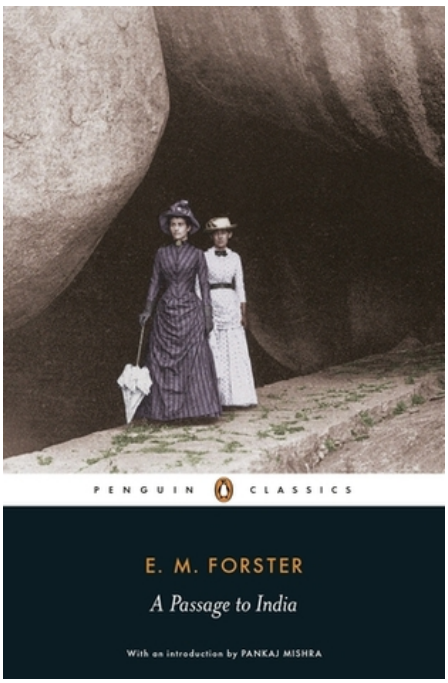

A Passage to India

E.M. Forster , Oliver Stallybrass (Editor) , Pankaj Mishra (Introduction)

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When Adela Quested and her elderly companion Mrs Moore arrive in the Indian town of Chandrapore, they quickly feel trapped by its insular and prejudiced 'Anglo-Indian' community. Determined to escape the parochial English enclave and explore the 'real India', they seek the guidance of the charming and mercurial Dr Aziz, a cultivated Indian Muslim. But a mysterious incident occurs while they are exploring the Marabar caves with Aziz, and the well-respected doctor soon finds himself at the centre of a scandal that rouses violent passions among both the British and their Indian subjects. A masterly portrait of a society in the grip of imperialism, *A Passage to India* compellingly depicts the fate of individuals caught between the great political and cultural conflicts of the modern world.

In his introduction, Pankaj Mishra outlines Forster's complex engagement with Indian society and culture. This edition reproduces the Abinger text and notes, and also includes four of Forster's essays on India, a chronology and further reading.

A Passage to India Details

Date	:	Published August 30th 2005 by Penguin Books (first published 1924)
ISBN	:	9780141441160
Author	:	E.M. Forster , Oliver Stallybrass (Editor) , Pankaj Mishra (Introduction)
Format	:	Paperback 376 pages
Genre	:	Classics, Fiction, Cultural, India, Historical, Historical Fiction, Literature

From Reader Review A Passage to India for online ebook

Chrissie says

This is so far my favorite book by E.M. Forster. I tried A Room with a View first and gave that three stars. This one, set in India probably about a decade or two before independence, mirrors British colonialism and the multicultural diversity of the land. This one has much more meat on its bones. Religion, multi-ethnicity, colonialism, imperialism, the dogged belief in the superiority of the rulers over the ruled and most specifically how very difficult it is to communicate over cultural barriers. These are the topics we look at in this book.

And friendship. How does it begin? How is it kept alive? Dr. Aziz says one is an Oriental if when meeting a stranger you know if he is or is not a friend. It says in the book, “friend” is the Persian expression for God. Another character says to Dr. Aziz, “Your hands are unkind….There is no pain, but there is cruelty.” He is an Oriental (in spirit), but he isn’t since he is British. Am I confusing? Does this interest you? Well read the book.

In both books readers see how well Forster draws the feel of a place, of an era and of the people. What distinguishes Forster’s writing from others is his ability to create an **atmosphere that feels utterly tangible**. Wherever the scene is set you see, feel, hear and sense a distinguishable tone, mood or ambience. I did feel this in both books. This seems to be a common denominator for Forster’s writing style. It is worth reading one of Forster’s books just to experience this. Having experienced it you will not forget it.

Secondly, Forster’s lines not only draw a memorable atmosphere, but they also give the reader food for thought. Here follow a few very short quotes:

-*Until his heart was involved he heard nothing.*

-*The original sound may be harmless but the echo was evil.*

-*We may hate one another, but we hate you most* (the British).

-*Nothing is private in India.*

-*No one here matters. Those who matter don’t come.*

-*The moon caught in the shawl of night with its stars…..*

For me the last line is utterly beautiful. I should have jotted down more of the beautiful lines, not just the ones that got me thinking.

I do not believe this book will satisfy everyone. It is not for those who are looking for action. It is instead the kind of book you put down and then go on thinking about. Who the characters are can best be judged on completion of the book, when you have properly seen and thought carefully about all that has occurred.

I loved how diverse cultures are shown, primarily Hindu and Muslim and British expatriates. I didn’t understand, but did appreciate the different religious traditions and celebrations depicted.

The audiobook narration by Sam Dastor was OK, so that I have given two stars. In the beginning I had trouble with the speed and pronunciation of foreign names. The voice he uses for women could certainly be improved, particularly the younger ones. They are all too squeaky and shrill. He dramatizes too much for my liking. When he just plain reads what is happening without added dramatics, it is good.

I liked the book a lot. I really appreciate the writing, how India is drawn and how the book makes you think.

Bookdragon Sean says

In a rather ironic piece of narration, E.M. Forster sums up my opinion of this book perfectly:

"Most of life is so dull that there is nothing to be said about it, and the books and talk that would describe it as interesting are obliged to exaggerate, in the hope of justifying their own existence."

Indeed, this book was so terribly dull. Ordinary, bland and mundane are all words that spring to mind. Nothing happened other than a single piece of melodrama that somehow managed to dominate the book.

