THE SHORT FICTION OF BATTACHARYA

Bhattacharya has written quite a large number of short stories which have been collected and published in multiple volumes. His short stories fascinate the readers with the universality of their appeal, authenticity of felt experience and in particular their inexhaustible comedy. Bhattacharya has clear preference for the short story as an asset form. He enjoys writing a short story because, unlike the novel, it does not require a long consistent effort. He was indeed, not only a prolific writer but a versatile one. In his profound literary career he has produced many short stories and translations besides the six novels. His famous short fiction works are:

1. *The Golden Boat.* (Translations from Tagore, 1932)
2. *Some Memorable Yesterdays* (1941)
3. *Indian Cavalcade* (1944)
4. *Steel Hawk and Other Stories* (1968)
5. *Gandhi the writer* (1969)

Bhattacharya proved himself to be one of the greatest prose writers in Indian writing in English. He spoke for millions; and in an age of very great men he was recognized as one of the most outstanding. Certainly he excelled all of them in his restless, almost fierce energy. His energy was, indeed, boundless. His works have been translated into almost all the important Indian, European, and non-European languages.

*The Golden Boat* (1932) is a collection of Tagore’s stories, allegories and other short pieces translated into English by Bhattacharya. *Some Memorable Yesterdays* (1941) and *Indian Cavalcade* (1944) deal with the great events and personalities that abound in the pages of Mughal and British history. They are an ordered sequence of several articles dealing with episodes from Indian History published earlier in news papers and periodicals. *Steel Hawk*
and Other stories (1968) is an anthology of short stories. The stories in it can be read in relation to specific events, and the events bring to surface some hidden emotions. Gandhi the Writer (1969) was specially written to commemorate the birth centenary of Gandhi in 1969. It represents Bhattacharya’s attempt of survey and assessment.

Golden Boat was first published in London in 1932. A second and revised edition was brought out in Indian in 1956. Bhattacharya mentioned in the translator’s Note that some pieces have been dropped and others added in the Indian edition. The collection opens appropriately enough with the piece, Tell me a Story which effectively portrays the love of storytelling inherent in human nature. The other piece The Wedding is the touching story of a Rajput prince and princess whose wedding ceremony is interrupted when the former is summoned to battle. The prince is slain. The princess hurries to his kingdom and completes the wedding by committing Sati. The piece has good combination of dramatic narration and portrayal of deep emotion.

In the other two pieces Lotus Offering by the Buddha and the Master’s appreciation of sincerity as opposed to ostentation are convincingly brought out. The stories salvation, Heaven and Earth and Attainment have Tagore’s deep humanity and his suspicion of asceticism. The three stories reveal Tagore’s philosophy of life. Heaven and Earth is a dramatic piece in which Indra, Brihaspati and Kartikeya are shown taking part in a discussion. On the other hand, Kartikeya points out that the Earth too cannot survive unless it re-establishes vitalizing contact with Heaven.

Attainment is the story of an ascetic who performs intense tapas to attain the place of an immortal in heaven. A Simple girl of the wood-gatherers becomes his devotee and vainly tries to win his attention. She brings flowers and fruits and water in leaf-cups but her gifts are untouched. Later, Indra gives the girl strange power of enchantment and the ascetic begins to notice her. She
however, is sorry that she has been standing in the way of his attainment; with his permission she goes to a place far away. When finally Indra is pleased with his penance and invites him to enter Heaven as an immortal, the ascetic astonishes him by saying that he no longer seeks Heaven. The boon that he seeks now is the company of the girl of the wood-gatherers.

_Salvation_ is another story with a similar moral. A woman who has lost her husband becomes a recluse and spends all her time offering worship to his image. She refuses to join a band of pilgrims going to a fair. In the end true knowledge comes to her and she joins the pilgrims for amongst the living she has found that which was lost. Preference of Earth to Heaven is also seen in another story, _Farewell to Heaven_. The _Ghost_ is an allegorical story which states that India is governed by the ghost of the past. _Bird’s Feather_ is an example of delicately fanciful and poetic observation. Tagore brings out the contrast between what the feather means to the child and to the mother. Some of the pieces included in _The Golden Boat_ are allegories like _Pathway, Love of Rahul, Life and Mind, He is Eternal_ and _He is newly born._

