ADELA QUESTED – THE “WRONG SORT” OF ANGLO INDIAN WOMAN

Scholars such as Mary Procida and Verity McInnis have argued that Anglo-Indian women, especially officers’ wives, were agents who monitored the power and ideologies of the British Raj. They argue that those women were actively involved in tasks that were symbolic of their service for the empire, such as running the households and assisting their husbands with governance work. Their research, thus, shows how an Anglo-Indian woman who was engaged to an officer was expected to bear imperial duties. However, in Forster’s A Passage to India, Adela appears to offer an alternative to these stereotypical Anglo-Indian women. Throughout the novel, she is uncertain about following other Anglo-Indian women’s common practice, as she keeps associating with Indians and eventually, exonerates Aziz at the trial. Therefore, Adela is not the right sort woman to marry Ronny, a City Magistrate, because she rejects the empire’s ideologies and thus refuses to uphold the British colonial power in India.

Anglo – Indian marriage and domestic life were considered the foundation of the British Raj, as Allison Sainsburry states in her study of Anglo – Indian domestic novels that “matters of courtship and marriage were matters of the greatest import for the maintenance and extension of British power” (170). Procida argues that a British marriage in colonial India was significant to not only the bride and the groom, but also to the entire imperial community. Thus, she claims that the marriage must be “right” – between an officer in the right point in his service and, especially, a woman with the right sense of duties to the Raj. McInnins refers to Anglo-Indian
officers’ wives as “indirect agents of empire” (379) as their main marital responsibility, running the household, required them to not just create a sanctuary for their husbands, but to build a fortress for the Raj right at home.

Running a British household in India was equal to running a “microsite” of the Raj (McInnis, 380), and the British wife was expected to manage her house in a way that closely established the image of the empire. Part of this image, according to Procida, was the “inclusion of the official Anglo-Indian community”. Like in Forster’s *A Passage to India*, both Sainsbury, McInnis, and Procida agree that in India, there was no privacy – even the house, the most private, intimate sphere, was open to the public. McInnis explains that an Anglo-Indian home acted as a model of British civilization and the image of imperial prestige; therefore, “private life was on permanent display and the home was an arena for political discussion and administrative action” (Procida, 58). She states that the house was never locked and always ready to welcome any guest, even strangers, and the number of guests an Anglo-Indian mistress must accommodate could go up to 100. Sainsbury also adds that “in Anglo-India, what was private was public, and Anglo-Indian women’s lives were organized and ruled by the fact that they lived as part of the ruling British enclave in India” (169) Therefore, officers’ wives were expected not only to sacrifice their household privacy for the empire, but also ensure that they could welcome the guests with hospitality while remaining economical. Moreover, as Procida explains, to ease the financial burden from the frequent visits of the guests, Anglo-Indian women sacrificed their garden – their very feminine pleasure in England – to raise vegetables and cattle to have fresh and cheap supply of food.

Another important responsibility of officers’ wives was to manage the native servants in a way that showcased the British’s superiority over the Indian – the core of the Raj’s ideologies
According to Chattopadhyay, the male native servants were the only Indians that British women could interact with; thus, within the household, the servants represented India. As the servants’ perceived “feebleness” and “feminism” usually exasperated the white mistresses, the British women took up the role of educating their servants and assumed a masculine position over the male natives (McInnis, 402). In *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, a popular housekeeping guide for Anglo-Indian women in the 19th century, Flora Annie Steel and Grace Gardner described the women’s superiority to the servants by noting that “the Indian servant is a child in everything save age and should be treated as a child; that is to say, kindly, but with great firmness.” McInnis also adds that the officers’ wives “[demanded] obedience and respect from servants through racism, feminism of male servants, and assumption of male masculinity,” which reflected the heart of the Raj’s ambitions and ideologies.

Enforcing the integrity of the household was another duty the Anglo-Indian officers’ wives committed to, as the morality of the household equaled that of the Raj. Especially, the officers’ wives themselves were expected to strictly refrain from misconduct, as they were part of the image of the Raj yet were considered “weak or materialistic or naïve about the treacherous workings of the Indian mind and were purportedly more susceptible to pleadings, insinuations or even outright bribery” (Procida, 32). Procida brings up an example of how an Indian gave a Sub-collector’s wife a lamb, and the Sub-collector made his wife return that “apparently innocent gift.” A few weeks later, the Sub-collector told his wife that that Indian got involved in a lawsuit, and “if you (his wife) had taken that lamb he’d have been able to frighten the plaintiff off, saying that I’d accepted a bribe and was bound to give judgment for him” (Procida, 32-33). To protect the household’s wellbeing from such potential public scandal, the women kept heavy accounting records: “All grocery items and servants’ wages were to be systematically recorded in account...
book” (Chattopadhyay, 361). In Steel and Gardner’s housekeeping guide, the two authors also advise that “all public servants in India are bound to keep written accounts showing their total receipts and expenditure” (19).

