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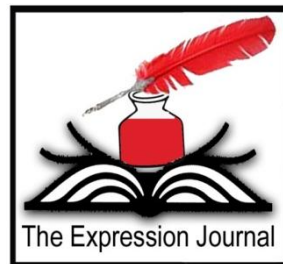
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TRACING FOR THE STEREOTYPE THREATS IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S NOVEL

THE WHITE TIGER: A STUDY

C. SWATHI REKHA

Assistant Professor, Department of English

PSVAS College, Gowrivakkam

Ph.D. Research Scholar (Part-Time),

Sir Theagaraya College, Chennai-600 021

DR. K. THIYAGARAJAN

Associate Professor and Head

Research Supervisor, Department of English

Sir Theagaraya College, Chennai-600 021

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Abstract

The Indian Post-Modernist writers concentrate on exposing the current social issues and how those affect their living. Being writers, they boldly picturise the real situation and who is responsible for it. Among such writers, Aravind Adiga used his novel as a medium to expose his feelings and thoughts for bringing a social order to ensure peaceful life. Aravind Adiga is not only a journalist but also a novelist. He wrote his first novel *The White Tiger* which received the Man Booker Prize in 2008. This novel gives voice for the impact of globalization, identity, corruption and caste conflicts. This novel reflects the post-modern society. The novelist used this novel skilfully to depict all the contemporary issues in rural and urban life. Stereotype threat is considered to be a situational problem in which people feel themselves are at risk. In the novel, Balram Halwai is a central character and the entire novel revolves around him. Adiga portrayed the real face of society through the protagonist. He picturised low minded rich people's behavior on the poor one. Balram is affected by stereotype threat so that he cannot socialize with anyone. Due to this reason he drops his school, he cannot admire any people except Mr .Ashok. Moreover that, he doesn't marry anyone as he is afraid of financial crisis. Even though he becomes successful entrepreneur at the end of the novel, he is influenced by stereotype threat. Hence, this paper attempts to analyse the protagonist Balram's negative stereotype threats including the ways with which he is able to overcome at the peril situations.

Keywords

Globalisation, Identity, Corruption, Caste Conflicts, Stereotype Threat, Entrepreneur, Risk.

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Introduction

In literature, the term Stereotype threat refers to the psychological phenomena where an individual feels at risk. This threat makes a large gap among racial, ethnic, gender and cultural groups. The term stereotype threat was first defined by the researchers Steele and Aronson as "being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group".(Steele et al.,1995). It further defines that an individual worries about his negative actions and behaviours that separate him from his group to which they belong. Stereotype threats include psychological, social class and injustice threats. It increases anxiety and stress as people actively attempt to disprove negative stereotypes about themselves. When a person is affected by any one of such threats, it would be difficult for him to interact with people easily or to achieve his goal. Because it creates barriers and blocks which later affect his or her creativity. It has also been called as a situational phenomenon, leading to test performance decrements, in which a member of a stigmatized group feels pressured by the possibility of confirming or being judged by a negative stereotype.

Here, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is a Bildungsroman novel which mainly focuses on the moral growth of protagonist from his childhood to adulthood. Balram Halwai is the protagonist who lives in Laxmangahr. He is the son of Rickshaw puller. Unfortunately, he faces many issues and struggles in life to raise his status level. For instance, he faces all the social issues like corruption, class struggles, poverty and self- identity which are abundantly prevailing in the society. These issues are being encountered by common people in everyday situation. Gradually, these issues increase fear among the people to take their life into the next level. However, he is able to overcome all his barriers and threats to become a successful entrepreneur. The genre of this novel is also called as Epistolary novel as it has been written in

the form of letters. The protagonist of this novel, Balram Halwai writes series of letters to Wen Jiabao, Chinese Excellency, to educate him about the ethics of Entrepreneurship in India. Through these letters he narrates his entire life story to him.

Stereotype signs can ruin our life. We can see the effects of this sign in various places such as in the classroom, workplace and throughout our lives. It is an existent issue that exaggerates negative stereotype among people. It increases anxiety and fear which leads to lack of self- confident so that they cannot focus on their interest. However, Stereotypes increase performance when people are exposed to negative stereotypes about another group. In the novel, the protagonist, Balram, is able to identify negative signs on Mr. Ashok. Even though, he is educated and returned from America, he is unable to lead his life without others support. Therefore, Balram likes him and supports him in various ways. Eventually, he dislikes his character after he identifies that he is not less cruel than his father Stroke and his brother Mukesh. Therefore, he stretches out a plan to transform his life from negative to positive. We cannot change the reality but through our positive thoughts we can do everything in a positive way to achieve success.

