

Impact of socio economic concerns in Bhabani Bhattacharya's- *So many hungers, he who rides a tiger and a dream in Hawaii*

¹ Naveenta, ^{*2} Dr. Poonam Rani

¹ M. Phil Scholar, Indus International University, Una, Himachal Pradesh, India

² HOD English Department, Associate Dean Welfare School of Arts, Media and Education Department, Indus International University, Una, Himachal Pradesh, India

Abstract

Indian writers of 20th century had a strong fascination to deal with the changing national scenes related to different levels as social, political, historical, and economic. In the field of fiction Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya give full vent to their shouldering resentment against the economic and social evils in fictional terms. The picture of hunger whatever be it causes and reasons is found in various colors in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a sieve*, R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* and *He Who Rides a Tiger* are representative picture of this new type of novels. Bhabani Bhattacharya is undoubtedly a prominent Indo- English fiction writer. He presents pestilence as hunger, not in fragments but in its wholeness. He not only delineates the gruesome scene of famine in Bengal, but depicts its physical and moral aspects in depth. He portrays a positive vision of life. In an interview with Sudhakar Joshi; he says that the novel should a social purpose. His stories abound in social and historical realities.

Keywords: hunger, poverty, exploitation, starvation, misery, liberty, freedom etc.

Introduction

Like other novelists Bhabani Bhattacharya is obsessed with the theme of hunger. His concern with the theme of hunger is very clear in his entire work. His writing is based upon man's hunger of food and other is disguised hunger of freedom. *So Many Hungers* his first novel is primarily devoted to man's hunger of food as well as other urges. *So Many Hungers!* Is a novel about so many worldly ills described in the backdrop of a great historical disaster that occurred in the colonial India. The novel vividly reflects Indian life and problems. It depicts the two devils of war and famine which squeeze the blood of human race. It deals with India's struggle for freedom in the early nineteen forties. It records vividly the Bengal famine in 1943 and *Quit India movement* of 1942 and has, as its theme, man's hunger for food and political freedom.

This novel is unique in the sense that it does not nearly depict the freedom movement in the country, as most other contemporary novels have done, but has reached out to the root cause responsible for such movement. The novel is divided into two parts. The first part represents the Basu's family and other with the peasant family of Kajoli. In the first part Devta, Samarendra and Rahoul play the dominant role. On the other hand Kajoli, her mother and Onu. The sad story of the Kajoli represents the pathetic fate of the millions of people. They suffered a lot due to the disastrous famine of Bengal in 1943.

The novel *So Many Hungers* deals with the character of Rahoul in a new perspective. In today's time the personal profits are more important than the public interest. But the novelist, who has a humanitarian outlook, provides the same status to Rahoul. The storey begins with the character of Rahoul, who is very much anxious to hear the news of his baby cry at the same time he heard the news of the war in Europe. The novelist had a keen observation of the incidents. When Rahoul heard about war he

was very disturbed because war has two shapes. If it is launched for the betterment of the people, it will have a positive aspect but if it will for their own benefits, it will take the negative shape. Thus, we can compare this conception with the struggle for freedom.

According to the novelist, the novel must have a social purpose. He wanted to do something for the hungry humanity. Because it was the need of the day. Bhattacharya remains the essential goodness and nobility of the hungry people. The moral unselfishness of hungry people has been described in very detail. And the best examples are Onu and Kajoli's mother. Although throughout the novel we came across the various instance of misery, poverty, starvation but these negative elements are subdued into the background when we think the hope and assertion of the self. The conflict of the self throughout the novel has not been the materialistic forces of evil but with the social forces of exploitation. There is no doubt that the novelist is successful to strike the heart of everyone. Another aspect of this novel is that, this novel reflects the image of Gandhi in Rahoul. One thing we can get from this novel is that the novelist is not against the British people, he is against their policy. And through the mouth of Devta, he tried to say that there is distinction between the British rule and the British people.

On the other side, Samarendra Basu also plays a major role in this novel. Though born poor, he gets good education and becomes a lawyer. He has two sons and both well educated. In this novel the first brother is cut from the society and the second for himself. Devesh is their parental grandfather. He is a retired teacher presently occupied in training the youth of the country to conduct Satagraha for the liberty of the country. Nothing interests us in a better way than the other side picture. Kanu is other character recollecting us the Kargil martyrs. Onu is his

younger brother, a symbol of an innocent Indian peasant. His life is simple but helpful to others.

Kajoli, the chief female character, suffers the pangs of the disintegration of her sprightly and innocent self on account of the catastrophic famine. She has a brief spell of happiness after she is married to Kishore but this happiness is put an occasional episode in the general drama of life. Alienated from her 'self,' Kajoli suffers from the conflict between situational compulsions and moral considerations. She never intends to live a sinful life but her utter poverty urges her to sacrifice her virginity and stoop to moral turpitude. Kajoli's alienation from herself is the offspring of her needs and necessities. It is a phonotypical manifestation of her inner drives and desires. So, through her character, Bhabani Bhattacharya portrays the dehumanization of a man in a mechanical society, where an individual remains alienated from the human aspect of his identity. Kajoli's struggle is not with the materialistic forces of evil and vice but with the social forces of exploitation and degradation. The novel thus depicts a phase of the Indian national movement when people, in towns and villages, fought for complete independence of the country.

