
Pleasant

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In E. M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India*, a central theme is the division between Indian and Englishman. One of the most important divisions is one of attitude, rather than of segregation. The English preoccupation with factuality, Forster shows the reader, does not suit India.

The English attitude is typified by Ronny when he says, "We're not out here for the purpose of behaving pleasantly! ... We're out here to do justice and keep the peace," (51). In support of the assertion that the English tend to pick nits about the literal truth required for the dispensation of 'justice,' Forster gives us the convenient example of Aziz's implication that water flows uphill (75). The Narrator explains for us how several Englishmen would react:

"Ronny would have pulled him up, Turton would have wanted to pull him up, but restrained himself. Fielding did not even want to pull him up; he had dulled his craving for verbal truth and cared chiefly for truth of mood. As for Miss Quested, she accepted everything Aziz said as true verbally." (76)

As characterized by this passage, Fielding, who is portrayed by the rest of the book as the Englishman most in tune with Indians, does not care about Aziz's inaccuracy. The officials in the government would have at least thought about the slip. Miss Quested is too naïve to notice it, but accepts what Aziz says so that she may pick nits later. The passage characterizes most English as sticklers for detail, an attitude which does not resonate well with Aziz, or most Indians.

Another example which deserves individual discussion concerns the death of Mrs. Moore. After Aziz's victory banquet, Fielding reveals to him that Mrs. Moore is dead. Hamidullah, though, immediately intervenes by saying, "He is trying to pull your leg; don't believe him, the villain," (283). Aziz accepts this explanation and continues his pleasant evening. Fielding then reflects on this experience: "It struck him that people are not really dead until they are felt to be dead," (283). Of course, when someone is dead, that person is dead. Fielding, though, sees the Indian point of view: the fact that the person is dead is not as important as how the living react. This Indian way of thinking about and doing things is portrayed in a rather positive light. It also achieves its goal in another set of circumstances: the death of the Rajah is not allowed to spoil the festival of the birth of Sri Krishna (335).

In contrast, the British (and European) ideal of treating everything officially, dealing with facts, and so on, is portrayed very negatively in India. One example is the Narrator's statement that "British officialism remained, as all pervading and unpleasant as the sun," (289, emphasis added). Another: "Where there is officialism, every human relationship suffers," (235). Yet another: "Indians know whether they are liked or not—they cannot be

fooled here. Justice never satisfies them, and that is why the British Empire rests on sand,” (289). There are other examples (pp. 71, 126, 291, 350, etc.). In each passage, officialism is condemned, particularly when applied to India.

According to Forster, English ideals such as truth, justice, and especially objectivity and impartiality, do not suit India. One may respond, though, that justice is a good quality for a society to have! For justice, in turn, there must be objectivity. Forster responds: “The original . . . may be harmless, but the echo is always evil,” (307).