



Acceptance Vs Resistance: Re-Reading Of *The White Tiger* In The Light Of Foucault's Power Theory

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ABSTRACT

Power is the ability to hold and control others and regulate their actions. The zealous desire for power is innate in human nature. All fights and conflicts in humanity are to gain power over others. Hence, in the present scenario, the study of power relations is significant and relevant. Aravind Adiga's 'The White Tiger' attempts to invent the various kinds of power strategies that function in society. It shows what are its impacts and effects on the life of an ordinary man. Michel Foucault is one of the most influential of all the French critics who brought about a revolution in the late 1960s with the interpretation of power. Foucauldian theory of power interacts with institutions among groups and individuals. The fundamental idea emerging from the power theory of Foucault is that holding power is nothing but the association between man and his social surroundings. His notion is that power is exercised by an institution or a group of people. It is fundamentally implicated only with suppression and inhibitions. The present study analyzes select novel in the light of the Foucauldian theory of power as oppression and foregrounding resistance to power can be seen in this book. According to Foucault power is intrinsic to every social bond. That is why all social relations can be seen as relations of power. Power relations can be witnessed in any social institution like family, court, government, etc. So, where there is power, there is resistance. A thorough reading of *The White Tiger* makes a reader accepts the availability of Foucault in terms of power and resistance to power throughout the novel.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This article is based on secondary sources. The scholarly article is carried out by the information collected from different sources like educational websites, peer-reviewed journals, and online sources. The content relies on the data collected through research journals, doctoral theses, scholarly

articles, and websites. This qualitative approach is conducted mainly based on collecting, examining, and interpreting existing knowledge on the selected topic by focusing on the keywords “Control, Influence, Oppression, Power, and Resistance”. The methodology of the study is the textual analysis and explorative method.

Findings/Result: Vast reading of Foucault’s power theory will enhance further areas of study. The careful reading of Man Booker prize winner 2008 Indian novelist Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* makes us accept the presence of Michel Foucault in terms of power and his views on resistance to power clearly in the novel. The novel juxtaposes the life of the working class in India against the lives of landlords who are empowered by the working class. The paper aims to find out the power structure within the economic, political, and social order. The pursuit of power over others is the root cause of all disputes in our present society. So, the scope and relevance of power theory are still pertinent.

Originality/Value: The paper is original and the study is carried out by referring to some educational and research journals and online secondary sources.

Paper type: Textual and Exploratory research paper.

Keywords: Control, Institution, Oppression, Power, Resistance

INTRODUCTION:

Aravind Adiga’s novel *The White Tiger*, which won the 2008 Man Booker Prize is a powerful critique of Indian democracy from a subaltern perspective. It juxtaposes the life of the working class in India against the lives of landlords who are empowered by the working class. The novel depicts the drawbacks of society and democracy in India in the form of maladministration, denial of equality to people, the prevalence of injustice, and extensive corruption. This has led to the creation of new distinctions and classes in society [1]. It strongly analyses the power structure within the Indian economic, political, and social order. Adiga is an Indo-Australian writer and journalist. He was born in Chennai in 1974. As his parents hailed from Mangalore, he grew up here. For his higher studies, he went to Columbia University. His debut novel, *The White Tiger* is in the form of a series of unsent letters which is addressed to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, by a British Halwai, who termed a murderer and abandoned his village and reached Delhi to work as a chauffeur.

The protagonist Balram Halwai writes a letter to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, in which he recounts his life in seven nights. Balram describes himself as an entrepreneur [2] in this letter, explaining how he, the son of a rickshaw puller, left a life of servitude to become a successful businessman. He was born in Laxmangarh, a rural area where he lived with his grandmother, parents, brother, and extended family. He is a bright boy, but he is obliged to drop out of school to help pay for his cousin’s dowry, so he joins his brother at a teashop in Dhanbad. From the talks of the clients, he begins to learn about India’s government and economics while

working there [3]. After learning the skill of driving he was appointed as a driver to Ashok, the son of one of the landlords. This time he was exposed to extensive corruption and he determined to kill his master as that is the only option to free himself from his exploitation. After killing his owner he moves to Bangalore and becomes a successful entrepreneur [4].

