



## **Socio- Economic Dynamics of Indian Society : A Study of The Haves And The Haves And The Have-Nots in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger***

**Dr. Sumitha Ashri**  
**Department of English**  
**GOVT. College For Women, Jind**  
**[ashri.sumita@gmail.com](mailto:ashri.sumita@gmail.com)**

The hiatus of inequality and the divide of the rich and the poor in human society has completely shattered the harmony and peaceful; co-existence of human beings that eventually further sharpened this gulf between the haves and the have-nots, the mighty and the weak. This scenario was witnessed by France in the Eighteenth Century which inevitably precipitated the War of Independence popularly known as The French Revolution. During that period the haves and the mighty, on the one hand, enjoyed an upper hand in all matters and left no opportunity in staking claim over the wealth that should naturally and equitably have had belonged to the share of all those who were born on this earth. They spend this wealth on the enhancement of the means of their physical comfort and personal glory. It is believed that 90 percent wealth was in the hands of merely one percent populace and rest Ten percent went to the 99 percent poor. A similar scenario exists even today in most part of the globe and particularly in India where the have-nots are forced to live from hand to mouth notwithstanding their diligence and austerity. Given these conditions, the rich are growing richer and the poor poorer. This sorry state of affairs has been the focus of the works of a host of Indian English Novelists. If Mulk Raj Anand through the life and career of Munnu and Munshi Prem Chand through *Godan* in pre-Independence era and Kamala Markandaya through *Nectar in a Sieve* in post-Independence period made a mark by highlighting the afflictions of the weaker sections of society, the noted contemporary novelists and the Man Booker Prize winners such as Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai and Arvind Adiga have emerged as pioneers of the cause of the have-nots. This is what this paper aims to highlight and analyse-the menace of discrimination against the have-nots as depicted in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*.

Arvind Adiga's the Man Booker Prize winning novel *The White Tiger* (cited hereafter as WT) extensively deals with the morbid realities of modern India. Prominent among such realities are the existence of acute poverty, a widening gap between the rich and the poor, exploitation of working class and corruption in politics and police department. The novel, running in seven chapters, is in the form of an address to the Chinese Prime Minister, Mr. Jiabao. The protagonist of the novel, Balram Halwai, "a self taught entrepreneur", bears the brunt of the current harsh realities of Indian society. Born and brought up in Luxmangarh village of Gaya district, Balram is the son of a poor rickshaw puller who dies of tuberculosis like Coolie of Mulk Raj Anand. At the age of sixteen, Balram is taken

out of school notwithstanding the fact that he is the most brilliant student of his class. Recognizing his talent, the Education Inspector calls him White Tiger, the rarest of the rare, the only boy in a classroom of underfed dunces to identify the photograph of the Great Socialist. The hopeless economic condition of his family forces him to join a tea shop in Dhanbad. Here he is made to break the coals and wipe the tables. Seeing his predilection to driving, his elder brother, Kishan, takes him to the house of taxi drivers and requests an old taxi driver to teach him to drive. Due to his deep interest in driving, Balram becomes an expert driver within a short period and joins Mr. Ashok, a rich coal merchant, as a driver of his Maruti Suzuki. Balram, a penniless Youngman who could not continue his study due to poverty, represents the have-nots and his employer, Mr. Ashok having two air conditioned cars in his garage, two drivers, a grand house in Dhanbad and a large piece of fertile land in Luxmangarh, represents the haves.

In the modern India the poor young boys belonging to the backward rural areas migrate to cities for earning livelihood. The urban rich employ some of them as domestic servants at low wages and treat them in the manner they treat animals. Balram Halwai represents this ill-fated class. He escapes Luxmangarh where “the sewage glistens and the women wait behind doors to fall on the salaries of their returning migrant husbands like wild cats on a slab of flesh”, and reaches the coal bowl of Dhanbad. Although his basic job in Dhanbad is to drive Mr. Ashok’s Maruti Suzuki, he is made to do all that a servant is supposed to. Apart from driving the car, he has to sweep the floor, the courtyard, make tea, clean cobwebs with a long broom or chase a cow out of the compound, play cricket with any brat in the household who wants to play and heat water on the stove, carry it into the courtyard and then lift the old man’s feet up one after the other and immerse them in the hot water and the message them both gently (WT, p. 69-70).

In spite of serving Mr. Ashok and his father faithfully and devotedly, Balram is not meted out human treatment. Mr. Ashok’s brother, Mr. Mukesh, more often than not, misbehaves with Balram, and treats him as inferior to dogs. Stung by the maltreatment of Mr. Mukesh, Balram says:

The rich expect their dogs to be pampered, and walked and petted and even washed! I got down on my knees and began scrubbing the dogs and then lathering hem and foaming them and then washing them down and taking a blow dryer and drying their skin (TWT, p. 78).

