Indian Ink

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TOM STOPPARD

Tom Stoppard was born to a Jewish family in the Czech city of Zlín in 1937. Two years later, his parents fled the country with him to escape the Nazi occupation. They moved to Singapore, where his father died as a Japanese prisoner of war, and then to Darjeeling, India, where he attended an American boarding school and his mother married Kenneth Stoppard, an English army officer. (This is how his name changed from Tomáš Sträussler, his birth name, to Tom Stoppard.) He moved to England with his family at age 10 and continued his education in Yorkshire. But he quit school at age 17 to become a journalist and never went to college. For a decade, Stoppard worked as a reporter and theatre critic, befriending actors and directors until he started writing plays of his own. His first play, *A Walk on the Water*, was an instant hit in 1962, and two years later, he published *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, which remains his best-known work today. In the more than five decades since, he has written around three dozen stage plays and nearly as many major screenplays (including many adaptations from novels, the Academy Award winner *Shakespeare in Love*, and even parts of the third *Star Wars* movie). Between 1968 and 2020, he won seven Tony Awards and Laurence Olivier Awards for Best Play. (As of 2022, he is tied for the most Tony Award wins for writing.) He has also translated numerous plays from throughout Europe into English—most notably those of the Czech writer, activist, and eventual president Václav Havel. After communist rule ended in the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the early 1990s, Stoppard finally returned to his birthplace of Zlín and learned, tragically, that his grandparents and his mother's three sisters were all murdered in Nazi concentration camps. He was knighted in 1997 and remains one of Britain's most highly regarded playwrights today.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Indian Ink is set between 1930 (a pivotal year in India's fight for independence from the British Empire) and the mid-1980s (some 40 years after it achieved that independence). The play is deeply concerned with British colonialism's social, political, economic, and artistic legacy in India. Decades after independence, many colonial norms and hierarchies were still in place, while most British people looked back fondly on the Empire's rule. This colonial legacy began in the early 1600s, when European governments began backing East India Companies, which were charged with securing natural resources from Asia through plunder and trade. To outcompete the Dutch and Portuguese companies, the British East India Company began establishing colonies in India, negotiating with India's emperor, and eventually invading and taking over many autonomous Indian territories. By the mid-1800s, the Company ran all of modern-day India, whether directly or through alliances with local rulers (like the Rajah in *Indian Ink*). But in 1857, much of the Indian army rebelled and tried to overthrow the Company's government—an event also known by various names, including the First Indian War of Independence and the Sepoy Mutiny. After this rebellion, the British Crown took direct control of India and deliberately exacerbated a series of famines that killed at least 60 million people. The Indian independence movement began growing in the early 1900s; while revolutionaries fought British rule through bombs and targeted assassinations, the steadfastly nonviolent activist leader Mahatma Gandhi emerged as the independence movement's leader in the years after World War I. In 1930, the year in which *Indian Ink* is set, Gandhi led his famous Salt March—in which he led thousands of supporters on a march to the sea in order to make his own salt, in protest of British salt monopoly policies. The march attracted attention worldwide and helped convince millions of Indians to start disobeying oppressive British laws. In this way, it played a significant role in contributing to the independence movement's eventual success in 1947.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Tom Stoppard has published more than 40 plays across more than five decades, and *Indian Ink* is far from the most popular. Rather, Stoppard's most widely read and performed works include *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966), *The Real Thing* (1982), *Travesties* (1984), *Arcadia* (1993), *The Invention of Love* (1997), the trilogy *The Coast of Utopia* (2002), and *Leopoldstadt* (2020). He has also written screenplays for prominent movies like *Brazil* (1985), *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), and the 2012 adaptation of *Anna Karenina*. Major recent Indian playwrights who deal with similar themes of art, colonialism, and independence include Asif Currimbhoy (e.g. *Goa*, 1964) and street playwright Safdar Hashmi (e.g., *Halla Bol*, 1989). Nirad Das also tells Flora Crewe about the *Gita Govinda*, the 12th-century Sanskrit epic poem that tells the story of Krishna and Radha, and the theory of *rasas* (emotion in art) that comes from the ancient *Natya Shastra*. *Indian Ink* also references many works of colonial English literature about India. The most significant of these is Emily Eden's *Up the Country* (1866), a collection of letters about traveling through India with her brother, the top-ranking British official in the subcontinent. In many ways, Eden inspired the play's protagonist, fictional poet Flora Crewe. The play's characters also discuss E.M. Forster's landmark novel *A Passage to India* (1924) and Rudyard Kipling's

poem celebrating British imperialism, "Mandalay" (1890).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Indian Ink
- **When Written:** 1990–1995
- **Where Written:** London
- **When Published:** February 1, 1995 (premiere at Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford, England)
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary, Postcolonial
- **Genre:** Historical Drama, Romance, Postcolonial Drama
- **Setting:** Shepperton, England and the fictional city of Jummapur, India
- **Climax:** Nirad Das gets arrested, and Flora Crewe leaves Jummapur and dies.
- **Antagonist:** Eldon Pike, David Durance, the British Empire, the Rajah, artistic norms

EXTRA CREDIT

From Radio to Stage. Stoppard adapted *Indian Ink* from a radio play he wrote in 1991, *In the Native State*.

Archival Allusion. In *Indian Ink*, the scholar Eldon Pike notes that Flora Crewe's papers are archived at the University of Texas library—the same place where Tom Stoppard has collected his own papers since 1991 (five years before he wrote this play).

PLOT SUMMARY

Tom Stoppard's play *Indian Ink* interweaves two storylines set more than 50 years apart. In 1930, the fiery, controversial English poet Flora Crewe goes to the fictional city of Jummapur, India, where she meets Nirad Das, a brilliant, passionate local painter. Das paints portraits of Flora as she writes poetry about sex, love, and India; it's never entirely clear whether they become lovers. Meanwhile, two other men also court Flora: a chauvinistic young English official, David Durance, and the elegant and extravagantly wealthy Rajah (king) of Jummapur. In the other timeline, in the 1980s, Flora's elderly sister, Eleanor Swan, meets with two men interested in Flora's legacy: Eldon Pike, a literary critic who is compiling Flora's letters and writing her biography, and Nirad Das's son Anish, who wants to learn more about his father.

The play begins with Flora Crewe arriving in Jummapur to speak at the local Theosophical Society, which accommodates her in a sparse but functional old bungalow. While Flora acts out the letters she wrote to Eleanor in 1930, Eleanor and Eldon Pike read the letters and discuss Flora's legacy in the 1980s. Coomaraswami, the Theosophical Society president, gives Flora a tour of Jummapur and hosts her lecture at his house. She is surprised to learn that her Indian audience knows almost everything about the London literary scene. She strikes up a conversation with the painter Nirad Das, who asks if he can paint her portrait. She agrees, and he starts biking to her bungalow to paint her as she writes. (Eldon Pike is astonished when he learns this: there are no known portraits of Flora. But Eleanor Swan nonchalantly mentions that Modigliani once painted Flora, too.) Flora and Das struggle to communicate at first because of cultural barriers, but soon, they hit it off. Das even gifts Flora a copy of Emily Eden's colonial travelogue about India, Up the Country.

Later, Anish Das visits Eleanor and explains that his father, a little-known artist who was imprisoned for supporting Indian independence in 1930, painted the portrait on the cover of Eldon Pike's *Collected Letters of Flora Crewe*. Anish and Eleanor get into a heated political argument: he believes that the British Empire exploited and impoverished India, while she views it as the best thing to ever happen there—and thinks that Anish's father deserved jail time for opposing it. (In fact, Eleanor's husband was a British army officer who was long stationed in India.) Anish explains that he's a painter, just like his father, and Eleanor agrees to let him sketch her.

Fifty years before, Flora and Das also discuss the budding Indian nationalist movement—Das supports it but is afraid to say too much and incriminate himself to an Englishwoman. The same day, Captain David Durance visits Flora's house unannounced and asks her to dinner at the official British Residency. She finds him pompous and distasteful, but she agrees. Meanwhile, during their painting sessions, Das and Flora chat about politics, the Hindu story of Radha and Krishna's love affair, and the concept of rasa (or the emotional "essence" of a work of art).

In the 1980s, Eleanor Swan tells Anish Das that Eldon Pike's footnotes to Flora's poems and letters are highly unreliable. Meanwhile, Pike and his friend Dilip show up in Jummapur in search of information about Flora—especially a lost watercolor portrait of her in the nude by Das.

Back in 1930, Das tears up his pencil sketch of Flora because he's insulted that she didn't say anything when he showed it to her. When he tries to destroy his canvas portrait, too, he and Flora start fighting over it—but she quickly collapses in exhaustion. She admits that she has come to India because she is dying (likely of tuberculosis). She wants to shower, but the running water is broken, so Das helps her bathe with a jug of water. She asks if he wants to paint her in the nude, and she requests that he paint her in his own authentic, Indian artistic style rather than continuing to imitate the Western styles that the British have imposed on him. He agrees.

Act Two of *Indian Ink* begins with Flora and David Durance dancing after dinner at the Jummapur Club in 1930, while Dilip and Pike go to the same club—which is largely unchanged—five

decades later. They finally find a connection to Flora: Subadar Ram Sunil Singh, an elderly man who was Flora's punkah (fan) operator as a young boy and remembers her meetings with Das. In 1930, David Durance takes Flora out for a drive and horseback ride, but he strikes all the wrong notes. He awkwardly brings up the obscenity lawsuit that her publisher faced for printing her erotic poetry and stupidly insists that only the English can rule India effectively. He asks her to marry him, and she says absolutely not.

In the 1980s, after visiting the Jummapur Club, Dilip and Pike go to the Rajah's palace—which is now a luxury hotel. They discuss Indian politics and debate whether Das and Flora were lovers. In 1930, the Rajah visits Flora and impresses her by having just a few of his 86 luxury cars drive by her bungalow. He warns that India must not become independent and agrees to show her his art collection, on the condition that he can gift her a painting. Back in the 1980s, Dilip and Pike meet the new Rajah of Jummapur—who is the original Rajah's grandson. He no longer has any formal powers, but he *is* a member of India's parliament. Meanwhile, back in England, Anish Das and Eleanor Swan admire Nirad Das's two paintings of Flora—the oil portrait and the nude watercolor, both unfinished—as well as the Rajah's painting of Krishna and Radha.

In 1930, after Flora's date with the Rajah, Das and Coomaraswami visit her and explain that the Rajah is shutting down the Theosophical Society over its support for the independence movement. Fed up, Flora decides to leave Jummapur for better weather. She and Das share a tearful goodbye: he gives her his watercolor and she reads him an erotic poem. Later, David Durance visits Flora and grows furious when she tells him that the Rajah visited her—he doesn't think she should be involved with Indian men, least of all "politically sensitive" ones.

In one of her final letters to Eleanor, Flora reports that she has finished her poetry book, *Indian Ink*, and admits that Eleanor "won't approve" of the man she is involved with. Years later, Anish Das assumes that this man was his father, but Eleanor thinks it may have been David Durance or the Rajah. She also reveals why Nirad Das ended up in prison: he threw mangos at a British official's car—which David Durance was probably driving on one of his dates with Flora.

Flora dies just a few weeks after her departure from Jummapur, and when Eleanor visits her grave a year later, she meets her husband Eric, an official who works for the British government. The play closes with Flora reading from her letters and *Up the Country*, in which Emily Eden wonders why Indians don't just band together and murder their British overlords.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Flora Crewe – Flora Crewe, the central figure in *Indian Ink*, is an English poet who's controversial in London for daring to write frankly about love and sex from a female perspective. However, decades after her death, critics and scholars start treating her as a central figure in English letters and feminist literary history. The play focuses on her visit to India and her relationship with the painter Nirad Das in 1930 (at the end of her short life), as well as her sister Eleanor Swan's conversations with Das's son Anish and the literary scholar Eldon Pike about her legacy 50 years later. She arrives in Jummapur to speak to the local Theosophical Society at the beginning of the play and moves into an old local bungalow. Brilliant, openminded, and endlessly curious, she tries to learn everything she can about Indian culture and society—even if this means consorting with ordinary citizens and offending stodgy colonial officials in the process. She quickly starts to recognize how British rule exploits and impoverishes the Indians who live under it. In particular, she worries that many Indians learn to view English society, art, and culture as inherently superior to their own. However, her relationship with Das eventually shows her that it's possible to see the profound value in both. At first, she and Das struggle to communicate because of their different sensibilities: she finds his responses evasive, and he finds many of her jokes offensive. However, over time, they build a deep connection. Das paints her, including in the nude, and teaches her about Indian art and culture (including concepts like rasa and stories like the tale of Krishna and Radha). However, she also goes on dates with the colonial administrator David Durance and the Rajah of Jummapur, who share her socioeconomic class, if not her perspective on India. She develops a relationship with (at least) one of these three men, but the play never reveals which, leaving the audience to judge for itself.

Nirad Das – Nirad Das is the portrait painter from Jummapur whose relationship with Flora Crewe forms the core of *Indian Ink*'s plot. In 1930, when he meets Flora, he is a 34-year-old widower. He is thoughtful, passionate, and extremely skilled, but also formal, cautious, and generally unaccustomed to dealing with English people. In particular, he struggles to treat Flora as an equal instead of deferring to her as a superior—which is the norm in the brutal, hierarchical society of colonial India. Surely enough, he suffers the consequences when the Rajah throws him in prison, allegedly for his involvement with the independence movement (but also likely because of his relationship with Flora). In fact, despite his support for independence, he also adores English art, culture, and literature—which is a nuance, not a contradiction. In fact, he and Flora first bond over his encyclopedic knowledge of London's literary scene, and like many Indian activists, he

attributes his political persuasions to his "proper English education" (which he received at Elphinstone College in Bombay). But he is also extensively schooled in traditional Indian culture, philosophy, and painting techniques. His collaboration with Flora helps him combine the two. He starts by painting her as she writes, but eventually, at her request, he ends up painting her nude. They likely have a sexual relationship, too, but the play never makes this clear, and he never finishes either of the portraits. His work is well-known in Jummapur but scarcely anywhere else—until Eldon Pike puts his portrait of Flora on the cover of *The Collected Letters of Flora Crewe*. Decades later, after seeing Pike's book, Nirad Das's son, Anish, goes on to interview Eleanor Swan and investigate his legacy.

Anish Das – Anish Das, Nirad Das's son, is a painter who lives in England with his English wife. In the 1980s, after seeing his father's portrait of Flora on the cover of Eldon Pike's *The Collected Letters of Flora Crewe*, he approaches Flora's sister Eleanor Swan to discuss his father's story. Although they disagree about many things, including the effects of British colonialism on India and the nature of Flora and Nirad Das's relationship, they still connect over their shared family history. Their conversations may represent opposite views of the British-Indian relationship, but they also demonstrate one unified approach to history: they try to take charge of their relatives' legacy, rather than letting scholars like Eldon Pike control it.

Eleanor ("Nell") Swan – Eleanor Swan is Flora Crewe's sister. She primarily appears in the scenes set in the 1980s as an elderly widow whom Eldon Pike and Anish Das visit to discuss Flora's art and life. She reads Flora's letters with Pike and tells Anish about Flora's relationship with his father Nirad Das. While Pike and Anish view Flora as a grand, almost mythological figure, to Swan, Flora is just her ordinary, long-gone sister. Yet Swan also emphasizes that Flora didn't receive the respect she deserved as a writer until far too long after her death. Swan lived in India for many years with her husband, a colonial administrator in the British Empire, whom she met at Flora's funeral. This marriage deeply shaped her political views: in the 1930s, she was an avowed communist (and Joshua Chamberlain's secretary and mistress), but by the 1980s, she is a staunch, opinionated, arguably racist conservative. Even though she deeply misses India, she also views Indians as a primitive, backwards people and defends British colonial rule as a noble attempt to civilize and modernize them, which leads her to clash with Anish. Nevertheless, they still bond over their intersecting family history and their love for art—even if Anish finds his father's portraits of Flora much more inspiring than Swan does.

David Durance – Captain David Durance is a colonial official who works with the Resident in Jummapur, as well as one of Flora Crewe's three suitors (along with Nirad Das and the Rajah). A convinced and unapologetic imperialist, he believes that the British are right to exploit and enslave Indians, whom he views as a savage, subhuman people who need to be civilized by force. Like many colonial officials, he does not recognize that the growing Indian independence movement is a response to the British Empire's abuses. He also thinks it's inappropriate for Flora to stay with the Theosophical Society and associate with Indians like Coomaraswami, Das, and even the Rajah. Flora finds his views repugnant, but still agrees to go on dates with him, and her sister Eleanor suggests that they may have slept together. According to Eldon Pike, Durance died during World War II.

Eldon Pike – Eldon Pike is a scholar and literary critic who studies Flora Crewe's poetry. He interviews Eleanor Swan and compiles Flora's letters to her for his book *The Collected Letters of Flora Crewe*, and then he goes to Jummapur with Dilip in an ill-fated attempt to learn more about Flora's life and Nirad Das's nude portrait of her. Eleanor is convinced that he is also writing Flora's biography, but he never confirms or denies this. Throughout the play, he gives context to the other characters' references and actions by reading out his footnotes—which are sometimes illuminating, but more often irrelevant or outright wrong. Indeed, his footnotes demonstrate how staid, academic approaches to art often compromise the rich emotion that makes it so valuable, and they show the risks of remembering artists primarily as vessels for their art rather than the way their friends and relatives remember them: as people. Meanwhile, Pike's struggle to adapt to India during his trip shows how the colonial power imbalance between Britain and India continues decades after independence, primarily because of the economic gulf between Indians (who were colonized and exploited for hundreds of years) and British people (who largely benefited from that process). Finally, Pike's exclusive focus on Flora's poetry—at the expense of Das's painting and the political context surrounding both—shows how academia often reproduces Eurocentric narratives about art and history.

