

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)

Vol. 4, Issue 7, July 2015

Social Concerns in Bhabani Bhattacharya's Fiction

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ABSTRACT: Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of the most celebrated Indo-Anglian writers. Endowed with excellent talents, he seeks a balance and synthesis and integration between opposite forces and values of life and that has had a deep impression on Indian English Literature. Bhabani Bhattacharya is a realist who sees what is, and says what he sees. His writings explore the realities of life. He, with a sensitive mind understands and expresses the problems of contemporary Indian society. His novels are a microcosm of India. The Sahitya Academy Award (1967) winner, Bhabani Bhattacharya has depicted Indian social scene in the light of historical events with major themes like: hunger, poverty, disease, addiction, tradition versus modernity and major social evils of the society. In his novels he has treated culture with different dimensions. His novels are in the tradition of Indian moral fable. Gandhi's humanism, his concern for the oppressed and suffering section of humanity, his commitment to truth and non-violence, his essential opposition to superstitions and dogmas, his stress on the need for purity and uprightness in thought, speech and conduct and his avowed objective of attaining Self-Sufficiency through austerity – all these find ample utterance in the fictional world of Bhabani Bhattacharya. His women characters occupy a prominent role in his novels, and are dynamic and brave enough to take active steps to achieve the fulfilment and meaning in life.

KEYWORDS: social-realist, social conscience, humanism, suffering, hunger, optimistic, synthesis

I. INTRODUCTION

Bhabani Bhattacharya (10 November 1906–10 October 1988), endowed with excellent talents, is unquestioningly one of the outstanding Indo-Anglian novelists like Mulk raj Anand, Anita Desai, R.K.Narayan, Kamala Markandeya and Nayantara Sehgal. His social-realist fiction has attracted the attention of scholars not only in India but abroad also. He was born in Bhagalpur, part of the Bengal Presidency in British India. Bhattacharya gained a bachelor's degree from Patna University and a doctorate from the University of London. He returned to India and joined the diplomatic service. He taught in Hawaii, and later in Seattle. In his mid-thirties Bhattacharya began writing fiction which clearly exhibit his keen interest in the political, social and economic problems of India. In all, Bhattacharya has written six novels:

1. So Many Hungers (1947),
2. Music for Mohini (1952),
3. He who Rides a Tiger (1955)
4. A Goddess Named Gold (1960),
5. Shadow from Ladakh (1966) and
6. A Dream is Hawaii (1978).

The Sahitya Academy Award (1967) winner, Bhabani Bhattacharya has presented Indian social scene in the light of historical events. As he believes that the novel must have a social purpose, his novels abound in the themes like: hunger, poverty, ignorance, disease, exploitation, greed and other major social evils of the society. He strives through his writing to arouse social conscience and thereby to awaken the conscience of the exploiter. He also shows a belief in the progress of human being towards betterment of mankind. "I hold that a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader something from the society's point of view. Art is not necessarily for art's sake. Purposeless art and literature which is much in vogue does not appear to me a sound judgment." (Joshi p. vii) Bhattacharya strongly believes that a writer should depict the life and its truth realistically specially in the drama. Art must teach, but

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unobtrusively, by its vivid interpretation of life. Art must preach, but only by virtue of being a vehicle of truth. If that is propaganda, there is no need to eschew the word. (Bhattacharya 395)

II. DISCUSSION

Gandhi's humanism, his concern for the oppressed and suffering section of humanity, his commitment to truth and non-violence, his essential opposition to superstitions and dogmas, his stress on the need for purity and uprightness in thought, speech and conduct and his avowed objective of attaining Self-Sufficiency through austerity – all these find a conspicuous place in the fictional world of Bhabani Bhattacharya. In the words of K.R. Chandrasekharan, "Bhattacharya is a realist and at the same time a visionary" (P172). The very first novel *So Many Hungers* deals with the theme of hunger for food and hunger for freedom which form the central themes of the novel. It is nothing but the story of a young scientist, Rahoul and his family and the story of a peasant girl, Kajoli and her family. Rahoul's story in miniature represents the struggle for freedom. The sad plight of Kajoli gives a pathetic record of the victims of a famine, who greatly suffered from all aspects. The novel underlines the fact that the famine was not an act of God but the result of the rapacity and selfishness of profiteers and the indifference of the British Government. K.R.S.Iyengar has considered the novel as "an impeachment of man's inhumanity to man" and "a dramatic study of a set of human beings trapped in a unique tragic predicament" (Iyengar 414)

As the Second World War broke out, the British government wanted India to help them. Indian leaders agreed to help on the condition of India's freedom. However when the British were losing the war to the superior armed might of Germany, Indian leaders were doubtful of Britishers' keeping their promise. So they demanded the establishment of provisional national government at the centre. Obviously, British did not accept and Indian national congress launched the Civil Disobedience Movement in October, 1940. British government did not take it seriously earlier revolts for freedom were very cruelly trampled by them. As a result congress demanded an immediate end of the British rule and adopted the Quit India Resolution in August 1942. The congress was banned as a result and drastic repressive measures followed. The prominent leaders like Mahatma Gandhi were imprisoned. This added the fuel in the revolt. Gandhi was the greatest inspiration for many Indians like Devesh Babu and his grandson, Rahoul to fight against the British rule. Using truth and non-violence as chief the weapons, Indians like them, instilled the patriotic enthusiasm and spirit of sacrifice for the freedom of the country. Devesh Babu's character reminds Gandhiji when he says that his fight is not with the people of England but with their ruthless rulers who hold Indians in subjugation for their narrow interests. The issues taken up by the writer are applicable even after so many years of Independence of India. The power of money is still the benefactor for those who do not have the potential to get the jobs. Bribery is a social and moral evil in the country even now. The incidents of sting operations, market of the fake degrees of doctors, engineers, getting things done by bribery or approach, buying tickets and votes are prevalent in our society. The novelist has tried to unveil the fake face of the politicians and officials through *So Many Hungers*.

