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# Of Slight, Spite, and Suspicion: The Treatment of India in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*

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## Abstract

This study analyzes E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* through the lens of colonial psychology, examining the intricate dynamics between the British colonizers and the Indian populace. The research focuses on the recurring themes of "slight," "spite," and "suspicion," highlighting how these attitudes manifest in the interactions between British and Indian characters. Through a detailed analysis of Forster's portrayal of colonial attitudes, this paper explores how the British perceive India through a lens of superiority, condescension, and distrust, reinforcing a racial hierarchy that permeates social, cultural, and religious domains. By interpreting these psychological underpinnings, the study reveals the lasting effects of colonialism on both the colonizers and the colonized, emphasizing how imperial ideologies obstruct genuine human connection. The research applies a qualitative approach, using textual analysis and postcolonial theory, with a particular focus on the symbolic use of space, language, and the Marabar Caves incident. This paper contributes to postcolonial scholarship by offering a critical re-evaluation of *A Passage to India*, focusing on the colonial mindset and its implications for cross-cultural relations.

**Keywords:** Indians; Servile; Insult; Malice; Native; Respect; and Treatment.

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## INTRODUCTION

Edward Morgan Forster's novel, *A Passage to India* (1924), stands as a powerful and enduring critique of British colonialism in India, masterfully exposing the profound and often insurmountable chasm between the colonizers and the colonized. The novel's title itself hints at a journey, not just across geographical space, but into the complex and frequently hostile landscape of human interaction under imperial rule. At the heart of the narrative lies a deep-seated tension, fueled by a corrosive mix of "slight, spite and suspicion" that permeates every aspect of Anglo-Indian relations. Forster's exploration of this dynamic is meticulous, delving into the ways in which religion, culture, and social customs are weaponized to maintain a rigid hierarchy, all while shedding a revealing light on the British psyche and its perception of the native population. Through a cast of characters who embody the complexities and contradictions of their time, Forster examines the rigid social structures of both British and Indian society, revealing how the seemingly benign rituals of daily life from tea parties to formal greetings are fraught with imperial power dynamics. The novel's central conflict, ignited by a false accusation against a kind-hearted Indian doctor, serves as a microcosm of the larger political and social injustices of the era, laying bare the deep-seated prejudices and anxieties that underpin the entire colonial enterprise. As Forster's characters navigate the intricate social labyrinth of Chandrapore, their interactions become a lens through which to view the psychological toll of colonialism on both the oppressor and the oppressed, ultimately questioning the very possibility of genuine human connection in a world defined by conquest and control.

E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* has continued to be a rich source of scholarly inquiry, with new critical perspectives emerging in the wake of postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis and a re-evaluation of the novel's formal properties. This review of literature upholds a trend of marching beyond traditional postcolonial readings to take a look at more nuanced and specific aspects of the text like slight, spite and suspicion upholding the complex relationships between the British colonizers and the Indian populace, giving priorities over the racial prejudices, cultural misunderstandings, and psychological barriers that define the colonial encounter.

Al Hammouri and Rababah [1] analyze Forster's use of "synecdoche and metonymy" as narrative devices that convey complex themes and colonial tensions. This focus on a specific rhetorical strategy highlight how Forster's literary choices are not merely aesthetic but are deeply embedded in the novel's political and social commentary. Mahmoud [2] explores "magical realism" in *A Passage to India*, arguing that Forster's blend of realism with mystical and folkloric elements reflects the rich cultural and religious tapestry of India. This approach moves beyond the novel as a purely political text and acknowledges its engagement with non-Western forms of storytelling. Ercan Tugay Akı [3] examines the "dialectics of place and space" in the novel from a Lacanian perspective, suggesting that the Marabar Caves and other topographical elements fictionalize the psychological struggles of both the colonizer and the colonized. This reading delves into the unconscious desires and anxieties that underpin the characters' interactions. Similarly, Nijat Ullah Khan and Abdul Hamid Khan [4] delves into the "psyche" of the English characters, investigating how their "colonial worldview" and "political psyche" create situations of misunderstanding and alienation. This approach offers a new framework for understanding the novel's famous "muddle" not as a simple failure of communication but as a complex psychological phenomenon rooted in colonial ideology. Mohammad Shahparan [5] and Rashed Daghamin [6] both analyze the "cultural conflicts" and