The Rajah (1930) – The Rajah (king) is Jummapur's leader during Flora Crewe's visit to India in 1930. As with many local Indian kings during the colonial period, the British let him stay in power and give him some autonomy, so long as he helps them exploit the people he rules. He profits handsomely from this arrangement: he schmoozes with colonial officials, takes extravagant yearly vacations to the south of France, and amasses a vast fortune—including the 86 luxury cars that he shows Flora and the painting of Radha and Krishna that he gifts her in an attempt to woo her. She finds him attractive, clever, and learned, but also too stuffy and aligned with the colonial government. However, the play never reveals whether they have an affair.

Coomaraswami – Coomaraswami is the head of the Jummapur Theosophical Society. (He is from southern India, even though Jummapur is in the north.) He kindly greets Flora Crewe upon

her arrival in Jummapur, sets her up with her bungalow, and hosts her speech at his house. Like Nirad Das, he is both an anglophile and an ardent Indian nationalist.

Krishna and Radha – In Hindu mythology, the heroic god Krishna falls in love with a married milkmaid named Radha, who becomes a goddess. Their romance is a classic example of pure love in Hindu culture and a favorite subject for Indian painting. Together, they are often called Radha-Krishna and associated with supreme divinity. Flora Crewe and Nirad Das frequently compare their own budding romance to Radha and Krishna, and the Rajah gifts Flora a painting of them.

The Rajah (1980s) – In the 1980s, the previous Rajah of Jummapur's grandson technically holds the same title but has no formal powers. However, he *is* a member of the Lok Sabha, the lower house of India's Parliament, but his overall lack of power shows how oppressive, hierarchical power structures largely survived India's transition from colonialism and monarchy to independence and democracy. He helps Eldon Pike and Dilip on their research trip to Jummapur.

Subadar Ram Sunil Singh – In 1930, Subadar Ram Sunil Singh is a young boy who operates Flora Crewe's punkah (fan). In the 1980s, he is a poor old man and World War II veteran who works at the Jummapur Club, operating the coat check and cleaning toilets. He tells Eldon Pike and Dilip that Nirad Das painted Flora's portrait.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Joshua Chamberlain – Joshua Chamberlain is the fictional English activist and Theosophist who organizes Flora Crewe's trip to India. He once spoke out against the British Empire in Jummapur, and Flora's sister Eleanor is his assistant and mistress.

Dilip – Dilip is the Indian scholar who shows Eldon Pike around Jummapur. Even though he celebrates the Indian independence movement, his love for everything English and subservient role in relation to the bumbling Pike suggest that colonial power dynamics still hold true decades later.

Modigliani – Amadeo Modigliani was a renowned Italian painter known for his nude portraits. In *Indian Ink*, Flora Crewe comments that he painted her shortly before his death of tuberculosis in 1920. The play insinuates that he may have infected Flora while painting her.

Nazrul – Nazrul is the servant who maintains Flora Crewe's bungalow. Despite his important job, he barely comes onstage or speaks throughout the play. His character exemplifies how the British exploited Indian people and ignored their humanity during the colonial era.

The Resident – In 1930, the Resident is the British Empire's head agent in Jummapur, the Rajah's advisor, and David Durance's boss.

J.C. Squire – J.C. Squire was a prominent English poet who was famous for picking fights with other writers. Flora Crewe claims to have poured her drink on him in a pub after he said that women shouldn't write poetry.

TERMS

"Bagpipe Music" – "Bagpipe Music" is a comical rhyming poem by the Irish writer Louis MacNeice. It subtly criticizes the way modern English society destroys traditional customs and communities. "Bagpipe Music" is **Dilip**'s favorite poem—which is ironic, because (like **Nirad Das**) he is an Indian man who prefers English culture to Indian culture.

First Indian War of Independence – The First Indian War of Independence—also commonly known as the Rebellion, Uprising, or Mutiny—was a major conflict in which thousands of Indian soldiers attempted to overthrow the British colonial government in 1857-8. In *Indian Ink*, the characters' disagreement over what to call this conflict demonstrates how colonialism shapes people's perspectives on history and justice in deep, enduring ways.

Punkah – A punkah is a traditional Indian pulley-operated fan, usually made of fabric, bamboo, or palm leaves suspended vertically from the ceiling. An operator (or *punkah-wallah*) has to flap the punkah back and forth by pulling on a rope, so during the colonial era, punkahs were generally a luxury for the rich and the English.

Rasa – In Indian philosophy, *rasa* is the dominant emotion in a work of art. Traditional sources describe eight or nine major rasas, including Shringara (love).

Salt March – The Salt March was a massive 24-day nonviolent protest campaign led by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930. The British colonial government banned Indians from producing salt but taxed them heavily for purchasing English salt. In response, Gandhi led a march to the ocean, where he made his own salt. Millions of Indians started doing the same, and the British jailed tens of thousands, including Gandhi. Today, the Salt March is widely viewed as a major landmark in the Indian independence movement. *Indian Ink* is set in the weeks immediately after its conclusion.

Shringara – Shringara is the rasa of romantic love, eroticism, and beauty. It is usually associated with the color blue and the god Vishnu.

Theosophical Society – The Theosophical Society is an organization founded by the eccentric Russian writer, traveler, and aristocrat Madame Blavatsky in New York. It attempts to link western and eastern (particularly Indian and Tibetan) thought in a way that combines philosophy, religion, and science. The Theosophical Society became especially prominent in India in the early 1900s and played a major role in strengthening the Indian independence movement.

Up the Country – *Up the Country* is the English writer and aristocrat Emily Eden's book of letters about her travels to India in the late 1830s. Eden's brother was the governor-general (the British Empire's top official in India), and so her perspective highlights the way that English colonizers lived opulently at native Indians' expense. Eden largely inspired the character of **Flora Crewe** in *Indian Ink*—in fact, **Nirad Das** gifts her a copy of *Up the Country* during the play.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE EFFECTS OF COLONIALISM

Tom Stoppard's play *Indian Ink* emphasizes the British Empire's responsibility for India's deep poverty and inequality. As the British poet Flora Crewe visits India and mingles with the English elite and the absurdly wealthy Rajah, she recognizes that they're only rich because they have subjugated the vast majority of Indians for centuries. She also sees how this hierarchy affects every aspect of colonial life. Ordinary Indians—like Flora's servant Nazrul—labor tirelessly but invisibly in the background of the play to make the people who colonized them wealthy and comfortable. Meanwhile, educated upper-class Indians like the painter Nirad Das and the Theosophical Society president Coomaraswami treat Flora with excessive respect and deference. Perhaps they have internalized the colonial hierarchy and learned to view English people as superior to themselves, as Flora suggests, or maybe they simply know that they'll face consequences if they do not play along with the hierarchy. Indeed, Nirad Das fully understands how the British Empire has systematically plundered India, and he supports Gandhi's independence movement in secret—but the play's conclusion strongly suggests that the government actually imprisons him in part because his taboo relationship with Flora threatens the colonial hierarchy.

Most troublingly, the scenes set in the 1980s show that similarly unequal dynamics continue today—decades after Independence—in both England and India. For instance, Flora's sister Eleanor lectures Das's son Anish—who lives in England and is married to an Englishwoman—about how the British Empire brought justice and civilization to India. Meanwhile, when he travels to impoverished Jummapur, Flora's biographer Eldon Pike gets the same royal treatment that she did. He also receives all the credit for reviving Flora's story, even though the person who made his work possible—an ordinary servant named Subadar Ram Sunil Singh, who is the only person who actually remembers Flora—never even gets to speak in the play. In short, *Indian Ink* shows that colonialism isn't just a relic of the past in England and India—rather, the British Empire still forms the template for their deep but fraught interconnections.

HISTORY AND MEMORY

In *Indian Ink*, events from two distinct time periods—the year 1930 and the mid-1980s—meld together onstage. They take place within the same set, and they interrupt and comment on each other. (For instance, Anish Das and Eleanor Swan talk about Flora Crewe's letters while she acts them out elsewhere on the stage.) This format isn't just a kind of nostalgia: rather, it shows how the act of remembering can both illuminate and distort the past. In turn, the play suggests that our sense of history deeply reveals—and affects—who we are.

The play explores the purpose of memory by contrasting two different ways of thinking about the past: Eldon Pike's academic research on Flora Crewe versus Anish Das and Eleanor Swan's family histories. Pike writes a definitive scholarly account of Flora's life and work, full of detailed footnotes that Eleanor and Anish find ridiculous and distracting. The wider public may not have known about Flora if it weren't for Pike's research, but Eleanor and Anish feel that Pike distorts the most important truths about Flora's life and work—like her passion, audacity, and sexual liberation—by limiting himself to biography. Yet Eleanor and Anish also clash over their incompatible views of the past. Eleanor celebrates the glorious British Empire, doesn't think much of her sister's opposition to it, and views Nirad Das as a criminal for his pro-Independence politics. But Anish celebrates Flora's open-mindedness, his father's activism, and the Empire's collapse. Their conflict over how to remember Flora and Das's romance is really just one small aspect of the broader fight over colonialism's legacy and the true meaning of freedom in the contemporary world.

ART AND INSPIRATION

Flora Crewe and Anish Das's relationship in *Indian Ink* is a meeting not only of hearts and minds, but also of different creative forms (painting and poetry) and artistic traditions (English and Indian). At first, they struggle to bridge the cultural gap between them through conversation. But they succeed once Das starts to paint Flora while she writes. This collaborative artmaking helps their relationship flourish: they use it as a proxy to build personal, cultural, and sexual connections. They realize that, by evoking the same emotional tone (or rasa) in their work, they can communicate through art in a way that they never could through words. By the end of the play, Flora is writing about desire and forbidden love, while Das is painting about the same

subjects by styling his nude portrait of Flora on traditional depictions of Radha and Krishna. This leads to their greatest work: Flora writes her final volume of poetry, while Das finally integrates the European painting styles he admires with the Indian artistic tradition to which he belongs. Through this portrait of mutual inspiration, the play suggests that artists should seek creative fulfillment not by withdrawing into their own minds, but rather by delving into the world and connecting with other people.

SEX AND LOVE

Indian Ink is a mystery composed of three love stories: the passionate painter Nirad Das, the haughty English officer David Durance, and the charming, extravagantly wealthy Rajah all court Flora Crewe during her short stay in Jummapur, but the audience never learns if any of them succeed. It's easy to assume that Flora and Das fall in love when their artistic collaboration culminates in Das painting Flora nude, but the play intentionally leaves this up to the audience's imagination. Indeed, by suggesting that Flora could have formed relationships with none, any, or all three of her suitors, the play challenges audience members to separate their opinions about her from conventional ideas of sexual morality. In colonial India in the 1930s, it would have been scandalous for a high-society Englishwoman like Flora to sleep with a middle-class Indian like Das—or, really, anyone but a colonial official like Durance. But Flora was already famous in London for courting scandal: she wrote forthright poetry about love and sex in an era when women were scarcely expected to write at all, and she refused to let puritanical critics stop her. The play thus presents Flora's search for artistic and personal freedom as a model for how people can live more meaningful lives when they throw off repressive norms and take passion and desire seriously.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE NUDE PORTRAIT

Nirad Das's nude watercolor portrait of Flora Crewe represents their artistic, cultural, intellectual, and romantic connection—which is also the core subject of *Indian Ink*. When they start collaborating, Das starts and abandons a conventional oil-on-canvas portrait of Flora writing on her verandah in her blue dress. Flora tells Das that she has a "delicate question" for him, but doesn't ask it until many days later, when she collapses and he helps her take a bath: will he paint her in the nude? It isn't the first time she's modeled nude—Modigliani painted her years ago (and may have infected her with tuberculosis in the process). Das agrees and starts painting, but Flora leaves Jummapur before he can finish—and dies before she can return.

Das and Flora only move forward with the nude portrait because of the intimacy they have built so far: they have discussed England and India, politics and culture, art and love. They have found that, even though they are *supposed* to be on opposite sides of the colonial world's sharp division between English and Indian people, they actually see eye-to-eye on most things—including the injustice of British rule in India. As Das paints an Englishwoman and Flora writes poetry about India, their artistic processes become an attempt to fuse visual and literary art, male and female, and English and Indian culture. Eventually, Flora insists that Das paint the nude portrait from his own, distinctly Indian perspective—instead of continuing to imitate English painters. In this sense, the nude represents a true synthesis of Indian and English styles, influences, and identities—the same synthesis that Stoppard puts front and center throughout this play.

THE RAJAH'S CARS

The Rajah's 86 luxury cars embody the extraordinary wealth that colonialism produces for a select few bureaucrats, shareholders, and local rulers—but only by brutally exploiting the vast majority of Indians. Flora Crewe first hears about the Rajah's cars when she attends a party at the British Jummapur Club. When the Rajah first visits and tries to woo Flora, he brings along several of his cars and has his (nameless, faceless) servants drive them by her bungalow. She is stunned at their beauty, but she also realizes that one of them used to belong to her wealthy but odious ex-fiancé. (The Rajah explains that he won it gambling.)

The Rajah thinks that his car collection makes him an impressive connoisseur, but Flora isn't entirely fooled: she recognizes that it reflects good luck, not good taste. He was born into the monarchy and made the unscrupulous decision to enrich himself by working with the British. When he insists that the independence movement is dangerous because common Indians could not possibly govern themselves, Flora sees right through the baseless claim: she recognizes that it's just a self-serving excuse. In contrast, her relationship with Nirad Das—an educated, culturally elite, but socioeconomically middle-class Indian—shows her how the colonial order exploits most Indians. After all, even decades later, when Eldon Pike and Dilip visit Jummapur in the 1980s, most Indians can scarcely dream of buying *one* car.

MRS. SWAN'S CAKE

Mrs. Eleanor Swan's cake represents the way that contemporary British society uses deception and

euphemism to distract from its colonial history. When Eldon Pike and Anish Das visit Swan at her home outside London, she constantly insists that they eat cake, even when they don't want any. Anish quickly realizes that this is a way for Swan to ingratiate herself with her visitors—and make them feel guilty about criticizing or disagreeing with her. For instance, when Swan tells Das that Indians should feel grateful for English colonialism (which she claims civilized them and modernized their country), she insists that he eat more cake instead of responding to her. "You advance a preposterous argument and try to fill my mouth with cake so I cannot answer you," he observes. In this case, Swan's cake is a kind of false hospitality that helps her reinterpret history so that people like she and her husband, an English colonial bureaucrat, do not appear to be villains. In fact, she notes that she always keeps two kinds of cake on hand for visitors. In a curious coincidence from the 1930s, Nazrul brings Flora and Nirad Das two different kinds of cake. While it's unclear whether this shared family custom began in India or England, this question is really beside the point: thanks to more than 300 years of colonialism, the cultures of Britain and India are so closely intertwined that it's impossible to talk about one without also considering the other. Attempting to separate the two nations' histories—for instance, by pretending that Britain is wealthy because of industry and democracy alone, rather than because it spent centuries plundering the rest of the world—is simply distorting the past.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Grover Press edition of *Indian Ink* published in 0.

Act 1 Quotes

"Jummapur, Wednesday, April the second. Darling Nell, I arrived here on Saturday from Bombay after a day and a night and a day in a Ladies Only, stopping now and again to be revictualled through the window with pots of tea and proper meals on matinee trays, which, remarkably, you hand back through the window at the next station down the line where they do the washing up; and from the last stop I had the compartment to myself, with the lights coming on for me to make my entrance on the platform at Jummapur. The President of the Theosophical Society was waiting with several members of the committee drawn up at a respectful distance, not quite a red carpet and brass band but garlands of marigolds at the ready, and I thought there must be somebody important on the train—"

Related Characters: Flora Crewe (speaker), Eleanor ("Nell") Swan, Coomaraswami, Nirad Das

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

In the opening scene of *Indian Ink*, protagonist Flora Crewe disembarks her train in the fictional Indian city of Jummapur in 1930, during the last decades of British colonial rule. Stoppard narrates this scene through the medium of Flora's letters to her sister, Nell, who also appears in the scenes set in 1980s England as the elderly Mrs. Eleanor Swan. This narrative technique, which appears throughout the play, allows Stoppard to interlace his two timelines, showing how the past shapes people's sense of identity in the present and how people's life experiences shape the way they remember the past.

Flora Crewe's arrival scene also introduces many of the questions and motifs that recur throughout the rest of the play. For instance, India's unfamiliar cultural norms (like receiving a tray in one train station and depositing it for cleaning in the next) captivate Flora, and she quickly notices that Indians bend over backwards to please and pamper her (which reflects the British colonial system's brutal racial hierarchy). But she hasn't yet started to critically analyze these features of colonial Indian life. Indeed, by presenting colonial India through Flora's eyes without further commentary, Stoppard gives his audiences a chance to react to them naturally. Stoppard's audiences may then question and reassess these initial reactions over the course of the play, as they also get to learn about the colonial system through the eyes of Indians (and independence activists) like Nirad Das.

The Shepperton garden is now visible. Here, MRS SWAN *and* PIKE *are having tea while occupied with a shoebox of Flora's letters.*

Related Characters: Eleanor ("Nell") Swan, Eldon Pike, Anish Das, Flora Crewe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

After the play's opening scene, in which Flora Crewe arrives to Jummapur, India in 1930, the action cuts to England in the 1980s, when Flora's sister Eleanor Swan meets with the

scholar Eldon Pike in her garden. However, between these scenes, the curtain doesn't fall and the set doesn't change. Instead, as in many of Stoppard's plays, the two time periods share the stage, and action drifts from one to the other. Sometimes, they interrupt each other—for instance, Eldon Pike often yells out footnotes to give (often unnecessary) context to Flora's trip, and Flora acts out the letters that Swan, Pike, and Anish Das read in Swan's garden. In Act Two, the same set represents the colonial Jummapur Club in both the 1930s and the 1980s; Stoppard uses this staging technique to emphasize how little has changed in India since the colonial era.

