



**POVERTY AND HUNGER: AN IRREVERSIBLE CONCERN OF SOCIETY
(AN IMAGE THROUGH BHABANI BHATTACHARYA'S WORKS)**

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Abstract:

The economic condition of any nation represents the social economic status of their natives. Poverty, being the reluctant factor, can be talked upon through the social class and mobility in the society. This paper aims at the revelations about poverty which vividly outcast the growth and development of any country. Emergence and resistance of poverty can visibly laid out through the study of this research paper and shows the effects of the same concern on the society. Bhabani Bhattacharya's works centre round the dictum that 'Art must have a social purpose'. He thinks that literature can have the main goal making the mankind better by giving them real check on society. This forte emphasized on some of the contemporary issues and he believes that a novelist can fuel to its pen by paying attention to the world around him and the things actually happening in the society. The proposed paper analyses not only the theme of hunger and poverty but also other ills and anomalies eating into vitals of society. Also, this study discovers the philosophy, suggested by the novelist, to mitigate social tension and restore harmony.

Keywords: *Hunger, Poverty, Subjugation, Eroticism, etc.*

In recent years, there has been a spiking rise in literature of development and modernization. The Third World Countries have shown the immutable concern for the analysis of issues involved in development. Most developing nations are now engaged in preparing ambition blue-prints for change. There is, also significant emergence of middle range generalisations regarding complex variables which perform the year-level function in the process of development. But none, too, is adequate for explaining macro-level change and typological abstractions; such as, developing societies. However, we have a galaxy of economists and social scientists that have authored their views on development approach, strategy and policy.

Development and growth define a society and a nation which is inseparable part of human beings. If we consider it a sociological concept, development is held to mean the transformation of lower society into higher society. Comte calls it "Positive-Mentality". Spencer defines it as "Differentiation and coherence". A nation that marches toward focusing to improve must be keenly aware of its social issues.

It is undeniably challenging or even hard to represent the idea of social issues. It somewhere relies upon the political conditions, normal bias, multiculturalism, conviction and so on. It might fluctuate from one place to another. The intensity and further the inception of any social issue are entirely on the perspective and attitude of the people living in a society. Along

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with a few peculiarities outside the control of human exercises, a major chunk of social problems are borne from individuals themselves. So, ultimately a social issue is proportionate to the individual response and their association to the society where they dwell.

When social problems (or a particular social problem) arise to the extent that the smooth functioning of the society is threatened, social disorganisation comes into existence. Further social problems and social disorganisation are correlated and this relation initiates a number of social concerns in the society. The study of this paper has opted the issues of poverty and hunger in the society of India which appear in various notions, shapes and categories. Although poverty has been a common problem with the most of the countries, the poverty in the Third World acquires alarming high proportions. As a developing country and as one of the leading developing countries of the Third World, India in no way is free from the scourge of poverty. The country has long been beset with a number of problems, but poverty is widespread in all areas of Indian society.

Modern thinkers present their view on poverty and consider it the result of multiple causes. In the present complex economic organisation, fate or the efforts of an individual are not the sole causes of poverty. This paper offers the study of the serious concern of society in the form of hunger and poverty whether it is physical or metaphysical. Literature is no mean away in describing this social concern in its own way.

Bhabani Bhattacharya, just like his compeer Mulk Raj Anand disapproved the idea of 'Art for art sake'. He postulated his knowledge and belief in the dictum of literature as 'a criticism of life' majorly is propagated by Matthew Arnold. Bhattacharya has constantly been striving to highlight the social purpose of fiction which acts as a vehicle of compassion. All his works- *So Many Hungers!* (1954), *Music For Mohini* (1952), *He Who Rides A Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960) and *Shadow From Ladakh* (1960) are truly emphasizing the historical crisis heralding and framing the nation's destiny.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is obsessed by a theme, a personal and compelling experience. His central preoccupation with the theme of poverty and hunger is evident in the entire corpus of his creative writings. The presented social issues are being used to express Bhattacharya's conviction that how a man's innate capacity for upholding human values is transmuted despite of all odds and sufferings. Though all the themes, characters, situations and problems are only apparently Indian; but considered in a broader perspective. It has the perennial relevance and essentially universally appealed and applicable.

