



A comparative Study of Indian woman in the Novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya with a specific reference to Music for Mohini

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Women have traditionally played a complex and striking role in Indian society. A brief glimpse of Indian woman makes it obvious that Indian Women have been showing their worth in each and every sphere whether it is history, scriptures or literature. In the modern time, women are on the path of progress without any full-stop and have been exposing their mettle as well as spirit in every field and haply for better than the male. In recent time women is not a puppet in the hands on man but she developed her true identity in every walk of life. In Indian English literature kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee and Manju Kapur and many more female novelists have left their indelible imprint on the Indian readers. Their vast contribution to English literature is not only remarkable but excellent too. Modern era has brought an entire change in women's existence. Although they have always been the heart of family life because they play various roles as wife, mother, daughter, sister, companion, mother-in law, daughter-in-law and always live for the continuance of family values and make efforts to maintain its unity, but now at present time with the national movement and other subsequent political events, women have thought more in terms of nationalism than men, and they have a great sense of service to their country" (Cormack, 169).

Freedom for Indian women meant freedom not only from the hands of British rules and their cruelty but actually their release from centuries of male-domination as well as social and cultural norms. Now woman is not enclosed within four walls but she is trying to effect a slow but slow but sure change within her own home.

In earlier fiction women were represented in a single-dimension-a responsible daughter or all sacrificing mother, an obedient wife or beloved and a virgin. Earlier they were considered weak, emotional and only confined to the household works. But today women have achieved a separate identity as well as a distinguished place in fiction, due to their awareness in every field whatever-political, social, cultural or individual. The novelists through their writings have tried to bring freedom to the female from their age long subjugation by men.

A general analysis of Bhabani Bhattacharya' s novels makes one thing clear that this most significant aspect of womanhood is clearly visible in his works. From So Many Hungers to Shadow

from Ladakh, women play an important role in his novels. Either they are the central figures or play equally important roles or sometimes they are the source of inspiration from which male character derives courage and strength. Being a great humanist, Bhabani Bhattacharya has dealt with the human fate and man's struggle against those problems which he has to face for his survival throughout his life in the world. His protagonist, whether male or female, is eternally engaged in struggling and fighting against the injustice that he or she faces in various walks of life. Sometime his female character comes forward and raises active step to come out of her sufferings. As Marlene Fisher marks out:

"Dr. Bhattacharya's female characters represent the triumph of the human spirit over famine and starvation and their accompanying degradation and over the inevitable crises that arise when old and new values clash" (68).

Various aspects of womanhood find ample space in the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya because he tried to paint an ideal picture of Indian woman. As Kajoli So many Hungers! Suffers a lot weakness and despair. In He who Rides a Tiger Chandrakha is true to her name in features and actions. When she finds that it is impossible for kalo to dismount from the tiger's back she is found ready to sacrifice her own life.

A Goddess Named Gold is the evidence of those courageous women who participate in freedom struggle. Meera, a girl of sixteen is the symbol of womanhood and buoyant spirit. Her old and spirited grandmother also encourages the rebellious women of the village to fight for their rights. As B. Shyamla.

Rao comments:

"Bhattacharya's fourth novel A Goddess Named Gold may be termed a woman's novel, In essence it is a feminist novel as the liberation of the country from the clutches of the Sethji is accomplished by women only"(58).

This novel may be considered as a true replica of courage of the woman of Sonamitti that helps them to liberate themselves from Seth Samsundarji.

Suruchi in Shadow from Ladakh is really an incarnation of womanhood who proves an ideal wife, mother as well as a perfect women. Though she surrenders herself to her husband completely, she emerges as a full and a mature women who doesn't lose her true identification. Marlene Fisher pointedly states:

"Altough the novels of Bhattacharya tend to be centered around his female characters, their themes touch broadly upon some of the most vital aspects of men and women alike- particularly society" (95-108).

It appears that though the portrayal of feminine characters in his novels, Bhabani wants to bring in to limelight the significant role played by women. The female characters in his novels are elevated to a higher state. Loftiness, grandeur, dignity and nobleness are richly found in these leading ladies. Mohini has beauty and playfulness, Kajoli is innocent, Chandrakha has her compassion and attraction, Meera has simplicity and honesty to Suruchi has her strong sense of identity. They are worthy enough to serve as model. Bhattacharya's attitude towards women character is that of respect and sympathy too. Neither he believes in revolutionary changes for women's liberation nor he advocates to confine them to the boundaries of tradition. Each women character of Bhabani Bhattacharya's second novel Music for Mohini is partly autobiographical

because its hero Jayadev is shy and reserved like Bhabani himself while Mohini is models on the nature of Salila. In fact this novel of Bhattacharya is really a different one because its first and foremost a novel of character and the only novel of Bhattacharya in which the name of the chief protagonist appears in its title. Actually Mohini is a medium to express Bhabani's innermost feeling to portray the Indian woman who in her life plays various roles as that of a mother, companion, daughter of a wife. Mohini upholds the true ideal image of an Indian woman because Bhabani Bhattacharya has brilliantly presented a beautiful synthesis of the old and the new in the character of Mohini. He reveals the finest valued of Indian womanhood in Mohini' s character. In the words of Rashmi Gaur:

"Bhattacharya has portrayed Mohini as a representative of his image of the new women who is to act as a bastion against the corrupting influence of the west and protect the traditional values of personal and social life from any sudden or violent change" (56).

