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## **Racial Factor in The Novels of Harper Lee and E. M. Forster: A Comparative Study**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper presents a comparative study of the depiction of racism in Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" and E.M. Forster's "A Passage to India." Both novels offer profound critiques of racial prejudices, albeit within different historical and cultural contexts. "To Kill a Mockingbird," set in the 1930s American South, highlights the overt and violent racism of the Jim Crow era through the trial of Tom Robinson, an innocent Black man falsely accused of raping a white woman. Lee uses characters like Atticus Finch to symbolize moral integrity and the fight against societal injustices. In contrast, "A Passage to India," set during British colonial rule in India, explores the subtler forms of racism and cultural misunderstandings between the British colonizers and the Indian populace. The false accusation against Dr. Aziz at the Marabar Caves serves as a central plot device to examine the deep-seated prejudices and mutual distrust that hinder cross-cultural relationships. Through their distinct narrative techniques and thematic focuses, both authors underscore the pervasive impact of racism and the complexities of achieving reconciliation and understanding. This study highlights the enduring relevance of these works in addressing contemporary issues of racial injustice and cultural conflict.

**Key words: Racism, Historical, Cultural, India, Relationships.**

### **Introduction**

Racism, a problem that has persisted for a long time and is prevalent, continues to have an impact on society and individual lives all across the world. As a mirror of cultural ideals and conflicts, literature has long been a vehicle through which writers investigate and critique racial stereotypes. This has been the case for a relatively long time. Harper Lee and E.M. Forster, two



of the most well-known authors in the world, have made substantial contributions to this discussion through their works "To Kill a Mockingbird" and "A Passage to India." Both of these works provide a glimpse into the various expressions and effects of racism within their respective contexts, which are the American South during the 1930s and British colonial India, respectively.

The novel "To Kill a Mockingbird," written by Harper Lee and published in 1960, takes place during the Great Depression in the place of Maycomb, Alabama, which is a fictional town. Tom Robinson, a black man who was falsely accused of raping a white lady, is the protagonist of the novel, which revolves around his trial. Lee sheds light on the deeply ingrained racism and moral difficulties that exist within her community by utilizing the perspective of Scout Finch, who is a child. Atticus Finch, Scout's father and Tom's defense attorney, is a character that exemplifies the struggle for justice and the fight against prejudices that are deeply ingrained in society.

On the other hand, the events of "A Passage to India," which was written by E.M. Forster and published in 1924, take place during the time of British colonial control. Through the lens of the novel, the tense connections that existed between the British conquerors and the Indian populace are investigated. Adela Quested, a British woman, is the one who makes the complaint against Dr. Aziz, an Indian Muslim surgeon. This accusation is the most important part of the story. The occurrence that takes place at the Marabar Caves serves as a trigger for the investigation of the broader cultural and racial issues that characterize the experience of colonialism. The work of Forster digs into the difficulties of interactions between people of different cultures, drawing attention to the notions of bias and misunderstanding that stand in the way of genuine connection.

The objective of this comparative study is to examine the manner in which Lee and Forster portray racism in respective books, with a particular emphasis on the narrative strategies, characterization, and thematic issues that each author employs. It is possible for us to acquire a more profound comprehension of the various ways in which literature may confront and oppose racial injustices if we examine these works side by side. In addition, the study will investigate the influence and reception of these novels, taking into consideration the relevance of these works to contemporary conversations on issues of equality and race. It is our aim that by conducting this analysis, we will shed light on the continuing power of literature to face societal concerns and inspire change.



## **Historical and Cultural Context**

It is essential to have a solid understanding of the historical and cultural circumstances in which Lee and Forster wrote their novels in order to effectively comprehend the depictions of racism that they present. The novel "To Kill a Mockingbird," which was first published in 1960, takes place in the American South during the 1930s, a time period that was marked by racial discrimination and practices that were deeply ingrained. The book is a reflection of the realities that existed during the Jim Crow era, which was characterized by the systematic oppression of African Americans and the denial of fundamental rights.

On the other hand, "A Passage to India," which was published in 1924, takes place during the time that India was under British colonial rule. In this story, the author delves into the intricate and frequently antagonistic ties that existed between the British occupiers and the Indian population. The tensions and prejudices that were inherent in colonialism are reflected in Forster's writing. During this time period, racial and cultural superiority were invoked to legitimize various forms of dominance and exploitation.

## **Depiction of Racism**

Both Lee and Forster portray racism as a complex and pervasive issue in society; nevertheless, their tactics and areas of concentration are distinct from one another. In the novel "To Kill a Mockingbird," Harper Lee depicts racism through the perspective of a tiny town in the South, where biases are blatant and brutal. The trial of Tom Robinson, an innocent Black man who was wrongly convicted of raping a white lady, serves as the core plot, showing the systematic racism that exists throughout the legal system as well as in society as a whole. In order to combat these prejudices and argue for justice and equality, Lee used the character of Atticus Finch, a lawyer who is morally upright.