Tryen Edwards avouches that fiction, in the hands of a master, may more truthfully portray life than sober history itself. And we have glimpse of the truth of this statement in Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!* which could be more conveniently described as a socio-historical novel. (Naik, 208). The Bengal Famine seized his mind and hunger in one form or another has haunted him throughout his literary career. Bhattacharya is absolutistic in his vision and approach, he has kept himself limited within the framework of a nation whose mores and traditions are soaked in his bones. Bhattacharya has a through grasp of his basic theme of hunger, and has dealt with most of its significant aspects and varieties.

Being Bhattacharya's first novel, *So Many Hungers!* is a novel about so many worldly ills described in the backdrop of a great historical disaster that occurred in the colonial India. This piece of work is an outstanding literary artefact that in its plot and characterisation, analyses the strength of human being involved in the everlasting struggle against the evil forces of mankind testing it constantly.

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So Many Hungers! has for its theme hungers- a variety of them- both benign and malevolent. To begin with, it appears to be the hunger as it is commonly recognised, the hunger for food. The Bengal famine of 1943 which tarnished millions of people under its catastrophic truculence forms the major part of novel's plot. Secondly, hunger for power evolved out which showcases tremendous bloodshed, pain and exploitation. The Second World War with full of rage and violence weaves the other unavoidable segments of the story. The next variable in the list of hunger comes into the light as hunger for power. The 1942 Quit India Movement provides another piece of its structure. The countdown does stop here; as there are more to discuss: hunger for health, for reputation, for lust and for security. The wholeness of these themes connotes the wilderness of the author to uncover the multiplicity of hungers as they are traumatising in a real sense.

The novel is an intricate story that is cocooned around the happenings of Rahoul and Kajoli and their families. In the opening of the novel, there is an outbreak of the war. For Rahoul, his father Samerendra plays an indispensable role. And for Samerendra war he literally means 'the most richening industry' (Bhattacharya, *SMH*, 23). Having two sons, the younger one Kunal joins the army though the elder one Rahoul participates in the national movement of the country as heartedly inspired by his grandfather. During the freedom movement Rahoul, being the participants of the same, Kajoli's father, her elder brother and Devata are imprisoned. Becoming homeless and reduced to cringing poverty, they migrate to Calcutta. On their way, they bashfully confront the inexplicable incidents full of agony and their fates remain unchanged in Calcutta too. Kajoli, a female fighter, turns out to be invincible after facing the extremity of degradation like being raped and sold to brothel and many more.

This piece of work paints a detailed and graphic picture of the Bengal Famine of 1943 which is a heart-rending scene of starvation and death. Horrible scenes are commonplace things: the mothers kill their own children for want of milk and food, the hungry infants are seen sucking the breast of their mothers who have already died of starvation; the mothers sell their daughters and even send them to brothels for the sake of food without comprehending the full import of their actions.

Rahoul, one of the most convincingly drawn characters, evolves as a sensible and noble man with the passage of time and struggling experiences. He was introduced as a 'sentimental boy' (Bhattacharya, *SMH*, 1) and his mother shows concern 'Would he not fit himself into the hardness of life?' (Bhattacharya, *SMH*, 1). Rahoul emerges as an irrepressible patriot from a conserved perspective creature who is always dripped in sciences. On the other hand Kajoli, the most memorable figure in the story, gradually becomes the soul of the novel. This strong character Kajoli, who was tender, vivacious and playful, becomes the victim of misery and exploitation. The woman's strength and capacity for endurance and sufferings are show cased through the unstoppable Kajoli. Devata introduced Kajoli to Rahoul: 'She is well-bred peasant girl. She has a legacy of manners as old as India' (Bhattacharya, *SMH*, 37).

