

Vol 4 Issue 8 May 2015

ISSN No : 2249-894X

*Monthly Multidisciplinary
Research Journal*

*Review Of
Research Journal*

Chief Editors

Ashok Yakkaldevi
A R Burla College, India

Flávio de São Pedro Filho
Federal University of Rondonia, Brazil

Ecaterina Patrascu
Spiru Haret University, Bucharest

Kamani Perera
Regional Centre For Strategic Studies,
Sri Lanka

Welcome to Review Of Research

RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2249-894X

Review Of Research Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial Board readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

Advisory Board

Flávio de São Pedro Filho Federal University of Rondonia, Brazil	Delia Serbescu Spiru Haret University, Bucharest, Romania	Mabel Miao Center for China and Globalization, China
Kamani Perera Regional Centre For Strategic Studies, Sri Lanka	Xiaohua Yang University of San Francisco, San Francisco	Ruth Wolf University Walla, Israel
Ecaterina Patrascu Spiru Haret University, Bucharest	Karina Xavier Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA	Jie Hao University of Sydney, Australia
Fabricio Moraes de Almeida Federal University of Rondonia, Brazil	May Hongmei Gao Kennesaw State University, USA	Pei-Shan Kao Andrea University of Essex, United Kingdom
Anna Maria Constantinovici AL. I. Cuza University, Romania	Marc Fetscherin Rollins College, USA	Loredana Bosca Spiru Haret University, Romania
Romona Mihaila Spiru Haret University, Romania	Liu Chen Beijing Foreign Studies University, China	Ilie Pinte Spiru Haret University, Romania
Mahdi Moharrampour Islamic Azad University buinzahra Branch, Qazvin, Iran	Nimita Khanna Director, Isara Institute of Management, New Delhi	Govind P. Shinde Bharati Vidyapeeth School of Distance Education Center, Navi Mumbai
Titus Pop PhD, Partium Christian University, Oradea, Romania	Salve R. N. Department of Sociology, Shivaji University, Kolhapur	Sonal Singh Vikram University, Ujjain
J. K. VIJAYAKUMAR King Abdullah University of Science & Technology, Saudi Arabia.	P. Malyadri Government Degree College, Tandur, A.P.	Jayashree Patil-Dake MBA Department of Badruka College Commerce and Arts Post Graduate Centre (BCCAPGC), Kachiguda, Hyderabad
George - Calin SERITAN Postdoctoral Researcher Faculty of Philosophy and Socio-Political Sciences Al. I. Cuza University, Iasi	S. D. Sindkhedkar PSGVP Mandal's Arts, Science and Commerce College, Shahada [M.S.]	Maj. Dr. S. Bakhtiar Choudhary Director, Hyderabad AP India.
REZA KAFIPOUR Shiraz University of Medical Sciences Shiraz, Iran	Anurag Misra DBS College, Kanpur	AR. SARAVANAKUMARALAGAPPA UNIVERSITY, KARAIKUDI, TN
Rajendra Shendge Director, B.C.U.D. Solapur University, Solapur	C. D. Balaji Panimalar Engineering College, Chennai	V.MAHALAKSHMI Dean, Panimalar Engineering College
	Bhavana vivek patole PhD, Elphinstone college mumbai-32	S.KANNAN Ph.D , Annamalai University
	Awadhesh Kumar Shirotriya Secretary, Play India Play (Trust), Meerut (U.P.)	Kanwar Dinesh Singh Dept.English, Government Postgraduate College , solan

More.....

THE CONSCIENCE KEEPER



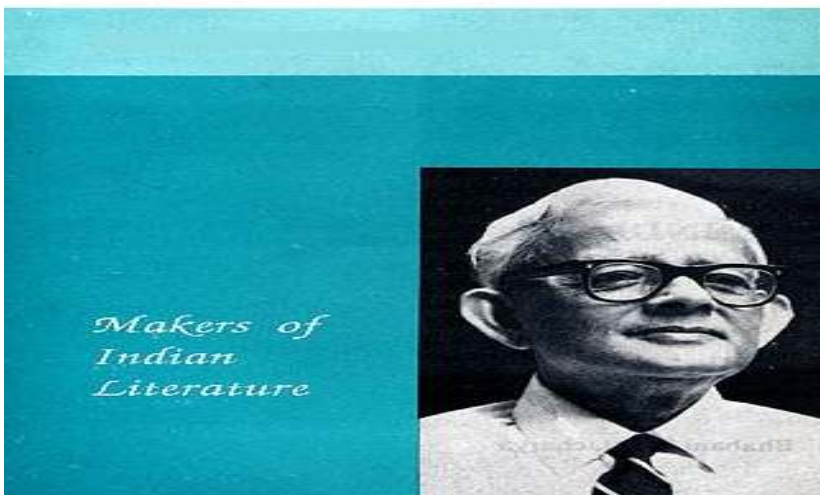
Bindu M . Raghavan

Asst, Professor , Dept of English , RDM Engineering College , Kavaraipettai , Chennai.

Short Profile

Bindu M . Raghavan is working as a Assistant Professor at Department of English in RDM Engineering College, Kavaraipettai, Chennai.

Bhabani Bhattacharya



ABSTRACT:

PART 'A'

Above all, Bhabani Bhattacharya is a humanist interested in the progress of the Indian society in every walk of life. He evokes compassion for the poor and the downtrodden. He brings to light social evils like hunger, inequality, cruelty, inhumanity and hypocrisy. He exposes through his novels the utter lack of morals and human values in the society.

In He who Rides a Tiger, Bhattacharya employs a lie to expose the truth about caste and religion as they obtain in the society. The protagonist of the novel is Kalo. His sufferings and thirst for revenge on the society constitute the

main theme of the novel. The superstitions among the people, casteism, the horrors of war and famine, the exploitation of the poor by the rich and the increasing evils of money-power are picturised in the novel. Kalo is presented as a champion of social freedom. His fight is not with any single individual. He wants to take revenge on the entire upper-class society. Ultimately, he learns, out of his miseries and experiences, that to be true to one's own self is most important.

KEYWORDS

humanist interested , cruelty, inhumanity and hypocrisy.

