

A VISION OF FUTURE IN THE NOVELS OF BHABANI BHATTACHARYA

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The intimate relationship between art and society is unmistakably ostensible in Literature as literary works not only record the social realities of their time, but in numerous ways transcend it to project the realm of future possibilities. Bhabani Bhattacharya, a prominent Indo-Anglican novelist has used this concept emphatically in their writings and has carved a niche for himself. He projects his vision of the future suggesting various ways out through his writings. He shows his stiff conviction in the essential goodness of human soul and also in the amalgamation of the opposites by way of accommodation, compromise and understanding. In his all novels Bhattacharya has projected his vision of the future. As Bhattacharya says that the novel should have a social purpose (Bhattacharya, 9). K.K. Sharma also says:

His stories abound in social and historic realities, quite often bitter and gruesome, such as the Bengal famine of 1943, the tragedies of the freedom struggle and partition, and the evils of poverty, corruption, ignorance, superstition, exploitation, greed, sexual perversion, etc. But beneath them, there is almost always present the novelist's influencing faith in future life.
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Moreover, Bhattacharya's faith in the vision of the future is confirmed again when he mentions explicitly, ". . . Art must teach but unobtrusively by its vivid interpretation of life." (Srivastava, xviii).

Bhattacharya in his first novel *So Many Hungers* presents the different dimensions of hungers to project his vision of future. Hunger represented by Samarendra Basu, brings him no fruit in the end of the novel. Both of his sons, Rahoul and Kunal are not benefitted with his wealth. Kunal is missing somewhere and Rahoul is in the jail. In that way Bhattacharya has tried to focus on the futility of the money acquired by wrong means. In delineating the hunger for food Bhattacharya again projects his vision of the future by creating the character of Kajoi in this novel. Even in the times of crisis such as Bengal famine of 1943 she tries her utmost to protect herself from the evil designs of the betal women. Even further, Kajoi's mother's reaction of the advance made by the betal women is suggestive of her strong belief in moral values. Thus Bhattacharya has substantiated his ideal visualization through this novel. While depicting a graphic picture of the Bengal famine of 1943, which is a heart rendering scene of starvation and death, still shows his strong belief in moral values which projects his vision. Even the young boy Onu, in a state of utmost misery and helplessness, is shown having a vision of dignified, bright future life based upon hard work and self respect. (SMH, 176)

On the political front, Bhattacharya while chronicling the situation of Quit India Movement of 1942 and the Second World War shows his unyielding belief in fighting with the evil forces so that a bright future could be achieved. When Samarendra Basu asks Rahoul how

long Second World War will last, the young man answers, “Till the new epoch is born” (SMH, 5). Even the message delivered by Devata of “Be strong, Be true, Be deathless”, clearly shows Bhattacharya’s dense faith in life (SMH, 72). Moreover, the ending of the novel by the famous line of Rabindra Nath Tagore again confirms his faith, “The more their eyes redden with rage the more our eyes open: the more they tighten the chains, the more the chains loosen” (SMH, 204). Bhattacharya by projecting Rahoul, an important character of the novel suggests a way out of the problems India was facing at that particular time. It was the time for making and reshaping India and Bhattacharya sees no shortcuts for these problems. Thus the novel suggests political freedom as the sine quo non for self-realization of both the individual and the nation. In this holy yajna for freedom, it is incumbent as much on women as on men to offer themselves at the altar. Especially the intellectual elite are called upon to come out of their ivory towers and give their less enlightened but more enthusiastic brethren the lead even if it entails the sacrifice of their secure perch. Rahoul, an astrophysicist, for example, gives up his sheltered ivory towers to join the struggle for making a new India. Thus in that way, Bhattacharya, while depicting the authentic picture of Bengal famine, second world war, Quit India Movement and freedom struggle, focuses his attention on the ways out suggested by him in this novel. Thus the analysis of the major scenes and episodes during those time set forth Bhattacharya’s determined conviction in brightness of life which is unmistakably, but artistically, presented at every turn and twist of the story. Thus the novel is an artistic embodiment of his vision of the future.