The next prose piece of Bhattacharya _Some Memorable Yesterdays_ with its alternative caption _Men, Women and Events of Indian History_, was published in (1941). It is mainly a selection from a series of sketches which Bhattacharya contributed to _The Hindu_ of Madras as a weekly feature, under the general caption _This week in Indian History_. After seven years in 1948 he brought out the outstanding work _Indian Cavalcade_ which deals on a broad canvas with the unforgettable events and personalities that abound in the pages of Mughal and British history. Bhattacharya divides the book under three headings Men, Women and three Historic events. The book presents to the reader’s eye the pageant of Indian History from the time of Vikramaditya to the country’s emergence as a free state at the solemn midnight ceremony on August 14, 1947.
The first piece in the book gives us a view of the greatness and glory of the age of Vikramaditya which is compared to the Age of Pericles in Greece or the Elizabethan Age in England. The military strength of the kingdom, freedom foreign harassment, the growth of trade and commerce, the achievements in the realms of art, religion and culture, the exemplary toleration practiced by the court, are all brought out in the brief survey.

*An Empire Goes Down* describes the defeat of the Vijayanagar Empire at the battle of Talikota by the Muslim forces led by the ruler of Bijapur. K. R. Chandrasekharan says about Bhattacharya’s historic and National sense as:

“Bhattacharya sees these momentous events not only with the eyes of the historian and the literary artist but also those of the dispassionate moralist.”

Some of the more important scenes in the pageant of Indian history depicted in the book concern the period of Mughal rule. The story of Babar’s rise from humble beginnings to an emperor’s throne is effectively told. Babar is studied not merely as conqueror or ruler but also as a man and as a diarist. Babar’s literary flair as shown in his ‘Memoir’ is also touched upon. Two sketches are devoted to Akbar. One describes his attempt to found a world religion Din Ilahi. Bhattacharya acknowledges the Emperor’s sincerity in his quest for truth. The other episode presents Akbar in the role of a heartless and cunning conqueror laying siege to and taking the strong fort at Asirgarh. Between the episodes which Akbar figures and the following sketch of Aurangzib there are few interludes. One gives a gruesome picture of Portuguese pirates marauding the coast of Bengal. Another is a sympathetic character sketch of Jahanara, daughter of Shah Jahan, and her love affairs.

Among the several historical heroines that shone resplendently in the galaxy, Bhattacharya has selected the most prominent among them _Padmini, Nurjahan, Muntaz and Durgavati_. He makes a touching sketch of Padmini, the
peerless queen of Mewar. Alaudin desired to get hold of the fair one. He attacked Merwar and demanded the surrender of the queen. It was of no avail. But later Alauddin saw her face in a mirror. Then he managed to get hold of Bhim Singh and sent message to him to surrender Padmini in exchange for him. After a long debate it was decided upon to surrender Padmini. At the time of departure, a number of Rajputs shot like thunder. A fierce battle took place and both sides suffered heavy losses. Allauddin prepared himself to make a fresh attack with redoubled force. But by the time Alauddin stormed into the fortless, he saw smoke issuing forth from the chamber where Padmini perished in flames.

In *Nur Jahan* Bhattacharya pens a heart-rending account of the rise and fall of Nur Jahan. She grew up a lovely and accomplished girl, was an adept in music, dancing, painting and poetry. She was given in marriage to Ali Quli, a young Persian, who took office under prince Salim. But an evil plan was hatched against him and soon he was hacked to pieces. Later Mihirunnisa joined as a lady-in-waiting of Jahangir’s mother. Jahangir chanced to see her on the New Year Day celebrations. She was styled Nur Mahal and later Nur Jahan (Light of the World). He was proud of her prowess as he was of her wisdom. Tie and age had not withered her beauty. She was endowed with a sharp intellect and an iron will. She was practical and resourceful. She was made the queen of Jahangir the master mistress of his heart. But she was too domineering and would not brook the rise of anyone else.

Dr. Syamala Rao compares the image Nur Jahan with the Shakespeare’s inimitable description of Cleopatra in his *A Study of Bhabani Bhattacharya* (p.87) Nur Jahan came into conflict with the great general Mahabat Khan. She was jealous of his prestige. But Mahabat launched a surprise attack. She surrendered voluntarily to him. But she was quite a diplomat. She tutored her husband and he could with Mahabat’s confidence. He played the double game successfully. He soon attacked Mahabat who fled into the hills of Mewar.
Nur Jahan became the empress again. As Jahangir died a year afterwards, her rule came to an abrupt end. Then her enemy Shah Jahan ascended the throne and she spent a retired life in her last days. With a catchy title “Shah Jahan’s Dream in marble”, Bhattacharya writes in glowing terms of the glory of Muntaj Mahal, originally known as Arjumand Banu. While her husband made a busy routine of the day quite methodically, she assisted him in studying the petitions. Rarely did a distressed person go away without success. He consulted her and looked forward to her wise decisions. She left proud of helping the needy. Shah Jahan was moved by the gleam in her eyes and the fire in her words. It is sheer destiny that she should have become the mother of Aurangazeb. She breathed last at her thirty seventh years.

