

**Psychological Conflict Revealed through Dramatic Monologue in  
Aravind Adiga's 'The White Tiger'**

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**Abstract**

The White Tiger unveils the consciousness of the central character of the novel, Balram Halwai through dramatic monologue. The protagonist communicates to a converser called Mr. Wen Jiabao, a Chinese premier regarding his previous experiences in his village the hardship he endured and his ambition to be an entrepreneur. He enumerates his journey from the darkness to light – from the struggle at his village to the urban locale in search of some employment to support his family. He faces exploitation at the hands of the Stork's family who forces him performs all sorts of works together with the main task of driver. The story thus explores the protagonist's mind which reveals the circumstances under which he was compelled to commit an act of murder. Thus, the paper mainly looks into the psychological conflict which makes the protagonist to do such act.

**Keywords:** Dramatic monologue, dilemma, epistolary method

Dramatic monologue as a form was mainly utilized as a poetic form which focuses the style of narration, the character development and language. It is a type of form in which “a person speaks to a silent audience and, in the course of doing so, reveals critical aspect of his own” (Quinn 96). The dramatic monologue gained the advancement that qualifies it as a new genre of poetry during the Victorian era. The dramatic monologue emerged with its capacity to illuminate the most complex flows of thoughts and reasons of action and provide a comprehensive representation of a character without the need for outside assistance. According to Stopford Brooke two significant poets who stood apart to utilize and popularize the dramatic monologue were Robert Browning and Lord Tennyson through their poems. The main goal of Browning's work is to reveal the thoughts and actions of a character's soul. By allowing him to communicate his own feelings and thoughts to another, he captures his character at a significant point in his life and exposes his true nature. Browning's dramatic monologues reveal a character's conscience in crisis exploring the intricate webs of emotion and thought that are too difficult to put into words. According Mr. Symons, “he selects a character, no matter how uninteresting in itself, and places it in some situation where its vital essence may become apparent- in some crisis or conflict ”(Symons 7). The present novel also unveils the churning of emotions of the protagonist, Balram Halwai. It appears to be a confession of a guilt however it could also be a conversation through an electronic device or a series of written letters.

The present paper traces the elements of dramatic monologue as a form utilized in the novel which identified through Balram's communication to Mr. Wen Jiabao as if having a live chat. It discloses certain dramatic situation in which the reader is drawn into confessions surrounded by the long digressions.

The White Tiger is a novel by an Indian writer in English published in 2008. He has used dramatic monologue, epistolary method as some of the techniques for his writing, which interestingly takes place at around midnight everyday for a week. The protagonist expresses his thoughts to the Chinese premier, who is a so called interlocutor about his rural background, his job at Mr. Ashok's house as a driver and his murdering of his master and rising to an entrepreneur. The novelist has framed his novel by using a device of dramatic monologue in which an Indian protagonist continually addresses to the Chinese listener who

never replied to these letters. The protagonist writing to the Chinese premier seems very unreal as telling personal secrets to a diplomat is unusual.

He starts his conversation addressing to his listener as if he is talking live with him:

“Pardon me, Your Excellency, for the long intermission. It's now 6.20, so I 'been gone five hours... Now excuse for a minute while I turn the fan on-I am still sweating, sir-and let me sit down on the floor and watch the fan chop up the light of the chandelier”

“But we don't really need these formalities any more, do we, Mr. Jiabao?... It'll be a short session today, Mr. Premier.” (Adiga 95)

“Mr Premier, you must excuse me- the phone is ringing. I'll be back in a minute” (Adiga 194)

“Can you hear that, Mr. Jiabao? I'll turn it up for you.” (Adiga 291)

The entire novel is recounted through letters by Balram Halwai to the Premier of China, who will soon be visiting India. Balram belongs to an impoverished background, born in Laxmangarh. He narrates his past life at his native. He boasts of becoming a successful entrepreneur and a thinking man after murdering his master.

In Laxmangarh, Balram was raised in a large, poor family from Halwai caste, referring to sweet makers. The hometown is symbolically called "the darkness" due to lack of opportunities, poverty and conveniences. On the contrary the protagonist refers to Delhi as "Light" having opportunities to grow financially and socially. During a surprise inspection, a school official calls Balram a "white tiger" for his extraordinary intelligence. But despite his promise, Balram is forced to drop out of school and work in a tea shop to earn lively hood. He acts as eavesdropper and listens to the customers chatting about chauffeur salaries and develops interest in the professional driving and learns it.

Balram runs from pillar to post in search of a job before he is employed as a second driver for the Stork's family. The Stork family had infamously ruled over Balram's village and exploited them. Balram, in order to become the chief driver of the family, discloses the real identity of the chief driver who actually was Muslim. Thus, he is given a charge of a driver of Mr. Ashok who is the youngest son of the Stork family. Mr. Ashok is migrated to New Delhi with his American wife, Pinky Madam, to manage the Stork's family business there. Balram realizes that Pinky Madam is not comfortable with Indian life style and

Mr. Ashok was not happy in engaging with the filthy family business. With an ambition to become affluent person, he vows to go beyond his stature and thus stops sending money to his family out of greed. To shed his rustic way of life, he dresses and behaves like Mr. Ashok.

