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ONOMASTIC DEVICES IN FORSTER'S _A PASSAGE TO INDIA_

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_A Passage to India_, published in 1924, is considered to be Forster's best novel and, without doubt, it is the one that is best-known. It was almost twelve years in the making, Forster having begun it after his first visit to India in 1912. In 1921, when he went back to India to become the Private Secretary to the Maharaja of Dewas Senior, Forster took the first chapters with him, but found he could not do much with them, because "as soon as they were confronted with the country they purported to describe, they seemed to wilt and go dead" (_The Hill of Devi_). It was after his return from this second visit to India that Forster realized that the novel he wanted to write had less to do with a description of India than with a much larger subject—a description, albeit a rather gloomy one, of the human condition as he saw it. The Indian setting, consequently, acquires a symbolic function for Forster to express himself on at least three important subjects: Man's relationship to man; Man's relationship to Nature and the earth; and Man's relationship to the idea of the Divine.

The use of symbols in the novel is both complex and unique. The complexity resides in the fact that Forster names and presents categories of a diverse series of elements—weather, landscape, architecture, cultural traits, religious attitudes, philosophical positions, races, and
nationalities—and uses each to show how it carries the potential for beauty as well as ugliness, for great strength as well as great weakness. The uniqueness of the symbols and onomastic devices is specially remarkable because they are integral to the story as it unfolds. It is the contrasts they represent that provide the novel with its power. Thus, for instance, we know that the subdivisions of the book are "Mosque", "Caves", and "Temple". However, in the Everyman edition of *A Passage to India* Forster indicates that the three sections of the novel depict the "three seasons of the Cold Weather, the Hot Weather, and the Rains, which divides the Indian year." (The cold weather in India is the season of pleasant weather, the hot weather the season in which all vegetation dies, and the rainy season is the season of rebirth and greenery.) As it happens, both these series of naming devices are valid from the point of view of the growth of the thought in the work. The terms actually used—Mosque, Caves, Temple—have associations with the three "seasons", so to speak, in the lives of the main characters as also with specific philosophical positions.

The central drama in the novel is based on the idea of confusion, or to use Forster's favourite term "a muddle". This mildly ironic epithet is used often by the narrator in his comments on people's narrow-mindedness, foolishness, or lack of consistency in matters of justice or moral choices. It is found in all of Forster's major novels, and is related in *Howard's End* and *A Passage to India* to his belief that human beings, having lost touch
with the sense of fraternity, are now assisting in the
destruction of those ideals of civilized behaviour that
evolved over several centuries. The misconceptions that
bring about Dr. Aziz's trial—the deep suspicions that
both sides, the Indians and the Englishmen, harbour about
one another, the misunderstanding that develops between
Fielding and Aziz after the latter is acquitted—all help
to support the idea of a vast "muddledom".

As the picture becomes darker and gloomier, Forster
is at pains to show how ludicrous are the causes that
contribute to the confusions in human affairs. No doubt
the first World War had much to do with Forster's sense
of declining hope, but we must not forget that the same
quality of sadness prevails in his two earlier novels,
The Longest Journey and Howard's End, when the narrator
speaks prophetically of the future. In his essays in Two
Cheers for Democracy, published in 1946, after the Second
World War, Forster expresses this thought in the follow-
ing words:

The only thing that cuts a little ice is affection
and liking. It must not be exercised with any ul-
terior motive. It must be an expression of the com-
mon humanity which in India and England and all the
world over has been so thwarted of late and so des-
pised.1

He makes a similar statement in a letter to Natwar Singh
in 1964.

When I try to conjecture the immediate future of this
energetic planet I am divided between interest and
gloom. All the values I appreciate are disappearing
and I don't want to outlive them...The world is in a
strange state and we all need each other's greeting..
I expect that a few islets in Cambridge and else-
where will remain uncovered for longer than I shall,
so I don't worry personally, which is in all circumstances a mistake. Still, when I reflect what the human race might do and feel, I naturally get depressed. 2

These are the words of a sorrowing sensibility without doubt, even though there is some comfort to be derived from the mention of "affection and liking" as the source of hope.

