



**The Blending of the Traditional and Modern Values in Bhabani  
Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger*.**



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**ABSTRACT:**

Bhabani Bhattacharya, the famous Indian English novelist, describes a situation of social and mental conflict in his famous novel, *He Who Rides a Tiger*. The novel deals with many issues that segregate the so called low class from the high class. In his Kalo and Chandralekha's story, the writer brings out on the surface the clash as well as the intermingling of the traditional and modern values.

**KEYWORDS:**

Idealism, Superstitions, traditionalism, portrayal, High caste, Low caste, Hunger

### Research Paper :

Bhabani Bhattacharya is a novelist with a highly developed social consciousness. His novels present high idealism, social purpose and affirmative vision of life. With the exception of Mulk Raj Anand, he is the only Indian novelist writing in English who has made a conscious effort to make it artistically beautiful. The novel *He Who Rides a Tiger* highlights the problems of the poor in eradicating superstitions, blind beliefs, taboo and other unwholesome aspects of rural society.

Bhattacharya has written novels like *So Many Hungers !* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess Named God* (1960) *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) and *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978). All these novels of Bhattacharya present a true picture of India and its people surging with life and substance. He refers to various customs, conventions, superstitions and oddities present in the Indian society without directly commenting on their merits. He has won the coveted Sahitya Academy Award in 1967 for his novel *Shadow from Ladakh*. Being a novelist with a social purpose, he has dealt with the social, economic and political changes in India. His themes generally revolve round poverty, hunger, traditionalism, freedom and industrialization. All the writing for him has a social purpose. In general sense, tradition is a continuous process of handing down from generation to generation, conventions, beliefs, habits and even superstitions through oral and written practice. In the literary context, tradition becomes a body of customs, beliefs, skills or sayings, handed down from generation to generation. Society, which is the basic to tradition, is dynamic and it undergoes a change in the course of time. As a result tradition also gets modified. The spirit of reform and revolt gives way to modernity. The Indian English novel has been a vivid portrayal of different attitudes which pleaded for the balance of tradition and modernity. Such a blend of tradition and modernity is also seen in the novels of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and *The serpent and the Rope*.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is a representative writer of the contemporary period. He has treated the theme of tradition and modernity very effectively in his novels. He also analyses the impact of both tradition and modernity on human society in a wider perspective. In *He Who Rides a Tiger* Bhattacharya presents the blending of the traditional and the modern values through the story of Kalo and his daughter Chandra

Lekha. He employs a lie to expose the truth about caste and religion as they obtain in the society.

*He Who Rides a Tiger* is based on an ancient saying-He who rides a tiger cannot dismount. This novel is more concerned with the history of an individual named Kalo and the ultimate liberation of spirit that he achieves. The novel brings home the truth that any individual who rebels against society cannot adjust himself and so has to reconcile to it. Thus, modernity becomes all the more important in the present times. Modernity has an immensely large scope; every aspect of human civilization falls under its range. Our field of thought and action has expanded with the advancement of recent scientific knowledge and so did the scope of modernity.

The protagonist of the novel, Kalo, is a dark skinned blacksmith who lives in a small town Jharna. He is industrious, ambitious and competent in his trade. The main theme of the novel is about his sufferings that create in him a sort of thirst for revenge on the society. The social theme is developed in terms of irony in order to dramatize the immoralities and double standard of the caste system.

Kalo's beautiful daughter, Chandra Lekha appears to be very intelligent. Kalo has firm faith in the traditional cultural values. The caste hierarchy is deeply rooted in his spirit. He makes up his injustice by hitting back to the people who are the cause of his sufferings. Through the life history of Kalo, Bhattacharya expresses his conviction in a positive and brighter view of life. Kalo is a low-caste blacksmith. He upsets the social order by investing himself with Brahmin hood and rising to the top. He does not undermine the society but becomes a part of it. He uses its power by accepting its rules and by fully understanding its purpose.

The novel explicitly depicts how rich people are savagely indifferent to the hungry men. They are greatly responsible for their miseries. For good omen and good fortune the rich people mirthfully offer much milk to the temple and the Ganges. But they do not care for the destitute and the hungry. When Kalo and Vishwanath take some bath milk for the starving children, which has already been offered to the temple, they are greatly opposed by the rich. They take up their voice against the vision of rich people by denying that they are insulting mother Ganges by pouring milk into her water, while a large number of children are lying hungry and dying on her bank. Kalo is the central figure of the novel.

