



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 3. Issue.3.,2016 (July-Sept.)

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

TRADITION AND CONTEMPORANEITY IN THE NOVELS OF BHABANI BHATTACHARYA
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO "SO MANY HUNGERS"

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ABSTRACT

Bhabani Bhattacharya is a great novelist among the old masters, who wrote their works which show their great creative power. Though he has not been put in the group of the 'Big Three'- Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan but he is unquestionably one of the celebrated Indo-English fiction writers. Some critics rightly regarded him as one of the four wheels of the Indian English novel. His fictional output, spreading over a period of about thirty years, consists of six novels and one collection of short stories viz. *So Many Hungers* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1952). *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1955). *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960), *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966), *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978), and *Steel Hawk and Other Stories* (1968).

In all his novels we find Socio-cultural matrix. His novel *So Many Hungers* is endowed with a transparently positive vision of life - explored and expressed artistically. Since he believes that the novel should have a social purpose, he gives the treatment of social culture of India in his novel. The novel is the blend of tradition and contemporaneity values, which he found in the social and historical realities in his country. His works have sincerely blended the two beliefs of Indian culture.

The present paper is an attempt to showcase the most conspicuous feature of Bhabani Bhattacharya's writings with special reference to his novel *SO Many Hungers*.

Keywords: Socio-cultural matrix, Contemporaneity, Tradition, Indian Culture

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The fusion of the traditional and the contemporary values is the most noticeable feature of Bhabani Bhalacharya's writings. The idea of the integration of approaches and the blending of values is by far the most significant idea that Bhabani Bhattacharya conveys through his novels. In his first novel, *So Many Hungers* (1947), the novelist synthesizes the old and the new values through different sets of characters and episodes. The stories of the Basu family in Calcutta and Kajoli's family in Baruni project his belief that life is all compromise, and there can, nevertheless, be unity in diversity.

The novel is the story of two families which represent the old and the new values of life. The Basu family lives in Calcutta. It has six members in all. The eldest member of the family is Devesh Basu. He is a great patriot and lover of traditional values of his country. He is an earnest Gandhite. He is an idealist and a veteran freedom fighter. He is an old man of about seventy years. He is a great devotee to his village and serves his village with all his means. So the villagers have great love and respect for him. Devesh Basu has no enemy in the village and all the people of the village are dear to him. He has also a great love for them and considers them as his sons and daughters. Above seventy in age, he lives in a village where people are very dear to him and he thinks them as "the core of his being, his blood and bone."

The villagers of Baruni call him 'Devata' out of their great love and respect for him. They regard him as a pious man, who has led his disciplined life right from his childhood, but the fact is that none of them understands him except Rahoul. Monju the wife of Rahoul, describes him.

Grandfather, an eccentric and had odd ideas. Ever since he retired from his work as a teacher at city school he had lived by himself in a village not far from the sea; he lived like one of the peasant folk". Some years back, when Congress had launched civil disobedience against the government, the aged one was deep in it: he formed a band of volunteers, peasants and fishers all, leading them to the Bay. making salt from sea water in defiance of the law gone to prison..... father was wise, practical unlike the aged one with queer ideas. Over seventy, and living a hard life all by himself.

Devesh Basu has other members in the family. His son, Samarendra Basu, his grandson Rahoul and Kunal. The family has two female characters. They are Rahoul's mother and his wife Monju.

In the family, though everybody respects the old man but even then there is a great difference of opinion between Devesh Basu and his family members. Samarendra Basu is a young man of enthusiastic nature. He has a different opinion from his father even about his country. On the one hand his father is a staunch follower of Gandhian philosophy while on the other hand his son has secretly joined hands with the British Government and has benefited in his human dealings and even has got the award of the title C.I.E. (Companion of the Indian Empire). Rahoul, for his father's sake, is prompted to action. He is influenced by the spirit of the times and participated in the Civil disobedience Movement.

