

THE CATALYST

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A Dream in Hawaii is Bhabani Bhattacharya's swan-song. It presents a fresh perspective and constitutes his experiment in the stream-of-consciousness technique. Written and published in the United States, the novel bears witness to an endeavour on the part of the author to "transcreate realities"¹ in the American Society with which he was associated for about two decades. And, consistent with his earlier attempts, he makes use of his new venture, too, for bridge-building between the contrasting values of the East and the West. Having revealed his inimitable for synthesizing divergent trends at the national level, now he has transferred that interest to the international arena.

Swami Yogananda is a professor-turned ascetic. He taught Philosophy in six Indian universities before he renounced the world. While teaching at Benaras, one of his students, Devjani, urged him to live Vedanta as Swami Vivekananda had done earlier, without resting content with merely teaching it. It was quite some time before Professor Neeloy Mookherjee got reconciled to the idea of turning an ascetic. While the excellent impression made by him on Devjani as a teacher prompted her to broach the topic with him, the fascination she had for him made him take her suggestion in all seriousness. His reluctance to act on it resulted from his awareness of his own limitations, and his essential humility. He sincerely believed that his attempt to become a yogi was very much like a firefly aspiring to become a star. Yet ultimately the struggle within him to gain a new

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identity won. Soon he sprang a surprise on everyone, except, of course, Devjani, by announcing his decision in that regard.

He sets up an ashram in Rishikesh and names it *Sadhana*. People come in large numbers and stay with him unasked. He gives *diksha* to many. Some of them renounce the world and become yellow-clad inmates of the ashram. In some time, he becomes a well-known figure both in India and abroad.

In fact, the memory of Devjani keeps haunting Swami Yogananda for long. He knows only too well that he has no business to think of her after renouncing the world. But his earnest efforts to erase her memory from his mind do not yield the desired results. Once he sends her a brief note saying that a firefly tries to be a star. Replying to it Devjani asks him if he will accept her in his ashram. The Swami's response is a firm "no". For he cannot bear to see Devjani in the yellow garb. He also fears that, in her gestures of reverence, Swami Yogananda will be destroyed.

Swami Yogananda follows the Gandhian way of inner purification : fasting with total submergence in meditation. After fasting for a few days, he finds it hard to avoid thinking of food. And when he ends his fast with a glass of lime juice, he is shamed by the intensity of his pleasure. The stretch of fasting days gets longer with each succeeding episode. Towards the end of the fasting, he has a mad craving to eat.

After spending three years at *Sadhana* he is no longer an ascetic's parody. His old being destroyed, he is truly reborn as Yogananda and becomes a world-famous yogi at the age of thirty.

One day he gets a letter from Devjani. It is a farewell note. She has been teaching in India and has since resigned her post to go abroad for her studies. The East-West center at Honolulu has offered her a research grant.

Swami Yogananda reads the note more than once. Soon he thinks of sending her a telegram inviting her to *Sadhana*. But on second thoughts, he drops the idea. Her letter goes unanswered. It is with a tinge of sadness that he recalls his impulsive change of mind in the matter. He is not able to explain it to himself. A distinguished American lady, Stella Gregson, who has been in India on a research work, is deeply impressed by the speeches of Swami Yogananda. She begins to stay with him at *Sadhana*.

On the initiative of Stella Gregson, Swami Yogananda visits Hawaii and decides to give a helping hand in setting up a World Center for Yogic Disciplines there. The center is named after him, as suggested by Stella Gregson, who sincerely believes that the West is badly in need of his counsel. As the meeting ground of the East and the West, Hawaii is considered the ideal place for setting up the World Center. Dr. Vincent Swift, who is a culture-vulture of the modern breed, is chosen to be the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Center. He is already the President of the Hawaii Academy.

Dr. Swift is a supremely practical man. He plans to make the Center commercially profitable. And Stella Gregson is also inclined to agree with him. But Swami Yogananda does not see eye to eye with them in the matter.

Stella is surprised to know that Swami Yogananda has no need of notes for his lectures. Like Swami Vivekananda, he makes his speeches extempore. When she asks him, if he does not think that notes can be useful he says,

I never use any notes as you know. I hate to be an engine on a railroad. I want to fly. Here, there, everywhere².

