

## The Geographic Images in *A Passage to India*

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Within the context of colonialism, E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* is usually interpreted by many domestic critics from the perspectives of post-colonialism theory or the identity crises of the characters. However, there is little study about the geographical images in this novel. Three images will be discussed in this paper with the combination of literary geographic criticism to have a deeper understanding of the theme of connection of this novel.

*Keywords:* *A Passage to India*, literary geographic criticism, geographic images

### Introduction

*A Passage to India*, which is one of Foster's most famous novels, is generally recognized as a classic work of the 20th century. This novel is full of pungent irony, beautiful lyricism, profound symbols, and philosophical foresight. The whole story takes place in India at the beginning of the 20th century. This specific historical background makes it impossible for any novel that needs to truly describe the status of Indian society to avoid the themes of confrontation between the British colonizers and the colonized Indian people, or the cultural differences and conflicts between the East and the West. At the beginning of the story, Mrs. Moore and Adela came to India and wanted to see the real India, but Mrs. Moore's son and other local British people did not approve of dealing with Indians. From the description of the daily life of the British and the locals in Chandrapore, the author fully demonstrated the differences in politics, culture, and religion between the East and the West. Some people think that this is a novel with a realistic style, because the carefully conceived storyline and the direct comments of the author appearing in the novel are the same as those of the 19th century realistic writers. Other people think that this is a work with a style of modernism, because the author has used a lot of symbolic techniques, and this is the feature which makes this novel outstanding. This article focuses on the geographical images in *A Passage to India* and combines the literary geographic criticism to analyze three images, which are the mosque, the Malabar caves, and the temple. On the basis of the analysis of the symbolic meanings of these important geographical images, this paper aims to reveal the profound theme of connection embodied in the novel.

### **The Mosque: The Possibility of Connection**

Judging from the narrative structure of *A Passage to India*, the narrative space of the novel is mainly composed of three geographic spaces, that is, the mosque, the Marabar caves, and the temple. These geographic spaces not only provide places for the development of the plots, but also deepen the theme of the novel as geographic images. According to Professor Zou's definition, geographic imagery is geographically related pictures and images which appear in literary works, as well as things related to geography. Geographic image is the most important thing in geographic imagery. Not only does it act as the background or the environment of the characters' activities, but also possesses its own independent connotation and even the symbolic meaning. It is important that geographic images are always closely related to the themes, images, artistic expression, and style of the literary works (Zou, 2015, p. 30). The mosque in *A Passage to India* is the geographic space where the fortuitous meeting of Aziz and Mrs. Moore takes place. The structure of the mosque itself has implied the integration of Islam and Christianity, and the mosque is the product of the combination of English colonial culture and Indian culture, which is verified by Forster that "The covered part of the mosque was deeper than is usual; its effect was that of an English church whose side has been taken out" (Forster, 1965, p. 8). As a geographic image, the mosque symbolizes the possibility of communication and connection between the English and Indian people and their efforts to build friendship. Mrs. Moore was a beautified image of a British colonizer without racial discrimination. She was admired by the Indian people because she respected and understood the Indians and their religious beliefs. She was called "a very charming lady" and "an Oriental" by Aziz. Aziz was a kind, friendly, and enthusiastic Indian. He had a certain resistance to British colonial rule and at the same time held a desire and passion to interact with British colonizers. He was understood and respected by Mrs. Moore. "I like Aziz, Aziz is my real friend," Mrs. Moore interposed" (Forster, 1965, p. 41). Forster chose the mosque which is a geographic image with the meaning of integration as a place for Mrs. Moore to communicate with Aziz in depth. Therefore, the mosque symbolizes the possibility of being a reality of the connection and understanding between the British and Indian people.

