

# **I. What I Believe by E. M. Forster**

## **Introduction to What I Believe**

E. M. Forster is an individualist and liberal thinker. He is an artist, finds difficult to adjust with the changing world. He does not believe any organized religion or social or political creed. He is a democrat. He is not a hero – worshipper. He does not believe in Great Men or Gospels. Respect for the individual, love, tolerance and sympathy had been the cherished ideals of democratic principles. He observes that the world is changing from bad to worse. Violence, cruelty plus racial religious persecution dominate the world. This essay is the honest confession of the Personal Faith. It guides his life. In other words, he follows the dictates of his conscience. He is truly a secular democrat. He does not claim to be a member of any religion or sect. This essay throws light on his personality.

## **Summary**

E. M. Forster begins 'What I Believe' with a note of clean confession. He does not believe in Belief. Most of the creeds are militant. The world is full of religious or racial persecution. He admits that Faith is a mental starch. He differs from the world.

He believes in personal relationships. The world is surrounded by violence and cruelty. We must love people and trust them. Reliability is the basis of personal relationships. It is not a matter of contract. It is a matter for the heart. without natural warmth, reliability is impossible. Most men possess this warmth. Politicians want to keep the faith.

Personal relations are despised today. We are urged to get rid of them. We are told to dedicate ourselves to some movement or cause. He halts the idea of the causes.

Democracy is not a beloved Republic really. It is less hateful than another form of government. The individual is important. All types of individuals make civilization. There is no division of people between bossers and bossed. He is the admirer of ordinary people. They get a chance in democracy. They are creative in their private lives. They are confined to their domestic work. Only democracy allows them to express themselves.

Democracy allows criticism and allows varieties of expression. Public criticism can check scandals. He believes in The Freedom of Press. (the press is not – free from lies and vulgarity) Parliament is sneered as a Talking Shop. He values parliament because it criticises and talks. Its chatter gets wide exposure.

The police and the army represent force. They represent the Government. All society rests upon force. All the great creative actions and decent human relation occur during intervals. We need not get habituated to Force. Force or Violence is the ultimate reality on our earth.

No form of Government or Christianity will bring peace to the world. No change of heart will occur. It is a wrong presumption that we cannot improve. What is good in people is their insistence on creation. Their belief in human values and loyalty creativeness alerts the people when violence sleeps. In order to escape the trials, we need not turn to hero-worship. Hero worship is a dangerous vice. It is a minor merit of democracy. It cannot produce Great Man. Democracy can produce different kind of small men with varieties. A hero is an essential part of dictatorship.

He distrusts Great Men. They are surrounded by a desert of uniformity around them. They are deprived of ordinary pleasures of the average man. He believes in Aristocracy. It is not the Aristocracy of power. Aristocracy is based on Power and Influence. He believes in Aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky. It has a universal existence. They are found everywhere. They represent the true human tradition. It is the victory of the queer race over cruelty and chaos. They are sensitive towards the world. They are generous. They have the capacity to endure. They can take a joke. They can't give up laughter. He disapproves the public image of the Aristocrats. He declares that he would like to go with the old Scotsman. He wanted less chastity and more delicacy. He accepts his aristocrats with all their human imperfections. He doesn't reject sensuous joys or pleasures. The terminology (Phraseology) describing aristocracy is false. Authority (Political Power) can utilize them or ignore them. They are not restricted to iron bars or Holy Kingdom. Their canvas is wide open. There is complete pleasure in earthly life. One needs eyes to see and hands to feel.

The power makes people crooked. The man without a status symbol is happy. Member of Parliament or Government does not trust each other. Suspicion, treachery, robbery and cheating are seen in public life. This is practised in the name of decency. The primitive man restrained these elements through certain taboos. There will be no messiah to preach a new Gospel. Only good temper or goodwill can strengthen. All theological prayers are a part of wishful thinking. One must under native goodness of man to explore New Universe to make life worth living. Christianity can't answer or solve the problems before us. In modern society Money behind the spiritual institutions will influence the people. The organized religion is a failure. His faith is very small.

As an Individualist, he fears that the dictator hero can not help the people solve their difficulties. Every human being is born separately and will die separately. Everybody is born naked and will die naked.

## **II. Another Note (from Oscar Education)**

E. M. Forster's "What I Believe" is interesting in that it reflects a moderated idealism. Throughout the essay, Forster will make a proclamation, such as rationality is good, and subsequently retreat half a step, in this case insisting on the continued necessity of faith. It is an interesting technique and demonstrates much of the complexity of his positions, and arguably those of Bloomsbury insofar as they are a whole. Particularly interesting are his fascination with faith, which forms the bedrock of the argument, and with personal relationships.

E. M. Forster says that he does not believe in belief; but there are so many around that one has to formulate a belief of one's own in self-defense. Three values are important to Forster: tolerance, good temper and sympathy.

### **Personal Relationships and the State**

Forster argues that one should invest in personal relationships: "one must be fond of people and trust them if one is not to make a mess of life". In order to do so, one must be reliable in one's relationships. Reliability, in turn, is impossible without natural warmth. Forster contrasts personal relationships with causes, which he hates. In an often quoted sentence he argues: "If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend I hope I should have the guts to betray my country". He goes on to explain:

Such a choice may scandalize the modern reader, and he may stretch out his patriotic hand to the telephone at once and ring up the police. It would not have shocked Dante, though. Dante places Brutus and Cassius in the lowest circle of Hell because they had chosen to betray their friend Julius Caesar rather than their country Rome.

### **Democracy**

Forster cautiously welcomes democracy for two reasons:

It places importance on the individual (at least more than authoritarian regimes).

It allows criticism.

Thus, he calls for "two cheers for democracy" (also the title of the book which contains his essay) but argues that three are not necessary.

Forster goes on to argue that, although the state ultimately rests on force, the intervals between the use of force are what makes life worth living. Some people may call the absence of force decadence; Forster prefers to call it civilization.

### **Great men, Forster's Aristocracy and Public Life**

The author also criticises hero-worship and profoundly distrusts so-called "great men". Heroes are necessary to run an authoritarian regime in order to make it seem less dull "much as plums have to be put into a bad pudding to make it palatable". As a contrast Forster believes in an "aristocracy", not based on rank or influence but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky. For Forster it is a tragedy that no way has been found to transmit private decencies into public life:

The more highly public life is organized the lower does its morality sink; the nations of today behave to each other worse than they ever did in the past, they cheat, rob, bully and bluff, make war without notice, and kill as many women and children as possible; whereas primitive tribes were at all events restrained by taboos. It is a humiliating outlook - though the greater the darkness, the brighter shine the little lights, reassuring one another, signalling: "Well, at all events, I'm still here. I don't like it very much, but how are you?"

### **Individualism**

Forster concludes by stating that these "are the reflections of an individualist and a liberal" who has "found liberalism crumbling beneath him", taking comfort from the fact that people are born separately and die separately. Therefore, no dictator will be able to eradicate individualism.