

The white Tiger: Deterioration And Corruption In The Post Colonial India

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Abstract:

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* holds the main theme that the rich people, politicians, policemen and the upper-class society people are leading their lives in lavishness only after the blood-burning labour of the poor people while they are still marginalised and forced to live under crushing poverty. By using fantastic literary talent, *The White Tiger* offers a story of wit, suspense and morality told by a brilliant Indian writer that this millennium has yet seen. Balram Halwai, the main protagonist has many faces like a complicated man, servant, philosopher, entrepreneur, murderer over the course of seven nights, by the dispersed light of preposterous chandelier. Balram provides us a terrible and nail-biting story that how he achieved success in life, starting with zero but his own wits to help him along. As the story progresses, Balram gets a break when he is hired as a driver of his village's richest man.

Keywords: Globalised, Diasporic, Uprootedness, Marginalised

Introduction

An Indian author Aravind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* was first published and won the 40th Man Booker Prize in 2008. The novel was criticised as a compelling, angry and darkly humorous novel. *The White Tiger* is a journey about a common as well as a downtrodden man from Indian village life to entrepreneurial success. Michael Portillo, Chairman of the jury of Man Booker Prize said:

"In many ways it was the perfect novel. The judges found the decision difficult because the shortlist contained such strong candidates. In the end, *The White Tiger* prevailed because the judges felt that it shocked and entertained in equal measure. The novel undertakes the extraordinarily difficult task of gaining and holding the reader's sympathy for a thoroughgoing villain. The book gains from dealing with pressing social issues and significant global developments with astonishing humour. Portillo went on to explain that the novel had won overall because of its originality. He said that *The White Tiger* presented a different aspect of India and was a novel with enormous literary merit." (Web. 15 Oct 2008).

Deterioration In The Novel

The novel provides a darkly humorous perspective of India's class-clash during a globalized world as told through a retrospective narration from the protagonist, Balram Halwai, a village boy to the Chinese Premier His excellency Wen Jiabao during seven nights. In detailing Balram's journey first to Delhi, where he's employed as a chauffeur to an upscale landlord, then to Bangalore, the place to which he flees after killing his master and stealing his money, the novel examines problems in India. Ultimately, Balram transcends his sweet maker caste and becomes a successful entrepreneur, establishing his own taxi service. In a country proudly detaching the history of poverty and underdevelopment, he represents, as he himself says, "tomorrow".

Adiga says in an interview:

"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. That's what writers like Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens did in the 19th century and, as a result, England and France are better societies. That's what I'm trying to do - it's not an attack on the country, it's about the greater process of self-examination." (Jeffries 2008).

Actually, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* holds the main theme that the rich people, politicians, policemen and the upper-class society people are leading their lives in lavishness only after the blood-burning labour of the poor people while they are still marginalised and forced to live under crushing poverty. By using fantastic literary talent, *The White Tiger* offers a story of wit, suspense and morality told by a brilliant Indian writer that this millennium has yet seen. Balram Halwai, the main protagonist has many faces like a complicated man, servant, philosopher, entrepreneur, murderer over the course of seven nights, by the dispersed light of preposterous chandelier. Balram provides us a terrible and nail-biting story that how he achieved success in life, starting with zero but his own wits to help him along. As the story progresses, Balram gets a break when he is hired as a driver of his village's richest man.

Balram Halwai, a poor Indian villager whose great determination leads him to the peak of Indian business culture, the world of the Bangalore entrepreneur. The story develops as Balram writes a letter to him describing his transformation and his experience as driver and servant to a wealthy Indian family, which he thinks exemplifies the contradictions and complications of Indian society when the president of China's awaiting trip to Bangalore. Balram travels to New Delhi with Ashok and his wife Ms Pinky Madam. During their time in New Delhi, Balram is witnessed to the widespread corruption of India's society, including the government. In New Delhi, the gap between poor and rich becomes even more evident in compilation with the wealthy with back-ward city dwellers.

