Chapter 1
Introduction

Bhabani Bhattacharyya is one of the more prominent but less prolific Indian English novelists. He has written only six novels, namely *So Many Hungers!* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1955), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960), *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) and *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978). Besides these novels he has published *Steel Hawk and Other Stories* (1968), a collection of short stories; *Gandhi the Writer: The Image as it Grew* (1969), a literary biography; and, *The Golden Boat* (1930), a collection of stories by Rabindranath Tagore, translated by Bhattacharya. In his monograph, *Bhabani Bhattacharya*, K.R. Chandrasekharan says that Bhattacharya "is perhaps not as widely known in this country as he ought to be, and judging from the number of translations of his works into foreign languages, he has a wider reading public abroad than at home" (1).

Bhattacharya was born in Bhagalpur in Bihar, India, in an educated and well-to-do Brahmin family. He studied in Puri and then went to Patna University to study English Literature. He started writing in Bengali and then in English too for magazines. He also attempted translations from Bengali to English for *Vichitra, Manchester* and *The Spectator*. Ramesh K. Srivastava,
in his introduction to *Perspectives on Bhabani Bhattacharya*,
says that it was Francis Yeats-Brown, the editor of
*The Spectator*, who urged Bhattacharya to write in English
in order to get a world audience (xiii).

Bhattacharya joined King's College, University of
London and obtained a degree in History and a Ph.D.
degree also. Returning to India in 1934, he married
Sabila Mukherji in 1935. A traditional wife, she
effaced herself and contributed her energies to the
enrichment of her husband's work. In 1936 Bhattacharya
was offered a teaching job at Santiniketan, but declined
it for fear that Tagore would overshadow him.

The national movement was gaining momentum and
Bengal became the centre of activity. Tagore and
Bankim Chandra Chatterjee attempted to awaken the
people while Gandhiji's principles of truth and non-
violence were sweeping the country. The Bengal Famine
of 1943 killed millions of people. The emotional
stirrings caused by the tragedy compelled Bhattacharya
to creativity and he wrote his first novel *So Many
Hungrers!*

*So Many Hungrers!* is set against the backdrop of
the Bengal Famine of 1943 and the Quit India Movement
of 1942 during the period of the Second World War. The
twin hunger for food and for freedom is the central
theme of the novel. The plot of the novel is woven out of two strands—the story of the family of Rahoul Basu, a young scientist and that of the family of Kajoli, a peasant girl. Rahoul's story is a miniature version of the national movement. Kajoli's story is a representation of the privations suffered by more than two million men and women of Bengal who became victims of a famine which was artificially created by the greed and selfishness of profiteers abetted by the callousness of alien authority. Kajoli is driven by hunger to the city of Calcutta only to find it no better than her village. On the way she is raped by a soldier and loses her unborn baby. In order to feed her sickly mother and her brother, she decides to take to prostitution and receives an advance from a procuress. But, at the last moment, the recollection of the patriotic exhortation of Devata, her dadu (grandfather), who is reported in the newspapers to have undertaken a fast unto-death in Dehra Dun prison, saves her from perdition. Rahoul progresses by stages from ineffectual sympathy to bold and open participation in the national movement till he is arrested. The novel deals essentially with exploitation—political, economic and social.

*Music for Mohini* is set in rural Bengal five years after the Bengal Famine of 1943. It presents certain
sociological aspects of Indian life and suggests the
direction in which Indians have to move if they are to
benefit fully from the political freedom recently
acquired. The novel portrays the intellectual and
emotional development of the heroine, Mohini, from a
carefree and sheltered girlhood in the city to the
position of a wife and the mistress of a prominent and
influential rural house with great and ancient traditions.
There are two prominent themes in the novel, namely
that of tradition and modernity and that of rural and
urban life. Mohini's husband Jayadev is presented as a
combination of the best of Indian tradition and Western
thought. The novel attacks social evils and seeks to
solve social problems like casteism, untouchability,
widow-remarriage and prevention of child-marriage.
Jayadev is a practical idealist trying to turn Behula
into a model village for all of India to emulate and
Mohini contributes her share to the enterprise.

