CHAPTER - 2

E.M. Forster: A Liberal Background

When E.M. Forster said that he belonged to 'the fag-end of Victorian liberalism', he not only provided his own guide to his cultural origins but hinted at their limitations. What were the main characteristics of the liberal tradition he inherited? What were its strengths? What were its weaknesses?

And what did Forster himself do to maintain the first and mitigate the second? These questions are prompted by his work as a novelist and essayist because he habitually saw himself in relation to this tradition and because all his writings explore the paradoxes and tension inherent in it. He was never simply a story-teller, a witty entertainer, but was always an ironic moralist imbued with a profound vision of man and society based on the contrast between the fine-spun issues of private morality and the coarse-woven or patched up solutions of society, a representative figure in a transitional age, conscious of his relation to the main movements of mind and society.

Although much has been done to interpret Forster's writings in relation to their appropriate historical context, especially by John Beer, Malcolm Bradbury, Wilfred Stone, and Lionel Trilling, the time has now come for a fresh assessment. Despite widespread agreement that E.M. Forster is one of the most important English novelists of the present century, he is a writer who has puzzled and perhaps, continues to puzzle discerning readers and critics. The sheer number of books and articles that have appeared on his work over the past twenty years is testimony to the fact that Forster's most interesting qualities do not always lie close to the surface. E.M. Forster has
been declared as, the most puzzling figure in contemporary English letters. He seems tacitly to assume that the reader shares his rather 'unusual outlook on life,' an assumption that can lead to some lamentable misunderstandings. Virginia Woolf also found something 'baffling and evasive' in the very nature of Forster's gifts. For her, his combination of poetry and realism of mysticism and fact, failed to cohere into the single vision that marks the great novelist. Lionel Trilling, saw him as a moral realist, but an evasive one. 'The plot', he says, speaks of clear certainties, the manner resolutely insists that nothing can be quite so simple. According to Philip Gardner, One of the most common adjectives that reviewers and critics have applied to Forster's fiction is 'elusive'. In one sense, Forster's elusiveness is a quality of his style, which is both personal and evasive.

Partly for these reasons, then, Forster until recently has been regarded by critics as an interesting novelist who was almost but not quite major, a writer of evident distinctive merits whose work lacked that largeness of intention or of invention that would make him one of the great discoverers in modern fiction. His manner, tone, and literary procedure were often described as old-fashioned, directly inherited from the nineteenth century; his particular kind of mystical atheism invited us to place him intellectually with Butler, Meredith, "Mark Rutherford", Edward Carpenter— as a late Victorian somehow perpetuated into the tradition of the twentieth century novel. Lionel Trilling has spoken of him as sometimes irritating in his refusal to be great- as making a kind of ironic humility into his saving virtue. Even if, then, Forster's reputation was somewhat slow to emerge and it was not—as in the case of some of his contemporaries that— he was found too difficult
for comprehension, but too easy. So when major writers and the great discoveries in the twentieth century fiction were welcomed and acclaimed, whereas, Forster was held to be not quite one of them at the level of recent criticism.

Recent criticism of Forster has tended to take different approach; in many ways it has demonstrated and shown that Forster's intellectual and technical character is a good deal more complex and more modern than the earlier view allows. What has been shown to us clearly over recent years is—among other things—the complexity and resource of Forster's fictional method, particularly in *Howards End* and *A Passage to India*, his last two novels. Cambridge dons like Wedd and McTaggart and Lowes Dickinson exerted formative influences on him. He applied the lessons he had learned at Cambridge in the four novels he published before the Great War, among which *Howards End* (1910) is the most considerable. Of the others, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *A Room with a View* (1908) are comedies of manners, contrasting English conventionality with the colourfulness and vitality of Italian life, while *The Longest Journey* (1907) comes nearest of all his writings to the autobiographical. Forster travelled extensively before the Great War and he visited India with Lowes Dickinson. By doing so, he drafted two novels, but laid them aside. He spent the war on duty in Alexandria. After the war he revisited India and completed and published *A Passage to India*. Indeed, there is another view of Forster associated with the opinion that his fictional manner is Victorian and which has also tended to fade. This is the view that Forster is 'intellectually' a Victorian, that is visibly the child of English middle-class liberalism, a liberalism that has an
evident historical location in the heyday of the advanced, but wealthy, intellectual bourgeoisie. And, to locate a writer like him is often an effective means of limiting himself, a means of suggesting that his work has not transcended its determining situation, and that it is not universal. In the profound sense, Forster has been vulnerable to such criticism; often made from a Christian (frequently a Catholic) point of view, or from a Marxist one. It has been said of Forster that he cannot reach beyond circumstances which he himself knows to be confining and that the consequence of this vague aspiration toward religious feeling, or toward a new society, which never takes the form of an effective critique of his own situation. By the way, Forster may recognise and define the liberal dilemma, yet he is also trapped within it, and unable to follow out its logic and so to solve it in all respects. In doing so, Forster is a creative artist, moralist and thinker. As such, these three roles are dexterously harmonised in his fictional world.