Article Indexed in :

DOAJ
BASE

Google Scholar
EBSCO

DRJI
Open J-Gate

INTRODUCTION:

Kalo is a blacksmith. The people of the upper classes call him "Kamar". He lives in a small town called Jharna. He loses his wife during child-birth. A daughter is born to him. He casually asks a priest to suggest a name for her. The priest says

Why, if it a boy, call him Obhijit; girl, call her
Chandra Lekha... We gentle folk give that kind of
name to our sons and daughter, Dark-minded folks
of your caste have a fancy for Haba and Goba, Punt
and Munni¹.

The lines reveal the caste-distinction in the society of the time. The Brahmin superiority- complex is presented through the priest.

Kalo's beautiful daughter, Chandralekha, (The moon-tinted one), appears to be very intelligent. Kalo desires to admit her in the local convent school, meant only for the rich high-caste people. Though Kalo himself is illiterate, he is aware of the importance of education and its ability to change the outlook of common man. This may suggest Bhattacharya's own hope to bring about social change through education.

The admission of Lekha into the convent school attracts criticism from both the lower and the higher castes. Lekha evinces a lot of interest in studies. Her school-mates tease her saying " smithman's daughter, what's your fee to mend a leaking bucket?"² They also say :

A kamar girl puts on the feathers of learning! A
sparrow preens as a parrot!³

Here again, Bhattacharya portrays the caste-distinction which obstructs the progress of the downtrodden towards a decent life. He also suggests how caste has a place even in the minds of small school girls. Kalo remains happy and proud because of his daughter's progress. To him it is a silver lining in a cloud. He tries to improve his knowledge going through Lekha's books.

Bhattacharya presents a gruesome picture of Bengal famine during the year 1943. To quote his words :

... the plague of hunger in the wave of war... no
rationing of food-grains, no price control, no checking
of giant sharks who play cornering game on a
stupendous scale... barns are empty ---- the peasants
had been induced to sell off their grain. Markets are
empty-the grain is hidden away... and now the rice
was five time the old rate... weavers sold their looms
to traders from big cities... Artisans sold their tools.
fishermen's boats were chopped up for fire wood to

sell.. the plague washed up in fierce tides⁴.

Bhattacharya tries to say how the poor are exploited by the rich in several ways. The famine slowly begins to invade the town of Jharna. The problem of unemployment grows acute. Kalo, like many others, finds no work. Big businessmen sell their implements to petty traders. Kalo goes to Calcutta hoping to get a job. He leaves Lekha under the care of an old aunt. He loves her so much that he finds it hard to part from her.

Kalo has no money even to buy his train-ticket. He travels on foot-board of a train. Hunger prompts him to steal three bananas from a first class carriage. He is arrested and tried for the offence. He tells the magistrate that he stole the bananas only to preserve his life. The question raised by the magistrate, "Why did you have to live?"⁵ shocks him and brings a drastic change in him. The magistrate's question reveals his callous attitude. Kalo is sentenced to three months' imprisonment.

In the jail, Kalo meets a revolutionary young man, who is known only by his number 'B-10'. (also called Biten) He is said to have been imprisoned for protesting against a policeman. The policeman had beaten up and killed a hungry destitute who stared at the food served at an eating place. Naturally, Kalo and B-10 become friends.

Later in the novel, it is revealed that B-10 belongs to a Brahmin family. His real name is Bikash Mukherjee. He has a sister by name, Purnima. She is five years younger to him. It is said that she is pleasing in her own way though she lacks the strange beauty of Chandra Lekha.⁵ Theirs is an orthodox family.

B-10's parents perform hours of puja every day. When Purnima is twelve years old, she is made to spend many hours performing special rites. These rites are meant for an unmarried girl to ensure a happy married life. But Purnima finds it difficult to spend so many hours in puja besides attending her studies. When she complains of it, her mother threatens to stop sending her to school. She says:

What good is this false book-learning? ...I would not let a big girl of mine go to school at all except for the fact that grooms these days have new-fangled notions and their parents yield foolishly to those notions, so that the question is asked at the bride-showing. 'Up to what class has she read at school?' In this country things are in a bad way⁶.

The comment suggests an attempt on the part of the author to expose the ways of the orthodox families to ridicule.

B-10's parents vie with each other in meticulously adhering to the customs and conventions followed by the orthodox people. His father says:

The day has come for a new Avatar—it would be the Supreme one's eleventh reincarnation in earth form... it will be an image of fury, like the fourth reincarnation, the Man-Lion, who tore the bowels of

Hiranya, the evil, with his claws. This age of sin needs the man-lion's claws again⁷.

Purnima is a quiet girl. But she happens to lose her heart to Basav, a low-caste by birth. He works as a foreman in a steel mill. He is expected to become an assistant engineer and rise even higher. He writes a letter to Purnima's father making a marriage-proposal. The latter is stunned as it is beyond his wildest nightmare. He flies into a fit of fury and behaves like a mad man. When Purnima's father hears about the proposal, she calls it a disgrace.

When Purnima comes home, the mother drags and beats her hard. She wishes that her daughter had died in her womb or she had throttled her at the moment of birth. She wonders why she had reared a serpent with the milk of her breast.

Purnima hears it all in stony silence. Biten finds it difficult to bear the raw deal meted out to his sister and for the first time in his life he raises his voice against his revealed father. The father says :

Fool!... do I have to tell you that the scoundrel is not a Brahmin? Do you pretend ignorance? I See! You are also in the game!⁹

Purnima remains a prisoner for nearly a week. Her marriage is fixed and it takes place on the seventh day. The groom happens to be a person with grey hair. He is a widower who has lost his wife months ago. He has children and even grandchildren.

That marriage is performed in great haste and only once Purnima is able to talk to Biten. She says,

Dada, I had faith in you. I had believed you were not like others, I had hoped... I was wrong¹⁰.

Her words bring a marked change in Biten. He finds a fire in her glance and is unable to forget it. This incident brings a remarkable change in his daily activities and shakes him to his roots. Being born and brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family, he is used to performing the brahminic rituals as a routine. He greets the sun god daily and makes the oblations to his ancestors with water. He utters the sacred Gayathri Mantra. It is said to be learnt by a Brahmin boy on the day he wears the holy thread and becomes twice born.

Purnima's words bring in a radical change in him and his attitude towards the rituals. He stops uttering the sacred Gayathri. He becomes free from his own roots.

Purnima's lover Basav feels guilty of being responsible for her fate. B-10 understands that her husband's house is a cage of gold. When he sees her last, she says :

The day will come when I shall not be able to bear it any more. Then I shall escape¹¹.