### **The Marabar Caves: The Barrier of Connection**

In the *A Passage to India*, the second notable geographic image is the Malabar caves. Yin Xinan mentioned that

According to research, the prototype of Chandrapore in *A Passage to India* is Patna, the capital of Bihar of the modern Indian, and the prototype of the Marabar caves is on the Barabar hill, which is forty miles outside Patna. (Yin, 2008, p. 80)

The Marabar caves are described as follows:

In the days of the prehistoric ocean the southern part of the peninsula already existed and the high places of Dravidia have been land since land began and have seen on the one side the sinking of a continent that joined them to Africa and on the other the upheaval of the Himalayas from a sea. They are older than anything in the world. (Forster, 1965, p. 54)

As a geographic space where the following mysterious event happens, the inner structure of the Marabar caves has been characterized by mysterious, gloomy, and oppressive. Guan Jianming also suggests that "the existence of the Marabar caves as a 'thing' also has a very mysterious influence on the people who have entered it" (Guan,

2019, p. 98). When Adela and Mrs. Moore entered the cave at the foot of Marabar Hills under the guidance of the tour guide and Aziz, the mysterious caves and the gloomy echoes in the cave made Adela and Mrs. Moore feel uncomfortable. "The crush and the smells she could forget, but the echo began in some indescribable way to undermine her hold on life" (Forster, 1965, p. 64). To this end, Mrs. Moore interrupted the further exploration of the Marabar caves, which foreshadowed the conflict between Adela and Aziz. The tour guide then took Aziz and Adela to climb to the caves. And Adele accused Aziz of raping her in the cave, causing Aziz to be arrested. Since then, the connection that Aziz has established with Adela, Mrs. Moore, and Fielding has been transformed into separation. Jin Guanglan points out:

The ancient and mysterious Marabar caves are a symbol of the universe that human beings must face but cannot understand. It is also a symbol of true India and Indian culture. Entering the caves means entering the center of Indian culture. And the values and ethics of the British will surely be disintegrated in the impact of these two cultures. (Jin, 2000, p. 151)

At this time, the Marabar caves have been transformed from a simple geographic space into a geographic image, which symbolizes the obstacle that blocks the integration of British and Indian cultures and the connection between the British and Indian people.

### **The Temple: The Pursuit of Connection**

The third important geographic image of *A Passage to India* is the temple. After the incident of Marabar caves, the conflict between the British colonists and the Indian people has intensified to an irreconcilable level. The hypocrisy and evil of the British colonizers are totally exposed, and the sense of independence and ethnicity of the Indians are awakened. The temple, as a graphic space, is decorated with "famous shrine of the dynastic cult" and "the inscriptions which the poets of the State had composed" (Forster, 1965, p. 124). Though most of the decorations are in a mess, the inner features of sacredness and renaissance of this geographic space are evident. Professor Godbole held the annual deity birth ceremony in the temple and one of the inscriptions was "God si love" (Forster, 1965, p. 124). Su Guiyan mentioned that

The "God of love" in India and the "love of God" in the Western world are both a metaphysical common fraternity of human society, and only this kind of common fraternity of the society can make the connection between Britain and India a reality. (Su, 2013, p. 97)

In this sacred geographic space, the alienated mind of the Indian people is to be comforted and saved, in order to seek a deeper connection between the British and Indian people. As a geographic image, the temple at this time is endowed with a deeper symbolic meaning. It symbolizes that the English colonizers can only achieve the connection between Englishmen and Indians by integrating God's love into all aspects of the life of the Indian people. It is also this kind of fraternity that helps Aziz make up with Fielding and makes Aziz and Adela remedy their breach. Therefore, the temple, as a geographic image, has successfully helped deepen the theme of connection in this novel and made the readers devote themselves to the appreciation of the novel with a new state of mind, while at the same time making the expectation of friendship and hope continue to extend into the future in the readers' horizons of expectation.

## Conclusion

Geographical images have a specific meaning, that is, the writer creates a geographical space with artistic authenticity not based on investigation and observation, but through imagination and fictitiousness in literary and artistic works, thus maximizing the field of art and embodying the talent and spirit of the writers and artists. Therefore, in order to probe into the profound theme of *A Passage to India* and appreciate Forster's writing styles, it is quite important to analyze the geographical images. From what has been discussed above, by exploring the intrinsic characteristics and symbolic meanings of the mosque, Marabar caves, and temple in *A Passage to India* by combining the concept of geographic images in literary geographic criticism, this paper helps readers achieve a deeper understanding of the theme of connection in the novel. The mosque stands for the possibility of the connection between Englishmen and Indians. The Marabar caves imply the obstacle of this connection. And the temple symbolizes the author's pursuit and prospect of future connections. The novel is remarkable that the unique features of each geographic image are wonderfully blended with the atmosphere of each story and the mental state of each character.

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