

Krishna at the Garden Party: Crises of Faith in *A Passage to India*

Wilfrid R. Koponen, Stanford University

E. M. Forster undermines public school notions of friendship, love, and civility in *A Passage to India*. Romantic love, God's love, and friendship are exposed as futile. Adela Quested cannot love. Mrs. Moore's Clapham-style Christianity fails her. Aziz's belief in friendship shatters. Godbole's Hinduism remains intact, but only to debunk Christianity and Islam.¹

The novel's key event is the outing to the imageless caves in the Marabar Hills, where Adela Quested, Aziz, and Mrs. Moore encounter the failure of what they most cherish. Words there turn into a booming echo, which unhinges Mrs. Moore "began . . . to undermine her hold on life."² Mrs. Moore, who arrived in India confident of her beliefs, becomes frail and bitter, and never returns alive to England. The echo leads Adela Quested to nervous collapse. Briefly the object of British sympathy, she finds herself an outcast and her engagement broken. Aziz comes to despise the British, who victimize him.

The Marabar Caves, where the hysteria begins, are established in the opening and closing sentences of the first chapter. The landscape carries a weighty, enigmatic, symbolic content. Barbara Rosecrance notes it suggests a "bleak picture of human incapacity."³ Sara Suleri says that Forster "constructs a symbolic geography that provides Western narrative with . . . the figure of India as a hollow, or a cave."⁴ G.K. Das sees the influence of Hindu mythology in the landscape "as living spirits having supernatural powers."⁵ Benita Parry notes that "the concepts of the major Indian cosmologies are objectified in the landscape."⁶

The caves epitomize the great age of India and its invaders' inability to force it to conform to their beliefs: "even Buddha . . . shunned a renunciation more complete than his own, and has left no legend of struggle or victory in the Marabar. . . . nothing attaches to [the caves], and their reputation . . . does not depend upon human speech" (*Passage* 124). Chaman L. Sahnii observes that the Marabar caves, Forster's model for the Marabar caves, "were for centuries occupied by Brahman-

¹ Frederick C. Crews, "A Passage to India," in *Critical Essays on E.M. Forster*, ed. Alan Wilde (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985) 159.

² E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, 1924 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984) 149. Subsequent citations provided parenthetically within the text after the abbreviation *Passage*.

³ Barbara Rosecrance, *Forster's Narrative Vision* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982) 192.

⁴ Sara Suleri, "The Geography of *A Passage to India*," in *E.M. Forster*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987) 171.

⁵ G.K. Das, "E.M. Forster and Hindu Mythology," in *E.M. Forster: Centenary Revaluations*, ed. Judith Scherer Herz and Robert K. Martin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) 251.

⁶ Benita Parry, "The Politics of Representation in *A Passage to India*," in *A Passage to India: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. John Beer (London: Macmillan, 1985) 37.

ical ascetics."⁷ Forster admitted the Barabar caves were ornamented,⁸ but for his purposes they would have to be empty and imageless. They undermine the meaning of forms, images, and words. The Marabar Hills are said to be "older than anything in the world," predating even "the arrival of the gods" (*Passage* 123,125). The Barabar Hills do predate the Himalayas (Sahni 107). As the Creation Hymn of the *Rg Veda* says, "The gods themselves are later than creation."⁹ The caves thus evoke the cosmic egg (Sahni 114), the "womb of the universe,"¹⁰ or the primal chaos, when "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Genesis 1:2).¹¹ The *Rg Veda* says, "At first there was only darkness wrapped in darkness."¹²

The Caves are indifferent to good and evil; if "excavated, nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil" (*Passage* 125). They seem morally neutral, but Forster likens them to the "Ancient Night" (*Passage* 76), evil itself. Mrs. Moore mirrors this ambivalence. At first, she thinks, "Nothing evil had been in the cave" (*Passage* 148), but later the echo gathers momentum, with "evil propagating in every direction" (*Passage* 187), hence the question: "What had spoken to her in that scoured-out cavity of the granite? . . . the undying worm itself" (*Passage* 208), a name for Satan in Isaiah 66:24 and Mark 9:48. As a Christian, Mrs. Moore recoils from it, though in traditional Indian symbolism the snake represents reincarnation, its coils the web of *samsara*, and, if biting its tail, eternity (Sahni 126).

