

## THE JOURNEY OF PROTAGONIST IN THE LONGEST JOURNEY

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*The Longest Journey* is E. M. Forster's second novel published in 1907. The novel in its a bildungsroman scope traces the development of the protagonist, Rickie Elliot, who has just entered Cambridge. The novel is more about what it is like to go to Cambridge and about the inner conflicts of an emerging artist. Forster has also made this novel thematically rich and relevant by cross-weaving the themes of morality, journey, people and money. Further, the novel resonates with a series of man-woman relationships, theme of heredity, Cambridge motif and the ambiguities of human relations. It is also possible to read *The Longest Journey* as a record of Forster's views on reality, art, man-woman relationship and sexuality.

The entire plot of the novel revolves around Rickie Elliot, who enters Cambridge in the early twentieth century and shapes his outlook and career in the company of two bright but cynical companions, Agnes Pembroke and her brother, Herbert. Rickie is also acutely conscious of his physical inferiority as he had been regularly bullied and chided by his cousins for his lame foot. He enters Cambridge with a negative self-image – having inherited weakness and a frail body. The rest of the novel is about Rickie's negotiation of this negative self-image in various contexts such as art, career, romance, sexuality, marital life and his relation with his step-brother, Stephen. If one follows this trail in the novel, then one can read *The Longest Journey* as a quest for Rickie's true identity through a series of relational situations. Hence, the search for self emerges as one of the significant themes in the novel.

Forster handles the major theme- the theme of journey in this novel which is suggested in the title of the novel itself. The revolution in the field of technology and industrial development during the Edwardian period made common man mobile. As a result, people travelled from one place to another in search of job, education and hunt for fortune.

Forster observed new changes in the society and wrote about common man's journey of education, job and search for fortune and reality.

A. S. Hornby in the *Oxford Advanced Dictionary* defines 'journey' as a distance covered in travelling usually by land, from one place to another. Further he adds that journey may indicate a long distance or a short one travelled regularly. There are different types of journey: the physical, mentally, visible, invisible, economical, educational, geographical, historical, spiritual, philosophical and intellectual. However in literature the word journey is used symbolically representing different kinds of meanings which the writer uses to fulfill his desire of passing his message to the readers. They make their characters mobile to reach their destinations. Likewise, Forster has focused on the journey of the characters in *The Longest Journey*. The novel envisages journey of major characters from one place to another and symbolically the journeys of their life. The novel also documents a detailed journey of the characters which is ultimately 'the longest journey.' Especially, the novel deals with the journey of the protagonist, Rickie. In this context the famous critic John Martin says:

*Rickie Eliot's longest journey is the journey of his life, taking him from the suburb in which he was born and where, during his childhood, his parents die to public school and on to Cambridge university; from there to a public school in Sawston, where he serves as an assistant master; and finally to Cadover, his Aunt Emily Failing's estate in Wiltshire, not far from which he falls victim to sudden and accidental death. (26)*

Rickie Eliot is the focal character who travels from one place to another in search of morality, spirituality, and reality. Ansell is guide in the longest journey of Rickie, who helps him to reach his destination successfully. There are two more characters who are companions of Rickie during his journey. Laxmi Prakash in this context says in her book *Symbolism in the Novels of E.M. Forster*, 'The title of the novel, recalling 'Epipsychidion' of Shelly, suggests Rickie's 'dreariest and longest journey' with Agnes' (128) Forster dedicates three sections of the novel to the theme of the journey. Rickie is born with lameness and he seems predestined to failure that fights to succeed which, certainly, is called a journey toward success. As he is

largely a victim of circumstances, his longest journey expresses his search for what in the novel called reality. John Martin captures Rickie's sections of journey in the following way:

*The three sections into which The longest Journey is divided – Cambridge, Swanston, and Wiltshire – mark the three major kind of experience to which Rickie is exposed in the course of his adult life. (32)*

