CHAPTER II
SOCIAL MILIEU
Man is the output of his environment. He is governed and guided by it his moods and dispositions are shaped and coloured accordingly. Literature is the reflection of society. A literary man, to a great extent is affected by the society in which he lives. He observes it, understands it and gives it his own vision. Literature, thus may be described as a recorded treasure of literator's observations, impressions, experiences, personal visions and creative impulses. Therefore literature in nothing but the artistic expression of feelings and thoughts of the writer. A literary man is very much a product of his society and his art is also a product of his own reaction to life.

It is essential, therefore, to know the "Social Milieu" in order that a writer can be appreciated only when we have a proper understanding of the age, the social, economic, cultural and the literary conditions of the age in which he was born, brought up and wrote. These conditions are liable for the natural 'make-up' of his mind because no mind can ever be free from the current and cross-currents of his age. It is not possible to assess the social realism of Fakirmohan as well as Bhattacharya's fiction without taking into consideration the complex forces interacting during their period. The social cultural and political scenes of their period must be judged to have an estimate of the same.

While studying the social milieu of Fakirmohan "one must start with a brief account of Orissa in the 19th century. It is necessary not only because this will provide a background to Fakirmohan's life and works, but also because Orissa and its people and their problems were the main concern and the core of Fakirmohan's writings."¹

Fakirmohan Senapati was a true patriot and nationalist, a reformer, a visionary and one of the greatest men and unforgettable celebrity Orissa has ever produced. He shone in the Orissan sky like a burning sun giving light and warmth to his dear Oriyas.

Fakirmohan was born in one of the darkest period of Orissan history. He was born on the 14th of January, 1843 at Balasore in Orissa and breathed his last there on 14th of June, 1918 at the age of seventy-five. The time when he was born can be said to be the period of darkness, despondency and despair seething under imperial rule in Orissa. Orissa had lapsed into the "Dark Ages" and had become a "Dark Continent". Fourteen years later of his birth the tragedy of 'Sepoy Mutiny' threatened to shake the British influence in India. At that time modern western inventions had barely gained a foot hold in India. Roads, railways and telecommunications were a dream and schools were a far cry in wilderness. Poverty was universal and illiteracy wide spread. Chitta Ranjan Das describes thus:

There was so little communication between the various regions in Orissa and besides, there was also distances of mind. Even the writers of one region did not know their compatriots in another region.  

So the Oriyas knew very little of any land but their own. The feeling of caste was deep rooted. "In school the children of untouchables used to sit a little away from the children of higher caste." The Bible was the only printed book avalilable in Oriya. There was a missionary school at Balasore where the Bible was being taught. "No Hindu Children would attend for fear of losing caste by reading that printed book." The Hindu society was so much orthodox that even

3. FAKIRMOHAN GRANTHABALI, p.4, trans. by the researcher.
during Great Famine of Orissa (1866) the people who ate at the relief centres were outcasted. In his *Atma Jiván Charita* Fakirmohan narrates thus:

The following year there were adults and children of both sexes wandering the streets with no where to go. They had been outcasted by Hindu society for having eaten at the relief centres. The Christian missionaries lovingly lifted them up into their arms, cherished them like sons and educated and trained them.\(^5\)

The function of a writer is to hold the mirror to life—his personal life as well as the society around him. Fakirmohan's literature reflects his time so faithfully and beautifully that a student of history can easily reconstruct it. Orissa stood then between two ages, one dead and the other yet to be born.

The very birth of Fakirmohan was in an inhospitable milieu. His parents had died before he was three years old. His forefathers who had fought for the Marathas against the British enjoyed certain Jagirs in form of landed property but had lost their valuable ancestral lands due to simplicity and innocence of his grand-mother, Kuchila Dei.

Fakirmohan's childhood was full of pain and suffering. He suffered from jaundice, looked pale and sickly. The miserable child was brought up under proper care of his affectionate grand-mother without who his survival as a child would have been impossible. The doting grand mother under the prevalent local religious belief, promised to turn him a Fakir, a Muslim saint if he could escape from probable death which he had suffered in his childhood. By God's grace the child slowly recovered from illness. So, in order to fulfil his grand-mother's promise the child adapted the life of a Fakir for few years and thus assumed the

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name 'Fakirmohan' by dropping his original name 'Braja Mohan'. The struggles of his life has been frankly described by Fakirmohan.

Fakirmohan's first wife Lilavati whom he had married at the age of 13 was "cruel, adment and quarrelsome." as a result of which his conjugal life was bitter and full of unhappiness. Fakirmohan narrates in his autobiography, "my married life was more painful to me than the diseases of childhood." His grand mother, Kuchila Dei who had all along been a source of inspiration to him breathed her last in 1867. The passing away of the doting grand-mother was like a bolt from the blue for Fakirmohan.

Fakirmohan had to marry again after the death of his first wife. His second wife, Krushna Kumari was an ideal housewife and an inspiring angel making their conjugal life happier and blissful. Fakirmohan himself had written, he started writing for the entertainment of his wife and to forget his own miseries. Misery and melancholy still goaded him. The first child died quite young. When Krushna Kumari died in 1894 Fakirmohan was full of remorse and grief-stricken and wrote poems in memory of his beloved wife just to provide solace to his disturbed mind.

Balasore, the birth place of Fakirmohan was a very important place at that time. It is in the northern bordering district of the state of Orissa on the eastern coast of India. It is now encircled by Midnapore district of the state of West Bengal on the north; hills and forests of Keonjhor and Mayurbhanj district on the West and the Bay of Bengal on the east. These multiformerous nature of the surrounding must have influenced the very life of Fakirmohan, which is evident from his autobiography as well as the short-stories like 'Baleshwari Panga Luna', 'Kalika

Prasad Gorap' and 'Kamala Prasad Gorap'.

Amarendra Kar describes the importance of Balasore thus:

Balasore was also a centre for manufacture of large and small sea-going vessels; design and manufacture of different size of 'sails' for these sea-going vessels were also being undertaken here. Due to the strategic position of the place and harbour facilities, English, French, Portuguese and Dennis Merchants, when they came to India, preferred to build up their business houses (headquarters) at this place. Large scale production of salt to the tune of nine lakhs maunds per year along the coast was the other important industry till 1863 A.D., when the English rulers banned and stopped it by force and under promulgation of law.\(^8\)

Thus Balasore, the birth-place of Fakirmohan has a rich tradition and cultural heritage of its own. Balasore was famous in those days being the most potential port on the eastern sea coast. Senapatê describes the increase and decrease of the fortune of Balasore seaport thus:

Balasore was well-known not only in India but all over Europe as a port and mart. Before they settled down in Bengal, the Danish, the French and the British traders opened their trading stations at Balasore. But fortune change, rise and fall being the law of life. And Balasore seems to prove this to the hilt.\(^9\)

Fakirmohan further describes this with a sorrowful heart, "It was unfortunate, not only for Balasore, but for whole of Orissa, that only too soon arrived orders arrived prohibiting salt manufacture and abolishing the entire concerned department. Orissa's goddess of prosperity left her soil to settle at distant Liverpool and other places of England."\(^10\)

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10. Ibid., p.9.
Thus during the first part of British administration the profitable salt manufacturing industries and other native industries were severely hindered as a result of which the economic condition of the state became more unstable and deplorable.

This was indeed an unlucky accident not only for Balasore but for Orissa as well. When Fakirmohan was sixty-four years old in 1907 he had published a true account of the forgotten salt manufacture of the past in Balasore. He has narrated how its very abolition resulted great financial loss for the Oriyas and its very continuance surely have fetched prosperity for them.

The critic and poet Mansinha observes, “nearly half a century before the salt became a symbol of human rights in India’s war of freedom under Mahatma Gandhi, Fakirmohan had raised his lone voice for the revival of salt manufacture in India.”

Fakirmohan reflects the life of the then Oriyas in his autobiography where he says:

Behind the show of wealth lie levers and brakes on our whole economic life controlled entirely by outsiders. And not the merchants alone but all the big officers in various government department also, are from other lands. Oriyas cannot even dream of a single job in the railway that runs through their land. Agriculture remains the sole means of sustenance of the Oriyas.

The dominance of the Bengalis over Oriyas was quite intolerable, “Bengalis held all the higher, non-European Posts in every single Government Department in Orissa. Their soul aim was to abolish Oriya and introduce Bengali in their departments. Whenever a post fell vacant they

12. Ibid., p.9.
strove to get a Bengali appointed.\(^{13}\)

The boundary of education in Orissa was almost without protection and decoration. From southern parts, the wandering teachers visit the north and start teaching their pupils in the so called Pathasalas opened on the verandahs of the well-to-do in the village. They taught alphabets to pupils for sometime and would return to their native lands in the beginning of rainy season. There was no printing press at all. The number of readers and writers were few and far between. The higher authorities in charge of education department were sceptical about the existence of Oriya as a language.

