

**CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES, CALCUTTA,
R-1 BAISHNABGHATA PATULI,
KOLKATA 700094**

GENERAL SEMINAR

Dr. Sourit Bhattacharya
Assistant Professor in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Roorkee

will give a talk titled:

“From Colonial Famine to Postcolonial Starvation: Two Novels from Bengal”

Abstract

Colonial India witnessed a number of devastating famines in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although the colonial British government maintained that ‘natural’ reasons such as the shortage of rainfall, drought, etc., were responsible for these famines, scholars like BM Bhatia, Amartya Sen, Cormac O’Grada and others subsequently showed that the capitalist-imperialist, administrative, and governmental reasons gradually prepared the grounds for famines which the ‘natural’ factors then escalated into disasters. More recently, a number of scholars such as David Arnold, Jean Dreze, and Stephen Deveraux have shown how famines have transitioned into hunger and malnutrition conditions in the postcolonial periods. This seminar will engage with the issues of colonial famine and postcolonial starvation through a reading of two novels from Bengal – Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers!* (1947) and Amalendu Chakraborty’s *Ākāler Sandhāne (In Search of Hunger)*, 1982). It will demonstrate that the authors have used several narrative strategies to record India’s tragic transition from colonial famine to postcolonial hunger conditions. In doing so, it will argue that, the novels have not only anticipated some of the relevant historical-sociological debates on famines and hunger but also showcased literature’s formalist-aesthetic investigations into the domain of the ‘disastrous’.

Bhabani Bhattacharya’s novel was published four years after the 1943 Bengal famine and two months after Indian independence from colonial rule. This publication history is important because the novel does not only show how the famine was ‘structural’ in character and actively manufactured by reasons of the World War II and speculative mode of capitalism, but also looks forward to a better and more stable postcolonial future. Bhattacharya uses an analytical-affective mode, marked by

narratorial reasoning, journalistic documentation of the horrors of the famine, and sensation and melodrama to raise public awareness on the issue.

Chakraborty's novel, written almost forty years after the famine, shows that our postcolonial future has been equally bleak and disillusioning. Chakraborty holds the uneven nature of postcolonial development responsible for widespread starvation and malnutrition in the rural areas of Bengal. He uses a metafictional mode of narrative – film-making on the famine where the film script is the famine-narrative – along with techniques from theatre (debate, monologue, aside, etc.) to express that famines and floods are now engineered by the State to make the population subservient to it, and that famine has transformed into a chronic case of starvation.

Date: Wednesday, 20 June, 2018; Time: 3 – 5 pm

Venue: CSSSC's Seminar Room, Patuli Campus

Debdatta Chowdhury
(Convener, Seminar Committee)
All are welcome to attend.