



INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION AS A LIVING AND EVOLVING LITERARY FORCE THROUGH THE FICTIONAL FORTE OF BHABANI BHATTACHARYA: AN APPRAISAL

Dr. S. Chelliah

Professor, Head and Chairperson, School of English & Foreign Languages & School of Indian Languages, Department of English & Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to project Indian English fiction as a living and evolving literary force, forming an impressive core of commonwealth literature and to reveal how Indo-Anglian literature has attained a distinct place in the literary landscape of India through literary creations of various Indian writers in different forms of literature with a particular focus on the fictional forte of Bhabani Bhattacharya. It beautifully pictures Bhabani Bhattacharya as a great social character and significance of art and literature but also exposing the hypocrisy of men, the outdated traditions, poverty and hunger of the sons of the soil so as to picture the inhuman horror with naked truth, making rather undoubtedly the masses aware of their birthright to live as human beings realizing the spiritual aspects of life as against the worldly and the mundane.

Keywords: Indian Ethos, Fictional Forte, Social Reform, Stern Idealism, Inhuman Horror, Naked Truth, Worldly and Mundane.

Indian fiction in English forms an impressive core of Commonwealth literature sharing the complex fate of third world art and reflecting several similar traits, besides articulating meaningfully Indian ethos and heritage. Indo – Anglian literature has, no doubt, attained a distinct place in the literary landscape of India. Growing like American literature or Canadian literature, Indo- Anglian literature has become a phenomenon of world literature without a parallel in the world the term ‘Indo – Anglian’ refers to original creative writing in English by Indians. Prof. K.R.S. Iyengar, a pioneering critic of Indo- Anglian literature, is said to have made through his earlier works ‘Indo – Anglian literature’, ‘Indian Contributions to English literature’ and ‘Literature and Authorship in India’ and his latest Indian writing in English to create an awareness of Indo-Anglian literature.’

Though various Indian writers have carved out a name for themselves in different forms of literature like prose, poetry, short – story, a few notable writers deserve mention. Nehru excelled in art of writing prose like **Discovery of India** and **Autobiography**, Sri Aurobindo achieved fame through the inspiring and valuable workmanship in the field of prose, poetry and drama, Tagore as a novelist and dramatist, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu as poets, Setina, Chettur, Manjeri Isvaran, Bhushan and Humayunkabir as other notable figures in the field of poetry, K.A. Abbas, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Bhabani. Bhattacharya made significant contribution to Indo-Anglian of fiction, Commonly speaking, the only possible literary form through which a writer can hope to keep himself in constant touch with the common readers is ‘fiction’. Usually writers are said to get themselves established through this ‘novel’ technique. That is why the bulk of Indo-Anglian literature and established its fame and attained eminence and popularity in the novel form. The first Indian novel published in English was Raj Mohan’s ‘Wife’ in 1864. Though writing of poetry was on the ascent, the novel established itself both in quality and quantity with a direct impact on the social, political and religious aspects of life.

What is generally held is that major triumphs of Indian English literature lie in fiction. The Indian English fiction is nothing but “a living, developing and evolving literary force” (Reddy I). It has attained a rich growth, mounting extraordinary heights in the context of the contemporary Indian literary scene. Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao are the rooted blossomers and in addition to them, the significant writers like Kamala Markandaya, Bhabani

Bhattacharya, Manogat Malgonkar, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi have gone either to the grassroots or the urban segments of Indian life and reality. While the elder writers were concerned with the national upsurge, social evils and rural problems, the recent novelists seize upon the more recent problems of sex, Conjugal Clashes, cultural chaos, loss of identity and other dilemmas of individual characters. Art is a vital cognizance of human reality and it has its roots in temporal conditions through it transcends them into timeless and universal experiences. Indian fiction reflects this process of growth.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee is nightly called the father of the novel in India. Krishna Kripolani has nightly commented on the novel played by B.C. Chatterjee as:

“It was Bankim Chandra who established the novel as a major literary form in India. He had his limitations, he too was romantic, effusive and indulged a little too freely in literary flashes and bombast and was no peer of his great contemporaries, Zola and Dickens, much less of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. There have been better novels in India since then, but they all stand on Bankim’s shoulders” (P 45)



