SOCIAL REALITY IN THE WORKS OF BHABANI BHATTACHARYA

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH

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DECLARATION

I, N. SAMUEL, declare that the thesis entitled SOCIAL REALITY IN THE WORKS OF BHABANI BHATTACHARYA submitted by me for the degree of doctor of philosophy is the record of work carried out by me during the period from December 2005 to April 2009 under the guidance of Dr. R. GANESAN, Reader and Head of PG Department of English, Government Arts College, Salem and has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associate-ship, fellowship, titles in this or any other University or other similar institutions of higher learning.

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I, Dr. R. GANESAN, certify that the thesis entitled SOCIAL REALITY IN THE WORKS OF BHABANI BHATTACHARYA submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Mr. N. SAMUEL is the record of research work carried out by him during the period from December 2005 to April 2009 under my guidance and supervision and that this work has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associate-ship, fellowship or other titles in this University of Institution of higher learning.

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CHAPTER – I
INTRODUCTION

An individual is the smallest unit of a society. There is no society without the envisaged personality. The entire society entertains the aspirations of individual which cannot be ignored at any cost. The etymological meaning of society is that it is a group of people with co-operation between one another. One individual cannot live in solitude. Each individual is closely associated with society. The entanglement of life of an individual in the society is meaningful if he/she can observe the solemn values and reality of society. No force can take away an individual from the essence of reality of the society. So concentrating on the concise, social reality is paramount now-a-days.

The social reality reflected on the works of Bhabani Bhattacharya is a relevant topic. When one closely analyzes the amplitude of his creative knowledge which was evident even before fifty years contemplates the day-today life of the society. The contaminated society during the time of Second World War was vividly and lucidly drawn to the society by the magic efforts of Bhattacharya. He reaped the full benefit of the political freedom which he got after a long struggle of
great sacrifices; he rightly enjoys the benefit of freedom of mankind.

Bhattacharya has truly depicted the caste differences and superstitions then prevailing in the Indian villages. He highlights the Bengal famine through which three million men and women had to die and also he ridicules the profiteers of their torturous timings. Bhattacharya also artistically touches on the evils of dowry and bribery. The need for dowry for a girl’s marriage causes a lot of misery and hardship to India families. According to him this becomes a hemlock to the poverty and starvation. Thus people fall into the hands of slavery even for one time bread. The atrocities and calamities caused as a result of war has become a social nuisance in the society. He remarks that life itself is nothing else but gambling which refers to the faith and devotion of Indians.

Here it is an attempt to bring out the social reality which appears in the works of Bhabani Bhattacharya especially towards the eve of India’s freedom fight. As he is an outstanding Indo-Anglian novelist he has earned world-wide recognition and his books have appeared in twenty six languages, sixteen of which are European. To know the social setup of India before Independence his works are very useful because his novels are a microcosm of India. Through this study social element which prevailed in India especially North
India can be easily observed. There is a scope for comparison of different cultures and customs which were prevalent in the North and South of India.

English literature has attained a distinct place in the literary landscape of India. So many critics like Prof K.R Srinivasa Iyengar, Prof C Paul Vargheese, Prof C D Narasimha, Prof Mehta, Dr. Naik, Dr. A V Krishna, Dr Meenakshi Mukarjee, and others have contributed their efforts to flourish English literature in India. Indo-Anglian literature is a product of the English speaking people who are Indians. Since English has become a universal language, it is almost a window to the outer world. The Indian writers in English have come to be accepted in usage in reference to the literature produced by Indians in English. It has gained attention and recognition.

Many Indian writers in English were able to realize their creative efforts through the medium of English. It has been agreed on many literary platforms that freedom is a fundamental need for creative writers. Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya says that the concept of freedom will have to include the medium of expression through which the writer, out of his inner urge, commits himself. It is far more difficult to write creativity in a foreign language than in one’s own – as the writers own business.
Bhabani Bhattacharya was born on tenth November, 1906 in Bhagalpur, Bihar. Quite a precocious child, his talents were discovered by his mother and fostered by his grandfather. At an early age of twelve, he wrote his first article in a Bengali magazine ‘Mouchak’. His flair for writing was not much appreciated by his father who was a District and Sessions Judge and who wanted Bhabani to prepare himself for government service.

Bhattacharya was educated at Patna University and took his B.A (Hons) degree in 1927. He then prosecuted his advanced studies in the University of London (1929-1934). After his B.A (Hons) degree from the London University in 1931, he was awarded Ph D degree on historical research in 1934. He married Salila Mukherji in 1935 and was blessed with three children, a son and two daughters.

Bhabani Bhattacharya’s first novel, *So Many Hungers* (1947) originated from his profound response to the Indian situation in 1942-1943, during which, he felt, the soul of India underwent a sudden development through a multi-dimensional experience. In one of his interviews Bhattacharya has said:
Then the great famine swept down upon Bengal. The emotional stirrings I felt more than two million men, women and children died of slow starvation amid a man-made scarcity were a sheer compulsion to creativity. The result was the novel

**So Many Hungers.**

Bhattacharya worked as Press-attache to the Indian Embassy in Washington, D.C. He was on the staff of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* as Assistant Editor during 1950-52. He acted as secretary, Tagore Commemorative Society, New Delhi, in 1959-60. His worth having been recognized, he was taken in as consultant in the Ministry of Education, New Delhi, in 1961 and continued to work there till 1967. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1967 for his novel **Shadow from Ladakh**. He got a Ford Foundation grant in 1968-69 to write the prestigious work *Gandhi, the Writer-the Image as it Grew* to commemorate the birth centenary of the ‘Father of the Nation’. He became a member on the Advisory Board of the Akademi. He adorned the East, West centre, Honolulu as Senior Specialist during 1969-70 and
since 1970 he has been a visiting professor in the University of Hawai, Honolulu.

Bhabani Bhattacharya has travelled extensively. In 1951 he visited the Soviet Union as a member of the first Indian cultural delegation of writers and scientists led by Dr. Baliga. Later, he attended the International Conference of writers of Stockholm. In 1959, he responded to the invitation from Harvard University and participated as a delegate in the Harvard International Seminar held at Cambridge, Massachussetts, and in the very next year he was invited to attend a similar seminar held at Tokyo. Later he lectured as a guest of the governments in New Zealand and Australia in 1962, and West Germany in 1963. He attended a Writers Conference in Adelaide during the Festival of Arts which is one of Australia’s biggest cultural events. He was the recipient of New Zealand’s prestigious award given by its four universities:

With such background and varied experience, it is no wonder that Bhattacharya has risen like a meteor in the literary firmament. He recollects with a sense of gratification and gratefulness, the highest amount of respect, extended to
the writers, in New Zealand and Australia and he was immensely pleased at the special treatment accorded to him as an Asian writer. He was invited along with his wife to dinner by the Minister of External Affairs. In New Zealand as soon as he and his wife landed at the airport, their luggage was carried by the Vice-Chancellor of the University much to Dr. Bhattacharya’s embarrassment. When prevented, the Vice-Chancellor told him. “You are our guest and it is our duty”.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is an outstanding Indo-Anglian novelist of the present times. He has earned world – wide distinction and his books have appeared in twenty six languages, sixteen of which are European. He has won the coveted Sahitya Akademi Award for 1967 for his novel ‘Shadow from Ladakh’, which is a deserved honor due to the genius of Dr. Bhattacharya. He is the fourth writer to receive the award for a work in English, the other three being R.K Narayan, Raja Rao and Verrier Elwin. Speaking of the award he remarks. “It is good to be known abroad. Even so, I must confess that I would like to be known to my countrymen too. The award redresses a balance – so far I have been better known in the U.S and Europe than in my own country”. One
has been accustomed to recognize talent only after it is
applauded in other countries. There is another tendency
among the literary critics to praise even third-rate material
from the West, but they begin to scoff at the writings of native
writers even when they produce something good and closer to
their life.

It is a strange thing to be a Bengali, born at Bhagalpur
(Bihar), writing in an alien language and living in Maharastra.
Writing is his first love and full time career. All the novels of
Bhattacharya present a true picture of India and its teeming
millions surging with life and substance. He does not believe
in the dictum of art for art’s sake. All writing for him has a
social purpose. His outlook is highly constructive and
purposeful. Smt. Lila Ray writes “As we read his writing, we
hear the dialogue between man and his situation, between
man and man, between man and ideas he lives by.”

Bhabani Bhattacharya has stated that he regards art as
is criticism of life which reviews current values and he
conceives the novel as an idiom of compassion’, which is
designed to have a curative social effect. S C Harrex, the
Australian writer feels that “his own novels conscientiously
reflect these views. Their subject matter and themes derive from modern Indian history and the problems of contemporary Indian society and they embody the programmers of reforms as well as stinging social criticism.”(45). This approach, initiated in modern Indian fiction in English by the early novels and short stories of Mulk Raj Anand is a feature of the majority of Indian post-independence novels.

His works include Tagore’s translations entitled The Golden Boat, Towards Universal Man, a commemoration volume published on the eve of the birth centenary of Tagore; Some Memorable Yesterdays, Indian Cavalcade, Steel Hawk and other Stories, a collection of fifteen short stories, Gandhi, the Writer, the Image as it Grew, a highly stimulating and provocative study released on the occasion of the birth centenary of Mahatma Gandhi and six novels, So Many Hungers, Music for Mohini, He who Rides a Tiger, A Goddess Named Gold, Shadow from Ladakh. A Dream in Hawaii is another political subject detailing the impact of China over Asia.

His wide range of experience, in and around the world and his close association with men, manners and their
personalities have enabled him to grasp the innate significance of humanity and all this finds expression in the characters of his novels and short stories carved out with a pen that never wavers. The reader lives with the characters of the stories and wonders at the author’s keen observation of the day-to-day incidents of life. Bhattacharya has written with a spicy language which is at once crisp and facile. He has caught the vein of rural speech and the informal behavior of the people, their rustic world and their small and simple views about the great things that take place around them. He holds the view that Indian writing in English has been a decisive factor in redressing the balance of false presentation by foreign story-tellers who with their limited possibilities of true experience have seen only the surface of the very life failing to reach deeper into the spirit. According to L N Gupta:

Pure intellectuals watch the crowds but do not force themselves on them. They visit slums and absorb the misery of their dweller in their being. They tour the famine-stricken sufferer. They share their distress. But they do not use amplifiers to blare their benefaction. They suffer quietly. The
process involves cycles of seething tensions. The end product is a major work say, a great novel, in the case of a fiction writer. It is a monument of its times, such is the case with Bhabani Bhattacharya. (231)

Bhabani is of the opinion that unless a writer has keen observation and an eye for noting the details of general behaviour of folk, he cannot write a social novel. For himself Bhattacharya has never missed a single opportunity of observing incidents and happenings.

Regarding sex in novels he said that it is an inevitable part of human life and that it has its place in literature too. He cannot like vulgar low-taste books revelling in sex descriptions. But he likes Lawrence who creates a whole world of this much tabooed feeling and yet the descriptions are most beautiful and excel in their lyrical quality. He has special liking for Hemingway who has shown that sex can be a theme to write upon, without making it repulsive.
Bhattacharya’s views are balanced and he conveys them through the medium of situation rather than statements. His novels centre in the dictum that Art must have a social purpose and he depicts the life of man in relation to Society, in relation to himself, and in relation to Destiny. His outlook is sympathetic, although there is embitterment in his novels. He deals with the theme of hunger, poverty, disease, the suffering of the poor, tradition and modernity, social evils, tensions and pretensions, changing values of modern civilization, inter-racial relations, crisis of character and East-West cultural relations.

Bhattacharya is the one novelist who has an avowed purpose in writing the novels with his manifesto and declaration that “Art must have a social purpose”. Not only did he believe in it, but he followed it implicitly in all his five novels. In this respect he is like Shaw who says that if art is not didactic, it is useless.

All his novels signify a note of triumph that there is a bright future for man and that man should make efforts at all levels to bring out a change in the pattern and structure of the society for the benefit of the entire humanity itself.
One can conclude with what S C Harrex views that:

Although Bhattacharya has a tendency to load his novels with mechanical sociology over-simplified philosophies and naively symbolic relationship these defects are compensated for by the sincerity of his compassion and the relevance of his vision.

(234)

**A Goddess Named Gold** signifies an advance in Bhattacharya’s art as a novelist, for the axes here are hardly visible and the grinding is not very audible. Also, the novel derives from Bhattacharya’s earlier short story, “Desperate Women”. In this story, Lachmi’s child, Nago, slips into the well, and is saved by the brave resourceful Meera Bai. The women now demonstrate before the local profiteer and compel him to release the hoarded saris for sale, and the excited women cry: Lachmi Bai Ki Jai. The novel begins with this episode of the rescue of the child and the sale of the saris.

Lakshmi’s husband is Seth Samsundarji, whose pursuit of wealth and power, at any cost, comes in conflict at various points with the minstrel’s half-mystic, half realistic Sarvodaya ideals. The obtrusive Seth and the elusive minstrel between
them effectively polarize the action of the novel, while the pure, brave, unspoilt, unselfish but adventurous Meera is poised between the two-now an unconscious instrument for evil, and then a conscious instrument for good.

The minstrel gives a taveez to Meera, and tells her that it would prove a touchstone and turn copper into gold every time she did any act of pure kindness. Owing to a misunderstanding, the egregious Seth thinks that the taveez does really have this alchemic power, and so he enters into a business deal with her on a fifty-fifty basis.

**A Goddess Named Gold** has a cathartic quality that sets it apart from many novels that merely entertain. The prototypical Seth Samsundraj finds precedent for his profiteering activities in the wartime orgies of cornering the market: during the rice famine in Bengal four years before three million men and women had to die so that there could be thirty new millionaires, and none condemned the profiteers. His present role, set beside theirs was a child’s prank. If the Sethji’s and permit-holders and license hunters and quota-seekers are not going to be effectively contained, there will be name many more hangovers again, thirty million
more hungers. India’s freedom is like the taveez on Meera’s hand there are Sethji’s profiteers, political bosses, civilian Bulaki Raos, foreign financial interests and local subversions who try to strike infamous business deals with freedom, even as Samsundarji tries to, with Meera’s touchstone.

The free participation of women and levelling of social distinctions brings about the common suffering, particularly jail life. As the solemn day appointed for the handing over of power approaches, there is a feeling of thrill and exaltation among the people. The hopes of Sohanlal, the common man, embody the aspirations of the people who look forward to an era of plenty and in which all the wealth of the nation will belong to the people.

The most important question one has to raise while evaluating A Goddess Named Gold is: Where or to what extent the novelist has followed his own dictum in the writing of this novel. Are the incidents and the characters true to life and is the message of the novelist conveyed unobtrusively without impairing the impression of reality? Regarding the most important episode in the novel, namely the representation of the amulet to Meera and her subsequent
_attempts to make it function, it has not credibility even in the 
setting of a most backward Indian village. The Indian 
peasant, is a hard boiled realist seasoned by centuries of 
harsh experience and is not the type of person to be fooled 
into believing in a taveez -that of a sensible girl burdening her 
body with all sorts of copper ornaments and attempting to 
pull the trick and the entire village sharing her faith in the 
amulet and adding to her burden, is too crude to be true even 
in a land of fakirs and magicians.

A Goddess Named Gold is a complementary to Music 
for Mohini. While in the latter the author emphasizes the 
need for social freedom to make the political freedom effective, 
in the former he tries to awaken his countrymen to the 
needed economic freedom of masses to save independent 
India from being exploited by the greedy capitalists and 
profiteers for their own selfish ends. Atmaram, the holy 
minstrel whose mind is filled with the vision of glorious dawn, 
remarks with foresight: Freedom is the beginning of the road 
where there was no road. But the new road swarms with 
robbers. Sohanlal, who has been in the army and worked in
the city, has seen the real faces behind the masks of these robbers, the Seths’ of many kinds:

The cities had a greater variety and profusion of them than the countryside. There was the money-Seth, of course, to whom freedom meant a chance to fields of trade vacated by the aliens. The Seth with a Gandhi caps on his head and the cap itself a deceit. (45)

Bhattacharya’s **Shadow from Ladakh** enabled him to get recognition even in his own native country. The native son of the soil of India who earlier received several encomiums from foreign dignitaries and press drew the attention of the Indian readers and won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1967 for this novel. Anyone concerned with recent events in India for over a decade would find ample justification and significance in the title. It is purposeful and meaningful. Probably it has significance in the title. Probably it is based on the popular proverb, that is, coming events cast their shadows before. The shadow from Ladakh is an unexpected and ill-boding omen, threatening the security of the nation. Against this background, the theme of the novel is woven. It
registers the conflict of ideologies during the critical period of
the Chinese aggression of India and Bhattacharya with the
fine acumen presents a vivid, moving and touching depiction
of the events against the background of the love story of
Bhashkar Roy and Sumita.

While India has been on the path of progress, the tragic
period came in 1962, when China stabled her in the back.
Ladakh is one of the points of her attack. The shadows of
Maoist dragon loom large from that snowy region to the
remotest villages of India. The friendship of several centuries
suddenly snaps. Communist Mao breaks away from Marx. He
wants to walk in the footsteps of her imperialist ancestors.
India is shaken.

Bhattacharya who experienced a sense of involvement
in Gandhian principle of simple living and high thinking and
who attached the deepest significance to the Gandhian way of
life, made this novel his first commitment to the ideal of
Gandhian life. Although Narayan in his novel *Waiting for the
Mahatma* and Raja Rao in his *Kanthapura* dealt with the
Gandhian theme as the back-drop, Bhattacharya made it a
mode of life, an ideal to live by. There are occasional splashes
of Gandhian philosophy and his love of rural life depicted in Bhattacharya’s earlier novels, but the Gandhian life is interspersed here, not merely in the theme of the story but in the veins and nerves of the characters felt in the blood and felt along the heart. This is in tune with the most apt remark passed by Elizabeth Drew who says: “Shadow of Ladakh is bound to concern itself directly with the emotional and moral standards men live by and all the problems of conduct which beset us every day” (12).

In his most recent novel, Shadow from Ladakh, Bhattacharya has a challenging theme; India at the time of the Chinese invasion of 1962. The title itself sets the pace of the writing, and the military situation casts its shadow almost everywhere, whose phrases and sentences read like excerpts from the reports of political or military correspondents:
If the whole action of the novel is something of a shadow play cast by the Chinese peril, many of the characters are shadows too—shadows chasing shadows. Satyajit is Gandhi’s shadow and Bhaskar, the Chief Engineer of Steel town, almost a Nehruistic symbol or shadow. Satyajit’s Gandhigram, is distantly patterned after Gandhi’s Sevagram, and Bhaskar’s Steel town could likewise be one of the dream- edifices of Nehru, one of the new temples in the secular India of Nehru’s imagination. Gandhi or Nehru? Recalling the earlier American dilemma, Jefferson or Hamilton? Is peaceful co-existence possible between Steel town with its blast furnaces and Gandhigram with its spinning wheels? Again, there was China, Mao’s armour-plated expansionist absolutist China and Nehru’s democratic-socialist federal republic. The political militarist confrontation was of even greater consequence than the other. Mao’s China trying to annex India, 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. It is essential to synthesize, interpret and examine his cogitations on the craft of fiction and correlate
them to the novels he has published in order to arrive at a correct estimate of his mind and art.

Bhattacharya pleads for reality in literature. But he does not subscribe to the belief that reality is at the root of all the creative writing of the modern age and that the Romantic artists of the preceding century, has fascinated only to imitate modern writers and does not find any significant expression in the outstanding creative writings of the present sophisticated age. In his opinion, it is not more than half-truth, for the difference between the literature of today and that of the earlier centuries lies in form and not in subject-matter.

The new intellectualism, brought about by Sigmund Freud, Vatsayana, Darwin and others, is to a great extent, responsible for this change in the form of a literary work, and much is being written about man’s subconscious and unconscious mind. Obviously, modern literature is not all realism. The masters of realism and their followers are there, but as Bhattacharya points out a great mass of writing, readable, technically superb show the deceptive face of the real without the true spirit. Indeed, the lack of genuine
realism in most of the realistic literature of the present age is lamentable.

The novel as a literary form is of recent origin in comparison with drama and poetry and has still a flavour of newness, though its descent can be traced back to the European medieval romance and the old Indian literary masterpieces like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Tales of Ten Princes by Dandi, the Panchatantra, the Yoga Visistha and other Puranic tales. It has developed casually through the centuries, framing its own rules, discarding them, borrowing things from abroad and taking a new turn and shape in accordance with the notions of every master hand. As such there are hardly any set laws about its nature, form and scope, and there is still no theory of fiction which is incapable of refinement. In the letter written on April 30, 1971, Walter Allen remarks: “I must say that I’m not yet absolutely convinced that any one of the novel will cover all those works we count as novels”. No wonder, then, if great novelists have propounded their own theories about the art of the novel and have their own conceptions of its form.
As a matter of fact, it cannot be cut apart from the general cultural pattern. It embodies a cultural outlook which now is only of historical interest, but which truly depicts the age it belongs to. Since the truth portrayed in it has remarkable university and vitality, the epic has survived the various ages and has charmed the initiate or satirize it. It would have escaped him. At the same time, none can satirize such an epic i.e. to make fun of the cultural standing of history. In recent times, Aubrey Menon, a famous man of letters, has attempted to satirize the epic, but he has miserably failed. He shows lack of historical perspective and lapses into a sort of vulgarity.

The serious problem confronted by him is how to correlate the reality of the olden days with the cultural patterns of his time. The values, conventions and others of the preceding periods appear funny and strange to a creative writer, and he finds it very difficult to present them convincingly to his readers. However, the unmistakable truth is that, he succeeds in creating a true work of art only when he is able to achieve the fusion of whether romantic or classical, old or new, and he must invariably project and
convey truth, the truth of emotion, which is the ultimate realism. It is this kind of truth which is universal in appeal: otherwise much of what is true ethically, economically and socially for the people of other periods and countries may only serve as material for gay laughter.

Commenting on the concept of Art for Life’s sake, Bhattacharya rejects the dictum of Art for Art’s sake and calls it a muddled cry because it is an absurd demand like Science for the sake of science. He emphasizes that art must have purpose as a writer.

I hold that a novel must have social purpose. It must place before the reader something from the society’s point of view. Art is not necessarily for art’s sake. Purposeless art and literature which is much in vogue does not appear to me a sound judgment. Just as no part of a man’s body can claim autonomy simply because it performs a definite function of its own, so art cannot be called art only when if fulfills certain artistic or aesthetic requirements and attains certain artistic standards. When with modern-space-time
concepts the world has undergone a lot of contraction and has become monolithic, it is neither possible nor desirable that a particular set of ideas or a particular type of human endeavor can be completely separated from another. Consequently, values in art cannot help getting involved in the values of human living. Though fascinated and inspired by nature and its manifestations, the artist is deeply rooted in human life, and it is especially true of the novelist and the dramatist. (78)

Bhabani Bhattacharya is unquestionably one of the celebrated Indo-English fiction writers. Not withstanding his rather scanty literary output-viz., five novels and one collection of short stories during a considerably long period of over thirty-two years, beginning with the publication of the memorable novel So Many Hungers in 1947-he has caught the fancy of quite a large reading public and academics both at home and abroad. So Many Hungers!, Music for Mohini, He Who Rides a Tiger, A Goddess Named Gold and Shadow from Ladakh are his masterpieces, which, in due course of
time, will surely find a place among the classics of Indo-
English literature. No wonder, then, if his latest novel has
won for him the much-coveted Sahitya Akademi award for
1967. Besides, he is a much-translated Indian novelist
writing in English. His books have been translated into
twenty-six languages, including fourteen European
languages. His immerse popularity in European countries is
obvious from the fact that eighty thousand copies of the
German translation of A Goddess Named Gold alone have
already been sold. In spite of the global fame that has come
evaluated thoroughly well with the sympathy of a scholar.
Only two full-length studies and a few articles in journals and
books have appeared on him.

It has been a sincere endeavor to make this study really
useful and interesting for scholars in general and for
university students in particular. Since there is a paucity of
critical works on the contemporary Indian novelists writing in
English, the book, it is hoped, will surely help the reader to
understand, and develop genuine interest in, Bhabani
Bhattacharya as well as Indo-English fiction of recent
decades.
Bhattacharya projects his vision of life, not only through his virtuous characters like Devata, Rahoul, Kajoli and others, but also through a profiteer and moral offender like Samarendra Basu. When this man was a rich class-mate humiliated him by denying him the taste of condensed milk. It was at that time that he had vowed to fight against poverty and provide his children a life without the miseries and insults of poverty. The writer evidences his affirmative belief in life by showing Samarendra Basu successful in realizing his dream in quite a short period. Moreover, Samarendra is shown believing in creation out of annihilation. He dwells upon this theme zealously while talking to Mr. Sidebottom about World War II and Rahoul’s scientific researches. He is also presented as a man of immense hope and courage.

Of all Indo-English novelists, Bhattacharya, with the only exception of Mulk Raj Anand, has discussed the art of the novel most consciously and comprehensively. Like many of his illustrious European, American and Indian predecessors and contemporaries, he has his own definite views on art and fiction. However, he has not put them systematically in book form like E. M Forster.
Though not a prolific writer with abundant humanism and leftist leanings like Mulk Raj Anand, nor a comic genius with artistic detachment and commitment to human values like R.K Narayan, nor a creative artist with astonishing philosophical depth like Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya—one of the major novelists of the older generation of living Indo-English fictionists— is endowed with a transparently positive vision of life, explored and expressed artistically in all the five novels he has published so far. Since he believes that the novel should have a social purpose, his stories abound in social and historical realities, quite often bitter and gruesome, such as the Bengal Famine of 1943, the tragedies of the freedom struggle and partition and the evils of poverty, corruption, ignorance and so on.

Both K.R Sirnivasa Iyengar and K.R Chandresekharan safely evaluate his fiction primarily on the basis of his themes and ideas, whereas M.K Naik, in his recent, *A History of Indian English Literature*, hints at a number of structural and other novelistic deficiencies like those in characterization and presentment of an interpretation of life in terms of social realism, and wonders whether his fiction has really any enduring quality. The foreign critics, too, say like H.M
Williams and Syd Harrex, are uncertain about their response to Bhattacharya’s fiction, though they seem to like his imaginative power, his scene-painting, and the sincerity of his compassion and the relevance of his vision. This article is an attempt at clarifying certain central issues connected with Bhattacharya’s novelistic art.

In his article Bhabani Bhattacharya aims to offer a fictional work by emphasizing its relevance in terms of the great themes it handles—the tiger he rides—but to examine the predicament of the writer who rides it. The tiger is there for everybody to see and admire. The great socio-cultural and political processes that India has experienced in recent times—the freedom struggle, the fight against poverty, superstition and caste-domination, modernization through industrialization, East-West encounter, the struggle to establish a new democratic and socialistic expressions are presented in his works.

Literature and Social Reality and the interview, with Bhabani by Sudhakar Joshi, are especially significant. It is essential to systematize, interpret and examine his cogitations on the craft of fiction and correlate them to the novels he has
published in order to arrive at a correct estimate of his mind and art.

In addition to hunger and freedom, synthesis of opposites is another dominant theme in Bhattacharya’s fiction. A profound scholar of Indian history as he is, he has concentrated upon the great Indian tradition of integration of diverse and conflicting element, viewpoints and cultures. His creative work artistically embodies in miniature the essential Indian ideal of unity in diversity resulting from the compromise between the various aspects of life. In the earlier novels, the theme of synthesis is dealt with indirectly and secondarily. But in the latest novel, entitled Shadow from Ladakh, it is conspicuous and dominant from the beginning to the end of the narrative.

Indian writing in English is a primarily part of the literature of India, in the same way as the literatures written in various regional languages are or ought to be. It can present the life of a village like Bulashah or Kanthapura, a small town like Malgudi or Kedaram, or sweep through continents and eternity itself; and so long as the operative sensibility of the writer is essentially Indian it will be Indian literature. Sanskrit was not an Indian language, nor were
Arabic and Persian but the one became the very breath of India, that by which all else is known-devabhasha, devajanavidya-and the other two, Persian more than Arabic, have fathered forth a very sophisticated Indian language, namely, Urdu.. The term English is no longer restricted to the language spoken wherever it is spoken and however well or ill-spoken.

A writer creates his own world. This creation may be a far cry from the actual world or partial modification or a convincing replica of it. It often happens that when events of great importance and significance take place in a country they are reflected or echoed in its literature. There may be exceptions to this. The novels of Jane Austen, for instance, depict a fairly tranquil England and shut out all reference to the Napoleonic wars.

The greatest event of this century in Indian History is the attainment of Independence. The period immediately preceding this event was one of struggle, suffering and hope and the period following it have witnessed unexpected trials and difficulties, but in spite of them, valiant efforts have been made to create a new order. Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of the foremost among Indian writers who have dealt with these
epoch-making events. His novels deal with the situation in modern India and therefore constitute a social document of great value.

Bhattacharya is one of the older generations of living Indian novelist writing in English. In spite of his versatility and undoubtedly great talents fame has come to him rather tardily. He has written not only novels and short stories, but has also translated and edited some of Tagore’s writings, written popular accounts of episodes from Indian history and produced a book on Gandhi the writer. He is perhaps not as widely known in this country as he ought to be, and judging from the number of translations of his works into foreign languages, he has a wider reading public abroad than at home. This monograph, although it is bound to be at times critical of certain aspects of Bhattacharya’s works, will endeavor to draw attention to the positive side of his achievement.

All the novels of Bhattacharya deal with contemporary problems in India. So Many Hungers and He Who Rides a Tiger are inspired by the famine in Bengal and the Quit India Movement. Music for Mohini is partly concerned with the reconciliation of old and new values in Indian life. A Goddess
Named Gold is fully preoccupied with the meaning and significance of freedom. Shadow from Ladakh focuses attention on problems arising from the Chinese aggression of 1962. Bhattacharya’s choice of theme in all these cases is the result of his concept of the novel. He believes that the novelist can find plenty of material in the happenings of the day. This is particularly true of India which is passing through a momentous stage in her history. The feelings and aspirations of the people, their attempts to create a new order based on the foundations of the old, the dangers and difficulties that confront them in their task, all these could be profitably utilized by an observant novelist who may have the privilege of capturing a true image of the times for the benefit of people living in other lands and of posterity. Bhattacharya is aware of the existence of a point of view that a novelist should use contemporary reality because he is too close to it. He can make it a great work of significance.
CHAPTER - II
THEME OF FAMINE

One of the main themes of Bhabani Bhattacharya is famine. He has successfully exploited the plot and theme of his novel to touch the core of human hearts. The novel mirrors the naked horror of the famine, the ruthlessness of society and above on the psychological and superstitions temperament of the people. He describes the disastrous famine happened in Bengal in 1943. It deals with the period of the Second World War as it affected India. Of all these provinces of India, Bengal was more imminently involved in the war with the constant threat of the imminent danger of Japanese air-blasts. It was shaken to the roots by the two diabolical forces of war and famine which sucked the blood of the have-nots. It is an irony of human nature that the rich people who treat the poor as the meanest creatures, crawling on the surface of the earth, do not mind offering any amount to worship with sincere hope that He would bless them in their immortal acts, unlawful and immoral transactions in the society.
It was a man-made famine that took a toll of two million innocent men, women and children. The story centers round the Basu family a peasant family, the girl Kajoli, her mother and her brother. Samarendra Basu thinks of organizing a business concern Bengal Rice Limited and the unscrupulous Sir Lakshminath helps the company extend its branches to every far-off corner of the province. It is this man’s genius that has so well spread the vice of corruption, and hoarded food grains. The fountains of human kindness seem to have almost dried up only vultures ruled the human habitats.

