

The White Tiger: A Postcolonial Perspective

Dr. Anjali Verma

Asst. Professor

Smt. MMK College of Commerce & Economics
Mumbai

ABSTRACT

The paper endeavors to analyze the nature of underclass, its identity, and causes of its emergence, ways of its subjection and articulation and reaction against it. Arvind Adiga in *The White Tiger* dwells on the problems of haves and have-nots. Adiga has graphically portrayed the different images of India— India of Light and India of Dark. But his focus is on the later and he tries to give it a literary voice

KEYWORDS

Identity; White Tiger; Underclass.

In the Post-colonial literature the subaltern occupies an important place. The lack and deprivation, loneliness and alienation, subjugation and subordination, the resignation and silence, the resilience and neglect mark the lives of subaltern, even when they resist and rise up, they feel defeated by their own subject positions. They are extremely important part of human race yet they get marginal place.

In *The White Tiger*, Arvind Adiga is dwelling on the age old problem of tension between the haves and the have-nots. However on a deeper level the novel apparently deals with the fundamental question of reality and truth. It is a process of self-examination where the writer highlights the brutal realities of society. Critics allege that the novel is written keeping awards and western audience in mind. The stories of rottenness and corruption are always the best stories. But literature is shaped by the material conditions of society. The writer describes and dissects the personalities and possibilities of existence that emerge. It is written in first person in epistolary form to

the Prime Minister of China. The writer has presented a spectacle varied and exotic. Indian society reflects diversity in various ways but Indian ethos is one of synthesis rather than exclusiveness. The struggle between the upper class and the marginalized section of society has been the theme of many artistic works written during contemporary times. The link between the novel and the 'narration' of nation is, of course a familiar one. As Timothy Brennan puts it: 'Nations then, are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role.' The rise of industrial and urban modernity accompanied by transformations in agrarian life, the mass production enabled by printing presses, and the concomitant rise of a literate middle class have their own affect on modern Indian society. The paper endeavours to analyse the nature of underclass, its identity, and causes of its emergence, ways of its subjection and articulation and reaction against it.

The White Tiger is about a murderer. The protagonist is a successful entrepreneur. His narrator Balram Halwai 'a self taught entrepreneur' whose father was a rickshaw puller, comes to understand early in life that the real god is the 'black mud of the Ganga into which everything died, and decomposed and was reborn from and died into again' He relocates to Bangalore, India's high tech boom town. He slit the throat of his employer and absconded with the suitcase full of money to Bangalore. Adiga shows the anger of the lower depth of society, their ambition, political and class war caste system where people have to struggle and lead their lives as servants and become part of the so-called Indian miracle. For poor people in India and the nature of life, it is the survival of the fittest. They are forced to live the Darwin's nature of life. On many occasions family and extended family opposes individual's progress along with acting as a support system sometimes.

Halwai tells the story of his financial rise and moral deterioration in a series of letters that he writes but never sends to Wen Jiabao, the Chinese premier, who has come to India to learn about the Indian economic miracle so that Chinese can emulate it. The narrator talks about the emergence of the "new India" an economic powerhouse. At the end of this debut novel, its voluble, digressive, murderous protagonist makes a prediction: "White men will be finished in my lifetime," he tells us. "In 20 years time it will just be us brown and yellow men at the top of the pyramid, and we'll rule the world." He is talking about the phenomenon at the heart of this dazzling narrative: the emergence of that much-heralded economic powerhouse, the "new India"

But with *The White Tiger*, Adiga sets out to show us a part of this emerging country that we hear about infrequently: its underbelly. We see through the eyes of Balram, who was born into the "darkness" of rural India, but entered the light that is

Delhi via a job as driver to Mr. Ashok, the son of a rich landlord. Now, though, Balram has escaped servitude and is himself a rich businessman. What's more, his unlikely journey involved a murder.

Adiga's whimsical conceit is to give us Balram's story via seven letters to the Chinese prime minister, who, Balram has decided, must be told the truth about India before a forthcoming state visit. So Balram begins: he tells of Delhi's servants, who live in rotting basements below, how Ashok's family bribes government ministers, and how national elections are rigged. Ashok, trendy and liberal, is forever expressing guilt over Balram's treatment, but his fine words never come to anything.

It is a thrilling ride through a rising global power; a place where, we learn, the brutality of the modern city is compounded by that of age-old tradition. "In the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India," says Balram. "These days there are two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies

Tired of a life of servitude, he takes the violent action that secures his place among Delhi's rich. Adiga's plot is somewhat predictable – the murder that is committed is the one that readers will expect throughout – but *The White Tiger* suffers little for this fault. Caught up in Balram's world – and his wonderful turn of phrase – the pages turn themselves.

The entire novel is narrated through letters by Balram Halwai to the Premier of China, who will soon be visiting India. Balram is an Indian man from an impoverished background, born in the village of Laxmangarh. Early on, he describes his basic story: he transcended his humble beginnings to become a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore, largely through the murder of Mr. Ashok, who had been his employer. Balram also makes clear that because of the murder, it is likely that his own family has been massacred in retribution.

