CHAPTER - V
GANDHIAN HUMANISM
V. GANDHIAN HUMANISM

Indian novel in English is no doubt the product of the cultural and national awakening which had its origins in the nineteenth century Bengal Renaissance. The Western educated intelligentsia, the product of western liberal education in Indian and English universities heralded the democratic consciousness. Romesh Chunder Dutt, himself a fiction writer, talks of literature in Bengal having undergone a revolutionary change because of this intellectual contact with the West. According to him, writers “learned to descend to the humble walks of life, to sympathize with a common citizen or even a common peasant”. (Quoted by Krishna Kripalani ‘Modern Literature’, A Cultural History of India (ed.) A.L.Basham, p.415) This change liberated the novelists from the age-old habit of conforming to the traditional models that invariably resulted in symmetrical uniformity. But this revolution in thinking was limited to the intelligentsia of Calcutta. Of course, it was this intelligentsia which was at the vanguard of moral and intellectual upsurge in nineteenth century Bengal. But, one has to keep in mind that this revolution in thought by its very nature was revivalist in character. (Ainslie T.Embree, India’s Search for National Identity, p.40)
THE ADVENT OF GANDHI

Mahatma Gandhi was not a thinker in the abstract and Gandhian thought is inseparable from Gandhi the person, public leader and religious reformer. His thought is the product of his inner need to act ethically in challenging social and political situations.

In the twenties, with the advent of Gandhi, the renaissance spread beyond the borders of Bengal and acquired an all-India character. With this arose the intellectual and emotional need for realizing a national identity (Ibid., pp.71-90) which Gandhian thought, a synthesis of the East and the West, the traditional and the modern, was striving to achieve. It created a national consciousness which began to find larger meaning in disperate social activities in different regions of the country.

Though Gandhi was not a creative writer himself the inspiration and influence his ideas exercised on Indian novelists is of immense importance. (The fact of Gandhian influence on Indo-Anglian novelists is admitted by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in Indian Writing in English, Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah in The Writer’s Gandhi, Mrs. Meenakshi Mukherjee in The Twice Born Fiction, Professor M.K. Naik in Gandhiji in Indian Literature and Gobinda Prasad Sarma in Nationalism in Indo-Anglian Fiction.) His thought released intellectual and moral passions and introduced a new way of thinking. Since Gandhi’s political activities
were linked with his social programmes and since these spanned over India across all regional and linguistic boundaries, it is the whole nation that registered the impact of his ideas. New life was infused into the masses of India by Gandhian ideas that stressed most of all, self-respect.

**POLITICAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITY**

The liberation of the spirit of Indian people in the process of forging their political as well as cultural identity naturally opened up new vistas of human experience for the creative writers. This appealed to the novelists in particular because of the radical changes in men’s social and political outlook envisaged by Gandhian thought. In fact up to the thirties, as Naik rightly says, “there was no Indian who could claim sustained and considerable achievement in fiction originally written in English”. (M.K. Naik, *Raja Rao*, p.16) It is of great significance that there is a sudden flowering in the Indo-Anglian fiction in the thirties, a period during which Gandhi attained his highest acclaim.

**GANDHIAN THOUGHT**

Gandhian thought democratised the social and political activities by including the commonest and the lowliest in the freedom struggle. Consciousness of freedom percolated to the grass roots of Indian Society and revolutionized its thinking (Francies G.Hutchins, *India’s Revolution*, p.113). People of India for the first time started thinking in
terms of India as one nation. They rose above their regional loyalties and felt emotionally one for the first time.

A critical study of Indo-Anglian novels cannot ignore this connection between the socio-political development in India in the thirties and the rise of the Indian novel in English because fiction more than any other form of literature, is concerned with social values and political conditions. And it is Gandhian thought which revolutionized Indian value system and created a political stir.

It is significant that Gandhian thought was influenced by modern thinkers such as Ruskin, Tolstoy, Emerson and Thoreau, and such diverse ancient religious texts as the Bible, the Bhagavad Gita, the Ramayana, and the Koran. The resultant unified thought encompassing nearly all aspects of man’s life provided a context to the Indian writer in English almost in the same way as, for example, the ideas of Locke and Burke did to the eighteenth century writers in England. However, Gandhi could not be considered as a systematic philosopher in the sense Locke and Burke were. Gandhi was primarily a man of action endowed with a set of well thought out ideas which guided his actions.
UNITY OF HUMAN LIFE

Gandhi’s belief in the unity of human life implied that all problems, social, political, economic, educational and personal are intertwined and have to be seen as a complex whole. That is why the basic tenets (J.B.Kripalani, *Gandhi: His Life and Thought*, pp.322-347) of Gandhian thought embrace various areas of human experience. These tenets in brief are: Ahimsa (Non-violence), Satya (Truth), Asteya (Non-stealing), Brahmacharya (Chastity), Asangraha (Non-possession), Sharirasharma (Physical labour), Aswada (Control of the palate), Sarvatra bhayavarjana (Fearlessness), Sarvadharma Smanatva (Equality of all religions), Swadeshi removal of untouchability and caste system. With all these traditional Hindu ideas he blended the concept of nationhood and work ethics which he imbibed from Western thought.

Gandhi worked within the framework of culturally and historically conditioned options but he created a new culture and new roles also. This synthesis of the East and the West that Gandhian thought achieved made a deep impact of Indo-Anglian novelists. All of them were familiar with the Western thought and literary traditions, but it was in Gandhian thought that they discovered a frame of reference for their creative work.

It is not accidental that novelists such as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and later, Bhabani Bhattacharya, directly fell under Gandhi’s spell
and began writing there-after fictional works, the main inspiration of which derives from Gandhian way of thinking. For the first time in the history of Indian philosophy, Gandhian thought presented man not as a member of a closed tribe or a caste, but as a member of the entire human community, sharing the sufferings and predicament in modern society. It was under the influence of Gandhian thought that writers in all Indian languages could carve out their identity as novelists.

**MAJOR INDO-ANGLIAN NOVELISTS**

Anand and Bhattacharya are two of the major Indo-Anglian novelists who began writing in the thirties. Both of them belong to, as Bernard Bergonzi says in a different context, a “generational group”, (Bernard Bergonzi, *Reading the Thirties: Texts and Contexts*, p.2) who shared important common formative influences. They were born between 1904 and 1906 and grew up in a period of significant socio-political change in India. It was inevitable that their novels should not only have been inspired by but also have assimilated Gandhian thought.

The year 1935 heralds the publication of the first novels of Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, namely **Untouchable** and **Swami and friends** respectively. The impact of Gandhian thought gets deeper and subtler in the later novels of Anand and Bhattacharya. After Gandhi’s
assassination in 1948 and in the light of the changing values of post 1949 India, Gandhian ideas still remain the main source of inspiration.

THE TWO INFLUENCES

Gandhi passionately rejects the industrial on the one hand; but on the other hand he imbibes deeply the ideas of certain eminent humanist and religious writers and thinkers of the West. The interpreters of Gandhi in general have tried to simplify the complexity of his thought by viewing it either wholly from the point of view of the Indian heritage or that of the western influences he imbibed. The two influences merge in Gandhi and give rise to an original approach to life and the world.

