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## MAPPING INDIVIDUALISM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELECTED WORKS OF AYN RAND AND ARVIND ADIGA

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### ABSTRACT

Individualism advocates that interests of the individual should achieve precedence over the state or a social group. Individualists promote the exercise of one's goals and desires and so value independence and self-reliance. Ayn Rand, a Russian-American novelist, a champion of individual rights, in her celebrated works *Anthem* and *The Fountainhead* upholds the cause of Individualism manifested in characters like Equality 7-2521, International 4-8818, Liberty 5-3000 and Howard Roark. The bloody dictatorships in *Anthem* couldn't alter the very terms in which humans think as to eradicate the vocabulary of individuality. Consequently, main characters, in successive episodes of purposeful self-naming, subvert the discourse of the decline and thus reclaim individualism and volition. In *The Fountainhead* also, the whole story revolves around Roark's struggle to retain his individuality in the face of forces bent on bringing him to heel. On the other hand, closer home contemporary Indian novelist Arvind Adiga's *The White tiger* details Balram's rags to riches story turns out to be an ample proof of his stubborn individualism. Subverting the prevalent caste dynamics, he embarks on individual betterment even at the cost of sacrificing morality. These characters adopt varied approaches towards the common goal of individualism. We observe that whereas protagonists Equality 7-2521 and Howard Roark use rational, moral approach to counter ominous external forces, Balram's blind pursuit of individualism threw morality wayside. Despite differing in moral undertones, the protagonists of both the writers managed to script their individual success stories in an affirmation of their invincible streaks of individualism.

Keywords: Individualism, Society, Struggle, Morality

### Introduction

Individualism is a moral, political or social outlook that stresses human independence and the importance of individual self-reliance and liberty. It opposes most external interference with an individual's choices, whether by society, the state or any other group or institution. It is the moral stance, political philosophy, ideology, or social outlook that emphasizes the moral worth of the individual. Individualists promote the exercise of one's goals and desires and so value independence and self-reliance and advocate

that interests of the individual should achieve precedence over the state or a social group, while opposing external interference upon one's own interests by society or institutions such as the government.

The term "individualism" was first used by French and British proto-Socialists, followers of Saint-Simon (1760 - 1825) and Robert Owen (1771 – 1858). The 19th Century American Henry David Thoreau is often cited as an example of a committed Individualist. In popular usage, the connotations of "individualism" can be positive or negative, depending on who is using the term, and how.

The scope of the present research article consists in exploring the instances of individualism in characters from the chosen works of Ayn Rand and Arvind Adiga. Below the theme of individualism has been discussed in the works *Anthem*, *The Fountainhead* and *The White Tiger* in a sequential fashion.

**Individualism in Anthem**---Ayn Rand was a Russian-American novelist, philosopher, playwright, and screenwriter. She was a champion of individual rights, which protect the sovereignty of the individual as an end in herself. *Anthem*, by Ayn Rand, is a very unique novella. It encircles individualism and makes the reader think of how people can conform to society and do as they are told without knowing the consequences and results of their decisions. Also, it teaches the importance of self expression and the freedom that comes along with being your own person and having the power to choose what path to take in life.

"We blew out the candle..." The first thing that is apparent about this quote is the use of we. The word we is used throughout the novella in place of I. This is directly related to the society in the novel that completely takes away individualism. The citizens of the setting do not have names and are not allowed to choose their jobs, friends, or even spouses. The character says "There is nothing left around us", which is directly related to the main character feeling alone. He feels like he is the only person who questions life and knows that it was not meant to be this way. Also, this quote sets a dark setting which then gives the reader an ominous feeling that is present throughout the book. This also is related to the dark and dismal lives that everyone lives during this time. This also is related to how he feels different and trapped in this way of life. He knows there is much more to the life he leads and feels trapped and does not know what he can do to change it. Here the word "I" no longer exists. This is the life of Equality 7-2521, the principal character and narrator of Ayn Rand's *Anthem*. As *Anthem* takes place in the dark ages of the future, in a totally collectivized world this culture has regressed to conditions reminiscent of Ancient Greece and the European Dark Ages. In the midst of fear and subordination, one man stands alone. Equality 7-2521 is not like his brothers. He is able think, create and defy. This makes him extremely dangerous. He holds the threat of change in his hands and his government will stop at nothing to take it from him. Equality's society represses him because they are afraid of those that threaten the established order. In Equality's society, it is evil to be different from ones brothers, let alone to be better than they are. He is taught at an early age to be ashamed of his intellectual superiority eg, "This is a sin, to be born with a head which is too quick".