*The longest Journey* is divided into three sections- Cambridge, Wiltshire and Swanston. They symbolize three major mile stones of experiences to which Rickie is exposed in the course of his life. Rickie traverses through Cambridge and gets many of experiences. These experiences help Rickie to shape his personality as well as his future. He makes friends, reads classics, talks philosophy, and is happy for the first time in his life. He meets his friends and gets news experiences which take him in new human world. It is a journey of going towards the reality. His journey of Cambridge begins with the discussion on cow which is dominated by Stewart Ansell, Rickie's stepbrother. The meeting is being held in Rickie Elliot's rooms but Rickie's part in the argument is limited and it soon becomes clear that he is intellectually inferior to Ansell. At this point, Rickie's intellectual journey is introduced and he is informed that his intellectual capacity is very limited. Further, he visits the library of Cambridge which heralds his journey from ignorance to knowledge and reality. As the protagonist novel, during his journey in the outer world, Cambridge, he encounters with many dangers. For instance, Gerald, the lover of Agnes and muscular figure, always frights him. Therefore, he does not appear frequently on the campus of Cambridge. His friends also tease him and lay down many barriers in his way wherein his room protects and shields him. In this context, John Martin comments on Rickie's refuge in his room:

*“His familiar rooms are his home, a shelter – like the dell at Maddingley – from the outer world which, both of his parents being dead, affords him no place to settle. To be sure, there are ‘sets’ at Cambridge – the athletes or ‘beefy set’, and Rickie and his non –athletic, cultivated friends who generally consider them – saves ‘saved’. Rickie would like to break down the barriers dividing the sets; but for that ambition his friends tease him.” (32)*

Rickie is under the impression that Cambridge is a store house of knowledge and intellectual vitality. The arrival of Agnes, tall young woman, who visits Cambridge with her brother as Rickie's guest, washes all his impressions and proves that Cambridge is narrow which explores the realities of Cambridge. At this point Agnes plays the role of a guide in the journey of Rickie towards Cambridge. Moreover, she dismisses the masculine atmosphere of easy intimacy and intellectual frankness is abruptly dismissed by the arrival of Agnes Pembroke. Her arrival breaks Rickie's mind. Agnes's brother Herbert' is a pompous and ambitious schoolmaster, and Gerald, a handsome young man who has been at school with Rickie represent the Sawston world and divert Rickie's way of. They prove that the life at Sawston is more realistic than Cambridge. As a result, Rickie experiences the narrowness of Cambridge in his journey from Cambridge to Sawston and back. When the question of narrowness reoccurs Ansell replies:

*There is no great world at all, only a little earth, forever isolated from the rest of the little solar system. The earth is full of tiny societies, and Cambridge is one of them. All the societies are narrow, but some are good and some are bad—just as one house is beautiful inside and another ugly.... To compare the world to Cambridge is like comparing the outsides of houses with the inside of a house. (68)*

Cambridge pushes Rickie to his journey of imagination. Consequently, he wants to write some stories as a Cambridge undergraduate in the company of nature. Therefore, he wishes to gear up himself towards nature to enhance the experience of imaginative power. Meanwhile, he falls in love with Agnes and fail to accord with his growing experience. He tells Agnes that he wants to travel in the company of nature to write his stories but he fails to start his journey. In this context he says:

*'You see, a year or two ago', he tells Agnes, 'I had a great idea of getting into touch with nature...It's funny enough now, but it wasn't funny then, for I got in such a state that I believed, actually believed that Fauns lived in a certain double hedgerow near the Gog Magogs, and one evening I walked a mile sooner than go through it alone.'* (77)

This is indicative of Rickie's journey as a search for some way of harmonizing his imaginative and emotional life with the facts of experience. Rickie, as an undergraduate at Cambridge exhibits his mature stance of imagination than his fellow friends. It indicates his journey of imagination from imperfection to perfection as other fellow undergraduates do not agree with his idea, he insists upon his journey of imagination and goes alone ahead.