A letter comes which says that Purnima has died in an accident. She is said to have found drowned in a pond. But biten knows that it is not an accident. It is a case of deliberate suicide. He knows

well that she was a good swimmer.

When Basav hears the news of her death, he tells Biten :

Now that you Brahmins have committed a murder,
are you satisfied ? Are you happy?¹².

Then Basav asks him to get out. Biten doesn't go. Instead, he pulls his sacred thread with its nine strands and throws it into a corner of the room as though it were evil. Basav is stunned. Biten says :

Basav dada, I am a Brahmin no longer, I am one of
you. Do you still hate me? Bhai, this is not a
moment's mad impulse... I swear by all I hold sacred
That never again shall I wear the brahminic thread.
Purnima, dying, has done this to me. Don't you
understand, Basav dada?¹³

Basav must have understood and appreciated the change in heart in Biten. It marks the birth of a revolutionary and suggests to Bhattacharya's deep interest in social reforms.

On being arrested and sent to jail Biten becomes a friend of Kalo's. He is able to convince Kalo that the right answer to a society that is full of exploitation and inhumanity is retaliation. He says :

We are the scum of the earth... They hit us where it
hurts badly --- in the belly. We've got to hit back¹⁴

Bhabani Bhattacharya makes masterly use of the conversation between Kalo and Biten for projecting his intimate understanding of the sickening state of affairs in the country. Biten asks Kalo :

Can you wear a saffron loincloth, smear your body
with ashes and marks a red paste trident of Shiva on
your forehead? Then, as you walk the streets, your
alms-bowl will fill up in no time; and may be, if you
have luck, someone with money enough to squander
will see in you a yogi with great spiritual power¹⁵.

We may presume that there is greater intensity in this description of a sanctimonious humbug passing for a yogi than in the description of the fraudulent astrologer or saint presented by R.K.Narayan. The willingness on the part of these writers to expose the faults and follies of their own countrymen may redound to their credit.

Biten suggests another way to prosperity. It is to make milch cows of people who have large funds of faith as well as cash. He adds that faith can be squeezed to yield cash. According to him food for the soul is produced and sold like food for the stomach, and though the ways of the two trades are different, you pay for both with hard cash. He calls the temple a market and the priest a dealer. And he

believes that people are always ready to pay well for feeding inner man!16

The views expressed here may be attributed to Bhabani Bhattacharya himself. In fact, we cannot help thinking that there is a great deal of significance attached to the character of Biten. What the author says about him may well be his own private persuasions. And the revolutionary spirit revealed by him is perhaps the spirit lying hidden in the author himself.

Biten maintains that one has to make oneself a Brahmin to be able to retaliate effectively. He also urges him to raise a false temple in order to befool people.

It is long before Kalo is able to act on the suggestion made by him. After his release from the jail, Kalo goes in search of some work. He finds it difficult to get back to his own work as a blacksmith. The only job he is able to get is of carrying the corpses of destitutes into municipal trucks. It brings him only a meager income. He fights shy of telling his daughter when he writes to her what exactly his job is. But a less honourable job brings him a better income which he shares with Chandra Lekha. The new job is as procurer for a group of brothels in the city. Kalo has a chance to discover and save his own daughter at the right time from a harlot-house. These incidents bring a new resolve in him to take revenge on the society.

Kalo remembers the words of Biten. He manufactures a miracle. A stone-idol of God Shiva is made to come up from the earth. Then, he, the smith, convict and harlot-house-procurer, becomes the master of a magnificent temple. Kalo's growth as a rebel is portrayed in the following words by Bhattacharya:

A small rebel was born when he sold his tools and set off for the big city. The rebel grew eyes and ears in court and prison, with the help of B-10, gave it a mouth and a protest. Out of that protest he had acted mutinously, challenging man and God17.

The lines suggest the author's own attitude towards the society, which is responsible for bringing about such a change in Kalo.

Kalo wears a thread and gives himself a brahminic look. He adopts a recognizably Brahmin-name, 'Mangal Adhikari'. Money and materials, as donation, pour in from all sides for the construction of the temple. The chief donors are blackmarkeeters and speculators. They believe that they could atone for their past sins and ensure the success of all their future undertakings by means of such donations. The new temple attracts a large number of worshippers. Kalo knows little about the rituals of the temple. So a pujari is appointed to perform the rituals of worship in the temple. Kalo pretends as if he was too busy to perform the pooja himself in order to cover up his ignorance of the rituals.

Kalo rides the tiger in the sense that he is able to successfully deal with his enemies. The tiger may also symbolize the mighty airs he has to assume to pass for a Brahmin. Bhattacharya says:

He rode a lie as if it were a tiger which he could not dismount lest the tiger pounce upon him and eat him up18.

He is able to win over his enemies by sheer deception. The magistrate who sentenced him to

imprisonment, is seen touching his feet. He tells Lekha :

The turn of the wheel favours us beyond all reckoning!.. they are praying. They touch our low-caste feet. They pray to god who is no god,.. They are polluted, fallen. They are doomed – for many lives to come¹⁹.

All the same Kalo feels sad, when poor people like coolies, rickshaw pullers and blind beggars spend their hard-earned money in the temple.

Kalo appoints an old man named Vishwanath as a gardener in the temple. When he comes to know that he latter is a blacksmith, he desires to arrange a smithy for him in the future.

Kalo does not forget Biten when he occupies a new position in his life. He remembers the day of Biten's release from prison and goes there, accompanied by his daughter, to receive him. He tells Biten how his plan worked and offers him a share in the income. But Biten rejects the offer. He feels that Kalo will surely be tired of the game in the near future. His comment --- "A man like you cannot trick himself too long",²⁰ implies a tribute to Kalo, as it suggests a high opinion of his true nature.

Kalo plays the role of a Brahmin so thoroughly that he is completely immersed in it at times. He abuses the old destitute, Vishwanath, for touching him. Lekha is shocked to see her father's behaviour.

Mrs.Meenakshi Mukherjee is inclined to regard this act as proof of Kalo's having struck root in Brahminism²¹. In the view of K.R.Chandrasekharan, it amounts to only a momentary lapse on the part of Kalo.²²

One cannot afford to forget that Kalo has only been playing a part with intensity. And inasmuch as such a piece of behaviour is expected of a typical Brahmin, it does not amount to a lapse on the part of Kalo. Mrs.Meenakshi Mukherjee's view may also be less than apt in the context, as Kalo's main purpose is to take revenge on Brahmins. It should be hard indeed to believe that he ever has a deep desire to strike root in brahminism, as suggested by Mrs.Mukherjee. In fact Kalo's plan to arrange a smithly for Vishwananth in the future may be suggestive of the soft corner he has in his heart of hearts for his own profession, notwithstanding his pretences and pretensions.