Fakirmohan attended school at the age of nine. After being coached by a village teacher Fakirmohan studied at Barabati school. Fakirmohan was a brilliant student and had never stood second in his class. But his school days ended soon because his uncle-cum-guardian, Lakhmana Charan being jealous of his nephew’s overwhelming success in the class refused to pay his school fees which was not more than four annas per month in those days. Due to betrayal of his uncle he was constrained under circumstances to discontinue his primary education and thus experienced the first pricks of pain in his early childhood. He was then completed to join his family business of ship building at Balasore sea port. Fakirmohan was very unfortunate to receive even the primary education in school which remained an unfulfilled desire in his life. English education became a dream for him. On the other hand to be deprived of this education was a blessing in disguise for him.

As a young boy he was in the midst of an unfavourable milieu that was very real, odd and rude. He had suffered a lot but it can be said that his suffering was not a punishment rather a part of the process of his evolution as a writer.

There was a Persian school at Balasore which taught freely to its pupils. Besides teaching, instructions were imparted how to write letters to one’s relation as well as appeal to law-courts.

Persian being the court language all legal transactions were executed in that language. The European officers used to sign in English only. Later on English and Oriya were used in courts in lieu of Persian. Gradually the importance of Persian started declining.

Fakirmohan’s knowledge in Persian perhaps generated in him a sense of fellow feeling for the muslim community which is evident from his novel Lachhama. Being sold to a Fakir in his childhood by his grandmother might too have generated in him a soft corner for Islamic religion.

Fakirmohan had marked the gradual decline of Islamic culture in India. Probably he could foresee a similar decline of western culture in distant future. When Fakirmohan was engaged to a notary public in the Salt Department, he could adjust his time in learning Bengali as well as Sanskrit from different teachers. His hunger for knowledge remained with him till the last breath of his life.

Fakirmohan didn’t forget to learn Telugu while he was at Tekkali of Andhra Pradesh for sometime though in age he had already crossed fifty years by that time, and his knowledge in English is indeed an intellectual adventure. Fakirmohan describes in his autobiography that with his personal effort he studied English and the knowledge which he gained helped him in later life through out his administrative as well as public career. For a person like him to possess mastery over this language without being taught by any teacher in true sense of the term is indeed an incredible achievement.

In later life though Fakirmohan had criticized English education and its evil impact upon the educated youth he had never been critical
of English language. He had rather softness in his heart for this language. Fakirmohan didn't know this language before he was twenty-three years old. A peculiar incident in his life urged him to learn this language. His self respect was once undermined by the behaviour of an orderly. "For an English - ignorant native Pundit, he however was a man to reckon with the city of Balasore, respected even by foreigners for his innate brilliance of mind. But piqued on one occasion by a European officer's orderly, he started learning English, the royal language immediately."

His love for English language is also evident from his mild remark on his visit to Vanavidyalaya at Sakshigopal in his old age where he came in touch with the young learners. He jokingly spoke "I am an ignorant man, you all know. What about my becoming a student here at your feet, to start the A.B.C. of the English language."  

During his teens he had the experience of working in the Salt Department but was retrenched like other workers due to abolition of this Department from Balasore. While wandering about the office premises in vacant or in pensive mood fortune smiled on him. Though he didn't have necessary qualification to be a teacher he was at once picked up for this job in an institution where he was once a student. His salary was two rupees and a half per month which seems to be laughable these days. Soon after he justified his potentiality as a successful teacher and was promoted to the rank of a Headmaster of the mission school in 1864.

During this period of 'Fakirmohan's life as school teacher, Orissa was undergoing rapid changes in social and cultural spheres. Fakirmohan was not only influenced by such changes he was also instrumental in bringing about some of them."  

15. Ibid., p.83.
Fakirmohan became interested in journalism and installed the first printing machine at Balasore in midst of great difficulties. With Fakirmohan's initiative the printing machine was set up on a joint stock basis in 1868 and the first press was known as P. M. Senapati and Co. Utkal Press. Rich and poor came from far and near in carts and palanquins to see its operation. "Rightly did Radhanath, the poet, publicly declare later on that even the fact alone of Senapati's setting up a printing press at Balasore on co-operative line would have immortalised his name in the history of modern Orissa." With the establishment of the press, he also started publication of two journals, Bodhadavini and Balasore Sambada Bahika the former was devoted to literature and the latter to news and comments. He published these journals in order to propagate his modern views and carry on a non-stop battle against national wrongs.

To meet the shortage of text books in Oriya Fakirmohan wrote and published books on history, grammar, arithmetics and translated the biography of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar from Bengali. This is the first phase of his literary activities which was primarily devoted to translations and adaptions. During this phase, he also translated seven cantos of the Ramayan, four cantos of the Mahavarat, Sreemad Bhagabat Geeta and Haribansa and some Upanisads. In simple and idiomatic Oriya he had thus exhibited his potentiality as a translator. While Fakirmohan was reciting his translations of the Ramayan before his beloved wife Krushna Kumari remarked, "Why should we weep for our last son? This book is our son; it will preserve our names for ever." Besides satisfying his wife, the very translation of the Ramayan, Mahavarat and Upanisads fulfilled the urgent spiritual needs of the Oriyas. The objective behind this sincere effort was to inculcate old values in the new generation and at the same time to glorify his mother-tongue which was undermined to be a poor language.

17. Mayadhars Mansinha, FAKIRMOHAN SENAPATI, p. 18. 
18. FAKIRMOHAN GRANTHABALI, p. 47. trans. by the researcher.
Fakirmohan had the privilege of being a Bengali and Oriya teacher to John Beames, the then Collector and District Magistrate of Balasore. The British civilian had softness for Oriya language. Fakirmohan's acquaintance and friendship with John Beames was of immense help to him which is remembered by Fakirmohan in glowing terms. It was indeed a turning point in his life.

Beams being a linguist was writing a comparative grammar of Indian languages. Thus Fakirmohan's knowledge of Oriya, Sanskrit and Bengali stood him in good stead in assisting John Beame in writing this book. Beams was so much impressed on the mental brilliance of Fakirmohan that he had acted for him as his guardian angel. Beams advised him to resign from teachership and opt for administrative career. On his suggestion Fakirmohan gave up his job and became the Assistant Manager of Nilgiri, a small state of Orissa at the age of 28. Subsequently he too served in the capacity of an administrator in various states and estates of Orissa like Dompada, Dhenkanal, Daspalla, Pallahara, Keonjhor and Kendrapara and retired in 1892, having a great deal of experience in public administration. Being an administrator he had observed and experienced men, women and their mutual contacts and conflicts. "And it is these observations that later filled his stories and novels making them so vibrant with life." Fakirmohan's vast and wide experience enabled him to identify himself with the masses and spoke of their longing and aspirations. Therefore his writing include people from all walks of life. "Fakirmohan's novels and short stories present a gallery of living men and women who are unsurpassed for their realism and vitality and have in them that divine spark, given only by great masters of literature to their creations, which not only make them live for ever but seem more living than living men and women."  

The years of administration were very significant in his life because he was far away from the suffering of his early life and lived in considerable richness. The spark of creativity in him was ignited during this period.

"Before writing his prose work he had written a lot of poetry for which he was known as ‘Vyasa Kavi’ but his fame as a writer rests on his prose work."\textsuperscript{21}

The poetic phase of Fakirmohan's literary activity continued till 1897. In 1892, his long poem "Utkala Bhramana" was published which carried the stamp of his originality. This poem was written while Fakirmohan was travelling on an elephant on government tour.

Poetry is not the real assessment of Fakirmohan's literary excellence. Yet his anthology of poems "Pushpamala", "Upkar", "Avasarabasare", "Pujaphula", "Prathana" and "Dhuli" reflect his depth of sincerity and naive simplicity. Some of his poems express social awareness which he had realised in his life time.

His \textit{Atma Jivan Charita}, auto-biography is also his literary success and is stranger than fiction. Like stories and novels it is also a delightful book. His four novels \textit{Chha Mana Atha Guntha} (Six and one third acres of land) in 1898, \textit{Lachhama} in 1903, \textit{Mamu} (The Maternal Uncle) in 1913, and \textit{Prayaschitta} (Atonement) in 1915 explore the social realities on a large scale and reflect the social, political and cultural conditions in an extensive backdrop of eighteenth and nineteenth century Orissa. His presentation of ordinary men and women with their hunger for various objectives, their greed, pride, aspiration, social customs and traditions are quite moving and realistic. Among his novels \textit{Chha Mana Atha Guntha} is unique and his masterpiece and shines like the

\textsuperscript{21} \textbf{EYE TO ORISSA}, p. 89
pole star in the literary sky of Orissa. It continues to be Fakirmohan's most widely read and discussed novel even after a century. "The novel was first serialised in Utkal Sahitya from 1897 under the pseudonym Dhurjati and completed and published in a book form in 1902."22

Regarding serialisation of regional novels in India T. R. Sharma tell us:

The twentieth century witnessed the emergence of the novel as a distinct form in vernacular languages. The novel writing got a boost with the publication of periodicals and magazines in which novels were serialised.23

Thus Chha Mana Atha Guntha was serialised and took time for its publication in the form of a book. His second popular novel Mamu was written in the last part of his life. It has its greatness too. Prayashchitta is also a successful social novel which reflects the conflicts generated by the clash of two different Karan castes in their traditional structure. Lachhama is nothing but a historical romance which reflects the state of lawlessness during Maratha attack in Orissa. Majority of the characters are non-Oriyas and the very propensity to write this novel might be due to the writer's consciousness of history.