There is no denying the fact that the menace of disparity between the rich and the poor is more serious in cities than in villages. While the rich live in air-conditioned rooms, their servants languish in dilapidated accommodation. In Delhi Mr. Ashok occupies an air-conditioned flat on the thirteenth floor of the Buckingham Towers whereas Balram is made to live in servants’ quarters in the basement of the tower. Balram curses his destiny when he notices “how the painting on the ceiling was peeling off in large flakes and how there were spider webs in every corner” (WT, p. 79). Mr. Ashok and his wife spend nights luxuriously and leave Balram alone to grapple with the cockroaches and mosquitoes.

The mushrooming of city malls particularly in metropolitan cities has affected a wide divide between the haves and have-nots. On the one hand, the rich spend lavishly on shopping in these malls and their drivers are denied entry inside them. As per the norm of mall culture, Balram is not allowed to enter the gate as he has sandals on his feet whereas “everyone who was allowed into the mall had shoes on their feet” (WT, p. 148).

Balram mutely bears humiliation and discrimination as part of his destiny. But internally, he is sore at the current realities of modern India. Revealing his anguish, he says:

To sum up—in old days, there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Mn with Big Bellies and Me with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat or get eaten up (WT, p. 64).

Balram is ambitious to become a man with big belly and not a man with small belly like his father was. His dream of earning money remains unfulfilled even in Delhi where people hailing from the Darkness desperately endeavour to rid themselves of poverty. Describing the plight of such people Balram says: “These poor bastards had come from the Darkness to find some light but they are still in darkness” (WT, p. 138).

People like Balram don't succeed to fulfil their dreams of earning a lot of money in Delhi for the reason that here the rich use them as a tool either to augment their income or to ensure their personal comfort caring little for the comfort of their servants. About this morbid phenomenon Balram observes:

The rich of Delhi, to survive the winter, keep electrical heaters, or gas heaters, or even burn logs of wood in their fire places. When the homeless or servants like night watchmen and drivers who are forced to spend time outside in winter, want to keep them warm, they burn whatever they find on the ground (WT, p. 157).

Unhappy with the conditions prevailing in India, Mr. Ashok's Christian wife, Pinky, leaves for America to the utmost embarrassment of both Mr. Ashok and Balram. Frustrated by Pinky's deceptive behaviour, Mr. Ashok renews relationship with his previous beloved, Miss Uma. Following this development, Balram's plight intensifies. Miss Uma, unlike Pinky, dislikes Balram to the extent that his continuation as a driver is intolerable to her. Taking benefit of her hold over Mr. Ashok, she not only suggests immediate replacement of Balram but also gets Mr. Ashok ready to implement her suggestion. This provokes Balram to revolt and in a state of frenzy he cuts the throat of Mr. Ashok and kills him the way “Muslims kill their chickens” (WT, p. 286).

Balram shows disloyalty to his employer on the surfacing of the question of his replacement. The thought of being deprived of his only source of livelihood drives him to do away with the life of a person who was till now mother and father to him. His spirit of revolt wakes up the moment the sense of insecurity of job attacks him. He ungrudgingly tolerates countless hardships and humiliations and never thinks of hurting his employer in any manner. It is the question of insecurity of employment that disturbs him immeasurably and leads him to take the extreme step.

Poverty is a curse and its victims are always rudderless. People like Balram have no real friend in this world. They are exploited, humiliated, by-passed and abused wherever they go. Even those whom such wretched persons serve faithfully in the hope of materialistic gain treat them as inferior dogs. The policemen on whom lies the responsibility of protecting the poor against injustice are always biased and prejudiced against them. Grease the palm of police officers and get anything done in India. Those who follow this truth get through all odds and commit crimes fearlessly. The poor have to bear the brunt of this evil. Revealing this morbid reality of India to the Chinese Prime Minister, Balram says:

A man on a bicycle getting killed—the police don't even have to register the case. A man on a motorbike getting killed—they would have to register that. A man in a car getting killed—they would have thrown me in jail (WT, p. 309)

Thus, the novel depicts the hazards of discrimination and exploitation against the poor as one of the threatening evils of modern India. Although the menace is a part of global phenomenon, the metropolitan cities of India in particular are worst-affected. The novel holds a mirror to the present shape of Indian society which is likely to get worse on account of the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor. Through the story of Balram, the novelist has not only sensitized people towards the growing discontent among the have-nots but also warned them against the repercussions of discrimination against them. It's because the novelist seems to agree with English writer John Ruskin who says that there is either co-existence or no existence.

#### **WORKS CITED**

*Adiga, Arvind. The White Tiger, New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008. p. 26.*

*All subsequent references to this novel are from this text in the article.*