

The Battle in Man-made famine : Hunger as seen in Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!*

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Abstract

Literature is an art work done amid intellectual value in a body of written works. Indian English Literature reflects Indian culture, tradition, and social values which paves way to bloom in life. As a social realist, Bhabani bhattacharya highlights the socio-political themes in the novel So Many Hungers!. It is an authentic record of the suffered people in the man-made Bengal famine of 1943. Bhattacharya indulged himself in presenting a credible representation of human subsistence. Hunger falls as the main problem in the novel in which poor people suffer by some greedy rich people, social setting and economical problems. Solution for the hunger problems is sharing and showing humanity may further make transformation in future. Socio political theory records the empowerment in favour of the revolutionizing the communal background. The paper focuses on how poor are suppressed and suffer due to hunger for food caused by man-made famine.

Key words: Hunger, Man-made famine, Humanity, Economical inequality.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!* depicts various faces of hungers which are greatly found in mankind. Very important hunger is 'Food' which may be followed by other hungers like "Freedom, Health, Sex and Social status". This novel is the vivid account of Bengal famine which is man-made in 1943. Famine is the outcome of the destruction to Bengal in which every foreigner sneaks into the freedom of Indian people and treat them as their slaves after scratching the wealth of India. Additionally some greedy people from India also help the alien of other country without having any guilt about their action against the country. These unkind actions of people create the famine in Bengal where poor people suffer immensely. It greatly affects the green village, Baruni in Bengal filled with loving poor people who are comparatively less bright and uncivilized than city people but are good in nature.

Hunger makes a man weaker and discontent towards life. Much hunger prevails and creates crisis at a snail's pace. Hunger always indicates food scarcity which makes people to starve. Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!* is the result of his frustrated feeling on hunger exists in the society and he admits in one of his interviews that:

. . . the great famine swept down upon Bengal. The emotional stirrings I felt (more than two million men, women and children died of slow starvation amid a manmade scarcity) were a sheer compulsion to creativity. The result was the novel *So Many Hungers!* (71)

Bhattacharya expects his work to act like a social catalyst to break the truth of human situation.

Baruni village's Rice-lands and rivers are the food authority where people work in harvesting and fishing for daily-wages. Their daily struggle for food changes into a sudden 'Famine' which breaks out when Japanese, Americans and German people entered the peaceful land to start their power game on them. Some of Baruni people believe these people innocently without knowing their crooked mind: to buy food in the exchange of money. The brutal approach of these greedy people over Barunians in snatching the foods and boats abruptly shows the sign of dominance and makes them to be inferior. Dominance formulates 'compelled poverty' among the good natured Baruni people. The scarcity of food makes people hardly to have a food even once in a day. This situation results in malnutrition, affects their mental and physical health to stop farming.

Money becomes their tool to act pitiless to the poor peasants and they give money as their value of life and speak, "The money will see you through for a long time . . . You will sit at home like a lord and eat the good rice of ease and sleep a-plenty and speak" (Bhattacharya : 55). Poor man never wants to lead his life with more money without physical work as the poor boat-wrecker replies "Money is a winged bird. It will fly off" (Bhattacharya : 55). It is the unbeatable truth which greedy people may not realize

Japanese are called as 'Japs' who buy food grains from Baruni people, in turn giving more profit of money which no longer last. The future plans of Japs are:

Food grains they must buy anyhow. What if the growers of rice had nothing left to sell? The merchants who purchased today at a fair price- tomorrow, if there was a squeeze, what selling price control in Bengal honest distribution. The rulers with War in their heads could not worry about such trifles. And the third year of war was running its dismal course. (Bhattacharya : 64)

Haphazardly the British people snatch the boats and food which ends the life of people at the end.

South Sudan has been in the grip of a brutal civil war for more than three years when more people are dead. Joyce Luma, the South Sudan director of the UN World Food Program says the Somalia famine as man-made in the year 2011. "Many families have exhausted every means they have to survive," he said. The Food crisis is most dangerous since the war gets erupt witnessed the agencies. David Sedaris words prove that famine and hunger are inseparable, "You can't brace yourself for famine if you've never known hunger." Through this he says, that knowing hunger may only make a person to realize famine because, a person who knows hunger may not stand as a reason behind man-made famine. Man finds no harm from other creatures but the manhood itself is making the destruction of the other. In *So*

Many Hungers! other country folks as well the greedy rich folks of the same country involves in corruption which ends with Baruni famine.

