Chronologically Music for Mohini published in 1952 is the second novel of Bhabani Bhattacharya. Although this novel was written just after So Many Hungers! its subject is totally different from the latter one. So Many Hungers! is about the Quit India Movement of 1942 and the Bengal Famine of 1943. Bhattacharya makes this novel a vehicle for an impassioned outburst of anger at and protest against certain social evils like hunger, exploitation, and the caste system. He exposes the callous and selfish attitude of the professedly religious-minded people and the government. But Music for Mohini is a novel of a different kind. It is the least didactic of Bhattacharya’s novels. He seems to have been cool and composed while writing this novel. Jayadev and Mohini in the novel are designed on the author himself and on Salila, his wife, respectively. Mohini’s background is like Salila’s whereas Jayadev’s life is fashioned on that of his creator.

Music for Mohini moves on two levels. On the personal level, it is about Mohini, a city-born girl married to a boy from the village. It is the story of her adjustment to her new lifestyle. On the social level, the narrative presents an attempt to “connect culture with culture”¹ and to merge “the old Eastern view of life with the new semi Western outlook”². The author dramatizes the conflict between the old generation (orthodoxy) and the new (modernity), who would like to usher in changes. The novel also deals with the problems of India after Independence. The action of the novel covers

² Ibid.
full span of the year 1948 and it also treats of social problems in rural and urban India. The novel is a psychological study of the intellectual and emotional growth of Mohini, the central character. The absurd beliefs and practices of our society are bitterly exposed. The novelist pleads for a reformed society. Social problems like casteism, untouchability, widow-remarriage and prevention of child marriages are sought to be eradicated through another character, Jayadev. He is a social reformer, who is anxious to see his village as an ideal one. Bhattacharya’s message in the novel is that political freedom without social freedom has no meaning: “Our political freedom is worth little without social freedom”\(^1\). The worn out practices, which hinder the progress of the country are severely attacked:

“Society, rural society (an nine-tenths of India was rural) was sick with taboos and inhibitions of its own making: the iniquities of caste and untouchability; the ritualism that passed for religion, the wide-flung cob-web of superstitions faith. It was all an out growth of centuries of decadence. The purity of ancient thought had been lost in misinterpretation until the dignity of man had become a mere playing of vested interest”\(^2\).

Themes like unhappy marriages, sufferings of women because of their total economic and emotional dependence on their husbands and rigid social morals, are also taken up in *Music for Mohini*.

The novel earned a good deal of popularity abroad, particularly in France and America. It was translated not only into French(1952) but also into

\(^1\)Bhabani Bhattacharya, *Music for Mohini*, p.127
\(^2\)Ibid., p.67-68
Italian(1955), Dutch(1963), Polish(1963) and Russian(1965). It became a monthly selection of the renowned book club, Le Club Français de Livre, Paris, and also a Book-of-the-Month selection at New York. The foreign readers were fascinated by the vivid picture of India in the process of modernization. The Chicago Tribune went to the extent of saying that it is "a splendid novel that may take rank with Pearl Buck's The Good Earth"\(^1\). The New York Times was equally fulsome in its praise of the novel: "We see the best of India—the best of any civilization, for that matter—in Mohini—we’ll be lucky if meet a more appealing heroine this year"\(^2\). The New York Book-of-the-Month Club News commented, "A more pleasing and skilful novel about India than this has not reached these Western shores in a long time"\(^3\).

The plot of Music for Mohini centres round Mohini, who is a Calcutta-bred Brahmin girl. She is the daughter of a Professor of History in a local college. She is married into a feudal family of a village called Behula. In contrast, her husband Jayadev’s sister, Rooplekha, is a village girl who is married to a Calcutta doctor. Both Mohini and Rooplekha are uprooted from one culture and transplanted into another, and their struggles of adjustment form the core of the novel. For instance, Rooplekha, a vegetarian in the village, is forced to eat egg, fish and meat. She is forced to go out on the street with her face bare and to mix freely with her husband’s friends. For her it is like growing a new skin. She imbibes enough sophistication to tell Mohini that girls who are married like themselves serve some purpose:

"It’s as though we made a bridge between two banks

---

1. Quoted from the blurb printed on the front page of Music for Mohini.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
of a river. We connect culture with culture, Mohini, our old Eastern view of life with the new semi-Western outlook. The city absorbs a little of the “barbaric” village, the village absorbs a little of the “West-polluted” city. Both changes, unaware. They are less angry with each other. This is more urgent today than ever before. Our new India must rest on this foundation.”

But the main narrative focuses on Mohini and her struggle—her struggle to come to terms with the traditions of her husband’s Big House and his village.

