2. SELF-CONSCIOUS ASSERTION OF FREEDOM

"--- The Mahatma need not go as far as the sea. Like Harishchandra before he finished his vow, the Gods will come down and dissolve his vow, and the Britishers will leave India, and we shall be free and we shall pay less taxes, and there will be no policeman."

(Kanthapura)

"I felt wonderfully free. I felt freed of all troubles and responsibilities and restraints. The fakir fellers in the bush are free men. Clotheless, devoid of all personal worries; they sustain themselves on aims from the population. And no worry or commitment at all."

(All about H. Hatterr)

"Your story will be a legend of freedom, a legend to inspire and awaken."

(He Who Rides a Tiger)

Freedom is a subject of supreme importance, primarily because it is not a single and simple idea. The true nature of freedom is often difficult to understand mainly because the word freedom includes within itself many different ideas, which often conflict with each other. We can therefore conclude that it is this constant struggle for freedom in a self-conscious manner which is perhaps more important than the attainment of freedom itself. All that we can say is that without freedom, man cannot attain fulfillment in life.

On the magic day of August,15, 1947, in Nehru's words, the world slept but India awoke to 'a new life and freedom'. A time when the dream of freedom had to be fully realized. Thus, this significant date provides the context and the vantage point from where we can turn back and look at what we have done since then. We may also ponder for a moment to understand what freedom actually means in the Indian context.

In understanding freedom as it exists in India we have to consider one significant fact. It is that in India, nobody is just an individual nor is an Indian just a family man. After the family identity, the next identity of every Indian is his caste. Therefore liberty in India also means the liberty of castes and fraternity means fraternity of all castes. It follows that religion is the key to understanding the struggle for independence in India. Freedom and religion, the distinctive facets of Indian nationalist identity, thus merged together and became the chief weapon of the freedom movement.

Freedom unexpectedly came at a price and created its own divisions. Along with the partition of India, the Indian society was also divided into two distinct groups – those who were acquainted with the English language and those who were not. This divide became more defined primarily because the English language in India was associated with a set of values, attitudes and life styles which was completely different from those associated with Indian languages. This linguistic gulf created a social and cultural divide. One of the problems emerging as a result was – the choice of language for the writer.

The use of English as the medium of expression created complex problems for the Indian novelist, more so in actual language speaking situations. The dilemma was mainly of authenticity, about how Indian language speech patterns could be reproduced in English, how a novelist could translate the dialogue of common folk into the English language. This significant aspect of Indian English writing was sought to be resolved in the literature of the 1930s. After initial experiments, the search of the Indian English novelists for a suitable Indian idiom finally succeeded with Raja Rao's *Kanthapura (1938).*

The novel *Kanthapura* in its own individual way is an expression of the confidence that Indian English writers attained during the 1930s. It was also an assertion of freedom and showed how the English language could be used and moulded by the Indian writer for his own purposes. By domesticating the English language, the Indian English writers had made their first strides towards freedom. Later, as Meenakshi Mukherjee puts it, the Indian English novel "gradually gathered confidence and established itself in the next two decades" (19) It follows that if the 1920s can be taken as the starting point of the Indian-English novel, and the 1930s as the beginning of the

decolonization of the English language, the period is also significant with respect to India's freedom struggle. Being Raja Rao's first novel, *Kanthapura* therefore, portrays the freedom movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in the 1920s to liberate India from foreign rule.

However, *Kanthapura* essentially deals with the impact of this freedom movement on a tiny Indian village. Set in South Indian rural society of the twentieth century, Raja Rao sets a new trend by combining folklore and politics, fact and fiction in a highly competent manner. It must be said that the novel *Kanthapura* is a culmination of the author's self-conscious assertion of freedom. In the novel, this quest for freedom is mainly revealed in three different ways-firstly in the bold use of language, secondly in the thematic probe about freedom and thirdly, in realizing the potential of each individual to stand for freedom against all odds. Whatever the consequences the novelist conveys the fact that it is the struggle that is more important. One of the freedom fighters in the story highlights this important fact when she speaks to the village women:

> You will say we have lost this, you will say we have lost that. Kenchamma forgive us but there is something that has entered our hearts, an abundance like the Himavathy on Gauri's night (249).

It is interesting to note that while the theme of *Kanthapura* is rural India, the choice of language is English. A number of problems confront the novelist while dealing with such a polarity between theme and language. Firstly, the novelist has to depict characters who do not speak English and are mostly illiterate. Secondly, the rural attitude to life and the standard of life of the rural people is vastly different from that of the English educated Indians.

Surprisingly, Raja Rao succeeds remarkably in freeing himself from all these limitations. From the beginning of the novel itself, we are acquainted with the skill of the writer. For one, Raja Rao chooses an old woman as narrator of the story. In order to narrow down the linguistic gulf, the writer chooses to make the illiterate narrator tell rather than write down her experiences. Since every village woman is acquainted with the *purana* from her childhood, the reader is able to identify with the form of

Sthalapurana or the legend of a local village used in the novel to narrate the story. This ingenious way of presentation makes the whole story authentic. The story reads like a form of monologue by an old woman of Kanthapura before the women of the neighbouring village of Kashipura. The uniformity of style suggests that even the talks of other characters are faithfully reproduced by the old woman. The language used in the novel creates a poetic effect and successfully reinforces the social and cultural background of the narrative through the old Brahmin woman. In an interview to O.P.Mathur, Raja Rao admits:

> I have tried to write in English to express my Indian sensibility as well as I could. I am thinking that what is important from my point of view is that if Indians could think in their own language, very possibly they will have a much better intellectual discipline and a language to express themselves. Language is extremely important for understanding and for sincerity. (193)

It is a certain fact that any community, if it needs to be free, has to experience an underlying sense of unity. In the village of Kanthapura, it is religion, particularly Hinduism that acts as a cementing force in the close-knit structure of the novel. The main catalyst of the entire movement for freedom in the village is Moorthy, a young man who tries to adopt the Gandhian ideal in his life. While on the one hand, he prepares the community to imbibe new ideas; on the other hand, he brings discipline into his own life. Very early in life, Moorthy understands that in order to gain political freedom he must relinquish or at least curb his personal desires and also free himself from any prejudices which his upper caste status might have inculcated in him.

The first attempt in freeing himself that Moorthy takes is to discard his brahmanic inhibition regarding the pariahs. He mixed freely with the pariahs and taught them to read and write. He realized that the enemy within him had to be conquered first in order to stimulate some kind of discipline into his own life. One day, he walked up to the temple where, seated beside the central pillar of the mandap, he began to meditate. Through every breath, more and more love seemed to pour out of him until he was

enveloped in the radiance of universal love. As the narrator says:

> That was why when Ratna came to see him; he felt there was something different in his feelings towards her. Her smile did not seem to touch his heart with delicate satisfaction as it did before. She seemed something so feminine and soft and distant and the idea that he could ever think of her other than as a sister knocked him and sent a shiver down his spine (89).

Thus, Moorthy rightly understands the need for individual freedom. He felt that he had to free himself from the feelings of caste superiority. He also knew that he should curb any other desires, which were impediments in his struggle for political freedom. The necessity of individual freedom was stressed again and again by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi gives his definition of *Swaraj* (Freedom) in the following way:

> If we become free, India is free and in this thought, you have a definition of Swaraj. It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. It is therefore in the palm of our hands(101).

In his struggle for freedom, Moorthy is sincerely helped by Rangamma, Ratna and Patel Range Gowda. He is also opposed by a few others like Bhatta. Raja Rao here seems to suggest that the active participation of women in any freedom struggle is important. Rangamma, who is a childless widow, represents the voice of thousands of women who took part in the freedom struggle. Choosing to ignore the rigid orthodox structure for Hindu widows at the time, she dressed in a Dharmawar Sari and always wore a gold belt. Being a voracious reader, she imparted her knowledge to the simple villagers. And in many ways, she became the connecting link between the village and the city; a woman who succeeds in keeping the village together in moments of extreme crisis. The character of Rangamma ascertains the fact that for any woman, the struggle for political freedom had to be preceded by a struggle for her individual freedom as a woman. Like Rangamma, Ratna also does not conform to any of the traditional roles set apart for the Indian widow. Ratna takes an active part in revitalizing the movement after Moorthy and Rangamma are imprisoned. In fact, when she spoke, the village woman

could feel that "there's the voice of Rangamma in her speech, the voice of Moorthy, and she was no more the child we had known, nor the slip of a widow we had cursed"(211).

It is quite evident that in their struggle for freedom, the women of Kanthapura had to make substantial changes in their way of thinking as well as the manner in which they conducted themselves in front of the villagers. They had to show their leadership qualities, they had to show that they were strong enough to change and modify themselves. John Dewey, whose thought dominated much of American philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century, comments upon this aspect of freedom and what it means to be a free person. Dewey offers a unifying conception of freedom as growth, learning and modification of character. Freedom, for Dewey, consists in the ability to readapt with changing conditions. Although animals also adapt to situations, Dewey considers it as passive because the animals do not do it on their own account as man does Dewey explains the difference and says:

> An animal such as a dog shows plasticity; it acquires new habits under the tutelage of others. But the dog plays a passive role in this change; he does not initiate and direct it; he does not become interested in it on its own account. A human being on the other hand even a young child, not only learns but is capable of being interested in learning, interested in acquiring new attitudes and dispositions. (205)

Dewey thus stresses on one important aspect of freedom as growth. Each individual should be motivated to strive for excellence, to reconsider their own strengths and to fight for just causes. In this respect, the women of Kanthapura are free individuals because despite social pressures, they had the courage to become united and join the non-violent struggle for freedom started by Gandhiji.

Patel Range Gowda, a member of the Congress group of Kanthapura, is also an important character who asserts his freedom through a strong sense of individuality. The attitude of Range Gowda regarding freedom is asserted in an emphatic and truthful manner through his encounter with Bade Khan, the newly arrived policeman. Bade Khan is the policeman appointed by the Government to watch the political activities of the

freedom fighters in Kanthapura. Being a Mohemedan, Bade Khan was allowed to live neither in the Potter's street, nor in the Sudra Street and also not in the Brahmin street. He went to Patel Range Gowda, the most powerful man in the village asking for a house. In an indifferent tone, Patel refuses to offer any house to him. In gestures and actions, he gives the visitor a cold reception. Dismissed with a warning not to take bribes, Bade Khan goes away and violently kicks a dog he meets on the way.

Range Gowda's behavior, in effect, is a positive sign of revolt against the British through which he proclaims his right to be free of people like Bade Khan. Patel Range Gowda's indifferent behaviour can be interpreted as the entire community's attitude against the British rule which the government employee Bade Khan symbolized. Through the character of Bade Khan, Raja Rao seems to suggest a primary and degrading aspect of the colonial experience. Bade Khan's kicking of the one-eyed pariah dog is symbolic of the situation of the obscure colonial who does not understand his place in society. It is a gesture of insult and anger. Bade Khan is referred to as "short bearded, lip smacking, smoking, spitting"(175). His short height combined with his untidy habits, completes his image of a submissive and detestable colonial.