He lost all charm of life and wanted to renounce the world and turn a fakir. But he had sacred love for the empire and an idea struck him to build a monument of eternal memory. Twenty thousand men were employed on the building and it took seventeen years to complete it. It has been the product of a combination of European and Asiatic genius. It is an apt combination of spacious design with an almost feminine elegance.

Shah Jahan determined to make the dear remains to Agra, where they were interred in a favourite garden on the Jamuna side, while a mausoleum was being erected, which, after the lapse of centuries still attracts the admiration of the world. Experts in different patterns of arts and from different nooks and corners were drawn and materials were brought from various places round the globe. The idea and spirit of the great monument with its grace and rhythm was entirely Shah Jahan’s own, although diversity of opinion exists regarding the person that designed the architecture. It was indeed his dream in marble. Tagore said that Shah Jahan’s wish was to make imperishable tear drop of love.
Bhattacharya gives a good account of Durgavati who ruled Narmada Plateau in the 16th century. She was noted for her beauty, daring and administrative skill. She was good at shooting and hunting. Circumstances forced her to be given in marriage to the Gond Raja. But he died young leaving a four year old boy named Bir Narain. She assumed the government as regent. She proved herself to an able ruler whose interest lay in the welfare of her subject. The eyes of the neighboring kingdom were cast on the powerful kingdom of Garha-kantaka Durgavati ruled. She gallantly resisted the unprovoked aggression of Akbar’s general Asaf Khan. She made her escape into the jungles, but later made a fresh attack. She was hit by two arrows and so she requested her minister Adhar to put an end to her life. But as he did not respond she stabbed herself and thus saved her honour without falling into the hands of Moghuls.

In the *Events* Bhattacharya takes up *British invasion of Nepal* The marquis of Hastings came to India as Governor and commander-in-chief and he decided to take action. He addressed a letter to the Raja of Nepal threatening him with dire consequences if he did not evacuate two districts The Raja of Nepal was for peace. The Governor-General made his diplomatic plan. He kept thirty thousand troops ready for invasion. But the Gurka Commander Balachandra sigh keenly awaiting the British. Major General Gillespie tried to make a surprise attack but was repulsed and was shot through. The second attack too was set at naught. Soon water supply was cut off. But Balachandra showed matchless powers and attacked the Britishers who showered encomiums on his military astuteness.

The Gurkas possessed such uncommon skill that they shattered the morale of opponents. Later General Centerlony made some improvements in heavy artillery. But still they were not equal to the strength of the Gurkas. The very existence of British India was endangered by this war with Nepal. Circumstances forced him to plead for peace. He surrendered all the territory
under British occupation. British India gained Darjeeling and Simla. The achievement of Hastings is an established fact; his character remains something of an enigma.

In *Suppression of the Thugs*, Bhattacharya states that the Thugs formed a vast secret society of murderers consisting of both Hindus and Muslims. Both of them worshipped Kali in the Hindu way. After the Mogul and Tartar invasion, they burst upon Indian society. Even the British authorities know nothing of these hereditary murderers. Attempts at destroying them proved futile. They became bolder and their murder trade became more profitable than ever. Lord William Bentinck deputed colonel Sleeman to destroy them who organized a tremendous drive against the Thugs. The police force was inspired under him, thus started the suppression of a secret society. Colonel Sleeman was wonder struck at the secrecy with which murders were committed. They used to move along with their intended victims by making a semblance of friendship and taking along with them some children to avoid being suspected. Thus there was veil of mystery for their bloodless murders. By distorting the dead victims, they used to bury them. They offered the victims as offerings to Kali. They believed in omens- especially those of asses and Jakals, deer, the wolf and birds. The verbal form of the word Thug means to deceive.

In the Indian National congress, Bhattacharya gives an evolutionary process of the Indian National congress. George Thompson gave an appeal to the intellectuals of Calcutta through his oration. He roused their feelings and the outcome was the British Indian Society. Later the British Indian Association was formed in 1851. Although they talked of the rights of the people, they meant the rights of the landed aristocracy. In 1876, the “Indian Association” was formed consisting of intellectuals and Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. But it later became the Indian National Congress. Meanwhile there were a series of political disturbances consequent on the Bengal cyclone and
famine. Various conferences were held and issues were brought into lime light by different political journals.