Mohini, a convent-educated girl, has made a name in Calcutta as a radio singer. Her father, is very fond of her and does not want to part with her but social customs force him to marry her off. So, he gives an advertisement in the newspaper. After a series of events involving bride-seeing, matching of horoscopes and setting of dowry, Mohini is eventually married to Jayadev, a twenty-five-year-old Zamindar of Behula village. He is a scholar who is busy writing a book on the culture patterns of the East and the West. He is not interested in marriage but because of his mother’s desire to see him married he has to agree to the alliance. It is at this stage that the ideas of the novelist are communicated to the reader through Jayadev’s thoughts and there is an expatiation on the immediate needs of free India—social reform, abolition of slavery, particularly that of the spirit, revelation of tradition value in their true splendour, and reestablishment of the Vedic Concept of womanhood enshrined in the figure of Maitreyi.

After marriage, Jayadev, Mohini and her brother, Heeralal reach the

village of Behula. The village however poses multiple problems for Mohini: for example, she faces the problem of shaping herself in accordance with Jayadev’s ideal of Maitreyi, the intellectual wife of Yajnavalkya, of coming to terms with her mother-in-law and her imperious ways and of accepting Sudha, whose presence is very disconcerting for her.

On the other hand there is Jayadev, who never tries to understand his wife’s loves and passions. In fact, he is “a shy, simple ascetic” who wants to make Behula, a model village and wants his consort to be his Maitreyi in action. So both are frustrated with each other and tension mounts between them. Her adolescent dreams being shattered, Mohini feels deeply hurt. Jayadev does at times feel for her but his mind is set on his ideal and he pleads for co-operation to fulfil them. Mohini, also decides that “in the great task ahead she would play her part. She would be his true partner in the feeling, in faith and in dream”.

Mohini’s mother-in-law who subscribes to traditional values in life imposes many restrictions on her and this soon become intolerable for Mohini. The former entrusts her with the trusteeship of the family tradition of the Big House. Mohini is sometimes filled with a sense of rebellion. Two years of her barrenness bring a lot of anxiety and doubts to her mother-in-law’s mind. She insensitively makes the lacerating remarks, “what evil destiny made me bring you into this house? Your barrenness will curse it for all time...you will put an end to the Big House” and Mohini retorts in anger, “Just as well I am barren,

2. Ibid., p.129
3. Ibid., p.167
just as well I am barren”. Only her pregnancy brings a reconciliation with her mother-in-law. These two years of marriage lead Mohini to mature under the pressure of new experiences in the village into a woman of understanding and responsibility. The novelist depicts the growth of Mohini’s personality and her inner self in terms of the various conflicts that she has to encounter.

The final dramatic event takes the protagonist to the Virgin Goddess for a blood-sacrifice. Through astrological predictions, Mohini’s mother-in-law comes to know that her only son, Jayadev would die that year if he was not blessed with a son. So her mother-in-law, takes Mohini to the Virgin Goddess but Jayadev comes in time to save his wife from the sacrifice. In the end Mohini’s pregnancy resolves many of her problems and transforms her into the true mistress of the Big House.

Music for Mohini expresses Bhabani Bhattacharya’s positive idea of life. Mohini, is described by the novelists as having a passion for a bright, joyful life, and a contempt for all that is dull and dead: “Mohini, who loved the warmth, the colour of life, could not bear images of decay”. She is instinctively vivacious, playful and carefree. She loves to laugh, and needs just a slight cause to go into peals of laughter. She is beautiful and has a melodious voice. When she longs for a lover and has really none, she does not get depressed or miserable. She lives in her own dream world, which she creates around Somir and others. In other words, Mohini accepts life and does not discard it, although the eternal woman in her is dissatisfied.

After some time she is married to Jayadev, “a silent, solitary man with

1. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Music for Mohini, p. 167
2. Ibid., p. 6
heavy-lidded dreamy eyes in a young tranquil face”¹. As a scholar he lives in a remote and traditional village but is obsessed by the desire “to reoriented the values and patterns of Hindu life”². He nurses tireless quest for knowledge and wishes his wife to be a Gargi or Maitreyi. The more he becomes abstracted in his thought the more Mohini’s dream of loving her husband and being loved by him is shattered. Her magic voice, which was recorded in the form of songs is totally neglected. She is shocked and feels lonely even on account of her mother-in-law. The latter is a strictly traditional and orthodox woman, while Mohini is obsessed with new values. Her sister-in-law, Rooplekha gives her strength to face the difficult situation by narrating the history of her own married life. She observes the need of synthesis of opposites. The result of these talks is that Mohini resolves to bring happiness to the Big House. The author points out that inspite of unfulfilment and joylessness, she does not accept defeat. What she accepts is the challenge to adopt the ways of life in the village:

“But she had her husband. For his sake she would absorb new ways of thought and habit, cultivate new interests. She set her mouth: life was a serious business, and she was no doll in silk and satin. She was the mistress of the Big House, a position higher than any other woman’s in Behula village. She had duties to discharge, responsibilities”³.