“distorted interracial relationships” in the novel, reinforcing the classic postcolonial critique of the British superiority complex. However, some of these studies also nuance this reading. Tini Mogeia [7] shows that the British colonize Indians by controlling them politically. The British people occupied every important governmental position in India. Every public policy is made only for the benefit of the British government in India that causes an antipathy for the colonized Indians and it becomes a factor for them to stand together and legitimize themselves as a nation that is separated from and appreciated by other nations. The colonists, having better technological development, consider themselves superior to the natives leading them to harbor racial prejudice toward the colony people. Nilufa Akte [8] sheds light on the psychological journey of the main characters (Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Adela Quested, Dr. Aziz) who are connected to the incident of the Marabar caves. The experience of the Marabar caves affected the minds of the characters and a great deal of transformation is observed among them. This paper highlights how the story of Dr. Aziz changes with the incoming of Adela and Mrs. Moore as well as how the deflection that occurs in the Marabar Caves incident transits these character’s life into a new diverse vision. This paper also focuses how the journey of the characters switches into a new mode of realization; find a new identity, new philosophy of life through the transitions. Sanju Jhahhari [9] explains how Britain remained the then India’s dominating power structure. Despite the fact that a great deal of fiction and critical research has attempted to depict aspects of the British Empire’s existence in India and its psychological consequences on Indian residents. Mahek Dudeja and Shivani Vashist [10] show a Eurocentric superiority of the British colonizers on the natives, who are perceived to be inferior, barbaric, and uncivilized. In an attempt to dominate inferior people, the colonial ruler has often set out to suppress their culture and tradition, as well as tried to suppress them with their own language. These acts of suppression were resisted by natives in order to save their indigenous languages, cultures, and lifestyles.

The existing review of literature emphasizes the “treatment of India” as a central concern, moving beyond a simple plot summary to a deeper interrogation of the novel’s political, social and psychological dimensions. While this review offers valuable insights of *A Passage to India* through new and established lenses, a notable research gap remains in the crisscrossing of literary interpretation and the novel’s reception history from varied global perspectives.

## METHODS

This study, “Of Slight, Spite, and Suspicion: The Treatment of India in E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*”, employs a qualitative research methodology to deconstruct the British psyche as it is portrayed in the novel. The central aim is to analyze how the attitudes of British characters characterized by a complex interplay of slight, spite, and suspicion reflect the psychological underpinnings of colonial rule in India. This research is grounded in an interpretive paradigm, which seeks to understand the subjective experiences and social realities presented within the text. It utilizes a close reading and textual analysis approach, treating *A Passage to India* as a primary data source. This methodology moves beyond a simple plot summary to examine the nuances of language, character interactions, and symbolic representations to reveal the ideological assumptions and psychological defense mechanisms of the colonizers. A detailed examination of key British characters, including Mr. Turton, Mrs. Moore, Adela Quested, and Ronny Heaslop will be analysed. The analysis will focus on their dialogue, internal monologues, and actions to identify patterns of thought and behavior related

to the Indian populace. Special attention will be paid to moments of direct interaction and conflict, such as the club scenes and the trial of Dr. Aziz. Linguistic and Rhetorical interpretations used by British characters to describe Indians and Indian culture will be dealt with using derogatory terms, dismissive phrasing and condescending tones. The analysis will also consider the narrative voice and how it positions the reader in relation to the characters' perspectives. The recurring themes revealing the British psyche will be identified and explored that very particularly uphold the themes of social hierarchy, the 'us vs. them' mentality, the fear of the 'unknown' or 'other', and the psychological burden of maintaining colonial power. The "Marabar Caves" incident will be a central point of analysis for its symbolic representation of the psychological and cultural chasm between the colonizers and the colonized. Physical spaces and symbols representing the psychological state of the British will be examined. In this regard, the separation of the "Civil Lines" from the native city, the club as a fortress of British social and cultural norms, and the oppressive heat and landscape of India as a metaphor for their discomfort and alienation will be analyzed. This paper will follow postcolonial theory, particularly the work of Edward Said on Orientalism. Said's concept of the West constructing a stereotyped and often inferior 'Other' will be used to contextualize the attitudes of the British characters. Furthermore, psychological concepts such as xenophobia and the defense mechanisms of projection and rationalization will be applied to interpret the characters' motivations and justifications for their behavior. This research work will follow the IEEE citation manual for both parenthetical citations as well as for a complete reference section included at the end of the study. This ensures the academic rigor and proper attribution of all sources used in the research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Results*

The title of the research paper "Of Slight, Spite, and Suspicion: The Treatment of India in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*", focuses on the attitudes and remarks of British colonizers toward Indian natives that belittle their status and essence as the citizens of a nation. Basing on these issues, the research would like to explore the following findings:

### *Ubiquitous Attitudes of Superiority*

The British characters frequently reveal a deep-seated belief of superiority in their own culture and race which is manifested in their scornful interactions, their presupposition of the right to govern, and their denial to become involved in Indian culture on an equal underpinning. The novel displays this sense of superiority not just as a personal impairment but as a systemic principle of the colonial directorate.

### *Social Interaction through "Slight"*

The study finds subtle slights and insults as the continuous characteristics of the interconnections between the British and the Indians. These principles are not always undisguised acts of animosity but are often inadvertent expressions of disdain. The British characters very often breaks down to acknowledge the humanitarian aspects, and social and personal dignity of the Indians, turning toward a continual stream of contemptuous gestures, belittling remarks, and complete indifference to their emotions, feelings and traditions.