It is the Skeffington Estate, however which emerges in the novel as a dominating symbol of colonial power and authority which curbs freedom. The iron gates of the Skeffington Estate, the high Estate trees with two banyans on either side and surrounded by barbed wires on all sides indicate the superiority of the rulers. The Sahib, with his cane, his pipe and his big heavy coat stands in sharp contrast to the coolies described as "half-naked, starving, spitting, weeping, coughing, shivering"(67).

The power relation that is evident here can be better understood through a reading of Zygmant Bauman's essay "Profits and Costs of Freedom". In this enlightening essay, Bauman explains why power is accepted by the people at large. Although Bauman admits that power can be oppressive, he also considers power as a guarantee of regularity, which can be experienced as order and security. He further asserts:

> Power offers, so to speak 'freedom from freedom': it brings release from the responsibility of choice – which is always harrowing and often too risky for one's liking. (53)

Bauman's views can only partly be considered in respect of the coolies of the Skeffington Estate. It is certainly true that when they were brought to the estate, they did not resent the order and security. In fact, it appealed to them in the beginning. It was only after sometime that they began to resent the oppressive nature of power relations, which worked against the poor man's interest.

The fact is that the coolies lose whatever freedom they had till then. The relationship between the Sahib and the coolies, who work under him, thus becomes that of the exploiter and the exploited. With each new Sahib, the exploitation continues, although the manner of exploitation might differ. As the narrator reveals:

> The old Sahib is dead and the new one, his nephew has not only sent away many an old maistri and man but he has bought this hill and that and more and more coolies have flowed into the Skeffington Estate. He is not a bad man, the new Sahib. He does not beat like his old uncle, nor does he refuse to advance money; but he will have this woman and that woman this daughter and that wife and everyday a new one and never the same two within a week (82).

The relationship between Bade Khan and the Sahib, although not highlighted in the novel, operates on the same level. The Sahib gives shelter to Bade Khan because as a policeman he would be useful to him. Being an Indian, Bade Khan could be used as an effective armor in case the coolies revolted. Thus, the Sahibs of the Skeffington Estate exemplify the operation of the colonial motif in its diverse aspects.

The understanding that class differences would remain even after the attainment of political freedom comes through only in the later part of the novel. The question of freedom is seen from a wider perspective and does not remain merely the idealist conception of freedom as in the beginning of the novel. After his release from prison,

Moorthy writes to Ratna :

> It is the way of the masters that is wrong. And I have come to realize bit by bit, and bit by bit when I was in prison, that as long as there will be iron gates and barbed wires around the Skeffington Coffee Estate and city cars that can roll up the Bebbur mound and gas lights and coolie cars, there will always be pariahs and poverty (256)

Moorthy here seems to oppose the kind of modernity, which limits the freedom of man. Here, he seems to conform to Gandhi's views on modernity. Gandhi, in fact attacked modernity by saying that it was unconcerned about the fate of real human beings in the future. He also felt that modernity did not have the resources to correct its own defects. In an essay titled 'Tradition, Modernity and Post colonial Subversion', Satish Aikant throws more light on Gandhi's views regarding modernity. In his words:

> Gandhi fervently believed that every civilization was nurtured by a specific concept of human beings and if that conception was flawed, it corrupted the entire civilization. That was perhaps the case with the modern civilization. Although it had many achievements to its credit, it was fundamentally flawed, which inevitably showed in its nature that it is aggressive, violent, exploitative and devoid of a sense of moral purpose. It was all due to the underlying conception of man that denied him humanity, privileging the body by neglecting the soul (56).

Freedom occurs only when there is a rejection of oppression. And as far as the oppressor is concerned, he regards everything as his right and he naturally resents it when anyone wants to curb this freedom. Commenting upon this lust for power, which destroys the freedom of man, Gilbert Murray says that lust for power combines within itself a sort of vanity, which cannot be abated. Powerful men like to have people flattering them and trembling before them because it soothes their vanity. And it is this

vanity that limits the freedom of other people. Murray explains:

> A very large part of Liberalism lies simply in vigilance against that lust in one's oppressors, in oneself, in the government of one's country, against the instinct of tyranny everywhere. It is a perpetual struggle and mostly an uphill struggle (16).

Kanthapura remains primarily a novel about the freedom movement. It upholds the Gandhian values of non-violence and abolition of untouchability to attain absolute freedom. It also shows how the Gandhian movement, in its own unique way, had the capacity to reach the millions of illiterate peasants in Indian villages. An attempt is made to strike a balance between the liberal view of Gandhian nationalism and the orthodox views of the religious village. In the village of Kanthapura, people belonging to each caste group lived in a separate quarter. The 420 houses in the village were divided into the Brahmin quarter, the pariah quarter, the weaver's quarter and the Sudra quarter. By revealing the multiplicity of castes in the village of Kanthapura, Raja Rao suggests that caste system, by itself, offered a feeling of kinship, of belonging to a group through which every person could assert his individual freedom. But the question that arises is – How would the illiterate people understand the value of political freedom?

A plausible answer is given by Raja Rao when he introduces the myth of Lord Shiva to reinforce the idea of Swaraj or freedom in the novel. This myth is narrated by Jayramachar, the *Harikatha* man who comes to the village. His was a *Harikatha* that no one had heard till then. He was able to fuse the legend of Siva and Parvati, of Damayanthi and Sakunthala, into his interpretation of what Swaraj meant. With his superb narrative skill, Jayramachar used the strength of religious discourse to generate new ideas regarding freedom. He knew that the illiterate villagers could understand the need for freedom only if it was explained through an episode of the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*. Thus Jayramachar would weave his own stories and pronounce the birth of not Krishna or Ram but of Gandhi, the new *avatar* sent by the Gods to free India.

Although Jayramachar's *Harikatha,* with its emphasis on freedom, appealed to the simple villagers, a few people had their own difference of opinion regarding the

Gandhian approach to freedom. It is true that the mythical design of the novel where Gandhi is treated as an *avatar* gains sustenance from orthodoxy and traditional values. Ironically, it is the same orthodoxy that opposes Gandhian nationalism in the novel, as represented by Bhatta, the 'First Brahmin'. It is through the character of Bhatta that Raja Rao brings out the criticism of Gandhian values. Expressing his apprehensions regarding the future, Bhatta argues:

> What is this Gandhi business? Nothing but weaving coarse hand made cloth not fit for a mop and bellowing out bhajans and bhajans and mixing with the pariahs. Pariahs now come to the temple door and tomorrow they would like to be in the heart of it. (42)

Bhatta in fact, is representative of Hindu orthodoxy, which gave more importance to Brahmanic vested interests. Raja Rao, in this novel, has highlighted this opposition, to bring out the challenges that Hindu orthodoxy faced from the demands of the historical present and their inability to understand the real significance of freedom.

In general, the proponents of spiritual freedom like Bhatta consider that perfect freedom is attained through the service of God. In other words, it also includes the freedom of conscience. The philosopher Herbert Muller, in his essay 'Freedom as the Ability to choose and carry out purposes', raises an important question regarding the contribution of religion to freedom. Muller feels that religions contributed very little to the concept and institutions of freedom. He argues that the people's belief in an exclusive unique God created a fanaticism, which had disastrous effects on the history of freedom. Muller's general response is:

> At its best, "spiritual freedom" is essentially subjective, the feeling of emancipation that may come through religious experience. A more precise word for it is peace of mind.... Such holiness may not be wholesome but may come down to a surrender of human powers and purposes for the sake of freedom from freedom (81).

In *Kanthapura,* however, Raja Rao emphasizes the positive role of religion in the struggle for freedom. Even the significance of Independence is expressed in religious metaphor. It is the religious faith of the simple villagers, which strengthens political activity in the novel. Raja Rao here advocates the Indian philosophy regarding liberation. God is referred to in the *Gita* and other sacred texts as all-pervasive. As Surendranath Dasgupta points out:

> In all the different states of existence (eg. the waking, dream, deep sleep, swoon and liberation) it is God who by His various forms of manifestation controls all individual souls either for mundane experience or for liberation, and whatever may be the instruments employed for the production of such knowledge, have God as their one common ultimate cause (315).

In the novel, it is Moorthy's spirituality, as reflected in his fasts and prayers, which gives him the dynamic strength to overcome all difficulties. His idea of celebrating the Rama festival, the Krishna festival and the Ganesha festival generates unity among the simple villagers. Gradually, they join the freedom movement. The villagers take oath as members of the Congress in front of the Gods in the sanctum. They invoke the Goddess Kenchamma for the success of their movement. Interestingly enough, when the villagers are assaulted by the cruel policemen, even when the lathis strike their backs, hands and heads, they seek strength from the Goddess for renewed resistance. Thus, Raja Rao affirms his strong belief in the eternal values of Indian Philosophy.

In order to seek liberation, the Gandhian values of non-violence, passive resistance, love of mankind and abolition of untouchability are also stressed repeatedly in the novel. Jayaramachar speaks of the Gandhian values in the novel:

> Don't be attached to riches, says he, for riches create passions and passions create attachment and attachment hides the face of Truth. (22)

Gandhi's emphasis on non-attachment to riches, is undoubtedly, drawn from Vedantic philosophy. The Indian Philosophy considers that bondage occurs due to attachment to worldly objects. Therefore, greed for wealth or other physical objects should be renounced to seek liberation. The villagers of Kanthapura also believe in the philosophy of *Karma*. Greatly devoted to spirituality, Moorthy transforms his whole personality in his quest for freedom. He overcomes his passion for Ratna and begins to think of her only as a sister. His spiritual development is clearly evident in his belief in *Karma*, in his non-attachment to riches and his sexual abstinence. As A.G.Krishna Warrier points out :

> In every school of philosophy in India, the Trivarga(the aggregate of the three), consisting of Dharma or virtue, Artha or wealth and Kama or pleasure has been treated as instrumental values, which directly or indirectly subserve and promote the intrinsic value, Moksa or liberation.(5)

Mahatma Gandhi felt that only passive resistance could win freedom for India. He also laid down rules that those who want to become passive resisters for the service of the country should observe perfect chastity, adopt poverty, follow truth and cultivate fearlessness. The village women of Kanthapura were trained by Rangamma in the non-violent struggle for freedom. They decided to call themselves 'Sevika Sangha' or Sevis. Rangamma urged them to offer passive resistance by saying: 'When your husband beats you, you do not hit back, do you? You only grumble and weep. The policeman's beatings are the like !(170). Shouting 'Vandemataram' ! the men and women of Kanthapura thus march together to win freedom for India. The struggle between the satyagrahis led by Moorthy and the police highlight the Mahatma's programme of satyagraha in all its aspects.

An important idea that runs through the novel is the Hindu belief in incarnation, the belief that whenever there is a decline in *Dharma*, God himself will take human shape to restore the balance. The villagers of Kanthapura sincerely believe in this doctrine. Therefore, Gandhi becomes the *Avatar* of God who has taken birth to free the Indian people from their self-enforced slavery. Gandhi, it was believed, would slay the serpent of the foreign rule as Krishna had killed the serpent Kaliya. In his role as God's

avatar, the villagers expect the Mahatma to be blessed by the Gods in his salt march, as Harishchandra was in the legend. They also believe that the Britishers would leave India by divine intervention. Even Moorthy, the follower of Gandhi is endowed with miraculous feats such as sending back the flooded river water to its old course. Range Gowda desribes Moorthy:

> He is our Gandhi. The state of Mysore has a Maharaja but that Maharaja has another Maharaja who is in London and that one has another one in heaven, and so everybody has his own Mahatma and this Moorthy who has been caught in our knees playing as a child is now grown up and great, and he has wisdom in him and he will be our Mahatma (109).