Mohini feels that she can not experience loneliness because “only idle minds

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.105-06
have time to feel lonely.\(^1\)

Bhattacharya also portrays Jayadev as very happy and contented with his wife. “His heart warmed to the image of his Maitreyi as she worshipped his gods. It was, he thought a measure of their spiritual union.\(^2\) Though a visionary, he is practical because he is able to tackle the crisis of famine competently. The dreamy quiet-eyed philosopher displays “a steel core”.\(^3\)

Bhabani Bhattacharya re-affirms his faith in life showing that the opposites—the old and the new values, city life and village life, the old and the young—can live in harmony with each other. Mohini is a city-bred girl but is able to develop intimacy with her old traditional mother by virtue of her natural resilience. The result is happiness and peace. She takes up the good work of educating the illiterate village women and feels happy and contented. The novelist comments: “life, once so empty, was now full.”\(^4\) Bhattacharya is against denial of life. That is why, he shows people anxious about “the anguished denial of Sudha’s life”\(^5\), and makes them believe that “Sudha truly in love would be Sudha reborn.”\(^6\) (Sudha is a Brahmin girl, whose marriage was postponed when she was fifteen years old because of the evil eye of Saturn. She remains unmarried and stays in the Big House of Behula village).

Harindra, an important character in the novel, is a progressive and philanthropic doctor, who has faith in a bright life. Through him, the novelist

\(^1\) Bhabani Bhattacharya, *Music for Mohini*, p.107
\(^2\) Ibid., p.106
\(^3\) Ibid., p.122
\(^4\) Ibid., p.150
\(^5\) Ibid., p.157
\(^6\) Ibid.
expresses his vision. There arises a fierce conflict between the village priest, representing the old superstition, and progressive people like Jayadev and Harindra. The rational forces come out triumphant. It is Harindra who reveals the author’s positive of life:

“Harindra felt the chill in their hearts and he gazed off towards the horizon as though he could see the dawn of a new day. He smiled and spoke with a sort of joy. Never again shall the hyacinth grow in Behula village. The myth of the devout one along with a hundred other myths is dust for the breeze of a passing age. We march ahead, we progress”¹.

Jayadev, who is quite often sad because of the gulf between his wife and him, is truly happy with her towards the close of the novel. He tries to understand her fully and enjoy life with her. In the end, Mohini who is supposed to be barren becomes pregnant. Through her joy and fulfilment, the novelist gives vent to his trust in the fullness and goodness of life:

“At last, there was no discord. Life was music—a note of song for the Old Mother was in her, a note for Jayadev and his rebel gods, a note for the Big House and Behula village, torn and at cross-purposes for a while. Her life was music—the true quest of every woman, her deepest need”².

Music for Mohini with a subject-matter and background different from that of So Many Hungers! is mainly about the woman’s world. Hunger

1. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Music for Mohini, p.166
2. Ibid., p.188
depicted in this novel is of a different kind. There is no hunger for food and wealth. Here Hunger is considered in the form of eternal ethical values, hunger for a happier life for the common people, hunger for sex, hunger to become a mother. The novel paints a young girl’s hunger for a lover and a man’s hunger for a girl of his liking. Then there is the hunger of a tender-hearted bride who yearns to go to her husband for the first time; and an intellectual’s quest for knowledge.

It is a fact that every young man and woman has an innate urge for a lover. And if there is no genuine fulfilment, one feels unhappy. Mohini, the central character of the novel, is portrayed realistically. She is also restless in her early youth because she has no lover. But she feels happy that her classmate Reba gets a love letter almost every day from her various lovers such as Mony, Pankaj, Borun, Premendra and others. Mohini is anxious to know the contents of the letter. She pities her teacher, Miss Sen, who is over twenty-nine years and yet has never heard a word of love from any man. When nobody claims a love letter in the class, Miss Sen frankly puts it in her handbag. Mohini thinks that, “perhaps she would read that letter again in the privacy of her room and enjoy the sweet words. Well, let her hungry heart have its fill”\(^1\). Since no boy has ever written any letter to Mohini, she feels that “she, too, must read the words of love addressed to her school friends”\(^2\). She seems to be angry when she finds Bindu having an admirer, a man to please her heart. (Bindu is the fourteen year old daughter of the cook-woman who worked at Mohini’s house).

