

SUCCESS FORMULA IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S 'THE WHITE TIGER'

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ABSTRACT: The terms 'entrepreneur' and 'entrepreneurship' attain a new definition and perspective through Aravind Adiga's modern hero, Balram Halwai in the novel 'The White Tiger'. Balram who claims himself to be a successful entrepreneur, terms 'entrepreneurship' as a 'daring task' in his letter to a visiting Chinese official, Wen Jibao. Adiga, through a retrospective narration of his protagonist, Balram, tries to reveal his formula of success as an entrepreneur to his readers. This paper tries to critically examine and comprehend the reliability of facts that Balram presents as his formula of success.

Keywords: White Tiger, Entrepreneurship, Success Formula, Individualism, Quest for Freedom

Introduction

Adiga's debut novel 'The White Tiger' is a social satire that portrays India's class struggle in a globalized world, through a retrospective narration of the protagonist, Balram Halwai. The novel is set in modern day India which unravels Balram's quest for freedom. Balram, the son of a rickshaw puller is a self-made man who turns from an innocent village fool into a urbanised person full of debauchery, depravity and wickedness. Balram himself believes that, his transformation has helped him in achieving success as an entrepreneur.

The novel is written in first person narrative in which Balram recounts his story in a letter to a visiting Chinese official, Wen Jibao, with a goal of educating the Premier about entrepreneurship in India. The entire novel is weaved into several letters that span upto seven days, which makes it a pure epistolary novel. The novel belongs to the genre of picaresque novels and was well received making it to the New York Times Best Seller List along with winning 40th Man Booker Prize in the same year of publishing (2008).

As Balram intends to educate Mr Premier about "how entrepreneurship is born, nurtured and developed in the 21st century" (6, Adiga), he explains it with reference to his own life as he considers himself to be a successful entrepreneur. While explaining, he highlights some of those essential skills that ought to be either inherent or developed in a person in order to become a successful entrepreneur. This paper tries to comprehend the reliability of those skills as facts that constitutes Balram's formula of success.

Entrepreneurship as a metaphor for Individualism

Balram's definition of the term 'entrepreneur' is extremely different from that of its conventional definition. According to Balram, an entrepreneur is someone who has the courage to fight against injustice and will to break free from poverty in India, regardless of the means that they adopt to attain freedom. Balram being belonging to a lower, backward class of sweet makers in India, calls himself a social entrepreneur after he murders and loots his master Mr. Ashok. Balram's quest for freedom is complete when he murders Ashok, as he terms it as an 'act of entrepreneurship'. After this 'act of entrepreneurship' Balram is able to establish an identity of his own by himself. Balram who inherited the name 'Munna' from his family that just meant a boy and later named 'Balram' by his school teacher that referred to the sidekick of Lord Krishna, is finally able to give away that name of servitude and name himself after his master Mr. Ashok. He attaches the second name 'Sharma' to him which is a Brahminical surname that portrays that he was able to climb the social ladder by transcending his sweet maker caste and achieve a position of power by establishing his own taxi service.

Balram's family is the cost of his entrepreneurship as even though he knew that his 'act of entrepreneurship' would cause a reflex on his family, he victimizes his family for his selfishness to achieve individual success in order to get out from the shackles of society as well as to become independent. Hence the struggle for individualism is complete once he becomes a social entrepreneur as he is free from both the ties of his family as well as the society. Once he becomes a social entrepreneur the definition of the term bounces back to its original definition. In fact he becomes an individualistic entrepreneur when he means that he transformed from a social entrepreneur to a business entrepreneur.

The transformation from social entrepreneur to a business entrepreneur is as daring as the murder which he commits as it involves proper planning and strategic advancement in order to establish stability. The difficulty level in achieving stability doubles as he has to keep himself safe from being caught for the crime which he had committed. Hence the skills and qualities which he possessed and developed in order to become a social entrepreneur is not disposed but is rather being reformed and recycled as he becomes a business entrepreneur.

