



NATIONALISTIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND GANDHIAN PRINCIPALS IN THE NOVELS OF BHABANI BHATTACHARYA

Dr. Sunil Garg

Assistant Professor of English

Shri Kapil Muni Govt College for Women

Kalayath (Kaithal)

gargsunil8181@gmail.com

Nationalism is a weapon for a dominated community to fight with the foreign rule of an imperialist country. The concept of Nationalism was born in the eighteenth century during the French Revolution in the European continent as adoration of collective power. India was a conglomeration of diverse states and principalities where there lived various peoples of different races and religions, castes and sub castes speaking a number of languages and dialects. 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 main Indian Freedom struggle began under the leadership of M.K. Gandhi. Gandhi and his followers also wanted Purna Swaraj or complete freedom from British rule through non-violent passive resistance like Tilak and others of the earlier phase. The two phases are not very distinct from each other and can be treated as one. Gandhi differed from Tilak in the sense that he insisted more on moral elevation of the people of India for winning freedom than Tilak had done. Non-violence was Gandhi's weapon for winning freedom as it was for the earlier leaders. But to it, he added a new meaning and a new significance. He philosophized and idealized these and other allied terms to the farthest possible extent.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of the Indo-Anglian novelists and short story writers of the period who were witness to dramatic events of the period and had felt the spirit of those times in their own veins have depicted these movements in their writings.

His first novel *So Many Hungers (1947)* reflects an aspect of the freedom movement under the leadership of Gandhi. It deals with the Gandhian ideal of rural reconstruction as a step towards winning Swaraj. The novel presents Bengali life both in its traditional, conservative and its dynamic aspects with convincing sincerity and fascinating power. It portrays so simply and realistically the life and manners of Bengalis. It also affords the author with ample scope for description of scenery for delineation of national types and characters, for reflections of social, political, and economic problems.

There is no doubt that the novel contains many descriptions of Indian life and manners. The picture of life and manners in the novel expound the main theme more markedly. The main theme reflects the national movement for political freedom under leadership of Gandhi. There are also themes of hunger for food and rural reconstruction of India after the ideal of Gandhi. Devesh is introduced here as a character with the ideals of Gandhi and the novelist seems to have done it with a purpose. He wants to show how every village or town during that period had one Gandhi of its own to lead the people by staying in their mist.

The pictures of life and manners in the novel expound the main theme more markedly. The Quit India Movement of 1942, The Bengal Famine of 1943 is described in the novel. But Hunger for freedom becomes the main theme in the novel. Mainly the story moves round the two incidents of National Movement and impact of Bengal famine in the history. Bhattacharya presents realistically agonies and



frustrations of The Bengal people during famine. Again he succeeds to show the unshivered determination, hard work, active participation and dedication of people in the National Movement.

Devesh Basu in *So Many Hungers* is shown as a great patriot and freedom fighter. He is a man of simplicity full of Gandhian principles. He detaches himself from his son and family and lives a simple life with the village people. The people of Baruni love him and honour him by calling him Devata' (God). Devata becomes philosopher, and guide to the people. He educates them, and trains them as freedom fighters.

Devesh adopts a peasant's family in Baruni. This family consists of a peasant, wife and three children, two boys named Kanu and Onu and a daughter, Kajoli, the heroine of the novel. The family is influenced very much by the preaching of Devesh. They never deviate from his path and principles. Devesh acts as master to the peasant's family, he refers to Kajoli as his granddaughter. He educates them, and preaches patriotism. He cultivates moral strength in the country people. He inspires and guides their lives. He shares their joys and supports them in their adversities. He makes them partners in the national movement and suggests to them to be non-violent. He encourages nationalism in his people by saying:

“Friends and comrades do not betray the flag. Do not betray yourselves. The supreme test has come. Be strong. Be true. Be deathless, Bandematram!”

These kinds of preaching touches their hearts deeply and strengthen them morally.

Bhattacharya shows the realistic pictures that have happened in India during the National Movement. The novel reveals that the happenings of the time when everyman voluntarily prepares to go jail so that the country may be free. All classes i.e., poor, middle, and upper classes, old, young, male and female join in the national movement. The theme of hunger for freedom occupies the first place among the other hungers for food, money, etc. in the novel. Bhattacharya has shown the importance of Spiritual strength that, if people are spiritually stronger they can defeat any kind of enemy. Devesh like leaders cultivate spiritual strength in the hearts of people. Inspired by Devesh people become stronger and they are ready to die in fasting for the sake of noble aim of Independence. Here Devesh stands as Gandhi and it reveals Bhattacharya's admiration for Gandhi who leads the nation during freedom struggle with his noble principles and strong will power.

