Review

- Marabar Caves as primal void of nothingness – not a space of potentiality, of generativity, but the tomb
- Marabar Caves are unlike the caves of Elephanta, which have sculptures of Parvati and Siva (68)
- Have an echo renders everything the same and “utterly dull”, “Everything exists, nothing has value”.
- As a result, very different experiences for Mrs. Moore, Miss Quested and Dr. Aziz
- See how landscape resists colonization
- Mrs. Moore has an epistemological crisis in which all systems of thought and belief fail her

- Miss Quested see her concerns about marriage and sexuality projected on to the landscape
- Tries to decipher the landscape and read the topology: “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” (131).
- Parvati is the Hindu mother of the universe, associated with the mountains, usually shown bare breasted as this is the divine form
- Note how the landscape is seen as both life giving and life taking potential violence
• Left alone with Dr. Aziz, Miss Quested, confides her concerns about marrying Ronny and fear of becoming another Mrs. Turton
• Landscape leads her to recognize that she does not love Ronny; passion is lacking
• 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?
• The intimacy of the situation prompts Miss Quested to discuss her feelings with Aziz and “… having no one else to speak to on that eternal rock, she gave rein to the subject of marriage and said in her honest, decent, inquisitive way: ‘Have you one wife or more than?’…She followed at her leisure, quite unconscious that she had said the wrong thing, and not seeing him she also went into a cave, thinking with half her mind ‘Sightseeing bores me’ and wondering with the other half about marriage” (143).
• Certainly, she can’t speak to the Civil wives about her thoughts, nor to Ronny - and her future mother-in-law would not be a likely confidant– Adela blunders in asking Aziz, but to whom else would she be able to confide in these circumstances?
• Aziz is horrified by this question and immediately ducks into another cave to regain his composure

• What follows next from Aziz’s point of view is fairly mundane
• When he sees her, near the bottom of the gully, he imagines that she has run down to meet the motor car which has just arrived.
• When he finds her field-glasses on the ground, he picks them up and puts them in his pocket.
• When the remainder of the travel party, now with Fielding, disembarks from the train, we discover that things have taken a terrible, but mysterious turn
• The next we hear of Miss Quested is a report that she “has been insulted in one of the Marabar Caves” (152)
• Not for another 30 pages do we get any details: “She had been touched by the sun, also hundreds of cactus spines had to be picked out of her flesh” (182) –
• landscape has wrought a violence upon her flesh
• like Fielding and the others, we are kept in the dark as to her condition

• “She would begin a speech as if nothing particular had happened. ‘I went into this detestable cave,’ she would say dryly, ‘and I remember scratching the wall with my fingernail, to start the usual echo, and then as I was saying there was this shadow or sort of shadow, down the entrance tunnel, bottling me up. It seemed like an age, but I suppose the whole thing can’t have lasted thirty seconds really. I hit at him with the glasses, he pulled me round the cave by the strap, it broke, I escaped, that’s all. He never actually touched me once. It all seems such nonsense’” (183).
• Events are never really explained
• Aziz is imprisoned for rape
• While Miss Quested declares, “He never actually touched me once. It all seems such nonsense’” (183).
• Too late for a retraction, because the entire British compound has rallied behind her

Aziz’s experience of the Caves

• Aziz initially experiences the trip “a success”:
• “They were dependent on him for a few hours, and he felt grateful to them for placing themselves in such a position….an obscure young man had been allowed to show courtesy to visitors from another country, which is what all Indians long to do – even cynics like Mahmoud Ali – but they never have the chance. Hospitality had been achieved, they were ‘his’ guests; his honour was involved in their happiness, and any discomfort they endured would tear at his own soul” (133).
• Once imprisoned, “[i]t enraged him that he had been accused by a woman who had no personal beauty; sexually he was a snob” (227).
• Aziz wants damages from Miss Quested, which Fielding talks him out of as ruinous for the woman.
• Fielding suggests Miss Quested provide a written, as well as a public apology, to which Aziz remarks: “Dear Dr Aziz, I wish you had come into the cave; I am an awful old hag, and it is my last chance. Will she sign that?” (237).

