'It hides in rubbish heaps': Ritual, Rumour and Restless Crowds in Forster's *A Passage to India*

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This dissertation entitled "It hides in rubbish heaps": Rumour, Ritual and Restless Crowds in Forster's A Passage to India, submitted by Milind Wakankar, Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Languages, New Delhi, for the award of degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any university. This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of Master of Philosophy.

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INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I will attempt to recover from E.M. Forster's A Passage to India (1924) traces of an emergent collective consciousness fused at certain moments by a shared anti-colonialist sentiment. I will argue that this inchoate insurgent (or subaltern) consciousness, manifest in the crowd activity after Aziz's trial and at Mau, is registered through and by the "work" of rumour and the ritual practice of Bhakti. Because of its inherent "openness" and its effective vacillation between the true and the false, rumour remains ec-centric to both the dark allegorism of "Hinduism" and the positivism of the "law." Hinduism and the law function in Passage as two regimes of (transcendent, and positive) truth that mutually reinforce, at the same time as they ironise, each other in the text. By exceeding these dominant discourses, and by remaining open to multiple authoring, rumour inaugurates its own short-lived regime of collective (mis)cognition, and mediates, as I will show, a collective (mis)reading of the "rule of law." I will suggest that rumour and Bhakti are in this sense collective modes of praxis that exceed Passage's fundamentally individualistic discourses of "law" and "Hinduism." In contrast to rumour's primarily linguistic register, the ritual practice of

Bhakti operates through an affective mode of spiritual fulfillment and union with the Deity. Yet, as I will suggest, Bhakti's liminal moment of communitas oversteps the given confines of the text's Orientalist problematic of "Hinduism." I will further argue that this liminal moment cannot be assimilated successfully to the literary device of shifting points-of-view, which resolves the contradictory strains and pulls of disparate narrative materials by generating (as in the exemplary case of the punkah-puller) moments of abrupt changes of textual focus. Furthermore, a notable feature of the two instances of collective consciousness listed above is the specific activity of unruly and/or festive crowds. The latter presents at least the possibility of (collective) praxis in the future; the deferral of praxis which this "waiting" involves is, I will argue, itself a pragmatic moment, another subaltern-effect, subsisting outside the text's dominant sign-systems (law, religion, religiosity) as a strategic political possibility.

The notion of "subaltern-effect" implies, in the words of Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, that "that which seems to operate as a subject may be part of a discontinuous network...of strands that may be termed politics, ideology, economics, history, sexuality, and language, and so on...heterogeneous determinations" (p.

341). In this sense, the subject of my study, the collective consciousness of the crowd, cannot be recuperated within the traditional radical humanist conception that the moment of transgression involves a unified and coherent self pitted against the dominant power (see Dollimore, "Dominant", p. 179).

Moreover, the subaltern-effect outlined above exceeds any author's self-conscious narratorial project (inasmuch as the latter can be ascertained on the basis of interviews, asides and journal-entries). In other words, this subaltern-effect cannot be traced to the radical "sympathies" and "intentions" of the author. Traditionally, Passage-criticism has adhered to a time-honoured postulate of liberal-humanism, viz., a belief in the author as the extra-textual source and guarantee of a text's meaning and "wholeness." Not surprisingly, the figure of "Forster" looms large in most readings of Passage. Benita Parry's words are paradigmatic of what might be called the pervasive "Forster and India"-reading of Passage: "Forster needs no critics to tell him of the ambiguities, contradictions and limitations in his intellectual stance [which function as]...constraints on the text's system of representation - [this]...should not hinder the perception that [Passage] is a rare instance of a libertarian perspective on another and subordinated culture produced from within

an imperialist metropolis" ("Politics", p. 43). A logical outcome of this argument is that the critique of colonialism that can be recuperated from the text, the social-satiric portrait of the civil station, the activity of the crowds, the individual utterances of natives which deconstruct Orientalist stereotyping ("'Oh, I beg your pardon, I'm sure. The licentious Oriental imagination at work'", Aziz says at one point) must needs be ascribed to Forster's "liberal sympathies." Sympathies are possible, however, not because individuals can "have them", but because a certain formation of statements (necessarily invested with power), allows them to be said or articulated from certain subject-positions which, again, only that discursive formation makes available. Passage's embeddedness in colonial discourse derives not from its author's sympathy/antipathy with colonialism but from its insertion into the discursive formation of (Orientalist, elitist) statements that ultimately serve the strategic purpose of the dominant power. Consequently, this embeddedness is much more pervasive, covering a great deal more of ideological ground, than the parallels between Passage and "history" that Prof. G.K. Das has meticulously drawn in his E.M. Forster's India. I might add that the recuperation of traces in Passage of actual moments in the history of the British colonial occupation of India is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Much of the traditional critical investment in Passage derives of course from the text's status as the final stop in a rather unprolific novel-writing career. Passage is thus often read for indications of a crisis in the personal beliefs of its author, or, obversely, a crisis in "history" that supposedly drove those beliefs into limbo, resulting in creative infertility. Frederick Crews, for instance, believes that Forster's experiences in India brought about a crisis in his humanism (p. 180). But, whatever purpose the critical rubrics, "Forster and India (or Indian Nationalism)" and "Forster and Hinduism" might have served in the past in the form of supplements to Forster's biography, both rubrics ultimately function within an elitist framework that narrativizes the national movement from the point of view of the elite nationalist leadership, and that regards "Hinduism" and (in a pernicious elision) "India-as-Hindu" as self-evident markers of a fixed and unchangeable set of metaphysical propositions. The latter tendency to fix Hinduism in terms of its dominant traditions, is a symptom of the latent Orientalism that underlies much Passage-related speculation on Hinduism and its metaphysics. Niradh C. Chaudhary's "Passage to and From India" is just one egregious instance of the elitism that mars the liberal-humanist aegis under which Passage-criticism has traditionally worked. For Chaudhary, the Indians (such as Aziz) in Passage are not

"nationalist" enough (p. 20) and the Hindus (such as Godbole), not "Hindu" enough (p. 21). Chaudhari leaves out from his framework an entire sphere of subaltern activity in the text that interrupts the larger narratives of nationalism and Hindu "thought" that critics of Passage often adopt. If, therefore, Forster and the critics of Passage occupy a (roughly) "liberal-Orientalist-nationalist" subject-position from which they read the text, my own subject-position is that of a critic attempting to read the text as, in Spivak's terms, a means of locating "the agency of change...in the insurgent or 'subaltern' [crowd]" (p. 330).

My attempt to retrieve the effect of subaltern-agency from Forster's text is naturally indebted to the work of the Subaltern school of Indian historians. I believe that their critical methods and concerns are extremely relevant to radical scholarship in English Studies, even more so because traditional criticism (especially that of canonical texts of "English Literature" such as Passage) shares some of the elitism of colonialist-nationalist historiography, which is the main focus of the Subaltern critique. This isomorphism between these literary-critical and historiographic traditions makes it vitally important that a fruitful give-and-take should transpire in radical scholarship between the separate fields of literature and history.

There is further justification for this in the textual approach that the Subaltern historians adopt toward the historical archive. This approach effectively reverses the naive belief in the "factual" nature of the historical archive that is prevalant in traditional historiography. The Subaltern historians find textual methods useful because the latter highlight the overdetermined nature of the archival material they deal with, the extent to which it is replete with, in Edward Said's words, "gaps, absences, lapses, ellipses, all of them symbolic of the truths that historical writing is after all writing and not reality, and that as subalterns their history as well as their documents are necessarily in the hands of others, the Indian elite and the British colonizers who ran, as well as wrote the history of, India" ("Foreword", p. vii).

In this respect a fruitful parallel can be drawn with the overdetermined nature of the literary text. As Pierre Macharey puts it, a literary text is "materially incomplete, disparate and diffuse from being the outcome of the conflicting contradictory effect of superimposing real processes which cannot be abolished in it except in an imaginary way" (p. 88). In this sense, the literary text shares with the historiographic "text" the symbolic ideological function of resolving contradictions through imaginary resolutions. One measure of this, as Guha

suggests, is that while dominant historiography has been "content to deal with the peasant rebel merely as an empirical person or a member of a class...not as an entity whose will and reason constituted the praxis called rebellion", the traces of that "will" and "rebellion" are usually either "dyed into most narratives by metaphors assimilating peasant revolts to natural phenomena [thunderstorms, earthquakes, wildfires, epidemics]" or assimilated to explanations which project on to the subaltern an "identity of nature and culture, a hall-mark, presumably, of a very low state of civilisation [<u>wild</u> tribes etc.]" ("Prose", p. 46). Such resolutions on the linguistic (metaphoric) and cultural level have the effect of reducing the urgent historical reality or "sub-text" of subalternity to "cuts, seams and stitches...cobbling marks" in the grand "text" or narrative of colonial and nationalist historiography (p. 47). The most pernicious outcome of this is to encourage the illusion that not only did the "sub-text" never exist but that, where it finds token mention in the dominant discourse, the latter itself gave rise to it. Hence, the Subaltern critique of traditional historiographic attempts to assimilate peasant politics to the nationalist stage. Fredric Jameson's formulation of ideological analysis in terms of the literary text could apply equally well to the nature of this Subaltern intervention: ideological analysis is the "rewriting of

the literary [or, one might add historiographic] text in such a way that [that] may itself be grasped as the rewriting or restructuration of the prior ideological subtext, provided it is understood that the latter -- what we used to call the "context" -- must always be (re)constructed after the fact, for the purposes of analysis" ("Symbolic Inference", p. 141).

