



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**English Literature**

**ALIENATION AND REPRESSION IN BHAWANI BHATTACHARYA'S NOVELS**

**KEY WORDS:** Alienation, Repression, Agonized, Emancipation, Enslavement

**Dr. Naveen Kumar Jha**

Associate Professor in English, R.A.G.S. College, Ahalyasthan, K.S.D.S.U., Darbhanga

**ABSTRACT**

Bhabani Bhattacharya has a great contribution to Indian English literature. He is of the view, 'Art' should be purposive and an instrument of social change. The writer is to reflect on the society's point of view. He opines that the writer places struggle; suffering and hope. We find all these elements in Bhattacharya's fictions. His works has social, political, economic and religious problems with a purpose to talk about them. Through his fiction he attempted to bring about a harmonious fusion of his social concern and artistic values. As a writer he is a reformist social realist that becomes clear when we study all his novels including *So Many Hungers!*, *Music for Mohini*, *He who Rides A Tiger* and *Shadow from Ladakh*.

His first novel is *So Many Hungers*. It is of creative writing out of the agonized torment of body and spirit. It came from Bengal during the hideous famine years and the early stages of the Second World War as well. The novel is targeted on Bengal famine and human relations. It takes into account problems of survival in the society, suffering, evil, love, passion and greed. We come across unscrupulous hunger and some chaotic scenarios in *So Many Hungers!*

*Music for Mohini* deals with issue of social freedom and importance for the real progress of the people. The author has a certain reason behind it that without social freedom political freedom is ineffective. Social freedom has been the real foundation of all other types of freedom. He knows that it involves a lot of strain and struggle. It is worth mentioning, "Our political freedom is worth little without social uplift...That means struggle." He wants her to teach the village women how to read and write, and thus to impart them the first elements of knowledge. Jayadev is very happy to have a contact with the young surgeon named Harindra. He knows the social problems of the country pretty well. He is a foreign-returned doctor, but he makes up his mind to live in Behula for its social freedom. The novel emphasizes the need for economic freedom. Jayadev clearly understands the fact that social slaveries are rooted in economic bondage, and hence social emancipation is not possible without economic freedom. He visualizes the future India with people free from economic bondage and social slaveries. He thinks:

"The battle for economic freedom, however, was in full swing and ten years hence there would be no landed gentry to live on the peasantry. India was fast moving that way. But then, would the people, fed well, be free in spirit because of their new physical state? The answer was plain."<sup>1</sup>

Most of the critics often mention that Bhattacharya's themes are entirely related to contemporary events and social realities. He writes on Indian problems but with a universal appeal. The main objective of his writing is to present the Indian scenario with a view to change it. He is not only a social realist but a writer preoccupied with human predicament. Bhattacharya is criticized for the abundant use of the incidents of poverty and hunger. As Paul Verghese, in his discussion of the novel considers that it is an exaggerated and cheap portrayal of the famine. However, another critic Chandrasekharan opposes by saying this:

The criticism is not valid because most of the situations depicted in the novel are true to life in the country even at normal times not to speak of a time of unusual hardship. Men without shelter, clothes and food are no new phenomenon in our land; it can still be seen on the pavements of our proud cities including the capital. Beggars hunting for food in garbage bins are a common sight. There is no incident in the novel which can be said to be impossible and we have the

novelist's word for it that the story is based on factual reports.<sup>2</sup>

K.K. Sharma in his book *Bhabani Bhattacharya: His Vision and Theme* interprets the title to reveal the theme of the novel thus: 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 a ferocious animal and unhesitatingly kills the man, so is hunger. Kalo and Lekha two principal characters of the novel suffer terribly on account of hunger and lose their home, place, profession, morals and goodness. Hence they decide to ride the tiger-symbolizing relentless hunger.<sup>3</sup>