The outing to the caves becomes a muddle from the moment of the invitation, despite Aziz's assurances: "'I like mysteries, but I rather dislike muddles,' said Mrs. Moore. . . . [Fielding:] ' . . . India's a muddle.' / 'India's—Oh what an alarming idea! / 'There'll be no muddle when you come to see me,' said Aziz" (*Passage* 69). Aziz issues the invitation on impulse, knowing little about the caves. Professor Godbole tells Aziz, "'There are no sculptures at Marabar.' / 'They are immensely holy, no doubt,' said Aziz, to help on the narrative. / 'Oh no, oh no.' / 'Still, they are ornamented in some way.' / 'Oh, no.' / ' . . . We all talk of the famous Marabar Caves. Perhaps that is our empty brag'" (*Passage* 75). Aziz, naming this an "empty brag," reveals words can be hollow; the supposed union between words and their referents may fail. His discomfort with the *Via Negativa* is shared by the Englishwomen, who are unprepared for the "spiritual silence" (*Passage* 140) they encounter en route to the caves. They hardly see the "pure space of the cave" as Brahman, as a Vedantist might (Sahni 120). They "wished the place could have turned into some Mohammedan object . . . which their host would have appreciated and explained" (*Passage* 141). Aziz is at a loss for words.

⁷ Chaman L. Sahni, *Forster's A Passage to India: The Religious Dimension* (Atlantic Highland, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981) 103. Subsequent citations provided parenthetically within the text.

⁸ John Beer, "A Passage to India, the French New Novel and English Romanticism," in *A Passage to India: Essays in Interpretation* 115.

⁹ Qtd. in Eloise Knapp Hay, *T.S. Eliot's Negative Way* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982) 160-61.

¹⁰ Wilfred Stone, "The Caves of *A Passage to India*," in *A Passage to India: Essays in Interpretation* 20.

¹¹ *Revised Standard Version Bible* [RSV] (New York: William Collins Sons, 1973). Subsequent citations provided parenthetically within the text as RSV.

¹² Qtd. in Hay 160-61.

The participants find the absence of what they wish to find. Instead of finding holiness, they confront evil; wishing for something picturesque, they find emptiness; rather than spaciousness, they are pressed against the crush of servants; they smell not incense but the stench of the unwashed. Instead of meaning, they find meaninglessness, not merely the absence of words, but an echo that undermines the meaning of all words. This is reflected in Forster's syntax. Gillian Beer notes, "Negative sentence structures, together with the words 'no,' 'not,' 'never' and in particular 'nothing' predominate."¹³ Molly B. Tinsley observes that "Forster's sentences . . . fight closure as consistently as they undermine climax."¹⁴ All are unprepared: "They awaited the miracle. But at the supreme moment . . . nothing occurred . . . and a profound disappointment entered with the morning breeze. Why, when the chamber was prepared, did the bridegroom not enter . . . as humanity expects?" (*Passage* 137). Here Forster alludes to the parable of the wise and foolish maidens who go "to meet the bridegroom," who is delayed, and thus hear the cry at an unexpected hour, after they have fallen asleep (Matthew 25:1-13, RSV). Mrs. Moore has learned "that life never gives us what we want at the moment that we consider appropriate. Adventures do occur, but not punctually" (*Passage* 25).

