

Theme of Marginalization in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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**Abstract**

The present research paper focus light on theme of marginalization in Adiga's *The White Tiger*. It explores the human miseries in all forms. He strongly condemns the political atrocity. Adiga's *The White Tiger* is the exploration of the portrait of 'real' India. The characters are from marginal communities, living in turbulent times and caste system, despair and unfulfilled dream provide many hurdles in their way of life. He believes that villages are the back on of India.

**Key Words:** Marginalization, political atrocity, portrait of real India, communal disharmony, exploitation, demystification

**Introduction:**

India is a multilingual, multicultural nation with majority of its territories consisting of villages. By mid sixties Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Chennai and all other large cities dotted with slums. Poverty-stricken people live in slums. Politicians looked at the slums as the vote bank. India's capital, New Delhi has a million and a half out of fourteen million living in slums. Mumbai is the worst with greater percentage living in slums. Poverty, corruption, crime, communal tension, caste system and class differentiation are the major problems prevailing in India.

Adiga began his journalistic career as a financial journalist, interning at the *Financial Times*. With pieces published in the *Financial Times* and *Money*, he covered the stock market and investment, interviewing, amongst others, Donald Trump. His review of previous Booker Prize

winner Peter Carey's book, *Oscar and Lucinda*, appeared in *The Second Circle*, an online literary review. Aravind Adiga's debut novel, *The White Tiger*, won the 2008 Booker Prize. He is the fourth Indian-born author to win the prize, after Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran Desai.

Adiga's *The White Tiger* is the exploration of the portrait of 'real' India. The characters are from marginal communities, living in turbulent times and caste system, despair and unfulfilled dream provide many hurdles in their way of life. Aravind Adiga's attempt to write the novel *The White Tiger* is only a process of self-examination and not a crude attack on his country. According to Aravind Adiga, he has not attacked India through his novel:

"At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the West, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society (Indian). That's what I'm trying to do -- it's not

an attack on the country, it's about the greater process of self-examination.”

In an interview with the BBC Aravind Adiga has remarked:

“*The White Tiger* is the story of a poor man in today's India,

1. one of the many hundreds of millions who belong to the vast Indian underclass; people who live as laborers, as servants, as chauffeurs and who by and large do not get represented in Indian entertainment, in Indian films, in Indian books. My hero—or rather my protagonist Balram Halwai is one of these faceless millions of poor Indians.”

*The White Tiger*, winner of the Man Booker Prize award has drawn the attention of thousands of Indian readers. It is realistic in the portrayal of the truths of India. In this novel *The White Tiger* Adiga illustrates the fall of values in Indian life through the story of the protagonist. Adiga has divided India into "India of Darkness" and "India of Light". The central character is a product of the Darkness who becomes a murderer and goes to the south to become an entrepreneur. He tries to convince the Chinese premier by his letters.

“Please understand Your Excellency that India is two countries in one: an India of Light and an India of Darkness” (TWT 14).

The area near the oceans is the India of Light, while Indian ear the river, the dark river “Mother Ganga” is the area of Darkness. It is in this “dark” India that our White Tiger, Balram Halwai is born and

raised as the prodigious son of a rickshaw puller. Sharing his father’s dream of having a good future, Balram progresses through the school well, but discontinues to earn to make his families both ends meet. This India has no clean water or electricity and is populated by children who are thin and hungry. The doctors who are employed in the government hospital are never there and work at a private hospital to pay bribes; the teacher swindles the lunch money earmarked for the students, because he is unpaid. Working for the “stork”, or the landlord, Balram gets his first break, when he is picked as the driver for the landlord’s son Ashok, and his American wife, Pinky. For a villager, this is as good as it gets—living in the city and driving masters in flashy cars to swanky places.

