

# **Indian fauna: a mode of representing Indian Culture and Hindu Philosophy in E. M. Forster's 'A Passage to India'**

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The present study analyses Indian mysticism and cultural traditions through the images of Indian wildlife portrayed brilliantly in E. M. Forster's book 'A Passage to India'. The novel features all the major religions i.e. Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, but chooses to concentrate on the first since the setting is India and the question over which the novel has been structured is of culture. The author has largely viewed Hindu philosophy as a part of Indian culture and way of life. Therefore, though the main characters of the novel are Mohammedans and Christians, Prof. Godbole emerges as the essential character, without whom Forster's passage to India and its true culture would have been incompletely stated.

Forster is particularly fascinated with the Hindu ideal of unity of all living things, from the lowliest to the highest, from the insignificant to the significant. Noticeably, he applies in his novel this theory of unity and love. This philosophy of love and presence of God in some of the least appreciated beings of nature such as insects and worms, is well expressed at the end of chapter III, where Mrs. Moore exhibits sympathy even to a lowly wasp, by addressing it as "pretty dear". The wasp is a symbol of the unity of all life, as understood in the Indian religious tradition. In the next chapter, the image of the wasp occurs again. The two English Christian missionaries, Mr. Graysford and Mr. Sorley, are in the habit of discussing the extent to which the animal kingdom might share in divine bliss (presumably after death). They discuss this question with their Hindu friends. Mr. Sorley believes that monkeys might be so blessed, but he is less sure about jackals, even though he thinks the mercy of God might well extend to all mammals. But he is uneasy, as a Christian, about extending this to wasps. The third occurrence of the wasp image occurs in Part III, when Professor Godbole is performing the birth ceremony of Lord Krishna at Mau. Into his mind at almost the same time drift the images of Mrs. Moore and of a wasp, two images that "melt into the universal warmth." The biblical statement "God is Love," with which Mrs. Moore had exhorted her son, is repeated in the Hindu ceremony, although through an error in its printing it becomes "God si Love."

Thus Mrs. Moore's peaceful regard for the wasp shows her openness to the Hindu mysticism and Prof Godbole's vision of the wasp and his association of it with Mrs. Moore reflects his perception of Mrs. Moore's sympathy with Hinduism.

The text takes up the argument whether India and its culture is a mystery or a muddle. According to Mrs. Moore and Prof. Godbole, India is a mystery, whereas Fielding is of the opinion that it is a muddle. "Muddle" has connotations of dangerous and disorienting disorder, whereas "mystery" suggests a mystical, orderly plan by a spiritual force that is greater than man. The muddle that is India in the novel appears to work from the ground up: the very landscape and architecture of the countryside is formless, and the natural life of plants and animals defies identification. This muddled quality to the environment is mirrored in the makeup of India's native population, which is mixed into a muddle of different religious, ethnic, linguistic, and regional groups. The little green bird that Ronny and Adela observe sitting in the tree above them is unidentified by them.

For Adela, the bird symbolizes the unidentifiable quality of all of India: India is elusive; it cannot be categorized and labeled as per Western notions of knowledge. As far as India is concerned, "nothing is identifiable; the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else." This is why India will always baffle and defeat those Westerners who seek to understand it. The Indians have a different attitude to understanding. Inability to recognize the little bird exhibits their misunderstanding Indian culture. The simile of monkeys while explaining the natives in the Marabar train once again creates this image of muddle of India.

