

An Exploration into Dark Reality of Indian Polity: A Study of The White Tiger by Arvind Adiga

Dr. Bindu Karanwal

Asso.Prof., S.D.P.G. College,

Ghaziabad, U.P

Email: binduraj20feb@gmail.com

Abstract

ArvindAdiga's debut novel The White Tiger delineates the sickening condition of present day India. India has degraded in terms of morality and is filled with corruption. The novel through the character of Balram, who comes from the background of crushing poverty, presents the drawbacks of Indian democracy, administrative system, political system, parliamentary system etc.

ArvindAdiga is an Indo-Australian write and journalist. His debut novel 'The White Tiger won the 2008 Man Booker prize, and is one of the widely read novels of contemporary times. He is the fourth India born author to win the prize, after Salman Rushdie, Aurndhathi Roy and Kiran Desai. The novel studies the contrast between India's rise as a modern global economy and the lead character, Balram, who comes from crushing rural poverty.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Received: 07.06.2019

Approved: 27.06.2019

Dr. Bindu Karanwal,

An Exploration into Dark Reality of Indian Polity: A Study of The White Tiger by Arvind Adiga

RJPSSs 2019, Vol. XLV, No. 1, pp. 166-172

Article No.22

Online available at:

<http://rjpss.anubooks.com/>

Introduction

The narrator of the novel *The White Tiger* is the protagonist BalramHalwai and he narrates the whole story in the form of letters written to Mr. Jiabong, a Chinese Premier. Through the character of Balram, Adiga delineates the sickening condition of present day India which has degraded in terms of morality and is filled with corruption. It portrays the darkest part of the country where ‘rottenness and corruption’, degraded and degenerated moral qualities have replaced the age – old moral values and qualities highlighting the darkness of India.

The novel is a commentary on the drawbacks of Indian democracy, administrative system, political system, parliamentary democracy which can be stated through the following statement by the protagonist Balram- “We have this fucked up system called parliamentary democracy. Otherwise we’d be just like China”. (P.109)

“The main thing to know about Delhi is that the roads are good, and the people are bad. The police are totally rotten.If they see you without a seat belt, you’ll have to bribe them a hundred rupees,”(p. 124)

“The ward boy, after we bribed him ten rupees, said that a doctor might come in the evening” (p.48).

Balram was raised in a large, poor family from Halwai caste in Laxmangarh. The village was dominated and oppressed by four landlords who were called ‘The Wild Boar’, ‘The Stork’, ‘The Buffalo’ and ‘The Raven’. They all extracted money as taxes from the villagers. They exoposited the poor for their own selfish motives.

Balram didn’t learn much from school. The very education system was corrupted from its core. The teachers at government school didn’t teach the children because they were not paid by government on time and so the teachers even kept the government aids that came for children. Thus the children remained devoid of their basic rights. What will happen of a country in future where the innocent minds have seen corruption in their very first place of life? Firstly, they are devoid of their basic right- right to education, secondly, they have been exposed to the dark side of the system at such a young age. Surely the future is not at all safe.

The medical system is also portrayed corrupt. When Balram took this ailing father (suffering from Tuberculosis) to the govt. hospital, there was no doctor available because the doctors were busy fulfilling their greed, as they all had their own private clinics and they rarely visited the government hospitals where they were actually employed. Balram’s father died in hospital, without getting treatment, while the officials showed that the treatment had been done. It is the responsibility of the doctors to

save the lives of people. Doctors are even regarded as gods as they save patient's lives.

But, it seems doctors have not only forgotten their duties but have degraded to the extent of fulfilling their desire of greed gratification and they no longer care for the patients who truant them and seriously need them.

Balram also describes at length the corrupt nature of politics in darkness. A politician known as the great socialist controls the darkness through the election fund. The stork's family involved in the shady business dealings in the coal industry must regulate bribe to the great socialists to ensure success.

The financial prosperity and the ultramodern city culture always has played an important role in our daily lives. Balram who was born in a remote village Laxmangarh in Bihar and journeyed through the difficulties of his life and settled in the capital of India, Delhi as a trained driver of Ashok. Balram as an innocent and rustic man becomes a totally different/ changed person with crime. Moral devaluation and degradation entraps him and this kind of loss in him happens with the corrupted influences of the Delhi city and its corrupted 'fucked up system'.