Mohini proves a perfect woman at all the stages of women good. From the very early stage of the novel we observe that Bhattacharya has presented her something of a tomboy, climbing a tree singing and dancing with gay lying to her father that she was reading Ancient Indian History while she was enjoying a Bengali novel, The Poisoned Kiss.

In relationship with her brother Heeralal, there is a melody of friendship. Heeralal is like a companion of Mohini as both share their every secret with each other. She behaves, protects and gives tenderness to him of an elder sister. She was so close to her brother HeeraLal that he goes with her to her husband's house so that she would not feel alone and adjust conveniently in her new environment. This beautiful accept of sister and brother relationship and companionship runs through her vein-so deeply that in the absence of Heera lal in her husband's house she develops a friendly relationship with a motherless child Ranjan and imparts her love protections and blessing to him. Mohini also provides him precious knowledge from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and such other Legendary tales. Ranja also has same kindly feeling for Mohini and worships her like an elder sister. Ranjan on his turn introduces her to dozen of little brothers - his friends and brings Ashu, Rabi, Montu and Gopal etc. to her garden In this way due to her loving and affectionate nature Mohini finds various little brothers in the village of Behula. Her relationship with Rooplekha jayadev's sister is also of a friend. It is Rooplekha who encourages aptly and that's why in a short while they both become good friends see not only plays the role of sister of younger ones but she is also superior in the role of a Bau-sister, that is, Elder sister to her husband's friend Harindra. When she cleverly speculates the attraction of Harindra for Sudha, the Saturn's Eyesore, she makes promise to Harindra that she would definitely bring the two together after her return to Behula from her father s home.

This facet of her behavior portrays that Mohini is also aware of all her liabilities towards her father and grand-mother Despite being a motherless

Child she is a very responsible daughter. Her father provides her convent education yet not withstanding there is a prefect blend of tradition and modernity in the personality of Mohini. Her character is shaped by the modern influence of her father which is partially based on his traditional and cultural values. She is not only against the bride the showing system but also opposes her grand mother' s insistence on her old and orthodox ways.

"Never had she so angry with old Mother. Why must she, whoreason Why must her antiquated outlook prevail against even Father' s judgment with her fixed ideas, her iron prejudice

against modernism, how could she expect to know, to feel, to understand the new generation" (44).

However, the widening gap between the old Mother and Mohini is abridged when marriage is finally settled with Jayadev by a bangle seller and the horoscopes are matched. Though Mohini's father was not willing in marrying his daughter in a village, but being a responsible daughter Monini persuades her father and assures him that she will be quite happy and satisfied in the village. Sashikala singh rightly observes.

"Mohini's willingness to settle in a rural atmosphere reveals the first change in her attitude to life. There are signs of a true Indian woman in her. There is a Mohini in every Indian girl with all her contradictions and the ultimate reconciliation to things Indian" (47).

Mohini's marriage brings a great change in the personality of this young and lovely girl. She encounters her dominating mother-in-law who is extremely tradition bound while on the other hand she comes across with the indifference of her husband Jayadev who is a research scholar as well as a social reformer. His only goal is to make his village Behula a model village and therefore, to fulfill his mission he fights against the superstitions, untouchability and caste system etc. along with young reformer Harindra. Mohini's life takes a turn, she has to make an adjustment with her husband Jayadev and her stubborn mother-in-law. If we estimate the character of Mohini as a daughter-in-law. We find that she is able to stand the test of time.

Being a modern sophisticated girl Mohini, like other girls, expects a lot from her husband Jayadev. Her heart is full of love for Jayadev and she also expects to be admired and loved by him in turn. But Jayadev grew up under the shadow of exaggerated various expectations as he is the only heir of the family. His spiritually fanatic mother who was widowed early in marriage brought him up with so much tenderness that neither he had a carefree childhood nor a bold exploring youth. The environment in which he grew up affects the personal relationship of Jayadev and Mohini. Jayadev expects Mohini as Matiyri or Gargi that's why on his nuptial night he provides her abstruse statement on the purity and holiness of the marriage bond instead of responding to her physically:

"Bonds interminable holds us in sacred relation, more sacred than any on earth," he began and then paused, for he felt his words sounded hollow" (90).

