E.M. Forster, though not a prolific writer, is, alongside Henry James, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf, an outstanding literary figure in the history of the twentieth century English novel. He has a great academic appeal, nevertheless he is also widely popular with the common reader. His novels have been interpreted in relation to their historical context by Lionel Trilling, John Beer, Malcolm Bradbury etc. Particularly his posthumous publications have added a new dimension to his standing as a writer, for it gives a critical backthrust to the estimate of Forster as a novelist. This phase compels us to review and reassess his position and stature as a writer, for the ruthless frankness with which he has treated some of the themes, which were for long taboos, reveals him in a new light. He thus turns out to be a precursor of the novel dealing with a forbidden theme. What the twentieth century writers like Melville and Mark Twain implied through undertones Forster expresses in overtones.

Forster's belief in the individual and personal relationships is central to his life's philosophy. He finds modern life chaotic and rootless. In his essays collected in Two cheers for democracy and Abinger Harvest, his emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual and personal relations take on the significance of a manifesto. Forster's statement "if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country" has taken on the importance.
and popularity similar to Lord Acton's dictum:
"Power Corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Forster belongs to the English Liberal Tradition and humanism. Like André Gide he is a humanist and has love for the humanity. Besides people and personal relations he also has a mystical attachment for the places and buildings. Much of his criticism has been directed towards the English middle class and their public-school attitudes. He himself was born in a middle-class family and he could observe their narrow-mindedness, undue emphasis on respectability, hatred for passion and poetry, and the "undeveloped heart" of the Englishman. All this forms the subject-matter of Forster's novels, short stories and non-fictional writings.

Like Robert Fry and other members of the Bloomsbury, Forster believes in art's autonomy, the laws of a work of art are its own. According to him "A poem points to nothing but itself". In Two cheers for Democracy, he writes, "I believe in art for art's sake," and declares that a work of art is a self-contained entity with a life of its own imposed by its creator. But he is not a formalist like Henry James. He admires Tolstoy for not subserving life to art. In fact this illustrates the dichotomy of theory and practice in art and shows how unsafe it would be to take an artist at his word. The classic example is
that of Picasso who once said with tongue in cheek whether his modern art was not a hoax. E. M. Forster's novels do not give art any ascendency over life.

The study of E. M. Forster's theory and practice of the art of fiction is a great clue to understanding not only Forster's novels but all novels. After Henry James he is the first practising novelist to give us in a systematic way the evidence of creative experience. What is most intriguing is to see a tension, at times even a conflict, between his theory and practice. But that is a universal fact that no artist ever has been able to achieve a perfect harmony between his theory and practice. Matthew Arnold is a classic example. However, Aspects of the Novel will remain a major authentic statement by the novelist on the novel. In Forster's view the story is the lowest and simplest of literary organisms and it does not take one far in the appreciation or creation of a great work of art. He admits that the story is the highest factor common to all the novels. He would like a melody or perception of truth to play a significant role in a novel then this low atavistic form. His dislike for the story would lead one to believe that his novels do not tell stories. On the contrary, Forster tells very interesting and gripping stories. His practice in a way refutes his great dislike for the story as an aspect of the novel. Peter Burra praises Forster's art of story telling. He writes about his stories in
The Nineteenth Century and after and says, "But what stories. What monstrous improbabilities they are What fearful, sensational things they are made of Manslaughter, bribery, and blackmail; slander and false witness, violence, sex episodes, illegitimate offspring, village idiocy, public school intrigues, for-fetched coincidence, a mysterious house-keeper, who has stepped straight from the pages of Gothic romance, death in carriage, accidents at level crossings, by drowning, on the football field". Yes Forster tells interesting stories. But the stories are used as vehicles for something very significant- "a melody or perception of the truth ". About people in the novel Forster writes in *Aspects of the novel* that people, taken from life, cannot be put into a book. But there are many characters in his novels which walk into his novels from life. Of course they are modified and transformed by the temperament of the novelist, '+ or - x' which is the important aspect of writing novels. This unknown quality 'X' in a novelist transforms what he observes and experiences in life. Mrs Honeychurch in *A Room with a View*, Mrs Failing and Ansell in *The Longest Journey*, Margaret and Helen in *Howards End*, his friend Dorothea in *Maggie O'Farrell Frew* are all based on people in the real life.