Kalo's attempt to make amends for his undesirable behaviour may speak of his ability to keep in touch with his own roots. The words spoken by him in the context to Vishwanath may go a long way towards confirming that view :

A craftsman honest with his iron and fire is as good as the best of folks. He can hold his head high because of the skill of his hands, his special knowledge²³.

The comment suggests that Kalo was not ashamed of his own roots by any means. The secret smithy he had set up in the attire of his house also reveals his deep attachment to his own roots.

Kalo comes to know that Lekha and Biten are in love with each other. He feels that the marriage can be finalized only after confirming that Biten is a Brahmin. When he asks about the caste of Biten, the latter says that he is of the "convict caste". Kalo tells him that he can marry Lekha on the condition that

he wears the sacred thread of a brahmin. But Biten stubbornly refuses to do so, though he is from a Brahmin family.

Kalo brings a destitute boy to his house and gives him a Brahmin name, Obhijit. Lekha is happy and takes care of him as if he were her own brother.

Milk is offered in huge quantities by rich people for the ritual bath of the idol in the temple. This milk, after use, is collected and mixed in the Ganga. Vishwanath is against this practice of wasting milk. He arranges to have it distributed among poor destitutes. He also manages to suppress the chaos created by the rich people who offered milk. The author's disapproval of the meaningless rituals is indicated through Mangal Adhikari's words.

.... While men died of hunger, wealth grew, and while kindness dried up, religion was more in demand. It was only the outward form of religion, the shell of ritual, empty within²⁴.

The wicked practices of hollow religion are portrayed. Bhattacharya throws light on the superstitions existing among people, and exposes them to ridicule.

Motichand is the main trustee of the temple. He wears a façade of respectability and religiosity. His interest basically is in money-making. Indeed he is also infinitely interested in women. Chandra Lekha arrests his attention at the very first sight. He wants to make her his fourth wife after deserting the third one. He makes an astrologer predict that there is a serious threat to his life unless he marries once again. His third wife begs him to allow her to remain in his house as a door-mat to the feet of his new wife. But he insists on having only one wife, for 'monogamy was the rule of his life²⁵'. Amusingly enough, in his opinion, monogamy means having only one wife at a time. His adherence to the principle does not prevent him from getting married to the fourth time. He is an ignoramus in matters concerning financial dealings. He depends entirely on the chance utterances of Chandra Lekha to decide on the buying or selling of shares. His profits are said to have enormously increased following the advice of Chandra Lekha. Hence, he becomes a regular visitor to the temple and a devotee of Chandra

Lekha in more than one sense. Kalo finds his owl eyes eat Lekha's face at arati²⁶. He is horrified to know that Chandra Lekha has a soft corner for Motichand. She moves to the brink of marrying him for her own reasons and it is the daring confession of Kalo that turns the tide against him.

Having dismounted the tiger on which he has been riding for quite some time, Kalo is able to save himself and his daughter from greater ignominy. In fact, the decision to wear the sacred thread and pose like a Brahmin is very much against his own grain. It is actually imposed on him by a conspiracy of circumstances. He remains a traditionalist at heart throughout in spite of his pretences to the contrary. And although he does not feel at home in his new garb as a Brahmin, he is forced to persist in his pretences to the utter dismay of his daughter, Chandra Lekha. Ultimately, he feels constrained to make a stunning confession :

....I am a Kamar from afar. Hunger drove me from my native earth. Hunger took me to jail. From there I walked into hell itself. I saw the face of Evil. I asked myself a question, I who had been content with my

lot, my humble place in life. I puzzled over all that had happened to me until the answer came : nothing is as true as falseness! The more false you are, to yourself and to others, the more true you become! The rest of the answer is, Evil is to be faced and fought with its own knives!²⁷

Kalo decides to leave with Lekha and take up his old job as a blacksmith.

The confession produces different kinds of reactions in the public. Some want to beat him up. Some suggest legal action. The prince of black-

Marketers, Sir Abalabandhu, wishes that he had a man of genius like Kalo to assist him in his new business. A large number of destitutes and men of the lower classes are all thrilled and delighted that a man of their class has successfully hoodwinked the so-called superior classes and ruled over them.

They shout with joy, 'Victory to our brother". Biten congratulates him saying :

You have triumphed over those others and over yourself.. your story will be a legend of freedom, a legend to inspire and awaken²⁸.

Ironically enough, that air of triumph is brought to an abrupt end quite deliberately by Kalo himself. If he were truly proud of his new-found links with brahminism, he would perhaps have avoided having resort to such an extreme step at any cost. Besides, it may also be difficult to agree with Meenakshi Mukherjee when she asserts that his brahminical pretences amount to "the fulfillment of his own submerged wishes". One may wonder if she has had difficulty in reconciling Kalo's "sudden renunciation of his power, his money and his status with his background"²⁹.

The implications of Mrs. Mukherjee's comments may amaze us. When she says that circumstances raise Kalo to the status of a Brahmin, she seems to place the Brahmin on a high pedestal, suggesting her belief in caste-based distinctions. The author himself does not seem to reveal a weakness of the kind. If anything, the novel helps expose the hollowness of the mighty pretensions made by some people in the name of castes. Through making them eat a humble pie, the author's endeavour has apparently been to bring them back to sanity. Indeed we must concede that by making Kalo get off the tiger towards the end of the novel, the author has prevented the triumph of falsehood over truth.

The author's comment that Kalo has 'made himself rootless'³⁰ by putting on the sacred thread seems to have given scope for a good deal of misconstruction. We cannot help thinking that the change in Kalo is largely superficial. We have already noted how he has held fast to his own roots, contrary to the impression created by his assumed appearance. In fact, he does not fight shy of giving expression to his intimate thoughts and feelings as and when occasion demands. His comments on the waste of huge quantities of milk for the sake of a temple ritual may be an instance of it. The author seems to identify himself with his protagonist in such contexts, though their backgrounds differ vastly. His affinity with the views represented by Biten may also be beyond doubt. Kalo's rage against the corrupt system and

the acquisitive society, referred to by H.M.Williams,³¹ is obviously the result of the author's own deliberate decision to rebel against them. P.P.Sharma has observed that it was not necessary for Kalo to pose as a brahmin³². As the author's intention is to dramatise the iniquities and hypocrisies of the caste system,³³ he could not have achieved his ends if Kalo were to masquerade only as a holy man without any caste affiliations. His decision to drag Kalo forcibly into the broil speaks of the intensity of his indignation against the society, as pointed out by Ram Sewak Singh.³⁴ His refusal to allow someone else to expose Kalo may also suggest that his sympathies have been with the latter.

