GANDHIAN CURRENTS
Bhabani Bhattacharya believes that a novelist can find plenty of inspiration to write in the happenings of the day. This is invariably true of India which passed through many significant phases in her history. Bhattacharya says that an immediate and acute issue of the time brings about an impulsive reaction a writer and this results in a realistic cut to fiction, emanating from inner obligation. He observes:

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? [60].

Apart from expressing transparently positive vision of life, explored artistically in all of his novels, the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya have a predominant Gandhian figure or ideology which leads the crises in novels towards an affirmative solution. The microscopic eyes of Bhabani Bhattacharya assesses pre and post-independent crises from different angles so that a positive message could reach the readers. Mahatma Gandhi becomes a role model against whom the evaluations of novelist are made. Therefore, Gandhian thought and philosophy is all pervading spirit striding across the length and breadth of his narration. K. R. Chandrasekharan observes, “Every novel makes some sort of mention of Gandhi and Gandhian thought is central to characterization and plot” [61].

Gandhi is a gift India gave to the world. His austere life style, strong convictions and commitments influence any creative artist’s
mind. With his unique attributes, Gandhi could reach out to the millions of Indians, be they prince or pauper. He is a full proof solution to any problems faced by the Indians. These qualities attracted the attention of Bhattacharya and Gandhi becomes a perennial presence in all his writings Bhattacharya adds that Gandhi’s influence on his writing was inevitable.

During pre-independent and post-independent period, political novels were based on Gandhian ideology. Indo-Anglian novelists inspired by the political ethics of Mahatma Gandhi, based their novels on Gandhi’s role in the political and moral awakening of masses. In this context, A. V. Krishna Rao writes:

Almost all the Indo-Anglian novels have one or more of the following nuclear ideas predominant in them; the evil of partition; the cult of Quit India; and the Gandian Myth . . . It is significant that the image of Gandhi is present in all the three types of novels though the details and emphasis may vary [62].

Bhabani Bhattacharya’s first novel So Many Hungers was published two months after India broke the shackles of the British rule. The novelist who had witnessed closely the entire National Movement, deals with the major events preceding Independence. The Civil Disobedience and the Quit India Movement form backdrop in this novel. Along with the Bengal Famine, which is its main theme, some of the important phases of the National Movement also play very important role in the novel.
There are two main threads in the plot—the young scientist Rahoul and his family, representing the fight for Freedom and the poor Kajoli and her family, portraying the sad tale of millions of people who became victims of man-made hunger.

Rahoul wants to join the National Freedom Movement, but he refrains from an active participation to serve humanity in a better way by means of a phenomenal scientific discovery. Rahoul is happy and hopeful to know that the Allied Powers have at last declared war against the Swastika in order to keep the soul of man free from the “death-like strangle-hold” of Germany. He whistles shrilly in joy to indicate that the Great War will preserve man’s freedom in consonance with his ideas. He himself always craves for freedom for all.

But Rahoul is upset, since he is not able to understand how England can wage a war for democratic freedom, while she is denying freedom to India. It is ironical that the Indians, who live in subjugation, are asked to fight for democratic freedom. He says to Kunal, his brother, in anger, “But the champions of freedom abroad were the eaters of freedom in this land” (SMH 40). However, he deeply desires that freedom should prevail in Europe and Asia.

His brother, Kunal, who joins the army and is found missing. In contrast, his father, Samarendra Basu, is a greedy hoarder of rice and is partly responsible for the man-made famine. Devesh Basu, his grandfather, is a staunch follower Gandhian principles in the real sense. He is a true patriot like Gandhi and shows enormous interest
in the wellbeing of common man. People of the village respect him a lot and fondly call him ‘Devata’. Devata’s influence on Rahoul is very deep.

The character of Devata is modeled after Gandhi - his simple living, dedication to the service of humanity. The principle of non-violence in the story is dealt with great care. As Rama Jha remarks:

Entry of Devesh Basu in the novel is like Gandhi’s phenomenal advent on the Indian political scene. Bhattacharya’s characterization of Devata shows the meticulous care he has taken to model this character after Gandhi [63].

Rahoul seeks his advice when his father wants to send him to Cambridge to avoid his getting indulged in freedom struggle. Devata unhesitatingly tells him that the call of the country comes first. Rahoul is of the opinion that his stay in Cambridge would allow him to understand the English better so that he can fight them better in India. Devata, in a true Gandhian way, tells him that their fight is with the British rulers not with the British people.

Devata is fond of Kajoli’s family, consisting of the peasant, his wife and three children. The peasant and the elder boy, Kanu, are put in prison for their participation in the Freedom Movement. Devata often visits their house and treats them as his family members. Devata is always inclined to give advice and provide guidance to the villagers. He asks them to be non-violent when they join the freedom struggle. Devata is taken to prison and appeals to the people before
being taken away, “The supreme test has come. Be strong, be true, be
deathless” (SMH 73). While in prison, he undertakes a fast during the
Quit India Movement.

Initially, Rahoul’s participation in the freedom is indirect. He
shows extreme concern for the people of the country who participate
in the national movement. His heart is with the victims who suffer due
to Bengal famine. When large number of students join the Quit India
Movement, he consults his grandfather and joins the movement
directly and is taken to prison. The novel ends with the people seeking
imprisonment voluntarily.

The story of the ruin and disintegration caused to Kajoli’s
innocent family runs parallel in the novel. The suffering of Kajoli’s
family is symbolic of the havoc wrought by the Bengal famine because
of the unsympathetic policy of the Bengal Government and cruel
practice of the rice merchants. Kajoli is about to fall prey to lures of
the betel woman but for a providential escape. Bhattacharya portrays
a simple rustic woman, who represents the freedom of spirit during
the most important phase in the history of India.

Bhattacharya is found to be very critical of the British
administration and their unsympathetic attitude to the common
people. Gandhi who commands massive respect from Indians is
imprisoned as he has protested against the unkind policies of the
foreign rulers. Bhattacharya remarks, “A noble hearted person must
share the lot of gangsters for speaking out his true faith in democracy”
(SMH 41).
Bhattacharya truly reflects Gandhian sensibility when he makes a clear distinction between the British rulers and the British people. Through Devata the novelist observes, “Why should you fight the people of England? They are good people. The people are good everywhere. Our fight is with the rulers of England who hold us in subjection for their narrow interests” (SMH 19).

Bhattacharya shows his respect for Gandhi and approves of the principles upheld by Gandhi. But he does not ascribe a direct role to Gandhi despite creating the character of Devata. The novelist also refers to Nehru speaking to the U.S.A. on an American radio and Gandhi who writes a letter to the Viceroy at New Delhi. Gandhi is all-pervading in his unquestionable principle of non-violence. The novelist writes:

Watching from his laboratory window on the first floor, he had seen a bigly-built European sergeant, pistol in hand, pounce upon the tri-colour flag heading the procession and dash it underfoot, and as the youth who had been carrying it bent to win it back the sergeant charged him, kicking, trampling. Then other youths came forward, and yet others, armed with nothing but non-violence. (SMH 66).

Rahoul, who happens to be a calm scientist, is motivated from within and holds the tricolor flag high. He is slammed with a lathi and dragged into the police van. In the prison, when other inmates ask him, he replies, “The hour is not just yet, but we are apart from it by a
hair’s breadth. We must stand ready to carry out Gandhi’s command: Do or die. We must not let our strength run to wasted” (SMH 67).

