

# Hunger in Society: A study of Bhabani Bhattacharya's so Many Hungers!

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**Abstract:** The novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya mostly represent a realistic and humanistic view along with it contains the outlook of oriental v/s occidental life of human society. His vision of life is very positive. As a novelist he is seriously concerned with the plight of the poor peasants and destitute, the landless and the labourer, the out castes of the society who suffer a great deal simply because they are helpless and their fate is sealed in hands of the rich and influential class of the people. He draw our attention through the scenes of poverty and suffering of the poor people and the cruel and heartless attitude of the rich and affluent people who thwart the prospects of a happy life for the helpless and unfortunate poor, peasant. In the novel, Bhattacharya artistically deal with the hunger i.e. the journey of Rahoul's and Kajoli's family is the tour de force of self- realization and self-assertion symbolically, it is the revolt for gaining freedom by the educated middle class against the disorder caused by the British government by Rahoul who was aware that without gaining political freedom, exploitation of social importance. The author deals in detail with the social setting of the time, with his own style of objective treatment. The famine of 1943 brings so many hungers, the hunger for food, money, sex the exploitation of man by man seemed to him to have become the creed of the day. The prevailing social conditions also worked upon the growing mind of Bhattacharya and inspired him to create his first novel. The famine of 1943 which stalked through the scared soil of Bengal, was one of the events as he himself confesses.

**Keywords:** Society, Caste, Destitute, Freedom, Hunger, Food.

## 1. Introduction

As we know many author describe caste issue, many novelist shows lower caste pain. Similarly Bhabani Bhattacharya also wants so society behaviour with them through this novel. So many hungers is a realistic study of the Bengal famine of 1943. The novel presents an authentic picture of the life in rural India in sharp contrast with the sophisticated and urban India. It is also a faithful portrayal of the changing social life of the contemporary India. The novel came out in 1947 soon after the independence of the country. The action of the novel covers the war years with Indian people's gruesome sufferings and frustrations, tension and apparent contradiction of the Indian society. Therefore, the novel is really a modern Indian classic depicting the inhuman atrocities committed on them by their own, fellow beings and countrymen during an almost man-made crisis in the form of famine which claimed the life of many innocent INDIANS. Then the great famine swept down

upon Bengal. The emotional stirrings I felt were a sheer compulsion to creativity. " the novel is regarded as socio-political, and economical history of the preindependent India. The characters of the novel represent different types of hungers prevalent in the Indian society at the time when the country faced a great famine. But the characters are also individuals because they have their own styles of behavior indifferent situations. The characters also seem to belong to all ages. It is very much clear when the relevance of the novel is taken into consideration. The issues raised in the novel are still present in the current Indian society. This research paper presents the very subject of discussion on the relevance of the social themes raised in the novel to the present day situations in India. The novel is full of realistic but pathetic scenes that they haunt the reader to a great extent. And one may be surprised to find the same situations in the country, and in which the people are still living, even after seventy five years. The aim of his paper is also to highlight those situations faced in every walk of life in the independent India.

"I know, I know, beloved.

Not in this life will hungers be sated-

I know, I know, beloved! What hungers?

(*So Many Hungers*, 93)

Harvesting was the very difficult task for them. They have to cut the sheaves of wheat, mustard and gram lentils while in the middle sun and that was very hard and painful. After all these hard labour they got very few wages from tags. After working of animals they got roti and noon every day. Specially makes by mixing the flour with husk since it was for the Dalit. But that was not enough food for them. Mostly time they have to live without eating and becoming sick and ill. People had died without proper treatment or medication. Even then people's faith in these Gods and Bhagats did not diminish. Sometime they totally depended on Bhagats.

Non-Dalits don't think about or worry about the Dalit existence in India. It's as if the Dalit experience is only related to Dalits. It's not that way at all they are a part of everything and they happen to be at the bottom of the pile. "most of the reapers were from the untouchable castes of the chuharas of chamaras. They had clothes on their bodies in name only. There was no question of shoes on their feet. There bare feet got badly

injured by the time the crop was brought in''  
(*Joothan*, 8)