I understand why this book is so widely read and studied. From a critical postcolonial perspective, there are lots of juicy bits in here to dissect. There's a lot to talk about, and I could easily write an essay on it because it raises so many important debates about race and national identity in the wake of colonialism. Seeing the true face of India becomes a difficult task because it has become so obscured with foreign influence and prejudices.

Indeed, the book is fiercely anti-imperialist and presents a compelling case for the benefits of an independent India. It also highlights the injustices the Indian native faced. Colonial rule is never good, and the coloniser always thinks his ways are better to the detriment of local culture, education and employment. He takes over and ruins everything despite how much he naively believes that he is improving the life of those he is oppressing.

Despite all this the plot has no energy. There were perhaps a few chapters, no more that forty pages or so, where the narrative managed to gain some momentum. The protagonist was imprisoned for a crime he didn't do and the bits leading up to his trial were quite engaging. When the verdict was eventually reached the rest of the novel dribbled on. There was no story left! Yet it continued for another hundred pages. This meant that for a relatively short book, this felt like a really, really, long book.

This is a book I SHOULD have liked

I was really surprised at my reaction to this. This is a book that appeals directly to my interests; yet, it just seemed so painfully convoluted and dull. I did, however, really appreciate E.M. Forster's prose. He is a very skilful writer and a wordsmith, his sentences and paragraphs roll into each other perfectly. (This seems like a generic point, though I only make it because the surface level of his writing is so eloquent in places.) It's just a shame the plot did not carry the same level of mastery. It just needed to be tighter and more focused to be effective.

Like *Heart of Darkness* it occupies an uncertain place in the cannon of English literature; it's not quite radical enough (and prejudice free) to be fully anti-colonial yet is still demonstrates the need for change. It's a book I could study, but never one I could enjoy. Although I didn't like this, I will still be trying another one

of E.M. Forster's novels in the future.

Jeffrey Keeten says

“Adventures do occur, but not punctually. Life rarely gives us what we want at the moment we consider appropriate.”

Illustrations from the Folio Edition by Ian Ribbons.

Adela Quested and Mrs. Moore have journeyed to India with the intention of arranging a marriage between Adela and Mrs. Moore’s son Ronny Heaslop. He is the British magistrate of the city of Chandrapore. He is imperial, much more so than when Adela knew him in England.

”India had developed sides of his character that she had never admired. His self-complacency, his censoriousness, his lack of subtlety, all grew vivid beneath a tropic sky; he seemed more indifferent than of old to what was passing in the minds of his fellows, more certain that he was right about them or that if he was wrong it didn’t matter.”

My impression is that Heaslop may have been elevated rather quickly and had no time to develop his own ideas of the way things were in India, but simply borrowed the established views of the more senior British officials in India. In this new role he was required to play he is a very different person than the young lad that Adela knew in England.

She had decided to break off the engagement and then fate intercedes with a near death experience that allows her to see Heaslop in a different light.

The engagement is back on.

“Sometimes I think too much fuss is made about marriage. Century after century of carnal embracement and we're still no nearer to understanding one another.”

It is always interesting to listen to people talk about marriage. Sometimes people can be too cerebral and talk themselves out of a perfectly acceptable relationship. Others give the commitment of marriage the same amount of thought as they do to deciding what they want for lunch. Arranged marriages used to work perfectly well simply because they were an alliance usually involving money and future offspring. We decided, at some point, that romance was the elixir that we must desire the most in a relationship. Divorce rates have skyrocketed and most people are not any happier than when marriages were arranged for them by their relatives, but free will has given people the idea that happiness can be achieved if they can just find that right person. It is always better to own your unhappiness or happiness instead of having it decided for you.

Adela is not very pretty, but she does have some money. Heaslop seems rather indifferent about the whole arrangement. Yes, he wants the marriage, but more for fulfilling a necessary obligation. The sooner it is settled the sooner he can move on to other things of more importance. Adela is trying to decide whether to accept this situation or wait to see if their is a better one on the horizon.

Dr. Aziz meets Mrs. Moore by chance in a mosque and though their meeting is rocky in the beginning a friendship quickly blossoms. Adela wants to see the real India, by, well, interacting with real Indians. A meeting is arranged with Dr. Aziz and in the course of their conversations with one another Aziz extends an invitation to take them on a journey to see the Marabar Caves. This is one of those invitations that are extended as a courtesy during a party that are never expected to be fulfilled. To his horror, he discovers, a few days later through an intermediary that the women fully expect him to take them to the caves. At great expense to himself he arranges this outing.

Aziz has always been a friend of the British, in fact, one of his best friends is a British teacher named Cyril Fielding. He had arranged for Fielding and another friend to go with them on this journey to provide the much needed cultural bridge between him and the ladies.

His friends miss the train.

Disaster looms.

Aziz is accused of physically assaulting Adela in one of the caves.

Ridiculous Fielding says.

Of course he attacked her the British community insists. All these brutes desire our women.

As events unfold it becomes more and more unclear as to what really happened, but even as doubt is raised the Colonialists continue to believe that Aziz is guilty.

He must be guilty.

This is considered E. M. Forster's masterpiece and lands on most top 100 books of all time lists. I personally did not enjoy this book as much as I have some of his other books, but because of the subject matter of this book and when it was published, I fully understand why people look on this novel as his most significant book. He was poking a finger in the eye of his own government and their insistence on continuing to try to rule the world with brutality laced with blatant racism. I can see the men, who returned triumphantly from their postings abroad, sitting around their clubs back in London angrily discussing this book.

