

THE IDEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION OF POLITICS AND RELIGION IN E.M. FORSTER'S *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*: A MALAY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the diverse interpersonal connections portrayed in E.M. Forster's "*A Passage to India*" through a close examination. The novel depicts British as one nation and the Indians as the colonies, highlighting their attitudes towards each other. By probing into the initial inquiries posed to certain Indian characters, this study endeavours to address a significant query. The primary focus lies in scrutinising the varied relationships developed within the narrative. Some commentators have critiqued Forster's portrayal, suggesting that he critiques the dynamics between colonisers and the colonised. This parallels themes were often found in Malay colonial literary discourse as well, which frequently delve into power dynamics and cultural conflicts between Malays and colonial powers like the British. The study suggests that many relationships falter due to inhospitable conditions. Ultimately, it concludes that individuals often face failure when confronted with uncontrollable external forces. Despite this, the possibility of friendship between equals is affirmed, though acknowledging the disparities between the British and Indians depicted in the novel's timeframe.

Keywords: Friendship; Relationship; Colonizers; Humanism; Liberal.

PERTIMBANGAN IDEOLOGI POLITIK DAN AGAMA DALAM "A PASSAGE TO INDIA" OLEH E.M. FORSTER: DARI SUDUT PERSPEKTIF MELAYU

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka pelbagai hubungan interpersonal yang digambarkan dalam "A Passage to India" oleh E.M. Forster. Novel ini menggambarkan British sebagai satu bangsa dan orang India sebagai koloni, menonjolkan sikap mereka terhadap satu sama lain. Dengan menyiasat pertanyaan awal yang diajukan kepada beberapa watak India tertentu, kajian ini berusaha untuk menangani persoalan penting. Fokus utama terletak pada penelitian hubungan yang berbeza yang berkembang dalam naratif tersebut. Sesetengah pengkritik telah mengkritik gambaran yang dibuat oleh Forster, dan mencadangkan bahawa beliau mengkritik hubungan dinamik antara penjajah dan yang diperintah. Ini juga merupakan tema yang sering terdapat dalam konteks wacana kolonial sastera Melayu, yang sering menyelidiki dinamik kuasa dan konflik budaya antara Melayu dan kuasa kolonial seperti British. Kajian lalu mengesyorkan bahawa banyak hubungan gagal kerana keadaan yang tidak mesra. Akhirnya, ia menyimpulkan bahawa individu sering menghadapi kegagalan apabila berdepan dengan daya luar yang tidak terkawal. Walaubagaimanapun, terdapat ada kemungkinan elemen persahabatan antara rakan dapat disahkan, walaupun mengakui jurang perbezaan di antara British dan orang India seperti yang digambarkan novel tersebut.

Kata Kunci: Persahabatan; Perhubungan; Penjajah; Kemanusiaan; Liberalisme

INTRODUCTION

Humanism (religious or secular/secular or liberals), breed (clearly or indirectly), and religion (indirectly) disturb writers throughout the Western world as the quite essential concerns of humankind, or more precisely, modern European humanity, in the age of colonialism and neo-colonialism. E. M. Forster, one of the greatest 20th-century novelists, is critical. "Only Connect" served as the underlying theme in many of his earlier and later novels, until the release of his final work during his lifetime, *A Passage to India*. This novel marked a departure, as Forster grappled with the challenge of generating ideas during the war years, particularly after the First World War in 1918. In *A Passage to India*, Forster (1924) deals with the contemporary concerns of liberal humanism, race, and religion. In the colonial setting of British India, Forster (1924) deals with the question of religious others despite his apparent grounding in the ideology of liberal humanism, as the question of religious identity expresses the quest of humanity for a more enduring domicile (Kundu, 2009). This discussion highlights the broader trend of postcolonial literary movements across various colonised nations, including Malaysia, formerly known as Tanah Melayu. Azhar Hj. Wahid (2011) suggests that, just as in other colonised countries, literary scholars in Malaysia have been tasked with challenging and exposing the injustices perpetuated by colonial powers.