### *"Spite" as a Means of Corruption*

The research highlights the colonial environment fostering an environment of spite, very definitely among the British ladies. The women like Mrs. Turton and others associated with her assiduously encourage a culture of banning and hostility toward the colonized Indians. This spite is used as a safeguarding tactics to give a justification of their classified position and to keep up a rigid social hierarchal status. This corrupting influence of “spite” plays a role that is more vigilant and venomous form of detriment than the simple “slight”.

### *The Predominance of “Suspicion”*

The novel is suffused with a deep-rooted suspicion on the part of the British characters. They are suspicious of the motives of the Indians, their fidelity, and their objectives. This suspicion is a key principle of the plot, with a particular focus on the Marabar Caves incident, where a fake allegation is gladly believed due to prejudices that existed priorly. This finding emphasizes on the worldview of the British colonizers that making any friendship in actuality or understanding the natives virtually is impossible as it is fundamentally based on distrust.

### *Dereliction of Individual Goodwill*

The study finds that even some good British characters, such as Fielding, grapple to get the better of the institutionalized xenophobia of the Raj. Their efforts to cross over the gap are often encountered with remonstrance from their own circle and are ultimately underestimated by the bigger societal fabric of colonialism. The novel advocates that individual kindness is inadequate to deconstruct a system built on prejudice and inconsistency.

### *Language Used as an Instrument of Control*

The research shows the British colonizers’ language being used to strengthen their potential and to belittle the Indians. They use slighting terms, make generalized conceptions about “the natives”, and talk about India as a “project” or a “burden”, rather than as a nation with its own generous history and culture.

### *Discussion*

The context of the novel *A Passage to India* is Chandrapore, an imaginary Indian town representing India. The very description of the town suggests that E.M. Forster is up to downplaying India. The writer [11] declares:

*“The city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary. Edged rather than washed by the river Ganges, it trails for a couple of miles along the bank, scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely. There are no bathing steps on the riverfront, as the Ganges happens not to be holy here; indeed, there is no riverfront, and bazaars shut out the wide and shifting panorama of the stream. The streets are mean, the temples ineffective, and though a few fine houses exist they are hidden away in gardens or down alleys whose filth deters all but the guest.”*

The words and phrases which punctuate one of the beginning paragraphs are worth a look: ‘Edged rather than washed’, ‘scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish’, ‘the Ganges happens not to be holy here’, ‘shut out’, ‘mean’, ‘ineffective’, ‘hidden away’, ‘filth’. These words and phrases denote physical and spiritual degradation and degeneration, expanded upon in the following few sentences [11] :

*“Chandrapore was never large or beautiful, but two hundred years ago it lay on the road between Upper India, then imperial, and the sea and the fine houses date from that period. The zest for decoration stopped in the eighteenth century, nor was it ever democratic. There is no painting and scarcely any carving in the bazaars. The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mudmoving.”*

When Forster [11] announces that *“Chandrapore was never large or beautiful.”* that sets the impression about the town. The readers are given the impression that she has never been “large” or “beautiful”. A place that’s not large lacks a vital feature of an ideal place. If a certain place is small, her inhabitants will be small too. They will be small in stature and mental abilities. They will be narrow in their thoughts and will be unworthy of any lofty ideals. The inhabitants of a place that’s not “beautiful” are inherently not beautiful. These inhabitants will be prone to crime and all sorts of immoral and unethical practices. To Forster, nothing in Chandrapore is worth having a look at. There’s no variation or excitement in anything. All look hopelessly similar and flat in the eyes of the author. The Ganges in Chandrapore is not “holy”. The Ganges, however, is considered the holiest river in *Rigveda* and to the Indians she is a goddess of purification and forgiveness. A river like the Ganges, thus, can’t lose her holiness, no matter what. Interestingly, the place where she loses her holiness is Chandrapore. By calling the Ganges unholy, Forster demeans and downplays one of the holiest aspects of the Indian religion. He has also questioned the notion of having a holy river, on the other hand.

