CHAPTER - I

E. M. FORSTER'S VIEWS ON LIFE AND ART

Since the research effort aims at studying E.M. Forster with reference to his theory and practice of fiction, it would be necessary to examine, at the outset, his views on art and life of all forms of literature, the novel is closest to life. It does not merely mirror life, it influences the age in the big way. The age makes us what we are, and hence the significance of understanding the novelist's approach to life and art - life as the soil from which literature grows, and art as the governing creative principle. No one who is not acquainted with the artist's approach to life and art can study comprehensively the artist. In case of E.M. Forster particularly, when we read his non-fiction - particularly diaries, letters, essays etc - we are struck by the way the line of demarcation between his life and art is easily blurred. For instance The Hill of Devi contains abundant raw-material that was through the creative process turned into Forster's masterpiece A Passage to India.

In 1943 E.M. Forster wrote the following words about André Gide:
He is a humanist. The humanist has four leading characteristics - curiosity, a free mind, belief in good taste, and belief in human race - and all four are present in Gide ... He is indifferent to authority, and he is willing to pay the penalty for independence. I only want to point out that here's a man with a free mind ....... indifferent to everything except what he believes to be true.1

As K.W. Gransden remarks, Forster's views on Gide "are scarcely less true of himself"2

As a true humanist, Forster believes that one should have affection for them. According to him the modern age is an age of barriers and divisions among people. He is against dogmas. Describing himself as a "child of unbelief" he says, "I do not believe in belief .... My motto is 'Lord, I disbelieve - help thou my unbelief".3 He pleads for tolerance, good temper and sympathy. Fielding in A Passage to India speaks for his creator: The world .... is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of goodwill plus culture and intelligence.4

In his essay "What I believe", the most striking thing about Forster's views concerning life and people and even art is the absence of any dogmatic approach. Like André Gide and humanists like Erasmus, Matthew Arnold, he has a free mind. But Forster was influenced most by Samuel Butler in the way in which he looks at the world. He has confessed his debt to Butl in the essay "The Legacy of Samuel Butler". He writes about Samuel Butler's influence thus:
Samuel Butler influenced me a great deal .... He, Jane Austen, and Marcel Proust are three authors who have helped me most over my writing, and he did more than the other two to help me look at life the way I do.5

Butler has influenced him in ways more than one. Forster had also planned to write a book on him. Both of them were critical of the middle-class hypocrisy and the muddle-headedness. The individual and personal relationships occupy the central position in Forster's statement of values. In a world where affection and family life are losing their significance, Forster speaks out firmly for personal relationships. He has great regard for the individual. He says:

I have no mystic faith in the people. I have in the individual. He seems to me a divine achievement and I mistrust any view which belittles him.6

According to Forster the world will be a better place if people love each other. He disapproves of people's indifference towards their fellow beings. His criticism of Tibby Schlegel in Howards End, Philip Herriton in Where Angels Fear to Tread stems from his disapproval of their concern for art independent of life. They, along with the British officers in A Passage to India, commit the unforgivable sin of being indifferent and unsympathetic to the fellow human beings. They keep aloof. Forster criticized even South Herfordshire because it contained so many fenced-in gentlemen's parks. Marco Polo's book on his travels in the east was not appreciated by him as it excluded any mention of the people he met.
Personal relationships offer some hope to Forster in this "muddled establishment". He lays great store by them. Though he is aware that in the modern materialistic civilisation, personal relations are under great stress, he emphasises their significance and says: "Here is something comparatively solid in a world full of violence and casualty".7

Helen Schlegel, in Howards End, criticizing the outer life of efficiency and hurry, speaks vehemently for personal relations which form the basis of the inner life. ....

"Personal relations are the important thing for ever and ever, and not this outer life of telegrams and anger."8

Forster discusses Proust's and Dante's views about personal relationships in his essay on Proust. According to Proust fondness and intimacy only breed misunderstanding and hatred:

Proust's general theory of human intercourse is that the fonder we are of people the less we understand them - the theory of the complete pessimist ... Dante believed that the fonder we are of people the better we understand them - the theory of the complete optimist.9

Not rejecting Proust's theory completely, Forster wonders whether Proust makes "enough allowance for a certain good sense that persists in the human organism .."10 Worldliness and pragmatism underline Forster's views about human intercourse. He admits that people are different; and
that psychology has affected our ideas about human personality, yet he stresses the importance of personal relationships. Assigning a prominent and central place to personal relations in Forster's "Credo", V.A. Sahane says, "Personal relations are almost an article of faith with Forster". But in the world dominated by militant creeds, and torn by sectarian attitudes, personal warmth and integrity are possible only if people are disposed to be tolerant, considerate, and sensitive towards others. People in his novels try to be large-hearted and considerate towards the foibles that beset their fellows. David Cecil points out the difficulties confronted by Forster's characters in the area of personal relations. David Cecil writes thus:

The only emotional relation between human beings into which he enters fully is friendship, that exquisite sense of a mutual sympathy of heart and mind which occasionally arises between independent individuals. The very sensitiveness which makes such friendship delightful also makes it precarious. Any jarring note, an error of taste, a failure of sympathy can destroy it completely.

People who possess sympathy for and understanding of others belong to Forster's 'aristocracy'. It is people much as these who vindicate essential humanity. The 'aristocracy' that Forster talks about is based on affection. Not an aristocracy of power, based upon rank and influence, but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky.
Forster's good characters possess the qualities that characterise an aristocrat as defined by him. Like George Emerson in *A Room with a View*, they never speak against affection, and are never afraid to express it though they are often misunderstood by the people who possess "undeveloped hearts". Much of Forster's domestic comedy deals with this quality of the people.

Much of his criticism is directed towards this quality of the English middle-class. The institution of the public school, according to him, is responsible for the undeveloped hearts of the middle-classes, and public schools bear the brunt of his unequivocal criticism. Writing about the traits that characterize the English middle-classes, he writes, "Solidity, caution, integrity, efficiency. Lack of imagination, hypocrisy". And for these qualities he holds that public schools are to blame. They foster the wrong set of attitudes and qualities in their students, who as the members of the "old Boys' Society", remain "old Boys and nothing else for the rest of their lives".

The public school lays stress on "good form" and esprit de Corps", and it wrongly teaches the young boys that no one can love his country who does not love his school. But Forster, who believes in Blake's "little platoon", is very critical of parochial thinking of the public schools. In *The Longest Journey*, he makes fun of the public school
where Penbrokes work and thrive. About the products of such public schools, he writes:

... they go forth into a world of whose richness and subtlety they have no conception. They go forth into it with well-developed bodies, fairly developed minds, and undeveloped hearts. And it is this undeveloped heart that is largely responsible for the difficulties of Englishmen abroad. And undeveloped heart - not a cold one. The difference is important.14

People with undeveloped hearts help him write the domestic comedy of which Forster is a master. He has been rightly and deservedly compared with Jane Austen by F.R. Leavis. Forster describes himself as "a Jane Austenite, and therefore slightly imbecile about Jane Austen.15 Forster's hatred of the public schools is based on his experience during his career at the Tonbridge School where he was a day boy. Lowes Dickinson had gone through a similar experience at Charlatanhouse and he wondered at the continuing attraction of public schools. Like Forster, he was the champion of personal relations. In his biography, Forster talks about the views of Dickinson: It is the experience of most of us that personal relationships are never perfect, but that when they are intense they hint at perfection.16

The influence of Cambridge on him in respect of his views on personal relations is discernible in Forster's writings. Like George Emerson of A Room with a View, Rickie Eliot in The Longest Journey believes in human warmth and affection.
Cambridge for him, as for Forster also, represents a place where qualities essential for personal relations are fostered. He tells his friend Stewart Ansell that...

...all the confidence and mutual knowledge that is born in such a place as Cambridge could be organised.... he wished there was a society, a kind of friendship office, where the marriage of true minds could be registered. 17

Forster's views on life and art bear close resemblance to the philosophy of the Bloomsbury group, of which he was also a member. Appreciation of works of art and cultivation of personal relations were the two most outstanding features of Bloomsbury's philosophy. The members of this small group came under the influence of G.E. Moore's Principia Ethica, a book that was elevated to the level of the Bible. (One of the characters in Virginia Woolf's The Voyage Out. Helen Abrose is shown reading this book) Mr. J.K. Johnstone writes at length about the influence of G.E. Moore on the members of Bloomsbury. He observes:

Bloomsbury's values or at least, the values of those of its members .... where formed under the influence of G.E. Moore, whose Principia Ethica defined Bloomsbury's attitude to life and guided its actions to a quite astonishing degree. 18

G.E. Moore held that pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects are the most valuable things which one can image. According to him, "personal affections and aesthetic enjoyments include all the
His plea for tolerance and sympathy, his unqualified support for the individual and his freedom; his belief in personal relations and private life rank him with the humanists like Erasmus and Montaigue whom he praises and salutes as his "law givers". The temple of the humanists, according to him, "stands not upon Mount Moriah but in that Elysian Field where even the immoral are admitted". Democracy as the form of government, has been praised by Forster, because it admits variety and because it permits criticism. Edward Carpenter's volume of poems Towards Democracy (1883) earned his appreciation for celebrating the freedom of individuals. Rex Warner calls him "the last survivor of a cultured liberal tradition" and adds that if this tradition is imagined as being gentle, tolerant, and intelligent; as containing an intense enthusiasm for the arts and a passionate hatred of imperialism, it is true that Mr. Forster is in the tradition.

