ISSN 2319-5339 IIS Univ.J.A. Vol.11 (4), 175-188 (2023)

(Trans)forming Affect: An Affective Reading of Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers*!

Richa Joshi Pandey

Abstract

The current paper proposes an affective reading of Bhabani Bhattacharya's novel *So Many Hungers!* It draws on Eve Sedgewick and Sedgewick and Frank's work on Affect Theory and re-reads Bhattacharya's novel from the point of view of affect, in general, and shame, in particular. The current paper is an exposition of how, within Bhattacharya's novelistic universe, shame emerges as an invaluable source of human motivation and interpersonal experience, while exploring the issue of selfhood. An affective reading of the novel would reveal, that it is affect and not the hunger drive alone, that emerges as the basic motivating factor for self-fashioning. The affective and transformational potential of shame in the novel, gestures towards the complex ramifications of different kinds of affective experiences associated with the lived experience of the great famine in Bengal.

Keywords: Affect; Co-assembly; Drive; Hunger; Shame.

The current paper proposes an affective reading of Bhabani Bhattacharya's novel entitled *So Many Hungers!*with an aim to reclaim the phenomenological ground and complexity of affect(s) associated with hunger. The paper draws on Eve Sedgewick and Sedgewick and Frank's studies on Affect Theory and re-reads Bhattacharya's novel from the point of view of affect, in general, and shame, in particular. Arguing for an intensely introspective and affective turn towards self-fashioning, shame, in particular becomes the prime motivator for enacting the self because of its unique communicability in response to internal and external psychological triggers. The current paper is an exposition of how, within Bhattacharya's novelistic universe, shame emerges as an invaluable source of human motivation and interpersonal experience in fashioning the self. Arguably, for

the novel's cast, this is as an ongoing project. An affective reading of the novel would reveal, that it is affect and not the hunger drive alone, that emerges as the basic motivating factor for self-fashioning.

The novel *So Many Hungers!* is Bhabani Bhattacharya's first novel. It was published in 1947. The novel, as suggested by the title, is a socio-political commentary on the experience of hunger by colonized subjects in Bengal, at the hands of a callous and exploitative regime under British colonizers. The novel's backdrop is India's involvement, via the British, in the Second World War. *So Many Hungers!* is a historical novel, that chronicles through its fictional characters, the Bengal famine of 1943, the Quit India Movement of 1942 and the Japanese attack on Bengal, which was then a part of British India.

Arguably, in Bhattacharya's novel, hunger is the bane of Bengal. Two plotlines are interwoven in the novel, and together, they thematize inexorable and dehumanizing forms of hunger. SamarendraBasu is a lawyer-cum-share-market-speculator-cum-businessman. He is a man of means. Having risen from a humble background, he is not unlike a Brechtian Mother Courage, whose spirit of war-profiteering stems from his inner drive to provide exceptionally well for his family. Mr Basu's family consists of his sons Rahoul, who is a Cambridge-educated astrophysicist, and Kunal, who joins the War as a British-Indian officer; Rahoul's wife and their new-born daughter Khukhu; and Mrs Basu, his wife. Together, they live in their Calcutta house. Mr Basu's father, Devesh, is a Gandhian, who lives and works amongst the impoverished village folk in the countryside.

The other plotline revolves around a peasant family who lives in the same village as Devesh. This includes Kajoli, Onu, Kanu and their parents, who are peasants and work on a small patch of land for a living. This family, along with the rest of the villagers, idolize Devesh and under his leadership, practice ahimsa towards their colonial tormentors. Rahoul too idolizes Devesh and visits him after his return from Cambridge. Here, he meets Kajoli, who is a young teenager at the time. He is impressed by the warmth that country people extend towards visitors, despite their own dire hunger. Rahoul instantly acknowledges and reciprocates the warmth extended by Kajoli and her family.

Eventually, once Devesh is arrested during a peaceful protest, other villagers join in. As a result of British involvement in the Second World War, the Japanese attack Bengal. British war policies cause a man-made fam-

ine in Bengal and there is an exodus of country people into cities, where they live in squalid conditions. Meanwhile, Kajoli's marriage to Kishore is short-lived. Unbeknown to Kajoli, Kishore has been shot down by a policeman's bullet. There is tragic irony in his death: Kishore dies on the same railway track, that was meant to take him to the city for gainful employment for the sake of his growing family.