Bhabani Bhattacharya's first novel, *So many Hungers!* (1947) is one of the finest pieces of creative writing born out of the agonised torment of body and spirit endured by the sacred soil of Bengal during the hideous famine years and they early stages of the second world war. The novelist shows the unfortunate. Predicament of Bengal by portraying the ups and downs in the life of two families—one of Samarendra Bose, an affluent barrister and the other of a peasant of Baruni whose soul is given to song and wandering. The two families are linked by their contact with the saintly figure of an aged nationalist leader, Devesh Bose who is worshipped by the villagers of Baruni as god because "the divine bliss fills his heart with riches". He is a true Gandhian and has been deep in civil disobedience movement several times. He loves villagers and is proud of them. Devesh Bose's son Samarendra Bose, is quite opposite in nature and ways of life to his saintly father. His only aim in life is to please his British rules, earn glamorous titles from them and accumulate more money. To him the war is veritable windfall. He treats it as the chance of life-time. As war progresses, he collects rice and hoards it and later on sells it at very high price. He has his plans for his eldest son, Rahoul too. He is proud son's D.Sc. degree in astrophysics from Cambridge University and wants him to be on the highest post of technical adviser in new Delhi so that he may use scientific knowledge to invent a highly destructive weapon. And the other side, Dalit's father tells their kids that schools were meant for the Babus not for the Bhangis. He hadn't quite understand the babus not for that then. Later he realized why my father had not sent him to school. Because of the sweeper and could never be Babu. Later still he realized that there was no school which would admit him, because the parents of the other children would not allow their sons to be contaminated by the touch of a sweeper's son. But the masters wouldn't teach the out castes test their fingers which guided the student touch the leaves of the out castes books and they be polluted. He knows that he was being abused. Not one of them spoke for them. They are only for latrines cleaning the cruel crowd! All of them abused abused. He always abused? Because they are Dalit?

"he abuses me. He happy when they call him 'jamadar'" so proud of his izzat! He just goes about getting salaams from everybody. I don't take a moment's rest and yet he abuse me. (Untouchable, 15)

Dalits who had went to school for study, it is possible that his master order him to sweep the whole verandas clean by asking their name and caste. They have to done it continue without learning any word in school. As karunakaran said, "the centre must set up dedicated university for the Dalits. That is the only way India can ensure the non-Dalit teachers will stop disrespecting India's original inhabitant. U.S has dedicated universities for the blacks. "India should apply this and then remove reservation system for Dalits. The Dalit universities should have everyone Dalits the faculty to students. Lower caste have to sacrifice everywhere and have to work hard for survive but yet they have no enough meal for two times in a day. They are people from same planet they have same things

like hand, mouth, leg, stomach mind everything like upper caste but these upper caste push them down in all field. If government give them reservation for coming forward at least in study but this upper caste stand against it. They have no power to fight with them equally. If upper caste want equal in reservation field then they have to be equal in rest field they have shaken hand with them, have to give them authority to sit besides, have to drink water from same well, have to worship in same temple have to clean with them latrine, have to clean road, have to wash cloths and have to eat joothan like Dalit than they can ask for equability in reservation areas. Why they don't want to come forward them, because they know that lower caste are hard worker, they can face all situation, whatever rain or sun light, they can face ice fall and can face storm because they have familiar with these situations and can crack all field. Only they want and that is reservation.

The three of us studied together grew up together, and experienced the sweet, sour moment of childhood together. All three of us were very good in our studies but our lower caste background dogged us at every step.

(*Joothan*, 3)

Every one of the Dalit family do some work. Even they don't manage to get two decent meals a day. They would often have to work without pay. And no one has dared to refuse the upper caste's orders. They called Dalits in using very bad language. Upper caste never thinks that they are also human and a part of the world. They have also authority to live in this world as all living but who knows. Who made all this rule that only upper caste have power to show their self, it doesn't matter that they have ability or not all depend on only on caste.

"wave after wave of hunger- stricken masses surging from the country side-a great many were in no fit state to consume solid food. They ate and died. To give them rice was to kill them"

(*So Many Hunger*, 286)

That title of the novel is an apt one. The novel presents the different hungers prevalent in society. We see the hunger for power hunger for an ideal world, hunger for freedom, and hunger for knowledge hunger for money; hunger for sex and not to forget- hunger for food.

Rahoul'd heart is, however, set elsewhere. Having come under the influence of his grand- father earlier, he is drawn towards Gandhi's non-cooperation movement. While pretending to research on the death ray, he works secretly for the quit India movement. The fishing boats of the villagers are seized by the government for the use of military personnel and peasants are forced to sell their grain to the agents of the imperialist government and greedy hoarders. As the famine stalks through the land, villagers being to die of hunger. Destitute leave their villages and march towards big cities in the hope of getting food. The mendicant's daughter kajoli, her mother and her little brother, anu also join this endless cavalcade of starving masses. On the way, they come across tired and famished skeletons groaning in pain while jackals crouch and eat their bodies. Vultures circle over the dead bodies and make a prey of human flesh. Facing numerous difficulties and hardships, they reach Calcutta kajoli and her mother make