The British Sahibs torment the Indians for no apparent reasons- particularly when the Indians are relaxing. After office hours, Dr. Aziz and his friends are having a jolly time over dinner at Hamidulla’s place. Dr. Aziz is called urgently to meet Major Callendar at his bungalow. In case of an emergency, Major Callendar should have called Aziz in the hospital, not at his residence. Dr. Aziz is cross at this high-handedness. Aziz [11] reacts- *“He has found out our dinner hour; that’s all, and chooses to interrupt us every time, to show his power.”* Aziz rushes to the bungalow of his boss. He gets down from a Tonga and approaches the bungalow on foot *“not because his soul was servile but his feelings- the sensitive edges of him- feared a gross snub.”* Let’s mark the phrase *“a servile soul.”* (This reminds us of the famous quote in *Arms and The Man* where Louka, the maid in the Petkoff household comments that Nicola, his suitor, has the soul of a servant.) As per the Forsterian phrase, the colonized have a *“servile soul.”* Now, we can pose a legitimate question- are the natives born with servile souls? The English and Indians are locked into a power relationship and a discourse of race in which each objectifies the other, although in any confrontation the English maintain the position of the subject. The incident that readily comes to our mind where we witness the exercise of this unequal power relationship is the one where Aziz is humiliated by Major Calendar, Mesdames Calendar, and Mrs. Lesley. Aziz is summoned by Major Calendar but the host leaves home cursing him. He neither leaves a note of apology nor an explanation with the chuprassy to be conveyed to Aziz. The calendar can do this only because he is the subject and thus can objectify a native. In a similar case, an Indian gentleman had driven up to an official’s house and been turned back by the servants and told to approach more suitably. The Indians are not allowed to ride up to the office or bungalow of a British official. They have to leave their transport a little far and approach the rest of the distance on foot.

The Indians know full well that they are not in a position to protest an injustice done to them. Aziz is vexed by the way his boss Major Callendar calls him especially when he is with his friends enjoying some quality time. Aziz [11] says:

*“Major Callendar interrupts night after night from where I am dining with my friends and I go at once, breaking up a most pleasant entertainment, and he is not there and not even a message.”*

Major Callendar gains a sadistic pleasure by deceiving Aziz of the much-needed socialization. Major Callendar doesn't have the least consideration for a widower who badly needs some quality time with his friends for his emotional well-being. In addition, Aziz does not indulge in the adda ignoring his duty. If it happens only once, it is pardonable. But it happens on several occasions. Needless to say, Major Callendar does this with malice and ill feelings towards the Indians. Major Callendar being a boss, has every right to summon Aziz, his subordinate, in case of an emergency. What is unacceptable is the departure of the boss without a message.

When Dr. Aziz goes to Major Calendar's bungalow, the latter leaves the place without leaving a note. Besides, before leaving his bungalow, Major Callendar also says 'damn Aziz'. This haughtiness is an outright insult to Aziz. Aziz sees two English women coming out of the bungalow. When he lifts his hat to show respect for the ladies, the first who is in the evening dress, glances at Aziz and turns instinctively away. The lady could have returned this courtesy with at least a smile. Another incident is equally insulting. Aziz leaves his Tonga outside Major Calendar's bungalow and the two ladies hop on it even without asking. When one hesitates, the other lady [11] screeches- *“Take the gifts God provides, anyhow.”* The tonga-wallah also hesitates as he is not paid the fare yet by Aziz. The two ladies do not ask anything about the fare either. Seeing this, one of the ladies [11] angrily asks- *“why doesn't the fool go?”* In the eyes of the British, the Indians are “fools”.

The English men [11] come to India *“intending to be gentlemen and are told it will not work here.”* If deconstructed, this statement boils down to the fact that the Indians are uncouth by nature and even if any civilized nation intends to behave well with them, at one point they will find that the Indians are not worth it. Upon arrival, the English people are given an orientation as to how to behave with the natives. This is what happens to Hamidullah as he grudges how Ronny, the city magistrate, insults him in court. Hamidullah in response narrates a personal story about sharing Turton's carriage in the latter's earlier days in India. Mr. Turton also showed his stamp collection. However, with the passage of mere two years, Mr. Turton changes enough not to share the carriage with a native nor showing his stamp collection.

The bicycle Aziz rides also come under attack as the writer finds that it has neither light nor brake nor bell. Does Forster pose the question as to what use are these adjuncts? A bicycle in India does not need to have a light or brakes or bell but these are a must for a bicycle in England. The implication is that the Indians can ride a bike in the darkness just because they live in the darkness as assumed by the Colonizers. Thus, India is a savage land where even a bicycle is savage in the sense that it's not fitted with a light, brake, or bell. In England, however, a bicycle is fitted with a bell by which passers-by are warned of an approaching biker. In India, however, in absence of a bell, the rider shouts at the top of his voice to alert the passers-by. Now let's come to the issue of light in a bicycle. Since an Indian bike does not have a light, we can and should assume that the Indians don't ride bicycles after sunset. What do they do if or when they have to ride at night? The rider must grope his way along the dark roads, posing risks for the rider and passers-by alike. Thus, it's no surprise that both the riders and the passers-by are vulnerable on a dark road. Finally, Indian bikes don't have brakes, as claimed by Forster. Isn't it an enigma how a bicycle without brakes can be ridden?

Another specimen of Forsterian criticism of India is her topography. Forster terms it as “hostile”. If the soil is hostile, there remains every possibility that the people of that soil will be

hostile. Can and should India be blamed for her topography? Topography, by no means is man-made. It is the whims of Mother Nature. Indian roads [11] are “*unexpectedly rigid or sharp.*” Thus, they are not as smooth as those of England. This is an example of the British superiority. By this comparison Forster alludes to the fact that mother nature is also averse to India.

