CHAPTER IV

HISTORICAL AND THE INDIVIDUAL
As has already been seen in the preceding chapters, art cannot but reflect the historical forces in the milieu wherein, it is written. But the artist's projection of the historical forces has to adhere to the laws of creativity "which transcend the horizons of society only when integrating the hell and paradise of human life into the symbols of the whole." The primacy of the imaginative experience is characterized by immediacy and closeness. Ideology, on the other hand, is general and though intellectually it may be inclusive, it is not easily reconcilable with individual, authentic, imaginative experience. For that reason, it may be so much extraneous matter for the novelist. With an overload of ideology, a novelist is so much more vulnerable but when he succeeds, he reaps for richer dividends. At its best, artistic alchemy generates such intense heat that the ideas it appropriates are melted into human gestures and fused with the emotions of its characters. However, for that ideas have to come to life and be endowed with the capability for moving characters. Rather than being, in Stendhal's phrase, "a pistol shot in the middle of a concert", history in the novel has to be integrated with the patterns of life traced, and has to function as the germinal nucleus of
fermenting the human story. History, thus is to be presented in art through the medium of living men and women and their actions. Thus, keeping this in view, an attempt has been made in this chapter to analyse the works of Bhabani Bhattacharya and Manohar Malgonkar. The most significant in their writings is the fact that both humanise their presentation of novel as history. They represent historical forces in their protagonists who have a human motivation for action. They do not act like puppet. They are rounded characters with individual gesture given to them.

Bhattacharya's novels are peopled with characters who represent significant historical forces. So Many Hungers! has Rahoul, the embodiment of the idealistically inclined youth of the country motivated to purposive action under inspiring leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Kajoli is the personification of the Indian rural populance steeped in the hoary tradition of the land. However, these two are characters in flesh and blood, goaded by personal predilections and predicaments rather than being mere robots put into predictable gestures by their creator. Since their public actions are the outcome of their personal beings, these characters seem credible and acceptable and it is this
humanizing touch in their historical actions that adds to the stature of the novel. So in a way, Bhattacharya is more concerned with the modes of projection of the artist’s convictions about life.\(^3\) Nor does he, the creator of his fictional universe, comment upon the scene or on the doers and their deeds. No where do we come across an impression or statement thrust on the readers or a view presented which goes against the current of action. He does comment in a neutral voice occasionally but the comment does not stand out, it springs effortlessly from the action which occasioned it. In \textit{So Many Hunger!}, Bhattacharya presents starving destitutes who see lots of delicious eatables in the market but far from attacking or grabbing them, they forcibly turn their gaze away.

\begin{quote}
The peasants’ hands were manacled with their antique moral tradition. The rice robbers were safe from peril because of the peasant’s tradition.\(^4\)
\end{quote}

Bhattacharya’s terse comment as an omniscient narrator causes no eyebrows to be raised. It is a comment which is natural and spontaneous in the historical/ideological frame work which is perceptible and as such is acceptable.
Bhattacharya's denunciation of exploitation—political, social or economic—is rendered in human terms and not ideological terms. *So Many Hungers* presents a moving spectacles of persons reeling under economic and political depredation. The political message that self-rule is a must even for individual self-fulfillment is presented not through ideological debate but through Rahoul, the protagonist, who come to realize it on his pulse. Even, what is much more significant is the human touch given to the representatives of the historical forces of villainous hues. The black marketer in *So Many Hungers* has been deftly delineated as an unfortunate growth of the poor adolescent in him (p.216). The character is at one level, a concretization of the historical forces of greed, avarice and exploitation which had raised their heads in the tumultuous period of the Second World War. But rather than presenting these forces as such or through unholy characters whose villainy has no human cause, Bhattacharya in a master-stroke gives such forces a local habitation and a name, and in this process he weaves a gripping tale of intense interest. Likewise the greedy being in Seth Sham Sunder in *A Goddess Named Gold* has also been painted in acceptable and believable
colours. He has also been given the same bare and austere background which has egged him compulsively towards his political ambitious and Machiavillian machinations.