It is observed that the natural environment of India has a direct effect on Ronny and Adela's engagement. As soon as Adela tells Ronny she does not want to become engaged, their surroundings begin to overwhelm them, making them feel like lonely, sensual beings who share more similarities than differences. In particular, they feel that the night sky swallows them during their ride with the Nawab Bahadur. The sky makes Ronny and Adela feel indistinct as individuals, suddenly part of a larger mass that is somehow fundamentally united. Therefore, when their hands touch accidentally in the car, both Ronny and Adela are attuned to the animalistic thrill of sensuality. It happened so that an unidentifiable animal got hit by the car, which Adela identified as Hyena and it is largely due to this incident that the two lovers come close together once again, making up their mind for marriage. Their experience under the engulfing Indian sky draws Ronny and Adela together, forcing them to assert themselves as important, distinct individuals through a commitment to each other. While Ronny and Adela feel a sense of unity against the muddle that is India, we see Mrs. Moore grow even more spiritually attuned to the minds of Indians. First Mrs. Moore appears to be most aligned with the religious figure of Professor Godbole. Godbole's song, in which God is called but does not come, profoundly affects Mrs. Moore, deepening her sense of separation from her Christian God. Then, when Ronny and Adela tell Mrs. Moore of their car accident with NawabBahadur, the elder woman strongly feels that a ghost caused the accident. Though Ronny and Adela ignore Mrs. Moore, we learn a short while later that the NawabBahadur, too, suspects that a ghost caused the accident—the ghost of the drunken man that he had run over nine years ago near the same spot. While Ronny and Adela begin to segregate themselves from the social and natural

landscape that surrounds them, Mrs. Moore surrenders to the overwhelming presence and mysticism she feels in India, attuning herself to a sort of collective psyche of the land she is visiting.

The reference to elephants is profuse in the book. In fact, they become symbols of India itself. When promised for an elephant ride by the Turtons, Adela knew by some intuition that she would not be able to see the 'real India'. On the other hand, Dr. Aziz arranged a painted elephant to bring Mrs. Moore and Adela to the Marabar Caves, as soon as they left the train. Forster writes, "As the elephant moved towards the hills, a new quality occurred, a spiritual silence which invaded more senses than the ear" (Forster 155).

Elephants are a symbol of royal magnificence. Elite Indians used to have elephants at their households. Hindu elephant God, Lord Ganesha is also a part of Indian culture and tradition.

India is the home of several animals and as the book refers most of them consider the country's interior as their homes. The wasp in Mrs. Moore's bedroom, flies in Dr. Aziz's house thus became the inmates of the respective houses- 'no Indian animal has any sense of an interior. Bats, rats, birds, insects will as soon nest inside a house as out; it is to them a normal growth of the eternal jungle, which alternately produces houses trees, trees houses.'

Variety and recurrence of animals in the novel is particularly significant in the context of cultural studies. The diversity of the animals presented in the novel such as hyenas, wasps, elephants reminds us of the Hindu philosophy, unity in diversity and the existence of one unified God in everything. Indian culture considers animals as 'friendly and loyal' whereas Greeks and Romans see them as 'fierce' and powerful. Indian Puranas confirm this cultural belief of India as the Hindu Gods and Goddesses are found to be accompanied by one or more animals to complete the bonding of gods, humans and animals. Indian cultural studies remain incomplete without studying its vast range of animals, birds and insects. Be it religion, social life, economy or the thought process of the Indians, it is influenced by the Indian fauna in a way or the other. It is the land where cow is worshipped as 'Gomata', birds like peacock, owl, and swans are found to accompany Hindu gods and goddesses such as Karthikeya, Laxmi and Saraswati respectively, fierce tiger and lion help virtue win over vice. Not only these, little mice too are revered.

Inability to identify Indian animals at different parts of novel points to the fact that the concerned characters are not familiar with the Indian culture and beliefs. The sense of cultural superiority of the British and their so-called noble mission of civilizing the Indians are explicitly the reasons behind cultural clash between the rulers and the ruled. Mrs. Moore and Adela, who came to visit India to find both the ends on friendly terms, remain astonished to come across just the opposite of what they thought of. The recursive image of wasp and its association with Mrs. Moore by Prof. Godbole again establish the Hindu belief that humans as well as insects are part of the God. The text is a valuable document as regards cultural studies.

It will be wise to conclude by quoting the Indophile E.M.Forster, as he says, "Indians believe that birds, animals and human beings – as indeed everything else – are an integral part of divinity. This is the central belief of all Indian religious and cultural thought and thus, all forms of life must be

respected equally. Thus human beings and elephants, horses, cattle and birds like the mynah, the peacock, the parrot and the koel are woven into many fables and religious treatises. Water creatures like the crocodile, the turtle and fish are considered sacred and are associated with sacred rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna. India's belief that animals, birds and sea creatures are sacred is a dominant and beautiful aspect of Indian culture for millenniums. They are earthly and spiritual companions of human beings and thus equal sharers of the world and its resources.”

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