



Role Of Money In Aravind Adiga's 'The Whitetiger'

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga is a journalist by profession. As a part of his profession he has moved around India and collected material which is related and not related to the job, but it is useful. He has modified it into a novel that is Adiga's debut novel 'The White Tiger'. It is an epistolary novel, written in letters to the Chinese president by the protagonist Balram. Balram is a school drop-out, born in a poor family of sweet makers called Halwais. Presently when the novel is going on, they are no more sweet makers. His father is now a rickshaw puller, trying to meet both ends of the day. In such a situation, he has also the duty of a father of a daughter. He has to get his daughter married off. For this, he has taken a loan to give dowry to her. In order to clear it off, Balram also has to leave his school and join as a helper in a mechanic shop. He is a clever boy who wants to grow up in life. In the process of his letters to the Chinese Prime minister Jiabao, he explains the 'light' and 'dark' sides of the country, in seven letters each a day.

My paper explores the ups and downs of Balram's life as a Halwai. His evolution from an innocent school dropout to a rich man, the owner of a taxi association which speaks about the contemporary conditions of the country.

Aravind Adiga is the newest Indian writer to become a worldwide publishing phenomenon. A former journalist with *Time* magazine, Adiga's first novel, *The White Tiger* (2008) won the Man Booker prize, making him the fourth Indian novelist to do so. *The White Tiger* explored the dark under belly of the new, modern India and was a fixture on bestseller lists across the country. Aravind Adiga shares the position of

being one of the top ten writers of India today along with Chetan Bhagat, Kiran Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Amit Chander, Rusk in Bond and Shobha De. These writers have explored themes ranging from delineation of contemporary life, globalization and its attendant evils. Since their pre-occupations are with modern India it has become imperative to study them from a modernist point of view, contextualizing them in cultural contexts.

Not only the new generation writers but the old generation writers also have done good work in the post 1980 era. The writers include R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Arun Joshi and others who have published excellent novels. During this period R.K.Narayan published four novels. *Talkative Man* 1983 *The Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), *The World of Nagaraj*, (1990), and *Grand Mother's Tale* (1992). Mulk Raj Anand has written three novels: *The Bubble*(1984)*Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi*(1991)and *Nine Moods of Bharata Novel of a Pilgrimage*. Of these novels *The Bubble* has become very successful. Shiv K.Kumar's *The Bone's Prayer*, has popular depictions of the spirit of India in a suitable manner. (Das, Bijay Kumar.(Pp 56, 57)

Adiga was the fourth Indian writer to be awarded the Man Booker Prize. The three previous Indian-born winners were: Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981); Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (1997); and Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). The 2008 Booker long list also included Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* and Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*. Along with Adiga, Ghosh was one of the six novelists shortlisted for the Prize.(Journal of Commonwealth Literature).

Adiga's lucid style, his keen observation of life around him and his intolerance of social evils, corruption, the growing differences between the rich and the poor and complacency of the educated masses attract the readers and most that are disturbed by the reading are prompted to react. Adiga took up the epistolary form for *The White Tiger* and gave it a necessary twist so as to incorporate elements from the stream of consciousness novels of the modern era and also from the postmodernist fiction having recognizable socio-cultural scenarios without any symbolic intentions. Though the novel contains letters each night, they are not explained chronologically. The protagonist takes freedom. The events are not in a chain of action. Flash back method is also used in a shrewd way.

Among Adiga's novels *The White Tiger* has explored the issues of poverty, caste politics, hierarchy, corruption, loss of ethical values, complacency etc., in a violent and vibrant, but calm manner. Balram the protagonist of the novel belongs to a system of hierarchs wherein the distinction is between 'haves' and 'have nots'. The landlords dominate the subordinates to an extent that the subject is deprived of human dignity, Robbed of the dignity. Caste superiority and terms of economic status are pushed to the periphery. A parallel history is being created by them and from the periphery. People who work on the right principles are unrecognized and considered to be foolish in modern society. Corruption in India is a result of the connection between bureau crats, politicians and criminals. The context is being exploited to the maximum by Balram, the man who comes up in life through this mode.

In the case of Balram, the protagonist of the novel, all the transitory shifts and changes have made him a murderer cum entrepreneur. As one goes through the novel, Balram, The sonofa sweet maker, explains about himself and the country to the Chinese Prime Minister, who is supposed to visit Bangaloreon an assignment. The changes in attitudes and circumstances which he mentions are sometimes comic and sometimes serious to listen to. 'Balram being scared of lizard' (p.28) appears to be a comic, wherein in reality he is a cold blood ed murderer. However, the reality dawns on the readers how serious the remark is as the seriousness of the novel progresses.

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga gives out details of rural as well as urban facets of transition that is happening for the detriment of the country-its various social evils like poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, caste and cultural conflict, superstitions, dowry practice, economic disparity, Zamindari system and exploitation of marginal farmers and landless labourers, rise of naxalism, corrupt education system, and poor health services. Tax evading rockets disturbed master servant relationships, prostitution weakened family structure, and entrepreneur's success and its fallout constitute the basic structure of Indian society which largely frames the dark image of India.

