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## AFFIRMATION OF LIFE THROUGH SOCIAL-REALITY IN BHABANI BHATTACHARYA'S NOVELS

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### Abstract:

*A study of Bhattacharya's novels reveals his belief that life asserts itself by making man express his innate self through his actions, embodying noble ideas and values. Bhattacharya points to a positive view of life which is possible only when man trusts in and practises universal ethical values. He believes in the bright side of human existence and that is exactly what reflects his affirmative vision of life. The recurrent artistic presentation of the affirmation of life in his works is something unique. The present paper aims at delineating a critical analysis of the theme of affirmation as portrayed in the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya with special orientation to Music for Mohini and Shadow from Ladakh.*

### KEY WORDS:

social-reality , Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels , embodying noble ideas .

### INTRODUCTION

Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of the major novelists of the older generation of Indo-English novelists. He is endowed with a transparently positive vision of life and has explored and expressed it in all the six novels he has published. His novels occupy a significant place in Indian fiction for their charm, warmth and artistic economy. As a creative artist, Bhattacharya has little sympathy for generalization and abstract theorizing. Without being didactic or a propagandist, he trusts that literature can play a constructive role and teach humanity through the work of writers. His attitude to literature is highly constructive and purposeful. He explores the various levels and dimensions of human growth and individual freedom and projects in his works the confrontation between the humanistic and anti-humanistic values. He strikes a balance between the brighter and the darker side of life.

A study of Bhattacharya's novels reveals his belief that life asserts itself by making man express his innate self through his actions, embodying noble ideas and values. Bhattacharya points to a positive view of life which is possible only when man trusts in and practises universal ethical values.

He believes in the bright side of human existence and that is exactly what reflects his affirmative vision of life. The recurrent artistic presentation of the affirmation of life in his works is something unique. The present paper aims at delineating a critical analysis of the theme of affirmation as portrayed in the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya with special orientation to **Music for Mohini** and **Shadow from Ladakh**.

In conformity with his view of novel as an expression of social reality, he shows his concern with the socio-political and economic problems of hunger, poverty, famine, exploitation of man by man, war and peace, imperialism and nationalism, and a host of other aspects of the reality of India before and after independence. Instead of wandering in a world of metaphysical abstractions and transcendental

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speculations, he indulges in exploring the various facets of social reality. As he says:

**“... a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader something from the society's point of view. Art is not necessarily for art's sake.”**

Bhattacharya has not only portrayed the darker side of life—its poverty, corruption and suffering but also the golden edges of hope around it. That's why Mrs Mukherjee considers him to be **“a realist and at the same time a visionary.”**

Along with his social concerns, Bhattacharya always remained conscious of expressing his unwavering faith in affirmative aspects of life and denounced the negative implications of asceticism and self-abnegation in his novels. In fact, he felt, like Gandhiji under the spell of the Gita from which he imbibed the principle of **“dynamic equilibrium in the art of living.”** This principle has been dexterously highlighted by **Jayadev-Mohini** relationship in **Music for Mohini** and by **Suruchi-Satyajit** and **Sumita-Bhashkar** relationships in **Shadow from Ladakh**.

**Music for Mohini** is a novel of tension—tension between the past and the present, between the village and the city, between asceticism and aestheticism, between the old and the new values, out of which emerges a new creative process of reasoning. By and by the clash between these contrasting values becomes less severe and finally an ideal stage of reconciliation and synthesis is established. The novel expresses Bhattacharya's anguish at the outmoded customs and traditions, taboos and inhibitions, superstitions and blind beliefs, and herald's science and reason. Marjorie B. Snyder views **Music for Mohini** as:

**“a sociological battle ground in which the older generation clings to tradition” whereas the educated people struggle “to throw away charms and bangles, to open themselves and their country to Western ideas.”**

Through the joy and fulfilment of the protagonists and through the synthesis of the old, the orthodox, the traditional and the new and the modern, Bhattacharya gives vent to his trust in the fullness and goodness of life.

The novel shows growth, maturation and transformation of **Mohini**, a motherless, mischievous, frolicsome and impulsive girl of seventeen blessed with mellifluous voice into an understanding and considerate wife. Mohini, who stands for the fullness of life before marriage, is married to Jayadev, the great ascetic who would like to assume the role of a great sage Yagnavalkya and see Mohini in the role of Maitreyi, his spiritual spouse. Jayadev prefers his ideals to his physical needs and expects Mohini, the incarnation of the aesthetic and emotional side of human life, to abandon her primordial drive for fulfilment as a woman.

**Music for Mohini** is a novel highlighting a clash between old and new values, out of which emerges a new creative process of reasoning. In it Mohini a motherless, mischievous and impulsive girl of seventeen matures as she is married, leaves the city for village and is transformed into an understanding and considerate wife. She has an extraordinary fighting spirit against heavy odds so as to come to terms with life and find fulfilment in it. In spite of unfulfilment and upheaval, she remains unyielding:

“But she had her husband. For his sake she would absorb new ways of thought and habit, cultivate new interests. She set her mouth, life was a serious business, and she was no doll in silk and satin. . . . She had duties to discharge, responsibilities.”

In this chronicle of the evolution of a young carefree girl into a mature woman, we actually see that Mohini consciously adjusts, changes her outlook and matures emotionally as well as intellectually. The greatest achievement of Mohini lies in the adjustment she makes and thus fits herself into her new position. As a result all clashes between mother and son, mother and daughter-in-law, and husband and wife disappear and sweetness prevails in the Big House. Through the hero Jayadev, Bhattacharya intends to pick up the best of the time-honoured Indian traditions and mingle them with the reasonable and acceptable aspects of modern society. He is involved in the noble task of ushering in an ideal social order which should enable man to attain his full stature. In the novel, Bhattacharya affirms that the synthesis of asceticism and aestheticism, tradition and modernity, mind and heart, intellect and emotion creates music and harmony in life.