**He Who Rides a Tiger** was written in 1954, a time when India was making sincere attempts at creating a new social order and came out with a new outlook on life. Here he once again regent to the old theme – the Bengal famine. His earlier novels have their roots in rural Vidarbha. He remains an unequalled master in interpreting rural India. Particularly in the novel **A Goddess Named Gold** the world of fable and reality that delve deep in to the minds of our rural folk are skillfully and artistically blended. It contains, like his other novel **He Who Rides a Tiger** some superb descriptions of rural folk. Sudhakar Joshi writes:
His novels have a penetration and sympathetic analysis of the simple but insurmountable problems of Indian life. His themes generally revolve round poverty, hunger, pestilence, traditionalism, caste, India’s struggle against poverty, industrialization and the resulting controversy of Gandhian panacea versus rapid industrialization. (235)

It is an attack on both who profited by people’s misery during the famine and those who exploited them a caste tyrants. It is a legend of freedom, a legend to inspire and awaken. It has a fascinating beginning. The story runs rapidly surging with emotion and agitation. Its sharp and vivid characterization and untainted realism make this novel a very interesting one. It is a grim satire on Hindu orthodoxy Dr. Iyengar says, “The tempo of life in Calcutta, the complex of urban vices and urban sophistication, superstition and mumbo jumbo – gives the novel an entire and piquant quality all its own” (136).

The novel is based on an ancient saying he who rides a tiger cannot dismount. A humble village blacksmith named
Kalo takes his revenge on a rigid, caste-ridden society and makes a living for himself and his daughter by faking a miracle that begins as a fraud and ends as a legend - and passing himself off as a Brahmin priest. The story ends with a note of triumph for the soul over flesh. Eventually, when the fraud is detected other low caste people hail him as their brother and the outraged upholders of caste and custom panic. **He who Rides a Tiger** is a skilful and entertaining and an illuminating fictional glimpse inside the corner of India – Bhattacharya writes of Indians and the social, cultural and religious world in which they live with an authority and understanding that no western writer can hope to match. An Australian writer S C Harrex says:

> The novel **So Many Hungers** is a harrowing account of a famine in Bengal and a passionate indictment of the human culpability involved, particularly of the grasping parasites who exploit the famine to make black-market fortunes. The story is told from the point of view of the starving peasants who migrated to Calcutta when they died in the streets and is calculated to shock the
readers sense of humanity in scenes such as that which describes a Jackal perched on the thigh of a pregnant woman tearing at her swollen belly, while her screams slash the air. (145)

Bhattacharya paints that naked horror of it all with a pitiless precision and cumulative detail. Dr Srinivasa Iyengar states:

So Many Hungers is on doubt an impeachment of man’s inhumanity to man, but it is also a dramatic study of a set of human beings caught in a unique and tragic predicament. The story has been effectively told and the tragic pathos of the real mass starvation described in the guise of fiction, moves the reader deeply. The novel describes a factual and vivid account of one of the most shocking disasters in history. (193)

Bhabani Bhattacharya has given a brutally frank picture of the hungry Bengal in his novel So Many Hungers. The novel deals with the man-made famine of Bengal of 1942. It is the story of a well-to-do Bengali family, with two sons-Rahul and Kunal. Kunal was all for Joining the army, and
Rahul was an intellectual. Their father Samarendra Basu took advantage of the fluctuating stock market and made a pile. Rahul was a professor at Calcutta University and was engaged in advanced research work in Astro-Physics. Kunal began to feel that the Second World War was a war loaded on the shoulders of India.

In the midst of this money-making and unset, is shown a Bengali family in Bengali village of Baruni. The Government was purchasing rice from all over Bengal and gradually villagers were being emptied of all their rice. Agents greedy for money paid fancy prices and condemned the villagers to sell all their hoarded rice. The result was scarcity and shadows of famine over the whole of Bengal; Kojoli- the village girl was in the gripe of that famine. The village leader Devata was arrested by the police and after his departure there was no guidance left.

The Battle of Bengal thickened, human endurance ebbed. Hungry children cried themselves to death. Streams of desperate men ventured out of their ancestral homes in search of food, hanging on the footboards of railways trains,
riding on the sun-baked roofs. But the police threw up all barriers.

Kajoli, who was pregnant, and her young brother Kishore at last started to Calcutta. On the way she was completely exhausted and hunger struck, and loses all her strength. An Indian sepoy tried to seduce her in exchange for a loaf of bread but she fainted. And the soldier went off. A Jackal came there hoping to eat the helpless girl. Her brother deadly trying to frighten and spell it out but he was also too weak. In this particular instant God appears in the form of a good soldier. He gave them food and water and a lift to Calcutta on his truck and for further treatment moved her to an army hospital.

Rahul, the Professor had organized relief work in Calcutta. At last Kajoli’s mother threw herself in the river and tried to kill herself. When Kajoli came out of the hospital, she had to face starvation again. But at last she got work of selling papers. Rahul, whose patriotic activities were known to the Government, was at last arrested and his father, who was on the directors of the concern, which had bought rice from the whole of Bengal, was left lamenting.
Quit India Movement of 1942 and the naked horror that pierced his eyes in the Bengal famine of 1943 haunted his mind so often that he was impelled to put it in the framework of fiction. As his heart was so much swayed by the consequences of the famine and its depiction, Bhattacharya could not do enough justice to the plot and some characters in the novel.

The novel *So Many Hungers* may be classified as under loose plot. The texture of the plot is loose and the author’s attention is focused more on the depiction of the after-math of war and famine. However he shows consummate skill in providing a deep insight into the realism of the disastrous famine. Here are a number of detached incidents, more or less, with no harmonious blending. The situation predominates in the novel and it dwarfs all the characters. There does not seem to be a comprehensive general design. It is a composite plot in the sense that it centre in two families.

Rahul’s story is a representation in miniature of the struggle for freedom. The sad tale of Kajoli is like-wise a pathetic record of what had happened to more than two million men and women who became victims of a famine
which was not an act of God but which was brought about by
the rapacity and selfishness of profiteers and the indifference
of an alien Government.

The description are surcharged with emotional
atmosphere and the underlying sympathy of the author for
the situations and the characters make the novel a
memorable account of the war years more than any other
historical details.

The intensity of the physical horror of the famine is
balanced by the sympathetic chords of Devesh. He was a true
veteran of the National Movement. He was panic-stricken over
the lot of the poor peasants during the dismal course of war,
they were the core of his being his blood-and-bone. He was
arrested and when people tried to restrain such action, he
exhorted them that there was violence in their thought and
they should not make it worse by violence in action. He laid
the ahimsa spell on Baruni.

Bhattacharya succeeds in raising the vents and
incidents described in the novel to a level of tragic
magnificence, thereby compensating for the absence of fully-
realized characters. The high hand of famine is effectively caricatured in the condition of Mangala, the cow.

Men denied of even the bare necessities of life-food, shelter and clothing are not rare specimens in India: they are present everywhere on the pavements of our metropolitan cities, the capital being no exception. Incidents and episodes are not unheard of, where children and sick persons are carried off by wild animal as are given in the factual renderings of Jim Corbett. The incidents narrated in this novel are based on eye-witness accounts; besides news paper reports and Bhattacharya had with him actual paper clippings of the war period and the famine of Bengal, while writing this novel.

Kalo is a dark-skinned blacksmith in the small town, Jharna, competent in his trade, industrious and ambitious. His pretty wife died of child-birth. The baby daughter is named Chandra Lekha- a name casually suggested by the priest when he came to the smithy for some work before the confinement. As the girl grows under the tender care of the rough artisan, she displays usual intelligence and she has inherited her mother’s good look. Kalo sends her to the local
English Convent School where her presence is frowned upon by the girls belonging to the higher castes. Kalo is criticized for his presumptuousness both by the high-caste people and the people at his level. As Chandra Lekha moves up from one class to another at school, her father is filled with pride and joy. He is at times conscious of his own mental backwardness and desires to improve himself by reading his daughter’s books at night when she is asleep. In her final year at school Chandra Lekha takes part in an all-State essay-writing competition, and to the great joy of her father, her essay is adjudged the best and she gets a gold medal. Kalo takes it out of its casket every day and spends some time fondly looking at it. The features which are clearly brought out in the story at his age are the low station occupied by father and daughter and their consciousness of it, the girl’s unusual cleverness and attainments and the touching tenderness of their mutual affection.

The background of He Who Rides a Tiger is partly political and mainly economic and social. The Quit India Movement; people being imprisoned for the crime of loving their country, defiance of bans, hunger strikes in jails, are the
reminder in the novel of the political situation in the country. That World War II and the threat of a Japanese invasion also form part of the background is suggested by the presence of British soldiers in the city. The casual attitude of the thoughtless British soldiers to the spectacle of hunger and their enjoyment of boys fighting for crumb of bread suggest the image of India they are forming and that they will carry with them when they leave the country. The Bengal Famine of 1943 which figures prominently in *So Many Hungers* is present here also and from the spring board for the main action of the story. Adequate measures have not been taken for the defense of the country against the Japanese. There is no rationing of good grains and no attempt at price control or checking of cornering. Boats have been people of the countryside by their frantic attempts to reach Calcutta.

*He Who rides a Tiger*’s theme reverts to his first novel *So Many Hungers* having for its background and detailed account – the Bengal famine, which rocked the very foundation of humanity. In a way they are twin novels and owe their inspiration to the same sources- the Quit India Movement and the Bengal famine. Nonetheless there is a
marked divergence in the treatment of the theme of famine in the two novels. But in common it is represented as the whirlpool into which the lives of the unfortunate lot have been sucked.

Bhattacharya deftly delineates the distinction between the strong and the weak; and he dexterously links up the two themes. He has also represented the contrast in temperaments. Thus Kalo, the strong man with irresistible force and energy is closely associated with the soft and delicate heart of his daughter Lekha on whom he lavishes all his innate affection. The famine serves as the right occasion to highlight this contrast. It brings our separation between them and it seriously affects the lives of both father and daughter. The story serves as a true mirror of the modern life where honesty has become unfashionable.

Bhattacharya has successfully exploited the plot in the novel. The theme of the novel touches the core of the human heart. The novel mirrors the naked horror of the famine, the ruthlessness of society and above all the psychological and superstitious temperament of the people. It is an irony of the human nature that the rich people, who treat the poor as the
meanest creatures crawling on the surface of the earth, do no mind offering any amount for worshipping god with sincere hope that he would bless them in their immoral act and unlawful and immoral transactions.

The impact of the famine is represented darkly in So Many Hungers whereas the resultant factors of the famine exhibit the wrath against the society in He Who Rides a Tiger and this aspect is skillfully designed and tactically portrayed. In the first novel human lives have got themselves engulfed in the famine, while it serves as a mere backdrop against which a moving human drama is enacted Who Rides a Tiger is a study of life in general and it deals with the central character Kalo and the readers get a glimpse of the famine as it dictates and directs the forces determining his life. The recurrence of this theme of famine drives home the fact how it has affected Bhattacharya’s conscience and how his mind is swayed by its burden. Dr Ram Sewak Singh in his article remarks:

Bhattacharya not only records the misery of the poor but misery of the rich also. The irony of situation very ably presents the ghastly contract
between affluence and poverty, power and helplessness, goodness and hypocrisy. (238)

The deplorable urban vices that have struck deep roots in Calcutta and neighboring towns and villages during the famine are conveyed with indefatigable force. Mass hysteria and superstition are effectively interpreted.

Bhattacharya gives a pathetic picture of innumerable indignities and cruelties to which human being were subjected during the famine. It depraved mankind of everything and made them do anything deprived. While some indulged in luring the young innocent lasses to prostitution, others made money whatever be the method that was employed then. Then law of the jungle prevailed and morality and honesty ceased to exist.

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not mind offering any amount for worshipping God with sincere hope that He would bless them in their immoral acts and unlawful and immoral transactions.

Bhattacharya’s third novel **He Who Rides a Tiger** is an attack on both who profited by people’s misery during the famine and those who exploited them in the name of caste. The social theme is developed in terms of irony in order to dramatize the inequities and hypocrisies of the caste system. It is a telling story of the classical hoax perpetrated by a low-born black-smith on the people of Bengal during the last war and offers biting criticism of the caste-system. Joseph Hitrec rightly sums up when he remarks, **He Who Rides a Tiger** is new for India in the sense that it deals with real people in our time and containing strong moral protest. Although the plot hinges in part on the caste system and is bound to generate more suspense in an Indian than in an accidental, its emotional appeal is pure are universal.

Bhabani Bhattacharya’s first book, **So Many Hungers!** is a socio-political novel. An authentic record of the Bengal Famine of 1943 and the Quit India Movement of 1942, it has as its central theme man’s hunger for food and political
freedom. The book is made of two plots: the story of Samarendra Basu’s family with young Rahoul as the central figure; and the story of a peasant family with a young girl Kajoli as the principal character. The first story with Samarendra Basu’s father, Devesh Basu, who is respectfully called Devata by everyone, and his eldest son, Rahoul, deals with India’s struggle for freedom in the early forties. The second represents, in miniature, the pathetic fate of millions who suffered immeasurably from a famine, which was the result of the most heinous selfishness of profiteers.

According to Bhattacharya, even if war is to be won, it should be closely related to values. When a man-made famine sweeps over Bengal, he is one of those very few persons who most willingly and freely offer help to suffering humanity. While his father, Samarendra, is a mean profiteer partly responsible for the famine, he unhesitatingly brings helpless and hungry pregnant women to his home and helps them in every possible manner.

The novel, as pointed out earlier, mainly focuses on man’s great hunger for food. Bhattacharya artistically portrays hunger for food as the most fundamental reality of
human life, and in this respect he is very close to Freud. The book paints a detailed and graphic picture of the Bengal Famine of 1943 which is a heart-rending scene of starvation and death. Every-where in the village of Bengal, people are undergoing terrible pangs of starvation.

Bhattacharya has a through grasp of his basic theme of hunger, and has dealt with most of its significant aspects and varieties. His fiction is based upon man’s hunger for food and political freedom. But it also gives adequate consideration to other forms of human hunger- hunger for eternal ethical values; hunger for a happier life for the common people; hunger for sex and wealth without any concern for moral and social codes and decency; hunger for social prestige, titles, riches and prosperity of one’s children etc. In a word, his fictional work fully explores and communicates his theme of hunger.

In **He Who Rides a Tiger**, the Quit India Movement is mentioned and lies in the large on the horizon. The two novels are in a way twins and owe their inspiration to the same sources. There is, however, great difference between them with respect to the treatment of the theme and the final effect
aimed at end produced. While the earlier novel focuses attention on the national movement and Bengal’s travail and their cataclysmic effect on the teeming millions of people, the later novel is more concerned with the history of one mind or at the most of two or three minds. The famine is the Valley of the Shadow of Death through which they have to pass before they attain their full stature as human beings. The hero Kalo, in particular, chastened and purified by his experiences and sufferings, learns the secret that to be true to one’s own self is the greatest achievement of man. It is when he liberates himself from the chains that enslave the spirit that his friend, Biten, congratulates him and tells him: Yours story will be legend of freedom.

The shadow of the Bengal famine now begins to fall over Jharna town. Food grains become scarce and unemployment becomes more and more acute. Weavers and other tradesmen sell their implements for a pittance and leave the town. Kalo does not find enough work and his hammer and blowpipe which he affectionately calls Thunderbolt and Swollen Cheek, become idle. Petty traders from the cities take advantage of the situation and buy implements and household articles at
bargain prices. Agents from brothels also roam from place to place trying to snare away good-looking and impoverished girls. One such agent talks to Chandra Lekha when she is alone in the house in insinuating language and for the time being induces her to sell a pair of gold bangles that she is wearing. Kalo surveys the whole position and decides to go to Calcutta where he hopes to find work in some smithy or workshop. He leaves his daughter with a heavy heart in the care of an old aunt. He has no money even to buy a railway ticket; all that he has with him is a little treacle rice in a cloth bundle.

The Bengal Famine of 1943 which figures prominently in *So Many Hungers* is present here also and forms the springboard for the main action of the story. The government is blamed for its inept handling of the situation. Adequate measures have not been taken for the defense of the country against the Japanese. There is no rationing of food grains and no attempt at price control or checking of cornering. Boats have been destroyed as a precautionary measure. The helplessness of the people of the countryside is revealed by their frantic attempts to reach Calcutta. They attempt to travel on the foot-boards of trains and are often beaten up
and driven away by policemen. Kalo’s own experience shows the nature of the ordeal endured by thousands. Some who travel on foot-boards fall by the wayside like the stranger whom Kalo sees struck down by the girder of the bridge and falling into the river.

Although the Bengal famine forms the immediate background of *He Who Rides a Tiger* and constitutes the main-spring of Kalo’s action, the emphasis shifts in the latter part of the novel to the characters of Kalo and Lekha and to the manner in which they react to their situation. Lekha’s character is steady and of a piece, and her attitudes and actions show a fair measure of consistency. In spite of her schooling and refinement she retains her original simplicity and contentment with her lot.

Bhattacharya experiences a moral and spiritual conflict between love of ease, power and prestige on one side and desire to be true to himself on the other. He is finally able to kill the tiger for deceit and make-believe when he acquires the moral strength to be himself. His personality has disintegrated in the course of the tiger-ride and he is able to slay the beast only when he has brought about a re-
integration of it. The struggle of Kalo is consequently a struggle for integrity.
CHAPTER – III
THEME OF POVERTY

The theme of hunger and poverty is markedly manifest in Kamala Markandaya’s novel *Nectar in Sieve*. The story centres in too many characters and the theme could not be artistically handled. The descriptions do not have the same vigor and force as are apparent in Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers*. The story moves slowly and the plot is simple, while Bhattacharya with his self-involvement, makes it moving with the force of the language and the pathos of the situation. Dr. C Paul Verghese rightly remarks that:

Food is the primary requisite of human dignity; hunger debases and dehumanizes man.

Bhattacharya has dealt quite forcefully with the theme of hunger and the concomitant theme of human degradation in his novels *So Many Hungers* and *He Who Rides a Tiger*. (123)

Bhattacharya is a stern realist. His novel *So Many Hungers* was published a couple of months after India’s attainment of Independence. One naturally expects that the theme of freedom would pervade the pages of this momentous
novel. The world hunger is very often used as a refrain in all his novels. Here Bhattacharya refers to the people’s hunger for food or freedom. Thus the twin hunger for freedom is the key to the theme of the novel. Bhattacharya makes relevant references to these dual aspects in the case of the novel itself.

Kishore’s song has a deep significance:
I know, I know, beloved.
Not in this life will hungers be sated
I know, I know, beloved;
It concludes with the jubilant note of Tagore
The more they tighten the chains, the more the chains loosen.

The people, especially, the poor peasants, become unhappy victims of the miserable plight that war brought upon them. It is a tale that relates the underlying truth that poverty and hunger debase humanity to an unfortunate level and it is impossible to imagine the depths to which they degrade themselves only to make a living. Bengal passed through the darkest misery in her history. It is an iron that the mythical Sonar-Bengla has cities. The essence of the novel is couched in the well-known maximum, Man eat food, not money.
The empty stomach was due to no light to Nature, not failure of crops; it is really a man-made scarcity. But the pity of it is that the villagers would fight and die over a moral issue. But hunger was their fate, an expiation of the sins of past lives. When Devata was arrested, the village had become rudderless and had become a prey to violence, and temptation to sell rice at higher rates for soldiers of the British Empire. The consequence was famine and the mass exodus of the villagers to the city of class Calcutta Kajoli was a victim of the grim tragedy which had taken a toll of two million lives of Bengal, Bhattacharya presents this picture with intense realism.

The Battle of Bengal intensified, human endurance ebbed. Hungry children cried themselves to death. Streams of desperate men ventured out of their ancestral homes in search of food, hanging on to the food boards of railway trains, riding on the sun baked roofs. But the police threw up barriers. Then the men trekked the meadows and roads, ten thousand village streams flowing city wards. Ahead was the city, shining bright as a light house. The city had never grown a blade of corn. The city had eaten out of the green bowl of
the peasant’s fields. The city, having taken harvests, would spare a little for the peasant folk who had ever filled the bowls? The city would not let the food-growers famish? Move on to the city. Move on. Drag your sore feet and move on.

The most grew some picture of the tragedy of the hunger-stricken masses drugging from the country side, ever presented by any Indo-Anglian novelist, is the following and it keeps the readers thinking and moves them to tears:

A great many were in no fit state to consume solid food. They ate and died. To give them rice was to kill them. They need a special diet and glucose. Rahul felt a better laugh in his heart. Glucose indeed! Poverty had made the cow, Mangala’s condition highly miserable. She began to low piteously for a bite of grass, thick bones sticking out of her russet skin, eyes afraid and begging, even her pair of strong curved horns looking oddly emaciated. (342)

The novel deals with the destiny of a whole populace and not that of an individual such aspects of disintegration and social Docrot Zhivago. While the hunger of lust, Kajoli’s
hunger of a home remains an unfulfilled dream. Abalabandhu and Samerendra are an epitome of the hunger for name and fame. Devesh’s hunger is for the general welfare of the entire humanity. The cow, Mangala stands for the supreme hunger for sacrifice.

Travelling on the foot-board of a train, he is tempted to steal some bananas from a carriage when he is ravenously hungry. He is arrested and tried for this offence. The magistrate is most harsh and unimaginative when Kalo pleads that he stole so as to preserve his life for the sake of his family.

In the prison Kalo shares a cell with a young man from Calcutta whose real name is revealed to be Bikash Mukherji at the end of the novel but who, like at other prisoners, is known in the prison is under sentence of imprisonment for the offence of having protested against a policeman beating up and killing a hungry destitute in the city who had stood before an eating-place and stared at the food.

The next development is the erection and inauguration of a temple on the hallowed spot. Money and materials pour in from all sides, especially from the black marketers and
speculators from whom worship is atonement for all sins committed and a durance of success in future undertakings. A magnificent temple is built and it attracts a large number of worshippers. Kalo, already wearing the sacred thread and passing for a Brahmin, also assumes a recognizably Brahmin name, Mangal Adhikari. Apujari is appointed as Kalo knows little about the ritual of worship and has, anyway to pretend to be so concerned with more important matters that he has no time for pedestrian work. A Board of Trustees is constituted to manage the financial and administrative work of the temple. The revenues swell; important men like the rich merchant, Motichand, and Sir Abalabandhu, become associated with the management. Among the worshippers who came to the temple and touch Mangal Adhikari’s feet is the magistrate who had sentenced Kalo to hard labor for stealing bananas.

Bhattacharya presents a deep insight into the fact that no one knows to what abysmal depths poverty degrades a man. Man loses all sense of values and becomes a slave to circumstances. The novel begins at a leisurely speed, but the events later quicken and tone up the spirit of the novel. But
the readers are not prepared for the sudden and abrupt ending of the novel – of Kalo’s confession. It may be taken as an offspring of his pecuniary frenzy and sudden force. Despite the flaws in the novel, it remains an achievement indeed.

The plight of the destitute in the novel reminds us of similar echoes from **So Many Hungers** the absence of rationing of food grains, non-challenge to price and hoarding. Boats are destroyed and the poor people took at the city as a light house and proceed thereby traveling on foot-boards of trains. The fate of the millions is written in the face of Kalo. Thus **He Who Rides a Tiger** has for its three dimensional view – the political, economic and social background. It is in main a social novel. The Quit India Movement, the imprisonments, defiance of authority and hunger strikes strike the political atmosphere. The economic crisis consequent on the Bengal famine of 1943 and the social injustice and inequities of the various classes in the society are an echo of the economic and social background. Amidst this setting, Bhattacharya gives a clarion call to the nation and his words have come out prophetic.
Bhattacharya presents here the misery of the poor as well as the rich. The contrast between property and poverty, goodness and hypocrisy, power and helplessness is drawn effectively. The useful picture of the human indignities and cruelties to which the human beings were subjected, sears the heart. Famine has pulled them down to its lowest depth and honor is kept at stake. Poverty has driven them to the cities where they become a prey to the whims and fancies of the money-bags.

Poverty killed the fairy land of Bengal. Two great hungers struck the land of Bengal in the wake of the war, the hunger of the masses of people uprooted from their old earth and turned into beggars, and the hunger of the all-owing few of pleasure and more pleasure; a rising fever of the times. The methods followed in tricking the poor girls into prostitution and the inhuman way of teasing and beating them into accepting the trades are minutely presented here. Even to have breathed the air of the harlot house would mark a woman as fallen.

The joining link between the two plots of the novel is Devesh Basu, who is the de jure head of the family of the first
plot and the de facto head of the peasant family of the second. Far away from his son and grandsons who lead a luxurious life in the city, he lives a very simple life in the village with the family of Kajoli. More than that, Devata is the source of inspiration to Rahoul and Kajoli, the two principal characters of the novel.

The book opens with a short paragraph referring to World War II. Then on the very first page we read about Monju’s hard and heavy labor pangs worrying everyone in the family. Rahoul, her husband, is greatly upset to know from his mother that the pains will continue for at least half an hour more. Though at first this short duration appears like an age to him, yet in no time does he recover from despair because he is wedded to a clear vision of joyful life.

More than Rahoul, Devata, who is part his seventieth year, lives amidst the villagers at Baruni far from the affluent life of his son and grandsons in Calcutta; because he finds the illiterate and nearly uncivilized rustics essentially good, having unfailing trust in human values. He says to Rahoul: I am civilized- like you city-breds; but they are good people. Centuries of hardship and strain have not destroyed their
faith in human values. He has become one with the poor village people whose welfare is the primary aim of his life. He has not only the hunger for ideal life, but also represents it with all its dignity, courage and grandeur.

Hunger for food, though it also closely analyses man’s other urges. It is a story not only about so many hungry people, but also about so many types of human hunger. It begins with Rahoul’s hunger for a new world order founded on eternal ethical values and higher ideals, and is haunted by the desire to see the advent of a new epoch dominated by higher values and ideas. This is the reason why he becomes fretful in his heart when he discovers that the Allies during World War II are fighting for victory only, and not for values and ideals: The new world order was an empty dream? The Allies fought for victory and nothing beyond? No higher ideals were visible in their proclaimed war aims-none. Like his grandfather, Devata, he acts under the inward urge, the passion of the soul, and to him, nothing is more precious in life than this. Rahoul and his ideal, Devata, are an embodiment of man’s hunger for the world of permanent values ensuring a happier life for the common people.
Rahoul, in spite of his known nationalistic leanings, is left alone for a time by the government because of the possibility of his discovering the Death Ray. His difficulties, however, increase as the days pass. The police are suspicious about his activities and employ a student to spy on him. This student sneaks into the laboratory in the absence of Rahoul and pries into his notes. Rahoul has been warned in time about the presence of the spy by a patriotic and devoted research student, Prokash. He advises Rahoul to keep the police on the wrong track by writing fake notes and pretending to be on the verge of discovering the Death Ray, Rahoul’s heart is with the people of the country fighting for their freedom and particularly with the people of rural Bengal suffering untold agony because of an artificial famine. The leaders of the people are arrested one after another and imprisoned. The arrest and trial of Nehru in Gorakhpur has stirred the country, and his dignified and defiant statement made at the trial has caught the imagination of people and instilled courage and heroism in their minds. As a result of the scorched-earth followed by the British rulers in Bengal in anticipation of a Japanese invasion of India and the heinous
activities of a few profiteers, thousands of people are rendered destitute and forced to quit their homes and to trek to Calcutta in search of food. Rahoul is deeply touched by the sight of their suffering. A few of his experiences stand out prominently.

A destitute woman lying on the railway platform giving suck to a baby dies, and the dead body lies there for several hours until picked up and disposed of. The baby continues to suck the breast of that died mother. Another haunting experience is the plight of a destitute woman from the countryside who is stricken with labor pain and has nowhere to go and no one to help her. Rahoul takes her into his house with the help of his mother and his wife and tries to help her, but the woman dies before she can give birth to her child.

Rahoul is more and more convinced that a foreign government is incapable of solving the problems of the country and that freedom is an imperative need. When students in large numbers join the Quit India Movement, he feels that it is his duty to be with them. He seeks the advice of his grandfather who is in prison in Dehra Dun and then takes the plunge. He addresses the students and proclaims his view
that the British should leave India: you have done us some
good along with much evil. For the good you’ve done you have
been paid in full. The accounts have been settled. Now, for
God’s sake, quit!. A black van drives up early one morning to
the Relief Centre where Rahoul has been feeding the
destitutes daily and takes him away to jail. At the prison gate
he is joined by other future. As they are led into the prison
they sing in chorus the memorable words written by Tagore:
“The more they tighten the chains, the more the chains
loosen”. 

While the hunger of men to be free is one of the themes
of the novel and the Quit India Movement forms its
background, a more palpable type of hunger, namely, the
hunger for food gets more spectacular treatment and possibly
steals the lime-light. Just as Rahoul symbolizes the Indian
working for the liberation of the country, Kajoli, the peasant
girl from Baruni, illustrates the cruel fate of the rural
population of Bengal at the time when India faced the
Japanese peril in the east and an unprecedented rice famine
was created by unscrupulous capitalists. Kajoli is a sprightly
and innocent girl of fourteen when the story begins. She lives
in her ancestral mud-and-thatch house along with her
mother who remains unnamed throughout the novel and a
younger brother, Onu, aged ten or eleven. The father, who
also has no name in the story, and an elder brother, Kanu,
are in prison for having taken part in the Civil Disobedience
Movement.

The disintegration and ruin that comes to Kajoli’s
innocent family is symptomatic of the devastation that affects
all family is symptomatic of the devastation that affects all
Bengal. The economy of the village is ruined because of the
Scorched-earth policy followed by the government and also by
the racketeering in rice done by wealthy men from the city. All
boats in the area are destroyed by government lest the
Japanese should make a landing on the coast and use them
for their movements. Many villages are evacuated. Greedy
merchants with the needed capital buy up all the available
rice with the aim of creating scarcity and later selling at a
huge profit. The villagers who are thus impoverished take to
the highroad leading to Calcutta hoping that the affluent city
will feed them all.
What the mother and the two children suffer on the way to Calcutta gives reader an idea of the plight of the many destitutes who left their village homes and moved towards the capital in search of food. This subject is dealt with elsewhere in the book. Kajoli has a painfully tragic experience on the way for which the novelist does not hold any individual morally culpable. She meets an Indian soldier and begs him for food.

He happens to have some bread in his kit-bag and gives her a portion. She is so ravenously hungry that she devours it rapidly without thinking of her mother and brother. The soldier offers her some more. As he looks at the emaciated body in tattered clothes, his heart is filled with pity but another force begins to operate on him. He has been separated from his wife for over a year and so he is sexually starved and feels the hunger for woman. Blinded by desire he grabs Kajoli and leads her to a meadow. Half fancying perhaps that she is his wife he mutters words of endearment and makes love to her.

Bhattacharya also suggests that the scorched-earth policy followed by the government resulting in the destruction
of all the boats in the countryside and thereby paralyzing life in the villages was foolish and ruinous. We see in the novel how the young fisherman who had celebrated his wedding by lavishly distributing fish among his friends is reduced to abject poverty within a year after the wedding. His wife cannot bear to witness the suffering of her hungry child and tries to put it out of its misery by burying it on the river-bed. Another precaution taken by the authorities is to evacuate the coastal villages lest the Japanese invaders should arrive and make use of the available man-power. This leads to the exodus of large numbers of people to the capital and the resultant chaos and misery. On the whole the treatment of the Japanese peril in the novel reveals the author’s view that it was grossly exaggerated by the authorities and exploited for the purpose of propaganda.