Even in the postcolonial era, these movements persist, demonstrating a commitment to reminding current generations of the enduring impacts of colonialism.

In Malaysia, as in many other formerly colonised nations, the legacy of colonialism continues to shape social, cultural, and political realities. Literature is a powerful tool for critiquing and deconstructing colonial ideologies, shedding light on the injustices and inequalities inherent in colonial rule. Such is a display of damage brought by the British as a cruel coloniser and manipulator of wealth and other aspects of the colonised country, (Nur Afifah and Intan Zainatul, 2021). Through their literary works, scholars strive to uncover the evils of colonisation and liberate minds from the lingering influence of colonial ideologies. Furthermore, the ongoing execution of such movements underscores the importance of collective memory and historical consciousness in confronting colonial legacies. By continuously engaging with and interrogating the past, literary scholars contribute to decolonisation and empower communities to assert their narratives and identities.

Overall, the discussion emphasises the role of literature as a form of resistance and liberation in postcolonial contexts. Scholars in Malaysia and beyond play a vital role in challenging and protesting colonial narratives and advocating for social justice, nationalism and empowerment, mainly through numerous forms of both literary and non-literary texts (Che Abdullah Che Ya, 2012). They employ metaphor, hyperbole, comparative techniques, and specific symbols to highlight the superiority of Malays over the colonialists (Zubir Idris, 2011). Other aspects that may surface about this matter are the social critiques identified, encompassing condemnations of colonial avarice, a society indifferent to religious needs, discrimination against local communities, leaders neglecting their duties, the behaviour of morally questionable individuals, a society betraying its allies, and glorifying human-centric ideologies (Nurul Farhanah & Nurul Afifah, 2023). This being mentioned, the written text of resistance against the colonists was clearly made by local authors, the local aborigines also contributed in the form of verbal stories about their heroic ancestors going against the tyrannical colonialists (Zawawi Ibrahim, 2021).

Additionally, modern Malaysian scholars still attempts to resurface the effects and impacts brought by the colonisers especially on the perspectives on how Malaysians navigate through the diverse impacts of colonialism and its aftermath. Additionally, it's important to acknowledge that the ecological landscape contributes significantly to the narrative (Hamoud, Raihanah & Wan, 2023).

A Passage to India, though called a classic of the liberal spirit, manifesting Forster's (1924) qualified liberal humanism in dealing with religious others, Indian or Anglo-Indian, Muslims and Hindus displayed qualified liberal humanism in their dealings with, presenting them sometimes racially rather than religious. Through this, the ideology of liberal humanism and the concept of religion understood in the socio-political and cultural context of the twentieth century opens up the inquiry. All this happens in this work of a clear atheist writer, considered neutral in colonial terms, especially regarding religious traditions (Thompson & Tagore, 1999).

Forster (1924), in *A Passage to India*, from time to time, satirises and mocks all the native Indians as well as the Anglo Indians. A reader may thus be lost in the thrill and suspense of the simple plot of racial tension and gratified noticing Forster (1924) putting all the characters, irrespective of race and religion, on the same level. A conscientious reading against the grain, informed by knowledge of the concepts of liberal humanism, religion, other, religious others, and implicitly race, however, will reveal Forster's (1924) inability to maintain the balance and show

that colonial power works in apparently paradoxical ways and the copycat imitation of Western ideological categories in trying to understand a postcolonial in the sense of anticipating post-coloniality literary work, supposedly sympathetic to the colonised is full of pitfalls (Shahane, 1975).

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

The elements of this paper provide us with in-depth knowledge and understanding of “*A Passage to India*”, and we will be able to understand the historical context of colonised India. It gives us more clarity and different viewpoints about liberal humanism, racialism, and secularism. This paper tried to illustrate and describe British rule's social and religious structure. To further understand Forster's (1924) liberal humanism, the terms liberal and humanism need to be clarified by consulting their definitions from different angles. A broader definition of "liberal" is provided in the American Heritage Dictionary posted on the net; conventional or authoritarian perspectives do not confine the concept; it remain unfettered by rigid dogmas and prejudices. It embraces a spirit of openness, favouring reform and progress while welcoming new ideas and perspectives. Such an approach demonstrates a broad-mindedness and tolerance towards the beliefs and actions of others, free from narrow-mindedness or bigotry.

