



## BHABANI BHATTACHARYA'S *HE WHO RIDES A TIGER*: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT:

*He Who Rides A Tiger*, written by the renowned post-independence Indian novelist Bhabani Bhattacharya, focuses on how racial and class inequality pushes a protagonist away from morality and towards vengeance. When that emotion begins to entrap him in a never-ending cycle of suffering and agony, his confession saves him and gives him the ultimate victory over himself. His writings make obvious the novelist's worries with the social, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual issues that India was experiencing shortly after gaining independence from the British. The purpose of *He Who Rides A Tiger* is to show how the religion and the caste system both are false. A dramatic sequence of events demonstrates the crucial spiritual direction that emerges in times of crisis, even if one is provoked to feelings of retaliation and caught in one's own trap.

**Keywords** : *Religion, Caste, Revenge, Hunger, Exploitation*

Author and novelist Bhabani Bhattacharya is renowned for portraying contemporary India during a time of change and rapid development. He is concerned with the truths of contemporary society, its problems, and their causes. He does not believe in 'art for art's sake'. The innovative work of Bhabani Bhattacharya is directly related to a critical period in a new nation's development. Both India's recent acquisition of freedom and the massive freedom movements that came before it had significantly altered society. The people's severe sufferings, mental anguish, and humiliation brought on by economic issues and the social evils of caste discrimination were leading them away from the cherished dreams of freedom fighters in a number of different directions. In fact, a growing political, religious, and cultural consciousness in India is closely related to the growth of novels. Bhattacharya's novels reflect his concern for India's current issues. *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960) is concerned to demonstrate the true meaning of freedom and the exploitation of the simple and innocent villagers by the greedy.

*So Many Hungers!* (1947) is about men's hungers against the backdrop of the Bengal famine and the Quit India Movement; *Music for Mohini* (1952) dramatizes the conflict between the old and new ways of life; *He Who Rides A Tiger* (1954) deals with the issues of hunger, poverty, and caste.

In 1967, Bhabani Bhattacharya was given the Sahitya Akademi award for his novel entitled *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966). This novel won the award because of his innovative way of handling the English language, which made it suitable for giving expression to the local feelings of a Bengal village. Additionally, Bhabani Bhattacharya's eye for details and flair for history combined together with his full awareness of the contemporary social, political, economic, and cultural problems.

The two most significant people in Bhabani Bhattacharya's life were Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, both of them were prominent figures in their time. Their influence on the novelist could be seen clearly in all of Bhattacharya's novels. Bhattacharya was a

lifelong admirer of Rabindranath Tagore and used many of his ideas in his works. Bhattacharya, who, being the contemporary of Tagore and Gandhi, was one of the first people to recognize the potential for religious and spiritual manifestations in human behaviour. He shared their view that human beings' fundamental characteristic is their religious affiliation. Human beings are the pinnacle of God's creative endeavours and were made in the divine likeness. Therefore, just like all of Bhabani Bhattacharya's other works of fiction, *He Who Rides A Tiger* illustrates how essential spiritual qualities of man can ultimately prevail, even when faced with the gravest of difficulties.

The book *He Who Rides A Tiger* sheds light on the depraved practices of a false religion that is both empty and pretentious. This religion takes advantage of the blind faith of innocent poor people, and it is also used as a tool to rob wealthy, corrupt people in order to put their troubled conscience at ease. *He Who Rides A Tiger*, much like *So Many Hungers!*, shows clearly the author's preoccupation with hunger; however, in this book, the emphasis is placed more on the moral wrongness of discrimination based on caste in addition to discrimination based on economic status. Poor people's hearts are filled with rage and a desire for vengeance due to the callous attitudes of wealthy and high-caste people.

