

Study of Humanism in the Novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya

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ABSTRACT

Women are the most powerful human spirit in literature. Personality of the typical Indian woman was wheeled in the context of male-dominated culture. It was considered that she had no mind not even thinking and own personality. She is glorified in her sufferings. The shadow and woman in life are no more than a shadow in literature, silent sorrowful and miserable creature, bearing children, no strength or desire to rebel for her rights. The appearance and capacity of an Indian woman portrayed in literature from the Vedic times today is constantly under the influence of change and flux. Except for a few in sparse times, a woman is considered more or less submissive especially in the Indian male dominated society. The root cause of all this to be the ideas and obstacles that have been imprinted on the girl's mind since childhood as a result of being accepted as having a weak position in society. Change is the law of nature, everything must change; the figure of the woman also shows especially the tremors of change in the 1950s. With the appearance of the chain the progressive novelist's Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya on a literary front, the role model for the woman began to change. In Bhattacharya's novels women can be traced ranging from self-sacrifice to self-realization, from self-denial to self-assurance from self-denial to self-affirmation. In Bhattacharya's novels, the woman passes away the state of tradition, change and modernity. This paper is an attempt to analyze the changing status and role of female characters in the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya.

Keywords: *Personality, submissive, male dominated, self-realization, self-denial and self-affirmation.*

INTRODUCTION

Bhabani Bhattacharya is a prolific writer with a great creative faculty of portraying socio-realistic vision of life through his novels. He is the well known Indian novelist writing in English during 1950's. He deeply believes that art must have a social and moral function to make people realize the worth of moral values. Being a novelist with a social purpose, Bhattacharya has depicted the social, economic and political changes in India on the background of the contemporary historical events and social conditions. Bhattacharya has produced six novels. They are: *So Many Hungers!* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He who Rides a Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960), *Shadow from Ladkh* (1966) and *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978).

Bhattacharya gives an account of the Indian way of life in each of his novels. He refers to various customs, conventions, superstitions and oddities present in the Indian society usually without commenting on their merits. One of the striking features of the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya is the prominence given to women-characters in them. Women are usually presented by him as highly significant if not central characters. They are not treated as inferior to men, although they happen to live in a male-dominated society.

In his novels, Bhattacharya traces the position of women through the journey undertaken by them from the state of self-sacrifice to self-realization, from self-denial to self-assertion and from self-negation to self-affirmation. Woman in the novels of Bhattacharya passes through the stage of tradition, transition and modernity. But due to the sublimation of their natural desires in the society, they can't reveal their subconscious self. This revelation of freedom loving side of women was unseen, undiscovered and was like an underwater mass of the iceberg; she is the hub around whom everything gyrates. She remains the still centre, like the centre in a potter's wheel, circling to create new forms, unfolding the continuity of a racial life, which in turn has encircled and helped her acquire a quality of concentration.

Bhattacharya provides a bent of window opened to look at the inner self of the woman and to help them to come out from their cocoon into the limelight. When one peeps into the gallery of Bhattacharya's portrait of women to find a wide range of women from conventional to contemporary one- all of which are quite convincingly set in the local backdrop. The idea and role of woman described gives us an insight into the cultural values, changes and the concepts of traditional Indian society in general. They also stand, raise their voices and protest against the exploitation and oppression in a male dominated society. Bhattacharya affirms that his women characters always occupied a special place in his novels and are more superior to man.

Women are either central characters themselves, or of at least equal importance as the male characters or provide the inspiration and meaning from which a man drives his strength. This kind of focusing on women, both as individuals and as symbols, is not surprising in Dr. Bhattacharya's works for at least two reasons. One stems from the author's own admitted fascination with and admiration for the Indian woman (Bhattacharya 66).

The very first novel *So Many Hungers* depicts Kajoli as a particularly charming, well-bred young peasant girl of fourteen. She has fancy for pictures of a bright colour and hangs them up all over the mud walls. However almost immediately it was to become impossible for her to enjoy such simple pleasures as firstly her father was dragged off to prison for his efforts to help his country for achieving independence, later her husband Kishore, who was sent to her by her father due to scarcity of food was forced to leave her as a newly-wed bride to go to Calcutta-in the hope of work, food and wage. Kishore could never come back, as he was shot dead at the outset of his journey by a police guard.

Kajoli with her mother, brother Onu and with the entire village became more and more impoverished. They finally decided to go to Calcutta. Along the way, Kajoli was raped and gave birth to a dead child and was taken to a hospital. She was nicely looked after and adequately fed in the hospital, but her mother as well as her brother had to sleep on the city streets and were forced to forage in garbage bins. After Kajoli discharged from hospital, she realizes that how her family had been half-living making her to take a grim decision of selling the last thing she owned herself.

The light-hearted, delicate girl had gone away and was replaced by a more determined, self-affirmed woman of new-found strength. She came out of the brothel and went to march with the patriots by preparing herself to participate in the hunger-strike. And hence at the moment of deepest degradation and shame, Kajoli majestically recaptured her bravery and power she had abandoned long ago. She projected the true spirit of every Indian woman which can walk even in the most difficult situation of life with utmost ease and calmness. Her new found courage to act arises from the depths of her womanly self. She required no more brightly coloured pictures for her because she now possessed a brightly coloured vision of a better tomorrow having undergone through the process of self-realization. She decides to start her life afresh.

