

A Brief Analysis of Spiritual Ecology in a Passage to India

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Abstract: The unity of man and self occurs only when mankind achieves harmony and balance between man and nature as well as between man and man. This article intends to examine awakening of consciousness of major characters in *A Passage to India*, especially analyzing the mental split of the major figures Aziz and Adela Quested. Adela's female self-consciousness and Aziz's national consciousness have been eventually established after experiencing "the cave event" and "the trial" event. Finally, they enter an intrinsic state of self-identification.

1. Introduction

"We seem to be more and more indulged in cultural, social, technological and productive consumption form at the cost of losing of our spiritual life" [1]. With the rapid development of the Chinese economy, society is facing a serious problem that 'inner ecological orderliness' of mankind is losing its balance. More and more people get lost spiritually while gaining materially under the impact of scientific and technological revolution, which gives rise to a spiritual ecological crisis. According to Lu Shuyuan, spiritual ecology is the study of mutual relations among spiritual beings. It mainly refers to the relations between human beings and their living environment, including natural, social, and cultural environments. It involves the balance, stability, and evolution of ecological systems under the influence of psychological variables [1]. Through careful observation, we realize that the major figures Aziz and Adela always stay in a state of mental turmoil, a direct result of the existing disharmony within human relations and distorted social environments. This kind of mental disintegration is strongly reflected in the ceaseless struggle of Adela and Aziz's spiritual world as they strive to gain independence and discover their true selves after experiencing a long spiritual journey.

2. Awakening of Female Self-Consciousness

Ecocriticism criticizes anthropocentrism and advocates eliminating the binary opposition between culture and nature as well, whereas feminism attacks androcentrism in order to fundamentally change the inferior female position in society and ultimately dissolve the male and female dichotomy. Ecofeminism is a combination of ecology and feminism, which concerns relations between the oppression of women and oppression of nature. "Oppression of women and the building of western industrial civilization are interrelated through the belief that women are closer to nature" [2]. Ecofeminism propagates interactivity between nature and culture, strongly opposing anthropocentrism and androcentrism, attempting to seek a kind of culture which is not separate from nature. Some critics state that to be an ecologist one must also be a feminist because the oppression and domination of nature and the oppression and domination of women are interwoven.

Most ecofeminists hold that women are born to take care of nature and that nature becomes a shelter for women. "Women have the original contacts with nature in the aspect of creating lives, women's body of breeding offspring is easy to get intimacy with nature which can rear all existence" [3]. Compared with men, women possess a special talent of knowing and perceiving the world. Women are able to have intimate contact with animals, the earth, the stars, and the moon, keeping in touch with nature in a vigorous manner. Women are able to get close to nature in a physiological way; the capability of producing offspring endows them with an instinctive and acute

awareness of the life processes of the earth. In *A Passage to India*, it is through her acute instinct that Mrs. Moore takes off her shoes before entering the Mosque at the very beginning, gaining respect from Aziz in the following chapters. Again, it is by instinct that she believes Aziz is innocent and that he had not committed the crime during the expedition. The moon and water become the symbols of femaleness. In the soft moonlight, Mrs. Moore senses the integrated moment of being merged her into heaven and earth and reaches harmony with man and nature.

When they entered Marabar Cave for the first time, Mrs. Moore “did not know who touched her, could not breathe, and some vile naked thing struck her face and settled on her mouth like a pad” [4] and “the naked pad was a poor little baby, astride its mother’s hip”[4] . Obviously, Forster compares Marabar Cave to the womb. When they enter the Marabar Cave, which symbolizes nature, both Mrs. Moore and Adela become hysterical in varying degrees, but nothing happens to Aziz and the other males. At the moment, the two English ladies have a sudden sense which implies that their long dormant self-awareness has awakened: “The walls of the circular chamber have been most marvelously polished” to resemble a “a mirror inlaid with lovely colors” [4]. Because of these two marvelously polished mirrors, these two English ladies see their better selves. Mrs. Moore automatically thinks that “though people are important, the relations between them are not, and that in particular too much fuss has been made over marriage; centuries of carnal embracement, yet man is no nearer to understanding man” [4]. She is aroused to rethink human practices and relations while confronting the natural hills that symbolize the huge universe.