Certainly, in the course of Forster's long life, he published five novels and wrote six, besides the short stories. Whereas, four of the five came out within six years, from 1905 to 1910, he then wrote Maurice, published after his death, and finally his masterpiece, A Passage to India, published in 1924. Thus it was less than a third of his lifespan that he gave to fiction. Of course, after 1924 Forster continued writing and his prestige continued to grow. But now he was essayist, biographer, liberattist, broadcaster and literary critic in many ways.

The question that rises: is he, then a 'major novelist'? Of course, Forster himself firmly denied it, but many of his admirers disagree with him. Their verdict, however, is not the only reason for studying him; a better
one is that he was 'the great connector' who made it his business, in his segmented society, to reawaken a sense of those relationships which prejudice and ignorance disposed its members to ignore or forget. As a matter of fact, the society, a hundred years from his birth, is somewhat different from that in which he grew up, but not so different as we are inclined to believe. Certainly, for us, he is a 'connector' in an additional sense and as such, he shows us continuities between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries better than any other novelist can do so, converging much that was best in the Victorian tradition without the Victorian differences and in a twentieth century idiom. In a quite way, Forster's achievements in these capacities had their own justification and they will not be ignored in this study in many respects. Thus Forster has entered a complex setting and also a complex cosmos of the novel. It would be reasonably worthwhile for us to acquaint ourselves with the society and social, religious, moral and intellectual values which explicitly or implicitly helped shape his complex vision and complex fictional universe.

Edward Morgan Forster was born on January 1, 1879, the only surviving child of an architect. A legacy of £8,000 left by his great aunt, Marianne Thornton, enabled him to go up to Cambridge, and he says that, the money also made my career as a writer possible. The place of his birth, the origin and position of his family have at least a symbolic bearing on his development. The place was London and although Forster has been anything but a lover of the city, his culture, with its accessibility to new ideas, is essentially metropolitan. His father, an architect, was on the paternal side of Anglo-Irish extraction and, through, his mother was from a family, which
for some generations had been notable members of the intellectual middle-class originally but did gradually drift to the Clapham sect of wealthy Evangelicals.\textsuperscript{18} While, his mother, "Alice Clara ('Lily')"\textsuperscript{19} had been a Whichelo. The Whichelos were a poor middle class family with a tradition of artistic pursuits. But Forster's great aunt on his father's side, Marianne Thornton, was the daughter of a banker whose household had been the centre of one of the most influential social movements of the early nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{20}

Forster speaks of his great-grandfather's London house in whose library William Wilberforce, James Stephen, Hannah Moore met to transact their religions and philanthropic business. Very sensitive to the evils of the slave trade which they were instrumental in abolishing, quite impervious to the evils of the manufacturing system, these were people who lived by public spirit and by ideas, however, narrow.\textsuperscript{21} Forster was to attack much of what they stood for, but he had been born in the intellectual citadel of a solid and powerful class and he drew strength and confidence from it. He undertook with peculiar ease at an early age the profession of the intellectual life, and in his latter age, in a time when intellectuals are not in good repute even with themselves, he continues to be least wearied of his profession and to justify it.\textsuperscript{22}

A case in hand is the publication of the biography of his great aunt, Marianne Thornton in 1955 wherein Forster recounts the contribution and influences of her father, Henry Thornton towards reforms and versatile activities of this gentleman who had a remarkable personality and great intelligences.\textsuperscript{23} Henry Thornton was an Evangelical and worked tirelessly with William Wilberforce towards abolition of the slavery trade during the last years of Victoria's reign.
The impression Forster gives of the sect is not at all of the Primeness and repressiveness which we tend to associate with the later Victorian Evangelicals; its character seems to have been that of the Thornton household which was its focus. According to E.M. Forster, the Thornton house was characterised by the atmosphere of intellect, piety and active benevolence where inmates lived in an atmosphere of uninterrupted harmony together engaged in their separate pursuits and enjoyed with such interest and vivacity all the pleasures of their beautiful home. The home permeated the atmosphere of a brighter and happier world. To read about them in Forster's words is to be reminded of Jane Austen's family life half a generation before: the Austens were not Evangelicals though the father was a Clergyman, but the family - also a large one - seems to have had a comparable bond of affection, liveliness in individual activity, and confident assurance. This was the period (the end of the eighteenth century and opening of the nineteenth) when the middle class was enjoying the beginning of the golden age, vigorous with its sense of promise and not yet arrogant with power or shadowed by the conflicts and doubts which darkened the Victorian era and imbued it with the need for defensiveness and repression. Such large families seem to have thriven above all by their capacity to give and receive family love. And yet Forster does not depict the period of Thornton greatness as a golden age: he sees the limitations of the Clapham circle to have been as strong as its virtues were positive. On the other hand, it was an inclusive and embracing society: it entertained an American, Indian and West Africans and in various respects.

