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BHABANI BHATTACHARYA AS A SKILLFUL ARTIST IN DEALING WITH THE THEME OF 'SYNTHESIS' IN HIS FICTIONAL WORLD

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to show how the Indo-Anglian novelists like Bhattacharya have taken up the themes from the social-set up and made social realism as a dominant trait in their novels, projecting Bhabani Bhattacharya as an outstanding Indo-Anglian novelist of the present times who has earned world-wide distinction by devoting himself to writing novels focusing attention on the current social issues faced by humanity thereby bringing about a synthesis of the cultural patterns of East and West.

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INTRODUCTION

The present age may be termed as the age of the novel. We are living in a dynamic world which is fast changing. With the changes in life, there are bound to be changes in the forms of literature, techniques of creative writing and even in the devices of presentation. Old order changeth yielding place to new, last one good custom corrupt the world. Whatever changes may take place, either in form or technique, the novelist has to depend on human experience as the basis for the fiction. Whether it be in India, United Kingdom, Russia or America or any part of the globe, the truth is that 'man and his experience' form the subject of any creative writer in fiction writing. Bhabani Bhattacharya is one such writer dealing with human experience and social realism as the basis and subject matter of his fiction writing. Bhabani Bhattacharya was born on November 10, 1906 in Bhagalpur, Bihar in a well – to – do, educated Brahmin family. His father's transferable job provided him with a plenty of opportunities to travel and widen his outlook Graduated in English Literature from Patna

University, he sought admission in King's College, London for his higher studies. Though a student of literature, he had to join the History Department for his Master's degree and later for obtaining Ph.D degree in History. His knowledge of history, however, benefited him in forming the background for his fiction. Generally speaking, a novel may be contemporary in sense that it deals with our immediate yesterdays. The creative artist has a compulsion to find an outlet for the living images in him. So Bhabani Bhattacharya says; "A novelist may well be concerned with today, the current hour or moment, if it is meaningful for him, if it moves him sufficiently into emotional response" (P 39). Most of the present day Indo-Anglian novelists have taken up the themes from the social set-up and realism is dominant in their novels. Bhabani Bhattacharya is quite modest in his attempts and tries to impress upon the readers the basic problems faced by humanity at large. Almost all his novels like *So Many Hungers*, *Music for Mohini*, *He Who Rides A Tiger*, *Shadow from Ladakh* and *A Dream in Hawaii* picture rather richly societal issues and various forms of freedom. As an outstanding Indo-Anglian novelist of the present times, he has earned world-wide distinction by devoting himself to writing novels focusing attention on the current social issues faced by humanity. Apart from writing novels, Bhattacharya has

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translated and edited some of Tagore's, written popular accounts of episodes from Indian History and wrote a book *Gandhi the Writer* (1969). As K.R. Chandrasekharan, a prominent critic of Bhattacharya, has put it, "... Bhattacharya is a worldwide famous writer ... judging from the number of translations of his works into foreign languages, he has a wider reading public abroad than at home" (P1). The prevailing social conditions made a deep impact on Bhattacharya before writing his first novel. The famine of Bengal in 1943 was one of such events. Bhabani writes about his evolution as a writer:

"...the great famine swept down upon Bengal. The emotional stirring I felt (more than two million men, women and children died of slow starvation amid of manmade scarcity) were a sheer compulsion to creativity. The result was the novel *So Many Hungers*" (P 24).

Bhabani Bhattacharya could not escape the impact of the social environment in which he was brought up and grew to maturity:

"The spirit of the age – the world –wide demands for equality, liberty and fraternity and the growing unrest among Indian masses to liberate themselves from the alien rule, fired his imagination and impelled him to write" (Sorot 13).

In addition to hunger and freedom, the theme of synthesis is another dominant theme in Bhattacharya's fiction. As a profound scholar of Indian history, he does concentrate upon the great Indian tradition of integration of diverse and conflicting elements, view points and cultures. His creative work artistically embodies in miniature the essential Indian ideal of unity in diversity resulting from compromise between the various aspects of life. In the earlier novels, the theme of synthesis is dealt with rather indirectly but in *Shadow from Ladakh*, it is conspicuous and dominant from the beginning to the end.

