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A detailed still-life composition featuring a quill pen as the central element. The quill is positioned diagonally, with its tip resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is secured with a red wax seal and a red ribbon. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder casts a warm glow. In the foreground, a glass inkwell with a quill inside sits on a wooden surface, alongside a red wax seal and a small wooden object. The overall scene evokes a sense of traditional scholarship and research.

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The Post-millennial Indian Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger***V. K. Venkatalakshmi***Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University, Annamalainagar, (T.N.) India***Dr. S. Karthik Kumar***Assistant Professor, Department of English, Annamalai University, Annamalainagar, (T.N.) India***Abstract**

The last decade of the past millennium and the first decade of the new millennium have brought India an array of Man Booker Prizes. Aravind Adiga won the Prestigious Man Booker Prize in 2008 for his phenomenal work *The White Tiger*. *The White Tiger* – a tale of two Indias – tells the story of Balram, one of the faceless poor left behind by the country's recent economic boom and the other as a thriving entrepreneur. Globalization has embraced the developing nations like India, the result of which is that the rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer. The novel is set in the backdrop of the economic boom in India that had ushered in a great chasm between the haves and have-nots. It reveals a sharp and unblinking look at the reality of India's economic miracle. Economic globalization and its effects on 'New India' are dexterously and daringly portrayed by Aravind Adiga. The paper delves into the way, Adiga has revealed a 'New India', where prevails a sharp contrast between India's rich who thrives and its working class people who strive.

Key Words: Man Booker, Adiga, New India, Balram, Economic boom.

The last decade of the past millennium and the first decade of the new millennium have brought India an array of Man Booker Prizes. India received its first Man Booker Prize for Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981. In an article in the 'New York Times', Barbara Crossette observed "Writing in English, these authors (Indian Writers in English) are able to present their disarmingly intimate and often unconventional images of India to readers beyond their nation's borders". Aravind Adiga won the Prestigious Man Booker Prize in 2008 for his phenomenal work *The White Tiger*. Michael Portillo – the Chairman of the judges, Man Booker Prize Panelists 2008 described *The White Tiger* "as a compelling, angry and darkly humorous novel about a man's journey from Indian village life to entrepreneurial success. What set it apart was its originality. The

feeling was that this was new territory.... And it is extremely readable. In many ways it was the perfect novel." *The White Tiger* is a compelling, angry and darkly humorous work. It is an unexpected journey into a New India, says *The Sunday Telegraph* cover page. Balram Halwai, tells the Chinese Premier, in his letter, that Indian entrepreneurs, though are grossly cultured and civilized, happen to run many outsourcing companies in America.

'The White Tiger' says only three nations – Chile, Afghanistan and Abyssinia did not have foreign rule. He calls his story, "The Autobiography of a Half-Baked Indian" (8). He tells his life story as an entrepreneur, thus a self-made man. He confesses that his formal education is little. He tells that he was employed by one millionaire Mr. Ashok. Ashok, a businessman in coal from Dhanbad happened to be from his village

Laxmangarh in Gaya district, Bihar. Ashok has an American Christian wife Mrs Pinky and a brother Mr. Mukesh. Their father is called 'Stork'. Mr. Stork is from Laxmangarh. He is a landlord from that village and he has kept his family in Dhanbad just to avoid the Naxalite enmity. As Ashok comments to his wife Balram Halwai is a low class fellow, "The thing is, he probably has ...what, two, three years of schooling in him? He can read and write, but he doesn't get what he's read. He's half-baked. The country is full of people like him" (10) Balram admits it, "The story of my upbringing is the story of how a half baked fellow is produced".

When Munna, the little one, went to school in Laxmangarh, he had no name as such. The class teacher called him Balram. The boy comes from halwai (sweet maker profession) community. Balram divides humanity by income. He calls the rich as 'India of Lightness' and the poor as 'India of Darkness'. His father pulled an auto, his mother died young; and he has a greedy granny by the name Kusum, Kisan is his brother, Munnu, Jayaram, Divyaram and Umesh are his uncles; and Rabri, Shalini, Malini, Luttu, Jyadevi and Ruchi are his aunts. The Halwais seem to be a poor lot. Balram narrates his story in a flashback mode. He is learned, wise, materialistic, and tells all this, after he kills his employer Ashok. He gives a glimpse of his village, which he calls a paradise. He says the village has two factions – one the landlords and the other naxals. The two parties are at strife. The bloody landlords are named, according to their qualities, as Buffalo, Stork, Wild Boar and Raven. The Buffalo seems to be the greediest of all. It is said, "All four of the animals lived in high-walled mansions just

outside Laxmangarh – the landlord's quarters." (25).

