Review

- Looked at two social functions: the Bridge party and Fielding’s tea
- Saw the ways in which the power relations between the colonized and the colonizer are imbedded in the language
- Bridge party’s failure to ‘bridge’ any divides since it is carried out in space designed to re-enforce existing power structures – official British space
- Fielding’s tea is organized around individuals who are not afraid to move outside their roles in the hierarchy (Miss Quested, Mrs. Moore, Prof. Godbole and Aziz)
- Even for these individuals who are well-intentioned and desire to be friends, language fails; there are misunderstandings

- Aziz, in a moment of goodwill, invites the English women to tea and then regrets it as his home is very humble: “Aziz thought of his bungalow with horror. It was a detestable shanty near a low bazaar. There was practically only one room in it, and that infested with small black flies” (63).
- Miss Quested, in her naivety and inability to read the “underdrift,” persists in the invitation
- Although Aziz has already suggested to the English women that the Bhattacharyas did not send their carriage for the women because they were ashamed of their home, Miss Quested doesn’t connect the two incidents; it wouldn’t have occurred to her that a man of Aziz’s position would have such meagre surroundings
• Aziz “thought again of his bungalow with horror. Good heavens, the stupid girl had taken him at his word! What was he to do? ‘Yes, all that is settled,’ he cried. ‘I invite you all to see me in the Marabar Caves’” (67).

• Aziz, anxious to show hospitality to his new friends and avoid personal embarrassment, traps himself in a more difficult situation

• Later, in conversation with Fielding, Aziz asks Fielding why he doesn’t marry Miss Quested and ensure that his line will not die out

• Fielding replies that Miss Quested is “a prig” (109) and that she is engaged to Ronny

• Aziz thinks he is ‘off the hook’ for the trip: “Has she indeed? I am so glad! He exclaimed with relief, for this exempted him from the Marabar expedition: he would scarcely be expected to entertain regular Anglo-Indians” (110).

• He recognizes that the ‘regular Anglo-Indians’ wouldn’t be socializing with him

• Later, he hears from Mahmoud Ali, whose servants have spoken to the servants of the English that the English women were surprised that Aziz did not follow through on his invitation. Aziz “thought his facile remark had been forgotten” (118).

• See the difference with which the two parties attach to the invitation. Recall Aziz’s remarks about bribes…
Caves

“[a] tunnel eight feet long, five feet high, three feet wide, leads to a circular chamber about twenty feet in diameter. This arrangement occurs again and again throughout the group of hills, and this is all, this is a Marabar cave. Having seen one such cave, having seen two, having seen three, four, fourteen, twenty-four, the visitor returns to Chandrapore uncertain whether he has had an interesting experience or a dull one or any experience at all. He finds it difficult to discuss the caves, or to keep them apart in his mind, for the pattern never varies, and no carving, not even a bees’ nest or a bat, distinguishes one from another. Nothing, nothing attaches to them, and their reputation – for they have one – does not depend upon human speech” (116).

- Primal void of nothingness – but not a space of potentiality, of generativity, but the end
- Sense of the void, the earth as Terrible Mother who devours and takes people back into herself as the tomb
• In the end, no one really wants to go:
• Fielding thinks the caves boring and “he foresaw friction and expense” (118)
• “no one was enthusiastic, yet it took place” (119)
• And Aziz goes to a great deal of trouble; he must ask for time off, “borrow cutlery from Mahmoud Ali without inviting him”, decide on a menu, determine transportation, and deal with Professor Godbole’s dietary restrictions since Godbole is a Brahmin. As he tells Fielding later, the tip has cost him “Hundreds and hundreds of rupees” (149).
• So anxious to appear punctual that he has spent the night at the train station
• Ironically, it is not he who is late, but Fielding and Godbole, who miss the train
• Goes to such trouble for the elephant ride, not knowing that Miss Quested is tired of such transport

• Miss Quested enters the caves, pre-occupied with the mechanics arranging servants following her impending marriage; no consideration of the actual ceremony or even a relationship with Ronny, (125-6) but rather “her thoughts ever veered to the manageable future, and to the Anglo-Indian life she had decided to endure” (127).
• See the Civil life in India as a deprivation
• Intrusion of the narrator: “How can the mind take hold of such a country? Generations of invaders have tried, but they remain in exile” (127).
• Intimations of the futility of the colonial project
• Also of the inability of Miss Quested to accomplish her ‘quest’ to see the real India
• Anticipation is continually dashed by the mundane; expects the sunrise to “be absolutely magnificent”… They awaited the miracle. But at the supreme moment, when night should have died and day lived, nothing occurred. It was as if virtue had failed in the celestial fount. The hues in the east decayed, the hills seemed dimmer though in fact better lit, and a profound disappointment entered with the morning breeze. Why, when the chamber was prepared, did the bridegroom not enter with trumpets and shawms [woodwind instrument], as humanity expects? The sun rose without splendour” (128)