These statements express Forster's central concerns, and we can place beside them others from the narrator and the characters in *A Passage to India*, to examine the similarities. The only difference is that the statements in the novel are metaphorical and ironic compared with the ones quoted above. Thus, towards the end of the "Mosque" section in the novel we find this passage:

It matters so little to the majority of living beings what the minority, that calls itself human, desires or decides. Most of the inhabitants of India do not mind how India is governed. Nor are the lower animals of England concerned about England, but in the tropics the indifference is more prominent, the inarticulate world is closer at hand and readier to resume control as soon as men are tired. 3

A similar sense of disillusion, even despair, is to be found in the description of Adela Quested's thoughts and the narrator's comment during the early morning train ride to Dr. Aziz's picnic party in the Marabar hills:

The train [was] half asleep, going nowhere in particular and with no passenger of importance in any of its carriages, the branch-line train, lost on a low embankment between dull fields. Its message -- for it had one -- avoided her well-equipped mind... How can the mind take hold of such a country? Generations of invaders have tried, but they remain in exile. The important towns they build are only retreats, their quarrels, the malaise of men who cannot
find their way home. India knows of the whole world's trouble, to its uttermost depth. 4

This last passage is followed by an extended description of the sunrise, but even that event is overshadowed by a sense of nullity, disappointment and loss because

The sun was returning to his kingdom with power but without beauty — that was the sinister feature. If only there had been beauty! His cruelty would have been tolerable then. Through excess of light, he failed to triumph, he also; in his yellowy-white overflow not only matter, but brightness itself lay drowned. 5

All these three passages, and the novel has many more, deal symbolically with a topography of the human spirit. They are the devices through which Forster tells of the malaise and tiredness he sees in the world; thus the descriptions of the actual physical landscapes become the emblems, and, by extension, the names for those places where the human spirit stumbles, and becomes confused. It falls, as does Mrs. Moore, into a condition of "spiritual muddledom." 6

Thus, we might say that Forster's ideas about man's inner life, his emotional, moral, and spiritual existence, are named indirectly by the descriptions of the changing Indian landscape at various seasons, and also by the associations with mosque, cave, and temple. The mosque section, in which we find descriptions of Dr. Aziz and his friends, all Muslims, gives a sense of the cultural hallmarks of the Indian Muslim world-view. In this section too is the well-known episode of Mrs. Moore leaving the Englishman's club and straying into a mosque, late in the evening. There she meets the high-spirited Dr. Aziz, who is outraged at her being in "his mosque,"
and is defensive to the point of rudeness, when he finds her there. In a few minutes, however, he is completely won over by her simple statement, "God is here," and in Aziz's mind, we are informed, "A fabric bigger than the mosque fell to pieces, and he did not know whether he was glad or sorry." By the end of this section we have been shown the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, the personalities of both groups, a close analysis of the expectations Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested have of India, and the excitable, emotional, and imaginative temperament of Dr. Aziz. We also get a taste of the comic tone the narrator frequently uses, as a relief from his customary ironic one, in the episodes of the tea party at Mr. Fielding's house, and the "bridge party" given by Mr. Turton for the visiting Englishwomen to meet Indian gentry.

All this detail, particularly the impressions of Dr. Aziz, and of Islam, comes back to the reader in the last section of the novel when, after the trial, all the main characters having dispersed from Chandrapore, the narrator brings attention to bear on Mr. Godbole. The concept of the "Mosque", along with all its connotations, is placed in direct contrast to that of the "Temple", as the ideas of the Hindu view of deity are presented. At that point one sees Forster's masterly craftsmanship in choosing the names of the three sections of the novel.

Whereas Islam bases its ontology on the simple credo "There is no God but God," Hinduism has a much more complex schema, and Forster turns the plot so in the third section that we have a brilliant account both of the rituals and ceremonies of the Gokul Ashtami festival, in celebration of the birth of Krishna, and also a
description of Professor Godbole's mind and Hindu philosophy. The onomatology of the novel performs the extremely important service in this complicated section of keeping the contrasts between the two world views distinct, while the voice of the narrator weighs and contrasts the emphasis of each.

