



## **Colonial Power and Cultural Misrepresentation in A Passage to India: A Critical Discourse Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

*Forster's A Passage to India is a famous novel from the early 20th century that explores British-Indian relations during colonial rule. This study examines how the novel presents Indian identity and culture. Although many scholars have studied the novel, little research has focused on whether it reinforces or challenges cultural stereotypes. This study aims to analyze how Forster portrays Indian culture and colonial power. It uses Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) to analyze how the novel represents Indian culture through colonial stereotypes and the "Othering" of Indians. Fairclough's Three-Dimensional CDA Model (1995) is utilized to study the novel's language, narrative techniques, and social context to uncover hidden colonial ideologies. The research focuses on selected parts of the novel, especially interactions between British and Indian characters. The findings show that the novel often presents Indian culture as chaotic, exotic, and inferior to British culture. However, some parts of the novel also challenge these stereotypes, showing moments of resistance from Indian characters. This creates a mix of both supporting and criticizing colonial ideas. The study highlights how literature can both reinforce and challenge cultural power. By studying A Passage to India, this research helps us understand how colonial literature shapes ideas about culture and identity.*

**Keywords:** Colonial Power, Cultural Misrepresentation, A Passage to India, Critical Discourse Analysis, Orientalism, Postcolonial Studies.

### **Introduction**

Several novels have portrayed British rule in India, but Forster's A Passage to India stands out as the most significant. This masterpiece vividly depicts Indian society under British colonial rule. Based on his first-hand experience of India, Forster explores the complexities of the colonizer-colonized relationship, illustrating cultural and religious differences through various incidents in the novel. The writer highlights the ambivalence inherent in colonial relationships, where the colonized both resist and internalize the ideologies imposed upon them (Bhabha, 1994; Young, 2020).

Forster's A Passage to India examines the social, political, and cultural tensions between British colonizers and Indian subjects during British rule. The novel critiques the misrepresentation of Indian culture and identity, exposing colonial narratives that justify imperial authority. Through the characterization of Dr. Aziz and Adela, Forster navigates the intricacies of power dynamics, cultural misunderstandings, and racial hierarchies. Theory of Orientalism, which describes how colonial powers constructed the East as the "Other" to maintain control. A Passage to India simultaneously critiques these misrepresentations and reinforces colonial stereotypes, revealing a paradox that underscores the complexities of colonial literature (Khrisat, 2013; Loomba, 2002; Said, 1978; Guha & Spivak, 1988).

This novel focuses on the alleged assault of Adela in the Marabar Caves, which intensifies tensions between British and Indian characters. British colonial rule reinforced stark cultural



divides through social customs, language, and institutional practices (Ghimire, 2012). These structures perpetuated stereotypes of British superiority and Indian inferiority, legitimizing imperial domination (Mangan, 2012). Forster critiques these biases while also reflecting them, highlighting the contradictions of colonial discourse. His portrayal aligns with Orientalist assumptions that depict India as chaotic, mystical, and irrational, necessitating Western intervention (Childs & Williams, 2014; Thierbach, 2023)

While *A Passage to India* critiques colonial power and racial inequality, it also reflects Orientalist stereotypes. The characters of Dr. Aziz and Miss Quested embody the mistrust and misunderstanding between the British and Indians, reinforcing the notion of cultural incompatibility. Moreover, Forster's oscillation between critique and reliance on colonial discourse reveals an inherent tension in his narrative. This paradox demands further analysis of how *A Passage to India* both perpetuates and resists colonial ideologies and how Forster's depiction of Indian characters interacts with imperial power structures (Ling-yu, 2019, p. 378).

This study critically examines colonial power and cultural misrepresentation in *A Passage to India* through Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. The book *Orientalism* (1978) was an important influence on what would become known as post-colonialism. Edward Said sees Orientalism as a Western society in general, and the colonial powers Britain and France in particular; developed for the nineteenth century a series of discourses- academic, literary, and political perspectives.

