Exploring Religious Indoctrination Through Things Fall Apart, A Passage To India And Midnight’s Children

Religion has always been one of the major socializing institutions, resolute in instilling norms and values to individuals with a view to maintaining order in society. At times, since the beginning of time, religion was required to gain solace and peace, hoping for protection from the unknown. However, over time, the same concept of religion started to take a different stance. Differences in opinions grew, resulting in creation of not just ‘improved’ but and degrading ideas for many. It started to work as a tool to control groups. And for confused individuals like me, agnostic to the very bone, religion started to seem more like a ploy, or a weapon of mass control and indoctrination.

Marx and Engels were very much sentimental about the role of religion in influencing people’s thoughts. According to them, religion was somewhat like opium, dragging people down to accept poor propositions without complaining. Hence, we can say that the very concept of colonialization was strongly backed up by the religion of the colonizers, enabling them to have a better hold of the people they were exploiting. Every form of religion itself is so vague and obtuse that the possibility of it being molded by certain groups of people for their personal gain is not that big of a surprise. Taking advantage of the weaker country by a stronger country or using the wealth of the weaker country to boost and enrich the stronger country is what we know by imperialism or colonialism. Many parts of the world in general, African and Asian continents in particular experienced this phenomenon. So, the advent of religion along with the western colonizers impacted those countries’ politics, education, economy and culture. Christianity played its definite part, but later on, even Islam and Hinduism were used to further strengthen the roots of control amongst the colonized.

In this paper, I shall bring forth arguments claiming that religion, apart from its other merits and demerits, has always been a tool for colonization, with missionaries spreading pure propaganda and not goodness, through the profound analyses of three texts I read in class. Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe and A Passage to India by EM Forster and Midnight’s Children by Salman Rushdie deals with religion in varying magnitudes and context; all their endgames upholding the message of wholesome faith being used to manipulate souls into submission, indifference and even oppression. The colonizing maneuver is made a zillion times easier through the clever use of manipulative techniques that include the focal issue of my paper, which is religion as merely a weapon.

I will start off with Achebe’s Things Fall Apart to show how the arrival of the Christian Missionaries ruined the tribes along with their nationalities, patriotism and their precious dwellings. In Things Fall Apart, the community’s religion is Igbo, yet Christian missionaries come in this story to try to convert the natives into Christianity. These two sects are distinct from each other. As such, it is difficult for the natives to understand the purpose of the Christian religion, and it is difficult for the missionaries to understand the culture of Igbo.

There are many deities in the Igbo faith. There's a storm lord and an earth god. Most of these gods are naturally centered. Since they are primarily an agricultural society, it makes sense for them to find nature as significant. We take care of the world as we love the planet and are

diligent not to dishonor the earth in any way. Also, for the Igbo culture, ancestors are very significant. This leads to a very important family. Ancestors are often dressed as deities. We should pray to their ancestors for guidance when they need help with something.

On the other hand, there is an all-powerful god in Christianity. The lord is there to save them from their sins and from this life to save them. This is so alien to the Igbo community because their whole life is this life and land. They don't seem to be quite relevant to a single god, particularly when this god doesn't seem to be as concerned about agriculture and their way of life. So, when Christian missionaries arrive, it makes sense that there is nothing the Clan wants to do with them. Okonkwo particularly has a hard time accepting them. Throughout his life he has made many sacrifices to serve the gods of Igbo and he doesn't want to turn his back on that. So, Okonkwo has a hard time accepting it when his brother, Nwoye, converts and disowns his son.

