

A STUDY OF SOCIO-POLITICAL ETHOS IN SELECT NOVELS OF BHABANI BHATTACHARYA AND MANOHAR MALGONKAR

S.Mohammad Shafiullah

Assistant Professor in English, Department of English, PVKN Government College, Chittoor (A.P)

Abstract

The novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya and Manohar Malgonkar can be studied as an embodiment of history. The novels of both the novelists are rooted in Socio-Political ethos. The exposure of social evils like poverty, social inequalities, injustice, capitalist or imperialist exploitations, the revolutionary-nationalist struggle for independence, the catastrophe of Hindu-Muslim discord and the tragedy of partition and the emergence of new India. The political atmosphere in the pre as well as post independence era is reflected in their works. They gave a socio-political canvas and they deal with these national experiences either directly as central theme or indirectly as back drop. As an enlightened Indian and as a devout scholar of Indian history, he takes a balanced view of these historical events in his works and highlights the human aspect. He has selected a variety of the significant themes of his time, including the themes of political independence, social problems and traditional modernity conflict.

Keywords: Ethos, Exploitation, Capitalist, Enlightened, Conflict, Catastrophe.

Introduction

Bhabani Bhattacharya

Bhabani Bhattacharya was an Indian writer of Bengali origin, who wrote socio-realistic fiction. He was born in Bhagalpur, part of the Bengal Presidency in British India. Bhattacharya gained a bachelor's degree from Patna University and a doctorate from the University of London. He returned to India and joined the diplomatic service. Bhattacharya served in the United States, to which country he returned as a teacher of literary studies once he had left the service. He taught in Hawaii and later in Seattle. In his mid thirties, Bhattacharya began writing fiction in historically and socially realistic contexts. As a graduate student Bhabani Bhattacharya became involved with Marxist circles and was also strongly influenced by Harold Laski, one of his teachers. He was also active in various magazines and newspapers. Some of Bhattacharya's articles were published in "The Spectator", and he developed a friendship with the editor, Francis Yeats-Brown. During this time, Bhattacharya also interacted with Rabindranath Tagore. He translated Tagore's poem "The Golden Boat" into English in 1930. Both Yeats-Brown and Tagore advised Bhattacharya to write his fiction in English, rather than Bengali.

On completion of his doctoral studies Bhattacharya moved to Calcutta and soon got married. After few years, he joined the diplomatic service, serving in the Indian Embassy in Washington D.C. and returned to India after completing that service. Bhattacharya accepted an offer to join the University of Hawaii as a visiting faculty, subsequently moving permanently to Seattle to take up a chair at the University of Washington.

All the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya present a true picture of India. His outlook is highly constructive and purposeful and his works has a social purpose. Smt. Laila Ray writes, "As we read his writing, we hear the dialogue between man and his situation, between man and man and between man and the ideas he lives by."

History and literature which are generally considered different discourses but in Bhattacharya's novels, he effectively chronicles real, historical events of a war torn India. His experience and close association with men, manners and their personalities have enabled him to grasp the basic qualities of humanity and he presented this in his novels and short-stories very skillfully. Bhattacharya has written with a spicy language and has caught the vein of rural speech and the informal behaviour of the people, their rustic world and their small and simple views about the great things.

Manohar Malgonkar

Manohar Malgonkar was an Indian author of both fiction and nonfiction in the English language. He was also a hunter, a civil servant, a mine owner and a farmer. Manohar Malgonkar was born in Jagalbeta village, near Loda in Belgaum district. His maternal grandfather had been governor of Gwalior state. He began his education in Belgaum. He later attended school in Dharwad and graduated from Mumbai University. After he joined the army and rose to the rank of Lieutenant colonel in the Maratha Light Infantry. He retired from service at the age of 39. He also stood for parliament. Malgonkar lived in a remote bungalow called 'Burbusa Bungalow' at Jabalpet in Joida Taluk in Uttara Kannada District, Karnataka. His only

child, Suneeta, who was educated at the famous Lawrence School, Sanawar, died in 1998.

Among the Indian writers in English, Malgonkar appeared on the scene with his intense historical consciousness in some of his novels. He adopted his own way of writing historical novels based on Indian tradition, culture and background. He wanted to put forth historical facts in his novels as specific as they were without much change in them.

A descendent of Prime Minister's family in the princely states of India, Malgonkar was brought-up in good environment. As a voracious reader, he enjoyed the reading of the writings of Kipling, Maugham and a number of writers. He came into contact with the English Officers through whom he developed authentic English conversation, diction, vocabulary and accent of English language. Though he was influenced by some of the English novelists, he sticks to his own Indian tradition and his exclusive method of writing. The socio-historical milieu of Indian Independence and its aftermath, form the backdrop of his novels, which are usually of action and adventure. He also wrote non-fiction, including biography and history.

Socio-Political Ethos in Select Novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya

The novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya and Manohar Malgonkar can be studied as an embodiment of history. The novels of both the novelists are rooted in Socio-Political ethos. The exposure of social evils like poverty, social inequalities, injustice, capitalist or imperialist exploitations, the revolutionary-nationalist struggle for independence, the catastrophe of Hindu-Muslim discord and the tragedy of partition and the emergence of new India. The political atmosphere in the pre as well as post independence era is reflected in their works. They gave a socio-political canvas and they deal with these national experiences either directly as central theme or indirectly as back drop. As an enlightened Indian and as a devout scholar of Indian history, he takes a balanced view of these historical events in his works and highlights the human aspect. He has selected a variety of the significant themes of his time, including the themes of political independence, social problems and traditional modernity conflict.

