

Bhabani Bhattacharya's A Goddess Named Gold: An Artistic Representation of Women

Dr. M.R. Bindu

Research Supervisor, Professor and Head, Department of English
Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology
Avadi, Chennai.

Priyadarshini S

Research Scholar, Department of English
Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology
Avadi, Chennai.

Abstract

The progression of women's lives over the centuries has been documented in the history of literature. Women naturally possess artistic qualities. India is a patriarchal country where men had a much superior status than women. One of the most well-known and highly regarded Indian English novelists of his time is Bhabani Bhattacharya. In terms of how women are portrayed in his writings, Bhattacharya contrasts from his contemporary writers. They sustain their roles as mothers, wives, and daughters while simultaneously recovering their individuality and affirming their real selves. The heroines in each of his novels embrace their destiny with fortitude. In contrast to his contemporaries, Bhattacharya provides a very different view of women in his novels. Thus, the focus of this article is on women, their pursuits, and their desire for individuality and identity in the select novel.

Keywords: Women, Identity, Patriotism, Familial, Social

Introduction

Bhabani Bhattacharya was one of India's early English novelists who strove to redefine fiction writing with themes other than independence struggle and post-independence turmoil. "Art must teach, but unobtrusively, by its vivid interpretations of life. Art must preach, but only by virtue of its being a vehicle of truth. If that is propaganda, there is no need to eschew the word" (Mishra). This was Bhabani Bhattacharya's perspective of fiction. Bhabani Bhattacharya became well-known because he made an effort to demonstrate to the public what we as a society missed and what we had in plenty. His pre- and post-independence books were centred on the atrocities the British committed against Indians. The fourth book written and published by Bhabani Bhattacharya is titled *A Goddess Named Gold*. He depicts India right prior to its declaration of independence. He appears to portray both the accomplishments and failures of the masses. It is an allegory in which each character serves as a symbol.

Bhattacharya introduces the Sonamitti village (Land of Gold). It depicts a group of six women who refer to themselves as "The Cowhouse Five". Meera Bai is the youngest and most well-known of them all. She is alleged to be actively engaged in nationalistic activities

and to be fighting for the welfare of the peasants alongside other ladies. Lakshmi, one of the women in the group, stands out from the others as Seth Samsunderji, her husband, has opposite attitudes and behaviour with hers. He is a moneylender and a textile merchant. Nearly everyone is deeply in debt to him. His obsession with resources and money is unrestrained. His insatiable desire for resources and money knows no bounds. His driver, Sohanlal, provides a charming explanation of the various types of Seths. Bhattacharya praises Sohanlal for having an incredible understanding of people and situations. He was in the army before becoming Samsunder's driver. He asserts that self-seekers must use freedom to pursue higher goals. He feels that the forthcoming struggle for independence will be, in some ways, worse than the one that has already been won. Atmaram, Meera's grandfather, is a wandering minstrel. He is regarded by the villagers as a renowned yogi who is capable of working miracles. He is portrayed as being identical to Gandhi. He gives the least consideration to his family or to himself and lives solely for the benefit of the people in his country.

An Artistic Representation of Women

A traditional Indian woman normally lives within the confines of her own four walls. She rarely exhibits either social or political awareness. She typically embraces Sita as her role model and aligns her interests with those of her husband. She does not appear to have an independent thought, and typically follows her husband's beliefs. The women depicted in *A Goddess Named Gold*, however, are from a different social stratum. They exhibit a relatively low level of social and political awareness. To fight for the welfare of their Motherland, they band together as a collective. The author's idealism is evident in the way he has portrayed those women. "The Cowhouse Five" is a group of six women who came together to fight for the welfare of the country. Against the objections of their family, they engage in nationalistic activities. They even end up in jail. They yell protesting slogans.

Meera stands out among them as the most prominent. She may be viewed as the book's protagonist. She, the other five women, and one of them, Lakshmi, the avaricious Seth Samsunderji's wife, gather every day in an abandoned cowshed at her home. The other women are Sohagi, the spouse of a tradesman, and Bimla, Champa, and Munni, spouses of peasants. They span a range of ages and social classes. They have the trait of being fiercely nationalistic and dedicated to defending their country. They had been detained as a result of their involvement with the Quit India Movement. Meera is the youngest of the women. She is barely sixteen when the book begins. She is bold and tolerant. She is admired by everyone in the village for being so helpful. She is alleged to have taken part in the independence struggle and was imprisoned at the young age of eleven along with others.

During her early years, she loses her parents. She resides with her grandmother, who is renowned for her nationalistic activism and leadership. Meera recounts how her grandma confined her in their kitchen in order to stop her from going with the latter. The grandmother is alleged to have left with the tricolour flag after saying that a young squirrel could not play the game. Then, after taking out the straw, Meera emerged from the kitchen, climbing up to its roof-thatch and making a way out. Her grandmother is proud to have been a part of the Quit India Movement. The grandfather of Meera is a travelling minstrel who hardly pays them no visits. The Cowhouse Five's female members consider Gandhiji to have emancipated them and given them a purpose in the New India. Gandhiji awakened them up, treated them as equals to their male members, and made them proud. Lakshmi, the Seth's wife, was expecting a child when she joined the independence struggle. An individual who has been

bitten by a snake is saved by Meera. As she uses her mouth to suck away the poisoned blood, she exhibits her ingenuity. She is constantly prepared to lend a helpful hand to anyone who requires it. She receives nothing but appreciation from the villagers. Bhattacharya depicts Lakshmi, Seth's wife, as a unique woman. The Cowhouse Five includes her. She is a nationalist who dislikes her husband. Her husband, cloth-merchant and money-lender Seth Samsunderji, is known throughout the region for his cunning and avarice. Unlike him, his wife shows kindness. Her husband disapproves of her nationalist activities. He merely wants to make money illegally. Seth faded away on a significant day for honoring the national flag. He fakes a business trip. Villagers know he is hiding. He obviously does not want to salute the flag.