Like Mrs. Moore, Adela undergoes ideological struggles caused by the echoes generated from the caves, and her long dormant self-awareness has been ultimately aroused. Having few life experiences and keeping fantasy always in her mind, Adela comes to India just to cater to her curiosity to see the real India. However, her special position in this novel puts her in a dangerous situation for the simple reason that she belongs to the so-called superior white race and the allegedly inferior female gender. On one hand, she was born into the upper-middle class in Britain and has received a formal liberal education; on the other, she is “only” a female and is subject to discrimination in a patriarchal society. Such a dilemma pushes her into a contradictory situation. When she just sets her foot in India, she feels great antipathy against the colonizers, who are arrogant, snobbish, hypocritical, and full of racial prejudice towards the colonized. However, she cannot rid herself of the superior consciousness of being a colonizer as well. Further, she has an unrealistic idea about marriage, wanting to obtain security in it and at the same time hoping to remain independent and dignified. Even though she seems rather rational, she is often in a confused state of mind, which can be better illustrated by her engagement to Ronny.

However, taking part in the expedition organized by Aziz to the Marabar Caves intensifies her self-conflicts, and finally her female consciousness is aroused by the stones that are able to say “I am alive” in the blazing sun. From that moment on, she begins to doubt her marriage with Ronny. She asks herself, “what is love?... she and Ronny---no, they did not love each other” [4]. At that exact moment, Adela strongly feels that “this discovery had come so suddenly that she felt like a mountaineer whose rope had broken. Not to love the man one’s going to marry! Not to find it out till this moment! Not even to have asked oneself the question until now” [4]. She finally figures out that between her and Ronny there only exists “animal contact at dusk, but the emotion that links them was absent” [4]. Moreover, due to the sudden awakening of her female consciousness, together with the fearful hallucination generated by the constant echoes from the caves, Mrs. Quested mistakenly regards Aziz as the man who has attempted to rape her in the cave. Under the misguidance of the Anglo-Indians, she brings an accusation against Aziz and directly leads to “the Cave Event.” At the court, Adela is not able to speak the truth at the beginning--she is forced to say the words that are manufactured by the male colonial officials. However, once she summons up all her courage to tell the truth, the existence of her independent self-consciousness is established. Finally, she not only rescues Aziz Fielding but herself by dropping the charge against Aziz. Forster characterizes nature as an uncontrollable super-power that human beings are incapable of dominating. As a female, Adela is the first one who puts forward the idea of an irresistible supernatural power which brought her into the zenith of spiritual crisis. As she says to Fielding, “I

only meant it is difficult, as we get on in life, to resist the supernatural, I have felt it myself coming on me” [4]. She is finally aware that it is the irresistible supernatural echoes, the buzzing sound in her ears, which misled her into taking action against Aziz. “The Cave Event” makes her realize that having an integrated self-status is what she longs for. Having suffered from a long spiritual journey, she eventually gets rid of the fate of being enslaved by marriage, discarding the identity of being a colonist after her return to Britain and becoming an independent woman in the truest sense. Fielding praises her: “She is perfectly genuine and very brave. When she saw she was wrong, she pulled herself up with a jerk and said no. All her friends around her, the entire British Raj pushing her forward. She stops, sends the whole thing to smithereens. She became a national heroine” [4].

After the charge against Aziz is withdrawn, Adela and Fielding have a heart-to-heart conversation at Fielding’s dwelling for the first time. Adela offers a deep analysis of the frustration encountered during her journey in India, and eventually she is brave enough to confess to Fielding that it must have been an hallucination that caused the feeling of being insulted in the dark and suffocating cave. Before leaving India, she is aware of her vanities and frailties, realizing that she has never done anything for society. Thus, she plans to return to her profession and start a new life after returning to England. Adela becomes an independent woman spiritually

and physically; she has grown up during her passage to India: “she was no longer examining life, but being examined by it; she had become a real person” [4]. The echoes which stand for nature awaken Adela’s female consciousness, making her go through an difficult process that takes her from immature girlhood to maturity and finally helping her to establish an intact identity and to achieve an organic integration, both spiritually and physically.

3. Awakening of National Consciousness

Aziz, an indigenous Indian, comes from the marginalized colonial India but has absorbed the modern medical knowledge and technology of Europe. Inspired by the European Enlightenment, Aziz uses modern European thinking to conduct his daily practice, even as he never abandons his colonial identity and the cultural background in which he was reared. In such circumstance, his integrated subject-consciousness has been split under the stimulus of this double status. Therefore, the modern European consciousness and the traditional Islamic consciousness coexist in his mind.

