

# The Impact of Globalization in Arvind Adiga's novel

## “*The White Tiger*”

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**Abstract:** Arvind Adiga's novel '*The White Tiger*' presents the live picture of this ugly face of globalization and urbanization which is sucking the blood of the depraved, downtrodden poverty stricken multitudes dwelling in the remote corners of the villages and obscured areas of cities of India. It presents the realistic pictures of two Indias – the India of the men of 'Big Bellies and the small Bellies' – the exploiter class and the exploited class.

**Keywords:** Globalization, intercommunion, free exchange of technology, knowledge and ideas, social upliftment.

Globalization and liberalization has changed the scenario of the life in the world. Today the whole world has become one state and one community. Trade and commerce has been boosted and the whole world is linked together because of the better intercommunion in the various aspects of life social, cultural, economic and political. Writing about the situation human civilization before the advent of Globalisation, CEM Joad comments:

“One might say that for the centuries the nations of mankind lived in a number of separate boxes holding no communication with each other except when the people in one box invaded those in the next, the same of the boxes were never opened at all”.<sup>1</sup>

But today the scenario is absolutely changed. Today there is constant coming and going on account of the process of globalization. There is in different fields of life.

Apart from the above positive contribution of globalization there is also its darker side. It has widened the gaps between the rich and poor and encouraged the exploitation of the poorer, undeveloped or underdeveloped nations by the richer and powerful countries like America, England, France and other countries of Europe. Focussing on the same aspect CEM Joad again writes:

“But the sharing out of money – which means the sharing out of food and clothing and houses and books and so on – is still very unfair”.<sup>2</sup>

Globalization has at one side created new sources and richer amenities of life and thus, enhanced the standard of life – on the other it has produced a cut throat competition, unscrupulous trading and inhuman exploitation of the weaker and poorer sections of society. It has widened the gap between the haves and have-nots. It has adversely affected the Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh etc. Here some people live in the grandest luxuries while others have to make a heart rending struggle for their barest necessities like their food and clothing – housing for them is a dream – the only place for their inhabitation are the pavements, slums and kholis in unhygienic muddy surroundings. They live the life of underdogs for their survival and are variously exploited sexually, mentally, economically and socially. For them democracy is a farce and the political parties use them as their vote bank and cheat them by their false and fake promises of their welfare and social upliftment.

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The novel begins with the monologue of the main character Balram Halwai who offers his help to the visiting Chinese Prime Minister, Mr. Wen Jiabao. Balram narrates to him the story of his life through the series of seven letters to him covering the seven nights of the letter writing of the protagonist. The story begins from his early life at Laxamanpur in

Bihar. There he lived the life of utter penury. His father Vikram Halwai had a wretched life. He recalls the cremation of his mother who died after leading a very miserable life. His father, Vikram though lived a starved life still he dreamt of a respectable dignified life. He himself worked hard to earn the bread for his family as a rickshaw puller but dreamt of educating his son Balram so that he could free himself from shackles of poverty and dearth. He says:

“My whole life, I was treated like a donkey. All I want one son of mine – atleast one should live like a man”<sup>3</sup>

Balram was an intelligent boy who shined brightly during his school days and was named 'the white tiger' by the inspector of schools.

But before this rare white tiger could shine as a brilliant scholar at his school, he had to face the hard blow of fortune. He was taken out of the school and put to work in a teashop to repay the debt taken for his sister's marriage. Being too much fed up of vicious exploitation, he swears not to remain a slave, but he would live a comfortable, rich and luxurious life of a gentleman. He in no time learns the skill of getting success in new India – the ability to break the law and to do anything to reach the top.

Balram again goes to relate his story in the letter of second night, he confesses that he has murdered his master. He becomes very emotional thinking about his master Mr. Ashok and his wife Pinki Madam.

Balram once again goes to tell his life story after the death of his father, he works in the teashop of his village Laxmangarh. He avoids to be a 'crushed human spider' like the other teashop boys by eaves

dropping on customers who dream of being ‘car drivers’ for rich men. After much begging or borrowing he learns how to drive a car and becomes the driver of Mr. Ashok, the son of Ramdev Thakur Balram knows that his master owns servants and enslaves them by terrorizing their families but is glad to get what so many craves for – food, shelter and uniform.

Thakur Ramdev and his elder son Mukesh alias Mangoose represents a deeply casteist feudal culture while Mr. Ashok is an American educated young son of Ramdev, brings home an Indo-American wife, represents modern liberal ideas. He fancies India but is shocked to see the way in which servants are treated. He is completely opposite to Mangoose – Mukesh who sucks the blood of his servants. Balram is often gets excited listening to his master’s talking about money. For fulfilling his ambition, he is involved in a cut throat competition with other servants in the house of his master – Ramdev. He ever remains to do something better than processing the smelly feet of his master’s pampering their dogs or gazing longingly at the foreign liquor they drink.

