



Resistance and Hope: The Marginalised as Agents of Change in *He Who Rides a Tiger*

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Abstract

This research article explores Bhabani Bhattacharya's novel *He Who Rides a Tiger* as a powerful story of resistance and hope. Bhattacharya, a well-known Indian English novelist, uses fiction to highlight the struggles of poor and marginalised people in Indian society. In this novel, he focuses on the cruelty of caste and the helplessness of the poor, but he also shows that the oppressed are not destined to suffer forever. Through the story of Kalo, a blacksmith from a lower caste, Bhattacharya presents how the marginalised can challenge injustice and bring social awakening. Kalo's disguise as a holy Brahmin priest exposes the hypocrisy of society and questions the very roots of caste superiority. This paper argues that the novel goes beyond describing pain and poverty; it gives dignity to the oppressed by showing their ability to resist, protest, and create hope.

Keywords: Bhabani Bhattacharya, marginalised, caste, poverty, resistance, hope, social justice, Indian English literature, *He Who Rides a Tiger*

Introduction

Indian English literature has always been closely connected with the realities of Indian society. From the time of colonial rule to the years after independence, writers used English not only as a language of art but also as a tool for social criticism. Among them, Bhabani Bhattacharya is remembered as a novelist who combined storytelling with social purpose.

Bhattacharya's fiction is marked by deep concern for the poor, the hungry, and the oppressed. He once said that literature is not meant to "escape reality" but to "interpret life." His novels therefore reflect real social and political problems such as hunger, caste discrimination, poverty, colonial exploitation, and the clash between old traditions and modern ideas.

He Who Rides a Tiger (1955) is one of his most powerful novels. It takes up the theme of caste, which has shaped Indian society for centuries. Bhattacharya presents the story of Kalo, a poor blacksmith who is insulted and rejected because of his caste. Instead of remaining a silent victim, Kalo takes a bold step by disguising himself as a Brahmin priest. Through this disguise, he exposes the false pride of caste and the hypocrisy of religious pretence.

The novel is not only a story of humiliation but also a story of awakening. Bhattacharya shows that resistance is possible even for those who are at the lowest level of society. This research paper studies how *He Who Rides a Tiger* represents the marginalised as agents of resistance and carriers of hope.

Historical and Social Background

To understand the novel, it is important to know the background in which it was written. The Bengal famine of 1943 had shaken India. Millions of people died due to starvation, even though food was available. Greed, hoarding, and British wartime policies made the famine worse. Writers like Bhattacharya, Mulk Raj Anand, and others gave voice to the victims of this human-made tragedy.

After independence in 1947, India faced new challenges. The caste system, which had divided society for centuries, continued to cause discrimination. The poor and lower castes remained powerless, often treated as untouchables. Bhattacharya, being influenced by Gandhian ideals, believed in equality, dignity of labour, and social justice. His writing reflects this commitment.

In *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Bhattacharya uses fiction to address these issues. The novel is set against the backdrop of famine and poverty, but it goes further to attack caste oppression. It is both a social document and a moral lesson.

The Marginalised in the Novel

The title itself, *He Who Rides a Tiger*, suggests danger and courage. Once you ride a tiger, you cannot easily come down without being eaten. In the same way, Kalo takes a bold step of resistance that is dangerous but also necessary.

Kalo's Position in Society

Kalo is a blacksmith by profession. He is strong and skilled, but society does not respect him because he belongs to a lower caste. In the Indian caste hierarchy, the upper castes enjoyed privileges, while the lower castes were considered impure and untouchable. This injustice makes Kalo's life full of humiliation.

For example, when he works hard, his labour is valued, but he as a person is insulted. His sweat and skill create tools for others, but his humanity is denied. Bhattacharya makes him a representative of all marginalised people who are excluded not because of lack of ability but because of birth.

Famine and Poverty

The Bengal famine makes the suffering of the poor even worse. Hunger does not see caste, but caste decides how much one suffers. The rich manage to secure food, while the poor starve. Women and children suffer the most. Bhattacharya shows that famine is not only about empty stomachs but also about loss of dignity. Poverty and hunger reduce people to helplessness.

In this background, Kalo emerges as a figure of resistance. Instead of dying in silence, he chooses to fight back in his own way.

Caste and Social Injustice

One of the strongest parts of the novel is its attack on caste. Bhattacharya presents caste not as a religious truth but as a man-made tool of oppression.

Kalo's humiliation is clear when he is treated as less than human simply because of his caste. His profession as a blacksmith, which should give him respect, is instead seen as dirty work. His entire existence is judged by his birth, not his worth.

Bhattacharya highlights how caste divides society. The upper castes enjoy respect and power, while the lower castes live in silence and fear. He questions the morality of a society that values false rituals over honest labour.

In many ways, Kalo's suffering reflects the real experiences of millions of Indians who faced untouchability. The novel gives them a voice through fiction.

Kalo's Resistance: Breaking the Chains

The turning point in the novel comes when Kalo refuses to remain silent. Instead of accepting humiliation as his fate, he decides to fight back.

The Disguise as a Priest

Kalo disguises himself as a Brahmin priest. This is not a simple act of play; it is a powerful protest. By wearing the mask of an upper caste, he exposes the shallowness of caste pride. The same people who once insulted him now respect and worship him as a holy man.

This disguise shows how society is fooled by appearances. Respect is given not to truth or honesty but to false signs of superiority. Kalo proves that caste is not divine but artificial, and it can be questioned.

Symbol of Protest

Kalo's act is more than personal revenge. It becomes a symbol of protest against the entire system. He shows that the marginalised can resist with creativity. His disguise challenges the authority of the privileged and gives courage to others.

Bhattacharya's message is clear: resistance may be risky, but it is the only way to break chains of oppression.

Hope and Social Awakening

While the novel is full of suffering, it does not end in despair. Bhattacharya believes in human dignity and the possibility of change.

The Power of Awakening

Kalo's rebellion awakens not only himself but also others. His actions force society to see its own hypocrisy. People who blindly followed caste rules begin to realise that truth and humanity are greater than false pride.

The novel suggests that once the oppressed discover their inner strength, they cannot be silenced. Hope comes from the courage to resist.

Relevance to Society

Even today, caste and poverty remain problems in India. *He Who Rides a Tiger* continues to speak to readers because it shows that change begins with resistance. Kalo becomes a symbol of the marginalised rising against injustice. His courage gives hope that a more equal and just society is possible.

Conclusion

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger* is not just a novel; it is a moral lesson and a social critique. It shows the pain of the marginalised but also gives them dignity by making them agents of resistance. Through Kalo's journey, Bhattacharya attacks caste and social injustice, while also presenting hope for a better future.

The novel teaches that the poor and oppressed are not doomed to suffer forever. When they question injustice and resist creatively, they become powerful. Resistance becomes the first step towards freedom, and hope becomes the force that sustains the struggle.

In today's world, where inequality and discrimination still exist, the novel remains relevant. It reminds us that courage and resistance can turn even the weakest into leaders of change.

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