



Faith And Survival In Modern India: The Struggle Of The Human Spirit In Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

This research article examines the thematic interaction of faith, survival, and the human spirit in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. The novel explores the stark realities of class, corruption, and social mobility via the experiences of its protagonist, Balram Halwai, within the context of a swiftly modernizing India. As Balram faces the systemic inequalities of the Indian social hierarchy, his internal conflict embodies a wider dialogue on existential belief and perseverance.

The study analyses Adiga's depiction of faith, not as conventional religious belief, but as a catalyst for human survival and aspiration. Furthermore, it examines the structural and thematic components that influence Balram's quest for independence and identity within a profoundly fragmented society. This study elucidates *The White Tiger* as a significant critique of the resilience of the human spirit in the face of contemporary socio-political adversities in India through a comprehensive examination of its core topics.

Key Words:

Faith; Survival; Human Spirit; Class Struggle; Corruption; Aravind Adiga;

The White Tiger; Social Mobility; Modern India; Identity

Introduction:

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* provides a scholarly examination of modern India, where social mobility is closely linked to corruption, poverty, and established class structures. Published in 2008 and recipient of the Man Booker Prize, the novel provides an unvarnished depiction of life inside India's underclass. The narrative chronicles Balram Halwai, an individual who ascends from extreme poverty to attain achievement, albeit by ethically dubious methods. Adiga's portrayal of Balram's odyssey serves as a penetrating critique of India's shifting socio-political terrain, elucidating the intricate interplay of survival, ambition, and faith in a nation plagued by injustice.

In the story, faith surpasses its traditional theological framework, evolving into an intrinsic conviction and a belief in the capacity to change one's destiny. For Balram, religion is not anchored in religious dogma but in his belief that survival hinges on his capacity to navigate and exploit the corrupt systems that subjugate him. This existential conviction motivates his acts, as he contends that individuals must create their own way in a morally murky world. His self-confidence, ambition, and shrewdness are essential instruments for navigating a society that provides minimal structural or moral guidance.

The story explores the duality of the human soul, depicting it as both resilient and profoundly flawed. Balram's unyielding pursuit of liberation drives him to engage in acts of rebellion, resourcefulness, and ruthlessness, challenging the ethical implications of achievement in an inequitable society. Adiga employs Balram's character to examine the durability of the human spirit during profound tragedy, while simultaneously depicting its compromise during moments of despair.

The White Tiger serves as a critical analysis of India's evolution, emphasizing the conflict between traditional values and the contemporary difficulties posed by globalization and economic inequality. Adiga's depiction of faith, survival, and the human spirit provides a complex examination of the moral and existential dilemmas encountered by individuals in a swiftly evolving society.

The Socioeconomic Landscape of *The White Tiger*

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* presents a sharp and vivid depiction of India's socioeconomic milieu, highlighting the significant chasm between the wealthy and the destitute that influences every facet of society. The story explores the rural impoverishment of "The Darkness" and the urban prosperity of places such as Delhi, emphasizing the divergent realities of contemporary India. Adiga examines, through the protagonist Balram Halwai, the systemic injustices that confine the destitute in perpetual poverty and the significant challenges they encounter in their quest for upward mobility.

In *The White Tiger*, India is portrayed as a country where the affluent abuse the indigent to preserve their status. Balram's transition from a rural village to urban centres exemplifies that the difference is not solely economic but is also profoundly rooted in social and cultural standards. His image of the "rooster coop" encapsulates the despondent subservience of the lower classes, who, akin to hens in a coop, are ensnared in their conditions, conditioned to acquiesce to their destiny while observing the liberty of the affluent. The "rooster coop" in *The White Tiger* symbolizes the disadvantaged populations in India:

Hundreds of pale hens and brightly coloured roosters, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and shitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a horrible stench – the stench of terrified, feathered flesh. On the wooden desk above this coop sits a grinning young butcher, showing off the flesh and organs of a recently chopped-up chicken, still oleaginous with a coating of dark blood. The roosters in the coop smell the 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.¹

Rural poverty is depicted as severe and unavoidable. Villages such as Laxmangarh, where Balram is raised, are devoid of essential amenities, education, and opportunity, with power monopolized by a select group of affluent landlords. In the metropolis, Balram confronts a distinct manifestation of inequality propelled by the economic aspirations of metropolitan India. The wealth, luxury, and corruption of Delhi sharply contrast with the destitution of those who service the privileged. The narrative highlights the

metropolitan elite, represented by Mr. Ashok, who live in excess, disconnected from the hardships of the impoverished.

