

**CONFLICT OF VALUES: EAST AND WEST IN  
BHABANI BHATTACHARYA'S  
A DREAM IN HAWAII**

–Ningombam Oligachanu Devi \*

**Abstract:** *Bhabani Bhattacharya's A Dream in Hawaii is a novel that shows the conflicting values of the East and the West. Westerners love aestheticism and spiritualism of the Orientals and are fascinated by it. Spiritualism and human civilization are closely related. Bhattacharya has tried to give this point of view through this novel. Neeloy Mukherjee, turned Swami Yogananda, is a man who left India to teach Indian aestheticism in Hawaii. He settles there but something in him is making him restless and that is his love for Devjani, his former student. His love for Devjani is so strong that he comes back to India for her. The novel represents the clash of values through the characters present in the novel. The characters are the representations of the whole society. Swami Yogananda represents Indian Yogi, Philosophers and Gurus while characters like Walt Gregson, Dr. Vincent Swift, the western, wealthy and materialistic persons. Through this novel, Bhattacharya had also tried to point out the various social happenings in the East, basically India and the West. The way the Americans behave towards Indian living in the West is also discussed in the novel. Though the Americans have the urge to know more about Spiritualism, yet, they tend to mock at them. Walt Gregson, the American, is attracted towards Devjani and Yogananda is often challenged by them.*

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**Keywords :** *Aesthetics, Spiritualism, Orientals, Materialism, Enlightenment, Vedanta, Culture. Kama Sutra, Ashram, Bohemian*

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Bhabani Bhattacharya's *A Dream in Hawaii* is a novel that shows the conflicting values of the East and the West. Our aesthetics and spiritual values attract the westerners in such a way that they are compelled to find themselves so much engrossed in it.

This is what happens in the novel *A Dream in Hawaii*. The novel is a clear picture of the way the westerners approach towards it. They love aestheticism and spiritualism of the Orientals and are fascinated by it. But sometimes they try to exploit it, without knowing its true essence. As the saying goes 'every coin has two faces' so also the Westerner's approach towards Indian aestheticism is also two sided. Often there are persons in the West who would like to uphold it and some others who would like to marketize it like Walt Gregson in the novel *A Dream in Hawaii*.

Spiritualism and human civilization are closely related. Man cannot just prosper and civilize without any kind of spiritualism. Even if a person is surrounded by many sophisticated material things, yet back in his brain, he needs peace and tranquility which are the aspects of spiritualism. Bhattacharya has tried to give this point of view through this novel. In his novel *A Dream in Hawaii*, Bhattacharya had tried to unveil the hollowness of the Western civilization. He was of the view that morality and spiritual lessons were closely related. The lack of spiritualism led to decadence of moral behavior. So, Bhattacharya made Swami Yogananda to accept Stella's invitation to Hawaii. In this context, we may quote Sudarshan Sharma's words:

With a view to serving a similar 'true human purpose' Yogananda accepts Stella's invitation to Hawaii. He agrees to stay on for sometime and propagate spiritual peace. He, however, is not in favour of the plans for a huge building to house the devotees (2007:103).

Swami Yogananda has no idea that the Western people intends to commercialize his talks and lectures on spiritualism and Indian Philosophy. His thoughts were simple and he is keen on expanding his knowledge. He wants to teach the essence of spiritualism and the achievement of the ultimate freedom.

Bhattacharya tried to catch the attention of the Western world through this novel. He wanted to arouse the human spiritualism that was lying dormant in the western world. The western

society had lost their value and identity. They were on the verge of breaking down. The present need of the Western civilization is spiritual enlightenment. Bhattacharya had tried to concentrate on this issue. He tried to present the decaying Western civilization through the mouth of Walt Gregson in his novel *A Dream in Hawaii*. Walt says about the present context of Western society:

An Eastern sage looking in vain for an answer to the unanswerable. The crisis we know are beyond his limited range of experience. This super-technological society. A dead rat lies somewhere under its brightly carpeted floor, rotting away, the stench rising, filling our nostrils. The vomit comes through our throat (1978:29).

In this way, Bhattacharya had tried to give a mental picture of the American society as a whole. The cultural aspect of the society is also presented through the mouthpiece of Walt Gregson. The novel represents the clash of values through the characters present in the novel. The characters are the representations of the whole society. Swami Yogananda represents Indian Yogi, Philosophers and Gurus while characters like Walt Gregson, Dr. Vincent Swift, the western, wealthy and materialistic persons. The degeneration of the western society is shown through the lifestyles of Walt Gregson, Sylvia Koo, Dr Vincent Swift and many others.

The conflict of Western and Eastern philosophies, the various differences in their outlooks, the Western concept of Indian philosophy and cultures are dealt in the novel with great detail. The liberty and freedom that is enjoyed by the western societies are the root cause of their problem. Often too much freedom and liberty leads a person to go wayward and indulge in uncontrolled habits that are often not favourable for the growth of spiritualism.

This novel deals with the notion of western people regarding India and its culture. They hardly know about Indian spiritualism but they tend to commercialize it. The result is that many young people are wrongly led from its real purpose. Their concept of India is purely based on easy books and advice given by the

inexpert persons who themselves claim that they are the masters in Indian philosophy. They are people like Devjani and Yogananda who try to change the concepts that are wrongly given to the Western minds. Devjani, the heroine of this novel, exchange a conversation with two young people, Alfred and Naomi. They question her about the Hindu concept of Kamasutra and they are eager to know more about it. They have a wrong idea that it was a kind of Bible for Hindu people. They are surprised at Devjani's answer. Devjani tells them that she had never seen a copy of *Kamasutra* in her life, which is very unusual to them.

What the novelist has tried to point out is that the Westerners have a kind of preconceived idea about Indian people and sexuality. They think that the Indians are supersexed. The fact is that in India, spiritual and moral value is higher than physical bliss and is alien to them. According to the view of the Western society, many writers write wrongly about Indian philosophy. Devjani is in a perplexed state when she ponders upon this fact.

They establish ashrams and appoint many Gurus from India. Many western people get themselves enroll in these ashrams and are given Indian names and by acquiring such names, they believe that they are part of the pseudo-Indian culture that is mushrooming in the West. They enjoy and think that they are enlightened by the words of fake commercialized Indian Gurus. Simply they are be-fooled by these false Gurus. The novel also highlights the conditions of Indian people living in the West. Nishi is a character that can be studied in this area. She is a young married woman who feels that she must have her experience of the West. She has left her home and she is ready to enjoy her life as much as possible. She is an example of Indian woman living in the western society. After discarding the Indian way of life, Nishi feels that she can find happiness if she lives her life at her own will.

Through Nishi, Bhattacharya has tried to point out the lifestyles of the Indian women who think that they have enjoyed freedom by imitating the Western way of living. Living a Bohemian

life by wearing a bikini is not always the true meaning of life. To get life's happiness, one has to know the meaning of spirituality and the Indian philosophy. Man cannot run away from one's duty. Duty itself is a part of spiritualism. By running away from her former life, Nishi's happiness will not last forever. Again, we have a character, Frieda, who wants to be a disciple of Swami Yogananda. For her, Yoga is a kind of fun. She casually asks Yogananda to be her Guru. She cannot understand the basic teachings and ordeals that are needed while studying Yoga and Spiritualism. To the Western people, meditation, yoga and spiritual lessons are something that can be learnt overnight. They cannot understand the fact that it takes over years and years and long penance to gain spiritual power. The Western society takes all things very lightly over sex which is considered to be the highest form of union in Indian philosophy.

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