Thus, too, the Clapham Sect values were inherited by the new public school system begun by Thomas Arnold. Certainly, in 'Notes on the English
Character: Written in 1920 and published in Abinger Harvest, Forster assesses the influential positions of this development. And he begins by stating that the character of English is essentially middle class, because, since the end of the eighteenth century, the middle classes had dominated English society. Thus, Forster's assessment of the qualities of his ancestry are ambivalent. At times, his biography of Marianne Thornton acknowledges wistfully not only the rich, abundant family life at Battersea Rise, and yet the rootedness of the family, that is to say, in that beautiful and spacious, seemingly indestructible house, which, as Forster sadly relates, has passed away, together with the style of the family which it sheltered.

If we compare Forster's childhood with that of Marianne Thornton we can in some ways see her world standing upon its head. Whereas, instead of being one of a large family brothers and sisters, he was fatherless, and also surrounded by women, so to say, his mother, his father's sister, Laura, his great-aunt and his Whichelo grand-mother. At times, there was never much money, although always a sufficiency, thanks to the Thornton wealth and Marianne's generosity. Certainly, instead of being rooted in one place—a secure, material home—his was a childhood of shifting residences; for only one of these did he and his mother feel deep affection, and that one they had to abandon like all the others. But the fact that Forster can be described as, a demonstrative child, prone to violent passions of love or fury, has to a great extent been a determining factor in his gradual development from a child to an adult.

By doing so, Forster's intelligence and imagination developed freely, richly and comically. As with the way, his favourite book in early years was
The Swiss Family Robinson; he loved it because the boys in it were happy, whereas Robinson Crusoe was always worrying over savages. Very soon, when he was only five, he began composing stories on his own account, 'long stories about things that have never happened except inside his head'. They had sensational titles like 'Dancing Bell', 'Chattering Hassocks', 'Scream', 'Scuffles in the wardrobe', 'The Earring in the Keyhole' and 'The Adventures of Pushy Senior'. The young Forster "became eleven in January 1890," and was sent to a preparatory boarding school. But it was his unhappiness there which caused his mother to leave Rooknest and move to Tonbridge, so that he could attend his public school there as a dayboy. Indeed, he was educated at Tonbridge School and King's College Cambridge. But for a legacy of £8,000 left by his great-aunt, Marianne Thornton, enabled him to go up to Cambridge, and, he says that, the money also made his career as a writer possible.

Though his early years at Tonbridge School were not happy, those at King's College, Cambridge, Where he read for the Classical and Historical Tripos, were full of golden sunlight. Forster later recollected, in Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, that as Cambridge filled up with friends, it acquired a magic quality. Body and spirit, reason and emotion, work and play, architecture and scenery, laughter and seriousness, life and art-these pairs which are elsewhere contrasted were there fused into one. People and books reinforced one another, intelligence joined hands with affection, speculation became a passion, and discussion was made profound by love.

Forster's life at Tonbridge and its influences in his latter years reveal a typical charm for it. His development as a novelist and as a thinker has
much to owe to Tonbridge surroundings. Since Forster’s concern here is with public schools that had been founded by tradesmen in the 17th century for their sons, and it had continued in that style until the nineteenth. Forster is aware, of course, that the average Englishman is a term which has meaning only in statistics, and that this statistical abstraction was more likely to be found among the tradesmen’s sons. Of course, Forster’s own remarks that the products of the school exhibited “developed bodies, developed mind” but "undeveloped heart" pinpoints a qualitative standard.

Forster contrasts these average Englishmen with the sensitive ones, but it would be a mistake to assume that Forster felt only hostility and contempt for the average Englishmen of the upper middle class. Who dominated English society until his late middle age. In fact, he felt appropriate respect for the virtues of ‘the average’ and his aim is not to eliminate the class but to convert it. But Forster was himself irremediably unaverage, and what Tonbridge did for him was to change him from a volatile, beautiful, eloquent child into an awkward, diffident, repressed adolescent. Brought up as he had been by affectionate women who indulged him, and then educated at a school where he was unappreciated, he might himself have never managed to make any "connections"; the world where he was at home and that where he was an alien might have remained estranged systems, as they have for so many twentieth-century artists, instead of becoming hemispheres of one system to which they truly belong. E.M. Forster belongs to the middleclass, a middle class now refined so as to form two dominant wings. This is again the militant Middle class of the Victorian
England with its characteristic attributes as Philistinism and repressiveness with its explicit aims to achieve industry, respectability and narrow snobbery.\textsuperscript{38}

