

## **Eco-critical Perspectives in So Many Hungers**

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**Article Received:** 10/11/2022,

**Article Accepted:** 12/12/2022,

**Published Online:** 13/12/2022,

**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2022.4.12.07

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### **Abstract**

Life with the harmony of nature and the environment is an integral part of human life. Many ancient cultures have advocated life in harmony with the environment. Many of the rituals like the worship of trees, animals, forests, rivers, and the sun, and considering the earth itself as a mother of goddesses may seem meaningless in this modern era. But these rituals and cultures have connected humans with the environment from ancient ages. In the era of development and industrialization, man has neglected the environment to satisfy his greed. It is a sincere urge of the era to find alternate sources of development that can lead a man toward sustainable development. Ecologically conscious texts help a man to realize his self and he reverts back to his roots from the external world. Man has roamed about everywhere in search of inner satisfaction and happiness, but the same is actualized in the lap of nature. Bhabani Bhattacharya has presented his characters who have achieved a state of tranquility only after surrendering themselves to the supreme power- nature and their environment. There is a close relationship between ecocriticism and literature. It is an interdisciplinary study of ecology and literary criticism which is an unusual combination of a natural science and a humanistic discipline. By analogy, ecocriticism is concerned with the relationship between with his environment or how man's relationship with his physical environment is reflected in literature. The paper discusses the term ecocriticism and the role of ecocriticism in literature. It cites examples of how the theme of ecocriticism can be interpreted through the reading of Indian novels, namely, So Many Hungers by Bhabani Bhattacharya.

**Keywords:** Eco criticism, Ecology, Poverty and Hunger, Indian novels etc.

### **Introduction:**

William Ruckert may have been the first person to use the term eco-criticism. Ruckert published an essay titled, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978) which he focused on "the application of Ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature." First, ecocriticism is a response to the need for a humanistic understanding of our

relationship with the natural world in an age of environmental destruction. Secondly, environmental cries are the result of humanity's disconnection from the natural world, brought about not only by increasing technology but also by particularization. Ecocriticism is interdisciplinary. In order to the connectedness of all things including the mind and life of the earth. One must reconnect the disciplines that have become sundered through over-specialization.

Eco-critical approaches thus can be theoretical, pedagogical, rhetorical, and on including combinations of the above. Ecocriticism expands the notion of the world referred to in literary theory as a society to include the entire ecosphere. Ecocriticism is a branch of literary criticism which has been discussed worldwide as an interdisciplinary study of literature and the environment. It covers the study of subjects like science, literature, anthropology, sociology, psychology, etc., and attempts to study the attitudes of mankind toward nature. Some popular names for this relatively new genre are eco-poetics, green culture, and environmental literary criticism.

Ecological Concern in Indian Fiction:

Ecocriticism is the application of Ecology and Ecological principles and the study of literature and theoretical discourse. There has been a close relationship between nature and literature. This relationship has been reflected through writers and poets throughout different cultures across the world. A variety of novels, poems, and other expressions of literature have been depicted on the backdrop of issues concerning nature. Today, environmental issues have become a matter of concern for many departments and disciplines of knowledge and development. In many literary works in English, nature has been a prime issue. Colonialism has been a significant factor in the social and cultural environments of the world have completely changed the representations of man's attitude towards nature in literary texts through nature imagery, gender construct, feminism, man-woman relationship, tourism, culture, etc. have a wider meaning than what is portrayed through their literal expressions.

Eco-critical reading: understanding the poverty and hunger in *So Many Hungers*: Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* describes the great Bengal Famine of 1943 at its best as well as worst. More than thirty lakh people lost their lives out of sheer hunger: no food to eat, no water to drink, no man to help them with necessary succor, and no shelter either. In this novel, the writer pinpoints man's dependence on nature and how nature hits back when it is threatened. Paul Varghese rightly remarks that "Food is the primary requisite of human dignity; hunger debases and dehumanizes man. That is why hunger is the theme of a large number of Indo-Anglian novels".

*So Many Hungers* is the story of a peasant girl, Kajoli, whose life is totally shattered by various factors of her life. Bhattacharya shows how the hostility of nature and rapid industrialization led her and her family to hunger and poverty. Through this environment, Bhattacharya depicts the life of toil and uncertainty lived by the tenant farmers. When their harvest fails to owe to natural calamities, the farmers face not only starvation but also miserable poverty that forces them to sell their small possessions in order to pay the rent.

Kajoli and her family are forcibly uprooted from their land as a result of man-made famine in 1943. The essence of the novel is touched in the well-known maxim, 'Man eats food, not money.' Bhattacharya makes a penetrating analysis of humanity at large. As K. R. Chandrasekharan states:

“Rahoul’s story is a representation in miniature of the struggle for freedom. The sad tale of Kajoli is likewise a pathetic record of what happened to more than two million people who become victims of a famine, which was not an act of God but brought about by the rapacity and selfishness of profiteers and the indifference of an alien Government.” (SMH 1947, P. NO. 77-78).

Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers* (1947) describes the female protagonist Kajoli’s attempt to retrieve and review elements of her family’s rural life or a strong sense of rootedness in their land. Both she and her family toil on the land and have a special sense of belonging to it. However, their sole dependency on this piece of land for survival is also a cause of their poverty. The relationship between land and Kajoli becomes an important instinct in understanding Kajoli’s sense of belonging to her rural environment. The very beginning of the novel focuses on the relationship between Kajoli, the land, and her rural environment. Dr. Srinivasa Iyengar states, “*So Many Hungers*” is no doubt an impeachment of man’s inhumanity to man, but it is also a dramatic study of a set of human beings caught in a unique and tragic predicament. The story has been effectively told and the tragic pathos of the real mass starvation described in the guise of fiction moves the reader deeply. The novel describes a factual and vivid account of the most shocking disasters in history.”

Bhattacharya does not blame human beings alone for the pitiable conditions of poor peasants. Nature to a large extent is also responsible for leading them to hunger. The tragedy of rural life in India is that the people of villagers are entirely dependent on nature with their innate uncertainties and freaks of weather. This hanging fear of uncertainties is quite evident in these words of Kajoli. Hunger for fulfillment, honor, and respect is common for a man, Kishore wants to fulfill his heart’s fancy to see his newly married wife wear a new mill made one of fine texture sari but a married girl’s hunger is limited to having her own nest and her children. Kajoli depicts it in very calculated words:

“Woman, wed, has one big hunger for home, no other. Little hunger make part of the big home hunger; they belong to it as the spokes belong to the cartwheel. Women, she has one big wheel of hunger. Man is a single spoke in that cartwheel- nah, maybe he is the axle. And”- (SMH, P. NO.128)

Very soon Kajoli goes to Calcutta in search of work and she sells her living body to earn their bread for the unbalanced conditions of nature and the environment. The Bengal Famine very soon takes man away from nature and ultimately destroys their relationship with nature and enters the life of Kajoli’s family. Kajoli’s fear come true when her mother dies of starvation and ultimately, she also fell ill from overwork, exhaustion, and starvation. Nature attacks them first in the form of heavy rains resulting in food. First, they have no rice to eat.

They have to live on roots and leaves, the fruits of the prickly pear and plantains. The second ravage of nature in the form of drought.

A remarkable quality that distinguishes Bhabani Bhattacharya from other Indian English is that he makes his readers realize the true meaning of 'Hunger and Poverty. True, one cannot judge the impact of hunger and starvation without passing through the terrible ordeal of being hungry. Bhattacharya lived in north Indian villages and shared the sufferings of villagers as an independent observer. This peculiar experience enables her to portray authentically the real picture of hunger.

The tannery symbolizes modernity. It transforms both, the environment and the economic conditions of the village. It also brings about a drastic change in the relationship between the conditions of the villagers. While Kajoli sees it as a threat to the village life. The tannery becomes the main factor in the loss of her family. While it created employment for them it also took them away from their family members, thus degrading the importance of their family life. Bhattacharya successfully establishes that poverty, hunger, and starvation can lead to the disintegration of a family followed by innumerable suffering. In such a hostile circumstance the character Onu, the youngest boy of a peasant family, faces famine with unbelievable strength and power; even in the darkest moment of hunger, he sacrifices his all figs to his friend understanding the gravity of the time. The same benevolence is witnessed by Rahoul, while running his free kitchen he comes across an old man. An old, bent, half-naked too weak to walk surrenders his card of free food to Rahoul requesting that it could help to have food for needier. Rahoul salutes the ray of hope in those pitch-dark days of inhumanity.

He thinks:

“The richness of the human spirit! Rahoul could have laughed at the oppressive dread he had felt. He gazed at the bent, half-naked figure receding down the street, and it filled him with wistful pride and joy, standing out in his mind as a signal of hope and deliverance for the hunger-stricken masses of Bengal”. (SMH; P. NO. 141)

**Conclusion:**

To conclude I would like to state that ecocriticism aims at analyzing any text that foregrounds nature and the environment. It is a broad genre that is known by many names: green cultural studies, eco-poetics, and environmental literary criticism. For some individual thinkers, ecocriticism can be socially activist or even spiritual. Although ecocriticism can touch virtually and discipline, it generally comes back to its home ground- the human relationship with the earth when it translates into action. Ecocriticism, then, can be, but need not be politically active, as it advocates for an understanding of the world that works to heal the environmental wounds like hunger, starvation, flood, and drought that humans have inflicted upon it. Bhattacharya brings out that it is hunger and starvation followed by innumerable suffering. In the same way, Bhattacharya portrayal of hunger and poverty of the poor people of the tide country and the metaphorical use of hunger in terms of love constitute the hunger motif

a predominant feature of *So Many Hungers*. The novel focuses on the main theme of hunger and poverty at large in the environmental situation at present.

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