Devata’s words in the equality of men and women reflect Gandhi’s belief. They echo in Kajoli’s mind. “It was a business as much of the women as of the menfolk” (SMH 71). Kishore tells Kajoli how women shouted slogans, marched along with men on the big May Day demonstration. On being arrested, Rahoul speaks to Monju over telephone that he is not a silly thing as he used to be. Monju is now a completely changed and matured personality. She grew very fast as women tend to grow faster than men. Monju is free from misgivings and is fearless. Rahoul is proud of her.

Non-violence is a significant aspect of Gandhian ideology. Kishore’s words echo the concept of Ahimsa, when he tells Rahoul how “Devata has laid the ‘ahimsa’ spell on Baruni. The people burnt down ‘dhak ghar’ in the heat of great anger, and then they remembered his teaching and the anger cooled off” (SMH 98).

However, cynical and debased personalities like the betel woman appear to be beyond redemption. Mentioning the news report of the fast undertaken by Devata, she says, “Man of seventy and more. Fasting at his ripe age. Not much juice to spare in his old blackened bones. Madness!” (SMH 204).

But Kajoli is a staunch believer in the Gandhian faith and can visualize him as preaching, “Friends and comrades, do not betray the flag. Do not betray yourselves” (SMH 73). Later in the novel, this faith
turns out to be saviour when she is on the verge of falling into the trap, set by the betel-woman.

Devata’s words inspire Rahoul to venture out into the open and immerse himself into relief work. He talks to the students about the cold and apathetic attitude of the British in a government in a speech just a day before his imprisonment. The novelist writes:

This War, he had said, was just a repetition of other wars in history. The Four Freedoms did not include the freedom to be free—not for Asians, This famine, this brutal doom, was the fulfilment of alien rule. The final commentary. Imagine two million Englishmen dying of hunger which was preventable, and the Government unaffected, uncensored, unrepentant, smug as ever! “Quit India!” cried the two million dead of Bengal, The anger was warm in his voice, and he had paused till his speech was cool again. “Quit!” cried all India. (SMH 212).

Monju decides to follow his way. This decision by Monju becomes source of great strength to Rahoul. Now, on his way to the prison he is able to shout more confidently ‘Jai Hind’. Subsequently, he sheds his fear of suffering and loneliness, and becomes an epitome of Gandhian principle of fearlessness. He is more concerned about his people than himself.

The last two pages of the novel are significant as they disclose Bhattacharya’s multidimensional concept of freedom. Through Rahoul, Bhattacharya reveals his firm faith in freedom from want and
in freedom to be free. He realises that freedom is not a manna-dew dropping from heaven all itself, nor is it something to be obtained from far-off lands. It is to be achieved by persistent struggle and is to grow out of man’s spirit. This realisation about freedom dawns on him suddenly on hearing Tagore’s song. He becomes stimulated that this type of freedom will surely be attainable by Indians.

The book ends with the description of the risen tide of millions singing loudly in chorus the following immortal lines of Rabindranath Tagore, “The more their eyes redden with rage, the more our eyes open; the more they tighten the chains, the more the chains loosen!” (SMH 215).

The novel thus depicts a phase of the Indian National Movement when people, in towns and villages, fought for complete independence of the country. Gobinda Prasad Sarma has rightly commented on the special feature of the novel when he says:

Instead of merely depicting…the national movement superficially, this novel goes deeper unlike others of its kind and reveals the agony of slavery of the whole nation [64].

Bhattacharya’s second novel, *Music for Mohini* depicts the emotional and intellectual transformation of Mohini, the protagonist, from the dissolute, carefree and playful maidenhood to the status of a responsible and mature wife of an inspiring idealist.

The Big House is much more than a house. It stands for a way of living, a stern discipline and iron tradition. In a way, it is a symbol
of free India which has to go through a process of rebirth if it is to attain freedom in the real sense because,

India, free to build up her destiny, was not yet truly free.
She was like a prisoner held too long in a dark cell.
Unchained and released suddenly, she was bewildered by the light. But the stupor would pass. India would renew herself, and her strength would be the strength of the young not more, not less (MFM 223).
There is a growing consciousness to maintain the country’s greatness and stability in its culture and traditions and make a conscious effort to travel towards prosperity.

The impression of Gandhian ideology is observed throughout the novel though no direct reference either to Gandhi or his ideology is made. Like Gandhi, Jayadev, the master of the Big House, feels that political freedom supplemented by social reawakening can bring about change in the common man’s existence. Even Gandhi said:

The Swaraj of my dream is the poor man’s Swaraj. The necessaries of life should be enjoyed by you in common with those enjoyed by the princes and the moneyed men [65].

Jayadev does not approve the adoption of western ideology to be a solution to the problems of Indians. Similarly, Gandhi also feels that exploring deep into India’s past traditions and heritage can be of great help.
Jayadev feels that the dignity of man is compromised since the purity of ancient thought and tradition is ignored because of the self-centeredness of the people at the helm of affairs. He longs to bring about the true meaning of ancient thought exactly the same way as Gandhi wanted to remove the misinterpretation of Hindu religion.

These principles do not make Jayadev “a spiritless copy of ancient Hindu man” (MFM 80). According to him reconsideration of every social value and release of spiritual energy in every individual will make the country free in the real sense. All kinds of slavery, including the bondage of the spirit, must end because one cannot afford to be half-slave and half-free. Seeta, one of the women characters, is not allowed to marry her true love because of the fear of her becoming a widow within a year of her marriage proves the slavery of the spirit. She marries a different man.

Still, the irony of destiny turns her a widow as her husband passes away within a year of her marriage. Even Sudha, despite her beauty and intellect, remains a spinster. She is considered to be ‘Saturn’s Eye-Sore’ only because her horoscope is not in her favour. Sudha’s uncle who believes in astrology finds the hour of marriage inauspicious and sends away the marriage party.

Mohini has been married for two years, but is not able get pregnant. The astrologer warns that if a child is not born, Jayadev will die. To save Jayadev, Mohini has to offer blood from her bosom. When her mother-in-law, a staunch believer of conventions, rituals, orthodoxy and superstitions, asks her to offer blood placate the
Goddess, Mohini hears the voice of her father, urging defiance. Mohini remembers Jayadev's words, “Do not bow down to such insult. You are the New India. The old orthodox ways have been our yoke, have enslaved us. Let us be free” (MFM 304).

However, she finally agrees and is about to offer her blood, Jayadev appears on the scene and prevents the bloodshed. He tells Mohini, “We are fighting the false clay foot gods. They’ve had their day and now they must quit” (MFM 203).

Jayadev with his followers in the village wants to bring about regeneration in the village. Jayadev feels that political freedom is worth little without social uplift. They decide to reform the existing order by promoting widow remarriage and condemning child marriage. He succeeds in preventing a seventy year old money-lender’s marriage with young Paru. He asks the money lender to marry a widow instead. He also tries to eradicate ignorance, superstition and untouchability. Jayadev is found telling Mohini that they should not be the slaves of the stars, “There is no room in the Big House for crazy beliefs. The village looks to us for ideals and a way of living. The pattern we set is not our private affair; it carries the strongest social sanction” (MFM 221). Mohini too becomes inspired and starts educating rural women.