In spite of his low caste, Kalo, the devoted father of a daughter named Chandralekha who had lost her mother, had lofty goals and expectations for his daughter's future. Even though Chandralekha experienced discrimination at school because of her low caste as she was growing up, the Bengal famine in 1943 had many more unhappinesses in store for both her father and herself. Chandralekha's father Kalo died of starvation. He was forced to leave the village in order to find work in the city, but the meager thefts he committed in order to satisfy

his hunger got him sent to jail. The daughter Chandralekha also travelled to the city, and once she arrived, her father located her in the brothel, where he was also forced to work as a pimp, and he was able to rescue her just in time. Kalo was filled with rage and frustration, which led her to the feelings of vindictiveness. At that moment, he recalled a trick that his fellow inmate Biten had taught him to fool people of high caste and wealth. First, he transformed himself into the revered priest Mangal Adhikari, who received respect and genuflection from the upper and middle classes. In spite of the fact that the myth of caste and superiority was shattered in his hands, he continued to uphold it and use it as a source of strength. Was he using it as a defense against himself? Or perhaps the sacred thread that he wore across his chest grid his most inner soul as well.

Kalo gradually started enjoying his role and identified himself with the role. Lekha, too, got uplifted in her spiritual status, as she was advertised as the mother of seven blisses and capable of doing miracles. Still, his heart was with the poor and needy in society, and he had to change the old tradition of offering Lord Shiva's used milk to the holy river in the temple. He started giving support to temple gardener to provide milk to the hungry children of the neighborhood. Another step he took in breaking tradition, was to give shelter to Obhijit, a destitute boy. Lekha, however, felt suffocated. When Lekha adopted the orphan boy, Obhijit, the name of her unborn brother, the tension between the father and daughter reached at a high point. The fraudulent behaviour and lie became like a tiger, even when he developed in him the feeling of guilt, Mangal Adhikari could not get down from it.

On the day of Yagna, Kalo confessed his real story before the large gathering. The people of his caste rejoice at this. Lekha, too, was elated at this turn of events. To her, their roles in the

temple were as oppressive as the hold of the brothel. Kalo's confession struck at the root of the false belief of the superiority of Brahmins and the rich. He was freed from the fake roles imposed upon him from time to time and qualms of conscience. From the role of honest blacksmith and affectionate and proud father that he loved, he became a thief, a pimp, and then a fake priest. Kalo fought the unjust social system, where human dignity and honour were devalued and man was compelled to become savage and wicked. So, Kalo's turning into Mangal Adhikari was not only to earn living but to attack back at those who hurt him and the strong feeling of revenge. With the objections raising their heads and Lekha's decision to be Motichand's fourth wife made him question himself his real motives, and he decided to tear the mask of fraud and hypocrisy.

*He Who Rides A Tiger* has a similarity with *The Guide* (1958) of R.K. Narayan, as both the protagonists pose as priests. Bhattacharya's social commitment is obvious at the end of the novel, the protagonist's real purpose was to teach a lesson to society for his humiliation, not to hoard money or power. The power of spiritual inheritance, even in the so-called lower section of society, emerges in the moment of crisis. This is one of the great messages conveyed through the artistic presentation of the emotional upheavals of characters in the novel.

Like the caste system and superstitious beliefs, Bhattacharya's novels show the transition period of India, when after a long time, the newly free country had to find its path, retaining many of its precious cultural and traditional values inherited from the past while rejecting many obsolete customs and western onslaught of materialistic attitudes.

Not only the misery of the poor, the novel records the gap between the rich and poor, affluence and extreme hunger, as well as, the callous attitudes of the rich and corrupt. Since

society has labelled Kalo as a thief, a convict, and an immoral trafficker, out of indignation he decided to expose the hollowness of their religion. When he gets success, he, too, starts enjoying riches and power. Still, inside him, he could hear the roar of the cries of Bengal.

His book centers on the evils and problems as well as the author's balanced approach to life, which is demonstrated dramatically through various scenarios in place of straightforward assertions. Bhabani Bhattacharya shows, through the portrayal of some of the revolting realities of contemporary Indian society, how such cruel practices lead to the rejection of the long-cherished moral values of otherwise virtuous and honest people. The centuries-old custom that formed the basis of Kalo's internal climate is the target of his decision to wage war.

Kalo, the protagonist, becomes the representative of all the marginalized people who suffer innumerable humiliations in society by fighting against the powerful and privileged and exposing them to show their real faces to themselves. Ultimately depicting the essential nobility of his soul and heart by renouncing the high position, he demonstrates the eagerness of the novelist to present an aspect of an ideal character. Kalo's story depicts the novelist's desire to present an aspect of an ideal character, acting as a mirror to represent the realistic picture of the society.

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