CHAPTER VI
Indian writings in English and more so Indian-English novel have always been a point of controversy and criticism in the East as well as the West. Even the novels of eminent writers like V.S. Naipul have been branded as a mimicry of the West. In spite of all adverse criticism by critics from various quarters, Indian-English novels have excelled as a literary genre — like any other of its European or American counterpart — by painting social realities of the Indian sub-continent, realities inside the country in the Pre-and-Post-Independence period and in its treatment of the human materials of universal appeal.

While expressing his satisfaction over this social aspect of Indian-English novels, Iqbal Bahadur observes, that "Our English stories, I am happy to say, have kept close to contemporary reality." And when the question of contemporary social reality comes to mind, five prominent names need mention including the 'Tristartis' as coined by Dr. Iyengar. The other two artists, namely Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya and Manohar Malgonkar have been less discussed in critical circles and research dissertations. In fact there is no reason why these two social realists of high potential should not be discussed adequately. Both of them deal with the social realities in
its variegated aspects that predominate the general Indian social structure of the Post-war period. So far as social reality in fictional form is concerned Shabani Bhattacharya has definite views on it. Though he has never codified his views on novel and social realities in a systematic manner, his interviews with scholars and critics like Sudhakar Joshi, Dr. Ramesh Kr. Srivastava and Dorothy Blair Shimer along with his article "Literature and Social Reality" are clear credentials of the artist in him.

Bhattacharya never believed in the theory of Art for Art's sake. He believed in reality in literature, and his popular datum was art for life's sake. For him every writing should have a social purpose. In his interview with Sudhakar Joshi he pointed out:

I hold that a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader something from the society's point of view. Art is not necessarily for art's sake. Purposeless art and literature which is much in vogue does not appear to me a sound judgement.²

As an artist he never missed any opportunity of observing incidents and happenings around him. He thinks that a writer should have a keen sense of observation and a keen eye for noting the details of general behaviour of folks in order to write a social novel. Personally he practised what he said. His novel So Many Hungers brought
him fame as a social realist. He painted the Bengal famine of 1943 and the multifaceted hunger prevalent in the then Bengal; hunger for money, hunger for freedom, hunger for sex, hunger of Hindu and Muslim fanatics for each other's blood; and finally hunger in its root form i.e., hunger for food. These are all descriptions of truth. And as Iqbal Schodur says, "In fiction truth alone counts."3

As far as social realities are concerned, Malgonkar did not differ much from Shibani Bhattacharya. Though Shibani Bhattacharya is highly honoured in the East and the West, Malgonkar made a consistent effort of presenting readable stories in fiction form, depicting life in India to the Western world. As a Shikari and an arayman, born of a noble family, he kept on writing about problems in the British-Indian army, life in the urban India, political, economic and social problems facing the Post-Independence period with a keen flair for historical veracity.

Both the novelists were keenly aware of the past and present history of a changing Indian society. Both were students of history. While narrating historical truths in fiction, Bhattacharya did not make any conscious efforts. On the other hand Malgonkar was conscious as an artist. He said:

"Though some would criticise my style, they don't criticise my historical veracity. I take great pains to be absolutely accurate."
If I write that something happened on a Saturday or on a moonless night, you can be sure it was on a Saturday or on a moonless night.  

His great novels like Distant Drum,Contest of Shadows, A Song in the Ganges and Shadow from Ladakh, while speaking of social realities in story form, are never far from historical truths. His novel Distant Drum which brought him fame and popularity in the distant West as well as in the East is largely a story of an Indian Officer in the Satpura regiment dealing with his sense of duty and responsibility, his passion for his ladies, his encounter with his British counterparts and interactions and his moral turpitude and triumphs. But essentially it is the historical aspect of the novel that draws the readers’ attention and, thereby, appeals. A similar opinion is given by G.S.Amar when he says, "As a matter of fact it is the historical aspect of Distant Drum which has appealed to its readers, rather than its fictional contents".

Malgonkar was a conscious story teller. He enjoyed presenting good stories to his readers and he frankly admitted it:

I do strive deliberately and hard, to tell a story well; and I revel in incident, in improbabilities, in unexpected twists. I feel a special allegiance to the particular subcaste among those whose castework I have affected, the entertainers, the tellers of stories. Novels that do not
conform to this basic pattern, however well written they may be, are to me like unending cheese-straws, they may tickle the taste buds, but they cannot constitute a square meal - at least not to one who is used to curries and chutneys. 5

On the other hand Bhobani Bhattacharya was equally a successful story teller without intending to be a story teller essentially. He did not strive hard deliberately because he always felt that his characters and situations always had an upper hand in shaping the end product. He thus observes:

When I feel like writing upon a theme, and the characters and events fit in the pattern, I start putting it down on paper. But once I start writing, it is not I, but the characters and situations that compel me to be led by them. It is they who decide the way they should end.

