Chapter – VIII

CONCLUSION
Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of the major Indian English novelists of our time. He is a realist who is keen on exploring the realities of life. He has a sensitive understanding of the problems of contemporary Indian society. His intimate knowledge of Indian rural and urban life is an outcome of his minute observation of the life of the common people. He is of the view that a keen observation of the details of social life is necessary for writing a successful social novel: “Unless a writer has a keen observation and an eye for details of general behavior of folks, he cannot write a social novel. I have develop this habit and I have not missed a single opportunity of observing incidents, happenings, where I can gain something for the writer in me”.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Bhabani Bhattacharya believes in the social character and significance of art and literature. According to him great writers are never detached from the atmosphere of their times. Like many great writers Bhattacharya mirrors artistically and sympathetically the social, economic, and political problems of his times and people. As a critic has pointed out, Bhattacharya “portrays full-blooded men and women, creatures of their society, victims of its unjust persecutions and yet possessing invisible strength to carry the banner of high ideals of new India.”

Bhattacharya bemoans the non-acceptance of the challenge that recent happenings pose to the creative artists. Western writers have written copiously about the two World Wars. India has passed through the
experience of war and the long drawn struggle for Independence. It also faced a calamitous famine in 1943, wherein millions died slowly of starvation. The partition of the country in 1947 awakens nauseous scenes of genocide. Not merely that, open for fictionally projection is “a people’s dream to attain a better life and... the strength to fulfill the dream”. According to Bhattacharya, 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?³

Bhattacharya refuses to deal either with surface situations or simple solutions. Circumstances and characters that may at first appear to be delimited, on closer acquaintance are revealed as components of a more inclusive spectrum.

Although there are many issues to which Bhattacharya addresses himself, the major and most inclusive ones seem to me to be those concerns of today that are universal in nature: individual human worth and dignity, freedom and national aspiration, and the need for reconciliation of differences or achievement of equilibrium among differing views and ways of life, especially between East and West, the traditional and the new. The manifestations of these universal issues and the manner in which they are handled may be peculiarly Indian, immersed in the author’s home scene and ethos. This does not, however, invalidate their universality or restrict their appeal; rather, it confirms our human commonality.
Bhabani Bhattacharya evinced keen interest in the political, economic, and social problems of India. Stephen Hemenway observes, "Bhattacharya inherits Forester's sharp eye for East-West dichotomies, Anand's concerns with social, economic and political problems, and Narayan's playfulness and exaggerations."\(^2\) Almost all his novels are set against the background of the Indian social scene in the perspectives of historical events, and he very strongly expresses his intense disgust for the cruelty and hypocrisy in Indian social life, with its castes, creeds, dead habits and customs, and its restrictive religious rights and practices.

Since Bhabani Bhattacharya does not accept the doctrine of 'Art for art's sake', but believes on the contrary that 'the creative writer's final business is to reveal the truth',\(^4\) it is natural that he should use the medium of his art for the propagation of his views and his philosophy. When a novelist makes his works the embodiment of 'ethical values', he need not fear that these values will 'contaminate the pure spirit of his creative endeavour'\(^5\) provided that he adheres to the truth and interprets life truthfully. Bhattacharya is concerned in all his novels with the serious problems faced by the country. The most important questions that he raises are with regard to the sort of future India has, the extent to which she should preserve her traditional culture and way of life, the values she has to acquire anew and the contribution the present generation can make to the building of a secure future.
By delineating imaginative scenes as real and actual happenings, by using the themes of hunger and of political freedom, and by reflecting the rustic world he wrote So Many Hungers! Harmonization of the contrastive aspects of human life in the Hindu society is the theme of Music for Mohini. He who Rides a Tiger records political, social, religious and economic aspects. A Goddess Named Gold deals with the themes of freedom, hunger, synthesis and affirmation while Shadow from Ladakh is based on the theme of synthesis of Gandhism with Nehruism or Gandhian asceticism with Tagorean aestheticism. Clash of values of the East and the West, the relationship between art and religion and the synthesis of the old and the new are presented as the theme of A Dream in Hawaii.

