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BHABANI'S SO MANY HUNGERS: THE PLIGHT OF PEASANTS IN THE POST COLONIAL INDIA

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ABSTRACT

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Bhabani continues literary culture of social realism emphasising the importance of social purpose in the fiction. His debut novel *So Many Hungers* is a realistic portrayal of peasants' pre and post colonial India. The novel describes the plight of peasants in rural India. It honestly portrays the changing social scene. The novel was published in 1947, but the action of the novel covers the war years with peasants' infinite suffering and frustration. Bhabani brought up in colonial India, and observed the socio-economic, cultural and political conditions prevailing under the colonial rules. He described realistically the effects of colonialism

The peasants migrated in masses due to the famine created by the war with the false hope in finding the food and job in cities. The colonizers are responsible for this artificial scarcity without having proper arrangements to fulfill the needs of the farmers. This leads to national movements which are suppressed brutally. The authorities failed to have futuristic views to reduce the worries of the farmers. The peasants experienced the horrible plight of homelessness in the urban for food grain.

Key Words: plight, migrated, socio-economic, cultural and political conditions

Bhabani continues literary culture of social realism emphasising the importance of social purpose in the fiction. His debut novel *So Many Hungers* is a realistic portrayal of peasants' pre and post colonial India. The novel describes the plight of peasants in rural India. It honestly portrays the changing social scene. The novel was published in 1947, but the action of the novel covers the war years with peasants' infinite suffering and frustration. Bhabani brought up in colonial India, and observed the socio-economic, cultural and political conditions prevailing under the colonial rules. He described realistically the effects of colonialism. He criticized the colonial government for their negligence and hypocrisy. Bhabani condemned vehemently the colonial administration for its indifferent attitude towards Bengal in the economic crisis.

The fiction depicts the inhuman atrocities committed on peasants by their own people. The central theme of the novel depends on the story two

families - Samrendra Basu's family and the peasant's family. Basu belongs to the upper middle class. Kajoli hails from peasants' family. Owing to the compulsions of the family, kajoli wanted to become a prostitute

The novel creates sensitiveness towards the Indian society. The peasants strived for the societal order. They are portrayed as victims of the unjust society. His concern was the society and the life of other people. The foreground in the novel is occupied partly by the Basu family, and partly by the peasant family, the girl Kajoli, her mother, her brother, Albert carefully individualized. The main objective of writing this novel is to present the Indian peasants scenario with a view to change it.

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They ought to have on the green figs and roots. But the green figs and the roots are in less number whereas the migrated farmers are high in number. "Roots? In a novel there will be no roots left any were in Bengal. There will be short of leaves, are even the grasses of the fields gone" (SMH: 135) Due to poverty families of peasants forcibly enter into brothel business. The young daughters of peasants are put them in the brothel business by the brothel agents. They move around the country-side like crow, eagle, and vultures to trap the hungry daughters of peasants. Abalbandhu says that no other investment is as good as the investment in the brothel, in money market "moneyed people have liking for the skinny girls from the country side" (SMH:176) Peasant destitute are exploited by Abalbandhu and his group are compared to vultures and jackals. They are comparable even to animals and monsters.

The peasants fight and die over the moral issues. But they accept their poverty and hunger as their fate and their sins of past, "The peasants hands were manacled with their antique moral tradition. The rice robbers were sale from peril because of the peasant's traditions"(SMH :108). Bhabani describes honesty and sincerity of peasants but they fight against existence situation, "Be it Kanu, Kajoli, Onu or the mother-every one is a crusader, Soldiers all" (SMH: 70). His protagonists' experience the pain and suffering with smile. The farmers were reduced to poverty. The villagers face consequently starvation.

The theme of fiction is combined by the ingredients of sighs and tears, misery, hunger and poverty, heroic suffering and sacrifice of the peasants. It describes slices of life and fusion of artistic pattern. The novel describes uncertainties, agonies cruelties of the peasant family- the girl Kajoli, her mother and brother. It reveals the story man-made hunger that took a toll two million innocent peasant in Bengal. Srinivas Iyengar writes, "The novel is an impeachment of man's inhumanity of man" (1980:414)

The unique theme of the novel portrays the plight of the peasants of the contemporary age. We feel more sympathetic towards the peasants. Abalbandhu and his class are compared to birds-vultures and jackals exploit the peasants. They enjoy the helplessness of a destitute girl in brothel house. They are compared to monsters.

