



Psychological Ambivalence in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

A.Divya M.A., M.Phil., NET

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Vinayaka Mission's Kirupananda Variyar Arts and Science College, Salem,
Tamilnadu, India.

Abstract

Ambivalence is the simultaneous existence of contradictory feeling towards an object or person. For Freud the term Ambivalence most frequently involved the opposition between love and hate, which often expressed in obsessional neuroses and melancholy. This sort of co-existing feeling towards an object or a person is called ambivalence. In the novel *The White Tiger*, the protagonist has the feeling ambivalence towards his master Ashok Sharma not only his master and towards society also. Adiga shows his ambivalence through the character Balram Halwai skilfully. This paper vividly deals with the psychological analysis of the character Balram Halwa. Moreover, Psychological ambivalence of Balram Halwai towards his master and Indian society.

Keywords: Ambivalence, obsession, psychological analysis, Indian society

Introduction

Aravind Adiga is one of the prominent writers. He is famous for his controversial themes. His works are picturised the reality of Indian society. Especially he voiced boldly about the dark and cruel sides of Indian society. He does not want to blame India deliberately but at the same time he just conveys the growth such as economical and technical developments in India and degradation of India through his novels.

The protagonist Balram Halwai begins his life as a driver. Gradually he becomes a driver to Ashok Sharma. Balram is faithful to his master as how Hanuman served to his master Rama. But his obsession and the city life corrupted Balram as a cheater, and murderer. In India, servants are faithful to their masters like how Haunuman served to God Rama. Haunuman is a half-man and half-monkey creature.

He is worshiped as the god of darkness in India. Moreover he is the shining example of absolute love and devotion in India. But masters treat their servants as slaves.

Balam Halwai's father Vikram Halwai is a rickshaw puller. He is a hard worker and a backbone breaker. He spends his whole life span for his family. When he caught his breath he said, "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" (TWT 30). This is one of the reasons why Balram lives like a man. His hard headed approach makes him as a successful business man. Moreover his ambivalence makes him to be faithful to his master simultaneously to take revenge on his master, Ashok. Balram highly respects his master and his wife as Rama and Sita. In the beginning of the novel, Balram is loyal to his master but Ashok treats him so meanly by which makes Balram cruel and cunning.

The title *The White Tiger* represents the protagonist Balram Halwai. The White Tiger is the rarest animal in the jungle and it appears only once in the generation like Balram Halwai. When Balram studied in his school, the inspector calls him the white tiger. "You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thug and idiots. In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals – the creature that comes along only once in a generation?" (TWT 35).

Balram is not like a common man who gives importance to sentiments and servitude. "I'm not a sentimental man, Jiabao. Entrepreneur can't afford to be." (TWT 12). Balram's uniqueness and his intellectual power provide him the name the white tiger. He searches for his identity. As a result, he breaks his squat position and the rooster coop in the society. Injustice and inequality is the foremost reason for Balram's ambivalence. Through the letter series, Balram highlights the widening gap between the servant (poor) and master (rich). "My father's father must have been a real Halwai, a sweet maker, but when he inherited the shop, a member of some other caste must have stolen it from him with the help of the police. My father had not had the belly to fight against" (TWT 64). He never tries to break out off the rooster coop.

Balram decides to break out of his fate of the poor. He comes out of the rooster Coop. Balram slits his master Ashok's throat. But he never feels guilt for that. He does not consider himself as murderer instead of that he focuses his empowerment. His ultimate obsession is to earn money stimulates him lavishly as a beast. He thinks about himself only rather than his family and the society. This is

considered to be the approach of the modern man. Balram is different from his father Vikram Halwai who lived his whole life as a donkey. His honest and sincerity gives nothing to him. Balram Halwai's obsession and his father pathetic life change his psyche gradually. His desire and obsession stimulates him aggressively.

Desire and obsession of an individual exist at the unconscious state which is known as id. It is child's natural desire which continues to develop as it grows. So it is called an unconscious drive which stimulates him to become rich and break the rooster coop. So that his urges makes him to cheat his master. At the extreme level he kills his master Ashok and steals a red bag full of money.