In the prevailing atmosphere of the Quit India Movement, several Indians are jailed. Across the country, Indians participate in hunger strikes. A pregnant Kajoli, along with the remaining members of her family, which include her mother and younger brother Onu, join the exodus to the city. Here, they encounter a flail woman who has come to forage for food, but lies dying, her armpits partially eaten up by vultures. Soon, Kajoli, whose strength is also ebbing due to hunger, gives in to the sexual appetite of a sepoy, in lieu of some bread. However, in the process, she loses her embryo, which is soon devoured by a wolf. In a bloodied state, Kajoli is taken to the city hospital by the remorseful sepoy and her life is saved. Now, Kajoli, Onu and their mother are destitute on Calcutta's seedy and overcrowded streets. In a last-ditch effort to save her mother and baby brother from hunger and likely death, Kajoli almost succumbs to the sex-trade, which, in fact, she has always found most reprehensible. Fortunately for Kajoli, inspired by Gandhian ideals, she ultimately chooses a living out of selling newspapers .

Meanwhile in the city, Rahoul ultimately breaks the cover of his alibi, "The Death Ray" (Bhattacharya 100) and courts arrest and imprisonment. Next, he joins the nationalist movement in full measure. Along with Monju, his wife, he has been running free community kitchens that serve the destitute, who are, by now, rapidly pouring in in large numbers from several countryside villages. Ironically, he often receives financial aid from his father, who is an ambitious war-profiteer. Rahoul echoes Bhattacharya's affirmative and promising view of life and faith in the emergence of a new world order, despite and as a result of the war. In "The imperialist war will grow into a war of ideas, values …" (14).

The novel reiterates the Gandhian philosophies of ahimsa and satyagraha as the panacea for various social ills and injustices of the time, including hunger. Moreover, it is cogent to an affective reading of the novel that "overcoming fear, shame and guilt, internally and externally, was an integral part of the satyagraha process" (Gupta 43). However, the novel does not treat shame as an affect to be entirely overcome. Nor does it treat hunger, or even the shaming of hunger, as an entirely reparative condition.

The novel is thematically grounded in hunger, which is a basic human drive. Moreover,through an affective reading of the novel, shame emerges as the affect,that significantly motivates the novel's cast. Shame, here is not an experience, commonly associated with self-deprecation. On the contrary, shame becomes agential in orienting the self to a range of other affects, objects and events. Affect is cogent to the self, and in so doing, may both construct and contain, in other words, discipline the self. This resonates with Sedgewick and Frank's work on shame. "If affect can be a source of resistance, it is also … a mechanism for power" (Cvetkovich quoted in Touching Feeling 110).

In Sedgewick's essaywritten with Adam Frank, entitled "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins", the writers draw upon Tomkin's idea of shame as an affect motivated by both internal and external systems in response to the strange. According to Sedgewick and Frank, "Tomkins places shame, in fact, at one end of the affect polarity "shame-interest", suggesting that the pulsations of cathexis around shame, of all things, are what enable or disenable so basic a function as the ability to be interested in the world (Touching Feeling 97)".

Shame is discursively produced, culturally conditioned and embedded, while it is experiencedindividually. Within the cultural registers of the novel, shame is necessarily organized around the female body as the spatial site for shame. For example, the covered female body exists in a binary oppositional relation with the naked female body.

In Bhattacharya's novel, hunger is a drive that affect-effects every living being in the novel, including Mangala, the family cow. Moreover, hunger is effected differentially along the lines of caste, class and gender. Men, like Kishore and the novel's unnamed gas-lighter, unlike women, are shot down with impunity. Else, hunger-driven, they shrivel up bodily, during hunger-strikes in prison, or, driven by hunger, outside prison. Conversely, the female body's hunger drive is amplified and accreted within the affective figuration of the emaciated, unclothed female body, which becomes the site for a unique and perverse male fantasy, that organizes itself around and is motivated by shame. Moreover, as suggested by Sedgewick, shame, besides being in-built into the psychoanalytic register of primary narcissism, may enable a new way to discuss identity politics, one wired through the positive affective motivation engendered by the negative experience of shame. According to Eve Sedgewick, shame is disruptive, is independent of time and intention and floods into a specific moment: "… like a stigma, shame is itself a form of communication. Blazons of shame,

the fallen face, with eyes down and head averted—and to a lesser extent, the blush—are semaphores of trouble and at the same time a desire to reconstitute the interpersonal bridge" (Touching Feeling 36).

