Chapter - 6

CONCLUSION
While favouring a compromise between the extremist stances taken by the supporters of the two opposite schools of artists by maintaining that art is not necessarily for art’s sake, Bhabani Bhattacharya insisted that a novel must have a social purpose, of the novelist’s own choice. And in his early phase as a novelist, he focused his attention on the atrocious conditions that prevailed in Bengal during the famine of 1943. His career apparently began under the influence of Mulk Raj Anand.

In almost all his works, Bhabani Bhattacharya deals with various aspects of Indian life. He deals with the social, religious, economic, political and even psychological aspects of Indian life. The diversified elements of Indian society are portrayed and concluded in unity. He has made his mark as translator, a creative historian, a biographer, a storyteller and finally a novelist. His works mainly focus on the happenings of the nineteenth century in India. Shyamala Rao remarks:

Bhattacharya presents the different aspects of Indian life—clash between the past and the present, caste and reform, man and machine, tradition and modernity, mysticism and materialism, science and superstition, myth and reality and individual and society [146].

Like other great Indian novelists, his works present him as a revolutionary social writer. As a sociologist, Bhabani Bhattacharya identifies and analyses the issues and problems of the society. As a committed artist he identifies himself with the society and has an
inner urge to express the contemporary issues to create awareness in the people. As a psychologist he deals with a variety of social problems and issues, analyzing them through his characters in day to day situation. He peeps into the minds of character and portrays them in a realistic manner. About Bhabani Bhattacharya’s art H. G. S. Arulandram rightly points out:

A novelist then for Bhattacharya is a man among men, gifted with an extra measure of sensitivity and keen powers of observation. What he sees around him creates an inner urge, a compelling need to express himself then and only then a novel is born [147].

Bhattacharya’s first novel So Many Hungers is born out of the Bengal Famine and the sufferings of the millions of people. His second novel Music for Mohini presents the conflict of modernity and tradition which the Indian society faced after the independence. His third novel He Who Rides a Tiger portrays the exploitation of the pseudo sadhus. His fourth novel A Goddess Named Gold depicts the eagerness of the money mongers. His fifth novel Shadow from Ladakh narrates the Chinese Aggression in 1962. His last novel A Dream in Hawaii deals with the East-West encounter from the spiritual aspect.

Like every great writer, Bhabani Bhattacharya is obsessed by a theme, a personal and compelling experience. His central preoccupation with the theme of hunger is evident in all his novels. 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 human hunger – viz., hunger of 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; title, riches and prosperity of one’s children. In a word, his fictional work fully explores and communicates his theme of hunger.

Bhattacharya is a novelist of social vision. In his novels, there are number of incidents that everyone faces, observes and reacts in day to day life. The nature of human beings is presented through his first hand observation. From the pathetic condition of Indian peasant to the spiritual discourses of Indian Yogi, there is an element of naturalism. He is a realist and is a visionary at the same time. He depicts the eye in the country as he has seen it with his eyes.

One finds the humanistic concerns and reformist zeal of Bhabani Bhattacharya in full play in his maiden venture. In So Many Hungers, he presents a threadbare analysis of a sickening state of affairs. The freedom movement and the Second World War also make their presence felt in the course of the novel. The stark realities relating to the famine are depicted in it with all their macabre details. The author throws a flood of light on the ignorance, hypocrisy, poverty, the exploitation of the poor and the evil of prostitution that
afflicted the society of his time. He concludes the novel with a hope for a better future of the society, revealing a positive vision of life.

Religion plays a dominant role in Bhattacharya’s novels. Religion is used as a weapon for exploitation in the Indian society. The novel *He Who Rides a Tiger* is mainly based on this kind of exploitation. The wickedness of the exploiters in the name of religion is the chief theme of this novel. The novelist, in this novel, exposes the wicked practices of the hollow religion exploited by the vested interests to exploit the blind faith of simple and credulous people.

The complex nature of human life and its eternal struggle between good and evil can be observed in the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya. His characters struggle for existence in the society. In this process they face so many problems, suffer a lot and then strive hard to stand firm. Regarding the nature of human beings, Bhattacharya disagrees with the idea of the perfectibility of humans. He has Hegelian belief in this aspect. Hence, the characters in his novels are a mixture of good and evil, virtue and vice. The heroes have some qualities of the villain and the villains have some qualities of the hero. There is blend of both contrary things. As Bhattacharya writes:

> The most heroic character must have his feet on common earth, and the dastardly villain, even more difficult create, needs to be redeemed by the ‘human touch.’ Otherwise, credibility is lost [148].