For the villager in Balram, this is what he could have hoped for, but for the entrepreneurship in him, this was just the beginning of a bigger change in his life. There is another driver in the household, Ram Prasad. Balram resents his seniority, and upon discovering that Ram Prasad is actually a Muslim pretending to be a Hindu for the sake of his job, threatens to expose him. Ram Prasad escapes and Balram becomes the senior servant. Mr. Ashok goes to Delhi to bribe some minister and takes Balram with him. Mr. Ashok’s wife, Pinky Madam wants to return to America and is angry with Mr. Ashok for having lied to him about his intentions to stay in India. One day, after Mr. Ashok and Pinky madam runs over a child on the streets of Delhi, Mr. Ashok and his brother get a signed statement from Balram stating that he is the only one responsible. The matter however is never

investigated by the police as there are no witnesses. Pinky madam leaves her husband and returns to America. Before leaving she gives some money to Balram, who spends it on a prostitute. Mr. Ashok sinks into a depression and starts drinking. Balram who has until then worked honestly, starts drinking and stealing. One day, as Mr. Ashok is going to some minister's place to bribe him, Balram murders him and runs away with the bribe to Bangalore, where he establishes a cab business, catering to call-centers.

The story serves as a prop for Aravind Adiga to describe the feudal village life, the elections, corruptions among the socialist leaders, the brutal repression of the poor by the landlords, superstitions, family burdens, treatment of servants, abysmal living conditions in the city slums etc. By making Balram the narrator, Adiga seeks to present a poor man's perspective of modern India. For Balram, human life is and always has been all about class conflict—a struggle between the rich and poor, each class seeking to defeat the other. At several places, there is a mention of the clichéd idea of two India— a modern, western, rich India and a feudal, poor one. Even the dogs of the rich people are different from the dogs of the poor. The dogs of the rich are treated as more than servants of the rich houses. Adiga says:

“The rich expect their dogs to be treated like human, you see— they expect their dogs to be pampered, and walked, and petted, and even washed! And guess who had to do the washing? I got down on my knees and began scrubbing the dogs, and then lathering

them, and foaming them, and then washing them down, and taking a blow dryer and drying their skin. Then I took them around the compound on a chain while the king of Nepal sat in a corner and shouted, ‘Don’t pull the chain so hard! They’re worth more than you are!’”(TWT 78)

This is a debut novel, Balram is writing a long letter to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, who is about to visit India. Balram confesses that he has murdered Mr. Ashok, a crime that enabled him to move to Bangalore and set himself up as an entrepreneur. At one point, Balram tries to explain why the poor do not rise up to overwhelm their masters, and the best metaphor he can come up with is the chicken market in Old Delhi, where live roosters sit powerless in cages beneath the carcasses of their fleshly slaughtered brothers. He writes:

“Every day, on the roads of Delhi, some chauffeur is driving an empty car with a black suitcase sitting on the back seat. Inside that suitcase is a million, two million rupees; more money than that chauffeur will see in his life time. If he took the money he could go to America, Australia, anywhere and start a new life. He could go inside the five star hotels he has dreamed about all his life and only seen from the outside. He could take his family to Goa, to England. Yet he takes that black suitcase where his master wants. He puts it down where he is meant to, and never touches a rupee. Why?” (TWT 175)

The novel captures the economic growth, call centre, an IT class, capitalism, corruption, greed, inhumanity, inequality of class, caste, wealth and religion, and the lively picture of a metro life. Adiga also presents the graphic pictures of the busy life of Delhi where 'late drinking' and accidents are common. The miserable lives of the poor living by the sides of the road are visible in the novel. The novelist has brought the environmental, social, cultural, political and moral drawbacks prevailing in India. Pollution, traffic Jam and corruption are some of the problems Adiga wants to point out. The plights of the poor people migrated from the darkness of the villages to the capital to find some light are also captured well. The novel is a fast-paced and engaging the reader, drawing the reader into the cares and concerns of the servant class. The narrator, Balram will do as a vehicle for showing an India in transition from one form of bad to another.

