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A Conflict between Materialism and Spiritualism in *A Dream in Hawaii*

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Abstract :

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *A Dream in Hawaii* deals with the conflict between the materialism of the West and spiritualism of the East in the modern era. It depicts how compromise and readjustment helps Swami to resolve the struggle of his inner self, the struggle between the traditional notions of asceticism or spiritualism and the modern Western concept of worldliness- spirit and body.

Key words: *Conflict, materialism, spiritualism, inner self, value system*

Introduction:

Bhabani Bhattacharya in his novel *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978) projects an acculturation between the materialism of the West and spiritualism of the East. The novel depicts the conflict between the East and the West and analyzes particularly the culture of American society. The first part of the novel deals with the sickness of American society. It is the conflict between the material and the spiritual values, whether material or spiritual things are useful for a man. After living materialistic life for a long period, a person having experienced wealthy life feels saturated and wants to divert his attention from material things to attain spirituality. So Swami Yogananda, a professor of Philosophy who turned yogi, tries to inquire his own inner self. A youth needs inner peace in the life to give proper direction to his misdirected materialistic life in the material world. Swami says:

The young people in their lostness are in desperate search of emotion based relationships. They need

friends, they need parents, and they need man gods. Had not Bhaktiyoga in India leading to the Chaitanya movement grown out of a similar impulse? Vastly different societies make a similar response under inner pressures somewhat alike. (118)

Hawaii is the central place where we meet the two opposite things: the gulf between the East and the West. Novelist depicts a comprehensive realistic picture of the Indian and American culture on the land of Hawaii. As Stella says to Swami Yogananda, "within him the East and the West so readily coalesced. It is a unique East West mix. The strong intercultural you cannot find the spark of this ethnic spectrum anywhere else on the globe."

The novel deals with the external life of Swami Yogananda who gives erudite and impressive lectures to his disciples about Vedanta philosophy and on the other hand his inner self's urge for Devjani, a typical Indian girl having deep faith in moral values of the East. For a single moment he cannot leave the thought of hers. The experience of Swami in Hawaii is to give guidance to those who have lost their direction. His dream for Devjani continues to torment him secretly, since he has met her first. In a way both the dreams appear to be reliable in the last experience of Swami in Hawaii after the justification of the novel to be entitled as *A Dream in Hawaii*. It is the quality of Swami's character that he not only enlightens the heart of the western people but also himself. The teaching of Swami arouses the spiritual awakening among materialistic Americans.

As a creative artist, the novelist has taken different themes for the projection of his novels. He extends his vision beyond the problems of his country to the problems of the Sick Western civilization of today. In this novel he wants to show the relationship between the two ideologies. He wants to connect the two things- spiritualism of India and westernization of America. "The new age in America is anguished with the cry: Not this, not that curious, isn't that the same cry had echoed in India's Vedanta age Neri. Neri (118).

The setting of the novel is on the island of Hawaii which is called westernized to some extent. Swami Yogananda is the protagonist in the novel. He is professor but turned yogi. He has not only the knowledge of eastern society but western also. He has much importance for science but he agrees with this point that science can help a man only for material progress. In today's fast changing time, a man cannot pass his life in a peaceful way without money and wealth.

All human society was set in being technology-based. This was a need for the preservation of life itself. Adequate food had to be produced; without ever advancing technology that was not possible. Health care was a necessity for all mankind. The curious irony was that life's continuation and its total annihilation were perilously close to each other parted only by a hair's breadth. (179-80)

Swami Vivekananda also agrees with this thought that in our spiritual attainment hunger is the basic problem. Food is the fundamental reality. Nobody can live without food. If a person tries to take fast for a long time it can't be possible. The same thing we can find in the character of Swami Yogananda. He also follows the traditional way of inner purification, fasting with total submergence in meditation. At first it is a five day stretch. The first days are easy, hunger comes and goes. He feels fine. Next day he is somewhat restless. It is hard not to think of food on the fifth day he is aching with hunger. He is on the edge of breaking his ordeal. Hunger destroys the feeling of man when the well-

to-do people can't live without food how peasants can or poor gentry live without food.