The rise of the novel in English in India was not only a literary phenomenon but also a social phenomenon as it was associated with social, political and economic conditions. The arrival of M.R. Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan, aptly termed as the founding fathers by William Walsh, on the literary scene gave Indian English novel a new vigour and vibrancy. K.S. Venkataramani's **Kanaden the Patriot**, Raja Rao's **Kanthapura** and Raja Anand's **Coolie** and **untouchable**, Abba's **Inquilab**, R.K. Narayan's **Waiting for the Mahatma**, Nagarajan's **Chronicles of Kedaram**, Nayantara Sahgal's **A Time to be happy** Bhubeni Bhattacharya's **Shadow from Ladakh** did significantly create political and social Consciousness coupled with sensation before and after freedom movement. Venkataramani himself had introduced **Kanden The Patriot** as a novel of new India in the making and dedicated it to the unknown volunteers in India's struggle for freedom.

The 1980's witnessed efflorescent emergence of new Indian fiction in English heralding a new era of change in its tenor, tone and content. The 1980's witnessed a second coming of the Indian novel in English. It's messiah seems to have been Salman Rushdie who charged the concept of Indian writing in English by making indelible reprints on the world literary horizon with his **Midnight Children** and later **Shame**, thereby depicting Indian reality with a fantastical tinge and transfusing history, myth and autobiography exquisitely. No doubt, the main concerns of Indian English fiction from 1930's to 1980's were largely sociological, national and at times philosophical, with the writers being Committed to their ideals of humanism and social justice. In the post-modern novel in India, the emphasis is on society and on relationships. The post-modern novelists want the world to become a better place and the people to be a 'better sect'. One of the resplendent stars during this era in the firmament of Indian writing in English is Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya who is unquestionably a gifted writer ranking with some of the best Indian novelists writing in English.

Having vast experience and background, it is no wonder that Bhattacharya has risen like a meteor in the literary firmament. Creative writing is his love and full time career. Almost all his novels present a true and vivid picture of India and its teeming belief in the diction of art for art's sake. For him, all writing should have a social purpose. His outlook is highly constrictive and purposeful. In the words of Smt. Lila Ray, "As we read his writing, we hear the dialogue between man and his situation, between man and man, between man and ideas he lives by" (P 173). He has to his credit publication is six novels – 1. **So Many Hungers** (1947), 2. **Music for Mohini** (1952), 3. **He who Rides a Tiger** (1954), 4. **A Goddess Names Gold** (1960), 5. **Shadow from Ladakh** (1966) and 6. **A Dream in Hawaii** (1978) and short story collections namely **Steel Hawk** and other stories (1968) and non-fictional writings namely 1. **Some Memorable Yesterdays** (1940), 2. **Indian Cavalcade** (1944), 3. **Gandhi the writer** (1969), 4. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1977) and 5. **Glimpses of Indian History** along with translation of two works of Rabindranath Tagore entitled **The Golden Boat** (1932) and **Towards universal Man** (1961), Besides, he has edited the book **Contemporary Indian Short Stories** (1967).

Being greatly unfenced by Tagore and Gandhi as well as Shakespeare and Steinbeck, he was interested in the societal issues and problems of social change. As a realist – cum – social reformer, he is keen on exploring the realities of life in the Indian society with a sensitive understanding of the problems of contemporary Indian society. Truly speaking, a careful observation of the details of the common folks is essential for a writer who wants to write social novels. Bhattacharya himself comments:

"Unless a writer has been observation and an eye for details of general behavior of folks, he cannot write a social novel. I have developed this habit and I have not missed a single opportunity of observing incidents, and happenings, where I can gain something for the writer in me" (Joshi vii)

Such a great social reformer and realist Bhabani Bhattacharya believes in the social character and significance of art and literature, mirroring artistically and sympathetically the people. High idealism permeates his works and they record the aspirations and urges of people heroically involved in struggle between the old and the new and inspired by the vision of a just social order" (Reizada 127). Like other writers, Bhattacharya does not depict in his works soul – tormented maniacs living alienated and isolated lives but portrays full – blooded men and women, creatures of their society, victims of its unjust persecutions and yet possessing miscible strength to carry the banner of high ideals of the new India.

