

Social Realism In Bhabani Bhattacharaya's So Many Hungers!

Dr. Sanjay Kumar Swarnkar

Head of Department, Department of English,
C.S.J.M. University, Kanpur

Dev Prakash Pandey

Research Scholar

Abstract: Bhabani Bhattacharya was born in the same decade of the 20th century in which famous Indian Novelists Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao were born. He is strongly called as one of the four wheels of the Indian English novelist. The other three are Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of the most famous amid the older generation of Indian English novelists. He was born on the 10th of November, 1906 in Bhagalpur (Bihar). Bhabani Bhattacharya belonged to an educated family. He had his schooling at Puri and joined Patna University for his undergraduate studies. After taking his Bachelor's degree with Honours in English Literature in 1927, he left for England to study at the University of London. He completed his Ph.D. degree in History and he returned to India in December, 1934. As a famous writer, he was very much influenced by Rabindra Nath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi as well as by English Playwright William Shakespeare. He was also very much influenced by Karl Marx, Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, Walt Whitman and Sinclair Lewis. Bhabani Bhattacharya, who passed away in October, 1988, is one of the leading in the middle of Indian writers who have dealt with these epoch-making events. The death of Bhattacharya India has vanished one of the best writers of novel who was at once a realist and a creative thinker, an artist and a propagandist with his authentic anxiety for society. He was very talented and made his position not only as a novelist but also as a translator, artistic historian, and biographer and as a short story writer. His fantastic contribution spreads over a period of about thirty years and consists of only six novels: So Many Hungers! (1947), Music for Mohini (1952), He Who Rides a Tiger (1955), A Goddess Named Gold (1960), Shadow from Ladakh (1966), A Dream in Hawaii (1978).

Keywords: Milieu, Realism, Social Realism, Bengal famine, Hunger, Sufferings, Peripheral, Exploitations

In English literature there are special narrative techniques for the narration. Among the narrative techniques, Realism, in literature, is an approach that attempts to describe reality of existence. Although realism is not restricted to any one century or set of writers, it is most often related with the literary movement in 19th-century France, specifically with the French novelists Flaubert and Balzac. George Eliot introduced realism into England, and William Dean Howells introduced it into the United States. Realism has been essentially concerned with the commonplaces of everyday life among the middle and lower classes, where character is a product of social factors and milieu is the essential aspect in the dramatic complications in literature. It is an approach that proceeds from an analysis of truth in terms of innate forces. It is a technique of writing that gives an actual way of life. Realism recognized itself as a significant convention in the

theatre in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in the work of Henrik Ibsen, Bernard Shaw, and others; and it remains an ordinary convention of film and television drama. In the play, realism is most closely connected with Ibsen's social plays. Afterward writers felt that realism laid too much importance on external reality. Henry James, turned to a psychological realism that closely examined the complex workings of the intellect. The 18th-century works of Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Tobias Smollett are among the early examples of realism in English literature. Realism became famous in the English novel with such writers as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Anthony Trollope and William Makepeace Thackeray

Social Realism is a keen representation of social situation. It implies a moral consciousness also. Social Realism includes

social consciousness, social sense and experience and social insight. It describes the social problem which prevailed in our society such as gender, race, hunger, exploitation, child labor, violence against women, poverty, class, culture and etc. All these are the main theme in the Post- Independence Indian English fiction. Social realism is a way of expression the major problems of the society. It is the social middle class which provided the most obvious context for the new Indian Writing in English. There is change in the situation after independence; the novelists desire to represent the life of people with background. They treated the themes like poverty, starvation, famine, hunger, caste system, women's position in society and people's economic condition. The Indian novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Kamala Markandaya and Khushwant Singh changed the condition and adopted realism with social insight in their novels. Bhabani Bhattacharya, in all his six novels, describes the Indian way of life. He refers to various customs, conventions, and superstitions which are present in the Indian society even today.

The present research paper is a representation of social realism in his first novel *So Many Hungers*. Being a creative artist cum-critic, Bhattacharya presents a vivid image of Indian life which is the result of his deep connection in life. He criticizes the cruelties and heartless acts of the anti-social and anti-democratic forces of democratic contemporary India. This research paper will cover Bhabani Bhattacharya's first novel *So Many Hungers!* This deals with poverty, hunger and exploitation of the peasants in man-made famine of Bengal in 1943. The novel is a past story of the great effort of India. History and literature which are usually considered particular element, but he describes the real picture of Indian society. Bhabani Bhattacharya's knowledge and relationship with men, manners and their personalities have enabled him to grasp the essential behavior of people and he presented the entire events in his novels very skillfully.

