

THE THEMES OF HUNGER IN SO MANY HUNGERS

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ABSTRACT

Bhambani Bhattacharya's novel so many hunger deals with various types of hungers -some character aspire for worldly success, whereas others aim at intellectual attainment or spiritual progress. The central concern in the novel is the sacrifice that the characters make in order to win freedom. The purpose of this paper is to examine the theme of "hunger" so as to see how it imparts structural unity to the novel.

Keywords: *Hunger, Intellectual Attainment, Spiritual Progress, Structural Unity.*

Introduction

The novel describes the plight of agent in Bengal during the great famine of 1943. The Basu family lives in Calcutta where is the grand father has retired to Barauni to work with the villages where there for the independence of the country. He is called Devata for his noble deeds and patriotic fervour. He feels perfectly at home there and adopts a peasant family. Deeply aware of the predicament of India in the early forties, the grandfather knows that millions of pigeon in Bengal are doomed to starve: Grandfather agreed. Facts never tell much unless they are seen in the term of human experience. On his petty income the landed peasant can have just enough of his own rice to eat, no reserved for lean days. And the Kisan - they must always be hungry save for a spell of two or three months in the year, when they earn meals and wage for field work. The hundred million Kisan of India must always be hungry. It is the craziest day to have the stomach full.

Fiction Samrendra is an unscrupulous profiteer who fishes in troubled. Samrendra's elder son, Rahoul D. Sc., is diverted from research in science to the actual service of the common people while the younger, Kunal joins the army both Rahoul and Kunal take after their grand-father.

The scene is soon shifted to Barauni and the Kajol family. After a brief glimpse of rural life and it's leisurely pace, we find clouds of war over Bengal. Then he starts the destruction of village life. When the angry peasants burn the dak-ghar and protest against exploitation, the male members are arrested and put in jail. Kajoli is married to Kishore, an operational of Devata. Tradesman, storeman and capitalists take undue advantage of the war and create a man-made scarcity. The peasants are slowly deprived of everything and rendered helpless beggars. Grief-stricken and starving they make for Calcutta in large numbers with the hope that the city will have some food for them. But their hope is belied and in the town they are fare worse than animals. Devata is put in jail for his involvement in the national movement. The Quit India movement gathers momentum in the village and people like Devata Kajoli's father and her husband strive hard to attain freedom. At last the kajoli family is broken and Rahoul along with others, courts arrest. He informs Samrendra on the phone: "father, this is just to say good-bye. I am under arrest."

The instinct for food age one of the basic urges in man and Bhmbani Bhattacharya describe it "not in fragment but in its wholeness." He dwells on the intense suffering of the people through the plight of the Kajoli family and in scenes where common people suffer and languish. People with "hunger" of different types weave a net in which the poor folk are inextricably entrapped. The novelist presents a moving spectacle of human misery in which the only hope is the glimpse of the richness of human spirit.

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The "hunger" for food is dominant in the novel. The consequences of the war and scarcity of food hit hard the village folk- they are deprived of everything, and as one cries at one place, "Hunger eats us." Their misery increases when the famine intensifies its hold. Even ants and animals come out to compete with the starving people for crumbs of food or dirt. At times hungry people eat with pleasure what animal refused to take. In this struggle animal often prove stronger than the suffering folk. On one occasion Onu digs a jam-tin from the rubbish and he feels delighted: "But as he picked up the tin a dog come snarling, claiming possession. Onu dropped it in alarm and stepped back. He had no strength in his starved body to fight the dog". Indeed they are so miserable that death or injury would be a boon for them. Onu adult league prays in a temple for such a consummation:

I ask naught from thee. Mother, I only ask this much: let a Japanese bomb hurt me, Mother.....only let a Japanese bomb drop from the sky and hurt me, Mother.

The calamity is something natural, and help should come from man when it is denied by God. However, the rich exploit the poor. The in-human Government, greedy capitalists, unscrupulous traders and middlemen aggravate their suffering. The Government does little to fight the famine. As the novelist points out: "Guns, not grain moved into Bengal". That girl rich have no sympathy for the poor, is also underlined through an implicit linguistic nuance- "brother" use frequently by the tradesmen does not mean what Onu calls "bhai."

