Chapter 4

A Study of Bhabani Bhattacharya’s Characters
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A Study of Bhabani Bhattacharya’s Characters

The present chapter deals with the study of self discovery as reflected through various characters in Bhattacharya’s novels. The term self-discovery is used mostly in religious field, it is supposed to be kind of journey from known to unknown. This unknown factor is a destination of the person who has been on this journey. Psychology tells us that though body and mind are the interlinked factors, there is a difference between them. It is necessary that both mind and body must equally develop within life time. There is also difference between growth and development. Body grows but mind develops. In spiritual term there is a difference between mind and soul. When physical growth is complete man must think about his maturity of soul. It means one must understand himself or herself through his or her mind and soul. This understanding mostly begins at subconscious level. This is the understanding of self. It means everyone has different self and one has to find it out. There are many ways to know the self; such as behavior, emotions, likings, disliking, thoughts, language and so on. It depends on the individual by which way he likes to try. Philosophical writer Ibrahim Gamard has given importance to the submission to Almighty God and through that we can have the knowledge of self. This is somehow we call personality.
He says,

“In order to discover yourself, you have to submit to the creator of yourself, my lord and your lord, and the lord, the lord of all the worlds, glorious and exalted is He! Beyond anything that, we can conceive.”

In every religion it has a meaning. It depends on how he discovers himself. Self is not something one realizes or creates. Self is an abstract idea. We cannot show self like a body part, it is a kind of light of knowledge shines the mind and the sight to see the world. When he sees through this sight he understands his strong and weak points. In other words, we may say that he discovers himself. The self is used in several different senses such as it can be referred to the ensemble of the psychic agencies, the narcissistic organization of the psyche, or the conscious part of the psyche that enables the individual to recognize himself or herself as an agent and a subject endowed with conscious.

In 1940, Malanie Klein used the word self in the general sense of representation of the inner world. The concept of the self is partly included in the term I, a person tries to know of long journey, hard task that one should have to perform. This method is given and explored in our ancient writing. In that we may come across different methods to know our self. Self is that element which has been used by the writers to discover the character, to reveal the inner voice of the character.
In our day-to-day life we must have a need of self-discovery to face the problems very effectively. A person who is not aware of himself i.e. his inner power and weakness, he cannot take decision or cannot remain firm on his view. Good decision and firm view put any work to its destination so that one should have the knowledge of self.

There are many religious books that try to reveal the self and the paths of self-discovery. All religions say that body is temporary and soul is permanent. In this case we cannot show the soul; likewise self is hidden in everyone, and only there is need to realize it. One, who realizes it, has the knowledge that is beyond the common person’s reach. It is a kind of energy that gives light to our sight, and also creates the wisdom in us. This light of knowledge and wisdom will guide the future action.

Winnicott tried to reveal the self. He says,

“He contrasted the true self, whose positive aim is the preservation of the individual in spite of abnormal condition.”

In the book *Ego, Distortion in Terms of True and False Self*, Winnicott described the true and false self. This self has the relationship with ego.

It is true when we see ourselves through the things around us then we can examine ourselves very nicely i.e. without prejudice and without ego. When a person tries to understand or know the answer of the question who am I? and this question helps him to know about
himself. Though this question is small, this may take long time or lifetime to answer it. It means area of this personality within is beyond easy reach of a common person. Though we are known by the name given by parents in the society but personality is beyond and much higher than all that. To understand the self we have to turn our self towards its discovery.

Man reveals his personality through his feelings or emotions towards particular things. In self-discovery, the role of a mind is very important. Personality is that which is hidden in the inner mind of the individual, so he is not aware of it. Personality is a journey that makes the person aware of his or her true potential. It also focuses his or her character. It depends on the individual how he can use himself to discover his own individuality.

There are frequent arrivals from without or within-a beneficial or harmful sort. The mixed self may be plagued by doubts of realized strengths previously unacknowledged.
**So Many Hungers!**

**Kajoli**

Bhattacharya draws out the character of Kajoli, the heroine of the novel in all the different phases of her life. The character of Kajoli looms large in the readers’ eyes. Kajoli, the peasant girl, from Baruni, illustrates the cruel fate of the rural population of Bengal at the time when India faced the Japanese peril in the east and an unprecedented rice famine was created by unscrupulous capitalists. She is the very incarnation of the true womanhood of India. She has a legacy of manners as old as India and she is indeed the “tri-colour flag.”

She has all the qualities associated with a rural character. She is simple, chaste, pure, selfless, generous and respectful to elders.

**Rahoul**

The character of Rahoul in *So Many Hungers!* has been portrayed quite convincingly. He represents the middle class, an intellectual doing his research in Astrophysics, but finally responds to the call of his motherland. He is a staunch nationalist and he cannot forget the hypocrisy of the foreign rulers.

**Devesh Basu (Devata)**

Devesh Basu, Rahoul’s grandfather is truly a Gandhian Character. Fired with patriotism and full of love for the common
people, he has settled down in a village called Baruni. The people of the village have so much affection for him that they call him ‘Devata’. He does not feel superior to or different from the simple people of the village and is accepted as a friend, philosopher and guide of the society. Rahoul and Kajoli have been deeply influenced by Devata.

**Samarendra Basu**

Samarendra Basu is greedy where money is concerned. His main aim is to grab wealth for himself and his family. There is not even a tinge of patriotism in him. All that he desires is affluence, safety and respectability. When World War II starts, he cleverly understands that rice has become scarce and that a good way to make money will be by hoarding it and selling at the most appropriate time.

**Kunal**

Kunal, the younger brother of Rahoul, is enthusiastic, affectionate and cheerful. He joins the army as a junior officer because he loves the adventure and thrill of a soldier’s life. He also tells Rahoul that if Indians prove their courage on the battle-field, then India will rise to the day of Independence one day. He leaves home for service in North Africa and in Italy.

**Kishore**

The character of Kishore is very touching. He strikes the readers’ imagination and his miserable and pitiable condition touches the hearts.
Kishore is a city youth, but simple in his heart and highly unassuming. He has been a worker in a cotton-mill in the city. He has taken part in the strike and has been imprisoned in the same jail as Kajoli’s father. The father has taken such a great liking for Kishore that when the latter is released from prison, he sends him to Baruni with a letter to his wife expressing his wish that he should marry Kajoli. The mother considers him her new son.

On his way to the railway station, he takes a short cut and climbs up railway embankment. One of the soldiers guarding the track challenges Kishore. He gets frightened and tries to run away, but the soldier shoots him dead. His sad fate remains unknown to the family right up to the end of the novel.

**Monju**

Monju is the wife of Rahoul, eldest son of Samarendra. She hates to be winked at by anybody as she is a Hindu woman. She can dance well. She is terrified to see the dead bodies in the street—people dying of hunger. She sees her husband’s true spirit—his hunger for a happier life for the common men. She seems to be as much unconcerned about the struggle for India’s freedom as she is unaware of her husband and Samarendra Basu’s racketeering.
Mohini

Mohini in *Music for Mohini* combines strength with grace, individualism with compassion. From the very beginning, she shows certain balance and proportion. She struggled to make required adjustment in her married life. She does not occupy a significant place among all the characters. She just pretended as if she was interested in the village atmosphere. The character of Mohini wins sympathy of all the readers. She was an incarnation of beauty, grace, dignity, authority and poise. The Mother too changed her attitude and showered her blessings. Mohini passed through several trials and tribulations and her docile and innocent nature triumphed over the onslaughts of a tradition – bound Big House.

She would yield to circumstances rather than complain against them. She resigned herself to fate. But destiny came to her rescue and made her life a bed of roses. Thus she occupies the position of the heroine by mere nomenclature but does not come up to the standard of the readers’ expectation.

Jayadev

Jayadev is the hero of the novel, but his character is not well developed. He was startled by the ignorance of Mohini and started giving lessons to her in Sanskrit. He is a strange mixture of the old
and the new. He is a subtle scholar in the philosophies of East and West. He wished to have a harmony of cultures for India.

This shy and simple ascetic with his serene face was quite different from others of his class. Crisis had tested the real man in Jayadev and revealed a core of steel in him. He rose to his full stature, convened assemblies in the village meadow and provided meals to all who needed them. He believed that the big house must stand by the people in the hour of need. While others sacrificed the country for their self, Jayadev would sacrifice his own belongings for the happiness of the people.

**Mother**

Jayadev’s mother is like Old Mother in her ideas but different from her feelings. She is aloof, alone, clothed in her own uncommon atmosphere. She is stern-willed, though tender at her heart. She is a simple soul with a singleness of purpose. She impresses upon Mohini the history and purity of their household bed. She is bent on one purpose to make Jayadev worthy of his father’s name. She controls the whole routine of the Big House including that of Jayadev. She dominates the events of the action in the Big House.

Old mother had compromised with modernity and her struggle to uphold the orthodox way was without passion. But the mother of the Big House was stern, adamant like iron. Old Mother was of the old and of new; this mother had nothing in her nature that would allow change.
Old Mother

Bhattacharya has brought a new dimension to the character of Old Mother. She is the symbol of our old orthodox life with an inter-mixture of modernism. She fondly calls her son ‘Childing’ though he is forty-seven years old. She does not like Mohini to be sent to a convent school but desires that she may be trained at home and learn classical Sanskrit, the language of the God. She has fixed ideas and has iron prejudice against modernism. Yet, she enjoys watching English movies. She suggests that Heeralal should wear an amulet to ward off his weakness.

