Chapter II

The Plight of the Marginalised

Social responsibility must be the basis of any theorizing on postcolonial literature as well as the root of the creative work of the writers themselves. (Katrak 255)

In Indian English literature, many novels centre on the dictum that art must have a social purpose. They portray the life of man in relation to society. Social realism has been the strong point of the Indian novels in English. Most Indian novels in English have shown a marked preoccupation with the social situation in a greater or lesser degree. As Vinay Dharwadker explains in "The Internalization of Literatures", the purpose of the novelists is, "to create a strong effect of every day reality in their representations of particular societies, characters and character types and historical events and periods" (66).

Among the novelists of the post-war period, writers like Raja Rao and Narayan have not shown a deep involvement in social problems of the day. Raja Rao's vision of rural India is more that of a poet than that of a committed sociologist. In Narayan's novels, one finds no specific social or national purpose. He shows no desire for reforming
the society. As Iyengar has stated in his *Indian Writing in English*, "Social life in a country of the size of India is so full of vagaries and varieties that the novelist with an observant eye and an understanding heart will find the material spread out before him to be literally inexhaustible" (327). The society in which the writers are members offers sources for creativity. As Iyengar rightly argues, "some of the best studies of social life are... in the regional languages; and it is not easy to translate the racy idiom of everyday speech into English" (327).

No novelist of that period has shown any interest towards the portrayal of the society which was under the clutches of many evils and natural calamities. The Bengal famine was at its worst. But it is only in the writings of Anand, Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, Nayantara Sahgal and Manohar Malgonkar that one can trace their involvement in portraying the social values. All the novels of Anand and Bhattacharya show their deep social commitment and humanistic involvement in the serious problems of the society.

In his novels, Anand deals with the problems of oppression and exploitation of the lowest classes by the upper classes, the tyranny and torture by the upper castes of the lower castes of Hindu society and
the ignorance and superstition of the people caused by illiteracy and orthodoxy that are hindrance to the progress of society. All his novels protest against the contemporary social set up, calling for a new order, where none would be able to oppress or exploit others. He is spontaneously critical towards these incidents and wants to redeem the people from the follies.

Bhattacharya highlights the problems of the contemporary society in India with an aim to make the society better. He depicts the life of his society as he sees it with his observant eyes. He deals with the social, religious, economic and political aspects of Indian life from a post-colonial perspective. He presents the plight of the marginalised - marginalised socially and economically - at various levels. In the Indian context, the common man is marginalised in more than one sense. Economic inequality is one major factor. Gender bias is another which unlike the West, takes root under religious sanctity. Caste and class discrimination are the other categories. Bhattacharya, being a committed writer, exposes the various social evils of Indian society in everyone of his novels. In Music, he points out some of the evils in Indian society:

Society, rural society (and nine-tenths of India was rural)
was sick with taboos and inhibitions of its own making:
the inequities of caste and untouchability, the ritualism that passed for religion, the wide-flung cobwebs of superstitious faith. It was all an outgrowth of centuries of decadence. The purity of ancient thought has been lost in misinterpretation until the dignity of man had become a mere play thing of vested interest. (Music 67-68)

Bhattacharya's novels reveal his Marxist leaning and a liberal humanitarian outlook on the problems of life. Dorothy Blair Shimer rightly observes, "A strong undercurrent of the early Marxist respect for liberal humanitarianism and the effects of economic pressures on history runs through all Bhattacharya's novels" (10-11). His novels focus on lower-class social conditions, class conflicts and economic exploitation. He also condemns social evils such as prostitution, corruption, exploitation, and superstitious beliefs. He attempts to destroy false beliefs and liberate men's minds so as to bring reconciliation of conflicting ideologies, and to rebel against untouchability and barriers of caste. As a social reformer, he wants to bring transformation in Indian society by appealing to the conscience of the people. Further, in his
novels, he expresses his views on creating a new India which is free from all social evils and also the need to re-orient the national life on new social structure.

Even after Independence, in India, people are under suppression. Once they were suppressed by British Imperialists. At present, they are under the suppression of the political leaders, the Indian Imperialists. In his book The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon affirms, "unless national consciousness at its moment of success was somehow changed into a social consciousness, the future would hold not liberation but an extension of imperialism" (qtd. in Said 323). Commenting on this predicament, John McLeod says in Beginning Post-colonialism,

A nationalism grounded in the collective interests of the people must continue to dictate the conduct of the nation after it gains the right to self-determination. The nation must not be hijacked by an indigenous middle class which acts like the previous colonial regime and does little to further the interests and conditions of the people. (90)