In 1883, Surendra Nath Banerji was arrested on charge of contempt. However an Indian Judge made a note of dissent. People became furious at this and it created a great impression. Then open air political meetings were started. Hume, Secretary to the Government of Indian noticed the dangerous clouds. He started making the plans, which was to result in the birth of the Indian national union. The Bengal leaders talked of an all Indian society. Then the Indian National Union formed with Hume as General Secretary. Hume took up the task of diverting the dangerous currents of Indian political consciousness into peaceful channels. It was rechristened as the Indian National Congress. Although established in unhappy times, it was a most significant one. The Middle class people were taken into the fold and they had an opportunity of voicing their feelings. Bhattachraya used a simple language. Bhattacharya has chosen a few heroes and heroines who have exhibited their talents in various events of history. He has made an imprint of his personality on this unique method of narration. He is endowed with such a rare gift of narration that he creates interest among the readers.

The sketches that make Indian Cavalcade appeared in periodicals in ‘The Hindus’ as a regular Sunday feature, in My India and The Aryan Path. He used some passages from standard works of translation of the chronicles of old. Dr. Syamala Rao says about Indian Cavalcade as:

“Dr. Bhattacharya has made keen and penetrating analysis of historical subjected and the outcome of it is the outstanding prose work ‘Indian Cavalcade.’”

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The third deals with the killing of Guru Govind Singh; the Sikh leader, by the sons of a Pathan horse trader whom he had murdered earlier. The rise of Shivaji and his inroads against the Mughal Empire is the fourth of these episodes. Aurangzeb is presented as an austere, efficient, hardworking, but without a grain of generosity, mercy or imagination.

The growth of Maharatta power, the disintegration of the Mughal Empire, the Cruel loot of Delhi and the massacre of at least 20,000 men by Nadir Shah of Persia, the battle at Panipat between a Pishwa and Nadir Shah’s successor, the birth of Hyderabad as a state and the brief ascendancy of the Maharattas once again under Madhoji Scindia are the events dealt with before the rise of the British power. Bhattacharya describes ‘The Black Hole of Calcutta’ and exonerates Siraj-Ud-Daula from blame for the incident. Some other episodes belonging to the British period are Warren Hastings’ duel with Philip Francis, a British expedition against Afghanistan, the unscrupulous subjugation and conquest of Sind, the slaughter of Bahadur Shah, the last of the Mughals, the passing of the Press act curbing the freedom of the Indian press, the sentence of imprisonment passed on the patriot, Surendranath Banerjee, the agitation by Anglo-Indians against the pro-Indian Ilbert Bill and notorious massacre at Jallian Walla Bagh.

The Ilbert Bill introduced during the Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon sought to give the higher Indian civilian and judicial officers the same power as their English counterparts in the matter of trying Europeans. This just measure was fiercely opposed by Englishmen in India who organized themselves efficiently for the purpose and therefore succeeded at least partially. Bhattacharya points out that the intelligentsia of the country learnt an excellent lesson from the organized opposition and the result was the birth of the Indian National Congress. Apart from its value as an interesting chronicle of events, Indian Cavalcade has considerable literary value. Bhattacharya succeeded in
presenting significant scenes from history and its heritage in an effective way. K.R. Chandrasekharan appreciates the skills of the author as:

“Skill in dramatizing incidents, capacity to describe battles and sieges and deeds of velour or cruelty, power to depict emotion or to portray character and besides, the wisdom to make generalizations and inferences and to draw a moral are qualities which the book displays in abundant measure”

In the story Public Figure of the anthology Bhattacharya satirizes the hypocrisy and craze for publicity exhibited by certain persons who donate jewelers to the country’s Defense fund. It presents a post colonial male protagonist, a rich business man hungry for name and fame. To satisfy this hunger he gets associated with a number of societies professing public welfare. He lives in a society where people are known by their offices. For instances, the Deputy Commissioner Ram Lal is known as D.C. Sharma. As Honorary Secretary of welfare fund P.F. decides to promote his name using every subterfuge. A grand function is organized by him to be presided over by a V.I.P.

The highlight of this function, he decides, would be the donation of gold ornaments by full coverage of the function in the newspapers; he invites the local correspondent to have tea at his residence, a subtle way of bribing a shrewd man like Muthuswami. His scheme gets a big jolt when his wife and daughter flatly refuse to oblige him. It is only when he gives the temptation of new pieces of the latest design, that the daughter agrees, and Public Figure gets what he had been waiting for – the supreme moment of his life.

