

## E. M. Forster's A Passage To India: Problem Of Evil

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### Abstract

The theme of the novel, A Passage to India is philosophical, symbolical and political. On one hand it deals with racial problems. On the other hand it answers the question whether or not the Indians and the English can be real friends.

Forster found different of gaps in Indian Society. He saw separation among different races and cultures. The most important separation was between the English and the Indians. He described the separation of race from race, sex from sex and even of man from himself. In the beginning of the novel some efforts are The Bridge Party proves to be ridiculous. Mr. Turton, Mrs. Turton, Ronny etc. are not serious about it and they are not prepared to meet the Indians on equal footing. Mrs. Turton tells Mrs. Moore that the British ladies are superior to all the Indian ladies except a few Ranis who are their equal. Mrs. Moore and Adela want to understand India but their attempts fail from the very beginning. The rude behaviour of Ronny spoiled the atmosphere of tea-party hosted by Mr. Fielding. The picnic at Marabar Caves led to the arrest of Dr. Aziz and now no success is possible in this affair.

**Keywords:** Imperialism, Tolerance, Intelligence, liberal humanism, Western intellectualism and dubiousness.

India's magnitude and mystery, its variety and complexity attracted Forster like anything. Once he remarked :-

"I began A Passage To India before my 1921 visit, and look out the opening chapters with me, with the intention of continuing them.... I used to look at them an evening in my room at Dewas. I felt only distaste and despair. The gap between India remembered and India experienced was too wide. When I got back to England the gap narrowed and I was able to resume."<sup>1</sup>

He came to India as a broad minded Englishman. He had no selfish motives in observing and describing Indian life. Though he faced many difficulties here yet he succeeded in his aim due to his extra ordinary insight. He wrote A Passage To India in leisurely manner because he could enter into the minds of Indian people. India was never terrifying and monotonous to him. Stone remarks :

"Forster .... went to India to be taught, not to teach, to appreciate, not to condemn. Moreover, he went not as an Englishman or a ruler or a missionary, but as an individual.... He went not to bring light, but to see if the darkness held secrets and mysteries worth knowing."<sup>2</sup>

While writing this novel he studied the Bhagvata Purana, Bhagwad Geeta, Havell's The Ideals of Indian Art and Martin's The Gods of India. All these books influenced his

thinking a great deal. He had friendly relations with Sir Syed Ross Masood, the Hindu Maharaja of Dewas, Sir Syed Ahmad etc. Laurence Brander says, "Forester had the rich affection which is common between English and Indians and because these friendships seemed under threat and because they were so rich that he wanted them to continue, he wrote the novel."<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, it is a deep allegory dealing with different aspects of Hinduism. "The great themes" says Laurence Brander, "Friendship and universal love, are developed through what happens to these Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested and the people whose lives are affected by meeting them... Friendship is found among the Muslims and Universal love is found in Professor Godbole."<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Aziz and Fielding made efforts to form a lasting friendship and no good comes out of it. They could not live as brothers. They could not forget the worlds that divide them. Even Hindus and Muslims are separated from each other. Though Aziz speaks in a friendly manner with Professor Godbole yet he does not want to be reminded of Cow-dung, Akbar etc. Prof. Goodbole also thinks that some Moslems are very violent. So Forster found infinite splits in the Indian soil.

The Moharram caused tension to the British authorities. The Moslems purposely raised the height of Tajia and wanted to cut the branches of a Peepal tree. The Hindus were not prepared to allow this. The question was if the Tajia procession should take another route or should the towers be shorter? Though the Collector favoured the Hindus yet he suspected that they had artificially bent the tree.

When Dr. Aziz is sick, Prof. Godbole also falls ill. Now Dr. Aziz is anxious about the health of Prof. Godbole. But he is shocked to know that Dr. Panna Lal is attending him. Moreover Dr. Panna Lala visits ailing Dr. Aziz, not as a colleague but as an emissary of the Civil Surgeon.