Cambridge University is the representative of its cultured, liberal, sensitive wing. Italy and Wiltshire are made to fill one side class values, indicative of an existence that is vital, spontaneous and authentie-a Lawrentian world. Individuals are judged by the extent to which they can break away from the restrictive social norms of the Sawston middle class and form a new life, based either on personal contest, personal truces, personal love, or on the non-materialist values of Italy and Wiltshire. The Cambridge and Italy/Wiltshire values are approximate; both are clear-seeing and honest. The Sawston world of the Herritons and Pembrokes clouds truth with notions of propriety. Forster also attempted to work out the antithesis between the liberal and repressive wings of the middle class but he was forced into qualifying earlier positions.\textsuperscript{39} Forster was torn between his awareness that by the twentieth century it was the Sawston faction which had the effective power in society and the apprehension he shared with the nineteenth-century writers of the anti-human characteristics of this faction. It is the fear that Arnold had of the middle class as Phillistine,\textsuperscript{40} something particularly stiff-necked and perverse in its resistance to light and its children.\textsuperscript{41} Moreover, Forster oscillates between seeing the Sawston values as undermining the Cambridge values, and in seeing them as protecting those humane values from the encroachment of war or class violence. He has the feeling that if the active instrumental world is now the real one, then personal, humane values will survive only by allying themselves to it.\textsuperscript{42}
Forster entered Cambridge when it was very different from what it is now-still, perhaps, not too hard to reconstruct. Nowhere outside England has there been an institution like Victorian Oxford and Cambridge that—Cockaigne or 'great good Place' for the sons of the professional middle classes. For good or evil it gave a special stamp to their careers, prolonging boyhood and opening fresh vistas of friendship, of intellectual self-fulfilment, of social climbing at an age when for most of their contemporaries the choice had been made. It was common for young men to fall in love with Oxford and Cambridge, and some did so tragically, living ever afterwards a 'scholar-gypsy' existence.

Forster fell in love with Cambridge himself, though not in any tragic sense; but then, he was already, in some ways a very wise young man when he arrived there. It was not an awestruck provincial who entered the gateway of King's and he would not have been over-impressed by the picture-book settings (For one thing shall we say-he would not have mistaken the gateway for medieval.) None the less, Cambridge transformed him, and he always acknowledged the debt. He found himself there, or at least began this process; and his Cambridge acquaintance widened and cushioned his existence ever afterwards. Though his feelings towards Cambridge fluctuated later, the place always had a precise significance for him; it was the place where things were valued for what they were in themselves, not for what use one could make of them. Too much has been made of the influence of G.E. Moore on him, for he never read Moore; but the epigraph to Moore's *Principia Ethica*, Everything is what it is and not another thing; hits off his own idea of the King’s College ‘truth’. But Cambridge—more
specifically, Cambridge—enabled him to go far towards overcoming such a disjunction in himself. It was itself a restricted world. For it nourished in him the prejudice that ‘it was scholars and civil servants, not business men, who ran Britain’, but it had two major influences upon him. First, it enabled him to cultivate a sceptical but caring disinterestedness towards all systems of value, especially towards any systems which projected themselves as absolute and final. The second influence of the place is best epitomised in his own words:  

As Cambridge filled up with friends it acquired a magic quality. Body and spirit, reason and emotion work and play, architecture and scenery, laughter and seriousness, life and art these pairs which are elsewhere contrasted were there fused into one.  

He had already experienced some of these fusions in the world of women in which he had spent his childhood. But that had been a world of innocence, in which relationships, however fond, had seldom been free. They had become dissociated at school, when relationships were neither free nor fond, and by the time he came to Cambridge he must have learnt that they are not often associated in the world at large Cambridge brought the fusion to him through the freedom of friendship, and especially those friendships associated with the famous and exclusive discussion circle known as ‘the Apostles’. It was a long-established society, founded in 1820, and although it had never been large it had included in its membership such famous names as those of the poet Tennyson, his friend Arthur Hallam, the Christian Socialist F.D. Maurice, the physicist James Clerk Maxwell, and the philosopher Henry Sidgwick. Sidgwick’s description of its aims was ‘the
pursuit of truth with absolute devotion and unreserve by a group of intimate friends'. Forster became a member in his fourth year, and his immediate contemporaries in the circle included men of great future distinction: Maynard Keynes, Roger Fry, Leonard Woolf, Desmond MacCarthy. Thoby Stephen, who died young, the brilliant brother of the novelist Virginia Woolf, was also a member; Lytton Strachey, Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead joined a little later.

