

Socio-Political Concerns in the Works of Bhabani Bhattacharya

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ABSTRACT

Bhabani Bhattacharya is well-known social reformer among Indian writers in English. He uses his art as a medium to achieve social reforms. He is the writer of transitional period in Indian Socio-Political history. Through his writings he proves himself to be the product of his age. He has depicted the social and political changes in India on the background of the contemporary historical events and social conditions. He has written six novels namely: *So Many Hungers!* (1947), *Music For Mohini* (1952), *He who Rides a Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960), *Shadow From Ladakh* (1966) and *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978). His novels give an account of different customs, conventions, superstitious and oddities present in the Indian society. Bhattacharya's experiences helped him to write exhaustively on social problems. He was acutely aware of the social and political problems of the then society, so that he could emphatically voice the voiceless of the society. In this edifice of creativity, the foundation rests on the themes of social reality, social and political issues, clash between tradition and modernity, allegorization versus historicity of facts, East-West encounter, progressivism, concern for the common man, Indianness, humanism, exploration of the self and the problem of identity of the post – Independence Indian nation and Indian man. This paper is an attempt to project only socio-political concerns in Bhabani Bhattacharya's Fictional Writings.

Keywords: *Social Reforms, Social Reformer, Social and Political Problems.*

INTRODUCTION

Indo-Anglian literature forms an integral part of English literature and it has attained a distinct place in the literary landscape of India. The term 'Indo-Anglian' refers to original creative writing in English by Indians various Indian writers have carved out a name for themselves in different fields of literature. Every piece of literature is like a treasure and its value greatly depends on its explorations to make it useful for life. Bhabani Bhattacharya is of the view that art must have purposiveness and the novel must have a social purpose. He wrote about the social conditions prevalent in his time. The socio-political and economic situations had left deep impact on his mind which stimulated him to have such six novels on his credit as:

1. *So Many Hungers*
2. *Music For Mohini*
3. *He who Rides a Tiger*
4. *A Goddess Named Gold.*
5. *Shadow From Ladakh*
6. *A Dream in Hawaii*

Bhabani Bhattacharya was born in Bhagalpur port of the Bengal presidency of British India. His parents were Bengalis. He studied at Patna University and received a bachelor's degree in English Literature. He received his masters' degree in 1931 and Doctoral degree in 1934 from the University of London. He won Sahitya Akadami Award in 1967. He passed away on 10th October 1988.

Bhabani Bhattacharya has a remarkable place among the 20th century Indo-Anglican writers. He is one such well accompanied and outstanding novelist who has made a culture interpretation of Indian ethos through his work. Almost all his novels do make a social document of great value and endorse a vision for the creation of a New society in India that is free from social evils, exploitation, suffering and variegated forms of hunger, both internal and external, thereby creating a human lands cape that stands out as a paradigm of the predicament of a puzzled and even bewildered modern man. Monika Gupta rightly comments:

“Bhattacharya can rightly be called the doyen of the Indian English novel in modern Indian for his futuristic vision, humanistic outlook historical perspective of the Indian social reality and his well defined theory of the craft of fiction” (Gupta 14).

He is said to have probed deep into various facts of human life through his characters by drawing one’s attention towards the social economical and moral crises of his times. Undoubtedly he uses social protest in his novels as an instrument to raise voice against injustice and to create awareness among the Indian masses of their own sufferings and societal problems in life. Bhattacharya through his fictional writings shows great concern for oppressive and crippling social and political forces. Bhabani Bhattacharya is of the view that art must have purposiveness and the novel must have a social purpose. He himself confirmed this view point in an interview:

“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.” (Badal, 1975)

Socio-Political Concerns in his Novels:

As a novelist, Bhattacharya continues and extends the tradition of social realism and thereby stresses the necessity of social purpose in his fictional world. Most of his novels have a social purpose apart from being a work of literary craftsmanship.

His very first novel, *So Many Hungers*, is a realistic study of the Bengal famine of 1943. The novel presents an authentic picture of the life in rural India in sharp contrast with the sophisticated and urban India. It is also a faithful portrayal of the changing social life of the contemporary India. The novel came out in 1947 soon after the independence of the country. The action of the novel covers the war years with Indian people’s gruesome sufferings and frustrations, tension and apparent contradiction of the then Indian society.

The picture that Bhattacharya presents in the novel is rather ghastly and grim. Its heart rending rights of human misery and suffering more one to tears but at the same time, it conveys to us the assertion of life amidst hunger, the flickering of light in the ashes. The two fundamental strands of the Indian society - the materialistic and the westernized modern society of the urban folk and the traditional and unsophisticated society of the rural folk are as conflict within the self of the individual generating the dilemma of existence. Therefore, the novel is really a modern Indian classic depicting the inhuman atrocities committed on them by their own fellow beings and countrymen during an almost man-made crisis in the form of famine which claimed the life of many innocent Indians.

