INTRODUCTION

Forster’s inability to write novels after A Passage to India (1924) is an interesting phenomenon in the history of Modern English fiction. He voluntarily ceased to be an artist and became a spokesman for art. P.N. Furbank, using Freud’s terms, describes Forster’s inability to write novels as being “wrecked by success.” Attributing superstitious fears to Forster’s otherwise rational temperament, Furbank explains his situation as “experiencing irrational fears at the realization of very deep wishes.”¹ A Passage to India closes with the denial of human relationship in the face of hard irrevocable social realities.

‘Why can’t we be friends now?’ said the other, holding him affectionately.
‘It’s what I want. It’s what you want.’

But the horses didn’t want it—they swerved apart; the earth didn’t want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single-file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath; they didn’t want it, they said in their hundred voices, ‘No, not yet,’ and the sky said, ‘No, not there.’²

This seems to be the saturation point of Forster’s artistic vision and the liberal humanist when confronted with realities realizes that the glorious ideals he visualized as an artist have failed. In an interview with David Jones in 1959 Forster remarked: ‘I somehow dried up after Passage. I wanted to write but did

not want to write novels.\textsuperscript{3} He dared not experiment in fiction with the continuous failure of his ideals in the human sphere nor did he want to write novels with heterosexual love stories as themes. Social realities need stronger and more direct representation and articulation than the fictional medium permits and so the novelist becomes critic and cultural historian.

Forster’s silence after \textit{A Passage} is an interesting instance of unintended similarity to the modern theory’s notion of ‘will to unmaking’ and continuous denial, and it is symbolic. His awareness of the insufficiency of the novel form to express his vision of life made him take upon himself the role of a critic, that of a tough-minded, sensitive commentator on the modern condition. This situation of heroic unmaking is a consistent quality in both modernism and postmodernism\textsuperscript{4} and it is a strong argument for Forster’s relevance as a critic in the contemporary debate between modernism and postmodernism. The characteristic looping together of unmaking and heroic recreation in his career as a writer — unmaking so far as his art is concerned and heroic recreation in his non-fictional writing — makes him increasingly topical in the postmodern situation.

Forster’s artistic disability can be interestingly seen in terms of modern theory’s formulations about ‘silence’ the principle of which is to be found in the alienation from reason, society, nature and history alike, the repudiation and subversion of language, convention and artistic form, the exploration of ecstasy, trance and other extreme states of feeling, the turning of consciousness upon

\textsuperscript{3} Advani, Rukan, \textit{E.M. Forster as Critic}, (New Delhi, Select Book Syndicate, 1985) p. 3.

\textsuperscript{4} Steven Connor, pp. 109-110.
itself, as well as in the intense awareness of imminent apocalypse. But he continued using his creative force in a new way. Contemporary theorist Ihab Hasan speaks of the legendary Orpheus to describe the notion of unmaking and recreation. According to Greek legend Orpheus was married to Eurydice, a nymph who after being bitten by a poisonous snake died and was sent to the underworld. Orpheus followed her and charmed Pluto, ruler of the underworld with his lyre. Pluto allowed Eurydice to return to the upper world with Orpheus on condition that Orpheus was not to look back at her during the journey back to the upper world. But he yielded to the impulse and looked back, and his beloved Eurydice vanished for ever to the underworld. Grief-stricken he wandered everywhere and fell in with a band of maenads, female worshippers of Bacchus. Later they tore him to pieces when he refused to join in their orgies. But his severed head went on singing with the severed hands playing on his lyre. An interesting analogy can be made between Forster and Orpheus. Forster, the modern Orpheus, in spite of his unmaking as an artist, continues to be creative as though he is singing in the affirmation of a new creative force. This new creative force - his criticism - the unity of which can be systematically traced in his essays, reviews and broadcasts reflects, like his novels, the central conflict between fact and feeling, between the world of matter and the sphere of the heart. This is in direct consonance with the clash and conflict between the Benthamite and the Coleridgean cultures which caught the educated imagination of the nineteenth century England. These two philosophic positions relate to the

earlier dialectic between Plato and Aristotle. In the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham advanced utilitarianism as the only basis for reform. He claimed that one could scientifically ascertain what was morally justifiable by applying the principle of utility. Actions were morally right if they tended to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Happiness was equivalent to pleasure. Through a kind of moral-mathematical calculation of pleasures and pains, one could tell what was a right or a wrong action. If all pleasures and pains were of the same order, then a utilitarian evaluation of moral, social, political, and legal activities would be possible. Also, Bentham argued, if values were based on pleasures and pains, then theories of natural rights and natural law were invalid. Bentham was the leader of the radical group of thinkers which included James Mill and John Stuart Mill and other Utilitarians. Diametrically opposed to this position was the Romantic-idealist position which was termed by Wilfred Stone as the Coleridgean Culture. This was championed by Jean Jacques Rousseau, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the other romantics all over Europe, and was characterized by a more or less exclusive reliance on the imagination and subjectivity of approach, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealization of nature.