The total number of stories written by Fakirmohan now available is twenty. Fakirmohan started writing stories at the age of forty-five. Some of his stories tell us his intimate knowledge of human psychology. The stories which deal with social, political and cultural life of Orissa reflect the period of transition from old to the new. His stories reflect human misery, suffering, hopes and hopelessness, fraud, sacrifice and simplicity of men and women. Among the short-stories "Rebati" is Fakirmohan's master piece. His "Randipua Ananta (Anta, the Widow's

son), Patent Medicine, Suna Bohu (The Ideal Daughter-in-law), Dhulia Baba (The Dusty Fakir), Dak Munsi (The Postmaster) are beautiful stories in Oriya literature.

'Lachhamania' is the first short-story written by Fakirmohan. Although it was published 1868 in the local magazine called "Bodhadayini" it is our misfortune that it still remains untraced. "If discovered it will have the credit of having been the first modern short story in the whole of India." 24

His wide range and contact with people of various walks of life, social and local experience, observation and knowledge about man and society stood him in good stead in making Fakirmohan a successful short-story writer. The stories though few in number point to specific realities of life. His Autobiography gives us a glimpse of social conditions and living history of his life time. It not only mirrors his personal life but also the contemporary scenario and the linguistic controversies prevalent at that time. Thus Fakirmohan comes out as an outstanding personality during Renaissance Orissa. He was also a great leader of Oriya people at a most critical period of Orissan history. The devotion and determination with which he steered the destiny of the people of Orissa has few parallels. The great man representing all that is best in Orissan thought and character had done much to make his people and language more truely understood by the people of Orissa. With his talent he gave the Oriya prose a distinct shape and made it a medium for creative work and attracted large number of readers in Orissa on account of his display of life against the background of Orissa.

There was no major field of literary activity which has not been explored and enriched by his daring spirit. "Being a pioneer in the field of creative literature including poems, stories and novels, it is mainly through his fiction that he achieves undiminished glory. Stories and Nov-

Chha Mana Atha Guntha, Mamu and Prayashchitta are Fakirmohan's social canvasses. They are noted for their current of high morality, deep realism and native language.

Fakirmohan is well accepted as an intellectual in Orissan society who had the consciousness and deep experience of 19th century Orissa and projected it in his writing very honesty. According to Sunil Gangopadhaya, "He was a prolific writer and gave Oriya literature a distinctive character by liberating it from the dominant influence of the literature next door. When Bankim was writing historical novels and love stories of the elite, Fakirmohan was writing about the ordinary people at the lower levels of society." Although the noted Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra is Fakirmohan's contemporary, the farsightedness and original writings of Fakirmohan can be taken for granted to be progressive and very much modern. With his vision and inventive power he created new ideas and new ways of expression. Like an undying flame Fakirmohan's literature is illuminating even today.

The 19th century in Orissan context is very important because the sociological set up was very much affected by the political climate of Orissa. In 1803 the conquest of Orissa was achieved by the Britishers. In order to strengthen their hold over the land they decentralised the vast region of Orissa and amalgamated it into adjoining provinces. Thus the people of Orissa were dominated and influenced by the people of other regions and the cultural identity of an Oriya was almost lost. However Fakirmohan braved the situation like a general of


the battle justifying his very title 'Senapati', in the battle for self-pride as an Oriya and enjoyment of freedom in the political and cultural direction. He dedicated himself to the cause of his mother-tongue. He fought for this language and the literature he had produced served best the cause of the Oriya society. The world of his fiction is an echo of Oriya society and the inventive power of Fakirmohan was in harmony with the "social realism" in the context of Oriya society.

Fakirmohan had varied experience which he had gained directly from the facts of life. The different spheres of life have enriched his experience which he had projected in his fiction presenting 'social realism' more credible. Fakirmohan's materials are the people seen around, pleasure and suffering of the common men commonly experienced, events and incidents occurring. Khageswar Mohapatra, a critic on Fakirmohan rightly comments:

There might not be technical artistry of remodelling Oriyas in Orissa in imitation of life in Greece, Rome, England or America or of exploring an image of the Oriyas through the vision of the European intellect. But there occurs in his works an authentic probe of the autonomous life style of the Oriya people.

Fakirmohan's thoughts and ideas are the consequence of his involvement in the political and social issues of his time. His social philosophy is deep rooted in three hundred years of history.

The modern state of Orissa came into existence on April 1, 1936. Before it was constituted as such, the conditions of the Oriyas were full of pathos and suffering. The very misfortune for the people of Orissa had begun with the loss of her independence in 1568 A.D. The people of Orissa became victim to the maladministration of Afghans, Mugals and

Marathas respectively and were subjected to sheer humiliation and gross exploitation. British occupied Orissa in 1803. Orissa vehemently resisted British occupation right from the beginning. "How ever, the defective land revenue system and the administrative vagaries of the British rulers continued to cause discontent among the people and as a result, there broke out a rebellion known as the Paik Rebellion of 1817. This is recognised as the first war of Oriya nationalism. The life of an Orissa in the past was remarkable and full of achievements but unfortunately the present is without identity and full of suffering. The Rebellion of 1817 is a very very significant event in the history of Orissa." It deserves special mention that long before the Freedom Movement started in the country in 1857 it had its beginning on the soil of Orissa as early as the opening of the 19th century."29

Long before Indian’s first war independence in 1857, Orissa’s Paik Rebellion of 1817 and the Ghumsar Rebellion of 1835 had given severe jolts to the British administration. The Oriyas who went against the British with patriotic fervor were mercilessly quelled and some of the leaders were even publicly hanged. Apprehensive of impending rebellions in future and the revengeful attitude against the Oriyas and tightening their hold over the land, the British decentralized the vast regions of Orissa.

"In the wake of the British rule, Orissa was dismembered and Oriya speaking tracts were annexed to the neighbouring Madras Presidency, the Central Provinces and Bengal Presidency, for administrative convenience in complete disregard to the racial, linguistic and cultural integrity of an ancient people. Politically, economically, educationally and in matters of communication, Orissa was the most neglected region and became the fertile ground for exploitation by outsiders."30 Thus, as a

28. EYE TO ORISSA , p.30
29. Ibid., p.31.
province Orissa had no territorial status of her own. When the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 shook the British foundation in India, Orissa unhesitatingly dived into the main stream.

During its administration Orissa was under the grip of a devastating famine known as 'Na Anka' (9th regnal year of the king of Puri) in 1866 in which lot of men, women and children passed away of starvation as well as epidemic and left a deep scar on the people and land. The economic backbone of Orissa was totally shattered. The book EYE TO ORISSA describes the various factors responsible for the outbreak of this great famine in Orissa:

A failure of rain in 1865 resulted in the loss of usual crops and brought about a catastrophic famine in 1866-67 which led to the death of about one million people in Orissa, gross negligence, indifferent administration, lack of communication and inadequate attention caused at least one man in every three in Orissa to die in famine.\[31\]

Ravenshaw Sahib, the then Commissioner of Orissa was misguided by psychophants and his indifference and apathy to the gravity of the situation increased the misery of the famine-stricken people and lakhs of people were victimized. Report of the Famine Commissioner of 1878 is described thus:

The local Government and officials not taking alarm and misconceiving the gravity of the occasion, abstained from making special enquiries; prices long remained so moderate that they offered no temptation to importers and forced no reduction in consumption on the inhabitants, till suddenly the province was found to be almost bare of food.\[32\]

The Great Famine of 1866 is in deed very memorable and unforgettable incident in Fakirmohan's life in which he himself was a

\[31\] EYE TO ORISSA, p.31.
\[32\] Report of the Famine Commission of 1878, quoted in Buckland's Bengal under the Lieutenant Governers* p.329 Quoted from Fakirmohan Granthabali, p.17.
part. Fakirmohan describes vividly his horrible experiences in his *Atma Jiban Charita* thus:

One could sight ten to twenty persons on the top of the trees like monkeys devouring green leaves. And wherever you looked you could see people reduced to bone and skin, skeletons with sunken eyes. Young daughter-in-laws of once-affluent houses roamed the streets with barely a torn cloth round their waist and with two pieces of wrinkled dangling skin on their breasts - the symbol of vanished motherhood. Some of them had children in their arms, and they were only bone and skin with their mouths sucking at the leathery breasts. It was difficult to know whether the children were alive or dead. Towards the month of Chaitra, the figures of death rapidly increased. There were dead bodies on the streets, by the roadside, at the banks of ponds, almost everywhere.  

The famine is the greatest reality in Fakirmohan’s life as he himself had witnessed the dying crops and the dying men with his own eyes. His prayer to the Almighty to prevail upon the hungry mass in such a crisis reveals his nobility and commitment to men which never kept himself away from the cross-currents of social life.

