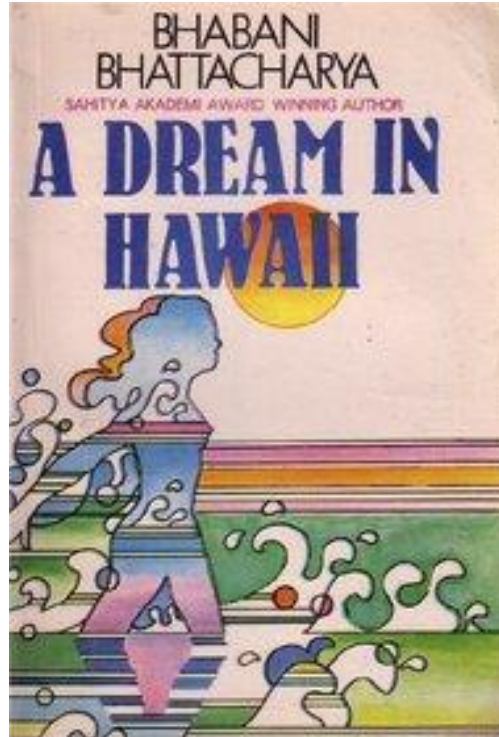


**Cultural Commitments in Bhabani Bhattacharya's
*Music For Mohini and A Dream In Hawaii***

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Abstract

Bhabani Bhattacharya is a realist who is keen on exploring the realities of life. He has a sensitive understanding of the problems of contemporary Indian society. His novels are a microcosm of India. In *Music for Mohini*, the harmonious blending of tradition and modernity, village and city is the predominant theme. The main problem for Mohini in the Big House is that of mental adjustment. Bhattacharya portrays an ideal woman in Mohini whose life divides in two phase. It is essential in two phases in order to visualize the adaptability and understanding of Mohini in the changing situation. *A Dream in Hawaii* is designed to project an acculturation between the materialism of the west and the spiritualism of the east. He provides ample realistic

ideas of the Indian and American life. On one hand Yogananda preaches to his disciples about Vedanta philosophy and on the other hand he reveals his inner self urge for Devjani. In *Music for Mohini* and *A Dream in Hawaii* Bhattacharya discovers more relevance in synthesizing the two cultures and enjoying the benefits of the both but together rather than oscillating between the two. The binaries within the characters of Mohini and Yogananda and within post – colonial Indian culture are pitted against the binaries of the western culture in general. Both the novels thus bring a true picture of the age couched in the modern realism. The reader can find through the characters of Mohini and Swami Yogananda, the methods of re-adjustment and compromise to solve their personal problems.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of the most celebrated Indo-Anglian writers. His passion for synthesis and integration has had a deep impression in the arena of Indian English Literature. In his six novels Bhabani Bhattacharya has treated culture with different dimensions.

Acculturation

Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels are in the tradition of Indian moral fable. Bhattacharya's *Music for Mohini* is a novel of tensions- tension between the mind and the body (the mechanical Acculturation), the mind of the husband and the body of the wife, tension between East-West, Village and town, tradition and modernity, astrology and rationalism, the daughter-in-law and the Mother-in-law. Ultimately, all tensions are resolved and there is the marriage of true minds. We have a big haul of characters, major and minor, sharply diversified as in the old mother and the lady of the Big House. The Big House itself is a major character, like the Elizabethan Great House replaced by the court. The novel is different from the novels of Bhattacharya. The title suggests that Mohini is central to its conception. In short it deals with the marriage of Mohini and Jayadev, which gets accomplished, despite the intellectual divergence between the two.

Blending of Tradition and Modernity, Village and City

The harmonious blending of tradition and modernity, village and city is the predominant theme in the novel. Tradition, as presented in the novel, can be divided into three aspects- personal, social and religious. Orthodox is the term, which covers all these aspects, the two

‘strong pillars of orthodoxy’ in the novel are old Mother and Jayadev’s mother. Mohini’s father doubts all traditional beliefs but wears the amulet to ward off evil eye. Mohini, the heroine, comes to Behula with her values established by city standards. But she triumphs the moment of crisis when she accepts the values of the old world. Jayadev, the hero, plans to re-orientate the values and patterns of Hindu life. He yearns for a revival of the values of traditional practices to set the community on the path real progress. Jayadev’s mother is a typical Hindu woman, who pursues family tradition to its ultimate limits. As her daughter, Roop Lekha says:

My mother is the usual orthodox Hindu woman, only she is more intense than others, and all her faith is pained to family tradition. No deviation for her, not one inch. Stern-willed, though tender at heart, she is a sample soul, with singleness of purpose, a one-eyed mind. She exists for the Big House; She would not Have it changed the least way’. (MM-94)

The House Restrictions

Mohini’s mother-in-law advises her not to use face powder, not to wear sleeveless blouses, not to wear glass bangles. She insists her to sing only religious songs and to wear a plain cotton saree. The widowed mother-in-law has kept a pair of wooden sandals of her late husband in the family prayer room and offers worship to them daily. Many taboos like this make life colourless and monotonous for Mohini. Mohini’s sister-in-law, Roop Lekha, combines in her character the traditional and modern values. When Mohini doubts the fusion of the city and the village representing the modern and the traditional values, Roop Lekha remarks that such a union is necessary.

The House lays certain restrictions on the women of the House. The mistress of the House is not allowed to walk in public. Even at a critical moment, when Jayadev is bitten by a snake, the mother refuses to allow Mohini to walk in public. She says, ‘it is not becoming’ (MM-170). According to the tradition of the Big House, the bride enters the village only in a palanquin. Mohini too enters the village in a palanquin. The women of the House are not allowed to sit for a meal along with, men. Music is tolerated only for the purpose of worship. It is part of the tradition of the House to conserve the family. ‘the House lived in the shadow of the family

tree' (MM-10). The genealogy has been preserved for a long time. The ancestors are the deathless symbols of spiritual heritage. At the same time, with her city education Mohini builds the spirit of 'modernity' around the conservative code of the village. Mohini thinks that Jayadev's mother is like Old Mother in her ideas but different from her in feeling.

Old and the New Values

There is another conflict between the old and the new values in the story of Harindra's family. Harindra's father the old Kaviraj is a practitioner of Ayurvedic system of medicine, while his son Harindra is a surgeon, educated and trained in a western – style medical college. The old father often argues with his son about the supremacy of Ayurveda that had prevailed for the millennium. The old man gives his wife Ayurvedic medicine and never allows his son to treat her. Harindra argues "There are many good drugs in our Ayurvedic system. We know them, we use them, not the home products but those made in modern laboratories. What's wrong in using in the fight against disease the best that east and west have to offer? Medicine knows no race or nationality." (MM-166). Through this story of Harindra, Bhattacharya reconciles the old values and systems with the new values and systems. The reconciliation starts in Mohini's family also.

After a few days, mother comes to know from Harindra of Mohini's pregnancy. She realizes that it is the age of the young men and women with their new ideals and aspirations. She starts changing her ideas to cope with the new age. At last, the mother agrees that her son's path is the right one, "for the first time she could see her son clearly. His ideas, his point of new, moulded by the new spirit in the land, were different from hers and opposed to them, but they were, none the less, true ideals". (MM-220)

Analysis of Cultures of Two Countries

In *A Dream in Hawaii*, Bhattacharya analyses the cultures of two countries: Indian and the Island of Hawaii. He discovers more relevance in synthesizing the two cultures and enjoying the benefits of the both but together rather than oscillating between the two. Perhaps it was this idea in mind which resulted in the following statement by the novelists,

But our Hawaii is a multiple image. The unique East-West mix. The strong inter-acculturation. You cannot find the like of this ethnic spectrum anywhere else on the globe. (ADH-55-56)

The plot revolves around two main aspects- Yogananda also called Neeloy Mukherjee's quest for spiritual realization in the West and his love for Devjani's beauty. Yogananda's perspective of relationship between art and religion and Stella Gregson's thoughts over his quest for spiritual fulfillment have strong implications in the novel's underlying themes. Yogananda is the mouthpiece of Bhattacharya as he, throughout the novel, stresses on the relevance for reconciliation between the East and the West. A sort of cultural synthesis has been advocated throughout the novel, *A Dream in Hawaii*. Swami Yogananda believes that much can be achieved in the realm of universal peace through a synthesis between the East and the West, which would be the confluence between the ancient and the modern, between science and spiritualism. Yogananda had progressive views about life and his first message to the people of Hawaii was to accept all faiths and thereby to harmonies all beliefs.