India is portrayed as a place of religious intolerance. At the outset of the novel, a comment by Aziz bears testimony to this intolerance. The Hindus play drums during one of their festivals. From the mere sound of drumming, Aziz [11] “*knew that they were Hindus.*” The rhythm of the drumbeats is also “uncongenial”. Drumbeats of the Hindus may not sound “uncongenial” to a secular person. But India is not a secular place. People are very narrow in their religious outlook. Forster showcases the narrowness of Indian religion, namely, Islam. The behavior of Aziz as Mrs. Moore enters the mosque speaks volumes in this regard. Forster [11] comments that Aziz is “*furiously angry.*” This is a racist comment and gives the impression that Islam doesn’t accept an intruder into the mosque. Islam, in general, doesn’t allow women inside a mosque. Mrs. Moore in this case is not only a woman but also a person of a different religion. Thus, seeing her inside the mosque, Aziz bursts into a rage. What Aziz [11] says amply shows his intolerance and harshness- “*Madam, this is a mosque, you have no right here at all; you should have put off your shoes; this is a holy place for Moslems.*”

Indians are lustful. Aziz desires Mrs. Moore to be young. He is disappointed to find that Mrs. Moore is “old”. Even she is older than one Hamidullah Begum. And India is full of “bad characters” and thus it’s unsafe for a lady to walk alone at night. When Mrs. Moore declines to take a carriage to the club and intends to walk alone instead, Aziz [11] warns her by telling her that “*there are bad characters about and leopards may come across from the Marabar Hills.*” Mrs. Moore counter argues by saying that Aziz walks alone himself and no harm is done to him. Aziz in reply says that “Snakes don’t dare bite me”. Interestingly enough, the snakes are hostile to the English and friendly towards the Indians. In the same vein, bad characters do not harm an Indian. They seem to have a fraternity with their fellow countrymen. They prowl the roads at night only to find an English alone. By this mention of bad characters and snakes, Forster alludes to the fact that India is a potential threat to the English. This threat comprises both men and animals.

The Chandrapore club is an emblem of colonial snobbery and pride. This “august” (emphasis mine) club is the place where the English spend time criticizing the natives. They are so inferior in race, culture, education, and etiquette that they are not allowed in the club. The natives are a potential threat to the privacy and sanctity of the club. The aloofness of the community is emphasized by the way the light comedy ‘Cousin Kate’ is being played. This comedy is played behind barred windows so that no outsiders, not even the servants can have a look at the memsahibs. Through this strict protocol during the staging of the comedy, Forster emphasizes maintaining the British culture. The British have to be reminded of their identity through an anthem at the end of the performance of a drama in the club, just in case they forget that they are British and thus mighty and superior. They can’t afford to do anything that is not like the British. They can neither show any gesture that will show leniency as rulers. They must remain aloof from the Indians to maintain their class identity. The superiority and exclusivity of British culture are shown here to inhibit any engagement with the Indians. Ralph Crane [12] says in this regard:

*“...the Club functions as an island microcosm within a larger framework of colonial isolation, and the way intimate colonial relations prevail within its walls and sustain an isolated*

*or remote (in all its myriad meanings) community which fears for its survival outside its enclosing border. As islands are to the ocean, so are the Anglo-Indian clubs to India.”*

Orwell [13] opines that “In any town in India, the European Club is the spiritual citadel, the real seat of the British power, the Nirvana for which native officials and millionaires pine in vain.” Collingham [14], in addition to this, says:

*“...the club provided a venue where specific groups of Anglo Indians could relax together, stretch out in a planter’s chair, cement social ties, play sports together, swap gossip. It was also the place where newcomers were initiated into the social code, or those who had been observed to stray from the narrow Anglo-Indian social path were chastised in a friendly manner for letting standards slip.”*

The English ladies are equally averse to association with the native Indians. In a club gossip, one of the English ladies who happens to be a nurse, gives a piece of her mind. Adela, the young lady who is supposed to marry Ronny Heslop, the city Magistrate, is desirous of seeing the real India. To Ronny, it sounds comical. Ronny asks Fielding how one is to see the real India. Fielding suggests that the best way to see the ‘real India’ is to try to see ‘the Indians’. Adela comments that she has avoided seeing the Indians excepting her servant. In response, Mrs. Lesley wryly comments that Adela is lucky to haven’t seen any Indian. This comment is quintessentially racist and a fine specimen of the hatred the English have for the natives. Another lady, who is also a nurse, blames the natives for not respecting the English. Respect is generally taken as a reciprocal act. The English do not respect the natives and insult them.

