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**MICHEL FOUCAULT'S CONCEPTS OF PARRHESIA AND GOVERNMENTALITY:  
A STUDY OF ARVIND ADIGA'S AMNESTY**

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**Abstract:**

This paper tends to study Michel Foucault's concept of parrhesia considering the novel of Aravind Adiga, *Amnesty*. The word parrhesia appears for the first time in Greek literature in Euripides [c.484-407 BC] and occurs throughout the ancient Greek world of letters from the end of the Fifth Century BC. Moreover, this concept was later adapted-adopted by Michel Foucault. By applying this concept onto the selected work of Aravind Adiga, it is intended to study the notions of parrhesia and how they help in shaping the governmentality that is the way the people are governed, and societies are shaped. Governmentality is defined as the conduct of conduct and it is different from sovereign or disciplinary power in the sense that it is not forced upon an individual, rather it is self-determining and in it, the participant acts out of his own will.

**Keywords:** Governmentality, parrhesia, power, truth

**Introduction:**

According to Michel Foucault, the famous French philosopher, Parrhesia is the activity that consists in saying everything: pan re- ma. "Parrhe-siazesthai is telling all" (*The Courage of Truth* 2012). Parrhesia is the daring, knowledgeable and trustworthy political commitment with its "candid speech and good counsel offered without fear or favor" (Tilley, 1994)

Amnesty is the story of Danny who is an illegal immigrant in Australia. He is basically from Sri Lanka and is now working, also illegally, as a cleaner in Sydney. He struggles daily to remain hidden from the eyes of the officials. Life for him, takes a turn when a murder takes place and the lady Radha who has been killed is known to Danny. Naturally, he leans towards investigating the circumstances in which she is stabbed and thrown in a creek by wrapping her body in a leather jacket and filling it with stones to make it sink in the waters. But he realizes that he should not be involved in this as he thinks and logically too that "You are a man without rights in this world" (Adiga, 2020).

He works indiscriminately in Sydney hovering around different kinds of jobs like cleaning etc. Life of an illegal immigrant is not easy as he must work and even after working so much, one can be easily cheated and then blackmailed for being illegal. It's a tough life which is clear from the fact that his tenant sees him returning without working and asks as to what he has been doing

when he is supposed to work. Danny replies he is resting to which Tommy, the tenant, is totally surprised. “Resting” (Adiga, 2020) is not an option for an illegal immigrant.

The question of investigating the death of Radha haunts him and he weighs his pros and cons. He feels that if he is to reveal about the murder to the police, he would be risking his own freedom as he says, “If I tell the law about him, I also tell the law about myself” (Adiga, 2020). Here he refers to Dr. Prakash who is having an illegal affair with Radha who is already married and would meet him often when her husband is away. Danny feels Dr. Prakash may have some hand in her murder as he behaves unusually when he calls him and threatens to reveal his identity of being illegal. Danny wonders why he is threatening him because this could only be in a circumstance where he wants to hide something from Danny. Danny must exhibit Parrhesia over here. Parrhesia “not only puts the relationship between the person who speaks and the person to whom he addresses the truth at risk, but it may go so far as to put the very life of the person who speaks at risk” (Foucault, 2012). In this case, Danny’s crime might also be revealed if he goes about unravelling the case of the murder of Radha.

Meanwhile Danny thinks of life in Sydney and the relationship the two have with each other. Both are into gambling and hide it from Radha’s husband. Infact, once after losing government money, Radha tries to run away to India but is caught by the immigrants as “her husband found out at the last minute and dobed her in” (Adiga, 2020). So, her husband exhibits Parrhesia, thus preventing Radha from leaving the country and in the process saves his marriage. By exhibiting parrhesia, her husband can “conduct the conduct” of his wife. He loves her very much and ignores her fallacies. Radha, on the other hand, cheats on him but does not divorce him “because that would lead to all kinds of issues, money, food, housing” (Adiga, 2020). So, she is selfish and dishonest, a perfect antithesis of Parrhesia, which ultimately leads to her doom.