As maidens like Mohini, Reba, Bindu and others long for lovers, so a

\(^1\) Bhabani Bhattacharya, *Music for Mohini*, p.23

\(^2\) Ibid.
bachelor like Harindra also desires to have a girl of his choice. He is a medical practitioner, who is fascinated by Sudha but caste stands as an obstacle in his way. He is a non-Brahmin, whereas Sudha is a Brahmin. He can marry her only if he defies a timeless social practice. But when he cures her of typhoid, he gets an opportunity to visit her frequently. He knows that an inter-caste marriage is not rare in cities, but a village like Behula cannot stand it and the villagers will surely regard it as a sacrilegious act. But his irrepressible hunger for her, depresses him and he is unable to control himself:

“He would marry the girl he needed, needed with the deep hunger of his spirit. Let Behula do what it could. His heart swell and he felt a swift surge of power. He would break Behula”

Music for Mohini also shows the longing of a maiden to give herself completely and religiously to her husband-lover. Mohini becomes a bride and marries Jaydev. She has a desire to be lovely and feels that her entire being “longed to be gift, fit for offering”\(^1\). The novelist portrays in her the essential Hindu maiden embodying the “ancient hunger to offer worship”\(^2\), to her husband in the form of Lord. On her bridal day she longs to see his face. She dreams, of being loved by her husband. And in return, she wants to give herself to him completely, physically and spiritually. She feels hunger even for sex. But this marriage brings only grief. Her husband, to whom she wanted to give every thing, cannot come up to her expectations. His presence to her becomes rare. He cannot give her physical joy because of his idealistic and

---

2. Ibid., p.55
3. Ibid.
intellectual pursuits. Whenever she sees her bright and pretty figure in the mirror, she feels an uncontrollable urge for her husband’s love. The words unutterable even for the tongue find repeatedly a clear expression on her face: “I hunger for thy love”.

Even a young man has an urge for the company of his young wife. It is not always Mohini who has a strong longing for Jayadev, but this visionary husband, despite his other preoccupations, is also disturbed due to his longing for his beautiful wife. When he rescues her from the barbarous superstitious ritual, which she is to perform in order to get rid of her barrenness, he pines to see her. He feels happy for her:

“He stared ahead at the palanquin fast bearing her away, and he felt a hunger for her face and her voice, for her smile, her fragrance and warmth.

His heart was full of tenderness”.

The other variety of hunger explored in this novel is that of an intellectual’s quest for knowledge. Jayadev has an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, social and philosophical. He wishes his wife Mohini to be a bodiless thinker like Gargi and Maitreyi, co-operating with him constantly in his pursuit of knowledge:

“The Vedic woman lived a thousand years before the start of the Christian era. She was no household drudge, no decorative being, but an intellectual, striding beside man in a tireless quest for knowledge.

Her contribution to Aryan, though, lived still, shining

1.Bhabani Bhattacharya, Music for Mohini, p.124
2.Ibid., p.180
as ever. There was Gargi. There was Maitreyi. Jayadev had evoked them before as bodiless thinker, never as women.

Jayadev wants to bring about a new ideal world order. He is an incarnation of the restless spirit hungry for “the new dawn”.

We all know that Bhattacharya lived in a period when people were dying from hunger and some mighty people accumulated most of the grains of Bengal. The author through these novels shows his anger towards the Government and these mighty and callous profiteers. Though Music for Mohini is a different kind of novel, but even here, Bhattacharya refers to hunger for food several times. When Mohini is going to her husband’s house for the first time, she says to her younger brother Heeralal: “I am so hungry.” The brother pities her because “hunger was a form of suffering he could understand.” The novelist also refers to the Bengal Famine of 1943, which was a devastating impact on the village of Behula. But the villagers are saved from starvation by the nobility of Jayadev. The man-made hunger causes “the living skeletons of men, women and children with dead eyes and balloon bellies, tottering from street to street, lying down exhausted.” As the famine passes away without causing much destruction in Behula, “the Big House had become more than ever a legend.”

1. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Music for Mohini, p.71
2. Ibid., p.187
3. Ibid., p.81
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p.123
6. Ibid.
bondage is the root-cause of social slavery and this economic bondage is the result of man's absolutely unavoidable need for food. Jayadev on behalf of the author comprehends this bitter truth of life during the dreadful of the famine: "A hungry man could not be free in spirit". 

Bhattacharya has also interspersed the narrative with some folk-songs sung by a cartman. These songs artistically spotlight several kinds of hunger, such as the devotee's hunger for God, the barren woman's longing for a child, the lonely wife's craving for her husband and the starving man's quest for a morsel of food:

"You say the name of Hari on the hundred beads of rosary. 
And hope to attain Him, Oh delusion! 
The barren woman cries for a child, 
The lonely spouse cries for a mate, 
The hungry cry for a morsel. 
All those cryings, full-throated, passionate, 
Mixed together—
Not enough for Attainment!".

