CHAPTER I
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE SCOPE

Existing Approaches

The New Learning holds him as much as the old, so that his heart is set on a synthesis, as he calls it. He would have a harmony of cultures for India. He reads ancient thought in today's light. He seeks in ancient thought sanction for the West-influenced ideals of our time. And he finds it. He is a man with a message for his country.¹

If Jayadev, a man with a vision of life, is possessed by a zeal to offer a worthwhile message to the world — especially to his nation — the same is true of the creator of that character, Bhabani Bhattacharya, one of the elder Indo-Anglian novelists.

It is not therefore quite surprising to view Bhattacharya as one who "has his 'axes' to grind". ²

Even a casual reading of his novels will convince the
readers of Bhattacharya's social consciousness. It was
Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar who first highlighted this
aspect of Bhattacharya's novels. While evaluating the
achievement of Bhattacharya as a novelist, he observes:

As a novelist, Bhattacharya is dowered
with many gifts: a satirical humour, a
social conscience, a feeling for nuances
in character, and, above all, a fierce
compassion for suffering in all its forms. 3

Keeping Bhattacharya's social consciousness
in mind, it is quite possible to study Bhattacharya as
a committed writer: for his themes lend themselves to
such an approach. Moreover, the author himself is never
tired of saying that he is a committed writer. It is
his firm belief that art has a purpose. Commenting upon
this aspect, Bhattacharya observes:

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. 4 (Italics mine)

3. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, "Indian Writing in
   Controversy Indian Literature: A Symposium
   New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1959), p. 55

4. Bhabani Bhattacharya, "Literature and Social
   Reality", The Asian Path, Vol. XXVII, No. 9 (Sep 1955), p. 395
A novel, according to him, must have a social purpose, for it is something concerned with social reality. On many an occasion he has stressed this view. In his interview given to Sudhakar Joshi, he observes:

I hold that a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the readers 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 sound judgement.  

Therefore, many critics naturally lay stress on his social consciousness, social realism and reformatory zeal. For example, Miss Jayanti Parthasarathy has worked on social consciousness in Bhattacharya's novels: in her M.Phil. dissertation she writes:

Man in his multi-dimensional relations


with society ... occupies a centrality of position in Bhattacharya’s novels. 7

A similar kind of study has been done by Syed Ameeruddin. Discussing the social commitment in the novels of Bhattacharya he observes:

All his [Bhattacharya’s] five novels are set against the background of the Indian social scene in the perspective of historical events. He very strongly expresses in his novels, his intense disgust for the cruelty and hypocrisy of Indian social life, with its castes, creeds, dead habits and customs, and its restrictive religious rites and practices. Further, in his novels, he expresses his views on creating a new India which is freed from all social evils, and also the need to re-orient the national life on a new structure. 8

That Bhattacharya is certainly for building a new social structure, nobody can deny or refute. And that is why Paul Verghese asserts that Bhattacharya is concerned with the building of a welfare society. To quote his words:


Bhattacharya as a novelist, has the vision of a welfare society at heart... for him art is always the communication of certain social, political ideals; and the artistic form, the means of winning over his readers to his views. 9

If Paul Verghese is able to show that Bhattacharya "follows the tradition of European social realism as does Mulk Raj Anand," 10 - R.K. Badal confirms this view. Calling Bhattacharya a novelist of destitutes, he observes:

Bhabani Bhattacharya is the novelist of destitutes...; he has sympathy with the socially down-trodden people but his delineation of them is consistently well-balanced and touched by compassion. 11

Compassion for the socially down-trodden people has heightened Bhattacharya's sensitivity, resulting in the production of a work of art - so argues L.N. Gupta. He says:


10 Ibid., p. 35

Pure intellectuals ... visit slums and absorb the misery of their dwellers in their being. They tour the famine-stricken areas. They look into shrivelled faces and sunken eyes of the sufferer. They share their distress... They suffer quietly. The process involves a cycle of seething tension. The end product is a major work, say a great novel in the case of a fiction writer. It is a monument to its times. Such is the case with Bhabani Bhattacharya. 12

And this kind of involvement, Syamala Rao feels, has helped Bhattacharya "to grasp the innate significance of humanity". 13 She says:

The reader lives with the characters of the stories and marvels at the author's keen observation of the day-to-day incidents of life. 14

Again, Sudhakar Joshi, while discussing 'contemporariness' in Bhattacharya's novels, observes:

Dr. Bhattacharya generally writes about the poverty, hunger, pestilence, traditionalism, caste, India's struggle against poverty, industrialisation and the resulting controversy of Gandhian panacea versus rapid

13 Ibid., p. 36
14 Syamala Rao, p. 36
industrialisation. He thus touches all the aspects of the present-day India and weaves pattern for the stories of his novels. 15

All these discussions on Bhattacharya are valid and useful: valid because, they prove beyond doubt that Bhattacharya is a committed writer and useful because they highlight Bhattacharya's reformatory zeal. Bhattacharya is certainly a social reformer, 16 interested in bringing about certain healthy reforms in society. That is why in every one of his novels, he directs his energies to exposing the various social evils of modern India. He interprets through artistic medium peoples' hunger for food and freedom; condemns social evils such as prostitution, exploitation, superstitious beliefs, all anti-life tendencies; stresses the need for mass literacy; attempts to destroy false faiths and liberate men's minds in order to make them self-reliant and self-respecting individuals; pleads for intelligent exercise of the franchise and reconciliation of conflicting ideals; unfolds his banner

15 Sudhakar Joshi, "An Evening with Bhabani" P.7

against untouchability and barriers of caste; advocates widow-remarriage and rebels against child marriage.

Bhattacharya's social consciousness is also seen in his interest in the position and welfare of women in society. The importance that he has given to women characters in his novels and the interest he has shown in their welfare are so telling and striking that another kind of approach to Bhattacharya becomes quite possible i.e. as an interpreter of women's psyche. Such a study has been done by a few critics. For example, Dr. Marlene Fisher in her excellent article, observes:

Dr. Bhattacharya's depiction of the Indian woman in his fiction is both sensitive and sympathetic. The significant content of a given novel and its artistic center of interest are to be found in the women.

And, therefore, it is not presumptuous on the

part of a research scholar to have worked on Bhattacharya's women characters. 18

A third approach to Bhattacharya is to dwell upon the depiction of rural India and contemporary Indian ethos and milieu. And on this score, he is called by a few critics, a novelist of rural India. Shyam M. Asnani, commenting on this aspect observes:

Bhattacharya's contribution as a novelist, lies in his sincere and sensitive interpretation of rural India. As Chekhov and Turgenev have done in Russian Literature, Bhattacharya has captured the soul of rural India in his novels.19

The same view has been endorsed by P.P. Mehta in his book, Indo-Anglian Fiction: An Assessment. 20


For his novel *Shadow from Ladakh*, Bhattacharya was awarded the much coveted Sahitya Academy Award for 1968. The award citation reads as follows:

In his novels, Shri Bhattacharya has depicted a cross-section of contemporary India during a period of transition and rapid development, and has reflected the intricate pattern of the present-day life with remarkable understanding and clarity... For its insight into the contemporary mind, its realism and vitality, it has been hailed as an outstanding contribution to contemporary English writing in India. 21

Though valid in themselves, all these approaches give too much of importance to the Indian element in Bhattacharya, forgetting the fact that though the characters and situations are India, his novels have a universal appeal. A few sensitive critics have touched upon this aspect of his writing. Prof. Dorothy Shimer in her monograph on Bhattacharya discusses the major issues that Bhattacharya touches in his novels and shows how these issues become universal ones, transcending the local and regional aspects. She says:

Although there are many issues to which Bhattacharya addresses himself, the major and most inclusive ones seem to me to be

21 *The Award Citation*, (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1968).
those concerns of today that are universal in nature: individual human worth and dignity, freedom and national aspiration, and the need for reconciliation of differences or achievement of equilibrium among differing views and ways of life, especially between East and West, the traditional and the new. The manifestations of universal issues and the manner in which they are handled may be particularly Indian, immersed in the author's home scene and ethos. This does not, however, invalidate their universality or restrict their appeal: rather, it confirms our human commonality.

Again Dr. G.S. Balarama Gupta also stresses this aspect, saying:

Bhattacharya's themes, characters, situations, and problems are only apparently Indian: viewed in a broad perspective, they reveal the perennial relevance and essential universality of their applicability and appeal.

