

# RURAL REALITY IN ARVIND ADIGA'S THE WHITE TIGER

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## ABSTRACT

Arvind Adiga, a great novelist, has painted the picture of contemporary rural society of Bihar with its corruption, inequality, superstitions, blind beliefs, rural poverty, arrogance and above all the exploitation of poor class. He points out that even globalisation has not brought any change in the lives of villagers. The novel can be said an authentic narrative of the unchanged village even under the impact of globalization.

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It is said that India inhabits in its villages. It means that India is mainly an agrarian society. It fulfils the basic need of food of people. That's why village is the soul and city is the body. The body cannot survive without soul . A village is a small area ,populated by a small number of people whose main occupation is agriculture . An Indian village presents a picture of simple people dependent solely on agriculture.

The history of the existence of village can be traced since ancient times . In Manu smriti, there is a classification of villages with regard to their sizes and habitation. Village and town are not treated as opposites. A village was controlled by village headman known as Grumini. The Janas or the individuals used to choose the Grumini. There is also a mention of Grama and Nagara signifying village and city respectively. During the period of The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, there was a differentiation between a small village and a big village. A small village was called Ghosh and big village was known as Nagara. The Arthsashastra explains how a king should dispense his duties in relation with the administrative affairs of a village. In twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi envisioned an ideal village; "My ideal village will contain intelligent human beings. They will not live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men and women will be free and able to hold their own will against anyone."

Laxmangarh from where Balram, the protagonist of the novel hails is the village of 21<sup>st</sup> century's India but provides a dismal picture of a village, located in Gaya district, Bihar. Though the leaders make promises to bring

prosperity in the village by providing the basic facilities such as education, hospitals, electricity, roads, sewage system etc. that will eliminate the poverty, unemployment and improve the life of the villagers. This means that the village will be a paradise if there is adequate supply of electricity, potable water, working telephones. The children who are the future of the nation get education and nutritious food. But Lakshmangarh presents an altogether a different picture. Because it is still totally devoid of so-called basic amenities. Balram's sarcastic comment about the village – "Lakshmangarh is your typical Indian village" (TWT 19), implies that there is no such facility in the village. There is poverty because of which the children are undernourished.

The village Lakshmangarh from where Balram hails is situated near Holy River Ganga. The Ganga has allowed civilizations to develop and thrive along the waterway through centuries. The Ganga that is the giver of life and provides salvation, now is in a pathetic condition. "Mother Ganga, daughter of the Vedas, river of illumination, protector of us all, breaker of the chain of birth and rebirth. Everywhere this river flows that area is the darkness, suffocating and choking and stunning." (TWT 15)

Zamindari system came into existence in India in 1793. It was Lord Cornwallis who introduced it through the Permanent Settlement Act. By virtue of this Act, Zamindars used to be the owners of the land and had the right of collecting the rent from the peasants. After independence many laws were passed to abolish this practice. This system is being practiced even in 21<sup>st</sup> century in India. It seems as if centuries of landlordism and subjugation have reduced the public into a state of passive acceptance of all forms of exploitations and subservience. In Lakshmangarh there are four landlords who exploit the villagers and they are known by the nicknames they have got due to peculiarities of appetite.

"The Buffalo was one of the Landlords in Lakshmangarh----- The Stork was a fat man with a fat moustache thick and curved and pointy at the tips. He owned the river that flowed outside the village, and he took a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman in the river, and a toll from every boatman who crossed the river to come to our village.

His brother was called the Wild Boar. This fellow owned all the good agricultural land around the Lakshmangarh. If you wanted to work on those lands, You had to bow down to his feet and touch the dust under the slippers, and agree to swallow his day wages. When he passed by women, his car would stop; the windows would roll down to reveal his grin; two of his teeth on either side of his nose were long, and curved like little tusks.

The Raven owned the worst land, which was dry, rocky hillside around the fort and took a cut from the goatherds who went up there to graze with their flocks. If they did not have the money, he liked to dip his beak into their backsides, so they called him the Raven. The Buffalo was the greediest of the lot. He had eaten up the rickshaws and the roads so if you ran a rickshaw, or used the road, you had to pay him his fees, one-third of whatever you earned, no less."(TWT:24-25)

So far as the infrastructure of the village is concerned, it is also poor though the leaders of the socialist party promised to improve the life of the people if he wins in the elections. But alas, there is no change. Adiga has clearly shown the picture of the infrastructure less village, “Electricity poles- defunct, water tap- broken, children – too lean and short for their age and with oversized heads from which vivid eyes shine.” (TWT 20)

Roads are important for the development of the place as they like the arteries, support the economy of a place to pulse. They link workers to job, sick to hospitals, producers to markets, students to job. But the roads in the village overflow with sewage water and remain crowded with pigs. “Down the middle of the main road, families of pigs are sniffing, through sewage- the upper body of each animal is dry, with long hairs that are matted together into spines; the lower half of the body is peat black and glistening from sewage.” (TWT 20)

The transport system that is considered important for economic growth and connect people and places is in a sorry state, partially due to the bad roads and partially due to the lack of proper frequency of buses; “When the buses came, they got on – packing the inside, hanging from the railings, climbing onto the roofs---went to Gaya.” (TWT 26)

