

REALISM IN ARVINDA ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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“The most general aim of realism was to offer a truthful, accurate and objective representation of the real world, both the external world & human self focusing on contemporary life rather than longing for some idealized past”¹ “Realism refers to certain modes and conventions of verbal and visual representation that can occur at any historical time.”² Adiga's *The White Tiger* is an epistolary novel, is a truthful, accurate and objective representation of the real contemporary Indian society rather than prosperous and flourishing India.

The White Tiger that has revealed the naked reality of shining India. The novel describes social injustice of modern India with well balanced humour and fury. As Amalanjyoti Patra rightly observes:

"It is a simple book full of wit and black humour, aiming at direct attack at the system of democracy in India. The Corrupt politicians and the unholy nexus among politicians, executive and the business community are ruthlessly exposed, making a poor show of much advertised "Shining India."³

The protagonist Balram Halwai writes seven letters in seven nights to Wen Jiabao, the Chinese Premier. To tell the truth about India before a forthcoming state visit. Balram realizes that he must explain to premier all about Indian entrepreneurship, it is something that China is missing.

Balram narrates his experience and recounts the whole story of how he becomes a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. He tells readers that he was born in Northern India, in a tiny hell hole called Laxmangarh. His parents were not bothered to give him a name calling him 'Munna'. This negligence on the part of the parents also presents the dark side of India where parents can only give birth to the child but they are not concerned with his social or emotional needs. He even has no idea about his date of birth. A local officer decides his date of birth.

Balram calls himself, "half baked" like many others in the country not allowed to finish school due to poor financial condition of the family. "Me and thousands of others in this country like me are half baked because we were not allowed to complete our schooling"(WT.10). He was a smart lad and was even recognized by school inspector who praised him as a "White Tiger" the rarest of the animal's creatures that only comes along one in a generation. The school inspector promises to arrange a scholarship and a proper schooling for the young boy, but of course proves to be a sweet daydream. His family takes him out of school and puts him to work at a tea shop. The fake promises of

the school inspector again reveal the pathetic condition of corrupt Indian education system. Where deserving students do not get benefit of the government policies. The teachers steal money from the school food programme and sell the uniforms meant for the student but nobody raises voice against it because the teachers are not being paid adequate wages by the government "The teacher had a legitimate excuse to steal the money –he said he had not been paid his salary in six months."(33) He surveys the gray remoteness of an India where the dispossessed and the privileged are not steeped in the stereotypes of struggle and domination. The ruthlessness of power and survival assumes a million moral ambiguities in this novel. *The White Tiger* says a lot about rising and shining India in the form of malls, Multi-storeyed buildings, air conditioned cars and IT people but the irony is that a greater part of Indian population remains in darkness, untouched and unaffected by this "Feel God" factor. Balram with contempt and resentment admits:

“In the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: “Men with big bellies and men with small bellies.”(64)

The novel is remarkable for the minute observation of the writer from beginning to the end. It sounds in the form of Barlam's voice that is witty, pithy, ultimate and psychopathic. He explores the pathetic life of poor in Delhi in contrast to luxurious lives of rich entrepreneurs. The miserable condition of subalterns is well depicted using the imagery of the ‘rooster coop’ where every hen or rooster gets killed by the butcher before the other rooster. But “they do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country”(173-174).

The White Tiger reflects the struggle, humiliations, atrocities and cruelties of the dominating class towards the poor, inferiors and servant class. Every statement of Balram draws the readers into darkness and compels to think about the emotional and psychological state of lower class people like drivers, servants, guards and rickshaw pullers. They are subordinate, marginalized and subaltern and their will is dominated by their masters. They live in the basement of the apartments where they can be called at any time with the ringing of electronics bells. Balrams calls the poor millions of India the human spiders as compared to the landlords, the politicians, the middle men and the powerful.

“While Adiga has adopted a dry, unsentimental, cynical and caustic tone in the novel, he has successfully portrayed the picture of present day India and given the reader a lot to ponder about. It is as if the author is challenging the readers to contradict him in what he says about India. The focus on the haphazard construction that is going on in the name of development is turning some of India’s metropolis into a jungle of concrete inhabited by people devoid of humanness; the manner in which "fixers" are found operating for the politicians; the way police forces operate the dirt, squalor and sub-human conditions in which the poor workers live, are some of the realities that are very difficult to gloss over, let alone by any responsible citizen of India or a discerning reader.”⁴

Adiga makes a striking comment on the terrible condition of Indian drivers who have been appointed as drivers but in the country like India they have to perform every type of works. They have to take care of the pets of their masters by making them bathe,

rubbing them and combing them. They massage the legs of their masters when their masters enjoy whisky in the sunshine and being treated very bitterly if they commit a slight mistake. Besides revealing the reality of marginalized Indian drivers, writer also focuses on the integrity of marginalized Indians in contrast to hypocrisy of those who represent wealth and glamour. "Indians are the world's most honest people..... the trustworthiness of servants in the basis of the entire Indian economy" (174-175). Driving cars and seeing or handling a lot of money sometimes in millions, for their masters but these poor people never think of running away with the money.

It is unfortunate that in spite of being so honest the servants get only ill treatment from their masters. Balram exposes his declined dignity in a very pathetic manner. When Mongoose had lost his one rupee, Balram was asked to get down on his knees and look for the coin on the floor of the car. He feels that he is losing his dignity as a human being and compares himself with the dogs.