Moreover, the officers’ wives were expected to maintain the Englishness of the house, as one of their main duties in India was to maintain the British identity of the men. Chattopadhyay describes a typical Anglo-Indian household in her article “Goods, Chattels, and Sundry Items,” showing how the women decorated their houses with English furniture: “In a typical Anglo-Indian house, the hall opened onto four rooms which answered the purposes of ‘parlor, dining, drawing, and sitting rooms […] [T]he hall would contain an assortment of armchairs, small tables, card table, piano, some pictures on the walls, a good number of wall lamps and shades, and a couple of table lamps” (249). Moreover, just as Forster describes how Indian and Anglo-Indian neighborhoods are separated by the civil station in Chandrapore in A Passage to India, Procida notes how the Anglo-Indian chose their houses far away from the Indian living space. The women ever ordered the servants to not wear shoes in the house because they didn’t want to feel the presence of natives in the house.

Beside the arduous task of running the household according to strict rules, an Anglo-Indian wife also sacrificed her parental needs to stay in India with her husband. According to Chattopadhyay, Anglo-Indian children were sent back to England after they turned seven. It was believed that to keep the children in India was to risk the future of the empire, as the children would not be able to receive proper English education in India (Chattopadhyay). Thus, the women faced the choice between staying in India with their husbands or leaving with the children. Procida adds that most women chose to stay in India because it was considered a sin to
leave their husband alone in India to go back to the conveniences in England. Therefore, to serve the empire, the women endured long separations from their children.

In her article “Married to the Empire,” Procida argues that though Anglo-Indian women did not directly work for the government, they actively assisted their husbands with official duties and helped them advance in their career. Their work involved acting as a public figure, accompanying their husbands in touring the districts, and spreading European civilization. The women even acted in their husbands’ stead when the husbands were absent, and the staffing was thin (Procida). Especially, the women were responsible for helping newly-arrived civilian officers to get used to life in India and avoid the temptation to go “native.” She described them as “incorporated wives who supported their husbands’ careers by subsuming their own ambitions, ideas, and identities to the demands of their spouses’ work” (Procida, 43).

Anglo-Indian officers’ wives spent their marriage, the central institution of their lives, serving and reinforcing the power of the Raj. Therefore, it was felt that a woman married to an Anglo-Indian officer must have a strong belief in the empire’s ideologies. In Forster’s *A Passage to India*, Mrs. Turton resembles such women. She is an experienced imperial woman, as she strictly complies with the Raj’s practices. Mrs. Turton hosts Adela for part of her stay in India, which is similar to the way Anglo-Indian officers’ wives frequently accommodated guests in their houses. She also believes strongly in the importance of a “right” marriage, as in the beginning she thinks it is a mistake for Ronny to marry Adela. She remarks that Adela “[hasn’t] been brought out to marry nice little Heaslop […] Mr. Fielding wasn’t pukka, and had better marry Miss Quested, for she wasn’t pukka” (Forster, 27). The fact that Adela is not aware of her imperial duties as she says, “I want to see the real India” (Forster 22) upsets Mrs. Turton, because it suggests that Adela is more a tourist than a potential Anglo-Indian bride. Most
importantly, Mrs. Turton is always racist toward the Indians. In the Bridge Party, she outright declines to associate with the Indians, saying “I refuse to shake hands with any of the men” (Forster 41). Her words reflect her belief in the Raj’s core principle: the British are superior to the Indians.

However, Adela Quested is different. She is uncertain about imperial ideologies and common practice, especially in their treatments towards the Indians, which leads to her hesitation in her engagement with Ronny, the City Magistrate. In the beginning, Adela always tries to be friendly with the Indians. In the Bridge Party, despite the nonchalance of the Indians and the reminder from Mrs. Turton of her superiority to the native - “You are superior to everyone in India except one or two of the Ranis, and they’re on an equality” - Adela is excited to talk to Mrs. Bhattacharya and Mrs. Das, as she cries out “But now we can talk: how delightful!” (Forster, 42). Also, Adela doesn’t hold negative prejudices against the Indians. She believes that the reason the Indians never sent the carriage for her and Mrs. Moore is their fault, not the Indians’, as she insists, “They even gave up going to Calcutta to entertain us. We must have made some stupid blunder, we both feel sure” (Forster, 72). Moreover, even after that disappointment from the Indian women, Adela still accepts Aziz’s invitation to the Marabar Caves, as she responds to him: “I shall be delighted” (Forster, 79). Her continuous interactions with the Indians show that Adela not only refuses to be racists towards the natives, but also seeks out their company.

