

The Spirit of Nationalism in the Works of Bhabani Bhattacharya

Dr. Ruby Kumari

Former Research Scholar, Department of English, L.N. Mithila University, Darbhanga, Bihar

Abstract- Nationalism is one of the key features of the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya who is considered to be the major political and social novelist of the age. It is felt that nationalism is a weapon for a dominated community to fight with a foreign rule of an imperialist country. India is a very fine example where various people of different races and religions, castes and sub-castes speaking a number of languages and dialects. He has depicted the socio-political and economic changes in India on the background of the contemporary historical events and social events. He is seriously concerned with the plight of the destitute and the low class people. It can be said that there is unity in diversity in India. The development of national movement was marked by the birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885, Bhabani Bhattacharya points out that by 1875, the seeds of nationalism sown by the British rule itself had germinated in the soil of India and the erstwhile geographical term had acquired a new meaning and a new significance. The Indian National Congress played a very important role to oppose all official acts by constitutional methods. Influenced with the idea of nationalism, eminent moderate leaders held the British Government responsible for the economic ruin of the country. There were some extremists in contrast to the old leaders. Bhattacharya focuses on the idea of nationalism in his novels. He protests and revolts against selfish and orthodox communities who drag always the civilization in the backward direction and they remain as hurdles in the growth of nation. Bhattacharya's educations, travels and experiences as a journalist shaped his vision of life. The present paper is a depiction of the presentation of the Indian Social, Economic and Political situation during the period of Imperial rule.

Index Terms- Nationalism, Community, Imperialist, Diversity, Protest, Indian National Congress, Moderates, Extremists, Imperial.

I. INTRODUCTION

The present paper deals with the aspect of nationalism in the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya. The concept of nationalism was born in the eighteenth century during the French revolution in the European continent as adoration of collective power. It is true that India was conglomeration of diverse states and principalities where there lived various people of different races and religions, castes and sub-castes, colors speaking a

number of languages and dialects. Despite these differences, it was seen that the seeds of nationalism sown by the English rule itself which had germinated in the soil of India by 1875. The full development of nationalism movement was possible with the formation of Indian National Congress in 1885. This organization covered whole India. The workers of this Indian National Congress struggled against the British government and opposed its policy through legal methods. On the other hand the main feature of Congress in its early stage was its loyalty to the British Government. It was also observed that many congress leaders of this stage, viz. Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and many others were the products of English Education and they had genuine respect for British culture. In the meantime as a reaction to the liberal leadership of the congress that saw in the British rule a divine dispensation; a new attitude towards the British government grew in the end of the 19th century. Some important leaders thought over it and held the British Government responsible for the economic destruction of the country they brought about a change of outlook and a change of goal to the party. In this context, these new leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandrapal and many others were generally known as extremists in contrast to the old leaders who came to be known as moderates. The extremists had a very high respect towards Indian civilization and Indian values. They blamed the old leaders for their attempt at a reproduction of Europe in India. Bhabani Bhattacharya has expressed such views in a very good manner.

Bhattacharya's novel second novel *Music for Mohini* presents the theme of tradition versus modernity. The novel is set in the Bengal countryside, five years after the Bengal Famine. It highlights the sociological concerns relevant to Indian family life and points to certain direction in which Indians must move if they are to reap the benefits of the political freedom recently won through the freedom struggle. The heroine Mohini is the daughter of an intellectual in the city. Being

motherless, she is reared by her orthodox grandmother, who is keen on getting her married off. Jeyadev, a young intellectual from an illustrious family in the countryside, is chosen as the bridegroom. Going to the village of Behula, Mohini finds that her mother-in-law is more old-fashioned than grandmother. However the village itself is undergoing gradual modernization from tradition because of the vision of some young men led by jeyadev, whose ambition is to synthesis Indian tradition and western thought. His *Music for Mohini* is quite remarkable in this context. Jaydev, who is a major character of his novel, protests against his mother who blindly believes in horoscopes and unwanted age old customs and forces Mohini to follow them. Harindra the young medical man accompanies Jaydev in his reformatory tasks. They challenge orthodox custom in the village. Against the orthodox views of the village people Harindra marries Sudha who is forbidden for marriage as her stars are not in favor for her marriage and she is called Saturn's eye sour. K. R. Chandrashekharan remarks, "One of the major concerns of Bhattacharya in this novel Music for Mohini is the need for a change of social outlook and reorientation of social values in India." In this context G. P. Sharma expresses his view and says, "With such a story the novelist stresses the need for eradicating social evils that are practiced in the name of custom and tradition. In this novel, *Music for Mohini*, we see the author's direct concern with Indian nationalism." Music for Mohini deals the life and experiences of Jaydev, an exponent of Indian tradition and culture. Born in an ancient Bengali Brahmin family Jaydev has education in Calcutta where comes under the influence of English studies besides Indian heritage, takes to westernized living, and then, after his successful career as a student, thinks for his way of living, amends his life and reaffirms his faith in Indian values, tradition, culture and philosophy. Jaydev becomes a social reformer and fights for revision of customs in the village. It is observed that the life story of Jaydev shows the author's nationalistic pre-occupation. The story is social and is reformatory in spirit especially in regard to the reformatory and emancipation of weaker sections in society. It is thus seen how the author portrays here an ideal man who will build India of Gandhi's dream. Though the story does not appeal as a political novel, the author's insistence on the reconstruction of the national economy through the development of the economic condition of the villages, and his appeal for a love for country's tradition, become abundantly clear, not only from the story but also from the conversations of the characters idealized by the novelist. It is a fact that

