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**Quest for Identity in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger***

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Quest for Identity in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Binita Magar has been approved by undersigned members of Research Committee.

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### Abstract

*Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger is a book about the man's quest for identity. The author asserts an existential journey of Balram from poor village boy to as an entrepreneur, which is certainly for his psychological self-concept and social identity. Presenting the fact that he was from the darkness and found his way into the light, he tries to prove his existence with his self-identity. In response to his claim of searching for identity, the present research paper tries to explore the text from the perspective of Carl Rogers's Self-concept Theory, Henri Tajfel and J. C. Turner's Social Identity Theory, and Charles Darwin's theory of struggle for existence. Carl Rogers's Self-concept Theory influences and indeed acts as the framework for one's personality. Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory is a person's sense of who he or she is based on his or her group recognition and identity. Charles Darwin's theory of struggle for existence shares the idea that there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species or with the individuals of distinct species or with the physical condition of life. The research attempts to discover how Balram's free choice was constrained by the social identity, self-concept and the existential struggle, causing him to murder his master to rob his money and getting success in life. Through the reading of novel from the above perspectives, the research concludes that the protagonist of the novel, Balram's decision to kill his master was not a criminal act, rather it was the act of building up his social identity along with his survival and existence in the modern Indian society.*

Keywords: self-concept; social identity, struggle for existence; entrepreneurship; postcolonial values

## Introduction

The research paper explores self-conceptual personality, social identity, and existential struggle in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* in order to argue that Balram's struggle results deviant behavior to sustain in the modern India. The researcher will try to discover how Balram's self-concept, social identity, and survival instinct force him to murder his employer to establish his social identity and prove his self-conceptual personality and existence in postcolonial Indian society. He considered killing his master as an act of making his self-conceptual personality, social identity and survival. Similarly, Balram's choices were driven by the circumstances he faced in darkness that led him to commit the criminal act, quite contradictorily, for his social upgrading with money, business, identity, and survival means.

Balram, a man from poor family, a drop out from school, worked in teashop to pay a loan of his cousin-sister's lavish marriage. While working in teashop, he overhears others' conversation and continues his informal education because he believed that informal education would help him to live pragmatic life. By overhearing others' conversation, he got information that taxi-drivers earn one thousand seven hundred rupees a month. Then, he requested Kishan and granny to send him for driving class. Somehow, he managed to learn driving and started to search work, and after the continuous effort; he got driving work in Mr. Ashok's house. When he worked for Ashok as a chauffeur, he experiences discrimination and exploitation. He felt alienation by money, identity, means of survival etc.

Gradually, while working for Ashok, he internalizes the new moralities of city life, how they compromise with their social and cultural values to sustain in the rat race. He also learns that an individual must focus on rationality and progress. Traditional beliefs and cultural values will lead to backwardness and intellectual

impoverishment. He also realizes the deep existence of rooster coop, which is not letting them to fight for their survival; rather it is stopping them to achieve success. Then he discerns that being in a rooster coop will never change his living standard, rather he was sure that his life would end in poverty. He thinks from the perspective of self-concept. He thinks in order to be a social entrepreneur, he has to break out of the coop and rebel against the ongoing exploitation and oppression of the rich towards the poor. Therefore, to get out from the coop, firstly, he observed the people around him such as his childhood hero Vijay, his master Ashok and many more. Eventually, he accepts the competition around him to survive and prove his identity. At the same time, lack of legitimate opportunity provoked him to compete for his identity and survival. He knows that there is no legitimate opportunity to success for people like him who is half-baked. Therefore, Balram turns to violence to prove his identity and existence and to escape the oppression that threatens his aspirations for livelihood and manhood. Even though he chooses corruption, bribery and violence, but still stays committed to a moral code, "I am a master of drivers. I don't treat them like servants- I don't slap, bully, or mock anyone- I don't insult them by calling them my 'family', either" (302). When he worked as chauffeur in Mr. Ashok's house, he was treated as servant. Most importantly, he was shattered when he was forced to take a blame of car accident, committed by Pinky Madam. He felt insulted when his master called him a family and took advantage of him. It portrays the self-concept and self-evaluation of this young man and suggests that Balram's actions and freewill will determine his course, development and meaning to establish his social identity. He has struggled to survive in the dominating world of rich. Balram changes slowly over time to adapt to the new environment. While, he is fighting for getting a huge sum of money for an entrepreneurial success, he becomes morally ambiguous man who is at once dubious

and sympathetic. David Huebert argues, “*The White Tiger*’s complexity and richness arises from the vital and genuine ambiguity at the heart of Adiga’s treatment of his narrator. Balram, I maintain, is not simply ‘monstrous’; he is also likable, clever, and most importantly, relatable” (26). Balram appears as an uncertain character; at one time, he becomes monstrous who can kill his master. On contrarily to this, sometimes he becomes likable character who understands the emotions of others. It presents that Balram is a murderer who killed his master, in order to get, contradictorily, social recognition, identity and existence in the competitive society where every individual is ready to rip others for their benefit. If he had received a healthy childhood and education, then he would not have chosen illegitimate way to success. He has seen many youngsters like him, who had given up the race to get opportunity for themselves. Witnessing them and analyzing his circumstances, he chose violence to meet his interests like social identity and survival in competitive world. It is true that he has involved in corruption and bribery, however, he has a lovely heart who feels others’ pain as well. He says to the aged parents of the victim of the accident, caused by his driver, “There are twenty-five thousands rupees in here. I don’t give it to you because I have to, but because I want to” (312).