My attempt to read in the margins of Passage what has been obscured by the dominant critical paradigms of Passage-criticism is homologous to the Subaltern re-reading of the historiographic text in terms of what can be found in the margins of that text. Moreover, it is necessarily attended by the methodological inflections inherent in such interdisciplinary transactions. The "effect" of collective consciousness that I will attempt to recuperate from Passage, manifests itself, as I have mentioned above, in the activities of the crowds at Chandrapore and at Mau. In Chapter One, I will investigate rumour's potential to mobilise collective memory for the articulation of a critique of the institution the "rule of law." This articulation, working within the dominant idioms of "Hinduism"'s allegoric mode and the positivism of the law, is produced in rumour's characteristically skewed register. Rumour, I will show, works through metonymy and is thus ideal for the transmission of insurgent consciousness. In Chapter Two, I will read

the discourse of Bhakti in Passage for traces of Orientalism, while demonstrating how dominant critical readings of the text reproduce this construction of Bhakti. I will attempt to demonstrate how the symbolic landscape of India in Passage provides symbolic resolutions to the dilemma of a colonising community torn between the historical necessity of retreat and the need to reassert its self-appointed historical role as India's "natural" ruler. I will attempt to reinterpret the ritual celebrations at Mau in the Temple section of the text as an instance of collective mobilisation that rehearses the possibility of collective action in the future. Finally, I will argue that a dialogue between disciplines would be a useful way of reassessing the relevance of English literature in the light of our contemporary concerns.

CHAPTER ONE

"ADELA'S LIES": RUMOUR, NARRATIVITY AND THE CRITIQUE OF COLONIAL LEGALITY

> 'A pity there is this rumour, but such a very small pity - so small that we may as well talk of something else.'
>
> -Fielding. (PI, p. 266.)

At one point in the festivities after Aziz's acquittal, the dangers inherent in mass unrest come as a flash of realization to a prominent figure in the native elite:

> [The Nawab Bahadur] knew that nothing was gained by attacking the English, who had fallen into their own pit and had better be left there, moreover, he had great possessions and deprecated anarchy...When they reached the Maidan and the sallow arcades of the Minto they shambled towards it howling...The earth and sky were insanely ugly, the spirit of evil again strode abroad. [He] alone struggled against [the rumour that Nureddin had been tortured by Callendar], and told himself that [it] must be

untrue. (PI, p. 228-229.)

Such apprehensions of imminent mass unrest are especially vivid for the dominant sectors of society such as the native elites and the colonising community who have, like the Nawab Bahadur, much to lose by such crises. And anxiety about the rebelliousness of unruly crowds is of course not unusual in situations were the colonial state perceives itself to be beleaguered and under the press of unforeseen circumstances. That such fears should come to rest on a discursive transmitter of insurgency such as rumour, is a measure of the subversive potential that the latter is especially equipped to realize. Rumours often stretch to the limits of the credible the supposed deviousness and malignity of the enemy. On the other hand, they can also exaggerate the threat to the dominant power and create a general state of panic in the colonising community. At the same time, as the subaltern historian Ranajit Guha has shown, rumours can employ religious motifs that amplify the prowess and prescience of insurgent leaders and thus generate mass mobilisation under the guise of cult-worship, while also raising the pitch of popular ire by stringing together omens and other motifs of divine retribution, or just simply circulating untrue reports (Elementary Aspects, pp. 251-277). Rumours thus accentuate the gulf between the warring blocs (subaltern groups and the representa-

tives of the colonial state) in a politically efficacious way (in Passage there is a more serio-comic register of such anxieties relating to rumour:"as always, an Indian close outside [Ronny's] window, a mali in this case, picking up sounds", PI, p. 197). Apart from its mobilising potential, however, rumour is useful in another crucial sense. In times of crisis, rumours serve also as modes of "popular memory" or narrativity, which Paul Ricoeur defines in a slightly different, hermeneutic, context, as a form of "human community [that]...is not confined to the individual" (p. 20) and that determines "what is to be 'preserved' and rendered 'permanent' in a culture's sense of its own 'identity'" (p. 18). One important way in which rumours actively intervene in popular memory is by translating popular grievances against the structures installed by the colonial state, such as the institution of the courtroom I will focus on in this chapter, into outright protest. Serving as a bridge between the everyday world (often marked by compromise and quietude) and moments of crisis, rumours link up two phases of collective political self-cognition (however inchoate and only half "true" that may be). In this chapter I want to look at the "work" of rumour in Passage in both these aspects of mobilisation and narrativity.

The courtroom was of course a familiar fixture of life in colonial times, affecting every sector of colo-

nial society, subordinate or elite, in a very immediate way. <u>Passage</u> provides us with some idea of the extent to which colonial legality had reached into the farthest corners of colonial society: "[The Nawab Bahadur] had spoken in a little room near the Courts where the pleaders waited for clients; clients, waiting for pleaders, sat in the dust outside...there were circles even beyond these - people who wore nothing but a loincloth, people who wore not even that, and spent their lives knocking two sticks together before a scarlet doll - humanity grading and drifting beyond the educated vision..." (PI, p. 39). But colonial legality was based on an avowedly egalitarian principle of the "rule of law" that was in reality fundamentally incompatible with the unequal conditions (the gulf between the powers and privileges of the colonisers and those of the colonised) that governed colonial society. The colonial period in India's history affords many instances where the flaws and fissures in the system of the "rule of law" provoked popular protest, if not upheaval.

The contradictions of the "rule of law" are to a great extent traceable to liberal ideology. Liberalism after all provided colonial rule with its meliorative face and generated the institutions of the state (such as the judiciary, the police, the civil service etc.) on the basis of the plea that the general peace

and welfare of its subjects needed to be ensured against anarchy. The "rule of law", therefore, necessarily partook of the ambivalences inherent in the bedrock of liberal ideology on which it rested. These ambivalences in turn stemmed from liberalism's core ideological component, individualism. In his recent account of liberal thought, Stuart Hall defines individualism as a "conception of the world premised on the sovereign individual", whose "concrete characteristics and attributes" are said to be "endowed by Nature and essential to...human nature" (pp. 39-40). It is often overlooked in common sense accounts that individualism enjoys a basic hierarchical precedence over other core conceptions of liberal ideology such as liberty and equality. As Hall points out, liberal individualism defines liberty negatively as "freedom from constraint", and assigns equality a "subordinate value...primarily that all individuals are equal because they are born with the same rights." Consequently, it privileges liberty over equality, giving rise to a fundamental tension. Within liberal thought "equality" does not refer to equality of means, whereby "those who start from a poorer position should be positively advantaged [to] compete on equal terms", but is defined individualistically as an equal chance to "enter the competitive struggle" (i.e., as the freedom to compete in a free market). The dis-parity between liberty and equality,

that lies beneath their apparent co-articulation within liberal discourse, provides an instance of how liberal ideology "squares its circles" or "bridge[s] the difficult transitions between contradictory ideas" (p. 41).

Partha Chatterjee provides us with another way of looking at liberalism's "inherently inegalitarian position" on liberty (Hall, p. 41), with his useful distinction between the stock concepts of an ideology that can always be drawn upon for "proof", and the specific conceptual "claims" that that ideology makes at a particular historical conjuncture (Nationalist Thought, pp 38-40). Accordingly, the individualist "claim" that "all men are equal" is annulled, even as it is vouchsafed, by the "proof" that, to be equal, men must merely be "equally free to compete." By excluding women, the poor and racial others from its purview, the liberal "claim" of equality reveals itself as an abstraction from actual social conditions. In fact, one might argue that liberalism has been marred by these exclusions ever since its inception. Cora Kaplan, for instance, has shown how Rousseau and Thomas Jefferson, who were the architects of the conceptual basis of republican freedom, nonetheless "specifically exempted women [and, in the latter's case,] blacks" from their "construction of a virtuous citizen subject for a brave new egalitarian world" (Kaplan, p. 150). But if, as in the case of liberalism,

no ideology is ever wholly consistent, the incompatible and contradictory positions it offers to subjects already split across a range of discourses often have the potentially liberatory effect of propelling "concrete individuals" toward transformative alternatives, and "new non-contradictory subject-positions", as Catherine Belsey describes them (p. 65). This is at least one (but not, of course, the only) reason why critiques of patriarchy, ethnocentrism and class society continue to be produced despite the ever-present threat of repression.

