1. **Family: Coddled among the 'old cats of women':**

Forster's father's family as well as his mother's family was dominated by colourful women, and their menfolk had a more or less steady reputation of being either largely ineffective or quite out of the scene.\(^1\) His paternal great-aunt, Mary Thornton had a great influence on his career and he very dearly loved her memory.\(^2\) He never saw his maternal grandfather, Henry Mayle Whichelo, who died when his mother was twelve. But he knew him to be, by reports, "unselfish, considerate, sensitive, handsome, cheerful, and alive to scenic and architectural beauty."\(^3\) His wife, Louisa Whichelo, Forster's grandmother, who survived her husband for more than forty years, was a favourite with Forster. Though she was "a terrible snob", she was sensible, breezy, witty and had a great zest for life. She brought up a family of ten children which was famed to be "a good-looking family, with vivid, clear-cut, Italianate features". The Whichelos were out-of-the-ordinary with "no enthusiasm for work, ... were devoid of public spirit, ... were averse to piety, .... But there were good looks about them and good taste and good spirits."\(^4\) Alice Clara (Lily), Forster's mother was the third child and the eldest girl of the Whichelos. Self-reliant and intelligent, she was the ‘solidest’ of

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1. It is interesting to note that most of Forster's male ancestors, including his father, were outlived by their womenfolk.
2. The last published work of Forster was her Biography, *Marianne Thornton: 1797 - 1887* (London, Edward Arnold, 1956)
the lot and naturally assumed the responsibility of mothering her brothers and sisters. By a stroke of good fortune, Lily acquired a rich benefactress in Marianne Thornton who took charge of her future.5

Mingling with the Thornton relations, first as a poor relative and then on a more equal terms, Lily, with her charms, liveliness, good looks and sense of humour, met and married Edward Forster, one of Marianne Thornton’s nephews. He was a practicing architect, good-looking, impractical, impatient and had a pleasant sense of sarcasm. They led a short married life under the constant and needling patronage of Marianne Thornton (Monie). Their first child died at birth and on 1 January 1879 Forster was born. He was registered as ‘Henry Morgan Forster’ to the great pleasure of Monie, who wished the little infant would be a “burning shining light”, an “olive branch, or rather a bud”, the “hopes and fears of future years ... to connect me - a decrepit old root - with a fresh generation.” 6

Monie’s enthusiasm for the child was shared by Maimie, the widow of Inglis Synnot and a childless hanger-on of the Thornton circle who gave Lily the love and support she needed after the death of Forster’s father in 1880. So the infant Forster was the lifeline of two shipwrecked women (Lily & Maimie) a situation which gave him a halo of extraordinary importance and coloured his own sense

4. Ibid. The Whichelos prided themselves to be the successors of the famed ‘Richelieu’ family.
5. This happened through the good offices of Dr. Tayloe who was the family doctor of both Marianne Thornton and the Whichelos, and who introduced Lily to the Thornton matriarchs.
6. Furbank, P 9. Two months later at Forster’s baptism, his father absent-mindedly told the verger that the name was ‘Edward Morgan’, and so to the horror of all the ladies, the infant Forster was christened ‘Edward’ though he was registered ‘Henry.’
of himself during his childhood.\textsuperscript{7} Added to this was Monie’s extravagant concern for the ‘Important One’ whose dispositions and temperament were diagnosed by her with prescience. She observed his “intense enjoyment of this world and all it contains and his proportionate misery when anything is withheld from him. He seems to have the attachment of grown up people for each other, for inanimate objects, ...\textsuperscript{8} Forster the infant was a demonstrative child, prone to violent passions of love or fury.\textsuperscript{9} Monie feared he would grow an idolater and observed that for him “any pleasure I am sure is double what it is to other people.”\textsuperscript{10} When they moved in to ‘Rooksnet’, their new house in 1883, Forster grew to love the house and eternally its significance in his novel, Howard’s End and he wrote later: “The house is my childhood and safety. The three attics preserve me.”\textsuperscript{11} Certified ‘delicate’ by the family full of women who mollycoddled him completely, the young Forster, who was never allowed out even in the slightest rain, and always heavily muffled up in woolen clothes, imbued the anxiety himself and thought himself as extremely frail and likely to develop consumption. But late in life he realised that he had an excellent constitution. Tormented by the aggressive attentions of admiring females around him, he became extremely precocious. He was evidently fond of things which promote happiness. He loved and cherished the happy boys in \textit{Swiss Family Robinson}, and prefers it to \textit{Robinson Crusoe} because Crusoe was always in fear of the cannibals. He was

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid. P. 11.  
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid. P. 15.  
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid. P. 14.  
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid. P. 15.  
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid. P. 16.
afraid of Monie’s influence over him and remarked: “I realised without being told, … that I was in the power of a failing old woman …” His experience with male cousins and friends was less happy for he always got into trouble because of his acquired sense of being ‘The Important One.’ Though Lily would be cross with him for being a cry-baby, Monie, old-fashioned (Georgian?) in her idea of manliness, was indulgent towards his molly-coddle characteristics. But her legacy of 8000 Pounds to Forster “represented his financial salvation, enabling him to travel and to write.” Lily, whose legacy was 2000 pounds considered it as a “stumbling block” because she had to “pay, pay, pay”, and was extravagant in generosity to her relations which Forster was later to learn from her.\(^\text{12}\) Of his three Whichelo aunts, Georgiana Louisa Whichelo(1856-1917), Mary Eleanor Whichelo and Rosalie Whichelo, Forster’s favourite was Rosie, who was a simple, affectionate woman with a queer abrupt way of speaking, chronically tactless and perpetually relating something, choking with laughter. She always called him ‘Margie’. Of his four Whichelo uncles, Horace, John, Phil and Harry, Forster loved and hero-worshipped Harry who told him stories about “explorers and bucking broncos.” Forster and his grandmother, Louisa Whichelo, adored each other. She was a shrewd, downright and joyful creature, “someone who knew how to live”, and she “formed an alliance with him against all old cats of women” in a fatherless, husbandless and brotherless household. Forster often sought refuge in the company of the garden-boys and played with them. He grew

\(^{12}\) Ibid. Pp. 23 - 25.
to like Ansell, 'a snub-nosed, pallid, even-tempered youth', and Forster clung to this idyllic, happy friendship.\textsuperscript{13}