Yogananda was in no way different from Swami Vivekananda who recognized and propagated India's historic role as a spiritual guide to the world. He advised the youth to imbibe in themselves 'life giving,' 'character building' ideas and insisted like Vivekananda that women should be educated but education should not be delinked religious and spiritual values which are indispensable ingredient of life in India.

Swami Yogananda sheds a little of the ancient India in him and had absorbs a little of modern America, a proper way of harmonizing the diverse cultures believing that a world culture will be possible only when it is based on the 'broad spectrum of interchange.' The Western mind's inexorable need is relaxation which the Eastern man discovered centuries ago in meditative repose thereby providing self-knowledge and filling the void between man and the infinite. Yogananda shows great faith in technology which no longer remains a challenge of the West alone. In fact, the whole human society is technology-based as this is necessary for the

preservation of life. Yogananda also visualises a close affinity between science and nature propagating this concept as an essential cognizance of the East-West Centre at Hawaii.

The Expatriate Experience- *Music for Mohini*

In Bhattacharya's *Music for Mohini*, character of Mohini has relinquished residency in her father's home country to become a resident of her husband's home. Likewise, Swami Yogananda in *A Dream in Hawaii* is no exception to this. Yogananda also relinquished citizenship in his home country, India and to become a citizen of his spiritual country, Hawaii. Therefore, the researcher will explain the detail vision of the both novels protagonist's expatriate experience.

In the novel *Music for Mohini*, the ultimate analysis, Bhattacharya is able to present a brilliant synthesis of before and after marriage in the character of Mohini. In fact, he presents the important values of Indian womanhood in Mohini's character. A modern sophisticated girl, Mohini is suave and urbane. She is an upcoming ratio-artist. She likes all good things of life and looks at the world around her terms of aesthetic values. Her heart is full of love for her husband and she wants to be admired and loved by him in turn. For, she gets only disappointment.

At first Mohini finds at the Big House almost unbearable. Mohini look. To start with you have to understand the Big House (MM-94). House has always been the symbol and the interest of the novelist. It has always symbolized ancestry, clan dynasty, family tree, kindred, line or lineage. However, Mohini at the later stage of the novel starts thinking about the prestige of the Big House. In Bhattacharya's Big House "the trees" are "growing aslant out of its gaping cracks" (MM-83). There are prohibitions and restrictions to be modern. However, modernity enters into these fortresses which safeguard tradition in look and substance. The problems of Mohini represent the problems of every married woman. Her dreams and desires have been shattered in her husband's house. She is oppressed in one way or the other. Mohini's mother-in-law is an orthodox woman. She has a stem faith on out influence customs and beliefs. As Jayadev has been pointed out earlier, the loneliness and forlornness of Mohini is on account of the temperamental

incompatibility between the husband and the wife. Brought up in two entirely different surroundings, they are poles apart from each other.

Dilemma in *A Dream in Hawaii*

In *A Dream in Hawaii*, Yogananda's dilemma is both cultural and emotional. The west has shaken him and brought his dilemmas to the surface, but their solution can be discovered only in his 'ashram' in the Himalayas. His stay in the west has been useful for him; it has also been beneficial to the Americans. He gives Stella a feeling of "release" (ADH-23) and Jennifer decides not to be Vincent Swift's "Puppet any more" (ADH-244). Even Walt Gregson, so disbelieving and Voluptuous, realizes the futility of working on his projected magnum work on the sexual habits of the American women (ADH-243), and he even begins to feel a personal need for Yogananda. Perhaps Yogananda's most significant influence has been on the American students to whom he has lectured:

Such a turn had been beyond his reckoning. The Young people Vying with each other to pull the great society to its knees. They denounced its morbid money culture listing the types of rottenness in that cesspool...(ADH-181).

However, as far as he himself is concerned, it is only upon the Indian Soil that the plant of his self-realization grows. Swami Yogananda's experience in Hawaii reflects how the balance between two extreme ideals would bring out a better result in the society. Not siding with any one of the extreme ideals, he finds Hawaii really an ideal place for the East-West meet. To get rid of the hard situation, Yogananda thinks of the need of Vedanta which can make human life better.

