

Exposure of Social Discrimination and the Consequences in Aravind Adiga's "*The White Tiger*"

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ABSTRACT

Aravind Adiga, a Chennai born writer, with his childhood and schooling in Mangalore, immigrated to Australia and then to the States, to study English Literature at Columbia University in New York and Oxford for further education. Adiga won the prestigious literary award Man Booker for his debut novel *The White Tiger* when he was 33. *The White Tiger* is his debut novel that is an angry story of an ordinary man's passage from Indian village life to entrepreneurial achievement. In spite of being out of his home town, Adiga is worried about the situation of his country. It is unquestionably true that the nation has witnessed a paradigm shift in financial and technological advancement. But, the bare reality is that this shift has been made possible at the cost of social, cultural, moral and human values. Social discriminations take forefront in the novel. The immense gap between the rich and the poor and among the different strata of the social set up discriminate the people which pollutes life and challenges all logic and reason. This paper analyses the societal evils that discriminate people and the consequences of the disparities which force them to adopt unfair means to fulfil their desires as embraced by Balram, the protagonist of the novel.

Keywords: Paradigm shift – Development - Social Discrimination – rich and poor – Consequences

I. INTRODUCTION

Aravind Adiga, a pioneering personality in modern English writings was born at Madras in 1974 and was raised in Australia. He studied at the Universities of Columbia and Oxford. Aravind Adiga's fictions cover almost every aspect of social life. His first novel "*The White Tiger*" which takes the pride and glory of winning the Man Booker Prize in 2008

portrays India with all her complexities. Modern India is depicted by Adiga as an amalgamation of growth and deterioration in several aspects. It is a nation of both light and darkness; rich and poor; optimism and pessimism; financial and technical growth and social and moral disintegration. Among all the factors, social discriminations take forefront in the novel. The immense gap between the rich and the poor and among the different strata of the social set up discriminate the people which pollutes life and challenges all logic and reason. This paper analyses the societal evils that discriminate people and the consequences of the disparities which force them to adopt unfair means to fulfil their desires as embraced by Balram, the protagonist of the novel.

1. SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION

There exist differences in wealth, power, and status in the present society. Some groups have higher status and greater privilege than others, thus leading to inequality in the system. In this uneven social system, unfair treatment is directed against certain social groups or individuals. This discrimination can be based on many different characteristics—age, gender, weight, ethnicity, religion, or even politics. "Social discrimination is defined as sustained inequality between individuals on the basis of illness, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or any other measures of diversity" (Bhurga, Dinesh 336). It is the unjust or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on race, gender, age in the society. For example, discrimination and bias based on race is called racism. Discrimination is the outcome of unfairness—a pre-formed negative conclusion or mind-set. This leads people to look certain persons or groups as inferior. Discrimination can occur at workplace, public places, politics, education, hospitals, etc. Discrimination affects people's opportunities and their well-being. Constant exposure to discrimination can lead persons to internalize the injustice that is directed against them, resulting in shame, fear and stress, low self-esteem as well as poor healthiness. As a result, many tend to lead a very pathetic life with no confidence, while a few venture in breaking the barriers that discriminate them at the cost of values to lead achieve the life they aspire. Balram of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is one such personality who comes out of the rooster coop adopting unfair means by murdering his master to accomplish his mission.

2. DEPICTION OF SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE WHITE TIGER

The White Tiger deals with the inhuman disparity prevailing in today's Indian Society, mostly an adopted culture from western part of the world. This book gives us a glimpse of contemporary India. The growing gap between the rich and poor and the failure of the police in tracking the criminals are clearly depicted. It also deals with other serious topics like corruption, poverty, terrorism, political turmoil caste and class discrimination etc. In India, the existing economic inequality paved the way for the various class systems, which create two types of citizens: masters and servants, most of the citizens are servants who are forced to work for their masters. It highlights the evils of contemporary Indian society such as corruption, assassinations, poverty and deterioration of human values. Without patronizing or being emotional about the whole situation, *The White Tiger* tries to make justice in depiction of the social injustice and death prevailing in India. On this strong basis, this is one of the revolutionary literary works.

