A Passage To India:

Summary:

A Passage to India was divided by E. M. Forster into three parts. The first part, "Mosque," begins with what is essentially a description of the city of Chandrapore. The physical separation of the city into sections, plus the separation of earth and sky, are indicative of a separation of deeper significance that exists between the Indian and English sectors.

This novel deals with human relationships, and the theme that determines its plot line is introduced in this section: "Is it possible for the Indian and the Englishman to be friends?" To show both sides of this question, the reader is first introduced to Dr. Aziz and his friends. Aziz is a Moslem doctor who practices at the government hospital in Chandrapore under the supervision of Major Callendar. Among Aziz's friends are Hamidullah, an Indian barrister who has lived in England; Nawab Bahadur, an influential landowner; and Mahmoud Ali. In the opening chapters these men are shown discussing the English officials who govern under the British Raj in India.

Among the English faction, who also discuss the Anglo-Indian relationship, are Mr. Turton, the Collector; Major Callendar, the English doctor; Mr. McBryde, the police magistrate; and Ronny Heaslop, the city magistrate and the latest official to assume duties in Chandrapore.

Between these groups, or outside them, are Cyril Fielding, the English principal of the government school, whose allegiance belongs to neither group; Mrs. Moore, mother of Ronny Heaslop, who has come to India as chaperone to Miss Adela Quested, Ronny's intended fiancee; Professor Godbole, a Hindu who is separated from the Moslems by his religion and* from the English by his religion and nationality; and the English missionaries, Mr. Graysford and Mr. Sorley, who share none of the arrogance of English officialdom as they attempt to convert the Indians to Christianity.

The story opens with Aziz's arrival at Hamidullah's house, where he is to spend a social evening with his friends. Their conversation centers upon the indignities that the Indian must suffer at the hands of the English officials and their wives. Young Ronny Heaslop, whom they dub the "red-nosed boy," is a particular object of ridicule.

Aziz is summoned to the house of his superior, Major Callendar. He is late in arriving and when he arrives, he finds the major gone. Two English women preempt his tonga and on the walk back to his house he encounters Mrs. Moore at the mosque. The old lady endears herself to Aziz by her innate understanding of him and of Moslem custom; he calls her an Oriental.

Later, at the English club, Adela Quested expresses her desire to see the "real India" and is advised by a passerby to "try seeing Indians." To humor her Mr. Turton offers to give a "Bridge Party," a garden party ostensibly designed to bridge the distance between the English and the Indian, and to give Adela and Mrs. Moore the opportunity to meet socially some of the upper-class Indians.

At Mrs. Moore's cottage that night Ronny and his mother discuss her encounter with Aziz at the mosque. Ronny shows his unmistakable prejudice and Mrs. Moore is appalled at his inhumane

attitude. On her way to bed, she exhibits a sympathetic response to a wasp, one of the least of India's creatures.

On the outskirts of the town, Mr. Sorley, the younger and more liberal of the two English missionaries, while willing to accept that there may well be a heaven for mammals, cannot bring himself to admit the lowly wasp.

The garden party given by the Turtons only serves to show more clearly the division of peoples, as each group keeps to itself. Cyril Fielding, who mingles freely with the Indians, is impressed by the friendliness of Mrs. Moore and Adela and invites them to tea at his home. They are also invited for a Thursday morning visit — which never materializes — to the home of the Bhattacharya's, a Hindu couple.

That evening, in a discussion with Ronny, Mrs. Moore is again appalled by her son, and quotes to him from the Bible, reminding him that God is love and expects man to love his neighbor (though she herself has found Him less satisfying in India than ever before). Ronny humors her, reminding himself that she is old.

At tea at Fielding's house, Mrs. Moore and Adela visit pleasantly with Aziz and Professor Godbole, enigmatic Hindu associate of Mr. Fielding. The kindness of Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested prompts Aziz to invite them on an outing to the Marabar Caves, which they accept. Ronny Heaslop arrives at Fielding's cottage to take his mother and Adela to a game of polo; his discourtesy to Aziz and his arrogant demeanor toward all Indians causes Adela and Ronny to quarrel, and Adela tells Ronny she cannot marry him.