Abruptly, One-night Balram's wife, Pinky decides to drive the car by herself and mistakenly hits something. She is worried that it was a child and the family eventually decides to frame Balram for the hit and run case. The police tell them that no one reported a child missing so that luckily no further inquiry is to be done. Ashok becomes gradually involved with the corrupt government itself. After facing continuous humiliation, during a trip back to his village Balram insults his grandmother and tells the reader and the Chinese Premier that in the next eight months he plans to kill his boss. Balram decides that the only way to escape India's 'Rooster Coop' will be by murdering and robbing Ashok.

One rainy day, he murders Ashok by hitting him with an unopened liquor bottle. Then anyhow he manages to flee to Bangalore with his young nephew. There he offers bribes to the police in order to help in starting his own driving service. When one of his drivers kills a bike messenger Balram pays off the family and police. Balram clarifies that his family was certainly killed by the Stork as revenge for Ashok's murder. At the end of the novel Balram justifies his actions by saying that his freedom is worth the lives of Ashok and his family and the financial success of his new taxi company

Asked whether it is the anger of Adiga himself, Adiga answers as follows:

"The novel is written in "voice"—in Balram's voice—and not in mine. Some of the things that he's confused by or angry about are changes in India that I approve of; for instance, he is uncomfortable with (as many men like him are) the greater freedom that women have in today's India. Some of the other things he's unhappy about—like corruption—are easier for me to identify with. When talking to many men whom I met in India, I found a sense of rage, often suppressed for years and years, that would burst out when they finally met someone they could talk to. But their anger was not the anger of a liberal, middle-class man at a corrupt system; it was something more complex—a blend of values both liberal and reactionary—and I wanted to be true to what I'd heard. Balram's anger is not an anger that the reader should participate in entirely—it can seem at times like the rage you might feel if you were in Balram's place—but at other times you should feel troubled by it, certainly."

The Indian sentiment readers responded sympathetically to his outspoken, innocent frankness with regard to social problems of our Indian society. Since the publication of his first novel *The White Tiger* Arvind Adiga has been considered an important voice of his generation, exemplified by a break from the past by writing in a distinctly Indian person rather than repeating the techniques of the English modernists. As Adiga quotes in the novel *The White Tiger* is: "The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen." (27).

The White Tiger comes with a sense of what it must be like for a young person growing up in a modern Indian village having no family support or economic means to make it in life. Adiga through the voice of Balram says in his novels:

"Me, and thousands of others in this country like me, are half-baked, because we were never allowed to complete our schooling. Open our skulls, look in with a penlight, and you'll find an odd museum of ideas: sentences of history or mathematics remembered from school textbooks (no boy remembers his schooling like the one who was taken out of school, let me assure you), sentences about politics read in a newspaper while waiting for someone to come to an office, triangles and pyramids seen on the torn pages of the old geometry textbooks which every tea shop in

this country uses to wrap its snacks in, bits of All India Radio news bulletins, things that drop into your mind, like lizards from the ceiling, in the half hour before falling asleep--all these ideas, half formed and half- digested and half correct, mix up with other half-cooked ideas in your head, and I guess these half-formed ideas bugger one another, and make more half-formed ideas, and this is what you act on and live with.”

Here Adiga bridges India’s school education with poverty. ‘White Tiger’, the name given to the young boy while at school, becomes his name as he makes his way into the wicked world of corrupt officials and crime bosses. Because he is educated, he has become groomed to be a driver and lackey for a rich family in Delhi. Balram becomes familiar with and is expected to handle, the worst of situation that involves murder, cheating, bribery and robbery.