At the start of the novel, Kajoli is scared of the R. A. F. plane that comes racing at her: "Shame came upon Kajoli that she had been so affrighted, she, Devata's granddaughter, who had faced gunfire (Bhattacharya 104)."Herself-deprecating experience, at this point, seems ominously naivein contrast with the transformational experience of shame, thatawaits her. Contrastively, she experiences a different shade of shame when Kishore, her fiancé, pays her a surprise visit. Her experience of joy mingled with shame and surprise overwhelm her with the disruptive blush of young love: "Sweet shame to be seen with her groom even before they were wed. Sour shame because of her glistening face and earth smears. Pleasure at sight of him" (120).

This kind of pleasurable shame experienced in the eroticised female body, is glimpsed early on in the novel, when Rahoul's wife is breastfeeding her child. A "curious" Rahoul can only partially countenance the "grace" and "wonder" elicited by a "young woman turned mother" (13). A while later, while he is in the room alone with his wife, Monju, his gaze merges with the narrator's and elicits an unsuppressed emotion:

> Over the drawn neck of her frilled white jacket her full breast lay bare and upright, an ooze of milk on its shadowed tip. There was a new ripeness about her breast like the ripeness of fruit. Her eyes, following his, bent to her bosom, her face flushed, her hand rose out of languor to sheathe itself. But the ooze of milk lingered long in his vision, stirring an emotion he could not suppress … (as if) Monju were something more and something less, remote and unattainable. (22)

Evidently, Rahoul experiences an inexpressible, remote joy indicative of the potential omnipotence of primary narcissism at the sight of his wife's "full breast". Here, the female breast is narcissistically cathected while it is also invested with object love for the selective visibility and spectacle offered by it. Monju, conscious of and following her husband's gaze (and never, in fact, meeting it) "face flushed" covers herself, experiences shame inscribed as reticence and pleasure. This shame, in fact, "is characterised by its failure ever to renounce its object cathexis, its relation to the desire for pleasure as well as the need to avoid pain" (Sedgewick and Frank *Touching Feeling* 117).

On the contrary, a different kind of "shame-interest" around the female body, the breast in particular, is experienced by Kajoli and her mother, in response to the stout-bodied woman's insinuation about the possibility of Kajoli entering the sex-trade. Both mother and daughter have just met Neeri and her mother. Neeriappears strange to Kajoli'smother—"of marriageable age but unwed, preening herself like a zemindar's daughter!" (Bhattacharya 172). Neeri's strangeness incites shame, mingled with contempt and disgust, when Kajoli, like Neeri, who is now herown mother's "kitchen-pot", is solicited in the sex-trade.

> The stout-bodied one glared at the image of wrath, measuring the famine in her face. The hollow cheeks, the sunken eyes, the naked collar-bone breaking through the parchment skin. How long could she stew in her false pride? And the eyes came calculating upon her daughter. Starved, she had grown in comeliness. The eyes big in the face that was lean from hunger. The breasts ripe because of the pregnant womb, yet small from famishing. A type of beauty unknown to the city before the famine came. And the city liked it for a change. Yes, the fat one reckoned. The girl was worth fussing about. (185)

Arguably, this painful experience of shame, in its co-assembly with disgust and pride, is foundationally transformative for Kajoli. Eventually, Kajoli goes on to lose her foetus when she gives in to the lust of thesepoy. She is tired, emaciated, hungry and disgusted by the sexual assault. At the most vulnerable moment of this defeatist sexual intercourse, Kajoli'sbody responds by spontaneously aborting and ejecting her bloodied and premature foetus. The foetus, as it emerges between her thighs, is devoured by a wolf. Eventually, Kajoli becomes destitute in the squalid streets of Calcutta city. At the brink of salvaging her sick mother and brother's lives, wilfully, she makes a choice against flesh-trade. Motivated by her experience of shame, Kajoli takes active control of her body, and chooses, instead, to sell newspapers, a socially respectable trade that reinstates her within the framework of social legitimacy, where too, the potentially shaming demands of gender segregation have been kept intact. Moreover, she both transgresses and preserves the gender categories that condition and are conditioned by shame, when she enters the market economy via newspaper sales, which is otherwise a particularly male domain. In doing so, Kajoli's accreted spectrum of experience around shame, enables her to re-negotiate productively and creatively, certain shades of shame with its associated affects and memory traces, particularly those related to the arousal of hurt and pain. Shame becomes pivotal in orienting her

