



Bhabani Bhattacharya's He Who Rides a Tiger, He Who Narrates Subaltern Voices and Resistance

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Abstract:

The Indian English novel has developed into a literary movement which presents historical evidence of a nation that has transformed from its imperial past to its modern national identity. These stories function as a vital communication method which enables "subaltern" people who have been excluded from society to express their suppressed anger to the world. The novel transforms into a conflict zone through which authors display their personal suffering and the historical events of decolonization which create a battle between established identity and actual political conditions. Bhabani Bhattacharya emerges as a crucial voice, using the harsh Bengal Famine environment to investigate the persistent authority structures which endure after colonial powers depart. The research exceeds basic storytelling as it fully investigates how oppressed people navigate an environment which deliberately prevents their participation, transforming their social exclusion into a forceful social protest which challenges the essential systems of class and caste.

Post-colonial Indian English novels have made a significant contribution to both Indian English literary and global literature. They captivated readers from different parts of the world. The Indian novelist expanded his depiction of the Indian landscape by showing how modern Indians experience their country today. They study current Indian societal developments which include Subaltern voices and marginal community members and regional cultural identity and conflicts between Indian traditional beliefs and actual Indian political matters through their use of magical realism and cosmopolitan storytelling and personal stories about being displaced from home. The research shows how multicultural societies operate while studying the difficulties faced by native communities and their efforts to maintain their authentic cultural identity. The research tackled topics such as colonialism, decolonization, marriage matters, sexuality, gender issues, and the hybridization of languages through multiple ideological discourses that interacted with each other.

People who belong to the subaltern group use their language to express their experiences of lacking economic and political and social stability in society. The people who lived through colonization developed a strong sense of racial inferiority because they experienced extreme deprivation. They show racial restraint which shows they prefer to keep their distance from others during social events. The less privileged group of people has no access to scientific knowledge and technological skills which remain exclusive to those who belong to the upper class. The subaltern situation shows that both men and women lack control over their lives. The existing pressures become too overwhelming for them to handle. Subaltern communities of people lack access to both financial resources and decent living conditions. Humans view subalternity as a shameful mark which they carry throughout their lives.

The presentation will explain how Bhabani Bhattacharya's He Who Rides a Tiger 1954 presents subaltern narratives which describe resistance to the Bengal famine and the Quit India Movement. Bhattacharya shows how the Bengal famine affected people through Kalo and Chandralekha who follow his story as the main characters. The social system together with business people who control it impose various forms of suffering on them which includes poverty and famine and all forms of persecution. Bhattacharya shows how subaltern voices in his story struggle to exist within a system controlled by political and business powers. Kalo and Chandralekha oppose the capitalist Motichand and the political figures Mangal Adhikari, Sir Abalabandhu, and Biten. Bhattacharya shows how post-independence India created new challenges which subaltern groups need to face. The researchers will use post-colonial theory to analyze the story.

Keywords: Subaltern, Voice, Narrative, Starvation, Poverty, Society

What is post-colonialism? The field of post-colonialism studies how colonialism operated through different ways which were used during



different historical periods. The content presents a theoretical framework which describes how people fought against colonial rule and its associated beliefs and the process of establishing new government systems. (Barker et al.5). The decolonization process demonstrates how postcolonialism developed through historical events which affected the colonized nation. The post-colonialism field studies political issues through post-colonial theories which use their specialized vocabulary. The study also investigates cultural aspects (Chibber2). Robert Young asserts that post-colonialism is defined as follows:

Post-colonialism delivers a political system which lacks any complete research method. The existence of post-colonial theory as a distinct discipline does not exist because this discipline exists only through political beliefs which use various theoretical frameworks to achieve their objectives (qtd in Chibber 3).

Post-colonialism operates as a historical framework which enables people to comprehend different cultural elements and various fields of study which include anthropology and philosophy and literary studies (Chibber 3). The discourse of subaltern studies functions as an essential component which defines the boundaries of post-colonialism. The study investigates various movements together with their subordinate groups and working-class society and their national identity and hybrid cultural elements and their story of being treated as outsiders (Chibber 5-6). Lazarus explained that post-colonialism requires scholars to fulfill a specific duty because they must develop a national view which includes liberation and international perspectives to support their global advocacy work (Barker et al. 20). Postcolonialism studies subaltern voices which belong to marginalized groups.