Adiga goes into some specifics on the socio-political structures in India. His narrator's village was essentially owned by four rich men, feudalism in effect, each named for an animal, each taking a piece of every bit of labor and product in their respective domains. Adiga also points out that, though our nation has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy or punctuality, we have entrepreneurs. Balram is clever and amusing and calls himself an entrepreneur. He always writes his memoirs in the middle of the night. The reader suspects he is running some company that provides technical or customer support for US companies in the middle of the night in

Bangalore, which is correct, but not exactly what the reader is initially led to believe.

He describes himself as "half-baked" because his education was interrupted by family obligations. "...all these ideas, half formed and half digested and half correct mix up with other half-cooked ideas in your head, and I guess these half-formed ideas bugger one another, and make more half-formed ideas, and this is what you act on and live with"(TWT).

The story highlights the class divide and struggle in the Darkness which spills into other regions in India and portrays the protagonist Munna (Balram) as someone who strives to come out of it in his own way. Munna is thus the white Tiger, a rare creature that comes once in a generation. Munna correctly answers the question asked by the school inspector, he presents a parting gift, and a book entitled *Lessons for young boys from the life of Mahatma Gandhi*. In his massacred right in front of Gandhi's images or statues and he eventually deviates far from them as he sets upon his journey to rise above the class divides. Adiga uses Gandhi to show how Gandhi is missing in our life when Munna says:

"Go to a teashop anywhere along the Ganga, sir, and look at the men working in that tea shop. Men, I say, but better to call them human spiders that go crawling in between and under the tables with rags in their hands, crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven, in their thirties or forties or fifties but still 'boys'. But that is your fate if you do your job



well with honesty, dedication, and insincerity and so the teashop was a profoundly enriching experience.” (TWT51)

Under the big photo of Gandhiji he quite knowingly killed the Gandhian principles and philosophy and experienced happiness.

The life in Laxmangarh revolves around the landlords and they are in their greed for power and money suck the marrow from the bones of the poor labour class. Adiga gives the names of the animals for the landlords in four categories according to their greed. They are the stork, Wild Boar, The Raven, and Munna coins a fifth one as the Mongoose, the brother of Ashok. Mr. Ashok and his wife Pinky madam come from America to live for a few days in Dhanbad, as the Stork, his father had settled there. The family involved in the coal business and their strategy was to bribe the ministers to save themselves from government taxes. Ashok was caught in this foul play created by his father and brother Mukesh who entrusted Ashok to bribe the ministers in Delhi to keep the business going. Ashok's soft behaviour with his servants was resented by his brother and father. Thus the gap between the rich and the poor became wider because of the hatred the masters showed to their servants and Ashok became the victim of this hatred.

**Conclusion:**

In this novel, Aravind Adiga talks about the growing gap between rich and the poor and also the failure of the police in tracing the

criminals. The people in Darkness try to manage their family with the earned money whereas the people in the Lighted area try to increase their income through all means and ways. The liquor shops, the government hospitals and brothels are the real places in India that the writer has seen during his travel. India of Light is access to education, health care, transportation facilities, electricity, running water, hope and justice. Moreover, it has acquired entrepreneurial power in the world surpassing China. India's rapid advancement in the field of science and technology, space, real estate, yoga and meditation, hotel and tourism, industry, expansion of cities and mall culture could be construed as remarkable. The hallmark of India is its entrepreneurial success. The industrialists, entrepreneurs, tax payers and the government doctors have to befriend a minister to fulfill their wishes.

Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, dowry menace, caste conflict, economic problem, exploitation of labourers and farmers, corrupt education system, master servant relationship, prostitution, tax evading, poor health services, entrepreneurial success are well delineated by the novelist. The malls and the call centers in Delhi show the changing culture in India. It reflects the economic progress of the country but that is not the real India. Adiga says the real India lives in villages. He has also touched the current political scenario and showed how the 'Great Socialist' was progressing from the darkness to Delhi.

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