The analogy sounds impressive. But, Stella's rejoinder suggests her knowledge of men and matters. She says :

A flying man isn't as free as all that. He has to use charts, data of many kinds. He must know the lanes in the skyways. The state of the weather. Not to speak of his reserves of aviation, fuel³.

The yogi's response to her comments testifies to his essential humility. He says that she must be exclaiming what a folly it is to have brought such a mad Indian to her great country.

His decision to wear the robes of an ascetic notwithstanding, Swami Yogananda is not a megalomaniac. His comments elsewhere may also prove as much. When he is profusely applauded by the audience in the course of one of his lectures, he says :

Handicap is good for politicians, for public figures. They need it. I don't. All I ask of you is: Listen to what I have to say- in silence. Then rise and leave in silence⁴.

Hearing those words, someone in the audience is said to have remarked that the man is overreacting, dramatizing himself. Again, when the audience sounds overly appreciative of his speech, he says :

I am not a professional speaker. I am not even a professor. I don't need your applause. Please leave in silence⁵.

One can help thinking that he is a yogi with a difference, though his yellow cloak touching his ankles and low hair gave him the look of a common ascetic.

But his clean-shaved face is uncommon for a holy man. Stella Gregson says :

A clean-shaved yogi – he wanted to be different from others of his kind, obviously. Yogananda should be told that a well-trimmed beard would add strength to his face. Strength. Balance. Serenity. Credibility⁶.

But unlike his fellow-sages from India, he is said to be averse to self-projection.

Stella's comment may suggest her own materialistic outlook and practical approach. Yet not many women characters seem to have escaped unscathed at the hands of Bhabani Bhattacharya as much as she. She is presented as a brave modern woman with no trace of immorality about her. She finds it impossible to get reconciled to her husband's attitude towards sex. She decides to live away from him sticking to her own path. She is lucky enough to get a Fulbright Award for prosecuting higher studies just as that time when her husband goes out of her life, seeking pleasure in the company of another woman, Sylvia Koo. She is well-mannered enough not to nurse any grouse against either her or her husband. A chance encounter with Swami Yogananda gives her what she has been thirsting for. It brings her a feeling of release and not just of relief. The author says :

She felt reborn like the yogis like Swami Yogananda himself. She had set right her inner balance. countless others in America were in need of such redress. Here was a chance for her to be the tool of a rich human purpose⁷.

Thus Stella basks in the sunshine of Bhabani Bhattacharya's appreciative comments.

The author's willingness to acknowledge the wholesome aspects of American life, without painting the whole of the Western society in break colour, speaks of his essential dignity and candour. On visiting Hawaii, Swami Yogananda himself gets exposed to the American environment. The manner in which his eyes get suddenly transfixed by the sight of a well-endowed maiden serves to expose his vulnerability again. The communion he is sad to have had with a sex-crazy woman, Frieda, also presents the yogi in a poor light.

Cromwell Crawford is inclined to think that Bhabani Bhattacharya has not meant to expose Swami Yogananda to ridicule in the context. He says :

The fundamental problem here is not sex, but honesty. Bhattacharya calls for the honest acceptance of every human need. If people were closer to life, more attuned to reality, they would achieve an inner balance with life strain, fulfilling the claims of both mind and heart. There is something of Nietzsche in the novelist. The gist of his censure of ascetic and intellectualistic ideals is that they call for an unhealthy repression of human desires and emotions, a repression which stifles creativity. Freud and later psychoanalytic theorists confirm these insights....Kalidasa would have been perfectly at home among the Hawaiians! Their closeness to nature makes asceticism shockingly unnatural⁸.

Presumably, Bhabani Bhattacharya does not regard one's inclination to satisfy the basic human urges as deviation from good conduct. The view suggests the immense influence the West has had on him, he also says,

In fact a large sector of the Indian people has shed the old inhibitions and is fast becoming what is called “Westernised”. Maybe one day this sector will regain some of its lost balance by absorbing some of the disenchantment as well⁹.