Time to time with the help of writers we come to know about the condition of society and here too through Balram’s eyes, we see India as we have never seen it before: the cockroaches and the call centres, the prostitutes and the worshippers and the water buffalo trapped in so many kinds of cages from there escape is second to impossible. The White Tiger with a charisma as undeniable as it is unexpected, he shows us that religion does not create morality and money doesn’t solve every problem-but decency can still be found in a corrupt world. A brutal view of India’s class struggle is cleverly picturised in Adiga’s debut novel The White Tiger. Balram Halwai is from the Darkness, born where India’s underdogs and unlucky are destined to rot.

So many examples Adiga has given to show the humiliation of Balram Halwai. Balram is not only a driver for Mr. Ashok but also a servant carrying bags in the malls, cooking and polishing the legs of the stork. The mean mentality of the upper-class shown through the lost coin episode. A one-rupee coin of Mongose, the brother of Mr. Ashok is lost while coming out of the car. He asked Balram to search for it. As Adiga writes:

“Get down on your knees. Look for it on the floor of the car.’ I got down on my knees. I sniffed in between the mats like a doe, all in search of that one rupee.

What to you mean, it is not thesere? Don’t think you can steal from us just because you are in the city. I want that rupee’.

We’ve just paid half a million rupees in a bribe, Mukesh, and now we are screwing this man over a single rupee. Let’s go up and have a scotch.’

That’s how you corrupt servants. It starts with one rupee. Don’t bring your American ways here’.

Where that rupee coin went remains a mystery to me to this day Mr. Premier. Finally, I took a rupee coin out of my shirt pocket, dropped it on the floor of the car, picked it up, and gave it to the Mangoose.”

Really ridiculous that Mangoose is so bothered about one rupee while bribing so many millions of rupees. Is this our India? However, Balram belonged to a small town yet his English pronunciation was perfect. He was asked to say the word ‘Pizza’ as Balram always says ‘Pijja’ and they mocked at him. He used to dress like Maharaja for Pinky Madam’s satisfaction. These are all so many incidents which gradually forced him to be a criminal. The worst incident was that Ashok’s wife Pinky kills a man in drunken driving and Balram was forced to admit the crime and asked to sign a statement as follows:

To WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN

I, Balram Halwai, son of Vikram Halwai, of Laxmangarh village in the distrcit of Gaya, do make the following statement of my own will and intention:

That I drove the car that hit an unidentified person, or persons, or person and objects on the night of January 23rd this year... That I was along in the car, and alone responsible for all that happened.

I swear by almighty God that I make this statement under no duress and under instruction from no one .

No doubt here that it is a nail-biting reality as Adiga mentions in The White Tiger:

...the jails in Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters. We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul and arse .

So, these horrible incidents persuade him to urge out of those things and become a free bird for that he has killed his master and decamp along with his money. His personal fortunes and luck improve dramatically after he kills his boss and flees for Bangalore. Balram may be a-clever and resourceful narrator with a witty and sarcastic edge that endears him to readers, as he rails about corruption, allows himself to be defiled by his bosses, spews coarse,

investive and eventually profits from moral ambiguity and outright criminality. It's the proper antidote to lyrical India. Although said to be disappearing in urban India, the class structure still remains in rural India an individual is born into a caste, and also the caste one belongs to determine his or her occupation. Balram gives his own breakdown of the caste system in India, describing that it was a "... clean, well-kept orderly zoo" .

Adiga spreads awareness to the corrupt Indian caste and creed structure by having Balram work the country's system to urge what he wants and to become an entrepreneur by any means necessary, without hesitating murdering his boss. Balram narrates the Chinese Premier throughout his letters about the corruption and immoral ways of India's caste structure and its gap in economy. Although it's going to seem that Balram's position in society will forever remain identical, he manages to travel from a sweet shop worker, to a private driver for an expensive man, and at last to an owner of a business. The White Tiger at one level will be thoroughly dismissed as another India-bashing book. It takes a grim view of everything and slams every Indian evil-caste system. As Nakul Krishna presents in New Statesman:

The novel's framing as a seven-part letter to the Chinese prime minister turns out to be an unexpectedly flexible instrument in Adiga's hands, accommodating everything from the helpful explanatory aside to digressions into political polemic. One might note the distinctive narrative voice, rich with the disconcerting smell of coarse authenticity. It is simultaneously able to convey the seemingly congenial servility of the language of the rural poor as well as its potential for knowing subversion. It sends up the neo-That cherite vocabulary of the new rich, their absurd extravagance and gaudy taste, but manages to do it tenderly and with understanding. Adiga's style calls to mind the work of Munshi Premchand, that great Hindi prose stylist and chronicler of the nationalist movement." (27 March 2008).

