



## MANIFESTATION OF HISTORICAL FACETS IN BHABANI BHATTACHARYA'S NOVELS

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### ABSTRACT

*This research paper attempts to study and identify the existence of historical aspects/facets in Bhabani Bhattacharya's selected novels. It is always apparent that every author's psychological growth is the outcome of his or her milieu. Characterization, background, themes, and socio-cultural aspects show how Indian history is reflected in his literary works. Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels explore the themes of the impact of colonialism, the fight for freedom, the clashes between tradition and modernism, the effects of the Bengal famine of 1943, casteism, spirituality, etc. His literary creations gain a valuable significance due to their connection with the historical facets. His novels force the readers to connect the present with the past and to interpret them accordingly. The researchers selected Bhabani Bhattacharya's six novels for this research study. Thus, this research article examines how historical facets are reflected in the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya to highlight a variety of social, economic, and political aspects.*

**Key Words:** Novel, historical facets, spirituality, modernism, colonialism, socio-cultural, etc.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Post-independence Indian English literature is intensely knotted with historical consciousness. As a result, it reflects the socio-political transformations that have played a vital role in shaping modern India. The themes associated with the colonial rule, the fight for freedom, the Bengal famine, partition, and socio-economic disparities have been explored by many Indian writers in English. Bhabani Bhattacharya has won the Sahitya Academy Award winner and he is considered one of the leading Indian novelists in English. His literary reputation is not limited to India only, but his credibility is observed as his books have been translated into twenty-six languages. Among these twenty-six languages, sixteen are European languages.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is specifically acknowledged for his capability to interlace historical realism into fiction. His literary work is not simply historical narratives, but it serves as a social critique. Such social critique exposes the injustices, inequalities, and traditions of the past and their persistent effects on the post-independence scenario of India. In-depth understanding of Indian history has shaped Bhattacharya's literary vision. His novels pinpoint the challenges observed in the societal transformations. This research attempts to comprehend the historical consciousness rooted in Bhattacharya's literary works and how they contribute to the broader outline of post-independence Indian English literature.

## 1.2 HISTORICAL FACETS IN BHABANI BHATTACHARYA'S SELECTED NOVELS

The presence of historical facets signifies the past and its overall impact on the present. It has been observed that historical consciousness occupied an essential role in the development of literary creations in Indian English Literature. The literary creations present complicated social, political, and economic facts. The major authors who have exploited history in their literary creations are Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, and Arundhati Roy.

Bhabani Bhattacharya made use of an in-depth and intense depiction of significant historical events like the Bengal famine of 1943, the independence movement, and post-independence social struggles. Bhattacharya's novels are truthful presentations of Indian society. The entire background of his novels is not Indian history but an active force in the presentation of characters and events. Bhattacharya's literary works replicate the misery of the common people, social inequalities, and the role of leadership in post-independence India. A combination of historical facts, social observation, and literary creativity made Bhabani Bhattacharya a crucial contributor to Indian English Literature.

Bhabani Bhattacharya (1906–1988) was a novelist who showed how literature can be a means of social documentation and critique. His works are encouraged by factual events of



life and address key historical movements. Bhattacharya opined that each literary work should serve a purpose to inform, inspire, and provoke thought. Oppression, resilience, and transformation in Indian society are the foremost themes of Bhattacharya's novels. The following are Bhabani Bhattacharya's prominent novels.

1. *So Many Hungers!* (1947)
2. *Music for Mohini* (1952)
3. *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1955)
4. *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960)
5. *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966)
6. *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978)

His novels display profound involvement with Indian history, social matters, and political changes. Bhattacharya's novels explore historical consciousness with the help of thorough character studies, socio-political observations, and replications on Indian history.

'*So Many Hungers!*' is considered one of Bhattacharya's most significant novels. It was published in the year of India's independence, i.e., 1947. The novel covers the Bengal famine of 1943. It was a heartbreaking and tragic event that ended with the deaths of millions due to starvation. The famine was the outcome of British policies as the British diverted food supplies for the war effort. There was a complete failure of the colonial management to handle the disaster. This novel is deep-rooted in the Bengal Famine of 1943 and the Quit India Movement. The quote reflects the disappointment after independence and explores the socio-economic dissimilarities that persisted, even after the end of the colonial period. The below-mentioned quote from the novel shows the facts of the Bengal Famine of 1943.

*"Freedom had come, but what freedom was this that left the poor hungrier than before, and the soil thirstier for justice?"*<sup>1</sup>

The novel '*So Many Hungers*' includes several narratives that expose diverse extents of hunger. In addition to this, it portrays the unending suffering of farmers as they are left to starve due to grain traders making a profit out of the food supplies. The novel also focuses on the hunger for freedom and dignity through Bhattacharya's characters associated with the independence movement. The following characters present the hunger for freedom.

- **Rahoul:** An educated and nationalist youth of India committed to the nation's freedom fight





- **Devesh Basu:** Rahoul's grandfather, a Gandhian philosopher, a participant in the freedom fight
- **Kajoli and her Family:** The famine-affected poor, who travel to the city in search of food
- **Samaddar:** The selfish and greedy profiteer, who embodies the moral decay

Bhabani Bhattacharya exposes the horrific outcomes of the Bengal Famine of 1943. He interweaves personal struggles with historical truths. He also criticizes the colonial exploitation and the socio-economic inequalities that persisted in the post-independence period.