Rousseau flagged off this movement by his slogan: "I felt before I thought", and thus established the cult of the individual and championed the freedom of the human spirit. This was meant to counter the grossly selfish and materialistic

Benthamite slogan: “Every man is nearer to himself than he is to every other man.” Forster was an implicit Coleridgean who earnestly undertook the task of restoring the nymphs who had departed from the human scene in the midst of the industrial milieu, the “dark Satanic Mill” of William Blake. He feared man’s alienation from the “springs of imagination”, the power-house which provides a milieu with its cultural symbols and sources of inspiration.

Both in his art and criticism, Forster felt the need to join poetry and prose for the sake of a mature and more integrated approach to life’s many problems. Margaret Schlegel in *Howards End* articulates this Forsterian obsession with completeness: “Only connect the prose and the passion and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer.” This illuminates the dialectic of Forster’s life and art which essentially is a conflict between a mechanical and an organic view of life. An ardent anti-Benthamite both in his art and criticism, Forster pleads for a wholeness of vision which can be achieved only by joining poetry and materiality, emotion and intellect, and feeling and reason. His novels, especially *Howards End* and *A Passage to India* are experiments in ‘connection’ with a view to convey the sense of wholeness which was essential to his artistic vision.

Forster’s predicament both as novelist and critic reflects the contemporary crisis which centered around the question how to make sense of the world in the

changed situation of flux and impermanence. This was a crisis of relationship between knowledge and experience, between past and present, between fixity and transience. Forster inherited the legacy of Victorian tradition and values which formed a sort of totality and fixity as a standard of literature and life. But in the modern context of flux and change these standards set by tradition had to be reviewed. Old standards hold good no more in the context of what Virginia Woolf said about the change of human character in or around 1910. Hence the main argument of this study is that Forster is our liberal humanist contemporary and to know him as a contemporary involves a kind of conceptual readjustment and some critical re-orientation. Roughly Forster can be described as a traditionalist Modern. He himself declared that he belonged to ‘the fag end of Victorian liberalism’. Being firmly rooted in a Cambridge begotten liberal academic tradition Forster the thinker and seer was ever open to new ideas and new experiments in the realm of art. He was not temperamentally antithetical to modern and modernist trends. He was intensely sensitive to the problems in the world and was hyper conscious about the duties of the artist towards society. His involvement in socio-political issues reflects the characteristically modernist trend of narrowing the boundaries between high culture which had traditionally become the preserve of universities and mass culture. It also reflects the postmodernist trend of involving the academic-humanities as the most representative forms of contemporary culture. So it can be rightly argued that Forster’s critical writings indirectly bring about the expansion of culture by their queer mixture of academic high culture with popular issues in the world. His criticism thus elevates cultural
documentation to a higher level by involving the literary attitude in its representation. This has a transforming impact on mundane matters. The broad spectrum nature of Forster's critical writings yields the vision of a cultural 'heterotopia', which has no edges, hierarchies or centre, and which is similar to the concept framed by Postmodern theory. This theory while being authoritative favours a disavowal of authority. It contradicts it everywhere, in a pervading inclusiveness. This theory in its critical discourse reflects a tendency to push language beyond itself. It is this very spirit of inclusiveness which makes Forster's critical formulations tellingly contemporary. Forster greatly valued Einstein's theory of relativity and underscored its crucial relevance to modern life. Nazism and Fascism repulsed him and so did totalitarianism and absolutism in the field of art. He greatly valued democracy in the political sphere and cherished democratic principles in the realm of letters. Hence his role and attitude as a literary critic was characterized by a broad and liberal tolerance which in his scheme of things evolved into a sort of imaginative sympathy.