The quest for power is innate and inborn in humanity. The repeated struggles and disputes among nations bear witness to the pursuit of power over others. Through vigilant and careful strategic operations, everywhere people strive hard to exercise power over others [5]. The dominant people employ different strategies to overcome their subordinates. One of the fundamental issues in all human sciences is resistance to power has always been a part of the equation. There is opposition where there is power; power implies that there is impediment and resistance. Many researchers have coined the term “resistance” to characterize a wide range of acts and behaviors in all facets of human social life and many circumstances. Resistance happens on a scale that is not necessarily the same size. Individual or group acts of resistance may be carried out, and they may be widespread or limited to certain locations [6]. Individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions are all targets of the resistance. As a result, while resistance is commonly thought to be directed at accomplishing some type of change, it can also be used to restrain change. Foregrounding resistance to power is an important aspect of power structure [7]. Both silence and resistance have the potential to challenge power. Silent suppression leads to resistance and revolt in later stages. Plenty of literary works depict the strategies of resistance in their narration. The novel makes resistance the hallmark and his protagonist Balram Halwai is the successful man who resisted and revolted against the domination of the rich over the poor. He is no longer a slave and breaks the Rooster-Coop and became a victorious entrepreneur. Resistance is the key fact of all freedom struggles in the history of mankind [8].

OBJECTIVES:

1. To analyze the various power structures depicted in the novel.
2. To know how power creates distinctions in society in the novel.
3. To better understand the Foucauldian theory of power.
4. To comprehend the relevance of the study of power dynamics in the present scenario through the novel.
5. To realize how both resistance and acceptance are the potentials to challenge any power portrayed in the novel.

METHODOLOGY:

Secondary data for this study were acquired from educational websites and articles. The study is conducted through the use of academic journals, books, and websites. The purpose of this qualitative study is to assess and evaluate current information on the subject by referring to web pages containing the keywords “Control, Institution, Oppression, Power, Resistance” that are available in peer-reviewed journals, publications, and a variety of associated sites.

POWER IN FOUCAULT’S VIEWS:

Michel Foucault is one of the most dominant and prominent of all French theorists who brought a rioting influence in the late 1960s with the interpretation of power. Foucauldian theory of power operates through institutions like family, society, police, and political system [9]. His works like ‘The Birth of the Clinic’, ‘The History of Sexuality’, ‘Discipline and Punish’, and ‘Power/Knowledge’ focus on the impact of power. One fundamental insight that emerges from all of these studies is that the best place to study power in action is in the individual-society relationship. His belief is that power is something possessed by a group of people or an institution. That Power is just interested in tyranny and limitations [10]. He sees power as the powerful oppressing the powerless. He argues that power is manifested in daily interactions between people and institutions. Unlike many other theorists before him, Foucault prioritized resistance to power. Power, according to Foucault, is a connection, not a resource. It is never “held” or “owned”, but rather “exercised” directly [11]. In addition, the logic of its distribution does not always entail capital accumulation. Power, like capital, is unevenly distributed, but it exists and is wielded across the social body. And there is always counter-power wherever there is power. Power, maybe most crucially for Foucault, has beneficial implications. It isn’t oppressive, but it is effective. Its mechanism is exceedingly specialized, and economic processes alone cannot capture it.

Foucault is a philosopher whose power politics can be seen in everyday life. He has been called a disguised Marxist, a nihilist, a new conservative, and a new liberal. According to Foucault, we are constantly subjected to and object of power; it is present in every relationship. Because there are multiple sources of power, there must also be multiple sources of resistance. Knowledge is the foundation of power, and it is used to reproduce knowledge by molding it with anonymous purposes. Knowledge allows power to re-create its workout fields. Power isn’t linked to certain individuals or groups. The circulatory aspect of power is emphasized by Foucault. Foucault’s theoretical approach has influenced a wide range of disciplines, to the point where the term “Foucauldian” is frequently used to describe his approach. While the subjects of Foucault's research appear to be diverse, they all tend to centre on how human knowledge is intimately linked. The study mainly focuses on the main aspect of Foucault’s theory of power that is how it as a system foregrounding resistance to power. In the book ‘Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings’, Foucault says that, “power is imminent in all social relations and that all social relations are relations of power,

whether in the family or the hierarchies of government and other social institutions” [12]. In ‘Discipline and Punishment’, Foucault explains how power works as a system of panopticon surveillance. It is an important mechanism through which exercises power [13]. In ‘The History of Sexuality’ Foucault mainly focused on the importance of resistance which is the natural result of the suppression [14].