After the great famine the British Government under moral compulsion was obliged to pay some attention towards the development of famine affected area as a compensatory measure. According to the narration of Dr. P. K. Mishra:

Establishment of more school, college and Vernacular press which followed in rapid succession during the commissioner-ship of T.E. Ravenshaw generated political consciousness among the elite class. A distinct awakening among the Oriya speaking people asserting their rights as the sons of the soil and claiming due justice for legitimate claims was soon observed. The affinity of language and the cohesive forces of one common culture created

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Thus the people of Orissa were awakened to this new reality and pined for their own identity. Some of the Oriya intellectuals took it as a challenge and tried to free their motherland from subjugation, ignorance, illiteracy and language crisis. Though the scope for modern education was not wide yet the Oriya renaissance of the late 19th century was remarkable in the history of Orissa.

The Oriya speaking tracts which were amalgamated into adjoining provinces for administrative convenience by the British not only destroyed the national unity but produced adverse effect on Oriya language. Oriya was looked upon as a minority language in adjoining provinces and had to compete with other languages. Hindi or Bengali Masters knowing Hindi or Bengali ruled the people of Orissa. "Language is the most important unifying factor and it forges unbreakable bond among the groups of people. This bond had led to creation of various contiguous territories according to the languages spoken by them. Any attempt to break this bond and destabilize the pattern causes grievous wounds which continue to bleed unless healed up." 35

Bengalis like Kantilal Bhattacharya and Rajendralal Mitra made statement against Oriya language and said that Oriya was not at all a language and the continued existence of this language would be a constant impediment to the progress of Orissa. Some of the Bengalis were of the opinion that "Orissa was a part of Bengal and also that Criya language was just a dialect of Bengali and thus could be assimilated into the latter." 36 Thus certain non-oriyas tried their best to do away with

36. A Glimpse into Oriya Literature, p.154
Oriya language and literature from the school curriculum of Orissa. Instead Bengali language was to be imposed in schools and offices in Orissa and Bengali teachers were to be recruited to teach the pupils in the schools. Thus Oriya as a language was in an alarming stage and on the verge of extinction. Fakirmohan had to face mockery daily in this regard. Despite the depressing situation, the enthusiasm and zeal of Fakirmohan for the cause of his language was so strong that it couldn't be suppressed by such anti-Oriya attitude. “Fakirmohan became one of the leaders of the ‘Save Oriya’ movement which ultimately succeeded in preventing Bengali replacing Oriya in schools and offices.”

The ‘Utkal Deepika’ (1867) acted as a torch bearer, towards the regeneration of Oriya language, literature and culture and fought for the participation in local administration. As a self-respecting, conscious and sensible Oriya, Fakirmohan could not drift himself away from this unfortunate predicament in which the Oriya speaking people suffered. He had understood his society well. Being a genius he played an important role in the cultural renaissance of Orissa.

The movement began in 1868 and Fakirmohan breathed his last in 1918. For full fifty years “Fakirmohan Senapati stood at the centre. The development of the national life in Orissa was almost parallel to the successes in the personal life of Fakirmohan Senapati.”

Personalities like Madhusudan Rao, Radhanath Ray, Madhusudan Das and Gouri Sankar Roy were though well versed in Bengali yet they were very faithful and devoted to the soil of Orissa. Orissa being the land of Lord Jagannath ‘tolerence’ and ‘acceptance’ are precious virtues of Oriyas.

The nationalism which moved forward in Bengal in the 19th century, flowed chiefly from ultra Hindu pride expressed in rough and noisy communalism and intolerance "...Orissa, however, was untainted by such arrogance and communalism. There regardless of race or creed, Bengalis, Marathas and Oriyas, Hindu, Muslims and Christians, all played their part in a united, national movement, for the people of Orissa the important thing was that all should acknowledge Oriya as their mother-tongue and Orissa as their mother-land." The cult of Lord Jagannath unites all religions and there is hardly any caste distinction. Though during British administration Orissa was dissected into several parts, yet by her own efforts she retained her unity.

Had Bengali been introduced in the school curriculum of Orissa this would have generated Bengali Babus in all offices. Oriya language would have died for ever and the status of the Oriya people would have jeopardised and certainly degraded ".........Fakirmohan was by this time becoming a nationalist; and in deed Oriya nationalist movement dates from the activities of Gouri Sankar Ray and Fakirmohan Senapati at this period."  

At the outset the Oriya nationalist movement was language and literature oriented. Hence it is obvious that the very success of the movement depended mainly upon language as well as literature. Leaders in this regard worthy to be mentioned were Fakirmohan Senapati and Gouri Sankar Roy.

Language Crisis led to national revival which in turn generated an age of cultural renaissance with the growth of modern Oriya literature. Publication of journals and periodicals enlightened the people with contemporary ideas.

40. Ibid, P11.
The literary activities of writers like Fakirmohan, Radhanath produced a driving force to Oriya literature. An Oriya literary activity and revival was accepted as a new recognition of the period through the writings of Madhusudan Das, Bishwanath Kar, Ramsankar Ray, Nanda Kishore Bal and Gangadhar Meher.

The language agitation later on metamorphosed itself into a political movement embracing all Oriya speaking tracts under one unity on 1 April, 1936. In this regard Fakirmohan had lot of contribution but he was unfortunate that he couldn't live long to witness the creation of Orissa as a province.

Of course, the role of 'Utkal Sammilani' under the leadership of Madhusudan Das, popularly known as Madhu Babu is unique. "The most commendable contribution of Madhusudan was organisation of the 'Utkal Union Conference' or 'Utkal Sammilani' on 30th September, 1903 which becomes the Socio-political Organisation through which Oriya nationalism found a proper formula for expression," 41 According to Justice S.N. Phukan", In reality the Utkal Sammilani was a splendid organisation of the Oriyas, which did not have a comparable in any other part of India at that time. In the very first session of the Sammilani, resolutions were passed to explore ways and means for improving Oriya literature and to revive the Orissa's arts and crafts." 42 Fakirmohan had the privilege of presiding over the 1918 session of Utkal Sammilani (Utkal Union Conference).

The 'Social Realism' of Fakirmohan's fiction can be judged in relation to his vivid description of social situation and social beings. The social significance of his work is beautifully magnified due to complete

integration of plot and character with the cultural and social situation i.e. the milieu. For example, "A character like Champa in Chha Mana Atha Guntha was a predictable outcome of the 19th century feudal society." She not only reflects the people of her own category but a social characteristic which implied other classes too.

Fakirmohan's social novels are a product of society in transition. It is not that he was writing during the period of transition but he was also quite alert to the process of transition itself. He wrote as a response to the challenge.

During 18th and 19th century and now-a-days too the Criya society is basically village oriented. To a large extent Fakirmohan had portrayed that society in his fiction.

Orissa being mainly an agricultural society the economy of his time was also agriculture oriented. During British administration, the tenancy law was changed as a result of which the traders and businessmen could invest their resources in accumulating land. The zamindars being in possession of vast amount of land were very powerful men in the society. The zamindars were very proud of their heritage. There was gradual decline of old aristocracy with the emergence of new land owners. These upstart land owners had neither any background of their own nor any sympathy or moral responsibility towards others.

The British introduced a law by which land belonging to landholders who had defaulted in payment of rent, was to be auctioned at Calcutta. Landholders in Orissa could not keep track of these auctions and land passed into the hands of Bengalis, mostly petty officials and clerks under the East India Company. Bengalis were the main work force of the com-

43. Khageswar Mohapatra, p.70.
pany administration in Orissa and they now became landlords too.

The legal system was never simple rather complicated for the lay man. The poor people were duped into expensive litigation. Such prevalent legal system bred nothing but social parasites in shape of lawyers. Lands could pass on from one man to another without being late. The poor and innocent were victimized by clerks, police and even by government servants holding minor posts and in the process they were reduced to poverty. These persons were privileged class of people by virtue of holding government posts.

During Fakirmohan's time the coming up of middle class with the decline of feudal culture finds its echo in his novel *Mamu*. The middle class had put its two legs one on the village and the other on the town. One comes across glimpses of urban life which was just emerging. Cuttack was the then only town worth mentioning. It was said to be mini-Calcutta and was just emerging as a centre of urban culture. Cuttack was the commercial as well as cultural nerve centre of Orissa.

Fakirmohan lived at Cuttack during 1896-1905 and therefore had direct experience of the new pattern of life and the social values. He observed two new classes of people i.e. the official class and the newly created riches. "The new education gave exaggerated importance to the English language which led to the development of social gulf between the educated Indian and the masses. This education was greatly divorced from the real life of the Indian people and problems."\(^44\) It glorified and idealized the British rule and depreciated India's past instead of giving a critical scientific appraisal of it. "All this further prompted the educated Indians to disorient from Indian

people, to feel himself identified with the ruling nation and harbour a contempt for common people."

