Bhabani Bhattacharya (born 1906), one of the older Indian novelists writing in English, possesses versatility and talent. Bhattacharya inherits Anand's concern with social, economic and political issues minus Anand's predilection for a proletarian stance and Narayan's comic playfulness and exaggeration (without Narayan's detachment as a comic genius). Himself convinced of a novelist's concern with social reality, all of his novels have social relevance. Bhattacharya writes with the conviction that "purposeless art and literature" is an exercise in futility; albeit his own achievement falls short, because he capitalizes too much on quaintness and contrived happy endings. He holds that "a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader something from the society's point of view. Art is not necessarily for art's sake. Purposeless art and literature which is much in vogue does not appear to me a sound judgement". His experimentations to render his vision of India in a rather symbolic and suggestive manner tend to make him 'tendentious', while his colourful descriptions and intricate explanations of rituals and customs seem to "have been written primarily for the

1 *So Many Hungers* (1947); *Music for Mohini* (1952); *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954); *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960); *Shadow From Ladakh* (1966).
3 Hemenway, *The Novel of India*, p.46.
Western market". It is for this reason that Bhattacharya, though stylistically a mature craftsman, has been sometimes dismissed as a "skilled popularizer of Indo-Anglian novel". Cowasjee counts Bhattacharya among the Indian writers who have written socially competent novels.

His novels merit consideration, not because of his well-constructed plots and well-developed characterizations, especially of Indian women, but because of his vivid articulation of contemporary problems and interpretation of contemporary reality from inner compulsion. Creative art for Bhattacharya is the spontaneous expression of personal reactions or responses. "A novelist may well be concerned with today, the current hour or moment, if it is meaningful for him, if it moves him sufficiently into emotional response".

Frequent use of Gandhian character or theme is a recurring motif in his novels dealing with freedom struggle. His characters, though individualistic and distinct, often tend to be pointed exponents of specific ideas. It is not very unusual that they are elevated to a symbolic plateau, as his avowed aim is to give descriptions that are true to life so that his novels should serve as a vehicle of truth. He argues that art "must teach, but unobtrusively, by its vivid interpretation of life. Art must preach, but only by virtue of its being a vehicle of truth. If

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4 Ibid., p.36.
that is propaganda, there is no need to eschew the word". 7

So Many Hungers (1947), published though in the fateful year of Partition of India yet covering war years (1942-43), depicts the gruesome tragedy of man-made hunger, further accentuated by the convulsions of 'Quit India' movement. In the backdrop of national struggle for freedom and the desperate striving of millions of people of Bengal for sheer survival synchronising with the apathy of the authorities and brutal pulundering trade of the inhuman profiteers, Bhattacharya seems to have transmuted into art Gandhian belief in the ultimate victory of soul-force and freedom of spirit emanating from man's infinite capacity to undergo sufferings. Soul-force pitted against the brute force to satisfy the twin hungers for food and freedom seems to be the real theme8 of the novel, although the ostensible theme is the ravage of Bengal famine. Painting with pitiless precision and cumulative details the naked horror of the tragedy of Bengal famine, So Many Hungers is an unsparring indictment of man's inhumanity to man, but the novel is also a poignant portrait of a set of human beings who vindicate invincibility of soul-force.

Using the word 'hunger' as a refrain,9 Bhabani Bhattacharya

7 Bhabani Bhattacharya, 'Literature and Social Reality', The Aryan Path 26 (September 1955) quoted in Bhabani Bhattacharya, p.3.
8 M. Tarinayya in Literature of the Past Fifty Year, p.179.
9 (a) "I know, I know, beloved, Not in this life will hungers be sated, I know, I know, beloved!" So Many Hungers, Chapter 9, p.95.
(b) "He knew in his spirit the hungers of his people. And they were his hungers, too". So Many Hungers, Chapter 10, p.111.
has woven inextricably the Bengal famine and the 'Quit India' Movement into the texture of the novel which can be read as a representation of the struggle for freedom and has, as such, caught the accents of the Gandhian age. The twin strands of the fates of Basu family of Calcutta and the peasant family of village Baruni are meant to convey how Gandhi drew people from all walks of life into the orbit of the national movement, after he had appeared on the political scene of India.

*So Many Hungers* is primarily the story of Kajoli, a slip of a girl with a "legacy of manners as old as India," and her family comprising her mother and her brothers Kanu and Onu. The story of Rahoul, a D.Sc. from Cambridge University and a scion of an affluent family, is woven into its body so as to present the predicament of the intellectual class and their response to Gandhi and his call for action. The novel is as much the story of the famine, ghastly, staggering, and horrible beyond words, as the imaginative recreation of 'Quit India' movement over-shadowed by the invisible presence of Gandhi throughout the country.