Balram proceeds to explain about Ashok, his employer, whom Balram kills for his money. Ashok is interested in three things: politics, coal and China. There are details about Ashok's drinking habits. Balram narrates much about his Christian wife. His account of Stork is a critique of the rich. Balram describes, in one occasion, how he has to take responsibility for the crime committed by his mistress Pinky, in her drunken drive. Adiga describes it thus, "The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid, middle-class masters. We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul and arse. Yes, that's right: we all live in the world's greatest democracy here. What a fucking joke. Doesn't the driver's family protest? Far from it. They would actually go about bragging. Their boy Balram had taken the fall, gone to Tihar Jail for his employer. He was loyal as a dog. He was the perfect servant. The judges? Wouldn't they see through this obviously forced confession? But they are in the racket too. They take their bribe, they ignore the discrepancies in the case. And life goes on" (170)

Having managed to become the driver of a rich businessman, having some roots in his village, Balram is able to learn about the ways of the wealthy and their relation to bribery, crime and politics. In need of money to rise as an entrepreneur, he grabs an opportunity to murder his gentle and affectionate master Ashok, with harrowing cruelty when he is carrying several lakhs for bribery to save his wealth from income-tax. Balram becomes a fugitive

now. He moves towards Bangalore, accompanied by Dharam. The master's red-bag of money is also with him. In the railway station at Hyderabad, he notices the police poster for his capture. After reaching Bangalore, he begins to serve in a hotel for a month, and then thinks of driving a car for a master, assuming the name Ashok Master. He decides to become an entrepreneur. He bribes a police inspector and starts to serve outsourcing companies as their transporter. He owns 16 drivers and 24 Qualis cars. Later he starts his real estate business. The novel ends with The White Tiger's meditation about the business called life.

Balram Halwai truthfully and sincerely unfolds his mind in his letters to Wen Jiabao, the Chinese Premier. Balram introduces himself to him as "A thinking Man" (3) and later as "His Midnight Educator on Matters Entrepreneurial" (45). He gradually moves from the formal to the personal level in his seven letters to Wen Jiabao. Balram talks mockingly of gods, numbering 3600004 according to him, and considers the land where Ganga flows, the area of darkness. He is also suspicious of people sitting under large portraits of Mahatma Gandhi, for in giving bribes they are driving past Gandhi. "See, this country, in its days of greatness, when it was the richest nation on earth, was like a zoo. A clean, well-kept orderly zoo. Everyone in his place, everyone happy And then, thanks to all those politicians in Delhi, on the fifteenth of August, 1947 – the day the British left – the cages had been left open and jungle law replaced zoo law. Those that were the most ferocious, the hungriest had eaten everyone else up, and grown big bellies ... It didn't matter whether you were a woman, or a Muslim, or an untouchable:

anyone with a belly could rise up To sum up – in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days there are just two castes. Men with the Big Bellies and Men with the Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat – or get eaten up." (63-64)

At the national level, things are as bad, perhaps more deplorable, as they cover practically the whole country. There is a deep feeling of communalism, which makes the "Stork" ask his son, playing cricket, to call himself Gavaskar and not Azharuddin, a Muslim (70). Similarly, Ram Persad, Ashok's servant, though a very good driver, is immediately fired after the discovery that he is really a Muslim, pretending to be a Hindu to get a job. The situation is further complicated at the time of elections because of the Naxalites. The Government can also make false promises of development at election time – even to the extent of making villages high-technology paradises. There is no fresh water in the villages for the poor. But all the same, politicians can kill and move on, as Balram notices.

The wealthy entrepreneurs are also squeezed by politicians, the ministers and their bureaucrats and agents to part with large sums of their money, which is evaded from the income tax, as in the case of Ashok who is ready to pay seven lakh rupees, possibly as one instalment. The ideal of democracy is justice from every angle but it is more abused than used for social welfare. As Arora comments in *Aravind Adiga's 'The White Tiger': A Freakish Booker*, "Corruption has embraced it and injected bribery in its veins. It is crying and voicing the common people but its voice is silenced because of

the money power, the magic of which enwraps electors, politicians, bureaucrats and judges.” (86) The cancer of corruption starting at the top pervades the whole governmental machinery including the highest police officers, one of whom in Bangalore extorts from Balram a large amount for the education of children in U.S.A. In fact, Balram has moulded and retained his career as a hitherto unknown upstart in the entrepreneurial world of Bangalore by his readiness to pay bribes wherever required. He is even able to go scotfree from the punishment for manslaughter involved in a fatal accident caused by one of his buses. Adiga explains how Balram got corrupted, “The rest of today’s narrative will deal mainly with the sorrowful tale of how I was corrupted from a sweet, innocent village fool into a citified fellow full of debauchery, depravity and wickedness. 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?” (197)

The whole political-economic scenario makes Balram think the country is ripe for a revolution, though he also rightly feels that with the Indian religious psyche “an Indian revolution” won’t happen, and “Everyman must make his own Benaras” (304). In such a situation, a number of political thinkers have even begun to consider whether a Presidential system would not have been more suitable for India than the Parliamentary, for even as Ashok Sharma says about it, “Father, we will never catch up with China for this reason”(280).