The original name of the circle had been the 'Conversazione Society' (or simply the Society), and the three names together suggest its special and complex character. It was informal (Conversazione) and yet very serious—'Conversazione' implies a tradition of serious dialogue as distinct from the possibly casual exchange of mere 'conversazione'. Membership was by election, but it required no specific qualifications, social or academic, except that women were excluded. Yet it was very select; candidates underwent scrutiny for two or three terms before admission. It maintained critical scepticism of all institutions with their rituals, but it was itself an institution with its own rituals: undergraduate members of the Apostles were denominated 'Active Brethren', and senior members were denominated 'Angels'; early defectors where subjected to a formal 'Curse'; members were assumed to practise the intimacy of the society in their daily lives, but they met on Saturday evenings when a formal Paper was read. By its nature, it could not exert continuity of subject from generation to generation in such discussions, but tendencies persisted over given periods. In Forster's time, the dominating influence was that of the Philosopher G.E. Moore (author of the *Principia Ethica*), and the Papers were especially philosophical; Forster's
own mind was not disposed to philosophical analysis, and he approved of a new direction under the influence of Strachey and Keynes, after he left Cambridge, into more mundane material. However, the central tenets of Moore's ethical principles must have appealed to him, although apparently he never read the *Principia*. Moore taught that 'the truth' is not an esoteric pursuit requiring special powers of the intellect and a specific language for its expression, but that it necessitated complete honesty in rigorous thinking, and that its attainment was registered in good states of mind, signified by admiration of things of beauty and by good relationship with other minds.

For Forster, it was the honesty and the relationship that mattered most in the Apostles, but their exclusiveness became a trouble to him. Brought up in a circle of adoring women, then alienated by the exclusively male environment of his schools, he found in Cambridge the experience of deep male friendships which complemented the female overbalance of his childhood. It was a circle that, for a time, completely satisfied him, and yet it could not be a permanent satisfaction, for there was still the outer world. He was not made for a career in the University; his academic record (Second Classes in Classics and History) was inadequate to earn him one. Apart from that there was the question whether such academic exclusiveness was in itself desirable or even estimable. As a matter of fact, "Cambridge, King's, the Apostles opened to Forster new vistas of human relationship, but they might have entrapped him and he evaded the trap. All his novels and indeed the rest of his life, were given to further explorations of human relationship."
Bloomsbury group was a club of intellectuals and literary men during the early years of the 20th century and E.M. Forster was naturally attracted and he joined it and remained an active member there quite for sometime. At one level, it is difficult in a short space to give a coherent account of the Bloomsbury Group by expressing all its relationships. Nobody doubts that it existed and that it owed its name to the district of London in the neighbourhood of the British Museum (with its comprehensive library) and London University where intellectuals were disposed to live, as artists lived in Chelsea. On the other hand it was not a movement although it is sometimes called one, for it had little coherence and no specific sense of direction. Again, no one doubts the identities of its central nucleus: Virginia Woolf, her husband Leonard, the economist Maynard Keynes, the biographer Lytton Strachey, Virginia's sister Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant—both painters—the art critics Clive Bell and Roger Fry; these were the most famous names, but beyond them there were other less famous fringe members and aspirants to the circle; it is among the fringe that Forster is often included as is T.S. Eliot. It started from that nucleus and extended itself until it lost its original centre, and an account of it depends on the opinion as to the point at which its dissemination destroyed it. The most intelligible way to describe the Bloomsbury Group is perhaps to say that it was a climate of cultural opinion which had prestige in the first quarter of this century. Many of its male members (Keynes, Strachey, Woolf, Forster and others) had been Apostles at Cambridge and carried the spirit of the Society into the more amorphous Group. The exclusive maleness of the Apostles angered Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell, Whom Roy Harrod has described as 'Apostles to
their finger-tips'. The inclusion of women must have made a great difference; the Apostles, despite their self-declared freedom, had their taboos in discussion and sexuality was one; this could scarcely continue in a circle which proclaimed equal freedom and included women. Moreover, the women had their own communal source: the need to emancipate themselves from the domination of their father, Leslie Stephen, the Philosopher and literary critic. Emancipation was the essence of the climate: at a time when English society was at its most Philistine, its values subjected to the interests and policies of the commercially rich, Bloomsbury stood for independence of mind and culture, for liberation of the critical faculties, for 'civilisation' in short, and the arrogance often attributed to it arose partly from its collective will to sustain itself in a world of massive antagonistic forces.\textsuperscript{49} Bloomsbury existed before the war; but it was the second generation, of Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf, that became widely known to the public. Much harsh criticism has been levelled at these writers. Their conviction that they represented the summit of high civilization has been challenged. In their own time, they had many enemies. Besides the taunts of opposing literary factions, they were accused of irreverence by Lawrence, and by the Philosopher Wittgenstein. And it certainly looks as if a spirit of reverence would have been as out of place there as a Yorkshire accent. Bloomsbury may have had too god a conceit of itself. The leading families of the intellectual aristocracy in England, while they have produced men and women of distinguished and various talents, have not produced a great writer. Moreover, they have tended to ignore or undervalue the great outsiders—a Wells, a Joyce, or a Lawrence. But of the Bloomsbury writers,
E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf should survive. And Bloomsbury at its best did represent a continuity from the humane rationalism of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.  