Forster always found himself in the centre of some conflicts the most crucial of which can be theoretically termed as the conflict between experience and knowledge. He intensely experienced the realities of life and found them in conflict with the given forms and structures of knowledge, philosophy, ethics, religion. The difficulty of experiencing life and at the same time understanding it was one of his central problems. This is the reason why Forster has no system to

advance, no comprehensive theory to offer, no movements to pioneer, no single
gospel to propagate. This difficulty also defines and distinguishes what is
normally called modernism and Forster was in the centre of this modernist
dilemma of self-conflict. He was intensely aware of such conflict. Strong
symptoms of this brand of modernism in the realm of letters can be found in
Baudelaire who called for an art which would register the passing moment
without doing violence to its fleeting transience. Walter Pater who urged us to
snatch moments of intensity from flux, Henri Bergson who convinced a
generation of a need for representations which would not falsely spatialize the
purely temporal flow of consciousness, and Virginia Woolf who sought an art
which would record the intensity of inner experience on its own terms, are similar
instances of such literary modernism. Forster too can be clubbed with these
artists in so far as he argued for establishing the condition of music in fiction so
that instead of closing and rounding off it expands and opens out.

Modernism is characterized by the attempt at “discovery or rediscovery of
those real intensities of experience which had for so long been concealed or
distorted by false structures of understanding.” It must, therefore be grasped “not
just in terms of the way it experienced itself, but also in terms of its own modes of
self-understanding – the ways it thought it was experiencing itself.” Forster was
an avid discoverer and observer of experiences. His self-consciousness invaded
his experience and the result was his critical formulations which were

9. Steven Connor, Postmodernist Culture An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary
characteristically avant-garde. His was a sensibility - liberal humanistic - characterized by a sense of the urgent, painful gap between experience and consciousness and the desire to replenish rational consciousness with the intensities of experience. His criticism arises from the split between experience and self-understanding and is an imaginative attempt at coming to terms with this characteristically modernist predicament of fragmentation which reflects our contemporary culture. Postmodern theory also celebrates contemporary culture and advances the claims for the existence of a widely diverse social and cultural phenomenon within and across a number of different cultural areas and academic disciplines, in philosophy, architecture, film studies and literary art. Similarly Forster’s treatment of literary and non-literary subjects in his criticism reflects this variety and his persistent refusal to be isolated along with his natural propensity to be involved in the affairs of the world links him to this postmodern trend which offers “an adequate representation of the objects and practices of contemporary culture.” Contemporary writing and culture formed the object of analysis for postmodern forms of theoretical criticism and postmodernist works were represented, and came to represent themselves, as self-conscious, quasi-critical activities. So is most of Forster’s non-fictional writing - they celebrate a curious kind of easy-going, agnostic, pragmatism and they can be described in modern theory’s parlance as ‘metafictional musing’ and ‘cultural documentation.’

10. Ibid. pp. 6-7.
Forster's critical formulations reflect a mid-way between pure academic criticism and populism. His sympathies were decidedly with the common man and with the lot of the poor working classes. He was an ardent supporter of democracy, but he fervently believed that the ultimate well being of society depended on a small aristocracy. Thus his attitude to the world order was an eclectic mixture of aristocratic inclination and working class sympathies. This attitude strongly resembles postmodern theory's emphasis on the changing relationships between cultural and academic-critical activity, and on self-reflection which brings about a healthy fusion between contemporary culture which it describes and its critical theorizing. "Postmodernism finds its object neither wholly in the cultural sphere, nor wholly in the critical-institutional sphere, but in some tensely renegotiated space between the two." Forster the critic can be said to operate from this space. His critical formulations are distant from the uncompromisingly universal horizons of modernism, "the purblind logocentric past, expressive as it is of a totalitarian will to absolute power." They resonate with an attitude of amused agnostic pragmatism. His mission of connecting the prose with passion, life with poetry, reason with imagination chimes in with the postmodern tendency to understand the complex relationships of an essentially pluralist reality.

This survey with all its obvious constraints will look into the different aspects of Forster's criticism in order to establish its contemporary relevance. Forster's

11. Ibid. p. 7.
12. Ibid. p. 112.
understanding of and his relevance to the modernist predicament can be meaningfully linked to the postmodern situation. This is strongly in evidence so far as the notion of 'critical discourse' is concerned. This argument becomes more and more convincing as we examine, in the different chapters of this thesis, the influences on Forster, his worldview, his theory of art, his literary criticism, his aesthetics of the Novel, his views on Novels and Novelists.