



Outlook on the EM Foster's Psychology Concerning English and Indian Character

Laraib Fatima Niazi

Department of English Literature, Riphah International University, Pakistan

laraibfatima2199@gmail.com

Received: 30 Dec 2024; Received in revised form: 03 Feb 2025; Accepted: 07 Feb 2025; Available online: 10 Feb 2025

©2025 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— This article critically examines EM Forster's psychological perspective as reflected in his essays *Notes on the English Character* and *The Mind of the Indian State*. By exploring his admitted reliance on psychology—despite limited knowledge in politics, economics, and science—the study argues that Forster's depiction of the English and Indian characters is significantly influenced by self-fulfilling prophecy and attribution bias. The analysis demonstrates that while Forster extols the virtues of the English national character, his portrayals of the Indian character are laden with negative stereotypes. In doing so, Forster not only reinforces his ingroup favouritism but also overlooks the complex interplay of environmental and individual factors in shaping cultural identity. Contemporary studies on intercultural interactions and cultural psychology are drawn upon to contextualize his bias. The findings challenge the impartiality of Forster's assessments and invite a reappraisal of his work from a more balanced psychological standpoint.



Keywords— Attribution bias, Cultural psychology, English character, Forster, Self-fulfilling prophecy

I. INTRODUCTION

Forster once remarked, "Having little knowledge of politics and none of Economics or Science I had to neglect the great forces that are driving East and West together and mixing them up whether they wish it or not: and I am keeping to psychology only" (1996).

This statement encapsulates his methodological choice to focus exclusively on psychological explanations in interpreting cultural phenomena. EM Forster, renowned as an author, novelist, essayist, and critic, employed psychological insights to analyze the characters and nations he depicted—most notably distinguishing between the English and the Indian. His writings, particularly *Notes on the English Character* and *The Mind of the Indian State*, reveal a dichotomous perspective where the merits of the English are extolled, and the faults of the Indian are emphasized.

II. EM FORSTER'S PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

Forster's reliance on psychology—despite his self-professed limitations in other disciplines—frames his interpretation of cultural identity. Influenced by the notion of the self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1948), he appears to have constructed a psyche wherein the virtues of his ingroup (the English) are presumed innate and infallible, while any shortcomings in out-groups (the Indians) are attributed to intrinsic faults. His personal history, having been raised solely by his mother, may have further predisposed him to view the world through a lens that favors familiar norms and downplays external influences when considering his own culture's achievements.

III. ANALYSIS OF FORSTER'S ESSAYS

3.1. Notes on the English Character

Published first in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1926 and later reprinted in the 1936 collection *Abinger Harvest*, *Notes on the English Character* presents the English as a middle-

class nation characterized by solidity, caution, integrity, and efficiency. Forster employs terms such as “commercial nation”—a label initially coined by Napoleonic critics—to reframe negative external judgments into a badge of honour. He humorously yet poignantly justifies these traits by suggesting that any missteps by the English are merely incidental, the product of environmental factors rather than personal failings.

3.2. The Mind of the Indian State

In contrast, Forster's 1922 essay *The Mind of the Indian State* employs markedly harsher language to describe the Indian character. He uses derogatory terms like “peasants” and paints a picture of an uncivilized, overly emotional people whose actions—such as extravagant spending on festivals like the Dessera—are dismissed as wasteful and impractical. Through anecdotes, Forster contrasts the measured emotional restraint of the English with the perceived emotional excess of the Indians, thereby reinforcing a binary opposition that privileges the rational over the emotional.

IV. DISCUSSION

A comparative analysis of both essays reveals a clear bias in Forster's approach. While he attributes English success to a disciplined, albeit understated, emotional life and an inherent rationality, he ascribes the Indian's perceived shortcomings to a lack of proper emotional regulation and an inability to judiciously manage resources. This skewed evaluation aligns with the dynamics of self-fulfilling prophecy and attribution bias: successes within one's own group are credited to intrinsic virtues, whereas similar actions by others are often dismissed as circumstantial or flawed. Moreover, even when similar cultural behaviours—such as the celebration of festivals—are observed in both nations, Forster selectively interprets them to reinforce his preexisting beliefs.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, EM Forster's essays illustrate how personal psychology, and inherent biases can shape cultural critique. His selective portrayal of the English as inherently virtuous, contrasted with a negative depiction of the Indians, raises questions about the impartiality of his psychological analysis. Rather than offering a balanced view that acknowledges both merits and faults across cultures, Forster's writings suggest that his interpretations are deeply colored by self-fulfilling prophecy and attribution biases. A reassessment of his work from a contemporary psychological perspective underscores the need to consider

environmental and contextual factors in the study of cultural identity.

REFERENCES

- [1] Forster, E. M. (1922). *The Mind of the Indian State*.
- [2] Forster, E. M. (1926). *Notes on the English Character*. *Atlantic Monthly*.
- [3] Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98(2), 224–253.
- [4] Merton, R. K. (1948). The self-fulfilling prophecy. *The Antioch Review*, 8(2), 193–210.
- [5] Paranjape, M. (1993). Forster's portrayal of Indian culture in *A Passage to India*. *Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 4(1), 45–60.
- [6] Tambling, R. (2009). Identity and cultural difference in E. M. Forster's works. *Studies in Postcolonial Literature*, 7(2), 112–130.
- [7] Word, C. O., Zanna, M. P., & Cooper, J. (1974). [Title unknown]. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 10(3), 263–274.
- [8] Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism & collectivism*. Westview Press.