I won't tell you what happened to Adela or what happened to Aziz, but tragically there was a realignment of thought for both of them. Adela never wanted to see India again. Aziz never wanted to see an Englishman/woman again. In fact, for the first time he feels at peace with who he is…**"I am an Indian at last."**

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit http://www.jeffreykeeten.com
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten

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Veronique says

4.5

"India likes gods."
"And Englishmen like posing as gods."

I first read this classic back when I was 18 and remember liking it. The main plot had remained in my memory but not much else. Re-reading it now in my 40s, I'm amazed how this text is so relevant to today's sociological and indeed political landscape.

Forster's novel, published in 1924, dealt with imperialism, showing the interactions between British and Indians in the fictional city of Chandrapore. As you expect, most of the English behave in the most atrocious manner, full of conceit, bigotry, racism, and indeed ignorance.

That in itself is not groundbreaking. No, the shock came from the author portraying both sides in his narration, giving voice to the natives too, and thus challenging the very essence of colonialism. Forster also showed the tension between the Muslim and Hindu characters, who often were just 'bundled' together in the eyes of the British.

Reading this, I could see the inherent incomprehension between the two sides, their wild and ungrounded assumptions in both race and religion, making the 'explosion' only too natural. Sounds familiar? The other thing that I noticed from my early 21st century viewpoint is the role of women, some behaving even worse than their spouses, others trying to do the right thing, all used as pawns.

I do wonder what made Forster write this and if his own circumstances (especially his personal ones making him feel outside the social norm) gave him the impetus to analyse further. The novel doesn't really give a 'solution' but, by bringing these issues to the fore, make us more aware of them and hopefully teach us too.

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peiman-mir5 rezakhani says

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Megan Baxter says

Can there ever be friendship between the colonizer and colonized? Individuals from each group? Can that trust last? Can it flourish? What happens when events put it under stress?

Forster has no easy answers in this book, as he dissects British colonial rule in India, and its impact on Indians and the British who have come there expressly to rule over India.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the recent changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision here.

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at Smorgasbook

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Warwick says

‘The past! the infinite greatness of the past!’ thrilled Walt Whitman in ‘A Passage to India’. A quarter of a century later, Forster borrowed Whitman's title, but with a very different mood in mind. In place of the American's wild-eyed certainties, Forster gives us echoes and confusion; instead of epic quests of the soul, there is only an eternal impasse of personal and cultural misunderstanding.

Animals and birds are half-seen, unidentified; the landscape is a featureless blur; motives are illogical and rest on miscommunication. All human language, in the final analysis, amounts to nothing more than the dull *ou-boum* thrown back from the Malabar caves during the fateful expedition at the heart of the novel. ‘If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same – “ou-boum”.’

Will Self once recommend as an exercise reducing a novel to a single word (he suggested in the case of *The Naked Lunch*, for instance, that it would be ‘insect’). For *A Passage to India*, that keyword would be ‘muddle’ – a term that recurs, gradually shedding its cosiness and accreting a sense of existential indistinctness, a kind of cosmic *flou* that renders good intentions, indeed all human endeavour, futile. ‘I like mysteries,’ says Mrs Moore, the novel's moral core, ‘but I rather dislike muddles.’ Elsewhere, Forster talks with something like dread of a ‘spiritual muddledom’ for which ‘no high-sounding words can be found’.

The plot of this book is, at times, heart-poundingly dramatic, but Forster is careful to make sure that even this is founded on doubt and indecision. In fact, what one thinks of as ‘the plot’ of *A Passage to India* is a

storyline that arises, reaches its climax, and is resolved entirely within the second of the book's three acts. What then, you might ask, is the point of parts one and three? Well, among other things they prevent the plot from seeming too tidy – there is always something before the beginning, something after the end, to frustrate neat conclusions. ‘Adventures do occur,’ he says, ‘but not punctually.’ Life isn't tidy – it's a muddle.

British India is a perfect setting for this kind of exploration: not only does it play host to numerous individual confusions, it is itself, as it were, the political embodiment of such a confusion. One of the wonderful things about this book is that the obvious hypocrisy and conflict between the English and the Indians is not left to stand alone, as a heavy-handed message, but is echoed by similar divisions between Muslim and Hindu, man and woman, young and old, devotee and atheist. Still, it is the gulf of understanding between the British rulers and their Indian subjects that provides the most interesting material for Forster's bitter social comedy. Most of the Brits are deliciously dislikable, couching their racism in patriotic slogans, droning through the national anthem every evening at the Club, and – like one of the wives – learning only enough of the language to speak to the servants (‘so she knew none of the politer forms, and of the verbs only the imperative mood’).

The heroes of this book are those that try to reach across this divide, or to challenge the assumptions of their own side.

> ‘Your sentiments are those of a god,’ she said quietly, but it was his manner rather than his sentiments that annoyed her.
>
> Trying to recover his temper, he said, ‘India likes gods.’
>
> ‘And Englishmen like posing as gods.’

These attempts don't work, and the reason they don't work is that cultural or racial divides are – the book suggests – only a special case of that ‘spiritual muddledom’ that is a universal constant. Still, the worldview isn't as bleak as it might seem. That famous ‘not yet’ in the book's closing lines is a lot more hopeful than a ‘no’, and if we're prevented from coming together by our tangled and violent past, that also raises the possibility that a better future can be laid down by the present we choose to enact now, every day, with each other. ‘For what is the present, after all,’ as Walt Whitman asked, ‘but a growth out of the past?’

