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Harish Trivedi (ed.), 2024. *100 Years of A Passage to India* (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan)

This well-produced paperback is a sparkling update on the critical evaluations of *A Passage to India,* E M Forster's best-known, if not the best, novel. Edited by Harish Trivedi, a familiar name in the field of Forster studies from India, the anthology of fifteen essays is a fresh intervention in unpacking a protean text which has attracted a plethora of scholarly assessments since its publication in 1924. Forster's swan song among his five novels became an instant bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic soon after its appearance and has remained a set text in English studies in the Indian subcontinent—perhaps in the rest of the Anglophone world too—over the years because of its wide reach and appeal as one of the most popular books of fiction on India written by a Western writer. Although the author's thematic concerns and ideological predilections instantiated by the centenarian novel have been analyzed in a flourishing body of professional explorations, the volume under review offers some arresting perspectives on the novel's signifying narrative transactions.

The essays focus on the filming and stage adaptations of the novel, its translation and international reception, philosophic and religious and political issues germane to the text as well as its ontology and aesthetic underpinnings. Three essays deal with the translation of *Passage* in various languages since its publication. Krzysztof Fordonski tracks down the versions of this novel in the languages of Central-Eastern Europe, formerly part of the Soviet Bloc. Forster gained global fame with the commercial success and critical acclaim of this novel and so it became a tantalizing text for translation even though its subject and characters were not immediately interesting to the readers of this region. According to Fordonski, it was first rendered into Swedish in 1925—only a year after its emergence—and subsequently in Czech and Russian (1926), Finnish (1928), German (1932), Danish (1935), Polish (1938) and Hungarian (1941). Even during the totalitarian dispensation nine editions of the novel in different languages of the area were published. It could have been a case of innocuous response to the book because of Forster's anticolonial slant in his creed of liberal humanism.

However, with the ideological hardening during the time of Stalin, the second translation (1937) of *Passage* lay in literary limbo. The revival of Russian interest in Forster's masterpiece had to wait until a new edition was published in 2017.

The decline of interest in Forster's novel also brought acute hardship and privation to its translator, Lidiya Ivanovna Nekrasova. She was found guilty under censorship and made to suffer for five years from 1937. Eventually, she succumbed to her suffering in 1942. In the climate of regimented and hidebound critical opinion, Forster was found lacking in "the necessary historical-materialistic Marxist perspective" and thus choosing "a mystical religious vision, escaping the social tensions in a period of transition" (49). In Poland too, Forster's novel evoked mixed response in a string of reviews that followed its successive translations. For instance, while Adam Bar, a noted literary scholar and bibliographer, made a positive appraisal of *Passage* for its author's "psychological incisiveness" in drawing "a perfect image of the attitude of the English towards the Indians" (53), despite its problematic plot, Zbigniew Grabowski, influenced by the literary trends and fashions of his time, found it insipid and pedestrian. Others, including Andrzej Tretiak, a pioneering Polish academic in English studies, faulted the poor quality of translation, particularly Helena Myslakowska's – indeed a disservice to the fine style of a "serious literary work" (54). Equally, the 1979 translation of *Passage* as *Droga do Indii* (A Road to India) went largely unnoticed, with the exception of a stray review by Adam Kaska praising Forster's indictment of the imperial hegemony. In Fordonski's cogent analysis in this essay, Forster's masterpiece had a tinted and truncated reception in Poland for over fifty years. It has now come into its own, backed by its cinematic adaptation, proliferation of publishing houses in the milieu of literary glasnost, as evidenced by the publication of its another translation by Tarnowska and Konarek in 1993.

Unlike the sporadic curiosity of its readers in Russia, Poland and around, the French translation of *Passage* in 1927 came into circulation and gained traction in the academic circles of Paris. Charles Mauron's translation, *Route des Indes*, had Forster's full approval, notwithstanding the editor's demand for alterations and revision of the draft. Forster knew some French and so he put his foot down in support of the unrelenting translator. It was not a commercial success but it aroused nonetheless the interest of French readers with the increasing dissemination of information about India and its prolonged colonial control by the British. In her contribution to this collection, Evelyne Hanquart-Turner notes that David Lean's film version (1984) of *A Passage to India* boosted the French reader's

appetite for the text. An edited and annotated French version with a preface and supplementary material was put together and published in 2013 to make it more accessible to the readers. The novel's theme of friendship attracted the peripatetic readers of the increasingly inter-connected world aligned with global solidarity. More significantly, the author and the translator forged close bonds of mutual amity, living out the message of the novel, as it were. This intimate trust is vindicated by the dedication of Forster's book, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), to his friend and the French translator of *Passage*, Charles Mauron. In their convivial get-togethers under the sunny sky of Provence in Charles' Garden, Forster and his friend experienced "real international friendship" which Aziz and Fielding in the novel had been denied in the early years of twentieth century India (41).