In *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Kalo represents the historical forces of rebellion and restlessness of the down-trodden sections of society during the hectic days of the freedom struggle. But the novelist in Bhattacharya makes him give Kalo a human reason to seek revenge. The rebel in Kalo was born when the proud father in him had to sell, because of rapacious exploitation, the medal his daughter had won. Likewise, the positive character of Biten also has a human side. He just does not represent the sane Gandhian sentiments in abstraction. Behind the reformist in him, fighting against the hegemony of the upper classes, is a repentant brother who had failed to save his sister from putrid orthodoxy and senseless ethnocentricism in a caste-stratified strait jacket of a society. It is by helping the hopeless being in Kalo that the saddened Biten can appease the growing sense of utter impotence and quiet in his innermost being. In *Shadow From Ladakh*, Bhattacharya weaves his narrative so deftly that the human and the historical appear but parts of one
artistic patina. In this novel, ideological is searched in most artistic manner through the particular. The realization of the adequacy of the exclusive, self-abnegating creed in personal life— as Satyajit awakes to the traces of passion in him— preceds the inadequacy of such exclusivism in the domains of economy and politics. Likewise it is the woman in Sumita who wakes up before the theoretician in her succumbs. In Bhaskar, too, it is a personal discontentment with the high-paced technology propped life which pushes him to Satyajitism ideologically.

Bhattacharya projects their characters through historical forces. Satyajit and Bhaskar in Shadow from Ladakh are the embodiment of the Gandhian and the Nehruian way of development respectively. But they are not only the prototypes of historical forces, they are human beings. Both Satyajit and Bhaskar conduct themselves as creature in flesh and blood rather than as "ideological abstractions". Bhattacharya makes the ideological rhetoric of his protagonists consistent and convincing. Satyajit Bhaskar and Sumita pursue the same ideals in both their private and public life. Similar is the case with Jayadev in Music for Mohini. A person like Rahoul in So Many Hunger veering away from sheltered
academics to the fret and fury of national politics, is humanized, and the change in him is presented as the inevitable outcome of his search for self-fulfillment as an individual. What is most credit worthy is the pains taken by Bhattacharya in rounding off to perfection the personality of a minor character like Roopa in *Shadow From Ladakh* by linking her permissive ways with her unhappy childhood and the later experience with a colleague, Wakefield. Her movement to the discovery of the 'Indianness' in her when she realizes that she would not be content to be a mere moment in the life of Bhaskar (p.334) is paralleled by Bhaskar’s movement towards Satyajitism. The synthesis of the two erstwhile contrary ideologies, Satyajitism and Bhaskarism, is accomplished successfully for it is rendered not in doctrinal but in essentially human terms of experience and enlightenment. Roopa and Suruchi, in *Shadow From Ladakh*, with their instinctive attachment of life, learn to hold on to something 'metaphysical', Sumita, tied to abstractions to the detriment of the woman in her, learns to acknowledge the claims of herself in totality. A similar movement towards each other is made by Satyajit and Bhaskar.
In *Shadow From Ladakh* Satyajit, a prototype of Gandhi, behaves in a Gandhian way as a historical force but at the same time, as an individual, human being, he recommends some modification in Gandhism. Thus the novel succeeds in exposing Gandhism as contrary to life. Gandhian non-violence is presented as partly irrelevant and anachronistic, not in cerebral verbiage but through Satyajit's failure to evoke popular response to his 'Shanti' march to Ladakh. It is in a similar vein that the underlying discontent in Bhaskar and Roopa, precipitates the awareness of the inadequacy of purely consumeristic, modernist way of life. *A Dream in Hawaii* is also characterized by an in depth analysis of the inadequacies in Yogananda and Walt who may stand in the readers' mind for the Eastern and the Western modes of living respectively, but they are presented as mortals in the first instance. In that way, the novel becomes an artistic success.

