

Conflict between good and evil in Aravind Adika's: The white tiger

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Abstract

In the post-colonial dialectics 'subaltern' or 'underclass' occupies prominent place which incorporates the intact people that is subsidiary in terms of class, age, gender, and place of work, or in any other way. It is the subject position that defines subalternity. Yet once it operates in stipulations of class, age and gender, it is more psychological than physical. The lack and scarcity, isolation and estrangement, defeat and subordination, the acceptance and peace, the flexibility and ignore mark the lives of subaltern, even when they resist and rise up, they feel bounded and defeated by their subject positions. They have no representatives or spokesperson in the society they live in and so vulnerably tolerate and get unimportant place or no place at all in the history and culture of which they are the essential part as human beings. The white tiger of this novel is Balram Halwai a poor Indian villager whose great ambition leads him to the Zenith of Indian commerce culture, the world of the Bangalore entrepreneur. On the occasion of the president of China's impending trip to Bangalore Balram writes a letter to him describing his transformation and his experience as driver and servant who a wealthy Indian family, which he thinks exemplifies the contradictions and complications of Indian society.

Keywords: aravind adika's, balram halwai, underclass

Introduction

There has been a conflict, since the very beginning of human life, a struggle between good and evil. Human beings have this choice; they can live their life in a good and noble way or in an evil and ignoble way. They have to choose either of the two. One is free to choose or decide one's lifestyle and life's principles. But there are certain things that are beyond human choices, these automatically come on their way. One cannot choose to get born in a rich family or in a desired caste. Destiny has to be submitted to, though one can always make efforts to be rich or prosperous in life. In the journey from poverty to prosperity or from slavery to freedom, one has to choose which path to follow, the good and honest one or the evil and dishonest one. Since childhood one is taught to follow the good, the right path in life but the path of goodness, honesty, and nobility is a difficult one and needs a lot of courage, patience, willpower and firm determination. On the contrary the path of evil and dishonesty is alluring, easy and smooth to tread on and it also promises an early success. Though most often the followers of the good path remain poor, miserable and deprived yet they are 'guiltless of country's blood'. These are sinless people with a calm soul and clean conscience. They face the world bravely and proudly while the walkers of the evil path, in spite of living in the light of prosperity, have to hide their sins from the world, they have a feverish brain and a troubled soul as very Faustus has to mortgage his soul to the devil for worldly pleasures.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is the story of a man who hangs between good and evil and is finally overcome by the devil. His 'Macbethian' ambition to live like a lord, and like a master turns him into a cold blooded murderer. *The White Tiger* is the saga of making an entrepreneur. The protagonist Balram Halwai, an inhabitant of the darkness always sees the dream of living like a man. This is the dream which his father

saw for him. His father was a rickshaw puller who died of tuberculosis in a government hospital waiting for the doctor. His father always desired that Balram should study well in the school and live a better life, the life of human beings and not insects as he himself ever lived. Balram was a sharp student but his family takes him out of the school and puts him to work in a teashop of the village. Balram never likes the work of wiping tables and crushing coal. Once he hears that drivers earn a good salary and get Rs.1700 a month, he decides to become a driver. He learns to drive and fortunately the Stork, a rich village landlord, appoints him as driver for his American returned son, Mr. Ashok. Balram comes to Delhi with his master. Here his ambition grows bigger. Earlier his dream was to earn a handsome salary and a khaki uniform but the day he sees his master's red bag filled with money, avarice enters his soul. He is never at peace since then finally he plans to kill his master and to run away from there to live a free life like a man. The novel deals with numerous themes. It deals with the age-old theme of the suppression of the poor by the village landlords, differences between the rich and the poor, political corruption and the servant-master relationship. It also vividly portrays human nature, how various people behave in various circumstances.