Although he has committed a highly inexcusable act by bribing the assistant commission instead of taking the boy’s case through proper legal procedures, Balram also shows more evidence, here, of a moral foundation that trumps self-interest. Explaining his actions, he differentiates himself from the gangsters who run the Darkness: “But I had to do something different, don’t you see? I can’t live the way the wild Boar and the Buffalo and the Raven probably still live, back in Laxmangarh” (313). Balram claims that he is not an ordinary man because he has not cheated poor people; rather he had competed with rich business person. Even when his employee

did accident, he offered certain amount of money to victim's family and he gives their other son an opportunity to work in his company. Balram is responsible for his guilt but he seems to have sympathy for others. He could run or settle the accident like his master did, but he had not done that, rather he meets victim's family and takes responsibility. Above all, he offered them twenty-five thousand, which was not necessary but he did, because he wants to, as he has moral foundation that motivated him to offer them money and work.

On the other hand, there are characters like Ashok, Pinky Madam, and Vijay who lack moral ground, and thus are highly influenced by western language, sense of dressing and western lifestyle. It portrays the acceptance of western culture and rejection of Indian cultural values. They are perfect examples of new India who have lost their dignity and greatness in front of western lifestyle. They have not only embraced others' values but also forgotten their moralities. In consequence, they are ready to screw each other for their own survival.

Identity theory, social identity theory, and existential/survival theory are used here for analyzing Balram's life progression from poverty to entrepreneurship. Stryker (2002) says that an identity is a set of meanings, which are attached to roles individuals occupy in their social structure. Burke & Stets (2009) give their opinion that meanings are individuals' responses when they reflect upon themselves in a role, social, or person identity (74). McCall & Simmons (1978) say that identities help to organize an individual's 'place' in an interaction, guide behavior, facilitate the development of stable social relationships, and make interaction possible (68). This all happens within the context of social structure.

Peter J. Burke & Jan E. Stets (2009) argue that identity change occurs when the meanings of an identity shift over time (74). Burke (2006) discusses three ways in



which identities may change: changes in the situation, which prompt changes in the identity meanings; multiple identities that conflict in a situation causing both identities to change; and identity meanings and behavior meanings that conflict causing a modification in both meanings.

The term 'self-concept' refers to the way how someone thinks about, evaluates or perceives himself or herself. To be aware of oneself is to have a concept of oneself. Psychologist Carl Rogers (1961) posited a theory of how self-concept influences and, indeed, acts as the framework for one's personality. He says that we always strive for self-actualization, some with more success than others. Baumeister (1999) provides the definition of self-concept: "The individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is". Self-concept maintenance refers to the way how people maintain or enhance their sense of self. The self-concept is a process of gaining self-awareness. It consists of mental images an individual has of oneself: physical appearance, health, accomplishments, skills, social talents, roles, intellectual traits, and emotional states and more –all make up our self-concept.

Psychologist Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979) propounded the concept of social identity theory. Social identity is a person's sense of who he or she is based on his or her group membership. Identity theory historically has focused on role identities while social identity theory traditionally has emphasized categorical identities.

Existentialist theory refers to the emphasis in an individual existence, freedom and choice. Existentialism proposes that a person's actions and free will determine their development and meaning to exist. People must act through choice and free will to bring meaning of their life. Balram's determination to see dreams to follow them

and finally to achieve them proves that man can fight for his true existence. He has given wings to his dreams through his calculated decisions. Balram carefully observes the discourse of the rich that was used to manipulate poor and, above all, Balram comments on coop created by the rich. Balram believes in actions to subvert his status. In the article, “Narrating ‘Dark’ India in *Londonstani* and *The White Tiger*”, Robbie Goh argues, “Balram as a character who refutes the whole notion of India as Hindu Nation. Refutation of Hinduism- its pantheon, beliefs and rituals, its caste system- is crucial to Balram’s story of his rise from poverty and oppression” (334). Balram illuminates the ideology of the rich, behind the depiction of India as Hindu Nation, so that it becomes easy to manipulate the poor when they are guided by religious beliefs. They want the poor to be loyal and faithful servant as Hanuman. These notions of loyalty and sincerity have firmly prescribed Hanuman as everyone’s favorite god in darkness. However, Balram refutes it, knowing the fact that the rich have achieved plenty of power and money being immoral and unfaithful. With refutation of Hinduism, he discards all the ideologies prescribed by rich to oppress poor. Moreover, he reveals the corruption and exploitation in his country. He also portrays the way exploiters are gaining more power and money each day.