The traditional cultural values slowly waned with the assimilation of foreign cultural values. The Indians who received English education aped the British mannerism and failed to keep in memory their own cultural heritage. This milieu or sociological phase is discernable in the last part of 19th century during Fakirmohan's life time and beautifully presented in his novel *Mamu*.

The character Nazir Natabar Das's appearance and villainous activities gives evidence to the historically new ruling class in the changed socio-political situation is in deed a striking feature worth noticing.

The western education brought to bear upon the Indian mind a revolutionary change. Disintegration slowly crept into Oriya Samaj, as a result of which the impact of caste was slowly losing into rigidity. Being a realist Fakirmohan had tried to express the thoughts and sentiments of human mind which are very much linked and conditioned by the age. This finds its reflection in his last novel *Prayaschitta*.

"Taken as a whole, the novels of Fakirmohan cover about a century of pre-British and post British Orissa. The gradual metamorphosis is clearly visible in his pages to any student of sociology."

Besides loving Oriyas, Fakirmohan had a great love and understanding of the country people of India. He sincerely cherished an independent India free from domination of foreign powers who were exploiting Indians. He was a critic of colonisation and British imperialism. "While

criticising the British, Fakirmohan does not mince words, something no other contemporary writer of Orissa had done.  

His biting satire against the British is revealed from the following description in Chha Mana Atha Guntha:

A Cormorant would even be seen now on the high bank, spreading its wings in the sun in excellent contentment, as Memsaibs do in their evening gowns on the eve of a party, Oh ye humble herons of India, see how the English cormorants fly across distant seas to our land and return gleefully with their erstwhile empty pockets filled with excellent fish, while you fools, who live on the boughs of trees standing close to this tank fail to get more than a few of the small fry after hard day-long struggles.

The above para which reflects the benefit of British and the loss of the Indians justifies the political implication and patriotic spirit of Fakirmohan Senapati. The Noble prize in literature by Vishwakavi Rabindranath Tagore in 1913, the outbreak of First World War in 1914 and the October Revolution of 1917 are some of the major events in Fakirmohan's lifetime. Although the epoch-making October Revolution took place in 1917 just one year before Fakirmohan's death, the revolution was already implanted in his consciousness much earlier than its outbreak. When the Industrial Revolution brought common man into literary description, had not made much influence on the writers in those days in Orissa, it was the common man who mattered most in Fakirmohan's writing.

When Gandhiji returned to India in the beginning of First World War he was already recognised as a leader and Fakirmohan by this time was a pretty old man and in the fag end of his life. He had no occasion to come in contact with Gandhiji who was just emerging as a national leader. It must be mentioned to the credit of Fakirmohan that before

47. A Man Without Mask, p.74.
48. Mayadhar Mansinha, FAKIRMOHAN SENAPATI, p.63
Gandhiji was recognised as a national leader in India it was Fakirmohan who attended the Madras Conference during Christmas holidays in 1898 as a Congress delegate from Orissa. It was in Madras that he came for the first and last time in contact with Bal Gangadhar Tilak who was a great patriot and prominent figure in India at that time. It is presumed that Bal Gangadhar had heard about Fakirmohan earlier. After a brief conversation when Fakirmohan greeted him to take his leave, Bal Gangadhar caught hold of Fakirmohan's hands and requested him not to greet him again. This proves that Bal Gangadhar had nice impression on Fakirmohan and some respect for him in his heart.

To quote Fakirmohan's own experience of Congress in Madras session:

Most of the topics at the conference were political. Though there was no immediate likelihood of our political aspiration succeeding, it would nevertheless be wrong for us to leave our grievances unsaid. Congress was unifying the well educated and patriotic from all over India in a common desire to free our motherland from its evil condition. Lack of unity was the main cause of India's past downfall.50

Fakirmohan was never in support of war and has condemned both Russia and Japan for fighting against each other. He has challenged both Russia and Japan in his poem "Japan-Russ" (FAKIRMOHAN GRANTHAELI, p.808) and reminds them not to forget the divine sermons of Christ and Buddha.

During Fakirmohan's time Christianity as well as missionaries was slowly creeping into Orissa. Fakirmohan and poet Radhanath together had discussed several times about their own life as well as the world around them. Once both of them made up their mind to accept Christianity as their religion but refrained from doing so. "Fakirmohan, right from his childhood had a liberal mind and inquisitive to know about the truth. He lost faith in idolatry and

was in search of True-God. 

Fakirmohan accepted Brahmoism and became a Brahmo. "Fakirmohan who had a liberal religious way of thinking and never believed in superstition and idolatry got this life's solace in Brahmo Dharma. He established Brahmo Samaj in a public place for the first time at Rajakotha in the year 1867 or 68 along with four of his friends." 

The Samaj aimed at social reformation of Hindu society. The objectives of Brahmo Samaj is to remove darkness from the mind of man and to have respect for all religions. Degrading women to a lower status of life with a stamp of inferiority, denying them the right of education and inheritance to property are some of the noble objectives of Brahmo Samaj. Fakirmohan's writings which envisage human and social appeal might be due to the impact of this religion.

Fakirmohan had talents as well as experience "Starting life almost with no resources, he achieved many times more than many of his more fortunate contemporaries. " His is a personality which stands out as a bright luminary, for his self-effacing dedication and unflinching devotion for the cause of his mother-tongue and justifies his title 'Senapati'.

These are of course, some of the social, economic, cultural and literary conditions of the age in which he was born and brought up. These conditions were responsible for his dispositions or the make up of his mind, because no mind can feel free above the ebb and flow of social condition.

Bhabani Bhattacharya too like Fakirmohan Senapati was born in the eastern belt of India i.e. in Bhagalpur of Bihar. He was born on 10th of November, 1906 and breathed his last in 1989 at Nagpur of Maharashtra.

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52. Sri Sibesh Kumar Dash "Welcome Address" 109TH BRAHMO CONFERENCE p.7.
He belonged to a well-to-do and educated Brahmin family. His father, Pramathanath Bhattacharya was a civil servant at the time of birth of his son and later on became a judge. The transfer of his job from place to place gave plenty of opportunities to Bhabani Bhattacharya to move with his parents and there by increased his outlook. The official career of his father was spent in Bihar and Orissa at a time when these two provinces were a single unit. As a child "he lived at home, studying in various places at which his father worked, Chhapra, Ranchi, Puri." 54 Rich cultural influences at home had worked on the boy well before his formal schooling began at the age of six in the sea side town of Puri on the Bay of Bengal, where the family lived during several of his early years. 55

While Bhattacharya was studying at school he composed couplets and poems for getting them published in magazines. At the age of twelve, he wrote his first article in a Bengali magazine 'Mouchak'. In his school career Bhattacharya was exposed to both Bengali and English literatures, as a result he could write in both the languages. Dorothy Blair Shimer, the biographer of Bhattacharya writes that he is in fact an heir to two cultures, the Indian and the British. Most of the rich persons those days provided English education to their children and sent them abroad. Bhattacharya was brought up in such atmosphere "where the outer crust was formed of British culture but below there was the culture of the natives" 56

As a student he was attracted by the collected works of William Shakespeare. The spring of humanity which those plays contained might have developed his insight into human nature, his horizon of knowledge expanded when he was exposed to the academic atmosphere of the college. "Here he found the plays of Henrik Ibsen and Bernard Shaw particularly stimulating. The novels of Romain Rolland and Knut Hamsun,

56. Ibid., p.3.
as well as those of John Steinbeck, Sinclair Lewis, John Dos Passos and Upton Sinclair, also appealed to him and provided in some ways an adequate perspective for his writing.  

In the middle of his teen age he was a voracious reader as well as writer and was not sure of his aptitude and career. If we consider the life of Fakirmohan in his mid-teens we find that he was also not sure of his career when he was unemployed due to abolition of salt Department at Balasore. Being a seeker of knowledge "he determined to add a little more regular education to the mere rudiments that he had already acquired through his irregular private efforts."  

Bhattacharya enrolled himself as a student of science under Patna University in 1923 but later changed over to Arts. He took his Bachelor's degree with Honors in English Literature in 1927. He then pursued his advanced studies in the University of London and was awarded Ph.D. on historical research in 1934 from London University. For his Ph. D. work it is worthy to mention that his topic was related to the socio-economic as well as political problems of Bengal of the 19th century. He was trying to explore the immediate past history in order to understand the present condition of India better. In his Ph. D. thesis he pointed out different social evils and described how carelessly they were tackled by the British authorities. Mentally he too equipped himself to fight against those immoral and social evils which were creeping into Indian culture and civilization.  

He returned to India in early thirteens and married Salila Mukharjee, the daughter of a prominent Bengali doctor of Nagpur. A good short story writer in her own right Salila helped Bhattacharya a great deal in his literary pursuits. "While he wrote, she collected the necessary information from the villagers. But it did not end there. She brought ideas, scenarios, and her artistic imagination in the character formation of those unforgettable women who occupy such important notes in all his nov-

57. Malta Grover, **Bhabani Bhattacharya as a Novelist of Social Coscience**, p.4.  
58. Mayadhar Mansinha, **Fakirmohan Senapati**, p.11.
She was indeed an inspiring angel to Bhattacharya as Krushna Kumari was to Fakirmohan.