His first novel *So Many Hungers* (1947) was published two months after India got Independence. The novel colorfully reflects Indian life and troubles. It deals with the hunger for liberty, hunger for food, and hunger for authority, hunger for sex, wealth, and for recognition. It describes the two devils of war and famine which press the blood of human being. The realistic position of the novel *So Many Hungers!* describe a very heartbreaking image of the suffering of body and strength endured by the natives of Bengal during the famine years and the early stages of World War II. The title of the novel shows different kinds of hunger. B. Syamala Rao in *Bhabani Bhattacharya* says,

The title of the novel, *So many Hungers!* is amply justified.

There are indeed many hungers. - hunger for food, hunger for affection, hunger for love, hunger for lust, hunger for money, hunger for sacrifice and hunger for the general welfare of all.

(Rao 46)

In India peasants are forever beneath the darkness of famine or a flood. Most of the peasants are always the victims of natural calamities. They recognize poverty and hunger as their destiny. But the story of the novel deals with the hunger which is the result of a man-made famine. Bhabani Bhattacharya deals with the pitiable period of famine, when

the poor farmers were fooled by the money minded people selling all their grain for a insignificant cost and were lastly reduced to hunger. Bhabani Bhattacharya traces their movement to the city of Calcutta in search of food and their poverty as well as the terrible deaths of millions of the people. He portrays a whole lot of exploiters who never hesitate to use the liability of its sufferers for selfish gains.

The novel is divided into two plots — the first, story of Samarendra Basu's family with young Rahoul as the central character and the story of a peasant family with the young girl Kajoli as the protagonist. The urban family of Samarendra Basu in Calcutta consists of his wife, two sons Rahoul and Kunal, Rahoul's wife Manju and father Devesh or Devata. The other, a peasant family from a small village Jharana, consisting of Mother, her husband, her daughter Kajoli, two sons and the son-in-law Kishore. The two stories symbolize the freedom movement or the struggle for freedom and the agonies of the famine respectively. Devesh Basu, the grandfather of Kunal and Rahoul participated in civil disobedience and after that he created a group of volunteers and made salt from seawater in disobedience of the law and this is the reason of his imprisonment. In the meeting of the peasant family and Kishore, Onu proudly discloses that Kanu, the eldest one was born in prison when Mother was jailed for following Gandhiji's *Satyagraha*. This event shows the long struggle that the people of India have already engaged in the freedom movement.

These two families make the two strands of the plot. All the poor are depicted as the exploited ones but not all the rich are the exploiters. While only one member of the rich family is responsible for the exploitation of the poor, the other members on the contrary extend their helping hand to the poor. The stories of these two families run parallel till the end of the novel. Samarendra Basu, who is a lawyer by profession, looks at the war as an opportunity to make a fortune. He forms a trading company with the ironic name 'Cheap Rice, Limited'. He feels that this opportunity gives a proper way in shaping himself as a millionaire. His younger son Kunal, who loves thrill, joins the British Army. The elder son Rahoul who follows the footsteps of his grandfather Devesh looks at the war as a danger to democracy. Samarendra's wife feels that shortage of food and necessary supplies will make the life of the ordinary people unhappy. Devesh Basu, whom the villagers of Baruni call 'Devata', inspires them to contribute in the Civil Disobedience Movement. The police arrest Devata and Kajoli's father. The villagers take action with anger and set the post office on fire. The government imposes a group fine upon the whole village for the flammable. The villagers set the rice grains to pay the fine. A number of villages at the coastal area are taken into control by the British army. The willing ones rush to Calcutta to earn their living. The situation in the countryside worsens day by day. The rice hunger swells with the time. The store of cattle fodder gets exhausted. The people start feeding themselves on the fish, crabs and green tree figs. The traders from the cities start appearing at the doors of the villagers to sell rice in exchange of the household tools and cattle. The brothel agents from the city attract the poor peasants by telling them how they can get rich by sending their young daughters to the city. When the lack of food becomes intolerable, Kajoli's family too leaves for

Calcutta. They feed themselves with green figs and roots during their journey on foot. One night Kajoli is raped by a soldier in the meadows. Kajoli, who is pregnant, is seriously hurt. The soldier however later on feels guilty and takes Kajoli and her family to Calcutta in an ambulance and admits her in a hospital. After a few weeks Kajoli is discharged from the hospital. The mother takes her to the alley where they live. Kajoli feels guilty for making her mother to live in such a miserable condition. A betel leaf seller woman suggests Kajoli an easy way of making money. Kajoli understands the nature of the woman and decides to keep herself away from her. But after a few days, in order to save her family from hunger, she decides to accept the offer. She feels that her body is already defiled so it does not make any difference if it gets defiled again and again. She accepts the advance from the agent and keeps the money inside the sacking on the bed under her mother's head. The mother decides to commit suicide to remove her burden from her children. When she wakes up, she takes off her sari and wraps herself with the sacking under her head and goes to the bridge over the river Ganga to commit suicide. Kajoli leaves the house to meet the brothel agent. On her way she hears a newspaper boy shouting that an old freedom fighter Devesh Basu is on hunger strike in the prison. Kajoli remembers his words "Do not betray yourself. The supreme test has come. Be strong. Be true. Be deathless" (195). Kajoli repents with anguish for succumbing to the crisis so cheaply. Now she decides to earn money with honest means. She gives a smack on the brothel agent's face and enters the newspaper office to find a job. Samarendra receives the news that his son Kunal Basu is missing from the war front and Rahoul is arrested by the police for the anti-government activities. He understands that the British Empire has claimed both his sons. His hunger for money and fame devastates his family.

