



REALISM IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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Abstract

*This paper examines the theme of realism in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, highlighting the stark contrast between the "India of Light" and the "India of Darkness." It explores how Adiga exposes socio-economic inequalities, corruption, caste oppression, and the failures of political and bureaucratic systems. Through the character of Balram Halwai, the novel presents the struggles of the underclass striving for survival and upward mobility in a deeply divided society. The study emphasizes the harsh realities of both rural and urban India, including poverty, unemployment, and exploitation. It also reflects on the moral ambiguity adopted by the marginalized to escape systemic oppression. Furthermore, the paper analyses how realism functions as a critique of the myth of a "shining India." Ultimately, the novel urges readers to reconsider social justice, equality, and the need for structural transformation in contemporary India.*

Keywords

Realism, Social Inequality, Corruption, Class Struggle, Contemporary India, etc.

Full Article

This paper makes an attempt to investigate how Aravind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* has reflected the harsh reality against the popular image of shining India. The trio i.e. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and other novelists succeeded in capturing the Indian realities in their writings and focused mainly on social evils prevalent in rural India. Currently, the focus has shifted towards the rapid and problematic growth of large cities across the world. Aravind Adiga has divided India into two parts i.e. 'India in Dark' and 'India in Light'. He has described the rustic social system, corruption, violence, poverty and unemployment as Dark India. India of Light comprises the big cities with towering buildings with black facia and mall culture and so on. Adiga has portrayed through the central character Balram Halwai who has represented the strong voice of marginal farmers, landless labors, jobless youths, poor auto and taxi drivers and servants. He has also focused on changing mindset of low class that is to adopt any way either moral or amoral to himself free from master-slave system. Thus, Adiga dared to reflect his contemporary real India.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* has delineated the Indian society. To him the dark side of India may be a new territory but to Indians this reality is not some kind of a discovery. When Indian readers go through the novel, they are quick to identify with the realities that the novelist uncovers but at the same time an unsettling feeling of shock and disturbance grips their hearts to realize that the mirror projecting these images is in a western hand. India with its cultural and linguistic diversity has always defied a simple and straightforward portrayal of its variegated and multi-layered realities in a fictional form. Indian realities with the Indian ways of perceiving them should be portrayed with genuine concerns on the part of the novelists.

Adiga's *White Tiger* is the life and struggle of Balram Halwai, an underclass struggling to shed his miserable existence and participate in the benefits of the modern globalised world.



Halwai, the son of a rikshaw puller moves from his village Laxmangarh in Bihar to Delhi to become a taxi driver. It is difficult struggle as he has been “confined behind bars of class, caste, economic disparity, illiteracy, zamindar system and poverty” (Kallappa, 232). Balram refers to his village as darkness full of misery, destitution and illiteracy in his email to Chinese Premier who is going to visit India to discover her from inside (Mendes, 277). He wished to inform the Premier that people in the darkness find themselves constantly in struggle ‘against the affluent middle - class elites and politicians for their day to day survival’ (Sheron, 172). His village Laxmangarh has shown no sign of development. It has school with unruly students and reckless teachers. Teachers who will chew betel leaves in the classroom with utmost freedom and colour “the ground of the classroom with the splash of ‘red paan’ (Adiga, TWT, 15). There are shopkeepers who sell “adulterated and stale items of rice, cooking oil, kerosene, biscuits, cigarettes, and jaggery” (Adiga, TWT, 15). As one walks along the road, one can see “down the middle of the main road, families of pigs” freely “sniffing through sewage” (Adiga, TWT, 20). The village has no hospital “although there are three different foundation stones for a hospital laid by three different politicians before three different elections” (Adiga, TWT, 47). When Balram’s father is gravely ill and he is rushed to a charity hospital, the scene that one comes across speaks volumes about the policies and schemes of the government and the way they come into effect or fail to ever materialize into reality. The hospital runs with all facilities only in the paper. In its physical picture it could be the most dirty, unhygienic and forsaken place. The wards have ramshackle beds with no attendants and pet animals like cats have freedom to roam about everywhere. The patients keep waiting but doctors have the predictable records of not turning up and the government ledgers shamelessly record deaths like one of Balram’s father who dies waiting in anticipation for medical health to arrive. Thus the misery and problems of the village are compounded by the corrupt Indian political and bureaucratic set up. The village is a veritable jungle wherein the rich landlords drain the last drop of blood from the bodies of the poor and still make them feel obliged to them. They are the rural Gods. All of them lived in high walled mansions, having their own wells, ponds and temples. They didn’t need to come out in to the village. It is ironical that the freedom of India did not bring equal opportunities for its people. There is one class with access to every source of luxury and entitled to a privileged existence and there is the other pushed to the margin with a constant struggle for survival as its fate. Thus an India emerged which as one came closer and closer showed itself as two Indias - one of light and the other of darkness. Right in the beginning of the novel the horrible pictures of paucity, extreme poverty, shocking state of education and health in rural India send chill down the spine and show that the subaltern “have no representative or spokesperson in the society. They live in and so helplessly suffer and get marginal place or no place at all in the history and culture of which they are the essential part as human beings”(Krishnasingh, 98).