towards recuperating and evolving a sense of self that associates shame as pleasure. Eventually, Kajolievolves into being differentially conditioned towardspicking up the pieces and mending the trauma of her past.

Sedgewick and Frank argue that "while the affect of shame-humiliation encompasses shyness, shame and guilt, it is distinct from the affect of disgust-contempt… shame is often intimately related to and easily confused with contempt, particularly self-contempt" (*Shame and its Sisters* 134) and that guilt is "internalized contempt" (134). Guilt, particularly, has been viewed as resulting from "the coassembly of shame with the affect fear" and that "inherent to the emotion guilt is *fear* of reprisal" (Nathanson 46). Sedgewick observes that conventionally speaking, "shame attaches to and sharpens the sense of what one is, whereas guilt attaches to what one does" (*Touching Feeling*37). In the novel, remorse or guilt is an emotion that is experienced both by Kajoli and the sepoy, who sexually exploits the former's vulnerability. Evidently, their guilt and remorse arecentered around their respective hunger drives: Kajoli's hunger for food and the sepoy's hunger for sex.

Kajoli's hunger drive is directed towards only one object, food, through a simple "means-end" (99) equation. But the remorse over her failure to procure its equivalent for her family, is the cause of Kajoli'smotivation and her behaviour, evinced in this instance in the form of shame in its co-assembly with guilt or remorse and the absence of any register(s) of feeling, including the response to fear or disgust.

> He (the sepoy) clutched her arm. She shrank a step, her eyes opening wide on his face, copper-like. She knew that face. She had seen that face peering from the Army-trucks that roared past. But she did not cry out, cower. All feeling was dead in her save one dull ache: remorse that she had eaten up all the bread, all. (Bhattacharya 204)

Later, the otherwise "god-fearing" sepoy, a family man himself, too feels remorse. "Remorse stabbed him. What had he done … What devil had seized his soul?" (209).Notably, Sedgewick and Frank, argue that sexuality, as a drive, operates through a binary (potent/impotent) model. Yet, its association with attention, motivation or action occurs in its affective co-assembly with a range of differential factors. In this case, it is the sepoy's spontaneous attention to his act of guilt, that motivates him to act with alacrity. As a result, he does manage to help salvage Kajoli's life. Evidently, these shifts in the differential readerly registers of guilt around

different kind of hungers, create moments of disruption, that operate through a circularity of affect.

Arguably, it is the affective amplification of shame and not hunger, per se, that provides the impetus to Kajoli so asto reassert her agency and reinstate a vision-praxis for change, despite and beyond her experience of shame. Clearly, Kajoli's social hall of mirrors, expose her to a range of shaming and shameful experiences. Furthermore, her external and internal psychological triggers inhere co-extensively with her socially embedded complex of shame-humiliation-disgust-sadness-enjoyment. Her experience of shame is pivotal and "self-validating", "without any further referent" (Tomkins quoted in Sedgewick and Frank *Shame and its Sisters* 7) and "involves a gestalt, the duck to interest's (or enjoyment's) rabbit" (Sedgewick *Touching Feeling* 116). In fact, Kajoli's experience of shame with disgust at the stout woman's sexual soliciting, becomes the switch-point for enacting and engendering a differential sense of self and body, one that reconstitutes identity in post-gender terms.

Another unnamed, destitute girl on the streets, exemplifies the experience of shame by reconstituting guilt as shame; this time, in her audience. Her gesture of experiencing shame confuses her audience and creates a radically new middle ground for countenancing shame in the *other*. Evident in the below-mentioned excerpt from the novel, she manifests shame through a 'peek-a-boo' viewing of her breasts, wherein, she looks "starward" before she hangs her head, gaze averted, in shame, in an act of delayed decoding. In an interventionist way, the unnamed girl,performatively displays herself as a hypersexualized and eroticised vulnerable woman who can re-configure shame to satisfy her own hunger drive, and by extension,that of her family's, embedded as she is, within the social imaginary of the street's destitute, who, as her audience and beneficiaries, share her shame, both in terms of shaming and being shamed.