• What is going on with the Caves?
• Miss Quested is traumatized and perhaps assaulted, Aziz ends up imprisoned, and Mrs. Moore hears the bou-oum,’ or ‘ou-boum’
• The novel never explains the experiences of the cave for any of the characters.
• Critics have read the caves in various ways:
  • eg. the ‘om’ of Om Mani Padme Hum, which is chanted by both Buddhists and Hindus as part of a mantra for meditation
  • Plato’s cave, where we see only the shadows and mistake it for reality
  • Symbolic of colonial alienation
  • Think about Achebe’s remarks about *Heart of Darkness*: “the desire – one might indeed say the need – in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will be manifest” (Achebe in Norton, 337).
  • It could be argued that *A Passage to India* sets up India in a similar way, so that the caves become the ‘place of negations’ which reflect England’s superior moral and even epistemological outlook as opposed to the depravity of India
  • Cave as the in comprehension of other cultures

• I would argue that Mrs Moore’s experience in the caves is a reaction against the emphasis on the imperial project;
  • Instead of a parched landscape or a frightening jungle, what Mrs Moore sees and hears in the emptiness of the cave is the emptiness of Eurocentric ideas about class, ethnicity, colonization
  • She recognizes early on the preposterousness of Ronny’s attitude and hence of the colonial posturing
  • She also recognizes that the values that make her privileged position in English and Anglo-Indian society possible are outdated
  • The hierarchies that have ordered her world are collapsing
• When she hears the echo “‘bou-oum,’ or ‘ou-boum’-utterly dull”, she interprets it as “‘Pathos, piety, courage – they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value’.
• Like Marlow, she has nothing with which to replace the outdated 19th century values – everything is rendered the same; extreme relativism
• Fear that as the old is seen to be an anachronism, there is only meaninglessness, death
• Miss Quested, who ought to be a representative of the generative and fecund feminine rejects this role as too terrifying
• She can’t accept marriage with Ronny or a relationship with Aziz

• Mrs. Moore’s experience is an articulation of the angst of modernism
• Turn of the century emphasis on technology and science, Friederich Nietzsche’s statement that “god is dead”
• much of the European and western world began to reject the notion of a universal order and system of values that is absolute
• In the absence of absolute values, what is left?
• Think of the arguments I made about modernism earlier on – notion that relativity theory argues that it is not that everything is relative, but rather that there is no one privileged position
• Benita Parry has commented that India stands in for the modernist crisis

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
If there were only water amongst the rock
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain.

• Mrs Moore experiences the modernist crisis as a massive void with nothing to fill it
• Relationships between people and with God mean nothing
• Instead, there is only death, experienced as nothingness
• Does Forster offer us compensation? Does he find a transcendent vision to overcome the meaninglessness and death of the cave? Is there anything that can replace what is rejected?
Temple

• The three sections of the novel have been seen in various ways:
  – Muslim, Jain, Hindu
  – Thesis, antithesis, synthesis
  – Cold, hot, rains (Forster)

• Section III opens two years later in a palace east of Chandrapore
• Eve of the Hindu festival celebrating the birth of Krishna
  – Gokul Ashtami
• Occurs during the monsoons, when the rains bring the promise of spring, the possibility of growth and fertility after the droughts of the hot period (the cave)
• Gokul is the village where Krishna is born
• Krishna is one avatar of the god Vishnu;
• Parallel would be Easter, Passover, Noruz
• Vishnu is the god that preserves the order of the universe; supreme god
• Vishnu becomes incarnate and visits earth from time to time to fight evil;
• takes on various forms
• Krishna is one form of Vishnu

• Krishna is adopted as a child to protect him from King Kamsa
• Krishna’s parents are warned in a dream to flee
• As an adult, Krishna kills King Kamsa
• Krishna known as a trickster figure
• Tricks bathing milkmaids, the gopis, into emerging naked from the river
• likes butter and steals it from the gopis

