



BHABANI BHATTACHARYA : 'ART FOR LIFE'S SAKE'

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ABSTRACT

Bhabani Bhattacharya one of the foremost Indo-Anglian writers was not only a realist and visionary, he was also an artist with his genuine concern for society. He has in him a passionate plea for the synthesis of modern and traditional values with a positive affirmation of life. A man of multitudinous interests he has made his mark not only as a novelist and short story writer but also as a translator, creative historian and a biographer. Bhattacharya has especially excelled himself in short story writing because of his perception, vision, variety and universality of appeal. With humour, satire and humanism he deftfully handled the themes, ideas and values of his works which owe to our native social and cultural situations. Similar to Mulk Raj Anand, he believed in art for life's sake. Hence, through his works Bhabani Bhattacharya became a reformist social realist.

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Bhabani Bhattacharya, one of the great pioneers of Indo-Anglian Short Stories has immensely contributed in making the genre hold a remarkable place in literature. Born on 10th Nov.1906 in Bhagalpur, Bihar to Promotho and Kiranbala Bhattacharya, Bhabani Bhattacharya belonged to an educated family. He had his schooling at Puri and joined Patna University for his undergraduate studies. Having completed his Honours in English Literature in 1927, he left for England to study at the University of London and returned India in 1934 after taking his Ph.D. degree in History. His marriage with Salila Mukherji in 1935 proved to be a boon to his literary career. In 1950 he was appointed Press Attache to the Embassy of India in America where he spent the rest of his life as an active creative writer. He was appointed a Visiting Professor in 1971 in the University of Hawaii where he wrote his last novel, "A Dream in Hawaii". Dealing

whole life with epoch making events Bhabani Bhattacharya passed away in Oct.1988.

Notwithstanding, his rather scanty literary output, it is observed that he has caught the fancy of quite a large reading public and academic both at home and abroad. It is no wonder that his novel "Shadow from Ladakh", has won for him much coveted Sahitya Akademi Award. Bhattacharya's fiction has been translated into twenty-six languages including fourteen European languages. Bhabani Bhattacharya was greatly influenced by Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhiji as well as by Shakespeare but all his fictional theory resembles his affinity with Mulk Raj Anand. Similar to him Bhattacharya believed in 'Art for life's Sake' and not in 'Art for arts sake' which R.K. Narayan followed. He promulgates:

"Art must teach, but unobtrusively, by its vivid interpretation of life. Art must preach, but only by virtue of its being a

vehicle of truth. If that is propaganda, there is no need to eschew the word.”⁽¹⁾

Here, according to Bhattacharya a writer must have a social purpose. He has every right to work for a better world provided he does not impair the value of his art at all. Here critics hold a similar kind of view as such : ‘Art’ should be purposive that is it should be an instrument of social change. And, the writer must place before the readers something from the society’s point of view. Struggle, suffering and hope find a place in Bhattacharya’s fictions as in those of Anand’s works. Similarly his works also deal with social, political, economic and religious problems of the country. Bhattacharya, has however, succeeded in his attempt to bring about a harmonious fusion of his social concern and artistic values. It can be said in one line that if Anand is a revolutionary social realist, Bhabani Bhattacharya is a reformist social realist.

All his novels, whether it is ‘*So Many Hungers*’, ‘*Music for Mohini*’, ‘*He who Rides A Tiger*’ and ‘*Shadow from Ladakh*’ witness the problems prevalent in the society. The dissociation of sensibility that has set in ‘*Music for Mohini*’ is aggravated in ‘*He Who Rides a Tiger*’, and the strategy of fantasy that the author uses for riding the tiger of social purposiveness takes him nearer to R.K. Narayan’s ‘*The Guide*’. ‘*Indian Cavalcade*’ a collection of episodes of striking incidents from Indian history, displays his descriptive power, vivid portrayal of character and dramatic talent. But, my utmost concern is with his short stories, which is collected under the title “*Steel Hawk and other Stories*’. It is estimated that Bhabani Bhattacharya’s stories show considerable variety of theme and tone ranging from light-hearted comedy to sombre tragedy, from nights of sheer fancy to the keen observation of facts and from a study of monkey’s mind to the exploration of the depth of the human soul.