For example in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Kalo, who is a kamar by birth, feels polluted with the touch of a low caste born Viswanath. The
daughter of Kalo, Chandra Lekha, is a girl of virtue. But due to hunger, in the days of famine, she yields to steal a pumpkin from the garden of an old woman. Kalo also steals bananas in the train to save his life. When he could not find a noble job, he works as a pimp in the harlot house. M. K. Bhatnagar aptly remarks:

Bhattacharya’s characters mark the triumph of the artist in their creator. They are not bundles of ideological platitudes, grinding their marker’s axe, but mortals who have psychological compulsion to adopt a particular course of action [149].

In the fiction of Bhabani Bhattacharya men derive motivation and inspiration from women. The role of women in Indian society and in a family is complex and multi-dimensional. She is the heart of the family life and renders the duties as wife, daughter, mother, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law and grandmother. Marlene Fisher points out:

In one after the other, from So Many Hungers to Shadow from Ladakh, 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 [150].

It may be fallacious to assume that the author has condemned brahminism lock, stock and barrel by means of his novels. Presumably, in He Who Rides a Tiger, his ire is directed only against the false pretenders to brahminism. His ability to acknowledge and
appreciate the positive aspects of both men and matters seems to have saved him from the cynical tendencies afflicting some of his contemporaries. Indeed, his altruistic leanings and interest in the welfare of the society have apparently contributed to his positive vision of life in a large measure. Bhattacharya wrote, “I have no patience for artificial barriers in human relationships. I don’t understand casteism and things of that kind. Nor do I understand narrow chauvinism of any caliber” [151].

Social realism is a tool in the hands of Bhabani Bhattacharya to expose social evils. As a realistic artist, he identifies the evils of contemporary society and suggests solution to overcome those problems. He exposes corruption and profiteering in the society through his characters – Samarendra Basu, Motichand, Sri Abalabandhu, Seth Samsunder, Jogesh Misra and Vincent Swift. According to him, corruption is the main cause for the inhumanity and indifference; be it in city or in village. From his first novel to last novel, he hints at the evils of corruption in social, economic and political fields. Khwaja Ahmed Abbas observes, “So Many Hungers and He Who Rides a Tiger are two of the most significant novels written by the Indians in the English language, and among the aptest illustrations of social realism” [152].

Bhattacharya’s novels are symbolic in their settings, their characters, their actions, as well as in their diction. He transforms the reality into artistic pictures in his novels. He creates the events in his fiction for the sake of symbolic significance. The characters in the
novels are symbols of contemporary real life personalities. In *So Many Hungers* Kajoli and family are the symbols of poverty and hunger. Devesh Basu is the symbol of a true patriot, who sacrifices his life for the village of Baruni and participants in freedom struggle. Samarendra Basu is the symbol of Black-marketers. In *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Kalo is the symbol of evils of caste system. Chandra Lekha is the symbol of victims who suffer in the hands of brothels. Harish Raizada points out:

Bhabani Bhattacharya is the most prominent of the contemporary Indian English novelists to make a consistent use of symbols in his novels to convey the intense reality of Indian life and present his own vision of a new and progressive social order in the country [153].

Bhattacharya ironically portrays the contemporary issues indicating the seriousness of the problems with an ironic touch. In his novels, the appeal is universal. Though the characters are Indians, they are the symbols of universe. Human nature is same everywhere and people have same human instincts, the joys and sorrows. Kajoli wants to lead a happy life with her husband, just as Chandra Lekha thirsts for family life. Satyajit dedicates his life for non-violence and peace in the country. All the incidents, actions and situations in his fiction have a universal appeal. Balaram Sorot observes:

The use of symbolism and irony, unfailing sense of humour and sincerity of purpose further enhance the appeal of his fiction which though dealing with the
contemporary Indian life, has a wider and universal significance [154].

A passion for building bridges has been characteristic of Bhabani Bhattacharya’s attitude towards life. It is evidenced in his attempts to reconcile tradition with modernity in *Music for Mohini* and asceticism with aestheticism as also idealism with pragmaticism in *Shadow from Ladakh*, The manner in which he uses the women characters as instruments of reconciliation in these novels along with their men speaks of the supreme regard he has for them.

In *Music for Mohini*, Mohini, wife of Jayadev, and his sister, Rooplekha, work hand-in-hand for the uplift of a village as advocated by Mahatma Gandhi. In a male-dominated society such as ours, activities of the kind are generally believed to be of the male-domain. These women are also able to contribute to a reconciliation of the divergent trends associated with traditionalism and modernism.

