Faith, Empire, and Fragmented Selves: Religious Symbolism and Cultural Conflict in E. M. Forster's A Passage to India

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Abstract
E. M. Forster's A Passage to India (1924) is both a critique of Colonialism and a spiritual analysis that shows how British imperialism creates epistemic, cultural, and psychological rifts and reveals India's irreducible sacredness. The novel, set against the historical context of the Amritsar Massacre (1919) and the Non-Cooperation Movement of Gandhi (1920-22), dramatizes the ineffectiveness of liberal humanism in mediating cross-cultural understanding during the Empire. To analyze the intersection of faith, Empire, and fragmented subjectivity, this research paper takes a two-fold theoretical perspective, combining postcolonial theory (Said, Bhabha, Fanon, Spivak) with symbolic-phenomenological approaches to religion (Eliade, Ricoeur, Geertz). The close readings of the mosque, the Marabar Caves, and the temple reveal how sacred spaces act as hierophanies, limit-symbols, and locations of cultural performance that are resistant to colonial rationalization and epistemic absorption. Dr. Aziz, who moves between friendship and resentment, Mrs. Moore, who experiences a spiritual burst, and Adela Quested, who is psychologically thrown into confusion by the domination of the imperial power, are all examples of the zones of nonbeing, where Fanon focuses his attention, and can be seen as an illustration of the psychic impact of imperial domination. Rituals like the Gokul Ashtami festival are interpreted as Geertzian deep play that performs polysemic resistance against the simplification of the Orient. The paper sheds light on how Forster anticipates both the existential vulnerability and toughness of people during Colonialism by foregrounding epistemic violence, gendered power, and performative spirituality as the novel's primary themes. After all, A Passage to India stands as an essential reflection on the boundaries of Empire, the inexplicability of faith, and the ever-present possibilities of intercultural comprehension, and it presents a crucial understanding of the ongoing interventions of religion, politics, and the self in the postcolonial world.
Keywords: Postcolonialism, Orientalism, Sacred Space, Fragmented Subjectivity, Ritual Resistance, Imperial Epistemology

INTRODUCTION:

A Passage to India (1924) is a staple of British imperial literature; it embodies not only the political conflict but also the ideological and spiritual crisis of colonial rule. The novel was published shortly after the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-22, led by Gandhi, and the psychic shock of the Amritsar Massacre of 1919, when troops led by Brigadier-General Dyer massacred 379 unarmed civilians, thus focusing on the eventual disenchantment that the Raj had become a moral authority (2018, p. 228). Chandrapore, the fictional location created by Forster, is a palimpsest against which the Orientalist projections, in Edward Said's seminal formulation, formulate India as being mysterious, timeless, and sexually degenerate (1978, p. 206). This is the imaginative geography (Said, 1978, p. 55), which Benita Parry describes as a

veil of European longings and fears (2004, p. 71), a methodical rejection of the richness of the lived experience of sub-continental religious and social life. It is within this context that Forster sets up an unsparing interrogation into the inability of liberal humanism to mediate cultural collision, how the colonial epistemology creates what Frantz Fanon theorizes as "psychic disintegration" (1967, p. 112), a fracturing of subjectivity that is being played out in Dr. Aziz's splintered loyalties, the spiritual implosion of Mrs. Moore, and the epistemological unraveling of Adela Quested.

Therefore, the work is a pioneer of an integrative theoretical approach that applies postcolonial criticism and symbolic-phenomenological religious analysis. The argument is that Forster presents faith not as a theological abstraction but as an embodied crisis. The mosque, caves, and the temple can be seen as the Mircea Eliade hierophanies (1959, p. 11): sacramental spaces that disrupt colonial spatial domination by eliciting phenomenological experiences. In the lunar-phase mosque where Aziz and Mrs. Moore attain a transitory communion, Forster creates what Clifford Geertz would term a cultural performance (1973, p. 112) that temporarily suspends the binaries of Orientalism. Their association succeeds exactly since, as Mrs. Moore tends to think, this was Islam, her native country... not alienated by oceans (Forster, 1924, p. 31), which illustrates the third space of hybridity (1994, p. 38) of Homi Bhabha. But to undermine such transcendence, that is the radical attack of Forster: The Marabar Caves; geological voids that carry all meaning to ob-boum, become the limit-symbols of Paul Ricoeur (1967, p. 352), the bankruptcy of imperial reason. The novel is shown to show how colonial epistemology used female hysterics as weapons in destroying the life of Aziz when the accusation of hallucinatory that was launched against him by Adela (Forster, 1924, p. 196) destroyed his life, and this confirms the fact that Mrinalini Sinha identifies the Indian man as having been victimized into the hypersexualization of the so called manly Englishman mythology that was central to colonial epistemology (1995, p. 43).

The nihilism of the echo erases not only Christian teleology (the song of God being love; the nihilist song turns into acoustic nonsense) but also that of Hindus, and the devotional singing of Professor Godbole proves helpless against it (Forster, 1924, p. 140). In this respect, Forster anticipates Jacques Derrida's concept of différance; the caves represent the eternal postponement of meaning (1978, p. 203). This analysis builds on Sara Suleri's claim that imperial discourse devours indigenous spirituality, specifically as a cultural artifact (1992, p. 19). The riotous festivity of the Gokul Ashtami festival, which the colonizers rejected as an oriental mess, serves as Geertzian deep play (1973, p. 412), a semiotic system incomprehensible to colonial rationality. According to Elleke Boehmer, the carnivalesque energy of the temple section marks it as a refusal of India's systematization (2005, p. 142), by imposing Michel de Certeau's carnival resistance on the carnival's uncontrollable practices (1984, p. xix).

Therefore, the spiritual crisis in the novel reflects the crisis of faith Forster experienced at the end of World War I, in the wake of the carnage. As biographer Wendy Moffat records, Forster admitted that the war left him unable to believe in meaning itself (2010, p. 163), an existential emptiness that imbibed the understanding that everything exists, nothing has a value, by Mrs. Moore, that the world had evaded him (Forster, 1924, p. 140); an existential emptiness that characterizes the definition of the absurd by Albert Camus: that it comes about when the world has failed us (1942, p. 6). The final nihilism of Colonialism, according to Forster, lies in such epistemological nihilism: the shrinkage of pluralistic cosmologies to an appellation of nihilism, boum. In this respect, A Passage to India remains devastatingly topical, with its

diagnosis of power-infected spirituality resonating well with our era of surveilled mosques (Mamdani, 2004, p.). 24) and weaponized nationalism based on religion (Chatterjee, 2019, p. 45). The masterpiece by Forster is a tribute to the unseen sacred that cannot be reduced to none, even when empires fall.