Coloniality raised the stakes on liberal rhetoric even as the liberal institutions that, according to nationalist and colonial historiography, gave birth to "modern India", were internally rent by a basic ambivalence toward the question of equality. I am not implying, of course, that in the pragmatic sphere such rhetoric was ever employed, much less adhered to. What is more crucial is to note that the critique of the essentially inegalitarian nature of the "rule of law" could only have emerged from those classes who were most obviously dispossessed of their rights by it. In contrast to what nationalist historiography tells us, it is not the elite leadership but the subaltern classes who are especially privileged to become the agents of such a critique and I want to stress here the extent to which this site of popular critique lies outside the elite

arena of nationalist struggle. As Guha reminds us, such critiques can only come from "outside the universe of dominance which provides the critique with its object, indeed from another and historically antagonistic universe" ("Dominance", p. 220; underscored in the original).

Since the effective critique of the dominant can only emerge from the marginal, the crowd in Passage that gathers after Aziz's trial to celebrate his acquittal, is a privileged carrier of critique. Laying claim to the bazaars, traditionally the loci of gossip, rumour and "lies", and, for the state, always hot-beds of rebellious propensities, the crowd fans out in different directions in a vengeful mood of general discontent and anger, which are of course ideal conditions both for the proliferation of rumour and its potential for mobilisation. What is notable in this instance of the rumour-process at work is the extent to which it condenses into one single moment of narrativity a whole prior history of popular discontent. In this sense the actions of the crowd are necessarily culminative effects of what has been simmering for too long beneath the civil surface of everyday life.

With Aziz's arrest on a charge of attempted rape, Indian rebelliousness against colonial rule finds a rallying cause. Anti-colonial feeling heightens in the

interval leading up to the trial ("the temper of Chandrapore was altering", much to Ronny's dismay, PI, p. 208). For instance, Adela, now recovered, learns of a riot during Moharram, when "the great procession left its official route, and tried to enter the civil station" (PI, p. 191). Fielding's students boycott classes (PI, p. 192). Driving up to the courtroom on the day of the trial, "there was a tap of silly anger" on the collector's car, "a pebble thrown by a child" (PI, p. 208). Two mutinies break out, seemingly minor, "nevertheless...disquieting" (PI, p. 209). The sweepers of Chandrapore's commodes strike work, and Muslim women eschew food (PI, p. 209). Turton's car needs to be escorted to the City Magistrate's Court, where it is compelled to use the rear entrance, "students [having] gathered in front" (PI, p. 209). Children, women and sweepers function as conduits of an insurgent consciousness that makes no distinction between different sectors of subalternity. Its flexibility and its ability to chart a domain of <u>collective</u>, as opposed to <u>individual</u>, intention, is precisely what makes the notion of "subalternity" itself so fruitful for narrativising moments of crisis and inversion.

The trial and its aftermath crystallize this sense of outrage, which finds its register of protest in the actions of the crowd, and its articulation through

rumour. During the trial, the gathering inside the courtroom, and the crowd outside, function as a single medium for the circulation of rumour. An event within the courtroom instantly evokes a response without ("the news of [the] humiliation [of the English who had to abdicate their platform on Das's orders] spread quickly and people jeered outside" (PI, p. 216). The initial rumours are still firmly within the "incantatory" address (defined below) of "Hinduism" : "The tumult increased, the invocation of Mrs Moore continued, and people who did not know what the syllables meant repeated them like a charm. They became Indianized into Esmiss Esmoor, they were taken up in the street outside" (PI, p. 219, emphasis added).

Subsequently the process comes to a head. In the aftermath of the trial crowds block the bazaars, compelling the English to gain "the civil station by by-ways", caught as they are "like caterpillars" that can be killed off easily", (PI, p. 226); and the crowd, in Fielding's words, catches "'flame'" (PI, p. 245). The incendiary metaphor gives some indication of the apparent fickleness and "confusion" (PI, p. 226) of the crowd, its "aimless[ness]" ("lacking [in] grievance") swiftly "lashed...to fury" (PI, p. 229), and its wayward course toward "friends, to enemies, to Aziz's bungalow, to the collector's bungalow, to the Minto hospital where

the Civil Surgeon would eat dust and the patients (confused with prisoners) be released, to Delhi, Simla" (PI, p. 227). This chaotic state of affairs is in fact ideal ground for rumour's own wayward generation of meaning. The "Esmiss Esmoor" chants, already meaningful, provide an instance of this, since they reflect the crowd's desire for an ally (Mrs Moore) amidst the forbidding and potent enemy (the English) equipped with a repressive state apparatus (McBryde's police). Such wishful thinking is possible despite the likelihood, given the chaotic and frenzied state of things, of <u>confusing</u> the ally with the enemy: "some addressed [Adela] as Mrs Moore!", (PI, p. 227).

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Adela herself is "so loathed in Chandrapore that her recantation was discredited, and the rumour ran that she had been stricken by the Deity in the middle of her lies" (PI, p. 226). This rumour condenses a chain of associations fuelled by the crowd's "collective mentality", as the historian Lucien Lefebvre has called it. It sustains the marshalling power of popular narrative at the same time as it serves as a popular "reading" of the trial. The rumour implicates Adela for her falsehood ("her lies") and hence exonerates Aziz, <u>fixes</u> her as <u>essentially</u> deceitful ("her recantation was discredited") and therefore impervious to remorse, and, given the formidable juridical and policing apparatus of

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the state, solicits divine aid and retribution within the framework of a divinely ordered scheme of justice ("stricken by the Deity in the middle of her lies"). This recourse to deus ex machina implies a fundamental dissatisfaction with the colonial institution of the "rule of law." The crowd's "reading" of the trial centres on the notion of "lies." It follows a pattern of successive inference. The crowd begins by "arguing" that the law rests, supposedly, on the dictum that "all men are equal" before it. But, if an Englishwoman's "lies" have greater weight with the law than an Indian's innocence, it would appear that "all men are NOT equal" before the law, that some (the English) are more equal than the others (the Indians). The crowd then reaches the conclusion that the institution of the lawcourt rests on "lies", which is justification enough for the intervention of the Deity.

The notion of "lies" is an index of another way in which rumour engenders and disseminates narrativity. The "rule of law", and indeed liberalism itself, rest on the primacy of the reasoning faculty. And rationalism is the instrumental criterion that underlies the juridical privileging of "evidence" (or "fact") as a means of ascertaining a particular variety of "truth." It is a fruitful paradox that what the court should take for the "truth", is, for the crowd, essentially mendacious in an

almost primal way, so much so that it merits insertion into a scheme of divine retribution. This rather different order of (collective) rationality is incommensurable with the positivism of the law and proves that, again, a definite critique of the dominant can issue forth only from an epistemic site that is necessarily extraneous to the ideology of the dominant (to return to Guha's words: from another "historically antagonistic [epistemic] universe").

Nor do the legal arrangements in Passage bear out the crowd "interpretation." Aziz is after all allowed to organise a defence, and Das has "to listen to the evidence" and try to "forget that later on he should have to pronounce a verdict in accordance with it" (PI, p. 216). Moreover, Aziz does have the right to appeal: "there was bound to be an appeal. The Nawab Bahadur had financed the defence, and would ruin himself sooner than let an 'innocent Muslim perish', and other interests less reputable, were in the background, too. The case might go up from court to court..." (PI, p. 208). The crowd actually reads into the trial a grievance related to an earlier phase in the evolution of the colonial lawcourt, when "an Englishwoman would not have had to discuss her private affairs. She would have made her deposition and judgement would have followed" (PI, p. 191); in the trial Adela has "to appear in court, iden-

tify the prisoner, and submit to cross-examination by an Indian lawyer" (PI, p. 191). The crowd's reversion to an older grievance in the history of native responses to the colonial law-court can perhaps be explained by a unique feature which Gramsci has noted of the "spontaneous philosophy" of "common sense" that motivates subaltern activity in general. This "spontaneous philosophy" often consists of (among other things) "prejudices from all past phases of history at the local level" (cited in Hall et al., "Recent Developments", pp. 265-266). As the reference to Das's having to try and "forget that later on he should have to pronounce a verdict in accordance with [the evidence]" suggests, the contradictory pressures on the "rule of law" have grown subtler.

> 'My Das is all right,' said Ronny, starting a new subject in low tones.
>
> 'Not one of them's all right,' contradicted Major Callender.
>
> 'Das is, really.'
>
> 'You mean he's more frightened of acquitting than convicting, because if he acquits he'll lose his job,' said Lesley with a clever little laugh.
>
> Ronny did mean that, but he cherished illusions about his own subordinates...(PI, p. 210.)

In fact the crowd-interpretation falls short of recognizing a basic inconsistency in the discourse of

colonial legality, which is alluded to in Mahmoud Ali's expostulatory speech to Das: "I am not defending a case, nor are you trying one. We are both of us slaves....this trial is a farce..." (PI, pp. 218-219). The "rule of law" rests in the final analysis on a "legalistic conception of equality" that is itself a product, Stuart Hall says, of liberalism's "negative conception" of liberty as "freedom from constraint" (p. 41). The "rule of law" recognizes only a "formal" equality, by virtue of which it has nothing to say about "substantive" equality, "the deeply unequal condition of those who appear before it" (p. 42). Liberal thought denies any ameliorative content to law; the law exists simply to secure the contracts, indeed is itself the product of a social contract, which sovereign individuals make freely with each other, to protect "the individual's rights, liberty, and property" (p. 42).