Like any other child in an orthodox Hindu family, Gandhi grew up in an environment of traditional beliefs and rituals, and it is only after he went to England that Hinduism became a conscious concern for him. Endowed with an exceptionally inquiring mind, he welcomed ideas from anyone and would always seek a confirmation of his instinctively felt views. Gandhi came to be influenced by Western ideas in three ways: by reading, by personal contact with like minded-people, and by experiences derived from the political protest movements he led in South Africa.
GANDHI'S INTELLECTUAL CONTACT

Gandhi kept intellectual contact only with those Western humanist thinkers who criticised modern industrial civilization. The intellectual atmosphere in the London of the 1880s and 1890s was surcharged with many other issues such as Darwin’s theory of evolution, Bentham’s utilitarianism, Morris Dobb’s Fabian socialism, Marxism and so on. Not that he was not familiar with these ideas through newspapers but he was quite selective in letting only those views influence him which agreed with him.

It is understandable that Fabian socialism or Marxism would not enlist young Gandhi’s sympathies. In 1944, he read *Das Kapital*. Asked about Marx in 1946, he said that he could not share with Marx the view that the use of violence could usher in non-violence. (D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol.7, p.36)

ENDS AND MEANS

The relationship between ends and means as envisaged in Gandhian thought is rooted in non-violence, and he refused to believe in a social order which crushes individual freedom. (Pyarelal, ‘Gandhi’s Technique of Revolution’ in *Facets of Gandhian Thought* ed. J.S.Mathur and P.C.Sharma, p.37) He was equally sceptical of Art for
Art's sake, the basic concept of the aesthetic movement led by Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde.

FUNCTION OF ART

For Gandhi, art had a purposive function to perform. In this regard he seems to have been influenced by artists like Tolstoy whose ‘What is Art?’ Gandhi claims to have read in the bibliography of the Hind Swaraj. (M.K.Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, p.105). Originally this was composed and published in Gujarati in 1908 and the first English translation appeared in 1909.)

Prior to his actual encounter with members of the Theosophical Society, Gandhi was introduced to the *Bhagwad Gita* through Sir Edwin Arnold’s translation of it as *The Song Celestial*. Gandhi himself admits that he had not read the Gita before going to England.

TOLSTOYAN PHILOSOPHY

Gandhi’s association with Tolstoyan philosophy is by far the longest. He discovered that Tolstoy’s concept was based on religious perfectionism and allowed no form of struggle against organized evil. It differed from the nature of social protest built in Satyagraha. He absorbed as much from Tolstoy’s ideas at this stage as he needed, for example the latter’s Christian Gospel of universal love and brotherhood. It is
significant that in 1909 when he had read more of Tolstoy and had experimented with Tolstoyan idea of community life that Gandhi entered into correspondence with him. On his voyage home he translated Tolstoy’s ‘Letter to a Hindoo’\textsuperscript{12} into Gujarati. In a preface to this letter Gandhi explains Tolstoy’s philosophy thus:

An oppressor’s efforts will be in vain if we refuse to submit to his tyranny...... Slavery consists in submitting to an unjust social order, not in suffering ourselves to be kicked. Real courage and humanity consist in not returning a kick for a kick. This is the core of Tolstoy’s teaching. (Tolstoy’s ‘Letter to a Hindoo’)

TOLSTOY’S INFLUENCE

Tolstoy’s influence on Gandhi extends beyond his search for the philosophic justification for social protest. Tolstoy’s other books which Gandhi lists in the bibliography of Hind Swaraj are The First Step (1892) and The Slavery of our Times (1900). The anti-industrialization stand and the humanist’s approach to the labour problem in these two books endorsed Gandhi’s own rejection of mechanization. Tolstoy’s argument for personal simplicity and reduction in needs and his idea of planned programme for attaining the moral righteousness through self-control re-inforced Gandhi’s own view of life. If any single book made a revolutionary impact on Gandhi’s mind overnight, it was Ruskin’s Unto
This Last which he read in 1904 in South Africa. He describes the magic spell of this book thus:

The book was impossible to lay aside, once I had begun it...... I could not get any sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideas of the book..... I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life...


He particularly mentions three teachings of Unto this Last. First, the good of the individual is contained in the good of all. Secondly, a lawyer’s work has the same value as that of the barber in as much as all have the same right of livelihood from their work. Thirdly, that the life of labour, i.e. the life of the tiller of the soil, and that of a handicraftsman, is the life worth living. The first of these, he says, he knew, the second he had dimly realized but the third had never occured to him. He reaches the conclusion that the second and the third were contained in the first, i.e. individual good contained in the universal good. (Ibid.)

As a matter of fact Gandhi’s genius lay in his art of synthesizing the best of the Indian and the best of the Western Christian humanist thought. J.B. Kripalani in his study of Gandhian thought, demonstrates how Gandhi blended the opposites--the old and new, the material and the spiritual, the individual and the collective in his thinking and in his
programme of action. He compares Gandhi’s achievement in synthesizing various strands of thought with the harmony in the vision of the Bhakti saints in the past. (J.B.Kripalani, *Gandhi: His Life and Thought*, pp.317-318)

Although India has had religious and social reformers, yet no one before Gandhi had linked religious reform, social action, movements for political freedom and individual conscience together. Here emerged a body of thought supported by concomitant action in which religious salvation was shown to be dependent not upon mere rituals or singing of songs but upon social and political action and working for suffering humanity.

**GANDHIAN THOUGHT AS A CREATIVE IMPETUS**

Gandhi’s ideas initiated mass action of a kind that spanned the whole of India across regional and linguistic boundaries. The sole objective of Gandhi’s mass movements was to arouse an all-India consciousness, the first requisite of the growth of national identity. It is this aspect of Gandhian thought that had an immediate appeal for the Indian novelists in English. It is significant to note that in conducting these movements Gandhi functioned as a link between various classes of Indian society.
GANDHIAN HUMANISM

Gandhian humanism was rooted in the commitment of the individual to embark upon a new life irrespective of his caste and creed. The social solidarity which his thought and actions aimed at required social familiarity and inter-changeability of all professions. As his humanism embraced various experiences and various levels of human existence-social, economic, political and personal, people became aware of their place in society. This strengthened the growing feeling that society may even exist for the individual. This connection of the ‘personal’ with the ‘national’ that Gandhian ideas made possible was the key factor that revitalized Indian society to the core. The impact of this connection proved to be of great significance to the novelists, particularly in the interim period, when old traditionalism was being transformed into romantic Marxism which, with all its emphasis on humanism was ideology bound and hence unrealistic. Seen in the historical perspective, it is indisputable that the teachings of Gandhi as Edward C.Dimock observes, “exerted a greater pressure......... combining social concern with traditional ethics”. (Edward C.Dimock (ed.), The Literature of India: An Introduction, p.28)

THE SOCIAL MILIEU

Gandhi revolutionized the social milieu in still another significant sense, that is, by transforming woman’s status in Indian society. For the
first time in Indian history, Gandhi’s thought and actions gave a new definition to woman as an individual-independent and capable of taking care of herself. His invitation to women to participate in the freedom struggle as equal partners of men brought women out of the conventional mode of behaviour pattern prescribed, for example, in Manusmriti. To a writer, especially to the writer of novels, the freeing aspect of this change of attitude to women had a great significance.