Bhattacharya in his works has used Indian history as one of the important ingredients. He has derived his themes from the most crucial phase of Indian history which he himself witnessed from very close quarters.

Bhattacharya's first novel, "*So Many Hungers*"(1947) is a deeply moving and impressive work of art. This novel is set against the background of Quit India Movement (1942) and the course of the freedom struggle at that time. It is also set in the background of Bengal famine and Second World war.

Bhattacharya's second novel, "*Music for Mohini*" was published in 1952. This novel deals with the socio-political, economic, cultural and ethical realities of Indian history in the fifties in the wake of newly attained independence. It is a story of the tensions and conflicts between the newly achieved freedom and the age long history of slavery of the Indians. There is also a growing concern about the shape of things to come, the problem which India were to face for her economic development and the steps to be taken in order to ensure the country's stability and greatness. Thus, 'Music for Mohini' deals with the theme of the social rejuvenation of India. This novel also records the confrontation between old and new values of life.

The next novel in this study is "*He who Rides a Tiger*" (1955). It explores the fate of the lower castes of society, such as the blacksmiths. This novel also focuses on the darkest chapter in the history of Bengal – A plague took the land in its grip, the plague of hunger, in the wake of war. The novel vividly portrays how the rich people are callously indifferent to the hungry millions and are greatly responsible for their unspeakable miseries.

"*A Goddess Named Gold*" (1960) delineates the multi-dimensional philosophy of freedom. The people of India are awakened to free India from political, social, economic and cultural exploitation. This novel is a repetition of much of what already has been said in the previous novels, but with a new emphasis. The concept of freedom to be free as discussed in previous novels acquires new dimensions in this novel. This novel also deals with the necessity of Indian people to eradicate the evils for a healthy growth of a social life.

The next novel in this study is "*Shadow from Ladakh*" (1966) in which Bhattacharya has treated the Indo-Chinese war of 1962 as the backdrop of the story and dealt with social, political, economic and ethical dimensions in the context of the post independence India. Bhattacharya's 'Shadow from Ladakh' deals with people concern to preserve the country's hard earned independence at all costs. This also records the denial of Gandhian's ideology of non-violence as the efforts to rouse the united conscience of all people fails and declares that a country's freedom cannot be preserved by Gandhian non-violent

means but with the help of steel and weapons. Thus this novel deals with the conflict between Gandhian social and political ethics and the modern forces of science and technology.

Socio-Political Ethos in Select Novels of Manohar Malgonkar

Manohar Malgonkar is another Indo-Anglian novelist whose works have also been analysed and examined critically in this study. His novels too like Bhabani Bhattacharya's are framed in the Indian historical, political and social milieu. Malgonkar has felt that history and fiction have many elements in common and he asserts that history forms the basis of his works.

Among the Indian writers in English, Manohar Malgonkar appeared on the scene with his intense historical consciousness in some of his novels. He adopted his own way of writing socio-political novels based on Indian tradition and cultural background. He wanted to put forth historical facts in his novels as specific as they were without much change in them. Malgonkar's achievement as a historical novelist is marked by his impressive contribution to the historical novel in English. In the first place, he in his novels recaptures the past through careful research. Exact truth in respect of time, place and circumstances is observed in every historical event introduced in the plot.

Manohar Malgonkar's "*A Bend in the Ganges*" (1964) open with the Civil Disobedience Movement of the early 1930's and ends with the partition riots in Punjab. It encompasses the Swadeshi Movement, the activities of the freedom fighters, the outbreak of the Second World War, the British retreat from Rangoon, the Bombay Dock explosion and the division of India in 1947.

Manohar Malgonkar's "*The Devils Wind*" is an important and successful historical novel. It is based on the most spectacular historical event in the Indian history-The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Expertly integrated with the theme of 'Sepoy Mutiny' the delineation of the character of Nana Saheb. Besides choosing the Maratha Peshwas represented by Nana Saheb, the nationalists included other rulers of the times. Here he achieved a superb integration of history and the art of portraying Nana Saheb as a moving character. As we gather information about Nana Saheb from the novel, he is not a dark and dismal figure as presented by the Britishers, but he is a hero who cared for values like freedom, friendship and love.

Manohar Malgonkar's next novel, "*The Princes*" is both an epic and an autobiography. It is at once the record of the end of an epoch in Indian History and the story of a man's search for its roots in an age of upheaval and crisis. This novel is stated to be an epic in the sense that it narrates the life-story of a Maharaj and a Prince of an Indian state just at the verge of time of extinction; and it is an autobiography because it is narrated by the hero in first person, though the story of the novel one can search and ascertain about the extinguishing states and their rulers. 'The Princes' by Manohar Malgonkar is predominantly historical in its nature, covering the epoch of the princely states of India at their declining stage from 1938 to 1947, until they were merged with independent India in 1949.

Conclusion

As we have seen in the foregoing pages that Bhabani Bhattacharya and Manohar Malgonkar's preoccupation in the writing of their novels is the use of Socio-Political ethos. Bhattacharya and Malgonkar put their characters against the backdrop of socio-political facts as discussed earlier, and let them grow as authentic individuals. They may be represented by historical forces but in the end they behave like an individual, as human beings. They have used socio-political history in their writings and also they have suggested some ways out of the problems often discussed in their novels. In that way both these writers project their vision of the future through their writings that makes their work more interesting and readable. Thus, the subject matter of these writers is the same, that is, the socio-political history of the people of India but the 'mode of projection' is different. Whereas, Bhattacharya stands for specific ideas or strategies to deal with these socio-political facts of pre as well as post independence India, Malgonkar stands for the human definitions of these. It is in men rather than in abstract institutions or values that he sees the ray of hope

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