It is obvious from this observation we know that, to write of the culture which produced Forster and Virginia Woolf would be to write a whole chapter in the intellectual and social history of England. They belong to the last phase of liberal humanism. Some documents of that phase are the autobiography of Leonard Woolf, Mrs. Woolf's life of the art-critic Roger Fry, a cult-figure of Bloomsbury, and Clive Bell's Civilization (1928), a Witticism which is none the less a provocative statement of Bloomsbury's doctrines of art and the good life.  

In Principia Ethica (1903) Moore had arrived at the conclusion that the only ultimate sources of value in the universe are the appreciation of art and beauty and the enjoyment of sensitive personal relationships. The doctrine was congenial to Bloomsbury. And Moore's attack on philosophical pontiffs had something in common with their attack on Victorian father-figures. If they committed the sin of Ham, so did he, Principia Ethica might be compared to Pater's Renaissance in its role as a sacred book for the younger generation. But Moore, like Pater, was to see his work used for purposes that he might not have approved. In many ways, as Keynes pointed out, he remained a great Victorian. The armchair antinomianism of Bloomsbury was not the intended sequel of his 'intuitions'. Thus, Forster valued Bloomsbury because it continued and extended some of the Cambridge values that meant most to him, and yet it was reaching into relationships with individuals beyond the Bloomsbury ken, and that might
mean more to him than Bloomsbury, as a milieu, did.\textsuperscript{53} Forster was already aware of F.D. Maurice and he came into close contact with the leading thinkers like Dent, Forrest Reid and Lyton Strachey.\textsuperscript{54} It was here that Forster was initially initiated into the intellectual climate there which disseminated the seeds of liberal thinking—Cambridge had much to do with Forster's liberal leanings.

'I belong to the fag-end of Victorian liberalism...\textsuperscript{55}

As a matter of detail, Forster was right to describe himself as being at 'the fag-end of Victorian liberalism'. And in his essay 'The Challenge of Our Time', Forster describes himself as belonging to 'the fag-end of Victorian Liberalism'. Critics have hotly debated over Forster's contention that he belongs to the fag end of Victorian liberalism. It has been pointed out, then, in this connection that Forster was at war with his liberal imagination, not withstanding his long commitment to its doctrine. But unfortunately this judgement seems to have been misplaced since Lionel Trilling pronounces this judgement while discussing and explaining liberalism in America. We need to ask, first, what it meant to be a Victorian liberal, and next, what sort of imagination belonged to such liberals, and what it might mean to be a liberal and yet at war with it.\textsuperscript{56}

In the early, nineteenth century when the word made its first appearance for this context in our thought, a liberal was identified as a revolutionary thinker, more usually known as a 'radical' because he attacked social institutions at their roots, with the aim of either reforming them altogether or else abolishing them and establishing new ones. In the second quarter of the 19th century the movement underwent two further phases:
the second in the mid-Victorian period of the third quarter, and the third, during Forster's youth, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth.\textsuperscript{57}

However, changes in political and economic circumstances gradually modified mid-Victorian optimism in the last quarter of the century. Other nations, especially the Germans and the Americans, were feeling that history was on their side, and were proving successful competitors; economic organisation besides, was becoming larger and more impersonal, more indifferent to the enterprising individual with his faith that his personal prosperity lay within the scope of his own efforts. Liberals who sought security began to change their allegiance to the Conservatives, and radical liberals, following the example of Mill who died in 1873, began to seek revival in association with new socialist reformers, especially the Fabian Socialists who advocated socialism by legislative reform and not by revolution. These were the circles in which Forster moved, and when some of his friends founded the liberal \textit{Independent Review} in 1903, it was there that he published his first essays and stories. Recalling the period in the biography of Lowes Dickinson he wrote: \textsuperscript{58}

Those who were Liberals felt that the heavy, stocky body of their party was about to grow wings and leave the ground. Those who were not Liberals were equally filled with hope: they saw avenues opening into literature, philosophy, human relationships, and the road of the future passing through not insurmountable changes to a possible Utopia. Can you imagine decency touched
with poetry? It was thus the 'Independent' appeared to us—a light rather than a fire, but a light that penetrated the emotions.\textsuperscript{59}