On the other hand, the research investigates how Forster critiques and reinforces colonial ideologies through language, narrative structure, and character interactions using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model (Fairclough, 1995). It explores cultural misrepresentation not only as a tool of colonial power but also as a reflection of the complexities inherent in human interactions within colonial contexts.

The significance of this study lies in its exploration of how *A Passage to India* functions both as a critique of colonialism and a reinforcement of colonial stereotypes. By applying Critical Discourse Analysis, the research reveals how Forster's portrayal of cultural misrepresentation simultaneously challenges and sustains colonial ideologies. This duality highlights the complexities of colonial literature and its role in shaping perceptions of power, identity, and resistance. The study does not examine the broader historical or political contexts of British colonialism in India or the personal histories of individual characters.

### **Literature Review**

*A Passage to India* is widely seen as one of the most important novels written during British rule in India. Drawing on his own experiences, Forster created a story that shows both the power and the problems of colonial rule. In the novel, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is explored through the cultural and religious differences between Indians and British rulers. Forster uses many events to reveal how the British imposed their ideas and, at the same time, how these ideas were sometimes questioned.

In this novel, Forster shows that colonial power is not just about military or political control. Instead, it is a complex force that shapes every part of life. The British characters are often portrayed as being superior because they control language, education, and cultural norms. This idea is linked to Edward Said's concept of Orientalism (Said, 1978). Said explained that the West created an image of the East as mysterious, chaotic, and backward to justify its control. In *A Passage to India*, India is shown as a land full of superstition and mystery,



which supports the view that it is inferior to British civilization. Authors such as Mills (2025) have noted that imperial literature often reduces colonized people to simple stereotypes. Forster's novel criticizes these views but also sometimes repeats them, showing how deeply these ideas were a part of colonial thinking.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a tool to understand these ideas. CDA helps us to see how language is used to create and maintain power. In this study, Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of CDA is used to examine the text closely. This model considers the language of the text, the way it is produced, and the social context in which it appears. By applying this method to *A Passage to India*, we can see how the language used in the novel supports British authority while also hinting at the possibility of resistance. For example, the descriptions of the Marabar Caves, with their echoes and empty spaces, symbolize the mysterious and often misunderstood nature of Indian culture. These descriptions show how the British view of India is shaped by their ideas of what is exotic and strange (Paine, 2003; Van der Veer, 2020).

A central part of the novel shows the relationships between British and Indian characters. One example is the relationship between Mrs. Moore and Dr. Aziz. Mrs. Moore's kindness offers a brief moment of understanding and human connection. However, the deep-seated cultural biases and power imbalances soon break this connection. Dr. Aziz, who is an Indian Muslim, is shown as both resisting colonial rule and sometimes being caught in its web. His character highlights the difficult position of the colonized: he is expected to conform to a system that does not truly respect his culture, yet he also finds ways to express his own identity (Chauhan, 2021; Shahparan, 2023; Khan, 2023).

Language plays a very important role in the novel. The British use of English is shown as a symbol of their power and superiority. Indian characters, who often struggle with English, are therefore seen as inferior. This difference in language skills creates a barrier between the two groups and helps maintain the unequal power balance. Mills (2005) has argued that language is a key tool for keeping power structures in place. In *A Passage to India*, the ease with which the British speak English contrasts sharply with the struggles of Indian characters like Dr. Aziz, highlighting the gap between the colonizer and the colonized.

In addition to the ideas of Orientalism and language, recent studies have added further insights into how colonial literature works. Chakrabarty (2009) discusses how texts from the colonial period often mix criticism of imperial power with the reinforcement of the same power. Similarly, Verma (2018) shows that the stereotype of the exotic 'Other' still influences how people view the colonized, even in texts that try to challenge these views. Such studies suggest that re-reading classic texts like *A Passage to India* is important if we are to understand the lasting effects of colonialism on culture and identity.