a vain attempt to search Rahaol and the join their destitute crowded on the roads and pavements. They beg for their food but find it difficult to satisfy their hunger. When unable to fight against hunger kajoli's mother and brother fall ill, she thinks of earning money by selling her shame. But as she goes to the betel woman who keeps a brothel, she hears the newspaper vendors shouting about. Devata's fast unto death in the prison house and immediately his message to his people to be strong, true and deathless in the face of their miseries begins to ring in her ears. "friends and comrades, do not betray flag. Be true. Be deathless. Bande Matram "how could she, Dadu's granddaughter deman herself, her grand-father and her flag? Stricken by deep remorse, kajoli decides to earn an honest living by turning a newspaper vender. Rahoul goes to combridge with hunger for science and returns to India with a d.sc degree. His hunger for research prevents him from joining the national movement at once. Kunal has an insatiable hunger for joining the army and he derives satisfaction only after fighting and winning the enemy Devesh's hungers for serving the poor and the ignorant finds its satisfaction when he courts arrest. Devesh has conquered all hungers by his hunger for self service. His hunger for service is a dedication which is insatiable and immortal.

"the first few days the man suffered most. He was made with hunger. Then he grew restless. He laid himself down. His mouth was too tired for food, and he 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"

*(So many hungers, 289)*

The narrative of both kajoli and Rahoul were interlinked in the novel to expose the theme of hunger for food, freedom and hunger unflinching faith. Kajoli being a peasant girl of baruni illustrated the cruel fate of rural population of Bengal in 1943. Her father and elder brother were taken to jail for participation in freedom struggle. She along with her mother and younger brother onu had to survive amidst the grim situation due to Bengal famine moreover, being unaware of the death of her husband, being five month pregnanr had to go on exodus in search of food and was raped by the soldier. Bhattacharya portrayed this incident as a hunger matrix i.e kajoli being Hungary for food had not eaten anything for days and the soldier was sexually starved. He had not met his wife for a year- was suffering from hunger for sex. The fateful morning on which kajoli makes her momentous decision, Samrendra Bose receives the news that his youngest son, Capt. Kunal of Indian artillery, has been listed as missing and his eldest son Rahoul been arrested. Simultaneously the radio announces in its morning, news that he has been awarded the title of "companion of the Indian empire" the empire that claimed both of his sons, the broken heated Samrendra Bose reflects

gloomily and drops down lifeless. Though knot Hamsun's hunger, the novel hints at different kinds of hunger that move men and women the world over, such as the soul's hunger for the absolute, a subject nation's hunger for wealth and titles, a debauch's hunger for cuddling girls, its main theme is hunger for possession of the rich city's ten thousand rubbish heaps, in which scraps of rotting food lie buried. Juxtaposed with this woeful tale of man's hunger foe wealth. While the granaries of the selfish and greedy capitalists and black musketeers like Shri Lakshmi Nathan and Samrendra Bose abound in rice innumerable human beings die for want of it. While the restaurants of the rich city, Calcutta buzz with life and music and bulge with food, destitute in the nearby lanes and pavements lie sick and helpless and die for hunger. In this world of wealthy traders, there prevails a callous disregard, of all codes of civilized humanity. It is a picture of mad world in which vice and self-interest are flauntingly successful and corruption universally prevalent. The symbol of this inferno is Shri Lakshmi Nathan, learning be batch, a big businessman who fattens on black market and shamelessly gloats over the sorry predicament of helpless destitute girls forced by circumstances to sell their bodies. If the famine exposes the sordidness and meanness of human soul it also brings on the surface of its latent nobleness. There are moments when the helpless and famished destitute rise above their bodily infirmities and shoe a hidden core of sympathy, nobility and heroism. A famished boy, who has fought against a dog to procure a jam tin lying in the dustbin, holds out the treasure to be shared by a youngster who looks with wistful eyes toward him. A peasant girl abuse the body's sanctity to feed starving destitute, who call her mother, it is these sights of richness of human spirit that hold out before us hope for man's survival in spite of all the bludgeoning he has to endure at the hands of nature and fellow beings.

What made me call this novel a truly. Indian novel is the fact that this novel showcases the Indian mentality in a very clear way. It depicts the rural life in India the difference in rural and urban mind set, the dreams of the rural people associated with cities, the concern of parents for their children and the taboos in Indian society. It is essentially an Indian novel. The characters in the novel stand out and are definitely going to stay with me till a long time.

The characters of Kajoli and her mother are my favourite among several others. I feel it is their dignity that wins our heart.

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