The people in Lakshmangarh have less access to healthcare as there is no hospital in the village. There is one government hospital across the river. When Vikram Halwai, the father of Balram and Kishan , suffers from serious illness, he was taken to the government hospital where even the basic facility of proper bed is not provided to the patient and to the worst the doctor does not attend the patient however serious the patient maybe. The building of the hospital is in the dilapidated state. The corruption is so high that one has to grease the palm of the ward boy to call the doctor. “There were three black goats sitting on the steps to the large, faded, wide building; The stench of goat fasces wafted out from the open door-----There was no doctor in the hospital. The beds had metal springs sticking out of them and the cat began snarling at us the moment we stepped into the room”. (TWT 48) Both the brothers sitting there with their father by their side noticed the grim reality being practised in the healthcare system of the village. Their father dies of consumption due to the lack of the treatment.

Education is the most empowering force. It generates knowledge, builds confidence and breaks down barriers to opportunities. It is a key that opens the door to a better life. But this is a grim reality that the children of Lakshmangarh are not able to get this key. First, they are destined to stay locked in the cycle of poverty secondly, the teacher who is considered the shaper of the child’s future is not interested in imparting knowledge with the excuse that he has not been paid his salary for last six months. But nobody blames the teacher because everybody in the system is corrupt. “You cannot expect a man to smell sweat in the dung heap.” (TWT 53) Balram’s father despite of being a rickshaw puller is well aware of the fact that education helps improve knowledge, social and economic status of a person. That is why he takes his son to the school where Balram is recognized as an intelligent student and is given the name “The White Tiger”. The school where he goes is also in a poor state. Later while writing the letter to the Chinese Premier, he describes the corruption, prevalent in the education

system. It is one of the reasons of the falling standards of education . If a village is considered a paradise, the school of the village should be a “paradise within a paradise” but unfortunately it is not so in Lakshmangarh. The school building is not maintained. There is no chalk and duster but lizards; “Two feet long Lizards, the colour of half ripe guavas hiding in its cupboards.” (TWT 52)

The government releases money to promote literacy in the village school by providing the students food and uniform. But the students are devoid of it They are given neither mid -day meals nor uniforms; “Once a truck came into the school with uniforms that the government had sent for us; We never saw them but a week later they turned up for sale in the neighbouring village.” (TWT 53)

The children in the village are not able to pursue studies partly due to the lack of avenues and partly due to poverty. That’s why remain half-baked. They are forced to work at tea shops where they are considered as “human spiders”. As they grow up, some of them take up the job of drivers and move out of the village. People like him endure exploitation in the village. The four landlords do not spare anybody in the village. Balram too suffers, despite of being a driver, he has to do all sort of odd works. While serving Ashok, the America educated son of The Stork and his wife Pinky in Delhi and Gurgaon, he endures their atrocities in different ways.

The caste-based distinction is a blot on the Indian society. After the independence, government has passed many policies to abolish this distinction. In the villages this is still being practised. Lakshmangarh is not an exception. Balram has been the victim of this caste system. When he wants to learn driving, the teacher asks ---“what is your caste? Halwai, you make sweets. How can you learn to drive-----That is like getting coals to make ice for you. Mastering a car -----You sweet makers can last longer in the fourth gear”. (TWT56)

Class based discrimination is also a part of rural reality. A person’s status rests upon wealth power, education and the work he does. If judged by these parameters, Balram is from lower class, hence he suffers.

Religion is a way of living. People particularly in villages face discrimination based on religions. They have little space for the followers of other religions. The inhabitants of Lakshmangarh are religious. They are Pantheist as they worship every object of nature. “The villagers are so religious in the darkness.” (TWT 90)

People, especially from lower class, lead an unpretentious life. The day-to-day activities of the women folk have been illustrated by describing the activities of the women of Balram’s family. “You will see-----the women working in the courtyard. My aunts and cousins and Kusum, my granny. One of them preparing meal for buffalo, one winnowing rice; one squatting down through the scalp of another woman, squeezing the ticks to the death between her fingers”. (TWT 21)

These people have their own way of recreation too and at times fighting and quarrelling seem to be a way of their recreation. They fight for a moment and then they make-up. “This means throwing metal vessels at one another, or pulling each-others’ hair and then making up by putting kisses on their arms and pressing them to the others’ cheeks”. (TWT 21)



India is world's largest democracy. Allied to this, it is the electoral process which has been embraced by Indians with enthusiasm. Election gives them an opportunity to decide the governing authorities, be at the center or state. and to exercise their constitutional right to participate in the exercise. The reality of Indian democracy is something else. The elections are managed by offering freebies and promises. In elections voting is one facet of participation. In Laxmangarh, it is manipulated.

“He sold our fingerprints -the inky finger prints which the illiterate person makes on the ballot paper to indicate his vote.” (TWT:97)

Thus, the novelist does not idealise Laxmangarh rather he rips open the sores of the village. It is a fact that natural beauty and idyllic life provide no solace when hunger and poverty hit the people. Though India is transforming yet the so-called globalisation has failed to bring 'light' in the poverty-stricken society of the village. The village, Laxmangarh still remains a trap of exploitation, exclusion, caste and class discrimination. There is no single story of change in Laxmangarh which fits in the Gandhian vision of village.

## Reference

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