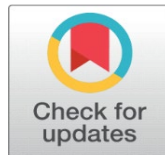
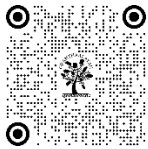


# EXPLORING THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS: JUNGIAN ARCHETYPES IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S THE WHITE TIGER

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the Archetypal dimensions of Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* and its cinematic adaptation through the lens of Carl Jung's Archetypal theory. Focusing on the archetypes of the Hero and Antihero, The Trickster, and The Shadow, the research examines how Balram Halwai's transformation embodies the paradox of heroism and moral ambiguity. By analysing Balram's journey from servitude to self-liberation, the study interrogates his dual role as both a heroic liberator and a morally transgressed antihero. The trickster archetype, symbolized in Balram's cunning and deception, is evaluated in the context of his navigation through India's socio-economic hierarchies, exposing systemic corruption and social mobility constraints. Additionally, the concept of the shadow, both in Balram's psyche and in the broader socio-political landscape, is explored to understand his inner conflict and moral evolution. The paper also critically contrasts the representation of these archetypes in the novel and its Netflix film adaptation (2021) to analyse shifts in narrative emphasis and visual storytelling. By integrating Jungian archetypal criticism with a comparative media analysis, this research underlines how *The White Tiger* deconstructs conventional hero narratives, challenging the binaries of good and evil, servitude and rebellion, morality and survival.

**Keywords:** Shadow Archetypes, Carl Jung, Collective Unconscious, Trickster Archetype, Hero Archetype, Archetypal Criticism Etc

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Man Booker Prize winning novel *The White Tiger* was written by an Indian writer Aravind Adiga and was published in 2008. The novel is picaresque in nature as it exhibits protagonist's ambiguous morality tinged with his inner goodness. It must be termed as an exceptional success for a writer whose debutant work acclaims a wider recognition in a dense authorship world. Although it attracted unexpected popularity worldwide, it remained a subject of great controversy in India as it not only depicted but also highlighted the criminal mindedness of the downtrodden of the Indian society in order to assert their individual identity. This novel is also cinematically adapted and streamed on Netflix in January, 2021. The direction of the adaptation is done by an American director named Ramin Bahrani and it is produced by Mukul Deora. Balram's role as an embodiment of the marginalized is played by Adarsh Gourav Bhagavatula. And other main characters are Rajkumar Rao and Priyanka Chopra Jonas. The adaptation was nominated at 93<sup>rd</sup> Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay. (Wikipedia)

This research examines how Jungian archetypes are reflected in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, with emphasis on Hero-Antihero, The Trickster and Shadow archetypes. *The White Tiger* has been worked upon through various dimensions so far such as; socio-political stance, subaltern treatment, poverty studies, capitalism, entrepreneurial ethos, desire theories, and many other likewise, but it has not been explored through the lenses of archetypes although these exist not only implicitly but also superficially. By superficial, it infers apparent transformation of Balram from a gullible to a knave. And this superficiality tirelessly transports a reader on the land of anti-heroism. And by implicit, it concludes shadow self of Balram working as a drive for his imminent brutal act. The paper also critically contrasts the representation of these archetypes in the novel and its **Netflix film adaptation (2021)** to analyse shifts in narrative emphasis and visual storytelling.

There are various socio-psychic archetypes that advocate the actions and thinking of the protagonist. These socio-psychic archetypes refer here to the common universal patterns of social conditions and psychological factors that shape up the action and behaviour of people. Journey of Balram presents social divide in Indian society as a prime cause of psychological turmoil for the people of lower strata. Balram experiences utter poverty due to the feudal system in his village and it was making his family more vulnerable. The desperation of coming out of such repressive system becomes the drive for Balram which coincides with the characteristics of heroic archetypes. The means he adopts for the pursuit of his deep down desire do not reflect the heroic qualities and thus, the protagonist fits into the category of a picaro, which has inner goodness but perturbed by the corrupt social ways he embraces deceptive means also.

