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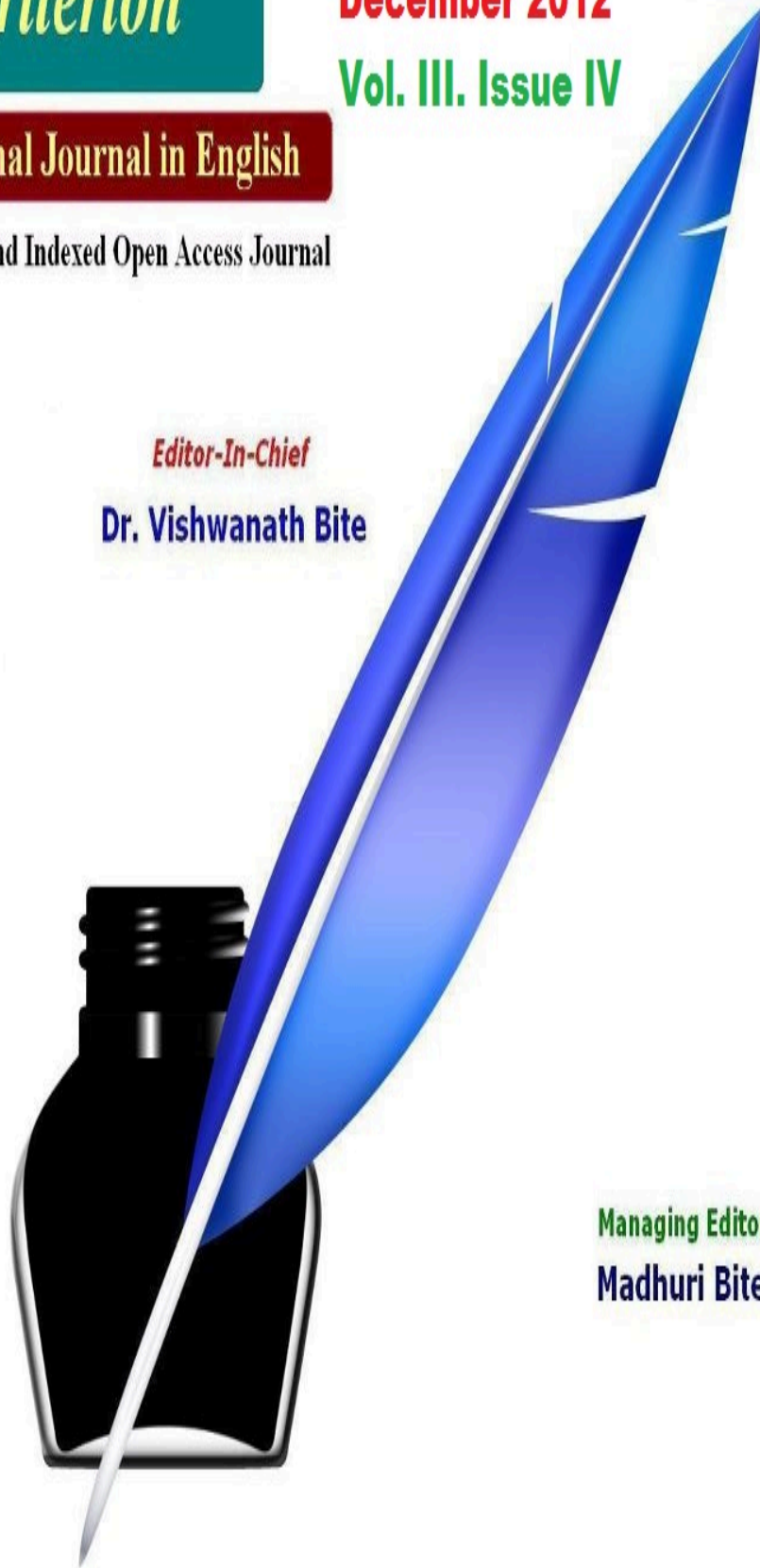
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Aesthetic and Ethical Values in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*

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*"Forster's literary career can more fruitfully be regarded as an attempt to explore and where this seemed to him desirable to criticize and modify the values and attitudes he had learnt as a young man."*ⁱ (Grandson: 1962: 05)

