



# Deficiency And The Mental Unrest In Bhabhani Bhattacharya's So Many Hunger

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## Abstract:

The novel deals with the modern Indian classic that depicts a dreadful picture of the Bengal Famine of 1943. Along with the famine and the pathos of the sufferers the novel brings forth the spirit of nationalism and the zeal for freedom from British. It delves into how the humans themselves were responsible for the famine in which their own species suffered. When you had to choose between the ache of hunger and the ache of indigestion, you would often choose the latter. He holds up the mirror to society by highlighting social evils like injustice, exploitation, cruelty and oppression.

## Keywords:

Famine, injustice, suffered, hunger,

Literature as a part of society captures and mirrors human expression and experience. It reflects and records human condition. The consequences of any disaster always seem to be the subject matter of the contemporary writers. Since time immemorial the writers have undergone and dealt with such kind of situation. This paper foregrounds the crisis that man passes through, during and after the outbreak of the famine. The paper concentrates on the element of alienation that the individual characters undergo. This particular novel deals with Bengal Famine during 1942-43.

Bhattacharya dwells upon the helplessness of the characters, their hunger, impact of the famine on their physical and mental well-being and many more. It mainly attempts to narrate the reciprocal relationship between the psychological and physiological claim of man's happiness and satisfaction. Literary writings articulate the unprecedented link between man and environment. This is what Ecocriticism talks about. The philosophy of this theory tries to revitalize a new approach to life. The paper insists on man's profound alienation and final recognition. It also revolves around man's successive stages of degeneration. The aftermath of any disaster appears to bring a change in the general principle of life. Thereby, they stand at the brink of

abject abandonment. Human-nature binary posits man at the centre of the cosmos. So, we must now retrace the lost connection.

In this novel Bhattacharya refers to the peoples' hunger for food and for freedom--- the two pressing problems of India at the momentous moment of India. And this twofold hunger is dealt with as the central theme of his first novel. The novelist has successfully and artistically inter twisted the historic Bengal famine of 1943 and the Quit India Movement of 1942. He makes relevant references to these dual aspects---- so the song of Kishore with deep sense and meaning:

“I Know, I know, beloved, Not in this life will hungers be sated I know, I know, beloved.”

Then, at the end of the novel, Tagore's song is also very significant: “The more they tighten the chains, The more the chains loosen.”

A close understanding and analysis of the novel will show that the title *So Many Hungers* is highly justified. The novel represents many hungers of man ---food, love, affection, lust, money, name and fame, political freedom, imperial expansion, human dignity, self respect etc. all interweaves together is the central theme of the novel. The very title of the novel is very justified and suggestive of all there hungers of man. The man made famine of Bengal and man's insatiable hunger for wealth and many are main motif of the novel. This motif is brought out against the back drop of the Quit India Movement and Gandhiji's Satyagrah for total freedom of the country. The two themes of the novel are shown through the two families of Kajoli and Rahoul and the various events inter mixed. The plot of the novel is very simple yet coherent weaving out successfully the two main strands in the novel. The story of Rohoul's family and peasant girl Kajoli's family are well united and inter woven with the main themes of the novel i.e. the historic famine and the freedom movement of the country.

- **Poverty:** Hunger is a consequence of poverty. Poor living conditions and limited food access lead to malnutrition in children, especially in rural areas with overpopulation.
- **Gender inequality:** Girls suffer more due to the patriarchal mindset, as they are considered secondary and are generally the last to eat in poor families. They are also deprived of mid-day meals due to a lack of access to schools.
- **Poor governance:** Corruption is one of the greatest obstacles to eliminating hunger. This problem is compounded by the lack of awareness among the people.
  - **Example:** Food distribution is inconsistent, with grains being diverted to the open market for profit and poor quality grains sold in ration shops.
- **Unidentified hunger:** Inaccurate classification of households as above or below the poverty line, coupled with poor quality grains, leads to a decline in food consumption.
- **Hidden hunger:** Micronutrient deficiency, caused by poor diet, disease, and inadequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation, leads to hidden hunger.
- **Lack of maternal knowledge:** Inadequate understanding of nutrition, breastfeeding, and parenting among mothers is another area of concern.

- **Resource wastage and climate change:** The consequences of resource wastage are borne by lower strata of society as they cannot adapt to changing events.
  - Further, the expansion of deserts, soil erosion, water scarcity, and extreme weather phenomena as a result of climate change invariably affects poor people more, leading to hunger.
- **Natural disasters:** Weather extremes lead to hunger crises. **Droughts** and floods destroy harvests and leave the poor vulnerable.