By referring to prayer and gods with such irreverence, it is clear that Halwai places little faith in religion. Instead he prefers to rely on human actions, believing that his life has been shaped by others (his family and his master), and that it can be changed through his own actions. (Khor 49)

Balram’s self-concept developed from his own circumstances. He has little faith in religion; therefore, he knows, if he remains idle, then his life will definitely end in poverty and feeble state. Although, he believed his master as god and he should serve him; thus, his master would take care of him. But Balram soon learns that his master,

Mr. Ashok, only cares for himself. Above all, he considers the rich has created a discourse to manipulate the poor to be faithful, “Do you know about Hanuman, sir? He was the faithful servant of the god Rama, and we worship him in our temples because he is a shining example of how to serve your masters with absolute fidelity, love, and devotion” (19). Hanuman appears to be favorite god in the darkness and it reflects how hard it is for man to win his freedom in India. They expect poor to be as faithful servant as Hanuman. Balram, an indigent man, used to consider himself as a faithful servant of his master, hoping to get protection from the evils of the society. But when he realizes that his master has benefited himself at the cost of his life. He could not believe in the existence of god because he considered his master a symbol of god. When his master cheated him, he decided to hatch a bigger coop and he appeared confident that his own actions would change his destiny. Thus, Balram’s commitments took him to achieve entrepreneurial destiny. Because of his little faith in religion, he did not simply wait for his destiny to change, rather he believed in changing his destiny with his actions. Balram has chosen a morality of corruption and violence, which helped him to get the entrepreneurial success in Taxi Company in Bangalore. Balram has chosen a violence as a ticket to success, nevertheless, Goh considers that Balram’s evil is not entirely Balram’s fault; he does not wholly absolve Balram for his own deed. Balram is the victim of society; it focuses on individual success at any cost, and they do not care about the way one chooses legitimate or illegitimate.

Goh and Joseph suggest, “The real villain here is a system of corruption, coercion, and injustice which is larger than Balram” (44-45). They consider Balram as a victim of the system; it does not allow him to reach material success. The system automatically attracts people towards corruption, coercion, and injustice. Goh and

Joseph are commenting on the system, they do not mean Balram is right to choose a path of violence. Neither Goh nor Joseph excuses or praises Balram's actions insofar as he is no better or worse than the corrupt superstructure of which he is part. As Balram belonged to a poor class and always saw his parents struggle for money. They did not have time even to take care of their children. Balram was not able to connect much with his parents and feels alienated. And he passes comments such as "now what kind of place is it where people forget to name their children?"(14). Later he was alienated from his own master his own class and the corrupt people around him. Alienation, struggle for identity, freedom and behaviour of big bellies had made him lose his identity and freedom in the hands of corrupt people. As said by Merton, "All people in the United States are encouraged to strive for the cultural goal of monetary success. Lower class individuals, however, are often prevented from achieving this goal through legitimate means" (495). Therefore, people like Balram has to face alienation from society and home, because being, powerless and ignorant, one cannot see a legitimate way out from this trap. He always wanted to come out from the dark side of life to achieve a life "full of light". He felt his destiny was not under his control, but is determined by external agents; fate and luck. He failed to understand himself therefore remained unhappy. He feels crime and violence as consequences of the individual's struggle with the forces of modern Indian values. He made rational decisions to take actions and choose a morality of corruption to establish himself with his better personal identity which is regarded with relevance in social identity theory. In this regard, David Huebert states,

Techno-capitalism provides the only clear route to self-empowerment for Balram, the path to wealth and status via techno-capitalism requires a rejection of Gandhian traditional values and involves an all-but-inevitable engagement

with criminal and immoral activity, and Balram's choice of personal advancement at the expense of others. (26-27)

Balram wishes to avoid a life of humiliation and exploitation in the impoverished darkness around him. Balram chooses to improve his place in the world via the only option, techno-capitalist entrepreneurialism. This choice leads Balram to adopt an ethic of bribery and crime that surround the dangerous way to wealth and power. He rejects Gandhian traditional values, involves in criminal and immoral activity as he knows that the new India stands for entrepreneurialism, technology, wealth and power at the expenses of others either with their life or emotion. Balram has learned from his master to take benefit at the expense of others. Balram has to establish him as the victorious "economic warrior" to survive at all cost. In the Darwinian struggle for existence of free-market capitalism, Balram has managed to rise out of the rooster coop and gain social prestige and financial freedom. The tiger, unlike the rooster, is a predator at the top of the food chain. Every time, it eats, other animals must suffer and die. Likewise, for Balram to become and remain the White Tiger, he must feed on those around him. His route to techno-capitalist power comes with the price: the repeated exploitation and domination of others to his own personal ambition. "These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies" (64). Given the choice between becoming the oppressor and remaining, the oppressed Balram chooses the former.

