E. M. Forster’s
A Passage to India
A Sourcebook

Edited by Peter Childs
E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) be generated decades of debate on issues as wide ranging as imperialism, modernism, ethnicity, sexuality and symbolism.

Taking the form of a sourcebook, this guide to Forster's challenging novel offers:

- extensive introductory comment on the contexts and many interpretations of the text, from publication to the present
- annotated extracts from key contextual documents, reviews, critical works and the text itself
- cross-references between documents and sections of the guide, in order to suggest links between texts, contexts and criticism
- suggestions for further reading.

Part of the *Routledge Guides to Literature* series, this volume is essential reading for all those beginning detailed study of *A Passage to India* and seeking not only a guide to the novel, but a way through the wealth of contextual and critical material that surrounds Forster's text.

Peter Childs is Professor of English at the University of Glouceshertire. His publications include *Modernism* (2000) and *The Twentieth Century in Poetry* (1998).
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To David and Andrea, David and Gina, and Keith

‘if they turn me away I must go to the Dak’

(A Passage to India, ch. xxvi)
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Introduction

Passage indeed O soul to primal thought,
Not lands and seas alone, thy own dear freshness,
The young maturity of brood and bloom,
To realms of budding bibles ... 
Passage to more than India!

- Walt Whitman, 'Passage to India' (ll.165–9, 224)

Though he lived for nearly fifty years after its publication, E. M. Forster did not write another novel after *A Passage to India* (1924). Almost as surprising is the fact that it appeared fourteen years after his previous novel, *Howards End* (1910). In the intervening years between his two most celebrated works, Forster was far from idle: during the First World War he worked for the Red Cross in Alexandria, about which city he published a book, *Alexandria: A History and a Guide*, in 1922; he travelled twice to India; he published a collection of short stories, *The Celestial Omnibus*, and a collection of essays and sketches on Alexandria entitled *Pharos and Pharillon*; and he even wrote another novel, *Maurice*, but its homosexual subject matter meant that it was not published until after Forster’s death.

For the country in which Forster’s new novel was to be set, India, this was also an eventful period. Between his first visit to the subcontinent in 1912 and his second in 1921, *A Passage to India* gestated in Forster’s mind over a decade that spanned the First World War, the Rowlatt Acts (extending wartime repressive measures – including imprisonment without trial – to post-war India), Gandhi’s return to India from South Africa and the start of his civil disobedience campaign, the first Government of India Act, an upsurge in Indian nationalist feeling, British promises of independence, and the most ignominious event in the raj’s history: the infamous gunning down of Indian civilians, known as the Amritsar Massacre, in 1919. *A Passage to India* is firmly rooted in this history even though Forster argued that his book was about the human race’s attempt to find a ‘more-lasting home’: that it was at its core about religion and metaphysics.

Over the course of this Sourcebook, the importance of both political and personal values for Forster will become apparent. The Sourcebook is divided into
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four sections, which cover different approaches to studying the novel. The first is concerned with contexts: biographical, literary and historical. The second focuses on interpretation: the history of the novel's criticism, early reviews and recent readings. The third section explores the book at the level of the text: after a brief summary of the narrative, there are detailed notes and discussion covering eleven key passages from the novel, from the opening paragraphs to the closing pages. Finally, the fourth section provides a note on the best available edition and a guide to recommended further reading. No single book can hope to cover every angle to reading and interpreting a novel, but this Sourcebook aims to provide the information that is most important to an understanding of its principal issues as well as the critical commentaries and debates surrounding them.