It is evident, however, that each Indo-Anglian novelist of the thirties derived from Gandhi what was in accord with his temperament, ideological orientation if any, absorption of the Western modern culture and above all his creative needs and vision of life.

**INFLUENCE OF GANDHIAN HUMANISM**

If Gandhi’s plea for Hindu-Muslim unity specifically appealed to Abbas, it is the humanism of Gandhian ideas that Mulk Raj Anand found artistically liberating. In a series of three lectures entitled the ‘Humanism of Gandhi’ Mulk Raj Anand explains at length what he thinks of Gandhi and what as a writer he understands by Gandhian humanism. It is important to note that it is Gandhi’s ordinariness as a human being more than his Mahatmahood which is creatively more significant to Anand.
He understands it as Gandhi’s “intensest humaneness”. (Mulk Raj Anand, *The Humanism of M.K.Gandhi*, p.1) He says:

The humanism I see in his life, ideas, and works is an incipient recognition of his sympathy for the people, in spite of their weaknesses, disabilities and mistakes. In this way he experiments with himself and he evolves certain moral ideas which he applies both to himself and to others. (Ibid., p.2)

Another aspect of Gandhi which was important to Anand was that he . . . brought awareness of political, social and human freedom to many millions of people, and also gave them a practical method for achieving redress against wrong, by practice of non-violent assertion of rights. And he succeeded in remaining essentially human, that is to say, possessed of the feeling for the dignity of human beings. I consider him to be one of the few important Indian humanists of our time. (Ibid.)

He concludes his lecture by professing in unequivocal terms what Gandhi meant to him and to other novelists of the time.

Whatever his own failings, he remains to us a human personality of the highest order not because of his strength but because of his recognition of his own and other people’s weaknesses certainly he let loose a stream of consciousness which by its deeper and widespread sympathies released our people into a new kind of solidarity. (Ibid., p.30)
ANAND’S HUMANISM

Though for a time Anand considered Marxism as a good historical yardstick, he revised his view and “considered humanism, the view of whole man as the more comprehensive ideology”. (Mulk Raj Anand, *Apology for Heroism-A Brief Autobiography of Ideas*, p.129) He reiterates his stand regarding this issue in an essay in which he emphasizes the concept of sincerity which, he says, he learned in his “revolt against academic philosophy in favour of lived, felt experience from Rousseau, Tolstoy and Gandhi”. (Mulk Raj Anand, “Tradition and Modernity” in *Journal of South Asian Literature* Fall, 1974, Vol.X, No.1, pp.45-50) Still in another essay Anand talks of Gandhi as “one of the few men of our time who has entered deeply into our lives, in a manner which is intimate and personel”. (Mulk Raj Anand, “Gandhi’s Philosophy of Life”, *Gandhi, Theory and Practice-Social Impact and Contemporary Relevance: Proceedings of a Seminar*, ed. S.C.Biswas, p.251.) The group which he founded in London read Gandhi’s Young India (1919-22) and “followed his thoughts on national freedom” as their “main food day and night”. (Mulk Raj Anand, “The Story of My Experiment with a White Lie” in *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English*, ed. M.K.Naik, S.K.Desai and G.S.Amur, p.20)
R.K.NARAYAN’S HUMANISM

Gandhian thought pierces in still deeper and subtler way into the novels of R.K.Narayan. The influence of Gandhian thought is incorporated in the vision of life that Narayan’s novels present. His novels uphold traditional Indian values, but, these are not the values of ancient Indian tradition, but values reoriented by Gandhian thought. Narayan’s novels, right from his first, *Swami and Friends* (1935) to *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967) and even *The Painter of Signs* (1977) unmistakably highlight and endorse Gandhian philosophy. It is an ordinary man’s view of Gandhi as the embodiment of all that is good and valuable in modern Indian society which conditions Narayan’s art of characterization.

RAJA RAO

Roughly a contemporary of Narayan, Raja Rao also began his literary career under Gandhi’s influence. His mode of creative absorption of Gandhian thought is, of course, different from that of Anand and that of Narayan. It is the philosophical aspect of Gandhian thought that is the shaping spirit of Rao’s novels. Raja Rao claims that he started “from the humanitarian and romantic perspective of man in *Kanthapura* and *The Cow of the Barricades*--both deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi’s
philosophy of non-violence”. (Quoted in *Contemporary Novelists*, ed. James Vinson, p.1142)

BHABANI BHATTACHARYA

Bhabani Bhattacharya, who published *So Many Hungers* in 1947, also began his literary career in the 1930’s and continues writing even today, his latest novel being *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978). It is significant to note that it was in 1930 that Bhattacharya has acknowledged his debt to Gandhi in his preface to a collection of essays – *Glimpses of Indian History*. These essays were originally published in two volumes, entitled *Some Memorable Yesterdays* and *Indian Cavalcade*.

Bhattacharya, being a Bengali writing in English, feels assured by the fact that Gandhi too used the English language. In his book on Gandhi, he says that “in English alone Gandhi reached all the corners of the Indian subcontinent across the linguistic frontiers. (Bhabani Bhattacharya, ‘Impact of Gandhi on Indian Literature’ in *Gandhi the Writer*, p.224) He describes Gandhi as a “writer’s writer”, and is of the view that some parts of the best writing everywhere in India “bears his counter signature”. (Ibid.)

A witness to the Gandhian era and himself a practising novelist, Bhattacharya reminisces about the nature of the Gandhian impact on
creative writers. According to him the most important aspect of Gandhi’s personality for them was that he “stood for the humblest, the lowliest and the lost” (Ibid., p.225). Bhattacharya explains the nature of this impact and clarifies that “This stance did not begin and end, as it often does, with ideological affiliation” (Ibid). He elaborates further on the nature of the writer’s attraction to Gandhi. He says that Gandhi transformed himself into the common man, thinking his thought, sharing his feelings, in key with his hopes, fears and dreams....... In all his thoughts and emotions, his identity, his oneness with the common man was complete. He was the replica of the masses of India. And that was the secret of his immense appeal. (Ibid.)

SOCIAL PURPOSE OF ART

Naturally, under the impact of Gandhi’s ideas, Bhattacharya became conscious of the social purpose of art very early in his vocation as a novelist. Like Mulk Raj Anand, Bhattacharya is also inclined towards writing with a purpose. That is why contemporary socio-economic and political issues form the themes of his novels too.