Shovelmonkey1 says

Written in 1924 this so called literary classic and 1001 book is set against the backdrop of the British Raj and the slow move towards Independence. This book has been showered with awards - I gave my copy of a good shake just to see if any of the awards had got stuck between the pages - although personally the only award I would be inclined to hand out for E.M Forster's most famous novel would be the highly coveted shovelmonkey1 pillow award for producing an epic snooze fest.

I read this book while I was commuting back and forward to office HQ and even the act of opening the pages of this beautifully covered Penguin volume was enough to send my eyeballs rolling to the back of my skull. I suspect on the whole that perhaps I am being a tad harsh, and maybe this can be attributed to the fact that I have read too many novels detailing the colonial dumb-wittedness of the British abroad, particularly

swooning laydees.

Poor Dr Aziz, despite running around attending to the whims and mores of the ex-pat populace and doing everything with the very best of intentions ends up in a spot of bother after Adela Quested unjustly accuses him of trying to "cop a feel" while they're out on a day trip to the Malabar caves. Aziz had previously mused on the premise of whether Indian gentlemen might ever truly manage to be friends with an Englishman and this episode surely gives him a fairly definite answer. As the trial unfolds Adela is forced to confront the fact that everything which happened the in the caves was a product of her delicate and overwrought laydee-mind, thus presumably giving the men in the courtroom further excuse to argue, over brandy and cigars, that the colonies are no place for the "wimmin folk".

I can see the point of this book, the message it was trying to convey and I can even understand why it is regarded to be literary significance but even the memory of reading it make me prone to... ZZZZZz zzzz.

Fionnuala says

So easy going - and then wham!
Quentin Tarantino could learn a lot from E M Forster. He'd learn that there's no need to pile on the menace in the early stages. The shock, when it comes is much more effective if the reader/viewer has been led into thinking all is ordinary and relatively safe. Forster is a master story teller, and a true philosopher as well.

Jan-Maat says

In a novel with the line “a perfectly adjusted organism would be silent” it is no surprise that the centre of this cloud of writing is the idea of the difficulty, or the possible impossibility of communication and direct connection between people.

Instead understanding has to be intuitive and incommunicable, Mrs Moore knows nothing has happened but can’t convince her son, how she knows or how Professor Godbole knows about her and the wasp is unclear and if we don’t like telepathy as an answer then we are best off not asking the question, just as we are best off not asking what, if anything, happened in the Marabar caves. Miss Quested experienced something, but even E.M. Forster screwed up the draft versions that attempted to give her point of view as that something occurred. A clear statement would run counter to the intuitive direction of this novel. Nothing can make sense in the unreality of our group think, some alternative means of perception, something more (view spoiler) is required to understand.

Miss Quested speaks of wanting to experience the real India, but because she lives, as almost all the characters do, in the world of illusion, her quest will be concluded but the object missed. A failed seeker after the Holy Grail. (view spoiler)

In the beginning “they were discussing as to whether or no it is possible to be friends with an Englishman” (p33) (view spoiler) As evidence of the potential of intimacy: “he has shown me his stamp collection” (p34). I wasn’t expecting Forster to have a sense of humour (view spoiler), nor quite the brutality implicit in Dr Aziz showing the picture of wife to Fielding only for the chest of drawers to be later forced open and that photograph presented in court as evidence of his immoral and degenerate character.

The characters exist very firmly in their environments. The English, at the slightest suggestion that something is not right flip back to 1857, the dominance signalled in 1757 so provisional that everybody has to be continually on watch (view spoiler). There are no innocent conversations. No exchange of views. Every gesture has its own sub-text of resistance and opposition, if one chooses to live on the verge of a nervous breakdown. But this is also unreal or at least only an aspect of reality. Change the air and of a sudden there are “problems so totally different from those of Chandrapore. For here the cleavage was between Brahman and non-Brahman; Moslems and English were quite out of the running, and sometimes not mentioned for days” (p289). The novel doesn’t claim to completeness only to offer up a few shards to work upon the imagination (view spoiler).

Apparently the last two Viceroys of India read this novel. Pushed in conversation Dr Aziz at first looks to the Afghans, for the Mughal Empire to strike back and replace the British, only then to imagine an Indian community as a viable future (view spoiler). Nodding to Benedict Anderson then there is no divide between the realm of the imagination and the realm of tangible reality. The one flows into the other. The boats collide and overturn. Despite the different directions and tools the experience is one.

Kim says

In some ways it's hard to believe that this was published in 1924, given the prescience Forster demonstrates in relation to the future of the British Raj. Towards the end of the novel, one of the central characters, Dr Aziz, effectively predicts that Indians will throw out the British when England is is involved in another war in Europe and articulates - albeit not in so many words - the need for Indians to identify as Indians rather than as members of their individual religious communities in order for that happen.

This is a story of the distrust and misunderstanding inherent in the relationship between colonisers and the colonised and poses the question of whether cultural differences can be overcome to find real friendship and understanding. It centres on the consequences of an incident in which a young English woman, Adela Quested, accuses the Indian Dr Aziz of assaulting her during an excursion to the Marabar Caves.

