

---

## The Theme of Hunger IN So Many Hungers! By Bhabani Bhattacharya

DR SUSHMA VERMA

Bhabani Bhattacharya occupies an outstanding place among the twentieth century Indo Anglican writers. His novel *So Many Hungers!*, *He Who Rides A Tiger*, *Shadow From Laddakh*, *Music For Mohini*, *A Dream In Hawaii* as well as his stories have world wide acclaim. His works have been translated into 26 languages. Like Mulk Raj Anand, he is a multifarious writer.

His first novel *So Many Hungers!* (1947) is set against the Bengal Famine and Quit India Movement and deals with the theme of hunger and degradation. Various types of hungers mentioned in it are hunger for food, hunger for sex, hunger for money, hunger for love, hunger for freedom, hunger for name and fame. These hungers are not confined to a particular place or community but are universal and they are applied to the international community as well. Here is an attempt to discuss the theme of hunger in the novel as it portrays the sufferings, trials and tribulations of the people of Bengal in general and the other people of Calcutta and its adjoining village of Baruni.

This novel is written in the backdrop of man-made Bengal famine of 1942-43 when during war years a few black marketeers started hoarding rice. The period coincides with Gandhian Satyagraha struggle which culminated in Quit India Movement. The exclamation mark with which *So Many Hungers!* ends, denotes the writer's bewilderment at the multiplicity of these hungers. Hunger for political freedom (in case of India) for imperial expansion, for money (in case of capitalists who create artificial scarcity of rice), for food (in case of starved poor Bengali), for sex (in case of sex starved soldiers), for human dignity and respect (in case of Kajoli who rejects brothel) and hunger as spiritual weapon employed by the freedom fighters who have gone on hunger strike under the leadership of Devesh Basu.

In *So Many Hungers!*, hunger for food is best mentioned. Hunger for food makes humans inhuman. The starving men quarrel fiercely for a little bit of food. The shortage of food compels a mother to eat food, while her child is lying dead in lap. Hunger also impels a girl to show her naked to men for the sake of morsels of food for herself and her dear ones.

The novel deals with the characters like Samarendra Basu who are like vultures and jackals who are greedy. We have depiction of boy fighting with other boys and animals for morsels of food ferreted out of the dust bin. On the other side we have glimpses into the heart and souls of human beings and find the abundance of love, of purity. Devesh Basu or Devata is prototype of Gandhiji "who tells the people of Baruni to be strong and be deathless and at least some follow him."

In chapter IV of the novel he gives vivid description of how hunger has taken the maximum toll of life during the war.

"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."

---

"The first few days the man suffered most. He was mad with hunger. Then he grew restless. He laid himself down .His mouth was too tired for food... His eyes died. He wasted to a skeleton."

The second quotation describes how hunger leads a man to death, while the first presents the futility of feeding the people. Thus while millions of people have died of hunger for food, Samarendra dies of hunger for wealth which he has amassed. He loves his son very much but his love for money surpasses it even.

Rahoul goes to Cambridge with his hunger for knowledge and returns India with his D.Sc. degree. His hunger for research prevents him joining the National Movement at once. Kunal has an unflinching hunger for joining the army and he is satisfied only after joining it. Devata has hunger for serving the poor and ignorant and he finds satisfaction after he is arrested by the court. He has conquered all hungers by his hunger for self service.

Sir Abalabandhu's hunger for name, fame and money knows no bound and is never satisfied, only death and nothing else can satisfy such an evil man.

There are two people whose hunger reveals that despite the adversities humanity still prevails. The one example is that of a young woman who sells her so called body's sanctity to feed the helpless destitutes. The other is the hunger experienced by a beggar who sells his meal ticket to a needier person. It is this hunger for sacrifice that binds all humanity into one eternal race conquering so many hungers that come to surface now and then.

So in short we can conclude that the theme of hunger is the prevalent theme in So Many Hungers! by Bhabani Bhattacharya.

#### REFERENCES

- i. K.R. Chandrasekharan: Bhabani Bhattacharya
- ii. R.K. Srivastava: Introduction, Perspectives On Bhabani Bhattacharya
- iii. Marlen Fisher: The Women In Bhattacharya's Novels
- iv. So Many Hungers! : Oriental Paperbacks