2. **School: Of gangsters and bullies.**

Brought up as a VIP at home, the first experience of Forster at his first school, Kent House, was "what it was to be unpopular." Snubbed and cold-shouldered, jeered and nick-named, Forster worked hard at friendships and "did everything he could think of to win acceptance."\textsuperscript{14} In his first published letter to his Aunt Laura from Kent House Forster expresses his discomfort at his privacy being invaded by his school mates and writes: "I cant write very well as boys are looking over the letter while I write. They have stopped now, so I can write in comfort."\textsuperscript{15} There is a vague reference, in another letter, to his being bullied during his visit to the baths.\textsuperscript{16} He also complains about one Mr. W.S. Hatch, one of the masters, who "tried to be funny, pinching me under the bedclothes, and he gave me my book and dropped it to be funny on me and the corners went on my arm. It did hurt but is all right now."\textsuperscript{17} Pathos becomes uncontrollable at unguarded moments of honesty, and this is visibly evident when he writes:

... I feel so very nervous somehow, ... perhaps it is excitement, but lately I have always been taking the dark side of things.... It is very much

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. Pp. 23 - 25.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. P. 34.
\textsuperscript{16} Letter to Alice Clara Forster, (late Sept. 1890) Ibid. P. 6. "... then they made me dip my head, which I did not like...."
\textsuperscript{17} Letter to Alice Clara Forster, (Before 26 Nov. 1890) Ibid P. 10.
like despondency. The worst of school is that you have nothing and nobody to love....”

Inspite of the raw deal and the chronic lovelessness that he encountered at Kent House, he topped his Christmas exams in 1892 and left school later, to be sent as a weekly boarder to one Mr. Seager's local school, 'The Grange'. He was very violently bullied and his stay there was brief and disastrous. His mother withdrew him from this school, and later sent him as a day boy to Tonbridge School. There he spent the most unhappy time of his life wounded by the general atmosphere of unkindness and the horror of gangs who persistently bullied him.

He could only recover his balance by "mentally resolving the gang back into individuals." Having chosen the classic side, he was captivated by his classics master, Isaac Smedley, a militant agnostic, who insisted that the classics were enjoyable literature like the English literature. He made Forster realize that Plato and Virgil were men who lived and wrote for living men. But the school made him "muted and subfuse, timid and buttoned-up in manner". He became a "sharp-eyed observer, with an adult sureness in judging character." His demureness which seemed natural was only an alibi he used to cover himself from the world.

He was excitable and skittery, almost an imbecile at home. He was tormented by a secret but uncontrollable longing to be noticed and loved, and to this end he was ready to abandon all sense of shame. His mother intuitively realised this, rejected proposals of marriage and made him more and more the centre of her

life. It was Aunt Laura who provided the County element in Forster's early experience. She outlived most of her brothers and sisters and settled down to a busy County existence in her house, West Hackhurst, around which she wove all sorts of sentimental tradition. Forster loved and respected her, though he was aware of her weaknesses. He could never stand up to her in her house. He felt moused by her presence and could not get over the sense of being 'an eternal nephew' even after he inherited the house. At Tonbridge he made his presence felt by exhibiting his possession of a wider range of ideas than most other boys, acquired a little coterie, enjoyed the reputation as a talker, had some academic success, won prizes for a Latin poem and for an English essay, and largely had 'made good'. But he always felt a grievance against his schooldays and he could not quite get rid of this notion.

3. **Cambridge**.

In October 1897, Forster joined King's College, Cambridge. He chose Classics and studied under John Edwin Nixon and Nathaniel Wedd and became very friendly with the latter who advised Forster to consider writing as a career. Cambridge mesmerized Forster and transformed him. He gladly and confidently imbibed the spirit of Cambridge and "... fell in love with Cambridge .... He 'found himself' there, ... and his Cambridge acquaintance widened, and cushioned, his existence ever afterwards." He discovered that "it was the place where things

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were valued for what they were in themselves, not for what use you could make of them." The epigraph to G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*, 'Everything is what it is, and not another thing', inspired and propelled his own idea of Cambridge 'truth', though Moore's influence on Forster is grossly exaggerated by many critics.23 Along with the Cambridge truth he also acquired Cambridge prejudice that Britain is ruled and run by scholars and bureaucrats, and not by business men. He had come up to Cambridge 'immature, uninteresting, and unphilosophic, but earnestly disposed', but soon warmed up to the general atmosphere at King's College, which was a forward-looking, reform-supporting, cozy and intellectually not very strenuous institution. One of its usually eccentric dons, M.R.James, who encouraged good conversation, was reported to have exhorted the undergraduates during a discussion of a philosophic problem with: 'No thinking, gentlemen, please!24 The "energetic, preposterously snobbish, most ignorant, ... most far-seeing, don", Oscar Browning became very fond of Forster and he was often waylaid by Browning with hospitality and conversation. The one-handed and one-eyed J.E.Nixon, fond of saying, "I threw up my hands in amazement," and who "moved about in a fury of self-generated activity", greatly and fondly inspired Forster. Nathaniel Wedd who was a "small, thick-set and ferrety, ... warm-hearted, pugnacious, hypochondriacal character, militantly egalitarian, and with a passion for bad language"; greatly and profoundly influenced Forster who

23. Furbank, p. 49. Furbank writes that Forster never read Moore.
owed his own awakening to him,\textsuperscript{25} like Immanuel Kant who was awakened from his “dogmatic slumber” by David Hume. Forster attended Lord Acton’s lectures on the French Revolution, Prof. Waldstein’s on Flemish painting, and Roger Fry’s on the Venetian painters. These were lasting influences on his life and art. During his second year at the King’s where he had his rooms, he was in a sanguine mood and began to enjoy the ambience of the place, making the best of the people he came across. He found it easier to make friends and “was on chatting terms with half King’s.”\textsuperscript{26} But he shied away from any exclusive coterie or ‘set’, whether aesthetic or otherwise, thinking that these created unnecessary animosities. He visualised only two sets in King’s, the exclusive and the excluded. He belonged to the latter by inclination because they were unconventional in their dress and behaviour and they disliked champagne breakfast and race-meetings. Forster believed that any form of exclusiveness in social behaviour would naturally lead to an undesirable and dangerous aesthetic attitude in art. This belief was largely due to the influence of Wedd who was a virulent anti-cleric and ‘set’ critic. Wedd blasted the idea popularized by the “stuffy hot house parasites”; that art was only for the few, and he found it a gross aberration of decency and morality to despise the rest of mankind for not being included in this elitist few. The photos of Italian paintings and architecture which Forster found in Wedd’s room and their discussions about Italy influenced Forster to visit Italy later. He also drew close to the orbit of Goldsworthy Lowes