The Seth controls massive cloth supplies. He hoards it and wants to sell it for a fortune. Women learn about the Seth's vast cloth stocks because Bengal's condition is so terrible. They fail to convince Seth to sell the cloth at a fair price. The Seth remains intact. His wife, Lakshmi, urges him to sell the stocks. However, he refuses. The women's leader, Meera, arranges a protest march to Seth's shop to force him to sell hundred Saris at a reasonable price. She suggests that all village women participate in the protest. If Seth refuses to sell the stocks, they threaten to walk nude. Seth's wife, Lakshmi, joins the protest. However, an incident occurs before the protest. Nago, Seth's son, fell into a well by mistake. Meera valiantly jumps into the well to save the boy. Meera's appearance surprises Munni. Sohagi and others plan to return on foot. Because of Nago's rescue, they're sad. But Meera keeps going. The women believe they are limbless without Meera. They exclaim, "Jai Meera!" and say she has proven herself countless times. The sixteen-year-old's inspires them all.

"The Cowhouse Five" start their demonstration along with a hundred other women. The policeman stops them by questioning if they have permission for the protest. The women react wildly to his query. The women question the policemen's allegiance to the foreign authority. Sohagi tries to persuade the policeman that their fight is against the Sethji, not the government. The policeman lets the women march after hearing their words. The marchers arrive at Seth's shop. Lakshmi's presence in the marchers frustrates Seth. He orders her to go back home. Meera's threat to undress does not really faze Seth.

The threat succeeds on Seth. Two packages of new saris sell out quickly. After their protest rally, the women are ecstatic. The Seth curses his lack of stubbornness. He plans to contest in the election to the District Board. So his act is meant to earn the favour of the villagers. After witnessing the women's march, he decides to arrange a school children's march with "Vote for Samsunder" slogans. With the help of an advertising company, the Seth puts on a free movie for the villagers. He exiles the women, including his wife, from the programme. Seth's idea upsets the women.

Meera finds a poor youngster, Buddhu, eating leftover jilebis in a leaf. She buys fresh Jilebis and offers him a handful. Her kindness makes her feel better. The novel changes when the minstrel arrives. He gives Meera an amulet that turns copper into gold when she does a kind deed. The minstrel misbehaves. After Meera saves Nago from the well, Lakshmi wants to give her a gold ring. The minstrel swaps Meera's copper ring for Lakshmi's gold ring while she sleeps. Then, Lakshmi goes to her parents' house. Seth is surprised to see Meera's gold ring instead of the copper one. She's similarly astonished. She accepts Seth's business offer. She receives half of the gold's profit. He buys a lot of copper jewellery for Meera. Since she wants to aid the underprivileged with the profit, she agrees to the deal. Her goal was to wipe

every tear. When she cooperates with Seth, she does not really realise she is assisting him. In the context, few believe her integrity and sincerity. Almost everyone thinks she joined Seth for profit.

Seth creates circumstances that allow kindness. Village women give Meera copper coins to wear. They ask her to return them after their conversion into gold. They also indicate that Meera has joined the Seth and gotten greedy. Plans by the Seth progressively turn out to be utter failures. The satisfaction derived by Meera from the so-called acts of kindness is not as much as what she has got from her earlier attempts to help the needy. Her friends misinterpret her as well, thinking that Meera has developed a selfish streak similar to Seth. She doesn't appear to be engaged in village activities. She also chooses not to take part in the procession organised by the villagers to celebrate Seth's electoral defeat. According to the public, there will only be corruption if he wins. Sohanlal, who is in love with Meera, is more aware of how her brain functions. He informs the people that the right candidate must be chosen. He feels that they will be unfit for freedom, if they fail to do so.

Soon after realising Seth is self-centered, Meera decides against working with him. The scenario in the village has changed for the better with the minstrel's appearance. The minstrel announces his plan to arrange for Meera to get married to a wealthy elephant merchant in order to gauge her attitude toward wealth. Meera responds angrily after hearing his statements in the situation. She pulls the amulet off her arm and throws it into the nearby river. Astonished by what he sees, the minstrel who is continuing to watch her is delighted. He feels convinced that Meera is not a silly thing as suspected by many.

The minstrel informs the public that the nation's grasp of the true meaning of freedom is inadequate. He asserts that it should not be abused to amass tangible wealth. He desires to use it to achieve something purposeful. Finally, Meera is able to persuade the minstrel that he must remain in the village to serve the inhabitants. She is committed to giving her own life to their cause as well. The villagers choose the minstrel as their candidate for the District Board election, shattering Seth's aspirations. The Seth, a chastened man, seems to take everything in stride and maintains his calmness. Lakshmi, his wife, has conflicting emotions about the situation. She agrees with Seth's mood but is also pleased with the decision made for the individuals involved. She congratulates Meera on convincing the minstrel to stay with them.

In Bhabhani Bhattacharya's novels, the female characters take up the majority of the narrative. They are depicted in all their guises, including that of a daughter, sister, mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother. Despite their convictions, he has portrayed his female characters as the ideal woman who are yet victims of society.

Conclusion

According to Bhattacharya, women should actively participate in social and familial life on an equal basis and with an optimistic attitude. The strong emotional connection between Bhattacharya's female protagonists, their community, and their country is thus a key aspect of his fiction. The evolving perceptions of women's role in societal and familial context are a major topic of discussion in contemporary fiction. Our patriarchal ideas regarding gender discrimination have changed as a result of changes in socio-economic realities, and this contemporary transformation is depicted in the novels.

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