Furthermore, she directly questions the Raj’s values and practices, and that uncertainty indicates her doubts in her ability to uphold the Raj’s power in the coming marriage with Ronny. When Mrs. Moore tells Ronny and Adela about her encounter with Aziz, Ronny is frustrated, saying that Mrs. Moore shouldn’t have replied to an Indian. Adela, not agreeing with this common belief of the Anglo-Indians, responds to Ronny, “Wouldn’t you expect a Mohammedan
to answer you if you asked him to take off his hat in church?” Adela disagrees with Ronny’s and other British’s view of the Indians, and thus she becomes skeptical of her future with Ronny – a future of an officer’s wife. This uncertainty urges her to unconsciously indicate that she is not going to marry Ronny by announcing that she’s not settling in India (Forster, 77).

Even though Adela appears anti-imperialist at the beginning, there are times when she complies with the Raj’s ideologies. In the car accident, Ronny and Adela remain calm and try to handle the situation smoothly. Adela is not frightened and even helps explaining the cause of the accident: “We didn’t skid […] We ran into an animal.” Ronny admits that she gives the right explanation, and the two become “united and happy. Thanks to their youth and upbringing, they [are] not upset by the accident” (Forster, 95). Adela and Ronny’s success in solving the accident is an indication of how they might collaborate in their marriage to serve the empire. Moreover, the fact that Adela can point out the reason of the accident demonstrates her ability to assist Ronny with civilizing the mysterious India. In contrary to the English people’s composure, the Nawab Bahadur is upset and emotional at the accident. After Adela tells Ronny that she is not frightened by the accident, the Nawab Bahadur cries out rudely that “I consider not to be frightened the height of folly” (Forster, 94). Ronny also responds later that “The Nawab Bahadur had not come out very well” (Forster, 97). The Indian’s emotional reactions persuade Adela that even a male Indian is more feminine than her, and thus resembles the Raj’s core belief that the Indian is inferior to the British. Therefore, right after that accident, she agrees to become re-engaged to Ronny: “‘Ronny, I should like to take back what I said on the Maidan.’ He assented, and they became engaged to be married consequence” (Forster, 101). All the references to the British empire’s ideologies in the car accident have convinced Adela that she and Ronny would make a good marriage.
Adela truly becomes a part of the Anglo-Indian community when she accuses Aziz of rape without any certainty or evidence, as her action unconsciously voices the British’s racist assumption that “All unfortunate natives are criminals at heart” (Forster, 184). Moreover, Adela’s movement from the Marabar caves, an Indian place, to Chandrapore, a British controlled place, also resembles her movement from being friendly with the Indians to becoming a ‘proper’ Anglo-Indian woman. The British now acknowledge her as “one of them,” calling her “pukka,” and shower her with sweet words and hospitality. Mrs. Callendar and Lesley call her “our sister,” while Mrs. Turton refers to her as “[her] own darling” (Forster, 199). The men remain in deep sorrow, as the Collector breaks down when he thinks of how “a young lady engaged to my most valued subordinate – that she – and English girl fresh from England …” was insulted by an Indian (Forster, 182). Their responses to Adela’s incident are not only because Adela is now considered a true Anglo-Indian woman, but more importantly, because the incident threatens Ronny and Adela’s engagement and thus indicates a threat to the future of the Raj. To the Anglo-Indian community, “Miss Quested was only a victim, but young Heaslop was a martyr; he was the recipient of all the evil intended against them by the country they had tried to serve” (Forster, 205). This corresponds to what Sainsburry claims in her study of Anglo-Indian domestic novel that “any threat to the romance of a young English couple is simultaneously a threat to the empire.”

Nevertheless, even as other Anglo-Indian acknowledge her as one of them, Adela expresses merely ambivalent support for the Raj’s ideologies as she is still uncertain about Aziz’s crime. Adela is horrified as she cries “Aziz … have I made a mistake?” and “Ronny, he’s innocent; I made an awful mistake” (Forster, 225). She is traumatized by her uncertainty, as she says to Ronny, “It would be so appalling if I was wrong. I should take my own life” (Forster,
229). She needs a firm decision on Aziz’s situation, and eventually, she refutes the charge against Aziz: “Dr. Aziz never followed me into the cave” (Forster, 255). By officially announcing that “[she has] made a mistake” (Forster, 255), Adela refuses not only Aziz’s alleged crime, but also about both the Raj’s ideologies and thus, her future as an officer’s wife – Ronny’s wife.

In British India, English women married to imperial officers were agents of the Raj, dedicating their life to serve the empire and reiterate its ideologies. Those women committed their marriage to help their husbands with governance work, guard the Englishness of the Anglo-Indian bachelors, and run the household with grace and dignity to establish proper values and practices of the Raj. Especially, they reinforced the British’s superiority over the Indian, the core of colonial ideologies, right within the house by managing the servants through racism and feminism of the male servants. An Anglo-Indian woman to be married to the official class in India was expected to bear such responsibilities; thus, she must have strong belief in the Raj’s ideologies. However, Adela doesn’t. By recanting her testimony against Aziz, she effectively breaks off her engagement with Ronny at the end because she doesn’t believe in imperial practice and ideologies, and thus is not the right women for him because she won’t be able to fulfill an officer’s wife’s imperial duties.
WORKS CONSULTED

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