Socio Psychological Threat

And then, his journey from rural to urban life is not a bed of roses for him. At the young age itself he lost his mother. This is the first stroke in his life. Generally, sons love their mothers to a greater extent. They expect love and care from their mothers often whenever they are under struggle. However, Balram afraid of seeing his mother's dead body. He says, "I stopped breathing. This was the first time in my life I fainted."(p.12). His father Vikram Halwai is a poor man. But he wants Balram to learn and study well. But, on the contrary, he does not like to go to school. Though he is an intelligent, he is afraid of going to school for some unknown reasons. Good, Aronson, and Inzlicht (2003) argue that " being evaluated in a stereotyped domain is sufficient to trigger the trademark responses associated with stereotype threat such as a lack of enjoyment of the educational process, increased anxiety and stress"(p.647).His school environment makes him to drop his education and it creates a big gap from education to life. He states that:

"Two of them pinned my hands behind my back and held my head still. Someone caught the thing in his hands, and began walking toward me with slow, exaggerated steps, making no noise-one flicking its red tongue in and out of its mouth-the lizard came closer and closer to my face. The laughter grew louder. I couldn't make a noise.The teacher was snoring at his desk behind me. The lizard's face came right up to my face; and then it opened its light green mouth, and then I fainted for the second time in my life". (p.18)

The above quote clearly states that he is affected by socio-psychological threat which leads negative outcomes finally he left his school. The prospect of confirming cultural stereotypes impugning their intellectual and academic abilities" (Good et al.,2003.p. 647).

Social Class Threat

Unfortunately, his father expired. After his father's death he needs to take care of his family. So, he starts to work in a tea shop and learn to drive a car. He gets Driver job and he works as a driver to Mr. Ashok, son of Stork. He returns from USA along with his wife Pinky Madam. Balram was criticised by Pinky Madam regularly. Not only rich people but also servants condemned him often.

He confesses that there were two white Pomeranians in the house-Cuddles and Puddles. The rich expect their dogs to be treated like humans, you see- they expect their dogs to be

pampered, and walked and petted, and even washed! And guess who had to do the washing? I got down on my knees and began scrubbing the dogs, and then lathering them, and foaming them, and then washing them down, and taking a blow drier and drying their skin. Then I took around the compound on a chain while the king of Nepal sat in a corner and shouted, "Don't pull the chain so hard! They are worth more than you are!"(p.47). Balram's social class differences make him to feel low and very difficult for him to search his self-identity at that situation.

He takes Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam to Delhi for their business purpose. It is contrasted to Laxmangarh. However, rich people live in luxurious apartment on the other hand, poor people live on road sides. Balram says:

".....in India every apartment block, every house, every hotel is built with servants quarters. sometimes at the back, and sometimes underground---a warren of interconnected rooms where all the drivers, cooks, sweepers, maids and chefs of the apartment block can rest, sleep and wait. When our masters wanted us, an electric bell began to ring throughout the quarters, we would rush to a board and find a red light flashing next to the number of the apartment whose servant was need upstairs." (Adiga, 2008)

Moreover, servants those who are working in the apartment denounce him badly. "Each one of them had to come up to me, and force his fingers through my hair, and call me a village idiot, and slap me on the back too"(Adiga 2008). He wants to isolate himself from the society one who criticise him exceedingly.

Injustice Threat

Balram is the victim of social injustice in the novel. Pinky Madam consumes liquor heavily and drives car. Unexpectedly she makes an accident and killed a child. Stork insists Balram to take responsibility of crime instead of Pinky Madam. He is shocked and can understand the threat which is made by storks' family. He thinks that not to stay in a Rooster coop as chickens wait for the butcher to slaughter. He says:

"Go to old Delhi, and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly coloured roosters, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they are next, yet cannot rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with humans in this country." (P. 175-76)

As he belongs to lower class, Storks family does not consider his life. It is a kind of threat to poor people. Further his grandma Kusum wants Balram to marry. However, he does not like to marry as he thinks it is a kind of financial threat. He is not ready to live his life under the financial crisis. He does not marry anyone even though he becomes an entrepreneur. At one point, he decided to break his threats which he has encountered in the society from his birth. On the contrary, he plans to murder Mr. Ashok, though he likes him to the core. He determined to create his own identity. "You were looking for the key for years but the door always open" (Adiga 2008). At last Balram kills him, steals his money and escapes to Bangalore. Balram established The White Tiger Call Taxi service and within two years he becomes a successful Business man.

Thus, this paper reveals that the protagonist of the novel, Balram Halwai is affected by psychological threat. Generally, person is paralysed to overcome barriers in the society one who is affected by stereotype threat. Balram feels inferior from his school days till he went to work as a driver to Mr. Ashok. As a student, he drops his school and as a servant he cannot

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socialize with his fellow servants. In addition to that he avoids marriage because of fear not to manage his life meticulously. Notwithstanding, he encourages himself to get rid of these barriers. He becomes an active listener and he observes everyone whom he come across in his journey from Laxmangarh to Delhi. He realised that to create his self- identity. Eventually he plots a plan to kill Mr. Ashok not because of he has money but to take revenge on him. He is afraid of Mr. Ashok's family that they would kill the family members of Balram. So, in advance he planned to kill him. His negative stereotype threat shapes his intellectual ability to excel in his life. At last with money which he stolen from Mr. Ashok, escaped to Bangalore and run a successful business. Hence, he transformed his negative stereotype threats to positive one to achieve his dream and to create his own social identity.

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