Music for Mohini is totally different from So Many Hungers! because the former one deals primarily with social freedom, whereas second one concentrates upon political freedom. Bhattacharya frequently affirms that social freedom is very important for the real progress of the people because without it political freedom is ineffective and has little value. It is this form of freedom, which is the actual basis of all other types of freedom. So, the

1. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Music for Mohini, p.139
2. Ibid., p.79
novelist presents the hero of the novel, Jayadev as dedicated to social freedom which is of utmost significance for India after she has achieved political freedom.

The novel portrays the social changes of the post-Independence period. The author wants to bring about a social renaissance. His intention as expressed through Jayadev, is to pickup the best of the time—honoured Indian traditions and fuse them with the reasonable and acceptable aspects of modern society. Our rural India is a composite whole of religion, superstitions, myths, festivals, weddings on the one hand and physical impoverishment and natural disasters on the other. But some of the superstitions and myths are evil and need to be abolished. And this abolition Bhattacharya effects through his character, Jayadev.

This visionary-philosopher is not thrilled with love for his newly-wedded wife. He is more interested in accelerating the process of social emancipation and upliftment:

"How could he pause and give himself to his private life at this great moment of history when India, proud with the freedom of which he had often dreamed, must reorient her national life of a new social basis? He, too, in his way head his contribution to make to India's developing struggle for social freedom, the fountain of all true freedom. This in his heart he believed".

Jayadev being a social reformer wants his village Behula to be a model village socially. He knows that for him this task is more important than writing books. He tells Mohini, that political freedom without social freedom, is meaningless.

He wants Mohini’s help to achieve his goal. He wants her to teach the village women how to read and write and so to impart them the first elements of knowledge. Harindra, the young surgeon also joins Jayadev. He understands the social problems of the country. His ideas are balanced with that of Jayadev.

Jayadev thinks that social freedom, the vital breath of human existence, is possible only when social slaveries, which are like a cactus growth that would renew itself again until the roots are cut completely, are done away with.

Bhattacharya mentions in his historical record that an Act was passed by the Government in 1856, allowing widow remarriage:

"An obstacle was gone from the path of the reformers. The battle was won. But the fruits of victory were mockingly snatched away by tradition. People did not come forward to marry widows."

The theme of widow-remarriage is obviously a major concern of this novel. Jayadev also has a profound knowledge of ancient Indian books, which approve of a union between widower and widow. So he pleads with his orthodox mother for the remarriage of the widows. He launches a social programme according to which an old man can remarry only when he chooses a widow. Jayadev also intends to bring about a social revolution by abolishing the evil custom of early marriages prevalent in India. In ancient India, early marriage were not permissible. It was the pressure of circumstances and the alien invasions that brought this heinous social evil to the country. This evil needs to be eradicated in order to establish true social freedom.

---

Another problem, which preoccupies the novelist, is that of inter-caste marriages. The inter-caste marriage between Harindra and Sudha appears to be an impossibility because of the rock like barriers of caste. Mohini and Jayadev notice that Harindra who is himself a revolutionary, cannot marry Sudha due to the difference of caste. By marrying a Brahmin girl, Harindra, the non-Brahmin, would be defying a timeless social practice. He knows that Sudha is a revolutionary inspired by the ideal of bringing about social emancipation, and that she only needs direction and encouragement:

"Circumstances and perhaps temperament had cut her out of social rebel. Only a lead was wanted, a direction. Sudha aware of her strength, would be a revolutionary force."

Bhattacharya set her as an example to those who are concerned with shaping a New India. He says in very clear terms that "The old orthodox ways have been our yoke, have enslaved us", at least let us be free now when we have the opportunity.

In fact, both Sudha and Mohini suffer a lot because of the predominance of social slavery in Indian life, in place of social freedom. For a long time they have been merely "the suppressed"; they are women "society had shaped with heedless hands". Jayadev works vigorously for their emancipation. He teaches the people to believe that they are not the slaves of the stars.

2.Ibid., p.166
3.Ibid., p.187
4.Ibid.
Jayadev vehemently and publicly opposes his mother when she tries to make Mohini offer her blood to Devi so as to get rid of her barrenness. He is against all such superstitious believes and wants to exterminate them. Though at first his mother is deeply shocked by her son’s revolutionary ideas and ways, yet ultimately she is able to understand through him “the new revolt, the restless spirit of the new dawn”.

Marriage of a girl which most Indian parents face, is another difficult problem taken up in this work. Mohini’s marriage causes immense worry to her father and grandmother. In order to find a suitable husband for her, Mohini’s father has to resort to the matrimonial column in the daily newspapers. We also read a lot about the custom of showing the girl to the members of the family of the prospective bridegroom. Mohini has to undergo this ordeal more than once. Dowry is also important in the marriages.