In depicting the life of Kalo during the period immediately following his release from prison, Bhattacharya gives a harrowing account of the plight of destitutes in Calcutta. Many of the details given is So Many Hungers are repeated in the present book, and other of an equally lurid type are added. Kalo is unable to find work as a blacksmith.
He ekes out a miserable existence for some time by carrying the corpses of destitutes into municipal trucks. One of his first acts after arriving in Calcutta is to write to Lekha telling her that he is in the city and vaguely mentioning that he has suffered greatly. He does not wish to cause her distress by revealing the truth. Even the loathsome job of carrying dead bodies becomes less lucrative because of competition. Kalo now remembers what the brothel-agent had told him at Jharna, namely that if ever he was in trouble about finding a job, he could seek the help of one Rajani Bose who would give him work and fair wages. Having no alternative he seeks and finds this man. The work that he offers is that of procurer for a group of brothels in the city. Kalo reluctantly takes up the work, begins to earn unexpectedly high wages and is able to make a handsome remittance to Lekha at home. At this juncture an incident takes place which marks a turning point in his life.

Bhattacharya brings to bear all the resources of his art when he gives us a view of the plight of the destitutes in the city. Many of the pictures given are reminiscent of those in the earlier novel but there is no actual repetition. We see
hungry men beaten up by the police for presuming to stand before a food shop and to stare at the food displayed therein. Men die in such large numbers that the bodies have to be taken away by the truckload. The piercing cry of people begging for a morsel of food can be heard - a wail from the bowels of Bengal.

The novelist’s delineation of the ordeals of the destitutes in *He Who Rides a Tiger* varies from his treatment of the same subject in *So Many Hungers*, not so much in detail but in emphasis. In the later novel the accent visibly shifts from mute, passive suffering to protest and rebellion. This is understandable because the story of Kalo is a story of protest. Another point of difference concerning emphasis is that *He Who Rides a Tiger* gives much more prominence to one type of hunger the hunger of the all owning few for pleasure and more pleasure, a raging rich is sparked off by the incident of his daughter narrowly escaping from becoming a victim to this variety of hunger. These subtle touches account for the difference in tone between one novel and the other.

*He Who Rides a Tiger* is a novel of protest not only against a political and economic system which degrades the
human being but also against an established social order which labels men as superior and inferior by virtue of the accident of their birth. The caste system comes in for chastisement in the novel, the symbol and agent of protest against the tyranny of caste; it should be carefully noted, in not Kalo the blacksmith, but Biten the Brahmin. The story of his rebellion against caste is given as an inset story. His sister, Purnima, is hastily given away in marriage to an elderly widower when the parents discover that a young man, Basav, of a lower caste is in love with her. Her unhappy married life leads her to commit suicide. When Basav taunts Biten about this cruel incident, he renounces his Brahmin hood forthwith, breaks and throws away his sacred thread and takes a vow never more to speak about his caste. This accounts for his refusal to name his caste when Kalo questions him about it. Biten takes the risk of losing the girl whom he loves, in sticking to his resolve never more to refer to his caste. Bhattacharya shows good artistic judgment in avoiding explicit fulminations against the caste system and by exposing and ridiculing it in a dramatic manner. The juxtaposition of Biten’s rejection of the Brahmin-hood which
he has created for himself through fraud makes the novelist’s condemnation of the system total.
CHAPTER – IV
DEPICTION OF EXPLOITATION

Bhabani Bhattacharya has taken the most stirring period and the most tragic calamity in the Indian History. Calcutta of 1942 and the great famine in which over a million people died of sheer hunger. There are heights of human sacrifice and nobility in the midst of general degradation. The story has been effectively told and the tragic pathos of the real mass-starvation described in the guise of fiction moves the reader deeply. Dr. Chandrasekharan rightly sums up:

So Many Hungers is a severe indictment both of the foreign government for its apathy and neglect and of unprincipled Indians who exploit the situation for their own benefit and who are no better than the vulture and Jackals waiting for the flesh that dies. The novelist’s righteous indignation his sincerity and his compassion are in evidence all through the novel. It undoubtedly represents and artistic success. (256)

Bhattacharya is an observer of men and matters and he reveals himself to be a true admirer of Gandhi and Nehru. He
does not have any party learning, unlike Mulk Raj Anand who was committed himself to the leftist views. The novel is concerned with the freedom struggle with its tensions and conflicts. He depicts here the money hunger, the sex hunger, the hunger for food and the hunger for political freedom. It institutes a comment on the alien government and its people. The novelists are highly critical of the British administration and its attitude towards the people and the problems of the land under a democratic garb, people are punished and humiliated.

A bond of sympathy is immediately established between the two men. B-10 transmits his revolutionary fervour to kalo and convinces him that the right answer to a society which has shown somuch inhuman callousness is to hit back. Very casually he mentions to Kalo one of serveralways in which to retaliate; the way is to fake a miracle, toget a temple raised by exploiting the gullibility of people and to make fools of them by making them workship a bogus image. This idea lurks in the soil of Kalo’s mind to germinate and to sprout into a mighty tree is due course
Mangal Adhikari is faced with a serious problem concerning Lekha. She is of marriageable age and as the Manager of a prosperous temple he has to find a suitable Brahmin bridge groom for her. He suggests to Biten that he should wear the sacred thread and call himself a Brahmin so that he may marry Lekha without shocking public opinion, but the later is obstinate in his refusal. The person who suffers most is Lekha. She has become bored with the game of make-believe that her father and she have been playing. Therefore she goes about her duties in the temple mechanically without the least enthusiasm. Once when Biten and she are together alone, he declares his love and is about to embrace her. This gesture has the psychological effect of producing revulsion and fear in her as it reminds her of her painful experience in the brothel when the rich owner of a jute mill tried to make love with her. Noticing her reaction and mistaking it to be a sign of coldness, Biten leaves her and does not reappear till near the end of the novel. Lekha has been so far idealizing and worshipping him but not she has realized that her golden image has feet of clay. Biten is no more a god, but he has awakened the woman in her. She is
troubled in mind to find that her father has apparently lost his original simplicity and rectitude. She is unhappy about the hypocritical part she to has been playing. It has become difficult, indeed, for them to dismount from the tiger’s back. In her desperate need for some solace she throws herself heart and soul in her work in the temple and feels genuine piety. Bhattacharya suggests through this that genuine faith and worship are states of mind which can be induced. A temple which has been erected on fraud can become a true temple even to the perpetrator of the fraud.

The different characters in He Who Rides a Tiger make utmost efforts to participate in life and it is nothing but man and his struggle with his own fate. The novel, an epitome of man versus society, relates how Kalo masquerades himself to wreak his vengeance on the society but ultimately realizes the futility to his disguise. Kalo’s disguise is the outcome of necessity. He wants to rehabilitate himself and lives that way but the malevolent society rejects his honest and humble efforts. Circumstances make him a changed man and he becomes a cheat and starts deceiving both people and gods. Of the two alternatives lying before him death or cheating-
Kalo chooses the latter and wreaks his vengeance on the society and its rank indifference. Under normal circumstances he could have sacrificed everything for the sake of his daughter. But when his daughter becomes a victim to the society, he turned a rebel against this oppressing trend and wanted to defy this social oppressiveness. This was not merely a sociological factor but it has a more psychological impact too.

Society is an admixture of both good and evil. Individuals are only pawns in its hands and have to remain mere passive spectators of the several acts of the drama performed by it. Lekhe becomes the victim of circumstances when she is dragged to the house of prostitution but in time is rescued by her own father. She is terribly surprised at the ways of society and is dumb founded with astonishment at the role of her father as Mangal Adhikari. Dr.Ram Sewak Singh rightly remarks:

The same man, in two different situations is different. Since the society has tricked Kalo into a thief, a convict and an immoral trafficker, he has foisted a big fraud on it this proved how hollow
our religion and its upholders are. The indignation of the novelist is all the more poignant because Kalo was forcibly dragged into the broil. (278)

Seth has a grudge against Meera’s grandmother and he wants to punish her by seizing her piece of land which has been mortgaged to him. He summons Meera to his shop to tell her about his intentions. When she is at the shop, he makes the discovery by chance that the ring on her finger is gold. She herself knows nothing about the substitution done by Lekshmi. Consequently both are convinced that the amulet has power.

Seth’s fertile brain begins to work and he formulates a plan to explore Meera’s possession of the amulet. It can be achieved only with powerful backing from someone like him. Alone, she may not be able to find enough copper to be transmuted. She needs a partner who will procure all the copper and spend all the money that may be necessary to perform acts of kindness. He offers to be her partner in his enterprise and they may share the proceeds equally. Meera accepts the proposal. Her desire, however, is not to win gold for herself. All the gold that she makes is to be distributed
among the people of the village. She is to use the power of the amulet only for altruistic purposes. Seth has to make experiments. The description of these experiments gives the novelist the opportunity to introduce comedy and farce.

The destitute girl in *So Many Hungers* who earns money by exposing her body to the Public gaze and spends it all on the hungry children of the neighborhood, the English soldier who strokes the hair of the ragged and dirty one and gives him a half-rupee coin, and the old low-caste woman in *He Who Rides a Tiger* who offers beans to Lekha when she has tried to steal pumpkins from her roof are some memorable examples of this virtue. In the present novel, the episode of Meera rescuing Nago from the well and her saving of the man who has been bitten by a cobra and her touching kindness to the cow, Soondri, suffering from labor pains and finally dying of it, are parallel cases. There is another touching portrayal of comparison in which Meera, after watching the poor boy Buddhu, hungrily licking the leaves thrown by customers in front of the sweetshop, buys some sweets promptly and gives them to the boy to eat. The deeds of supposed kindness suggested one after another by the Seth
are ludicrous parodies of these spontaneous acts. The descriptions of these acts amuse and entertain us and at the same time embody a veiled lesson in ethics pointing out negative examples of the virtue in question.

Daughter is asked to wear them as far as possible in such a way as to touch the body in order to give the best chance for the amulet to work. She has them on her arms, round her neck and about her waist. When her grandmother sees her for the first time with her bulging abdomen, she misunderstands the situation and thinks for a moment that she has got into a scrape and is pregnant. One cannot help feeling that by attempting comedy, the novelist has produced farce and that the farce not only detracts from the seriousness of the real theme but also destroys all traces of realism.

Several friends of Meera implore her to wear copper coins brought by them. They are to be restored to them after they change into gold. Acts of kindness devised by the Seth are repeated. One of them is a cruel caricature of the incident in which Meera saved the Seth’s son. The Seth orders the parapet wall of the well near his shop to be knocked down
pretending that it needs repair. He tempts the poor boy Buddy, to fly kite near the well and on the pretext of having something to talk about, he summons Meera to the shop. Bulaki Rao, the Seth’s fox-like assistant, is to contrive everything in return for a handsome fee.

Bulaki Rao raises a hue and cry and announces that Buddhu has fallen into the well. In a highly amusing but improbable scene, the Seth does his best to encourage Meera do descend into the well with the right kind of feeling needed to make the amulet do it work. She is inclined to oblige, but time seems to stand still and we have interminable talk going on, giving enough time for a person to get drowned twenty times. In the meantime Shanlal, the Seth’s driver, arrives on the scene, He is in love with Meera and he does not allow her to make the attempt. In fact, to the Seth’s chagrin, he proceeds to get down. Knowing that the trick has failed, the Seth asks Bulaki Rao to produce the boy and he comes out of the latrine where he has been asked to hide himself. The trouble with this exaggerated farce is that it has no similitude.
The novel **A Goddess Named Gold** contains a warning that freedom is not an automatic passport to greatness or plenty. It only provides essential climate in which the endeavor of the people will fructify. The minstrel administers a warning in words which presumably represent Bhattacharya’s own views: Freedom in the beginning of the road where there was no road. But the new road swarms with robbers.

The characterization again is seriously affected by the novelist’s didactic intention. Meera herself is a breath-taking combination of intelligence, generosity, patriotism—and stupidity. She is a heroine only up to the moment that she goes to the Seth in response to his summons in order to discuss their mortgaged land, but a mere stuffed puppet after she enters into the strange contract with the cormorant and begins playing the fool. The reader shares the sorrow and disappointment of Sohanlal at the spectacle of her gullibility and folly.

The old minstrel himself is a bundle of contradictions. Whatever his symbolic significance, he is not a character from life. As his wife herself points out, he is a fabricator of cock
and bull stories and yet we are to suppose that the whole village is made to fall at his feet and to worship him. He is the embodiment of wisdom and has the prophet’s vision and yet he places his innocent grand-daughter in a situation in which she plays the dancing near at the behest of the Seth.

As earthworm has become a cobra, he exclaims, but he has himself been responsible for the mischief. The decision of the village to elect him to the Board again is one of those numerous situations in the novel in which to quote Lytton Strachey. Unreality has reached its apotheosis.

His idea of murder, however, is to walk towards the Seth’s house in the small hours of the morning with a sickle in his hand as if the potential victim were waiting, with his door open for the throat cutting to be duly performed listens of Meera’s plea and returns home, his mission unaccomplished. Perhaps for him, the better part of valor is discretion.

**A Goddess Named Gold** is an allegory of the threatened exploitation of free India by greedy capitalists. Just as Meera with her amulet becomes the scourge of the village of Sonamitti. When exploited by the self-seeking Seth
Samsundarji, similarly New India with its political freedom may turn into a curse for the people of the country if allowed to be misused by the unscrupulous capitalists for their selfish ends.

All these developments are shown as taking place against the somber background of the treacherous Chinese attack first at Ladakh and later at several other points on the extensive border. Bhaskar knows that the real obstacle to his plan is the presence in Gandhigram of its guiding spirit, Satyajit, whose soul-force is a match for whatever political or legal pressure may be applied of him. Sathyajit is confronted with the perils simultaneously the peril to the country and the peril to Gandhigram. The interest of the country naturally gets priority and he proceeds to Delhi in order to secure the permission of government for the peace March. The government turns down his proposal to take a party of four persons to Ladakh as apostles of peace and non-violence, and suggests instead, a large contingent of volunteers drawn from the entire country, provided there is popular support for the plan. These alternative plans come to nothing as the Chinese order a cease fire after seizing all the territory that they had
planned to grab. Satyajit is now free to return to Gandhigram to lead the resistance takes the characteristic shape of a fast unto death which he announces in the identical language that Gandhiji used on the occasion of one of his most crucial fasts.

Bengal Famine of 1943, the tragedies of the freedom struggle and partition, and the evils of poverty, corruption, ignorance, superstition, exploitation, greed, sexual perversion, etc. But beneath them, there is almost always present the novelist’s unflinching faith in life and its invincibility, indestructibility and worthiness. What emerges prominently in almost every chapter of his novel and finally at the end of it as the pith of the world is the affirmation of life. Even in the midst of ghastly and heart-rending scenes of human sufferings and tortures, life asserts itself sparking amid ashes. From his assertion of ethical values and the synthesis of the old and the new and of opposite extremes emanates Bhabani Bhattacharya’s final vision of the affirmation of life. However, it does not mean that his novels alone embody an affirmative view of life, while other writers are concerned only with nihilism. What I want to stress is
that the recurrent artistic presentation of the affirmation of life in his works is something unique.

Samarendra is obsessed by a quest for money and profit. An economic offender, he makes a lot of money and, therefore, does not bother about his practice at the Bar of the High Court. He has earned more in six months through dishonest means than he can earn as a lawyer in fifty years. He is always busy increasing his wealth by foul means. He collected his winnings and threw them back into the game, with one simple formula to lean on, for with him it was an article of faith. The Stock Market moved like the swaying of a see-saw. Each movement shed upon his lap a golden dust of profit until Samarendra wondered if it was not too good to be true. Easy money; he hoards rice in order to make money, no matter if thousands of people die of starvation. He has no other interact and no other dream than accumulating riches. The war means to him nothing but opportunity to increase his wealth: That mind was unshaken as ever, insensitive. It thought of the war only as a rare chance to reap a harvest of gold. Devata to have such a son! The bitter irony! Samarendra is absolutely different from his father as well as his sons, not
only in his basic nature, manners, temperament and attitude towards life, but also in his physical appearance and dress. Bhattacharya brings it out emphatically early in the novel.

The tiger is there for everybody to see and admire. I mean the great socio-cultural and political processes that Indian has experienced in recent times-the freedom struggle, the fight against poverty, superstition and caste-domination, modernization through industrialization, East-West encounter, and the struggle to establish a new democratic and socialistic order and so on-which Bhattacharya’s novels patently deal with. But the major critical problems is to have a clear view of the strategies and devices that Bhattacharya uses for taming and controlling the apparently intractable material and for presenting it to his audience, which includes Western readers, and to evaluate them with a view to determining his place among the Indian writers in English. At the moment, there is certain ambivalence and certain tentativeness in the critical evaluation of Bhattacharya’s fiction, though it is generally considered.

Bhattacharya’s interest in freedom can be attributed to certain factors. He lived in a period in which entire India was
immersed in the struggle for freedom from the British yoke. By the time he was a young boy, Gandhiji on whom he later wrote a full book, had assumed the leadership of the Freedom Movement. Indeed, any intellectual, who happened to live through the eventful first forty-seven years of the present century, should inevitably have been pre-occupied with thoughts of political freedom. After Independence in 1947, the country was confronted with difficult economic problems; economic freedom was still to be achieved. Thus it was natural for Bhattacharya to be drawn towards the problem of economic freedom also. Then, there were social evils eating into the nation’s vitals. A battle had to be fought against them in order to lead India to her destined place among the developed countries of the world. This was possible only when people had attained freedom of the mind and the freedom to be free. Here Bhattacharya’s stress on these two varieties of freedom.

People know no other word except food, but there is no food for their hunger. Corpses and vultures are visible everywhere in Bengal: A myriad vultures gazed down upon the countryside. Corpses lay by the road, huddling together. A
family group had sunk into sleep; and beyond the sleep were-
vultures. Vulture-eaten corpses keep company of famished
uprooted humanity moving sore-foot towards Calcutta in the
hope of getting food. To Kajoli and other starving people, life
has lying unconscious because of hunger. All that Bengal has
yielded and all the hidden roots of the earth have been
plucked clean, boiled and eaten away. In spite of all this,
there is no word in the government circle or among the
wealthy about this enormous hunger and terrible devastation
of the peasants. Kajoli, in a state of extreme hunger, eats the
entire bread which she perchance gets from a soldier, without
thinking for a minute about her hungry mother and brother.

Kajoli’s happiness is short-lived. As conditions
deteriorate in the village, Kishore decides to go to Calcutta
where he hopes to get employment in a mill. On his way to
the railway station he takes a short cut and climbs up the
railway embankment. The governor’s train is to pass that way
very shortly and, therefore, soldiers are guarding the track.
He gets frightened and tries to run away, but the soldier
shoots him dead. His sad fate remains unknown to the family
right up to the end of the novel.
The repentant soldier tries to make amends for the wrong he has done in a moment of blindness. He tells an army doctor who is about to proceed to Calcutta in a military truck that some destitute woman is lying unconscious by the wayside and persuades him with some difficulty of give her professional aid. The kind doctor after examine Kajoli and giving her first aid suggests that she should be admitted into a hospital. He volunteers to take her and the family with him in his vehicle. In a few hours Kajoli becomes a patient in a Calcutta hospital and her mother and Onu find themselves on the streets like so many other destitutes who have flocked to the city. The sad plight of these uprooted men, women and children is a subject which captured the imagination and roused the indentation of Bhattacharya and which he goes back to in, *He Who Rides a Tiger*.

Once she is discharged from hospital, Kajoli’s eyes are opened to the miserable plight in which she and her family are. The mother knows that Rahoul is somewhere in the city and is confident that he will help them if only they find him. But she does not know his address and Kajoli discourages her from making an attempt to find him because of her fear
that he may not condescend to recognize or to help them. Ironically Rahoul often thinks of them. He had written to their Baruni address but no reply had come. A money order sent by him had been returned to him as the payee had already left the village. Once he passes by Onu when he is hunting for food in a rubbish-dump, but cannot recognize him. At another time, likewise, he sees the mother walking in the opposite direction, but neither recognizes the other.

The fate of Kajoli’s mother is a matter of conjecture. It is a little unnatural that she resolves to abandon her children to their fate and kill herself. But does she succeed in her attempt. Just at the moment when she is struggling to climb up the rail of the bridge from where she is to hurl herself into the river, the police wagon carrying Rahoul to prison comes up to the bridge and the glare of the head-lights falls on her. Rahoul’s appeal to the police guards to stop falls on deaf ears. As he watches the woman, he sees her pausing and flopping to her feet.

Bhattacharya alludes to a likely tendency among the people of India to blame Englishmen for imaginary misdeeds and show how irrational this tendency is. As a typical case,
when Rahoul take his wife to a dance at a fashionable Calcutta hotel, she complains that an English soldier has insulted her by winging at her. Rahoul shows how frivolous the complaint is by confessing that when he was in England he had winked at many English girls. The novelist also suggests that an officer in the British army or Air Force who carries out commands may be doing so against his personal wishes. For instance Flight-Lieutenant Brooke of the Royal Air Force who has been asked to fly low over certain villages and intimidate the population by strafing the building and people, is most unhappy about his assignment because he understands and sympathizes with the aspirations of the people. In the novel we have a few instances of white soldiers who are not touched by the sight of poverty of degradation, but on the contrary regard them as a source of amusement. Some soldiers patronize a booth where they could pose for a photograph with a destitute girl sitting on their knees, presumably to be exhibited as a souvenir on their return to civilization. The girls are paid two rupees a day by the keeper of the show. Some others entertain themselves by watching a girl who resembles Kajoli standing on the road and every now
and then pulling down her jacket so as to expose her bosom to their gaze. Every time the girl does this, a soldier throws a rupee coin into her begging bowl.

By an unexpected development the offering to the goddess is not made. Sudha, a frustrated girl who had dreams of marrying Jayadev and who cannot forgive the usurper, Mohini, informs Jayadev about the blood-offering and he prevents it in the nick of time. This is a token that the son’s progressive attitude has at last defeated the mother’s orthodoxy. But ironically the defeat of orthodoxy coincides with its victory because Mohini has at last made the requisite adjustment within her mind. She has come to accept and to love the Big House and she is prepared to make any sacrifice to cherish its ideals—even the sacrifice of allowing her husband to marry her rival Sudha as his second wife in order to beget a son.

Fortunately for Mohini it becomes known that she is already pregnant. The danger of her being superseded by Sudha is removed and life once again becomes music for her. What is of primary importance to note is the fact that she has re-established harmony within herself only by her
psychological growth and her change of outlook. A slip of a
girl brought up in urban ways, has at last blossomed into a
responsible woman, willingly and cheerfully undertaking the
responsibility of guiding the destiny of a family with its roots
in the past.

Bhattacharya clearly indicates that the traditions of the
Big House have much in them to admire. When the
unfortunate famine afflicted Bengal and large numbers of
uprooted people thronged into Behula, the master of the
house did everything in his power to alleviate their suffering.
He gave away all the rice in the granary and even sold away
priceless family heirlooms to help the needy. Thus the
account given in the novel of the heritage of the Big House is
fairly impartial and objective.

*Music for Mohini* contains references to some
superstitious beliefs among the people of Bengal. Even the
city-bred Heeralal interpreted the itching of his back as an
omen of a sound beating to be received. Widowhood is
regarded as inauspicious and therefore, a widow is not to take
part in the reception of a new bride into the household. A
bamboo chip worn in the braided hair is imagined to ward off evil and to protect the pregnancy of a woman.

One night, in one of the brothels for which he has been working as tout, he sees a rich customer enter one of the rooms. Immediately after that he hears the plaintive, protesting cries of a woman. The voice sounds strangely like that of Chandra Lekha. Within a couple of minutes the customer leaves the room in anger. Driven by a strange foreboding, Kalo enters the room to find to his horror that the girl is none other than his daughter. Not willing to lose a moment lest the keeper of the house should block their way, he hurriedly leads her out of the hell and takes her to his poor habitation. She has undergone a nightmarish experience but her honor is unsullied. She tells her father how the woman had decoyed her to the city with the false story that he had met with an accident, was in hospital and had sent for her. She has resisted the woman and refused to submit to degradation; the cruel woman had lashed her on the back with a whip and tried to break down her resistance. Her father had arrived in time and saved her. The tale told by her touches the tenderness chords in him. The meanness and
cruelty shown by unscrupulous exploiters rouses his indignation. He remembers the oft-repeated words of B-10 in prison: We are the scum of the earth. They hit us where it hurts badly—in the belly. We have got to hit back. Society has now hurt and his, not merely in the belly but in the soul.

We are given indications by the author that in spite of his best attempts to assimilate Brahmanism, Kalo remains in his heart of hearts the simple blacksmith. He insists on doing his shopping by himself. He converts the top storey of his house into a temporary smithy and works there secretly so that the urge in him to do his true work may be satisfied. He takes pity on an old blacksmith, Vishwanath, who comes to beg as a destitute.

Vishwanath has no faith in the temple. His approach is logical and humanitarian. He creates a storm in the temple by one of his characteristic acts. According to usage, the milk that has been used for the ritual bath given to the image every day is collected and thrown into the sacred river, the Ganga. Vishwanath begins to steal the milk and distribute it after boiling, to destitute children in the neighborhood. This is considered as sacrilege. Mangal Adhikari is touched by the
humanity of the gesture and supports Viswanth. The trustee and the worshippers who pay for the milk through endowments creates a furor but hardies the storm and finally establishes the custom of using the sanctified milk for feeding the hungry children.

The finale to the drama comes with Kalo’s realization that his beloved child is about to ruin herself for his sake. The shock of this realization opens his eyes. He sees himself and his moral fall. He had started with the idea of revenge but had deceived not only his supposed enemies, but his own inner self. His desire for integrity which had been present in his mental make-up all the time now reasserts itself. He decides to act and to act dramatically. On the day of the ceremony for the installation of the Mother, when the whole congregation is assembled and Mangal Adhikari is asked to make a speech, he stuns everyone by revealing his true story, that he is no Brahmin and the temple no true temple. He graphically describes how he faked the miracle of the image of Shiva sprouting from the ground. The image which he had got made, had been placed on the top of a tin containing two seers of gram and both had been covered with earth. When
the water sprinkled on the ground by the man of God had soaked down to the tin and made the gram germinate, the stone image had been gradually pushed up. The revelation produces diverse reactions among the audience. Some want to beat him up, some suggest legal action and the prince of black-marketers, Sir Abalabandhu, wishes he had a man of genius like Kalo to assist him in his business.

A large number of destitutes and men of the lower castes have stationed themselves in the rear. They are all thrilled and happy that one of their classes has outwitted the so-called superior castes. Viswanath and Biten are also with them, they raise the cry, Victory to our brother which resounds like a war-cry. The presence of this crowd unnerves the orthodox who are powerless to do anything. In the mean Kalo has learnt that Biten is a Brahmin by birth who has repudiated his caste because of a tragedy and his real name is Biskash Mukherji.

As the denunciation of the caste system is one of the purposes of the novelist, he alludes to it in several places in the story. The system is so well entrenched that Chandra Lekha’s attending school meets with criticism both from the
high-caste and the low-caste people of Jharna. The point emphasized by Bhattacharya here is that caste has become a habit of thinking as much as a way of life and therefore extremely difficult to eradicate. How the feelings of superiority engendered by belonging to a high caste can intoxicate and turn the head is illustrated by the ironic case of Kalo himself. To begin with he puts on the cloak of Brahmin-hood as part of a deliberate trick. The victims of the hoax are to be primarily the very classes whose ranks he joins surreptitiously through the backdoor. But in a very short time the Brahmanism affects his mind and he out-Harrods when he rebukes the kamar, Viswanath, for polluting him with his touch.

**He Who Rides a Tiger** marks a departure from **So Many Hungers** in the sense that though the background is common, the former highlights the growing protest in the country. The protest is chiefly against two evils- the evil of exploitation which results in hunger and degradation and the evil of caste. Two characters symbolize the protest, Kalo that against exploitation and Biten that against caste. Biten becomes Kalo’s mentor and guide. Both have witnessed the
ill-treatment of the have-nots by the haves and Biten’s advice in forcefully conveyed in these words: “We are the scum of the earth. They hit us where it hurts badly—in the belly. We have got to hit back” (146).

Biten’s imprisonment is the price he has to pay for protesting against the callous treatment given to the hungry by the authorities. The agitation to which desperate men resort when they are no longer able to bear the pangs of hunger is graphically represented in the novel. When Kalo and Lekha are comfortably settled in the temple, they one day see a procession of destitutes carrying a banner and shouting: Food! Food! We demand food for the hungry! Bhattacharya indicates that the protest against hunger becomes a broad-based movement with which all patriotic people begin to identify themselves and also that it becomes merged with the larger movement for national freedom.

As Kalo is playing the role of Brahmin with gusto, it is not surprising that his identification with the role becomes at times embarrassingly complete. Trapped in his Brahmanic plenty he has to continue playing the game, as the alternative would be the old uncertainty and fear. He learns enough
Brahminical lore to speak words of profound wisdom with references to faith, sin, punishment and karma thrown in. We see a most disturbing sign that perhaps the mask has begun to eat into his spirit when Mangal Adhikari rebukes the blacksmith Viswanath for having touched his fore-arm while supplicating for charity.

Kalo feels and behaves like a Brahmin, his heart is fundamentally untouched. His behavior on these occasions is like that of an actor playing the part of Othello in a recent performance of the play who proceeded to do the strangulation of Desdemona with so much sincerity that the poor actress had to be rescued by the audience. It is true that there is a struggle in Kalo’s mind between Mangal Adhikari and Kalo. Lekha is a witness to the struggle and she consistently backs up the Kalo part of him. Every time the conflict is indicated, the issue is also indicated equally clearly; the scales are heavily tilted against Mangal Adhikari. Kalo’s decision to support Viswanath in the milk bath episode and his acceptance of Obhijit into his home are crucial decisions which reveal the state of his mind. He never tries consciously to become one of the Brahmins; on the contrary
whenever he is unconsciously pulled towards Brahmanism, he resists the pull with all his strength.

Kalo has no objection to Lekha’s becoming the Mother of Sevenfold Bliss if she cannot get a suitable Brahmin husband. But she rebels against the idea because she wants to live like a human being. Her plan is to agree to Motichand’s proposal that she should become his fourth wife. He uses blackmail by threatening to get Obhijit expelled from the temple if Lekha does not agree to marry him. Lekha’s solution is to accept Motichand’s loathsome offer with the twin objects of saving Obhijit and escaping from the lot of playing the role of the Mother of Sevenfold Bliss. Lekha is a determined rebel.