She was of the opinion that the city youth were willful and flighty; whereas village youth were slow and conservative. She was a true representative of the old model of life and customs and traditions. She was insistent that the bride should not touch food till marriage is over, because fasting makes the inner heart pure. But she was dogged and dogmatic in her approach.

Rooplekha

Rooplekha (Beauty’s writing) was Jayadev’s married sister. She was not so cold, not so self-contained as her mother and not so meditative. She was village-bred and city-wed, while Mohini was city-bred and village-wed. She impressed upon Mohini that her mother was the usual orthodox woman and that all her faith was pinned to family tradition. She serves as supporting character in the
Big House and plays a significant part in the life of Mohini to the new set-up and thus paves the way for an easy mental adjustment.

**Sudha**

Sudha remains merely an assembly of attitudes. She has an important place in the multiplicity of events that take place. She is a key figure in the lives of Big House before and after Jayadev’s marriage. This fair and fragile girl with faultless features was doomed to heart-break for not fault of her own. Her brooding jealousy had a razor’s edge. But she knew the goodness and affection of Mohini and so could not think of doing harm to such a woman. Thus she is the most disappointed character in the novel.

**Heeralal**

Heeralal serves as a supporting character in the life of Mohini, till she goes to her husband’s house. But later he pales into insignificance. He has no definite part to play except as a loving brother and affectionate playmate of his sister Mohini. He used to indulge in playful tricks of youth and was occasionally discouraged and disappointed in his attempts.

**Mohini’s Father**

Mohini’s father made a mock as a renowned professor of history. He was endowed with the quality of kindness towards the students in particular and humanity in general. He was able to tolerate the childish pranks of his son and daughter under his very nose. Like
all sincere parents, Mohini’s father also was a symbol of deep longing and anxiety for his daughter’s future marriage. He could not at all relish the idea that she should become so lonely in a country that all her talents would go wasted. He does not come on the stage in the later part of the story.

Among the minor characters, mention must be made of Bindu, Ganesh, Ranjan, Meera, Barber-woman, Snake-charmer and the Bangle-seller.
He Who Rides a Tiger

Kalo

The whole story of Bhattacharya’s novel He Who Rides a Tiger centers in two characters – those of the blacksmith Kalo and his daughter Lekha – more particularly that of Kalo himself who lets his fury and resentment against a society which has degraded him most callously. He succeeds in taking vengeance upon society by faking a miracle and passing off as a Brahmin priest. But towards the close of the novel, when he frankly admits his true self, he becomes the butt of ridicule and of the rich and high-caste persons. But his own brethren hail him as the emancipator and spokesman of class freedom. Kalo is a humble blacksmith. As famine breaks out in Bengal, he finds no work. Life becomes difficult, so he goes to the city leaving his daughter Lekha in the care of his old aunt. He travels ticketless and gets imprisoned. He is called P-14. He has a friend named B-10.

Kalo comes out of the jail and gets appointed as an agent in the harlot-horse. He rescues his daughter timely. Then he decides to hit back on the society. He settles himself under a banyan tree, like a Brahmin with his daughter absorbed in strange ritual. By chanting ‘Namo Shivay’, he hypnotizes the audience. He is now a Brahmin Mandal Adhikari. Money pours in. All those that scorned at him previously are now at his feet. But he longs to go back to his
profession, being pricked by conscience. His conscience tortures him. When his turn comes for a speech, he starts confidently but soon ‘a sudden force’ takes hold of him. Then he breaks open the secret and they call him Rogue, Shaitan. Lekha feels relieved that the mystery is unraveled. Kalo thus takes his vengeance on the society ridden with caste and cash, Kalo and his daughter start life afresh.

Kalo, black, was true to his complexion which had the colour quality of the ink. His large head set squarely on his tall, big-built figure. He was an humble blacksmith of Jharna, a small town in Bengal. He had a broad face and thick black moustache. He was the very fast craftsman in town. He lost his wife after the birth of his daughter Chandra Lekha. He never married again. Kalo set his heart on bringing her up as a girl of gentle birth. It was his joy and pride to find that Lekha made quick progress with her studies. He could just read and write. It was quite inconvenient for him to face questions from his daughter. He was worried to expose his vast ignorance. He found the image of his wife in his own daughter.

His words were calm and wise. His decision had the weight of finality. People recognized his mettle and they knew that Kalo could be relied upon. Kalo’s means had been too slender in those early days to afford better and by the time his business prospered, his wife was dead. He had given her nothing but privation during the short span of time they were together but she had never complained.
Kalo was a man of accepted conventions; his roots run deep into age-old habits of mind and belief. He never doubted the Brahmin’s superior status as God’s chosen. He had a sacred thread on his chest. When the thread was given to him with the set ritual and from that moment he was a twice-born. Since his wife’s death, Kalo lived as a celibate. But he became an agent for women who sell their living bodies. He soon learnt that his own daughter was deceived. He was able to rescue her at the proper time. He decided to wreak his vengeance upon the society.

Kalo disguised himself as a tall, dark big built Brahmin. in a holy man’s yellow cloak and skull-cap, a rosary on his neck. He sat with his legs crossed on a striped tiger-skin spread under the banyan tree and repeatedly uttered the word ‘Namo Shivay.’ He turned the holy thread in his hands. He was filled with a new courage and exhilaration. The Brahmin masquerade was only a step towards a basic reincarnation. He kept his poise, overwhelmed by his dreamlike success. Coins, golden bangle and chains poured in.

He had set out on this bold path for the sake of Lekha. He rode a lie as if it were a tiger which he could not dismount lest the tiger should pounce upon him and eat him up. But the mantra was quite beyond his capacity to learn. So, all rituals were entrusted to the Pujari. It was not just a question of living. It was a question of revenge. The Brahminic role, it appeared, was not to be as easy as it had seemed. He felt a terrific itch to go back to his old ways. But he
became a figure of dignity and cool assurance. The myth of caste superiority lay snapped in his hand. Kalo was like the counterfeit coin which needed more glitter than the real. He became an expert past-master in dealing with the psychological reaction of the people.

**Chandra Lekha**

Chandra Lekha is the daughter of Kalo, an humble blacksmith of Jharna, a small town in Bengal. She was the only tender spot in the life of Kalo. Her name had a history behind. During his early marriage period, a Brahmin priest brought a broken pitcher for getting it mended. Although he was doing the work, his mind was thinking on something else. His wife was pregnant and was due to deliver a child. He was thinking of how to name the babe. The old Brahmin suggested that it was a boy, Obhijit would be suitable and if it was a girl, Chandra Lekha could be given as a name. His wife gave birth to a girl and he named her Chandra Lekha. But the mother died soon after her birth.

He felt a lot but he sought relief from the baby girl. He did not marry again. But she was always with him waking and dreaming. He got himself so much attached to Lekha. Lekha fares brilliantly in her studies in the Convent School. She wins the coveted Ashoka Memorial Medal in essay competition. As Kalo’s native place is caught in famine, he goes to the city leaving Lekha in the care of his old aunt. He travels ticketless and steals another’s bananas and so gets imprisoned. But he was sure that Chandra Lekha was a replica of his
wife. There was a pinpoint mole near her chin. Her mother wished that even at the expense of their own food, she should be educated at school. But with her looks, pretty ways and even her name, she was still a Kamar’s daughter.

She made quick progress in her studies. She stood first at the annual test and was given double promotion. Her thick, abundant hair escaped from its blue ribbon and her face flushed rosy. She had firm faith in her father’s goodness and would not let him be slandered. She could not bear to see her father mocked or insulted even in her fancy. She grew to girlhood and beauty and she remained the one tender spot in the tough man’s being. Lekha was an image of beauty. She had taken after her mother. Her complexion became even fairer than at her birth, like carved ivory and her eyes, under the long lashes, took on deeper, prettier collyrium blackness. She had a pleasing manner – graceful in the few gestures of her hands quiet but with a smile and sweet word for everyone.

She seemed unaware of her comeliness and took no notice when people watched her with an admiration. She was content to wear whatever she had. She was never jealous of others. The girls at school were cold and aloof because of her humble caste. She was content with her mother’s glass bangles on her arms. Her face was hallowed frame-work of bone; her eyes dim, large, deep in their sockets. She was a poor eater. She pecked at her food. Unless her father worked somewhere she would not have even that. All his thoughts were on
Lekha. The sooner he earned a living, the sooner the girl would come to him in the great city. He was in a fix whether to write her letter or not. Lekha had been left with nothing to sell. She sold her medal which was indeed her sacred amulet and her bangles too. She had a tough time and passed through crucial period. But she knew that her father would have a victory. She knew the strength of purpose, the metallic stuff of the core of his being. She joined the service campaign in the ceremony of the mission lady. She was to teach there. She was in the care of her aunt. But she was deceived and taken to the city. Her father came to know of the trick played by the fat woman who cheated her by saying that her father was hospitalized. Both of them decided to hit back the society.

Lekha sat by his father Kalo, dressed in yellow, her long rich hair flowing down her back and arms, her fair brow thickly smeared with vermilion. Her voice rang hollow. Her face was curiously rigid. She had a real part to play then. She was to be very close to the temple now beginning to grow. She, contaminated by the air of a brothel, was to have the aura of sanctity. She was damn surprised to see the miracle happen. She was terribly afraid of the consequences of the whole history, regarding her father’s sudden transformation. Lekha would now marry only a Brahmin. It was not just a question of a living. It was a question of revenge. She was almost eighteen years of age. After getting married only, she would find it easier to adjust herself. Then only she would be freed of the load of her misery. She was
wondering as to how to go back to the old futilities after the nine
day’s wonder.