Adiga's portrayal of contemporary India exposes the entrenched injustices that confine individuals like Balram, compelling them to resort to drastic actions for liberation. *The White Tiger* urges readers to confront the disquieting truths of inequality, corruption, and the human toll of India's swift economic advancement. According to Brinda Bala Srinivasan, "*The White Tiger* represents the struggle of the protagonist to come up against all odds and lead a life of effluence. The protagonist demonstrates that in the postcolonial Indian society in the era of globalization, it is immensely difficult for the straightforward people to become successful."²

Faith and Its Role in the Protagonist's Journey

In *The White Tiger*, religion is characterized not by compliance with religious doctrines but by an intrinsic conviction in one's capacity to influence one's fate. Balram Halwai's metamorphosis from a rural servant to a prosperous entrepreneur is propelled by his steadfast belief in transcending his modest beginnings and cultural constraints. This type of existential trust is essential in a society where conventional structures provide minimal prospects for progress.

Balram's repudiation of traditional religious activities indicates a transition from external to internal sources of conviction. He notes the frequent exploitation of religion by the affluent to preserve the status quo, hence perpetuating the oppression of the lower classes. In response, Balram relies on self-determination instead of religious rituals. His recurrent allusions to the "Rooster Coop" represent the socioeconomic constraints that ensnare the impoverished. His conviction in his capacity to evade this restriction underscores his intrinsic trust in personal autonomy.

Balram's conviction significantly impacts his choices, especially the assassination of his employer, Ashok, which, despite its ethical ambiguity, symbolizes his definitive claim to autonomy over his destiny. He contends that extreme measures are essential to escape the bonds of oppression, rationalizing his approach through his conviction in self-liberation.

Balram's conviction stands in stark contrast to the scepticism he cultivates towards societal structures. He gets disenchanted with the court system, education, and family, perceiving them as complicit in sustaining inequity. This intensifies his dependence on personal faith as the catalyst for transformation. Balram's struggle for liberation is marked by aggression and violence, leading him to betray his family and society to achieve his independence, thereby subverting the existing power dynamics. He exhibits no regret for having killed and for allowing his family to be murdered by his master's henchmen as an act of vengeance. Balram states, "All I wanted was the chance to be a man - and for that, one murder was enough."³ (Adiga 318)

Ultimately, Balram's conviction in *The White Tiger* epitomizes his quest for uniqueness and autonomy. His faith manifests as a resistance against the stringent societal roles imposed upon him, exemplifying self-assurance as a means of survival in a repressive culture. Adiga depicts faith as a multifaceted, intrinsic force that enables Balram to confront and surmount the institutional obstacles of contemporary India.

Survival Against the Odds: Navigating Corruption and Class

In *The White Tiger*, survival in contemporary India is portrayed as a complex endeavour of manoeuvring around established systems of corruption and class stratification. Balram Halwai's rise from a menial servant to a self-made entrepreneur necessitates navigating a profoundly crooked and inequitable culture that favours the affluent. The novel depicts corruption as pervasive, permeating all strata of society—from politicians and law enforcement to entrepreneurs.

Balram swiftly comprehends that in a society dominated by corruption, conventional moral principles provide neither safeguard nor avenue to achievement. His employer, Mr. Ashok, represents the affluent elite, detached from the grim realities of the impoverished while engaging in unscrupulous activities, including paying politicians to advance his commercial interests. To endure in this milieu, Balram realizes that adhering to the system's regulations will merely confine him to subservience.

Class is a significant factor that constrains Balram's choices. His existence is characterized by his lower-class status, however his resolve to escape this destiny compels him to leverage the corruption that subjugates him. By ultimately perpetrating murder to evade his position, Balram subverts the limitations of class and ensures his existence, exemplifying the extremes to which one must resort to transcend a deeply inequitable society.