Kalo understands the nature and magnitude of the sacrifice that Lekha is about to make in order to liberate herself from a living death in the temple and to give him the security he seems to desire. All his tenderness wells up within him and he takes the momentous decision. Lekha has been his liberator because she has opened his eyes to the truth. He wins his redemption when he makes his confession to the assembled people; his integrity has been re-established.
The restoration of Kalo’s integrity after a prolonged and bitter struggle, far from being a facile solution is the most appropriate conclusion possible from the artistic point of view- a conclusion for which many details in the novel prepare the careful reader. The novel gains immensely in seriousness by this conclusion which is in perfect consonance with the character of the hero as it has been delineated.
CHAPTER – V
OTHER SOCIAL ELEMENTS

Babhani Bhattacharya’s second novel *Music of Mohini* was written after India attained full independence and because a Republic. Thus it takes for its background the post-Independence scene in India. It presents the conflict between the twain cultures of East and West and a reconciliation is suggested which may be taken as a form of adjustment. So in *Music of Mohini*, he deals with caste distinctions and poverty. L N Gupta remarks *Music of Mohini* blows up the citadel of old traditions and superstitions which menace India’s progress.

Reviewing this novel, *The New York Times* has observed: “It blends the story of an attractive girl’s marriage with the eternal problems of that caste-ridden land and its divorcement from various kinds of imperial rule. And the main brick-bats are not hurled at Britain” (37). *The Chicago Tribune* has showered its praise on this novel by stating that:

India as presented by Rudyard Kipling, Rabindranath Togore and others has become to us a multiple image. Now these diverse pictures are
brought into focus by a native son. In a splendid novel that may rank with Pearl Buck’s The Good Earth, Bhabani Bhattacharya gives us Modern India. (150)

**Music of Mohini** is the story of an arranged marriage and the adjustment which the modern city girl, Mohini, has to make to fit into the traditional pattern of life in her husband Jeyadev’s Big House; presided over by his aristocratic iron-willed mother. In this novel, Mohini, a young girl of seventeen is married in the traditional manner after observing the auspicious signs and comparing the horoscopes. Mohini goes to her new home, Jayadev, the quiet scholar who lives in his ancestral village, and Mohini the young city bred wife, who adapts herself very well to her new environment are the two forces that put the village on the path of progress and modernization. The superstitions old mother to the changing times. The characters of Mohini, Jayadev and Heeralal are well drawn with fine precision and facial expression. This is aptly summed up by S C Harrex, the Australian writer that: “The main theme of the novel is the idea of synthesis, a profound union of today with yesterday,
whereby the conflict between irradiation and modernity will be resolved” (389).

Synthesis is achieved in practice as well as in theory. Finally Mohini and her mother-in-law are agreeably reconciled and Jayadev is transformed through conjugal and moral stimuli, from an ascetic intellectual into a village reformer.

Bhattacharya’s fourth novel A Goddess Named Gold written in 1960 is the best novel describing Indian village life and makes a most illuminating and satisfying reading experience. It is a masterly satire on those who live by the lure of gold. It tells how high spiritual values like spontaneous kindness are sought to be prostituted for purposes of gold. It is a modern fable of rural India and the close-textured fabric of its life on the eve of independence in 1947. The Characters are introduced one by one in a leisurely manner and u magic talisman Dr. Iyengar states: “It entertains as a story, but is also disturbs as a warning and as a prophecy” (298).

Meera’s grand father, a wandering minstrel gives her an amulet and tells that it will acquire the power to turn base
metals into gold, if she does an act of real kindness. She rescues a child; Seth Samsunderji seeks to profit out of India’s new found freedom and enters into a business deal with Meera on a fifty-fifty basis. Meera gets disgusted with it finally and throws the amulet into the river. The minstrel returns soon after explain that freedom is the real touch-stone. S C Harrex states:

**He Who Rides a Tiger** and **A Goddess Named Gold** are social fables and as such are Bhattacharya’s most formally sophisticated works like Narayan’s The Guide. The former is the story of an untouchable who successfully poses as Holy Brahmin, the plot of the latter is a variation of fairytale in which the heroine and her fellow villagers believe that her amulet has the magical wooer to transform copper into gold whenever she performs a true act of kindness. In **He Who Rides a Tiger**, that performs a true act of kindness. In **He Who Rides a Tiger** the social iniquities and hypocrisies of the caste system, while in **A Goodness of Gold** the moral supremacy of
communal unity over landlord selfishness is
proposed as a model for independent India. (183)

Bhattacharya’s latest novel Shadow from Ladakh was
published in 1967. It has for its background the Indo-China
crisis, it tells and extremely gripping story of unsurpassed
drama on a broad and revealing canvas. It tells what India
needs for survival—a meeting point between Gandhian social
ethics and tremendous forces of science and technology. It
deals with India’s conflict with China and her response to the
challenge. The theme presents a considerable amount of truth
of a politically conscious Indian family. S C Harrex rightly
remarks that:

The Indo-Chinese border conflict following China’s
annexation of Tibet is also a variation on the
theme of synthesis. Through the relationships of
the main characters, Bhattacharya advocates for
present day India a cultural progressive people’s
technology. (193)

It provides an insight into the contrasting contemporary
life of India symbolized by Satyajit who regards Indian village
life as the ideal life and by the westernized American trained
Bhaskar the forward-looking Chief Engineer in a steel plant, who feels India’s future lies in industrialization ends on a week not of co-existence of these two ideologies.

The modern militant industrial outlook has its hero an American educated Bhasker Roy who in his need to expand the steel town, knows no use of purpose in Gandhigram. So he wants to dispose off Gandhigram, because it is a hindrance to India’s industrialization. He brings every pressure to bear, but to his surprise, the community of the believers in non-violence stands firm under its great leader Satyajit. The conflict is complicated by Bhaskars’s love from Sunita, the daughter of Satyajit and Suruchi.

Around the central theme, Bhabani Bhattacharya has woven an eminently moving tale of the conflict of modern India. This is not strictly a historical or political novel through the story is woven round two great conflicts between the steel town and Gandhigram. In a sense the two conflicts are related, with the ways of life for which Gandhigram stood, and industrially mighty India cannot be built which would deter aggressive china from attempting adventures across the border. Dr. Paul Verghese states that
Bhattacharya has the vision of a welfare society at heart. His concerns are clear and unambiguous; they are political, economic and social. In other words, the dignity of man both national and international contexts its uppermost in his mind. In this he follows the traditions of European social realism as does Mulk Raj. (181)

However a process of contrast is introduced in characterization. Rahul and Kunal serve as a good contrast of their reactions to war. The mother of Basu family provides a keen contrast to Kajoli’s mother of the peasant family. Again Manju and Kajoli belonging to the two different grades of social status have their own individual place. Although Bhattacharya cannot be said to have done full justice to the characters in this novel, he makes a deep psychological study of them and they are better understood in their relation with other characters.

In depicting the life of Kalo during the period immediately following his release from prison, Bhattacharya gives a harrowing account of the plight of destitute in Calcutta. Many of the details given in So Many Hungers are
repeated in the present book and other so an equally lucid type are added. Kalo is unable to find work as a blacksmith. He ekes our miserable existence for some time by carrying the corpses of destitute into municipal trucks. He does not wish to cause her distress by revealing the truth. Even the loathsome job of carrying dead bodies becomes less lucrative because of competition. Kalo now remembers what the brothel-agent had told him at Jharna, namely that if even he was in trouble about finding a job, he could seek to help of one Rajani Bose who would give his work and fair wages. Having no alternative he seeks and find this man. The work that he offers is that of procurer for a group of brothel in the city. Kalo reluctantly take up the work begins to earn unexpectedly high wages and is able to make a handsome remittance to Lekha at home. At this juncture an incident takes place which marks a turning point in his life.

In one of the suburbs of the city a vast crowd has assembled to witness a promised miracle. The man who has foretold the miracle is sitting in an attitude of fervent prayer, occasionally sprinkling water on the ground. A young girl is seated by his side. Both wear robes pertaining to an ascetic
order. The holy man has had a dream that at a certain hour an image of Lord Shiva will miraculously rise from the earth. A temple is to be built on the spot to bring the solace of religion to the people of the great city. The man has a striking resemblance with Kalo because he is Kalo himself. He wears the sacred thread like a Brahmin. The girl by his side is Chandra Lekha. The promised miracle takes place in the ground. The onlookers are thrilled and happy because the god has chosen this spot in the city as a habitation. A large group of destitutes are also among the audience. They have the hope that at least the deity will put an end to all their sorrows and tribulations.

On the day of the ceremony for the installation of the Mother, when the whole congregation is assembled and Mangal Adhikari is asked to make a speech, he stuns everyone by revealing his true story that he is no Brahmin and the temple no true temple. He graphically describes how he faked the miracle of the images of Shiva sprouting from the ground. The image which he had got made had been placed on the top of a tin containing two seers of gram and both had been covered with earth. When the water sprinkled
on the ground by the man of God had soaked down to the tin and made the gram germinate, the stone image had been gradually pushed up. The revelation produces diverse reactions among the audience. Some want to beat him up, some suggest legal action and the prince of black marketers, Sir Abalabandhu, wishes he had a man of genius like Kalo to assist him in his business. A large number of destitutes and men of the lower castes have stationed themselves in the rear. They are all thrilled and happy that one of their classes has outwitted the so-called superior castes; Viswanath and Biten are also with them. They raise the cry, “Victory to our brother”, which resounds like a war-cry.

The presence of this crowd unnerves the orthodox who are powerless to do anything. In the meantime Kalo has learnt that Biten is a Brahmin by birth who has repudiated his caste because of domestic tragedy and his real name will be legend of freedom. At the end Kalo and Lekha walk out of the temple for over presumably go back to their own way of life, seeking the peace which is the fruit of being true to one’s own self.
Kalo is a man of accepted conventions, his roots run deep into age old habits of mind and belief. He never doubts the Brahmins superior status as the chosen of God. He knows that all Brahmins are not priests, but all priests have to be Brahmins. But recent reforms introduced by the government seem to set to ought this convention.

The Brahmin masquerade is only a step toward a basic reincarnation. This lie is a tiger which he cannot dismount, lest the tiger should prone upon him and eat him up. He considers himself to be a pillar of the society, but sighs in misery, gazing through the screen of darkness. The new role of Mangal Adhikari lands him in a desert of problems where he can find no oasis. He is a figure of dignity and cool assurance and he is the man to hold stem the tide of skepticism and irreligion which is rising everywhere. But he is like the counterfeit coins which need more glitter. No doubt, he is a past master in dealing with psychological reactions of the people. He looks deep into the face of his superiors, inhabitants of a higher world whose very shadow used to strike him into abject humility. But he has become their equal and has sized them up. He seems to awaken from his
half sleep. He begins to confess himself and his past ordinary life.

The novel sets its aim against the orthodoxy and superstition of the people. Another major factor is against the religion which can easily be cashed in India any time. This is represented in the milk-crisis. It also condemns capitalists like Sri Abalabandhu, who have absolutely no human values.

The essence of the novel is that fraud never triumphs over conscience. On the spur of the moment and the heat of oppression, although a man does surrender himself to the lowest temptation and trickery in life, he cannot consciously feel and solace till he clear himself of the shackles or degradation and ruin. He feels restless and goes back to his ethical plane.

The protest against caste-system lashed out in He Who Rides a Tiger with lacerating vehemence gains a new dimension because the main symbol of this protest is he a Brahmin. Vishwanath gives the Brahmin name Obhijit to the destitute boy whom he brings up in his house. The arrogance of higher caste people is markedly portrayed. The ritual of milk-baths for the idols is not a novel feature introduced by
Bhattacharya but is prevalent in many a temple in India. It is supposed that such donors of milk will have their sins expiated and Punyam or merit will accrue to them. Their so-called Bhaku make them blind to the wishes of even the dying man who expresses his desire to have a milk bath performed in his name so that it would enable personal and selfish and do not touch the general chords of humanity. Lekha is aghast and knows not how to come out of the new spiritual transformation of the devotees. All this presents Bhattacharya’s sarcasm and biting satire on the flimsy and meaningless rituals and blind beliefs of the people, which are done purely for the acquisition of the God of Mammon and never in a broad perspective of the dictum.

Unlike in the earlier novels, Bhattacharya has kept up the grip of the story by concentrating on the two major characters of Kalo and Lekha. The entire story revolves round a single incident in which three main figures enact their suitable roles. Kalo resort store all kinds of depraved activities as per the dictates of his conscience and even falls in to the trap lay by destiny. Lekha is able to keep aloof, almost untouched.
Bhattacharya gives suggestive, meaningful and significant names to his characters in this novel in keeping with their role. Kalo is a variation of kamar, the blacksmith. Chandra Lekha is true to her name in features and actions. She is a Digit of the Moon, that wanes and waxes, her temperament also changes from mildness to seriousness as occasion demands. Biten is a funny variation of B-10 and his attitude is biting on the ways of society and so suggests an equally biting reaction. Rajani is the anchor of hope.

Here again Bhattacharya makes a dent in the superstition that plays its role in this age of science and technology. Man no longer likes to live on this planet but thinks of colonizing the moon. The part played by religion in Indian life is also made vivid in this novel which takes for its theme the caste-ridden society. The fact that one cannot conquer one’s conscience is brought home by the life of luminous wings. He cannot any more resist the inner-self and finally he discloses the secret of his success. The sociological obsessions and psychological clashes of individuals involved in an Indian village are conveyed in this novel.
The beastly vices of lust and trading in the flesh of the poor and helpless and the superiority of a specific class in the society especially in the city of Calcutta and its nearby towns and villages are depicted with force and satirical fervor. Superstition too raises its high hand. The whole story, more or less, centers in the life of Kalo and his daughter Lekha and the entire concentration is focused on this part of the story, although others who do have purposive role pale in to insignificance.

Man lives on hope and as long he lives, it does not leave him. It is only this optimism that makes Kalo think of making a living in the city. The effects of famine and war are unimaginable and the effects of man-made scarcity are much more ruthless. Unable to see his daughter digging for roots and plucking berries, Kalo proceeds to the city. Hunger drives him to commit a theft and this take him to the jail, where, of course, his good conduct gets him an early release. But it is here that seeds are sown in his brain that he has got to hit back at the society that has been responsible for his present despicable degradation. The incident of saving his daughter from being a prey of a harlot-house strengthens his revolt
against the society. Thus he seeks his vengeance against the society that is steeped in cash and caste. Bhattacharya appears to hint at the sincerity and devoted instruction of Convent schools where education does have better polish and standard.

In those days education was confined to only higher classes. Lekha, a Kamar’s daughter, was ridiculed. But intelligence is not the sole right of a privileged class. In fact it is Lekha, who got high distinctions and gold medals.

The Quit-India Movement and the people’s clamor for freedom are drawn with strength. The institution of prostitution has been flourishing in India. Maidens have been bought from their parents, or stolen or lured away with fair promises. Even at the other end people can make a living by begging in the streets by wearing a saffron loin cloth, smearing the body with ashes and masking a red paste trident of Shiva on their forehead. Even the rich can be hood-winked into considering them Yogis with great spiritual power. But not all Brahmin are priests, but all priests have to be Brahmin wearing the thread across the chest.
Men of wealth with no time or heart for prayer and penance give willingly for ritual, the easier way for them to gain merit. The philosophy of the Indian soil Karma Bhoomi is etched in all its essence here. To the question why there is so much devilry and misery, in this land of a thousand and one gods, Kalo gives the apt reply,

There is no faith in our hearts. The fire of punishment is our own making. It is the fire-bath of our purification. Sins committed in one life may have to be expiated in another though suffering. The real evil-doers seem untouched by Karma. They eat well and utter the name of Shiva and name of Rama and sleep in beds of peace and comfort. (192)

People cannot lose faith in the social order, so long as there are true-hearted Brahmins. To deceive a destitute man is to deceive one’s own blood and bone. The untouchables in those times were kept away from the sanctum. There is the belief that no day in the year is more sacred than Shivaratri. Any grievous wrong committed in a past life will have its bitter fruit of retribution. The belief in re-incarnation theory is
thus clear from the various references. Bhattacharya refers to Avatars also.

Bhattacharya pours forth his scriptural eloquence on the traditions and customs followed by the Brahmins, when they become twice-born. The Brahmin boy learns and utters the sacred Gayatri on the day he assumes the holy thread, takes the stern vows with the Fire-god as a witness and becomes a Twice-born.

The preoccupation of Bhattacharya in *A Goddess Named Gold* is to tell the way in which a country should use freedom and what benefits may be derived from it. Evidently he is looking back on the decade or so which has achieved and what they have failed to achieve. Gold in the popular connotation is material wealth, but gold may also symbolize richness of mind or spirit. The gift of freedom should not be looked upon as a means for the acquisition of prosperity alone; it is the golden key which can open magic doors and admit one into a realm in which men think noble thoughts and do kind deeds so that happiness may be the portion of all.
The women are of different age and represent different levels of rural society. A common bond knits them together; they are all ardent nationalist and have been in fail for participation in the Quit India Movement. Lakshmi’s case is unusual because she and her husband are poles apart in temperament and outlook. The husband, whose name is Shamsunder, but who is know as the Seth or Sethji, is a cloth-merchant and money-lender. He is a worshipper of Mammon and has avoided taking part in the nationalistic movement. The Cowhouse Five, trained in the methods of satyagraha, are trying to evolve a method of fighting the Seth for his open exploitation of the current scarcity of cloth and his refusal to sell it to the villagers at fair prices. The novelist makes use of the opportunity to focus attention on some of the social evils following the famine of 1943. Cornering of stocks and boosting of prices are a legacy from the dark period in the history of Bengal. Having, a monopoly of the cloth trade in the group of five villages to which Sonamitti belongs, the Seth controls the market so efficiently that no ordinary villager can afford to buy his requirement of the cloth. The resulting hardship is indicated by the novelist
when he mentions that the blouses of some of the women are made out of the jute cloth from old gunny-bags. Their saris are worn out and need immediate replacement. The group considers various ways of compelling the Sethi to sell them saris at a fair price.

The youngest of the Cowhouse Five is the heroine Meera, a girl of sixteen, living with her grandmother who is known for her patriotism and her leadership. She is an unusually gifted girl. She was only eleven at the time of the Quit India Movement. Nevertheless she had insisted on joining an anti-government demonstration her resourcefulness and altruism on another occasion by saving the life of a man bitten by a cobra by sucking out the poisoned blood with her mouth. Meera suggests that the women of the village should join together, organize a protest-march to the Seth’s shop and demand that he should sell a hundred saris at a fair price. Another woman suggests that if the Seth does not relent, they should threaten to strip themselves naked and march through the streets in order to rouse his conscience.
Nago, the only son of the Seth and Lekshmi, fall into a well while flying a kite. No male assistance is available on the spot. As the agitated women are confusedly discussing what could be done, Meera acts spontaneously. With the help of the other women, she rescues the boy in time. In spite of the strain she has endured, she insists on joining the demonstration which takes place as planned at mid-day.

The procession and the slogan-shouting have no effect on the Seth. Even Meera’s threat to strip herself does not intimidate him, but when his own wife, Lekshmi, begins to divest herself offer sari, he relents and as a result two bundles of newly arrived saris are sold away on the spot to the assembled women. The Seth curse himself for his softness, but the novelist makes us understand that he has acted, not under fear, but out of farsightedness. He has decided to contest the Election to the Distinct Board which is to come off as soon as the country is free and he naturally wants to win the goodwill of the people of the village. The sale of the saris therefore is not an act of kindness but a calculated step in self-aggrandizement. The Seth is also clear in his mind as to what he is to do as a member of the Distinct
Board: his sole aim is to gain power and influence so as to make money; the women have incidentally given him a useful idea. He could also organize a procession of schoolboy who will parade the streets shouting the words, Vote for Shamsunder. The women nevertheless, have to be taught a lesson. The Seth has made arrangements for a fee cinema-show in the village sponsored by a company which manufactures vegetable ghee so as to advertise their product. He decides to keep the women out. This could be a severe punishment to any villager because of the rarity of such shows in the countryside. The women are depressed by this development and considered to thwart the Seth’s purpose.

The attitude of the minstrel becomes the distinct point of important developments. Meera tries to make use of him as a counter-attraction to the cinema show so that the Seth’s plan may be frustrated, but the old man would no approve of any spiteful action. He however promises to have a story telling session after the cinema show. Before the session the minstrel promises to give the Seth a taveez or amulet to be worn round the arm that will enable the wearer to realize all. He speaks these words: “Therefore everyone assembled, at the
story-telling, and Atmaram ties a taveez round the arm of Meera”.

The last attempt made by the Seth to make the amulet show its power turns out to be a crisis in Meera’s life. Two of the most notorious people in the village, a drunkard and a prostitute, are persuaded to marry and the marriage is to be solemnized in the presence of Meera. There are clear signs that far from being an act of goodness, the marriage is going to be a fiasco if at all it takes place. The drunkard and his friends pester the Seth for money to buy liquor with. The bride is busy practicing her trade even up to the hour scheduled for the marriage ceremony. Meera’s eyes are opened. She strips herself of the copper ornaments and throws them in a heap on the ground, and disappears from the place. This seems to be the end of the Seth’s fantastic dream, but he still clings to hope, thinking that Meera may yet be persuaded to continue the experiments.

With the arrival of the minstrel on the eve of Independence Day, one comes to the denouement of the novel. He conjures before Meera’s mind a picture of a new India that has attained material prosperity, but which also
suffers from the evils of such prosperity. The picture that Meera sees is one which illustrates Goldsmith’s words, “Where wealth accumulates, and man decays” (87). With the clear object of testing and provoking Meera, her grandfather suggests to her that after becoming the goddess of plenty, she should get married to a fabulously rich man from Delhi, a man who has several elephants for sale. Meera’s reaction of this taut is sharp and immediate. Her grand father’s suggestion seems to be an insinuation that she is hankering after wealth or position, but she is clear in her own mind that she had accepted the amulet only out of a desire to do good to others. Enraged by the insinuation she wrenches the amulet from her arm and throws it into the river.

Bhattacharya uses the minstrel as a mouthpiece to voice some of his own views on the use of freedom and the conditions in which freedom can be of value. The minstrel assures the people of Sonamitti that freedom can be of value. The minstrel assures the people of Sonamitti that freedom is capable of bringing about miracles. No miracle, however, can happen without effort. The taveez presented to Meera is only a symbol of freedom. What the old man had told Meera about
its properties was not meant to be taken literally. It was only to make our lives golden, provided we are capable of right feeling and right action. Without act of faith explains the minstrel, Freedom is a dead pebble tied to the arm with a bit of string, fit only to be cast into the river. The novel also lays emphasis on the idea that freedom is not merely political freedom or economic freedom, but freedom of the mind. The minstrel refers to Gandhiji’s definition of freedom as a state of the mind. Bhattacharya also uses the phrase which he is very fond of, and which he uses again and again in his work starting with the Indian Cavalcade—the freedom to be free. Meera’s throwing away of the taveez into the symbolism as a sign that she had won the freedom to be free. It is precisely this freedom to be free that Kajoli and Kalo attain in the two earlier novels.

Bhattacharya’s fears for the immediate future and his hope in the final triumph of democratic values are embodied in the vision conjured before Meera’s eyes by the minstrel in the course of midnight stroll just before the girl throws away the taveez. To make Meera visualize the problems of the future, he gives her an imaginative view of what might
happen to her won intimate friends—the Cowhouse five. Two of them acquire more and more property in the village thereby dislodging the poor and get substantial houses constructed for them. Their growing affluence corrupts their minds; they begin to compete with each other and become better enemies.

The cart driver’s wife becomes rich and as a result, her husband gives up his work, stays at home and passes the day sleeping on a soft bed. The woman herself grows fat through over-eating. This makes the ex-cart man cast his eyes on comely women and he seeks a second marriage. Apart from what happens to individuals, there is a general transformation of the economic set-up in the entire village. Instead of most people having their own pieces of land, the land is bought up by a few very rich men who use hired labour for cultivation. Gradually tension which breaks out between the haves and have-nots is described in the language reminiscent of Jonathan Swift:

The Bath gowns were perplexed: they could not tell what the trouble was about. The men in loincloth cried that the new freedom was for all to share. The Bath gowns laughed in honest
disbelief. Every tear would be wiped from every
eye, the toilers cried, gazing ahead into the far
blue horizon. The Bath gowns asked, eyes
snapping in fun. Have you buckets enough to
collect so many tears. (152)

There are a few other symbols employed in the novel
and two of them refer to the exploiters of society greedily
wanting to devour whatever that could seize. One of these is a
spider that the Seth watches in the act of ensnaring a red ant.
The Seth is fascinated by it ostensibly because he feels a
secret sympathy with it: they are brother in the same
enterprise of trapping and destroying gullible victims.
Therefore the thoughts of the Seth run thus:

Why deny the hard-working spider its well-earned
meal? Here was an instance of the way; nature
worked its ruthless principle. The slow-writer was
meant to be the prey of their betters. The weak
had to feed the strong with their flesh. The fittest
alone were fit to survive. (198)

Another symbol which, incidentally, is more effective
because the symbolism is left unexplained, is a snake which
has half devoured a frog. This occurs in the very appropriate context of the expulsion of old father from the house by the Seth. As Meera and her grandmother look in the direction of their neighbor’s house, late in the night, wondering whether they are getting ready to leave or not, they hear the pathetic croaking of the frog.

The reader’s credulity is tested too much in the scene in which the Seth is tricked into leaving the site from the cinema show by the story of monkeys invading his shop and damaging the cloth. Equally incredible is the episode of the hard-hearted man scampering away from a certain mangos tree out of fear of ghosts. As if the spectacle of the man feeling in panic from an imaginary ghost were not enough, the author lays it on heavily with a trowel by making him slip on a banana peel and lie sprawling on his back. After performing all these feats, the Seth discovers that the report of the invasion by monkeys has been grossly exaggerated. A group of men mockingly ask him where the monkeys are and he wryly answers: “They are here, You, I and many others” (197).

One cannot help feeling that despite the novelist’s avowed creed, he is in this novel enjoying a holiday from
realism. The unreality, for instance, of the strange contract which Meera enters into with the Seth is magnified by the pompously real language of the agreement that the Seth has drawn up, apparently without the assistance of a lawyer.

It is difficult to escape the feeling that what one man has unintentional caricature and not realism. Yet another instance of disregard of probability is the incident of old Father's eviction. The old man had shown no scruples in borrowing money from the Seth, but when Meera offers him money obtained from the Seth to enable him to redeem the mortgaged house, he refuses to touch it and chooses to leave the village without the slightest idea of where he might go. While the old man is thus exhibited as a paragon of rural virtue, his gentle son is represented as being so much roused by righteous indignation.

The protagonist of novel, Meera, is ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of the people. She has a kind soul and a brave heart. From her grandfather, a roving singer, she has got a talisman as a present, which ostensibly possess a miraculous quality; at the time of every good act, the brass ornaments which Meera wears, are converted into the gold
ones. And brass ring on her finger becomes Golden. Meera truly believes in the miraculous quality of the talisman and desires to bring happiness to everybody. People bring brass ornaments to her and she herself wears them on her body, bring exhausted with weight. But this does not bring happiness to the inhabitant’s of the village. The very thought of gold makes the former friends enemies. At the end of the novel, the author brings the reader back from the world of the fairy-tale symbolism to the world of reality. It turns out that there was no miracle whatsoever. It was the grandfather of Meera, who had put on her finger the golden ring while she was sleeping. The ring was given by Lakshmi, the mother of the child whom Meera had saved. The story of the grandfather sets Meera free from fallacy and she decides to dedicate her life to struggle for real happiness of the people, for freedom.

While portraying Lakshmi, the writer has striven to create not so much a realistic character of a woman of new India, as to enshrine in it his own ideal. However, the very longing of the writer to show the woman-fighter, inspiring people for a fight against the conquerors, fully redeems the hyperbolic-quality of some of the traits of this character.
The novelist reveals share his belief that man’s hunger for gold in not an end in itself and therefore, should not be considered all important. It is end in itself and therefore, should not be considered all important. It is just a means to fulfill other desires. It not only enables men to escape the cruel clutches of starvation, but also helps them in their old age to satisfy their wish to visit holy places. While discussing the touchstone and its future prospects with Sohanlal, Meera observes: God in itself has no value. Gold is a strip of field released from bonds. Gold is a new straw thatch on the walls of mud hut. It is the rag woman’s escape from hunger and the old Father’s wish for a pilgrimage to Holy Benares. Besides, gold, as the Five Elders of the village of Sonamitti remark, does a lot of good to the villagers by helping them to meet their requirements. No wonder Rajaram affirms that everyone needs a little gold and even we aged ones have a hunger in the readers.

Bhattacharya has truly depicted the caste differences and superstitions prevailing in Indian villages. The Halwai, a middle-aged man of the village, Sonamitti, longs to marry young Meera, but the caste system is the way. Though he
knows that their castes differ and so the village will not sanction their marriage, yet he believes that his wealth can enable him to overcome the caste barrier. Therefore, he tells Meera that there is a way to get them married; he can make the five elders overlook their caste difference by paying them money. The Seth also knows well the power of gold to enable man to work a miracle and attain to great heights. It is repeatedly stressed that gold has the last word in the world of today:

Such madness about Gold-A mystic value was set on the yellow metal, so that there could be a game for men to play. Whoever gained the metal, more and yet more, came up on top and all bowed to him with palms folded, Maharaj, great one; A man’s worth was best stated in terms of his gold: Superstitions oppress the villagers as much as castes. They are obsessed by the fear of apparitions visible at certain places in the night. The Seth, who is more enlightened than most of the illiterate villagers, is terribly frightened when one night he has to pass by a neem tree supposed
to be haunted by the bhootni, a female apparition.

It is believed: Four men are Sonamitti had seen the apparition, the female of the species, dangling skeleton legs from its roost. (180)

In **A Goddess Named Gold**, Bhattacharya artistically touches on the evils of dowry and bribery. The need for dowry for a girl's marriage causes a lot of misery and hardship to Indian families. It is also one of the causes of poverty in our country. Money helps the parents to get suitable husband for their daughter. There is a reference to an unfortunate old woman who has to suffer excessively because she cannot manage dowry for a daughter; Spectacles of misty eyes going blind. A dowry for a maid, well past her marriageable age; she had no good looks, but a match could be arranged for eight rupees. The corrupt practice of bribery and other unfair dealings so rampant in Indian society are among the primary causes of the nation’s slow progress. We read in the novel to the building contractors’ dishonesty resulting in substandard buildings and bridges. Even the Seth, a great profiteer himself, does not believe that a contractor can build hopelessly undependable buildings for the sake of making
money, and that these economic offenders, even when caught, are not punished by the government.

The novel dramatizes how village political and social reform can be brought about. Marlene Fisher views that *Goddess*, has links with *Music of Mohini, Shadow of Ladakh* and *So Many Hungers*; in so far as it stress that individuals must change, must alter their servile attitudes, must in short learn how to value themselves.

The real significance and symbolism of freedom is made known through the amulet worn by Meera. The members of the Cow-house Five- proudly recall their heroic adventures in 1942 when they had boldly marched in processions to drive away the British for whom the bell tolls. There is Hoosiar Singh, the village constable, the relic of the Britishraj who refuses to believe that the British lion will cease to growl and strike terror in Indian hearts. Seth Samsundarji reminds the readers of Marlowe’s Barabas and Shakespeares’ Shylock, the merciless money-lenders whose motto is to make money with their own machinations. Their very shadow strikes the poor into abject misery and poverty. He has hoarded huge stocks of saris whose price has shot up sky-high. Reason has no
place in the rigid hearts of money-lenders and he challenges his opponents to go to the Privy Council in London city to file a case against him for selling them at exorbitant rates.