Bhattacharya's characters mark the triumph of the artist in their creator. They are not bundles of ideological platitudes, grinding their maker's axe, but mortals who have psychological compulsions to adopt a particular course of action. They feel the ideological battles on their pulse. They are psychologically
convincing and it is their credible conduct from which he draws ideological conclusions. With the objectivity of an artist Bhattacharya creates both positive and negative heroes, giving them all private motivations for their public deeds. Samarendra Basu from *So Many Hungers*, Kalo and Biten both from *He Who Rides a Tiger*, and Seth Shamsunder from *A Goddess Named Gold*, are obvious examples. Bhattacharya creates no author-surrogates in larger-than-life dimensions to dominate the scene and render covertly what their creator eschews overtly.

Bhattacharya is well aware of the requirement of fictional characters being flesh-and-blood-creations:

...literary art is not black and white. The most heroic character must have his feet on common earth and the dastardly villain, even more difficult to create, needs to be redeemed by the human touch'. Otherwise credibility is lost. The willing suspension of disbelief on the reader's past is withdrawn.

This is what he has to say about the manner in which his characters take birth and develop:

I start with a broad idea of what the people are going to be like. In the process of writing they often become new persons.

Walt Gregson in *A Dream of Hawaii* and Roopa in *Shadow from Ladakh* are the ones depicting such autonomous
growth, going by the creator's own testimony. However, we do have some minor characters who betray the conscious hand of their creator rather than the shaping power of imagination forming them. In *So Many Hungers*, the man who surrenders his food ticket and the woman who bares her bosom for the sake of others fall into this category.

So it can safely be concluded that Bhattacharya doesn't force any character to embody certain principles or ideals at the cost of his flesh-and-blood existence. Even the seeming colossuses are given feet of clay. Devata in *So Many Hungers* has a greedy son, Samarendra; the minstrel in *A Goddess Named Gold* has a wife who nags; Satyajit and Swami Yogananda in *Shadow From Ladakh* and *A Dream in Hawaii* respectively have repressed physical desires, Kajoli in *So Many Hungers* has a weakness for fancy-coloured ribbons (p.87) and the old Mother in *Music for Mohini* has a fascination for English pictures (p.30).

Malgonkar's novels present the novelist's perspective in eminently human rather than philosophic terms. The Malgonkar code is expressed in diverse particular situations and it is through the particular
that the general is expressed at times tacitly, at times not so tacitly. The historical message in Malgonkar's novels is rendered in human terms. While Jugal Kishore in *Combat of Shadows*, represents the pre-independence congress politician, intoxicated with power, Kanak Chand in *The Princes*, Lala Vishnu Saran Dev in *Distant Drum*, Krishna Manikam in *Bandicoot Run* and the Great leader in the *Garland Keepers* present the specter of authoritarianism masquerading under a facade of democracy. Kiran, Abhayraj, Nadkar and Reddy represent the dedicated ones fighting valiantly to stem the rot. Gian's, in *A Bend in the Ganges*, early infatuation with Gandhism is the concertization of an average Indian's affair with the philosophy that had taken the whole country by storm, as Malgonkar sees it. In a similar vein are Deseadyal and Shafi, human actors embodying another historical force-militant nationalism.

In *Combat of Shadows*, Malgonkar presents the story of Winton himself. It is the tale of the failure and death of a man who finds that his public school values and his 'middle-class rectitude', imbibed in England, fail him in his confrontation with the Indian scene. Reading in between the lines one discovers how selfish, dishonest, cowardly and mean Winton is.
Despite the sleight of hand Malgonkar displays in the arrangement of his narrative, *Combat of Shadows* has an effortlessness, a certain inevitability about it. The way in which Winton, lacking in the value comprising the Malgonkar Code goes down, has the inevitability of the denouement of a Greek tragedy. This by implication, facilitates the impression how indispensable these values are for men on offices of importance.