Bhattacharya is preoccupied mainly with three problems of society- the problem of oppression and exploitation of the lowest classes by the upper classes, tyranny and torture by the higher caste of the lower castes of Hindu society, and the ignorance and superstition of the people caused illiteracy and orthodoxy that are hurdles to the progress of society. In his third novel, *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Bhattacharya has depicted the problems of poor and backward classes, suggesting the magnitude of the harm it has done by impeding the harmonious growth and development of society as a whole while violating the sense of humanity in a most brutal manner. The oppression and tyranny of high caste Hindus are all vividly shown here- there ruthlessness, their cruelty, their hypocrisy and their love for mastery and dominance over the low castes. Bhattacharya has tried to show the sad and passive suffering of the low castes with their agony and pain.

In *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Bhattacharya has tried to depict the character of a poor blacksmith, Kalo who belongs to lower caste. He is an illiterate but a good competent in his trade. His wife died during the child birth. He lives with his only daughter Chandra Lekha, with memories of his wife. Kalo joins his daughter, in an English school. Chandralekha studies well and occupies the first position in the school. Kalo feels happy, but the rich and the higher classes comment on her studies as the children of lower castes are prohibited for studies as customary of the time. Bhattacharya points out the monopoly of the education by the rich people only. The Bengal Famine of 1943 degraded conditions of the poor in India. The rural mass moved to city. Kalo is also affected by the famine. He moves from his village Jharna to the city in search of a job. The author reveals the story of the problem of the working class thrown out of their traditional moorings with the advent of famine. The peasants and the traditional blacksmiths and other self-employees have lost their traditional jobs because of the famine. So, the bulk of them remain jobless. These critical situations amidst the jobless people have been exploited by the reactionary elements of society. Kalo meets bitter experiences in the city. For a little mistake of stealing bananas in an unbearable hungriness, from a fellow passenger in his journey, he is punished for three months of imprisonments. All of his hopes end in vain. Unable to do anything he silently swallows his sorrow. During his imprisonment Kalo gains worldly wisdom from Bio, a co-prisoner and a young intellectual. After his release from the prison Kalo finds no job anywhere. So, he takes out a miserable existence for sometime by carrying the corpses of destitute into

municipal trucks. Even the loathsome job of carrying dead bodies becomes less lucrative of competition. Having no alternative, he joins in a job of procurer for a group of brothels in a chariot house. One night, in one of the brothels for which he has been working as tout, he hears the plaintive, protesting cries of a woman. Driven by a strange foreboding, Kalo enters the room to find his horror that the girl is none other than his daughter. Kalo saves his daughter from the place and learns that she has been deceived and brought out to there by a brothel woman. He consoles his daughter. He sheds tears and realizes that there is no room for honesty in the world. Society has now hurt him and he must retaliate on the society and so he decides to deceive the world. Bhattacharya points out the hypocrisy of the rich in the society who deceive and dominate over the poor. Under disguise of gentlemen and social workers, the hypocrites degrade the values in the society and ever they resist the growth of the condition of the poor in the nation. This is the pathetic scenario of the poor in our nation. They clash the weaknesses of hunger and poverty of the weaker sections and even they seduce young women and drag them into loathsome jobs of prostitution. Poor girl Chandralekha is deceived and dragged forcefully by the hypocrite class under disguise of gentlemen into prostitution. Bhattacharya protests against capitalism. He supports political and economical equality. He has shown sufferings of the poor at the hands of capitalists and tradesmen. This division of men into two classes and showing the need of a revolution against the monopolies of the rich by the author's most radical character Kalo in the novel is very significant. Kalo starts to deceive people by wearing saffron and sacred thread on his body under the name of Mangal Adhikari. He installs an image of Shiva, tell people as it has emerged from the ground. Money and material are gathered from the public, a temple is built. A pujari is appointed to worship. A board of trustees is constituted to manage the financial and administrative work of the temple. The revenues swell important men like rich merchants, Motichand and Sir Abalabandu become associated with the management. Among the worshippers who come to the temple and touch Mangal Adhikari's feet is magistrate who had sentenced Kalo for his little blunder of stealing bananas. Bhattacharya further says that Kalo reaches himself to retaliate on the society that he hates. Chandralekha accompanies him. He is now riding a tiger and cannot get down from its back. He forgets his pace and his aim of taking revenge against the rich. He behaves tyrannically as a Brahmin. Even he does not

agree to give his daughter Chandralekha to Bio who falls in love with her. Kalo proposes a condition before Bio, if Bio wants hand of Chandralekha, he has to accept Brahminhood before his marriage. Bhattacharya points out an addiction of people to the drug of caste system in India. Kalo forgets his past background and his ambition to retaliate on the society which has neglected him. Through the character of Bio Bhattacharya protests and revolts against selfish and orthodox communities who drag always the civilization in the backward direction and they remain as hurdles in the growth of the nation.