Later the young people go for a ride with Nawab Bahadur, and when the automobile is involved in an accident with an unidentified animal on a back road, they are drawn together once more and announce their engagement. Mrs. Moore accepts the news calmly, but when told of the accident she murmurs, "A ghost!"

Aziz, pleased with the friendship shown him by Cyril Fielding, shows the English professor a picture of his dead wife, a courtesy equal to inviting Fielding behind the purdah, the highest honor an Indian can give.

The next section, "Caves," begins with a detailed description of the Marabar Caves, the peculiar hollow caverns within the equally curious Marabar Hills that rise from an otherwise flat area outside the city of Chandrapore.

It is to these caves that Aziz has planned an elaborate trip for Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested. He has also included Fielding and Godbole in the invitation. Unfortunately, Fielding and Godbole miss the train and Aziz is left in full charge of the expedition, which begins with a train ride and ends with an elephant ride to the immediate vicinity of the caves. In the first cave Mrs. Moore is terrified by an echo and the press of the crowd and declines to go farther.

Aziz, a guide, and Adela go on alone. Adela, pondering her engagement to Ronny, unwisely asks Aziz if he has more than one wife. The excitable little Indian, upset by her queries, dashes into a

cave to recover his composure. Adela wanders aimlessly into another cave and is supposedly assaulted by someone there. She rushes down the side of the hill, where she meets Nancy Derek, an English companion to a maharani, who has brought Fielding to the caves. Nancy returns the overwrought Adela to Chandrapore.

In the meantime Aziz, knowing nothing of what has happened to Adela, entertains his other friends and returns with them by train. At the station he is met by Mr. Haq, the police inspector, who arrests him for assaulting Miss Quested.

Fielding alienates himself from the English by siding with Aziz. The English rally around Adela and press for a quick conviction. Mrs. Moore, now sunk into a state of apathy, refuses to admit that Aziz may be guilty but also refuses to testify in his behalf in court; Ronny arranges passage for her to England. On the way she dies; her name, however, becomes for a time a legend to the natives of Chandrapore.

At the trial, Adela Quested, who has been in a state of shock since the incident at the caves, suddenly finds her mind clear again and exonerates Aziz. Her withdrawal of the charge against Aziz causes her to be ostracized by the English. Fielding reluctantly offers her the use of his cottage while he is absent on official business, and Ronny eventually breaks their engagement. Disillusioned by her experience in India, Adela returns to England; and Fielding persuades Aziz to drop a damage suit against her.

Two years later the setting of the novel shifts to the Hindu state of Mau in a section entitled "Temple." Following the trial, Fielding had returned to England, married, and was then sent on a tour of central India to inspect government schools. Godbole has become the Minister of Education at Mau, and through his influence, Aziz has become personal physician to the Rajah of Mau.

The opening chapter of this section describes a Hindu ceremony honoring the birth of the god Krishna. Professor Godbole directs the temple choir and, in an ecstasy of religious fervor, dances his joy. While in this almost trancelike state he remembers Mrs. Moore and a wasp, associating them as he contemplates the love of God. The biblical statement "God is Love," with which Mrs. Moore had exhorted her son, is repeated in the Hindu ceremony, although through an error in its printing it becomes "God si Love."

Aziz is annoyed when he discovers that Fielding is visiting Mau in line with his official duties. He has become thoroughly disillusioned with the British and even with Fielding; when he learned that Fielding had married in England, he concluded that the wife was Adela Quested and henceforth refused to read any of Fielding's letters. Aziz has married again and has his children with him. Although he does not embrace Hinduism, he is tolerant of their festivals and is finding peace and contentment away from British domination. He has, however, let his practice of medicine degenerate until he is little more than a glorified medicine man.

When Aziz meets Fielding again, he learns that Stella Moore, not Adela Quested, is Fielding's wife. Stella and her brother Ralph have accompanied Fielding to India. Aziz forms a special

attachment for Ralph, whose bee stings he treats, because Ralph shows many of the traits of his mother, Mrs. Moore.