Rahoul, a brilliant young scientist, working as a Professor of Astro-Physics in the University of Calcutta and his younger brother Kunal are the sons of Samarendra Basu, a lawyer turned businessman. Samarendra's aged father, Devesh, lives in a coastal village Baruni. During the Second World War, the government seizes all boats of the fishermen and requisition all paddy without controlling prices. The peasants and fishermen are thus

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driven to starvation. Kajoli, her mother and her little brother Onu are the members of a poor peasant family in Baruni. Kajoli's father and her elder brother are serving jail sentence for their participation in the national movement. Kajoli is married to a young man who soon afterwards dies in an accident. The 'Quit India' movement has been launched and Devesh courts arrest with his followers. Driven by hunger, Kajoli's family moves to Calcutta but she is raped by a soldier on the way. The entire family ekes out their living by begging. The night Kajoli takes the desperate decision to turn a prostitute in order to maintain her family, she hears of Devta's fast in jail and is reminded of his parting words "Do or Die". She is saved miraculously from degeneration but his mother commits suicide. Rahoul resigns his job, joins the freedom struggle and courts arrest. Rahoul's father has amassed great wealth through black market in rice but he cannot prevent his son from casting his lot with the followers of Gandhi.

Bhattacharya is sensitively alive to the significant reality that Gandhi's greatness lay in producing local Gandhis all over the Country — persons who went the whole hog with Gandhi and could be taken as his prototypes. The delineation of the character of Devesh, the grandfather of Rahoul, is an attempt to translate this significant aspect of Gandhi's greatness into fiction, although this attempt is not as successful as that of Raja Rao in Kanthapura (1938). Ever since this Gandhian character retired as a teacher, he has lived like one of the peasant folk in village Baruni. Devesh who is affectionately called Devta, the celestial being, is seventy years old. His living is marked by austerity, self-control and rigorous discipline — attributes associated with Gandhi. When the Congress
launches Civil Disobedience against the government, "the aged one was deep in it" (p.14). He forms a band of volunteers, peasants and fishers all, leading them to the Bay, making salt from seawater in defiance of the law. The novelist seems to have transformed and recreated imaginatively Nehru's characterisation of Gandhi in the following depiction of Devta: "So loving, so gentle! And yet firm and majestic. A true veteran of the national movement. Three times he had gone to prison, seven years in prison. Devta, the village called him no wonder" (p.23).

The grand old man echoes Gandhi's utterances and recapitulates his manner of living. He has always listened to his conscience as his guide, and he is firm but polite: "Grandfather, now past his seventieth year, so mild and so hard, had acted always under that inward urge" (p.19). Like Gandhi, he is fighting against the British rule, but he has no quarrel with the English people. When his grandson Rahoul insists upon meeting and knowing English people before he could start his fight with them, Devta's retort is cast in the Gandhian mould: "Why should you fight the people of England? They are good people. The people are good everywhere. Our fight is with the rulers of England, who hold us in subjection for their narrow interests" (p.19). Like Gandhi, Devta's identification with the peasant folk is complete, and he gives village reconstruction work top priority as "This is the very basis of our life to come" (p.24). The old man seems to have imbibed Gandhian tone and manners modified by the personality of Tagore whom Bhattacharya admires along with Gandhi. His physical personality reminds us of Tagore: "A tall, straight figure in white home-spun. Long, silver thinning at the edge of the high forehead, long, flowing
silver beard. It was Dadu, Grandfather. He walked barefoot like the peasants" (pp.20-21). The stamp of Gandhi is unmistakable in Devta’s message to the people on the eve of his arrest:

“Friends and comrades, do not betray the flag. Do not betray yourself. There is violence in your thoughts; that is evil enough. Do not make it worse by violence in action.

Ours is the harder task. If we use the weapons of our enemy, we play into their hands. The supreme test has come. Be strong. Be true. Be deathless” (p.73).

Bhattacharya exercises his discretion and critical faculty in transcreating Gandhi’s impact on the people. We learn that the hangers-on of the alien government with their eyes on the chosen favours shun the Mahatma, while the pampered children of the rich think him eccentric. The awakened youth among the sophisticated upper classes, are, however, drawn towards Gandhi. It is only the peasant India that has responded to him without any reservations. Samarendra Basu, Devta’s son, whose only aim seems to be able to amass wealth for himself and his family, has no trucks with the patriotic old man. Rahaul’s wife Manju, at first, regards Devta an eccentric old man with odd ideas. Manju, who takes unscrupulous Samarendra as “wise, practical, unlike the aged one with queer ideas” (p.7) would naturally make light of Gandhi’s call for sacrifices. Rahaul is the symbol of the awakened youth and regards jail as a place of pilgrimage. That is why there exists a close rapport between the patriotic old man and his grandson Rahaul.

When British rulers arrest Gandhi because he has “decried the attempt to drag his people into a war that was none of their seeking, as they were the humblest of slaves,” (p.41) Rahaul feels utterly shocked and deeply stirred. He finds it difficult to keep himself aloof when his countrymen are voicing their anguish and
fury at the arrest of Gandhi following the 'Quit India' resolution. The reign of terror unleashed by the government further strengthens his resolve to jump into the cataclysm. The first person narrator in Bhattacharyya makes the following observation:

Rahoul was unhappy. The leader had often expressed Rahoul's own thoughts in words and images more beautiful and forceful than he himself could devise. Rahoul was no hero-worshipper. His ideas had been shaped on the anvil of reason, and emotions had no visible place in the process. Yet that one personage (Gandhi) who India knew to be her man of destiny stirred his depths —— was it because (Rahoul had asked himself, wonderfully) he seemed so warmly human, even as he wrote and spoke and eted with relentless logic? (p. 41).