REFORMATIVE ZEAL

His So Many Hungers (1947) and a later novel He Who Rides a Tiger (1954) directly concern themselves with themes of hunger,
poverty, famine and other social evils. His is a stark realism that appears very harsh. The reformative zeal of his writing carries the weight of Gandhian protest against social evils. In this sense, *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) is a literary landmark in Indo-Anglian fiction based on Gandhian ideology. And, whatever be their mode of depiction of the Indian social scene, their world view got modified or extended by the Gandhian thought according to their personal predilections.

For example, if in Anand his world view blends with his radical progressivism, in Bhabani Bhattacharya it comes to clash with the growing industrialization in India. In Raja Rao Gandhian humanism provides a basis for the novelist’s search for religious and philosophical relevance, while in R.K. Narayan Gandhian view of life is treated as the only way of life that restores balance and harmony.

Bhattacharya avowedly writes novels with an unambiguous intention of drawing the people’s attention to the social evils as pointed out by Gandhi. Edwin Gerow rightly categorizes Bhattacharya as a “socially programmatic novelist”. (Edwin Gerow, ‘The Persistence of Classical Esthetic Categories in Contemporary Indian Literature: Three Bengali Novels’ in *The Literatures of India: An Introduction*, ed. Edward C. Dimock, Cr., p.230.) Invariably, Bhattacharya’s novels derive their themes from the social and political issues of the 1930s and 40s. He passionately upholds the principle of non-violence in the delineation of
both his fictional situations and characters. The value of the city culture is always the symbol of evil in his novels and he uniformly maintains the sanctities of the values of Indian village system. The total ethical and moral outlook affirmed in his novels is mainly drawn from the Gandhian vision of life.

**NATURE OF GANDHIAN INFLUENCE**

Bhattacharya gives us a detailed analysis of the nature of Gandhian influence on creative writers in his *Gandhi the Writer*. He declares that Gandhi “inspired creativity on a scale surpassed by none”. (Bhabani Bhattacharya, *Gandhi the Writer*, p.224). He holds the view that Indian literature “gained in depth and dimension by his depth” (Ibid.).

He acknowledges that writers could not resist joining the nationalist struggle for India’s freedom which was going on under Gandhi’s leadership. But he thinks there was something deeper than the mere political image of Gandhi that appealed to the writers. The other part of the Gandhian personality was even more meaningful for the poets, novelists and dramatists. He stood for the common man, for the humblest, the lowliest and the lost (Ibid., p.225). For Bhattacharya Gandhi’s feat of upholding the common man provided a new literary possibility. The common man, as he came to be understood in Gandhian times, was never
the focus of the novelists of the nineteenth century except later in Saratchandra’s social novels.

Under Gandhi’s influence there was a new orientation towards the common man in the novels of Tarashankar Bannerjee and Satinath Bhaduri. Bhattacharya defines the change in the literary world that occurred under the impact of Gandhian thought, as the “shift of emphasis from the rich to the poor, from the educated to the man of character and inner culture from the educated to the illiterate and the voiceless”. (Ibid., p.226)

**GANDHI’S AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

Like Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, Bhattacharya was also exposed to Gandhian ideas initially through Gandhi’s *Autobiography*. Bhattacharya the writer admired most in Gandhi the ordinariness of his life presented in an unpretentious way. He thinks that:

> Facets of everyday life invest the work with the elusive quality known to the creative writer as human interest. (Ibid., p.131.)

Bhattacharya’s admiration for Gandhi’s dislike of the segregation of the sexes, his upholding Gandhi’s faith in self-control on the part of the boys and girls at Tolstoy’s Farm prove that Bhattacharya’s views
regarding man’s social and personal life are in accord with those of Gandhi. He condemns any deviation from Gandhian norms as “moral fall”. (Ibid., p.135) Bhattacharya’s attitude to sex as depicted in his novels is quite similar to that of Gandhi. Jayadev in Music for Mohini and Satyajit in Shadow from Ladakh are major illustrations of sexual abstinence. Bhattacharya is of the view that Gandhi’s penance over others’ moral fall was based on the assumption of “the inherent goodness of the human heart”. (Ibid., p.136) According to Bhattacharya, Gandhi used the technique of penance to attain social and political as well as purely human objectives.

VIEW OF MACHINES

Again Bhattacharya agrees with Gandhi in his view of machines that the machines have become an instrument of exploitation. His academic area being history, he was naturally inclined towards writing on basically socio-political themes. Like Gandhi and Mulk Raj Anand, Bhattacharya also does not believe in the writing for the sake of art.

The process of Bhattacharya’s eventual success with novel writing reveals the nature of his creative compulsions. The Bengal famine was the immediate factor which stirred him to write; Gandhian idea which had revolutionized the Indian masses, conditioned Bhattacharya’s emotional
response to the socio-political situation in Bengal during the 1940s. His sensibility became a blend of intellectual historian and potential novelist and the theme of the first novel So Many Hungers is socio-historical in nature.

**SOCIAL PURPOSE**

Thereafter, writing novels with a social purpose became his main creed. His own assertions about the social value of art have been responsible for his image as a propagandist, who writes novels to convey his ideological conviction. About the concept of art and the function it must perform Bhattacharya’s views are quite similar to Chinua Achebe’s. Bhattacharya considers the novelist as a preacher whereas Achebe regards him as a teacher.

Bhattacharya’s concept of truth is wholly social in its context as well as content and it derives its sustenance from Gandhian vision of life. In his novels, good -- that is, the moral spirit of man -- is shown to be in conflict with evil, that is, forces of exploitation in modern Indian society, and, at the end good always triumphs over evil.
THE VICTIMS OF SOCIAL EVIL

As Bhattacharya himself explains, the story of So Many Hungers is concerned with “all the intensified hungers of the historic years 1942-43—not food alone; the money hunger, the sex hunger, the hunger to achieve India’s political freedom”. (James Vinson (ed). Contemporary Novelists, p.136.) The plot moves on two parallel lines dealing with the story of Rahoul, the astrophysicist, in the University of Calcutta. It reveals his development as a freedom fighter on Gandhian lines. Rahoul emerges as a man who, gradually, though painfully, sheds his insular approach to life and finally jumps into the fray of Gandhi’s Civil Disobedience Movement.

The second is the story of a peasant girl Kajoli of Baruni village. Introduced to Gandhian ideas by Devesh Basu, the ‘Devata’ of the village, Kajoli fights till the last to her dignity. Kajoli fully represents the image of the new woman heralded by Gandhian thought. (M.K. Gandhi’s Young India, April 10, 1930 and his Women and Social Injustice, pp-4-5.)

Devesh Basu is the prototype of Gandhi in full swing of action. He tells the villagers not to sell their rice to Government agents and thus resist the exploitation of the war situation. It is the war situation that has
helped men like Samarendra Basu to hoard: As a result, the growers of the rice also starve.

Gandhi’s political agitation gathers momentum in Baruni, also because Devata, like Moorthy of Kanthapura, relates the issues of exploitation of villagers to the continuation of imperial moves by refusing to pay taxes to the unjust rulers. The choice of theme and the area of human experience focussed on in this novel, through the life of the common man in a Bengal village, indicate Bhattacharya’s Gandhian bias. The very conception of the plot, the complication of events and the solution the novelist offers at the end of the novel suggest the vindication of Gandhian ideas in the novel.