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. Pp. 53-55. \\
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid. P. 57.
\end{flushright}
Dickinson, a man of great zeal and good-will, an exponent of liberal virtues of reason, decency and a Cambridge brand of Hellenism. His circle was an ‘advanced’ one and had a “fondness for blasphemous or slightly *louche* jokes.” Forster soon became a member of Dickinson’s Discussion Society, and progressed towards a very productive friendship with him.27

Forster’s friendship with fellow-undergraduate, H.O.Meredith, was a very significant one. For Meredith Cambridge was a revelation and he decided that for him good life was there and there only. He was restless, high-spirited, intellectually impressive and quiet-voiced, an intellectual romantic with some new key to the problems of the universe. He sincerely believed that the rest of humanity were “fated to misery and banality; ... were the foredoomed victims of priestcraft and plutocracy.”28 Meredith was largely, if not singly, responsible for demolishing Forster’s ‘Christian beliefs which were not very deep. Catching the virus of Cambridge scepticism which infected the higher intellectual circles, Forster began to think for himself about religion and galvanised by Meredith’s atheistic ministrations, gladly abandoned his Christian faith. “He disliked the personality of Christ” who “was lacking in humour”, and who “surrounded himself with disciples;”, and who “seemed to welcome pain;” His mother considered it as repetition of history because his father too mislaid his faith and then retrieved it after some time, and she allowed his absence at family prayers.29 Meredith

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27. Ibid. Pp. 58 - 60.
introduced Forster to his own circle of friends, all doctrinaire agnostics and fervent Moor-ites. George Barger, the half-Dutch, unsentimental science student, and A.R.Ainsworth, a voluble, untidy, disputatious classics scholar and philosopher. Forster was very defensive of Meredith whose arrogance was much noticed and resented at the King's and somehow he was in sympathy with Meredith's "knowledge that he is immeasurably superior to it (the world) and that it is (in a way) unworthy of his notice ..." He completed his second year at Cambridge, much friended and full of new possibilities for the future. He competed and won half-share of the College Prize on an English essay on "The Novelists of the 18th century and their influence on those of the 19th." He was all triumph when he wrote to his mother about it:

There now! After all I have got an English Essay prize- .... There were, you know, three subjects - Montesquieu, The Future of Africa and the Novelists. The two best essays were on Montesquieu, ... so gave a prize to one on Montesquieu, and recommended the other to an extra prize .... but when they decided to whom to give the other half of the real prize, they had to choose between me and the Africa man ....

Forster, in his third year at Cambridge, was "just right." He felt himself in his elements and experienced a new expansive power within his soul. He revelled in "the idyllic, sociable, intelligently idle undergraduate existence" which, according to him, was "something only Cambridge could provide." Thus wheeling about

32. Furbank, P.69
blissful and busy, Forster met G.M. Trevelyan at a paper session at Dickinson's Political Society. Invited to lunch by Trevelyan, a vociferous champion of new Liberalism, Forster got himself introduced to Lytton Strachey whose voice and his earnest masculine talk abashed him. On many occasions he played host to his visiting mother and aunts at Cambridge, and sentimentally cherished these visits. He wondered at the extraordinary way in which time stood still on such family visits. In a little article titled ‘A Long Day’, he wrote:

Of all days a long day is the longest, ... a day that is when friends or relatives arrive by the first train in the morning and stop till the last train at night ... A long day does not bow to the rules of nature. The sun stays in his path, neither does the evening come.

Forster got an upper second class in his classics tripus, and he along with Meredith decided to stay on for a fourth year to read history. Oscar Browning's insisted that Forster worked under him. He had also earned a certain reputation in Cambridge through his little articles. He also began working on a novel which remained without a title. Forster's comment on this maiden attempt was:

This wasn't writing .... The apparatus was working, not inaccurately, but feebly and dreamily, because I wasn't sure it was there.

34. Ibid. P. 72. This article appeared in the first number of Basileona, a King's College magazine launched in 1900.
35. Ibid Pp. 72 - 73. The Cambridge had selected 'A Tragic Interior' as the best burlesque of the Greek play.
36. Ibid P. 72.
In his fourth year at Cambridge he was elected to the ‘Apostles’, the exclusive intellectual coterie which was originally and officially called ‘The Cambridge Conversazione Society’. Founded in 1820 by Henry Tomlinson, the purpose of this society was ‘the pursuit of truth with absolute devotion and unreserve by a group of intimate friends.’ According to the tenet of this society, worldly success counted for nothing and ‘reality’ existed solely within the society and the rest of the universe was merely ‘phenomena’ living in the ‘world of appearances.’ It was influenced by G.E. Moore who became a self-styled prophet with a mission to liberate philosophy from two thousand years of mystification. His theory of ethics that the only things of intrinsic value were good states of the mind, the most important of which were ‘the pleasures of human intercourse’ and ‘the enjoyment of beautiful objects’ was becoming very popular. The prominent members of the society at Forster’s time, Ralph Hawtrey, A.R. Ainsworth, G.H. Hardy, Lytton Strachey, Maynard Keynes and H.O. Meredith were all under the strong influence of Moore. But he was not a Moor-ite and believed himself incapable of abstract thought. The society maintained critical scepticism of all institutions with their rituals, but it was itself an institution with its own rituals. Forster loved the society and all the friendship part of it and its mixture of intimacy, honesty and uncompromising intellectuality, but he was weary of its exclusiveness. He also enjoyed the ‘experience of deep male friendships which complemented the

37. Ibid. P. 75 - 77.
38. Undergraduate members were called ‘Active Brethren’, and senior members were called ‘Angels’, early defectors were subjected to a formal ‘curse.’ Gillie, Christopher, A Preface to Forster (Longman, 1986) P. 21.
female overbalance of his childhood. 39 Irremediably unaverage, turned from a volatile, beautiful, eloquent child into an awkward, diffident, repressed adolescent by his school education, Forster was helped by Cambridge to go forward and overcome such a disjunction in himself. He developed "a skeptical but caring disinterestedness towards all systems of value, especially towards any systems which projected themselves as absolute and final." 40 In his biography of Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, he nostalgically reminisces the benign influences he experienced at the King's:

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. 41

He celebrated this fusion through the freedom of friendships for which the 'Apostle' connection offered great opportunities. Forster lavishly basked under the typically King's College attitude of tolerant acceptance and positive appreciation of all individuals and spoke of any violation of this attitude always with evident grief. 42 Cambridge, King's, the Apostles opened to Forster new vistas of human relationship and they naturally drew him into 'Bloomsbury.'