He has naturally turned in upon himself and developed his imagination. Reality is another destination of his journey that traces his spiritual journey. His discussion with Ansell about the configuration of squares and circles indicates his inquiry into spirituality which symbolizes his journey in spiritualism:

*'Are they real?' asks Rickie, looking at the configuration of squares and circles. 'The inside one is', replies Ansell, 'the one in the middle of everything, that there's never room enough to draw.'* (27)

The above discussion of the Edwardian young men throws light upon their differences opinion on reality and spirituality. It is the ultimate source and single centre from where both spiritual and material drives are taken by the characters. Agnes is Rickie's guide on his longest journey, recalling him to the path of objective fact when he is over-involved in fantasy. Rickie recalls the world's beautiful things and remembers certain places and people with absolute beauty and goodness. He traverses to his longest journey back into his past life where he had spent many happy hours alone or with his friend's, the dell at Maddingley. In his first visit to dell created a very adverse impression on him. So the first journey to dell was a journey towards the darkness as he was immature to understand the holiness of the dell. His second journey, to this place becomes holy for him and it is imaginary, which develops his spiritual attitude to dell. Here the dell symbolizes the development of Rickie's spiritual journey. Similarly, it is his journey towards reality of dell which is articulated by Rickie himself in the following way:

*...a kind of church—a church where indeed you could do anything you liked, but where anything you did would be transfigured. Like the ancient Greeks, he*

*could even laugh at his holy place and leave it no less holy. ... If the dell was to bear any inscription, he would have liked it to be 'This way to Heaven. (20)*

Forster presents that every moment of Rickie's journey introduces him with new realities. Rickie is also in search of his mother. After the death of his mother he feels lonely therefore, he travels to Cambridge in search of mother, but his search ends at dell that partly compensates him for the loss of his mother. In Agnes he finds a substitute mother. His journey in search of mother ends here. Forster presents his reaction after reaching his destination of substitute mother:

*Inside the dell it was neither June nor January. The chalk walls barred out the seasons, and the fir-trees did not seem to feel their passage. Only from time to time, the odours of summer slipped in from the wood above to comment on the waxing year. She bent down to touch him with her lips. (80)*

Presumably, Rickie represents absolute good but when he meets to harsh realities he finds that his soul gets bankrupt. The journey, hence, is like that of T.S. Eliot's "Journey of Magi" wherein Rickie traverses away from frustration and the unbearable harsh realities in a hope of getting salvation. Here, Rickie represents the Edwardian society which is strangled in the spiritual ethos and is looking for some solution for salvation. Both, Eliot and Forster were writing in the early twentieth century who experienced the same miseries of human life. He reaches to the point where, there is only god or god's image in the world which makes his journey complete. Therefore, Cambridge signifies Jerusalem for him. Further, he deprives himself from human satisfactions. Furthermore, Forster presents that he might instead worship God for God's image at least is incorruptible:

*There is, indeed, another coinage that bears on it not man's image but God's. It is incorruptible, and the soul may trust it safely; it will serve her beyond the stars. But it cannot give us friends, or the embrace of a lover, or the touch of children, for with our fellow mortals it has no concern. It cannot even give the joys we call trivial—fine weather, the pleasures of meat and drink, bathing and the hot sand afterwards, running, dreamless sleep. (243)*

The journey of the protagonist is also compared with the heroes of the contemporary novel. In this context David Bradshaw in his text *The Cambridge Companion to E.M. Forster* says:

*The Longest Journey at first seems a modern Bildungsroman like Joyce's A portrait of the Artist as a Youngman or Lawrence's Son and Lover, that records the journey of its protagonist, the Forster-like, Rickie Eliot as travels from the safety and happiness of Cambridge, through the degradation and misery of Sawston, reconciliation and rehabilitation in Wiltshire.(52)*

During the journey of Cambridge, Gerald dies and Rickie shows sympathy for Agnes as, he is attracted towards her and his journey of spiritual love begins, but unfortunately he has to travel in the experience of physical love in which Rickie is not interested. He becomes a victim of conscience and sexual embarrassment, and tries to recall Agnes to the memory of her symbolic moment with Gerald to get rid of this sexual act.