Bhabani Bhattacharya views the theme of hunger in its wide perspective. When this urges concern basic needs, it is understandable and excusable because all live by bread. It makes people helpless and wretched. A hungry man is forced to surrender his values, to act against cherished convictions. For example, owing to utter helplessness, Kajoli's neighbors give in and "sell" their daughters. The deeper implications of the famine are shocking: the emotional hardening and the death of the very spirit of people. Rahoul realizes this when he visualizes the spectacles the object mystery all around:

The millions are who had died gasping for food. The millions are who had yet to die of disease. The uprooted millions are who would live on without a living, broken in body and spirit, shreds of humanity. The prisons packed with men and women who had dared claim a larger life for all. No enemy occupation could have affected a fiercer devastation.

The adverse circumstances bring out the best in some people as the real nature of man often manifests itself in moments of crisis. At this level the spirit is invincible. At one time Onu wrests and empty tin from a dog and keeps it for his friend. A miserable, hungry man comes to surrender is ration card so that others with greater need could leave on his spare ration. A woman leaves a debased life to support others. Kajoli's mother kicks everything offered to her by way of a bribe or temptation when she realizes how the rich want to exploit the women folk in the family. She dies while making a sacrifice for her children. Kajoli too, resist all temptations. If at one time she gives in, it is primarily to help her family. And when she remembers her grandfather, she at once spurns the offer and cancels her earlier commitment to the vile betel-women.

The sacrifice the collectors make to win freedom is the central concern of the novel. Devata works for the independence of India through non-violent means. A true discipline of Mahatma Gandhi, he admires the peasants and prefers to live in a village. Before his arrest advises his followers to carry on their struggle and eschew violence:

Friends and comrades do not betray the flag. Do not betray yourself; there is violence in your thoughts that is evil enough. Do not make it worse by violence in action.

His personality serves as a unifying force in the novel. His message or memory inspires others in moments of distress.

As the story progresses, the hunger of the spirit becomes stronger and all pervasive. At this stage all sufferings tends to pale into insignificance. Devata has attained this state in the earlier part of the novel. He works along Gandhian lines and regards is project as a long journey:

Ours is the harder task. If we use the weapons of our enemy, we play into their hands. The supreme test has come. Be strong. Be true. Be deathless.

Rahoul and Kajoli steadily move towards this goal in due course of time. Towards the end Rahoul's wife, Manju, too, determines to follow the same way of life. She confesses this to her husband:

"So you begin your new journey?"

"Manju, you know it was only a question of time."

"Darling" -the softness of her voice caressed him-

"I, too, shall go your way soon."

"You, Manju?" The voice asked.

A pause, and then:"I am not the silly thing I used to be, you know that."

Although the ambitious of capitalists and tradesmen are satisfied, they are completely dispirited and demoralised in the end. Samrendra for example, is broken in spirit as Kunal is reported missing and Rahoul is under arrest. Search the novelist: "when the bliss for which he had hungered for so many years came to him at last, it hit him like a curse, and evil things." Soldiers of free India, on the other hand emerge stronger than their sufferings. The hunger for freedom enables them to bear everything. Rahoul abandons his research. Quite conscious of his spirit's urges, he feels intensify for his people:

Rahoul was completely self-assessed. Somewhere on the long, winding path of the years he had shed his fear of suffering and loneliness. What happened to him as an individual did not matter. It only matter what happened to his people. He was different, too, towards his captors, and his mind was without hate, without anger, in a nirvana of passionlessness.

In the end the prisoners find a new hope, a dawn coming over them, a flowering of the spirit : "Listening, Rahoul begin to lose his sadness, for in that instant he saw the horizon of the east illuminated by a new dawn."

In sum, "hungers" of various kinds constitute the central theme of So Many Hungers. Different "hunger" for freedom, a desire for a happier life for the common man is shown as a natural aspiration of the spirit. This urge requires immense strength and energy in distress and crisis. The evil is self-destructive. At long last the quest for material gain leads to disillusionment. The spirit of the suffering masses emerges triumphant. Rahoul, along with other people (in the Jail), feels a mysterious sense of victory, a short of fulfillment:

And strong exultation burned in his eyes and a strong intense look of conquest kindled in his face as he gave his voice to the united voices: The more they tighten the chains, the more the chains loosen.

So Many Hungers thus presents a tale of suffering, but deep down it indicates a victory won after persistent struggle, a sense of freedom "growing out of the seeds of the spirit."

References

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