

Depiction of Poverty and Hunger in Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So*

Many Hungers and He Who Rides a Tiger

Dr. Poonam Rani

HOD English Department &

Associate Dean Student Welfare

School of Arts, Media and Education Department

Indus International University, Una (H.P.)

Naveenta

M. Phil Scholar

Indus International University, Una (H.P.)

India

Abstract

Indo-Anglian literature forms an integral part of English literature. The term Indo-Anglian refers to the original creative writing in English by Indians. Indo-Anglian writing has reasons to grow, like American literature or Australian literature or Canadian literature. The only difference between the two begins that, while other literatures are the products of English speaking people, Indo-Anglian literature is written by Indians whose mother-tongue is not English. Among the writers of Indo-Anglian fiction R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, K. S. Venkataramani, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Bhabani Bhattacharya have achieved considerable name.

*Thus, this paper, at the outset, introduces the readers to the origin of Indian English novel laying focus on the Indian themes like hunger, poverty, exploitation, class consciousness etc and then projects focus on the ' Depiction of Poverty and Hunger in Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers and He Who Rides a Tiger*'.*

Key words: Hunger, Human spirit, High caste, Low caste, Freedom etc.

Introduction

Bhabani Bhattacharya, winner of the Sahitya Academy award, is a gifted writer who ranks with some of the best Indian novelists writing in English. Bhattacharya has both fictional and non-fictional works to his credit, but he is best known for his novels which have received the highest critical acclaim in Indian and abroad. The works of Bhabani Bhattacharya depict the life of man in relation to society. Sometimes they also portray the predicament of man in relation to Destiny. His entire works center round the dictum “Art for the sake of life” Art must have a social purpose. Bhattacharya thinks that literature can have the main purpose of making mankind better by giving them the truthful picture of society.

This is what we find in almost all his major works like *So Many Hungers* (1947) and *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954) etc. But a thorough perusal of his works also reveals the author’s rich craftsmanship, his poetic and aesthetic presentation of a dry and harsh situation hunger and poverty and above all, his rich symbolic and connotative description. The central theme of Bhattacharya’s novels is poverty and hunger. His works also deal with disease, sufferings of the poor and the deserted, social evils, tensions and pretensions, caste politics, tradition and modernity etc. In brief, his novels are a microcosm of India.

The author rightly holds the view;

“A novelist may well be concerned with today, the current hour or moment, if it is meaningful for him, if it moves him sufficiently into emotional response”.(p.18)

There has been a great line of writers in Indian English Writings who showed the theme of poverty and hunger, despair and desolation in their respective works. Mulk Raj Anand has beautifully presented a very realistic picture of poverty and hunger in the deserted lives of the untouchables- who are tyrannized by the upper caste people without any rhyme or reason. Its poverty which compels Bakha, the hero, to face many ups and downs, taunts and jeers.

The other great novelist who deals with the theme of poverty and hunger is Kamala Markandaya. Her works, *Nectar in Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice* are the novels on the same theme. The sense of adjustment and reconciliation between two diametrically opposed situations in the leading theme of Bhattacharya’s novels. As a matter of fact, Bhattacharya was not opposed to the sexual portrayal in literature as such. He is a great realist. So he cannot neglect it

altogether. What he is really opposed to is the cheap description of sex or vulgar exploitation of sex? He has a very good opinion about the sexual portrayal of Hemingway and D. H. Lawrence. He observed:

“The flow of cheap, paper-backed, vulgar, low taste books reveling in sex descriptions cannot be welcome. I have revulsion for them. But look at Lawrence. He creates a whole world of this much tabooed felling and yet the descriptions are most beautiful and excel in their lyrical quality. Look at Hemingway and you will learn how sex can be a theme to write upon, without making it repulsive”. (p.2)

Bhattacharya's first novel, *So Many Hungers* (1947) realistically deals with the theme of poverty engendered by Bengal famine in the early forties. The title 'hungers' has been connotatively used. It has two meanings- hunger for food and hunger for sex. Bhattacharya shows how the general people are starving to death for want of food and how, on the other hand, a sex- starved soldier rapes the destitute rustic girl, Kajoli.

The novel portrays the two diabolical forces of war and famine which sucked the blood of the poor. His harrowing account of a famine in Bengal and the merry and the joy of the profiteers and black marketers are very thoughtfully and beautifully projected, through a bit exaggerated and sentimental. The main objective of Bhattacharya's writing is to resent the Indian scenario with a view to change it. Being a social realist, he is also engrossed with human predicament. He analyses the real cause of the famine.

Bhattacharya sketches the characters of the girl Kajoli, her mother and her brother. Another urban family of Samarendra Basu in Calcutta consists of his wife, two sons Rahoul, his wife Manju and Kunal. These two families make the two components of the plot. The stories of these two families run parallel till the end of the novel. The novel is full of horrible scenes of hunger and exploitation.

Bhattacharya has a through grasp of his basic theme of hunger. He dealt with most of its significant aspects. In this novel, Kajoli and her family are the symbols of poverty and hunger. If there is any protagonist in this novel, it is hunger. All the characters represent various types of hungers. People hurt by bombs during those days are promptly taken to hospitals, but nobody bothers about those who are hurt terribly by hunger.

On the other side, Rahoul is a victim of *So Many Hungers*. He shows his hunger for research and freedom, Kunal has hunger for adventures; Samarendra has hunger for money. Manju is hungry for money. Devesh Basu, and Kajoli's father and brother have shown hunger for freedom. So, it would be wrong to say that this novel successfully documents the hunger and exploitation through the behavioral patterns of various characters.