The implication is that the \textit{Independent} was not merely political but a 'progressive' journal containing articles on many subjects. Forster and Hilaire Belloc, the Catholic apologist, were the chief contributors of this imaginative work, and the fact that his name was mistaken by some readers for a pseudonym of Belloc's shows how little political bias his contributions contained. Indeed, Forster's liberalism always concentrated on what politicians ignored, and could not afford to ignore, in their thinking. But this emphasis was not peculiar to himself; liberalism, form near its start, had always had such liberal critics.\textsuperscript{60} 'A liberal at war with the liberal imagination',\textsuperscript{61}

Trilling goes on to justify the statement by showing how Forster overcame the simplifications of the liberal reformers by accepting the paradoxes of human nature and stimulating a sense of order in spite of them. The way of human action of course does not satisfy him, but he does not believe there are any new virtues to be discovered; not by becoming better, he says, but by ordering and distributing his native goodness can man live as befits him.\textsuperscript{62}

As a matter of truth an attempt is made to show how Forster's intellectual antecedents made it natural for him to reach such a conclusion. And if we shall see when we come to the essays, Forster's later liberalism was not expressed directly in political terms scarcely even in social ones. So too, it focused on the areas of human experience which are usually ignored
by politicians and sociologists alike, the personal links by which the individual relates himself to his environment in such a way as to make politics and social science humanly intelligible and that can be understood. Forster is basically a humanist who believes in 'education' 'culture' and 'freedom', whereas, humanism is a school of thought and set of beliefs which gives prime importance to man in his relationship with nature and society. In one way, Forster's ideas seem similar to those of Coleridge who subscribed to a romantic and organic view of life. This implies that Forster is a humanist and symbolist. So liberalism and humanism are in a way related to his Romantic and poetical quality. In fact, humanism, and humanitarianism in the Victorian age were multifaceted movements which cut across many divisions of social and political thought. So too, they encompassed many diverse elements and beliefs. Thus, too, the literary heritage of humanism gives meaning and substance to Forster's creative work. All the same Forster was a rare combination of creative writer, so as a moralist and humanist.

It should be obvious from the observation that, "if words like 'liberal', 'civilized' and 'tolerant' can still be used unironically, it is largely because of the work of this quiet, unpretentious, witty writer". Forster's theme as a novelist is the relation between nature and culture. Nature is deeper than culture: it is spontaneous self, the centre of our profoundest sincerity, which preoccupied D.H. Lawrence. Forster might be described as a Lawrence with less vital force, more wistful, more tentative, more urbane. The similarity of their attitudes towards modern civilization may be seen in Forster's anti-Wellsian fantasy 'The Machine Stops'. But though he recognized the ascendancy of nature over culture, Forster also believed in culture. What he
meant by culture was much the same as what Matthew Arnold to correct the provinciality and narrowness of the educated class to which he belonged. He was a liberal humanist, but one tempered by a keen critical sense of the shakiness of the humanist position. His novels often describe the chastening of idealistic humanists who come up against not only confusion and stupidity, but deep irrational forces which their humanism cannot cope with.  

Indeed, Forster's conception of humanism will embrace all: the earth, passion and friendship, thirst for the truth, and hunger for the Absolute. For him, the 'Greek view of life' is the right one; and the problem of morality is not to set one's mind against body or soul either, not to antithesize but to reconcile, by proportion and subordination to effect a harmony. In the language of metaphysics; Forster must be described as a 'naturalist'; but he is a naturalist with wings and humanistic manners and balancing perceptions, one who, like Santayana, believes that everything ideal has a natural is basis and that nothing in nature is incapable of an ideal fulfilment.

Recalling again, the background of Forster's nineteenth Century heritage, we may now look rather more closely at the nature of his humanism. Broadly speaking, perhaps we may distinguish two main forms of humanism in the modern world. There is a rational, sceptical humanism, which stems from the Enlightenment, and an imaginative (and often religious) humanism which draws its sustenance primarily from the Romantic Movement. Clearly something of both of these are to be found in Forster but there can be no doubt as to where his sympathies lie. When, in
the essay 'What I Believe', he makes his well-known statement, 'I do not believe in Belief' and goes on to declare his allegiance to Erasmus and Montaigne and perhaps also with Gibbon and Voltaire. He may appear at first sight to be ranking himself with the sceptical rationalists. But when we see the human endowments which he picks out for special praise: 'the heart' (as so often), creativity in all its forms, 'creation means passionate understanding. Creation lies at the heart of civilisation like fire in the heart of the earth; a rejection of the creeds of religion but an acceptance of its 'indwelling spirit'; and when we find that the ideal which he sets before himself, however, unattainable is 'Love, the Beloved Republic' then it becomes clear that his humanism is both romantic and in a perfectly acceptable sense of the word, religious. We can perhaps agree with the observation that, Forster's work is not only spiritual and moral curiosity but also spiritual and moral control. It is a kind of good sense of perception which has to do with the way in which art can be considered to be 'true'. Art may illumine our lives by fantasy; or by making elegant formal orders; or by pursuing, finally, a standard of wisdom and truth.