Adela had come to India as a fiance of Ronny. But she could not get married and had to leave India for England unmarried. Both of them found not interest in each other. Even Mrs. failed to adjust with Ronny and other narrow minded Britishers. Fielding got married with Mrs. Moore's daughter Estella and soon realised that his wife is after something else. She did not share his ideas and hence both of them could not meet on the same intellectual level.

The only solution Forster could think of all these separations was universal love and friendship inspite of all pervasive sense of separateness.

Forster was not prepared to write traditional novels. He did not want to give 'an air of finality to the plot' and distinguished a story from a plot. There is a time-sequence among all the events of this novel. Every incident answers the questions – Why it happened and how it happened? This novel does not end where it ends. It grows and aims at expansion. Its plot is organic. The novel develops and progresses through scenes that are inevitably related to one another. The plot has been divided into three parts. The mosque, the Caves and the Temple. In the very beginning Dr. Aziz, Nawab Bahadur, Hamidullah etc. are discussing whether it is possible to be friends with Englishmen. They feel that good relations between Indians and the English are possible only in England. The Bridge Party widened the gulf between the two. The tea party and the Picnic failed to achieve the desired results.

The Marabar expedition began with an ill omen. Mr. Fielding and Prof. Godbole were held up at the crossing and didn't join Dr. Aziz, Adela and Mrs. Moore. Mr. Fielding jumped to get into the running train but missed the hand of Dr. Aziz. Dr. Aziz told the ladies – 'Our expedition is a ruin'. When the train moved towards Marabar Caves, Mrs. Moore thought of

the insignificance of all human relationships. She felt tired after visiting the first cave and decided not to visit the second cave and Adela became hysterical. She was troubled with some hallucination. Her field-glasses with their broken strap were left behind and were picked up by Dr. Aziz. But he was arrested at the railway station the next day inspite of all the efforts of Fielding to protect him. The British officers took it for granted that Dr. Aziz tried to ravish her chastity. They thought that she protested and struggled hard to protect herself. It was also accepted that the strap of the glasses broke during the struggle and she suffered from nervous breakdown. But she never blamed him for any violence. She said, "I went into the cave. I remember scratching the wall with my finger .. And there was this shadow or sort of a shadow-down the tunnel. It seemed like an age, but I suppose the whole thing can't have lasted thirty seconds. Really I hit him with the glasses. He pulled me round the cave by the strap. It broke. I escaped. That's all. He never actually touched me once." (P. 190), From this confession in he mind one may feel that the whole thing was a hallucination on her part.

The Marabar Caves are the centre of gravity and create a sense of mystery in the minds of the readers. Forster wanted this to be the major caves and he gave it a central place in the novel. Prof. Godbole and Dr. Aziz are ignorant about the caves. According to the upanishads, Brahmin is beyond all manifestation, beyond expression, beyond name and shape, beyond the reach of mind and words.

According to Dr. C.L. Sahni, "The caves are further related to the concept of Brahman because of their indifference to the ethical distinctions of good and evil. Many passage in the Upanishads clearly indicate that good and evil are only relative terms, and that is the Absolute is not affected by them. Forster seems to suggest that some caves are still in a state of unformed, unconditioned and undifferentiated potential."<sup>5</sup>

The plot reaches its climax when Dr. Aziz is arrested as an accused. Fielding tried his level best to support Dr. Aziz but failed in his efforts. Good sense prevails in Adela and she thinks of Mrs. Moore. Seized with an attack of conscience, she withdraws the charge and Dr. Aziz is set free. She goes back to England and all the British officers are transferred to different places.

According to few critics, the main action of the novel ends with the end of the second part. However, the third part is organic conclusion of the novel. Through the Temple, Forester wanted to say that God is love. Here he described the Hindu festival Krishna Ashtami in details. Prof. Godbole has become the Minister of Education and Dr. Aziz is the personal physician of the Hindu Rajah of Mau. Prof. Godbole worships God whole heartedly :

"God is not yet born yet – that will occur at midnight – but He has also been born centuries ago nor can He be born, because He is the Lord of the Universe, who transcends human process. He is, was not, is not, was." (P. 283)]

Fielding made efforts to meet Dr. Aziz in Mau and offered him to hand of friendship. But, alas! Their horses go in different directions and they separated from each other. Forster says that perhaps the earth did not want their friendship. Now both the riders had to pass in single file. They found the gap between themselves and are the objects of Mau said in their hundred voices, "No, not, yet." The sky also said, "No, not there."