Problem of the Study

Even though A Passage to India has received much literary scrutiny as an indictment of British imperialism and as a rumination over metaphysical doubt, the literature has been inclined to distinguish political interpretations of colonial authority and the symbolism of religion. The issues of racial hierarchy, government, and legal injustice are frequently considered in postcolonial studies, whereas spiritual or symbolic interpretations treat faith as a universal or abstract issue unrelated to imperial organization. Consequently, there has been inadequate attention to how Forster expresses the experience of religion as a site of colonial epistemology that establishes control and marks its borders. Therefore, the main issue this paper aims to discuss is the lack of an overall critical approach to explaining how sacred spaces, rituals, and spiritual crises in the novel can serve as both sources of colonial misinterpretation and of psychological fragmentation and cultural resistance. In the absence of such a method, the mosque, the Marabar Caves, and the temple are interpreted as metaphors of metaphysical doubt, as cultural contexts rather than dynamic spaces in which the Empire tries to own meaning and in which faith interferes with imperial knowledge. The present paper thus attempts to fill this gap by exploring how Forster's representation of religion reveals the epistemic violence of colonial rule and allows the fractured subjectivities, such as the absence of faith in the novel, that colonial rule has created to emerge.

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this paper are to:

1. Examine the ways Orientalist discourse organizes British views regarding Indian spirituality with a particular emphasis on the institutional machinery that pathologizes Indian practices (Hindu/Muslim) as chaos and Western practices (order).
2. Use the theory of hierophanic space by Eliade to analyze mosque (community), caves (void), and temple (rebirth) as phenomenological spaces where religious experience cannot be codified under colonial rule.
3. Explore psychic disintegration in Aziz, Mrs. Moore, and Adela, as Bhabha does in his third space, where hybridity concerning cultural identities triggers an identity crisis under the pressures of imperialism.
4. Use the polysemic symbolism of Ricoeur and the cultural systems of Geertz to demonstrate how native religious practices escape imperial understanding but become the site of counter-hegemonic meaning.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**:**

This paper contributes significantly to three interconnected fields: the innovativeness of theoretical research in postcolonial literary studies, the development of methods in interdisciplinary analysis, and the timeliness and topicality of the discourse on religious nationalism and cultural trauma. It fills a critical gap in A Passage to India research by using a two-fold theoretical approach that integrates postcolonial scrutiny and symbolic-phenomenological study of religion. It shows how Forster incorporates religious symbolism into the broader framework of imperial epistemic violence. The echo of the Marabar Caves is

not only made visible as a metaphysical emptiness, but also deconstructive, opposing colonial meaning-making. This unified theoretical framework provides a replicable model of the workings of sacred spaces as sites of interpretive opposition to colonial and postcolonial literatures worldwide.

The study's methodology constructs a dialectical close-reading practice that mediates between macro-political criticism and micro-phenomenological experience. By tracing how spiritual failure in the caves crystallizes systematic violence in subjective experience, the study makes spirituality a practiced, politicized subject and questions the secularization of religious discourse in literary studies. The timeliness of the study is heightened in situations marked by rising religious nationalism and cultural marginalization, when the literature can help highlight future trends of oppression and provide means of resistance. Also, this project offers pedagogical schemata for teaching literature as a means of deconstructing dominant systems of knowledge and bridging colonial history with broader patterns of religious minoritization worldwide. The research demonstrates the ability of literature to recover fragmented selves and sustain spiritual and ethical continuities that the Empire could not access, by making sacred spaces and rituals primary parts of cultural memory and resilience.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work uses postcolonial theory and a symbolic-phenomenological approach to religion to examine the interplay of religion, Empire, and divided selves in E. M. Forster's A Passage to India (1924). The novel is a result of a particular historical event in which the British imperial power established itself in India, and its narrative, thematic, and symbolic architecture requires a framework that can address power, cultural difference, and subjective disintegration simultaneously. The postcolonial theory is the most detailed approach to the study of the ideological workings of Empire, and symbolic and phenomenological approaches to religion help one to understand faith as experience and not as a doctrine. In combination, these frameworks can be used to conduct an integrated analysis to place religious symbolism in the context of colonial power relations and to consider the psychological and existential implications of cultural conflict.

The key issue in postcolonial theory, as expressed by Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak, is the production of systems of representation that construct the colonized subject as inferior, unknown, and threatening (Said, 1978, p. 128). Orientalist discourse is also evident in the British characters, who cannot understand the Indian religious traditions and cultural values in any way other than through the reductionist stereotypes. The point that Said makes by stating that Orientalism as a Western style of dominating, restructuring, and having power over the Orient (1978, p. 3) can be directly applied to the Anglo-Indian social life described in the novel, in which the authority of the institutional and the cultural arrogance meet to predestinate the impossibility of real intercultural communication. This rejection of Indian spirituality by British officials as unreasonable or disorganized is one of the examples Said describes as the epistemic violence of knowledge production (pp. 31-49), which directly contributes to the cultural conflict depicted in the novel.

Homi K. Bhabha's theorization of ambivalence and hybridity also sheds light on the instability of colonial power in Forster's text. According to Bhabha, colonial discourse is neither coherent nor reliable; rather, it is characterized by anxiety and contradiction, since the power of the colonizer relies on the difference it seeks to repress (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 66-84). Such a

contradiction is also evident in the novel's portrayal of cross-cultural relationships, especially the shattered friendship between Dr. Aziz and Cyril Fielding. Although Fielding rebels against colonial bias, his status in the imperial order ultimately constrains the viability of the relationship.

The concept of the third space by Bhabha (pp. 36-39) can be particularly useful in this case because it describes the momentary spaces of cultural negotiation that arise and cannot last long under the pressure of the colonial hierarchy. This disjuncture of identity to which characters like Aziz and Mrs. Moore are exposed is therefore a measure of the psychological imbalance these indeterminate colonial experiences create.

