

Paradoxical Portrayal of Oppression and Liberation in Schindler's Ark and the White Tiger.

DR. S. ANAND SARGUNARAJ¹, JEEVA D²

^{1,2}Assistant Professor of English, KG College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore.

Abstract- This research undertakes a comparative literary analysis of Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's Ark* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* in order to analyse the manner in which literary representations of systemic oppression articulate ways of liberation. These novels with their divergent historical and cultural backgrounds of Nazi eclipsed Poland and India fragmented by its caste-capitalism. Both novels portray the socio-political oppression of marginalized groups and the inherent moral contradictions in the pursuit of liberation. The research unveils the fight against oppression and ethical ambiguities are not disparities but complementary forces that are part of oppressive systems. This paper involves a qualitative methodology with close reading under the lens of postcolonial theory and subaltern theory. The research examines characterisation, power dynamics and literary representations of oppression. The study proposes that the ethical contradiction seen in the protagonists like Oskar Schindler and Balram Halwai is not a character flaw but the reflection of the true nature of resistance. By bridging holocaust and postcolonial literatures, the research contributes to closing the critical gap of isolation of these genres. Through a juxtaposition of *Schindler's Ark* and *The White Tiger*, the study offers a systemic understanding of literary representations of survival and complicity as a morally entangled notion. It pushes the boundaries of scholarly discussions on oppression and liberation within the contexts of power dynamics, subaltern ethics and discursive practices.

Index Terms- Comparative literary analysis, Ethical resistance, Survival and complicity, Subaltern agency and Narrative ethics.

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature has always been the linguistic portal for profound expression with the desire for liberation and resistance against oppression. Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's Ark* that depicts the dark history of holocaust may appear disparate if weighed up against Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* which centered on India's caste and class hierarchies in a neoliberal economy. While on the one hand Oskar Schindler, a

Nazi, ironically becomes the saviour of Jews, Balram Halwai, on the other hand, achieves liberation through an act of murder and becomes a self-proclaimed entrepreneur. Both of them, in their fight to achieve redemption and freedom, blur the boundaries between virtue and vice. They challenge the readers to confront the undeniable reality that liberty and redemption emanate from ambiguous ethical choices.

The study addresses the underexplored area of comparative study on holocaust and postcolonial fiction, focusing on how these two genres depict power dynamics, violence, and moral contradiction. The present literature on *Schindler's Ark* centers around historical representation of Holocaust and its memory. Existing literature on *The White Tiger* mostly accentuates postcolonial identity, corruption and socio-economic division prevailing in India. However, there has been limited study on the resistance against oppression and liberation emerging from moral compromise. The present study employs a comparative analysis of these texts to explore the ways in which the general perception of oppression and liberation are challenged.

The objectives discussed in this paper are as follows:

1. To study the representation of systemic oppression through narrative structure and character development in the novels *Schindler's Ark* and *The White Tiger*
2. To analyse the role of moral paradox in the protagonists' quest for freedom.
3. To explore the moral consequences of liberation emanating from acts of violence.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach based on close textual analysis under the lens of postcolonial

theory and subaltern narrative theory. Though both the novels are divergent culturally, a comparative literary analysis is employed to analyse the shared thematic concerns in their narratives. In this study, both the novels are subjected to thematic and rhetorical analysis with a focus on paradox as narrative core and a philosophical drive of the protagonists. Through a critical examination of characters, symbols, underlying ideological frameworks, and motifs, the study seeks to explore the contribution of these texts to the understanding of freedom and resistance.

The study enriches academic engagement with its comparison of Holocaust and postcolonial struggles and offers an unified analytical approach to explore the workings of power dynamics and paradox in these texts. The research unfolds the role of literature in highlighting the intricate nature of oppression and the ethically contested nature of liberation. By foregrounding paradoxical portrayal as a strategic resistance, the paper contributes to contemporary political discussions and trauma studies and offers novel ways of interpretation in the contexts of historical violence.

III. DISCUSSION

The novels *Schindler's Ark* and *The White Tiger* unravel the nature of oppression and liberation through the lens of paradoxes via its ethically ambiguous protagonists who counter systemic oppression by being a part of the system. The portrayal of the characters Oskar Schindler and Balram Halwai as complex embodiments of contradictions as saviour as well as oppressor unfolds new perspectives on the nature of liberation.