Now if we look at the history and the feuds holistically, with a perspective that delves more into the sociological imagination, we can easily see the disturbing pattern. When the Europeans came to colonize Africa, they did not just do it with pressure and brute. Colonization had been driven through the use of faith, and Christianity in particular. Many Africans now identify as Christians, and many as Muslims. Christianity seems to have done the most to influence the black person’s consciousness in Africa. Traditional African religions have been washed away, and they are seen in nature as pagan and heathen, particularly with Christianity. While everyone has the right to their religion, it is the same religion that influenced the history of Africa, especially with the advent of imperialism and colonialism on which it was founded. Across Africa, Christianity has done a major thing: to force black Africans to reject all their customs and to promote colonization. The African was taught to reject all African things and embrace a new way of living, a new way of living, a new order that separated them from who they were originally. Christianity was implicitly bound up with the Western agenda. Africans were seen as backward, barbaric, and uncivilized. Their mission was therefore to 'civilize' the African. They have achieved something with a great degree of success. Christianity was the Westerners ' religion. And it's obvious that the missionaries were embedded in Western values. So, what happened was a situation in which Africans were taught to hate all African things and accept the European way of life. The colonizers worked hand in hand with the early Christian missionaries and missionaries. The missionaries were sent on most occasions to negotiate treaties that would subjugate the Africans. The gun was accompanied by the Bible. And thus, Christianity's presence in the process of colonization had a devastating effect on the Africans. Some of the aims were to promote the Christian values inculcated in Africans. One of these was to pacify the Africans so that they would become passive and docile while the Europeans were doing with the land of Africans whatever they considered necessary. This is not to suggest the vilification of Christianity, not at all. Yes, it has become one of the continent's most accepted religions, shaping the way most think. During the colonial era, the way it was entirely different from the way it is now. It's just the fact that it was used to exploit Africans when it came. But now that all has changed, the causes have changed too. Not all missionaries, however, were determined to advance the interests of the colonial masters. Some were (at least according to them) of a genuine conviction that the Africans really needed Jesus as their Savior. While missionaries came to evangelize Africa with the good intention; the timing was bad. Together with colonial rulers and merchants, missionaries came to Africa with the plan to introduce Christianity, commerce and culture.

Now I am going to analyze my findings on A Passage to India, which brings to light a different

approach of the colonial masters, fueling the rivalry of the native Hindus and Muslims. In A Passage to India, religion plays a major role, dividing not only the primarily Christian from the Indians, but also Indian society from within. Though Hinduism is India's major religion, and Islam is the largest minority, other religious Indian groups mentioned in the novel are Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists. Ronny Heaslop typifies the attitude of official toward all faith as an arbitrary system of beliefs, including Christianity. According to him, Christianity is only useful to the degree that it provides empire with divine justification, and no more. And the plenty of religions in India only underlines their backwardness to someone like Ronny. However, the novel explores how different religious traditions could provide a better, more inclusive view of humanity, including Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. But over the others, no religion in the novel is valued as the last word about life, the universe, and the lot.

Religion is perceived as a dividing force on a socio-historical level. The "Mosque" and "Temple" sections were divided by the" Caves" section, reflecting the difference between the Indian Muslims and the Hindus. The Marabar Caves are synonymous with the concept of negation; the trip to it is said to have "challenged the very spirit of the Indian Earth, which keeps men in compartments" and ends in disaster. In spite of Dr. Aziz's triumphant battle cry at the end of the novel, his manipulative presence both in the structure and throughout the novel nullifies any possibility of reconciliation between the Indians and the Muslims through "Hindu and Moslem and Sikh shall all be one!" (Forster, 315),

Almost a quarter of a century later, the partition of India into the Union of India and the Dominion of Pakistan justified Forster's premonitions. Meanwhile, the sole Occidental religion, Christianity, is conspicuously absent; not just in the structure, but in the rest of the novel as well. The Oriental places of worship are described in detail by Forster, and are the locations of important plot events such as Dr. Aziz's first meeting with Mrs. Moore. The mosque and the Hindu temple are both evoked in concrete terms while there is no mention of anything Christian built on Indian soil.

Nearly a quarter of a century later, Forster's premonitions were justified by India's division into the Union of India and the Dominion of Pakistan. However, Christianity, the only Western faith, is conspicuously absent; not only from the structure, but also from the rest of the book. Forster describes in detail the Oriental places of worship and are the sites of major plot events such as the first encounter with Mrs. Moore by Dr. Aziz. Both the mosque and the Hindu temple are evoked in concrete terms while on Indian soil there is no mention of anything constructed by Christians.