The V.I.P. is garlanded by his fourth daughter, the opening song is sung by his fifth daughter, he himself gets half hour for introductory remarks and another half an hour for the concluding remarks, and finally his third daughter Nolini donates some pieces of her jewelry. Time seems to stop still for Public
Figure _ “Pride visible on his broad face, pendulous lips parted in a self-satisfied smile. But suddenly there is a second jolt for him. The V.I.P. sees another ruby necklace in Nolini’s neck and asks her to donate that too. Bhattacharya described well the ironical humorous scene. Thus Public Figure is at the brink of disaster, but his agile brain once again whispers the same mantra in her ear “latest design”. His missed heart beat regains its rhythm when his daughter understands the sign and donates the necklace too. Thus momentary recognition is gained, though at a high price. The end of the story is slightly ironic. Public Figure does not get enough space in the newspaper.

The story *My Brave Great Uncle* focuses on male psyche. The old man of the story, nearly seventy, with a wrinkled face and toothless smile impresses the villagers with his supernatural yarns and thus becomes a legend amongst the people of his small village. He claims that the flesh-creeping tales are not just the products of his fertile imagination, but the stuff of his true experience. Thus he has succeeded in creating an image of a very brave man who can command ghosts and goblins. In fact, the old man is afraid of ghosts. He cannot sleep alone and constantly needs light during the nights to ward of his fear. The façade of fearless is a cover for his fear. His yarns fulfill his hunger for recognition and satisfy his sense of self-respect. The mask comes off pathetically when the villagers insist that he should spend the night in the dead priest’s room. As per the Hindu custom, the dead body has to be kept under vigil at night and there could not be a better choice than great uncle famous for familiarly spooks, goblins. Even when he is exposed, he wants to keep the mask saying that he cannot clap his hands to ward off the ghosts as one of his hands is placed on the bier all the time. The narrator explains it in the following words:

“Sick with his morbid fear, he had been living in the protective shell of his brave yarns, himself the dramatized hero! He clapped
his hands out of a wish thought: his fear intense, the way he fought fear was no less intense.  

*Pictures in the Fire* is another story, in which the protagonist is not an Indian. In this piece Bhattacharya stresses that the racial differences are of no importance. Basic human nature everywhere is the same. In fact, racial similarities are more revealing than the differences in elucidating the principles that govern man’s behavior. The story is a graphic example of the male ego. Henry Brown, a creative writer, sends his first story to a magazine in the name of his wife Josephine Brown. The brittle male ego, apprehensive of rejection, seeks protection behind his wife’s name. His story is accepted. The wife pleads against it and implores him to use his own name, but he continues to write in her name. He is happy because he feels he has created her, “created the as surely as any character in his stories”. It is only when she becomes famous as a creative writer and even starts enjoying this new image of hers as a separate famous identity that he begins to feel angry with her.

The vulnerable ego of man can never tolerate the fame of his wife. Man regards woman as his possession like his cigarette box. When a man asserts his own individuality, it shocks his ego. Unable to bear her fame, Henry blames the whole female race. He feels a great need of fame for himself. What a contrast between male and female psyche! While a woman feels happy to be the wife of a famous man, man’s ego is shattered when he feels he is a mere appendage to his famous wife. His attempt to get fame results in futility when his story is rejected, while the next story in Josephine’s name is accepted. The shattered male ego finds release by joining World War – II as a soldier. The war gives him a flight from harsh, heavy realities.
As said by Asha Viswas in *Bhabani Bhattacharya Some Points of View*, in *Mere Monkeys* Bhattacharya echoes Conrad Lorenz and Desmond Morris. As far as the basic instincts of hunger, fear, anger and sexual desire are concerned, there is no difference between a monkey and a man. A female as mother is a higher form of life inhabiting a dimension which is too mysterious for comprehension. Species make no difference. All female species are alike when there a threat to their motherhood. The female monkey, perched on the tamarind tree with her week old baby clasped to her bosom, is a picture of pride and contentment. Her wild amber eyes are soft and if the pinched orb of a monkey face could smile, this one smiled.

The other monkeys, invited by her fond cries of motherhood, come and fondle the babe by turns, taking care not to hurt it. The huge outsider, an over grown male of the species represents naked lust and aggression, consuming-love and harmony as a typical representative of male species; the monkey is innately and instinctively aggressive. It shows the restlessness of male species always in need of change, excitement and challenge, ready to strike out whatever comes in its way. The way this outsider snatches the baby monkey, and drops it to the ground expresses brutal aggression with a will to dominate. There is touch of anthropomorphism about the group mourners. It is difficult not to attribute human feelings to the female monkey when she takes revenge in a mysteriously subtle way. Though she herself is killed in the attempt, she has destroyed the aggressor, the killer of her baby.