One may wonder if the author has meant his swan-song for that Westernised sector. For the uninhibited ways of some of the characters in the novel tends to make the dream assume certain aspects of a nightmare for those who are not “Westernised”.

Stella Gregson glories in the thought of her having been responsible for the setting up of the World Center. She also prides herself upon naming it after Yogananda. She considers herself lucky to have enlisted the cooperation of Dr.Vincent Swift in the effort. Dr.Swift plans to make the center a colourful thing like a rainbow. He says that they must have a fund-raiser first of all, as they need a million dollars before starting the institute. Jeniffer, a gutsy, influential and resourceful woman is appointed as its secretary.

Dr.Swift tells Jeniffer that big business with its profit orientation can be honest, decent, serving vital needs. He says that he is in favour of marketing spiritual experience under certain conditions. He is not for making in a charitable institution. He wants to follow the establishment norms of business practice. He believes that one should be willing to pay for anything worthwhile, either material or spiritual. The World Center being a non-profit organization, he feels, should not prevent them from making profits. He likes Vedanta to be one of the Colours of the rainbow. He insists that it is far from his intention to underrate that colour. He is not sure If Swami Yogananda will accept this multi-

hued project. He wants the latter to shed a little of the ancient India in him and absorb a little of modern America. According to him, it is the only way to harmonise diverse cultures. He likes some fraction of one system being replaced by another. He believes that the world culture can have no reality unless based on the broadest spectrum of interchange.

Dr.Swift's interest in harmonising the diverse cultures of the world suggests that the author's sympathies are with him.

Swami Yogananda's purpose in coming to the West is said to be for presenting Universal Religion in its Vedantic concept. And it is impossible for him to agree to any arrangement that involves the dilution of that purpose. He is greatly impressed by the innovative thoughts of the youths dealt with by him. In two weeks the Amphitheater of the Center is said to have begun to get packed. The youths begin to accept Swami Yogananda soon enough. They feel free to open their hearts to him. "He ceased to be an alien. He merged himself in the listeners and they merged into him. He grew with them into depths of understanding, sole-searching. They grew with him likewise"¹⁰.

Even when it rains all day, the Amphitheater is full. They insist on staying on braving the bad weather.

But Dr.Swift does not feel happy about the interaction between Swami Yogananda and the youths. He says that the Center should not be oriented to the young people. He does not like it to be an outlet for their "futilities".

His comment on them suggests his belief that the interaction with them is unlikely to be commercially productive. But Swami Yogananda's interest in

contemporary man is found to be as intense as his absorption in the abstract thoughts on Vedanta. He believes that the dissection made by the young people may help restore balance to the American ego. He tells Dr.Swift as much. The latter, however, is in no mood to allow Swami Yogananda to have his way. He feels that Swami Yogananda is trying to impose the values of the East on the West. He insists that the Center should be of both the East and the West, open to every value, every insight.

Swami Yogananda guesses that the wind is not favourable to him. And does not choose to mince words as he tells Stella : “Dr.Swift expects me to dance to his tunes? You Know, I don't have to stay on in Hawaii. The moment my usefulness here ends...”¹¹

Stella is shaken with alarm. She pleads with Swami Yogananda to give the center a chance. She insists that it is his Center and not Vincent Swift's. But, she is torn between Swami Yogananda's wish and Vincent Swift's objection.

Dr.Swift maintains that Swami Yogananda knows nothing about America's present social ethic. Stella's faith in Yogananda seems to be matched by her belief in Vincent Swift.

Jeniffer is convinced that the institute will be three-fourths commerce. As the secretary of the center she has seen the confidential file in which Dr.Swift reveals his rainbow project. Dr.Swift himself gets reconciled to the situation. He assures himself that Swami Yogananda can be a more powerful presence at *Yogananda* when he is away from it than in flesh and blood.

The die is cast, Swami Yogananda catches the earliest available flight to return to his ashram, *Sadhana*.

But before his return, an intriguing incident takes place. Devjani having come to Hawaii in response to an invitation from one of her friends and Swami Yogananda having accepted her as a disciple, thoughts of her return to him. In fact he had earlier dismissed her memory from his conscious mind through a deliberate effort. Now at the instance of a sex-crazy professor, Walter Gregson, his mistress, Sylvia Koo, has a secret plan to breach the abstinence of Swami Yogananda. She has been aware of the soft-corner Swami Yogananda has for Devjani.

