

**Perspective on Gandhian Ideology in Bhabani Bhattacharya's
"So Many Hungers"**

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Abstract :

Mahatma Gandhi strongly believed in satya (Truth), ahimsa (non-violence). satyagrah(non-violent resistance) and purity of soul. His ideologies have immense effect on the whole world. While his ideologies aromatized the air of pre and post independent India, all spheres of fields danced under his magic spell. Indian English Literature isn't left untouched by his presence in one or the other form. Some writers portrayed him as a character while others portrayed their characters as Gandhiji. The novelists of pre-independent India tried to create literature depicting the Gandhian movement of the thirties and forties. This is clearly reflected in the works of Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, K.S.Venkataramani, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and many more.

Bhabani Bhattacharya grew up in an age when the nation was struggling for its independence and human rights. Bhattacharya, in his fiction, assigned the highest place to human values. Being an advocate of Gandhian principles of truth and non-violence, Bhattacharya created a fictional world in which Gandhian principles were put to severe tests. His novel 'So Many Hungers!' was published in October, 1947; two months after India got its long awaited freedom from foreign rule. The novel was set against the backdrop of the Bengal Famine of 1943 and the Quit India Movement of 1942

The present paper endeavours to study the impact of Gandhian Ideologies in the life of poor Indian peasants as well as rich educated elites of pre-independent India as portrayed by Bhabani Battacharya in his fiction "So Many Hungers!" Key Words: Bhabani Bhattacharya, Gandhi, Gandhian Ideology, So Many Hungers

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Introduction:

Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi is the man who inspired the nation to fight against the foreign rule in India. Born on 2 October 1869, the father of our nation whom we lovingly call Bapu, is known for his struggles for equality, non-violence and freedom as well as his movement against untouchability. He left an indelible impression through his way of simple living and high thinking. His ideals continue to inspire us even today. Every field, whether be it politics, philosophy, sociology or literature, he has inspired all the way round the globe. Indian English Literature of pre and post independent India is much inspired by his ideals in one or the other form. This is clearly reflected in the works of Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya K.S.Venkataramani, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and many more.

Bhabani Bhattacharya grew up in an age when the nation was struggling for its independence and human rights. Bhattacharya, in his fiction, assigned the highest place to human values. Being an advocate of Gandhian principles of truth and non-violence, Bhattacharya created a fictional world in which Gandhian principles were put to severe tests. *So Many Hungers!* was published in October, 1947, two months after India got its long awaited freedom from foreign rule. The Bengal Famine of 1943 and the Quit India Movement of 1942 figure prominently in the book. The Famine of 1943 in Bengal Province of British India was a few months after Gandhi's call for the Quit India Movement. It left everyone horror struck. Major historians characterised it as "Man Made" (Arnold 1991). Bhattacharya in his novel depicts the naked horror of the famine-stricken farmers in the background of Gandhian Satyagrah struggle. It is no wonder that an author who was a close witness of the entire national movement and famine, deals with these events in his novel.

The novel has two plots- the first, is the story of an urban family and second is the story of a rural peasant family. The urban family is the Basu family residing in Calcutta consists of Samarendra Basu and his wife, their two sons Rahoul and Kunal and Rahoul's wife Monju. The other, a peasant family from a small village Baruni, consisting of Mother, her husband, her daughter Kajoli, two sons and the son-in-law Kishore. Devesh Basu, father of Samarendra Basu is the link between the two families. He has adopted the mother of Kajoli as daughter thus acting as the defacto head of the peasant family. The two stories symbolize the freedom movement or the struggle for freedom and the agonies of the famine respectively. Devesh Basu, 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 for 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 Gandhiji's Satyagraha. This event shows the long struggle that the people of India have already engaged in the freedom movement.

VARIOUS GANDHIAN IDEOLOGIES IN THE NOVEL: Gandhiji's magic whirlwind swept across the whole country. Whether rural or urban, rich or

poor, male or female, sick or children, all were much impressed by his simple living and high thinking. His ideologies of truth, non-violence, believe in inner voice, working for the upliftment of villages and educating the Indian masses created much awareness in the mind of ignorant Indians. Bhattacharya took up the issue of 1943 Bengal famine and then put Gandhian ideologies to test in practical situations.

Satyagraha and Non-violence:

Gandhiji was a believer in Satyagrah. He believed in winning over the enemy by torturing oneself because truth should never attack another's integrity. Non-violence picketing, fasting, civil disobedience, non-cooperation etc. were Gandhiji's various tools of satyagraha. He believed that satyagraha was pure means to achieve pure ends. Devata following Gandhian path encourages the villagers in the freedom struggle by advising them not to use violence. In the early part of the novel Devata is arrested and on the eve of his arrest he exhorts the villagers to be strong and true. Devata's hunger strike in the jail at the age of seventy and his fast unto death make us believe in Gandhi's principles of truth, non violence and satyagraha.