It seems absurd to Mohini because she believes in the warmth of love and compassion which she fails to get from her husband while Jayadev considers that spiritual love and physical love should be kept apart. He expects Mohini to be his partner in his scholarly pursuits. Mohini's marriage fails to provide the promised happiness and bliss. In marrying a entirely to him; but he does not assume the corresponding obligation, which is to accept this gift and its consequences." Gradually Mohini suppress her human desires and makes attempt to adjust herself with the new way of life. She loved to live a free life while in Behula she is always considered the mistress of the Big House. Jayadev had already made Mohini aware of the fact that she would have to mould herself to the stern traditional life pattern of the Big House imposed on the ladies and thus Big House makes heavy demands on Mohini. Mohini's Mother-in-law is extremely tradition bound to Rooplekha, Jayadev sister describes Mohini about the various facts of the Big House, including her mother and brother. As Rooplekha describes about the firmness of her mother.

"My mother is the usual orthodox Hindu woman, only she is more intense than other, all her faith is pinned to family tradition. No. deviation for her, not one inch. Stern-willed, though tender at

heart, she is a simple soul, with singleness of purpose, a one eyed mind. She exists for the Big House, She wouldn't have it changed the least way" (94).

This statement of Rooplekha has to adjust herself in a city because born and bred in the village, she was unable to adopt herself to the modern city life after her marriage but she tries her best to make an adjustment with new life. It is a well - known fact that an Indian woman faces an entire change in her life after marriage because she has to adopt the culture, tradition and customs of her spouse' s family. Rooplekha expresses her feelings in such words:

"you are city-bred, village-wed. I am village bred, city wed. we share one common lot: we have been pulled up by the roots. A city has as little mercy for an alien as the country, no more, no less. Years it was before I could fit in, Mohini hard years" (92).

In the beginning life was not easy for Mohini because she feels suffocated and lovelorn and finds life unbearable in the Big House. Her mother in law imposes a number of restrictions upon her. It is indecorous for women to have a meal along with a the men. They are not allowed to move out for the house on foot, if they want to go anywhere they have to use either a palanquin or a bullock cart. Being a radio artist, Mohini is fond of singing and music but in big House music is tolerated only if is used for worshipping. Mohini falls into a torturous state of loneliness and isolation. Yet she shows great fortitude and prepares herself to make adjustment with the stern rules and traditions of the big House. Iyenger comments on Mohini's transformation:

"She throws herself into new tasks, and she strikes roots into the soil of Behula. The strain is nothing, what matters is the sense of fulfillment alone. She is thus able to establish rapport with her husband readily furthering the causes so dear him" (415).

It shows how Mohini endured all with great fortitude which is a characteristic trait of Indian women. Gradually Mohini starts learning Sanskrit from Jayadev and soon his belief has been proved wrong that there is nothing of the scholar in her. But he is impressed to find that Mohini starts to educate the village women by imparting them some elementary general education. Now husband and wife seem to ascend to a common pedestal. They develop a common interest which brings them closer to each other. She collects small village children in the garden whom she treats as her younger brothers and provides them precious knowledge so that she could assist her husband in his social duties. According to Indian mythological belief, woman is the other half, i.e. ardhangini of her husband she Is supposed to discharge at least half of the duties of her husband. Mohini judged from this perspective, proves an ideal Indian wife. She does not tag behind in discharging her social duties or rather the duties that she owes towards her husband. But soon she realizes that she is ignoring the dignity and authority of the big house as its mistress. Progressively she begins to give importance to the traditions of big house and prepares herself for living in an old world. Perhaps a suitable balance of old and new in her character helps her to negotiate the hostile situation in her life. As Shantha Krishnaswamy rightly observes:

"....through her, the author aims at interlinking polarities, at connecting culture with culture, tradition with modernity, the individual and society" (61). She not only complies with her mother-law to drop the singing of secular songs but also wears only cotton sarees and gold bangles instead of lovely and fashionable bangles. She realized that she has to learn and grow as well as she will have to modify her stand and make adjustment if she is to play the role of a good wife. It is really amazing that an impulsive girl like Mohini is transformed into an understanding and complacent housewife. As Bhattacharya comments:

"yes the young mistress of the Big House took deeper colour from her new life everyday. Slowly she fitted herself to the rural design. Her sprightliness, her quick girlish laugh, she easily subdued. The mother was a ruthless teacher" (130).

