NATIONALISM AND GANDHISM

Nationalism is a weapon for a dominated community to fight with the foreign rule of an imperialist country. The concept of Nationalism was born in the eighteenth century during the French Revolution in the European continent as adoration of collective power.

India was a conglomeration of diverse states and principalities where there lived various peoples of different races and religions, castes and sub castes speaking a number of languages and dialects. By 1875, the seeds of nationalism sown by the British rule itself had germinated in the soil of India, and the erstwhile geographical term had acquired a new meaning and a new significance.

The full development of this movement was marked by the birth in 1885 of the Indian National Congress. The Indian National Congress opposed all official acts by constitutional methods. The very distinct characteristic of Congress in its early stage was its loyalty to the British Government. The Congress leaders of this stage, viz. Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, etc. were products of English education and they had genuine respect for British culture.

As a reaction to the liberal leadership of the Congress that saw in the British rule a ‘divine dispensation’, a new attitude towards the British Government grew by the end of the nineteenth century. Eminent moderate leaders held the British Government responsible for the economic ruin of the country; they brought about a change of outlook and a change of goal to the party. These new leaders viz., Tilak, Bipin Chandrapal, etc. were generally known as extremists in contrast to the old leaders who came to be known as Moderates.
The extremists held Indian Civilization and Indian values of life in a high esteem. They blamed the old leaders for their attempt at a reproduction of Europe in India. To them, the old leadership was un-national. Freedom to these extremists meant something quite different from what it meant to others before them. By self government or Swaraj they meant absolute independence or ‘Purna Swaraj’ from the British rule. According to them freedom for India must need bring to end all sorts of colonial relations with the British.

The main Indian Freedom struggle began under the leadership of M.K. Gandhi. Gandhi and his followers also wanted Purna Swaraj or complete freedom from British rule through non-violent passive resistance like Tilak and others of the earlier phase. The two phases are not very distinct from each other and can be treated as one. Gandhi differed from Tilak in the sense that he insisted more on moral elevation of the people of India for winning freedom than Tilak had done. Non-violence was Gandhi’s weapon for winning freedom as it was for the earlier leaders. But to it, he added a new meaning and a new significance. He philosophized and idealized these and other allied terms to the farthest possible extent.

Non-violence meant for Gandhi a deep faith in love for all, whether friends or enemies, a complete dissociation from evil, and abstention from such brute reaction as retaliation or revenge. As for non-cooperation for Gandhi, it was only a new name for suffering. It was to him an acid test of people’s sincerity, because it required silent sacrifice. He thus gave the new name Satyagraha to non-violent non cooperation. Passive resistance for Gandhi was a restraint undertaken voluntarily for the good of society. Swaraj meant to Gandhi something more than mere political independence from foreign rule, it was a state of being in which all people live in peace and harmony, getting rid of fear, helplessness and other evils.
The British Government tried to repress this movement with an iron hand and declared the Congress Volunteer Organization illegal. Gandhi in his turn appealed to his people to disobey that unjust law and join the volunteer organization in thousands. The non-cooperation movement became civil Disobedience and thousands of people courted arrest and over flooded the jails.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of the Indo-Anglian novelists and short story writers of the period who were witness to dramatic events of the period and had felt the spirit of those times in their own veins have depicted these movements in their writings.

His first novel *So Many Hungers* (1947) reflects an aspect of the freedom movement under the leadership of Gandhi. It deals with the Gandhian ideal of rural reconstruction as a step towards winning Swaraj. The novel presents Bengali life both in its traditional, conservative and its dynamic aspects with convincing sincerity and fascinating power. It portrays so simply and realistically the life and manners of Bengalis. It also affords the author with ample scope for description of scenery for delineation of national types and characters, for reflections of social, political, and economic problems.

There is no doubt that the novel contains many descriptions of Indian life and manners. The picture of life and manners in the novel expound the main theme more markedly. The main theme reflects the national movement for political freedom under leadership of Gandhi. There are also themes of hunger for food and rural reconstruction of India after the ideal of Gandhi. Devesh is introduced here as a character with the ideals of Gandhi and the novelist seems to have done it with a purpose. He wants to show how every village or town during that period had one Gandhi of its own to lead the people by staying in their mist.
The pictures of life and manners in the novel expound the main theme more markedly. The Quit India movement of 1942, The Bengal Famine of 1943 is described in the novel. But Hunger for freedom becomes the main theme in the novel. Mainly the story moves round the two incidents of National Movement and impact of Bengal famine in the history. Bhattacharya presents realistically agonies and frustrations of The Bengal people during famine. Again he succeeds to show the unshivered determination, hard work, active participation and dedication of people in the National Movement.