The title of the novel, "He Who Rides a Tiger" is borrowed from the saying "He who rides the tiger cannot dismount". From common sense point of view we can say that riding a tiger is the most dangerous game is which we may even lose our lives. Similarly, when a person is living in starvation he is fighting against the most brutal enemy. It is a very terrific situation to live in starvation and fight against it. Of all the cruel things in this world starvation is the cruellest one. Hunger does not see religion or caste. Hundreds of hungry people of different religions and castes demonstrate together, eat together oblivious of their caste and religion. He attacks the caste system, which has finally divided society the poor and the rich. Vishwanath, the Kamar, praises Kalo, "So long as there are true hearted Brahmins like you, people cannot lose faith in this social order" (126). It seems that caste is made to hinder the poor section of society. Hunger makes Kalo, Biten and Vishwanath protest against caste. Kalo experiences exploitation on the basis of the caste even in his moderate days at town. Nobody in Jharana congratulates a Kamargirl who wins the medal defeating the high caste boys and girls in an essay competition at state level but he tolerates it. He tolerates his exploitation at the court of magistrate but the exploitation of his daughter at the brothel turns him rebellious. Even Indian administrative and judicial systems are not exception to the influence of caste system. In this regard K. R. Chandrasekharan says "The point emphasized by Bhattacharya here is that caste has become a habit of thinking, as much as a way of life and therefore extremely difficult to eradicate".<sup>4</sup>

Bhabani Bhattacharya's novel, "Shadow From Ladakh", we come to know the political condition of India, China and Tibet around the year 1962. It shows many social realities of the post-Independence India. The need for overlooking caste-system for the betterment of the society is emphasized in this novel. There were several organizations and movements going on for the purpose of dealing with hurdles of society in various ways. Satyajit, who is a devotee of Tagore in Santiniketan, rejects his surname 'Sen' to become casteless. He marries Suruchi, who belongs to a different caste. In *So Many Hungers*, freedom means freedom and democracy for

the people of the world. India was asked to step into the world war-II. India's fight was against the English rulers, not against her people, who are defeated, would face enslavement. So the national movement offered cooperation and recognition to the Indian people. Nonviolence, as a means and as a philosophy, dominated the fight for political struggle. In *So Many Hungers* Rahoul and his friends are ready to sacrifice and leave everything for freedom.

In "Shadow From Ladakh" Bhattacharya makes Gandhian principle of simple living and high thinking to be main way of life for achieving political freedom. Indian Government's point of view is to meet strength with strength but Satyajit is against this view. He is a firm believer in non-violence and he plans for a peace March to Ladakh in the hope that he would touch the hearts of the Chinese to make them give up their aggressive intentions. It has been a peaceful way of making political dream realize; bloodshed can never solve any kind of problem. The idyllic life of Gandhigram is disturbed and Gandhian economics is threatened by the wake of industrialization. In this pretext steel has been very symbolically used by the author. Steel stands as the symbol of India's freedom. Bhaskar Roy believes in steel standing for mass production to cope with the growing population of India. We should observe his saying that appears to be a way to India's economic progress.

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Kalo becomes aware of the fact that the rich who are indifferent to the miseries of the poor, indulge in immoral acts and unlawful and immoral transactions. They are least concerned with evens and odds of the poor. If the rich can be richer through unfair means, he feels that nothing is wrong in making the poor accept the unfair ways to survive. To the rich means is not so significant to consider for earning. All the moral laws for earning are applied to the poor who are not opposing the rich man's hypocrisy. Bhattacharya gives us a pathetic picture of innumerable cruelties to which the human beings are subjected due to poverty and hunger. Hunger brings mankind to a despicable level. Honour becomes the easiest target. Hunger provokes to do anything and everything deprived. It gives birth to various kinds of perverse activities and exploitation. The law of brutes prevails and everything is reduced to mere brutality. SyamalaRao in the book *Bhabani Bhattacharya* observes, "Bhabani Bhattacharya presents a deep insight into the fact, that no one knows to what abysmal depths poverty degrades a man"<sup>5</sup>

#### CONCLUSION:-

Bhattacharya shows that poverty and hunger adversely affect not only the body but also the mind. He proves it through the case of Obhijit. Obhijit keeps two slices of bread under his bed every day. A boy who had been hungry for the bread gets it easily. But the fear of not getting it the next day makes him keep it under his bed. Even after Lekha's assurance that he will get whatever he likes to eat, he cannot change his habit. "...sweets would not let Obhijit forget the rotten food from rubbish heaps." He cannot get out of his past with its taboos and denials easily. The fear of hunger haunts him. Bhattacharya attacks the political exploitation of the poor by the rulers in the name of administration. Bhattacharya tries to show that some people may think ending the village people

back to the countryside can solve the hunger problem of the cities. Villagers go to the big cities with the belief that big cities will offer those jobs. But they get thunderstruck when they find that thousands of hungry men already existing in the city. They realize that to find a job is like chasing a mirage in the big cities. If they go back they can till their fields. But the fact is most of the destitute are landless labourers and those with lands have either mortgaged or sold their ancestral lands. This solution will "Throw the hunger back into the countryside, there it will remain unseen" (194).

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