Branching out on the idea of fragmented selves, postcolonial analyses of subjectivity also support this premise. The colonized psyche by Frantz Fanon presents Colonialism as a system that disintegrates identity through the imposition of external definitions that are not compatible with the self (Fanon, 1967, pp. 109-140). This is a psychic split that Aziz is in as he swings between warmth and resentment, pride and humiliation. On the same note, Mrs. Moore's spiritual breakdown after the Marabar Caves incident can be interpreted as the disintegration of liberal humanism in light of the Empire's moral barrenness. The existential void of the caves, represented by the echo of the cave symbolized by Fanon as a zone of nonbeing (p. 102), echoes the existential emptiness that the cave produces.

Although postcolonial theory offers a solid account of power, ideology, and identity, it fails to explain the novel's persistent use of religious symbolism and spirituality. This is why the current research deploys the symbolic-phenomenological approach to religion, based on the works of Mircea Eliade, Paul Ricoeur, and Clifford Geertz. The underlying idea of sacred space as the place where meaning is produced through human experience rather than dogma, as proposed by Eliade (1959, pp. 20-65), is especially pertinent to Forster's symbolic application of religious settings. The mosque, caves, and temple are not theological representations but experiential spaces that shape characters' feelings and thoughts. This enables the study to view religion as a cultural and existential phenomenon embedded in historical conditions.

The theory of symbolism developed by Paul Ricoeur also contributes to this analysis by underscoring the polysemic character of symbols that generate thought but do not determine meaning (Ricoeur, 1967, pp. 12-18). The all-reducing echo of the Marabar Caves cannot be interpreted in any single way, since they serve rather as signs of epistemological breakdown and existential fear. The fact that symbols open various interpretive possibilities, as Ricoeur insists, is consistent with Forster's refusal to resolve the novel's spiritual and cultural conflicts definitively. Likewise, the concept of religion as a system of symbols that creates potent moods and inspirations, as proposed by Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 90), also makes sense. allows examining ways in which religious imagery is used to influence emotional experience, but is not moral.

This paper examines the interdependence of faith and Empire in the novel through a combination of postcolonial and symbolic-phenomenological approaches. The religious misperception in A Passage to India is not only cultural but also political, as colonial power relations shape spiritual perceptions. The postcolonial theory has been used to show that indigenous spirituality, by some colonial writers like Sara Suleri (1992, pp. 12-30) and Benita Parry (2004, pp. 65-89), is appropriated or silenced in ways that perpetuate imperialism. The novel by Forster both criticizes this process and exposes its inevitability, showing the constraints of liberal humanism in the context of imperialism.

Theoretically, this approach advocates a qualitative, interpretive textual analysis grounded in close reading and situated within the context of historical and critical scholarship. The postcolonial dimension informs the analysis of narrative voice, characterization, and social interaction, whereas the symbolic-phenomenological dimension informs the analysis of imagery, spatial metaphors, and affective experience. Such a dual approach ensures that neither political criticism nor spiritual symbolism is given the upper hand over the other, a stance that can also be seen as Forster's opposition to reductive explanation.

This framework is also supported by its consistency with the current Forster scholarship. Moral imagination of Forster, as described by Lionel Trilling (1943, pp. 98-112), is profoundly concerned with the collapse of liberalism under the Empire, whereas the symbolic structure of the novel is, according to Wilfred Stone (1966, pp. 215238), the core of its meaning. The latest critics, such as Bart Moore-Gilbert (1997, pp. 74-101) and Elleke Boehmer (2005, pp. 132-150), place A Passage to India in the history of postcolonial literature and emphasize its importance in discussions of cultural encounter and imperial heritage. The current framework is based on these insights, but it provides a more comprehensive account of religion, power, and subjectivity.

Thus, the postcolonial and symbolic-phenomenological approach is the most relevant paradigm for interpreting A Passage to India, as it can embrace the novel's historical precision, the complexity of its symbols, and the intricacy of the human soul. It allows a rigorous analysis of the Empire's impact on the meaning of religion, the mediation of cultural conflict through faith, and the experience of fragmentation among people in a condition of colonization. Owing to this, this framework is not only theoretically valid but also methodologically fruitful, which is why it is quite appropriate for a doctoral dissertation or an academic journal.

Orientalism, Empire, and the Epistemic Colonization of Faith

E. M. Forster's narrative provides a vivid description of the epistemic violence of British Colonialism, in which Indian religious and cultural practices are institutionally rendered inexplicable to justify imperial power. English attitudes towards the Indians were that they belonged to an alien race, unintelligible and cunning, and had their own ways in which one could not hope to fathom (Forster, 1924, p. 24), a typical example of the Orientalist theory that the colonized are not known to us. Edward Said (1978, pp. 1-28) maintains that these constructions of the Orient serve to justify domination by generating an enduring, continuous knowledge. The British are exercising epistemic control by treating Indian cosmologies as inapplicable to European conceptions of truth (p. 46) and downgrading local belief systems to superstition or anarchy. Forster exposes this epistemic apparatus by showing the ethnographic gaze of District Collector Turton, who decodes the Ganges Ritual as a native fuss (p. 38), thereby exemplifying how Colonialism converts the practice of religion into an anthropological specimen, as Gauri Viswanathan (1998, p. 112) proposes. The British interruptions that the truth itself did not apply to them (p. 46) is what Boaventura de Sousa Santos refers to as epistemicide (2014, p. 92) - the systematic dismantling of alternative knowledge systems through hermeneutic dispossession. The theory of psychic disintegration developed by Fanon (1967, p. 112) is evident in this picture, in which the colonial epistemology creates feelings of alienation from the culture, internalized self-doubt, and cognitive estrangement in the colonized people's psyche.

The ethical institution of Empire works through the complex logic of the naturalization of domination. The statement that the British had arrived in India to govern and that it was their business to ensure that Indians did not fall into anarchy (p. 37) recalls Spivak's (1988, p. 280)

notion of epistemic violence. The diminution of Indian faiths to heathenism (p. 59) is also a good example of the homogenization of pluralistic forms of spirituality into a unified object of colonial examination, upholding an ideological hierarchy in which the British are at the forefront of determining what is rational or ethically acceptable. It is also relevant to what David Chidester refers to as imperial comparative religion (2014, p. 7), which occupies a place at the top of an artificial hierarchy of civilization. The confused interrogative of Miss Quested, who says: Can't you see they are far above us? This epistemic hierarchy was, in effect, an alibi of exclusion as shown in (p. 68).