In *A Bend in the Ganges* Gian and Debidayal represent the historical forces of non-violence and violence respectively but both are human beings. What is most remarkable is the manner in which the character of Debi Dayal has been handled to accommodate the historical and the individual side of it. Debi's physical vulnerabilities as a young boy are shown to be directly responsible for his later committedness to the cult of shakti. In this manner the terrorist revolutionary in him is presented as but an extension of the individual dilemma faced by him. Likewise is the case with the later transformation in his character when rather than teaching Shafi Usman a bloody lesson, he himself gets caught in the coils of love. It is in this way that his personal, individual actions become the outward manifestation of the change in his public
stance. His gradual disillusionment with the ever-increasing and self-consuming violence, his growing frustration with those in public life and his disenchantment with the glare of revolutionary politics has deeply affected Debi the public man but it is through his individual self that this change in him is brought forth. At this juncture it would be relevant to refer to the fact that even as regards the change in his public posture, Debi is not an isolated, exceptional case. Even a casual browsing through the books on contemporary Indian history with focus on the direction the Indian freedom struggle took, would reveal the fact that during the mid forties the revolutionary movement based on terrorism had suffered a severe set back during this period with most of its adherents turning away to a state of mental drift. It is this historical change that Debi is made to embody. Malgonakr's success in making flesh-and-blood individuals feel and represent history on their pulse is very much obvious here. It is thus that one can term A Bend in the Ganges as an authentic human chronicle of this particular phase of Indian history.

Coming to Gian Talwar in the same novel, the evaluation of the novel as history is revalidated.
Any discerning student of the Indian history of the first half of this century would be aware of the impact of Gandhi on the national mind but equally true is the fact that for most of the neo-Gandhians the creed was but a fashionable craze to swim with the tide. As quoted by the novelist himself on the very first page of the novel preceding the unfolding of the narrative, Mahatma Gandhi himself had unambiguously questioned the antecedents of most of the people claiming to be Gandhians. It is this historical fact which is sought to be conveyed by Bhattacharya through the character of Gian. Gian is thus another instance of an individual being embodying a historically verifiable abstract force. What is equally noteworthy is that the public posture of Gandhism has been given a rationale, credible in the context of the personal circumstances of Gian Talwar. In this manner, Gian becomes another successful illustration of the rendering of the historical through the individual.

Prince Abhayraj of The Princes is another dimension of the rendering of novel as history, while the historical self of the protagonist gets rendered in a credible manner through the conservative- but-correct stance of the Prince, it is as an individual that the
character fails to perform impressively. His failure in this respect is reminiscent of the failure of Kiran Graud in *Distant Drums*. Both seen just the bundle of platitudes, devoid of the wart that makes a human being possible. Their personal relations with women seem contrived and lacking in the passion that should have characterized people like them. Their rigid stances seem but the result of the promptings of their creator. In this respect they woefully lack the roundedness and vitality of life. It is this failure on the individual front which makes their historical self suspect.

The failure in respect of Kanak Chand of the *The Combat of shadows* belongs to a different category altogether. It is the hostile perspective wherefrom Kanak Chand is viewed that makes his character seem one dimensional. The possibility of an exploited and suppressed individual in Kanak being genuinely motivated by the stirrings of the awakening of freedom is not allowed at all. The blinkered view of the protagonist in a simplistic manner interprets Kanak's character, predictably enough: Kanak is fighting against the Princely order because he has a past score to settle with the Prince. By giving Kanak's public actions a grossly private motivation along these lines
the novel nips in the bud all possibilities of Kanak being given complexity of being.

Not with standing minor blemishes, as outlined herebefore, Bhattacharya and Malgonkar have creditably succeeded in making their novels peopled with characters who have their historical and individual selves as two facets of the same reality, or to put it differently, as two sides of the same coin. By making their fictional characters embody abstract historical forces, by making such beings have individual motivations for personal actions and by making their individual selves as extensions of their public and historical selves, these two novelist have revealed new possibilities of the use of novel as history.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


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