Samarendra was simply shocked to learn of the arrest of Rahoul for participating in the "Quit India Movement". He thought of the war as a rare chance to reap a harvest of gold, He missed no opportunity that would be of help to him, and no stone unturned for his uplift and self-aggrandizement whatever it means. The human element was so self-centered in him that he elected the dishes of fellow human beings. Samarendra Basu is a lawyer. He is living in Calcutta. He is greedy and over scrupulous where money is concerned. Having suffered privations in his younger days, his main aim is to amass wealth for himself and his family, but is not even an idea of patriotism in him. All that he desires is safety and respectability. When the Second World War starts, he cleverly makes use of the opportunity to multiply his wealth by speculation in shares:

Samarendra Basu had played his cards well. His firm faith in the British Empire's armed might had helped. The stock market was divided against itself. The Soviets had marched into Poland before the Nazi python could swallow it altogether. Some thought that the Soviets had thrown a challenge to the Allies: others thought it was a check to blitzkrieg. The stock market was concerned only with the military implication. Would the Allies come into conflict with Russia? They would, and nervous speculators unloaded - their holdings (28-29).

Samarendra Basu is very hostile to his father, Devesh Basu, because of his involvement in national struggle for freedom. He is the most practical man, a hard-core realist. He has earned money by illegal means and the same life wants to lead by his sons. He is a man of fifty years of age with shrewd eyes with a broad face, and close-cropped hair. He is eccentric and had odd ideas. He wears ill-fitting English clothes with a thick gold watch chain on the chest. He too wanted to make the best use of the war, the chance of a lifetime.

He is a pure materialistic man and has a great greed for money and fame like any common man. His motto is "The end justifies means" and therefore, he does not like his father's nationalistic ideas. He is

hankering after glamorous honorary titles, whereas his father is whole heartedly devoted to the cause of National Independence.

Rahoul and Kunal are his two intellectual sons. Rahoul is the younger one. He has a D.Sc. degree from the Cambridge University, where he has carried on research under a distinguished scientist. Before going to Cambridge, he has liked thousands of other young men, contemplated joining the Independence movement and seeking arrest, but father had shrewdly managed to send him away to England. At the time the story begins, he is on the staff of a college in the city and continues his research on cosmic rays:

Rahoul made an impatient gesture, father wouldn't understand. Born in England, he would have been a tory diehard. Born in India, he was conditioned by the same spiritual bondage and something worse. It was his kind, bred in the decadence that overtakes a race at certain periods in its history—yes it was his kind that had made possible England's long-drawn occupation of India. A Great War was giving the age-long problems a razor's edge. But not in his father's mind that mind was unshaken as ever, insensitive. It thought of the War only as a rare chance to reap a harvest of gold. Devata to have such a son! The bitter irony! Hurt, unhappy. Rahoul looked at his father. His reverence and his love winced under his scornful thoughts (30-31).

He is happily married to Monju and a daughter named Khuku is born to them. Rahoul's desire is to throw his lot with the people, struggling for freedom and self-respect. But for the time being he refrains from action and the impression is created among the British officers that he is on the verge of a great scientific discovery that will turn the tide of the war against the fascists and Japan. Nevertheless he is a staunch nationalist and he cannot forget the hypocrisy of the foreign rulers who do not want to grant Indian freedom:

Rahoul was completely self-possessed. 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 mattered what happened to his people. He was indifferent, too towards his captors, and his mind was without hate, without anger, in a nirvana of passionlessness.

