This thesis set out to trace the ordeal of change in Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels, taking into consideration his first five novels which are set in India, namely *So Many Hungers!, Music for Mohini*, *He Who Rides a Tiger, A Goddess Named Gold* and *Shadow from Ladakh* and excluding his sixth novel *A Dream in Hawaii*, which is laid outside India and therefore does not lend itself to a study of the ordeal of social change.

Given his background and growth and the influences he underwent, it was inevitable that Bhattacharya should become a novelist writing with a social purpose. The summaries of the novels make it very clear that his novels record social change.

Bhattacharya's mind was influenced by Marxist thought, democratic ideals, Tagore, Gandhiji and Nehru. That is why his novels sometimes echo Tagore's ideas and include characters modelled on Gandhiji and Nehru. But Bhattacharya's identification with Gandhian ideals does not blind him to the danger of pseudo-Gandhism.

Social change is of primary interest to Bhattacharya the novelist. He understands the problems of contemporary Indian society and presents them through the method of
dramatisation. Therefore Bhattacharya's novels are essentially social novels.

Bhattacharya maintains that a novel should be concerned with social reality. An artist should not, in Bhattacharya's view, be frightened of labels which may be attached to him. He himself is able to balance the artist and the propagandist in his novels successfully.

Bhattacharya has a genuine concern for society. He is a novelist of the destitutes. He has the vision of a welfare state at heart. His social conscience is outraged to see exploitation in any form and he strives to arouse the conscience of the reader in turn.

Bhattacharya is quite justified in choosing current social problems for the theme of his novels. In fact he regards it as fortunate for a writer to live at a turning point of national life. Because of his preoccupation with contemporary issues his novels are suspected to be journalistic, but Bhattacharya refutes the charge. He asserts that Indian history of today is fit material for a novelist. In fact he criticises Indian novelists for their indifference to contemporary events.

Bhattacharya is obsessed with the theme of hunger in his novels. Freedom is an important recurrent theme in his novels. Synthesis of opposites is also a dominant
theme in his novels. His major concern is with forces which are conducive to life. His novels are essentially about the making of a man. He is obsessed with his dream of true freedom for his country. He is endowed with a transparently positive vision of life.

Women occupy an important position in Bhattacharya's novels. He believes that women have more depth and richness than men. Moreover, they have, according to him, a greater capacity than men for value adaptation.

In short, Bhattacharya is a world-class novelist and a scholarly and cultured writer, writing with sincerity and dedication.

An important feature of Bhattacharya's novels is the clash of contrasting viewpoints and ways of life. Proceeding to solve them, Bhattacharya often upholds the policy of compromise. He attempts a synthesis of the old and the new and of opposite extremes.

These clashes are attended by change, usually on the part of both the parties involved except when fundamental principles are involved, like national honour. All such change is an ordeal, usually for both the parties involved. The change is always marked by travail. This thesis endeavours to analyse the ordeal of change in Bhattacharya's novels.

This thesis is organised into seven chapters.
Bhattacharya's sixth and last novel *A Dream in Hawaii* is not analysed because, unlike the other five novels, it is not set in India and so whatever change occurs in it is not related to Indian social life.

*So Many Hungers!* is set against the background of the Bengal Famine of 1943 and the Quit India Movement of 1942 in Bengal. The War encourages hoarding and profiteering. The national movement takes most men to prison. An artificial famine is created. Villagers crowd to the city and live on charity as destitutes. Profiteers flourish. Conscientious nationalists are frustrated. The famine degrades human beings. Kajoli, her mother and her brother Onu go to the city. She is raped on the way by a soldier and loses her baby. In the city, unable to bear the sufferings of her mother and brother, Kajoli decides to become a prostitute. However, the voice of her *dadu*, Devata, urges her to her senses and she resolves to lead an honourable life selling newspapers. But her mother has already committed suicide.

Change is inevitable and prevalent throughout the novel. Devata pays a heavy price for his nationalism. Rahoul moves from spectator to participant in the struggle and lands in jail. Imperial interests play havoc with the lives of the poor. The artificial famine
degrades human beings to animal existence. At the peak of the tragedy human nature undergoes deformation and degeneration.

Not everything need be changed. There is virtue in traditional customs too, particularly those practised in the countryside.

So Many Hungers! has a galaxy of characters of various shades who are contrasts of one another.

*Music for Mohini* is largely set in the village of Behula where the city-bred Mohini goes as the bride of the cultivated scholar Jayadev. The hoary traditions of the Big House and the impositions of Jayadev's mother threaten to suffocate Mohini. She conforms where she can and rebels where she cannot. Jayadev, when his eyes are opened to her predicament, comes to her rescue, but has to tread carefully, lest he offend his mother. Mohini's failure to conceive, coupled with a fatal prognostication in Jayadev's horoscope, create a new confrontation between the tradition-bound Mother and modern Mohini. An accident suffered by Jayadev converts Mohini and she surrenders to tradition, agreeing to give her blood to the virgin goddess. Jayadev averts the tragedy in time. Mohini, it is learnt, is already pregnant.

Change has to be forced on the village of Behula and the Mother, but the intelligent Mohini does exactly
that. Mohini is not foolish or adamant and bends where wisdom reigns in the form of tradition. Jayadev, caught square in the middle, is frustrated till the full degree of his Mother's decadence is revealed. Then he openly asserts himself in favour of modernity.