In Laxmangarh, Balram was raised in a large, poor family from the Halwai caste, a caste that indicates sweet-makers. The village is dominated and oppressed by the "Four Animals," four landlords known as the Wild Boar, the Stork, the Buffalo, and the Raven. Balram's father is a struggling rickshaw driver, and his mother died when he is young. The alpha figure of his family was his pushy grandmother, Kusum

Balram was initially referred to simply as "Munna," meaning "boy," since his family had not bothered to name him. He did not have another name until his schoolteacher dubbed him Balram. The boy proved himself intelligent and talented, and was praised one day as a rare "White Tiger" by a visiting school inspector. Unfortunately, Balram was removed from school after only a few years, to work in a tea shop with his brother, Kishan. There, he furthered his education by eavesdropping on the conversations of shop customers.

Balram feels that there are two India: the impoverished "Darkness" of the rural inner continent, and the "Light" of urban coastal India. A mechanism that he dubs the "Rooster Coop" traps the Indian underclass in a perpetual state of servitude. It involves both deliberate methods used by the upper class and a mentality enforced by the underclass on itself.

Balram's father died from tuberculosis in a decrepit village hospital, where no doctors were present due to abundant corruption within all the government institutions in the Darkness. After the father's death, Kishan got married and moved with Balram to the city of Dhanbad to work. There, Balram decided to become a chauffeur, and raised money to take driving lessons from a taxi driver. Once trained, Balram was hired by the Stork - whom he crossed path with coincidentally - as a chauffeur for his sons, Mushek Sir (known as the Mongoose) and Mr. Ashok. Officially, Balram was the

"second driver," driving the Maruti Suzuki, while another servant, Ram Persad, drove the more desirable Honda City.

As a driver in the Stork's household, Balram lived a stable and satisfactory life. He wore a uniform and slept in a covered room which he shared with Ram Persad. When Ashok and his wife, Pinky Madam, decided to visit Laxmangarh one day, Balram drove them there, and thus had a chance to visit his family. They were proud of his accomplishments, but Kusum pressured him to get married, which angered him since that would cede what he saw as his upward mobility. He stormed out of the house and climbed to the Black Fort above the village, spitting from there down upon the view of Laxmangarh far below.

Balram describes at length the corrupt nature of politics in the Darkness. A politician known as the Great Socialist controls the Darkness through election fraud. The Stork's family, involved in shady business dealings in the coal industry, must regularly bribe the Great Socialist to ensure their success.

As part of these political maneuverings, Ashok and Pinky Madam made plans to go to Delhi for three months. When Balram learned that only one driver would be brought with them, he spied on Ram Persad to discover that the man was secretly a Muslim who had lied about his identity to gain employment. Once his secret was out, Ram Persad left, and Balram was brought to Delhi as the driver of the Honda City.

One night, a drunk Pinky Madam insisted on driving the car, and she accidentally killed a child in a hit-and-run. The next morning, the Mongoose arrived and announced that Balram would confess to the crime, and serve jail time on Pinky Madam's behalf. Balram was terrified by the prospect of going to jail, but was relieved when the Stork arrived and casually mentioned that they had got out of

the incident through their police connections.

During this time, Balram's political consciousness grows more intense, and his resentment towards the upper class more violent. Much of the novel traces his growth from a meek peasant to an inflamed individual capable of murder in pursuit of his own success.

A few days later, Pinky Madam found Balram and asked him to drive her to the airport. With this abrupt departure, she ended her marriage to Ashok. When Ashok discovered that Balram took her to the airport without informing him, he furiously attacked the driver, who defended himself by kicking Ashok in the chest. On his family's behalf, Ashok frequently collected large sums of money in a red bag, using it to bribe government ministers. Balram's family sent a young male relative, Dharam, for Balram to care for. Dharam is a sweet and obedient companion. One day, Balram took Dharam to the zoo, where Balram observed a white tiger in a cage.

Finally deciding to break free of the Rooster Coop, Balram fashioned a weapon from a broken whiskey bottle, and lured Ashok from the car. He rammed the bottle into Ashok's skull, and then stabbed him in the neck, killing him. He stole the red bag, filled with 700,000 rupees, and escaped with Dharam to Bangalore. In revenge for his actions, the Stork's family likely murdered all of Balram's family, though Balram remains unsure of their exact fate. Nevertheless, he chose to commit the murder knowing this was a likely outcome. In Bangalore, Balram found great success. He launched a taxi service for call center

workers, which he calls White Tiger Technology Drivers. By bribing the police, Balram was able to gain influence and make his business successful. Demonstrating how far he has come, he is able to cover up a fatal accident through his connection to the authorities. He considers himself to be a quintessential entrepreneurial success story that represents the future of India, and presents himself as such to the Premier.

Arvind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* portrays Indian society racked by corruption and servitude. The author has exposed the country's dark side and unglamorous portrait of India's economic miracle. His novel explores with wit and insight the realities of two India, it reveals what happens when the inhabitants of one collude and then collide with those of the other world. Homi Bhabha has rightly said in *The Nation and Narration*:

the uneven development of capitalism inscribes progression and regression, political rationality and irrationality in the very genetic code of the nation – it is by nature, ambivalent.

The White Tiger is a penetrating piece of social commentary, attuned to the inequalities that persist despite India's new prosperity. It correctly identifies — and deflates — middle-class India's collective euphoria. Adiga has graphically portrayed the different images of India— India of Light and India of Dark. But his focus is on the later and he tries to give it a literary voice

WORKS CITED

- Adiga, Arvind. *The White Tiger*, New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers. 2008. Print Apte, Sudhakar <http://mostlyfiction.com/world/adiga.htm>
Donahue, Deirdre < <http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/India/adiga.htm>>