The reformist group led by Jayadev are regarded as ruffians. They face resistance at every quarter but they are not disheartened. Ironically, the Harijans for whose welfare Jayadev is working, are furious as there is a caste hierarchy even among them. This is exploited by the vested interests of the leaders who represent them in
the district towns. To show their protest a man empties a bucket of stinking water on Harindra’s head. But they are not disheartened and plan to carry on non-violently.

Harindra is quite offended because he cannot marry Sudha, based on his caste. In sheer disgust, he lets out an anguished cry. The novelist reflects:

He would break Behula. In this fight with reaction he was not alone. He was much more than Harindra, He was the New Free India, strong because he was aware after dark ages, because he hated all chains (MFM 198).

Bhattacharya, in a way, foresees the theme of his later novel *Shadow from Ladakh*. Jayadev is very particular about an amalgamation of rural and urban values.

In his determination to master self in order to serve the nation better Jayadev is Satyajit in embryo. Gandhi too had realized this and supported self-restraint. Gandhi writes, “Without the observance of *brahmacharya* service of the family would be inconsistent with service of the community. With *brahmacharya* they would be perfectly consistent” [66].

Bhattacharya’s third novel, *He Who Rides a Tiger*, is a legend of freedom, a legend to inspire and awaken (HWRT 232). This novel is similar thematically to *So Many Hungers*. The plot has the backdrop of the Quit India Movement of 1942 and the Bengal famine of 1943. It is critique on the debased, degrading political, economic and social order of the time. Patriots are imprisoned, bans are in place and hunger
strikes are common in jails. References are repeatedly made to the prevalent social evils which Gandhi wanted to eradicate. The aim of the novelist is to strike hardest at the deep-rooted notions of superiority and inferiority based on the caste system. P. N. Bhatt remarks:

Bhattacharya’s earlier novels follow Gandhian ideology and Gandhiji’s doctrine of non-violence, Satyagraha, his views on untouchability and casteism, etc, whereas his later novels which we call post-Gandhian novels present Gandhi in the context of free India [67].

His daughter, Chandra Lekha, is unwelcome by the girls of higher castes in the school. They tease her by saying, “Smithman’s daughter, what’s your fee to mend a leaking bucket?” (HWRT 12). Lekha, however, remains unperturbed and continues to have still greater pride in her father’s profession of a kamar.

The novel unfolds many such incidents that emphasize the unpleasant aspect of the rigid and meaningless caste system. The caste system is criticized not as much by Kalo, the blacksmith as by Biten who is Brahmin by birth. Gandhi does not favour the observance of shallow, uncharitable rituals of religion. This exasperation is echoed in the author’s comment:

Kalo had thought over a curious contradiction of the times: while men died of hunger, wealth grew; and while kindliness dried up, religion was more in demand. It was only the outward form of religion, the shell of ritual,
empty within (HWRT 113).

The author deliberately mirrors the callousness of the religious system which demands wastage of the milk, collected after Shiva’s milk-bath, instead of distributing it among the hundreds of poor children dying of hunger. Gandhian concept of courage is highlighted when Biten, talking of Viswanath, the destitute blacksmith, observes, “A man who has struggled and overcome fear can never be crushed” (HWRT 156).

Bhattacharya’s next novel A Goddess Named Gold is an allegory that exposes the events that happen in the village of Sonamitti, three months before India attains freedom. The novel that describes the way by which a country should use its newly-attained freedom, replete with both comic and farcical situations. P. N. Bhatt remarks:

The impact of Gandhi on the author is clearly shown here by his free use of Gandhian weapon – Satyagraha and non-violence – against the black-marketeers. Like Gandhiji, Bhattacharya is worried and warns us against the dangers of political situations immediately after freedom and if the people are not careful, the black-marketeers and the anti-social elements will take advantage of the freedom and misuse this liberty [68].

In spite of belonging to different age groups and different economic backgrounds, the Cowhouse Five share common adherence as all of them are devoted nationalists. It is understood that they were in jail for participating in the Quit India Movement. They recapitulate:
Those days—Sohagi, remember? Gandhi touched our spirit as it slept. Wakened, we became the equals of our men folk. Proud, chins up, we marched in a column of our own across the meadow to Pipli, onward to Kanhan. ‘Quit India!’ we shouted to the Engrez aliens in one big voice.... Wherever we went, women came flocking out of held, barn and kitchen to cry with us ‘quit’ (AGNG 6).

They are trained thoroughly in *satyagraha* on how to face exploitation by Lakshmi’s husband, Seth Shamsunder. They assemble to evolve a method of fighting, Seth Shamsunder for his open, debased exploitation of the current shortage of cloth. Regarding Bhabani Bhattacharya’s application of Gandhian ideology in the modern political scene, M. K. Bhatnagar remarks:

Bhabani Bhattacharya’s is a strong plea for rediscovering the true essence of ways rooted in our tradition and employing them in a constructive manner, moulding the method, if need be, to sharpen its efficacy. A genuine application of the all-encompassing political philosophy of Gandhi would seem, the most suitable in the present times as much as it had been in the past [69].

Meera, the youngest of the ‘Cowhouse Five’, is sixteen years old and is living with her grandmother. The grandmother has earned a respect for her patriotism and recognized leadership. Meera was only eleven at the time of the Quit India Movement. She gets arrested by the police to demonstrate her protest against the Government. Her
grandfather was a roaming minstrel who commands great veneration from all the villagers. Though he is not interested in politics, he preaches Gandhian ideology to everyone he meets. He may be a representation of the Mahatma as no novel is penned by Bhattacharya without reference to Gandhi and Freedom Movement.

When the Seth decides to stop women from attending the film show, Meera recommends to take revenge by attracting the attention of the spectators to her grandfather’s recital. Meera’s grandfather tells her in the true Gandhian spirit:

You cannot fight one wrong with another. You cannot fight malice with malice. Let the Seth have his way. Let him deny the women and in his heart he will suffer. True victory will be yours (AGNG 62).

Even during the recital, Meera’s grandfather refers to the Gandhian ideologies and principles. He says, “An old man whose voice has filled this country for thirty years has a curious wish in his heart. It is to wipe every tear from every eye” (AGNG 15).

And then it dawns on the audience that the old man being referred in the story is none other than the Father of the Nation, Gandhiji. They are determined to wipe away at least a few tears from the eyes of misery. Like Gandhi, grandfather expounds fearlessness. He continues, “Do not be afraid. Do not step back, whatever happens” (AGNG 15).

Her grandfather gives an amulet to Meera and tells her that if she commits an act of kindness, even the copper on her body will turn
into gold. The taveez causes a lot of confusion, heart-burn and even misery because it does not have any miracle to pronounce. Towards the end of the novel, the minstrel explains the symbolism of the amulet to the people who gathered under the banyan tree to revel in Independence. The minstrel tells the villagers that the real touchstone is the independence that they are celebrating. He elaborates:

Remember, friends, all this cannot be cheaply won. The miracle will not drop upon us. It is we who have to create it with love and with sweat. Freedom is the means to that end (AGNG 303).

Bhattacharya declares some of his own perspectives on the right use of newly-won freedom. It is understood that his views are molded under the influence of Gandhian principles. He explains that freedom will turn the country into a heaven only if we are capable of right feelings and right action. The minstrel explains, “....without acts of faith freedom is a dead pebble tied to the arm with a bit of string, fit only to be cast into the river” (AGNG 303).