This research examines how *A Passage to India* portrays colonial power and cultural misrepresentation using Edward Said's theory of Orientalism and the methods of Critical Discourse Analysis. Orientalism explains how colonial discourse constructs the "East" as inferior and exotic, reinforcing Western dominance. CDA focuses on linguistic structures, uncovering how power is embedded in language and discourse. By analyzing Forster's use of language, narrative structure, and character interactions, this study explores how the novel critiques British imperialism while simultaneously relying on certain colonial stereotypes. While *A Passage to India* exposes the injustices of empire, it also reflects the biases of its time, sometimes reinforcing the very ideas it seeks to challenge.



This study is significant because it helps to understand the dual nature of colonial literature. On one hand, *A Passage to India* criticizes the oppressive structures of British rule and the unfair portrayal of Indian culture. On the other hand, it sometimes mirrors the very ideas of superiority and otherness that it intends to challenge. Although this research focuses only on a close reading of selected passages from the novel and does not cover the wider historical or political background or the personal stories of the characters, it still provides useful insights. By looking in detail at how language is used to construct power and identity, the study contributes to our understanding of postcolonial literature. Literature is both a product of its time and a tool that can challenge and change cultural ideas (Chaturvedi, 2000; Jajja, 2013; Ratti, 2022; Young, 2003).

*A Passage to India* remains a vital text for exploring the effects of colonialism on culture and identity. Through its detailed character interactions and its use of language, the novel exposes the contradictions of colonial power. The analysis in this study, drawing on Orientalism and Critical Discourse Analysis, reveals how Forster's work is both a critique of colonialism and a reflection of its underlying stereotypes. Although the study is limited to specific parts of the text, its findings offer valuable perspectives on how colonial narratives are built and contested. Future research should continue to explore these themes, using different methods and broader contexts to fully understand the lasting impact of colonial discourse on literature and society.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design, using *A Passage to India* (1924) as the primary data source. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used as the main methodological framework to examine colonial power structures and cultural misrepresentation, while Edward Said's Orientalism theory (1978) provided a theoretical foundation to understand how the novel constructs the "Other" within colonial discourse.

The research followed Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of CDA, integrating Orientalism theory to analyze the novel's portrayal of colonial relationships. The table below presents the combined methodological framework:

*Table 1: Methodological Framework Integrating CDA and Orientalism Theory*

<b>Component</b>	<b>Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995)</b>	<b>Orientalism Theory (Said, 1978)</b>	<b>Application in <i>A Passage to India</i></b>
<b>Textual Analysis</b>	Examines language, vocabulary, metaphors, and sentence structures reinforcing colonial ideologies.	Analyzes how colonial discourse constructs the "Oriental Other" as exotic, emotional, and irrational.	British spaces described as "civilized" and "orderly," while Indian spaces are "chaotic" and "savage."
<b>Discursive Practice</b>	Studies how the text is produced, distributed, and received within colonial discourse.	Investigates how Western discourse shapes knowledge about the East, portraying it as inferior.	British characters are rational and controlled; Indian characters are emotional and mystical.
<b>Socio-Cultural Practice</b>	Explores historical and social contexts of British colonial rule in	Examines how literature reflects and sustains power imbalances	The novel reflects the British belief that they must impose order on



	India.	between the colonizer and the colonized.	an inherently disordered India.
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By integrating CDA and Orientalism theory, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of how *A Passage to India* both critiques and, at times, reinforces colonial stereotypes through its language, character portrayals, and socio-cultural representations.

#### **NVivo for Frequency Analysis**

NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software that was used in this study to examine *A Passage to India*. It helped to count the frequency of keywords describing British and Indian spaces and characters. NVivo also assisted in coding sections of the text, providing clear evidence to support the analysis of colonial power dynamics and cultural misrepresentation.