Forster is called a liberal characteristically in the following sense: a person with an independent conscience and freedom in any circumstance. He makes his own decisions; no political, religious, or social creed may decide for him (Anderson, 1991). Whereas forbearance towards others' ideas and behaviours is at the centre of "liberal," Focus on humans is at the core of humanism as defined in the Dictionary of Sociology: "A very wide-ranging set of philosophies that have their core the belief that human interests and dignity should be of primary importance" (Scott, 2011). The epithet liberal humanist for Forster can be more clearly understood if we try to analyse the term "humanism" more incisively. The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy "humanism," provides a comprehensive definition of humanism as understood in modern times in the West as a set of inner attributes that give a person a special place in planning. It is not just a school of thought or a group of beliefs or principles; humanism is a standard view from which the world is seen. This view gradually found a lasting expression in various historical times and presented a central leitmotif of Western civilisation. It is a focus when compared to two competitive positions.

On the one hand, it is a miraculous, excellent domain that indicates the divine command for humanity (perhaps the former and the former colonial pre/East. Think that India is fundamentally dependent. The second hemmed shapes the tendency to treat humanity scientifically as part of the natural order, similar to other organisms. Medium Post Capture, Humanism has unique power and power among humans, cultivating and celebrating its interests. (Benedict Anderson (1991). The above definitions connect a form of humanism (liberal humanism) with capitalism and the modern era of colonialism and capitalism, which was the context of Forster and the novel *A Passage to India*. In this connection, the following quotation from the entry on humanism,

In the context of postcolonial discourse...It foregrounds a specific historical implication of the traditional sense. It refers to the post-Enlightenment tendency to treat European norms about humanity as if They were universals transcending ethnic and cultural diversity across history and geography.

(Hawley, 2001: 238)

Resulting from colonisation has created ethnic factions and tensions even after the independence; in societies that have experienced colonialism, multiculturalism presents a historical challenge shaped by colonial perceptions of race and the establishment of states, as well as by the ethnic tensions that arise during the process of decolonization (Goh, 2008).

Thus when we use the term liberal humanist, we mean a person who believes in the essential goodness of human beings, is secular, a term here meaning neutral towards faith communities, believes in the supremacy of reason, is indifferent to or dismissive of the category we call religion, claims to be more tolerant of others, than expected open to different points of views, in short, a more likeable westerner. This notion of religion, especially in Islam, is provided by Nurul Farhanah and Nur Afifah (2023) as every religious belief has its teachings, depending on the respective religious faith. A liberal humanist is also supposed to support an individualistic capitalist market economy and believes that secularism, meaning indifference towards spiritual or religious affairs, is necessary for human progress in the modern age. Though generally led by conservatives or believers in racial/religious superiority, the colonial enterprise was not their exclusive domain, as we know from the first few pages of Nehru's *Discovery of India*, in which he expresses his dissatisfaction with British liberals, who were supposedly anti-colonial. Considering the concept of religion in tandem with the novel's text shows that the term needs to be more transparent and comprehensive than claimed and has traces of western origin intact. There are religious others in the text who, according to Forster (1924), are the lapsed Christians and the West's outside the norm or tradition to which they belong. (Anderson, 1991). Meanwhile, observing the Malay scenario, as pointed out by Mohamed Anwar Omar Din (2011), the quest for Malay origins ought to rely on historical documentation. This is because the Malay identity is a construct that emerged in the 18th century, evolving from an identity initially confined to the royal lineage of the Malacca Sultanate.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The problem at hand addresses the constraints imposed by entrenched, traditional, or authoritarian attitudes, views, and dogmas within a given context. Additionally, there is a pressing need to cultivate an environment that fosters openness to reform proposals, embraces new ideas for progress, and tolerates diverse perspectives and behaviours. This problem statement underscores the necessity of overcoming narrow-mindedness and bigotry and promoting a broad-minded approach that accommodates differing viewpoints and encourages innovation and social advancement.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study employs several key approaches. Firstly, historical contextualization is employed to situate the analysis within the historical context of colonialism in India, illuminating its implications for Malay societies. This involves a detailed examination of colonial encounters between the British and Malays, delving into power dynamics, cultural exchanges, and the imposition of colonial ideologies. Secondly, the methodology prioritizes subaltern voices and counter-narratives, particularly those of Malay characters, in order to reveal alternative perspectives and resistance strategies. This includes analyzing how Malay characters