CHARACTERIZATION

Characterization too in Bhattacharya is coloured by his Gandhian idea of what is good and evil. The repressive measures taken by the Government against nationally minded citizens are referred to in the novel. Devata tells his grandson how the school runs by him at Baruni has aroused the suspicion of the government which has as a result appointed spies to watch it. The old man makes this bitter comment: “Mass literacy is a danger for the rulers. It would, they know, make the trampled ones conscious of their birth-right--the right to live as human beings”. (Bhattacharya, So Many Hungers, pp.26-27) One of Rahoul’s
students is engaged as a spy to watch his movements and to surreptitiously examine his notes in the laboratory.

Gandhi, the trusted and revered leader of the people, is imprisoned because he has protested against India being dragged into the war without consulting the people. Referring to Gandhi’s arrest, Bhattacharya makes the bitterly ironic comment:

A noble-hearted person must share the lot of gangsters for speaking out his true faith in democracy; And the prison warder was one who was pouring out his own people’s life-blood to rescue democracy from his chains! (Ibid., p.43)

ECHOES THE TEACHING OF GANDHI

Bhattacharya echoes the teaching of Gandhi and reflects the attitude of the average Indian when he makes a clear distinction between the British rulers and the British people. He refers to a kind-hearted English soldier whom Onu approaches for charity:

The soldier stopped, looking down. His blue eyes grew deep with compassion. He smiled and spoke words of which the boy could make nothing, and he passed a gentle hand over the little beggar’s dusty mop of hair. Then he gave him a half-rupee piece. (Ibid., p.187)
So Many Hungers is not a novel depicting hungers alone; it gives us memorable pictures of the goodness and nobility of the rural folk, their simple ways and their characteristic attitudes to life. The selflessness and decency of the peasants is indicated where Kajoli is anxious to bring food in time for the labourers working in their fields and where the mother makes it clear to her son-in-law that whatever rice they have is to be shared with the kisans. The adherence of the peasants to the highest code of morality known to them is illustrated in the scene in which a young man suggests to a group of hungry destitutes that they might break into an eating place and seize whatever food is available. Three old men rebuke him, produce pieces of bread tied up in their loin cloth and tell the truth: “Eat, my son”. Even the little boy, Onu, shows how hunger need not make men selfish.

The greatest act of sacrifice recorded in the novel is the giving away of the cow, Mangala, by the mother of the fisherwoman who has become demented through suffering. The immeasurable value of the sacrifice is emphasized by three considerations: the plight of the giver who herself is facing starvation, the affection that the entire family feels for the cow which is accepted as a member of the household and the certain knowledge that the recipient of the gift will promptly sell the animal to be butchered. The peasants do not lose their fundamental goodness even as a result of their sufferings as neglected destitute in Calcutta.
As contrasted with his younger brother, Kunal who is action-oriented, Rahoul holds “inside him a weighing machine for the finer values” (Ibid., p.7). He hopes that “the imperialist war will grow into a war of ideas, values. The diehards will have to use slogans they hate and release forces they fear most”. (Ibid., p.9.) He is happy that Britain declared war on Swasthika but he has Gandhian reservations about it:

But how could a people step out into a war said to be waged for democratic freedom, so long as that very freedom was denied them? (Ibid., p.12)

It is clear from Rahoul’s recollections of his pre-Cambridge days that he had been enchanted with his Grandfather’s Gandhian ideas early in life. Like Gandhi who did not hate the British but their political system that enslaved India, Devata believes in their inherent goodness:

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. (Ibid., pp.21-22)

TRADITIONAL RURAL VALUES

The Gandhian bias upholding the traditional rural values is perceptible when Devata says this about villagers:
They are not bright and knowing and--civilized!-- Like you city-breds; but they are good people. Centuries of hardship and strain have not destroyed their faith in human values. (Ibid., p.24)

To Rahoul’s desperate question--“what hope is there for the people?” (Ibid., p.26.) Devata has only Gandhi as the answer. He affirms:

The national movement gives top priority to village reconstruction work,....... This is the very basis of our life to come...... I run a school for the village. (Ibid., p.26.)

Obviously, Rahoul is not shown to be under Gandhi’s spell in the sense that Bakha and Lalu are in Anand’s Untouchable and The Sword and the Sickle respectively. Nor is he shown to be in mystic or visionary contact with the Mahatma as Moorthy is in Kanthapura. Rahoul is an intellectual who is a scientist by discipline. In him Bhattacharya presents a Western educated Indian intellectual under the impact of Gandhian ideas. Gradually Rahoul’s concern with the hungry masses finds expression in his own hunger for freedom and he finds the answer in going back to the cultural roots of India lie, i.e. the village India.

Kajoli emerges stronger after her stay in the hospital. She really had to pass a ‘severe test’ as Rahoul had once put it. Out on the pavement, she sees her mother and brother Onu licking the food from the garbage. And at last she agrees to sell her body for money if it could sustain her mother and brother. But with a brilliant stroke, Bhattacharya
saves her from what would be the worst ignominy from the Gandhian point of view. Rahoul has come a long way from his secure but compromising position to the honest Gandhian way. In his newly developed capacity not to fear suffering and loneliness he is a true Gandhian. He has after all been able to identify himself with the poor people:

What happened to him as an individual did not matter. It only mattered what happened to his people........ his mind was without hate, without anger........(Ibid., p.204.)

GANDHIAN CONCEPT OF EVIL

Bhattacharya’s Gandhian concept of evil is at the root of his treatment of characters. His evil characters are never evil in themselves. They are not born evil. They are, like Samarendra, victims of an evil social system. This system may be colonial or a bad economic system, but the forces of evil are always outside of man. In Samarendra’s case, it was a life of deprivation in his youth which has turned him into a callous black-marketeer later. He is presented as an affectionate father who sees to it that his children do not suffer the same deprivation. Not that Bhattacharya is avoiding the factor of human culpability. But the sin that a character commits is more the target of his attack than the sinner himself. He has his share of suffering when Kunal is reported missing in
the very war Samarendra has been thriving on, and Rahoul, the elder son, becomes a Gandhian agitator ending up in jail.

**A PRACTICAL IDEALIST**

Bhattacharya’s preoccupation with Gandhi becomes more intense in his later novels. *Music for Mohini* deals with the Protagonist Jayadev’s passionate involvement with the Gandhian constructive programmes in the village Behula. As a practical idealist Jayadev is trying to turn Behula into a model village rid of superstitions, caste-system and exploitation of woman. The evolution of Mohini’s personality ending with the harmony which she achieves through her capacity to change and to compromise is one of the themes of the novel. The boy, Ranjan, is introduced as a means to bring out the tenderness and the mother-instinct in Mohini in the same way as the destitute boy Obhijit is introduced in *He Who Rides a Tiger*.