It follows that the real hero in the novel is not Gandhi, but Moorthy. This is because Gandhi is not introduced directly but only as a reference. Moorthy is a staunch follower of Gandhian principles. A gradual transformation takes place in Moorthy when he becomes the leader of the struggle for freedom in Kanthapura. In the course of time, the struggle for freedom becomes a deep spiritual experience for him. When the villagers behave violently towards Bade Khan, Moorthy decides to fast for three days in the temple. By doing so, he mainly aims at self-purification. He said his *gayatri* thrice a thousand and eight times and began to medidate. Meditation brings about a spiritual awareness in Moorthy and he experiences union with God. The spiritual development of Moorthy is reflected in his recitation of Sivoham, his non-attachment to riches and his sexual abstinence. In other words, it results in the common and attractive idea of spiritual freedom.

Freedom can be attained only by following the path of action. For Moorthy, the path of action with its emphasis on getting at the truth became one of the ways of spiritual union with God. Several statements and definitions regarding life, truth, and freedom add to the richness of the novel:

> There is but one force in life and that is Truth and there is but one love in the and that is the love of mankind, and there is but one God in life and that is the God of all (52).

> And remember always, the path we follow is the path of the spirit, and with truth and non-violence and love shall we add to the harmony of the world (181).

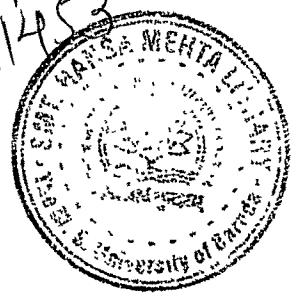
Moorthy advises the freedom fighters to bear their punishment as though it was their *Karma*. In this, way, he projects the concept of action or *karma-yoga*. The freedom fighters of Kanthapura are given special instruction to carry on a non-violent struggle for freedom. When the freedom fighters are assaulted by the policemen, they seek strength from Goddess Kenchamma for renewed resistance. Rangamma offers the Vedantic philosophy to inspire the women satyagrahis to face police courageously: "No, sister, that is not difficult. Does not the Gita say, the sword can split asunder the body, but never the soul?"(153)

Rangamma also teaches the women how to practice meditation and also the first principles of yoga. The control of breath, as practiced in yoga, gave the women a new strength and freed their mind. Advising Range Gowda to forgive his enemies, Moorthy says:

> Every enemy you create is like pulling out a lantana bush in your backyard. The more you pull out, the wider you spread the seeds and the thicker becomes the lantana growth (102).

Any non- violent agitation for freedom makes it necessary that even an unintentional act of violence should be repented through the means of penance and prayer. In the case of Moorthy, it is his spirituality, which gives him the political strength to face imprisonment and severe beatings from the police. In this way, Moorthy embodies the spirit of the Mahatma's passion for freedom. He also strictly followed the instructions from the Congress Committee. In this respect, the Lahore pledge released by the Congress Working Committee is worthy of note:

> We recognize that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. We will, therefore, prepare ourselves by withdrawing, so far as we can, all voluntary



> association from the British government and will prepare for Civil Disobedience, including non-payment of taxes. We are convinced that if we can but withdraw our voluntary help and stop payment of taxes. Without doing violence, even under provocation, the end of this inhuman rule is assured (115).

Raja Rao gives an element of objectivity and universality to the freedom movement through the narrator's interpretation of reality. The narrator in *Kanthapura* is a grandmother. Due to her bringing together of the past and present, Gods and men in her narrative, freedom struggle in Kanthapura attains a universal appeal. The old woman narrator recounts details about the daily recitation of *bhajans*, which kept the village united even in moments of crisis. The 'we' of the narrative voice expresses the consciousness of the whole village. The employment of myths such as that of Rama and Ravana, Bharata and Sita, Devas and Asuras, Krishna and Shiva gives the story a universal significance and a quality of timelessness.

The struggle for freedom is further intensified through the *Sankara- Jayanti* festival started by the villagers. The narrator recounts that it was old Ramakrishnayya, the learned father of Rangamma who read out the *Sankara Vijaya* day after day. The villagers discussed Vedanta with him in the afternoons. They also discussed the philosophy of *Maya* Bhajans were Sung. Sometimes, there would also be *Harikatha.* Raja Rao explains in the footnote that *Harikatha* literally means story of God. The story from one of the Indian epics or puranas is taken, and with music and dance, the *Harikatha* performer relates it in extemporized verse.

Thus, the Gandhian nonviolent struggle for freedom left an indelible mark on the simple villagers. The movement not only sought political freedom but also aimed at economic independence and spiritual regeneration. In order to achieve this objective, free spinning wheels were distributed in the name of Mahatma by Mooorthy's men. The villagers were told that if they had to gain economic freedom, they should spin at least two thousand yards of yarn per year. If this is done, the money that goes to Britain will be retained in India to give food and clothes to the hungry and the naked. The *Harikatha*

man Jayaramachar would explain the concept in his own unique manner:

> Spin and weave everyday, for our Mother is in tattered weeds and a poor mother needs clothes to cover her sores. If you spin, the money that goes to the Red-man will stay within the country and the Mother can feed the foodless and the milkless and the clothless. (22)

The main idea of Gandhi, in this respect, was to exhort the people to lead a dignified life without exploitation of any kind. In his essay "The Ends and Means of Development", the noted economist and Noble Prize winner Amartya Sen points out that economic freedom contributes, directly or indirectly, to the overall freedom people have to live the way they would like to live. He explains the term further: "Economic facilities refer to the opportunities that individuals respectively enjoy to utilize economic resources for the purpose of consumption, or production, or exchange"(39).

However, merely economic freedom is not enough, distributional considerations are equally important. And it is here that the relationship between freedom and equality gains prominence. Turning then, to the discussion of equality, the general argument is that equality is to be defended as a form of distributive justice. In an essay titled "Freedom versus Equality", Richard Norman discusses at length about his idea of equality and freedom. In his words:

> A society of equality will be one in which the conditions of freedom are distributed equally. The more people share equally in power, wealth and educational opportunities, the more they will then share equally also in freedom and the more truly their society can be described as a 'free society'. The link between freedom and equality is thus established from both directions(134).

The struggle for equality may also be considered as a struggle against oppression. The novel gives us an insight into the distressing social conditions of the coolies who are exploited by their colonial masters. The only solution that Raja Rao provides in the novel against such exploitation is for the pariahs to learn to read and to write. It is pointed out that when they could do so, they could speak straight to the Sahib and ask for their demands without any fear.

The exploitation of the coolies by the Sahib points out to one important aspect of freedom. What is notable is that the Sahib enjoys unlimited freedom; he can do anything without any fear of the law, the police or the people. On the other hand, the coolies lack even the basic freedom required to live a dignified life. The noted philosopher, John Stuart Mill, points out to this basic contradiction inherent in freedom. Mill argues: "To a certain extent, one man's freedom means another man's restraints which is almost the same as saying that one man's power often means another man's oppression"(335).

The failure of the law to impart justice and to safeguard freedom is pointed out by Advocate Raganna. He tells Moorthy :

> Judges are not for truth, but for law, and the English are not for the brown skin, but for the white, and the Government not with the people but with the police (125).

The inequalities and consequent loss of freedom in Indian Society are further deepened by caste consciousness. Despite being a brahmin, Moorthy freely mixes with the pariahs. As a result, he is condemned by the orthodox villagers for having brought disgrace to the Brahmin community by caste pollution. His innocent mother Narsamma, becomes the victim of all kinds of taunts and humiliation by the village people. In his essay "Profits and Costs of Freedom", Zygmunt Bauman points out:

> One can sometimes locate the source of oppression in the people one knows-people with whom one comes into a direct communicative contact. Small, intimate groups which one forms or enters willingly – hoping to escape the cumbersome

> rules and formal patterns of 'public life', and thus to lay down arms, relax, vent one's true feelings – may soon turn into sources of oppression in their own right (49).

Finally, Moorthy is excommunicated as a punishment. It meant that he could never go to a temple or to an obsequial dinner, to a marriage party or to a hair-cutting ceremony. Through his excommunication, Moorthy is deprived of his freedom to take part in social ceremonies. Defining freedom as the ability to choose and carry out purposes, Herbert Muller says:

> In simple words, a man is free in so far as he can do something or choose not to do it, can make up his own mind, can say yes or no to any given question or command, can decide for himself the matter of duty or for what. He is not free in so far as he is prohibited from following his inclinations or is obliged to do something against his own volition. whether by direct coercion or fear of consequences (77).

Kanthapura, however, mainly deals with the struggle for political freedom. The novel successfully documents the progress of a non-violent agitation against the British by the simple villagers of Kanthapura. The struggle for political freedom under the leadership of Gandhi significantly attains a new grandeur. But once freedom is attained, what is there to strive for? And is the attainment of political freedom an end in itself? Towards the climax of the novel, a sense of frustration creeps in and many questions are raised regarding freedom. However, they remain unanswered in the novel. In spite of all his protestation of faith in the Mahatma, Moorthy expresses his doubts towards the end: "It is wrong to stop till the goal is reached. And yet, what is the goal? Independence? Swaraj? Is there not swaraj in our states and is there not misery and corruption and cruelty there?"(256) Thus, the final passages in the novel bring us back to the reality of history and the reality of freedom.

* * *

In the novels written immediately after Independence, a note of protest and attempts to understand the drawbacks of Indian socio-cultural life attained prominence.

The close encounter with the west brought about new ideas and the literature of the period promptly reflected this spirit. In this context, Meenakshi Mukherjee points out that while Sarat Chandra Chatterjee exposed the corruptions in the village life of Bengal, Premchand fought against the evil of dowry and prostitution. Mukherjee further asserts:

> It is not mere coincidence that Mulk Raj Anand wrote his early tracts about the socially depressed more or less in the same period. These broad ideals of progressive liberalism became intensified into a definite literary movement, which in Hindi came to be called 'pragatibad' (30).

Thus, the broad ideals of progressive liberalism resulted in a literature which exposed the social and political drawbacks of India. The themes became more complex and bold. The spirit and tone of writing underwent a substantial change. The ascetic or the sanyasi, who, until then generated respect and adoration, began to be portrayed as an imposter who merely satisfies a social need. G.V.Desani's *All about H.Hatterr* falls into this group of novels, which appeared in the 1940s.

