

Foucault's Caring for Self, Korzybski's Time Binding Force and the Failure of Aravind's Adiga's *The White Tiger*

- Sudhir K Arora

Abstract: “For what is ethics, if not the practice of freedom, the conscious practice of freedom (284)?” are Foucault's words that truly present the nature of ethics to a great extent. The word 'conscious' before 'practice of freedom' makes a human being feel the value of freedom. Freedom, if enjoyed without feel, takes a man to the kingdom of animals. But, when it is felt within, it directs his conduct that leads to the way of human kingdom. In this paper, Alfred Korzybski's time-binding force is interwoven with Michel Foucault's caring of self for caring others for the true realization of freedom that makes a man a useful being who with his time binding force binds time.

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“Man has the capacity of time-biding—he binds time”, says Alfred Korzybski. A man who cares for himself and remains confined only to himself without passing the output to others is no better than an animal. To be a human being is not simply to be a human being from outside but from within. If he comes to know his inner being and feels within, he can enjoy freedom in true sense. Such a man will not be a slave of his longings and belongings. But, if he is a slave, no doubt, he can enjoy the pleasures physically but always remains restless from within. Michel Foucault is right when he states: “Taking care of oneself requires knowing oneself. Care of the self is, of course, knowledge of the self—this is the Socratic-Platonic aspect—but also knowledge of a number of rules of acceptable conduct or of principles that are both truths and prescriptions. To take care of the self is to equip oneself with these truths: this is where ethics is linked to the game of truth” (285).

Caring for 'Self' is a prior condition to care for others. How can one care for others until or unless he cares for his own Self. If he takes care of himself properly, to use Michael Foucault, “he will, by the same token, be able to conduct himself properly in relation to others and for others” (287). Such a man is well aware of what others feel. He puts himself in their place and then acts—such act when applied to him may not harm. Using powers over others makes a man significant but how to use them properly qualifies him for being a true human being. Here, “power over oneself” helps in regulating “one's powers over others” (Michel Foucault 288). As a man is gifted with time binding capacity, he believes in “idealization” and never judges human beings with the space-binding

force of animals. He knows that “survival in space” leads to “fighting and other brutal forms of struggle” while “survival in time” leads to “intellectual or spiritual competition, struggle for excellence, for making the best survive” (Korzybski 147). Aravind Adiga in *The White Tiger* has employed the theory of “survival of the fittest” not as time binding force but as space binding force. He does not communicate, rather, barks. Korzybski's words “Those who speak of the “survival of the fittest” as in the Darwinian Theory of animals bark an animal language” (139) applies in Adiga's case. He makes his characters animals that do nothing except binding the space for the sake of their greed, exploitations and animal-like pleasures. Korzybski believes that “there is a vicious implication in using the name of an animal to denote a purely human product” (150). Adiga uses and judges man with the animals' standards. He is a total failure from the viewpoints of Korzybski's theory that propounds: “Animals units and standards are to be applied to animals, human standards to man, “Divine” standards to “God.” (151).

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, as the title suggests, is a tiger of rare species in the form of Barlam Halwai, a man only in name but an animal in his deeds. It is he who believes in survival of the fittest not in time-binding sense but in space-binding sense. Though he seems to propagate the philosophy: “Let animals live like animals; let humans live like humans”, he suggests one murder to be a man. How can animals live like animals and humans like humans when humans become animals? He does not understand why “Free people don't understand the value of freedom” (*The White Tiger* 117). What does freedom mean? Does freedom come only after committing murder? He is the only one who understands the value of freedom and so murders his master to be free. He goes to Bangalore where, for him, “the men of this city, frankly speaking are animals” (*The White Tiger* 298). When he gets him settled well, he plans to sell everything to begin an English language school where he will turn children into white tigers that will not learn ethics or religion but only science and technology. What will be the future of such a school and the students that he wishes to produce? For him, relationship is meaningless. What will happen? Is he not leading the state into anarchy where there will be the rule of 'might is right'? Murder a man to become a man. What a philosophy! He treats his employees as animals, not as human beings. When the work is done, he kicks them out of the office. “no chitchat, no cup of coffee. A White Tiger keeps no friends” (*The White Tiger* 302). He does not call his employees servants because he speaks little. What his tongue cannot do is performed by his leg that kicks the employees as soon as the work is over? What will happen if the drivers follow his example? Is there any guarantee if an ambitious driver may murder Barlam Halwai and become the master—the driver of drivers? 'Circumstances make man' gives place to 'man makes circumstances' for an ambitious man. What Barlam speaks today will be spoken tomorrow by more powerful white tiger. “Once I was a driver to a master, but now I am a master of drivers” (*The White Tiger* 302). The story of murder will continue. The school inspector calls Barlam the white tiger and, this