Bhattacharya propounded the theory of the social and moral function of art and has pleaded for reality and truth in literature. According to him, a novelist should not have a preconceived plot but should use contemporary events and social realities as subjects for writing novels. So the Bengal Famine of 1943 and the Quit India Movement of 1942 inspired him to write So Many Hungers! and He who Rides a Tiger. The synthesis of the old and the new values in Indian life urged him to write Music for Mohini. A Goddess Named Gold is concerned with the meaning of freedom while Shadow from Ladakh concerns with the Indo-China border conflict of 1962. He explores an affirmative vision in all his novels. Denouncing asceticism and self-abnegation, he pleads for a full and joyuous life in his Music for Mohini, Shadow from Ladakh and A Dream in Hawaii.
Bhattacharya's first novel, *So Many Hungers!* was published two months after India attained independence. Bhattacharya himself says that the immediate urge to write a novel came to him from the Bengal Famine of 1943:

Then the great famine swept down upon Bengal.

The emotional stirrings I felt (more than two million men, women and children died of slow starvation amid a man-made scarcity) were a sheer compulsion to creativity. The result was the novel *So Many Hungers!*⁶

Bhattacharya portrays the image of hunger by focusing our attention on the story of a peasant family, and comparing and contrasting it with the story of an urban family living in Calcutta. It is literal hunger which forces Kajoli, together with thousands of hungry people, towards the big city in search of food.

But when they reach Calcutta, they are disappointed and humiliated. As "the city of million lights! the city of humanity. The city of civilized living"(144) depends on the produce of the villages, it can’t satisfy the hunger of thousands of destitute pouring into it from the villages. Hunger drives many children to search “the rich city’s ten thousand rubbish heaps, in which scraps of rotting food lay buried. It was not every time that the destitutes were routing the dogs on the streets and the dog within
themselves"(178). The pangs of hunger drive Kajoli to the brothel but luckily her inner spirit and courage save her from degradation of her body and soul. The words of her beloved leader, Devata, inspire her and she decides to fight against all odds. Bhattacharya’s sympathy is for the poor, helpless and hungry people. He condemns the rich merchants and traders by calling them vultures “feeding on the miseries of the people”(38). A close reading of So Many Hungers! and He Who Rides a Tiger reveals that Bhattacharya had in mind several types of hunger which afflicted Indians during 1940s.

As mentioned above, the theme of hunger is continued in He who Rides a Tiger. But in the latter novel the hungry people voice their protest by taking out processions and shouting slogans. Besides the hunger for food, Indians at that time had hunger for freedom from the British rule. Rahoul’s story in So Many Hungers! is “a representation in miniature of the struggle for freedom.” A staunch nationalist, he realizes that the people’s suffering can’t be mitigated without political independence. As a result of this realization, he sets his research aside and jumps into the freedom struggle influenced by Devata, his grandfather. The struggle for freedom assumes terrifying dimensions:

Meantime they stayed in prison, sixty thousand men and women and bulk of them were peasants. 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! (100).

_He Who Rides a Tiger_ has many things common with the earlier novel. The novel focuses on the darkest chapters in the history of Bengal: “a plague took the land in its grip, the plague of hunger, in the wake of war, 1943!” (118). The profiteers are behind the artificial famine. The farmers are compelled to sell their grain, with the result that markets are empty and peasants are reduced to starvation. This novel portrays how rich people are indifferent to the hungry millions and are greatly responsible for their miseries. For their prosperity and divine grace they offer a lot of milk to temples and the Ganges, but they are not prepared to help the poor. When Viswantath and Kalo give some milk meant for the temple to starving children, the rich people object to it.

_He Who Rides a Tiger_ also portrays the hunger of the well-fed and prosperous men of the city for destitute women: “Uprooted women with their own kind of hunger had to soothe the other hunger.” (54)

Thus, as Khwaja Ahmed Abbas observes, _So Many Hungers!_ and _He Who Rides a Tiger_ are "two of the most significant novels written by the Indians in the English language, and among the aptest illustrations of social realism."8
Religion plays a significant role in common people’s life in India. Bhattacharya is a staunch critic of superstitious beliefs. What he values most is the ethical aspect of religion. In a letter to Malta Grover, he writes, “Religion is a purely personal matter. It is usually an opiate, a tranquilizer, but we do need that kind of medication in our moments of tension . . . Far more important are the moral value.”