Carl G. Jung is the founder of Analytical Psychology, which is the exploration of unconscious mind and its effect upon human action and behaviour. He said: "On each side of the threshold of consciousness there are proformas reflected in different cultures at different times. They seem to be preserved in the unconscious and passed on from generation to generation." and connecting it from archetypes, he states that "Archetype is an image of the unconscious that has a general significance beyond the individual". (Jung 99) The ideas reflect on the unaware patterns of behaviour that are found universally and cause individuals to act the unexpected. The proformas Jung talked about can be these unaware patterns of unconscious mind that enter the consciousness at a certain point. Carl Jung has introduced the concept of Collective Unconscious that refers to the part of the unconscious mind which all humans share. This unconscious mind is made up of universal images and ideas that are known as archetypes. Jung believed that the collective unconscious emerges from evolutionary processes, rooted in the experiences of our ancestors. These archetypes are not directly accessible but manifest indirectly through dreams, art, religious practices, and literature.

*The White Tiger* on screen appears to be a story of a poverty-stricken and ambitious boy Balram, but it encapsulates myriad socio-economic issues in its background, which contributes a depth in the psychological development of the protagonist. The ambitious trait of Balram reflects upon the psyche of the whole indigent community that along with its struggle for survival aspires to rise higher in the society. Contrary to it, they are also bound to their instinct of pleasing their master to the extent of their self-depreciation. This is the work that presents a well-structured and nicely portrayed balance of these two traits within the same person and this very person is our protagonist, who voluntarily chooses his master using all his means just in order to be an apple of his master's eye. His constant condemnation and objectification by his masters compel his naivety to adopt witty ways and plot for infidelity.

Film direction by a foreign director in itself is a matter of the recognition of archetypes due to which he could associate it with global behavioural patterns of individuals aspiring to attain higher social position in society. In this regard, Aravind Adiga has said, "To sum up-In the old days, there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat-or get eaten up" (Adiga 64)

Film adaptation also highlights a deep-rooted and universally prevalent social structure that is patriarchy. There is a contrast in one incident when Balram's mother dies in the novel due to tuberculosis. (*The White Tiger*, p.12) This incident makes Balram psychologically and emotionally vulnerable. However, in the film adaptation, this loss is replaced with the death of his father from the same illness. This narrative shift reflects a patriarchal bias in storytelling, emphasizing male suffering while sidelining the impact of female experiences. This could reflect the tendency in mainstream media to focus on the suffering of **male characters as more central or impactful**, sidelining women's struggles.

The marginalized has been the core subject for Aravind's other novels also as he explored and presented before us the voice of the neglected and the maltreated people of society. According to the British Politician Michael Portillo;

"It (Adiga's novel) changed my view of certain things like what is the real India and what is the nature of poverty...what set this one apart was its originality. For many of us this was entirely a new territory, the dark side of India...it's a book that gains from dealing with very important social issues, the division between rich and poor and the impossibility of the poor escaping from their lot in India." (Dhawan 58)

Such remarks by a foreign politician and journalist reflect or substantiate the existing system of poverty all over the world and thus it become a matter of surprise for Portillo that India, which is known to be a rich-cultured country, is also untouched from this system. The archetype of poverty is well treated in Adiga's novels encapsulating the compelling cause and the shocking aftermaths emanated from it. However, Adiga has justified his criticism in an interview to Stuart Jeffries by saying-

At a time when India is going through great changes and with China is likely to inherit the world from the west, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society. It is not an attack on the country but, it is about the great process of self-examination. That's what writers like Flaubert, Balzac, Dickens did in the 19th century and as a result, England and France are better societies. That's what I am trying to do. (The Guardian, 2008)

This study aims to identify archetypes that are universally present across socio-psychological domains. Balram Halwai serves as a key figure in examining the dynamics between the upper and lower classes in India. This research is Exploratory in nature that employs **content analysis** to investigate how these archetypes shape the narrative. By analysing both the novel and its film adaptation, the study explores how the articulation of meaning evolves across different mediums, shedding light on the socio-economic tensions embedded within the text.