Radha and Krishna

• Professor Godbole’s choir sings for the festival: “God si [sic] Love. Is this the final message of India?” (271).
• Festival is a ritual re-enactment of the important moments in Krishna’s life
• Stealing of the butter
• “All laughed exultantly at discovering that the divine sense of humour coincided with their own. ‘God si love!’ There is fun in heaven. God can play practical jokes upon Himself, draw chairs away from beneath his own posteriors, set His own turban on fire, and steal His own petticoats when He bathes. By sacrificing good taste, this worship achieved what Christianity has shirked: the inclusion of merriment. All spirit as well as all matter must participate in salvation, and if practical jokes are banned the circle is incomplete” (274).
• Krishna’s birth saves the world: “All sorrow was annihilated, not only for Indians, but for foreigners, birds, caves, railways, and the stars; all became joy, all laughter; there had never been disease nor doubt, misunderstanding, cruelty, fear” (273).
• after the void of the middle section, the death of the drought, we have the renewal of the landscape in the monsoons and a vision of universal joy and love
• “Not only from the unbeliever are mysteries hid, but the adept himself cannot retain them. He may think, if he chooses, that he has been with God, but, as soon as he thinks it, it becomes history, and falls under the rules of time” (273) –
• impossibility of being a participant and an observer; as soon as one tries to relate or describe the moment, one steps into time and out of the event.

• In the midst of ecstasy of singing and dancing, Godbole “remembered an old woman he had met in Chandrapore days. Chance brought her into his mind while it was in this heated state, he did not select her, she happened to occur among the throng of soliciting images, a tiny splinter, and he impelled her by his spiritual force to that place where completeness can be found. Completeness, not reconstruction. His senses grew thinner, he remembered a wasp seen he forgot where, perhaps on a stone. He loved the wasp equally, he impelled it likewise, he was imitating God” (272).

• Mrs Moore, whom he barely knew, has appeared to Godbole in a moment of spiritual ecstasy
• Comes to stand for something more than herself
“Covered with grease and dust, Professor Godbole had once more developed the life of his spirit. He had, with increasing vividness, again seen Mrs Moore, and round her faintly clinging forms of trouble. He was a Brahman, she Christian, but it made no difference, it made no difference whether she was a trick of his memory or a telepathic appeal. It was his duty, as it was his desire, to place himself in the position of the God and to love her, and to place himself in her position and to say to the God, ‘Come, come, come, come.’ this was all he could do. How inadequate. But each according to his own capacities, and he knew that his own were small. ‘One old Englishwoman and one little, little wasp,’ he thought, ....”(275-6).

We remember the wasp that Mrs Moore saw at the end of Chapter III and also Prof. Godbole’s song to Krishna at Fielding’s tea party

“She had known this wasp or his relatives by day; they were not as English wasps, but had long yellow legs which hung down behind when they flew. 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 trees, houses trees. There he clung, asleep, while jackals in the plain bayed their desires and mingled with the percussion of drums.

‘Pretty dear,’ said Mrs Moore to the wasp. He did not wake, but her voice floated out, to swell the night’s uneasiness” (30-31).
• Recall Godbole’s song at the tea party given at Fielding’s bungalow
• None of the Anglo-Indians understood it, although the servants did
• In the song, Godbole takes the role of the milkmaids, the gopis, who petition Krishna, “Come! Come to me only” … “I say to Him, Come, come, come, come, come, come. He neglects to come” (72)
• In this last section, Godbole reiterates his duty and his desire to continue to invoke the godhead and say, “Come” despite the fact that God remains elusive
• Even in the absence of God, in the void, he retains the faith that allows him to wait for the void to be filled

• Forster suggests that the Hindu approach offers something for ‘modern’ life that Western philosophy and religion do not
• the spirit of the festival, is “a tender, happy state unknown to an English crowd” (270)
• Recall that Godbole has rather enigmatically told Fielding before Aziz’s trial, “Yet absence implies presence, absence is not nonexistence, and we are therefore entitled to repeat, ‘Come, come, come, come, come’” (167).
• Absence of the caves is read by Mrs. Moore as the void created at the turn of the century as old systems of thought fail, but if we use Godbole’s thinking, then this void is not the ‘end’ or ‘nonexistence’, but rather a presence yet to be detected;
• Westerns fear the void as ‘the end’, but for the Hindus, the void is necessary; part of the cycle of cold/heat/rain
• There has to be a death (tomb) before there can be a birth
• Response to emptiness should not be panic; rather, need to wait and have faith that the void will be filled by something new
• Suggests that the linear, Western eschatological approach with its notions of a finite ending is not always useful; the Hindu approach is to see time as cyclical
• Aziz is also at the palace, working as physician to the Rajah
  “[t]he Criminal Investigation Department [had] kept an eye on Aziz ever since the trial – they had nothing actionable against him, but Indians who have been unfortunate must be watched, and to the end of his life he remained under observation, thanks to Miss Quested’s mistake” (279).