Collector Turton, Major Callendar, Ronny Heaslop, Me Bryde etc. are typical representatives of a governing class in India. They want to control the natives by all possible means so that they may keep peace here. They are loyal to the British empire and follow the policy 'Divide and rule'. They have rough official morality and that is why they care of fig for the arguments of Fielding in defence of Dr. Aziz. They want to be flattered by the Indians

and still they are indifferent towards their problems. Mr. Turton is ready to observe courtesy towards Indians but no intimacy at any cost. All such people are always conscious of their imperial authority.

Prof. Godbole wants to please Mr. Fielding and suggests that he proposes to establish 'Mr. Fielding High School' whenever he gets a chance to do so. When he becomes the Minister of Education in Mau he executes this plan. Through Krishan Bhakti, he is in a position to imitate God. He can feel God's omnipresence in his own heart in the mystic stone of heightened self awareness. His mind feels 'Universal Warmth' and he had a positive vision of life and God. He can not be called an orthodox Hindu as he has the right attributes of the spiritual Hindu mind with rational thought. He takes religion as a means of self-realization. Through him Forster has shown the true Hindu Culture.

Mrs. Moore felt that love for God means love for mankind. She asked her son Ronny to be decent to the Indians – "because India is part of the earth. And God has put us on earth to love our neighbours and to show it... The desire to behave pleasantly satisfies God..." (p.p. 51–52). She gives importance to human conduct and tries to understand the unseen and the mystery of universe. She even wanted to be one with the universe. After seeing the I cave, she develops an attitude of full detachment. She leaves Adela and Dr. Aziz in the 'muddle'. She knows the meaning of the echo but can't explain it in words. She believes that the religious truth is not only to be known but also experienced. According to Forster, "She had come to that state where the horror of the universe and its smallness are both visible at the same time the light of the double vision in which so many elderly people are involved..." (p. 207)

Miss Adela Quested is a complex lady to some extent. She realises that Ronny does not suit her and she has no desire to settle in India forever. She fails to understand the mystery of the echo on account of her ignorance. She has her own approach towards love, life and death. The echo 'Boum' continues to haunt her imagination and she suddenly withdraws her charge in the trial scene. Now she becomes conscious of the emptiness of her soul. Her impressions cheated her yet she is to be admired for the nobility of her soul. Forster can be admired for his objective portrayal of Dr. Aziz. Like many Englishmen, he admired Muslims civilization and said :

"Here was Islam, his own country, more than a faith, more than a battle cry, more, much more.... Islam, an attitude towards life both exquisite and durable, where his body and thoughts found their home." (p. 19)

In the last chapter of the novel he thinks of Mecca and feels delighted. Dr. C.L. Sahni says, "There is no wonder that Aziz, being an orthodox Muslim and a firm believer in the Quran, should think of the Hajj, and the Kabah of union in his moment of spiritual inspiration."<sup>6</sup>

Aziz loved the mosque, its graciousness, the arrangement, three arcades, hanging lamp, the moon and the ninety nine names of God on the frieze. He enjoyed reading the poems of Jalaluddin Rumi, Ghalib, Hafiz, Hali, Iqbal etc. Dr. C.L. Sahni remarks : "His rational mind finds it difficult to believe in a life here after. But his faith in the Islamic dogma contends with the waverings of his mind. Ultimately, his deep rooted faith prevails over his questioning intellect."<sup>7</sup> Towards the end of first section of the novel, E.M. Forster says :

"He dropped off to sleep amid the happier memories of the last two hours-poetry of Ghalib, female grace, good old Hamidullah, good Fielding, his honoured wife, and dear boys He passed into a region where these joys had no enemies but bloomed harmoniously in an eternal garden...." (p. 122)

He regarded India the land of Islam. While riding with Fielding, he loses his temper and says :