Mr. Lionel Trilling reads Forster's novels from the point of view of liberal tradition, and moral realism. In the words of Trilling the liberal tradition is, ".... an opinion which includes such ideas as that loose body of middle-class, as progress, collectivism and humanitarianism".
Though he has certain attitudes which put him in the liberal tradition, Forster has also challenged some of the thinking of this tradition, through the treatment of death and the use of surprises, mild and great. According to Trilling, inadequacy of imagination is the single desperate weakness of liberal tradition and hence it is always being surprised. "The liberal mind", says Trilling, "is sure that the order of human affairs owes it a simple logic: good is good and bad is bad". Forster's intellectual honesty and artistic integrity refuses to accept such a simple logic and Rickie Elliot in The Longest Journey is said to be suffering from the "Primal Curse - which is not - as the authorized version suggests - the knowledge of good and evil but the knowledge of good-and-evil" (p.175)

No essay about Forster's views on life will be complete and fully representative without his views on music and the human passions. Music plays a significant role in his novels as an experience, a symbol, and a conveyer of the innermost thoughts of the characters. Like Andre Gide, Forster was very fond of music and played on the piano. He had written the libretto for Billy Budd in collaboration with the famous musician Benjamin Britten, who praised Forster's ability to use music in his books. He says in his essay "Some Notes on Forster" and Music".
There is no doubt that E.M. Forster is our most musical novelist. And I don't mean that he just likes music or likes going to concerts and operas, or plays the piano neatly and efficiently (all of which he does), but that he really understands music and uses music in his novels, and fairly frequently.  

In his prefatory note to *A Passage to India* (1950) and an Address at Harward (1947) he expressed his views of music as "the deepest of the arts and deep beneath the arts".

Music in his novels and particularly in *A Room With a View* and *Howards End* helps to suggest the subtle psychological undertones, of the state of mind of the characters. Lucy Honeychurch in *A Room with a View*, we are told, "never knew her desires so clearly as after music" (p.45), and she "who found daily life rather chaotic, entered a more solid world when she opened the piano" (p.34). Forster's love of music is evident also in the way his novels are structured. One of the important aspects of the novel according to him is rhythm. As we read in his novels, particularly *A Passage to India*, *Howards End* and *The Longest Journey* we do note how prominent is the rhythm that lends symphonic touch.

Sahane's view that "Forster uses musical scenes and situations to convey the hidden meanings of life and promptings of the soul" is quite correct because like Marcel Proust in *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, Forster uses music
as a rhythm to comment on the state of mind of the characters and to provide the emotional background to the scenes. Lucy's innermost thoughts are expressed through her playing Beethoven and Schumann. The Fifth Symphony of Beethoven is deftly used by him in *Howards End* as a device to reveal the feelings and thoughts of the characters like the Schlegel sisters, Margaret and Helen. Like the author himself, Helen sees "meaning" in music. Writing about his own reaction to a musical composition, he writes that in the beginning he "Woolgathers" and then he hears two sorts of music, "music that reminds me of something", and the other 'music itself".23 and adds that "I thought music must be the better for having a meaning". He praises music because it postulates a double existence, it exists in time, and also exists outside time, instantaneously (TC,p.128).

The description of the larger rhythm, the more difficult rhythm, that he finds a Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, is akin to the existence of music outside time. In his chapter on "Pattern and Rhythm" in *Aspects of the Novel* Forster wonders whether any novel can leave behind it an effect which one feels after one has heard the fifth symphony, the effect of the symphony as a whole. According to Forster

> When the symphony is over, we feel that the notes and tunes composing it have been liberated, they have found in the rhythm of the whole their individual freedom.
This quality of "opening out", or "Expansion" which he finds in musical compositions, Forster wishes a novel to possess. Virginia Woolf, according to R.C. Trevelyan, had, while writing, a notion corresponding to the notion of a musical composition. Forster admired this quality in her books like Mrs. Dalloway and adds,

In the first chapter she stated the themes, in the subsequent chapters she developed them separately, and she tried to bring them all in again at the end.25

The Longest Journey, A Passage to India and Howards End seem to have been written with a notion that produces musical compositions. The use of music to reveal the subconscious workings of the character's mind is quite frequent in Forster's novels. Beethoven's Fifth symphony also helps to foreshadow the events in Howards End. The music of Beethoven and Schumann is used to indicate the victory of the forces of light and passion over those of darkness and insincerity.