Religion only appears through description and religious references, both of which leave no lasting impressions. Therefore, Forster suggests that there is no room in India for Christianity, and by extension for colonialists (Singh, 270). We will never be able to establish themselves permanently in the country despite their attempts to subjugate the Indians. Once, the prediction of Forster has been successful. India gained independence from in 1947, 23 years after the novel was published. Hence, from here we can clearly say that the colonizers never cared much for the ones they were willingly or unwillingly exploiting. Just as Islam is first introduced in the novel through Dr. Aziz's characterization and reveling in its past glory, Hinduism is portrayed through the spiritual and indifferent Godbole, Mrs. Moore and the insignificant commoners. In contrast, Christianity is presented as a religion erecting barriers between people despite its insistence on encouraging mutual acceptance. But then again, there are instances where the common people find the arrival of the Christian missionaries in India pointless for, they consider

the Indians below them and unworthy of the attention but, we all know why the colonizers are unfazed by all that, ignoring public opinion and preference. I said it before and I shall mention it once again, for the umpteenth time, that here, the coming of the missionaries is just a political move regardless of the other small pros and cons attached to it.

Moving on to Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children, we see a more horrifying impact of conviction on the society and the characters in general. Religion is at the forefront and drives most of the accounts throughout the novel. Now before we get into the novel, we need to know about the motivations and dispositions of Rushdie as well. Born into a wealthy Islamic family in colonial Bombay, Rushdie swam in the throes of alienation and identity crisis. As a secular humanist, his writings speak volumes of his preference towards a more profound form of religion that is free from conflict and extremism. However, in his novel Midnights Children, we readers get a glimpse on the chaotic psyche of Saleem Sinai, the incredible wonder being. We are torn between the violence cause through wielding religion by, and the communal riots between the Hindu-Muslims, fueled by the prior. "These themes, exile from the world of tradition and faith, and alienation from the modern world that 'abandoned' him philosophically and ethically, are consistently expressed as the central concern of Rushdie's writing, especially Midnight's Children" (Droogan, 3). It is completely understandable where this mindset of Rushdie comes from which is purely derived from the internalized preaching he faced in his early days.

Slipping back into the novel, the communal riots are the most significant portions of the story that operate in the most subtle of ways, hinting how the various governments are out to stay in power forever, disregarding the common interests of their people. If we dive into the history of India's independence, the very basis of this novel, we can see that the call for the partition of India was a move that would benefit the Colonizers the most. Better administration, smoother operations and swift business. Pitting the people against each other on the basis of their faith with the Brits posing as their fairy godmother looking over it all was a clever move indeed.

Rushdie refers to several religions in post-colonial India's culturally pluralistic backdrop including Sikhism, Buddhism, and Judaism, but he focuses primarily on Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. Despite being surrounded by religion, Saleem the protagonist is not a practicing Muslim, and he never visits a mosque or worships in any other way; however, Saleem is never able to escape religion completely, and as his story unfolds, it is a major cause of civil unrest following the independence of India. The freedom of religion, restricted under rule, is a fundamental right under the new constitution of India, and has filled society.

Midnight's Children is centered on the dichotomy of the religious and secular within Indian society, as well as the tension between majority and minority religions present within the subcontinent as a whole. With Saleem's story, Rushdie argues that religion affects all lives, devout practitioner and staunch atheist alike, and if left unchecked, it can become very dangerous. Midnight's Children focuses on the dichotomy of the religious and secular within Indian society, as well as the tension that exists within the subcontinent as a whole between majority and minority religions. Rushdie claims with Saleem's tale that religion affects all lives, both dedicated believers and militant atheists, and if left unchecked, it can become quite harmful. So harmful that it can turn lives upside down, ruin nations and destroy identities. And that is exactly what happens in the story and in history.

Therefore, from the brief analyses, we can conclude that religion, irrespective of the pros it brought (way less when weighed with the cons), was purely a tool for colonization. The

colonizers used it impeccably against the people for their own benefit, masking it as the “White man’s Burden”, and kept on exploiting people for millennias. In Things Fall Apart, the Igbos fell apart along with their culture, tradition and religion. In A Passage to India nations fought and magnificent friendships ended, crumbling in its own grandeur. And then in Midnight’s Children, nations were divided, blood was spilled and brotherhoods were ruptured. All because of religious indoctrination and the advent of the colonial hyenas. One can never really put forth well-articulated arguments regarding religion as a weapon without having read about the various perspectives on history and the arrangements of the colonizers. Thus, I believe with all my heart that religion is a positive factor only when it is used to truly solve conflict and spread amity, and not to conquer.

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