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## NIETZSCHE'S UBERMENSCH IN FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY'S *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT* AND ARAVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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### ABSTRACT

It is inherent to human beings to strive to achieve. But in some men, this tendency augments to bigger proportions and often leads to disastrous results. Nietzsche's Ubermensch strives to become superior individual beyond being 'human all too human'(Nietzsche), establishing own values and affecting lives of others. Both Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and Balram in *The White Tiger* (2008) can be examined from Nietzsche's concept of Ubermensch. Nietzsche's exposition of The Will to Power and Superman Substantiate that a man should strive for the higher self and find the essence of existence without merging it with moral values. The protagonists of *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and *The White Tiger* (2008) represent Nietzsche's Ubermensch. The most striking similarity between Raskolnikov and Balram is their idea of the extraordinary man, the over human. Both committed crime as a means towards becoming Superman. Both characters' 'sense of self' begs comparison between them. Although, they differ in a way they response to their crime. Both commit crime, but transformed their lives in a different way. The present research paper pursues a comparative study of Raskolnikov and Balram in the Nietzschean context by identifying differences and parallels between their personality traits. Both Raskolnikov and Balram aspire to create a new life living on their own terms. Their predicament to lead such life along their moral perplexity is critically analyzed in the present research paper. It tests the applicability of Nietzsche's Ubermensch theory to both characters and distills the essence of free will and its ultimate consequences.

**Key Words:** Crime and Punishment, The White Tiger, Raskolnikov, Balram, Crime, Nietzsche, Ubermensch.

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### INTRODUCTION

"It was dissatisfaction that prompted men to seek refuge in other-worldliness and embrace other-worldly values"(Nietzsche). This view by Nietzsche that indicates a rise of Ubermensch (Superman) found place in the novels *Crime and Punishment* & *The White Tiger*. Ubermensch is a concept in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. In

his 1883 novel *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche has his character Zarathustra represents the Ubermensch as an ideal man. Ubermensch is also known as Superman, Great man, or over Human. It claims that an Ubermensch would discover new moral values essential for the development and growth of society. He is an ideal man who exceeds conventional morality followed by everyone that

ceases man's growth. The work describes this concept as follows:

I teach you the over man, Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him? All beings so far have created something beyond themselves, and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the over man: A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment... Behold, I teach you the Over man. The Over man is the Meaning of the Earth (*The Perspectives of Nietzsche- Towards The Ubermensch*)

Analogous to the Ubermensch presented above, Raskolnikov and Balram believed themselves beyond ordinary people and exceed all the moral laws. *Crime and Punishment* (1886) by Fyodor Dostoevsky and *The White Tiger* (2008) by Aravind Adiga have been considered excellent novels based on the theme of crime and received immense popularity and worldwide recognition. *Crime and Punishment* is the 19th century's Great Russian novel and is among the greatest classics that fascinates readers of the present age too. *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga is among the best of 21st century's novels of crime in Indian English Literature. It won the prestigious Man's Booker Prize in 2008. Both the novel has parallels in the motives of their protagonists as both mirrors Nietzsche's 'Superman' and wants to rise above the ordinary beings.

Both Dostoevsky and Adiga lead the readers into the subjective utopia of their respective characters. We find the Ubermensch complex in both the novels where the protagonists of the novels considered themselves to be superior among all. Intellectuals are the central figures of *Crime and Punishment* and *The White Tiger*. Both Balram and Raskolnikov present the world from their perspectives. They reveal themselves to be an exemplary figure, an ideal to be followed by society. Raskolnikov and Balram are highly intelligent and have high dreams and visions. Both conceive themselves beyond ordinary people which cause them to commit crime. Both think of themselves to

be the right person to destroy evil from the society and thus bring a change in the society. Both have a vision that they are committing crime for the good of the society and it is necessary for the welfare of mankind and believed that they have all the right and power.

*Crime and Punishment* and *The White Tiger* have occurrences that show similarities between the two protagonists. Both Balram and Raskolnikov determine to murder in order to transform their lives and to prove themselves as great man. Raskolnikov and Balram delude themselves from the conventional norms of the society. Nietzsche's Ubermensch called superman can be identical in the personality traits of both the characters. According to Nietzsche, A superman has a freedom of thought; he creates his own world and doesn't believe in following the conventional norms. According to him, there are two types of Morality: One is the Christian Morality which he calls Slave Morality and the other one is the Creative Morality. Christian Morality is called Slave morality by him because in such morality, a person follows the conventional norms that are believed to be the commands of god, without actually knowing what is right or wrong, they blindly follow it. On the other hand, Creative Morality is man's created morality in which he follows his own instincts; he does what he feels right without taking consideration of the conventional morals. He justifies himself and his actions in the creative reality and believes that whatever he does is worth it. This leads to the concept of Ubermensch or Superman who is beyond a moral system.

