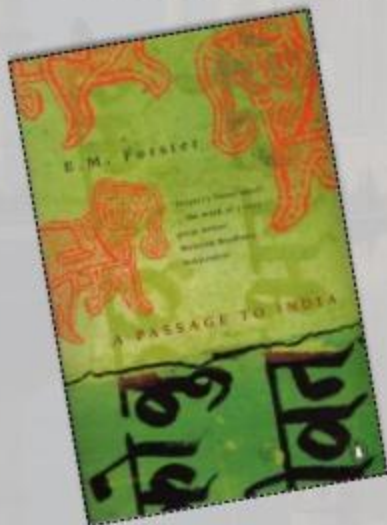


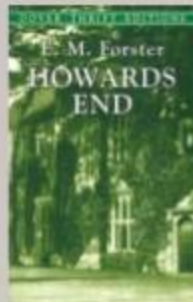
“A PASSAGE TO INDIA”

BY EDWARD MORGAN FORSTER



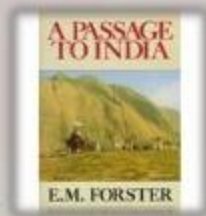
Forster's life

- **1879:** born in London
- **1880:** his father died
- **1893-1900:** studied at Tonbridge school and then at King's College in Cambridge
- **1901-1904:** after graduating he travelled in Greece and Italy with his mother
- **1906:** became the tutor of a young Indian Moslem, **Ross Masood** and he fell in love with him
- **1908:** "A room with a view" was published (it is set in Florence, Italy)
- **1910-11:** "Howards end" and "The celestial omnibus" were published;



- **1912-1913:** travelled to India. He had a negative impression of the Anglo-Indian community and imperialism. Back in England he wrote "A passage to India" but then abandoned it in favour of "Maurice"
- **1915-19:** the First World War had begun. He joined the International Red Cross. The **Amritsar Massacre** in India worsened Forster's vision of British rule
- **1921-1922:** returned to India. He spent nine months with his friend Masood and he improved his knowledge of India
- **1924:** "A passage to India" was published: it received a great acclaim from the critics and became very famous.

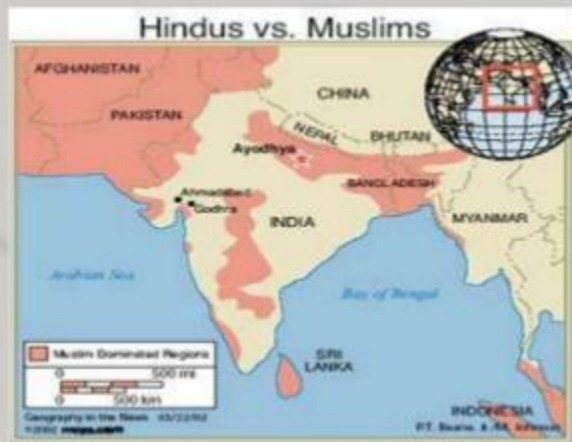
From 1924 to 1970 he wrote no more novels but he gave important lectures in Universities and he published critics and essays.
He died when he was 91. (O.O)



CULTURAL BACKGROUND

o India: the “muddle”

*It contained cultural diversities: people from different tribes, castes, languages. Hinduism and Islam were the most important religions: the former was polytheistic, worshipped natural elements and tolerated other beliefs and rituals; the latter had a human-centred view of creation, it was monotheistic and justified the “jihad” (the holy war) as Christianity (that was quite similar to Islam) allowed the spreading of **Imperialism**.*



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

o Imperialism and decolonization:

Indian exploitation began in the seventeenth century with the East India Company. England controlled a large part of the country, above all during the Victorian Age when the administration of India was transferred from the East India Company to the Crown.

*India rebelled twice against British rule: the first time during the **Mutiny**, the second time at **Amritsar** where 379 Indians were killed and 3200 were injured by the army.*

In the meantime, after the disasters of the First World War, English people were facing some social changes, such as the feminist movement, the emergence of trade unions and the Irish question.

*After the campaign of non-violence by **Gandhi**, India gained independence from 1947, even though conflicts between Hindus and Muslims provoked the creation of Pakistan.*



A passage to India: CHARACTERS

○ **Doctor Aziz**

He is a Muslim doctor.

Aziz is the most complex character: he is intelligent, outgoing, sensitive, but sometimes suspicious and irrational.

He shows hospitality and kindness to Adela and Mrs. Moore.

Fielding seems to be his best friend, but after the trial against his "crime" their friendship breaks off.

After the excursion to the Marabar Caves, Aziz will be unfairly accused of sexual harassment against Adela.