Devesh Basu in *So Many Hungers* is shown as a great patriot and freedom fighter. He is a man of simplicity full of Gandhian principles. He detaches himself from his son and family and lives a simple life with the village people. The people of Barini love him and honour him by calling him ‘Devata’ (God). Devata becomes philosopher, and guide to the people. He educates them, and trains them as freedom fighters.

Devesh Basu is completely different from his son, Samarendra Basu who is a famous speculator in the city. Samarendra is greedy, selfish, and money minded. His main aim is to amass wealth for himself and his family. There is not even a tinge of patriotism in him. When World War-II starts, he cleverly makes use of the opportunity to multiply his wealth by speculation in shares. He has not been influenced in any way by his father Devesh. He never cares for nation’s good. Money is everything for him. So Devesh detaches himself from his son and lives a simple life in the midst of village people.

Devesh adopts a peasant’s family in Baruni. This family consists of a peasant, wife and three children, two boys named Kanu and Onu and a daughter, Kajoli, the heroine of the novel. The family is influenced very much by the preachings of Devesh. They never deviate from his path and principles. Devesh acts as master to the peasant’s family, he refers to Kajoli as his grand-daughter. He educates them, and preaches patriotism. He cultivates moral
strength in the country people. He inspires and guides their lives. He shares their joys and supports them in their adversities. He makes them partners in the national movement and suggests to them to be non-violent. He encourages nationalism in his people by saying

“Friends and comrades do not betray the flag. Do not betray yourselves. The supreme test has come. Be strong. Be true. Be deathless, Bandematram!”

These kinds of preachings touch their hearts deeply and strengthen them morally.

Kajoli, his adopted grand-daughter always remembers him. Bengal famine makes the peasants leave to city. Kajoli reaches a city along with her mother and brother in a hope to get help from Rahoul but they fail to meet him. Their condition becomes miserable. Kajoli decides to join with a brother to feed her mother and brother. But in the last minute, the shoutings of a newspaper boy remind her Devesh who is going to start hunger strike in Dehra Dun jail-house. She recollects Devesh, a man of Great Spirit who always teaches ethics to be followed in life. She thinks it is not appropriate to her join in the nefarious trade of prostitution.

She thinks

“...And she, dadu’s grand daughter? Hunger-trapped, she had sold herself. What if dadu knew? What if dadu knew one day? This, the final gesture of her life, would hurt him more than all the oppressions he suffered in jail-house and all the pangs of his hunger battle...”

Then she readily changes her opinion to join in the brothel and makes up her mind to become a sales girl of the newspaper, Hindustan. We can understand
easily the cause behind her escape from spiritual fall. The stirring moral lessons of Devesh impact on minds of the village people. Devesh is a Gandhian Character; he inspires the people of Baruni by his speeches and actions. Inspired by his speeches people join voluntarily in national movement. The peasant (whose name is not mentioned) and his son Kanu join in the national movement and go to prison, is just an example to tell the range of influence of Devesh on people of Baruni. It also reveals the novelist’s desire to show how every village had one Gandhi of its own to lead people by staying in their midst.

Rahoul is grandson of Devesh. He has a D.Sc. degree from Cambridge where he had carried on research under a famous scientist. Rahoul is attracted to the noble principles of his grandfather and joins in the national movement. He is a staunch nationalist and he cannot forget the hypocrisy of the foreign rulers. Rahoul always follows his grandfather; he visits the village Baruni along with Devish and works for the village people. He develops deep attachment with the village people. He serves the hunger stricken people. He is more and more convinced that a foreign government is incapable of solving the problems of the country and that freedom is an imperative need. He is suspected by the police, he faces the problems by the Government but he never deviates from his path National Movement. He feels that it is his responsibility for him to fight for the sake of his people.

Bhattacharya shows the realistic pictures that have happened in India during the National Movement. The novel reveals that the happenings of the time when everyman voluntarily prepares to go jail so that the country may be free. All classes i.e., poor, middle, and upper classes, old, young, male and female join in the national movement. The theme of hunger for freedom occupies the first place among the other hungers for food, money, etc. in the novel. Bhattacharya has shown the importance of Spiritual strength that, if people are spiritually stronger they can defeat any kind of enemy. Devesh like
leaders cultivate spiritual strength in the hearts of people. Inspired by Devesh people become stronger and they are ready to die in fasting for the sake of noble aim of Independence. Here Devesh stands as Gandhi and it reveals Bhattacharya’s admiration for Gandhi who leads the nation during freedom struggle with his noble principles and strong will power.