The Hindu festival continues after the celebration of the birth of the god. Fielding and Stella go out in a boat to better observe the ceremony, as do Aziz and Ralph in another boat. In the storm the boats collide with each other and capsize. In the general confusion that follows, the ceremony comes to an end and the English return to the guest house. Aziz has confided to Ralph that the rajah has died, but the announcement of his death is suspended until after the festival.

Hinduism affects both Stella and Ralph, but Fielding cannot understand the effect it has on them, though he is intrigued by it. Aziz believes that Ralph, at least, has an Oriental mind, as Mrs. Moore had.

Although Fielding finds that the school that Professor Godbole was to superintend has been neglected and the building turned into a granary, he does nothing to rectify the situation. The floods, which have kept Fielding in Mau, abate, and he and his party make plans to leave. Before they go, Fielding and Aziz take a final horseback ride together. Good-naturedly, they argue about the Anglo-Indian problem. Aziz excitedly declares that India must be united and the English driven out. Sensing that this is the end of their association, Aziz and Fielding attempt to pledge eternal friendship in spite of their differences, but the path narrows and their horses are forced apart, signifying that such a friendship is not yet possible.

Characters

Adela Quested A young woman newly arrived from England, expecting to be the fiancee of Ronny Heaslop.

Mrs. Moore Adela's chaperone and Ronny Heaslop's mother, by her first marriage.

Ronny Heaslop The City Magistrate of Chandrapore.

Doctor Aziz The Moslem doctor at the Government Hospital.

Major and Mrs. Callendar A Civil Surgeon and Aziz's superior; and his wife.

Cyril Fielding The English Principal at the Government College.

Professor Godbole The Hindu colleague of Fielding's.

Hamidullah Aziz's uncle and eminent Moslem barrister.

Mahmoud Ali Pleader (attorney) in the court, and friend of Aziz.

Ram Chand, Syed Mohammed, and Mr. Haq Friends of Aziz.

Mr. Das Ronny's assistant and the Hindu judge at the trial.

Nawab Bahadur The wealthy, influential friend of Aziz.

Mr. and Mrs. McBryde The District Superintendent of Police and his wife.

Nancy Derek A guest of the McBryde's and the companion of a maharani in a native state.

Mr. and Mrs. Turton Collector, head of British officialdom and social leader of Chandrapore; and his wife.

Mr. Armitrao The lawyer from Calcutta who takes Aziz's case.

Nureddin Grandson of Nawab Bahadur.

Ralph Moore Mrs. Moore's son by her second marriage.

Stella Moore Mrs. Moore's daughter, who becomes the wife of Cyril Fielding.

Mr. and Mrs. Lesley A British official and his wife.

Karin, Ahmed, Jamila Children of Aziz.

Doctor Panna Lal Hindu colleague of Aziz.

Mohammed Latif Poor relative who lives in the house of Hamidullah.

Mr. Graysford and Mr. Sorley Missionaries who live on the outskirts of Chandrapore.

Lord and Lady Mellanby The Lieutenant Governor and his wife.

Mrs. Bhattacharya The Indian woman who invites Adela and Mrs. Moore to her house and then neglects to send a carriage for them.

General meanings of a passage to india:

The question that the Indians discuss in Chapter 2 — "Is it possible for the Indians to be friends with the English?" — is the focal point of the plot of A Passage to India. Can East meet West on a plane where each not only tolerates but also appreciates the other? In a larger sense Forster asks if universal understanding is possible. (It should be pointed out that this novel does not really suggest an affirmative answer to that question.) He then proceeds to introduce characters from the major factions in India and to show their interactions.

As he traces the interplay, he keeps before the reader symbols that show forces above and beyond the reach of most men's grasp. The sky and a hint of arches beyond it are prominent examples. To show that not only are there heights which only the most perceptive minds can comprehend, but

also depths, he shows especially sensitive people finding beauty — and God — in the lowest of creatures, the jackal and the wasp. Within this framework he treats of three of the great religions, Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism.