Edward Morgan Forster is a prominent name among the novelists of Edwardian Era. It is difficult to assess his real place in the twentieth century world of fiction. His extraordinary talent as a novelist lies in the depiction of various aspects of human society. It is his world view which makes him a distinct figure among the contemporaries. His world view can be seen in his humanism and themes of inter-relationships a concrete depiction of the contemporary society and social problems. His views on art, religion, culture and politics and his concern for the individuals also add to the same aspect of his writings. His novels provide an answer to the dilemma and the imponderables of modern life. He believes for a positive social existence connection that has to be made between mind and body, seen and unseen and between the lives of the intellect with the life of instinct.

Ethics and aesthetics are not the only concerns for Forster's works but they are primary to an understanding of them and of what may be called Forster's world. They are the clues to an exploration of what must otherwise remain to large, craggy and complex to grasp in its entirety. In setting out to trace these through his novels the object of this study is to present an angle of vision from which that world can be observed with some steadiness and clarity an aid toward what Forster has called:

*"The sense of cooperation with a creator which is the supremely important step in our pilgrimage through the fine arts."*ⁱⁱ (Arnold: 1951: 117)

A Passage to India presents a genuine and intense articulation of his ethical and religious intuitions. The India that Forster describes with its multitudes of people, its races, creeds and hierarchies its conflicting aims and aspirations, is the modern world in epitome. India offers him an unconscious parody of the achievements of Western rationalism represented by the English rulers. It also confronts him with the triumph of natural forces that such rationalism claims to have controlled and ordered. Much critical discussion has therefore concerned itself with the nature and validity of these insights. The novel is an aesthetic masterpiece, the most closely textured, highly wrought and carefully structured of all his writings. Its artistry has been another major focus of attention. Forster's last novel increasingly detaches itself from the rest of his work as incommensurably major.

These intervention years served as a spiritual passage eastward. The novel is aesthetically satisfying and philosophically profound that contains Indian contemporary situation. Forster's *A Passage to India* is as pertinent as it was to the period between the two world wars for it concerns no less a subject than men attempt to find order and a basis for solid and durable ethical values in our disordered world.

The word *Passage* itself is highly significant for it is aesthetically the act of traveling east functions as a rite of passage, the rebirth through which man passes beyond the rational to an awareness of the mystery. The whole world of conflict and separation is envisioned in the gulf between England and India. In more important sense *passage* is the transit between one place and another that signifies Foster's ethics, a search for union. In the same way Whitman's *Passage* is an exploratory journey into the *past—the dark, unfathomed retrospect* of Indian thought contained in *the myths Asiatic, the primitive fables*. The predicament facing the characters in the novel can be summed up as their desire for connection and for union in a world where separation and dissolution are ever present or rarely understood. This is an attempt to resolve the disparate forces of matter and essence the harmonize man's tragic antithesis and reaffirm the wholeness of truth that runs throughout Forster's work.

India provides a complex setting with its landscape that is the natural life of plants and animals, its formless architecture and native population with its mixed religions, ethnicities and regions; thus a much more complex setting to present the contrasts and the conflicts. The prominent concern is focused on the personal relationships. A *Passage* is constructed in three parts- *Mosque* emphasizes the Moslem world of Aziz and his friends *Caves* stand for the British and Anglo-Indian element and *Temple* the Hindu. What is notable about such divisions is that they highlight the diversity and complexity of India and the problems of its inhabitants. The importance of the Marabar Caves in Forster's *A Passage to India* is that most of these discussions fall within one of the two dominant lines of inquiry: an exploration of the historical, religious or mythological associations of the actual Barabar Caves on which Forster's caves were modeled and affects the characters' experiences and actions. No doubt whether they convey meaning directly or metaphorically the caves constitute the thematic center of the novel; they indicate the place, fictional or real from which everything in the narrative unfolds. It is obvious that Forster is using the word India on at least two levels of thought- the literal earthly reality and the transcendental reality. There is a literal India the earthly- Asiatic nation with its millions of people striving towards national independence and self-government; there is the figurative India as the transcendental cosmic clarity towards all humanity strives here. Forster sometimes uses India in one sense sometimes in the other and at times in both senses simultaneously. Forster's ethical impulse aims at the union between man and man in a global sense and then of man with infinite. So it is not only more than what *Howards End* was a national novel; it is more than that form that Henry James so finely aspired to the international novel that attempts to resolve contrasting value-systems from a cohesive cosmopolitan point of view.