Bhattacharya's novels are considered as nothing but a microcosm of India and he conveys his views through the medium of situation rather than statements. Through his writing, he does depict rather beautifully the life of man in relation to society, in relation to himself, and in relation to Destiny and his outlook is sympathetic, thereby dealing with the theme of hunger poverty, disease, the sufferings of the poor, tradition and modernity, social evils, tensions and pretensions, Changing values of modern civilization, interracial relations, crisis of Character and East – West cultural relations. He is the one novelist who has an avowed purpose in writing the novels with his manifesto and declaration that "Art must have a social purpose" Not only did he believe in it, but he followed it implicitly in all his novels. In this respect, he is like Bernard Shaw who said that if out is not didactic, it is useless. His novels **So Many Hangers** and **He Who Rides a Tiger** are predominantly woven round



the theme of hunger, while the theme of cultured synthesis is taken up in **Music for Mohini**. His **shadow from Ladakh** deals with the theme of simplicity and sophistication whereas **A Goddess Named Gold** deals with superstition and lust for gold.

Bhattacharya's very first novel, **So Many Hungers** is one of the finest pieces of creative writing born out of agonized torment of body and spirit endured by the sacred soil of Bengal during the hideous famine years and the early stages of the second world war. The novelist here shows the unfortunate predicament of Bengal by portraying the ups and downs in the life of two families – one of samarendra Bose, an affluent barrister and business man of Calcutta and the other of a peasant of Beruni, whose soul is given to song and wandering. As the famine strikes through the integers begin to die of hunger. Restitutes leave their villages and march towards big cities in the hope of getting food. The mendicant's daughter Kajoli, her mother and her little daughter, Anu also join the endless cavalcade of starving masses. On the way, they come across tired and famished skeletons groaning in pain while jackals crouch and eat their bodies. Vultures circle over the dead bodies and make a prey of human flesh. Facing numerous difficulties and hardships, they reach Calcutta. If the famine exposes the sordidness and meanness of the human soul, it also brings on the surface its latent nobleness. There are movements when the helpless and famished destitute rise above their bodily infirmities and show a hidden core of sympathy, nobility and heroism.

Music for Mohini deals with the tensions and conflicts of the Indian society at “a moment of transition, of search for a true way of life“ (MM 52). It is indeed ‘a forward – looking novel in which the author dwells on certain sociological aspects of Indian life. The Characters and the incidents pictured in this novel represent the forces of the past and the present and point to the utter desirability of achieving a kind of spiritual for the survival and growth of India. Mohini and Jayadev, are the two really important characters in this novel **Music For Mohini**. Mohini strikes us as a peculiar blend of submission and revolt, humility and defiance, while Jayadev has a settled and definite social philosophy of his own:

“It was his dream to remunerate the values and patterns of Hindu life. India was on the verge of freedom...While others ideology to cut the knots of the problem, Jayadev delved back into India's remote past for a solution”
(MM 67)

Jayadev launches a crusade against blind beliefs and Superstitions; he wants to re-weight social values. He believes in the continuity of culture but rejects the old tapestry of tradition, he is all out for truth but he does not want to posterity to cling to blind faith or crazy beliefs. He seeks nothing but integration of values. This novel **Music for Mohini** is out and out an ardent plea for integration or synthesis of values. The past should not be rejected as something utterly irrelevant, useless or obsolete, and similarly the present should not be accepted as ‘Wholesome’. It is in a profound union of today with yesterday, of village with city life, of the East with the West, of through with action, of consumption with commitment, of asceticism with aestheticism that our salvation lies. As J.P. Singh has put it, “the rebuilding of a new society for Tree India is possible only through a reorientation of human values” (P 56). This gets reflected in **Music for Mohini**.

In **A Goddess Named Gold**, Bhattacharya deals with the theme of economic freedom of hungry masses and warns against the evils of profiteering and poverty, which if not completely eradicated, may defeat the purpose of freedom and lead to many more hungers. The novel has provided the base for the author to emphasize his conviction that woman represents power and it has been possible for him to spiritualize and it electuaries women. He has made clear women's realization and assertion of their any power through modesty in their most precious possession. It is perhaps to bring to limelight the significance and role of women that India is called the Motherland. Meera is the symbol of women hood with her buoyant spirit. She is indeed the backbone of the whole village and is the guiding force of their destined and inspires them to unity and action. She is like a golden thread running through the entire story and she herself is the symbol of freedom. Her motto is to use old means for a new end.