The demonstrations and agitations which shock the affluent and make them bow down are introduced by Meera. A hundred women of the village rend the sky with their slogans. “We demand cloth to wear.” Their unity is strength and it adds fuel to the wrath of the Seth, who however becomes helpless when his wife herself threatens to walk naked unless he sells the saris at fair price. He wants to make it a generous trick to catch their votes for the elections to the District Board, so that he can make good the loss by extracting ten percent from the contractors in the contraction work of the Board. There is always contrived kindness but there is no single occasion of involvement of her friends and throws it into the river. Meanwhile the minstrel arrives and expounds the truth that freedom is the real touch-stone and it can be had only through the genuine act of faith. Then only life turns golden, men have a touchstone whereby to try gold but gold is the touchstone whereby to try man.
The core of the novel deals with the conflict of values and ultimate triumph of the Gandhian principle. Bhattacharya has depicted two modes of existence, way to life—the industrialization is equally necessary in view of the growing population which demands increased production.

Bhashkar, whose mind and body were infused with Western ideology and atmosphere, sought to apply them to Indian conditions, but without success. He lacked a sense of adjustment and the spirit of approach. Ideas might be good, but application might not be congenial to the rural rational thinking and proper assessment and appraisal. Even Gandhi himself was never opposed to industrialization, but he was only worried about the resultant factors in the light of its awakening. One is reminded of Auden’s poem, Work, where he states that the men will smash the machines and come back to nature again.

The contrast between urban and rural life, the sophisticated life and the village background, the machine-oriented and the simple spiritual life of the rustics is highlighted in this novel by Bhattacharya who has spared no attempts, both in style and theme, in portraying the serenity
of mind among the humble peasants of Gandhigram and the Westernized outlook of the steel-minded engineer Bhashkar Roy. A new pattern of relationships and a novel design area drawn here. How modern sophisticated civilization is encroaching upon the simple and unassuming lives of the poor villagers is represented here and Satyajit on the other.

This vies is will substantiated by the two main figures in the two different set of values, between which the different scenes alternate. Gandhigram stands for Gandhian ideals and so it represents Satyajit’s beliefs. The wholly mechanized steel-town is the embodiment of Westernized outlook of life and it stands for Bhashkar Roy’s highly sophisticated mode of life. As each tries to assert his claim about a philosophy of life, it leads to an inevitable clash of ideas. These two views represent, in short, the pre and post-independence eras in the history of India. Dr. Ram Sewak Singh asserts:

The difference between the two periods is brought out through the conflict between Satyajit and Bhashkar, Which is not a clash of personalities, but a historical inevitability that had to come to the fore sooner or later. Shadow from Ladakh is a
deeply philosophical novel with a message of great relevance to the future of the country. (182)

His doctrine of non-violence is a basic creed but it has become a mere instrument on paper. Both against the Chinese aggression and Pakistan aggression, we had to resort to violence first, although there was a cease fire agreement later. The concept of love conquering hatred appears to have scant relevance in the context of the present set-up. However Bhattacharya brings to light the hop that China can find salvation through the younger generation, especially the children. This is brought home in the episode of the Chinese shoemaker Ah To and his five children who come closer to both Bhashkar and Rupa.

The life in Gandhigram is founded on discipline and self-restraint, similar to that of Gandhi’s Sevagram. Satyajit is the founded of the village and a true Gandhian- both in principle and practice with reference to himself and Gandhigram too. His wife Suruchi and their daughter was the intellectual counter-part of Satyajit. Sumita remains an unfailing follower of her father. The sudden Chinese aggression on India turns the tables of the peaceful
atmosphere prevalent in the country. Satyajit, who feels aghast at the shattered fraternity between the two nations, decides to take a peace Mission to the border to appeal to the core of humanity at the heart of every Chinese.

Satyajit continues the work of spiritual reconstruction. He makes the people renounce all. He is a non-violent Neo-Marx and seeks a redistribution of wealth through the instrument of the heart, the inherent goodness of the human spirit. He uses the same Gandhian instrument of fast unto death to resist the expansion of the Steel town of Gandhigram. He dedicated himself to a life of service. He attached little value to material possessions. He cared for inner satisfactions. He even toyed with the idea of becoming a Buddhist monk. He lent his hand in the rural development work. Suruchi was his student but did not belong to his caste. But that would not come in the way of their marriage. Satyajit Sen denoted caste affiliation. Satyajit believed in three aspects-the system of wide spread small scale industries on the economic plane austerity and repression of natural instincts on the personal plane and the weapon of non-violence on the international plane.
Bhashkar impressed upon Satyajit the imminent need for the construction of the blast furnace and that steel meant economic progress and it would help them to fight poverty and hunger. It was not merely the maker of objects, but the shaper of India’s future. He fought hard for whatever he wanted. But he could easily grasp that neither Satyajit nor Gandhigram could be won over by force. He had no hatred for Satyajit in fact he had utmost reverence for him. He wanted to stand for what he stood. But the Steel in him had got to be softened both for Sumita and unison with Gandhigram. It was his deep love for his motherland that prompted him to cut off the strong pull of America, where he stayed for over a decade and enjoyed the bliss of paradise. He was very vehement in his argument on industrialization in the wake of the Chinese aggression.

In contrast to everything that the mill stands for, it is the village that runs along one side. In Gandhigram material objects are reduced to a minimum. Houses are bare and thatched; all cloth is self-woven, meals are frugal, adornment is little known, everything is grown in the village so that the little colony will be self-sufficient. Not only in its physical
aspects is Gandhigram austere, but in its spiritual side too. Men and women strive to overcome human and fleshly urges and to deny the temporary impulse by meditating on the Eternal. The village stands too for the Gandhian ideals of resistance, for meeting hatred by love, and violence by non-violence. To Bhashkar the colony is a relic of the bygone time and whatever its spiritual core, he sees it now only as an anachronistic obstacle to India’s progress.

Two opposite pole which in the beginning seem to be incapable of meeting each other are represented in the novel by Gandhigram and Steel town. Satyajit has been selected by the founder to guide the destitute of this ideal village and to regulate its life so that it may become an example and a source of inspiration to the rest of the country. Educated in Cambridge, he has seen service as a teacher at Shantiniketan and at one level he shows the impress to Tagore’s educational ideals and his philosophy of life. Characteristically, it is a Shentinikethan that her first meet his future wife, Suruchi, a woman of great vitality, adorned with beauty and the gift of song. They have a daughter, Sumita, who is carefully trained by her father and who increasingly comes under his influence
until at last she comes to be recognized as the best embodiment of his attitude of life.

At all three levels Satyajitism is pitted against antagonistic forces. Gandhian economics is threatened by the new cry of Industrialization. The steel production unit established in the vicinity of Gandhigram and called Steel town in the novel is the embodiment of the new approach.

Steel town is a threat and challenge to Gandhigram. Bhaskar with his fanatical zeal prepares a plan for the expansion of the factory involving the annexation and liquidation of Gandhigram. He knows that the plan for the destruction of the model village is not based on technical considerations because for mere physical expansion, Steel town alone. Bhaskar is interested in striking at the village because it is a symbol of conservative reaction and it stands for values which he desires to destroy. His sincerity and missionary zeal are so great that the Board of Directors of the unit finally approve his scheme of expansion although they are reluctant to ask for trouble by touching Gandhigram.

Bhattacharya makes it clear in the novel that Bhaskar’s fight with Gandhigram is not merely the fight of modern
industrialism against Gandhian economics. It is also a campaign for a new way of life as against the cramped and convention-bound life of Gandhigram. Bhaskar is intelligent and imaginative enough to understand that he may not succeed through merely force. He, therefore, uses a weapon from the armor of the opponent himself— the weapon of non-violence.

The novel acquires romantic interest and perhaps gains in symbolic significance when Bhaskar falls in love with Sumitha. His first impression of her is anything but favorable. She is too plain, too frigid for his sophisticated tastes. Seeing her chapped lips, he tells himself that she will do well to use a little lipstick. Taking her to a deserted temple at the commencement of their acquaintance and noticing her insensitiveness to a sculptured portrayal of love on one of the columns, he realizes that they are moving in different orbits. Nevertheless, there is deep within him, as another character, Rupa, tells him on one occasion, as Indian-ness which no Indian can easily escape. He is progressively fascinated by the simple girl and her sterling qualities of head and heart. A torrential rain brings them together and when Bhaskar
reveals his warmth of feeling for her, she is quick to respond. Love enters into her life and changes her entire outlook. She begins to take interest in dress and ornaments and becomes conscious of her personality as a woman. The transformation of her nature is indicated in the description of her second visit to the temple with Bhaskar and her human reaction to the sculptured figure of love. Soon after the dawning of love in her heart, Sumitha is summoned by her father to Delhi and there is an interregnum in the romance.

Bhabani Bhattacharya presents his men and women upholding a positive view of life. Broken-hearted owning to disappointment in her first love, Rupa gave up her job of air hostess and kept herself buried in a hotel room for several weeks. But then her wound was soon healed and a new Rupa emerged out of her chastened self. Likewise, when Satyajit took to asceticism, the renunciation in which he found release was not a denial of the world. The novelist does not show any character rejecting life and believing in nihilism. He depicts the hero of the novel, Satayajit, expressing his unswerving belief in the ultimate triumph of nobility of the human spirit over all other things. When he meets the Indian
Minister to discuss his plan of peaceful march to Peking, the latter remarks: Your faith that the ultimate goodness of the human spirit must prevail in all circumstances—if that faith is the reality and all else illusion. The author presents his characters like Satyajit upholding the belief that, from death lead me to immortality. Almost all his characters have passion for life, and none is apathetic to life. They bring to light their creator’s belief in crumbing all the anti-life forces to dust.

Throughout the novel, Bhabani Bhattacharya concentrates upon the problem of bridging the gulf between the old and the new, East and West, and the different cultures so as to bring about their integration. The novelist reproduces Gandhiji’s and Krishnamurti’s ideas about the free mixing of cultures. It is stressed that all cultures should flow freely without any restrictions. As a matter of fact, there should be a healthy synthesis of these. That is why Gandhi asserts that Indian should not merely feed on the ancient culture of their land; they should enrich their old traditions with the experience of the new times. But the foreign
elements in their turn should be conditioned by the spirit of the soil.

Preoccupied with the theme of synthesis, the novelist shows how the clash between Gandhigram and Steel town, embodying two contrary thoughts and modes of life, disappears gradually bringing about a true adjustment between them. All this is the result of the understanding and sympathy that grows between Bhaskar Roy and Satyajit. Bireswar regards them as essential to each other in spite of their clear-cut differences.

The synthesis of East and West, of materialist and spiritual values, is also achieved through the marriage of Bhaskar Roy and Sumita who embody two contrary ways of life. Bhaskar is educated in the West. He had traveled widely in Europe and seen cabaret and night-clubs. He understands only the body and mind and not the soul and high morals. Before meeting Sumita, His body had never tried as asceticism. Naturally he sometimes feels restless and finds it difficult to work seriously and continuously. At such moments, he would ask himself if he is a machine, a thing of steel. She respects asceticism and spiritual values; she
belongs to the India of the epic age. A true follower of her father, she is an out-and-out Gandhian. When she happens to come in contact with Bhaskar, the two opposites irresistibly attract each other. All are surprised to see them coming nearer to each other.

Bhattacharya, spotlights the synthesis of asceticism and aestheticism. In more ways than one, he points to an integration of Gandhian asceticism and Tagorean aestheticism, Satyajit is an amalgam of the two. He is a true Gandhian believing in, and practicing, simplicity of life, social service, village uplift, non-violence, truthfulness, fast as a means of penance, a spiritual strength, rejection of materialism, brahmacharya etc. He devotes himself to the task of creating a model village with the hope that it would be a replica of Sevagram, the village of service that the Father of the Nation had founded. Naturally he named it Gandhigram. By his words and action living, voluntary poverty, self-help and celibacy, use of moral force as a weapon to combat evil and an infinite capacity to bear suffering and death rather that retaliate. If on the one hand Satyajit is a true Gandhian, on the other, he has the essential Tagore in him.
The contrast between urban and rural life, the sophisticated life and the village background, the machine-oriented and the simple, spiritual life of the rustics is highlighted in this novel by Bhattacharya. He has portrayed the serenity of mind among the humble peasants of Gandhigram and the westernized outlook of the steel minded engineer Bhaskar Roy. How modern sophisticated civilization in encroaching upon the simple and unassuming lives of the poor villagers is represented here in the two ways of life presented by Bhaskar Roy on the one hand, Satyajit on the other.

Gandhigram in short is a microcosm of India. India is a mirror of many villages and what is happening in one village does happen in any other village and Gandhigram is no exception. It tries to resist the onslaughts of a machine-oriented life. The setting and background of the novel are quite relevant to its design. Gandhigram stands for Gandhian ideals and so it represents Satyajit’s beliefs. The wholly industrialized Steel town is the embodiment of westernized outlook of life and it stands for Bhaskar Roy’s highly sophisticated mode of life. As each tries to assert his claim
about a philosophy of life, it leads to an inevitable clash of ideas. These two views represent in short, the pre and post independence eras in the history of India.

Bhattacharya presents a study in contrast both of the ideology and in the characters. The theme is based on structure of contrast. It is in between the rolling mills and hunger strikes. There is pleasant contrast between the two pairs-Satyajit and Suruchi and Bhashkar and Sumita.

There was no defeat in the voices, but a secret, excited triumph. Listening, Rahoul began to lose his sadness, for in that instant he saw past the clouds of pain-he saw the horizon of the east illumined by a new dawn. Freedom could not drop from the skies, nor he asked from lands beyond the seas; but there, in the vast swamp of suffering and struggle, would it break into bloom, growing out of the seeds of the spirit. And strong exultation burned in his eyes and a strange intense look of conquest kindled in his face as he gave his voice to the united voices:

“The more they tighten the chains,
The more the chains loosen”.

The author presents his characters like Satyajit upholding the belief; from death lead me to immortality. Almost all his characters have passion for life, and none is apathetic to life. They bring to light their creator’s belief in crumbling all the anti-life forces to dust. Later in the novel, she gives up some of her asceticism, and Bires say to Satyajit: The new Sumita is in love with life. Bhattacharya’s men and women have in them sources of great strength. In the novelist’s opinion, they can have strength only from themselves, and not from anywhere else. Nandini decides to many her lover Ashok, even though it is believed that he may lose his eyes.

The author stresses the virtue and value of courage in life. It is courage which enables man to have a strong grip on life and achieve what he desires. Hence Suruchi’s remark about the young girl Jhanak: No, she would not stop Jhanak, who had something she herself had never possessed: courage, the resolve to grasp life between her hands; and the boldness to fight tooth and nail to secure whatever she deeply wanted. In addition to courage, the author emphasizes the significance of a hard struggle in life to acquire inner power.
Satyajit says to Bires. Bhashkar can have every chance to win. For us an empty victory will be worse than defeat. It’s the confrontation that strengthens our spirit.

This analysis of the four major male characters of the narrative clearly shows that inspirit of their being near blood relations, they are more or less diametrically opposed to one another with the exception of Rahoul and Devata, who resemble each other a good deal. But they never fight with or despise one another. They exemplify that life is all compromise and the live peacefully. As a matter of fact, the novelist succeeds remarkably in depicting them as part and parcel of an integrated family. They understand and adjust with one another pretty well.

The harmonious relationship between Devata and Kajoli’s family further illustrates Bhattacharya’s idea of synthesis. When in person, Devata is worried about these people who were truly his own, nearer to him than his blood kin. He is and outsider in the family and there is surely a great gap and city-bred, while the latter consists of unlettered peasants; the two have entirely different ideas and values. This is the reason why Rahoul feels flustered and upset on
Kajoli’s touching his feet when he goes to her residence to meet him.

Bhattacharya deeply console about the various problems such as: how to blend the specific and the general, the symbolic and the natural, the abstract and the concrete; how to teach and preach unobtrusively and present at the same time a vivid interpretation of life; how to reconcile the two pulls—that of the essayist and that of the story-teller, that of the novelist of ideas and that of, what Aldous Huxley calls, the congenital novelist, that of normative objectivity and that to evaluate his work on the basis of the quality of fusion and, as Eliot says, the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place. In this article my strategy would be to examine each novel in the chronological order so that we trace the graph of Bhattacharya’s development as a novelist.

Bhattacharaya is primarily a didactic writer interested in writing novels of ideas. He himself asserts that Art must teach. Art must preach. He holds that a novel must have a social purpose, that purposeless art and literature which is in vogue does not appear to me a sound judgement. This
explains why his novels are full of essay-like reflections on various socio-cultural and political problems. As a teacher and a preacher he uses two obvious strategies—one, unwholesome; and two that of presenting what he considers positive values in terms of a pattern of characters and situations. As a novelist, he is committed to concretization of themes and problems in terms of felt life. Bhattacharya is aware of this when he says: unless a writer has keen observation and an eye for noting the details of general behavior of folks, he cannot write a social novel. I have developed this habit and I have not missed a single opportunity of observing incidents, happenings, where I can gain something for the writer in me.

Upholding the concept of Art for Life’s sake, Bhattacharya rejects the dictum of Art for Art’s sake and calls it a muffled cry because it is as absurd as a demand like, Science for the sake of Science. He emphasizes that art must have purposiveness and the novel must have a social purpose. While conversing with Sudhakar Joshi about art and literature and his own practice as a writer, he observed:
“I hold that a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader something from the society’s point of view”.

As a matter of fact, it cannot be cut apart from the general cultural pattern of an age. For instance, the great classical epic, the Ramayana, embodies a cultural outlook which now is only of historical interest, but which truly depicts the age it belongs to. Since the truth portrayed in it has remarkable university and vitality, the epic has survived the various ages and has charmed the people till now. However, it is not possible for a writer to imitate or satirize it: It would be futile for a modern writer, even if he is a literary genius, to echo the Ramayana in his art. The reality, the truth, would have escaped him. At the same time, to satirize such an epic, i.e. to make fun of the cultural pattern that produced it, would indicate an utter lack of understanding of history. In recent times, Aubery Meon, a famous man of letters, has attempted to satirize the epic, but he has miserably failed.

The novelist artistically expresses his belief that there can be true understanding among different classes of society, and that the class barriers can be extirpated, provided people
have genuine kindness for one another. The elimination of the
gulf among the classes surely results in happiness and the
expansion of the self. Subtly but unambiguously does the
writer show Rahoul mixing well with the peasant family of
Kajoli, and this brings happiness to both the parties
belonging to two entirely different classes-Rahoul is a
scientist, philosopher and wealthy citizen of Calcutta, while
Kajoli and others in the family are poor, illiterate village folk.
In no time Rahoul becomes an integral part of the integrated
family and spontaneously addresses Kajoli’s mother as
mother.

The novel vividly describes the National Movement. The
old and the young, irrespective of caste, creed and sex, plunge
into it. It is with great difficulty and intelligence that
Samarendra can keep his son, Rahoul, a student then, away
from the movement by sending him abroad for higher studies.
The movement spreads in villages because the leaders give
top priority to village reconstruction work, since it is thought
to be the very basis of the Indian way of life to come. When
the movement emphasizes the importance of mass literacy,
the alien rulers regard it as dangerous. For, it would, they
know, make the trampled ones conscious of their birth-right-the right to live as human beings.

The novel deals with India’s dilemma during World War II: whether she should it to fight against the fascist forces. For some time, she stands inactive, uncertain about which way to take. The dilemma is resolved by the decision to fight with the British people against the Nazis. It is felt that Indians are to oppose the British rulers, and not the British people who are in danger of losing their liberty. Indians are to side with freedom and democracy, and not with tyranny and enslavement. So the National Movement offered co-operation, pledging its full strength to the war effort, in return for recognition of the welfare of the society.

Rahoul always looks forward to meeting him so as to get strength and hope. Even Kunal, Rahoul’s younger brother, has a thirst for basic human values. Without caring for his parents, he goes to World War II to play his part in the great event. He affirms that the English are deeply devoted to high ideals and values which they cannot bear to lose. He talks to his elder brother about doing good to a fellow-being, and tells him that one of the noblest acts a man can do, and which
truly counts, is to help a man to solve his food problem. He himself does such an act by resigning his post, so that someone else may have a chance to get it.

Realism means for Bhattacharya the perception of the essential truth of a situation or a period; it does not mean wallowing in detail for the sake of detail. In the treatment of love, for example, he is all for moderation and restraint. He complains against some modern writers who introduce pornography into their writings for popular appeal:

The so-called romantic writer of today seems to woo actuality by depicting in detail and with sharp photographic accuracy the sex convolutions of his Cinderalla and his prince, thus giving them roots, apparently, in the common earth of life and time. Here is an adolescent determined to be an adult. It is, indeed, amazing that literature today is so full of adolescence, preening itself in adult form but being betrayed by disorders of which it is a victim.

The creative writer has a well-developed sensitivity, though this does not mean that he understands or shares all emotions. The things he witnesses, the things he experiences, are likely to move him more intensely than what may be
called recollection at second hand. Even the historical novel relies as much on the writer’s personal experience as on imaginative evocation. A second point is that the true novelist writes because he must. If the events of today have moved him so deeply that he must have a creative outlet for his feelings, why should he put those feelings in cold storage, as it were, and leave them until the present time has slipped into the vista of dim yesterday.

Bhattacharya certainly is one Indian novelist who has accepted the challenge among the writers who influenced him. Bhattacharya prominently mentions Tagore and Steinbeck. Tagore’s impress on him is profound and some of the philosophical ideas introduced in *Music for Mohini* and *Shadow from Ladakh* are derived from the poet. Bhattacharya’s translation of Tagore’s stories and other short pieces included in *The Golden Boat* and his associations with the preparation of the *Towards Universal Man* provide ample evidence of his admiration for him.

One has, therefore, in Bhabani Bhattacharya a scholarly and cultured writer writing with sincerity and a sense of dedication to his country and to his art. He has a
definite theory of the novel which he applies to his own works. As a result he has produced works which have relevance to life in contemporary India. With his progressive ideas and his vision of a glorious future he has also great admiration for the spiritual and cultural heritage of the country. Like the great men whom he admired, particularly Tagore and Gandhi, he is also a builder of bridge between the present and the past.

Rahoul and his younger brother, Kunal, are the sons of a lawyer, Samarendra Basu, living in Calcutta. Samarendra’s father, Devesh Basu, does not live with the family. The small family represents in a way a cross-section of middle-class Indian society with its variety and contrasts. Rahoul has D.Sc. degree from Cambridge where he had carried on research under a distinguished scientist. Before going to Cambridge, he had, like thousands of other young men, contemplated joining the Independence Movement and seeking arrest, but his father had shrewdly managed to send him away to England. At the time the story begins, he is on the staff of a college in the city and continues his research on Cosmic Rays. He is happily married and a daughter is born to him. Rahoul’s desire is to throw in his lot with the people
struggling for freedom and self-respect, but for the time being he refrains from action and the impression is created among the British officers that he is on the war against the Fascists and Japan. Nevertheless he is a staunch nationalist and he cannot forget the hypocrisy of the foreign rulers who talk about the Four Freedoms, which, so far as India is concerned, do not include the freedom to be free.

The technique employed by the company is to tempt all the small farmers to sell not only all their stock of rice but also the unharvested crops, to store the rice safely in a few places and to wait until the cornering has boosted the price. The famine which results is, therefore, entirely engineered by man. Samarendra’s wealth is ill-gotten and he wants his sons to lead comfortable, self-centered lives. He curries favor with the Governor of the Province and other high-placed British officials. To enhance the prestige of the family and to the government that he is engaged in research work of great potential value and that any day he might discover a Death Ray which the Allied Powers could make use of in order to win the war.
The family represents some of the finest qualities of rural Bengal or of rural India. Their life is simple but gracious and dignified. Devata eats with the family often presumably, sharing their plain meal consisting of steamed rice and lentils, a pinch of salt and a lemon, some baked sweet potatoes and a vegetable curry of sorts, and perhaps some thickened milk in a small brass bowl by way of luxury. When Rahoul arrives at the house in the company of Devata, Kajoli receives him in the traditional manner, removing the shoes from his feet, pouring cold water in the feet and washing off the dust. Rahoul is embarrassed and tries to expostulate, but Devata silences him and reminds him that Kajoli is a well-bred peasant girl’ with a legacy of manners as old as India.

Kajoli has a brief spell of happiness after she is married to the young man, Kishore. He had been a worker in a cotton-mill in the city, had taken part in a strike and been imprisoned in the same jail as Kajoli’s father. The father had taken such a great liking to Kishore that when the latter was released from prison he sent him to Baruni with a letter to his wife expressing his wish that he should marry Kajoli. So the marriage took place. The novelist suggests by a few deft
touches how radiantly happy the young couple were after the marriage. If, for instance, Kajoli heard a cuckoo singing when she and Kishore were out on the fields, she would immediately echo the bird’s note, coo-coo-oo, with the spontaneity and joy of a child.

Kajoli actually has an abortion. As she lies helpless and bleeding, a jackal comes near attracted by the smell of blood and elated at the prospect of eating up the prostrate and almost moribund body. She is providentially saved from that fate by the arrival of little Onu who has been directed to the spot by the repentant soldier. Weak and defenseless himself, Onu somehow manages to drive away the jacket and brings his mother to the scene. This is the most harrowing episode in the whole novel. A critic safely ensconced in his study might be tempted to pooh-pooh the incident as sensational and exaggerated, but what matters is that it is credible to the imagination and has been handled by the novelist with feeling and restraint.

Temptation comes to Kajoli as to countless other destitute women like her. A woman who sells betel-leaves and also runs a brothel offers her sixty or even eighty rupees if
she agrees to become a prostitute. She spurns the offer, but the growing misery of their situation makes her toy with the idea of accepting the woman’s offer so that her mother and Onu may be fed. After days of anxious brooding and vacillation, she finally makes up her mind to sell herself. She takes the money from the jubilant woman and ties it up in a bit of gunny-bag which her mother usually keeps under her head at night. She has planned to go with the betel-woman early one morning. By an ironic coincidence her mother has planned to leave her children the same morning and to put an end to her life by jumping into the river from the bridge. Kajoli is the first to get up and she stealthily leaves the place.

There is to be a hunger-strike among the political prisoners at Dehra Dun. She also understands that her dear Devata is to be leader of the Satyagrahis. This news changes the entire course of her life and saves her from the jaws of degradation. She sees the image of the revered old man before her mind’s eye and his parting advice given to the people of Baruni echoes in her ears: Be strong, be true, and be deathless. With a pang of remorse she realizes that she has let him down and debased herself. A few casual words spoken
by the betel-seller give her an idea. The woman remarks that a newspaper which contains such news will sell like hot cakes and that a boy could earn a commission of two annas by selling a dozen copies. Kajoli eagerly pounces on the idea and acts swiftly and firmly. She buys there dozen copies of the paper and tells the woman that she has changed her mind and will return her money-minus a loan for payment of deposit for the paper.

Another question is whether Kajoli really became a fallen woman after she took money from the betel-seller and before she broke off relations with her. Bhattacharya suggests in a subtle and delicate way that the heroine’s honor remains untarnished. After she accepts money, Kajoli is asked to tidy and preen herself before she is taken to some place where she is to ply the nefarious trade. The woman is to conduct her to this place one morning. On the way, however, there is an unexpected development. Kajoli hears of Devata’s fast and the memory of his saintly personality and teachings makes her revolt against the way of life she has tentatively chosen.

The reader is left to brood over the question whether the mother was saved from death by the appearance of the
vehicle at the crucial moment. The author is in no mood to
give a neat answer to the question; on the contrary he poses
the question deliberately so as to produce the particular
artistic effect he has in mind. It is possible to analyze this
effect. First one may ask oneself whether preventing the
woman from dying would mean saving her. In the context,
she will be saved only for hunger. This is how the author
indicates the thought that passes through Rahoul’s mind as
the truck moves away from the bridge.

Death for her would be a liberation rather than
punishment. The artist’s central concern is not what is to
happen to her, but what she has already passed through; the
gesture of despair that she makes and the indifference of the
police guards who do not care to stop the truck effectively
dramatize the hell from which she tries to escape. The
novelist is not interested in spelling out the details of her
future. Secondly the novelist has the choice of two main
alternatives not to speak of other less obvious ones. These
alternatives are depiction of the fate of a whole community,
and portrayal of the lot of an individual or a small group of
individuals. It is mainly a question of perspective. An
individual’s experience may be projected in such a way as to symbolize the experience of a large group, but it is just possible that one may see the trees and not the woods. In *So Many Hungers* the emphasis is definitely on the lot of the many individuals rather than anyone’s lot.

Among the three novels of Bhattacharya which deal with the pre-Independence period, *So Many Hungers* is the one most concerned with the freedom struggle with its tensions and conflicts. Consequently this novel has comments to make on the alien government and the British people. Bhattacharya is very critical of the British administration and the ruler’s attitude towards the people and to the problems of the land. He mentions the Atlantic Charter satirically and hints at the hypocrisy of the ruler who claims to be fighting for democracy while denying democratic freedom to India. The repressive measures taken by the government against nationalistically minded citizens are referred to the novel.

Referring to Gandhi’s arrest, Bhattacharya makes the bitterly ironic comment: A noble-hearted person must share the lot of gangsters for speaking out his true faith in democracy: And the prison warder was one who was pouring
out his own people’s life-blood to rescue democracy from its chains. The entire country is a vast prison. Indian industries are not allowed to develop because the interests of the ruler are likely to be jeopardized by their progress. Collective fines are imposed on already impoverished villages for minor acts of violence done by infuriated groups of people.

Big officers of government tour the countryside to do propaganda for the war effort and against the potential Japanese invader, but they spend no thought on the starvation and misery of the people. There was to be no true word, no food for the people’s hunger. In vain, in vain had five villages walked the three hours’ way to Rangamati’s banyan and the three hours’ way back in scorching sun, and five thousand fake words in their empty stomachs? Bhattacharya squarely blames the government for the artificial famine which takes a toll of two million lives. The thoughts of Rahoul as he is being taken to prison at the end of the novel could very well be the thoughts of the author himself.

The brief episode is a piece of great literature as it movingly depicts a human situation and illustrates not only the pathos of human existence but also the nobility and
goodness of man’s heart. There cannot be more convincing proof of the author’s freedom from prejudice and his clearness of vision.

The advance of the Japanese across Burma and the threat of their invasion of India from the east; forms part of the background of So Many Hungers. There are, therefore, references to the threatened invasion and to the repercussions of the danger in the country. Bhattacharya does not take this threat seriously although he does not altogether ignore it. He mentions how the presence of the Japanese in Burma and the possibility of an invasion influence the natural leaders and induce them to make an offer of co-operation with the government provided they concede the demand of the people for freedom. The over-all impression that Bhattacharya gives is that the Japanese bogey was largely a creation of the British propaganda machinery.

So Many Hungers is not a novel depicting hungers alone; it gives many memorable pictures of the goodness and nobility of the rural folk, their simple ways and their characteristic attitudes to life. One of the earliest pictures
that one sees is that of the girl Kajoli showing respect to a visitor by washing his feet. The selflessness and decency of the peasants is indicated where Kajoli shows anxiety to bring food in time for the laborers working in their field and where the mother makes it clear to her son-in-law that whatever rice they have is to be shared with the Kisans. The adherence of the peasants to the highest code of mortality known to them is illustrated in the scene in which of young man suggests to a group of hungry destitutes that they might break into an eating place and seize whatever food is available. Three old men rebuke him, produce pieces of bread tied up in their loin cloth and tell the youth.