"Down with the English anyhow. That's certain clear out, you fellows, double quick, I say. We may hate one another, but we hate you most. If I don't make you go, Ahmad will, Karim will, if it's fifty live hundred years we shall get rid of you, yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea...." (p. 322)

Like Iqbal he thought of an ideal Muslim state and a mother land. He shouted : "India shall be nation! No foreigners of any sort ! Hindu and Moslem and Sikh and all shall be one ! Hurrah ! Hurrah for India ! Hurrah ..." (p. 322)

A few Muslims were praying with their faces towards Mecca and now Dr. Aziz saw a Brahmin Bull walking towards them. He at once gave it a tap with his polo mallet so that the Muslims are not hurt with the animal. (Hindus regarded Bull as Nandi Siva's vehicle). Aziz hated this 'idolatrous animal'. Moreover, he wanted his religion to be admired by all. Dr. C.L. Sahni remarks :

"For Aziz religion is manifestation of Muslim culture. He has an overwhelming love for the mosque, which is a formal manifestation of Islamic faith.. his sense of beauty is awakened at the sight of the mosque, which also reminds him of the militant nature of Islam – how it spread in India and strengthened its foot hold on the Indian soil."<sup>8</sup>

The mosque is a source of inspiration to him. He finds peace and beauty here. He hopes to build a perfect mosque sometime so that others experience the same happiness.

Like Iqbal, he also preferred Aurangzeb to Akbar. During the Marabar expedition he told Miss Adela Quested how his ancestors came to India and settled here. When Adela asked him about Akbar, he replied : "Yes, Akbar is wonderful, but half a Hindu; he was not a true Moslem.... never repented of the new religion he invented instead of the Holy Quran." (pp. 144-145).

But Adela admired Akbar for his new religion embracing the whole of India. Aziz didn't like this and replied, "Miss Adela Quested, find but foolish. You keep your religion, I mine. That is the best. Nothing embraces the whole India..." (p. 145). In comparison to Indian national unity he preferred only Muslim nationality. Sometimes, he believed that there is no such person as the general Indian. After Mr. Das had requested him to write a poem, he felt flattered. Now he started thinking differently and wanted to compose a new song for all to be sung by all and sundry. Here we find a change in his thoughts. Now he wanted to love India. He even wanted to appreciate the Hindus and serve in one of their states. But then he feels himself to be stranger in a Hindu State. He wanted that the women must be freed from a life seclusion. He was touchy on the question of Polygamy. Like Iqbal, Aziz also believed that the lady in Purdah is like God. He showed the photograph of his wife to Fielding and said, "She has ever come before..."

When Fielding admired this family gesture, Aziz further said.

"All men are my brothers, and as soon as one behaves as such he may see my wife." (p. 116)

Fielding, a man of scholarly temperament, stands for western intellectualism. He can be admired for his tolerance, intelligence, liberal humanism, disinterestedness etc. Sometimes he felt dubious and discontented and sad. He used to say that the world is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can do so with good will and intelligence. He was free from racial prejudices and that is why he strongly supported Dr. Aziz against all the prejudiced British Officers. He firmly believed that Dr. Aziz would not commit such a crime.

E.M. Forster, like G.B. Shaw, was bold enough to call a spade. He observed India groaning under the iron heels of British imperialism and raised his voice against the cruel

conduct of British Officers. The British Officers were hostile towards the Indian freedom fighters. Through this novel he boldly satirised the tendencies of British imperialism and condemned people like Mr. Turton, Ronny, Burton, Major Callendar etc. He described the gap which existed between the rulers and the ruled.

The attitude of British Officers towards the natives was disgusting. They did not want to mix up with Indians. The thought the moment they became familiar with the natives, the latter started taking undue advantage of such relations. Ronny the best representative of this attitude, tells Adela and Mrs. Moore that the British Officers are not supposed to show their best manners in India. India, for him, is not a drawing room rather a wretched country to be controlled by force. He has own way of doing administrative work. He believes in master-slave relationship as he is an officer and nothing else. Imperialism develops snobbish mentality in him. Forster boldly satirised this self-assumed superiority of the British Officers in this novel.

