

# Essays of EM Forster Critical Study Essay

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**Abstract:** *This work engages with the novels of E. M. Forster and George Orwell from a cultural studies perspective, to explore the insights that the study of literature can offer to the study and theorisation of culture. It maintains that many of the challenges first formulated by Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu, Alan Sinfield and Pierre Macherey remain unfulfilled, and might help reshape cultural studies, or at least reveal its limits. I approach Forster's and Orwell's novels through a socially-grounded close reading, to release them from the liberal-humanist conspectus within which they were produced and have continued to be predominantly received. Turning to what Pierre Macherey has called the work's 'ideology', which percolated through these novels at the moment of production, I look for the stories they tell, but also (reading 'against the grain') for the stories they fail to tell. My analysis falls on three topics — Englishness, imperialism and liberalism — to reconstruct these authors' specific formation. I identify three different, but related, elements of 'Englishness': its reliance on a series of cultural and social 'Others', its links to liberalism (in the form of 'a capacious liberalism'); its rootedness in capitalism. The construction of 'Otherness', which manifests itself in a long chain of binary oppositions (such as, public/ private; masculine/feminine; rational/ emotional; elite/ mass), is not only at the centre of Forster's and Orwell's literary/political vision, but has been also replicated in the various identity-based post-modernist critiques of liberal-humanism. I displace this primacy, by complementing my reading with Alain Badiou's notion of 'event' and 'ethics of truth'. My concern is not with finding a label for these authors' politics, but with teasing out a set of elements and relations that helped to shape the 'criteria of plausibility' (Sinfield, 1992) that continues to define today's rather broad and deep-rooted liberal-democratic consensus.*

**Keywords:** Forster, Orwell; Cultural studies; Englishness; 'Other'; 'Event'; liberalism

## 1. Introduction

The essay has been defined differently in different ages according to the prevalent literature standards. According to Bacon, essay is a vehicle for the expression of a man's thought in a rather disconnected manner. Bacon was the most learned and wisest man of the Elizabethan age and his essays are packed with thought and learning. In the eighteenth century the essays in the hands of the Addison and Steele took a more light-hearted and humorous colouring. Their aim was to interest and amuse the readers. The themes of their essays were events of the day to day life. Their essays reflected the social and political thoughts of the eighteenth century England. Dr. Johnson and Goldsmith were the others two prominent essayists of the eighteenth century England. Dr. Johnson defined essay as, "a loose sally of the mind and irregular digested piece, not a regularly and orderly composition". According to this the essay is an impetuous outpouring of ideas, without any form of arrangement, but all with the freshness of the eager mind.

In the nineteenth century, the romantic revival with a stress on the personality of the writer, affected the conception of the essay. Most of the writers of that period introduced the personal touch in the essay and made it a reflection of the personality of the writer. Among them Hazlitt, De Quincey and Charles Lamb are worth mentioning.

Their essays were mainly autobiographical in nature. They made the essay a vehicle of the personal likes and dislikes. Lamb was full of humour and capable of laughing at himself and he wrote his essays about the incidents of his own life. Thus with the emphasis shifted from the social and political life to the personality of the writer, the personal touch came to be accepted as almost vital part of the essay. The essay came nearer to the lyric, and became the literature of the

self-expression. A personal touch introduced during the romantic revival has since then become the key note of the essay and majority of the essays of the later nineteenth century and twentieth century belongs to the category of personal essays.