While he was in London he had earlier published in 1932 a small book named *The Golden Boat* which carried the English translations of some of the poems of Rabindranath Tagore. In India he published *Indian Cavalcade* in 1944 which reflects the moving scenes of Indian history. This book is a collection of various articles which appear like imaginative short stories. This book is supposed to be Bhattacharya's earliest attempt in creative writing. He plunged more and more into creative writing and in 1947 he published his first novel, *So Many Hungers!*. This justified his fame as a promising Indian English novelist. It was soon translated into many languages.

He successfully discharged his duties as a Press Attache at the Embassy of India in Washington, D.C. in 1947 and after one year became the Assistant Editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. The overwhelming success of the first novel, *So Many Hungers!* (1947) prompted Bhattacharya to write more and more. In 1952 the readers found the publication of his second novel, *Music For Mohini*. His reputation as a leading Indian English novelist was confirmed with the publication of his third novel *He Who Rides A Tiger* in 1954. He travelled beyond India in the years to come and was associated with the literary activities outside India. In 1959 he responded to the invitation from Harvard University and participated as a delegate in the Harvard International Seminar held at Cambridge, Massachusetts and in the very next year he was invited to attend a seminar held at Tokyo. His fourth novel *A Goddess Named Gold*, was published in 1960. He had now been recognized both in India and abroad as a renowned literary artist. His worth having been recognised, he was taken in as consultant in the Ministry of Education, New Delhi, 1961. He continued to work there till 1967. In 1961, he contributed to the preparation and publication of the Tagore Centenary volume *Towards Universal Man*.

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In the next two years he made extensive travel to New Zealand, Australia and West Germany and lectured in various universities. He was recipient of New Zealand's prestigious award for his writings. His famous novel *Shadow From Ladakh* was published in 1966 and in 1967 he received from the President of India the Shitya Akademi Award, India's highest literary honour. Besides novels, Bhattacharya also contributed short stories which were published in 1968 under the title *Steel Hawk and Other Stories*.

Bhattacharya published *Gandhi the Writer: the Image as it Grew* in 1969 on the occasion of the birth centenary of Gandhiji. In this book he described the potentiality of Gandhiji as a writer. The same year he worked as a senior specialist in Honolulu. In the following year he joined the University of Hawaii as Visiting Professor. Bhattacharya became Walker-Ames Professor at the University of Washington, Seattle in 1973 and made up his mind in writing another novel.


Bhabani Bhattacharya like Fakirmohan Senapati had numerous interest. Fakirmohan was a translator, creative historian, autobiographer, story teller and foremost novelist of Oriya literature. Bhattacharya too was a translator, "a creative historian, biographer, story-teller and a foremost novelist of the class of Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan."

Bhattacharya was very much influenced by the writings of Rabindranath Tagore and John Steinback. Bhattacharya drew inspiration from Steinback's concern for social justice, moral earnestness mixed with humour and his interest in common man. The deep impress of

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Steinbeck in relation to theme and treatment is discernable in Bhattacharya’s novels like *So Many Hungers!* and *He Who Rides A Tiger*. In these two novels, Bhattacharya vividly portrays the social injustice and raises a strong voice in protest against it. Bhattacharya also uses Steinback’s treatment of irony tinged with mild satire.

Undoubtedly it can be said that the strongest and most abiding influence on him was that of Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore was a true pillar of light not only to Bhattacharya but to many other writers of Bengal and also of the Indian sub-continent. Krishna Kripalini in a very perceptive analysis of major impact on Indian literature suggests:

Tagore’s influence, after the award of the Nobel prize in 1913, crossed the frontier’s of Bengal and was for sometime a source of exhilaration, if not always an inspiration, to the contemporaries all over India, from master Zinda Kaul in Kashmir to Kumaran Asan in Kerala. There is hardly an outstanding pioneer of modern poetry in any language of India, except perhaps Urdu, who escaped this impact.  

At the age of nineteen Bhattacharya had been to Santiniketan and slowly he developed a personal relationship with Tagore. His close contact with this great man helped him in shaping his artistic vision. Bhattacharya himself had acknowledged this in an interview:

I think my real intellectual awakening came when I was a freshman at the University. For the first time, I discovered Tagore....

A letter from Tagore inspired him on his writing career. In his own words:

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One day the mail brought a letter from Rabindranath Tagore! The poet had read a series of my articles in a Bengali magazine with which he was associated, and he expressed in his letter his warm appreciation of my writing. That was a day of jubilation.63

Since his childhood he devotedly studied the classics of Bengali literature, such as the works of Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim, Sarat Chattopadhyaya and Rabindranath Tagore. That is why he was very much delighted when he came in contact with Tagore himself, when he entrusted him the task of translating his poems entitled The Golden Boat (1933) into English. After this he came up to the expectation of the prominent poet. "It is precisely due to the translation of Bhabani Bhattacharya that the work has become accessible to the European reader and is included in the treasures of world literature."64

Bhabani Bhattacharya is a great admirer of Tagore. According to Bhattacharya, "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."65

Bhattacharya not only studied the works of Tagore with devotion, but also translated into English some of his short-stories. Besides he associated himself with the preparation of this book Towards Universal Man, a collection of essays and articles by Tagore. In keeping with the true spirit of Indian culture and her heritage and philosophy, Tagore assigned highest place to man in his writing. Tagore had also dealt with the deep rooted evil of caste system in Indian society. This is discernable in the earlier works of Bhattacharya.

The impact of Tagore on Bhattacharya was so overwhelming that he was apprehensive of being overshadowed by the personality of the great poet. Therefore he refused the offer of teaching assignment and a tree-house when he visited Shantiniketan in 1936.

The second great influence on his mind was that of Gandhiji and his ideal principles. It is not only Bhattacharya but so many Indian writers couldn't escape from the impact of Gandhiji's ideology and philosophy.

The Gandhian era which began after Gandhiji's appearance on the political stage for the independence of India, deeply influenced Indian life and literature. The main phases of Gandhian struggle for freedom are Passive Resistance Movement against the Rowlatt Act in 1919, the Non-violent Movement of 1920-1921, the Salt Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 and the Quit India Movement of 1942.

It is surprising to notice that the whole nation was awakened by the magic spell of Gandhiji. The Indians realized that they are no more passive slaves and therefore must struggle for freedom and dignity which is their birth-right. "Life could not be the same as before, and every segment of our national life politics, economics, education, religion, social life, language and literature acquired a more or less pronounced Gandhian hue. Thus it was that Gandhi exercised a potent influence on our languages and literature ....."66

According to Kripalini:

Gandhi's impact on Indian writers was direct and wide spread. Apart from its political repercussions, it was both moral and intellectual and at once inhibiting and liberating.67

No writer could escape from the direct or indirect impact of

Gandhiji. What is remarkable is the stress on language was clarity and simplicity. "There has been a more or less conscious shift of emphasis from the city to the village, from the rich to the poor, from the educated to the illiterate and the voiceless. At times there is an implied contrast between the two urban luxury and sophistication on the one hand and rural modes and manners on the other."  

Bhattacharya deals with the theme of hunger in all his novels relating to national independence save his last one, A Dream in Hawaii where the treatment is not related to independence. A Goddess Named Gold is the first novel of its kind in which the focus is on the responsibilities of the Indian citizens with the attainment of political independence. The minstrel in this novel is a Gandhian character who guides the destiny of a small village. His songs are full of glory of the India's past as well as the brightness of the future. He advises the villagers to be very cautious and to preserve the hard-won freedom at any cost.

The novel Shadow from Ladakh is full of Gandhian references. The village Gandhigram stands for Gandhian ideals and principle of peace and non-violence. His first novel So Many Hungers! ends on a Gandhian note. His another novel He Who Rides a Tiger tells us the problem of lower castes in the society. It upholds the cause of the poor and downtrodden for whom Gandhi fought through out his life undauntedly. Rama Jha, a scholar on Bhattacharya observes:

The choice of theme and the areas of human experience focussed on in this novel, through the life of the common man in a Bengal village, indicate Bhattacharya's Gandhian bias. Characterization too in Bhattacharya is coloured by his Gandhian idea of what is good and evil.

The profound influence on Bhattacharya is also evidenced by the fact that he had written two books on Gandhiji, *Gandhi the Writer* (1969) and *Mahatma Gandhi* (1977) in which he had not only shown how Gandhiji paved the way for the writers of his age but also discussed some of his philosophical and political views.

Since Bhattacharya was actively contemplating a creative writer's career for himself in the forties, he, too, was obviously influenced by Gandhiji's writings. Like Gandhiji, Bhattacharya was very much concerned with moral and social regeneration of the people and was against all forms of exploitation of man by man.

Bhattacharya was also influenced by the Western world to a great extent. While studying in London he was the student of famous political philosopher Harold Laski.