The deep-set rifts in the discourse of the "rule of law" only grow wider in the colonial situation. The colonised subject, pressured to constitute him/herself as a legal subject, asks: if the legal system is contracted between sovereign and free individuals (as liberalism postulates), how can the colonial institution of the "rule of law", in the making of which the colonised subject has had no say, claim to represent equally a society whose members are fundamentally un-

equal? The gaps between liberal "claims" for an egalitarian "rule of law", and the contradictory "proofs" educed to buttress those claims, show up flagrantly in the alien and arbitrary legal structures put up by the colonial state. As Bhabha puts it, "in 'normalizing' the colonial state or subject, the dream of post-Enlightenment civility alienates its own language of liberty and produces another knowledge of its norms" ("Of Mimicry and Man", p. 199).

How does rumour negotiate the "truth" of this alienation that lies at the heart of colonialist discourse? The answer must lie with the rumour-process itself. The discourse of rumour irrupts in the spaces between Passage's privileged discourses, and as such is what Bhabha calls "a discourse uttered between the lines...both against the rules and within them" ("Of Mimicry and Man" p. 202). Of necessity, therefore, it does not belong to the positivistic discourse of the court, which is required to try and discover the answers to Fielding's persistent questions (repeatedly put to Adela after the trial during the course of their "numerous curious conversations", PI, p. 232) : "What miscreant lurked in [the caves], presently to be detected by the activities of the law? Who was the guide, and had he been found yet? What was the "echo" of which the girl complained? He did not know but presently he would know.

Great is information, and she shall prevail" (PI, p. 186). Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak has described rumour as fundamentally "illegitimate" because of its "primordially...errant" nature and its lack of an "assignable source" or truth-*value* (p. 354). It is this characteristic illegitimacy of rumour which produces an-other rationality, an "errant" rationality, that which has no source apart from the general narrativity of popular memory.

Nor does rumour belong to the discourse that constantly ironizes Fielding's positivism, viz, "Hinduism." Every ideology has its mode of address with which it interpellates its subjects, and "Hinduism"'s consists of certain norms of behaviour. In other words, the constitution of the subject of Hinduism takes place through certain characteristic modes of (re)cognition. These can be listed as reticence ("'It will be a great pleasure.' He forewent the pleasure..." PI, p. 74), minimalism ("'There is an entrance in the rock which you enter, and through the entrance is the cave'", PI, p. 74), implication ("'Never be angry with me. I am, as far as my limitations permit, your true friend', PI, p. 300) and incantation ("'Come, come, come, come, come, come'", PI, p. 78). A crucial distinction needs to be made, however, between incantation and rumour. This can be inferred from a similar contrast Guha has drawn

between chain-mail letters and omens in order to demonstrate the greater efficacy of the latter in times of upheaval (Elementary Aspects, pp. 245-246). Albeit non-graphic, incantation is, like the chain-mail letter, fixed and unalterable, with its "meaning firmly tied to the text", and its relay in toto from one individual to another (p. 246). Moreover, incantation is essentially an individual form of religiosity, with its use-value highly dependant on context (for instance, sacralisation, exorcism, etc.). Rumour is on the other hand marked by the "vague and indefinite" character of its "message [which] keeps it wide open to various degrees of semantic modification at each point of its passage between communicators" (p. 246). Of course, rumour is instrumental during times of insurgency precisely because it is a public and collective mode of what Guha calls "transmission."

If, therefore, the court is "the place of question" (PI, p. 222) and, as one might infer from Passage, "Hinduism" the place of (promised) answer, rumour both questions and answers, drawing eclectically from the languages of law and transcendence. Between the positivistic privileging of "facts", and "Hinduism"'s prefer ence for allegory (since it constantly alludes to, but never specifies, its "truths"), rumour intervenes as an open "text," freely interpretable and subject to shift-

ing authorship, even as it strategically borrows its symbology from "Hinduism."

At the same time, rumour needs to be contrasted with <u>Passage</u>'s privileged mode of metonymy, echo ("echoes generate echoes", PI, p. 145). Briefly, one might say that the role of echo in <u>Passage</u> is confined to the articulation of nostalgia, a crucial but barely perceptible undercurrent that runs through the text. A great chunk of the thematic of Islam in the text can be seen as a site of displacement for (colonialist) nostalgia for the bygone days of imperial (Mughal/British) glory. There is considerable justification in arguing that Aziz's nostalgic "'gone, gone'" (PI, p. 262) is counterpointed by Godbole's utopian "'come, come'." But, as the narratologist A.J. Greimas points out, "nostalgia" always implies, among other things, repentance (or "desire for expiation and reparation"), which is really a "regret for having done" something (p. 173). The only explicit instance of this aspect of nostalgia in the text is Mrs Moore's yearning for "one touch of regret - not the canny substitute but the true regret from the heart - [which] would have made [Ronny] a different man, and the British empire a different institution" (PI, p. 50). The connection between "repentance" and echo is made, finally, by Fielding: "In the old eighteenth century, when cruelty and injustice raged, an invisible

power repaired their ravages. Everything echoes now. There's no stopping the echo. The original sound may be harmless, but the echo is always evil" (PI, p. 269). But this uneasy recognition of the true nature of colonialism is quickly dissolved (as is the irreducible "ou-boum" of the caves) into the triumphal "om" of "Hinduism", and the succeeding lines slowly chart the way to a resolution of (what appears to be) an internal conflict: "This reflection about an echo lay at the verge of Fielding's mind. He could never develop it. It belonged to the universe that he had missed or rejected. And the mosque missed it too" (PI, p. 269). A few lines later the resolution is complete: "There may be something in religion [Fielding says to Aziz] that may not be true but has not yet been sung...something perhaps that the Hindus have found" (PI, p. 270).

Rumour thus conducts what can be called a "relay" between the discourses that constituted the colonial subject in colonial times. Rumour is after all a metonymic process which brings about, according to David Lodge, "condensations of contextures" (p. 76). In other words, if one looks at subalternity as a social condition which is constituted by heterogeneous sign-systems (such as the law, religiosity, etc.), and subaltern resistance as essentially a disruption in the linkages between these sign-systems (see Spivak, p. 332), ru-

mour's task is to subversively relink together these sign-systems in a strategic and meaningful way. Hence the radical "break" with the old "linkage" which the crowd-interpretation embodies. This is in fact an epistemic "shift" with which rumour exceeds, as I have suggested, the dominant sign-systems of _Passage_. In this sense, rumour is the discourse of marginality _par excellence_.

It is important to note that rumour's collective mode of articulation is very different from "Hinduism"'s in the individualistic avatar it sometimes took in Orientalist readings (Forster calls one of his essays on Hinduism, "The Individual and his God"). It also differs from the juridical notion of the autonomous "subject" who conscientiously provides the "facts" of a case. Rumour exceeds, as I have said, the individual "intentions" of its multiple carriers (who re-write, even as they transmit, it). In the next chapter, I will discuss another collective mode of praxis, viz., the ritual practice of Bhakti. I will attempt to show how the pragmatic moment of collective consciousness that the practice of Bhakti generates cannot be subsumed within the larger discourse of Bhakti that the text foregrounds and which traditional readings of the text promote. I am aware of course of the diversity of practices within the popular tradition of Bhakti itself, and especially the

interface with Sufism that was involved in that tradition, as well as the extent to which the communal amity that this tradition promoted was not something prescribed by the dominant power but served instead as a communal ethic. I have tried to give some indication of such specificities by moving from the larger rubric of "Hinduism" used in this chapter (which receives, as I have shown, a great deal of textual investment in Passage) to the narrower rubric of Bhakti (which has both an elite and a popular dimension) in the next chapter.

CHAPTER Two

"WRATH OR JOY": RITUAL, RESISTANCE, AND THE LIMINAL SUBJECT OF BHAKTI

Religions are in fact ideologically flexible and open to historical change.

- Samir Amin. (*Eurocentrism*, p. 83.)

A Passage to India has often been noted for its use of Bhakti as a liberal-humanist trope for the possible coming together of disparate cultures and peoples through universal "love" and a spirit of "completeness [if] not reconstruction" (PI, pp. 283, 282). In *Passage*, Bhakti serves to fulfil on a utopian plane a central thematic in Forster-criticism: the liberal-humanist quest for social, psycho-spiritual and metaphysical "connection." Yet there is one specific area *within* Bhakti which remains marginal to the text's deployment of the latter as its dominant problematic. This is the domain of popular belief and practice, which can often transmute Bhakti into, using Gramsci's words, one of the "pillars of politics and of...collective action" (cited in Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, p. 12). Religions are, after all, both ensembles of concepts, and, in their pragmatic aspect, forms of conduct and

community in the everyday world. They cannot, therefore, be abstracted from the lived material practices of popular belief, an arena of contentious traditions which radical critics, historians and anthropologists have of late begun to reassess. A major theoretical influence in this respect has been the work of the Subaltern school of Indian historians (consisting of, among others, Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee and Sumit Sarkar) who have sought to understand how subaltern resistance often works <u>within</u> the hegemonic discourses of elite religion and culture to articulate forms of protest that strategically reverse dominant paradigms at specific moments in history. In this chapter I want to focus my attention on a moment of collective consciousness during the ritual practice of Bhakti (in the Temple section of the novel) that does not find a place in <u>Passage</u>'s elite registers of Bhakti's philosophical and ethical burden.