Biten was absorbed in Chandra Lekha’s image, her face and
voice and every word she had said. Lekha was terribly worried to
keep her secret hidden and deceive her husband at every moment. She
would manage the thousand and keep an account of the daily
expenses. She spoke strange words that the way of struggle against
fear is the true way. She decided to worship the man from the jail.

Kalo managed to buy a suitable horoscope for his daughter
Lekha at a cost of hundred rupees. It showed the prospect of the star-
conjunction of a girl of high Brahmin birth. He found that Lekha was
interested in Biten. Finally she feels relieved that the mystery is
unraveled. Kalo thus takes vengeance on the society ridden with caste
and cash. Kalo and his daughter Lekha start life afresh. She marries
Motichand and thus attains the right to be free.

**Biten**

Biten was the jail-friend of Kalo. He came to prison for inciting
persons to plunder food-shops. Kalo was called P-14 in the jail. B-10
informed P-14 that they had got to hit back those that put them to
suffering namely cash and society. Biten narrated his experiences how
a friend named Rajani offered him a job as an agent in the harlot
house. He further informed Kalo how people could be exploited under
the garb of religious faith and how he could feign to be a Brahmin and
squeeze people into religious powers.
B-10, the fellow convict of Kalo was a quiet young man, tall but thinly built. He was sentenced to year’s hard labour for inviting hungry men in the great city to loot a food-shop. He arrived after Kalo who had already served half of his term. As the city jails were full with Quit-India Jailors, B-10 had to be provided quarters here. He came to know of Kalo, his daughter Lekha, her naming, her medal, hunger driving him to theft and imprisonment from the latter’s narration.

B-10 suggested that they had got to hit back on the boss people. He went on narrating his story how he was once appointed by a person named Rajani who was an agent of highly well-placed persons like lawyers or bankers who were running those brothel houses. He suggested that Kalo might wear a saffron loin cloth, smear his body with ashes and mark a red-paste trident of Shiva on his forehead.

It was learnt that B-10 would be released in a fortnight. Hence Lekha began to ironically comment that B-10 may demand a share of the temple income as it was his idea. She made a comment whether Kalo would give him a sacred thread and make him a Brahmin. She was wondering how with after all two month’s association they had come together. She longed to see the prison so as to meet B-10. He saluted her. Then Kalo informed him that B-10 should see the temple by himself. He requested B-10 to tell him all what had happened after his exit.
B-10 began to disclose facts about his life. His father was a petty clerk at the great steel mill, in Tatanagar where thousands of men were employed. He had four brothers and a sister. His father could not pull on. B-10 passed his final school examination in the first grade, with two distinctions. Father found him a clerk’s post. But B-10 had other plans. Both Kalo and B-10 wanted to start on work. B-10 agreed to assist him and the old warmth of prison friendship flowed again.

B-10 began to explain his story as to how once he was in a flourishing condition and how later a scene that he had witnessed when a child was crushed under a car and how he had to repair the damage of that particular car brought the change. He wanted to see and first understand the things happening there. After some stay with him, Kalo wanted to find out his name and found that it was Biten. Then it was agreed.

Biten wanted to make a living. He was lost in thinking about Lekha ever. He had a sister named Purnima. She was quite meek and helpless. She had no social life and it was strange how she chanced to meet Basav and fell in love with him. But Biten’s parents did not accept the alliance. Biten, bred in orthodoxy performed the Brahminic ritual of prayers as a matter of iron routine. He felt worried that his parents were bereft of human feelings. He went to his sister in Calcutta and saw Purnima. But he could learn from the situation there that she was vexed with life. The inevitable happened indeed, when
she drowned herself in the pond. Biten had nothing to do there. He removed his sacred thread. He could not stay any longer with his parents. He left home and boarded the train for Calcutta. He joined the Bengal Automobiles Ltd. He was absorbed in Chandra Lekha’s image, her face and voice and every word she had said.

Biten was doing his work. But there was emptiness in him that he could not understand and he was depressed. He was not at all peaceful. He did not like to have a share in the temple income. He wanted that people should be saved from hunger. The hunger-victims readily joined their Quit-India brothers. Lekha also participated in it. Kalo found that Lekha was interested in Biten. But she was given in marriage to Motichand.
A Goddess Named Gold

Samsundar

The readers’ attention is focused on the trinity – Seth Samsundar, his wife Lakshmi and Meera. The Lure of the gold that became hard food for Midas is taken up as a suggestive title by Bhattacharya for this novel. The love and attraction for this precious metal has ensnared the lives of not a few and led them into the mire of helplessness and utter confusion. The life and career of Seth Samsundarji presents a true picture of this irrevocable truth. But the irony of the situation is that he is ignominiously defeated in his designs by the women of Sonamitti under the leadership of Meera. The defeat of the Sethji is the punishment for vice and the success of the women is the reward for right and virtue.

Bhattacharya shows skill in drawing the portrait of Seth Samsundar, who reminds us of Shakespeare’s Shylock and Marlowe’s Barabas. At times even Shylock pales into insignificance before the Sethji. Neither pity, nor prayer nor threats, nor tears can draw him from his objective.

‘Words will melt a ripe coconut, but not the Seth’s heart in its cast-iron shell’ (GNG: 26)

He believes in the survival of the fittest theory. But he knows how to swim the current. Making money is his duty, as it were.
alone gives his life its meaning and value. Like the spider, he thinks he should trap the fools and fatten on their meat. Although he has no sense of proportion, he is capable of understanding the spirit of the times. But business is business with him and it has no place for soft sentiments. Still he cannot defy the combined ‘will of women’ and will submit. He has his own moments of remorse and feels that everything depends on one’s fate and that nobody can save anybody’s life.

He knows that there will be no gain without risk. He firmly believes in the bedrock principle of trade ‘Give and take.’ He does not miss any opportunity if only it is profitable and will fight with every means, fair or foul. All the villagers, including the grandma, so inflated with pride, are his customers.

The life-story of the ingrate people is registered in the red-bound ledgers. No one can escape his enchantments. Grandma pledges away her land for cash. But he gets flabbergasted to learn that his own customer is a contestant in the election against him. But he resolves the problem through the good offices of Meera, by cancelling all the loans of grandma. The combined and consistent efforts of the women of the Cowhouse Five of Sonamitti enable them to come out of the shackles of Samsundarji. The people and the country should be freed from such vultures and Jackals, who are squeezing the blood of countless millions. Even a wicked demon like Ravana has inner
goodness, but not these living monsters of money-lenders. They draw blood out of stone.

Ultimately it is the fight with the Seths that will save India, not a miracle, nor armfuls of gold. Bhattacharya’s optimism is very clear when he remarks,

‘The days of the Seths were numbered. Soon would the people, vested with their new power, fully waken and their thunderous wrath would make every tyrant whine for mercy.’ (GNG: 52)

The spider and ant imagery which the Sethji sees, discloses the innate traits of the Seth in exploiting the downtrodden and helpless victims of the society. Again the symbol of the snake which has half-devoured a frog is highly effective.

Samsundar, who is known as the Seth or Sethji, is a cloth-merchant and money-lender. He is a worshipper of Mammon and has avoided taking part in the nationalistic movement. Having a monopoly of the cloth-trade in the group of seven villages to which Sonamitti belongs, the Seth controls the market so efficiently that no ordinary villager can afford to buy his requirements of cloth.

The procession and the slogan-shouting have no effect on the Seth. Even Meera’s threat to strip herself does not intimidate him. But when his own wife, Lakshmi, begins to divest herself of her sari, he relents and as a result, two bundles of newly arrived saris are sold away on the spot to the assembled women. The Seth curses himself
for his softness. But he has acted so, not under fear, but out of far-sightedness. He has decided to contest the election to the District Board which is to come, as soon as the country is free and he naturally wants to win the good-will of the people of the village. The sale of the saris therefore is not an act of kindness, but a calculated step in self-aggrandisement.

The Seth is also clear in his mind as to what he is to do as a member of the District Board: his sole aim is to gain power and influence so as to make money. The women have incidentally given him useful ideas. He could also organize a procession of school boys who will parade the streets shouting the words, ‘vote for Samsundar’. The Seth has made arrangements for a free cinema-show in the village sponsored by a company which manufactures vegetable-ghee so as to advertise their product. He decides to keep the women out. This could be a severe punishment to any villager because of the rarity of such shows in the country side. The women are depressed by this development and consider ways to thwart the Seth’s purpose.

When Meera is at the shop, the Seth makes the discovery by chance that the ring on her figure is gold. The Seth’s fertile brain begins to work and he formulates a plan to explore Meera’s possession of the amulet. It can be achieved only with powerful backing from someone like him. He offers to be her partner in his enterprise and they may share the proceeds equally. The Seth makes experiments to know what is meant by acts of kindness. Among the
calculated and elaborately staged acts of kindness arranged by the Seth, is the distribution of sweets to all the urchins employed by him for his election campaign.

Typical of the Seth’s Machiavellian approach is his attempt to create the right atmosphere for an act of kindness by Meera, by threatening to evict old father and his family from their ancestral home. The Seth confuses it with planned acts of charity and goodness. He analyses the whole situation quite like a true capitalist or like an adept economist. According to him, two things are needed for the materialization of the profitable plan of turning copper into gold—first the raw material and second a power source—respectively the copper and the act of kindness. He finally comes to the conclusion that kindness has to be a natural impulse and that is why he devises plan after plan for moving Meera to a spontaneous impulse of kindness. The end, though being apparently good, in all cases is profound by selfish intentions which work as the motive force and the means in turns, is also tainted. Consequently, the Seth’s various plans of charity and compassion prove to be sheer mockeries of real acts of kindness.