Bhattacharyya describes how Rahoul joins the Gandhian revolution in a dramatic manner. One day he views from his laboratory window a huge procession of Indians with national flag held high and the army cracking down upon the patriots. Rahoul rushes out of his laboratory and tries to reason with the European sergeant. He undergoes his first experience of lathi-charge and prison cell for a day along with some of his students as his fellow prisoners. They want to ascertain if the final hour of revolution has come. He is forthright but firm. "The hour is not as yet", he said, "but we are apart from it by a hair's breadth. We must stand ready to carry out Gandhi's command 'Do or Die'. We must not let our strength run to waste" (p. 67). Rahoul's participation in the national movement brings about the desired awakening in his wife. Later, when Rahoul is again arrested and he contacts his wife to inform her, she is herself a follower of Gandhi. She assures him that she too shall go his way soon as "I am not the silly thing I used to be, you know that" (p. 213).
Gandhi's immense popularity with the villagers is deftly demonstrated by Devta's decision to stay among the poor folk in the village Baruni near the sea shore. Baruni is rural India in microcosm. What happens there, must have happened everywhere in India. Like Gandhi, the old man is proud of his people as centuries of hardship and strain have not destroyed their faith in human value: "I have scores of daughters and sons in Baruni. I am proud of my people. They are not bright and knowing — civilized — like you citybred; but they are good people. Centuries of hardship and strain have not destroyed their faith in human values" (p.22).

The 'flag salute' ceremony held under the banyan tree and the whole village, surcharged with Devta's parting message on the eve of his arrest, are loud echoes of "Quit India" resolution and Gandhi's Call of 'Do or Die' before he was arrested.

The finest representation of the deep Gandhian impress on the rural folk is furnished by the unbeaten spirit of Kajoli, 'a living tricolour'. A single artistic touch has suggested amply what hundred pages of stirring and even heart-rending events have not succeeded in portraying adequately. Torn between the consuming pangs of starvation, destitution and despondency and the tempting offer of the betel-women, the procurers of a house of ill-fame, Kajoli is on the verge of falling deep into the abyss of prostitution when she hears that the political prisoners at Dehra Dun are resorting to hunger-strike and Devta is to lead the Satyagrahis in this fast. Kajoli at once retrieves the lost image of her revered Devta before her inward eye, and his parting words ring loud and clear in her ears: "Be strong. Be true. Be deathless".
Her redemption is instantaneous. Calling the procuress a "jackal woman", Kajoli slaps her in the face, and adopts the path of dignity and self-respect.

So Many Hungers is, therefore, a fictional treatment of Gandhian revolution in which the enlightened classes and the masses display solidarity in the face of brutal repression by the alien government. The novel is not merely a narrative of the famine and the war but a poignant study of the freedom consciousness that has percolated to the grass-roots. The lively portraiture of Kajoli, Devta and Rahoul as the followers of Gandhi are among the finest creations of Bhattacharya.

Described as "a modern fable of India at the time of Independence," A Goddess Named Gold (1960) is rather a mixed allegory having ingredients of a parable and a fable in its texture. Unlike pure allegory, the buried or hidden meanings, quite distinct from the surface tale, are elaborately explained and the narrative has little point without the moral. With comic exaggerations and farcical contrivances aglore, Bhattacharya, a critic would say, does not consistently tend to countenance what Aristotle calls "probable impossibility". The lack of consistent point of view — sometimes of Grandpa, now of Grandmother, then of Mira and occasionally of Sohan Lal — deprives the novelist of perspective, blurs his vision and tempts him to indulge in interpolations of utterances bearing on the theme and their elucidation into the body of the novel. But the charge of consistency would make the picture incomplete and make the vision narrow.

The novel pertains to a period immediately preceding the attainment of freedom and the locale of action is a tiny village
called Sonamitti. A group of women called 'the Cowhouse Five' meet almost daily to review things in Lakshmi's house. These women have participated in 'Quit India' movement. Lakshmi's husband Seth Sham Sunder, an affluent cloth-merchant, has all along kept away from the national movement. The women are planning to launch a stayagraha against the Seth for his refusal to sell cloth at fair prices. Meera, a young girl of sixteen, leads the protest-march to the shop and they meet with a limited success in their mission because the Seth wants to win over the people as he is seeking election to the District Board. Meera's grandfather, a wandering minstrel, appears on the scene and ties an amulet round the arm of Meera with the suggestion that it will turn all copper on her body into gold provided she does an act of real kindness. Lakshmi secretly replaces the copper ring on Meera's finger with a gold one when the girl is asleep. The Seth seeks to exploit Meera's amulet and he becomes her partner so that they may share the gold equally. The poor girl is virtually loaded with ornaments made of copper but the desperate plans of the Seth misfire. The minstrel explains in the end that amulet is the real freedom that alone can bring miracle.