Bhattacharya is imbued with the new spirit of Nationalism. He feels the need of giving expression of glorious age long Indian traditions, peculiar manners and customs in English, so that the foreign readers may learn the distinct identity of India. Bhattacharya is preoccupied with the things that are Indian–Indian themes, Indian characters, Indian life, Indian manners, Indian totem and taboos and all that. His novels have turned out to be propaganda novels of topical interest. His works reveal a search for national identity of Indians.

In *So Many Hungers* Bhattacharya contrasts two types of cultures in India. Through basis family he shows the Western influenced Indian urban life. Through peasant’s family he shows age long Indian traditional life. The peasant’s family represents some of the finest qualities of rural Indian (Bengal) life. The peasants live in a simple and dignified way. They honour their guests. When Rahoul arrives at the peasant’s house in the company of Devesh, Kajoli receives him in a traditional manner, removing shoes from his feet, pouring cold water on the feet and washing off the dust. Rahoul is embarrassed and tries to expostulate, but Devesh silences him and reminds him that Kajoli is a legacy of age old tradition.

“‘Rahoul, she is a good peasant girl with nice clean hands. Why won’t you let her touch your feet?’

‘She is a well-bred peasant girl. She has a legacy of manners as cold as India!’”³
Bhattacharya emphasizes on the importance of Indian tradition and culture, beliefs and superstitions, he also shows how from very ancient times his people were the inheritors of a very rich folklore. He always gives importance to the spirit of national self assertion or self identification.

The novel reveals the truth that the national movement embraced all sections of the population. Even young people join in the national movement. Kunal like young stars join in the army and fight for the British cause as the British government has promised freedom for Indians on a condition of Indians participation in the war. Indians feel the war as crusade on Fascist plague. They think it as their responsibility to rescue peace from the Fascists. Kunal says-

“Humanity crusading to save from destruction all that worth living for” 4

Kunal is inspired by his grandfather Devesh, as a true patriot, he joins in the army and sacrifices his life for the nation’s sake.

The story of the novel narrates the sufferings of a whole people of a particular time in particular situation created by the British Government. One of the achievements of the work is that it has been able to convey so effectively the mood and the temper of the native life. Bhattacharya seems to have acquired here an emotional identity with the characters he has depicted. It is for this, besides that the social milieu which the author has described rather in minute detail in the book; it has also shown faint signs of resentment and rebellion of the Indian people against oppression which soon laid the foundation of the Indian National Movement. It is, however, the description of the social milieu which has made this novel. In the minute descriptions of the manners and customs, tradition and culture of the Indian (Bengal) people, the author’s purpose of asserting the identity of the nations has been evident.
Nationalism seeks freedom from foreign oppression at the same time it wants to organize consolidate the collective power of the people. The power can be consolidated only after the removal of social injustices. A nation struggling for freedom also struggles to free itself from its social evils. The attempt to rid society of its age old evil practices that in the name of custom are only causing harm, is also a national process.

Bhattacharya writes his works with the purpose of purging society of its harmful practices. His attempt at a reformation is not only an attempt at bringing happiness to individual members of society but also an endeavor to make society like the Indian which is ridden by caste and religious differences, this endeavour also means an endeavour for consolidation and integration of various peoples into one race or nation.

Bhattacharya’s novels are social reformative and nationalistic in purpose and spirit. His novels *Music for Mohini, He Who Rides a Tiger, A Goddess Named Gold* and *A Shadow from Ladakh* reveal Bhattacharya’s reformative and nationalistic views. His heroes strive towards political freedom and social emancipation of the weaker sections. Bhattacharya writes for the transformation of modern values into its ancient structure through his works. He desires to change certain aspects which prevent the full development of an individual. He believes in the conviction of Gandhi, that an integrated community can be achieved only through integrated individuals.

Bhattacharya projects his reformative and nationalistic ideas through his second novel *Music for Mohini*. Jaydev, the protagonist of the novel strives for political freedom and social emancipation of the weaker sections. He dedicates his life for the development of his village, Behula. In spite of taking his higher education in city, he stays at home for sake of his village. He always adheres to his aim. As a master of the village he feels that even married life will be secondary. He always adheres to his aim of development of the village and
even he hides his feelings of romance from his wife and keeps himself away from married life for a while and concentrates on his goal. He adulates his wife, Mohini and convinces her by explaining his aim and concept and makes her partner of his ambition. He employs her in the job of eradication of illiteracy in village women.

Jaydev encourages young people to serve for the village. He invites a young medical man, Harindra to Behula to improve health and sanitation in the village. He eradicates the age old evils and absurdities in the village with the help of youth. He incorporates the modern values into ancient structure of Indian Society. He solves many problems successfully relating to economic development, political integration and emancipation of weaker sections. He sacrifices his wealth and dedicates himself to the public good, and commits to the nation’s culture and heritage and a strong concern for the upliftment of disadvantaged sections of the society.