The end of the story, in my case, is never the one which I had in my mind in the beginning. 7

Bhattacharya was also basically a student of History. His student days in the University of London were spent mostly in the department of History where he was welcomed as an Indian student. It is basically his firm grounding in history that has shaped his vision as a socially conscious artist. Dorothy Blair Shimer in this context observes:

In many respects Bhattacharya has been in the vanguard of authors addressing themselves to social issues. His grounding in cultural history and political science has helped him as an artist, to look beyond narrow, temporary problems to issues that surmount time and place. 8
While both the novelists believed in narrating social and historical truths, they differed widely in certain technical aspects.

Bhattacharya had firm faith in the stream of consciousness technique, whereas Malgonkar totally disapproved of the idea. Bhattacharya laid greater emphasis on subconscious and unconscious spheres of his character's consciousness. In other words he delved deep into his character's conscious and subconscious motives. But Malgonkar revolted against the stream of consciousness technique like any other modern novelists. He believed in romantic revivalism. He was against the psychological novels of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, and considered them as temporary aberrations in the novelistic tradition. In fact he anticipates romantic revivalism in the tradition of fiction. He was in favour of novels full of action, drama, entertaining incidents in the story and a good structure in the novel.

A writer's theories of economics and politics, no matter how well reasoned and convincing, amply demonstrate his social position and financial interests. In our analysis we find that both Malgonkar and Bhattacharya belong to a class or the privileged few. But the class character is more vivid and vibrant in Anmol Malgonkar than in Babani Bhattacharya. Prof. Dayananda rightly highlights the class character of Malgonkar as an artist in the following lines:
Halgonkar's works demonstrate the Marxist point that there is a correlation between a writer's class and his vision of life. Halgonkar has always been financially well-off with a comfortable and independent income from his ancestral family land to support his career as a writer. This economic fact explains the class character of his works. He is often inhibited by ideas, attitudes, values, and assumptions of his own property owning, wealthy middle class. He cleaves to this class and does not feel called upon to present the experience of another class. Nine times out of ten he chooses his principal characters from his own class. He rarely steps outside his class for his literary or historical material.9

Whatever may be the differences between these two great artists in the contemporary Indo-Anglian scene, there are remarkable similarities between them. Both the artists are optimistic of novel as a literary form useful to the society and Halgonkar appears to be more confident in this respect.

Bhattacharya is of the opinion that while writing a social novel with a definite purpose in mind, the writer must be very close to the society and his descriptions should be largely and basically based on his personal experience of life as it is. He felt that the British and American writers often failed to portray the contemporary Indian life in its barest form. That is why he says,

Indian writing in English has been a decisive factor in redressing the balance of false presentation by foreign story tellers who with their limited possibilities of true experience have seen only the surface of our way of life, failing to reach deeper into our spirit.10
Personally he himself, like Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, experienced and depicted contemporary Indian problems in his fiction. The most astonishing feature of his career is that it is basically social problems that urged him to write a novel. Like Napoleon trying to shoot himself after repeated failures, Bhattacharya destroyed his manuscripts repeatedly in an attempt to become a novelist. When the great famine swept down upon Bengal, he was emotionally stirred to hold his pen upright. Like the ultimate realization in Napoleon, the ultimate creation was *So Many Hungers* which brought for him quick success. Since then the ethos and milieu of rural India, the customs and taboos, the insurmountable caste system of the Indian society, the maladies caused by superstitions, the economic impoverishment, the impact of the world wars on India under a foreign rule, the quest for freedom from slavery and subsequently the pathos caused by partition have all been the subject of interest for Bhattacharya.

Malgonkar is no exception to these themes. Speaking of his social consciousness with particular reference to India he says:

I keep writing of India ...... because I feel no author should write outside his own living circumstances. If he does, it is phoney. To write of our own society and to be accepted by the English and American reading public we must be better than average writers.