Kalo's refreshing confession towards the end of the novel speaks of the triumph of his sincerity and integrity over the petty emotions that prompt him to take revenge on brahmins. It also suggests the victory of his own values. Though the novel has served "as a warning and as a prophecy"³⁵, as maintained by K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, the author seems to have exercised a good deal of destructive character of Kalo's experience, referred to by Ihab Hassan,³⁶ has not been allowed to result in a negative vision. Apparently, Kalo's confession may form part of the author's attempt to present an "affirmative vision of life"³⁷ in the novel.

The hero of R.K.Narayan's *The Guide* has not been capable of such a confession, though the disguise assumed by the two has few things in common. And Kalo may deserve a special word of praise on that score.

Besides portraying the sufferings imposed by the famine on the people of Bengal, the novel has also depicted certain dramatic changes that have come about in the life of an individual, belonging to an oppressed and depressed section of the society. While presenting those changes, the author has allowed us an insight into the kind of society envisioned by him. It is a society in which notions of caste-based superiority or inferiority make little sense. It is a society in which uprightness and moral values prevail over frivolous and hypocritical emotions, bringing about the ultimate triumph of good over evil and truth over falsehood.

PART – B

The women characters in Bhabani Bhattacharya's first novel, *So Many Hungers !* have been found to be relatively passive. They are inclined to accept the customs, conventions and traditions that prevail the society unquestioningly.

The change from *So Many Hungers!* to *He Who Rides a Tiger*, it has been observed, is a change from passivity to rebellion³⁸. While commenting on that change, Bhabani Bhattacharya observes :

So Many Hungers! follows the famine upto its peak point, its climax. In the Storm of death that almost suddenly swept the city streets and filled them with human debris, there was no room for any kind of counteraction..... certain gaps were left – the famine was multifaced. The gaps were filled out in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, which was written with a different perspective³⁹.

The observations suggest the author's own awareness of a deficiency in his earlier novels. We

many conclude that he is able to find his feet as a novelist only by the time he writes *He Who Rides a Tiger*.

The most significant woman character in *He Who Rides a Tiger* is Chandra Lekha who is the only daughter of its protagonist, Kalo. The name is suggested to Kalo by a Brahmin priest. He also sends her to a mission school which is meant for children of high castes.

While contesting Mrs. Meenakshi Mukherjee's view that Kalo's desire to give a Brahmin name to his daughter and give her the kind of education received by children of high castes is suggestive of his submerged desire to become a Brahmin⁴⁰, K.R.Chandrasekharan seems to be on slippery grounds. For we find that the mother of the Brahmin girl, Purnima, is against sending her daughter to school when the school-work interferes with the observance of rituals at home.

The desire expressed by Kalo's wife before her death to send her child to the mission school at any cost, regardless of its sex, seems to have influenced Kalo's decision in this regard more than anything else. She says :

Our golden one, boy or girl, shall go to the mission school and get all the learning they have there. We must find the money for expenses even if we have to go without food⁴¹.

By attributing a desire of kind to Kalo's wife, the author seems to reveal his unbiased attitude. Obviously, his intention in ascribing the contrary view to a Brahmin mother is to expose her to ridicule.

Lekha is occasionally ill-treated by her classmates who belong to high castes. One day Lekha flies into a fit of fury and slaps a girl for making derogatory comments on Kalo. She believes in the goodness of her father and his profession. Yet the fact that she has resorted to beating up the girl may testify to the spirit of rebellion she has in her. The regard she has for her father's feelings prompts her to hide away the incident from him.

The ill-treatment by her classmates does not prevent her from doing well in her studies. She does her father proud that way. Kalo also tries to learn things by going through her books after she goes to bed.

Lekha's brilliance as a student does not make her slight her father's profession. In fact, she wishes that she were a boy so that, she can be helpful to her father in his work. Kalo himself does not think of giving her training in his work as she is a girl and also she reads well and gets many prizes at school.

Lekha's education in the mission school is not at all appreciated either by the lower or the upper castes of the society. They say :

A Kamar girl puts on the feathers of learning! A sparrow preens as a parrot!⁴²

Lekha stands first in Bengal in an essay writing competition and wins the Asoka Memorial Medal. Kalo is overwhelmed with joy when he sees her name published in the paper, 'Hindustan'. He expects his daughter to be complimented by the inspector of schools, the magistrate and several others.

But no one is seen. The author says :

It was as though nothing had happened to Jharna town⁴³.

Anyhow, Kalo basks in the sunshine of his daughter's achievement. He keeps the medal below his pillow and touches it before going to bed. He loves Lekha so much that his very existence is for her. The author says :

Chandra Lekha was the very spark of his being. She was the sole reason for his existence⁴⁴.

The second world war hits the entire Bengal and makes life extremely difficult for the poor.

Along with many others, Kalo also finds himself idle. He feels deeply depressed as he thinks that he is able to give his daughter nothing but suffering. But she has never complained. Kalo realises that she has inherited not only her mother's good looks but also her good nature. She is happy with her mother's glass bangles.

Kalo plans to go to the city of Calcutta hoping to get a job. He leaves Chandra Lekha behind, with a heavy heart, in the care of an old aunt.

Lekha thinks of selling her medal to buy food. She is aware that her father would not approve of such an action as the medal is a source of pride to him. He used to tell her that it was not just a piece of silver but a sacred amulet. The author says that it lifted her out of the oppressive bonds of her class and gave her a status denied her caste⁴⁵. Yet, she finds it impossible to avoid selling it off. She sells it to a trader for three measures of rice. She expresses her desire to have the velvet case of the medal and tells the trader as much. The latter thinks that she is bargaining for some extra rice towards the cost of the case and gives her a little more of rice.