The novel *So Many Hungers* has been written by Bhabani Bhattacharya who hailed from Bhagalpur district of erstwhile Bengal Presidency. The novel was written in the backdrop of the 1943 famine of Bengal in which millions perished. The novel deals with the dual theme of hunger for food and hunger for independence. It was set during the 1940s when both World War II and the Quit India movement raised the tone of the freedom struggle to its climax. However, the plot does not showcase merely the patriotic zeal of its protagonists, a scientist Rahoul, and Kajoli, a peasant girl. It also brings out the sensitivity of the conditions post-famine, created by the British. The food supplies from Bengal at that time were either being used to feed the soldiers of the colonial army or destroyed in fear of being stolen by the Japanese, who were believed to be invading India. The writer touches upon the emotional side of the catastrophe, vividly describing the conditions of the living, who were worse off than dead while showcasing the barbarity of the British government's wartime policies. Thus, the way the storyline treats the idea of the freedom struggle, likened to a thread sewing the entire theme together while highlighting the famine makes it valuable literature.

The central theme of Bhattacharya's novels is famine and hunger. Bhattacharya presents a gruesome picture of Bengal famine during the year 1943 in *So Many Hungers!* and *He Who Rides a Tiger*. To quote his words, "... the plague of hunger in the wave of war... no rationing of food-grains, no price control, no chocking of giant sharks who play cornering game on a stupendous scale... barns are empty — the peasants had been induced to sell off heir grain. Markets arc empty-the grain is hidden away... And now the rice was five times the old rate, weavers sold their looms to traders from big cities... Artisans sold their tools. Fishermen's boats were chopped up for fire wood to sell... The plague washed up in fierce tides" (*He Who Rides a Tiger*, p.15).

Bhattacharya's another novel, „*He Who Rides a Tiger*“ has an affinity with his first novel, „*So Many Hungers!*“ In that the two themes of Bengal famine of 1943 and the Quit India Movement of 1942 have also figured, though not as obtrusively as in the former one. It is an attack on those who profited on people's misery during the famine as well as those who exploited them as caste tyrants. The novel is also a satire on the Hindu orthodoxy written against the socio-political background of Bengal famine and the freedom struggle before the attainment of independence. *He Who Rides a Tiger* is the story of Kalo's victory of revenge against society and his learning of the principle through varied experiences that the integrity is the greatest achievement of man. It is only when he liberates himself from the fetters which bind him that his friend Biten tells him

admiringly, “your story will be a legend of freedom, a legend to inspire and awaken” The famine of Bengal is grinding the people to death. Kalo too sits idly in his smithy for days together and watches the position. He fears that Lekha “might have to roam the fields with hundreds of others, like a hungry animal, digging out soft wild roots for a meal”. Unable to see his daughter suffer the pangs of starvation, Kalo decides to go to Calcutta where he hopes to find work and earn a living. Travelling without ticket on the footboard of a train, along- with hundreds of other destitute- men and women clinging to the foot boards, his eyes are the ripe fruit inside the compartment gives him as unbearable ache. He steals three ripe bananas and is arrested and tried for his offence. Kalo pleads guilty and explains: “I was hungry, sir. A madness came upon me. It was because I thought I had to eat or I would die. A madness came upon me. I had to live”. The theme of hunger signifies the title of the novel, *He Who Rides a Tiger*. Riding on the tiger implies man’s quest for riding on hunger. Hunger is ferocious and is killing man as a tiger does. Kalo and Lekha, the two central characters, suffer from hunger losing their all on account of it. So they decide to ride the tiger of hunger to eke out their living.

Kalo thinks that the main cause of the suffering of the poor is the hierarchy of the caste system. Brahmin at the upper side exploits low caste at the bottom. Kalo arrives Calcutta to make his livelihood but cannot get a job honestly. He finds poverty and starvation all around. On the one hand the rich compile wealth by dishonest means and on the other hand poor suffer from starvation due to poverty. The rich are hungry for money and sex; poor are hungry for food. Dr. R.S. Singh in *Indian Novel in English: A critical study*, says: "Bhattacharya not only records the misery of the poor but of the rich also. The irony of the situation very ably presents the ghostly contrast between affluence and poverty, power and helplessness, goodness and hypocrisy" (Singh 67).

Bhabani Bhattacharya in *He who Rides a Tiger* portrays a stern and sick image of the hungry and rural India; its wretchedness and hardships, doubtfulness and deprivations, torments and frustrations. The themes mostly cover the troubles of poverty, hunger, infestation, traditionalism, casteism, and India’s battle against these troubles. Bhattacharya’s works arouse our sense of pity and fellow feeling to the poor and the marginalized.

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