Forster's portrayal of the British colonial rulers is trenchantly critical. He exposes their hypocrisy, their fundamental fear of Indians and their desperation to retain control. While Forster's portrayal of Indian characters is largely - although not completely - sympathetic, he was a still a man of his time and there are some aspects of his portrayal of Indian characters which a contemporary reader is likely to find patronising.

Forster evokes a sense of time and place in beautiful prose and he provides plenty of food for thought. That said, there were times when the narrative seemed to meander and I wasn't always sure where Forster was going with it. This is one of those books I'm glad I listened to rather than read, because it allowed me to complete productive tasks while listening to those few parts of the novel which I might otherwise have skimmed. I knew that Sam Dastor's voices for both the English and the Indian characters would be excellent, having listened to his narration of Kipling's Kim. However, the downside of listening to Dastor is that he does not do female voices well. This wasn't an issue with *Kim*, because it contains no female characters to speak of, but Miss Quested is a central character in this novel and Dastor's voice for her is simply awful. I enjoyed listening much more when Miss Quested wasn't around.

The only other of Forster's novels I've read is A Room with a View, which I love. This one I like a little less. But I'm very glad that I finally tackled it and I don't know why it took me so long to do so.

Carol says

[who is ultimately accused of attacking Adela while touring the Marabar Caves (hide spoiler)]

Henry Avila says

Adela Quested, a plain looking, young , affable, and naive English school teacher, travels to distant India in the early 1920's, accompanied by the elderly , kind, Mrs. Moore, (maybe her future mother-in-law) a widow twice, and see the real country, more important, to decide if she will marry Mrs. Moore's son, the magistrate, of the unimportant city of Chandrapore, disillusioned Ronny Heaslop (he dislikes Indians now)...Conditions are very uneasy in India, the natives hate the British rulers, and seek independence, and in turn the conquerors, despise what they perceive as an inferior, local race, besides the Hindu and Muslim populations are always ready to riot against their enemies, foreign and domestic, the tense, volatile situation needs the strong hand of the British army to keep peace, but for how long ? Mrs. Moore, like her female companion, Adela, wants to see and feel India, experience its atmosphere, no matter how alien, breathe in the romantic flavors, customs and particularly, the strange, exotic, mysterious and nevertheless engaging people, of this dangerous but fascinating nation. Warned not to go alone , the old lady, does, visits a mosque, and hears a voice in the dark, telling her to take off her shoes, she had, by Dr. Aziz, a young Indian, Muslim physician, ignorant foreigners, in the past, had shown disrespect, unexpectedly, they later become great friends, the two so completely different... Cyril Fielding, the head of the modest local college, is the only British man to show any sympathy for the poor, native people, he hates how they are treated, the Indians, especially the English women, who do not hide their contempt . Yet can friendships develop and last, between the Indian and the British, in the colonial era, such as the emotional Dr. Aziz and the calm Mr.Fielding ? There is not much to see in the unattractive, dirty city, no spectacular monuments, or building, nothing, the Ganges River flows leisurely by, not causing any impact, mostly ignored by the population, it isn't sacred here, occasionally a dead body is spotted, not devoured by the crocodiles, as it floats down to the ocean...In the local British Club, no Indian members of course, they gossip, drink, play cards and the highlight, tennis, when the notorious weather permits, scorching heat waves that crush the spirit, and monsoon rains pouring ceaselessly down, causing widespread, devastating flooding. Still twenty miles away , in the Marabar Hills, are countless caves to explore, nobody knows what makes them exciting though, the areas only attraction, a tour is organized and led by Dr.Aziz, composed also of Mrs.Moore, Miss Quested, Mr.Fielding, and prominent Indians, both Hindu and Muslims, but plans are not facts, they do not go accordingly, a disaster ensues which will effect many people, lives are changed...A very interesting exploration of India, during an unique period in its history, that even today is still relevant, to her destination as a rising superpower, both economically and militarily...Yes things change...

Kinga says

“A Passage to India” is most of all a story of a fragile friendship which carefully treads the cultural differences. It’s a story of tiny misunderstandings and silly errors and their dramatic consequences.

Adela Quested who arrives in colonial India with the best and purest intentions ends up causing irreparable damage to the reputation of an Indian doctor Dr Aziz, and in consequence ruins his friendship with Cyril

Fielding, an English teacher.

Adela is not so much a heroine but a catalyst of the events which due to unspoken feelings and wounded pride derail a friendship that almost succeed at bridging the gap between the two cultures but the structure is so delicate that the smallest things send massive ripples – a pause in the wrong place, intonation, a meaningless clichéd phrase misunderstood, and the whole conversation is doomed.

In the end Forster's conclusion is that redemption and any future friendship is only possible after the end of colonialism because the power imbalance would always get in the way of the noblest sentiments. The optimistic point Forster is trying to make (I think, although I might be wrong) is that it is not cultural incompatibility that's ruining it for everyone, it's only the tension between the oppressors and the oppressed. Yes, people may misunderstand each other's social cues if they are not culturally aware but without the colonial baggage and resentment this could be easily resolved.

"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, Ahmed will, Karim will, if it's fifty-five hundred years we shall get rid of you, yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then "—he rode against him furiously— "and then," he concluded, half kissing him, "you and I shall be friends.""