The farmers always live in hunger and poverty with their limited sources of income. The farmers depend on rice land and rivers. The hundred millions of peasants in India are hungry. The peasants don't have stomach full of food on any festive day. The farmers of India had the old aged traditions and customs. They never abandon their manners and proprieties to suit new ideas. The poor peasants live in muddy houses with thatched roofs and the mud walls decorated with pictures of bright colour.

The novel presents vividly peasants living in the countryside. Bhabani is closely associated the food habits and dresses of the people. He knows where they live and work. He presents the rustic life of the Indian peasants in a more fitting manner. The peasants take simple food and wear a tiny homemade spun dhoti and sleeveless vest. He describes their festival meal: "We peasants don't have elaborate courses with our rice-fish, meats, curds, sweets- we can't afford them. You'll be given a leaf plate of steamed rice and lentils, a pinch of salt and a lemon, some baked sweet potatoes and a vegetable curry of sorts, and perhaps some thickened milk in a small brass bowl by way of luxury. That makes a big festive meal."(1986:24) Indian peasants lead a miserable life.

Bhabani microscopically observed the plight of peasants in rural India. The poor farmers treat the pet animals as the members of their family. Mangla, the cow, for Kajoli and her brother, is not merely cow, she is a human being: "Rightly so, for it would be like eating the meant of Mangla, who was no animal to the children, she had become human for them by their long association and fondness. (1986:118) Indian peasants follow their age-old tradition. They are fatalists and will never rise in revolt against those who exploit them for their selfish end: "The peasants' hands were manacled with their antique moral tradition. The rice-robbers

were safe from peril because of the peasant's tradition."(1986:108)

Indian peasants are sons of soil. They are deeply attached to the land. Moreover they have been adopting their ancestral professions for the generations. The financial position has brought so many changes in their lives which make them forcefully migrate to the city: "It has been agony to leave the house-unutterable agony. Torn from the earth in which lay their roots and the roots and the roots of her husband... The house had been their temple, with the sacred tulasi plant in the yard, the image of a god in a niche of the wall, the breath of ancestors in the air."(1986:133) being native of the nation, Bhabani touches the lives of the peasants.

It portrays the pathetic plight of peasants during the worst hit period of famine which causes the millions of farmers starved. People, especially farmers lead an utterly wretched life due to the war. Bhabani emphasizes that poverty and starvation dehumanize the farmers to a miserable condition. People are craving for money which may degrade the humanity. The novel is full of terrible scenes of pathetic condition and exploitations of the peasants. It also presents the moral degradation of the rich landlords, capitalists and the passiveness of the Governmental officials. The economic condition of Bengal is completely collapsed that condition worsen the situation.

The peasants, having lived in villages for ages, migrated to the urban in searching of new jobs and food. The sighs and sights of suffering peasants are shocking. "a woman of groaning and a jackal eating her body" (140), of a rare battle-"three or four vultures fighting jackal over a corpse" (149), of destitute hunting for food in the garbage can and advising other destitute to put up in the laneway and not on the main street (160), of the battle of destitute and dogs (171): are the order of the day to be observed in the days. He has taken up serious problem faced by the country and drawn attention of the readers. He wants to build a stable and happy future from corruption, exploitation, despair and injustice. He believes that human values triumph over vices and evil manners. Bhabani explores the realities of life. He has a sensible understanding of the problems of contemporary Indian society.

The title of the novel *So Many Hungers!* is apt because there are so many hungers- hunger for

food, hunger for affection, hunger for love and hunger for the welfare of peasants. Bhabani is a great explorer and applies the indigenous flavour to the colonial language. He has created a distinct variety of English to depict Indian sense and sensibility of the Indian peasants to the foreign readers. He has left the indelible Indian style with Indianisms in it.

M.K.Naik accurately asserts that hunger manifests in *So Many Hungers! The So Many Hungers* of the title are those for political freedom (in case of India; for imperial expansion in case of the axis powers)...The exclamatory mark which is used after the title denotes the writer's bewilderment at the multiplicity of hunger. The title of the novel is justified because of many hungers for food, hunger for affection, hunger for love, hunger for lust, hunger for money, hunger for sacrifice and hunger for the general welfare of the peasants in India.

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