

A Detailed Study of Bhabani Bhattacharya's Concept of Society Depicted in his Novels in the Post-Independence Era

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Abstract:

The first decade of the twentieth century saw the birth of four great novelists of post-independent Indo-Anglian fiction, viz. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya. All of them grew up in British India, observed the social, economic, cultural and political conditions, prevailing under the colonial rule and imbedded firsthand experience of the National Movement either through their perceptive artistic imagination or through active participation in it. Bhattacharya has both fictional and non-fictional works to his credit. His fictional corpus includes the best known six novels and fifteen short stories which received the highest acclaim in India and abroad. His edifice of creativity is based on the themes of social reality, allegorization versus historicity of facts, tradition-modernity clash, East-West encounter, progressivism, concern for the common man, Indianness, humanism, exploration of the self and the problem of identity of the post-independent Indian nation and Indian man.

This research paper emphasized on Bhattacharya's concept of social reality in the post-independence India depicted in his renowned novels and his honest efforts to bring about the desired changes in the society through his characters.

Keywords: Post-colonial, Post-independence, Untouchability, Exploitation, Prohibition, Superstitions, Caste system, Social, Religious, Economic, Political, Hunger, Orthodoxy

Introduction:

Dr. Bhattacharya in each of his novels has taken up a contemporary social problem and presented it in a manner which would arouse the social conscience of man to work for a better world. He is a novelist of the destitute, has sympathy with the socially downtrodden people and does not spare the government and administration for the inhumanity and apathy towards the downtrodden. He deals with the corruption, selfishness and inhumanity in society. He wants to create a new India free from economic bondage, hunger, inequality, misguided faith, superstitions, rituals, and ignorance. He sees India on a new social basis and exposes various social evils of postcolonial society such as hunger for food and freedom, prostitution, exploitations, superstition, and hoarding of food grains, etc. through his novels. As a social reformer he wants to make men self-reliant and self-respectful individuals and pleads for intelligent exercising of vote, advocates widow remarriage and rebels against child marriage and casteism. As a realist, visionary and an optimist, he firmly believes that there is every hope for India to be a better place because it has all the basic material required for development and reconstruction. He asks people to give up their old beliefs and welcome new ideas which will ensure human happiness. According to him the country without social freedom is not truly free, "India, free to build up her destiny, was not yet truly free. She was like a prisoner held too long in a

dark cell. Unchained and released suddenly, she was bewildered by the light. But the stupor would pass. India would renew herself, and her strength would be the strength of the young not more, not less." (Music for Mohini: p. 181) According to Bhattacharya, a novel should be concerned with social reality. He puts an emphasis on social purpose and rightly remarks, "I hold that a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader something from society's point of view." (The Sunday standard: p.VII)

Dr. Bhattacharya emphasizes social freedom which is of utmost importance for the real progress of the orthodox and superstitious people of India and therefore attacks superstitions. His major concern is a need for change of social outlook and reorientation of social values in India. For instance, Jayadev in *Music for Mohini* is shown to be dedicated to social reform and freedom. Bhattacharya tells us the reality that the Hindus are still unable to shake off the shackles of superstitions and irrational orthodoxy. It is depicted through the characters of Old Mother and Jayadev's mother. Old Mother is against recording Mohini's songs for commercial purpose and prevents Mohini from going to an English convent. Bhattacharya condemns some traditions of Hindu society such as bride showing and bride inspection as if she is a commodity, the practice of not touching food by the bride during marriage till the whole ceremony is over, aversion to allopathic medicines and injections, untouchability and frowning upon widow remarriage. There are glimpses of religious superstitions like Jayadev's mother's dedication of her right hand to Shiva for her son's long life, blind faith in astrology and palmistry is highlighted here through the story of Sudha and belief on the presence of all the eight luck signs on Mohini's palm. Through all these religious superstitions the novelist suggests the need for change. Jayadev's *Big House* represents a miniature society full of

stern disciplines, iron tradition, orthodoxy and prohibitions like prohibition of singing loudly by a woman, prohibition of the mistress of the house from moving out of the house on foot, the tradition of using only the handloom saris, the customs, the necessity of begetting a son for the continuation of the family tradition etc. The novelist mocks at other superstitions like Heeralal's interpretation of the itching of his back as an omen of beating, prohibition of a widow for taking part in the reception of a new bride into the household, wearing a bamboo chip in the braided hair to ward off evil and protect a woman's pregnancy etc. He has suggested the need of change by giving some passing references of traditional practices such as the worship of Tulsi plant, the services of professional puranic story-tellers, a wife's sacrifice to tolerate even a co-wife etc. Having the impact of Gandhian thoughts, the protagonist Jayadev involves in constructive programs in the village like campaigning against superstitions, caste-system and exploitation of women. These social-reformation and reconstruction programs are taken up by a group of the village youths in collaboration with Jayadev and Mohini.