Aziz often finds himself in embarrassing circumstances. As an Indian doctor, he works for Minto Hospital but he is subordinate to the British Civil Surgeon, Callendar. The first chapter begins with Aziz hastening to the Civil Surgeon’s bungalow because Old Callendar wants to see him, but he is disappointed when he is told after arriving that the Major is out. The Major’s absence without leaving any message for him brings Aziz causes despair and resentment. However, at that exact moment, he changes his attitude and tries to please two English ladies, Mrs. Callendar and her daughter Mrs. Lesley, who have just come out of their house, but he is coldly repelled with an “the inevitable snub--his bow ignored, his carriage taken” [4]. His sense of being humiliation increases. Actually, both Aziz and his compatriots often suffer from the arrogance and rudeness of Anglo-Indians, but they can do nothing except acquiesce, as he says to Mrs. Moor when they first meet at the Mosque: “Major Callendar interrupts me night after night from where I am dining with my friends and I go at once, breaking up a most pleasant entertainment, and he is not there and not even a message, I can do nothing, I am just a subordinate” [4]. His sincerity to Mrs. Moore exemplifies the typical reaction held the colonized, who feel quite resentful but can do nothing. In addition, his inability of accepting the old Indian conventions and customs breaks down his cultural identity. On the one hand, the traditional Indian arranged marriage brings Aziz union with his wife without the foundation of love, but on the other, the Westerner in him attempts to pursue a marriage based purely on passionate love. Islamic poetry endows him with great passion; he often immerses himself in reciting or writing the glorious history of Islamic empires. Therefore, complete cultural awareness becomes polarized. The conflicted nature of his spirit is shown symbolically by the two flames which rise in the dark Marabar Caves when he

strikes a match, immediately another flame rises in the depths of the rock and moves towards the surface like an imprisoned spirit: the walls of the circular chamber have been most marvelously

polished. The two flames approach and strive to unite, but cannot, because one of them breathes air, the other stone [4] .

The two flames seem like the extremes of two contradictory poles in his mind. Each side tries its best to unite with the other, but it turns out to be a vain attempt because for one breathes air, the other stone.

Under such circumstances, Aziz lingers in contradiction, remaining a split self. However, the trial brings him a thorough mental change which becomes the turning point of his conscious transformation. After being harmed by the wrong judgment, his strong sense of disgrace, humiliation, and shame overwhelms his mind and his nationalistic consciousness is ultimately aroused. He finally extricates himself from a double awareness, realizing the British colonists' pride and ugly, aggressive features. In addition, under the Anglo-Indians' domination, Aziz becomes aware of the reality of Indian sufferings and begins to take action to fight against British colonial oppression. Aziz realizes that the whole of India should be united even despite its religious disputes and cultural divergences, and he firmly believes that a new India will be born. As Jin Shuofeng argues, "[Aziz'] voice is no longer the hypocritical sounds of aesthetic emotion from a small number of people, historians, or nihilists. He has learned to look at the future and face the reality from the hardships of his life experiences, he first calls for a new-born India by his own voice" [5]. Indeed, he shouts loudly to Fielding at the end of novel that

India shall be a nation! No foreigners of any sort! Hindu and Moslem and Sikh and all shall be one! Hurrah! Hurrah for India! Hurrah! Hurrah! ... Down with the English anyhow. That is certain. Clear out, you fellows, double quick, I say. We may hate one another, but we hate you most. If I don't make you go, Ahmed will, Karim will, if its fifty-five hundred years we shall get rid of you, yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then, and then, you and I shall be friends[4].

Aziz's patriotically declares that India must become an independent nation and that there should be no foreign rule; Moslem, Sikh, Hindu, and other religious believers should be united in one Indian country. Indians should rid themselves of English occupation; English invaders will be driven off by fervent Indian patriots soon or later--it is only a matter of time. His call to patriotism exactly coordinates with what Forster conveys in this novel--that it is impossible for the British to impose forced order on India. The communication between Anglo-Indians and indigenous Indians--even the communication among all human beings-- should be premised on equality. Finally, Aziz throws off the shackle of Islam centralization while appealing to religious toleration; he successfully overcomes the religious disputes between Islam and Hinduism. At the same time, he attempts to appeal to those Indians who have been suffering from racial, cultural, colonial, and religious distress to strive to build a unified Indian country.