Bhattacharya is imbued with the new spirit of Nationalism. He feels the need of giving expression of glorious age long Indian traditions, peculiar manners and customs in English, so that the foreign readers may learn the distinct identity of India. Bhattacharya is preoccupied with the things that are Indian-Indian themes, Indian characters, Indian life, Indian manners, Indian totem and taboos and all that. His novels have turned out to be propaganda novels of topical interest. His works reveal a search for national identity of Indians.

The novel reveals the truth that the national movement embraced all sections of the population. Even young people join in the national movement. Kunal like young stars join in the army and fight for the British cause as the British government has promised freedom for Indians on a condition of Indians participation in the war. Indians feel the war as crusade on Fascist plague. They think it as their responsibility to rescue peace from the Fascists. Kunal says-

“Humanity crusading to save from destruction all that worth living for...”

Kunal is inspired by his grandfather Devesh, as a true patriot, he joins in the army and sacrifices his life for the nation's sake.

The story of the novel narrates the sufferings of a whole people of a particular time in particular situation created by the British Government. One of the achievements of the work is that it has been able



to convey so effectively the mood and the temper of the native life. Bhattacharya seems to have acquired here an emotional identity with the characters he has depicted. It is for this, besides that the social milieu which the author has described rather in minute detail in the book; it has also shown faint signs of resentment and rebellion of the Indian people against oppression which soon laid the foundation of the Indian National Movement. It is, however, the description of the social milieu which has made this novel. In the minute descriptions of the manners and customs, tradition and culture of the Indian (Bengal) people, the author's purpose of asserting the identity of the nations has been evident.

Bhattacharya writes his works with the purpose of purging society of its harmful practices. His attempt at a reformation is not only an attempt at bringing happiness to individual members of society but also an endeavor to make society like the Indian which is ridden by caste and religious differences, this endeavour also means an endeavour for consolidation and integration of various peoples into one race or nation.

Bhattacharya's *A Goddess Named Gold* deals with happenings in a village during the period immediately preceding India's attainment of freedom. The novel opens exactly a hundred days before 15th August, 1947. The scene is 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 deified by a grateful and admiring people. K. R. Chandra Sekharan opines as:

“It may very well be that he is a veiled representation of the father of the Nation.”

Reference to the freedom struggle and Mahatama Gandhi became very common in the works of Bhattacharya. The arrival of the minstrel in the village is the starting point of important developments. Meera tries to make use of him as a counter attraction to the free cinema show which was planned by the Seth who wanted to attract people into his way for paving the path easy to become a member of the district Board, so that the Seth's plan may be frustrated, but the old man would not approve of any spiteful action. He promises to have a story telling session after the cinema show. Before the session the minstrel promises to give the Seth an amulet to be worn round the arm that will enable the wearer to realize all his wishes. Therefore everyone assembled at the story-telling is surprised when instead of giving it to the Seth.

Towards the end of the novel the minstrel explains the symbolism of the *taveez*. The village is celebrating Independence Day and people are assembled under 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 he modestly replies that he does not have wisdom enough to give guidance, but he 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 won 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 here are the free participation of women and



leveling 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.

Bhattacharya's *Shadow from Ladakh* is set against the frictional background between the Chinese and India. The novel reflects the Gandhian thought. The novelist reveals the India's condition which needs new strategies for its development according to the changing conditions 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 hopes the amalgamation of ideological views with Western thought of industrialization. The two opposite ideologies, the novelist expects as complementary parts, they can play in the building up of the nation. This theme became the central part of the novel.

The novel makes numerous references to Gandhiji's teachings and his work. Satyajit is a character who tries to mould him and others according to the principles lay down by Gandhi. The seventh chapter gives a resume of Gandhi's work, first in South Africa and later in India. The perfection of the weapon of non-violence, the victory General Smuts, the struggle against the British Government in India, the demonstration of the potency of moral force at Naokhali, are all recapitulated. Gandhigram is a model village in which we find the principles of Gandhian economics and ethics worked out. The village is self-sufficient as all its needs besides food are satisfied by cottage-based industry. In the sphere of education, the village follows the basic scheme of craft-centred teaching advocated by Gandhiji. Gandhigram seeks to build up a new set of values.

Bhattacharya highlights the views of Mahatma Gandhi who always stressed to ensure status of equality for women in the society. He emphasizes the involvement of women in the village development. Bhattacharya reflects Gandhi's belief in the fundamental equality of man and woman in the sense that both have immortal souls and same intellectual and spiritual potential. Bhattacharya also exposes expectations of Gandhi all around development in a woman and he wants them to grow physically, mentally, spiritually and morally. Bhattacharya reveals Gandhi's aspiration that women should come forward voluntarily to serve the nation involving them in the public life. He stresses on Gandhi's opinion of the need for compulsory and free education for girls along with the men.

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