• Ostensibly, this passage is about Miss Quested’s disappointment in the quality of the sunrise
• Her imagination is not met by reality
• References to the “bridegroom” and the “chamber” are Biblical and depict her disappointment in nature’s pageantry
• But coming on the heels of her reflections on her impending marriage, it also hints at dashed hopes in her own bed chamber or at the very least, anxiety about the sexual aspect of the relationship
• Followed by curious event
"As the elephant moved towards the hills (the pale sun had by this time saluted them to the base, and pencilled shadows down their creases), a new quality occurred, a spiritual silence which invaded more sense than the ear. Life went on as usual, but had no consequences, that is to say, sounds did not echo or thoughts develop. Everything seemed cut off at its root, and therefore infected with illusion. For instance, there were some mounds by the edge of the track, low, serrated and touched with whitewash. What were these mounds – graves, breast of the goddess Parvati? The villagers beneath gave both replies. Again, there was confusion about a snake, which was never cleared up. Miss Quested saw a thin, dark object reared on end at the further side of a water-course, and said, 'A snake!' The villagers agreed, and Aziz explained: yes, a black cobra, very venomous, who had reared himself up to watch the passing of the elephant. But when she looked through Ronny's fieldglasses she found it wasn't a snake, but the withered and twisted stump of a toddy-palm. So she said, 'It isn't a snake.' The villagers contradicted her. She had put the word into their minds, and they refused to abandon it. Aziz admitted that it looked like a tree through the glasses, but insisted that it was a black cobra really, and improvised some rubbish about protective mimicry. Nothing was explained..." (131).

• This event foreshadows what is to come:
  – The “confusion...which was never cleared up”
  – Miss Quested seeing a threat and then recanting
  – Aziz’s uneasy responses amid his desire to be hospitable and offer something of worth to his guests
  – Villagers inability to see the truth once the notion of a venomous snake has been voiced
  – Miss Quested's thinking the mounds of dirt are breasts of the goddess; her imaginings of a “thin, dark object reared on end”
  – Sexualizing the landscape
  – Both disappointing in its lack of passion and excitement and terrifying in its potential violence
• It also speaks to Miss Quested’s unconscious preoccupation with marriage and impending sexuality
• She and Mrs. Moore have discussed the wedding preparations on the journey to the caves

• The caves turn out to be more than just boring
• “Bending their heads, they disappeared one by one into the interior of the hills. The small black hole gaped where their varied forms and colours had momentarily functioned. They were sucked in like water down a drain…” (136)
• It is as if they are consumed by the caves
• Sense of being drawn into a vortex beyond their control; also of disappearing into oblivion and annihilation – they are now without function, form and colour; erased
• The experiences of Mrs. Moore, Miss Quested and Aziz in the caves are markedly different
• The women “did not feel that it was an attractive place or quite worth visiting…”, while Aziz sees that “[t]he expedition was a success…” (132).
• Differences in perspective foreshadow much greater differences in experiences of the caves
Mrs. Moore’s experience is wretched: “Crammed with villagers and servants, the circular chamber began to smell. She lost Aziz and Adela in the dark, didn’t know who touched her, couldn’t breathe, and some vile naked thing struck her face and settled on her mouth like a pad. She tried to regain the entrance tunnel, but an influx of villagers swept her back. She hit her head. For an instant she went mad, hitting and gasping like a fanatic. For not only did the crush and stench alarm her; there was also a terrifying echo” (137).

The echo in a Marabar cave is … entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. ‘Boum’ is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or ‘bou-oum,’ or ‘ou-boum’- utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce ‘boum’. Even the striking of a match starts a little worm coiling, which is too small to complete a circle, but is eternally watchful. And if several people talk at once an overlapping howling noise begins, echoes generate echoes, and the cave is stuffed with a snake composed of small snakes, which writhe independently” (137).
• Given the previous association of snakes with a threat, the notion of a cave full of small snakes writhing independently is overwhelming, even for those lacking a phobia for snakes
• More importantly, the echo renders everything the same and “utterly dull”
• Compared to the encounter in the mosque, where Mrs. Moore and Aziz talk of God and unity with the world, the caves are the void and disintegration
• Mrs. Moore imagines that “a baby, astride its mother’s hip” has settled on her mouth like a pad – suggestive of a succubus that would draw the life out of her
• she tries to compose herself through letter writing to her children in England, as if to connect to the living and the predictability of home
• Can’t stop thinking about the echo