In the novel, the Swami also knows that the proper adjustment of the two cultures plays a vital role in life. He does not adhere to his own ideas about the construction-plan of the yoga centre, but permits Dr. Vincent Swift to have his own way with some of the trees on the centre site. Yogananda realizes:

Some compromise had to be accepted. He had no wish to be rigid.
Swami Yogananda justified himself. (ADH-209)

This attitude of compromise and readjustment helps Swami Yogananda a great deal in resolving the struggle of his own inner self, the struggle between the traditional Indian notions of asceticism or spiritualism and the modern Western conception of worldliness-Spirit and Body.

Man Does Not Live by Bread Alone

Thus by presenting the yearning of the people for the spiritual content in life, Bhattacharya demonstrates his conviction that man does not live by bread alone and that he needs food for his hungry soul too. In other words, material aspects and spiritual aspects are complementary in man's life and in preference to one; the other should not be neglected. And this becomes the major theme and the core concern of the novel. Ironically, Yogananda's attempts at spiritual experience take place in the enchanting atmosphere of the beautiful island of Hawaii, a pleasure resort of the most materialistic kind. The sight of the body's bareness on the Waikiki beach makes him feel enchanted. The result is spiritual disenchantment for him. The reality that he is searching for proves an illusion. The Guru that the disturbed Americans see in him is himself torn by doubt his own spiritual integrity.

Flashback from America to India

In the novel, the shifting of sense from India to America and in flashback from America to India is like displacement of experience. For, the applause from the American audience is of lost souls in search of a spiritual mirage. Such like, the vain attempts of an Indian Swami like Yogananda, himself and within the Indian culture are pitted against the binaries of the American culture in particular and the Western culture in general.

The Discontent Relationship

The discontent relationship means the unhappiness or disgruntlement between the two persons. Likewise, in Bhattacharya's *Music for Mohini*, the discontent relationship reveal between a protagonist, Mohini and his husband, Jayadev. Similarly, in *A Dream in Hawaii* also gave the discontent relationship between Swami Yogananda and Devjani.

In *Music for Mohini*, marital discord between husband and wife forms the thematic focus of Bhattacharya's *Music for Mohini*. Mohini and Jayadev play their part, but at no time in their life, do they trust at a common point. Mohini did her duties to her husband – chiefly that of helping him in a pragmatic way in furthering his programmes of social work. Marriage does not prove to be the panacea it is made out to be. She only suffers neglect, loneliness and humiliation after marriage. Her loving surrender only confirms her subjugation to her husband, who is too engrossed in his own pursuits to understand his wife's agony, ultimately she decided to stay away from the stifling atmosphere of the Big House during her pregnancy and go away to her father's place along with Rajan, the young motherless child.

In short, it deals with the marriage of Mohini and Jayadev, which gets accomplished, despite the intellectual divergence between the two. As we can see in the novel, Jayadev is totally different from his wife. Jayadev does not understand Mohini's deliberation. Jayadev is a visionary and an idealist. He only cares for the betterment of the country or nothing else. Jayadev wants Mohini to be with him in everything he does. As a scholar of eminence, he is disappointed to learn that there is no scholarship in his wife. Moreover a grave mistake that Jayadev makes is to discern between spiritual love and physical love and to treat them as two separate ideals. This is against the codes of real or true love since real loves are in tune with each other and unless they exist in the same being as two harmonious entities. Mohini's marriage fails to provide the promised happiness it mutilates her emotionally, enhancing the distance between the life partners. In the interpersonal relationship that exists between Mohini and her husband, it is the husband who enjoys a higher status and greater authority rather than the wife. For a person with higher authority and status to make a request to one who is inferior to him is to do something unusual. The claims and responsibilities that exist by virtue of their relationship determine the illocutionary act that a speaker performs. The whole verbal exchange between Jayadev and Mohini reflects the congenial relationship that existed between the husband and the wife. As a result, Jayadev is very poor in relational values. Over connection with the family comes in the way of the personal relationship of Jayadev and Mohini. This ideological gap between husband and wife creates problem between them. Mohini's reunion with her husband and the coming of a child bring ultimate happiness to Mohini. She eventually experiences a feeling of ecstasy, of

ultimate joy: “At last there was no discord: Life was music... her life was music... the true quest of every woman, her deepest need” (MM-188). However, later on Jayadev realizes that a balance and harmony is required for a happy life and life should be lived without any repression of natural urges. Thus finally a deep communion is established between Mohini and her husband. This communion is indicated by making Jayadev sit on the very perch on which Mohini used to sit.

