

# CONFLUENCE OF MIND AND BODY *MUSIC FOR MOHINI*

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## Abstract

*This paper studies Bhattacharya's second novel, Music for Mohini and attempts to highlight the changing rules of women in Indian society that the playwright sought to represent in his writing and the vision he carried for a better and equal society where women are valued as individuals and had a self-identity, apart from the real that patriarchy imposed on them. The story revolves around Mohini's life after marriage and her resistance to the old patriarchal norms and ways of thinking that marginalize women in the society. There is conflict between the two contrasting cultures and ways of thinking, the Indian and the Western or modern values.*

## Paper Identification



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## Introduction:

Bhattacharya's *Music for Mohini* deals with the theme of the social rejuvenation of India, particularly its villages which constitute the nine-tenths of the country. With freedom of India in sight, the author fears that the putrid Indian society caught in the deadly mire of obscurantism, superstitions, rituals, blind faith, and obsolete customs, may fail to utilize political freedom for the real progress of the country till it undergoes a complete social and cultural transformation. Thinking of the degenerated Indian society, the hero of the novel reflects the society as;

*Society, rural society (and nine-tenths of India was rural) was sick with taboos and inhibitions of its own making: the inequities of caste and untouchability; the ritualism that passed for religion; the wide-flung cobweb of superstitious faith. It was all an outgrowth of centuries of decadence. The purity of ancient thought had been lost in misinterpretation until the dignity of man had become a mere plaything of visited interests” (Bhattacharya 67-68).*

He feels “*what was political liberty worth to the common man if it was not part of a renaissance in social life?*” (Bhattacharya 67). If freedom is to be made effective, India must reorient her national life on a new social basis. Jayadev is determined to make his own contribution “*to India’s developing struggle for social freedom, the fountain of all freedoms*” (Bhattacharya 124). The freedom he envisions must release a spiritual being re-weighted. He considers the present moment in India’s history to be the most suitable moment to end all slavery, not least of all the slavery of the spirit: “*The proud nation that would soon step onto the world stage could not afford to be half-slave, half-free*” (Bhattacharya 68).

The novel portrays the emotional and intellectual advancement of the heroine, Mohini, from sheltered and carefree girlhood to the role of the mistress and a wife of an influential and prominent home with great traditions. An intriguing thing to mention is this novel was released between Bhattacharya's 2 masterpieces, *Therefore Many Hungers* and *He Who Rides a Tiger*. Nevertheless, *Music for Mohini* is owned by an alternative category, as Dorothy Shimer observes, *Music for Mohini* is “undoubtedly Bhattacharya's the majority of light hearted novels.”

If the story starts, Mohini is a motherless school going female of 17, a youngster in the Calcutta house of her, wherever she's provided total freedom by the dad of her, a professor with modern suggestions, and the grandmother of her, called Old Mother, who provides conventional values and views. As previously stated, one of the primary themes or templates within the novel is Mohini's maturation as well as development, the metamorphosis of carefree females to the life partner of a careful idealist who wants to enjoy the part of his in the putting together of the country's long term.

His widowed mother, a staunch pillar of orthodoxy, has been pressing him to marry and the proposal of marriage to Mohini comes after the two horoscopes have been carefully compared and the planets found to be in favourable conjunction. Mohini’s father is reluctant to marry her to a person living in a village as he fears that she may not be able to adapt herself to the conditions of life in a village with its taboos and restrictions.

Old Mother, however, insists that the proposal should be accepted. She has been impressed by an article written by Jayadev in a journal and particularly by a photograph of the handsome young man. Mohini is also captivated by the photograph and is prepared to leave the city for the village Behula. The father gives in to the wishes of his daughter and mother, and the marriage is arranged without Jayadev and Mohini even seeing each other. When Mohini observes the way, she is welcomed by the people of the village with which she is received into her new home, she realizes that she has entered a new world which involves new responsibilities. Her mother-in-law represents the old values. He sees in her Gargi or Maiteryi, “*no house-hold drudge, nor decorative being, but an intellectual, striding beside a man in a tireless quest for knowledge*” (Bhattacharya 71). Though she could not lead a glamorous life, Mohini does not express any kind of dissatisfaction.

