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SOCIAL CONCERNS IN THE NOVELS OF BHABANI BHATTACHARYA



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ABSTRACT

Bhabhani Bhattacharya's novels have an extraordinary responsibility in depicting the social and political issues that prevailed after the Indian Independence. He deals with the social evils in India. He empathises from the point of the people who are greatly affected by the outcomes of Indian Independence. His novels were the results of his anger and aggression against the brutality of the British government as well as the inability of the Indians who failed to live in unity and discriminated against the

people from oppressed classes or communities. He wanted to exclude and eradicate discrimination in the label of caste and religion. He was also very much concerned about the loss and struggles of the farmers, especially the people of rural India, who were affected due to the Bengal famine which arose after the British Colonization.

KEYWORDS

Social realism, Discrimination, Hunger, Indian Independence, Social evils...

RESEARCH PAPER

Artists are deeply rooted in the lives of others and novels must serve a social purpose for Bhattacharya. Bhattacharya is basically a social philosopher who strives to express the social problems confronting society and the conceivable remedies through the novel. Bhabhani Bhattacharya's novels have an extraordinary responsibility in depicting the social and political issues that prevailed after the Indian Independence. He empathises from the point of the people who are greatly affected by the outcomes of Indian Independence. His novels were the results of his anger and aggression against the brutality of the British government as well as the inability of the Indians who failed to live in unity and discriminated against the people from oppressed class or community. Bhabani Bhattacharya mocks arts for the sake of art. In an interview with Sudhakar Joshi he says:

*"I hold that a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader something from the society's point of view. Art is not necessarily for art's sake. Purposeless art and literature which is much in vogue do not appear to me a sound judgment."*¹

Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of the pillars of Indian writing in English. Bhabani Bhattacharya is a realist and as a result, he has written six novels that are very famous viz. *So Many Hungers*, *Music for Mohini*, *The Goddess Named Gold*, *He Who Rides A Tiger*, *Shadow From Ladakh*, and *A Dream in Hawaii*. He is concerned with the social issues, problems, and their remedies. A deep analysis of Bhabani Bhattacharya's works asserts that he is primarily an objective observer of man's condition in this world. Throughout his novels and short stories, Bhattacharya exposes life in a society whose meaninglessness and resentment to the chivalrous individual are apparent. Bhattacharya's writings in general and his novels, in particular, are pinpointed on this sad tale of an individual placed in an indifferent environment.

Social relationships are essential to human life in general. These relationships are organized by so-called social institutions. It is still possible for a man to drive beyond himself and become more profoundly and entirely who he is. Because of his sense of the order of intellect, ethics, and aesthetics and the notion of its harmony, rhythm, and life, He was able to

express his ideologies without flaw. In his first novel *So Many Hungers*, published in 1947, Bhattacharya once said:

*“The great famine swept down upon Bengal. The emotional stirring I felt (more than two million men, women and children died of slow stagnation and a man-made society) were a sheer compulsion to creativity. The result was the novel So Many Hungers.”*²

The themes of Freedom and social reform are at the center of *So Many Hungers* and *A Goddess Named Gold*. Mahatma Gandhi dreamed of this. It was Gandhi's goal to eliminate untouchability from society. This theme is depicted in *He Who Rides a Tiger*. The beauty of Tagore's various appearances signifies the truth of Gandhi. So, Bhattacharya shared both of their ideas neatly and clearly. Tagore and Gandhi were those who conveyed a change that was greatly needed in society. Tagore and Gandhi were so sensitive to the social issues and evils that are dealt with by Bhattacharya in his works. Bhattacharya was also heavily influenced by the West, and his ability to portray the characters and subjects of his novels reflect his long-term foreign stay. His themes include hunger, poverty, disease, the plight of the poor, tradition and modernity, conflict and pretension, interracial relations, moral crisis, and cultural relations between the East and West. As said by Sharma in “Depiction of Woman as an Epitome of Sacrifice for Social Reconstruction of India in Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *Music for Mohini*.”:

*“Bhattacharya is a thinker-artist who not only watches closely the actual social events and embodying them in his novel, but at the same time suggesting to the society as it ought to be. There is not only criticism but protest in his novels which moves us by its ringing sincerity. He cannot help speaking out the truth but the manner in which he does it, is very artistic.”*³

Bhattacharya has written novels concerning the political and social consequences of rural India during the colonization of the British. He gave importance to the ancient values and heritage but never support the mythical and superstitious believes of rural India. Bhabani Bhattacharya by promoting a vision for the formation of a better Indian society free from the social evils of exploitation, suffering, and hunger, brings forward an authentic record of great

value through his novels. This he brings forward by depicting the condition of rural India in his novels especially *A Goddess Named Gold* and *He Who Rides a Tiger*. The poverty and misery of the Indian people in rural areas have given rise to the new genre of the Indian- English novel called the novel “the Hunger Theme”.

