

Tradition, Modernity, Compromise and Reconciliation: Navigating Conflict in Bhabani Bhattacharya's 'Music for Mohini'

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Abstract

Bhabani Bhattacharya was a nimble and punctilious litterateur and awakened novelist, his intellectual and wide knowledge is reflected in his novel *Music for Mohini*. His work on humanity, socio-economic disparity and synthesis of interpersonal relationship of the society existed in the contemporary age; he explicated the truest value of modernity, in context of correlation with conventional subtleties. He has portrayed the progressive and immutable conservative customs rooted since the centuries in his novel.

He inked the impeccable syllables to the immersive story of Mohini, a staple character in his novel - also he focussed on the inspiring women power post freedom struggle, in relation to adaptability of western culture suitably cogitative to eastern, Bhabani poignantly limned exploitation of poorly destitute people in view of rural urban divide. He was the noted contemporary litterateur who literally and metaphorically narrated the rural colloquial-vernacular; exactly congruous to the English philology is unmatched.

This paper examines how Bhattacharya portrays the clash between tradition and modernity in post-independence India through the protagonist Mohini's experiences. It analyses the author's use of music as a metaphor for harmony and reconciliation, highlighting how characters navigate cultural tensions, generational differences, and personal aspirations. Additionally, it investigates Bhattacharya's narrative techniques in depicting the gradual transformation in conflicts into understanding and compromise. Through this novel, Bhattacharya expresses growing concern about shaping a new India and emphasizes the measures needed to ensure the country's progress toward greatness. The plot successfully portrays him as a social reconciler, reflecting his trust in the goodness of human life.

Keywords: conflict, resolution, modernity, societal values, tradition, transformation

Introduction:

Bhabani Bhattacharya has been a writer of humanitarian approach, which he upholds both in principle and practice. K.K Sharma rightly being with "*a transparently positive vision of life.*" (KK, Bhattacharya p.13)

Bhabani believed that an artist need not shy away from the labels of 'Partisan or chauvinistic' as an artist has every right to work for the reformation of his society, so far, his or her commitment does not impair the value of his art as art.

Bhattacharya himself has gone too far to prove his argument. Hence in all his novels, he intricately weaves themes of conflict resolution and social justice. His narratives often delve into the complexities of the human psyche, highlighting inner conflicts related to class struggles, humanism, and individuality. Bhattacharya emphasizes humanism as a pathway to resolve conflicts. He described studiously his motif in context of the fiasco of moral values of character in the people, which is deeply prevalent in the society in general, he astutely observed the commingled subtleties of conservative approach and modernity, especially in the villages, he was of the opinion that the metaphysical contradiction ingrained in the society must be devised with the absolute solution, with humanistic accessibility and modalities, to the exclusion of everything else, to extricate the dialectics and conflicts of cognitive thoughts and rudimentary customs, in a wider perspective of tradition and modernity.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's writing unleashed the pathways to either conciliate or concede interpersonally, the underlying facts of the deep rooted social disparities, which causing a catastrophe to subsist, because the gullible people lack to defy and antagonize oligarchy rulers, they were destined to face the undue corporal and mental exploitation since the umpteenth years. He exerted influence on the people to raise their voice to establish egalitarian principles and inclusive society in context of the topical issues of the contemporary structures, to establish the egalitarian and harmonious society transmogrified connaturally itself.

Research Objectives:

The key objective of the research is to enlighten on the comprehensive study of inter-mingled core issues of socio-economic disparity arising among the people, who are aggrieved with traditional customs, afflicted with conservative values and oppressed with growing conflicts in the society and the sociality, which is changing itself to neoconservative society to modernity, on the basis of principle doctrine of evolutionary system, which has been dexterously explicated by Bhabani Bhattacharya in his novel.

Central character of Mohini is a *raison d'être* of research objective, wherein Mohini struggled with patriarchal society, she meted out many challenges to conciliate and strive to reform the society, culture and the social forces, which remained circumstantially with fraught relationship, even after India got freedom. Research paper will articulate the motif of Bhabani Bhattacharya; how he portrays culture, humanity, education and modernity and distinct elements for a better society.