It's one of the better books that speak against racism, but of course it's not entirely free of racism itself. But I can't imagine how it could possibly be, especially considered when and by whom it was written. Even now it's almost impossible to completely rid our thoughts of the concept of the Other. And accepting it and being aware of it is probably going to produce better results than the adorably naïve attitude like that of Mrs Moore who arrived in India, accompanying Adela, and thinking she could undo the damage of the entire socio-political structure of colonial India by simply being a nice human being. The same way she thought she could survive Indian heat but in the end it killed her., because the nature in 'A Passage to India' is mostly oppressive and even hostile – it puts up a fight against the British.

I particularly liked the comedy of horrors that was the description of the absurd trial and how things spiralled out of control on both sides and Mrs Moore became a kind of pre-Internet meme as 'Esmis Esmoor', while Dr Aziz lost all his personal characteristics, even to the people that knew him well, and became the embodiment of the 'dark-skinned monster'. Those stereotypes are never buried deep and can be excavated very quickly if need be. Immediately men in the novel start talking about 'women and children' and once 'protect our women and children' enters the stage all reason will be abandoned. That's how these men mask their own fear and vulnerability. 'We're not afraid, of course, for we are strong men, but our women and children… must protect women and children, most protect women and children.' Some atavistic auto-pilot gets turned on and you can go on any senseless war, as long as you're 'protecting women and children'.

As expected, 'A Passage to India' is beautifully written. I read it many months ago but I still remember the opening paragraph and the mixture of striking descriptions and gentle irony, so characteristic of Forster's style. On the first page you will find the phrase 'the temples ineffective' in the description of Chandrapore and its lack of charm. Even these two words could be interpreted in different ways. Are the temples ineffective as a place of worship, because they have been of no help against the invasion of the British, or are they ineffective as landmarks from the British tourist-visitor point of view.

Or this little sentence on the landscape of India:
"[…] The boulders said, 'I am alive,' the small stones answered, 'I am almost alive.'"

Forster tries to be fair in his descriptions of the characters, both Indian and English – and even if he ridicules

them, he does so with some affection – but it’s always clear that it’s the British who start off from the position that’s simply morally wrong and that’s refreshing for a book from that era. It’s hard to write fair about ‘the Other’, some even question whether anyone should, whether we should leave those stories to ‘the Others’ themselves to tell. And of course we should, but at the same time I think it is a brave thing to do to try to write from that different perspective and a great exercise in empathy – as long as you accept you will never be absolutely 100% fair.

Mrs Moore’s son, Ronny, who is a colonial official, like many before him, found a way to deal with the cognitive dissonance by completely redefining the reality of colonialism; in his narrative the British arrived in India to help people there, bring peace and order (and not to steal all the country’s riches). He seems to truly believe it. Forster doesn’t portray him as evil, just lazy and conformist.

Even the ‘good’ Englishman, Cyril Fielding, is not free of the imperialistic mindset and he seems conform more and more as the book goes on. Was conformism the true villain of this novel?
It’s open to many readings and interpretations – a whole PhD could be written on gender in ‘A Passage to India’. Race, imperialism, and all of it with the undertones of repressed sexuality, especially in the fantastic scene in the caves (that really should make anyone hot and bothered and filled with a mixture of fear and excitement – if they know how to read all the symbols, that is).
It looks on things from the personal point of view that’s nonetheless immersed in the political. And that’s my favourite kind of writing, when the personal is political and the political is personal.

Zadie Smith, Forster’s devoted fan, wrote lovingly about him in the New York review of books. You can read it here: http://novelssince1900.blogspot.co.uk... (or on the actual NYbooks website if you are a subscriber).
I didn’t love this novel when I read it. But now, months later, I think I do. And unlike boyfriends, it’s never too late to love a novel.

Samadrita says

Make no mistake. This, to me, will always be Forster's *magnum opus* even though I am yet to even acquaint myself with the synopses of either Howards End or Maurice. Maybe it is the handicap of my Indian sentimentality that I cannot remedy on whim to fine-tune my capacity for objective assessment. But strip away a colonial India from this layered narrative. Peel away the British Raj too and the concomitant censure that its historical injustices invite. And you will find this to be Forster's unambiguous, lucid vision of humanity languishing in a zone of resentful sociocultural synthesis, his unhesitant condemnation not merely of racism, casteism, religion-ism and what other noxious, vindictive 'ism's we have had throughout the history of our collective existence but of the fatalistic human tendency of rejecting a simple truth in favour of self-justifying contrivances.

Yes there's the much hyped 'crime' analyzed in the broader context of presupposed guilt and innocence . There's the issue of race, class and privilege factoring into the ensuing judicial process. The ripples of the eventual fallout of this mishap disrupt the frail status quo that all parties on either side of the race divide were tacitly maintaining so far and pose crucial existential questions before people of all communities. Then there are hypocritical Englishmen who cannot choose between preserving the sanctity of the Empire's administrative machinery and upholding their own prejudices. And hypocritical Indians who righteously accuse the Englishmen of institutionalized hatred while stringently maintaining their own brand of

intolerance. But greater than the sum of all these thematic veins is the connecting thread of Forster's sure-footed, measured prose which explores not only the inner lives of the central characters but tries to penetrate the heart of a nation-state in the making.

The India depicted here is a foreign country to me - a time and a place yet to be demarcated irreversibly along lines of communal identities that are presently dominating our political rhetoric. It is of little appeal to the newly arrived umpteenth Englishman but, nonetheless, presents itself as an amalgamation of unrealized possibilities. Not once did my brows knit together in frustration on the discovery of any passage or line even casting a whiff of Forster's bias against the people or the land. My senses were stretched taut all the time in an effort to detect any. Sure, Dr. Aziz is a little infantilized and his importance is sometimes reduced to that of a plot device used for manufacturing the central conflict while Adela Quested, Mrs Moore and Mr Fielding appear before a reader as upright individuals who stand for the truth. The other Indian characters seem to be defined by their general pettiness. But these imperfect characterizations can be more than forgiven in the light of what Forster *does* accomplish.