Rickie's second journey also takes place in a particular spot, the Cadbury Rings, a prehistoric tumulus not far from Cad-over, his aunt's estate in Wiltshire. He quarrels with Aunt Emily to enjoy the view and spent his time in the company of natural beauty. Instead of giving company to him she gives him shock by telling that Stephen is a son of shepherd to irritate Rickie. This journey, too, begins with the frustration. Despite, his experience with Aunt Emily, he wanders in the company of Rings that consists of a bank of grass enclosing a second ring of turnips, and in the middle a small tree. The spot reminds Rickie of the dell, for not only is the view of the outside world. The arrival of Agnes at the Rings recalls her presence in the dell. This time, however she stands on the outer barrier waiting for Rickie and his aunt to traverse the Rings alone.

The following scene of journey is melodramatic. Rickie leads towards the centre of the Rings where he sees the graveyards of pagan soldiers who are buried there. Aunt Emily declares that the place is full of ghost and the spirit of buried soldiers. Consequently, Rickie traces that he is travelling through graveyard which is not subjected to journey and he is dismayed by the sight. Further, Aunt Emily gives references of Stephen more persistently which alarms his journey. The terror and the reference of Stephen are horrendous to Rickie as a result he becomes unconscious. On the contrary, Stephen shouts to fetch him to the life.

Instinctively, Rickie accepts the reality, revealed by the symbolic moment and cries out to his brother. So once again the journey of reality arrives at destination. Finally, Rickie and Agnes with Herbert return to Sawston School.

The third phase of Rickie's journey traces with his stay in Sawston School. At the school, Rickie compromises his independence and helps Herbert to victimize a weak boy, Varden. This act of Rickie turns him from his philosophical journey to the journey of violence. But this journey ends soon as Stephen, his step-brother helps him towards his right path. Here, Forster brings back Stephen into action for latest journey of Rickie. Equally to Stephen, Ansell plays the role of guide and soothsayer to reveal that Stephen is not the son of Rickie's father but of his mother. Rickie encounters the truth and once again his invisible journey brings frustration to him. Forster presents his visible and invisible journey in the novel which captures his multifaceted journey ranging from philosophy, geography, morality, education and truth. At Sawston, Rickie encounters the people of his own social class, but fundamentally different from himself and his Cambridge friends. The people as he observed snobbish and intolerant hidebound by the conventions of the Edwardian professional middle class. The journey of Sawston is not fruitful to Rickie as he wants to return to Cambridge as early as he can.

The final stage of his journey begins when Stephen invites Rickie to accompany him to Sawston. Here, he plunges into many doubts and tries to make his way back home. So, he takes time to accept Stephen, since he considers that it is an act of overruling the conventions that have governed his attitude towards him. Though, Rickie's desire to accept Stephen is realistic it troubles him as he accepts Stephen in a wrong way. It is an incurable act which took place in the past, however, he sees him not as a symbol of his father's sin, but of his mother's virtue. Eventually, when he plunges into the fog in response to Stephen's call, it is their mother's voice that he hears:

*Habits and sex may change with the new generation, features may alter with the play of a private passion, but a voice is apart from these. It lies nearer to the racial essence and perhaps to the divine; it can, at all events, overleap one grave. (271)*



Forster projects Rickie as a mature and visionary idealist in the concluding phase of the novel. This signifies the completion of Rickie's journey of life. He is seen as the visionary idealist who sacrifices his life for Stephen; a youth chiefly guided by instinct and feeling, might live. It seems, Forster is projecting Rickie as Jesus Christ figure through Rickie's final act. The final chapter shows Stephen married and with a child, and leading the 'happy tangible life' of a country farmer, a few miles from Cadover. Stephen's settlement as a farmer also signifies his completion of journey from nomadism to settlement. Even the death of Aunt Emily indicates the completion of her physical journey of the earth. Further, the Silts, poor cousins of Rickie's father, who are making needed improvements in the property, signify their journey towards improvement and settlement. Stephen and Herbert seem busy in preparing an edition of Rickie's stories, which have already enjoyed a moderate success. This act throws light upon two things- Rickie's journey as a writer is complete and secondly, Stephen and Herbert settle economically. In this way, all characters in the novel complete their respective journey and reach their destination.

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