She tries her best to rise to the expectation of her husband. She knows that her married life will be peaceful and meaningful only when she adjusts herself to the wishes of her husband, shares her ideals and renders him positive help in his programme of social reconstruction for his sake she is ready to undergo any ordeal: “*For his sake she*

would absorb new ways of thought and habit and cultivate new interests” (Bhattacharya 105-106). Jayadev is an idealist and Mohini knows “how hard it is to be an idealist’s wife! If he were like other young men. No! How do you compare him with others! He was far above them all” (Bhattacharya 128-129). Though she thinks that “she would much rather have the commonplace things of life, like other girls. She was not made to be an idealist. She couldn’t bear the strain,” the very next moment she realises, “she could. She must. Her husband needed her help. How could she fail him? In the great task ahead, she should play her part. She would be his true partner in his feeling, in faith and in dream” (Bhattacharya 129). The women of the village begin to identify the new mistress of the Big House with themselves: “their own, their joy, their joy, their joy and pride, and she was so human, without any of the plumage of the rich, whose distant look bespoke that they tried the blue pathways of the sky” (Bhattacharya 150). Consequently, perhaps indirectly, Mohini assists Jayadev in realizing the vision. Jayadev shows the individuals to think they are not the slaves on the stars, that the existing insane values must be rejected totally, and that the brand-new ideas guaranteeing man happiness can obtain the best personal action. Based on Jayadev, cultural freedom is as essential as political freedom. He thinks:

*Great and exciting days lay ahead. India, free to build up her destiny, was not yet truly free. She was like a prisoner held too long in a dark cell. Unchained and released suddenly, she was bewildered by the light. But the stupor would pass. India would renew herself (Bhattacharya 183).*

That Jayadev is not just a man of words but a man of action is proved when Jayadev vehemently and publicly opposes his mother when she tries to compel Mohini to offer her blood to Devi to get rid of her barrenness. He is against all superstitious beliefs and wants to cleanse society of them. Though in the initial stages his mother is shocked at his revolutionary ideas and ways, ultimately, she can understand him correctly and through him “the new revolt, the restless spirit of the new dawn” (Bhattacharya 183). Thus, Jayadev paves the way for social freedom. As already mentioned, at first Mohini finds her new environment unbearable. As she has been brought up in an entirely different type of environment, she has struggled hard “to retouch her mental values, readjust her expectations” (Bhattacharya 108). Before she can accommodate herself comfortably at Behula, her mother-in-law is stern and puts a number of restraints on the young girl: “There was no end to prohibitions.” (Bhattacharya 130). Subdued by these prohibitions, Mohini strives hard to adjust to the old ways and modes of life in the rural society. In this process, surprisingly, she too changes unawares:

*Yes, the young mistress of the Big House took deeper colour from her new life every day. Slowly she fitted herself to the rural design. Her sprightliness, her quick girlish laugh, she easily subdued. The mother was a ruthless teacher (Bhattacharya 130).*

Mohini realizes that the Big House exists in association with the traditions of the family:

*This house lived always in the shadow of the family tree, nothing mattered so much as the family tree. The tall, gilt-framed portraits of ancestors that seemed to hang on every wall had a rich vivid life beyond canvas and point. An old, proud house of an old, proud family. A tradition within a tradition (Bhattacharya 108).*



The weird old looks of the Big House make it oppressive to live in:

*“The evenings unlit by a moon in the sky were oppressive, almost unbearable. The Big House was a pebble clutched in the iron block fist of night. Dim Kerosene lamps, scratched the darkness tiredly. Dull bursts of cricket chirp, jinn! With frog songs for variation, deepened the immense, listening silence. Then, the ancestors of the house brooding on the high walls slipped down and trod the long corridors back and forth, the clop-clop of their wooden sandals . . . echoing from wing to wing (Bhattacharya, Bhabani, 31 33).*

The Big House defies any change in its traditional setup because of Jayadev’s mother. Roplekha, Jayadev’s sister, tells Mohini:

*My mother is the usual orthodox Hindu woman, only she is more intense than others, and all her faith is pinned to family tradition. No deviation for her, not one inch, stem willed, though tender at heart, she is a simple soul, with singleness of purpose, a one-eyed mind. She exists for the Big House; she wouldn’t have changed it in the least way. Even the age-grey walls are not to be time-washed because Mother loves to see them absorb time (Bhattacharya 94).*

Mohini has the changes of her to make with the mother-in-law. The mom is individually really considerate as well as affectionate towards Mohini, but expects her to comply with the time-honoured way of living. She insists on every family member adhering to the family traditions. With the passage of time Mohini starts to recognize that the mom comes with specific simple human characteristics such as sacrifice and compassion. She overcomes the hatred of her and develops an excellent love as well as sympathy for the mother:

*. . . Mohini told herself, perhaps she judged the mother too harshly? Perhaps she saw the wrong side of this old tapestry of tradition and missed the design? Duty and compassion were not at odds in the mother; the key to the design was sacrifice which was a right and privilege, not a duty alone. ((Bhattacharya 173).*

Gradually both Mohini and her mother-in-law, representing the modern and traditional values respectively, begin to understand each other better:

*Meanwhile, in the Big House, a sweet intimacy built on their common dream linked Mohini with the mother. It was as though they were two conspirators filled with one secret. Everything else, the movements and gestures of work and day life, was a covering shell (Bhattacharya 144).*

The mother, who has strong faith in horoscopes, is anxious that Mohini should become a mother to prevent the calamity. She feels relieved when she guesses that Mohini is pregnant. She is so happy that she wants to follow the practice of sticking a piece of bamboo to the hair of the girl as a charm to protect the child in the womb and prevent any mishap. Mohini does not have faith in charms. The mother becomes very angry when she notices the charm missing. She tells Mohini that the only way to save the family is to pray to the goddess of birth and to vow to give her a nose ring when her wish is fulfilled. If that is not enough, she should cut the skin of her bosom and offer blood

to the goddess in a lotus-leaf. Mohini's sophistication makes her rebel against the suggestion and she becomes unhappy and restless. Jayadev comes to know of her predicament and gives her moral support by declaring that he has no faith in the astrologer's prediction. He snubs the mother and tells her that they are not slaves of the stars, that there is *"no room in the Big House for crazy beliefs"* (Bhattacharya 179), and that the whole village looks towards the people of the Big House for a proper way of living. This attitude infuriates the mother and she says that she is ashamed to have him as her son. She further says, *"I know your mind. Heresy holds you. Old beliefs, old morals, old values mean nothing to you"* (Bhattacharya 180). Jayadev wants his mother to understand that there are *"values beyond your grasp, since you'll always try to reach them with your reason, never with your feelings. Life has punished you . . . Blind belief shapes your thinking: Blind belief can't make a sentiment"* (Bhattacharya, 180). Thus, there is an ideological tussle between the mother and the son. At this critical stage an accident occurs which affects the course of events, Jayadev is bitten by a snake. The mother is shocked. But fortunately, the snake is a non-poisonous one and Jayadev is safe. The mother considers the snake-bite a warning and requests Mohini to offer prayers to the goddess immediately. Mohini's acceptance of the ordeal reveals the compromise she is willing to make with orthodoxy and tradition. But, the offering to the goddess is not made. Jayadev's intervention is the success of the son's progressive attitude over the mother's orthodoxy. But at the same time Mohini decides to accept and love the Big House. She is even prepared to allow her husband to marry Sudha to beget a son. But fortunately, it becomes known that Mohini is already pregnant.

The mother also realises that Jayadev's path is the right one: *"His ideas, his point of view, moulded by the new spirit in the land, were different from hers and opposed to them, but they were, nonetheless, true ideals"* (Bhattacharya 187). This realization brings the mother closer to Jayadev, and the Big House experiences an atmosphere of cordiality and mutual understanding. The discord between the mother and the son, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and the husband-and-wife end:

*"At last, there was no discord. Life was music-a note of song for the Old Mother was in her, a note for Jayadev and his rebel gods, a note for the Big House and Behula village, tom and at cross- purpose for a while. Her life was music - the quest for every woman, her deepest need (Bhattacharya 188).*

With all the synthesis in between the modern and the older, symbolized by the reconciliation among Jayadev as well as the mom, life gets music that is sweetly flavoured for Mohini. This has made possible since she succeeds in re-creating harmony inside herself by her mental change as well as development of perspective. Hence a slip of a female brought up in urbanized methods blossoms right into a responsible female, cheerfully and willingly undertaking the duty of guiding the destiny of any family with the origins of its previous times.