Because of business concerns, Balram’s master, Mr. Ashok and his wife Pinky shifts to Delhi along with their Honda car. Balram comes to Delhi with his master Balram is now very happy as he gets success in leaving the darkness of Bihar and enter Delhi, the capital of the country, bustling with new life of hectic activities, full of new unspeakable glamour.

On the fourth night, Balram writes to his Chinese Premier about the luxurious life of Delhi. Here he comes across the extreme pathetic conditions of the poor and sees the corrupt master bribes the

beaurocrates and the politicians in the power to get profitable contracts and grab money from different schemes of the welfare meant for the upliftment of the poor. One day Balram drives his master Ashok and his elder brother Mangoose to the congress office at Riasina Hill where they bribe minister to seek his blessings for their illegal mining business

As the lifestyle of Delhi is not simple for a driver like Balram as it was at Laxamangarh. Therefore, he gets some tips from the fellow drivers how to cheat money from the cruel master and how to deal with the policemen. At Delhi Balram notices that the masters in the ultra-modern skyscrapers and drivers like him stay in uninhabitable cells, doing every odd task and even for their minor lapses they are subject to great humiliation and insult. Seeing the brutalities of the cruel masters, Balram decides not to remain a slave. So he starts to plan for a better respectful life.

By chance the relations between Pinky Madam and Mr. Ashok deteriorate one day Pinki drinks too much and runs over the street but Balram is forced to plead guilty for this accident. He is terrified until he learns that his sacrifice is not needed as no one has seen the accident. This case makes him realize that his master is in no way different from other masters and would not hesitate to kill him for his own interest.

On the next, i.e., on sixth morning Balram writes about his own transformation as Ashoka’s wife Pinky leaves him and goes to America when Mr. Ashoka comes to know of it and that Balram drove her to the airport. He becomes furious. Balram’s pleading of his innocence is of no avail. Out of great fury he beats Balram badly and almost throws him down from his 13<sup>th</sup> floor apartment

because he cooperated Pinki in his escape by driving her to the airport.

After the departure of Madam Pinki from the life of Mr. Ashoka he is involved in all the corrupt practices like that of going to the call girls and mixing with unscrupulous politicians. A tremendous change comes to Balram as he sees debauchery of the rich. He goes wild and wreckless. His thought turn revengeful towards the rich. He acquires criminal mentality. He starts grabbing money by cheating his landlord. Like his master he starts consuming expensive liquor and bedding with the foreign whores etc. To manage money for these extravagant things, he cheats his master. His big chance comes when he sees Mr. Ashoka collecting loads of cash to bribe some politicians. Now he is totally tempted to murder his master, take money and step into a great future. He is fearful of consequences, the fear of being caught and the aftermaths of it. He could be thrown into jail and might also be ruined due to his ill-fated action. But a book of Urdu poetry helps Balram to resolve his dilemma and inspire courage in him. The following lines of the poet make him bold and resolute:

“You were looking for the key for years  
But the door was always open”.<sup>4</sup>

In this way he led to victory in his war against his master Ashok, therefore, he puts:

“...the history of the world is the history of ten thousand years war of brains between the rich and the poor ... the poor win a few battle...of course the rich have won the war for thousands years... one day some wise men, out of compassion for the poor, left them signs and symbols in poems...”<sup>5</sup>

When Balram comes to know that his master is about to dismiss him, his determination to kill his master becomes strong. His accidental visit to a dirty slum gives him the premonition that if he shrinks from his resolve the horrible future of dogs life is awaiting for him. Besides this, other things related to Balram's life like warning of his family, bright prospects at Bangalore visit of Delhi zoo makes him ready for this crime of killing his master and leaving Delhi, therefore he writes a final letter to his granny that he can never spend his life like a caged white tiger which was a languishing in a cage. On the D-Day, he meditates and prays for courage. After it he takes his master on his rounds of gathering money from banks and ATMs on a deserted road, Balram request Ashok to get down and help him in lifting a tier stick in the money. Ashok does so then Balram hits his head with the jagged glass bottle and stifling his throat and runs away with cash and his little nephew Dharma to the railway station.

On the arrival of seventeenth night Balram happily writes about his great escape from Delhi. After killing his master Balram cleverly dodges the law and lands in Bangalore. Realizing the outsourcing is the biggest business in Bangalore Balram decides to get a foothold in his business by running taxi service to call Centre employee. For being a successful businessman and running his business uninterrupted he bribes the police. After some time Balram becomes the owner of a huge firm with fleet of SUVs and dozens of drivers. He assumes the new identity. ‘Ashoka Sharma’ ‘North India's Entrepreneur’. He becomes the master of the art of success in Bangalore – the future of India.