This elite framework generates two basic representations of Bhakti in the text: an essentialist version of Bhakti's divisive social dimension (Hinduism "riven into sects", PI, p. 288); and an Orientalist version of Bhakti's universalist dimension. Bhakti's privileged role (in its universalist aspect) as the ultimate sanction for <u>Passage</u>'s network of meanings is suggested, for example, by the instances of aphorism in the text ; and

from the text's "unifying" string of motifs. The syntax of aphorisms such as "'absence implies presence'" (PI, p. 175) and "He is, was not, is not, was" (PI, p. 279), implies a logical progression from "absence" to "presence." Passage's pervasive idiom of Bhakti translates this gnomic idea into ritual, where the constantly foregrounded ecstatic "appeal[s]" (PI, p. 135) to "come", mediate between a perceived "absence" in this world, and the possibility of "presence" (the Deity, Krishna, God) in another world, or in the future. Bhakti is thus installed as the horizon of every kind of "absence" in the text, especially of what Mrs Moore perceives as the terrifying valuelessness of the caves ("nothing has value", PI, p. 147).

My second example is derived from the text by means of a reading technique with which I am uncomfortable, since it is mostly employed as a guarantee of a literary work's "unifying rhythm" and "pattern" (see Schwarz, pp. 55-57; Forster, Aspects). But it remains effective as a means of identifying a text's privileged repertoire of motifs. Accordingly, one might draw a connection between the bird that Ronnie and Adela are ill-suited to "label" at the polo ground ("some Indian wild bird", PI, p. 82), Godbole's bird-like song ("It was the song of an unknown bird", PI, p. 77) and the "passing birds" that pronounce the caves as "extraordi-

nary" (PI, p.124) -- all of which constitute an intra-textual web foregrounded by the text, most explicitly during the Gokul Ashtami festivities where

> all men, the whole universe, and scraps of their past, tiny splinters of detail, emerged for a moment to melt into the universal warmth...Infinite Love took upon itself the form of SHRI KRISHNA, and saved 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. (PI, pp. 281, 283; emphasis added.)

It should be evident from this that the discourse of Bhakti is the focus of textual investment in Passage. In fact, Bhakti assumes in Passage the form of what Dave Morley calls a privileged "discursive position" that is inscribed in a text and serves to ensure the "natural[ness]" of its dominant discourses and their reproduction in criticism in the form of "preferred readings" (p. 167). Critical adherence to these embedded readings results in the formation of critical orthodoxies, with all the exclusions and obfuscations that the latter involve. And Passage too is subject to the interpretive straitjackets imposed by its critical "heritage."

The traditional account of Mrs Moore is a classic instance of this. Because of their adherence to the dominant discourse of the text, and their belief in "Hinduism"'s salutary questioning of Western norms, values and varieties of belief, critics of Passage invariably stress the despair and existential crises of characters like Mrs Moore. But this is at the cost of ignoring, if not completely obscuring, the disorienting encounter with coloniality that such characters mediate. One particularly pernicious fall-out of this is that Mrs Moore is often bracketed with Mrs Wilcox of Howards End. This comparison is sometimes effected by way of contrast: "[Mrs Wilcox] is far more impressive than the easily befuddled Mrs Moore", Alfred Kazin remarks (p. 36). For critics, Mrs Moore's posthumous deification is a sign of her innate affinity with "India" and "Hinduism" ("At one period two distinct tombs containing Esmiss Esmoor's remains were reported...the beginnings of a cult",PI, pp. 249-250; "Aziz...knew with his heart that this was Mrs Moore's son...'Radhakrishna Radhakrishna Radhakrishna Radhakrishna Krishnaradha,' went the chant, then suddenly changed, and in the interstice he heard, almost certainly, the syllables of salvation that had sounded during his trial at Chandrapore", PI, p. 308).

For most critics, Mrs Moore's deep "intuitiveness", enabling her to remain critical of the colonial-

ist attitudes of the Anglo-Indians in the novel, presumably validates the parallel with Mrs Wilcox. But this kind of approach overlooks some crucial dissimilarities between the two. In Howards End, Mrs Wilcox is the focus of an implied, unarticulated critique of "the frantic striving for property and position so central to [the Wilcoxes]", and embodies "natural inheritance, not the solicited kind...the transmission of spirit...a truth that cannot be put into words" (Kazin, p. 36). She belongs integrally to the English countryside, "descended [as she is] from the yeoman class" (Trilling, p. 119), and assumes naturally the role of a genius loci, symbol of the spirit of Howards End.

Mrs Moore is on the other hand displaced from the mother country and propelled into an encounter with "the radical otherness of colonial life", as Jameson has called it, of which "holistic knowledge" had always been "lacking in...national literature", since it was mostly relegated to the "noncanonical adventure literature of imperialism" ("Modernism and Imperialism", pp. 49-51). In the colony the insulated life of the civil station cushions the effect of arriving in a strange new world torn apart by mutual distrust and suspicion between coloniser and colonised. But Mrs Moore soon strays beyond her "appropriate" space (PI, p. 25) by meeting Aziz in the mosque, initiating the series of such transgressions that culminate in her "adventure" at the

Caves ("'Adventures do happen, but not punctually'", PI, p. 25). Lionel Trilling describes the consequences of this adventure in the starkest terms, and his account conveys, despite his own rather different problematic of "death", at least some idea of the alien and horrific nature of an historical predicament that has (for Mrs Moore) no prior precedent:

> Panic and emptiness -- Mrs Moore's panic had been at the emptiness of the universe. And one goes back beyond Helen Schlegel's experience of the Fifth Symphony in Howards End: the negating mess of the caves reminds us of and utterly denies the mess of that room in which Caroline Abbott saw Gino with his child [in Where Angels Fear to Tread, p. 123]. For then the mess had been the source of life and hope, and in it the little child had blossomed; Caroline had looked into it from the "charnel chamber of the reception room and the "light in it was soft and large, as from some gracious, noble opening." It is, one might say, a representation of the womb and the promise of life. There is also a child in the Marabar cave -- for the vile, naked thing" that settles "like a pad" on Mrs Moore's mouth is "a poor little baby, astride its mother's hip" [PI, pp. 145-146]. The cave's opening is behind Mrs Moore, she is facing into the grave;

> light from the world does not enter, and the universe of death makes all alike, even life and death, even good and evil. (_E.M. Forster_, p. 157.)

The radically different quality of Mrs Moore's encounter proves that she exceeds the internal limits of metropolitan culture, for which Italy and Greece mark marginal sites from where a critique can be made of life in the metropolis. Elderly tourists such as Miss Raby (in "The Eternal Moment") and Mr Lucas (in "The Road From Colonus") stray away like Mrs Moore from the confining norms of English life, and Trilling is quite correct in drawing a comparison between them (pp. 40, 46; see Forster's _Collected Short Stories_). But, invoking neither the pristine "beauty" (Trilling, p. 40) of nature untouched by culture, as Miss Raby and Mr Lucas do in Italy and Greece, nor the passage of generations ("natural inheritance") like Mrs Wilcox, Mrs Moore goes on to respond to a different kind of reality: "I meet this young man in his mosque, I wanted him to be happy. Good, happy, small people. They do not exist, they were a dream...But I will not help you torture him for what he never did. There are different ways of evil and I prefer mine to yours" (PI, p. 200). This recognition of the consequences of colonial rule leads her to disparage colonial institutions: "I will have nothing to do with your ludicrous law courts" (PI, p. 196). One might

speculate that the reason for Mrs Moore's abrupt effacement from the plot (her death on board the ship to England) is a register of the extent to which she exceeds the text's privileged modes of cognition. As Mahmoud Ali seems to indicate: "[Mrs Moore] was imprisoned by you [at Aden] because she knew the truth" (PI, p. 218).

Passage-criticism, however, has traditionally assumed that there is a continuity between what Kenneth Burke calls Mrs Moore's "incipient acedia" (p. 230) and her posthumous incorporation via Godbole's ecstatic vision into, in Parry's words, the "affirmative stance" (Delusions, p. 303) of "Hinduism" ("he impelled her by his spiritual force to that place where completeness can be found", PI, p. 282). The underlying assumption is of course that spiritual alienation and ecstatic reconciliation necessarily imply each other in a negative relation (i.e., "not-cave" = "temple"). Here, again, the installment of Bhakti as the goal of the text's thematic of psycho-spiritual yearning, and the complicity of critical accounts with that thematic, comes to the fore. What are the political implications of this textual-critical investment that seeks to determine the ways in which Passage should be read? A widespread tendency in traditional literary criticism is to promote totalizing notions of religion. One outcome of a current

engagement in contemporary radical scholarship (exemplified in the work of Samir Amin) has been the problematization of the common-sense notion that religions form a fixed body of concepts and practices that remain unaltered in changing historical situations. Ronald Inden's critique of Indological efforts during the colonial period to construct and define India as "essentially" Hindu and Hinduism itself in terms of various notions of rationality, is a notable instance of this changed perspective (see _Imagining India_, pp. 85-130). It is a well-known fact that Forster and some of the more speculative critics of _Passage_, notably Parry and Wilfred Stone, derive their knowledge of "Hinduism" from works on Hinduism by E. B. Havell, Joseph Campbell and Heinrich Zimmer (for Forster's reading of Havell, see Stone, _Cave and the Mountain_, pp. 303). Inden's account of the latent Orientalism of the latter group of texts is instructive in more ways than one. Indeed, _Passage_, and its critical heritage -- for which this text has always been a remarkable instance of a liberal intellectual's (i.e., Forster's) attempt to "understand" a "civilisation" by making use of the "timeless" truths "inherent" in its religious traditions (viz, Hinduism) -- can be situated within this ideological grid of statements about India and its people. I need hardly add, after Edward Said's highly effective demonstration in _Orientalism_ of the relation, that such statements

intervene in a field of representations of the colonized other that are instrumental for colonial hegemony.