In fact he made all conscious efforts to be what he intended. Besides, the rural and urban India as a subject of interest, he liked to narrate realities about the British
Indian Army, the life of the Indian Princes, the life of British tea planters as well as important political movements. But he never intended to speak for India; to speak for the suffering Indians, the downtrodden mass that largely comprise of rural India. Advocating for his own standpoint as a writer, he observes:

The social life of millions of Indians centres round the dustbins of great cities. Granted. But mine doesn't, and for me to write about it would be as insincere as a white man writing about a Negro riot.\textsuperscript{12}

It is at this point that he differs from Bhabani Bhattacharya to some extent. In spite of this opinion he cannot be ascribed to have deviated from the social realities of his times. Rather he fills the void and acts as a complement to Bhattacharya in bringing out the true picture of a wholesome India of the Post-Independence period.

Both the novelists touched upon the human material. They never cherished for superhuman characters, however noble or ignoble he or she may be. By touching upon the human material, they made stories of universal appeal. Whether it is Kajoli in \textit{So Many Hungers} or the Prince of Begwad in \textit{The Princes} the treatment was essentially human. Their virtues and vices, capacities and limitations, triumphs and failures were essentially human and of unique human interest.
Another point of interest lies in the treatment of women characters in case of both the novelists. Bhabani Bhattacharya's women characters are from a varied range, beginning from the simple, rustic and conservative background of Bengal to the liberal nude of the Hawaiian islands. Women are found in their predicament as victims of social change. In Malgonkar's novels women are rather revolutionary; trying to break the barriers of tradition which is equally a trend in social change. Personally Malgonkar was always in touch with a society in the British Indian army which was much influenced by Western thoughts and ideas. Naturally his women characters are seen as reacting against traditions and conventions.

Both Malgonkar and Bhattacharya were not averse to the depiction of sex in literature so far as it is not inartistic. Rather Bhattacharya considered that sex can be an appropriate subject for artistic description as it constitutes an integral part of human nature. He did not believe in the theory that love has hardly anything to do with social reality. Rather he was of the opinion that if a writer treats his theme with intellectual honesty and accuracy, somewhere in the course of his narration, he will find himself in the mesh of reality.
It can be well said that the writings of these two novelists, mostly in the novel form, can be marked as an instrument of social change. Both of them play a vital and effective role in presenting the Indian culture, and in reconstructing the Indian society by expressing and depicting the thoughts, ideologies which speak of the new values of the post-independence era.

As pointed earlier George Lukacs in his *Studies in European Realism* is of the view that "The social determinants of an artistic creation depend upon the degree to which the writers are bound up with the life of the community, to the extent they take part in the struggle going on around them or their merely passive observation of the events". In fact it is neither possible to actively take part in all possible forms of struggle nor a passive observation is always helpful for an artistic creation. But a good balancing, a sound rationization of both, can be of immense help to a writer with keenness and closeness to the society for artistic creation. And both Shattacharya and Malgonkar lived amidst the Indian community, shared their feelings, joys and sorrows, shared the responsibilities of struggling Indians either in the civilian or in the military circles and the process of shaping an emerging Indian society has consistently been attempted by the two contemporary socially conscious artists. Hence the point of similarity between
these two writers has inspired us to analyse how far they have offered solutions to different social problems of their times.

Both the writers have appeared to come out with a good deal of message and a promise as to the future shape an emerging Indian society. Both are matured as socially conscious artists. Both the artists have set their characters against the social and historical forces. Whether it is Kajoli, Kalo, Satyajit or Kiran, Henry and Abhaya, all are set against the background of prevailing social, historical and political forces.

Kalponkar in Distant Drum has projected a nice cult of human relationships which is far more important than any other social conflicts to create a nice national and international order. Kiran's relationships with Abdul Jenal transcend all human barriers and military limitations; their meeting on the 'no man's land' is a message to both India and Pakistan. Inside our own Army the message that the Satpura regiment carried was to create a life in the Regiment devoid of animosity and bitterness between the ruler and the ruled. Indians and the British emerge in the novels as genuine friends, friends capable of sacrifice and love for one another. Indo-British relationship at the personal level has been very effective to bear the message of international brotherhood and amity rather than bitter
jealousies. There has been nothing of the skepticism that J.M. Foster had presented in his *A Passage to India* (1924) about the possibility of genuine friendship between Britishers and Indians.14 The task that Kiran and Abdul achieve in controlling the communal violence in Delhi is the birth of a conception that many state governments and even the Union government are now adopting, i.e., the creation of 'Task Forces' comprising of dedicated officers from different religious and linguistic groups to quell this sort of violence at any time. The combined effort of Kiran and Abdul may be described as a nice effective and model action plan set against a background of real historical and political forces.