Forster has criticised Hardy's plots because the characters have to contribute to the plots by suspending their natures, in a way Forster's plots also demand contribution by the characters. People die or are killed
so that the plot may develop. A healthy athlete
Kerala in *The Longest Journey* dies so that Rickie
might marry Agnes. There are sudden deaths in
his novels, for the sake of plots. He likes a
plot to be aesthetically compact and disapproves
of details that have no relation with the main
plot of the book, nothing like 'The Man of the
Hill' stuff that we find in Fielding's novel, *Tom
Jones*. But details regarding the form of Mr. Failing
and its mis-management in *The Longest Journey* details
regarding Clive's sister and her fiance Archie London
and the shadowy guest at Renge in *Maurice* could
have been minimised or dropped for the sake of
compactness of the plot that he admires. Forster
criticises Fielding and Thackeray because they take
the readers into their confidence about their characters.
In *The Longest Journey* Forster may be criticized for
the reason.

But with regard to other 'aspects' of the novel,
his practice bears out his theory. Fantasy, prophecy
and rhythm are found in his novels. His use of "rhythms"
in his novels, especially in *The Longest Journey*, *Howards
End* and *A Passage to India* is admirable. Through the
the use of "rhythm" he tries to impart to his novels
the quality of 'expansion' and "opening out" which he considers a great achievement in any novelist. We find in his novels 'great chords' that 'sound behind us' as he hears them in War and Peace. In this he finds a parallel between music and novel. Forster is one of the most musical novelists among the twentieth-century English novelists.

Any one who studies the novels of E. M. Forster chronologically cannot miss the pattern of evolution of his art and mind, culminating in his magnum opus A Passage to India. It is fascinating to see the ever-expanding ripples on the surface of his aesthetic consciousness. Beginning with 'undeveloped heart' in contact with a foreign culture in Where Angels Fear to Tread to the East-West encounter in A Passage to India, it is a huge sweep. Like Henry James, Forster brings his characters, with 'undeveloped hearts' in contact with a foreign culture, and through a chain of ironical situations leads them to self-realisation. Philip Herriton, the protagonist in Where Angels Fear to Tread is an aesthetic snob of Sawston who comes under the influence of Italian culture and people. Through this influence he realised the enormity and richness of life. Cyril Gino represents the Italian culture and life. The Italian life serves to satirise the parochial and
snobbish respectability of the English middle classes epitomized by Mr. Herriton and her daughter, Harriet. Where Angels Fear to Tread presents the British abroad trying to seek a holiday, as it were, in the mainstream of European culture, free from the British middle class morality. In the Italian milieu they have encounters which eventually throw them on themselves and lead to a kind of self-knowledge, which is a new awareness. Journey to Italy results in a better understanding not only of England but also of themselves Italy also plays an important role in Forster's other novel A Room With a View whose heroine, Lucy Honeychurch, visits Italy and meets people like the Emersons. This novel is about an English girl whose tragedy results from her failure to accept that 'passion is sanity.' She, a victim of her prudery, suppresses her true feelings for a young man, George Emerson. She attains happiness only when she accepts her true passions and desires. Apart from exploiting the setting to build up milieu congenial to the experiences of his characters abroad, Forster here tries to suggest that life is larger than art. The Journey theme is prominent in so far as the journey is a sort of cultural stimulus giving a new awareness to the characters. The protagonist of The Longest Journey, Rickie Eliot, travels within England. There is an element of autobiography in this character. Like Forster, Rickie goes to Cambridge from a public school. He, like his creator,
writes stories full of fantasies. For the first time in Forster's novels, the protagonist is haunted by the division of realities, and the complex nature of good and evil, that one encounters in life. His is an attempt of an innocent and honest person to lead life through ideals of liberal humanism. His tragedy results from a failure to understand the symbolical significance of visions. A sense of haunting tragedy pervades the book. The Longest Journey illustrates the process which produces English people with 'undeveloped heart'. The product of the middle class culture cannot lead integrated lives. They fail to maintain personal relation and to acknowledge the equally claims of body and spirit. Hence they cannot connect. Shelley's poem 'Epipsychidion' imparts symbolical significance to the novel. In this novel the use of rhythm become intricate and richer because in this novel, as also in Howards End and A Passage to India man's relationship with the unseen is stressed through symbols.