One day Sylvia Koo wears a saree borrowed from Devjani and steals into his room and to his bed while he is asleep. Strangely enough, Swami Yogananda is in the grip of a dream, involving Devjani, at the moment. On waking up he mistakes the intruder for Devjani and calls out her name. But when he realizes that the woman is different, he orders her to get out of his room. Thus the cynical plan to seduce the yogi fizzles out.

Bhabani Bhattacharya has expressed the view that the majority of the holy men in India are an unholy lot. And one may be left wondering if he has actually meant to present Swami Yogananda also in a poor light. Perhaps he hasn't. He seems to plead the case of the Swami, when he says that the latter is the most misunderstood of all his characters. He adds,

Here is a young idealistic scholar built of common clay hopelessly in love, struggling hard (first consciously then in his sucken self) to transcend his love. His sublimation of feelings (sex in part, spirit in part) succeeds and fails; that contrariness makes Yogananda. It is not just rhetoric that he would rather be a firefly than a star¹².

Swami Yogananda's courage of conviction, as pointed out by Sudershan Sharma¹³, is revealed by his unreserved confession to Devjani about the incident. And his determination, not to deviate from the path of the ascetic by any means, may bear testimony to the loftiness of his ideas and ideals.

One may be inclined to think that the author's attempt in the novel is to present the Gandhian concept of asceticism in its true colours. By means of his swan-song, he seeks to prove that it suits only those who have won over their human traits entirely. The impossibility of sticking to the path of absolute abstinence even for a sworn ascetic, leave alone the lesser mortals, is borne out by the unwholesome aberrations on the part of Swami Yogananda. Significantly enough, the author has not chosen to suggest that he latter abandoned the path of asceticism once for all, succumbing to the momentary temptations. He has been virtuous enough to hold out against them.

The picture, however does not seem to be rosy enough as suggested by Harish Raizada, who says,

In the end, Swami Yogananda succeeds to resolve both the conflicts, one by awakening the American society to the need of cosmic consciousness and the other by overcoming his aberrations and attaining self-realization.

He also says,

Thus the Swami who returns to India after his brief stay in Hawaii,...is a transformed Swami whose soul is no more racked by doubts about his sanctified persona¹⁴.

Indeed a firm and happy resolution of the conflict in him remains a pious hope within Devjani as well as Stella Gregson after Swami Yogananda takes leave of them.

One may safely presume that Bhabani Bhattacharya's primary intention in writing the novel is proving that the way to healthy human life lies neither in the sexual permissiveness of the American Society nor in the asceticism which completely discards human passions as vicious, as maintained by Harish Raizada. He has also drawn attention to the irony of an ascetic who is internally tormented himself going over to Hawaii to bring about a change in the outlook of the sex-ridden American Society,^{14(a)} And, as mentioned by Harcharan Singh Boparai, the novel is bound to help promote international understanding,^{14(a)} Bhabani Bhattacharya's capacity for subjecting his own society to criticism certainly rebounds to his credit.

PART - B

Her audacity did produce results! On a backward glance it seemed hard to believe. Neeloy would have found himself in any case – that was inevitable. Yet she ventured to think that she has hastened a creative process serving as a kind of catalyst¹⁵.

These observations form part of a confession, made by Devjani on her role in bringing about a transformation in the life of the professor-turned ascetic, as mentioned by the author.

Devjani goes over to the Benaras University from Calcutta for her post-graduate studies, owing to a feeling of revulsion against her own Mother's illicit relationship with the father of her friend and classmate Rajib. Her father is a

famous nuclear scientist at Calcutta's Saha Institute. He has gone to Canada on receiving an invitation from the Canadian Atomic Energy Commission. Her mother, whom she has been addressing as Ma-moni, Jewelesque mother adorningly, expresses a desire to accompany him. But he refuses to entertain the idea as he is not going on a tour.