Bhattacharya states in Hunger that both the Bengal famine and the policies of the British Government are responsible for the sufferings
of the people. His implicit indictment of the British government for its inhuman suppression of the Indians is explicit in the realistic description of the harrowing scenes of hunger and corruption. The events are real and so he, with care and sophistry, mixes the flavour to the events and portrays them naturally. He has portrayed how the people of Baruni village are suppressed and tortured by the agents of the British rulers. They become victims of an organised brutality which was nothing but a manifestation of man's inhumanity to man. They live in poverty not because of the natural calamity like Bengal Famine, but because of the man-made scarcity. It is caused by black marketeers, money-lenders and rice-hoarders and "the empty stomach was due to no blight of nature, no failure of crops ... It was man-made scarcity ..."(105). Syed Amaruddin in his article, "Social Commitment in Bhattacharya's Novels" explains how Bhattacharya reacts to this situation:

As a committed writer, he deals with social evils like corruption, selfishness and inhumanity in the society which is responsible for the most unimaginative, degraded human plight of our time, which has almost dehumanised and demoralised the inner heart and spirit
of the millions of destitutes who suffered during the famous famine of Bengal. (22)

Bhattacharya gives an account of the pitiable conditions of a large number of destitutes who are merely reduced to the status of wandering beggars in the city of Calcutta. A destitute mother who could not feed her three children tries to drown them in the river Ganges. Another woman sits on the pavement eating from a bowl while her famished child sits nearby and looks at her. A starving mother with a child at her breast is given food at a kitchen. While she is eating, the child dies in her lap. But she goes on eating. After finishing her meal, she leaves her dead child. Girls earn two rupees on being photographed upon the soldier's knees or they are forced to prostitution to satisfy their hunger for food. A girl of six is sold for ten silver rupees. In the novel Hunger, Bhattacharya opines, "... a lot of moneyed people have a liking for these skinny girls new from the country side" (176). And he explains how hunger leads to all kinds of humiliation - a man loses his life while awaiting food in a queue, and another man locates his food in a garbage and finally gets a banana skin. Men and animals fight to get hold of peels and rotten vegetables in the rubbish can. It is indeed an
exceedingly painful and desperate situation. In the Indian context, as the novelist delineates, the people's fight over dustbins among vultures and jackals are very common. The poverty strikes at the low born and they survive even among their ruins.

Destitutes and dogs in those days often fought for possession of the rich city's ten thousand rubbish heaps in which craps of rotting food lay buried. It was not every time that the destitutes won, routing the dogs on the streets and the dog within themselves. (Hunger 171)

The desperate men and women, in search of food, leave their ancestral homes, and travel on footboards and on roofs of the railway trains or trek the meadows and roads towards the city. "Streams of desperate men ventured out of their ancestral homes in search of food, hanging on to the footboards of railway trains, riding on the sunbacked roofs" (111). Their home at present is the highroad and they move along, bearing the label of destitutes. They become victims of hunger and collapse on the highroads or on the streets of Calcutta. A number of hunger deaths occur in quick succession: "Corpses lay by the road, huddling together. Picked to the bone; only the hair uneaten-fluffy baby's
hair, man's hair, the waist-long hair of women. A family group had sunk into sleep; and beyond the sleep was vultures" (Hunger 137).

In the city, many relief centres have been opened and the food that is offered at the free kitchens is not sufficient to meet the requirements of the poverty-stricken people. Onu tells his mother, "There is pity. They have set up free kitchens to give you rice gruel. Not enough. Not all can get it every day. Too little grain, too many mouths" (Hunger 160). At mealtime, when the gates of the kitchen are opened, they rush in to receive their portion of the meal. Many of the destitutes are so weak that they cannot take solid food. Some of them die after consuming food because of the prolonged starvation. As Chandrasekharan rightly points out, "Bhattacharya is at his best when he depicts the plight of the ruined peasants, their exodus to the city and their abject misery and degradation" (31-32). The city even now holds the pavement dwellers and the condition is still worse during the rainy and summer seasons.

In his novel Hunger, Bhattacharya also shows the pathetic plight of Kajoli and her family. Kajoli, Onu and their mother live in poverty because of the selfishness of black marketeers and rice-hoarders.
Having nothing to eat, Kajoli, pregnant and hungry would go out with her mother to hunt for roots that can be boiled, salted and eaten:

Some roots tortured the stomach, and you learnt to discard them; but those that only made you uneasy, resting in your stomach like a stone load, had to be retained in your daily fare - you could not afford to pick and choose, and it was good, after all, to have something inside you that ate up your hunger for a long while. (119)

But they do not last long. Now Kajoli, her mother and her brother too join the exodus after loosing everything in the village. When they reach the city, their problem of hunger continues. On the way, a soldier takes compassion on her and gives her bread and money. Kajoli says "the silver had no meaning for her, but the bread, so much bread; it would mean life for her dying mother and her brother" (144). But in his hunger for sex, he rapes her, imagining himself to be near his wife; but the shriek of the girl and the excessive bleeding after abortion melts his heart. She is admitted in a military hospital. So long as Kajoli remains in the hospital, Onu supports his mother. After her release from the hospital,
Kajoli finds the miserable condition of her mother and brother. She decides to save her family by becoming a prostitute. As Jan Jindy Pettman rightly points out in "Sex Tourism: The Complexities of Power",

