

ARAVIND ADIGA'S THE WHITE TIGER: A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper is an attempt to study and analyze Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger in the light of Identity Crisis, cultural discrimination, political corruptions and inferiority complex in the socio-economic and cultural areas. The novel describes the positive and negative developments in the early free Indian villages. It also emphasizes on how the corruption corrupts the mind of the common people. The identity is the prime concern in the novel through which the writer highlights most of the evils in the Indian societies. Not only the culture, society and economy but also the birth,

Aravind Adiga, recipient of Booker Prize award was born 23 October 1974 in Madras, India. He has written three novels *The White Tiger* (2008), *Between the Assassinations* (2008) and *Last Man in the Tower* (2011). His very first and Booker prize winning novel depicts the contradictions in the early free Indian villages. The second one deals with the stories of the Assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the last one deal with the story of the struggle for real estate in Mumbai.

Aravind Adiga's Booker Prize Winning novel, *The White Tiger* is the most heart-rending picture of imbalanced societies in 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. When it comes to the approach or facing something that has varied

facets it comes to two opposite and equal phenomenons, the dark and the shining. Similarly the novel slowly but steadily criticizes both the phenomenon, positive and negative developments in the places such as Laxmangarh and Dhanbad where the end of imperial rule meant new possibilities of cultural self determination but also a kind of chaos both the pain of developing indigenous culture and political system.

Adiga depicts both the downtrodden, unpleasant deprived place and the highly developed cities like Delhi and Bangalore. As usual the marginal are kept at the ridge or periphery of the power centre. They always suffer for their daily bread and butter. In the present context marginality is used to analyze socio-cultural, political, economic spheres, where deprived people struggle to gain access to resources and full participation in the social life. International Geographical Union defines marginality: as the temporary state having been put aside of living in relative isolation at the edge of system, in mind, when one excludes certain domains or phenomena from once thinking because they don't correspond to the mainstream philosophy.

Marginalized people are usually discriminated, ignored and often suppressed on the basis of race, gender, culture, religion, ethnicity, occupation, education and economy by the mainstream. This order results in the paralysis of one side of the society as Balram, his family and community paralyzed in *The White Tiger*. So through the whole novel these marginal aspects hunt for the identity, social value and economic balance. Through this novel the paralyzed part of society is struggling for the socio-economic equality.

The White Tiger is all about marginal consciousness in which Balram, the protagonist, narrates his life story to Mr. Wen Jiabao, Premier of China, in seven nights from his desk, which is a revolt of a deprived against the mainstream of society and social values, made by the power centre. The protagonist, Balram, son of Vikram Halwai, Rickshaw Puller, born in dark corner of India, in Laxmangarh, in the district of Gaya. His native was under the domination of Land Lords. He was born under the domination and miserable condition of his family.

The place where he born is a mystic place in India where the mother Ganga emancipates lives of people but at the same place people forgets to name their children. Here we come across the real name of the protagonist that is 'Munna' by which his parents call him, means boy.

*“Munna? That's not real name.
He was right: it just means boy.”*

(Adiga, 2008: 13)

The name, Balram, is a name given by his school teacher, Krishna, on his first day of schooling. According to Balram India is two countries, one is an India of light and another India of Darkness. It is a Darkness where he was born and raised. He describes it is a placed in Darkness since the freedom of India. It is just away from the technologies, roads and light; in the face of Delhi and I.T. city Bangalore. Therefore, the places like Laxamangarh are

hunting for the development and to acquire identity as an important place on the geographical maps.

Being sincere in his studies, Balram always is praised by school teacher. The School Inspector also gets impressed by him and presents a parting gift a book entitled: '*Lessons for Young Boys from the Life of Mahatma Gandhi*'. He praised Balram calling intelligent, honest and vivacious fellow in the crowd of thugs and idiots:

In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals the creature that comes along only once in a generation?

I thought about it and said:

The White Tiger;

That's what you are in this jungle.

(Adiga 2008: 35)

Though he was honest and intelligent in his activities, but, as usual poverty and deprivedness of his family doesn't permit him to complete his education.

In India uneducated deprived people either joins the tea shop or becomes porters in the big cities as Balram joins tea shop with his brother, Kishan and used to sleep on the road with him in the night. He undertakes job like coal crusher and table sweeper, but never been satisfied with his earnings. The prime concern of their life was food, shelter and identity. Balram faced so many calamities in his life therefore decide not to die like his father in the government hospital waiting for the doctor. He decides to learn driving to earn more money for his and family's betterment. Now even in the present it is not easy for a low born to get job in India easily. Being born in low caste, Balram expelled from various land lords and employers. His big chance comes when a rich Landlord hires him as a chauffeur for his son, daughter-in-law and their two Pomeranian dogs. Balram gets a chance to be free from the shackle of tradition, caste and cultural inferiority. Mr. Ashok who is also the offspring of the same soil where Balram was born and raised, but both becomes two opposite poles of the same society. Mr. Ashok, rich, educated and important person of in the society and opposite to him, Balram, poor, least educated and less-important. Once Mr. Ashok thinks:

"His eyes seemed full of wonder!

How could two such contrasting specimens of humanity be produced by the same soil, sunlight and water?"

