

British Colonialism in India

From Defoe to Forster.

The voices of Malala and Iqbal.

ABSTRACT

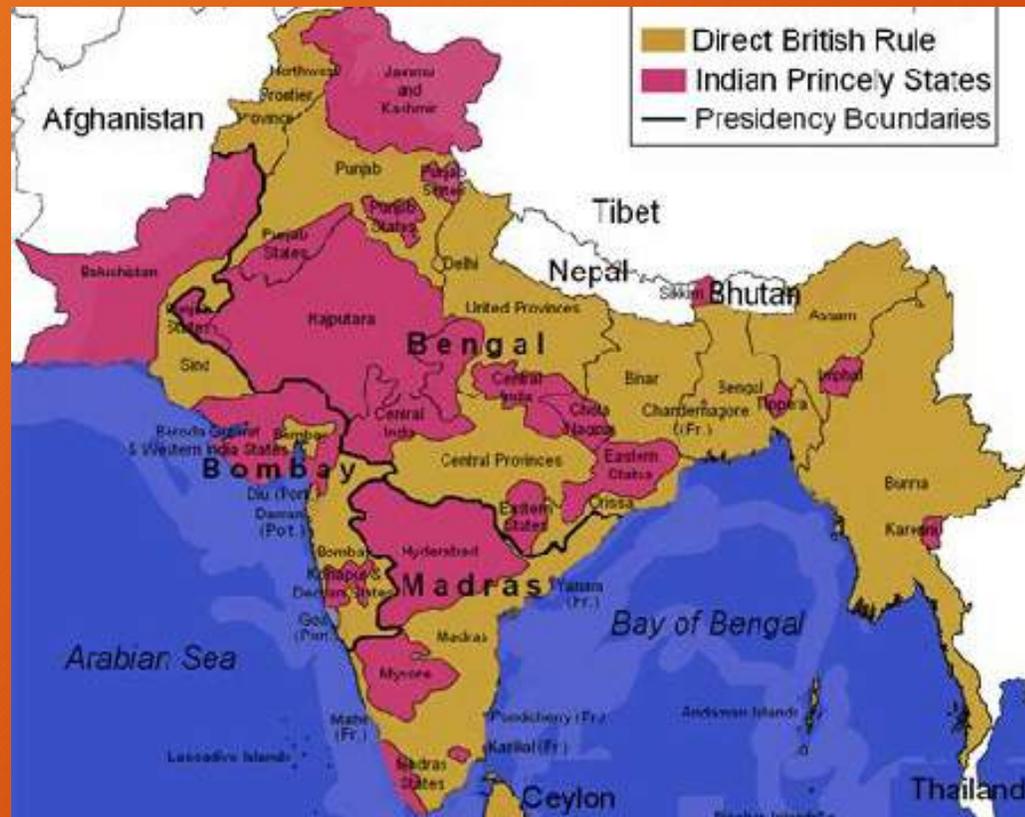
This project analyses the British colonialism in India, with a great attention to the historical period in which it developed and its literary background.

In particular, it is focused on the relationship between India and Great Britain through the centuries, on the Independence of India and Pakistan, analysing great characters such as Mahatma Gandhi and Malala Yousafzai.

Also, this project explores the great literature of writers like Daniel Defoe, Rudyard Kipling, Edward Morgan Forster and Joseph Conrad.

Finally, there is an important reference to the national Pakistani poet, Mohammad Iqbal, considered the spokesman of the Islamic religion.

Historical background



The British Raj began at the end of the 15th century, when Queen Elisabeth the 1st sent a group of merchants in India, that would later become “The East India Company”.

Not only did Britain acquire these new territories, but it also imposed them heavy taxations and many cultural changes.

When Indians rebelled in 1857, the situation worsened and two-thirds of modern India became British property, creating the British Raj.

DURING THE 2 world wars

During the First World War, Britain declared war on Germany without consulting India, and about 1.500.000 Indian soldiers died in the British army.

In the meantime, on 13th April 1919, more than 15.000 Indian gathered at Amritsar, in Punjab, to protest against the curtailment of their rights: British troops fired on the crowd, killing hundreds of men, children and women. This was an horrible massacre, known as the Amritsar Massacre.

During the Second World War, India contributed hugely to the British war effort.

However, this war was fundamental in its decolonizing process. At the end of it, in fact, India started to show its desire to become independent.



THE INDEPENDANCE OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN

In India, the Independence Movement was led by two great parties: the Indian National Congress Party, whose major exponent was Gandhi, and the All India Muslim League, to which Mohammad Ali Jinnah (the founder of Pakistan) adhered.

They had different ideas: the first supported non-violence, while the second thought that violence was an important weapon against British oppression. In the meantime, on 17th August 1947 a violent fight broke out between Hindus and Muslims, and India was divided in 2 areas, a Hindu area (India) and an Islamic area (Pakistan).