To Kajoli and other starving people, life has shed its young dreams. Kajoli, in a state of extreme hunger, eats the entire bread which she perchance gets from a soldier, without thinking for a minute about her hungry mother and brother. And when the soldier's hand creeps down to her breasts, she is "still drugged with eating", and doesn't know what is going to happen to her- a sexual act resulting in acutely painful abortion. However, the two satisfies the hunger of each other for the time being- the soldier pacifies Kajoli's fearful hunger for food, while she satiates his long-standing hunger for a sexual intercourse with a woman.

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To move further, taking the examples of his other novels "*Shadow from Ladakh*" in which Bhabani's concern is more with internal and ideal life than the external and real. It is the ordinary men who are majorly inhabited this world, burdened with the problem of hunger more than anything else. During the early revolutionary struggle in Peking, Bireswar, a minor character in the novel, observes: "... but it failed to give the common man what he needed above all else: an acre of earth to till, a bowl of rice to eat... hunger raged as before" (Bhattacharya, *SFL*, 186-87).

As such, this work does not concentrate only upon external hungers like those for food, wealth, sex etc. These varieties of hunger are just sporadically treated. What is repeatedly brought out in it is man's hunger for moral grandeur and idealism. Besides, it concentrates on man and woman's essential need for each other, instead of man's urge for intimate relations; it stresses his innate and healthy hunger for the woman in her wholeness. However, as pointed out above, the novel does not completely ignore the basic hunger for food; it makes many references to it. Bhashkar Roy, a major character in the novel, decides to leave America for India because he hears an Indian visiting minister in Washington talking about India's problem of famine; the minister says to him, "You see ours is a problem of sheer survival. We are on the edge of a precipice and we stand dazzled. Mind you, this is not just a figure of speech. Any day we may go hurtling to our doom- literally. How old were you when the famine struck?" (Bhattacharya, *SFL*, 36)

Shadow From Ladakh discusses one very significant variety of human hunger- the male's quest for the female and vice versa. Bhashkar, like every man in the world, needs a woman to give himself completely to and to take some sort of refuge in her company, whenever he feels exhausted with work, boredom and frustration. Sumita's selection to represent a Peace Mission to Ladakh shocked him and he longs to be "submerged in Rupa"- another young woman with whom he is frequently intimate. Even Sumita, who is brought up by his ascetic father in ascetic ideals, begins to have an acute inner urge for the male in Bhashkar. The dominant phallic consciousness in man leads him to love a woman in her wholeness, and not for physical intercourse alone. Bireswar, who was a born philanderer, gives himself completely to young Suruchi. He has never taken women seriously in his life until he has the incredible, shattering experience of love: "...for the first time I found myself in love! In love with a woman in her entirety- not just her face, her shape, her voice...well, I was in love with all that, and in addition with the invisible, the innermost...I had never before imagined such an absurdity could happen to me, of all people. I became lost in Suruchi. All my past life stood before me in a stark futility and all my future" (Bhattacharya, *SFL*, 204).

Another character in the novel Satayajit, after his *brahmacharya* vow, he and his wife Suruchi, occasionally suffer a lot, since both of them are deprived of the spontaneous fullness of being. They try to control the basic urge, but cannot get of it. And hence it surges up within them at times. Satayajit's over busy life immensely helps him to observe asceticism peacefully, but Suruchi usually hungers for the natural man-woman relationship and is very much worried about her daughter's leading a life of forced asceticism, killing the natural flow and fullness of life. In short, Bhattacharya in his novels depicts several kinds of hunger, from the lowest to the highest. What is most striking about the theme of hunger here is that he repeatedly emphasizes his belief that all men, rich and poor, young and old are obsessed by hunger of one kind or another.

To conclude, Bhabani Bhattacharya's plea for a social reality intrinsically reflected in his confidence in the bright side of human existence with which his novels conclude, in his trust in the unmeasured opulence and holiness of man's spirit which cannot be crumpled by adversity and



mortification and in his faith that the evil powers in man and social deception and moral deterioration only mark the real metals and the luminous spirit of man.

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