CHAPTER - 6

Conclusion

The study of E.M. Foster's novel reveals that he is a rare combination of a novelist who assumes the stand of a moralist and a humanist in his work. In a sense he belongs to the heritage of the Victorian multifaceted humanism and humanitarianism envisaging the discriminatory sense of a moralist and the deep concern for culture and freedom of a humanist. The unironical use of phrases like "liberal", "civilised" and "tolerant" in his novel reveal the fact that he strove to establish a relationship between nature and culture. Nature in his novels is deeper than culture: it is spontaneous self and hence the centre of man's profoundest sincerity.

Forster held a strong view of culture like Matthew Arnold and again like him strove to correct the provinciality and narrowness of the educated class to which he belonged. He was indeed a liberal humanist but for the fact that he had been tempered by a keen sense of the shakiness of the humanist position. He describes quite often in his novels the chastening of idealistic humanists who come up against not only confusion and stupidity, but deep irrational forces which their humanism can not cope with. His characters like Philip Herriton, Rickie, Margaret Schlegel and Adela Quested all fail due to the working of the irrational forces in the novels.

E.M. Forster held a comprehensive view of humanism which includes the earth, passion and friendship, thirst for truth, and hunger for the absolute. He prefers the Greek view of life which reconciles the problem of morality with body and soul by proportion and subordination to effect a
harmony. Here he takes the stance of a naturalist with wings and humanistic manners and affirms that everything ideal has a natural basis and also that nothing in nature is incapable of an ideal fulfilment. This brings him closer to Santayana. Forster's novels then embody rational, sceptical humanism and an imaginative but often religious tradition of humanism with his sympathies apparently with the sceptical rationalist but at heart with the human endowments with his special praise for 'the heart' with creativity in all its forms. Creation for Forster is passionate understanding and it rests in the heart of civilization. He rejects the creeds of religion but accepts the inner spirit of religion—Love, the Beloved Republic—which is unattainable. We can perhaps say that Forster's work is not only about spiritual and moral curiosity but also about spiritual and moral control. He advocates for a good sense of perception which can illuminate human lives by fantasy pursuing a standard of wisdom and truth.

The eminence of E.M. Forster, then rests on his spokesmanship of the liberal tradition, agnosticism, antiflalism, anti authoritarianism and of social justice. The holiness of the heart's affections together with his conception of good life based on personal relations, rational discourse and disinterestedness play an important role in his novels. But this public attitude of Forster as expressed in his much more complex, something which can hardly be expressed in clean cut and simple statements other than darkly through symbols. These at their most convincing appear as perceptions of the nature of reality, as in Helen Schlegel's experience of Beethoven's fifth symphony in Howards End.
Forster’s treatment of the perception into the nature of things in his early novels rests on the knowledge of good and evil which is treated as primal curse. Pathos, piety and courage in the early novels are treated as filth leading man into an endless labyrinthine void.

This makes Forster fundamentally a tragic humanist for whom man is justified by his self awareness and by the fruits of his imagination, by the acts and especially perhaps, by music. The early novels also reveal Forster’s advocacy of balance, of the whole man, but man is rarely balanced and few can be said to be whole. In the early novels, then, there is usually a young person impressed as it were into the army of the benighted and striving to break free from it. Forester’s Villains are those who refuse to recognise, or betray, the holiness of the heart’s affections. They are, generally, the emotionally immature; and in Forster’s world they may be equated with that aspect of English upper middle class values which can be summed up in words as public school and established Church. Against these values are set the symbols of different ways of life. Italy is the symbol employed by Forester in his early novels, conventional home counties are the locus of rebellion in his early novels.

Forster’s experiment with symbolism in *Howards End* speaks of his most explicit values which were dear to him as a humanist. Through ‘only connect the passion and the prose’¹ Forster has aimed at a reconciliation between two representatives—Margaret and Helen Schlegel on the one side and Wilcoxes, a middle class family that stands for what is called in the novel ‘the outer world of telegrams and anger’, the world of action. Moreover,
it is a symbolical novel about the state of England. Yet, if there is virtue in action at all - and this is certainly Margaret Schlegel's belief, since defending the Wilcoxes against her sister Helen, she tells us, 'They made us possible'—then the Wilcoxes are certainly not fitting representatives of it, any more than the Schlegels, for all their liberal mindedness and culture, can really stand for the life of the spirit; they seem now to express little more than the luxury of combining advanced opinions with a private income. Nor is Leonard Bast, the representative of the working class, any more satisfactory; indeed, he is less so, since it is hard to see that any observation of working men went into his creation.

The three early novels which constitute Forster's first phase of experiment with liberalism deal with human life and situations quite tragically in a world where man's advance for relationships on international basis is thwarted by his lack of love and power of understanding. The tragedy, as it appears, is the only sure *sine qua non* for man in the world. The liberating vision of the novelist is also harshly satirised with man's sterility, snobbery and 'witty weariness' of the self consciously cultured English characters with only hope of liberation with Italy.

The plot of the *Howards End* suffers from obtrusiveness due to the fact that characters in it are too small for the general argument of the novel. The technique often relies on descriptions of individual appearance or mannerisms, whereby personal details are carefully selected to produce a distorted, ridiculous or partial picture of character.
Forster attains maturity and success as a novelist in his last novel, *Passage to India* where 'only connect', through something rather different serves as the leitmotif. India as the choice of Foster's subject with its clashes of race, religion, and colour, perhaps, compelled Foster to interpret his values in terms of a concrete situation taken from contemporary history. Here English and Indians are described within the brilliantly pictured world of conventional Anglo-Indian relations. Mrs. Moore, Adela Quested, Fielding on the English side and Dr. Aziz on the India side strive to establish contacts as human beings, but they fail because the mysterious event in Marabar Caves seems to represent a perverseness in the scheme of things in the novel. The attempt to contact in the novel has turned English bitter. Here Forster’s attitude to life comes under the shadow of gloom. The picture of life of India in the novel is a muddle which again is like life itself. Structurally the novel is constructed on two planes. The plane of realism in the novel is characterised by Forster’s satire, sympathy, humour and understanding which are exploited to author’s full advantage. Forster sums up all his previous criticism of the 'undeveloped hearts' when he describes the behaviour of the English at Chandrapore. His natural sympathies are with those who seek reality and feel the necessity to connect. Mrs. Moore, Adela Quested, Fielding and Aziz belong to this group of characters in the novel. Hinduism and its rituals in the novel receive superb understanding and humour of the novelist. The final conclusive meeting between Aziz and Fielding in the novel after Aziz's trial sums up realistically that East and West would never meet.
But on the second plane the earlier conclusion can be contradicted. Mrs. Moore in the context of the novel achieves a figure of great stature and earns a local goddess-like status. It is through her that a reconciliation between the spiritual East and materialistic West can be possible. With Forster's obvious sympathies with her, Mrs. Moore possesses her moments of perception to see through the nature of things. Adela Quested finally, comes to know the reality and affirms that Aziz did not assault her in the Caves. But this realization comes to Adela through Mrs. Moore. The novel ends up with a hope when Fielding is married to Mrs. Moore's daughter. Mrs. Moore has been quite successfully used as a symbol of hope and renewal of ties between Indians and the English. *A Passage to India* is a superb novel from all points of consideration.
Notes and References

(1) E.M. Forster, *Howards End*, Chapter. XXII