The minstrel, who can be identified with Gandhi, sings that freedom is a state of mind. He explains that the idea of freedom is not merely political freedom or economic freedom, but freedom of the mind. For this purpose, unadulterated greed, black market profiteering, which are represented by unpatriotic exploiters like the Seth, have to be eliminated. Meera always keeps in mind her Grandpapa’s words, “Freedom is the beginning of the road where there
was no road. But the new road swarms with robbers” (AGNG 119). Meera further explains who these robbers are:

There was the money—Seth, of course, to whom freedom meant a chance to seize fields of trade vacated by the aliens. Then the Seth of politics, ready to dupe the people with the power of his glib tongue. The official Seth, a man of arrogance ready to change masters without a change of mentality, human open to the best offer. The Seth of religion with gods for sale. The Seth with a Gandhi cap on his head and the cap itself a deceit. And several others on the list. (AGNG 119).

Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel, Shadow from Ladakh, advocates Gandhian ideals in a better and more powerful way than his other novels. Gandhi’s early life in South Africa and in India is comprehensively described in one chapter. The protagonist Satyajit is reincarnation of Gandhi. The novel has Chinese aggression on the sub-continent as its backdrop. The attack by Chinese on India raised a basic question in the mind of the Indians whether non-violence is a true solution to violence or not. The novel is a successful attempt by the novelist in answering how India of the Gandhian heritage can respond to and cope with the destructive forces. It also deals with the how spiritual integrity of India withstand materialistically centered world order. Cromwell Crawford says:

In addition to social concerns, Bhattacharya thinks that the strong ascetical bias in the Indian religious tradition
is anti-life and is the bane of the nation. Sacrifice, self-control, simplicity are all beautiful ideals which have come down from the past and have been sanctioned by great souls such as Gandhi [70].

In addition, the novel generates a greater realization and elucidation of the concept of freedom. Satyajit realizes, “Freedom in Gandhi’s reckoning, was only the means with which to reach targets further away. Those targets were now as remote as ever before” (SFL 323).

In Bhattacharya’s words, *Shadow from Ladakh* “is rooted more deeply in Gandhian Thought” [71]. It tries to reexamine Gandhian principles and their applicability in the modern day context. The novel advocates a perfect unification of the two completely conflicting sets of values to face the challenge of the time. It also aims at presenting Gandhian ideology in the right angle as with the passage of time many irrelevant details and overemphasis on certain aspects of the great man’s teachings are bound to creep in.

It is generally understood that Gandhi was not in support of large-scale industrialisation. But the fact is that he could foresee the key role machinery would play in the industrial economic growth of India. Gandhi clarifies, “I am aiming not at eradication of all machinery but limitation” [72]. He further elaborated, “The heavy machinery for public utility has its inevitable place, but all that could be owned by the state and used entirely for the benefit of the people” [73]. Bhabani Bhattacharya, an exponent of Gandhian ideals and
ardent admirer of Gandhi himself proposes a sort of middle path for co-existence for the healthy growth of Indian economy in the modern context.

Bhabani Bhattacharya feels industrialisation would reduce India to a mechanical copy of the west. He observes that Indians must try to preserve our own time-tested culture and ancient traditions. Thus the novelist suggests a fusion of Gandhian philosophy and Nehru’s ideology. In this novel, the novelist also attempts to bring about a settlement between the asceticism of Gandhi and aestheticism of Tagore.

Satyajit, under the influence of Tagore, takes up teaching in Santiniketan. However, he is gradually attracted towards Gandhian way of life and shifts to Sevagram. By the end of the novel, he is not able to reject the earlier influence of Tagore completely and feels that a unification of the two ideologies should be an ideal combination to follow. The comments by Pyarelal, one of the most prominent disciples of Gandhi, are quite relevant on this subject. Bhattacharya writes:

Gurudev and Gandhiji represented the two poles of India’s psyche—the aesthetic and the ascetic. Neither excludes the other...The two were complementary. The difference was in point of emphasis only. In a proper synthesis of the two lay the fulfilment of India’s destiny [74].

Showing an implicit faith in this statement, Bhattacharya makes many references to the teachings of both Gandhi and Tagore, and their complementary role in the making of the nation.
Bhattacharya uses several quotations in *Shadow from Ladakh*, pertaining to Gandian ideology as spoken and written by Gandhi in his writing and speeches. The novel also touches biographical elements as well. Satyajit is Gandhi’s shadow and moulds his life based on Gandhi’s principles. Suruchi, his wife, is a shadow of Kasturba in her suffering. Gandhigram represents Sevagram, a village founded by Gandhi as a model village of his dreams.

Bhashkar’s Steeltown could be modelled after Nehru’s perspectives. The opposite poles are represented in the novel by Gandhigram and Steeltown.

Steel means economic progress. Machine tools, tractors, big industrial plants, locomotives. Steel to fight poverty and hunger. But steel has gained a second meaning. It stands for our country’s freedom. This is an inescapable fact, not to be changed by wishful thinking. Development plus defence—a compulsion of our current history (SFL 30).

Gandhigram is referred as established by Vinoba Bhave, one of the disciples of Gandhi. Gandhi made him name the village Sevagram as he would not have liked to have a village named after him. But after his death, a village established on the same pattern has been named after Gandhi. The writer at the end of the novel concludes that the Steeltown should be able to co-exist with Gandhigram. Gandhigram’s preference for the spinning wheel is symbolic of slow tempo of life.
When Gandhi visits Santiniketan, Satyajit is teaching there. Impressed by the sincerity and simplicity of his devotion, Gandhi asks Satyajit to come to Sevagram and help run it so that the village could be an example for the rest of the country. Satyajit moves to Gandhigram with few material possessions. He voluntarily takes up simple living. His wife, Suruchi, and his daughter, Sumita, accompany him. Satyajit discards his surname Sen, representing his caste, before entering Gandhigram.

Satyajit received a spinning wheel as a gift which once belonged to the Mahatma himself. For Satyajit, spinning wheel is the symbol of Gandhian inheritance and is an instrument to go into his own deeper self. Like Gandhiji, Satyajit believes that the heavy machines or industries are detrimental for the whole world and have widened the gap between the rich and the poor. The rapid growth of giant machines and craze for speed is an end in itself and small-scale industries like spinning wheel is the only answer to the problem of industrialisation.

Gandhigram depicted by Bhabani Bhattacharya becomes a model for whole of India and aims at equality and economic self-sufficiency. It symbolizes co-operation, amenity and harmony amongst its inhabitant’s belonging to different professions and social orders - weavers, blacksmiths, artisans etc. All men in Gandhigram are casteless and equal in status. Gandhigram is described by Bhattacharya thus:

The apparently insignificant village was building up a
model for the whole of India. The new community was creating a social order in which all were truly equal. All land belonging to the cooperative. Food from the fields distributed according to the needs. Other needs met by small-scale industries based locally; economic self-sufficiency was the set aim (SFL 28).

After a short stay, Satyajit realizes that his way of life does not conform to Gandhian ideology as he is still getting attracted towards the temptations of the flesh. He wants to take up life abstinence. He talks his decision over with Suruchi and offers her freedom and remarriage if this life of abstinence is unpalatable to her. He echoes Gandhi when he says:

One such idea is *brahmacharya*, complete chastity of body and even of thought. It is, Gandhiji believed, a great source of spiritual strength. He never asked his followers to take that vow, but his expectations were clear. You know that Ruchi? (SFL 22).