Balram, the white tiger, struggles to survive in post-independence Indian wilderness, because, as he notes, "on the fifteenth of August, 1947- the day the British left- the cages had been let open; and the animals had attacked and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law" (63-64). According to Balram, formerly colonized people had to adjust to "the law of the jungle", when the British departed,

the orderly zoo became a landscape of destitution and inequality, a corrupt jungle where local elections were customarily bought and sold. Balram's life was heavily affected by post-independence Indian wilderness "where there are "only two destinies: eat- or get eaten up" (64). It portrays struggle for existence, where one must get ready to screw others for his own survival. If you do not screw others, they will screw you, so, to escape the process of being eaten up, Balram chooses to fight. After the independence, Indian people had become corrupt where everything appeared chaotic. People had become self-centered who screwed others in every possible way. There is no humanity; rather there is the dominant survival instinct in them to exist in the world. To Balram, pre-independent India was the richest nation on the earth, was like a zoo. Everyone in his place and everywhere was happy with what he or she had. But, today India is living in the corruption and they consider it as a progress whereas everyone is unhappy, dissatisfied, living in turmoil.

This novel represents "a sea change from postcolonial and subaltern construction of hopeful communal India can perhaps be best seen in the metaphor of "darkness", used explicitly and repeatedly in *The White Tiger*" ( Goh 341). Postcolonial and subaltern construction of hopeful communal India turns into a 'dark' India, where people appear deceptive and corrupt. Most of the characters in the novel take corruption, violence and bribery as a way that benefited them. They think that they are doing progress but in reality, they are turning back to darkness. "There was no doctor in the hospital. The ward boy, after we bribe him ten rupees, said that a doctor might come in the evening" (48). Generally, doctor is taken as god but here doctor seems irresponsible towards his duty. He is not on time whereas; he works in private hospitals and gets extra earning. Along with doctors, even a ward boy appears to involve in corruption. Similarly, "We've just paid half a million rupees in a bribe,

Mukesh, and now we're screwing this man over for a single rupee" (139).

Businessperson like Mukesh and Ashok also involve in bribery whereas ministers involve in corruption. In one way to other, most of the people involved in corruption, bribery and murder to survive. If a person remains naïve and loyal, then he has to live in poverty or sometimes go to jail for their masters because "the jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle class masters" (169). Balram knows he must fight for his personal and social identity along with his existence; therefore, he has become self-centered with his self-concept. To further, clarify this point, David Huebert adds, "it is ethically problematic that Balram's entrepreneurial self-interest requires a descent into crime and corruption, but on the other hand, Balram's transgressions are understandable insofar as they provide the only available means to escape a life of poverty and subjugation" (30). Balram chooses crime and corruption as a means to success because there are no legitimate opportunities for uneducated (half-baked) poor people like him. To alter life of poverty and subjugation, Balram, the White Tiger, has to take conscious action, "the creature that gets born only once every generation in the jungle" (276). He opines that Hippos lie in mud and do nothing-that is their nature. He further adds-let animal live like animals and let humans live like humans. He believes that human has power to subvert their condition with their choices and he has power to think. With his intelligence, man can change his destiny whereas animals like Hippo can do nothing. He also sees that there are people like his father and his brother Kishan, who did nothing to change their life; therefore, they always remained in destitution. However, he is a different kind, a white tiger, who fights for his existence at the expense of others. He has become entrepreneur by screwing his granny, brother, and eventually his master to change his destiny.

Therefore, he is emotionally strong to fight against any kind of hurdle on his way.

After the colonial rule, Indian people had witnessed the political, historical and economical change in their country. Because of that change, people were also adopting the new values to survive in the new environment. In order to get power and money, people are going extreme for instance Vijay, focusing on his own existence.

You see, a total of ninety-three criminal cases-for murder, rape, grand larceny, gun-smuggling, pimping, and many other such minor offences- are pending, against the Great Socialist and his ministers at the present moment. Not easy to get convictions when the judges are judging in Darkness, yet three convictions have been delivered, and three of the ministers are currently in jail but continue to be ministers. The Great Socialist himself is said to have embezzled that money into a bank account in a small, beautiful country in Europe full of white people and black money. (97-98)

Vijay, the bus conductor had quit his job and joined politics, each time Balram saw him he had done better for himself. In order to prove his existence with his social identity, the great socialist had done several criminal acts and achieved power, position and money. In consequence, it has brought great competition among people where each individual has to struggle hard to prove his or her identity and existence either by hook or by crook. In this respect, Balram justifies his position and claims that he had done single murder, which was enough to set his entrepreneurship and that had established his social identity. Everyone in this world has to struggle to overcome the obstacle in the way to success. He or she must make self-concept and then move ahead. Struggle is an essential urge, an inner force in all human beings. Charles Darwin writes struggle for existence as, "I should premise that I use this term in a large and metaphorical sense, including dependence of one being on another, and



including (which is more important) not only the life of the individual, but success in leaving progeny” (49). Here Darwin recognizes the need for struggle and existence to be contingent upon one another. Existence is dependent upon the struggle for life and competition among species for the availability of resources and ultimately survival. Conversely, the struggle and competition among species is what defines existence. Darwin also states that this struggle not only applies to the individual’s existence but to the legacy, they leave as a result of their existence. It requires the individual to act in order to exist.