Bhattacharya's forth novel *A Goddess Named Gold* is constructed on the lines of a parable. It describes the happenings in the village of Sonamitti during the one hundred days before the attainment of Independence. Meera, a spirited girl of the village, is committed to doing good to as many people as she can help. The novel *A Goddess Named Gold* is also remarkable for the description of the aspect of nationalism in India. This novel deals with the happenings in a village during the period immediately preceding India's attainment of freedom. The novel exactly opens a hundred days before 15th August, 1947. The scene is from a village called Sonamitti. The main object of the novelist in the novel is the way in which a country should use freedom and what benefits may be derived from it. Bhattacharya is looking back on the decade or so which has passed after their attainment of Independence and representing through the medium of his art his assessment of what they have achieved and what they have failed to achieve. Freedom is the golden key which can open magic doors and admit us into a realm in which men think noble thoughts and do kind deeds so that happiness may be the portion of all. The minstrel is an unusual character and he plays a vital part in this novel which deals with India's freedom. He is a homeless wanderer at home with large crowds. He is a man among men but defied by a grateful and admiring people. Towards the end of the novel the minstrel explains the symbolism of the taveez (amulet). The village is celebrating Independence Day and people are assembled and the banyan tree. The old man tells them that the freedom which they are celebrating is the touchstone. It belongs to every one of them but will yield results and transmute copper into gold only if acts of faith are performed. When he is asked to define acts of faith and modesty, he replies that he does not have wisdom enough to give guidance, but he is sure that miracles can be performed if they all hold themselves in readiness. The miracle will not drop upon us. It is we who have to create it with love and

with sweat. Freedom is the means to that end. The novel ends with the decision of the villagers to use their newly freedom in the right way by electing the minstrel to the district board. Bhattacharya gives us reminiscences of the Quit India Movement. The aspects of the struggle that are referred to her are the free participation of women and levelling of social distinctions brought about by common suffering; particularly jail life. As the solemn day appointed for the handing over of power approaches, there is a feeling of thrill and exaltation among the people. The novel contains a warning that freedom is not an automatic passport to greatness or plenty. It provides an essential climate in which the endeavor of the people will fructify. The minstrel assures the people of Sonamitti that freedom is capable of bringing about miracles. No miracle can happen without effort. The novelist reveals the India's condition which needs new strategies for its development according to the changing condition in the contemporary situations. Industrialization is inevitable in the competitive context along with the neighbor countries. The Industrial revolution, ought not to transform Indian life into a mechanical life in the west. Bhattacharya's fifth novel *Shadow from Ladakh* is a powerful novel against the background of the Chinese invasion of India in 1962 and the debate it generated between the adherents of the spinning wheel and those of the steel industry. The characters are also divided between Gandhian ideas and industrialization. The contrasts gradually develop into confrontation, but in the End, The novelist drives home his message that the two are complementary and should work hand in hand with each other. In *Shadow from Ladakh*, the novelist presents this vision of the regeneration of India from ideological point of view. The novel is set against the background of the Chinese aggression upon India in 1962. It is seen that Chinese aggression starts expanding rapidly. The natives of Gandhigram are annoyed at it. They oppose it. The villagers have deep faith in Gandhian economics; Satyajit Sen is the guiding spirit of Gandhigram. He plays role of a true nationalist and plans to save villagers from Chinese attack. Ultimately, however, a solution is found whereby Steeldown gives up its plan to swallow Gandhigram and Sumita sees no reason to reject Baskar. It is worth mentioning that *Shadow from Ladakh* is one of the few novels depicting a confrontation between Gandhian ideals and Nehruvian idealism.

II. CONCLUSION

It is seen that Bhabani Bhattacharya is a true nationalist. His novels are full of the description of

national activities. The portrayal of contemporary issue is remarkable feature of his novels. Several national event during the writing of his novels. It is observed that the Gandhian era is remarkable for a quantum leap for the nationalist movement in the country. Bhattacharya points out that Gandhi's experiments with truth and non-violence as means to attain independence for the country. It influenced the thoughts of intellectuals. It was the period when the writers like Bhattacharya and others of the day to select themes pertaining to the changing pattern of the nationalistic upsurge in the land, gravitating from British imperialism to independence, pure and simple. His novel *So Many Hungers*, presents the true picture of nationalism. *So Many Hungers* deals with India's struggle for freedom in the early nineteen forties. K.R. Chandrashekharan remarks, "This novel encourages a new consciousness of Indianness and the India heritage as contrasted with western traditions and culture." In fact, his novels like *Music for Mohini*, *He Who Rides a Tiger*, *A Goddess Named Gold*, *A Dream in Hawaii*, and *Shadow from Ladakh* are remarkable for the description of nationalism.

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