tiger, with the passage of time, crosses the village jungle to enter the city where he is called “the country mouse” by other drivers. The four landowners who present the view of feudalistic society prevalent at an early stage are Buffalo, Stork, Wild Boar and Raven. Adiga has not called them by their names but by the name of animals because of their animal appetite. The stork's sons Mr Mukesh and Mr Ashok are 'the mongoose' and 'the lamb' respectively. When the white tiger Balram kills the lamb Mr Ashok, he does not feel sorry or shame at the later stage rather he realizes that he “should have cut the Mongoose's neck” (*The White Tiger* 317). Even the whisky is also named after animals like 'Black Dog', 'Royal Stag', 'Wild Horse' etc. Not to talk of wine, even language does not escape from his space-binding force. He uses derogatory words for Urdu: “Some books were in Urdu, the language of the Muslims – which is all just scratches and dots, as if some crow dipped its feet in black ink and pressed them to the page” (*The White Tiger* 253). Is Urdu merely scratches and dots? Is it crow that writes it with its feet in black ink? The crow is nowhere; it is in the mind of Adiga who makes it write such.

As Adiga is ethically bankrupt, he enjoys playing with the religious sentiments. He may be a Marxist or any. He has full freedom to propagate what he wishes but he has no right to do it at the cost of defaming or hurting others' religious feelings. *The White Tiger* is a text that mocks everything—be it religion, politics or social system or human beings. The white tiger is a tiger—an animal in the form of a man but inwardly he is not a human being from any angle. Gods are not gods for him; rather they seem to be 'arses' for kissing. Touching feet or kissing them is not in his culture. Adiga may be an atheist or a staunch believer in the principles of communism but he has no right to call gods 'arses'. For him, there are 36,000,000 Hindu gods, one Muslim god and three Christian gods making the total of 36,000,004 divine arses, among which he has to choose one. Later, he adds one more name to the list—Buddha, when he answers to the question of the inspector about Buddha saying first that he was 'An enlightened man', then, 'An enlightened god.' What Adiga writes in bracket is worth-noticing. (Oops! Thirty-six million and five--!) (*The White Tiger* 34). He adds one more name—Buddha to the list that now has the total of thirty-six million and five. But, what is worth-noticing is the hyphen after the word five. Is he afraid of the Chinese Premier or China where the followers of Buddhism reside? Has he no courage to fill the gap with the word 'arses'. He is a sadist who takes pleasure in hurting others. He is not satisfied with this and, so, makes Balram Halwai ridicule the Muslim bookseller.

He shook his head, but I kept flattering him, telling him how fine his beard was, how fair his skin was (ha!), how it was obvious from his nose and forehead that he wasn't some pigherd who has converted but a true-blue Muslim who had flown here on a magic carpet all the way from Mecca, and he grunted with satisfaction. (*The White Tiger* 253)

What is noticeable here is the way he flatters. He praises him for his beard and fair skin while the reality is that his beard is white and skin is black. Earlier, he describes his face as “a pitch-black face that was bedewed

with sweat" (*The White Tiger* 253). The word 'ha' within bracket makes his intention clear that it is not his praise rather it is hatred that he has for the Muslims. To call him that he is a true Muslim who has directly come from Mecca is nothing except the emotional blackmailing. The use of the word 'pigherd' needs no explanation as it reveals the inner pattern of his mind. He commits, to quote Korzybski, "the same kind of blundering as when we intermix phenomena—meaning "God" by human standards, or human beings by animal standards" (150). Gods are not gods, rather they are politicians who "seem to do awfully little work" and "keep winning reelection to their golden thrones in heaven, year after year" (*The White Tiger* 8).

