

Hunger And The Feminine In Bhabani Bhattacharya's Novels

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Abstract

Bhabani Bhattacharya stands out in Indian English literature for his ability to blend political awareness with human emotions. Among the central themes in his novels are hunger and the feminine experience. This paper explores how Bhattacharya portrays hunger not only as a physical condition but also as a symbol of emotional and spiritual deprivation—especially in the lives of women. Novels such as So Many Hungers! and He Who Rides a Tiger highlight how hunger, in its many forms, intersects with the struggles of womanhood. Through these narratives, Bhattacharya presents women not only as victims of poverty and patriarchy but also as symbols of strength, resistance, and transformation.

Keywords – Hunger, Survive, Political, Equality

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I. Introduction

Bhabani Bhattacharya's fiction delves deep into the socio-political fabric of India, especially during and after British rule. While issues like famine, poverty, and injustice form the visible surface of his work, there exists a deeper layer that explores the inner world of women. Bhattacharya links hunger with feminine suffering—both bodily and psychological. This seminar paper examines how these two themes—hunger and femininity—are woven together in his novels, giving voice to the silent struggles and quiet defiance of Indian women during times of crisis.

II. Hunger: A Multidimensional Theme

In *So Many Hungers!*, Bhattacharya presents the devastating Bengal famine not just as a historical event, but as a backdrop for exploring broader human suffering. Hunger here is not only about the absence of food but also about the loss of dignity, purpose, and freedom. The character of Kajoli exemplifies this: her struggle is both physical and moral. She faces the choice between survival and self-respect—and chooses the latter, becoming a symbol of female resilience.

Similarly, in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, the theme of hunger drives the protagonist to adopt a false identity to challenge social injustice. The women in the story, however, endure hunger at a deeper level—bearing the weight of gender oppression and emotional neglect. Their stories reflect a silent hunger for identity, autonomy, and equality.

III. Feminine Strength Amid Suffering

Though Bhattacharya's female characters are often caught in difficult circumstances, they are rarely portrayed as helpless. Kajoli, for instance, resists becoming a victim of prostitution despite overwhelming pressure, and instead takes up a humble yet dignified role as a street vendor. Through her, Bhattacharya shows how a woman can reclaim agency even in the face of intense deprivation.

Women in his novels are not only shaped by their suffering but also rise above it. They represent both the burden of tradition and the hope of change. Their hunger—for food, respect, freedom, and love—is what fuels their transformation.

IV. Hunger And Patriarchy: Intertwined Struggles

In many ways, Bhattacharya presents hunger as a gendered experience. Women suffer not only because of poverty but also because of the deeply entrenched patriarchal systems that restrict their choices. The female body becomes a site of sacrifice—where hunger is both endured and imposed. Bhattacharya critiques this double oppression by showing how awareness and resilience among women can lead to social reform.

V. Conclusion

Bhabani Bhattacharya's portrayal of hunger goes far beyond the surface reality of famine. It is a powerful metaphor for the layered suffering that women experience in a patriarchal society. Yet, his narratives also celebrate the quiet power of the feminine spirit—its ability to endure, resist, and transform. Through characters like Kajoli and others, Bhattacharya shows that the struggle against hunger must also be a struggle for gender equality and human dignity.

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