The moral decadence and the loss can be found in lines – "All these changes happened in me because they happened first in Mr. Ashok. He returned from America an innocent man but life in Delhi corrupted him – and once the master of the Honda city becomes corrupted, how can the driver stay innocent". (p 149) In the post modern period everything had always been in a threat by the globalization as well as liberalization which create a baseless weak society. The corrupt politicians consider corruption is the indispensable part of the country and criminalization of politics has become a golden rule of India.

The govt. officials have the pictures of Gandhi, they are more interested in Gandhi on currency. Hence Mr. Ashok's comment goes on like that: "We are driving past Gandhi, after just having given a bribe to a minister. It's a fucking joke isn't it". This kind of tendency is applicable to everyone. Balram also gives bribe to the police to save himself. "There is no end of things in India, Mr. Jiabong, as Mr. Ashok so wretchedly used to say, You'll have to keep paying and paying the fuckers. But I complain about the police the way the rich complain; not the poor complain. The judicial system is the store house of all the corruption also. The judges know the reality of the criminal cases but abandoning their moral responsibilities and duties welcome the illegal and unjust ways for the materialistic prosperities." (p 139) Balram tells the truth about the nakedness of the judges: "The judges? Wouldn't they see

through this obviously forced confession? But they are also in the racket too. They take their bribe; they ignore the discrepancies in the case and life goes on.” (p 152)

Adiga has very beautifully depicted the dark social realities of corruption and moral degradation at many levels, of which the protagonist – Balram is also a part.

Throughout Balram’s narrative, Adiga constantly exposes the prevalence of corruption throughout all of India’s institutions. Schools, hospitals, police, elections, industries and every aspect of government are thoroughly corrupt, while practices such as bribery and fraud are entirely commonplace. Balram’s approach to this truth largely involves a deeply cynical humor. However, there is an ugly component to his character. In order to escape the “Darkness” and enter into the “Light”, Balram must himself become a part of this system. His victory is thus bittersweet; while he has succeeded in elevating his social position, he continues to live in a country paralyzed by corruption, which prevents true progress from taking place. Adiga’s ultimate point seems to be that corruption necessarily breeds corruption, unless of course a greater revolution remakes society.

India, described by Balram is in the throes of a major transformation, heralded in part by the advent of globalization. India finds itself at the crossroads of development in the fields of technology and outsourcing, as the nation adapts to address the needs of a global economy. Balram recognizes and hopes to ride this wave of the future with his White Tiger Technology, Drivers business in Bangalore, but this force of globalization has a darker component for him as well. It threatens and disenfranchises those adhering to a traditional way of life, such as his family in Laxmangarh. Hence, he must change who he is in order to compete in this new world. Adiga thus vividly conjures the tension between the old and new India, suggesting that succeeding in this world (as Balram does) requires a flurry of ethical and personal compromises.

Balram frequently discusses the issues of social mobility in the new social hierarchy of India. Having idolized Vijay from childhood, Balram recognizes the possibility of moving up in the world, but has to confront the reality of such movement throughout his story. One of the big issues is how India’s social system has changed. Under the caste system, people’s fates were predetermined, but they were happy, believing they belonged somewhere. However, the new social structure promises the possibility of social mobility, but actually only offers two social divisions: the rich and the poor. The poor are kept in an eternal state of subservience and servitude to the rich by the mechanism that Balram dubs “The Rooster Coop.” However, they are now more unhappy because there is a possibility of social mobility that nevertheless remains out of their grasp. Balram ultimately finds a way to break from the Rooster

Coop, but it requires him to compromise his ethics and personality - he has to kill his master and betray his family. That social mobility is a specter captured only through such difficult means is a comment on the unfortunate reality of a world built more on limitations than possibility.

The White Tiger is largely a story of self-fashioning, as Balram undergoes a transformative journey to construct his own identity. Inspired by his childhood hero, Vijay, also rose from a humble background to achieve success in the upper echelons of Indian society, Balram dedicates himself to self-improvement, so much so that he is willing to destroy who he once was. He sees identity as fluid and malleable, a fact articulated through the many name changes he employs throughout the story. Ultimately, he even chooses a new identity for himself in imitation of his master, calling himself Ashok Sharma. And yet the novel is full of dramatic irony revealing that Balram cannot fully repudiate the person he once was. He remains full of unresolved guilt and provincial superstitions, reminding us that while identity might be entirely fluid, it is also entirely immovable as well.

