

# Depiction of “Hunger” and “Social elements” in Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers!* : An Appraisal

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## ABSTRACT

*This article examines in detail about the hunger, poverty, economic exploitation, humanism, class consciousness in So Many Hungers! Laying focus on to the political and economic situation of Bengali's society. The theme of Bhattacharya's novels is mainly the existing pressing problems of rural India before and after Independence. All his novels belong to Indo-Anglo political novels and Indian culture and struggle for freedom.*

**Keywords:** Social Reformer; Hunger; Human spirit; Character delineation; Rural India

Hunger for food, hunger for money, hunger for love, hunger for sex, hunger for freedom, hunger for name, hunger for popularity are many hungers prevailing in the society but here, an emphasis is focused on the theme of hunger for food, sufferings, trials and tribulation of the people in Bengal and people of Calcutta including the village of Baruni. *So Many Hungers!* The exclamation mark denotes the writer's bewilderment at the multiplicity of these Hungers.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's first novel *So Many Hungers!* (1947) was set against the Bengal Famine dealing with the theme of hunger. He was one of the Indo-Anglian writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Raja Rao. He was a very notable writer for the freedom. Mulk Raj Anand also exposed poverty, economic exploitation in his novels *Coolie* and *Untouchable*. Bhattacharya's intellectual sculpture is intended to have a social purpose for the novel like a theory of "Art for Art's Sake". He was born on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1906 in Bhagalpur, Bihar in an educated family. He had his graduation at Patna University by B.A in English Literature in 1927 and he got his doctoral degree from the University of London in History. Maybe he had study of history helped to his writings. And his thematic concerns focus on the importance of political freedom and evils of caste system. *So Many Hungers!* Background of Bengal famine of 1943 and Quit India Movement of 1942.

*So Many Hungers!* The story has two plots as one is the story of Samarendra Basu's family with young Rahoul as the main figure and another one is the story of a young girl, Kajoli belongs to a peasant family. This is oval tragic story of the largely man-made hungers took a two millions innocent people in Calcutta and Bengal. The novel of Bhattacharya which deals with the Pre-independence period is *So Many Hungers!* , One most concerned with the freedom struggle with the tensions and conflicts? This novel has comment to make on the alien government and the British people. Bhattacharya is very critical of the British administration and the ruler's attitude towards the people and problems of the land. Bhattacharya's mentions the Atlantic charter satirically and hints at the hypocrisy of the ruler who claims to be fighting for democracy while denying democratic freedom to India. The repressive measure taken by the government against nationalistically mind citizens is referred to in this novel.

At the opening of the novel, Rahoul is busy with his studies and research at Cambridge University and has no connection with India. But then he is very sad for the history of the famine of hungry and death of millions of Bengal. But his tall ideas and refined ideas about life and human life make him a great man. She wants to bring about social change based on her faith and great visiosn of life and society.

*So Many Hungers!* starts with a bright new day symbolizing his optimism about man and women will not go astray and bring change in Bengal famine and death of millions of people. So the fact that he is a son of a rich trade man and profited, he offers free help to the poor and needy people suffering from a great man-made human tragedy. His younger brother Kunal is also very lovable and affectionate character like his brothers Rahoul, Kunal too is a spirited and adventurous young man embodying noble ideals and cheerful disposition but his presence is limited to only in the earlier part of the novel. Nothing is heard about him after his leaving home for service in North Africa and Italy as an army officer.

Rahoul's father Semrendra Basu, a lawyer by profession is just the opposite of Devish Basu. Samrendra character in the novel is pitted against the character of Devish on the one hand and Rahoul and Kunal on the other hand. He is very shrewd and greedy person and has no feeling for the nation or society. His only aim is to amass huge wealth, name and fame by pleasing the British rulers. He is very proud of his

sons but towards the end of the novel his dreams are shattered when the report of Kunal missing in Italy and the news of Rahoul's arrest come simultaneously to him in connection with the historic Quit India Movement. His father Devish popularly known as Devata is a prototype of Gandhiji himself. He is beloved and venerated by the people of Baruni village.

He has infused Rahoul with trust in existence. In fact the character portrayal of Dervish is based on Gandhiji and represents his ideals of life with all his dignity, courage and strength of truth and moral values. He always thinks about the welfare of the villagers. For the sake of the villagers and society in general, he does not care for his own son and his own family. He advice the villagers not to sell rice to the government agents and tries to save them from their exploitation at the hands for tradesman and hoarders of rice. The village Baruni is a miniature India and it agitates and gathers momentum and fervors in the wake of Gandhiji famous Quit India Movement.