Jaydev protests against his mother who blindly believes in horoscopes and unwanted age old customs and forces Mohini to follow them. Harindra the young medical man accompanies Jaydev in his reformative tasks. Jaydev and Harindra challenge orthodox custom in the village. Against the orthodox views of the village people Harindra marries Sudha who is forbidden for marriage as her stars are not in favour for her marriage and she is called Saturn’s eye sour.

K.R. Chandrsekharan says –

“One of the major concerns of Bhattacharya in this novel (Music for Mohini) is the need for a change of social outlook and reorientation of social values in India.”
G.P. Sarma says –

“With such a story, the novelist stresses the need for eradicating social evils that are practised in the name of custom and tradition.” 6

In this novel, *Music for Mohini*, we see the author’s direct concern with Indian nationalism. It deals with the life and experiences of Jaydev, an exponent of Indian tradition and culture. Born in an ancient Bengali Brahmin family, Jaydev has education in Calcutta where he comes under the influence of English studies besides Indian heritage, takes to westernized living, and then, after his successful career as a student, thinks for his way of living, amends his life and reaffirms his faith in Indian values, tradition, culture and philosophy. Not satisfied with that above he becomes a social reformer and fights for revision of customs in the village. The life story of Jaydev shows the author’s nationalistic pre-occupation. The story is social and is reformative in spirit especially in regard to the reformative and emancipation of weaker sections in Indian society.

It is thus seen how the author portrays here an ideal man who will build India of Gandhi’s dream. Though the story does not appeal as a political novel, the author’s insistence on the reconstruction of the national economy through the development of the economic condition of the villages, and his appeal for a love for country’s tradition, become abundantly clear, not only from the story but also from the conversations of the characters idealized by the novelist.

Bhattacharya is preoccupied mainly with three problems of society – the problems of oppression and exploitation of the lowest classes by the upper classes; tyranny and torture by the higher caste of the lower castes of Hindu society; and the ignorance and superstition of the people caused by illiteracy and orthodoxy that are hurdles to the progress of society. In his third novel, *He whoridesa tiger* (1955), Bhattacharya has depicted the problems of the poor
and backward classes, suggesting the magnitude of the harm it has done by impending the harmonious growth and development of society as a whole while violating the sense of humanity in a most brutal manner. The oppression and tyranny of high-cast Hindus are all vividly shown here – there ruthlessness, their cruelty, their hypocrisy and their love for mastery and dominance over the low castes. Again this is shown the sad and passive suffering of the low castes with all their agony and pain.

_He Who Rides a Tiger_ is a story of a poor blacksmith, Kalo, who belongs to lower caste. He is an illiterate but a good competent in his trade. His wife died of child birth. He lives with his only daughter Chandralekha, with memories of his wife. Kalo joins his daughter, in an English school. Chandralekha studies well and occupies the first position in the school. Kalo feels happy, but the rich and the higher classes comment on her studies as the children of lower castes are prohibited for studies as customary of the time. Bhattacharya points out the monopoly of education by the rich only.

The Bengal famine of 1943 degraded conditions of the poor in India. The rural mass moved to city. Kalo is also affected by the famine. He moves from his village Jaurna to the city in a search of job. The author reveals the story of the problem of the working class thrown out of their traditional moorings with the advent of famine. The peasants and traditions blacksmiths and other self employees have lost their traditional jobs because of famine. So the bulk of them remain jobless. These critical situations amidst the jobless people have been exploited by the reactionary elements of society.

Kalo meets bitter experiences in the city. For a little mistake of stealing bananas in an unbearable hungriness, from a fellow passenger in his journey, he is punished for three months of imprisonments. All of his hopes end in a vain. Unable to do anything he silently swallows his sorrow. During his
imprisonment Kalo gains worldly wisdom from Bio, a Co-prisoner, and a young intellectual.

After his release from the prison Kalo finds job no where. So ekes out a miserable existence for some time by carrying the corpses of destitute into municipal trucks. Even the loath some job of carrying dead bodies becomes less lucrative of competition. Having no alternative he joins in a job of procurer for a group of brothels in a charlot house. One night, in one of the brothels for which he has been working as tout, he hears the plaintive, protesting cries of a woman. Driven by a strange forboding, Kalo enters the room to find his horror that girl is none other than his daughter. Kalo saves his daughter from the place and learns that she has been deceived and brought to there by a brothel woman. He consoles his daughter. He sheds tears and realizes that there is no room for honesty in the world. Society has now hurt him and he must retaliate on the society and so he decides to deceive the world.