The operation of power in the Foucauldian context doesn’t mean oppression alone. It extends itself to a protest against power. To quote Sara Milles in the book Michel Foucault: “Foucault, unlike many earlier Marxist theorists, is less concerned with focusing on oppression, but rather in foregrounding resistance to power” [15]. In The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction Foucault says: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority about power”. In other words, he claims that if there is no resistance, no power relationship exists. Power coexists with resistance. Wherever power is used, there must be someone who opposes it. Resistance is inscribed into the exercise of power, according to Foucault. The complete power relations, secret transcripts, and public performance must all be studied in order to analyze a power relationship [16]. Foucault is more concerned with the resistance of those forces that are applied upon, rather than the severe part of the force. The Marxist thinker Louis Althusser, for example, focused on how people are oppressed by state institutions and how they build themselves as individuals through the mystifying action of ideology. While individuals are considered as puppets of the ideological and repressive apparatus by Althusser, and power is perceived as operating from the top down by Foucault, power relations are seen as dispersed throughout all social constructions by the general public [17]. This enables him to construct a model of commonplace and unremarkable habits in which force is applied and challenged, similar to an analysis focused on the human individual as a functional unit.

Power is defined as a specialist’s ability to impose his will over the desires of the weak, or the ability to force others to do things they don’t want to do. In this perspective, power is viewed as something that belongs to someone with a lot of clout. Power, on the other hand, according to Foucault, is not something that can be held, but rather something that acts and shows itself in a specific way; it is more of a strategy than a possession [18]. This perspective on power emphasizes that all individuals are not only the objects of power, but also the sites where power and resistance to it are exercised. According to Foucault, “power is coextensive with resistance; productive, having positive results; omnipresent, being found in every sort of relationship, as a condition of the possibility of any kind of relationship”, as stated in his book The History of Sexuality. This implies that power relations between people cannot be reduced to dominate slave or oppressor-victim relationships; however, they are useful relationships because they imply opposition, without which no force relationship can be considered: where there is power, there is always someone who opposes it [19].

RESISTANCE IN *THE WHITE TIGER*:

Resistance is the trademark of Adiga's *The White Tiger*. It is known for its defiance. It depicts not only the dominant class's dominance over the lower class, but it's also a wonderful investigation of the subordinate class's resistance. The lower class is not a passive victim; instead, it actively generates counter-power. Balram opposes his owner's power, citizens oppose politicians' power, family members oppose Kusum, students oppose their teachers, women oppose their husbands, and the impoverished oppose the wealthy. Balram, the anti-hero, represents the oppressed in society and revolts against the wealthy. Balram is depicted as a lively, agile, and thoughtful man. Balram is not a prisoner to the circumstances in which he lives, but rather provides enough room for him to act and think. Balram does not become a slave to the circumstances in which he lives, but rather provides enough space for himself to act and practice his ethics. The individual, in the Foucauldian meaning, is a free subject who can either conform to societal standards or act independently. Because power is dynamic and creative, and resistance is a natural part of it, the individual has the freedom to participate in the power game in a way that is distinct from being a submissive body that simply does what society dictates.

The White Tiger showcases a resistance to power first, concerning Balram's father who even after being a Halwai, a sweet-maker by caste, and after having rejected serfdom unlike Balram's uncles, prefers to become a rickshaw-puller. It is a bold protest against serfdom as Balram says it: "My father could have worked with them; he could have worked with the landlord's mud, but he chose not to. He chose to fight it" [20]. The resistance to power further expresses again in terms of Balram's father who plans to liberate Balram through education: He says, "My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine- at least one- should live like a man". Balram's protest against oppression is first seen when after having been taken out of the school he is made to clean tables and break coals for the oven in a tea shop. The shopkeeper even if he finds Balram a little careless he would "...jump down from his seat, chase me around the tea shop with the ladle he had been using to stir the sugar, and whack me on the head with it" [20].

Balram's resistance to the power of his master seems to be cast interestingly. Instead of taking revenge on his owner's brutal treatment, Balram uses the workplace as the means to educate himself in his way. He says: "Instead of wiping out spots from tables and crushing coals for the oven, I used my time at the teashop in Laxmangarh to spy on every customer at every table, and overhear everything they said. I decided that this was how I would keep my education going forward – that's the one good thing I'll say for myself" [20]. Pinky, his employer's wife described him as "half-baked" and Balram himself calls his life incidents as 'The autobiography of a half-baked Indian'. Even his resistance seems in his judgment as a boy: "I was destined not to stay a slave".