O.P. Mathur, in his book, *Post 1947 Indian English Novel – Major Concerns*, writes, “Aravind Adiga has created an uncommon commoner whose prismatic mind contains a rare ‘white tiger’ who, to quote Blake, is “burning bright / In the forests of the Night”, the Night being the money-based politics, all-round corruption, brutal injustice, servility and events like the elimination of whole families in revenge – all combined to make politics almost a synonym both of sin and crime unveiled in this “angry novel”. (144) Having violently broken out of his cage, Balram is now so rapturous that even if he is caught and sentenced to death he exclaims, “I’ll never say I made a mistake that night in Delhi when I slit my master’s throat. I’ll say it was all worthwhile to know, just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant” (320-321) For Balram the murder is deserved and the robbery of the bribe money is no robbery. They are but necessary steps for his own leap into light. But the last sentence of Balram’s last letter to the Chinese Premier is potentially interesting: “I think I am ready to have children. Mr. Premier” (321).

“The novel is a wonderful revelation of Indian society that reflects the good combination of its pauses and postures over all. It is not simply the Balram’s of the world caught in the rooster coop but Adigan stand – the world’s most privileged suffer from a cultural and class myopia that limits perspective and distorts self understanding.” (1) says Saini in his work, *Perspectives on Indian Booker Prize Winners – Readings & Reflections. The White Tiger* – a tale of two Indias – tells the story of Balram, one of the faceless poor left behind by the country’s recent

economic boom and the other as a thriving entrepreneur. An incredibly complex character, Balram appears at different times worldly wise and rustically naive, honest and corrupt, subservient and unbearably arrogant. The novel describes a 'New India' far removed from the colourful costumes and music of the bollywood films and the mystical enticements of tourism promotions. The novel is set in the backdrop of the economic boom in India that had ushered in a great chasm between the haves and have-nots. It reveals a sharp and unblinking look at the reality of India's economic miracle.

Globalization has embraced the developing nations like India, the result of which is that the rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer. Humanitarian approach has lost its way in the jungle of materialism. Mall culture welcomes a rich, not a poor man. A man with sandals is not allowed in the mall because of his poverty. Balram's cry, "Am I not a human being too?" (148) reveals the heinous face of globalization, which neglects human values. The ancient India has given place to the industrial India. Adiga makes a tour of the country where he shows the river and lands, mountains, cities and villages. He presents the contemporary picture of the Post-Millennial India and attempts to show that in spite of the claim of having realized the concept of Shining India, some of its landscapes remain in darkness. Saini writes, "In his reportorial skill, Adiga points his finger at the three pillars of modern India – democracy, enterprise and justice. For him they appear same, as instead of bridging the gap in Indian society they widen the gap between the

rich and the poor; rural and urban, and allow a small minority to prosper at the expense of the silent majority.

The novel reveals the brutal injustices of changing India, which is on the verge of inheriting the world from the West." (3)

Adiga himself opines, "This is the reality for a lot of Indian people and it's important that it gets written about, rather than just hearing about the 5% of people in my country who are doing well...it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society. I wanted to depict someone from India's underclass – which is perhaps 400 million strong – and which has largely missed out on the economic boom, and which remains invisible in most films and books coming out of India. My aim was to draw aspects from the people I'd met to create someone whom I see all around me in India." Adiga is adept in describing Indian corruption, from the vote-rigging of the local elections, where the 'Great Socialist' candidate was unopposed, to the conditions at school, where the teacher steals the money for the school-food-programme and sells the uniform meant for the students. Adiga ascertains, "... I've tried hard to make sure that anything in the novel has a correlation in Indian reality. The government hospitals, the liquor shops and the brothels that turn up in the novel are all based on real places in India that I've seen in my travels." Economic globalization and its effects on 'New India' are dexterously and daringly portrayed by Aravind Adiga. The main theme of the novel is the contrast between India's rich who thrive and its working class people who strive.

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