Jayadev's mother wants Mohini to play the role of a mother in the kitchen, serve the farmhands as a sort of Anupurna, as well as to become the mother of Jayadev's child. Mohini also feels depressed, she questions her own credulity and becomes restless when her mother-in-law judges her every mode of life and the enlightened and modern way of living. She thinks that perhaps she is needed only to bear a son for the Big House. Her existence in the Big House is only for the heir drinks cold milk while looking at the moon. Really it shows the assertion and craving of a woman for children. It is considered that the primary object of marriage is to beget children. It is significantly described by Bhattacharya in the quotation from the marriage mantra with which the seventh chapter closes:

"O Indira kind of all the gods, let this lady be the mother of heroic sons"

(63).But a crisis arises when Jayadev approaches the age of twenty-eight, as it has been predicted by an astrologer that Jayadev will die an untimely death at this age unless a child is born to him. That's why mother of Jayadev was anxious that Mohini should become that would prevent the misfortune of Jayadev's death. About two years after the marriage, when mother finds no news of pregnancy from Mohini, she advises Mohini to cut the skin of her bosom and offer blood to the goddess in a lotus - leaf bowl in order to save poisonous snake, which arises consternation in the mind of the mother who considers it as a warning for Jayadev's death. But she is saved from this incident, becomes ready for sacrifice. But she is saved from this ceremonial offering of blood when in the nick of time Jayadev arrives and asks Mohini not to step of sacrifice which is raised by Mohini to save the family integrity does not define her as a victim but portrays her as a devoted woman. Shashikala Singh aptly remarks.

"Bhabani Bhattacharya thus successfully presents in Mohini the typical Indian woman. She is not a synthesis of the tradition and modernity nor a 'battered victim,' but a new woman. She absorbs tradition only to give new direction to the concept of Indian womanhood" (51).

Though Jayadev's bold step against his mother's orthodoxy saves Mohini but one thing is remarkable that Mohini, at last, prepares to adjust herself with the Big House even she was ready to accept Sudha as a second wife only to save Jayadev. But fortunately, it is known that Mohini is already pregnant. It removes her fear of being replaced by Sudha. Thus life becomes a music for her once again. She makes struggle to reshape her mental values and revise her expectations, as well as to make the required adjustment to married life and to be the mistress of Jayadev's large village household.

Bhattacharya in his novels especially in music for Mohini, refers to the pivotal role played by his woman character. The novelist presents woman in myriad roles such as: Mother which is represented by old Mother and Mother of Rooplekha, harsh mother-in-law by Jayadev's mother, connecting two different cultures through Mohini and Rooplekha companion and sister by Mohini and Heeralal and at last wife and beloved with unspoken demands represented by Mohini. It describes the theme of uncertainty, alienation and communication in the married life of a woman. It is really the most artistic piece of Bhattacharya which deals with the ways in which Mohini a city bread girl, given a modern education, solves the problems of her married life and adopts the lifestyle and tradition of Behula village, where she goes with so many dreams to live with her

scholar husband. The two major female characters Mohini and Rooplekha feel uprooted after marriage. Mohini is city-bread and village-wed while Rooplekha, born and bred in the village is unable to adapt herself to the modern city life after marriage. Rooplekha disclose her innermost feeling to Monini.

"We who're so wed, serve some real purpose. It's as though we made a bridge between two banks of a river. We connect with culture, Mohini, over old Eastern view of life with the new semi - western outlook" (93-94).

Though in both the situations Mohini's and Rooplekha have to suffer but the only difference is that former would feel much more disillusioned. Besides, Indian woman tries her best to make the situation favorable by her understanding and perseverance. Mohini also tries her best as remarked by Shashikala Singh.

"As in the case of every Indian woman, Mohini's life too revolves around her family. Though an image of modernity, she also possesses all that is good about the tradition. Her immense respect for elders, her love and faithfulness toward her husband, and her commitment to the village people exemplify the characteristics of typical Indian woman". (52).

Thus Music for Mohini shows the status of woman in Indian society and in the home before marriage and after marriage. It is the destiny of every Indian woman to make adjustment with her life after marriage in order to enjoy the bliss of marital life. Old Mother in Music for Mohini while describing true meaning of marriage for a woman comments.

"You will brighten another house, child. What use is a lamp, golden and filled with oil, if it has no wick. The house is the lamp, man is like oil, the woman is wick, Mohini, and happiness the living flame" (39).

Hindu woman always worships her husband. Marriage brings an entire change in a girls attitude because then she doesn't thinks of herself but prepares herself to make the necessary sacrifices and conditions demand. As Bhabani asserts in Music Mohini:

"A hundred thousand Hindu maids on each bridal day of the year give their hearts to their unknown husbands, asking nothing in return but approval" (63).

It clearly indicates the development of Mohini from her girlhood to the position of a wife as well as the misters of the Big House. Progressively Mohini is transformed into an understanding housewife. As a heroine of Bhabani Bhattacharya's novel, she possesses all the traits of a heroine and gives the mini-glimpse of all the aspects of Indian womanhood.

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