39 Ibid. P. 22.
40 Ibid. P. 20.
41 Ibid.
42
Forster, it may be rightly pointed out, never truly left Cambridge. His personal relations formed there were never interrupted and they "continued in his London milieu, known in cultural history as 'the Bloomsbury Group'." Though he was troubled by the exclusiveness of the Bloomsbury Group, he cherished and enjoyed the honesty and the relationship which the group emphasised most. This was a climate of cultural opinion which had weightage and prestige in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and though he was in the list of the original members, it was among the fringe that Forster was usually included. This group was of a more amorphous nature than the Cambridge 'Apostles', though it predominantly reflected the Spirit of the 'Apostles'. Michael Holroyd has disentangled the origins of Bloomsbury from its retrospective reputation and traces its source to the group of friends surrounding Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf and Thoby Stephen and who considered "... any girl (who was not also a sister) might, ... have been a species of creature belonging to some other planet". With the inclusion of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell, whom Clive Bell describes as "the heart" of Bloomsbury, and who were its natural custodians, the male exclusiveness of Bloomsbury was disbalanced. The house at 46 Gordon Square, in which they settled down with their two brothers, Thoby and

42. Ibid. P 22. This is diametrically opposed to the Trinity College attitude that unreality of most individuals make significant relationship with them impossible. These two attitudes were first distinguished by John Tresidder Sheppard in a paper presented to the 'Apostles'.
43. Ibid. P. 25.
45. Ibid.
Adrian, which Strachey called ‘the Gothic mansion’, (the two sisters referred to as ‘Visigoths’) became the centre of the group. Taboos in discussion were removed, equal freedom was proclaimed and emancipation rang in the air of the Bloomsbury climate. Piqued at the philistinism of the English society which subjected its values to the dictates of the commercially rich, Bloomsbury stood for independence of mind and culture, for the liberation of the critical faculties, for ‘civilization’, and arrogantly made a willful attempt to sustain itself in a world of massive antagonistic forces. It advocated refinements and intellectual and witty conversation. Holding out an invitation to congenial friendship and conversation, it was also marked by a “gaucherie” of a Woolfian variety which was “tempered into what was later to be recognized as the Bloomsbury manner.” This group met on Thursday evenings at Fitzroy Square (where Virginia and Adrian moved from Gordon Square after Vanessa married Clive Bell), and these meetings became a tolerable substitute for the delights of Trinity and King’s. It was more or less a talk-shop. “Talking, talking, talking, ... as if everything could be talked - the soul itself slipped through the lips in thin silver discs which dissolve in young men’s mind like silver, like moonlight”, was the comment of Virginia Woolf. There was a strange conviviality and kindred spirit among the friends, which was further augmented by the usual diet of whisky, buns and cocoa, and talk. This “Cambridge garrison of Bloomsbury, a civilized fortress”, had at first an air of austere scholasticism which marked their “Cambridge dialectics”, and which was

46. Ibid. P. 18
47. Ibid. P. 30
48. Ibid. P. 32
later lightened by the infiltration of feminine society. It functioned in isolation amid
the hostile population of London but quite "immune from the vulgar assaults of
ignorant masses." Its spirit was founded on a "superfine mixture of arrogance
and diffidence, of ambitious talent and crippling shyness."

The 'Bloomsberries', as this group was derisively called by suspicious
contemporaries, were the denizens of "a semi-precious, brittle form of mock-
Hellenic culture, encased in a Gallic frame", and Virginia Woolf was termed as
'the Queen of Bloomsbury'. This group shared "an identical system of aesthetics,
the same philosophy and values, all of which stem from Principia Ethica and that
unsuspecting G.E.Moore." Leonard Woolf pointed out that most of the members
specially MacCarthy, Lytton, Saxon Sydney Turner, Forster, Keynes and himself
"had been permanently inoculated with Moore and Moorism." Disliked by
contemporary writers for their "socially secure antecedents and inherited financial
independence, the Bloomsberries were said to represent "a new exclusive
movement, an avant-garde fashion of superior, voluntary ostracism from life." This "queer tribal faction", in which "all the couples were triangles and lived in
squares", envisaged the greatest freedom about sexual generalities. But in the
eyes of Forster, it "would have shrunk from the empirical freedom which results
from a little beer." Frank Swinnerton says that the Bloomsbury voice, its free
speech, which was modelled on the "infectious Strachey falsetto", had the

49. Ibid. P. 33
50. Ibid. P. 37
51. Ibid. P. 40.
dangling “charms of lasciviousness, the filth of Petronius, the romance of the Arabian Nights”. Love was rumoured to be uninhibited and free, and E.W.Fordham despairingly wrote in the *New Statesman* about Bloomsbury atmosphere: “Here verse and thought and love are free; / Great God! Give me captivity.” Osbert Sitwell criticizes the “meaningless syncopation” which passed off as Bloomsbury means of communication. Its unhealthy and almost incestuous mutual patronage and self-admiration was ridiculed by Roy Campbell thus:

Of all the clever people round me here
I most delight in me -
Mine is the only voice I hear,
And mine is the only face I see.  

Bloomsbury extended its aegis to the propagation of Literature with the setting up of the Hogarth Press by Leonard and Virginia Woolf. This press was a progressive force in contemporary literature. Stephen Spender calls it a “tendency ... to be agnostic, responsive to French impressionistic and post-impressionistic painting ... with slight leanings towards socialism ... the last kick of an enlightened aristocratic tradition.” Feeling guilty about their inborn and untouchable snobbery, the ‘Bloomsberries’ tended to be very tolerant and flirted with left-wing politics. Bloomsbury attracted various degrees of hostility from

52. Ibid. P. 39
53. Ibid. P. 40
54. Ibid. P. 42.
55. Ibid. P. 45.
various literary personalities like Wyndham Lewis, L.H.Meyers, F.R.Leavis and D.H.Lawrence. Wyndham Lewis wrote: "I met Forster ... the 'Bloomsbury novelist.' A quiet little chap of whom no one could be jealous, so he hit it off with the 'Bloomsburries,' and was appointed male opposite number to Virginia Woolf(sic). Since then he has written nothing. But the less you write, in a ticklish position of that sort, the better." He describes the whole group as "a select and snobbish club comprising a disarray of catty, envious and shabby potentates.... Making a cultural stronghold of the Victorian hinterland where they resided, ... these freakish monsters ... had managed to set up a societification of art, substituting money for talent as the qualification for membership", and thus they presented "a curious spectacle of a group of financially secure men and women, 'drifting and moping about in the untidiest fashion'... In a witty statement Times Literary Supplement (17 June 1949) commented thus on Bloomsbury:

... the Bloomsbury world is like the memory of a legendary great-aunt; a clever, witty, rather scandalous great-aunt, who was a brilliant pianist, scholar and needlewoman, who could read six languages and make sauces, who collected epigrams and china and daringly turned her back on charity and good works. ... Religion was covered by a belief in the importance of human relationships, and the belief seems reasonable enough, though one gets the impression that the milk of human kindness was kept in the larder and that the tea was usually served with lemon."