After this Partition, in order to avoid a new civil war, the new viceroy Lord Mountbatten proclaimed the independence of Pakistan on 15th August 1947. India was made independent the following day.



Mahatma Gandhi

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was the father of India's independence.

He is commonly known as "Mahatma", a word that in Sanskrit means "great soul".

He was born in 1869 in India, but then he moved to South Africa, where he underwent a racist episode that led him to begin a policy against British despotism.

At the beginning, he fought against "apartheid", that is the racial segregation policy established by the government of white people in South Africa, proposing "ahisma", that is "non-violence".

His unforgettable affirmation is: "Non-violence does not mean sweet submission to the will of the wicked, but it means the use of all the forces of the soul against the will of the tyrant."



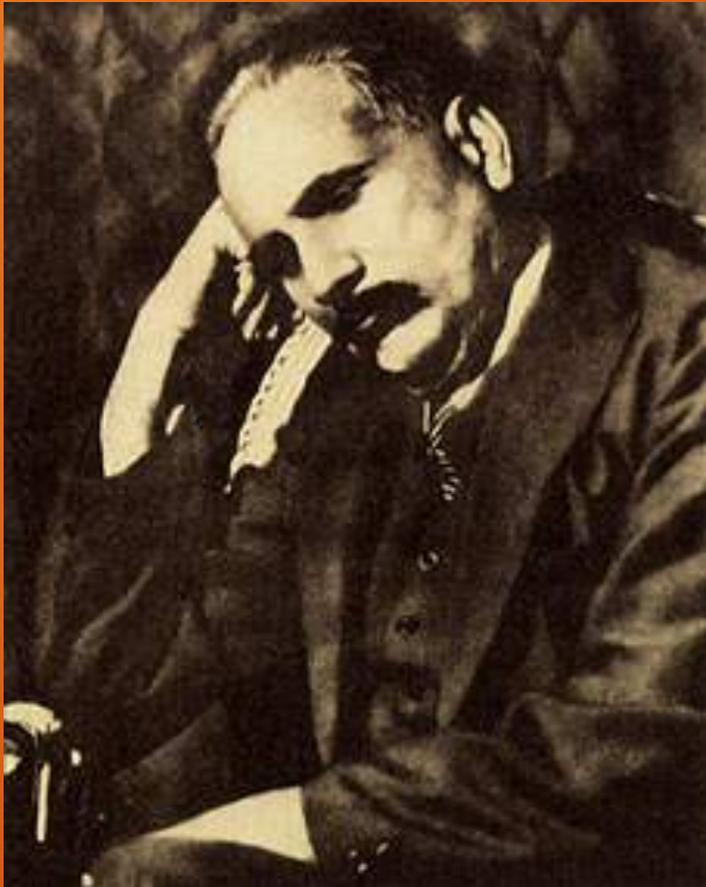
During his life, Gandhi was admired by many people, but only after his martyrdom he became a symbol of universal peace.

He was nominated for the Nobel Prize a lot of times, but he never received it.

In 1948, he was assassinated with three gunshots by Nathuram Godse, a radical Hindu fanatic.



MUHAMMAD IQBAL



Muhammad Iqbal is a Muslim philosopher, also considered the national poet of Pakistan. He was born in Sialkot in western Punjab on November 9, 1877.

As a poet, he explored the inner world of man and civilization.

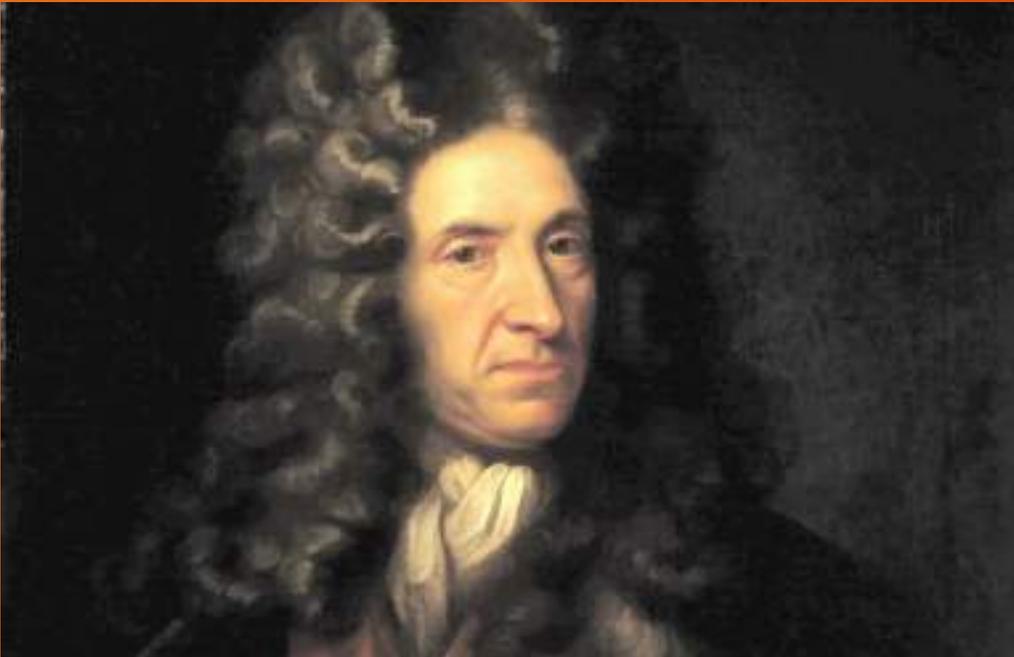
In a famous poem, he invites the Hindu majority of India to the coexistence:

