

Friendship and Empathy in *A Passage to India*

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Friendship vs. Colonialism: Investigating How E.M. Forster uses Empathy in *A Passage to India*

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BACKGROUND

- Upon its publication in 1924, E M Forster's *A Passage to India* was recognized for its insightful and **sympathetic portrayal** of Anglo-Indian relations.
- More recently, the novel's reception has been shaped by **postcolonial readings**, highlighting its engagement with colonialism, racial tensions, and cultural disparities.
- The **friendship** the novel centers around– and ultimately its **failure**, induced by a **rape accusation**– serves as a polarizing event for critical interpretations.
- **Is the failure of sympathy in the novel significant in any anti colonial sense? Or does it exist as an apolitical distraction?**

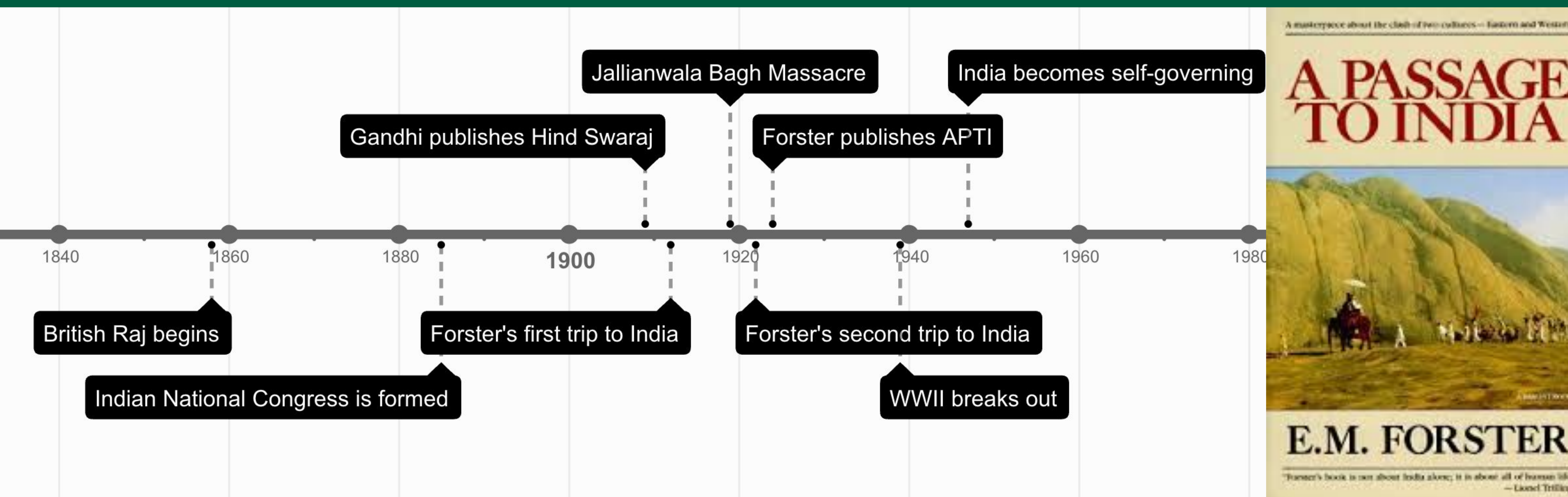
“If I had to choose between
betraying my country and
betraying my friend, I hope I
should have the guts to
betray my country”
– E.M. Forster, “What I
Believe” (1938)

“For the first time I saw myself reflected
in the mind of an English author without
losing all semblance of a human face”.
(Anonymous Indian Review of *APT*,
Snook, 1928)



"But for him, I
might never have
gone to his country,
or written about it".
(Forster, of Masood)

- E.M. Forster befriended and fell into **unreciprocated love with Syed Ross Masood in 1906**. His primary motive for his **first trip to India in 1912**, was to see Masood.
- During Forster's **second visit to India in 1922**, he served as the **private secretary to the Maharajah of Dewas**. By the time of this second trip, Masood was married, and Forster had also experienced his first physical affair with an Egyptian man. This period of resolution in his personal life appears to have coincided with his ability to complete the novel, **11 years** after he set out to do so.



“In *A Passage to India*, the colonizer is depicted as one who benefits from privilege and seeks personal gain, often at the expense of appropriating that which does not rightfully belong to him. Due to the presence of mistrust and animosity, communication becomes a scarce commodity, which is of utmost significance in the social context.” (Nayel & Mohammed, 2024)