Let me illustrate this point by examining Benita Parry's essay, "The Politics of Representation in A Passage to India", a paradigmatic instance in Passage-criticism of an Orientalist reading of Bhakti. Parry's avowed purpose in the essay is to examine the "politics of the novel" in terms of the "system of textual practices by which the metropolitan culture exercised its domination over the subordinate periphery" (pp. 27-28). Hence, where previous critics privileged the text's "narrative content", and sought to read it from a standpoint of "empiricism tied to didacticism" as an "authentic potrayal of India and a humanist critique of British-Indian relations during the last decades of the Empire" (p. 27), Parry's project is to foreground the novel's "enuncia[tion]" of "a strange meeting from a position of political privilege" (p. 28). By drawing a relation between the text and colonial discourse, Parry is of course allying herself with a host of similar critiques of canonical and non-canonical texts, initiated, notably, by Said, whose call for "non-repressive and non-manipulative perspectives" on "other cultures and peoples" (Orientalism, p. 24) is invoked in the epigraph to the essay and in its closing lines. However, barely two paragraphs through the essay, Parry

effects a characteristic turnabout: "Yet to interpret [Passage] as an act of recolonisation which reproduces the dominant colonial discourse would be to ignore - egregiously - the text's heterogeneous modes and its complex dialogic structure...Only by wilfully suppressing its initiation of an oppositional discourse is it possible to insert [Passage] into the hegemonic tradition of British-Indian literature" (p. 28). It comes as a shock to realize that, in sharp contrast to anything Said might have attempted in his book, Parry actually recuperates the text's "heterogeneous modes", "complex dialogic structure" and "oppositional discourse" not, as one might have assumed, from the text itself, but from an "alternative worldview" extrapolated from "the cosmic perspectives and aspirations institutionalised in some of India's major cultural traditions" (p. 29). This provides the rationale for the ensuing series of evocations, clothed in an effusive and highly speculative idiom, of "an India that is difficult, intricate and equivocal" (p. 35), offering the possibility of "alternative ways of seeing", that "challenge...the authorised categories of Western culture...the myopia of empirical observation and measurement" (p. 37), with the result that the "the rhetoric of positivism" is finally "transgressed by the language of deferred hope, imponderables and quietism" (p. 30).

Sharmila Purkayastha and her associates have pointed out that to extoll the virtues of an India that can "regenerate the West" on the "spiritual plane", is to expound a thesis that is "complicit with imperialist interests" (p. 199). Said suggests in Orientalism that the Orient, "overvalued for its pantheism, its spirituality, its stability, its longevity, its primitivity", was always simultaneously undervalued, appearing "lamentably underhumanized, antidemocratic, backward, barbaric," (p. 150), resistant to "change...to the development of men and women out of archaic, primitive classical institutions"; what this amounted to was that, for Orientalism, the doors of modernity were forever closed to the East (p. 263). One is reminded of Parry's remarks in an earlier essay: "Hinduism imitates the appearance of the physical world in India, overriding barriers between man and the inarticulate world; and while this allows for subtle speculation on the nature of creation and the transcendental, it short-circuits a scientific understanding of the universe. Hinduism in this sense both matches and perpetuates an undynamic society...[but] unchanging India, its material growth stunted by the predominance of a malevolent nature, nurtures modes of thought and feeling that make for greater personal harmony, a more integrated social and spiritual life" ("Passage to More Than India", pp. 161-162). This is of course, after Said, extremely dubious

rhetoric; surfacing, however, in the later essay in the more modulated form of a celebration of the language of "deferred hope, imponderables and quietism" (p. 30), its political implications assume decidedly dis-quieting overtones.

If we adopt a distinction that is implicit in the title of Kenneth Burke's essay, "Social and Cosmic Mystery: A Passage to India", approaches to the Passage may be classified as either "cosmic" or "social." Parry's work would of course fall in the former category. The social aspect of the text has been emphasized by Trilling. Yet, on a re-appraisal, what the text actually presents is not a binary relation between the two categories but a mutually perturbatory relation. In other words, the cosmic infects the social, and vice versa. One effect of this, a largely neglected aspect of the text, is the pervasive symbolization of the landscape. In critical writings on Passage, this motif is normally incorporated within what is projected as the "oneness" of India (or "Hinduism"), and its putative ability to reconcile matter and spirit. I will argue, however, that this perspective on the landscape is complicit with the larger ideology of Bhakti. In passages such as the following, the utopian hope that underlies the chain of being is accompanied by a characteristic sense of precariousness:

> When the darkness began, it seemed to well out of the meagre vegetation, entirely covering the fields each side of them before it brimmed over the road. Ronny's face grew dim - an event that always increased [Adela's] esteem for his character. Her hand touched his...a spurious unity descended on them, as local and temporary as the gleam that inhabits a firefly...And the night that encircled them, absolute as it seemed, was itself only a spurious unity, being modified by the gleams of day that leaked up round the edges of the earth, and by the stars. (PI, p. 86; emphasis added.)

Here each item in the chain is of a tenuous and transcient nature, projecting, in Parry's words, the possibility that man is just "another creature in the chain of creation", and that "equal value attaches to all things" (Parry, "Passage to More Than India", p. 161). Irrespective of whether nature is actually egalitarian or otherwise, this way of looking at it involves not communion but discourse. Raymond Williams has remarked that "men come to project on nature their own unacknowledged activities and consequences" ("Ideas of Nature", p. 81). And one can argue that the symbolic function of the chain of being in this "egalitarian" aspect is to resolve the contradictions in the social world (torn apart by conflicts and divisions), by displacing them onto the natural world.

But the chain of being here may also be seen to perform other symbolic mediations. As is suggested by its similarities with the string of items that sanctify the ritual at the Mau tank ("little images of Ganpati...tiny tazias after Moharram - scapegoats, husks, emblems of passage, a passage not easy, not now, not here", PI, p. 309), the chain of being works within the discourse of Bhakti. Passage constantly foregrounds the Bhakti-aspect of the landscape, and elides this with the "question of India" ("[India] calls 'Come' through her hundred mouths...come to what? She has never defined", PI, p. 135). Crucially, the specific feature that the chain of being shares with Bhakti is a temporary withdrawal from the social world of day-to-day life, as a means of projecting a utopian possibility onto a future rid of the dissatisfactions of the present (at Mau the passage is "not to be apprehended except when it is unattainable", PI, p. 309; the stars, the outer limit of the chain of being represent, after all, the possibility of an "infinite goal" beyond themselves, PI, p. 257). Taking all these aspects of the chain of being into account, one might say that Bhakti works through liminality. The anthropologist Victor Turner defines "liminality" as "a sort of social limbo which has few of the attributes of the socio-cultural life that precedes and follows it...a process rather than a state" (Turner, Celebration, p. 202) where "private

space is...socialized" and "enculturated social space is correspondingly made private" (p, 19). Although Turner's concerns lie with the discourse of ritual, I find it fruitful to read "liminality" as a discourse in itself, and one that can as well generate a literary device such as the chain of being. At the same time I want to stress that the "liminal subject" that is generated, as I will show, by the ritual practice of Bhakti, necessarily exceeds the discourse of "liminality" within which it emerges.