Aziz, the outing's host, expects triumph, but is humiliated. He treasures hospitality, and spares no expense to reveal "true courtesy—the civil deed that shows the good heart" (*Passage* 60), like Muslims he reveres. He claims, "This picnic has nothing to do with English or Indian; it is an expedition of friends" (*Passage* 161). Yet he wins no kudos for his hospitality. Aziz is arrested for accosting Miss Quested in a cave and thrown in jail. He becomes convinced that friendship is impossible with the English until they leave India.

Kindness and pleasantness are ideals held by Mrs. Moore and Aziz. Both see in the other a kindred soul. Mrs. Moore says, "Aziz is my real friend" (*Passage* 97) and Aziz tells Mrs. Moore's son Ralph, "Your mother was my best friend" (*Passage* 312). Aziz treasures Mrs. Moore as a friend, even though the Marabar, their final meeting, is only their third. For Aziz, "What did this eternal goodness of Mrs. Moore amount to? . . . She had not borne witness in his favour, nor visited him in the prison, yet . . . he always adored her" (*Passage* 312). Mrs. Moore, "As Esmism Esmoor' . . . becomes a Hindu goddess."¹⁵ Even readers ascribe great qualities to her: Harold Bloom sees her as "the Alexandrian figure of Wisdom, the Sophia."¹⁶

Friendship is advanced more than marriage by Aziz and others. Mrs. Moore grows tired of love and marriage, as is evident in this narrated monologue: "The unspeakable attempt [of Aziz's supposed attack] presented itself to her as love: in a cave, in a church—Boum, it amount to the same" (*Passage* 208). Though jaded about marriage, Mrs. Moore regards Aziz as her friend. Aziz views friendship as sacred: "The Friend: a Persian expression for God" (*Passage* 277). Yet friendships in the novel are undermined by betrayal, often due to the disdain of members of the

¹³ Gillian Beer, "Negation in *A Passage to India*," in *A Passage to India: Essays in Interpretation* 45.

¹⁴ Molly B. Tinsley, "Muddle, Et Cetera: Syntax in *A Passage to India*," in *E.M. Forster: Centenary Revaluations* 259.

¹⁵ Lionel Trilling, "A Passage to India" in *E.M. Forster*, ed. Harold Bloom 25.

¹⁶ Harold Bloom, "Introduction" to *E.M. Forster* 5.

British Raj for Indians, widespread prior to World War I. Adela asks the Collector, Mr. Turton, to meet "those Indians whom you come across socially—as your friends," only to be told, "Well, we don't come across them socially" (*Passage* 28). Indians share these reservations. Aziz finds Hamidullah's guests discussing "whether or no it is possible to be friends with an Englishman" (*Passage* 10). Yet the most significant friendships in the novel are those between Mrs. Moore and Aziz and between Aziz and Fielding; that is, between an Indian and an Englishwoman, and between an Indian and an Englishman. Aziz waxes eloquent about friendship, yet after his trial he concludes that he and Fielding cannot be friends until the Indians have driven "every blasted Englishman into the sea" (*Passage* 322). Once Aziz feels "genuine hatred of the English" he thinks (in quoted monologue), "I am an Indian at last" (*Passage* 293), completing his own passage to India. He tells Fielding, "My heart is for my own people" (*Passage* 302). Yet as Rustom Bharucha comments, the separation between Aziz and Fielding "in the final moments of *A Passage to India* . . . is so subtly juxtaposed with intimacy that one might say that Aziz and Fielding have acquired a mutual understanding."¹⁷