Balram experiences the ruthless exploitation from the Stork family when he was compelled by the Stork family to take the charge of hit and run case for which Pinky Madam was guilty. Balram wipes out the stains of blood from the car just to save Pinky Madam but the reward that he gets is a trap in which he was forced to enter. He realizes that power and money can go to any extent to keep their reputation intact. Pinky Madam, in frustration of such life style and fear of involving in the accident, leaves India and this leads Mr. Ashok to a mental discomfort. The protagonist's hatred for his masters intensifies as he found them selfish and unreliable who have lost morality. Soon after, Mr. Ashok gets into a business of bribe which infuriates the protagonist, and thinks of murdering him. The protagonist conceives an immoral desire to become an affluent person and according to him his master is the only hurdle in the way to achieve the success. To fulfil his ambition he gets a broken bottle and stabs his master on a road and becomes an absconder. He starts his new business of taxi fleet in Bangalore namely "White Tiger Drivers." He changes his identity as Ashok Sharma to retain his master's name in it. At the end there is some sort of repenting on his part which is reflected through the following monologues.

The protagonist has confessions which put the reader in a dilemma whether his committing of murder makes him feel repentance or is considering it as key to his success. The ambiguity is rooted in the certain dialogues which perplexes the reader

“I could gloat that I am not just any murderer, but one who killed his own employer (who is a kind of second father)...”(Adiga 45)

“Now, even though I killed him, you won't find me saying one bad thing about him. I owe him so much” (Adiga 47)

“It's a fact: I am a sinner, a fallen human.” (Adiga 102)

“The real nightmare you get is the other kind. You toss about in the bed dreaming that you haven't done it-that you lost your nerve and let Mr. Ashok get away.” (Adiga 313)

“But I do think about him a lot and, believe it or not, I do miss him. He didn't deserve his fate.” (Adiga 317)

His voice inside him said, “But your heart has become even blacker than that (black puddle), Munna.” (Adiga 265)

The above dialogues force the readers to interpret Balram as guilt ridden person. He couldn't have sound sleep, having nightmares, increasing heart beats and sweating shows signs of sleeplessness. He stopped watching Hindi films which typically shows story of poor man kills a rich man and the deceased person in the form of ghost pursues the killer saying mur-der-er, mur der-er (Adiga 313). His conscience tells him "You did it! “You killed him!” (Adiga 314) He has stopped reading news papers because of horror stories of murder appear every morning that reminds him of his crime and further creates anxiety about his family's life threat. But real intention is still difficult to gauge because he considers his act as successful step towards being an entrepreneur from mere a servant i.e. a rooster co-op for him.

“I've made it! I've broken out of the co-op.” (Adiga 320)

“I will never say that I made a mistake that night in Delhi when I slit my master's throat.” (Adiga 320)

He is in a dilemma whether he has done the right thing to murder his employer whom he considers like parents. “You're like a father and mother to me, and how can I ask for money from my parents” (Adiga 65) Balram has rendered his services to his master and he has been faithful servant. The relationship between Ashok and Balram is even more complex as Mr. Ashok considers Balram as loyal driver and constantly defends him to his elder brother when the Mongoose insults Balram for his driving skills. Again when Mongoose suggests that Balram should be fired and replaced by a new driver, Mr. Ashok refuses expressing his trust in Balram. Balram is always viewed by Mr. Ashok as trustworthy servant.

Balram has also expressed his gratitude by taking care of Mr. Ashok when he left by Pinky Madam, he vowed to take care of his health as though he were the man's wife, once Mr. Ashok came drunk heavily, unable to keep balance, Balram carried him to his bed. He feels pity on Mr. Ashok's miserable condition and shares his village wisdom. He has

always been with Mr. Ashok wherever he asked to go, anytime. For a moment he feels that it would be better if he would have killed Mr. Mukesh instead of Mr. Ashok.

However, the most contradiction lies in the fact that despite the respect and admiration Balram has for his master, he eventually murders him which is incompatible to the readers. Adiga has effectively made use of the form of dramatic monologue through which the protagonist in a blatantly conversational manner the inner confusion regarding the act of murdering whether it was just action or a sin of greed that makes repent and simultaneously feels proud to be out of the rooster co-op. In addition to that he considers the murder as a revenge in advance for Mr. Ashok's family was going to kill his family as an aftermath of the crime as he says: "I was just getting my revenge in advance" (Adiga 285)

Perhaps the reader might interpret that the murder is revenge against the worst treatment he received from his masters whom he served day and night tirelessly. But during his master's pitiable condition he forgives everything

"Whatever anger I had against him for trying to pin Pinky Madam's hit-and run killing on me passed away that evening. That was her fault. Mr. Ashok had nothing to do with it. I forgave him entirely" (Adiga 186)

In the end the reader is left in an uncertainty regarding the actual cause the murder because the relationship between Balram and Mr. Ashok is a complex one. To conclude it can be said that this text is an expression of duality of thoughts, on one hand there is reassessment of one's own actions, sense of guilt consciousness and on the other hand there is a feeling of revenge.

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