Music for Mohini dwells on the transformation of the female protagonist named Mohini, a care-free, young, tom boyish, city-bred girl into an intellectual, cultured lady of tradition in the Big House of village Behula. It not only talks about the process of her transformation, but also the quality of transformation and the extent of her achievement. After being married for two years, she longs for the love of her husband, Jayadev and a child. For Jayadev, physical love has no meaning as he cares for the upliftment of his country only. This becomes the root cause of her marital discord. Hence leading her to test her adaptability, flexibility and also reveals whether or not she is capable of growth and building a life of service and commitment. She manages in the midst of her typical Indian problems of a daughter-in-law to stand and to help her husband in his self-appointed task of educating the villagers by weeding out the harmful superstitions; she plunges into the job of teaching the village women. By transforming her attention from family to society, Mohini emerges as a stronger woman of great strength and emancipation. In the words of Rashmi Gaur:

Bhattacharya has portrayed Mohini as a representative of his image of the new woman who is to act as a bastion against the corrupting influence of the west and protect the traditional values of personal and social life from any sudden or violent change. Mohini is expected to be a harbinger of new ideas and new skills in a stagnant society without much freedom to act of her own volition (Gaur 56).

In *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Chandralekha is true to her name in both her features and actions. At the time when she finds that it is quite impossible for her father, Kalo to dismount from the lie of deceiving the people through transforming themselves from Kamar (lower class) to Brahmins (upper class) acts as riding on a tiger's back. They both undergo such a transformation due to the oppressions, class restraints imposed on them. "We are the scum of the earth. The boss people scorn us because they fear us. They hit us where it hurts badly in the pit of the belly. We've got to hit back" (Bhattacharya 37).

Although, now they become Brahmins but still have longing for their previous lives. Chandralekha is supposed to become the incarnation of the mother of seven fold Bliss. But she finds her position to be suffocating: a gilded cage and wants to enjoy freedom. With her self-assertion, she has the sufficient reasons to revolt against the prevalent mode of behaviour of his father and society as she has been through the same hell of starvation and suffering as his father has undergone. In a way she has suffered more than her father at the hands of society, because she was forced to a brothel. She feels greatest discomfort in riding the tiger of lie and falsehood. But still, she sacrificed her true freedom at the stake of her father's happiness, makes him realize his fault. With the help of her inner will and goodness in her character, she not only comes out as a redeemer; but also helps her father in getting rid of the burden of falsehood-imposter as a Brahmin. She comes out as an undaunted spirit and leads a new life in future free from all vices projecting Bhattacharya's new woman of self-realization.

Bhattacharya makes us look at the female as a ray of hope for mankind. By putting them in the whirlpool of miseries, Bhattacharya proves her strong enough to face any crisis. Meera and her experiences with taveez in *A Goddess Named Gold* becomes a fable for the responsibilities that freedom entails. She reveals her will and determination for the freedom at the tender age of eleven that makes her exceptional. She expresses her strength of will and determination, her capacity for fullness and her concern for others by joining her fellow villagers for a month in prison following their freedom march and their cries of Quit India.

Later, at the age of eighteen, she possesses the courage to descend into the well to rescue the child named Nago; the son of Sethji (money-lender). She goes to an extent to unite all the women of the village to march against the Sethji, demanding that he should charge fair prices for cotton saris so that they might exchange their tattered saris for new one. Even her grandmother is shown as a woman of great insight. Though being an orthodox creature, she brings about the emancipation of the village woman. She suffers from gout, but still manages to participate in procession against Sethji. Her very presence gives courage to the timid village women and frightens the Sethji who does black marketing which proves that in Bhattacharya's novels, women stand against all the atrocities that befall on them.

The character of Suruchi, wife of Satyajit in *Shadow from Ladakh* has to adopt Gandhian principle along with her husband. She also follows the path of becoming ideal women neglecting her own wants and desires. Woman suffers as wife owing to their emotional home loving temperament and treating their husband as God. It is difficult for the wives to rebel against their husband as they have to fulfill their sociological role in life by submitting themselves to the traditional stridharma. For persisting Gandhian ideals, Satyajit becomes self centered and finally decides to become Brahmachari. But being a projection of true Indian woman Suruchi agrees with Satyajit.

Suruchi later makes her daughter, Sumita realizes about the true essence of womanhood which she had forgotten under the influence of her father. By showing the affair between Sumita and Bhaskar, Bhattacharya projects the image of new woman who can go to an extent to fulfill their desire and can choose their life partner. The vitality that Suruchi fails as a woman, Sumita gains it. In the process of finding herself, Suruchi felt displaced, pulled from the roots of her inner self but finally finds her true position.

In *A Dream in Hawaii* a remarkable transformation can be seen in his female characters namely Devjani, Stella, Sujata, Nishi, Frieda, Jennifer etc. as they are more affirmed, confident and independent. This novel is about the metamorphosis of an Indian Professor of Philosophy named, Neeloy Mukherjee into Swami Yogananda It is actually his disciple Devjani who helped him on the mystic path to become a Swami. Although renouncing the world, Neeloy still longs for the love of Devjani. But she is shown as above sexual desires and after helping him on the mystic path, she goes to America for her research work. Women are given more space in the novel regarding taking important decisions of their lives, choosing to have relationship with a person or not-without marriage or not, going abroad for further studies etc. Bhattacharya has openly talked about sex, love and physical desires of a woman. They are no more traditionally bound and represent the class of New Woman.

CONCLUSION

Bhattacharya assigns different roles and position to the women in his novels. Although, in his novels, women suffer, submit them at first, but later comes out from the traditional mooring and mark their presence. Awakening of the spirit, recreation of confidence, i.e. liberation of women from weak, fragile being to a stronger personality is seen. Bhattacharya presents women as rising above the custodian existence to a distinct footing and marked that the name of woman with a distinct image and stature.



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