



GENDER ISSUES: TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES OF CULTURE, SUB-THEME: BHATTACHARYA'S FAVOUR OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE TO WOMEN

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ABSTRACT:

Bhattacharya is in favour of social and economic justice to women. The female for him is not the weaker sex. According to him, the initial form of life is female. He has projected his Indian sensibility and attitude through his women characters in his novels. He combated injustice and ill-treatment meted out to simple sober, unsophisticated house wives. He focused light on tragedy of unsuccessful maiden, marital life and of widowhood. He advocates the freedom, liberty and emancipation of women in order to extricate them from obsequious servitude and inhuman torture to which they were subjected by male sex, and their own i.e. mothers –in-law. His novels voice the need of emancipation of Indian women. His reformist objective is foregrounded in his novels. This scholarly man champions the causes of Indian women and exposes the deep mental agony of the married and unmarried in his works.

His works sought to evoke pity and sympathy for the socially and sexually tortured women who dare not raise their voice for deliverance from persecution. Bhattacharya attempts to explore in to the deeper chamber of the mind that reacts passively and timidly to various forms of oppression. Bhattacharya depicts the Indian women living in an orthodox and conservative family feel inhibited to raise their voice against the society due to their inferiority and the rigid code of conduct imposed on them.

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Bhattacharya opines that there was no difference between men and women during ancestral times. Even women worked equally on intellectual grounds. He says that the ancestral woman was not a household drudge, a decorative being but an intellectual. She strode beside in a tireless quest for knowledge. Gargi and Maitreye were some role models from ancient Indian culture. He feels wonder about the ancestral women like Maitreyi and Gargi who used to work like their husbands on the intellectual part. He wishes that modern women should prove their talents as in the way of ancestral women intellectuals.

Bhattacharya depicts the image of the new women waiting for emancipation and liberation in a fast changing world in his works. He

mentions the Hindu community in India as being governed rigidly by its traditions. As India has been a tradition bound nation, if women are also shackled by numerous social and religious customs and conventions that render them incarcerated behind curtains. In view of their miseries, Bhattacharya fictionalizes women's cause with a view to ameliorating their position and releasing them from the state of traditional servitude. He portrays the evils and abuses of customs and traditions that had enslaved married women that rendered them practically helpless and voiceless. He upholds the reaction of women and shows how women endure physical and psychological suffering simply by virtue of their womanliness.

Bhattacharya champions the causes of Indian women and exposes in his works the deep mental agony of married and unmarried women. His "Music for Mohini" is the story that focuses realistically on the inner mind of suppressed women. The novel is seeking to evoke pity and sympathy for the socially and sexually tortured women who dare not raise their voice for deliverance from persecution. His novels attempt at exploration into the deeper chamber of the mind that reacts passively and timidly to various forms of oppression. He depicts the defects of the Hindu marriage system which depends on asters and horoscopes and leads to utter failure in Indian society. He too depicts the tragedy of child marriage, early widow and sterility in marital life of women.



He mentions above belong to the pre and post-Independence period during which communities in India were being governed rigidly by the traditions. In view of miseries of women Bhattacharya committed himself to fictionalize women because with a view to ameliorating their position and releasing them from the state of traditional servitude with the increasing awareness of feminine sensibility as a new revolutionary idea, the trend of feminist writing persisted in Indian literature even after independence.

Bhattacharya panoramically portrays the evils and abuses of customs and traditions that had enslaved the married and unmarried women and rendered them practically voiceless. He upholds the reaction of women and shows how Indian women physical, psychological suffering simply by virtue of their womanliness. The most conspicuous feature of his art is portrayal of character. He penetrates psychologically deep into the inner working of women and externalizes their passive reaction.

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In his *Music for Mohini* Bhattacharya depicts how Mohini - a city bred girl of Calcutta well to do and educated has to marry a young scholar, Jayadev of Behula and live in a tradition bound Big-House. She has to struggle much to crave out her own identity in the orthodox family. Bhattacharya focuses on the conflict between tradition and modernity.

Mohini loves music, by practice she becomes a professional singer in All - India Radio. She attends to Radio-station to record her songs. Her grandmother objects her to go to recording centre in view of that voice of a woman of a respected family should not be recorded in the commercial purpose. She says that unmarried girls should not be sent out side. She warns Mohini's father not to send Mohini to music centre.

"You let the girl's voice be caught in shiny black disks.

You let her songs be sold in the bazaar for a few rupees a piece".

"Girls of the most respectable houses and ladies of the highest

Social statuses have put their songs on gram phone records.

Why this fuss ?

