

Social Realism in the Short Stories of Bhabani Bhattacharya

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Abstract - Social realism is a broad term that has often been used in literature, paintings and other forms of arts. It does not belong to any particular age, nor can it be assigned a particular place in the history. Time and again artists have used it in the art form to express the condition of working class or the real picture of the society. Bhattacharya's short stories are inextricably interwoven with the theme of social realism. The present article highlights the use of this technique which Bhabani Bhattacharya has used in delineation of characters in his short stories.

Keywords - social realism, Marxism, Bhabani Bhattacharya, characterization, narrative technique

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INTRODUCTION

Bhabani Bhattacharya has been one of the foremost and the most famous Indo-Anglian writers. He has made his mark as a novelist and short story writer. He is considered as a translator, creative historian and a biographer, too. He has especially been excelled himself in short story writing for his perception, vision, variety and universality of appeal. He has deeply handled the themes, ideas and values of his works with humour, satire and humanism. It is thought that he did so for his native social and cultural situations. His technique as a novelist is based on the traditional novel of a number of English, American, Scottish and Indian predecessors. He did always try to captivate the subtleties and surrounding nuances. He has been very much concerned with the facts of life. He was skilled at not only describing and explaining but also dramatizing incidents. He creates characters which are very vivid and realistic. He is a conscientious artist and he is most methodical in his work. His capacity for creative writing is surprisingly tremendous.

The stories of Bhattacharya have undoubtedly been free from two major evils of the twentieth century writing. He tried to make his stories free from excessive intellectualism. There has been a group of intellectual elite to have intellectual debate in their stories. Secondly, they were very much and very extremely subjective in their viewpoint to discuss the topic in their compositions. They were trying to prove themselves modernists and to achieve this target they went to the abnormal types of analysis. He lays stress on continuing interrelatedness of the exterior states of mind which uncover a change in the nature of the character or in their situations, or in our

understanding of them, or in all. We should consider the aspect of unconscious mind in the character named 'Names are not Labels' in which the author gets embarrassed at the name changing of the bus Sankhini with which he has been very closely associated for a long time. In the bus after name changing there is a debate being cited below.

"Sir, you don't understand. Look at it this way. You have a wife named Sankhini. Since the marriage night you have called her by that name. You see the name in print and at once, involuntarily, what image floats up before your mind's eyes? Your wife's. Then one day, you are told that your wife's name is Sarojini. Does it not seem strange calling her by the new name? It is as if you are calling some other woman. The name feels odd on your tongue. It is as if your wife has become another woman. How? Not that her face or figure has changed, or there is a new mole on her chin. Yet, change her name and she becomes a new person. Call her by a number, say A-24, and her very breath is different. Names have a spiritual value, sir. They are not just labels."

We need pointing out at this juncture that action, events and characters are very important features of successful stories. The action of his stories is not confined to one situation, rather his stories offer diverse situations and events and incidents to the characters when they try to assert their identity and grow. His characters are in a search of their identity and so the life pattern of the characters of

Bhattacharya is a quest for identity and fulfillment. The characters of his novels bravely encounter the various problems of life and death. At the same time they try to resist the temptations of evil may be of traditional, social, modern or moral. In most of his stories he takes resort to cinematographic technique. Flashback, juxtaposition and montage are finely fused with conventional chronological sequence. He exploits the flashback as judiciously as it does not affect the progress of the action in the episodic structure of his stories. No doubt, he is a skilled and master piece writer and the most able one in the manipulation of various narrative techniques. As a story teller he is simply unparalleled. He believes in presenting minute detail in his description of all major and minor incidents. He is so conscious of minute details that very often the most trivial incidents are described in an elaborate and detailed manner. While analyzing events and characters he rises above the personal level and is quite objective. Bhattacharya's art of characterization is excellent. A character can be presented in various ways, by a psychological analysis of character, by dialogue, by action and reaction which is very closely connected with the main concern of the narrative. Bhattacharya's characters are not types but are individuals with strongly defined personalities. He has brilliant power of concluding his story after making a lot of discussion on different logical grounds by the characters which is explicit from the excerpt quoted below.

"In prison the convicts lose their names and become numbers, don't they? This man might have become A-something."

"Yes. Say, A-24. What then?"

"A buried sensibility in him might have got badly bruised. And---" my friend paused, hesitating---"and is this talk the bus Sankhini losing its name a kind of inverted self-pity, I wonder?"²

Now we should examine his art and style that he employed in his stories. When we examine his stories from characterization point of view, we find that each of the characters stands as an individual and has both an individual and general appeal.

His characters have a strong moral code by which they live their life, and direct the lives of readers. The old mother is strict in bringing up the children, and allows them only that much freedom as tradition would allow. She inculcates in them respect for their elders. However, living in the city, she has to compromise with forces of modernity. While making titles of the stories Bhattacharya shows his great consciousness. He considers his art and technique that he uses in his stories before he makes titles of the stories. He thinks that titles reflect story and theme of works more distinctly; so they should not be causally or simply or plainly made. But they should

be rather highly suggestive and deeply symbolical. They throw light on the direction and meaning of the stories. It is believed in India that a person is born with tradition. The children still in her mother's womb are tagged with some kind of culture being tagged with a set of tradition. He symbolically explains man's greediness, and his concentration towards temporary materialistic world. He also points out how man degrades himself for temporary things. His stories have the story of downfall of a person from high moral standard owing to fulfillment of his personal greed. This kind of thing is generally found in all corner of the world. He reveals the illusions and assumptions of the modern man who proposes many things for the sake of material gains but fails to fulfill them. Bhattacharya compares and contrasts values of the East and the West, spiritual and material worlds. He does that kind of thing to make a true conclusion about social and cultural matrix of society where characters spend their lives.