This universality of appeal springs basically from the author's vision of life. He is perhaps one of the few Indo-Anglian novelists who has the unique power of combining realism with vision. Commenting

22 Dorothy Blair Shimer, Bhabani Bhattacharya, (Boston: Wayne Publishers, 1975), pp. 117-18

on this aspect Dr. K.R. Chandrasekaran observes:

Bhattacharya is a realist and at the same time a visionary. He depicts life in the country as he has seen it with his observant eyes... he sees ground for hope because the country is in a position to shape its own future and it has the basic material needed for reconstruction and development. 24

Though Dr. K.R. Chandrasekaran's approach is very useful and valid, it tends to limit Bhattacharya's vision to the national level. But Bhattacharya is a universalist, having larger interests, which extend from the individual to humanity at large.

Although Dr. R.S. Singh is able to speak about Bhattacharya's interest and confidence in man, it is quite unfortunate that he is able to discern only dreamy wisdom in Bhattacharya's novels. Labelling him as 'a novelist of dreamy wisdom' 25 he writes:


Bhattacharya's attitude is rational tinged with idealism; he is a utopian who aspires to create a better cultural atmosphere for the citizens of his country. 26

The unfortunate use of the words 'utopian', and 'dreamy wisdom' tends to devalue the practicability of Bhattacharya's vision of life.

His [Bhattacharya's] stories abound in social and historical realities, quite often bitter and gruesome, such as the Bengal famine of 1943, the tragedies of 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 sparkling amid ashes. From his assertion of ethical values and the synthesis of the old and the new and of opposite extremes emanates Bhattacharya's final vision of the affirmation of life. 27


- so writes Dr. K.K. Sharma in his book, which is based on his post-doctoral research on Bhattacharya. Though he is able to show Bhattacharya's positive vision of life, he is unable to discern a comprehensive humanistic vision of life in Bhattacharya's novels.

Present Study: its Scope

All these existing approaches to Bhattacharya are justifiable in so far as they deal with or discuss one or another aspect of the many faceted genius of Bhattacharya. But none of these approaches view Bhattacharya from a wider and all-inclusive angle ensuring a fuller and better understanding of Bhattacharya - especially his vision of life, which is essentially that of a humanist. What marks and vitalizes his works is a strong undercurrent of a broad-based philosophy of life. His philosophy of life is not something handed over to him ready-made. His is a case of philosophy which evolves in a gradual process, subjecting itself to many changes and adjustments on the way. That is why though the existing approaches appear valid to some extent, they do not seem to cover the entire man. In dealing with Bhattacharya one must be conscious of the fact that
one is dealing with a genius of complex nature in
the sense that the genius is in the process of deve-
lopment. From So Many Hungers to a Dream in Hawaii
is a long journey symbolising the process of develop-
ment of an artist and especially his shifting atti-
tudes to life. But however much the writer's outlook
on life may appear to change on the surface level, a
careful reader can discern a solid substratum of an
essentially humanistic way of life directing and con-
trolling all these surface changes. The present study
proposes to fathom those deep under-currents of huma-
nism whose external manifestations appear as ripples
of social reformation, humanitarian zeal, interpreta-
tion of women's psyche, etc.

Formative Influences

At the outset, a survey of the formative
influences will help, to a certain extent, to under-
stand and appreciate Bhattacharya's philosophy of life.

Bhabani Bhattacharya was born on November 10,
1906, in Bhagalpur, Bihar State, in a culturally rich
and well-to-do family of Brahmins. His father, Promethe
Bhattacharya, who was a lawyer - a defender of human rights - at the time of his son's birth, later became a judge, the custodian of human rights, privileges and dignity. His mother, Kiranbala Bhattacharya, though an orthodox brahmin lady, yet believed in giving complete freedom to others. Bhattacharya was fortunate enough in having been born to parents who had a great regard for human values. Again, born into a Bengali family, it is obviously inferable that rich cultural influences should have worked on him even in his early years. Bhattacharya’s family had for several years lived in Puri, Orissa State. A major influence in those years was the sea: for not only did it help him to develop a love for sea which has remained throughout his life but also it helped him to acquire a sense of compassion - an elementary understanding of the sufferings of others and sympathy for those people who lived on the sea for their livelihood - the fisherfolk who risked their lives daily to earn their bread. Commenting upon the Puri beach, Bhattacharya observes:

The major influence in those years was the sea itself. Puri beach is one of the most attractive in the world, almost furlong-wide stretches of bright sand extend for miles, enormous breakers created with foam
roaring down upon them. The most brilliant sun-rises and sun-sets. The sands sloped gradually into salt water and bathing was an immense pleasure. Long canoes of fisher-folk rode perilously over the breakers, but a furlong beyond, the sea was calm. 28

This compassion, this yearning to understand the predicament of others and sympathise finds its vivid expression in his novel, So Many Hungers.