The City Collector, Mr. Turton, insultingly calls the natives the “Aryan Brother”. As Adela Quested is keen to meet the Indians, Mr. Turton assures her that that can easily be arranged. Mr. Turton then mockingly adds that he had no idea that the natives would “amuse” her. The natives, so to say, are likened to monkeys in the zoo or circus who amuse the visitors. This sort of malice towards the natives remains a constant throughout the novel. This malice constitutes the collective psyche of the colonizers and they don’t seem to have any tangible attempt to overcome it. If or when a British does anything to reconcile the two races, that’s merely an eyewash; not well-meaning nor sincere.

The English don’t accept the fact that any of their community members be disliked by any Indian. When Mrs. Moore discloses that in her conversation with Aziz she comes to know of the latter’s dislike of the Calendars, Ronny at first does not believe it. Then he decides to pass this information on to the Calendars. Alarmed, Mrs. Moore tries to dissuade her son from not going ahead with his plan. Ronny, however, doesn’t budge. This is what Ronny [11] says to galvanize his argument- *“If the Major heard that I was disliked by any native subordinate of mine, I should expect him to pass it on to me”*. As a last bid, Mrs. Moore calls it a “private conversation”. ‘Nothing is private in India’- Rony comments. Ronny, doesn’t believe that the Indians have a sense of privacy. The English seem to imply that privacy has to do with education, culture, and heritage. Since the Indians don’t have these, they should not have any sense of privacy. When the English pass a comment like this, don’t they hint at the primitiveness of India?

Ronny’s conversation with his mother shows his low estimate of the Indians. The very fact of an Indian showing dislike of an English shocks and surprises Ronny. He holds that the older generation of the Indians were submissive and didn’t dare to criticize the British. Ronny [11] says – *“They used to cringe but the younger generation believe in a show of manly*

*independence*". Ronny also comments that behind every remark of a native, there's a plot. This is a rather sweeping remark by Ronny. One can't have a plot behind all his remarks. An impression of this sort only makes the rulers suspicious of the nation they are ruling. Here's what Ronny [11] says: "*whether the natives swagger or cringes there's always something behind every remark he makes, always something, and nothing else he is trying to increase his ijat (honor)- in plain Anglo Saxon, to score.*"

A comment like this is generated from a deep-rooted hatred and suspicion.

The English are shown to be insensitive to the Muslim religious values and practices. For example, the invitation to the bridge party holds an insult to the Indian ladies. It says that Mrs. Turton would be glad to receive any ladies without purdah. Asking a Muslim lady to come without purdah is an insult. Violating the instructions, however, a few purdah women show. When the hostess is asked by her husband to attend to the guests, Mrs. Turton [11] passes a comment that shows her malice. "*Oh, those purdah women! I never thought any would come. Oh dear!*" Mrs. Turton does not want to meet and greet the guest. She [11] curtly says, "*I refuse to shake hands with any of the men unless it has to be Nawab Bahadur*". It is noteworthy that Shaking hands with the common Indians falls below the dignity of the English while robbing them doesn't. By not intending to shake hands with the commoners, Mrs. Turton seems to imply that the black Indians are dirty and they don't have any sense of cleanliness. We try to read the English psychology behind not treating the Indians properly, we may trace what Ali, Mohammad Arshad [15] refers to as "fear". A guest may not be treated with hospitality from this very 'fear'. One possible 'fear' may be that the natives might misinterpret the handshake [16]. They might feel that the English are up to befriending them instead of ruling them.

Turton also shows his annoyance with the guests and frankly criticizes a few of them. He points out to someone, who is allegedly attending the party to win a contract by pleasing Mr. Turton. The purpose of the presence of the astrologer also faces a taunting comment. The astrologer shows up to please Mr. Turton so that he can dodge the municipal building regulations. The Turtons are fiercely critical of the Parsee who smashes into the hollyhocks in front of the venue. Mrs. Turton angrily comments that no natives should be allowed to drive inside the club. Their carriages should be left outside. The incident happens because he pulls the left rein when he means the right. What Mrs. Turton [11] says next again shows her malice toward the Indians "*Why they come at all I don't know. They hate it as much as we do*". We can't help being shocked and surprised by such malicious comments hurled at the guests. The Turtons should have weighed this before inviting them to the party. Hatred in the psyche of the rulers flows like an undercurrent for the ruled. This hatred surfaces to show its ugly face at the Bridge party.

There is hardly any sign of discontent and unhappiness at the guests' end. Mr. Turton [11] talks with the guests and they are overjoyed and take his address as a 'permanent asset'. We might note that Mrs. Moore once commented that the Turtons are little gods in India. She proves true here. When a god or goddess recognizes and talks with his or her deities, the deities are elated. Forster's [11] comment in this regard, thus, makes sense- "*To be addressed by so high an official was a permanent asset*". Among the literate guests, a few including Mahmoud Ali finds an otherwise reason behind organizing the party. They are convinced [11] that "*Turton has been made to give the party by his official superiors and is all the time consumed by 'impotent rage'*". Let's mark the phrase 'impotent rage' here. Turton does not have any intention to treat the natives to a party. Much to their chagrin, the Turtons have to smile, greet and talk to the natives. One can understand the mental state of a couple when they have to throw

a party not on their own but from the dictate of their superiors. Thus, their behavior with the guests will naturally lack warmth and sincerity. Despite the insults hurled by the hosts, many of the guests, especially the humbler and the less anglicized, were “genuinely grateful”. The gratefulness lies in the fact that they are invited to a party thrown by the rulers. This sect of the guests has never thought of such a privilege.