He Who Rides a Tiger is set against the background
of the Bengal Famine of 1943 and the Quit India Movement
of 1942, though the latter is only vaguely hinted at,
while the hunger looms large. The horror of the famine
is here concentrated in the history of a few individuals
who retaliate against the boss-folk who hit the poor
where it hurts and then attain their full stature as
human beings. The hero, Kalo, is so infuriated by man's inhumanity to man that he plans and executes a fraud that reduces complacent society to virtual perdition. Through his experiences and sufferings, he learns the secret that the greatest achievement of man is to be true to one's own self. Kalo, a blacksmith, is driven to the city by the famine and finds himself in jail for stealing a few bananas. Released from jail, he becomes a corpse-remover and then a pimp. He discovers his darling daughter in a brothel. He then wreaks vengeance on the high-caste people by faking the "coming" of Shiva, using germinated gram. The novel castigates the hypocrisy and fraud of traditional and religious-minded people. The novel presents the clash of haves and have-nots, appearance and reality and orthodoxy and reason. Kalo mounts a tiger with a purpose, but also manages to dismount when the purpose has been served.

_A Goddess Named Gold_ is set in the village of Sonamitti and describes the happenings during the one hundred days leading to freedom. The novelist's main concern is to define what freedom really means and to castigate freedom-killing tendencies like greed and profiteering. Seth Samsundar, the moneylender and merchant, is pitted against Meera, a vivacious do-gooder.
Her grandfather, a wandering minstrel, gives her a taveez (amulet), which he says has the power to transform copper into gold, provided she performs an act of real kindness. The Seth perceives the opportunity and strikes a deal with Meera to manufacture gold without mining. He stages several artificial acts of kindness to be performed by Meera, who is overloaded with copper ornaments, but none is transformed into gold. These attempts only alienate Meera from the people. Finally, the minstrel returns and it is revealed that the one instance of transmutation was actually a trick planned by him. Meera flings the taveez into the river. The minstrel reveals that freedom is the real taveez that will enrich the people, provided they are honest and industrious. In the course of these developments the danger of the Seth being elected to the District Board in the first free elections in India is also averted.

Shadow from Ladakh is set against the background of the Chinese invasion against India in 1962. The aggression itself highlights the simultaneous need for industrialisation and Gandhian ideals, which constitute the theme of the novel and provide the artistic clash of contrasts, to be prudently resolved, as it is in the novel, in a harmonious synthesis. Gandhigram and
Steeltown are poles apart, representing opposing ideologies and ways of life, confronting each other for some time, and then coming together in peace, symbolised by the impending marriage of Bhaskar of Steeltown and Sumita of Gandhigram. Both Satyajit of Gandhigram and Bhaskar of Steeltown want to preserve India's freedom and dignity, but through different means. Ultimately the answer is found in peaceful co-existence and synthesis, when Steeltown gives up its plan to swallow Gandhigram, so persuaded by Satyajit's fast- unto-death challenging the appetite of Steeltown.

*A Dream in Hawaii* deals with the conventional East-West encounter, this time in Hawaii. The encounter is abortive because, while the East, which represents the spiritual, has not yet completely conquered the flesh, the West is still too commercialised and confused and so the twain do not meet. Swami Yogananda, who represents the East, discovers that he has yet to rise above his love for Debjani. The American, Dr. Swift, the organizational man who wishes to use Yogananda as a tool to found a flourishing spiritual centre, and his compatriot, Dr. Gregson, the champion of permissive society, represent two facets of American culture that thwart a synthesis of the East and the West.
Bhattacharya’s creative mind was influenced eclectic ally. Dorothy B. Shimer, in Bhabani Bhattacharya, says that the writers who influenced Bhattacharya include Romain Rolland, Bernard Shaw, Ibsen, Knut Hamsun, Johuan Bojer, Walt Whitman, John Steinbeck, Sinclair Lewis, John Dos Passos, Upton Sinclair and Alan Paton (8-9).

Sudhakar Joshi, in “An Evening with Bhabani,” the record of an interview published in The Sunday Standard, quotes Bhattacharya acknowledging the influence of Tagore on his mind:

"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."