Most of the British long in India avoid friendships like Aziz and Mrs. Moore's, though Forster wrote, "What is good in people . . . [is] their belief in friendship and loyalty for their own sakes."¹⁸ Even Forster admitted, though, that "they are not enough" to withstand politics.¹⁹ Most of the British sacrifice friendship with Indians to show unity when facing the natives collectively. They are scandalized when Fielding breaks ranks to side with Aziz. The British maintain unity to preserve their superiority, leaving behind Christian notions of loving-kindness to become as gods: "A community that bows the knee to a viceroy and believes that the divinity that hedges a king can be transplanted, must feel some reverence for any viceregal substitute. At Chandrapore, the Turtons were little gods" (*Passage* 28). Ronny Heaslop exemplifies this utilitarian religion his Mother detests; Mrs. Moore asserts, "Englishmen like posing as gods" (*Passage* 50). Ronny tells her, "we're not out here for the purpose of behaving pleasantly" (*Passage* 49). He upholds a nationalistic civil religion, as when the Anthem of the Army of Occupation is played at the Club: "The meagre tune, the curt series of demands on Jehovah, fused into a prayer unknown in England" (*Passage* 26). Mrs. Moore insists: "The English are out here to be pleasant. . . . God . . . is . . . love" (*Passage* 51). The words "God is love" reappear in the Hindu ceremony as "God si Love" (*Passage* 285, 289), enthusiastically if incomprehendingly embraced by Hindus.

Hindus delight in the words "God si Love," but Heaslop is not amused. "Ronny approved of religion as long as it endorsed the National Anthem, but he objected when it attempted to influence his life" (*Passage* 52). Ronny views his mother as a harmless fool. But McBryde, the District Superintendent of Police, views Fielding as a traitor for aiding Aziz. McBryde tells Fielding that the Bengal Mutiny "should be your Bible in this country" (*Passage* 169).

¹⁷ Rustom Bharucha, "Forster's Friends," in *E.M. Forster* 164.

¹⁸ E.M. Forster, "What I Believe," in *Two for Democracy*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (1951; London: Edward Arnold, 1972) 69.

¹⁹ E.M. Forster, "Believe" 65.

Given the secularized religion of the British, Forster's allusions to the Bible and the *Book of Common Prayer* become ironic echoes. Judith Herz finds in the language in this novel "a sign system adrift from its signifieds."²⁰ Thus when Mrs. Moore first alludes to 1 Corinthians 13:1, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol" (*Passage* 52), a paean to love, she is confident that "the desire to behave pleasantly satisfies God" (*Passage* 52), though her son demurs. She fails to realize that "behaving pleasantly" is only a dim echo of "having love." She is like the "clanging cymbal" Paul belittles. Mrs. Moore's confidence rests upon an echo of St. Paul. When these words from Corinthians recur after Mrs. Moore's terror in the cave, her faith is gone. She "has moved closer and closer to Indian ways of feeling."²¹ At "the edge of her mind, Religion appeared, poor little talkative Christianity, and she knew that all its divine words from 'Let there be light' to 'It is finished' only amounted to 'boum.' Then she was terrified" (*Passage* 150). "The novel . . . discards Christianity . . . firmly," Das insists.²² Forster himself "lost his faith completely" at Cambridge and wrote, "I cannot believe that Christianity will ever cope with the present worldwide mess."²³

Mrs. Moore's belief in pleasantness does not prepare her for India, where her faith collapses. She hears the echo as "boum," the sound of negation, not as "aum," the hum pervading the created universe. She grows feeble and dies. Her Christianity breaks down before the excursion. We learn that Mrs. Moore "found [God] increasingly difficult to avoid as she grew older . . . though oddly he satisfied her less. . . . Outside the arch there seemed always another arch, beyond the remotest echo a silence" (*Passage* 52). Thus while asserting "God ... is ... love" (*Passage* 51), she hesitates, an equivocation Forster suggests via the ellipses. This collapse of her faith surfaces after she hears Godbole's song about "the desired spiritual union between Krishna and His *gopis*," suggesting "a religious devotee's complete self-surrender to God."²⁴ The song puzzles the English, particularly Mrs. Moore, to whom Godbole explains that his is "a religious song. I place myself in the position of a milkmaid. I say to Sri Krishna, 'Come! Come to me only.' The god refuses to come. . . . This is repeated several times. . . . / 'But He comes in some other song, I hope?' said Mrs. Moore gently. / 'Oh no, he refuses to come,' repeated Godbole" (*Passage* 80). The milkmaid's song foreshadows the disastrous outing and Adela and Ronny's failed love. It hints of the failure of Mrs. Moore's passage to India in order to see Heaslop joined to Miss Quested in marital union, a union that never occurs.