> She said no word, only rose to her feet, languid, slender of limb, no taller than Kajoli. Arms drawn, unfolded over her bosom, she stood erect, and lifted her face starward, the moulding of her neck revealed. Her lips curled with a smile that was no smile. Then the arms unfolded, stripping the ragged garment from her breast. So, she stood bare, the hooded street light full upon her, a bronze image with eyes reaching starward …… The crowd gaped, no titters came. .. (she) dropped her face and drew the saree back to her bosom and sank on her knees. She hung her head. She looked shamed.

> Another rupee clinked into the bowl… (she) rose once more and bared herself …bronze again, a different mould. And the ravages of hunger showed on her flesh… her face lowered, she looked more shamed. When a third rupee had clinked into the bowl and she stood again, the lips that curled with a smile trembled and at the corner of each eye a big tear glistened. (Bhattacharya 254)

Rahoul, too, has been witnessing this scene as audience; witnessing without acting. Here, Rahoul's gaze merges with that of the omniscient narrator and the girl's experience. "She looked shamed" (Bhattacharya 254) is recounted in a way that highlights the context of the act, not just in terms of the act, per se rather in terms of the conditions that ascribe shame in a particular manner, embedded within the individual as well as their social sphere. Here, the narrative voiceacts periperformatively. It relies on the unspoken, in the silences and the ellipses. Sedgewick and Frank argue that "In contrast to the performative, the periperformative is the mode in which people may invoke illocutionary acts in the explicit contexts of other illocutionary acts" (*Touching, Feeling* 79). The description of the unnamed girl's actions and the response they elicit, culminate in the periperformative statement about shame. The statement goes on to characterise and engender shame in her, thereby interpellating her, via a proxy disembodied voice. This is evident in the narrative description of the girl, in the excerpt quoted above.

The recognition of shaming as interpellation, involves a self-reflexive and spectacular viewing of shame. This involves both shaming and being shamed, which is not only affectively embedded within the novelistic universe, but also extends into the readerly affective experience of shame. Shame as affect, is contagious and disruptive in the way that it can enjoin the reader with the gaping "crowd", onlookers both, that cannot titter. Their response to the experience of perverse pleasure as pain is partial and self-reflexive; it is produced at the expense of the naked and hungry female. This experience of shame is foreclosed by its possible recognition of the onlooker's complicity in the ascription and production of shame. The 'ravages of hunger' are experienced by both the onlooker and the looked-upon. The crowd haven't been able to act, only gape and 'not titter'; their inaction has made room for the girl's own radical and transgressive action in the market economy, which, in turn makes room for a display of the female body as a spectacular commodity. Ultimately, the unnamed girl, has found a way to trans(per)form her shameful experiences to a 'spectacular' window-shopping available for mass consumption.

The repetition of the entire spectacle of shame enacted and experienced in the unnamed girl's second and third gestures of exposure, indicate a deeply introspective and mutating consciousness. This involves an orienting of the female self towards an acknowledgement of, in respons(es) to the *other*, the conditions of possibility that configure her own bodily shame. Correspondingly, she harnesses this experience of shame towards engendering productive social and economic action. The unnamed girl's actions, therefore, exemplify the phenomenological agency motivated by shame. She incorporates the onlooker's shaming and shamed gaze. She re-combines her own spectacular shame with her reticence and resolve. This empowers her to radically re-constellate her relationship with the external world in a way that is disruptive, agential and oriented towards a rich terrain of consciousness about her own body image and body schema. The affective thrust of the supplementarity of the unnamed girl's interventionist action as and in addition to the viewer's inaction, forms the basis of the reader's subjective encounter with the former's multiple agencies.