...women's economic dependence on father or husband and lack of alternative employment or adequate social security force women into the sex industry. This is especially so where rapid social change, rural impoverishment and displacement force young women into towns and cities in search of jobs. Prostitutes are then victims of poverty or development, as well as of patriarchy. (110)

At last Kajoli changes her mind by becoming a newspaper vendor. The plight of Kajoli and her family is the plight of everyone in India during a high calamity. Even the lesser known and insignificant things have been used in place of bread. He also pictures how women like Kajoli have been forced to become prostitutes. It is not only famine, the cause for women becoming prostitutes but also the rapid social changes and displacement. People have to move from their native place to a
completely new environment which make them sometimes "misfits" or else simply accept it. Kajoli accepts the new environment and becomes a newspaper vendor. Her spirit is quite unchanged but she goes on changing to new situations. Sorrows and sufferings do not destroy her spirit which remains "unconquered and unconquerable". In "Bhabani Bhattacharya: Novelist of Social Ferment", Harish Raizada says, "Kajoli is the symbol of India which though humiliated and exploited by the alien imperialists, preserves its unconquerable spirit to face the mighty power" (159). Bhattacharya throws light on the darker side of his native humanity in which he identifies individuals and expresses his or her plight.

In his novel Tiger also, Bhattacharya portrays how the Bengal famine has affected the people of Jharna town. "A plague took the land in its grip, the plague of hunger, in the wake of war. [...] No rationing of food grains, no price control, no checking of the giant sharks who played the cornering game on a stupendous scale" (Tiger 15). Bhattacharya brings out effectively the pathetic human existence that the minimum grains they have kept for the famine days have been looted.
The foreigners and urban Indians purchase the grains from the poor peasants. Having nothing, the peasants become paupers, begging for a fistful of food grains. The destitutes move to the city on foot boards of trains and cry out "Hungry, we die ... Give us a few grains for food, Baba ... Give us a ride to the great city" (23). Men and women die of hunger; a few sell their household articles for food. Weavers sell their looms, artisans their tools and fishermen their boats. Some women are taken to prostitution. B-10 explains this predicament:

Two great hungers had struck the land of Bengal in the wake of war: the hunger of the masses of people uprooted from their old earth and turned into beggars, and the hunger of the all-owning few for pleasure and more pleasure, a raging fever of the times. Uprooted women with their own kind of hunger had to soothe the other hunger, had to cool the raging pleasure-fever with their bodies. (53)

Kalo, a blacksmith of Jharna town, goes to the city in quest of food. Kalo's only daughter, Chandra Lekha also sells everything of her
house, including her Ashoka memorial medal. She is brought to the harlot-house by deception. She is saved by her father at the nick of the moment. Kalo turns against the society, arranges Shiva's coming with the help of two seers of grams and avenges himself on the people. It is a bitter attack on those who exploited them as caste-tyrants. It is a quest for freedom.

Bhattacharya's short-story, "A Moment of Eternity" shows the plight of Mother of Sona-Mona. She is very much devoted to her husband. When her husband is suffering from a disease, she devotes all her time to take care of him. She even neglects her own children, Sona and Mona. She thinks herself in terms of Savitri, the ideal wife of Satyavan. "I felt Savitri in me, Savitri, who is ever in every woman. I could not be defeated, not unless I was lost, destroyed (81). Unfortunately, her husband dies. After the death of her husband, she faces poverty and hunger in her life. As there is no other way for her livelihood, she kills her two children and attempts to commit suicide by eating opium. She fails in her attempt and is admitted in the hospital. She is sentenced to four years imprisonment. Her words to her husband come true at last. "We three have no existence apart from yours. In you, we three live. In your dying, we three die"(81).
Bhattacharya also pictures how the people have been tortured by the agents of the British rulers. The British send boat-wreckers, "agents of the rulers", to seize the boats of the fishermen. One fisherman requests the boat-wreckers to spare his boat because "what the plough-and-kine is to the peasant, the boat is to the fisherfolk" (Hunger 55). They do not bother about the consequences which would deny the fishermen their only means of livelihood and food, and the villagers, their means of transportation. The peasants are forced to sell their grains to the agents of the imperialist government and greedy hoarders. Thus the ruling British have scorched the boats. They have scorched the food and finally they would scorch the people too. The village economy would soon go to pieces. Bhattacharya sketches the life of the hungry mass who are under the shadow of atrocities committed by both the natives and the British rulers. While the former hit the sufferers of famine directly, the latter damage their surviving elements indirectly. When the people participate in the Quit India Movement, the authorities beat them, kick them, and trample them under foot. In Hunger, Kishore, Kajoli's husband, explains how the political prisoners have been tortured by the British authorities:
They opened fire on the prisoners. We used to sing. They told us not to sing. We sang. The warder slapped one of us. That one slapped him back in return. Whistles blew, bells began to ring, the jail-house was soon a battle-ground. Warders, guards, opened fire on us, un-armed ones, who had nothing to fight with save our fists. [...] Fifteen killed. Twice as many more wounded. (81-82)