Balram himself admits that being a successful entrepreneur is a 'daring task' especially in India. One of the reasons why he says so must be in terms of the class struggle as eventhough the novel is set in modern day India, Balram traces the socio-economic inequality with which he struggles back to 1947. In the year 1947, eventhough India gained Independence from Britain through the Indian Independence Act, it led to race riots between Muslim and Hindu Indians which further led to the establishment of Muslim Pakistan as a separate Independent state. In the 1960's when caste system was abolished in India it led to even more extreme inequality due to disorganisation and chaos. The economic boom during the 1990's also drastically increased income inequality. Hence Balram represents those section of society or Indians who were left behind in the midst of India's rapid economic rise.

People like Balram, he says would constitute India's half of the population. But the irony lies in the fact that instead of addressing the issues of the poor, Indians tend to highlight its developed side to the world by shunning the poverty stricken sections. Balram through his letter, tries to unveil this darker side of India to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jibao when he says "If anyone knows the truth about Bangalore, it's me"(4,Adiga). As Balram considers his achievement to be glorious and as Wen Jibao is supposed to visit India to meet some of the Indian Entrepreneurs to hear their success stories, he takes the initiative to write the letter to him as he feels that there is no one more apt and eligible than him to provide Mr Premier with his success tips as he is the 'tomorrow'.

While presenting his formula of success to Mr Premier, Balram states that the facts are applicable only to the Chinese and Indians and not to Americans as he personally feels that Americans are caught up in midst of development and degraded due to misuse of technology. The reason why Balram considers Chinese and Indians to be similar might be the fact that both the countries are spread over a vast geographical area and hence constitute greater population. The only factor that makes India different from China according to Balram is its parliamentary democracy. But the unjust service of the system towards the poor due to the intrusion of class system into politics makes Balram mock at it and hence consider both the countries being similar. Therefore Balram feels that his success formula can also be implemented in China. When Balram distinguishes India into India of Light which constitutes the wealthy and India of Darkness to which people like him belongs to, his intention is clarified that he presents his facts exclusively to the people of Darkness eventhough he claims that anyone who wishes to be independent could undertake his formula for success.

While presenting his facts, he notifies Mr Premier that 'entrepreneurship is not rewarded in India' in a sense that it makes way to individualism which is considered as a threat to the society. This justifies his need to present his formula of success.

Facts that constitute Balram's Formula of Success

He is a 'man of action and change'. The first and the foremost point that Balram presents to Mr. Premier is that " I'm a man of action and change"(5,Adiga). Through this point, he depicts his ability to swiftly alter and totally reinvent himself. He stresses the point that in order to be a successful entrepreneur in a country like India especially for a person who belongs to the lower class, one should be swift in taking decisions and actions. This is a skill that is perceived to be instilled in him even from his childhood. For instance, eventhough Balram is scared to death of lizards, in spite of being frightened by his aunt about a giant lizard that lived in the Black Fort, he consistently tries to overcome this fear until he is able to make it to the Black Fort. He is able to overcome even his worst fear only because he is a 'man of action'. This skill is instilled upon him due to the influence of his father who wants his son to live like a 'man'. For Balram being a 'man' is equated to Vijay who in spite of being belonging to the lowest class of pigherds is able to become a conductor but through underhanded ways. Therefore, Balram adopts the path of underhanded ways as he sees Vijay as his role model.

As a social entrepreneur, action is meant by each steps that he takes in planning the murder. The action is so quick and the preparation for murder is either unnoticed by the outer world that turns out to be a boon for him or is planned in undercover. His ability to confront an emergency is reflected when he becomes a business entrepreneur. This is best seen when one of his cab employees drives into an accident that kills a boy. When Balram says " That was the first objective - to get the girls home. I have signed a contract with their company and I honour all that I sign"(310,Adiga), it depicts his ability to take a swift action so that it doesn't affect his overall business as well as doesn't lead to further consequences.

