
**The social and political structure in So Many Hungers by Bhabani
Bhattacharya**

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Abstract:

Indian literature, characterized by its abundance and variety, has consistently mirrored the socio-political environment of the nation. This research study examines the socio-political elements present in Indian literary works from various time periods and languages. The analysis focuses on how Indian authors have tackled subjects such as colonialism, independence, social justice, caste, gender, and current political dynamics. This article examines the significance of literature in influencing and reflecting the social and political environment of India through the analysis of important texts. Bhabani Bhattacharya's novel "So Many Hungers!" (1947) provides a dramatic portrayal of the social and political upheaval in Bengal during the early 1940s, with a specific emphasis on the Bengal famine of 1943. This research paper examines the novel's investigation of the destructive consequences of colonial policies, the fight for Indian independence, and the wider social disparities that worsened the famine's consequences. The article scrutinizes Bhattacharya's indictment of governmental indifference and societal inequities, which resulted in extensive suffering, by analyzing the characters and narrative.

Keywords: socio-political, marginalized, oppression, injustice, equality

Indian literature, with its abundant variety of stories and many perspectives, has consistently mirrored and shaped the socio-political environment of the nation. Indian writers have employed their literary works since the colonial era to scrutinize societal injustices, promote transformative action, and convey intricate viewpoints on the intricacies of Indian society. Through the analysis of these socio-political factors, we can

develop a more profound comprehension of how literature functions as both a reflection and a driver of social and political change.

Bhabani Bhattacharya, a distinguished Indian author, has produced noteworthy contributions to Indian English literature, specifically in the examination of political and social frameworks. The author's writings frequently explore the socio-political structure of Indian society, tackling subjects such as colonialism, independence, social justice, and the consequences of political transformations on everyday individuals. His novels offer a subtle and discerning analysis of the political and social systems in India. His works provide profound understanding of the intricacies of colonialism, the fight for autonomy, social stratification, economic inequalities, and the changing roles of women and political beliefs. Bhattacharya's storytelling not only mirrors the socio-political conditions of his day but also promotes social justice, equality, and human dignity. According to Sudhakar Joshi's interview, Bhattacharya states: "I hold that a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader something from the society's point of view. Art is not necessarily for art's sake. Purposeless art and literature which is much in vogue do not appear to me a sound judgment." (34)

Bhabani Bhattacharya, predominantly wrote during the mid-20th century, was a significant contributor to the dynamic era of Indian literature. Numerous writers of the present age achieved noteworthy advancements in Indian English literature, delving into diverse socio-political subjects. His contemporary writer R.K. Narayan's literary works frequently portray the mundane existence of common individuals residing in the imaginary locality of Malgudi. His writing has a subtle wit and a profound comprehension of human behavior, with a particular emphasis on societal and cultural matters. Mulk Raj Anand's works often tackle social injustices, particularly the suffering of those who are marginalized and oppressed. He is renowned for his staunch advocacy against the caste system and his efforts towards social reform.

Khushwant Singh frequently delves into the subjects of Partition, individuality, and communal unrest in his literary works. His frank and even provocative manner provides a sharp analysis of social and political matters in India. Raja Rao's literary works explore India's spiritual legacy, skillfully combining conventional Indian motifs with existential and philosophical inquiries. Kanthapura, his novel, is a notable contribution to India's fight for freedom. Kamala Markandaya frequently depicted the challenges faced in both rural and urban areas of India, with a particular emphasis on the themes of destitution, colonialism, and the conflict between traditional values and modernity. These authors, in addition to Bhabani Bhattacharya, had a significant impact on the development of Indian

English writing in the mid-20th century. Collectively, these works offer a comprehensive portrayal of the social, political, and cultural environment of their respective eras, showcasing the intricate and varied aspects of Indian civilization. By presenting diverse narratives and exploring various issues, these works have made a substantial impact on the worldwide literary scene. In his analytical framework and notes, S. T. Hemenway draws comparisons between Bhattacharya and renowned authors such as E. M. Forster, Mulk Raj Anand, and R. K. Narayan, "Bhabani Bhattacharya inherits Forster's sharp eye for East-West dichotomies, Anand's concern with social, economic and political problems, and Narayan's comic playfulness and exaggeration." (36)

Bhabani Bhattacharya's novel *So Many Hungers!* (1947) provides a dramatic portrayal of the social and political upheaval in Bengal during the early 1940s, with a particular emphasis on the Bengal famine of 1943. This research paper examines the novel's investigation of the destructive consequences of colonial policies, the fight for Indian independence, and the wider social disparities that worsened the famine's consequences. The article explores Bhattacharya's critique of governmental indifference and societal inequities, which resulted in widespread misery, by analyzing the characters and narrative. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar states, "while the hoarders, profiteers and black marketeers plied a thundering trade, authority was apathetic, the wells of human pity seemed to have almost dried up, and only the jackals and vultures were in vigorous and jubilant action."(413)

So Many Hungers! takes place during World War II and the Bengal famine of 1943, a devastating event that resulted in the loss of millions of lives. Bhattacharya's novel intricately weaves together the lives of several characters to portray the multifaceted aspects of hunger, encompassing its literal, social, and political dimensions. This paper examines how Bhattacharya used his characters and storyline to emphasize the socio-political concerns of his age, presenting a critical analysis of both British colonial governance and the deeply ingrained social structures inside Indian culture.

The primary societal concern addressed in the story is the Bengal famine, which is attributed to the direct consequences of colonial exploitation and wartime actions. Bhattacharya demonstrates the impact of British wartime policies, including the "Denial Policy," which sought to impede Japanese forces' access to supplies by annihilating rice stocks and boats, resulting in severe food scarcity. The famine's consequences were worsened by the combination of this policy and the colonial government's unwillingness to provide sufficient help.