***“Once again we lift the veils of the suspect.
we join the separated once again, no more divisions.
the abode of the heart has long been deserted
come, let's build a new altar in this country ”***

As it's clear, it is a strong message of integration and cohabitation made towards a religion and a culture which are different from Iqbal's own ones.

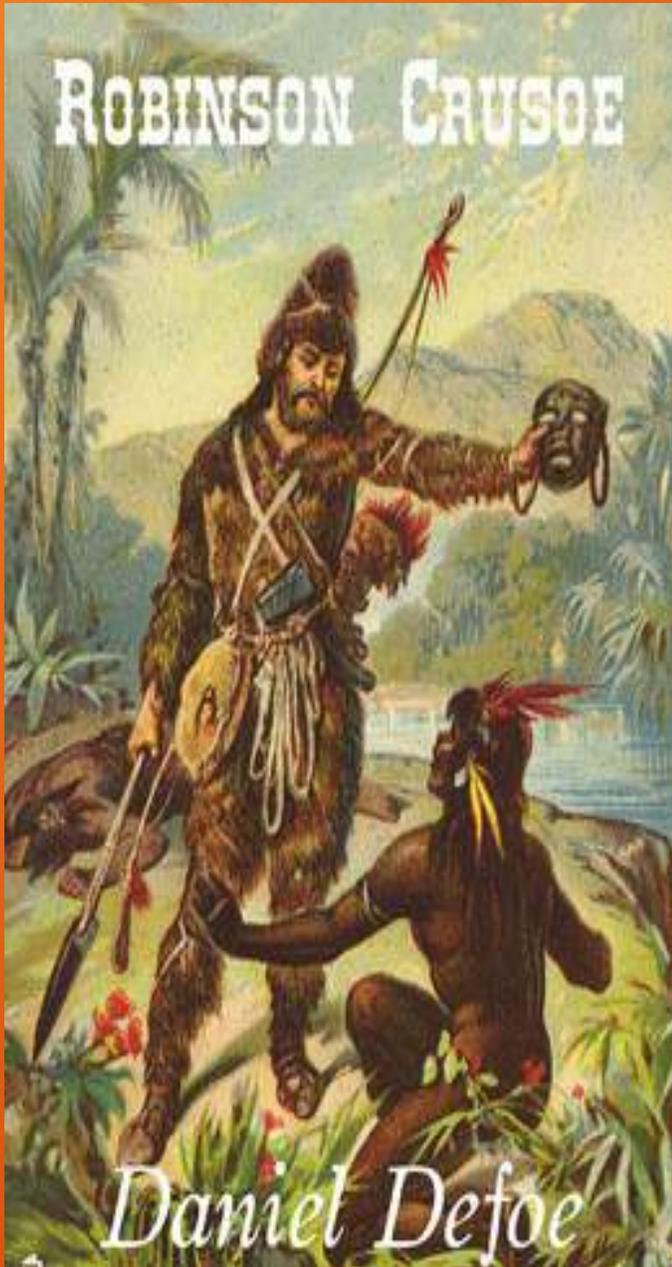
Literary background

The theme of “colonialism” is a complex theme, that has been analyzed in several different ways throughout the literary history. We explored it through the novels of important writers such as Daniel Defoe, Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad and Edward Morgan Forster.