His resistance increases itself at the age of twenty-four when he comes from Dhanbad to Laxmangarh to take for a picnic of his masters Ashok and his wife. Balram explains that it was a remarkable excursion for himself. While his owners relax after lunch, Balram tries to reach the Black Fort and enters it for the first time. Relaxing from the edge of the fort, though the sight was most appealing and beautiful, he spits. He considered

it a disgusting act. Balram's spitting in the Foucauldian context marks his resistance against the landlords of Laxmangarh. It is also disgusting against Ashok, his master transformed from a landlord of Laxmangarh into an entrepreneur of Dhanbad. It paved the way for Ashok's murder: "Well, actually, I spat, again and again. And then, whistling and humming, I went back down the hill. Eight months later, I slit Mr. Ashok's throat" [20]. Here Balram's spitting is a clear sign of his suppressed hatred for serfdom. Finally, Balram's resistance against power is indicated in terms of cheating his master, he siphoned the petrol, took his master's car to a mechanic who is amoral, and telling lies to Ashok. Balram never feels guilty of his actions but he feels ashamed of his deed. Instead resists strongly with anger and revenge, he says: "The more I stole from him, the more I realized how much he had stolen from me" [20]. Foucault argues that one can resist power but one cannot escape it.

Despite Ashok's good treatment and love and affection towards Balram, he finds himself at continuous war with Ashok, and with his grandmother who always demands money from Balram. She always scolds Balram for not sending money.

Balram's parents intended him to work at a tea shop, but one of the landowners whisked him away to Delhi, where he was introduced to the world of corruption and fraud. His re-education begins when he arrives in Delhi with his new master, and he learns a new way of life in the heart of the new India. Balram realized that like the chickens he is also caged in the coop and determines to crack the cage, escape and experience his freedom [21]. When his fellow workers read the news in the Murder Weekly, he sketches how he might escape from his exploitation. Balram imagines himself in the condition of the worker of trader of diamonds. This diamond merchant is bringing bags full of cut diamonds from Surat to Mumbai. He could not cheat his masters because they are caught in the cage. Slowly he understands that any victorious person must pour his blood while accomplishing his goal. Balram allows Ashok to corrupt first and later allows him to be corrupted like Ashok. He drinks and indulges in debauchery like Ashok. His vicious submission for freedom and resistance is very hostile and revengeful. His journey from a servant from the Darkness to the rich in the Light, reveals how he struggled to be dark and poor to capture power and status [22]. The struggle uncovers his deviated psychopathic nature to break the coop by betraying his family and society. Adiga uncovers the fierce character of Balram who choose to kill his owner. He determines to murder his master to escape from the brutal clutches of his master so that becomes a free man. And at the end, he says: "All I wanted a chance to be a man- and for that, one murder was enough". He never regrets for his crime of murdering his master but for him, this murder is a must for his successful life.

The White Tiger is a brilliant example of the protagonist's resistance to the domination of the masters. The novel exposes how Balram is cheated and accordingly revolts and breaks out for freedom. He is rare like a white tiger which is very uncommon. Adiga hints and warns the chance of a rebellion that may happen to frees the exploited. Adiga states: "Maybe once in a hundred years there is a revolution that frees the poor" [20].

Balam, the white tiger acquires unique strategies to revolt his owner's control on him. Thus he liberated himself from the clutches of his master. The human quandary and resistance of temptation and the spark of vengeance together stirred him and finally, the key moment has arrived. He committed his deed very cleverly like a trained and seasoned criminal, without leaving any witness. He tried to calm his fury by indulging in revolting gestures: "I turned the body around, so it would face me. I stamped my knee on his chest. I undid the collar button and rubbed my hand over its clavicles to mark out the spot" [20]. He felt an extreme sigh of relief. He experiences an urge of boldness and confidence and finally declares: "I have made it! I have broken out of the coop". After committing the crime, Balam washed away the spots of blood from his hands and face, feeling no pricks of guilt, remorse, or repentance. He resumes his usual activities of life like doing yoga and says: "I began reflecting on the progress of my story, and realized that I'm almost done". But he also admits that: "It took me four weeks in Bangalore to calm my nerves".

This is not the end of Balam's shocking and amazing tale of triumph, but it is the starting point that shifts his status from a social entrepreneur to a business entrepreneur. Balam's suppressed and oppressed inner psyche took the opposite direction of revolt and revenge even though he is afraid of the punishment for his offense [23]. He remarks: "...even if they throw me in jail and have all the other prisoners dip their beaks into me - even they make me walk the wooden stairs to the hangman's noose - 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" [20].