III. RESULTS

The picture that Bhattacharya presents in the novel is very gruesome. The heartrending sights of human woe and sufferings move us to tears. At the same time, there is an underlying ray of hope, the assertion of life amidst hunger, the flickering of light in the ashes in the novel. K.K.Sharma considered it to be Bhattacharya's "affirmative vision of life" (P26). K.R.Chandrasekharan found the novel portraying "the triumph of spirit over matter" (P 34). Rahoul joins the freedom struggle and helps the destitute suffering from famine. Kajoli who decides to sell herself for the sake of food, moves back and remembers Devata's word never betray yourself, she decides to earn food by doing hard work honestly. The novelist has given an optimistic message here. The characters of the novel live on the hope and live for hope. There is a silver lining too underneath the dark and gloomy life.

In *A Dream in Hawaii*, Bhattacharya extends his vision beyond the problems of his country to the sick Western civilisation. He attempts to synthesise the materialism of the west and the spiritualism of the east. The novelist designed to project an acculturation between the two contraries. He provides ample realistic ideas of the Indian and American life. On one hand Yogananda preaches to his disciples about Vedanta philosophy and on the other hand he reveals his

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inner self urge for Devjani. Hawaii symbolically becomes the meeting ground of the east and the West and their encounter leads to “dynamic equilibrium” which epitomises his concept of ideal world.

Bhattacharya's *Music for Mohini* portrays in detail the tussle between tensions- tension between the mind and the body (the mind of the husband and the body of the wife), tension between East-West, old and new, village and town, tradition and modernity, astrology and rationalism, the daughter-in-law and the Mother-in-law. In the beginning the contrasting values are in sharp conflict with each other, but by and by the clash becomes less severe and ultimately, all tensions are resolved and there is the marriage of true minds. “The light hearted spirit of Mohini cannot be dimmed entirely by the national and social forces in which she is caught— To be sure, she ripens and matures as head of a large household as wife, daughter-in-law, self-appointed teacher and as expectant mother. But a spark of irrepressible girl remains.” (Shimer 46) Mohini is the central figure who believes in fighting against heavy odds and in spite of unfulfilment and upheavals, does not accept defeat. “The novel is a study in psychology without the involutions and complexities of a typical psychological novel.” (Chandrasekharan 37)

Bhattacharya's women characters do not only occupy a very special position in his novels, but also keep the warmth of personal contentment intact when their courage and endurance put to test. They do not negate and berate the family life. While maintaining their identities as daughters, wives and mothers, they are dynamic and brave enough to take active steps to achieve the fulfilment and meaning in life and affirm their true selves. Women in each of his novels show the women facing their future with confidence and fortitude. His women characters are embodiments of tenderness, affection and vivaciousness. They exhibit in the family relationships their affection, tenderness and resilience exuding the warmth of femininity. Amidst so many uncertainties and vagaries of life, they show glimpses of optimism and hope to their family. Bhattacharya is of the view that women should take active and equal part in family and social life with an optimistic approach. The subtle empowerment of woman as presented in his novels, seems to show his special concern for the betterment of women's position in society.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The novel *He Who Rides a Tiger* “is a moral fable of human depravity and degradation to get out of the moral morass of fraud and falsehood.” (Singh 93). The novel is a successful attempt to explore the victory of human spirit over degrading material temptations. Kalo in the novel has not only a purpose in life, but also the will and strength to achieve that purpose. His daughter Chandralekha has profound faith in his capacity to attain his goal.

Shadow from Ladakh, saturated with Gandhian references, thought and imagery, portrays the conflict between two modes of life represented by Gandhigram and Steeltown. In the novel, Bhattacharya tries to emphasise that the nation cannot do without heavy industry, steel production, stockpile of armaments, nor can it do without love understanding and compassion.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *A Goddess Named Gold* presents an analysis of the Indian nationalistic freedom movement and highlights the role of women in Indian freedom struggle. In the novel *A Goddess Named Gold*, women activists occupy the focus of his novel. Meera, the protagonist of the novel has the spirit for patriotism and leadership. In this novel, when a man is bitten by a Cobra, Meera sucks the poisoned-blood with her mouth and saves the life of that man. Even before the demonstration against the Seth takes place Nago, the only son of the Seth and Lakshmi falls into a well, while flying a kite. No man is visible for help. Other women are confused but Meera acts spontaneously. With the help of other women, she rescues the boy in time. This shows his optimistic approach. He also describes the multi-dimensional philosophy of freedom. He tries to awaken the people to the need of economic freedom of masses from the exploitation by the greedy capitalists and profiteers for their own selfish ends. Bhattacharya is positively one of the significant scholarly geniuses who have contributed in extraordinary measure to the improvement of Indian fiction in English. An observer to pre and post free India, he could get his nation's otherworldly anguish, its difficulties, it desires its inconsistencies, its nerves, its disappointment and expectations. In the light of his anecdotal yield, he can be said to have built up for himself a pride of spot in Indian writing. To conclude, Bhattacharya expresses his sincere concern for the realities and problems of life and through these novels launches a vigorous campaign against what he considers to be anti-life tendencies and forces in the way of life and pleads for a full and joyous life.

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