The influence of Tagore on Bhattacharya is evident in So Many Hungers! wherein the freedom fighters sing a song by Tagore (215) and in Shadow from Ladakh, wherein Bhattacharya quotes Tagore’s belief in the harmony of cultures:

That was Tagore’s firm belief. Integration—that was the poet’s lifelong quest: integration of the simple and the sophisticated; the ancient and the modern; city and village; East and West. (215)
Gandhi, whom Bhattacharya met in England in 1931, also influenced him significantly, as he himself has said in an interview with Shimer, published in her book *Bhabani Bhattacharya*:

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

(12)

In *Bhabani Bhattacharya: A Study of His Novels*, G. Rai says that Bhattacharya's novels show the influence of Gandhi in the treatment of non-violence, love for rural people, the freedom struggle, poverty, corruption, ignorance, superstition, exploitation and greed. Some of his fictional characters like Devata in *So Many Hungers!*, Jayadev in *Music for Mohini*, the old minstrel in *A Goddess Named Gold* and Satyajit in *Shadow from Ladakh* are partly modelled on Gandhi, particularly in their views on self-control, chastity, celibacy, asceticism and indulgence. They resort to well-known Gandhian means like satyagraha, non-co-operation and
peaceful strikes to achieve social and political ends. However, Bhattacharya's subscription to Gandhian ideals is not blind (6). The hypocritical use of Gandhian ideals and symbols is ridiculed by Bhabani Bhattacharya in the person of the wheat trader Jhunjunia, who, in Shadow from Ladakh, is reported to visit Gandhiji's samadhi at Rajghat whenever he makes a fortune by a shady transaction (210) and in the person of Rajani in He Who Rides a Tiger, who asks Kalo to cover his pate with a Gandhi cap to make himself "more respectable" in his new profession of pimping (53). Rama Jha, in Gandhian Thought in Indo-Anglian Fiction, says, "Being thoroughly familiar with Gandhi's views on varied subjects, Bhabani Bhattacharya has been able to touch upon almost all the aspects of Gandhian ideology and in the right perspective too" (128-29).

Jawaharlal Nehru also influenced Bhattacharya's mind to a certain extent. Nehru's banned Gorakhpur prison statement is mentioned in So Many Hungers! (43). Excerpts from Nehru's midnight speech on Independence day are quoted in A Goddess Named Gold (304). Nehru's ideology of rapid industrialisation is one of the two dominant and opposing elements in Shadow from Ladakh and Bhaskar, the Chief Engineer of Steeltown, partly represents Nehru.
Rai says that Bhattacharya's novels reveal his Marxist leanings and humanitarian outlook, pointing to the influence of Harold Lasky's Marxist interpretation of history (2). Shimer also says, "A strong undercurrent of Marxist respect for liberal humanitarianism and the effects of economic pressures on history runs through all Bhattacharya's novels" (10-11). Bhattacharya was also influenced by the ideals of democracy as preached by British statesmen, but not practised by them in India. Mahaul, the Cambridge-trained Indian scientist in So Many Hungers!, refers to this paradox more than once.

The problem of social change is of paramount interest to Bhattacharya. He has a sensitive and realistic understanding of the problems of contemporary Indian society, acquired from minute observation of the life of the common people. His novels present faithful pictures of the various aspects of life, intensified through the device of dramatisation. So Bhattacharya's novels are essentially social novels. Ashok Kr. Bachchan, in "The Theme of Hunger in Bhabani Bhattacharya's Novels," says that Bhattacharya made his novels "effective instruments of social change" ([29]).
Joshi records Bhattacharya's view that a novel should be concerned with social reality:

"I hold that a novel should 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."

In "Bhabani Bhattacharya: A Social Reformer," H.G.S. Arulandram says that Bhattacharya, "in every one of his novels, directs his energies in [sic] exposing the various social evils of modern India" (37). In *The Novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya*, Balram S. Sorot says:

Bhattacharya depicts life in Indian society exactly as he has viewed it with a discerning eye. His themes are close to social reality and based on real experience. He is concerned with large public issues and social problems. He generally writes about the poverty, hunger, pestilence, traditionalism and the resulting controversy of Gandhian panacea versus rapid industrialisation. In this way, he touches almost all the aspects of the present-day
India while weaving a pattern for the stories of his novels." (16)

In "Literature and Social Reality," Bhattacharya maintains that an artist should not be frightened by labels which may be attached to him:

Art must teach, but unobtrusively, by its vivid interpretation of life. Art must preach, but only by virtue of its being a vehicle of truth. If that is propaganda, there is no need to eschew the word. (4)

In "Bhabani Bhattacharya: Artist/Propagandist," P.P. Sharma maintains, "Bhattacharya is a writer who can keep the artist and the propagandist in him in perfect equipoise, in a delicate balance" (51).

