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Bhabhi Bhattacharya's Aesthetics of Fiction

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Abstract :

Bhabhani Bhattacharya is a pioneer novelist, a theorist and also a critic of society who belonged to Bengali origin. He is a stern realist, he is against the romantic or imaginative treatment of life. His novels contribute a social document of great human value, as they deal with the contemporary and are based on his personal experiences of life. He believed that art is not necessarily for art's sake but it must be for life's sake. Bhattacharya seldom writes with a well-conceived plan. His characters and situations act and react on each other and bring about a change in narrative. He had no high ideals to make his characters hero, he wanted to portray them with all their virtues and vices without compromising with reality, and he completely succeeded in it.

Keywords :

Realist, exponents, fictional, aesthetic, reconciliation, preach, antagonist, contemporary, portray

Introduction :

Bhabhani Bhattacharya is a distinguished novelist a theorist and a great critic of the society. He has discussed the craft of the novel most compressively. He has given serious consideration to the basic nature of art, literature and fiction. However, unlike E. M. Foster and Henry James he has not discussed his aesthetics of fiction in a systematic form. His theory of the novel can be gathered with the help of articles, letters and interviews etc. In this connection, his article entitled "Literature and Social Reality" published in the Aryan path -September 1955 and the interview "An Evening with Bhabhani Bhattacharya" published in the Sunday Standard, April 27,1969 are notably significant. Bhabhani Bhattacharya's aesthetics can be studied keeping in mind the object of the novelist, the theme of the novel, its characterization and narrative technique. There is nothing strikingly original in his aesthetics -it is the synthesis of the old and the new approaches to the novel.

Bhattacharya's Social Reality :

Bhabhani Bhattacharya is a stern novelist, his object in his novels is to present 'Social Reality'. It is difficult for a writer to create a work of art and 'reality is the soul of art'. The difficulty of the novelist is how to correlate the reality of the remote with the spirit of the modern time. However, he can succeed in his craft if he is able to achieve the fusion of the reality of the old time of his own age. Bhattacharya says, "A work of art whether romantic or classical, old or new, must invariably project and convey truth of emotion which is the ultimate realism". It is this kind of truth which is universal in appearance, otherwise much of what is true which is universal in appearance, otherwise much of what is true ethically and socially for the people of a particular age, may not impress the people of other periods and countries and may only serve as material for entertainment.

Though significantly expressed, Bhattacharya's opinion is not altogether new. The fact, he is simply highlighting the new trend of the novel. The development of a realist fiction in India started in the beginning of the 19th century. Prem Chand, Saratchandra Chatterjee and Rabindra Nath Tagore were the great masters, Bhattacharya too, like Mulk Raj Anand and RK Narayan, depicts life realistically in his novels. This however, does not mean that Bhattacharya is against the romantic or imaginative treatment of life. He differs with those who think that modern literature is all realism. He maintains that the ways and methods of its presentation.

The Novelist's Role :

No writer can remain unaffected by the momentous happenings that take place around him. He cannot remain indifferent to the sufferings of the people. His role as a creative artist is to be sensitive to the human predicament and the social issues through his writings. Bhattacharya superbly achieves this role of the writer. Poverty, starvation, homelessness, social taboos, ignorance – all these are depicted in his novels as they are experienced by the victims. Bhattacharya has dealt with the epoch – making events preceding and following the attainment of independence. His novels constitute a social document of great human value, as they deal with the contemporary social problems in modern India. Bhabhani Bhattacharya could never have become a novelist if the ghastly scenes and inhuman exploitation of landlords, hoarders and black – marketers during the Bengal famine of 1943, had not moved him to creative writing. Bhattacharya recalls how he became a novelist :

When I was a student in London in the thirties, I started writing a novel. Half through, I thought it was no good and I was not destined to be a creative writer. I took up the manuscript. However, I wrote some short sketches for The Spectator. I translated Tagore. Back in India, I found other preoccupations. Easily in the 'forties', I tried to do a novel again. When half-written, it found its way into a heap of unwanted papers. Then the great famine swept down upon Bengal. The emotional strings I felt were a sheer compulsion to creativity. The result was the novel, 'So Many Hungers'."

This assertion of Bhattacharya agrees well with his fictional theory which -:"unless a novelist has keen observation and a strong creative -urge, he cannot write a social novel ".

Expression of social consciences :

Bhabhani Bhattacharya is a committed writer with a social vision. All his novels are an expression of social consciences. All writing for him has a social purpose. According to him the novel must place before the readers something from the Society's point of view. He firmly believes that a novelist is expected to express what is true to life. In an interview with Sudhakar Joshi, Bhattacharya observed :

You see, Mr Joshi, unless a writer has keen observation and an eye for nothing the details of general behavior of folks, he cannot write a social novel. I have developed this habit and I have not missed a single opportunity of observing incidents, happenings, where I can gain something for the writer in me. Most of my characters have shaped themselves from the real earth ".