Crucially indeed, amid this pervasive translation traffic, the eponymous novel of Indian provenance has not been rendered into the primary language of its characters, namely Hindi. While this novel's two Bengali translations, *E paysej to Indiya* (1960) by Rabishekhar Sengupta and *Bharatpathe* (1995) by Hirankumar Sanyal, were published from Calcutta and Dhaka respectively, a Hindi version is still awaited. Interestingly enough, Rupert Snell's essay in this anthology assesses the resonance of the six samples of the unpublished Hindi translation of the opening paragraph of *Passage*, and points to the challenges of catching and matching up to Forster's language. The translation excerpts closely collated with the source are by eminent two-way hands, including Harish Trivedi, Gopalkrishan Gandhi, Kunwar Narain, Rohini Chowdhury, Sara Rai and Rakesh Pande. The spectrum of transfers in these Hindi renderings shows some of these draft translators using the original text as the conduit for their own independent and foregrounded creativity and others seeking to capture the sense components with tentative textual engineering. Snell argues how the bilingual execution of these specimen versions adds to, or subtracts from, the source into the host language. The Hindi versions have some sufficiently expressive equivalents of the compressive, allusive and "brilliantly ominous" (14) poetic prose of the original. By suggesting a measure of competent translation through varied nuances of the Hindi equivalents of a stylistically well-crafted original passage organically related to the novel, Snell's essay looks forward to a compelling carry-over of Forster's masterpiece in Hindi.

Snell rightly points out that an opportunity for a Hindi translation of the dialogues in *Passage* was missed when the iconic Indian film maker Satyajit Ray desired to film it in the 1960s but he could not get the screen adaptation

rights. As it happens, the novel has gained global fame following the screening of David Lean's film version of *A Passage to India* (1984), fourteen years after Forster's death. Some deviations are inevitable for rendering a verbal text into a visual medium in order to tighten and improve the narrative. Madhu Singh's essay in this compilation, "Visualizing *A Passage to India*: Re-imagining Forster's Classic on Stage and Screen", is focused on the fidelity of these adaptations. She is of the view that, though some aspects of the source had to be altered because of the change in perspective due to the time lag between the published story and its filmed version, Foster might have resisted the changes, given his firm reluctance to release the rights to film the novel. Of course, this classic had been adapted for the stage during the author's lifetime by Santha Rama Rau in 1960, and was modified for television in 1965, but John Brabourne and Richard Goodwin could buy the film rights only in 1981 and then select David Lean as director. The film's tidy narrative trajectory wedded to the centrality of the Marabar Caves and Adela Quested's prominence in the adaptation is a faithful rendition of the novel's theme, successfully catching the imperial landscape. As in the case of Santha Rama Rao's stage adaptation, Forster, who died in 1970, might be equally pleased by David Lean's screen version, which cites as its source the play as well as the original text of the novel.

Madhu declares in her estimation of the cinematic narrative that, on balance, there is no "inevitable disparity between literature and film" (69) here. The essay includes another adaptation of the novel for analysis: Martin Sherman's *A Passage to India* produced by *Shared Experience* in 2003. By making Narayan Godbole, the Hindu mystic "a central character and 'linking narrator' in the Hindu state of Mao" (70), Sherman wanted to highlight what had not been covered in earlier adaptations. According to him, the "Temple" section had been reduced and downplayed, and so the novel had not been well-served in the past adaptations, in that it is not just about the mystery of the caves of Marabar. Thus "most visual adaptations of *A Passage to India*," Madhu concludes, "were successful and brought Forster closer to the public" (73). It would seem that by resisting the appropriation of his novels for screen, Forster denied himself "a full theatrical meal."

The novel's genesis, its long gestation and the seminal role of its dedicatee, Syed Ross Masood, in begetting the book have been recounted in several biographical accounts of Forster. The details are now well-known to his readers. What is then the justification for David Lelyveld's essay "Syed Ross Masood, Author of *A Passage to India*" in this florilegium on Forster's final opus? As one reads the

cogent piece between the lines, its significance becomes notable for two reasons: first, it dispels the facile likeness between Aziz and Masood—suggested casually by the author—in light of a posthumous tribute to his friend that Forster wrote, as well as the letters published after Forster's death; second, for a tantalizing nugget of information about the friendship between Masood's father Syed Mahmood and G E A Ross, with whom he lived for many years, before the latter left India. He married at last in 1888 and named his son Ross, who was born in 1889. The friendship between Masood's father and Mr Ross was cited "as symbol of British-Indian friendship" (82) – a salient thematic concern of the novel.

Although Lelyveld has not shied away from intimate biographical questions, frowning on what Joyce Carol Oates labeled "pathography," a fuller discussion on the homoerotic origins of the novel would have enriched his essay. In this context, a little-known book published by the Gay Men's Press—Arthur Martland's *E M Forster*: *Passion and Prose* (1997)—is very informative on Forster's private life, apart from Wendy Moffat's *E M Forster*: *A New Life* (2010).

