

## Oriental v/s Occidental of Outlook Life and Human Society in the Novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya

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### Abstract

Realism is one of the most remarkable features of Bhabani Bhattacharya's fiction. He conveys socio-political reality of the contemporary Indian society. His novels give expression to the Indian sensibility towards the pressing problems of the then Indian society. His novels show a passionate awareness of life in India--the social awakening and protest, the utter poverty of peasants, the Indian freedom struggle and its various dimensions, the tragedy of partition of the country, the social and political transitions, the mental as well as the physical agony of the poor peasants and labour class people of the then Indian society, especially that of Bengal and other adjoining states. Bhattacharya, like other contemporary Indian novelist, believes in a deep exploration of social and political realities of then Indian societies. He is of the view that an artist should inevitably be concerned with truth and reality: He has rightly commented, "the creative writer's final business is to reveal the truth. He reveals it, unlike the philosopher, in no cold statements of dogma but only in terms of life, rendered through the devices of dramatization. And how could the truth help being partisan". Thus, through his novels, Bhattacharya has portrayed a faithful and realistic picture of various aspects the Indian way of life and its society. His portrayal of the life and society is never a photographic one nor a journalistic record. It is more truly a sensitive rendering of social, political and economic life of the Indian people. Freedom, hunger, poverty, disease, tradition, modernity, social evils, political tensions and pretensions, changing social values, crisis of morality and degeneration of social moral values and East-West relations and tensions are the major themes of his novels. In this paper my intention is to provide the predicament of oriental v/s occidental approach of life and human society in the works of Bhabani Bhattacharya.

**Key Words:** Realism, Socio-political, Contemporary Indian Society, Indian Sensibility, Peasants, Partition, Exploration, Rendering, Pretensions, Social Awakening and Protest.

### Introduction

The novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya mostly represent a realistic and humanistic view, along with, it contains the outlook of oriental v/s occidental life of human society. His vision of life is very positive. As a novelist he is seriously concerned with the plight of the poor peasants and destitute, the landless and the labourer, the out casts of the society who suffer a great deal simply because they are helpless and their fate is sealed in hands of the rich and influential class of the people. He draw our attention through the scenes of poverty and suffering of the poor people and the cruel and heartless altitude of the rich and affluent people who thwart the prospects of a happy life for the helpless and unfortunate poor, peasant class of the society. The painful tale of Kajoli and Kalo as no less moving than Bakha and Munoo in Dr. Mulk Raj Anand's novels. The novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya strongly and clearly express his righteous indignation against the sharks and parasites of society and like a staunch humanist; Bhattacharya explores the causes of human suffering and their possible remedies with his own vision of life and society. As a social novelist, he pleads for a synthesis of various social, political values. As a true human being, he feels sympathy for the poor and the down trodden class of the Indian society and as a visionary writer, suggests ways and mean for the improvement of human life in general and especially in the Indian context. Both his themes and characters embody his hungers for human values. Bhattacharya's humanism finds a clear expression in the themes and character of almost all his novels. Bhabani Bhattacharya is a powerful contemporary writer in India. He is a novelist who is least interested in metaphysical or spiritual abstractions. Personal human relationship also does not attract him much. He is very much keen about presenting various aspects of social reality especially of his own day which is well known to him and he has a practical experience of it.

### Review of Literature

The Times Literary Supplement commented—"It is a sincere, bitter... a factual and vivid account of one of the most shocking disasters in history." And The Hindustan Times also reviewed the novel in the following terms: On the other hand critic K.S. Iyengar has termed the novel as, "a dramatic study of a set of human beings trapped in a unique tragic predicament." The very first novel of Bhattacharya highlights the dehumanizing effects of poverty and starvation and the corrupting influence of man's lust for money. And as we know well that hunger and poverty can debase humanity to any level. The desire for possession had similar effects degrading man to unimaginable depths. In this respect the words of K.R.S. Iyengar are worth quoting: "The novel really unfolds the story of a largely man made hungers that took a toll of two million innocent men, women and children in Calcutta and Bengal. While the holders, profiteers and blacketeers piled a thundering trade, authority was

apathetic, the wells of human pity seemed to have almost dried up, and only the jackals and the vultures were in rigorous and jubilant action. The novelist paints the naked horror of it all with a pitiless precision and cumulative detail." The peasants and poor people were uprooted from their native villages and remote places and they were compelled to migrate to Calcutta in the dire need of food and jobs. Other Critic, Dr. G Rai has commented: "The novelist has thus, given a very grim picture of the war year. No official account could do it as the novelist has done here". While on the other hand critic M.K Naik is unhappy with the romantic touch given to the social reality of the Indian society and its main character Kalo being the author's mouth piece so many times. We may see the novel favourably or unfavourably but the fact remains in favour of the novelist that he is a social realist and this novel of Bhattacharya presents a critique of the then Indian society with a sense of sincerity and reality. The events and the plot of the novel is all drawn from the real life situation existing in the state of Bengal, India at the given time and place. Another critic, K.R Chandrashekharan expresses the view that the novel surely and strongly exposes Indian caste system and the gross root realities of it in the Indian society in a very dramatic manner.

"The juxtaposition of Biten's rejection of the Brahmanhood which is his birthright and Kalo's renunciation of the Brahmanhood he has created for himself through fraud makes the novelists condemnation of the system total."

In this respect the opinion of the reviews of the New York Times is worth mentioning here:

"He Who Rides a Tiger, is a skilful and entertaining story and an illuminating fictional glimpse inside one corner of India."

Thus the novel is remarkable for its vivid character delineation and stark reality of the then Indian society and an unscathery satire of Indian social system and orthodoxy. The central character of Kalo is a blacksmith. He is a victim of unfortunate Bengal famine and he comes to Calcutta in search of a Job to make a living there. His experiences on the city of Calcutta are very painful and scathing. He recovers his daughters Chandralikha from a brothel, where he has found some job. People's callousness and inhumanity shake him terribly and turn him into an entire social rebel and he protest against the ill treatment of the poor by the rich. Chandralikha, a pious human being, is yet another victim of social reality. His own experiences at the brothel are nightmarish and harrowing. In the novel, her father Kalo comes to her rescue from the brothel and then the father and the daughter plan revenge against society which has treated them very badly and inhumanity. Biten is another important character of the novelist who clemently protests against the evil of Indian caste system. His following words strike the dominant note in the novel; "we are the scum of the earth. They hit us where it hurts badly in the belly. We have got to hit back."

### **Description of Bhattacharya's 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. 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. The conflict between the traditional India and the modern India. 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. 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'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.

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 reflect the Indian National character. Indians as a race which believes in the universal brotherhood and tolerance.

### Conclusion

Thus, it is very clear that Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels are devoted to the exclusive exploitation of social and political realities of life in the country. His novels closely examine the social and economic problems of the 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 economic and political realities of life and 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 Haweii' 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 cultural 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 culture and values.

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