The English sense of superiority surfaces when Mrs. Moore requests her son Ronny to introduce her to the guests. Ronny considers this inquisitiveness of her mother inappropriate. Ronny doesn't think that the English should take any interest in any natives. Forster [11] warns his mother- *“You're superior to them anyway. Don't forget that. You're superior to everyone in India except one or two ranis, and they are on an equality”*. Mrs. Turton, much against her will, shakes hands with the guests. She exchanges greetings with them in Urdu (she has mastered the language only to speak to her servants). As Forster [11] puts it- *“She had learned the lingo, but only to speak to her servants, so she knew none of the politer forms, and the verbs only the imperative mood”*. Mrs. Turton could have taken the help of a native who could speak English. Urdu has only offended the guests. Thus, we might comment that Mrs. Turton has not taken the guests seriously. Otherwise, why would she choose to speak the language that she speaks with her servants? We might also tend to think that Mrs. Turton has chosen to speak this faulty Urdu just to insult the guests. Much against her will Mrs. Turton greets the invited ladies. After the greetings, Mrs. Turton asks her fellow English ladies if that's what they wanted. An insult is inherent in this inquiry too.

What happens to the guest-host relationship at the Bridge party is what Chin-yuan Hu [17] calls ‘insidious’. This relationship is marked by animosity, hostility, distrust, and mistrust. The Bridge party is a lost opportunity in that the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized could have been repaired and restored, had the hosts been cautious and courteous enough. Chin-yuan Hu [17] adds

*“... hospitality is a virtue honored and celebrated – even legislated for – within the major world religions and cultures. It is the lubricant which oils our religious and cultural relationships.”*

If that's so, what makes the English so negligent and indifferent in extending hospitality? One possible answer may be that the English, by no means, want to build an amicable relationship. The masters usually don't have a friendly relationship with the servants for the very fear that a friendly relationship might make the servants willy. When servants get willy, it gets harder for the masters to control. We have to note that the English-Indian relationship is no different from a master-servant relationship. The master keeps from showing any gesture that could be heart warming. Interestingly, this treatment of the natives is duly and reasonably criticized by Adela. She [11] says it loud and clear- *“this party today makes me so angry and miserable”*. It's now that we get a more authentic picture of how the Indians are treated in the Bridge Party. It hurts Adela's English sense and sensibility to watch such a gross anomaly in showing appropriate courtesy to the guests. Adela adds [11] - *“I think my countrymen out here must be mad. Fancy inviting guests and not treating them properly. The rest make me perfectly ashamed, and it has got worse and worse”*. From the attitude and behaviors of the rulers, it may seem that they are devoid of shame or at least they have shelved their shame during their stint in India.

The British, time and again, insist that one of the major purposes of their presence in India is to educate the Indians. That this is a lip service is evident in the frank confession of

Ronny [11]- “*The educated Indians will be no good to us if there’s a row, it’s simply not worthwhile conciliating them*”. Understandably, the educated Indians will not accept the freaks and high-handedness with which the British might like to rule them. Nor will it be easy for the British to hoodwink the educated Indians. This class will be able to see through the cunning of the rulers. Thus, Ronny rightly points out that the educated Indians are no good to them and it will not be worth it to win the heart of this section of the Indians.

Forster [11] downplays the traditional religious trends and practices. Here is a conversation between Mr. Fielding and Adela Quested: “*I am rather a hermit, you know. Much the best thing to be in this place*”. India has traditionally been a land of sadhus and hermits who forsake the customary call of *samsara* and go to remote and at times inaccessible places to mediate. Many of them, if not all, live on a bare minimum. Devoid of all the worldly needs and greed, these hermits or *sannyasis* roam from a place to place as they don’t have any permanent address. When Fielding claims that he is a hermit, we are taken by shock and surprise. The English are in India with the sole purpose of plundering. Every move and action of this nation is directed towards gaining wealth and authority. A hermit or *sanyasi*, however, is devoid of any need and greed for wealth. He roams around without having any material pursuit. When an English likens him to a *sanyasi*, we readily understand the hypocrisy [18].