3. **DICHOTOMY BETWEEN THE LIGHT AND THE DARKNESS.**

The sum total of the journey of Balram is evaluated by the dichotomy between the Light and the Darkness. Balram delineates the vision of two Indias as the duality of the custom of life in India: “India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings light to my country. . . But the river brings darkness to India – the black river” (*The White Tiger* 14). He also states that there were a thousand castes in India and now there are only two castes - Men with Big Bellies and Men with Small Bellies” (*The White Tiger* 64). The significant details of the history of the nation is replete with stories of poor people remaining voiceless victims of Rooster Coop syndrome with not even an iota of rebellion or show of protest because they are honest and moreover, do not have the courage. The harsh and unbearable Rooster Coop state of affairs is unfeelingly inflicted upon human beings also in this country.

Before Independence, Adiga seems to suggest through Balram, India has been the richest nation on earth in terms of regulation – everyone in his place and everyone doing his job with a sense of devotion, satisfaction and gratification. Landlords have remained kind to their serfs. The cowherds have tended the cows. In effect, the zoo law has prevailed. The converse becomes the truth after India’s independence. The zoo law is substituted with jungle law. Freedom has brought with it the unbridled actions – the survival of the inhuman, ferocious and malicious and growing big bellies. They gobble up the weak and the fragile.

Mr. Ashok, Balram’s master is an aspiring young man, educated in America and married an American lady. His treatment of the servant class is classic totally dissimilar to that of his feudalistic father or brother, putting up with their bad English, augmenting their income with frequent raising of salaries and behaving towards them in a humane manner.

But even he, at least on two occasions, strips off his facade of the arrogance of the rich. He remarks to his American wife that drivers like Balram have only a few years of schooling which is insufficient in grooming them and appends this: “He is half baked. The country is full of people like him, I’ll tell you that” (*The White Tiger* 10). On the second instance, Mr. Ashok exhibits a pregnant silence when Balram is implicated in the accident caused by the drunken driving of Pinky Madam in which an urchin is crushed to death. He does not support his servant this time and there is a strong tinge of nauseating selfishness in his act.

The feel of Balram as a fugitive strikes hard on his entry into a shopping mall. The guards in grey uniforms stare at him, a paid driver. He wonders whether there is no place for the poor in the shopping malls of New India. The guards treat any poor person entering the mall with sandals with derision and they are so bent upon driving such people out of the premises that makes a poor individual cry in anguish whether he is not a human being after all.

Balram is disgraced on quite a lot of occasions. He must follow his master and mistress carrying their countless bulgy shopping bags from the shopping malls. The lost coin incident in the car epitomizes all. The Mongoose offends Balram through his doggedness in a miserly and cruel manner. He compels Balram to retrieve immediately the one rupee coin dropped by him inside the car. Balram stoops so low as to crawl on his knees sniffing like a dog in search of it but in vain. Mr. Ashok pacifies him with the statement that it does not matter losing just a one rupee coin and pointless in screwing Balram when they have squandered half a million rupees as bribe. The Mongoose is not convinced and chides Mr. Ashok for

remaining sympathetic to servants by introducing his American style of functioning. Balram, finally, drops a coin himself and hands it over to the Mongoose to convince him.

This scene draws out two notions. The Mongoose admits that an innocent individual turns corrupt when he becomes a city dweller. Secondly, the Mongoose, as a master, is egotistical, inflicting endless tortures through innumerable techniques on servants who are constrained to put up with them. On every time Mongoose visits Delhi, he harasses Balram with a barrage of instructions of do's and don'ts. His deficiencies become their pastimes – English pronunciation like 'pijja' for 'pizza' and 'maal' for 'mall.' The black humour of Balram is in the forefront when he broods over the offer of money by Pinky Madam as reward for driving her to the airport at midnight. The introspection bares the tight-fisted rich people.

Balram is not just a driver alone. He does all lowly jobs – massaging the Mongoose, carry cash in suitcases to the politicians, ministers and officials, deliver liquor and ladies to men and serve liquor to passengers while on the move in the car. His aping of his masters in resorting to corrupt practices is an indication of his progress towards his ambition.

4. CORRUPT SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

India is greatly noted for its democracy. The word democracy seems to be very striking and complicated. Some people rob the freedom of others for their own sake. Powers are again subjugated by the dominant power controllers. Adiga depicts the corrupt system of our government in this work. The rich are highly corrupt and the Great Socialist has more than ninety three criminal cases on him for an assortment of offences – murder, rape, gun smuggling and minor offences. The judges are embodiments of dishonesty and fraud, judging from Darkness. The Great Socialist has siphoned off one billion rupees and stacked the money in a beautiful European country known for amassing illegal money. The people in Darkness could muster courage only to utter witty comments.