In his introduction to Perspectives on Bhabani Bhattacharya, Ramesh K. Srivastava points to Bhattacharya’s genuine concern for society:

Bhabani Bhattacharya, having within him the genuine concern for society, has his favourite areas to which, as to a refrain, he periodically returns. The irrepressible enthusiasm to see the world shaping to his ideals and to see it soon, the desire to cure the cankerous diseases infecting people individually and
collectively, the dream of raising the nation to dizzy heights so that it could tower above all—these are the vital concerns of Bhabani Bhattacharya and he, like an overanxious father, goes on guiding the people on the right way, warning them against pitfalls.

(xxvi)

Nathan M. Aston, in Bhabani Bhattacharya: A Stylistic Analysis of His Novels, drives home the point more directly:

Bhattacharya is a novelist of the destitutes. He has sympathy with the socially downtrodden people. The novelist doesn't spare the government and administration for the inhumanity and apathy towards the downtrodden.

(9)

Shyamala B. Rao, in Bhabani Bhattacharya, quoting C. Paul Verghese, rounds off the argument thus:

Bhattacharya has the vision of a welfare state at heart. His concerns are clear and unambiguous; they are political, economic and social. In other words the dignity of man both in national and international contexts is uppermost in his mind....

(45)
In the preface to her book Bhabani Bhattacharya as a Novelist of Social Conscience, Malta Grover says:

Bhattacharya's social conscience is outraged to see exploitation in any form and he strives to arouse the conscience of the reader to the wrongs and evils that prevail around us. But the manner in which he achieves his objective is unique. His work on the whole appears to be a significant attempt to maintain a fine balance between his moral and aesthetic concerns. ([i])

In "Social Commitment in Bhattacharya's Novels," Syed Ameeruddin says, "Bhattacharya's novels on the whole are a protest against the deeprooted social evils of our country. He is a committed writer with a definite purpose" ([20]). In "Bhabani Bhattacharya and His Novels," R.K. Badal says, "Bhattacharya's writing quivers with an outraged social conscience..."([77]).

Chandrasekharan justifies Bhattacharya's choice of current social problems for the theme of his novels:

He [Bhattacharya] believes that the novelist can find plenty of material in the happenings of the day. This is particularly true of our country which is passing through a momentous stage in her history. The feelings
and aspirations of the people, their attempts to create a new order based on the foundations of the old, the dangers and difficulties that confront them in their task, all these could be profitably utilized by an observant novelist who may have the privilege of capturing a true image of the times for the benefit of people living in other lands and posterity. Bhattacharya is aware of the existence of a point of view that a novelist should not use 'contemporary reality' because he is too close to it to be able to view it dispassionately and understand its proper significance. . . . (5)

In fact Bhattacharya, in "Indo-Anglian," says that it is fortunate for a writer to be living at a turning point of national life:

It is not often that a novelist is fortunate enough to live at a turning point of national life. The turning point faces us with its challenge. Will not some of India's novelists accept the challenge? (47-48)

Because of his preoccupation with the problems of contemporary life, Bhattacharya's novels are often charged by critics with a journalistic treatment of
themes and characters, without being tempered artistically. However, Bhattacharya, in "Literature and Social Reality," asserts that, if a creative writer is moved so deeply by events of today that he must have a creative outlet for his feelings, there is no reason why he should put them in cold storage (395). He goes on to cite John Steinbeck as a model:

A novelist may well be concerned with today, the current hour or moment, if it is meaningful for him, if it moves him sufficiently into emotional response. An instance that comes to my mind among a score of others is Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. That good book, depicting an immediate and acute problem of the time of its writing, could easily have become brilliant journalism. Instead, it became a true piece of fiction. (396)

In "Indo-Anglian," Bhattacharya says:

As a corollary of this premise I suggest that our own history of today is fit material for a novelist. That history need not wait for fifty years before it is declared suitable for fictional projection. Here is a history not of political developments, but of a people's dream to attain a better life and
of the struggle to fulfil the dream. In economic terms it would simply mean better living standards. But the creative artist sees other values which are inherent in living standards at every level. To put it briefly, it would be appropriate for a novelist of today to make the spiritual values of our Five Year Plans the basis of his theme. Those spiritual values expressed through living images, creatures of flesh and blood and feeling, may well give a new direction to our creative endeavour. . . . (47)

Mahendra N. Pandia, in "Relevance of Bhattacharya's Fiction," says that Bhattacharya, "with a remarkable sensitivity and accuracy saw the panorama around him and gave it a convincing voice in his novels" (6).

