

**BHABANI BHATTACHARYA : THE NOVELIST OF GANDHIAN  
THOUGHT**

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**Abstract**

*Bhabani Bhattacharya deals with some of the contemporary problems in all his novels. He has added a renowned literary contribution to Indian English Literature. Apart from all his literary work of art, he has six novels that are very famous to his credit viz. So Many Hungers, Music for Mohini, The Goddess Named Gold, He Who Rides A Tiger, Shadow From Ladakh, and A Dream in Hawaii. He has depicted rural India in all his novels. He wrote his novels with a social purpose. Bhattacharya was influenced by Tagore and Gandhian thoughts. Tagore and Gandhi were so sensitive to the social issues that are dealt with by Bhattacharya in his works.*



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Bhabani Bhattacharya, an Indo – Anglian novelist of considerable merit and distinction, born in Bhagalpur, a town in Bihar, Bhabani Bhattacharya wrote in a non-native language. From London University, he completed his doctorate in historical research. He was born into a culturally rich and well-off family of Brahmins in Bhagalpur, Bihar State on the date Nov. 10, 1906. Bhattacharya lived in Puri, a village in Orissa, for several years with his family. The sea has always been a big influence on Bhattacharya even from childhood.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of the successful writers whose novels depicted social evils. His first novel, So Many Hungers (1947) was published in the year of Indian Freedom. Gandhi is a gift of India to the world. His basic lifestyle, strong principle, and assurances are heroic enough to influence any creative artist's mind. He has reached out to the millions many of the writers, who wrote in the decade following independence, remained committed to the ideas of Gandhi. He is a full-proof solution to any of their problems. These qualities caught the attention of Bhattacharya and hence Gandhi has a constant presence in all his writings.

In So Many Hungers!, Devesh Basu resembles Gandhi and his principles, which inspire

millions of people to rise above their narrow interests and join the freedom struggle. They used the novel to mirror of socio-political realisms of India. As the Mahatma Gandhi said:

*Truth is like a vast tree, which yields more and more fruit, the more you nurture it. The deeper the search in the mine of Truth, the richer the discovery of the gems buried there, in the shape of openings for ever greater variety of service!<sup>1</sup>*

Bhattacharya's pre-occupation with social problems reaches new altitudes with the two books he wrote on Mahatma Gandhi, titled Gandhi, the Writer, and Mahatma Gandhi respectively. It is this humanistic aspect that helped Bhattacharya, the novelist, to decide the choice of his themes. Much influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, he quotes the great leader, when trying to explain the functions of a writer:

*He who wields words effectively for a creative purpose is beyond doubt a writer. So is he who uses words to make images of beauty even of an ephemeral kind. Beauty is not necessarily the truth, though not is truth necessarily beauty- there is a genre of writing which owes its enrichment to truth, not to beauty<sup>2</sup>.*

Gandhi is observed as a saint and a sacred man. This view is upheld and explored, amongst others, in the novels of both Bhattacharya and Sahgal. The major teaching of Gandhi that finds favour with Bhattacharya is non-violence, understood in its right perspective. Bhattacharya's novels amply prove that he has had a tremendous influence on Gandhian ideology. He has created mini-Gandhis in the characters of Devesh Basu, Jayadev, Grandpappa- the roving minstrel, Satyajit, Bhaskhar and Yoganand. If Gandhi is the 'Mahatma', Devesh Basu is 'Devta' for the people. Bhattacharya elaborated the Gandhian thought in every novel. He appears to have had a sound foundation in Gandhian thought, culminating in his scholarly masterpiece, Gandhi the Writer. Being completely familiar with Gandhi's views on varied subjects, Bhabani Bhattacharya has been able to touch upon almost all the aspects of Gandhian ideology and in the right perception too.

Bhattacharya's fundamental principles are love for and empathy with the common man and humanity are large equity, simplicity, humanity, generousness, charity, severity, equivalent status for woman, remarriage, fearlessness, social upliftment, universal love, love for villagers, self-help. He admittedly writes novels with an explicit intention of the portrayal of his readers' attention to the social problems. Edwin Gerow categorizes Bhattacharya as a "socially programmatic novelist"<sup>3</sup>. Perpetually, the novels of Bhattacharya derive their themes from social, political, and economic issues. The other themes of his novels are exploitation, hunger for food, hunger for knowledge, hunger for justice, hunger for self-respect, etc.