Howards End is essentially English in the sense because it is not only placed against the rural background of England, but it also attempts to deal with the problems of class struggle in England. It is about two families representing two attitudes to life. Margaret Schlegel tries to build a bridge between the two ways to life; a
bridge between the inner and the outer life, between poetry and prose. If *Passage to India* gives us the authentic images of British India, this novel holds a mirror against the novelist's own country. The novel shows Fabian influence on the author in his idealistic reaction against the growing materialism that tended to cloud the intellectual climate of the day. In Margaret Schlegel we have the new woman at once establishing kinship with Ibsen's and Shaw's new emancipated women. Forster's emphasis on the integral view of the whole man, unfragmented and undissipated, is central to our understanding of the book. *Howards End* reflects the contemporary England, the way perhaps Shaw's *Heartbreak House* does.

In a sense *Passage to India* is Forster's magnum opus. Even if he had written nothing else, the one book should have ensured his place in the history of the English novel. The theme and setting of the novel have a special appeal both to the western and Eastern readers.
Naturally, therefore, it easily tends to be central in any study of Forster. Compared to it, the other novels by him fail to measure up to its stature. *A Passage to India* presents the East-West encounter, the theme which has been of major importance throughout the twentieth century. *Paul Scott* presents the picture of the crumbling Raj and the chaos accompanying the fall of the empire, Forster seems to view it in its hey-day and incidentally prophesises its fall. A part from Rudyard Kipling no other novelist has been able to portray British India the way Forster has done, taking into Kipling’s prolific output, Forster’s only one novel on British India speaks volumes for its quality as it remains a milestone in the Western literature with Indian themes. Only one novel, *A Passage to India*, says as much, or even a little more, than what Kipling’s fiction does. Authenticity and integrity of vision mark out the novel as Forster’s magnum opus.

In a sense, *A Passage to India* a touchstone for any enquiry leading to the search for correlation between Forster’s theory and practice as a novelist. When one takes into account his *The Hill of Devi* as a source-book for a substantial part of the novel, one is struck with the amazing way in which the novelist has transformed into a work of art his observations.
experiences. Fraser in *The Twentieth Century Mind* calls *A Passage to India* as "the last really major English traditional novel, the last rounded and complete, distanced and exact portrait in our language of a rationally intelligible and morally judgeable society. It is also a very middle class book... the last great English novel of unquestionable authorial authority. For a British writer in particular, and a Western in general, to imbibe colonial approach to India, it speaks for intellectual and creative integrity of Forster that he vigorously steers away from that position and views the East West encounter in the perspective of liberal imagination. If therefore colonial attitudes and imperial psyche are revealed in a work like *A Passage to India* it seems that the author exposes them in pursuit of the exploration of reality and eventually to reject them. Not that Forster, in any way, is less patriotic than Rudyard Kipling and others whose creative involvement in the colonial India was deep but not quite so very un-British. It is astonishing how Forster remains every inch British and yet is not imperialistic. If we look at the people in *A Passage to India* on the whole, the Indian characters are even artistically better delineated than the British, they are more dimensional, more complex. Juxtaposed with their British counterparts who are largely standoffish...
tightlipped and stilted, with the probable exception of Mrs. Moore and Fielding. The natives easily spring to life. It speaks volumes for Forster's integrity and vision that he transcends all imperial barriers and complexes and approaches. The raw material of his novel in a catholic way. It speaks volumes for Forster's catholicity and humanity that he has no villains with the probable exception of Rickie Elliot's father in The Longest Journey. In an age when the British talked of Great Britain as independent of Europe, when England was reckoned to be a world apart and when they proclaimed that the sun of the British Empire never set Forster's approach to Italy was liberal and human. Forster has tolerant view of the human comedy. It would no exaggeration to say that in regard of an integral vision and a creative catholicity Forster paved a way for the writers like Paul Scott who brought to their viewing of the collapse of the Empire the same integrity, understanding and vision far above the narrow colonial or imperial considerations and obsessions. Forster is an excellent representative of the liberal English Tradition. While reading A Passage to India or A Room With a View and Where Angels Fear to Tread not once does the reader feel any obsession about British ascendancy.

It will not be a critical hazard to guess that
the liberal and integral approach of Forster imparted
great strength to his creative effort and achievement.
In the hands of a lesser artist than Forster, a novel with
a thematic concern like that of *A Passage to India*
could have easily lapsed into a crude and narrow colonial
spectacle. Sympathy, understanding, humanity and
above all fairness characterize Forster's approach
of life. The barriers of caste or class, race or religion,
east or West do not cramp his creative processes.