Rahoul also very sadly exposes the British repression: "A thousand killed, twice as many wounded. Many had been hanged after a hurried trial—peasant lads had gone to the rope crying with their last breath, 'Victory, victory to freedom!'" (97-98). Bhattacharya has brought alive the colonial society of India with all its dialectical tensions. On the one side, stand the callous, cruel and repressive British rulers with their hypocritical, greedy, exploitative collaborators; on the other side, stand the working class people, struggling heroically against the colonial rulers and their collaborators. The colonial influence has seriously disturbed the existence of the natives. The novelist portrays the crucial existence of them under an alien atmosphere which is domineering
because of the local agents. Thus with a socio-political backdrop, Bhattacharya exposes the helpless conditions of the marginalised - the poor and the women.

The ground realities in today's India are very harsh and bleak. The common people continue to struggle with poverty, corruption, violence, exploitation and marginalisation. Even the indigenous ruling class are corrupt to the core that their lust for money and power make others suffer in their life. As N. Krishnaswamy comments in "Decolonising English Education in India",

In India, even a casual observer can see a quite crisis developing - a crisis of character, of morals and of values. A civilization that has given birth to the apostles of peace - Buddha, Mahavira and the Mahatma - is getting vulgarized and is becoming the abode of criminalization; a culture that has celebrated spirituality and detachment is turning out vultures of materialism, those who can do anything to become 'crore-pathis'. a country that was considered 'Shanti-Niketan' has become 'a society of scams' and a disturbed state polluted by
creatures that are corrupt to the core, ... The degeneration is taking place without any exception in all classes, castes, religions, professions, ideological groups-in short, in all walks of life. (49)

Nationalism cannot seriously be considered as the alternative to imperialism that it was once thought to be. In the years since the busy period of decolonisation, there has emerged a disenchantment with the ideas of nation and nationalism. Even now, the people of the independent countries confront a series of insoluble problems even after formal independence was achieved. The common people are still subject to the whims and unjust rule of the indigenous elite. As B.N.Singh rightly observes in "Khushwant Singh's Delhi : A Post-colonial Novel",

... the internal colonialism that exists even after fifty years of India's independence is no less dangerous than the former. It has not only pushed the majority of the masses to the margins of decision making but has also led to their estrangement and alienation from the 'main stream'. Their sense of depravity and marginalised entity become much more acute in the context of the exultant
voices celebrating national unity and political solidarity. They become exiled from the national 'mainstream' as frustratingly as they were kept invisible during the colonial regime. (142)

Bhattacharya, as a social realist, pictures how the common man suffers in the hands of black-marketeers and village money lenders by means of corruption and exploitation. It is clearly portrayed in his novels **Hunger, Tiger** and **Gold**. During the time of the famine, conditions in Bengal were highly miserable. Corruption took roots in all the fields. The rich exploited the poor with the result that the rich grew richer, while the poor became poorer:

Corruption had grown like an epidemic. Money had become a mad hunger. [...] The poor grew proportionately poorer. Never in the land's history had the process that made the rich richer, the poor poorer, gained such ruthless intensity. (**Hunger** 106)

As the survival of human beings in this world is possible by wealth, they develop an affinity towards money. In the novels of Bhattacharya, most of the characters do have a hunger for money and
they find ways to mobilise it. Getting rich at any cost becomes the be-all and end-all of life for them. Bhattacharya shows how their hunger for money renders them blind to the sufferings of their fellowmen. Samarendra Basu, Abalabandhu, Motichand and Seth Samsundar are representatives of the money hungry businessmen. Samarendra Basu in *Hunger*, sees before him a rare opportunity to double his wealth through speculation in shares. If he could buy huge stocks of grain and hoard it, he would be able to sell it at a higher price in due course. He is a hypocrite. On the one hand, he is earning money by black marketing rice and on the other, he donates money for buying rice for the destitutes. He knows that "...some of this amount would return to him via the black market and its inter-mediaries working up to Cheap Rice, Ltd."

(*Hunger* 173). Samarendra Basu's ultimate goal is to double his wealth but his attitude is not visible to others. His hypocrisy is hidden at the base and humanism cemented with nationalism is completely displayed by the novelist. It is ironic that humanism is at loss when others' suffering or poverty is not considered.

Sir. Abalabandhu, the Senior Director of "Cheap Rice, Ltd." is equally avaricious and he is known as the prince of the black market.
Under the cloak of charity, he parades himself as a respectable man. "As scarcity grew, as masses of people died of hunger, his margin of profit would increased" (Tiger 125). Both Samarendra Basu and Abalabandhu are responsible for the scarcity of rice. Instead of helping the poor people, they force them to live in poverty. The village traders like Girish continue to stay in the fast-emptying villages and exploit the people. As a result, the villagers are driven to the city only to suffer further humiliation.