Signs of future greatness were discernible in Bhattacharya even as a child. Prominent was his creative response to literature. Thanks to his Sanskrit teacher, who, discerning Bhattacharya's creative abilities, encouraged him to compose couplets, which enabled him to write poems which were more than couplets.

At school I drew the attention of a scholarly teacher of Sanskrit, who had strong literary interests. He often took me on walks in the course of which he would cite a line of poetry and ask me (then in my early teens) to compose a rhyming line to make a couplet. I enjoyed the "pastime" and it did me good. I soon began to write poems which were not just couplets. 29

28 Shimer, p. 7
29 Ibid., p. 5
With the creative response to literature thus discovered and nurtured, Bhattacharya soon began to contribute poems and short prose sketches to MOVCHAK, a leading children's magazine, which also published articles of top-ranking artists like Tagore. He placed his foot on the first rung of the ladder which was to lead him on to international fame and repute in the years to come.

Bhattacharya's father, though a judge by profession, was a great lover of literature and so, on his book-shelves were interspersed, great literature in Bengali and in English, with his professional law books. Very soon Bhattacharya discovered Shakespeare and read with great interest every play that he found on his father's book-shelves.

In 1923, his schooling over and winning the much coveted top scholarship quite unexpectedly, Bhattacharya entered Patna University hoping to achieve something great in the field of Science. But very soon he discovered that he was better suited to the study of Arts and so he 'moved to the Arts program' § where he belonged.

§Shimer, p. 3
To Bhattacharya, the Patna years were the great period—formative as well as impressionable—in his life; for it was at this time that he assimilated his humanistic views. It was then, too, that he fell under the spell of Tagore's poetry which was to continue and mellow in his later life. It was then that he read a host of the writers of the West—writers like Walt Whitman, Knut Hamsun, Romain Rolland, John Steinbeck—to name only a few—those works had a common basis—the basis of social concern. These were the writers who must have influenced him to reject the idea of 'Art for Art's sake', and, later on, to base his novels on a serious concern—a concern for man and his welfare. Commenting upon their influence, Bhattacharya observes:

Among westerners, I may mention such diverse influences as Knut Hamsun, Romain Rolland, and John Steinbeck. One common factor among all these writers is the powerful dramatization of the basic human values. Perhaps you will agree that these values are one of the main ingredients of my writing. 31

If this influence of the western writers was great, no less was the influence of Indian thinkers and writers like Tagore and Gandhi. It was a great moment in life when Bhattacharya received a brief note of appreciation from Tagore himself - "I like your work. Keep on writing. All my blessings." Such encouraging words gave Bhattacharya a great filip in his creative authorship.

Bhattacharya's early adoration of Tagore took shape when he translated some of the poems of Tagore. Not satisfied with this, and moved by a strong desire to see Tagore, he made a pilgrimage to Santiniketan. This visit produced an indelible impression on his mind regarding interculturation in terms of ways of life and thought. And a few months later, Bhattacharya's winning of a literary prize, in selecting Tagore's poems for an anthology, proved to be a prelude to a more intimate and personal relationship with Tagore.

In 1927, Bhattacharya took his Bachelor's degree with Honours. Upon the insistence of his father,

32 Shimer, p. 9.
he proceeded to England to continue his studies in English Literature at King's College, University of London. But what awaited him there was insult and cold welcome! The professor's indictment "I don't understand why Indians come to this department. Their English is sickening",33 insulted and wounded the young and enthusiastic scholar-writer. Thus humiliated, Bhattacharya turned to the History Department of the same University. It was a blessing in disguise for that decision had an important bearing on the course of his life as a novelist-enabling him later to ground "all his major fictional works in the immediacy of history". 34

The London years had significant bearings on Bhattacharya's life to bring to maturity some basic principles of his humanism. It was here that he had the good fortune of having close contact and personal relationship with many British intellectuals and liberal thinkers.