In fact, in "Literature and Social Reality," Bhattacharya takes Indian writers to task for their indifference to contemporary events:

War has washed over our borders and the effect has been felt all over the subcontinent. The struggle for freedom has rocked the land. Famine of a kind conceivable only to a Dante's imagination has actually taken place.
The tragedies of partition have been beyond anything that a writer could "invent". But where is the creative expression of all these happenings? It would be somewhat odd to say that the writers have been too dazed by recent history to make it their material. In contrast, the two world wars are adequately reflected in the best literature of the West: the writers have lived through history undazed. (5-6)

In *Bhabani Bhattacharya: His Vision and Themes*, K.K. Sharma says that Bhattacharya is obsessed with the theme of hunger:

His [Bhattacharya's] central preoccupation with the theme of hunger is evident in the entire corpus of his creative writings. The Bengal Famine seized his mind, and hunger in one form or another has haunted him throughout his literary career. He regards hunger, external and internal, as the fundamental reality of life. . . .

Bhattacharya has a thorough grasp of his basic theme of hunger, and has dealt with most of its significant aspects and varieties.
His fiction is based upon man's hunger for food and political freedom. But it also gives adequate consideration to other forms of hunger—viz., hunger for eternal ethical values; hunger for a happier life for the common people; hunger for sex and wealth without any concern for moral and social codes and decency; hunger for social prestige, titles, riches and prosperity of one's children, etc. . . . ([41])

Freedom is an important recurrent theme in Bhattacharya's fiction, as K.K. Sharma says in Bhattacharya: His Vision and Themes:

As in the case of hunger, the novelist [Bhattacharya] examines the theme of freedom in its various forms. He deals with political, economic and social freedoms, as also with the freedoms of the mind, 'the freedom to be free,' etc. Bhattacharya's interest in freedom can be attributed to certain factors. He lived in a period in which entire India was immersed in the struggle for freedom from the British yoke. By the time he was a young boy, Gandhiji . . . had assumed the leadership of the Freedom Movement. Indeed,
any intellectual, who happened to live through the eventful first forty-seven years of the present century, should inevitably have been preoccupied with thoughts of political freedom. After Independence in 1947, the country was confronted with difficult economic problems; economic freedom was still to be achieved. Thus it was natural for Bhattacharya to be drawn towards the problem of economic freedom also. Then, there were social evils eating into the nation's vitals. A battle had to be fought against them in order to lead India to her destined place among the developed countries of the world. This was possible only when people had attained freedom of the mind and 'the freedom to be free.' Hence Bhattacharya's stress on these two varieties of freedom. ([69])

Synthesis of opposites is another dominant theme in Bhattacharya's fiction, as K.K. Sharma says in

_Bhabani Bhattacharya: His Vision and Themes:_

A profound scholar of Indian history as he [Bhattacharya] is, he has concentrated upon the great Indian tradition of integration of
diverse and conflicting elements, viewpoints and cultures. His creative work artistically embodies in miniature the essential Indian ideal of unity in diversity resulting from the compromise between the various aspects of life. In the earlier novels, the theme of synthesis is dealt with indirectly and secondarily. But in ... Shadow from Ladakh, it is conspicuous and dominant from the beginning to the end of the narrative. ([93])

In "The Human Dimensions of Statis [sic] and Growth," Jasbir Jain says:

Bhabani Bhattacharya’s major concern in his novels is with the forces which are conducive to life. He explores the various levels and dimensions of human growth and individual freedom and projects in his works the confrontation between the humanistic and anti-humanistic values. But this does not imply that a simple categorisation of these forces is possible. Ideas or beliefs are not human or anti-human in themselves; they become one or the other because of the attitudes of individuals and the way they
relate to these ideas and beliefs. The same set of ideas which may be life-giving at one time may become a burden at another, constricting both human freedom and happiness. ([52])