The well-crafted drama in Forster's subtle and sensitive novel has been analyzed from disparate points of view by the contributors to this well-culled critical collection, especially by Rukmini Bhaya Nair in her incisive essay engaging with the tension between Forster's critical formulations in his 1927 book, *Aspects of the Novel*, and his own art of fiction displayed in *Passage*; by Howard J Booth's exploration of Forster's views on Kipling; and Ipsita Chanda's reading of the novel as Forster's message for risking connections with alterity despite their negative possibilities. Bhaya Nair argues that "*Passage* and *Aspects* are themselves a 'pair' embodying a sometimes tense but always thoughtful conversation between Forster the novelist and Forster the literary critic" (207). More persuasively, Bhaya Nair underlines Forster's masterly prescience in anticipating "the Age of the Anthropocene so imbued with prognostications of planetary doom and internecine hate" (213). However, Ruth Vanita's point, in her discussion of "*A Passage to India* as a Vedantic Novel," that Forster "critiques liberal humanism and moves beyond it" (96) is less than compelling. In fact, liberal values are firmly at the novel's centre and the story moves in the liberal direction, though impeded by its inner tension and about-faces represented by the character of Cyril Fielding. Liberal sentiments are thick on the ground in the novel with its examination of the bonds of transcultural friendship. In fact, Forster's insistence on the value of friendship between individuals is an extreme modification of the old liberal order that he found crumbling

around him in the larger world. Impelled by the pervasive disorder he imagines the possibility of constructing smaller spheres of liberal order within a chaotic world. His liberalism does not stem from a concise body of doctrine. It is rather a capacious predilection receptive to various social and political pressures.

In his essay, Trivedi attributes Adela's fantasy or hallucination about Aziz's unfair sexual advances towards her to Forster's "overheated imagination" (226) following his Indian friend and host Masood's rejection of his homosexual expectations on the night before he visited the Barabar Caves on "29 January 1913 [sic]"—in other words, he projected his own distractions onto her. This speculation adds another layer of uncertainty to what actually happened in the caves simply because there is "no obvious original" for this event. The author, as the omniscient narrator, never divulged it. The point thus made in the essay is moot because Forster was not writing the novel on the fly or in a flurry. He planned and put his hands to the plough many months after visiting these caves. The writing got stalled and the fragments hung fire until he revivified the novel after his second visit to India in 1921–22. As he said in several interviews, a novelist should be a meticulous planner and always settle "what is going to happen in the novel and what his major event is to be." Trivedi concludes his argument by stating that the novel ends up in a "non-poetic and utterly political impasse" (230). The impasse is not just political, but also spiritual, in that the drifting and bewildered human beings are uncomprehending of the mystery and marvels of the universe that seem to be amenable to Hinduism, as suggested in the novel's crowning climax. Trivedi also gives short shrift to the novel's multiple perspectives on its principal problem of forging friendship across socio-cultural divides and under political conditions of oppression that unleash the pressures of social and political forces on human relations with troubling alternatives.

A creative reworking of Forster's novel as a wellspring for parodic adaptations is evident in Anamika's innovative take-off from the given plot in her essay titled "Adela Adrift in India." It is an ingenious and intriguing send-up on the Englishwoman's post-trial hang-out in India in contrast with her return to England in the novel. Forster's high-minded, 'priggish' and awkward character reduced to a catatonic figure in the court and her reflective and articulate doppelganger envisioned by Anamika crossmatch in their courage and conscience. The title of this paper harks back to Forster's non-fiction piece "Adrift in India: The Nine Gems of Ujjain", first published in *New Weekly*, 21 March 1914, and later reprinted in *Abinger Harvest*, 1936. During "ten good years" of her surplus

stay in India, as she is saved from "a shattered state on a ship sailing back to London" (138) and given an extratextual frame, Adela mutates into a liberated and mature observer of the world around her. Her epistolary accounts of Forster in King's College, Cambridge, as well as Fielding and Aziz are leavened with satiric modulations. The feminization of King's College, Cambridge, however, is slightly misdated— "17 August 1974"—here (138). In fact, the proposal to admit women put forward to the College's Governing Body in May 1969 by the Provost Edmund Leach was voted overwhelmingly and it got going with the admission of 47 female students in 1972. King's was thus, alongside Clare and Churchill, the first of the Cambridge all-male Colleges to admit women in 1972.

Finally, , this centennial offering is an eminently useful contribution to the revaluation of one of the best-known and widely read novels of our time. The editor has cast his net wide and put together pretty interesting stuff in this volume of substantial value and real virtues. Yet some inadvertent slips are there: Forster's mother died in 1945, not "in 1944" (xiii) and he visited the Barabar Caves on 28 January 1913, not "29 January 1913" (226). The other spotted typos include "fly-invested" (78), "ICS office" (80), "Surry" (84), "Forster's *A Passage to India* (1926) "(177), "an demonstrable" and "deitic" (207), "prophetia" (211), "a short shrift" (229). These typing errors will need to be weeded out in the next print.

All in all, this critical anthology has extended the frontiers of engagement with Forster's richly multilayered novel from diverse points of view and enriched our understanding of his portrait of Indian society in the grip of imperialism. The contributing essayists have revealed the extraordinary depth and complexity, and most of the enduring qualities of this classic which make Forster harder to pigeonhole and harder to define.