When I was a student in London, I was lucky enough to come into close contact with certain British liberal thinkers. Some of them

33 Shimer, p. 10
34 Ibid., p. 10
were even conservative minded but I got on well with them. An example was Col. F. Yeats-Brown. ... I also met liberal intellectuals of a very different type. One of them, Ralph Fox, who had a brilliant career at Oxford, gave his life on the battle-field of the Spanish Civil War. 35

Also he had the rare privilege of studying under the famous political philosopher, Harold Laski, from whom he learnt to apply leftist interpretations to human problems. Moreover, he developed a profound respect for Marxist principles such as equality and liberal humanitarianism. Bhattacharya, commenting on his early interest in Marxist principles says,

Yes, I was strongly attracted by Marxism. Later, during the War, I was bewildered by the contradictions. I hated the anti-intellectualism. But my interest in the Soviet system continued. 36

He was able to appreciate the idea of equality - equality even in material possession like land. And this idea finds vivid expression in his novel Shadow from Ladakh, where he pleads for equal distribution of

35 Bhattacharya's letter to me from Calcutta dated February 23, 1980 — vide Appendix 36 Ibid.
lands, calling Vinobhaji, the guiding spirit of the great 'Soondan Movement' as a neo-Marx. Also he became an active member of the Marxist group in London. His activism was so conspicuous that his activities were noted and his father in India was notified of his son's political activities with a warning that his position as a judge would be jeopardised if his son continued his association with this group. His respect for Marxist principles - treating all men as equals - no doubt impressed the mind of the budding humanist.

1930 was a landmark in Bhattacharya's literary progress. When Tagore came to London, an agreement with George Allen and Unwin, London, was reached for the publication of The Golden Boat, a collection of Tagore's short stories, translated into English by Bhattacharya. Thenceforth the relationship between Bhattacharya and Tagore grew closer day by day and Tagore's love and respect for Bhattacharya was so deep and abiding that he urged Bhattacharya to join the ashram as a teacher-writer. Though it was a flattering and tempting offer, Bhattacharya declined it as he felt that acceptance would mean loss of his own identity and individuality as an author. It was, Bhattacharya felt, better to work at a greater distance from Tagore's all-pervading
and overwhelming personality, than to become a satellite of another man, however great he may be.

If Bhattacharya said:

Tagore appealed to me from my school days and my writer's career also began from those days. It was therefore quite unlikely that I would miss the impact of Gurudev's all-pervading personality. 77

it was no exaggeration, for the impact of Tagore's humanistic ideas had been considerable on Bhattacharya. Tagore stood for integration and that was his mission in life. Bhattacharya says:

Integration - that was the poet's life-long quest: integration of the simple and the sophisticated: the ancient and the modern: city and village: East and West.

Again Tagore's concept of internationalism - universalism as it is now-a-days styled - is spelt out thus by Bhattacharya:

He [Tagore] was resolved to work not only for a co-ordination between India's past

77 Sudhakar Joshi "An Evening with Bhabani" p.7

and present, a fusion of the best elements, but also for a synthesis of the East with the West, a 'Union' between them. Western materialism, he believed, had to be supplemented with the Western genius for social organization. The world could not afford to remain split forever into the Orient and the Occident. The march of mankind had to be a unified progress.

Bhattacharya's humanistic bent of mind was attracted to these essential teachings of Tagore, along with accepting Tagore's plea for leading a full life and for a reconciliation between the claims of earth and heaven. These ideas which are essentially humanistic, have found vivid expressions in Bhattacharya's novels - especially in Music for Mohini and Shadow from Ladakh - with slight modification and shift of emphasis in accordance with his own philosophy of life.

If Bhattacharya was so much influenced by Tagore's idea of interculturization and internationalism, no less was the influence of Gandhiji and his love for truth and non-violence. His humanistic outlook accommodated Gandhiji's concept of 'ahimsa' and non-violence. India's struggle for independence had reached its

significant phase in 1931. And Bhattacharya was involved in the struggle, though not as an activist. Bhattacharya realised the importance of political freedom for our country, if it was to prosper and establish its identity in the world. Great was the moment in his life when he met Gandhiji who had come to London for the Round Table Conference face to face. About his first meeting with Gandhiji (1931), Bhattacharya says

India's struggle for freedom had reached one of its peak points. I had been close to that struggle, though not an activist. In India, I had attended many meetings in which Gandhi spoke. But this was my first encounter with the great man; it was only a little less overwhelming than the one with Tagore. 40

As one interested in the development of the whole man, Bhattacharya felt that political liberty was worth nothing "to the common man if it was not part of a renaissance in social life" 41 and so quite naturally he was drawn to Gandhiji's ethical and moral teachings—such as removal of untouchability and caste barriers, preaching and practising virtues like love and

40 Shimer, p. 12
41 Music for Mahini, p. 30
compassion, and recognizing the worth and dignity of man. He was so deeply influenced by Gandhiji that apart from incidental preaching of Gandhiji's principles, one of his novels, Shadow from Ladakh is 'rooted more deeply in Gandhian thought'.