A moment of Eternity depicts a lower middle class Indian woman married to a clerk who has lost his job. The husband’s worry to provide for his wife and two children haunts him day and night and results in tuberculosis. It is her enormous love for her husband which fills her with tremendous anguish. For this woman, her husband is her whole world. She hardly cares for the children during his illness. Dr. AshaViswas expresses her opinion as:
“A liberated modern woman may dismiss the story as an exaggerated clap trap, yet the truth is that for a Hindu woman, there is no separate existence, away from her husband.”

The *Acrobats* presents overpowering love between two males—a father and his son. In the absence of a mother, the son lives in close companionship of his father. The father too had drawn very close to the growing child with warmth of heart so intense that it was hard to bear. When the boy feels his father’s attraction for a maidservant coming between him and his father, he is unable to understand it, yet he instinctively resents this outsider because it represents a threat to his love. When the father does not care for his verbal resentment, he wants to runway from this miserable situation, but unbreakable bonds of his love for his father hold him helpless. Finally, he decides to express his anger against this new intruder in a masochistic way. He deliberately loses his balance on the pole and falls on the stone pavement. When he regains consciousness, he explains his reasons.

*She, Born of Light* too compares and contrasts the male and female drives. Dhruba, the artist who makes a picture of Suta, is more interested in giving a new realism to art by bringing it closer to life. He is very well aware that Suta loves him, but he was denying himself life while he created it in his picture. Even when she agrees to denude herself so that he can give realism to his art, it is the artist in him that prevails. Behind this artistic urge is the drive for recognition, all else is secondary. For Suta, a simple girl with commonplace needs, near twenty and ripening into womanhood,” the very act of taking off of her clothes means complete surrender to the artist she loves. All immersed in his art, when he ignores the woman in her, she breaks.

Even when she leaves him saying, “we shall never meet again”, he does not follow her because now he has been able to paint the trapped soul of a woman. So far his creation has only the reality of flesh and bone and warmth
of life. The artist in him is satisfied: recognition is ensured, his physical desire can wait. For Suta, love is superb. She fulfils her desire at the doors of Nakul, the down-to-earth peasant. Dr. Asha Viswas says about Bhattacharya’s skills as:

“Bhattacharya has tried to show hidden human desires.”

Bhattacharya was a student in London when Mahatma Gandhi went to attend the Second Round Table Conference in 1931. He met the Mahatma there and felt the everlasting impact of his hypnotic personality on him. On returning to India, he witnessed the traumatic agonies and sufferings of the Indians. Bhattacharya’s *Gandhi the Writer* (The Image as It Grew) was published in October 1969 to commemorate the centenary of Gandhiji’s birth. The project was sponsored by the National Book Trust, India, and the Ford Foundation provided the author with financial assistance to enable him to work on it uninterruptedly. The publisher’s blurb declares that in this book Bhattacharya has studied Gandhiji “predominantly as a writer. This, however, is not the impression given by the book. Only five or six chapters deal more or less exclusively with Gandhiji’s writings. The bulk of the book is concerned with other subjects like the evolution of his political weapons, his contacts with other great men, his image in the West, his way of life and his philosophy.

Gandhi used more than two million words. The English weeklies *Young India* and *Harijan* commanded effective relationship all over the country. Bhattacharya appreciated that Gandhi kept up the quantity as well as the qualitative standard even in the crucial periods when the country ablaze with a national conflagration, and the obligation to direct countless messes. It was said that Gandhi corrected the prepositions wrongly used by the foreigners and received their acclaim. Gandhi started writing quite early in his youth. The words that flowed from Gandhi’s pen stand as a living record of his amazing inner development. This eventually led him from untruth to truth, from darkness to light and from death to immortality. Gandhi was influenced early
by the ancient epics and the play of lords- Harischandra, Rama and Truth became in Gandhi’s mind synonymous interchangeable terms. Gandhi was influenced by the Bible, Roman law and common law. He also read the Gita and the Sermon on the Mount equally. *The Gita* became his infallible guide of conduct and a dictionary of daily reference. He was deeply influenced by Tolstoy’s book *The Kingdom of God is within you* and Ruskin’s work *Unto This Last*. Ruskin’s book expressed in clear terms the innermost echo of some of his own growing convictions.