  “His impulse to escape from the English was sound. They had frightened him permanently, and there are only two reactions against fright: to kick and scream on committees, or to retreat to a remote jungle, where the sahib seldom comes….And, though sometimes at the back of his mind he felt that Fielding had made sacrifices for him, it was now all confused with his genuine hatred of the English. ‘I am an Indian at last,’ he thought, standing motionless in the rain” (278-9).

• National identity is determined through polarization – Aziz sees himself as Indian because he hates the British. Sees his earlier efforts to befriend the British as an experiment gone wrong, a colossal error
• Not unlike the way that the British use India to determine their own identity
• Fielding has tried to contact him, but Aziz has refused to read Fielding’s letters
• Aziz convinced Fielding has betrayed him by marrying Miss Quested
• Of course, this would also mean that Fielding got Miss Quested’s money, which Aziz felt should have been his
• To Fielding, Aziz declares that “I wish no Englishman or Englishwoman to be my friend”(288).
• Bitter and angry
• Sneaks into the Guest House and is confronted by Ralph Moore
• Ralph shocks Aziz by declaring, “Your hands are unkind” (294).
• Aziz continues to hold on to his position of victim: “Yes, I am Aziz. No, of course your great friend Miss Quested did me no harm at the Marabar.’

Drowning his last words, all the guns of the State went off. A rocket from the jail garden gave the signal. The prisoner had been released, and was kissing the feet of the singers. Rose leaves fall from the houses, sacred spices and cocoanut are brought forth…. It was the halfway moment; the God had extended His temple, and paused exultantly. Mixed and confused in their passage, the rumours of salvation entered the Guest House” (295 ellipses in text).

• The ritual release of a prisoner from jail coincides with Aziz releasing himself from anger and releasing Miss Quested from culpability
• Ralph detects the change immediately, causing Aziz to remark, “Then you are an Oriental.’….Those words – he had said them to Mrs Moore in the mosque at the beginning of the cycle, from which, after so much suffering, he had got free. Never be friends with the English! Mosque, caves, mosque, caves. And here he was starting again. ‘Take this, think of me when you use it. I shall never want it back. I must give you one little present, and it is all I have got; you are Mrs Moore’s son.

‘I am that,’ he murmured to himself; and a part of Aziz’s mind that had been hidden seemed to move and force its way to the top” (296).
• Meeting with Ralph awakens memories of Mrs Moore
• Also awakens the nasty ending, as he puts it, to the cycle of mosque, caves, mosque, caves into which Aziz has been trapped
• What does the section “Temple” have to offer Aziz in his personal torment?
• Something in his mind that has been hidden is freed up
• He releases himself from that cycle
• Note that the cycle of mosque, caves, mosque, caves is also the cycle of cold/heat without the liberating monsoon

• Aziz claims to have no interest in the Hindu celebration
• Ends up in a boat with Ralph, Mrs Moore’s son, amidst the procession with the chanting, the torches, the fireworks, and a palanquin of Krishna as well as “elephants, artillery, crowds” and rain and wind
• As part of the celebration, the image of Krishna is thrown into the water, “a passage not easy, not now, not here, not to be apprehended except when it is unattainable: the God to be thrown was an emblem of that” (299).
• A commentary on the difficulty of comprehending the universe, of both the human desire to ascertain an order and at the same time, the inability to do so
• Also the difficulty of the journey of life
• From earlier statements, we see that while we may understand or be part of the mystery in a moment of time, we cannot both experience and describe the mystery simultaneously.
• Also, the necessity of participating in the ritual in order to fully comprehend the meaning of it— if one could understand it simply by hearing it described, Forster could have as easily written, ‘the birth of Krishna is celebrated as an act of universal love’.