While at the University of London, Bhattacharya took a continental tour, visiting places like Berlin, Warsaw and Paris. And this visit gave him an opportunity to see and understand fresh ways of life, thus enlarging his horizon of nations and peoples.

In 1934, Bhattacharya returned to India with a Ph.D. in historical studies. Then started the bride-hunting. Bhattacharya was all against 'arranged marriage'. And so he was allowed to see, meet and move with Salila, the daughter of a leading Physician in Calcutta, well before his marriage. The Humanist in him did not permit him to hold the conventional pattern of 'bride-seeking' or 'bride-showing'. On the other hand, he and Salila met each other and decided on marriage. Fortunately Salila came from a cultured family with a modern outlook.

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and she had inherited a great deal of her father's spirit—his human values and heart's warmth. When their wedding was over, a good deal of adjustment took place, especially on the part of Salila. Their predicament was exactly like that of Jayadev and Mohini in Music for Mohini, and Salila rose to the occasion. Commenting upon this, Bhattacharya observes:

It will be near the truth to say that she and Mohini are of the same genre. Their backgrounds are alike, while I had Jayadev's background—upto a point. My wife, brought up in 'westernized' lifeways, faced the compulsion of adjusting herself to a very different psychological environment. And she did achieve the harmony needed—enormous self-sacrifice was involved. 43

The tendency to bring about a balance in life through adjustment and self-sacrifice is necessary for every man and woman if he or she is to realise a full life—this lesson he learnt from his own married life and the credit of demonstrating this should go to Salila. Again Salila helped him in many ways—as a collaborator, typist, first editor and above all the interpreter of the woman-psyche for Bhattacharya. His progressive ideals regarding the position of women in Society, were

43Shimer, p. 16.
fed and nurtured by Salila, confirming his idea that
given opportunity, women could prove themselves better
partners; given opportunity, they could show that they
were in no way inferior to men; and given equal rights
with men, they could make life worthwhile not only for
their dear ones but also for people around them.

"War destroys not only human lives but some-
thing also no less important - human values," 44 observes
Bhattacharya in an unpublished paper. He was pained to
see human values destroyed at the time of the Second
World War. Such a heart-rending episode in the annals
of the world history naturally pierced to the core the
sensitive artist; and led him to denounce war and demand
its avoidance if human values were to be preserved.
While this war was being fought on alien grounds, India's
struggle for freedom reached its zenith under Gandhi's
'Quit India Movement' in 1942. The Bengal famine in
1943 followed. As a humanist-artist, as a very sensi-
tive soul concerned with the welfare of man, Bhattacharya
was terribly shaken by these horrible events that destroy-
ed human dignity and values altogether.

44Anamai Bhattacharya, "After Vietnam What", unpublished paper read at conference, University of
Hawaii, March 17, 1970. n. pag.
Uncontrolled inflation, lack of rationing of food grains (there was no drought or crop failure), administrative breakdown, and above all the human greed that manifested itself in cornering of all food grains on a stupendous scale. 45

- these, according to Bhattacharya, were the causes for that great famine that annihilated three millions of people. As a result of this, Bengal witnessed scenes of unprecedented horror. One such description of horrible trauma is thus presented by Bhattacharya:

Calcutta witnessed unbelievable scenes: hundreds of dead bodies littering the lanes everynight and removed at dawn in municipal vans, to be assigned en masse to funeral pyres; tens of thousands of the half dead for whom there was no escape; swarms of destitute children whose limbs had shriveled from lack of food but whose empty bellies were bloated balloon-like; the scramble to recover scraps of vegetable peelings from the dust-bins on the street - and men had to fight for the spoil with fierce parish dogs; women giving birth to babies on the street pavement. 46

The result of seeing such pathetic and unbelievable scenes was the stirring of his deepest emotion; the