Swami Yogananda, the incarnation of Swami Vivekananda, was very much influenced by Vivekananda, Gandhi and Tagore. The great society was desperate for spiritual leadership. To follow the theme of the novel, *A Dream in Hawaii*, Bhattacharya has followed the footsteps of Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore. "A large, well-framed portrait of Swami Vivekananda would be hung on that wall. Ascetics of every order in India had gurus of their own. Tradition demanded that Yogananda, bold nonconformist, claimed to have received his initiation, the secret mantra whispered by the guru in his disciple's ear from a person who had left this earth from half a century earlier, Swami Vivekananda, dominant in the pantheon of the remakers of India. (9)

His interest in contemporary man was as intense as his absorption in the abstract thoughts of Vedanta. I will go into a thousand hells cheerfully if I can rouse my countrymen to stand on their feet and be men. (182)

The kind of following that the Indian-spiritual 'Gurus' are getting in America and other western countries which are affluent and materialistically far ahead, India reflects that they are suffering from some spiritual restlessness. They are finding that material wealth is not enough. It cannot bring happiness to them and so they are in search of a spiritual solace that the hope, the ancient Indian philosophical system of Vedanta can provide them: "Not that contemporary India was without spiritual leadership. Devjani had heard of Ma Anandamayee, a woman whose name was a household word. The name itself was meaningful: Mother Joyous; Dr. Neeloy Mookherji knew her personally, perhaps? He had wide contacts is he knew" (88).

Besides Vivekananda, Swami was much influenced by Gandhiji who was so popular in America at that time. He has a hope that he can win the feelings and hearts of American people. By temperament or dress he was a very simple man.



He does not believe in show-off or artificiality. Gandhiji was a good example of sacrifice and renunciation. And he had renounced all luxuries of life for the sake of common humanity:

Coming to contemporary times, we see the same pressures of history directed at Gandhism. I know people who honestly believe that Mahatma Gandhi in his homeland has been turned into one of the numerous Gods and placed on a high pedestal, a dead image with flowers on its stone feet: While, abroad, he is more and more a living image. (126)

When the nation is passing through a great upsurge, there is a need of one man who can give the right direction. When everywhere we are facing the calamities and rental disturbance, there is a need of one spiritual God who can give consolation to the confused people of society. Swami Yogananda's mission should not be restricted to his own country. Like most great men he is a world citizen. He belongs to America as much as to India. As India so do? He has no political influence. Renunciation of worldly possessions and selfish motives is the foundation stone of Indian religion and culture. Desires constitute the springs of the feeling of sex, love of power and wealth, desire for the common good and a hunger for communion with the unseen. These different activities react upon and modify one another. Their functions in life are just a different way. Renunciation having its own law is an inevitable factor in every life.

The essence of the message of Sri Krishna in Bhagvad Gita is to attain perfection and wisdom by complete renunciation of work. The work renunciation has a greater importance in this novel *A Dream in Hawaii*. It means self-denial of worldly temptations and selfish motives, passion and emotional bondage. It is a fundamental and all pervasive ideal of Indian life, an ideal that cuts across the boundaries of language and regional culture, and it becomes an undercurrent force in Indo-Anglican novels. History tells us the story of those leaders who have sacrificed their life for the welfare of the country. Being a rich man they can't achieve their

goal. Self-denial is essential for such type of work. As in the case of Yogananda who was a professor Neeloy Mukherjee by profession but he renounced all the comforts of his life and adopted the life of a spiritual person. Now he is a source of inspiration for Indians but Americans.

Swami Yogananda believes in the theory of the Gita. The Gita demands a dynamic equilibrium in the art of living. Every man has to complete his inner image through the work which is his life's mission; the work he has been born to do. To be true to his inner image at any cost in terms of materiality and in terms of struggle that is his obligation. But even this commitment is not the last word. Do your work with no wish for results that is the key command.

There are other characters who believe in the theory of integration. Walter Gregson, a typical western man, believes in the theory of integration between the diverse element as body and spirit, spiritualism and materialism. In the beginning of his career, he believes that a man can progress only through the materialistic values. He has no faith in moral and spiritual values of life. He gives emphasis on free sex which is a fashion in American society. Not only American society but Indian also affected by this fever of sex. All through we have got freedom earlier but until now the impact of American culture is very much on us. Due to impact of American culture Devjani's mother though married woman having immoral relationship with other man.

