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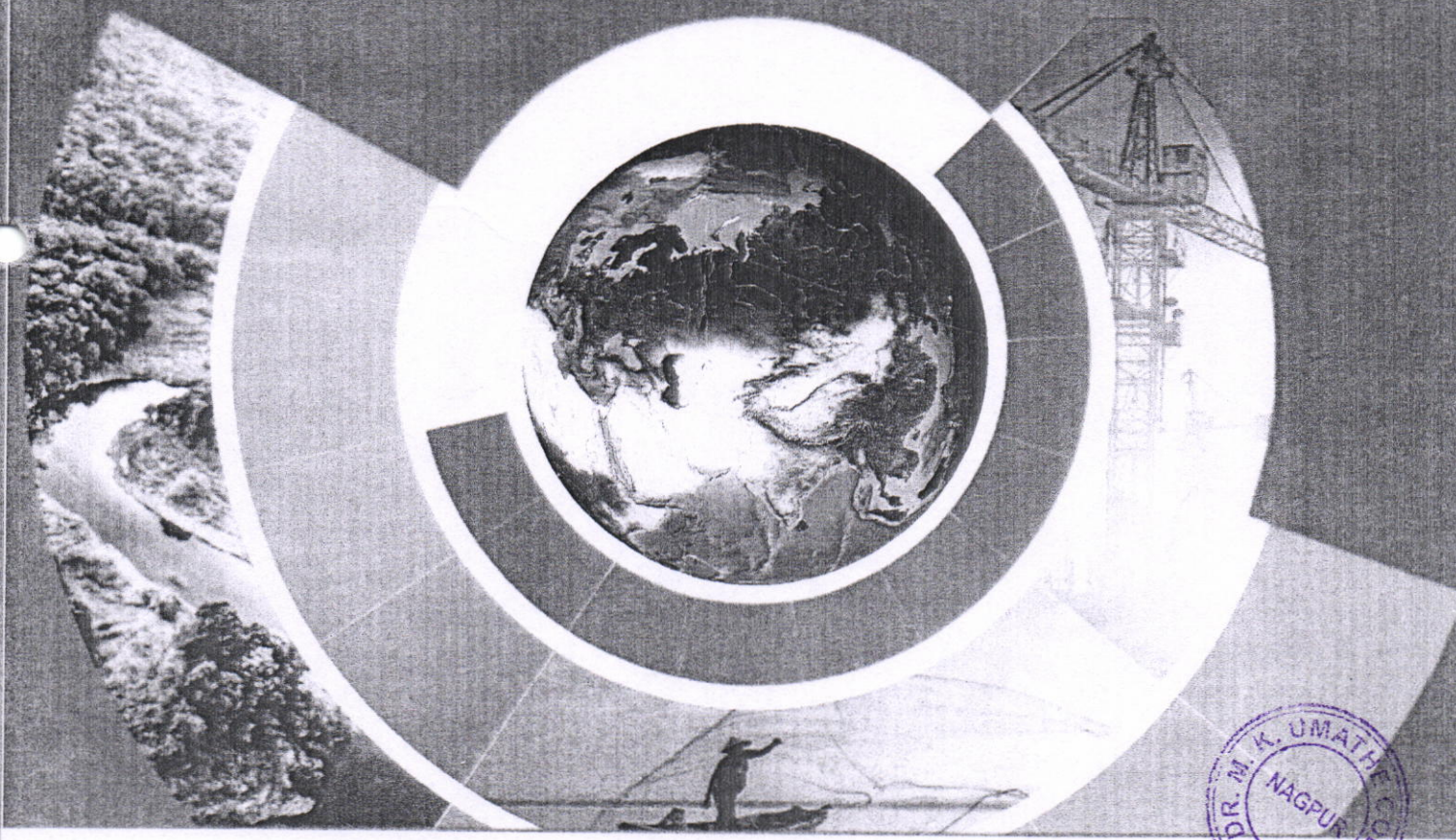
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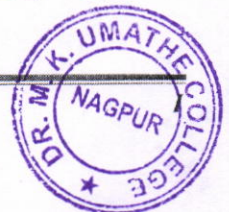
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Editor

Dr. R.V. Bhole

'Ravichandram' Survey No-101/1, Plot No-23, Mundada Nagar, Jalgaon (M.S.) 425102

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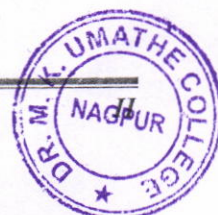
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**A Study of the East-West Encounter in Bhabani Bhattacharya's Novels
with Special Reference to Music for Mohini and Shadow from Ladakh**

Dr. Vaishali Meshram, Assistant Professor,
Dr. M. K. Umathe College, Nagpur

Abstract:

