

**Bhabani Bhattacharya's
Steel Hawk And Other Stories**

Smt.Mangala L. Nayak
Associate professor
Department of English
BGVS's Arts and Commerce College
Sadashivgad
India

Abstract

Bhabani Bhattacharya was a good translator, prose writer, press attaché, visiting professor and a short story writer- a multifaceted personality. Short story entitled, " **Steel Hawk** and other stories" (1968) contains a delightful collection of fifteen short stories, all written with subtlety and skill. They are the stories of psychological interest and social reality. There is a fine account of a thrilling experience of the villagers who enthusiastically welcome the arrival of an aeroplane, which is a symbol of modernity. In "Glory at Twilight" Bhattacharya gives a touching story of Satyajit, "Public Figure" exposes satirically the clamour for publicity of certain men who donate jewellery for the Defence Fund. "My Brave Great Uncle" gives an altogether different setting, taking the readers into a supernatural world, "Lathu Ram's Adventure" is a spirit of adventure, "Names are not Labels" is based on the fine and pithy expression, 'Names have spiritual value, they are not just labels', "Pictures in the Fire" is very interesting which has woven round a simple and catchy incident, "Mere Monkeys" represents the human emotions that operate in a monkey's mind, "She, Born of light" is the story of the exploration of the depth of human minds which has a philosophical undertones. Thus many of the short stories in this collection have a psychological approach to people and events. This article also shows that a

realistic appraisal of the social content and a frank approach to the psychological complexities of modern life.

Key words: Stories, Steel Hawk

Introduction

Bhabani Bhattacharya is a rare genius in the firmament of Indian English fiction of post Independent India. As a novelist, what Bhattacharya has earned in the realms of Indian English fiction is really enduring. Besides, a novelist he was a good translator, prose writer, press attaché, visiting professor and a short story writer etc.- a multifaceted personality.

Bhattacharya has attained a distinct place as a short story writer. Bhattacharya shows himself as an all round artist touching upon all aspects of life right from rope dancing to the heights of Hindu philosophy. Like the other Indian English short story writers, Bhattacharya has also shown equal brilliance with Indian characters and Indian atmosphere. His stories are thoroughly Indian with a spicy language.

Bhattacharya's anthology of short stories entitled, "Steel Hawk and other stories" (1968) contains a delightful collection of fifteen short stories, all written with subtlety and skill. They are the stories of psychological interest and social reality. They reveal considerable variety in theme and the mood varying from light-hearted comedy to realities, from flight of imagination to keen observation of realities, from a study of the mind of animals to an exploration of depths of human soul. His stories reflect the situation in the post independent India.

Steel Hawk

It is strange that the story "Steel Hawk" which the book is named after is the last in the collection but not the least in importance. Bhattacharya very aptly coins the word 'Steel Hawk' for the aeroplane. Here is a fine account of a thrilling experience of the villagers who enthusiastically welcome the arrival of an aeroplane, which is a symbol of modernity. Therefore, their acceptance symbolize the Indian's acceptance of industrialization which is instrumental for the socio-economic transformation of the country after independence. It also brings out the innocence and simplicity of village folk and calmness of the country side.

Bhattacharya also refers pointedly to the customs and ideas of the old people. He gives a fine summing up of life, “Life is a great wheel! It spins slowly in the stream of time, a finger’s width in a hundred years! Things on top get lost to the view with the wheels turning but, as time flows on they rise again!” The innocence of the child and the ticklish questions it poses are also neatly sketched.

Babla questions what happens if birds attack the flying wonder. Then the mother replies, “Birds have no malice, darling. They have clean thoughts”. Thus reaction and inspiration of the flying characters to the “flying wonder” are described here.

Glory at Twilight

In the short story entitled “Glory at Twilight” Bhattacharya gives a touching story of Satyajit, who by force or circumstances, has to sacrifice his life and that of the members of the family to help Srinath, especially in performing the marriage of Beena, his fifth daughter. The traditional customs and procedures of marriage are fully drawn. It tells of man’s futile efforts to get out of self-made shackles of prestige. There is a fine inner conflict in the mind of Srinath and Satyajit.

Public Figure

In one of his stories, “Public Figure” he exposes satirically the clamour for publicity of certain men who donate jewellery for the Defence Fund. The author must have had in his mind the days of the National Defence Fund. It is an extract from his own novel, “Shadow from Ladakh” adopted for the short story form.

My Brave Great Uncle

In spicy language of rhythmic beauty, Bhattacharya depicts the character of the great uncle in the short story “My Brave Great Uncle”. Here he gives an altogether different setting, taking the readers into a supernatural world of gnomes and spirits like the Rosicrucian machinery in Pope’s “Rape of the Lock”. The key of this story is “there is no friend, like light”. The story runs through alterations of fear and anxiety. He gives a touching account of the aged Brahmin who dies by a paralytic stroke. He refers to the Hindu customs.

