

Depiction of Social Eveils In Bhabani Bhattacharya's Novel He Who Rides A Tiger

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Abstract

Bhabani Bhattacharya is a reputed and creative Indo-Anglian novelist, regarded as a visionary who used his pen as a tool to struggle against various social eveils. He presents a vivid image of Indian life and social eveils. In his third novel, He Who Rides A Tiger, He exposes contemporary social eveils that are prevailing in Indian society such as the caste system, hunger, poverty, exploitation, hypocrisy. His people raise their voice against various social eveils. It is true that he paints a particular situation of Bengal [1943] in He Who Rides A Tiger. He refers to the effects of hunger, poverty, exploitation, caste system and hypocrisy. Kalo and Chandralekha suffer from hunger losing their all on account of it. So the novel expresses many brutal social realities and eveils duering the Bengal Famine of 1943.

Keywords

Caste System, Hunger, Poverty, Exploitation, Hypocrisy.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Received: 01-06-26

Approved: 25.06.26

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Bhabani Bhattacharya's Novel
He Who Rides A Tiger*

Notions Jan. - June 2026,

Vol. XVII, No. 1,

Pg. 001-006

Article No. 01

Similarity Check: 09%

Online available at :

<http://anubooks.com/journal-volume/notions-vol-xvii-no1-jan-june-2026>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31995/notions.2026v17i01.001>

Bhabani Bhattacharya has a respectable position in Indo-Anglian Fiction. He takes his people from real society. The common men and women play a vital role in his novels as he does not deal with the pleasures and tensions of king, queen, dukes, barons, lords and rich ladies. He has described common people, low class people in his novels. As a narrative artist he exposes social evils in his novels. He has no desire to describe the fairies, ghosts, devils, witches etc. to create the atmosphere of romance. He wants to reveal miseries of poor people, truth, social evils and realities of contemporary society in his novels.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's third novel *He Who Rides A Tiger* was published in 1954. It is a grim satire on Hindu Orthodoxy and it attacks the social reality of cast and class system. The novelist discusses the religious aspect of the Hindu society. The novelist has described the story of Kalo, a poor blacksmith who jailed for stealing a bunch of bananas, vows revenge on society. We can see that the Indian Freedom struggle and the Bengal Famine of 1943 are the two major themes dealt in it. Dr. R. K. Chandrasekharan remarks:

“While the earlier novel focuses attention on the national movement and Bengal's travail and their cataclysmic effect on the teeming millions of people, the later novel is more concerned with the history of one mind or at the most of two or three minds.”

In *He Who Rides A Tiger* Bhabani Bhattacharya describes the agonies of Kalo and his daughter Chandra Lekha. Kalo, the blacksmith, works hard for his living in the small town Jharna. His pretty wife dies in childbirth. The baby grows up into a girl. She looks like her mother. She is sent to the local English convent school. There is no limit to his joy when his daughter wins a prize in the essay competition. Since the caste system was highly rigid before independence, he also became the victim of the same. However, he didn't bother much for his low caste in the beginning of his life. But the situation becomes grim in the whole town due to famine. Kalo fails to adjust with the changed situation and rebels against it. Balram S. Sarot remarks:

“The oppressive awareness of his low birth, poverty, hunger, three months' rigorous imprisonment for offence, his work as a brothel-house petty not agent, and last but not the least. Lekha's degradation and humiliation in the harlot-house, are the factors which turn Kalo into a social rebel.”

So far the social and economic tendencies did not make him feel nervous. Now the old values appear disgusting to him as his job fails to provide him bread and vegetables. He had never planned his future as the job of a blacksmith was decent for him. Due to economic crisis he found himself disillusioned and miserable.

As a member of Kamar caste he never thought of building a temple of Lord Shiva. As Namita Gokhale narrates the life of a Muslim Kothewali in *Gods, Graves And Grandmother*, he adopts a tricky way to earn his livelihood. After coming out of the prison he finds himself rootless. His short term as a pimp proves helpful as he could protect his daughter from the brothel. As his plan succeeds, he becomes Mangal Adhikari and pretends to be a Brahmin. Now he was no more a blacksmith and a Kamar. For a short time he feels elevated as the people of other castes touch his feet and seek his blessings. Temporarily he forgets his past. The present situation gives him immense delight. Soon the inner conflict torments him as he fails to reject his past. Balram S. Sorot remarks:

“This inner conflict continues in Kalo’s mind until it becomes unbearable to him. The moment comes when Kalo has to make a manly decision to kill the tiger’ and thereby descend to earth from his lofty seat. His daughter, Chandra Lekha, bent upon destroying herself for his sake, further forces his decision, and finally he reveals the astounding truth The crisis of his spirit ends and Kalo becomes his real self again.”

Once again Bhabani Bhattacharya refers to the effects of hunger, war and Quit India Movement in *He Who Rides A Tiger*. Young women are purchased and even cheated in his rural areas and many agents of prostitutes make money with clever tricks. People like Bitten justified prostitution and said:

“Must a woman die rather than sell herself? Why must she die? Only her body, which seemed account, was involved, body that, unsold, had less value than a seer of goat’s meat. Why must she die for honor, die for a dead idea? Why should the women continue to bear on their shoulders the rotting corps of honor? The suffer so much from social tyranny.”