Superstitions and rituals form an integral part of Indian social life. Mohini’s grandmother is perturbed to see her grandson, Heeralal, getting weaker day by day, and so she decides to seek the help of an amulet which, she believes, “will guard his health; it will strike the Evil Eye sightless”2. We also told about a propitious omen, which Mohini believes in. She sees a white owl sitting on the bokul tree early in the morning. She pays respect to the owl of the future, which starts blinking as the light grows and flies away after some time. There are also references to the importance of horoscopes and the relevance of astrology. Many conventional ways of Indian social life are portrayed in the novel. For instance, Mohini is not permitted to eat anything on her wedding-day because “A bride was not to touch food till the marriage

1.Bhabani Bhattacharya, Music for Mohini, p.187
2.Ibid., p.38
was over—that was the practice”\(^1\).

The novel emphasizes the need for economic freedom. Jayadev, the champion of social freedom, understands the fact that social slaveries are deeply rooted in economic bondage, and hence social upliftment is not possible without economic freedom. After political freedom, the crux of India’s problem is to achieve economic freedom, which alone can make the common people free in spirit. He is happy to see the country struggling hard to attain it. He visualises the future of India, with people free from economic bondage and social slavery. He thinks:

“The battle for economic freedom, however, was in full swing and ten years hence there would be no landed gentry to live on the peasantry. India was first moving that way. But then, would the people, fed well, be free in spirit because of their new physical state?”\(^2\).

Bhattacharya does not ignore the aspect of individual freedom and displays an abiding interest in the concept. He expresses his belief that human happiness is not possible without it. Mohini, Harindra and Sudha suffer a lot for want of it. Mohini’s whole personality is crushed by the social conventions and traditions of the Big House to which she belongs after marriage. She often thinks of rebelling when in despair, breaking all these conventions, she escapes to the garden and climbs a tree to seek refuge against negation of life: “Here she expressed her right to be herself”\(^3\). Bhattacharya advocates a

\(^1\) Bhabani Bhattacharya, *Music for Mohini*, p.60
\(^2\) Ibid., p.139
\(^3\) Ibid., p.146
rational attitude to combat old customs and ancient beliefs. He ridicules all superstitions such as the matching of horoscopes before the marriage, sacrificing of blood to appease gods and goddesses as well as dedicating a part of the body to God.

Besides the narrative element either the social, political or economic aspects of society or the private life of the individual, there is a philosophical theme which is resolved on a note of compromise or synthesis of opposing ideologies and cultures. The novelist is a man of humanistic and international ideals and feels that rigid adherence to separate ideologies leads to conflict and clash. He has not only responded to this theme of tradition-modernity conflict in its varied aspects but has transcended it in suggesting a fusion of the two supposedly opposed concepts.

Music for Mohini is thus an indepth study of the contrariety between the old and the new values of life in Indian society. Bhattacharya puts forward the view that a reconciliation between the contrary ideas and values—modern and tradition—can lead to a happy and harmonious life. In order to bring out the virtues moderation and integration, and to emphasize his major theme of blending the modern and the conventional, the novelist uses the dialectical method of contrast in depicting his characters.

There are two sets of characters: those that uphold the old, established values of the past and those standing for modernity and change. The first set is represented by Mother, the Big House and the village Behula, and secondly those who plead for a change and deviation from the dead past in favour of the new and unconventional value—pattern that suits the modern age. These are represented by Jayadev, Mohini and Harindra.

The rural India is so much plagued by superstitions, blind beliefs, taboos and obsolete customs that modernization is essential if the freedom of
the country is to be of any use. Bhattacharya does not recommend one at the cost of the other but advocates reconciliation of the two that is Tradition and Modernity.

In the beginning of the novel, the story unfolds itself at Mohini’s parental home; her father, the Professor is shown in conflict with Old Mother. He is inspired by the norms and fashions of the modern times. He gets his daughter, Mohini, admitted to a Christian convent school, and also allows her to become a radio singer. But Old Mother is very much opposed to this wide publicity of her granddaughter. She has a blind faith in orthodoxy and superstitions, and is a staunch supporter of the old and established moral values. The differences between the mother and the son are soon resolved when Jayadev appears on the scene and is found to be the most suitable groom for Mohini. He is accepted not only by the Professor and Old Mother, but also by Mohini herself as he combines in him the traditional as well as the modern values in being both “a great scholar and master of Behula village”.

The marriage of Mohini and Jayadev serves the purpose of the novelist to depict the theme of intercultural. Mohini, is the bridge between the values of the city and the traditions of the village, between sophistication and simplicity, lastly between the modern West and the old fashion East.