The story of the peasant girl Kajoli comes into represents another hunger in the novel. Her story is brought into focus on the issues of poverty, destitution and hunger and food caused by the man made famine. Kajoli's father and brother Kanu are arrested for their joining the Civil Disobedience Movement. But Davish or Devata adopts Kajoli's mother as his daughter and takes care of the family in the absence of her father and brother. Thus, now he acts their family head and helps them to face the new situation. He also encourages the people in the freedom struggle by advising them not to resort to violence and face the situation by becoming strong, true and deathless.

On the whole his novels are remarkable for their social realism and their honest treatment of themes, problems of contemporary India. India's social realism, problems, poverty destitution and hunger find a successful depiction in them its entire rich heritage social, historical and geographical variety, to get focused in his novels. As a novelist he is true to his purpose of writing and his character delineation and presentation of Indian people's problems and challenges is artistic and in depth. His mastery and control over the incidents and events of the novel is really marvelous and enchanting and Manju is hungry for money. Devesh Basu and Kajoli's father and brother have shown hunger for freedom. Rahoul feels pity and sympathy for the poor people. He decides to work for the victims of hunger.

The following description in the novel is concerned with hunger in the big city:

He had died for lack of food, so it was reported, and the brief news flashed past almost unnoticed. A mere beggar. No one of them felt that he was a Premonition, a symbolic shape of things to come. Other man sank down and died (104-105).

He died for good shortages, so it was reported, and the brief news wandered almost unnoticed. Just beggar of them insisted that he was a model and a symbol of the coming things. The other fell down and died.

Bhattacharya accuses the poor for their situation but he believes that their faith in God gives them courage to fight against hunger. That the father and son are poles apart is noticed when, during draught, Rahoul runs a free kitchen for the poor people. And on the other side, his father plans to sell rice. He goes into black market for that purpose. Rahoul expresses his agony:

...The empty stomach was due to no blight of nature, no failure of crops Rahoul knew. It was man-made scarcity, for the harvest had been fair, and even if the Army bought up big stocks, with rationing at the right level there could be food for all. But there was no rationing (105).

The empty stomach is not due to any split in nature and Rahoul crops are no fault. It was good for the harvest because the harvest was good and the rationing on the right would be a food for everyone, even if the army bought large shares. But there is nothing. The difficult situation of hungry, poor people expressed by Rahoul represents the difficulties of all the migrants:

Strange how much a human body could go through before life at last. The first few days the man suffered most. He was mad with hunger. Then he grew listless. He lied himself down. His mouth was too tired for food and he only wanted to be left alone. His eyes died. He wasted to a skeleton, using up whatever shreds of flesh he had anywhere on his body (153-154).

How long before the human body can survive? In the first few days of the afflicted man. He was crazed with hunger. Then he grew absent. He was lying down on himself. She was very tired of the food in his mouth, only to be left alone. What he was not anywhere in his body to shreds of flesh, a skeleton waste. When Kajoli gets piece of bread from a soldier she forgets her mother and brother:

...instantly she dug teeth into the lump, swallowing swiftly, not chewing, not lingering for the feel of bread on her tongue, swallowing hard. And the soldier clacked his tongue with pity, for his hearth was worm. He watched her... in a minute the bread was all gone, and then the realization burst upon her that she had eaten all; nothing was left for her brother, her mother nothing. (144).

Immediately she was torn by her teeth, did not swallow quickly, chewed, and did not realize she was breaking up her tongue, except to swallow hard. The throne was clothed with his tongue. He was watching her...in a minute bread was gone, and she realized she had eaten; there is nothing for her brother, her mother does not have anything. Kajoli is married to a young man, kishore. He decides to go to Calcutta where he hopes to get employment in a mill. The family things that he has gone to Calcutta and when he fails to write they fear that possibly he has been arrested somehow and penalized to jail again. Sri Abalabandhu is a curious character obsessed by sex. He reveals his thought on the need of feeding.

The famished ones must feed well before they go into business-feed on rice and ghee and milk, so that their bones may put on meat. Hair to be rid of like, smoothed. A hundred other details. It pays. No better investment in the whole money market (176).

Rice, ghee and milk should be prepaid to business. Thus their bones are placed in meat. Hair should be destroy like, a complex other details. It pays. There is no better investment in the whole money market.

The faith makes them embodiment of robust life full of energy and fearlessness. They are strengthened and not softened by the exploitation. The novel successfully the hunger and exploitation through the behavioral patterns of various characters. So it can be concluded that the theme of hunger is the prevalent theme in *So Many Hungers!* By Bhabani Bhattacharya.

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