Bhattacharya points out the hypocrisy of the rich in the society who deceive and dominate on the poor. Under disguise of gentlemen and social workers, the hypocrites degrade the values in the society and even they resist the growth of the conditions of the poor in the nation. They cash the weaknesses of hunger and poverty of the weaker sections and even they seduce young women and drag them into loathsome jobs of prostitution. Poor girl Chandra Lekha is deceived and dragged forcefully by the hypocritic class under disguise of gentlemen into prostitution. Bhattacharya protests against capitalism. He supports political and economical equality. He has shown sufferings of the poor at the hands of capitalists and tradesmen. This division of men into two classes and showing the need of a revolution against the monopolies of the rich by the author’s most radical character Kalo in the novel is very significant.
Kalo starts to deceive people by wearing saffron and sacred thread on his body under the name of Mangal Adhikari. He installs an image of Siva, telling people as it has emerged from the ground. Money and material are gathered from the public, a temple is built. A pujari is appointed to worship. A board of trustees is constituted to manage the financial and administrative work of the temple. The revenues swell, important men like rich merchants, Motichand and Sir Abalabandu become associated with the management. Among the worshippers who come to the temple and touch Mangal Adhikari’s feet is a magistrate who had sentenced Kalo for his little blunder of stealing bananas.

Kalo reaches himself to retaliate on the society that he hates. Chandralekha accompanies him. He is now riding a tiger and cannot get down from its back. He forgets his past and his aim of taking revenge against the rich. He behaves tyrannically as a Brahmin. Even he does not agree to give his daughter Chandralekha to Bio who falls in love with her. Kalo proposes a condition before Bio, if Bio wants hand of Chandralekha, he has to accept Brahminhood, before his marriage. Bhattacharya points out an ediction of people to the drug of caste system in India. Kalo forgets his past, background and his ambition to retaliate on the society which has neglected him. But in an intoxication of superiority complex of cast he tempts Bio to join in the act of riding a tiger of society. In another occasion Bhattacharya shows us the odd behavior of Kalo who scolds Viswanath, a poor blacksmith like him, as he has polluted him by an unexpected touch. Bhattacharya intends to point out the deep rooted evil in the society. People become tyrannical by ego of caste and even they forget humanity.

Bhattacharya refers the quite opposite character of Bio. Bio is a born Brahmin but he renounces his Brahminhood as he has seen ugliness in the ego of orthodoxy of Brahminism. He is moved deeply by the tragic event of his own sister Purnima. Purnima falls in love with Basav, a lower caste man. But she is hastily given away in a marriage to an elderly widower when parents
discover her love with Basav. Her unhappy married life leads her to commit suicide. Moving deeply by the tragic end of his sister, Bio renounces his Brahminhood forthwith, breaks and throws away his sacred thread and takes a vow never more to speak about his caste.

Bhattacharya has depicted the problem of ego of higher castes, suggesting the magnitude of the harm it has done by impeding the harmonious growth and development of society as a whole while violating the sense of humanity in a most brutal manner. The oppression and tyranny of the high-caste Hindus are all vividly shown here – their ruthlessness, their cruelty, their hypocrisy and their love for mastery and dominance over low castes. Against this is shown the sad and passive suffering of younger generations and low castes with all their agony and pain. Mainly Bhattacharya is pre-occupied with the problems of orthodoxy. Oppression and exploitation of the lowest classes by the upper classes; the tyranny and torture by the higher castes of the lower castes of Hindu society; and the ignorance and superstition of the people caused by illiteracy and orthodoxy that are hurdles to the progress of society.

Through the character of B10 Bhattacharya protests and revolts against selfish and orthodox communities who drag always the civilization in the backward direction and they remain as hurdles in the growth of the nation.

Bhattacharya’s A Goddess Named Gold deals with happenings in a village during the period immediately preceding India’s attainment of freedom. The novel opens exactly a hundred days before 15th August, 1947. The scene is a village called Sonamitti. The main object of the novelist in the novel is the way in which a country should use freedom and what benefits may be derived from it. Bhattacharya is looking back on the decade or so which has passed after their attainment of Independence and representing through the medium of his art his assessment of what they have achieved and what they have failed to achieve. Freedom is the golden key which can open magic doors and admit us
into a realm in which men think noble thoughts and do kind deeds so that
happiness may be the portion of all.

The minstrel is an unusual character and he plays a vital part in this
novel which deals with India’s freedom. He is a homeless wanderer at home
with large crowds. He is a man among men but deified by a grateful and
admiring people. K. R. Chandra Sekharan opines as:

“It may very well be that he is a veiled representation of the
father of the Nation.”