All the novels of Bhabhani Bhattacharya deal with the contemporary in India's social life. 'So Many Hungers' and 'He Who Rides A Tiger's are inspired by the famine of Bengal and the Quit India Movement in 1942-43,'Music for Mohini' is partly concerned with the reconciliation of old and new novels in Indian life. 'A Goddess Named Gold' is fully concerned with the true meaning of liberty. 'A Shadow from Laddakh' deals with the problems arising from the Chinese aggression of 1962. 'A Dream in Hawaii', of course, is a deviation, as it depicts the seemingly antagonistic values between the eastern and western materialism.

Bhattacharya's choice of themes is fully in keeping with his concept of 'social reality'. All his novels are directly related to his concept of the novel. He believes that the novelist can find plenty of material in the happenings of the day. He does not subscribe to the view that a novelist should not use "contemporary reality" because he is too close to it to be able to treat it objectively.

Concern for life :

In an interview with Sudhakar Joshi, Bhabhani Bhattacharya opines about his theory and practice of novel : "I hold that a novel must be 'a criticism of life'. It must deal with the social realities of contemporary society. Art is not necessarily for art's sake. Purposeless art and literature which is much in vogue does not appear to me a sound judgement". The artist is deeply

concerned with human life and it is especially of the creative art with a purpose is so firm that he records faithfully all the changes taking place in the Indian society from 1940 onwards to the late 70s in his novels. Seen in the perspective of the great events of Indian history, his novels constitute a social document of great value.

Uploading the concept of 'Art for life sake' Bhabhani Bhattacharya rejected the theory of 'Art for art's sake' and call it as abused as 'science for the sake of science'. In Bhattacharya's opinion, it is wrong to think that the novelist can adhere to the theory of 'Art for Art's sake', if he deals only with personal relationships and love, believing that love, he cannot escape 'reality' because 'love' cannot exist in a vacuum and is bound to be conditioned by social forces. Bhattacharya opines that a novelist can escape reality by escaping into a dream world. But living in an ivory time, he will only create "the images that move in the wishful mirror of fantasy" and not literature of universal value. Such a novelist feels proud that he is free from partisanship or propaganda. Such a novelist, according to Bhabhani Bhattacharya, cannot create great art, because art cannot remain separated from the truth of life

Further, Bhattacharya points out that a great writer is a stern realist who is dedicated to ideals. He is of his time and therefore condemned as a "propagandist". He exposes and denounces injustice or oppression and demands basic human rights for mankind and thus creates public awareness He does only to make life better. Such a creative artist must treat the social problems fearlessly without caring to be called a "propagandist". "Art must preach", says Bhattacharya, "but unobtrusively by the mind interpretation of life". His preachings should closely relate to the basic truth of life. He must treat the social issues in an artistic manner.

Narrative technique :

Regarding the technique to be employed in a novel, Bhattacharya has said nothing strikingly new. During an interview with Sudhakar Joshi, Bhattacharya remarked : "a writer chooses a style that suits his theme and genius most. Personally I have always felt like writing in a way I write now. I cannot give my opinion on Narayan and Malgaonkar, since it is for them to decide what they should write "

Bhattacharya adds that the novelist should use the stream of consciousness technique judiciously. He does believe in employing new and unusual techniques ,and unconscious spheres of his characters consciousness. He opines that the modern novelist does not feel much affected towards the stream of consciousness technique which should be used in a balanced manner in order to impart the novel a clear meaning and form.

Bhattacharya maintains that a novelist should focus his camera on the subconscious only if the exigencies of the plot demand it, it is justified if used in a judicious manner. As a story teller, he seeks in his art of synthesis of manner and modernity.

Characterisation:

Bhattacharya believes that characters, instead of being the spokesmen of the novelist, should be from real life and must have a flesh – and -blood existence. The novelist's skill lies in making them human beings. By making them mere instruments of his intentions, an artist could drain them of their vital sap. They must grow, mature change and behave exactly as human beings do. Thus Bhattacharya's characters many times "moved by their volition" and defeated his purpose. He usually starts with abroad idea of his characters who often change completely in the process of his writing.

It is the novelist who has to create characters outside his experience, he can take the help of imagination. For example, Bhattacharya's knowledge of village life was not adequate, but he depicted the rural people with intuition and insight. He had no high ideals to make his characters heroic :he wanted to portray them with all their virtues and vices without compromising with reality and he succeeded in it.

Conclusion :

Bhabhani Bhattacharya's aesthetics of fiction reflects his 'social realism'. It includes all that he enshrined in the traditional and modern approaches to life. There is hardly anything original about it. The artists creative urge, his missionary spirit, his affirmative vision, his attitude of synthesis and reconciliation of the old and the new, his facial expression – these combined together may be termed as Bhabhani Bhattacharya's fictional aesthetics. All his novels illustrate his concept of the novel as an expression of social reality. They deal with the contemporary problems faced by Indian society. "So Many Hungers" and "He who Rides A Tiger " are inspired by the harrowing experiences of the Bengal famine and Quit India Movement, "Music for

Mohini” seeks the reconciliation of the ancient and modern values in Indian life :freedom, “ Shadow From Laddakh” champions the cause of industrialization and “A Dream in Hawaii” reflects the materialistic attitude of American society. Bhattacharya’s choice of themes in all these novels is the outcome of his fictional aesthetics.

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