

## Psychopath Balram in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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### Abstract

The White Tiger is the 2008 Man Booker Prize winning novel in which the psychopathic character plays a role in telling the dramatic tale of his life. The protagonist Balram's unpredictable journey from the underprivileged to the wealthy tycoon in India is amazing. The novel is a psychopathic story of murder and success. The genius memory of psychopath Balram sparks not only to map an excellent text space, but more than this, regulates Balram's nerves. His struggle to be wealthy is full of compassion and sympathy. Balram is a blazingly savage, brilliant, and psychopathic on his journey. In the new alien world, he experiences a state mental disorder. That's why Balram, the narrator of the letter, has the mark of a Psychopath. The present research is an effort to examine and investigate the dimension of Balram's psychopathic character. This will give another heading to rising literary examination to character in an alternate psychopathic style.

Keywords: Psychopath, Nerves, Savage, Mental disorder, Character.

The literature on the topic of Psychopathic research is very barren. There's hardly any research going in this direction. There are other facets of character that are still overlooked and perceived as illegitimate. The stress of the character has to be analyzed in the psychotic

mode. The primary emotions of the wilderness have always been overlooked. The voices of the character crying in the wilderness are caused by physiological stress. Psychopaths are blamed for the most serious crimes. They are exceptionally charming and deceptive. They can disappear behind a well-cultivated mask of normalcy for years and sometimes their entire lives. Psychopaths, the word itself has become synonymous with evil, denoting a specific form of barbaric bloodthirsty. Psychopath lacks remorse, empathy and impulse of control. They are quick to break social rules and manipulate others to get what they want. The similar case happens with Aravind Adiga's protagonist Balram in *The White Tiger*. In the review of *The Economist* stated that "As Balram's education expands, he grows more corrupt. Yet the reader sympathy for the farmer tea boy never flags. In creating a character who is both witty and psychopathic, Mr. Adiga has produced a hero almost as memorable as Pip, providing himself the Charles Dickens of the call-center generation." <sup>1</sup> On the foundation of this quote I am going to examine and investigate Balram's psychopathic character in the research paper.

Psychopaths have difficulty knowing and absorbing the feelings of others. In this regard, I have a few questions about the psychopathic character. Who is going to make these people sick? Why they are so narcissistic? Why they so cruelly disregard the needs of others? Why are they committing serious crimes? Were they intentionally conscious? What are the tendencies? Is it essential to safeguard society from them? Here, I'm not going to claim that we should get everybody back to a normal way of life. Therefore, by sensitizing society, it might be possible to improve. This would help people to think deeply about the abnormality of Psychopaths. It will certainly reduce the possibility of recurring serious crimes in society. The new verdicts of my research concentrate on an analysis of the psychopathic character of the Man Booker Prize Indian English novel *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga.

The term Psychopathy was coined by German psychologist in nineteenth century, from psycho (soul of mind) and pathy (suffering or disease) are linked to body and suffering.

In today's terminology, it is just called mental disorder. The study of mental disorder is known as psychopathology. Joseph P. Newman opined that, "Historically, the term "Psychopathy" has been used to describe who display adequate intellectual functioning but who appear to have a profound affective or inhibitory defect that impairs their ability to conduct themselves properly."<sup>2</sup> Today, it might be termed as the personality disorder with a wide range of other neurological disorders. Throughout the early twentieth century, the terms are used such as 'constitutional (inborn) psychopaths' or 'psychopathic personalities.' Therefore, it has been commonly used to describe someone who has violated legal or moral standards. Even, the action was considered intrinsically socially unacceptable. Psychopath is a mentally imbalanced personality that manifests itself as amoral and antisocial behavior. He lacks the capacity to love or to create positive personal relationships. Kiehl, Kent A, and Morris B Hoffman opines comments that, "These are people who lack the ordinary connections that bind us all and lack the inhibitions that those connections impose. They are, to over simplify, people without empathy or conscience."<sup>3</sup> Further, according to Cleckley, "Psychopathy should be perceived as a constellation of affective, behavioral, and interpersonal features. The affected individuals have a mask of sanity with preserved intelligence and a surface demeanor that disguises severe underlying abnormalities such as selfishness and impulsivity, a lack of empathy and remorse, and a desire to dominate."<sup>4</sup> In fact, they are highly egocentric, narcissistic and unable to learn from experience.