Devjani feels that her mother badly needs some diversion. She thinks of going to a movie with her and asks Rajib to buy the tickets. Rajib has a desire to marry Devjani. But the latter is not sure about her own feelings. She thinks of making up her mind in the matter in consultation with Ma-moni. Rajib brings the tickets and they drive to Devjani's house in Rajib's car. She thinks of springing a surprise on Ma-moni. Leaving Rajib in the car at the gate she goes to the back of her house calling out for her mother. The latter usually takes a nap at the hour. Devjani thinks that she will be greatly delighted when she wakes up hearing the unexpected call from her. Devjani glances into her mother's bedroom through the window its curtain being half-drawn. She is taken aback by what she sees inside. Her mother is found in the company of a man, who happens to be Rajib's father.

Devjani finds it hard to absorb the shock of the moment. She begins to abhor the very sight of her mother. When Devjani sees her again she blames it all on the husband with an easy conscience.

Soon she sends up an application to the Benaras University for admission into its M.A. Philosophy course. Her father has left enough of money in her bank account to enable her departure from Calcutta.

Professor Neeloy Mookherjee, who interviews her, wonders why she has thought of leaving Calcutta University where she obtained a First in Honours. Devjani tells him that his book Vedanta has made her seek admission in Benaras University. She adds that she is fascinated by his ideas and their lucid exposition. She is all praise for the manner in which he projects the ancient vedanta into modern experience.

The professor must have felt rather flattered by Devjani's comments. He agrees to give her admission and says ,

You are welcome to enjoy all the facilities I'll offer. Don't blame me later¹⁶.

His words bear testimony to his essential humility. Devjani is rather confused and worried to note her own hunger for the spiritual life. Presumably, it is promoted by the shock she has had in Calcutta. She is aware that she has always had a materialistic outlook. The impulse cannot be ascribed to genes or environments.

Devjani develops immense admiration for Professor Neeloy Mookherjee in course of time. And at the earliest available opportunity, she tells him that he should try and live Vedanta as Swami Vivekananda did. A comment made by a monk from the Vivekananda ashram who visited the class as a guest lecturer has put the idea into her head. He says,

There is a yogi deep within Neeloy. One day the yogi will assert himself powerfully and then... perhaps Neeloy will be gone forever¹⁷.

Laughter is said to have greeted the strange remarks, the loudest being from Neeloy himself. He does not appear to have taken the prophecy seriously. But Devjani does not take it lightly.

But Professor Neeloy takes Devjani's suggestion in all seriousness, though he does not believe that he is worthy of such an exalted opinion. Yet, Devjani insists that he is of a superior class. She says that he must try and fulfill her expectations for "those of us who need guidance and do not know where to turn: whom to seek out for direction"¹⁸. Again, Professor Neeloy is about to burst out laughing. He has difficulty in containing himself. Devjani appears grave. Yet he says,

A firefly cannot be a star¹⁹.

Devjani rejoinder to the comment is sharp. She says,

And a star cannot be a firefly²⁰.

The professor finds himself facing a crisis. He has to remake himself.

One day, Nirmala, a classmate of Devjani, finds the professor staring at the latter. She believes that the professor is fascinated by Devjani. In fact, Devjani herself feels the touch of his gazing eyes. But she feels that his look passes through her as though glass to some point far beyond. When Nirmala asks for Devjani's address in Calcutta, with a view to informing her mother of the professor's interest in her, Devjani says..

You don't understand. Neeloy... Neeloy is like Swami Vivekananda.

If only you could see that!²¹

Nirmala is amazed. She asks,

You are not suggesting he may renounce the world?²²

Devjani assures her that he will. Soon, at the start of a lecture, Professor Neeloy says,

My students as well as colleagues have laid down my future course of life. I have no choice left²³.

Everyone in the class, except, of course, Devjani, thinks that the professor's words are spoken in a lighter vein. But Devjani knows that he has found himself.

Professor Neeloy takes leave of them all in a calm and undramatic manner. Devjani is left in deep depression on the departure of Professor Neeloy. She comes to understand that he has set up an ashram in Rishikesh and become a famed ascetic with the name, Swami Yogananda. Devjani is greatly delighted when she receives a note from "Swami Yogananda" which says that the firefly is trying to become a star. Later, Devjani receives a fellowship from the East-West Center at Honolulu for her higher studies. Before her departure from Benaras, she sends a note to Swami Yogananda.