A methodological orientation aimed at unmasking and defamiliarizing the text while looking for hidden or elliptical meanings of the various aspects of the novel may take away from the richness of the individuals' emotional and pragmatic experience. Arguably, for example, the novel exemplifies Rahoul's identity as fluid and dynamic. He co-evolves with the novel's "many hungers": From being born into privilege and receiving a DSc from Cambridge to ultimately denouncing his privilege and social status to courting arrest and imprisonment along with the teeming millions of India's impoverished, subjugated and uprising population. Yet his identity explained in social constructivist terms, would focus entirely on "why" he did what he did and not 'what' or 'how' he did it.

Drawing upon Sedgewick and Sedgewick and Frank's work as mentioned earlier in the paper,Rahoul's experience may be explored in affective terms. This would be a form of reparative praxis that could undercut the possible "neglect of emotion, mood and disposition" (Felski 11) in the conditioning of his subjectivity and agency in experiential and embodied terms. According to Rita Felski:

> For Sedgewick and Frank, constructivism remains caught up in the very dualisms that it strives to oppose. They therefore draw out the less salutary aspects of the linguistic turn, with its absolutizing of a semiotic model of analysis, its dismissal of biology and physiology, and its flattening out of the thickness, complexity and

unpredictability of affective life. (11)

Notwithstanding his strong ideological-intellectual claims, Rahoul's experiences, like the other characters in the novel, are embedded in and respond to his affective resonances with others' experiences. In his first brush with prison, the narrative voice discusses the tactical and historical situation in Bengal and the reader's gaze is drawn to Rahoul, who is watching from his first-floor laboratory window: A European sergeant is dashing the tricolour underfoot and is charging at a youth who is trying to retrieve it. In that instant, as Rahoul "lost(es) himself", he experiences a spontaneous outburst of affect. This is an affective event that elicitspositive and agential actionby Rahoul.

Evidently, Rahoul's experience of violence isembedded within a specific historical situation. Yet, anidentity critique, enabled by the poststructural framework or a sociological approach, would garner little in terms of mapping his actions that are inextricably interlinked with his emotional and affective experiences. In addition, a materialist correlation with affect, arguably helps to delve deeper into his ambient experience.

Locationally, his first-floor scientific elevated-ness, brackets him into a world of science, intellect and rational thought, away from the emotionally imbued spirit of those fighting for freedom in the here and now. Until this moment, Rahoul's voice has often merged with the omniscient narrative voice, which factually locates the colonized subject's objective understanding of the historical situation in the years immediately preceding the Indian independence. However, at this point, Rahoul does not speak or draw out an internal rationale, but "rushes out" (Bhattacharya 92). The productive ambivalence of his own national dilemma accumulates into and as the rich bodily experience of his felt emotions. As a result, Rahoul's earlier ponderousness transmutes into being "possessed by one thought: Hold up the Flag!" (98). He transcends the limits of his realist reading of the situation in the past, a realism elsewhere exemplified in the narrative voice as well as in various intellectual strands shot through in the novel within various speech-acts. Likewise, these speech-acts have been exemplified in the illocutionary statements made elsewhere by Devata, Samarendra, Rahoul himself, Kunal and various European bureaucrats.

Rahoul's experience resonates with the narrative voice, however transformed, in affective and revelatory terms: "Five minutes before, he, a calm scientist, could not have imagined himself in this picture. It was very strange" (98).Here, his objective, intellectual viewing of the situation,

changes into a correlating, co-existing and disruptively transformed experience. At this point, Rahoul emerges asa fluid and dynamic individual and may be viewed in queer, anti-essentialist and non-linguistic terms.

Moreover, Rahoul maps his emotional experience in the liminal and overlapping space between the individual body as well as the individual's connect with the body-politic.

> (Rahoul's) leg burned like fire. And something deep within burned fiercer than fire … Later he knew. Authority was goading, provoking the movement …(which revealed) Authority's bitter hatred of the people on who's bones Empire had been built …(99)

Attacked by the lathi on his leg and dragged into the police-van, Rahoul's own experience of the pain is not localized on his leg but inheres in the "combinatorial complexity" (Anderson 5) of many affects including interest, surprise, anger and distress.