Thanks to Stoppard's technique, the audience is not fully immersed in one time period or the other. By staging the play in this way, Stoppard invites his audiences to note the similarities and differences between the past and the present, analyze how the past shapes the present and people in the present remember the past, and apply their insights to their own family histories and life experiences.

❝ FLORA And it's called a duck bungalow …"

MRS SWAN *Dak* bungalow.

FLORA "… although there is not a duck to be seen."

She disappears into the bathroom with her suitcase.

MRS SWAN Dak was the post; they were post-houses, when letters went by runner.

IKE Ah …

Related Characters: Flora Crewe, Eleanor ("Nell") Swan, Eldon Pike (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3-4

Explanation and Analysis

As Eleanor Swan and Eldon Pike go through Flora Crewe's old letters from Jummapur, Swan repeatedly gives Pike much-needed context about India so that he can understand what Flora's journey would have been like.

In this passage, Swan corrects Flora's misunderstanding: Flora calls the bungalow (home) where she stays in Jummapur a "*duck*" bungalow, but it's really a "*dak*" bungalow—a disused old postal house. Swan's correction shows that she knows far more about India than Flora did in the 1930s and Pike does in the 1980s—which foreshadows the play's later revelation that Swan has lived decades of her life in India, as a colonial administrator's wife.

Flora's ignorance about India in the 1930s is understandable, as she is traveling there for the first time. But this ignorance also illustrates how, during the era of the British Empire, even highly-educated English people knew next to nothing about the lands they colonized. Meanwhile, Pike's ignorance in the 1980s is more troubling, since he is a scholar studying Flora's time in India. Indeed, over the course of the play, Pike seems increasingly absurd as he tries to understand the poetry Flora wrote in Jummapur by learning everything he can about Flora—and next to nothing about India. Stoppard uses Pike's failures to criticize the way that academic research on art and literature continues to privilege Western figures, perspectives, and stories over those from the rest of the world.

❝ "The sightseeing with picnic was something of a Progress with the president of the Theosophical Society holding a yellow parasol over me while the committee bicycled alongside, sometimes two to a bike, and children ran before and behind—I felt like a carnival float representing Empire—or, depending how you look at it, the Subjugation of the Indian People, and of course you're right, darling, but I never saw anyone less subjugated than Mr Coomaraswami."

Related Characters: Flora Crewe (speaker), Coomaraswami

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

When Flora Crewe arrives in Jummapur, the local Theosophical Society—which has invited her to give a talk on the London literary scene—takes her out for a formal tour of the city. This is a section from her letter describing the experience: it's both pleasant and unsettling, educational and demoralizing. She feels honored that the society treats her as such an important guest. At the same time, it distresses her to realize that this treatment reflects the unjust social, economic, and racial hierarchy that the British Empire has imposed on India. Indeed, in this scene, she starts to understand the complex layers in colonial India's class structure: an educated professional like Coomaraswami, who runs the Theosophical Society and has significant contact with the administration, has far more power and independence than an ordinary Indian, but far less than even an ordinary English person who happens to

be in India.

These first interactions in India essentially confirm Flora's assumption that colonialism is immoral, and Indians are inherently equal to English people. After all, her educated Indian intellectual friends show her that Indians are perfectly capable of governing themselves—and that they have at least as much to teach her as she has to teach them. Thus, Flora starts to make sense of the predicament that haunts her throughout the rest of the play: how can she fight a deeply unjust hierarchy when she is one of the people who most benefits from it?

> PIKE "Perhaps my soul will stay behind as a smudge of paint on paper, as if I'd always been here, like … Radha?"
>
> MRS SWAN Radha.
>
> PIKE "—the most beautiful of the herdswomen, undressed—"
>
> MRS SWAN (*Interrupting, briskly*) Well, the portrait, as it happens, is on canvas and Flora is wearing her cornflower dress.

Related Characters: Eldon Pike, Eleanor ("Nell") Swan, Flora Crewe (speaker), Nirad Das, Krishna and Radha

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

During his visit to Eleanor Swan's house, Pike stumbles upon this curious passage in one of Flora Crewe's final letters from Jummapur. In fact, it recurs throughout the play, and its meaning changes as the audience learns more and more about Flora's relationship with Nirad Das. (Stoppard is famous for using complex plot devices like this.)

When Flora refers to a "smudge of paint on paper," she is writing about the unfinished nude watercolor portrait that Das painted of her. "Radha" is a reference to a story from Hindu mythology: the god Krishna falls in love with a cowherd named Radha. (Das tells Flora about this story, and they often mention it as a metaphor for their own relationship.) By the end of the play, it becomes clear that the watercolor represents Das and Flora's romance—whether or not it ever moved past flirtation—and the cultural, creative, and philosophic exchange that their artistic collaboration enabled.

Based on Flora's letter—and especially the word "undressed"—Eldon Pike deduces that there must be a nude portrait of Flora somewhere. However, Eleanor Swan insists that there couldn't be. She claims that the only painting of Flora is Das's first, the equally unfinished oil-on-canvas portrait of her writing on her verandah in her blue deck. After all, she doesn't have the nude watercolor (Anish Das does), and she does not know for sure that it exists. Yet she has no doubt read the same letter dozens of times before and considered the same possibility as Pike at least a few of those times. Still, she shuts down Pike's speculation in large part because she is sensitive about the way that the world remembers her sister: she does not want stodgy academics like Pike to determine the public meaning of her sister's romances, so she prefers to keep the details private.

> "Yes I am in heat like a bride in a bath,
> without secrets, soaked in heated air
> that liquifies to the touch and floods,
> shortening the breath, yes
> I am discovered, heat has found me out,
> a stain that stops at nothing,
> not the squeezed gates or soft gutters,
> it slicks into the press
> that prints me to the sheet
> yes, think of a woman in a house of net
> that strains the oxygen out of the air
> thickening the night to Indian ink
> or think if you prefer—"

Related Characters: Flora Crewe (speaker), Nirad Das

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

This is the poem that Flora Crewe writes while Nirad Das paints her in Jummapur. It is one of Flora's last poems, and the title piece in her final collection, *Indian Ink*, though the play's audiences and readers do not yet know this.

However, the poem *does* clarify several key features of Flora Crewe's work, reputation, and legacy. It is obviously erotic: "I am in heat" is both a literal reference to the weather in Jummapur and a metaphor for sexual desire. (This is clear from the beginning of the poem, when Flora evokes "a bride in a bath" waiting for her beloved on her honeymoon.) This subject matter foreshadows Flora's relationship with Das—after all, it may simply be describing her feelings for

him—and it explains why she was so controversial in London in the 1920s. At the time, it was all but unheard of for women to publish such erotic work.

The poem's central image is also significant. The poem describes air congealing into a thick liquid, with lines like "heated air / that liquifies to the touch" and "strains the oxygen out of the air." This is clearly a sexual metaphor—and, within the context of the play as a whole, it might also be a metaphor for the dying British Empire. But, as readers and audience members will learn later, the poem is also a more direct reference to Flora's terminal lung disease, likely tuberculosis, which she has come to India to treat—and which will kill her there, in the colonial capital of Shimla, just a few weeks after she leaves Jummapur.

DAS May I ask you a personal question?

FLORA That *is* a personal question.

DAS Oh my goodness, is it?

FLORA I always think so. It always feels like one. Carte blanche is what you're asking, Mr Das. Am I to lay myself bare before you?

DAS (*Panicking slightly*) My question was only about your poem!

FLORA At least you knew it was personal.

DAS I will not ask it now, of course.

FLORA On that understanding I will answer it. My poem is about heat.

Related Characters: Flora Crewe, Nirad Das (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Nirad Das paints Flora Crewe as she sits on the verandah of the bungalow where she is staying in Jummapur, writing a poem. When he carefully tries to ask her what her poem is about, this is the conversation that ensues. Flora is teasing and flirting with Das, but he is hesitant and concerned. After all, she talks to him with a familiar, bantering, egalitarian tone that is neither common nor viewed as appropriate in conversations between Indians and English people during the colonial period. Das is not used to this tone, and he's not entirely sure what Flora's means, so he hesitates.

This passage is essentially about power: an Englishwoman like Flora could get the government to punish an Indian man like Das at any time, for practically any reason, so Das does everything he possibly can to avoid getting on Flora's bad side. This means taking her comments without responding in kind, on the off chance that he has offended her and would do so further by joking back. Fortunately, she's just teasing him—in fact, she doesn't even fully recognize his predicament because she doesn't know just how dangerous it would be for him to insult an Englishwoman.

I did say that but I think what I meant was for you to be *more* Indian, or at any rate *Indian*, not Englished-up and all over me like a labrador and knocking things off tables with your tail—so *waggish* of you, Mr Das, to compare my mind to a vacuum. You only do it with us, I don't believe that left to yourself you can't have an ordinary conversation without jumping backwards through hoops of delight, *with* whoops of delight, I think I mean; actually, I do know what I mean, I want you to be with me as you would be if *I* were Indian.

Related Characters: Flora Crewe, Nirad Das (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

When Flora asks if Das will answer a "delicate question," he excitedly replies, "I am transported beyond my most fantastical hopes of our fellowship!" This is Flora's reaction. She finds Das's response frustratingly inauthentic; he is obviously trying to win her favor. She compares his efforts to ingratiate himself with her to an overenthusiastic dog trying to please its owner—of course, she no doubt misses how insulting it could be to compare Indians to dogs in a colonial system that justifies itself by saying that nonwhite people are closer to animals than humans. But her intentions are clearly good: she simply wants herself and Das to be equals. She insists on talking to him like she would any ordinary acquaintance in London, and she asks him to treat him like any other Indian.

But surmounting profound cultural barriers is never easy, least of all when one person's culture has colonized the other. Perhaps most importantly, Flora doesn't understand that Das *must* act cautiously around her to protect himself—at least, until they grow far closer, and he can be sure that she won't expose him to risks from the colonial government. Of course, the ultimate irony in the play is that this is exactly what happens: Flora and Das grow close, and then colonial officials turn against Das, presumably because

of his relationship with Flora.

ANISH Oh … yes. Yes, I am a painter like my father. Though not at all like my father, of course.

MRS SWAN Your father was an Indian painter, you mean?
ANISH An Indian painter? Well, I'm as Indian as he was. But yes. I suppose I am not a particularly *Indian* painter … not an Indian painter *particularly*, or rather …

MRS SWAN Not particularly an Indian painter.

ANISH Yes. But then, nor was he. Apart from being Indian.

MRS SWAN As you are.

ANISH Yes.

Related Characters: Eleanor ("Nell") Swan, Anish Das (speaker), Nirad Das, Eldon Pike, Flora Crewe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

After seeing his father's portrait of Flora Crewe on the cover of Eldon Pike's book, Anish Das visits Eleanor Swan in the 1980s to discuss his father's life and art. Swan asks Anish about himself, and she is surprised to learn that he lives in England and is also a painter. She immediately compares him to his father.

In this curious exchange, Anish insists on his individuality while Swan denies it. He insists that, just because he is an Indian and a painter, he is not necessarily like his father—in fact, his style and influences are completely different. But Swan says that Anish and Nirad Das are *obviously* similar because they are both Indian painters. Of course, to Anish, this is just as absurd as it would be to say that Swan is just like Flora because they are both English women. This line of thinking only makes sense to people who define others primarily through general, surface-level characteristics—like their nationality—and ignore their individual differences. Perhaps all Indian painters seem the same to English people because they simply know very little about India and do not know how to identify different kinds of Indian art. Yet this is not Swan's case: actually, she lived in India for many years.

Swan's sense that Indian artists are all the same comes from her *exposure* to India, and *not* her ignorance about it. And it's clearly tied to her racist belief that Indians are incapable of governing themselves (and were better off under colonialism). Specifically, she seems to believe that Indians are only capable of producing one kind of art because they can only make copies of one another's work, but not create anything original. Ultimately, while Flora manages to see the richness and originality in Indian art, Swan simply views Indians as intellectually inferior to Europeans and incapable of producing real art at all.

ANISH We had been loyal to the British right through the first War of Independence.

MRS SWAN The … ? What war was that?

ANISH The Rising of 1857.

MRS SWAN Oh, you mean the Mutiny. *What* did you call it?

ANISH Dear Mrs Swan, Imperial history is merely … no, no—I promise you I didn't come to give you a history lesson.

MRS SWAN You seem ill-equipped to do so. We were your Romans, you know. We might have been your Normans.

ANISH And did you expect us to be grateful?

Related Characters: Eleanor ("Nell") Swan, Anish Das (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

As Anish Das and Eleanor Swan discuss Jummapur and India, they run into this basic disagreement about colonial history in India. In 1857, thousands of Indian soldiers rebelled against the British colonial government and nearly succeeded in overthrowing it. But Anish and Swan disagree about whether this event should be called "the Mutiny" (as it is often known in England even today) or "the first War of Independence" (as Indian nationalists often call it).

This minor debate aptly illustrates many of the questions at the heart of the play's plot. Namely, Swan and Anish's disagreement shows that it matters deeply *who* narrates history. Viewing the 1856 rebellion as a "mutiny" implies that British rule was fair and just. In contrast, viewing it as a "War of Independence" portrays the British as unwelcome invaders whom the native Indian people tried to expel for centuries. It is convenient for British people to remember their empire as benevolent, while Indians' ideas about colonialism are more closely tied to the actual events on the ground. With this passage, Stoppard suggests that British public opinion could benefit from an Indian kind of historical

awareness.

ANISH Mrs Swan, you are a very wicked woman. You advance a preposterous argument and try to fill my mouth with cake so I cannot answer you. I will resist you and your cake. *We* were the Romans! We were up to date when you were a backward nation. The foreigners who invaded you found a third-world country! Even when you discovered India in the age of Shakespeare, we already had our Shakespeares. And our science—architecture—our literature and art, we had a culture older and more splendid, we were rich! After all, that's why you came.

But he has misjudged.

MRS SWAN (Angrily) We made you a proper country! And when we left you fell straight to pieces like Humpty Dumpty! Look at the map! You should feel nothing but shame!

Related Characters: Eleanor ("Nell") Swan, Anish Das (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 21-22

Explanation and Analysis

Anish Das and Eleanor Swan's disagreements about the legacy of British colonialism in India culminate in this explosive argument. Das accuses Swan of spreading harmful lies about Indian history, while falsely imagining Britain to be a glorious, benevolent, and cultured country. Swan angrily insists that India only became "a proper country" because British colonialism forced it to develop. Needless to say, the facts are on Das's side—virtually all modern historians would agree with him. Meanwhile, Swan's perspective shows how people who participate in atrocities distort history to avoid feeling guilty and responsible for their actions. Swan's kind offer of cake functions in a similar manner—she hopes her generosity will prevent Anish from disagreeing with her.

Das points out that Great Britain was an irrelevant backwater until the Roman Empire conquered it. And he points out that, even for centuries after this conquest, India was far wealthier, more developed, and more scientifically, artistically, and culturally advanced than Britain. In fact, this was even true in the early days of British colonialism in India. Britain only surpassed India in the Industrial Revolution—which it fueled with raw materials *from India*. Thus, the story of Britain's historical development is inseparable from the story of the way it plundered India. As such, Swan's notion that superior white do-gooders from Britain colonized India to develop it and help its people is simply absurd.

MRS SWAN We were right up near Nepal …

ANISH Yes, the tea-tray …

MRS SWAN You spotted it. In India we had pictures of coaching inns and foxhunting, and now I've landed up in Shepperton I've got elephants and prayer wheels cluttering up the window ledges, and the tea-tray is Nepalese brass. One could make a comment about human nature but have a slice of Battenburg instead.

Related Characters: Eleanor ("Nell") Swan, Anish Das (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 30-31

Explanation and Analysis

As Anish Das and Eleanor Swan chat about India, England, art, and their relatives, Nirad Das and Flora Crewe, Swan eventually reveals that she lived in northern India for many years. In fact, her husband was an administrator who worked for the British colonial government. Anish points out her Indian-style tea-tray—a subtle sign that Swan actually *can* appreciate Indian art—and Swan admits that she seems to miss India as much now that she lives in England as she did England when she was living in India.

Swan's comment illustrates the power of nostalgia: people miss things from a distant past that they can no longer have. Of course, Stoppard is also commenting on his own nostalgia for his childhood in India, as well as Britain's collective nostalgia for the time when it was the world's primary superpower—even if it reached that status by plundering and enslaving much of the rest of the world. Yet Swan's final line, "One could make a comment about human nature but have a slice of Battenburg [cake] instead," is a metaphor for the way Britain often prefers to avoid talking about this nostalgia and its enduring links to the countries it colonized.

DAS My painting has no *rasa* today.

FLORA What is *rasa*?

DAS *Rasa* is juice. Its taste. Its essence. A painting must have its *rasa* … which is not *in* the painting exactly. *Rasa* is what you must feel when you see a painting, or hear music; it is the emotion which the artist must arouse in you.

FLORA And poetry? Does a poem have *rasa*?

DAS Oh yes! Poetry is a sentence whose soul is *rasa*. That is a famous dictum of Vishvanata, a great teacher of poetry, six hundred years ago.

FLORA *Rasa* … yes. My poem has no *rasa*.

DAS Or perhaps it has two *rasa* which are in conflict.

Related Characters: Flora Crewe, Nirad Das (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36-37

Explanation and Analysis

Flora Crewe and Nirad Das's artistic collaboration begins as Flora sits on her verandah, writing poetry, and Das paints her. From time to time, they banter, chat about their lives, or discuss art. In this passage, both Das and Flora have noted that their work is uninspired today, and Das relates this to the concept of *rasa*—"juice," "taste," or "essence"—in Indian art.