India's encounter with Britain has a massive impact that has still persisted in different spheres of life in our country. More than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism. There is no aspect of life in our country that has been unaffected by colonialism. It disrupted existing economic and social structures, forcibly retarded growth, undermined the political system, and divested traditional institutions and values of their vital function in society. If we consider the culture of the people in its widest, the most meaningful sense as the changing way of life, the gestures, the social institutions, the beliefs and the rituals that emerge as the people collectively engage with their environment, the art and the science. Two centuries of British rule has exposed the Indians to a culture that was alien to theirs. It becomes obvious that the British presence in India was and continues to be a strong formative force in our culture. It is easy to see how important this has been in the political and economic spheres, but its general influence on the perceptual frame works of contemporary people is often less evident. Literature offers one of the most important ways in which these new perceptions are expressed and it is in their writing and through other arts such as painting, sculpture, music and dance, the day to day realities experienced by colonized people have been most powerfully encoded and hence are so influential.

Here in this research article a humble attempt has been made to study the East and the West encounter in the selected novels of internationally acclaimed postcolonial Indo-Anglian Novelist Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya.

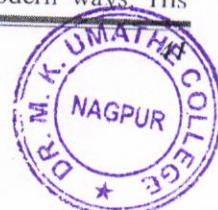
Keywords: Colonialism, Post-colonialism, Spiritual, Materialistic, Encounter, Conflict, Tradition, Modernity

Introduction:

During the period of more than 30 years from 1947 to 1978, Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya experienced life in two different worlds—the spiritual East and the materialistic West. The conflict between tradition and modernity is the result of the East–West encounter experienced by India in the wake of the English rule and the English education. In the complex fabric of contemporary Indian culture, the two easily discerned strands are the indigenous Indian traditions and the modern European conceptions. The East and West encounter highlights the polarities of these two distinct and separate cultures spiritualism of the East and technological and material values of the West. Almost every educated Indian today is the product of the conflicts and reconciliations of these two cultures, although the consciousness of this tension varies from individual to individual. Focusing on the effect of modernity on educated Indians, Nabneeta Dev Sen remarks, “The shallow superficial character of modernity, which came to India along with partial modernization, exerted its complex repercussions on our lives. Our urban elite consist of a motley bunch, often functioning under two contradictory sets of values. He wears a traditional face in domestic life and a modern mask in the public arena. Most of the traditional Indian social institutions like the joint family, or the caste system, even feudalism or serfdom still continue under a variety of guises, in spite of the long standing pressures against them all over India. The values that go with them, therefore, still live within us. While we are trying consciously to adopt modern values from the outside world, there is an external sense of freedom, but an inner feeling of freedomlessness due to his bondage to traditional values acutely bothers the sensitive modern man.” (Nabneeta Dev Sen, 1997)

Music for Mohini:

Dr. Bhattacharya has described the conflict between the tradition and modernity which remains a glaring problem in Indian society even today. The rural-urban clash is an important feature of the novel. The tradition ways of life stand in sharp conflict with those of modern ways. His



approach to life is always positive. There is always an affirmation of life amidst suffering. In the novel **Music for Mohini**, Bhattacharya has given two sets of characters. The first set upholds the old, established values of the past and second set pleads for change and deviation from the dead part and favors the new and unconventional value-pattern that suits the modern age. He juxtaposes different antagonistic characters in order to bring out their ideological conflict, and then finally leads them towards a reconciliation so as to create a harmony in life. In the beginning of the novel at **Mohini's** parental home, her father, the professor, is shown in conflict with Old Mother. Her father who is a highly educated and modern-minded man is inspired by the norms and fashions of the modern times, and hence admits his daughter to a Christian Convent School and also allows her to become a radio singer. He does not see any harm in Mohini's songs being recorded and sold in open market. But Old Mother who is above seventy opposes to the wide publicity of Mohini due to her conservative and rigid outlook. She has a blind faith in orthodoxy, superstitions and is a staunch supporter of the old and established moral values, does not like her son's ideas which are odd to her. She threatens to renounce the world when he does not pay heed to her; however, the professor handles it tactfully. But the real crisis occurs on the issue of Mohini's marriage. Being a man of modern ideas, he naturally wants to marry his daughter to an educated, urban-bred and cultured boy. He, therefore, rejects two proposals because the former party demands a heavy dowry and the latter one comprises the uncultured lot who examine Mohini physically as if she were an article for sale in an auction. Then there arrives the third party but at this time the prospective groom comes with his friends. All of them are bright young men, good-mannered, gracious and courteous. Having seen the girl, they approve her. The professor appreciates the boy wholeheartedly and agrees to marry Mohini to him. But Old Mother does not like the match at all. There occurs a conflict in the family and the novelist describes the discord as follows:

His voice was joyous and proud. "Mother, we've found the right match for our girl. Look up the almanac for an auspicious day."

