

Indian Sensibility in the Works of Bhabani Bhattacharya

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Abstract: Most of Indian literature in English has embodied the struggle for overcoming negativesocial forces manifested in both pre and post independent Indian society. Throughout most of Indian history, laws, social mores and folkways have forced Indians to seek various alternatives that would enable them to realize their potential by seeking opportunities for intellectual, economic, political and self determination. Indian scholars and writers have generally identified two tendencies of Indian people seeking to realize their full potential in society: the desire for integration by emphasizing full participation as Indian citizens, and call for nationalism where everyone would be independent (physically, culturally or psychologically), emphasizing collective action of Indians based on shared heritage and common concerns. In this paper I will examine socialism as a strong form of nationalism in the select works of Bhabani Bhattacharya who is a strong advocate attempting to resolve societal racism. The paper aims to study the protagonists in the select works of Bhabani Bhattacharya who have a staunch nationalistic approach and are committed to make every possible effort for the betterment of their society.

Key words: Indian history, society, self determination, nationalism, betterment

While looking at the history of Indian literature in English it has been observed that the themes of nationalism and socialism mainly emerged from the novels of 1930's and 1940's. The Indo Anglican writers used the language of the British colonizers as a tool to reach the west and presented the real India to them; they tried to portray their nationalism and changes they need to implement to make their nation better. G. N. Saibaba in his essay "Colonialist Nationalism in the Critical Practice of Indian Writing in English: A Critique" remarks that "English literature has been a powerful enterprise towards constructing a kind of Indian nationalism mediated through the interpretation of the literary works in particular ways" (61). Saibaba is of the view that "English literature is the authentic tool that can represent India as a nation more than any literatureof the native

language” (61). Hence most critics argue that Indian writing in English has always “portrayed” the social, political and cultural changes that have occurred in India along with Indian tradition and culture.

Culture, country and language serve as a mirror for human beings and it is this mirror in which one finds himself or herself. It is the identity of a person and it becomes our duty to invest and participate more and more in things like these. Nationalism on the other hand, is not only fighting for the freedom of country from a dominant class, neither it ends when one attains freedom, rather, it is such a continuing process which requires more voluntary actions and social works from its citizens so that the country may prosper and remain free from all the evils.

As earlier said fighting wars is not the only way to prove your nationalism, there are people who used their pen to fight the evils in the society. There are writers who became the voice of people to tell the tale of a beautiful culture and to let the whole world know about the richness of culture of their country. There are writers whose works reflect their culture and society and Bhabani Bhattacharya is one such writer whose works are full of this Indian sensibility or Indianess more precisely. By Indianess it means the culture and unique identity of Indians. He reflects himself in a rich culture and tries to enlighten everyone with its richness. Bhabani Bhattacharya thinks that if only a few individuals from the society come forward with determination to work for the exploited and to guide them in the right direction, there can be hope for the salvation of the country. It is the reason why the novelist has created some ideal characters in his novels, who belong to the educated class of the society and share common features. They fight against injustice and cruelty to remove such elements from the society and make it a better place for people to pursue an honest living, free from suppression and oppression of all types, in an atmosphere of freedom and goodwill. On one side these protagonists inspire the exploited to stand up for their rights, on the other hand they try to convince the exploiters against their inhuman acts by arousing their conscience. The artist in Battacharya is committed to bring back to human mind the possibility of happiness “the path to fullness of life” as envisioned by Tagore.

In Bhabani Bhattacharya's fiction the theme of political independence is closely related with the theme of social, economic and cultural issues. According to Bhattacharya if common man enjoys economic, social and cultural freedom then only the political freedom can be meaningful. Gandhi's concern for the exploitation of the common man and his endeavor to wipe "every tear from every eye" highly attracted Bhattacharya (*Goddess Named Gold* 75). He was very much fascinated by Gandhi for his practical approach to the problems afflicting the lowest castes of society. He admired Gandhi for his works like abolishing untouchability and banning the dowry system. It is in this context that a social novelist steps in to depict the reality by choice. He shows true image of the society to its people so that it may correct its follies and foibles. His fiction gives an account of the Indian way of life, like Mulk Raj Anand, he believes that, "an artist should delineate contemporary reality rather than recreate the historical or legendary theme" (Srivastava 5).