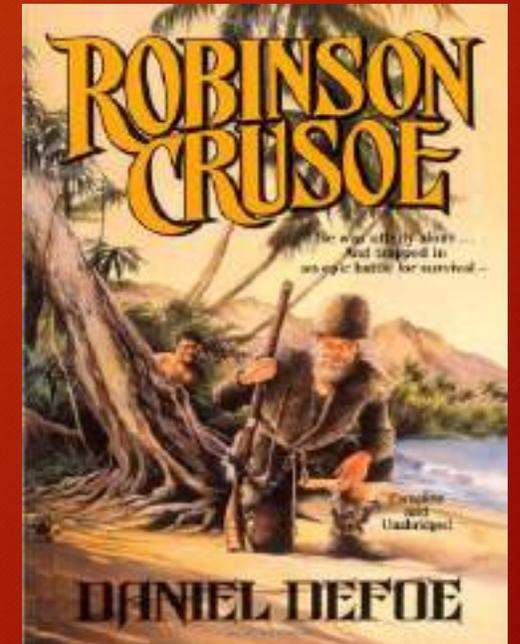


Daniel Defoe was born in 1660 in London, into a Puritan family. He graduated at Newton Green, a famous dissenting academy, and he became a part-time writer and a part-time businessman. In 1719 he published his masterpiece, *Robinson Crusoe*, a story of a shipwrecked sailor who manages to survive alone on a desert island for 28 years.

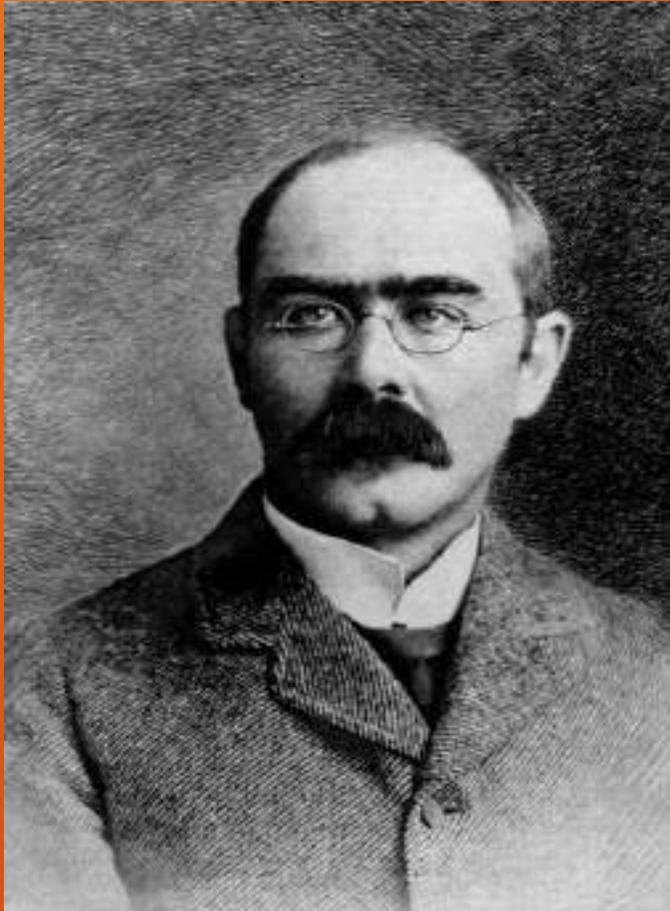
He died in London in 1731, alone and full of debt.



In *Robinson Crusoe* there is an Englishman, Robinson, that asserts his British superiority over a native, Friday, and their relationship perfectly reflects that between colonist and native. Robinson's attitude is the imperialistic attitude of the 18th century European men, whose only desire was to impose their dominion over new territories and new people, considered inferior.