Private space is socialized, social space is made private -- this is precisely the kind of existential reversal that the chain of being carries out. The "egalitarian" nature of the chain of being serves to undermine (or "dim") the autonomy of the unique self (marked by a unique "character") that the face represents. The time of the day, dusk, the interstice between the daytime social world and the nightlife of the psyche, is ideal for this blurring of the boundaries between self and other. The word "character", however, has more crucial connotations than simply individuality. For instance, a few pages earlier the word takes on an entirely different meaning: "Experiences, not character, divided [Adela and Ronny]; they were not dissimilar, as humans go; indeed when compared to the people who stood nearest to them in point of space they became practical-

ly identical. The Bhil who was holding an officer's polo pony, the Eurasian who drove the Nawab Bahadur's car, the Nawab Bahadur himself, the Nawab bahadur's grandson - none would have examined a difficulty so frankly and coolly" (PI, p. 83; emphasis added). Here "character" refers to the colonialist discourse of "a common national character" that supposedly endows the English with the ability to rule over their colony efficiently and selflessly. This explains why the face assumes a different aspect, deserving of Adela's "esteem", during the moment of the chain of being, than it would otherwise ("[Ronny's] words without his voice might have impressed [Mrs Moore], but when she heard the self-satisfied lilt of them, when she saw the mouth moving so complacently and competently beneath the little red nose, she felt quite illogically that this was not the last word on India. One touch of regret...would have made him a different man, and the British empire a different institution", PI, p. 50). The word "character" functions here like a "stereotype", which Roland Barthes once defined as an "over-familiar word, which claims consistency and does not know its own insistency" (cited in Coward and Ellis, p. 54). Again, it is Mrs Moore who quite explicitly points out the possible ambivalences: "'One knows people's characters, as you call them,' she retorted disdainfully, as if she really knew more than character but could not impart it. 'I have heard both English and

Indians speak well of [Aziz], and I felt it isn't the sort of thing he would do'" (PI, pp. 200-201). The "face" is of course only apparently at one with the rest of the landscape. The darkness threatens to overwhelm it. One might argue that the darkness symbolizes an unsettling historical reality (arguably, the strengthening of anti-colonial forces, the formation of "committees", the hate and distrust underlying daily life in the colony). The "face", interpolated into the Indian landscape, then celebrates, or, to borrow a phase from Said, "commemorat[es]" the "survival" ("Narrative", p. 96) of a colonizing community that re-stakes its claim to "represent, inhabit and possess" the colonial territory (p. 89). Bhakti's problematic of retreat, effecting a withdrawal from normal modes of cognition and selfhood, is thus annexed by colonial discourse as part of its larger attempt to reach into the farthest corners and backwaters of native culture.

Using the Subaltern historian Ranajit Guha's useful distinction between the native and colonialist idioms that constitute colonial discourse ("Dominance Without Hegemony", p. 233), one might say that the aesthetic device of the chain of being functions as a colonialist idiom of collective self-identity within the discourse of Bhakti. The native idiom takes this as its point of departure: the crowds at the Mau festivities

appropriate Bhakti as part of their own strategic need for collective mobilization, seizing hold of those aspects of this discourse, such as its collapsing of social hierarchies, that the hegemonic colonial idiom necessarily ignores.

This appropriation is possible despite Bhakti's usefulness for the colonial state as an ideology of humility and submission. Guha emphasizes the latter potentiality when he describes Bhakti as one of the discourses that constituted the colonial subject as a willing "collaborator" with his/her colonial masters. The rasas, or constituents, of Bhakti -- primarily, dasya ("the quality of being a servant, slave or bondsman...[in] total servility to the deity") and srngara (by which the "sexual instrumentality of women is...spiritualized...into an ideal of love that transcends all that is of the body and of the world") -- made Bhakti an ideology of subordination par excellence, since the devotee, "subordinate by definition", effectively constituted him/herself as a subject, or rajbhakta, of the state ("Dominance", pp. 257-264). But, as the anthropologist Nicholas Dirks has pointed out in his recent overview of theories of ritual and liminality, there is always a productive asymmetry between discourse and practice (see "Ritual and Resistance", pp. 229-237). Turner's notion of the "liminality" of ritual

discourse is, according to Dirks, a conservative one, since it assumes that rituals function as safety valves for wayward social energies. Dirks suggests, on the contrary, that the actual "practices" of popular belief might well exceed and subvert the given constraints of dominant "discourses" of religion and ritual. The liminal moment of collective consciousness in the Temple section of Passage is a product of this awkward fit between ritual discourse and ritual practice.

The section begins by pushing Godbole abruptly to the foreground: "Some hundreds of miles westward of the Marabar Hills, and two years later in time, Professor Narayan Godbole stands in the presence of God" (PI, p. 279). This is of course in sharp contrast to his inconspicuousness in the first two sections of the novel. Godbole's first appearance at Fielding's tea-party is an early indication of his tangential relation to the main action of Passage ("a strange quartet -- [Aziz] fluttering to the ground, [Adela] puzzled by the sudden ugliness, Ronny fuming, the brahman observing all three, but with downcast eyes and hands folded, as if nothing was noticeable", PI, p. 76; emphasis added). Subsequently the "Ancient Night" aspect of Godbole, his claim to arcane knowledge of the Caves, is established (Godbole "never mentioned an echo, it had never impressed him perhaps", PI, p. 173), as well as his enigmatic beha-

viour ("he always did possess the knack of slipping off", PI, p. 188). Godbole's "absence" from the picnic at Marabar and from the trial that follows seems to imply his "presence" at the centre of the text's central allegorical mode, "Hinduism." Yet this reading, almost a commonplace in Passage-criticism, occludes, I believe, certain crucial possibilities that the figure of Godbole mediates.

In fact, the textual effect at the beginning of the "temple" section can be described, in Fredric Jameson's terms, as that of a "structural readjustment such that what was secondary and inessential in one moment becomes the centre and the dominant, the figure against the background, in the next" (The Political Unconscious, p. 223). One can always argue, therefore, that this readjustment serves really to "manage" the potentially conflicting materials that constitute narrative content. The literary device of shifting points of view accomplishes this by allowing enough space for marginal figures like the punkah-puller to overstep their marginality and occupy, albeit temporarily, narrative centrestage. "Point of view" is in this respect essentially a recuperative device that enhances the ideological reach of the novel form itself. In Passage, however, such moments of sudden inversion invariably precede the activities of rebellious crowds. For instance, Kenneth

Burke observes that even as the punkah-puller in the courtroom at the close of the trial "continued to pull the cord of the punkah...the rationale of the plot was developing into its next phase, the orgy of impromptu celebration...that followed upon the abrupt termination of the trial" (p. 232). The punkah-puller does not serve merely as a vehicle for textual readjustment; the moment of the punkah-puller contains within itself the possibility of collective consciousness, the bridging of the pernicious gap between the individual and the community that individualism brings about (see Hall, p. 41). In this sense, the moment of the punkah-puller is ultimately unassimilable to the resolutions of narrative "point of view." The abruptness with which Godbole comes to the fore in the Temple section and the ease with which he becomes a part of the celebrant crowd -- and constitutes himself, I must add, as the liminal subject of Bhakti -- show how fruitful the moment of the punkah-puller is in terms of the later trajectory of the narrative of _Passage_.

Yet, what is more remarkable is the mobilising potential of such moments, even if that potential remains unrealized in terms of outright rebellion. For the duration of the liminal moment, a symbolic social cohesiveness is attained that presents the possibility of future collective action. The potential for this is

discernible to an extent in the discourse of Bhakti:

> 'I place myself in the position of a milk maiden [i.e., a gopi]. I say to Krishna, "Come! come to me only." The god refuses to come. I grow humble and say: "Do not come to me only. Multiply yourself into a hundred Krishnas, and let one go to each of my hundred companions, but one, O Lord of the universe, come to me. This is repeated several times.' (PI, p. 78; emphasis added.)

The structural principle underlying Godbole's appeal centres on the fluidity of the supplicant's status: initially, s/he (Godbole assuming the role of a gopi) implores Krishna to "come to me only" and thus attempts parity with the deity; with the god's subsequent "refus[al]" to come, there is a return to a state of submissiveness ("I grow humble"). June Perry Levine remarks that "Godbole who participates in the [Temple section] ceremony is himself both God and supplicant" (p. 181). There is enough evidence in the popular tradition of Bhakti to suggest that such an inversive possibility is built into the pattern of its ritual practice. As Kumkum Sangari points out in her formidable account of the tradition, Krishna's relations with his gopis can be, for certain Bhakti cults, "non-hierarchical...disinterested in maintaining social order...the distinction between god and devotee can be blurred" (p. 1469).

Not surprisingly, the punkah-puller, Nature's proof "to society [of] how little its categories impress her", serves as an emblem of these contradictory possibilities (socially "aloof", yet in "control [over] the proceedings" of the trial; both "humble" and "god"-like; "a male fate, a winnower of souls", yet, despite this prescience, unaware "that he existed", PI, p. 212). The other subaltern figures in the text share a similar potential to overstep their given social constraints. As John Drew has observed, without, however following through the implications of his own statement, the Hindu servitor whose "hereditary office [it is] to close the gates of salvation" at the Mau tank (PI, p. 310), "has authority more subtle than that of the rajah, just as the authority of the punkahwallah in the court is subtler than that of the magistrate and the sensibility of the water-chestnut gatherer [at Fielding's garden house] as subtle as that of the brahmin Godbole" (p. 97). It is in this sense that, closing the gap between the individual and the community, dissolving social boundaries in an act of (albeit inchoate) collective will, the subaltern figures of the punkah-puller, the servitor, and Godbole (who <u>emerges</u> into subalternity here in a moment of collective anti-colonial feeling) -- constitute themselves as the liminal subjects of Bhakti, prospective agents of collective action. Using Guha's words in a related context, one might say that the

"unity of all Indians and the opposition between them and their alien rulers" becomes possible once the liminal aspect of Bhakti has been broached (Elementary Aspects, pp. 263-264).