While the literal level of the novel emphasizes the divisions between the Indians and the Englishmen the diversity among men the symbolic level reveals the way of union and

unity. The desire for union manifests itself differently in various characters. When Mrs. Moore lands in India, she aspires “*to be one with the universe. The song of the future must transcend creed.*” (API: P.208) Godbole who desires his union with Brahman says about Aziz’s poem ‘one on the brotherhood of nations’, “*Ah that’s a bhakti*” (API: P.293). Fielding and Adela do not seek “*an infinite goal behind the stars*” (API: P.264) but they desire connection with their fellowmen. Caste, religion, nationality, race and individual perversity join a silent universe in keeping man alone and unsatisfied. Yet they continue to seek and amazingly some limited connection is made.

Forster’s politics depends on his ethics on a moral vision partly admittedly yet penetrating and disturbing. His ethics depend on metaphysics as the first part of the novel ends with a pact of friendship between Fielding and Aziz. As part II ends there is coolness between them resulting the understanding arrived at the Mosque. This is finally replaced by suspicion and lack of trust. While political relations have been imperiled personal ones fare no better. Adela is rejected by the English community Ronny breaks his engagement. Fielding too cast out by his compatriots is misunderstood by the Indians. Fielding’s familiarity with Adela his cold logical mind would prevent him and Aziz from remaining close friends for long. Forster underlines this truth by Aziz’s suspicion of Fielding’s relation with Adela:

“Tangles...interrupted their intercourse, a pause in the wrong place, an intonation misunderstood and a whole conversation went away.” (API: P.267)

Aziz since his disastrous expedition to the Malabar Hills has become harder and less friendly in his attitude towards the English. He is beginning to see “*the vague and bulky figure of a motherland*” (API: P.273) and he decides to leave British India to take service in a Hindu state. One feels that kindness and good will have failed of all the hopes and tentative gestures of union. In Part I nothing is left but hatred force and fear. The reason is that Marbar has triumphed. The movement from life to death is paralleled by the progression from Moslem to Hindu from complete trust in physical reality in Part I to denial in the Marabar. The third section *Temple* has struck some critics as tacked on and an after thought. J.B. Bear remarks:

*“There is no spectacular denouement, no final revelation concerning the events in the cave, only Adela’s denial that Dr. Aziz followed her. And if this negation is all that is to be offered, the key events of the trial ought to come at the end of the novel. Why is there a long sequence dealing with irrelevancies such as the festival?”*ⁱⁱⁱ (Bear: 1962: 132)

Forster seems to say that life is supremely queer; things not explicable in terms of reason happen, the nearest man can get to pierce the mystery is through the imagination. Trilling says: “*It is not easy to know what to make of the dominant Hinduism of the third section.*”^{iv} (Trilling: 1951: 144) But this dominant Hinduism cannot be readily dismissed nor can we dismiss the socio-political world of the novel for those who would see Forster as a mystic. In India this mystery takes as it were concrete forms as though the unknown forces were stronger here than elsewhere. Forster honors the Hindu way in particular in because it is the least resistant to the unconscious and the instinctual, the least dogmatic and theological, the least appalled by the vision or the shadow. Novel’s third section is architecturally necessary to the structure of the novel because in it the fragments are

brought together into a coherent pattern. Hinduism is valuable in that it restores those things that the West has most repressed and forgotten. As Radhakrishnan says:
“Hindu thought admits that the immanence of God is a fact admitting of various degrees. While there is nothing which is not lit by God, God is more fully revealed in the organic than in the inorganic, more in the conscious than in the unconscious, more in man than in lower creatures, more in the good man than in the evil.”^v (Radhakrishnan: 1961: 51)