Human beings are like animals and are fickle-minded, dissatisfied whose desires keep on increasing. Once they get what they wanted, they desire for more and there is no end of this more in life. It is believed that the rich hate the poor and the poor always jealous of the rich. Every human being dreams to live a good, comfortable and prosperous life but all have to accept whatever their destiny decides for them. Till a person is poor, he thinks that the rich must think about the benefits of the poor but once a poor being becomes rich, he also starts behaving in the manner of the rich ones. May be, it is the magical effect of money, that it changes a person or the

way to prosperity passes through selfishness and callousness. Balram, once he starts earning sufficiently well, he starts ignoring his family and their needs. He treats his aunt's son in an ill manner, when the poor boy comes to him in Delhi. Earlier he was quite faithful and devoted to his master Mr. Ashok, but in greed of money and to fulfil his lustful desires, he starts cheating him. The worst ideas of deceit come to his mind when he sees the red bag full of rupees. As he clicks the red bag open, 'All at once, the entire stairwell filled up with dazzling light-the kind that only money can give out.' (TWT, 244). Money is said to be the mother of sins.

Balram, though he likes his master, appreciates him for his goodness, nonetheless kills him ruthlessly. A single glimpse of the inside of the bag makes him brutal and blood thirsty. Basically Balram is not an entirely black character. He has certain merits and demerits. He is a grey character who has some flaws and often acts immorally. As Balram is not a completely corrupted individual so he faces great mental conflict before committing the murder of his master, Mr. Ashok. For a long time his mind is given to the thought of money that he sees in his master's bag. He is caught between the two ideas to steal or not to steal. Strange thoughts visit his mind. As guilt enters his mind and soul, he sees all things and statements as pertaining to his plan.

It is ironic that Balram who remains in an undecided state of mind whether to steal the red bag or not, starts planning and working ahead. The day his mind sees words and lines scribbled in the red puddles, he goes straight way to the railway station in Pahar Ganj instead of waiting for his master in the car. He sees there the names of the cities Benaras, Jammu, Amritsar, Mumbai, Ranchi etc and thinks: "What would be my destination, if I were to come here with a red bag in my hand?" (TWT, 247). He sees there the shining lightened weighting machines standing on the rail platform. He inserts a coin into the slot and waits for the small stiff chit of cardboard to pop out of machine so that he could know what the fortune says to him, written on the card. It is human nature that when one plans a thing, one wants to know if that would be a fortunate scheme or the unfortunate one. Even people who do not believe in such fortune telling things, can't help themselves to remain untouched by them, they do it out of curiosity. Balram also perhaps wishes to try his luck. He chit that comes out of the machine reads: "Lunna scales Co. New Delhi-11005. Your Weight 59. Respect for the law is the first command of the gods" (TWT, 248). Balram becomes unhappy to see the scribbled message on the chit gives satirical laugh and broods:

Here, on the threshold of a man's freedom, just before he boards a train to a new life, these flashing fortune machines are the final alarm bell of the Rooster Coop (TWT, 248).

He imagines that as he is trying to escape, the sirens of the coop are ringing and he wouldn't be given the share of his freedom; rather a hand would pick him up by the neck and he would be shoved back into the coop.

Freedom is one of Balram's dreams. The theme of freedom has been handled in the novel in the light of materialism. The term freedom has always been discussed in various ways. The word has distinguished interpretations for distinguished people. Saints and the divine scholars say that getting rid of worldly objects and worldly relations is freedom. They teach human beings that beings should free their minds and souls from jealousy, falsehood, passions and from all evils things,

existing in the world and they should devote themselves to the divine and the divinity that is the real freedom. For a prisoner coming out of the four walled cage is freedom. For a poor being releasing himself from the shackles of poverty is freedom. Everyone defines freedom in his own way. Balram too, has his own concepts about freedom. He is a lover of freedom and he had this spark since his childhood. He quotes a poem, the name of the poet (a Muslim poet, as he calls) he doesn't recall, has written about slaves: "They remain slaves because they can't see what is beautiful in this world," and he thinks: "that's the truest thing anyone ever said" (TWT, 40). He says to Mr. Jiabao: "Even as a boy I could see what was beautiful in the world: I was destined not to stay a slave" (TWT, 41). He admires Mr. Jiabao's country and people for they never let the British rule them. Only here nations have never let themselves be ruled by foreigners: China, Afghanistan, and Abyssinia. "These are the only three nations I admire" (TWT, 5). He regrets: "Free people don't know the value of freedom, that's the problem" (TWT, 117). Being the son of a poor rickshaw-puller who was 'a man of honour and courage' as he calls his father, Balram had to be a servant. In the beginning, no doubt he serves his master honestly and devotedly. He does all household works, washes his master's Pomeranian dogs and conceals all secrets of his master, Mr. Ashok. Many times he is humiliated also. He feels that all poor servants are trapped in a Rooster Coop and there is no escape because it is not guarded only from outside by the masters, but also by the fellows inside.