The festivities of the "temple" section demonstrate precisely these aspects of liminality. There Bhakti "awak[es] in each man according to his capacity, an emotion that he would not have had otherwise" (PI, p. 285), a feeling that involves "nothing personal" (PI, p. 280) and is, for Godbole, "more than I am myself" (PI, p. 286; emphasis added). Both the presiding symbols of authority at the celebration, the god who is the object of worship, and the ailing Rajah, undergo a similar blurring of identities: the napkin is "God, not that it was, and the image remained in the blur of the altar" (PI, p. 283), while, for the Rajah, "this was no moment for human glory" (PI, p. 282). The dissolving of hierarchies, a necessary fallout of the liminality of popular ritual, fosters, in Victor Turner's words, a cohesive collective vision of "communitas, a direct, spontaneous and egalitarian mode of social relationship, as against hierarchical relationships among occupants of structural status roles" (Turner, "Religious Celebrations", p. 202).

Consequently, the ritual practice of Bhakti (Gokul Ashtami) transforms "Hinduism...riven into sects and

clans" (PI, p. 288) into "a living force...fling[ing] down everything that is petty and temporary...The festival flowed on, wild and sincere, and all men loved each other, and avoided by instinct whatever could cause inconvenience or pain" (PI, p. 299). The crowd in the palace at Mau seethes "like a beneficent potion", and its otherwise disparate constituents -- the "toiling ryot" for whom "anything outside their villages passed in a dream...a few tradesmen...officials, courtiers, scions of the ruling house" -- begin to "resemble one another", only reverting to "individual clods" once the ecstatic moment is over (PI, pp. 279-280). The tumult and movement of the celebration enhances this inchoate collective feeling ("The boys and men who were squatting in the aisles were lifted forcibly and dropped without changing shapes into the laps of their neighbours", PI, p. 282).

But it is at the Mau tank that celebration and ritual crystallise the collective identity of the celebrants. This happens in the course of what can only be described as a virtual "staging" of an encounter between cultures; except that this encounter, the collision of the boats with the consecrated silver tray, can hardly remain untainted by the real social divisions that underlie it and to some extent make it possible. As Aziz soon recognizes, the "pose of 'seeing India'...was

only a form of ruling India; no sympathy lay behind it; he knew exactly what was going on in the boat" (PI, p. 302). As the boats containing the "four outsiders" (Fielding, Stella, and Aziz and Ralph), or "intruders", as they are later called, draw dangerously near, Godbole "waved his arms - whether in wrath or joy, Aziz would never know." The ensuing collision jumbles together the "oars, the sacred tray, the letters of Ronny and Adela." Each item serves as a sign of the closing in of each community on itself: the oars "hidden to deter the visitors from going out" (PI, p. 307), the letters inaugurating the "closing [of] ranks against the alien" (PI, p. 301), and the tray on which "King Kansa [is] confounded with the father and mother of the Lord." The utopian discourse of the ritual (with its "emblems" of a "passage not easy, not now, not here") is definitively undermined, leaving behind a sense of anti-climax: "This was the climax, as far as India admits of one" (PI, p. 311). Meanwhile, the "worshippers howled with wrath or joy" (PI, p. 310).

Wrath, or joy? The crowd is poised between the one and the other, between protest and connivance, engagement and withdrawal. The text leaves both possibilites open. As I have suggested, the liminal moment of ritual can also work to project purposive action on to some more opportune moment in the future. In this sense,

ritual practice serves as an interstice between the everyday and the spectacular, between the travails of daily life and outright protest. For the celebrants at Mau, Bhakti is instrumental because it helps negotiate the necessary interlude of waiting which precedes more overtly political action. During the course of this strategic waiting-game, the "stage" is set for impending confrontation.

This explains the undercurrent of hostility that threatens to undo the civilities between Fielding and Aziz in the final chapters of Passage, which chart out the "closing [of] ranks against the alien" (PI, p. 303) that is characteristic of coloniality. Aziz stresses his loyalties to his "'own people henceforward'" (PI, p. 299) and Fielding too retreats behind the lines of Anglo-India: "Would he today defy all his own people for the sake of an Indian?" (PI, p. 314). Hence the underlying pathos of the closing lines of Passage, "the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the guesthouse that came into view...didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, 'No, not yet', and the sky said, 'No, not there" (PI, p. 316). For Said, these lines underscore "the pathetic distance still separating 'us' from an Orient destined to bear its foreignness as a mark of its permanent estrangement from the West" (Orientalism, p. 244). But if this is a

moment of estrangement, it is also one of waiting: "'Until England is in difficulties [Aziz remarks] we keep silent, but in the next European war - aha, aha! Then is our time'" (PI, p. 316).

In the meantime the celebrations at the Mau tank draw to a close ("Some of the torches went out, fireworks didn't catch"), giving rise to a sense of the ineffable nature of the ritual: "But how, if there is such an event, can it be remembered afterwards? How can it be expressed in anything but itself? Not only from the unbeliever are the 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" (PI, p. 283). As Turner notes, "celebrations end, and in most human groups certain people try to put into words, however lamely, whatever they have experienced in the meta-experience of culturally stimulated action" (p. 19). For the celebrants, "whatever had happened" is as nebulous as the "heart of a cloud" (PI, p. 311). The ritual moment passes by ("The divisions of daily life were returning, the shrine had almost shut", PI, p. 316), leaving behind a sense of expectancy: "Whatever had happened had happened, and while the intruders picked themselves up, the crowds of Hindus began a desultory move back to into the town" (PI, p. 310). The

singing, however, "went on even longer...ragged edges of religion...unsatisfactory and dramatic tangles" (PI, p. 311; ellipses in text).

How Forster could have had such insight into the varied aspects of Bhakti, is of course a question that still remains to be answered. Forster's own notions of Bhakti are embedded, as the work of Inden suggests, in Orientalist assumptions of "Hinduism." One effect of this is that the dominant discourses of the text partake of the general Orientalist tendency to "fix" Hinduism's characteristics, and to extend this to a "fixed" and "essentially Hindu India." Hence the text's recurrent "question of India" articulated, as I have shown, in the idiom of Bhakti. Consequently, the contentious traditions of Bhakti, documented by Sangari and by the Subaltern school, are of necessity supressed by the dominant problematic of the text. If I have been enabled to read Passage differently, this is because the Subaltern school has shown how resistance can be recuperated from in-between the lines of what Guha calls the "prose of counter-insurgency" or of representations, written from a position of dominance, that (wittingly or unwittingly) suppress alternative voices. If Forster is to be credited with anything, it is his ability to observe organised or unorganised mass activity in a way that must generally exceed his conscious knowledge of the

enormous potential of what he has observed. This potential, largely unrealized in the journals collected in The Hill Of Devi, resurfaces in Passage in ways that I have tried to indicate.

The recuperations of the restless crowd I have attempted in this and the previous chapter raise the question of the complicity or otherwise of Passage in relation to its dominant critical readings. The latter, as I have shown, recycle Orientalist commonplaces and produce preferred readings of the text that simply reproduce its own dominant problematic. In doing so, they suppress the discourses that are marginal to that problematic. Moreover, they completely ignore the moments of anti-colonial feeling in the text and the subaltern activity that accompanies them. To the extent that Passage is party to this preferred reading, it might be seen as complicit with the (roughly) "colonialist" assumptions that pervade its critical "heritage." Yet, the fact that the text is also available for the kind of anti-colonialist appropriation I have attempted in this dissertation, shows that Passage is in a sense "responsive" to anti-colonial rereadings or counter-appropriations. Whether this is due to the polyphonic nature of the text itself, or to "Forster's sympathies" is of course something that can never be definitively ascertained.

Counter-appropriations of the kind I have attempted here have to utilise the possibilities afforded by the co-existence of both hegemonic and subordinate elements of ideology within such texts. The productive heterogeneity of such textual material provides us with a way of rejuvenating literary critical practice from both the prisonhouse of textualism and the territorial limits of disciplinary English. Transactions of this kind between literary criticism and the writing of history (in terms of a shared concern with subalternity) can generate an engagement with discourse that does not assimilate it to either fact or fiction, historicity or fictionality, but focuses instead on the discursive formations in which both literature and the writing of history, by virtue of their socially symbolic nature, are invariably embedded. Moreover, inasmuch as there is a need to bring the Indian classroom to crisis by exposing its complicity with colonial paradigms of knowledge and pedagogy, it becomes necessary to expose Passage to the test of "relevance" by reading it within the context of our post-colonial condition. Otherwise, by supplying yet another speculative-metaphysical supplement to the text, one would merely be ensuring the conditions of its radical isolation from history and therefore from politics. Hence the urgent need to read the "rubbish heap", that emblem of marginality in Passage, as a means of recovering things which move "when no one is looking"

(PI, p. 249). The punkah-puller will "end" in that same "rubbish heap" (PI, p. 212) where, furthermore, Mrs Moore will flourish as the locus of a popular cult and where gossip/rumour will proliferate. But, for the dominant power, rumours and popular cults (and rituals) will always be, just as they are for Fielding, "half-alive things...trying to crowd out real life. Take no notice, [they]'ll vanish like poor old Mrs Moore's tombs" (PI, p. 268). The subaltern of course knows better, even if s/he does not <u>know</u> everything.

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