Motichand in Tiger also belongs to this category. He always keeps his eyes fixed on the stock market. The war offers immense opportunities for him to make huge profits. When he finds himself in a dilemma, as to whether he should buy or sell, he hears about the Shiva Temple and goes there to meet the young priestess. He discloses his problem to her and the bewildered girl mumbles "buy ... sell ... buy ... sell" (Tiger 92). Taking this as the word from God, Motichand does exactly as the priestess has told him though it means going against the trend in the market. He gets huge profit and this makes him a devotee of the temple. In the hunt for money, as the characters of Bhattacharya reveal, they act as if they are crazy. They take everything for granted and
earn money even in the name of God. Bhattacharya discloses here, the foolish faith of a man who exploits others to earn for his survival.

In Gold, Seth Samsundar, the village money-lender exploits the simple folk of Sonamitti:

A loan standing in the Seth's ledger doubled itself in a twelve month. When he paid out twenty rupees, the figure he entered in his book was forty – a year's interest charged in advance as soon as the loan was given. The debtor could whine or howl but had no option. (Gold 67)

Samsundar corners all the cloth of the market and raises its price, thereby causing hardship to the villagers. He also lends money at an exorbitant rates of interest. At the same time, he dreams of entering the local politics by fooling the villagers. But his most ambitious dream is to get rich by converting copper into gold with the help of a village girl, Meera. He believes that Meera has power to change base metals into gold by the power of an amulet (given to her by her grandfather, the minstrel) which only works while she performs kind deeds. Somehow she becomes a partner to this cunning businessman. Though Samsundar's story is
unbelievable, Bhattacharya asserts the existence of such a concept - making money by shortcuts - in the minds of the people. He also traces such type of men in all corners awaiting for innocents to fall a prey to them.

There are also Seths or men of authority in other fields such as religious, moral, social and traditional who take advantage of those who fall within their sphere of influence and dominate them. Through Sohanlal, a minor character in Gold, the novelist observes,

The cities had a greater variety and profusion of them than the countryside. 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 chattel 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. (119)

Religion is also used to exploit the blind faith of simple and innocent people. It is turned into a spiritual trade where people try to buy
spiritual merit in exchange for merchandise. Bhattacharya exposes falsehood in religions through the words of Biten:

Food for the soul is produced and sold like food for the stomach, and though the ways of the two trades are different, you pay for both with hard cash. The temple is a market and the priest a dealer. People are always ready to pay well for feeding the inner man! (Tiger 41).

The rich people make offerings to the temples to gain more riches. They please the Gods with extravagant offerings so that their wishes may be granted. In Tiger, many rich merchants frequent the Shiva Temple for their own selfish ends. One merchant makes an offering of two milk baths for the deity with the special prayer that the price of gold should go up, while another makes the same offering with the prayer that the price should go down. The milk after the bath is collected and thrown into river Ganges to ensure the full merit of the offering to the donors. Thus, while hundreds are dying of hunger everyday, the precious milk which would have saved the lives of many is wasted to satisfy the whim of the rich. Harish Raizada says, the
novel *Tiger* "satirises the blind religious faith of ignorant masses who will grudge to feed famished destitutes but fill whole-heartedly the alms-bowls of the Sadhus dressed in saffron loin cloth..." (162).

Having diasporic experience and the Western impact, Bhattacharya is able to expose the corruption prevalent among religions in general and in the Hindu religion in particular. There is in him, an implicit appreciation for the British rule for dispassionately handling the problem arising out of religious ceremonies-equating the low born and the high born on par with each other from a legal perspective.

Bhattacharya does not believe in the blind religious dogmas, rites and rituals. He condemns the evil practices of religion which are undertaken by many for their personal gain. P.P. Sharma writes in "Bhabani Bhattacharya : Artist / Propagandist?"

Bhattacharya's reformist zeal spills over in some other directions also; the highly credulous Hindu masses who can be easily imposed upon in religious matters by the wily and the scheming; the wanton waste of essential commodities (milk) for some supposed religious beliefs, the donor's unabashed self-seeking and the exploitation
of a religious institution by the powerful and the unscrupulous for their own personal gain. (45)

Bhattacharya wants to caution that the people should not be carried away by misguided faith in religion; instead, they should try to understand the real spirit of the religious practices. To him, religion should not become hollow and empty, devoid of its true spirit. "Religion seems to have lost its pristine glory and forgotten its basic ethical values" (Raizada 162). The novelist gives a warning that if, in the name of religion, humanity is exploited, then, there is no end of corruption.