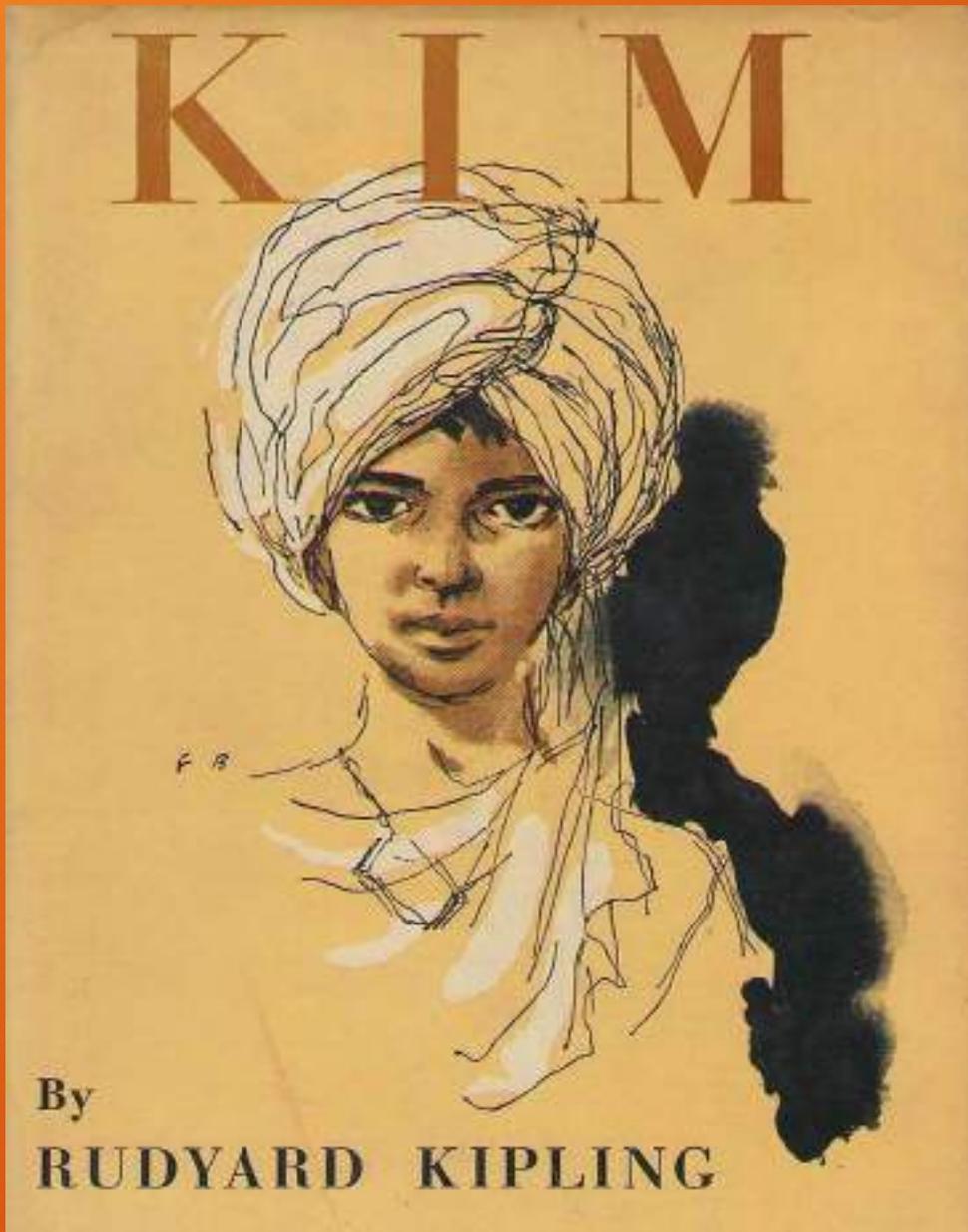
Rudyard Kipling



Rudyard Kipling was born in 1865 in India, but he went to school in England, as was the custom among British residents in India (Anglo-Indians).

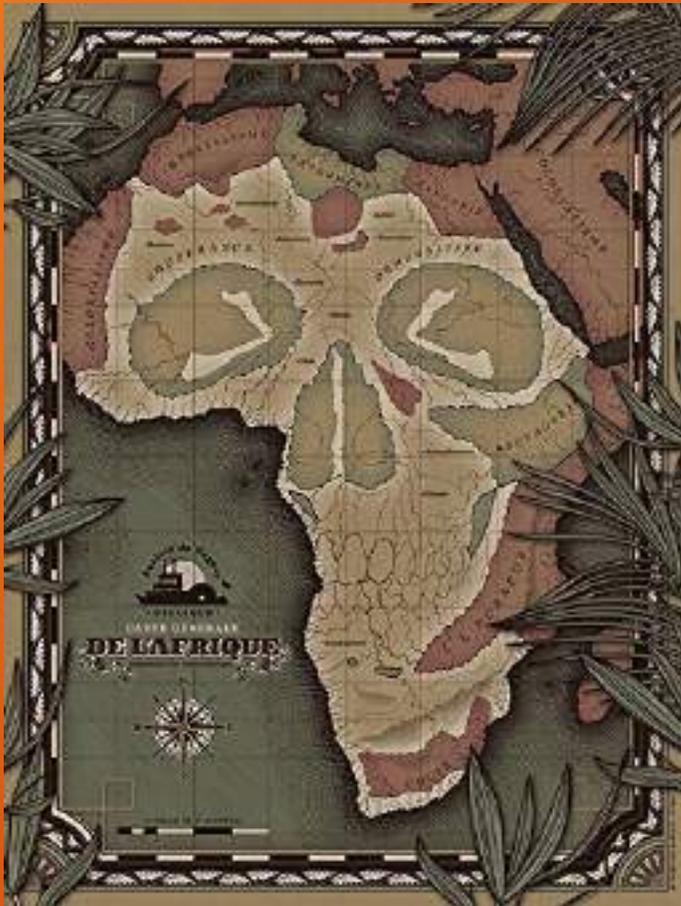
He was the first English man to win the Nobel Prize for literature and, with his masterpiece “Kim”, he became the great chronicler of the Anglo-Indian experience.

In “Kim”, he defines “imperialism” as a philosophy that assumes the British superiority and duty to “civilize the uncivilized”.