Generally, Adiga’s novel is read as a journey to freedom where Balram makes different choices that lead his existential journey from a poor village boy to as an entrepreneur. His own attitude and his choices, or his self-concept, are responsible to establish him as an entrepreneur. Above all, he has murdered his master, robbed his money and headed towards Bangalore. It portrays Balram’s daring attitude and choice to exist in the competitive world. Because of his actions, he has become capable of subverting his status from a poor village boy to a rich and successful man, with his distinct personal identity in society. “As more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life” (Darwin 50). Every individual has to struggle for life sometimes either with same species or with different species and sometimes an individual has to struggle with different situations in their life. When we look at Balram, we only look at him as struggler who is fighting with the people around him to prove his existence. In fact, he is also dealing with the circumstances needed for physical life to exist.

Balram has lived in a world of “defunct electricity poles, broken water taps,

and children too lean and too short for their age, and with oversized heads from which vivid eyes shine” (19-20). Balram has experienced the lack of food, water, electricity and health care whereas there are people like politicians and businesspersons enjoying lavish lifestyle. To overcome from his circumstances and to survive in competitive world with his social identity, Ashok’s murder turns as an existential act, which gives him a sense of freedom and identity. Above all, he has experienced the most miserable conditions in his life that motivated him to take illegitimate way to achieve his destiny as entrepreneur. He brings the example of his school to show the miserable life, he had: “There was supposed to be free food at my school- a government programme gave every boy three *rotis*, yellow *daal*, and pickles at lunchtime. But we never ever saw *rotis*, or yellow *daal*, or pickles, and everyone knew why: the schoolteacher has stolen our lunch money” (32-33). Balram has witnessed the corruption in government school where teachers make excuses to steal money. However, the interesting thing is that no one blamed the school teacher for doing this because everyone in the village knew that he would have done the same in his position. In order to survive in new India, one must deceive others to exist. Sometimes people become corrupt and snatch others' rights in the race of survival. “Once, a truck came into the school with uniforms that the government had sent for us; we never saw them, but a week later they turned up for sale in the neighbouring village”(33). If there is a large population, then there will be corruption in each step because there are limited resources in the world and not all of them can get access to the resources. On the other hand, powerful people grab the resources; keep it for their offspring. In this way, they are exploiting poor even to get a basic need: food, water and space. As a result, poor are being poorer and rich are getting richer. In the same way, the free school uniforms were sold in another village. It reflects corruption and

deception of society from the hand of powerful people who even steal the money of the poor students. Moreover, there is not only corruption in school; rather there are corruption in hospitals too.

There's a government medical superintendent who's meant to check that doctors visit village hospitals like this. Now, each time this post falls vacant, the Great Socialist lets all the big doctors know that he's having an open auction for that post. The going rate for this post is about four hundred thousand rupees these days. (49)

There are corruptions in every beat of new India; everyone wants to be at top by dominating others. There is misuse of power and position, which is leading the society towards corruption and fraud. Government hospitals must be facilitated with excellent doctors and medicine. Nevertheless, there are not adequate doctors in the government hospitals. Above all, the remaining doctors are also involved in the evil contract of government officials so that they can work in other private hospitals. It presents the Machiavellian deception of government workers. They are the thugs who is exploiting their country and leading it towards impoverishment.

Now, you-Dr Ram Pandey-will kindly put one-third of your salary in my palm. Good boy. In return, I do this. He made a tick on the imaginary ledger. 'you can keep the rest of your government salary and go work in some private hospital for the rest of the week. Forget the village. Because according to this ledger you've been there. You've treated my wounded leg. You've healed that girl's jaundice. (50)

The government workers are not loyal and responsible. They think that their deceptive actions are leading them towards triumph but in reality, they are sinking in corruption. Doctors appear as a broker who is playing with the life of poor villagers. Those who

can afford to visit private hospitals, and those who cannot, left there to die. It portrays how poor had struggled to exist in this world. As every individual must struggle to get what he or she needs to survive, competing against others. Similarly, highly admired persons as doctors, desire for monetary success at the cost of human life reflects the miserable condition of new India. In a same way, Darwin claims, “only the life of the individual does not matter, what matters the most is success in leaving progeny” (49). On contrary, poor has to struggle for their own survival along with that they have the pressure to leave progeny, which appears beyond their reach. Hence, Balram goes so far as to justify murder as comparable to the misdeeds routinely engaged in by senior government officials and successful businesspersons as they search for their identity. These people know how to destroy others for their own welfare. It also reflects that the injustice and corruption of twenty-first-century India is so deep rooted and so pervasive that the only way a poor man can better himself is by an act of aggression, theft or murder. In order to survive in the jungle of thugs and idiots, along with the pressure to establish his identity, he has to be like them.