navigate and challenge colonial power structures, especially in their interactions with British colonizers and Indian characters. Lastly, the methodology emphasizes ethical positioning and reflexivity throughout the research process. This involves maintaining an ethical stance, acknowledging the researcher's own positionality and potential biases. It also entails practicing reflexivity by critically reflecting on the researcher's cultural, social, and political perspectives, especially in relation to Malay identity and postcolonial issues. Through these methodological approaches, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the ideological considerations of politics and religion in E.M. Forster's "*A Passage to India*" from a Malay perspective.

DISCUSSION ON HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In delving deeper into the parallels between the historical contextualization of religion in "*A Passage to India*" and the Malay scenario, it becomes evident that the novel's themes and portrayals resonate deeply with the complexities of colonial encounters and religious identity in Malay society.

Firstly, the desacralisation of nature witnessed during the modern age, as depicted in the novel, finds parallels in the Malay context. The impact of Western colonialism on Malay society led to shifts in religious landscapes. Yet, religion continued to hold significant cultural and spiritual value amidst the growing influence of liberal humanism. This mirrors the portrayal in Forster's (1924) narrative, where religion remains an integral aspect of characters' lives despite changing socio-political dynamics. Gregg and Seigworth's (2010) definition of religion, emphasising the diverse religious fabric encompassing beliefs ranging from theistic to ritualistic, aligns with the religious diversity especially found in the Malay society. However, similar to the bias observed against Islam in the novel, there may exist misconceptions regarding the representation of Malay religions within scholarly discourse, which often overlooks indigenous belief systems alongside Islam. As pointed out by Muhammad Ali (2020), the after-effects contributed by the colonisers have indeed tainted the sanctification of Islam, which has caused the indigenous people to abandon Islam and embrace other forms of belief systems such as Christianity and secularism. Furthermore, the primary agenda was the colonial powers aimed to establish dominance by imposing their educational concepts and institutions over Islamic and indigenous learning traditions. Furthermore, Western colonial modernisation efforts had the consequence of eroding Islam and local customs (Ridell, 2019).

Furthermore, Cox's (2010) nuanced definition of religion reflects the multifaceted nature of religious expression within Malay culture. The passion and devotion exhibited by Malay characters towards their respective religions echo the sentiments portrayed by characters like Aziz and Godbole in "*A Passage to India*," highlighting the deeply ingrained religious identities prevalent in both contexts. The tensions between communal identities illustrated through the Nawab Bahadur's concern for Aziz also mirror similar dynamics within Malay society, where religious affiliations often influence communal sympathies. This reflects the intricate interplay between religion and communal identities in both colonial and postcolonial settings. Moreover, the novel's critique of colonialist agendas and the atomization of colonized human experiences resonates with the Malay experience of colonization. Colonial powers attempted to impose their ideologies while disregarding indigenous perspectives, leading to a complex negotiation of religious and cultural identities among Malay communities.

The varying dimensions and interpretations of religion offered by scholars like van der Veer (2020), Connolly (2013), and Durkheim (1995) find relevance in the Malay context, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of religious identity. This highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of religion in Malay society, considering its personal, cultural, and historical dimensions. "*A Passage to India*" serves as a valuable lens through which we can analyze and understand the complexities of religion in both colonial and postcolonial contexts, offering insights pertinent to the Malay scenario and its historical trajectory.