Lekha has no news from her father for several months after he leaves for Calcutta. At that time Kalo is in prison for three months for stealing bananas. Lekha is very much worried. Besides, she has an evil dream about her father. Soon after, she receives a letter from Kalo saying that he is safe. But he hides away the fact that he was in jail for fear of upsetting her. The letter brings her immense joy and makes her forget hunger.

Lekha writes a letter to her father and waits for a reply. Long after, she gets a reply with two ten rupee notes. Lekha and her aunt are able to have food with the help of it. But the fact that her father has been able to find his feet at last appears more important to her. She has been actually expecting that to happen.

Lekha has visions of being able to continue her studies in Calcutta. She realises that it means excessive ambition in her. She is confident that she too will be able to stand on her own feet some day.

Mean while, a fat woman who pretends to be coming from Calcutta appears before Lekha and tells her that her father has met with an accident and is hospitalized. She also says that Lekha's father wants to see her and the hospital authorities have sent her to bring Lekha. She is not in favour of the old aunt accompanying Lekha. She is able to trick Lekha into believing that she is speaking truth and Lekha accompanies her.

On her arrival in Calcutta, she lands in a brothel against her own wishes. She has to spend two days in the brothel with her door locked and windows closed without having any food. She finds it

impossible to starve and has a few mouthfuls of food most reluctantly. On the next day, the woman arranges a feast for her. Along with her feeling of disappointment at not seeing her father, she feels a sense of relief, as she knows that he has not met with an accident and been hospitalized.

The fat woman uses both persuasion and coercion to make her yield and live the life of a prostitute in the brothel. But providentially, Lekha's father himself gives her a helping hand. Recognising her voice when he hears her scream, on someone making advances towards her, he comes to her rescue. He has been working in that brothel.

Lekha's stay in the brothel for a few days may make some of us wonder if she can be considered unpolluted in spite of it. The author himself suggests the possibility of the orthodox society holding such a view, when she says :

Even to have breathed the air of the harlot house
would mark a woman as fallen⁴⁶.

Yet the truth is that she has remained virtually pure. And her providential escape from disgrace may also arise some eye-brows as it tends to strain one's imagination. It may well be considered a blot on the realism of the novel. Yet, we have to acknowledge that the positive quality of the author's vision of life has promoted such a chance occurrence. Indeed, Bhabani Bhattacharya is an artist with a design on the reader. And a certain amount of manipulation of his part in the presentation of the incidents of the novel may perhaps be considered pardonable. Mercifully enough, the Hardy-esque chance has once again played a benevolent role in the world of Bhabani Bhattacharya.

The untold hardships caused to Chandra Lekha apparently bring about a new resolve in Kalo to wreak vengeance on the society which inflicted them on her. He says :

She was society's scum in a truer sense than he. Her
suffering had been incomparably more than his. She
had to hit back. Would she? Would She?⁴⁷

Consequently, Kalo goes about executing the plan suggested by Biten. Lekha is aware that her father's attempt is to practise sheer deception. Yet she does not feel like opposing the plan. In fact, she goes to the extent of complimenting him on the cleverness revealed in it. The voice of her conscience remains muted for the time being by the force of circumstances.

Perhaps such an unholy plan would not have originated in Chandra Lekha herself. And she would not also have helped promoted it if she were to take the vital decisions involved in it. We are reminded of the role played by the male-dominated society in such cases. Woman, more often than not, are left helpless spectators, when men go about taking important decisions and implementing them.

Surely, the voice of a strong conscience cannot be suppressed for too long. It is bound to assert itself sooner or later.

When Kalo makes himself instrumental in the setting up of a Shiva temple installing himself as its master, flying in the face of established customs and conventions, Lekha is confused as well as alarmed. Kalo himself is far from sure that she will cooperate in his endeavours. It is her respect and affection for him that makes her keep silent in the face of his attempts to dupe himself and others in a

manner that it is not worthy of a conscientious person. Of course, Kalo also has immense regard for his daughter's sentiments. He believes that she has been wronged by the society and she has to hit back. He notices a peculiar look in her eyes as if she feared him. He finds no frankness in her face. She was withdrawn, deep inside, beyond his reach⁴⁸ – says Bhabani Bhattacharya.

The comment may suggest the author's views on her relative strength. Chandra Lekha, according to him, is too deep for her father. Her superiority seems to spring, partly at least, from the kind of education she has received, while Kalo remains relatively shallow and rustic. He knows only too well that her views are likely to be more right than his own. Yet he seems to have deliberately avoided taking cognizance of her conscientious objection to his practices, as he finds no other way to wreaking vengeance on the society. Chandra Lekha also seems to have deliberately avoided making her views explicit for quite some time.

Only when Kalo exceeds the limits of propriety in pursuit of his goal, Chandra Lekha begins to speak out.

When Kalo is angered by the touch of a blacksmith, Vishwanath, and uses abusive language against him, Lekha is shocked. Her very look addressing him as 'Baba' is enough to force him make amends for his misbehavior towards the man by using a conciliatory tone. Lekha is deeply impressed by the manner in which Kalo responds to her hint.

When Vishwanath is introduced to her by Kalo as a God-sent uncle, Lekha proves the essential humanity of her nature by touching the man's feet. The manner of that introduction may testify to the consideration Kalo has for a member of his community, his brahminical pretences notwithstanding. In defence of his seeming misbehavior earlier, Kalo tells Lekha :

We stand on the edge of a cliff. A hundred eyes keep watch on us, waiting to see if we slip and fall. We have to be wary. In our difficult position we cannot be familiar with a menial. Do you understand?⁴⁹

But Lekha is left wondering :

Was his brahminism sinking deep into him? Even if he must keep his distance from Vishwanath, why could he not be kind? Sometimes he even ignored the old man's formal greeting, she had noticed. Rudeness could add nothing to his dignity. Many of the Brahmins she met everyday had a humble and gracious manner. Was it, then, that the counterfeit coin needed more glitter than the real?⁵⁰

Lekha's awareness of the existence of a good number of Brahmins with a humble and gracious manner may reveal that she is not prejudiced against their community by any means, though her father nurses a grouse against them. B. Shyamala Rao's comment on Chandra Lekha's attachment to her nativity seems to create an incorrect impression about her. She says :

She never likes to leave her 'nativity' to transform herself into 'new strata' of society and it is she that

awakens Kalo too from his temporary
'darkness' (Tama's)⁵¹

One would think that Lekha's affinity is towards probity rather than nativity and her objection to her father's plan is based on her aversion to his practice of deception to an unconscionable degree. And while Kalo allows his own conscience to remain muted in the thick of his retaliatory activities, he allows himself to listen to the voice of Chandra Lekha's conscience whenever it is heard. In that sense Chandra Lekha functions as his conscience-keeper.