Life in Sydney is also reflected upon by Danny, the cleaner, as he goes about surviving on low pay and a secretive lifestyle. In fact, he cannot get his hands on such a basic need as water because “bottled water in Sydney can cost more than coffee, can even cost more than beer” (Adiga, 2020). So, where does he drink water from? From one of the taps in the washroom of a pub. That is the situation in the city. Adiga also talks about the duplicity of showering praise on someone. He says that if someone is heaped with praises and garlanded during the day, he is only befitting for the “gutter” (Adiga, 2020) later in the day. This shows that with popularity comes criticism also. This is the reality of stars who are the heartbeat of people at one time and are turned to dust at another. Coming to life in Australia, Adiga mentions some of the Australians being racists as they acknowledge “the wealth of their race and the poverty of others” (Adiga, 2020). The situation is tight lipped as news mentions that illegal migrants have taken over Australia, not in the literal sense, but enough to draw the ire of the natives. On one such occasion, when Prakash and Danny are in a pub and there are three white men hurling abuses at the migrants on TV, Prakash just goes over to the TV and switches it off, while at the same time Danny thinks of running from there, afraid of being thrashed. It shows the bold character of Prakash who is not afraid of doing what his heart says. He exhibits parrhesia and thereby makes the three white men shut their mouth and

not speak a single word against men and women of the likes of Prakash and Danny. As Foucault mentions, “What is at stake in this new form of parrhesia is the foundation of ethos as the principle on the basis of which conduct can be defined as rational conduct in accordance with the very being of the soul” (*The Courage of Truth* 2012). Aravind Adiga here also eulogizes Prabhakaran, the slain LTTE leader who stands for the rights of the Sri Lankan Tamils, for his courage and in a way compares the act of Prakash with the heroics of Prabhakaran.

But Prakash is also a man of duplicity. He exhibits heroism but only from the outside. Inside, he is weak and vulnerable, as is clear, the moment he runs out of the pub in which he gambles and then vomits. As per Aravind Adiga, he has created this self-image of himself being a “dissenter” (Adiga, 2020) and a rebel. He has two faces and ironically, he is referred to as a “icosahedron” (Adiga, 2020). This observation of Danny about Prakash makes him doubtful that Prakash is involved in the murder of his paramour.

Australia is a land where a lot of immigrants fly for opportunities. They come from the developing nations to carve out a niche for themselves. They work in high rise buildings as opposed to the native Australians who prefer “houses with gardens” (Adiga, 2020). Australians are rich and that is because the rule of the law is paramount in the country unlike a country like India or Sri Lanka for that matter where the law is “a burning cigarette on your forearm” (Adiga, 2020). The Aussies follow the law fervently and that makes them the richest clan as the government then also comes in support of them for fulfilling every need like “free lawyers defended indigenous Australians and those who couldn’t afford their own defense” (Adiga, 2020). It is for this reason that Danny is the most fearful in revealing the secret of the death of Radha to the police as Danny retorts, “If I tell the law what I know about Dr. Prakash, I tell the law what I know about myself” (Adiga, 2020).

The story of migrants, especially illegal migrants, is one of hardships and turmoil. They are looked down upon even by their fellow people who might have come before them and become permanent residents. As an illegal migrant has no rights, Danny is not sure of interfering in the investigation to ascertain the cause of death of Radha. But he is being prompted at every stage to do that as he is walking on his way which says, “Cross the road now” (Adiga, 2020) and which leads to Prakash’s home who has asked him to come over for cleaning. This period when Danny walks towards Prakash’s home is crucial as Danny does not have the courage to face up to the truth. Socrates mentions this aspect when he says: “Do not get angry when you hear me tell you these truths: no man can escape death if, however nobly, he should oppose you, or any other popular assembly, and endeavor to prevent injustice and illegality in his city” (Foucault, 2012). Here Danny tries to prevent illegality but he must be courageous enough to stand up to the truth and so he remembers Gandhi who is the epitome of truth.