He Who Rides a Tiger, the finest of all the novels of Bhattacharya deals with the theme of poverty and utter helplessness. Both *So Many Hungers* and *He Who Rides a Tiger* have the background and the detailed description of the Bengal famine of 1943 which rocked the foundation of humanity. Though there is a marked difference in the treatment of famine in both the novels, but the common thing is that in both the works the common people are caught in the whirlpool of natural catastrophe.

The whole story revolves round the protagonist Kalo, a simple poor blacksmith of the village who wants to lead a very peaceful life. But, poverty and circumstances make him a changed man. He wants to jet his fury and resentment against an entirely cold and indifferent society which revolves on the two hinges of caste and cash. In the very beginning of the novel, the novelist exposes the corruptions and belittling attitude of the upper caste men- who are in great illusion in giving value to the status of birth in preference to that of merit.

The title of the novel, "*He Who Rides a Tiger*" is based on the ancient saying that, "*He Who Rides a Tiger cannot dismount*". But, here the case of the hero, Kalo is different. He has the courage to dismount from the tiger in the hour of his critical juncture. Raju the protagonist of R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* passes through the same problems in the temple of a remote village. He never exposes his reality. But Kalo pays attention to the cordial call of soul and develops his wisdom to face the critical situation and goes back to his original state so that he may identify himself to the society. It is consciousness that overtakes him in the last phase of his drama. Raju achieved humanity through his deep devotion to the cause of the villagers. But Kalo got that status by dint of the power of consciousness.

It's quite interesting to note that the story of the novel is full of irony and contrasts, antithesis and balance. Kalo is out to rebel against the cruelties and indifference of society. But on the other hand, Lekha, the daughter of Kalo, terribly afraid of the consequences of the whole

history regarding her father's sudden transformation. Therefore, the novel explicitly depicts how rich people are savagely indifferent to the hungry men. About her character Dr. Syamala Rao observes:

“She is wondering how to go back to the old futilities after this nine days wonder. She is out to rebel against her father. She speaks strange words that the way of struggle against fear is the true way. She has no craving for the good things of life. She is not for divine role. She is all too earthly, too human”. (p.12)

He Who Rides a Tiger serves as a true reflection of modern life and the best example is the protagonist Kalo. Kalo is a man of accepted conventions. His roots also run deep into age old habits of mind and beliefs. Kalo suffers a lot because of his low caste. Bhattacharya presents the misery of the poor as well as rich in the novel. He also shows the contrast between goodness and hypocrisy, property and poverty. Bhattacharya appears to hint at the sincerity and discipline of Convent schools.

In those days though education was confined to only higher classes, Lekha got distinctions and a gold medal proving that intelligence is not the sole right of a privileged class. Thus Kalo's existential encounter with the conventional system values- social as well as legal- makes him a perfect man. Kalo and Lekha both are very important in the novel. They suffer terribly on account of hunger. They lose their home, peace, profession and morals. Bhattacharya has treated hunger as the worst of social evils in the novel. The novel is an attempt to remove class and caste barriers so as to achieve their synthesis. In the novel Bhattacharya is painfully conscious of his role as a writer. He deals with the life and tensions of the poor and middle class people.

The novel is an attack on those who were profited by people's misery during the famine, and those who exploited them as caste tyrants. The story runs rapidly rushing with emotions and distress. Kalo gets embittered with the society. It becomes indifferent to his poverty. Bhattacharya's themes revolve round day-to-day life incidents and matters. So, at last I can say that the novel successfully documents the importance of traditional as well as modern values.

Conclusion

Thus, it is very clear that Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels are devoted to the exclusive exploitation of social and political realities of life in the country. His novels closely examine the

social and economic problems of the Indian people arising out of hunger, poverty, famine exploitation etc. As, a novelist, Bhattacharya is least concerned with philosophical themes- he is interested in the artistic depiction of the social economic and political realities of life and Indian society.

In most of his novels we find that the story is based on clash or conflict of two opposing stands. The plot of '*So Many Hungers*' and '*He Who Rides a Tiger*' is based on a contrast between the forces of nationalism and thereof established set up of the society, the simplicity of the village life and the sophistication of the city life. In his entire novels one can find that India and its contemporary views make the very basis of all his novels.

As a thinker writer Bhattacharya presents an affirmative picture of India and its cultural values. As a novelist he is true to his purpose of writing and his character delineation and presentation of Indian people's problems and challenges is artistic and in-depth. His mastery and control over the incidents and events of the novel is really marvelous. This adds to his success as a novelist and social realist of present day India.

Volume IV,
Issue XII
December 2016

IJELLH
International Journal of English
Language, Literature and Humanities

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
ISSN : 2321-7065

Indexed, Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal

Works Cited:

Bhattacharya, Bhabani: *So Many Hungers* quoted by K.R.S. Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, p. 413. Print.

Bhattacharya, Bhabani: *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Arnold Publishers, New Delhi, 1977, p. 181. Print.

Iyengar, K.R.S: *Indian Writing in English*, Sterling Publications, New Delhi, 1962, p. 414. Print.

Joshi, S: "An Evening with Bhabani", *The Sunday Standard*, (April 27, 1969). Print.

Rao, Syamala: Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly, 1988, p 58. Print.