ABSTRACT

Born in 1906 in Bhagalpur, Bihar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, studied history at the University of Patna, and then at the University of London from where he graduated with Ph.D. in 1934. During his student days in London, he began contributing articles to British Periodicals, and continued writing for magazines and papers when he returned to India in 1935. In 1947, he published *So Many Hungers!* Since then, he has built for himself a strong reputation with novels such as *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960), *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966), for which he received the SahityaAdademi Award and *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978).

His wide range of experience in and around the world and his close association with men, manners and their personalities have enabled him to grasp the innate significance of humanity, and all this finds expression in the characters of his novels and short stories, carved out with a pen that never wavers. The reader lives with the characters of the stories and marvel at the author’s keen observation of the day-to-day incidents of life. Bhattacharya has written with a spicy language which is at once crisp and facile. He has caught the vein of rural speech and the informal behaviour of the people, their rustic world and their small and simple views about the great things that take place around them.
All the novels of Bhattacharya present a true picture of India, and its teeming millions, surging with life and substance. All writing for him has a social purpose. His outlook is highly constructive and purposeful. As we read his writings, we hear the dialogue between man and his situation, between man and man and between man and the ideas he lives by.

He remains an unequalled master in interpreting rural India. Particularly in the novel, A Goddess Named Gold, the world of fate and reality that delve deep in the minds of our rural fold are skillfully and artistically blended. It contains, like his other novel, He Who Rides a Tiger, some superb descriptions of rural folk. His novels have penetrating and sympathetic analysis of the simple but insurmountable problems in Indian life. His themes generally revolve round poverty, hunger, pestilence, traditionalism, caste, India’s struggle against poverty, industrialization and the resulting controversy of Gandhian Panacea versus rapid industrialization.

According to Bhattacharya, most of his characters have shaped themselves from the real earth. The end of the story in his case is never the one in which he had in his mind in the beginning. Even the original plan itself gets modified or changed due to certain traits which his characters develop during the course of events.
L.N. Gupta writes:

“Pure intellectuals watch the crowds but do not force themselves on them. They visit slums and absorb the misery of their dwellers in their being. They tour the famine-stricken areas. They look into the shrivelled faces and sunken eyes of the sufferers. They share their distress. But they do not use amplifiers to blare their benefaction. They suffer quietly. The process involves cycles of seething tensions. The end product is a major work say, a great novel, in the case of a fiction writer. It is a monument to its times. Such is the case with Bhabani Bhattacharya”.

The first chapter of the thesis is Introduction. It contains a brief study of Indian writing in English and Bhabani Bhattacharya’s contribution to it. There is also a focus on the aims and objectives of the study.

The second chapter contains the thematic study of Bhabani Bhattacharya’s three novels, *So Many Hungers!*, *Music for Mohini* and *He Who Rides a Tiger*.

*So Many Hungers!* was published in 1947, soon after the transfer of power by Britain to India and Pakistan, but it actually covers the war years with their uncertainties, privations, agonies, cruelties, frustrations. The Bengal-famine of 1943 was the background of this novel.
Bhattacharya paints the naked horror of it all with a pitiless precision and cumulative detail.

Dr. Srinivasa Iyengar states:

“So Many Hungers! is no doubt an impeachment of man’s inhumanity to man, but it is also a dramatic study of a set of human beings caught in a unique and tragic predicament. The story has been effectively told and the tragic pathos of the real mass-starvation described in the guise of fiction moves the reader deeply. The novel describes a factual and vivid account of one of the most shocking disasters in history.”

His second novel, *Music for Mohini* deals with cast distinctions and poverty. In this novel, a young girl of seventeen is married in the traditional manner, observing the auspicious signs and comparing the horoscopes. Mohini goes to her new home. Jayadev, the quiet scholar who lives in his ancestral village, and Mohini, the young city bred wife of his, who adapts herself very well to her new environment, are the two forces that put the village on the path of progress and modernization. The superstitious old mother of Jayadev realizes in the end her mistake and reconciles herself to the changing times.

*Music for Mohini* blows up the citadel of old traditions and superstitions which menace India’s progress. The story blends with an attractive girl’s marriage with the eternal problems of that cast-ridden
land and its divorcement from various kinds of imperial rule and the man made brick-bats are not hurled at Britain.