Many critics have wondered why Forster turned to fiction when he was so fond of music. His sense of fiction's inadequacy is regretted by Rickie Eliot in The Longest Journey, when he says, "I can't soar; I can only indicate. That's where the musicians have the pull..." But he has ideas which music or pure fantasy is not capable to articulate Peter
Burra explains why Forster did not turn to pure fantasy, abstraction, music" and says that

It is that he has ideas which need a more distinct articulation than music or abstraction can make. He is an artist on the fringe of social reform. He is interested in causes.26

Forster's short stories and the Pre-war novels celebrate the open-hearted passions. It is a sin to ignore and suppress, the natural passions and when a person deliberately tries to suppress them, he, like Lucy Honeychurch joins the "armies of the benighted, who follow neither the heart nor the brain, a march to their destiny by catchwords. (RV,186). Forster's criticism of such people is quite strong as "They have sinned against passion and truth, and vain will be their strife against virtue" Mr. Emerson in the same novel preaches, at Lucy that "Passion is sanity" and "holiness of direct desire" is admirable. The members of Forster's aristocracy believe in 'Holiness of the Heart's affection'. It reminds one of Keatsian Philosophy"I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the heart's affections, and the truth of imagination. If one listened to one's soul's promptings and believed in the truth of one's emotions, one can lead a happy life and can harmonize the claims of the inner and outer life. The motto of Howards End to connect can be realised if one learns to connect passion and poetry, in other words as Forster says, in the Freudian language
"the conscious must be satisfactorily based on the subconscious" (TC, p.283). Imaginative passion is as significant an aspect of his novels as are social comedy and music.

In an address delivered before the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York, Forster expressed his views on "Art" quite categorically by declaring, "I believe in art for art's sake", Art, according to him, represents an important fragment of the human spirit, the other fragment of the human spirit gets expressed through society. But society, with endless bickerings and fighting, does not offer much hope to a person who believes in tolerance, culture and liberal humanism. If he turned to liberal humanism and personal relationship in the social sphere, he turned to art for some order and meaning in this life. For him, "art for art's sake" is a profound phrase. According to him, it indicates that art is a self-contained harmony. Art is valuable not because it is educational (though it may be), not because it is recreative (though it may be), not because everyone enjoys it (for everybody does not)... it is valuable because it has to do with order, and creates little worlds of its own. Possessing internal harmony in the bosom of this disordered planet.

The art's kind of order, its wholeness, is the only order that Forster finds in this "disordered planet". In the social and political spheres he finds only chaos. Astronomy does not offer any order either. Only in the
"aesthetic category" can one hope to find some order, because a work of art possesses "internal harmony". A.C. Bradley's view that Poetry's nature is "to be a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous" has something in common with Forster's view of art's "autonomy". Mr. Alan Wild in his book Art and Order: A Study of E.M. Forster, argues that Forster finds in the harmony of art itself the best that man has done and may do in the face of the increasing disintegration of the world. The influence of G.E. Moore's Principia Ethica is discernible on Forster, and his view that a work of art possesses "autonomy". G.E. Moore, that in a work of art we should aim at "organic unity". Like Moore, he believes that the work of art should not be judged by any outside referrent. Moore is of the opinion that, it is 'autonomous'; and by this is meant (among other things) that there is no separate standard by which it can be judged.29

Roger Fry and Clive Bell, the prominent members of Bloomsbury, supported G.E. Moore's idea of art's autonomy. Their views on art influenced the other members of the group. Forster echoes Fry's views on art's autonomy when he says that "A work of art—whatever else it may be—is a self-contained entity, with a life of its own imposed on it by its creator. It has internal order".30
Since the work of art is 'a self-contained entity, with a life of its own', it remains unaffected by the passage of time, and is remembered and admired by the posterity. Macbeth, according to him is a world of its own besides being several other things and it "exists in virtue of its own poetry" and internal order. Much of the history of ancient Athens has been forgotten, but 'Antigone' is read and enjoyed. Similarly the portrait of Mona Lisa has transcended the boundaries of place and time as it possesses internal harmony. Roger Fry's views have affinity with Forster's. Fry observes,

... the purpose of literature is the creation of structures which have for us the feeling of reality, and these structures are self-contained, self-sufficient, and not to be valued by their references to what lies outside.31

Mr. Frank Kermode calls him a symbolist because Forster is concerned with the essential unity of art, which is "the one orderly product that our muddling race has produced".