> The song of the future must transcend creed.

There are times when the narrator's voice dissects the drama unfolding against unfamiliar Indian landscapes with a kind of fond exasperation and times when it dissolves into a withering regret for the way the engines of civilization continue to trundle along towards some catastrophic destiny without ever pausing for the purpose of self-assessment. And it is the profound clarity of Forster's worldviews and his sensitivity and forthrightness in deconstructing the enigma of the 'Orient' that elevates his writing even further.

> Perhaps life is a mystery, not a muddle; they could not tell. Perhaps the hundred Indias which fuss and squabble so tiresomely are one, and the universe they mirror is one.

It's not the 'handicap of my Indian sentimentality' after all. Forster sought to extract the kernel of truth buried underneath layers of artifice and his craft could successfully flesh out the blank spaces between that which can be expressed with ease. Those are always worthy enough literary achievements in my eyes.

William1.2 says

A Passage to India seems a bolder statement on Colonialism and racism than ever. The Indians are thoughtful and droll, speaking about the trouble making friends with Englishmen, who become less personable the longer they are in India. The British seem to a man all about keeping the Indian down, of holding the colony by force. The writing is beautiful. I just finished E.L. Doctorow's The March, which errs on the purplish side at times. There's no such overwriting here. Even when one reads more slowly the prose constantly surprises. And this is my second or third reading, too.

Few books I have found can sustain such interest over the years. Lolita, Madame Bovary, Germinal, they are rare. This time through I find myself astonished by Forster's skill at under-describing his characters. This technique adds to the fleeting, lighter than air aspect of the writing. He'd much rather talk about a gesture, say, or the layout of a house. But the characters are left very flat, if not without description altogether. We must go by their voices. Under-description of this sort was highly recommended by Elmore Leonard, too, in his day. He was another master of it.

Part Two opens with the story of the developing geology the India. Venturing into the Marabar Caves, whose substance is hundreds of millions of years old, is to enter the primordial. It is to be shown something ancient, far outside the mental and emotional scope of *homo sapiens*, who are no older than 100,000 years, and probably closer to 50,000. Forster's fascination here is with the numinous. Adela and Mrs Moore have since their arrival talked of nothing more than seeing the "real India." In her quest for this passage to India, Adela enters the caves with little knowledge of their history, and there finds herself face to face with the numinous. But in its most primitive essence, which of course includes the erotic, and just like that her heretofore admirable open mindedness is overwhelmed by the true otherness of India. Overwhelmed by fear, she makes an egregious category mistake—a reductio ad absurdum—that upends the lives of all the main characters. An unwarranted charge of attempted rape is lodged against Dr Aziz.

Aziz's arrest reminded of the U.S.'s current epidemic of frightened white cops shooting unarmed black men. These events are equitable only to the extent that both are examples of raw racism run amok. Aziz, however, will get a trial and be acquitted. Our shooting victims will never get that, even posthumously, as we have seen.

The novel is a big nail in the coffin of the Old India Hands. My God, how Forster must have been hated for writing it. How dare he besmirch their generations of "service" in keeping the Indian down. It's a very brave book. Forster indicts his nation in 1924, twenty-three years before Partition. All the insipid reasons for being in India are trotted out and shown to be lies. Britain was not in India to pass down a legacy of democratic administration, that was an unexpected and lucky outcome. It doesn't matter what Niall Ferguson says about the benevolence of the so-called Raj in Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order. This was commercial exploitation at its basest. That the British left slightly fewer corpses in their wake than King Leopold of Belgium did in the Congo is not an argument in their favor.

One final note on this Folio Society edition. It's a beautiful book on acid-free paper with sewn signatures, wonderful to handle. Even turning the pages is a joy. But the illustrations by Glynn Boyd Harte are wretched and annoying. The book is best unadorned.

Gabrielle says

The more I explore E.M. Forster’s books, the more I come to realize that he was a man who held very unconventional views for his days. In “A Room with a View”, he discussed the independence of spirit of women, in “Howards’ End”, the subtle ways the class division separates people and in “A Passage to India”, he expresses very anti-colonialist views about what was once the jewel of the crown: British-occupied India.

Racial tensions and prejudices turn a misunderstanding into quite a drama. The portrait Forster paints of the British occupants is very far from flattering: they consider the natives to be inferior in every way, often can’t be bothered to be civil to them and easily blame them for anything not going as smoothly as they wished, even when they are very obviously the ones at fault. The Indians in turn view the English as untrustworthy – except of course for those who seek to emulate them in every way. These combined attitudes reinforce many levels of animosity between races, religions and castes. Loyalty and justice are not easily defined for those living in this strange setting, and this further muddles the water.

After just a few pages, I knew that Aziz would get himself in trouble: he is just too candid and honest to play the hypocritical social game required to stay on the good side of the British. No one directly accuses him of anything, but people assume right off the bat that he has done something wrong, that like all members of his

race, he is deviant and has a natural inclination towards criminal activities. A strange series of event makes him look guiltier and brings to the surface a lot of anger and resentment that proper social behavior had simply concealed under the surface. And the end result of that is the amplification of the negative prejudices both sides have towards each other. It is so easy to say – out of innocent ignorance – something that will be interpreted as appalling to the other side, but if there is no sensible and open dialogue, there is no resolution.