Reference to the freedom struggle and Mahatama Gandhi became very
common in the works of Bhattacharya. The arrival of the minsterel in the
village is the strating pint of important developments. Meera tries to make use
of him as a counter attraction to the free cinema show which was planned by
the Seth who wanted to attract people into his way for paving the path easy to
become a member of the district Board, so tht the Seth’s plan may be
frustrated, but the old man would not approve of any spiteful action. He
promises to have a story telling session after the cinema show. Before the
session the minstrel promises to give the Seth an amulet to be worn round the
arm that will enable the wearer to realize all his wishes. Therefore everyone
assembled at the story-telling is surprised when instead of giving it to the Seth.

But the minstrel ties it round the arm meera, instead of the Seth and tells
her about amulet which will turn copper on her body in to gold if she does any
kind work and if it departs from her body it will become powerless. Some time
after the presention of the amulet dthe minstrel does a puck-like cat. Meera has
been wearing a copper ring on one of her fingers and has refused the giftr of a
gold ring earnestly offered by Lakshmi. Lakshmi is all the time eager to show
her gratitude towards Meera for having saved her sons’s life. The minstrel
knows the situation and mischievously suggests to Lakshmi that she may
replace the copper ring on Meera’s finger with a gold one when she is asleep. Lakshmi does this and then goes home to her father’s place for a few weeks’ stay.

The Seth has a grudge against Meera’s grand mother and he wants to punish her by seizing her piece of land which has been mortgaged to him. He summons Meera to his shop to tell her about his intentions. When she is at the shop he discovers by chance that the ring on her finger is gold. She herself knows nothing about the substitution done by Lakshmi. Consequently both are convinced that the amulet has power.

Now the Seth formulates a plan to exploit Meera’s possession of the amulet. He convinces her that a laudable objective like making gold out of copper can be achieved only with powerful backing from some one like him. Meera accepts the proposal. Her desire is not to win gold from herself. All the gold that she makes is to be distributed among the people of the village. She is to use the power is to known what precisely are the acts of kindness that will make the amulet function. The Seth has to make experiments. The description of these experiments gives us the novelist the opportunity to introduce comedy. The account of the desperate experiments perforformed at the instance of the Seth is also used by the novelist to indicate the basic difference between acts devoid of the spirit of compassion. K. R. Chandrasekharan says as:

“Compassion is a theme dear to the heart of Bhattacharya. There is no novel of his which does not refer to this virtue or depict touching examples of it.”

There is a touching portrayal of compassion in which Meera, after watching the poor boy Buddhu, hungrily licking the leaves thrown by customers in front of the sweet-hop, buys some sweets promptly and gives them to the boy to eat.
Meera is encumbered with ornaments made of copper with gold coating. She is asked to wear them as far as possible in such a way as to touch the body in order to give best chance for the amulet to work. She has them on her arms, round her neck and about her waist. Her movements are necessarily cumbrous. Seth does his best to encourage Meera to descend into the well with the right kind of feeling needed to make the amulet do its work.

Typical of Seth’s Machiavellian approach is his attempt to create the right atmosphere for an act of kindness by Meera by threatening to evict Old Father and his family from their ancestral home. As the Seth expects, Meera intervenes and offers money to the old man to redeem his mortgaged house, but he refuses to accept it knowing that it is the Seth’s money. His self-respect does not allow him to accept a favour from the greedy tyrant. Meera is condemned for part in the expulsion of Old Father. Even her friends turn against her as they believe that she has become an accomplice of the Seth on account of her desire for gold.

The last attempt made by the Seth to make the amulet show its power turns out to be a crisis in Meera’s life. Meera’s eyes are opened. She strips herself of the copper ornaments and throws them in a heap on the ground and disappears from the place. This seems to be the end of the Seth’s fanatic dream, but he still clings to hope thinking that Meera may yet be persuaded to continue the experiments.

With the arrival of the minstrel on the eve of Independence Day we come to the denouement of the novel. He conjures before Meera’s mind a picture of a new India that has attained material prosperity, but which also suffers from the evils of such prosperity. The picture that Meera sees is one which illustrates Goldsmith’s words, ‘where wealth accumulates, men decay’. With the clear object of testing and provoking Meera, her grandfather suggests to her that after becoming the goddess of plenty, she should get married to a
fabulously rich man from Delhi, a man who has several elephants for sale. Meera’s reaction to this taunt is sharp and immediate. Her grandfather’s suggestion seems to be an insinuation that she is hankering after wealth or position, but she is clear in her own mind that she had accepted that she is hankering after wealth or position, but she is clear in her own mind that she had accepted the amulet only out of a desire to do good to others. Enraged by the insinuation she wrenches the amulet from her arm and throws it into the river.