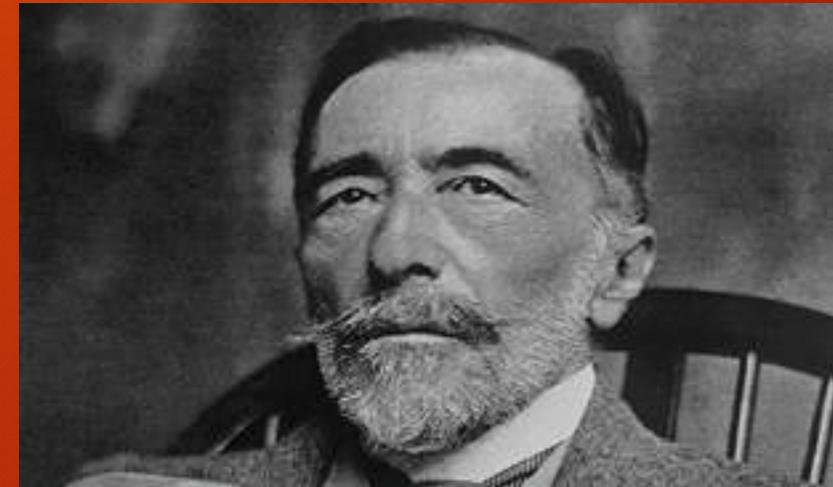


There's a difference between Forster's *A passage to India* and Kipling's *Kim*. Kipling has a great admiration for the British Empire, which he defines "morally superior people". Kim, the protagonist, is an Anglo-Indian native, an ambitious boy who starts to travel through India, discovering its culture. Forster, on the other hand, is not a strong defender of the imperialistic tendency: in his famous novel "A passage to India" he sums up his critique to British Empire, that he considers "morally corrupted", not "morally superior" as Kipling does.

Jozef Teodor Konrad

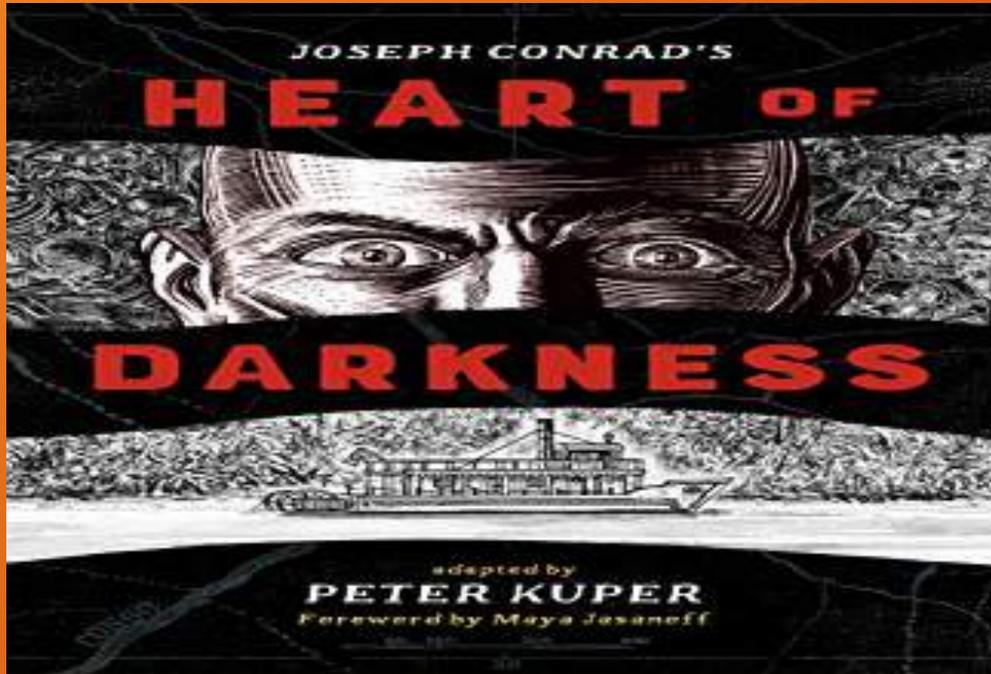


Jozef Teodor Konrad was born on December 3, 1857, in Ukraine. When he was 16 years old, he started his career as a mariner and, in 1890, he sailed up the River Congo and this experience inspired his masterpiece, *Heart of Darkness* (1902).

