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## Bhabani Bhattacharya As Novelist Of Post-Independence Era

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**Abstract :** Indian English Literature or Indian Literature in English has attracted a widespread interest recently both in India and abroad. It has come to occupy a greater significance in world literature. It is now realized that Indian English Literature and Commonwealth Literature are in no way inferior to other literatures. The writers in Australia, New Zealand, West Indies, South Africa, Canada, Nigeria and India have contributed substantially to the modern English literature. Fiction, having been the most powerful form of literary expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in Indian English Literature. It is generally agreed that the novel is the most acceptable way of expression of experiences and ideas in the context of our time. The Indian Fiction in English has been attracting worldwide attention.

Though not a prolific writer with abundant humanism and leftist leanings like Mulk Raj Anand, nor a comic genius with artistic detachment and commitment to human values like R. K. Narayan, nor a creative artist with astonishing philosophical depth like Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya – one of the major novelists of the older generation of living Indo-English fictionists – is endowed with a transparently positive vision of life, explored and expressed artistically in all the five novels he has published so far. Since he believes that the novel should have a social purpose, his stories abound in social and historical realities, quite often bitter and gruesome, such as the Bengal Famine of 1943, the tragedies of the freedom struggle and partition, and the evils of poverty, corruption, ignorance, superstition, exploitation, greed, sexual perversion etc. But beneath them, there is almost always present the novelist's unflinching faith in life and its invincibility, indestructibility and worthiness.

**Key words :** Bhabani Bhattacharya, Bengal, Bihar, English, Indian, Fiction, Literature

What emerges prominently in the article is that of his novel and finally at the end of it as the pith of the world is the affirmation of life. Even in the midst of ghastly and heart-rending scenes of human sufferings and tortures, life asserts itself sparking amid ashes. From his assertion of ethical values and the synthesis of the old and the new and of opposite extremes emanates Bhabani Bhattacharya's final vision of the affirmation of life.

However, it does not mean that his novels alone embody an affirmative view of life, while other writers are concerned only with nihilism. It is to be noted that the recurrent artistic presentation of the affirmation of life in his works is something unique. In an age when the world appears to be a wasteland and life is steeped in despair, injustice and alienation, and when writers are seen groping and questing for values and happiness, it is a great treat for the reader to discover the assertion of deathless life triumphant over every other thing in the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya. In support of my thesis, I pass on to a close analysis of his novels.

Bhabani Bhattacharya was born on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1906 in Bhagalpur, Bihar. Quite a precocious child, his talents were discovered by his mother and fostered by his grandfather. At an early age of twelve, he wrote his first article in a Bengali magazine, 'Mouchak'. His flair for writing was not much appreciated by his father who was a District and Sessions Judge who wanted Bhabani to prepare himself for government service.

Bhattacharya was educated at Patna University and took his B.A. [Hons.] degree in 1927. He then prosecuted his advanced studies in the University of London [1929-1934]. After his B.A. [Hons.] degree from the London University in 1931, he was awarded Ph.D. degree on historical research in 1934. He married Salila Mukherji in 1935 and was blessed with three children, a son and two daughters.

He worked as Press Attache to the Indian Embassy in Washington, D. C. He was on the staff of 'The Illustrated Weekly of India' as Assistant Editor during 1950-52. He acted as Secretary, Tagore Commemorative Society, New Delhi in 1959-60. His worth having been recognized, he was taken in as consultant in the Ministry of Education, New Delhi, in 1961 and continued to work then till 1967. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1967 for his novel *Shadow from Ladakh*. He got a Ford Foundation grant in 1968-69 to write the prestigious work *Gandhi*, the writer - the image as it grew to commemorate the birth centenary of the 'Father of the Nation'. He is a member of the Advisory Board of the Akademi. He adorned

the East, West centre, Honolulu as Senior specialist during 1969-70 and since 1970, he has been a visiting professor in the University of Hawai, Honolulu.

Bhabani Bhattacharya has travelled a lot. In 1951, he visited the Soviet Union as a member of the first Indian cultural delegation of writers and scientists led by Dr. Baliga. Later, he attended the International Conference of writers at Stockholm. In 1959, he responded to the invitation from Harvard University and participated as a delegate in the Harvard International Seminar held at Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the very next year, he was invited to attend a similar seminar held at Tokyo. Later, he gave lectures as a guest of the governments in New Zealand and Australia in 1962, and West Germany in 1963. He attended a Writers' Conference in Adelaide during the Festival of Arts which is one of Australia's biggest cultural events. He was the recipient of New Zealand's prestige award given by its four universities.