It must be said that the novel *All about H.Hatterr* raises important questions regarding the relevance of freedom in an India, which is ever changing. This self-conscious assertion of freedom is mainly revealed in the novel in three different ways – firstly, in the peculiar experimentation in language and technique of the novel. Secondly in the characterization of the central character Hatterr and thirdly, in respect of the general theme of the novel. The technique of the novel is highly complex and contains elements of allegory and multiple symbolisms. The language used in the novel is Hatterr's own language. Hatterr, who is of Anglo-Indian parentage and the central character in the novel, uses a strange mix of Indian, French and Latin expressions as well as colloquialisms. By using an individual mode of expression solely suited to the character of Hatterr, G.V.Desani heralds the beginning of a truly distinctive style. The complexity and novelty of expression makes it a novel beyond classification. Basavaraj

Naikar's views in this regard are worthy of note. Naikar comments:

> It is true that All about H.Hatterr has disturbed and irritated the naïve reader and puzzled and unnerved the serious critic both by its thematic peculiarity and by its technical novelty and linguistic gallimaufry. In fact, it has posed a real challenge to the analytical and explicatory powers of the critics. That is the reason why critics have failed to designate and classify it confidently and define it. There are also a number of critics, who want to solve such a critical problem by following the escapist method of never facing it (25).

All about H.Hatterr published in 1948, deals with freedom in a mock-serious tone, thereby raising questions about the true nature of freedom. The novel relates the story of H.Hatterr, the son of a European seaman and a non-christian woman from Malaya. After his baptism, Hatterr was taken by his European father to India. However, after suffering from chronic malaria and pneumonia, his father died. Later, a local litigation for the possession of Hatterr started. It so happened that his mother lost the case and he never heard from her after that. Consequently, he was adopted by a European – a Scottish parishioner who wanted to rescue Hatterr from the non-christian influence of his mother. The Scot, who was a trader in jute, brought Hatterr to India. Back in India, the English missionary society looked after Hatterr until the age of 14. Later, he says,"I decided to chuck the school, get into the open spaces of India,..... and win my bread and curry all on my own"(32).

What we understand here is that there is an over whelming desire in Hatterr to assert his freedom. However, this desire raises more problems than it solves. Through the character of Hatterr, the novelist in fact expresses the tensions within the concept of freedom. In the beginning, Hatterr values his freedom more than anything else. However through his adventures, Desani makes us understand the many different and conflicting conceptions of freedom. The question is – why is freedom valuable and important to every man? To Hatterr, as it is to every man, freedom contains the ingredients of happiness. He considers it as a privilege to move about freely, to use and

interpret experience in his own way. And by making a choice to leave school and do whatever he likes, Hatterr exerts his moral right to be free.

Freeing himself from all social responsibilities, Hatterr thus embarks on an adventure to understand the school of life. Taking with him an English dictionary, the Latin self-taught and the French self-taught along with some missionary funds, he begins his journey. First of all, he assumed the name of H.Hatterr, where H stood for Hindustaniwalla. And as he himself says, the name Hatterr was inspired by his headmaster's "too large for him hat"(33).

By assuming a new name, Hatterr asserts his freedom as also his right to be identified as an Indian. It may also be construed as arising from his sense of alienation. By giving himself the first name 'Hindustani Walla', he was securing his place in the adopted land of India. As he himself says, "I went completely Indian to an extent few pure non-Indian blood sahib fellers have done"(33). However, apart from his name, we find that there is nothing much Indian about Hatterr His belongings consisted of an American fur coat, a smoked cane trunk, Missionary society's stereoscope complete with the slides of Florence, Naples, Venice, Paris, Rome etc. Even in his dress, the only thing Indian about him is his sola-topi.

Hatterr found that freedom had its own complexities. Other people exerted their influence upon him directly or indirectly, thereby limiting his freedom. During the course of his journey, Hatterr meets various sages. His meetings with the sages of Calcutta, Rangoon, Madras, Bombay, Delhi, Varanasi and finally the sage of All-India himself are described in vivid details. For Hatterr, there are many lessons to be learnt from the school of life. All the sages whom he meets dupe him in one way or the other. Hatterr sums up his observations in the following manner:

> I assess the world is made up of the two contrasting kinds: the Hitters (fellers who hit others without scruple or reserve) and the ruddy crabs, at the other end of the line (61).

Hatterr realizes that freedom is not possible as long as man is inter-dependent. Existence in the world is a matter of choice about being the exploiter or the exploited,

the oppressor or the victim. In the character of Hatterr, we come across the kind of simple oppressed man who is always duped, and who can be termed as a crab in his own words. Hatterr learns all his lessons the hard way. He understood that as long as there was deception and treachery in the world, he would not be free. Tricked into accepting a loan, he borrows money from a South Indian loan shark, while in Mysore. After coming back, he kept getting letters from the man. And then one day, Hatterr received a registered mail demanding payment of double the amount that he had actually taken. Unable to pay the debt, Hatterr smeared himself with ash and transformed himself into an Indian sadhu. In an easy manner, he comments how one could become religious in India and attain freedom.

> You simply cast off clothing. You wear the minimum loincloth, walk freely on the plains of the country of Hindustan... and spend your life comforting, instructing and teaching the populace (120).

However, the incident leaves Hatterr in a bitter mood and he assumes the name "The Bitter one."

Hatterr now realizes that the opportunity to "walk freely' is merely the starting point of his experiences. From both these events, Hatterr is made to realize that he is not really free in the true sense of the term. In the first instance, he is forced to part with his clothes. In the second experience with the loan shark, he is forced to part with his money. In both these instances, coercion acts as the prime factor, which limits his freedom. P.H.Partridge throws light on this aspect of freedom. Defining freedom as the absence of coercion, he says:

> If absence of coercion is a necessary condition of being free, coercion must be understood as including not only the direct forms – commands or prohibitions backed by sanctions or superior power – but also the many indirect forms – molding and manipulation or, more generally, forms of control which are indirect because they involve control by certain persons

> of the conditions that determine or affect the alternatives available to others (95).

Thus, through out the novel, Hatterr emerges as a simpleton who is constantly in search of freedom but fails to attain it. Instead he is repeatedly threatened, exploited, robbed and harassed. Even the three women characters in the novel harass and exploit his good nature. The first character is the old washerwoman who was nearing sixty. When Hatterr was unable to pay her bills, she makes advances to him. As Hatterr says:"I was reluctantly compelled to put her in good humour with a sundry kiss or two"(44).

But when she makes further advances, Hatterr could stand it no longer and rebuffs her. The result is that she takes her revenge by making a scene at his club. She disgraced Hatterr by saying that Hatterr owed her money. The incident leads to Hatterr's expulsion from the club. It makes Hatterr realize that he is not necessarily free and as he says, "I had regarded life as a bed of roses and thorns absent"(46).

Gradually, Hatterr realizes that there are many obstacles in his search for total freedom. He is continually forced to live according to the dictates of the world, and being an innocent man, he feels a certain degree of isolation. Hatterr wants to lead a fully human life but finds himself caught in the wilderness of a materialistic world. The problem, which confronts him, is not his particular limited freedom but the fact that his freedom conflicted with the freedom of others. He raises the question: "Is Nature unsocial in intent? Why should one unique individual feller lose and the other gains, whenever any two are brought together by deliberate design or by off-chance accident?" (283) This question is colored by Hatterr's sense of danger posed by his inability to understand the complexities of life. He feels powerless in the face of obstacles and experiences the insecurities of an isolated individual. In comparison with the world outside, he is utterly helpless. Ultimately, he tries to escape from his immediate surroundings. Psychoanalyst Erich Fromm points out the psychology that operates behind such attitudes. He says:

> Both helplessness and doubt paralyze life, and in order to live, man tries to escape from freedom, negative freedom.

> He is driven into new bondage.... He finds new and fragile security at the expense of sacrificing the integrity of his individual self. He chooses to lose his self since he cannot bear to be alone. Thus freedom – as freedom from – leads into new bondage (207)

Although Hatterr tries to free himself from the responsibilities of life, he finds that it is impossible to escape. He is enveloped in new bondages.

Freedom from the fires of passion through meditation, this is the advice given by the sage of Rangoon to his disciples. Although Hatterr could finally free himself from the washerwoman, he is driven into new bondage. He becomes infatuated by Mrs. Rosie Smyths, the wife of a cockney circus-owner. Mrs. Smyths was not beautiful but she had a strong will and was second in command to the lion-tamer. Invited to the tent of the Smyths, Hatterr is forced to drink. In his drunken state, Hatterr gets attracted to Rosie Smyths; and agrees to become the lion-tamer. But the actual experience leaves him a frightened and exploited man and he advises Bannerji to maintain purity and celibacy in his personal life.

Hatterr realizes that freedom had its own temptations. Man has to undergo the conflict between the immortal moral values and the desires of the flesh. It is only after his encounter with the washerwoman and Mrs. Rosie Smyths, that Hatterr feels the need to be faithful to his wife. Throughout the novel, he refers to his wife as "kiss-curl"(64). Sometimes while talking to Bannerji, he refers to her as "perspiring, hip-rolling and soundly sleeping wife"(43). Mrs. Hatterr, on the other hand, calls Hatterr by the anglicized name 'Harry'. Mrs. Hatterr lives in a private world of her own and has contacts only with the Europeans. She had Indian servants referred to as 'servantwallahs' who get a vulgar uproar from her now and then.

The need for celibacy and chastity as necessary conditions for freedom is stressed by Mahatma Gandhi in his *Hind Swaraj.* Gandhi is of the view that "He whose mind is given over to animal passions is not capable of any great effort"(105). In the novel, although Hatterr decides to lead a life of purity, he finds it difficult to disregard temptations of name and fame. Once when Mrs. Hatterr was away from home, Bannerji

decided that Hatterr should be honored with the title 'Sangita Kala Sagara', which means ocean of musical art. He will receive the title for his great services to Indian music. By exploiting his position with the music pundits, Bannerji organized an Abisheka ceremony. Bannerji wore the Indian ceremonial dress, the long black coat, and Hatterr was in the semi-nude required of him for the occasion – the orange colored silk square worn as a loin-cloth and the apricot turban to add the gay note. Bannerji also spent money-giving drinks to the two guests who were to honor the situation.

It must be said that Hatterr lost his freedom when he became bound by greed. Hatterr tries to get name and fame in an easy and improper manner and makes a fool of himself. A very large part of freedom consists of being vigilant against any sort of greed. Gilbert Murray provides an explanation:

> Men are constantly slaves of their passions, customs, most of all perhaps of their greed, self-love and the like. All these things prevent a man from thinking freely, seeing freely. They make him so that he cannot see the truth; he cannot even wish for the right things, and choose good in preference to evil (10).

Hatterr realizes soon after that he was falling into new bondages and that he should be on his guard. Enriched with the experiences he gains, Hatterr starts off on an inglorious odyssey. The adventures are at once comic, at once tragic and through the character of Hatterr, we come across a man who never changes or learns anything from life. From the beginning to the end of the novel, Hatterr remains the very same person. His meeting with sage Sadanand is in no way different than the earlier incidents of his life. Sage Sadanand accepts Hatterr as his disciple and promises to give him a forty percent share of profits. Before becoming a Sadhu, sage Sadanand was a commission agent for a privately run lottery. As a disciple, Hatterr learns that there was stiff competition even in the Sadhu business. Sage Hiramanek Mukti was competing with them and Sage Sadanand uses Hatterr as a tool to drive him away. But the final act of betrayal comes when Hatterr overhears Sadanand telling his disciples:

> My disciple, the Bitter-one, once upon a year was lust-injected... he was not free from the attachments of the flesh.