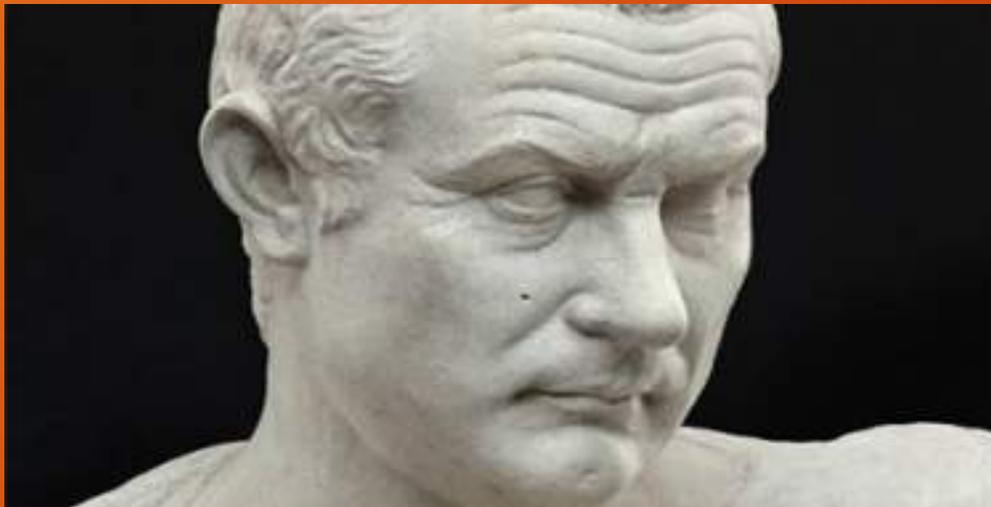


In it, the author criticizes the European colonialism (Europe only had economic interests) through the character of Kurtz, that exploits the resources of African lands.

However, the real main character of the story is Marlow, who starts a travel through Congo, but above all a travel into himself (this is the sense of the term "*darkness*").



The theme of duplicity is also present in “Heart of Darkness”: during his travel, Marlow understands that the human soul is divided into two parts, one conscious and one unconscious, the Good and the Evil.



The theme of duplicity is taken by Plautus, a writer of antiquity that used it in his famous comedies. However, while he used it to make his audience laugh, Conrad used it in a deeper meaning, to stress the constant fighting between Good and Evil.

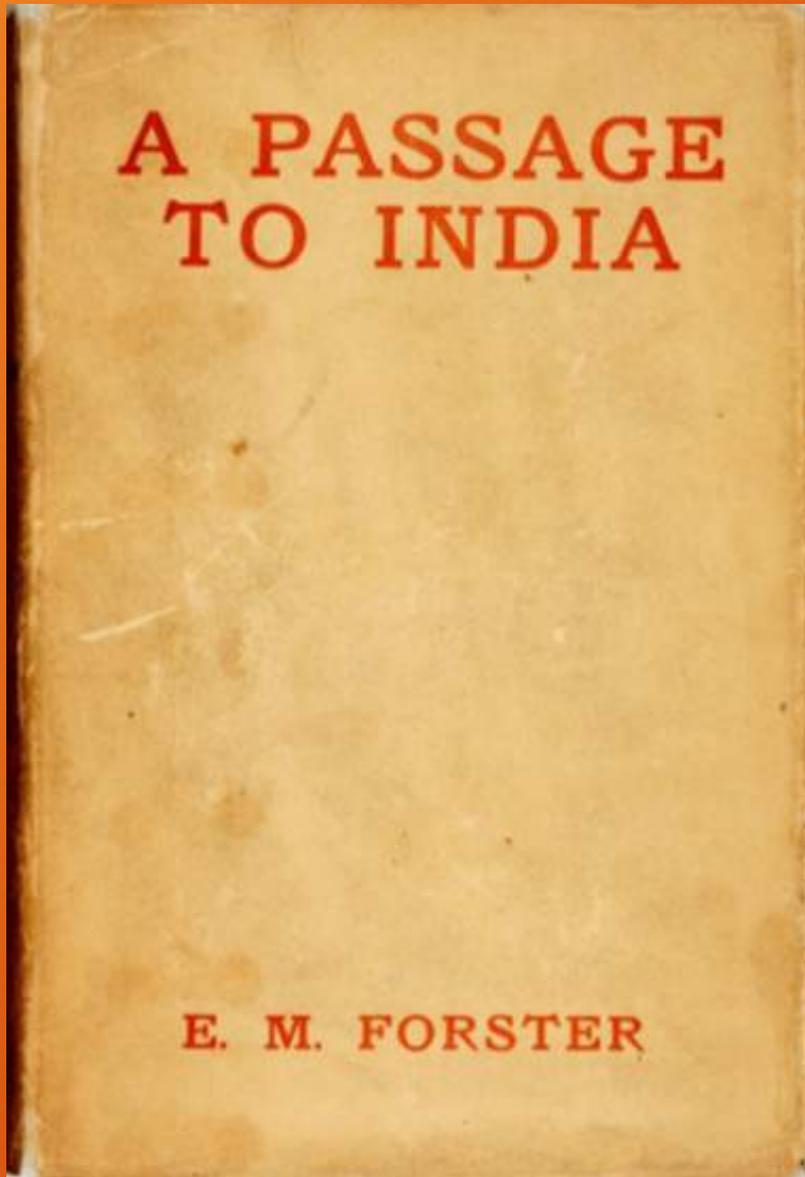
Edward Morgan Forster



E. M. Forster was born in 1879 in London. When he grew up, he travelled to India, where he got the inspiration to write his masterpiece, *A passage to India*, published in 1924, in which the author analyzed the difficult human and political relationship between the British and the Indian in the 19th century.

