

## **CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF DR. AZIZ IN "A PASSAGE TO INDIA"**

The main character in Forster's novel, Dr. Aziz is a pleasant man, typically eager to please others. Unfortunately, he often acts hastily, without thinking through his actions carefully, and the consequences are not what he expected. For instance, in an attempt to impress Mr. Fielding and to welcome Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested to India, Aziz invites them to his house before realizing to his horror that his house is not presentable. Quickly, he changes the plan to a visit to the Marabar Caves, a place he has never even seen.

Two qualities that make Aziz stand out in the novel are his fondness for ancient poetry and his interest in the history of India. At times he seems to wish he could have lived in the past. His quoting poetry demonstrates a sensitive side while it also reveals a characteristic of Indian life not seen among the British.

A Muslim, Aziz is contemptuous of most Hindus, calling them "slack," because he disapproves of their careless view of time. Though he yearns to be friends with certain members of the British community, he, like most of the other Indian characters, resents the British colonial rule. The question that begins the novel, "Can an Indian be friends with an Englishman?" is one that puzzles Aziz for much of the novel.

He is kind to Mrs. Moore, whom he sees as "an Oriental," because she is spiritual, and Mr. Fielding because Fielding is a compassionate friend of the Indians, but as the novel unfolds, Aziz has experiences that change his view of Fielding. Mrs. Moore achieves an almost god-like status, on the other hand.

Likeable, knowledgeable as a physician, friendly, Aziz is nevertheless to some extent as prejudiced as the British in the novel. His hasty actions and sometimes flighty behavior cause problems he doesn't anticipate when he goes overboard to impress his guests on the trip to the caves.

Aziz seems to be a mess of extremes and contradictions, an embodiment of Forster's notion of the "muddle" of India. Aziz is impetuous and flighty, changing opinions and preoccupations quickly and without warning, from one moment to the next. His moods swing back and forth between extremes, from childlike elation one minute to utter despair the next. Aziz even seems capable of shifting careers and talents, serving as both physician and poet during the course of *A Passage to India*. Aziz's somewhat youthful qualities, as evidenced by a sense of humor that leans toward practical joking, are offset by his attitude of irony toward his English superiors.

Forster, though not blatantly stereotyping, encourages us to see many of Aziz's characteristics as characteristics of Indians in general. Aziz, like many of his friends, dislikes blunt honesty and directness, preferring to communicate through confidences, feelings underlying words, and indirect speech. Aziz has a sense that much of morality is really social code. He therefore feels no moral compunction about visiting prostitutes or reading Fielding's private mail—both because his intentions are good and because he knows he will not be caught. Instead of living by merely social codes, Aziz guides his action through a code that is nearly religious, such as we see in his extreme hospitality. Moreover, Aziz, like many of the other Indians, struggles with the problem of the English in India. On the one hand, he appreciates some of the modernizing influences that the West has brought to India; on the other, he feels that the presence of the English degrades and oppresses his people.

Despite his contradictions, Aziz is a genuinely affectionate character, and his affection is often based on intuited connections, as with Mrs. Moore and Fielding. Though Forster holds up Aziz's capacity for imaginative sympathy as a good trait, we see that this imaginativeness can also betray Aziz. The deep offense Aziz feels toward Fielding in the aftermath of his trial stems from fiction and misinterpreted intuition. Aziz does not stop to evaluate facts, but rather follows his heart to the exclusion of all other methods—an approach that is sometimes wrong.

Many critics have contended that Forster portrays Aziz and many of the other Indian characters unflatteringly. Indeed, though the author is certainly sympathetic to the Indians, he does sometimes present them as incompetent, subservient, or childish. These somewhat valid critiques call into question the realism of Forster's novel, but they do not, on the whole, corrupt his exploration of the possibility of friendly relations between Indians and Englishmen—arguably the central concern of the novel.

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