He even quotes Gandhi himself to lend weightage to his statement, “Those who perform national service...must have a celibate life, whether married or unmarried. I do not think that in our conception of marriage our lusts should enter” (SFL 23).

He believes that the crux of the vow of abstinence is not escape, but self-conquest. One renounces life, not in emptiness of the jungle, but amidst all the bonds of domestic bliss (SFL 50). Suruchi is not at all happy, but she loves her husband too well to renounce her
marriage and her pride comes in the way of her resistance to his proposal. Suruchi is only twenty-nine and cannot understand as yet the full meaning of her denial and the suffering to come. Still, her faith in the ‘stone god’ Satyajit is strong and her surrender is complete when she agrees to his proposal.

Both Satyajit and Suruchi have to go through a lot of emotional confusion. The author does not want the readers to forget that they are mere human beings subject to falling a prey to the weaknesses of the flesh. In fact, *Shadow from Ladakh* explores the meaning of Gandhian thought in strictly human terms. And Satyajit’s attempt to adopt Gandhian methods fails, not because Satyajit is mistaken or that Gandhism has no further relevance but because the true being of Gandhi is in the moral fibre, not the intellectual stance and it is on the moral level that Bhashker meets Satyajit on an equal footing [75].

‘Satyajitism’, a word coined by Biresh, Satyajit’s friend, represents four facets of Gandhian ideology in the novel. These are austerity, repression of natural instincts, non-violence and the popularization of small scale industries. In the beginning of the novel, all the three strands are pitched against hostile forces which seem to be inclined to annihilate them completely.

Gandhigram and Steeltown, representing the two ways of life, are located close to each other as non-interfering neighbors. When the Chino-Indian conflict starts, Steeltown has expansive plans. Because of this, Gandhigram is faced with the threat of being wiped out from its present location. Steeltown could expand towards any direction,
but the conflict is different the two sets of values. Bhashkar tells Rupa the reason behind expanding and taking over Gandhigram:

We are in a state of war. Expansion. We have to take Gandhigram in our stride. Our natural line of advance, from the technical point of view. It does not make sense to leave out this site and turn in some other direction. But there’s a second reason why Gandhigram must be annexed. Its whole outlook is contrary to ours. It is what we’ve got to fight all over India (SFL 130).

Bhashkar feels that Satyajit is the very soul of Gandhigram. He realizes that without Satyajit’s guidance the structure of ideas will topple ‘like a thing of sand.’ He regards other members on the village council as men of smaller dimensions. He feels that half the battle would be won only if Satyajitism could be annihilated.

Bhashkar is the direct three-dimensional opposition to Satyajitism. He feels that large-scale industrialisation leads to mass production, which can not only solve the problem of feeding the large population of India, but it can also protect its new-found freedom and democracy. Unlike Satyajit, he believes in the freedom of human emotions. He believes that vice and virtue co-exist in human beings. When confronted by Satyajit on this issue, he tells him that vice is the darkness that gives value to light and that without darkness light has no real value. He wishes vice and virtue to be juxtaposed and balanced.

Vice is the darkness that gives value to light. No
darkness, and light is hurtful. Let there be some virtue, some vice. Let them be juxtaposed, balanced... Virtue and vice together give life its colour, savor. That’s what I’ve experienced personally. One without the other could easily destroy us (SFL 32).

This confession has impact on Satyajit. But, he cannot change his opinions overnight. He is the type who undertakes a fast whenever he trespasses from his moral code. Bhashkar believes in the satisfaction of normal human emotions. He never repents whenever he surrenders to them. His attitude to the various problems of life is absolutely normal. One can understand that Bhashkar’s conflict with Gandhigram is not merely the fight of modern industrialisation against Gandhian economics, but also that of an enlightened modern outlook against the cliché-ridden practices of Gandhigram.

The fight is not only between Gandhigram and Steeltown, but also in the hearts of some residents of Gandhigram. This conflict depicts an idea to prove that human beings should not be forced to relinquish their human emotions. In fact, Gandhi was not in support of imposing restrictions and restraints from outside and believed that man should evolve from within. It may be a difficult to achieve this goal, but external pressures do not benefit anyone.

The failure of restraint is reflected in Satyajit’s wife, Suruchi. She is a helpless prey of the conflicting emotions of a full-blooded human and the imposed restraint of abstinence, forcing her to live up to the norms set by her Satyajit. In the beginning, she agrees to
Saiyajit’s request of helping him live a life of brahmacharya, but she is not happy about it. Once she gets so disappointed and disgruntled that she breaks with a tone the bangles she has been wearing. Bireswar, her husband’s best friend in Cambridge, opposes with her for giving in to her husband’s whims so easily. She longs for another child, a son. In fact, she wants to have two sons and in her imagination, she has even named them as Ajoy and Sanjoy. She cannot understand how “one’s dedication to national service could gain strength from the state of celibacy” (SFL 23). She regrets that her husband does not have Bireswar’s zest for life.

Moreover, not everyone in Sevagram lives up to the Gandhian standards. On her way back from Moscow, Suruchi recalls how Dharam Vir and Kumari decided to get married after two years of stay in the Ashram. Gandhi himself approved this and conducted the simple ceremony to celebrate their marriage. The newly married couple surprised everyone by declaring that they took the vow of abstinence. And still, Kumari became pregnant within a year of getting married and taking the vow.

Suruchi does not wear ornaments on her person because there is no place for material possessions in Gandhigram. But she loves to see her daughter Sumita adorned. But Sumita is a shadow of Satyajit. She is practically leading an ascetic’s life. There is a big gulf between Suruchi and Sumita.

Suruchi finds a bracelet of garnets at a department store in Moscow. She wants buy it for Sumita, but she knows Suruchi has no
use even for coloured beads. Suruchi would think her mother spent years in Gandhi’s hermitage in vain without understanding the essence of Gandhian philosophy. Suruchi is a much Gandhigram as Satyajit. In Gandhigram, the spirit of man is striving to transcend human emotions and Suruchi appears to be an enthusiastic partner.

Discipline is imposed in Gandhigram for early childhood. Boys and girls bathe together in the village pond. This act is thought to be helpful in overcoming certain impulses. Five members in the village council represent different aspects of Gandhian ideology. While Satyajit forms the intellect, and Swamiji represents the spiritual side of Gandhi’s personality. Krishnamurti is the social worker, Chittaranjan Ghose stands for the political aspect of Gandhi and Madhab Uncle represents the human side of Gandhi. Surnames representing caste names are dropped from usage.

Free mixing of sexes is encouraged, expecting that there would be no awareness of sex between the two units. Once there was a lapse in this practice in Tolstoy Farm in South Africa, and Gandhi undertook the fast for five days to atone for sins done by others. The same sin is committed in Gandhigram, and Satyajit fasts for five days. The boy, who is involved in this act is not repentant, goes to the Steeltown. The girl, Jhanka, rejects the boy. This incident makes Bhashkar feel that Gandhigram is burdened with the ideas of Satyajit, the stone god. According to Satyajit, zest for living is a vice, but Bhashkar feels:

Vice in this country lay choked in taboos, inhibitions—the
rickety props of spiritual India! There was more of the truly spiritual in the world beyond. The modern State with its accent on equality; the same opportunities given to the elevated and to the depressed, the social services. Yes, that was modern materialism. Let India receive its full share. Let life be easier, freer, happier (SFL 60).

