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Social Issues in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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ABSTRACT: A social issue is a problem that influences a considerable number of the individuals within a society. Social problems are the general factors that affect and damage society. Social issues as themes are used by many writers such as Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, Mulk Raj Anand, Bharatt Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Arvind Adiga has also used the theme of social issues in his novels like *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower*. *The White Tiger* is narrated through letters from Balram Halwai to the Chinese Premier. Balram narrates his life. Balram is raised in a large, poor family from the Halwai caste. It is a social commentary on the effects of the huge gap between the wealthy and poor in India. The village is dominated and oppressed by four landlords. Balram comes from rural area. He is struggling to liberate from age old slavery.

The following is the abbreviation used after the quotation TWT - *The White Tiger*

A social issue is a problem that influences a considerable number of the individuals within a society. Social problems are the general factors that affect and damage society. Some of the social issues are struggle for identity, mockery of religion, sex, poverty, class struggle, caste system, corruption, domination, oppression, equality, rights, violence, freedom. Social issues as themes are used by many writers such as Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, Mulk Raj Anand, Bharatt Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande. Arvind Adiga has used the theme of social issues in his novels like *The White Tiger* and *last Man in Tower*. In, *The White Tiger* he explores on the social issues. Balram Halwai is the central character. He describes the struggles of his life.

Balram Halwai was a protagonist of this novel. He was a complicated man, servant, philosopher, entrepreneur and murderer. He was a rickshaw-puller's son from an impoverished background, born in the village of Laxmangarh in Gaya District, Bihar. It was a community deep in the dark of rural India. The village had poor facilities like, "electricity poles defunct, water tap broken, children too lean and short for their age and with oversized heads from which vivid eyes Shine". (WT 20) Balram's father, Vikram Halwai was a poor rickshaw-puller. His mother died when he was young. His mother died early. He cremated with due rituals on the banks of the polluted and filthy Ganga. Balram advised the Chinese Premier not to dip in the Ganga. He can doubtless he wanted his mouth "full of faces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and seven different kinds of industrial acids". (22) Balram's father, Vikram Halwai was an indigent but self-respecting puller. When his father began spitting blood, Kishan and Balram took him by boat across the river. They kept washing his mouth with water from the river. The river was so polluted that it made him spit more blood.

When he took his father to the government hospital, it was polluted. "a large, faded white building, the stench of goat faces wafted out from the open door. The glass in most of the windows was broken". (32) He died due to lack of treatment. There was corruption in hospital and bribery between politician and doctor. They bribed and then practiced in private hospitals.

Balram's name was given to him by his class-teacher simply because he had never been given a proper name by his parents other than a non-committal 'Munna'. The people forgot to give names to their children. The school master called him as The White Tiger because his attitude was different from others. Balram did not continue his studies because of the family situations. He called himself "half-Baked because he never completed school." (20) Balram cannot give correct pronunciation for the word "pizza". He was ridiculed. He tried out the correct pronunciation. But he failed.

Adiga described the clash between Hindus and Muslims. *The White Tiger* roared against the Muslims and their strange belief in the number 786. The number was associated with the religion "Just before the movie got started, either the number 786 would flash against the black screen, the Muslims think this is a magic number that represents their god" (8). It was not the intention of showing unity between the Hindus and the Muslims. Adiga had presented the great secular India as one. Muslims in order to feed their starving families had to take Hindu names like Ram Prasad to get a job under a landlord who did not like Muslims. Muslims did not believe in idol worship. How can a Muslim begin his day by bowing down before the pictures of gods? Job at the cost of religion was beyond understanding. He followed one religion-religion of mockery. The chatting of Om and bowing down before pictures were the activities that were not expected from a Muslim "Mohammad denounced idolatry. No picture or idol of Mohammad is therefore available" (87). A Muslim scolded a Hindu calling him a Naxal for not praying. These things cannot naturally flow to a mind whose mind was not religious. Not only in religion but also the poor people had suffered more.

Balram was pulled out of school to work in a tea shop. He worked like a spider. "Go to a tea shop anywhere along the Ganga side and look at the men working in that tea shop. Man I say but better to call them human spiders that go crawling in between and under the tables with rags in their hands, crushed human in uniforms, sluggish, unshaven, in their thirties or forties or fifties but still 'boys'." (51)

Adiga showed how Gandhian principles were missing in life. This was a kind of degradation in our country. *The White Tiger* presented the voices of the masters and servants, servants and other servants, master and their masters-the politicians. The varied voices cumulatively evoked the experience of living in a corrupt and oppressive environment. The novel gave an account of the realities of the poor in India. While working in Dhanbad, Balram learnt to drive. He got his break when a rich man from his village hired him as a chauffeur for his son, Ashok. Ashok was a gentleman and behaved soft with his servants. But his brother and father behaved rudely. Balram faced physical as well as mental discomfort. His sons involved in the coal trading and they gave money to "the politicians so that during an election the campaign and victory will be assured." (123) In return, they were exempted from paying taxes. Ashok was conflicted by the corruption and harshness of life in India, but he was caught in this foul maze.

After some days, Balram went to Delhi with his master Ashok and Pinky. One day in a drunken mood, Pinky drove through the traffic. A beggar child went under the wheels. No one was around to witness. Ashok drove the car in full speed. Pinky realized her mistake and wanted to go back to the spot and help them. Ashok did not accept. Pinky started to speak about the accident. He said to Balram, not to tell anyone about the accident. Balram must accept the blame for the accident. He was prepared to go to jail for the sake of his masters. He proved himself to be made a servant. It happened to driver's life. Some servants were loyal to their

masters. But the master used them as slaves. After his imprisonment, he rejoined the family. Ashok and his family were treated badly. Again, he felt trapped in the Rooster Coop. “The upper class suppressed by the lower class peoples and mainly Indians servants. So, they are felt Rooster Coop.” (175)

The poor were desperate enough to attack on the rich. After the oppression, Balram decided to murder Ashok. After the murder, he escaped to Bangalore with his red bag containing seven hundred thousand rupees. Balram once again faced a same situation. One of his drivers, Mohammad Asif was involved in an accident. He ran over a boy. Balram went to the dead person's house next morning with an envelope containing twenty-five thousand rupees. He offered his condolences, placed the envelope containing money on the table. He accepted the responsibility for the accident.

Balram was a different kind of master. In the end, there was an attempt to show regeneration and renewal, but it sounded hollow. Balram became Ashok Sharma, a high successful entrepreneur. Finally, Balram escaped from the rooster-coop. He rationalized his actions and considered that his liberation was worth the lives of his family and Ashok. Thus, ended the letter to Jibao.

The White Tiger justifies every kind of trick to succeed in life. In each scene social issues are depicted. Balram gives many satirical accounts of immorality. He is not the reason for all the mistakes. The society is the main reason for that all crimes. In *The White Tiger*, Adiga showcases in Balram Halwai, a versatile talent from a have-not. He thinks to change the existing predicament of the poor. Balram gets liberation from the upper class. Balram's life is one of the examples of the thousand Indian lower class and rural servants. Thus, *The White Tiger* is a depiction of the social and economic inequalities of contemporary India. It is a penetrating piece of social commentary.

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