In *Schindler's Ark*, the characterisation of Oskar Schindler is revolutionary because of his liberating actions that challenge the binaries of saviour and the prosecutor. As a German industrialist and a Nazi party member, he lives the life of a war profiteer who exploits Jewish labourers for cheap wages. Later on, when his workers face the dangers of deportation and death, he emerges as a redeemer despite the risk of losing his wealth and reputation. About his contradictory nature, Keneally writes: "He was not a virtuous man in the conventional sense, yet there it is—he saved more Jews than any other single

individual in the war. Not because he had to. Not because he was told to. But because he chose to" (Keneally, 220). His choice of saving Jewish lives amidst holocaust comes not from his clean consciousness or any ideology he follows but it emerges from his complex nature accentuated by his contradictions. He is an unlikely saviour who is a drunkard, an unfaithful husband and a close friend to many Nazi officers. In the novel, he is called a "flawed vessel" (Keneally, 95) because his ambiguous moral compass is entangled with his acts of redemption. His resistance against Jewish oppression comes through bribing Nazi military officials, manipulation of official records, destruction of weapons. Such acts are possible only due to his privileged status in the oppressive structures which he fights from within. This morally paradoxical defiance illustrates the fact that resistance is more potent while operating within the oppressive system.

Similarly, in *The White Tiger*, the novel centres around the individual called Balram Halwai who breaks all the barriers to ascend in the social hierarchy by committing murder. Through his journey towards liberation, the novel exposes the grim realities of deep-rooted systemic violence and injustice caused by caste, economic disparity and capitalism in modern India. As an individual born in a lower-caste family in a backward village in Bihar, he lives a life of a slave under his employer Ashok. By murdering him and escaping with large amounts of money, he transforms himself into a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. Though his redemption comes out of a crime, it was the only viable option of the darkness of oppression. About his liberation, Balram declares, "I am in the Light now, but I was born and raised in Darkness. I have made it out. I am a free man" (Adiga, 14). Balram does not feel guilty of his violence rather he justifies it by unveiling moral bankruptcy of the society that institutionalises exploitation and criminalizes only the act of resistance. The novel is written in epistolary form in which Balram acts as a narrator and confesses his life story to a Chinese Premier. This choice of narration resonates with the theme and acts as what Spivak describes as the "subaltern voice that speaks through distortion" (Spivak, 285). Adiga points out that freedom of choice on moral actions is a mere illusion in an oppressive structure, as Balram declares, "I was

looking for the key for years, but the door was always open” (Adiga 282). His liberation is thus undeniably tied with violence and moral compromise.

Both novels depict oppressive systems as a dynamic external force that internalises the ideologies of violence. The novel *Schindler's Ark* meticulously depicts the institutionalisation of genocide to make it 'normal' for Germans. The way Nazi's documentation of human beings and their death to reduce Jewish as mere objects reflected their ruthless nature. Reflecting on their cruelty, Keneally writes, "To the Nazis, the Jews were not people but figures, cattle to be moved, bodies to be processed. Yet to Schindler, these figures became faces, names, histories" (Keneally, 184). The novel traces how Schindler slowly grows sympathetic towards Jewish people. His recognition of their human worth is an act of resistance against institutionalised dehumanisation. Nevertheless, his moral transformation and his acts of redemption become possible due to his privileged status in the Nazi oppressive dynamics. As a person who is deep rooted in the machinery of oppression, he uses the same exploitative tools like bribes, political connections, and fraudulent paperwork but this time it is to save Jewish workers.

In *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga uses the metaphor of the "Rooster Coop" to bring out how violence is a part of oppressive structure and gets deep rooted through psychological conditioning. One day, Balram witnesses how a group of roosters which are kept in a cage never attempts to escape the slaughter despite watching other roosters killed one by one. The incident is an eye opener for Balram who describes the Coop as, "Hundreds of pale hens and brightly colored roosters stuffed tightly into wire cages. They see the blood. They smell the blood. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the cage" (Adiga, 147). The Rooster Coop is not simply a physical cage but a psychological one. The poor in India are ideologically enslaved by the society and the marginalized people are made to accept their low social status and servitude as 'normal' without making any effort to come out of it. In this world of systemic oppression and violence, Balram's rebellion is justified as it is not merely personal but a societal

one. It is a resistance against the system that enslaves subalterns like him through violence and criminalises only if the violence is against it. His calculated violence is a declaration of marginals towards breaking the shackles that bind them psychologically and physically. Addressing the Chinese Premier, he asserts that this moral contradiction is the ethos of a new India, "I am tomorrow" (Adiga, 276).

Schindler's Ark, at the national level, is a blend of history and literature where the non-fictional real incidents are animated into the reader's imagination through its literary dramatization. Real names, events, and testimonies charge the Schindler's narrative into a historical iconography. Though Keneally explores the ethical duality of the protagonist, he never goes for relativism of paralleling the actions of cruel Nazis as moral equivalents to Schindler's actions. In contrast, *The White Tiger* is written from first person perspective in epistolary form which gives Balram the discursive control over the readers to shape their moral and societal perception. This subjectivity provides a strategic vantage position from which his subaltern voice is amplified to have complete control over his story. This narrative positioning by Adiga reflects Foucault's 'power and knowledge' where truth is a construction through a discourse. Balram's storytelling is an expression of his resistance through self-fashioning which is a rejection of victimhood.