The English dictionary Merriam Webster describes the word psychopath as, "a person having an egocentric and antisocial personality marked by a lack of remorse for one's actions, an absence of empathy for others and often criminal tendencies."<sup>5</sup> Psychopathy is an assemblage of personality qualities allegedly connected with dishonesty, misconduct or in some cases socioeconomic accomplishment. In this regard, Cambridge dictionary has given two definitions of psychopath first as "a person who has no feeling for other people, does not

think about the future and does not feel bad about anything they have done in the past” and second “a person who is likely to commit violent criminal acts because of a mental illness that causes the person to lack any feelings of guilt.”<sup>6</sup> Further to clarify more transparently, Psychiatric manuals adopted a mixture of various approaches regarding harmful personality syndrome. In the meantime notions of psychopaths had become dishonorable between the general public domain. It was intended to indicate failure to societal norms that harms the others. There are many examples of psychopathic characters in the fiction. It was also represented in history as insane figure, image of darkness and threat to society. Further, the psychopath is a mixture of concepts of dangerousness, evil and illness.

English literature is no exception in the case of a psychopathic fictional character. Since the ancient age of literature, there have been many characters that, by their personalities, have percolated psychotic shades. Psychopathic attitudes embody these behavioral types, embedded in their unconscious personality. Behavioral research indicates that it has been programmed in every human psyche. Every human being has a range of violence and non-violence. There is space for social, political and economic critical circumstances to arise. It can be seen from the Roman Empire that Nero played on the Fiddle when Rome burned in the flames. The primordial Greek army statesman Alcibiades has been labeled as the finest instance of psychopath, due to consistent failures despite his potential and confident speaking. Hannibal Lecter is perhaps the most famous psychopath in the world, who was the anti-hero of *The Silence of the Lambs*. The impoverished student in *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov killed the old pawnbroker woman and his sister for the sake of money. Even, Don Quixote's encounter with the windmill was the perfect example of a psychological behavior. Shakespeare's Shylock demanded a flash from his friend instead of his debit. Hamlet, Othello and Macbeth are psychopath characters with gray shades. In all Shakespeare's plays, Iago was the worst characters. Iago's violent behavior resulted in his

underground homosexual relationship. He was a well-known liar, a master manipulator, who had no special motive but to enjoy the devastation of his own. In this regard West Fred observed that “Dramatists were particularly intrigued by the more bizarre working of the human mind, often creating characters whose personalities could form the subjects of contemporary psychological case studies. This is certainly true of Iago, who is an accurate portrait of a psychopath.”<sup>7</sup>(P.27) Thus there are ample of examples in English literature, reflecting psychopathic character but they are neglected because of their abnormality.

Balram’s struggle to become rich is scandalous because, in such a poor condition, it cannot be possible to emerge as a super wealthy tycoon in India. He was trapped in poverty without any political power as well as skill. No doubt he was a genius, a white tiger of India. He was determined to do anything to accomplish his goals without considering any social and moral frame of society. There is a sense of genius in his madness that forced him to kill Mr. Ashoka. The act of murder cannot be explained on a legal basis, but Balram argues that this is social justice. It was his utter madness that he sacrificed seventeen members of his family to become wealthy. Achieving wealth is a victory, no matter what the road to success is. The road of murder and greed is the best path to success. He races madly behind the money, but the money can't solve his problems. Instead, money is a concern for him, losing himself and the integrity of his life. He blames society, it cannot offer the geniuses the opportunity. He thinks that crime is natural, that everything can be settled with money. The law of forest, he played in the humanistic society. The power of money is the greatest power in the universe. Even, he disconnected his family, which was totally dependent on him. At the one hand, he was the most wanted killer, at the other hand; he was writing a genius letter to the Chinese President Wen Jiabao about entrepreneurship in India to control his nerves. This psychiatric drama shows that Balram is a psychopathic character.

The novel definitely depicts different aspects of life, but psychopath character was a significant factor left to researchers. In search of fate, Balram's character rushed behind money. He has become the voice of a modern globalized world. Money matters are really important to them; for the sake of money they will commit serious crime. Balram also caught up in the web of psychology like Hamlet. Though they are in the age of globalization, their mentality still plays like the Stone Age. In this regard Scott Madintz, in *The New York Sun* comments that "At once a fascinating glimpse beneath the surface of an Indian economic, a heart stopping psychological tale of a premeditated murder and its aftermath and a meticulously conceived allegory of the creative destruction that's driving destruction that's driving globalization (...) that may sound like a lot to take in, but *The White Tiger* is unpretentious and compulsively readable to boot."<sup>8</sup> Thus no doubt that *The White Tiger* is psychological tale of Murderer Balram Halwai, the most brilliant psychopathic character that is the topic of my research paper.

