

THE WHITE TIGER: A CONFLICT BETWEEN THE HAVES AND HAVE-NOTS

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Abstract:

With the publication of 'The White Tiger', Arvind Adiga shot to fame and was highly appreciated for highlighting the injustices and poverty presented in the rapidly changing shining India. Our society is replete with injustice, violence, darkness and suffering. The protagonist of the novel, Balram Halwai undertakes his journey from Bharat to the globally accepted Indian as IT leader, India where he happens to see the darker aspect of the badly dancing Indian democracy at crossword. The gap between the poor and the rich is ever widening, causing miseries to the poor. The sense of 'Indianness' finds an expression in certain important ways. Throughout the novel, Indians are fully exposed through their corrupt practices. "The White Tiger" is the representation of darker side of India.

Keywords: inequality, injustice, violence, darkness, poverty, castism and inhumanity

Introduction:

A revamp but heterogeneous portrayal of India has garnered an unparalleled visibility in many Booker prize winner Asian writers. Although they have tried to focus on the fate of few powerless individuals, ultimately manages to explore, with intimacy and insight, just about every contemporary international issue: globalization, malnutrition, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorist violence. Adiga's staging of darker side of India comes out as an exotic attempt. 'The White Tiger' is an ironic representation of uncovering some tendencies which assumes that they are presenting Dark India into global literary marketplace at a time of a observed shift in re-orientalist and representational exercise and well aware of their Western reception. Before Adiga writers like Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie had tried to spotlight the darker side of India, referring to centuries of subjection by the economic and cultural power of west.

With the publication of 'The White Tiger', Arvind Adiga shot to fame and was highly appreciated for highlighting the injustices and poverty presented in the rapidly changing shining India. But with the passage of time, when the novel was put to the acid test of national feeling, the critics expressed their outrage at the judges' decision of awarding him Man Booker Prize as the opinion that the novel depicts Indians and their culture in a very disgusting light. This novel hears criticism for being dull and demeaning. The novel seems to have been designed to present India in a very humiliating condition with a view to drawing the attention of the Western publishers and media. The author and playwright Manjula Padmanabhan has gone to the extent of discussing it as "a tedious and unfunny slog"

Our society is replete with injustice, violence, darkness and suffering. The protagonist of the novel, Balram Halwai undertakes his journey from Bharat to the globally accepted Indian as IT leader, India where he happens to see the darker aspect of the badly dancing Indian democracy at crossword. This is the irony of India thinking that Indians dislike politicians to the core of their heart but, they leave no stone unturned to embrace politics. Through the characterization of Balram, Adiga strongly exposes the corrupt practices of the politicians. Having gone through the book, affluence Indians might be feeling uncomfortable in their seats. The daily inhumanity shown by the rich towards their domestic stuff in 'The White Tiger' of which many will realize they too are guilty. Balram's investigation about the shining India

and Bharat (real India) is the axis around which the whole novel seems to be revolving. The journalist turned writer, broke the myth by bringing to the notice of the world, the pathetic condition of our system. In one of the interviews, Adiga confirms that his book is an attempt to catch the voice of men you meet as you travel through India, the voice of the colonial underclass. The novel seems to have been written keeping in mind the expectation of the Western people, for they are keenly interested in the topics like, arranged marriages, religion, communal Violence, castism and partition. It is divided into two groups: on the one hand, a handful of people dying out of over eating and on the other hand, majority of common people are extremely groaning under the merciless wheel of poverty and scarcity. Everywhere people are fed up with the existing system of society but they are born with the enough patience to bear it. The hero of the novel, Balram Halwai addresses the premier of China, not the prime minister of India. Is it not the issue to be contemplated over?

Balram Halwai is entitled as a White Tiger by a visiting Inspector of school education owing to his distinctive qualities and smartness of his personality. The relevant dimension of the novel lies in unfolding the revolution that occurred with the assassination of master at the inhuman hands of the driver, but in the classroom where Balram was named White Tiger does not reveal anything meaningful.

“The Inspector made me write my name on the blackboard;

Then he showed me his wristwatch and asked me to read the time. He took out his wallet, removed a small photo, and asked me, “Who is the most important man in all our lives?”

The photo was a plump man with spiky white hair and chubby cheeks, wearing thick erring of gold; the face glowed with intelligence and kindness. ‘He is the great Socialist.’