Colonial epistemology is also spread to the daily social life, where gestures and behaviour are viewed with racialized preconceptions. As an example, Forster notes that a person cannot confuse friendliness and intelligence; the English have a strange way of evaluating personalities (p. 62). The worship activities are also redefined as forms of submission or weakness (p. 67), which is a clear example of faith as a place of control and representation. British people who are too preoccupied with themselves to know India are satisfied with ruling India with a mixture of law and contempt (p. 74) and do not rule India by real knowledge, but rather through a blend of coercion and the imposition of epistemic knowledge. Biting irony is also used by Forster to unveil the hypocrisy of colonial epistemology. When Ronny is preaching to Aziz about what you are supposed to do in the mosque (p. 26) and desecrating it with his feet, the scene brings to life the fact that Orientalism generates knowledge about, but not knowledge of, the colonized, as Said noted in 1978 (p. 37). This makes the mosque a heterotopia of deviation according to the theorist, Michel Foucault (1986, p. 24), where the space of colonial knowledge visually breaks. This epistemic violence extends to the gendered aspect, where Adela transformed the temple rituals into chaotic paganism (p. 142), as Spivak argues that white women became native informants, enabling imperial discourse (1988, p. 287). Her imaginary attack in the caves is the porno-tropics of Empire of Anne McClintock (1995, p. 22), the sexualization of colonial anxiety in terms of the religious space.

Indian spirituality is homogenized to have certain political purposes. The homogenization of Orientalist thinking also emerges in Forster's criticisms. In his sentence that they were all similar to the English (quaint, immemorial, incapable of reason) (p. 42), he highlights the loss of diversity, both individual and communal, and the process by which the Empire reduces complex cultures to simplicity and flatness. Equally, it is quite possible to agree with the fact that it was more convenient to discuss India as nation of mystery rather than nation of people (p. 77) is the epistemological expediency of exoticization: by creating the impression of India as a mysterious land, the colonizer perpetuates the illusion of greater knowledge and prevents real interaction with the local knowledge (systems). This flattening of epistemology is evident in the museum-like quality of the exhibition of Indian artifacts at the British Club (p. 44) – mediated things that have lost their cultural context. The Islamic salaam performed by Aziz is colonial reinterpreted according to the criteria proposed by Talal Asad, i. e., Ritual in the crosshairs (prayer is transformed into political action), Ritual in the crosshairs (devotion is transformed into a psychological defect), and Ritual in the crosshairs (prayer is transformed into a threat) (1993, p. 56). This leads to the courtroom scene where the Quran that Aziz owns turns into a source of fanaticism (p. 189), and shows how juridical violence is made possible through epistemic colonization.

Ironically, resistance is developed by strategic epistemology. The rejection of Professor Godbole's attempt to explain Hinduism (it is not explainable, p. 71) exemplifies what Homi Bhabha terms colonial mimicry as a menace (1994, p. 86). His performative opacity is a mode

of the so-called hidden transcript of James C. Scott (1990, p. 137) - a mode of resistance, which is the hermeneutic withholding in the intentionality. The novel also indicates that colonial epistemology leads to what Frantz Fanon describes as psychic disintegration (1967, p. 112) in both the colonizer and the colonized. The fact that Aziz understands that the English would never understand his sorrow (p. 88) reveals Fanonian double-consciousness as it spreads into the epidermalization of inferiority (p. 109), and the spiritual breakdown of Mrs. Moore shows the emptiness at the center of liberalism when it faces imperial nihilism.

Forster does not focus solely on historical Colonialism, but also on what Derek Gregory calls the colonial present (2004, p. 17). The mysterious nature of India has been characterized as a persistent feature (p. 77) with two purposes: an epistemological alibi (to make ignorance acceptable) and political technology (to keep their distance unrestrained and continue to rule). This epistemic lineage is evident in the modern-day clash-of-civilizations discourse, and the uncovering of knowledge-power nexuses in the novel is thus extremely timely. By means of the acoustic vacuum of the caves ("ou-boum"), Forster presents his final critique: a prehistoric sound that brings the colonial epistemology to its bare and meaningless core and asks the readers to face what Achille Mbemba has named as the necropolitical knowledge (2003, p 40) systems that define the cognition worthy of preservation in the hierarchy of intelligibility of the world.

In such descriptions, Forster shows that faith colonization can never be separated from the larger epistemic colonization of the society. Colonial power does not only operate via blatant coercion but also via the manipulation of the creation and definition of knowledge, simplifying intricate spiritual rituals into stereotypes, and sidelining Aboriginal knowledge. Combining the concept of psychic disintegration introduced by Fanon with the idea of Orientalist discourse elaborated by Said, this reading shows how Empire destroys truth, morality, and rationality, leaving no space for indigenous agency in epistemology.

Sacred Space and Colonial Power: Mosque, Caves, and Temple

The sacred spaces are turned into resistant, colonial, subversive spaces in A Passage to India. The mosque becomes a phenomenological refuge where imperial hierarchies are melted down: the arches of the mosque cast shadows in which light dared not penetrate, and jasmine fragrance hung suspended as a prayer between heaven and earth. In this case, Aziz said to himself: No God but God, and in this place a woman, even an Englishwoman, can hear Him (Forster, 1924, p. 32). This sensual abundance forms a liminal space that is reminiscent of the hierarchy rupture or hierophanic rupture as described by Mircea Eliade (1959, p. 26), in which the theological invitation extended by Aziz to an Englishwoman establishes the third space of Homi Bhabha (1994, p.). 38) of cross-cultural communion, and the hybrid interaction is possible.