In *Music for Mohini* too, Bhattacharya applies the same conclusion as drawn from the above analysis of *So Many Hungers*. This novel also expresses Bhattacharya’s firm belief in life. In this novel too, he suggests various ways out for projecting his idea of future. In this novel, Jayadev, the highly cultured and scholarly scion of the big house and Harindra, a doctor sacrifice their secure perch for the welfare of the society. The marriage of Jayadev with Mohini itself suggests Bhattacharya’s conviction in life with which he shows his visualization of future by projecting the opposites; the old and the new values, city life and village life, and the old and the young-in harmony with each other. The novel has repeated references to the need for a synthesis of the old and the new, “the horoscope and the microscope” as Mohini’s father puts it (MFM, 52). But the synthesis remains merely on the conceptual level, With Jayadev, its chief theoretician. We are informed by the omniscient narrator how Jayadev had delved “back into India’s remote past for a solution” (MFM, 67) of her current problems. But Jayadev would use the past creatively as he says, “Look back that you may look for forward. Look to the roots of India in this fateful hour of flowering. Use the buried material of the past to write the new social character . . . the new man of his vision was not to be a hollow reincarnation, not a spiritless copy of ancient Hindu man” (MFM, 68). Jayadev stands for a re-examination of the past in the light of the present and the likely future and thus for forging new strategies using past experiences. Even when Jayadev’s mother is forcing his wife Mohini to sprinkle blood from her bosoms to appease the deity, his clear cut exhortation is, “Do not bow down to such insult. You are the new India. The old orthodox ways have been our yoke, have enslaved us. Let us be free” (MFM, 166). This shows Bhattacharya’s faith in the changing scenario of the Indian traditions and society. Thus keeping in tune with his attempt at chronicling the events of the post independence period, Bhattacharya describes the ongoing changes in the Indian social set up. In the end of the novel Bhattacharya’s concept of ‘Life is all compromise’, clearly shows his vision of the future and consequently there is a 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 note . . . 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” (MFM, 188).

Thus, while depicting the social history of the country in the wake of the newly achieved freedom, Bhattacharya shows his faith in synthesis of opposites which projects his vision of future. In this novel superstition is eliminated while keeping the faith alive.

In *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Bhattacharya’s vision of future gets intense and sharper than in *So Many Hungers*. Though the background of both the novels is the same that is Bengal famine of 1943 and Quit India Movement yet the treatment is different. Whereas *So Many Hungers* is a silent saga of human miseries and sufferings, this novel is their vocal protest. *He Who Rides a Tiger* is, “essentially the story of a crusade to challenge the very organization of society” (Bhatanagar, 6). Bhattacharya projects his vision of future by highlighting the protests against two evils- the evils of exploitation which results in hunger and degradation, and the evil of caste system prevalent in India during that particular time. Two characters in this novel symbolize the protest, Kalo against the exploitation and Biten against the caste system. Bhattacharya through this novel gives a message to the society “food for all work for all and jail for the rice profiteers” (HWRAT, 162), which clearly projects his vision of the future when Kalo, poses to be a Brahman “to hit back” (HWRAT, 34) by raising of a stone of God Shiva out of the earth, he rides this lie “as if it were a tiger which he could not dismount lest the tiger pounce upon him and hit him up(HWRAT, 84).In this way Bhattacharya does not recommend the wrong ways to fight against exploitation. This point is expressed by Lekha when she approves the idea of revolt but she is not quite convinced about the method adopted. When Kalo confesses his guilt in public he is not degraded or insulted by his daughter and the common folks. They cry “Victory to our brother”, even Chandra Lekha is brimming over with high spirits and happiness. She has an overwhelming realization of a sort of eternal victory “Baba, after this, whatever happens to us, wherever we go, we can never again be unhappy or defeated” (HWRAT, 252).Even biten congratulates him, “You have triumphed over these others- and over yourself. What you have done just now will steel the spirit of hundreds and thousands of us. Your story will be a legend to inspire and awaken” (HWRAT, 232).This proves his unbending faith in true values of life which help in projecting the vision of future.