Gandhi has always advocated non-violence. At times, the reader may wonder who between Satyajit and Bhashkar is true in Gandhian spirit. Bhashkar captures the spirit of Gandhigram and decides to build the Meadow House to attract the youth of Gandhigram. He chooses the idea of non-violence to take down Gandhigram. Satyajit knows how to fight violence, but not non-violence.

Satyajit is a mere mortal likely to get tempted by the weakness of the flesh. Man in him is not dead yet in spite of being smothered by the ascetic in him. He gives in to sensual desires frequently, and he tries to pacify these carnal emotions by doing penance through fasting. These occasional lapses prove that the practice of Gandhian principles on the moral plane is difficult. Satyajit fights with the temptations till the end of the novel, realizing ultimately that mere mortals must strive at living like human beings only. He decides to amend to Sumita now.

He even wishes for the first time that his wife should have resisted his demand of leading an ascetic’s life, and not surrender. She should not have wiped out her identity for his sake. Sumita, Satyajit’s daughter, also reaches the same point of life though initially
she leads the life of an ascetic. Satyajit and his daughter Sumita chant lines from an ancient Sanskrit verse used by Gandhiji as a daily prayer and solace themselves:

From the unreal, lead me to the real.

From darkness lead me to light.

From death lead me to immortality! (SFL 67).

Biresh names her anti-life. Suruchi is very apprehensive about Sumita. She does not want her own life be repeated in Sumita. Bhashkar finds Sumita very frigid and insipid for his sophisticated tastes. He feels she should apply some lipstick on her chapped lips. He finds her absolutely unmoved in her reaction to seeing an erotic sculpture in the deserted temple. Bhashkar feels that they belong to different worlds. However, deep within him, he admires her simplicity and the genuine qualities. He realizes that she is suffering from father-complex and tries to awaken her pent-up emotions tactfully. Incidentally, she starts showing the signs of reviving. She even begins liking ornaments and feels shameful of her bare and ugly feet. She admires the beautiful dancing feet at the cultural show organized by the Steeltown Club. The novelist writes:

Sumita let her hands slide to her own. The sole was hard with callus; that was because she had never worn shoes or slippers. Feet did not have to be cracked darkly stained, meant only to walk on. And her hand stopped as though it had touched something ugly (SFL 159).
Different response arouses during her second visit to the deserted temple. But the complete awakening of womanly instincts happens when she visits Delhi, where she undergoes the impact of Nandini’s vigorous and down-to-earth personality. When she returns to Gandhigram she is an absolutely transformed woman. Her love for Bhashkar in the end happens to be a natural outcome.

Bhabani Bhattacharya does not favour Gandhi’s championship of brahmacharya. Many references are made to the violation of the accepted code in Gandhigram. Even in Cambridge, Satyajit has undertaken occasional fast to purify himself and get Harriet Greene or Stella Johnson out of his system. He is found to be struggling to smother human emotions till the end. Suruchi is not happy for having accepted this self-imposed torture. She feels that she is not Kasturba, but an ordinary woman who wants her normal urges to be satisfied. She resists Satyajit’s attitude and does not welcome his occasional advances which were getting rarer and rarer.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is fully in favour of Gandhian teaching of non-violence. The novelist shows his faith in the creed when Satyajit plans to take the Peace Mission to the Himalayas across Ladakh to the disputed territory between India and China. The novelist writes:

The freedom struggle had been won without a single shot fired by its soldiers, no hand lifted in anger. Non-violence, the quire courage....what a contrast to scenes elsewhere: Vietnam – Algiers – Indonesia (SFL 179).
This Gandhian principle was discovered by Gandhi in his younger life in South Africa. Another great act by Gandhi, passive resistance became the means of mass protests and resulted in the country’s freedom. Bhattacharya devotes the Seventh Chapter in *Shadow from Ladakh* to trace out the history of Satyagraha Movement in South Africa. Gandhi, under the partial impact of Tolstoy, started believing in austere living, voluntary poverty, self-help and abstinence. These basic ideas of moral force have become a weapon with which Gandhi combatted evil. Gandhian ideology implies an infinite capacity to withstand suffering and to die rather than retaliate. Tagore pays a tribute to Gandhi by calling his non-violent movement, “A steep ascent of manhood, not through the bloody path of violence but that of dignified patience and heroic self-renunciation” (SFL 69).

Bhattacharya feels that even though Gandhi is gone, his ideology lives and it must live forever. A Gandhi should be born in every century. Satyajit who considers himself less than a shadow of Gandhi decides to follow Gandhi in word and deed. He takes up Peace March as Gandhi did after the attainment of freedom to subdue communal violence in East Bengal. He equates Gandhi with Jesus Christ and Budha because these great men withstood the brunt of self-immolation for their convictions. That explains why the inhabitants of Gandhigram are casteless and equal in status.

One of the basic values of Gandhi’s philosophy is the absence of hatred for the opponent. Sumita quotes Satyajit to Bhashkar in order to elaborate this idea, “To give hate for hate is only to make the evil
Satyajit, like a true Gandhian, believes that the rulers and not the people are to be blamed for the conflict between India and China. Satyajit keeps hoping for a change of heart and the resultant co-existence between the two countries. He wonders what Gandhi would have done under the current circumstances. He remembers Gandhi’s words:

Not to believe in the possibility of permanent peace is to disbelieve in the godliness of human nature. If even one nation were unconditionally to perform the supreme act of renunciation, many of us would see in our lifetime, visible peace established on earth (SFL 82).

Bhashkar is a combination of modern ideas and Gandhian ideologies. This is testified when he decides not to destroy Gandhigram and not to take any aggressive action against it. Suruchi is the one who perceives that his aim is peaceful penetration of modern ideas into Gandhigram. The Meadow House is built solely with that purpose. Bhashkar wants to change Gandhigram through nonviolence. He plans to achieve his mission through understanding and love by bringing the people of the village and the Steeltown together in the Meadow House.

Bhashkar admires his adversary Satyajit for not being bitten by the ambition-bug. He is certain that his only aim is to become morally as superior as possible. He even appreciates Sumita for her

grow stronger. To hate is to be defeated in the moral struggle” (SFL 124).
enthusiasm for joining the Peace March which will only involve suffering and possible death and regrets that Steeltown does match Gandhigram in such dedication.

The similarity between Bhashkar's way of thinking and that of Gandhi is hinted at when Chittaranjan, while watching the show, put up by the Lohapur club, quotes Gandhi:

We have to enrich our old traditions with the experience of the new times. But the alien elements in their turn will have to be affected by the spirit of soil. One dominant culture absorbing the rest that cannot make for harmony: that will be an artificiality and forced unity that we do not want (SFL 156).

Bhashkar's way of thinking is akin to that of Gandhi when he takes the Chinese children to his house. They are not treated as children of a hostile, alien country, but children who need to be treated with love. Bhashkar does not want to destroy the commitment of the people of Gandhigram, but he wants to channelize it through a new way of expression to Steeltown. He feels that the show is a failure in Gandhigram and realizes the urgency of changing Sumita who will feel no exultation.