The cruelty of Indian master's touches climax when Balram is emotionally forced to take blame of the car accident committed by Pinky Madam during her rash driving. He has to sign a paper prepared by Mukesh that contains his confession, of the crime and he disclosed the fact how his masters family bribe government ministers regularly so that his family would be exempted of income tax. He reveals the hollowness of minister's promises that are made by them before elections just to get the favour of innocent and ignorant people. As a method of shock therefore the readers who easily identify them with Ashok and get terrified to find the protagonists grudge against the master class people.

The democratic idea of India is being shattered by the inhuman relationship of master and servant. Servants are expected to be so dedicated like Ram bhaghat Hanuman but the masters are not touched by a single ideal of Lord Ram. Balram is treated as a clown on the birthday of Pinky madam, the wife of Mr. Ashok. He dresses as a maharaja with a white turban and dark cooling glasses and serves the food in that costume. He is instructed by Mr. Ashok to stand near the portrait of cudgels and puddles with folded hands and wait for the order. He describes the lavish life of Indian masters just because of Indian servants and this lavishness can never be enjoyed by the masters of America and England.

Every day millions wake up from dirty and goes to their masters' posh houses to clean the floors, wash the dishes, weed the garden, feed their children, press their clothes all for a pittance. The master-servant relationship again gives a shocking reflection when Balram is blamed for the elopement of Madam Pinky. He follows the instruction of Madam Pinky and takes her to the airport. He is caught and rudely pushed in the balcony by Mr. Ashok. He is not ready to listen to any explanation from Balram and blames him for ruining his family reputation. The hollowness of Indian morality is projected through the character of Mr. Ashok who shows the double standard of morality. He seems to be very concerned regarding his family reputations when his wife left him but he himself indulges in illegal sexual relationship with a golden haired foreign prostitute inside a big hotel. "His wife Pinky represents the open exhibition of female sexuality in the glamorous society of Delhi"⁵. She is entirely unaware of the fact that her half covered body is being noticed by the male servants of the house. Balram also feels bad to see the exposed breast of his mistress. "When she sat in back, I could see half her boobs hanging

out of her clothes each time I had to look in the rear view mirror".(143) She symbolizes the modern woman of dark India far away from the social, moral and family values and even does not hesitate to leave her husband without any genuine reason.

Adiga presents India as vast and dark jungle where hierarchy, sycophancy, corruption and ruthlessness are the rule of the day. He feels that after independence jungle law replaces 300 laws where the most furious the hungriest are eating the weaker and making their bellies big. Where the youths are out of job and have become helpless. Instead of struggling and facing the challenges of life, they are busy in nonsense gossiping and watching photographs of film actresses. Adiga remarks:

“The things are different in the Darkness. There, every morning, tens of thousands of young men sit in the tea shops, reading the newspaper, or lie on a charpoy humming a tune. Or sit in their rooms talking to a photo of a film actress. They have no job to do today. They know that they would not get any job today. They have given up the fight.”⁶

Adiga challenges secular fabric of India where a Muslim has to change his name as Ram Prasad to remain a Hindu because being a Muslim he can not get a job in the Hindu family. "What a miserable life he's had, having to hide his religion, his name, just to get a job as a driver"(110). Balram also becomes a witness to the dark Indian social, political and religious unjust systems, where fatal accident caused by the drunken owner are not reported to the police who is greased to keep silent; drivers are compelled to sign confessionals and treated like animals. Democracy has become a mockery and ministers are the symbols of corruption; action is meant to disturb nation's economy and to make fun of democracy where girls going into building late at night and coming out with so much cash in the morning.

The evil transforms Balram into a monster and he becomes so cruel that he does not hesitate to murder his master Mr. Ashok. It is his way of getting social justice. Along with his nephew, he establishes himself as a successful entrepreneur, with the seven lakh rupees that he has stolen from his master. He never seems to repent for what he has done but justifies his act of murder as an act of class warfare. With the murder of Mr. Ashok, he also kills the character of Balram and appears as Ashok Sharma and is the proud owner of sixteen SUVs which he uses as taxis and has drivers working for him. He treats his drivers in entirely different way. He establishes a dignified employer employee relationship. He admits:

"I was a driver to a master, but not I am a master of drivers. I do not treat them like servants- I do not slap, or bully or mock anyone. I do not insult anyone of them by calling them my 'family' either. They are my employees, I am their boss, that all. I make them sign a contract and I sign it too, and both of us must honour that contract".(302)

His transformation from Balram to Mr. Ashok and his successful elopement from Delhi to Bangalore make a sharp comment on Indian legal system where after committing murder a man can easily protect himself by changing name, profession and city. But like a real hero of black comedy, he is also not free from the corruption of Dark India. When his driver hits a boy on a bicycle, he also shows the same loss of moral and humanitarian values that he inherited from his master. He deals the case like a perfect professional businessman who greases the palm of police commissioner often to close the case or to change the case or to change the case in his favour. Here Adiga's intentions to

show the role of money in Indian legal system and how legal system has become the handmaid of corrupt businessmen and politicians. Money can change the number plates of the car and make another car a substitute.

By the end of the novel Adiga puts a big question mark on India's sixty two years old independence. He presents a dark jungle where all social, political, legal and religious systems seem to have entirely failed out and where Balram appears as a 'white tiger' who survives beyond the bondages of the cage. The image of the white tiger is evoked for the final time by Balram to "take money, and start a school, an English language school for poor children in Bangalore, a school where the kids are taught the facts of life in lace of hollow idealism. By the end of the novel, the murderous protagonist becomes very optimistic regarding the bright future of India and makes a golden prediction to be on the top of the pyramid.

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