The Rooster Coop was doing its work. Servants have to keep other servants from becoming innovators, experimenters, or entrepreneurs (TWT, 194).

So finally he decides the strategy of his freedom, but it was full of cruelty and wickedness.

All human beings have a conscience and it always checks them from doing hideous and immoral deeds. It depends on individual choice, if one listens to it or ignores it. Then there is the fear of being caught and being punished that prevents a human being from doing a wrong and illegal action. Balram's conscience also ceases him from committing crime. His father had taught him true courage and integrity. His father wanted to see him as an educated man and to earn his greed fairly and honestly that is what was to live like a man. First it was the goodness of the blood he owned from his father that he meditates for long before slaving and robbing his master, secondly he fears for his family that has to pay later for his sins. It makes him sweat when he thinks to go further in his plan: "Think, Balram. Think of what the buffalo did to his servant's family" (TWT, 249). Tormented with such thoughts he loiters on the roads of Delhi. He decides to go to 'red-light district' to relax him but there too he starts fighting with the people. Then with a heated and confused mind he walks away. There from he goes to the big second hand book market of Darya Ganj. Here he learns two lines of an Urdu poem: "You were looking for the key for years / but the door was always open!" (TWT, 253). He finds the key to hid problem in these lines. This regularly echoes in his ears. In Old Delhi, Balram passes through a butchers' quarter. He sees a buffalo coming down the road, pulling a large cart behind it. It had no human driver but the buffalo. The cart was full of the faces of dead buffaloes, their skulls and other body parts. Balram walks along with that poor animal for some time, staring at the dead parts of the buffaloes. Suddenly a thing happens there and it

was enough to make his soul severe. Balram narrates this to Mr. Jaibao.

Just the next day after this incident, when his master comes to the car, Balram decides that he would make a confession, but then he changes his ideas when he sees his master busy with his mobile. He deems about his master's ignorance relating to the conflict going on in his mind,

To have a madman with thoughts of blood and theft in his head, sitting just ten inches in front of you, and not to know it. Not to have hint, even. (TWT, 257)

He calls it blindness that his master is talking to Americans thousands of miles away but not having even "the faintest idea what's happening to the man who's driving your car!" (TWT, 257). Balram's mood gets routine when Mr. Ashok gives him a hundred-rupee note for celebration of his marriage. His master's words, 'We'll take care of your wedding expenses' echo in his mind. For a while he behaves like a mad man, he falls down his face into the ground then he washes his face in common toilet and comes to his room. His frustration and anger there falls on the young boy Dharam, who had come to Delhi with a letter from Balram's granny.

Balram remains very inconclusive about what to do. Though he slaps the boy Dharam and ill-treats him, yet he thinks that the arrival of the boy has saved him from sinning. He muses:

I had come to the edge of the precipice. I had been ready to slay my master-this boy's arrival had saved me from murder (and a lifetime in prison) (TWT, 263).

Once in a while sitting outside a tea shop he sees the dirty black water passing, a voice inside him says: "But your heart has become even blacker than that, Munna." (TWT, 265). Balram's mental agony somewhat touches Macbeth's conflict before he murders his lord Duncan. He shares some of his traits with Macbeth. The red bag causes the same spell on Balram as does the prediction of witches on Macbeth. The thought of murdering their lords upset their mental state. Balram's mind is also troubled with his imaginations of killing his master. Though he always loves him and admits that his master is better than nine in ten yet he slays him. In greed Macbeth and Balram both kill their masters, though fortunately both had good masters and both loved their lords well.

Balram's goodness and humanity is displayed. He shows his deep concern and love for his master. When Mr. Ashok's wife pinky madam leaves him, he becomes miserable. At this, Balram gets very sad. He says:

It squeezed my heart to see him suffer like this- but where self-interest began, I could not tell: no servant can ever tell what the motives of his heart are. (TWT, 187)

Unfortunately evil succeeds both Macbeth and Balram and despite their admiration and love for their lords, both of them kill their masters callously. Both deceive their masters who trusted them deeply. Duncan had a lot of faith in Macbeth and his goodness; on the other hand Mr. Ashok always admires Balram for his devotion, honesty and goodness. His perennial thinking was that Balram is honest, good and trustworthy; he is not crooked and cunning like other city drivers. He could never guess what he was doing behind his back.