The name for the middle section -- Caves -- is rich with several associations. The most famous one is with the allegory of the caves in Book VII of Plato's Republic in which the lover of truth must ascend through the steep tunnel of the cave and learn to face the light of the sun and see things for what they are, and emancipate himself from the ambiguous shadows cast by the fire. The cave also, in the Jungian canon, is symbolic of the womb, which too is only the infant's temporary shelter, and which it must leave, to live in the real world. Then, there are all the associations with dwarfs and gnomes, fairies, and demons, who live in caves, some making gold, and some hatching secrets to harm humankind. All of these associations seem to be present in the middle section of Forster's novel. It is after her visit to the Marabar cave that Mrs. Moore's spiritual supports, specifically her belief in Christianity, seem to fall away and the "Ou Boum" of the cave echoes reverberates in her head. She discovers that nothing matters, that the echo had murmured "'Pathos, piety, courage -- they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value.'"8 It is in this section too, that Adela Quested is assaulted in the caves, and Dr. Aziz is mistakenly accused and tried as the culprit of that assault.

In the same section, Mr. Godbole, when he is asked
about his opinion of the accusation against Dr. Aziz, presents his view in the following way:

Good and evil are different, as their names imply. But, in my own humble opinion, they are both of them aspects of my Lord. He is present in the one, absent in the other, and the difference between presence and absence is great, as great as my feeble mind can grasp. Yet absence implies presence, absence is not non-existence, and we are therefore entitled to repeat, "Come, come, come, come."\(^9\)

There is a striking similarity between what Godbole says in this passage to Mr. Fielding, and what Mrs. Moore feels after her cave experience. But there is also a great difference -- she, a Christian who had so far believed that "The desire to behave pleasantly satisfies God,"\(^{10}\) finds that nothing matters, and is caught, as the narrator states, "in the twilight of the double vision." For Godbole, the acceptance of the two aspects of Divinity is a fundamental belief, but he is quite clear that they are not interchangeable.

It is in the third section -- "Temple" -- that Mrs. Moore's daughter, Stella, coming to India as Fielding's wife, continues the search her mother gave up after the shock of her experience in the caves. Fielding tells Aziz, "I wish you would talk to my wife. She too believes that the Marabar is wiped out...my wife's after something. You and I and Miss Quested are roughly speaking, not after anything. We jog on as decently as we can, you a little in front -- a laudable little party. But my wife is not with us." A little later, he adds, "She found something soothing, some solution to her queer troubles here... But why do my wife and her brother like Hinduism, though they take no interest in its forms?" To this, Aziz, who has already said he has no
interest in Hinduism, refuses to reply, but remembering a letter he was writing to his former accuser, Adela Quested, takes out his pen and writes, "For my own part, I shall henceforth connect you with the name that is very sacred in my mind, namely Mrs. Moore." The cycle of events is thus completed -- the Temple section, or if we accept Forster's other description of it, the Rainy Season section, has adversaries looking for reconciliation, friends patching up quarrels, while all the time the ceremonies go on, reliving the legend of the birth of Krishna, the god of Love.

Forster's choice of the names "Mosque", "Caves", and "Temple" for each of the three parts of the novel must be acknowledged as stemming naturally from a masterly control of the craft of plot-making. Equally impressive, however, is his skill and purpose in giving the main characters names that express their personalities -- Fielding, Moore, Heaslop, Quested, Aziz, and Godbole. That Forster was conscious of the advantages, and the significance, of choosing emblematic names for characters finds support in some interesting remarks in the novel itself, and in one outside it, which is reported by his biographer, P.N. Furbank.

In the novel, soon after Mrs. Turton, the wife of the District Magistrate, meets Adela Quested she says disapprovingly to her husband, "Miss Quested, what a name!" By contrast, when Mrs. Moore hears from her son the name of the Mohameddan doctor in the mosque, she exclaims, "Aziz! What a charming name!" However, the stronger meanings of names comes from Furbank's report in E.M. Forster: A Life:
On Sunday evening, he is invited to a reception by the Brahmo Samaj, and meets a Mr. Godbole, a Brahmin ("What a name!" he exclaimed). After the reception the two strolled in the public gardens, and Mr. Godbole sang to him.15

While all the names in A Passage to India seem to have symbolic significance, it is the ones given to the main characters that are most noteworthy. They include names of both Indians and English men and women. A point worth noting is that Forster, who, on all three of his visits to India was a guest of several Indian families, both Hindu and Muslim, seems as well aware of the meanings of Indian names as he is of English ones. This seems eminently clear from the remark Furbank reports Forster made on meeting the real Mr. Godbole ("What a name!") in Lahore on his first visit to India in 1912.