India-British relationship is viewed more critically in *Combat of Shadows* where human dignity is repeatedly emphasised instead of racial superiority. Indians and Anglo-Indians should be viewed as human beings and not inferior races as considered by Henry. Ruby Miranda, the Anglo-Indian girl is as humane as Jean Walters, the English girl. But the inhuman treatment meted out to Ruby is viewed critically by the novelist. Henry is demeaned in the eyes of all communities including his own for his racial superiority. Malgankar's views on elections bear a clear message that India needs a clean election procedure to be adopted after analysing the pros and cons of the anomalies prevailing, if it is to lead towards democracy.
In *Conflict of Shadows*, *The Princes* and in *A Bend in the Ganges* the socially conscious artist makes us aware of an impending danger that may pose a major threat to the nation's economic shape and structure. The theme of bribery as a common practice during the pre and post independent era is a cautious message silently projected by the novelist. The emerging bureaucracy and the decadent royalty all are found taking resort to this practice for their own benefit. The message has in it a silent warning to the common man of India. Abhuya himself has repeatedly protested several times that in the triangular clash between Gandhism, imperialism and communism the greatest sufferer has been the common man who was never been consulted by any one. The question then posed by the novelist is: On whom democracy in India is to rest and survive? By scanning analytically the real social and political issues in novel form, the novelist is able to give a message to the readers to judge and decide for themselves. Corruption as a newly adopted practice by the native politicians has been duly warned by Malgumkar, the artist. Jugal Kishore, Konak Chond and people like them are full-grown characters in the novel. Those native politicians projected in their totality are a threat to the new administration. By projecting these corrupted native politicians, the novelist not only traces the origin of corruption in India as an emerging independent nation but also warns the natives. Gian Talwar and Debidyaal realise it in *A Bend in the Ganges*. Abhuya's hatred of Konakchand
as a native politician in The Princes also points the same truth. Sir Jeffery Dart's assessment of Jugal Kishore in Combat of Shadows is again a confirmation of the truth. In all these cases the novelist projects the social malady in bold and clear terms and through other characters he makes us aware of the solution. The solution is that if India is to have a clean administration, it must have a strong bureaucracy based on British morals rather than have a pan Parliament and a Constitution only on British model.

Like Shabani Bhattacharya, Malgonkar has not adequately raised the problem of castes in his novels. But he has offered at least some solution. In dealing with the elopement of the young queen of Begum with Abdulla Jan, the Palace Officer in The Princes, Malgonkar emphasises more on the human aspect of the situation. In doing so he has championed the cause of a casteless and creedless society based on love and mutual respect among human beings rather than subservience. The rise of Kanakchand, the cobbler boy in The Princes to rule the ruler has a note of challenge to the caste-ridden society of India of ancient times. Though Kanakchand appears to be vindictive to Abhaya, his upperhand in the State politics is a pre-indication of the role of the down-trodden in the emerging Indian political scenario. Need Kanakchand and speak in favour of him. Hence Malgonkar preaches the message that
A casteless society can only be formed when the so-called lower castes are given due weightage in the state politics along with their uppercaste brethren.