From the very outset of the book, there are references to show that how Balram is very different from those he grew up with. He is referred to as the 'White Tiger' that also a symbol for independence and individuality. As Adigasays:"See, the poor dream all their lives of getting enough to eat and looking like the rich. And what do the rich dream of? Losing weight and looking like the poor."

The novel is rather a memoir of Balram's journey to find his freedom in modern day utilitarian society. The novel throws light on modern day, with free market and free business. As Soumya Bhattacharya, puts it in The Independent:

"Aravind Adiga's riveting, razor-sharp debut novel explores with wit and insight the realities of these two Indias, and reveals what happens when the inhabitants of one collude and then collide with those of the other. The pace, superbly controlled in the opening and middle sections, begins to flag a bit towards the end. But this is a minor quibble: Adiga has been gutsy in tackling a complex and urgent subject. His is a novel that has come not a moment too soon." (11 Apr 2008).

According to Adiga, down-trodden people are the victim of economic disparity of our society like we see Balram Halwai in The White Tiger. He wants to take revenge of all the bad- deeds of his master. He wants to get rid of the slavery. He tries to copy all the things: by visiting prostitutes because he has seen his master Ashok enjoying life with girls in the malls and hotels. Balram also wants to take pleasure with the women in golden hair:

I held it up to the light.

A strand of golden hair

I've got it in my desk to this day. (Adiga 221-222).

Balram's observation is replete with incongruity, contradiction and anger that runs like a toxin throughout every page. As Adrian Turpin reviews:

Balram's violent bid for freedom is shocking. What, we're left to ask, does it make him - - just another thug in India's urban jungle or a revolutionary and idealist? It's a sign of this book's quality, as well as of its moral seriousness, that it keeps you guessing to the final page and beyond." – (Financial Times 19 Apr 2008).

Adiga says: "Balram's anger is not an anger that the reader should participate in entirely- it an seem at times like the rage you might feel if you were in Balram's place-but at other times you should feel troubled by it, certainly." In portraying the character of Balram, Adiga has succeeded in projecting him as an antisocial person:

As Balram's education expands, he grows more corrupt. Yet the reader's sympathy for the former tea boy never flags. In creating a character who is both witty and psychopathic, Mr Adiga has produced a hero almost as memorable as Pip, proving himself the Charles Dickens of the call-centre generation.

So, the mission of Balram is completed by murdering his boss and become a big business tycoon. As Adiga puts it:

At points it does get like that. But this is the servant's perspective. It is his subjective views, which are pretty depressing. There are also two crimes that he commits: he robs, and he kills, and by no means do I expect a reader to sympathize with both the crimes. He's not meant to be a figure whose views you should accept entirely. There's evidence within the novel that the system is more flexible than Balram suggests, and it is breaking down faster than he claims. And within the story I hope that there's evidence of servants cheating the masters systematically...to suggest a person's capacity for evil or vice is to grant them respect—is to acknowledge their capacity for volition and freedom of choice .

Conclusion :

An innocent boy from Laxmangarh goes to New Delhi and works as a driver, getting torcher by his masters, learnt corruption and bribing money to buy politicians and policemen. The system forced him to kill his master and snatch the money (Rs. 7,00,000/-) and became a businessman. His thirst for freedom made him to do so. The novel portrays the India in which downtrodden people like Balram suffers under the rich.

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