Bhabani Bhattacharya, in his novel *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954), depicts the authentic conditions which exist in Bengal, India. The caste system brings about complete destruction of the lives which subaltern individuals lead. The caste system at the grassroots level inside society produces multiple forms of victimization against impoverished individuals. The Bengal famine and the Quit India Movement exemplify opposition to disordered political rule (Saleem 122). Bhattacharya explains the actual situation which existed in India after the country gained its independence. The novel showed how the subaltern main character expressed his thoughts through dialogue while he fought against the forces that oppressed him. He experiences harassment

through slurs and he endures different forms of physical violence. K.R.S. Iyengar asserts that the novel is:

The novel gains its unique unsettling taste from the energy patterns of this Indian urban area which experiences its highest population levels through its combination of urban faults and artificial elegance and through its public demonstrations and emotional outbursts and its strong belief in myths and unscientific practices (qtd in Patel 70).

The story follows Kalo who belongs to the subaltern group and tries to survive through his work as a blacksmith in a countryside area. Kalo fights against caste discrimination but his attempts to fight back fail because his status as a lower caste member leaves him without power to succeed. He belongs to the Brahmin caste. His wife died before the present time. Chandralekha his daughter also fights to maintain her survival within the framework of society. The narrative examines the conditions under which the subaltern Kalo and his daughter faced the extreme social conditions which existed during that period (Patel 70). Kalo staged a revolt against the upper-caste businessman who forced his daughter into submission. She works in private homes where rich people keep her under their control. She endures her pain without fighting back although she makes attempts to defend herself but wealthy families intimidate her (Sinha 18). The authentic path to follow involves walking through moments of difficulty. The main battle which people should fight their way through involves facing their deepest fear (Bhattacharya 169). Kalo received a prison sentence because he stole bananas from the shopkeeper's store. He wants to own the product which will satisfy his hunger yet he receives a three-month prison term as his punishment. After he leaves prison he finds it hard to maintain his living because he has no job or food and he has been treated badly in prison for a minor theft. His life becomes worse when his daughter dies. The disaster brought an irreversible change to the entire universe. He lost everything and became a lower-status person which made him feel cut off from society and experience deep emptiness (Sharma 30). John Berger and his colleagues explain that "a people or a class which is cut off from its own past is far less free to choose and act as a people or class than one that has access to its history".

Chandralekha presents her elderly aunt's perspective about their home eviction through her subaltern



account. The Bengal famine produced severe economic hardships which caused his family to suffer from capitalist exploitation and middle-class social aggression:

What malevolent fate had disrupted their households? The elderly aunt attempted to prevent it with rituals and supplication. She woke up before sunrise and sat on a small carpet made of fragrant material. She prayed in the kusa grass while her spirit begged the deities for heavenly forgiveness. She had even purchased incense at the cost of the day's dinner because the deities would freely grant home blessings when the fragrant sticks were burned. (Bhattacharya, 58).

Bhattacharya shows the terrible situation which homeless subalterns face through his research. The people who need help the most receive no assistance from others who ignore their urgent needs despite their attempts to reach out to God. Bhattacharya shows his complete disapproval of both existing poverty conditions and the people who destroy homes belonging to desperate and underserved communities.

Moreover, the tumultuous circumstances arise due to Kalo and his family's constant relocation in an effort to preserve their life. "From that song, the temple emerged, and the conflict entered a new phase—not one of survival, but of aggressive assault" (Bhattacharya 112). Kalo rebelled against the prevailing hazardous political system and the caste system. The mediator does not provide assistance to the impoverished during food scarcity. Chandralekha also illustrated the subversion against the individual who marked down or concealed food from the starving populace of Bengal and Calcutta. The opposition exhibited by both father and daughter appears to be detrimental and destructive to their individual lives. Kalo informs Chandralekha that Vishwanath is observing her, stating, "We stand on the edge of a cliff." A hundred eyes observe us, anticipating our misstep. We must exercise caution, as the counterfeit coin required more luster than the authentic one" (Bhattacharya 122). Kalo's resistance appears to challenge the hegemony of governance and political intrusion in the subaltern lives of the people of Bengal. They endure torment while being monitored by authoritative and brutal societal forces. Bhattacharya examines the myth of oppression and prejudice against subaltern groups. He demonstrated his Indianness by aligning himself

with the subaltern group. Gramsci posits that Subaltern individuals are those who:

The subaltern social groups of society worldwide present a history that exists in permanent disarray because their social existence operates in distinct historical periods. The historical behavior of these groups displays a clear tendency toward unification yet their attempts at unity face constant disruption from ruling powers. Even when subaltern groups achieve apparent victories they primarily focus on protecting themselves according to Chaturvedi's citation at page 274.