57. Holroyd. P. 40.
Forster, though he believed in the 'elect', did not consider Bloomsbury as the sole source of the 'elects'. He was influenced more by his relationship with some of its members rather than the circle itself. He was inspired by Roger Fry who, according to him, set up a standard for cultured liberalism. He greatly admired Leonard Woolf but was reserved with Virginia Woolf though he shared a professional bond with her. He expressed his initial feeling for Bloomsbury in a letter to W.J.H. Sprott in 1931:

Oh the Bells, the Woolves—or rather Virginia, for I do like Leonard! Oh how do I agree, and if to become anti-Bloomsbury were not to become Bloomsbury, how I would become it! (Selected Letters 2, p. 105)

He found Lytton Strachey enlivening though disconcerting at times, and like Risley in Maurice, Strachey was 'at play, but seriously'. Forster remained friends with Maynard Keynes at a distance. Upholding and extending Cambridge values, Bloomsbury always remained alive for Forster as a formative and formidable influence. Though he disclaimed any influence of G.E.Moore, this "realistic philosopher was of the greatest importance to him as a young man." Moore and Plotinus evidently had a hold on Forster's fictional imagination, and this is clearly seen in the "juxtaposition of the irrefragably concrete and the intensively ineffable in A Passage to India." A group of twentieth century intellectuals who were friends and adopted common views on many subjects, as

59. Maurice. Ch 5. P.
Bloomsbury can be roughly described, was marked by the exclusion of Forster because he led some of his life at a physical remove from theirs. But Forster as a distant disciple of Moore, was "by Gestalt if not by biographical fact certainly in and of Bloomsbury."\(^61\) McDowell criticizes the exclusion of Forster from the Bloomsbury Group by Leon Edel in his book, *Bloomsbury : A House of Lions*, and bravely describes Forster's *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End* as "quintessentially Bloomsbury documents".\(^62\) In his book, *Bloomsbury Aesthetics and the Novels of Forster and Woolf*, David Dowling, treats all of Forster's novels as "fine-art aesthetics", and asserts that "Forster's novels embody his attraction to G.E.Moore's emphasis on friendship". And Diane F. Gillespie in her review of Dowling's book speaks of Forster's interest in people and in the creative process, and thus he makes his readers actually relive his creative acts.\(^63\) In his review of J.K.Johnstone's book *The Bloomsbury Group*, titled "The Significance of Bloomsbury", Geoffrey Moore calls it a "particular sample of English intellectual life" which had its hey-day in the 'twenties'. He quotes Alan Pryce: "It had become a kind of sixth-form, with special privileges, special tuition, and a special sense of community", and states that it "had its ramifications in most branches of English cultural life. A socio-literary-intellectual phenomenon, it had a powerful influence in the between-wars period". It opposed the Victorian spirit represented by its "sanctified effigies", - religion, materialism, hypocrisy,

\(^{61}\) Ibid. P. 203.  
\(^{62}\) Ibid. P. 204  
smugness and upper class snobbery,- and its undergraduate side was exemplified by Lytton Strachey. Being the first symptom of the “University-intellectual-intelligence”, Bloomsbury’s favourite epithet was ‘amusing’, and it fostered the noble ideal that people should be given the opportunity to experience the best things and ideas in life. Its spirit led the intellectuals to dominate the Labour Party with their doctrinaire socialism, and much resentment was generated by the “cultural domination of the great Public School and University group”, by its “waspishness and lack of humility”, by its “conscious artiness”, by the “lofty assumption of an artistic superiority”, by its “lack of warmth... (&) heart”, by its “ thinness of style”, by its “constant twitter of words and notions”, and by what Keynes describes as its “brittleness”. Bloomsbury believed in good taste which was its religion, a legacy of Sir Leslie Stephen’s and of the later Apostles’ high-minded agnosticism.64

This notion of good taste which was in evidence in Clive Bell’s household hospitality is thus described by David Garnett, who was to join the informal circle of friends; "When the door was opened, a warm stream of Clive’s hospitality and love of the good things of life poured out, as ravishing as the smell of roasted coffee on a cold morning.”65 But it had all the air of a coterie of Liberalist-humanist Neo-Brahmins fired by idealism but evidently out of touch with the


It was exclusive and clannish. It regarded outsiders as unconverted ... and was contemptuous of ... opinions. ... they criticized each other unsparingly but with affection. ... naturally repudiated the moral code of their forefathers. The doctrine of original sin was replaced by the eighteenth-century belief in man’s fundamental reasonableness, sanity and decency. They violently rejected Evangelical notions of sex, tossed overboard any form of supernatural belief ... and set their sails in the purer breezes of neo-Platonic contemplation .... personal salvation ... meditation and communion among intimate friends.⁶⁶

The Greek ideals of civilization were made more worldly and sophisticated and were “translated into a neo-Greek cult of friendship, donnish rather than Hellenic.”⁶⁷ But Bloomsbury was dominantly inspired by the Greek example and its idea of independence was founded on the Hellenic model. It tried to shed the ‘dry Victorian ectoderm’ and basked in the shining, hopeful and reforming spirit of ‘neo-Platonism’, which, spreading from Cambridge to the literary salons of London, became “the distinctive religion of Bloomsbury.”⁶⁸ Deeply loyal to the beauty and emotional flavour of London, celebrating “the play of mind with mind on literary and other topics”, Bloomsbury was “bound together by intense and enduring personal relationships which ... were managed in a very civilized way.” This “collective literary voice” as F.L. Lucas describes it, was “shepherd’s piping

⁶⁶ Ibid. Pp. 29-30
⁶⁷ Ibid. P. 49.
⁶⁸ Ibid. P. 50.
in Arcadia", and allergic to the humdrum of real life, these "romantic academics and quietists" were, in the words of E.M. Forster, "full of the wine of life without having tasted the cup - the teacup - of experience."\textsuperscript{69} Permeated with the same intuition, fired by a desire for partial independence from the Victorian smugness, vehemently opposed to the religious and moral standards of Victorian orthodoxy, these dreamy reformers, described by Roger Fry as "the last of the Victorians", represented the "culmination and the ultimate refinement of the aesthetic movement"\textsuperscript{70} in the twenties.