The idea of *rasa* helps Flora understand why she's struggling to write new poetry, and it shows her how learning about Indian art and culture can enrich her work. In particular, *rasa* speaks to the connection between an artist, their environment, and their audience. Thus, it shows Flora how her connection to Das enables both of them to produce more inspired—and inspiring—artwork. Indeed, later on in the play, both Flora and Das break through their creative blocks and start to succeed as artists when they harmonize: their shared attraction starts to inspire both Flora's poetry and Das's painting of Flora.

DAS (*Unhesitatingly*) The rasa of erotic love is called Shringara. Its god is Vishnu, and its colour is *shyama*, which is blue-black. Vishvanata in his book on poetics tells us: Shringara requires, naturally, a lover and his loved one, who may be a courtesan if she is sincerely enamoured, and it is aroused by, for example, the moon, the scent of sandalwood, or being in an empty house. Shringara goes harmoniously with all other rasa and their complementary emotions, with the exception of fear, cruelty, disgust and sloth.

Related Characters: Nirad Das (speaker), Flora Crewe

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 37-38

Explanation and Analysis

When Flora tells Das that she's writing a poem about sex, he explains that her poem's *rasa* must be *Shringara*, and then he describes the general guidelines for creating art about sex and love in traditional Indian aesthetic theory. Of course, his description is full of thinly-veiled references to their budding romance, such as the "lover and [their] loved one" and Flora's "empty house." It also predicts some of the symbolism in his nude painting of her and gives readers and audience members a framework for thinking about Flora's dates with her other two primary suitors, David Durance and the Rajah. If Das (and common sense) is right, then the "fear, cruelty, disgust, and sloth" that they provoke in Flora would no doubt prevent her from feeling anything for them.

FLORA That was the thing I was going to ask you.

DAS When?

FLORA The delicate question … whether you would prefer to paint me nude.

DAS Oh.

LORA I preferred it. I had more what-do-you-call it.

DAS *Rasa*.

FLORA (*Laughs quietly*) Yes, *rasa*.

Related Characters: Nirad Das, Flora Crewe (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

After Das accidentally sees Flora undressed, she goes ahead and asks him the "delicate question" she has long been wondering about: would he paint her in the nude? Das ends up agreeing. When Flora says that a nude portrait would have more *rasa*, she means that it would more accurately capture her identity and the atmosphere

surrounding her collaboration with Das. Of course, this is no surprise, since she is world-famous for writing erotic poetry.

Flora and Das's agreement represents their relationship evolving to a new, deeper stage. It doesn't necessarily mean that they have sex—although it certainly implies as much. Regardless, it's a remarkable step for an Englishwoman and an Indian man in India in the 1930s. Their agreement shows that they are breaking past the norms imposed on them by the colonial system and treating one another as equals, individuals, and artists. This contrasts with virtually all of the other interactions between Indians and English people in the play, which follow the formulas established by the political order: English people talk down to and look down on Indians, who dutifully serve their colonial masters. Indeed, Flora's reference to *rasa* shows that she considers Indian *culture* to be Western culture's equal: she is willing to learn from India's art, literature, and philosophy in the same way as Das has learned from England's.

ANISH My father abandoned this portrait.

MRS SWAN Why?

ANISH He began another one.

MRS SWAN How do you know, Mr Das?

ANISH Because I have it.

He opens his briefcase and withdraws the watercolour which is hardly larger than the page of a book, protected by stiff boards. He shows her the painting which is described in the text.

MRS SWAN Oh heavens! Oh … yes … *of course*. How like Flora.

ANISH More than a good likeness, Mrs Swan.

MRS SWAN No … I mean, *how like Flora!*

Related Characters: Anish Das, Eleanor ("Nell") Swan (speaker), Nirad Das, Flora Crewe

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 51-52

Explanation and Analysis

Anish Das shows Eleanor Swan his father's nude portrait of Flora. Swan doesn't know for sure that it exists up until this point, and for nearly fifty years, Anish has kept it in storage, without knowing whom it depicted. Thus, their meeting finally gives both of them the context they need to understand their relatives' fateful relationship. Das's portrait can help Swan understand Flora's last meaningful romance—even if, as the widow of a longtime colonial official, she finds it difficult to accept that her sister could have fallen in love with an Indian man. And meeting Swan can help Anish understand one of the last paintings his father left behind, as well as the circumstances surrounding his father's imprisonment.

Thus, just as Flora and Das's relationship made it possible for them to achieve their own creative goals, Anish and Swan keep their respective family legacies alive when they trade stories, letters, and paintings. Their loved ones may be long-gone, and the painting may not fundamentally change their views about them, but it does give them a certain kind of closure. In this way, the present informs the past (by enabling people to remember it differently) just as much as the past informs the present (by shaping it).

DAS Nazrul was delayed at the shops by a riot, he says. The police charged the mob with lathis, he could have easily been killed, but by heroism and inspired by his loyalty to the memsahib he managed to return only an hour late with all the food you gave him money for except two chickens which were torn from his grasp.

FLORA Oh dear … you thanked him, I hope.

DAS I struck him, of course. You should fine him for the chickens.

Related Characters: Nirad Das, Flora Crewe (speaker), Nazrul

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

On the day when Das agrees to paint Flora nude, he relays this message to her from her servant, Nazrul, and this is the exchange that ensues. While Nazrul's labor is essential to Flora's daily survival in Jummapur, he is all but invisible in the play, which reflects the power dynamics of British colonialism: the people who did most of the labor in the British Empire and generated most of Britain's wealth, like Indians, were completely invisible to ordinary British people.

Das explains that Nazrul claims to have run into a riot linked to the Indian independence movement. Yet his reaction—to suggest that Nazrul should be hit and fined—suggests that

he thinks Nazrul is lying and has simply invented the story about the riot to steal two chickens for himself. In colonial India, stealing from an English person would have been a serious offense. Yet readers and audience members can easily understand why Nazrul, who was almost certainly too poor to afford meat, would do such a thing. Worse still, there is no proof that Nazrul is lying at all. Indeed, some readers and audience members may think that Das is merely saying what he knows that other English people would expect him to say—while empathizing with Nazrul and secretly hoping that Flora does, too.

DAS Oh!—you're not dying are you?!

FLORA I expect so, but I intend to take years and years about it. You'll be dead too, one day, so let me be a lesson to you. Learn to take no notice. I said nothing about your painting, if you want to know, because I thought you'd be an *Indian* artist.

DAS An Indian artist?

FLORA Yes. You are an Indian artist, aren't you? Stick up for yourself. Why do you like everything English?

DAS I do not like everything English.

FLORA Yes, you do. You're enthralled. Chelsea, Bloomsbury, Oliver Twist, Gold Flake cigarettes, Winsor and Newton … even painting in oils, that's not Indian. You're trying to paint me from my point of view instead of yours—what you *think* is my point of view. You *deserve* the bloody Empire!

Related Characters: Flora Crewe, Nirad Das (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after Das agrees to paint Flora nude, Flora admits that she's dying of a terminal lung disease. She thinks she has many years to live, but unfortunately, readers and audience members will eventually learn that she has only has a few weeks left. In addition, as Flora suggests in one of her final letters to Eleanor, Das's watercolor of her will come to represent an important element of her legacy.

Flora tells Das to make the most of his time on Earth, first and foremost by finding his authentic perspective as an artist—something that she has no doubt done successfully back in London. She argues that Das is so influenced by English artists that he might as well be pretending to be an English painter—and that, in the process, he is turning his back on his own culture and heritage. Of course, this logic is nearly as simplistic and unfair as Flora's sister Eleanor Swan's thinking years later, when she tells Anish Das that he and his father must be similar painters because they are both Indian.

At the same time, Flora clearly has a point: Das has been avoiding traditional Indian painting styles, materials, and symbolism in his paintings. Undoubtedly, this is because he assumed that an Englishwoman like Flora would not be able to appreciate non-English art. But she insists that, for his art to be authentic and meaningful, he must be comfortable enough with her to paint from his own point of view. Put differently, Flora agrees to disrobe physically on the condition that Das does the same creatively.

DAS The Empire will one day be gone like the Mughal Empire before it, and only their monuments remain—the visions of Shah Jahan!—of Sir Edwin Lutyens!

FLORA "Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"

DAS (*Delighted*) Oh yes! Finally like the empire of Ozymandias! Entirely forgotten except in a poem by an English poet. You see how privileged we are, Miss Crewe. Only in art can empires cheat oblivion, because only the artist can say, "Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"

Related Characters: Flora Crewe, Nirad Das (speaker), Coomaraswami

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55-56

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of Act One, after Flora suggests that Das try to paint her from a more authentically Indian perspective, he argues that the British and their influence will eventually fade from India. He references the Mughal Empire, the Muslim dynasty that ruled India for centuries before the British. The Mughal emperor Shah Jahan famously built monuments like the Red Fort and Taj Mahal, and Edwin Lutyens was the English architect who designed much of New Delhi.

Flora's response to Das and Das's line about Ozymandias's empire allude to Percy Bysshe Shelly's famous poem about a well-known statue of the Egyptian pharaoh Ozymandias (or Ramesses II). The poem portrays this statue as the only

remaining proof of Ozymandias's once glorious empire. Das adds a further spin to the poem's meaning by pointing out that Ozymandias's empire is now best known because of the poem *about* the statue, rather than the statue itself.

Thus, Das suggests that the British Empire in India will also fade away, such that all that remains of it will be its architecture and literature (including Flora's poetry). Of course, this is also a thinly-veiled comment on the play itself, as all that remains of Flora and Das's relationship is their art: his painting of her and her poetry and letters about him.

FLORA If you don't start learning to *take* you'll never be shot of us. *Who whom*. Nothing else counts. Mr Chamberlain is bosh. Mr Coomaraswami is bosh. It's your country, and we've got it. Everything else is bosh. When I was Modi's model I might as well have *been* a table. When he was done, he got rid of me. There was no question who whom. You'd never change his colour on a map. But please light your Gold Flake.

Related Characters: Flora Crewe (speaker), Coomaraswami, Joshua Chamberlain, Nirad Das

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

Flora reiterates why she thinks it's so important for Das to find his authentic style as a painter, and she implicitly connects this to India's colonial predicament. Namely, she argues that Indians have to take their country back from Britain, just as Das must take his own artistic process back from the English influences that have too long stifled it. The colonial order has taught people like Das to be squeamish about taking and using power. But good art, like good governance, requires overcoming this squeamishness—whether this means ruling one's own country, speaking for oneself, or merely painting the way one wants to paint, and not the way one's subject wants to be painted. Flora points out that "Modi," the Italian painter Modigliani, was an expert at this: he practically treated her as an object when he painted her. White male artists have long had permission to do this, but not female artists (like Flora) or artists in colonized countries (like Das).

But Flora hopes that her liberated women's art can teach Das to create his own liberated Indian art. Just as Das's comments about concepts like *rasa* help Flora refine her own poetry—such that she manages to finish her final book, *Indian Ink*, in Jummapur—her comments about authenticity push Das to stake his own claim in the art world by painting her in the pose, medium, and style that *he* wants to. He can innovate within Indian artistic traditions by embracing some English influences without simply imitating English art.

Act 2 Quotes

DURANCE Indianization. It's all over, you know. We have Indian officers in the Regiment now. My fellow Junior here is Indian, too, terribly nice chap—he's ICS, passed the exam, did his year at Cambridge, learned polo and knives-and-forks, and here he is, a pukkah sahib in the Indian Civil Service.

FLORA Is he here?

DURANCE At the Club? No, he can't come into the Club.

Related Characters: David Durance, Flora Crewe (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65-66

Explanation and Analysis

Act Two of *Indian Ink* opens at the Jummapur Club, an exclusive social club for British colonial officials. Flora dances with one of these officials, David Durance, who has clearly taken an interest in her. Eager to improve Flora's view of the Empire, Durance tells her about the Rajah, who is technically the city's ruler, even though the British will oust him if he goes against their wishes. He also praises the "Indianization" policy of replacing British colonial officers with Indian ones. While he presents this policy as a benevolent way of educating Indians and including them in their own governance, it is actually little more than an attempt to win local elites' support for British rule by giving them government jobs.

But when Flora asks about Durance's fellow officer, Durance admits that the club is still whites-only. This makes it abundantly clear that "Indianization" is merely cosmetic: even if the Empire is willing to give Indians more responsibility, it refuses to treat them as full equals to white people from Britain (and even other parts of the Empire). Similarly, the administration clearly doesn't value Indian *culture*. Its policy is designed to "English-ize" Indians as much as to "Indianiz[e]" the bureaucracy: as Durance points out, the Indian officers have to learn to fit into English culture, including by playing polo and eating with European utensils.

In contrast, Flora is sincerely interested in connecting with Indians and learning about Indian culture—and not just in joining the British elite.

The case was dismissed on a technicality, and the policemen were awfully sweet, they got me away through the crowd in a van. My sister was asked to leave school. But that was mostly my own fault—the magistrate asked me why all the poems seemed to be about sex, and I said. "Write what you know"—just showing off. I was practically a virgin, but it got me so thoroughly into the newspapers my name rings a bell even with the wife of a bloody jute planter or something in the middle of Rajputana, damn, damn, damn, no, let's go inside.

Related Characters: Flora Crewe (speaker), Eleanor ("Nell") Swan, David Durance, Nirad Das, Eldon Pike

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

Flora is telling David Durance about her obscenity trial in London, which focused on her erotic poetry. Apparently, it affected her reputation even on the other side of the world: Durance and all of the other colonial administrators have heard about it. Notably, they seem to judge Flora negatively for this far more than Indians like Coomaraswami and Nirad Das do—which helps explain why she finds it so liberating to spend time with Indians. Indeed, Flora clearly felt out-of-place in conservative 1920s London, too. Of course, Flora's public reputation also makes it clear why people like Eldon Pike start taking an interest in her work more than 50 years after her death. As Eleanor Swan points out, nobody paid much attention to Flora's work during her lifetime, but by the 1980s, she's viewed as a lost feminist icon. Indeed, Stoppard uses the story of Flora's obscenity trial to explore how the way people are remembered can diverge widely from their actual life experiences.

DURANCE Would you marry me?

FLORA No.

DURANCE Would you think about it?

FLORA No. Thank you.

DURANCE Love at first sight, you see. Forgive me.

FLORA Oh, David.

Related Characters: Flora Crewe, David Durance (speaker), Nirad Das

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

When Flora goes out horseback riding with David Durance, he half-jokingly complains about how colonial India has changed since English women started coming and insinuates that Nirad Das has been spreading rumors about her. Flora doesn't take this well, but remarkably, Durance follows up by asking her to marry him. She declines, immediately and resolutely. Of course, this strongly suggests that her secret affair in Jummapur isn't with him—although the play's audience never learns this for sure.

Needless to say, Durance is either wildly imperceptive, absurdly overconfident, or pursuing some ulterior motive. In fact, later in the play, Flora learns that Durance has known about her terminal illness all along because he secretly read her correspondence with the Theosophical Society. But if he knows that she is dying, why would he propose to her? Doesn't he get all the information he needs from her just on their dates? Characteristically, Stoppard refuses to directly answer these questions, but he does give his readers and audiences ample room for speculation.

PIKE Do you think he had a relationship with Flora Crewe?

DILIP But of course—a portrait is a relationship.

PIKE No, a *relationship*.

DILIP I don't understand you.

PIKE He painted her nude.

DILIP I don't think so.

PIKE Somebody did.

DILIP In 1930, an Englishwoman, an Indian painter … it is out of the question.

PIKE Not if they had a relationship.

DILIP Oh … a *relationship*? Is that what you say? (*Amused*) A relationship!

PIKE This is serious.

DILIP (*Laughing*) Oh, it's very serious. What do you say for—well, for "relationship?"

PIKE Buddies. (*Dilip almost falls off his chair with merriment.*) Please, Dilip …

Related Characters: Dilip, Eldon Pike (speaker), Nirad Das, Flora Crewe

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 73-74

Explanation and Analysis

On their visit to Jummapur, Eldon Pike and Dilip (his friend and guide) speculate about the unthinkable: could Flora Crewe and Nirad Das have been lovers? The possibility seems so remote that Dilip literally doesn't understand Pike's question at first. As Dilip implies, such a relationship would have been beyond taboo in the 1930s—it would have been just as transgressive as Flora's erotic poetry was in London. And by the 1980s, interracial relationships are still all but unheard of in India, although much less so in England.

However, in addition to underlining the transgressive nature of Flora and Das's relationship, this passage also highlights Stoppard's interest in the contrast between formal and personal approaches to history. The characters from the 1980s learn about Flora and Nirad Das's relationship through a combination of memories (whether their own or other people's) and artifacts (Flora's writing and Das's paintings). But While Eleanor and Anish consider Flora and Nirad's relationship by analyzing their loved ones' personalities, Pike and Dilip imagine it sociologically, in terms of what was normal and accepted for Indian and English people at the time.

I went home. It was still "home." I learned that my father had left me his tin trunk which had always stood at the foot of his bed. There was nothing of value in the trunk that I could see. It was full of paper, letters, certificates, school report cards … (*He takes a newspaper clipping from his wallet and gives it to Mrs Swan.*) There was a newspaper cutting, however—a report of a trial of three men accused of conspiring to cause a disturbance at the Empire Day celebrations in Jummapur in 1930. My father's name was there.

Related Characters: Anish Das (speaker), Nirad Das, Flora Crewe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

Anish Das explains that, after his father's death, he found two important artifacts in this trunk: the nude portrait of Flora and a newspaper clipping about his father's arrest. This enables Stoppard to draw a clear parallel between Anish's story and Eleanor Swan's. Namely, both learn about their relatives through the artifacts that they left behind, and both are trying to recover stories that their loved ones never managed to tell them before their deaths. Anish brings both the portrait and the newspaper clipping when he visits Eleanor Swan at her home.

Each artifact points Anish to a different hidden truth about his father's life: the portrait to his father's relationship with Flora, and the newspaper cutting to his father's fateful involvement in the Indian independence movement. Of course, these are also the two central mysteries in *Indian Ink*. However, since the play focuses primarily on Flora, the mystery of her relationship with Das comes up far more often than the mystery of Das's arrest, which the play often pushes to the background.