Forster went to India twice, and wrote this book soon after returning to England. Obviously, the experience had not been a positive one, and the racist attitudes of his compatriots disgusted him. But the novel is not didactic: the complexity of the situation is described in great details, to really convey to the reader that no easy solution can reconcile the politics of colonialism and personal relationship between diverse groups. Tensions are unavoidable, as are disagreement, but without openness and compassion, the conflict will remain irreconcilable.

The cultural differences in this book feel impossible to overcome because of power dynamics, but it is interesting to note that the different groups of Indians are just as virulent in their opposition to each other as the British are towards them. I was worried at first that this would be a Rousseauist story about noble savages and big bad white dudes, but Forster does not idealize the Indians and demonize the British; he simply shows that all humans are flawed despite their best intentions. He also makes clear that some of his characters' attitude do not come from ingrained prejudices, but from parroting the hateful nonsense spewed by their superiors. By simply emulating senior officers, Mr. Heaslop doesn't have to think too much about his direct experience of India, but he unwittingly propagates the disdainful attitudes of the racists at the top.

I'm from a corner of the world where there is a linguistic divide: English-speakers and French-speakers have been (metaphorically and literally) at each other's throat for about 300 years and despite the historical rearview mirror, people still feed each other's prejudices by generalizing intolerant attitudes and accusing each other of cultural colonialism with the only result of driving a wedge between perfectly decent people who just can't give up this idea of colonial oppression. "A Passage to India" echoed this strange contemporary dynamic, and also made me think of the racial profiling police forces can't seem to help in the United-States. Some things are very hard to overcome, and institutionalized hatred is certainly one of them.

Forster's humanist views are expressed with great sensibility and intelligence in all of his books. His prose is beautiful and takes you right to this exotic setting that you discover along with Miss Quested and Mrs. Moore. You will turn the last page and think about it for a long time. I gave it four stars simply because as interesting and well-written a book as it is, I did not enjoy it as much as "Howards End" or "A Room with a View": maybe because the subject matter, while important, is a lot less pleasant, or maybe because I couldn't get attached to any characters the way I did to Lucy or Margaret. In other words, this is a wonderful book that touched me less personally than Mr. Forster's other works.

Chari says

Es Forster. Es un cinco estrellas.

Madeline says

"The sky settles everything - not only climates and seasons but when the earth shall be beautiful. By herself

she can do little - only feeble outbursts of flowers. But when the sky chooses, glory can rain into the Chandrapore bazaars or a benediction pass from horizon to horizon. The sky can do this because it is so strong and so enormous. Strength comes from the sun, infused in it daily; size from the prostrate earth. No mountains infringe on the curve. League after league the earth lies flat, heaves a little, is flat again. Only in the south, where a group of fists and fingers are thrust up through the soil, is the endless expanse interrupted. These fists and fingers are the Marabar Hills, containing the extraordinary caves."

Taking place in the waning years of British rule in India (although Forster, writing the book in 1924, could not have know that India would become independent in less than twenty-five years), *A Passage to India* is, at the surface, the story of a misunderstanding and its long-ranging consequences. But that's only the barest plot description. The book is an exploration of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed, human imperfections and mistakes, and whether friendship can ever exist between the colonizer and the colonized. It's also a thoughtful and powerful critique of the British presence in India, which Forster shows us by shrinking the conflict to a handful of people.

Our main characters are Dr. Aziz, a native Muslim; Mr. Fielding, a British teacher who has not yet become one of the "Anglo-Indians"; and Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested, fresh off the boat from England. Miss Quested is in India to marry Mrs. Moore's son, and both women express an interest in seeing "the real India." Mrs. Moore befriends Dr. Aziz when she meets him in a mosque, and this leads to a friendship between her, Aziz, Miss Quested, and Fielding. After the women express an interest in seeing the Marabar caves, Dr. Aziz offers to be their guide. (The trip doesn't occur until halfway through the book, but the caves are a constant presence in the story, always looming somewhat menacingly in the background) While Aziz is at the caves with the women, an incident occurs, and due to a misunderstanding, Aziz finds himself accused by Miss Quested. An unfortunate series of events makes him seem guiltier than he is, and he is arrested. Miss Quested's accusation, and the sides the characters take in the ensuing trial, bring long-standing resentments and issues bubbling to the surface, and no one gets out unscathed.

This was the second Forster book I've read, and I enjoyed it more than *A Room With A View*. The latter didn't really grab me until about a hundred pages in, but this had me enthralled from the beginning. I loved Forster's beautiful descriptions of India, his look into people's minds, and the fact that a British author could write such a blistering portrayal of colonization. Better yet, he doesn't simply villify the English and idealize the Indians - everyone is flawed here, but no one is outwardly evil. Characters are all well-intentioned, but not always sympathetic. And once Aziz is arrested, Forster's description of the panic that grips the British is evocative and sadly familiar to 21st-century readers:

"They had started speaking of 'women and children' - that phrase that exempts the male from sanity when it has been repeated a few times. Each felt that all he loved best in the world was at stake, demanded revenge, and was filled with a not-unpleasing glow, in which the chilly and half-known features of Miss Quested vanished, and were replaced by all that is sweetest and warmest in the private life."

Mohammed says

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