The peasants do not lose their fundamental goodness even as a result of their sufferings as neglected destitutes in Calcutta. One of the miserable boys who have been ransacking a garbage heap finds a discarded jam can with bits of jam sticking to the sides. Before he can enjoy his feast another boy disputes possession of the tin, but the first boy makes a conflict superfluous with his superb offer of generosity: Lick this side; the other side belongs to my mouth. Lick. Rahoul witness another act of heroism and
magnanimity by a girl who resembles Kajoli and whom he mistakes to be Kajoli in the beginning, she earns six rupees by the shocking method of exposing her bosom for the entertainment of a few thoughtless white soldiers, but buys bread for the entire sum to feed a large number of emaciated boys who are not related to her. Another such act is done by an old rustic at the Relief Centre run by Rahoul. The old man has been using his ticket to get his daily quota of rice gruel along with other destitutes. One day he walks up to Rahoul when the distribution of rice is in progress, hands over his ticket to him and tells him that the food he has been eating for some days has given his sufficient strength and so he desires that the ticket should be given to someone whose need is greater.

Bhattacharya also gives us instances of the self-respect of the simple villagers and their high moral sense. A procuress tries to lure Kajoli away to the city and as a preparation for her temptation she gives the family sweets, rice, lentils and ghee. Not knowing the intentions of the stranger, the mother eats some of the sweet delicacy and begins preparing sumptuous why the woman has come; she
has already eaten so that it may not contaminate her. “I ate dirt from the hands of a whore”, she cries out in self-reproach. The weakening of this moral strength shown happening in the case of Kajoli is a measure of the devastation caused by the famine.

In the precedence to assess the literary value of *So Many Hungers*, one should keep in mind the novelist’s main aim in writing the book. Bhattacharya has prominently in his mind the theme of several types of hunger which afflict man, particularly the hunger for farm and the hunger for food. There is a third type of hunger which is explicitly mentioned in *He Who Rides a Tiger* and is partly dealt with in that novel, namely, the hunger of the well-fed and prosperous men of the city for the emaciated women destitutes. Bhattacharya in a comment on *So Many Hungers* refers to the inclusion of various types of hunger in the theme of the novel:

The story was concerned with all the intensified hungers of the historic years 1942-43, not food alone: the money hunger, the sex hunger. The hunger is to achieve India’s political freedom. The theme of freedom is placed in the forefront; it is
introduced in the second chapter, runs like a thread all through the book and the novel closes with a jubilant reference to it. (167)

Paul Verghese in his discussion of the novel considers Bhattacharya’s portrayal of the famine as exaggerated and cheap. The criticism is not valid because most of the situations depicted in the novel are true of life in the country even at normal times not to speak of a time of unusual hardship. Men without shelter, clothes and food are no new phenomenon in our land; myriads of them can still be seen on the pavements of our proud cities including the capital. Beggars are hunting for food in garbage-bins is a common sight. Occasionally one hears of a child being carried away by a jackal and we have in Jim Corbett’s book factual accounts of sick people carried away from their homes by man-eating tigers. There is no incident in the novel which can be said to be impossible and we have the novelist’s word for it that the story is based on factual reports.

There is in the novel a moving human story shown against the setting of a historical situation. Bhattacharya does not tell the story with cold detachment; his feelings are
very much involved and he does not hesitate to apportion blame for the tragedy where it is due. The novel is a severe indictment both of the foreign government for its apathy and neglect and of unprincipled Indians who exploit the situation for their own benefit and who are no better than the vultures and jackal’s waiting for the flesh that dies’ and sometimes not even waiting till it dies. The novelist’s righteous indignation, his sincerity and his compassion are in evidence all though the novel. It undoubtedly represents an artistic success.

Bhattacharya has dealt with some of the real concerns and problems of a period not far away, which the older generations have lived through. Yet it has to be mentioned that he does not show any affiliation with any political party of identity himself with any particular ideology. In this respect he is very different from another contemporary novelist, Mulk Raj Anand, who also deal with similar themes but takes up a definitely leftist position.

Bhattacharya reveals his admiration for Gandhi and Nehru and approves of some of the values for which the Indian National Congress stood, but he is no party-man and does not accept into the manifesto of any single party. What
we have in this novel is a close personal observation of men and events and realistic and bold description of what is observed. The reporting is not merely journalistic because there is selection, organization and control.

The portrayal of characters in *So Many Hungers* is one instance of the novelist’s artistic control over his material. While dealing with a national crisis and widespread calamity, he has also to enrich the story and to appeal to the reader by portraying individual characters. The artistic problem involved is that of perspective, adjustment of the focus and correctly balancing one interest against the other so that the final effect may be what the artist is aiming at. In this novel Bhattacharya is fundamentally preoccupied with the general rather than the particular. We have a clue to his purpose in the fact that two characters, one of whom figures all through the story, Kajoli’s father and mother, are not even given names. They are referred to all the time as father and mother. This is unmistakable proof that the author desires them to be regarded as symbols or types even through they may be sufficiently realized as individuals.
Dr. Srinivasa Iyengar remarks about the characters of the novel that though they have been individualized, they are nothing more than algebraic symbols. This is true of some of the characters but certainly not of all. Where the individualization has not been adequately done, the omission is by design and is not due to technical incompetence. There are characters that stand out prominently such as Rahoul, Samarendra, Devata and Kajoli. At the end of the novel the individual characters are deliberately pushed aside in fulfilment of the novelist’s design.

**So Many Hungers** deals with many things that are depressing, but still it is not a depressing book. On the one side is the panorama of men and women emaciated by hunger and in rags. There are the vultures and jackals and, not essentially different from them, the greedy and rapacious men. We have the spectacle of boys fighting with other boys and animals for morsels of food ferreted out of garbage bin. On the other side we have glimpses into the hearts and souls of human beings and find therein abundant love, purity strength and hope. Be strong, be deathless, Devata tells the people of Baruni and at least some of them live up to this
advice. A book which thus portrays the triumph of spirit over matter cannot depress the reader; on the contrary it conveys a message of confidence and hope.

One of the foremost qualities of the book is the author’s sincerity and depth of feeling. The theme has caught his imagination and set it afire. His sensitivity and heightened awareness enable him to see things in the proper perspective and to convey his vision to the reader. The novel is a moving and impressive work of art. With respect to intensity of feeling and artistic sincerity it may be given the first place among Bhattacharya’s novels. When other factors such as range, depth, organization of material and style are also taken into account, it has to yield pride of place to *Shadow from Ladakh*.

When the story begins, Mohini is a girl of seventeen, studying at school and growing up in a home where she is petted and given complete freedom. She is motherless and is brought up by her father who is referred to all through the novel as Father or as the Professor and her grandmother who also remains unchristened and is called Old Mother. In the opening chapter of the novel Mohini is shown competing with
her younger brother, Heeralal, in the childish game of collecting English proper names which sound funny to Indian ears such as Silverthorne, Long street, Rainbird or Slaughter. At the end of the novel she has been married for two or three years and is returning to her parent’s home for a first holiday, an expectant mother and lady of the Big House of Behula. One of the main themes in the novel is the process of her growth and maturity- the metamorphosis of the care-free girl into the life partner of a thoughtful idealist who desires to play his part in the building of the country’s future.

In a typical scene, the brother and sister fight each other for fun in the absence of the father, but when he suddenly and unexpectedly enters the room, the boy pretends to be working on a sum and Mohini pretends to be reading a text-book on Ancient India: Reaching Benares, Gautama Budha delivered his first sermon on the Noble Eightfold Path leading to peace. The second sermon stressed the need of detachment from the world’s affairs as the means to freedom. The third, delivered on a mountain-side. The professor is taken aback when he causally looks at the volume she has kept open in front of her and discovers that it is a Bengali
novel, The Poisoned Kiss. His spontaneous reaction is to pull her ears one after the other as he has done in the case of Heeralal. This seems to be a great humiliation for Mohini, and the grandmother is the first to notice it and speak about it to the father. With her knowledge and experience of the world she has noticed that Mohini is no longer a child but a woman and she urges on her son the need to get her married without much delay.

Bhattacharya brings out the fact that like other normal girls of her age she has begun to indulge in romantic fancies and to dream to being loved and in love. He also emphasizes through the delineation of two other juvenile characters, Bindu, the cook’s daughter who is only fourteen, and another girl in the neighborhood whose boy-friend uses kites to send her love-letters secretly, that it is a sign of normal vitality for a young person to entertain thoughts of love. As a result of Old Mother’s prompting, several proposals for Mohini’s marriage are considered and the conventional inspection of the bride is carried out by a few parties. One proposal comes through the agency of a bangle-seller. A bangle-seller, like a barber, has access to several families and his position thus
makes him useful in Indian life as a match-maker. The bridegroom suggested is a handsome, well-educated and affluent young man in the late twenties by name Jayadev who is the head of an aristocratic family in the village, Behula, called the Big House. 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 favorable conjunction. Jayadev’s mother has approved of the match because she has ascertained that all the eight signs of luck such as figures of the wheel, the couch, and the elephant and so on are present on Mohini palm.

Old mother has been very favorably impressed by seeing a learned article written by Jayadev in a journal, Maya, and particularly by a photograph of the young man which shows him to be extremely handsome and graceful. Calcutta-bred Mohini also has been captivated by the photograph and has prepared herself mentally to leave the city and to live in Behula. The father in the end gives in to the wishes of his mother and his daughter, and the wedding is arranged even without Jayadev and Mohini seeing each other.
After the marriage ceremony which is described by Bhattacharya in considerable detail, Mohini goes to her new home with Jayadev accompanied by Heeralal and the cook who are to keep her company for a few weeks. After the train journey, when the couple travel towards Behula first in a bullock-cart and then in a palanquin, the reader gets the distinct feeling that Mohini is being transported from a modernistic home in the city to another in the heart of rural Bengal dominated by orthodoxy, convention and ritual. The manner in which the bride is welcomed by the people of the village on the way, the rites with which she is received into her new home, all suggest to Mohini that she has entered a new world which involves new responsibilities.

Her mother-in-law is a symbol of what the Big House has stood for all through its long history of many centuries. After the loss of Jayadev’s father in a flood, the widowed mother has lived entirely for the Big House and the values that it represents. She is austere, dedicated and strong as steel. She has kept a pair of wooden sandals, which had been used by her late husband, in the family prayer-room and offers worship to them daily. The family eats only vegetarian
food. This causes hardship to Mohini who is accustomed to eating fish. Many taboos make life colorless and monotonous. It is indecorous for ladies to sit down for a meal along with the men.

The main problem for Mohini in the Big House is that of mental adjustment. Even before two or three days have passed, she realizes that Jayadev is not what she would desire a husband to be. Roughly speaking, Mohini stands for vitality, life, and her husband—at least one side of him—is anti-life. One the very first night, as soon as he enters the bedchamber, he begins to speak to her pompously, in words that he has carefully rehearsed, trying to give her an idea of his lofty conception of the relationship between husband and wife.

Mohini is so much disappointed and angered by his behavior that she bites the flower garland adorning her neck tearing away the jasmine blossoms one after another. It is only when he notices her reaction that he realizes the foolishness and artificiality of his pose and warms up to her as a woman and as his wife.
Jayadev’s study of ancient lore has given him the idea that he and Mohini should be like the ancient sage, Yagnavalkya, and his intellectual wife, Maitreyi. He expects her to sympathize with and to share in his scholarly pursuits and to give him the necessary moral support to carry out his programs of social reform. He is disillusioned very soon when he finds out that there is nothing of the scholarliness in her. She starts learning Sanskrit from him, but tires of the exercise before long. Jayadev is disillusioned very soon and withdraws into the shell of reserve. He is kind to Mohini but does not always respect her feelings as a woman. Hardly three days after their arrival at Behula has he wandered away from the house at night, and when he returns and enters the bedroom, he finds her standing by the window singing a sad song about the lover who has cast away his beloved. The import of the song awakens him to a realization of his mistake and her plight.

When the opposing forces within him struggle for supremacy, he becomes confused and unhappy. He tells himself and he tells Mohini also that he would like her to be the saintly Maitreyi as long as he engaged in his scholarly
work and that when that work is over and he is return to
normal life she can again become his Mohini. Briefly the
mistake of Jayadev is to assume that love on the spiritual
plane and love on the physical plane can be kept apart. It
takes time for him to learn that such ambivalence is not
possible.

Mohini stands for life and therefore rebels against the
coldness and artificially of the pattern sought to be imposed
on her. But she also has to learn and to grow. She
understands as time passes that she also has to modify her
stand and make adjustments if she is to play her role as a
wife and as the mistress of an illustrious house. She has her
duties to her husband. If she is unable to share his scholarly
preoccupations, she can at least help him in a practical way
in furthering his programme of social work. She makes a
significant beginning by conducting classes for the women of
the village and giving them some elementary general
education. Husband and wife now have a common interest in
selfless public work; this sharing of interest brings them
closer together and puts an end to the reserve on one side
and suspicion on the other. Gradually a good-natured but
impulsive girl is transformed into an understanding and competent wife.

Mohini has her adjustments to make with her mother-in-law and the Big House too. The mother is personally very considerate and affectionate towards Mohini, but nevertheless expects her to conform to the time-honored way of life. She makes the girl understand that now she is the mistress of the house by handling over to her the key of the safe in which all the money and jewelry is kept. At the same time she reminds her that she has to subject herself to a sort of reorientation. She discourages her from singing secular songs, advises her to wear only cotton saris and asks her to put on gold bangles in the place of the lovely glass and lac bangles that she loves. Time and again the mother harps on the theme of the family traditions. The Big House at last becomes inhabited in Mohini’s imagination by the spirits of all the ancestors of Jayadev.

A crisis in Mohini’s life and in the life of the Big House itself comes when Jayadev is approaching the age of twenty-eight. As may be expected, the mother has staunch faith in horoscopes. An astrologer has predicted that Jayadev will die
an untimely death at this age unless a child is born to him by then. The mother is naturally most anxious that Mohini should become a mother in order to prevent the misfortune of Jayadev’s death and the greater calamity of this Big House coming to its end through the lack of an heir. About two years after the marriage, when the mother guesses from the appearance and looks of Mohini that she is pregnant she is filled with gratitude and joy. In accordance with the practice in rural Bengal she sticks a chip of bamboo to the braided hair of the girl as a charm to protect the child in the womb and to prevent any mishap.

Mohini does not have faith in charms. As a result she throws away the bamboo chip when the little boy, Ranjan, asks her why she is wearing it. The mother is vexed and angry when she notices that the charm is missing. Later the mother promises her to join in the sacrifice by offering her blood also to be blessed with a grandson.

One of the major concerns of Bhattacharya in this novel is the need for a change of social outlook and reorientation of social values in India. As a necessary corollary to his implied plea for change, she presents to the reader a picture of society
today and invites attention to many beliefs and practices which have become strongly entrenched. Some of these concern norms of personal etiquette, others relate to social behavior while some others relate to religion.

The two strong pillars of orthodoxy depicted in the novel are Old Mother and Jayadev’s mother. The former is less inflexible than the latter and is more capable of making concessions and showing tolerance. But even Old Mother condemns the recording of Mohini’s songs for commercial purposes. She had tried to prevent Mohini from being sent to an English Convent School for study and even used the not very infrequent threat of renouncing the world and living in the Holy City of Benares if she were to be overruled. Old Mother counsels rejection of a marriage proposal for the sole reason that the suitor’s friends who have come to see the bride smoke before elders and thus show disrespect. Mohini has the desire that Jayadev should visit their house just once but she knows that her grandmother would hear of no such thing.

Bhattacharya mentions some social customs and norms of behaviour which have become strongly established. One
such practice is that of a suitor’s friend or relatives inspecting the bride and subjecting her to an examination as if she were a candidate at an examination.

During a marriage, a bride is not to touch food till the whole ceremony is over. A Hindu wife is not supposed to eat before her husband. It is considered unseemly for a person belonging to a high caste to talk during a meal. Older people, particularly in the rural areas have an aversion to allopathic medicines and injections. Untouchability is practiced: widow remarriage is frowned upon. These are some of the manifestations of orthodoxy in social life referred to in the novel.

The novel also shows glimpses of orthodoxy as it operates in the sphere of religion. Vows and offerings to the deity come in for specific mention. Jayadev’s mother eats with her left hand and she has dedicated her right hand to Shiva to bring the blessing of long life on her son.

The faith of people in astrology and palmistry is also illustrated in *Music for Mohini*. The unfortunate Sudha, though a Brahmin girl and endowed with great beauty, remains unmarried primarily because of her great-uncle’s
irrational belief in astrology. A good match is rejected as the old man thinks that the girl is under the influence of Saturn and he wants to wait till the influence has passed. As a consequence, Sudha remains unmarried and comes to be nicknamed in the village as Saturn’s Eyesore. Mohini is accepted as Jayadev’s bride only after the mother has satisfied herself that she has on her palm all the eight signs of luck.

Some of the values it stands for are brought in out the novel. Symptomatic of its orderly way of life are the restrictions it places on its members, especially the ladies. It is unbecoming for a woman to sing loudly in the hearing of others. Plain cotton saris made on handlooms are preferred to fine mill-made muslin. Even the style of hair-dressing is regulated by custom. The mistress of the house is not supposed to move out of the house on foot. Men and women are usually segregated and do not eat together except on very special occasions. The whole house seems to be permeated by the presence of the ancestors and the ideals they represented. Even the bridal bed-flower bed as it is called-partakes of the spirit of the mansion.
The preservation of the house and the perpetuation of its traditions is the greatest aim of Jayadev’s mother. She has dedicated her right hand to Shiva with the object of ensuring that the heir to the house may not be harmed. The chief blessing that she invokes on Mohini when she arrives in the house is that she should have offspring. This steadfast desire to ensure the continuation of the family traditions drives her to the act of making Mohini offer her blood to the goddess. The mother is not prompted by any attachment to persons; her attachment is to a tradition and a way of life. One feels in the Big House the brooding presence of shadowy figures from the past including the last lady of the house who committed sati. The mother will not allow any pollution of the sanctity of this tradition.

Bhattacharya clearly indicates that the traditions of the Big House have much in them to admire. When the unfortunate famine afflicted Bengal and large numbers of uprooted people thronged into Behula, the master of the house did everything in his power to alleviate their suffering. He gave away all the rice in the granary and even sold away priceless family heirlooms to help the needy. Thus the
account given in the novel of the heritage of the Big House is fairly impartial and objective.

In contrast with observances or practices which hamper or lower the individual, there are others which in the novelist’s view have beneficial results. One can see the soul of goodness in them if one is capable of seeing the reality behind the appearance. One such practice is that of offering worship to the tulsi plant.

Bhattacharya likewise appreciates the service of the professional story-teller who goes round the villages giving lucid and colorful expositions of stories from the Puranas and other sources. These performances aided by music and wit keep our legendary love alive and help to reinforce religious faith. Ceremonies also have their value. For instance, the ceremony of a sister anointing her brother or brothers, as an incident in the novel illustrates, sub serves the purpose of giving color to life and evokes tender fraternal feeling.

Bhattacharya is not an iconoclast who wants to demolish everything old in order to find room for something new. There is a core of conservatism in his thinking which is proved by the respect he shows for many of our traditional
values. Regarding the place of woman in society and in the home, his attitude is not one of radical feminism.

To a Hindu woman as depicted in the novel, April is not the cruelest month. She does not seek barren love; the primary object of marriage is to beget children. Children alone make the survival and perpetuation of tardyons and values possible. Bhattacharya makes numerous references in the novel to the craving of a woman for children.

During the brief period of agony and suspense when Mohini fears that she is not going to bear a child, she even prepares herself to tolerate a co-wife, Sudha, if fate should will so-in the interest of her husband and the family. This is a measure of the self-sacrifice that a wife is capable of. The novelist makes use of this detail to emphasize the solidity and goodness of some of our traditions.

The conservatives in the village give the nickname ruffians to members to this group. Mohini defies the conventions of the Big House by climbing up a tree in the garden and sitting on the branch for relaxation. Jayadev approves of this act of rebellion by himself climbing up the same tree and occupying her perch in her absence. Mohini
warns him that there is danger in his breach of decorum. His answer to this is: Danger is just what we all need. Of the safety of second-hand thoughts and living we’ve had enough. It is well known to the younger people that Jayadev will take over the leadership of the ruffians when they have won the sympathy of the masses. He is very unhappy about the attempt made by his mother to force Mohini to offer blood to the goddess. The root of the trouble is blind belief in astrological predictions. Jayadev tells Mohini that it is their duty to fight such superstitious beliefs.

Even the gentle Professor, unfurls the banner of revolt when he is provoked. He insists on Mohini’s going to the English Convent School in spite of his mother’s usual threat, “Send me away to the Holy city”. He mocks at the practice of consulting horoscopes in this age of microscopes. The young Heeralal objects to wearing an amulet rounds his neck at recommended by Old Mother. Harindra laughs at the myth of the devout crocodile and tells the scandalized priest that the place where the crocodile would be most comfortable is the zoo in the city. There is something of the rebel in Mohini also, although in her case there are other forces which tone down
the mutiny in her mind. At a critical juncture in her life when her mother-in-law commands her to bow to superstition, she fancies that she hears the voice of her father urging defiance.

Mohini finally obeys the mother-in-law only because she seems to hear the persuasive voice of Old Mother counseling moderation: Give yourself to the goddess with grace, if not with faith. Jayadev, like his father-in-law, refuses to pay heed to astrology. He is not intimidated by the prediction of his death at the age of twenty-eight and he asks Mohini not to be unnerved by it.

Mohini refuses to accept Old Mother's view on dancing and exclaims how much she would love to dance. Father ridicules the custom of a bride fasting on the day marriage. Heeralal goes a step further by fetching from the kitchen a morsel of tastily cooked fish and slipping it into his sister's mouth. Harindra is the new man of medicine as opposed to his father who is a practitioner of the indigenous system of medicine. The father has the theory that only ayurved is good enough for the village; the pollution of the foreign system is to be confined only to the cities. Harindra ignores his father's wishes and sets up a dispensary at Behula. Circumstances
and fate are also in his favor. His mother falls ill; the father’s medicines have no effect and she begins to sink; at this juncture Harindra is allowed to step in and he is able to save her. Under Harindra’s leadership, the enthusiastic ruffians take up social work. They start a campaign for the elimination of the mosquito menace which involves the filing up of ponds. The priest of the Shiva temple blocks their way, but they triumph in the end.

The old money-lender tries his best to marry a young girl. The reformist group intervenes and prevents the marriage. They canvas the idea that when a widower wishes to marry, he should be compelled to marry a widow. Man should not be given a privilege that is denied to woman. Another reform that is mentioned is the prevention of child marriages and the fixing of the lower age limit for a girl to be married at fourteen. Bhattacharya must have been aware while writing the novel that there is a law in the Statute books called the Sharda Act but that does not seem to operate.

The conventional inspection of a prospective bride and the marriage ceremony get special attention in the novel. One
of a party of elders who come to see Mohini plies her with a number of questions relating to mythology and religion. The questions concern the number of divine incarnations that the Earth has witnessed the nature of Yoga. Not quite satisfied with the girl's answers, the man demands a higher dowry than has been offered.

The preparations for the wedding and the ceremony itself are described at some length. Details such as the turmeric ceremoniously carried to the bride’s home, the tray load of gifts including the lovely saris, the arrival of the bridegroom, the ceremony called the Auspicious Glance during which the bride and bridegroom see each other for the first time, the giving away of the bride by the father to the accompaniment of chanting by the priests and with the holy stone as witness, are given without undue interference with the progress of the narration. The ceremonial reception of the newly wedded wife at the husband’s place also gets adequate treatment.

Bhattacharya show his power of observation and his understanding of ordinary men and their life in his description of the journey by bullock-cart to Behula from the
railway station. Ganesh, the cart-man, urges the oxen forward with these very human words. He is very eager to prove to Heeralal how fast his oxen can run. On the way, seeing the eyes of the oxen drawing a cart coming in the opposite direction at night, Heeralal takes them to be tigers and raises an alarm. Another cart-man encountered on the way has run short of bean-oil for his lamp and wishes to borrow some from Ganesh. Ganesh parts with the oil only after getting the price he demands. All these touches add life and color to the narration.

The most outstanding among the characters of the novel are Old Mother and Jayadev’s mother who have their orthodoxy in common but are nevertheless sharply distinguished from each other. Old Mother is gentle and capable of winking at heterodoxy. She always states her point of view and sometimes uses the weapon of asking her chiding to send her away to the Holy City. If, however, she loses the battle she accepts defeat quietly and there the matter ends. Mohini’s mother-in-law is made of different metal. She is rigid and uncompromising in her view and in her; we have the bastion of Orthodoxy in the novel.
Mohini’s character is convincingly drawn. As mentioned earlier, the evolution of her personality ending with the harmony which she achieves through her capacity to change and to compromise is one of the themes of the novel. The boy, Ranjan, is introduced as a means to bring out the tenderness and the mother-instinct in Mohini in the same way as the destitute boy Obhijit is introduced in *He Who Rides a Tiger*. One cannot help feeling that the character of Jayadev in only imperfectly realized. The novel says a good deal about his ideals and aspirations but gives little evidence of his ability to translate them into action. The temple episode reveals his moral courage, but not his capacity for leadership and positive action. As we lay down the book we wonder whether all his plans are not going to meet with the same fate as his projected thesis.

*Music for Mohini* is a novel with rather restricted scope dealing with a limited area of life and experience. Many themes are named and suggested, but only one of them is effectively developed. The rebuilding of a new society; for Free India and a reorientation of values through a blending of past and present are among the issues raised at that time of being.
The only theme that is properly dealt with is the theme of a girl’s mental growth and adjustment to her new role as wife. Cultural integration is only academically discussed and not fictionally rendered. The young reformers of Behula do not strike as more effective than members of a school or college Society for rural service. Jayadev will boldly come out as their leader when they have gained sufficient popular support. The novel unfortunately does not give the feeling that this condition is likely to be fulfilled.

Kalo is a dark-skinned blacksmith in the small town, Jharna, competent in his trade, industrious and ambitious. His pretty wife dies of childbirth. The baby daughter is named Chandra Lekha- a name casually suggested by the priest when he came to the smithy for some work before the confinement. As the girl grows up under the tender care of the rough artisan, she displays unusual intelligence and she has inherited her mother’s good looks. Kalo sends her to the local English Convent School where her presence is frowned upon by the girls belonging to the higher castes. Kalo is criticized for his presumptuousness both by the high-caste people and the people at his level. As Chandra Lekha moves
up from one class to another at school, her father is filled with pride and joy. He is at times conscious of his own mental backwardness and desires to improve himself by reading his daughter’s books at night when she is asleep. In her final year at school Chandra Lekha takes part in an all-State essay-writing competition, and to the great joy of her father, her essay is adjudged the best and she gets a gold medal. Kalo takes it out of its casket everyday and spends some time fondly looking at it. The features which are clearly brought out in the story at his stage are consciousness of it, the girl’s unusual cleverness and attainments and the touching tenderness of their mutual affection.

The next development is the erection and inauguration of the temple on the hallowed spot. Money and materials pour in from all sides, especially from the black-marketers and speculators for who worship is atonement for all sins committed and a guarantee of success in future undertakings. A magnificent temple is built and it attracts large numbers of worshippers. Kalo, already wearing the sacred thread and passing for a Brahmin, also assumes a recognizably Brahmin name, Mangal Adhikari. A pujari is
appointed as Kalo knows little about the ritual of worship and has, anyway, to pretend to be so concerned with more important matters that he has no time for pedestrian work. A Board of Trustees is constituted to manage the financial and administrative work of the temple. The revenues swell; important men like the rich merchant, Mortichand, and Sir Abalabandhu, becomes associated with the management. Among the worshippers who come to the temple and touch Mangal Adhikari’s feet is the magistrate who had sentenced Kalo to hard labor for stealing bananas.

The protest against the caste-system depicted in the novel is all the more effective and touching as Biten, the main symbol of this protest, is himself a Brahmin. The story of his repudiation of caste has been summarized already. When Kalo persistently questions him about his caste, he tells him that he belongs to the convict-caste. After he falls in love with Lekha, Kalo suggests that he should wear a sacred thread so that people may take him to be a Brahmin. Otherwise Lekha’s marriage with him will put down the very foundations of their present status by forcing them to quit the temple. The only condition stipulated for his winning the hand of Lekha is that
he should just wear the sacred thread. The alternative to compliance with this request is losing the girl whom he loves and adores, but Biten has no hesitation in refusing to comply. In this episode Bhattacharya dramatizes the protest against the caste system. The end of the novel hints that Biten’s fight against the evil is not merely theoretical; his marriage with Lekha is a foregone conclusion.

In *He Who Rides a Tiger* we have a few asides which represent the author’s reaction to certain aspects of the Hindu religion as it is practiced by the masses of the country. Kalo’s trick and the eager expectation with which the miracle is awaited by the assembled people show that faith in miracles and credulity does not belong entirely to the past or to the villages. Bhattacharya also makes the reader see the contradiction in the fact that while destitutes die like flies on the street without anyone lifting his little finger to save them, money and materials are promptly offered for the construction of a false temple.

The selfish motives with which people offer worship at a temple are brought out in the novel through a few episodes which also illustrate the novelist’s flair for sarcastic humor.
Motichand, a speculator in shares, has heard of the new temple and visits it for reconnaissance purposes. Seeing the young votaries, Lekha, he tells her about his great problem—that of deciding whether to buy or sell. Lekha, who naturally has not the least knowledge of the subject, mechanically repeats the two words, “buy, sell, buy, sell”. Motichand takes it for granted that God has spoken through His oracle and has shown him the way. Against the trend of the market he proceeds to carry out the transactions of buying and selling in the exact order which the girl has indicated. The miracle works, the British Empire triumphs in the war against all expectations and Motichand makes a huge profit. This is how the man with three wives becomes a regular worshipper in Shiva’s temple and prays for divine favour so that he may secure more wives and make more money.

The milk episode in the temple is another revelation of the motives and mentally of worshippers. In imitation of the practice in the holy temple at Beneras, Kalo has instituted the ritual of milk baths for the idol every day. The superstition is that the donor who provides the large quantity of milk
required for the bath gains expiation for sins or accumulates merit.

One also gets a glimpse of the motives with which most of these people make their offerings to the deity. One of them prays that the price of gold may rise and keep on soaring; the next man on the list of donors wants the god to cause a slump in the price of the same commodity. These are among the staunch worshippers who refuse to give priority to the sick man whose object is the salvation of his soul. Through these episodes the novelist shows that what one has in many holy mansions is a mockery of religion and not true religion.

Bhattacharya seems to suggest through an important episode in the novel that ritualistic worship even in a false temple with a faked image can be of help to a dedicated worshipper by serving as an anodyne against sorrow and by aiding the growth of mental powers through concentration. Lekha, knowing as she does all about the unreality of the temple, seeks refuge in its rituals when her lover Biten leaves her. A correct appraisal of the artistic effect produced by the conclusion of the novel is possible only if one carefully
analyze the course of Kalo’s struggle with himself and its culmination.

The novelist plainly suggests through various devices that far from having become rootless, Kalo is very much his old self. When he is watching the scores of workmen building the temple, restlessness seizes him and his hands itch for his implements of work. The urge to be he is so strong that he secretly sets up a smithy in the attic of his house. Biten, who has the most correct understanding of Kalo’s character and temperament is amazed at his acting a part even for a short period and makes a correct prophecy when he tells him, “A man like you cannot trick himself too long”. The point to note is that Biten knows that while Kalo is deceiving others, he is deceiving himself also by pretending to be a Brahmin.

