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**EXPLORING PROGRESSIVE TRENDS AND
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MUSIC FORMOHINI**

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Exploring Progressive Trends and Dimensions in Bhabani Bhattacharya's Music for Mohini

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Abstract – The advent of progressive writings has been a new phenomenon that reflects the changes in the pre-independence Indian society to fight against the social evils. Realism aims at objectivity, psychological representation of characters and a search for truth in a matter of fact way. The development of imperial experience strikes the note of moral upheaval and confusion. The imperialists, despite their claims to be torch bearers of civilization, were exploiting the colonies for raw materials and income. The First World War exposed the hollowness of fake promises of the British Empire. The pre-independence writers wrote a literature of protest against the foreign government empowered with fatal weapons. They were rational and realistic in their approach towards life and developed the public taste for philosophy, science and other fields of knowledge. They worked as an example for progressive writers as it depicted the deterioration of elite class and backwardness of the society as a whole. Subject became more important than form so they conceived man as a crown of creation, capable of utilizing the natural objects to serve the interests. They believed in the self-respect of everyman. These concepts are the crux of progressive literature and exercised a great literature on the progressive writers. The old values collapsed and the new had not been yet born. The awakening of labour class and farmers strengthened. Like politicians, writers were also left with no choice except to choose the path to revolution or to quit the scene. They wrote about the oppressor and the oppressed and also depicted the problems of untouchables, middle and lower middle class illustrating their psychological state of mind, highlighting their suppressed desires, ignorance, narrow mindedness, superstitious nature and their exploitation due to corruption prevalent in the society.

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INTRODUCTION

The progressive writers came under the influence of Communism and there was a protest to classical literature and laid emphasis on the simplicity of language and style. They used colloquial diction to make common person understand what they wanted to say. They introduced new forms in English literature and widened the scope of narration by forming the new conventions. They modified the art of criticism by emphasizing the analysis of social, political and historical perspective and they dreamt of a humanitarian society free from class distinction. They wrote on social problems caused by social deprivations, urbanization and industrialization. They used psychoanalysis to explore the mind of their protagonists and to describe the real motives of their actions.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is well-known among Indian progressive writers in English for his use of art as a medium for achieving social reform. Being a novelist with a social purpose, he has depicted the social, economic and political changes in India on the background of the contemporary progressive writings

and social conditions. Realism demands a realistic portrayal of incidents and occurrences for Bhattacharya the real is what is true, so there is no outright rejection of the old and an extravagant advocacy for the new in his progressive writings. The emphasis is on the ideas of synthesis between the old and the new. Bhattacharya, like a humanist has a great faith in man and his aim is to reconstruct the social order based on equality and freedom for all. In his writings he takes up human issues and which influence the everydayness of the common man's life like orthodoxy, caste-system, mispriced faith, pseudo sainthood, superstitions and the worship of the sham gods, social position and the rank. His attitude to religion and orthodoxy is that of a humanist who concerns with human values and discourses everything that is hostile to the growth of human interest.

Music for Mohini (1952) dramatises the "growth and maturation -the transformation of a care free girl into the life partner of a thoughtful idealist who desires to play his part in the building of the country's future." He criticizes the traditional Hindu Society in which orthodoxy was the sole god to be worshipped in life

and any departure from the accepted beliefs was condemned as heretical and it attacks its values and recommends, by contrast, to espouse what is human.

Mohini, a motherless child is married to the sole heir of the Big House of Behula village by virtue of carrying all signs of luck in her palm. Bhattacharya arranges a parade of the variegated group of bride hunters through whom he exposes the greed, vulgarity under the false version of sophistication and modernity.

Four pairs of eyes surveyed the girl from foot to head. She had to walk a few steps at the mother's bidding to prove she did not lack grace of movement. They fumbled with her prettily arranged hair and unloosed it down her back to know its length. They rubbed her face with their thumbs to make sure the fair complexion was natural, not of paint. (42)

The house stands on traditions; the Old Mother represents orthodoxy which is a challenge for a city-bred girl to come to terms with its cultural construct. She finds everything different, partly amusing and partly serious to learn of their implications. The Old Mother, for example, has not been eating with the right hand for nearly two decades because it is dedicated to Lord Shiva for the good of her son. Bhattacharya brings into focus, outside the clash between tradition and change, other associating issues like caste-distinction, widow- remarriage, superstition, and customs which are passed for religion, faith in Ayurvedic system and match making by way of tallying horoscopes. The beautiful Sudha, an orphan Brahmin girl, is denied the match of a handsome young man working in jute -business by her uncle who is 'a professional horoscope caster' for the reason that she is under the watch of Saturn's evil eye. She is nicknamed as "Saturn's Eyesore." She is also the victim of moral hypocrisy. Since Mohini is barren, a proposal is made that Sudha be accepted as her co-wife to save Jayadev's life. The Old Mother does not accept the proposal for her romance with a boy but later she encourages her to become the mother of Jayadev's child. What a fine illustration to the sanctity of the house from moral pollution!

There are situations in the novel in which their human implication cannot be ignored. Mohini is saved by Jayadev's timely intervention in the temple scene from offering blood to a deity to beget a child which is all a biological phenomenon. An old money -lender is prevented from marrying a young girl by the reformist group with the plea that a widower be compelled to marry a widow. The greed of dowry is exposed in a highly comical manner. The inspection party of the prospective bride put questions, ranging from mythology to Yoga exercise which can baffle any one's wits. In case of failure a handsome dowry is brought into counterbalance her ignorance.

The dowry you offer, sir, isn't enough. We would take your offer if the maid were well versed in our Ancient

Culture. She isn't. In the present circumstances, dowry must be decisive factor. Think it over. (41)

A fine gesture of commercialization of virtue! The Old Mother and Jayadev's mother, and the priest of Behula village who propagates the myth of the devout crocodile represent orthodoxy, on the other hand Jayadev, Harindra, Mohini, and her father are the creation of the ideal of the things to come. What Jayadev tells Mohini regarding fighting out the worship of false gods is at the centre of the novelist's drive against orthodoxy? "We're fighting ignorance and superstitions, are not we? We are fighting the false clay foot gods. They've had their day and now they must quit" (165).

Therefore it is not Mohini alone who has to accommodate the self with orthodoxy, Jayadev has also to compromise with the familial traditions as represented by the mother. Their rebellion is not an act of defiance but a value to create a new social order. The novel nowhere shows them standing defiant against and coming into conflict with the tradition of the Big House. One can create the new even without bulldozing the old.

The creation of a new social order need not preach any revolution; it is simply by being true to self that one can create the symphony of life. Despite Jayadev's promptings to discard the pent up beliefs, Mohini falls in the line of the mother but the rebel in her urges upon her to be free from the taboos of a feudalistic social order. At this critical juncture she hears the voice of the protest of her father in imagination not to blow down to "such insults. You're the new India. The old orthodox ways have been our Yoke, have enslaved us. Let us be free" (166).

And certainly Mohini at the end rises to the image of 'new India' in which there would be no place for blind faiths and irrationality which constitute the centrality in the structure of the story. After a transient upheaval Mohini comes to accept and love the traditions of the Big House, the psychological growth and the change in outlook has enabled her to reestablish harmony within self. Life becomes music for her, she is shown going to her father's house as the mother of Jayadev's child.

Mohini's story is in the main plot, built on the agreement that if there is a will to seek harmony in life there is a way which is not confrontation but integration of the old and the new. The story of Sudha is in the sub-plot in which certain other issues come under attack like inequality of class, rigidity of caste system and the belief in the astrology and palmistry that has been destroying the real happiness in life since olden times.

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