He sinned secretly. He did not possess the untold serenity of spirit of a true, passionless and flesh-loathing yogi"(146).

Sage Sadanand later explained that it was through *Sadhana* and certain treatments prescribed by him that Hatterr or the Bitter one had changed. Greatly ashamed, Hatterr leaves the place at once. Thus, Sadanand succeeds in getting rid of him, without giving him his share.

One might object to what Sage Sadanand has done to Hatterr on the grounds that it constitutes an undue interference with the freedom of the individual. By degrading him in public, Sage Sadanand caused a definite damage to Hatterr. For his own selfish interests, he had restricted Hatterr's individual freedom to lead a life of dignity.

The other educators of Hatterr include the Sage master Ananda Giri Giri, the Naga Sadhu and Punchum, the fat, naked recluse. When Hatterr went to meet the Sage Ananda Giri Giri, the latter urged him to stay on. Finally, Hatterr decided to accept the hospitality. In the middle of the night, Hatterr finds that in a fit of delirium, the Sage Master was trying to kill him. Hatterr tries to escape but could not. The sage's disciples think that Hatterr and the Sage were possessed by a ghost. Later, the people tried to burn him at stake to get rid of the ghost. In a desperate act to save himself, Hatterr gave up all arrogance and said that the ghost of Heropal was quitting. After enduring all torture, he at last is freed.

Three facts about this incident may be noted. In the first instance, Hatterr's imprisonment and consequent limitation of freedom is a result of superstition. The other is that it shows the limitations of mob mentality and the consequent restrictions on freedom. Thirdly, it also shows how the very same people can be duped and be deprived of their freedom by an ordinary person like Ananda Giri Giri. It follows that a line must be drawn between the area of private life and that of public authority. A person must have the choice to lead the kind of life he wants to and to choose his goals, without submitting to the will of other people. The incident is a clear violation of freedom.

The role of money in giving freedom to an individual is a debatable point, especially in today's materialistic world. The Naga repeatedly warns Hatterr to beware of the thin, slimy and wiry people and to guard his purse. Later, the Naga instructs Hatterr in the art of living fearlessly. He tells Hatterr that money breeds fear and fear robs us of our freedom. He says:

> "I am fearless because I do not crave money.
> Money breeds fear."
> "I am fearless because my intellect is good. My intellect is good because I do not rob, earn or gather money. I am naked"(218).

Minutes later, they fight with each other and the Naga blows away all the money belonging to H.Hatterr and disrobes him. Hatterr feels utterly helpless. With no money, Hatterr has to beg. He realizes the importance of money to get self-respect and freedom. In his struggle for existence, he realizes that lack of money creates frustration and anxiety.

In this way, after his three-day ordeal without money, Hatterr fully realized that the Naga was wrong. Money was important and the lack of money limited his opportunities. In this respect, Herbert Muller feels that money gives greater freedom because it frees man from external constraints. In his essay "Freedom as the ability to choose and carry out purposes", Muller explains:

> Effective freedom requires opportunities as well as rights. From this point of view, the major historical barrier has been not merely political oppression but poverty and ignorance. All other things equal, a man with money is freer than a man without it, an educated man freer than an illiterate (78).

Hatter fully understands the value of money in granting greater degree of freedom. Without any money, he had to experience indifference and insults.

Hatter's final adventure comes when he attends a *satsang* on the request of Bannerji. Bannerji told him that a *satsang* literally means a gathering of seekers of Truth and it was an extremely old Indian custom. In one of the *satsang,* Hatterr meets Punchum, the fat naked recluse. In the gathering, a man stood up and told his tragic tale. On hearing this, Punchum summoned the *satsang* gathering to support the wounded soul in his sorrow, by giving money. When Hatterr hesitated, Punchum compelled him to part with his entire month's salary as charity. It is only later that Hatterr understands that this was planned by Punchum and the fellow to make money. As Hatterr says :

> Two engaging entertainers, the guru and the chella, flinging themselves far and wide, province-touring, always changing address and inflicting themselves on their public (282)

Through this final adventure, Hatterr understands the contrasts that life has to offer. By holding a satsang, Punchum was seeking Truth but in reality, he resorted to lies to make money. When one man gains, the other man loses. Hatterr fails to understand why some people should enjoy life at the expense of others. Truth and reality become incomprehensible to him. He understands that man is not free. The importance of Truth as a necessary condition for freedom was stressed by Mahatma Gandhi when he says:

> Truth, therefore, has necessarily to be followed and that too at any cost. In this connection, academic questions such as whether a man may not lie in order to save a life etc arise, but these questions occur only to those who wish to justify lying. Those who want to follow truth every time are not placed in such a quandary, and if they are, they are still saved from a false position (105).

All about H Hatterr thus presents an autobiography of H Hatterr, which is partly tragic and partly comic. The novel can be interpreted as the hero's desire and subsequent search for freedom, his attempts to understand self and his quest for a suitable philosophy of living. Hatterr exerts his liberty to discover his own philosophical

conclusion about life. He makes the remarkable statement:

> Life distinguishes a feller from a stone. Life is feelings. I say I know the feelings of funk and fright, of rage, anger, loathing, nausea, and tenderness and distress.... variation of the feelings of man (284).

However, life does not limit itself to feelings. It is also contrast. As he tells Bannerji :

> Life is contrast. Life is ups and downs, light and shade, sun and cloud, opposite and opposites..... Example, man-woman, honesty-dishonesty, day-night, perfume-stink, saints-swine (159).

This contrast can be between the exploiters and the exploited, it can also be between appearance and reality.

The self-realized conclusion that Hatterr learns from life is that there is exploitation at all levels and therefore, man cannot achieve absolute freedom. Life is a process of one-up-man ship, a diamond cut diamond game. Hatterr is duped and exploited by all the five sadhus. And each of them teach him that in order to survive in the world, he should be extra vigilant. The sage of Calcutta tells him that "a wise man must master the craft of dispelling credible illusions. He should be suspicious"(41). The sage of Rangoon advises him to save himself from temptation. The Naga instructs him to beware of the thin, slim and wiry people as well as to guard his purse. The sage of All India gives him he instruction: 'Abscond from charlatans and deceivers"(252). It is the sage of Delhi, however, who instructs Hatterr to make a distinction between reality and appearance. The sage says :

> All appearance is false. Reality is not appearance. The wise should discriminate between Reality and Appearance (198).

There are certain recurrent themes which occur in the novel. The central theme is the search for Truth. In answer to the question 'What is Truth ?' Hatterr replies, "I sum it up as life."(284) Hatterr further says that he has learnt all his bittersweet lessons from the school of life. However, it is quite clear that Hatterr does not actually learn anything from his experiences. Till the end of the novel, he remains a simpleton although his continued quest for freedom and for a viable philosophy of living is commendable. As Anthony Burgess points out in the Introduction :

> The reader who expects the shapeless mind-wandering regularly associated with an amateur search for Truth, must now be informed that H.Hatterr's story is as carefully, even pedantically, planned as Ulysses (10).

Apart from the philosophical statements about life, *All about H.Hatterr* can also be taken up as an exhaustive study of the colonial experience Different shades of the colonial consciousness are projected through the different characters in the novel. As M.K.Naik points out:

> All about H.Hatterr offers perhaps the most complete picture of the colonial experience in Indian English fiction and this theme is not illustrated in the character of Hatterr alone; certain other characters in the novel also exemplify the operation of the colonial motif in its diverse aspects (111)

The novel has three main characters. Hatterr himself, his friend Nath C. Bannerji and the advocate Beliram. The main character is Hatterr, the son of a European seaman and a lady of Penang. It is in Hatterr that we witness the colonial hybrid who always feels a deep sense of insecurity. Even his name H.Hatterr, where H stands for Hindustaniwalla and Hatterr, for his headmaster's hat, represents his mixed racial heritage. Here, hat is representative of the European sahib. Divided between the East and the West, Hatterr feels a desperate necessity to belong, as is expressed in the following lines :

> For as long as I can remember, I have been ashamed of my stem, pedigree and pater-and-mater. Question: Should a problem feller like myself-born low and ploughboy-stop being personal and start being ashamed of man's origin and ancestry instead? (261)

This polarity arising from his mixed parentage accounts for Hatterr's inability to make a final choice between the East and the West. He goes alternatively to the West and the East and is unable to make up his mind about a final destination. He calls himself "fifty-fifty of the species."(31) So wihen he reached England, he 'greeted the soil both in the true English and the Eastern fashion."(36). However, Hatterr's transformation to an Indian occurs only after his expulsion from the white man's club. Until then, he dressed himself fully in European attire. Now that he was expelled, he decided to have no contact with the European sahibs. As he says: "I went completely Indian and kicked out of the house the only sahib who came to condole!"(47)

In order to free himself from his European identity, Hatterr discards his white drill shorts. However, Hatterr's search for an Indian identity is full of impediments. He does not understand why he is repeatedly made to remove his clothes. In the very first chapter, Hatterr meets the sage of Calcutta after he is appointed for the responsible post of a suburban reporter. The sage asks him to remove his clothes and whatever else was on his body. Again, acting as the living human plate for Bill Smyth's lion, he had to remove his clothes and put on a lemon-colored undie. Sage Sadanand threatens to have him photographed in the nude. The Naga Sadhu with whom he makes friends, also takes away his clothes and robs him of his money. The symbolic repetition of Hatterr's disrobing, and his being robbed again and again in the novel shows Hatterr's unacceptance as an Indian. These incidents symbolize his frustration and his feeling of alienation from the society.

This frustration is also evident in his dog Jenkins, named after its first master, the seaman Jenkins. His colonial master gives Jenkins a new name and a new identity. Jenkins loves only confectionary and would swallow candy, cookies, chocolate, sundaes, sweet lozenges and even ice cream. He dislikes all natural diet.

It is quite evident that Jenkins is totally dependent upon his alien master. The dog was timid and a coward. He ran up to Hatterr every now and then for sympathy. He always followed Hatterr, groaning and moaning at his heels. Jenkins always needed consolation from his master. In times of trouble, however, he was the first to escape. As Hatterr says in the novel:

> How many times had he bolted like hell, his tail half-mast, frightened by a rat? And whimpering like the dickens, this feller, Jenkins, had the nerve to come to me for consolation: every time giving me a hell of an unashamed straight look in the eye (165).

Hatterr felt that the dog suffered from extreme mental malady. What he resented was to see the dog running up to him for sympathy every now and then. Jenkins was terrified of darkness. Even his looks were full of mistrust and suspicion. He is finally abandoned by Hatterr and enrolled as a member of the Tail Wagger's Association of London in keeping with his inferior status. The inferiority complex and cowardice of Jenkins conforms to the role of the submissive native subject.

However, there are also natives who exploit the resourcefulness of their masters. It is in the character of Beliram, the advocate and Bannerji's teacher that we witness the cunning native who exploits the best of both worlds. Beliram acts as Hatterr's legal advisor. Being an Indian and educated in the West, he makes a lot of money. As a great lover of Shakespeare, he names his son 'Hamlet.' Beliram also exploits his Indian heritage as is evident when he changes his name to Yati Rambeli.