“*Steel Hawk and other Stories*” gives a beautiful insight into the minds of people when they come across technology Narrated by a cart-man Bishen, the story proceeds to show the feelings of awe both in the heart of young and old. In the title story Bishen’s thoughtfulness to describe a steel hawk to the old grandma makes the story a lot more

interesting. Also, it is a perceptive account of the reactions of rustics when a helicopter descends near the village.

In Bhattacharya’s short stories, there is a suspense which is sustained till the end of the story. It is not a dramatic suspense but a momentum which is developed gradually till the end from the very beginning. The story “*A Moment of Eternity*” is a beautiful story revealing the agonies and anguish of a mother’s soul. The law declares her a criminal for killing her two lovely children and punishes her for four years rigorous imprisonment. Step by step and with much care the momentum is built. The subtle handling of pain and sorrow rancouring the heart and psychological insight of the mother is quite amusing. In the story she is a villain mother but still the readers develop sympathy for her as she is a character with a difference. It is observed that her character is being glorified in her villainy just similar to Rahman Khan the villain in K.A. Abbas’s story “*The Sparrow*”.

The story mentioned above is a grim tragedy. And, the vice-versa of this is ‘*The Quack*’ which is all in all a humorous story. Here, poverty or hunger is the main theme which makes the character adopt quackery for his livelihood. However, Bhattacharya’s humour is different from that of R.K. Narayan’s. The latter’s humour is hilarious while that of the former is satirical. Narayan leaves the readers smiling at the end while Bhattacharya ends with a suggestion making the readers thoughtful. This can be witnessed in his (Bhattacharya’s) story ‘*Glory at Twilight*’.

The slow, narrow-gauge Indian train with its awkward freak of an engine had a way of making unauthorised stops for no good reason between fields of corn or at the foot of a village, it was said that the guard signalled a halt to pluck a pumpkin or ripe melon from its stem or to buy fistfuls of green gram from a peasant⁽²⁾

Moving further, it is acknowledged that Bhattacharya’s achievement lies not only in the handling of themes, manipulation of plot, narrative technique and art of characterization but also in moulding the English language to suit his artistic purpose. He shaped it as a suitable medium to

convey Indian sensibility by giving it a flavour of the soil. That is, he used vernacular dialects making the language look distinctly Indian.

In the '*Glory at Twilight*' readers analyse

Young woman gave the shrill traditional greeting of great joy: Ulu, Ulu, Ulu⁽³⁾

Also, in 'The Quack',

There in his dispensary waits Dogdar Sab with his big needle.

But, despite his being so influential, he lacks in developing bond with children. His '*Lattu Ram's Adventure*' does not attain the level that Anand's 'The Lost Child' has attained. Also, he misses Narayan's child psychology that is found in most of his works.

Thus, Bhabani Bhattacharya being a sincere writer has made a conscious effort in artistically highlighting the problems of the poor and in eradicating superstitious, blind beliefs and other wholesome aspects of the society. At the same time, he has taken all care to project a positive affirmation of life.

In the story "*Pictures in the Fire*" he has very beautifully drawn contrast between male and female psyche, stressing that racial difference is of no importance; basic human nature everywhere is the same. The story is a graphic example of the male ego. Here, the protagonist Henry Brown, not an Indian is a creative writer who sends his first story to a magazine in the name of his wife Josephine Brown. The brittle male ego apprehensive of rejection seeks protection behind his wife's name. And, the story is accepted. Further, continues writing in her name even after repeated pleads by his wife to not to do as such. But, he feels glad as he think he has created her. It is only when she becomes famous as a creative writer and even starts enjoying her new image that he begins to feel angry and jealous with her. The vulnerable ego of a man can never tolerate the fame of his wife. Unable to bear her fame Henry blames the whole female race. Concluding this one can say that Bhattacharya has deftly drawn the difference in the mental possession of the genders of human race. While a women feels happy to be the wife of a famous man; man's ego is shattered when he feels he is mere secondary to his famous wife.

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