Search Of Selfhood and Alienation in Bhabani Bhattacharya's *Shadow From Ladakh*

S. Umadevi

Assistant Professor In English,

Sree Sowdambika College of Engineering, Aruppukottai.

ABSTRACT

One of the prominent writers in Indian Writing in English, Bhabani Bhattacharya is a notable novelist, who depicts social crises for the readers. Bhattacharya's fifth novel *Shadow from Ladakh* was published in the year 1966. This novel brought the novelist, Sahitya Akademi Award for the year 1967. The novel is not set against the crucial background of the Chinese aggression in 1962. The power of the military encounter with the unknown enemy at Ladakh is defined everywhere. The major theme of this novel explores the different opinions of ideologies during this unpredictable juncture of Indian history. The love travels between Bhaskar Roy and Sumita is initially opposed by the Indian society. And the ideology, which is discussed in this novel is an allegory, and never fails to find out the resolution for various conflicts of ideologies. It is really proven that Bhattacharya plans to explore the vision of social regeneration in Indian society by connecting the ideology of Gandhism and Nehruism. This paper is an analysis of social issues, which explains a synthesis of the spinning wheel and the spindle. Another notable synthesis discussed in this novel is of Gandhiji's asceticism and Tagore's aestheticism.

Keywords: Threat, Chinese aggression, Military encounter, Asceticism and Aestheticism.

This paper tries to bring out how the synthesis of the Gandhian social ideology, and the tremendous progression of science and technology alienates one from one's society. Bhattacharya brings out the way of life of the people who follow Gandhian principle, that is leading a simple life with high thinking as an ethic of life in the Indian society. The novel deals with the clashes between values and the goal of the Gandhian principle. Two types of living such as industrial and rural, are discussed in this novel. The novelist sketches the principal character of Satyajit as a miniature Gandhi even though he is equally interested in India's industrialisation in view of the increasing population as well as the external threat. Through the handling of the theme, it is proven that the novelist is undoubtedly ambivalent.

Taking extreme positions Bhaskar and Satyajit face different phases of life never to be united. But Sumita, sketched in Satyajit's image and planning to marry Bhaskar, will be the remarkable idea of the two contradictory ways.

The different ideologies stand for the rivalry between Gandhigram and Steeltown. Satyajit is the principal figure of Gandhigram. The following lines express the situation, "Integration of the simple and the sophisticated and the ancient and the modern, city and village, East and West" (*Shadow* 215). He is an original Gandhian who leads a simple lifestyle with ascetic ideas and is a true Tagorean in his career and thoughts. Though he is brought up on the refinements of Tagorean influence, he was married at Santiniketan to beautiful Suruchi, a woman of vitality. The couple has a beautiful and lovable daughter, Sumita, who is cautiously brought up by her father. But Satyajit faces a conflict in his personal life as Suruchi is against his austerities and as Sumita loves Tagorean aestheticism. Sexual abstinence is forced on Suruchi by Sathyajit but she and Sumita have strong belief in his ideal and dedicate themselves to a life of austerities. Thus, Satyajit becomes a disciplined Gandhian following the principles of Gandhian economics and ethics in the regulation of the life of Gandhigram and the conduct of his own life.

While India is on the path of progress, Chinese Aggression shows its face to collapse the situation. As Satyajit is a firm disliker of non-violence he steps ahead for a Peace March to Ladakh with confidence to pacify the Chinese aggressor. He makes himself ready to face hatred with smile. The ideological life of Gandhigram is collapsed and Gandhian principle is faded by the new type of industrialization. The arrival of young Chief Engineer Bhaskar Roy, who was trained in America becomes the backbone of Steeltown. His experience from America gives him hope in steel standing for mass production to cope with the increasing population of India.

Bhaskar plans to expand his Steeltown factory which would result in connecting Gandhigram. Thus, the two dedicated men, Satyajit and Bhaskar, are brought to polar opposition. The board of Directors of the Unit of Lohapur Steel Company finally accepts Bhaskar's scheme of expansion. Even Nehru's Government gives him a chance for this expansion. Bhaskar understands that Satyajit is the real threat to his plan. Satyajit is worked by two burning problems—the peril of the country from China's attack and the peril of Gandhigram being swallowed up by Steeltown. Of the two unbearable situations, China's attack on India, the national cause, gets priority with Satyajit and he puts forward a requisition to the government for a Peace Mission to Ladakh. But the government never accepts his proposal. Instead, the Chinese order ceasefire and withdraw their forces immediately. Thus, the nation's problem ends but the unresolved conflict in the nation's policy remains.

Satyajit comes back to Gandhigram and is ready to stand against Steeltown's expansion by undertaking a fast unto death. Bhaskar knows the power of non-violence, and he keeps great admiration for Satyajit. To win the equality of the sexes in both the places in the club, he plans the construction of Meadow House and sets up a club between Steeltown and Gandhigram. He easily gets his first achievement when Jhanak, a girl of Gandhigram, takes step against its rules of anti-life. On the other side,

common peasants like Sumita show interest to participate in the activities of the Meadow House. Since Bhaskar's conspiracy against Gandhigram is found out by Sumita, she resists his dishonesty and goes to Delhi to support her father. Her relationship with Nandini, the niece of Bireswar, and her journey to various places in Delhi, show her positive side and make her to be aware of womanhood.

The association between Bhaskar and Sumita stands for the association of Steeltown to Gandhigram. Bhaskar as well as Satyajit change their principles and ideology for the welfare of the village. At the end of the chaos, as defined by G. P. Sarma, it is "A happy combination of Gandhi, Nehru and Tagore together" (12). For a futuristic vision of India, Bhattacharya is concerned with the social, religious, economic and political development.