‘Good. And what is the Great Socialist’s message for little children?’

I had seen the answer on the wall outside temple: a policeman had written it one day in red paint.

‘Any boy in any village can grow up to become the prime minister of India. That is his message to little children all over this land.

The Inspector pointed his cane straight at me. ‘You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and the idiots. In any jungle what I is the rarest of animals- the creature that comes along only once in a generation?’

I thought about it and said, I’ll write to Patna asking them to send you a scholarship. You need to go to a real school-somewhere far away from here. You need a real uniform, and a real education.’

He had a parting gift for me – a book. I remember the title very well: Lessons for young Boys from the life of Mahatma Gandhi.....so that’s how I became the White Tiger.” (34-35)

Balram Halwai wants to escape from the India of Darkness to become man of big belly. The journey is not an easy one. Balram knows that experience is a hard teacher, because it gives the test first, the lesson afterward. About his journey he clearly states that- “In his journey from village to city, from Laxmangarh to Delhi, the entrepreneur’s path crosses any number of provincial towns that have the pollution and noise and traffic of a big city- without any hint of the true cities sense of history, planning and grandeur. Half-baked cities, built on half- baked men” (53). Balram decides to learn driving. Initially his granny doesn’t approve the idea. She thinks that he is a greedy pig. “She wants you to swear all the gods in heaven that you won’t forget her once you get rich” (56)

At last the granny agrees to give money to learn driving. Balram along with Kishan came to an old man in a brown uniform. Kishan explains the situation to him. At first he is reluctant to let Balram join the driving class: “The old driver asked, ‘What caste are you?’ ‘Halwai’ ‘sweetmaker’, the old driver said shaking his head. “That’s what you people do. You make sweets. How can you learn to drive?’ He pointed his hookah at the live coals. ‘That’s like getting coals to make ice for you. Mastering a car” (56)

The old driver adds that only a boy from the warrior castes can manage that. He presumes that Muslim, Rajputs, Sikhs-can be good drivers as they are fighters. At last the lessons begins but each time Balram makes a mistake with the gears, the old man slaps on his skull and asks: “ Why don’t you stick to sweets and tea?”(56)

After the completion of driving lessons Balram gets a job as a driver at the Stork. Balram drives straight at the Stork’s feet. Balram says that he is from Laxmangarh, the Stork’s village. The Stork says, “Ah ...the old village. Do people there still remember me? It’s been three years since I was there” (61). The Stork enjoys the following remarks: “Of course, Sir –people say, our father is gone. Thakur Ramdev is gone, the best of the landlords is gone, and who will protect us now?” Balram gets the job as a driver. He quickly adjusts to the rhythm of the house. He gathers details of the Stork and his son, Ashok who has come back from America. Balram beholds India as a country having ‘two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with small Bellies.’ ‘And only two destinies: eat or get eaten up’ (64). Balram says that, “this country, in its days of greatness, when it was the richest nation on earth, was like a zoo. On the 15th August 1947- the day the British left- the cages had been left open; and the animals had attacked and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law”(64).

Balram begins his stereotyped existence in the Stork’s family only to realize that in India- or, at least, in the Darkness- the rich don’t have drivers, cooks, barbers and tailors. They simply have servants. When Balram is not driving the car, he has to sweep the floor of courtyard, make tea, clean cobwebs with a long broom, or chase a cow out of the compound. At the beginning, he is not allowed to touch the Honda City.

Ashok tells his wife Pinky that in India, no one follows any rules. Unpleasant reality is described in the pages to come: “A tractor was coming down the road at full speed, belching out a nice thick plume of black diesel from its exhaust pipe” (81).

This scene is not uncommon in rural India where the traffic police pay hardly any attention to law-breakers. It is through Balram Halwai, the central consciousness of the novel, that we are given a glimpse into the private lives of the politicians and businessmen. Balram is proud that we have democracy. He says to Mr. Premier-

I gather you yellow-skinned men, despite your triumphs to sewage, drinking water and Olympic gold medals, still don’t have democracy. Some politician on the radio was saying that that’s why we Indians are going to beat you: we may not have sewage, drinking water, and Olympic gold medals, but we do have democracy (95-96)

The novel presents a deep crisis of identity in any democratic set up. The leaders are projected as vote –buyers. They have no vision but to rule the Darkness for years. Balram calls himself as India’s most faithful voter who still have not seen the inside of a voting booth.