Balram frequently mentions the rooster coop when describing the situation or characteristics of the servant class in India. The servants in India are sincere to their masters but the masters try to suck their servants' blood. Balram's father is a real Halwai whose shop was caught by some other caste people by the help of police. Likewise the opulent people suck the blood of the poor as a leech.

Balram despair and unhappiness leads him into the emotional distress. Poverty is the root of all evils. Balram recognizes that the system is unjust, cruel, and brutal. In the rooster coop, chickens are not trying to escape from the poor constructed cage. Likewise, Balram compares those chickens living in a miserable condition with the poor class in India. His thinking explains the ambivalence towards his master Ashok.

Balram continuously thinks about positive and negative side of his master. Such dilemma leads him into an ambivalent state. For instance, sometimes Balram is proud to be Ashok's servant at the same time he remembers how Ashok humiliates him. This sort of positive and negative perspectives gradually increases the state of ambivalence towards his master, Ashok.

The left hand

puddle of spit

seemed to say

Your father wanted you to
to be an honest man.

Mr. Ashok does not hit you
or spit on you, like people
did to your father.

Mr. Ashok pays you well,
4,000 rupee a month.

He has been raising your
salary without your even

asking.

Remember what the Buffalo
did to his servant's family.

Mr. Ashok will ask his father
to do the same to your family
once run away. (TWT 246)

Though Balram Halwai is a loyal servant to his master, the chain of suppressing by his master and his vengeance makes him take revenge against his master Ashok. These make a transformation in his psyche from a faithful servant to murderer. Then he escapes to Bangalore changing his identity to Ashok Sharma.

When Balram Halwai is in his village, he is an innocent village boy. But the city life fully corrupted him. His quest for freedom makes him kill his master Ashok, through breaking the fence of 'Rooster Coop.' At the same time, Balram's obsession and his ultimate goal to become a rich urges him to kill his own master Ashok and steal the red bag which has full of currency. In psychological term, this sort of ambition is called *idée fixe* which means fixed idea. One who fixed with his or her context or they never change it, in the medical term, it is called monomania. Moreover, his ambivalence makes him break the 'Rooster Coop' which represents slavery.

But the right hand

puddle of spit

seemed to say

Your father wanted you
to be a man.

Mr. Ashok made you take
the blame when his wife killed
that child on the road.

This is a pittance. You live in a
city. What do you save? Nothing.

The very fact that Mr. Ashok
threatens your family makes
your blood boil!

The White Tiger reveals that how a royal servant turned into a murderer. The change of human psyche is explained through *The White Tiger*. Survival is the most important focus which takes the novel to the peak of success. Balram's motivation entirely drives him to reach his designations that become a rich fellow. Freud saw all human behaviour as motivated by the drives or instincts, which in turn are the neurological representations of physical needs.

The famous psychiatrist J.B. Watson says, "Give me a dozen healthy babies; I can make any one of them as a theologian or criminal as you want; no matter what so ever is its heredity". Balram Halwai suffered by in his young age by extreme of poverty. Later he endures the suppression of upper class people. Those suffering rooted to change Balram Halwai's psyche gradually as a murderer. Thus, the surrounding plays a vital role in human being's life. His survival instinct makes him a rare creature as the white tiger.

The life instincts drive Balram to obsess and satisfy his desire. These instincts kindle him or her to seek their needs. This sort of motivational energy instincts drives the powers in order to satisfy their needs. According to the great psychologist Freud, "life is not easy!". Balram has undergone many struggles and hudles to break the rooster coop and poverty.

Balram Halwai is totally different from others. He is the rare creature like the white tiger. He wants to loyal to be his master. But his mind wants to possess his obsession, at the same time he wants to truthful to his master. Based on the social values the servant should be loyal to his master. But his conscious mind tempts him to be a rich businessman. The struggle between these two, his obsession won the battle. "The more I stole from him, the more I realized how much he had stolen from me" (TWT 231).

He says, "I think the rooster coop needs people like me to break out of it" (TWT 320). He is a rare creature like the white tiger. His thinking is totally different from other. "I'm always a man who sees 'tomorrow' when others see today. He never feel guilt for his deed. " I never say I made mistake that night in Delhi when I slit my master's throat" (TWT 320). His ambivalence exposed through this statement. Moreover he severely condemns Indian society.