Walter Gregson also does not hesitate to take over the control over the yoga centre. A man always tries to reach on the highest level but when he reaches, he is unable to get satisfaction. But despite his involvement in the sexual pleasures of life, he is not satisfied himself. His inner self is demanding something else than more material power or physical satisfaction. But at last he comes to the point that it is not his personal problem, but a social one. He always has feeling of jealousy towards Swami. And he insists Sylvia Koo to seduce Swami. He is called a clever man for his personal gratification. He always tries to end the spirituality of Swami. But in the end



he comes to realize that he has destroyed the supreme spiritual power of the East. In a western society, there is a need of such spiritual man who can overcome the difficulties of American people.

Devjani presents the synthesis of the modern materialism of the West and the traditional spiritualism of the East. In the beginning of his career, he considers her as a typical Indian girl having deep faith in moral values of the East. She is shocked to see the immoral relationship of her mother with other man. To come out of her crisis, she wants to take help of Professor Neeloy Mookherjee. So she decides to renounce the world of earthly pleasure. We can say that she has capacity to adjust herself according to the atmosphere. In every step of her life, she wants to make her life meaningful. So she tries to reconcile between the two opposites, the physical aspect of the West and spiritualism of Yogananda. If she will be able to reconcile the two opposite her life may become meaningful. Here we can see the aesthetic view between Swami and Devjani. Both have an attraction towards each other. One thing we can calculate in the character of Devjani, although she has the feeling of love towards Swami but she doesn't like that Swami should disguise himself in the role of Neeloy once again. Devjani touches his feet. He doesn't have the desire of it. She answers "there is no Neeloy. There is only Swami Yogananda (186). But she doesn't want that Swami should completely reject the western materialism because for the complete development of the personality of a man both the things are necessary.

Dr. Vincent Swift is also interested in establishing the epitome of eastern and western philosophy. He intends to establish a world centre for yogic disciplines where Swami can preach the lesson of Vedanta spiritualism to the Americans. In *A Dream in Hawaii*, it is only the character of Yogananda, turned yogi, that come out quite sharp and clear. He is a humanized form of Swami who was sponsored by the University of Hawaii for a series of lectures. He is not a dry formulation of yogic concepts, but a

human being with his weaknesses. He comes to India after getting fulfillment of his real self in the West.

In *A Dream in Hawaii* the familiar duality of spiritual East and materialistic West are completely discarded. The characters are both American and Asian- a total departure for the novelist and all of them are involved in a quest to find the meaning of their existence, and to experience their self-fulfillment. It was this American and Asian combination which made the writing of the novel a special challenge and obvious joy for every author. Swami addresses to Stella: "As you know, Stella, I have certain precise ideas about Vedanta's relevance to some areas of modern western experience. That our Ancient philosophy is badly modern in its own way. The West has read that own way. The West had read that same story in our ancient temple sculptures at Konark and Khajuraho (18).

The fact our common humanity supplies the basis for intercultural. In this novel Bhattacharya has portrayed the process of intercultural. It is the unity between different human existence which imparts the novelist his posture of cultural relativity and cognitive flexibility both of which are fundamental marks of a meditating man. One thing we can calculate in this novel is that in such a dangerous world it is not mere information but better understanding which is very necessary. "Knowledge has grown but not understanding. Swami Vivekanand's mission was to build human understanding rather than dispense knowledge. He was a path finder (11). It was the talent of the British that they had used their knowledge for the foundation of colonial purpose. Knowledge must be superseded by understanding. Knowledge can be increased with extensive study not the understanding. The better understanding can be developed only in good relation. And this is the basic aim of the novelist to show in what way we can strengthen our understanding with others. In such a short time he tries his level best to bridge the understanding gap between the United States and India.



संशोधक

The method of re-adjustment and compromise helps Swami to solve his personal problems. In the first part of his life he has the infirmity of love with Devjani but when he comes in his own original self, he realizes his own weakness. But at last he reaches to a conclusion that if he wants to convert himself as a yogi, he will try his best to leave the physical desire. We can say that physical desire has more power to convert the life style of a man. Yogananda has tried his level best to turn himself as a yogi, but his love for Devjani unable him to reach the destination. That is why he says: "Swami Yogananda has ceased to exist. This man you see is Neeloy Mookherjee. The yellow garb he has to wear must be discarded (292). At the end Yogananda realizes that human being is a mixture of good and evil. A man should lead his life naturally. Hence, he decides to leave US discarding material prosperity for the sake of spiritual desire. Compromise and readjustment helps Swami to

resolve the struggle of his inner self, the struggle between the traditional notions of asceticism or spiritualism and the modern Western concept of worldliness- spirit and body.

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