Through his novels, Bhattacharya reveals how man's lust for power and money makes him heedless of the suffering that the others have undergone in their life. This leads to social conflicts and consequent suffering and misery of the weaker sections. What Bhattacharya portrays about Indian society is equally true for any other part of the world because man's basic nature is selfish, trying always to dominate and subdue the lower sections of society. But Bhattacharya, while sympathizing with the victims of exploitation, does not give up all hope. He firmly believes that men in power can improve and change their mental attitudes and selfish natures, provided their social conscience is
aroused. Bhattacharya strives to arouse this social conscience of man so that he may become humanized. It is this inner change in man which must precede all transformation in society and the country at large.

Moreover, this is Bhattacharya's inner urge also. Though his contemporaries document the values of society in their writings, they have not shown a way to overcome the follies in them. They portray realistically the lives of the downtrodden much to the surprise and shock of the readers. But, Bhattacharya goes to the extent of giving solutions to the social problems.

The Marxian concept of a new socialist society presupposes a classless and a casteless society free from exploitation of all sorts. In this society, nobody owns anything but everybody owns everything. Each individual contributes according to his ability and receives according to his needs. Like the Marxists, Bhattacharya works for a classless and casteless society. In Music, Jayadev's words echo Bhattacharya's stand point: "All untouchability - there are different sort under different labels almost everywhere-is being brought to an end. Mankind has a new charter of equal rights for all" (142). He condemns caste-barriers among men. The upper caste dominate and exploit the
lower castes with the result that the lowest caste has to suffer the most in all respects. Naik observes in *Mulk Raj Anand*,

… The caste Hindu is armed with the feeling of six thousand years of social and class superiority – a feeling which refuses to accept the fact that the untouchable is a human being but insists on treating him like a subhuman creature to be ignored or bullied or exploited as the occasion demands. (29)

It is ironical that caste is yet to be eradicated in India. The reasons are not far to seek. The caste and religion are inter-connected. The caste system is supposed to have been divinely ordained. Hence the unconditional acceptance of it both by the suppressed and the dominant. People in India, as a rule, are god-fearing and that explains why caste could not yet to be abolished. Indians - the majority of them are Hindus - not only believe in God but also accept as fact that God created the caste system for *Bhagavat Gita* sanctifies the caste system:

The four fold caste system was created by me, by differentiating people according to their *Guna* and *Karma*. [...] It is better to follow one's own *Dharma*,
righteously established, even with all its blemishes, than the Dharma of others, even when it is more attractive; it is better to die doing one's own Dharma, the Dharma of other is terrible to follow... You bring into your present life, the accumulated merit or guilt of the past. The present is but a reward or punishment for the past. There is little that you can do to undo your past because it has happened and gone. There is little that you can do about the present misery that you undergo because it is your just reward. So live a righteous life now, do not revolt, accept the lot because if you are righteous, you will have a better deal in your next life... (IV. 13 & III. 35)

It is not surprising that the Brahmins and the high-caste Hindus believe in this concept because it is convenient for them to do so. But the irony is that the suppressed people also believe it, accepting any insult or injustice, stoically enduring that they are destined to be so by divine order.

But the redeeming humanistic attitude of Bhattacharya is revealed when Kalo in Tiger decides to revolt against the entire upper
class that dominates and exploits the lowest and most deprived sections of society. He is a low caste blacksmith and suffers immensely at the hands of the rich. As he is socially backward, he hesitates to send his daughter, Chandra Lekha to school. Her presence at school is frowned upon by the girls of the higher castes. She is addressed by her classmates as "Smithman's daughter"(8). Bhattacharya explains her predicament thus:

The girls at school were cold and aloof because of her humble caste. She was at the top in every test and that made it worse. Lekha would have preferred to be at the bottom of the class if that would have made her schoolmates more friendly. It wouldn't, she knew. She would then be scorned all the more. (11)

Kalo is even afraid of accompanying his daughter up to the entrance of the school because the gateman would think that a Kamar's daughter comes to school, inspite of Kalo's decent clothes. He feels depressed that even the fundamental rights have been denied to them. He determines to take revenge upon the upper castes of society. He is against this society that uprooted him and sent him to the jail for a petty theft of food.
By disguising himself as a Brahmin priest, he succeeds in befooing
the rich and making them worship the false God in his temple. He upsets
the old social order by investing himself with brahminhood and rising to
the top:

He was scum no longer. He was going to be a pillar of
society! ... A smith reincarnated a Brahmin. A convict and
harlot - house procurer become a master of a temple, placing
the hand of benediction on the bowed heads of pious folks.

So had the wheel of karma turned! (86-87)

Though he takes risks as terrific as riding a tiger, he succeeds in
demonstrating to the whole society, on what flimsy grounds the system of
caste is based in modern times and thus condemns it implicitly.

The novelist expresses his belief that there can also be true
understanding among different classes of society and the class barriers
can be overcome provided people have true kindness and recognize one
another as human beings having similar feelings and emotions. Such
happy relationship can reduce the suffering and humiliation of the lower
classes, caused by the arrogance and pride of the upper classes.