'Hunger' is the central character of this novel. If there is any protagonist, it is hunger. All the human characters are peripheral. They represent different types of hungers. At the inner periphery there are three characters: Kajoli, her mother and her brother Onu. They are victims of hunger for food. At the outer periphery we have Samarendra, his elder son Rahoul, younger son Kunal and Rahoul's wife Manju, Samarendra's father 'Devesh, Kajoli's father and brother, the soldier and the black marketeer Abalbandhu. Samarendra is a victim of hunger for money. Rahoul is a victim of so many hungers - hunger for research, hunger for freedom, and hunger for happier life of common man. Kunal has a hunger for adventures. Manju is hungry for her sweet home. Devesh Basu and Kajoli's father and brother have hunger for the freedom. The soldier is a prey to sex. Abalbandhu is not a victim of hunger for money but he makes others victim of his hunger for money. Basically a Barrister at the bar of the High Court, Samarendra jumps into the share market to satisfy his hunger for money. The failure in the share market makes him think about his own business. His obsession with money makes him a black-marketeer. He becomes an anti-social culprit who performs the immoral act of hoarding food grain. Because of him, men, women and children all over Bengal suffer from hunger. Poor helpless innocent people die lingering, painful deaths. Rahoul does not follow the footsteps of his father. As an idealist he feels pity and sympathy for the poor. He

understands that any kind of exploitation is bad. Towards the end of the story she decides to sell herself for the sake of her mother and brother. She feels that the body once defiled is defiled; its purity cannot be restored. At least she can save her family and send them back to the village. Kajoli had made her grim decision. She would sell the last thing she owned - herself. So Many Hungers' speaks of the story of Kajoli but it is not only the story of a single girl Kajoli. Rather it is the real story of many Indian girls who had to suffer a lot because of their destiny. Devesh Basu, the grandfather of Rahoul, is modeled on Gandhi as Moorthy is Gandhian in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938). He is called by the villagers of Baruni as Devata, a celestial being.

All the major characters of *So many Hungers!* listen to their internal voices. Rahoul listens to his internal voice and joins the 'Quit India' movement. Kajoli's mother listens to her internal voice and sacrifices her life. Kajoli, who is on the verge of her personal poverty responds to her internal voice and chooses the right path. One significant characteristic of Indian rural life, depicted in the novel, is that the peasants are bound by the sense of oneness, common brotherhood, attachment and their motto of living and dying together. Bhabani Bhattacharaya's first novel is the true representations of the mental agonies of the people during the war period because of misbehavior and wrong policies of the British government.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, his novels are notable for their social realism and their honest treatment of themes, problems of contemporary India. India's social realism, problems, poverty, need and hunger find a successful representation in them. As a novelist Bhabani Bhattacharaya is true to his purpose of writing and his character description and presentation of Indian people's problems and challenges is artistic and in-depth. His mastery over the incidents and events of the novel is really wonderful and charming. This adds to his achievement as a novelist and social realist of present day India.

REFERENCES

- [1] Agrawal, B. R. & M. P. Sinha. *Major Trends in the Post-Independence Indian English Fiction*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishing & Distributors, 2003. Print.
- [2] Bhattacharya, Bhabani. *So Many Hungers!* New Delhi: Orient Paper Backs, 1978. Print.
- [3] Bhattacharya, Bhabani. *Contemporary Novelists in the English Language*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972. Print.
- [4] Bhattacharya, Bhabni. *Literature and Social Reality*. Bombay: The Aryan Path, 1939. Print.
- [5] Bhattacharya, Bhabni. *Socio-Political Currents in Bengal: A 19th Century Perspective*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1980. Print.
- [6] Bhatnagar, K. C. *Realism in Major Indo English Fiction*. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1980. Print.

- [7] Chandrasekharan, K R. *Bhabani Bhattacharya*. New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1974. Print.
- [8] Rao, Syamala. *Bhabani Bhattacharya*. Bombay: Blackie & Son Publishers, 1988. Print.
- [9] Sharma, K K. *Bhabani Bhattacharya: His Visions and Themes*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1979. Print.

IJIRAS