Bhattacharya shows well how the unmarried women lose their independence at home and they fail to fulfill their desires for their career in his novels. In "Music for Mohini" Mohini has



been shown as a victimized woman who has been crushed by the rigid customs in the country of the age old traditions. This is really a miserable condition of typical young woman in India. After her thirteen a young girl faces many kinds of restrictions. She is questioned by every elder in the family and is suspected in every angle. The parents start to search a groom for her. They think to make marriage and send to in-laws' house as they feel it as major responsibility. In this process a young woman loses her own identity. She is forced to bend her neck to the conditions. She sacrifices her desires and dreams just for sake of age old traditions. She silently accepts the unknown man as husband and suffers lifelong.

Bhattacharya shows this phenomenon through Mohini's marriage in *Music for Mohini*. Mohini is a professional singer who is given freedom and encouraged in her profession of singing by her father, a professor who is broad minded with modern views. He sends her to English school. But the grandmother does not agree to send her English school and singing practice. She argues with the professor to search a groom for Mohini and reminds him that she has already crossed seventeen and now it is time to her to be married.

"Mohini, a child? Mohini, a woman for four whole year, a child?"

She paused a moment, recalling that her Mohini, spare of build though not thin, had not too feminine a figure. Many a young maid looked riper than she for marriage."

"Seventeen!" "And no horoscope made for her yet"

As a result of old mother's prompting, several proposals for Mohini's marriage are considered and conventional inspection of the bride is carried out by a few parties. Interviews are arranged. The first one is an old-fashioned party, the elders who would not condescend to bring the groom to be with them. They arrive at dusk, the traditional bride-showing hour, when the soft sunset light paints a girl's face with new grace. One of the elders in the party says that the horoscopes of the bride and groom well suited and he starts to bargain dowry as:

"The Horoscope is favorable.

Your stars are at peace with the stars of our son.

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."

The second party comes a fortnight later, the groom himself, a young married sister, their old parents. They examine the girl from foot to head. They make her walk few steps and test her grace of movement. They test her hair by fumbling with her prettily arranged hair and unloose it down her back to know its length. They rub her



face with their thumbs to make sure the fair complexion is natural not of paint. A woman stoops to pull up her sari to the knees to inspect the shape of her ankles and legs. Mohini gulps down her tears of shame. The professor raises to his feet angrily shouts to go outside by pointing to the door. This incident makes professor feel shy and sad. Mohini consoles him as:

"Why must you bear insult on my account?

Why must I get married?

So many girls these days remain unwed;

They work and earn their living.

Why can't I do it?

"Why don't they set up a monthly fair where girls

Could be on view? Honest and inexpensive and much

More convenient than this hateful bride-showin.

The groom's party could go round the stalls and

See fifty girls in two hours, and the girls would be

Showing themselves to so many people at same moment."??

Mohini filings back, close to rears says as:

"They don't have to give up their dignity, Dignity ?

In our Hindu society a maid is addressed as Lakshmi,

the gracious goddess. Married, she walks in to her

new house hold proud as the Devi"

"Vulgar minds have cast pollution upon the old ways"

"If we must be old-fashioned, why don't we go all

the way back to ancient times ? Swayamvara!"

Sudha, a victimized woman who is crushed by the rigid customs of the Hindu Society shown in the novel *Music for Mohini*. She becomes a prey to the meaningless faiths of horoscopes and remains an unmarried. Sudha is an orphan, brought up by her great uncle who believes blindly in astrology. He speaks his thoughts to everyone, so people laugh at him and nick name him Saturn's Eye Sore. At her fifteen Sudha is about to be given to a young handsome groom who is a reputed jute business man. On the day of "ashirvad" the old man sits and counts the luck signs of Sudha in her horoscope and speaks to the groom's party as :

"Brothers, my Sudha is unfit to wed at present.

She is under the wrath of Saturn's evil eye.

Wait a while. Wait till Saturn goes his way."

Thus a good match is rejected due to blind belief of old man in astrology. Sudha weeps but the old man feels happy as he thinks that he has saved the girl from the danger of evil stars. As this consequence Sudha remains unmarried and comes to be nick named in the village as "Saturn's Eye sore". She becomes a



creature of the darkest ill omen. No one comes to marry her. She remains Saturn's Eye sore, doomed to herar break for no fault of her own. She sobs in the night for her fate.

Sudha, an alone and neglected girl, slips in to a chance of friendship with a youth, a black smith, from the neighboring village, Sonapur, She meets him in the cool shadows of mango groves or of bamboo-screened pools. Her secret friendship with a black smith comes into light in the village. Her love affair with a lower cast boy is considered serious by the elders in the village. They do not allow Sudha, a higher caste Brahmin girl to marry a blacksmith, a lower caste boy. They object to the unconventional act in the village. The similar occurrence happened in the village in case of a peasant girl who had been aborted. But now this is Sudha, a higher caste girl, curse lay on her head; she must smear society with its blackness. The elders declare that Sudha must not marry the blacksmith and she must not meet the man again. She has to be looked after by the mother of the Big-House. The mother will make the luckless girl strive after knowledge, and knowledge will be like a sponge: it will absorb the smothered feelings, the wakened unfulfilled passions of her woman hood.

