

# A Comparative Study of Radha Kumar and Balram Halwai: The Despondent Dreamer and The Desensitized Doer

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This paper presents the comparative study of the character of Radha Kumar from the novel "*Selection Day*" and the character of Balram Halwai from the novel "*The White Tiger*." The themes of ambition, identity, social inequality, class struggle, and familial control are common in both the novels written by Aravind Adiga. The theme of class struggle and familial control plays a major role in the comparison between Radha Kumar and Balram Halwai.

The Despondent Dreamer represents Radha Kumar's character in the beginning of the novel as highly ambitious who dreams to become an ace cricket player. Although he is trapped by his father's obsessive vision, he had deep admiration for sports. However, over time, he loses hope and confidence and becomes disconnected from his dream. On the other hand, the Desensitized Doer, represents the character of Balram Halwai, and as a response to the familial control, he chooses to rebel and perceives success in his life.

However, Balram Halwai chooses an unethical path; he murders his employer and becomes a successful entrepreneur. However, by comparing both the characters, this study explores how family governance and ambition shape individuals, leading to internal conflict, downfall, and ethical compromise. The study ultimately emphasizes how personal identity, perseverance, and social settings influence the choices that individuals make when their dreams are denied and thwarted.

**Keywords:** Ambition and Identity; Class Struggle and Social Inequality; Dreams and Downfall, Familial Control; Internal Conflict.

Aravind Adiga, an Indian writer and journalist's debut novel, *The White Tiger*, won the Man Booker Prize in 2008. His novels frequently explore poverty, social inequality, familial control, and identity. Through his novels *The White Tiger* and *Selection Day*, he probes deep into the complexities of Indian society by highlighting the class struggles of the marginalized and showing contrasts between the elite and the poor.

Aravind Adiga explores the theme of ambition, and the oppression of the family, which leads the characters into ambiguity. Aravind Adiga's portrayal of ambition is not merely aspirational but intricately tied to the moral and emotional compromises which his Characters have endured. His protagonists often navigate a path of ambiguity, oscillating between ethical dilemmas and their survival instincts. In these novels, he represents the characters who overcome parental control, societal oppression, and class struggles.

Ambition is the driving force of both Radha Kumar and Balram Halwai. Although ambition drives them both, it is important to examine how they pursue their dreams in distinct ways.

In the novel *Selection Day*, Radha Kumar and Manjunath Kumar, the sons of Mohan Kumar, emerge as a prominent cricket players where their aspiration are enforced by their father. Mohan Kumar aspires to make his sons, Radha Kumar and Manjunath Kumar as national cricket stars. “If you make it onto the Ranji team, that’ll do. One point five lakhs a month will be your salary.” (Selection Day 225). Mohan Kumar’s words lucidly explicates the situation about his father’s burden on them just for financial gain. Radha Kumar wholeheartedly wishes to dedicate himself to fulfil his father’s expectations even if that warrants his own desires. Initially, he was very passionate about his game. “I love the feel of the leather on my bat.” (Selection Day 17). This shows Radha Kumar’s deep connection to the game, as he follows his father’s instruction and practices tirelessly.

However, Mohan Kumar’s dictatorial control over Radha Kumar transforms his passion for cricket into a burden. His father makes him feel that cricket is the only prominent sport and cricket should be the only focus of his life. Mohan Kumar considers Radha Kumar as a project to gain financial support and never bothered to treat him with dignity and respect. “My son, you were not born to fail: believe in me, today of all days.” (Selection Day 224). This statement expounds how Mohan Kumar motivates Radha Kumar, and expects him to play and win, undergoing a lot of pressure. Day by day, the pressure of the game and the prospects of father crushes his spirit in the game.

This leads to a decrease in the intensity of Radha Kumar’s passion. Radha Kumar becomes a despondent dreamer who pursues a dream that no longer belongs to him. In due course, he withdraws and become inefficient to rebel against his father’s expectation and eventually, he lost his interest in the course of his journey towards success.

In the novel, *The White Tiger*, Balram Halwai who was born in the village of Laxmangarh, a small and impoverished village on the banks of the Ganga River in Bihar is self-driven. He is trapped in poverty and dreams of escaping enslavement. “The story of a poor man’s life is written on his body, in cuts and scars and bulges.” (The White Tiger 22). These lines explore how poverty and oppression affect individuals, both physically and mentally. He then runs away from his village and initially goes to

Dhanbad in Jharkhand, where he works in a tea shop, and later escapes to Bangalore and works as a driver for Ashok. It is where his ambition emerges from witnessing the wealth of his employers and the hopelessness of his family. His ambition leads him to a dark but decisive act: he murders his employer and exploits money. Finally, he settles down in Bangalore and establishes his taxi business.

The character of Balram Halwai differs from Radha Kumar, who suffers passively because of his dream, which is imposed by his father. In contrast, Balram Halwai actively nourishes his ambition. His desire for success flourishes because of the humiliation he had experienced as a driver in Delhi. “I am a servant. I am a philosopher. I am a murderer.” (The White Tiger 250). It depicts Balram Halwai’s identity and the adventures in his journey. Balram Halwai’s ambition is merciless and self-propelled, which defines him as a desensitized doer. “I am tomorrow.” (The White Tiger 6). These lines show that Balram Halwai visualizes himself as the future of India, representing ambition and self-creation.