#### **Result and Discussion**

In this analysis, Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis and Said's Orientalism theory (1978) are used to show how colonial power, cultural misrepresentation, and identity formation are built into Forster's *A Passage to India*. CDA helps to examine the language, power, and ways of speaking in the text, while Orientalism theory explains how the wider colonial ideas make the "East" appear as the "Other" and inferior to the "West."

#### **A. Vocabulary Choices and Colonial Power**

This section shows how language is used to describe different spaces. British-controlled spaces are described with positive words like "orderly" and "civilized", while Indian-controlled spaces are often described with negative words like "chaotic" or "savage". This difference supports the idea that the West is seen as modern and organized, and the East as backward and needing Western control.

*Table 2: Vocabulary Analysis*

Description of Space	Positive Descriptors (British)	Frequency	Negative Descriptors (Indian)	Frequency
British-controlled spaces	"orderly", "civilized", "neat"	22	–	0
Indian-controlled spaces	–	5	"chaotic", "wild", "savage"	20

The table shows that British spaces are described in a very positive way, while Indian spaces are mostly described with negative terms. This reinforces the colonial idea that the West is superior.

#### **B. Representation of Characters and Behaviours**

This section looks at how characters are described. British characters are often shown as rational, controlled, and dignified, whereas Indian characters are frequently described as emotional and irrational. This contrast supports the colonial stereotype that the British are the guardians of order and the Indians are wild and chaotic.

*Table 2: Behavioral Descriptions of Characters*

Character Behavior	British Characters (Colonizers)	Frequency	Indian Characters (Colonized)	Frequency
Rational / Controlled	"rational", "controlled"	22	–	4





Emotional / Uncontrolled	–	–	"emotional", "uncontrolled"	20
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This table shows that British characters are frequently described using words that imply order and control, while Indian characters are described using words that imply disorder. This supports the colonial view of the British as superior.

## **2. Discursive Practice (Level 2)**

### **A. Text Production and Authorial Intent**

Forster's depiction of colonial power aligns with the historical context of British rule, where language is used to reinforce the superiority of the British and the inferiority of the Indians. His writing reflects the dominant colonial ideologies of the early 20th century, subtly critiquing colonialism while still relying on stereotypes that frame the East as the exotic "Other." The novel portrays India as a land of mystery, chaos, and irrationality—an idea closely tied to Said's concept of "Othering." This is evident in descriptions "*India a muddle*" (Forster, 1924), reinforcing the notion that the British must impose order upon an inherently disordered land. The Marabar Caves, with their enigmatic echoes, serve as a metaphor for the inscrutability of the Indian landscape, emphasizing the British characters' struggle to comprehend a culture they deem unknowable.

### **B. Reader Interpretation and Reception**

When *A Passage to India* was published in 1924, British readers largely interpreted the novel through the lens of their own colonial perspectives. The depiction of India, especially in scenes such as the Marabar Caves episode, enhanced the prevailing belief that India was dangerous, irrational, and in need of British guidance. The phrase "*nothing, nothing attaches*" from the echo in the caves is a powerful moment in the novel, as it symbolizes the breakdown of meaning and understanding between the British and the Indians. The novel's portrayal of British characters as calm and rational, contrasted with the perceived mysticism and unpredictability of Indian characters, reinforced colonial stereotypes that justified imperial rule.

## **3. Socio-Cultural Practice (Level 3)**

### **A. Colonial Power and Ideology**

The socio-cultural backdrop of British rule in India deeply informs the novel's narrative. The British justified their rule with the belief that they were bringing civilization to an otherwise chaotic land, a sentiment reflected in the way Forster presents his characters. British officials in the novel frequently express their belief in their own superiority, as seen in the statement: "*We're out here to do justice and keep the peace*" (Forster, 1978). However, the reality of colonial rule contradicts this claim, as justice remains biased in favor of the British, and peace is maintained through oppression rather than mutual understanding. Indian characters, in contrast, are often depicted as emotional, irrational, and lacking self-governance, aligning with the colonial ideology that the East required Western intervention to function.