Mohini is happily married to Jayadev and comes to Behula as the new mistress of the Big House. Her heart is full of love for her husband and she wants to be admired and loved by him in turn. Jayadev is an idealist who expects his wife to be different from an ordinary young woman with basic physical needs and requirements. He sees her as “Gargi” or “Maitreyi”. Though frustrated in her ambition to lead a glamorous life, Mohini does not

give vent to her dissatisfaction. She is resilient by nature and soon overcomes her dejection. She knows that her married life can be peaceful and meaningful only if she adjusts herself to the wishes of her husband, shares his ideals and renders him positive help in his programme of social re-construction. Thus Mohini not only comes closer to Jayadev, but also rescues the backward, ignorant and illiterate rural women from the darkness of orthodox living and shows them a glimpse of the modern times. By identifying herself with the women of the village, she brings the Big House closer to the ordinary houses of Behula. Mohini tries to prove worthy of her husband and establishes deep communion with. Bhattacharya describes this communion by making Jayadev sit on the very tree-perch on which Mohini used to sit daily. It is a symbolic act, suggesting a union of beings.

For Dorothy Blair Shimer:

“Mohini’s journey into her unknown life may be seen as symbolic, her future a probing into India’s ancient village-centred past, which is at once past, present and future of a culture. The “fire-breathing train, symbol of modern technology, is first link to the countryside. The bullock cart, slow and ponderous as it may be, yet travels roadways that link rural life with urban. But beyond them are the still undisturbed meadows, through which wheels have yet to find their way, penetrated, only by narrow foot trails to India’s yesterdays”

Besides Jayadev, Mohini has also to adjust with the obsolete ideas and

1.Dorothy Blair Shimer, Bhabani Bhattacharya, p.37-38
superstitions of her inflexible mother-in-law, known as "Mother" in the village. This old lady with her rigid orthodox beliefs is, in a way, the ruthless past reincarnated. In reality Mother represents the Big House, which is "a stern discipline and iron tradition" much more than a residence. At first Mohini finds life at the Big House unbearable. She has to struggle hard "to retouch her mental values, readjust her expectations". Owing to her mother-in-law's sternness and old-world spirit, Mohini sometime feels sore about her behaviour but with the passage of time she begins to realise that the Mother is not altogether devoid of the essential qualities of compassion and sacrifice. So she soon comes to develop a great love and sympathy for the old lady:

"Perhaps she saw the wrong side of this old tapestry of tradition and missed the design? Duty and compassion were not at odds in the mother, the key to the design was sacrifice which was a right and privilege, not a duty alone."

Gradually, the struggle between the contrasting values that is so intense and fierce in the beginning becomes less and less severe, and resolves finally into a happy compromise. Mohini and her mother-in-law, representing the modern and the traditional values respectively, begin to understand each other better and live amicably together.

It is not that Bhattacharya always makes his younger characters submit before the elderly ones in his bid to present their mutual adjustment. He makes his old characters also realise in their turn the genuine demands of the new

1. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Music for Mohini, p.78
2. Ibid., p.108
3. Ibid., p.173
Jayadev’s mother, at last begins to feel that her son is right and justified in his ideas and actions, and that the values to which she rigidly adheres count no more in the modern times. The only possible way to end all discord in life seems to her to be a compromise between her old beliefs and the new values of life upheld by her son and daughter-in-law. She and Jayadev have earlier been in constant conflict with each other because of their contrasting ideas and outlooks. She has been an ardent supporter and defender of the family traditions, whereas Jayadev has had a liberal outlook. The conflict between them takes a serious turn when the Mother attempts to make Mohini offer the blood of her heart’s to the Virgin Goddess. Jayadev, who comes in time, is angry with his mother. He says that they are not slaves of the stars and that there is “no room in the Big House for crazy beliefs”1. The infuriated-mother, too, in her turn, accuses him of being degenerate and says that she is ashamed to have him as her son. She further says: “I know your mind. Heresy holds you. Old beliefs, old morals, old values mean nothing to you”2. Jayadev makes it clear to her that there are “values beyond your grasp, since you’ll always try to reach them with your reason, never with your feelings. Life has punished you...Blind belief shapes your thinking; blind belief cannot make a sentiment”3. Thus there is a fierce ideological tussle between the mother and the son. But this conflict does not stand for a long time. After learning about Mohini’s pregnancy, the mother realises that her son’s path is the right one:

“For the first time, she could see her son clearly. His ideas, his point of view, moulded by new spirit” in

1.Bhabani Bhattacharya, Music for Mohini, p.179
2.Ibid., p.180
3.Ibid.
the land, were different from hers and opposed to
them, but they were, nonetheless, true ideals"1.

This “moment of insight” brings the mother nearer to Jayadev, and there
prevails an atmosphere of cordiality and mutual understanding in the Big
House. The discord between the mother and the son, the mother-in-law and
the daughter-in-law and the husband and the wife at last comes to an end.
Bhattacharya concludes as quoted earlier:

“At last, there was no discord. Life was music—a
note of song for the Old Mother was in her, a note
for Jayadev and her rebel gods, a note for the Big
House and Behula village, torn and at cross-purpose
for a while. Her life was music—the quest for every
woman, her deepest need”2.