The Seth’s deeds and thoughts symbolize the blind principle of capitalism which is at the root of all exploitation. He, like all possessors of gold, represents an impersonal form, born of the lust for private possession. That is why he is repeatedly mentioned as ‘Sethji’ instead of being referred to by his personal name. Even his name Samsundar combining Shyam and Sundar meaning respectively black
and beautiful is symbolic. It is a distorted form of Samsundar which is
the name of Lord Krishna whose apparent blackness is all beauty and
purity. As opposed to it, Samsundar, the Seth who poses to be
beautiful externally is all black inside. He is a veritable devil who
poses to be a demigod, his mind being a big workshop of evil.

Laxmi his own wife, who knew him more than anyone, says of
him that ‘he is a monster’. No wonder, then that the Seth of Sonamitti
had earned the unique reputation. ‘Speak his name in the kitchen and
the rice pot on the oven should crack in halves. Your midday meal
will be lost’. He had earned this notoriety though his own attempts of
exploitation of the poor, the whole village being neck deep in debt to
him and tethered to his stiff rate of interest. A loan in the Seth’s ledger
doubles itself in twelve months and a year’s interest was charged in
advance as soon as the loan was advanced. Besides he was so callous
that he did not hesitate to remind even his wife of the humbler status
of his parents and their heavy indebtedness.

The Seth was a thorough materialist, for whom silver in his
hand had more meaning than a halo about his head. Verily he
embodies the robbers who swarm the road of freedom combining in
him the money Seth to whom freedom meant a chance to seize fields
of trade vacated by aliens and the Seth of politics who was every
ready to dupe with the power of his glib tongue. Yet the Seth of
politics that he wanted to become was also to serve the ends of the
money Seth.
The Seth wanted ‘the new wealth out of habit, the habit of getting rich, richer’ and making money was his duty as it were which alone gives his life its meaning and value. As a representative of capitalism, he had learnt that trick of covering the market by watching, during the rice famine in Bengal four years before ‘when three million men and women had to die so that there could be thirty new millionaires…’ A self-interested man that he was, the Seth used to advocate the principle of ‘Laissez-faire’ which guarantees full freedom to every individual to amass wealth for himself and for his successors.

**Meera**

Bhattacharya presents the character of Meera in a splendid manner. Her character looms large in the readers’ eyes. She is the symbol of womanhood with her buoyant spirit. She is indeed the backbone of the whole village and is the guiding force of their destinies and inspires them to unity and action. She is like a golden thread running through the entire story and she herself is the symbol of freedom. The Sethji, who tries to exploit the mild innocence of Meera, lands himself towards the end in utter destruction and confusion.

The daring, buoyant and selfless Meera, cool as ice apparently, acts as a conscious agent of good and an unconscious instrument too in between the avaricious Seth and the elusive minstrel. All her
friends begin to misunderstand her as all her activities are towards the possession of that precious metal and Meera becomes the Gold-Goddess. She lives in an enchanted world of dreams, far away from the mundane realities, till finally the truth is disclosed by the minstrel after his arrival about the true significance and implication of freedom which is the real touchstone. Meera eventually attains the freedom to be free.

Meera is the only hope of the village in all difficulties and complexities. It is this orphan that leads the women of the village against the tyrant. She has a strong will and nothing can shake her out of her will. Her motto is to use Old means for a new end. She has faith and so can face any challenge. When once she sets her heart on something, she goes all out for it like a stone through water. Everything else ceases to count. She does not retrace her steps even in the hour of danger. Failure does not dim her hopes. She wants nothing for herself. She does not have any craze for gold and she has less hunger for riches than everyone else in the village. She wants to make Sonamitti, a bright jewel. It is these sterling selfless and domineering qualities with which Meera is endowed that give her the necessary fillip to face any situation with fortitude and success is bound to be hers.

The first daring act in the novel starts with Meera’s rescuing Lakshmi’s son. It is Meera again that makes the Sethji help her old and spirited Grandma. It is she that persuades grandma to stand for
elections against the Sethji. It is once again Meera that tackles the issue for settling Grandma’s account with the Sethji, in the context of a contest for election. But she is thoroughly misunderstood when she goes into the fold of Seth’s gold trick. The other members consider her to be a menace and even go to the extent of burning her effigy.

The youngest of the Cowhouse Five is the heroine Meera, a girl of sixteen, living with her grand-mother. She is an unusually gifted girl. She was only eleven at the time of the Quit India Movement. Nevertheless, she insisted on joining the anti-government demonstration and got arrested along with others. She also demonstrated her resourcefulness and altruism on another occasion by saving the life of a man bitten by a cobra by sucking out the poisoned blood with her mouth. Meera suggested that the women of the village should join together to organize a protest march to the Seth’s shop and demand that he should sell a hundred sarees at a fair price.

The Seth’s fertile brain begins to work and he formulates a plan to explore Meera’s possession of the amulet. It can be achieved only with powerful backing from someone like him. Alone, she may not be able to find enough copper and spend all the money that may be necessary to perform acts of kindness. He offers to be her partner in this enterprise and they may share the proceeds equally. Meera accepts the proposal. Her desire, however, is not to win gold for herself. All the gold that she makes is to be distributed among the
people of the village. She is to use the power of the amulet only for altruistic purposes.

Meera herself is a breathtaking combination of intelligence, generosity, patriotism and stupidity. She is a heroine only up to the moment that she goes to the Seth in response to his summons in order to discuss their mortgaged land, but a mere stuffed puppet after she enters into the strange contract with the cormorant and begins playing fool.

The protagonist of the novel, Meera is ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of the people. She has a kind soul and a brave heart. From her grandfather, a roving singer, she has got a talisman, as a present, which ostensibly possesses a miraculous reality; at the time of every good act the copper ornaments which Meera wears, are converted into gold coins. The copper ring on her finger becomes gold. Meera truly believes in the miraculous quality of the talisman and desires to bring happiness to everybody.

But it turns out that there was no miracle whatsoever. It was the grandfather of Meera who had put on her finger the golden ring while she was sleeping. The ring was given by Lakshmi, the mother of the child whom Meera had saved. The story of the grandfather sets Meera free from fallacy, and she decides to dedicate her life to struggle for real happiness of the people, for freedom. She responds to the lunacy for gold, not for herself but for the freedom of the land of the village-
folk from the ledgers of the Seth as also for their general welfare and
development. She is involved in the fraud nevertheless.

Meera is presented as a foil to the Seth because she had no self-
interest and wanted to make Sonamitti better. She imbibes in her all
the noble and serious traits of a Devi in a human form. Her very name
recalls to our minds of Meera, the medieval saint-poetess of the royal
family who had to drink the cup of poison for her devotion to Lord
Krishna. Even the Seth called her the pride of the village. She is
presented as a girl of exceptional courage, rare grace, firmness of will
and extraordinary caliber and insight. She is the very embodiment of
compassion-symbolizing the compassionate Mother-India who is full
of promises and possibilities of producing gold of both the kinds, the
symbolic gold of virtues and the real gold of wealth. It is because of
the symbolic significance of her character in the allegory that her role
is more suited to a fantasy than to a realistic story.

Meera embodies the goddess Annapurna to whom all the
poverty-stricken people look for sustenance. The real goddess fighting
against the powers of gold had to join hands with the devotees of the
Gold-Goddess and that is what produces a dichotomy in Meera’s
character. She was not a maker of circumstances, but its victim.
Meera, the heroine of the novel had to live amid tragic circumstances
of life. Her father died of snake-bite and the mother died of grief. Yet
she was not depressed and gloomy and had an affirmative attitude
towards life.
In essence, A Goddess named Gold is a feminist novel as the liberation of the country from the clutches of the Sethji is accomplished by women only. It is this courage of the women of Sonamitti under the leadership of Meera that helps them to liberate themselves from Seth Samsundarji.

**Lakshmi**

Bhattacharya depicts the character of Lakshmi in a fitting manner and she plays a very significant part in the novel. She presents a contrast to her husband in her dealings with men and matters. Her home Cowhouse Five is a respite from toil and she becomes a true friend and sister in the prison. It is really a critical situation for Lakshmi to deal with delicate matters between her husband on the one side and her intimate friends on the other. She finds herself placed between this devil and the deep sea, between Scylla and Charyibdis. But whenever the situation warrants, she does not hesitate to defy the will of her own husband, although ordinarily she is lump of clay under her husband’s implacable will. She joins hands with her associates and impresses upon her husband not to add further disgrace but sell clothes at a fair price. She even threatens to go naked in the streets like god Shiva for the sake of the people. Again the Seth’s attempts at preventing the women from witnessing the cinema-show are foiled by the members of the Cowhouse Five. They are a match to any situation and can tackle any issue that confronts them both at home and in society. Even the Sethji’s wife Lakshmi joins the procession crying.
‘vote for Grandma, Vote!’ This rebel woman bends Samsundar under her stubborn will. Lakshmi’s case is unusual because she and her husband are poles apart in temperament and outlook.

Lakshmi distinguishes herself with a strong and consistent character. To keep quiet, to submit, to suffer that is the lot of a woman in a patriarchal Indian village. However, Lakshmi does not wish to reconcile with this sort of fate and marches ahead on the path of struggle for human dignity. While portraying Lakshmi, the writer strove to create not so much a realistic character of a woman of new India, as to enshrine in it his own idea. However, the very longing of the writer to show the woman-fighter, inspiring people for a fight against the conquerors, fully redeems the hyperbolic facility of some of the traits of this character.