One by one the maidens of Behula, snub-nosed and squint-eyed, pitch-dark and protruding teeth, and even limping Jamuna, everyone is married except Sudha who is has exquisite beauty with no stain on her face, body, spirit and character.

Sudhaloses intimacy with the other girls of her age, for she holds herself aloof, encloses in a hard shell of her own making. Sudha becomes over sensitive because of her fate and she nurces a feeling that the village girls scorn and shun her as something abnormal. She, in return, fiercely scorns all of them. She grows lopsidedly, scornful of human values, antisocial, frigid yet darkly passionate, it is her growth in darkness, not in light, in cramping space of a cold cell, in emotional bondage.

Bhattacharya had given a clear picture of the mental agony of a typical Indian maid who is tortured by the meaningless customs in the traditional bound society besides the traditional Indian concept that emphasized the marriage of girls in which they are tested variously and victimized not only by the groom's party, sometimes they are victimized by their own people. Sudha suffers from the acts of her own uncle who is an orthodox man. His case is similar to that of Mohini who suffers from her old mother who blindly believes in astrology, decides her life. Mohini accepts the match from country side against her wish; she does, it just to satisfy her old mother and to avoid the quarrels at home as she respects the elders. Just as Mohini, Sudha also suffers from her old uncle who does everything according to luck signs.

Bhattacharya points out the evils in the society. He revolts against hypocrisy under age-traditions which suppress women for centuries. He brings light on problems of women who are



denied to express their wish and willing in selection of their groom. Whenever a maid wants to be married, the stars, luck sighs, horoscopes, dowry and other formalities, willingness of groom's party decide their marriage. She is restricted variously, she should not express her opinion on her would be partner and even she is restricted to lift her face to see groom's face in the marriage interview. Bhattacharya opposes boldly these kind of misappropriate restrictions on women through the stories of the two characters of Mohini and Sudha.

Bhattacharya further goes to say that women are not only suppressed by the blind beliefs and orthodoxy in the society, He shows their problems through Sudha and Paru. Sudha becomes a main victim in the communal quarrels. Her friendship with a young man, a blacksmith leads to love and marriage. Her love is checked by the elders in the village. The village elders define her love as non-conventional, they further explain that a girl of higher caste must not love and marry a lower caste youth, already it has been happened in the village and the peasant woman has been aborted which is somehow tolerable in case of peasant woman but it is completely unjust for a woman who comes from a higher caste. Without mistake of her own Sudha suffers a lot and thus she develops frustration and aggression against the society.

There is another reference of feminine aspect given by Bhattacharya through the story of Paru in the novel, *Music for Mohini*. Paru is the young

daughter of a poor peasant in the village. She is going to be given to the money lender of seventy years old in the marriage as the poor man indebted to the money lender. The money lender's third wife dead barely two months, she was like goddess Lakshmi Devi. Without any feeling of shyness and sentiment, the old man sets his age-stiff heart on young and innocent Paru. It is because Paru's father is in neck-deep in debt at the money lender; his three fields are tied up in strong chains. The old man will release him for one price; it is young Paru's hand, her marriage flower.

Bhattacharya points out the systems of polygamy, the other deep rooted evil in the Indian society of age old traditions. It reflects domination and hypocrisy of male sex in tradition bound society. If a man fails to beget children with his wife, he becomes ready to get second marriage; his wife has to welcome her co-wife without any objection. A husband will get next marriage after marriage without any cause. But woman must never think about next marriage. If she becomes a widow, she has to live alone without marriage and she has to bear many restrictions in name of customs.

Bhattacharya opposes boldly these wild traditions. The crazy incident of marriage scene between the old man and the young Paru shows us Bhattacharya's identification of unjust in the tradition bound society. It also shows us Bhattacharya's recognition of hypocrisy in a male dominated society. We can the projection of hypocrisy of men



i.e., the money lender even at his age of seventy becomes ready to marry a young girl, without any love and gratitude towards his recently dead wife. Bhattacharya further points out women always become victims to the hypocrisy of men and to the wild justice in the society. He shows it through the story of young Paru who becomes a victim in the wild game without any mistake of her own.

Seeta is another female character who becomes a victim to the age-old traditions in the novel *Music for Mohini* of Bhattacharya. She belongs to Shibpur, loves her second cousin whom she has known since childhood. In a mood of desperation she reveals her heart to her mother. It is a better match, for the boy is well placed, both belong to same caste and social status, and no dowry has to be paid, but the stars come in the way. The horoscope says that if Seeta gets married with her cousin she will be widowed. So another groom is selected according to

luck signs and marries her. But immediately after a month her husband is killed in a street accident.

References:

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