Perhaps it is a chance, more than any peculiar devotion, that determines a man in his choice of medium, when he finds himself possessed by the obscure impulse towards creation. The distinction between the functions of one art and another is not clear; they have a tendency to overlap, to merge, even to identify themselves, in a manner which prevents definition. They have one common subject for discussion—the life that is lived and known by men; and since it is not at once apparent why men who are intimately involved in living that life should desire to contemplate so
immediate an experience in any remoter way, another activity (criticism), as old as themselves, has attended upon the arts from their beginning, which has constantly and variedly, but never quite satisfactorily, attempted to explain the reasons for their being. In the advanced state of everything,—of life, that is, and our ideas about life—that we have achieved today, people, including Forster, have set themselves to define the difference between the real life which we live and the life which the arts present to us. 70

Despite widespread agreement that, the artist is an expert in the ‘minute particulars’ and ‘qua’ artist pays little or no attention to generalizations which he finds in actual practice are too crude to discriminate between what is valuable and the reverse. For this reason the moralist has always tended to distrust or to ignore him. Yet since the fine conduct of life springs only from fine ordering of responses far too subtle to be touched by any general ethical maxims, this neglect of art by the moralist has been tantamount to a disqualification. The basis of morality, as Shelley insisted, is laid not by preachers but by poets. 71 And so, bad taste and crude responses are not mere flaws in an otherwise admirable person. They are actually a root of evil from which other defects follow.

It appears now that Forster kept himself quite abreast with these ideas about liberalism, art, humanism and humanitarianism current among the intellectuals of the early years of the twentieth century. It is also evident that the young Forster was intellectually fully equipped to make his individual identity acknowledged and felt universally. Indeed, literature was early Forster’s true vocation by the time he left Cambridge. At first it was a vague aspiration, but it became definite during his tour of Italy in 1901, when the
*Story of a Panic* came to him with sudden inspiration. Meanwhile he contributed short articles and sketches in the *Independent*, and then his first novel was well received.

The beginning of twentieth century may be characterised by various forms of literary innovations which were carried on in Poetry, Fiction, Poetic plays etc. Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence were also actively engaged in publications of their novels with general acclaim and wide receptions by the readers during the early years of our century. E.M. Forster, too, with his liberal humanism championed the cause of the importance of relationships in a world where national boundaries divided men even emotionally apart. He contributed seminally with his experiments through his liberal and humanistic approach to the problems of relationships and humanism during the early decades of the century. A systematic study of E.M. Forster's liberal humanism is offered in the following chapters under titles as Early Experiment, Experiment in Symbolism and Last Experiments in order to make the present study compact, synthetic and arguably convincing.
Notes and References


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.


7. Ibid., P.2.


9. Ibid., P. 94.


11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., P.3.


14. Ibid., P. XII.

15. Ibid.


21. See Trilling, *E.M. Forster* (London, 1959), P. 24: In an essay in *The New Statesman and Nation* (April 1, 1939), Forster writes at some length of Henry Thornton, his great-grandfather, and speaks of his two very successful books. One was a volume of family prayers, posthumously collected, which "between 1834 and 1854 . . . ran into as many as thirty-one editions". The other was a work on banking, *Essay on Paper Credit*, still regarded as sufficiently useful to be recently republished in an edition by Professor F.A. Vonttayek (Allen and Unwin). Between them, the two books, as Forster implies, neatly comprehend the nature of Clapham Evangelicism.

22. See Trilling, PP. 24 - 25.


25. Ibid., P. 10.

26. Ibid.


30. Ibid, PP. 19 - 20


32. See Gillie, P. 19.


34. Ibid, PP. X - XI.

35. See Gillie, P. 19.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., P. 20.
39. Ibid., P. 95.
40. Ibid.
41. See ibid. P. 95. See also *Arnold, Poetry and Prose* (selected by J. Bryson) (London, 1967), P. 496.
42. Mary Eagleton and David Pierce, P. 95.
44. Gillie P. 20.
47. Ibid., P. 24.
49. Ibid., PP. 26 - 27.
51. Ibid., P. 102.
52. Ibid., PP. 102 - 3.
56. See Gillie, P. 50. For details, see also Trilling, PP. 9 - 23.
Interpretation (London, 1936), PP. 80 - 89.

58. See Gillie., P. 51.
60. Gillie, PP. 51 - 54.
62. Ibid., P. 13.
64. Ibid., PP. 94 - 95.
67. Ibid., P. 43.
68. H.A. Smith, 'Forster's Humanism and the Nineteenth Century' Vide Bradbury, PP. 112 - 19.
71. P.B. Shelley, A Defence of Poetry.