Balram becomes a mimic man successfully aping the social and business practices of his former master. He achieves his entrepreneurial destiny by starting his own Taxi Company and becoming the new Ashok: “once I was a driver to a master, but now I am a master of drivers” (259). People have embraced violence, deception and corruption as the ticket to success. Similarly, violence was the solution to one man’s oppression, because it enabled Balram to escape the rooster coop. On the other hand, the effect of violence was to replace one master with another. “Without education, most Indians have no chance of securing meaningful work. In the darkness, every morning, tens of thousands of young men sit in the teashop, reading the newspaper. They have no job to do today. They know they won’t get any job today.

They've given up the fight" (45-46). Balram was aware that the darkness is the curse where they do not get good education and remain half-baked. As a result, thousands of young men have to accept unemployment and many have given up the fight, knowing the truth that they will not get a job. However, Balram was the "White Tiger" who does not give up rather he continued his informal education by overhearing others' conversation. His strong survival instinct that he remains motivated to compete and win. With his never giving up attitude and choices in his life, lead him to prove his existence.

In contrast, living a life of slave, he tries to become like the colonizer, to adopt the colonizer's skin, values, and lifestyle. Balram first apes his master in superficial ways- drinking the same scotch and seeking out blond women-but then comes to the realization that the only way to accomplish his goals is to kill his master and steal his money. On one hand Balram thinks, he completely knows the heart and soul of his master. On the other hand, he looks little confused, later, he feels that he must take a risk to create his unique identity. In this respect, Darwin states, "When we reflect on this struggle we may console ourselves with the full belief that the war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply" (60).

Balram believes that the war of the nature is not continuous and there is no fear; as a result, Balram being a mentally and physically healthy grabbed the opportunity. He presents himself as strong and energetic, he replaces his position over his master because in the race of survival, someone has to die-off and while struggling for survival, Balram has killed his master. It reflects violence is necessary tool to achieve radical reform; given the corruption of today's India, dishonesty and disloyalty is the only path to success.

The offspring, also, will thus have a better chance of surviving, for, of the many individuals of any species which are periodically born, but a small number can survive. I have called this principle, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term natural selection, in order to mark its relation to man's power of selection. (Darwin 48-49)

As said by Darwin, the above-mentioned idea elaborates that the small number of offspring will have better chance of surviving if the useful variation is preserved. Similarly, Balram's father always wanted to have life of a man but he could not get it. However, Balram, being a son of poor rickshaw puller achieves a successful life because he has adapted variations from his father that helped him to prove his existence and establish his identity as entrepreneur. According to Darwin, when an individual adapts variations in him or her, he or she can fit in present environment and can survive. Similarly, Balram understands his position, observes the situations, and changes himself according the situation. He develops the skills of deception, corruption and immorality to survive in the tough situation. Thus, his struggle pays off with his new identity as businessperson.

In this regard, Darwin states, "In a state of natural selection will be enabled to act on and modify organic beings at any age, by the accumulation of variations profitable at that age, and by their inheritance at a corresponding age" (67). In Natural selection when, organic beings gather profitable variations in them, they change themselves according to dynamic situation. Nature has provided each organism with the power to change. In this respect, Balram has completely changed his identity from a poor boy to a successful entrepreneur. He has consciously chosen his steps towards a success where he says, "I'm a man of action and change" (5). Firstly, he changed his position from a servant in teashop to a taxi driver. Secondly, he changed from taxi

driver to an entrepreneur. He was guileful to grab the opportunities he gets on his way. Balram says, “Instead of wiping out spots from tables and crushing coals for the oven, I used my time at the tea shop in Laxmangarh to spy on every customer at every table, and overhear everything they said” (52). It appears as if he has benefitted himself from his life experiences. However, Balram was not satisfied with his status, he wants opportunity to reach towards the destination of getting social identity and economic freedom. When he sees the appropriate situation to enjoy freedom and to better his life he does not take back step rather he found it as opportunity to change his identity and murdered his own master. In addition, he calls his action as an entrepreneurial act. He perfectly modifies himself, accumulating the profitable variation in him and able to create his identity.

There all organisms are engaged in a constant competition with one another, with their habitats, and with their climates, for survival. Furthermore, Balram has also faced new moralities of city life and its nature to change. Balram too found it challenging to survive in the city, as there are great competitions among people in the city but he wants to stand out as distinct.

All that we can do is to keep steadily in mind that each organic being is striving to increase in a geometrical ratio; that each, at some period of its life, during some season of the year, during each generation, or at intervals, has to struggle for life and to suffer great destruction. (Darwin 60)

As the above lines by Darwin indicate, the primary cause for the struggle is the fact that organisms produce at rapid rates and the world could not possibly sustain all of the organisms that were thus produced. Therefore, some-in fact, even most must die off. Balram justifies his act to murder his master as an existential act because he believes that he is the white tiger, and when he searches for food, another has to

suffer. He is referred to as “The White Tiger” which symbolizes power, freedom and individuality. Balram calls it a survival of the fittest, those who can best adapt to their environment, with the extinction of others, can survive. It is true that there is increase in geometrical ratio but a small number can survive and Balram represents that small number, who can survive and able to create his distinct identity. It also portrays that Balram is ‘best fit’ in the jungle of thugs and idiots with his new morality of corruption.