He writes about many things including war, army, rural life, city life, bureaucrats, criminals, the English and Indians. But whatever he writes, he writes most authentically and authoritatively. His style is characterized by lucidity, precision and control, quickness, confidence, eagerness and masterly control over vocabulary. He is successful in portraying Indian social and political lives most authentically for the simple reason that he first lives life of his characters before he portrays. It is as if his own life of action and drama has been transposed into the pattern of his stories. His main concern is with humanity, but not the average and democratic but unusual and exceptional in human experience and tradition and the disintegration of these values is disheartening to him. He synthesizes his personal feeling with common human understanding point of view. There seems to be an amalgamation of the west and the east, the ancient and the modern, individual and general and so on. In keeping with his choice of subject and vision Bhattacharya chooses his own form and style. He has firm convictions about his aim as a story that is to tell a story well. He specially admires Tagore because his novels, stories and dramas are well constructed and dramatic and they are not afraid of incidents. Bhattacharya's conservative and personal attitude to technique is extended also to his use of language and style. He knows it well that we cannot give vent to his feeling through diction and style adopted by other story writers of his time. The writer himself has several kinds of counter feelings and thoughts when he starts writing. While he begins to compose, he heeds so much on his contradictory ideas about themes and techniques. He surmounts the initial difficulty with the language whether he should write in typical Indian style as the reader may catch up the feeling or keep it highly sophisticated only for intellectual forum. Bhattacharya is also able to cultivate a highly individualistic and sensitive style. He is a conscious and effective artist and he is

acutely conscious of his medium. When we look at the various speech styles he employs in his stories, we may deduce his concern for accuracy of language. His mastery over the foreign medium is strikingly evident in all his works of fiction which he organizes mainly in terms of action and characters. The most significant thing about the style, we can say that it has the originality. His English is neither derivative nor imitative of English or American English. His style has all accuracy, ease and grace which is generally found in a good style. It does not suffer from clumsiness of expression. His style is free from an excess of solemnity. His style and contents are inseparable. It is not artificial but natural, not affected but genuine, not pretentious but authentic, not dull but dynamic. He has developed a style which is termed special. He does not like to avoid monotony. He does not write a long succession of too many short sentences. He tries to save the reader from bogging down in a quagmire of extremely long sentences running to several lines. The variety is secured sometimes by an alternation of short and long sentences and sometimes by varying the structure of the sentence. There are loose sentences, period sentences, and balanced sentences in his works. His sentence or paragraph is linked up with the theme that he raised in his novels. His linguistic composition exerted upon it by the total composition. He has the necessary vocabulary to ensure that each character speaks his own language.

The stories of Bhattacharya have all the elements of a best seller like sex, sensationalism, religion, revenge, love, war, romance, hunting, adventure; a wide canvas, a variety of characters, incidents and situations. They have width, range, depth and height. They are not only entertainment but significant also. His technique is technique of the art as an aesthetic experience. He is full with a realist's perception of the way things are and romancer's vision of what ought to be. In his stories one finds a fine blending of these two elements discussed above. He may be only a minor novelist in the world of commonwealth writers in English. In India he is without doubt a major Indo-Anglian writer. He cannot be considered a classic writer but he is definitely a very rewarding writer. A classic writer remains excellent in his linguistic use and selection of his subject matters to be discussed. Dr. K. R. S. Iyengar appreciates his achievement as a writer —The Sahitya Academi Award to him in 1967 was a fitting recognition of his standing achievement in the field of Indian fiction in English.⁴

His stories are so widely read and appreciated for some reasons. He has wide and varied experiences of life in Indian life that he weaves into his works. His fiction is Indian in the deepest sense which shows Indians experiencing mysticism. From his works he is quite a craftsman in the art of storytelling. He remains throughout his life a true story teller without any kind of philosophy to make works more complex. He does not lay any claims to a profound philosophy of life. He is not a didactic writer. He does not have

any kind of life teaching to pour on his readers. He has been focused on the main aim to entertain and to present a humanistic vision of life through the rich and varied themes in his novels. His main concern is for character and the tangle of human emotions and relationships and this together with his very sound and accurate historical sense makes him a novelist of vision and power in Indo-Anglian fiction.

We find that his stories are based on reality and truth of individual and society. His works bring out a profound truth. It is narrated in the typical Indian way of story -telling. His works have a definite purpose and are deliberately woven into perfect shape. His works give a taste of Indian stories and story-telling we come across clarifications and comments on the profound philosophical speculations in his works. A complete picture of the Indian marriage is given when we go through the story of Beena, daughter of Srinath married in the story, 'Glory at Twilight.' There is consummate art in the apparent artlessness, supreme coherence seeming incoherence, and connected design in the sprawling structure. Much sense is hidden in the glib loquacity. He makes a distinction between impersonal attitude and personal musing. It is not as though he pours down his knowledge on the reader or exhausts him by his interminable expansiveness. He makes himself a true story teller and so he remains an impersonal observer of social phenomenon. Side tracking is there but it is deliberate. The thread is resumed and the link supplied at some later point and only then is the reader able to see the purpose and unity of the narrative. Music, Medicine, Astrology, Commerce, History, Philosophy and religion both Indian and western are sources of his images. It is not possible to have a deep knowledge on all these branches of knowledge. It is why it is not an evidence of depth in every subject. He knows the fact that it is humanly impossible. But we can say that it is a proof of his versatility.

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