Hundreds and thousands of people in the country are portrayed as victims of periodic outpourings of hunger and famine. They encounter all intimidating consequences coming out from such disasters: moral degradation, illicit trafficking, and all the horrible scenes that get tagged along with famine in India. In these novels, the characters are seen to be forced by circumstances such as lack of food and employment to leave their village. Bhattacharya is one of the best spokespersons of the novel “the Hunger Theme”. In the vault of Indian English literature of the post-independence period, Bhabani Bhattacharya stands out to be a rare genius. What Bhattacharya has gained as a writer in the field of Indian English Literature is noteworthy.

He portrays the characters in the novels whose lives are full of miseries and extreme sufferings who “are silent and passive viewers of the effects of famine.”⁴ So, this chapter enumerates the depiction of rural India in the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya namely, *So Many Hungers* and *Music for Mohini*. In the novel *So Many Hungers*, Bhattacharya represented the stories of two families where one family appears to be rich in status and the other to be poor. Samarendra Basu, a lawyer who has a wife and two sons, appears to be more concerned only about acquiring money irrespective of the way he gets it.

Bhattacharya’s fourth novel, *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960) signifies an advance in Bhattacharya’s art as a novelist, for the ‘axes’ here are hardly visible and the grinding is not very audible. *A Goddess Named Gold* is purely a rural novel. The novel depicts the life and conditions of a pre-independence Indian village. In this novel, the major aim of Bhattacharya was to show how carefully a country should make use of its freedom and what positive results can be attained from this. Concerning a village named Sonamitti; the novelist tries to speak about ways to attain freedom and also about the beginning of a new age in India.

He Who Rides a Tiger (1954), one of Bhattacharya’s finest novels deals with the theme of poverty, misery, and helplessness. It is based on the ancient saying, “He who rides the tiger cannot dismount”. But in the novel, the situation of the protagonist Kalo is different. Kalo has the guts and courage to alight from the tiger during the time of his critical moment. This novel is considered to be the masterpiece of Bhattacharya. *He Who Rides a Tiger* has as its background

social, political and economic themes. The novel has for its background the World War II and the Bengal famine of 1943. The author has accurately depicted the Quit India Movement in the novel. It narrated incidents of imprisonment, tortures, and inhumanness for loving one's nation. There is also the portrayal of hunger strikes, defiance of bans, etc. all of which depict the vicious incidents of the political situation before independence. Bhabani Bhattacharya has created the characters in his first novel that undergo immense miseries and hardship. But in *He Who Rides A Tiger*, he makes his characters revolt against the injustice and hit back the people who are the cause of suffering.

The narrative of *Shadow from Ladakh* and *A dream in Hawaii* is woven together by a constant and strong theme of synthesis. Nothing like this has ever been written before. Throughout the former novel, the author assimilates large-scale and small-scale industrialization; Tagore aesthetics, Gandhian asceticism, old and new values, village and city, India and China, etc. These words reproduce the author's thoughts. He describes the latter novel with the conflicting lifestyles of India and Hawaii. In *Shadow from Ladakh* he says,

*“Integration—that was the poet’s lifelong quest: integration of the simple and the sophisticated; the ancient and the modern; city and village; East and West.”*⁵

Bhabani Bhattacharya's first love and full-time job is writing, and practically all of his novels depict India and its teeming millions bursting with life and substance. He is not a believer in art for the sake of art. For him, all writing serves a societal purpose. He has a really positive and purposeful approach. He sees art as a form of life criticism that examines current values, and he sees the novel as a sympathetic idiom with a remedial social effect. He is one of the novelists who have made it clear that his work has a social purpose in his platform and declaration that "art must have a social purpose."

S. T. Hemenway compares Bhattacharya with E. M. Forster, Mulk Raj Anand, and R. K. Narayan, in his critical framework and remarks:

*“Bhabani Bhattacharya inherits Forster’s sharp eye for East-West dichotomies, Anand’s concern with social, economic and political problems, and Narayan’s comic playfulness and exaggeration.”*⁶

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