Similarly, another existential philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre’s states “existence precedes essence,” which means man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward defines himself. “Man is not only that which he conceives himself to be, but that which he wills himself to be, and since he conceives of himself only after he exists, just as he wills himself to be after being thrown into existence, man is nothing other than he makes of himself” (Sartre 22). The above lines elaborate that man is nothing at the beginning; later, he will be what he makes of himself. Sartre adds that only by existing and acting in a certain way we give meaning to our lives. Man is totally responsible for his choices and his entire existence. Similarly, at first, Balram was just a Munna whose family did not bother to name him, later, he names himself as Mr. Ashok Sharma and establishes himself as north Indian Entrepreneur settled in Banglore. Therefore, in order to create an existential identity, his choice to murder his master helps him to escape his trapped state and gained freedom. “Man is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does” (Sartre 29). Once a man is thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does. Life has no meaning, it is up to you to give it a meaning, and value is nothing but the meaning that you choose. Moreover, Sartre



states,

The first effect of existentialism is to make every man conscious of what he is, and to make him solely responsible for his own existence. And when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men. (23)

Generally, man deserves to be free and the first effect of existentialism is to make every man conscious of what he is, and to make him solely responsible for his own existence. Self-concept theory and social identity theory approve of the same thing-being conscious of what he is. Man can fight for his existence, and the only maker of his life. In the same way, Balram was constrained by the societal pressure to achieve high standard in life. He deserves to be free and successful but there is no legitimate way to get success on the path of poor people in his society. However, he breaks the trap, fights for his existence. As a result, he changes his fortune, and achieves an entrepreneurial success along with his name and social recognition. Sartre adds, “Despite the fragile condition, man has to invent his way to define who is” (Sartre 33). Regardless of being alienated from the parents and society, he struggled to invent his way towards successful entrepreneurial identity.

The argument of the research revolves around the reality, which exists only in action. It ventures even further than that, since it adds, “man is nothing other than his own project. He exists only to the extent that he realizes himself, therefore he is nothing more than the sum of his actions, nothing more than his life” (Sartre 36-37). Balram tries to assert his project as surviving act. He understands that his existence counts in terms of his actions, although he faced many oppression and exploitation from his master while working as a chauffeur but still he worked patiently. He was completely alienated from his consciousness of his own freedom. Therefore, being a

chauffeur, he had to do household activities like a servant does which includes “heating water on the stove, carrying it into the courtyard, and then lift the old man’s feet up one after the other and immerse them in the hot water and then massage them both gently” ( 70). As chauffeur, his task is to drive but he has to work as servant to massage his master’s feet. Meanwhile, he also cooks food for his masters. Being a chauffeur, he has to do multi task. In the same way, he was forced to do signature on the paper, which goes like this,

I drove the car that hit an unidentified person, or persons, or person and objects, on the night of January 23<sup>rd</sup> this year. That I then panicked and refused to fulfill my obligations to the injured parties by taking them to the nearest hospital emergency ward. That there were no other occupants of the car at the time of the accident. That I was alone in the car, and alone responsible for all that happened. (167)

He was forced to take a blame of the car accident made by Pinky madam. Balram considered Mr. Ashok as a kind man but when he remained silent while he was forced to sign on the paper. Then, he felt a kind of remorse against Mr. Ashok because he never expected him to be biased. Later, he did not have to take the blame as the police had settled the case. However, it also reflects how rich man treats poor man in terms of their convenience. In this respect, Hegel illuminates,

I hope that I may succeed in earning and gaining your confidence. Above all, a trust in science and a trust in yourselves, the love of truth, faith in the power of spirit is the first condition for philosophy. Man because he is spirit may and should deem himself worthy of the highest; he cannot think too highly of the greatness and the power of his spirit; and with the faith, nothing will be so difficult and hard that it will not reveal itself to him. (6)

Human beings are not aware that all beings are connected and we are in fact part of God. Balram gets consciousness of his good qualities: power, knowledge and freedom. He becomes confident to take control of his life and defies his fate with his choices. With this understanding, Balram believes in power of action over emotions and values. Then he decides to take risk to change his identity. Consequently, he even gets prepared to see his family destroyed- haunted, beaten, and blurred alive by the masters- can break out coop (176). He understands life, its nature which can turn to any direction at any time and he might have gone to jail for a killing he had not done. Therefore, he comprehends the risk of life in every phase, “he visualizes the image of the Rooster Coop, with its depiction of a violent struggle for existence, suggests the Balram’s choice was to trample or be trampled, to fight or to die. Understandably, he chooses to be the former” (Huebert 38). He believes this coop is a cage of fear, powerlessness, and intimidation that prevents servants from cheating their masters; from even wanting their own freedom, the threat is that the masters can murder the servants’ families. At the same time, he considers family loyalty itself is another coop. Therefore, Balram’s choice to fight against the exploitation and oppression appeared as justifiable response to prove his existence. As everyone has to struggle for existence, so does Balram for his survival. In order to get new identity, he has even sacrificed his family that reflects his strong decision and unusual will power.