Towards the end of the novel the minstrel explains the symbolism of the taveez. The village is celebrating Independence Day and people are assembled under the banyan tree. The old man tells them that the freedom which they are celebrating is the touchstone. It belongs to every one of them but will yield results and transmute copper into gold only if acts of faith are performed. When he is asked to define acts of faith he modestly replies that he does not have wisdom enough to give guidance, but he sure that miracles can be performed if they all hold themselves in readiness:

“The miracle will not drop upon us. It is we who have to create it with love and with sweat. Freedom is the means to that end”. 9

The novel ends with the decision of the villagers to use their newly won freedom in the right way by electing the minstrel to the district board. Bhattacharya gives us reminiscences of the Quit India Movement. The aspects of the struggle that are referred to here are the free participation of women and leveling of social distinctions brought about by common suffering, particularly jail life. As the solemn day appointed for the handing over of power approaches, there is a feeling of thrill and exaltation among the people.

The hopes of Sohanlal, the common man, embody the aspirations of the people who look forward to an era of plenty in which all the wealth of the nation will belong to the people. The novel contains a warning that freedom is
not an automatic passport to greatness or plenty. It provides an essential climate in which the endeavour of the people will fructify. The minstrel warns as:

“Freedom is the beginning of the road where there was no road. But the new road swarms with robbers.”

The Minstrel assures the people of Sonamitti that freedom is capable of bringing about miracles. No Miracle can happen without effort. The Minstrel stands for Gandhi. The amulet presented to Meera is only a symbol of freedom. What the old man had told Meera about its properties was not meant to be taken literally. It was only a figurative way of indicating that freedom will enable use to make of lives golden provided we are capable of right feeling and right action. He indicates that, as:

“Without acts of faith, freedom is a dead pebble tied to the arm with a bit of string, fit only to be cast into the river”.

While the Minstrel stands for Gandhi and his principles and he becomes a mouthpiece of Bhattacharya. K. R. Chandrasekharan points as:

“Bhattacharya uses the minstrel as a Mouthpiece to voice some of his own views on the use of freedom and the conditions in which freedom can be of value.”

Bhattacharya emphasizes the views Gandhi that the freedom is not merely political freedom or economic freedom, but freedom of the mind. The minstrel refers to Gandhi’s definition of freedom as ‘a state of the mind’; this phrase is used by the novelist repeatedly in his works.

Bhattacharya’s ‘Shadow from Ladakh’ is set against the frictional background between the Chinese and India. The novel reflects the Gandhian
thought. The novelist reveals the India’s condition which needs new strategies for its development according to the changing conditions in the contemporary situations. Industrialization is inevitable in the competitive context along with the neighbor countries. The Industrial Revolution, ought not to transform Indian life into a mechanical life in the west. Bhattacharya hopes the amalgamation of ideological views with Western thought of industrialization. The two opposite ideologies, the novelist expects as complementary parts, they can play in the building up of the nation. This theme became the central part of the novel.

Gandhism is represented by the simple rural community of Gandhigram, established by the veteran Gandhian, Satyajit Sen, while industrialization is represented by a young engineer, Bhaskar who is in charge Steeltown, which in the process of its growth to swallow up Gandhigram. The confrontation between Gandhigram and industrialism takes on a political colouring owing to Chinese invasion. The exigencies of war production make the steel town engineers anxious to take over the adjoin Gandhigram. Gandhigram presents a model of rural India as envisaged by Gandhi. Satyajit has been selected by the founder to guide the destinies of this ideal village and to regulate its life so that it may become an example and a source of inspiration to the rest of the country. The growth of Satyajit till almost the end of the novel is a growth in the direction of asceticism and Gandhian idealism.

For all appearances Satyajit is a disciplined Gandhian applying the principles of Gandhian economics and ethics in the regulation of life of Gandhigram and the conduct of his own life. A testing time comes with the launching of Chinese aggression against India. One point of view in the country is that strength can be met only with strength, but Satyajit represents the opposite point of view, namely that physical force may be conquered by spiritual force. He, therefore, uses a weapon from the armory of the opponent himself, the weapon of non-violence. Gandhigram to be won over gradually to
the new way symbolized Steeltown. The crisis in the novel comes with Satyajit’s commencement of a fast to death to protest against the Government’s decision to let Steeltown swallow the village. Bhaskar has, in the meantime, unconsciously undergone a profound change.