Do Indians think of beak, arse, boobs, women's begging for dipping beak? or Is it Adiga's brain that gets erected and begin to work? The beak is in the brain. This is his beak that makes him see arses of 36, 000, 004 gods. When will the White Tiger kiss gods' feet in place of arses? He has his readymade suggestion for curing any disease whether of body or mind through dipping the beak into a virgin? His sex market has earned a high profit. He has changed the previously script developing the body of culture into the culture of the body. Thanks to the boom of consumerism that has turned the world into postmodernism where everything is for sale. One day, when the tiger becomes old, he will be forced to think because of his approaching death that the beak is only a means of releasing lust that turns a man into an animal. What counts is man. Certainly, in old age, the beak of white tiger will become weak to the extent that it will not be able to colour the forbidden landscape. Then, "the beak into anything" will become "the beak into nothing" and out of this nothing, he will take out something which will give him a meaning to his life. Adiga's *The White Tiger* is a total failure from the ethical viewpoints. None but animal will like to feel such pleasure out of sheer selfishness that does not take others' selves into consideration. He has applied animal standard to human standard and the result is an atmosphere that creates greed, war, struggle and class differences. "Applying animal standard to time-binding beings", for Korzybski, is "like applying inches to measuring weight" (147). This is what Adiga has done in *The White Tiger* that justifies animal logic which ultimately results in "animal ethics and animal economics" (148). That's why the cunning white tiger keeps on fattening on "the living of the fruit of the dead" (148). The fruit in red bag containing cash makes him enjoy the pleasures that he wished to enjoy. But, there is no guarantee that the pleasures that he enjoys may remain with him as some other strong tiger may kill or snatch what he has gained out of selfishness. His freedom is short-lived because it is not according to the "ethos of freedom" which makes "a way of caring for others" (Michel Foucault 287). He abuses power and misuses his freedom in order to impose his own "fantasies, appetites, and desires on others" (Michel Foucault 288). This tiger longs for mastering over others without mastering over himself and hence fails to feel freedom in real sense though he enjoys freedom without inner satisfaction. If the white tiger, Balram had not taken care of himself

properly, he would have never exercised his dominating power over others. Korzybski believes :”The fittest in time—those who make the best survive—are those who do the most in producing values for all mankind including posterity” (148). But, the white tiger has done nothing that may make him known to the mankind. He takes freedom as a license while the truth is that freedom is neither “license” nor “licentiousness”. “Freedom”, to quote Korzybski, “consists in lawful living—in living in accord with the laws of human nature—in accord with the natural laws of Man. (154). Adiga has used “survival of the fittest” in Darwinian way that leads to the animal world that believes in space binding. His protagonist is not time-binder as he kills his master to encroach space. “I was blind. I was free” (*The White Tiger* 286). He is blind to time but quite awake to space where he enjoys his unlawful living. He is blind to ethics which approves the lawful living. The Darwinian specs make him see “the fittest” as “the strongest.” When will the white tiger know that “survival of the fittest” means “best in science and art and wisdom” which is “a natural law for mankind, the time-binding class of life” (Korzybski 154)? Who will make him understand that the true freedom lies in being the master of self that cares for others and true pleasure is within which can be felt only when one knows himself properly. Who will tell him that true happiness is not in encroaching others' happiness but in giving happiness? When will he translate Foucault's 'Caring for Self' and Korzybski's 'Time Binding Force' in reality? Who will make him learn the new mantra: “Know what your true self is; come out of your space that binds you to selfishness; bind time with your rightful acts and then you will feel light of freedom that makes you radiant to the extent that others may enjoy what you feel”? He chants “murder and be a man”, the only mantra that tempts him to bind space for caring his own self at the cost of others. He is merely a white tiger and will remain so. Hence, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* proves to be a total failure when Korzybski's time-binding force and Foucault's caring for self are applied to it as touchstones.

References :

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