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**ARAVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*: A CRITIQUE OF SOCIAL REALITY**

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**Abstract:**

*The White Tiger, a 2008 Booker Prize novel by Aravind Adiga is a novel about prevalence of corruption in the socio-political life in India. It addresses the entire Indian social problems like corruption, nepotism, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, dowry system, caste and class conflicts etc. The writer satirizes the social practices and the people's inability to find any escape from their fate. It also highlights their impotent admittance to the system because of an ironic fact that deep rooted in their psyche, they would have done the same, provided the opportunities.*

**Keywords:** *Corruption, Social Deprivation, Poverty, Class Conflict, Liberation, etc.*

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, a 2008 Booker Prize winning novel presents a darkly humorous, ironical and satirical picture of the rural India amidst the phase of globalization. Written in the form of letters by its protagonist Balram Halwai to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, the narrative projects many of the social issues such as caste system, class struggle, corruption in the fields as education, healthcare system, politics, poverty, the impact of globalization on the Indian metropolitan cities, immigration and a sharp contrast between the rural India – India of Darkness and the urban India – India of Light.

Through the autobiography of Balram Halwai, 'voice of underclass' (Singh, 229) the novel attempts to speak out the experiences of the underclass, the impoverished areas of rural India. The narrative unfolds itself through the letters of Balram Halwai to the Chinese Premier. In his letters, he tells life story of himself, the son of a rikshaw puller who escaped the 'Rooster Coop' (Adiga, 173), the life of servitude and poverty, to become an entrepreneur. Born in a village in Gaya district in a poor, joint family, Balram is forced to work at a teashop with his brother in Dhanbad. The ambitious boy refuses to succumb to poverty driven conditions and decides to upgrade himself by becoming a driver to the family of Laxmangarh's landlords. He moves to Delhi to serve his master, Mr. Ashok and his wife, Pinky, who has returned from the USA. Balram is forced by his masters to confess the offence of hit and run case, the crime committed by Pinky. Unable to find a way out, he finds the killing of his master as the only way for his escape from the Rooster coop, to his liberation. He murders Mr. Ashok and flees with the large amount stolen from the victim. He moves to Bangalore, and starts up his own taxi business.

Through his journey from his village to Gurgaon and Bangalore, Balram's narrative records a cynical picture of a number of issues like deep rooted caste system, servitude to the superior castes and classes, class struggle, corrupt education system, ill practices in healthcare services, politics devoid of any morals, poverty, the seeming hope of globalization and the consequent divide of the society in the urban and rural India.



**Corruption in the Education System:**

Balam presents a dark and gloomy picture of education system in his village Laxmangarh. The free food to the students, school uniforms are stolen and sold aftermarket:

There was supposed to be free food at my school – a government programme gave every boy three *rotis*, yellow *daal*, and pickles at lunchtime. But we never ever saw *rotis*, or yellow *daal*, or pickles, and everyone knew why: the schoolteacher had stolen our lunch money. The teacher had a legitimate excuse to steal the money – he said he hadn't been paid his salary in six months (Adiga, 33).

The writer satirizes people's acceptance of the malpractices in education system because, No one blamed the schoolteacher for doing this. You can't expect a man in a dung heap to smell sweet. Everyone in the village knew that he would have done the same in his position. Some were even proud of him, for having got away with it so cleanly (Adiga, 33).

**Corruption in the Healthcare Services:**

Government hospitals are meant to provide health care services for the poor. But in reality the government doctors remain absent from their duties as they practice in their private hospitals where the rich get treatment. When Balam and his brother Kishan took their dying father to the hospital, they bribe ward boy to know when the doctor would come. The appointment of medical superintendent is influenced by the politician, Great Socialist through 'an open auction for that post'. Such doctors appointed through bribery neglect their duties and the private hospitals have 'taken the place of five-star hotels where the rich people are treated well' (Aurora, 169).