**IMPASSIONED SEARCHER AMONG PEOPLE AND PLACES**

"Man's life is a day. What is he, what is he not?
Man is the dream of a shadow. But when the god-given
brightness comes
A bright light is among men, and an age that is gentle
comes to birth.\textsuperscript{71}

These lines from Pindar, a curious mixture of darkness and light, were like a charm for Forster and it guided and goaded him in his quest for affinities and relationships. Forster gave supreme importance to the affections of the heart which was for him the "god-given brightness" which flames into the "bright light" signaling the birth of "an age that is gentle". Forster shares Roger Fry's firm belief that man can be rational and that "the mind can and should guide the passions towards civilization."\textsuperscript{70} This rational optimistic humanism made Forster see life as

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid. P. 52.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid. P. 53.
complex, as "whole", and not as a subject for abstract philosophising. He was ardently sceptical of "all theory, all systems, all Faiths and Causes", and eagerly sought pleasure pastures in the realms of the private, the personal, the poetic, in "what's small and immediate", and was compelled "to adopt values." He entirely relied upon human imagination to provide personal values and thus to construct smaller realms of order in the midst of the vast disorder. It is in this missionary spirit that Forster undertakes his voyages out and into people and places.

Furbank writes about his "habit ... of working hard at friendships; he listened so attentively; he invested so much concern in the other's affairs and wrote so many letters. It had nothing flirtatious about it, for in matters of affection he always intended permanency". This posture is far different from fleeting attachment and neurotic infatuation which would naturally end in frustration and rejection. He had experiences of being romanticized by those eager for his friendship, and also the experience of romanticizing those he was eager to befriend. Encounter with people made him abandon his illusions about his friends and widened the prospects of further braver relationships:

How small is our country where things have an objective value: - e.g. my Cambridge friends.
How immense the countries around, into which we are impelled by curiosity or passion.

71. A quotation from Pindar's Eighth Pythian Ode - a maxim for Forster. Furbank, P.N.
72. Furbank, p - 166.
73. Ibid., - the case of R B Smith and that of Gaunt.
It is too sad, or I could write down a list of peoples & places whom I have transfigured, and know at the bottom of my heart not to be what I pretend. One's comfort is that the transfigured is the real perhaps, and that indifference is blind, not love.  

Forster’s optimism grew as he freely moved among real people and real places. People and places infected him and he was grateful for that. Any parcel of human nature drew his attention. He was never at a loss for words when it came to describe people and their locale. This prospect transfigured him and he transfigured what he saw and liked. While on a tour of Italy with his mother, bored by the scenery which was ‘curiously drowsy and unreal’, they zestfully engaged themselves in the “sport of dissecting their fellow-travellers.” It was in Milan, among the galleries, that Forster took his stand “on the paramountcy of human value in art.”  

While in Florence, at the house of the art-scholar R.H. Cust, Forster enjoyed the circle of young art-historians talk on art, though “he thought the ‘viewy young men’ awful.” Five weeks spent in Florence seeing “the orthodox Baedeker-bestarred Italy” delighted him so much that he felt that he could well afford to leave “the Italian Italy for another time.” In Sicily he began to wake up to the inspirational charms. He wrote some sentimental articles about “Southern warmth and love of life as against the ghosts and glooms, the self-denial and self-consciousness, of the Gothic north.” This Italy-inspired mood saw Forster waxing eloquently on the importance of the body and the Greek belief:

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74. Ibid.
75. Furbank, p. 82.
“cherish the body and you will cherish the soul”. He also began to dwell more bravely on friendship: “human affection need not be confined to the home circle or extended to the harem.”78 In Naples he had ardent dreams of friendship and experienced the wonderful strength of feelings. He dared to experiment with ‘imagination pure and simple’ and pleads for the role of ‘sentiment’ where knowledge and poetic genius have failed to create. At Ravello he was inspired by the spirit of the place and produced the fruits of what Italy had done for him.79 Italy was a revelation to him. He was able to respond to the greatness of life and his writings acquired a strange vigour and largeness. Italy released him from being ‘charming, old-maidish, a little ineffectual’, and taught him “that one could live in the imagination”.80 She caused his arrival as a writer. Inspired by a new found confidence he wrote about himself: “I can’t think of anybody who is in a better position for making new friends & keeping old ones”.81 And this he thought was “a characteristic reason” why he should like to be a don. Counseled by Trevelyan to “know more people, and all the rest will be added unto you”, he traveled briskly to discover the ‘Italian Italy’ and began ‘steadily committing noble thoughts to green paper’.82 Though during this first visit to Italy he did not make any Italian friends and never entered an Italian home, it had warmed him with a vision and it would haunt him as ‘The beautiful country where they say “yes”.’ and

76. Ibid., pp 84 - 85
77. Letter to Wedd (1 December 1901), Ibid p 85.
78. Ibid, p. 90.
79. ‘Story of a Panic’ which was the result of imagination-pure-and-simple experiment. Ibid P.92
82. Furbank, pp. 94 – 95.
the place 'where things happen.' Italy haunted him intermittently and made him nostalgic especially during his visit to the Venice by Night exhibition at the Empress Hall in 1904.

His Greek cruise in 1903 in the company of E.A. Gardner and Nathaniel Wedd began on a cold note because he came over-prepared for many sights. But gradually Greece took possession of him in Cnidus and Demeter of Cnidus, his "benevolent mother-deity", who represented for him the reconciliation of male and female in his own nature." This experience was deified by him as one of the "monuments of our more reticent beliefs" in The Longest Journey. The whole of his short story, The Road to Colonus was inspired in the vicinity of Olympia. He was awakened to the prospect of "swimming with the tide of one's own being, getting in touch with the manifold 'greatness', the depths and splendors of life." He came back from Greece, "his private stronghold for sentiment" with the air of being reawakened in sentiment after 'the sleep of a drunk at Troy, and in the Castalian Spring'. The English landscape, discovered during his solitary journeys and walking tours, developed his sense of the bone-structure of England, its rock formations, hill and river systems. At Figsbury Rings he met a lame shepherd boy who was "friendly". The boy offered him a smoke of his pipe and refused Forster's gift of sixpence. Forster visualised the boy as "one of the remarkable human beings he had ever met", admired "his enormous wisdom",

83. Ibid. p. 96.
84. Ibid. pp 102 – 103.
85. Ibid pp 110 – 111.
and went on to infer "that the English can be the greatest men in the world". He eagerly rated the shepherd boy "miles greater than an Italian" and earnestly decided that "The aesthetic die away attitude seems contemptible in a world which has such people." This was Forster's great discovery in his own land, and the boy's father discovered six days later leaves him with "the same impression of a human being with his 'head out of the water'." One is at once reminded of the "leech gatherer" whom Wordsworth discovered on the lonely moors.