In concluding the object of research will describe how Mohini managed to bridge the gap of orthodoxy and social discrimination among the people of the society. A comprehensive study, importance of education, inherent gender issue of patriarchal system, conflict of

neoconservative thoughts of traditional and modernity -- are the considerate objectives of the research to be manifested in today's relevancy .

Literature Review

Music for Mohini is a unique limn of the exactitude literary work on social transformation and characterisation of the old customary to neoconservative to modernity by Bhabani Bhattacharya, in the India of that time.

The novel invites further exploration into how these themes continue to shape societal values and individual identities in an ever evolving cultural landscape. Additionally, literature reviews have identified gaps in research regarding the synthesis of Eastern and Western values as depicted in Music for Mohini. While some studies focus on individual themes, there is a need for more comprehensive analysis that explore how these themes interact and influence one another within the story of the novel.

Discussions: -

“Her life was music- the true quest for every woman, her deepest need”. (Bhabani Bhattacharya p.232)

Music for Mohini was published in 1952, immediately after freedom, reveals a new consciousness of Indianness and Indian cultural heritage versus western tradition and culture. Music for Mohini is a progressive novel which unveils certain sociological aspects of Indian life which we needed to shed to stand parallel to the entire world with utmost strength and valour. Through this novel, Bhabani Bhattacharya dwells into how individuals and families strive to reconcile traditional values with modern ideals. The novel expresses an affirmative vision of life.

The story of the novel portrays ‘Mohini’ the central character as a woman of substance and progressive in nature. Woman is adaptable and intelligent to understand the complexities of human behaviour.

Mohini's character and her life is of progressive nature, she plays a pivotal role by bridging a gap between the followers of conservative traditions and one who believe in evolution and moderate thoughts, her comprehensive ideas of emotive-development -- articulates her personality to a progressivist.

Marriage of Mohini and Jayadev is significant, while Jayadev comes from an aristocratic family of a village, his rural background and moderate thinking weighing the traditional customs despite him being an intellectual.

Mohini is not new to village customs, whilst she at her own home in the village, she faces challenges to make the family members understood about outdated customs of no relevance in the transition virtually in the period of neoconservative to modernity, in conformity with her spouse Jayadev, who supports Mohini, when she raises the fundamental issues with firm

reality of changing superficial and inimical customs, as the time goes by, despite difference of standpoint in between the both Mohini and Jayadev. Jayadev balances and holds with inheritance culture and reform in the society, side by side.

The novel mentions some rituals and customs practised in the shade of religion. These references to established-traditions are deliberately added to the structure of the story as one of the aims of the author is to give a clarion call to the society and suggest for a change. Hence, Mohini's character is delineated to stand for life and therefore metaphorically she struggles as an antagonist against the indifference and pliability of the orthodoxy imposed on her. At the same time Mohini is adaptable and ready to adjust and reform her stance to reconcile with her family and society on the whole, viewing this, we can deduce the intention of Bhabani Bhattacharya being the advocate of harmony and peace.

Mohini has her individual conflict; a city bred young woman marries Jayadev, an intellectual man with traditional values from a rural background. Upon moving to her new home, she finds it difficult to adapt to her husband's family customs and the strict social structure of the village. Her mother-in-law a strong pillar of orthodoxy in the novel expects Mohini to reorient herself as per the established tradition and norms of the Big-House. Meanwhile, Jayadev, embodying a progressive yet introspective mindset, encounters his own challenges in aligning his ideals with the realities of rural living. Time and again the mother plays the music on the theme of family tradition making Mohini's life uncomfortable. Her earnest desire to ensure the continuation of family traditions drives her to the act of making Mohini offer her blood to the goddess. Mohini feels the weight of her mother-in-law's superstitions and the pressure to fulfil traditional roles, such as bearing children, which creates a sense of fear and anxiety about her worth as a wife. This environment stifles Mohini wanting her to escape into light and freedom.