The point why Balam murders his master despite all his respect and praises is remarkable here. Ashok was powerless and lost at that time but Balam's heart burns with anger against his situation. Maybe it is because of his increasing debauchery, particularly his interest in the girl with the golden hair. It prompted him to spend seven thousand rupees but he was cheated and he found that roots are black and it was just a dye job. Or maybe the arrival of Dharam, his nephew from the village becomes an extra burden for Balam. But Balam has already made up his mind to kill his master before the arrival of Dharam. Then what made him kill his master who is even afraid of a lizard. It is an attack and revolt against the rotten systems of political, social, and economic conditions [24].

Before the murder of Ashok, Balam's encounter with a white tiger in a cage in the National Zoo in New Delhi caused him to faint is very significant. It makes him feel: "...I can't live the rest of my life in a cage, Granny. I'm so sorry". Thus, he is forced to break the chain of servitude and make himself free and prove himself as the white tiger. He proclaims that: "The creature that gets born only once every generation in the jungle". Thus, Balam transforms himself from 'Balam Halwai alias Munna', 'village idiot', 'yonkel from the village', 'country mouse', 'half-baked Indian' to a 'chauffeur' and gradually to 'Ashok Sharma', North Indian entrepreneur, settled in Bangalore. He adopts the name of his master, showing his transformation from 'a driver to a master' to 'masters of drivers' with sixteen drivers and twenty-six Toyota Qualises by killing and robbing seven hundred thousand rupees from his master Ashok [25]. The continuous references to Buddha and

Gandhi throughout the novel are also important. The reference to Buddha in terms of Balram's doubt whether Buddha ever walked through Laxmangarh and if he did, he might have run as fast as he could. The reference to Gandhi when an evil act like bribery is committed under his portrait and statue has a significant note. The references to the darkness and light, the color black in the Black Fort and Black Dog, the animal names of masters, the holy river Ganga is described as 'black river' and 'a repository of chemical waste and pollution are some of the clear indications of hidden suppressed resistance [26]. The root of resistance is silently expressed throughout the narrative.

FINDINGS:

The sole aspect of Foucauldian power theory is, power as oppression, foregrounding resistance to power conforms to Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. Viewed in the Foucauldian context, the resistance to power is first seen in terms of the rejection of serfdom by Balram Halwai's father and he accepted his career as a rickshaw puller. Finally, by murdering and robbing his master, Balram breaks the Rooster-Coop. He transforms himself from 'driver to a master' to 'a master of drivers'. The paper argues that Foucault's power discourse has undoubtedly set in motion a totally new perspective of looking at how societies' power dynamics work. It demonstrates how specific people and institutions are linked to power. In the novel, power should be viewed as a form of resistance. The characters are not always in the driver's seat, but they are always in the cars of power. His primary character's thirst for power elevates him from a lower to a greater level.

SUGGESTIONS:

The study of power relations is very relevant and challenging in today's world, where people are driven by a strong desire for power. This is an attempt to look at the Foucauldian concept of power and how it is used in the novel as a form of resistance. The study should be useful in today's India, where there are many divisions based on class, race, and economics. Adiga tries to explore the different types of power structures that operate in the society and shows how it influences human life. He focuses on the interconnected forms of power that maintain individuals in unjust and unequal positions, such as political power, economic power, physical power, and religious power. As a result, there are a variety of alternative angles to investigate further.

CONCLUSION:

Adiga depicts that resistance and revolutions are an inevitable part of social change. Society can undergo a major change through a small resistance or a big revolution. Thus Balram transforms his dream into reality. He gives voice to the silence of the silent people and it is a hope that even 'half-baked' can have light in their life. Through the depiction of Balram, Aravind Adiga expressed his optimistic view that low-class people also can make their destiny by fighting. So that Adiga wants to develop consciousness and awareness in

the minds of dominated people. We have seen in the novel the present mode of economy and exchange has drawn a line between the rich and the poor [27]. Regarding the process of self-formation and resistance, Balram is more promising than Foucault believed. Balram creates a self which is free from any restrictions and ways of society. At present India is arising as a strong nation in entire world. India is heading in the field of science, technology, economy, politics, society, and culture. In the entire field, there is rapid progress in the nation. But still, many people are deprived of the necessities of life. There are plenty of people who are exploited, oppressed, illiterate, and leading the life of servitude. Based on caste and class there is still discrimination among people [28]. The Foucauldian power politics is still prevalent in the current society. For all these reasons we can assume that Foucault's power structure matters more now than ever. Power is everywhere and the main aspect of social regulation and political activities. A sole aspect of Foucault's view of power is it exceeds political activities and views it as a regular socialized and inevitable occurrence. In the novel, Adiga beautifully depicted the power politics and its enforcement in the social, political and economic framework of our country. So Foucault's power theory easily fits into the novel.

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