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga, is an outcome of internal Diaspora. It means that the novel is a result of the writer's journey to various parts of India as a journalist. The unofficial, Unwanted things for the profession are brought out in the form of a novel. According to Bodo Barna:

Internal diaspora is (was) formed as a consequence of historical processes (new circumstances caused by cataclysms, borders that have been moved). In the case of the members of internal diasporas, events that caused their minority status just happened, while being a member of a diaspora is a matter of personal choice even in cases when there was political pressure that caused it. Internal diaspora is the phenomenon of living in the same place despite of a changed political and ethical medium. Internal diaspora means undertaking continuity. (Internal Diaspora Assimilation Formation)

The novel talks about the protagonist's dislocation and relocation.

The novel deals with the ever widening gap between the rich and poor, rural and urban, and the brutal reality of an economic system that allows a small minority to prosper at the expense of the silent majority; political culture of India, voting behavior, social milieu, caste and cultural conflict, superstition, social taboos, exploitation of underclass, Zamindari practice, emergence of Naxalism, unemployment, especially in rural India, prostitution, master-servant relationship, nexus between the politicians, criminals and the police, mockery of education system, hollowness of Government's welfare schemes, poor medical services, harmful impact of scientific, technological and industrial development. All these issues are interlinked resulting in the protagonist's displacement and replacement. The final impression of the novel is that it justifies every kind of trick to succeed in life. Balram Halwai, the protagonist and his rise from Munna to Ashok Sharma validates this proposition. Adiga's exposure of the dark areas of India can be taken positively to cure the sick image of it – if one focuses on the areas of darkness and works sincerely, undoubtedly a new India will emerge.

Poverty is one of the main issues, attracting the attention of not only sociologists and economists but writers as well. It indicates a condition in which a person fails to maintain a living standard adequate for a normal lifestyle. There appears to be a stubborn bond between art, artists and poverty. Rainer Rilke said that one cannot be a good poet (writer) until one loves poverty, indifference and wretchedness. As if to prove him right, Dostoevsky, Kafka and others of the tribe lived their miserable life in ignorance and penury while producing master pieces. But in most other cases the artist might seek it because poverty is a great reality. The Indian novelists Munshi Prem Chand, Sarat Chandra Chatterji belong to this category. Prem Chand wrote about rural poverty, and no other author of that era presented a more realistic and

humanized face of poverty as effectively as Premchand. Far from the peripheral, poverty emerges at the centre of National debates about social justice, citizenship, and minority identity in his works. In contemporary Indian English fiction as well India's poverty appears to be a major theme.

In Aravind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* the narrator and protagonist Balram Halwai is an intelligent man born into poverty. Aravind Adiga has concentrated on Balram Halwai and the poverty all around him in *The White Tiger*. He tries hard to make sure that anything in the novel has a correlation in Indian reality. The government hospitals, the liquor shops and the brothels that turn up in the novel are all based on real places in India that he had seen in his travels. Adiga presents a very pathetic picture of poverty. Some people cannot follow their religion because they are poor and they want a job in a house where a child cannot call himself captain of the Indian cricket team, Azharuddin because the captain is a Muslim. Through the character and the story of the driver 'Ram Prasad', Adiga shocks the readers to the core that a Namazi Muslim is forced to become Ram Prasad just to earn his livelihood.

The scene of accident in the novel brings forth another real picture of poverty that is children of poor people loiter here and there, 'With none to look after them' (p. 165). They are homeless and live under the flyovers and bridges. Poor people are poor people as they have no control over their population. Amid all the celebration of India's progress Adiga's novel will perhaps provide a reminder to the wider world of how far India still has to come. In short, contrary to the position of critics, globalization has served as the agent of deliverance for India from economic stagnation and perpetual economic crisis even as it has reduced poverty.

Marriage is a social as well as cultural custom. It is a blending of happiness and sadness in *The White Tiger*. Marriage is a divine bonding between two unknown persons, a boy and a girl which makes them stay together as husband and wife for a lifetime. They take initiation in creating a new generation. Dowry is an offering by the bride's father to the groom at that time out of happiness. In recent days the happy occasion of marriage has turned out to be a sad one due to the commands and demands for dowry by the groom's family. This sometimes leaves the girl's family in a helpless situation. The recent issues like domestic violence and violence against women are due to dowry. This has become one of the social evils of recent days. Balram's cousins' marriage has made him drop out of school. The marriage has a linkup with the dowry system in

Indian culture. This has led to financial crisis for the family for generations. Balram and family members are called for the service under the land lord, when they have failed to repay the loan at high interest rate. Balram was forced to break the coal in a tea shop. But he hates the job of breaking coal. Even then he educates himself by roaming round the tables. Balram's father's wish to become successful remains an elusive dream till such time that he becomes a deviant. 'My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine at least one should live like a man.'(p30).Balram after seeing his friend Vijay from a lowly family becoming a conductor through a queer relationship with a politician, he too wishes to live like him come what may.