Aziz reflects the fears and disillusionments of any Indian under the British empire.

○ **Mrs Moore**

She is Ronny's mother. Mrs Moore is another complex character: reflective, sympathetic and sensitive, with a deep Christian belief. She likes Aziz and hates how Anglo-Indians behave with native Indians.

After the experience of the Marabar Caves, Mrs Moore changes in a negative way: she loses her religious faith and she decides to "escape" from Aziz's trial even though she's aware she would have proved his innocence. During her journey, back to England, she suddenly dies.



Mrs Moore is the other side of the English colonizer: she doesn't like colonialism and above all she's kind with anyone, regardless of race, gender, religion and culture.

○ **Adela Quested**

She is engaged to Ronny Heaslop. Adela is a serious, curious, young woman, but she's also really insecure and ambiguous. During the trip to the Marabar Caves, she realizes she doesn't love Ronny (and perhaps she desires Aziz). When she gets lost to the Marabar Caves and then escapes from there, she gets really confused and upset so that she unfairly accuses Aziz of sexual harassment. When she admits Aziz's innocence, she is abandoned by the whole Anglo-Indian community, except for Fielding.



Adela is not able to have a good relationship with Indians, even if she respects them. She is the most insecure character: her rational mind is destroyed by the evil of the Marabar Caves.

○ **Ronny Heaslop**

He is Mrs Moore's first son and he is engaged to Adela.

Ronny is extremely racist, full of prejudices and above all he doesn't trust anyone but himself. According to Ronny, religions are stupid and useless, except for Christianity that has the only function to justify the English monarchy.

Ronny thinks that his career of City Magistrate is more important than respecting other people.

After the trial, he breaks off with Adela.

Ronny is the example of the English colonizer, the "white burden". He has a deep sense of civilisation, duty and honour, but he is insensitive.



○ **Mr Fielding**

He is the headmaster of the local college and Aziz's friend.

At the beginnings of the novel, Fielding seems to be the most pleasant character, because of his revolutionary thoughts, his way of talking about respect and love amongst people. Like Mrs Moore he is free from prejudice and generalisation. But Fielding is not loyal and reliable...he abandons Aziz twice, just when Aziz needs his help: before the trip and during the trial.

At the end of the novel he will marry Stella Moore, Mrs Moore's daughter.



Fielding is a negative and positive character at the same time. He prefers the individual and personal relationships rather than the institutions that judge and rule on people's lives.

○ **Professor Godbole**

He is a Hindu philosopher. He is the most charming and mysterious character of the novel. Godbole is deeply thoughtful and wise, he is aware of the universal mystery; sometimes he is able to foresee future events. He believes in love amongst people and in respect for nature and life as well.

Godbole seems the only one who is far from human beings.

Godbole is the proof of Hinduism and peace. It is far too complicated to understand such a wise and strange man, although he understands everything.



THE SETTINGS

*The majority of the novel is set in **Chandrapore** but at the end it is also set in **Mau**. It is divided into three parts and each name depends on the place where the most important event happens:*

- **MOSQUE** (*it corresponds to the Cold Weather*)
- **CAVES** (*it corresponds to the Hot Weather*)
- **TEMPLE** (*it corresponds to the Rainy Season*)

*The places are always symbolic, such as the **Marabar Caves**: here we find the universal mystery, the “muddle” and the evil of nature. It's here that Adela and Mrs Moore change in a negative way.*

Language and style

This is an intensely poetic novel with a great emphasis on humans and nature at the same time. The description of landscapes creates a musical effect through the use of repetition and variation.

The narrator

*The narrator is **omniscient** but he also gives voice to Anglo-Indians and Indians, showing their thoughts (sometimes with a comic and ridiculous effect). By this point of view, Forster can't be considered a Modern writer.*

PLOT

MOSQUE:

The novel is set in **Chandrapore**, divided into the Indian quarter and the British Civil Station. **Ronny Heaslop** works there as City Magistrate; **Adela Quested** decides to visit India with **Mrs Moore**. One day, Mrs Moore meets doctor **Aziz** at the mosque: they immediately become friends. Adela and Mrs Moore have a negative impression of the Anglo-Indian community, especially during the "Bridge party". During the party, Adela and Mrs Moore meet **Mr Fielding** who invites them to tea with Aziz. The day after, Mrs Moore, Adela and Aziz go to Fielding's and they meet **Professor Godbole**. In order to show his politeness and hospitality, Aziz invites them to a picnic to the Marabar Caves.

CAVES:

The day of the excursion, Aziz, Mrs Moore and Adela go to the Marabar caves, except for Fielding and Godbole who lose the train.