He is not only a great scientist and like his grandfather, he has a deep faith in the moral values of human life. He has soft corner for his suffering masses. During the Bengal famine he helps the volunteers in running a free kitchen for the destitute. Unlike his father, he has full sympathy for the freedom fighters. He himself has a keen desire to plunge into the freedom struggle. Without caring for his scientific researches, like his grandfather "Devesh Basu", he supports for the freedom movement. He himself is a staunch nationalist. His passionate speeches to his students show his great, nationalistic feelings:.... with bitter smoldering rage he had been speaking to the students. a widening circle. He had addressed them the day before, this war, he had said, was just a repetition of other wars in history. The four freedoms did not include the freedom to be free—not for Asians. In his famine this brutal doom, was the fulfillment of alien rule. The final commentary. Imagine two million Englishmen dying of hunger that was preventable and the Government unaffected, uncensored, unrepentant smug as ever! "Quit India" cried the two million dead of Bengal The anger was warm in his voice and he had paused till his speech was cool again. "Quit!" cried all India "You have done us some good along with much evil, for the good you're doing you have been paid in full. The accounts have been settled. Now .for God's sake, quit! (202).

Kunal, the younger brother of Rahoul, is tall, slim and has a good physique. He is realist, affectionate and cheerful, but undisturbed by idealism or patriotic fervor. He considers war to be a good adventure and decides to plunge into it and he joins the army as a Junior Officer, being an affectionate and spirited youngman. Kunal too has the sense of mortality in his character. He helps a needy young man in solving his food problem. Kunal figures only in the earlier part of the novel. He leaves home for service in North Africa and in Italy. He seeks the blessings of his mother, when he expresses his readiness to enter the battle field. She gives her blessings. He is prompt in his decision and there is no hesitation in his nature.

Samarandra's heart knew a throb of pride for the heroic son. Kunal who had acted twice as company commander. The last letter received from Kunal was from Naples. He received a telegram from the Defense Department intimating that Captain Kunal Basu of the Indian Artillery had been reported missing. He lay wide

awake with memories of his son. But after three hours he had another message, hearty news that Captain Kunal Basu had returned safely to his line:

Kunal, with his practical mind, had sprung into decision, untroubled by theories of right and wrong. The War would be a great adventure. The aims of war did not count. It was a matter of chance that Kunal would find himself in the armed forces of democracy. But he, Rahoul, holding inside him a weighing machine for the liner values, felt the same swift urge to take an active part in democracy's war against fascist aggression had he not, in the years past, longed for this struggle? Kunal was pleased with the war for one reason: So was father, for another. "And you, too?" Rahoul asked himself in his heart Kunal going to be a soldier. Father going to buy shares, and mother rice and mustard oil. You? (9).

There are two important members in the family namely Rahoul's mother and his wife Monju. They are Indian women and have their different temperaments and outlooks of life. He enquired of his mother about his wife - Monju. The mother informed him that his wife was going to deliver a child in a few months. She could not bear to see her husband rush into danger. She started arguing with him that he was never looking an inch beyond his own heart's desire. She found fault with him that he was feeling for the humanity more than for their child. He tried to comfort her by saying that they should see how things would take shape.

Monju hated to be anybody as she is a Hindu woman. She can do dancing well. Her husband danced with her and assured that she has a lovely complexion and that she is as pretty as the prettiest of the ladies. She is a pure Indian woman and believes in the traditional values of her country but she also has good faith in the modern India. She has a synthesis of the best flowers of traditional Indian culture and the developing scientific modern ways of her country. While her mother-in-law is totally a woman of old ideas and she believes only in the traditional values of her family system. She is not accustomed of accepting the modern open culture of today. Rahoul's mother is a middle aged lady of worldly wisdom while Monju is only twenty five and her Mother-in-law considers her only a novice in domestic affairs; though the old lady has a full faith in the old values of life and is far away from the modern life of the city, but she is a very wise woman and has a practical mind. She loves her sons very much. She is not happy that Kunal should put his life in danger in the war. She is worried to hear the news of the World War II and she is very much afraid to think about the life of her secondson may be in danger in the war. We see that she shows her worldly wisdom when she advises her family members to store the commodity of the daily use. Bhabani Bhattacharya tells about her:

Mother felt worry. "War? It has started then? Why, we must buy rice and mustard oil. a half year's supply before the forces has an inkling. Prices will touch the sky.... Sugar, too. clothing. I must get white English drill for the father and you two boys. And tinned butter, tinned fish. Strange tongues you children have. The rivers of Bengal choked with fish-every kind, large and small-still you fancy the year old shape packed in tins, both you and Kunal. The strong smell".