The Goddess Named Gold deals with a tremendously important theme of freedom and its ramifications, but the narrative is burdened with the allegory, though it is difficult to believe that the novel "is a triumph of symbolistic art". Sonamitti (The Earth of Gold) that suggests 'The Golden Sparrow' as India was once called, is India in miniature, and it is the threshold
of Freedom. Bhattacharya has transmuted Gandhian concept of Freedom with its moral and ethical implications, into the periphery of his fictional art, although the symbols are not distinctly sharp, and the 'finished content' smacks of the author's confusion and preoccupations. It is difficult to share the observations that the novel is a technical success, although Iyengar argues that "A Goddess Named Gold" signifies an advance in Bhattacharya's art as a novelist, for the 'axes' here are hardly visible and the grinding is not very audible. The indiscriminate mingling of the comic playfulness and exaggeration and the serious overtones of the thematic postulates deprive the novelist of his perspective on the one hand and the symbols of their pointedness on the other. Bhattacharya can't resist the temptation to show that good too easily triumphs over evil. His noble characters pass a Gandhian test of courage and love, and the fantasy is elevated to a symbolic plane.

There is, no doubt, ubiquitous condemnation of the rich because of their callous exploitation of the dispossessed and the social hypocrisy of the moneyed classes in consonance with their avaricious instincts. The Gandhian impress on characters and situations is unmistakably clear and well-pronounced, but the novelists' over-powering zeal for quaintness lands the narrative into contrived situations of farcical nature. Whereas quaintness and juxtaposition of situations are listed as failings of Bhattacharya as a novelist, the frequent weaving of Gandhian myth into the tale imposes a kind of rhythm on the action of the novel. In fact, there is no novel of Bhattacharya without a reference to

12 Indian Writing, p.418
13 Hemanway, The Novel of India, p.46.
freedom struggle and Mahatma Gandhi, appearing either in the explication of the theme or the mental make-up of the character. It is for this reason that Bhattacharya is found worthy of consideration for his vision of life: "Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of those Indo-Anglian novelists who expend care on their medium but matter more for their vision of life".  

Using gold as the symbol of richness of spirit and mind, and dilating on the conditions immediately preceding India's attainment of Freedom, Bhattacharya has sought to render into art Gandhian thrust that freedom, being a state of mind, is the means to higher and nobler living, and not an end in itself. Iyengar perceptively remarks that A Goddess Named Gold entertains as a story, but it also disturbs us with its undertones of warning and prophecy. The novelist seems to echo Gandhian postulates: "Freedom is the beginning of the road where there is no road. But the new road swarms with robbers". People have to guard themselves against the misuse of freedom by the Setha of many kinds — the Setha of politics, the Setha of religion and the official Setha.

The novel is interspersed with this warning voiced by various characters, serving as 'lucid reflectors' of the novelist's point of view. Meera's Grandma remarks that freedom "is to be built by our own hands" (p.124). Sohan Lal, an awakened young


15 Indian Writing, p.420.

Bhattacharya seems to reiterate Gandhian conviction that freedom is the golden key to unlock floodgates of happiness for all.mere acquisition of wealth would be the negation of freedom: "Gold in itself has no value. Gold is a strip of field released from bonds. Gold is a new straw thatch on the walls of a mud hut. It is the rag woman's escape from hunger and the Old Father's wish for a pilgrimage to Holy Benares" (p.175). Meera's Grandpa has suggested in unambiguous terms that the touchstone on the girl's arm can work only under certain conditions, which means the impact of the spirit upon matter. Out of that impact gold would come. That is fascinatingly reminiscent of Gandhi's emphasis on moral values acting as a spark to transmute baser elements in mere man into gold. The old minstrel, who seems to have been designed as the veiled representation of Mahatma Gandhi, ties an amulet round the arm of Meera with these prophetic words: "Wearing it on your person you will do an act of kindness. Real kindness. Then all copper on your body will turn to gold. Remember, all copper touching your body will become gold. Gold with which to do good.... Parted from your arm, the touchstone will be dead, a worthless pebble" (p.85).
Later on, the Grandpa explains that freedom is the touchstone for everyone, but it is not enough to possess this touchstone simply, "for it could wake to life and work its miracle only when acts of faith were done" (p. 303). Freedom is not simply political freedom but congenial environment to bring about moral edification for which the individual has to undergo some kind of spiritual experience through acts of faith: "The miracle will not drop upon us. It is we who have to create it with love and sweat. Freedom is the means to that end" (p. 303). Sohan Lal, who feels thrilled by Nehru's utterances regarding our 'Tryst with Destiny', seems to speak for the novelist that mere attainment of freedom will not do; we must cultivate fearlessness: "I step into freedom as soon as it comes to my country, do I not? That is one thing. The other is that each of us has to win the freedom to be free. It is a state of the mind, so Gandhiji tells us" (p. 301).