Hatterr, however, is not as cunning as Beliram. Throughout the novel, he is repeatedly duped, threatened and robbed of whatever he has. He is also portrayed as a weak-willed and cowardly person. Being an orphan, Hatterr feels a persistent feeling of insecurity. He says: "I haven't had my mother to love me... I have no relations, don't you see! I m afraid, can't you see?"(223)

Like his dog Jenkins, Hatterr also experiences feelings of fear and isolation. The fact that he is afraid is expressed again and again in the novel. Hatterr's insecurity is

also revealed in the fact that he carries a list of fifty doctor's telephone numbers in his pocket. At the end of the novel, Hatterr regains his composure. What is remarkable is that he never loses faith in himself and determines to carry on his quest for Truth and Freedom. Confidently, he says:

> I am not fed up with life. A sportsman, if at all genuine, never stops shooting. He must carry on. I carry on"(277).

Hatterr's wife, on the other hand, tries to cling to her European identity and comforms to her role as the colonial memsahib. Hatterr refers to her as "a member of the memsahib community."(258) For Hatterr, his own home offered him very little scope to exert his freedom. Mrs. Hatterr ruled over the whole house and everything was done according to her orders. Once when a music society was conferring a title on Hatterr, she stormed into the house. In a fit of anger, she threatened to shoot all the people who were present. It was raining outside. Hatterr wanders in the garden in his semi-nude position and sees how she was enjoying a lavish meal with her French guests. The pain and humiliation of his insignificant status is revealed in Hatterr's lament:

> Damme having been made a laughing stock in my own house and neighbourhood, and having had my guests nearly machine-gunned. I could not very well show off (258).

The incident however, strengthens his regard for the Indian belief in *Kismet*. He resigns himself to his fate and says,

> "I married a woman like the kiss-curl, waxed and all, because it was fate"(258).

Hatterr's friend Bannerji, who occupies a central position in the novel after Hatterr, is typical of the middle class colonial Indian who blindly admires everything that is European. He represents the anglicized Indian who is constantly trying to adopt

the lifestyle of the colonial masters. He proudly says:

> I already believe in the European sanitation and the water closet. Mrs. Bannerji and I are also using forks and knives, which is better than eating with sweating fingers in this summer. A decent quantity of toilet tissue has already been ordered (240).

Through out the novel, Bannerji refers to Hatterr as Mr. Hatterr, which reveals his admiration and respect. In fact, most of the admiration of Bannerji arises from the fact that Haterr is a Eurasian. He is always full of praise for Hatterr. In his dress, his manners and his speech, Bannerji tries to ape the English masters. Referring to England as 'dear England', Bannerji confides to Hatterr.

> I often wish I could change my maiden name Nath to Noel. I have recently formed several English connexions myself and I like dogs too If you require a proof of my sincerity, I am a member of the English Tail Waggers although I had the clear nationalistic choice to join the Kennel Club of India. It is like loving the Mediterranean Sea, Mr. H.Hatterr, when having our own Indian Ocean (239).

Being an Anglophile, Bannerji even compares himself with Shakespeare. However, it is freedom, which Bannerji craves for. He emphatically states, "I love the freedom in the United States. I venerate their flag, also the statue of Mother Liberty."(157) In his essay, "The Method in the Madness", M.K.Naik points out:

> Bannerji's veneration for the Englishman is well illustrated in his attitude to Hatterr, who for him is an English man, for all purposes. Hence, he consistently misinterprets Hatterr's motives and actions, always crediting the Eurasian with virtues the poor man never possessed, with the result that though Hatterr is fooled and worsted in adventure after adventure, he

remains a hero in Bannerji's myopic eyes (113)

The references to freedom come through again and again in the novel. *All about H.Hatterr,* therefore, might be read as a journey to discover freedom. The undying spirit of man is exemplified in the character of Hatterr. The novel, as a whole, redeems our faith in the future.

* * *

After attaining Independence, the development of India began on a high note of idealism, but eventually reconciled itself to a more realistic approach. Indian English writing also, moved in very much the same manner and the shock of self-recognition gave inspiration to socially relevant themes. A host of social and economic problems like poverty, superstition, caste-domination, caste-consciousness and untouchability began to dominate Indian English writing.

The oppressed individual fighting against an iniquitous social order is the common thread running through most of the novels written in the 1950s and 60s. Some of the rebels are muted and some forthright in their protest. What comes through in these novels is the image of India in transition, an India entering a new age of industrialization. There is also a passionate attempt to understand the depressing and conflicting situations that arose in the country. Much interested in the social purpose of writing, Bhabani Bhattacharya explains the functions of a writer in his book *Mahatma Gandhi* He quotes the great leader:

> He who wields words effectively for a creative purpose is beyond doubt a writer. So is he who uses words to make images of beauty, even of an ephemeral kind. Beauty is not necessarily truth, though nor is truth necessarily beauty... There is a genre of writing, which owes its enrichment to truth not to beauty.

It is this enthusiasm about the social purpose of art that made Bhattacharya choose socially relevant themes for his novels. *He who Rides a Tiger,* first published in 1955, focuses attention on the Indian freedom struggle, the Bengal famine of 1943 and

its disastrous effect on the population. The novel also tackles problems like the caste and class-consciousness and the exploitation of the poor by the rich. As a committed work of art, the novel stirs our social conscience with a rare insight into the social problems of India.

He who rides a Tiger explores the need and importance of freedom in many different ways. Firstly, it raises issues like social and economic freedom as well as inequalities prevalent in Indian society. Secondly, the writer chooses to make the central character a unique symbol of freedom. Thirdly, it seeks to deal with women's issues and the political struggle for freedom. And finally, the writer also explores the suitability of adopting the English language to Indian needs and tries to overcome the problem of linguistic alienation.

The self –conscious assertion for freedom is best exemplified through the central character Kalo, a blacksmith in the small town of Jharna Kalo is industrious and ambitious; he is also competent in his trade. But the shadow of Bengal famine falls on Jharna town. Foodgrains became scarce. Kalo does not find enough work. Since there was no price control, rice became five times the old rate. Taking advantage of the situation, small traders from the cities came to buy things at cheap rates Chandra Lekha also sold a pair of gold bangals in return for rice. Bhattacharya in fact, suggests that famines play a larger role in restricting freedom of the individual. In this respect, the views of noted economist Amartya Sen is worthy of note. In his words:

> Very few people across the world suffer from varieties of unfreedom. Famines continue to occur in particular regions, denying to millions the basic freedom to survive. Even in those countries, which are no longer, sporadically devastated by famines, under-nutrition may affect very large numbers of vulnerable human beings (15).

Needless to say, the people of Jharna town lose their freedom to carry on their hereditary trade and to get enough food. They even lose the freedom to stay in their own hometown. Deprived of his freedom to enjoy a decent livelihood, Kalo becomes miserable. After surveying the whole situation, Kalo decides to try his luck in the city of

Calcutta. He knew that "the capital city was the workshop of war weapons"(20). So he would always have work. However, for Kalo, hopes of a bright future do not materialize. With no money to buy tickets, he travels ticketless on the footboard of a train to Calcutta. Extreme hunger compels him to steal bananas. Caught red-handed, he is put into prison for three months on charges of theft. During the trial, Kalo pleads he stole the bananas so that he could live for the sake of his family. Nothing could prepare him for the magistrate's harsh question:

"Why did you have to live?"

The question, while on the one hand, shatters the simple faith of Kalo in the law. it also reveals to him about his insignificant position in a stratified society. The incident also reveals to him that hunger and poverty take away whatever freedom a person enjoys. In the words of Amartya Sen:

> Sometimes the lack of substantive freedoms relates directly to economic poverty, which robs people of the freedom to satisfy hunger, or to achieve sufficient nutrition, or to obtain remedies for treatable illnesses, or the opportunity to be adequately clothed or sheltered, or to enjoy clean water or sanitary facilities (4).

It is quite evident that Kalo could not get justice in the court only because he was poor. In fact, poverty acted as a constraint on his right to freedom. Commenting upon the role of courts in restricting freedom of the individual, Harold J. Laski says:

> Private liberty may be denied when the poor citizen is unable to secure adequate legal protection in the courts of Justice. A law, for example, which gives the rich access to its facilities, but broadly, makes them difficult, if not impossible for the poor, invades their private freedom (78),

In this way, Kalo experiences unfreedom in different ways. Famine takes away his freedom to stay in Jharna town and carry on with his trade. He is caught stealing

bananas and finds that he does not have the freedom to satisfy his hunger. In court, he finds that he does not have the freedom to gain justice. He also realizes with a shock after hearing the magistrate's question that he did not even have the basic freedom to live.

The protest against the inhuman nature of society which curbs freedom of the individual is brought out through the character of Biten or B_{10} whom Kalo meets in jail. Biten was in jail for having protested against a policeman who was beating up a hungry destitute. It is Biten who makes Kalo understand the unequal standards imposed by society. With his revolutionary favour, Biten convinces Kalo: "We are the scum of the earth. The boss people scorn us because they fear us. They hit us where it hurts badly – in the pit of the belly. We have got to hit back"(37).

Once out of jail, Kalo realizes that imprisonment imposes its own variety of unfreedom on the individual. Labeled as a thief,people like Kalo are not able to find work.. It destroys their freedom to seek any occupation, in most cases, it is this lack of freedom which makes them anti-social and returns them back to prison. Unable to find work as a blacksmith, Kalo carries corpses of the destitute into municipal trucks. Feeling miserable with the job, he at last decides to meet Rajani Bose. With no other alternative, he agrees to work as procurer for a group of brothels in the city and begins to earn very high wages. However, Kalo understands the meanness and cruelty of his profession only when he meets his own daughter inside the brothel. Burning with shame and indignation, Kalo reflects on the lessons he had learnt in the city:

> 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! (239)

Kalo thus understands that the poor people have very limited freedoms. Labeled as a thief by the court, he could not find a way of honest living in the city. He thought of

the shame and tears of trapped victims inside the brothel. Even his own daughter Chandra Lekha was there because people like Rajani had schemed the whole thing. Freedom from the oppressive nature of society is important and Kalo realizes that other people also play significant roles in restricting freedom of the poor. In this respect, Isiah Berlin comments:

> The criterion of oppression is the part that I believe to be played by other human beings, directly or indirectly... By being free in this sense, I mean not being interfered with by others. The wider the area of non-interference, the wider my freedom (85)

It is quite evident that by giving Kalo the job of a procurer, Rajani exploits Kalo's lack of choice. Also, by bringing girls like Lekha to the brothel, he also exploits their poverty. Thus, poverty and the subsequent limitation of choice plays a unique role in restricting freedom. It also allows people like Rajani to interfere in the freedom of others.

The question is – How can freedom be attained in the face of such adversities ? The novelist, in fact, presents a dubious answer to the question when he makes Kalo transform himself into Mangal Adhikari, the Brahmin. By a neatly contrived trick, he raises a stone Shiva linga from the ground, thus putting a final stamp on his Brahmin status. He also frees himself from the inferiority of his own caste. Amassing a large amount of wealth and an equally worthy admiration, he takes his revenge – a revenge which would bring to his enemies the shame and bitterness he had suffered. A magnificent temple is built and it attracts large number of worshippers. Ironically, the magistrate who had told Kalo he did not even have the freedom to live, comes as a worshipper to the temple and touches Mangal Adhikari's feet.