45 Bhabani Bhattacharya, "City of Cities is now Callous", The Times Survey of India, January 26, 1962, p. xxi.

46 Ibid., p. xxi.
humanist in him, so long dormant, shook off its long slumber of indifference and was replaced by an urge for the artistic outlet of his feelings. The result was the novel, *So Many Hungers*. Commenting upon how he came to write his first novel, Bhattacharya observes:

"The great famine struck Bengal. The emotional stirrings I felt (more than two million men, women and children died of slow starvation) were sheer compulsion to creativity. The result was *So Many Hungers*! (The book was concerned with all other prevalent hungers of the time 1942-43, and not food alone; the hunger for money-making and the self-degradation on one hand, and the urge for the country's political freedom on the other.)" 47

The novel was a great success and it brought him fame and recognition through translation into Russian, Czech and Slovak well within a span of three years. Encouraged by this initial success as a novelist, Bhattacharya returned to the discarded partly-written novel, *Music for Mohini*, which deals with synthesis—the synthesis of village and city life, of traditional and modern values.

New came the important phase in Bhattacharya's life: he became increasingly involved in national and international life. At the first instance, in 1949, he

47 *Makar* p. 43
moved to Washington DC as the press attache at the
Embassy of India; but soon returned to India in 1950
on a contract for three years as Assistant Editor of
The Illustrated Weekly of India, Bombay. During this
time, Bhattacharya was fortunate enough to receive an
invitation from the Union of Soviet Writers to visit
the U.S.S.R. as a member of the First Indian Cultural
Delegation to the U.S.S.R. Though the trip was short —
only for six weeks — it was memorable for, it was in
a way a realization of himself as an author — a pure
self-revelation of the prestige of being an author.
Commenting upon his experience at the Bolshoi Theatre,
he observes:

Suddenly I found the whole audience
clapping and cheering. "Do you know
whom they are cheering?" I was asked.
"No", I replied. "They are cheering
you. You must return their applause,"
I was told. 48

The trip convinced him that people are good everywhere
whatever ideology they may practise. But soon after
his return to India, The Weekly wanted articles on his
Russian trip — but insisted that his experiences should
be presented with an anti-Russian bias. There arose a

48Bhimer, p. 102.
disagreement between Bhattacharya and the Management, for Bhattacharya felt that it was wrong to compel him to write ill of a people who were really good. The result was his terminating the contract well before the schedule. Regarding this, Bhattacharya writes thus:

I was a member of the first Indian Cultural Delegation invited to the USSR — we traveled 2000 miles in the country. In consequence, as you know, I had to part company with the I.W. [Illustrated Weekly of India]. You ask why that happened. The simple answer is that I believe in being free to write as I wish. 49

In 1952, appeared his second novel, Music for Mohini, which further established his position as a novelist. This was followed by He Who Rides A Tiger (1954), which demonstrates that the greatest achievement of man in life is to learn to be true to himself. Soon Bhattacharya's involvement in international life increased rapidly — he was sent as a cultural Ambassador to Australia (1962), New Zealand (1962), West Germany (1963) and England (1969); a participant in international seminars held at Harvard (1960), in Tokyo (1960) and other places. Meanwhile Bhattacharya found time to publish his fourth novel, A Goddess Named Gold (1960)

49 Bhattacharya's letter to me from Calcutta, dated Feb. 29, 1960, vide Appendix.
which lays emphasis on the idea that true freedom is not merely political freedom or economic freedom but freedom of mind. His fifth novel, *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966), is a plea for the blending of divergent sets of values, a theme very dear to Bhattacharya. And this novel brought him official national recognition—the Sahitya Academy Award for 1968.

Soon an invitation came to Bhattacharya from the Institute of Advanced Projects, The East-West Center, Hawaii, to be a senior specialist. He moved to the States in 1970 and his stay there became permanent. Bhattacharya had the unique and rare privilege of being visiting Professor at the University of Hawaii, Walker-Ames Professor at the University of Washington, visiting Professor at the University of British Columbia and a senior research scholar at the East-West Center, Honolulu.

