

Caste Conflicts in Arvind Adiga's The White Tiger

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Abstract:-

The present scenario of Indian English writing has undergone a sea-change ever since its inception in the 1820's when the Indians started expressing themselves in a foreign language due to the influence of the alien rulers. "The White Tiger" shows the most heart-rending picture of imbalanced societies in India and also a record of sharp and glaring look at modern day India. Arvind Adiga, Booker Prize Award winner, has successfully interpreted modern Indian ethos from the point of view of lower class in his debut novel 'The White Tiger'. Adiga debunks the age-old division between the rich and the poor, existing caste system, corruption in Indian politics and the miraculous economic growth in India. Arvind Adiga is interested not only in demand of revolution but also change of heart. The novel describes the positive and negative development in the early free Indian villages.

Key Terms: Caste system, Dark India, white India, Free Markets

The present scenario of Indian English writing has undergone a sea-change ever since its inception in the 1820's when the Indians started expressing themselves in a foreign language due to the influence of the alien rulers. Today, the focus has shifted because of the rapid and problematic growth of large cities all over the world. "The White Tiger" shows the most heart-rending picture of imbalanced societies in India and also a record of sharp and glaring look at modern day India. The novel specially refers to the Cultural and Social issues of marginal tribes in the early free Indian villages. It boastfully pictures, what really happen to colonized people and places after colonialism has met its end. The prime approach of the people in the newly free societies becomes the important issues of discussion in the novel. Arvind Adiga, Booker Prize Award winner, has successfully interpreted modern Indian ethos from the point of view of lower class in his debut novel 'The White Tiger'. Adiga debunks the age-old division between the rich and the poor, existing caste system, corruption in Indian politics and the miraculous economic growth in India. The novel describes the positive and negative developments in the early free Indian villages. The present paper focus on the reinterpretation of reality in terms of content, form, language, point of view of a current Indian novelist like Arvind Adiga's The White Tiger took the post-colonial writers by storm by its innovative technique of narration of revolutionary theme of social change.

Adiga in his novel, created two different India's in one: "an India of Light and an India of Darkness". (14) It is the India of Darkness which is focused by the novelist articulating the voice of silent majority, trying to dismantle the discrimination between the "Big Bellies and the Small Bellies" (64) and create a society based on the principles of equality and justice. The title, *The White Tiger*, is the protagonist Balram's nickname, which he earns by being deemed as the smartest boy in his village by an educational inspector. Balram is told that he is like a white tiger, a rare animal that is said to come only once per generation. He is a person of pioneering spirit to set a new position to his progeny. Later on when Balram becomes an entrepreneur, he names his taxi company as "The White Tiger Drivers." His father's greatest dream was to live a dignified life that is to live like a man. —My [Balram's father] whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine - at least one - should live like a man (30). According to Adiga, the exigence for *The White Tiger* was to capture the unspoken voice of people from "the Darkness" - the impoverished areas of rural India, and he "wanted to do so without sentimentality or portraying them as mirthless humorless weaklings as they are usually. Adiga's novel was described as a compelling, angry and darkly humorous novel about a man's journey from Indian rural life to entrepreneurial success.

As Michael Portillo, Chairman of the judges 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 humor. 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).

The novel provides a darkly humorous perspective of India's class struggle in 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 works as a chauffeur to a rich landlord, and then to Bangalore, the place to which he flees after killing his master and stealing his money, the novel examines issues of religion, caste, loyalty, corruption and poverty in India. Ultimately, Balram transcends his sweet maker caste and becomes a

successful entrepreneur, establishing his own taxi service. In a nation proudly shedding the history of poverty and underdevelopment, he represents, as he himself says, “tomorrow” (Adiga 319).

The book shows a modern day, capitalist Indian society with free market and business. It also shows how it can create economic division. In India there are not social classes, there are social castes. The novel portrays India’s society as very negative towards the lower social caste which Balram refers to as the “Darkness”. According to his philosophy, individual action is the key to break out of the rooster coop and the servants are self-trapping. He validates his evil actions to his master by saying, “I think the Rooster Coop needs people like me to break out of it. It needs masters like Mr. Ashok – who, for all his numerous virtues, was not much of a master – to be weeded out, and exceptional servants like me to replace them.” (Adiga 257) Adiga in his novel shows that side of India where those who are born in poverty and low caste are destined to remain there forever and so are their children. This is how far a servant can dream, “If you save from today, you’ll make enough to buy a small home in some slum”. (193) All good and real properties are kept for the rich. Poor can only get worse things even if it is a blonde prostitute with dyed hair or Indian made foreign liquor. Shopping malls are specifically for those of high economic and social importance. Bouncers are there at the malls to keep the servants out by identifying them by their clothes. Balram mentions the rooster coop when describing the servant class in India. He visualizes the rooster coop as: Hundreds of pale hens and brightly colored roosters stuffed tightly into wire mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other, sitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a horrible stench – The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. (167)