*'Music for Mohini'* was published in 1952, i.e., in the post-independence era. This fictional work explores the conflict between tradition and modernism. This conflict was a critical issue in the post-independence period of India. The novel highlights how the younger generation is trapped between advanced ambitions and traditional customs and rituals. Mohini is a young woman and the protagonist of the novel. She was brought up in a liberal and urban milieu. But she observes herself married into an extremely traditional family in a rural Indian scenario. Her struggle shows the biggest hindrances and challenges of women's freedom in a society deeply rooted in the past with traditional customs. Though the end of colonial rule and the start of independence, the social and rigid hierarchies, gender dissimilarities, and marital prospects remained the same. Bhattacharya portrays Mohini's character to raise questions about whether political freedom certainly translates into social and cultural liberty. The below-mentioned quote from the novel shows the clash between tradition and modernism along with the internal changes in the Indian society.

*"India was reborn not merely in the ballot box or Assembly Hall, but in the hearts of her men and women who began to believe that change was possible."*<sup>3</sup>

The novel entitled *'He Who Rides a Tiger'* was published in 1955. Bhattacharya highlights caste discrimination as one of the most persistent social evils in the Indian scenario. The novel depicts the character of Kalo, who is a blacksmith by profession. Kalo rebels against the caste structure by pretending as a Brahmin priest. Social flexibility, hypocrisy, and the fight against tyrannical traditions are observed through the life journey of Kalo. The phrase *"riding a tiger"*<sup>2</sup> signifies the threats of challenging societal customs. Kalo's trick allows him momentary power, but he continually faces the risk of exposure. Bhattacharya describes how historical dissimilarities prolong modern discrimination. The novel criticizes the failure of the new democratic state to eliminate caste-driven domination even though constitutional provisions are made. Bhattacharya forces the reader through Kalo's rise and final downfall to



observe the deeply rooted social patterns of power and control that are constant in dictating people's lives even after India gained independence. The following lines from the novel criticize casteism and economic domination.

*"A man who defies caste is not merely breaking a rule—he is tearing open a history that was never written by him."*<sup>4</sup>

Bhabani Bhattacharya's novel *'A Goddess Named Gold'* was published in 1960. The novel is a reflection of deep historical events. Colonialism, economic struggles, spiritual beliefs, and issues related to cultural identity are the foremost themes observed in this novel. The setting of the novel *'A Goddess Named Gold'* is in colonial India. It examines the economic and psychological influence of British rule. It reveals rural poverty, social order, and the mistreatment of peasants. It also highlights the challenges faced by the poor masses under colonial tyranny. The novel interweaves folk tales with the past. The example is Meera's (the protagonist's) trust in a magical amulet, a piece of jewellery, that signifies the Indian people's hopes for self-determination. The novel explores Gandhian ideals of self-reliance and moral strength are fundamental to the discourse. It underlines the significance of social justice over material wealth. Bhattacharya assesses the blind quest for gold while encouraging true empowerment through unity and self-reliance. The quote distinguishes between the illusion of wealth and the actual strength of India. The actual strength of India is its people and their determination.

*"Gold, they believed, could lift them from centuries of bondage. But India's riches were never her metals—they were her people's courage."*<sup>5</sup>

Bhattacharya's novel *'Shadow from Ladakh'* (1966) is set in the period of the Indo-China War of 1962. It shows the tension between Gandhian ideals of self-reliance and the push for industrialization and technological advancements in independent India. The character of Satyajit, a follower of Gandhian philosophy, trusts in self-reliance, rural empowerment, and traditional ideals. On the contrary, the character of Bhimsa, an industrialist, denotes modern India's quest for technological and economic development. The novel raises the question whether to accept industrialization or follow its traditional way of life. Thus, Bhattacharya highlights how the impact of colonial philosophy still outlines national policies, and how India continues to define its future. The below-mentioned quote displays India's reply to exterior threats with a call for internal strength and unity.

*"In the echo of boots on the Himalayan stones, India heard the call—not to war, but to rebuild her soul."*<sup>6</sup>

Bhabani Bhattacharya's novel *'A Dream in Hawaii'* was published in 1978. The focus of the novel is the exploration of India's spiritual heritage in the post-colonial world as a globalized



setting. The novel tracks the character of Swami Yogananda. He is an Indian spiritual leader who has gained a reputation in the West. It discovers the actual encouragement of figures like Swami Vivekananda. It inspects the cultural sharing between India and the West. It questions whether spirituality can persist authentically if it is commercialized. Bhattacharya focuses on the stress between materialistic ideologies of the West and Indian spiritual traditions. The novel also analyses the Western understanding of Indian spirituality. It explores how cultural heritage is often misinterpreted or transformed to fit diverse narratives. In a nutshell, the novel describes cultural identity and spirituality through an East-West understanding of both notions.

*"India was not a land to be seen from without. One had to enter her myths, her chants, her silence, to know what she remembered."*<sup>7</sup>

### 1.3 CONCLUSION:

It has been observed that Bhabani Bhattacharya's literary creations are deeply rooted in historical facets. All his novels capture the struggles and changes in India from colonial rule to the independence of India. His novels contain a rich investigation of historical events, social issues, and the psychological impact of transformation. Bhattacharya's novels cover the Bengal famine of 1943, caste system and its consequences, gender dissimilarity, and the dilemmas of modernity. These historical facets force readers to engross with the past and its consequences for the present India. He interweaves fiction with historical realism which makes his literary work a crucial part of Indian English literature after freedom. Bhattacharya confirms that history is not simply recorded but critically examined in the transition of nation. His contribution to Indian English Literature assists as a link between history and literature. This way of presentation strengthens the idea that understanding history is indispensable for shaping an unbiased future. To conclude this, Bhattacharya mixes history into fiction keenly. This marks his literary works not simply narratives of personal struggles but also echoes on India's developing socio-political and cultural facets.

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