Lakshmi, the Seth’s own wife, who knew him more than anyone else, says of him that ‘he is a monster’. But she never bothers about gold even as much as an ordinary woman does. She is an embodiment of love for all and that is why Grandpa observes, ‘Lakshmi, there is no gift as precious as your love.’ But her husband, the Seth is always mad after gold and wealth. She craves for love and fellow-feeling.

The women leaders decide to fight against the economic offender (the Seth) who has put the people in unbearable economic slavery. Lakshmi is one of the leaders of the movement because she is wedded to the lofty ideal of economic freedom and prosperity for all.
Although she is in a tight corner, she unhesitatingly resolves to plunge into the struggle for women’s economic betterment. She must have her part in the struggle against the tyrant, even though he was her son’s begetter. She must join the procession or else all her marching in the past would prove to have been in vain. When the Seth does not pay heed to the women’s demand for one free sari for every woman, they think of a device. They go to him in a procession, and hundreds including his wife, Lakshmi, threaten to strip themselves naked and throw their rags at him. The Seth yields to his wife’s threat of stripping off her clothes in full view of all and concedes to the women’s demand.

The cowhouse Five – the five prominent women of the village including the Seth’s wife decide to defy the Seth and this kind of man’s attitude towards women so as to achieve genuine freedom for women. She is a noble woman respected by everyone in the village. She is devoted to the welfare of the common-folk of Sonamitti and is very busy in doing something for the people. Right from the day of the Freedom movement, she is essentially good and a great nationalist, while her husband, the Sethji is wicked and unpatriotic.

Lakshmi is every grateful to Meera for rescuing her son Nago, without getting drowned in the well. She gives a gold ring to Meera, without her knowledge, by trying it to her arm. She is thus grateful and liberal to Meera in particular and to the people in general. She is aware of the weaknesses of her husband, but she manages carefully
both her husband and the situation. She is thus critical and careful of her husband’s actions and reactions.

In short, Lakshmi and the Seth are extremely unhappy with each other, being unable to bear each other’s ways. Yet they live together under the same roof, thus bringing about the novelist’s belief in the importance of adjustment in life.

**Atmaram (Minstrel)**

Atmaram, the minstrel is an unusual character and he plays a vital role in this novel, which deals with India’s freedom. It may very well be called that he is a veiled representation of the Father of the Nation, a homeless wanderer at home with large crowds, a man among men, but defied by a grateful and admiring people.

Atmaram, the wandering minstrel gives his granddaughter Meera an amulet which will have the power to transmute base metal into gold provided, she also does an act of kindness. But to the disappointment of Meera and the Seth, the amulet does not produce the desired result because she enters into a profit contract with the Seth on a fifty-fifty basis. Naturally Meera throws the taveez into a river in utter disgust. At this moment, the minstrel appears in the village of Sonamitti and interprets the symbolism of the amulet. It becomes clear that political freedom opens up ways where there are no ways, but miracles cannot occur without hard work.
The minstrel impresses upon his fellow villagers:

‘Brothers, now that we have freedom, we need acts of faith. Then only will there be a transmutation. Friends, then only will our lives turn into gold. 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.’ (GNG: 316)

In Atmaram, the minstrel, we see the synthesis of the tragic and the comic, dream-elements and practical wisdom and social and unsocial elements. His life is both happy and unhappy, and he composes and sings tragic as well as comic songs. The throats of listeners grew thick with feeling when his theme was tragic; but when he made mock of bigwigs in the doggerel, he had composed, there was much laughter. He would go away from his home for a long period and would live in ideas and other worldliness. But he would also return home and would teach the villagers a lot of practical wisdom. His giving Meera the amulet is an act of practical wisdom. Escaping from life, he would live on the mountains for months together. However he takes an active part in the Freedom Movement.

The minstrel begins to emphasis the fact that freedom is the touchstone and it is a touchstone for everyone. It is not enough to possess the touchstone. It can wake to life and work its miracle only when acts of faith are done. The minstrel makes it still more emphatic when he says, ‘The miracle will not drop upon us’. He does not fall into the whirlpool of the material and earthly values of freedom. To
him, freedom means something having spiritual content. It is not an escape from responsibilities, but a real plunge into the real matters and values of life. The villagers do not permit him to go back to his life of seclusion, but impress on him the need for participation in the activities of the village of Sonamitti, that he should make them share his faith in the future and release them from a past that is dead and gone. Thought has to find its fulfillment in action.

The attitude of the minstrel becomes the distinct point of important developments. Meera tries to make use of him as a counter-attraction to the cinema-show so that the Seth’s plan may be frustrated, but the old man would not approve of any spiteful action. He however promises to have a story telling session after the cinema-show. Before the session, the minstrel promises to give the Seth a taveez or amulet to be worn round the arm that will enable the wearer to realize all his wishes.

Sometime after the presentation of the amulet, the minstrel does a puck-like act. Meera has been wearing a copper ring on one of her fingers and has refused the gift of a gold ring earnestly offered by Lakshmi. Lakshmi is all the time eager to show her gratitude towards Meera for having saved her son’s life. The minstrel knows the situation and mischievously suggested to Lakshmi that she may replace the copper ring on Meera’s finger with gold one when she is asleep. With the arrival of the minstrel on the eve of Independence Day, we come to the denouement of the novel.
He conjures before Meera’s mind a picture of a new India that has attained material prosperity, but which also suffers from the evils of such prosperity. With the clear object of testing and provoking Meera, her grandfather suggests to her that after becoming the goddess of plenty, she should get married to a fabulously rich man from Delhi, a man who has several elephants for sale. Meera’s reaction to this taunt is sharp and immediate. Her grand-father’s suggestion seems to be an insinuation that she is hankering after wealth or position, but she is clear in her own mind that she had accepted the amulet only out of a desire to do good to others. Enraged by the insinuation, she wrenches the amulet from her arm and throws it into the river.

Towards the end of the novel, the minstrel explains the symbolism of the taveez that the freedom which they are celebrating is the real touchstone.
Satyajit

Satyajit loves to think himself as a reincarnation of the Mahatma. He is a man with intense devotion to Gandhi’s high principles, but without the strength of character. He founds a village called Gandhigram and designs it along the austere lines of Sevagram of Gandhi.

As Satyajit is a devoted follower of Mahatma Gandhi, he too believes in a healthy synthesis of the old traditions and the new elements in life. He duly recognizes the vital role of Steeltown in the national prosperity. In his opinion Gandhigram will take the lead when Steeltown has finished its race. He asserts:

Steeltown belongs to the present, Gandhigram to the future. Steeltown must do its work. But when that work is done, when the material benefits of production have been fully attained, Steeltown, decrepit and soulless, will have to seek new moorings. Then it will be Gandhigram’s turn to come forward. (SFL: 156)

He, too, has definite views about the integration of values. His desire is, however, to bring about a healthy synthesis of the two
modes of life. When he sees Dalai Lama at Darjeeling, Satyajit makes it clear to him:

What has alienated us from Tibetan way of life is the semi-feudal pattern of society. A relic of the old world cannot lie within the shell of the new; under the hard pressure it’s bound to be crushed into pulp. (SFL: 295)

**Bhashkar Roy**

Bhashkar Roy, the American educated engineer believes that steel is the symbol of India’s progress. He believes in economic revolution based on industrialism. He thinks that steel is significant for India’s defense, being the core of all armaments. What concerns him is the sovereignty and prosperity of the country.

His character is a curious mixture of the old and the new values. He has lived long in the West, but he does not forget his Indian heritage. Though he does not see any harm in drinking wine, dating and merry-making, he also has a high respect for the basic human values. For years Bhashkar has richly imbibed the American culture on the physical plane, yet he fails to attach himself spiritually to that culture and returns to India as soon as opportunity comes:

He absorbed America with all his senses. Not know-now alone. He absorbed much of the human scene. He drank hard with the men. He dated with the women. He was now very far from his homeland-in something
other than mileage. Yet it could well be that within him India remained as real as ever before. That, may be, was the reason why, even after a stay of twelve years, he could cut the strong pull of America all at once and fly back home. (SFL: 35)

Rupa, a modern girl, half-American by birth, discovers to her disillusionment that Bhashkar has more of an Indian than of the Western man within him. She observes:

So many years you lived in the West, absorbing its life, becoming part of that life. Yet back home, you were sucked at once into five thousand years of Indianism!... The truth is that America as a Whole has meant nothing to you. You brought back the industrial know-how. Not the know-how of life! This is the case with every Indian. He goes West and becomes a new person. He returns home and at once he is a complete Indian. (SFL: 317)

**Suruchi**

There are two important and representative women Suruchi and Sumita in Bhattacharya’s award–winning novel *Shadow from Ladakh*. Suruchi, wife of Satyajeet and mother of Sumita is a well developed character. She has adopted Gandhian ideals and works by the side of her husband for the creation of Gandhigram. Suruchi adjusted well with the demands of her husband and never lost her poise except once.
She also realizes in her turn that during all the past years she herself has gained much on the spiritual plane. Now, she does not underestimate Satyajit’s achievements on that level. All that she wishes is a synthesis of the ascetic and the worldly, of the idealist and the practical man in Satyajit:

The past years, too, had brought enrichment, and she could not negate them, throw them away. And she would hate to see Satyajit cast himself adrift. She would like her husband to be Satyajit in one part of his being and someone else in another. That someone else—it was Bireswar! Yes, he could be both. That was the image in which she would want him. That was the image in which she could lose herself completely and be fulfilled. (SFL: 341)

**Sumita**

Sumita, unlike Suruchi, is given to complete submission. She accepts her father’s position unquestioningly. The woman in Sumita has been dominated by the ideal of asceticism and lies dormant and unresponsive. Bhattacharya projects her as a bridge between the two worlds of ancient and modern.