Monju is a modern woman and is very co-operative to her husband but she is not a practical minded lady, as her mother-in-law is. She lacks practical wisdom. She is not an economical girl. She likes to visit hotels and restaurants with her husband. She is a great lover of dance and wants that her husband should go with her in the evening in the ball dance room of the restaurant. She loves to dance on a ball room floor. She is a modern woman and believes in the modern values of the country. Her mother-in-law does not like all these modern fashions. She believes that the Indian woman should always live within the four walls of the house. She is a woman of the old and traditional views.

She danced with easy grace of movement, and looking in her eyes, black and large and edged with collyrium, he saw them brighten with jubilation. It was a dream fulfilled. And the jubilation of her flowed into him like a current. The new perfume she used, soft and exciting. cool and warming, caught a fresh meaning-it was the very perfume of her person attuned to the mood of this moment. It was as though a great perfumer had studied her in this mood and then in the perfume he had created for her had given her expression. (49).

In the novel Bhabani Bhattacharya has analyzed the natures of the male and the female characters of the Basu family. All accept one live together under the same roof. They are, more or less, diametrically opposed to

one another with the exception of Rahoul and Dcvata, yet they live peacefully and happily together. They have altogether varying temperaments, attitudes and ways and modes of life, and yet one does not see any apparent clash between. The novelist is very successful in depicting their lives in an integrated family. He has given a very good synthesis of the old and the new values of life. Through them we find that "There is a queer amalgam of the old and the young, the idealist and the materialist, and the imperialist and the democrat in the Basu family".

The second very important story of the novel also deals on the theme of the old and the new values in this novel. This is a story of a peasant family with a young girl Kajoli as a principal character. The novel unfolds the tragic story of a largely man-made famine in which over a million people died of sheer hunger. The Bengal famine of 1943 was the most tragic calamity in Indian history. The novelist has described this horrible scene in the following words:

"Corpses lay by the road, huddled together, picked to the bones, will eveln cavern of sockets, bits of skin and flesh rotting on the nose and chin and ribs, the skulls packed open, only the hair uneaten. A family group had sunk, into sleep, and beyond the sleep vultures Heaven's scavengers save for them the air of Bengal would be putrid with the rotting flesh of men. Fellow human being had ceased to care for the living, how could they care for the dead"(187)

We find the same horrible description in one of the poem of KB. Shelley.

Hunger has played a horrible dance.
Death is here, and death is there
Death is busy everywhere,
All round within beneath above is death-
and we ore death(Shelley, Death, 1920)

Again we find a horrible description of the hunger in the following lines of the novel:"Hunger Strike !" scoffed the betel-woman.

"Hunger enough in our Calcutta city. To give up your food when you may eat! In every jail house, look east look west. look north. look south There is a hunger strike_ the vendors of news pour it into your two cars every day, every hour, Bhagwan ! Why not take the useless sons of owls out of the cool comfort of jail house and put them in a beggar's lane here? Good for them," And she grinned with all her teeth (194-195)

The novel is a grim tale compounded of the ingredients of sighs and tears, misery squalor, hunger and poverty, heroic suffering and sacrifice. It is a slice of life rather several small slices imaginatively fused into an artistic pattern. The novelist life rather several small slices imaginatively fused into an artistic pattern. The novelist "paints a graphic picture of the Bengal famine of (1943) which is a heartrendering scene of starvation and death".

People have nothing to eat. not even the roots of plants, hunger eats the mup. But on the other hand "the hoarders, profiteers and black marketers 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 vigorous and jubilantaction."