It does not, however, mean, that E.M. Forster is
one of the greatest novelists of our age. He has written
a great novel, perhaps the greatest on British India by
any standard, but when we view him in the great tradition
of English novel, he does not wholly attain the stature
of a Jane Austen or a Dickens, of Hardy or a Lawrence.
But *Howards End* and *A Passage to India* will remain
important achievements in the history of the English
novel. For instance Rudyard Kipling used India even
more interestingly and abundantly than Forster. No
one who cares for India mirrored in the Western fiction
could afford the bypass Kipling. In fact, in the Raj
tradition of fiction, Kipling and Paul Scott stand out
prominently, against that Forster has written only one
novel about India. And yet he too emerges as great
as Kipling, if not greater. However we do well not to
ignore Forster's superiority over Kipling, comparing the art of Kipling and Forster, Laurence Brander writes in his book, *E.M. Forster: A Critical Study* that Kipling merely indicates but Forster explores the peripheral mental experiences.

E.M. Forster is not a regional novelist, and his canvas has a large range covering the lands as far as Italy and Italy. But against this epic canvas the life that he chooses to mirror is not limitless. He seems to have chosen the narrow world of the middle classes, the way Jane Austen did. Even when he turned to the British Empire and embarked on a passage to India, the focus continued to be limited. Take for example, the British in India. He does not seem to have any use of the Englishmen in very high position, the governors, the viceroy and the like of them. Same is the case with the Indian people in the novel. Almost all of them belong to the middle classes. The teeming millions living in object poverty in India have no place in Forster's world. Even here he is close to Jane Austen in more than one way. Jane Austen, with her profound interest in the human comedy, did not care to even refer to major historical events like the wars. Forster also does not directly mirror the great national awakening ushered by Mahatma Gandhi's call for freedom.
Towards the end, after he is disenchanted with the British, he voices some sort of national reaction against the foreign rule. May be Forster's aesthetics did not easily accommodate great spectacular events. In one more way too, Forster is Jane Austen - in his view of the human comedy characterized by wit and wisdom, and a definite disregard for solemnity. He can as easily scoff at the colonial solemnity of the British men and women, whether at home or in the clubs, in private interviews or public parties as easily as he can caricature Hindu festivals and temple congregations. Like Bernard Shaw he has an incorrigible streak of irreverence and like him he can be comic without being solemn. Even at times, as in A Passage to India, we see that his primary concern is artistic; it is for him a governing principle. In Two Cheers For Democracy he states:

The work of art... so far as it is authentic... presents itself as eternally virgin. It expects always to be heard or read or seen for the first time, always to cause surprise. It does not expect to be studied, still less does it present itself as a crossword puzzle, only to be solved after much reexamination. If it parades a mystifying element, it is to that extent, not a work of art, not an immortal muse but a Sphinx who dies as soon as her riddles are answered.
It is, to a certain extent, a handicap in his creative process because a typical Forster novel which expands far beyond the ending has inherently a narrow confine in terms of interest and even range. So far as his human interest is concerned. As there are no portraits of aristocracy or monarchy in Forster there are no portraits of stark poverty either; the probable exception being Leonard Bast in Howards End. But this too has been most flimsily delineated. Forster's position in terms of his social background is essentially centrist avoiding extremes at both ends. It may lead to a lack of warmth in his works.

With Maurice and The Life to come Forster broadens his canvas still further by accommodating homosexuality in his art. In his letter to Forrest Reid, Forster wrote about Maurice, "I was trying to connect up and use all the fragments I was born with." (13 March 1955) Maurice is a novel about "the unspeakable vice" i.e. homosexuality. It deals with the spiritual crisis of the key characters arising from their homosexuality and the fear of social criticism. Through it Forster seems to defend the homosexual love and pleads that the society should be more liberal and tolerant. As a novel with taboo at its thematic centre, Maurice stands out as a literary reaction Edwardian middle-class
morality that viewed the theme of homosexuality as a sacriilege. The significance of the novel lies not only in its autobiographical interest but also in sincerity of the artist who refuses to steer away from a vital aberration of his own character and thus keeps a date with the posterity.

It is indeed a long journey from Where Angels Fear to Tread to A Passage to India across Maurice and quite a substantial amount of his non-fiction including Aspects of the Novel. Which no study of E.M. Forster can ignore for Aspects of the Novel is largely the summing up of his views based on the evidence of his experience of writing fiction over more than two decades. That it is crystallisation of his views on fiction is unquestionable. What is interesting is the fact that there is some discord between his theory and practice, but it is not striking.