This book is representative of the failure of the attempt to combine Western and Eastern culture.

The racial antagonism between these 2 great races, with different heritage and history, is too much.



In *A passage to India*, there are a lot of different themes:

-theme of power: the book is set in India while it was a British colony;

-theme of justice: Western ideals get corrupted in a morally corrupted institution like the British Empire;

-theme of religion: the many different religions, in India, provide a more inclusive view of humanity, while the Christian vision is used to provide a divine justification for British monarchy;

-theme of race: the White Europeans are far superior than the Orientals, considered to be unable to rule themselves.

The condition of women in India

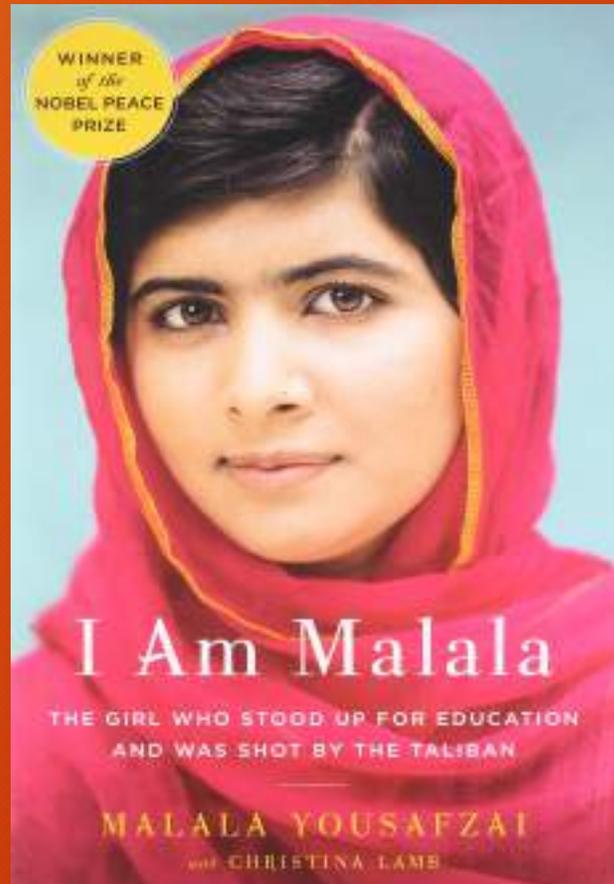
Also the gender is a fundamental theme in *A passage to India*. It divides Indian society, because women are considered a much weaker sex than men. The same happens today... Women are subject to inhuman laws and considered incapable of understanding. Many women couldn't shut up in the past, and didn't want to tolerate those terrible conditions, so they raised their voices. Among them, we have to remember Malala Yousafzai.



MALALA YOUSAFZAI

Malala Yousafzai was born on the 12th July 1997 in Pakistan. She is a famous activist, who has been fighting for a long time for the women's civil rights in Muslim countries.

She became well known after the attack suffered on the 9th October 2012, when she was shot at the head by a Taliban while she was returning home on the bus, because of her activism.



She founded a non-profit organization called “Malala fund” and wrote an important book, “I am Malala”.

In 2013 she gave a speech during the United Nations Youth Assembly, in which she said “books and pens are the most powerful weapons against the injustice; education is the only solution”.

Finally, in 2014 she won the Nobel Prize.

THE INDIAN PARTITION IN MODERN FICTION



The historical theme of the Indian Partition is also present in a modern fiction called “Doctor Who”. It is one of the best known British television series, and it chronicles the adventures of an eccentric time-and-space-traveling Time Lord, the Doctor, native of the planet of Gallifrey.

In the 6th episode of the 11th season of the show, titled “Demons of the Punjab”, the Doctor (Jodie Whittaker) and his companions travel to 1947’s India through space and time, when the border with Pakistan was being drawn.



The story is set during the Partition of Punjab.

The Punjab takes its name from the Persian words Panj (پنج) and Àb (آب) and it means “land of the 5 rivers”, because it is crossed by the rivers Satluj, Bias, Ravi, Chenab and Jhelum. When the British Raj conquered India, Punjab went under its government; then, during the partition of India, in 1947, this region was split in half, and its Eastern side was assigned to India while its Western side was assigned to Pakistan. Today, Pakistani Punjab is bigger than the Indian one, and it is even the most populated area of Pakistan.

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