.Bhattacharya’s next novel, *Music For Mohini*, deal with the problems of India soon after the independence. The story of the novel ranges from 1948 to the present day India. It deals with a problem which is relevant even today. In *Music for Mohini*, Bhattacharya does neatly show the need for restructuring the society for retaining and promoting political independence without relentlessly disturbing traditionalism. The novelist’s aim in thus novel is to show that India is unable to free itself from the clutches of orthodoxy and superstition even after independence. Here in this novel, Bhattacharya has made a sincere attempt to represent the conflict between the old values and the modern values as symbolized by the old Mother and Mohini respectively.

His major concerns are nothing but the need for a change in the social outlook and reorientation of social values. The main focus of the novel *Music for Mohini* is not merely on Mohini but for the social set up rather than the intellectual diversity. Having an intimate knowledge of human nature and a keen insight into the common motives and passions, creative power and dramatic sympathy, the author confers on his characters some degree of reality. The conflict between orthodoxy and modernity makes the central theme of the novel and its treatment is very realistic and convincing.

His other novel, *He who Rides a Tiger* is yet another novel for social change. It presents a true and realistic picture of Indian people and Indian society in the pre-independence era. The two major incidents of that era - the Bengal Famine and the Quit India Movement are the main sources of inspiration for Bhabani Bhattacharya while writing the novel. The novel once again draws the picture of poverty and destitution of the Indian people. This novel is almost like a more replica of the earlier novel because it attacks the social reality of the caste and class system and also the dehumanizing effect on the growth of individual character. As Poli Reddy has put it:

“He Who Riders a Tiger is a moral fable of human depravity and degradation to get out of the moral morass of fraud and falsehood. The novel is among the aptest illustrations of social realism” (Reddy 93).

The first novel, *'So Many Hunger'* and the present novel *'He who Rides a Tiger'*, draw a realistic picture of the then Indian society, people suffering from extreme poverty and destitution while the Sadhus in saffron colour get lot of alms and donations in the name of God and religion by the unscrupulous people:

"While men died of hunger, wealth grew; and while kindness dried up, religion was more in demand, it was only the outward form of religion, the shell of ritual, empty within. That suited Kalo's purpose."
(Bhattacharya 7)

Bhattacharya's next novel, *A Goddess Named Gold*, narrates the happenings in a village during the pre-independence days of India. The freedom movements forms the back ground of the novel. It is basically a novel devoted to rural India and its simple people especially the peasants. It is a satire on man's lust for gold and shows how spiritual values like sympathy and natural kindness are employed for purposes of gold. In fact, it is a modern fable, presenting a real picture of the then Indian society, actively craving for social and economic equality. Bhattacharya exposes people's belief in superstitions and miracles in the name of gold and pseudo wealth.

The preoccupation of Bhattacharya in this novel is with the way in which a country should use freedom and what benefits may be derived from it. He speaks about the advent of freedom, of the beginning of a new era in Indian with reference to a village called Sonamitti. It depicts the social and political situation of our country at a time when India is on the threshold of freedom. It is an expression of faith sanctity and supremacy of people's power. There is no denying the fact that his novels do have the hard core of didacticism in them and yet they are works of art, giving us interesting stories, credible characters and largely realistic situations.

His last novel, *'Shadow From Ladakh'*, deals with the central theme of India during the Chinese invasion of 1962. The main purpose of the novel is to present a contrast between rural and urban way of life. The novel emphatically pleads for a synthesis between the two ways of life as no one is complete and perfect in it. The novel symbolically and suggestively advocates for a synthesis between the spinning wheel and the spindle the two ways of life, the traditional and modern. The novel also shows people's concern to preserve the freedom of the country. It also examines the question of Tibet's freedom and reflects the Indian National character.

CONCLUSION

Bhattacharya believes that an artist should inevitably be concerned with truth and reality, his portrayal of the life and society is neither a photographic one nor a journalistic record. One can very well find the reflection of Indian culture, tradition and struggle in it. It is very clear that his novels are devoted to the exclusive exploitation of social and political realities of life in the country. His novels closely examine the social and political concerns related to Indian people arising out of hunger, poverty, famine exploitation, war and people's concern for peace, imperialism and nationalism.

As a novelist, Bhattacharya is least concerned with philosophical themes and ideologies. He is interested in the artistic depiction of the social and political realities of Indian society. He does not plead for any particular solution to their problems but very suggestive in the presentation of the real problems of the contemporary India. In most of his novels we find that the story is based on a clash or conflict of two opposing stands. The plot of, *'So Many Hungers'* is based on a contract between the forces of nationalism and thereof established set up of the state or society, the simplicity of the village life and the Sophistication of the city life. Orthodoxy and modernism are sharply contracted in his next novel *'Music For Mohini'*.

The novelist has interred woven the entire story of the novel in such a way that a strong contrast and conflict of the two ways of life comes out on the forefront. Then in the last novel *'A Dream in Hawaii'* Bhattacharya represents the East-West encounter in an interesting and impressive way. In his entire novels one can find that India and its contemporary views make the very basis of all his novels. The stories of his all six novels reflect of a strong implied picture of India in contract with the outer forces and views of life. As a thinker writer Bhattacharya presents a very portiere and affirmative picture of India and its social values. His contrast with the other culture and views in just to assess its worth in the changing time and scenario. As a devout Indian, Bhattacharya is always in favour of all that is Indian and his firm belief in its rich and time-tested values.

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