The Third novel, *He Who Rides a Tiger* is an attack on both who profited on people’s misery during the famine and those who exploited them as caste tyrants. It is a legend of freedom, a legend to inspire and awaken. Here he discusses a variation on the theme of hunger. It has a fascinating beginning. The story runs rapidly surging with emotion and agitation. Its sharp and vivid characterization and untainted realism make this novel a very interesting one. It is a grim satire on Hindu orthodoxy.

Dr. Iyengar says,

“The tempo of life in Calcutta – the complex urban vices and urban sophistication, the pressure of mass movements and mass hysteria, the reign of superstition and mumbo jumbo gives the novel an entire and piquant quality all its own.”

The novel is based on an ancient saying, “He who rides a tiger cannot dismount.” A humble village blacksmith, named, Kalo takes his revenge on a rigid, caste-ridden society and makes a living for himself, and miracle happens as a legend and passing himself off as a Brahmin Priest. The story ends with a note of triumph of the soul over flesh. Eventually, when the fraud is detected, other low-caste people hail him as their brother and the outraged upholders of caste are custom panic.
In **the third chapter** of the present thesis, there is a thematic study of his another three novels, i.e. *A Goddess Named Gold*, *The Shadow from Ladakh* and *A Dream in Hawaii*.

*A Goddess Named Gold* is a novel of Indian village life and it gives a satisfactory reading experience to the readers. It is a masterly satire on those who live by the lure of gold. It tells how high spiritual values like spontaneous kindness are sought to be prostituted for the purpose of gold. It is a modern fate of rural India and the close textured fabric of its life on the eve of independence in 1947. The characters are introduced one by one in a leisurely manner and we see among them a pretty girl, a strolling minstrel and a magic talisman. The novel entertains as a story but it also disturbs us as a warning and as a prophecy. Meera’s grandfather, a wandering minstrel gives her an amulet and tells her that she will acquire the power to turn the base metals into gold, if she does an act of real kindness. She rescues a child. Seth Samsunderji seeks profit out of India’s new-found freedom and enters into a business deal with Meera on a fifty-fifty basis. Meera gets disgusted with it finally and throws the amulet into the river. The minstrel returns soon and explains that freedom is the real touchstone.

The next novel *Shadow from Ladakh* tells an extremely gripping story of unsurpassed drama on a broad and revealing canvas. It tells what India needs for survival – a meeting point between Gandhian social ethics and tremendous forces of science and
technology. It deals with India’s conflict with China and her response to the challenge. The theme presents a considerable amount of truth of a politically conscious Indian family.

The novel provides an insight into the contrasting contemporary life of India symbolized by Satyajit who regards Indian village life as the ideal life and by the Westernized American trained Bhaskar, the forward looking Chief Engineer in Steel-Plant, who feels India’s future lies in industrialization, ends on a weak note of co-existence of these two ideologies. Bhaskar wants to dispose Gandhigram, because it is a hindrance to India’s industrialization. He brings every pressure to bear, but to his surprise the community of the believers in non-violence stands firm under its great leader Satyajit, and he himself falls in love with Satyajit’s daughter, Sumita, a bare-foot, white-saried girl.

Hist last novel, *A Dream in Hawaii* deals with the East-West encounter. The plot centres round the personality of Swami Yogananda, a learned professor of Vedanta and Yogi. Swami Yogananda accepts the importance of science but also the moral regeneration of mankind.

In the fourth chapter there is a combined study of all the characters in the above six novels. Bhattacharya’s characters are the blending of slums and elite, of poor and rich, of educated and uneducated, of leaders and common men. It becomes necessary to
pick them out of this crowd, in the complex social system of Indian culture and its changing values.

**The last chapter** is conclusion. Bhabani Bhattacharya’s novels present a high idealism, social purpose and affirmative vision of life. He depicts horrors of dying alien rule very faithfully and soberly. His novels are praiseworthy from technical points of view also. His novels have social purpose and he is an advocate of peace, progress, prosperity and harmony. In short, his characters are the glimpses of the whole society as Bhattacharya has experienced in his own life. Bhattacharya’s characters always develop in a particular way, either due to Gandhian impact or Swami Vivekananda’s view. They sparkle with typical Indian tradition and culture.