The lines he learned from the Urdu poem keep on instigating Balram towards the evil deed. He finds a meaning in this verse indicating towards his ambition, his aim. He feels the door of a better life was always open; it was he who could not identify his way. In the death of his master was hidden his life, new

life, a life lived by man, a free and rich life. So lastly he schemes murder, he selects his weapon, a broken bottle of Jonny Walker Black, with its claws of glass. The day when Balram has to act his plan, he first drives his master to the city where Mr. Ashok collects money from bank to bank and the weight of the red bag was growing. He feels its pressure increasing on his lower back,

...as if I were taking Mr. Ashok and his bag not in a car, but the way my father would take a customer and his bag-in a rickshaw (TWT, 280).

He dreams of seven hundred thousand rupees. "It was enough for a house. A motorbike. And a small shop. A new life" (TWT, 280). As it was raining that day, the roads were deserted; Balram stops the car and bids Mr. Ashok to step out. His constant refrain at that time was, 'trust me, sir, trust me.' He imagines that his master's body is moving as far from him as it can. He thinks: "I'm losing him, I thought, and this forced me to do something I knew I would hate myself for, even years later" (TWT, 282). When Mr. Ashok comes out and bends to see the wheel of the car Balram hits his skull with the bottle and Mr. Ashok's body falls into the mud. Balram grows cruel. First he thinks over the question of leaving his wounded body in the bushes, but due to the fear that he will recover and call the police, he decides to kill him. Turning to the body around, facing to himself he stamps his knee on its chest then opens the collar button, slits his master's throat and finishes his life-story. Now he feels "a free man" (TWT, 285) having escaped the clutches of the rooster coop.

Balram attains everything he has yearned for, freedom, money and power. He doesn't repent for what he did, though he was sorry for Mr. Ashok. The character of Balram seems to assert and justify his evil deed. The story shows evil winning over good. Balram's statement: "I'll never say I made a mistake that night in Delhi when I slit my master's throat. I'll say it was all worthwhile to know, just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant" (TWT, 320), raises many questions. Balram says that he is 'a man of action and change', 'a self-taught entrepreneur.' A man who is projected as a good and talented person in the beginning of the story and who comments on corruption, disintegrity, cruelty and on evil deeds of other people and laments for the lot of the poor ones, when he proclaims himself to be a man of action and change, it indicates towards a strong individual who would fight for his rights openly and proudly. A few words that Balram frequently speaks attract attention; freedoms, to live like a man, servitude, lightness and darkness. The way these terms have been interpreted by the protagonist, they show a sea change in the mortality of the present age. Today's spirit is happily willing to sacrifice age-old morals for comforts and pleasures. They do not want to fall into the debate of good and evil. Balram says that he wants to be free; he could be free if he had left the job, but then he would have to suffer poverty again. He does not want merely freedom, but also money, easy money. He becomes the stork, the buffalo and the raven that he used to hate. He wishes to live like a man: "Is living like a man is to live in sins, immorality, and cutting the throat of others?" He wants to escape servitude and humiliation but in this world everyone has to be a servant; in some or the other way; every lion is guarded by the other bigger one. Balram, himself writes to Mr. Jiabao:

But pay attention, Mr. Premier! Fully formed fellows, after twelve years of school and three years of university wear nice

suits, join companies, take orders from the other men for the rest of their lives. (*TWT*, 11)

Humiliation is also a part of human life. If Balram is insulted for he is a servant, then his master is also humiliated by the politicians. According to Balram, the world of poverty is the world of darkness and the world of richness is the world of light. But they who are living in light according to Balram and ever shopping in malls, they too need a suffering existence. Their problems are not relating to bread and butter but are of other type. After gaining worldly wealth Balram's body may live in light but his soul is the darkness and will always remain there. It is only truth that gives real freedom to the being. Sin and untruth always binds him, slaves him. Sinner's soul is always a troubled soul. One can never justify ill deeds for black is black and white is white and will always remain so.

So throughout the novel he suffers with this state of mind whether to go with right path where there is no surety of success and which takes long period and the path is full of problems or to choose wrong way which is shortcut to success and richness.

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