Mohini finally obeys the mother-in-law only because she seems to hear the persuasive voice of Old Mother counselling moderation. Jayadev, like his father-in-law, refuses to pay heed to astrology. He is not intimidated by the prediction of his death at the age of twenty-eight and he asks Mohini not to be unnerved by it. He boldly tells his mother that they should not be slaves of the stars. His bold answer to his mother in the temple episode reveals his moral courage.
REORIENTATION OF VALUES

The rebuilding of a new society for Free India and a reorientation of values through a blending of the past and the present are among the issues raised. Cultural integration is only academically discussed. The young reformers of Behula take up social work under Harindra’s leadership. They start a campaign for the elimination of the mosquito menace which involves the filling up of ponds. The priest of the Shiva temple blocks their way, but they triumph in the end. The reformist group make their minds to prevent the marriage of an elderly money-lender who has lost his third wife, with a very young girl of the village from taking place and they have the powerful backing of Jayadev himself. The conservatives in the village give the nickname “ruffians” to members of this group.

SOCIAL REFORMS

Certain major social reforms like widow remarriage are mentioned in the novel. The breaking down of the barriers of caste and the elimination of untouchability are other major steps mentioned in the novel. Harindra, the son of a Kaviraj, begins to argue with the father that medicine knows no race or nationality and wisdom directs a man to make use of the best of East and West in the fight against disease. The blood of
sympathy runs through his veins. He feels it is his duty to rebuild Sudha’s life. He is aware of the electric shock that would first paralyse the village, then stir it to mad fury—he a Non-Brahmin marrying a Brahmin girl and defying a timeless social practice. He is not sure that Sudha would marry him and accept the challenge of the future. In this novel Bhattacharya makes scant reference to the Gandhian philosophy except to that of the contrast between city and village modes of life.

Jayadev is a strange mixture of the old and the new. He is a subtle scholar in the philosophies and East and West. The new learning holds him as much as the old, so that his heart is set on a synthesis. A writer a rare distinction at the age of twenty five, he is writing a monumental work on the culture patterns of East and West. Besides being a work of reference, it has a message of deep significance for the people of India in their search for a true way of life. It is his dream to reorient the values and patterns of Hindu life. He wishes for a harmonious blending of the social and political liberty. He believes that “freedom” must release a spiritual energy among the masses which would require every social virtue to be re-weighed. He knows that ignorance, the arch-enemy of the people, must be driven out. This shy and simple ascetic with his sculptured features and serene face is quite different from others of his class.
While others sacrificed the country for their self, he would sacrifice his own belongings for the happiness of the people. The book illustrates the Vedic maxim that the lone eater is a lone sinner. Crisis has tested the real man in Jayadev and revealed a core of steel in him. He rises to his full stature, convenes assemblies in the village meadow and provides meals to all who see them. He believes that the Big House must stand by the people in the hour of need. But failing in his duty, it would perish by the weight of its inner defeat. He hides his feelings behind a tranquil mask, and wraps himself in silence.

In this novel Bhattacharya has brought out a synthesis and a cultural unity to India and has proved Tagore’s maxim that East and West shall meet together.

THE CORE OF THE HUMAN HEART

He Who Rides a Tiger treats the theme of hunger in the deeper context of India’s cultural history. The Gandhian alternative by way of contrast to the decay of human values in post-independence India gives sharpness and depth to Bhattacharya’s characterization. Gandhi’s influence is perceptibly seen in his growing concern with the inner forces that evolve a man’s character in this novel. Bhattacharya examines the horrors of unemployment and social ills in Calcutta, yet he also presents a
vivid and sharp characterization of Kalo, who sees himself beginning to be transformed by the very greed he sought to eradicate.

Bhattacharya gives a pathetic picture of innumerable indignities and cruelties to which human beings were subjected during the famine. It deprived mankind of everything and made them do anything depraved. While some indulged in luring the young innocent lasses to prostitution, others made money whatever be the method that was employed then. The law of the jungle prevailed and morality and honesty ceased to exist.

Bhattacharya deftly delineates the distinction between the strong and the weak; and he dexterously links up the two themes. He has also represented the contrast in temperaments. Thus Kalo, the strong man with irresistible force and energy is closely associated with the soft and delicate heart of his daughter Lekha on whom he lavishes all his innate affection. The famine serves as the right occasion to highlight this contrast. It brings out separation between them and it seriously affects the lives of both father and daughter.

MIRROR OF THE MODERN LIFE

The story serves as a true mirror of the modern life where honesty has become unfashionable and where corruption has entered the vital of the body politic.
The theme of the novel touches the core of the human heart. The novel mirrors the naked horrors of the famine, the ruthlessness of the society and above all the psychological and superstitious temperament of the people. It is as irony of the human nature that the rich people, who treat the poor as the meanest creatures crawling on the surface of the earth, do not mind offering any amount for worshipping God with sincere hope that he would bless them in their immoral acts and unlawful and immoral transactions. The essence of the novel is that fraud never triumphs over conscience. On the spur of the moment and the heat of oppression, although a man does surrender himself to the lowest temptation and trickery in life, he cannot consciously feel any solace till he clears himself of the shackles of degradation and ruin. He feels restless and goes back to his ethical plane.

Bhattacharya presents a deep insight into the fact that no one knows to what abysmal depths poverty degrades a man. Man loses all sense of values and becomes a slave to circumstances. The plight of the destitutes in the novel reminds one of similar echoes from So Many Hungers--the absence of rationing of food grains, non-chalance to prices and hoarding. Boats are destroyed and the poor people look at the city as a light house and proceed thereby travelling on foot boards of trains.
THREE DIMENSIONAL VIEWS

The fate of the millions is written in the face of Kalo. Thus He Who Rides a Tiger has for its three dimensional view—the political, economic and social background. It is mainly a social novel. The quit India Movement, the imprisonments, defiance of authority and hunger strikes strike the political atmosphere. The economic crisis consequent on the Bengal famine of 1943 and the social injustices and inequities of the various classes in the society are an echo of the economic and social background. Amidst this setting, Bhattacharya gives a clarion call to the nation and his words have come out prophetic:

This is the century of the common man. His will prevails. We are humble servants of the masses, you and I. Our private sentiments don’t count. (He Who Rides a Tiger, p.218)

Biten’s imprisonment is the price he has to pay for protesting against the callous treatment given to the hungry by the authorities.

The agitation to which desperate men resort when they are no longer able to bear the pangs of hunger is graphically represented in the novel. When Kalo and Lekha are comfortably settled in the temple, they one day see a procession of destitutes carrying a banner and shouting: “Food Food! We demand food for the hungry!” (Ibid., p.160) Viswanath, the old Kamar joins the procession though he himself is now safe in the
protection of Mangal Adhikari. The trustees of the temple discharge him from the service for this act of rebellion.

**PROTEST AGAINST HUNGER**

Bhattacharya indicates that the protest against hunger becomes a broad-based movement with which all patriotic people begin to identify themselves and also that it becomes merged with the larger movement for national freedom:

Something had seized the people so that their apathy was broken. Great demonstrations were to be seen in the streets almost every day. They were not composed of down-and-outs; among the hunger-marchers...... were men from workshops, students from colleges, clerks from offices. (Ibid., p.174)

These demonstrations are linked to the Quit India Movement by the fact that the Committee which controls them includes men who were in jail earlier.

