

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* as a Critique of the Current State Affairs

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ABSTRACT

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* describes a daring character named Balram Halwai who struggles a lot in all walks of life. Adiga raises many crucial issues of the country such as hunger, oppression, poverty, illiteracy, corruption in government offices and unemployment that hinder the growth of the country. Since the starting of English writing in India, numerous novels have been published with burning issues. It is evident that some novels create problems to the smooth running of the society. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is one among such novels that brings out the darkness of the lives of the people. Adiga's novels, explore the financial, emotional and psychological entrapments of people who are struggling to rise up and emerge from the barsare explored and exhibited in Adiga's novels.. His *The White Tiger* that won the Booker Prize is a blend of the darkness of Bihar and the brightness of Bangalore. It is the actual story of new India created by globalisation.

The White Tiger is an epistolary novel that tells the daring story of a village young man who narrates a great deal about the poverty and sufferings of the poor in India. He tries to highlight the socio-political system of India and how it causes innumerable malicious religious practices, superstitions among people and corruption in several government offices. In order to ventilate his views on such important issues, Adiga compares the dark and light side of India.

It is interesting to note in Adiga's writings how feelings and emotions of human beings affect their behaviour. Adiga's *The White Tiger* is a sincere effort in this direction. It not only portrays the realities of Indian school system but also depicts how these realities change the behaviour of Balram Halwai. He talks about the miserable condition of the Indian schools. Balram's teacher hardly takes his regular classes. He always tries to avoid his allotted duty. About mid-day meal, young Balram expresses his grievances in the following words; "we never saw rotis or yellow dall, or pickles and everyone knew why: the school teacher had stolen our lunch money" (33). His school does so because he has not been paid his salary since last six months. A kind of cheating like this left a deep mark of pain in the personal life of Balram.

One of the most pertinent contemporary issues of majority of Indians is the dowry system which Adiga highlights in *The White Tiger*. Balram's family faces the problem of dowry during the marriage of his cousin, Reena. He says, "We have to give a new bicycle, and cash, and a silver bracelet, and arrange for a big wedding"(36). The family has to take a loan to bear the expenses of the marriage from one of the village landlords. As a result of this loan, the family members have to work day in and day out so that they can pay back the amount of the loan.

Adiga views the country in binaries such as poor/rich, slave/master, day/night, light/darkness. The inhabitants of the darkness are portrayed as largely poor with small bellies and those who live in buildings in rural areas with big bellies are the rich people. This is how he portrays the "India of Light and India of Darkness" (14). The majority of Indian population lives in the area of 'darkness'. Balram's own family lives in darkness in the village of Laxmanpur. But he raises his status to the level of being a person of the area of Light with his hard work, will-power and tricky behaviour. He himself accepts the fact, "I am in the Light now, but I was born and raised in Darkness" (14). Hence the social contrast is depicted through the words of 'darkness' and 'light'. In order to be in the part of Light, Balram has to kill his master, bribe the police officials and has to do a number of

other illegal, unethical activities. These are the evidence that he reaches to the area of Light by struggling through his moral darkness and degradation.

Adiga also criticises the blind religious beliefs of the people in his novel. He highlights how the holy Ganga has been polluted by those who worship it and call it “Mother Ganga, daughter of the Vedas, river of the illumination”(15). He also regrets for the corrupt politicians. In one of his statements, Balram can be heard saying about a so-called socialist political leader;

You see, a total of ninety-three cases-for murder, rape, ground larceny, gun-smuggling, pimping and many other such offences – are pending against the Great Socialist and his ministers at the present moment... The great Socialist himself is said to have embezzled one billion rupees from the Darkness, and transferred that money into a bank account in a small, beautiful country in Europe full of white people and black money (97-98).

Adiga’s novels bring out the major social issues deprivation and injustice, flaws and failures: moral, social and political. His novels explore the financial, emotional and psychological entrapments of people struggling to rise above the constraints of their condition and emerge from the bars, self-made or enforced by others, for something life-altering. Hence Adiga’s novels should be read by taking a deep look at ourselves at our social structures and polity, our failures and inequity, the chains that bind us and our collective quests for release, and shots at freedom and glory.

Adiga’s characters are caught as in the conflicts and contradictions unleashed by the economic liberalisation of India. The aspirations of Dharmen Shah, the ruthless property developer in Adiga’s *Last Man in Tower*, Balram Halwai in *The White Tiger*’s and the brothers, Manju and Radha Kumar in *Selection Day*’s are fundamentally similar characters. On the other hand, Adiga’s *Amnesty* is about choices and crossroads which helps to understand the complexity of the power-play between Sydney’s migrants, as well as the duality that marks the city: idealism and corruption flowing side by side like parallel streams of sewage. The main point that strikes the reader of Adiga’s works is the ease and felicity with which he writes about people from a cross-section of society. As a novelist, he has this enormous ability to navigate the minds of characters from bewilderingly different strata. His novels are all written by the inspirations and by his own experiences and travels across the country and around the world. They are the stories of fallen and alienated middle-class people.

Adiga has conceived *The White Tiger* as a critique of the state of things in the country and as an attack on a rotten political system. It was published in the middle of the -global recession of 2007-2008. He told Godwin how he was fascinated by the idea of an alternative history of India, a history that considers the violent events, like the Bombay Naval mutiny of 1946 - on which actor Utpal Dutt, who was a Naxalite in his younger days, has written a play which Adiga happened to have read in his childhood days as the proximate reason for the departure of the British from India, and not the non-violence movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. The psychoanalysis of Sudhir Kakar, whom Adiga met in 2005, was also a major influence. Kakar, in some of his essays, explores the transformations that happen in the stories of urban migration.

Adiga kept insisting in several interviews that the role of fiction was to entertain and disturb. He loathed the characterisation of the novel as an exposé of the ‘underbelly’ of the economic boom. He said that it was a novel and not a polemic. He stated that it was not a social or political document, but a work of literature, meant to entertain and provoke. *The White Tiger* succeeded because, it was largely due to the fact that it was a novel with a sense of humour, irony and paradox. For example, Balram Halwai, in his letter to the visiting Chinese President, writes how it pays to play both ways; the Indian entrepreneur has to be straight and crooked, mocking and believing, sly and sincere at the same time. His tone throughout the novel is acerbic and unsparing. He also writes: As a novelist, Adiga argued, he was trying to dramatise and highlight a situation. In *Amnesty*, he does the same to dramatise the moral crisis which is faced by immigrants around the world, as he said in a statement recently after Bahrani announced that he will also adapt the novel *Amnesty* for Netflix.

Therefore *The White Tiger* is read as the story of the new India created by globalisation. Adiga is currently working on a novel on ‘*the new India*’ again which is created by the right-wing



nationalists. It is also believed that he is working on a book based on his life in Mangalore. Writing has been a source of excitement and mystery for Adiga. He writes to make a nuisance for himself, he said in a recent interview. It is really interesting to see how he makes a nuisance of himself in his new books.

Hence Adiga explores the issues and problem of the contemporary Indian society in his novels: the social corruption, the pathetic politicians, the government and the educational system. The irony lies in the education system which is expected to bring “Light” to the country from the world of ignorance-the darker realities of India. Obviously *The White Tiger* points its fingers at corruption on societal and political fronts of democratic India, and hence makes the very notion of democracy questionable.

References:

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