Mrs. Moore was badly shocked at his behaviour in the Bridge Party and remarked — "I think, my countrymen out there must be mad : Fancy inviting guests and not treating them properly.' The British Officers behaved officially and maintained aloofness even in the party. Ronny didn't like that Adela and Mrs. Moore should wander here and there with Indians. If they have to see India, they should gounder British auspices. Dr. Aziz was arrested without any proof and even the bail was refused. This indicates their sense of pride.

The British Officer wanted to interfere even in matters of law. They put the Indian judge in an embarrassing situation. Mr. Turton even wants to decide the case himself. Of course, he recognises that the Indians have to love for their rulers and hate them like anything. Mrs. Turton, Miss Derek, Mrs. Callender etc. fail to hide their contempt for the natives. Mrs. Turton refuses to shake hands with any Indian unless it is Nawab Bahadur. When the car of Nawab Bahadur goes out of order on the road, Miss Derek doesn't bother. She agrees to give a life to the Britishers and not the Indians. She allows Nawab Bahadur only on the condition that he would sit in front and nurse her pub.

Forster observed that most of the British Officers were arrogant and insensitive. They came to India with preconceived ideas and didn't understand the needs of Indians. He satirised this prejudice so commonly found in the hearts of these officers.

Forster was a realist and he tried to give a convincing picture of India, her people and their traditions. His picture of this country can't be called superficial. It is also true that he tried to give a sympathetic account of the problems arising during the British rule in India. Though this country has been changing regularly yet his appraisal of Indian scene is admirable. It is noteworthy that he didn't hide the weaknesses of Indians and described them in true colours.

He laughed at the so-called hospitality of the Indians. Mrs. Bhattacharya invited Adela and Mrs. Moore at the Bridge party. Mr. Bhattacharya told them that he would send a tonga on Thursday to fetch them, but that time never came. The ladies continued waiting but alas! Both of them were badly disappointed at this. Dr. Aziz also ridiculed this action of the Hindus and called them 'slack'. But soon he invited the ladies to his house. When this formal invitation is accepted by them, he became conscious of his poor surroundings and was at a loss what to do. He then changed this idea and invited the ladies to see the Marabar Caves. Ronny was clever enough to understand the formal voice of Dr. Aziz and ridiculed his formal behaviour.

Forster took it for granted that the Indians are superstitious by nature, They manipulate many stories about the death of Mrs. Moore. The mounds on the way to the Marabar Hills were regarded as the breasts of Goddess Parvati. Forster even believed that the

Indians have suspicious nature. For example, Dr. Aziz suspected Fielding of having illicit relations with Adela. He was shocked to see that the Indians don't believe in the sanctity of private correspondence. When Dr. Aziz goes to see Mr. Fielding at the guest house, he finds two letters lying on the Piano.

He reads them without any hesitation. He was not the least ashamed of doing this. Forster was further horrified to see that the whole country was divided into different races, sects and creeds. He found no Hindu-Muslim Unity in the country. Every religion was divided into various sects and creeds. According to Forster, Indians were not punctual. They attached no importance to time. "Prof. Godbole miscalculates the time taken in his morning prayer and misses the train But the birth of Lord Krishna was observed exactly at midnight.

It is true that India is a big country with a lot of fields, jungles, hills etc. In spite of his limitations, he tried to understand the country where so many languages were spoken. He tried to depict the Indian mind in real colours. He knew the spiritual meaning of Rasa-lila and it created his interest in Lord Krishna. He had discussed various principles of Hindu philosophy with the Maharajah of Chhatrapur who used to meditate on Lord Krishna. Like him, Forster also loved Love, Beauty and Wisdom. He knew that the Hindus were concerned not with conduct, but with vision. They always wanted to realise God. They were interested even in the unseen. Gokul Ashtami was observed with all pleasure and devotion. So, this novel shows Forster's wonderful knowledge of Indian thought and different Indian problems before 1947. Though Islamic culture was very clear to him on account of his Christian background yet he felt attracted towards Hinduism also. He had the rare gift of interpreting Hindu-Muslim art and philosophy in view of his own experiences. If he had not written *A Passage to India*, he would not have been a 'Superman'.