The celebration of Janam Ashtami is a moment of communal vision as distinct from personal and this vision is a positive one. Professor Godbole whom McConkey calls the only true prophetic character in the novel is involved in the greatest religious festival of the year during which the birth of the Lord of the universe is re-enacted and a model of the village Gokul in which he was born is taken in a torch-light procession to the great tank at Mau on the evening after the birth. In the palace at Mau amidst drums, cymbals, electric lights, religious chanting and the music from Europeanized band the Birth of the Lord Krishna is awaited. It proclaims that while individuals may be small in the grand scheme of the universe they nevertheless have any meaning. This is the antithesis of the message of the caves. Forster writes: *“Everything exists, nothing has value”*, which suggests that *“though people are important but the relations between them are unfortunately not.* (API: P.115-16) Professor Godbole who leads a choir at the ceremony attempts to find unity to connect- connect and connect until the whole universe is one. The statement is visibly clear when readers finds Godbole singing: *“Tukaram, Tukaram, Thou art my father and mother and everybody.”* (API: P.280) He is praying not to God but to Tukaram who is the greatest mystic saint of Maharashtra, an exponent of the Bhakti cult which emphasizes man’s union with God through love. This union with God in Hindu mysticism is shown as the central theme in the novel. The scene of being united with God presents the macrocosmic image of the brotherhood of man where Forster writes: *“The Hindu is concerned not with conduct, but with vision. To realize that God is seems more important than to do what God wants.”*^{vi} (Forster: 1914: 304) Forster sees Godbole’s metaphysical longing for the God as an essential aspect of Hinduism’s dogged pursuit of the other worldly values and Ethics. The celebration of these festivals in India symbolize as a joyously affirmative expression of seeking the divine.

To Forster love is almost a regenerative force in modern life but it is not at all love detached from the physical world or from human relationships. Forster believes solidly in the mental and physical development of the individual. That his leading characters do not always exemplify this all- round individual development is another matter; their failure cannot be equated with the beliefs of their creator. At the end of the novel although they must part there is no doubt that Aziz and Fielding are friends. It is the social and political conditions that prevent them from meeting again. The political argument they engage in does not alter the affection they bear each other. The whole tenor of the conversation reveals this intimacy. Even though the divisions of daily life intervene even though the earth and the sky mirroring the separation of hostile nations, interpose even though Fielding and Aziz must part Forster’s ethics of secret understanding of heart have triumphed. This is the keynote of structural arch of *A Passage to India* so he writes:
“Kindness, more kindness, and even after that more kindness, I assure you it is the only hope.” (API: P.114)

The collision of the boats is a device to bring into sudden focus and final reconciliation the antagonistic force in the novel. It brings harmony where all form of rational explanations has failed. The fusion of the three ways of life comes in the water at Mau. Fielding and Aziz surrounded by the water of life and then the fertility meet. The emotions and intellect of East and West find a common ground as the devotional ritual comes to a climax. The tank at Mau presents a universal symbol as water in the traditional manner symbolizes the life continuity and enhancing. As the sacred images are committed to the water, the tank has an almost religious sanctity. It caused them all to resemble one another during the moment of its indwelling and when it was withdrawn they revert to the individual clods.

The novel revamps the archetypal pattern of spiritual quest and heroic trial in a comic mode but the form of the fable is as universe as the classic myths. At every point the grand design meshes with the narrative to make the readers aware that the physical and the metaphysical are separate aspects of a single interpenetrating reality. Forster mirrors forth the aesthetic plan in the novel to reflect an order in the world of men and universe. Obviously he establishes and maintains the three classical unities of time. The events of the first two parts occur over one or two months and those in the third after an interval of two years. Chandrapore is the scene of action of the first two parts and Mau some hundreds of miles westward of the Marabar Hills that of the third action. This occurs primarily in Anglo-India except for the last action which takes place in a native state. The extension of the classical to the romantic is affected by Forster's mythical mode of narration and by the archetypal significance in the novel.