Mrs. Moore's Christian beliefs appear unassailable in her first encounter with Aziz, in the mosque. She asserts, "God is here" (*Passage* 20), a belief she cannot sustain in the Marabar caves, where she enters "a spiritual muddledom . . . for which no high-sounding words can be found" (*Passage* 208). If one acknowledges that Aziz's belief in friendship is religious, then the religious beliefs of all who join in the outing are dashed by the Marabar. Only two fail to come in time to get

²⁰ Judith Scherer Herz, "Listening to Language," in *A Passage to India: Essays in Interpretation* 59.

²¹ Trilling 22-23.

²² Das 254.

²³ P.N. Furbank, *E.M. Forster: A Life*, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) 1:62; E.M. Forster, "Believe" 72.

²⁴ Vasant A. Shahane, "Forster's Inner Passage to India" in *E.M. Forster: Centenary Revaluations* 269.

on the train: Fielding, "a blank, frank atheist" (*Passage* 255) and Godbole, who does cope with the effects of the caves.

Godbole achieves an equivocal and subtle union with God. Forster suggests through Godbole that "Hinduism is more open to certain kinds of experience than is Christianity or Islam."²⁵ Forster "identifies himself wholly with Godbole," insists John Drew, who also finds that Godbole owes much to Forster's reading of the Neo-Platonic *Enneads* of Plotinus,²⁶ a view also advanced by Harold Bloom.²⁷ But Godbole's Hindu philosophy eludes his listeners. He clarifies: "Good and evil are different, as their names imply. But . . . they are both of them aspects of my Lord. He is present in the one, absent in the other, and the difference between presence and absence is great. . . . Yet absence implies presence, absence is not non-existence, and we are therefore entitled to repeat, 'Come, come, come, come'" (*Passage* 178). Frederick P.W. McDowell states that "Godbole's Hinduism takes us beyond good and evil to a cosmic force more often passive than positive and always unpredictable."²⁸ Is Godbole the incarnation of profound wisdom, or merely aloof and unfeeling? Godbole is at ease with absences. As Gillian Beer reminds us, this is "a book about gaps, fissures, absences, and exclusions."²⁹ In the ritual of the birth of Krishna, Godbole is said to be "in the presence of God" (*Passage* 283), although his understanding of this is paradoxical. Forster noted that "the Hindu festival represents the same thing as the scene in the cave 'turned inside out'" (Sahni 141), but he refused to state what happened in the cave. He claimed he did not know. Godbole refrains from expressing ultimate values directly in words. As one who has studied the *Upanishads*, like the *Kena Upanishad* he might exhort: "That which cannot be expressed by speech, but by which speech is expressed—That alone know as Brahman."³⁰

Godbole's facility for embracing paradox leaves him relatively unscathed by the Marabar. Rosecrance sees "the affirmation embodied in the Krishna ceremony" and its embracing of contingency as the opposite of "Mrs. Moore's nihilistic vision," but avers that Forster pulls back from Godbole by making his detachment unappealing.³¹ Das contrarily implies that Godbole's participation in the Krishna ritual makes him appealing, for Das says that Forster sees the Krishna myth "as an embodiment of the Hindu vision of complete being."³² Godbole himself, though detached, believes all is interconnected. Godbole says to Fielding, "Nothing can be performed in isolation. . . . I am informed that an evil action was performed in the Marabar Hills . . . [T]hat action was performed by Dr. Aziz. . . . It was performed by the guide. . . . It was performed by you. . . . It was performed by me. . . . It was even performed by the lady herself. When evil occurs, it expresses the whole of the universe. Similarly when good occurs" (*Passage* 177-78). Godbole may grasp unity, but he is aloof from friendship and affection. Fielding talks about

²⁵ Stone 18.