Bhattacharya’s craze for the comic exaggeration and playfulness accounts for his inability to save this allegory from degenerating into a fantasy. The whole affair of Seth’s partnership with Reeta, and her carrying a load of copper on her person sounds absurd. It seems to be a joke, rather extended and taken literally. The omniscient novelist does not fail to remark: "A good joke had gone too far, until it was joke no longer, until it hurt badly" (pp. 277–78).

The novelist has played upon common man’s hunger for gold through contrived situation. The secret of gold ring strains human credibility. Even the minstrel thinks that it must be a great fun. He thinks that it is "like a fable of old come to life. A peasant maid become a king’s daughter. Glory and disgrace; glamour and
ridicule" (p.299). Instead of the selfless and spontaneous act of real kindness, contrived and deliberate gesture of this impulse is resolved into a business deal.

There is a constant reminder through Grandma, that the minstrel is not to be taken seriously: "This is the minstrel's joke! He never thought his little leech would become a serpent!" (p.181). Even Meera knows that the Grandma has no belief in the minstrel. The old lady understands that her husband has built up a fable of Atmaram, and his touchstone is simply fantastic and incredible.

Bhattacharya has recreated Gandhian myth through deft touches and appropriate characterisation, although he attains only qualified success in the creation of Gandhian characters. The old minstrel is meant to represent the Father of the Nation. He is deified by the admiring people as the incarnation of the Sage Atmaram just as the grateful Indians had conferred the honorific of Mahatma on Gandhi. The wandering minstrel belongs to the people and is their conscience-Keeper. His role in the awakening of village Sonamitti is as significant as that of Gandhi in the Freedom Struggle of India. An aura of greatness surrounds him, but there is something mysterious and elusive about him, and he remains unnamed. His symbolic significance apart, the old minstrel is not a character from life. He seems to combine in himself wisdom and vision of a prophet, yet he places his grand-daughter in a situation where unreality has reached its apotheosis.

Meera is another character wherein the novelist betrays perplexity. She is an example of stupid credulity as she hopes that the miracle would come by itself with no effort on anyone's part,
dropping from the air like a sackload of jewels. Sohan Lal tries in vain to explain that the touchstone in her heart can turn everything into gold figuratively, but she remains gullible as ever. It is difficult to believe that she has been thick in the freedom struggle, and can be so enlightened as to remark that elections can't be won by the support of a mere handful of people belonging to upper classes: "Let them watch the show. It is the man beyond the rope barrier who will count finally" (p.120). Meera is an odd mixture of precocious Gandhism and bright idealism to be the real beneficiary of freedom. The glittering gold has deluded her temporarily, but it has not completely dried up the sap of humanity in her. She recovers from this delusion before the story is rounded off for a happy ending.

The novel bears an echo of 'Quit India' Movement and the role of women played therein under the leadership of Gandhi. The fact can be historically corroborated, as a large number of women participated in the Freedom Struggle. The mood of the women of this Cow-house Five and their way of thinking reflect the temper of satyagrahis, as they are ardent nationalists and they have been to jail for participating in the 'Quit India' movement: "Those day____Sohag, remember? Gandhiji touched our spirit as it slept. Wakened, we became the equals of our men folk"(p.6). They were all afire and "wherever we went, women came flocking out of field, barn and kitchen to cry with us 'Quit!'(p.6). They felt that their "thunderclap made the aliens in Hindustan tremble in their coat-and-pantaloons"(p.6). Even the old Grandma does not lag behind. Later, she is pulled out
of her stupor when Sohan Lal asks her to revive her old spirit: "You, who are of the people, their trusted Old Mother. Remember the Quit India days? You cannot quit!" (p. 123). He is voicing the sentiments of the novelist that Sonamitti cannot bear to lose Meera’s Grandma. This is to reiterate faith in the tried Satyagrahis and trusted followers of Gandhi for undertaking the task of national reconstruction after the attainment of freedom.

A Goddess Wandering is thus a literary transcript of Gandhian concept of freedom as a means to reach higher ends, although the affluent and powerful persons are anxiously striving to misuse freedom for their selfish ends. The novelist makes us realise that freedom in Gandhi’s reckoning cannot be the privilege of a few unscrupulous individuals to amass wealth. The suggestion is clear that people have to be on their guard to usher in an era of real freedom after Gandhi’s dream.