Islam is shown in a decadent state reveling in past glory. The Westernized Moslem finds it hard to maintain his belief. His festivals are empty ceremonies in which the participants bicker about inconsequential matters. Aziz, whom Forster chooses to represent Islam, professes to skepticism about the precepts of his religion; his poetry is devoted to flamboyant exploits of the past. All he appears to have left is a sadness because of the decline of Islam, and a contempt for the Hindus.

The phrase that Mrs. Moore uses to describe Christianity, "little talkative Christianity," seems to be Forster's view of that religion. He chooses to use many biblical allusions, often in an ironic manner, which point up what Christianity professes, but does not practice. The religion of the English in India takes second place to affairs of state and does not enter into the practical aspect of their lives; it is merely a conviction.

The events of the story lead the reader step by step to a consideration of Hinduism. Professor Godbole, its main exponent, is pictured as a man of peace, a man of wisdom, who refuses to become enmeshed in the petty quarrels of men. The short climactic section at the end of the novel shows Hinduism in action. The religious zeal of the participants in the festival causes them at least to suspend momentarily, if not to disregard entirely, any self-seeking for position as leader, even though the rajah is near death. The adoration of the god is so intense that when the sick and aged rajah is brought to the ceremony, he is scarcely noticed.

The ceremony includes ecstasy, merriment, and solemnity, suggesting that religion should embody the whole of life. The biblical passage "God is love" has an error in spelling, but none in practice. The Hindus' faces are mild and serene, because "religion is a living force to the Hindus," and among its tenets, one of the most important is the "peace that passeth understanding." But Hinduism too has its imperfections; Forster points out that in Mau, though there is no strife between Moslem and Hindu, there is between Brahmin and non-Brahmin.

The key phrases in regard to the characters are "the understanding heart." Aziz, warmhearted and impulsive, possesses understanding, but his volatility reduces its effectiveness; Adela is cold, honest, and reserved. Mrs. Moore has both kindness and an innate understanding of people at the beginning of the novel, but the kindness at least does not withstand her experience in the caves, and understanding without kindness is of no use to her.

Fielding is the key figure who develops with the novel. He not only crosses racial and national lines, but he responds as though they did not exist. He professes atheism, but by the end of the novel he has at least become personally aware of spiritual influences: puzzled by the pleasing change in his wife after the encounter with Hinduism, he is intrigued by whatever it is that the Hindus seem "to have found."

Professor Godbole is not so much a character as a "carrier" for an ideology that suggests at least a theoretical answer to the question Forster poses at the beginning of the book, "Can the Indian be friends with the English?"

There is a historical aspect to this novel as well as a religious one. Forster's premise seems to be that no nation can subjugate another without inflicting wounds that leave deep scars. No nation can be of service so long as the ruling nation holds itself superior and aloof. The book is not a strictly historical account, of course, because Forster is more concerned with social relationships than he is with history. But he does indicate the spirit of rebellion that is beginning to build in India and shows the English losing their grip on the government. The last few paragraphs of the novel seem almost prophetic of Indian independence, which did not take place until 22 years after the book's publication.

Mysticism in A passage to India:

Much has been written about mysticism in Forster's novels, primarily in A Passage to India. It is not, however, mysticism per se with which Forster is here concerned, but rather the mysticism of Hinduism. Any understanding of the mystic element in this novel requires some knowledge of the religion on the part of the reader. (See the short paragraph at the beginning of the commentary on Part III, the "Temple" section.)

But even such knowledge will not bring complete or immediate understanding, for Forster is not attempting to explain Hinduism, or to proselytize for it; his method of dealing with it is, in the main, allusive rather than expository.

The novel is full of unanswered questions: "Mrs. Moore felt increasingly (vision or nightmare?) that, though people are important, the relations between them are not." "God si love. Is this the first message of India?" The reader can find many others for himself; since Forster himself does not pretend to answer them, it would be presumptuous to do so here. In fact, part of the essence of mysticism is its inexpressibility; it cannot be reduced to words, to questions with answers.

However, the reader should at least be aware of those elements that have mystical overtones — primarily the character of Mrs. Moore, the echo and its effect on her, and many of the aspects of Hinduism.