This device of suppression by means of shame was used in an attempt to stifle geniuses and, hence, pacify his society's fear of change. As Equality grew, he confirmed their fears. During his lifetime he made many revelations and discoveries. His most profound breakthrough was his re-invention of electricity. He declares

We, Equality 7-2521, have discovered a new power of nature... (54).

Unfortunately for Equality, as well as his society, his discovery met violent opposition and his brothers were not able to benefit from his intelligence. His ideas were swept aside violently, and his society remained unchanged. But Self-interest leads to the defiance of unjust restrictions. Equality's government prohibits individual action. No one is allowed to do anything on their own. "...There is no transgression blacker than to think or do alone". Equality's defiance of his government's laws set him apart from his brothers. The condition of the Palace of Corrective Detention is demonstrative of the unquestioning obedience of his brothers.

It is easy to escape...there are no guards...There is no reason to have guards, for men have never defied the Councils so far as to escape from whatever place they were ordered to be.... (78)

Unlike his brothers, Equality had the individual strength to disobey the laws of his government. By questioning authority he took an interest in himself and was liberated. The noblest human purpose is to pursue enlightened self-interest and only those who follow that course can emerge as champions. Equality's

government had tried to contain him from day one. Authorities cannot control him because he has an independent mind. This totally collectivized society has no power over the individual. His self-interest allows him to act as independently as his surroundings would permit.

Equality is not the only person who is able to transgress in order to create. One of his brothers, International 4-8818, is a natural artist and is punished in an attempt to stifle his talents. He attests to the spirit of individuality--

They were not liked because they...drew pictures... and they...made men laugh. Their government strictly prohibits this sort of creativity. It is only our brothers in the Home of the Artists who are permitted to draw pictures. Even though both men, Equality and International, are very talented and intelligent, they are both assigned to be street sweepers among pale boy[s] with half a brain. ..( 17)

These men were kept from sharing their gifts with their society.. Repression of creativity and individualism are a perfect way to inhibit social change. He risked his dignity, his safety, and his life and was rewarded with freedom. Equality 's raging individualism comes out in words---

Many words have been granted to me, and some are wise, and some are false, but only three are holy: 'I will it! ....( 109)

But even these bloody dictatorships were not able to so alter the very terms in which humans think as to eradicate the vocabulary of individuality.

Liberty 5-3000, the Golden One, similarly refuses to surrender her independence to the state. She, too, defies the decrees of the councils to achieve her ends. She notices Equality 7-2521, though she is supposed to take no heed of men. She names him in her mind The Unconquered. She speaks to him against all the rules. She abandons the city and the only life she has ever known, venturing alone into the Uncharted Forest to find him. In the end, it is she who, unaided, comes closest to re-discovering the Unspeakable Word when, in the forest, she gropes for the words with which to accurately express her feelings. She is an individualist like Equality 7-2521 and International 4-8818.

These three main characters, in successive episodes of purposeful self-naming, subvert the discourse of the decline and thus reclaim individualism and volition.

**Individualism in the Fountainhead:** The recurrent theme in "The fountainhead" is the Primacy of the Individual. Individualism is the only element which makes a person's character unique. In the Fountain Head, a character binds true to this belief and goes by the name of Howard Roark. He is the novel's embodiment of the perfect man. This young architect who had his own viewpoint of the world and how he envisioned it, was condemned by the media and the public by doing so. Roark's lifestyle completely perpendiculatates the mundane lifestyle that the average citizen lives. Rand wants us to admire his talent and courage, and his struggle to resist society's sway and remain true to himself. The whole story revolves around Roark's struggle to retain his individuality in the face of forces bent on bringing him to heel. At his second trial, Roark argues that individuals, not societies, propel history. He says that individual creators are the fountainhead of civilization. Roark conforms to only what he considers valid in his own conscience. The novel opens the door to lead the way against the oppression of conformity. The environment which Howard was placed into didn't help in his situation to freely express his thoughts on certain subjects. This was mainly made possible by the people who he had come in contact through out the years. Many examples of this type of movement are shown by the actions taken by Roark during his career as an architect. Roark's speech is passionate and lyrical, and the audience receives it with awed silence.