Yet this doesn't make Das's arrest any less significant to readers and audience members seeking to interpret the play. Namely, Das's arrest speaks to the long-term consequences of his relationship with Flora, which clearly landed him on the colonial government's hit list. Of course, it's impossible to know whether this alone accounts for Das's arrest—or whether perhaps he really *did* feud with officials and "cause a disturbance" at the event.

Codswallop! Your "house within a house," as anyone can see, is a mosquito net. And the book is Emily Eden, it was in her suitcase. Green with a brown spine. You should read the footnotes!

Related Characters: Eleanor ("Nell") Swan (speaker), Flora Crewe, Anish Das, Nirad Das, Dilip, Eldon Pike

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

Anish Das brings his father's unfinished nude portrait of Flora along with him when he visits Eleanor Swan, and they look at it together. Anish sees many of the portrait's features as symbols representing femininity, death,

romance, and more—but, as Swan explains in this passage, she sees nothing more than a literal portrait of Flora laying on her bed.

Stoppard uses this disagreement to explore two opposite approaches to interpreting life and art. For Anish, everything is a symbol with some deeper meaning, and for Swan, nothing is. Indeed, this resembles the way they each interpret Flora and Nirad Das's relationship: Anish sees their artistic collaboration as evidence that they became lovers, while Swan refuses to speculate on the matter.

This disagreement also points to the different perspectives on history that Stoppard explores in the play. Dilip and Eldon Pike view Flora and Das as characters from history, while Swan and Anish view them as lost loved ones. Now, Swan views the portrait as nothing more than a picture of her sister, while Anish views it as his father's unfinished *magnum opus*, an exploration into the nature of India, painting, and love.

Of course, Anish's knowledge of traditional Indian symbolism and his profession as a painter significantly inform his perspective on the portrait. This explains why Anish can make sense of it more easily than Eleanor. Ultimately, Stoppard does not suggest that one or the other way of interpreting the painting is right—just as he doesn't necessarily conclude that interpreting Flora and Das's story through the lens of Eleanor and Anish's personal memories is necessarily better than doing so through the lens of Eldon Pike's research. Instead, Stoppard shows that both viewpoints are valuable, but they serve different purposes. As such, they can work together to yield an even more complex and robust understanding of art and history.

❝ It is all bosh! The Theosophical Society is bosh! His Highness the Rajah is bosh! I must leave you, Miss Crewe. (*He hesitates.*) I think I will not be coming tomorrow.

Related Characters: Nirad Das (speaker), Flora Crewe, The Rajah (1930), Joshua Chamberlain, Coomaraswami

Related Themes:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

After learning that the Rajah has banned the Theosophical Society, Das visits Flora and reveals that they can no longer work together. He does not precisely explain why, but it should be clear to the audience that spending time with her will present too much of a danger to both of their safety. Surely enough, Flora reveals that she is also about to leave Jummapur and head to Shimla, in the Himalayas, for her health. These are some of Das's last words to her before she goes.

Das's speech to Flora closely parallels her speech to him at the end of Act One, when she says: "Mr Chamberlain is bosh. Mr Coomaraswami is bosh. It's your country, and we've got it. Everything else is bosh." Thus, Das's lines show that he has taken Flora's lessons about authenticity to heart: he has finally decided to paint for himself and stand up for his own beliefs, which are the only way to make a lasting impact on the world. Surely enough, decades after his death, his portraits of Flora and the newspaper stories about his activism are the only remaining evidence of his life's work.

❝ FLORA There is enough light. Mr Coomaraswami was quite right about the moon. (*Flora unwraps the paper.*) It's going to be a drawing, isn't it? … Oh!

DAS (*Nervous, bright*) Yes! A good joke, is it not? A Rajput miniature, by Nirad Das!

FLORA (*Not heeding him*) Oh … it's the most beautiful thing …

DAS (*Brightly*) I'm so pleased you like it! A quite witty pastiche—

FLORA (*Heeding him now*) Are you going to be Indian? Please don't.

DAS (*Heeding her*) I … I am Indian.

FLORA An Indian artist.

Related Characters: Flora Crewe, Nirad Das (speaker), Coomaraswami

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

When Flora and Das finally separate, she asks if she can keep his nude watercolor portrait of her. He agrees, but in a confusing turn of events, she decides not to keep the portrait because taking it off the canvas would damage it. Instead, he gives her a different small watercolor portrait of her, which he has painted in the traditional miniature style of the Rajput painters.

This brief scene, which is easy to miss on the page and the stage alike, creates a remarkable twist in the plot: there are *three* portraits of Flora, not two, and nobody besides Flora, Das, and the play's audience knows about the third portrait. Crucially, this third portrait is also the only one that Das actually finishes, and Flora says that, in it, he manages to paint in a truly authentic Indian style. This all represents the way that the deeper truth of Flora and Das's life, art, and relationship remains a secret—they alone know the truth, and despite everyone else's attempts to dig up their story decades later, no reconstruction will ever fully capture the original.

> "Heat collects and holds as a pearl at my throat,
> lets go and slides like a tongue-tip down a Modigliani,
> spills into the delta, now in the salt-lick,
> lost in the mangroves and the airless moisture,
> a seed-pearl returning to the oyster—
> *et nos cedamus amori* ..."

Related Characters: Flora Crewe (speaker), Modigliani , Nirad Das, David Durance, The Resident

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the poems that Flora writes in Jummapur. After she and Das part ways for the final time, she reads it to the play's audience over a loudspeaker, but its true significance isn't apparent until much later. At the end of the play, the audience learns that this is Flora's final poem, which she published in her last book, *Indian Ink*. Thus, this poem suggests that Flora's time in India and relationship with Das enabled her to reach the height of her literary work—just like her influenced helped Das finally find his authentic style as a painter.

From the "delta" to the "seed-pearl," the poem's references to nature all appear to be erotic. Meanwhile, the final line—"*nos cedamus amori*"—translates to "we surrender to love." This is a reference to Virgil's *Bucolics*, which David Durance's boss, the Resident, quoted to Flora during her visit to the Jummapur Club. These images all seem to suggest that Flora and Das did finally become lovers, although there is also another way to interpret the poem: since Flora consistently associates heat and breath with her illness, her poem about letting the heat out of her mouth could also be seen as a reference to her death.

> It's no go the records of the Theosophical Society, it's no go the newspaper files partitioned to ashes ... All we want is the facts and to tell the truth in our fashion ... Her knickers were made of crêpe-de-Chine, her poems were up in Bow Street, her list of friends laid end to end ... weren't in it for the poetry. But it's no go the watercolour, it's no go the Modigliani ... The glass is falling hour by hour, and we're back in the mulligatawny ... But we will leave no Das unturned. He had a son.

Related Characters: Eldon Pike (speaker), Dilip, Modigliani , Flora Crewe, Nirad Das, Anish Das, Eleanor ("Nell") Swan

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

During their visit to Jummapur, Eldon Pike and Dilip go drinking and start quoting the famous Louis MacNeice poem "Bagpipe Music." In this passage, Pike intersperses the first halves of lines from the poem ("It's a no go," "All we want is," "Her knickers were made of crêpe-de-Chine," and so on) with comments on their own journey to learn about Flora Crewe. "Bagpipe Music" focuses on the uniformity and alienation that modern culture imposes on English society. Thus, Pike's drinking song arguably points to the way these same cultural influences have affected India, the way Flora and Das resisted them, and the way his own research could be turning the rich, complex story of Flora's life into a dull history book just like any other.

Besides reporting that they haven't been successful in learning anything about Das and Modigliani's paintings of Flora from the Theosophical Society and the local newspaper archives, Pike's creative drinking song also contains a curious description of his goals: "All we want is the facts and to tell the truth in our fashion." Of course, readers and audiences will already recognize that Pike's version of "the truth" is quite different from Anish Das and Eleanor Swan's. Pike is interested in the kind of names, dates, and events that can go down in history books, and not in what Flora's time in Jummapur truly meant to *her* or the people around her. And because Das and Swan do not trust Pike, they don't share crucial information with him, and he ends up only telling a small part of the story about Flora's trip to Jummapur.

DURANCE Where did you get such a thing?

FLORA His Highness gave it to me.

DURANCE Why?

FLORA Because I ate an apricot. Because he is a Rajah. Because he hoped I'd go to bed with him. I don't know.

DURANCE But how could he … feel himself in such intimacy with you?

[…]

DURANCE … but I'm in a frightfully difficult position now.

FLORA Why?

DURANCE Did he visit you?

FLORA I visited him.

DURANCE I know. Did he visit you?

FLORA Mind your own business.

DURANCE But it is my business.

FLORA Because you think you love me?

DURANCE No, I … Keeping tabs on what His Highness is up to is one of my … I mean I write reports to Delhi.

FLORA (*Amused*) Oh heavens!

Related Characters: David Durance, Flora Crewe (speaker), The Rajah (1930), Krishna and Radha, Nirad Das, Coomaraswami

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95-96

Explanation and Analysis

On a visit to Flora Crewe's bungalow, David Durance discovers the miniature painting of Radha and Krishna that the Rajah has gifted to Flora. He responds with anger and astonishment, but she insists that the painting is no big deal. However, she also casually mentions that the Rajah was sexually interested in her, probably owing to her reputation as an erotic poet. This outrages Durance, who claims that it's a security threat for her to see the Rajah.

To the extent that Durance's claim is true, it shows that Durance is lying when he repeatedly insists that Jummapur is the Rajah's fully independent princely state. In reality, Durance's job is to impose the British Empire's will on the Rajah and make sure that he does *not* make independent decisions under any circumstances. Durance's justification also points to his ulterior motives for seeing Flora: he's clearly meeting with her to gauge whether certain people in the Theosophical Society, like Coomaraswami and Nirad Das, are supporting the Indian independence movement.

But Flora identifies another obvious reason for Durance's negative reaction to her comment about the Rajah: he's jealous that she's also meeting other men (and, clearly, likes them much better than she does him). Of course, modern readers and audiences can see how racism and control also play into Durance's reaction. He finds it distasteful that a woman would entertain multiple suitors rather than giving a chance to just one (himself). And most of all, he's clearly astonished that an Englishwoman would dare to consider having sex with an Indian man, even a wealthy and well-connected prince, because this threatens the concept of white racial supremacy that the British Empire is built on.

The terror of the Empire Day gymkhana, the thrower of mangoes at the Resident's Daimler.

Related Characters: Eleanor ("Nell") Swan (speaker), Nirad Das, The Resident, David Durance, Flora Crewe, The Rajah (1930)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor Swan provocatively describes Nirad Das with this reference to the crime for which he was imprisoned: throwing mangoes at a car owned by the Resident (the main British official in Jummapur and David Durance's boss). Of course, besides the true nature of Das's relationship with Flora, this story about his alleged crime is this play's other central, unresolved mystery: Stoppard never clarifies if Das actually threw the mangoes. It's also entirely possible that David Durance invented the charge against Das, whether because Durance viewed Das's political views as a threat to the Empire or simply because he grew jealous of Das's relationship with Flora. Yet another scene shows Durance driving off in a Daimler car—which suggests that perhaps Das was really throwing mangoes at *him*.

Das's imprisonment also reflects the broader political context of India in 1930. The British and the princes who help them enforce their rule (like the Rajah) are imprisoning independence activists for even minor crimes. Crucially, over the course of Flora and Das's relationship, not only do they help each other become better artists, but they also persuade each another to more forcefully support Indian independence. Das teaches Flora about the existing independence movement and its goals. Meanwhile, Flora encourages Das to go out and participate in the movement,

rather than just silently supporting it from his studio. Thus, Das's imprisonment—whether it was the consequence of Das's activism, Durance's jealousy, or both—is also clearly part of the legacy of his relationship with Flora.

Quite possibly. Or with Captain Durance. Or His Highness the Rajah of Jummapur. Or someone else entirely. It hardly matters, looking back. Men were not really important to Flora. If they had been, they would have been fewer. She used them like batteries. When things went flat, she'd put in a new one … I'll come to the gate with you. If you decide to tell Mr Pike about the watercolour, I'm sure Flora wouldn't mind.

Related Characters: Eleanor ("Nell") Swan (speaker), Flora Crewe, David Durance, The Rajah (1930), Nirad Das, Eldon Pike, Anish Das

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 98-99

Explanation and Analysis

As Eleanor Swan and Anish Das's conversation comes to a close, Das complains about a footnote in which Eldon Pike suggests that Flora had an affair with David Durance. But Swan insists that it's impossible to know whom Flora slept with—and that it really doesn't matter, because Flora "used [men] like batteries."

On the one hand, this could be just another of Swan's evasion tactics: just as she told Eldon Pike that there was no nude portrait of Flora to get him to stop asking tough questions, she may just be telling Anish that there's no evidence of Flora's relationship with his father to prevent him from digging deeper. Swan may even want Pike's footnote to stay as it is because she's embarrassed to admit that Flora slept with an Indian man. After all, the play convincingly suggests that Flora's relationship was with Nirad Das. Yet, on the other hand, Stoppard never does reveal the identity of Flora's lover, so what Swan is saying is absolutely correct: Flora very well could have been with Durance, the Rajah, "someone else entirely," or even more than one of the men in question.

Nevertheless, while the play's readers and audiences consider all the possibilities of Flora's affair(s), they should also ask whether Swan might also be right when she says that "it hardly matters" whom Flora slept with. Swan is really asking: why the fixation on sex? It's clear that Flora dated all three men, her time with Das made the longest-lasting impact on her life and legacy, and her fate was the same, regardless of her relationships. Would her affection for and collaboration with Das have been meaningless if she hadn't slept with him at all? If she really *did* sleep with Durance or the Rajah, would this devalue her relationship with Das?

"Darling, that's all from Jummapur, because how I'm packed, portrait and all, and Mr Coomaraswami is coming to take me to the station. I'll post this in Jaipur as soon as I get there. I'm not going to post it here because I'm not. I feel fit as two lops this morning, and happy, too, because something good happened here which made me feel halfway better about Modi and getting back to Paris too late. That was a sin I'll carry to my grave, but perhaps my soul will stay behind as a smudge of paint on paper, as if I'd always been here, like Radha who was the most beautiful of the herdswomen, undressed for love in an empty house."

Related Characters: Flora Crewe (speaker), Coomaraswami, Krishna and Radha, Modigliani , Eleanor ("Nell") Swan, Nirad Das, Anish Das, Eldon Pike

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of *Indian Ink*, Flora Crewe reads from this letter, which is one of the last that she ever sends to her sister, Eleanor. She announces her departure from Jummapur and explicitly references Das's painting of her (which she compares to an earlier nude portrait of her by Modigliani).

This letter has come up repeatedly over the course of the play. For decades, it was essentially Eleanor Swan's only window into Flora's final days. And since Eleanor did not have a copy of Das's second portrait of Flora, she did not know what Flora's references to Radha, "something good," and the "smudge of paint on paper" really meant.

But now, after meeting Anish Das, Swan finally has the context she needs to understand what Flora was really saying. And, as the play has run its course, readers and audiences finally have the context to understand how much Swan has learned about her sister. They can see how the letter, the portrait, and other people's memories all offer

fruitful but incomplete glimpses of Flora's final days. And they can see how, by piecing these sources together, people like Swan, Anish, and even Eldon Pike can imagine the events depicted in the scenes from the 1930s.

Indeed, when reflecting further on Stoppard's treatment of memory and the past in the play, it's worth asking whether these earlier scenes are really supposed to be an accurate view of the past at all. Perhaps they're just one possible version of Flora's final days, the fantasy that Swan and Anish Das imagine based on the resources available to them. After all, they leave many crucial questions—like the true identity of Flora's lover—completely unanswered.

"Twenty years ago no European had ever been here, and there we were with a band playing, and observing that St Cloup's Potage à la Julienne was perhaps better than his other soups, and so on, and all this in the face of those high hills, and we one hundred and five Europeans being surrounded by at least three thousand Indians, who looked on at what we call our polite amusements, and bowed to the ground if a European came near them. I sometimes wonder they do not cut all our heads off and say nothing more about it."

Related Characters: Flora Crewe (speaker), Eleanor ("Nell") Swan, Nirad Das, Nazrul

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

Indian Ink ends with Flora Crewe quoting *Up the Country*, Emily Eden's memoir about her travels through India in the late 1830s. As the sister of the top British official in India, Eden had a privileged perspective on the country—as well as strong reasons for supporting British colonial rule there. In this sense, she's very similar to Flora Crewe.

By reading Eden's book at the end of the play, Flora focuses on the easily-forgotten dynamic at the heart of British colonialism: it requires the application of brutal violence because it consists of a tiny, powerful minority ruling over an enormous, disempowered majority that would much rather rule itself. This British minority is always under threat because the Indian majority can easily overwhelm it and take its country back. All it needs to do is stage a rebellion and cut off some heads.

From Mrs. Swan's cake and the dress code at the Jummapur Club to Das's hesitancy when speaking to Flora and doubts about Nazrul's loyalty, all of the fanfare, formalities, and social codes that Stoppard has depicted throughout the play are just complex ways of covering up the basic reality that colonialism is effectively a hostage situation. Of course, within historical perspective, the implication is clear: Indians will soon take their country back through the independence movement—and, remarkably, they will do so with very little bloodshed.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1

Flora Crewe disembarks a train in the fictional town of Jummapur, India in 1930. Coomaraswami, who works for the Theosophical Society, greets her at the train platform. He garlands her with marigolds, kindly leads her to a bungalow (guesthouse), and leaves her to rest. Nazrul, a servant, carries her luggage.

Stoppard introduces his play's protagonist (Flora Crewe) and its central premise (her trip to India in 1930). But her warm welcome doesn't just reflect Eastern hospitality—it also demonstrates how British colonialism imposed a strict, oppressive, and exploitative hierarchy on India. Native Indians effectively became servants and slaves to British invaders—including even freethinkers who didn't agree with the colonial system (like Flora).