The skeletons of the human dead bodies were exported to other countries even by the doctors. A few political volunteers took out processions to draw the attention of authorities towards the shortage of food. People did not want to be slaughtered by this hunger. But alas! Only military trucks were used to scatter the hungry people. As a realist the author describes the miseries of the people and laments:

The dark year started three or four months after Chandra Lekha won her gold medal. It was almost the darkest in the history of Bengal. A plague took the land in its grip, the plague of hunger, in the wake of war. A few persons sell food for the body and the priests sell religion for the soul. Bitten advises Kalo to be practical in life as the latter has no choice left with him. He can succeed in the market of religion if he is clever:

“Food for the soul is produced and sold like food for the stomach, and though the ways of the two traders are different, you pay for both with hard cash.

The temple is a market and the priest a dealer. People are always ready to pay well for feeding the inner man.”

Due to his good luck he gets establishing a big temple of Lord Shiva. Nice food, milk and other luxuries are enjoyed by him and his daughter. Chandra Lekha is also pleased as she is not worried of the basic necessities of life. Bhabani Bhattacharya remarks:

“This was not going to be the sole false Shiva in the great city. Others must be installed and true temples put into shade by the false ones with their aggressive splendour. This splendour was to be based in the main on the rich elaboration of ritual. Over a curious while men Kalo had thought contradiction of the times died of hunger, wealth grew; and while kindness dried up, religion was more in demand. It was only the outward.”

These days people like Ablabandhu, and Motichand become the traders of religion for personal purposes. Kalo proposes that the milk from Shiva's bath should be distributed among the poor children. But the so-called authorities of the religion don't like this proposal. C.L. Khatri remarks:

“Bhattacharya cuts through the layers of upper class morality to reveal the bare bones humanity. The emotional dilemma and his inner conflict are well reflected in his brooding over what to write to Chandra Lekha. He neither wants to hurt her sentiments by telling frankly about himself nor does he want to be untrue to her.”

At times Kalo revolts against the prevailing social injustice and inequalities. His daughter had suffered due to social barriers that men had created in the guise of caste. There is no limit to his mental agony whenever he thinks of his daughter. He asks why has fate been cruel to him and his daughter? The author describes his tension and sense of despair with full sympathy:

“Suddenly, in that moment, Kalo was asking himself why Lekha had suffered, Chandra Lekha? She with all the innocence, all the purity of a child. What had she done to deserve her unspeakable fate? The real evil-doers seemed untouched by Karma they ate well and spoke the name of Shiva”

In most of the situations his daughter proves to be his moral support. She feels hurt whenever her father is not true to himself. After all, she has full faith in his capacities and moral strength. She herself does not accept defeat in the midst of odd situations. According to Bhabani Bhattacharya, life has meaning for her and not death. Through Kalo and Chandra Lekha, the artist admires the tolerance and fortitude of lower class people and that confirms that he is a of Have-Nots. Kalo does not forget his champion Dr. K.K. Sharma positive approach to life remarks:

“The novelist shows even the lower-class people rising high and deriding the society which hates and insults them. Kalo and Chandra Lekha do so, even take risks to though they have terrific as riding a tiger. Really they wonderfully his hard the powerful upper-class people at whose hands they have suffered immeasurably. The paper also unfolds the humble craftsman’s confidence and pride in his skill. Kalo emphatically tells the destitute Vishwanath... that an honest and competent craftsmans is as good and dignified as the best of folks... In truth, Kalo’s life history is an expression of Bhabani Bhattacharya’s conviction in a positive, bright vision of life.”

Here the author succeeds in breaking the old caste barriers and succeeds. Namita Gokhale follows the same pattern in the novel *Gods. Graves And Grandmother* where a Muslim old lady sings Hindy hymns every evening and becomes Mataji. However, Mataji practices meditation and gets rid of ‘Maya’. Kalo knows that Chandra Lekha no leads a comfortable life. And yet he gather courage to dismount the tiger and declares:

“I have installed a false god, for there was no dream at all. I have made you commit sacrilege and blacken your face... some of your have been wiled wrath because I gave shelter to a homeless little boy of unknown caste. A down-trodden Kamar has been incharge of your in most souls, souls corrupt with caste and cash....”

Now Kalo feels himself a liberated person as he rises above greed, lust, selfishness, priesthood, ego etc. He practises right conduct and takes the risk boldly. At this step there is no sense of fear in his heart and he feels his real ‘self’. The author appreciates his moral deed and remarks:

“Only his inventive mind could have conceived it. He saw himself in the new role, unique in spiritual annals. For a moment he was so taken with his own noble image he could almost have touched the dust on his feet reverence. Then he burst out laughing, his teeth shinning. It was a grand idea, but not practical. Even if he wore the in to saintly cloak, which would be far from easy, there would be hurdles. His business, for one. He was going retire from business, and it would be unwise to run it through the hands of a manager iã partner. In any case, it would take the zest from his life.”

Even Biten admires this step of Kalo and calls him a legendary figure and a symbol of freedom. This declaration of Kalo is inspiring for the urban people too. Biten remarks:

“You have chosen, my friend. You have triumphed over those others and over yourself. What you hae done just now will steel the spirit of hundreds and thousands of us. Your story will be a legend of freedom, a legend to inspire and awaken.”

Thus, Bhattacharya attaches due importance to ethical values. His people raise their voice against various social, political and economic evils and yet don't take law in their own hands. The rich people exploited the poor every day and yet the author hoped for the regeneration of society at large. Hunger failed to kill their interest in life. People like Devata and Kalo are a source of inspiration even today. The growth of population has created a pathetic situation in the country. Bengal and Bihar happen to be the worst hit areas even today. The authors creates pity and fear in the heart of readers as he paints pathetic situations created by hunger and exploitation.

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