

Use of Tiger as a Symbol in *He Who Rides A Tiger*

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Abstract: Corbett has described tiger as the symbol of “large hearted gentleman”. Long before him British poet Blake contrasted tiger with sheep. In the present article I have made a study of three Indian English novels where tiger is a symbol. Tiger stands here for ferocity, ambition and almost an impossible conveyance. Neither Bharati Mukherjee, an NRI author, nor Arvind Adiga, a Carnatic author, could descend from it but Bhabani Bhattacharya made his protagonist, an honest man, descend and enter into wilderness.

Keywords: autobiographical, democracy, cheat, non-pareil, unsettled sensibility, adolescent femininity.

English poet William Blake (1757-1827) in his *Songs of Experience* (1794) has used Tiger as a symbol and composed a poem with tiger rubric. It is a symbol of ferocity, it is God's Wrath. Man's own burning passion shut up within his natural body is the Tiger(1) N.Ram, the editor of “Frontline” has brought out *Riding the Nuclear Tiger* (1999) comparing nuclear weapons to Tiger's similar ability to kill.

Bharati Mukherjee has written an autobiographical novel *Tiger's Daughter* (1972). Tara is the daughter of Bengal Tiger. Her tiger symbol is biological inheritance of Tara, the protagonist, who acquires a second self in America and on return to original self in Calcutta, fails to accommodate and live smoothly. There is loneliness in her life. It is an important milestone in Diaspora literature by Indian authors in English. There duality of self seems in soluble.

In 2008, appeared the fiction *The White Tiger* by Arvind Adiga of Karnataka; in it Balaram, the hero is the tiger not white by color but by virtue of rarity. It is the epithet qualifying the brilliance of Balaram, in the crowds of thugs and idiots(2). An outsider to the village, the Inspector, asks Balaram 'what is the rarest of animals', Balaram's response is 'The White Tiger'. The Inspector agrees that is Balaram, The White Tiger. In course of flow of time, in the novel, he visits National zoo where, at the sight of real quadmped white tiger, he faints, and does something to communicate it to grandma through Daram's pen(Adiga, 35). Balaram, the driver, murdered his boss and as the country was democratic it went well with him. “Who can not be caught in India”(Adiga, 278). “ I will never say I made a mistake that night in Delhi when I slit my master's throat”(Adiga, 320). The subtext of rise as Bangalore-based entrepreneur, attracting attention of foreign lands follows next as grist for P.M of China. The novel is written in the first person, narrator of *The White Tiger*.

Critics like Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyenger in his *Indian Writing in English* and M. K. Nair in his *A History of Indian English Literature* have called Kalo, the poor protagonist of Bhabani's novel *He Who Rides A Tiger* cheat. I do not know what they would call Balaram, the entrepreneur protagonist of *The White Tiger*. The narration in *The White Tiger* is sensational and full of dramatic quality with the characteristic harmony and wholeness that beauty require.

However, out of all this uses of Tiger as symbols, Bhabani's use of Tiger as symbol of protagonist, Kalo's vehicle for onward voyage is full of suspense, an essential quality of a novel and non—pareil. It is true to E.M. Forster's standards: "Not completion. Not rounding off, but opening out" (Aspects of The Novel).

There is no music to smooth and to move softly (except on a Harlot house ch. 7). There is attack of ferocity on her when (i) Lekha goes to school from classmates and teachers, (ii) in famine—stricken house she is alone, (iii) in Harlot—house Jogesh Mitra outraged her modesty, (iv) in temple from lecherous Motichand, etc. in the midst of an avalanche of ferocity (without introduction of tiger) Lekha beside her father, on tiger skin, his seraphic. Lecherous Motichand with dissimulation greets them as serendipity, makes manifold increase in self—interest unknown to the duo on tiger. Since ch 7 of the text, lies, and therefore, the animal are accompanying undertone to the theme of Kalo's destiny: tiger writes a new space and discourse. It was daughters who drove King Lear in Shakespeare Mad. It is now Kalo's affection and concern for Lekha's future which makes him mad (ch. 7 "I have gone mad"). His filial affection for Lekha is unfathomable till we read his response to the heart—rending sound of "Nah" (in italics) from inside of Rupa, it flashes before his inner eye, Lekha in peril. Hard fact of fall precipitates collapse of his five precipitates collapse of his five wits and five senses: but the fourth dimension propels him to act that very moment decisively. Alone he rescues his life's only bet—Lekha from Jogesh Mitra, the basest animal about to fall on meekest girl. He decides: "what shall I do?....." yes, yes, there was a way, a way not simply to make a living but a way to settle accounts with them. They hit us where it hurts badly. We've got to hit back we've got to hit back" (Bhattacharya, 77).