In England in the 1980s, Eleanor Swan and Eldon Pike sit in a garden with a shoebox of Flora Crewe's letters to Eleanor. While they converse on one part of the stage, on another, Flora variously reads from her letters and acts out scenes from her time in India.

Throughout Indian Ink, *this second timeline will play out onstage alongside the first. Stoppard uses this technique to show how the past and the present are intertwined: not only does the past set the foundation for the present, but people can only access the past through the ways that they study and remember it in the present. In particular, Stoppard will use other characters' memories of Flora to explore colonialism's long-term effects on both Britain and India.*

Flora Crewe discovers that the electric light in her bungalow is broken, but that its oil lamp works. She tests the chair, table, and sofa on the verandah. Meanwhile, Eldon Pike calls Flora's letters a treasure. Eleanor Swan, Flora's sister, is her only remaining family. Flora writes that the servant Nazrul avoids using the electric kitchen appliances, and that she needs to hire a boy to operate her punkah. She calls the house a "duck bungalow," but Swan clarifies to Pike that it's really a "*dak* bungalow"—an old post house. Swan offers Pike **cake**, which he reluctantly accepts.

Flora immediately notices the technological and infrastructural differences between London and India. Londoners light and cool their houses with electricity, whereas English people living in India employ slaves and servants to do the same. Flora's confusion about the dak *bungalow underlines how ignorant she is about the country where she has arrived—and where everyone bends over backwards to satisfy her. Swan's clarification hints at an important plot point: Swan lived much longer in India than Flora ever did—and her perspective on it is very different.*

Pike explains that he is compiling *The Collected Letters of Flora Crewe*—but that most of the work will be adding notes. He starts reading the next letter: Flora describes how the Theosophical Society took her on a formal sightseeing tour, which made her feel "like a carnival float representing Empire." Coomaraswami tells Flora that the temples are better in southern India (where he's from), but Flora apologizes—she's not religious, so she doesn't really appreciate temples. She tells Coomaraswami how "Herbert's lady decorator" once joked, "I worship mauve." Swan explains to Pike that "Herbert" is the famous writer H.G. Wells, whom Flora met just before leading to India.

The two timelines intermingle, raising the question of how much Pike and Swan distort the past as they remember it. Pike's book makes it clear why Flora's memory is so significant: she was a major figure in the interwar London literary scene, as well as an early feminist icon. Meanwhile, Flora immediately recognizes how colonialism deeply shapes the way everyone views and treats her in India. Even though she's utterly ignorant about Indian culture and people, she makes a point of trying to respect them. In fact, as soon as she arrives in India, she becomes the beneficiary of a deeply exploitative colonial system—but unlike most English people in India, she recognizes and questions it.

Flora writes about giving a lecture at Coomaraswami's house. Afterward, an audience member asks if her "intimate friend" H.G. Wells writes with a pen or a typewriter—and she says pen, even though she has no idea. (Pike starts inserting his annotations: Flora only met Wells briefly, for a weekend.) Later, at her reception, Flora is surprised at how closely Indians follow London intellectual life. The same audience member asks her about Gertrude Stein, whom she dislikes but refrains from insulting.

Flora realizes that, even though she is totally ignorant about India, educated Indians are deeply knowledgeable about England. They find her visit exciting because she can put them in touch with an English literary world that scarcely thinks or cares about them. Put differently, Flora realizes that the British have colonized India's culture as well as its people: colonialism teaches Indians to value English culture above their own and prevents them from forming a vibrant local intellectual culture.

Later, Flora meets the painter Nirad Das, who asks her about Virginia Woolf, George Bernard Shaw, and London. He says that he loves Chelsea, where Flora lives, because so many famous painters lived there. He offers to paint a portrait of Flora, and he gives her a rough pencil sketch that he did of her. Back in the 1980s, Pike asks Swan if she has the sketch. Swan says no—in fact, Flora only left behind one suitcase. But Pike is furious to hear that Swan threw it away.

Stoppard introduces the play's other central figure: Nirad Das, an Indian painter who—like most educated Indians—is thoroughly steeped in British culture. Stoppard will use Das and Flora's interactions to explore the relationship between several of the complementary pairs that his work tries to bridge: England and India, women and men, and literature and visual art.

Pike reads another letter. Nirad Das bikes to Flora's guesthouse with his easel, canvas, and paints. Flora comes outside in a vivid blue dress, greets him, and starts to write while he paints her. Reading Flora's letter, Pike realizes that Das **painted Flora nude** in watercolor on paper—but Swan corrects him: it's oil on canvas. The portrait is "fairly ghastly," Swan says, but it's above her wardrobe somewhere. Pike is astonished: there are no known portraits of Flora. But Swan nonchalantly mentions that Modigliani *also* painted Flora nude in 1918. (But someone burned it.)

Das and Flora's collaboration represents something highly unusual in colonial India: Indians and English people meeting as equals. Pike and Swan's different perspectives on the painting reflect the opposition between two different ways of remembering the past: the formal, dry memory of academic research and the informal, emotional memory of those with personal connections to significant historical figures. For Swan, the portrait of Flora is "ghastly" because it's not the way she wants to remember her sister; for Pike, it's an incredible artifact because it offers unique insight into a significant historical figure.

Flora sits on her verandah in the blue dress, writing a poem about heat (which represents sexual desire), while Das paints her. She accidentally moves and crosses her legs, so he stops painting. She apologizes, but he thanks her for her patience and kindness, then asks, "May I ask you a personal question?" She responds, "That *is* a personal question." He anxiously explains that he was just wondering about her poem, but promises not to ask his question. She replies, "My poem is about heat." He goes back to painting her skirt, and she continues writing. Meanwhile, on the other part of the stage, Das's son Anish walks into Mrs. Swan's garden.

The sexual tension between Das and Flora is evident and building. After all, their collaboration represents a kind of symbolic, artistic unity: he paints her writing, and she writes about a desire that is presumably directed at him. Of course, Flora's choice of material also explains why she was so controversial during her time, and why she was so historically significant decades later: it was scandalous for a woman to write openly about sex in the 1920s and 1930s. Finally, even though Flora and Das meet as relative equals as they make their art, Das still acts with caution and deference towards Flora—which shows how the colonial system's hierarchies affect them nonetheless.

Flora and Das continue bantering. Flora tells Das that she wants "to ask [him] a delicate question," and he responds by exclaiming, "I am transported beyond my most fantastical hopes of our fellowship!" She tells him not "to be so Indian"—or maybe "*more* Indian." She means that instead of acting overenthusiastic and "Englished-up" in every conversation, he should just talk to her as if she were a normal Indian person. He says that's impossible, but she says it's possible to imagine, like a unicorn. He replies, "you can imagine [a unicorn] but you cannot mount it," but she responds that she was only planning to *imagine* it. Understanding the innuendo, Das grows uncomfortable and apologizes, but Flora ridicules him. He says that she's cruel, and she apologizes. He decides to continue painting in silence.

Flora can tell that Das's response is insincere: even if his enthusiasm is genuine, he is trying too hard to play a part. Her confusion about whether truly being Indian *means playing this part or relinquishing it shows that colonialism shapes English people's concepts of Indianness just as deeply as it shapes Indian people's concepts of Englishness. Still, with his unicorn metaphor, Das clearly explains why he's playing a part: it's unthinkable and dangerous for Indians and English people to treat each other as equals. In the colonial system, the English (including Flora) have practically absolute power over Indians (including Das).*

In the 1980s, Mrs. Eleanor Swan brings Anish Das tea and **cake**, and they sit in the garden. Swan asks if Anish is like his father. Anish says that, unlike his father, he hasn't "suffered for his beliefs"—but he is also a painter. Swan declares that they are both *Indian* painters, so they are alike. Anish pulls out a copy of Eldon Pike's *The Collected Letters of Flora Crewe*, then declares that his father painted the portrait on the cover and would be proud to see his work reproduced. But Swan is skeptical. She asks how Anish's father "suffered for his beliefs," and Anish explains that he was imprisoned for protesting the British Empire. Swan says that he "obviously deserved what he got." She offers Anish cake, which he accepts, and Anish points out that his father was imprisoned in 1930—the year he met Flora.

Anish Das's visit advances the play's plot in several ways. It also reveals important details about Nirad Das's story. It demonstrates how Eldon Pike's academic remembrance can combine with and enrich Swan's personal remembrance. And it shows how colonial-era hierarchies and tensions persist for decades after India won its independence. Whereas Flora knew little about India but saw British colonial rule as obviously unjust, her sister Eleanor still avidly defends the Empire more than 50 years later. When Eleanor declares that Anish and his father must be similar, she makes it clear that she isn't capable of seeing any complexity or individuality in them beyond their being Indian—in her mind, Indians are still a class of inferior colonial subjects who are only significant if and when British people say they are.

On another day in 1930, Flora asks Das if they are friends again—he says yes. She jokes that he should write something on his pencil sketch of her. Nazrul brings Flora lemonade, and as a gift, Das gives her an old copy of Up the Country, Emily Eden's book of letters about traveling through India.

Das and Flora's reconciliation again shows how basic human instincts, which bring different kinds of people together, serve as important counterweights to colonialism, which tears people apart. Still, Nazrul's presence and Up the Country*—a book about India by the sister of a high-ranking English official—shows that Flora and Das can't escape this system completely.*

Back in the 1980s, Anish Das tells Mrs. Swan about his father. Nirad Das was 34 in 1930—younger than Flora—and a widower. He loved to read English novels to Anish; he got "a proper English education" at Bombay's prestigious Elphinstone College. Swan finds this surprising, given his political leanings. Anish explains that Jummapur's people supported the English until the First War of Indian Independence—which Swan calls "the Mutiny." Anish disapprovingly says that he hasn't "come to give [Swan] a history lesson," but Swan says he's obviously wrong: the British brought culture to India, she argues, like the Romans did to Britain.

Nirad Das's background reflects the complexity of English cultural influence in India: appreciating English art and literature didn't necessarily mean supporting British rule. Rather, like any colonized people, Indians adopted some elements of their colonizers' culture while rejecting others. Meanwhile, Anish and Swan's disagreement about the nature of the War reflects how India and the U.K. still remember the colonial era in completely different ways—while Indians deeply understand colonialism's deep impacts on their nation, Britain has never fully come to terms with it.

Swan asks why Anish speaks English so well and tells him to eat more **cake**. Anish calls her "very wicked" and insists that "*We* [Indians] were the Romans!" because India was far more advanced than England for thousands of years. She asks if Anish is returning to India, but he explains that he lives in England and is married to an English woman he met in art school. Swan finds this charming, until Anish explains that his wife was a model—not a painter. He explains that he paints "deconstructive" paintings now, and she calls it "a shame." He asks if he can sketch her, "to close one of [life's] many circles." She calls this reasoning "very east of Suez," but agrees.

The vast majority of historians would side with Anish, who argues that British colonialism played a significant role in setting India up for its present-day underdevelopment. Anish's life shows how colonialism has transformed Britain, too, by enabling migration and diversifying the population. Swan may still think of the U.K. as an essentially white country and Anish as a foreigner there, but clearly, times have changed. Of course, just as the legacy of colonialism continues to shape both India and the U.K., Anish's marriage to an English model suggests that he has fulfilled his father's legacy, too. When Swan calls his desire to paint her Eastern*, she draws a tenuous distinction between traditional European concepts of history—according to which the past ends and people must simply move on from it—and Indian concepts of history, in which the past lives on into the present. Of course, Stoppard complicates this oversimplified distinction throughout the play.*

In the 1930s, Flora Crewe and Nirad Das have a contest to see who can use more Indian words—like *dungarees*, *pyjamas*, *chutney*, *hullabaloo*, and *coolie*. Flora wins but admits that she memorized a word list. Das explains that he learned English by reading classic novels. He jokes that Lord Macaulay—the politician who forced the British education system on India—did a great service, because the independence movement could only form once educated Indians could all communicate with each other in English. Flora asks Das if he's a nationalist, but he changes the subject back to the painting. He agrees to let Flora look at it. She explains that a friend once painted her in the nude, but her ex-fiancé burned it.

Flora and Das's game shows both that she is starting to learn about India and that Indian languages have made a lasting impact on English. Of course, Das's comments about Macaulay point to English's even greater influence on India. In addition to locating the play within the historical context of the Indian independence movement, these comments again demonstrate that the British influence on India is too complex to be reduced to a simple positive or negative. Whereas colonizers like Macaulay foolishly thought that teaching Indians English would civilize and improve them, in reality, it gave them the crucial tool that they needed to overthrow British rule.

Suddenly, Captain David Durance arrives on a horse. He greets Flora and Das—who leaves on his bicycle. Durance asks if Flora needs anything and explains that he heard about her arrival through word of mouth. He asks what she is doing in India and if she has any friends there—like Mr. Das. She says no and asks if he's a policeman, but he isn't. She explains that Mr. Joshua Chamberlain has organized for her to travel around India, speaking about the London literary scene in exchange for room and board. Durance says that she should have stayed at the official British Residency and asks if she knows that Chamberlain is a communist. She sarcastically says that she does.

Durance's arrival transforms the play's atmosphere, shutting down Das and Flora's free, playful conversation. Durance reimposes the British Empire's strict social hierarchy and pervasive sense of suspicion; he views Flora's presence in India as threatening because she clearly doesn't agree with the colonial government's official stances. In particular, Flora's friendship with Das shows that Indian and English people are inherently equal—a truth that threatens the fundamental premise behind colonial rule.

Durance tells Flora to visit the British Club. They shake hands, and Flora asks about Durance's job. He explains that he works for the Viceroy to ensure that the local Indian rulers "don't get up to mischief." She points out that he really *is* a policeman, and he laughs. He asks her out to dinner—he's not married—and they agree that he will pick her up at eight on Saturday evening. He rides off.

Durance speaks about his job in euphemistic terms, but what he really means is that he enforces the Empire's control over the local leaders who still technically rule much of India (like the Rajah in Jummapur). Durance's date invitation makes it clear that, regardless of Flora's political persuasions, they belong to the same social class in India.

In the 1980s, Anish Das is drawing Eleanor Swan. Swan insists that the British weren't responsible for imprisoning Anish's father, since Jummapur was ruled by a local Rajah. She says that he would have gone to prison for longer if he were living under direct British rule—for at least a year, instead of six months. She declares that Indians *wanted* to go to jail so that they could look like serious activists and brags that her husband Eric, a British official, used to let them off with just a fine to spite them.

David Durance's comments about his job in the last scene make it clear that Swan's characterization of Das's imprisonment is deeply misleading. The Rajah technically did *rule Jummapur, but only because he agreed to work as a British agent—and help the British deflect responsibility for their abuses of power (like arbitrarily detaining independence activists). Lastly, Swan's marriage to Eric helps explain her regressive views on India: she and her family were colonizers who profited handsomely from British rule there.*

Swan asks if Anish's paintings are like the **cake** she's feeding him—but he says that they're difficult to describe. He shows her his drawing of her, and she's impressed. Swan asks Anish what they should tell Eldon Pike—who she thinks is secretly writing Flora's biography. She complains that Pike added far too many footnotes, and that Flora has turned into a dull academic subject. Nobody paid attention to her during her life. Anish asks if he can see his father's original portrait of Flora, and Swan agrees.

Swan's approach to biography, which focuses on Flora as a person, still sharply contrasts with Pike's, which focuses on her as a historical figure. Stoppard asks how these two strategies relate to one another—and which should define the way that a culture remembers its heroes. Swan's memories have a specific emotional resonance, but they are fundamentally private; in contrast, Pike's academic biography offers broadly applicable, if dry, lessons to a much wider audience. Perhaps Anish Das offers a solution: he uses Eldon Pike's dry research as a tool in his quest to understand himself, his family, and his country in a deeper, personal way.

Das paints Flora while she sits on her verandah in her blue dress, writing a poem about Das fantasizing about her. Das helps her order bread, butter, and duck pâté in Hindi from Nazrul. But Nazrul reports that the pâté has been stolen—Flora points out that it contains pork, so touching it is against Nazrul's religion. Das says that only God knows, and Flora jokes, "Which God do you mean? […] Yours was here first." Das tells her about the god Krishna's affair with Radha, a beautiful herdswoman, in Hindu mythology. Flora describes the statues of buxom women in the Hindu temples she visited with Coomaraswami.

Flora and Das's jokes about Nazrul's real motives again underline the deep gulf between British colonizers (and the educated Indians who work with them), on the one hand, and the vast majority of Indians, on the other. Perhaps more troublingly, this raises the question of whether Das painting Flora is any different—or whether this action, too, is a kind of servitude. Yet the story of Krishna and Radha adds complexity to this question. Not only does the story suggest that Das and Flora are falling in love, but it also suggests that love can help people cross social boundaries—after all, Krishna was a God and Radha, an ordinary mortal.

Flora admits that she's struggling to write because "the … emotion won't harmonize." Das reports that he can't paint because he doesn't have the right rasa—which he defines as "juice," "essence," or "the emotion which the artist must arouse in you." There are nine *rasa*, which correspond to nine colors and nine moods. When Flora says that her poem is about sex, Das explains that her rasa is Shringara, erotic love, which is blue-black. Flora compares Das to Dr. Aziz from E.M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India*, "for not knowing his worth." But Das promises that Aziz improves at the end of the novel.

Just as English art has inspired Das's creative work throughout his life, his lessons about Indian art theory now inspire Flora's poetry. Of course, the erotic subject matter of Flora's poetry again hints at the nature of her relationship with Das. But her reference to A Passage to India complicates this suggestion by hinting that it is not safe for Das to get involved with her. Forster's novel explores the complexities of sex, power, and culture in colonial India by telling the story of an Englishwoman falsely accusing a respected Indian doctor (Dr. Aziz) of sexual assault.