Jain adds, "Bhattacharya's novels are essentially about the making of a man—about the need to be honest to one's inner being" (64). She illustrates it with Suruchi's feeling in Shadow from Ladakh and says that it is acceptance of life in its totality. But not the Steeltown way; that also was denial of life deep under the surface. Let licence be chastened by restraint. Let restraint find its right level by a leavening of freedom. Let there be a meeting ground of the two extremes; let each shed some of its content and yet remain true to itself. (274)

In "Bhabani Bhattacharya: A Profile," Lila Ray compares Bhattacharya the novelist to one of his own characters:

Jayadev, the hero of Music for Mohini, was possessed by his dream of true freedom for his country. India was on the verge of
political independence, a new page of history was being written. Like many young men who came to maturity in the late twenties and early thirties of this century, Jayadev pondered the implications of the coming change. What was political liberty worth to the common man if it was not part of a general social renascence. The freedom he envisioned was one that would release a spiritual energy among the masses which would require every social value to be reweighed. To him it seemed the time to end all slavery had come, not least the slavery of the spirit. Jayadev dreamt of breaking through the crust of vulgarity that had, during centuries of decadence, come to obscure the purity and nobility of ancient Hindu thought. He did not, like some iconoclastic young men of his generation, wish to borrow a readymade sword from Western ideology to cut through the knots of India's many problems. Jayadev delved into the remote past in his search for a solution although the new man of his vision, grown to his full stature, was not to be a hollow reincarnation of ancient
Hindu man any more than a Hindu moulded on the Western pattern.

Jayadev is a solitary man, silent, with dreamy heavy-lidded eyes set in a young tranquil face. He is essentially a scholar. His clear-cut mouth and chin reflect the firmness of his purpose. He is gentle, a little shy, endearingly absentminded.

This description fits his creator, Bhabani Bhattacharyya, very aptly. . . . (73-74)

In Bhabani Bhattacharyya: His Vision and Themes, K.K. Sharma says that Bhattacharya is endowed with a transparently positive vision of life, explored and expressed artistically. . . . Since he believes that the novel should have a social purpose, his stories abound in social and historical realities, quite often bitter and gruesome. . . . But beneath them, there is almost always present the novelist's influencing faith in life and its invincibility, indestructibility and worthiness. What emerges prominently in almost every chapter of his novel and finally at the end of it as the pith of the world is the affirmation of life. Even in the midst of ghastly and heart-
rinding scenes of human sufferings and tortures, life asserts itself sparkling amid ashes. From his assertion of ethical values and the synthesis of the old and the new and of opposite extremes emanates Bhabani Bhattacharya's final vision of the affirmation of life. . . . the recurrent 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 questing 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 Bhabani Bhattacharya.

. . . ([13]-14)

In "Bhabani Bhattacharya the Humanist: A Critical Study of His Novels," K.S. Jha says that Bhattacharya is "endowed with a vision of life that owes much to the spirit of humanism" ([139]).

In "The Women in Bhattacharya's Novels," Marlene Fisher says that, in all Bhattacharya's novels, women are "either central characters themselves, are of at
least equal importance with the male characters, or provide the inspiration and meaning from which a man derives his strength. One reason for this is Bhattacharya's reported admission, in a letter to Fisher, that women have more depth, more richness in them than men.

Another reason is the complex role women have traditionally played in Indian society, being always the heart of the family, ensuring the solidarity of the family and the continuation of its values ([66]). In "Woman in My Stories," Bhattacharya says that one of the different forms of human richness is "the capacity for value adaptation," which, according to him, women possess in plenty (2). In The Woman in Indian Fiction in English 1950-80, Shanta Krishnawamy says:

Bhabani Bhattacharya presents the Indian woman as the pure woman in his novels. She is pure with exuberant vitality and high ideals, only to be victimised ultimately [sic]. Her vitality is crushed, her ideals dig her own grave and she is invariably victimised. Yet Bhattacharya makes the reader feel that she is the ray of hope for mankind, that it is the pure woman, who, though victimised, gives form to an unjust life and informs us and the world we live in with love. The
concept of the innocent victimised woman is a
continuous thread in his fictional output. (60)