After being at Honolulu for about a year, Devjani receives an award from Harvard University, USA, for doing research. And she gets exposed to the Western environment which brings about a radical change in her attitude of life. She receives an invitation from her friend Nishi to Hawaii. She is informed about the setting up of a World Center for Yogic Disciplines named after Swami Yogananda. Nishi asks her to witness the exciting events about to happen in Hawaii. Devjani is sure that Swami Yogananda is the right person for such a role.

She is aware that he has no use for the colourful wrapping needed for that merchandise. She is sure that he does not exult in his holiness like other gurus.

Before leaving for Hawaii, Devjani visits her parents and spends nearly a month with them, her aversion to her mother having worn off. She also has the pleasure of seeing her mother going abroad with her father.

On her arrival at Honolulu, she also receives a warm welcome. She contacts Swami Yogananda on telephone and is greatly pleased to know that he remembers her well enough.

Later Devjani calls on Swami Yogananda and is accepted as his disciple. When she comes to know about Dr. Swift's plan to make the World Center a multi-coloured set up like a rainbow, she is sure that Swami Yogananda will not approve it. She tells Stella Gregson about the reason for holding such a belief. Stella feels that is the fault of India's educational system that has promoted such a belief in her. She says,

A scientist had little concern for the humanities. A creative writer had no use for the sciences. In America knowledge at all levels was getting more and more interdisciplinary. A year at the East-West Center hadn't been long enough for a shift in Devjani's orientation²⁴.

When Swami Yogananda decides to return to his ashram in India – she is able to appreciate the reasons that prompt him to take the decision. She listens to Swami Yogananda's confession on his inner aberrations involving her, without losing control over herself.

In fact, the influence the West has had on her is revealed by her attitude towards *Kamasutra* and the sex-crazy professor Walter Gregson. Her friend,

Nishi, is amazed to find a copy of *Kamasutra* among Devjani's belongings. Devjani says that she has not read it yet, as she received it just before leaving from Harvard. Even if we are inclined to accept the veracity of her statement, the very possession of the work reveals her attitude towards sex.

One is amused to find Nishi reading the work in a single sitting, indicating her own leanings.

Now an elaborate description of the contents of the work follows. One is left wondering at the extent of attention paid to it by the author, though it is treated on a par with the *Bhagavad Gita* by some Americans.

And amusingly enough, Devjani's attention swings like a pendulum between Swami Yogananda and Walt Gregson. She thinks that the pendulum will stop only if the impossible happens, the two extremes meeting and ceasing to be extremes.

The spiritual leanings revealed by Devjani while she was studying at Benaras seem to have vanished soon enough. Indeed they served a mighty purpose in making her instrumental in the transformation of Professor Neeloy Mookherjee to Swami Yogananda. Obviously her interest in spirituality is a passing phase which is terminated by her exposure to the Western Culture in the United States. On her visit to Hawaii, Swami Yogananda is surprised to see that she has not got married as yet. He is inclined to think that her strong hunger for spiritual life has defeated all other feelings and needs. He thinks that she has been steadfast and true to herself even though she is denied the guidance she has wanted and deserved.

One cannot help thinking that Swami Yogananda's understanding of her nature is suggestive of his relative ignorance about the ways of the world. Devjani considers it curious that many Americans are in need of light from the East, while she herself, born of that light though, is intent on finding out what America can give her. Ironically enough, she is accepted as a disciple of Swami Yogananda, when she is bereft of all spiritual leanings. When she observes that there will be many demanding the privilege of initiation by Swami Yogananda, he finds an occasion to indicate what he feels about Dr. Swift, He says,

I shall send them to Swami Vincent Swift. He has only to wear a saffron cloak. The perfect guru to ask for in America!... He knows how to talk in glamour. He knows how to build up splendour. He is also a superb business executive... Here in America it's splendour that attracts. In India its self-denial²⁵.

He also adds,

I see an East-West encounter. An encounter of the spirit. America seems to be in the throes of a change. Yesterday this was wishful thinking. Today it is believable²⁵.