The entire sequence of the novel is co-related with the three stages of man's spiritual history or the individual's spiritual development. A shallow stage marked in the book by Aziz's superficial optimism is a stage of disillusionment embodied in Mrs. Moore's response to the Malabar and a stage of qualified achievement exemplified by Godbole's meditation at the Hindu festival. The physical and human waste-land fades into the background and God is no longer totally absent. Temple as religious image and Godbole as human image indicate a challenging hope for man in his spiritual quest now and in the future. To put it differently Mosque explores the Moslem approach to truth Caves examines the confusion and sterility of the Birth of rational Western approach and the Temple celebrates the comprehensive spirituality of the Hindu approach. The dialectical structure which consists of positive affirmation-negative retraction and muted reaffirmation not only determines the meaning of the novel but is reflected in every detail of its imaginative organization. Glen Pederson believes that the Caves separate Mosque from Temple. Thus Forster reveals the division inherent in India in two attitudes depending upon the values and ethics towards these two different lives.

Mosque is not only a symphony of differences but also of attempts at oneness. The mosque has an institutionalized significance of what history has done to India socially and religiously. That is why Aziz could rhetorically question: "*What did it matter if a few flabby Hindus had preceded him there and a few chilly English succeeded?*" (API: P.24) Less amenable than Christianity to nationalistic bias it appeals to Aziz's sense of beauty

and history enabling him to write sentimental poetry glorifying the Islamic past. It is true that India in *A Passage to India* is not beautiful not even romantic for it is a muddle not a mystery. Ethics in all religions here have their limitations; neither is exclusive of the other. They lend to an interpretative significance not only to mosque but to the whole. It is muddle that produces the misunderstandings and middle-class rows that have so central a place in the novels. In *A Passage to India* muddle is seen on a larger and more alarming scale. It vitiates not only personal but racial relationships. Mystery promises on answer and romanticism is concerned with the adumbrations of order to be found in beauty and mystery. India in its social and historical muddle land in his formless landscape is developed as a powerful symbol of unknowable reality. From the outset the structure of reality is divided into the ordinary and the extra-ordinary Chandrapore is typical of what is ordinary. It is remarked:

“It is the city, the place of human habitation and has no things that can be called extraordinary. But outside the ordinary there is the extra-ordinary; it is there in addition to the ordinary”.^{vii} (Frank: 1966: 92)

The first chapter is purely descriptive like the opening of a film in which the camera offers a bird's eye view. Like the mixture of nothing and something in the opening sentence's description of Chandrapore, the account of the Ganges and its relation to the city includes both negative and positive movements. There is elimination and decay but also a building up of substance. Here the realm of ordinary life is conceived as the market place of trade and other practical efforts to survive. The Ganges is not holy here as the ordinary realm is perhaps elsewhere surrounded by the holiness but is here seen devoid of spirituality. A few aesthetic values exists in this ordinary realm but are available only by invitation and with effort they are surrounded by filth-identical to the rubbish deposited by the river but in their hidden state they are kept safe like a jewel in dung. Filthy alleys and private gardens mingle in the ordinary realm to surround the fine houses – beauty and ugliness, upper and lower class life forming a continuous medium of ordinariness.

Through its description of the contrasting aspects of Chandrapore, the one native and the other official through its description of the contrasting faces of earth and sky and its ominous and most carefully placed allusion to the extraordinary caves. The first chapter releases the dominant images of these since it is the images of the undifferentiated earth and over-arching sky that become the controlling symbols in the novel. The dome of the sky is richly ambivalent image suggesting simultaneously the promise of a rounded perfection but also hints as a receding infinite. As the events unfold in the first part the dome it becomes associated with the mosque and this secret understanding of the heart is experienced by Mrs. Moore and Aziz with the quest for the divine through the ideal Friend with the way of Islam.

The criticism implicit in this self-consciously mannered style is strengthened by its association with the red-brick civil station. On the rise itself, life is defined functionally – grocer's bungalow cemetery and laid out along right-angled roads. Thus they were historical and the gushy romantic diction is connected with self-protective European notions of technical progress and civilization. There are indications that the realm of reality associated with the sky has similarities both to the ever-changing fluid and to the

artificially divided social realms; like them the sky has its changes and is occasionally mapped into sections by clouds. But it is normally a unifying dome a spectrum that includes all colors. Stylistically the description seems an attempt to transcend the inadequate formulation of guide-book talks and conventional romantic images in a voice without expectation, value or judgment. The narrator becomes a metaphysician of light mixing careful naturalistic observation of the changes in the sky with mystical religious suggestion a dome of blending tints the stars hang like lamps from the immense vault. In sum, the sky is both an encompassing and unifying dome over life and an emptiness that stands outside human concerns. In either case the sky is the same and its duality must be considered a meeting ground between being and nothing.