Summing up the achievement of Bhattacharya,
Harcharan Singh Boparai, in "The Achievement of Bhabani
Bhattacharya," says:

he [Bhattacharya] has emerged as a world-class
novelist who has presented the birth-pangs of
a nation's freedom, and its agonies and
aspirations in a historical perspective;
who has shown concern for man's physical,
mental and spiritual needs; and who has
depicted the human drama at microcosmic as
well as epic scale. . . . Bhattacharya's
achievement does not lie in the portrayal of
life alone; it lies in the vision of life
which he conveys through it. And this
achievement is no less great than the
achievement of any other world-class novelist
writing today. (216)

Rounding off his profile of Bhattacharya,
Chandrasekharan says:

We have . . . in Bhabani Bhattacharya a
scholarly and cultured writer writing with
sincerity and a sense of dedication to his
country and to his art. He has a definite
theory of the novel which he applies to his own works. As a result he has produced works which have relevance to life in contemporary India. With his progressive ideas and his vision of a glorious future he has also great admiration for the spiritual and cultural heritage of the country. Like the great men whom he admired, particularly Tagore and Gandhi, he is also a builder of bridges between the past and the present. (8)

An important feature of Bhattacharya's novels is the clash of contrasting viewpoints and ways of life in them. Rai says that the narrative of Bhattacharya's novels is based on a clash or conflict of two opposing strands (110). In A History of Indian English Literature, M.K. Naik says that Bhattacharya presents contrasts and then solves them (213). Bhattacharya upholds the policy of compromise between two opposite ways of life, like orthodoxy versus reason, tradition versus modernity, materialism versus idealism, spiritualism versus industrialism. The contrasts are not always clear-cut or the clashes simple. In Bhabani Bhattacharya: His Vision and Themes, K.K. Sharma speaks of "the synthesis of the old and the new and of opposite extremes" in Bhattacharya's novels ([13]).
In *So Many Hungers!* there are two clashes, one between nationalism and colonialism and the other between poverty and affluence, the latter overshadowing the former. In *Music for Mohini* the clash is between tradition and modernity. In *He Who Rides a Tiger* the clash is between orthodoxy and reason. The clash in *A Goddess Named Gold* is between greed and altruism. In *Shadow from Ladakh* the struggle is between Gandhism and Nehruism—the spinning wheel and the steel mill.

In all these clashes there is a movement, usually from the old to the new but not always or necessarily so. There is virtue in tradition too, and its worth has to be upheld. Social change is the inevitable consequence of any clash of contrasts. No change is good or bad *per se*.

Moreover, all change is attended by a travail of some kind and degree. This ordeal of change, as realised in literature, is worth studying, particularly in fiction, with its amplitude of treatment. The change usually resolves the clash, usually in the form of a compromise or synthesis, though there are subjects like, for instance, national honour, where no compromise is possible. Besides, there is an inner change that often results from such clashes. These are of particular interest to the student of human nature.
To illustrate, in Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers!*, Rahoul has always been guided by his grandfather Devata, rather than by his father, who, according to him, "does not care what happens to the world" (17); when the Salt Satyagraha was launched, Rahoul, taking his cue from his grandfather, would have gone to prison, but his father changed his course by dangling the carrot of Cambridge education before the youngster’s eyes and Rahoul, despite Devata’s view that Cambridge could wait, after "a keen struggle in his mind," opted for Cambridge (21-22); Rahoul, who admires Nehru, is stirred by Nehru’s Gorakhpur prison statement and shamed by the patriotism of his research student Prokash, who has acquired a permanent limp from a police lathi charge, whose father has been in jail with tuberculosis for four years and who has to support his mother and a widowed sister with children with his research grant (42-46); Rahoul becomes pensive, but has to wait till he sees police lathis break open Indian skulls and police feet desecrate the national tricolour before he leaves his perch in the laboratory and gets baptised by a lathi blow on his leg and a brief stint in prison (65-66); Rahoul suffers only light intellectual qualms when, upon the suggestion of Prokash, he leaves fake notes on his research on the death ray for the
benefit of the student-spy and his Special Branch masters (67-68); when the famine rages at its peak, Rahoul paces the laboratory floor, his feet restless, worried why he cannot "escape from the oppressive darkness of Bengal far into cosmic light," and loses his intellectual poise, because he shares the hangers of his people and, after this ordeal, he decides to play his part in the national movement, taking over leadership of the students, steering them away from potential terrorism to mass action (108-09); he plunges into relief work also (152-54); he tries to assess the deeper implications of the famine, prompted thereto by disturbing newspaper reports of emotional hardening among the destitutes (181-82); he is deeply moved by the self-sacrifice of a girl who exhibits her breasts to the gaze of alien soldiers to earn money for bread for her fellow destitutes (183-86); he is greatly impressed by the richness of the human spirit displayed by another destitute who, after feeding in the relief centre for a few days, says that he can now fend for himself and so insists on surrendering his ticket so that it can be given to another destitute whose need is greater (186-87); and, having given up his fake notes and openly called upon the British to quit India, he calmly faces arrest by the police, says good-bye to his family and climbs into the police van (202-03).
The ordeal of change that Rahoul experiences is set off by the absence of any such travail for Kunal, who joins the army merely for adventure or for Semazendra, who keeps to his selfish path of making more money, the only change overtaking him being his death.