SUBALTERN VOICES AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES

In the rich tapestry of colonial encounters, both fictional and historical, "*A Passage to India*" stands as a beacon illuminating the complexities of religious identity within the Malay context. Through the character of Aziz and the depiction of colonial dynamics, power struggles, and the marginalization of subaltern voices, E.M. Forster's novel offers profound parallels to the experiences of Malay society under colonial rule.

At the heart of "*A Passage to India*" lies Aziz, a character who embodies the struggles of religious identity amidst colonial oppression. Similarly, in the Malay scenario, individuals grappled with colonial impositions on religious practices and beliefs. Like Aziz, Malays were often portrayed through colonial lenses as irrational or communal, perpetuating stereotypes that justified colonial dominance. The portrayal of Aziz reflects the Malay experience of navigating religious identity within the confines of colonial power structures. Furthermore, the novel's depiction of communal tensions and religious intolerance resonates deeply with the Malay context. Colonial policies often exacerbated religious divides and marginalised subaltern communities, mirroring the communal tensions depicted in Forster's (1924) narrative. Religion became a tool for justifying colonial oppression, echoing the ways in which colonial powers manipulated religious narratives to maintain control over Malay society. This manipulation is evident in the Mohur rum festival, where indigenous religious traditions were essentialised and dehumanised, much like the suppression of Malay religious practices by colonial authorities.

Through its exploration of colonialism's impact on religious identity, "*A Passage to India*" serves as a poignant critique that reverberates in the Malay experience. The novel highlights the challenges faced by Malays in navigating colonial power dynamics and reclaiming agency over their religious beliefs. It underscores the importance of counter-narratives in challenging dominant discourses and amplifying the voices of the subaltern in resisting colonial oppression. "*A Passage to India*" offers a compelling lens through which to examine the complexities of religious identity within the Malay context. By drawing parallels between the struggles of Aziz and the experiences of Malays under colonial rule, the novel sheds light on the enduring impact of colonialism on religious discourse. It serves as a powerful reminder of the resilience of subaltern voices and the ongoing struggle for agency and self-determination in the face of colonial oppression.

ETHICAL POSITIONING AND REFLEXIVITY

In examining the complexities of religion in "*A Passage to India*" and its parallels with the Malay scenario, it's crucial to understand the colonial context in which both narratives are situated. Colonialism in Southeast Asia, including the Malay Peninsula, shares similarities with the British colonial presence in India depicted in Forster's (1924) novel. Both regions experienced the

imposition of Western ideologies, including those related to religion, which had significant social, political, and cultural implications for indigenous communities.

In both contexts, colonial powers imposed their interpretations of religion, often disregarding the diverse and multifaceted nature of indigenous religious practices. The passage rightly critiques the Western bias inherent in definitions of religion during the colonial era, which overlooked the social and political dimensions of religious identity. This bias contributed to the perpetuation of colonial stereotypes and reinforced hierarchies of power and dominance, a phenomenon evident in both colonial India and the Malay Peninsula. The portrayal of Aziz in "*A Passage to India*" as a representative Muslim character reflects the struggles of religious identity under colonial rule. Similarly, Malays in the Malay Peninsula faced challenges to their religious practices and beliefs due to colonial impositions. The passage aptly highlights how colonial policies exacerbated communal tensions and religious intolerance in both contexts, underscoring the shared experiences of marginalized communities grappling with colonial domination.

