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A STUDY OF E.M. FORSTER'S MAURICE

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ABSTRACT

In an independent country where after many years we hear the Indian Supreme Court giving the LGBT community freedom to express safely their sexual orientation under Right to Privacy law, some still tend to give a different look when we hear about the very term LGBT. In the fiction world too, it has a different place altogether. E.M. Forster in his book, Maurice shows the triumph of true love in his book in a similar way and that too in a country where homosexuality is prohibited. This novel has been made into a movie too. This paper shall look at the novel from a famous writer in a critical perspective with highlighting the aspects of LGBT literature and how the novel neatly fits in it.

KEYWORDS:

LGBT, Homosexuality, Hierarchy of classes, Friendship

INTRODUCTION

This novel is a twentieth century product of fiction which throws light on the LGBT community then in England. This was a bold attempt by Forster as the community was not accepted to be part of the society in England. This paper is an attempt to highlight the aspects of LGBT literature in the novel, *Maurice*. Some instances from the book like the couple Alec and Maurice decide to go off from their land and the fear of Clive to be in a homosexual relationship shows how the law, society, etc were totally not favorable to the sidelined homosexuals. The story of the novel is basically about the hero Maurice's emotional incline and how he deals with the repercussions of identifying himself as a homosexual in a heterosexual society, especially in England. Maurice succeeds in the same. This is one of the reasons why the novel is looked upon and the other reason being Forster's fear to publish the book during his time due to the order in England. His writing was a bold attempt where he throws light on a successful gay relationship which most modernist writers couldn't do because of the condition of homosexuals in England in the start of the century.

Forster's early life at Rooks nest is where he formed his first friendship. This led to

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"comradeship" in his later part of life. Forster's friendship was with Ansell, the garden-boy, who spent Wednesday afternoons to play with Forster. The friendship was a symbol for naturalness and fraternity and not only intense joy. This relationship might have served as a background for portrayal of many subsequent friendships, both in Forster's life as well as his fiction. Some relations in his novels include separation of two men due to different class or nationality. For example, in *Maurice*, it was Alec and Maurice and in *A Passage to India*, it was Dr. Aziz and Fielding.

In *Maurice*, the protagonist Maurice initially has a vision of friendship via George, the garden-boy, whose naked image haunts Maurice in his dreams. Forster in real life even seems to have confessed a preference for "a strong young man of the lower classes and to be loved by him and even hurt by him" (Colmer 3). The novel explores the theme of continuity of England which is a brief of Forster's sense of belonging to Rooks nest from which he was snapped. This was also a major preoccupation of the age. This application of the principle of continuity was an achievement of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century shattered that ideal.

The first chapter of *Maurice* records the pathos and futility of Forster's sex education at a preparatory school to which he was sent to at the age of eleven. Cambridge became the symbol of the undivided life, and all Forster's novels explore possibility of men and women achieving such a harmony. In *Maurice*, it's between people who remain faithful to wisdom of the body and those who don't prefer to do so. Forster failed to create a suitable setting in which the strength of heroic tradition is present. Also, he failed to work on envisage the kind of relationship the antithetical men might enjoy as the reconciliation became more personal and less ideological. Forster left to India putting aside these problems. Again this was hidden when a momentary physical contact with Edward Carpenter's friend and servant, George Merrill provided base for *Maurice*, the novel. *Maurice* was thus an explicitly homosexual novel written in 1913-1914, though published after the death of E.M. Forster in 1970's.

Maurice was a well kept literary secret. This novel does throw light on Forster's dilemma as an artist and as a man on how to come to terms with his own sexuality in a society that imprisoned homosexuals and censored homosexual/LGBT literature. The novel *Maurice* was written initially for the author and a small circle of his friends, all of whom had a special interest in the theme of homosexuality. This limited reach accounts for the thinness of narrative, its self indulgent tone, the too intermittent play of irony. *Maurice* is clearly an exercise of personal therapy and not a complete work of art.

The novel *Maurice* has a simple plot. The story is centered on *Maurice* Hall and his parallel and contrasted relations with two young men. First, Clive Durham, a fellow Cambridge undergraduate whom Maurice loves and is loved by Clive. Clive's homosexuality is only temporary stage in his development as Clive is repelled by masculinity including *Maurice's* and discovers his capability for indulging in normal heterosexual relations. He gives up to trivial duties and responsibilities of a gentleman. Another instance is when *Maurice* meets Alec Scudder with whom he ends up living happily and could recognize frankly, 'the wisdom of the body' as he couldn't do with Clive.

Throughout the plot there are homosexual and social themes reinforcing each other. When sleeping together at Penge, the hierarchy of social class comes into being. The upper class *Maurice* and under game keeper Alec offend the social and sexual taboo of the Edwardian society and still couldn't shed off the inherited attitudes or manners of talk. Also, Maurice had confirmed his homosexuality with Alec before his second meeting with the hypnotist. The last two parts show the conflict of love and social conditioning and thus the last chapters are given a large complexity compared to the previous

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ones. The image of the 'crack in the floor' which Maurice himself mentions to his doctor acts as a symbol of a path which he can't cross separating him from normal heterosexual life and also bridges class and sexual taboos of the society.

Maurice is a poignant work especially for the portrayal of the main character. He liberates himself from the social norms and stands as hope to the sidelined or those who feel alienated. Forster raises the contrast of agricultural England and industrial England to a myth which belongs to the pastoral tradition. As Colmer puts in, "For most modern readers therefore Maurice is likely to appear a charming pastoral eclogue in Edwardian fancy dress"(127).

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