His daughter Chandra Lekha also suffers a lot owing to the caste system and the economic pattern of society. Kalo's fight is not with a man but with the social forces. It comments on the savage and wicked human beings of the society.

After his release from the oppressive bondage of class and caste, Kalo emerges as a complete modern man. No more does he think of a Brahmin as the superior and God's chosen one now. He starts believing in the modern man's faith in equality between man and man. Kalo represents both the new and the old ways of life. The inner conflict continues in Kalo's mind until it becomes unbearable to him. Though unable to understand the validity or the utility of the established social order, Kalo has never questioned its existence. Honesty, hard-work, faith in law and justice are the core of his being. He wants to know why there is so much discrimination and ruthlessness in society. Chandra Lekha's name was suggested by the priest when he came to the smithy for some work before the confinement. Chandra Lekha grows under the tender care of the rough artisan. She displays unusual intelligence. She has inherited her mother's good look. Kalo sends her to the local English Convent School where her presence is frowned upon by the girls belonging to the higher castes. Kalo is criticized for his rudeness both by the high caste people and his own people. In her final year she takes part in one state essay writing competition in which her essay is adjudged the best and she gets a gold medal for it.

Bhattacharya deftly delineates the distinction between the strong and weak. He has also shown the contrast in temperaments. *He Who Rides a Tiger* serves as a true reflection of modern life, in which honesty has become unfashionable and corruption has entered the vital of the body politic. 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 the 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 Convent schools education has been better polished and standardized. 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.

The suggestive title of the novel, *He Who Rides a Tiger* can also be interpreted in relation to the theme of hunger. To sit and ride on the tiger's back implies man's quest for riding on hunger. Just as the tiger is ferocious animal and unhesitatingly kills man, so is the hunger. Kalo and Lekha both are very important in the novel. They suffer terribly on account of hunger. They lose their home, peace, profession, morals and goodness. Bhattacharya has treated hunger as the worst of social evils in the novel. It kills love, dignity, sympathy, pity and higher values of life. The novel is an attempt to remove class and caste barriers so as to achieve their synthesis.

Bhattacharya strongly attacks against the distinctions on the basis of caste, class and creed. In the novel Bhattacharya is painfully conscious of his role as a writer. He also holds up the mirror to society. It highlights social evils like injustice, exploitation, cruelty and oppression. He deals with the life and tension 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 emotion and distress. Kalo gets embittered with the society. It becomes indifferent to his poverty and utter helplessness. He gets all the more wrathful and indignant against it when his daughter is caught in a crisis. He succeeds in his attempt. His success takes the form of a personal revenge on the society.

Bhattacharya aims at a faithful representation and a certain view of life. It also presents some of the problems of life. A good novel emerges directly out of such life struggle. It contains something of lasting human significance. The different characters in the novel make honest efforts to participate in life. The novel is an epitome of man versus society. It relates how Kalo masquerades himself to inflict his vengeance on the society. However ultimately he realizes the futility of his disguise. He also wants to rehabilitate himself and many more lives. The malevolent society still rejects his honest and humble efforts.

*He who rides a Tiger* sets its aim against orthodoxy and superstition of the people. It has for its three dimensional view – the political, economic and social background. As the denunciation of the caste system is one of the purposes of the novelist, he alludes to it in several places in the story. The system is so well established. Chandra Lekha's attending school meets with criticism both from the high caste and the low caste people of Jharna. Her character is steady and her attitudes and actions show a fair measure of consistency.

In spite of her schooling and refinement she retains original simplicity and contentment with her lot. When father and daughter start 'riding the tiger', it is the daughter who shows great discomfort and less inclination for the adventure.

Bhattacharya's themes revolve round day-to-day life incidents and matters. The characters presented by Bhattacharya are cross-sections of the rural and urban setting. He has a keen eye for situations and characters. He takes up varied aspects and themes. The novelist has tried his best to show that the people of working class should not bend before anybody for their poverty and difficulty. The novel has depicted certain dramatic changes which deal with the life of an individual. It belongs to an oppressed and depressed section of the society. It is a society in which honorableness and moral values prevail over frivolous and hypocritical emotions. It brings about the ultimate triumph of good over evil and truth over falsehood. The novel successfully documents the importance of traditional as well as modern values through the behavioral patterns of various characters.

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