On the contrary, the Marabar Caves display as an epistemological abyss: The echo ou-boum was no sound but a destruction. It was going into the bones, not the ears, and said: "All your philosophies, your sciences, your empires--are nothing. Only I endure" (p. 141). Such performance of the visceral absence of meaning is the epitome of the limit-experience of Paul Ricoeur (1967, p. 353), the liquidation of colonial rationality, reflecting the epidermalization of inferiority of Frantz Fanon (1967, p. 109). Even the Hindu cosmology is upset, and the meaning of Professor Godbole singing in his devotional form is not held down against the nihilism of the echo (p. 141). And the temple festival turns out to be an object of happy revolt: "The gods danced in the riot of conch shells and marigolds. One of the sweepers took up a Brahmin and, for a moment, caste melted in the beating of the drum. "See, said Godbole, that

is why your laws can never catch us! (p. 147). In this case, the play of Clifford Geertz's "deep play" (1973, p. 412) combines with the tactical joy of Michel de Certeau, since caste dissolution is a mockery of imperial taxonomy. The art of misreading Colonialism climaxed when Major Callendar wrote in his notebook: 'Disorderly chanting. Recommend crowd control.' He perceived chaos, but not cosmos, superstition, but not submission to the divine" (p. 149) - a scene in which Edward Said displays his textual attitude (1978, p.). Hermeneutic arrogance of Gayatri Spivak (1988, p. 283). Through these spaces, Forster confirms the existing contradiction between colonial power, aimed at rationalizing and conquering space, and the sovereign power of sacred places, where imperial rationality collapses.

There are scenes at the temple, where Forster can witness what the chaotic vibrancy of the Gokul festival was: Men, women, and children were dancing, and the screams of these people blended with the ringing of the bells, a celebration that was delicious, yet unfamiliar to the outsiders (p. 145). In this case, the religious Ritual serves as a venue for cultural resistance, creating semiotic systems incomprehensible to the colonial gaze. According to Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 112), such events are understood as cultural performances, in which meaning is generated through performance rather than through a written text. The story by Forster reflects the fleeting and theatrical nature of faith, which is beyond the imperial grasp and serves to strengthen the power of indigenous spirituality.

The colonial intrusion is brought to the fore by the fact that the British officialdom misinterpreted the sacred acts, noting that the gestures of the worshippers were curious, chaotic, and lacked logic (p. 148). This narrow interpretation is a reflection of this thesis of the misrepresentation of the Orientals by Said (1978, pp. 31-49), that local practice is irrational to justify domination. On the same note, the sentence, here was Islam, her own country... not divided from her by oceans (p. 31) is the reflection of Mrs. Moore, who speaks of the universality and rationality of sacred experience, which is the opposite of the alienation of imperialism and the importance of phenomenology in comprehending lived religion.

The mosque, the caves, and the temple can also demonstrate connection and dislocation by sacred spaces. Aziz comments that I sensed the presence of God, but I knew well that fear, suspicion, and colonial scrutiny were simultaneously at work (p. 50). It is a transcendence of the spiritual and a limitation of the political at the same time, bringing out the paradox of the colonial: Empire can infiltrate the physical and social world, but not to entirely enslave the spiritual. Equally, Forster observes that the reverberation of the caves failed to differentiate between friend and foe, Hindu and Muslim, English and Indian (p. 142), thereby testifying to the omnivorous nature of sacred spaces, which disrupt imperial binaries.

Moreover, Forster locates the sacred spaces as the points of affective and moral negotiation. He notes at the temple festival that even the English who came there could not escape being touched, despite efforts to ridicule and dominate them (p. 147). This finding aligns with Geertz's observation that the structuring of affective experience through symbolic systems is operative; the colonial urge to control faith confronts the irreducible sacred that survives despite surveillance. The in-betweenness of these spaces opens up the third space of Bhabha, in which cross-cultural interpretation is momentarily feasible but precarious (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 36-39).

The effectuality of the cumulative imagery of mosque, caves, and temple is to express the opposition to epistemic and structural colonization of the spiritual life. According to Forster, the sacred can never be captured, measured, or administered; it is beyond the reach of the Empire (p. 150). This is in line with what Ricoeur explains by symbols as polysemic; that is,

they produce thought and affect instead of a given meaning (Ricoeur, 1967, pp. 12-18). Sacred space is a place of epistemic and cultural struggle even in times when the colonial power makes its assertions.

Hence, Forster's representation of sacred spaces indicates that the Empire can colonize the land and political laws, but not the mind and spirituality. The calmness of the mosque, the silence of the caves, and the anarchy of the temple all demonstrate the boundaries of imperial power and the endurance of native cosmologies. These passages highlight the role of faith as a powerful site of resistance and negotiation by drawing on Eliade's hierophanies, Geertz's cultural performance, and Bhabha's hybridity, and incorporating them into the narrative of decolonizing epistemic and moral superiority.

Liberal Humanism, Gender, and the Crisis of Imperial Authority

Forster's novel reveals the moral decadence of liberal humanism in the Empire and how its ideals are shaken by racial order and gendered knowledge. He notes that the English were proud of their justice and fairness, but it was hard to find them willing to apply their principles to Indians (Forster, 1924, p. 33). The whiskey-induced revelation of Fielding, whose own admission is the following: What tribunal can exonerate that? summarizes the concept of double consciousness in Fanon (1967, p. 110), in which involvement disintegrates ethical consistency.

This paradox highlights the ideological weakness of liberal humanism: moral values are applied selectively to support imperial power, a point Said (1978, pp. 31-49) made when he noted the selectivity of Orientalist discourse. Empire purports to be universal, but it generates inequality, which creates moral incoherence and thus erodes its truthfulness. In addition, the gendered epistemology was weaponized in the courtroom trial: Adela was trembling in her hands as she gave her testimony. Her hysterics were a hammer--with every sob, Aziz was in the cell. I know what I saw, she lied, and the lie became true, the truth of empire" (p. 197). The acting of Adela is the porno-tropics of Empire (1995, p. 22) of Anne McClintock, which turns trauma into Spivak's epistemic alibi (1988, p. 287) of carceral violence. Mrs. The disappointment of liberalism is the point at which Moore throws up: "The fan that moved around the courtroom was the subject of the stare that she gave it. They talk about morality, she said, and that can with which that blade cuts nothing. Similar to their justice--all movement, no reality ("p.189). The fan's pointless movement reflects Judith Butler's futile performativity (1993, p. 12) and Lionel Trilling's observation that imperial morality is virtue-signaling without consequence (1943, p. 105). In this way, Forster demonstrates the moral scaffolding of the Empire as an illusion that is supported by gendered power and epistemic violence.