Rooted more deeply in Gandhian thought, and its relevance to modern times, Shadow from Ladakh (1966) is an ambitious work whose narrative is packed with Gandhi's significant utterances and events, making it thereby a piece of journalism written, of course, in a serious vein. The novel dramatises the conflict between Gandhigram, a village where the Gandhian way prevails, and the adjoining Steeltown, a symbol of newly industrialized India. The clash which develops into a menacing catastrophe challenging our traditional ways and moorings, is rounded off into a hastily contrived happily situation. The story is the fictional reconstruction of a plea for leading a life of fullness and intensity, resulting from the synthesis of Gandhian inheritance and modern technology.
Satyajit, a brilliant economist educated at Cambridge teaches at Shantiniketan. He is persuaded by Vinoba Bhave to guide the destiny of Gandhigram, a village modelled on the ideals of Gandhi by the Bhoodhan leader, Satyajit, his wife Suruchi and their only child Sumita take to the life of the austeres and ascetic Gandhian code in Gandhigram. Near the village is Steeltown, a steel production unit, established by the government in pursuance of its policy of rapid industrialisation. The chief engineer of Steeltown is Bhaskar equipped with his American training and westernised outlook. In the wake of the Chinese aggression, Bhaskar seeks the permission of the government to expand his factory and this would mean the liquidation of Gandhigram. Satyajit proposes to lead a peace mission to Ladakh so as to meet Chinese force with soul-force. The unilateral withdrawal of the Chinese forces renders his peace-march irrelevant. Satyajit now plans to undertake a fast unto death against the decision of the government to annex Gandhigram. Sumita visits the club set up by Bhaskar half way between Steeltown and Gandhigram. Her frequent visits draw her close to the young engineer and they decide to marry. Bhaskar drop the proposal to destroy the village and finally leads a procession from Steeltown to Gandhigram to announce Satyajit’s victory.

Basing the plot on the doom cast by the Chinese invasion, Bhattacharya has posed a very pertinent but rather topical question —— How far can Gandhian ideology meet the challenge of the new situation? The answer lies neither in co-existence of two nor in the annihilation of one approach by the other but in
in the reconciliation and integration of Industrialism (Bhaakhar) and Gandhian approach (SumiHS, the alter-ego of Satyajit, the living Gandhi): "Integration — that was the poet's (Tagore's) life-long quest: integration of the simple and sophisticated, the ancient and the modern; city and village; East and West".\(^\text{17}\)

This synthesis is not the outcome of any ideological considerations but is prompted by the desires of the protagonists to lead an intense and full life. The motivating suggestion is distinct and unambiguous: one should live intensely and seek joy and beauty, rather than impose unnatural restraints by imbibing the influence of sterile austerity, represented by 'Satyajitism'. Satyajit, the Oxford-qualified economist, whom Gandhi had personally initiated into a life of service, austerity and asceticism, at long last realises the futility of having drifted to anti-life tendencies. He feels that "Suruchi was an urge for him to live, re-live, and not on the Gandhian plane. His newly won release would seek expression in the honest acceptance of every human need. But the years of his life had passed much too quickly and ... it was too late" (p.353). Thus synthesising the aestheticism of Tagore and asceticism of Gandhi, Bhattacharya has rejected anti-life forces. It is, therefore, rightly believed that "theme of life versus anti-life forces is a central theme in the novel"\(^\text{18}\) and Bhattacharya is unmistakably on the side of life because Sumita's transformation is represented as something salutary.

\(^\text{17}\) Shadow from Ladakh (Delhi: Hind Pocket Books Ltd., 1966), p.215. Subsequent references pertain to this edition of the novel and will appear in the text.

The marriage of Bhaskar and Sumita, —— of modernity and Gandhian legacy, of the turbine and the spinning wheel, of Tagore and Gandhi, of Nehru and Gandhi, —— is symbolic of the reconciliation and synthesis, and not merely the co-existence of the conflicting stand-points. They symbolism apart, their personal relationships impart human interest to the narrative and save the novel from becoming a mere rehash of press clippings, and snatches from the writings of Gandhi and Nehru. Without leading the tale with claptrap from the technical jargon of Psychology, Bhattacharya has skilfully explored the working of human mind. Vergheesa's criticism is justified only to the extent that the novel breathes an air of topicality, but his conclusion that the lack of depth in his treatment of problems of human relations is a weakness of Bhattacharya's art does not hold at least in Shadow from Ladakh. The references to the Chinese invasion and the teachings of Gandhi, Tagore and Nehru, apart from determining the philosophical structuring of the novel, provoke re-appraisals of the cherished values and goals. The life-patterns of the chief protagonists are vivid manifestations of deeply-ingrained philosophical attitudes. It is for this reason that the main characters of the novel tend to merge with the figures of history and appear to be

19 "But lack of depth in his treatment of problems of human relations is a weakness of his art. For example, though his fifth novel, Shadow from Ladakh, provides an insight into the contrasting contemporary life of India symbolised by Satyajit —— and Bhaskar .... it ends on a weak note of co-existence of these two ideologies. The inclusion of Chinese aggression as a major incident in the novel and the references to Gandhian idealism and Tagore's ideal of international brotherhood only add to the topical interest of the novel. A philosophical base rather than the prop of a topical event would have strengthened the discussion of the conflict of two ideologies". C. Paul Vergheese, "Problem of the Indian Novelist in English" in The Banasathali Patrike 12 in Bhabani Bhattacharya, p. 125.
If the whole action of the novel is something of a shadow-play cast by the Chinese peril, many of the characters are shadows too—shadow chasing shadow. Satyajit is Gandhi's shadow (or a Gandhian echo), and Bhaskar, the Chief Engineer of Steeltown, is almost a Nehruistic symbol or shadow. Satyajit's Gandhigram is distantly patterned after Gandhiji's Sevagram, and Bhaskar's Steeltown could likewise be one of the dream-edifices of Nehru, one of the 'new temples' in the secular India of Nehru's imagination.