The notion and the reality get confronted and in the process Balaram adopts a new ethic which ultimately makes him a successful business entrepreneur devoid of morals and ethics. The irony and satire on the conduct of elections is graphic in the novel. At a crucial juncture in life Balram's father dies of tuberculosis due to lack of proper health care in the village hospitals. Though money is being spent, services never reach the villages is Adiga's contention. He says typhoid, cholera and election fever are the three main diseases of the country for which there is no cure. The heart-rending death of Balaram's father by tuberculosis due to the absence of trained professionals is shown as an indictment of moral corruption that dominates the graphic description of the condition of the patient and that of the hospitals explicitly speak of the attitude towards poverty, and the indifference to the lives of poor people. The 'Dark India' that Balaram has witnessed haunts him when he is exposed to the 'Bright, shining India', which of course has its own necessary evils to counter.

While the novel moves from country to city, the whole world of underclass also migrates. When one looks into the case of a senior driver in the landlord's house, Ram Prasad is basically a Muslim. But unemployment and poverty forces him to change his religion and earn money. Even in the case of Balram, the employer in the village says."All our employees are of top caste. It won't hurt to have one or two bottom caste working for us"?(p.65).Survival strategies speak volumes about the plight of people caught in the web of poverty.

Balaram too tends to confess:

“Over the next two weeks, I did things I am still ashamed to admit. I cheated my employer. I siphoned his petrol; I took his car to a corrupt mechanic who billed him for work that was not necessary; and three times, while driving back to Buckingham B, I picked up a paying customer.”(p.230)

The White Tiger is the country-mouse for his class. He belongs to a class of drivers but with an ambition to live like his master. The dislocation from the darkness of the village to the light of the city shows things in a different way.

The city is a revelation. Amid the cockroaches and call centres, the 36,000,004 gods, the slums, the shopping malls and the crippling traffic jams, Balram's re-education begins. Under the conflict between two opposite thoughts - to be a loyal son and servant or fulfill his desire to better himself, he devises a new morality. New morality is a new way of thinking where an individual thinks in his own way and does things accordingly, taking advantage of loopholes in the system and society. Beyond designation drivers in new India also carry out the work of a servant, washing utensils, brooming the floors, cooking, massaging, scrubbing, lathering and drying the skin of dogs, they sell drugs and read with full enthusiasm *murder weekly* because a billion servants are secretly fantasizing about strangling their bosses. There is no place for the poor in the malls of the new India. Drivers and servants are also forced to confess the crimes their masters have committed. Though they earn extra income, they remain servants. Balram is so much disgusted with the life of a slave that he never feels guilty of Ashok's murder. “He wants to experience just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute what it means not to be a servant” (P.321).

These things prompt Balram to kill his master. He puts himself out of 'Rooster Coop'. Balram has a Macbeth-like conscience. He is aware that he was corrupted from a sweet innocent village fool into a citified fellow full of debauchery, depravity and wickedness. He keeps on viewing and analyzing the two worlds. He says,

‘The dreams of the rich and the dreams of the poor they never overlap, do they? See, the poor dream all their lives of getting enough to eat and looking like the rich. And what do the rich dream? Losing weight and looking like the poor.’ (P.225).

The idea of becoming an entrepreneur was not fascinating to him at one point. All that matters was to get liberated from the 'Rooster Coop!'. With this act of murder and escape Balram paves way for a new order and a distinct class of people, who are unique in social order. He comments:

In the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India but now there are just two castes. "Men with Big Bellies, and Men with small Bellies. And only two destinies eat or get eaten up" (p.64).

Balram, taking advantage of the need, starts climbing the ladder of success and turns himself from a social entrepreneur to business entrepreneur. In spite of his picture being displayed all over the country, in the railway and police stations under wanted criminals Balram succeeds in getting a license to shuttle taxis for MNC's in Bangalore under the title of the company 'White tiger Drivers'.

Just as Newton's third law says "Every action has an equal and opposite reaction", so also centuries of oppression and domination of the poor and underprivileged masses has created a new class of people. The reader feels the pulsating humanism in this novel. Adiga never misses the stirring of denial and dispossession beneath the sheen of an economically prosperous India. *The White Tiger* can aptly be called the new generation Indian English novel. It projects the dilemma and expectations of the depressed Indian masses, their extreme poverty representing a generation in a state of flux and dissatisfaction.

In conclusion, this novel is just the antidote for those who are overwhelmed with the usual blend of piety and poverty in Indian novels. Adiga's message through Balram sings out loud and clears that to be the *The White Tiger* the rarest of animals the creature that comes once in a generation is preferable (55) rather than to live a miserable life at the lower level of the social Ladder. *The White Tiger* can possibly evoke two broad classes of responses from readers. The reader could recognize the growing class distinction in our society, empathize with the not-so-rich Indians, and get on with his daily chores. The other response could be that the reader idolizes the courage of the 'white tiger' and chooses to follow the same path for his alleviation. Status quo or heightened social unrest – which is the bigger of the two malaises, is the conundrum that remains unresolved.

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