The description of the visitor's experience in the caves is probably Forster's nearest approach to successful lyric poetry. Stone quotes the entire sequence to show how it contains all the symbols in the novel before going on to see the caves as symbols of womb, tomb and the unconscious pre-rational condition. The narrator achieves what even Godbole later fails to image a vision of the life of stone. The vision merges sky land stone, inside and outside human and inhuman with a striving toward unity it ends with a muted sexual climax and closure. The conclusion of Temple the form of the novel has been archetypal following the sequence of the ritual. The cyclical pattern says without words that there is life out of death union is duality and continuance in all things. In the great union of Hinduism friendship is reaffirmed and the action seems to conclude with all the positive results of a successful ritual--a passage, rain, fertility of the land and the birth of child. Forster has ostensibly answered the need for connection that runs throughout his work. In a way the state of puzzlement at the end of *Passage* is appropriate to its archetypal dimension: the work is finished yet unfinished, full created yet not concluded. The community of understanding pleasure and interest established by Forster opens on to endless future possibilities. Perhaps the main paper upon which the novel rests is that human beings can never fully understand one another for it is in the nature of the human to be ultimately mysterious arising from mystery and going down to the grave in the same aura of unknown and incomprehensible.

A Passage to India draws upon Forster's profound feelings and building itself around them with bold consistency, it achieves aesthetic freedom too. It is a novel whose resources of plot and symbolism work in harmony toward a single end and whose subdued prose reverberates like the voice of Mrs. Moore to swell night's uneasiness. In *A Passage to India* Forster has successfully blended his ethical and aesthetic vision by integrating suggestive images and echoes with the small human community at Chandrapore and their discordant quarrels and misconceptions. The novel is not a symphony which indicates any false hope of exaltation but it confines itself to pointing out the failure of man to integrate himself with the rest of Nature. He is there on Earth after centuries of carnal embrace a stranger to the Marabar Hills, a stranger to his fellowmen and an alien by the side of the mighty Ganga. In presenting his actions Forster has not surrendered to the vogue of impersonality and detachment. With conservative assurance he brings to bear on the actions of his characters the whimsical totally honest totally forthright reflections of an engaging mind.

Through its description of the contrasting aspects of Chandrapore the one native the other official through its description of the contrasting faces of earth and sky and its ominous and most carefully placed allusion to the extraordinary caves. The dominant images like the undifferentiated earth and over-arching sky become the controlling symbols of the novel. The dome of the sky is richly ambivalent image suggesting simultaneously the promise of a rounded perfection but also hints as a receding infinite. As the events unfold in the first part the dome becomes associated with the mosque with the secret understanding of the heart experienced by Mrs. Moore and Aziz with the quest for the divine through the ideal Friend in the way of Islam.

Forster is an author whose writing stretches across the whole period of the late Victorian and Early Modern ages. In his search for the lost unity of man's spirit and body he looked back toward the classical ideal of harmonious perfection which had disappeared with the destructive impact of the technological revolution. Like the major romantic poets, Forster sought salvation in turning to nature. The quest for meaning in modern life is directed to nature. Modern myths are not enough to create a meaning in modern life. Man did not only identify with nature in the past, but he also found meaning in nature. The old harmony in the classical myths and the archetypes which stemmed from the earth and nature helped man to hold onto life. Forster's primitive myths and archetypes created strong bonds among his characters, and between his characters and nature. Brotherhood, friendship, solidarity and love were the greatest values which helped man to find a meaning in life. Man never felt isolated and alienated in the past, since he always belonged somewhere. Man's isolation from society and his intense loneliness lead him to a genuine despair and self-estrangement. Forster's mystification provides a powerful means of expressing the oppression and alienation of humanity and the spiritual crisis of modern society.

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