Bhattacharya's next novel *He Who Rides a Tiger* also deals with the theme of social freedom. Casteism is seriously protested through the inset story of Biten whose sister is hastily given away in marriage to an elderly widower by her parents when they discover her affair with Bhasav, a man of lower caste. Her unhappy life leads her to commit suicide and Bhasav taunts Biten about this. Biten, thereby, renounces his Brahminhood throwing away his sacred thread and promises never to speak about his caste. That is why he refuses to disclose his caste when Kalo questions him about it. Instead he takes the risk of losing the girl he loves. Lekha's education criticized by both the high and low caste people of Jharna shows the root of caste-system and the difficulty in eradication of it.

Kalo's rebuking the blacksmith Viswanath for touching and polluting him after wearing the Brahmin mask temporarily exposes the arrogance of the upper class people. The ill-treatment given to the boy Obhijit by Pujari's wife is also the example of caste tyranny. Bhattacharya exposes the wicked practices of the hollow religion and points out the hypocrisy of the corrupt society through the instance of the temple. The old Viswanathan is very sentimental man who has no faith in the temple creates a storm by one of his bold act. According to the practice, the milk that has been used for the ritual bath given to the image every day is collected and thrown into the sacred river Ganga. Viswanath begins to steal the milk and distribute it after boiling to destitute children in the neighborhood. Mangal Adhikari supports him, but the trustees and the worshippers who pay for the milk through endowment create uproar but he rides the storm and finally establishes the custom of using the sanctified milk for feeding the hungry children. This instance shows the hypocrisy and hollowness of the Hindu religion.

Dr. Bhattacharya attacks the corrupt practices in the novel *So Many Hungers* through the characters like Samrendra Basu and Abalabandhu. Samrendra Basu is an affluent lawyer who pleases his British masters to earn titles and accumulate huge wealth. Having suffered privation in his younger days, his main aim in life is to accumulate more and more money by fair or foul means for himself and his family. When World War II starts, he treats it as a chance of life-time to multiply his wealth. When a beggar casually mentions that a grain of rice would be more welcomed to him than money, Samrendra is quick to understand that rice is becoming scarce and that a good way to make money by hoarding it and selling at the most appropriate time. He, therefore, joins hands with his capitalist friend Sir. Abalabandhu and hoards rice in large quantity to sell it at inflated price later on. As a result, a

trading concern with the ironic name Cheap Rice Limited is formed. As the war progresses and hardships of people increase, Calcutta turns into a world of wealthy traders where one witnesses the hateful sight of man's callous greed for money and shameless disregard of all codes of civilized humanity.

In *A Goddess Named Gold*, Dr. Bhattacharya describes Seth Samsunder's lust for wealth, power and gold. This greedy exploiter concerns not only mill-made saris but even those made by the local weaver and raises the prices to such an extent as to make it impossible for anyone in the village to buy from him. Bhattacharya tries to show that if the wrong men are allowed to grab power; freedom will mean nothing to the people. He uses the Minstrel as a mouthpiece to voice some of his own views on the use of freedom and the conditions in which freedom can be of value. Bhattacharya gives a glimpse of his vision of the future India and also expressed his views on the dangers facing the country and the duties of the citizen. He gives the advice through Sohanlal that no one in a free country should be contented to live on charity. Sohanlal tells Meera, "We must demand what should be ours, the right to live as human beings." (*A Goddess Named Gold*: p.176) He gives a warning through Meera's grandma that there is no "easy end to our woes," (p. 270) and one should not expect that freedom will act like magic and solve all our problems for us. Bhattacharya's optimism about the ultimate liquidation of all exploiters by the people is conveyed through the following lines: "The days of the Seths were numbered. Soon would the people, vested with their new power, fully waken and their thunderous wrath would make every tyrant whine for mercy." (p. 224)

In *Shadow from Ladakh*, Bhattacharya is concerned with the future of India - the social, religious, economic and political regeneration. So the novel shows that neither Gandhism nor Nehruism can be alone the national ideal; only

a harmonious combination of the two would be an answer to the problems facing the nation today.

Conclusion:

In all the novels of Bhattachaya, poverty, corruption, casteism, ignorance and superstition, exploitation and dumb sufferings have been noticed and depicted. He belongs to the period of great up-heaval in political and social life in India and thus has a scathing attack on the inhuman and corrupt practices of the rich and apathy of the administrators before and after independence. Bhattacharya is modern in outlook, believes in the social reform on the principles of equality, justice and liberty, his characters are full of hope, zeal and courage

to bring about the expected changes in the society.

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