

“NOTHING IN INDIA IS IDENTIFIABLE,”
AS A SENSE OF PLACE
IS NEITHER STABLE NOR UNCONSTRUCTED

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A Thesis Submitted to the
University of North Carolina at Wilmington in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English

University of North Carolina at Wilmington

2004

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ABSTRACT

The naming of place is a way of naming our own belonging or identity. Understanding place begins with identifying the person, or group of persons, who name the space, whether it be the colonizer or the colonized. To name a space is to understand it and control it. Place, as belonging, is dependent upon self-definition. Self-definition is dependent upon the binary construction of Self/Other, “us” versus “them.” Each person’s binary construction contributes to one’s sense of place. Once the binaries are identified, senses of place are set in motion.

In examining E. M. Forster’s A Passage to India we see the British colonial, Miss Adela Quested, come to India in search of the mystical, exotic, and “real” Indian. The question is whether India as a “place” can truly be identified and labeled. Forster has detailed various people’s ideas of place throughout his novel, and, depending upon who is speaking in the narrative, the sense of place changes. The man-made construction of binaries influences one’s sense of place. Adela’s presumption that Dr. Aziz is an “authentic” Indian invokes her Self/Other constructed binary as she defines both “self” and place. Whether Adela is asking questions about India or the exact nature of the Marabar Caves, there is no clear-cut answer available. India is an ever-changing place in constant motion. The difficulties of sustaining an agreed upon sense of place is problematic not only with colonizer and colonized but is also characteristic of India itself.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest thanks go to Dr. Cara Cilano who ignited my interest in Postcolonialism, but more specifically for filtering the static and noise around me making it possible to hear the soft voice of subaltern people. Without Dr. Cilano's continuous guidance and support, this thesis would never have come to fruition.

Special thanks go to my parents, sister, and brothers who helped me along the way. I am sure they suspected it was endless as they felt the pressures of deadlines each semester as if it were their own.

Finally, I would like to thank my committee, Dr. J. Lewis Walker and Dr. Barbara Waxman, for their assistance throughout my studies. Their insight on this project has been invaluable.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my best friend, William Ostrosky, whose continued support and encouragement along the way have meant more to me than he will ever know. Not only has he been the world's greatest husband, but he has also been the world's greatest father and mother to our daughter. Simply, thank you.