Thematically *So Many Hungers* and *He Who Rides a Tiger* start from the same point but branch off in different directions. The former is concerned all the time with large issues, with the destiny and the fortunes of the whole nation or of a large section of the population. It produces an impression of massiveness and has epic dimensions. The latter novel, while showing the larger issues in perspective, is
more concerned with the history of an individual. The travail through which he passes and the ultimate liberation of spirit that he achieves. Because of the preoccupation with one mind there is concentration which makes the story more gripping, but what is gained in intensity is lost on account of the circumscription of the scene and restriction of scope. Among the novels of Bhattacharya *He Who Rides a Tiger* may be given the third place.

The women are of different age and represent different levels of rural society. A common bond knits them together; they are all ardent nationalists and have been in jail for participation in the Quit India Movement. Lakshmi’s case is unusual because she and her husband are poles apart in temperament and outlook. He is a worshipper of Mammon and has avoided taking part in the nationalistic movement. The Cow house five, trained in the methods of Satyagraha, are trying to evolve a method of fighting the Seth for his open exploitation of the current scarcity of cloth and his refusal to sell it to the villagers at fair prices.

The novelist makes use of this opportunity to focus attention on some of the social evils following the famine of
Concerning of stocks and boosting of prices area a legacy from that dark period in the history of Bengal and having a monopoly of the cloth trade in the group of five villages to which Sonamitti belongs, the Seth controls the market so efficiently that no ordinary villager can afford to buy his requirements of cloth. The resulting hardship is indicated by the novelist when he mentions that the blouses of some of the women are made out of the jute cloth from old gunny-bags. Their saris are worn-out and need immediate replacement. The group considers various ways of compelling the Seth to sell them saris at a fair price.

The youngest of the Cow house five is the heroine, Meera, a girl of sixteen living with her grandmother who is known for her patriotism and her leadership. She is an unusually gifted girl. She was only eleven at the time of the Quit India Movement. Nevertheless she had insisted on joining an anti-government demonstration and had got arrested along with the others. She had also demonstrated her resourcefulness and altruism on another occasion by saving the life of a man bitten by a cobra by sucking out the poisoned blood with her mouth. Meera suggests that the
women of the village should join together, organize a protest-march to the Seth’s shop and demand that he should sell a hundred saris at fair price.

Another woman suggests that if the Seth does not relent, they should threaten to strip themselves naked and march through the streets in order to rouse his conscience. These suggestions are accepted by the group. The material that the novelist uses here is based on incidents connected with the struggle for Independence. The mood of the women and their way of thinking truly reflect the temper and spirit of India immediately before Independence.

The procession and the slogan-shouting have no effect on the Seth. Even Meera’s threat to strip herself does not intimidate him, but when his own wife, Lakshmi, begins to divest herself of her sari, he relents and as a result two bundles of newly arrived saris are sold away on the spot to the assembled women.

The Seth curses himself for his softness, but the novelist makes one understand that he has acted, not under fear, but out of farsightedness. He has decided to contest the election to the District Board which is to come off as soon as
the country is free and he naturally wants to win the goodwill of the people of the village. The sale of the saris, therefore, is not an act of kindness but a calculated step in self-aggrandizement. The Seth is also clear in his mind as to what he is to do as a member of the District Board; his sole aim is to gain power and influence so as to make money.

The arrival of the minstrel in the village is the starting point of important developments. Meera tries to make use of him as a counter-attraction to the cinema show so that the Seth’s plan may be frustrated, but the old man would not approve of any spiteful action. He, however, promises to have a story-telling session after the cinema show. Before the session the minstrel promises to give the Seth a taveez or amulet to be worn round the arm that will enable the wearer to realize all his wishes. Therefore everyone assembled at the story-telling is surprised when instead of giving it to the Seth; he ties it round the arm of Meera.

Some time after the presentation of the amulet the minstrel does a Puck-like act. Meera has been wearing a copper ring on one of her fingers and has refused the gift of a gold ring earnestly offered by Lakshmi. She is all the time
eager to show her gratitude towards Meera for having saved her son’s life. The minstrel knows the situation and mischievously suggests to Lakshmi that she may replace the copper ring on Meera’s finger with a gold one when she is asleep. Lakshmi does this and then goes home to her father’s place for a few weeks’ stay.

The Seth has a grudge against Meera’s grandmother and he wants to punish her by seizing her piece of land which has been mortgaged to him. He summons Meera to his shop to tell her about his intentions. When she is at the shop, he makes the discovery by chance that the ring on her finger is gold. She herself knows nothing about the substitution done by Lakshmi, Consequently both are convinced that the amulet has power.

The account of the desperate experiments performed at the instance of the Seth is also used by the novelist to indicate the basic difference between an act of real kindness and a flamboyant, motivated act devoid of the spirit of compassion. Compassion is a theme dear to the heart of Bhattacharya. There is no novel of his which does not refer to this virtue.
In spite of the failure of the amulet, the Seth, Meera herself and the people continue to have faith in its virtue. There is the possibility, they tell themselves, that some other type of kind act will meet the requirement and make the charm work. Several friends of Meera implore her to wear copper coins brought by them. They are to be restored to them after they change into gold. Acts of kindness devised by the Seth are repeated. One of them is a cruel caricature of the incident in which Meera saved the Seth’s son. The Seth orders the parapet wall of the well near his shop to be knocked down pretending that it needs repair. He tempts the poor boy, Buddu, to fly kites near the well and on the pretext of having to talk about; he summons Meera to the shop. Bulaki Rao, the Seth’s fox-like assistant, is to contrive everything in return for a handsome fee. As the Seth and Meera are in the shop talking, Bulaki Rao raises a hue and cry and announces that Buddu has fallen into the well.

In A Goddess Named Gold at least three of these types are included. Shamsunder combines in himself the roles of the money-Seth and the Seth of politics while the village constable, Hoosiar Singh, stands for the official Seth. The
novel gives expression to a stern warning that if the wrong men are allowed to grab power, freedom will mean nothing to the people. Discussing the Seth’s ambition to become a Deputy Minister in course of time with Meera’s grandmother, Sohanlal makes the caustic comment: “Free India will die a hundred deaths. Beware lest one such death takes place at the polling booth of this village”.

Bhattacharya uses the minstrel as a mouthpiece to voice some of his own views on the use of freedom and the conditions in which freedom can be of value. The minstrel assures the people of Sonamitti that freedom is capable of bringing about miracles. No miracle, however, can happen without effort. The taveez presented to Meera is only a symbol of freedom. What the old man had told Meera about its properties was not meant to be taken literally. It was only a figurative way of indicating that freedom will enable one to make lives golden provided one is capable of right feeling and right action. The novel also lays emphasis on the idea that freedom is not merely political freedom of economic freedom, but freedom of the mind. The minstrel refers to Gandhiji’s definition of freedom as a state of the mind.
Bhattacharya also uses a phrase which he is very fond of and which he uses again and again in his work starting with *The Indian Cavalcade* - the freedom to be is interpreted by herself as a sign that she had won the freedom to be free. It is precisely this freedom to be free that Kajoli and Kalo attain in the two earlier novels.

**A Goddess Named Gold** also gives a glimpse of the novelist’s vision of the India of the future and expresses his views on the dangers facing the country, and the duties of citizenship. Through Sohanlal the author gives the advice that no one in a free country should be content to live on charity. Sohanlal tells Meera:

We must demand what should be ours, the right to live as human beings. He gives a warning through Meera’s grandma that there is no easy end to our woes. It is wrong to expect that freedom will act like magic and solve all our problems for us. One of the tasks facing us is the elimination of unpatriotic exploiters of different types, the parasitic Seths (120).

Bhattacharya’s fears for the immediate future and his hope in the final triumph of democratic values are embodied
in the vision conjured before Meera’s eyes by the minstrel in the course of a mid-night stroll just before the girl throws away the taveez. To make Meera visualize the problems of the future he gives her an imaginative view of what might happen to her own intimate friends, the Cow house five. Two of them acquire more and more property in the village thereby dislodging the poor and get substantial houses constructed for them. Their growing affluence corrupts their minds; they begin to compete with each other and become bitter enemies. The cart driver’s wife becomes rich and as a result her husband gives up his work, stay at home and passes the day sleeping on the soft bed.

The sarcasm in the minstrel’s description of Sonamitti as a Land of Gold and his provocative suggestion to Meera that she should marry a millionaire at last make her see that she has been pulling her leg and she shows her sense of release from the bondage of illusion by casting away the amulet. The vision thus contains a warning that freedom should not be regarded as an open Sesame. It only creates an environment in which men can show forth the best in them and live on terms of equality with their follow-men, practicing
virtues like compassion. The greatest benefit conferred by freedom is the liberation of man’s mind and spirit.

As the novelist has chosen an oblique way of conveying his meanings in *A Goddess Named Gold*, he makes considerable use of symbols. The amulet itself is the most prominent of the symbol and its symbolism is explained by the minstrel at the end. Gold is a symbol at two levels—the material and the spiritual. At the material level it stands for both power and possessions.

In the light of Bhattacharya’s declared view that a novelist should try to come to grips with social reality and the cultural ethos of his own time one may understand his preoccupation in this novel with the most epoch-making event in Indian history, the attainment of independence. Nor is he frightened of the possibility of critic’s condemning him as a tendentious writer. He has something to teach and he does not hesitate to make his novels the medium for the teaching. At the same time he recognizes that there is one important condition to be fulfilled by the artist, and this is spelt out in the novelist’s words: Art must teach, but
unobtrusively, by its vivid interpretation of life. Art must
preach, but only by virtue of its being a vehicle of truth.

The most important question one has to raise while
evaluating *A Goddess Named Gold* is whether or to what
extent the novelist has followed his own dictum in the writing
of this novel. Are the incidents and the characters true to life
and is the message of the novelist conveyed unobtrusively
without impairing the impression of reality?

The Indian peasant is a hard-boiled realist seasoned by
centuries of harsh experience and is not the type of person to
be fooled into believing in a taveez that could work as the
philosopher’s stone. The spectacle presented in the novel-that
of a sensible girl burdening her body with all sorts of copper
ornaments and attempting to pull off the trick and the entire
village sharing her faith in the amulet and adding to her
burden is too crude to be true even in a land of fakirs and
magicians. Monstrously incredible is the episode of the Seth
laboriously trying to tempt Meera to get into the well to rescue
Buddu who has been concealed in a latrine. Realism is again
scattered to the winds in the scene which depicts the
prostitute plying her trade through the back door up to the
minute when she is to be married to the drunkard. To make this even more incredible, the brother of a cockroach, Bulaki Rao is the chief beneficiary of her enterprise and industry, as he is depicted counting the money he has made through the transaction. The novel abounds not only in improbabilities but also in sheer impossibilities.

It is difficult to escape the feeling that what one has here is unintentional caricature and not realism. Yet another instance of disregard of probability is the incident of Old Father’s eviction. The old man had shown no scruples in borrowing money from the Seth, but when Meera offers him money obtained from the Seth to enable him to redeem the mortgaged house, he refuses to touch it and chooses to leave the village without the slightest idea of where he is to go. While the old man is thus exhibited as a paragon of rural virtue, his gentle son is represented as being so much roused by righteous indignation as to attempt the murder of the Seth. His idea of murder; however is to walk towards the Seth’s house in the small hours of the morning with a sickle in his hand as if the potential victim were waiting with his door open for the throat-cutting to be duly performed. The
farce becomes complete when the enraged young man promptly listens to Meera’s plea and returns home, his mission unaccomplished. Perhaps for him, the better part of valor is discretion.

**A Goddess Named Gold** is the least effective of Bhattahcrya’s novels. It does not have the range and intensity of *So Many Hungers*, the psychological insight and depth of passion of *He Who Rides a Tiger* or the quiet harmony of *Music for Mohini*. It deals with a tremendously important theme, but does not do it adequate justice. The narrative is burdened with the allegory as Meera’s body is encumbered by the copper that she carries about.

The seriousness of whatever message the novelist desires to convey is destroyed by the admixture of elements which are incompatible with one another. The comedy degenerates into farce and characterization is often reduced to caricature. The novel is good only in patches. The character of the heroine is convincing until she is transformed into a puppet by the amulet in the novel. The most readable parts are those which contain the farcical elements, but the amusement which farce provides hardly blends with the
seriousness of purpose with which evidently the novel is written. This novel probably represents an experiment in technique tried out by the novelist, and the fortunate fact that it is not repeated in the next novel indicates that he was not satisfied with the result.

Two opposite poles which in the beginning seem to be incapable of meeting each other are represented in the novel by Gandhigram and Steeltown. Founded by Vinoba Bhave, one of the truest exponents of Gandhian philosophy, Gandhigram presents a model of rural India as envisaged by the Father of the Nation. Sayajit has been selected by the founder to guide the destinies of this ideal village and to regulate its life so that it may become an example and a source of inspiration to the rest of the country. Educated in Cambridge, he has seen service as a teacher at Shantiniketan and at one level he shows the impress of Tagore’s educational ideals and his philosophy of life. Characteristically, it is at Shantiniketan that he first meets his future wife. Suruchi, a woman of great vitality, adorned with beauty and the gift of song. They have a daughter, Sumita, who is carefully trained by her father and who increasingly comes under his influence
until at last she comes to be recognized as the best embodiment of his attitude to life-Satyajitism as it is called in the novel.

Bhattacharya makes it clear in the novel that Bhashkar’s fight with Gandhigram is not merely the fight of modern industrialism against Ganhian economics. It is also a campaign for a new way of life as against the cramped and convention-bound life of Gandhigram. Bhashkar is intelligent and imaginative enough to understand that he may not succeed through mere force. He, therefore, uses a weapon from the armoury of the opponent himself, the weapon of non-violence. He has no personal rancour against Satyajit; in fact he has reverence for him. Bhashkar orders the construction of a building called Meadow House which is to encourage cultural activities and to provide recreation. It is to be a meeting place for Steeltown and Gandhigram.

Gandhigram is to be won over gradually to the new way symbolized by Steel town. For instance Gandhigram discourages the free mixing of the sexes, but meadow House is to provide for Western dancing that will encourage men and women to come together and to shed their inhibitions. The
success of Bhashkar’s plan in indicated by the fact that many of the people of Gandhigram including Sumita; the austere girl, begin to take interest in the activities of Meadow House. There is no longer an impenetrable barrier between the two worlds.

The character of Suruchi is a delicate and careful study in psychology. She radiates vitality and represents beauty during her residence in Shantiniketan; Satyajit’s impulsive proposal of marriage to her is an indication of one side of his nature- the side that encourages love of life and beauty, the Tagorean side. Gandhigram and its ideals gradually bring about at least a partial atrophy of this side and the result is his request to her to help him to live a life of brahmacharya.

The crisis in the novel comes with the return of Satyajit to Gandhigrama and his commencement of a fast to death to protest against the Government’s decision to let Steeltown swallow the village. Bhashkar has, in the meantime, unconsciously undergone a profound change. Rupa, the pretty stenographer, has fallen in love with him and he has used her as a diversion, but his heart truly yearns for Sumita.
He has had another moving emotional experience. The four daughters of a Chinese prisoner are temporarily in his care.

Gandhigram is a model village in which one finds the principles of Gandhian economics and ethic worked out. The main object of its founders was to create a social order in which all were truly equal. The village is self-sufficient as all its needs, besides, foods are satisfied by cottage-based industry. Land is owned by the co-operative and food in distributed to each family according to its needs. Every home has spinning-wheel, the frail old-world wheel of wood set against the giant machines of the modern age. In the sphere of education, the village follows the Basic Scheme of craft-centred teaching advocated by Gandhiji, Gandhigram also seeks to build up a new set of values, the most important among them being full equality, unreserved fraternity and non-violence in thought and action.

Gandhiji’s championship of celibacy or continence is a doctrine that figures prominently in the novel. Even in the social life of Gandhigram, the creed finds an echo. While there is no taboo against people of both sexes freely mixing with each other, the expectation is that there should be no
consciousness of sex. When Jhanak breaks the accepted code, Satyajit undertakes a purificatory fast for five days as Gandhiji did at Tolstoy Farm. Sathayjit himself wants to practise strict brahmacharya some time after the birth of Sumita. In his mind, sex comes to be associated with sin. Even in his Cambridge days, whenever he had transgressed the self-imposed restriction, he had tried to atone for it by fasting.

The major teaching of Gandhiji, that figures in the novel is non-violence. Satyajit’s plan of forming a Shani Sena is born of his faith in this creed. Gandhi believed that the human spirit had the power to prevail over armaments and armies. He said: “Even if one nation were unconditionally to perform the supreme act of renunciation, many of us would see in our lifetime visible peace established on earth.”( ) With his implicit faith in the Master’s teaching, Satyajit believed that the Shanti Sena could touch the hearts of the Chinese and draw them away from their aggressive designs. He thought that a few determined idealists throwing themselves between two contending armies would constitute a powerful moral force that could bring about peace.
Satyajit conceives the plan of converting Gandhigram through understanding and love by bringing the people of the village and Steel town together in Meadow House. They are no longer citizens of a hostile, alien country but God’s children, to be treated with generosity and love. This experience of love is one of the turning points in the life of Bhashkar.

A basic question raised in Shadow from Ladakh is the extent to which industrialization on a vast scale is relevant to the Indian situation. Bhashkar and Satyajit represent the two opposing points of view in the debate. The former has the passionate conviction that the salvation of the country lies in industrialization. Industrialization to him means not only the use of machinery and the establishment of factories for large-scale production but also, more importantly, a reorientation of values and a revision of the ways of life. At the material level he thinks that the problem of India’s rapidly of the necessaries of civilized life. The Bhashkar’s point of view is shared by the government and it is indicated by its willingness to let Steel town expand at the expense of Gandhigram and to exercise its powers for the taking over of the village.
Through Bhashkar, the novelist also expresses the view that industrialization should bring about a change in the way of life and outlook. Bhashkar rebels against many aspects of the convention-bound life of the average Indian. He gets a personal experience of the way in which most marriages are arranged in India. He is sorry for many a girl who has to give herself body and soul to an unknown man and live with him for all time. It may not be wrong to take this to represent the author’s own view. One may take it for what it is worth notwithstanding the logical fallacy of associating arranged marriages with the pre-machine age and love-marriages with the age of machines.

Bhattacharya suggests in *Shadow from Ladakh* that an Indian is ordinarily so much influenced by his heritage that the Indianness within him cannot be obliterated even by prolonged and close contract with the West. It is the half-caste Rupa with an American mother and an Indian father who makes this observation with reference to Bhashkar.

The conduct of China in stabbing India in the back and deliberately trying to thwart her progress along the path of democracy naturally claims considerable attention in the
novel. The importance of the first border incident near Ladakh is at first minimized by India, but subsequent events gradually reveal the real intentions of China. Poisoned by the teachings of Mao, the Chinese embark on a career of aggression with the aim of dominating all Asia. Perfidy, hatred and hypocrisy are the qualities they display in the course of their campaign against India whose democratic way of life is taken by them to be a serious challenge to their new-found ideology. Bhattacharya’s description of the aggression is factual and the sentiments he expresses in the novel are the sentiments of all patriotic Indians.

One remarkable feature of *Shadow from Ladakh* is that while dealing realistically with the treacherous Chinese aggression, it also artistically pleads that India should show love and friendship for the Chinese people. The novel repeatedly and consistently makes a distinction between the people and their government. It refers to the long history of friendly association between the peoples of the two countries. It points out how the greatest of Indian thinkers and leaders have shown their affection and respect for the people of China and their old culture. Tagore has set an example by
instituting a chair for the Chinese language and culture at Shantiniketan and inviting a Chinese professor to adorn it.

Nehru, disillusioned as he was by the treacherous conduct of the Communist government, made it clear in his broadcast to the nations that India had no ill-will towards the Chinese people. Even the Dalai Lama, the victim of Chinese aggression and brutality, declared in an interview that he had no quarrel with the people and added. There are no better people. The novelist is not; however, content to record these views and statements in the novel; he makes literary use of the sentiment by embodying it in one of the most moving episodes.

The episode is that of four Chinese children, daughters of a Chinese shoe-maker who is arrested along with other enemy citizens, they are given asylum in Bhashkar’s house until their father is released and repatriated. There is an apparent contradiction in Bhashkar, a bachelor, who believes in the policy of fighting steel with steel, uncomfortable in the beginning. He very soon wins the affection of the girls by treating them kindly. He is taken aback and pained for a time when he notices one day that they offer ritual worship to a
portrait of Mao, but learns very soon that it is nothing more than a habit in which they have been trained in their home. What is more important, the children offer the same kind of worship first to Rupa who becomes their tutor and then to Bhashkar himself.

The Chinese girls stay away from their school after their unpleasant experience, but after a time the two younger children insist on going back. On the day they attend school again, several Indian girls welcome them with warmth and ask why the two elder girls have not come with them. They send a message to the absent ones asking them to join a school picnic to the riverside. One sees the same unspoiled goodness in all the Chinese girls. When the time comes for them to leave India, they are grief-stricken at the thought of having to be away from Bhashkar. Rupa, who is about to leave Steeltown for ever, talks to the children about their future attitude to India and they assure her that when they grow up they will work for proper understanding between the two peoples.

In *Shadow from Ladakh*, the novelist makes artistic use of parallelism and contrast in order to focus attention on
what he wants to communicate. Satyajit is contrasted with Bhashkar and to a less extent with Bireswar. Satyajit is a prisoner of his own scruples and moral principles and never able to live a full-blooded life. On the few occasions during his residence at Cambridge, when he yields to his instincts, he is overcome with remorse and expiates by chastising his body. Bhashkar and Bireswar are differently made. Bhashkar particularly regards such affairs as mere moment in life.

Bireswar is a critic of Satyajit asceticism and reproaches him for having destroyed the happiness of Suruchi. He actually falls in love with her and discontinues his annual visits to Gandhigram lest his feelings should come to be known. At on stage Satyajit feels that Bireswar would have been a more suitable husband for Suruchi and even toys with the idea of encouraging her to join him. It is no Bireswar’s advice that Satayjit decides towards the end of the novel to give up his unnatural asceticism and to live a normal life if he survives the fast.

There is a similar contrast between Sumita on one side and Rupa and Jhanak on the other. Her life has become one of dedication. The dedication has acted as a restraining force
and has hampered her natural development. She has become an ascetic woman. According to her mother, an ascetic woman is a contradiction in terms and no girl wants a life of dedication. In contrast with her, Rupa refuses to accept any kind of restraint.

Another artistic device used in *Shadow from Ladakh* is a subtle balancing of effects by first depicting a movement in one direction and then a counter-movement in the opposite direction. In Suruchi one sees the movement from freshness and spontaneity towards asceticism that is imposed from outside. In Sumita one witnesses the counter-movement from asceticism cheerfully accepted, towards fullness of life and freedom that follows mental awakening. And since in the final analysis the message of the novel is that of compromise and equilibrium, this balancing of force provides it with the appropriate setting. The reconciliation between Gandhigram and Steeltown with which the story ends is the most appropriate conclusion to a novel which advocates the way of integration and synthesis.
Bhashkar’s marriage to Sumita is the marriage of Steeltown to Gandhigram. Satyajit emerging from his fast is to start a new chapter in his life by placing himself in the hands of Suruchi. The very last words in the novel are words announcing that the ascetic girl trained by Satayjit has surrendered herself to the terrific wave which stands for love and fulness of life. Thus there is no question of tame co-existence. And the note at the end of the novel is not a weak-note but on the contrary a fanfare of trumpet announcing the birth of the new era.

The teachings of Gandhiji and Tagore referred to in the novel, far from adding to any topical interest; provide the material for the construction of the philosophical structure which Paul Verghese fails to see. The Chinese invasion again has not been dragged in merely to provide the challenge which makes introspection and a re-examination of values urgently necessary. Shadow from Ladakh is a deeply philosophical novel with a message of great relevance to the future of the country.
CHAPTER – VI
CONCLUSION

The novel *So Many Hungers* is on the whole a triumph of spirit over matter. It enthuses the reader with a message of confidence and hope that the future of humanity will not be at stake. There is a deep involvement and a sense of belonging on the part of the novelist in delineating the incidents and the character and Bhattacharya has verily succeeded in this artistic triumph. A significant note is sounded in Dr. Ram Sewak Singh’s statement:

A shocked and bewildered spectator of the atrocities perpetrated on Indian populace during the war years Bhattacharya attempts an appraisal of the forces that had fought against treachery and corruption to keep the face of man from sagging in his first novel *So Many Hungers*. (143)

The total effect of the novel is one of wholesomeness. But the story loses its grip from the ninth chapter but it gains momentum only after the introduction of the family of
peasant of the characters, though individualized, represent the general state and tragic situation of the people of Bengal caught the excruciating misery of the famine. The novel is in short, a patois study of man’s inhumanity to man.

Dr. Bhattacharya aims at a faithful representation of life as a novelist has to end as every novel must necessarily present a certain view of life and some of the problems of life. A good novel energy directly out of life and it contains something of lasting human significance. It should bounce us into life. Dr. Chandrasekran, in his study of Bhattacharya, has said:

The transformation in Kalo is indeed brought about by daughter Lekha who is an ineffectual angel beating in the void her luminous wings in vain. She knows, she cannot imbibe the spirit of the masquerade and so comes out of its clutches and is prepared to incur the displeasure and sharp reaction of her father instead of being a fish our of water in the strange world. In a way, she is his liberator because she has opened his eyes to
the truth. The supreme sense of belonging overwhelms her. (160)

The institutes of prostitution and the principle of bigamy are the two other aspects that Bhattacharya condemns with vehemence. In these days of family planning, while bigamy becomes criminal, prostitution flourishes, thus making that Karma Bhoomi a land of immorality and decadence.

Bhattacharya pours forth his scriptural eloquence on the traditions and customs followed by the Brahmin boy. He learns and utters the sacred gayatri on the day he assumes the holy thread, takes the stern vows with the Fire-god as a witness and becomes a Twice-born.

The spirit of freedom flows through the veins and arteries of every man and woman – including the prisoners and they shout Quit India and Jai Hind! Bhattacharya prophesies the future of India. This is the country of the common man. His will prevails; we are humble servants of the masses. Our private sentiments don’t count. Evil is to be faced and fought with its own knives.
Towards the end of *A Goddess Named Gold* explains the symbolism of the taveez. The village is celebrating Independence Day and people are assembled under a banyan tree. The old man tells them that the freedom which they are celebrating is the touchstone. It belongs to every one of them but will yield results and transmute copper into gold only if acts of faith are performed. When he is asked to define acts of faith he modestly replies that he does not have wisdom enough to give guidance, but he is sure that miracles can be performed if they all hold themselves in readiness:

It ends with the decision of the villagers to use the newly won freedom in the right way by electing the minstrel to the District disappointment. He goes on placidly smoking his hookah, as if nothing minstrel has a reasonable chance of winning the election as his wife is not likely to be his rival.

*A Goddess Named Gold* entertains as a story, but it also disturbs us with its undertones of warning and prophecy. Sonamitti is everywhere, for gold and wealth are pouring on us in abundance; Meera the compassionate mother is ready with her gold and her wealth; and yet is not this gold and wealth, not even the priceless gift of freedom,
but what one is going to do with it all that will determine mankind’s future. In view of Bhattacharya’s concept of a novelist’s function, it is most natural that he should pay attention to conditions in India after the achievement of freedom and give expression to his hopes for the future.

The novelist’s optimism about the ultimate liquidation of all exploiters by the people is conveyed through this passage from the book, *A Goddess Named Gold*: “The days of the Seths were numbered. Soon would the people vested with their new power, fully waken and their thunderous wrath would make every tyrant whine for mercy”.

In the light of Bhattacharya’s declared view that a novelist should try to come to grips with social reality and the cultural ethos of his own time, one may understand his preoccupation in the novel with the most epoch-making event in Indian history, the attainment of independence. Nor is he frightened of the possibility of critics condemning him, as a tendentious writer. He has something to teach and he does not hesitate to make his novels the medium of the teaching. At the same time he recognized that there is one important condition to be fulfilled by the artist, and this is spelt out in
the novelist’s words: Art must, teach, but unobtrusively, by its vivid interpretation of life. Art must preach but only by virtue of its being a vehicle of truth.

**A Goddess Named Gold** is the least effective of Bhattacharya’s novels. It does not have the range and intensity of *So Many Hungers* the psychological insight and depth of passion of *He Who Rides a Tiger* or the quiet harmony of *Music for Mohini*. It deals with a tremendously important theme, but does not do it adequate justice. The narrative is burdened with the allegory as Meera’s body is encumbered by the copper that she carries about. The seriousness of whatever message the novelist desires to convey, is destroyed by the admixture of elements which are incompatible with one another. The comedy degenerates into farce and characterization is often reduced to caricature. The novel is good only in patches. The character of the heroine is convincing until she is transformed into a puppet by the taveez. This is the only transformation or miracle affected by the amulet tin the novel. The most readable parts are those which contain the farcical elements, but the amusement which farce provides hardly blends with the seriousness of
purpose with which evidently the novel is written. This novel probably represents an experiment in technique tried out by the novelist, and the fortunate fact that it is not repeated in the next novel indicates that he was not satisfied with the result.

Meera’s grandfather, and old singer, occupies a significant position in the novel. He appears only on two occasions: in the beginning when the outset of the plot is laid, and at the last moment when the idea of what has happened in the past becomes clear. At the end of the novel, an Indian village on the eve of the elections is shown. The peasants believe that he is capable of defending their interests. Owning nothing, he had the dignity of a king. He had more power than a king, for he could take the hearts of people in his fist, he could make time laugh and cry at his will. That is why the slogan, “Vote for our minstrel brother, vote”, raised by someone is taken up by the whole village. The lines at the end of the novel are fraught with faith in the just reforms.

The sterling virtues of love, labor and freedom have been stressed in the novel. Towards the close of the story the minstrel points out that true freedom and miracles are not
possible without love and hard work. Simple traditional miracles and gold cannot provide people with happiness and security. Men and women will have to fight against the merciless wealthy people and will have to believe in, and practice, true acts of kindness.

Bhabani Bhattacharya expresses his belief that the betterment of life should be the ultimate goal of every human activity, and that all other things should only lead to it. According to him, even freedom is the means to the end. This end is quite difficult to attain, and man can achieve it only through hard work and love, and not through miracles. As a matter of fact, miracles do not drop from heaven, but are the creation of man’s labor and love. Thus towards the end of the novel, the minstrel says to the huge crowd of villagers.

As in *Music of Mohini*, here also Bhattacharya refers to the belief in horoscopes. The Sethji reminds his wife that he married her because of a rare star conjunction in her horoscope. “Mainly it was the stars. Your horoscope agreed so well with mine, it was plain that you were made for me. Jupiter crossed the ellipsis of Saturn at the moment you were born and the deep shadow of Mars”. Again he points out
India’s belief in the existence of ghosts and devils. The bhootni spoke dirty words with the girl’s tongue, words that no decent maid knows. The girl, no longer herself, would burst into pathetic sobs and in the next breath shrieks with laughter.