The first of the six main characters to whom we are introduced is Aziz. Aziz is a fairly common Muslim name, and might be heard as frequently in Muslim families as "Henry" or "Richard" might be in America. It is Arabic in origin, and means "loved" or "dear." Certainly Forster's depiction of his character as an emotional, affectionate, and rather sentimental person would find concordance with the meaning of the name in the original. In fact, in the early part of the book when he is introduced to us in the company of friends he is full of fun and high spirits. It is significant, too, that the most serious topic of discussion at the dinner party at Hamidullah's home is whether or not it is possible for them to be friends with an Englishman. The idea of friendship is expanded in the novel when Aziz meets Mrs. Moore in the mosque, and after an initial negative response to her, becomes totally devoted to her and
remains so till the end of the book, remarking, as has been mentioned earlier, that her name will always remain sacred for him. His spontaneous response to Fielding's friendly behaviour leads him even to the rather sentimental, but nevertheless significant, gesture of showing Fielding a picture of his dead wife, who, while she was living, had probably never revealed her face to any of Aziz's friends, let alone an Englishman. Clearly the theme of friendship, or "Azizdari", as it is known in Urdu, is one for which Forster had deep regard, as is evident from the two passages quoted at the beginning of this paper, and in several other statements he has made. It was for him the only bulwark against the uncertainties and anxieties of modern times, indeed, of life in general, and the hope that derives from it, battered as it may be, is a recurring theme in A Passage to India, right up to the last few sentences in the book.

The names "Fielding" and "Moore" have in common the phonetic association with a pastoral landscape, and to a large extent they may be said to be associated with that openness of manner and breadth of mind which both Mrs. Moore and Mr. Fielding demonstrate in their attitudes to people, particularly to Aziz. But there is a difference, of course, between the meaning of "field" and "moor", the latter usually being understood as larger, less defined, and in places, perhaps, wilder and even desolate. A field, on the other hand, is an area of land with boundaries, and is specifically understood to be either cultivated by its owner, or available for such use. These differences seem to have a bearing on the contrasts of temperament, and outlook, that Mr. Fielding and Mrs. Moore present in the novel.
Mr. Fielding, the Principal of the little Government College in Chandrapore, is introduced to the reader as an official who "knew little of the district and less against the inhabitants, so he was in a less cynical state of mind." Described as "over-forty", an athletic, cheerful, "hard-bitten, good-tempered, intelligent fellow on the verge of middle-age, with a belief in education. He did not mind whom he taught; public school-boys, mental defectives, and policemen had all come his way, and he had no objection to adding Indians." He did not fit in with the "sahibs" in the Englishmen's Club in Chandrapore, and, we learn, "the feeling grew that Mr. Fielding was a disruptive force, and rightly, for ideas are fatal to caste, and he used ideas by that most potent method -- interchange. The world, he believed, is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of good will plus culture and intelligence -- a creed ill-suited to Chandrapore, but he had come out too late to lose it. He had no racial feeling ... because he had matured in a different atmosphere where the herd-instinct does not flourish."

Yet another point of comparison between Fielding and Mrs. Moore that underscores the significance of the difference, as also the connection, between their names lies in the matter of their beliefs in God and Providence. During a discussion of the state of humanity, when Aziz's barrister friend, Hamidullah, says, "The whole world looks to be dying, still it doesn't die, so we must assume the existence of a beneficient Providence," Fielding, it must be noted, disavows a belief in either Providence or God. When he is asked whether it is correct that most people in England are atheists,
he responds, "The educated thoughtful people? I should say so, though they don't like the name. The truth is that the West doesn't bother much over belief and disbelief these days. Fifty years ago, or even when you and I were young, much more fuss was made."20