As the story progresses, Mohini begins to understand her mother-in-law's perspective, recognizing that her adherence to the traditions stem from the deeply ingrained beliefs.

Mutual understanding cherishes genre of communicating skill, which helps to transform amicable behaviourism; this skill paves the thoroughfare of respect towards mother-in-law even for the traditional customs inflicted reluctantly on her, Mohini putting her own aspects before mother-in-law very sublimely, she deftly navigates intricacies of personal bonding with her mother-in-law.

Her adoption of the unpleasant customs is a vindication of conciliation to old fashioned traditions and preposterous orthodoxy.

Mohini makes a good as a bridge to transform society afflicted with orthodoxy and catastrophic barriers of conflict of rudimentary tradition, and transition phase to modernity, for betterment of women in India. Bhabani Bhattacharya portrays social transformation in a broader prospective in his novel on Mohini's endeavour to harmonize her journey full of conflicts and conciliations.

Mohini deftly made her new recognition in the fresh ambient at her new home, sustaining on her bedrock-identity, she was judicious enough to redress the conflict of tradition and modernity that needs homogeneous character and congruity with her mother-in-law, she articulated her equitable perception of her ingrained compassion, endurance, forbearance and strong will-power to make the existed-conflict superficial and insignificant, she symbolizes evaluation to the patrimonial relationship to the cost of her core identity.

Mohini has harmonious integration with her mother-in-law and her spouse Jayadev, she is a high spirited lady dyed-in-the-wool of modernity, while Jayadev is one who is strong believer of conventional traditions, Jayadev conjures up an image of Mohini in his mind as a progressivist partner and social reformer. Whilst, Jayadev oft disregards feelings of the heart of Mohini and this leads her to disappointment; creates a telling distance between them.

Jayadev, metaphorically personifies Mohini as Maitreyi from the eyes of the ancient times, he creates undue mental stress on Mohini, he ideates of her to assimilate evolutionary piety, simultaneously, wants her to adopt traditions and patrimonial customs. Mohini reconciles her realistic approach of modernity to Jayadev's anticipation of duality of standard of his idealism, which panders conflict in their relationship.

The time goes as like, Mohini and Jayadev understand the art of living, gracious and strong willed Mohini guided by her innate sociable character of resilience and adaptability, transmogrifies, the other way around, idealist Jayadev, moderates his beliefs, values and rigid stands, he would follow in life.

They begin to understand each other better. Mohini starts to appreciate Jayadev's ideals while asserting her own identity and Jayadev learns to value Mohini's perspective and emotional needs. A few awkward instances occurred in the family helped them to introspect each other's role in their life. Mohini realizes her duties towards her husband and helps him in furthering his programme of social work. She begins by giving elementary education to women folk of Behula. Hence, they both share a common interest in social work; this brings them closer to each other. On the other hand, Jayadev comes out as moral support to Mohini by declaring that she need not comply with the age-old superstitions dictated by his mother. He disregards the blind beliefs and urges Mohini to fight against superstitions: "*We're fighting ignorance and superstitions, aren't we?*" (Bhabani Bhattacharya p.203)

Their evolving relationship symbolizes reconciliation between tradition and modernity, illustrating Bhattacharya's broader commentary on the complexities of marital dynamics in Indian society.

In the end, the conflict between Mohini and Jayadev serves as a microcosm of the larger societal tensions between old and new values. Through their journey, Bhattacharya emphasizes that true partnership requires empathy, communication, and a willingness to adapt—the qualities which are essential for navigating the challenges of modern relationships within the traditional frameworks.