Bhattacharya, being a novelist of social conscience, finds a lot of evils which he thinks ought to be scrapped and purged from society. He has no patience with a lot of dead weight, like superstitions, orthodox traditions, and customs, which we have inherited from the past and which are choking the current of national life. But instead denouncing all this, he makes his stand clear by his light hearted humour. Instead of criticizing the two old women in *Music for Mohini* for their old-fashioned beliefs and practices, he makes us laugh heartily at the absurdities of these women. We know that all their thinking is askew and they believe in matching horoscopes or looking for the lucky signs in the bride's hand before the marriage or other silly old beliefs, but we also know that their hearts are in

the right place. Although Bhattacharya avoids making the old women detestable, he never abstains from showing how they and the others they represent have run to seed.

*Music for Mohini* (1952) is perhaps the least didactic of Bhattacharya's novels and hence aesthetically the most satisfying. It is an interesting story of a light-hearted girl in search of happiness, into which Bhattacharya weaves the conflict between tradition and modernity. There is every possibility that Bhattacharya should have written this novel from his own personal experience-either about his daughter's marriage or from his son's marriage. The author at every stage appears to be driving towards a climax but fails to achieve it. There is an attempt at reconciliation of the theme of the East and West. But the reader is at a loss to know whether it is fulfilled after all. The characters are simply drawn away according to the situation, but they do not have the mettle to control it.

Bhattacharya's aim was to show that India could not free itself from the shackles of orthodoxy and superstition even after Independence. The novel "*Music for Mohini*" is a true replica of the India of the post-war Independence still making abortive attempts to come out of the mire of tradition and orthodoxy. The aim of the novelist is no doubt good but how far he has succeeded in implementing his idea is a matter for debate. A sincere attempt has been made in the representation of the conflict between old values and modern ones as indicated by the old mother and Mohini respectively. The need for a change of social outlook and reorientation of social values is Bhattacharya's major concern.

Dr. Chandrasekharan remarks that his novel is a study in psychology without the involutions and complexities of a typical psychological novel. There is very little movement and action in the story. The artistic imagination of the novelist is not sufficiently and markedly kindled in this novel. One tends to agree with Dr. Chandrasekharan, according to whom, "There is much in the novel to entertain, to delight and even to provoke. But the music, we hear, is only the soft and subdued melody of the flute and not the varied harmony of a rich orchestra"(56).

Bhattacharya seems to suggest the significance of the title when he writes "*Her (Mohini's) life was music- the true quest for every woman, her deepest need*" (Bhattacharya 232). If she was in the company of the old mother and father, and her affectionate and indulgent brother Heeralal, her life was quite musical, ringing pleasant notes of bliss and serenity and nothing to worry. In fact, it was the music showered by gods and goddesses on this heavenly damsel walking on earth. Her life was a bed of roses. She had a musical voice and she was often singing on the radio and people would hear her songs with rapt attention. But she had to face a different type of music after her marriage in the Big House. It took a little time for her to adjust herself to the discordant notes of music in the strange atmosphere. But her sense of confidence enables her to face the music with fortitude and she brings out a total transformation in the outlook of the inmates of the Big House and makes it musical. She is indeed the 'Goddess of Music'

Through and through Mohini struggles to make harmony with the discordant elements in her own life and finally comes out successful, triumphant. However, on a broader social scale, harmony must be established between the old and the new ways of life, between East and West. Mohini must adjust to strange village customs much as Rooplekha (Jayadev's sister) had to enter the bewildering life of the city. When Mohini speaks against village - city inter-marriages, Rooplekha replies that we who're so wed, serve some real purpose. It's as though we made a bridge between two banks of a river. We connect culture with culture, Mohini, our old Eastern view of life with a new semi-Western outlook. This is more urgent to-day than ever before. Our new India must rest on this foundation: 'A bridge between two banks of a river'; 'connect culture with culture.'



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