The Marxist interpretation of this great author exercised an everlasting influence on his approach to the crisis of Indian world. Shimer describes:

At the London School of Economics he met Harold Laski who was interested in Marxism. Throughout his years in London, Bhattacharya came close to the Marxist group as they were against British rule in India. However it must be emphasized that Bhattacharya is not totally a Marxist. The undercurrent of Marxism seems to flow in *So Many Hungers* and *He Who Rides A Tiger* where he is sympathetic towards the downtrodden and the underdog and the exploited class. He is affected by the poverty, misery and suffering of the humanity.  

Though Bhattacharya was not a Marxist "a strong under current of the early Marxist respect for liberal humanitarianism and the effects

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of economic pressures on history runs through all Bhattacharya's novels. While he was in London diverse forces reacted upon his young mind. The plea for equi-distribution of wealth in society, the kindness towards proletariat and the appeal for the elimination of caste and class discrimination—all these necessary features of the progressive view of life have convincingly been presented in his novels So Many Hungers! and He Who Rides a Tiger.

Bhattacharya was also influenced by writers like Leo Tolstoy, Bernard Shaw and Henrik Ibsen. These writers presented not only 'realism' in their writing but also condemned the evil forces wherever they raise their evil heads.

Leading American writers like Dos Passo and John Steinbeck have appealed to Bhattacharya and influenced his artistic vision. Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath is parallel to So Many Hungers! in many respects. The exploitation of man by another man is presented here. Bhattacharya is concerned with the fate of the exploited, the down trodden and the forgotten.

Bhattacharya had derived inspiration from contemporary events and situations which he had seen around him. He was an observer of Indian scene right from the days when India was struggling for independence. The prevailing social condition also worked upon his growing mind and inspired him to write his first novel The untold suffering of the common people of rural Bengal who were victimized by the onslaught of the second World War, the utter apathy and callousness of the urban society towards the their suffering have been vividly presented in his novel So Many Hungers!. It was an age of restlessness caused by the exploitation of the masses by the Imperialistic rulers. The famine of

71. Shimer, Bhabani Bhattacharya, p.10.
1943 which stalked through the holy soil of Bengal, was one of such events as he himself confesses:

Then the great famine swept down upon Bengal. The emotional stirring I felt [more than two million men, women and children died of slow starvation amid a man-made scarcity.] The result was the novel So Many Hungers!.

It was this time that the Second World War broke out which had a greater impact on India than the First World War. The war spread to the eastern side of India. The Japanese had joined hands with the Germans to fight against the Allied Forces, i.e. the Russians, the British and the Americans. The impact of war had been keenly felt in Bengal because panic-stricken British were trying their best to retain their supremacy over India, hence, they had mobilised forces on the eastern border because of Japanese aggression from the east. As the British were afraid of the possible attack of the Japanese at any moment, they were determined to prevent them from advancing on both land and water. As a first step they had captured all the country boats and had set fire to them, thus throwing a section of rural folk out of their job. The authorities, more ever had engaged agents to procure rice by paying higher rates to make a reserve stock for army and other ancillary forces, and as a result rice has become scarce in the village market.

To some business-men war came like a veritable windfall. They treated this as the chance of a life-time. As the war progressed they accumulated rice in their granaries and hoarded it to sell at a higher price later. While describing the din and clamour in Calcutta Stock Exchange, Bhattacharya describes thus in his So Many Hungers!:

Chance slipping off. Chance of twenty years. Not another war for twenty years. War, the most enriching

Bhattacharya’s heart was moved to see the famine-hit streets of Calcutta. The detailed, graphic and moving picture of the hunger for food and the heavy loss of human lives are neatly presented by the author. Famine shows the distressing pictures of human suffering which people of Bengal had never witnessed before. Mothers couldn’t bear the death by starvation of their children. Women sat on the pavement eating from the bowl. While the restaurants of the rich city, Calcutta was buzzing with life and music, the destitutes in the near by lanes and on the pavements lay sick, helpless and died of hunger. There prevailed a sort of callousness in regard to all the codes of civilized humanity. Therefore his first novel So Many Hungers! is “one of the finest pieces of the creative writing born out of the agonized torment of body and spirit endured by the sacred soil of Bengal during the hideous famine years and the early stages of Second World War.”

The Bengal Famine proved to be a traumatic experience for Bhattacharya. He once spoke in an interview:

“My creative writing had its true genesis in the hunger-hit street of Calcutta where the great famine raised. I had an intense need of release from the agony of traumatic experience.”

The famine intensified the demand for political freedom that was sweeping the whole nation. Gandhi spoke to the people that ‘food’ and ‘freedom’ cannot be ‘given’. They are to be earned and taken from the

73. So Many Hungers!, p.17.
rulers. He convinced the Indians that self-government would never be achieved without struggle for freedom.

Bhattacharya couldn't escape the impact of social environment in which he was brought up, the growing unrest among the Indian masses to free themselves from foreign rule. This fired his imagination and induced him to write. It is his interest in contemporary history which initially inspired him to write in novel form. His writing can be divided into two phases i.e. World War II to independence and the second from independence to late seventies. The social, economic and political conditions of these two historical phases are reflected in his fiction.

On August 8, 1942 the Congress passed on the famous 'Quit India' resolution which was an ultimatum to the Government. It demanded the withdrawal of the British Government from India. The mass struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi continued on the basis of non-violence. The activity of the Congress was very soon banned and all prominent leaders including Gandhiji were put to prison. This raged Indian masses to revolt against the government and resorted to assaults and violent riots, several disorders and deliberate damage on a large scale in different parts of India. Thus there was a great political turmoil and people were prepared to die for the freedom of their motherland. The administration in some part of India was almost in a state of paralysis. The British government adopted strong measures to suppress the rebellion.

Gandhi made his protest against the heavy penalty imposed on the Indian masses from jail and fasted for twenty-one days even at the age of seventy-four. There was a country wide agitation for his release. By this time the Second world war came to an end in 1945 and the Labour Party in Britain came to power. On the basis of the political settlement reached in 1947 between Indian leaders and British Govern-
ment. India was divided and on August 15, 1947 India became an independent State.

There occurred a great change in the economic life of India. The demand for war materials increased at home as well as in the other parts of the Commonwealth. The Government provided assistance to the industries as a result of which the production of various items in the industries increased. By now the Congress Ministry resigned and the condition of the common man and farmer which had earlier shown signs of improvement suffered. The difficulties and unpleasant conditions of war-time increased. Prices of various commodities especially food grains and cloth increased rapidly. In spite of control measures, price regulation and rationing system maintained by the Government prices went high. Black marketing and corruption increased simultaneously. There was scarcity of food and many people died of starvation. It was observed that the family life in rural Bengal was shattered. With the increase of unemployment social and moral disintegration set in. The scar left on Bengal due to terrible famine was difficult to cure.

Although India achieved her independence on August 15, 1947 it was confronted with numerous problems of seriousness. The freedom was obtained in the midst of communal disturbances of unexpected violence and uncontrolled behaviour of the mob. Millions of people fled leaving their homes and property, almost half a million lost their lives and nearly one lac women young and old were abducted raped and mutilated. India experienced the agony and suffering of partition and the dignity and defeat at the moment of freedom. Subsequently the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation on January 30, 1948 was a terrible shock to the Indians and another shocking was the unexpected and unprovoked attack on Kashmir by Pakistan. The attack by Pakistan was like a bolt from the blue. By this time the Indian government was busy in solving the most difficult task like rehabilitation of refugees and the
integration of unfriendly and scattered princely states in the Indian Union. Indian leaders faced these problems courageously and went ahead with their plans to set up economic and political equilibrium in India. On January 26, 1950, India became a Sovereign Socialist Democratic Republic. Since then it had been making all its sincere efforts to go ahead in the field of industrialization on the path of progress.

The aggression by Pakistan and China had caused grievous injury to economic and political set-up of India yet India stood firm and remained enthusiastic and determined in its attempt to improve itself and be parallel with the developing nations of the world.

India took certain important decisions about the reorganization of its social and economic structure. While keeping itself rooted in its ancient traditions, it also tried to progress in the field of science. It tried to rid itself of its communalism, casteism and superstitions. In the field of economy it opted for industrial and technological development contrary to the native cottage industries and decentralized economy.

Bhabani Bhattacharya had witnessed these significant turning points of the country in his own life and described them artistically in his fiction. He is interested in analysing the historical forces working behind these changes. K. R. Chandrasekharan, an authority on Bhabani Bhattacharya remarks:

Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of the foremost among the 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. 76

Bhattacharya has presented life of the Indian society exactly as he has seen it with a discerning eye. His writing is close to social real-

76. K. R. Chandrasekharan, p.XIII.
ity and based on real experience of his life. He is concerned with large public issues and social problems. Generally he writes about the hunger, poverty, traditionalism, Gandhian principles versus rapid industrialization. The problems of contemporary life of the Indians of all strata of society are reflected in his novels. “Bhattacharya's sensitivity to his social, political, economic and cultural surroundings is further stimulated by his keen observation, and this causes a tremendous urge within him to think and create. It is his milieu which directs his mind and nourishes his soul to produce meaningful works of art”.