Rahoul was disturbed by the British, who championed the cause of freedom abroad and were the eaters of freedom in the land. He is inspired by Gandhiji's policy of non-violence, learns that there is room for morality and spirituality in politics.

Gandhiji believed that one should always hate the sin but not the sinner. Rahoul expresses his wish to go to England to know the enemy well before the fight, Devata a revered person speaks like Gandhiji

"Why should you fight the people of England? They are good people, the people are good everywhere. Our fight is with the rulers of England, who hold us in subjection for their narrow interests" (S.M.H. p.26, 27)

Faith in inner voice :

Like Gandhi, Bhattacharya has strong faith in inner voice. It helps human beings to follow the right path and keep them away from the wrong doing. All the major characters are of the belief of their inner feelings and join the "Quit India Movement".

Kajoli decides to become a prostitute to maintain her family consisting of her mother and younger brother. On the way to meet the brothel agent she comes to know of Devata's hunger strike in jail and remembers his words "Do not betray yourself. The supreme test has come. Be strong. Be true. Be deathless" (S.M.H.p.269). Kajoli repents for succumbing to the crisis so cheaply thus her inner voice helped her to save her dignity and she became a newspaper vendor. Bhattacharya seems to be suggesting

through his portrayal of Kajoli's character that neither poverty nor the pressure of the unfavourable circumstances in life should ever be allowed to lead a woman to compromise with the dignity of being.

Similarly Rahoul who once was not interested in freedom struggle, listens to his inner voice and joins the 'Quit India' movement.

Village upliftment and helping the needy: Must for country's progress: Gandhiji's whole life was directed towards the welfare of mankind. Regarding the upliftment of rural India, he said "The true Indian civilization is in the villages". Bhattacharya created Devesh Basu as a Gandhian Figure. The villagers of Barauni respectfully call him 'Devata. He is presented as the spokesperson of Gandhian philosophy in the novel. Bhattacharya portrayed the character of Devesh Basu as an Indian inspired by Gandhiji, who was desperate to help the villagers, leaving the luxurious life of city to reside in the village Barauni. His stay in the village for the benefit of the poor, illiterate villagers reminds Gandhiji's call to go back to the villages, Devesh Basu continuously tried to uplift the social life of villagers. Rahoul, Devesh Basu's grandson was inspired by the life of his grandfather. He has always pity and sympathy for the poor and downtrodden people. He decides to work for the victims of hunger. The sight of the food reveals him of thousands of destitute dying of hunger.

Education :

Gandhiji strongly insisted that Indians should be well educated. He has said regarding the aim of education that true education must turn an individual into a person "who will live and die for the country's freedom". In Rahoul's character as a young scientist Bhattacharya appears to be suggesting that research degrees and education need to be properly soaked with a spirit of nationalism, patriotism and freedom. Gandhian emphasis on education for freedom and for nationalism stands filtered out here in Rahoul's example. Rahoul is the Scientist who knows not to sell his freedom in his research on the Death-ray and it is important that Bhattacharya recommends his social role as a young scientist.

Love for the country :

Rahoul, a young scientist, who initially was not interested in the freedom movement. once happens to see through his laboratory window the police kicking and abusing freedom fighters in a procession and trampling underfoot the national flag. Enraged, he called the police only to find himself in the prison. There he declares "we must stand ready to carry out our leader's (Gandhiji's) command, "Do or die"(S.M.H.p.93). The novel ends with Rahoul entering jail associating with group of other prisoners who were chanting Rabindranath Tagore's line "The more they tighten the chain the more the chains loosen". They were accepting imprisonment cheerfully for the country's freedom which reminds us of thousands and thousands of Indians who suffered jail life for the love and freedom of their country.

Conclusion :

Taking up the issue of 1943 Bengal famine which led to severe hunger, poverty and suffering, Gandhian ideals were put to severe tests, Bhattacharya ultimately shows the triumph of Gandhian principles. Indians even though were suffering were not ready to sacrifice their ideals. Bhattacharya made Gandhi's principle of simple living and high thinking an ideal mode of life and an ideal way to live. Rahoul is shown to be dedicated to social reforms and freedom. Kajoli in the hands of Bhattacharya emerged as an Indian woman who knows the virtues and value of sacrifice, ready to help others and save her dignity. In the words of K.R. Chandrashekharan, "Raoul's story is a representation in miniature of the struggle for freedom. 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 which was brought about by the capacity and selfishness of profiteers and the indifference of an alien government". Through portrayal of his characters Bhattacharya has shown that poverty, hunger and exploitation cannot degrade or debase the true human spirit. Suffering can take them away from moral values but it is temporary.

So Many Hungers! is thus an attempt by Bhattacharya who insightfully established the application value of Gandhian ways for the practical life situations.

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