The research paper examines how the paradox interplay between form as well as content. Schindler is not a fully redeemed person whereas Balram is not fully a condemned human being. The novels never resolve their moral complexities and reflect the paradoxical nature of the action in unjust oppressive systems. The novels raise questions on the feasibility of ethical actions within the system that upholds violence. It is hard to ignore Gayatri Spivak's thought provoking question, "Can the subaltern speak?" while analysing the ways in which both the protagonists Balram and Schindler act. Both are not bound by the system and they disrupt it by manipulating its codes. This redefines resistance which here is not a noble condition but as a strategic contradiction. Schindler, instead of rejecting Nazi regime outwardly, used his position as an insider of the party and industrialist in the war economy to create a sanctuary to his Jewish

workers. His factory, Emalia is a place of forced labour still it was a safe haven for the labourers to escape from holocaust gas chambers. Highlighting the moral contradiction, Keneally writes: “Emalia was no paradise... Yet it was, for its time and place, a sanctuary. A heaven with guards at the gate” (Keneally, 245). Similarly, Balram instead of dismantling the complex web of caste-capitalist oppression, he exploits it by creating loopholes in it. He creates a new identity as “Ashok Sharma” for himself and becomes a business owner but maintains the inequalities that he faced once. For Balram, this act is not cheating but evolution. He mentions: “The rest of us are just one white tiger away from changing our fate” (Adiga, 276). Balram’s symbolic identification with white tiger is the proclamation of his individual rebellion against the oppression. The white tiger is a unique animal and a once in a generation wonder. By identifying with it, Balram makes a statement that he is not the ordinary rooster, the victim rather a killer powered with predatory intelligence. His path is neither angelic nor demonic but a subaltern’s survival strategy.

The moral dilemma depicted by both novels redefines resistance, morality and justice beyond the assumptions of binaries of good and bad. Neither text provides an idealistic portrayal of the protagonists. While Schindler is completely entangled with the Nazi system, Balram becomes the oppressor he once hated. The protagonist's identity without any moral clarity is not aimed to be a radical gesture but as a reflection of reality. It intends to illustrate that ethical absolutism under the condition of systemic violence is a chaotic one and often a compromise. In *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985) Elaine Scarry asserts the ability of literature to articulate the trauma of marginalised people. He says: “make visible the invisible injuries of oppression” (11).

The novels *Schindler’s Ark* and *The White Tiger* perform this literary function by exhibiting the survival of flawed protagonists without any dramatization of victimhood. Such survival frameworks are morally contentious but politically necessary. They expose the limitations of ethical norms and emphasise the importance of accepting the paradoxical condition as a part of human nature. By

focusing on the paradox as a literary resistance and ethical condition, this research fulfills the research objectives and enables an interdisciplinary analysis in literary studies in the light of postcolonial theory and subaltern theory. The paper also discusses the shared themes of paradoxes of resistance and complicity in these two novels, providing deeper insight on liberation as a dialectical process shaped by power dynamics, identity politics and history. The discussions of these two novels provide deeper insights into the different narratives of life and context. It brightens the shared narratives used to deal with the paradoxes of resistance and complicity. The discussions ultimately argue that liberation is not a linear movement toward justice, but a dialectical process shaped by history, identity, and power.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Schindler’s *Ark* and *The White Tiger*, with their morally ambiguous protagonists Oskar Schindler and Balram Halwai, provide an incisive literary discourse on the intricacies of oppression and of liberation. The novels are critical interrogation on the nature of liberation which is not feasible with traditional ethos of balance but through moral ambiguity. The research has shown that the texts demonstrate that resistance is a dialectical process based on power and survival rather than simple moral categorisation. Another key finding of this comparative study is that moral contradictions are not antithetical but rather they are central to resistance. These novels accentuate the potential of literature to reinterpret the common conception of justice and morals and give rise to narratives from flawed humans instead of conventional puritarian versions. In this way, these novels enrich literary and moral discussions by highlighting the complexities of liberation which are rarely addressed by moral purity. The study demonstrates that works of art supported with comparative and critical theoretical viewpoints critically interrogate socio-political realities. The authors, Keneally and Adiga, should be appreciated for their choice of narratives and off the beat characterisations to portray the morally ambiguous nature of their eras. Their works are not just reflections of historical and social injustices but also reinterpretations of freedom, resistance and agency. This study acknowledges their contributions by

depicting their contribution to illuminate the intricacies and contradictions of resistance against oppression and journey towards liberation.

REFERENCES

- [1] Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. HarperCollins, 2008.
- [2] Keneally, Thomas. *Schindler's Ark*. Hodder & Stoughton, 1982.
- [3] Adorno, Theodor. *Negative Dialectics*. Continuum, 1973.
- [4] Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- [5] Nussbaum, Martha C. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford University Press, 1990.
- [6] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- [7] Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. Pantheon, 1980.
- [8] Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford University Press, 1985. Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage, 1993.
- [9] LaCapra, Dominick. *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*. Cornell University Press, 1994.