The story of Kajoli is the story of the hunger of a peasant girl. She is the heroine of the novel. She is a poor girl and looms large in the readers' eyes. She illustrates the cruel fate of the rural population of Bengal at the time when India faced the Japanese peril in the east and an unprecedented rice famine was created by unscrupulous capitalists. She is a sprightly and innocent girl of fourteen when the story begins. She lives in her ancestral mud and thatch house along with her mother who remains unnamed throughout the novel and younger brother Onu aged ten or eleven. The father, who has no name in the story, and an elder brother Kanu, are in prison for having taken part in the civil disobedience movement. The family represents some of the finest qualities of rural Bengal or of rural India. Their life is simple and dignified. The novelist has described the heroine's life background in the following words.

"She is a well-bred peasant girl. She has a legacy of manners as old as India. How could she give up her manners and proprieties to suit your new Tangled city ideas ? You ore a respected visitor in the house_"Then

Rahoul saw how Didi was enjoying the moment He gave in. He came forward a step, smiling. "Kajoli, have your way, then; there is dust a-plenty on my feet." "Didi ! " Onu gave a great shout : " A picture Didi!" Grandfather held a colored print in his hand-he had kept it rolled up somewhere in his garments.

Kajoli sprang to her feet, eager and jubilant, the visitor's feel forgotten for the moment. "For me,dadd ?

"For you, Kajoli." And as he turned to speak to his grandson, an intense warmth came upon his face, mellowing like a cloud its pure quality of light "This young girl has a keen fancy for pictures of bright colour She hangs them up all over the mud walls. Her longings for beauty finds expression that way." And his eyes deep with compassion, rested long upon the peasant girl, as though pouring upon her some speechless blessing. (28).

This family bus limited members who lead their hard life on account of their financial position. Kajoli has two brothers, Onu and Kanu. She is married to Kishore, who is a city youth but very simple by heart All the family members of this peasant girl are crushed under the feet of two mighty monsters-the Japanese war and the inhuman rice famine. She receives the village respected youth. Rahoul, warmly in the traditional manner. She removes his shoes from his feet, pouring cold water on the feet and washing off the dust. When Rahoul attempts to divest it. Devata silences him and reminds him that Kajoli is a "well-bred peasant girl with a legacy of manners as old as India".

Devesh Basu appreciates her and praises her to Rahoul in high words. Her husband is also a nationalist and earns his livelihood by working in a cotton mill in the city. Like Kajoli his character also touches the heart of the readers. He is very simple in his heart. He is highly unassuming. He takes part in the national freedom movement and like Kajoli's father he is also imprisoned. The parents of Kajoli are proud of the choice of their daughter to choose such a nationalistic youth.

The young boy is pleased to see his wife in a sari out of his spinning. The husband and wife go to the weaver's hut and he has become mad to see her put it on. he wants to buy her a mill made saree. He is content to look at her face and often steals a tender glance at her. Kishore informs that they are married two months ago. Kishore is very happy to have Kajoli as his wife. He thinks fortunate that he would be a father soon and therefore he begins to love Kajoli more.

Bhabani Bhattacharya describes the emotions of Kishore in the following lines:

"Silk and Satin are shamed." said Kishore as they walked into the village, passing by the aged banyan. And the rainbow colours the city girls wear, those also. In white you are like a lotus, shaming all the flowers that bloom ever". "Nah ! Kajoli said huskily, feeling embarrassed by this hymn. Yet he would love to buy her a dry sari, too, a mill-made one of fine texture, when he had some money. Why one day. when he had money, they would go to the city of cities a visiting he and the girl, his wife. What streets ! What crowds ! Like people in a fair. And the illumination! So many lights on each street. No lamps of oil, mind: lights of great power lighting - white, so many lights that night was no darker than day time. And the cinema plays ! How he would love to take the girl, his wife, to a cinema play (91, 92)

Kishore starts collecting lotus seeds and frog's parasol for his pregnant wife but his happiness was short lived because he was put in jail. The disintegration and ruin that comes to Kajoli's innocent family is symptomatic of the devastation that affects all Bengal, she has a brief spell of happiness after she is married to the young man Kishore. The conditions in the village that deteriorated her father and husband are in the jail.