On his release, Rahoul wonders if all other prisoners were also released along with him. In fact, he soon realizes that there is no "rare gesture of goodwill" (Bhattacharya 99) to be had from the side of the Beckettian Godot of "Authority" (58). The colonizers have acted explicitly in accordance with the unambiguous and final word ensuing from Authority's end in a top-down trajectory. They have not released *all* the prisoners who were taken in custody along with him on this occasion. In fact, Samarendra has had to ingeniously plan Rahoul's release by strategically deploying the grandiloquent and pseudoscientific rhetoric of the "The Death Ray"(100) alibi. Contrastively, Rahoul has spoken only to answer the call of his students who are "deferential" (99) and "hang on his word". Else, Rahoul has withheld his word strategically and when pressed for details "said nothing to deny, nothing to affirm, he had only laughed" (100). Thus, Rahoul's gesture of laughter is implicit, ambiguous, agential and is (re)enacted, in a deliberate deferment, encoded in the subterfuge posed by the Death Ray premise and his own laughter.

Arguably, the complexity of Rahoul'soevre of speech-action is embedded in his affectively amplified experience of hunger. His own hunger for social justice and equality is interwoven with the hunger drive of his people. At the end of the novel, he is arrested and imprisoned. Rahoul has seen hunger in its many ineluctable forms and has worked tirelessly at the relief centre to relinquish it. "Rahoul knew in his spirit the hungers of his people … In his blood and spirit he had so many hungers!" (156). Rahoul

is haunted by misery and his own feelings of combined compassion as interest, anger, shame, surprise, joy, fear, distress, disgust and contempt are part of a productive contagion experience by the subcontinent at large and expressed spontaneously in song and poetry. These affects and emotions merge within the narratorial voice, making Rahoul's own affective experience, prescient and engaging:

> The bitter mockery left him and sadness dimmed his eyes, haunted by the endless vision of misery…. He was alone and in enemy hands. Yet he was far from alone. He was a ripple in the risen tide of millions for whom prisons enough could never be devised, nor shackles forged. And strong exultation burned in his eyes and a strange look of conquest kindled in his face as he gave his voice to the united voices:
>
> The more they tighten the chains,
>
> The more they loosen! (288).

To conclude, *So Many Hungers!* chronicles the hungers experienced by individual characters in the turbulent years of its novelistic reckoning. In particular, an affective reading of the transformational potential of shame in the novel, gestures towards the various ramifications of different affective experiences. These includethe complexities associated with the subjective and lived experience of the great famine in Bengal in 1943. Shame and its related emotions become all but impossible to overlook. Shame, in particular ,and affect, in general, emanate from culture and are a vital indicator of how social injustice and inequality operate at the individual and collective levels. Given the grimness of the novelistic encounter of hunger, the affective correlation of hunger and shame, gestures towards the possibilities of re-imagining individual and collective identities in non-essentialist and non-dominant modes that can problematize reparative and restorative demands for individual and collective dignity.

Reparation, redemption and restoration of dignity, in the face of lasting degradation and dehumanisation caused by the famine, may not always be possible. A child suckling at a dead mother's breast, a woman being pecked alive by vultures because she is to famished and weak to fight back or a woman, who chooses to bury her child instead of letting it live a life of degradation and abject hunger, constitute an anti-essentializing and starkly affective archival imagery of the dehumanised human or the un-motherly mother in the novel. However, the focus on an affective encounter of these images may help harness negative affective responses

and orient us towards a readerly embrace of shame. Alternatively, the affective appraisal of shame's transformative potential can critically reclaim the ground for subjectivity and individual self-fashioning.

Works Cited:

Primary Source:

Bhattacharya, Bhabani. *So Many Hungers!* Hind Kitab, 1947.

Secondary Sources:

Anderson, Ben. *Encountering affect: Capacities, apparatuses, conditions*. Routledge, 2017.

Anker, Elizabeth S., and Rita Felski, eds. *Critique and Postcritique*. Duke University Press, 2017.

Gupta, Ruchira. "Gandhi and Women in the Indian Freedom Struggle." *Social Scientist*, vol. 47, no. 1-2, 2019, pp. 37–48, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26611494. Accessed 20 Apr. 2022.

Nathanson, Donald L. *The Many Faces of Shame*. The Guilford Press, 1987.

Sedgwick, Eve K. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Duke University Press, 2003.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins (Written with Adam Frank)."*Touching Feeling.* Duke University Press, 2003. 93-122.

Sedgwick, Eve K, Adam Frank, and Irving E. Alexander. *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*. Duke University Press, 2006.