What Adela [11] says merits a serious deconstruction. To her, the best thing to be in India is to be a hermit or *sanyasi*. This is a highly sarcastic remark in that when an Indian opts for this *asrama*, he goes beyond the call of worldly affairs. He or she dispossesses everything in the pursuit of God. What Adela insinuates is, the more Indians become *sanyasi*, the better for the colonizers. Through this comment by Adela, Forster mocks an important aspect of the Hindu religious doctrine of India. When the people of a nation have the religious obligation to be *sannyasi* in the latter part of their life, this is no surprise that this nation falls prey to the colonizers. Had the Indians been as materialistic as the English, things could have been different. Indians have a certain indifferent look towards life and its transitoriness. It’s due to this indifference that they are not bothered much about amassing wealth and achievements. The opportunist colonizers have taken the advantage of this very attitude of the Indians considering them as the ‘others’ or ‘orient’ and the colonizers themselves are the ‘occident’ that Edward W Said [19] mentions in his well noted book *Orientalism* (1978):

*“My point is that Orientalism derives from a particular closeness experienced between Britain and France and the Orient, which until the early nineteenth century had really meant only India and the Bible lands. From the beginning of the nineteenth century until the end of World War II France and Britain dominated the Orient and Orientalism; since World War II America has dominated the Orient, and approaches it as France and Britain once did. Out of that closeness whose dynamic is enormously productive even if it always demonstrates the comparatively greater strength of the Occident (British, French, or American), comes the large body of texts I call Orientalist.”*

The findings discussed above open several promising avenues for further research. First, a focused investigation on the Indian perspective regarding the dynamics of “slight, spite, and suspicion” could illuminate the profound psychological and social implications these attitudes had on the Indian psyche, particularly in relation to dignity, self-perception, and interpersonal relations. Such work would benefit from comparative analyses with other postcolonial texts that explore the consciousness of the colonized. Second, further inquiry may address the gendered dimensions of colonial prejudice by examining how British gentlewomen, in contrast to their

male counterparts, reinforced and amplified sentiments of spite and suspicion within colonial society. This could help determine whether such hostility emerged from their marginalization within the patriarchal colonial structure or from deliberate efforts to maintain their social dominance. Third, a stylistic analysis of Forster's narrative techniques including his use of irony, foreshadowing, and shifting perspectives may reveal how these devices enrich the thematic exploration of slight, spite, and suspicion, while simultaneously exposing the sanctimony and moral inconsistencies of the British characters and eliciting empathy for the Indian figures. Fourth, comparative studies involving other colonial authors such as Kipling or Orwell could contextualize whether Forster's portrayal of these attitudes is uniquely his own or reflective of broader colonial ideology [18], [20]. Finally, situating the narrative within its political and historical milieu could offer deeper insight into how the behaviors and attitudes of British characters correspond to documented events and administrative policies of the British Raj, thereby illustrating how Forster's fiction mirrors and critiques the realities of empire and the political project of colonialism itself [21].


## CONCLUSION

To conclude, this paper deals with a few remarks and incidents that take place in *A Passage to India* by Forster. These remarks and incidents essentially belittle India. In a bid to show their superiority over the natives, the characters in the novel find fault with pretty much everything in India- including her religion, society, culture, towns, people, manners and etiquettes. The Ganges, one of the holiest entities of India, is not spared the slight. The topography of India has the same fate. The paper also attempts to dig deep into the British psyche that is responsible for the bitter relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. In fact, Forster's *A Passage to India* meticulously captures the belittling remarks and dismissive attitudes of the British colonizers toward the Indian natives, ultimately concluding that these biases are the insurmountable barrier to any genuine relationship. The novel's title, "Of Slight, Spite, and Suspicion", aptly summarizes the core themes of the British treatment of India. The British, exemplified by characters like Ronny Heaslop and Mrs. Turton, view Indian religion, culture, and social customs with patronizing disdain, a "slight" that permeates their every interaction. This attitude is evident in their judgments of Indian towns, which they deem chaotic and unsanitary, and in their refusal to acknowledge the depth and richness of Indian social etiquette. The Ganges, a symbol of profound spiritual significance for Indians, is often reduced to a mere geographical feature or a source of contamination in the British imagination. This constant undercurrent of "spite" and "suspicion" particularly the collective suspicion that all Indians are fundamentally dishonest and untrustworthy culminates in the disastrous events of the Marabar Caves and the subsequent trial of Dr. Aziz. The novel's conclusion reinforces that as long as these attitudes of racial superiority and cultural arrogance persist, any meaningful connection between the colonizers and the colonized is impossible, leaving the relationship irrevocably bitter and irreconcilable.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

P.C.B. conceptualized the research, designed the methodology, and supervised the project. S.Y. managed data collection, performed analyses, and contributed to the writing of the manuscript. D.B. conducted the literature review, analyzed the findings, and drafted the discussion section. All authors contributed to the review, editing, and final approval of the manuscript, ensuring accountability for all aspects of the work.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

“The authors declare no conflict of interest.”

## DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

The authors used Gemini AI and Grammarly during the preparation of this work to enhance grammar and language clarity. Following the use of these tools, the authors carefully reviewed, revised, and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the final version and its accuracy.

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