The winds of change have started blowing across the village too, thanks to a band of youth led by the rebellious physician Harindra. Thanks to them even Sudha, Saturn's Eyesore, may at last find a bridegroom in Behula.

The major concern of *Music for Mohini* is the need for a change of social outlook. Conventions and traditions are not to be dumped overboard in a mass, but they have to be subjected to the test of reason.

*He who Rides a Tiger* goes back to the Bengal Famine of 1943, but, after showing a few vignettes of the misery caused by it, passes on to positive action and retaliation by an aggrieved victim. Kalo, a village blacksmith, goes to Calcutta in search of employment, but finds himself in a jail for stealing a few bananas. A cell-mate exhorts him to retaliate against the boss folk.

Released, Kalo becomes a pimp. He saves his own daughter Lakha from a brothel and vows revenge. Claiming to be a Brahmin, he performs a miracle, raising Shiva
from the ground. A temple is built on the spot and Kalo settles down to a prosperous life as the maker of the temple.

The elite and the rich patronise Kalo and the poor worship him. He dispenses grace to one and all with his kamar lips and hands. His daughter grows resplendent in the service of the temple. He manipulates religion and ritual to suit his whims and convictions.

His former cell-mate in ajil, Biten, arrives and wonders when and how Kalo will get off the back of the tiger he has mounted. The moment comes when the trustees deny him the adoption of an orphan and nearly blackmail his daughter into marrying a lecherous old man. Kalo reveals his true identity, denounces his hypocritical devotees and walks away, protected by the low-caste people who outnumber the Brahmins.

Kalo fails as a traditional good man. When he changes over to fraud, he is phenomenally successful. The world of the rich is so riddled with hypocrisy and dishonesty that he can succeed by merely playing them one against another. He exploits their own traditions and devotions to fool them.

However, when the happiness of his daughter is threatened, he decides to dismount from the back of the tiger.
A Goddess Named Gold is set in the village of Sonamitti during the one hundred days preceding Independence. Seeing that the village is held to ransom by the greed of Seth Samsundar, a minstrel much respected by the villagers gives his grand daughter Meera a taveez. He says that if she performs some act of real kindness while wearing the touchstone, the copper on her body will turn into gold.

The Seth acts quickly and drafts Meera as business partner to manufacture gold. He loads her body with copper ornaments and invents acts of kindness for her to perform. The villagers also become greedy. But, when no gold comes forth, Meera becomes unpopular. The machinations of the Seth make Meera a hated figure and there is an attempt to burn her effigy. The minstrel returns and explains that the real touchstone is freedom. Meera throws the taveez into the river. The Seth stands exposed and defeated on all counts.

The confrontation between greed and altruism triggers see-saw change in the entire village and even Meera's close friends of the Cowhouse Five circle nearly desert her. Only the revelation of the truth restores the equilibrium.

Shadow from Ladakh is set against the background of the Chinese aggression of 1962. Steeltown wishes to
expand in order to make munitions for the armed forces and needs to swallow Gandhigram, a Gandhian village. The Chief Engineer, Bhaskar, is a pragmatist while the leader of Gandhigram, Satyajit, is a Gandhian idealist.

Satyajit moots the idea of a Shanti Sena to go on a Peace Mission to Ladakh to face Chinese guns with truth and non-violence. But the call for volunteers elicits negligible response. The idea is shelved. Next Satyajit announces a fast-unto-death to save Gandhigram from the jaws of Steeltown.

Satyajit's staunchest ally is his daughter Sumita, who has fallen in love with Bhaskar. Ultimately, however, a compromise is reached and Bhaskar decides to extend Steeltown's tentacles elsewhere. Harmony is restored and synthesis effected.

The real significance is reserved for the two ideologies involved—the spinning wheel and the steel mill, Gandhism versus Nehruism. The solution arrived at is a synthesis of the two ideologies, each admitting the need for and the relevance of the other.

Change is palpable at every level—local, national and international. Even personal relationships undergo change in the stress of circumstances. For instance, at last, Satyajit realises after so many years that he is not Gandhian enough to observe real brahmacharya. Sumita gives up white saris for coloured ones, goes back
to white ones and returns again to coloured ones.

Sumita's mother, Suruchi, who always retains her individuality internally, is perhaps the only character who does not change.

Bhaskar undergoes a good deal of change. A go-getter always on the roll, he pauses and plays the flute, devotes time to cultural programmes, sight-seeing in Sumita's company and playing with Chinese children. It is only when he succumbs to the better side of the Gandhian ideology that he finds contentment.

Change is an inescapable imperative of human existence. Circumstances force change and they determine its direction. Change is neither good nor bad per se. Often it leaves no winner or loser. But change always involves travail of some kind and degree. The ordeal of change, as realised in literature, is worth studying as a feature of the mimetic art. In the case of novels, with their amplitude of representation, change can be delineated minutely and faithfully. It is during the process of change that character is revealed at its clearest.

The foregoing study has traced the ordeal of change in the first five novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya. All the novels are predominantly marked by change at the individual as well as the collective level. The change is generally positive, towards an affirmation of life.
Very often the change takes the form of a compromise between and a synthesis of opposites. Besides physically palpable change, there is the inner change that affects the mind and character, which is then manifested in outlook and attitude. It is the latter variety of change that is of paramount importance to the student of human nature.

It would be a welcomeendeavour if some scholar were to undertake a study of the ordeal of change in Bhattacharya's novels from the point of view of psychology. Another welcomeendeavour would be a study of the novels of Bhattacharya as fables.