Two of Gandhi’s close associates began to run a magazine entitled *Indian Opinion* which was meant to voice the feelings of Indians in South Africa. Without *Indian Opinion* there would have practically been no Satyagraha. It almost became the means for the study of human nature in all its castes and shades. Gandhi himself penned several biographical sketches of well-known personalities. He was greatly benefited by the writings of Thoreau and Emerson. Gandhi translated an idea into a technique, developed it step by step over a span of forty years and having won complete command over millions of hearts, he pitched united ‘soul force’ against relentless brute force finally by one of the most astounding feats recorded in world history, he drew conquest from what looked perilously as the chasm of defeat. It may be said that where Thoreau’s bridge building stopped, Gandhi’s began.

Gandhi was overwhelmed by Tolstoy’s works like *The Kingdom of God is Within You, Reason and Religion, Gospel in Brief, What to do: How shall we escape?* He was quite anxious to communicate with the great writer. He made bold to write him seeking his advice on the problem of civil disobedience and Satyagraha. Tolstoy promptly wrote back that the very problem of the fight between gentleness and brutality, between humanity and love are felt in his own country too. Gandhi sent a copy of his own book ‘Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule’ to Tolstoy.
In the *Young India* he wrote that he longed for freedom from the English Yoke and he sought to deliver the so-called weaker races of the earth from the crushing wheels of western exploitation. Gandhi did not make any literary pretensions. His *Atmakatha* (Autobiography) was serialized in *Nav Jivan* and later its English translation was issued through *Young India*. He also wrote *History of Satyagraha* and *Key to Health*. His style is clear, lucid, precise and full of concentrated directness. The key point behind all this is disciplined conscience. He issued the English rendering of the letters in a booklet *From Yaravat Mandir*.

Gandhi was certainly not a “born” writer. He achieved literature without being literary. It was by hard work and will that he made himself, an outstanding and gifted writer. He developed simple, straight-forward, orderly, precise, well reasoned, lucid, adequately condense, lucid, adequately condense, and more than all. Single minded and persuaded style. He could use pithy sentences that contained the very essence of what he wanted to say. He had perfectly mastered the quality of clarity. In the past when pomposity was reckoned a literary grace, Gandhi’s writing was a sharp departure from artistry. As he was deeply engrossed in social problems and as most of his time was spent behind the bars. Gandhi could devote very little time to any serious and constant study.

The Satyagraha Ashram established in 1915, was human laboratory where Gandhi tested his moral and spiritual hypotheses. He was of deep-rooted conviction that truth alone would endure, but all the rest would be swept away before the tide of time. As a writer Gandhi had much more to say about Ahimsa than about any other subject. He found his lone abode in a prison cell at Yaravada. He began to live in a world of literature inhabited not only by his early inspirers- Ruskin and Tolstoy and many other writers like Scott, Ben Jonson, Goethe, H.G. Wells, Bernard Shaw and Kipling.
Gandhi Wrote *Satyagraha in South Africa* which was a prelude to experiments with Truth. *The story of My Experiments with Truth* was serialized in his paper every week for over a period of three years. Mahadev Desai took up its translation into English for *Young India*. His idea was not to write the autobiography in the Western sense where the author’s ego has a predominant place. His chief aim was to recount his numerous experiments with Truth. Major part of the work deals with the recordation of the historical, political and social aspects as well as all those on personal plane. The book discloses with relentless candor each dark area in the author’s life. The first part ends with Gandhi’s departure from England. The second part begins with the narration of his way of life in India and ends with his second voyage to South Africa. The next part shows Gandhi in the midst of storm that burst upon him in all its fury. In part four, the Autobiography reaches a turning point. Here Gandhi devotes his pages to the birth of Satyagraha, his self restraint and literary training.

The final part with its 43 chapters is the longest in the book. It is set entirely in India. He set about to start his own Ashram. Though he had to face several hurdles his indomitable will persisted. Then the story goes on to the non-cooperation movement. The book concludes rather abruptly after a discussion of the Nagpur session of the congress in 1925. Gandhi should have related his later experiences when he lived more intensely. His contacts with Oxford and Cambridge intellectuals were of a higher order. They could draw the impression that he was a man leading a life devoted to the ideals in which he believed with every fiber of his being. Gandhi attained world stature. Supreme leader of the Indian freedom movement, he was revered as the “Father of the Nation”. His wish to meet Romaine Rolland had at last been fulfilled.
Bhattacharya writes with greater credence about Gandhi’s visit to Romaine Rolland. Rolland after having a vivid portrait of Gandhi in his mind—the outward visage and the man within—wrote his biography of Mahatma Gandhi, subtitled, “The man who became one with the *Universal Being*.” This was virtually the first book through which Gandhi was being presented to Western Readers. Gandhi was free from any kind of religious dogma and bias. The chief kernel of his belief was that God was only one, but was worshiped under different nomenclature. He translated into English a collection of verses of his confinement under the caption *Songs from Prison*.