The reader receives a portrait of Mrs. Moore mainly through observing her responses to other people and their remarks. The narrator does not tell us much about her directly, except that she is old, has a red face, and white hair! Our earliest impression of her is of a figure that Dr. Aziz sees against a dark pillar in the mosque, late in the evening. Then, when she encounters him, we get an immediate sense of her directness, candour, and a capacity for an unafraid, intuitively benevolent response, even to a strange, alarming young man. Her poise and spontaneity are unchanged even though by the end of the meeting he has asked her all sorts of personal questions about her name, her marriages, and her children.21 Her sensitivity to personalities and the atmospheres natural to each is quite remarkable. The memory of this essential quality of her nature and that of her breadth of vision — both are evocative of her name — was in the future to change the outcome of Dr. Aziz's trial. We receive a very moving account of all these aspects of Mrs. Moore's sensibility from the narrator in the following passage:

Mrs. Moore, whom the club had stupefied, woke up outside. She watched the moon, whose radiance stained with primrose the purple of the surrounding sky. In England the moon had seemed dead and alien; here she was caught in the shawl of night together with earth and all the other stars. A sudden sense of unity, of kinship with the heavenly bodies, passed into the old woman and out, like water
through a tank, leaving a strange freshness behind.22

Like Mrs. Wilcox in Howard's End, Mrs. Moore's sympathy with nature is almost that of a pagan. When she discovers, for instance, a wasp on the peg where she hung her cloak, instead of driving it away or shrieking in alarm, she begins to ruminate as follows:

Perhaps he mistook the peg for a branch -- no Indian animal has any sense of an interior. Bats, rats, birds, insects will as soon nest inside a house as out; it is to them a normal growth of the eternal jungle, which alternately produces houses, houses, trees, houses trees ... "Pretty dear," said Mrs. Moore to the wasp.23

The story takes a most disturbing turn after Mrs. Moore's experience with the echoes in the Marabar cave. She retreats into depression and silence which are accompanied by feelings of discontent, unhappiness and confusion. One gets the distinct sense that it is at this time that Mrs. Moore is closest to being like a moor, a space that may be covered by brush or scrub, grass, and rocks, and present all manner of surprises to the unwary traveller. The message the caves give her is representative of the dualism of Hindu philosophy, but it does not give her peace: in point of fact, it robs her of all that her Christian faith had given her. Her resistance, rather than satisfaction, at the thought that all opposites may co-exist -- "Pathos, piety, courage -- they exist, but are identical, and so is filth" -- and that "nothing has value," shows Mrs. Moore to be closer to Dr. Aziz's position, rather than that of Dr. Godbole.
We discover that Mrs. Moore is not of the company that can live in a world that does not provide the concrete comfort of there being a purpose, a Providence, and a benevolent God to worship, and this fact allies her in spirit with Dr. Aziz, Hamidullah, and their group of Muslim friends. Thus, her name, Mrs. Moore, might also be said to have a link with those other more famous Muslims, well-known to Europe, the Moors of North Africa.

Yet another interesting contrast is provided by the fact that whereas the ordinary word "moor" is a noun, "Fielding" is part of the participle or a gerund, thus contrasting a passive as against an active sensibility, in the case of Mrs. Moore and Mr. Fielding. Connected with this thought is the further one that Mrs. Moore dies on the way home to England, but Fielding goes back to England, briefly, and returns to India with Stella, Mrs. Moore's daughter, as his wife. He actively pursues a rapprochement with Aziz, and partly achieves his purpose when the novel ends.

Besides Fielding and Moore, there are two other English surnames which are worthy of attention in the novel, those of Adela Quested and Ronnie Heaslop. The name "Quested" is certainly the most obvious one in the work in terms of its meaning. Neither is it difficult to see that Adela is quite literally on a quest -- it is her declared reason for coming to India. She is there to "find out" whether she likes Ronnie Heaslop enough to marry him and live in India. In the endeavour to do so, she also wants to discover the "real India," yet another quest, which unhappily leads to the misunderstandings in
the caves, and the acrimonious proceedings of Dr. Aziz's trial. Adela does complete her quest in that she learns that she is not ready to either marry Ronnie Heaslop or to live in India. After her experiences with her fellow countrymen, and her general sense of confusion at the trial, Adela Quested makes an extraordinarily poignant statement:

What is the use of personal relationships when everyone brings less and less to them? I feel we ought all go back into the desert for centuries and try and get good. I want to begin at the beginning.