Food is essential for every human being and if not no one may survive. Some people are struggling for food when some other are blessed plenty as per fate. Even there are people living without adequate food for many days and it is proved that one billion people around the world that is one in nine people are hungry without food. Due to ‘malnutrition’, 3.1 million children are dying each year and 840 million people suffer from ‘Chronic hunger’. World produces enough food but it fails to reach everyone because greedy rich people conceal it for future.

Farmers, the producers of food, sometimes find foodless. The three main reasons for hunger of food are the problems in farming, economic and social conflicts and the change in climate. Within these three, economic and social conflicts play the adequate role and reason for hunger, is ultimately man who made it himself for the other. If a man eats whatever he needs and give other man the excess, then everyone may be fed. But in reverse, the one who have more, saves it for the next generation and there begins the scarcity of food for the hungry one. Sometimes man snatches away more money and left others nothing, becomes the other reason for hunger. In *So Many Hungers!* also people face so many problems of hunger due to economic and social conflict.

Poor peasants do not want to lead a luxurious life; they need a simple meal only. As rice and lentils fail, they eat ‘roots’ as their food. Even the animals and insects have no food because poor peasants robbed its food, the roots. Baruni people are eating “the thick roots of wild *kachu* or some unfamiliar plant (lumps of clotted clay hanging on them), to be cut and boiled and consumed with salt.” This creepy food for their stomach makes aches of indigestion, but they think that “When you had to choose between the ache of hunger and the ache of indigestion, you would often choose the latter” (Bhattacharya : 119). Many hunger problems grip their necks make them eat anything which convinces their hunger and even there are many farmers left without food.

Everything fails in the village and people start to move from Baruni to Calcutta by thinking that it may feed them enough. On their way to city, poor peasants eat whatever looks like leaves and a woman says the bitter truth, “Roots? In a month there will be no roots left anywhere in Bengal: trees will be shorn of leaves, even the grass of the fields gone” (Bhattacharya : 135). Every green leaves, roots and grass are eaten as everyone is crying out of hunger. They start dying one by one and Vultures round upon their heads to eat them. Jackal takes its turn to eat weak people on their way to city.

Even if rice is given to a hungry man of longer time, he may die. “As food came into sight, ready to be served, the man shuddered with an excitement that he could not hold . . . Food . . . As he sat watching, the bleary eyes bulged with fearsome desire, a groan of agony broke from thin throat, and the man slumped on his side, dead” (Bhattacharya : 154). No poor man needs food unless he has the hunger for it.

Hunger for food makes everyone to die in Calcutta, where “a destitute woman lay on her side, her legs drawn up, eyes closed, a baby at her breast. The woman lay still, but the

baby moved its lips faintly as it suckled. The mother was dead” (Bhattacharya : 154). It has all happened due to the careless action of inhumane fellow being towards foodless and ends up with the story of each hungry orphan. A hungry man eats the banana peel taken from the dust bin and he recommends the same food to Onu, the starving boy, because every hungry mouth is not fed by good people in Calcutta.

The South Sudan director for “CARE” Fred McCray, the international relief agency announces that “The last three years of violence have pushed people over the edge of survival, leaving many families with nothing but leaves and roots to eat.” This shows the terrific state of South Sudan people who may be illustrated as the living example of the Baruni people’s hunger for food in *So Many Hungers!*. In *Ice Candy Man*, the author Bapsi Sidhwa elucidates the starvation of a small boy Ranna:

. . . wandered through the lanes stealing chapatties and grain from the houses strewn with dead bodies, rifling the corpses for anything he could use. He ate anything. Raw potatoes, uncooked grains, wheat-flour, rotting peels and vegetables. (207)

Hunger for food makes people to eat anything even uncooked to please the stomach.

Hunger is more crucial thing which affects a man. It makes a man cry like a baby, fight like warriors and even dies like orphan. Everyone has enough food in the world but shared unequally which amplifies the rate of hungry folks. Reason behind one’s hunger is the corruption of other.

Hunger of the Bengal people is man-made which is initiated by greedy rulers as well as greedy rich people. Hunger can be solved when the people who have money and food share it to the hungry people. When humanity exists, hunger may be eliminated. Famine is not just because of shortage of food but it is the result of shortage of justice.

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