Shadow from Ladakh examines the problem whether or not two opposite modes of life can exist freely side by side. The two ways of life represented by steel town and Gandhigram are hostile to each other, for each one feels that it may lose its freedom because of the other. Steel town is modelled after the modern style of living with emphasis on the importance of steel and materialism, while Gandhigram follows rigidly the Gandhian pattern of life with stress on Ahimsa and plain living. Bhaskar and Satyajit, the two central figures representing the two forms of life, are determined to follow their different ways, for each thinks that adherence to his particular mode of life is the surest means of attaining freedom to reach a higher and better plane of life. Neither of them would give up even a little of his own mode of life which he considers to be ideal for the full growth of human life. Towards the close of the novel, the writer shows that even the opposite way of life can co-exist harmoniously by presenting Satyajit and Bhashkar as understanding each other sympathetically without sacrificing their freedom. The novel reveals the author's faith that freedom, in spite of being indispensable for the dignity and development of human life, is not an end in itself but a means to achieve higher goals. Through Satyajit, he affirms that "Certain values transcend freedom" (SL 30).

The novel *Shadow from Ladakh* is "an attempt to bring the integration of materialistic civilization and Gandhian way of life; integration of the East and the West; integration of Gandhian asceticism and Tagorean aestheticism; integration of the values-old and new; integration of village and city" (Sharma 40). Bhattacharya says that integration was Tagore's life long quest; 'integration that was the poet's life long quest; integration of the simple and the sophisticated the ancient and the modern city and village; East and West" (SL 215). The novel deals in detail with conflict and compromise between two distinct modes of life represented by steeltown and Gandhigram – the first stands for the modern, western industrial civilization, while the other represents the old, Eastern values of life. Throughout the novel, Bhabani Bhattacharya does concentrate upon bridging the gulf between the old and the new, the East and West. The stress on integration underscores Gandhi's ideas about "the free mixing of cultures" (Ramesh 186). As a matter of fact, there should be a healthy synthesis of these. That is why Gandhi asserts that Indians should not merely feed on the ancient culture of their land; they should enrich their old traditions with the experience of the new times. But the foreign elements in their turn should be conditioned by the spirit of the soil. He draws the conclusion, "one dominant Culture absorbing the rest that cannot make for harmony; that will be an artificiality and forced unity. That we do not want" (SL 156). Since Satyajit is saturated with these ideas, he thinks that there is no permanent gulf between the ways of life represented by Steel town and Gandhigram; the two can adjust and be complementary and supplementary to each other. Thus he remarks:

"Steel town belongs to the present. Gandhigram to the future Steel town must do its work. But when that work is done, when the material benefits of production have been fully attained, Steel town, decrepit and soulless, will have to seek new moorings. Then it will be Gandhigram's turn to come forward" (156).

Being a man of mature wisdom, experienced, well-read and remarkably objective, Satyajit believes in a harmonious blending of the old and the new. When he happens to meet Dalai Lama, he expresses his conviction that there should be a slow, true and lasting adjustment between the old and the new leading to a healthy and happy mode of life since

"A relic of the old world cannot live within the shell of the new; under the hard pressures, it's bound to be crushed into pulp" (P 295).

Like her parents, Sumita too does not frown at machines and the new civilization. Bhashkar is amazed to notice that she regards machines as an enemy to higher life. But in fact, she gets greatly fascinated by electricity and machines that have created the new civilization, the new country. Expanding on the theme of synthesis, the novelist shows how the clash between Gandhigram and steel town embodying two contrary modes of life disappears gradually bringing about a true adjustment between them. All this is the result of the understanding and sympathy that grows between Bhashkar and Satyajit. Towards the close of the novel, the crisis caused by the assault of steel town on the Gandhian village is resolved. The workers of the Steel town go to Gandhigram and proclaim that they have no quarrel with the spinning wheel and that they are brothers of the men of Gandhigram. The synthesis of the East and West, of the materialist and spiritual values, is also

achieved through the marriage of Bhashkar and Sumita who embody two contrary ways of life. Bhashkar is trained in the West and apparently he has typically a westernized outlook on life. On the other hand, Sumita is typically Indian in her views and naturally she respects asceticism. Their marriage is in fact, the integration of body, mind and soul, of western materialism and Indian spiritualism" (Chandrashakaran 108). The marriage between Satyajit and Suruchi is significant in that it symbolizes the union between asceticism and aestheticism.