The very step which is taken by Balram is to take administration into confidence by greasing the palm of the officials as he points out:

“I wasn’t alone ...I had thousands on my side! You’ll see my friends when you visit Bangalore – bat policemen men swinging their canes... harassing vendors and shaking them down for money. I’m talking of the people, of course”.<sup>6</sup>

The second approach of Balram is to be the biggest successful businessman. For this purpose he adopts purely practical approach forgetting all ethics and norms of morality. He has before him the model of the boom of foreignness and native rulers who were plundering the country as they do not follow the rule of law. That is why; Balram is convincing that he is far better than the landlords of his village. He treats his drivers politely and does not think of either insulting them or exploiting them as he was insulted and exploited when he was a poor driver.

Balram tells the Chinese premier that he is an enlightened slave who has got freedom and successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century India. He points out:

“..a few hundred thousand rupees of someone else’s money, and a lot of hard work can make magic happen in this country. I’m worth fifteen times the sum I borrowed from Mr. Ashok. See for yourself at my website. See my motto: ‘We Drive Technology Forward’. In English! See the photos of my Fleet: twenty six shining new Toyota Qualises”.<sup>7</sup>

Balram thinks of plans to enter a profitable real estate business and that the education sector where he thinks to teach kids in English, not about Gandhi; but about real life:

“A school full of white tigers unleashed on Bangalore! We’d have this city at our knees, I tell you, I could become the boss of Bangalore”.<sup>8</sup>

Balram comes to conclusion that he is proud to be man of power. Though haunted by fear of punishment for his crime, he assaults:

“I will never say I made a mistake that night in Delhi when I slit my master’s throat. I’ll say it was as worthwhile to know just for a day just for an hour just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant”.<sup>9</sup>

Telling about the sum total of his life experience Balram says that there are two castes in modern India – the rich and the poor. He describes the rural India which is absolutely devoid of health and hygiene, education and awareness, employment and the means to live a dignified life. Balram’s village has no government hospital though the foundation stone were laid by three politicians before three elections. The government hospital in the neighborhood has no facilities and the post of superintendent is auctioned off. False records are made by the superintendent and doctors get paid without visiting to the hospital. Balram’s father dies waiting for the doctor, spitting blood in the corridor. Illiteracy and unemployment plagues the youth who waste their time in empty dreams. Politician gets success in engineering class wars between Naxals and landlords resulting in untold misery to the villagers. Balram too speaks of the ‘**half-baked cities**’ full of ‘**half-baked man**’. The glory of urbanization is lost in polluted, crowded and unplanned cities and towns. It can be said that the traditional importance of the caste in free India has been changed by the class of Balram. In the words of Balram:

“.... This country in its days of greatness... was like a zoo... everyone in his place, everyone happy ...on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, 1947 ... the cages had been led open; and the animals has attacked and ripped each other part.. Those that are more ferocious ... has eaten everyone else up... that was all that counted now, the size of your belley... anyone with a belley could rise up... in the old days there were one thousand castes in India. These days there just two caste: Men with Big Bellies and the Men with small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat or get eaten up”.<sup>10</sup>

The other imported field which has been described by the novelist is the actual practice of the democracy at the grass roots level. Balram points out that foreign leader who come to visit our country are told a lot about:

“The splendour of democracy, in India- the awe inspiring spectacle of one billion people casting their votes to determine their own future”.<sup>11</sup>

But the fact is that the reality is totally different. Balram’s father who had seen twelve elections never votes for himself. What Balram thinks about the powerless can be understood by his following utterance:

“These are the main diseases of this country – typhoid, cholera and election fever. The last one is the worst: it makes the people talk and talk about the things they have to say in... like eunuchs discussing the Kamasutra, the voters discuss elections in Laxamangarh”.<sup>12</sup>

As the story of Balgram shifts from Bangalore and Laxamangarh village to Delhi, the capital of India the novelist again focuses on economic divides. He national capital, Delhi is viewed very closely by

Balram a rustic driver. Globalization and urbanization have arrived big time but this progress is cultivated by the hard labour and exploitation of the poor. The congested metropolitan city is full of many polluted black dogs numerous starving people live on pavements. On the other hand the rich have all the luxuries of life like air conditioners and the other sophisticated modern amenities while the poor laboring in the various real estate projects, buildings sky kissing towers at the same time homeless are shivering in street in freezing cold. Many innocent servants are jailed for the crime of their rich masters and live a hand to mouth life with half naked and half fed ugly bodies.

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