As a 'man of change' he means being 'consistently inconsistent'. This occurs as a result of his prior skill of being a man of action. It is due to the fact that he is able to overcome his fear through his action that, he is able to transform himself. Likewise, each action that he does adds to his change. While looking from the perspective of a social entrepreneur, according to him 'change' is something that leads to his growth but in reality it leads to the degradation of his self. He undergoes moral degradation that occurs due to the influence of the society in which he lives in. But eventhough he lives in the midst of corruption and degraded society, he is able to become successful as a social entrepreneur through these two qualities and also a successful business entrepreneur. But the 'man of change' which he refers with reference to a business entrepreneur is in terms of changing his area of interests in business. He calls himself a 'first gear' man as he cannot persist in a certain field of business over a long time as he is a person who tends to lose interest focussing on a field for a long period. After becoming a business entrepreneur, the 'change' is not in terms of a personal change but on the business perspective as he thinks of altering his area of business. But Balram doesn't justify how being a 'man of change' helps in becoming a successful entrepreneur or what would hinder the success of an entrepreneur who doesn't shift from his area of business constantly.

Next comes his ability to perceive tomorrow. In a country that is constantly developing, one needs to be rapid in thought which connects to the point stated above i.e. 'man of action'. The ability to pre-conceive tomorrow or future leads to success when others see today or think about what was applicable in the present or until the present. As a social entrepreneur, his ability to perceive

'tomorrow' is reflected when he murders his master Mr. Ashok, as a prior revenge upon him for the harm that would be inflicted on Balram's family as a consequence of the murder. Balram is obvious that his family would be executed for his evil deeds. So by foreseeing this harm, he decides to kill Ashok. He justifies the murder by saying that if he had left Ashok free, he would never be able to gain anything. The drawback of the point is that, it portrays Balram's hypocritical nature. When he justifies the murder, his intentional usage of his own family for his selfish success is clarified. His family is what that costs his success and he lets them starve for his cruelty where he could have lend a hand to pull them out from the Darkness. When he becomes a business entrepreneur, his ability to perceive tomorrow is about the business opportunities in the future. In this manner he might be successful as he decides to choose his area of business by considering its purview in the future. Another drawback in this point lies in the fact that the ability to perceive tomorrow would not turn into effect in becoming a successful entrepreneur provided it is accompanied by instilling an interest in that area of business. Balram is able to make use of this ability only because he is in a do or die situation to become successful in life.

He is a 'self-taught' entrepreneur. He claims that an entrepreneur needs to be self taught, when he says that " I am a self-taught entrepreneur. That's the best kind there is trust me" (6, Adiga). He also says that "Entrepreneurs are made from half-baked day" (12, Adiga). By the term 'half-baked' he means one who has not completed his basic schooling. He is a best example of a half-baked man, as even though he was taken out of his school and put to work at a tea shop, he became a successful entrepreneur. He became successful only because he was ceaseless in procuring knowledge from his surroundings. According to him, the most important part of an entrepreneur's education involves developing an awareness of one's surroundings, i.e. one should observe his surroundings and learn from it in order to tackle the problems which one would have to confront in the future. Hence an entrepreneur needs to be a keen observer. This self-education is what makes him a man according to him.

Balram's self-education helps him in planning the murder bravely without getting caught. But this cannot be considered as the sole reason that has made his 'act of entrepreneurship' a success. Instead there is a factor of 'luck' that favours him since childhood. Even though he disguises it into his ability to turn bad news into good news which is depicted as another fact that contributes to his formula of success.

At first even if he says that procuring basic education isn't necessary and that one who have not completed their schooling is best for becoming entrepreneurs, he considers education as an important factor when he says he plans to start a school which would teach the poor students about 'the facts in life'. This is contradictory due to the reason that 'the facts in life' in a way refers to these facts that constitute Balram's formula of success. Hence this denotes that he doesn't fully stand on his point of 'self-education' even though he gives importance to education.

An entrepreneur ought to be straight crooked, mocking believing, sly sincere at the same time. This point along with all the facts that constitute his formula of success make the fact clear that Balram is a 'paradox'. But his success lies in his ability to use his paradoxical behaviour logically according to the situation. To understand this point, it is necessary that one is exposed to such situations to experience it and act accordingly by deciding which side of the coin to choose. As one can never be taught how to behave at different situations by giving examples, Balram can only highlight his paradoxical nature that led him to success.