The actual battle begins when Kalo fights against both the political and social upheaval which creates unrest in Bengal due to its food shortages. The minor insurrectionist emerged when he gave up his weapon and walked to the city. The insurgent built a network of spies who operated in the royal court and detention center with B-10 which allowed him to express his opinion against the authorities. The man showed rebellion against all people and all gods because he rejected the right thing to do based on his beliefs (Bhattacharya 195). Kalo and Chandralekha both fight against the Bengal and Calcutta officials who create poverty and pain for the subaltern community. Chitralekha heard the sounds of needy people who asked for food, shouting, "Food! Food!" "We demand sustenance for the famished" (qtd in Rani 466). The demonstration for food rights creates the narrative which tells the story of subaltern people. Satyajit in Bhattacharya's *Shadow from Ladakh* fights against governmental authority to find solutions for both famine and poverty which affects the society (Singh 176). Gramsci defines the Subaltern according to the following explanation,

The subaltern classes initiate movements which trigger a backreaction from the right-wing factions of the ruling class. The situation shows two opposing forces which include discontent from subaltern groups and their unplanned protests against reactionary groups who use their governmental authority to stage coup attempts (qtd in Ayers 270).

The rich people in the village including Motichand and Abalabandhu used their financial power to exploit the lower class residents of the village. Biten



is a vital character because he teaches Kalo. Kalo becomes trapped in Biten's political plans after he receives orders to start a rebellion against a businessman who denies him money to build the local temple. Kalo's innocent nature led him to become trapped in the political activities of others while he fought to survive in his community (Bhatnagar 77). Biten advised him that "the fraud served no greater purpose than to satisfy one's own hunger and enrich one's wallet" (Bhattacharya 191). Bhattacharya examines the compromised regional political landscape in India. The politician used the temple as his source of income. They used lower income workers to build the temple while paying them less than their actual worth and taking advantage of their work. Guha defines Subaltern as "the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the elite" (qtd in Louai 6).

Sir Abalabandhu made a profit by selling Kalo's daughter because he claimed she had both a good character and magical powers. Motichand intends to marry her solely to enhance his business prospects. "A collaboration of her divine function and its continuation together." (Bhattacharya 235) Mangal Adhikari utilized Kalo and his daughter along with other subaltern people who faced food shortages and extreme poverty because of his power over Kalo who belonged to a lower caste (Bhatnagar 78). Kalo works to fight against the oppressive systems which wealthy people and traditional customs maintain because his inner self originates from a centuries-old tradition (Bhattacharya 71). Bhattacharya shows how subaltern groups face serious problems because capitalist systems create disorder in society. Abalabandhu sells Chandralekha. The post-independence period brought about a deep tragedy which Bhattacharya shows through his research on how poor subaltern women faced exploitation during that time. The business sold subaltern men and women to wealthy customers who wanted them to work in their residential spaces and agricultural properties and manufacturing plants. Kalo and his daughter experienced extreme poverty because they faced treatment that resembled animal abuse. Chandralekha stands out as an exceptional individual yet she was still called "merely Kamar's daughter" (Bhattacharya 5). Ranjeet Guha defines the Subaltern as "a name for the general attribute of subordination...whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or any other way" (qtd in Beverley 26).

Chandralekha fights against the injustice and caste discrimination that Biten demonstrates while Chitralekha states that "Instead of comprehending

society by confronting the entrenched system of caste stratification, he had assimilated into it" (Bhattacharya 221). Chandralekha strongly rejects caste system problems because they have created a negative impact on subaltern people who experience extreme poverty without access to food and shelter and other vital resources. Bhattacharya expresses his sorrow at the dire situation in Bengal and Calcutta, where the subaltern masses have endured significant suffering due to the oppressive influence of businessmen, upper castes, and other dominant factions. Bhattacharya presents Kalo, a lower-class blacksmith, and his daughter Chandralekha as subaltern representatives of the entire Indian nation who live in Bengal. Mohammed Ayoob defines "Subaltern" as referring to individuals who are weak and of lesser status (qtd in Robins and Johns 9).