Though the visit to various places had widened his perspective of human understanding, it was the East-West Center that had made him a thorough-going internationalist. The Center which serves as a meeting ground for cultural and technical interchange between
scholars and specialists from Asia and the West, had much in its aim common with Bhattacharya's idea of synthesis. So it was quite natural that he was drawn to it. While at the Center, he studied as a research project, "South and South East Asia I Some strategies of Solidarity". Commenting on this Bhattacharya writes:

This study, in its conceptual frame work, is meant to be multi-disciplinary. It will cover intercultural history (including religion), education, economics and other areas of social sciences. 50

and speaking about the task in hand, he observes:

In my research, I seek practical answers to these intricate problems, so that multi-form cooperation may not appear as a mere wish-thought and an empty phrase. 51

Bhattacharya was delighted to see how Tagore's idea of interculturation had been institutionalised, and the Center also provided the impetus to express his experiences there in the form of a novel, A Dream in Hawaii. Regarding the impact of the Center on him, Bhattacharya observes:

50 Shimer, p. 20
51 Ibid., p. 20
Interculturation, in a broad sense of the term, is one of the key elements in two of my novels (Music for Mohini, and Shadow from Ladakh)... Hence, when I saw another dimension of the same idea institutionalised at the East-West Center, I felt pleased... The East-West Center with its unique human content along with the concrete realizing of 'Interculturation' in terms of lifeways has illustrated for me over again what Tagore's Visva-Bharati (World University) envisioned several decades ago. And I value this experience very deeply indeed. Perhaps I may be able to dramatize this stuff of experience in a novel I have in view, tentatively titled A Dream in Hawaii. 52

Another rich experience that Bhattacharya had while at the Center was the response of Americans to lectures and meditation sessions conducted by Indian visiting 'Swamis' and 'Gurus'. Describing one such session Bhattacharya comments:

The place was packed with young people, sitting in the aisles, standing at the rear. Their faces displayed their hunger for spiritual nourishment. 53

It has been Bhattacharya's firm conviction that man does not live by bread alone, and this finds a place in his latest novel, A Dream in Hawaii (1978). Commenting upon the book, he observes:

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52 Shinor, No. 10-21
53 Ibid., p. 21
A Dream in Hawaii ... is a total departure for me, being an American novel – American even in Hawaii. The characters are both Americans and Asians: the setting today. The core concern of the story is the current disenchantment of the Great Society and the intense, and fretful strivings to find an answer to one's life, to find the path of one's self-fulfilment. 54

To find a solution to this kind of problem which people face now, Bhattacharya brings in India's age-old wisdom – the nature of true wisdom as expressed in The Gita. Interpreting the Gita, Bhattacharya says:

What gives the Gita its own individuality is its strong insistence on the establishment of a dynamic equilibrium in the art of living. That equilibrium is essential in both intra-personal and interpersonal relationships, and is the very way to self-fulfilment. Man has to complete his inner image through the work that is specifically his mission in life, the work he is born to do. He has to be true to his own inner image at any cost, in material terms or in terms of struggle – that is the core, the ultimate meaning of 'religion', and all else is illusion. 55

Bhattacharya still continues to write. He is at present engaged in writing a research-based book.

54 Shimer, p. 29

In a recent letter Bhattacharya writes:

I am not writing a novel. I have been engaged on a research project titled "America-India: Some Bridgeways of Thought (1820-1970)". In fact, I went to India last winter in connection with this research; the visit was sponsored by the American Institute of Indian Studies and Indian Council for Cultural Relations. The theme is transcultural communication between the two countries over a period of a century and a half. 56

When such were the diverse and varied influences and experiences that moulded and shaped his philosophy of life, Bhattacharya is unique in assimilating the best and the most vital elements in Western as well as Indian Philosophy to arrive at his own. His is a markedly singular one for it is a synthetic product - a product arrived at through the fusion and blending of divergent sets of values over a life-time of wide and divergent experiences. As a man who has seen life in the widest perspective, he has propounded his philosophy of life in a markedly personal fashion to suit the living conditions of all people, be he an oriental or occidental.

56 Bhattacharya’s letter to me from Manchester dated June 25, 1980 - vide Appendix.
Present Study: Methodology

That a creative artist's works are deeply coloured by the philosophy of life that he espouses is true in the case of Bhattacharya also. Though his philosophy of life is not to be found embodied in a single volume, his ideas can be found embedded or enshrined in his works and essays. Therefore a close examination and study of Bhattacharya's concept of man, society, the world and religion, with 'man' occupying the central position, will help to explicate and even define Bhattacharya's philosophy of life. And hence an attempt has been made in the following chapters to study man, as we find him in Bhattacharya's works, in relation to self, society, the world and religion, to highlight his comprehensive vision of life which is essentially that of a humanist.