Once he went against convention by naming her Chandra—Lekha. Now he takes resort to conventional structure i.e. temple, as his container of action and falsehood as tiger to keep the wolf from the door and to take revenge. His tiger though put him in strong financial footing; it put a shell around Lekha which is intolerable for her. Her femininity wants to break out of it. In Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, transformation of Balaram, the driver, comes from committal of crime but here Kalo's tiger comes from within. He springs surprise on public gullible minds by false rumor of dream, and arrival of Shiva. Within the halo of falsehood i.e. presence of tiger Kalo lives, acts, speaks according to inner existential urge.

Irony of fate stalks in.

In spite of tiger, he humbly revives a cheque from the identical rapist of Lekha without a trace of mutiny within or without, but this conflict and compromise causes physical collapse. The novelist has selected this significant incident to downplay the ability of tiger to take him away from the spot or to abide by anti-tiger's law i.e. truth to take revenge.

In the struggle between his unsettled sensibility and crisis of Lekha's adolescent femininity (of loving Biten with blemished body) the irrational vehicle, the tiger, remains static, but metaphor of Tiger is a King in the novel who brings many things for Kalo-Lekha (freedom from want).

In the long run Lekha also considers the achieved Brahmanism unbearable. She has forgotten her father's advice of experience, how brutish a man can be. She accompanies Biten to public meeting to take part together in it. Kalo considers it defiance. Sceptic Biten who once renounced Brahmanism at Tatanagar – an opposite of Kalo in Calcutta –, urges her to open up her past. Lekha trembles in horror; she can neither receive her loving embrace nor reject him. Sponsored by powerful trustees of the Temple Lekha is proposed to be Mother of Divinity in a ceremony.

More powerful Motichand, polygamous MLC sends the match-maker to Kalo to agree to give Lekha in marriage with Motichand. Milk donors are up in arms against Viswanath. Some want Obhijit, the adopted son of Kalo, to be thrown out of his home. A bereaved mother publicly curses Lekha. Though Kalo thinks otherwise in consonance with his tiger journey, Lekha agrees to marry Motichand.

In the other subtext Biten is away from the scene after forecasting imminent descent of Kalo from the tiger.

Kalo, as in thirty second line of first chapter, like an epiphany said, 'I am thinking' so in one hundred forty fourth line of closing chapter 27, 'he began' without an inkling us to what was going on in his mind. In his years at Jharna he had faith in obedience to law or practised truth. But it went topsy-turvy. When the single individual as a (i) Magistrate put him to jail and (ii) that very man begged his blessings when he was riding tiger. He himself was an untouchable and lived in a different locality away from the 'touchables' at Jharna, but when he rode a tiger in Calcutta he asked the same untouchables to stand away from the precincts of the Temple.

Those who do not take help of effective falsehood similar to effectiveness of "Tiger", go poor, they are unemployed, their potentialities are killed, want of food withers away their values (so Kalo became a procurer) and ethics (so Lekha attempted to steal a pumpkin from a dying untouchable's hat), suffer erosion of values of earnings (3/4th of Kalo's earning eroded by inflation), lack freedom of movement (while moving freely as well as hungrily Kalo was asked : "Don't be overlong coming back(ch-5) looking for pockets to pick?" (Bhattacharya, 50) etc.

Plethora of contradictions were in the air even to suffocate the falsehood,

the 'Tiger'. So Yagna fire burns, guests have come, uninvited guests are waiting outside in large number, Motichand is in reception, with pain written over his countenance Kalo enters with Lekha, wearing pearl necklace. The dramatic anti – climax of descent from 'Tiger' begins as soon as “he began” (Bhattacharya,237). As the story of Kalo's falsehood unfolds Lekha looked at him with rapt attention. Biten joined the crowd and faithful Viswanath was there to hear him.

From some he received claptrap, from some stone. From the Knight, who need not descend from 'Tiger' praised the tiger's i.e. his 'business sense' and desired to pack his office with such 'Tigers'. Biten called it a legend. Lekha threw back the pearl necklace at Motichand.

Deconstructing both tradition and falsehood, phlegmatic, bleeding (only in front, but not in the back like an escaping soldier) 'Tiger' walked out with Lekha for they have more things, to revalue for their life is life of an artist over the paradigm of society.

Behind them, 'yagna' fire continued to singe.

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