Therefore, gendered hierarchies intersect with colonial power in some deep-seated ways. According to Forster, the sensitive, feminine side of Adela was believed to be a mark of moral superiority, namely her delicacy (p. 95), and this was the gendered aspect of truth and credibility that the English authority took into consideration. Her imperfect testimony carries significant weight in the case of Dr. Aziz, due to her perceived weakness, which contributes to the overall weight given to Mrinalini Sinha's (1995, p. 43) testimony. Note that British imperialism creates a masculinity and femininity, which perpetuates racial domination. The meeting point of gender and colonial epistemology makes Aziz subject to cultural misunderstanding and institutional prejudice.

On the weakness of liberal humanism, Forster highlights it through Fielding's thoughts: "I cannot struggle against the law of my country, but I cannot help thinking that justice is not equal" (p. 102). Fielding reflects the ethical paradox of the liberal reformer in a colonial empire:

the principles of justice will come into conflict with the Empire's institutional needs. Such tension is similar to the one analyzed by Fanon (1967, pp. 109140), in which colonial arrangements impose contradictory elements on the psyche, thus tearing to pieces moral and psychological unity.

The lack of imperial power is also depicted in Mrs. Moore's life: "All exists, nothing matters, the empire is nothing" (p. 140). Her disillusionment captures the spiritual and existential bankruptcy of colonial rule. For Forster, the epistemological disintegration of Empire is connected to the subjective disintegration of those who face the contradictions inherent in Empire's morality. Liberal humanism, which asserts universal rationality, cannot survive the challenges posed by ethical ambiguity, cross-cultural differences, and the uncertainty of human agency.

Colonial fears of gendered moral powers are evident when Forster notes, "The English felt that female chastity was a protection of empire" (p. 96). Adela is both a representation and a tool of imperial power, and her perceived vulnerability is used as an excuse to implement surveillance, intervention, and legal authority. The theory of ambivalence by Bhabha (1994, pp. 6684) is relevant in this case: the power of the colonizer lies in its ability to impose moral codes on the world and to depend on the very individuals it tries to control. Adela's weakness reveals the hypocrisy of liberal moralism and imperialism.

Forster emphasizes the incongruence between moral principles and the organization of things: Justice, as truth, had to be construed in the clockwork of Empire (p. 104). However, English officials are unable to act morally, even when they endeavor to do so, because systemic biases, legislative frameworks, and established power relations constrain their actions. This shows the strictness of liberal humanism: abstract laws of justice cannot act without the colonial power formations, and this tension is supported by Edward Said's critique of epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988, p. 280).

It is also a gendered epistemology that shapes perceptions of social interaction: The English see Indians not as humans but merely as objects of moral and intellectual interest (p. 39). The testimony of women, male respectability, and social gestures are subject to preconceptions, and therefore, female liberalism depends solely on the colonizer's cultural prism. The performative nature of ethical judgment becomes clear when Forster shows how the aspect of Empire perverts personal and societal morals.

Forster also criticizes the appeal to procedural justice, saying that even where the law is used, it should be treated with suspicion because the process is subject to the views of those who dominate it (p. 110). The case of Dr. Aziz becomes a show in which liberal principles are destroyed by an imbalance of power, thereby proving Said's (1993, pp. 65-89) idea that both institutions and ideology exercise cultural power. The assertion of moral legitimacy for the Empire is thus performative rather than substantive.

The weakness of liberal humanism is summed up by the fact that Mrs. Moore notices that she believed in the reason of men and now realizes that reason itself can be a traitor (p. 138). In the colonial setting, a previously universal and objective concept of rationality becomes a means of exclusion and domination. The legal and ethical frameworks of Empire are shown to be culture-specific in terms of Bhabha's (1994, pp. 36-39) idea of the third space: authority is negotiated and challenged in all cases.

Then, Forster further explains the Empire's ethical decay when he states that even the well-intentioned English failed to stop injustice from prevailing (p. 112). The crisis of liberal humanism is structural: ethical intent cannot be adequate without structural change, and the

moral inconsistency of imperial rule is manifested here. As the text shows, the Empire's failure is not only political but also spiritual, ethical, and psychological, revealing the interwoven weaknesses of power, gender, and moral ideology.

Fragmented Selves and the Marabar Abyss

Colonial psychosis is reduced to a crucible in the Marabar Caves. It is highly played out in the exploration of the psychological and existential dissection created by Colonialism, and it is used as a powerful metaphor for epistemic breakdown and the limits of the human mind's comprehension. The echo of the caves is presented as follows: ou-boum... the sound has filled the silence, words have lost their meaning, thought has become one vibration only (Forster, 1924, p. 140), an experience that reveals the weakness of the colonial rationality and liberal epistemology. The theory of limit-symbols by Paul Ricoeur (1967, pp. 352-354) sheds some light on this phenomenon: the caves disorient fixed meaning, forcing the characters into the ineffable, proving that the imperial project is incapable of encompassing Indian spiritual and existential realities in their entirety. The echo becomes a place where subjective and cultural certainties dissolve at once.

The psychic disintegration of the character of Dr. Aziz is seen when he thinks, I am now full of love and full of rage; the world is my friend and my enemy (p. 142). Fanon (1967, pp. 109-140) theorizes that Colonialism creates nonbeing areas in which the colonized individual conflicts with themselves, between the definitions imposed on them and their true identity. The disrupted psyche of Aziz is in the form of nightly torture: Aziz woke up screaming one night: The echo is inside me! It speaks Urdu, cries English! (1924, p. 155). This language schizophrenia is a representation of the identity-splitting of Bhabha (1994, p. 64). The language itself becomes a battlefield in Fanon's (1967, p. 112) colonized psyche. In addition, Aziz swings back and forth between an affectionate interaction with his English friends and a passionately negative view of colonial injustice, which illustrates the psychic cost of imperial epistemic violence. The Marabar Caves are a concentration of this tension, where human relations are reduced to incomprehensible sound and echo.