Bhattacharya believes that class distinctions and caste rivalries can be
removed and a new social order will emerge in the future.}
Not only the untouchables and the poor are under oppression, but women too belong to this category. The plight of Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is more applicable to Indian women. Nora says, "...our home has been nothing but a playroom. I've been your doll-wife here, just as at home, I was father's doll-child" (76). They are victims of oppression by men and also by their own kind. Women in general, confront issues of male chauvinism, sexist bias, psychological and even physical exploitation, the utter disregard of their psychological, cultural, familial and spiritual quests. As Fran Hosken emphasizes, "Rape, forced prostitution, polygamy, genital mutilation, pornography, the beating of girls and women, purdah (segregation of women) are all violations of basic human rights" (qtd. in Mongia 185). Leela Gandhi echoes the same view: "She was the forgotten casualty of both imperial ideology, and native and foreign patriarchies" (83). Even in the post-independence era, she assumes the status of the "other". She has been forced to occupy a secondary place by strong cultural forces and social tradition. They fail to occupy a place of human dignity as free and independent human beings. They do not get equal benefits because of gender inequality. "It is the difference and the struggle between men and women
and the exploitation of the latter by the former that is the underlying thread that runs through history" (Mc Lellan 374). Shulamith Firestone and Ellen Willis also emphasize in "Red Stockings Manifesto",

Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism, etc.) are extensions of male supremacy; men dominate women, ...

They have used their power to keep women in an inferior position. All men receive economic, sexual and psychological benefits from male supremacy. All men have oppressed women. (127)

Traditionally, India has a phallocentric culture. The economic, political, social, and other factors are responsible for the disparity between man and woman. The woman is expected to sacrifice her entire life to a man. Beverly Jones in "Toward a Female Liberation Movement" says, "Men enjoy special privileges in life as a direct result of the oppression of the opposite sex" (109). In his appendix to Three Rebellious Women, Complete Collection of Guo-Ma-ruo's Plays, Guo-Ma-ruo writes,
When she is a maiden at home, she shall obey her father; after she gets married, she shall obey her husband; if her husband dies, she shall obey her son. Through all her life, a woman is always the dependent of men and never is allowed a moment of independence. [...] They have been sinking under the male-centred morality for thousands of years and have sacrificed all their lives. (qtd. in Keyssar 254)

In order to emancipate themselves from patriarchy, women must create their own values and their own identities. As Homi K. Bhabha says in *The Location of Culture*, "... Some challenged the symbols and authorities of the culture they fought to defend. Others disrupted the homes they had struggled to sustain. For most of them there was no return, no going back to the ‘good old days’" (27).

Feminism has brought about a significant change in one's outlook towards women. It struggles for the spiritual, economic, social and racial equality of women. It protests against male domination and the oppression of women. One of the primal concern of feminism is, as
P. Ramamoorthi declares in "My life is my own - A Study of Shashi Deshpande's Women", "a women is a being. She is not an appendage of man. A woman is not the 'other'; she is not an addition to man. She is an autonomous being ..." (115). Feminism wants to reconstruct society in which women's desires and purposes are given equal importance. Feminists try to redefine woman's role in the society and reassert her self-identity.

The problem of women especially the suppression of women finds expression in the novels of Bhattacharya. He portrays how women are suppressed in the name of superstition and orthodoxy. He wonders, "How can a country which is caught in the deadly mire of obscurantism, superstitions, rituals and obsolete customs, make progress even though it may be free?" (Raizada 160). In the novel, Music Mohini's grand mother and her mother-in-law stand for old, orthodox life. The old mother (Mohini's grand mother) does not like Mohini to be sent to a convent school but desires that she is trained at home and learn classical Sanskrit, the language of the Gods, the essence of true knowledge and wisdom. She prevents Mohini to become a radio-singer. She has fixed ideas and has strong prejudices against modern way of living.
After marriage, Mohini's problems continue in her husband's house. Her mother-in-law (Jayadev's mother) wants to preserve the tradition of the Big House. The family customs are highly restrictive. The customs impose many restrictions especially on the mistress of the Big House. The female members of the house have to use palanquins or bullock carts when they move out of the house. They have to lead a subdued life. Even music is to be rendered only for worship. A bride is not permitted to eat anything on her marriage day. A bride who fails to bear a child within a year of her marriage becomes an object of ridicule. The purpose of Bhattacharya to expose the status of women after marriage through Mohini is achieved. She becomes the target of others who speak ill of her and her status becomes a question mark. She has to undergo so many hardships and ordeals which she accepts passively. Mohini's problem is typically the problem of every women in India.

Superstitious fear and faith in the horoscope spoil the life of many young girls. At one stage, Mohini's mother-in-law is convinced on the basis of her son, Jayadev's horoscope that if an heir is not born to him, he will die in his twenty eighth year. Therefore she persuades her
daughter-in-law to give her own blood to God. Jayadev is able to stop this foolish act in time and to convince his mother of her irrational and absurd beliefs.