The new Oxford dictionary defines essay as "A composition of moderate length on a particular subject" originally implying want of finish but now said of a composition more or less elaborate of style though limited in range. Therefore essay is no longer, "a loose sally of the mind", but it is a composition on a particular subject with a central idea. It has become a carefully constructed and elaborately designed work of art. Essays are much popular today and they are published in newspapers and journals. Modern essays have a moderate length and brevity, is the chief characteristic of the modern essay. Most of the modern essays are subjective and the essayist makes a brief and a fragmentary attempt to express a problem in terms of his own personality. Being primarily an expression of personality the important characteristic of a good essay is its informality. The writer places himself in close intimacy with the reader. According to A.G. Gardiner familiarity is the key note of a good essay. On account of personal touch, the informality and a familiar style the essay resembles the lyric. Though the essay differs from the lyric, the essay is an expression of quiet everyday moods when one is comparatively at leisure and peace. It is at that time that most trivial occurrences like a crowing of a cock, the smile and the face of a child, the pattern of rain drops and dews, serve to set him dreaming. The essayist gently muses on them and in these fanciful moods he sometimes dreams of the golden age of the past or looks into the future but he expresses these visions with gentle poignancy and subtle humour. It is this fact which makes essay a most elusive of all literary forms. It is always written in an essay and unobtrusively in a quietly humorous manner which is not obvious

to the casual reader. But the essay is more concerned with the common things of life and it is this cause it attempts to reveal the essential beauty that lies in such things. But in spite of its remaining on the level of the common place, the essay has its own supplements as we find in Lamb's essay- 'A Dream Children' while essayists like Hazlitt and Stevenson reveal to us the inner working of the personalities, writers like Chesterton exaggerate the trivial incidents like missing a train or bus, or running after one's hat as in the case of Chesterton. Looking from this point of view all good essays give us the writer's criticism of life, which is obviously an important characteristic of the essay. Thus the main characteristics of good essay are the personal touch, informality, good humour, interest in the common place things of life, and its gentle or severe criticism. A good essayist is one who has a good humoured, gracious and reasonable personality so as to readily win the confidence of the reader and established a bond of friendship with him.

The English essay started with Francis Bacon who published his essays in 1557. His essays are brief aphoristic, argumentative and dogmatic. It was in the eighteenth century that essays suddenly became a great force in English literature. The periodical essays which appeared almost a new thing and in combination with the earliest development of journalism, began with Defoe and was developed by Richard Steele in the Tatler and used by Addison in the Spectator. After the Tatler and Spectator there appeared later in the eighteenth century Fielding's essays in the Covent Garden Journal and Dr. Johnson's in the Rambler, Adventurer and the Idler. Goldsmith's Citizen of the World became very popular.

It was during the first quarter of the nineteenth century that a great revival of the essay took place. Charles Lamb was a foremost writer of that age. His essays of Elia appeared in series from 1820-1823. The Victorian period was rich in the serious, formal essays, particularly of a critical and historical nature.

The essay ceased to be confessional or autobiographical but became literary, historical or controversial in that period. The major Victorian essayists- Carlyle, Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater and T.H. Huxley and Leavis were a few popular writers, who were respected and admired by the Victorian public. The essays of Matthew Arnold have influenced the writers and critics of the later period. Augustin Birrell and Edmund Gosse wrote critical essays in the style of Arnold.

During the twentieth century the essay has regained playful and light-hearted vein as we find in Montaigne and Lamb. Max Beer, H. G. Wells, E. M. Forster, G. K. Chesterton, Virginia Woolf, Robert Lynd, E. V. Rieu, C. E. M. Joa, Aldous Huxley, Samuel Butler are some of the prominent essayists of the twentieth century. As it is not possible to make an exhaustive treatment of the twentieth century essays within the limited range, it is proposed to discuss a few selected essays of E. M. Forster a well-known modern English essayist in his dissertation.

