

Communication in our extract : Bridging the gap ?

The “**passage**” between East and West was the process by which both cultures and civilizations found common ground, an area of agreement based on mutual respect. In this extract, we saw that the passage seemed **most unlikely to be found**. The word “passage” in the title of the novel also refers to this idea.

Similarly, the expression “**bridge party**” does not refer to the popular British game of cards, but rather to an attempt at “bridging the gap” between British and Indians during a garden party organized by the Collector to entertain Mrs Moore and Miss Quested who want to meet Indians.

When Mrs Moore and Miss Quested discover that the Indian ladies speak English, they are genuinely enthusiastic, however, they don’t manage to talk with them!

In this excerpt, the language is not the only impediment /barrier. Indeed there seems to be a **complete misunderstanding**. Even **gestures** seem to be difficult to interpret. (l.....) (mention the Indian ladies’ awkward reactions!),

The cultural clash indicates that the two groups are very different from each other, and that “walls” prevent them from communicating.

Genuine communication seems **to be bound to fail despite efforts** on both sides. This is what the reader is made to feel in the second part of our extract :

Indeed failure is mentioned several times we may quote words and expressions such as : strove in vain/ unsuccessfully/ neither...nor..could provide/

and the two key sentences are : 1) “ the echoing walls of their civility” “ and 2) “ **as if they sought for a new formula which neither East nor West could provide**”.

1) -The Indian ladies’ polite attitude is like a protective wall which **prevents** the 2 ladies **from having** access to what they really think. The author uses an oxymoron (a figure of speech that combines contradictory terms). The very “civility” which should make relationships easier is called a “wall”. The 2 newcomers will only hear **their own “formulas” repeated** by their Indian peers. Moreover, all the negative sentences point to **aborted** communication. (The “echoing walls” may also refer to an episode in the novel).

2) - This **new formula** is a new code (based on genuine human values) that needs to be invented by both communities, but certainly **not at an official reception**. This points to the irony of the situation. Mrs Moore and Miss Quested may appear as very naïve!

Bridging the gap between the two cultures **proves impossible** : it is either too early or too late! The British ladies’ efforts are fruitless.

The conversation **comes to a deadlock** (impasse/stanstill)/(a situation in which no progress can be made or no advancement is possible). This is underlined by the embarrassed silence which settles in several times. **Neither** the British ladies **nor** the Indian ladies know how to react. **In spite of** their willingness to communicate/good will/benevolence/ neither the newcomers nor the natives **manage to find** common ground. people are very **awkward** on both sides. **Even though** Mrs Moore and Miss Quested treat the Indian ladies fairly, the latter are ill-at-ease, probably because **they are not used to being on an equal footing with/ they are not used to being treated as equals** by the British. It may be the first time they **have been invited** by the Collector and his wife, as a result, they are **at a loss** what to do and what to say.

Remember that they were trying to hide in the summer-house (beginning of the text), standing apart, trying to be as inconspicuous as they could!

The relationships can only be superficial. They are **flawed** (faussées) by the strict hierarchy the British rulers introduced when they colonized India. For example (last lines) we learn that Mrs Battacharya, who probably belongs to the highest caste, feels it is **her duty** to stay at home every Thursday should British ladies want to visit her on an impulse, since the British have imposed that day for their visits paid to Indian ladies ! The Indian ladies have no choice but to agree. Therefore, Mrs B. suggests a Thursday, unable to realize she may choose the day as any British host would do!

Conclusion : Even if there may be an open door, with a planned visit to Mrs Battacharya, the relationships may not be as genuine as Mrs Moore and Miss Quested hope they will be....