Balram's brutal sufferings create an emotional and painful experience which traumatized him for long time. Adiga therefore through the first person narration expresses the various difficulties in the modern world such as poverty, caste suppression, lack of freedom and inequality.

People in the modern world have ambivalence towards society. They remain silent sufferers like how Balram Halwai's father Vikram Halwai suppressed by politicians and opulent people. But Balram changes his fate by his own intelligence to break the fence called rooster coop. His ambivalence towards his master Ashok made him at once murderer and a successful businessman in Bangalore.

The White Tiger explains the character Balram Halwai and his ambivalence towards his master as well as society. Psychological changes of the character Balram is explained through his ambivalence. Adiga has a clear vision about the impact of the poor and rich discrimination in India and corrupted society which changes Balram's psyche. Metaphorically he is considered to be a rare species like the white tiger and the corrupted society is considered to be a jungle.

The corrupted society is considered to be a jungle where animals fight for their lives to survival. Likewise in the modern society, man fights for his life in order to live and satisfy his needs, desires and feelings. In *The White Tiger*, Balram Halwai is considered the "survival of the fittest" (Spencer 320). He is same like other human beings but his behaviour is different from others. Charles Darwin stated in his *Origin of Species*, "I use the term struggle for existence in a large and metaphorical sense" (OS 50).

Balram's obsession drives him towards to do that murdered his master and steals red bag full of money. According to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, id is considered to be wish fulfilment which stimulates to satisfy needs and desires. His desires motivate him to murder his master Ashok. In India, servants treat their masters as God but Balram differs from others because he is a cunning and person who knows how to survive. For the sake of his own welfare he murdered his master viciously. He is a successful student of the school of life. He is tutored by his employers in the art of deceit and unconscious criminal practices.

According to Charles Darwin, "strongest and most cunning - would survive" (BHA 28). In jungle the strongest and cunning animals easily survive. Similarly, a cunning and shrewd person would easily survive in this modern world. Adiga compares Balram to a white tiger. White tigers are stronger than the golden variety. Such white tigers are intelligent and rare to find, hence treasured and protected with

utmost care. The protagonist in the novel is the white tiger of his generation, an uncommon rarity because he has the aspiration to rise above his class and transcend his poverty. He says, “there – I’m revealing the secret of a successful escape. The police searched for me in the darkness: but I hid myself in light” (TWT 118). He successfully moved from darkness to light.

Balram’s character symbolically represents the life of modern man. Balram wants to be a rich person soon like how a modern man wants to live rich life without encountering hurdles and struggles. Moreover, Balram’s loyalty towards his master Ashok shows his devotion. At the same point, his vengeance and move to kill Ashok shows his abhorrence for Ashok. Likewise, the struggle (ego) between his obsession (id) and social value (superego), his obsession has secured an upper hand.

Balram’s ambivalence towards his master and society led him towards his obsession. His approach towards his master is considered to be between the devil and the deep sea. If he leaves his master, he will lose his job at the same time he has a good job and enough comfort for his life so he stays as a driver to Ashok. His hard headed approach towards his master is considered to be ambivalent. He is not a sentimental man. He breaks the rooster coop. For the sake of his own welfare he murdered his master Ashok and ran with red bag full of currency. Even he did not care about his own family.

Conclusion

Man is a fusion of good and bad. Circumstances play vital role in one’s life. Likewise in Balram’s life, he is an intelligent student but his family failed to give proper education to him. In the working place, he is treated like a beast. He is loyal to his master Ashok. But Ashok treats him inhumanly. Everywhere he was suppressed and he longed for recognition. His sole desire in the initial stages was to be treated as a human being. The pain of suppression made him to be a murderer. It is the fault of society.

The world is a jungle and if people want to survive they have to either fight or run forever. Balram knows the survival technique of when to run and when to fight against. He gives counter attack to those who stabbed him at his back. His ambivalence taught him great lessons. He learns more from Indian roads and pavements. “ The road is a jungle, get it? A good driver must roar to get ahead on it.’ ” (TWT 57). Modern society is considered as a jungle. Balram Halwai is the right one suitable to survive in the modern society because he is a practical man.

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