Bhattacharya loves deep involvement in life. He abhors to escape its travails. A plunge into its turbulent water is a part of his philosophy. A strong sense of social purpose drives him to write. The peculiarly Indian details and settings of his novels are universal in their import, commenting intimately upon conflicts of social man, whatever his particular society. The novel **A Dream in Hawaii** deals with the tensions and pretensions of the modern world, nay the ultra modern world: With its sick hurry and divided aims, Bhattacharya deals – primarily with the two poles of life – Kama (physical desire) and Moksha (Spiritual bliss or Salvation). The novel also highlights the two aspects Tames (darkness), referring to the bodily pleasures and Janna (enlightenment). He has in mind the clash of rashes between the East and the west – India and America. While depicting the core of India's strength Bhattacharya refers to the magnetic influence of four personalities on the Indian scene – Buddha, Vivekananda, Tagore and Gandhi and makes minute references to Kamasutra, the ancient classic of India which is considered the best gospel for America. Here in this novel. the novelist extends his vision beyond the problems of his country to the problems of the sick western civilization of today. Through his talks and dialogues, yogananda impresses upon youths



of America the value of the Begaved Gita – gospel of desireless action to attain dynamic equilibrium or inner adjustment and peace. He exhorts them to have purpose in their life and strive for God – Consciousness. Under the influence of yoganada, the youths of America begin to realize the menace of the lostness in American life and identity. They are made to emphasize the need for purpose, belief and hope as the real values for future. Thus , Bhattacharya unravels the fundamental and universal values of life and awake the readers to the vital necessity of their supremacy in human life. In the words of D. Ramakrishna, “In Bhabani Bhattacharya’s **A Dream in Hawaii** as in Raja Rao’s **The serpent and the Rope** the guest in that of an academic for spirituality despite his sensual involvements. The binary opposition of the sensual and the spiritual determines character and action. Instead of Leaving the reader lost in the web of Advaita philosophy predicament” (P132). Further he adds: “What is ultimately significant in Bhattacharya’s presentation in **A Dream in Hawaii** is the Kiplingesque awareness that East in East and West is west” (133)

The universality of the works of the works of Bhabeni Bhattacharya lies in the fact that even after decades, they are relevant today. The very reason why his novels are still read and studied widely is that they are capable of the present society. He is the humanist trying his level best to improve the life of the common man so as to direct his writing towards a moral and intellectual regeneration of Indian society so that the ills of the society may get removed and the common man will be able to share some prosperity with the rich man. While Tagore in a great humanist giving importance to man, Bhabani Bhattacharya expresses his anger against the most inhuman exploitation of man by man in the contemporary society. He analyzed the historical forces working behind the social economic and political changes in India and produced works which have relevance to life in contemporary India. Balaram commenting on the fact that Bhattacharya could not escape the impact of the social environment in which he was brought up and grew to maturity, Balaram sarot remarks:

“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 ” (P13) .

To conclude, it may be said that Bhabani Bhattacharya in a stern realist exposing the hypocrisy of man, the out dated traditions, poverty and hunger of the sons of the soil so as to picture the inhuman horror with naked truth. He makes rather undoubtedly the masses aware of their birth right to live as human beings realizing the spiritual aspect of life as against the worldly and the mundane.

Work Cited

1. Joshi, Sudhakar. “An Evening with Bhattacharya” The Sunday standard April 27, 1969. P.vii print.
2. Kriplalni, Krishna Indian Literature: A Panoramic Glimpse Bombay: Nirmal Sadaneud, 1969.
3. Raizoda, Harish. Bhabani Bhattacharya: The Novelist of social Ferment” Response: Recent Revelations of Indian English Fiction (ed) Hari Mohan Prasad , Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot , 1983.
4. Ramakrishna, D.” Bhabani Bhattacharya’s A Dream in Hawaii: A Study in pose colonial Spirituality” The Novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya (ed) Monika Gupta. Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 202. Print.
5. Ray, Lila. “Bhabani Bhattacharya, Aprofile” Indian Literature vol-xi No-2, April July 1968. P 173.
6. Reddy, Poil. Bhabani Bhattacharya and Societal Concerns New Delhi: Manglam publication, 2015 Print.
7. Singh, Jitendra Prasad. The Novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya A Historical and Sociological Study, New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers, 2012. Print.
8. Sorot, Balaram. The Novels of Bhattacharya, New Delhi: Prestige Publications, 1991. Print.