In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov has idealistic thoughts about himself. Dostoevsky narrates that the influence of such ideas leads him to his self destruction. Raskolnikov believes himself to be a superman who doesn't fear anyone. Raskolnikov is full of pride. He considers himself to be superior from others:

There was a sort of haughty pride and reserve about him, as though he were keeping something to himself. He seemed to some of his comrades to look down upon them all as children, as though he were superior in development, knowledge and convictions as though their beliefs and

interests were beneath him (Dostoevsky, 53-54).

Raskolnikov's idealistic views and concept of superman found place in his article on crime which is published in the *Periodical Reviews*. He divides human beings in two categories:

I only believe in my leading idea that men are in general divided by a law of nature into two categories, inferior (ordinary) that is, so to say material that serves only to reproduce of its kind, and a men who have the gift or a talent to utter a new word (Dostoevsky, 261).

*The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga narrates a journey of Balram. It depicts how he transformed his life from a servant, then a driver and finally into a successful entrepreneur. The novel caricatures Balram's journey from darkness to Lightness. Balram is the man from darkness. He wrote letters to the Chinese Premiere Jiabo, who is about to visit India. Through the letters written to Jiabo during seven nights, Balram presents a sordid reality of Indian life and the suffering he gone through due to the social evils like poverty, caste system, class difference, corruption, exploitation and so on. Balram is affirming his identity and his place in the society.

Balram from the beginning claims himself to be a great man that can be seen in his letter to Chinese Premiere Jiabo, "I'm a man of action and change" (Adiga, 5). "I am tomorrow (Adiga, 6)". Again, Balram is rewarded for his intellect while the Inspector came to their school; Balram is the one who impressed the inspector through his prompt answers. He considers Balram as "White tiger" because he is *intelligent, smart and honest in this crowd of thugs and idiots*" (Adiga, 35).

On defining what is the ideology of both the characters for committing the crime, we find that in a near parallel, in *The White Tiger*, Ashok is a corrupt person, who is of no need to anyone after his wife left him; by killing him, Balram can make use of his money to live a better life. Accordingly, In Crime and Punishment, the old pawnbroker Alyona Ivanova is a worthless person; by killing her, Raskolnikov can make use of that money to help his family, to complete his education and helping the needy for the good of the society. Balram and

Raskolnikov share their more constructive and ideological views on how to perceive the world and change their lives. In order to live up to their perceptions of world, they committed crime.

Übermensch is an extraordinary human being with unique qualities and profound ideas. He is the ideal for mankind that leads human beings into the world of a new morality. Raskolnikov feels that he is above mankind, and his act of murder will benefit the mankind. In the writings of German philosopher Hegel, we find a general perception of the Übermensch. According to him, man exists for noble purposes, and any means of person are justifiable, if ends are noble. Raskolnikov counterbalance his act by applying this theory for his crime. Raskolnikov worships Napoleons' ideology. As Napoleon bears Übermensch theory; it can be seen in his confession to Sonya. He worshipped Napoleon ideas: "I wanted to make myself a Napoleon..." (Dostoevsky, 350). Raskolnikov claims that like Napoleon, he has the right to do anything. He thinks everything is permissible, if it is done for the good of the society. Affected by half knowledge of such ideals, he threw himself into the dark world of crime.

I wanted to murder for my own sake, for myself alone! ...I wanted to find out then and quickly whether I was a louse like everybody else or a man. Whether I can step over barriers or not, whether I dare stoop to pick up or not, whether I am trembling creature or whether I have the right... (Dostoevsky, 414-415).

In *The White Tiger*, Balram aspires to rise above all. He feels pity for those who remains slave in their entire life, they born poor and cling to their poverty till the end of their life. Balram feels they lack the required courage and strength of will. He feels that he is above all that he has the courage and strong will to come out of the rooster coop "I've made it! I've broken out of the coop!" (Adiga, 320) and rise and live like a self made man. "Once I was a driver to a master, but now I am a master of drivers..." (Adiga, 302).