To escape both the butcher’s knife and the rooster cage, to escape these two simultaneous threats of being underdeveloped by the rich and by the poor, one must go against humanity. One must be “a freak,” “a pervert of nature.” One must not, indeed cannot, be a “normal” human being. (Khor 48)

Balram goes against humanity to escape from master’s exploitation and religious dogmas. He becomes indifferent towards his family members and decides to take big

step that a normal human being cannot dare to do. Though, he is born in poverty, he has taken completely unusual action to change his status. “Just me and a chandelier above me, although the chandelier has a personality of its own” (7). At the same time, his fascination towards chandelier reveals his inner desires to remain in light (rich and successful). He has become corrupt and deceptive to break the rooster coop. He gives priority to his actions over his life, taking a huge risk to break the coop. In the same way, it reflects as if his entire existence depends upon his actions.

Man makes himself; he does not come into the world fully made, he makes himself by choosing his own morality, and his circumstances are such that he has no option other than to choose a morality. We can define man only in relation to his commitments. It is therefore ludicrous to blame us for the gratuitousness of choices. (Sartre 46)

After experiencing life-threatening circumstances, Balram is aware that situations are not in man’s control but man can be responsible for his actions and its consequences. Only man can change his destiny with his actions. Balram chooses his morality of corruption and deception because corruption has saved him from coercion, as he enters in to a swirl of immorality. Balram has witnessed that the accident went unreported because the Ashok’s family has a contact in the police. As a result, Balram’s life was saved by corruption. He determines to kill Mr. Ashok and steal from his bag carrying seven hundred thousand rupees. Mr. Ashok was going to give the money to different politicians in Delhi so that he would not have to pay taxes to the state. Balram executes his plan and uses the money as capital to start his taxi service. He changes his name from Balram Halwei to Ashok Sharma, rents vans, and hires drivers. He also bribes the local police chief to cancel the license of a competing taxi service so that his company will have more clients. It reflects his deceitful

actions, which subverts his position from poor man to entrepreneurial idol.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of criminal law, murdering Ashok is a crime. On contrary from the Balram's subaltern perspective, it is an act of rectificatory justice, part of emancipation and existential act leading to his social identity. Later, he believes that everyone who counts in the world has killed someone or other on their way to top and concludes, "All I wanted was a chance to be a man and for that, one murder was enough" (220). Generally, lower-class individuals more often experience strain, with this strain being a function of the disjunction between their goals and legitimate means for achieving them. Thus, being a man from lower-class, he has closely analyzed the barriers on his way to success. He was experiencing a strain, but when he gets chance to achieve his goals, he feels that rather than living in darkness for lifetime, it is better to take risk, therefore, he murdered his master and that murder was enough to reach success. Balram goes so far to justify murder as comparable to the misdeeds routinely engaged in by senior government officials and successful businessmen as they climb to the top. Similarly, when Balram got a chance to prove his existence through murder, he did it without any regret. As Sartre states, "I think therefore I am" (40). Agreeing with this concept, when Balram realizes that his master is not a saviour, he started thinking for his career and looks for the opportunity to prove his existence. Similarly, when Balram started to think for his existence, firstly, he chooses his actions; then, he was able to establish him as successful entrepreneur, with his success in quest of his identity. Therefore, it reflects that man's destiny lies within himself.

In short, Balram Halwai was born in a backwater village on the River Ganges, the son of the rickshaw puller, struggles to better himself. He worked as waiter and chauffeur to earn money. Once he went to zoo with his nephew, where he saw the

repeated action of walking of The White Tiger in a cage. Suddenly his eyes met the tiger's eyes, Balram realizes that he cannot stay servant for lifetime, he feels sorry to his family and decides get out from the cage of poverty. He builds his self-concept, as Carl Rogers refers to self-concept theory of personality. Therefore, Balram acknowledges the fact that individual existence; freedom and identity are the most important factors to survive in modern India. So, he takes charge of his action, murders his master and calls it an existential act to survive in competitive India. He considers a single murder of his master as a ticket to success and never felt guilty about it because he feels that violence is the only way to success for half-baked person like him. Although, he kills his master and settles his entrepreneurship in Bangalore, he helps poor people and does not take advantage of them. Balram is just a mere victim of society, which forced him to take illegitimate way. Thus, he intends to present himself as a successful entrepreneur who sacrificed his name, family and place to achieve power, freedom and identity. Thus, Balram's existential act portrays his struggle for survival, social and personal identity with his existence in modern India.

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