She is not against electricity, the power to turn the wheel of modern industrial revolution. Realizing its importance to the modern civilization, she herself begins to learn about electricity. Bhashkar is astonished to note:
The ease with which she could resolve all contradictions in her mind. Machines were the enemy. Yet she was fascinated by the very life spark in machines – electricity. The life spark, the energy that had begotten the new century, the new civilization. (SFL: 142)

**Mrs. Mehra**

Mrs. Mehra is a very useful character in *Shadow from Ladakh*. She almost plays the role of a mother to Bhashkar, although she is only his Personal Secretary. First, she takes to matrimonial advertisement to select a suitable bride for Bhashkar, but later when she finds him interested in Sumita, she concentrates on the Gandhigram girl. It does not take her much time to realize that Sumita is ‘no Lohapur Club decorative piece’ that she has ‘a thinking mind’ and that she can be Bhashkar’s ‘intellectual companion’. At the same time she does also realize that in order to be true to Bhashkar what Sumita needs is ‘a measure of orientation’. She takes Sumita to Steeltown, and tries to groom her in all possible ways.

It is quite in keeping with her nature that she shows her concern for Bhashkar’s safety when he goes to the Meadow House to join the crowd of demonstrators there. Mrs. Mehra’s character is ‘a combination of excessive efficiency and honest concern’ for Bhashkar’s welfare, and she is as much devoted to her Chief Engineer as she is to her self-effacing husband.
**Rupa**

Rupa, born of Indian father and American mother, is a charming and attractive girl, her life is one of grief and despair, partly because of the separation between her father and mother, and partly, in fact, chiefly, because of her very painful experiences as an air hostess. And although she is very nearly broken in spirit, she tries to revive herself when she joins the Security Office at Steeltown as an assistant. She is conscious of her beauty, and that is why if on the one hand she tries to corrupt Satyajit, on the other she tries to seduce Bhashkar too. However, it is the very same Rupa who plays the role of both tutor and mother to the Chinese children taking shelter in Bhashkar’s bungalow.
A Dream in Hawaii

Swami Yogananda (Professor Neeloy Mukherjee)

The novel *A Dream in Hawaii* centers in three characters: Swami Yogananda, Dr. Vincent Swift and Devjani. The chief character in the novel Swami Yogananda looms large in the readers’ eyes. He was a man of mystery from the East. He was ageless and rootless. He was young, tall and clean-shaven. His relentless Quest was directed to the core of reality, behind the appearances which were maya, the stuff of illusion. He is considered a Neo-Buddha who will lead Americans from darkness to light. He follows the traditional way of inner purification and he lectures on the topic *Crisis in a sick society*. Within him, the East and the West so readily coalesced. He is a world citizen. He belongs to America as much to India.

Swami Yogananda had taught philosophy for six years in Indian Universities before he renounced the world. At thirty, he became one of India’s famed spiritual leaders. He had plans to travel in the United States and had reached Honolulu. He gave several lectures interpreting the Gita. He knew how to give plain words a dramatic content. His wisdom was beyond question. He received his mystical experience from Vivekananda. He was totally averse to the personality cult. His idea was to present universal religion in its Vedantic concept. The theme of the novel is about the conflicting
needs of man. Neloy Mukherjee is unable to submerge his identity completely into that of Swami Yogananda and realizes that he is not a Swami. In Neeloy Mukherjee, the conflict has an additional facet; he is made to conform to a role imposed on him by Devjani, though Devjani’s contention that a spiritual leader cannot be made out of an empty person is true. Yet, it is she who is responsible for the truth of Swami Yogananda by leading him to deny the sensual aspects of life. Ironically enough, it is only when he has achieved fame and success as a Swami that he realizes the truth of his inner being which continues to be Neeloy, surviving against all outward impositions and control.

Contemporary man, caught in the whirlpool of the dehumanizing life, looks desperately for succor, seeking peace either in drugs or in the proliferating cults. Taking advantage of this situation, self-seeking Mammon-worshippers – gurus, maharishis, and yogis – have launched spiritual movements and established ashrams to preach instant meditation. As a result of these perversions and ungodly activities, the meaning of meditation – dhyana – as enunciated in the great Hindu scriptures like the Vedas and Bhagavad Gita – is lost on the contemporary man. The concept of Guru, enunciated in the Holy Books, has taken on such perverted meanings in the popular understanding that Peter Brent says,

“For Indians, particularly those of the middle classes, there are only two directions they can go to prove that they can love, and be loved. One is towards
homosexuality, the other towards the Guru – the two not being mutually exclusive.

_A Dream in Hawaii_ is not the dream about the international cultural center but it is Swami Yogananda’s dream which brings back to him the consciousness of Neeloy. The Swami’s Journey back to his ashram is a Journey of self-realization – a process he begins with his confession to strip the holiness of the Swami. And it is Devjani’s visit which awakens the dormant Neeloy in the Swami. In this novel the central figure is Swami Yogananda, a youthful, charismatic reincarnation of the great Swami Vivekananda, who cuts an idealistic swath through the American student community, represented as eagerly seeking the spiritual sustenance offered by Eastern philosophies. The Great society was desperate for spiritual leadership. An enormous vacuum remained.

The working out of the dilemma in which the Swami is caught, is the central core of the novel. At the conclusion, Swami Yogananda leaves Hawaii, leaving behind the distorted image of his ashram dream to a return to Indian for a renewal of spiritual discipline. But he leaves with questing youth a legacy of Purpose-Faith-Direction, there was a new dream of youth and Yogananda seemed somehow closer to that dream. So, the East does meet the West in Hawaii and leaves its imprint on Western heart and mind.

Swami Yogananda can create; he cannot construct. His Vedanta is the path of self-knowledge filling the void between the man and the
infinite – next the system of physical exercises, breathing controlled with a precise set of techniques evolved in India. He himself explains his philosophy: ‘My place is in Sadhana. All else has become meaningless. Only Sadhana matters. Sadhana is not an exclusive physical entity. It is an idea. The idea can transcend its physical image and take other shapes anywhere in the world’.

Finally, he is disillusioned and realization dawns upon him when he says,

‘You have to know the truth. Swami Yogananda has ceased to exist. This man you see is Neeloy Mukherjee. The yellow garb he still has to wear must be discarded’. (DH: 232)

Neeloy Mukherjee, the professor of Indian philosophy, is metamorphosed into Swami Yogananda, by the cumulative effect of his own spiritual hunger and the need and desire of his student paramour Devjani, who helps him to find his new identity in which he never feels fully at home, though he does carry the Swamihood with delectable grace. The garb of an ascetic is meant to help him achieve his union between the Vedantic thought that he teaches and its practical working out in his own life. Handsome and spiritual as he is, he remains thoroughly human throughout, playing his roles of a teacher and an ascetic with a verse and gusto that never let him lapse into a banal and incredible mediocrity. A right balance of the sensuous and the sublime makes him a fascinating character indeed.
The plot of the novel is centered round the personality of Swami Yogananda, and learned professor of Vedantism, who has turned Yogi at a very young age. He was taken his retreat Sadhana in the Himalayan foot-hills of Rishikesh to the beautiful island of Hawaii by his American disciple Stella Gregson, to teach the relevance of Vedanta to soul-tormented people of America. The plot is divided in two narratives which run parallel to each other concerning Yogandanda’s external life describing his contact with the West and the other concerning his inner life dealing with this struggle to overcome his desire for Devjani. The experience of Swami Yogananda in Hawaii to give a direction and purpose to the current loss in American life is a dream which begins with his arrival in the paradise of the Pacific and ends with the abrupt departure from there. The other, his dream of Devjani, which continues to torment him secretly since he has met her first in Banaras, surfaces itself in concrete form the night Sylvia Koo dressed as Devjani, slips herself into his bed to defile him.

His confession before Devjani of his intense feeling for her, and his experience with Sylvia Koo sublimes his impure desires and releases him from his old self of Neeloy Mukherjee forever. Swami Yogananda’s experience in Hawaii proves beneficial not only to the people of Hawaii but also to the Swami himself. It arouses the spiritual awakening among materialistic Americans. It also resolves the Swami’s own psychic aberration. Swami Yogananda, who returns to India after his brief stay in Hawaii, is a transformed Swami whose
soul is no more racked by doubts about his sanctified personage. During his stay in Hawaii, he is able to assess the causes of the crisis in the super-technological and acquisitive society of America. He feels that Western society is imperiled by its self-induced Venom called progress. He exhorts the youth to have purpose in their life and strive.

Yogananda gives a harsh blow to the selfish designs of Vincent Swift and Jennifer by leaving Hawaii suddenly and thus razing to dust their castle of world center for Yogic disciplines. His spiritualism thus gains victory in its conflict with American materialism. His stay in Hawaii does not only make America see its sickness, it also makes the Swami see his own inner sickness. It is under the inspiration of Devjani, his student of philosophy in Banaras, that Prof Neeloy Mukherjee the famous scholar of Vedantism renounces worldly life and reincarnates himself as Swami Yogananda. In the initial stages of his ascetic life, the Swami finds it difficult to forget Devjani whom he secretly loves, but with the help of fasting and meditation, traditional ways of purification, he at last succeeds in destroying his old body and recreating himself. Despite his attainment of God-realization he is not completely rid of Devjani’s remembrance.