Gandhi started a weekly named *Harijan* devoted mainly to the welfare of the “Men of God”. Several letters of appreciation from different corners of the globe poured in. It was often enriched by Gandhi’s depiction of the human scene out of his experiences. Despite of its suppression on several occasions, Gandhi was sure that the Harijan could be suppressed, but not its message. Speaking about the English edition of the Harijan he speaks in glowing terms of the indispensability of the English Language.

Gandhi continued writing for the *Harijan* till almost the day of his death, Jan 30, 1948. Indeed Gandhi was the prince of journalists. He had an eagle eye with which he chiseled every word. He was insisting on right expression, on adherence to truth where facts were concerned, on the necessity of not using one word more than necessary and the use of a bare rocky literary directness. If it is said of Wordsworth, baldness is applicable to Gandhi’s style. Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Home Rule) was a slender volume of about a hundred pages. It pointed rightly to the sore spots in the current crisis in world civilization. It is a great book noted for its clarity and beauty. The language of it is simple and logical; it is economical, condensed and poetic.
Gandhi had a high sense of appreciation for the work turned out by Andrews and Tagore at Shantiketan. A good amount of correspondence was continued between Gandhi and stormy periods. Tagore was wedded to the life and ideals of Gandhi. In April 1936, Gandhi presided over all India literary conference where he stressed the importance of villages. He decided to settle down in Saigon out of humanitarian impulse. It developed into an ashram and various new huts grew up in the vicinity. The daily routine was strictly followed with communal prayers and spinning in the morning. Gandhi spent most of his time in writing and devotional prayers and spinning in the morning. Gandhi spent most of his time in writing and devotional prayers. In 1940 Saigon received a new name Sevagram, a village dedicated to service. Gandhi was highly candid both in speech and writing and Sevagram became the centre of holy pilgrimage.

Gandhi’s impact on Indian literature is considerable. It is twofold. Bhattacharya appreciates Gandhi as a writer’s writer. Gandhi did not produce any original creative work but inspired creativity on a large scale. Bhattacharya opines that Gandhi exercised a potent influence on our languages and literature, both directly through his own writings in English and Gujarati and indirectly through the movements generated by his revolutionary thought and practice. Hindi literature with a galaxy of writers like Premchand, Kausik, Sudarsan, etc, came under the full impact of Gandhian ideas. His impact on Gujarati was naturally stronger than the influence on the other regional literatures of India. His simple, direct natural prose style aimed at appealing not to the classes alone, but to the masses as well. Bhattacharya says as Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar there are two kinds of writers in India –those that made Gandhian philosophy the main content of their literature and those that were influenced by Gandhi but adopted an independent line.
Bhattacharya identified that influence of Gandhi is everywhere on almost all Indian languages. According to Bhattacharya Gandhi influenced the main language like Kannada, Assamese, and Bengali. Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Tagore, Tarasankar Nath Bennerji, etc, selected the ideals of Gandhi for their subjects of non-violence, truth and fearlessness. His influence on Tamil literature was no less. Rajagopalachari, Kalyanasundarnar and Varadarajulu Nayudu were inspired by the rise of Gandhism. Bhattacharya finds out that Gandhi’s influence was equally felt on Marathi literature mostly on drama upon Khadikar, Warerkar Sane Guruji and Prema Kartak. He expresses the similar opinion the similar opinion that Gandhi’s influence on Indo-Anglian literature too was considerably remarkable. According to him, under Gandhi’s influence, Indian creative thought was being centred increasingly on the life, the joys and sorrows of the common man.

Bhattacharya relied on the sources of history and for Gandhi’s work, he appears to have relied completely on the original works of Gandhiji, and was much benefited by the meaningful discussions with the most distinguished novelist Ethel Manning and Prof. George Catlin and Prof. Geoffrey Ashe. He received valuable suggestions and considerable help from individuals like Louis Fisher, Tendulkar, K.M.Munshi and Pyarelal. Bhattacharya shows us the simplicity of Gandhi’s style is unique in the annals of Indo-Anglian literature, more than the impact of his style, his impact of the theme and aspects of his life is profound on his contemporaries. Dr. Syamala Rao says as:

“Bhattacharya does not discuss the merits and demerits of Gandhi as a writer. He just gives an evolutionary process of his writings and their impact.”

And K. R. Chandrasekharan tells as:

“He attempts an original appraisal of the influence of Gandhi on contemporary literature”
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