Externally Balram was straight, believing and sincere while internally he was crooked, mocking and sly before his master as well as before his employees. His externalised behaviour served like a mask that got highlighted, which veiled their decayed intensions behind. This point can mislead as, he indirectly denotes that one should be evil at heart but should keep an innocent face. This point leads to moral degradation as, along with positive qualities he highlights the necessity of possessing the negative qualities. Hence even if the intention is to mould a successful entrepreneur, there is the eminent threat of being degraded at the same time.

His skill to turn bad news into good news is the next point that he presents to Mr Premier. This point can be approached with double perspectives. Primarily at the base level it denotes his optimistic quality. As one's optimistic nature is reflected through their positive approach and their by actions, only an optimistic person can possess this skill of turning the bad news into good news. Balram is optimistic in the sense that, he never gives up and get himself doomed by belonging to the lower class. Instead he encounters all those obstacles that hinders his path to success, with hope and confidence.

His story would have taken a diversion if he had continued working at the tea shop. But he doesn't give a chance to 'fate' in deciding his life. Instead he decides to fight. Secondly, it depicts his rebelling nature as Balram attaches the fact "to break the law of his land" (38, Adiga) to the fact "to turn bad news into good news is the entrepreneur's prerogative" (38, Adiga). Hence Balram considers breaking the law as an entrepreneur's right. From his perspective, Balram was able to become a successful entrepreneur only by breaking the law of his land as he by his caste's virtue, belongs to the sweet makers caste would have led a pathetic life drowned in poverty under the feudal rule of the landlords. He has attained freedom or become self-reliant by breaking the shackles that were casted upon him by his society. Approaching this point from an optimistic perspective doesn't pose any threat whereas approaching the second one would obviously be hazardous to the individual as well as to the society since one is bound to one another.

Balram's ability to find beauty in everything is purely formed upon the influence of a Muslim poet Iqbal. Iqbal in one of his poems writes 'they remain slaves because they can't see what is beautiful in this world'. Therefore Balram believes that one ought to find beauty in everything in order to attain freedom from slavery i.e. in his sense, to become a successful entrepreneur. Balram is the only person who admires the Black Fort in his village that is the oldest building in Laxmangarh.

The Black Fort serves as a symbol of power as it was built when British ruled India and was occupied by different rulers one after the other. Balram's admiration for Black Fort hence denotes his love to attain power and to rule. Hence he finds beauty not in everything as he says but in those that which appears to him as a symbol of prominence. He finds beauty in Black Fort and chandeliers but not in slums and that is why he leaves Laxmangarh and Delhi once he becomes successful. He chooses to live settle and in Bangalore as he says the difference between Bangalore and that of his village Laxmangarh is in 'choice'. Balram feels that one has choice either to be good or bad while in Bangalore whereas this choice doesn't exist in Laxmangarh. But it is seen that Balram gets degraded only after he leaves Laxmangarh. Balram chooses his own path by breaking the law of his land. He chooses to live in India of Light that which is developed and not in India of Darkness that which is dwelled in poverty. This shows that he is a hypocrite as he doesn't show justice to the facts he presents to Wen Jibao.

He claims that he is an original listener than an original thinker. Just as his above statements are contradictory, this point too doesn't prove to be true. He calls himself an original listener as he used to eavesdrop on conversations of people around him especially of his master which he feels would have his destiny written in it. At first, he becomes a chauffeur from a coal breaker by over hearing conversations of the people who came to the tea shop at Laxmangarh. Later he plans of murdering his master when he gathers information from one of Ashok's conversation that he was likely to get replaced with one of the local drivers in Delhi. Eventhough his habit of eavesdropping helps him in becoming an entrepreneur, he doesn't take any effort to confirm what he heard is true. He as a 'man of action' hence takes steps abruptly due to which he believes that, had helped him in becoming successful. Although he says that he is an original listener than an original thinker, he is vice versa. The letter itself serves as a proof of him being an original thinker. The thoughts and feelings that are occurring in his mind is clearly portrayed as he writes the letter. Balram might have had an intention of joining in politics when he claims that he is a 'first gear' man to Mr Premier. When he claims that he is a 'man of action', it indirectly reveals that he is an original thinker as his actions are the result of analysis of his thoughts. Hence here too he fails to stick to his points.

