SERVANT – MASTER RELATIONSHIP IN ARAVIND ADIGA’S THE WHITE TIGER

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Aravind Adiga's first novel, The White Tiger, delivers an invincible central character and an India bristling with economic possibility, competing loyalties and class struggle. The story of a rickshawallah’s move from the “darkness” of rural India to the “light” of urban Gurgaon reminds us of the harsh facts behind the fiction. It also consider the relationship between inequality and violent crime. Aravind Adiga tells the shocking, apparently amoral story of a young man who brutally murders his employer and gets away with it.

Relationships are the way in which two or more people or things are connected. There are many different relationships that are developed between people. We have relationships with everyone we know and those who are close to us. Some relationships are very simple others may be complicated. Also some are healthy while others may be unhealthy. To create relationship with people are very easy but it is not so easy to maintain. There are times when a relationship can go bad because there is no understanding, lack of communication, and a feeling of distance in the relationship. It can be separated into negative and positive relationships. Relationship between servants –master is found in the Aravind Adiga’s novel The White Tiger. It is the most interesting novel in which writer highlight the character of Balram Halwai when he was the servant of Mr. Ashok. Adiga says,

The servant-master system implies two things: One is that the servants are far poorer than the rich; a servant has no possibility of ever catching up to the master. And secondly, he has access to the master’s money, the master’s physical person. Yet crime rates in India are very low. Even though the middle class—who often have three or four servants—are paranoid about crime, the reality is a master getting killed by his servant is rare. Balram Halwai is the Son of a
rickshaw puller, narrates the story of his life and his movement from darkness to light in a subtly mocking way aiming to resolve how the ruling entrepreneur philosophy never allows the poverty stricken to come up into the limelight.4

Balram comes from the social underclass of India. As a boy he is made to leave school and aid his brother Kishan in work at the local tea shop. However Balram is sharp and smart and in a few years’ time realizes that he doesn’t really make a good servant. He decides to become a driver and finds work at the local landlord’s house. His work with the family takes him to Delhi where a series of events and an inherent feeling of cynicism and disenchantment make him realize that he might be stuck in the life of servant forever.5 Balram takes them to shopping plazas and also carry their shopping bags when they come out of the mall. The harsh and stingy behavior of rich class is shown when he lost the coin while getting out of the car:

Get down on your knees. Look for it on the floor of the car. I got down on my knees. I sniffed in between the mats like a dog, all in search of that one rupee. ‘What do you mean, it’s not there? Don’t think you can steal from us just because you’re in the city. I want that rupee.’ That’s how you corrupt servants. It starts with one rupee. Don’t bring your American ways here where that rupee coin went remains a mystery to me to this day, Mr. Premier. Finally, I took a rupee coin out of my shirt pocket, dropped it on the floor of the car, picked it up, and gave it to the Mongoose.6

Such mean behaviour of the masters continues when they instruct the servants about does and don’ts. Balram is told never to switch on the AC or play music when he is alone. Ashok and Pinky madam always make fun of his pronunciation when he pronounced ‘maal’ for mall. The lady to amuse herself trapped Balram to repeat Pizza as he always pronounced it ‘PIJJA’. They always taunted him for his lack of English education. He has to suffer humiliation in the hands of his masters with ever increasing routine duties which climaxes in his being blackmailed when Ashok’s wife Pinky kills a man in drunken driving. He was forced to sign a statement accepting full responsibility for the accident.7 He recalls what poet Mirza Ghalib wrote about slaves: “They remain slaves because they can’t see what is beautiful in the world”.8

The suppressed class finds itself trapped in constant mental pressures that shape their needs and desires. This class has to work under elite class regardless of their personal demands and satisfaction. Same is the case with Balram, he is a type of servant to Ashok although he earns money with his own efforts, and he does not take charity from his master but the attitude of society forces him to believe that he is no more than an animal to his boss. The following lines have symbolic significance, “When master and driver find each other’s eyes in this mirror, it swings open like a door into a changing room, and the two of them have suddenly caught each
other naked?” The norms of loyalty and sincerity started to breakdown when the capitalist relations replace the tradition of trust and respect and loyalty. The humanity is betrayed by such materialistic notions. Balram’s words are: “trustworthiness of servants which is the basis of the entire Indian economy.”

His thirst for freedom came alive when he visited his native village while Mr. Ashok and wife Pinky went on an excursion.

…It was a very important trip for me… while Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam were relaxing… I swam through the pond, walked up the hill… and entered the Black Fort for the first time… Putting my foot on the wall, I looked down on the village from there. My little Laxmangarh. I saw the temple tower, the market, the glistening line of sewage, the landlords’ mansion – and my own house, with that dark little cloud outside – the water buffalo. It looked like the most beautiful sight on earth. I leaned out from the edge of the fort in the direction of my village – and then I did something too disgusting to describe to you. Well actually, I spat. Again and again. And then, whistling and humming, I went back down the hill. Eight months later, I slit Mr. Ashok’s throat.

In a desperate attempt to escape his self-destructive fate Balram makes a giant leap of faith and ends up inventing a new kind of morality for himself- a morality that allows him to grow beyond what the Indian social structure permits to a man of his background, a morality that allows to Murder.

The title of the novel The White Tiger also has Marxist significance. This title has been used several times from different people to address Balram. The story revolves around the tiger imprisoned in the cage it is similar to the low class imprisoned in the cage of the suppressing class. The circumstances and society of India is similar to the tiger which is bound and chained in the cage. Balram’s success is based on the bribe he gave to political institution. He is unable to draw a line difference between justice and fairness as his act is heinous. He is living in a country where one can prove himself through money, power and industry. No one is committed to moral values. The tone of Balram throughout the novel is materialistic. He is a supporter of Marxist stance. To him the workers have no hold on the things they produce. They build houses for rich people and they themselves have to live in tents ad unhygienic places. The conditions in which Balram is grown up are of extreme starvation and suppression. The family relations and duties of family meant nothing to him. His thinking is shaped by materialism. He takes relationships on materialistic terms. Following words of Balram on murder of his master Ashok are:

I could gloat that I am not just any murderer, but one who killed his own employer (who is a kind of second father), and also contributed to the probable death of all his family members. A virtual mass murderer… Mr. Ashok’s face
reappears now in my mind’s eye as it used to every day when I was in his service – reflected in my rearview mirror. It was such a handsome face that sometimes I couldn’t take my eyes off it. Picture a six-foot-tall fellow, broad-shouldered, with a landlord’s powerful, punishing forearms, yet always gentle almost always, except for that time he punched Pinky Madam in the face and kind to those around him, even his servants and driver.\textsuperscript{12}

This debut novel of Adiga has got the Man Booker Prize, which shows also the Master-slave relationship along with this Poor-Rich conflict. If the poor would become rich, their poor mentality will remain within themselves. They never think beyond the constructed ideas. Balram Halwai comes out of the cage and fights with the circumstances and achieves the level of the master. For him, no matter how he achieves. He is altogether different from the other poor people. He does not like to walk on the path on which the others are walking but he has created his own path to accomplish the status as the Master.

\textbf{WORK CITED:}


9 \textit{Ibid.}, 199.

10 \textit{Ibid.}, 175.

11 \textit{Ibid.}, 41-42.
12 Ibid., 45-46.

Websites:


http://siddharthdesai121011.blogspot.in/2012/04/depiction-of-poor-rich-conflict-in.html