A Goddes Named Gold which reflects man's hunger for gold tells us that political independence alone is not sufficient for India to march ahead in progress. What is important for the Indians is sympathy and kindness for each other. Being a lover of peace what Bhattacharya cherishes in the novel is the greater happiness of the Indians.

The Chinese aggression in 1962 is a living experience for Bhattacharya. In the context of the Chinese attack India was dwindling between the two i.e. to accept rapid industrialization as symbolized in his Shadow From Ladakh by steel town or to embrace the cottage industry as symbolized by Gandhigram? His last novel A Dream in Hawaii was written after he had deeply felt the impact of his wide travels which includes his three-year-stay in the island of Hawaii. The very stay of Bhattacharya in Honolulu probably enlarged his mind and heart. He had served there for one year as a senior specialist in 1969 at the Institute of Advanced Projects. In a letter written to Cromwell Crawford, Bhattacharya says:

I should add a few words in regards to the East-West Center's impact on me.............. The East-West centre with its unique human content along with its concrete realizing of interculturation in terms of life ways has illustrated for me over again what Tagore's Visva-Bharati

77. Malta Grover, p.17.
(World University) envisioned several decades ago. And I value this experience very deeply, indeed.78

The motto of the university of Hawaii was "Above all nations is humanity."79 This might have influenced and expanded his intercultural outlook because he was very much associated with this university.

The socio-political climate of the country, the impact of Gandhi and Tagore, his knowledge in history together with his wide personal experience helped him develop his mind and art. Having contributed only six novels which is of course not a very big number, Bhattacharya admits that he doesn't have a big literary output. K. K. Sharma is full of praise for this literary artist:

The artistic presentation of the affirmation of life in his works is something unique. In an age when the world appears to be a wasteland and life is steeped in despair injustice and alienation and when writers are seen groping and questioning for values and happiness it is a great treat for the reader to discover the assertion of deathless life triumphant over every other thing in the novels of Bhattacharya.80

Bhattacharya believes that characters in a novel or any piece of art must be real life rather than be merely spokesmen of the novelist and it is the responsibility of the novelist to make his characters human beings, Bhattacharya does not agree with the view that a creative writer should abstain himself from taking material from contemporary reality.

In the opinion of the author:

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 thing he experiences, are likely to move him more intently than what may be


79. Idem.

are likely to move him more intently 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 the cold storage, as it were and leave them there until the present time has slipped into the vista of dim yesterdays?81

Judging in the context of epoch-making events of Indian history, his works constitute a social document of great value.

Bhattacharya is of the opinion that creative literature should be instructive to mankind. He believes that there should be a fusion of moral values in literature. But these values must be presented in such a manner that creative art does not become didactive imposing moral code of conduct upon the readers and at the same time it does not seem to be artificial portrayal of the reality of social life.

Bhattacharya dislikes the idea of a writer with a moral purpose being termed tendentious. He believes that such a writer is usually an idealist who preaches higher moral values for humanity through his writings. He would be considered a good creative artist if he depicts life realistically. Creative writer should not care for being branded as propagandists but should give more attention to the dangers of technique:

There are dangers in tendentiousness, but they are matters of technique. Art is not a pulpit or platform from which one may uphold or denounce. Further 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.  

Bhattacharya believes that a novelist deals with subjects which are changing from time to time and must write about them. The purpose of the writer is to reveal truth, and not fantasy. The writer will be in a position to express them only when he has minute observation and an eye for the details of general behaviour of the folk. A true artist cannot exist in an ivory tower of his own. On the other hand his observant eyes are very keen on noting what is happening around him. Bhattacharya said, "I have not missed a single opportunity of observing incidents, happenings where I can gain something for the writer in me. Most of my characters have shaped themselves from real earth." The statement of Bhattacharya is also applicable to the fiction of Fakirmohan where most of his characters are real human beings. Fakirmohan had also depicted the changing social situation of Orissa taking characters and incidents from real and day-to-day life.

Bhattacharya sides with Mulk Ray Anand who not only vividly portrays in his fiction the life of the under-dogs of society but also vehemently appeals for their uplift. All the novels by Anand, and especially Untouchable (1935), Coolie (1936) and Two leaves and a Bud (1937), champion the cause of the downtrodden. The Grapes of Wrath (1939) by Steinbeck had appealed to Bhattacharya most due to its strong voice in protest against injustice. Though Bhattacharya is not a committed writer like Mulk Raj Anand he had taken keen interest in analyzing the social conditions and economic problems of his men and the political upheavals of his country in his fiction. There are many fictionists who had deliberately avoided the treatment of political problems in their fiction R. K. Narayan never deals with the problem of contemporary India.

in any of his novels. Even his novel Waiting for Mahatma though deals with the character and personality of Gandhiji, only shows the great Indian leader in relation to ordinary events of life rather than political events of the time.

None of the novels of Raja Rao with the exception of Kanthapura (1938) deals with the socio-political situation of modern India. In Hindi, Munshi Premchand wrote about the prevailing political events and social conditions of his time. The contemporary realities are very much focussed almost in all his novels and stories. Premchand took materials from contemporary life and presented it in a living language. The materials of his fiction are from the contemporary events and the people around him and also from his personal life.

Bhattacharya is not against depiction of sex in his fiction. Sex can be a subject-matter for fiction because it is an integral part of human life. Since novel is a creative art and is concerned with the "human-scene" the treatment of sex cannot be ignored because it is the duty of the artist to reveal the truth of life in a realistic way, According to Bhattacharya:

I am not one for tabooing sex in literature. I don't believe in censorship. And I welcome good literature where sex is symbolically suggested. It is an inevitable part of human life and I believe it has its place in literature too.84

Bhattacharya, however, pleads for a suggestive and meaningful treatment of sex in the novel. This would acquire artistic touch about it. A naked pornography is not art in any sense for him. Bhattacharya ridicules the so-called romantic writers who indulge in vulgar and pornographic description of sex. Bhattacharya generally avoids it in his fiction. "Though stray references of rape - actual (So Many Hungers!) or attempted (He Who Rides a Tiger), and of love - pure (A Goddess Named

84. Sudhakar Joshi, PVII.
Gold) or passionate (Shadow from Ladakh) and A Dream in Hawaii - are present in his novels, yet the novelist does not describe it in detail and with sharp photographic accuracy in his fiction.\(^{85}\)

But Fakirmohan's attitude towards sex is conventional. The readers believe that amorous relation exists between Mangaraj and Champa in Chha Mana Atha Guntha, pure love of Indumati for Gobinda and Gobinda's love for Indumati to meet her at night in Prayashchitta and passionate love of the zamindar in the story 'Patent Medicine.' Fakirmohan avoids the portrayal of the scenes dramatizing physical passions in his work. Both Fakirmohan and Bhattacharya do not appreciate the notion of free-sex. Sex for Fakirmohan is permissible only within marital life. Respect for morality is one of the concerns in his fiction.

According to Bhattacharya a novelist should have full freedom in his choice of medium of expression as well as subject -matter. The style, technique, the methods of expression should also be his own choice. He is supposed to have the power of observation to find out the details of life around him. A novel, according to Bhattacharya should be written with a "social purpose" in view and should portray the picture of the society in which he lives.

The fiction of Bhattacharya upholds his concept of fiction and illustrates how he describes the social realities of the contemporary times truthfully and artistically.

So far the medium of expression is concerned, Bhattacharya has an open mind. He feels that the creative writer must enjoy full freedom in his choice of medium of expression. He opts for English and writes in

\(^{85}\) Balram S. Sorot, p.39.
this language. He has two valid reasons for selecting English as the medium. First, “The English language is a bridge that carries our cultural values to the world—not only to the English speaking countries but to most of the other countries as well in translation”. Secondly Bhattacharya says, “I have enjoyed the challenge of this literary problem—expressing Indian life in the idiom of an alien tongue”. Bhattacharya is very much thankful to W. Yeats—Brown who suggested and encouraged him to write in English.

As regards to the subject matter, style, technique and the methods of expression these should also be in accordance with the choice of the writer. He should also possess the power of observation to find out the details of life around him. A novel in view of Bhattacharya should be written with a ‘social purpose’ and should portray the picture of the society in which he lives.

Bhattacharya touches almost all aspects of India of his time. The two serious novels of Bhattacharya, So Many Hungers! and He Who Rides a Tiger where ‘social realism’ is more prominently present are set against the background of the political, economic and social life of India especially of Bengal. The horrors of war and famine, misguided faith in religion, superstitions, casteism and economic and food crisis are very much reflected here.

Thus Fakirmohan Senapati and Bhabani Bhattacharya, though separated by time wrote with the same commitment. Bhattacharya belongs almost to the region from where Senapati hailed. They are the product of the Indian social milieu save the passage of time brought about a few changes.

86. The Novel in Modern India, P.E.N. Centre, Bombay, p.47. (Quoted from THE BANASTHALI PATRIKA IX Yr. No. 2, July 1976, p.II)
87. Contemporary Novelist in the English Language, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1972. (Quoted from THE BANASTHALI PATRIKA, PII)