(Adiga, 2008: 80)

The deprived people never been treated as human being since ages in India. Only because of their low birth, Balram also treated as animal since his childhood to his grand success as entrepreneur in Bangalore. Mostly such treatment is given him by Mr. Mukesh and Stork, the land lords. The rich expects their pets to be treated as humans, they expects their dogs to be pampered, walked, petted, and even washed, but they never treat their servants as human beings. Repressed are always deviant in front of their masters and their pets. Balram describes how he takes dogs for walk,

"Then I took them around the compound on chain, while the king of Nepal (Watchman) sat in a corner and shouted. 'Don't pull the chain so hard! They are worth more than you are!'"

(Adiga, 2008: 78)

The White Tiger projects to evaluate dichotomies within society- one rich, prosperous and other deprived in every field; one technologically developed and other slums of early free Indian Villages where the common rights divest from inhabitants. The right to vote is also divest:

*"My father told me that night,
I've seen twelve elections- five general, five state, two local- and someone else
voted for me twelve times."*

(Adiga, 2008: 100)

If anybody asks about his rights, people like Vijay kills them with the help of the policeman but that never had been called a murder because murderer belongs to the ruling party.

Balram escapes from Darkness and drive his master to Delhi, where he sees that in the developed cities also there are slum areas where Slum dogs like Balram lives. There are some people from Darkness too, who came Delhi to survive with the light but they are still away from the equal rights for which Balram is struggling. One day, a child dies in the accident by Pinky Madam but they force Balram to take this accident on his part just to save Pinky getting trapped in the case. Fortunately, no one registers the case otherwise he should undergo the punishment for the crime which he didn't perpetrate.

*"We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul
and ares."*

(Adiga, 2008: 170)

In the novel Adiga boldly pictures the internal affairs of political parties, bribe, black-mailing and corruption etc. Mr. Ashok visits Delhi for the same purpose, to solve his tax problem regarding coal mines. The rich people always visit to Delhi to settle their black money but the deprived goes in the search of light for better life. Adiga rightly describes the conditions of slum dogs.

*"The poor basterds had come from Darkness to Delhi to find some
light- but they were still in the darkness."*

(Adiga, 2008: 138)

Pinky Madam becomes bore of Delhi's atmosphere and asks Ashok to return to New York but he delays. So Pinky leaves for New York, her native, to acquire her own identity and status in the society. Feminists may happy with the female character in The White Tiger that Pinky and Balram's Grandmother have their own set of rules and life styles. They do not

compromise their values and livings for anything. One the one hand Pinky leaves Mr. Ashok in search of her own life and on the other hand Kusum, Balram's Granny dominates her family. Balram speaks about his grandmother:

*"She had grinned her way in to control of the house;
Every son and daughter-in-law lived in fear of her."*

(Adiga, 2008: 16)

The Corruption in the Indian capital and The Murder Weekly corrupts Balram. He observes the politicians, who received bribe from Mr. Ashok to exempt from the taxes of Coal Mines, which is obviously the wealth of nation. Whenever he finds Ashok making corruption and not paying taxes, he becomes furious and it leads him to think about the story in The Murder Weekly titled '*Rape, Murder and Money*'. Balram come to conclusion:

*"The history of the World is the history of ten-thousand- year war of
brains between the rich and the poor. Each side is eternally trying to
hoodwink the other side...."*

(Adiga, 2008: 254)

Balram is not ready to die as servant, driver or with an identity as a low born member of Halwai community. He haunts for the identity, he finds a way to be out of cage to become *The White Tiger*. He has had Martin Luther's point of view so he'll not be satisfied '*until the justice roll down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.*' Apparently it is clear that the poverty is the only cause to be deprived. He thinks:

*"Amazing how much money they have',
.... And yet they treat us like animals."*

(Adiga, 2008: 207)

The corrupt minded Protagonist decides something furious and life changing that we guess from his narration. On the other hand the political changes make Mr. Ashok restless because The Great Socialists become ruling party, which demands seven hundred thousand rupees from him to veil the tax case. Already, city and its life styles have been corrupted Balram and made him selfish and evil who decides to steel money from his master. He prepares lot for the same and considers it's an opportunity. He describes.

*"I was looking for the key for years,
But the door was always open."*

(Adiga, 2008: 267)

Not only he wants to steel money but he put a bottle of visky, Johnnie Walker Black with the purpose to kill Mr. Ashok and escape from the cage to reestablish his own identity. Finally on the D day, he does the same and escapes with money. Finally after the murder he settled in Bangalore and became successful entrepreneur with the money stolen from power centre.

Though it was not easy to acquire identity in the face of dominant forces of the society, Balram undertakes various odd jobs like table swiper, coal crusher, servant, chauffeur, driver, murderer of his own master, Mr. Ashok. He went through the way of crime because it was needed for his freedom and betterment.

I conclude with the words of famous Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz:

*If these poor beasts ever lift up their heads,
Mankind would, then, forget all deeds of rebellion.
If they decide, they can own the universe,
Even chew down the bones of their cruel masters.*

(The Dogs: Sain Sucha)

Through *The White Tiger*, Adiga has been raised the voice of repressed aspects of society and warns dominants to beware. He also raises the question about marginal's socio-cultural and economic conditions. Adiga rightly gives a message that the marginal are still waiting for their rights and betterment. If the suppression and domination may continue they can take turn to become criminals. The aim of the life of these people is to make 'all is well' for their community and entire humanity:

*"It may be turn out to be decent city
Where human can live as like human
And animal can live like animals."*

(Adiga, 2008: 318)

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(The Dogs by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Translated by Sain Sucha)