**Shadow from Ladakh** also refers to the idea of synthesis and announces Bhattacharya's deep faith in the affirmative aspects of life. Bhattacharya in this novel allegorizes his final vision of the regeneration of the nation by describing the conflict between Gandhigram and Steeltown, symbolizing the opposing ideals of soul power versus armed power, asceticism versus full-blooded satisfaction of life's urges, and village economy versus large-scale industrialism.

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Satyajit's submission to Gandhian ideals and the vow of celibacy denies his wife Suruchi a life of fulfilment and deprives her of the opportunity of begetting sons which had been her dream. Their daughter Sumita completely devoted to her father's ideals unquestioningly, develops anti-life tendencies. Suruchi feels cramped under her husband's discipline and pines for a life of fulfilment for her daughter. She decides to make her realize the true meaning of the joys of normal life and thinks Bhashkar to be the right person to awaken the latent woman in Sumita.

Finally, it is **Sumita** whose life blends the ascetic and aesthetic ways of life and leads to an idyllic reconciliation in the end of the novel. Her union with Bhashkar suggests that the clash of different ideologies needs to be resolved to ensure happiness in life.

Shadow from Ladakh, in which Bhattacharya has expressed his faith in the affirmative aspects of life and denounced the negative implications of asceticism and self-abnegation with great dignity and amplitude, continues the conflict between the old and the new and between the rural and the urban earlier presented in Music for Mohini and extends it to its political and technological aspects. Gandhigram and Steeltown—standing respectively for spiritual powers and technological powers, small scale versus large scale industrialism, ideas of non-violence and peaceful existence versus realistic appraisal of giving the country teeth by manufacturing arms—are uneasy neighbours. Bhattacharya's affirmative vision of life in the novel reflects itself in his recommendation of the meeting of these two extremes— Gandhigram and Steeltown— by suggesting that they yield some of their respective grounds and yet retain their basic points.

Satyajit's desire to transfer Gandhian ideas into actuality assumes anti-life proportions in the character of his young daughter, Sumita. His own submission to Gandhian ideals is possible only through the suppression of his own passionate nature. He also denies his wife, Suruchi a life of fulfilment. She submits her will to her husband's. Her submission, however, is not whole-hearted. Complete submission is visible only in Sumita who accepts her father's position unquestioningly, unaware as she is of any other world outside Gandhigram.

Suruchi, in the novel, upholds Bhattacharya's affirmative outlook of life and emerges as a full, mature, most attractive woman with a strong sense of her own identity. She resolves to find a middle ground between the extreme of Gandhigram on the one hand and Steeltown, the symbol of industrialism and Western values, on the other. For many years she feels cramped under her husband's discipline, and finally, fearful of those idealistic and often self-negating qualities of Satyajit's that she sees so clearly in Sumita, her twenty-year-old daughter, the half fulfilled wife and mother grows determined that her child shall be free to have what the mother has been denied. And we actually see that Sumita begins to grow up and finally realizes her mother's wishes for her womanly as well as her ideological fulfilment. Finally, it is Sumita whose life fuses the worlds of Steeltown and Gandhigram and leads in the end of the novel, to an idyllic reconciliation. Bhattacharya's belief in affirmative aspects of life goes hand in hand with Suruchi's belief in:

**“...acceptance of life in its totality... Let license be chastened by restraint. Let restraint find its right level by a leavening of freedom. Let there be a meetingground of the two extremes; let each shed some of its contents and yet remain true to itself.”**

Both Music for Mohini and Shadow from Ladakh represent the triumph of the human spirit over adverse circumstances and over the inevitable crisis that arises when old and new values clash. All the protagonists like Mohini, Jayadev (Music for Mohini), Suruchi, Satyajit, Sumita and Bhashkar (Shadow from Ladakh) move towards a life of “dynamic equilibrium” in the end. This equilibrium is sought at personal, social, national and international levels.

Thus both Music for Mohini and Shadow from Ladakh unfold glaringly and artistically Bhattacharya's affirmative vision of life and reflect his belief in bright side of human existence, his faith in the unfathomable richness and sacredness of man's spirit which cannot be crushed by adversity and humiliation, his conviction that the evil forces in man and social treachery and corruption only test and underline the sterling qualities and the resplendent spirit of man. Through these novels Bhattacharya launches a vigorous campaign against what he considers to be anti-life tendencies and forces in the way of life and pleads for a full and joyous life.

Bhattacharya does not recommend modernity at the cost of tradition or vice-versa. In fact he advocates reconciliation of the two and suggests that the best elements of both are derivable. Bhattacharya thus sees a ray of hope in the dark clouds of despair and like Shelley seems to be singing the songs for a bright future:

**“If winter comes can spring be far behind?”**

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To conclude, Bhattacharya in his works asserts that the synthesis resulting from correct understanding and adjustment is the only possible solution to all our problems and this synthesis alone can ensure true and lasting happiness and peace. It has rightly been said that his fiction “does not simply convey life; it says something about life.... It reveals some kind of pattern in life. It brings significance.”

His achievement does not lie in the portrayal of life but it lies in the ideology which strengthens his vision of life. Through the principle of satisfactory balance between contrasting values, Bhattacharya has attempted to visualize the emergence of an ideal man, an ideal society, an ideal country and above all, an ideal world leading to a life of serenity and joy. For Marlene Fisher, his novels deal with the efforts of human beings to forge and to fulfil workable and communal ideals and, perforce, with the struggle to reconcile individual social goals.

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