All of the actions taken by Roark had a deep profound effect on one key player in the novel, Toohey. Toohey with all the power he had with the public and through the newspaper, was not able to manipulate Howard into his way of thinking. The general public who read the Banner had been convinced that Tooheynew what he was talking about on all subjects. His plan to manipulate the public and gather them as a whole was directly countered with every move that Howard made. One of these major moves was the building of the Stoddard Temple. With the temple, Roark had the freedom to build whatsoever he choose. This gave him a medium to express his viewpoint without having any restrictions. After the delayed unveiling of the temple, it was condemned by the public. At them head of this group was no other than Toohey. He wrote articles in the

newspaper on how the temple in no way represented the human spirit. The temple became, fortunately, an agent for Howard to display his individualism, his uniqueness, and his self being. This temple was looked down upon because it did not conform to the ancient styles of architecture. The struggle for individuality is not confined to Roark alone. Every one of the novel's sympathetic characters struggles to act independently from society, and the desire to assert one's self becomes the single greatest virtue a character can possess. The novel ends triumphantly not because Roark defeats or converts his enemies, but because he has won the right to act according to his own principles. The thesis at the heart of *The Fountainhead* is that society has a herd mentality, and individuals must act selfishly in order to be free.

**Individualism in The White Tiger:** The *White Tiger* is the Debut novel by Indian author Aravind Adiga. He (born 23 October 1974) is an Indo-Australian writer and journalist. Aravind Adiga, a socially committed novelist, has produced a good deal of literature. He stands in the front line of Indian Writing in English. He writes realistically and his characters are the persons whom he met. *The White Tiger* is a furious and brutally effective counterblast to smug "India is shining" rhetoric. It details the journey of Balram, the protagonist, first to Delhi, where he works as a chauffeur to a rich landlord, and then to Bangalore, the place to which he flees after killing his master and stealing his money. In narrating his complete journey from the small village called Laxmangarh, Bihar to the IT city Bangalore, Balram frequently discusses the issues of "individual progress" in the new social hierarchy of India. Under the caste system, people's fates were predetermined, but they were happy, believing they belonged somewhere. However, the new social structure promises the possibility of personal growth. He adopts a new name each time he moves up within India's social hierarchy—Munna, Balram, Ashok, The White Tiger. Balram's rags to riches story is ample proof of his stubborn individualism. Subverting the prevalent caste dynamics, he embarks on individual betterment even at the cost of sacrificing morality. No doubt, *The White Tiger* turns out to be a story of self-fashioning. The novel explores how identity is malleable enough that one can construct one's own selfhood. Balram undergoes a transformative journey to construct his own identity. Despite the difficult life he is born into, Balram excels in school. His academic potential and personal integrity distinguish him from his classmates, bringing him to the attention of a visiting school inspector who nicknames him "the White Tiger," after the most rare and intelligent creature in the jungle. He accepts the name "The White Tiger" because it allows him to define himself. A white tiger symbolizes power in East Asian cultures such as in Vietnam. It is also a symbol for freedom and individuality. But later in his life, Balram's headstrong individualism sees him killing his own employer, Ashok. As he perceives this murder the only way to escape India's Rooster Coop. After bludgeoning Ashok with a bottle and stealing a large money, Balram moves to Bangalore, where he bribes the police in order to help start his own taxi business—the last milestone in his bullish individualism. Throughout the book, there are references to how Balram is very different from those back in his home environment. Balram is seen as different from those he grew up with. He is the one who got out of the "Darkness" and found his way into the "Light". He sheds the weights and limits of his past and undoubtedly his personal inhibitions that keep him from living life to the fullest that he can. Eventually, he broke free from the Rooster coop. The novel is somewhat of a memoir of his journey to finding his freedom in India's modern day capitalist society. Towards the beginning of the novel, Balram cites a poem from the Muslim poet Iqbal where he talks about slaves and says

They remain slaves because they can't see what is beautiful in this world...[12]

Balram sees himself embodying the poem and being the one who sees the world and takes it as he rises through the ranks of society, and in doing so finding his freedom.

### **Conclusion**

A comparative study of the above works will reveal a striking similarity among them which holds them together on the plain of Individualism. The protagonists like Equality 7-2521, Howard Roark and Balram and other characters demonstrate exceptional individual will in face of their respective odds. These characters adopt varied approaches towards the common goal of individualism. Whereas Equality 7-2521, Howard Roark use rational, moral approach to counter ominous external forces, Balram's blind pursuit of individualism threw morality wayside. By slitting the throat of his own master and later enjoying luxurious lifestyle in Bangalore

even at the cost of leaving his family back in Laxmangarh in a state of penury, Balram broke all the barriers of individualism. Despite differing in moral undertones, the protagonists of both the writers managed to script their individual success stories-----Truly a triumph of Individualism...

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