

Modernism in "a passage to india"

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Modernism refers to a classification of literature that was written between 1914 and 1965. E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* was published in 1924, placing it in the early years of the Modernist Period as well as within the Georgian Age (Harmon 597). In art and literature, Modernism paralleled the rise of industrial technology and advances in science. In music, atonalism – that is, music which deliberately avoids key centers and is often dissonant – was produced by composers such as Arnold Schoenberg. Visual art found expression in cubism. Theories by Sigmund Freud also had a powerful influence on this movement.

In literature, the Modernistic writing style is characterized by breaking with tradition. It is inner-self oriented, and that inner-self is often explored using a stream of consciousness manner. Modernism rejects traditional values and assumptions. The individual takes pride of place while the social and outward are cast aside. Some scholars see Modernism as a reaction to the practical and systematic sensibilities of Realism and Naturalism (Harmon 326).

Not surprisingly, the Modern Era was also when Existentialism came into prominence – a related philosophy in which human beings are expected to create their own meaning for existence. Forster's "Oriental-leaning" characters in this novel provide examples of a Modernistic mindset contrasting with the traditional English Imperialist mindset provided by other characters. Forster uses the symbol of water to represent the idea of renewal in the "Temple" chapter.

There is an event in which the Hindus are "preparing to throw God away" (Forster 308), and part of the ceremony involves a replica of the village of Gokul that is placed on a tray and is to perish. Meanwhile, the British and others are in boats out in the water, observing the festivities, and the boats collide, expelling the passengers. The symbolic village perishes so that it can be renewed, and is representative of the renewal of mindsets of some of the passengers in the boats.

Aziz in particular in the latter portion of the "Temple" section, exhibits several examples of stream of consciousness thinking. In one instance Fielding asks Aziz to meet with Stella and Ralph, and Aziz does not reply. Instead, the reader is allowed into his thoughts, which are not linear but circular, and is one example of how a human mind jumps around from topic to feeling to emotion and back (Forster 314).

Because Forster is examining traditional values through a Modernistic lens in this novel, material detail is much less important than what the characters are thinking. The action in this story is in each character's mind, and how they grapple with new ideas concerning culture, religion, and morality.

Professor Godbole and Mrs. Moore express their inner character and the workings of their minds in an "Oriental" manner, embodied in the Hindu sensibility. Mrs. Moore, although a Christian, is accepted into Oriental culture, and she clashes with Heaslop prior to Aziz's trial. Heaslop does not understand his mother because he does not recognize her spirituality, and he sides with the English Imperialist mindset against Aziz, the

Oriental. Mrs. Moore will have no part in helping her son succeed to the detriment of an Oriental. She ultimately leaves India and the trial (Forster 201).

In *A Passage to India*, Forster uses Modernism to explore the inclusive attitude of the "Oriental" and how diverse people make their passages in coming to terms with this sensibility. Forster makes use of a Modernistic approach to help him tell a story with great depth, complexity and surprise.

Works Cited

Forster, E. M. *A Passage to India*. New York: Harcourt, 1924.

Harmon, William and C. High Holman. *A Handbook to Literature*. 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996.