She is often stupefied by the recurrent fantasy of his making love to her in his sleep. He realizes that he was only half way through the tunnel and still fighting his battle with darkness. He had to stumble again and again. The arrival of Devjani from Harvard at the
island of Hawaii where she had earlier worked on a research project brings the Swami into contact with her again. In India he had declined to give her initiation and admit her to his ashram, but in Hawaii he does it without her asking for it. Walt Gregson’s conspiracy to use his mistress Sylvia Koo, as a weapon to break the Yogi’s detachment however brings to light his hidden love for Devjani and causes great mortification to him. To disintegrate his imposter self, the Swami performs the cruel penance of making a confession to Devjani, out of the fire of this ordeal, there emerge the sanctified self of Swami Yogananda.

**Devjani**

Devjani was a charming young woman who was attracted to the brilliant exposition of the Upanishads. She was repulsed by a chance discovery of the ugliness lurking under the polished skin of the sophisticated family life and determined to hitch her wagon to a mystic star. But she is confident that Neeloy has the making of such a star. The candour of her faith sweeps Neeloy off his base and, before long he finds himself shot into the galaxy of Indian gurus illuminining the American firmament. He loves Devjani in an earthly sense, though for Devjani, he is a symbol sacred and inviolable.

Devjani had put Neeloy on the mystic path. Again it is his passion for her which proves to be the greatest hurdle in the way of Neeloy’s progress on the path. But it is that very passion which in a way saves him from the culture-vulture’s beak. These, however, are
Neeloy’s affairs, strictly subjective – Devjani, more or less, is steady in her faith. She emerges as the strongest character.

Devjani has been teaching and the East-West Center in Honolulu has offered a research grant. Her father is a famed nuclear scientist at Calcutta’s Saha Institute. She watched the visage of Varanasi with its multiple splendours – a fusion in which the spiritual and the intellectual become united and inseparable. She obtained a First Class Masters Degree. She was giving all her time and energy to research, but she was caught in her intense need for change. She was aware of her inner strength. Though Devjani’s contention that a spiritual leader cannot be made out of an empty person is true, it is she who is responsible for the birth of Swami Yogananda by leading him to deny the sensual aspects of life. Devjani’s mother, whose scientist husband finds no time for her in the midst of his professional engagements, seeks solace in an adulterous relationship with the family doctor.

It is under the inspiration of Devjani, his student of philosophy in Banaras, Prof. Neeloy Mukherjee, the famed scholar of Vedantism, renounces worldly life and reincarnates himself as Swami Yogananda. Despite his attainment of God-realization, he is not completely rid of Devjani’s remembrance. He is often stupefied by the recurrent fantasy of his making love to her in his sleep. The provocative scenes of American life on the Waikiki beach bring Devjani often into his thoughts. The arrival of Devjani from Harvard at the island of Hawaii
where she had earlier worked on a research project brings the Swami into contact with her again. In India he had declined to give her initiation and admit her to his ashram, but in Hawaii he does it without her asking for it. Devjani asked whether he would accept her in his ashram. Though initially he wanted to give a positive answer, he replied in the negative. He wished that her happiness should be in home life, marriage. He could not bear to see her in the yellow garb.

Swami Yogananda had been apparently sure of Devjani’s presence at the airport. But he was informed that she was away at Harvard. He thought that she was perhaps attending a seminar. But he was told that Prof. De Bryun, the chairman of Sanskrit at Harvard had arranged a research grant for Devjani. He was strongly impressed after reading her article ‘Philosophy: East-West’, in their University magazine. Devjani was often in Yogananda’s thoughts. He could not see any reason why she had left Hawaii. He felt she would return. While he was in the flight, he hoped to see her again and give her initiation. But he missed the chance.

Devjani walked across Harvard-Square on her way to the library. She met a couple of friends, who after learning her name as Devjani expressed jubilation that Hindu girls have such pretty names. They wanted to know about the wonderful book written in India. Devjani thought that they were referring to the Bhagvadgita. But they said that it was Kamasutra. They felt wondered how Indians could miss the Kamasutra. Then their eyes fell on the thick volume entitled
Vedanta: A Gospel for America. They thought it was a book on Yoga. Devjani corrected it and said that it was on Vedanta, a system of thought concerned with God-consciousness. They were of opinion that Hindu girls do a lot of dating. But Devjani said that dating in their sense was rare in India. She felt sorry that the foreign novelists using oriental themes had created the myth of the super-sexed Indian. But the fact is that Indians would attach importance to deeper values of life.

Devjani’s father was excited about his assignment with the Canadian Atomic Energy Commission, though he did not like to be away from his daughter Devi and his wife Mamoni, so beautiful in middle age. Devi had been eager to accompany him, but her wish was turned down. But mother needed some diversion. So they liked to go to a movie. She would ask Rajiv, her best friend whose father was their family physician. Rajiv could not reject their wish. Devjani was well aware of the nature of his feelings for her.

He wanted her to be his wife. She was uncertain about her own feelings. Initially she wanted to seek her mother’s advice, but later decided that the answer should come from her own heart. Rajiv came with the movie tickets. Devjani would spring a surprise on her mother. She walked through the garden and went to her mother’s bed-room where she was shocked to find her mother naked by the side of Dr. Sarkar (Rajiv’s father) who was also naked. Rajiv knew about the illegal connection and did not like to talk about it. Devjani was
thinking of her father who had been living with a lie. She informed Rajiv that she would go back to college. Mamoni said that Devi need not have to forgive her. She pleaded that her father simply rejected her request to follow him. Devjani argued if she did not care about her husband’s work and dedication. Mother said that it could not be at the cost of her own needs and that constant self-denial was not her idea of life. She rose and walked away.

After serious thinking, Devjani had decided to join the Banaras University and read under a famed scholar of philosophy whose writings she deeply admired. Father had given her enough bank account to make her feel independent. She met the young professor of thirty years named Neeloy Mukherjee, later known as Swami Yogananda. She was impressed by his exposition of the universalism of Vedanta. She felt more and more over-whelmed with each lecture. She developed a hunger for spiritual life. He started the session with a series of three lectures on Swami Vivekananda. She felt that Swami Vivekananda should have been reborn.

Devjani watched the visage of Varanasi with its multiple splendours – a fusion in which the spiritual and the intellectual became united and inseparable. She used to sit all by herself on the sacred bank of the Ganges to meditate. She felt that it would not be possible to go far without a guru’s guidance. She realized that no one without an inner awakening could teach Vedanta in such an impassioned way. She emphasized that the ultimate meaning of
philosophy was higher consciousness. She began to refer to the proclamation of So Aham, I am He.

One day in the class room Nirmala – Devjani’s class-mate – stated that Neeloy was taking interest in Devjani and that he would be a suitable partner for her. She even suggested that she would write a letter to Devi’s mother as she would be trying for a worthy son-in-law. A jumble of images flashed in Devjani. She was wondering about the reaction of her mother at the presence of her father. Her father would be missing her a lot, but would console himself by feeling that she should be happy wherever she happened to be. Devjani was quite sure that Neeloy would renounce the world.

Devjani wanted to go to Hawaii for a brief while with a view to listening to the familiar voice of Swami Yogananda. She would keep her distance from him. She was gone out of his personal life. With her extraordinary insight; she had seen his inmost being. The familiar grace of her face was unaltered by the years of growing into maturity. Her big black eyes still retained the wonderment which used to be his source of fascination. He touched her head, giving benediction. He expected that she must have married. But she had different yearning. She simply stated that it had just happened that way. He could see only one reason for that – her strong hunger for a spiritual life defeating all other feelings and needs. She felt glad that the center should be entitled Yogananda. He felt certain that Devjani and the
Yoga center would enrich each other. He said emotionally that he would give Diksha to Devjani.

Devjani knew for certain that Vincent Swift was a first rate organizer and a man who could think boldly and act decisively. She felt that Yogananda’s real field of work was in India. He had accepted her as his disciple. Her expectations were fulfilled. There was nothing else to ask for. But she was upset that Yogananda would soon be going. She was pulled back to those days in Varanasi and before her eyes, the panorama of the past lay vivid. She was simply absorbed in Yogananda, content to savour his presence.

Devjani received the message from Swami Yogananda asking her to come over immediately. She had spent the whole day in the library working on a test paper. In a panic, she rushed off. He wanted to discard the yellow garb. But she saw in him a potential guru. The thought came quickly upon her that he could not be two persons. Yogananda seemed to be emerging into light. It was she that brought about a change in him.

**Stella Gregson**

She is the American woman who, in the course of a visit to India, happens to see Swami Yogananda lecturing to a large crowd of people in Ramlila Ground in Delhi, and feels so impressed by him that she visits him later at his ashram at Rishikesh. And it is she who then prevails upon him to pay a visit to Hawaii in her company to interact with the American people there. Stella is the estranged wife of Dr.
Walter Gregson, a teacher of English literature at a school in Hawaii. Stella lives apart from her husband though she has not formally divorced him. After bringing Swami Yogananda to Hawaii, Stella makes all the arrangements for his stay there and for his lectures and discourses to the American public in Hawaii. Her purpose in doing all this is, of course, to bring about an interchange of ideas between a yogi from the East and the people of the West. She knows that there is a wide gulf between the East and the West; but she hopes that the two sides would be able to understand each other better, and that Swami Yogananda might be able to make an impact upon the American people by his spirituality. She is convinced that Western society has lost its moorings, and needs the stabilizing effect of Eastern wisdom and the Eastern tradition of spirituality.

