

# Existentialism Restraints and Societal Demarcation: A Real Paradigm in Bhabani Bhattacharya's So Many Hungers!

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Indian writers were exposed to literature in the English language only during the nineteenth century when they were under the British regime. The Indian novelists of the pre-independence and post-independence periods attempted writing novels on new subjects. They dealt especially with three major themes- the Indian National Movement for freedom, their faith in Indian life and the problems of adjustment, which a westernized Indian encounters in India. The character of Indian novel is bound to vary from language to language and is bound to be conditioned by the regional linguistic and cultural peculiarities and characteristic of the writer and his environment.

The trend of social relation, which flowered in the pre-independence English novels, has been successfully and powerfully continued in the post-independence period by certain writers like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar and Khuswant Singh, who made their appearance during the nineteen fifties. The most dominant and persuasive theme used by the writers of Indo-English novel has been the focus on the burning problems of contemporary Indian life.

Like every writer, Bhabani Bhattacharya is obsessed by a theme, a personal and compelling experience. The Bengal famine seized his mind, and hunger is one form of another has haunted him throughout his literary career. This novel is born by paying attention to the shades of thought experienced by famished people in Bengal in the early stages of Second World War. It also focusses in their inability to touch the fringes of freedom which lies before them but completely abducted by a group, the so-called upper class monsters who reside with the same famished bunches the sole responsible for their cause.

The author's portrayal of the true picture in bringing out the discrepancy among the two classes of people i.e., upper and lower classes is vivid. Leaders strive for independence to bring back the feeling of unity and oneness among the people. It is convincing that real independence should first arise from mind where there are no boundaries, no discrimination, no restraints and no demarcation. Independence should sprout with attitude of Indian that Navigate through cross cultural diversity. Syed Ameeruddin says Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels as:

Perceives political protest against social evils afflicting India as the underlying message in the author's novels. Commitment to humanist values permeates these fictions. The authors work calls for a realignment of social forces as the only practical possibility for change in the country's future. (p.20)

In **So Many Hungers!** Bhattacharya narrates the story of a man-made famine that took a toll of the lives of two million innocent men, women, and children. Devesh Bose is a nationalist, true Gandhian who was imprisoned several times was also worshipped as God by Baruni villages. The supreme quality of him is found missing with his son Samerandra Bose, who pleases the Britishers and earns glamorous titles thereby, accumulates money. He is after richness and wealthy life. In fact, he enjoyed the luxuriousness by stamping the starving peasants of Baruni villages wherein he never takes time to listen to their hardships. As war progresses in the third year, peasants are forced to sell their lands and grains to greedy hoarders and the upper class people sold it for higher price. After relentless ill treatment and looting the possession of the Baruni villagers, they are deliberately made to move out of the village. The villagers guide, Devata actively participates in

Civil Disobedience Movement. Like great patriots, he organizes a large number of peasants and fishermen, and defies the law by making salt from sea-water. Devata and his eldest son Kanu are sent to prison for breaking the Salt Law. The peasants thus started migrating to Calcutta in search of Rahoul who is the eldest son of Samerandra Bose and he works secretly for Quit India Movement.

Society is not at all bad. There are good people who do not hesitate to come to the rescue of the famished and the desperate. However, many of the men in the novel are greedy and sexually perverted; people like Rahoul do have some ethical conscience. His father wants him on the highest post of technical adviser in New Delhi. He must use his scientific knowledge to invent weapons, is the opinion of his father but he gives his active participation towards Gandhi Non-Cooperation Movement. He has concern for starving people who beg for morsel of food.

A mendicant's daughter, Kajoli, her mother, her little brother Anu joins these starving masses. At a point of time, Kajoli decides to become a whore. When hearing the news 'Devata fast unto death' she feels ashamed of her attitude and decides to live honestly by turning as a newspaper vendor. Dr. Chandrasekharan aptly states :

Rahoul's story is a representation in miniature of the struggle for freedom. The sad tale of Kajoli is likewise a pathetic record of what had happened to more than two million men and women who became victims of a famine which was not an God, but which was brought about by the rapacity and selfishness of profiteers and the indifference of an alien Government.(p.11)

The poverty-stricken vista of famished people focuses on the heart wrenching sights of human misery and their sufferings move us to tears. People started dying of hunger and it rapidly increased day by day. Mother unable to bear the death by starvation buried her children alive. Men wanting for food breathe their last when the moment food is poured in their bowels. Destitutes and dogs fight together for rotten food in heaps. On the other side author brings out Calcutta buzzing with life and music and bulging with food, whereas, umpteen destitutes are deprived of this. Shri Lakshminathan, a black marketer took advantage of the crisis and the helpless destitutes are forced by circumstances to sell their bodies. Bhattacharya sketches the predicament and intense sufferings of peasants to live their life most importantly to breathe freely is set realistically before us. He remarks that:

A bigger boy, passing that way, took things in at a glance. He came dashing, kicked at the dog, snatched the jam-tin from its teeth and stood ready for counter attack. Destitutes and dogs in those days often fought for possession of the rich city's ten thousand rubbish heaps, in which scraps of rotting food lay buried. It was not every time that the destitute won, routing the dogs on the streets and the dog within themselves. (p.171)

War is always a symbol of evil in the pacifist vision of Bhattacharya. In this novel too, various aspect of war are the target of Bhattacharya's criticism. The war which Rahoul, the scientist was supporting does not remain a war of democracy against fascism. Ironically, it turns out to be a war of man against man. Indians are to side with freedom and democracy and not with tyranny and enslavement. The novel ends with the description of inspired people singing loudly in chorus the following immortal lines of Rabindranath Tagore : "The more their eyes redden with rage. The more our eyes open; The more thy lighten the chains. The more the chains loosen!" ( p.205).

In this novel, we find different minds of people stuffed with choices of hunger. Hunger for wealth in Samerandra Bose; hunger for position in Shri Lakshminathan; the debaucher's hunger for cuddly girls; woman's hunger for a secure home and happiness; hunger for food among peasants of Baruni and the rulers hunger for power. The dehumanizing and demeaning effects of hunger are depicted in this novel. Dr. Paul Varghese rightly remarks, "Food is the primary requisite of human dignity; hunger debases and dehumanizes man. That is why hunger is the theme of a large number of Indo-Englian novels. Bhattacharya has dealt quite Concomitant" (p.86).

Existentialism is born out of societal circumstances. Existentialism within India is being a point to ponder despite speaking about national leaders who fought for independence. Probing into an unnoticed issue, which is kept aside in the midst of extensive striving, is distinctly expressed by the author. His overall dedication and perseverance in giving consideration of the unnoticed sufferings around us means a lot and it carries significant meaning in life. Societal conflicts therefore is projected by Bhattacharya as a man-made phenomenon in the sense that it issues out of the social interest of the powerful field who have established a type of socio-economic structure which both creates and perpetuates it.

Bhattacharya's plea for social reality is reflected in his confidence in the bright side of human existence. As the critic Sudhakar Joshi says:

His novels have a penetrating and sympathetic analysis of the simple but insurmountable problems in Indian life. His themes generally revolve around poverty, hunger, pestilence, traditionalism, caste, India's struggle against poverty, industrialization and the resulting controversy of Gandhian panaceas versus rapid industrialization. (p.174)

**So Many Hungers!** depicts the lacerated passions of the wounded self that triumphs over the bitter sufferings of humanity and looks beyond it to a world as spiritual consolation and bliss. It is a tour de force of self-realization and self-assertion. Thus Bhattacharya evinces an affirmative vision of life issuing out of one's social - moral and socio-ethical sense of values.

#### REFERENCES

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