Bhashkar is sure that balm from Sumita's hands will strengthen him in his mission. When he expresses his fear about Satyajit hating the people of Steeltown, Sumita tells him, “Men of Gandhigram are incapable of hate. Hate is the vice of city people” (SFL 162).
The Meadow House means much to Bhashkar. This house is not just built in bricks, wood and glass, but it is a symbol of his hand extended towards Gandhigram to make friendship. He never wants to destroy the existence of Gandhigram. Sumita realizes it and believes, “Gandhigram must expose itself to every wave of thought, the full force of the modern age….Isolation was no answer. Isolation meant fear of defeat” (SFL 174). Gandhigram accepts Bhashkar’s offer so promptly that within five days of the show by the Lohapur Club, Sumita along with her friends decides to put up her show there. She discards the garb of a widow and starts wearing coloured clothes.

Bhattacharya uses the most significant aspect of Gandhian philosophy, non-violence on political plane, when Satyajit writes the memorandum for the Peace March to be submitted to the Government. He is so sure that strong forces will be arranged against the Peace March and wonders how the men in power can abnegate non-violence, the instrument of their own rise to power. He reminisces:

The freedom struggle had been won without a single shot fired by its soldiers, no hand lifted in anger. Non-violence, the quiet courage— “If blood be shed, let it be our blood” had brought the world’s greatest empire to its end (SFL 179).

It is sublime on the part of Satyajit to think that to change the destiny of common man, India should try to resolve international
conflict by moral force. For this goal to achieve, united conscience of all people, not United Nations, is required.

Satyajit appears to be a reincarnation of Gandhi when he opts for voluntary poverty, simplicity and indifference towards power. He turns down the offer to be the Minister without Portfolio the way Gandhi refused an office of profit after the attainment of freedom. He is determined to wipe every tear from every eye, as advocated by Gandhi.

Like Gandhi, Satyajit feels that there is no place for compromise in the path of truth as there should be no compromise with aggression. He considers the Peace Mission with its weapons being aimed at the aggressor’s deepest spirit. The Minister is doubtful of the success of Peace March in the modern day context. He tells Satyajit that Gandhi wanted the whole country to be involved in a movement of this kind. But Satyajit knows on many occasions Gandhi took upon his shoulders the entire burden of the struggle.

In spite of all the opposition, Satyajit is quite convinced that Peace March that he has taken up would fulfill its purpose. He knows the value of the method embraced by him because like Gandhi he feels, “Violence always hurts its perpetrator as much as its victim—that was a fact of history. In the final reckoning moral resistance alone could be creative” (SFL 207).

Satyajit is quite disappointed to see hardly any response to his call for Peace March. Bireswar consoles him “A Gandhi, and none else, should make a Gandhian gesture” (SFL 208). Bireswar’s remark is
partly true and Satyajit also believes that a Gandhi could not live perennially and his spirit could bestride the land powerfully. He feels that Gandhian spirit does not have to manifest itself through one person and one figure alone and that the collective strength of all the people could replace that figure. He knows that Gandhi would not want his ideas to be made into ‘ism.’

Satyajit believes that application of Gandhian ideas to a problem is more important than the theory. They could be stronger than the tyrant if they are armed with non-violence. Even Gandhi knew that non-violence is only a weapon but not a creed. This is the reason why Gandhi did not accept the offer to hold an office as a Minister. He wanted his followers to their own way. He did not want his spiritual vision to be undone by material means.

Like Gandhi, Satyajit also realizes the limits of his capacity. He gets another jolt when he is told by Bireswar that Steeltown is taking over Gandhigram. He thinks that this defeat is due to his being not able to observe brahmacharya. Gandhi said that it was harmful to suppress the body if the mind went astray. Satyajit feels another Gandhian instrument will save Gandhigram. Within an hour of the verdict against Gandhigram, he announces his protest by declaring a fast unto death. The author wonders why he had used the same words used by Gandhi when he wrote a letter to the British government. Suruchi who could understand him well realizes:

But Gandhi would have gone his way with absolute peace of mind; he capable of accepting self-imposed death
without the least ripple in his equanimity. Satyajit would be battling hard every hour, every minute; battling against the inner man. The common man whom he wanted to be uncommon. Was not the struggle itself a commentary on the lack of preparation? (SFL 338).

Suruchi knows Gandhigram would not be destroyed from outside, but only from inside. Even Bireswar tells him that Gandhigram stands on the idea. It is the people. The idea can change and so can the people. He also tells him that even if he considers himself to be the light, he is futile without Bhashkar because darkness is as important as light. He even plans to meet Bhashkar to find a solution to the present crisis, but it is not acceptable to Satyajit. Biresh replies:

You are yielding to violence, Satyajit. In your spirit, Gandhi always offered every possible opportunity to his adversary to win. His own personal stand was never important. It was always truth, truth and truth again. You must give truth a chance, Satyajit (SFL 344).

In a way, the fast fulfils the aim propagated by the Meadow House. It brings the Steeltown towards Gandhigram and that is what Bhashkar also aims at. The Mill workers are agitated and though they had not bothered about Satyajit earlier, now they see an aim the light of Gandhi. The people’s will is stirred all over India and there are mass meetings and impassioned speeches. Seeing inscrutable hardness of Bhashkar’s face, Mrs. Mehra, his Secretary, realizes that he too had
his full share of the spiritual force of the Gandhian village. Satyajit also feels a new sense of release. Having forced himself into Gandhian stance and gained victory over himself, he thinks that now, if perchance he were to live, he will not step on each footprint of the Master’s striding gait. Ambuj Kumar Sarma points out:

The confrontation between Gandhigram and Steeltown or Satyajit and Bhashkar reveals the novelist’s two-sided vision. On the one hand, he exhibits full faith and reverence to the Gandhian ideals but, on the other hand, he reckons the rapid development and mass production to be the need of the hour [76].

Ultimately, Bhaskhar himself joins the procession to request Satyajit to break the fast. The Government also decides to take a favourable decision because Bhashkar decides to change his stand as he feels that Gandhigram will live as long as it has vitality within. He, therefore, requests people from the Steeltown not to move away from Gandhigram after the passion of the movement is spent. Thus a meaningful policy of co-existence is evolved. Bhattacharya subscribes to the creed of non-violence and expressed his sorrow at the hollowness of India’s claim to be a follower of the Gandhian path. Bireswar says:

A handful of years after freedom was won, we’ve released ourselves from the architect of the freedom by giving him a shrine on the bank of the Jamuna River. We place wreaths on the holy spot in Rajghat. Foreign dignitaries
who come to New Delhi follow the set ritual and feel assured of Indian’s devotion to the departed leader, or may be, they don’t. (SFL 209).

*Shadow from Ladakh* also discusses whether large scale industrialisation is relevant to the Indian situation. Bhashkar with his *Steeltown* the Satyajit with his groundings in Gandhigram represent the two conflicting views. Bhashkar with his stress on rapid industrialisation realizes that “the assault on Gandhigram was ideologic, not economic” (SFL 200). He feels that the people from Lohapur must learn to appreciate the qualities of the heart in the people of Gandhigram. Thus there is a converging movement from extreme positions to the middle path with stands for compromise.

Even Gandhi was not absolutely against the use of machines. Gandhi said, “What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such!” [77]. His fight was against the system that fused human beings to the machines. He considered mechanization would be inevitable when there was a dearth of labour. It became irrelevant and an evil when there was a surplus of hands. In the words of Gobinda Prasad Sarma, “.....in the contemporary context none of the ideals of Gandhi and Nehru can alone be the national ideal; only a balanced combination of the two ideals would be an answer to the problems facing the national today” [78].