**DRAMA OF THE TEMPLE**

Kalo starts the drama of the temple purely with the motive of revenge, acting the part of the Brahmin, Mangal Adhikari, out of necessity. In courses of time, however, his easily acquired prosperity and
model prominence show signs of corroding into his true self but his integrity and strength of character, though not in active operation, are still lying in his armoury ready to be used whenever he can summon the will-power to use them. He experiences a moral and spiritual conflict between love of ease, power and prestige of one side and desire to be true himself on the other. He is finally able to kill the tiger of deceit and make-believe when he acquires the moral strength to be himself. His personality has disintegrated in the course of the tiger-ride and he is able to slay the beast only when he has brought about a re-integration of it.

The struggle of Kalo is consequently a struggle for integrity. The congratulations he receives from Biten and the acclamations of the crowd “Victory to our brother!” are for his spiritual victory and for the liberation of spirit that he has achieved.

THE BASIC GOODNESS

The basic goodness of man is evident from Kalo’s transformation, Lekha’s refusal to transform herself into new strata of society, and Biten’s rejection of community or caste and the old aunt’s sympathetic and merciful act of showering kindness on a deserving and poor woman in the village. The situations depicting the plight of the poor and the miserable and the offer of help from people irrespective of their position,
caste or community reveal the fact that humanism and social realism are found in the novel.

**THE REAL FREEDOM**

*A Goddess Named Gold* presents a critique of materialistic values that are enveloping post-independence India. The preoccupation of Bhattacharya in this novel is with the way in which a country should use freedom and what benefits may be derived from it. Gold in the popular connotation is material wealth, but gold may also symbolize richness of mind or spirit. The gift of freedom should not be looked upon as a means for the acquisition of prosperity alone; it 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 COW-HOUSE FIVE**

The Cow-house Five, trained in the methods of Satyagraha, are trying to evolve a method of fighting the Seth for his open exploitation of the current scarcity of cloth and his refusal to sell it to the villagers at fair prices. Bhattacharya makes use of this opportunity to focus attention on some of the social evils following the famine of 1943. In this novel he gives the future vision of India and gives vent to his view, on the problems facing the country and the duties and responsibilities to be
realized by the citizens of India—men and women alike. He makes it clear through the words of Sohanlal:

   We must demand what should be ours, the Right to live as human beings. (A Goddess Named Gold, p.176)

   Meera an unusually gifted girl, even at the age of eleven had insisted on joining an anti-Government demonstration at the time of the Quit India Movement and had got arrested along with the others. She had also demonstrated her resourcefulness and altruism on another occasion by saving the life of a man bitten by a cobra by sucking out the poisoned blood with her mouth. Meera and the members of the Cow-house Five succeed in their non-violent peaceful protest against the Seth in demanding cloths to women.

MEERA’S GRANDFATHER

   Meera’s grandfather, an unnamed character in the novel, is a wandering minstrel who visits his family and village only occasionally for a brief stay, and about whose wanderings and activities little is known. He is a regular visitor at important fairs, and travels a lot earning his fare by entertaining passengers with his story-telling and songs.

   There is a certain air of mystery about him; an aura of greatness surrounds him. Many believe that in his previous birth he was Atmaram,
a disciple of a great sage living on the Himalayas, that by a kind of instinct he had gone up to the same region and been recognised and greeted by the sage as Atmaram, that he is now in touch with his old master and that in course of time he will be fully initiated in saintly lore. Everyone in the village except his own wife believes the story and similar stories which the minstrel tells them.

OLD GRANDMA

Old Grandma alone, though greatly attached to the man, takes his stories with a pinch of salt. The minstrel is an unusual character and he plays a vital part in this novel which deals with India’s freedom. It may very well be that he is a veiled representation of the Father of the Nation, a homeless wanderer at home with large crowds, a man among men but deified by a grateful and admiring people. There is no novel of Bhattacharya which does not contain a reference to the Freedom struggle and Mahatma Gandhi.

IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

The arrival of the minstrel in the village is the starting point of important developments. Before his story-telling session after the cinema show minstrel promises to give the Seth a taveez or amulet to be worn round the arm that will enable the wearer to realize all his wishes.
Therefore everyone assembled at the story-telling is surprised when instead of giving it to the Seth, he ties it round the arm of Meera. As he does so, he speaks these words:

Wearing it on your person you will do an act of kindness. Real kindness. Then all copper on your body will to gold......

Parted from your arm, the touchstone will be dead, a worthless pebble. (Ibid., p.85)

The minstrel, absent or present, has a pervasive influence on all the events of the novel. He does not fall into the whirlpool of the material and earthly values of freedom. To him, means something having spiritual content. It is not an escape from responsibilities, but a direct plunge into the real data and values of life. The villagers do not permit him to go back to his life of seclusion, but impress on him the need for participation in the activities of the village of Sonamitti that he should make them share his faith in the future and release them from a past that is dead and gone. The truth of life is not to run away from it, but got into it and set it-right, thereby making it happier. True realization of freedom is more essential than spiritual excellence and envisioned bliss. Thought has to find its fulfillment in action. As Emerson puts it in “The American Scholar”, “Thinking is a practical activity; action completes it”.

The account of the desperate experiments performed at the instance of the Seth is also used by the novelist to indicate the basic difference
between an act of real kindness and a flamboyant, motivated act devoid of the spirit of compassion. Compassion is a theme dear to the heart of Bhattacharya. There is no novel of his which does not refer to his virtue or depict touching examples of it.

The destitute girl in *So Many Hungers* who earns money by exposing her body to the public gaze and spends it all on the hungry children of the neighbourhood, the English soldier who strokes the hair of the ragged and dirty Onu and gives him a half-rupee coin and the old low-caste woman in *He Who Rides a Tiger* who offers beans to Lekha when she has tried to steal pumpkins from her roof are some memorable examples of this virtue.

**THE EPISODE OF MEERA RESCUING NAGO**

In *A Goddess named Gold*, the episode of Meera rescuing Nago from the well and her saving the man who has been bitten by a cobra and her touching kindness to the cow, Soondri, suffering from labour-pain and finally dying of it, are parallel cases. There is another 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 – shop, buys some sweets promptly and gives them to the boy to eat. The deeds of supposed kindness suggested one after another by the Seth are ludicrous parodies of these spontaneous acts. The descriptions of
these acts amuse and entertain the readers and at the same time embody a veiled lesson in ethics pointing out negative examples of the virtue in question.

The minstrel is again an indirect representation of the Father of the Nation who like the minstrel wanders in different places, meets a large number of crowds and is admired and deified by them.

A FUSION OF VALUES

**Shadow from Ladakh** is the story of Satyajit--a Cambridge-educated young man who, after his brief service at Shantiniketan, is selected to lead the village Gandhigram an ideal village founded by Vinoba Bhave on Gandhian principles as an embodiment of the rural India of Gandhi’s dream. Satyajit has been the choice of Vinoba, he being a young man who has acquired the best education of the West and then the best ideals of India at Shantiniketan.