He also refers to the propitious time and consultation with the almanac to see the blue bird is to have a wish come true. He gives vent to his philosophy of life when he remarks “Life itself is nothing else but gambling. One must take some risk at every step. This is how the river of life flows. We have to sail with the current”(98). He makes apt reference to the faith and devotion of Indians to the ancient epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and their love of Hare Rama Harey Krishna. He has also an ironical comment on the extravagance of Indian folk during marriage and other ceremonial functions when they fall into steep debts thereby enriching the village money-lenders who en cash money even on the ashes of the poor. The interest accumulates like sin and the borrower has only to entrust this debt to the care of his children. The heartlessness and utter cruelty of the money-lenders is pointed out with vehemence.
The money lender’s attitude to enjoy at the expense of others is in sharp contrast with Gandhi’s dictum to wipe every tear from every eye. The belief of acquiring miraculous and magical powers by penance on the snow-peaks of the Himalayas and Kailash is conveyed through the life and adventures of the minstrel and the blind belief of the poor-folk to have a cure for all their diseases is revealed through the Magic Chamundi Earth.

The scientific inventions of the times are made clear through penicillin. Alchemy is nothing but the transformation of copper into gold. Again the adoration of the Indians for the cow is sketched in the portrayal of Soondri, the cow. The last phase of Soondri’s life melts the reader’s heart and we begin to learn that kindness has no value unless it is expressed in a deed. A reference is also made to the ceiling on all holdings including land. He even refers to the parijat, the tree paradise bearing blossoms of gold. Even ascetics are not free from the possessive lure of the wondrous metal.

Bhattacharya presents a study in contrast both of the ideologies and in the characters. The theme is based on a structure of contrast. It is in between the rolling mills and
hunger strikes. There is plesant contrast between the two pairs- Satyajit and Suruchi and Bhashkar and Sumita. Bhashkar and Bireswar on one hand, Sumita and Rupe on the other make a sharp contrast.

Bhattacharya gives appropriate names to his characters. Bhashkar is indeed the sun whose rays shed luster on Gandhigram and could absorb him into its fold. Satyajit is indeed the incarnation of truth, honesty and integrity, ready to preach his doctrines and convince others. Suruchi is the woman of good tastes and she envisages a salutary influence on all action. Rupa is none other than the embodiment of beauty and grace. But her Western legacy has left her unhappy in the two worlds.

Bhattacharya’s mind is so much engrossed in the Gandhian ideals that he is shocked at the sudden Chinese aggression. Whole pages are devoted to rehashes and summaries of Gandhian philosophy and even Mao’s thought. The novel is based on the two philosophies of Gandhism and of mechanization.

**Shadow from Ladakh** is set against the menacing background of the Chinese aggression against India started in
1962. Comparing the novel with So Many Hungers the novelist himself declares that it is rooted more deeply in Gandhian thought. Synthesis is undoubtedly the central theme of the novel.

The crisis in Shadow of Ladakh comes with the return of Satyajit to Gandhigram and his commencement of a fast to death to protest against the Government’s decision to let Steel town swallow the village. Bhattacharya has in the meantime, unconsciously underwent a profound change, Rupa, the pretty stenographer, has fallen in love with him and he has used her as a diversion, but his heart truly yearns for Sumita. He has had another moving emotional experience. The four daughters of a Chinese prisoner are temporarily in his care. His kindness inspires in them the deepest gratitude and affection. Their warm adoration touches his heart and he is convinced more than ever that love can conquer hatred. We realize from these developments that the man of steel has after all a human heart and that there is something of Satyajit in his nature also. The crisis of the novel is resolved by Bhaskar himself leading a procession of workmen from Steel town who march to Gandhigram to support the cause of
Satyajit. This means that Steel town has given up its plan to expand at the expense of Gandhigram. The two are to co-exist. The co-existence, however, is not merely a matter of live and let-live, it is a result of compromise and readjustment of values on either side. Symbolic of the reconciliation between the two is the marriage of Sumita and Bhaskar and the new resolve of Styajit to tone down his asceticism and to live a full and natural life.

To conclude, Bhattacharya’s affirmative vision of life is glaringly, but not undramatically and inartistically, reflected in his belief in the bright side of human existence with which his books conclude, in his faith in the unfathomable richness and sacredness of man’s spirit which cannot be crushed by adversity and humiliation, and in his conviction only rest and underline the sterling qualities and the resplendent spirit of man.

In **Shadow from Ladakh**, Bhabani Bhattacharya focuses his attention mainly on the theme of synthesis. The novel throughout is an attempt at the way of life, East and West, Gandhian asceticism and Tagorean Aestheticism, the old and the new values, village and city, India and China etc.
In short, the novelist is primarily concerned with what he describes as Tagore’s lifelong quest: “Integration that was the poet’s lifelong quest: integration of the simple and the sophisticated: the ancient and the modern city and village, East and West” (159).

The novel deals in detail with conflict and compromise between two distinct models of life represented by Steel town and Gandhigram—the first stands for the modern, Western industrial civilization, while the second represents the old Eastern values of life. Early in the novel, we read that Steel town, which has come into being as a result of Chinese aggression, begins to spread so fast as to threaten the existence of Gandhigram centering on Satyajit, Sumita and others. Naturally, the people of Gandhigram decide to fight against Bhaskar, the central figure of Steel town which is also called Lohapur. Satyajit and Sumita treat the situation as emergent and do not think it proper to leave Gandhigram even for two or three days. Gandhigram follow the ideas of selfless service and self-help and thus is also called Sevegram which primarily aims at teaching people through action alone. When men from Lohapur begin to probe
Gandhigram and measure parts of it with a long metal tape, the inhabitants of the village are greatly upset, seeing that the town people will never be able to comprehend the values and ideals for which Gandhigram stands.

Towards the close of the narrative, the crisis caused by the assault of Steel town on the Gandhian village is resolved. The workers of Steel town go to Gandhigram and proclaim that they have no quarrel with the spinning-wheel and that they are brothers of the men of Gandhigram. Quite a large number of mill-hands, both men and women, go to Satyajit’s house to get the latest news about his health, and speak in friendly tones to the village-folk who surround them. The villagers cordially welcome the visitors and take them to the fields, small workshops, school and the mud dwellings.

Shadow from Ladakh presents an interesting adjustment of two entirely contrasting old classmates, Bires and Satyajit. An antithesis of ascetic Satyajit, Bire is given to gaiety of life, to the philosophy of eat, drink, and be merry. When he comes to know though Satyajit that Sumita has given up the garb of austerity, he is exceedingly happy and looks forward to seeing her beauty in a blue sari. He is the
masculine counterpart of Suruchi and therefore always loves and worships her in his heart. Strictly opposed to Satyajitism, he makes a correct prophecy about Sumita in her presence, One day you will be rescued by something more elemental than Satyajitsm. You may fight it, but at last you’ll give way. He is deeply in love with life. That is why when he marks a change in Sumita, a change from ascetic austerity to love for life, he tells Satyajit that she is like her mother at the age of twenty, and that he should completely surrender himself to her and should not force upon her a heavy guiding hand. But notwithstanding their different attitudes and ideas, the two understand each other. For instance, Satyajit’s fast up to death immensely disturbs Bires, and he does his utmost to persuade him to give it up.

**Shadow from Ladakh** is deeply concerned about harmonious relationship between India and China. Satyajit, the central figure in the novel, wants that the clash between the two countries should end and that there should be harmonious relation between the two, as there were in the good old days. He tells Suruchi that there existed warmth of
feeling between them in the past and that was the reason why Tagore was so much interested in China.

To conclude, Bhattacharya’s concept of compromise and integration finds a convincing expression in this novel. Through Mrs. Mehra, he asserts that adjustment is essential for and inevitable in life: Life is all compromise. One yields a bit here and gets it back elsewhere. But synthesis, in Bhattacharya’s opinion, means the acquiescence of life in its totality and not the denial of it in any form or the suppression of identity.

There was one way left for Gandhigram. It must make readjustments. That would mean acceptance of life in its totality. But not the Steel town way; that also was denial of life deep under the surface. Let license be chastened by restraint find its right level by a leavening of freedom. Let there is a meeting ground of the two extremes; let each shed some of its content and yet remain true to itself.

The Shadow from Ladakh is an unexpected and ill-boding omen threatening the security of the nation. The theme of the novel is woven against this background. It registers the conflict of ideologies during the critical period of
the Chinese aggression on India and Bhattacharya with his fine acumen presents a vivid, moving and touching depiction of the events against the background of the love story of Bhaskar Roy and Sumita.

Bhattacharya who experienced a sense of involvement of Gandhian principle of, Simple living and high thinking, and who attached the deepest significance to the Gandhian way of life, made this novel his first commitment to the ideal of Gandhian life. Although Narayan in his novel, Waiting for the Mahatma, and Raja Rao in his, Kanthapura, dealt with the Gandhian theme as the back-drop, Bhattacharya made it a mode of life, an ideal to live by. There are occasional splashes of Gandhian philosophy and his love of rural life depicted in Bhattacharya’s earlier novels, but in the veins and nerves of the characters felt in the blood and felt along the heart.

Bhabani Bhattacharya exquisitely manifests his affirmative vision of life in the heroic act of a destitute maid, who makes the supreme sacrifice of showing herself naked to men for the sake of giving food to the helpless, famished people. She is called, the mother, by suffering humanity for whom she is life and joy: Life stirred in the dim, dismal lane
in the instant of her coming. She has the bearing of a princess. Though she has abased herself by selling her modesty, yet even Rahoul, an ideal man himself, is enchanted by her purity of spirit: But Rahoul felt as though he had glimpsed the sanctity of the human spirit, and was dazzled by too much richness and beauty. That was the streak of light to illuminate the gloom of his heart. The young village maid is not the only person of this kind. There is no the same page the description of an aged destitute villager who is truly an incarnation of the nobility of life. Though too weak to walk, he holds out his card of free food to Rahoul, imploring him not to deny him the joy of seeing a needier person eating his share. This fills Rahoul with pride and hope.

Bhattacharya expresses his positive view of life and opposing attitude towards war. He points out that though war is the massacre of humanity, yet it is desirable if it is used as a means of freeing the world from pests. In truth, the novelist is against all that is destructive and negative. Like a robust visionary, he wishes that was should break out of bounds and lead to the professed objective of false-hearted politicians:
creating out of a world in ruins a new enlightened world order.

His writings used to illustrate the vision of the affirmation of life. At the very beginning, Kajoli makes a grim decision of selling her body for money in order to keep her mother and younger brother alive. She upholds the high ideal of self-sacrifice. Again, in the suicide of the famished people, there is an assertion of life.

The novelist portrays man as lustrous as the sun, and an incarnation of truth, strength and deathlessness. Devata is such a man and in this book, Kajoli, through her mind’s eye, sees him with a light that is not of the sun alone. If he had been cast among the victims of misery, Dadu, Kajoli knows fully well, would have been put on his mettle. At this critical moment of her life, she recalls the past and sees before her mental eye her father, Kanu Bhai and her husband, who were all great fighters and had fought undauntedly for one or the other noble cause: Undefeated, all daintily for one or the other noble cause. Consequently, her eyes gleam, and she feels new strength in her feet and power in her spirit.
The last three paragraphs of the novel, above all, spotlight the novelist’s view of the greatness and richness of life. Rahoul, who has witnessed the spectacle of endless miseries of the famished uprooted millions, reaches prison thronged with people beaming with exultation.

The conclusions drawn from the above analysis of So Many Hungers can also be applicable to Bhattacharya’s other four novels. Bhashkar gets rid of the sense of alienation which has been upsetting him for a long time. And towards the close of the novel, Satyajit, like many other persons in the book, is happier than he has been ever before. The novelist is possible only with the fusion of the conflicting values and modes of life. He makes through Suruchi a very explicit statement which is of paramount importance for the ideal of synthesis.

Gandhigram is meaningfully called Sevagram because it aims at teaching man to serve people and become one with them through action alone. There people are made to realize the inner richness of life, rather than outer material prosperity. The village has a set of values to be practiced, viz.,
equality, fraternity, and non-violence in thought as well as in action, and realization of slogans, etc.

Throughout his work, he emphasizes the Indian ideal of one basic goal—human happiness. There may be many paths, but all lead to it. All these paths have to co-exist so as to enable man to acquire the great ideal of universal brotherhood. The novelist reaffirms his belief that men everywhere in the world have the goodness and richness of spirit. Thus, in spite of China’s blatantly shameless attack on India, men like Satyajit firmly hold:

Bhattacharya presents his men and women upholding a positive view of life. Broken-hearted owing to disappointment in her first love, Rupa gave up her job of air hostess and kept herself buried in a hotel room for several weeks. But then her wound was soon healed and a new Rupa emerged out of her chastened self. Likewise, when Satyajit took to asceticism, the renunciation in which he found release was not a denial of the world. The novelist does not show any character rejecting life and believing in nihilism.

Bhattacharya explicitly holds that denial of life in any form is to be completely rejected, and that life is to be
accepted in its totality. Both the Gandhigram and Steel town modes of life are faulty and must make readjustment.

Bhattacharya inevitably experiments with most of these modes, often combining them in various proportions. Structurally, such novels of purpose have a well-organized plot, a carefully patterned set of characters, who are more symbolic than realistic and a predictable movement of narration in a well-defined direction. The characters are algebraic symbols; too many threads are too neatly tied up.

The change, on the whole, is more in the form than in the basic content. Cinderella continues to have her wonder nights. The Prince of Grandma’s fairy tale still tries to create a trill or a heart-throb. There is a difference in the setting. The old simplicity that was the essential charm of the fairy tale has been lost in a labyrinth of motives, a complex of reactions.

To conclude, Bhattacharya’s concept of compromise and integration finds a convincing expression in his novels. Through Mrs. Mehra, he asserts that adjustment is essential for and inevitable in life: Life is all compromise. One yields a bit here and gets it back elsewhere. But synthesis, in
Bhattacharya’s opinion, means the acquiescence of life in its totality, and not the denial of it in any form or the suppression of identity. His idea of synthesis is clearly embodied in his observations on the adjustment between Gandhigram and Steel town.

There was one way left for Gandhigram. It must make readjustments. That would mean acceptance of life in its totality. But not the Steel town way; that also was denial of life deep under the surface. Let license be chastened by restraint. Let restraint find its right level by a leavening of freedom. Let there is a meeting ground of the two extremes; let each shed some of its content and yet remain true to itself.

The novel also does not present a large variety of characters. There is very little movement and action. On the whole it gives an impression of tenacity. *So Many Hungers* which precedes this novel and *He Who Rides a Tiger* which follows it are inspired works of art charged with feeling. In *Music for Mohini* the artistic imagination does not appear to be sufficiently kindled and the result is a story on a much quieter note. There is much in the novel to entertain, to delight and even to provoke. This music we hear however is
only the soft and subdued melody of the flute and not the varied harmony of a rich orchestra.

Towards the end of the novel the minstrel explains the symbolism of the taveez. The village is celebrating Independence Day and people are assembled under a banyan tree. The old man tells them the freedom which they are celebrating is the touchstone. It belongs to every one of them but will yield results and transmute copper into gold only if acts of faith are performed and transmute copper into gold only if acts of faith are performed. When he is asked to define acts of faith he modestly replies that he does not have wisdom enough to give guidance, but he is sure that miracles can be performed if they all hold themselves in readiness.

**He Who Rides a Tiger** ends with the decision of the villagers to use their newly won freedom in the right way by electing the minstrel to the District Board. The discomfited Seth does not show any external sign of disappointment. He goes on placidly smoking his hookah as if nothing in the world has happened to him. The novelist also hints that the minstrel has a reasonable chance of winning the election as his wife is not likely to be his rival.
In view of Bhattacharya’s concept of a novelist’s function, it is most natural that he should pay attention to conditions in India after the achievement of freedom and give expression to his hopes for the future. As he does in *So Many Hungers* and *He Who Rides a Tiger*, he gives reminiscences of the Quit India Movement. The aspects of the struggle that are referred to here are the free participation of women and leveling of social distinctions brought about by common suffering, particularly jail life.

*Shadow from Ladakh*, among Bhattacharya’s novels, has greater range and scope than the other novels. It has more variety in characterization, a story that is sufficiently interesting by itself and a metaphysical content which could make all the difference between great and mediocre art. Some of the greatest masterpieces in world fiction are novels which in addition to telling moving stories, make us feel the heartbeats of a nation and present the panorama of life on a vast canvas. In *Shadow from Ladakh*, the novelist takes a significant step in the direction of immensity and depth. What is presented is the spectacle of a new State with an ancient culture facing a massive physical threat to its existence and
at the same time struggling for a way of life that will enable it to take its place in the new world order without losing its moorings and its distinctive identity. The novel is Bhattacharya’s greatest achievement so far although it does not possess the same intensity and glow of imagination as *So Many Hungers* or *He Who Rides a Tiger*. Bhattacharya himself makes the following comment; “My latest novel, *Shadow from Ladakh*, is not a favorite of reviewers, but that is the one I enjoyed most. The men and women in this story held me obsessed all through the writing” (173).

Bhabani Bhattacharya is well-known among Indian writers in English for his use of art as a medium for achieving social reform. His novels have commended themselves for a study by virtue of the arresting quality of his themes. His passion for synthesis and integration has had a deep impression in the arena of Indian English Literature.

Being a novelist with a social purpose, Bhattacharya has depicted the social, economic and political changes in India on the background of the contemporary historical events and social conditions. The major themes of the three novels namely, *So Many Hungers! (1947)*, *He Who Rides a*
*Tiger (1952)* and *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960) are poverty, hunger and exploitation.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's first novel *So Many Hungers!* (1947) deals with poverty, hunger and exploitation of the peasants in the man made famine of Bengal during the Second World War. The exclamatory mark with which the title ends denotes the writer's bewilderment at the multiplicity of hunger. B. Syamala Rao in *Bhabani Bhattacharya* says,

The title of the novel, *So many Hungers*, is amply justified. There are indeed many hungers. - hunger for food, hunger for affection, hunger for love, hunger for lust, hunger for money, hunger for sacrifice and hunger for the general welfare of all. (Rao 46)

Bhattacharya deals with the specific period of famine, when the poor farmers were fooled by the opportunists into selling all their grain for a paltry price and were finally reduced to hunger. Bhattacharya traces their movement to the city of
Calcutta in search of food and their degradation as well as the tragic deaths of millions of men. He portrays a whole lot of exploiters who never hesitate to use the vulnerability of its victims for selfish gains.

The urban family of Samarendra Basu in Calcutta consists of his wife, two sons Rahoul and Kunal, Rahoul's wife Manju and father Devesh or Devata. The other, a peasant family from a small village Jharana, consisting of Mother, her husband, her daughter Kajoli, two sons and the son-in-law Kishore. These two families make the two strands of the plot. All the poor are depicted as the exploited ones but not all the rich are the exploiters. While only one member of the rich family is responsible for the exploitation of the poor, the other members on the contrary extend their helping hand to the poor. The stories of these two families run parallel till the end of the novel.

Samarendra, who is a lawyer by profession, looks at the war as an opportunity to make a fortune. He forms a trading company with the ironic name ‘Cheap Rice, Limited’. He realizes that if he could corner even a fraction of Bengal’s rice yield, he would be a millionaire. His younger son Kunal, who
loves thrill, joins the British Army. The elder son Rahoul who follows the footsteps of his grandfather Devesh looks at the war as a threat to democracy. Samarendra’s wife realizes that scarcity of food and essential commodities will make the life of the common people miserable.

Devesh Basu, whom the villagers of Baruni call ‘Devata’, inspires them to participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement. The police arrest Devata and Kajoli’s father. The villagers respond with anger and set the post office on fire. The government imposes a collective fine upon the entire village for the arson. The villagers set the rice grains to pay the fine. A number of villages at the coastal area are taken into possession by the British army. The disposed ones rush to Calcutta to earn their living.

The condition in the countryside worsens day by day. The rice hunger swells with the time. The stock of cattle fodder gets exhausted. The people start feeding themselves on the fish, crabs and green tree figs. The traders from the cities start appearing at the doors of the villagers to sell rice in exchange of the household utensils and cattle. The brothel agents from the city lure the poor peasants by telling them...
how they can get rich by sending their young daughters to the city.

When the scarcity of food becomes unbearable, Kajoli’s family too leaves for Calcutta. They feed themselves with green figs and roots during their journey on foot. One night Kajoli is raped by a soldier in the meadows. Kajoli, who is pregnant, is seriously hurt. The soldier however later on feels guilty and takes Kajoli and her family to Calcutta in an ambulance and admits her in a hospital.

A number of relief centers are opened in Calcutta to help the destitutes from the countryside. Rahoul works in one of such centers. Kajoli’s mother and brother survive for the next few days on the free kitchens run by the relief centers. After a few weeks Kajoli is discharged from the hospital. The mother takes her to the alley where they live. Kajoli feels guilty for making her mother to live in such a miserable condition. A betel leaf seller woman suggests Kajoli an easy way of making money. Kajoli understands the nature of the woman and decides to keep herself away from her. But after a few days, in order to save her family from hunger, she decides to accept the offer. She feels that her body is already defiled
so it does not make any difference if it gets defiled again and again. She accepts the advance from the agent and keeps the money inside the sacking on the bed under her mother’s head.

The mother decides to commit suicide to remove her burden from her children. When she wakes up, she takes off her sari and wraps herself with the sacking under her head and goes to the bridge over the river Ganga to commit suicide. Kajoli leaves the house to meet the brothel agent. On her way she hears a newspaper boy shouting that an old freedom fighter Devesh Basu is on hunger strike in the prison. Kajoli remembers his words “Do not betray yourself. The supreme test has come. Be strong. Be true. Be deathless” (195). Kajoli repents with anguish for succumbing to the crisis so cheaply. Now she decides to earn money with honest means. She gives a smack on the brothel agent’s face and enters the newspaper office to find a job. Samarendra receives the news that his son Kunal Basu is missing from the war front and Rahoul is arrested by the police for the anti-government activities. He understands that the British Empire has claimed both his sons. His hunger for money and fame devastates his family.
'Hunger' is the central character of this novel. If there is any protagonist, it is hunger. All the human characters are peripheral. They represent different types of hungers. At the inner periphery there are three characters: Kajoli, her mother and her brother Onu. They are victims of hunger for food. At the outer periphery we have Samarendra, his elder son Rahoul, younger son Kunal and Rahoul's wife Manju, Samarendra's father 'Devesh, Kajoli's father and brother, the soldier and the black marketeer Abalbandhu. Samarendra is a victim of hunger for money. Rahoul is a victim of so many hungers - hunger for research, hunger for freedom, and hunger for happier life of common man. Kunal has a hunger for adventures. Manju is hungry for her sweet home. Devesh Basu and Kajoli's father and brother have hunger for the freedom. The soldier is a prey to sex. Abalbandhu is not a victim of hunger for money but he makes others victim of his hunger for money.

Bhattacharya blames the poor for their superstitions but believes that their faith in the God gives them strength to fight against poverty and hunger. The chanting of their names gives them strength to survive. Their faith makes them
embodiment of robust life full of energy and fearlessness. They are strengthened and not subdued by the exploitation.

In one of the interviews Bhattacharya says,

Most of us are made up of some good, some evil, some virtue, some vice. The proportions vary, of course. But we are never made in proportions of Rama and Ravana, all hero and all villain.

(Gemil 304)

By exposing the evils of society Bhattacharya arouses our social conscience, believing in the hope that the conscience of the exploiter will be awakened.

Bhattacharya gives us a pathetic picture of innumerable cruelties to which the human beings are subjected due to poverty and hunger. Hunger brings mankind to a despicable level. Honour becomes the easiest target. Hunger provokes to do anything and everything deprived. It gives birth to various kinds of perverse activities and exploitation. The law of brutes prevails and everything is reduced to mere brutality.

Bhattacharya wants to attack a number of evils in our society, which make the lives of the poor miserable. Through
the comparison of the deaths of the poor and the rich he attacks the evil rituals of Hindu religion. There are no rites performed after the death of destitutes. The dead bodies of destitute are carried away by the municipality people in the garbage vans. On the other hand, in the funeral procession of the rich large quantities of rice and copper coins are scattered in the street. The rich do it to earn goodly measure of merit for the soul. But Kalo asks “What will happen to the departing souls of those dying in the street without any ritual? Were they doomed to haunt the earth forever as specters? ... was heaven meant only for the rich alone?”(52).

Most of the common people feel that the root cause of poverty and hunger is in the evil social system. Many surrender to it passively, calling it their destiny. They suffer and die. But some people like Kalo revolt against such evil system. Kalo rises to the top of the social hierarchy by upsetting the old social order but instead of undermining the society he becomes the part of it. The revolt of a Kamar becoming a Brahmin does not make any difference to the order to which he truly belongs and to which he attaches himself. He is alienated from his class and feels lonely. While
playing the role of Mangal Adhikari - The priest, Kalo becomes one with the role and almost forgets his revenge. It is easier to fight for one's purpose and principles than to live up to them. Money should be one of the means of happiness; it cannot be the aim of life. If you get money and lose happiness you are the loser; if you lose money and get happiness you are the winner.

Bhattacharya shows his concern about women exploitation in the patriarchal system. He wants to attack the conventional attitude of men towards women. Through the dramatization of women’s victory over men in the ban of film show, he wants to defy patriarchal system. He makes the reader aware of the fact that women, on the verge of the freedom have become aware of their exploitation by ‘men’. They express their anger over men’s tyranny for the freedom for which they fought with men against the foreigners is not given to them. The women feel that the union of men and women is rare but necessary. . It is possible only when man and woman treat each-other as equals. “Where is true union between man and woman unless they accept each other as equals?”(225).
Unlike other contemporary writers, Bhabani Bhattacharya has presented the Indian woman as the pure woman in his novels who has been victimised in spite of her high ideals and vitality. This concept of the innocent victimised Indian woman is a constant feature of his novels. He has also created some woman protagonists in his novels. They are full of noble ideas, which are more refined than those of their male counterparts. He has effectively portrayed the role of motherhood in his fiction. He feels that a woman in her capacity as a mother is capable of great deeds. As a mother, she is a symbol of gentleness, love and sacrifice. He shows that the woman as a wife is also human and is an equal partner of man. Most of his heroines are pure and simple.

The women characters in Bhabani Bhattacharya’s first novel, *So Many Hungers!*, have been found to be relatively passive. They are inclined to accept the customs, conventions and traditions that prevail in the society unquestioningly. The change from *So Many Hungers!* To
He Who Rides a Tiger, it has been observed, is a change from passivity to rebellion. While commenting on that change, Bhabani Bhattacharya observes:

So Many Hungers! follows the famine up to its peak point, its climax. In the storm of death that almost suddenly swept the city streets and filled them with human debris, there was no room for any kind of counteraction....certain gaps were left - the famine was multifaceted. These gaps were filled out in He Who Rides a Tiger, which was written with a different perspective.

(90)

Chandralekha is the victim of distortion like Mohini in Music for Mohini. When her father poses as the Brahmin Mangal Adhikari and becomes the chief priest of Siva temple, Lekha too, being his daughter is forced to perform the role of the Mother of the Seven-fold Bliss. Many people come to her from far and near expecting her to perform miracles. She adopts a little waif Obhijit, whom she has picked up from the street
during the famine. She has a motherly love for him. This motherly tenderness flows in her so much that she is ready to face the wrath of the entire Brahmin crowd and to accept banishment from the temple and suffer poverty. Shantha Krishnaswamy remarks:

At heart she is a warm hearted Bengali girl who looks forward to nothing more than a pact of companionship with Biten, the idealistic reformer, who, eschewing his, Brahmanism, was a fellow prisoner with Kalo during the famine riots in Calcutta. Her physicality as the natural woman rebels against this bogus sanctity and tries to reassert itself. One natural consequence is her outpouring of motherly love towards Obhijit, the low caste street waif she adopts. (86)

In *Shadow from Ladakh*, Bhabani Bhattacharya attempts syntheses between conflicting ideologies. He makes some
women instrumental in these syntheses along with men. These women include Satyajit's wife, Suruchi, and his only daughter, Sumita. The pride of place accorded to them in the building of bridges on a par with men may testify to the supreme regard Bhattacharya has for them.

Bhattacharya has shown that the Gandhian principles of asceticism led women to suppress their personal desires. Suruchi was educated at Shantiniketan. There she meets Satyajit and they get married. Suruchi shares her aesthetic values with Satyajit and life becomes a sweet music for her with him. Satyajit, who had come under the influence of Tagore and Shantiniketan, now has the influence of Gandhi and Sevagram. He adopts Gandhiji's principles of asceticism. The real problem begins, when Suruchi finds to her dismay that Satyajit has started avoiding her and their home. He feels ashamed and guilty of himself, whenever he feels attracted towards her. She felt she had lost her womanly dignity by this attitude of her husband. But Satyajit's asceticism was anti-life as his friend Biresh has pointed out. He put his ideals to test at the cost of his wife's happiness. She had to suppress her wish for a son and all her womanly
urges, and finally she had to allow her own daughter to be brought up in Satyajit's pattern. She has a blind adoration for her father and follows his asceticism. It is very painful for her when she sees Sumita dressed like a widow and wearing no bangles.

Bhattacharya has dealt with two modes of life in the plot of the story. They are Gandhigram and Steeltown. The Gandhigrarn is represented by Satayajit, who is a true follower of Gandhiji and Bhaskar represents the Steeltown. There is a fierce conflict between them as they both have totally different ideas and attitudes. Gradually the clash between them grows weaker and at last it completely disappears. Ultimately, the two different modes of life intermingle with each other. This synthesis is significant as it denotes the understanding between Bhaskar and Suruchi.

Bhattacharya keeps the poverty and hunger for food, at the background of the story. There are very rare instances of hunger for food. Most of the villagers except the Seth and Halwai are poor. The life in Indian countryside is marked by poverty, hunger and exploitation. Sonamitti is a village of fertile land yielding fine cotton sufficient for the whole district.
But most of the villagers fall upon the mercy of the moneylender for expenses borne against the rituals like childbirth, marriage and even funeral. They get enough to eat but not to spare. Due to their illiteracy they easily fall victim to the Seth’s exploitation:

A loan standing in the Seth’s ledger doubled itself in twelve months. When he paid out twenty rupees, the figure he entered in his book was forty - a year’s interest charged in advance as soon as the loan was given. The debtor could whine or howl but had no option. If you dislike my terms, go elsewhere. Go to the big moneylender in town.... So the debtor swallowed his saliva and put his thumb-mark on the bond and went his way. When he returned to the cloth shop after harvest the money he paid lessened the balance but the remainder doubled itself with the New Year’s advance interest added. So it went on year after year.

(67, 68)
Bhattacharya concentrates on the exploiters’ hunger for gold and power and satires upon their hunger. He shows hunger for gold existing even in the poor people, but he does not laugh at it. He makes us understand that at the root of their hunger for gold, there is a basic hunger for food. There seems to be two other hungers - villagers’ hunger for magic or miracle and Meera’s hunger for spiritual experience. The villagers say, “We hunger for miracle whatever else may follow good or bad” (207).

Bhattacharya has been deeply influenced by Rabindra Nath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. Their high idealism permits all of his work and they record the aspirations and urges the people heroically involved in the struggle between the old and the new, inspired by the vision of a just social order. Inspired by these, Bhattacharya incorporated all the momentary events of his time in his creative writing. In this way he depicts life in Indian society exactly as he has viewed it with a discerning eye. That's why he has been capable to provide a variety of themes.

The novels thus unfold various examples of exploitations of the ignorant Indian masses living in villages
who try to overcome their poverty and hunger through the supernatural means like magic and miracle. Bhattacharya exposes the worthlessness of such a miracle in eradication of poverty, hunger and exploitation.
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