Bhattacharya, a novelist with a social conscience, has explored social, economic, and political transformations in India against the backdrop of current historical events and socio-economic conditions. His works explored the implications that had a significant impact on India and its people, elaborating on their right to vote based on hunger, thirst, and even shelter. He also highlighted the

government's lack of prevention and control measures during the post-World War II period, while knowing about the disruptions and consequences that occurred during that time, but failing to take the necessary actions.

Bhattacharaya's works have always been outstanding and excellent. His social concern is seen in a research that concentrates on six main novels of Bhabani Bhattacharaya called *So Many Hungers*, *He who Rides a Tiger*, *Music for Mohini*, *A Goddess Named Gold*, *A Dream in Hawaii*, and *Shadow from Ladakh*. It explains the inhumanity of one man to the other man using the novel *So Many Hungers*. It brings out the dilemma of mind and body using the novel *Music for Mohini*. It explains the great hero who opposed the exploitations using the novel *He Who Rides a Tiger*. It encapsulates the greatness and the mystic value aurum using the novel *The Goddess named Gold*. It portrays the novel *Shadow from Ladakh* as imagery, a symbol of Non-Violence. It finally explains the differences and nuances encountered between the East and the West.

The novelist reproduces Ganghiji's and Krishnamurti's ideas about the free mixing of cultures. It is stressed that all cultures should flow freely without any restrictions. There should be a healthy synthesis of these. The different economic systems are portrayed as a cottage industry and heavy industry. The novel shows the former invested with human values, the latter means mass production achieved through the application of science and technology, hence gross materialism and society's evil. Gandhigram is a village and represents cottage industry and symbolizes the Indian view of the economic structure of society.

He has a great concern for oppressive and crippling social, political, and cultural forces and Gandhian Humanism. His concern for the oppressed, neglected, suppressed suffering sections of humanity usher in a strong plea for social freedom and societal emancipation.

In 1975, in the interview Bhattacharya was asked, "Has Gandhian idealism disappeared in contemporary India?" to which he replied, "Gandhian idealism does live in the same way"<sup>4</sup>. The reply affirms the fearless and undiminished persuasion of Bhattacharya in Gandhian ethics as the remedy for both personal and social evils in today's world. It is true that in an abstract and general sense, Gandhian ideals are still established in contemporary India, though they may not appear to be guiding the everyday life of people. They are, however, the very substance of which Bhattacharya's novels are made.

He almost beats worn the two standpoints- first, Gandhian with its highlighting on pro-village economy and non-violent way of life and the economic problems. In the novels, 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 form of Rahloul in *So Many Hungers!* He has been a votary of industrialization in the greater part of the novel, but finally, he is transformed to the Gandhian way of life. Associating the novel with *So Many Hungers!*, Bhattacharya himself declares that it is "rooted more deeply in Gandhian thought"<sup>5</sup>.

In the novel *So Many Hungers!*, when Rahoul visits Baruni village prior to his visit to Cambridge settled by Samarendra Basu, his father, and when he treks one again to Baruni, he remembers Devata's words which reproached him not to hate the people of English. Like Gandhi, who did not hate the British but their political system that enslaved India, Devata believed in their integral 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 interes<sup>6</sup>. (So Many Hungers! P. 21)*

*Shadow From Ladakh* focuses on several other problems besides the relevance of Gandhi in a free society contending with other industrial societies. It focuses attention on the concept of *brahmacharya*, and the man-woman relationship. Satyajit looks within for an answer, trying to revive Gandhian patterns of behavior. Gandhi's persistent revision and self-questionings deliver him with the answer. If there is a Gandhi in Satyajit, there is also a Bhaskar within him. And in his desire to follow Gandhi, Satyajit has never had time to be free, or to be himself.

As seen in the novelist, Tagore's influence can be realized in his urge for a full and happy life and unity of ideals and philosophies. Gandhi and Tagore were both very important to Bhattacharya. It was a bit confusing for him to know who to follow. Tagore convinced him that writing would allow him to contribute more effectively. Gandhi and Tagore became more closely related after he embraced the social activism of Gandhi. The Quit India Movement was another attraction for Bhattacharya. Six of his novels deal with the impact of movement in one way or another. The themes of Freedom and social reform are at the center of *Many Hungers* and *A Goddess Named Gold*. Mahatma Gandhi actually dreamed of this. It was Gandhi's goal to eliminate untouchability from society. This theme is depicted in *He Who Rides a Tiger*. The beauty of Tagore's various manifestations represents the truth of Gandhi. So, Bhattacharya combined both of their ideas neatly and clearly. Tagore and Gandhi were those who brought a change that was desperately needed in the society.

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