Lekha's freedom from caste-based prejudices is borne out by her attitude towards Biten, a Brahmin by birth who has severed his links with brahminism for his own reasons. Lekha is broad-minded enough to hold him in high esteem though he has no caste affiliations. The fact that Bhabani Bhattacharya has credited her with such a broad outlook may prove the supreme regard he has for women as well as his belief in their superiority. Lekha is not upset by Biten's blunt refusal to wear a sacred thread to be considered eligible to marry her. Instead, she is embarrassed by her father's insistence on such an absurd condition. T.N.Dhar suggests that it is prompted more by Kalo's fear of economic insecurity and less by his genuine fascination for brahminhood"⁵².

Lekha does not seem inclined to give any credit to Kalo in the matter. Yet her sense of delicacy and decency prevents her from entering into an argument with Kalo on that score, much as she desires to get married to Biten. Apparently, she is willing to put up with the consequences of her father's decision in the matter passively.

In the normal course, she is not in favour of getting married to a Brahmin. She shudders at the thought of her having to live a life of deception in the company of a person who actually deserves her affection and respect. But such considerations do not seem to matter to Kalo. Having decided to play a part, he is keen on playing it in a thorough-going manner, allowing no scope for anyone to point an accusing finger at him. Lekha has difficulty in approving his new manner. The author says :

She, who agreed with her father's impulse of revolt,
felt confused of his method. Was he hitting back,
truly?⁵³

Kalo is not deep enough to understand and appreciate the inhibitions felt by his daughter in the matter, in spite of the affection he has always had for her. And, as an affectionate daughter, her sympathies were with him, notwithstanding his follies and foibles.

As the only daughter of the chief priest of the temple, Chandra Lekha commands enormous reverence. Her absorption in the rituals of the temple brings her a kind of relief. Biten's attempt to embrace her on an occasion rouses the woman in her. Biten misunderstands her revulsion and leaves her. She seeks refuge in the temple when her lover leaves her. The author says :

Would the temple bring her peace? Would her piety
be no less potent than Brahminic invocation
investing the stone with meaning, transmuting
falsehood into truth?⁵⁴

The rituals in the temple provide her a good deal of solace in the context. K.R.Chandrasekharan

suggests that the efficacy of ritualistic worship, even in a false temple, is proved by that fact.⁵⁶ But one feels that any serious occupation that involves one's attention is likely to serve the same purpose and not necessarily the rituals observed in a temple.

After Biten leaves her, she becomes a woman like any other. But she is considered 'The mother of Sevenfold Bliss' by the devotees. A mendicant begins chanting :

Thou who art the secret breath in all created beings,
Hail to thee, Mother, and hail, and hail, hail!⁵⁶

The author pinpoints the irony of the situation in which the people begin to deify Chandra Lekha when the woman in her is awakened⁵⁷.

Lekha's attitude towards the orphan boy, named Obhijit reveals her essential nobility and compassion. The comforts of her new life do not prompt her to neglect the interests of the study. The rhetorical question attributed to her by Biten "Is it a crime to demand food for the hungry?"⁵⁸ may suggest that her heart is throbbing for the poor as much as the author's. She is also said to have asked,

"Who does not want food profiteers to be sent to jail,
or better still, hanged by the neck?"⁵⁹

The question may testify to her strong views, notwithstanding her passive nature. Surely, in a male-dominated society, one is not used to hearing such strong words from the mouths of women, as matters of the kind are usually considered to belong to the male domain. The exalted position assigned to women by Bhabani Bhattacharya in his novels has apparently made him credit his women characters with such views.

Lekha is said to have undergone a spiritual transformation and is considered sanctified. Bhabani Bhattacharya maintains that this kind of transformation in her is rendered possible partly because of her compassion and affection towards the orphan boy.

Meanwhile, Motichand, one of the trustees of the temple, plans to desert his third wife, Radha, with the help of a fake astrologer. His idea is to marry the beautiful Lekha. He is very much fascinated by her looks. He tells Kalo about his desire to marry her, Neither Kalo nor Chandra Lekha feels in favour of Motichand. Yet they are aware that he will make a dangerous enemy. The author says :

Ten thousand maids in Bengal prayed for such a rich,
high placed husband. But Lekha was unlike them in
temperament and needs. She had no craving for the
good things of life. She wore few ornaments and only
plain cotton clothes. The rest was a load cast upon
her unwilling head⁶⁰.

Motichand persists on his attempts to win over Chandra Lekha. He is determined to gain his ends by fair means or foul. He even tries to blackmail Kalo. He threatens to separate Obhijit from them.

The temple authorities decide to formally install Chandra Lekha as the mother of Sevenfold Bliss. But for Lekha, the status, which is imposed on her, is suffocating. The fact is revealed when

Bhabani Bhattacharya says :

The very air she breathed was sick with stench as it had been in the house of the ogress⁶¹.

Chandra Lekha has no hope of getting married to Biten , as he already has gone away from her. Yet she prays for his well-being.

The only choice left before Lekha is of agreeing to be married to Motichand. She knows that he is a despicable character and it is impossible for her to respect him as a married woman should respect her husband. Her plan is only to punish him in all possible ways.

Lekha tells her father about her deliberate decision in the matter. He is totally confused. He has not expected such a decision from her. But in her attempt to convince him of the utility of her plans she says :

You wish that I stay buried in the temple? forever?⁶².

Her question is pregnant with significance. It suggests her deep sense distress and disappointment with the kind of life she is expected to live. Her plan is to get married to Motichand soon after being installed as the Mother of Sevenfold Bliss. The benefits accruing from her decision in this regard are manifold. One cannot help thinking that she has her tongue in her cheek when she says :

Don't you see the benefits? I shall have a rich husband, you will be safe with your temple. Jit stays with us, a Brahmin boy⁶³.

That is the closest Chandra Lekha is capable of going towards hurting her father's feelings. Being a decent and dignified person, she has utmost regard and respect for the sensibilities of others.

Kalo is convinced that his daughter means business and has made up her mind once for all to sacrifice her life for protecting her interests. As suggested by T.N.Dhar, her decision to get married to Motichand becomes the proverbial last straw that breaks the camel's back⁶⁴.