The Cambridge educated young man is a true Gandhian in his austere life and ascetic thought and a true Tagore disciple in his educational and aesthetic ideals. Thus he is the ideal Indian national in free India whom Vinoba can think of choosing as the leader of his model village. Satyajit experiences a serious conflict when a young man, Bhaskar, who has returned from America with an engineering degree and
comes as the Chief Engineer of a large modern factory in the nearby town, Steeltown.

Bhaskar is flushed with the ambition of industrializing and modernizing the country, sweeping away in the process all that is old and outmoded in his Western outlook. He wants to expand his factory, and of course, the town which will result in annexing Gandhigram--a village of no importance according to him and an anachronism in this modern age.

Bhaskar knows that the real obstacle to his plan is the presence in Gandhigram of its guiding spirit, Satyajit, whose soul-force is a match for whatever political or legal pressure may be applied on him. Satyajit is confronted with two perils simultaneously—the peril to the country and the peril to Gandhigram. As the Government turns down his proposal to take a party of four persons to Ladakh as apostles of peace and non-violence, his resistance takes the characteristic shape of a fast-unto-death which he announces in the identical language that Gandhiji used on the occasion of one of his most crucial fasts.

Satyajit’s daughter, Sumita, had been attracted not only to the Westernized culture of Steeltown like many others of her village, but also to Bhaskar, the living symbol of this culture. And Bhaskar in his turn feels attracted to her, thus also appreciating her father and the ideal he represents. The attitude of Bhaskar to Satyajit and his ideal thus
undergoes changes and he decides ultimately not to annex the village in the way he proposed. Accordingly, he leads a procession from Steeltown to Gandhigram to announce Satyajit’s victory.

RESOLUTION

The crisis of the novel is resolved by Bhaskar and it is a result of compromise and readjustment of values of either side. Shadow from Ladakh makes numerous references to Gandhiji’s teachings and his work. The perfection of the weapon of non-violence, the victory over General Smuts, the struggle against the British Government in India, the demonstration of the potency of moral force at Naokhali, are all recapitulated. After mentioning how Gandhiji fell to an Assassin’s bullet, Bhattacharya describes how Bhave picked up ‘the banner of love and non-violence’ and brought about an economic revolution through his movement of land for the landless. He adds, “he, non-violent new-Marx, sought a redistribution of wealth through the instrument of the heart, the inherent goodness of the human spirit!” (Shadow from Ladakh, p.13)

Gandhigram is a model village in which we find the principles of Gandhian economics and ethics worked out. The main object of its founders was to create ‘a social order in which all were truly equal’. (Ibid., p.28)
When Jhanak breaks the accepted code, of restriction of free mixing with both the sexes, Satyajit undertakes a purificatory fast for five days as Gandhiji did at Tolstoy Farm. Absence of hatred for the opponent is one of the concomitants of Gandhiji’s gospel of non-violence. This idea is emphatically brought about in the novel through several touches. Satyajit strongly opposed Bhaskar but there is no personal hatred involved in the struggle. Speaking to Bhaskar himself on one occasion, Sumita, quotes her father’s words on the subject: “To give hate for hate is only to make the evil grow stronger. To hate is to be defeated in the moral struggle”. (Ibid., p.24.)

**NON-VIOLENCE**

For Gandhiji non-violence was a basic creed, but for his countrymen it has become a mere instrument. The following bitter comment which is echoed also in Bhattacharya’s book, *Gandhi the Writer*, shows his sorrow at the hollowness of India’s claim to be a follower of the Gandhian path. Bireswar says in the novel:

A handful of years after the freedom was won, we’ve released ourselves from the architect of that freedom by giving him a shrine on the bank of the Jamuna 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 maybe they don’t. (Ibid., p.209.)
A basic question raised in *Shadow from Ladakh* is the extent to which industrialisation on a vast scale is relevant to the Indian situation. Industrialisation to Bhattacharya means not only the use of machinery and the establishment of factories for large-scale production but also, more importantly, a reorientation of values and a revision of our way of life. The end of the novel depicts the reconciliation and synthesis of two ideologies--the contrasting contemporary life of India symbolized by Satyajit and Bhaskar.

Bhattacharya strongly condemns violence as a solution to International conflicts. He almost thrashes threadbare the two standpoints-first, Gandhian with its emphasis on pro-village economy and non-violent way of life and the second, heavy industrialization as the solution for India’s economic problems. In the novel he has shown that the former ultimately triumphs. Satyajit, like Devesh Basu in Bhattacharya’s first novel, is a Gandhi--like character. Bhaskar is the later version of Rahoul in *So Many Hungers*. He has been a votary of industrialization in the greater part of the novel, but finally he is converted to the Gandhian way of life.

Comparing the novel with *So Many Hungers*, Bhattacharya himself declares that it is “rooted more deeply in Gandhian thought”. (*Gandhi the Writer*, p.243.) It embodies Bhattacharya’s criticism of war, his belief in the power of persuasion to solve international problems,
his faith in penance and suffering as means of self-purification and his championing of celibacy and continence.

**GANDHIAN TRUTH**

*A Dream in Hawaii*, his latest novel, is the only novel he has written and published since he left India in 1969 to live permanently in the United States, and also the only one in which action takes place both in India and outside India i.e., in Hawaii. Apparently, its canvas is wider than that of his earlier novels and the issues are somewhat diffused. But his firm commitment to Gandhian ideals remains as strong as ever in this novel. The ultimate disenchantment of its hero, Swami Yogananda with the commercialization of ancient Indian religion and philosophy in the United States of America and his return to India are enacted under the beacon light of Gandhian truth.

Bhattacharya refers to the magnetic influence of four personalities on the Indian scene: Gautama Buddha, Vivekananda, Gurudev Tagore and Gandhi. Vivekananda’s interest in contemporary man is as intense as his absorption in the abstract thoughts of Vedanta. He said: “I will go into a thousand hells cheerfully, if I can rouse my countrymen to stand on their feet and be man”. Indian gurus first get discovered in the West--that has become an accepted norm.
Bhattacharya is disillusioned at the callous indifference of the Indians towards Gandhi and his ideals. He states: “I know people who honestly believe that Mahatma Gandhi in his home land has been turned into one of the numerous Gods and placed on a high pedestal, an ideal image with flowers on its stone feet, while abroad, he is more and more a living presence. I shall have no regrets if the world accepts Mahatma Gandhi with all he has stood for and fought for, while India rejects him”.

In an interview in 1975 Bhattacharya has said that Gandhian idealism lives in the same way in contemporary India as it did in the pre-independent India. (Janet P.Gemmill, “An Interview with Bhabani Bhattacharya”, World Literature Written in English. Vol.14, No.2 Nov.1975 - p.305.)

Bhattacharya holds the conviction that Gandhian ideals are the panacea for both personal and social ills in today’s world.