In the novel, Balram kills Mr. Ashoka, but cannot easily control his emotional nerves. He struggled with his emotions to calm the dawn his guilt conscious. He was a common person, but his ambitions and aspirations are too strong. He was caught up in psyche to face the challenges of life. Balram glorified his act of crime; everyone does everything to fulfill his ambition. No one is free from the stigma. Citizens admire the style of these murders by constructing bronze statues and honoring them from time to time. He only commits one murder to fulfill his ambition to become great entrepreneur. He wants to do something for the poor. These two ambitions are very controversial with each other, and only a mad person can think that way. This is the modern image of Robin Hood, killing the rich and helping the poor. The gap between poverty and prosperity is too long. This can be tracked down legally, but it will take a lot of time. The short cut to success is a simple, successful murder of a rich person. This type of ideology is the ideology of psychopath person. Psychopath wants

success by hook or by crook. Here the opinion of Adrian Turpin in his review in Financial Times expresses that, “Literature has a noble tradition of sympathy psychopaths. Balram Halwai, protagonist of Aravind Adiga’s impressive first novel, demands admittance to their hall of fame.”<sup>9</sup> Thus Balram got sympathy from the reader and neglected as a psychopath character. He was psychopath running behind murder and success story.

Throughout the early pages of the book, Balram is planning a successful murder of a rich individual. He chose Mr. Ashoka as his savage because he had returned from abroad and did not know the social and political atmosphere of India. He was also upset by leaving his beloved wife Pinky. He wasn't crooked like his brother Mukesh, who doesn't believe to someone else, including his driver. Mr. Ashoka was totally dependent on his driver, he became a drunkard. That's why he was chosen by Balram as his convenient scapegoat. Mukesh has always insulted Balram, made him aware of his status in society. He was quite cruel, and he observed every detail of his behavior. When Balram decided to kill Mr. Ashoka, he was in a mood of total confusion. He feels sympathy for his master. He was unable to make a quick decision to kill his owner. He speaks madly to himself, the entire past appears before him, and even the future disturbs. He was in a state of complete madness. He interacts with himself:

I am losing him, I thought and this forced me to do something. I knew I would hate myself for, even years later; I really didn't want to do this. I really did not want him to think, even in the two or three minutes he had left to live, that I was that kind of driver the one that resorts to blackmailing his master- but he had left me no option. (P. 282-283)

This clearly shows that at one time he feels sympathy and at the other he wants to brutally murder his master. He doesn't think that master has given him bread and butter. He blames himself for committing the crime, so he doesn't provide opportunity to think about his

cunning driver. Balram doesn't care about the ramifications of the murder on him and his family. They are a rich businessman; they have the power to find a killer. The law and the social prohibitions were never in his mind. With his own philosophy, he justified his act of murder. He feels guilt as a human being, but he recovers it with his brutality. There's a combination of man and animal instinct in his psyche. This problem of the mental state cannot be tolerated by the ordinary people but one that is psychopath person. Beyaz Kaplan in *The Complete of Review of the Review* precisely observed that, "This is psychologically pretty interesting situation, but here as elsewhere Adiga doesn't do much with his premises. For one, he doesn't convey adequately why so many Indians are supposedly stuck in his Coop... with family's like Balram's, it's a wonder far more don's go on rampages and wipe them out themselves. And Balram's own pangs of conscience (or indifference) aren't nearly considered enough." <sup>10</sup>

Balram kills his master very mercilessly. He attacks Mr. Ashoka's body with a broken bottle. He's doing exactly the same thing three times. He was completely psyche that he appreciated the quality of the Johnnie Walker Black wine bottle. It was a fine, solid, having resale value. The resale value of the bottle shows how he was addicted to financial issues. Even from a bottle, he can make some money. He has a lookout for Mr. Ashok's wife, Pinky, with a lascivious expression. He offers his master drugs and beverages so that he has to get addicted. He never left a chance to manipulate his master's mind. The height of his cruelty is that he provides a duplicate golden hair girl for sex and robs his master for money. Every act of Balram is full of psychological tricks, making the perfect trap to his master. He has mercilessly confessed that;

I rammed the bottle down. The glass at the bone. I rammed it three times into the crowd of his skull, smashing through to his brains. It's a good, strong bottle, Johnnie Walker Black-well worth its resale value. (P. 284)



After killing Mr. Ashoka, Balram himself falls on the road; he cannot control his mind and body. His entire body begins to tremble like Macbeth of William Shakespeare. His psyche was totally disturbed; he feels someone will watch him. Even on the crawling bottle he cannot believe. The bottle looks like human being that he was with hissing lips standing on his hands and knees. He was looking for someone's help to save his master's precious life. In the trance of hallucination he was unable to control himself. No doubt, he was blood thirsty, lack of sympathy, remorse and impulse. He violates social rules and exploited his master for the sake of money. The cold-blooded Balram fulfilled his autism by killing his master. The perfect mask of genuine sanity and surface robust mental health was exposed with the murder.