Balram Halwai who, being poor and burdened with family debt, in spite of his thirst for learning, the education was snatched away from him. After realizing that there was no prospect of his survival from the family debt, he migrated to Dhanbad, a local town to work at a tea shop. He soon got frustrated when he could not see himself escaping the poverty. Ambitious in the core of his heart Balram was not going to accept his fate “in poverty and low caste and started looking for a change of profession (Sindhu, 332). He soon switched his job from a tea-shop boy to a house driver and then accompanied his master Mr. Ashok to work in Delhi. He has understood the disparity between the rich and the poor in the cities also. Adiga has depicted the pathetic life of the slums in a minute detail. Many residents of rural India move to the cities in the hope of a better life they can be seen scattered in the city. They sleep on the roads, footbath or in a cramped rooms specially made for servants. They come with expectant eyes though their expectations hardly get fulfilled. They fail as they don’t have the courage like Balram Halwai to say goodbye to their



slave like ways and get rid of their inner demons which bar them from showing any defiance to the risk who restrict their upward way to progress and better opportunities people who come from rural can be recognized very easily.

You can tell by their thin bodies, filthy faces by the animal like way they live under the huge bridges and over passes, making fires and washing and taking like out of their hair while the cars roar past them (Adiga, TWT, 120).

Adiga has reflected the harsh reality of the urban society through Delhi, how it is westernized in manners and culture soaked in consumerism. They have plenty of money to spend on wine, women and clothes, but are too mean to let servants lead a decent life. Behind the immaculate exteriors of the big hotels, shopping malls, wide roads lies that ugly reality which no political establishment is ready to admit and eradicate. Balram soon learns that this world holds no promise for the poor and many of his kind are languishing in jails for the misdeeds of their masters. The irony is that the people from the dark India have been brought up with the ethos that salvaging the master from a difficult situation is a matter of pride. Mr. Ashok cleverly makes Balram sign the papers wherein he owns the responsibility for killing a child which had been, in fact, killed by Pinky Madam in a state of drunken driving when there was hardly anyone on the busy roads of Delhi. This incident reveals the true picture of Delhi, the capital of a great country, where unidentified people are killed on the roads and such cases are not even reported. For the poor the problem of survival, of earning two-square meals is more pressing than seeking assistance from the police which in neck-deep in corruption.

Adiga has represented the Indian people who are divided into on the basis of the liquor they drink. There are English liquor men and Indian liquor men. English liquor is for the rich of India and Indian liquor is for the poor of India.

In this country, we have two kinds of men: Indian liquor men and English liquor men. Indian liquor is for village boys like me-toddy, arrack, country hooch. English liquor, naturally is for the rich, rum, whisky, beer, gin- anything the English left behind (Adiga, TWT, 73).

In the novel, the reality of darkness is used as a metaphor particularly for corruption. When the two brothers are going to bribe a minister, the narrator depicts the journey. “I was taking my particular dark egg right in to the heart of the city” (Adiga, TWT, 77). When they are returning after bribing, it is noted, “It was getting dark when the two brothers came out of the building..... Mr. Ashok was dark and sullen when he got in” (Adiga, TWT, 78). Adiga has attempted to enlighten us that the darkness is in the elite societies of cosmopolitan cities like Delhi and Bangalore. There, people are doing corruption worth hundreds of thousands of rupees and still remained invisible in the midst of all the lights.

Adiga has reflected the election system with his bigoted eyes as a disease inflicted upon the nation. Balram’s father had seen through twelve elections, voted all twelve, but not himself. When a mad but brave rikshaw puller decided to cast his vote and was ruthlessly murdered by Vijay and his companions. The elections are a time celebrates not the democracy but its elimination as we witness biriyani being distributed in front of a temple and free areas in abundance for all and also distributing money. Actually a primary difference between light and darkness is that in light people are free to cast their own vote and in darkness, people are again free to cast their own vote, but not by themselves as Balram says: “I am India’s most faithful voter and I still have not seen the inside of a voting booth” (Adiga, TWT, 102).



Prostitution is encouraged by the protectors of law but irony is that corruption has not touched even this area untouched. Balram has observed all things that are happening in Delhi and learnt how to protect from police and politicians from his master Ashok. After killing Mr. Ashok, Balram establishes himself as a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. By giving away the bribe to police and other officers as Mr. Ashok, he has not spent his life in jail instead he has led his life like other business magnets i.e. The White Tigers.

Conclusion:

Finally Aravinda Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* is not only delineating the harsh realities of the miserable poor but also reflecting how the rich has been exploiting the country for their own selfish purposes. It has also reflected caste system, Zamindari system, rigid class discrimination, corrupt political and buracratc system, economic disparity and so on. Adiga has portrayed through the central character Balram Halwai who has represented the strong voice of marginal farmers, landless labours, jobless youths, poor auto and taxi drivers and servants. He himself has also focused on changing mindset of low class that is to adopt any way either moral or amoral to free from master-slave system. The novel agitates the minds of the readers to interrogate the quality of the life and the society, especially of the poor and introspect on what must be done to address the 'darkness' for a greater progress and prosperity of the society. Finding little hope to grow out of the rigid caste based society and deprived political systems, the novel seems to suggest that the social and economic salvation for these poor masses lies in providing quality education to them. Thus, Adiga has given a warning to us to the change of our mindset towards the differences and disparity which are existing in contemporary India.

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