

Passage to india by foster essay



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In his novel *A Passage to India*, Forster uses a series of repeated misunderstandings between cultures, which become hardened into social stereotypes, to justify the uselessness of attempts to bridge cultural gulfs. In many instances, the way in which language is used plays a great role in the miscommunication between the English and the Indians, as well as among people of the same culture. This is exemplified in the way in which people use the same words, but do not hear the same meaning. It is also displayed through the British characters Aziz meets and befriends, through a series of invitations and through time and true mistakes. Upon Meeting the British: Two significant instances of miscommunication occur when Aziz meets the British characters in the novel that will end up being very close, yet controversial friends. Upon his encountering Mrs. Moore at the Mosque, he sees a British woman and right away develops a series of misconceptions about her. He believes that she is like all other British women (bring up conversation on women being alike): Madam, this is a mosque, you have no right here at all; you should have taken off your shoes; this is a holy place for Moslems. I have taken them off. You have? I left them at the entrance. Then I ask your pardon. I am truly sorry for speaking. Yes, I was right, was I not? If I remove my shoes, I am allowed? Of course, but so few ladies take the trouble, especially if thinking no one is there to see (18). What Aziz finds is the unexpected fact that she is like Aziz in many ways, or as he describes her, Oriental (21). Yet, when seeing this side of the British woman, he again breaks his connection with her when she speaks of her son: And why ever do you come to Chandrapore? To visit my son. He is the City Magistrate here. Oh no, excuse me, that is quite impossible. Our City Magistrate's name is Mr. Heaslop. I know him intimately. He's my son all the

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same, she said smiling, (19). It does not occur to Aziz that Mrs. Moore's son may be part of the Indian race. It is something that is not understandable at first.

Another British character that Aziz makes a connection with is Mr. Fielding.

When Aziz arrives at Fielding's home to meet him for the first time, he has the same type of miscommunication that he does with Mrs. Moore, yet it is displayed in an opposite manner: Lifting up his voice, he shouted from the bedroom, Please make yourself at home. The remark was unpremeditated, like most of his actions; it was what he felt inclined to say. To Aziz it had a very different meaning (66). Aziz understands Fielding's remark as a warm invitation, whereas Fielding has a routine of making the remark. People saying one thing and meaning another, usually just to be polite: A. Invitations The matter of invitations in the novel creates a cultural misunderstanding between the Indians and the British in the sense that the Indians make invitations just to be polite, which the British take literally. This causes offense in some cases to the British involved, whereas the Indians see it as a normal part of their society. This is first apparent at the Bridge Party, where Adela and Mrs.

Moore are introduced to Mrs. Bhattacharya: When they took their leave, Mrs. Moore had an impulse, and said to Mrs. Bhattacharya, whose face she liked, I wonder whether you would allow us to call on you some day. When? she replied, inclining charmingly. Whenever is convenient. All days are convenient. Thursday Most certainly. What about the time? All hours. Tell us which you would prefer. Mrs.

Bhattacharya seemed not to know either. Her gesture implied that she had known, since Thursdays began, that English ladies would come to see her on one of them, and so always stayed in. Everything pleased her, nothing surprised. She added, We leave for Calcutta today. Oh do you? said Adela, not at first seeing the implication. Then she cried, Oh, but if you do, we shall find you gone. Mrs. Bhattacharya did not dispute it. (44). Mrs. Bhattacharya doesn't think of the invitation in the same way Adela does. The same is for Aziz when inviting the two women to the Marabar caves. He thought again of his bungalow in horror. Good heavens, the stupid girl had taken him at his word! What was he to do? Yes, all that is settled, he cried. I invited you all to see me in the Marabar Caves. (79) Misunderstanding of time:

Misunderstanding of time occurs not only between the two cultures, but is also apparent amongst the Indian society. The difference between the different races of Indians is displayed here. The first example of misunderstanding time is given at the beginning of the novel, when Dr. Lal sends for Aziz. Another case in which there is a misunderstanding of time occurs at the Bridge Party. The guests, Indian and British, have different ideas of time, which is displayed in the way the guests arrive. The narration states that the Bridge Party was not a success at least it was not what Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested were accustomed to consider a successful party. They arrived early but most of the Indian guests had arrived even earlier, and stood massed at the farther side of the tennis lawns, doing nothing, (38). Communication on the same level: There are several instances where the British and Indian cultures are communicating on the same level. The first time this is demonstrated is among the Indian culture, when Aziz dines at Mahmoud Ali's house. The servants are asked if the dinner is ready and they

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reply that it is, when in fact, it is not. Aziz and his friends, however, understand the meaning in what the servants say. They the servants meant that they wished it was ready, and were so understood, (8).

Ronny Heaslop, having lived in India, and understanding a slight bit of the Indian culture, does realize the true meaning of the invitation. B. Other Fielding, having lived among the Indian culture for some time, is on the same level of communication that Heaslop is, as far as understanding the invitation goes. Another invitation that is given to the two True mistakes and gossip: Some of the misunderstandings in the book take place due to flat out mistakes, which at times involve gossip. This occurs first when Aziz offers his collar stud to Fielding in an 'effusive' act of friendship, Heaslop later misinterprets Aziz's missing stud as an oversight and extends it as a general example: "...there you have the Indian all over: inattention to detail; the fundamental slackness that reveals the race" (82). We later see Aziz's biggest mistake of all, becoming the turning point of his relationship with Fielding. Jump in, Mr.

Requested, and Mr. Fielding. Who on earth is Mr. Requested? Do I mispronounce that well-known name? Is he not your wife's brother? Who on earth do you suppose I've married? I'm only Ralph Moore, said the boy, blushing, and at that moment there fell another pailful of the rain, and made a mist round their feet. Aziz tried to withdraw, but it was too late.

However did you make such a mistake? said Fielding, (338). The end of the novel displays a circular pattern that has developed throughout, in the sense that the cultures are no better in their understanding of one another

than they are in the beginning. If the British were to really try to understand the Indian, the cultural barriers might weaken and the British might begin to see their equal humanity and this of course would make the British role as conquering ruler more difficult. One of the major themes of E. M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India* is cultural misunderstanding. Differing cultural ideas and expectations regarding hospitality, social proprieties, and the role of religion in daily life are responsible for misunderstandings between the English and the Muslim Indians, the English and the Hindu Indians, and between the Muslims and Hindus. This is why Mrs. Moore is so revered by Aziz and the other Indians. She is too new a visitor to have become hardened, not having been there the six months Aziz and his friends agree are required for English ladies, and she still treats the Indians as people. She never advocates British withdrawal but she doesn't understand why they can't be more 'pleasant' to the natives.

Perhaps there is a clue to answering this question in the experience Mrs. Moore has at the Caves.

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