Both the artists deal with social issues that are definitely the major ones in the Indian context relating to a particular period. All the social issues are also universal in nature, though all the political issues need not necessarily be universal. But Bhattacharyya always projects a reconciliation of differences or achievement of equilibrium among differing views and ways of life. He is more vibrant and redundant than Malgankar. The conclusion of the action in Shadow from Lodsh forcefully expresses reconciliation of oppositions. Reconciliation between the steeltown and Gandhigram is portrayed vividly not as a way of thinking but as a continuation of action in the novel. Amalgamation of different ways is the strongest of strains in Music for Mohini. Mohini's relatively emancipated and free life in the city with her radio career, the Western movies, the study in co-educational classes stand at the opposite pole to Jayadev's village and the Big house. It is Roop-Lekha, Jayadev's sister, and Mohini, his wife, who come to be the living strands binding the opposition of old and new, East and West. Entering into the confusing complexity of the city as a sixteen year old bride, Roop-Lekha had brought with her the teachings of Mother and the traditions of the Big House. It
is she who is instrumental in finding Mohini for her brother. As a result of Roop-Lekha's intervention Mohini later carries the values of the city back to the village. In this way 'the shuttle has been set in motion that will help to weave the fabric that is the new India....' The conclusion of the action in A Goddess named Gold makes clear the message of individual responsibility in meeting a new age. There is a consistent attempt for reconciliation between contending forces within the individual and society, a heightened need as India stands on the brink of nationhood and prepares for her first popular election. The message is clear. If the new nation is to survive every citizen must assume his share of responsibility in accordance with his personal endowments. Every segment of society must also recognize and fulfill its role. Youth and old age, as epitomized by Heera and her grandfather; old and new, East and West, village and city, summed up in the personalities of simple villagers and Sohanlal, the educated young city man — all these must reconcile their differences, and be brought into balance if the new government is to go forward into the future with strength. In He Who Rides a Tiger the concept of reconciliation of differences is worked out mainly through the character of Kalo. At the conclusion of the traumatic experiences that have marked his journey from village to city, from low caste to high, from acceptance to self-knowledge, Kalo has reconciled the bitter divisions that had once rent his personality. Kalo and Chandralekha are once more united not as partners in a cruel charade of
duplicity, but as father and daughter facing life together honestly and with dignity. Bhattacharya does not tell us what the future will bring but he has hinted at marriage between Leela and Biten - a wedding between the confined village and the wider world, between ancient ways and new - and he has indicated that Viswanath - the personification of Kalo's conscience - will have a part in it. Rohouil and Monju at the outset of the action are preoccupied by the birth of their daughter but by the conclusion of the story they are busy devoting themselves to the welfare of the starving masses. These are all elements of reconciliation that independently preach a new gospel relevant to the emerging independent Indian society.

For centuries caste has been one of India's hurdles on the road to social reforms that would assure each citizen full stature as a member of the human family. Though outlawed in the Indian Constitution adopted following independence in 1947, caste discrimination is still prevalent especially in village life. In meeting this internal problem and revealing it as a continuing major challenge to the nation's people and leaders, Bhattacharya reveals himself as one of the brave literary social critics. In He Who Rides a Tiger the outcaste is the protagonist and the novelist exposes the festering sore on the social body that, left untreated, might well endanger the health of a nation struggling to be born.
Shattacharya always realised that national independence is related to national aspiration which again is ultimately related to human worth and dignity. Freedom from colonial bondage concerns him in almost all his major works. His basic concern has always been freedom from all debilitating influences, whether from without or within. Though the feeling of national pride is apparently visible in both the writers, in case of Shattacharya this feeling is more vivid. The remarkable absence of non-Indian characters, subjects and themes in his major fictional works amply justify his indigenous feeling and pride. The artist with all his national pride makes a consistent effort in almost all his novels as to show a new nation must shape itself. The variegated social problems that India faced and struggled as she witnessed the dawn of a new way of life are the problems many other emerging nations have faced in the first half of this century, and which are confronting still others about to be born. Malgonkar also confirmed to this pattern but the social aspects that he touched upon as an artist are not as variegated as those that Shattacharya dealt with. The canvass was comparatively a smaller one as he represented the way of thinking of a smaller privileged section of the society rather than the social maladies affecting the general fabric of Indian society. In a sense it can rightly be said that Shattacharya was a more socially committed artist than Malgonkar.
In short it may be concluded here that both the artists have shown a keen social consciousness in recording the contemporary elements in the Indian society, particularly at a time when the country was passing through a very crucial and critical period. Not only have they appeared as the most keen observers of the social developments, but also they have proved themselves as writers with an alert mind and an honest motive to project the very nerves of the Indian society. These novelists have correctly understood the responsibility of a modern artist as emphasised by F.R. Leavis, and have thereby, made all efforts to highlight the social events which played a great role in shaping the destiny of India as an emerging country in the map of the world. In their art of characterisation, they have concentrated chiefly on the actual social circumstances which have motivated their protagonists to act and react against events and situations which determined the position of Indian characters fighting against all the social maladies of the time. Above all, in spite of certain difference in their approach and point of views, both the novelists have made psychological analyses of their characters and made a skin-depth study of these characters to project their innermost feelings and their views and opinions on the various socio-economic, political, religious and cultural developments that took place in the country. Their novels, therefore, are to be considered essentially as social documents that establish them as the most conscious social artists of their time.
NOTES

1. Iqbal Bahadur, ed., *The Novel in Modern India: Indic Anglian*, Bhaban Bhattacharya (The P.I.H. All India Centre with the assistance of Indian Council for Cultural Relations), Bombay, 1964, p.47.


3. Ibid., p.45.


10. Iqbal Bahadur, op. cit, p.45.