Intermittently, Aravind Adiga talks about the exploits humans have carried out in the area where Danny is walking. He sees a Jabiru, a bird found in Australia, and which has a yellow tag printed with a surveillance number and at the same time the smoke from the forest fires can be felt reaching Danny’s nose. In fact, in each of his novels, Aravind Adiga talks very subtly about the problems that are encountered in the places where his novels are set. For example, Corruption and

nepotism in India in *The White Tiger*, Power and freedom struggle in *Selection Day* and now bushfires in Australia in *Amnesty*.

Aravind Adiga also raises some significant issues concerning the world as he talks about the injustice being meted out to the people in Syria. As Danny is in a dilemma to report the suspect in the murder of Radha and is walking through the streets of Sydney, he watches a lady shouting, “Do not turn a blind eye to Syria! Thousands being massacred, raped and murdered.” (Adiga, 2020) What the narrator tries to portray here is that one must stand up to injustice by speaking the truth and standing with nothing but the truth. The example of Syria is given to motivate Danny to come out of his dilemma and reveal the truth of the death. The narrator is telling Danny to be parrhesiastic. But Danny knew that even if he was doing something for the greater good, he would be deported back to his native country once the whereabouts of his illegal stay in Sydney are known. He would be shown sympathy but according to the law which no one can deny, he would be returned to Sri Lanka. People who stayed illegally in Australia had come from Pakistan, Sri Lanka or Malaysia. Danny thought that a day would come when they would be granted Amnesty or an official pardon by the Government. But his friend Ibrahim thinks otherwise. He feels that only by converting Australia into a Muslim state, can the problems of the nation be solved. Meanwhile, there were migrants who somehow managed to tell lies to their families back home so that they could enjoy their life. They could not tell straightforwardly as to what kind of job they have been doing in Australia as it is quite embarrassing for them to reveal the truth about themselves.

Meanwhile, Danny has finally decided to reveal the truth to the police about Radha’s murder. He says, “A man without rights in this world is not freed from his responsibilities” (Adiga, 2020) as in parrhesia, it is one’s duty to tell the truth and one cannot shirk his responsibility. The land of Sydney is considered as one which is “built on the principle of exclusion of men and women who were not white”. This sort of racial discrimination by successive governments is meant to exploit the condition of those migrants who somehow manage to enter the country under the notion that Australia would one day accept their status of being an Australian. This also means a steady flow of jobs for the educated Australian and less jobs for the migrant who is trying to take away their job. In a way, getting the best of both the worlds by making the illegal migrant work at less wages by intimidating and blackmailing on the one hand and excluding him from the mainstream on the other. That corresponds to Governmentality wherein one tries to regulate the “conduct of conducts” (Foucault, 2012).

Even Danny, who has entered illegally into Australia, meets the same treatment at the hands of a Sri Lankan interrogating officer whose “burning cigarette penetrated Danny’s forearm” (Adiga, 2020). This is a blatant show of power and according to Foucault, “It was the effect, in the rites of punishment, of a certain mechanism of power: of a power that not only did not hesitate to exert itself directly on bodies but was exalted and strengthened by its visible manifestations.” (*Discipline and Punish* 1977). Before Danny enters Australia, he has also worked in Dubai in a hotel where he would be serving “An Arab in caftan from one of the most repressed emirates.”

(Adiga, 2020). Aravind Adiga mentions the other emirates being more repressive as compared to Dubai which is also clear from the fact that UAE stands at 116th position in terms of freedom index (“International center for justice and human rights”). Power is thus used to repress citizens, especially journalists, to maintain the political supremacy of the monarch. Even Danny, along with his co-workers working in the hotel, must bear the brutality of his employer as the raise that he has been promised as part of his contract, is cancelled at the eleventh hour leaving him at the mercy of his employer who has possession of his passport. That is the law in Dubai. Another show of power being used to intimidate the workers. Aravind Adiga also depicts the way in which natural calamities or tragedies can alter the rules of existence. Due to the tsunami that struck Sri Lanka in 2004, many people died and “Men and women who had been sending their sons to kill Tamils now sent money to save Tamil lives” (Adiga, 2020). So, a natural occurrence like a tsunami or even a pandemic can alter the way one is governed as governmentality is not only about political power but also about “the government of lives and souls” (Foucault, 1991). But the fate of a do-gooder in the world is bad as is in the case of a whistleblower who blows the lid off a crime or fraud. Someone who speaks truth to power is admonished and so is the person who cares for others as parrhesia is not only the mode of truth telling with courage but also an attitude of life, a way of living. “It is also an attitude of the heart, a way of being, which does not need to manifest itself in discourse and speech.” (Foucault, 2012).