Balram is driving the Honda City in Delhi now as Ram Persad has left the service. While driving the Honda City, Balram has no difficulty as he has to follow the buses. There are buses and jeeps all along the road. “And they were bursting with passengers who packed the insides, and hung out of the doors, and even got on the roofs. They were all headed from the Darkness to Delhi; you’d think the whole world was migrating” (111)

In a few days, Balram learns so many things about Delhi and its people. He has heard that the air is so bad in Delhi that it takes ten years off a man's life. What makes the case of Delhi more pitiable is the fact that no serious efforts are done to stop the pollution. You find the men on the motorbikes and scooters with handkerchiefs wrapped around their faces.

The concluding part of the novel, however, has a different tone: Balram has adapted himself so well to the social and cultural milieu of Delhi that he feels very much comfortable in the company of other drivers. He sees his free time as an opportunity. Balram exposes everyone who is corrupt. "The judges? Wouldn't they see through this obviously forced confession? But they are in the racket too. They take their bribe; they ignore the discrepancies in the case. And life goes on" (170).

Life goes on like this for Balram and one day he kills his master Ashok. "I pulled out all the stickers of the goddess, and threw them on Mr. Ashok's body- just in case they'd help his soul go to heaven"(286)

Everything depends upon our inclination, whether it is towards a peaceful and blissful life or whether it is towards a life full of problems and distress. When we try to find the solution, the direction of life can change, and if we complicate the problem, then complexities of life go on enhancing infinitely. There is no question of escaping from life. Where can one go after escaping? In any case, one cannot go beyond this world. It is immaterial whether you live in India or abroad, you have to seek shelter and settle down. Balram goes to Bangalore after killing Ashok. He starts his own company 'White Tiger Drivers'. Inspiration has to be from within and without. Inspired to do something, The White Tigre alias Ashok Sharma owns twenty-six shining new Toyota Qualises. He thinks of real estate next, as he is a first-gear man. The novel ends with these words.

Yours forever,
Ashok Sharma
The White Tiger of Bangalore
boss@white tiger-technologydrivers.com

Values in life arise out of one's desire to live usefully. The most common one is the desire to live for oneself. Balram lives for himself. Very significantly, the novel is divided into eight parts, beginning with the first Night and ending with the Seventh Night. The first part of the novel seems to be dominated by the early days of Balram in the village as well as Dhanbad.

The novelist Arvind Adiga justifies his stand in highlighting the brutal injustices of society in the following words- "At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the west, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society.... The great divide."

We acquire knowledge, but we lack awareness. Awareness arises when knowledge accompanies action. Arvind Adiga's knowledge of rural India is not untrue. Gurucharan Das, a well known commentator and author, says – "A book should not be judged on the basis of whether it creates a negative or positive picture of a country. It should be seen as a work of art and judged on its literary merits. If it's a good book and it deserves an award."

Arvind Adiga depicts Balram Halwai's dilemma on the sociological plane. He tries to project his life in the Darkness as well as in the Light. He records all his sufferings, disillusionments and tragic experiences that are the part of his early life. The gap between the poor and the rich is ever widening, causing miseries to the poor. The sense of 'Indianness' finds an expression in certain important ways. Throughout the novel, Indians are fully exposed through their corrupt practices. Indians respect for the traditional faith on one's cultural norms, one begins to lose one's identity. Balram is representative of rural as well as urban India. Kevin Rushby writes about Arvind Adiga in the following words- "My hunch is fundamentally an outsider's view and a superficial one. There are so many alternative Indians uncontacted and unheard. Adiga is an interesting talent. I hope he will immerse himself deeper in that country, and then go on to greater things."

Balram's story attracts the West, as it is the brutal confession of 'The White Tiger'. In an interview to 'India Today' Arvind Adiga expresses himself like this- " Q. Are you angry or disillusioned with the India you live in? Anger is only one part of my reaction to the India- I live in: also joy, love, acceptance and curiosity. There is nothing I like better than to get on to a train and travel through India. This is a novel and the narrator's voice is different from the author's"⁷

The above expression clearly projects the writer's view on India and its people. He has dedicated the award to the people of Delhi. The jury felt that 33-year-old Adiga's novel 'shocked and entertained in equal measure.' The novel may be shocking for the West but it entertains the Indian readers. "The White Tiger' is the representation of darker side of India.

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