

BRITISH STEREOTYPING TOWARDS INDIANS IN E.M. FORSTER'S A PASSAGE TO INDIA: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY

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Abstract

This research aims to find out how the Indians are presented in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and how the novel reflects the stereotyping of the British toward the Indians seen from the orientalism of the postcolonialism theory. This research applied the descriptive qualitative method. The data of this research were in the form of expressions related to the British stereotyping towards the Indians found in *A Passage to India*. In order to achieve the validity and trustworthiness of the data, the researcher applied the peer debriefing method. There are two results of the research. First, there are three main stereotyping represented by the British towards the Indians: inferior, primitive and barbaric. Second, the novel reflects the stereotyping of the Indians through the narration and the dialogs.

Key words: postcolonialism, orientalism, stereotyping

INTRODUCTION

The world is composed of many different peoples, races, ethnic and religious groups who live in various geographical spaces. Those factors create differences in culture; people from certain regions or countries most likely have different culture and customs from others living in other areas. Cultures affect how people see themselves and others. In many cases, when two different cultures meet, a cultural clash is likely to happen. This clash can be in the mildest sense like misunderstanding, but can also be in a more serious way. One of the effects of cultural difference is stereotyping. People tend to stereotype others because they believe that their thoughts and point of view about something are the right one, thus it is possible to have many different kinds of stereotyping over one thing that comes from people's own mind. For those who think that

their culture is better than the others, they will look down and tend to decline the existence of other cultures. In most cases, cultural, religious, and racial stereotyping lead to social and racial conflicts.

A Passage to India is a novel about the relationship between the native Indians and the British visitors in *Raj* era. *Raj* era is a period of time of the British empire in India, which that took place from 1858 to 1947. The term *Raj* was taken from a Hindi word which means "rule". In Forster's *A Passage to India*, a Muslim Indian physician named Dr. Aziz with his Indian friends is conversing about whether it is possible or not to be a friend of an Englishman, only because they have been colonized by the British in the past. While the British in this novel shows their curiosity towards the native Indians, yet it is lack of acknowledgement because their curiosity is growing more and then it tends to

become prejudice and negative assumptions. Since the objectives of this research are to (1) find out how the Indians are represented by the British in the novel, and (2) show how the novel reflects the stereotyping of the British towards the Indians, this research is a Postcolonial study which applies Edward Said's Orientalism theory.

Postcolonial theory is an approach in literary analysis that concerns to literature written in English in formerly colonized country. It is usually used as an approach to analyze the literature written whether by the English author or by the native author from a certain colonized country in a form of English Literature. Postcolonial literature and theory investigate what happens when two cultures clash and when one of them with its accompanying ideology empowers and deems its superior towards others.

Postcolonial literature in English is important because it enables us to listen to and participate in a cross-cultural and multi-voiced dialogue. Introducing new aesthetic norms and modes of appraisal and challenging notions of English exclusiveness, postcolonial writers are laying bare submerged histories, bringing minority interests and ethnic diversities to the forefront, and reconfiguring cultural forms and ways of life previously relegated to the periphery (Shands, 2008: 13).

Postcolonialism usually focuses on some common themes such as the struggle for independence, emigration, national identity, allegiance and childhood. Most of the Postcolonial writers (those who write within the era of Postcolonialism) usually write

about their view about certain issues concerning colonizer-colonized relation as a result of colonialism. As an example, the Postcolonial writer from the colonized country may write about the people's struggle to get their independence, about how they had been treated by the colonizer, about how they had been seen as inferior by the colonizer, about how the colonizer's culture are imposed to the colonized etc. The subject of their writings can be the colonizer or their own people as the colonized.

Orientalism is one of the relatable term in Postcolonialism. Orientalism was developed by Edward W. Said. He is a famous scholar and an expert in Postcolonial studies. There are three definitions of the Orientalism that Said presents in his book. First, Orientalism is a term that the Orient is placed in a special way in European western experience. It is not only about Europe, but it is also about the Europe place of its greatest, richest and oldest colonies, and the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other (Said, 1978:1). Based on this definition, Orientalists are those who teach, write or research the Orient, and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist.