²⁶ John Drew, "The Spirit Behind the Frieze?" in *A Passage to India: Essays in Interpretation* 81, 84.

²⁷ Bloom 6.

²⁸ Frederick P.W. McDowell, "A Universe . . . not . . . Comprehensible to Our Minds," in *Critical Essays on E.M. Forster*, 132.

²⁹ Beer 45.

³⁰ Swami Nikilananda, ed., *The Upanishads* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) 99.

³¹ Rosecrance 215, 224.

³² Das 254.

traveling light but befriends Aziz and marries Stella Moore. Godbole travels light and avoids all messy entanglements.

Aziz loves his connection with others, though the outing tests this. Aziz turns within and emerges a strong Muslim. Though he moves to a Hindu state, "he had no religious curiosity, and had never discovered the meaning of this annual antic" (*Passage* 291-92) of the celebration of Krishna's birth, a key Hindu festival. Likewise, his view of friendship contracts as he recognizes the pitfalls of associating with the English. Still valuing friendship, he expects less. Yet his dream of a unified, non-British India admits a fusion of Hindu and Muslim. Forster notes Muslim saints have been adopted by Hindus, and a Muslim poem absorbs "the call to Krishna." Aziz embraces the insights of Ghalib's poem, which he recited prior to the Marabar fiasco, a poem "less explicit than the call to Krishna," but which "voiced our loneliness nevertheless . . . our need for the Friend who never comes yet is not entirely disproved" (*Passage* 106).

Union in friendship remains a chimera. Friends promise yet fail to come. Fielding promises Aziz, "We're coming to McBryde together," but "Aziz went on to prison alone" (*Passage* 162); later, after the trial, Aziz cries out: "Cyril, Cyril, don't leave me." Fielding promises, "I'm coming back" (*Passage* 232), but does not, causing Aziz to lament, "Cyril, again you desert" (*Passage* 235). Adela asks regarding her trial, "Can Mrs. Moore be with me?" Ronny says "Certainly" (*Passage* 195), but she does not come.

Adela is incapable of friendship. At the "bridge" party held in her honor, "friendly Indians were before her, and she tried to make them talk, but she failed" (*Passage* 43). The English are stirred by the violated feminine purity Adela represents, but fail to warm to her personally. Aziz finds coldness Adela's major shortcoming. Adela admits to Fielding that she tried to make "tenderness, respect and personal intercourse" take the place of love in her engagement (*Passage* 263). Fielding tells her, "You have no real affection for Aziz, or Indians generally" (*Passage* 259), to which Adela assents. Adela is Mrs. Moore's foil. Mahmoud Ali says, "Mrs. Moore . . . was poor Indians' friend" (*Passage* 224). Indians warm to Mrs. Moore but are repelled by Adela's coldness; even her scrupulous honesty, which causes the British other than Fielding to abandon her, is rejected: "Her behaviour rested on cold justice and honesty; she had felt, while she recanted, no passion of love for those whom she had wronged. Truth is not truth in that exacting land unless there go with it kindness . . . unless the Word that was with God also is God" (*Passage* 245). As we have seen, curious things happen to words under the influence of the Marabar. The above sentence alludes to the opening verse of the Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1, RSV), and possibly to heat and desire in the Creation Hymn of the *Rg Veda*: "That One which came to be, enclosed in nothing, / arose at last, born of the power of heat. / In the beginning desire descended on it."³³ Adela lacks such heat and desire.

Aziz is also a foil to Adela. He is as emotional and careless as she is rational and scrupulous. Anxious to get to know Cyril Fielding, he forgets his first invita-

³³ Qtd. in Hay 160-61.

tion. Aziz is surprised by how literal-minded are the English regarding invitations. He is slow to adapt to this cultural difference. So are the new arrivals. Adela and Mrs. Moore fail to penetrate the "echoing walls of civility" (*Passage* 43) of the Bhattacharyas, who said their carriage would come that very morning, and await it, but it never comes. Despite this cue about invitations, they make the same mistake and take Aziz's invitation to the caves literally. The seasoned Heaslop, for once, is right: "The way those Bengalis let you down this morning annoyed me. . . . Aziz would make some similar muddle over the caves. He meant nothing by the invitation" (*Passage* 83).