The novel reaches its end when Motichand makes a marriage proposal to her which she rejects because he is a wealthy businessman. Chandralekha rejected his marriage proposal; yet, Lekha remained undeterred. Her resolution became her protective shield against opposing forces which threatened her existence. She possessed a newfound strength and knowledge to confront the challenges of an uncertain future" (qtd in Sharma 32). Deciding to refuse an affluent marriage proposal demonstrates that Chandralekha possesses inner strength. She desires to manage her life independently without the assistance of others. The father and daughter both demonstrate their strong opposition against the wicked forces that control society. Who oppressed and abused and tormented them while treating them as the lowest class of society. The subaltern Indian community bases its entire existence on their struggle for ideological acceptance of their daily life. Guha explains that the Subaltern functions as a historical entity whose will and reason enable him to practice rebellion as his essential conduct (qtd in Beverley 27).

The rejection of Motichand's proposal is not merely a refusal of a man, but a radical repudiation of a system that views women's bodies as commodities for exchange and subaltern lives as assets to be managed. For Chandralekha, marriage to an affluent oppressor would have been a gilded cage because she would have to continue living her life as an exiled person who needed protection. Her choice of an "uncertain future" instead of the guaranteed security that comes from a businessman's wealth represents her strongest demonstration of subaltern power. Her resolution functions as a "protective shield" because it changes her value assessment method from social standing to her internal moral clarity. She stops being a famine



victim and she ceases to be a tool in her father's extensive deception projects; she transforms into a historical agent with autonomy.

Kalo and Chandralekha's collective journey shows that subalterns maintain their power through their ability to think and make decisions. According to Guha their rebellion functions as a necessary action which allows them to exist in a society that has excluded them from its social structure. The father and daughter present a united front against the elite's "wicked forces" which allows them to break free from psychological restraints that tie them to racial and class inferiority. The upper class controls all technological expertise and financial assets yet they cannot control the actual facts.

The "ideological acceptance" they seek is not a plea for pity from the upper echelons of society, but a demand for the recognition of their inherent humanity. The protagonists from Bhattacharya's work demonstrate resistance methods which operate within the new social structures that emerged after colonial rule in India. The only way to achieve social hypocrisy dismantlement requires complete abandonment of deceitful beliefs, which people consider to be their most fundamental religious truth, because people should cherish their way of living instead of protecting established systems.

He Who Rides a Tiger presents an enduring truth which shows that subalternity functions as a revolutionary battleground instead of a shameful permanent condition. Kalo and Chandralekha demonstrate that exceptional character strength constitutes the most effective weapon which fights against systemic oppression because it protects people from being controlled through financial power. The subaltern voice exists as an enduring power which can disrupt all established social systems.

Conclusion

In his story, Bhattacharya used subaltern characters Kalo and Chandralekha to show them. The main characters Kalo and Chandralekha faced difficulties throughout the story because they fought against societal expectations. Bhattacharya demonstrates how people living in poverty conditions experience their daily existence. He represents Indian subaltern communities who fight against government oppression and famine challenges. He shows the harsh conditions that India faced after it gained independence.

The force of Bhattacharya's storytelling enables him to transform subaltern people from their role as Great Hunger statistical data into living characters who fight through Kalo and

Chandralekha, having learned all their battles. Their struggle shows active resistance against oppressive systems which they learned to resist through their direct experience of imperialist violence. Kalo survives through Brahmin asceticism which exposes the social system's dreadful double standard that people practice when they worship a false idol while they permit their actual offspring to die on the streets. The subaltern's hazardous route which requires people to accept dangerous falsehoods serves as the "riding the tiger" act which functions as a dangerous true path to uncovering most perilous actualities.

The ending of their story demonstrates that authentic freedom for oppressed people exists because they restore their capacity to make ethical choices. Through his main characters Bhattacharya demonstrates that people experience poverty as a personal shame while the entire nation shares the responsibility for their condition. Their departure from the temple of lies leads them back to the world where they obtain a new form of power which no political authority or famine can take away. The novel demonstrates that subaltern groups maintain their ability to fight back against oppression even when their resources disappear which forces all readers to face the ongoing unfairness that exists in contemporary society.

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