After having detected the crime committed by Dr. Parkash, Danny runs from the spot after hitting Dr. Parkash with the cactus in his hands. Dr. Parkash tries to manipulate him by saying that if he reveals Dr. Prakash’s name to the police, he “will be a hero for a minute on Twitter, and then everyone’s watching football while you are deported for the rest of your life” (Adiga, 2020). People will idolize him for a day or two and then forget everything, but his life will be ruined ultimately. Danny agrees with that saying, “doing the right thing was like turning the lights off” (Adiga, 2020). In parrhesia also, “one has to accept that, if one is to tell the truth, not only may one’s personal, friendly relationship with the person to whom one is speaking be brought into question, but one may even be risking one’s life” (Foucault, 2012).

While Danny is contemplating telling the truth, his entire past comes before him like a flashback. The time when he returned from Dubai and was mocked by his father for failing to achieve what others could achieve when they go abroad and the time when he is deciding to go next to Canada or Australia, now come to haunt him. Smuggling is very common and often people leave on a boat from Rameswaram in India, a fact Danny comes to know from one of his friends Kannan. People from the developing nations gallop these developed nations in search of a better life and often they do it illegally, the act can be referred to as anti-parrhesiastic but which also influences the governmentality of both the countries. Countries deport citizens if they are caught and often, they remain hidden and send remittances to their homes and families. Going legally is not an option as Kannan says, “I don’t have that kind of money. The smugglers, they don’t ask for this much” (Adiga, 2020). Often, going illegally is fraught with risks and dangers and not all who venture out survive. One might be tempted to feel that anyhow going illegally or legally, one’s life may be altered but the truth is that if one hides the truth and does something, one is bound to fail. One act

of anti-parrhesia may lead to more crimes in the future that affects the society at large. Now in this case, Radha has been murdered by Dr. Parkash, but justice stands on thin margins and at the whims and fancies of Danny, the illegal migrant.

Having spent lots of money for education in Australia, one might be tempted to feel that the education will be world class but the college in which Danny gets to enroll in Sydney is on “the first floor of a brick building- a warehouse” (Adiga, 2020). It is dilapidated and a makeshift kind of arrangement. It is a deceit to take advantage of the poverty and illiteracy in developing nations. One’s positioning at a more powerful position gives rise to discrimination and fraud against the lower strata of society. In another case, Migrants are made to work for less as compared to the legal wage if they want to earn some extra money beyond the maximum no. of hours set by the government. They are working illegally so their employers take advantage of that. It is yet another way of exercising control over people by taking advantage of their weaknesses or shortcomings. Since Danny has been cheated into taking admission into a substandard college and that too by paying hefty fees, he decides to give up college and start living in Sydney illegally. He is helped by Tommo who provides him with a place to stay but he is exploited by him because Danny does not have rights. Danny starts working as a cleaner in various houses and there is when he meets Radha. Radha wins the trust of Danny as he reveals to her that he was an illegal in Australia.