Balram proposes the fact that an entrepreneur should never be sentimental. When Balram exclaims that "I'm not a sentimental man Mr Jibao. Entrepreneurs can't afford to be" (12, Adiga), he proves it through his heartless act of murdering his master. It was only Mr. Ashok who treated him better than the rest who were around him. But when Balram comes to know that Mr. Ashok was not different from his father whom he calls as the Stork, he decides to murder him. Balram's decision of killing Ashok and not his father nor his brother lies in the fact that Ashok was too innocent that he believed Balram completely. In fact Balram naming Ashok as 'Lamb' clearly depicts Ashok's nature. But Balram possess a sentimental heart within him which is accidentally exposed to one of his employees when he mentions about visiting the dead boy's family who was hit by his employee Asif while he was on work. Balram is seen alarmed and concerned of the mistake as he doesn't encourage in showing his weakness in front of his employees as he fears of being taking it as an advantage. Hence eventhough he says that an entrepreneur should not be sentimental, he depicts that one ought to be sentimental but not expose it to the outer world which doesn't makes sense.

At the end of the letter he makes the fact clear that "It would in fact take a White Tiger" (177, Adiga). All of the above stated facts can only be established if this fact is made true as this point is the amalgamation of all the facts that constitutes Balram's formula of success. Balram calls himself a 'White Tiger', a name that he earned from a school inspector who came to inspect his class and found him to be unique. The name 'White Tiger' instills confidence in him and later helps him to justify his actions in underhanded ways. In fact there is no other word that is apt to personify Balram as he possess similar characteristics with the animal. Just like a White Tiger which is a solitary animal Balram is a lone fighter in his jungle to attain freedom. Its incredible sight, hearing quality along with its stealth matches to that of Balram's abilities. Balram is as strong, powerful and incredibly fast as a White Tiger. Balram's skill to hypnotise himself in order to distract his rage of living a life of servitude, makes him completely identifiable with the animal that he sees caged in a zoo in Delhi. Balram considers the White Tiger to be a superior being as it can pursue beauty. In this context 'beauty' is the life of financial prosperity and freedom that Balram yearns for. The White Tiger is exempted from moral laws in order to attain power as it is an inherently superior being. Balram's identification of himself as a White Tiger hence justifies all his actions to attain freedom.

The White Tiger is a beautiful animal as well as a fierce hunter. It is hence an evil that is disguised in beauty.

A snag to this fact is that White Tiger is a rare animal as it is solitary. Hence only a person like Balram who could sacrifice his family for own sake can be a successful entrepreneur. His sense of White Tiger might have instilled confidence in him but through this point he is trying to inculcate wickedness into the minds of entrepreneurs which would actually lead to chaos. Eventhough Balram tries to bring revolution with an individual action, the method he chooses involves utmost brutality. Also when he says one should be a White Tiger, he portrays the need of possessing a dual nature which again reflects his paradoxical nature.

Conclusion

Analysing all those facts that constitute Balram's formula of success, it is confirmed that his paradoxical nature is reflected in his subjective opinions as it is proved to be contradictory. In addition to the facts, there is a factor of luck that prevails throughout his life that helps him in becoming successful to a greater extent. Hence the reliability of facts lies in its trial and error method as the situation may vary according to the individual and their circumstances eventhough Balram claims that he represents half the men in India. The facts should be approached with caution eventhough an attempt is made, as the success is attained through underhanded ways which leads to moral degeneration. Until and unless it is approached on a positive constructive basis in a business perspective, it doesn't pose a threat to an individual as well as to the society.

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