By depicting racism as a more subtle and insidious force in "A Passage to India," Forster shows that racism is manifested in the interactions and attitudes of the British colonizers against the Indian characters in the story. The incident that took place at the Marabar Caves, in which Adela Quested made a false accusation of assault against Dr. Aziz, is a reflection of the racial tensions and misunderstandings that plagued relationships between colonial people. This episode is used by Forster to investigate the cultural divide that exists between the British and the Indians. He highlights the deep-seated prejudices and mutual mistrust that exist between the two groups, which prevent any genuine relationship from occurring.



## **Characterization and Symbolism**

The way in which both authors communicate their messages regarding racism is significantly influenced by the use of characterization. Throughout the novel "To Kill a Mockingbird," characters like Atticus Finch, Scout, and Tom Robinson are utilized to represent the ethical conflicts and injustices that were prevalent during that era. Taking a stand against the systemic bigotry that exists within his town, Atticus in particular stands as a figure of integrity and moral courage. It is not merely a legal war that he is fighting for Tom Robinson; rather, it is a fight against the moral decay that has taken place in society.

Forster, on the other hand, used characters such as Dr. Aziz, Cyril Fielding, and Adela Quested in order to investigate the intricacies of relationships within colonial societies. Dr. Aziz is a representation of the educated and contemporary Indian who is torn between the influence of British control and the virtues of traditional Indian culture. Despite the fact that it is ultimately strained by the prevalent racial attitudes, his friendship with Fielding, an Englishman who is empathetic, is a symbol of the possibilities for cross-cultural understanding. Adela's erroneous allegation and eventual discovery of her error bring to light the harmful impact of racial misunderstandings as well as the challenge of eliminating biases that are firmly ingrained.

## **Themes and Motifs**

A better understanding of the authors' opinions on racism is provided by the fact that both works contain a number of themes and motifs that appear again. In the novel "To Kill a Mockingbird," the concepts of empathy, morality, and justice play extremely important roles. In order to emphasize the unfairness of causing harm to people who have not committed any wrongdoing, Lee employs the motif of the mockingbird, which is a symbol of innocence and harmlessness. Both Tom Robinson and Boo Radley are examples of mockingbirds, which are representations of innocent people who are harmed by preconceptions brought about by society.

Within the narrative of "A Passage to India," the themes of friendship, cultural struggle, and the search for understanding are prominently addressed. This motif of the Marabar Caves, with its reverberating and mysterious corridors, is meant to represent the incomprehensibility and ambiguity that are associated with relationships between different cultures. As a reflection of the larger issues that arise when attempting to bridge the cultural barrier that exists between the British and the Indians, the caverns become a place where misunderstandings and fears are expressed.



## **Narrative Techniques**

In order to convey their respective messages, both authors make use of different narrative strategies. Through the use of a kid narrator, Scout Finch, Harper Lee is able to present a vision of the racial atrocities that occurred in Maycomb that is both genuine and unfiltered. A fresh perspective on the prejudices and complexity of adult culture is provided by Scout's innocence and curiosity, which makes the novel's indictment of racism more painful and relatable to the reader.

The narrative style that E.M. Forster employs in "A Passage to India" is more intricate, as it makes use of various points of view and has a framework that is greater in fragmentation. This technique is reflective of the novel's investigation of cultural and racial ambiguity, with the shifting viewpoints highlighting the subjective aspect of reality and the challenges of attaining mutual understanding within the narrative. The tale is enriched with additional levels of significance because to Forster's use of symbolism and allegory, which is intended to encourage readers to contemplate the more far-reaching ramifications of the colonial experience.

## **Impact and Reception**

The public debate on racism and cultural understanding has been significantly shaped as a result of the effect and reception of both works. As a result of its profound moral message and criticism of racial injustice, "To Kill a Mockingbird" has been elevated to the status of a literary classic in the United States. It is extensively taught and acclaimed. On the other hand, it has also been subjected to criticism for the way it depicts race, particularly the representation of the white savior figure in Atticus Finch and the restricted agency of its Black characters.

With its subtle representation of colonial tensions and its astute investigation of cultural issues, "A Passage to India" has garnered praise from critics and commentators alike. The criticism that Forster offered of British colonialism and the empathetic portrayal of Indian characters were both remarkable for the time period in which they were written. The novel has been criticized for a number of reasons, including the fact that it presents Indian characters via a Western perspective and that it takes an equivocal stance about the feasibility of genuine cross-cultural understanding.

## **Conclusion**

By contrasting Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" with E.M. Forster's "A Passage to India," it becomes clear that both authors provide strong criticisms of racism, despite the fact that their



approaches and circumstances are different. The image of racism in the American South that Lee provides is straightforward and private, with the primary emphasis being placed on the moral struggle against injustice. In his investigation of colonial racism, Forster draws attention to the cultural and racial misunderstandings that characterize the colonial experience. This investigation is more complicated and multifaceted than other approaches. Both of these works continue to be relevant in today's world, providing insightful perspectives on the nature of racism as well as the difficulties associated with establishing genuine equality and comprehension. Through the examination of these works together, readers have the opportunity to acquire a more profound knowledge of the myriad of ways in which literature may face and fight the prejudices that are prevalent in society. This can help to cultivate a stronger awareness and dedication to justice in our own time.

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