There is no rice to eat in the house. They have been living on roots and figs. They sell whatever can be sold. Their suffering and starvations in no way ailed their nobility and purity. When they find it impossible to live in the village, they proceed to Calcutta.

Kajoli has painfully tragic experience on the way for which the novelist does not hold any individual morally culpable. She meets an Indian soldier and begs him for food. He gives her a portion from his Kit-Rag. She is so ravenously hungry that she devours it rapidly without thinking of her mother and brother. The soldier offers her some more. Being separated from his wife for over a year, he feels the hunger for woman. Blinded by desire, he grabs Kajoli and leads her to a meadow. Fancying her to be his wife he mutters words of endearment and makes love to her. A piercing shriek from her awakens him to his senses and he finds her bleeding and

unconscious. She has an abortion, she lies helpless and bleeding. She is providentially saved from that late by the arrival of little Onu. who has been directed to the spot by the repentant soldier. He tries to make amends for his wrong. He informs her pitiable position to a military doctor, the kind doctor after examining Kajoli gives her first aid.

In a few hours, Kajoli becomes a patient in a Calcutta hospital. After she is discharged from the hospital, Kajoli's eyes are opened to the miserable plight in which she and her family are. They could not recognize one another, a woman who sells betel-leaves and also runs a brothel, offers her sixty or even eighty rupees, if she agrees to become a prostitute. She spurns the offer. After days of anxious brooding and vacillation she finally makes up her mind to sell herself. She takes the money from the agent woman and ties it up in a bit of gunny bag which, her mother usually keeps under her head at night. She has planned to go with the betel woman early one morning. She joins the betel seller and together they proceed towards the house of ill fame.

So Kajoli started her new life as a destitute of the city. The betel woman hailed her in the evening as she came out of the alley. She offered the girl a scat in the stall.(179)

Kajoli had made her grim decision. She would sell ihelasi thine she owned- herself. Mother was dying. She ailed, and could not eat the poor son and daughter provided, begging on die streets and picking in the garbage. She needed shelter too. because of the severe winter cold that had affected her chest. All this could be had for t.ne money the agent offered eighty rupees. This body of hers was worth so much? Thought Kajoli with grim wonderment. This body had been defiled on the high road. Let it be defiled over and over again, then, if Mother's life could be saved at that price. Mother had suffered enough: she had not the strength to bear it any more. How she had shrunk and aged! : her speech was almost gone, and she breathed with heavy pain". (191)

On the way Kajoli hears some boys selling newspapers shouting the important news of the hunger strike launched up by 'Devata' in the Dehradun Jail. She sees the image of the revered old man before her mind and his pointing advice, given to the people of Baruni, echoes in her ears "Be strong, be true, be Death less "He stands there, the tall, while clad figure, with up liked handcuffed arms, and the pale silver of his hair and the pale silver of his flowing beard are touched with alight that is not of the sun alone.

"Friends and comrades do not betray the flag. Do not betray yourselves, The supreme test has come. Be strong. Be true. Deathless.....She saw him in jail-house in the grab of a convict, wielding his body's hunger like a sword, strong as ever and true and deathless. (195)

She realizes with a pang of remorse that she has let him down and deposed herself Kajoli is caught by the idea of selling newspapers quickly and firmly. She buys thrice dozen copies and tells the woman that she hits changed her mind and will return her money. The woman is amazed, but Kajoli calls her jackal woman, slaps her on the face and leaves her gaping in amazement. This is Kajoliexit from the story. Her future is left to the readers' guess. But it is clear that she has grown to full moral status and chosen her path, which one may safely surmise, in the path of dignity and self-respect, sorrow and suffering have not destroyed her spirit which remains unconquered and unconquerable.