• Aziz and Ralph Moore’s boat collide with a second boat carrying Fielding and his wife, Stella (Mrs. Moore’s daughter).
• Everyone capsizes amid the rain and the detritus from the celebration.
• Ritual cleansing amidst the “God is Love” of the festival.
• Swept up in the joyous enactment of birth and renewal after the void of the heat, the void of the caves.
• Conversation with Ralph and recollection of Aziz’s friendship with Mrs Moore that pulls Aziz out of his rage.
• Need the emptiness of the void to allow the energy of the world to flow in; the monsoons follow the drought
• The Hindu celebration allows for a god who is mischievous, “[a]ll spirit as well as all matter must participate in salvation, and if practical jokes are banned the circle is incomplete”
• Forster is suggesting that Western notions of politics and religion are tied up together (ie justifying imperialism through notions of helping to save the “poor infidels”) and that these notions are flawed and corrupt
• Miss Quested’s rational approach leads her to reject the message of the caves and configure it as violence
• What of Fielding, whose views were held up as more liberal?

• Fielding’s visit is a failure in some senses – the Rajah is dead, Godbole is unavailable to tour the King-Emperor George Fifth High School because the school has become a granary
• But Fielding and Aziz are talking again
• Aziz gives Fielding a letter for Miss Quested thanking her “for her fine behaviour two years back” (302)
• Seems to have put some of his anger and vindictiveness away; able to see that her courage cost her expulsion from her “tribe”
• After the nihilism of modernism, the death of god – Forster has a vision of unity
• Not as naïve as the universal love that both Miss Quested and Aziz speak of in Section II
• Ending emphasizes the political aspect

• In a horseback ride, he and Fielding discuss the nature of India without Britain
• Fielding asserts that it will “go to seed at once” (305).
• Aziz replies, “Clear out, all you Turtons and Burtons. We wanted to know you ten years back – now it’s too late. …Clear out, clear out, I say. Why are we put to so much suffering? We used to blame you, now we blame ourselves, we grow wiser. Until England is in difficulties we keep silent, but in the next European war – aha, aha! Then is out time” (305)
• Presentiment of W.W. I - also Aziz’s remark suggests Sir Richard Burton, the famous English explorer and adventurer and also translator of The Kama Sutra – exoticization of the Orient for Western consumption
• Fielding and Aziz try to imagine other political configurations for India, how the Hindus and Muslims might unite, and consider nationhood ranking “with Guatemala and Belgium perhaps”
Aziz rages: “Down with the English anyhow. That’s certain. We may hate one another, but we hate you most. If I don’t make you go, Ahmed will, Karim will, if it’s fifty or five hundred years we shall get rid of you, yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then’—he rode against him furiously—‘and then, ‘he concluded, half kissing him, ‘you and I shall be friends’.

Why can’t we be friends now? ’said the other, holding him affectionately. ‘It’s what I want. It’s what you want.’

But the horses didn’t want it— they swerved apart; the earth didn’t want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single-file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw the Mau beneath: they didn’t want it, they said in their hundred voices, ‘No, not yet,’ and the sky said, ‘No, not there’” (306).

- Can Aziz and Fielding be friends within the colonial environment?
- The narrator suggests ‘no’: the “hundred voices” say, “‘No, not yet,’ and the sky said, ‘No, not there’” (306).
- As the colonized or oppressed individual, Aziz is not able to fully express himself
- What about the homophilic content?
• However, other critics have claimed that Aziz indeed has some agency
• If the subaltern cannot speak, can they subvert or transform?
• Gandhi?
• What about Professor Godbole’s songs to Krishna”? John McBratney has argued that the song, along with the chant to Mrs Moore undermine British legal authority – British can’t interpret the song or the chant, nor can they make the chanting stop; these forms of oral language disrupt the discourse of the dominant culture
• McBratney – the drowning of the letters of Ronny and Adela in the boat collision – see how the oral triumphs over the literary power of the British
• Additionally, I think we have to consider the ways in which the Indian characters manipulate the English language, which is the language of the oppressor – to subvert, critique, rage, satirize the British
• eg. “Clear out, all you Turtons and Burtons”