I fell to the ground-my hand was trembling, the bottle slipped out, and I had to pick up it with my left hand. The thing with the hissing lips got up on to its hands and knees; it began crawling around in a circle, as if looking for someone who was meant to protect it. (P. 284)

Thus, he gets the red bag from the hand of Mr. Ashoka and fulfills his dream of becoming rich. R. Renuka Narasiman and Prof. Vinita Singh Chawdhry in their research article clearly pinpointed the actions of psychopath Balram. "Mainly the actions of the psychopathic are influenced by the actions of others. They are perverted. They are interested only in their personal needs and desires without concern for the effects of their behaviour on others. So the mission of Balram is completed by killing his master and become a big entrepreneur."<sup>11</sup>

The height of Balram's psyche is that he abused his master's dead body. Throughout Indian tradition, the dead body is handled with reverence, and the crematorium of the body is performed to return the heavens. Many cultural rituals have been conducted on the body from ancient time. But Balram humiliated by mocking the dead body. He handles the body of

Ashoka with violence. He turned down Mr. Ashoka's body to show his triumph. He stands on Ashoka's body and celebrates his success. No doubt, showing the supremacy in front of a dead body is definitely an act of a psychotic person. The uniqueness of a psychopath is that he works very consciously. He eliminated all the indications on the shoulder of the body. Balram's trusting character is subjected to this horrendous crime that embossed on him as a psychopath person.

I turned the body round, so it was face me. I stamped my knee on its chest. I undid the collar button and rubbed my hand over its clavicles to mark out the spot. (P. 285)

Thus A.J. Sebastianin in her article declares that, "Balram proves to be a psychopath with his hysterical laughter with which he concludes his story of success in blood. A very dangerous philosophy of life, which is nothing but that of terrorists."<sup>12</sup>(P.242)

After Mr. Ashoka was killed, Balram decided to leave Delhi as soon as possible. But Balram still recalls his insult by Mr. Mukesh, Mr. Ashoka's brother, for a rupee coin. Now he was the lord of millions, but he had the coin in his pocket for which he was once humiliated. This reveals how Balram was full of envy and jealousy. From his village trip to the metropolitan city, he stuffed his mind with every insult. This was not only about the rich person, but about every political, political and economic structure that controls the desires of the poor. A feeling of revenge must be anchored in a psychopath. He reacts seriously to any insult in his life so he revenged Mr. Ashoka. Mr. Mukesh was very strong and alert businessman that's why Balram leave him. This act was done only diplomat criminal mind set of psychopath person easily.

I reached into my pocket, searched for rupee coin, checked to make sure it wasn't a two rupee coin, and rolled it towards the bucket. (P. 287)

Adiga has skillfully depicted the character of Balram as the typical modern psychopath. Jennifer Copley points out in "*Behavioural Traits of Psychopaths*" that, "While

most people's actions are guided by a number of factors, such as the desire to avoid hurting other people, the psychopath selects a course of action based on only one factor—what can he get out of it. This cold-blooded mode of reasoning enables the psychopath to commit acts that most people's consciences would not allow.”<sup>13</sup>In this sense, Balram's target was to theft the money that will provide him immense power in the life.

In the conclusion, I think that the Booker Prize winner novel raises significant question of psychopath character. Balram's psychopath behavior has been embedded in the social, political and economic structure. Initially, many scholars have been celebrated the murder and success story of Balram. Even killing a greedy rich man and becoming wealthy is definitely not a rational decision. While rich people are becoming rich and poor people are becoming poor. There is no question that the resources of the country must be shared equally among the nations. It does not mean that, in order to be successful, a person must behave as a dishonest individual, rejecting the democratic moral values of life. The celebration of Balram's accomplishment has been tainted with mental illness, since only a crazy person can violate the laws of society. Balram's personality has been affected by three major factors, social, political and economic deprivation. Balram's family was a very large, and there are very few members who run the house. It was hard to fill everyone's stomach. Family struggled for food and job that is why Balram left his school being a white tiger in the classroom. He was a brilliant guy, no doubt, but he used his talent to kill the person. Moreover, the society was not able to provide anybody with an equal opportunity. His father, the rickshaw puller, died without treatment on the steps of the government hospital. And when driving skills are learned, the young learner is sexually abused by the truck driver. The next major trigger was economic hardships that had battered the psyche of Balram. He thinks that the influence of money can alter everything, and it can disrupt everything. The psychological state of the Balram was severely impaired by master's insult to a single rupee.

Here, Balram was entirely transformed, he neglected his family, and he neglected his duty and, most importantly, his moral character. The poverty is the root cause behind Balram's psychopathic behavior, so there is a need for restructuring of social, political and economic structure that will provide fair opportunities based on ability and not class or lobbying. It is necessary to make the best out of it and form it in a way that will be beneficial to the individual and to society. Consequently, Psychopathy cannot be that disordered and pathological. So we need to sensitize their disability and sport them through medical treatments. For this reason, the long-term research has been required in order to address the questions of the psychopathic character in the field of psychopathy and literature.

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