The Quest for Freedom and Identity

The central theme of *The White Tiger* is Balram Halwai's unyielding pursuit of liberation and self-identity. Emerging from destitution and moulded to conform to the stringent class hierarchy, Balram's odyssey is one of self-emancipation, transcending societal norms and his ingrained subservience. His need for freedom transcends mere economic escape; it is a declaration of his identity in a world that perpetually undermines his autonomy. According to Shreya Sihna, "*The White Tiger* is a brutal but honest portrayal of modern India. Adiga's uncompromising view of the corrupt and unequal society is both a triumph and a mirror for the socio-economic divides prevalent in contemporary India."⁴

Balram's pursuit of liberation commences with his acknowledgement of the repressive forces that envelop him—the "Rooster Coop" of Indian society, wherein the impoverished are maintained in a condition of subservience. This epiphany ignites his will to attain liberation, although he recognizes that genuine freedom necessitates more than mere financial achievement—it involves the establishment of a new identity, one that is not constrained by class, caste, or subservience.

Balram's quest for identification compels him to engage in ethically dubious actions, culminating in the assassination of his employer, Mr. Ashok. Although the act is radical, it signifies Balram's claim of autonomy over his existence and his repudiation of the subservient role assigned to him. By the conclusion of the novel, Balram has attained financial autonomy and has remade his identity, shedding his former role as a servant to adopt that of a self-made entrepreneur.

Faith in a Secular World: Moral Dilemmas and Ethical Conflicts

In *The White Tiger*, faith is associated not with religion but with self-confidence and survival in a secular, ethically ambiguous environment. Balram has significant moral issues, especially when he wrestles with the ethics of homicide and treachery in his quest for liberation. The novel depicts a realm in which conventional morality is subverted by pervasive corruption and inequity, compelling Balram to traverse ethical ambiguities. His mental struggle between self-preservation and moral purity underscores the stark reality of survival, where self-belief frequently undermines traditional ethical standards. As Priyanka Tiwari views, “Adiga’s *The White Tiger* stands out for its biting social commentary and the innovative narrative voice of Balram Halwai, who reveals the underbelly of the Indian success story with wit and cynicism. This novel reshapes the narrative of India’s socio-economic reality.”⁵

The White Tiger as a Metaphor for the Human Spirit

In *The White Tiger*, the white tiger metaphorically represents the resilient human spirit and the distinctive power necessary to escape oppressive conditions. The white tiger, both rare and formidable, symbolizes Balram's perception of exceptionalism within a culture that seeks to restrict him to subservience. In the narrative, Balram perceives himself as a unique being, capable of transcending the "Rooster Coop" and confronting the entrenched systems of inequality.

The metaphor underscores perseverance and survival despite adversity. Similar to a white tiger's distinctiveness and ferocity in its natural environment, Balram emphasizes his individuality by challenging customary conventions. His metamorphosis from a subservient attendant to an autonomous entrepreneur exemplifies the human spirit's capacity to withstand and surpass constraints. *The White Tiger* serves as a metaphor of Balram’s personal journey and the larger quest for independence and self-identity within a society constrained by social limitations. In the words of Jose Chacko, “Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* marks a refreshing departure from the romanticized depictions of India. Through the lens of Balram Halwai, Adiga critiques the false promises of globalization and the persistence of social hierarchies.”⁶

Conclusion

In *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga illustrates the intricate dynamics of faith, survival, and the human spirit amidst the stark reality of contemporary India. Balram Halwai's ascent from destitution to self-made prosperity is driven by an unwavering belief in his capacity to overcome societal constraints. By confronting corruption, social conflicts, and ethical quandaries, Balram exemplifies the tenacity of the human spirit. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, "*The White Tiger* is a compelling novel that courageously tackles India's social and political corruption. Adiga's razor-sharp prose and daring narrative make it a seminal work in contemporary Indian fiction."⁷ Adiga's story compels readers to contemplate the ethical sacrifices frequently necessitated for survival in an inequitable environment, while emphasizing the potency of self-belief in transcending systematic oppression.

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