Similarly, the prominent women characters of *Shadow from Ladakh*, Suruchi, wife of Satyajit, and her daughter, Sumita, are largely instrumental in the reconciliation between the values associated with Ganghigram and Steeltown. With the sheer force of their personalities, they successfully persuade Satyajit and Bhashkar to climb down from their rigid and inimical positions and help in the synthesis of the seemingly irreconcilable values advocated by them.

Protest has always been an essential feature of literature. It reflects the writer’s concern, work, social reality and the human predicament and almost all writers have protested against established order of
things to express their disapproval of prevalent literary tradition or social norms.

Through his characters, Bhattacharya not only reflects but also revolts against the social evils in the society. In *So Many Hungers* Kajoli protests against seduction, Rahoul protests against the exploiters. Devesh Basu protests against the British rule. In *Music for Mohini*, Jayadev protests against the superstitions, blind beliefs and customs. In *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Kalo protests against the caste-ridden society. Chandra Lekha protests against the exploiters who seduce young village girls. In *Goddess Named Gold*, Meera protests against the political and economic exploitation. In *Shadow from Ladakh*, Satyajit protests against the industrialisation and modernity.

One may be inclined to think that such reconciliations are far from practicable in the real life. One must concede that such synthetic solutions presented by Bhabani Bhattacharya tend to detract from the quality of realism achieved in his novels. Yet, surely the patriotic fervour, humanistic concern and the positive vision of life, that prompt the novelist to have resort to denouncements of the kind, do not deserve to be brushed aside with cold contempt. Cromwell has aptly described him as a mediating man [155] and observed that, more than a builder of bridges he himself is the bridge.

Bhabani Bhattacharya uses English freely for artistic purposes. He experimented in English language and wrote in his own variety of style to narrate the speedy speech of Indian peasants. He used Indianised style of English with traces of Indianisms to be able to
convey Indian sensibilities and culture. He used Bengali phrases and idioms recurrently in his narration.

Bhattacharya thinks that the medium of expression is important and therefore he should be very particular about it. He feels that since the creative writer has to convey his vision of life to the readers clearly, he should take full freedom to use the language of his choice. He points out that a writer can use any language as a suitable medium of expression. If he is to take a foreign language, he has to face ‘immense technical hurdles’ [156] which he should cope with in his own way.

Bhattacharya has chosen to write in English for two cogent reasons. First, English “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” [157]. Secondly, he uses English because it gives him the challenge of portraying Indian life through a foreign language. He says, “I have enjoyed the challenge of this literary problem—expressing Indian life in the idiom of an alien tongue” [158].

One of the striking features of Bhattacharya’s novels is his use of literal translation of phrases, idioms and proverbs from Bengali. These Indianised expressions reflect the Indian way of life and his typical Indian outlook on life. Regarding Bhattacharya’s purposeful use of these proverbs K. R. Chandrasekharan fittingly remarks, “Their use may be considered as a successful linguistic experiment because
they introduce local colour without reducing intelligibility. As a rule the proverbs fit the characters who use them” [159].

Bhattacharya cons new compound words, sometimes sentences, by means of literal translation from local languages. For example: *cook- woman, cinema-play, picture-play, water-machine* (for water tap), *cook-shop, well-water, child-pain, happy-sad-mother, mother of Onu, tear-haze, picture-show* (cinema), *fire-wagon* (train), *flowerbed* (bridal bed), *head-protector* (umbrella), *chatter-machine* (radio), *joy-moments, tongue-clever, milk-infant, day-down* (sunset), *tying a soul to the sari end, laughing a bellyful, eating one’s salt, eating one’s head, holding one’s chin up*, etc.

Besides these, the novelist uses a large number of phrases literally translated from Bengali to English and some of them have parallel phrases in other North Indian languages. *So Many Hungers* abounds in such phrases. Some of them are: *white as lime plaster, greed in the belly, full upto the throat; sun- wet-face: shame bit into her, just a way of talk*, etc. In *Music for Mohini* we see such phrases: *get this plain fact in your stomach, Eat my head, a cheekful of smile, Anger bit into her*, etc. Again, *A Goddess Named Gold* also abounds in such examples: *two men-lengths, move your buttocks faster, one of our skin and sweet*, etc.