Old mother was silent for a time, her face withdrawn and grave.

"Why, surely, you approve—"

"No, childling," She shook her head with quite decision. "He is not the right sort for our Mohini. He and his friends have no respects for elders. They smoked cigarettes in your presence, didn't they? And they ask our girl such indecent questions. 'Do you dance?' As if she is to be an actress or something. What vulgarity! No our girl has not been trained up in their un-Indian way, even if she has read at a Christian convent school. She will be a misfit in that fast circle..."

"But, Mother, the groom—"

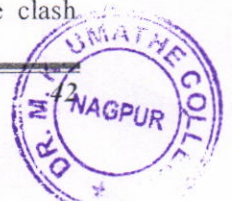
"The groom belongs to his circle. He has his roots in that soil. They are all alike. No tradition, no true culture. Apes of Westernism!"

His patience gave way. His face darkened. "Let our girl remain unwed," he cried harshly, "rather than be sacrificed to your antiquated outlook."

Old Mother's face was a picture of rage." Her eyelids flickered and her gentle mouth stiffened.

"Send me away to the Holy City. I won't have no mouthful of your food, or let water pass my lips." (Music for Mohini, P.44)

The issue of marriage is left unsettled due to this difference in outlook and Mohini remains unwed. The difference between the mother and the son is, however, resolved soon after the appearance of Jayadev on the scene and is found to be the most suitable groom for Mohini. He is accepted not only by the professor and old mother, but also by Mohini herself as he combines in him the traditional as well as the modern values in being both a great scholar and master of Behula village. Mohini is happily married to Jayadev and comes to Behula as the new mistress of the Big House. Here she again encounters the old values personified in her mother-in-law. Mohini is a beautiful girl of modern times, city-bred, convent educated and up-coming radio-star whereas her mother-in-law is a stubborn, stern-willed, orthodox, superstitious lady. The novelist describes the clash between Mohini and mother-in-law and between Jayadev and his mother. Jayadev knows that the clash



between him and his mother is an inevitable and difficult one as it is not a clash of personalities, but that of values, of tradition and modernity.

Shadow from Ladakh:

Dr. Bhattacharya, in the novel, **Shadow from Ladakh** describes the same clash between the traditional and the modern values in the form of the discord between Gandhigram and Steeltown. Steeltown, gaining in importance because of the Chinese aggression, starts expanding rapidly, and its surveyors and draftsmen measure and draw maps of the pasture-land adjoining the village, Gandhigram. The villagers are annoyed at it and oppose to Steeltown. **Bhashkar** and **Satyajit** symbolize the modern Western values and the traditional Eastern values respectively. Satyajit is pitted against antagonistic forces. Gandhian economics is threatened by the new cry of Industrialization. The steel production unit established in the vicinity of Gandhigram, known as Steeltown, the embodiment of the new approach. The villagers think that the people from Steeltown are unable to understand what the village stands for. It is simply a tract of land for them that can easily be acquired; however, think that the village has a deep meaning: "The apparently insignificant village was building up a model for the whole of India. The new community of people was creating a social order in which all were truly equals. All land belonging to the co-operative. Food from the fields distributed according to the needs. Other needs met by small industries based locally, economic self-sufficiency was the set aim." (Shadow from Ladakh, P.28)

The villagers have an aversion for big industries and have deep faith in Gandhian economics; Satyajit Sen meets Bhashkar Roy, and expresses his concern over the unhappy developments. Bhashkar disagrees with him and is of the opinion that in order to attain economic self-sufficiency and safeguard India's freedom, the establishment of big industries as well as large-scale steel production is essential. He argues, "Steel means economic progress. Machine, tools, tractors, big industrial plants, locomotives. Steel to fight poverty and hunger. But steel has gained a second meaning. It stands for our country's freedom. That is an inescapable fact, not to be changed by wishful thinking. Development plus defense—a compulsion of our current history." (Shadow from Ladakh, P.30) **Bhashkar**, the young chief Engineer of the factory, with his American training and highly Westernized outlook, represents a three-dimensional opposition to Satyajit and Satyajitism. **Satyajit** represents three things mainly decentralized small-scale industry on the economic plane, austerity and repression of natural instincts on the plane of personal life and non-violence on the plane of international relations.

Conclusion: Music for Mohini and Shadow from Ladakh show the novelist's perspective on the Indian tradition and the Western culture. He mentions some social customs and norms of behavior which are deeply rooted. He is a meditating man bridging the East and the West and concerning with the synthesis of an old and new. He suggests synthesis i.e. reconciliation in the end of the novels through either male or female characters.

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