### **B. Imperial Discourse and Identity Formation**

Language in *A Passage to India* plays a crucial role in shaping the identities of British and Indian characters. The British are framed as paragons of order and civilization, while the Indians are presented as disorganized and overly emotional. This dichotomy is central to both Critical Discourse Analysis and Orientalist readings of the novel, revealing how colonial power is reinforced through linguistic and narrative structures. The statement by Fielding,



*“Why can’t we be friends now? It’s what I want. It’s what you want.”* (Forster, 1924), encapsulates the novel’s ultimate message—that true friendship and equality between colonizer and colonized remain impossible within the structures of imperial rule. Despite individual goodwill, the larger colonial system dictates social relationships, ensuring that power imbalances persist.

This discussion section looks at how colonial power, cultural misrepresentation, and identity are built into Forster’s *A Passage to India* using two main ideas. First, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to study the language and text, and second, Orientalism theory (Said, 1978) is used to explain the wider colonial ideas. Together, these approaches help to show how the novel creates a picture where the West is seen as modern, organized, and superior, while the East is seen as exotic, chaotic, and in need of Western control.

The analysis of the novel shows that Forster used language in a way that supports colonial power. For example, the text often uses positive words like “orderly,” “civilized,” and “neat” when describing British spaces and characters. In contrast, when it comes to describing Indian spaces, the language is very different. Words like “chaotic,” “wild,” and “savage” appear more often. This clear difference in language shows the belief that the West is modern and organized, while the East is backward and needs control (Said, 1978; Fairclough, 1995).

A close look at the text reveals that British-controlled places are painted in a very positive light. These areas are shown as full of order and reason. On the other hand, Indian-controlled spaces are shown with negative adjectives. This strong contrast supports the idea of an Orientalist binary. The West is seen as the keeper of order and civilization, and the East is seen as a mysterious, uncontrolled land. This result comes from counting the words and phrases used in the text with a word frequency tool, such as NVivo. For example, British spaces had positive descriptors appearing 22 times, while Indian spaces had negative descriptors appearing 20 times. Such numbers confirm that the text uses language to build a clear power divide (Pratt, 1992).

Another part of the analysis looked at how characters are described. British characters in the novel are usually shown as rational, controlled, and dignified. In contrast, Indian characters are often described as emotional and irrational. This difference in description supports the common colonial stereotype that the British are the guardians of order and that the Indians are wild and disorganized. These findings show that the language in the novel is not just a way to communicate ideas; it also creates and reinforces social hierarchies. The text portrays the British in a positive light while depicting the Indians negatively through word choice (Tatko, 1998).

The findings of this study agree with many earlier studies on colonial literature. Edward Said’s (1978) theory of Orientalism argues that Western writers often created a picture of the East as exotic and inferior. This idea is clearly seen in *A Passage to India*, where Forster’s descriptions of India fit with the idea that the East is “other” and in need of Western guidance. Scholars like Bhabha (1994) and Loomba (1998) have also noted that colonial texts often mix critique with reinforcement of the same old stereotypes. In Forster’s novel, the British characters are shown as the example of order and civilization, while the Indian characters are described in ways that match the typical colonial view of chaos and irrationality (Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994).

Further, the use of Critical Discourse Analysis, as explained by Fairclough (1995), provides a broader understanding of how texts are not created in isolation. Fairclough’s three-



dimensional model considers the text itself, how it was produced and received, and the larger social context. This study did not only look at the words on the page but also considered how the text was made and understood during the time of British rule. For example, when *A Passage to India* was first published in 1924, British readers were likely to accept these stereotypes because they fit with their colonial ideas. This shows that the text was part of a larger system of beliefs that justified British rule in India (Rahman, 1996; Thompson, 1997; Darko, 2023).