## 2. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

### ARCHETYPE OF HERO AND ANTIHERO DYNAMICS

Aristotle, who gave an account of comedy, tragedy and epic poetry in his Poetics, defined heroes as "better than the ordinary men" (Aristotle, 2005: 15). As per Carl Jung, "The hero's main feat is to overcome the monster of darkness: it is the long-hoped-for and expected triumph of consciousness over the unconscious." (Jung, 1959, p.167) The character of Balram Halwai in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is significant in terms of archetype of Hero Introduced by Carl Jung. When we analyse the text, we find that Balram being the protagonist of the story has all the traits of being a Hero of the story. He has moral sensibility which makes him obedient towards his master Mr Ashok. He is curious and wants to learn new things. He remains true to his role of a servant. He also himself decides to leave the trivial work he was into for being a driver of Ashok and it was a conscious effort taken by him to come out of his impoverished life symbolic of a dark life. In his letter to Chinese Premier, he mentions that, "I knew then, this (America return Ashok) was the master for me. (The White Tiger, Netflix, 00:13:11-00:13:14)" These lines exhibit his strong hope in his fate vital for any hero to achieve anything.

Concept of Antihero exists from a long time and it is evident from the role of Achilles in Homer's Iliad. Achilles exhibits the traits of superiority and fury which disqualifies him from the role of an ideal hero. The Byronic hero, who emerged during the Romantic period, introduced self-destructive and **melancholic** qualities, often seen in Lord Byron's characters. In the 19th century, Gothic literature portrayed more intricate antiheroes, symbolizing defiance and inner conflict. By the 20th century, existential figures such as Meursault in *The Stranger* represented a sense of disillusionment and ethical ambiguity. Contemporary antiheroes, like Walter White from *Breaking Bad* (American drama series, 2008) and Tony Stark, reflect modern societal complexities, blurring the boundaries between right and wrong. The twentieth century, particularly the post-war era, introduced a new character shaped by a distinct emotional and mental process, reflecting the antihero's negative outlook on life. Today; the antihero continues to disrupt conventional moral standards in narratives.

**The antihero is often a protagonist who is characterized by a lack of traditional heroic qualities such as idealism, morality, and the desire to help others. This absence of conventional heroism makes the antihero a more complex, flawed, and realistic character that mirrors the struggles and contradictions of real life.**-Merriam-Webster Dictionary (Definition of Antihero)

Balram is devastated by extreme poverty and inhumane conditions of his family. The Mentality of serving his masters without questioning and living like a slave is embedded in his veins that he never forgets his place even after receiving friendly behaviour from Mr Ashok. Even after the accident caused by the harsh driving of Pinky, Balram is so much devoted towards pacifying Ashok and Pinky without giving a thought that the girl died in the accident was someone belonging to the community, he also belongs. When Ashok asks him "what was she doing at the street at 2:00 in the morning?" He says to flustered Ashok that "exactly sir, it is not our fault, sir. He just jumped in our way, stupid kid." (The White Tiger, Netflix, 1:03:27-1:03:32) And after looking at his blood stained car, when Ashok says, "God, what am I gonna

do?" (1:03:17-1:03:12) Balram says, "Nothing, sir." And consoles him by saying something which must confirm his disgust over massive children produced by the poor, he says "you know how those people are? Sometimes they have ten, twenty kids. Even they don't remember their names. Nobody will miss this one, sir." (1:03:12-1:03:03) Such statement by Balram blurs his moral sensibility and he appears to be mere a flatterer whose only goal is to win the favour of his master.

Remaining loyal to his masters, he initially seems to embody the role of a dutiful servant, which is essential for being seen as a hero. However, his inclination to favour his masters even when they are in the wrong hints at his development into an antihero — someone who strays from the conventional heroic path of helping others. He reflects the complexity of a realistic character, exhibiting both positive and negative traits as life presents challenges.

Despite enduring exploitation without resistance, his passive loyalty transforms into a desire for revenge upon learning that his masters plan to replace him with another driver. This revelation prompts him to re-evaluate situations he had previously ignored. He realizes that the bribes paid by his masters to politicians come from money collected from the poor and are meant to evade taxes.

From the moment he becomes aware of the plan for his replacement, he steps into the realm of an antihero by devising a scheme to steal the money for his own benefit, ultimately planning to kill Ashok to execute his plot. This decision symbolizes his break from the "rooster coop" of endless servitude. The servitude which is rare for a person like him thinking of coming out. Right observed by Adiga, "The roosters smell blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet, they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop". (Adiga 173) While his choice to prioritize his own success at the expense of his family may paint him as self-serving, he redeems himself by successfully establishing his own business and taking full responsibility for any mishaps caused by his drivers, thereby reclaiming aspects of heroism.