**Corrupt Political System:**

All the public welfare policies are supposed to work for the poor and the needy. But in reality all the government machinery is manipulated in the interest of the rich, the powerful and influential people. Adiga presents the evil practices in the political system prevailing in post-independent India. The system in which votes are bought, scoundrels and criminals win the elections by all unfair means, seems to mock the parliamentary democracy. The voters even didn't know that their votes were sold out before the actual voting:

I had to be eighteen. All of us in the tea shop had to be eighteen, the legal age to vote. There was an election coming up, and the tea shop owner had already sold us. He had sold our fingerprints – the inky fingerprints which the illiterate person makes on the ballot paper to indicate his vote (Adiga, 97).

Balam's father recalls in all the twelve elections that he has seen, someone else has voted for him. He tells Balam that he has 'heard that people in the other India get to vote for themselves' (Adiga, 100) The politicians like the Great Socialist in India are not the selfless devotes in service of the society and the country. Rather, they are criminals, murderers, bribers, and the system allows them to be in power even if they are convicted to be guilty:

A total of ninety-three criminal cases – for murder, rape, grand larceny, gun-smuggling, pimping, and many others such minor offences – are pending against the Great Socialist and his ministers at the present moment. Not easy



to get convictions when the judges are judging in Darkness, yet three convictions have been delivered, and three of the ministers are in jail, but continue to be ministers (Adiga, 97-98).

The politicians have exploited the government system to rob the wealth and stalk it in the banks of foreign countries. The Great Socialist himself is said to have embezzled one billion rupees from the Darkness, and transferred that money into a bank account in a small, beautiful country in Europe full of white people and black money.

The Great Socialist scorns the Stork to extort money for his elections, in exchange of facilitating him taking coal from the government mines for free. The novel also notes the vague promises made by the contestants in the elections to the public, which are never fulfilled. The candidates during election campaign often assure plenty of reformation and development plans. Once the elections are over, everything is forgotten and the politicians get engaged in looting the public funds. An example of such fake promises is 'three different foundation stones for a hospital, laid by three different politicians before three different elections' (Adiga, 47), but still there is no hospital in Laxmangarh.

The writer presents a sarcastic picture of a typical Indian village:

Electricity poles – defunct.

Water tap – broken.

Children – too lean and short for their age, and with oversized heads from which vivid eyes shine, like the guilty conscience of the government of India (Adiga, 20).

The Indian people hoped fair governance after independence but the parliamentary democracy has 'provided a platform to the rogues in politics to harbour their personal interests' (Nimsarkar: 92), sacrificing the interests of the poor, illiterate public.

### **Emigration of Workers: A Broken Hope of Social Mobility:**

The poor people's migration to the urban areas in search of livelihood and in hope of a better life reflects their helplessness for absence of work opportunities in the Dark India. The rich and landlords have consumed up everything in the villages and there is nothing left for the poor. The Wild Boar owns all the agricultural land in Laxmangarh. The Raven owns infertile land besides the hills and the fort and levies taxes on goatherds. The Buffalo takes taxes from rickshaw pullers on the roads.

The poor are forced to migrate to the fast developing cities for work. But the urban India – India of Light also fails to provide a decent life to the workers.

These poor bastards had come from the Darkness to Delhi to find some light – but they were still in the darkness. Hundreds of them, there seemed to be, on either side of the traffic, and their life was entirely unaffected by the jam. Were they even aware that there was a jam? We were like two separate cities – inside and outside the dark egg (Adiga, 138).

The plight of the poor remains unchanged even after migration:

These people were building homes for the rich, but they lived in tents covered with blue tarpaulin sheets, and partitioned into lanes by lines of sewage. It was even worse than Laxmangarh (Adiga, 260).



**Conclusion:**

The narrative is full of the accounts of corruption in every spectrum of life. Education, health care system, politics, judicial system all seems to work together to exploit the poor in India. The lawyer tells Mr. Ashok, in the hit and run case of his wife, that ‘the judge has been taken care of’ and assures him if his man ‘does what he is to do, we’ll have nothing to worry about’ (Adiga, 167) Corruption, bribery, poverty, slavery, illiteracy, deprivation of fundamental amenities to the poor and their ignorance of their rights, calm acceptance of the persistent system, renunciation of any hope for liberation are the fate of the people born poor in the country.

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