The novelist's great concern in this novel is harmony between India and China and he is quite successful in exploring it. Bhattacharya's ennobling ideals of harmony and friendship between China and India find a convincing expression in this novel. Through Mrs. Mehra, he asserts that adjustment is inevitable in life: "Life is all compromise one yields a bit here and gets it back elsewhere" (SL 115). But synthesis, in Bhabani's opinion, means 'the acquiescence of life in its totality and not the denial of it in any form or the suppression of identity' (Sharma 46). His idea of synthesis is clearly embodied in his observation on the adjustment between Gandhigram and Steel town so urgently needed now:

"There was one way left for Gandhigram. It must make readjustments. That would mean acceptance of life in its totality. But not the Steel town way; that also was denial of life deep under the surface. Let licence be chartered by restraint. Let restraint find its right level by a leavening of freedom. Let there be a meeting ground of the two extremes; Let each shed some of its content and yet remain true to itself" (Shadow from Ladakh 274).

Music for Mohini portrays in detail the old and the new values. In the beginning, the two contrasting values are shown in sharp conflict, but by and by, the clash becomes less severe and ultimately reaches the ideal stage of reconciliation and synthesis. The old mother of Mohini, the mother of Jayadev, the grandfather of Sudha and the father of Harindra have faith in old values while Jayadev, Harinda, Mohini, her father and Sudha have new ideas and attitudes. Early in the book, we see the old and the new values represented by Mohini's grandmother and father. The two are in clash with each other in regard to Mohini's education and love for music, but later on they come to an adjustment.

Mohini is married to Jayadev who belongs to a very orthodox family named the Big House in Behula. While she is a sceptic because of her father's teaching, her mother-in-law is more traditional and orthodox than her old mother. In the very beginning, Jayadev says to her, "The Big House was much more than a residence, he wanted to tell her: it was a way of living, a stern discipline and iron tradition" (MM 78).

She encounters numerous difficulties in the new house, as she is brought up in a different environment. She has to struggle hard "to retouch her mental values, readjust her expectations" (MM 108). She sees people coming to her husband to discuss books, ideas and problems of the day. When she appears, they touch their heads to the ground at her feet and take the dust from feet to express reverence to her. At first, all these old ways upset her, but little by little, she gets acclimated to them! "Weeks had to pass before the girl with her city breeding could accustom herself to this old-fashioned homage" (MM 118). There is perfect adjustment and sweetness in the Big House and all clashes between mother and son, mother and daughter-in-law, and husband and wife disappear;

"At last there was no discord. Life was music – a note of song for the old mother was in her, a note for Jayadev and his rebel gods, a note for the Big House and Behula village, torn and at cross – purposes for a while. Her life was music – the true quest of every woman, her deepest need" (MM 188).

Jayadev's entire personality is a healthy mixture of the old and the new, the Indian and the Western values. He is dedicated to the "task of bringing about a synthesis of the cultural patterns of East and West" (Sharma 101). No doubt, Bhattacharya highlights the synthesis of asceticism and aestheticism in Music for Mohini. The marriage between Jayadev and Mohini symbolizes the union of asceticism and aestheticism. Jayadev is an embodiment of ascetic qualities while Mohini is "an incarnation of the aesthetic and emotional sides of human life" (128). Jayadev is deeply interested in the synthesis of intellect and emotion, mind and heart, asceticism and aestheticism. Thus, his great desire and effect is to see Mohini as an embodiment of intellectualism and aestheticism by making her develop in her Maitreyi and Gargi – the two great intellectual women of ancient India. Thus, Bhattacharya is a skillful artist dealing with the theme of synthesis in his fictional world.

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