One of the prominent concerns of Bhabani in this novel is about the reformation and transformation of ideologies regarding social values in the post independent India. As a necessary denouement to his insistence for the change he represents a picture of contemporary society and attracts attention to many beliefs and practices which have become deeply engrained. Mohini thus seems to be a mouthpiece of Bhabani Bhattacharya; her character is rendered so well to convince the readers to understand the importance of being like a musical instrument – harmonizing with occasional dissonance sometimes playing low tune and sometimes high note to create a great composition or melody. As K. R. Chandrashekharan notes, Mohini's transformation reflects her mental growth and ability to navigate change and compromise, making her a symbol of resilience. Mohini symbolizes a new, liberated generation, she redefines the role of gender in the society through her struggles while she standing undeterred in the conventional mode of living. Mohini and Jayadev understand that true modernity doesn't mean rejecting tradition altogether but finding ways to blend the two.

Music for Mohini remains relevant in contemporary India, as the themes of tradition, modernity, and reconciliation continue to resonate within the society in our country even today. The novel's exploration of these tensions reflects ongoing debates in India about how to modernize without compromising cultural and religious values. The issues such as arranged marriages, generational conflicts, caste system, orthodoxy and the role of women remain as relevant today as they were in the mid-20th century. Judea, a social reformer represents Gandhian perspectives envisions an ideal village where people are free from the shackles of rigidity and orthodoxy. Jayadev propagates social freedom being the fundamental necessity for our country. Bhabani Bhattacharya writes: “*Our political freedom is worth little without social freedom*”. (Bhabani Bhattacharya p.127)

Bhabani Bhattacharya, a scholar and a robust visionary had a sense of dedication towards his country and his art too. He has produced literature with substance which has relevance to life even today. His progressiveness and visionary ideas are hailed from none other than Great Tagore to whom he admired since his childhood. His love for spirituality and cultural heritage of India comes from Gurudeva Rabindra Nath Tagore. Bhattacharya's emphasis on compromise and reconciliation is a powerful message in the present-day context.

India's power exists in its capability to constitute diverse standpoint, Bhabani Bhattacharya poignantly depicts in the novel - Music for Mohini, which manifests social transformation, harmonic relationship, mingle of conservative traditions and modernity, conflict and reconciliation, which remains most relevant in this context.

In the abstract, analytic and comprehensive deliberation in Music for Mohini, the author Bhabani Bhattacharya explicates the intricacies of adaptability, reciprocity and resilience in connection with traditions; he delineates neoconservative-approach and instinctive repression of modernity in transforming the society. The chronicle evolution deciphers and interprets how individuals endeavour to equilibrate the embodied sociality, culture and traditions, which

transfigures as the time goes by the social obligations and conjures with the instinct evolutionary transformation in the society.

Bhabani Bhattacharya vividly portrays the characterised attributes of protagonists in the novel; they have contentious issue of historical traditions, culture and motif of confrontation of a metamorphosing social structure in the world. Their odyssey of culture, traditions and customs is fraught with wrangle of supremacy and identity, and the virtual possessions vested in due to illusion of self grandeur.

The crux of the subject matter in novel *Music for Mohini* is conflict of traditions, customs and modernity; the different characters of the novel navigate the astute observations of tradition and modernity and interpersonal relationship in evolutionary society of different culture and customs and social structure. The author spells out the conflict of transition of traditions to modernity and relationship and reconciliation within individuality, how they devolve into conflict and lead the way to equitable society.

Mohini, the central character of the novel emerges as a woman-protagonist in the transition phase of social transformation to modernity; she reconciles traditional customs to accommodate with moderate values, Mohini endeavours to navigate the pervasive intricacies in the society, and transform the sociality, her insightful skill and nimble virtuosity makes her a leading protagonist, to which she personified herself an ideal by building a bridge between social disparities of tradition and modernity.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is wildly successful to explicit the astute observation of the central character Mohini, in *Music for Mohini*, wherein Mohini articulates her transformative thoughts more clearly on thematic issues of conflict in tradition and modernity; Mohini harmonizes the reconciliation, compromises in contemporary transition phase amongst the opposition forces; she manifests art of living conciliating conflicts for coexistence with harmony and integration to reform the harmonious society; *Music for Mohini* is a salutary work by the renowned litterateur Bhabani Bhattacharya, navigates the conflict to reconciliation.

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