As Gandhigram becomes a miniature of India, the novelist shows that the Gandhian ideology and ethics are sowed everywhere. K. K. Sharma has noted that, "it is a transparently positive vision of life" (13). Through the portrayal of the character Satyajit, as a Gandhian character, life is celebrated with discipline and self-restraint, like Gandhi's Sevagram. He brings the life of the village under the Gandhian principles and ethics to be worked out. Spinning wheel becomes the part of their life. The village sketches new set of values—equality, fraternity and non-violence in thought and action. Following Gandhi's doctrine of celibacy, Satyajit himself follows Brahmacharya after the birth of Sumita.

To form a Shanti Sena to Ladakh, Satyajit spreads non-violence, the major goal of Gandhi. Suruchi and Sumita insist on following Satyajitism. Satyajit continues the job of spiritual reconstruction in his own village. He sacrifices his personal life to service and uses the Gandhian tool of fast unto death for the sake of Gandhigram.

Even when the government is ready to offer a compliment, Satyajit never moves a bit against his ideology, showing his steadfastness. That makes the factory laborers and his opponent Bhaskar to be united. This quality brings him the love and trust of Gandhigram and the whole village follows his steps.

Bhaskar Roy's perspective is highly westernised. According to his own principles, steel plays a predominant role in India's future. He maintains reverence for Satyajit. Ever since falling in love with Sumitha, his steel temper softens slowly. The menace of China makes him vehement in his argument for industrialisation. He believes that only force can face aggression.

Bhaskar is the exponent of the principles of industrialisation that should change the way of life and outlook and transform life to be fuller and happier. He fights against the conventional life full of inhibitions and against the arranged marriages in Indian society. Bhaskar's love for Sumita elevates the romantic mood of the novel. Since he is a westernised engineer, he expects an educated wife. He has the confidence to transform Sumita's life and outlook and win her hand. Despite his very long stay in America the Indianness in him cannot be obliterated. Rupa contrasts him with an English pilot who had made love to her in the past.

Suruchi's character plays a significant role in the novel. She is the loyal partner of Satyajit both at home and in society. Her mind is confused between her ideals and instincts; and her devotion to her husband and her interest in her daughter's life and prosperity. She surrenders her will to her husband and accepts his request to lead a life of Brahmacharya. She cannot get over her longing for another child, a son. She admires the courage of the girl Jhanak. She pays due respect for her husband's friend Bireswar. At the end she triumphs over her husband who surrenders himself to her will. In the novel she moves first, from graceful naturalness to cramping asceticism and secondly, from inhibition to spontaneity and freedom. As a mother, Suruchi knows the problems faced by her daughter Sumita and other girls. She also

encourages Bhaskar's love for Sumita. She is against the idea of Sumita's leading a life of dedication. She blends in herself the qualities of asceticism and aestheticism to create a better society and happiness for herself and for all.

Sumita is a prominent and successful woman character in the novel. She is tall, fair and smart but unadorned. She is a girl grown up and moulded according to the Gandhian pattern in a cocoon, with her father's ascetic ideals recorded in her mind. She wears white attire but without kumkum mark and bangles. She is a playmate of Jhanak, the girl of the untouchables who is given to desires. Rupa and Jhanak are sharply contrasted to her. Her visit to Delhi enriches her knowledge. Finally, she comes out of the Satyajitism and blends in her asceticism and aestheticism, the spinning wheel and the turbine for making a better and happier life for herself and for all.

The character of Bireswar Basu occupies a unique place in the novel. His role as a linker between Bhaskar and Suruchi is significant. He is Satyajit's loyal friend, always ready to help him in difficult times. The character of Mrs. Sorojini Mehra occupies a part in the development of the plot of the novel. She is appointed as the personal secretary of Bhaskar. She conforms to the pervasive mother-image in Indian society. So, she persuades Bhaskar to be the caretaker of the Chinese children. She courageously takes decision to persuade even Rupa to leave when she senses a crisis due to her stay.

The character of Rupa is slightly contrasted to that of Sumita. She is portrayed as the daughter of an American mother and an Indian father. She is the stenographer in Bhaskar's office. She once served as an air hostess. While Sumita stands for the spinning wheel, she stands for the turbine. She served as a caretaker of the children of a Chinese prisoner. She is enamoured with Bhaskar. So, she teaches morality to the Chinese children in his house. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar points out the relationship between India and

China, "… Steel town trying to swallow up Gandhigram, and this was no matter of conquering square miles alone but a way of life, an inner spirit" (430).

There are many minor characters who play significant roles in the novel. Many characters like Ah To is introduced as a bridge of understanding between China and India. Some characters are ambitious and want to top the list of women sacrificing for the motherland. The novelist institutes this character for skillful handling of comic irony. K. K. Sharma rightly marked "*Shadow from Ladakh* thoroughly examines the various planes of reality – political, historical, social, economic, moral and spiritual" (146). Thus, the novel presents different types of selfhood and Bhattacharya showcases the longing of individuals to enjoy the space given for them.

Works Cited

Bhattacharya, Bhabani. *Shadow from Ladakh.* New Delhi: Orient Paper Backs, 1966.

Sharma, K. K. *Bhabani Bhattacharya: His Visions and Themes*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1979

Iyengar, Srinivasa K.R. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publication, 1983.

Sarma, G.P. *Nationalism in Indo – Anglican Fiction*, New Delhi: Sterling Publication, 1978.