It is a strange thing to be a Bengali, born at Bhagalpur [Bihar], writing in an alien language and living in Maharashtra. Writing is his first love and full-time career. All the novels of Bhattacharya present a true picture of India and its teeming millions surging with life and substance. He does not believe in the dictum of art for art's sake. All writing for him has a social purpose. His outlook is highly constructive and purposeful.

Smt. Lila Ray writes –

“As we read his writing, we hear the dialogue between man and his situation, between man and man, between man and ideas, he lives by.” [1990: 123]

Bhabani Bhattacharya has stated that he regards art as a criticism of life which reviews current values and he conceives the novel as an idiom of compassion, which is designed to have a curative social effect. S.

C. Harrex, the Australian writer feels that –

“his own novels conscientiously reflect these views. Their subject matter and themes derive from modern Indian history and the problems of contemporary Indian society and they embody the programmes of reforms as well as stinging social criticism.” [Ibid : 145]

This approach, initiated in modern Indian fiction in English by the early novels and short stories of Mulk Raj Anand [from 1935-47] is a feature of the majority of Indian post-independence novels.

His works include Tagore's translation entitled 'The Golden Boat', 'Towards Universal Man', a commemoration volume published on the eve of the birth centenary of Tagore, 'Some Memorable Yesterdays', 'Indian Cavalcade', 'Steel Hawk and other Stories', a collection of fifteen short stories, 'Gandhi, the Writer, the Image as it Grew', a highly stimulating and provocative study released on the occasion of the birth centenary of Mahatma Gandhi and six novels – *So Many Hungers* [1947], *Music for Mohini* [1952], *He Who Rides a Tiger* [1954], *A Goddess Named Gold* [1960], *Shadow from Ladakh* [1967] and *A Dream in Hawaii*. It is another political subject the impact of China over Asia, entitled *A Dream in Hawaii*. It is more or less a continuation of his *Shadow from Ladakh* in theme and treatment.

He very much longed to have a glimpse of the world poet, Rabindranath Tagore. So, at the age of 19, he visited Shantiniketan and met him. Later, he won a prize in a literary competition held to select Tagore's poems for an anthology, 'Chyanika'. Thus, his wide range of experience in and around the world and his close association with men, manners and their personalities have enabled him to grasp the innate significance of humanity and all this find expression in the characters of his novels and short stories carved out with a pen that never wavers. The reader lives with the characters of the stories and wonders at the author's keen observation of the day-to-day incidents of life. Bhattacharya has written with a spicy language which is at once crisp and facile. He has caught the vein of rural speech and the informal behaviour of the people, their rustic world and their small and simple views about the great things that take place around them. He holds the view that Indian writing in English has been a decisive factor in redressing the balance of false presentation by foreign story-tellers who with their limited possibilities of true experience have seen only the surface of our way of life failing to reach deeper into our spirit.

L. N. Gupta writers –

"Pure intellectuals watch the crowds, but do not force themselves on them. They visit slums and absorb the misery of their dwellers in their being. They tour the famine-stricken areas. They look into the shriveled faces and sunken eyes of the sufferers. They share their distress. But they do not use amplifiers to blare their benefaction. They suffer quietly. The process involves cycles of seething tensions. The end product is a major work say, a great novel, in the case with Bhabani Bhattacharya." [1969 : 7]

Bhabani is of the opinion that unless a writer has keen observation and an eye from noting the details of general behaviour of folks, he cannot write a social novel. For himself, Bhattacharya has never missed a single opportunity of observing incidents and happenings.

As regards sex in novels, he said that it is an inevitable part of human life and that it has its place in literature too. He cannot like vulgar low-taste books reveling in sex descriptions. But he likes Lawrence who creates a whole world of his this much tabooed feeling and yet the descriptions are most beautiful and excel in their lyrical quality. He has special liking for Hemingway who has shown that sex can be a theme to write upon, without making it repulsive.

Bhabani himself opines about his novels. *Music for Mohini*, *He Who Rides a Tiger* and *A Goddess Named Gold* followed. His latest novel, *Shadow from Ladakh* is not a favourite of reviewers, but that is the one he enjoyed most. The men and women in this story held me obsessed all through the writing.

To quote him –

“I have no big literary output, as you see. I have not believed in writing for the sake of writing. I seldom planned a story structure. Each story grew in my subconscious mind, as it were. When it had grown enough, I had to give it a physical form. The characters, even when I had decided how they were going to behave, moved by their own volition often, often defeating my purpose.” [1972: 87]

On the whole, Bhattacharya is a worldwide novelist. It is a matter of great pride that he should have been included in the famous world authors series, along with Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru. Mrs. Dorothy Shimer of the Department of English at the University of Hawaii has been commissioned to write his biography for Twayne Publishers of New York. It has recently come out and won the appreciation of one and all as a delightful study of the rare genius.

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