

Commiseration of the Downtrodden in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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ABSTRACT

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga has become a well-known novel for its lucid depiction of the miseries of the rural Indians in 'Darkness'. The presence of many hamlets in India seems to stultify the advantages of various schemes launched now and then with serious plans since our Independence. Lack of basic amenities in a village makes even a peace-loving person seething with frustration which may lead to resort violence as the Hobson's choice, especially when their justifiable frequent SOS calls are turned a deaf ear and a Nelson eye by the authorities concerned. The following terse research article throws light on the excruciating discomfort faced by the villagers in the form of poor basic facilities and the cruel inhuman treatment of the villagers by the landlords. As a result of reading the article or the primary source, sympathising or empathizing with the disadvantaged particularly of the villages in India is ineluctable.

KEYWORDS

Downtrodden; *The White Tiger*; Aravind Adiga.

Aravind Adiga has become a widely laudable writer by his successful magnum opus *The White Tiger* which has fetched the novelist the coveted Booker prize in 2008. The novel is in the form of a missive penned to his Excellency Wen Jiabo, the premier of China by Balram. It throws light on the various burning issues in India such as the horrible iniquity meted out to the poor by the rich, the greatness of the poor in accepting and overcoming the inhuman atrocities and the bohemian life of the rich. This view has been supported by Vijay Nair in his literary review of the novel on the 4th of January, 2009 in *The Hindu* that *The White Tiger* traverses the familiar territory of class and caste divide, poverty and exploitation and the triumph of the human spirit that

one expects in a book that unfolds from a place called "Darkness" in Bihar ..." [1]

The novelist has patronized the poor for which he has allotted a lot of space in the novel. This notion has been shared by Manjula Padmanabhan in her review in *Outlook India* titled *Bleached House Cat* that

The author's target is the cruelly insensitive landlord class, so we can relax in the knowledge that he's a Pureheart, battling for the downtrodden and the underprivileged. [2]

The novel presents *raison de etere* for the culpable homicide which the protagonist of the novel has committed. The popular saying - the poor become poorer and the rich become richer is justified. Such sorrowful iniquity occurs due to various

factors such as a dearth of basic facilities offered to the poor by the government and the ruthless dominance of the rich over the poor.

The novelist is cynical at the poor quality of education which is a root cause for the poor to remain poor forever. It is the bane of the poor in rural areas. Quality education refers to the education offered in the most committed manner from the knowledgeable and dexterous teachers who can uplift the students' creativity, intelligence and discipline from nadir to zenith or plausible level. This may be naturally feasible only in a conducive atmosphere where the basic facilities of a classroom are provided. As many students in rural areas study in a school which lacks basic infrastructure and less committed teachers, they may find it difficult to acquire even a smidgen of academic progress.

Owing to the topographical factor, there may not be basic amenities and the teachers are placed in a disadvantageous condition. This fact has been revealed in a review of the novel by Kevin Rushby who has stated the following views in "His Monster's Views" that

Balram has worked out very early in life that good deeds usually have awful consequences. This is because he, along with most lowly Indians, inhabits the Darkness, a place where basic necessities such as clean water, home, money and health are routinely snatched away by the wealthy, who live up there in the Light. [3]

The review was published on the 19th of April, 2008 in *The Guardian*. The teachers may not worry much about the social growth of children in such areas due to umpteen number of external and internal factors. Defects in the system of supervision of teachers, the absence of an iota of the feasibility of academic progress, poor motivation, and lack of economic sources to cope with the academic

expenses for higher education, nescience about the advantages of education and so on usually leads to a pathetic educational scenario, especially in hamlets. In the novels, there is a reference to the poor facilities in a village from which one can surmise how pathetic the predicament would have been for the villagers:

"Electricity Poles – defunct
Water Tap – broken
Children – too lean and short..."
(p.20)

The following line reveals the reason which is responsible for the students to feel less motivated.

The teacher was snoring at his desk behind me... When he went to sleep, which he usually did by noon, we stole paan from his pockets; distributed it amongst ourselves and chewed on it; and then; imitating his spitting style.
(p.29)

In the above passage, it is lucid to gauge that the students who belong to the underdeveloped places, usually do a lot of mischiefs and they don't emulate the teacher positively. They lampoon the teacher during the latter's absence. As our constitution states that an accomplice is more culpable than a criminal, in the above-mentioned context, the teacher is like an accomplice and the students are like criminals. As stealing is an offence, the students can be accused of stealing from the teacher. Though the students might have involved in it only for fun, it cannot be justified.

The villagers do not have convenient transport facility also. The author expressed it in the following line: "The bus from Gaya stopped there at noon every day (never late by more than an hour or two)" (p.23)

Among the ill-treated poor, there are people who do not want to stoop and they would like to bring about the tangible changes in the socio-economic condition

of the family. There is a context in the novel to espouse the view:

They (the rickshaw pullers) were not allowed to sit on the plastic chairs put out for the customers; (p.24) ...