Forster's German interlude in 'Elizabeth's German Garden' in Nassenheide was equally memorable to him. A few hours in Berlin, "a terrible city, dirty, ugly, mean, full of unhappy soldiers", on the way to Nassenheide was trying for him. He could not warm to Germany: "It's got no charm, like Italy....". And as to the Germans: "I don't make out the Germans .... They terrify me." But he found himself in the thick of family life in Elizabeth's establishment, admired the good deal of jollity of the children and "had rapidly made himself at home, a thing he was adept at doing." He found his patroness, Elizabeth, 'a delightful character' and her cryptic and abrupt opinion about church-going: "After all our beliefs all lead to the same thing in the end"-- intrigued him. His comment was:

her attitude to literary and spiritual questions is that of ours to food, which depends not on the food but on the state of the stomach. I hope

that I shall never again be depressed when she thinks me rot — and more
difficult — elated when she praises me."87

But later he admits that "a hard tight indestructible little spiritual existence
seemed to bob up and down (in Elizabeth): hard, yet if I ever I cracked it I should
expect to find a spot of chocolate cream at the core". And he left Nassenheide in
glory leaving Elizabeth more or less 'uncracked.'

In 1912 Forster and his friend Dickinson came to India in a mood of optimism,
still believing in the power of disinterested social criticism. Dickinson came as a
political commentator and was duly appalled by India's "muddle and squalor and
indifference to human life", the "'senselessness' and 'horribleness' of its
sculpture and architecture". He found India "such a contradiction of the Greek
ideal" that he could "make no sense of it and felt no Westerner could", and he
went off to China with relief. But Forster arrived there drawn by the affections of
the heart and quickly found himself at home in India and led the life he led
anywhere, "a life of mild human contacts and awakened imagination." He was
rewarded for his wise investments in "private life and private virtues". He felt like
a native and did "break, or slip through national barriers with remarkable
success." He achieved this "by means of his courtesy, his inconspicuousness, his
desire to be liked, his willingness to be bored".88 India, visualised as "a queer red
series of hills a little disquieting, as though Italy had been touched into the

88. Ibid, p – 222.
sinister", began with a muddle for Forster. His first servant in India, Baldeo who had been commissioned to carry his luggage to the hotel disappeared for two days and slipped into the hotel looking "twenty years older". The sense of drift in Indian politics seen at M.A.O. College Aligarh, the easy emotion among Masood's friends and their public exhibition, a Muslim wedding conducted on rational lines, the 20 orthodox Muslims doing their evening prayers to the accompaniment of 'I'd rather be busy with my little Lizzy' from a gramophone, the quirky philosophy of the Maharaja of Chhokrapur, the shapeless landscapes of Ujjain, the different meaning of time and history in India, the 'old-fashioned'-phobia of the Maharaja of Dewas, the tradition of the third stream at the Ganges – Jamuna junction at Allahabad, the gentle oriental confusions illustrated by the Finance Minister and Saeed Mirza, the amazing cave-temples of Ellora, and the accounts of friends "written in the heart", were permanent inspirations to Forster. The liberal humanist in him embraced this "muddle" and it broadened and matured him thus distancing him from his youth.

Forster's memorable tryst with India was in fact an attempt to expand and explore his love for Syed Ross Masood. His voyage out to India was to attempt a geographic extension of his oriental predilections and inclinations which were largely inspired by Masood. Masood's arrival in his life in 1906 was a very crucial turning point for Forster. He experienced a sort of emotional resurrection from the academic morass that enveloped his inner life. Masood's oriental magnificence,

his grandiose mannerisms, emotional extravagance and gregariousness filled Forster with admiration. He was released from the cold intellectual idealism and he was electrified by Masood’s ruling passion for friendship. Masood lambasted Forster’s “horrid English formality”, and quite dramatically taught him that “personal relations come first.” He was woken up from his “suburban and academic life” and was released from the Meredith-infected defeatism and negativity.90 His eyes and heart were opened to a new Masood-inspired “civilization” which implied giving up duties for the sake of friends. This vision of a new civilization, and the confusion it illustrated in the “Oriental states”, appealed to Forster. This inspiration was behind the positive and pro-active stance which Forster declared for himself in his letter to Malcolm Darling two years later:

“I am so glad that you see I’m not a cynical beast. .... I can’t write down ‘I care about love, beauty, liberty, affection, and truth’, though I should like to.” 91

He prized Masood as the greatest of his “Inward events”, and notes in his diary: “He and Italy – that is really all. .... Public affairs interest me more, especially when they touch Italy, Germany and India ....” During their 1910 trip to Paris Forster was in for more self-discovery and “returned in a glow of love and dazzlement and incomprehension”. He found the enigma in Masood’s nature an oriental version of his very own. He discovered and was puzzled by the distance

90. Ibid, pp – 143 – 146.
91. Letter to Malcolm Darling (12 December 1908)
between them: "... on one side beauty and tradition; on the other a 'bourgeois
cuteness' wanting to know where it stood". And his mind, moved by love and the
desire for self-improvement, declared itself in a sort of plaintive anthem:

Oh love, every time thou goest out of my sight, I
die a new death.' How
can I keep quiet when I read such things? My brain watches me, but it's
literary. Let me keep clear from criticism and scheming. Let me think of
you and not write. I love you, Syed Masood; love.92

It was this love for the enigma which drove Forster to India – "the place
where he would complete his understanding of Masood and find a new opening
for imagination."93 Masood, in his turn, found in Forster a very rare power of
understanding the Indian soul, the power of true and real sentiment. He loved
Forster for being "an oriental with an oriental view of life on most things".94 This
relationship, with all its frustrations, sustained Forster and gave some meaning
to his life. Though sensitive but not responsive to his love, Masood had
dispelled the still lingering 'frost' in Forster. It was a very sad and sombre
Forster, reacting to Masood's marriage in 1915:

He stands at the close of my youth. I wish very much he had felt, if
only once, what I felt for him, for I should have no sense of wasted time.95

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India always remained a permanent influence both on his literary genius and on his world-view. India, in its multiplicity, variety, confusions, mystery and benevolent anarchism provided for him some sort of a metaphor for the greater mysteries of life and human relationship.