Decades later, the well-dressed Eldon Pike arrives in modern Jummapur and finds it "vaguely disappoint[ing]." In one of her letters, Flora wrote that Das thought she was "posing as a poet," like "the Enemy." Pike clarifies with a footnote: "the Enemy" was the London poet J.C. Squire, who complained that young women shouldn't be poets. Dilip offers Pike an Indian cola, but Pike refuses. Dilip explains that Flora's bungalow was exactly where they're standing—but it was destroyed in 1947 during the riots that followed the Partition of India and Pakistan. Dilip and Pike take photos of each other, and Pike considers putting out an ad in the newspaper to request information about Das and his portrait of Flora.

Pike's research gave him high hopes for Jummapur, which he idealized because of the important role it played Flora's life. When his actual visit disappoints, this suggests that he has been wrongly giving theory the upper hand over reality. And yet Flora's conflict with Squire demonstrates why she was so historically significant as a feminist figure—and why Pike's academic research into her life is actually noble and valuable. The destruction of her bungalow also shows how research can uncover important historical truths that can become buried—literally or figuratively—under the weight of time.

While Dilip goes to the roof to find a better angle for the photos, Flora reads from her letters about Das, but Pike interrupts with irrelevant footnotes about Gandhi's Salt March, the influential Tree family, and Flora's family doctor. Flora yells at Pike: "Oh, shut up!" At the same time, Das yells, "Get off!" at a stray dog, and Dilip yells "Eldon!" Pike walks offstage.

In a rare moment of comic relief, several characters agree that Eldon Pike's rigid, academic approach to documenting Flora's life and work misses everything that's really valuable about her story: her freedom, her passion, and above all, her bold willingness to engage with India on its own terms, rather than through the same chauvinistic perspective as other British people.

Back in 1930, Das apologizes to Flora—he's struggling to paint. But Flora says it's really her fault: the mood changed because she stopped writing her poem and started writing a letter to her sister. Das smokes a cigarette and asks about Flora's sister, Eleanor. He's thrilled to learn that Eleanor lives in Doughty Street in Holborn—the same street as Dickens—and works for Joshua Chamberlain's newspaper, *The Flag*. Das recalls how the Rajah suspended the Jummapur Theosophical Society after Chamberlain gave a lecture opposing the British Empire. Flora reveals that Eleanor is also Chamberlain's mistress. Das assumes that Eleanor won't be able to marry and her family will be ashamed of her. But Flora is actually "very happy for [Eleanor]."

Flora recognizes that, even though Das can't see what she's writing, it affects the atmosphere of his painting because it shapes the mood of the whole scene. In a sense, their art is so interconnected that it becomes, essentially, collaborative. This raises the important question of why, in his research into Flora's poetry, Eldon Pike never takes Das seriously as an influence on her. Yet Flora and Das's connection once again shows how art can unite people, which—in the colonial context—enabled them to fight back against colonialism's divide-and-conquer tactics. This was no doubt Joseph Chamberlain's goal in sending Flora to Jummapur—and David Durance's great fear. Finally, Flora also reveals interesting details about Eleanor's early life—which makes it clear that Eleanor's marriage to Eric fundamentally changed her political outlook and beliefs.

Flora wants to continue writing, but Das says that he's done painting for the day, and he starts to hurry away. Flora asks what she did wrong, and Das finally admits that it's that she looked at the painting but didn't say anything. He grabs his pencil sketch of Flora and tears it up into little pieces. He tries to grab his canvas, but Flora won't let him, and they end up fighting over it. Flora suddenly runs out of breath and collapses; Das helps her seat herself. She says that she has come to India for her health—she has lung issues. She and Das agree that she should go up to the mountains soon.

Flora and Das's feelings for each other give way to conflict because of their incompatible (but unspoken) expectations about their art. Clearly, Flora does *appreciate Das's portraits of her—but he expected her to communicate her appreciation in a different way. Meanwhile, Flora's comments about her health show that there is far more to her story than meets the eye. They also put an implicit end date on her stay in Jummapur.*

Flora goes inside the bungalow to take a shower. She undresses and goes to the bathroom while Das gets her a towel from Nazrul and waits with it in her bedroom. But the running water is broken, so Flora returns to her bedroom, naked, to lie down. When he sees her, Das is frightened and tries to leave, but she asks him to pour a jug of water over her head in the bathroom. He does. Das adjusts her mosquito net and she gets back in bed, removes her towel, and gets under the covers. She finally asks Das the "delicate question" she has been thinking about: does he want to **paint her nude**? It would have "more what-do-you-call it"—rasa, Das replies. Das leaves the room.

Flora's poetry and reputation have already shown the audience that she is sexually liberated; now, the tension between her and Das escalates, but Stoppard stops short of making it clear that their relationship turns sexual. Some audience members may see Stoppard as reinforcing racist stereotypes about Indian men being sexually conservative, while others may view him as celebrating the way that love and sexual attraction can connect people across social and cultural boundaries. After all, relationships between Indian men and English women were viewed as entirely taboo in colonial India (even though the opposite was common and accepted).

In the 1980s, Eleanor Swan brings Nirad Das's portrait of Flora out to her garden and shows it to Anish Das. Swan calls it "a bit much," but Anish finds it "vibrant" and starts to weep. Anish explains that the portrait is unfinished, because his father never painted the background. Das must have abandoned it and started another one. He pulls **a small watercolor** out of his briefcase. Swan moans, "Oh heavens!" But getting painted in the nude was so "like Flora," she admits.

Nirad Das's two portraits of Flora represent two stages in their relationship, two opposite ways of remembering their legacy, and two different artistic styles—one mostly English, one distinctively Indian. Of course, Swan's conservatism and Anish's artistic vocation shape their reactions to the paintings: Swan sees them as crude and frivolous, while Anish sees them as a deep reflection of both his father and Flora's creative brilliance. Still, these paintings enable both of them to remember beloved relatives who left very little behind.

Back in 1930, Nazrul brings soda water back from the market, and Das pours it in a glass for Flora. Das reports that Nazrul claims to have run into a riot on his way home and lost two chickens. He and Flora wonder whether it really happened. Das sends Nazrul to bring the dhobi (washerwoman) and warns Flora not to drink the water Nazrul gives her. Meanwhile, the punkah starts circulating cool air around the bungalow—Das explains that he found a boy to operate it. Das tries to leave Flora's bedroom so that Nazrul won't see him there. In fact, he's never been all alone with an Englishwoman before, and he feels ashamed to have seen Flora naked. But Flora says that a real artist would take it in stride.

Das's comments to Flora about Nazrul are in part practical—it's true that Nazrul may be lying about the chickens, and it's true that Indian water may make Flora sick. At the same time, his comments reflect the divisions and distrust between Indian elites and commoners. Of course, this also echoes the scene in which Dilip refused to drink Indian cola on his trip to Jummapur—which is another of the countless details that Stoppard includes to show how the past shapes the present. Meanwhile, the riot in the streets shows that the Indian independence movement is still active in the background of the play. Das worries about Nazrul seeing him in Flora's room because he knows that he could face dire consequences from the colonial government for getting involved with her.

Flora explains how she poured a drink on J.C. Squire's head after he criticized her poetry, but she regrets spending weeks of her life on him. Das asks if she's dying, and she says yes—but slowly, she hopes. She admits that she didn't tell Das what she thinks about his painting because she expected him to "be an *Indian* artist"—but instead, he's obsessed with England. She wants Das to paint her from an Indian point of view, not an English one.

Flora's shocking revelation about her health should lead the audience to rethink the meaning of her journey, her relationship with Das, and others' efforts to remember her life and work decades later. She will not make it out of India alive, and the poetry that she is writing with and about Das will be her final work. The context of her trip also makes it clear why Das's painting is so shocking to her: she has come to India in search of Indian art but has found artists imitating English art instead. This doesn't mean that nothing remotely English can be authentically Indian, but it does mean that the British Empire has mistreated India to the point of suppressing its native art.

Das smokes a cigarette on the verandah and declares that "the bloody Empire finished off Indian painting!" He admits that he agrees with Joshua Chamberlain: the English robbed and exploited India. Eventually, the British Empire will fade away, leaving behind just its monuments and art, like the Mughals. Flora repeats that Das must use her for his art, representing her according to *his* perspective and conventions. Das notes that the story of Krishna and Radha is central to the tradition of Rajasthani painting.

The play sets up a metaphorical link between Das's painting and the independence movement: both represent India fighting to win itself back from Britain. Flora asks Das to discover his own authentic perspective by painting for himself and his fellow Indians, and not for the British audiences that have so long held the power to determine which Indian art gets taken seriously. Of course, this doesn't mean that Das has to purify his work of everything British—just that he shouldn't focus on imitating *British art.*

The electricity returns, and the ceiling fan turns on. Flora tells Das that Durance invited her to dinner, and then she asks if Krishna and Radha were punished for their affair. She also tells him to give the punkah boy (Subadar Ram Sunil Singh) a rupee; he gives the boy an anna instead (1/16 rupee).

Flora's comment about Krishna and Radha once again hints that her relationship with Das is more than just artistic. It's curious that Act One ends with Flora paying the punkah boy—which again reminds the audience about the invisible Indian labor that makes her trip to India possible (as well as British colonialism and Britain's present-day wealth). An anna is insignificant to Flora, but—as the audience will soon learn—a significant sum to the boy. This doesn't just speak to the enduring inequality between Britain and India: it also indicates that British colonialism is responsible for this inequality.

ACT 2

Flora Crewe and David Durance dance with two other English couples in the Jummapur Club in 1930, while across the stage Eldon Pike sits on the club's verandah in the 1980s. The other dancers ask Flora about her poetry. One man brings up the imperialist writer Rudyard Kipling. The other—Durance's boss, the Resident—mentions studying with the classicist poet Alfred Housman, who believed that everyone either gives in to love (like Virgil) or tries to resist it (like Ovid). Flora says that she's like Virgil.

Flora inhabits an entirely different persona and social world with Durance than she does with Das. She's equally comfortable in both, but she clearly finds Durance's less interesting and inspiring. Meanwhile, the other colonial officials' references to Kipling (an avowed imperialist) and Housman (a noted scholar of the Romans and Greeks) suggests that they essentially view their purpose in terms of civilizing India through Western influence—even as the Indians around them are demanding autonomy and self-determination. Flora is starting to see how the notion of Western cultural superiority is merely a flimsy justification for plundering India's labor and resources.

One of the women asks if Flora will be in town for the ball honoring Queen Victoria's birthday—she says no. Flora explains that David has promised to take her for a ride in his car, and the woman notes that the Rajah of Jummapur has a "terrific" collection of **86 cars**. Flora and David go out to the verandah for fresh air, and the other man starts quoting Kipling.

Flora's disinterest in the ball suggests that she is growing more and more skeptical of the Empire. The Rajah's "terrific" cars show how he profits handsomely from doing the Empire's bidding—and again shows how colonialism is about nothing more than amassing wealth and power.

In the 1980s, Dilip meets Pike on the verandah. He's wearing a fine suit and carrying an old, worn-out one with military ribbons on it. He helps Pike into it and explains that nobody can enter the Jummapur Club without formal wear. But Dilip also declares that he's learned the painter's name: Nirad Das. The man who lent him the jacket remembers Das and Flora. Pike insists on meeting this man immediately. Dilip explains that he's an elderly World War II veteran named Subadar Ram Sunil Singh. Now, he works in the cloakroom, but as a young boy, he operated Flora's punkah. Dilip and Pike go inside for dinner.

By staging Dilip and Pike's visit to the club in the same set as Flora and Durance's—and making Pike wear an absurd suit—Stoppard emphasizes the lasting influence of British colonialism on the organization of contemporary Indian society. In fact, Subadar Ram Sunil Singh's story underlines the basic injustice of colonialism: he has spent his life working tirelessly for both of these elites, but he still lives in poverty and must give his suit—with its proof of his distinguished military service—to an ignorant white visitor.

Settings and timelines mix together onstage. In a letter to Eleanor, Flora writes that Durance took her out in his car, that she ate dinner at the Club, and that the Club members were talking about withdrawing from India. Servants bring her and Durance their whiskey-sodas, and then Dilip and Pike have dinner in the same club, five decades later.

Stoppard highlights the marked contrast between the passionate Indian movement for independence—whose participants faced retaliation, imprisonment, and even murder—and the British officials' leisurely chats about whether to set India free. Some readers and audience members may conclude that, by juxtaposing this conversation with Dilip and Pike's visit to the club decades later, Stoppard is suggesting that Dilip and Pike's research into Flora actually perpetuates *the same kind of inequality enforced under colonial rule. Namely, they treat Flora's work as the most important art ever created in Jummapur, totally ignoring the contributions of Indian artists like Nirad Das.*

Durance asks about Flora's health and offers to show her the English cemetery. He says that English colonists "drop like flies" of tropical diseases in India, so he finds it peculiar that the doctor would send her there. She clarifies that the doctor told her to travel by sea to a warm place, and she chose India. Durance explains that English soldiers, government workers, and businesspeople all come to the same club in Jummapur, because it's ruled by the Rajah. Under the new "Indianization" policy, they're training Indian officers to run the civil service themselves. But Indians can't even enter the Club.

As Durance points out, it's ironic that an environment that kills many English people actually promises to heal Flora. This irony serves as a metaphor for the way that Flora's freedom of thought and sexual liberation prevented her from fitting into her era's stuffy, sexist culture. Of course, this scene also alludes to a classic trope from colonial literature: the idea that Europeans can discover themselves and achieve true freedom by traveling to their countries' colonies (where a vast population of enslaved natives will do their every bidding). Lastly, Durance mentions the Rajah's decision-making power and the "Indianization" policy to make British colonial rule seem less exploitative, but the ban on Indians entering the club makes the brutal truth clear: the Empire will never treat Indians as equals.

David asks Flora to ride with him in the morning and tells her to say yes: everyone has been gossiping about her and is watching them. He awkwardly kisses her and admits that people know about her scandal in London. She explains that her publisher faced an obscenity trial for printing her poems. She mostly wrote about sex, and when the judge asked why, she replied, "Write what you know." All the newspapers covered it.

David describes—or invents—the other colonists' gossip to try and manipulate Flora into dating him. (Unlike Das, he still doesn't know that she's dying.) Of course, her widely publicized obscenity trial further underlines her historical, political, and literary significance.

David Durance mounts a horse and starts practicing his polo swing. Flora asks about India's future. Durance notes that Gandhi just finished his Salt March and declares that "the jails are filling up" due to conflicts between Hindus, who support Gandhi's fight for independence, and Muslims, who don't want to live under Hindu rule. Flora mounts a horse and jokes that governing India looks fun. Durance declares that the Indians view the English as superior rulers who have finally "pulled this country together."

Stoppard situates his play in the historical context of the Indian independence movement: the Salt March was a crucial turning point in the movement because it won Gandhi broad, nationwide support for the first time. Readers and audiences must ask whether Flora takes Durance's comments at face value or manages to see through them, thanks to her conversations with Das. Clearly, India's jails aren't just "filling up" on their own—rather, the British are filling them up by ruthlessly persecuting anyone who dares to call for democracy and self-determination in India. Similarly, Indians clearly don't admire the English—this idea is little more than a convenient, self-serving delusion.

As Flora and Durance ride out in the country, a group of birds startles their horses. Flora admits that it's her first time riding a horse, and Durance says that he can tell. He laughs and proclaims that everything "went wrong" when the Suez Canal opened, English women started coming to India, and English men stopped mixing with the natives. Flora asks how Durance's boss (the Resident) knows that she's in India for health reasons, since she hasn't told anyone—except Das. Durance says that Das probably gossiped about her. But Flora calls that impossible. Durance asks Flora to marry him. She says no. He asks if she would ever *consider* it. She says no again.

Durance keeps trying to turn Flora against Das, for both personal and political reasons, but the reality is that the other officials probably found out about Flora's health condition on their own. His comment about English women isn't just a flirtatious joke; he's also observing that the Empire undermines itself by drawing such a strict division between English rulers and Indian subjects. Of course, this is ironic, because Flora *is now the one mixing with Indians (something English men used to do in the past but have given up ever since English women started going to India).*

Dilip and Pike drink American cola in the Rajah's palace, which is now a luxury hotel. The Rajah still lives upstairs. The waiters are dressed like his old servants, and they effortlessly cross over between both sides of the stage—1930 and the 1980s.

The fate of the Rajah from the 1930s, his grandson (the current Rajah), and their palace shows how the social hierarchies imposed by the British on India have largely survived intact. The major difference is that elite Indians—not British officials—now sit at the top of it.

Subadar Ram Sunil Singh turned out to be "a goldmine"—he told Pike and Dilip that Nirad Das was imprisoned for throwing a mango. Pike asks Dilip if he paid Singh too much and admits that he doesn't know how to deal with India's poverty—like whether to give beggars money. Dilip jokes that begging is a profession in India, which is spiritually "in a higher stage of development." That's why Madame Blavatsky moved her Theosophical Society to India, he says, quoting his favorite English poem, "Bagpipe Music."

While Singh's story reveals important details about Nirad Das's fate, it also leaves a crucial question unanswered: what actually happened? Was Das really just arrested for protesting, or was the real motive his relationship with Flora? Meanwhile, Pike's comments about poverty—a common preoccupation for contemporary travelers to India—once again show that colonial inequalities persist. Dilip's clever response focuses on lifting Pike's spirits and distracting him from the problem. But the reality—which Pike scarcely realizes—is that this poverty is really the legacy of English rule. As Anish Das pointed out in his conversation with Eleanor Swan, for the vast majority of India's history, India was far wealthier, more developed, and more integrated into the global economy than England.

Pike asks why Dilip loves English so much, and Dilip replies that English is "a disaster" in India—50 years after independence, India's education system and high society have scarcely changed. This isn't the India that Gandhi and Nirad Das were fighting for. Dilip also thinks it's a shame that Das's "revolutionary spirit went into his life and [not] his art."