## THE TRICKSTER ARCHETYPE

Carl Jung has introduced the Trickster Archetype in his concept of Collective Unconscious that embodies duality, cunning, and unpredictability. This trickster archetype operates as a catalyst for change, showcasing both creative and destructive tendencies (Jung 1969). This highlights the complexities of human nature, revealing both its foolishness and its potential for growth. This archetype works as a fuel to the picaresque journey of Balram in *The White Tiger*.

In picaresque tales, in carnivals and revels, in magic rites of healing, in man's religious fears and exaltations, this phantom of the trickster haunts the mythology of all ages, sometimes in quite unmistakable form, sometimes in strangely modulated guise. (Jung 165)

Every story has an element whether a character or plot twist that serve the purpose of the Trickster Archetype. In the novel *The White Tiger*, the main protagonist Balram and some supporting characters serve the purpose of Trickster Archetype. The first character is Mr. Ashok's father often called "The Stork" in the story, a wealthy and cunning land owner who exploits the villagers to earn his livelihood. The second character is Mr. Ashok's elder brother "The Mongoose" who is cunning, intelligent and morally corrupt person. Balram also has a burning desire to become rich and powerful just like his masters. In doing so he uses many tricks and tactics to come into the light. Tina Azariya explaining trickster Archetype in her research paper says; "Trickster has been associated, by Jung and others, with the unconscious mind. Like the unconscious, the Trickster is unpredictable and beyond the conscious control of ego." (Azaria 32)

Aravind Adiga uses personification and metaphors to explain the adverse situation of working class in India. Character like the Stork and Mongoose are interlinked with traditional archetype of trickster that is depicted in fables, folklores and stories of various cultures including India and other countries. The archetype of trickster is visible in many places in the novel.

The stork often associated with long legs and sharp beak is considered a predator that preys on innocent animals to get his food. In the context of *The White Tiger*, The stork, Father of Mr. Ashok does the same with poor villagers. Mongooses are known for their agility and cleverness, especially in their ability to fight snakes. In the novel, the Mongoose's role as the family enforcer reflects these traits. He uses intelligence and intimidation to uphold the family's dominance. Their trick is visible in the incident where they manipulate Balram to take the Blame of Accident that was done by Pinky Madam. This incident becomes the turning point of the story.

The behavior of Balram, from the beginning of the novel till the end, was questionable. From his childhood he always rejected the prejudiced mentality of his family. He uses his tricks and tactics to win the confidence of his masters. Throughout the novel Balram has taken decisions which are not morally correct. Balram's desire to become rich and



powerful overpowers his morality throughout the novel. His hatred for his fellow driver then his hatred for Mr. Ashok proves him an opportunist. In the movie adaptation these dialogs depicts his thought process.

Balam: Is there any hatred on earth like the hatred of the number-two servant for the number one? While I cleaned he strolled about like a master. He had every Hindu God lined up and was always praying, as if to accuse me of being a naxal, a communist, like you sir. I would not let him out pray me. (00:21:49)

He reveals the true identity of his fellow driver to his masters and due to his religion; he was Muslim he lost the job. This scene is the perfect example of trickster archetype. Though, we observe inner conflict in Balam's thoughts where he wants to apologies for his mistake.

Balam: When the number one driver got a bonus to drive my master to Delhi, I did something I wish I did not have to tell you. What a miserable life, having to hide his religion and name just to get a job as a servant. (00:31:03)

Balam; I want to run to his and apologize. "You go be their driver in Delhi." Forgive me, brother. (00:32:23)

## ARCHETYPE OF SHADOW

The concept of good and evil is a common theme in all religions and philosophical discussions, with many thinkers offering their own interpretations. In Hinduism, evil is considered anything that goes against "*Dharma*" (a person's duties or moral principles). Carl Jung in order to explain the 'Problem of Evil' introduced the Archetype of Shadow. Shadow Archetype represents the darker unconscious aspect of the psyche that an individual tries to repress, deny or remain unaware of. The shadow contains desires, qualities and impulses that are immoral, unacceptable in terms of societal norms and the self-image of the person. In explaining the Shadow archetype Carl Jung says; "the meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one's own shadow" (Jung 21)