In 1915 Forster was freed from his recent “most awful gloom” and was given an unexpected enlargement at his first meeting with D.H. Lawrence. Forster found him “really extraordinarily nice,” and his views “wonderfully attractive”, and thought him “so human, so personal” and one “who lived his views” without posing any philosophical detachment of the Cambridge variety. But he was alarmed at the fierce proselytizing mood of Lawrence who was on a recruitment spree for his new utopia, Rananim. Lawrence was tired of people who were childish and greedy seeking immediate desire and expressing the particular outlook without any conception of the whole horizon wheeling round. He thought that Forster had reached “the limit of splitness” with his ‘Only Connect’ motto, and hoped to see him “pregnant with his own soul”. He wrote to Bertrand Russell:

Forster ... is bound hand and foot bodily. Why? Because he does not believe that any beauty or any divine utterance is any good any more. . . . Will all the poetry in the world satisfy the manhood of Forster, when Forster knows that his implicit manhood is to be satisfied by nothing but immediate physical action. He tries to dodge himself - - - - - - Why can’t he act? . . . . Because he knows that self-realization is not his ultimate desire. His ultimate desire is for the continued action which has been

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96. Letter to Forrest Reid (23 January 1915), Selected Letters, 1, P - 217
97. Furbank, P.N., Vol. 2, p - 8
called the social passion – the love for humanity – the desire to work for humanity.\textsuperscript{98}

Forster in his turn thought Lawrence too "un-self-aware" or "deliberately self-blinding" which caused the absurdity in their relations and Forster, as a result of the collision with Lawrence, resolved "to be more open in expressing feelings."\textsuperscript{99}

In 1915 Forster set sail for Egypt as a hospital 'searcher' recruited by the Red Cross. He was excited at the prospect of seeing Egypt but was disappointed by the Egyptian landscape which seemed to be "a feebler India, as flat without the sense of immensity". An uneasy sense of mud, "the mud of the Nile, and moral 'muddiness' were always to figure in his vision of Egypt."\textsuperscript{100} He enjoyed his own serviceableness to the soldiers and admired their matured attitude of tolerance to their enemies. He was experiencing a sort of moral freshness and wrote to Leonard Woolf: "I am here become cheeriness itself and run from one little deed of kindness to another all day".\textsuperscript{101} Being thus busy and useful, he was settling down to the prosaic Alexandria. It was in this mood he wrote to Masood:

\begin{quote}
All one can do in this world of maniacs is to pick up the poor tortured broken people and try to mend them, and the Italian Ambulance Unit would give me an opportunity to do this.\textsuperscript{102}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., PP – 10 – 11.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., P – 13.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid. PP – 22 – 23.
He breathed the fresh air of humanity and even found himself inspired by his experience in an hashish den.

I felt curiously at ease in that haunt of vice, and didn't even realize I was behaving priggishly till afterwards. So perhaps I wasn't a prig really.  

He met the Greek poet C.P. Cavafy who impressed him by telling:

Pray that you – you English with your capacity for adventure – never lose your capital, otherwise you will resemble us, restless, shifty, liars . . .

Being quite caustic about the Greeks, Cavafy liked to be called 'Heilene' rather than a Greek and Forster thought he had found the epitome of Alexandria in Cavafy, in his vision, in his "disbelief in racial purity and high valuing of 'bastardy' in civilization." His adventurous affairs with Mohammed el Adl, the tram-conductor, led to the realization of all his secret ambitions; he was able to break through the barriers of colour and class and for the first time he could "feel a grown up man". Elated by his achievement in 'athletic love', and feeling a sense of his inner development Forster felt spiritually alive. He also developed the power of adaptability, and learned to come to terms with the horrors of the war atmosphere in Alexandria. Mohammed had "fallen like some lovely cloud between himself and the war", he wrote to Florence Barger, "were he to rise I

104. Ibid. P – 33.
105. Letter to Florence Barger (1 June 1917), Selected Letters I. P – 257.
should see it again." 106 He began to feel a sense of alienation from his own class and to declare his 'love' for the lower class. "Middle class people smell", he wrote to Dickinson, 107 and began to realise that "to be trusted, and to be trusted beyond the barriers of income race and class, is the greatest reward a man can receive". 108 Though he was weary of the actual Alexandria, staying there meant adding new friends to his little circle, and he managed to sustain the vision of ancient Alexandria. He could not and did not respond imaginatively to Egypt, found it hard to like the Egyptians. This dislike was largely an aesthetic not a personal one. In a letter to Masood he wrote:

I was telling you how much I disliked the Egyptians and how inferior to the Indians I have found them, both in charm, intellect and morality . . . . . . . . . . . Here there is only the pseudo-East – the pretentious, squalid, guttural Levant – and I shut my eyes to it on purpose, lest it spoil my pleasure in the true East, to which I shall one day return". 109

Forster never learned to love Egypt or Alexandria which were small parodies of India which undoubtedly was his ideal. This intuitive preference for India and the Indians gets expressed in another letter to Masood:

But what I have seen seems vastly inferior to India . . . where I still hope to die. It is only at sunset that Egypt surpasses India – at all other hours it is flat, unmysterious, and godless . . . I feel as instinctively not at

home among them (Egyptians) as I feel instinctively at home among Indians.  

While in Egypt he found consolation in looking at a little Mughul figure which a friend had given him; "it takes my thoughts away from the war and also from this pseudo-orientation of Egypt, which I greatly dislike." This feeling of aversion is expressed in stronger terms to Malcolm Darling:

... my idealisation, ... of India, mounts and mounts and mounts. Egypt feeds it by contrast. I hate the place, or rather its inhabitants. This is interesting, isn't it, because I came inclined to be pleased and quite free from racial prejudices, but in 10 months I've acquired an instinctive dislike to the Arab voice, the Arab figure, the Arab way of looking or walking or pump shitting or eating or laughing or anythinging - ... . Now and then I have a hideous fear. Will this sojourn in the spurious East put me against the true East - Dewas, Aurangabad, Jodhpur?.

But he was never to lose his love for India. In fact he grew steadily in love with India and the Indians. India was for him a permanent inspiration, - her hundred voices always beckoning him to hearken to her. He loved these hundred voices and they largely sustained and supported his vision of life.