The White Tiger portrays the feelings, emotions, aspiration, sorrows and the simmering anger and hatred of the till now invisible poor. “A billion servants secretly fantasize about strangling their bosses”. (125) For Adiga, his achievement is capturing, something new in India, a stirring, a glimmer of refusal by the poor to accept the fate ordained for them by their master.” Still the current social order where the poor slave 24/7 as cooks, cleaners, drivers, nannies and maids so that the well off can feel comfortable continues (Jeffries). Balram says that the rich of America or England, who have no servant, cannot even begin to understand what a good life is. Balram Halwai, like Mulk Raj Anand’s Munoo realizes that slavery, the exploitation of the poor at the hands of the rich is a perpetual fact. And he feels that a servant like he has no suffer for his master’s faults and for no fault of his : The Jails of 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. (170)

Prathiba Nagpal in her article “Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger: A Critical Response” says that Adiga takes away the “last vestibule of dignity—their honesty, from these sad people existing on the periphery and attributes their situation to their conditioning.”(156) In his letter to the Chinese premier he writes: Now I say they took me on as their ‘driver’ I don’t know exactly how you organize your servants in China, but in India – or at least in the darkness – the rich don’t have drivers, cooks, barbers and tailors. They simply have servants. What I mean is that anytime I was not driving the car, I had to sweep the floor of the courtyard, make tea, clean cobwebs with a broom or chase a cow out of the compound. (68) In Indian society the “colossal underclass” discovers itself sandwiched between inexplicable psychological pressures that contour their desires and social forces that confine execution of these desires. Balram's political perception grows more intense, and his antipathy towards the upper class becomes more violent. The novel is an intelligent and ruthless portrait of India in which downtrodden people like Balram suffers under the rich. Here the author shows the true picture of Indian society. The voice of Dark India—the underclass that is, comments Uma Mahadevan-Dasgupta, “intelligent, savagely funny and quite unforgettable—it is also a voice of anger and protest, and it is almost completely un sentimental. It is a voice that seeks out and understands the power of beauty” (2008 : 128). Lee Thomas has reviewed the novel in San Francisco Chronicle (April 27, 2008): “Adiga’s first novel The White Tiger, delivers an indomitable central character and an India bristling with economic possibility, competing loyalties and class struggle” (sfgate.com). Sudheer Apte finds the most enjoyable part of the novel, “is richly observed world of have-nots in India...with his keen observation and sharp writing Adiga takes us into Balram Halwai’s mind, whether we want or not” (mostlyfiction.com). Right in the beginning of the novel, the horrible pictures of paucity, extreme poverty, shocking state of education and health in rural India send chill down the spine and show that the subaltern “have no representative or spokesperson in the society they live in and so helplessly suffer and get marginal place or no place at all in the history and culture of which they are the essential part as human beings (Krishna Singh 98). In conclusion, Balram's story is relevant to India's current state of affairs and its hierarchical society despite attempts to institute change. It is evident that the modern society is inescapably in the grip of the menace of divide between the marginalized and the privileged, the mighty and the weak. The privileged and the might on the one hand enjoy an upper hand in all matters and miss no opportunity in staking claim over the wealth. Arvind Adiga is interested not only in demand of revolution but also change of heart. So Balram Halwai changed many roles, to get value of human beings. Rootlessness, alienation, loss identity, attitude of big bellies made him loose his identity among the hands of corrupt people. So he wrote “I’ve made it! I’ve broken out of the coop” (Arvind Adiga-page-320) “That’s why I was cheated

of my destiny to be fact, and creamy skinned and smiling.” (Arvind Adiga-page-64) These lines remarks that he is White Tiger in the society of the beasts. The destruction of the identity laid him to prove existence by hook or crook. Ultimately the novel justifies every kind of deception or trick to succeed in life. However, the novel ends on an optimistic note, with Balram both making it out of poverty and being able to make more moral choices.

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