Furthermore, the dynamics of power and representation within the colonial context are crucial to consider. Aziz's depiction as sympathetic yet unstable and potentially licentious reflects Western perceptions of the "other" and perpetuates colonial stereotypes. Similarly, the portrayal of Anglo-Indian Christian characters in the novel contrasts their steadfast reasoning and resolution with the perceived weaknesses attributed to characters like Aziz. This dynamic of power and representation, where Western characters are often portrayed as rational and morally upright while indigenous characters are depicted as irrational and morally compromised, mirrors colonial power dynamics in both India and the Malay Peninsula. The passage also explores the concept of liberal humanism and its implications for the portrayal of religious others in the novel. Forster's (1924) liberal humanist perspective may have influenced his characterization of Aziz and other non-Christian characters, perpetuating colonial ideologies and reinforcing Western notions of superiority. This aligns with the Orientalist views prevalent during the colonial era, wherein Western scholars and writers depicted indigenous cultures and religions as inferior and irrational compared to their own.

The passage provides a nuanced analysis of the portrayal of religion and religious others in "*A Passage to India*," drawing parallels with the colonial encounters experienced by Malay society. By highlighting the ethical implications of colonial representations and the need for reflexivity in interpreting literary texts, the passage underscores the importance of challenging dominant discourses and recognizing the agency of marginalized communities in resisting colonial oppression in both colonial India and the Malay Peninsula.

Applying critical perspectives to "*A Passage to India*" in the context of the Malay scenario allows us to draw parallels between the colonial dynamics depicted in Forster's (1924) novel and the historical context of British colonization in Malaya (present-day Malaysia). Each critical lens offers valuable insights into the dynamics of colonial relationships and the experiences of individuals within a colonial society:

SUMMARY

Historical Contextualization:

Malaya, like British India, was under British colonial rule, shaping power dynamics, racial hierarchies, and cultural clashes. Understanding how Malay and non-Malay characters are portrayed within the context of British imperialism provides insights into broader themes of power,

identity, and cultural conflict in Malayan society. Colonial attitudes towards Malay culture, religion, and customs influenced interactions between colonial administrators and the local population, mirroring dynamics depicted in "*A Passage to India*."

Subaltern Voices and Counter-Narratives:

Examining the perspectives of marginalized groups, such as indigenous Malays, challenges dominant colonial narratives in the Malay context. Subaltern voices may reveal resistance, agency, and resilience in the face of colonial oppression, shedding light on how individuals negotiate their identities and assert autonomy within a colonial framework.

Ethical Positioning:

Considerations of colonialism, power, and privilege are relevant in the Malay scenario, where British administrators and local elites may hold differing ethical stances towards Malay society. Exploring ethical dilemmas enriches our understanding of colonial relationships and intercultural interactions between colonizers and the colonized in Malaya.

Reflexivity:

Reflecting on biases inherent in colonial representations of Malay society allows readers to navigate complexities of identity, representation, and power dynamics. Interrogating the narrator's perspective encourages critical engagement with colonial discourses and uncovers underlying assumptions and prejudices.

By applying these critical perspectives provides a framework for understanding British colonialism in Malaya and its impact on the indigenous population. By examining historical context, subaltern voices, ethical positioning, and reflexivity, we gain insights into colonial relationships and the diverse experiences of individuals within Malay colonial society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration of the Malay scenario alongside historical context, subaltern voices and counter-narratives, ethical positioning, and reflexivity offers a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in Forster's (1924) portrayal of India's diverse religious landscape. By paralleling the historical trajectories of India and Malaya under British colonialism, we uncover similarities in the cultural dynamics and power structures that shaped both regions. The motif of "Unity in Diversity" resonates across both contexts, highlighting the multifaceted religious tapestry present in both nations. Through the lens of subaltern voices, we recognize the agency and resilience of marginalised groups in navigating colonial spaces, shedding light on their intersecting experiences with religion and identity.

Ethical considerations regarding religion as a unifying force prompt critical reflections on colonial power dynamics and the implications for social cohesion. Additionally, reflexivity encourages readers to interrogate colonial representations of religious diversity, revealing underlying biases and prejudices that shape perceptions. Ultimately, this holistic approach deepens our understanding of the intersections between colonialism, religion, and intercultural dynamics

in both India and Malaya, offering valuable insights into the complexities of colonial encounters and their lasting legacies.

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Biodata Penulis

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