Bhattacharya has rendered in fictional terms the veracity of the epigram, 'The king is dead. Long live the King', suggesting thereby the unholy haste with which people shift their allegiance to suit the exigencies of changed times on the one hand, and using Gandhian postulates as expedient strategy to achieve freedom on the other hand. The followers of Gandhi, particularly those in the seats of authority, pay only lip-service to Gandhian principles but cannot resist the temptation to discard Gandhi in actual practice. The assassin's bullet "had hit more than mere flesh—it had pierced a banner: the banner of love and non-violence that had been the undoing of a proud empire" (p.13). The only follower to go the whole hog with the Rahatna is Vinoba Bhave—a frail old man, bespectacled and with a sharply pointed beard, who has picked up the fallen emblem of love and "continued the work of spiritual reconstruction" (p.13). Gandhi could not live for ever, physically, but his spirit could. That has not taken place as the people in power, while owing full-throated allegiance to Gandhi, have relegated his teachings to mere expedient strategy to grab power. Impressive monuments have come up all over the country, but Gandhian ideology remains as distant...
and unattainable as ever. A reference to Gandhi for these people is nothing more than a spiritless ceremony or a mere ritual:

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

Bhabani Bhattacharya is alive to the fact that rapid economic progress is not possible without industrialisation. Steel which is needed for machine tools, tractors, big industrial plants and locomotives to fight poverty and hunger has gained an added significance for the defence of the country. Development plus defence is, therefore, the compulsion of our current history. The population explosion poses serious economic problems, which cannot be contained by self-sufficient village economy of Gandhi when the nation is faced with the problem of sheer survival. "Each tick of the clock meant an opportunity used or lost. Each five ticks or it could be four__signalled the birth of an Indian child. A child to be fed, clothed, reared, educated; given cultural fare, given employment, given his due share of the human heritage" (p.34).

Rapid industrialisation alone offers the key to improve the shattering economy and defence preparedness: "The babies would not eat steel. But steel was the spine of the economy. Steel was food and clothing and dwelling. Steel was culture and art and ritual. And steel was soon to be the honour of the people, the shield of their freedom" (p.37).

But freedom in Gandhiji's reckoning is not the ultimate aim as "it was only a step towards the aim. To wipe every tear from every eye—that alone counted. It was more than a material aim" (p.189). Spiritual regeneration will follow when
the body is fed. Satyajit, therefore, prophesies: "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" (p. 156).

Gandhigram is thus designed to be a replica of Sevagram, the "Village of service" that the Father of the Nation had founded. The apparently insignificant village is creating a social order in which all are to be equal. It is here that the principles of Gandhian economics and ethics are being worked out: "All land belonging to the co-operatives. Food from the fields distributed according to needs. Other needs met by small industries based locally; economic self-sufficiency was the set aim.... The frail old-world wheel of wood set against the giant machines of the modern age" (pp. 28-29). The people know, after Gandhi, that mechanization is inevitable only when there is dearth of labour. It becomes needless and an evil when there is a surplus of hands. An hour of trial comes with the launching of Chinese aggression against India. Lohapur or the Steeltown wants to take Gandhigram and that poses a challenge which is resolved not by confrontation but by conscious amalgam. This hour in India's national life has to be one of conscious amalgam. It's the hour of both dawn and twilight; the two are alike in content. So are the two flesh and blood symbols" (p. 344).

Satyajit is Gandhian echo whose life and thinking offers a convenient device to the novelist to recapitulate recent Indian history and evoke appropriate historical background. Deeply
versed in Gandhian lore, he is giving it a practical shape. Being thus a prisoner of his own scruples and moral principles, Satyajit has never been able to live a full-blooded life. It is, therefore, believed that "the evangelist's image is the whole of Bhattacharya's Gandhi in Shadow from Ladakh and Satyajit is depicted practically unreservedly as a Gandhi duplicate." He has fully assimilated brahmacharya ever since the birth of his daughter and the only child, Sumita and thus callously imposes unnatural restraints on Suruchi. When a young girl, from Gandhigram, namely Jhanak, revolts against social taboos, Satyajit undertakes a purificatory fast for five days as Gandhi had done at Tostatoy Farm under similar circumstances.

He plans Peace March to Ladakh to move the hearts of the Chinese by soul-force.