Bhabani Bhattacharya was not able to disentangle himself totally from the impact of Gandhian sensibilities even in his last novel, *A Dream in Hawaii*. The novel portrays the conflict of values between
the East and the West. The novel has no Gandhian figure as a character. But Gandhian ideology has always been a great source of inspiration for Bhattacharya. Swami Yogananda, a professor-turned Yogi walks the Gandhian talk. He is always found to spread Gandhian love for humanity. He even proposes to begin humanitarian work at Sadhna, the Ashram, where he stays till he leaves for Hawaii.

Like Gandhi, he supports fasting to purify self. He advocates Gandhian principle of considering work as worship. He preaches that every man has to complete his image through work. And, this work should be done without any desire for reward. He is a strong exponent of the teachings of Bhagavad Gita which proclaims that one must remain untouched by victory or defeat and gain or loss.

The Yogi takes the vow of abstinence, yet he is occasionally tortured by carnal desires. He wants to curb it completely even in the face of temptation. Like Gandhi, he undergoes the rigours of self-control. On account of an uncontrolled upsurge in his sleep, he goes to the beach where countless semi-nude figures were lying on repose. This is because like Gandhi he believes self-control is not the reward of an escapist. Deliverance has to be fulfilled under the stressful impact of realities of life.

It is really a strange phenomenon that Gandhi has almost been forgotten in his own country. Dr. Vincent Swift, the Head of the Cultural Academy at Hawaii, tells Swami Yogananda that any cult is more popular abroad. He finds that the Buddhism is more popular religion abroad than in India. He observes:
Coming to contemporary times, we see the same pressures of history directed at Gandhism. I know people who honestly believe that Mahatma Gandhi in his homeland has been turned into one of the numerous gods and placed on a high pedestal, a dead image with flowers on its stone feet; while abroad, he is more and more a living presence [79].

However, Yogananda finds consolation in the fact that Mahatma Gandhi was beyond the boundaries of the nationalism in the narrow sense of the word. He replies:

“I shall have no regrets. Dr. Swift, if the world accepts Mahatma Gandhi with all he has stood for and fought for, while India rejects him. A true human purpose will have been fulfilled” (ADH 126).

With a view to serving a similar ‘true human purpose’ Yogananda accepts Stella’s invitation to Hawaii. He agrees to stay on for some time and propagate spiritual peace. He is not in favour of the plans for a huge building to house the devotees. He does not require a stone monument to carry on his dialogues and prefers the natural living surroundings. This is obviously reminiscent of Gandhi’s insistence on simple living. Yogananda illustrates this statement by explaining how Gandhi spent the most fruitful last twenty years of his life in a mud-hut which even became a place of pilgrimage later. The irony of the situation can well be understood when we realize how
Gandhi is being forgotten even when huge buildings are being constructed in his honour.

Another aspect of Gandhian ideology portrayed in this novel is his dislike for super-mechanization and the atrocities committed in the name of national interest. It is voiced through the students when they try to interpret Prof. Gregson’s poem ‘The Dead Rat’. Alex’s interpretation of the poem reminds us of Mahatma Gandhi:

The dead rat...I call it technology. Up to a point, technology is good for mankind. It’s a tool of civilized living. Beyond that point it turns anti-social and defeats its original purpose while it goes on hitting at every aspect of traditionalism, technology-super-technology—becomes an end in itself. Machines with monstrous power take over the functions of the human brain, control human action. As machines get humanized, men get dehumanized (ADH 135).

Carol interprets the poem the following way:

National interest, the so-called national interest....that’s the dead rat. No bigger hoax has ever been invented. Spectacular crimes committed in the name of national interest. One day nuclear bombs will be dropped somewhere on the globe in our national interest. Other bombs will come flying to our country in someone else’s national interest (ADH 134).
Yogananda’s discussions with Devjani reveal why Gandhian followers do not command as much respect as the Mahatma himself. The reason is that they failed to identify themselves with the masses. Yogananda tells Devjani:

Gandhi renounced all and, clad in a peasant’s loin cloth, he lived as one of the poor and humble, that was the secret of his power over a hundred million people. Gandhi stood for renunciation, self-restraint and self-denial (ADH 188).

Perhaps the answer lies in Yogananda’s dictum that Indian gurus first get discovered in the West. Swami Yogananda strikes a note of affinity with the Mahatma when he confesses his moral lapse to her. Like Gandhi, he has the courage of conviction and reveals to Devjani not only his experiences with Frieda and Sylvia, but also the fact that he had often made love to her in his sleep. From Yogananda he becomes Neeloy. When he calls himself by his name while talking to Devjani on the eve of his departure for India, Stella asks Devjani to solve the riddle. Devjani replies in a suggestive but meaningful way, “It may be that one cannot exist without the other” (ADH 245). From this one can understand that Gandhian concept of brahmacharya has apparently failed.

A review of Bhabani Bhattacharya’s novels amply proves that he has had a tremendous influence of Gandhian ideology. He has, in fact, created mini-Gandhis in the characters of Devesh Basu, Jayadev, the roving minstrel, Satyajit, Bhaskhar and Yogananda. If Gandhi is the
'Mahatma’, Devesh Basu is Devata for the people [80]. Bhabani Bahattacharya seems to have had a sound grounding in Gandhian thought, culminating in his scholarly masterpiece, *Gandhi the Writer*, published in 1969 at the time Gandhi’s Centenary Celebrations. Thus, a conscious study of Gandhi has given him an added advantage over other novelists. Being thoroughly familiar with Gandhi’s views on varied subjects, Bhabani Bhattacharya is able to touch upon almost all the aspects of Gandhian ideology in the right perspective.

Bhabani Bhattacharya strongly advocates many Gandhian principles such as love for and identification with the common man and humanity at large, equity, simplicity, humanity, magnanimity, charity, austerity, equal status for women, widow remarriage, fearlessness, social uplift, self-help, voluntary poverty, victory of truth and spiritual force and above all, non-violence. Like Gandhi, Bhattacharya also protests against the cancerous evils of untouchability, superstitions, blind faith, uncharitable rituals, backwardness, orthodoxy, tradition-bound and cliché-ridden practices, slavery of spirit, caste system and all types of exploitation.

Bhabani Bhattacharya, through his novels, refers to the futility of observing a life of abstinence. He believes that being mortal human being is given in to carnal desires. He voices his opinions through Bhashkar in *Shadow from Ladakh* that the repression of natural instincts is unhealthy and purificatory facts and other rigours of self-control for any violation even in thought, are illogical and irrelevant in the present context. Howsoever, one may try to justify a celibate life in
the name of self-restraint, self-abnegation, self-renunciation, self-denial and even self-conquest, it is merely an escape and experience shows that curbing of human emotions does not necessarily lead to sublimation. It has resulted more often in failure on the moral plane. What is needed is purely a human approach which concedes co-existence of vice and virtue and even reconciliation between as asceticism and aestheticism.

In the same vein, Bhabani Bhattacharya suggests a synthesis of rural and urban values and a sort of middle path for the growth of economy. Not only small scale industry need be encouraged, even industrialisation and mass production have come to stay in the face of population explosion. Siv Narayan Dash remarks:

Bhattacharya has strong faith in Gandhism and all it stands for. Hence they are often noticed in his creative works, which ends in idyllic reconciliation of contradictory values. Like Gandhi he has an affirmative vision of life. The sterling qualities and the resplendent spirit of man cannot be crushed down by adversity, is what Gandhi stood for and so also the creative creed of Bhattacharya [81].