Second, Said (1978: 2) presents the Orientalism in a more general way than the first one which is related to the academic condition at that time. He says that Orientalism is a style of thought based on an ontological and epistemological distinction

made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident”. The third definition is that Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient, by making statements about it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, and ruling over it. In brief, Orientalism is a term as a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said, 1978: 3). Orientalism is always related to the negative stereotypes of the West towards the East. Stereotypes are characteristics ascribed to groups of people involving gender, race, national origin and other factors. Lippmann (1922) introduced the term „stereotype“ to refer to the typical picture that comes to mind when thinking about a particular social group. Hilton & von Hippel, 1996, in *The SAGE Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination* stated that Stereotypes are cognitive schemes used by social perceivers to process information about others (Dovidio, 2010: 7). Stereotypes do not only reflect beliefs about the traits characterizing typical group members, but also contain information about other qualities such as social roles, the degree to which members of the group share specific qualities (i.e., within-group homogeneity or variability), and influence emotional reactions to group members. Stereotyping in Postcolonialism is always related to how the colonizer and colonized see each other based on their own assumptions. In the case of

Postcolonialism, the colonizer has the advantage in stereotyping since they have more power and knowledge above the colonized. They use this power and knowledge to overpower the colonized and allow themselves to make their own interpretation about others based on their point of view. Thus, their interpretation is sometimes still bias and it tends to lead them to a negative interpretation.

THE RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a qualitative method with content analysis in the technique of data analysis. This research technique was needed to produce applicable and valid inferences of the data towards the content. This research is qualitative because the source of the data is a non-numerical source and the interpretation also the analysis of the data was based on human’s experience or social circumstances. Krippendoff, 1981 (in Eni Purwanti, 2011: 28) states that qualitative research tries to analyze a document in order to understand the content and the meaning of the document. In conclusion, the researcher used this approach in order to find out or discover the meaning embodied in the source text.

The main source of this research was *A Passage to India*, a novel written by Edward Morgan Forster and published in 1924. This novel tells about the relationship between the native Indians and the British visitors in Raj era. Raj era was a period of time of the

British empire in India which took place from 1858 to 1947. This novel contained 362 pages and 37 chapters which are divided into 3 parts; Mosque, Caves, and Temple. The each part was named and remarked, according to the setting of the situation in the novel.

The data collection of this research was processed through several steps: reading, taking notes, categorizing, and interpreting the data. First, the researcher did the close reading to the novel, *A Passage to India*, as the main source of the research. This close reading process aimed to obtain the comprehensive data from the novel. Second, the researcher collected the data by taking some notes and categorized them to sort the data which are most relatable with the research. Third, the researcher interpreted the data that were collected in order to identify them and to get more understanding.

In analyzing the data, the researcher conducted several steps. The steps were (1) reading and re-reading the categorized data to get further understanding of the data related to the research discussion; (2) sorting and arranging the categorized data according to its order by sorting the pages of the data based on the most significant order, and taking notes; (3) interpreting the data by giving further explanation and giving meaning by interrelating the data and the theories used in the research; (4) relating the data to the theories used in this research in order to answer the questions of the research, and (5) writing down the findings and

discussion in the form of a thesis. To accomplish the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher applies the peer debriefing method by doing the peer-review with two students from English Literature Study Program and by consulting the research to the supervisors as the experts.

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research tries to analyze the stereotypes of the British towards the Indians reflected in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. There are two main topics of the discussion in this research which will be explained further in the following.

The Representation of the Indians in the Novel as Attributed by the British

In Forster's *A Passage to India*, the superiority of the colonizer is represented by the British settlers. As the colonizer, they hold the colonial power. Since they are the holder of the colonial power, they apply their power through a form of colonial discourse. The British settlers, representing the West, use their knowledge to place the Indians, representing the East, as the subordinate one. They regard themselves as superior by applying their values towards the Indians in order to dominate them. They define the Indians as subaltern as well as the object of their domination. As the result, the native Indians are oppressed by the British settlers. In order to maintain their power over the

Indians, the British set the binary opposition between them.

There are three stereotypings that the British attributed towards the Indians in the novel, which are Inferior, Primitive and Barbaric. The inferiority of the Indians that the British has attributed can be seen in how they see the Indians as an object and how they treat the Indians in social life. Seeing as an object, the British has disregarded the Indians' value of humanity. The British only sees the Indians as an object of their curiosity.

„If I'm biking in English dress – starch collar, hat with ditch – they take no notice. When I wear a fez, they cry,
„Your lamp's out!“ Lord Curzon did not consider this when he urged natives of India to retain their picturesque costumes. – Hooray! Stud's gone in“ (Forster, 1924: 69).

The quotation above shows that during the Raj era appearance did matter in the social life. If a person appears in an English style, the police officers will not take notice. However, if a person dresses and appears like an Indian, the officers will stop him and will try to find any mistakes that the person could have been made. This phenomenon depicts how the Indians were objectified and treated unfairly in the society. Another form of inferiority that the Indians has attributed is how they seen as a lower class in the social relationship. The following quotation is the example how the Indians are being treated in the social life.

„I only want those Indians whom you come across socially – as your

friends.“

„Well we don't come across them socially,“ he said, laughing. „They are full of all the virtues, but we don't and it's now eleven – thirty, and too late to go into the reasons“ (Forster, 1924: 26).