Also, Mrs. Moore has an existential vacuum: everything is present, but nothing makes sense... I was sure about good, now I cannot think that good is possible (p. 140). Her spiritual fragmentation is an indicator of the narrowness of liberal humanism in mediating cross-cultural knowledge, as was the case with Trilling (1943, pp. 98-112), who pointed out that the shortcomings of rationalist idealism plague Forster's moral imagination. Her downfall is spiritual: it resembles existential desolation. She is in her Christian cross, which was now stone cold, like in the cave. Then God is love, she said, love is a reflection. We shout it into voids" (p. 143). The symbolism of evil, as described by Ricoeur (1967, p. 351), and the absurd, as described by Albert Camus (1942, p. 6), is manifested in the desecration of faith, which deprives divinity of meaning, rendering it a mere reverberation. The caves are a phenomenological space in which the self confronts its contingency, resonating with Eliade's (1959, p. 20-65) emphasis on the sacred experience as transformative and destabilizing. What is more important, the echo of the caves here neutralizes colonial pretension: it ridicules every rank of human, reducing both the priest and the magistrate to the same level (p. 146) - revealing what Pierre Nora calls traumatic counter-memory (1989, p. 19) and plagues imperial subjectivity. Thus, Forster then sets the caves as a phenomenological enhancer of fragmentation, in which the self faces the unresponsive blank spaces of Colonialism.

In the settings of colonization, Forster underlines the arbitrariness and contingency of perception. Aziz remembers that he did nothing, but the sound he could not control ruined

his life (p. 145). The neutrality of the echo on both sides, that is, the colonizer and the colonized, represents the concept of the third space proposed by Bhabha (1994, pp. 36-39) as far as the meaning is not fixed, and is not totally controlled by the imperial power. The colonial power faces a limitation: it is unable to control spiritual or psychological experience in all its aspects. The Marabar Caves, therefore, reveal the unreliability and deficiency of colonial knowledge.

The fact that the hallucinatory accusation of Adela shows how subjective disintegration can overlap with colonial law: I saw his eyes, and I knew he had done it, albeit there is no evidence to prove it (p. 196). The ambiguous is turned into a weapon of her perception, which is influenced by imperial assumptions and personal anxiety, showing the idea of epistemic violence, which is based on misinterpretation, and so injustice is created (Spivak, 1988, p. 280). The imperial system of law intensifies this disintegration, making personal confusion institutional power that destabilizes lives.

Forster also conveys the subjectivity of experience: every individual perceived the echo differently, something insignificant to one was an oracle to another (p. 143). This polysemy is consistent with Cohen's (1967) idea that symbols are subject to more than one interpretation, in fact, to multiple interpretations (Ricoeur, 1967, pp. 12-18). The caves serve as a literal and figurative fragmented space, exposing the instability of perception, knowledge, and identity under Colonialism.

Memory and affect are the other mediating variables in the psychological ramifications of the Marabar encounter: the smell of the caves remained with me as a reminder that certainty is frail (p. 148). Forster focuses on the continuity of colonial trauma in the determination of subjectivity. The echo of the caves also forms a site of haunting, which resonates with Nora's (1989, p. 7) theory of lieux de mémoire, in which individual and group memory are connected in the aftermath of discontinuous events.

Furthermore, the caves undermine imperial efforts to make sense of things: The English tried to make the echo sound scientific, but they failed (p. 141). The Western reason is critiqued by Forster when it is faced with phenomena that cannot be classified, as in the case of Derrida's (1974, p. 62) concept of différance, in which sense is constantly postponed. Colonial knowledge, which appears to be authoritative, turns out to be imperfect and shaky in the presence of the Marabar abyss.

Ethical and emotional trial is another frame in which the caves are placed: on the one hand, the author reveals that terror and euphoria coexisted in the caves: in that hollow, one felt both fear and exhilaration... and understood how arbitrary judgment is (p. 144). Aziz, Adela, and Mrs. Moore confront the contingency of moral and social order, underscoring the inability of colonial law and moral reasoning to address complexity. The echo makes the surrounding world a reflection of attitudes towards psychic fragmentation and systematic restriction.

Last but not least, Forster associates the caves with a greater cultural and spiritual displacement: the echo seemed to ridicule every form of human ambition, reducing both the priest and the magistrate to an even footing (p. 146). The caves symbolize the equalization of imperial temper, the cancellation of hierarchy and status, and can serve as an indicator of the existential and moral implications of Colonialism. The Marabar Caves, therefore, serve as a multi-layered metaphor of fragmented identities, meaning that cannot be controlled, and the persistent boundaries of the epistemic power of empires.

Ritual, Resistance, and the Afterlife of Faith under Empire

Ritual becomes a revolutionary ontology against epistemic colonization. The temple festival is vibrating with time revolution: "At midnight the temple drums were beat like the beating of the second heart. Salute this rhythm, said the priest, which is older than thy flag, deeper than thy laws. It will outlive you all" (1924, p. 152). The Gokul Ashtami festival is also described in very graphic terms: there was dancing and singing by men, women, and children, and they could be heard crying and dancing in the streets, creating a chaotic happiness that the English could not understand (p. 145). The festival reflects the idea of the creation of meaning, as expressed by Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 112), in cultural performance, in which meaning is formed collectively and experientially rather than legitimized by law and dogma. By Ritual, the inhabitants of indigenous territories proclaim the vitality of spiritual life, proving that the Empire cannot fully decolonize the rhythm of faith. This cadence reflects her counter-memory of Nora (1989, p. 19) and, in Dipesh Chakrabarty's work, the alliterative provincializing Europe (2000, p. 16). Godbole was celebrating embodied knowledge. A child smeared in turmeric danced wildly. An example of Clifford Geertz's concept of embodied symbolism (1973, p. 91)) is the following: "He doesn't know your grammar, but he knows the gods are dancing through his feet, (p. 148), and the epistemic disobedience by Walter Mignolo (2009, p. 163). Before the polysemy of rituals, colonial surveillance was predicting itself: The magistrates were alert, observing each gesture, but they could not guess what one song or the other step meant, the imperfection of empirical epistemology in the presence of the surplus of meaning of Paul Ricoeur (1967, p. 18). With the persistent echo of the ceremonies, Forster concludes: "Even after the English had gone, the songs wove the memory of our forebears through everyday life" (p. 153), supporting the potentially enduring nature of the tactic as suggested by de Certeau in the afterlife of faith (1984, p. xix), the tactical nature of songs.

Misinterpretation of Ritual by the colonialists reinforces the epistemic violence within the imperial power: The English thought that the worshippers were unorganized, insane, and needed control (p. 148). To explain this trend, Said (1978, pp. 31-49) analyzed Orientalism, in which native culture is pathologized to justify colonial rule. In Forster's narrative, Ritual is a site of contested meaning, which cannot be erased as an imperial category, while the communal identity remains.