Lathu Ram’s Adventure

Bhattacharya makes an enthralling beginning about the annual fair in “Lathu Ram’s Adventure”. The spirit of adventure is much on Lathu Ram and he thinks he should make himself a well known figure by taking the boy Kedar Narayan to the tower. The boy who has tasted the sense of freedom makes Lathu Ram a play thing. Lathu Ram gets naturally disappointed when he learns from the man at the central tower that Kedar Narayan had already been found.

Names are not Labels

The next story “ Names are not Labels” reminds us one of A.G. Gardiner’s essay, but one would be struck by Gardiner’s sentence, “ After all a name is only a label, and if it is honest, the shorter it is the better.” Of course that was written in a different context. But the title of this story is suggestive of Gardiner’s essay.

The conclusion has a dramatic effect, altogether unexpected, but is given a fine turn, “In prison the convicts lose their names, and become numbers” there is a Goldsmithian touch in his method of narration. The whole crux of the story is based on the fine and pithy expression, “Names have a spiritual value. They are not just labels.”

Pictures in the Fire

Bhattacharya’s another short story called “Pictures in the Fire” is very interesting which has woven round a simple and catchy incident.

Mere Monkeys

“Mere Monkeys” is another short story which makes a profound impact on the reader, as it represents the human emotions that operate in a monkey’s mind. It is a story of revenge wreaked by a female monkey which had killed her baby, by dragging it into a well and losing its own life in the process.

A Moment of Eternity

The author’s sense of compassion and humanitarian sympathy is brought out in the story, “A Moment of Eternity”. A poor woman who loses her husband when he is about to get a job, gets maddened by the grief. In a fit of frenzy, she kills her two children and tries to kill herself but she is arrested and sentenced to imprisonment only to recollect the unhappy memories

of her family. Here the author poignantly evokes the pathetic feelings of the reader. The title of the story is highly significant. He uses a racy style which is at once inspiring and suggestive.

Just Coincidence

In “Just Coincidence” he has given an instance of human psychology and man’s premonition. It has an arresting beginning.”This is a true happening, but the strangeness of it gives, perhaps the semblance of imaginative fiction”

Acrobats

His another story titled “Acrobats” is again a psychological study of a father and motherless son. He attempts to take revenge on his father who has fallen in love with a maid servant by falling down from the height of the acrobatic feat. This changes his father’s attitude resulting in the reconciliation of father and son with a common respect for the dead mother.

The Faltering Pendulum

In “The Faltering Pendulum “, Bhattacharya gives a touching and moving sketch of the life of a dispirited young woman. The rag woman purchases three ripe pumpkin seeds embedded in the flesh of a sliced crescent piece, and a month old goat youngling. As a result of shocks and disappointments in life, she wants to seek some fulfillment through the young limbed pumpkin vines. But the vines have tricked her. It seems that whatever she touches must become barren. The short but pathetic sketch of the exit of the goat from the earth is masterly.

The Quack

The next story “The Quack” gives a very good idea how quack doctors squeeze our money for nothing by making a mountain out of a mole hill. What can be cured and relieved at a low cost, the doctor makes the patient’s purse thinner by four rupees – four! Somebody or other falls a victim to the tact of the quack, whose statements make everything appear like truth, even truer than truth itself.

Pilgrims in Uniform

In “Pilgrims in Uniform” Bhattacharya gives a philosophical pill to those men who are usually sunk in rank materialism. Ram Lal, a lad of sixteen who is travelling with the dark motives of theft, gets reformed on listening to the philosophical dissertations of Bhargava. This

reminds one of Goldsmith's well-known line in his "Village Preacher," 'Fools who came to scoff remained to pray'. Bhattacharya gives an arresting glimpse of the Car festival of Puri Jagannath.

She, Born of light

"She, Born of light" is the story of the exploration of the depth of human minds which has a philosophical undertones. A rustic girl by name Suta meets a painter Dhruva in one of Ajanta Caves. He expresses his desire to paint her picture. In this process, he makes amorous advances towards her, shocked by the incident, she decides to leave him but changes her mind later and yearns for him. But, the painter's coolness makes her go back to her once rejected lover Nakul. The story embodies Tagore's philosophy of fullness of life and reconciliation of earthly claims with heaven.

Conclusion

This article concludes that many of the short stories in this collection have a psychological approach to people and events. They show the author's keen perception of human action and reaction. 'A Moment of Eternity', "The Faltering Pendulum" and "Pilgrims in Uniform" deserve special mention as revealing the fine art of short story narration.

Bhattacharya is a stern who grappled with the hard problems of contemporary life. We also find a realistic appraisal of the social content and a frank approach to the psychological complexities of modern life. The hidden conflicts in the mind have been laid bare. The human character has been revealed in all its strength and weakness. Thus his short stories bear the impress of his genius.

By and large, Bhattacharya's short stories reflect the situation in the post Independence and also reflect seriousness of purpose and give an insight into his personality, his awareness of human presentiment and his ability to explore human psyche.

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