The story of Kajoli arises two questions. The first one is whether the soldier actually rapes her or not some of the critics are of the opinion that the Soldier wishes to rape her and nc also attempts to seduce her but Kajoli is fainted before he tries to rape her So he does net dare Id enjoy her and thus she is saved from raping, but if we read carefully the episode we see that she is actually raped because we read in the novel the lines, which show that Kajoli shrikes, she bleeds and faints because of, the strong phallic violence of the soldiers, but he is a good human being and he repents for this work. He decides to save the life of the innocent woman.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is a good psychologist and he knows very well that sex is a weakness of all the human beings. The soldier is not a God. He is also a human being, who was away from his family from months together and therefore he was starving sex. He is in a state of emotional starvation and acts in moment of over

powering desire which makes him almost unconscious of what he is doing. But he is a very kind man. He wants to help the woman he goes to the captain to help the woman.

The soldier was God-fearing, honest with himself. At home he had been a devoted husband and a loving father. Left alone the girl might die of bleeding. Pregnant. What devil had seized his soul? The soldier was wretched. At the edge of the air-field the ambulance truck stood ready to set off Captain Bannerji of the Army Medical Corps was proceeding to Calcutta on duty. The soldier spoke with quick decision. "Sa'b I was coming across the meadow. I saw a woman lying stretched on the on the ground. Amere girl, Helpless in the meadow".

"A destitute," said the other, "Nothing I can do".

"A pool of blood, huzoor, Foul work. Some murderous fellow is about. The soldier had to create an impression.

"Not my duty Snapped the officer as the truck moved.

"Sa'b, the jackals will eat her alive." the soldiers cried, his voice breaking.

"It is right on your way_." "Jump in." the Captain snapped again.

The soldier bounded into the truck, relieved. He knew his officer. The soldier's trained mind had retained a landmark_ a broken Palmyra, its bushy top clipped off by hurricane the truck drew up. A minute later the Captain flashed his torch upon Kajoli. He gave a start. "Run" he ordered. "Get the stretcher." They carried the girl into the ambulance. She had lost much blood. She was indanger of sepsis, hanging onto life by a thread. The Captain set himself to his task.

So Many Hungers shows an engaging picture of the human being torn between the worlds-the self and the society. Suffering and hunger ennoble and strengthens the protagonist of the novel. They live and thrive enduringly and ethically. Pain and hunger cannot brutalize him. Nor can they degrade and debase them. The novelist does not make the conflict metaphysical; rather the conflict issocio-spiritual. Moreover the social world in the novel is a time space, construction of rational and moral values. The novelist to one of his interviews admits that *So Many Hungers* is an offspring of his emotionally disturbed self in the hunger stricken society.

So Many Hungers is a socio political novel. It portrays the unflinching faith of the individuals in human values, even the teeth of all miseries and privations. Suffering does not snatch them away from values which they cherish high.

DeveshBasu rightly says to his grandson Rahoul that all the daughters and sons of the village are his own sons and daughters. He is proud of them because they have faith in human values. Kajoli, The heroine of the second story of novel, has a good sense of tradition. She respects for all the traditional values even in the modern mechanical age "The two fundamental strands of the Indian society-thcmaterialistic and the Westernized modern society of the urban folk and the traditional and the unsophisticated society of the rural folk are at conflict within the self of the individual generating the dilemma of existence. Whether to stick to thus or to that, to do their or that, is the problem But the characters are not bedeviled in the face of such social odds. Rather they emerge out of such a dilemma triumphantly. In spite of all her suffering and self-mortifications, Kajoli doesn't Shun traditional values. She sells her body out of necessity but not her soul, not her socio historical self-nurtured in the traditional social values of faith and hope. As has been pointed out earlier, she has "a legacy of manners as old as India"

Rahoul is a young man of new light he does not appreciate the selfishness of the rich people because, he believes that the death of poor human beings is on account of selfish nature of the rich people. He also works about the village economy, which is going to pieces in the hands of the Government and public agents.

Bhabani Bhattacharya in this novel has combined in a very sincere way the two themes of hunger and freedom. Kajoli is a character which embodies the liberation. She is unlettered but wise, a rustic girl yet elegant and patriotic. She works for the family, yet worrying for others.