Bhattacharya here seems to present the different aspects of freedom. The title of the story, in this connection, stands for freedom from fear, freedom to overcome adversities, freedom to live life according to our own standards and freedom to live a dignified life. The metaphor of the title 'He who Rides a Tiger', gains significance in this respect. The range of Bhattacharya's novel is clearly an impressive achievement

and an analysis of his themes reveals that Tiger might mean a host of social and economic problems like poverty, superstition and caste-domination. K. K. Sharma interprets the title in the following manner:

> 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 man, so is hunger (61).

It is not just the interference of other people that can destroy one's freedom. Sometimes, a man can destroy his own freedom, by resorting to lies. In the novel, Kalo puts on the cloak of Brahminhood as part of a deliberate trick. However, while deceiving the society that he hates, he begins to deceive himself. He starts thinking of himself as a Brahmin. Thus, Kalo who rides the tiger, cannot get down from its back. He is able to kill it finally, when he reveals his true identity before a large gathering.

Freedom can however, be attained, through the strength of conviction. In the character of Kalo, we witness an intelligent man who, despite his humble background, strives to excel himself with an inner zeal. By naming his daughter as Chandralekha, he sets up a new pattern of names which was unheard of among the people of his caste. He knew very well that names gave an identity to people and by giving her an upper-caste name, he gained a certain degree of self-esteem for his daughter. Even as Lekha started to progress with her studies at school, Kalo began to be troubled. He did not want his daughter to see his ignorance and be ashamed of her father.

> With resolve, he started to teach himself. All day he was busy with his work but late at night, when Lekha lay asleep, he took her books from her green school bag and pored over them for hours by the light of a kerosene lamp. He learned fast because of the urge in him and kept well ahead(9).

It is true that Kalo asserts his right to live a life of dignity. The people had unquestioned faith in him. He played the Brahminic role with the art of a true Brahmin. But the fact is that by asserting his freedom to choose a new caste name and practice, Kalo was also losing his freedom to live the life he was born into. Even in his village, when he used to work with his hammer and anvil, people from the village came to him for counsel because "his words were calm and wise. His decision had the weight of finality."(12) Acting the part of Mangal Adhikari, the Brahmin, Kalo experiences a moral and spiritual conflict between the love of power and prestige and the inherent need to be true to oneself. In a very short time, Brahminism began to affect Kalo's mind. He rebukes the *kamar* Viswanath for polluting him with his touch. Ironically, Kalo himself begins to have the same feelings of superiority, which he disliked in other people. John Stuart Mill, in his essay 'The Tyranny of the majority endangers freedom,' emphasizes on this aspect of power. Mill states:

> Probably all human beings living in society at all times are both subjects, agents and objects of power, in proportions differing among individuals and varying from one situation to another for each individual. Nobody is or ever was all-powerful, even a despot needs some co-operation in order to control certain values. And nobody is or ever was completely without power; even a slave is not entirely without at least a subtle bargaining power... Every power agent is at the same time a subject and an object of power (334).

Kalo knew very well that real freedom from the bondage of caste could be gained only through education. He wanted to do the best in his power for Lekha and so; he enrolled his daughter in a convent school. He was filled with pride when Lekha made quick progress in her studies. When Lekha received the Ashoka memorial medal for an essay competition held for students all over Bengal, there was not a prouder father than Kalo in the whole of Jharna town. The medal became for Kalo, a symbol of freedom -- freedom from the shame, humility and oppression that was the fate of the downtrodden caste to which he and Lekha belonged:

> The medal lifted her out of the oppressive bonds of her class. It gave her a status denied her caste, he meant Lekha could not see with her eyes, share his point of view, but what did it matter? A feeling was involved, that was the real point. The feeling gave a mere medal sanctity and turned it into an amulet (58).

However, freedom comes not alone but with a host of problems. And the problem to survive, to fight joblessness and hunger, brings with it the feelings of fear, fear of the unknown. After three months of imprisonment, Kalo experiences a strong element of fear, when he is about to be released. In this way, imprisonment, which confines and limits freedom is highlighted in the novel as a debatable topic. Kalo puts forth the question: "One thing I do not understand, Chandra Lekha. The idea is to reform the convict, make him a better man, is it not? But they do their utmost to make the convict feel he is not human at all."(110) And thus, through the constant humiliation meted to them in prison, people like Kalo begin to hate the system and everything else until it became "an illness of the mind."(110)

Law and justice thus comes in for sharp criticism in the novel. For the common man, law is everything. It makes him secure. But it does not take long to understand that justice only works for those who have money. Kalo only comprehends this reality inside the court where he is accused of stealing. He understands that law and justice, which are clearly meant to promote freedom and equity, do not always serve their purpose. In a lecture entitled 'Freedom and Justice in History', Herbert Muller states:

> There can of course be no effective freedom in society without some principle of justice, rights assured by custom or law; and historically, conscious ideals of justice have in the long run clearly tended to promote freedom for the many, the poor and the weak. The growth of freedom has in turn as clearly tended to promote the ideal of equity (15).

It is clearly evident in the novel that both class and caste consciousness inhibit human freedom. Kalo understands that society is not merely divided on the basis of one's position or class; it is also divided according to one's caste. The protest against the caste system is brought out mainly through the character of Biten. Biten is actually a Brahmin. Many events in the family contribute to his condemnation of caste practices. His sister's marriage to an elderly widower after the discovery that she was in love with a young man Basav of lower caste, her unhappiness and subsequent suicide and his being taunted by Basav, all these incidents trigger off Biten's resolve. Despite being a Brahmin, Biten rebels against the established social order based on caste. He renounces his Brahminhood, throws away his sacred thread and takes a vow never to speak about his caste. Thus Biten, in his own way, becomes the symbol and agent of protest against the tyranny of caste.

Kalo and Biten choose different ways in an effort to achieve freedom from the tyranny of caste. Like Biten, Kalo also makes attempts in changing the inherent social order. The city offered Kalo enough scope to make changes. While Biten, born a Brahmin, realizes the stupidity of caste conventions and throws away his sacred thread, Kalo, born in a low caste family, puts on the sacred thread to take revenge on society. Biten observes:"What curious irony that he, shorn of his Brahmanism, had been instrumental in creating a new Brahmin! What precisely did that mean?"

However, freedom from the bondage of caste, which both Kalo and Biten strived for, could not be attained easily. The stronger urge is to belong, to belong to a community. To an Indian, caste bestowed an identity, which could not be thrown away easily. In this respect, the views of Mark Tully are worthy of note. He states:

> It would lead to greater respect for India's culture, and indeed a better understanding of it, if it were recognized that the caste system had never been totally static, that it is adapting itself to today's changing circumstances and that it has positive as well as negative aspects. The caste system provides security and a community for millions of Indians. It gives them an identity that neither western science nor western thought has yet

> provided, because caste is not just a matter of being a Brahmin or a Harijan; it is also a kinship system. The system provides a wider support group than the family; a group which has a social life in which all its members can participate"(7).

While taking his revenge on society, Kalo begins to identify himself with the Brahmanic role, so much that he even thinks of getting Lekha married to a Brahmin. How do we understand this queer contradiction in Kalo? Does Kalo's identification with the Brahmin caste indicate merely his submerged wish to raise his status?

The more agreeable answer is that freedom has its own complications. This fact is brought out most emphatically through the character of Kalo. Freed from his own caste, Kalo feels a desperate need to belong somewhere. He understood that while he had adopted a new caste, he could not actually uproot himself from his original caste. And so, he begins to identify himself with the Brahmin caste in a desperate attempt to belong somewhere. Kalo gained a new status but he also developed a feeling of alienation from society. As the writer points out:

> But Kalo was helpless and lonelier than he had been. He had hurdled class-boundaries only to find others, he must move only among high-caste people for whom he felt no warmth It was better to avoid them, to eschew all social contact because the Kamar might peer through the Brahmin mask (96).

We also have the character of Biten, who does not feel this craving to belong. Biten himself discards his Brahmin status and throughout the novel, he never wavers from his decision. He remains the same person with the revolutionary fervour. Biten's need to belong does not arise because he had the intellectual strength which Kalo did not possess. In his essay 'Free and Equal', Richard Norman points out:

> To achieve human happiness, we have to use to the full our distinctively human capacities. We have to think for ourselves, make our own judgments and our own decision,

> drawing on our own experience. In short, if we are to find our lives genuinely rewarding and fulfilling we have to exercise our freedom (9).

Thus, through the conflicting characters of Biten and Kalo, Bhattacharya points out that real freedom can only be gained through intellectual freedom.

This is perhaps the appropriate moment to consider the freedom of women, as dealt with by Bhattacharya. This comes through most appropriately in the character of Lekha, the beautiful daughter of Kalo. Lekha is presented in the novel as a very intelligent girl. She has inherited her mother's good looks also. Lekha always stood first in her class. However, there are limited opportunities for girls from poor social and economic background, to benefit from education. Lekha has to suffer constant humiliation from her class-fellows." The girls at school were cold and aloof because of her humble caste."(11) She also has to face constant criticism from elders of her own caste as well. "A *Kamar* girl puts on the feather of learning! A sparrow preens as a parrot!"(11)

Whatever the nature of criticism, Kalo was proud of his daughter. Proudly, he would take the medal she had won out of its casket everyday. He himself tried to gather as much information as possible. In this way, both father and daughter tried to liberate themselves from the confinement of their caste. *He who rides a Tiger,* can therefore be interpreted as a movement against an established social order where men are considered superior or inferior according to their birth.

It is the Bengal famine, which acts as an impediment in Lekha's progress. She was good in studies and wanted to go to college with a scholarship. However, hunger changed everything. She had to sell her gold medal to a trader from the great city for three measures of rice. There was nothing else left to sell. The house only had the bare essentials As the novelist says,

> Two great hungers had struck the land of Bengal in the wake of war; the hunger of the masses of people uprooted

> from their old earth and turned into beggars, and the hunger of the all-owning few for pleasure and more pleasure, a raging fever of the times Uprooted women with their own kind of hunger had to soothe the other hunger, had to cool the raging pleasure-fever with their bodies (53).