Rahoul and Kajoli directly face the severe repercussions of these policies. Rahoul's intellectual and political awakening exemplifies the increasing disenchantment with British

governance, while Kajoli's decline into poverty and despair highlights the human toll of political choices made in far-off centers of power. While the story prominently explores the issue of longing for independence, which is accompanied by tensions and conflicts, it is the need for food that receives more extravagant attention and perhaps becomes the central focus of the novel. Furthermore, as K. R. Chandrasekharan accurately highlights "Bhattacharya is at best when he depicts the plight of the ruined peasants, their exodus to the city and their abject misery and degradation." (31-32)

Rahoul represents the Indian people who are actively striving for the freedom of their nation from British rule. Kajoli, a peasant girl from Baruni, serves as a depiction of the harsh destiny faced by the rural inhabitants of Bengal in 1943. R. Chandrasekharan further states, "the sad tale of Kajoli is a pathetic record of what happened to more than two million men and women who became victims of a famine which was not an act of God, but was brought about by the rapacity and selfishness of profiteers and the indifference of an alien Government" (11). It can be argued that the breakdown and ultimate disaster experienced by Kajoli's innocent family does not represent the widespread devastation affecting all of Bengal.

Kajoli is a youthful and lively girl of fourteen at the start of the tale. She resides in a dwelling with a thatched roof, alongside her mother and a younger sibling named Onu. Her father and her older brother, Kanu, are incarcerated for their involvement in the Civil Disobedience Movement. She marries Kishore, a person who strongly supports and defends their country. However, her happiness is fleeting. Kishore has been fatally shot. She is currently pregnant. Due to the absence of wealth in the household, the family, like many others, sustains themselves primarily on roots and figs. They sell a wide variety of items at the house, including the cow-bells. Recruiters seeking underprivileged females for brothels in Calcutta attempt to entice Kajoli, but she rejects their offer. The family currently faces insurmountable challenges residing in the village. Thus, similar to numerous other families from Bengal, they embark on a lengthy and perilous journey to Calcutta.

During the journey, Kajoli is utterly fatigued and famished. She lacks vigor. She encounters an Indian soldier and pleads for sustenance. Upon receiving the bread, her insatiable hunger compels her to consume it hastily, without any consideration for her mother and brother. While she is consuming her meal, a soldier, who is experiencing a strong deprivation of sexual satisfaction, guides her towards a grassy field. "A piercing shriek, a deep, heavy groan" (*So Many Hunger* 145) Upon awakening, he becomes aware of her presence and notices that she is both bleeding and comatose. Kajoli undergoes an abortion procedure. While she is in a state of hemorrhaging, a jackal approaches to consume

her.8 Meanwhile, Onu, her brother, who was searching for her, encounters the soldier and pleads for food with desperate and sorrowful cries: My sister. She is hungered. I am hungered. Mother's hungered.... Gives us a little bread, mighty soldier.... Hunger eats us. (*So Many Hunger* 146)

Bhattacharya's work takes place during a crucial era in Indian history, characterized by the fight for freedom. The political activities during that period, namely the Quit India Movement of 1942, provide the context against which the personal narratives of the protagonists unfold. The story depicts the several aspects of this conflict, ranging from the proactive involvement of individuals such as Devata, a leader following the principles of Gandhi, to the more subdued hardship experienced by the impoverished rural population.

The narrative implies that the struggle for independence encompasses not only political warfare, but also moral and social dimensions. The protagonists' experiences mirror the wider ambitions for a society that is both liberated and equitable. Bhattacharya employs their narratives to scrutinize the enduring socioeconomic disparities that exist even within the struggle for independence, emphasizing the necessity for a more comprehensive and fair conception of liberation.

So Many Hungers!, refers to the different types of hunger that afflict Indian civilization. In addition to the tangible hunger resulting from the famine, Bhattacharya delves into the need for self-respect, fairness, and parity. A reoccurring subject is the enormous disparity between the affluent urban elite and the destitute rural populace. Characters like Kajoli and her family epitomize the challenge of staying alive in the midst of institutional disregard and exploitation. Bhattacharya also discusses matters pertaining to caste and gender. The social hierarchies that govern the lives of the characters expose profound disparities. The novel depicts the systematic exploitation of women, who endure the dual burden of economic destitution and patriarchal persecution. Kajoli's transition from a rural girl to an urban sex worker vividly exemplifies the harsh truths experienced by numerous women in this era.

Bhattacharya examines and criticizes the indifference displayed by persons in positions of authority and emphasizes the ethical duty of individuals. The apathetic stance of the British authorities and the collusion of affluent Indians who put their self-interests over the collective welfare are important to the storyline. Characters like as Rahoul's father, who is a prosperous lawyer, represent the ethical trade-offs made by individuals who profit from the existing social order.

On the other hand, the narrative also exalts gestures of empathy and unity. The diligent endeavors of Devata and other individuals who tirelessly strive to mitigate suffering underscore the capacity for constructive transformation. Bhattacharya argues that genuine autonomy and equitable treatment can only be attained by collectively dedicating ourselves to confronting both political and social inequities.

Thus the paper concludes that *So Many Hungers!* by Bhabani Bhattacharya scrutinizes the societal and political challenges that influenced Bengal in the early 1940s. The novel provides a sharp analysis of both colonial governance and internal social hierarchies by vividly depicting the Bengal famine, the fight for independence, and the widespread socioeconomic injustices. Bhattacharya's work continues to be pertinent in the present day, serving as a reminder to readers about the significance of confronting systematic inequalities in order to attain a genuinely liberated and fair society.

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