In *A Dream in Hawaii*, Swami Yogananda is a Universalist whose character signifies a fusion of diverse culture. He belongs to America as much as to India. Devjani in the same novel is a leading character whom the West does not shake. In the beginning, Bhattacharya portrays Devjani as a typical Indian girl, having deep faith in the moral values of the East. Devjani is rather happy at Varanasi because she looks upon the Holy City as a fusion of the intellectual and the spiritual. And she considers herself immensely fortunate, for there she gets in touch with Dr. Neeloy Mukherjee, a teacher of philosophy whose classroom lectures on Vedantic monism are so very erudite and impressive. She begins to see Neeloy in a startling new perspective to see in him the Guru image. At the same time she is astonished to discover within herself ‘a hunger for the spiritual life’, a hunger of which she has been totally unaware. The mysterious relationship between Devjani and Swami Yogananda carries a new dimension of man –woman relationship. In this issue Swami Yogananda hovers between two selves his role as Prof. Neeloy Mukherjee, a man responding to the common feelings and as Swami Mukherjee, a man responding to the common feelings Yogananda the spiritual guide. His second meeting with Devjani at Hawaii enkindles a passionate attraction for her though he had already become a yogi at that time.

Devjani had put Neeloy on the mystic path. Again, it is his passion for her which proves to be the greatest hurdle in the way of Neeloy’s progress on the path. For, it is that very passion which in a way saves him from the culture-vulture’s entrance. There, however, are Neeloy’s affairs, strictly subjective Devjani, more or less, is steady in her faith. She emerges as the strongest character. At this juncture, Devjani establishes a close communion with Swami. When he tells her that Sadhana is only an “idea (that) can transcend its physical image and take shapes anywhere in the world,” (ADH-214) Devjani tells him frankly: “Sadhana is you” (ADH-214). As

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a matter of fact, she is interested in Yogananda, the physical entity, and not in the values which he represents. She even pleads with the spiritualist for having a broad-minded approach to the Western way of life. She thinks: “To over exact to that life way is to lose one’s perspective.” (ADH-233-234) However, Devjani does not wish Swami Yogananda to become Neeloy Mukherjee once again.

When Swami Yogananda’s very presence in America, Devjani again arrives on the scene and the Swami is able to meet her. Devjani had approached the Swami in order to be initiated into his ashram but he refused her entry. Now in Hawaii he initiates her without her even approaching him. ‘A love-hate reaction becomes inevitable’ (ADH-211). However, it is on her Guru’s advice that she stays on in Hawaii to preach the gospel of Vedana to the American people. At this point it deserves special mention that Devjani is as much in love with Neeloy Mukherjee as he is with her, but that she considers it to be an ‘audacity’, an ‘utter stupidity’, if not a sacrilege, to see the great Yogi of *Sadhana* in the context of a common human experience. All the same, she works as a powerful influence on both Neeloy and Swami Yogananda, and her character is far stronger than that of the Swami.

In the first part of Swami’s life he has infirmity of love with Devjani but when he comes in his own original self he realizes his own weakness. But in the last he reached on a conclusion that if he wants to convert himself as a yogi, he will try his best to leave the physical desire. We can say that physical desire has more power. It can convert the life style of a man. It is a famous proverb that everything can be fair in love and war. Yogananda has tried his level best to turn himself as a yogi, but could not reach his own destination. Due to the weakness of the love of Devjani. He makes a confession before Devjani: “Swami Yogananda has ceased to exist. This man you see is Neeloy Mukherjee. The yellow grab he still has to wear must be discarded” (ADH-232). Yogananda finally comes to the conclusion that human life is a mixture of good and bad qualities.

As a result, Bhattacharya’s both novels are in different ways proclaim the superiority and tenacity of Indian and Western culture through the major characters of Mohini and Swami Yogananda.

Summation

In “Cultural Commitments in Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *Music for Mohini* and *A Dream in Hawaii*” the culture has attempted to bring out a solution that the implementation of strategy and as a mechanism for generating commitment among society. In his second novel *Music for Mohini* the commitment treated is that of India’s choice between obscurantism and modernism as a way of life. In his sixth novel *A Dream in Hawaii*, Bhattacharya shifts his focus from the commitments of the country to those of individuals. Bhabani Bhattacharya has woven the plots of these novel’s themes related to certain basic problems which clog the advancement of India and which need a proper tackling to put the country in the right direction on its way to progress.

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