Mr.Ashok, Balram's master engages in unfair means like bribing the officials and politicians alike in Delhi to rid his family of the burden of income tax. This operation is not just illegal but also unjustified as it deprives the nation of its revenue and thus detrimental to its march ahead. This also leads to stashing of money and creates economic imbalance in the country. His precepts and practices are at odds.

5. DEPLORABLE PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

Adiga pictures the poor quality of public health system in India, by his protagonist Balram. Balram's father suffers from tuberculosis. His eyes are deep and vacant. He is as lean as a skeleton. Nonetheless, he makes his livelihood by pedaling a rickshaw. When he is crippled, he is supposed to be admitted into a hospital. To the disappointment of the persons involved, there are no hospitals in Laxmangarh "although there are three different foundation stones for hospitals, laid by three different politicians before three different elections" (*The White Tiger* 47). The lack of hospitals in rural communities is a sad reality across India. With the help of a boatman, Balram and his brother manage to take their father to an unimpressive building on the other side of the river. Lohia Universal Free Hospital receives them with three black goats sitting on the steps to the faded white building. As per the protagonist, the glass in the windows was broken and a cat was looking staring at them from one the cracked windows. The patients slowly pour in, but the doctors never appeal. These doctors favour the politicians who receive lump some money from them. The corrupt politicians help the

doctors who make huge amount of money from other places and completely ignore the people in the village side. As a result, Balram's father faces death and the entire family comes under trouble.

6. CONSEQUENCES OF DISCRIMINATION

The perpetual servitude is the curse of the servant class and they are unable break out of this rooster coop. The reason is obvious: the Indian family system and its irreversible values. To come out of this snare, the rooster coop, the individual should be exceptionally daring and courageous like Balram to bear with grit the hunting, beating and burning alive of his family by the masters as retaliation. Of course, he would be a man like Balram, no common average human being, but an abnormal individual, even a deviant from nature.

At one stage, he is about to confess his dastardly acts of cheating and criminal misdemeanour, but the frugal behaviour of Mr. Ashok hardens his stance. Thinking that Balram wants money to meet his wedding expenses, Mr. Ashok first takes out a thousand rupee note from his wallet, puts it back, then takes a five hundred rupee note but puts it back also and finally settles with a one hundred rupee note. The rich poor divide is complete and sealed. The gap between the two is beyond repair.

Balram determined to protect himself from blind obedience and slavery, one day when he gets a suitable opportunity, he murders his master Mr. Ashok. Balram wants to escape from the Rooster Coop. Having been a witness to all of Ashok's corrupt practices and gambling with money to buy politicians, to kill and to loot, he decides to steal and kill. Adiga delves deep into his subconscious as he plans to loot Rs.7,00,000 stuffed into the red bag. He is then an entrepreneur in Bangalore. He thus rises with success, thus becoming a business tycoon from a social entrepreneur. He thinks himself as the incarnation of Mr. Ashok by naming himself Ashok.

The circle is complete in his case like that of his boss Mr Ashok, who was from a cook's family. He claims to be different from Mr. Ashok. "Once I was a driver to a master, but now I am a master of drivers"(The White Tiger 302). He doesn't treat his servants as low people and also doesn't insult them in any way. He wishes that they learn from his behaviour. He says that as the White Tiger keeps no friends, he too kicks them out of the office when the work is done. After doing his self-confession to the Chinese Premier Mr. Jiabao, Balram justifies his act of murder and says that he would never say that he had made a mistake by murdering his master because he considers it worthwhile as he had been the servant.

11. CONCLUSION

The White Tiger, thus depicts the social and economic disparities of contemporary India. It is a piercing piece of social interpretation, adjusted to the dissimilarities that persist despite India's new prosperity. Thus the novel presents a startling contrast between India's rise as a global economy and the plight of the marginalized class of society living in devastating rural and urban poverty. It presents that if the marginalized are suppressed, a day will come when these suppressed land in breaking the barriers through any means to achieve their ends. Thus, it depicts a powerful commentary on the ever widening rich-poor divide that has gripped India in the twenty-first century and the impact of the divide to become independent individuals.

III. WORKS CITED

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