Raskolnikov aspires to become Nietzsche's Übermensch, but he fails to create his own domain of morality. We find his claim as an Übermensch

when he comprehends why he killed the old woman: "I wanted to overstep all restrictions as quickly as possible...I killed not a human being but a principle!" (Dostoevsky, 274-275). That's what Nietzsche's *Übermensch* stands for. But, soon after the murder, Raskolnikov realized his blemished ideology and embraces moral values as he feels that without a moral authority, the world will be destroyed. Although Raskolnikov attempted to be an over human, as tormented by the guilt, he lost the courage and strength essential of an *Übermensch*. Ultimately, he realized that he is not Napoleon and that he has no right to kill "If I began to question myself...I wasn't Napoleon" (Dostoevsky, 414). Raskolnikov now actualizes the fact that although, he considered himself to be an extraordinary man, he is just an ordinary man. Dostoevsky presented Raskolnikov as an ordinary person strives to become extraordinary, an *Übermensch* but failed. Because, a Superman can overstep all moral codes to achieve his goal, and he is without any guilt because he has every right.

In *The White Tiger*, in constructing his own morality, Balram accepts the assassination of his master as necessary to move towards reaching his goal. Balram aims at moving up from darkness to lightness. Balram has now become Mr. Ashok; he has acquired a new identity: "Yes Ashok! That's what I call myself these days. Ashok Sharma, North Indian Entrepreneur, settled in Bangalore" (Adiga, 302). He believes that only by murdering Ashok, he can come out of the rooster coop and find a place in the world of lightness; His own new world of lightness. Thus, Balram comes out as an immoral protagonist, the murderer, who justifies his violent act by constructing his own moral code.

Balram is an individual thinker, who made his own life choices with least concerned to moral laws. First, he breaks the family code, as he is destined to become a sweet maker, but he chooses a different path and becomes a driver. He is a man of free will and like an *Übermensch*; move ahead in life of Independence and freedom. Balram exposes all the vices of India like Dowry, Corruption, Poverty, Class Difference, and Caste System. It is noted, "Balram is the conscience of underclass, their anger, frustration, protest and revenge, ready to adopt a

new moral code of conduct to succeed in life" (Chopra, qtd. In Sharma, Milan Swaroop).

For Balram, to reach at the top, it was necessary for him to kill his master, and argues that every powerful person who brings change in the world has killed one or other to reach to their target; But isn't it likely that everyone who counts in this world, including our prime minister, has killed someone or other on their way to the top? Kill enough people and they will put up bronze statues to you near Parliament House in Delhi..." (Adiga, 318). Further he rationalize his crime "All I wanted was a chance 'to be a man – and for that, one murder was enough" (Adiga, 318). He thinks himself to be the *Übermensch* who can destroy the evils and can bring change in the world "I think the Rooster Coop needs people like me to break out of it. (Adiga 320)". Under the observed facts, Balram merits to be called an *Übermensch*.

Nietzsche's Over man stands alone and must not allowed his will to be influenced by others and the affirmation of such will alienates a person from society. When Raskolnikov tries to project his will, he finds himself away from humanity. This unbearable condition of alienation leads him to confession to become a part of the society again. Balram completely asserts his own free will without restrain of any moral values. Balram is the one who possesses strongest will and is able to dominate his desires and power over others. Balram can kill his master Ashok, risks the life of his entire family and become a successful entrepreneur without any guilt and fear of punishment. He represents a superman who asserts his own will in order to gratify his own desires.

The two heroes Raskolnikov and Balram weave their way into Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. Raskolnikov commits murder to test his ideology; whether he can dare to kill or he has the right to kill. While Balram kills his master to come out of the Rooster Coop and acquire Individual Identity, Independence, and Freedom. Both felt it necessary to commit crime for the achievement of their higher purposes. Both the characters are framed within the Nietzschean *Übermensch*. The contradiction between the two characters is found in their reaction after committing the crime. Raskolnikov

confess before Sonya that what he did was a crime and wants a freedom. Whereas, Balram made a kind of confession in his letter to the Chinese premiere Jiabo that by killing his master, he has acquired freedom from the Rooster coop and got the superiority from the people of his background.

Raskolnikov aspires to become Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, but he fails to create his own domain of morality. Like *Übermensch*, Balram considers himself to be exceptional and compares himself to the white tiger like rare, intelligent and strong. Adiga attempts to revive Nietzsche's *Übermensch* in Balram. What distinguishes Balram from others is his mightiness of defining lightness in the world of darkness. In Balram, We find the rise of an ordinary man. Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* demonstrates the over man as "Something that shall be overcome...Man is a rope tied between beast and over man...a rope over an abyss...what is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end." Both Raskolnikov and Balram tried to succumb Nietzsche's theory of over man. Perceiving Balram and Raskolnikov as anchors of this rope, Raskolnikov fails, and Balram succeeds. Because, Raskolnikov tries to overcome suffering and meaninglessness but cannot create individual morality, leading to a vacuum in his moral space. Whereas, Balram is guilt free and able to accomplish his goal to further himself. Balram believes him to be his own god and created his own conception of morality.