Bhabani bhattacharya's concept of freedom is unique and he uses it more realistically. While as other writers regard the idea of freedom to political freedom only, but for Bhattacharya it refers to economic, cultural, intellectual and above all social freedom. Following lines from Tagore's *Gitanjali*, later translated into English describe Bhattacharya's attitude towards India more realistically. He like Tagore wants his country to be like this:

Where mind is without fear and the head is held high,
Where knowledge is free,
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments By narrow domestic walls; (*Gitanjali* 35)

Bhattacharya as a novelist makes a further attempt to bring about the desired change in social attitudes. The social theme taken by the novelist gives him plenty of scope to draw our attention to the exploitation of man by man, leading to untold misery and suffering. The author hopes that the conscience of the persons who are exploiting the weak will be awakened. And he also appeals to the exploited to stand for their rights. He knows that these changes will take time but he is confident that they will ultimately come. He presents some social and political ideals through his protagonists which can transform society. He is of the opinion that man has to change himself first and only then can he change the society. Only a man of good moral and civic sense can build a society based on justice and goodwill.

Bhattacharya presents the picture of Indian merchants, traders and money lenders who reduced the state of Indian farmers to utter poverty because of their innate greed and selfishness. Bhattacharya has created such merchants in his fiction who are entirely free of social conscience (*So Many Hungers* 183), and have gathered massive wealth by cornering all the grain of the market and selling it at sky-rocketing prices. This drove the poor to the wall and caused their downfall. It is this poverty which is the root cause of many social evils that prevail in our country.

Bhattacharya is a socialist, trying to create a better cultural atmosphere for the people of his country. His fiction records the aspirations and urges of the people heroically involved in the struggle to change the society. Though suffering is involved in this struggle, the determination of the people to fight against all odds, in order to create a better World for themselves is remarkable. The optimistic characters of Bhattacharya's fiction encourage the readers to look forward to a bright future and to set right the various ills of society. Bhabani Bhattacharya thinks that if only a few individuals from the society come forward with determination to work for the exploited and to guide them in the right direction, there can be hope for the salvation of the country. It is the reason why the novelist has created some ideal characters in every novel, who belong to the educated class of society.

Bhattacharya's protagonists are idealists, having many admirable qualities and they share a common feature and that is their active concern with the wider interests of social and cultural life. They fight against injustice and cruelty to remove these ills from society and make it a better place for the people to pursue an honest living, free from suppression and oppression of all types, in an atmosphere of freedom and goodwill. On one side they inspire the exploited to stand up for their rights, on the other they try to convince the exploiters against their inhuman acts by arousing their conscience. They dream about a more just social order in which the common man will be able to enjoy a dignified and fulfilled life.

In the novel *So Many Hungers!* Devata is regarded as a Local Gandhi. He inspires others to join the freedom struggle. He goes to jail many times and guides the people by his example and advice. His grandson Rahul is also inspired by him and joins the freedom struggle. When he realizes that millions are dying of hunger, he leaves his research work:

Sadness dimmed his eyes, haunted by the endless vision of misery. The millions who haddied gasping for food.

The uprooted millions who would live on without a living, broken in body and spirit, shreds of humanity. (*So Many Hungers* 214)

He is determined to liberate his country from the colonizers. He says to them:

You have done us some good along with much evil. For the good you've done you have been paid in full. The accounts have been settled. Now for God's sake, quit!" (*So Many Hungers* 212)

In this novel Bhattacharya presents through protagonist, Rahul, a picture of a person who not only runs a free kitchen for the hungry people but also puts his research activities aside in order to fight the exploiters of an apathetic society. Kajoli, in the same novel, also inspires faith in the emergence of a better society. Though she suffers immensely during the famine still she keeps her chin up and remembers the words of Devata "Be strong Be true Be deathless!" (*Music for Mohini* 204).