Bhaskar has had one important moving emotional experience. The four daughters of a Chinese prisoner are temporarily in his care. His kindness inspires in them the deepest gratitude and affection. Their warm adoration touches his heart and he is convinced more than ever that love can conquer hatred. We realize from these developments that the man of steel has after all a human heart and there is something of Gandhi in his nature also. The crisis of the novel is resolved by Bhaskar himself leading a procession of workmen from Steeltown who march to Gandhigram to support the cause of Satyajit. This means that Steeltown has given up its plan to expand at the expense of Gandhigram. The two are to co-exist. The co-existence, however, is not merely a matter of live-and-let-live; it is a result of compromise and readjustment of values on either side.

The novel makes numerous references to Gandhiji’s teachings and his work. Satyajit is a character who tries to mould him and others according to the principles lay down by Gandhi. The seventh chapter gives a resume of Gandhi’s work, first in South Africa and later in India. The perfection of the weapon of non-violence, the victory General Smuts, the struggle against the British Government in India, the demonstration of the potency of moral force at Naokhali, are all recapitulated. Gandhigram is a model village in which we find the principles of Gandhian economics and ethics worked out. The village is self-sufficient as all its needs besides food are satisfied by cottage-based industry. In the sphere of education, the village follows the basic scheme of craft-centred teaching advocated by Gandhiji. Gandhigram seeks to build up a new set of values.
Gandhi’s championship of celibacy or continence is a doctrine that figures prominently in the novel. Even in the social life of Gandhigram, the creed finds an echo. The major teaching of Gandhiji that figures in the novel is non-violence. Satyajit’s plan of forming a Shanti Sena is born of his faith in this creed. Gandhi believed that the human spirit had the power to prevail over armaments and armies. He said that even if one nation were unconditionally to perform the supreme act of renunciation, many of us would see in our life time visible peace established on the Earth.

Satyajit believed that the Santhi Sena could touch the hearts of the Chinese and draw them away from their aggressive designs. He thought that a few determined idealists throwing themselves between two contending armies would constitute a powerful moral force that could bring about peace. Absence of hatred for the opponent is one of the concomitants of Gandhiji’s gospel of non-violence. This idea is emphatically brought out in the novel through several touches. Satyajit strongly opposed Bhaskar but there is no personal hatred involved in the struggle. Sumita reveals Styajit’s opinion to Bhaskar in one occasion as:

“To give hate for hate is only to make the evil grow stronger. To hate is to be defeated in the moral struggle”. 13

Bhaskar also with his modern ideas has something of Gandhi in him. He conceives the plan of converting Gandhigram through understanding and love by bringing the people of the village and Steeltown together in Meadow house. Gandhian precept is to be seen in his reaction to the presence of the helpless Chinese children in his house. They are no longer citizens of a hostile, alien country but God’s children, to be treated with generosity and love. The experience of love is one of the turning points in the life of Bhaskar.
The conduct of China in stabbing India in the back and deliberately trying to thwart her progress along the path of democracy naturally claims considerable attention in the novel. The importance of the first border incident near Ladakh is at first minimized by India, but subsequent events gradually reveal the real intention of China. Poisoned of aggression with the qualities they display in the course of their campaign against India whose democratic way of life is taken by them to be a serious challenge to their new-found ideology. The descriptions given in the novel by Bhattacharya are appreciated by K.R.Chandrasekharan as:

“Bhattacharya’s description of the aggression is factual and the sentiments he expresses in the novel are sentiments of all patriotic Indians”.14

Chandrasekharan points out that Bhattacharya’s patriotism and his reverence towards Gandhi and the other National leaders their reverence towards principles to restore peace in the International Relations. He remarks as:

“One remarkable feature of ‘Shadow from Ladakh’ is that while dealing realistically with treacherous Chinese aggression, it also artistically pleads that India should show love and friendship for the Chinese people”.15

“It points out how the greatest of our thinkers and leaders have shown their affection and respect for the people of China and their old culture.”16

Tagore sets an example by instituting a chair for the Chinese language and culture at Shantiniketan and inviting a Chinese professor to adorn it. Nehru, disillusioned as he was by the treacherous conduct of the communist Government, made it clear his broadcast to the nation that India had no ill-will
towards the Chinese people. Bhattacharya makes literary use of the sentiment by embodying it in one of the Chinese girls. When the time comes for them to leave India, they are grief-stricken at the thought of having to be away from Bhaskar. Rupa, who is about to leave steeltown for ever, talks to the children about their future attitude to India and they assure her that they can never forget the kindness they have experienced and that when they grow up they will work for proper understanding between the two peoples. Finally the novel gives to India and to the world the Gandhian message of conquering hatred through love.
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