The synthesis of the old and the new is also evident in the story of Harindra’s
family. His father, the old Kabiraj, has been practicing the ancient Indian
Ayurvedic system of medicines for over forty years. He considers this medical
system very efficacious as a cure for all sorts of diseases. But his son,
Harindra, is a full-fledged surgeon, educated and trained in a Western-style
medical college. Often he argues with his father that his rigid ideas about the
supremacy of the Ayurvedic medical system over all the others are false. He
tries to convince his father that modern medicines are more efficacious in
curing diseases, but the old man openly ridicules his son and his ideas.
However, later he does recognize the efficacy of the modern Allopathic
medical system when he fails to cure his ailing wife. The old man has been

2. Ibid., p. 188
trying Ayurvedic medicines on the patient, but there is no improvement. Her condition deteriorates and all hopes of her survival are lost. Then, the old man yields to Harindra's wishes to treat her in accordance with his own branch of medicine. The miracle happens and the mother's life is saved. The old man lives happily with his wife and son, quite reconciled to the modern values and systems.

So Jayadev and Harindra, both put forth the message of synthesis between the old and the new concepts. The Professor, too, sees Jayadev as the product of this synthesis and tells Mohini: "He has true legacy of the past, in inner health, a source of graceful living, and to that he had added our modern culture." There is an autobiographical touch about Jayadev's character. The author and his persona are identical in their attitude to life. Jayadev, like the author dreams about a fusion of the past with the present. It is his earnest wish to create "a profound union of today with yesterday." Jayadev does not altogether negate the importance of the past in the modern times, but thinks that it is only because of yesterday that today exists. He wants to reshape the Indian society, but also recognizes the significant role of the ancient lore in the whole process of social reconstruction. Lila Ray observes:

"Jayadev was a solitary man, silent with dreamy, heavy-lidded eyes set in a young tranquil face. He is essentially a scholar...This description fits his creator, Bhabani Bhattacharya very aptly. Jayadev

1. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Music for Mohini, p.130
2. Lila Ray, 'Bhabani Bhattacharya: A Profile', (Indian Literature, Vol.XI, No.2) p.74
3. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Music for Mohini, p.78
is the only one of his characters which bears an autobiographical resemblance to him”.

Being village-bred and married in the city, Rooplekha also combines in her character traditional and modern traits. When Mohini doubts the fusion of the city and the village, representing the modern and the traditional value-patterns respectively, Rooplekha emphatically remarks that such a union is worthwhile:

“Rooplekha held Mohini in the warmth of her smile.

“Shall I answer you? We who’re so wed, serve some real purpose. It is as though we made a bridge between two banks of the river. We connect culture with culture. Mohini, our old Eastern view of life with the new semi-Western outlook.”

Thus, Bhabani Bhattacharya quite successfully blends the two contrary values—tradition and modernity and the novel virtually becomes the novelist’s plea for such a unison in every sphere of life.

Bhattacharya, in Music for Mohini has covered a wide range of contemporary issues of the Indian society. We find Mohini married to a village landlord, but she is unable to accept certain orthodox customs and traditions. Bhattacharya makes the protagonist Jayadev introduce literacy and education in the village to bring about enlightenment to the villagers. This educated young man opposes his own mother when she acts in an irrational manner guided by her old traditions. Jayadev combines in him the personalities of both Devata and Rahoul. To quote Rama Jha;

1. Lila Ray: op.cit., p.74
2. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Music for Mohini, p.93-94
"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 superstition, caste-system and exploitation of women"1.

Jayadev's wife Mohini also helps him. We see that Jayadev and Mohini bridge the gap between village and city, and so stand for an integration of the ancient with the modern culture and simplicity with sophistication. For Dorothy Shimer, "Music for Mohini is the depiction of misunderstanding and animosities between village and city and between Old and New India"2.

Marjories.B.Snyder considers Music for Mohini as,

"A sociological background in which the older generation clings to tradition" whereas the educated people struggle "to throw away charms and bangles, to open themselves and their country to Western ideas"3.

In Music for Mohini, the attitude, the trend underlying the entire delineation is more important than the situations. The impact of all the apparently disconnected incidents is cumulative and the total impression is of the general tenor of social life in India of the period portrays—post Independence India still struggling to emerge from the abysmal depths of superstition and irrational orthodoxy. What is crystallised is a confusion of

1.Rama Jha, *Ghandian Thought and Indo-Anglian Novelists*, (Delhi,1989) p.170

2.Dorothy Blair Shimer, *Bhabani Bhattacharya*, p.35

faiths prevalent in India at that time. The novel, to put it simply, is a fictional statement of values in turmoil.