In the Novel *Music for Mohini* there is another idealist Jaydev trying to reform society by uprooting blind faith and superstition from the country. He hates old customs and traditions which have lost relevance in modern society. For this he opposes anybody who has out dated ideas and beliefs, including his own mother. He wants to combine ancient and modern Indian cultures in order to make it more relevant for the growth and development of the country. He suggests"

...a harmony of cultures for India. He reads ancient thoughts in today's light. He seeks in ancient thought sanction for the west influenced ideals of our time. He is a man with a message for his country. (*Music for Mohini* 94)

Bhattacharya suggests a change in the social set up through his hero, Jaydev. He tries his level best to remove illiteracy and superstition by introducing education in the village and by setting up his village, named Behula as a model of writing a book on culture, in which there is a healthy combination of the diverse elements. He is obsessed to use the buried material of the past to write the new social character, with the clear object of bringing about true freedom for the people.

In the novel *He who rides a Tiger*, Bitten is another idealist. He is a strong socialist who tries to reform the caste system which has galvanized the Indian society. Bitten's personal experience at home, of his sister's suicide, when she is not permitted to marry the person of a lower caste, makes him a rebel against the caste system. He once and for all, renounces his Brahmanism, though he faces a lot of obstacles, prefers to work and live without the arrogance and the sacred thread of a Brahmin. He decides to marry a girl of his choice rather than a girl of his caste. Bhattacharya demonstrates through Bitten's character that it is quite possible, rather preferable, to lead a meaningful life without the distinction of caste in society. After all, we all belong to the common caste of mankind.

Bhattacharya believes in the basic goodness of man, therefore, he feels that man can be changed for the better, provided he is shown the right way. For this purpose he never allows his faith in the idealistic characters to be shaken. Bhattacharya through his characters shows his anger against the exploiters. Bhattacharya presents his ideal characters so sympathetically that readers admire them for their sterling virtues of nobility and integrity. They are so realistic that they make the reader feel that if he tries he might also become something like Rahul in *So Many Hungers!* or Jaydev in *Music for Mohini*.

Bhattacharya condemns traders, Seths and black-marketers who are not bothered about the welfare of others, but are only interested in making money. Their loyalties are narrow and restricted either to their own welfare or that of their family. Besides these Seths and merchants of upper class, Bhattacharya also holds the upper castes of society, including the Brahmins, responsible for the down-trodden condition of the lower castes in society, such as the blacksmiths. He demonstrates by the example of Chandralekha in *He Who Rides a Tiger* that merit is not recognized in people of low caste. Though she bags the first prize and a gold medal in an essay competition, no one pays any attention to the event. On the other hand if the prize had gone to one of the high castes there would have been celebrations in the whole town and winner would have been applauded and encouraged.

Bhattacharya does not believe in class war or revolution which is the stronghold of the Marxists. His protagonists are both realists and idealists striving to transform society into something better by arousing the conscience of people.

Khawaja Ahmed Abbas remarks about Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!* and *Who he Rides a Tiger* that, "these are two of the most significant novels written by Indians in the English language, and among the aptest illustration of social realism." (149, 150)

Bhattacharya wants to change the conditions of the down-trodden by making them assertive and at the same time wants to change the heart of the exploiters by making them merciful, so that both the sections will be educated in the right direction.

Bhattacharya is more at ease with the world that surrounds us. It is this reality which is his constant source of reference and it is this which he is striving to change. So his novel is not just a fanciful and romantic boy and girl affair, but a realistic and imaginative depiction of the social, economic, cultural and political conditions. His artistic creations are not an end in themselves but a means to touch the minds of his fellow citizens with a desire to provide them with a better vision of life. It is through art and literature that men are made conscious of their destinies and the higher values of their soul. It is the task of the writer to make the average man understand himself and the conditions of his life, and is exactly what Bhattacharya tries to do.

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