**Dr. Walter Gregson**

He is Stella’s husband, from whom Stella has been alienated for a long time because of his reckless love-affairs and his most unconventional way of life. The rift between Stella and this man had taken place because, originally wanting to write a book on the “Sexual Habits of American Women in Fiction”, he had begun to practice the art of love-making in real life so as to be able to judge at first hand reactions and the attitudes of the American women to sex and the sexual act. He becomes jealous of Swami Yogananda’s growing influence upon the young people and, in order to bring down this alien yogi from his high pedestal, makes use of his mistress Sylvia Koo to
carry out a plan by which to degrade Swami Yogananda in his own eyes, and thus make it impossible for him to continue with his role as a guru from the East. Walter’s plan partly succeeds in its purpose; but by now Walter has begun to realize the utter futility of his own way of life.

Spirituality cannot be experienced by a man who is physically starved. Human life is not fulfilled merely on the ascetic plane. Body and spirit must be gratified equally in order to make life happy. Walter Gregson, an American, in the end realizes that life is not complete if lived merely on physical plane; man must also have faith in the spiritual values which help him immensely in his inner crisis. Walter Gregson forsakes his past way of life and accepts Eastern Spiritualism.

Jennifer

She is a young widow from the city of Los Angeles, settled permanently in Hawaii where she has become quite a celebrity because of the lavish cocktail and dinner parties which she frequently gives, inviting well-known personalities of Honolulu, to attend them. She was on a visit to India as a tourist when she received a telegram about the sudden death of her husband in Mexico while he had gone in the company of his beautiful private secretary on a business trip. Jennifer had known about her husband’s affairs with a few women in Los Angeles, and she had, therefore, herself been unfaithful to him on a few occasions. Even in New Delhi, while staying at Jahangir Hotel,
she had allowed an ordinary employee of that hotel to perform the sexual act with her. On returning to Hawaii, she had yielded to the temptation of having sex with a couple of shoe-shine boys from Mexico. On being introduced by her friend Stella to Swami Yogananda, Jennifer had initially felt skeptical about the man’s piety and holiness, but had afterwards felt much impressed by him.

Later, she gets actively involved in the project relating to the World Centre to be named “Yogananda” and becomes an assistant to Dr. Swift in his work of implementing that project. She helps Dr. Swift devotedly but at the end of the novel she changes her attitude towards this man because she has discovered that he is not as sincere in his intentions about the proposed World Centre as she had thought him to be, and also because Swami Yogananda’s last words to her before his departure from Hawaii had aroused in her sense of her own individuality and her own importance as a human being.

**Dr. Vincent Swift**

Dr. Vincent Swift, the president of Hawaii Academy, after the death of his faithful wife, remains single only to seek solace in sexual narcissism and self-release aided by a view of X-rated movies. Dr. Vincent Swift, the prototype of the American culture-vulture and Jennifer, the young socialite represent American’s voracious appetite for dollars and superficial culture. They wish to turn the world center for yogic disciplines named after the Swami.
Dr. Vincent Swift, an admirer of Swami Yogananada, was a thin, tall man with a grey beard and a large shiny patch at the center of his head. He had close familiarity with every area of world culture. He attended seminars in three continents and he was a prestigious delegate. He was next in status to Swami Yogananda. He said that he was the only person not to have seen the Swami so far. He had missed all his lecturers. He informed the Swami that he had been waiting to see someone a hundred years old. He only missed his lectures, but not his thoughts. It was telepathy which was common in India. But in the case of Dr. Swift, it was electronic. He explained that his lectures at the University were recorded in tapes. As he listened to them, he felt over powered. He had heard a great deal about him in India. In fact they should have sat on the same platform at a conference in New Delhi but something went amiss.

Dr. Swift insisted that an informal gathering was no place for discussion. He felt that they should make constructive use of his presence, by learning something that would be a permanent value. He stated that Yogananda received his mantra from a person who burst upon America like lightening in a rain cloud – a mystical experience. They all offered their salutations to Swami Yogananda on his hundredth birthday. The Swami never imagined that he would be asked to start an institute there. Dr. Swift suggests that he might spend a few weeks at a lovely beach-side place beyond their central mountain range. He asked the Swami how one could meditate transcendentally. It was clear that Hawaii would have a Yoga Center.
Dr. Swift saw himself in his new role as founder of a great Yoga center. He was also chairman of its Board of Trustees. He had a receptive mind with all his intellectual sophistication. He was a romantic realist, a down-to-earth visionary.

Dr. Swift began to state that the great glory of Hawaii was its magnificent rainbow-seven brilliant colours, building a symphony. Their world center would be a trans-creation of that rainbow. He said that Esther, his secretary, would work with Jennifer everyday for two hours. He further stated that people who count should be selected. The purpose of the center was only social change and their motivation was purely humanitarian.

As Vincent Swift looked at Jennifer, he only felt sorry at her nose-marred face. She had no attraction for him. He had become immune to temptation in the past four years and even earlier, when his wife Bestsey was on her sick-bed dying slowly. She had made a good home for him. He was loyal to her all the twenty three years they were together. They had no children; that was their only regret. She later died. It would have been easy enough to have married again, as the world of culture in America was inhabited by more women, young and deeply dedicated. Dr. Swift went to an X-rated movie in Hotel Street. A change had come on him when he saw a man having reaction when there was oral sex on the screen.

The world center should be named world center of Yogic Disciplines. There would be an ashram named Sadhana, path of
spiritual discipline. Their target was a million dollar fund. They thought of moving forward to the five million dollar-mark. Swift pointed out that Buddhism had spread outside India remarkably and Gandhi had become a more and more living presence abroad, while in India he was getting rejected. He took Yogananda to the Hanuman Bay and the Swami was at once enchanted. He felt glad that those islands were called the Paradise in the Pacific. Swift showed him the eighteen acres of wood-land selected for the world center. He suggested that they should drop down to their knee, touch the earth with reverence, and smear a little dust on their forehead. He appealed to the Swami that they had sufficient grants for payments. He only requested the Swami that he should give specific ideas for the structure. He was alone in his office, finalizing what he would tell the committee – all the ten members, belonging to the Yogananda center. He recalled to his mind about Hanuman Ojha, the priest and blacksmith who had ousted the devil. He wanted to utilize his services by training him in spoken English, as he would soon be in demand all over the United States.

Dr. Vincent Swift was a superb business executive and would walk in splendor and glamour. In America, it is splendor that attracts while in India it is self-denial. He was a first rate organizer and a man who could think boldly and act decisively. The tragedy is that he found the dark more attractive. He had set a high value on the fraudulent and the corrupt.
Nishi

She is a married woman from and has come to Hawaii, against the wishes of her husband, to study American life. In Hawaii she develops the American women’s habit of having boy-friends. But she does not realize that only the unmarred women in America have boy-friends, not the married ones. When one day she looks through a copy of the “Kamasutra”, she is fascinated by the many ways of kissing and sexual postures suggested in this book. She is an unconventional kind of woman who feels greatly interested in exploring the art and technique of love-making in practice as well as in theory. She becomes very friendly with Devjani, and keeps in touch with her when she (Devjani) has gone away to Harward University. It is from one of Nishi’s letters that Devjani comes to know about Swami Yogananda’s visit to Hawaii and the reputation which he has made there.

Kamal Dasi and Vishnu Narayan

Kamal dasi has been a friend of Devjani. Devjani was at Harward University, when Kamal Dasi got married to Vishnu Narayan. Both Kamal Dasi and Vishnu Narayan are the followers of Bhakivedanta, the founder of the Hare Krishna movement. It is from Vishnu Narayan that Devjani learns all the details about the technique of transcendental meditation from a man by the name of Maynard Goldreich.
**Frieda**

She is a married woman who has come to Hawaii for a vacation with her husband, Henry. She is a “libber”. Her husband is, like her, a liberated man. If Frieda wants to have casual sex with her a man with her choice, her husband raises no objection to it; and vice versa. Frieda becomes acquainted with Swami Yogananda on the sandy seashore, and then tries to have sex with him in his hotel-room on the night of her departure from Hawaii. Swami Yogananda, however, refuses her offer, even though she has already taken off her clothes and lies in his bed with her breasts fully exposed to view. She is a typical American woman of “liberated” kind.

**Sylvia Koo**

She is Walter’s latest mistress. She is extremely beautiful, alluring, and seductive in her appearance. At Walter’s behest, she tries to seduce Swami Yogananda in his hotel-room but fails in the attempt even though she succeeds in degrading and lowering him in his own eyes by bringing into his conscious mind his subconscious craving for Devjani’s flesh.

India is a land of Sadhus and Sanyansis. At the same time, science and technology also started finding its roots in Indian tradition. India is a complex culture of tradition and modernity, of vividness in integration, in appearances and personalities, in living styles and manners. Bhattacharya has tried to reveal his characters through their actions. In that sense, he achieved success. With the help
of unique style and tools of self-discovery, he achieved what many writers strive for.

Bhabani Bhattacharya tries to give special focus on the inner mind i.e. the self that can be revealed by emotions, thinking, behavior and actions of the characters through his novels. The real personalities of Gandhi, Nehru, and Tagore etc. are represented through the actions and presentation of the characters.

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