Thus, hunger meant that the poor people could be exploited by the rich people. Women had to sell their honour so that their family could survive. The force of circumstances take Lekha to a brothel from where she nevertheless escapes. The incident, however, does leave an incorrigible stamp on her character. Afterwards, she goes about life in a detached manner without any yearning for individual fulfillment. The question of women's honour is discussed in the novel on many occasions. When Kalo meets Biten in jail, Biten raises the poignant question about woman's honour. He says,

> Must a woman die rather than sell herself? Why must she die? Only her body, which seemed to be of no account was involved, a body that, unsold had less value than a seer of goat's meat. Why must she die for her honour, die for a dead idea? 39)

This point may look somewhat baffling in the context of women's freedom. Between the problems of life and death, many such questions languished in the minds of the hungry people. To live a life of dignity is indeed important. It would be a deprivation of women's freedom, if she is left with no other choice. There is a need to understand the linkage between freedom and responsibility. The fact remains that without substantial degree of freedom and capability to do something, a person cannot be responsible for doing it Freedom is necessary to carry responsibility. It means the removal of certain factors like poverty, tyranny, poor economic opportunities, social deprivation etc. Indeed, it frequently happens that one kind of freedom may have to be sacrificed, in order to make others secure. What finally matters, though, is the individual

conscience. As Victor Gollancz notes:

> The test in the long run is the individual conscience, which can only resolve its perplexities by the application to each problem of the basic principles of humanity, reason and justice as each human being is capable of applying them. And man can only apply those principles if in his own fallible mind he is at least free from unnecessary external compulsions, fears and sanctions (84)

Through the life of Lekha, Bhattacharya makes a strong comment on the position of women in society. After her rescue from the brothel, Lekha seeks refuge in the rituals of the temple. She performs her duties in the temple mechanically without the least enthusiasm. As time goes on, she becomes so venerable to the worshippers that they wish to instal her as the Mother of Sevenfold Bliss. There is irony here, because at one time, Lekha is kept in a brothel to please men, at another occasion, the people wished to deify her and instal her as Mother of Sevenfold Bliss. The burden of complying to people's demands is the fate of most women, and so is the case of Lekha who is unable to live life in her own way.

Lekha finds a way out of her monotonous life by showering her affection on the destitute boy Obhijit. She is very fond of the boy and treats him as a younger brother. In the novel, there is an episode when a photographer tries to take a photograph of Lekha in a spirit of compassion. Even after much time, the photographer could not get the right picture. The correct moment arrives only when Lekha looks naturally and affectionately towards the boy Obhijit. In that very instant, the photographer quickly took a snap of Lekha with all the radiance on her face. According to him, it was "the face of compassion for the universe"(210). What is important here is that the photographer finally gets a spontaneous and natural picture of Lekha, at a time when she is under no compulsion to act. This is what is called as "positive freedom." In the words of the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, "Positive freedom consists in the spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality."(208) In the beginning, when she was being photographed, she did everything as demanded of her. However, she was acting under

compulsion and was repressing her natural self. In his essay 'Freedom and spontaneity'. Erich Fromm explains the term further:

> Spontaneous activity is not compulsive activity, to which the individual is driven by his isolation and powerlessness; it is not the activity of the automaton, which is the uncritical adoption of patterns suggested from the outside. Spontaneous activity is free activity of the self and implies, psychologically, what the Latin root of the word, sponte means literally: of one's free will(208).

Lekha is totally released from her mental imprisonment only when Biten awakens the woman in her. Loving another person is also an act of spontaneity. Once when Lekha was alone with Biten, he declared his love to her and embraced her. His passionate touch reminded Lekha of the painful experience in the harlot house. Unknowingly, Lekha showed her revulsion by beating him madly with her hands and pushing him away. Biten felt that she was aloof. He could not understand her true feelings. It is only when Biten leaves her that Lekha understands her own feelings towards him.

> She was human, not freakish. She, too, could have a place in the everyday pattern, a woman among women, the strangeness of it. For the first time she was self-aware (209).

It is because of this awareness about herself that Lekha makes the further "liberating discovery" that her body was undefiled.

A study of Bhattacharya's women characters reveal that woman occupy a central place in each of his novels. As Krishnaswamy points out, Bhattacharya's women characters are "pure with exuberant vitality and high ideas only to be victimized ultimately...Yet, Bhattacharya makes the reader feel that she is the ray of hope for mankind"(60).

There is also the case of Biten's sister, Purnima who is born in an orthodox Brahmin family. As a woman she enjoyed very limited freedom. She has to discontinue her studies in order to perform special rites as expected from an unmarried girl. All this was done to ensure her happiness in marriage. She also had to help with the daily preparations for pooja. When Purnima complained that she could not do her schoolwork, her mother even threatened to stop her schooling. While Lekha who enjoyed comparatively more freedom had to leave her studies because of the famine, Purnima could not study because of the orthodox thinking in her family.

Though Lekha has the opportunity to study in a convent school, she remains a simple and unaffected girl. Lekha was mature enough to realize that her humble background would prevent people from appreciating any of her qualities. She fully understood the limitations that society imposed upon her. As she recollects:

> There was the time when she won the medal, and not a breath of recognition had come to her from Jharna town because of her humble place. Imagine if the magistrate's daughter had won the medal how the town would have rejoiced and feted her! It had been Jharna's sneaking shame, not glory that the medal was won for them by a kamar's daughter (148).

Lekha's position in the temple also involved her mental imprisonment. She wants to liberate herself from a living death in the temple. Therefore, she rebels against the idea of becoming a living goddess, the mother of Sevenfold Bliss. Left with no other options, Lekha at last decides to become the fourth wife of Motichand and live like a human being. She feels that "by giving herself to Motichand, she would pay off her debt of love to her father and at last have the right to be free"(230).

It would be worthwhile here to ponder for a moment about the subject of women's freedom and its relation to marriage. Marriage has its own sanctity and according to the Indian tradition, it bestows a respectable position to women in society.

When Lekha decides to marry, she clings to this notion:

> Wearing the vermilion mark of marriage at the central parting of her hair, as woman must, she would gain freedom, freedom to live her own way. Biten's way (230).

The forming of the sense of responsibility in a person and the cultivation of high consciousness are important elements for the development of freedom. In this respect, Kalo's liberator is Lekha. By asking him whether he expected her to stay forever "buried in the temple", she opened his eyes to the reality of his position. Kalo realizes that while playing a game against the society, he was destroying the life of his daughter. After a prolonged and bitter struggle, Kalo finally kills the tiger of deceit. In front of the assembled gathering, he makes his confession.

At the end of the novel, Kalo learns that to be true to one's self is the greatest freedom, which one should strive for. He liberates himself from the chains that bind his spirit. His friend Biten congratulates him and tells him:

> You have triumphed over those others – and over yourself. What you have done just now will steal the spirits of hundreds and thousands of us. Your story will be a legend of freedom, a legend to inspire and awaken (244).

Thus, the novel concludes with Kalo's spiritual victory and upholds the liberation of spirit that he has achieved.

The Indian freedom struggle and the Bengal famine of 1943 are also introduced in the novel and provide a perfect background to the main theme. The plight of the destitutes in Calcutta because of the Bengal famine is presented vividly while depicting the life of Kalo after his release from prison. In the country around Jharna, peasants had mortgaged their paddy crops months before they were grown. With the money that they received, they bought rice from the dealers at five times the old rate. While the masses of people were in misery, money was in the hands of city sharks. A large number of people from the countryside made frantic attempts to reach Calcutta. They travelled on the footboards of trains and were often beaten up and driven away by policemen.

Hungry people were dying at an alarming rate. Their bodies had to be taken away by the truckload. Agents from brothels roamed from place to place in search of good looking and impoverished girls. These girls could be lured to the harlot houses to satisfy the rich people. Thus, the hunger of the poor and the weak was exploited to satisfy the hunger of the rich people for "pleasure and more pleasure."

One of the moving images of hunger in the novel is that of the destitute boy Obhijit. Lekha first sees the boy when he was digging his hands into the garbage. He told Lekha that soldiers had taken away his mother in a motor-wagon. Lekha took him home and begins to take care of him. However, it becomes hard for Obhijit to accept his new life. He could not forget the rotten food, which he used to eat from rubbish heaps. It is from Obhijit's psychological state of mind that Lekha gradually understands the haunting fear of hunger. Obhijit had the habit of storing bread beneath his mattress, even when it was no longer required. For him who had known hunger, bread was the only dependable safety. Lekha understood his insecurity, his haunting fear of hunger, which had to be liberated so that he could develop freely. Amartya Sen feels that development is the process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. He elaborates the point further:

> The constitutive role of freedom relates to the importance of substantive freedom in enriching human life. The substantive freedoms include elementary capabilities like being able to avoid such deprivations as starvation, under nourishment, escapable morbidity and premature mortality, as well as the freedoms that are associated with being literate and numerate, enjoying political participation and uncensored speech and so on. In this constitutive perspective, development involves expansion of these and other basic freedoms (36).

Some of the debates surrounding the issue of development also center on the relationship between freedom and equality. It is largely felt that we should aim at the promotion of the maximum amount of freedom compatible with an equal distribution of freedom. Among the possible reasons for inequality in India, emphasis has to be given

to poverty; for poverty weakens every resource of the individual and he becomes unfit to participate or benefit from any legislative measure. Bhattacharya's *He who Rides a Tiger* lays emphasis upon the need for equality. In the novel, Kalo attempts to bring about equality by challenging unjust practices. This is evident when he decides to give the leftover milk from Shiva's milk bath to the destitute children. At the end of the novel, Kalo feels happy that he had been able to show at least a bare vision of an equal social treatment to his caste-fellows. In an essay titled 'Freedom versus Equality', Richard Norman explains:

> Freedom does not just mean being left alone, it depends upon positive conditions, which are socially created and socially assigned. Hence, if we are to apply the epithet free to a whole society, we have to consider how these positive conditions of freedom are distributed within that society, and the society will be a free society to the extent that those conditions are distributed equally rather than enjoyed disproportionately by particular sections of the society. This then, is the first step in the linking of freedom and equality (133).

Political freedom also tends to contribute to equality. It increases the general capability of a person to live more freely. The Quit India movement and the hunger strikes in jail, which are, referred to in the novel, remind us of the political situation in the country. The Government is blamed for its inept handling of the situation. There is no attempt at price control and no rationing of food grains. Men die in large numbers. When they are no longer able to withstand hunger, the starving men resort to agitation, with the demand "Food for all". Great demonstrations were held in the streets everyday. Among the hunger marchers were also men from workshops, students, clerks and volunteers. The jails began to be crowded with men who had broken the law to appease their hunger. Inside the jail, there were also people taking part in the Quit India movement. As the novelist says, these people were "imprisoned for no crime save the one of loving their country and asking a better way of life for it, a life free from hunger and indignity, a life built by hard self-denial"(174). The protest against hunger thus

merges with the larger movement for national freedom. R.K.Dhavan comments :

> The Bengali writer usually chooses several main characters for his novels relating their experiences side by side. Though telling a single story, he subdivides it into several subplots complementing each other. Being less concerned with the fate of an individual character, novels such as *So Many Hungers, He who Rides a Tiger* or *Shadow from Ladakh* are meant to present us with a kaleidoscopic picture of reality, thus reflecting the forces at work in different sections of society (57).

It is quite evident that many issues regarding freedom find mention in *He Who Rides a Tiger*. However, it is Kalo who becomes a living symbol of freedom. On the day of the great Temple festival, he frees himself from his Brahminic role. By doing so, Kalo serves as an inspiration and sets the pattern for thousands like him, rooted in the age-old fetters of caste and class. Apart from being a skilful and entertaining story, *He Who Rides a Tiger* remains in the minds of the readers as a novel that upholds freedom and equality. It emphasizes that social and economic equality is only a starting point in the way towards achieving complete freedom.

* * *

In his oft-quoted speech on freedom, Nehru had said: "A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation long suppressed, finds utterance."

Indeed, by moulding the English language and by expressing the authentic Indian voice of protest, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Desani's *All about H,Hatterr* and Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger* give utterance to the "long suppressed" soul of India. All the three novels thus become trailblazers for many more distinguished works to follow.

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