If we wish to comprehend a work of art, we should, according to Forster, bring to bear love and imagination on our reading. Criticism alone can be of little assistance. He rejects reverence as it may blind as to the defects of the work of art. "Our comprehension of the fine arts", says he "is or should be of a nature of a mystic union" and adds. "But, as in mysticism, we enter an unusual state, and we can only enter it through love".32
Love can establish the best raison d'etre of criticism in the arts. Like Shelley, Forster considers imagination vital for creation and appreciation of a work of art. In his essays like "Anonymity", "Art for Art's sake", "The Duty of society to Artist", "The Raison D'etre of criticism in the Arts". Forster has written at some length about the creative state and the critical state, and the place of the artist in the society. In his opinion anonymity is the common quality of the artists while they are engaged in the act of creating a work of art. Similarly, the surface personality of the artist does not help us much to appreciate the work. He divides an artist's personality into two categories, surface and spiritual, and it is the latter kind of personality that produces a work of art. "It has something in common with all other deeper personalities, and the mystic will assert that the common quality is God".

Forster pleads for a sensitive criticism of the works of art and thinks that the critics quite often fail to see the significance of the work of art. According to him "A gulf between the critical and creative states exists in all cases", and perhaps for this reason critics "state of mind is the exact antithesis of that of the author whom they propose to interpret".

Forster didn't agree with Matthew Arnold about the instant power of art to soothe and calm us when confronted with injustice and afflicted by cruelty. A work of art has the soothing power only to those who possess the creative impulse. He agrees with Siegfried Sassoon when he calls the
works of art 'lamps for our gloom, hands guiding where we stumble'. He expects the society to be tolerant and generous towards artists because apart from entertaining people, they "extend human sensitiveness" through their art. He criticises Plato because Plato was critical of the poets and he wanted to banish them from his ideal community. He rejects governmental interference in the field of art because the censoring authorities damage the creative instincts of the people. About such official interference he writes that,

Officials, even when they are well-meaning, do not realise this. Their make-up is so different from the artist's. They assume that, when they censor a work, only the work in question is affected; they do not realise that they may have impaired the creative machinery of the mind.33

A great spokesman for art as he is, he is also aware that art is not everything, and it should not be seen and practised in a rigid and narrow sense. If artistic pattern dominates in a book, human life has to suffer, and Forster is not prepared to accept this. In the address to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, he made it clear that "Many things, besides art, matter". The complexity and richness of life is more important to Forster.

Man lives, and ought to live, in a complex world, full of conflicting claims, and if we simplified them down into the aesthetic he would be sterilised.34
Forster's prejudices are with H.G. Wells who was very critical of Henry James for following the narrow aesthetic path. "Wells would go on to say that life should be given the preference, and must not be whittled or distended for a pattern's sake".

In the end one might say that Forster's humanist who believes in personal relationship and private life, tolerance in the public affairs, and in art's autonomy.

E.M. Forster, it is evident, is quite clear about the hierarchy of values. The values of life have precedence over the values of art. Life, to him, is always larger than literature although he expresses an unequivocal faith in the autonomy of art. His fiction presents a clear image of art scrupulously and consciously created. It is, therefore, interesting to see his fiction having a balance between form and content, his thematic concern and human interest tilting the balance in favour of content against form at times. Any study of Forster's theory and practice, hence must inevitably reckon with thematic exploration as well as formal one. In fact, in any good work of art dichotomy between form and content must give way to organic unity. For an integrated approach to E.M. Forster, therefore, an
exclusive formal approach would be lopsided. We must view his works in all their totality in order that we examine con-
sonance between his theory and practice of the art of fiction. The fact that Aspects of the Novel came to be written almost at the fag end of his tenure of fiction-writing, one is apt to find greater degree of harmony between the critic and the artist in E.M. Forster. In a sense, the kind of conflict that we find in writers like Arnold or to an extent even T.S. Eliot, is almost non-existent here; and we see the artist and the critic, more often than not, going hand in hand, at peace with themselves and with the world they inhabit as well as the world they create.
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