*In the tour of the first cave, Mrs Moore feels ill and is shaken spiritually by the **echo** within the caves, so she decides to stay behind.*

Aziz and Adela go on visiting the caves. Adela realizes she doesn't love Ronny and at the same time she offends Aziz with some private questions. As Aziz escapes into a cave to avoid her, Adela walks into another one and she gets lost: from that moment, Adela is really confused, so that when she escapes from the caves, back to Chandrapore, she accuses Aziz of sexual harassment.

When Aziz is arrested, Fielding tries to defend him, but then abandons him. In spite of being aware of Aziz's innocence, Mrs Moore is still upset by the experience of the Marabar Caves and she decides to sail back to England.

The day of the trial, Adela realizes she made a mistake. Thus she withdraws her accusation against Aziz. Adela is abandoned by the whole community, but Fielding protects her. At the same time, Aziz and Fielding break off, but Fielding succeeds in convincing Aziz not to ask a payment for damages against Adela. After having break off with Ronny, Adela returns to England.



TEMPLE:

*The novel fast-forwards several years to **Mau**, where Godbole is the Minister of Education and Aziz is a doctor for a local hospital. During a walk, Aziz meets Fielding and another man: this man is **Ralph Moore**, Mrs Moore's third son. Aziz realizes his mistake: Fielding didn't marry Adela Quested, but **Stella Moore**, Mrs Moore's daughter. Aziz's antagonism towards Fielding ends, above all when he talks alone with Ralph in the guest quarter.*

When Aziz and Fielding go horse ride together, they realize that circumstances prevent them from maintaining their friendship.

The novel ends as it opens, with the main question: "Is it possible for an Englishman and an Indian to be friends?"

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Imperialism

Forster's novel is an obvious critique of Imperialism. The British Empire is portrayed as a racist institution that exploits Indians and treats them unpleasantly. But the novel is quite ambivalent about Indian desire to be independent. The author seems also sceptical about that: India is really difficult to unify because of so much religions and social differences. Is there something that includes everyone, regardless of race, religion or class? Forster gives no solutions...

BUY EMPIRE GOODS FROM
HOME AND OVERSEAS

Race

Life in Chandrapore is based on racial lines, with the white English on one side and the Orientals on the other side. The “white burden” has to help Indians to be civilised people, but they don’t manage to do so (since they’re not as civilised as they think to be). Orientals are considered to be exotic, sensual, irrational and unable to rule themselves. Forster doesn’t like this point of view, but he also makes this mistake: he shows the Orientals as generally irrational and uncivilised even though he is sympathetic to them.

WOMEN

British colonial society aggravates the traditional attitude towards women, which was typical of the English culture. Englishwomen have to be protected by the “white knights”, because they are threatened by the Orientals (Adela has to be saved from Aziz).

But Englishwomen demonstrate their weakness by being more racist and nasty than their husbands (such as Mrs Turton, Mrs McBride and Mrs Callendar).

On the other hand, Indian women are segregated from the male-dominated system (this practice is called “purdah”); but as Hamidulla says, women choose purdah, enforcing their own oppression.

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

"A passage to India" considers friendship and love as the solutions to the complex political system that spoils the whole society and institutions that control people's lives. In this novel the characters establish their friendship trying to destroy all the barriers, particularly with Aziz and Fielding. But their friendship is a failure, because Aziz is too suspicious and Fielding is not loyal: in other words, they are not able to bridge their cultural and political differences, as well as Adela Quested.

The only two characters who are able to bridge cultural differences are Mrs Moore and Professor Godbole: the former dies, the latter has a mental attitude which is far too complicated and mysterious.

Religion and nature

*Religion plays an important role in this novel: it divides not only Christians from Indians, but also the Indian society from within. Here religions may provide a better society or a safe for humanity, but the **"boum"** in the Caves (which is the universal mystery) shows the scepticism towards all organized religions.*

Natural landscapes are usually described in a poetic way; but in "A passage to India" nature is not seen as a positive thing (as it is considered in the other novel "A room with a view"), in fact after the experience of the Marabar Caves, Adela and Mrs Moore change and the evil of nature drives them into confusion.

Above all nature doesn't care of men and what they do.

FURTHER INFORMATION

This novel belongs to the genre of “**travel literature**”, in fact Adela and Mrs Moore have been to India just to visit and know it better even though this travel changes them as travels in general change people.

For instance in 1968 the Beatles visited India and they met Ravi Shankar, the most famous sitarist. This travel changed their musical style and friendship between Ravi Shankar and above all George Harrison lasted for a very long time.



*"The world is a globe of men who
are trying to reach one another,
and they can best do so by the help
of goodwill, culture and
intelligence"*