To suit the mentality of a peasant, Bhattacharya uses a large number of Bengali and Hindi words. For example: *apsara, asirbad, bhai, beta, bhootni, chal, champa, choorie, dal, dhoti, dak-qhar, dilruba, dakini, ghee, haat,jilebi, kachu, kajal, kabiraj, kos, kamar, kusa,*
ladcloo, nimkin, pronarn, puri, palki, shehnai, sindur, swarga and thana, etc. Besides these, the novelist also uses many other Indian words having their English equivalents like: ma-bap (mother-father); Viman (aerial car); Brahmastra (wonder-missile); pagla-ghanta (crazy bell); chamar (untouchable); tamasha (spectacle); lota-kambal (water-bowl and blanket); ojha (exorcist); etc.

A prominent practice of Bhattacharya’s style is his formation of adjectival forms by adding the suffix ful to nouns even when they do not become idiomatic. Examples are: skyful, fistful, prideful, palmsful, cheekful, etc. A remarkable feature of Indianness in Bhattacharya’s style is his use of words like: han, hoon, arey, nah, beta, beti, bhai, bahen, pan, taveez, etc. He uses them for making local colour in the speech of the rustics who do not speak English.

Commenting on the novelist’s successful use of these expressions for their unmistakable flavour of the vernacular speech Ramesh Srivastava remarks as follows:

They also provide a glimpse of the wise sayings of the rural people preserved and transmitted in their everyday conversation, as also their attitude to life, and, above all, are gentle reminder to the reader that the characters are firmly rooted in the Indian soil [160].

The introductory chapters in Bhattacharya’s novels are very significant from the narrative point of view. The novelist places the reader before a particular scene, an occasion, which he is to follow in the course of the novel. In So Many Hungers the opening scene
presents the evil consequences of Second World War and the determination of Rahoul to work for the welfare of nation. The opening scene in *Music for Mohini* presents the central character Mohini as a young girl interested in romantic novels, giving rise to the subsequent events in the story. *He Who Rides a Tiger* opens with an introduction to the background of a blacksmith, Kalo. The opening scene in *A Goddess Named Gold* presents the planning of six women of the cowhouse to launch a movement against the seth. The narrative in *Shadow from Ladakh* begins with a short scene, which shows Suruchi and the airhostess in conversation reminding the threat of Chinese Aggression. The introductory chapter in *A Dream in Hawaii* opens with the musings of Swami Yogananda which leads to the central theme of the novel.

The political happenings during the period of Bengal Famine, Freedom movement and Chinese aggression are presented by Bhattacharya in wider human framework. The endeavors of the protagonists are intertwined with the chronicle of the nation. As a creative writer, Bhattacharya presents truthful account of the bare facts of history including the name and dates with artistic touch. His treatment of the events and persons of the thirties and the later period projects him as a perfect chronicler, who has succeeded in rendering artistic approach to historical forces.

The critical survey of the novels brings out Bhattacharya's interest in human values. He is humanist like Mulk Raj Anand, and his novels, like those of Anand, focus attention on the miserable life of
the Indians, especially the destitute and the low-castes. The painful tale of Kajoli or Kalo is by means less moving than that of Bakha or Munoo. It also makes the readers sensitively aware of the horror of poverty and suffering and the heartlessness of the few which thwarts the promising life of the helpless young. The novelist feels angry against the sharks and parasites of our society.

The fiction of Bhabani Bhattacharya has universal appeal for its wide range of motifs. All his novels have certain central ideas around which the action takes place. Harcharn Singh Boparai points out:

The reason for this universal appeal lies in the archetypal motifs that Bhabani Bhattacharya has objectified in his fiction. The most dominant of these motifs is the quest motif which lies at the center of all great literatures. The main configurations of this motif in Bhabani Bhattacharya’s fiction may be termed as quest for food, Indian dream of edenic possibilities and man-woman relationship. These quests operate at different levels of consciousness [161].

Being a writer of objective outlook, Bhattacharya discusses the vital aspects of Indian life in totality. Along with the social, cultural and economic aspects, the historical and political forces influence the presentation of his fiction and short stories. His aim is to transform the society, which is deep rooted in evils. This can be observed in his literary output. The socio-economic and political forces of nineteenth
century shaped both the realistic content of his novels and his desire for social transformation.

Bhattacharya, while sympathizing with the victims of exploitation, does not give up hope. He is for encouraging them to be conscious of their birth-right to live as human beings. He also believes that if their social conscience is aroused, men of power can improve and change their mental attitudes and selfish nature. The main purpose of Bhattacharya seems to arouse this social conscience of man so that he may become humanized. As Harish Raizada rightly observes:

In all his novels Bhattacharya is concerned with the future of India, its social, religious, economic and political regeneration, so that it may make rapid progress and come to occupy it pride of place in the comity of world’s highly developed nations [162].