Aravind Adiga mentions the plight of Hindus in the world when Danny says, “Everyone everywhere makes fun of Hindus” (Amnesty 2020). Hindus, being the minority in the world, are stereotyped as being associated with cows etc. People in the minority are generally taken advantage of. Danny, soon after becoming an illegal worker, is made to pick up dog shit because his owner wants that his customers should not step onto that while entering the shop. A horrible state of living can be seen, which no one would have dreamed of when he/she set out for his native country for greener pastures. It’s true that people take advantage of you when you are vulnerable too. The powerful can rule and dictate terms because of the existence of the powerless, the meek and the submissive. As Foucault mentions, “power is everywhere, diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and regimes of truth” (*The Foucault Reader* 1984), Danny is able to come out of his powerlessness when he gets the knowledge that “Any man who employs an illegal and knows he is doing so is going to jail” (Adiga, 2020). This little piece of knowledge has wide reaching consequences as Danny is able to come out of his misery of being a slave to Tommo and also strike a deal with him of giving a part of his profits to him in exchange for leaving in his store while at the same time he could work as a freelancer in Sydney. That is the power of knowledge. With his display of courage in confronting Tommo and showing parrhesia, he can turn the tide on Tommo and bring respite to many illegals in Sydney as they now begin demanding for more wages from their employers.

Finally, Danny receives a call from Detective Sergeant Michaelos asking if he knew anything about the murder of Radha. Danny could have exhibited parrhesia over here, but he prefers to remain silent. That is the first time he is asked about the murder and Danny falters. He fails to muster courage to confront the demons inside him. Foucault describes parrhesia as “the courageous frankness of truth telling” (*The Courage of Truth* 2012). Danny does not want to leave

Australia at any cost. But the Australians are wary of the immigrants as Adiga says that “Men worry that too many brown, yellow and black immigrants are pouring into their country” (Amnesty, 2020) but the Government still wants more of them to come. Immigrants take away jobs and thus their peace of life.

Danny is hopeful that Radha’s killer could be caught and that is giving him jitters whereas if he gives up any hope of letting the murderer be known by the police, it is conducive for him as then he will not be in a position of getting deported from the country. Adiga summarizes this aspect in the following lines, “Hope is a kind of rigor. Despair is sugar” (Adiga, 2020). Australia for Adiga is a mere puppet of America when he says ironically that Australia is “not just a remote refueling stop for the US pacific fleet” (Adiga, 2020).

The way immigrants are exploited is also depicted aptly by Aravind Adiga. Poor immigrants from Malaysia enter Australia illegally and are made to work in the farmlands. They are exploited by the rich Australians and ultimately the cherries that are grown with their help is sold to the rich Malaysians at a very good price. The Malaysians cannot see this big picture because “rich Asians and poor Asians don’t seem to talk a lot to each other” (Adiga, 2020). Similarly, the poor immigrants are made to work indiscriminately and when the time comes for them to get paid, their employers inform the police who come and catch them and begin the deportation process. So, if one does not exhibit parrhesia or truth telling, one is bound to face the consequences of his / her actions and especially in Australia as the people there are mean when Adiga points out that, “The moment you shout help, Australia becomes empty” (Adiga, 2020). Being illegal, one cannot have the opportunities that the localities have like medical care. One leaves his native country, giving up the responsibility one owes to his home and surroundings but ultimately, he reaches a place that is full of struggle and shame and disrespect.

Coming back to the climax of the story, Danny thinks twice before revealing the secret about the murder to the police. He weighs his being deported back to his country against his duty to report the murder of Radha. Only when he realizes that Prakash, the murderer of Radha, was going to attempt another murder that he wakens up from his slumber and informs the police about the murder. Thus, Prakash is caught by the police and Danny, who had wished one day to be felicitated in Australia, is “now being processed for deportation to his own country” (Adiga, 2020). Ultimately, parrhesia triumphs over everything.

### **Conclusion**

Danny in employing parrhesia brings out the change in the system with better tightening of norms for illegal immigrants. It also helps to address the challenges that illegal immigrants face. Moreover, Danny’s quest for truth leads him to a path of self realisation wherein he amends the wrongdoings of his life by returning to his native country and starting his life afresh. He no longer continues to remain a slave in a foreign land. Parrhesia, if employed, can bring about revolutionary changes in the society and lead to governance in a better way, in other words, leading to governmentality.

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