Essentially good or evil are not separated rather two sides of a coin, existing within each individual and their choices. This theodicy can be found in other religious ideologies as well. The Greeks are among the first pre-Christian theoreticians of evil. Plotinus, for example, claims that "evil has no actual being. Instead, evil is simply a lack of the good" (Svendsen 46). The character of Balam in *The White Tiger* is the key to explore the "Problem of Evil." Through Balam's story, Aravind Adiga reveals the harsh reality of Indian society, divided into two groups: one enjoying privilege and opportunities, and the other struggling to meet basic needs. In his letter to the Chinese Premier, Balam talks about these deep class divides and the contrasting lives within India. Balam's statement- "India is two countries in one: an India of light, and an India of darkness." (Adiga 12) reveals his dissatisfaction and disappointment regarding the class struggle in India.

At first, Balam starts as a morally and ethically good person but eventually becomes the antagonist of the story. However, it wouldn't be fair to label him entirely as an antagonist because he also has qualities typically associated with a protagonist. For example, after becoming a successful entrepreneur, Balam stood by his employees and supported them during difficult times, unlike his former masters, Mr Ashok and his family. They had manipulated Balam into taking the blame for an accident, but when one of his employees faced a similar situation, Balam took full responsibility himself. This shows that, despite his darker side, Balam has some admirable traits.

David Fontana has given one of the most fitting descriptions of Shadow in relation to the concept of evil in his book *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*. He asserts that "The potential for evil resides in what [Jung] termed the shadow" (Fontana, 2003, p.172) according to this perspective evil is not an inherent or unavoidable aspect of human nature but rather potential which depends on free will. (Kechan and Ismail 21)

Jung believed that the Shadow holds the potential for both destructive and creative impulses, and it is up to the individual to confront, understand, and integrate these elements into their conscious self. By doing so, individuals exercise their free will to choose growth, balance, and ethical behaviour over succumbing to the darker potential within the unconscious. This perspective resonates with the idea that evil is a potential, not a predetermined reality, reinforcing the importance of free will in shaping moral outcomes.

If it has been believed hitherto that the human shadow was the source of all evil, it can now be ascertained on closer investigation that the unconscious man, that is his shadow, does not consist only of morally reprehensible tendencies, but also displays a number of good qualities, such as normal instincts, appropriation reactions, realistic insights, creative impulses, etc. on this level of understanding, evil appears more as a distortion, a deformation, a misinterpretation and misapplication of facts that in themselves are natural. (Jung 1959, 266-267)

In the early duration of his service to the masters, he remains very earnest and gullible to his duty but, gradually with the help of Pinky, who is one of his masters taking always his side, he realizes his shadow self which was pent up by his surrounding environment of servitude. Fierce attitude of Pinky towards the brutal ways of his father-in-law compelled Balram to think of his selfhood which was out of existence for him so far. Because the social image of a daughter-in-law in his mind was of a submissive and compliant person. But Pinky broke this stereotype by constantly fighting for wrong behaviour. Witnessing all this, Balram started believing that his independence also exists as a reality. He thinks after seeing Pinky retorting to her in-laws that "where did Pinky Madam's aggression come from? She didn't care about tradition." (The White Tiger, Netflix, 00:30:56-00:31:00) He had never thought this way because from his childhood he was exposed to the practice of working tirelessly and being obedient to the affluent on the cost of own self-respect.

### 3. CONCLUSION

This paper highlights the universal patterns within stories which connect with the concept of collective unconscious by Carl Jung. Balram Halwai exemplifies the trickster through his clever strategies for survival. His journey from an obedient servant to a morally complex entrepreneur illustrates the hero-antihero transformation. The shadow archetype emerges as Balram confronts his hidden anger and ambition, ultimately challenging societal norms. The study highlights how these timeless archetypes are reinterpreted within India's socio-economic setting while maintaining global relevance. By examining these archetypes within India's socio-economic context, this study highlights how *The White Tiger* reinterprets universal psychological motifs while maintaining their global relevance. The contrast between the novel and its film adaptation further emphasizes how visual storytelling reinforces and reshapes archetypal themes, making them accessible to contemporary audiences. Ultimately, this analysis reaffirms Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, demonstrating how recurring patterns in human storytelling continue to reflect our deepest fears, desires, and struggles across time and cultures.

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