Adela Quested's honest, energetic spirit, we realize, will lead her on search after search for answers to fundamental questions all her life.

Heaslop bears the least complimentary of all names. It sounds unpleasant, and broken into syllables it certainly makes an insulting, scatological statement about the bearer. It is obvious also that Forster is, by and large, unsympathetic to Ronnie Heaslop, the intellectually lazy young man who has joined the rank of a group of hard-bitten, chauvinistic British colonials to rule India. Even when Ronnie is praised by his colleagues to his mother, Mrs. Moore, the tone of the narrator conveys doubt and reservation. Thus, "It wasn't that the young man was particularly good at the games or the lingo, or that he had much notion of the Law, but -- apparently a large but -- Ronnie was dignified." To this the District Magistrate, Ronnie's superior, adds, "The long and the short of it is Heaslop's a sahib; he's the type we want, he's one of us." In episode after episode, Forster shows Heaslop as being without patience and sympathy to his mother, rude to Indians, and domineering
in his attitude, generally speaking, to Adela. It is only his reserve and dignity during the trial that Forster commends, but otherwise, he remains a "flat" character in the novel.

The most interesting of all the names in the book, and probably the most significant, is that of Prof. Godbole. Yet it is extraordinary that he is the one character who has the smallest radius of action in the story, even though he is close to Fielding, and is a principal figure in the ceremonies for Gokul Ashtami in the Temple section. He appears only three times, once in a rather caricatured Hindu role at Fielding's teaparty for Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested, once after the caves episode when Fielding seeks him out to ask support for his views about Aziz's innocence, and, lastly, at the Mau ceremonies. On each of these occasions his presence and his statements turn the reader to questions of ontology, ethics and metaphysics. Several critics feel that Forster is more sympathetic to Professor Godbole than to Aziz, and that in terms of a world view it is Hinduism that appeals to him more than Islam or Christianity, and this may be the reason that he uses the name of a person he actually met, for the character who represents the Hindu view, and who is central to the ceremonies for Krishna's rebirth. The name "Godbole" can be broken into two syllables; one is the word, "God" from English, and the other the Hindustani verb for "speaks" or "spoke". It is no wonder that when Forster first heard it he exclaimed, "What a name!"

There is one last name that bears consideration -- Chandrapore-- the name of the town where the main action of the novel takes place. Forster describes the setting of the town in his first chapter in a
passage of brilliant, ironic realism. "Chandar" in Hindi means "moon", and "pore" is the abbreviation for "puram" which, in Sanskrit, means "town." The main reason for remarking on this name is that some of Forster's most lyrical passages of description in the book are the ones in which he describes the enchanting moonlight in India, and we have already considered such a passage earlier in this discussion. The descriptions of the moonlit countryside provide a striking contrast to the descriptions of the searingly hot, cruel sunlight of the summer when all things cower, and hide, till late in the evening.

To conclude, it seems fair to say that while Forster is a writer who deals fearlessly and, one must add, brilliantly, with the enigmas of human behaviour, his work is itself frequently enigmatic in its effect. However, since it must be the concern of every artist to lead his audience to the keys which will unlock the secrets of his meaning, Forster provides us with a series of naming devices that are vitally useful to a reading of A Passage to India. In doing so he has added one more reason for being considered, along with James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Joseph Conrad, one of the most poetic novelists of this century.

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NOTES


4 Ibid., p. 136.

5 Ibid., p. 115.

6 Ibid., p. 208.

7 Ibid., p. 20.

8 Ibid., p. 149.

9 Ibid., p. 178.

10 Ibid., p. 52.

11 Ibid., p. 319-20.

12 Ibid., p. 320.

13 Ibid., p. 28.

14 Ibid., p. 32.


16 A Passage to India, p. 46.

17 Ibid., p. 61-2.

18 Ibid., p. 62.

19 Ibid., p. 111.

20 Ibid., p. 111.

22 Ironically, in the "Caves" section, when Adela Quested asks Aziz similar questions about his life, before they enter the cave, he seems to
take offense at them.

22 A Passage to India, p. 29.

23 Ibid., p. 35.

24 Ibid., p. 197.

25 Ibid., p. 27.