'My father could have worked with them; he could have worked with them; he could have worked with the landlord's mud, but he chose not to. He chose to fight it... (p.27) They had to crouch near the back in that hunched-over, squatting posture common to servants in every part of India.' (p.24)

There are writers who express their wrath over the cunning rich in various forms such as writing candidly or insinuatingly about the atrocities of the rich. It may either be a burlesque or a satire. Aravind Adiga has employed a strange technique of assailing the rich by addressing them only by names of animals like buffalo, stork, wild boar and raven. S. Prasannarajan has conveyed the view tersely with the following comment in his review titled "Books-Driving out of darkness" that "there is protest, anger, disgust and a sense of compassion." [4] It is worthy to state that Adiga has dehumanized the cruel rich who deserve such treatment for their despicable and brutal thoughts and deeds.

It is horrible to find that there is casual human right violation perpetrated by the landlords on the poor. Facing physical as well as mental discomfort is a part and parcel of the poor in the rural areas in India. The following lines in the novel reveal the pathetic condition of the downtrodden:

A Sharp blow landed on my head... A minute later, he hit me on the head again.' (p.71) ... 'Do you have to hit the servants, father?'

'This is not America, son. Don't ask questions like that.' (p.72)

Complacency and lack of scope for any extraordinary socio-economic fortunes usually make the poor feel contented, to be honest. The following lines in the novel glorify the honesty of poor people albeit the feasibility of becoming rich with a dishonest act;

He (rickshaw puller) unloads all this furniture for you, and you give him the money in cash- a fat wad of cash the size of a brick. He puts it into his pocket, or into his shirt, or into his underwear, and cycles back to his boss and hands it over without touching a single rupee of it! (p.174)

In order to strengthen his adulation of the poor, the novelist has presented the honest deeds of the chauffeurs, of the taxi drivers and of the servants of the diamond merchants. He has gone to the extreme level of stating that the loyalty of the servants is the root cause of our economy.

As there is always an exception in any group of people, it is quite common to find the jeunesse among the poor to feel irate to change their social and economic status by choosing violence as the only tool. When the torture inflicted on the poor reaches adnauseam, the former is desperate enough to retaliate the latter. This situation leads to the ineluctable birth of Naxalism and the novelist has revealed the repercussion of Naxalism tersely in the following line; "The fighting between the Naxal terrorists and the landlords was getting bloodier." (p.85)

The illiterate women in Indian villages are known for being garrulous and they gawk at the youth which happens due to generation gap and senility. They always yearn for the youth of the present day to think, to behave and to act like the youth of the yesteryears. The following utterances made by Ashok's grandmother Kushum depict the typical attitude of old Indian women:

'My grandson has a job and he still forces me to work. This is the fate of an old woman in this world.'

'Marry him off! The neighbours yelled That's the only way to tame the wild ones like him!'

"Yes", Kusum said (p.84).

It is worthwhile to mention that many Indian women are fatalists and they whine and chat a lot. Being a fatalist is itself a soothing element to those who meet any failure. The servants need to be loyal and talkative to slay their masters occasionally. In the novel, Balram insisted his mother have staunch belief in God. Generally, the theists usually follow good principles since they believe that even a peccadillo may bring them punishment from God. In fact, theism is considered to be a panacea for many evils in the society. Balram considered himself to be like Lord Krishna who was advising Arjuna while performing the duty as a driver as chariot.

Even among the cruel members in a family, there may be the chance for a good person with gentle manners and humanism. The novelist has not mentioned the name of the landlords emphatically but he has mentioned his master's name with the prefix Mr. It shows that Balram has respected his master, Ashok.

The following line is one of the reasons for Balram to have respect for his master; "Have a heart, Pinky. He was seeing his family. You know how close they are to their families in the Darkness" (p.88)

WORKS CITED

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It is perspicuous that Aravind Adiga has focused his attention much on the poor in the rural as well as urban areas. Even in revealing the dominance of the poor, the life of the poor and of the rich, one can gauge the ocean of difference between the rich and the poor. By presenting Balram as a great entrepreneur, the novelist has ended the novel with a note of optimism that it is feasible for a man of economically poor status to bring about better economic fortunes by hook or crook in India. This observation has been reflected in Neel Mukherjee's review "Exposing the real India" that:

through Balram's personal tale of how he came to murder his employer, steal 700,000 rupees from him and set himself up as the owner of a flourishing taxi service in Bangalore, he offers the story of the real India. [5]

This review was published on the 27th of April, 2008. When the poor are not provided with even the basic amenities, how long can they remain patient? Hence the poor people have to be taken more care by the government which has to offer more meaningful and beneficial welfare schemes for the poor to feel sanguine about their better socio-economic status. It will augur well for our nation to eschew the ramifications of Naxals and Maoists who seem to be a major threat to integrity as well as the integration of our glorious nation. *The White Tiger* is a document of the concerns of the poor people for the common people to feel concerned.