For Raskolnikov, life becomes too painful for examination in reality. In the end, Raskolnikov is redeemed from his ideologies and finally returns to the conventional Russian faith in Christianity. Sonya redeemed Raskolnikov from his ideologies and directs him to the path of Christianity. Thomas Rachel in this context points out:

"It is with Sonya that he reads the story of Lazarus, an experience through which he is reborn from his *Übermensch* personality into one of Christian humility. In this rebirth, he leaves behind the intellectual pursuits that first inspired him to sin" (80).

Balram doesn't get affected by the crime he committed. He escapes successfully from Delhi where he killed his master Mr. Ashok, and started his business of Taxi service in Bangalore. He did not

regret his crime as he wants to feel and experience "What it meant not to be a servant" (Adiga, 321). He argues that the rich and powerful person who sucks the blood of the poor people deserves to be punished. Even if his family is at the risk, he decides to kill his master by rationalizing that, "Only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed, hunted, beaten and burned alive by the masters can break out of the coop" (Adiga, 176).

Balram's killing of his master is his first step towards the world of lightness for him. He regards himself as the creator of new world like *Übermensch*, as he points out:

"It may turn out to be a decent city, where humans can live like humans and animals can live like animals. A new Bangalore for a new India. And then I can say that, in my own way, I helped to make new Bangalore" (Adiga, 317-318).

Here lies a huge difference between the two characters. Raskolnikov is caught by the guilt and has almost gone insane after committing a murder. Unlike Raskolnikov, Balram is not caught by the guilt, he is thinking of the future as he says, "I'm always a man who sees tomorrow, when others see today" (Adiga,319). Thus, in both the novels we find the characters held same idealistic views ,but the treatment given to them by the authors makes a difference. One is punished, while the other got the freedom. Rachel Thomas in this context points out:

"Crime and punishment deals less with Raskolnikov's particular philosophies and more with the *Übermensch* complex that his intellectual pursuits help him to develop. It is this complex that leads him to commit two murders".

Leatherbarrow describes Raskolnikov as understanding "Crime as a prerogative of small elite whose value to mankind puts them above punishment or guilt" (qtd.in Rachel Thomas, 75).

Raskolnikov though, in the beginning thinks himself to be an extra ordinary man, after committing two murders, realizes the fact and surrenders himself to the ordinary people who are confined to moral values. In a way we can say that Raskolnikov aspires to be *Übermensch*, But Balram actually becomes *Übermensch*. Balram is more akin

to Nietzsche's ideal man, *Übermensch* than Raskolnikov. Because, Raskolnikov was fascinated by the idea but can't actualize the idea. Whereas, Balram both in thought and action can apply the idea and reach to his goal. Milan Swaroop in this context remarks:

Adiga portrays the protagonist as the man who does not succumb to the herd mentality. He explores a unique species in Balram, which made him distinct from the village herd. He attempts to revive Nietzsche's *Übermensch* in Balram, who is free spirited and never yields to the herd mentality; who is released from the chains of traditions and ideology; who breaks the rusted codes of the society and creates new values with a sense of uniqueness and passion for life.

Balram Halwai is an *Übermensch* who has "The will to live like a man (Adiga, 30)". Adiga narrates a character of Balram as the one who doesn't yield to a mindset of the crowd, the ordinary people. He is a distinct individual who rises above all.

Dostoevsky through the character of Raskolnikov wanted to know whether such superman or *Übermensch* can really exist, or have any such predictability, but it was too early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the existence of such superman as Nietzsche himself proclaimed that his theory of superman has yet to come, and we find the application of Nietzschean theory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century novel by Adiga. Adiga shows the rise of *Übermensch* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and assures that *Übermensch* exists. Through the character of Balram, he proves such possibility.

It is interesting to note that Nietzschean Superman philosophy leads Raskolnikov towards self-destruction, while it leads Balram towards self-creation. Balram conceptualizes his own morality in terms of "The Creation of his New Life", and Raskolnikov perceives the conventional morality in terms of "The Revelation of his new Life". Dostoevsky and Adiga present their protagonists Balram and Raskolnikov in quest of self-esteem. Both aspire greatness. Both Raskolnikov and Balram possess the characteristic traits of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. However, the difference is that Balram

knew how to become a superman, while Raskolnikov didn't.

To conclude, "In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky considers the question borrowed from the philosopher Nietzsche, of whether or not an *Übermensch*, can really exist ...." (Walsh, George, 184) and In *The White Tiger*, Adiga wants to convey through the character of Balram that, "As man emerged from the animal, so out of man, the superman emerges" (Sri Aurobindo).

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