In *Music for Mohini*, Mohini, a city girl gets married to a village landlord. Certain orthodox customs and traditions stand in the way of their happiness. These superstitions and customs make the lives of people in villages miserable:

We connect culture with culture, Mohini, our old Eastern view of life with the new semi-Western outlook. The city absorbs a little of the ‘barbaric’ village, the village absorbs a little of the ‘West-polluted’ city. Both change, unaware. They are less angry with each other. This is more urgent today than ever before. Our new Indian must rest on this foundation. (113)

Jayadev introduces literacy and education in the village. He opposes his own mother, when she tries to impose her orthodox views on all the members of the family. His wife Mohini also helps him. Thus, Jayadev and Mohini successfully bridge the gap between village and city, and thus stand
for an integration of ancient culture with modern culture, simplicity with sophistication.

*Shadow from Ladakh* focuses on the theme of synthesis, the integration of steel of civilization and Gandhian way of life, the new and the old values of cultures. Steeltown represents the former and Gandhigram represents the latter. Bhashkar is a typical modern man of business while Satyajit represents the traditional values and culture. In the wake of Chinese aggression there is a conflict between Steeltown and Gandhigram. Satyajit wants problems to be solved through non-violent means while Bhashkar is for an increase in the manufacture of weapons. The novel ends on a note of compromise, suggesting that neither Satyajit’s extreme stress on non-violence and spiritual values nor Bhashkar’s complete stress on industrialization will be beneficial to the country in the long run. What is required is an integration of the two different attitudes of life. Adjustment is required at both ends and when this is done, the result will be the emergence of an ideal society. Bhattacharya is optimistic about the results”:

> “he visualizes the emergence of an ideal man, an ideal society, an ideal country, and, above all, an ideal world leading a life of serenity and joy.”

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

As Harish Raizada rightly observes,

In all his novels Bhattacharya is concerned with the future of India, its social, religious, economic and political regeneration, so that it may make rapid progress and come to occupy its pride of place in the comity of world’s highly developed nations.¹¹

Bhattacharya foresees the course of future times. He knows the cursed for which history was carrying forward into the new era. His fourth novel *A Goddess Named Gold* un.masks these new tyrants. New class of robbers. The moral supremacy of unity over landlord selfishness proposed as a model for independent India.

The novel dramatizes how village political and social reform can be brought about. Marlene Fisher views that *A Goddess Named Gold* has links with *Music for Mohini. Shadow form Ladakh* and *So Many Hungers* in so far as it stresses that individuals must change, must alter their servile attitudes, must, in short, learn how to value themselves and how to use freedom if an independent India is to be capable of handling its new status.”

The intricate designs of human life are contrived into this plot where Bhattacharya presents the profiteering black-marketeers whose very looks
crush the poor and the spirited girl Meera who withstands the onslaughts of the affluent and shows them their place.

Bhattacharya is a realist and at the same time a visionary. He depicts life in the country as he saw it with his observant eyes. Poverty, corruption, ignorance and superstition, exploitation and dumb suffering are among the evils that he noticed and depicted. On the other hand, he sees ground for hope because the country is in a position to shape its own future and it has the basic material needed for reconstruction and development. 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—these are the ideals cherished by Bhattacharya and given unequivocal expression in his writings.

The novel *Music for Mohini* allegorizes the conflict between modernism and obscurantism. In *He who Rides a Tiger*, Kalo's physical journey through life allegorizes his journey through the world of spirit. *A Goddess Named Gold* is an allegory of the threatened exploitation of free India by greedy capitalists. In *Shadow from Ladakh*, Bhattacharya allegorized his final vision of the regeneration of India by describing the conflict between Gandhigram and Steeltown, symbolizing the opposing ideals of soul power versus armed power, asceticism versus fullness of life, and village economy versus large-scale industrialism.
In conclusion, it can be unhesitatingly stated that because of his significant contributions in theme, form and style, Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of the most outstanding Indo-Anglian novelists.
References:


11. Harish Raizada, “Novelist of Social Ferment” 149