Further, not only has Aziz been aroused to national consciousness, but also all Indians have been awakened at the same time, which can be illustrated in the third part "Temple". There, Forster uses symbolic descriptions to suggest the awakening of Indian national consciousness of. The god Shri Krishna, who transcends nature, classes, races and human processes is Lord of the universe. The universal love from God can touch upon myriads of things; it is not difficult for Him to transcend racial and cultural barriers to establish connections among mankind. We could say the birth of the god Krishna symbolizes the emergence of the nation's awakening--Indian national consciousness. The image of God symbolizes the Indians' eagerness to get rid of enslavement, to obtain equality, and to establish unification in India. At last, Aziz, together with the oppressed Indians, has thoroughly gone through the mental changes from slavery to extreme patriotism. Aziz is generally acknowledged as a true patriot at the end of the novel, one who ultimately recognizes his duty to defend his own country. He achieves self-realization only after suffering personal humiliation and insults.

Thus, Forster's in-depth portrayal of the mental and spiritual struggles of Aziz and Adela mirrors his contemplation of the way one should go in quest of the balanced and harmonious true self. The awakening of Aziz's national consciousness, as well as of Adela's female self-awareness, profoundly reveals Forster's desire to keep one's self intact in the search for one's true identity and

integrity.

4. Awakening of Global Consciousness

Global consciousness can be defined as the common consciousness of the whole human society. In a narrow sense, global issues pose a grave menace to the survival and development of human beings; such issues include global warming, global freezing, the greenhouse effect, air pollution, and so on. These are issues that can result in global ecological degradation; they are fundamental and crucial and reach well beyond the realm of class, race, and discrepancies among individual nations, directly involving the subsistence and sustainable development of mankind. It is a life-and-death for all humanity.

As is known to all, different eras have different issues. The central issues of the twentieth century concern cultural dissimilarity, racial discrimination, and gender bias, and are the focuses of cultural and literary criticism. Starting from the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, the central issue has been the shifting of the focus from human-centered to earth-centered investigation because of the serious destruction of the physical environment on which all human beings depend for survival. It means that the major issues of the twenty-first century are different from those of the twentieth in the respect that they are not limited to a certain field of study such as general literary theory, which is mainly restricted to the social sphere or what we call society, but a global issue which is closely related to the survival of the all human beings. It is a study that exceeds all boundaries and expands the social sphere to the entire ecosphere. In this way, a responsible citizen is supposed to have a certain global awareness to prevent the increasing ecological deterioration. Forster, an insightful intellectual and novelist, had already foreseen the ecological problems that would occur about a century after him. For instance, at the birth ceremony of God in the Temple section, Forster suggests that it makes no difference whether Professor Godbole is a Brahman and Mrs. Moore is a Christian. Likewise, we have the same duty to protect the earth, the only planet on which all living things creatures rely for their existence. In addition, in the subsequent chapters, Forster writes “come, come, come, come. This was all he could do. How inadequate! But each according to his own capacities, and he know that his own were small” [4]. Indeed, there is no religious boundary, no national limitation, no racial difference, no cultural contradiction at the moment; what we have to do is to contribute our inadequate power to make an effort to prevent the increasing ecological retrogression. No matter how inadequate our own capacities are, we must strive to protect the ecological environment for ourselves and for the coming generations. *A Passage to India* presents us with not only the natural concern for the physical exacerbation of the Indian mainland, the disharmonious social relations in the colonized Indian society, and the self-integration of the major characters under special historical conditions, but it also simultaneously attempts to arouse in us an awareness that global ecological consciousness is a prerequisite for the protection of nature if we are to make effective contributions to the harmonious coexistence between man and nature and to the sustainable development of the planet’s ecosystems.

Admittedly, in view of the era limitations, it is unable to find many more evidences to support Forster’s global awareness about ecological thinking. But in *A Passage to India* he mounted to a prodigious height and observed not only the ecological problems that were occurring in his time but also the ecological degradation that would be a consequence. He was therefore a genuine luminary of his age and should be regarded in our present age of consequence as a prophetic sage.

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