E. M. Forster is a short story writer, a novelist and a biographer. He wrote in all five novels, two volumes of short

stories, three biographies, and a critical treatise of the novel, two volumes of essays and some travel books. He came to India in 1912 and his novel A Passage to India reflects a social, political and religious problem pertaining to India during the British rule. He was a private secretary to the Maharaja of Dewas in 1921. He attended the Indian P.E.N. conference in 1945 and he has recorded his impressions of his visit in his book India Again. In 1937 he was awarded the Benson Medal of the Royal Society of Literature. A course of lectures delivered as clerk lectures at Cambridge University has been published in book form with the title Aspects of the Novel. His essays have been collected together published in two volumes namely Abinger Harvest and Two Cheers for Democracy. Abinger Harvest consists of eighty articles, essays and reviews, chosen out of a number of contributions to various periodicals. They are arranged in four sections according to subjects- as (1) Commentary and passing events (2) Literary Criticism (3) The Past (4) The East. Two Cheers for Democracy contain sixty-seven essays in all and it is divided into parts. Part one is entitled "The second Darkness" and contains fourteen essays. Part two of the book is divided into three sections. "Art in general", "The Art in Action", and "Places". Ten essays of Forster have been chosen from Abinger Harvest and Two Cheers for Democracy focusing on their themes, style and technique. Though several critical works have appeared on Forster's Novel, no serious attempt has been made to discuss his essays. An attempt has been made to discuss his essays. An attempt has been made in this dissertation to study critically a few popular essays of E. M. Forster to understand Forster's mind and art.

## 2. Related Work

The essay, 'Syed Ross Masood' was originally published in Urdu magazines in India. Later, it was included in Forster's "Two Cheers for Democracy".

S. R. Masood (1887-1937) was a Muslim educationalist in India. He was educated at Oxford. He studied law, but took to teaching as a profession. He became the vice-chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University. In his last years, he acted as a member of the Executive Council in Bhopal Raj.

He treated the English people in a manner that put down their superior airs. If they patronised him, he let them have it back, very politely but firmly. Once, a British officer bounced into his railway compartment and asked him to clear out, in a rude manner. Masood quietly looked up from his sleeping posture and asked the other if he wanted his head to be knocked off. At once, the officer realized that he had to deal with an educated and masterful Indian. So he apologized to Masood, who then moved with him in a friendly manner. On another occasion, he offered to shave an Australian miner during a voyage for once guinea. He kept his contract and showed that Indians were both truthful and capable.

Forster concludes that Masood's real work lay in his own Muslim community in India. So those alone, who shared that work, could write about him best. As for himself, Forster was content to praise his artistic and tolerant nature, which earned for Masood the love and respect of men and women,

who differed from him in creed, race and language, but who yet recognized his greatness of heart and his genius.

In the first place, he noticed the increased interest of Indians in politics. Every problem, social or economic or literature was subordinated to politics. When he spoke about literature, attention of the hearers wandered, though he listened politely. "Literature in their view should expound or inspire a political creed". (E.M.Forster, 'India again', p.111) this obsessions of Indians in politics was more vehement in 1945 than in his previous visit.

Secondly, Forster remarks on the external changelessness of India. Though industrialism had increased, it did not dominate the landscape, as in the west. Forster noticed that poverty, malnutrition and squalor persisted in the country, in spite of the passage of 25 years after his last visit. Politicians made use of the catchy phrase "real India" to suit their own ideologies. But Forster suspected that phrase as a convenient slogan of political parties to boost up their own creeds.

Thirdly, Forster noticed the increasing emancipation of women. He particularly observed this fact in the largely moslem cities. In 1912, he scarcely saw any Indian women. In 1921, he noticed "the semi-purdah" of ladies, who came into company and retired behind the veil, as it suited their likes and dislikes. In 1945, he found more women than men in the parties which he attended. Forster noticed the graciousness with which Indian women moved in such social gatherings. He was positive that, very soon, the Indian fabric of society would be changed by the freedom given to the women.

### 3. Problem Formulation

Forster mainly participated in buffet dinners and he enjoyed the fine dishes at such parties. He knew that relating was in force but he did not have any occasion to feel its effect. He believed that, for well-to-do people, life was a bed of roses in India. He also knows that, for the poor, life in India is a bed of thrones.