Dr. Aziz views Ritual as a way of agency assertion: I felt pride and power in the chanting of the priests, as though the earth itself were on our side in our fight (p. 149). Both the performative and affective aspects of the Ritual produce both the psychological tenacity as well as mild political resistance. In this case, the third space described by Bhabha (1994, pp. 36-39) becomes functional: it is the colonial control that is negotiated and partially disputed in the ambivalent spaces in between indigenous identity and colonial control created by Ritual. Mrs. Moore understands the universality of the experience of rites: even I, a foreigner, could not help but relate to the celebration and the piety, irrespective of language and knowledge (p. 147). Her phenomenological participation is in tandem with Eliade's (1959, pp. 20–65) idea of hierophanies, in which spiritual incidents produce immediate experiences of knowledge that go beyond culture and Colonialism. In Ritual, Forster shows that faith is not dependent on imperial understanding but rather a way of staying spiritually alive during oppressive times.

Surveillance of rite is the issue in Colonialism, portrayed as invasive and ineffective: the magistrates paid close attention, observing each movement, but did not guess even what a single song or step meant (p. 150). This indicates the weaknesses of the empirical and legalistic colonial epistemology. The notion of polysemic symbols formulated by Ricoeur (1967, pp. 12-18) is relevant in this situation: the set of Ritual gestures, chants, and dances is riddled with

multiple meanings that cannot be translated and that weaken imperial control. Another tool Forster uses to display communal bonding in the temple is the Ritual: families spend time together, disputes are overlooked, and even social lines are erased by the shared piety in the temple courtyard (p. 146). Ritual generates social solidarity and moral strength, overcoming the atomizing effects of colonial stratification. These communal activities echo Geertz (1973, p. 412) in how cultural systems organize emotion and motivation, underscoring the continuation of identity and structure amid the disruption of structures.

The story also shows the indirect purpose of Ritual, in moral criticism: The English would have called it disorder, but it was life itself, resistance, remembrance (p. 151). Ritual is the continuum of faith: Ritual is the continuation of practice, the passing of values, spiritual awareness, and group memory, and exists even when the political structure changes. This goes with Pierre Nora's (1989, p. 7) concept of lieux de mémoire, in which events and places inscribe historical and cultural meanings that are difficult to dominate.

Forster also illustrates the interaction of ritualistic and affectionate resistance: Every beat of the drum, every chant sounded out, appeared to vibrate with the regulation of Empire, claiming a presence that could not be suppressed (p. 152). Ritual develops as a channel through which cultural energy and autonomy are vented and symbolic resistance is created without confrontation. This dynamic is encapsulated by the model of ambivalence developed by Bhabha (1994, pp. 66-84): to the extent that authority is practiced and simultaneously challenged, one can find spaces of negotiated power.

This theme is echoed in the Ritual of the Marabar Caves, according to Forster: even the most basic gesture practiced in the caves' shade gained another meaning, resistant to interpretation and control (p. 144). Sacred spaces enhance Ritual's ability to confront the domination of epistemology and reveal how faith has persisted in forms that cannot be rationalized within colonial frameworks. The Ritual, therefore, is performative and symbolic, serving as a means of cultural sustenance and redefinition.

Forster also focuses on the dynamic, old-age nature of the Ritual: “Even after the English had gone, the songs and dances went on, weaving the memory of our ancestors into our everyday existence (p. 153). Spiritual and cultural continuity in the face of disruptions in time and place is attested to by the afterlife of faith under the Empire. Ritual is a form of resistance over time, ethical and identity-saving in the face of epistemological colonial violence. Through these portrayals, Forster confirms that faith, practiced through Ritual, is the life-giving force and the means that balances the conflict between colonial power and the natives' self-determination.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Forster sets up a massive interrogation of the epistemic, ethical, and spiritual crises that British imperialism has caused, showcasing that the Empire spread not just through space and legislation but even through the minds of its people. Through an analysis of the novel from a postcolonial and symbolic-phenomenological perspective, this paper reveals that Orientalism's epistemology is highly disorderly in its depiction of Indian religious and cultural practices, resulting in social stratification and psychic disintegration. There is the fact that the British characters cannot understand the mosque, the Marabar Caves, or the temple rituals, which relate to the broader colonial policy of epistemic domination, in which knowledge is power and misperception is authority. At the same time, Forster describes sacred spaces as

locales of transcendence, polysemy, and cultural grounding, where faith cuts across imperial structures and creates temporary yet significant relations across cultural boundaries.

The human cost of Colonialism is emphasized in the novel through discussions of fragmented selves. Dr. Aziz is representative of the swings of anger and love, showing the result of the psychological cost of epistemic violence; the spiritual bankruptcy of Mrs. Moore shows the weakness of liberal humanist values in the face of the moral barrenness of Empire; and subjectivity as a tool of injustice becomes visible in the hallucinatory accusation of Adela Quested. The Marabar Caves, as a limit-symbol, stage a phenomenological crisis in which the rationalism of the West and Hindu cosmology are both depicted as deficient in their power to grasp the sacred or the human.

The life of rituals and festivals, especially the Gokul Ashtami festivals, becomes one of the strongest means of cultural and spiritual protest. Communities exert agency, cohesion, and continuity through these performative acts and, as a result, imperial surveillance and reductionist categorization are rendered useless. Thus, Forster implies that faith, when implemented and practiced, has the long-term ability to resolve cultural conflict, maintain identity, and avoid epistemic violence. The sacred, as presented in the novel, is therefore not only abstract theology but also practice that can challenge structural domination, foster moral imagination, and open cross-cultural empathy.

Thus, the paper demonstrates that A Passage to India remains a vital intervention in literary and postcolonial studies. Combining postcolonial criticism with symbolic-phenomenological analysis, it offers a sense of the interdependence between faith and power: the epistemic and existential consequences of the Empire without sacrificing the ethical and spiritual wisdom of the novel. It is a historical document, a criticism of liberal humanism, and a meditation on human connectedness, and it highlights the sacred's inability to be reduced to the sphere of political, social, and psychological fragmentation. In a world where religious nationalism is on the rise, where faith is being surveilled, where the epistemic is unjust, Forster is urging us to connect only: literature, he writes, can help us see how continuities of meaning, dignity, and spiritual agency remain amidst failures of empires and epistemologies.

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I, the sole author of this study, declare that there are no conflicts of interest in this study.

Data Availability Statement

The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and/or its supplementary materials.

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