And Kalo's daring confession, when it comes at last, brings a pleasant surprise to Chandra Lekha. "Her expression", in the words of the author, was one of rapt worship. He had seen it in her face when, as a child. She had watched him work, shaping a horse-shoe with fire and iron. He had seen it when she woke once in the middle of the night and caught him poring over her geography book. But he had not seen it for a long time and it ran through him like steel or like honey and gave him even greater strength to destroy in fury and create in love. He could shake the earth with his hands or endure agony in silence, he felt unbearably happy⁶⁵.

Chandra Lekha herself feels the exultation with her too overwhelming to bear. The appearance of Biten on the scene soon after fills her cup of joy. The sarcastic comments of the orthodox do not bother her in the least. The confession has meant the release of both herself and her father from a suffocating bondage. She makes no bones about throwing the pearls presented to her by Motichand into his outstretched arm before walking away to freedom accompanied by her father. K.R.Chandrasekharan has taken exception to the view expressed by Mrs.Meenakshi Mukherjee that

Chandra Lekha is the liberator in the novel perhaps needlessly. Of course, it is true that Lekha remains rather passive in her attitude throughout the novel. Nonetheless, the liberation resulting from Kalo's confession would perhaps have eluded him in her absence. Hence, we may safely argue that she is the de facto liberator of the novel, though her father may be credited with that achievement nominally. In fact, in regarding Chandra Lekha as the conscience-keeper of Kalo also a similar objection is likely to be raised. Does he not have a conscience of his own to check him? Why does he need another conscience-keeper? The fact, however, remains that he does not choose to listen to his conscience for his own reasons. Perhaps it is overwhelmed by his all-consuming passion for revenge. But thanks to her education, refinement and innate gifts, Chandra Lekha is able to keep her conscience intact. And her father has to depend on it in a large measure for judging the propriety-or lack of it – of his own attitudes and activities.

NOTES

1. Bhabani Bhattacharya, *He Who Rides a Tiger* (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann), p.2. Henceforth referred to as *He Who Rides a Tiger*.
2. *Ibid.*, p.8.
3. *Ibid.*, p.11.
4. *Ibid.*, p.15.
5. *Ibid.*, p.31.
- 5a. *Ibid.*, p.164.
6. *Ibid.*, p.165.
7. *Ibid.*, p.165.
8. *Ibid.*, p.165.
9. *Ibid.*, p.166.
10. *Ibid.*, p.167.
11. *Ibid.*, p.168.
12. *Ibid.*, p.169.
13. *Ibid.*, p.169.
14. *Ibid.*, p.37.
15. *Ibid.*, p.40.
16. *Ibid.*, p.41.
17. *Ibid.*, p.120-121.
18. *Ibid.*, p.85.
19. *Ibid.*, p.93.
20. *Ibid.*, p.174.
21. Meenakshi Mukherjee, p.122
22. K.R.Chandrasekharan, p.80.
23. *He Who Rides a Tiger*, p.113.
24. *Ibid.*, p.116.
25. *Ibid.*, p.143.
26. *Ibid.*, p.218.
27. *Ibid.*, p.239.

28. Ibid., p.242.
29. Meenakshi Mukherjee, p.122.
30. He Who Rides a Tiger, p.82.
31. H.M. Williams, Indo-Anglian Literature 1800-1970 – A Survey, (Madras: Orient Longman, 1976), p.93.
32. Review by H.S. Singha, Indian Book Chronicle, August 16, 1984.
33. B. Shyamala Rao, "A Preface to Bhattacharya's Fiction", Bhabani Bhattacharya, (ed). B. Shyamala Rao (Bombay: Blackie and Son Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1988) p.43
34. Ram Sewak Singh: "Bhabani Bhattacharya : A Novelist of Dreamy Wisdom", Banasthali Patrika,
35. Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, p.332.
36. Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence (Princeton University Press, 1961), p.7.
37. K.K. Sharma, Indo-English Literature : A Collection of Critical
38. Ramesh K. Srivastava, p.232.
39. Ibid., pp.232-233.
40. K.R. Chandrasekharan, pp.78-79.
41. He Who Rides a Tiger, p.5
42. Ibid., p.11.
43. Ibid., p.13.
44. Ibid., p.47.
45. Ibid., p.55.
46. Ibid., p.71.
47. Ibid., p.87.
48. Ibid., p.87.
49. Ibid., p.114.
50. Ibid., p.114-117.
51. B. Shyamala Rao, P.76.
52. T.N. Dhar, "Bhabani Bhattacharya's "He Who Rides a Tiger" : The Role playing Matrix", Studies in Indian Fiction in English, Gupta G.S. Balaram, (ed). Gulbarga : JIWE, 1987, p.100. Henceforth referred to as T.N. Dhar.
53. He Who Rides a Tiger, p.108.
54. K.R. Chandrasekharan, p.75.
55. Ibid., p.74.
56. Ibid., p.206.
57. He Who Rides a Tiger, p.209.
58. Ibid., p.170.
59. Ibid., p.170.
60. Ibid., p.222.
61. Ibid., p.225.
62. Ibid., p.231.
63. Ibid., p.231.
64. T.N. Dhar, p.102.
65. He Who Rides a Tiger, pp.239-240.
66. K.R. Chandrasekharan, p.82.

Publish Research Article

International Level Multidisciplinary Research Journal For All Subjects

Dear Sir/Mam,

We invite unpublished Research Paper, Summary of Research Project, Theses, Books and Books Review for publication, you will be pleased to know that our journals are

Associated and Indexed, India

- ★ Directory Of Research Journal Indexing
- ★ International Scientific Journal Consortium Scientific
- ★ OPEN J-GATE

Associated and Indexed, USA

- DOAJ
- EBSCO
- Crossref DOI
- Index Copernicus
- Publication Index
- Academic Journal Database
- Contemporary Research Index
- Academic Paper Database
- Digital Journals Database
- Current Index to Scholarly Journals
- Elite Scientific Journal Archive
- Directory Of Academic Resources
- Scholar Journal Index
- Recent Science Index
- Scientific Resources Database

Review Of Research Journal
258/34 Raviwar Peth Solapur-413005, Maharashtra
Contact-9595359435
E-Mail-ayisrj@yahoo.in/ayisrj2011@gmail.com
Website : www.ror.isrj.org