But Devjani's impressions about the West are different. She tells him that everything she sees contradicts his assertion. According to her, the America of his vision does not exist.

What is suggested in the process is an attempt on the part of Bhabani Bhattacharya to synthesise the divergent trends of the East and the West. The ascetic leanings of the East, in his view, are unrealistic as they constitute the

violation of certain basic human urges which have to be honoured. The West, on the other hand, is overly attached to the demands of the flesh. Its attitude obviously lacks in sobriety if not in spirituality. And, while there has been an increasing awareness of their limitations in the people from the West, the Orientals perhaps continue to gloat over their spirituality. Cromwell Crawford says,

In addition to social concerns, Bhattacharya thinks that the strong ascetical bias in the Indian religious tradition is anti-life and is the bane of the nation. sacrifice, self-control, simplicity are all beautiful ideals which have come down from the past and have been sanctioned by great souls such as Gandhi. But there is a certain point at which these virtues become vices; when they rob us and those closest to us (especially wives and daughters) of experiencing life in all its joyous fullness, such unbalanced values stop short of masochism and escapism. To be sure, the myriad forms of self-abnegation are carried out in the name of *moksha*, but “deliverance was never the reward of an escapist”²⁶.

What is attempted in *A Dream in Hawaii* by the author seems to be a portrayal of his own convictions in regard to the East and the West. Presumably, he is not inclined to think that a slight deviation on the part of an Indian from the path of an ascetic should not be magnified out of proportion. Perhaps, that is the reason for his soft corner for Swami Yogananda and Devjani even as they reveal the influence of the West on them in their attitudes. We may remember how he argued the case of Swami Yogananda, when Ramesh K.Srivastava suggested that the Swami has not been depicted in a healthy way. Elsewhere, Bhabani

Bhattacharya has maintained that all his women-characters, including Devjani, have been safe in his hands²⁷.

Towards the end of the novel, one feels that Devjani has become more powerful than ever before, as she holds the key to Swami Yogananda's success or failure. For, if only she wills, she seems to be capable of converting Swami Yogananda into a man of the world. But she chooses to conduct herself with remarkable restraint and dignity, while confronting the crisis faced by Swami Yogananda. When Stella Gregson asks her about the meaning of Swami Yogananda calling himself Neeloy while speaking to her, her response sounds like a riddle. She says,

It may be that one cannot exist without the other.²⁸

What is suggested seems to be the inseparable link between Swami Yogananda and herself. She also says,

Swami Yogananda has a great need of *Sadhana* at this time.... The ashram must possess him, if possible²⁹.

The author says that her voice has a clear note of uncertainty. Surely, that note does not bode well for the future of Swami Yogananda. Yet soon we are also told,

Shamed by her doubt she cried, face uplifted "Reveal yourself again as an illumined one"³⁰

Her words obviously have a ring of sincerity in the context. Having shuddered at the thought of his possible failure to stick to the path of an ascetic

soon after he renounced the world, she is now left praying, once again, for the success of his endeavours. In fact, she was all alone when she expressed her anxiety about him on the earlier occasion. But now her prayer is said to have been echoed by Stella Gregson.

As a person, who has the power of making and unmaking an ascetic vested in her, Devjani proves herself to be a catalyst of rare distinction.

NOTES

1. Srivastava., Ramesh, K. "Bhattacharya at work : An Interview" *Perspectives on Bhabani Bhattacharya*, Srivastava, Ramesh, K., p.235. Henceforth referred to as Srivastava, Ramesh.K.
2. Bhattacharya, Bhabani, *A Dream in Hawaii* (ed). The Macmillan Company of India Ltd., Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, 1978, p.17. Henceforth referred to as *A Dream in Hawaii*.
3. Ibid., p.17.
4. Ibid., p.7.
5. Ibid., p.8.
6. Ibid., pp.29-30.
7. Ibid., p.23.
8. Crawford, Cromwell, "Bhabani Bhattacharya: A Mediating Man" *Perspectives on Bhabani Bhattacharya*, Srivastava, Ramesh, K. (ed). Ghaziabad : Vimal Prakashan, 1982, p.14. Henceforth referred to as Crawford Cromwell.
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