Ultimately, *The White Tiger* is a tale about morality, suggesting that morality can be viewed as either rigid or flexible. Balram eventually embraces the latter option. In order to justify murdering Ashok and risking his family's lives, Balram develops an alternate moral system. He reasons that the money he steals from Ashok is rightfully his, since servants are exploited by the rich, and he convinces himself of his exceptionalism as "the white tiger" in order to rationalize his decisions. Believing he is the only one who has truly woken up to the truth of the "Rooster Coop," he feels compelled to change his life. In this sense, Balram has become a version of Nietzsche's "ubermensch," or over-man, who believes himself to be above the moral and legal limitations of society. Adiga poses a question through Balram: do we blame a criminal for his decisions, or do we try to understand those decisions as reactions to an overly oppressive and restrictive society? Assuming that a reader does not have a definitive answer, Adiga suggests then that morality is a fluid and unfixated concept.

The White Tiger abounds with instances of twinned pairs and dualities, each corresponding to one half of a central dichotomy: the rich and the poor halves of India. Balram poses India as broken up into two sections, the "Darkness" and the "Light." Examples of twinned pairs from each of these two halves include: the "men with small bellies" and "men with big bellies;" the hospital where Balram's father dies and the city hospital visited by the Stork; the beautiful blonde prostitute visited by Ashok and the uglier, faux-blonde prostitute hired by Balram; the apartment building

in Delhi and its servants quarters below; and the two versions of all markets in India (one for the rich, and a smaller, grimier replica for the servants). The most significant of these twinned pairs is, of course, Ashok and Balram themselves. It is telling that Balram, the narrator, views the world as split into halves. It reveals the extent to which oppression has ruined his worldview.

Another means by which Adiga explores this theme is through the symbolic rearview mirror, which doubles everything through a reflection and hence functions as a conduit for the confrontation between Ashok and Balram. This particular image suggests that identity can be transferred across the divide - one can move from one area to another. Other instances of dualities in the text serve to further highlight the extent of Balram's transformation; for example, the two car accidents (Pinky Madam's hit-and-run and the death of the bicycling boy) demonstrate just how far Balram has come in his quest to become a successful entrepreneur. Balram was once a pawn in the game, whereas in the latter case he has found the power to be a representative of the more fortunate "Light."

The extended Indian family plays an incredibly significant role in the traditional way of life in the Darkness. The family is the core social unit, so all its members are expected to act with selfless devotion to its interests. Though the poor ostensibly view this construct as strength, Balram comes to see it as another way through which the poor are kept in the "Rooster Coop". Firstly, the expectations of family enforce limitations that can quash individual ambition (as they almost do with Balram). Further, since a servant's disobedience is visited upon his family, servants remain trapped by the whims of their masters. Social mobility becomes impossible. In order to break free and live the life of a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore, a city representing a new India, Balram must sacrifice his family. This conundrum seems to suggest that in order to thrive in the modern world and embrace the potentials of a New India, this traditional attachment to the family must be relinquished in favor of a newfound emphasis on individualism.

References

- 1 Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. India: Harper: Collins Publishers.2008
- 2 Bronowski, J. "Science, the Destroyer or Creator". *Science Speaks: A Selection of English Prose*. Ed. Hume Dow.Bombay: Ginnand Company Ltd 1969, 160-169.
- 3 Brunton, Paul. *The Spiritual Crisis of Man*.London: Rider. 1952, p.7.
- 4 Fuller, Edward. *Man in Modern Fiction*. New York: Random House, 1958.
- 5 Giner, Salvador. *Mass Society* New York: Academic Press Inc., 1976.

- 6 Ivasheva, Valentina. *On the Threshold of Twenty- First Century*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978
- 7 Monteiro, John B. *Corruption*. Bombay: P.C Manaktala and Sons Private Ltd., 1966.
- 8 Verghese, Paul C. *Problems of the Indian Creative Writers in English*. Bombay: Somaiya Publications, 1971.
- 9 Volkov, G.N. *The Era of Robots or the Era of Man?* Moscow, 1965
- 10 Urban, G.R. *Can We Survive Our Future?* London: The Bodley Head Ltd., 1971