Aziz distorts the truth to maintain the right feeling. He lies to Adela, saying he has a wife, feeling "it more artistic to have his wife alive for a moment" (*Passage* 152)! Yet Adela strains for factual clarity. Her coldness disorients her as she enters a cave in the Marabar, pondering love and realizing she does not love her fiancé. "Did she love him? This question was somehow dragged up with the Marabar. . . . Was she capable of loving anyone?" (*Passage* 212). Upon entering the cave, a symbol of the unconscious, the instinctual, and of motherhood and fertility, Adela becomes unhinged, suggesting a rejection of sexual union.³⁴ She breaks her engagement. She falls apart when her ascent to the caves with Aziz makes her anticipate the sexual act.

The frankly sexual desire for union suggested in the milkmaid's song to Krishna is absent from Adela's engagement with Heaslop; Adela "regretted that neither she nor Ronny had physical charm" (*Passage* 153). Forster mostly holds ideal union in marriage to be unattainable in *A Passage to India*. Adela and Ronny's union, lacking love, never comes to pass; McBryde's unhappy marriage ends in divorce; later, Fielding marries, but is "not quite happy" (*Passage* 318); Aziz remarries, but his wife is never shown: she is in purdah, despite Aziz's poetry calling for the liberation of women, which, like many words, is a meaningless echo, without influence over events. Aziz merely wants someone to raise his children and to manage his household. In a narrated monologue, Aziz felt that "a friend would come nearer to [the place held by his late first wife] than another woman" (*Passage* 55). One reason Forster never wrote another novel after *A Passage to India* is that "being a homosexual, he grew bored with writing about marriage and the relations of men and women."³⁵

The only happy marriages in the novel are those in which one spouse is already dead; Mrs. Moore's two husbands are dead, as is Aziz's first wife. But memory is unreliable. Aziz cannot even picture his late wife. Real union must be here and now, in time and space, and thus subject to change. In the ceremony of Krishna's birth, the author avers: "Not only from the unbeliever are mysteries hid, but the adept himself cannot retain them. He may think, if he chooses, that he has been with God, but as soon as he thinks it, it becomes history, and falls under the rules of time" (*Passage* 288). Godbole, though masterful at expressing subtleties in words, knows words cannot capture experience; they can only echo what once was present, and point to its absence.

³⁴ Louise Dauner, "What Happened in the Cave? Reflections on *A Passage to India*," in *Critical Essays on E.M. Forster*, 152.

³⁵ Furbank 2: 132.

Adela, who collapses when attempting to fathom her feelings and her fear of sex as she enters the cave, is terrified by her inchoate feelings, which blend in her mind with the echo. The echo leaves her only after she confesses at the trial that she was mistaken. With this release from the echo comes a newfound resignation to the limits of knowledge and words. Following the trial, Adela finds herself "at the end of her spiritual tether." She wonders, with Fielding: "Were there worlds beyond which they could never touch . . . ? They could not tell. . . . Perhaps life is a mystery, not a muddle; they could not tell. Perhaps the hundred Indias . . . are one and the universe they mirror is one. They had not the apparatus for judging" (*Passage* 263).

Aziz desires a unified India and believes Muslims and Hindus can live in peace. Hatred of the British unites Muslim and Hindu after the trial. Given the bloodshed after the British left India, Aziz's optimism seems naive. The ancient boom of the caves baffles foreigners and Indians. India "calls 'Come' through her hundred mouths, through objects ridiculous and august. But come to what? She has never defined. She is not a promise, only an appeal" (*Passage* 136).