The other victims of this type are Sudha, Seeta and Purnima. Sudha's uncle examines the horoscope which is written by just a professional horoscope caster. He decides, out of love for Sudha, that she should marry only after a few months when the Saturn's shadow which now falls on her recedes. Otherwise some calamities may fall on her. Thus Sudha remains a spinster for a long time as a result of which Sudha gets the nickname, "Saturn's Eyesore" and she is treated as an object of ill omen. Sudha is "a living symbol of the madness of things" (117). She is not allowed to marry Harindra, a non-Brahmin. R.K. Narayan says in Bachelor of Arts, "A marriage would not be tolerated even between sub-sects of the same caste. If India was to attain salvation, these watertight divisions must go-community, caste, sects, sub-sects and still further divisions" (69). Belief in horoscopes results in tragedies also. Seeta is in love with her second cousin whom she had known since childhood. Her parents consult the horoscope and they find out that if the girl marries that young man, she would be widowed in the middle age.
So, Seeta is married to another man who dies in an accident within a month of their marriage. In Tiger, Biten's sister, Purnima is hastily given away in marriage to an elderly widower, when the parents discover that a young man, Basav of a lower caste is in love with her. Her unhappy married life leads her to commit suicide. Edward Said is emphatic of the need for a change: "... new and imaginative reconceptions of society and culture were required in order to avoid the old orthodoxies and injustices" (263).

In the novel Ladakh, Bhattacharya portrays the suppression of women in a different way. Suruchi, the wife of Satyajit, is really a woman of aesthetic temperament. But under the spell of her husband's idealism, she suppresses her natural instincts. His vow of brahmacharya imposes a strain on her personality and she wishes that her daughter, Sumita may never suffer a similar fate. But the suppression is evident in the case of Sumita also. Her father, Satyajit strictly moulds her character according to Gandhian ideals. She is trained right from the very beginning to dress in coarse white sari and blouse. She is taught to observe strict moral principles in her day-to-day life, which hampers the growth of her personality. It is only towards the end of the novel, she is
able to escape from her father's dominant influence. As a normal woman, she begins to love Bhaskar, the engineer incharge of Steeltown.

Bhattacharya exposes the age-old social evils of poverty, corruption, exploitation of the weak, caste-barriers, women's oppression in a reformist tone. The socially marginalised suffer all these evils in a society dominated by the high castes, rich people, exploiters, black marketeers and hoarders who have no sympathy for the poor and the downtrodden. These social evils linger on in our societies even today in various forms. Though the political and economic scenes might have changed, the Indian character or the national character has not changed. Perhaps, even after the advent of freedom, anti-social elements continue to operate in the country with greater freedom. The nation has not succeeded in solving the problem of poverty and hunger and also other social evils like corruption and exploitation of the weak and physical persecution. There is a general break down of law and order everywhere and there is very little security in society. Hence most of these social evils dealt with by Bhattacharya still have a relevance to our own times. Ramesh Srivastava says that Bhattacharya is

the only Indian novelist writing in English who has made a conscious effort in highlighting the problems of the
poor people and in eradicating superstitions, blind beliefs, taboos and unwholesome aspects of rural society. He has shown his opposition to the exploitation in the name of religion and caste as also to the perpetration of cruelty and injustice on the poor and rural people. (XIII)

Bhattacharya has clearly depicted the impact of the changing times on all sections of society as well as his vision of the bright future. He wants to change the conditions of the downtrodden. He strives to mould the human perception and attitudes by making people see things in a new way through his fiction. His artistic creations are not an end in themselves but a means to provide his fellow citizens with a better vision of life. It is the task of the writer to make the average man understand himself and the conditions of his life. Bhattacharya directs his writings towards a moral and intellectual regeneration of Indian society so that the ills of society may be removed. As Harish Raizada says,

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 its pride of place in the comity of world’s highly developed nations. (168)
Bhattacharya has shown concern for man's physical, mental and spiritual needs and depicted the human drama at micro-cosmic as well as at an epic scale. One is carried away by his buoyant optimism and feel that all is not yet lost and man can regain his former glory and dignity provided his conscience is aroused and he acts with more compassion and responsibility. Bhattacharya hopes that the country is in a position to shape its future, and there is a scope for reconstruction and development. As Chandrasekharan observes,

He is for an economy which ensures equitable distribution of necessaries, a social order which gives equality to men, a religious attitude which gives no quarter to superstition and meaningless ritual, and a mental outlook which promotes harmony at home and abroad through tolerance and reconciliation. (172)

It is Bhattacharya's constant concern with a genuine relationship between the writer and the problems of his time – between art and social concerns that in fact elevates him to the status of a major writer of his time.)
Indian culture has been affected on account of the Western impact which is presented in the confrontation between the traditional and modern values, between technological advancement and conservative backdrop, and between Eastern spiritualism and Western materialism, is of great significance and hence needs probing. How these conflicts are presented with a Hegelian perspective by Bhattacharya is the concern of the next chapter.