Forster noticed also that language question was another all-absorbing problems in India. It was hotly debated in the P.E.N conference. The northerners were for Hindi, while the southerners favored the continuance of English. Forster was however happy to note that the people of India as a whole to use English freely with their vernacular speech. He had a pleasant talk in that mixture of English and vernacular, with some Gujarati in a railway journey to Baroda. Out of courtesy to him, they talked entirely in English.

Forster noticed an increased output in the Indian literary field. Book production was very active, through the authors were miserably paid. Short stories were popular and one some of them in Bengali were very good. Poetry was often an imitation of that of Eliot and Auden.

Drama was not prominent, while criticism was of a very poor standard. Forster remarked that Indians were capable of eulogy of denunciation but not of critical acumen. He also

regretted that there was then a lack of writers of the stature of Tagore and Iqbal.

Forster remarked on the enormous growth of the cinema industry in India. It was evidenced by the advertisements everywhere on the walls and the lamp posts. Forster was unlucky to see two cinema shows, which were not good at all. But he admitted that Indian had a fine scenery, a varied life and a great domestic history, which could be well utilized for the cinema art. He also believed that Indians had the innate power of acting naturally and gracefully.

Forster visited Hyderabad and noticed that fine university building there. It was a nice building of the Muslim and Buddhist art. He noticed an increased interest in paintings and sculpture. He visited several studios in Calcutta and spent a night at Santiniketan. He admired folk art of Bengal. He had a special liking for the artistic work of Jamini Roy, the Calcutta painter.

Forster concluded by remarking that he could not offer any solutions to India's future. He could only offer any advice to Englishmen. Good-will was not enough into their attitudes towards Indians. They must evince a genuine affection and liking for India and her people, without any ulterior motive. Then only "a passage to India" could be made by the Englishmen.

'The other side of the hedge' is a short story, written in 1904 and published "Independent review" later; it was included in the "celestial omnibus", which was published in 1911. This short story is an allegory on the fever and fret of modern life, which has been the theme of many modern poets and writers. In the "Scholar Gipsy", Matthew Arnold contrasts the life of the Oxford scholar with strange disease of modern life with its sick hurry and divides aims. Such a life loses the very value of life, which is the joy of the quiet and the beautiful. Sir Max Muller "India View of Life", remarks that the westerner sacrifices their lives for the sake of living. Forster gives a picture of the life "on the other side of the hedge" and emphasizes its wisdom and value of the modern people.

Apart from its hidden meaning, the story is simple and striking. The hero of the story finds himself in a strange country. Like Gulliver among the Lilliputians. He learns interesting and intriguing fact of that country from his guide. He regards life in that country is foolish. At the end he understands his mistakes. The hero is the narrator of the story and his guide in that story is the only other character.

The talk between them gives out the allegory by implication. Every detail of that strange country heightens the atmosphere of wonder while the climax of wonder is the hero's volte-face, forgetting his own ambition.

### 4. Conclusion

A thematic study of E. M Forster's novels has brought to the focus many social, psychological and cultural concerns which Forster tried to articulate in the historical backdrop of Edwardian England. The present study has also observed certain inferences and findings about Forster and his novels.



Further, this study has unearthed some motifs and themes that run as spine works of all the novels of Forster. This chapter is an attempt to draw conclusions on the basis of the analysis presented in the preceding chapters.

The first chapter of the study undertakes a brief survey of Forster's life and works, which is essential to understand the thematic tempo of the author. The biographical details like he has completed his education from Cambridge and had a tour of Europe in his early age are essentially considered for the analysis of the social milieu represented in the novels and the cultural embodiment and its actual impulses. The biographical details also reveal the socio-psychological aspects which influence the actual creative process of a literary enterprise. For instance, his exploration of materialism in his novel *Howards End* is a result of the World War I and his depression towards the materialistic prosperity of the modern world. These references were utilized in order to support the research arguments made in the thematic analysis of the novels. The chapter further deals with the influences on the author in order to understand his literary motifs. His intellectual seriousness and deep sense of commitment are the result of his upbringing in the religious Thornton family.

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