Sometimes the ordeal of change takes the form of abject surrender to overwhelming odds, for instance, when, in Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!*, the pregnant Kajoli lets herself be led almost insensibly to a secluded spot by a sex-starved soldier (144-45); sometimes the ordeal is a deliberate surrender to the inevitable, as when Kajoli decides to become a prostitute and suffers all through the early part of the night (191-92); sometimes the ordeal is a bold action against heavy odds, as when Kajoli, hearing of Devata's fast in prison, and recalling his exhortations, inquires about the feasibility of an honourable existence by selling newspapers, slaps the procuress of the brothel, and walks towards the office of the *Hindusthan* (191-98). Thus the ordeal of change is manifested in several ways and degrees of intensity in Bhattacharya's fiction.

There are several occasions when the ordeal of change is not overtly exhibited but becomes internalised, to be reflected in change of altitude or outlook. For example, in Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!*, at one
stage, when the mother pins her hope on finding Rahoul in Calcutta, Kajoli says that Rahoul, her dadu's grandson, would not know them because he is a rich man and rich men have poor memories. This scornful idea is not founded on her knowledge but is distilled from her other miserable experiences, but, even as she expresses it, her smile resembles weeping, indicating an internalised ordeal (139).

A careful analysis of the texts will help to trace many such instances of the ordeal of change in Bhattacharya's novels. Individuals change and so does society. The change is sometimes voluntary but mostly necessitated by circumstances. The ordeal involved may sometimes go unperceived amidst the force of circumstances as the victims are preoccupied with coping with the change but the critical eye of the reader cannot miss the travail.

This thesis is organised as hereunder.

The first chapter, entitled "Introduction," introduces Bhattacharya and his works, traces his authorial genesis, spells out his artistic credo, traces the salient features of his fiction like social purpose, concern for society, preoccupation with contemporary events and issues, positive affirmation of life, and, treatment of the themes of hunger, freedom and synthesis
of opposites, celebration of womanhood, and, clash of contrasts.

The second chapter, entitled "Poverty versus Affluence," analyses the process of change in _So Many Hungers!_.

The third chapter, entitled "Tradition versus Modernity," analyses the process of change in _Music for Mohini_.

The fourth chapter, entitled "Orthodoxy versus Reason," analyses the process of change in _He Who Rides a Tiger_.

The fifth chapter, entitled "Greed versus Altruism," analyses the process of change in _A Goddess Named Gold_.

The sixth chapter, entitled "Spinning Wheel versus Steel Mill," analyses the process of change in _Shadow from Ladakh_.

The seventh chapter, entitled "Summing-up," sums up the earlier chapters and offers suggestions for further research.

It needs to be mentioned here that this thesis does not address itself to Bhattacharya's last novel _A Dream in Hawaii_, though there is a kind of contrast therein between the East and the West. However, this last novel lacks the closeness to the values of the people and their way of life which is to be observed
in the first five novels. Because of this, the clash of contrasts in the sixth novel pales into an anaemic intellectual exercise instead of becoming a lively exercise loaded with social significance for the novelist as well as the reader—in terms of outcome. The clash of contrasts in A Dream in Hawaii, if any, leads nowhere beyond itself. For these reasons A Dream in Hawaii is not included in the analysis.

This thesis has been written and documented according to the guidelines provided by the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers by Joseph Gibaldi, 4th edition (1996).
Note

"C. Paul Verghese, "Problems of the Indian Creative Writer in English," (Indian Writing To-day 8), qtd. in Shyamala B. Rao (45).