The characters of Radha Kumar and Balram Halwai: the journey of both characters is a study of identity and internal conflict. Radha Kumar’s identity is not something he forms independently rather, it is scrupulous constructed by his father, whose expectations, training methods, and personal ambitions

dictate every aspect of Radha Kumar's personality, choices, and connection to cricket. He is, above all, a cricketer, a role imposed upon him rather than one he has chosen for himself. Radha Kumar begins to question his love for his sport but he also questions his sense of self. "I no longer remembered why I played cricket." (Selection Day 192). These lines elucidate the impact of the internal conflict and self-doubt that Radha Kumar undergoes. He indicates the pain of a boy who doesn't belong to his choice of ambition, but imposed eternally by his father. "We had no choice, son. But if you have learned how to give this absurd game everything, you will have learned how to do the same in life." (Selection Day 223). This shows how Radha Kumar is forced by his father, equating cricket with his life. The internal conflict in Radha Kumar emerges in him, and it results in the emotional withdrawal and the loss of purpose.

In comparison, the character of Balram Halwai undergoes a profound identity shift. At the beginning of his journey, he was an obedient servant conditioned by his family and society to accept his place in the "Rooster Coop." "The rooster coop never opens, and the ones inside don't even try to escape." (The White Tiger 68). It indicates the metaphor of Balram Halwai for the system of servitude which keeps the poor as obedient. Aravind Adiga's metaphor for the social and psychological trap binds the poor to their masters. The internal conflict of Balram Halwai is between his loyalty to his master and the freedom he wants and between his morality and survival. In the end, he makes the difficult but decisive choice to prioritize his own survival and freedom. "Do we loathe our masters behind a façade of love or do we love them behind a facade of loathing?" (The White Tiger 187). This line captures Balram Halwai's conflicted feelings toward his employer, Mr. Ashok. His transformation from servant to self-made business man is attained by sacrificing his morality and loyalty.

In the context of the characters, Radha Kumar and Balram Halwai, Radha Kumar internalizes his oppression and ambiguity within himself has resulted in the emotional withdrawal and silent despair. Balram Halwai externalizes his struggles and oppression and by breaking his boundaries of morality and loyalty to establish a new life.

Both novels of Aravind Adiga emphasize the weight of parental control and social inequality that shape the destinies of Radha Kumar and Balram Halwai. In the novel, *Selection Day*, parental control dominates Radha Kumar's life, whereas, Mohan Kumar's ambitions for his sons allow no room for their own choices. The way Mohan Kumar governs his sons' lives affords them no freedom of personal choice. Even the other characters in the novel, comments over his obsession indicating that he is "raising cricketers, not children." (Selection Day 60). It is evident on how Mohan Kumar raises his boys for his financial profit. Radha Kumar's tragedy begins when he is unable to free himself from parental control. Thus, his story exposes the psychological toll of a life dictated by his father's ambition rather than systematic poverty.

In the novel *The White Tiger*, Balram Halwai's oppression is multi-layered. He does not face only familial oppression, but he also the oppression of society in terms of economic and caste-based discrimination. The society ensures that there are limited opportunities for Balram Halwai, meanwhile his family expects his loyalty, morality, and financial support from him. Thus, he describes his reality as "The poor man is trapped in the coop of his own family, his own village, his own caste." (The White Tiger 83). These words of Balram Halwai explore his state where he is trapped in his village and cannot afford any financial gain because of his caste and society. Hence, the central context of both characters is that Radha Kumar is crushed by personal and familial ambition, which leads to quiet despair. However, Balram Halwai is trapped by systematic social inequality, which transforms him into a violent

rebel. It reveals how familial governance and social inequality in Indian society can stifle individuality and distort ambition.

Balram Halwai's journey is both ethical and violent as he actively dismantles the chains of oppression, but he does so through murder and betrayal. After stepping into an immoral act, he justifies his actions by claiming that morality has no place in the world as that completely occupied by exploitation. As he demonstrates, "To break free from the coop, you must be willing to see blood." (The White Tiger 176). These lines reflect Balram Halwai's justification of violence at the cost of liberation from servitude.

Radha Kumar's downfall is primarily psychological, as he passively accepts his decline without resorting to breaking the rules or rebelling against the forces which control his life. This indicates that his tragedy is the slow death of his ambition. "Cricket became a chore, not a calling." (Selection Day 184). Radha Kumar's words make it clear that he realizes that his passion is absolutely gone. "He stared at the pitch and felt nothing. Not joy, not fear, not even anger." (Selection Day 188). This is a symbolic moment of Radha Kumar's complete detachment from cricket. Emotional withdrawal and silent despair reveal the pain of a young man struggling under the heavy burden of expectations and the controlling influence of his father. "Bad luck can take a million forms at the start of an innings." (Selection Day 224). This line by Aravind Adiga is reflected as a metaphor for Radha Kumar's life, where early promise of Radha Kumar is bothered by his father's control and his own inability to rebel. Finally, both characters from the two ends of the spectrum can be viewed Radha Kumar, the passive victim of ambition is moral, but despondent about his life. Balram Halwai, an active rebel is liberated, but morally compromised.

From the selected novels of Aravind Adiga, the characters of Radha Kumar and Balram Halwai embody two divergent responses to similar pressures such as ambition, familial control, and social inequality. Radha Kumar, the Despondent Dreamer, surrenders to the burden of dreams imposed by his father, leading to silent despair. Balram Halwai, the Desensitized Doer, goes against social, ethical, and moral codes to seize his freedom and to achieve success by destroying his innocence and conscience.

Through these characters, Aravind Adiga presents an unadorned modern Indian society, a place where the dreams of young men are either crushed or corrupted.

Radha Kumar is a representation of a young man whose dream is crushed, but he is morally right. Balram Halwai is an embodiment of a vibrant young man whose ambition is corrupted and who lost his morality and loyalty. This comparative study reveals that ambition under pressures such as familial pressure, class struggle, and internal conflict can result in two forms of tragedy, one is the silent tragedy of unrealized potential, and the other is the violent tragedy of moral compromise.

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