Satyajit embodies Gandhian principles in their entirety. Satyajitism highlights three significant strands of Gandhian way of life — Cottage industry on the economic plane, austerity and asceticism on the personal plane and non-violence on the plane of international relations. He shares with Bhaskar basic human kindness and dedication to convictions. Bireswar, is, therefore, right when he suggests: "There's Bhaskar deep within you, Satyajit! And there's you somewhere in Bhaskar, of that also I am sure" (p.344). Bireswar's criticism of Satyajit having denied the bliss of conjugal relations to Suruchi in his taking to Gandhian asceticism with a vengeance and Bhaskar's concern at Sumita's growth having been stunted under her father's cramping

influence are meant to place Satyajit in proper perspective. The obvious inference, one can draw, is that Gandhian principles have to be re-stated if they are to work successfully on the personal plane of the individual. Suruchi who has been created as a shadow of Kasturba Gandhi clinches the issue forcefully that an "ascetic woman is a contradiction in terms" and "no girl wants a life of dedication" (p.289). The exposure of Suruchi and Susita to new experiences, therefore, becomes the artistic inevitability. In Moscow, Suruchi feels the familiar ache in her heart—a longing to go back to life, when she has almost purchased some bracelets for Susita’s arm but she fears that Susita, far from appreciating motherly gesture, would conclude that "In vain had her mother spent years in Gandhi’s hermitage. In vain had she shared in the life of Satyajit" (p.49).

Satyajit’s vision prevails, at least technically, upon Bhaskar towards the close of the novel but the Gandhite tacitly comes to recognise that he has not cared to imbibe fully the import of Gandhi’s message regarding the action and interaction of different cultures. Satyajit almost reproduces Gandhi’s words when he ruminates:

This is what Gandhi said: 'No culture can live if it tries to be exclusive. I do not want my house to be walled on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want all cultures to flow freely about my house.... I refuse to be blown off my feet, though I do not propose merely to feed on the ancient cultures of our land; we have to enrich our old traditions with the experience of the new times. But the alien elements in their turn will have to be affected by the spirit of the soil. One dominant culture absorbing the rest— that cannot make for harmony; that will be an artificiality and forced unity. That we do not want (p.156).

Shadow from Ladakh is thus richly steeped in Gandhian
thought. There are numerous references to Gandhi's life and works. The relevance and strength of non-violence, brahramacharya, absence of hatred, austerity, self-sufficient village economy, etc., have been deftly introduced into the main body of the novel but the fact remains that Bhattacharya's weakness for elaboration gives the book a touch of journalism. A more concerted and sharper picture would have emerged if the novelist had cared more for these explanations to grow out of life.

Bhattacharya has sought to recreate the Gandhian spirit in Gandhigram which, with its two hundred mud houses, is seeking to build a set of values to be lived and expressed in terms of deed — complete equality, unreserved fraternity and limitless non-violence. Slogans glibly voiced everywhere have to be real in Gandhigram where the spirit of man is striving to transcend the physical. Discipline is imposed from early childhood so that it can lead to sublimating of certain impulses. Bhattacharya has vividly brought out the splendour of many-faceted personality of Gandhi, not in one but in five disciples, each representing one particular aspect of Gandhi's personality: "Gandhi was the rainbow and these men were five of the rainbow colours" (p.50). Satyajit, continuation of the man of Sevagram, is the intellectual aspect of the Mahatma; Swamiji the man of religion in Gandhi; Krishnamurti the zealous social reformer in the Mahatma; Chittaranjan Ghose the politician in Gandhi; and Madhab uncle is the embodiment of the human side of the Mahatma. These four persons with Satyajit as their nucleus represent the four corners of India having Gandhian thought as the central guiding spirit. It is for this reasons that Bhattacharya suggests: "Gandhigram
An analysis of Bhattacharya's fiction leads us to the conclusion that frequent use of Gandhian character or theme is a recurring motif in his novels. In almost every novel there is a reference to Gandhi, appearing either in the explanation of the theme or the mental make-up of the character. Gandhi is treated as an idea, a symbol and a pervasive influence. The impulse towards seeing Gandhi as a measuring-rod is obvious, along with the blind respect for him as some kind of saint figure that this implies. Bhattacharya lavishes lyricism and symbolism on the portrait of Gandhi who emerges as a god-figure or a divine. The times which are portrayed by Bhattacharya possessed dynamism that brought a reflection of Gandhi in his writings which tend to encompass his individual and social significance. Although Gandhi does not figure as a character directly, yet Bhattacharya has utilized Gandhi figure in the creation of significant characters as protogynes of Gandhi. Devesh in *So Many Hungers*, Old Minstrel in *A Goddess Named Gold* and Satyajit in *Shadow from Ladakh* are veiled representations of Gandhi. Bhattacharya seems to have devotional fervour for the Gandhi image, and this results in the emergence of an evangelist Gandhi in his novels. At times, there is something elusive and mysterious about the symbolic significance of Gandhi characters who do not always leave the impression of being characters drawn from life, but these characters at places become pointed exponents of specific symbols.

Bhattacharya seems to be seriously interested in the interpretation of Gandhian ideology and his programmes through
his fictional works. An attempt is made to show how Gandhi drew people from all walks of life into the orbit of the national movement. The novels evocatively recreate the participation of the people in the movements launched by Gandhi. The significant utterances of and events connected with Gandhi are woven into the fabric of the novels. The frequent weaving of Gandhian myth into the tale imposes a kind of rhythm on the action of the novels. As an exposition of Gandhian ideology, Bhattacharya's novels are significant addition to Gandhi literature. An elucidation of Gandhism and its relevance in the climate of India today is a worthwhile exercise of an artist to comprehend Gandhi as is done in Shadow from Ladakh.