

Female Characters Handling the Theme of E.M. Forster's Novels

Dr. Amar Kumar

PGT (English), Govt. Senior Secondary School,
Kanti, Muzaffarpur, Bihar.

Abstract:

E.M. Forster is not only a novelist but also a short story writer, a romantic idealist, a humanist thinker. He is also a writer of social issues. His literary career spans the first quarter of the twentieth century; an age of science, an era of material, prosperity and affluence has been ushered in. He was aware of the social difference, colonialism, racism and other evil issues of our society. E.M. Forster's novel "A Passage to India" published in 1924 and considered one of the author's finest works. The novel examines racism and colonialism and the problem of human relationship very effectively. His female characters in his novels have very significant role. It is obvious that his female characters are well aware of the fast changing values of the modern world. Lilia from "Where Angels Fear to Tread" is a complex female figure whose psychology is difficult to read out. Forster is a novelist who believes in tolerance and modesty, in friendship and personal relationship and in peace and freedom.

Key Word: *Idealist, affluence, ushered in, racism, humanist.*

Introduction

Edward Morgan Forster has been a controversial figure in the world of 20th century fiction. The bulk of his creative work belongs to the Edwardian Era. However, his art and thought has a great affinity to the work of the prominent Georgian novelists. His novels are the expression of his moral vision and its world rests on moral foundations. In his novels he takes up different problems and tries to come to their solution. Walter Allen is right in saying 'Forster is a novelist difficult to assess; he can be easily overestimated and underestimated'.¹ It is very interesting for me to deal with E.M. Forster's major female characters in his novels. In Forster's first novel, 'Where Angels Fear to Tread', there are three such characters who draw our attention. The first is Lilia Herriton who gets transformed during her visit to Italy and where she does also die in the course of childbirth. Lilia is really important who deserves elaborate treatment. If we compare these three characters Lilia, Caroline Abbott and Harriet Herriot, we find that it is Caroline Abbott who is most compromising and tolerable Harriet suffers from superiority of being a Sawstonian, while Lilia figures as fickle- minded character.

Forster's 'A Room with View' came out in 1908. It is said that this novel is smaller and lighter than 'Where Angels Fear to Tread'. A Room with a View as Forster says, is his nicest book. According to

Wilfred Stone, "Forster's fictions are always in some way testing values and roles, here he tries on conventional happiness of actual marriage and sexual joy".² Lucy Honeychurch accepts Cecil Vyse and the two get engaged to be married. Lucy is rather happy though not quite happy with her engagement, for bit by bit she finds Cecil rude, prudish. Really speaking, Cecil has no idea of the comradeship after which Lucy's soul yearned. She is quite impressed with Mr. George Emerson. Lucy has had her own share of the experience of life. Italy's influence on her has deep and profound:

"She had reached the stage where personal intercourse would alone satisfy her.

A rebel she was a rebel.

Who desired, not a wider dwelling room but equality beside the man she loved."³

The truth is that she does like the old man, Mr. Emerson, who is open and frank, loves Nature and believes ardently in the equality of the sexes. Nevertheless, she is upset over the impudence of his son George, kissing her.

'Howards End' begins and ends with the image of Ruth Wilcox and with the physical presence of Margaret. The characters who are directly involved in the drama of the clash of the values or thoughts are Mrs. Ruth Wilcox, Henry Wilcox, Margaret Schlegel, Helen Schlegel, Leonard Best. The Wilcoxes are masculine people, practical, rational and institution. They are fortune-hunters and empire builders; they stand for the outer life of action and adventure, of 'telegrams and angers'⁴, and are the champions of impersonal forces. On the other hand, the Schlegels represent the feminine principle so much that as Margaret says, 'theirs is a female house'⁵, they are academic, cultured and cultivated persons, greatly interested in art and literatures; they stand for the inner life of spirit and imagination, believe ardently in 'personal relations'⁶. And they are idealistic in their attitude. Margaret seems to be a responsible lady, a caring sister to her younger sister Helen and brother Tibby. She behaves like an elderly lady shows that even in her girlhood she is very serious and self-confident.

'A Passage to India' is Forster's best known and most widely read novel. It is a novel of human love and compassion, and this theme of love and affection relates to Mrs. Moore like Mrs. Ruth Wilcox in Howards End and Mrs. Ramsay in Virginia Wolf's *To the lighthouse*, is perhaps the most effective character in *A Passage to India*. She is indeed an enigmatic character, a person gifted with intuitive powers and mystic apprehension. She pervades the book throughout and dominates it in one form or another, from the beginning to the end. The other lady who attracts our attention is Adela Quested. She has come to India with Mrs. Moore to see the real India. To her great horror and shock, she finds the ugly realities in India. She is a reasonable girl and after the cave incident she decides not to marry Ronny the magistrate at Chandrapore. She puts question to know the people, events and India. Mrs. Moore is shocked to see that the ruling people, her countrymen, including the ladies are so very contemptuous of Indians. She is different from other English

people of the place and she is also different from Adela Quested for the latter does not have the insight, the perceptiveness, the intuitive understanding the vision of the former. In fact Mrs. Moore wants English people in India to be pleasant for, as she tells her son that India is a part of the earth and God has put us on the earth in order to be pleasant to one another. Mrs. Moore is kind and sympathetic not only to human being but also to animals and insects. It is generally said that Mrs. Moore is a character who enjoys the gift of soluble vision. This means that if on the one hand Mrs. Moore is in a position to observe people and objects and situations in their external aspects, she is also in a position to look deep down into them and get at the reality. She has a power to understand the mystery of this universe. In any case, both Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested are important characters. These two characters are there throughout the story. Forster is quite conscious when he delineates these two female figures in the novel. They are also humanist in their own way.

Conclusion:

It is notable that Forster seems to have a genuine feeling of respect for his female characters, and the way he analyses and projects their psyche is indeed impressive. Whether it is Mrs. Moore or Mrs. Ruth Wilcox, they speak of both tradition and modernity. At the same time his major female characters, are spiritual in nature in attitude as they speak of both the physical and the spiritual world. The two female characters, Mrs. Moore and Mrs. Ruth Wilcox represent the picture of a class of high quality. Mrs. Ruth Wilcox is an extraordinary figure as she has extraordinary intuitive power. Mrs. Moore has a controlling influence upon events and places. She is not a high born woman but she certainly cares for values and ethics in life. Caroline Abbott from 'Where Angels Fear to Tread' seems to be more clear and kind than Lilia and Herriton. Forster's novels deal basically with an endeavour to connect the prose of life and the passion of life.

Reference:

1. Allen : The English Novel, (Penguin International Edition 1970) P.332
2. W. Stone : The Cave and The Mountain: A Study of E.M. Forster (Stanford, 1969) P. 216
3. E.M. Forster: A Room with a View (London, 1958) P.135
4. E.M. Forster : Howards End (Penguin Edition, 1957) P.27
5. Ibid, P.42
6. Ibid, P.27
7. E.M. Forster: Where Angels Fear to Tread (London, 1983)
8. E.M. Forster: A Passage to India (Surjeet Publication) P.393
9. E.M. Forster : Where Angels Fear to Tread (London, 1983).