Bhattacharya sees no shortcuts to freedom and progress – neither violence nor miracles. This is true of another novel *A Goddess Named Gold*. Meera’s good intentioned folly in banking on a taveej for making the lives of the villagers prosperous is revealed and freedom is presented as the taveej which can transform the lives of the villagers if it is used in good faith. Freedom is a means to the welfare of the people which, indeed, is the ultimate end. Bhattacharya in this novel also points out that political independence alone will not lead India to true progress unless the people are motivated by acts of sympathy and kindness. A change in the attitude and outlook of an individual is a pre-requisite for the greater happiness of the people. In that way Bhattacharya projects his vision of future which warns us against the evils of profiteering and poverty which if not completely eradicated may defeat the very purpose of freedom and lead to many more hungers. Bhattacharya also suggests that true freedom and miracles are not possible without love and hard work. Simple traditional miracles (even if they occur) and gold cannot provide people with happiness and security. Men and women will have to fight against the merciless wealthy people and will have to believe in, and practice true acts of kindness. Shohan Lal justly points out to Meera, “ You cannot have enough gold to save all India! . . . It is fight with the Seths that will save India, not a miracle, not armfuls of gold” (AGNG, 117). Thus in a way Bhattacharya gives a solution for the problems, India was facing just after getting its independence.

Shadow from Ladakh gives a forceful plea for reinterpretation and reappraisal of Gandhism in the modern context. Here, Bhattacharya proposes a synthesis between the virtues of a narrow, isolationist Gandhism and open –ended industrialism. The realms wherein it is arrived at include the personal, the economical and the political. Both the spinning wheel and steel are shown to be complementary to each other, working as means to the same end of the betterment of the people. Bhattacharya raises some questions regarding Indian politics and plannings for the future. The Chinese invasion has been virtually the death knell of Gandhian values. During the traumatic experience the nation had , people in their suppressed tone blamed Gandhiji for incapacitating the nation to fight by advocating non violence as they blamed Nehru for not visualizing the Chinese designs of many warnings to the contrary after their annexation of Tibet. The Gandhian strategy of winning over the adversary in a non violent manner is shown triumphant in personal and societal realms through the winning over the Gandhian grammians by Baskar. The Mao-worshipping Chinese girls are won over through the exercise of soul power and love. Thus by raising the problems of Chinese invasions and then presenting its way outs, establishing the need to review prevalent political, social and economical strategies, and by emphasizing on industrial development the novelist has presented a perfect vision of future.

Through *A Dream in Hawaii* he shows the synthesis of East and West. He gives an idea of integration of spiritualism of East and materialism of West in order to attain the fulfillment of life Bhattacharya through Yogananda of *A Dream in Hawaii* preaches the spiritualism of the East, but he does not deny the importance of Western value pattern. Along with spiritualism, he thinks the necessity of the science and technology for the progress and prosperity of the world, “unlike many faddists in the religious field, Yogananda had great faith in technology. It was no longer a Western product, a Western challenge. All human society was set on being technology-based. This was a need for the preservation of life itself” (ADIH, 10). Bhattacharya asserts that an adequate knowledge of the material world is as significant for man as the profound spiritual wisdom. Those two are supplementary and complementary to each other, “There can be no true knowledge without wisdom and no true wisdom without a hard core of knowledge” (ADIH, 201). Thus in a way Bhattacharya projects his vision of the future by emphasizing the need of blending of these two diverse cultures. Bhattacharya, in the end of the novel concludes that neither the spiritualism of the East nor the materialism of West deserves to be accepted or to be rejected in its ‘entirely’. In the end of the novel, Bhattacharya projects Yogananda’s dream which reveals the Neeloy in him. Really it was Debjani, who, through her insistence on seeing the Swami in Neeloy, had made him into one, leading him to deny the sensual aspect of life and acknowledging only the spiritual being in him. Ironically enough, it is only when he is at the pinnacle of his daughter as a ‘Swami’ , Yogananda realizes the truth of his inner being which continues to nurture Neeloy, resisting all outward impositions and control. In that way, Bhattacharya has proved that sex and spirituality are the two sides of the same coin; in spite of the fact all sorts of perversions are committed in their name.

Thus, the novels of Bhattacharya reflect his vision of future by asserting his firm faith in the essential goodness of human soul. How so ever bad and evil intentioned a person may be, there is always a possibility of his seeing the light of reason and the surfacing of good in him. Validation of Gandhian ideology, synthesis of past and present, need for industrialization and national defense and resistance for exploitation are well suggested for the vision of a better future.

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