Just like Nirad Das, Dilip loves English art and culture even though he's fully aware of how British colonialism devastated India. And there's no contradiction between this Anglophilia and historical awareness: in fact, once instated through British colonial rule, this dynamic has become a permanent feature of life in India. Dilip's comment about Das's "revolutionary spirit" may merely be his way of saying that Das wasted his potential by going to prison. But this may also indicate that he views Das primarily as a machine who produced art, and not as a complex individual. After all, Eleanor Swan has complained about Pike remembering her sister Flora in precisely the same flawed way.

Pike asks if Dilip thinks Das and Flora had a sexual relationship. Dilip says no—but upon further reflection, he admits that it could be true but is impossible to know. A waiter informs them that the former Rajah—who is now just "an ordinary politician"—is coming downstairs to meet them.

Pike and Dilip act as foils for the audience when they discuss the elephant in the room: the nature of Flora and Das's relationship. Stoppard will never reveal the truth to his audiences, but they should also ask whether—and how much—the play's fundamental meaning changes if Flora and Das really do turn out to have been lovers.

In 1930, the Rajah visits Flora's bungalow in his Rolls Royce to invite her to tiffin (lunch). He apologizes for not being able to show her **all of his cars** at once, but then, several of them drive slowly by her bungalow in a procession. She admires them, and the Rajah explains that he won one of them while gambling with an English Duke in the South of France. He jokes that, while he goes to the South of France for his health, Flora comes to India. (She is disappointed to hear that he knows about her illness.)

A third suitor sets out to win Flora's heart. Where Das catches her attention through his creativity and passion, and Durance, through his wit and power, the Rajah tries to attract her with his wealth and connections. However, audiences—and Flora—can easily see the dark truth: he has only amassed his fortune by helping the English control and exploit his own people.

The Rajah starts talking about Winston Churchill—whom he knows from school—and declares that Britain's power depends on controlling India. But the Princely States (like Jummapur) also depend on the British for their survival. Independence would only lead to conflict and division, the Rajah concludes. He compares the nationalist threat today to the fundamentalist threat during "the First Uprising"—a term Flora doesn't understand, since the British call it "The Mutiny."

The Rajah's reasoning is just as self-serving as Durance's—although at least he recognizes that most ordinary Indians don't want a foreign empire to be rule them. By bringing up Churchill, who is best remembered for his leadership during World War II but also famously hated Indians and opposed Indian independence, Stoppard reminds his readers that European countries' history of democracy and freedom at home is closely linked to the brutal empires that they ran abroad.

As the Rajah's **cars** continue driving by, a servant brings snacks, drinks, and cigarettes. The Rajah smokes and tells Flora about his art collection. Some of it is erotic art, which he can't show her. She is offended, but he agrees to let her see all of it, on the condition that he can gift her one painting. She eats an apricot, and the Rajah points out that most Englishwomen don't eat fruit without a thick skin in India. Suddenly, Flora recognizes one of the cars that goes by. She walks offstage to go sit in it, and Eldon Pike explains that it used to belong to Flora's ex-fiancé, Augustus de Boucheron (or Perkins Butcher), a wealthy philanthropist who burned Modigliani's portrait of her. Flora asked Modigliani to paint her again, but he died before he had the chance.

The Rajah continues trying to impress Flora with what he owns *rather than what he does or who he is. Stoppard strongly implies that Boucheron's car is the same one that the Rajah said he won from a Duke in a gambling match—which would mean that the Rajah won the car from him when gambling. Thus, Flora's meeting with the Rajah takes on the air of an elaborate practical joke: Flora has crossed the world, seeking an exotic adventure, only to meet people she could have met back at home. With his comment about the fruit—which most visitors would not eat for health reasons—the Rajah seems to imply that Flora is more adventurous than other English women. But the truth could also be that she simply does not care because she is already dying.*

The Rajah approaches Eldon Pike and they start to chat. (The same actor now represents the original Rajah's grandson, in the 1980s.) He apologizes for being late and explains that he's just a member of Parliament now. He also explains that his father gave away **his grandfather's cars** during World War II and produces a thank-you note from Flora to her grandfather from 1930. According to the note, the original Rajah gifted Flora an old painting of Krishna and Radha. Pike asks if it was **a nude watercolor** on paper, but this confuses the Rajah. After a handshake, they part ways—but Pike doesn't understand when the Rajah says "*Namaste*" (goodbye).

When the same actor portrays the two Rajahs, this once again underlines the continuities between the present and the past. After all, the same small elite continues to hold power in India, even if the nation has transitioned from a monarchy to a democracy. Pike misses the significance of the first Rajah's gift to Flora because of his utter ignorance about India. Indeed, his confusion about the word "Namaste" (which should be the first Hindi word any traveler learns) again underlines how, despite his deep interest in Flora Crewe, he does not bother think to about India, its people, and its art as legitimate objects of academic study.

Anish Das and Eleanor Swan sit in the garden, drinking gin-and-tonics and looking at Nirad Das's painting of Flora and the painting the Rajah gifted to her. Swan talks about how she and her late husband Eric started drinking gin-and-tonics in India to avoid malaria. She also reveals that she didn't tell Eldon Pike about the paintings. Anish remembers receiving the news of his father's death one Christmas day while he was studying in England. In his father's trunk of papers, he found two things: a newspaper clipping from his father's trial for "conspiring to cause a disturbance at the Empire Day celebrations" in 1930 and **the nude watercolor painting of Flora**.

Stoppard draws a direct parallel between Anish going through his late father's possessions and Eleanor doing the same with Flora's. They have both learned far more about their loved ones' last days through this conversation than through the objects that their loved ones left behind. Their stories speak to Stoppard's fundamental questions about history and memory: how can we know about past events when the people who experienced them are gone, and how much should we trust the meager evidence that we do collect? Similarly, how much of the past do we miss when we remember, study, and memorialize it?

Looking at the watercolor, Swan points out that Das didn't paint Flora "Indian"—meaning that she doesn't look flat, like the tree, birds, and sky in the background. Anish says that these elements are all important symbols. For instance, there's a vine whose leaves and petals are falling off, which represents the fact that Flora was dying. But Swan disagrees: "sometimes a vine is only a vine." She points out that Das has painted a copy of Up the Country on Flora's pillow, and Eldon Pike drops in with a footnote to explain that Emily Eden wrote *Up the Country* while following her brother on a tour of India.

Because of their different cultural, artistic, and educational backgrounds, Anish and Eleanor interpret the same picture in wildly different ways. Eleanor just notices whether Das's style is "Indian" or not, which suggests that she still thinks all Indian painting is the same. Her remark also implies that she underestimates the intricacy of Indian art. But Anish notices the work's details and his father's creative decisions. Of course, in his dry, scholarly work on Flora, Eldon Pike also misses these crucial details—and virtually everything else that actually makes the end of Flora's life so meaningful.

Back in 1930, Das and Coomaraswami are sitting on Flora's verandah when she comes home in the evening. She invites them inside, where they light the oil lamp and sit. Coomaraswami apologizes for the unannounced visit and asks about her day. She explains that she visited the Rajah and talked to him about **cars**, art, poetry, and politics. Coomaraswami starts asking her a convoluted question, but Das clarifies that Coomaraswami is trying to say that he's sorry if the Rajah criticized Flora for her connection to the Theosophical Society. Flora explains that the Society never came up; Das and Coomaraswami are delighted, and they apologize for the trouble and start to leave.

Flora saw her meetings with Durance and the Rajah as just innocent dates. But they could be quite dangerous for Das and Coomaraswami, who could face prison time if Flora inadvertently linked them to the independence movement. Indeed, this scene raises the question of whether Durance and the Rajah's true motive for dating Flora was to keep tabs on the Theosophists. In fact, Anish Das and Eleanor Swan's conversation in the previous scene shows that Nirad Das did *ultimately end up imprisoned over his politics—and raises the troublesome possibility that Flora's visit to India made this possible.*

Flora stops Das and demands that he tell her what's wrong. He explains that the Rajah has banned the Theosophical Society, allegedly for participating in the riots. He collects his watercolor painting of Flora, which he won't be able to finish. Flora admits that she's considering leaving Jummapur tomorrow, and she asks Das if he told anyone about her health problems. (Tired of waiting for Das, Coomaraswami leaves in his buggy.) Das explains that everyone knows about Flora's illness because Joshua Chamberlain mentioned it in his letter to the Theosophical Society—which the Rajah and the Resident surely opened and read before it reached Coomaraswami. Flora weeps and apologizes.

Stoppard starts tying up his play's many loose ends: the audience learns how Das became an enemy of the state, and Flora learns how everyone found out about her illness. It turns out that, from the very beginning, her visit was far more political than she realized—and, despite her best intentions, she unwittingly served the colonial government's interests by passing information on the Theosophical Society to Durance and the Rajah. The Theosophists pose a threat to the colonial order because they promote free thought and connect Indians to British intellectuals like Flora—who could serve as powerful allies in the independence movement.

Das gathers his painting supplies and prepares to leave, but Flora asks if she can keep **the unfinished watercolor** so that she won't forget him. He agrees. He asks if they will see each other again. Flora says maybe—she has to take a ship back to England in July because her sister will be giving birth in October. Then, Das pulls a watercolor out of his pocket and gives it to Flora. She finds it stunningly beautiful and tells Das that it has the love rasa. (Shringara, he clarifies.) Under the moonlight, a recording plays of Flora's poem about giving in to heat (sexual desire).

Flora asked Das to paint her according to his own Indian perspective and style, and this conversation suggests that he succeeded. When she describes the painting as having shringara *and then reads from her work, which has the same tone, this suggests that they consummated their attraction through art (even if they never did so sexually). Of course, while Stoppard directly shows the audience these reflections on the portrait, the play's other characters—especially Anish Das and Eleanor Swan—have to infer what it truly means. This dramatic irony underlines how omission, distortion, and guesswork are inherent parts of any attempt to recover lost memories.*

At dawn, Flora lies in her bed on one part of the stage while Pike and Dilip come onto another part, drinking and chanting the poem "Bagpipe Music." Dilip tells Pike that the Jummapur branch of the Theosophical Society was shut down for its nationalism. Then, he falls asleep. Pike mumbles about Flora and India, inserting his comments into the general structure of "Bagpipe Music." Then, he wakes Dilip, and they plan to get breakfast. Dilip says that Pike hasn't experienced real Indian heat yet—and will go to the hills soon.

"Bagpipe Music" comments on the way that modern society destroys traditional culture and community. This makes Pike and Dilip's drinking song doubly ironic: it points to the way British imperialism devastated India, as well as the way Pike and Dilip's (modern, institutional) academic research totally misses the truth about Flora Crewe's time in India. In his journey to Jummapur and the hills, Dilip follows in Flora's footsteps—the difference is that, unlike her, he learns virtually nothing about India in the process.

Back in 1930, Flora wakes up at dawn and meets David Durance on her verandah. He offers to take her for a ride and show her the sunrise. She agrees. While she gets dressed inside her bedroom, Durance stands outside and tells her that he ran into Nirad Das on his way to visit her. He waved to Das, but Das refused to acknowledge him. "There's hope for him yet," Flora remarks, which confuses Durance. Flora finishes dressing, so Durance enters her bedroom. He picks up her copy of Up the Country and finds the Rajah's miniature painting of Krishna and Radha inside.

Flora's past encounters with Durance and her recent conversation with Das and Coomaraswami have given her good reasons not to trust anything that Durance tells her—especially his story about meeting Das on the road. Flora's comment about "hope for [Das]" strongly suggests that she now fully supports the independence movement, and the fact that Durance doesn't enter her bedroom until she finishes dressing suggests that their relationship never goes beyond acquaintance.

Durance asks why the Rajah would give Flora a painting, and Flora comments that perhaps the Rajah wanted to sleep with her. Durance is horrified, complains that this puts him "in a frightfully difficult position," and insists to know if the Rajah ever visited Flora. She refuses to answer, but he declares that it's his job to report on the Rajah for the British, and Flora is "a politically sensitive person" because of her links to Chamberlain. She tells him to report whatever he wants, and they drive off in the Daimler car.

Durance's comments again mix his personal interest in Flora with racist prejudice against Indians and his political role defending the British Empire. He simply cannot fathom that Flora would treat Indians as her equals—or, worse still, as potential lovers. (He and his fellow colonial officials would never do the same.) He also worries that Flora might be encouraging the Rajah to abandon his steadfast support for the Empire.

Flora sits on her verandah with her suitcase and writes that Eleanor "won't approve" of her latest romantic interest, but also that she's finally leaving Jummapur. (In a footnote, Eldon Pike explains that David Durance died during World War II.) Flora writes that she feels better and is starting to write poetry again; Pike notes that the poetry Flora wrote in Jummapur formed part of her 1932 book *Indian Ink*.

Flora's letter to Eleanor is ambiguous—her unseemly romantic interest could have easily been Das, the Rajah, or Durance. (After all, Eleanor was a communist in the 1930s and probably would have approved of Durance least of all.) And Stoppard gives his audience yet another subtle twist: Flora's time in Jummapur is of academic interest to people like Eldon Pike because she wrote key parts of her final poetry book, Indian Ink, *during her time there. Of course, this just accentuates the irony in Dilip and Pike's failure to learn anything about the poems' subject and inspiration: Nirad Das.*

Decades later, Anish and Mrs. Swan read this same letter. Anish declares that Pike is wrong to insinuate that Flora's affair was with Durance, because it was really with his father, Nirad Das. But Swan argues that it's not clear—she would have approved of Das more than Durance at the time, even if she has since become a conservative. She comments that Das changed, too: he ended up throwing mangos at the Resident's Daimler car. So, Swan concludes, nobody knows if Flora's romance was with Das, Durance, or the Rajah. And it doesn't matter, she says, because Flora "used [men] like batteries."

The truth of Flora's relationships will forever remain a mystery. This may frustrate some readers and audience members, but it will certainly leave all of them thinking. It's even possible that she consummated relationships with none, or more than one, of the men. But Swan's comment about Flora changing men around like "batteries" challenges the audience to question whether the truth about Flora's relationships even matters. And Swan's comments about the way people change also underline the fact that, through her own relationships, Swan turned from an avowed communist into an impassioned defender of the British Empire. Finally, it's notable that the Daimler car was the same one David Durance drove off from Flora's bungalow. Thus, the charges against Das may really mean that he fought with Durance over Flora—or that Durance simply invented charges against him.

Anish decides that he won't tell Eldon Pike about his father's watercolor of Flora—his father wouldn't want it publicly mentioned. Anish thanks Swan for the tea, **cake**, and jam. Swan reminisces about "the fruit trees at home" in India, which released a flood of flowers that covered Flora's gravestone.

Anish and Swan's agreement not to tell Pike about the portrait suggests that they have chosen personal remembrance over formal remembrance. They cherish their knowledge about Flora and Das's story, but they fear that scholars like Pike would misinterpret it. It's telling that Swan calls India "home"—this proves that, despite her defense of the Empire, her sense of identity is really just as caught between India and England as all of the other characters'.

"Nell," a much younger Eleanor Swan, pays her respects at her sister Flora's grave in India in 1931. Flora died on June 10th, 1930, just weeks after leaving Jummapur. Eric, an English official stationed in India, promises to add "Poet" to Flora's gravestone and recalls how Flora gave a poetry reading to his Club. Nell bursts into tears, and Eric comforts her. He asks about Nell's baby—who died as an infant—and asks Nell to call him "Eric," not "Mr. Swan." He invites her to a cricket match. They leave, and then Eldon Pike comes onstage to search for Flora's grave.

Stoppard ends the play with a few final plot twists. First, Flora died in India, and so her time in Jummapur was the last creatively significant period of her life. The play challenges its audiences to assess how this fact—which characters like Swan and Pike have known since the beginning of the play—changes their understanding of Flora's legacy. Second, Stoppard reveals that Nell met her husband Eric at Flora's funeral (and ended up staying with him in India). In a way, by doing so, Eleanor fulfills Flora's legacy. But she also ends up choosing the most distasteful kind of romantic prospect that Flora had: the colonial administrator. Perhaps Stoppard is also suggesting, more darkly, that the true legacy of Flora's stay in India was converting another well-meaning young English woman—her sister—into a diehard imperialist.

In the play's final scene, Flora again reads from her letters to Eleanor (Nell). She writes that she's leaving Jummapur, and while she "committed a sin [she]'ll carry to [her] grave," she hopes that her "soul will stay behind as a smudge of paint on paper," like Radha the herdswoman. On one part of the stage, Nazrul and Coomaraswami take Flora to the train station and help her board, while on another part, Nell goes through Flora's suitcase, finding the blue dress, Das's canvas, the copy of Up the Country, and the Rajah's miniature painting.

The audience has heard fragments of this passage several times throughout the play, but Flora finally reads it out in full. The passage takes on a different meaning now that readers know that Flora died in India, but not which of her suitors shared in her "sin." (Indeed, she does manage to "carry [this secret] to [her] grave.") The objects she leaves behind in her suitcase offer readers and audience members yet another ambiguous, incomplete lens through which to remember her final days.

The play ends with Flora reading aloud one of Emily Eden's letters from Up the Country. Eden describes a small group of Europeans throwing a beautiful celebration for the Queen's birthday in 1839, while a group of thousands of Indians waits on and bows to them. Eden asks why the Indians don't just "cut all our heads off and say nothing more about it."

Audiences may find it surprising that Stoppard ends his play by quoting an entirely new text, which he has only obliquely referenced so far. However, Emily Eden is arguably a model for Flora Crewe, and this passage from Up the Country *underscores many of the play's central ideas about colonialism. It shows that the British have profoundly exploited Indians for centuries. It shows that this truth has long been obvious to intelligent visitors (even if they benefit from the colonial system). And it shows that the British Empire was always inherently fragile—and bound to eventually collapse.*

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