In the quotation above, the British admit that they do interact with the natives but socially they do not see the Indians as friends. They scrutinize the fact that the British and the Indians are different and cannot be friends. They do not even want to mention the reason why they cannot be come across socially, because they assume that there are no specific reason for it. They think that it is only natural for them to see themselves as superior over the Indians.

The second is that Indians are regarded as primitive. The term primitive is always associated to backwardness. The West regards the East as primitive and assert that the East are physically and racially inferior. According to Said, the ideas about the biological bases of racial inequality in the early nineteenth century are linked with the ideas of backwardness, degeneracy and inequality with the West (Said, 1978: 206).

In *A Passage to India*, the West represented by the British settlers attribute the native Indians as primitive. On the contrary, they regard themselves as advanced or modern. They categorize the ideas of primitivism by comparing the standard of both values. Thus, by applying such standard, they regard the native Indians as primitive for having different ways of life with them.

Taking off his spectacles, as was his habit before enunciating a general truth, he looked into them sadly, and remarked that the darker races are physically attracted by the fairer, but not *vice versa* – not a matter for bitterness this, not a matter for abuse, but just a fact which any scientific observer will confirm (Forster, 1924:243).

The quotation shows the fact that the darker races are usually attracted by the fairer races. This statement shows the British's stereotyping towards the Indians, where the Indians have the standard of affection based only on the physical appearance, showed by the way they perceive the British as attractive for having a fairer skin. The quotation above, which is expressed by the British settlers character in the novel, also highlights the fact that this condition is not vice versa. It means that the British settlers would not have the same way of thinking with the native Indians.

The last is that the Indians are regarded as barbaric. The term barbaric is used by the British to describe the Indians who are considered the opposite society of the civilized British. By applying such description towards the Indians, they shape a certain way of thinking to perceive the existence of the native Indians, which mostly contains negative stereotyping.

I am afraid we must have made some blunder and given offence," said Mrs. Moore. „That is even more impossible. But may I know the facts?"

„An indian lady and gentleman were to send their carriage for us this morning at nine. It has never come.

We waited and waited; we can't think what happened" (Forster, 1924:72).

The quotation shows that the native Indians may have deceived Mrs. Moore, a British woman. She says that there were two native Indians offering her some help to send their carriage, but after she waited for too long, the carriage was never sent. This phenomenon creates a more negative assumption and stereotyping of the British towards the Indians. They will consider the Indians as deceiving; and deceiving is regarded as one of the barbaric behaviors.

In reflecting the British stereotyping towards the Indians that happens in the novel, the researcher uses the narration and the dialog. Narration is one of the most important components of the novel. It has an important role for giving the information to support a certain situation in the novel. The narration can also be used as a bridge from one situation to another, in order to help the readers to understand the plot of the story. The narration can be both explicit and implicit in revealing or showing the readers about a certain situation.

The triumphant machine of civilization may suddenly hitch and be immobilized into a car of stone, and at such moments the destiny of the English seems to resemble their predecessors", who also entered the country with intent to refashion it, but were in the end worked into its pattern and covered with its dust (Forster, 1924: 234).

In the quotation above, Forster tries to

depict the image of the Indians, from the point of view of the British. He explains the image of the Indians implicitly. However, it vividly shows how the British settlers see the native Indians. It is said that the British firstly came to India in order to fix the country. Regardless the facts that they want to fix the country, they found it is hard to fix it in some aspects, and so they have to follow the Indians' pattern and adapt to their way of life.

Beside the narration, the novel also reflects the British stereotyping towards the Indians through the dialogs. Dialog is also one of the most important components of the novel. Through the dialog, the readers are able to understand the situations that happen in the novel. The readers can also understand the emotion, the feeling and the thought of the characters in the novel.

„There are. Callendar boasted so before the trial. I heard through the tatties; he said, „I have tortured that nigger.“

„Oh, my God, my God... He called him a nigger, did he? (Foster, 1924: 262)“

The quotation above shows how the British has been rude towards the Indians by calling them nigger. The word „nigger“ is an inappropriate expression to call someone from the darker race. It can be categorized as an insult for the Indians to be called like that. The Callendar which is one of the British settlers had purposely called the Indians as „nigger“ in order to demean them. By stating that he has tortured that nigger, the

Callendar has disregard the humanity value of the Indians. As an addition, he also calls the Indians „nigger“ for having the darker skin, which can be considered as a racial discrimination.

CONCLUSION

The British colonization in India brought oppression and stereotyping along with it. The stereotyping that they constructed was based on the knowledge and the power as colonizer. By having such knowledge and power, the British settlers had the ability to overpower the native Indians, whom were regarded as the colonized. As the colonized one, the Indians were defined as an object. Being objectified, they experienced the oppression from the British settlers. The oppression by the British had a single purpose; to totally dominate both culturally and socially. To maintain their domination and to show that they had power over the Indians, they constructed the negative stereotypes of the Indians.

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