She is the central character who combines the old and the new values of India. The novelist blends the traditional and Modern elements of life through two male characters, DcvshBasu (Dcvata) and Kishore are the outsiders. They belong to the big city of Calcutta. Their ways and attitude of life are quite different from

the villagers of Baruni. Devata is a highly educated and enlightened man of his time but unlike most of the city people, he is not a self-centered man. He is an idealist, having an entirely different family background. He is a believer of the harmonious relationship in the family. He loves all the family members equally and, in turn, they too are greatly attached to him. He does not care at all for his own kith and kin but calls Kajoli's house as "My daughter's household". Live in while in prison, he feels worried about these people who were "truly his own. Nearer to him than his blood Kin."(99). A girl of common clay, Kajoli is not highly educated or sophisticated but there exists a great affinity between her and the old man. She and her younger brother, Onu, tell him "Dadu" affectionately.

Kajoli's husband Kishore is also an idealist like "Devata He is also a great patriot and like modern young boys, he is not selfish. He happily accepts Kajoli as his wife. He does not demand any dowry and sees only her female virtues. They are mutually adjusted with each other. Both the characters justify the novelist's ideas of blending the old and new values of life.

Kishore is a young and enthusiastic modern man. He is well educated and enlightened modern youth. He has progressive views and has been a famous labour leader of a cotton mill at Calcutta. He has served five months' imprisonment for leading the striking workers of the mill. The peasant's work of sowing, growing and reaping paddy is alien to him. Kajoli, on the other hand, is a peasant girl of the small village. She is not an educated girl; She is also not sophisticated like a city bred girl. She is totally an Indian village girl. She has borrowed traditional values 'With a legacy of manner as old as India' thus the marriage of both the young people is a good synthesis and fusion of the old and the new values of life.

In the novel the novelist also shows the encounter of the old and the new through some other episodes. A destitute girl bares herself in order to save, not only herself but also a number of other destitute for starvation. She is common and yet uncommon, traditional and yet modern, ideal and yet real girl of the modern India. This girl appears to be unconventional and different to the reader when he finds her surrendering to the animal passions of the alien soldiers. But she becomes one of the extraordinary ones when she spends all her hard earned money to feed the starving destitute. While demeaning herself on physical level, she exalts herself on the human level.

In the novel we see a very touching episode where Rahoul, the most educated modern man does not leave his traditional culture. He addresses Kajoli's mother as "Mother" He does not treat her only as a poor peasant woman. His behaviour also symbolizes the synthesis of the traditional and the modern values. This type of culture we can never find in western countries. This is only the matchless quality of India. Rahoul establishes his kinship enthusiastically with the simple and uneducated village woman. The following dialogue between Rahoul and the peasant woman presents a blending of old and new values in a nice way.

"father is well ? Mother ?" She asked out of politeness "Bua-ma (daughter-in-law) ? The little one ?" "Yes Mother, they are well" 7 Mother ! The word had slipped his tongue without thought. Happiness came upon him that he had broken out of his class. Sophistication and I called a simple peasant woman mother. What was there in this woman of Bengal village nor unlike others of her kind, that he had the urge to call her mother ? The peasant mother had tears in her eyes because of his kindness. "How have you named your little one. my son ?" "We are looking hard for a name, it's no simple business naming your child ? Meantime we just call her Kliuku (Baby) He pulled off his shoes and stood in bare feet as was becoming.

The novel is a synthesis of the old and new values of India. The two elements are like red and white corpuscles in human blood, are antagonistic yet essential components of the flow of life. The old people of the succeeding generation always hand down the old values of India to their succeeding generations.. The new generations think it is their duty to maintain the traditional moralities with the modern progress of their time. Thus tradition functions responsibly in regard to the individual as well as to the society in the novel "So Many Hungers" Bhabani Bhattacharya with the help of male and female characters and some episodes has very successfully blended the two values of life.

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