“Even the elephant had become a nobody. Her eye rose from it to the entrance tunnel. No, she did not wish to repeat that experience. The more she thought over it, the more disagreeable and frightening it became. She minded it much more now than at the time. The crush and smells she could forget, but the echo began in some indescribable way to undermine her hold on life. Coming at a moment when she chanced to be fatigued, it had managed to murmur: ‘Pathos, piety, courage – they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value.’ If one had spoken viliness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same – ‘ou-boum.’ If one had spoken with the tongues of angels and pleaded for all the unhappiness and misunderstanding in the world, past, present, and to come, for all the misery men must undergo whatever their opinion and position, and however much they dodge or bluff – it would amount to the same, the serpent would descend and return to the ceiling. Devils are of the North, and poems can be written about them, but no one could romanticize the Marabar, because it robbed infinity and eternity of their vastness, the only quality that accommodates them to mankind” (139).
• Not even religion can overcome the emptiness of the cave; religion also comes to be ‘ou-boum’
• "Then she was terrified over an area larger than usual; the universe, never comprehensible to her intellect, offered no repose to her soul, the mood of the last two months took definite form at last, and she realized that she didn’t want to write to her children, didn’t want to communicate with anyone, not even with God. She sat motionless with horror, and, when old Mohammed Latif came up to her, thought he would notice a difference. For a time she thought, ‘I am going to be ill,’ to comfort herself, then she surrendered to the vision. She lost all interest, even in Aziz, and the affectionate and sincere words that she had spoken to him seemed no longer hers but the air’s" (139-40).

• Somehow, the emptiness of the cave has reflected back to Mrs. Moore what she has been struggling with for two months
• She tries to think about being ill as a way of grounding herself, finding something stable and fixed within this sense of void, where nothing matters
• As usual, Miss Quested is a bit oblivious to Mrs. Moore’s mood
• At Mrs. Moore’s urging, she and Aziz go off on their own to see the rest of the caves

• David Lean film, *A Passage to India*, dresses Miss Quested from ~1920
• In reality, for 1912, Miss Quested would likely have dressed as a fashionable Edwardian
• Far more restrictive clothing

Town suits with hobble skirt and morning coat cut jacket – 1914
‘V’ neck introduced 1913 and denounced from pulpit and by physicians as dangerous to health
• Imagine climbing around in the hills in the heat in restrictive clothing, corset and delicate shoes; reinforces fixed gender roles
• As they hike up into the caves, Miss Quested reflects on her upcoming marriage and the role she will be required to take as Ronnie’s wife
• In particular, she openly admits to Aziz her “Anglo-Indian difficulty”, her fear of becoming like Mrs. Turton and Mrs. Callendar, “ungenerous and snobby about Indians” once she marries Ronny (135).
• She thinks, also, about the nature of Mrs. Turton’s life as the wife of a senior official and the nature of her marriage to Mr. Turton; life of service – both politically and physically

When Adela and Aziz are alone, Adela has a further realization about herself:

“But as she toiled over a rock that resembled an inverted saucer she thought, ‘What about love?’ The rock was nicked by a double row of footholds, and somehow the question was suggested by them. Where had she seen footholds before? Oh yes, they were the pattern traced in the dust by the wheels of the Nawab Bahadur’s car. She and Ronny – no, they did not love each other.

‘Do I take you too fast?’ inquired Aziz, for she had paused, a doubtful expression on her face. The discovery had come so suddenly that she felt like a mountaineer whose rope has broken. Not to love the man one’s going to marry! Not to find out till this moment! Not even to have asked oneself the question until now! Something else to think out. Vexed rather than appalled, she stood still, her eyes on the sparkling rock. There was esteem and animal contact at dusk, but the emotion that links them was absent. Ought she to break her engagement off? She was inclined to think not – it would cause so much trouble to others; besides, she wasn’t convinced that love is necessary to a successful union. If love is everything, few marriages would survive the honeymoon. ‘No, I’m all right, thanks,’ she said; and, her emotions well under control, resumed the climb, though she felt a bit dashed. Aziz held her hand....” (142)
• Aziz has no idea that Miss Quested is experiencing a revelation about her feelings toward Ronny in this short interlude
• Instead, he imagines that he is climbing too quickly for her and she has paused out of fatigue
• She, on the other hand, is not fully able to acknowledge her own desires. While part of her has the expectation of a marriage of love and passion, another part of her sees marriage as a mechanical function that solidifies society
• She is already reading the landscape as a sexualized terrain. Now she sees “a rock that resembled an inverted saucer”, “nicked by a double row of footholds” and her unconscious, physical thoughts percolate up and erupt into consciousness
• Yet, she remains largely unaware of what are as yet fragmentary notions. There arises a whole other layer of sexual undertone to which Miss Quested is, as usual, obtuse

• When Aziz inquires, ‘Do I take you too fast?’, do we not see how remarkably his query suggests that of a bridegroom to his bride on their wedding night in light of Miss Quested’s preoccupation? And when we reflect on how the narrator has held Ronny and Aziz up for comparison throughout the novel, are we not meant to be feeling the possibility of sexual undertones, not only in Miss Quested’s repressed content, but also in her reading of her interaction with Aziz?