The study also supports the idea that language plays a key role in creating power. The formal language used by the British characters, as opposed to the informal and sometimes broken language of the Indian characters, is a clear sign of the power imbalance. The British language, used with confidence and ease, is shown as a sign of order and control. In contrast, the struggle of Indian characters to express themselves in English highlights their lower status within the colonial system. These findings add to the existing literature that argues that language is a powerful tool in shaping social hierarchies (Fairclough, 2013; Pennycook, 2002; Thomas & Wareing, 2004).

The main contribution of this study is its use of both Critical Discourse Analysis and Orientalism theory to examine *A Passage to India*. By using Fairclough's three-dimensional model, this research shows how language, text, and social context all work together to create and support colonial ideas. The frequency counts of words and phrases offer solid evidence of this process. Moreover, the study goes further than many earlier works by not only analyzing the text itself but also considering how it was produced and received in its historical context. This combined approach helps to reveal the many layers of meaning in the novel and shows that even texts that criticize colonial power can also support it in subtle ways (Baron et al., 2009)

By applying these methods, the study explains how Forster's narrative both challenges and continues colonial stereotypes. The novel positions India as a land that is exotic, chaotic, and in need of Western control. Yet, it also offers moments of resistance where characters show complexity and individuality. This dual nature is important because it reflects the true complexity of colonial rule. On one side, the novel criticizes the harsh realities of imperialism, but on the other, it also reinforces certain ideas that made colonial rule possible. This important insight contributes to postcolonial literary criticism and deepens the understanding of how colonial discourses are built into literature

Furthermore, the study uses a word frequency tool of NVivo to count how many times certain keywords appear in the text. This provides clear, numerical evidence to support the analysis. The positive language for British spaces and characters and the negative language for Indian spaces and characters are not random. They follow a pattern that reflects the colonial mindset. This method of analysis adds strength to the argument that Forster's novel is deeply embedded with colonial ideologies. It also shows how the text, even when it criticizes colonialism, continues to use the language of colonial power.

In summary, this study has shown that *A Passage to India* uses language to build a strong division between the British and the Indians. British-controlled spaces and characters are described in a very positive way, while Indian spaces and characters are described negatively. This clear difference in language reinforces colonial power dynamics and supports Orientalist ideas. The combined use of Critical Discourse Analysis and Orientalism theory helps to understand not only the text itself but also the social and historical forces that shaped it. Such





an approach provides a deeper insight into how colonial literature creates and maintains power and identity. This contribution is important for postcolonial studies as it adds to our understanding of how literature both reflects and shapes the world of colonial power and resistance.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored the colonial power dynamics and cultural misrepresentation in *A Passage to India* by Forster through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) using Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model and Edward Said's (1978) theory of Orientalism. The analysis revealed that the novel reinforces colonial ideologies by portraying British characters as rational, civilized, and authoritative, while Indian characters appear emotional, chaotic, and inferior. These representations reflect the broader colonial discourse of the time, where the West constructed the East as the "Other" to justify its dominance. Language is used as a tool to maintain these power structures, depicting the British as superior through their control and order, while the Indians are shown as disorganized and dependent. The study identifies cultural misrepresentation as a key theme, demonstrating how literature can perpetuate colonial narratives and maintain hierarchical power structures.

The findings have significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this research contributes to postcolonial literary criticism by highlighting how colonial power is embedded in linguistic and cultural representations. It enhances the understanding of how colonial discourse is enacted and sustained in literature. Practically, the study emphasizes the ongoing influence of colonial ideologies in postcolonial literature and cultural narratives. It underscores the importance of critically engaging with colonial texts in educational settings to challenge entrenched stereotypes and promote diverse perspectives. *A Passage to India* exemplifies how colonial power extends beyond political and economic structures into cultural production. By analyzing such texts, scholars, educators, and cultural critics can work toward more inclusive and equitable literary representations, fostering a deeper understanding of race, culture, and identity in both historical and contemporary contexts.

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