In this novel characters mean more than they say. The symbols deserve study. This is a highly symbolical novel. Its division into three parts – Mosque, Caves, Temple is symbolic. These three divisions are symbolic of the three seasons of India – spring, summer and monsoon. Mosque is the symbol of man's emotional nature, Caves symbolise his intellect and Temple stands for love. Mrs. Moore is at ease everywhere and she is the symbol of the integrated vision of life. Emotion, intellect and devotion are combined in her.

The separateness between Anglo Indians and Indians is symbolic of a wider separateness – the separation of man from the world. Man might often feel a vague unity with Infinite but this is short-lived. But then the gulf widens between the real and the ideal. Forster uses symbols to suggest the relations so dimly observed by man between the temporal and the transcendent.

Sometimes critics opine that the caves represent evil, negatively, nothingness and illusion. Some others say that the caves symbolise the riddle of life. The Marabar Hills and the Marabar Caves were indeed considered most suitable for symbolic purpose by the novelist. Dr. C.L. Sahni says, "Forster, who was looking for an area place than the Marabar Hills, containing the Marabar Caves."<sup>9</sup>

He regarded them older than all spirit. The expedition to Marabar Hills suggests a journey back into the timeless past' and ultimately reality. The pure space of the cave, according to the Vedantic point of view, symbolises Brahman. The match flame is the symbol of Atman. The polished walls of the circular chamber symbolise Matter and the flame mirrored in the wall is symbolic of Jivatma caught in the world. Forster himself remarks. "Hinduism so solid from a distance, is riven into sects and class, which radiate and join the change their names according to the aspect from which they are approached." (p. 292)

For Forster, the Marabar echo was different from echoes : "There are some exquisite in India ..... The echo in a Marabar Cave is not like these, it is entirely devoid of distinction.

Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is observed into the proof. 'Boum' is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it..." (p. 147). Those who understand Indian thought would not associate it with evil but rather with Om or Aum. So the Marabar Caves represent Indian thought which gives importance to renunciation, detachment, isolation and realisation of Absolute Reality.

Adela asked Dr. Aziz about his marriage before entering into the caves. This incident is not incidental but suggestive. It suggests what was lacking in Adela's conception of love and marriage with Ronny. She got frustrated with Ronny. But Aziz married a woman without knowing her. He loved her even after her death. In the case of Aziz, the animality brought him his first son and then he immensely loved his wife. But Adela felt animal thrill for Ronny before the car accident takes place and she got dust and nothing else.

According to the Indian philosophy, the death of Mrs. Moore in the Indian Ocean symbolises her merging with Vishnu. The ocean is the elemental form of Lord Vishnu himself. Her death on the Indian Ocean suggests her absorption in the Absolute.

The Hindu temple, according to E. M. Forster, symbolises the world-mountain, on whose sides gods, men and animals are sculptured in their complex moods. Inside the dark central cell, the worshipper makes contact with the divine spirit. Here man could be alone with his God. The temple symbolises joy, fertility and divine grace. The whole Hindu festivals of Lord Krishna's Birthday is symbolic of love and harmony. When Prof. Godbole worships Lord Krishna, he forgets all his sufferings. Lord Krishna himself is the symbol of infinite love. When we pass from 'Caves' to 'temple' we pass from mystery to salvation. Prof. Godbole worships – Tukaram, the exponent of Bhakti cult who believed in man's union with God through love. The path of love to be with God is common to Hinduism and Christianity. Forster knew the symbolic meaning of Ras-Lila dance also. It actually symbolises the soul's wooing the God. On this dance, each girl believes that she alone dances with Lord Krishna. It may be ridiculous in terms of the body. But it was very important in the terms of the spirit. The Maharaja of Dewas has explained the significance and true meaning of this dance to E.M. Forster and he believed all this. Lord Shiva, Lord Krishna and other Gods, Forster said, are the various roads through which Hindus wanted to get salvation.

Thus, Forster studied the people of India minutely and portrayed them with great fidelity. He also tried to sound the spiritual depth of people and got success. On the surface 'A Passage To India' may be a simple novel, symbolically it presents the complex mystery of all life.'

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