Bhattacharya's first novel *So Many Hungers* and the third novel *He Who Rides a Tiger* deal with the theme of hunger, born of the world War second and the famine of 1943. Both novels have Bengal for their fictional locale. In *So Many Hungers* the general picture of starvation is particularized by showing the plight of Kajoli, her mother and their search for food. In *He Who Rides a Tiger* the treatment of hunger is made more effective by showing trials of Kalo and his daughter Chandra Lekha in the face of hunger. In this novel hunger is of two kinds: the hunger of the rich, black marketers, and oppressors for sexual pleasure and the hunger of the poor to meet the bare needs of life. Kalo the protagonist of the novel leads a happy life with his younger daughter, Chandra Lekha at Jharna. His crusade against the discrimination based on caste system begins silently when he gets his daughter admitted to a convent school in Jharna town. Chandra Lekha is subjected to this discrimination throughout her studentship at the hands of upper caste school-mates who tease her and look down upon her. So, the predicament of Kalo and Lekha reminds us of the hunger of Nathan and Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*. The hunger is caused by drought and by the tannery introduced by the colonial rulers. Like Chandra Lekha they sell their household things to stave off hunger. In both the novels the protagonists have full faith that better days will come back.

In the suffering of Kalo and his daughter we find a cosmic view of human suffering caused by a system 'corrupt with cast and cash.' Thus Bhattacharya forcefully presents the traumatic experiences of the stark poverty of the village folk on the one hand and the 'city bulging with riches' on the other hand. The emotional crux, the searing of soul that Kalo experiences in parting from his daughter while going to Calcutta evokes our pity and sympathy for Kalo and Lekha. The harrowing experiences of hunger and misery "spread like some corroding acid" over Kalo's faith, and over the values he has lived by. Nothing is unfortunate in the history of mankind than the social evil of prostitution—"the end of human decency" – caused by economic disparities, an evil to which Lekha becomes a victim, even though Kalo comes to her rescue in time.

So, the climax of Kalo's fight with the 'system' is reached in the episode of the Yagna ceremony, when Lekha is installed as the "mother of seven fold bliss". Not that he has virtually

realized his objective he explodes the myth at an opportune moment amidst a heterogeneous crowd consisting of the trustees of the temple, distinguished guests, and pundits etc. However the end is not without a touch of the idealistic. Kalo for example, could have continued with this "twice-born" life. Unlike *So Many Hungers* and *He Who Rides a Tiger*, *A Dream in Hawaii* does not concentrate upon hunger, poverty and exploitation but it depicts a fascinating encounter of East and the West cultures and life styles. In *A Dream in Hawaii*, as in Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*, the quest is that of an academic for spirituality despite his sense involvements. The binary opposition of the sensual and the spiritual determines character and action. In the beginning, the novelist tries to analyze the cultural values of India and the Island of Hawaii.

The spiritualism of the East and the materialism of the West are to be blended for attaining fulfillment. Here, the novelist artistically presents the ever-repelling poles of carnal desire and spiritual fulfillment. The plot revolves around two major aspects- Yogananda and Neeloy Mukherjee's quest for spiritual realization in the West and his love for Devjani's beauty. Yogananda's perspective of relationship between art and religion and Stella Gregson's thoughts over his quest for spiritual fulfillment have strong implications in the novel's underlying themes. Swami Yogananda major character in this novel and the whole story revolves around him. Walt Gregson, Frieda, Sylvia Koo, Dr. Vincent Swift, and Jennifer represent the Western malady. The basic conflict in human nature is presented by Bhabani Bhattacharya in *A Dream in Hawaii* involving movement between realms.

In this novel, the shifting of scenes from India to America and in flashback from America to India is like displacement in the post-colonial sense. The novel draws special attention to the spiritual desolation that is prevalent in the American society. Set against the mesmerizing scenic landscape of the Hawaii, the novel cites several examples to exhibit how the Westerners sought spiritual aid from the East. Stella's frustration exemplifies the failure of marital bliss in the American society. So, Bhattacharya utilizes various characters to comment upon the American lifestyle. The novelist observes widespread spiritual degeneration in a highly complex competitive world concluding that material success has not fulfilled the needs of the soul which grows increasingly admired and craves for something better. Thus in the other angle, the novel is about Indian life, social practices and their reactions, and the American social life of the present day. It demonstrates the Indian faith in spiritualism and in action free from desires for the fruit. The novel emphasizes the concept of transcendental meditation which originated in India but has swayed the lives of the Americans. It compares attitude of the Indians and Americans.

Thus, *A Dream in Hawaii* establishes a synthesis between the two different worlds. Swami Yogananda firmly believes that much can be achieved in realizing universal peace through a synthesis between the East and West, where one finds a conflict between the ancient and the modern, and science and spiritualism. Yogananda with his progressive views of life gives his first message to the people of Hawaii for accepting all faiths and harmonizing all beliefs. In this sense, the East- West Centre at Hawaii becomes the veritable seat of cultural synthesis.

Conclusion

Bhattacharya's mode of fictional presentation is determined

largely by his concept of literature. He holds that art should be firmly based on reality- social or historical. He believes that the creative writer's final business is to reveal the truth. The events in his novels are dramatized through the shifting viewpoints of characters inside the story. The conflict or clash of opposing ideologies is central to the narrative of all of his plots. The protagonist is picked up at a specific point in time and through intermittent flash-backs the reader is provided with the information about the earlier phases of life. The past of other characters, which came in contact with him, is also revealed. The plots of Bhattacharya's novels are well organized and coherent.

This gives an impression that he plans his plots stories before writing them and that his plots, therefore, lack natural growth or evolution. Bhattacharya is thus a class by himself among the contemporary Indian novelists both in the selection and treatment of his themes. His works are both artistic and infused with social awareness and thus relevant to all ages and all places. And in his quest of freedom, Bhattacharya is unique among all the contemporary writers.

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