



Social disruption and disparity in Aravind Adiga's the white tiger

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Abstract

The present research paper effectively highlights how Aravind Adiga, in his debut novel titled 'The White Tiger' depicts the dark side of India. Social disruption and societal conflict/disparity have been successfully depicted in the novel by raising befitting issues like poverty, hunger, tyranny, social disparity, and unfairness based on the basis of caste, religion, and class through the story of Balram, the protagonist who rose from a humble background to achieve success in the upper class of the Indian society. Adiga makes a noble effort to exhibit the experiences which poor Indian people go through their entire lives. Also, this paper explains how Adiga portrays socio-cultural challenges in India; especially in power-politics, the Caste system, and master-servant society. Balram represents the voice of poor class people symbolically as a rooster coop. In order to release from social restrictions imposed on the deprived class by the upper class he practised unethical deeds including the murder of his own boss and betrayal to his own family. Adiga tries to bring the reformation in the socio-economic and rich-poor system by eradicating existing social problems in Indian society.

Keywords: corruption, master-servant, poverty, rich-poor, social disruption, tyranny, unfairness

Introduction

Society finds its actual meaning in literature. Literature is the mirror to demonstrate social issues regarding the happenings for the betterment of social values. Since the beginning of time literature has appealed to people of all ages. Through the form of literary works with diversified narrative techniques and approaches that are applied to bring out the issues and the incidents which are actually seen by the writers in the society. Thus human society and literary works are indispensable to each other. There is a shared relationship between them. Creating an ideal society is the first primary concern of the writers and they ultimately want people to overcome their predicaments and get advancement and betterment in their social life. The socio-cultural framework of the writers is the prominent one in literature which is used by many wizards to depict the relationship between literature and society. It is the reflex action of the human behaviour which presents their thinking, saying, and doing in society. Thus the sociological approach of writers highlight the rooted problems of the society like; economic, political, poor-rich disparity, ill affecting attitudes, behaviours, and the breach of moral code of conduct in human life. Here Aravind Adiga writes about the societal happenings to bring awareness and to find the remedial measures. Critics mentioned about The white tiger; Mendes (2010) notices in this a certain artificiality, cleverly masked by irony, and remarks the "cardboard cut-out" title character equipped with an inauthentic voice that ultimately undermines issues of class politics" (p. 277)

Arvind Adiga's debut novel The White Tiger brought him accolades and won him the prestigious Man Booker Prize in 2008. The novel The White Tiger is a story of an oppressed, poor boy, Balram, who through illegal means rises to success and becomes a successful entrepreneur. Balram Halwai, the protagonist unfolds the experiences of his subjective life to the readers through the seven letters which he writes to Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao. The letters

highlight the sad/sardonic yet real picture of modern India. The White Tiger uplift the social Unfairness of Indian society. Where billions of people live under the shroud of darkness with grief-stricken and hunger-bitten pallid hands. The novel presents contrastive disparity between exuberant urban cities and lifeless rural villages. It depicts the multifaceted corruption of both the rural and urban society of India and throws the light on various cultural flaws intrinsic in caste and religion along with other societal disruptions. It represents the socio-economic sad realities of modern India with a view of helping reconstruct India with a more comprehensive development program. Aravind Adiga attacks the democratic system of India. He exposes the nexus among corrupt politicians, landlords of India. The epistolary novel is an open invitation to the morally depraved conscience of the Indian upper class and at the same time, it is a powerful message that chaos and crime will be escalated until social equalities are restored.

Balram's social status

The Protagonist and narrator Balram grows up in a rural village, Laxmangarh in India. Being the victim of a poverty-stricken system he wants to lift up his social standards so later migrates to a metropolis to work as a driver, and finally breaks out of poverty by killing his master and stealing his money. Balram's reflections of his actions reveal an awareness of structural social problems where he lives and his attempt to escape from poverty through individual effort. The nomenclature of the protagonist's name 'Balram' was done by his teacher soon after he had realized that he had never been given an identity or a name by his poor parents. Balram was born and brought into a poor family where his parents were suffering from illness and so much involved in earning their livelihood that they did not have time to give a name to their son. This particular portion of the society has been marked as dark, underprivileged by Adiga. Where poor people are devoid of the basic necessities of life. The

protagonist Balram is adversely affected by poverty. At his childhood, he lost his mother and father, a rickshaw puller, who died of tuberculosis in a dysfunctional government hospital. Balram recounts his mother's funeral who died in penury. My mother's body had been wrapped from head to toe in a saffron silk cloth, which was covered in rose petals and jasmine garlands. I don't think she had ever had such a fine thing to wear in her life. Her death was so grand that I knew, all at once, that her life must have been miserable. My family was guilty about something. (*The White Tiger* 16). He was an intelligent student, who was once addressed by the inspector of schools as 'a rare white tiger'. In order to pay the family debts incurred for his sister's marriage, he was taken out of school and put to work in a tea shop to repay their family debts. Being trapped in the chains of exploitation, he determined to give up slavery and would establish his life of its own desire. He soon started planning to practice the required skills to succeed in the modern society, India. Balram's dormant ambition leads him to become a driver and later fulfilled when he becomes a driver to the landlord's son Ashok and his wife Pinky. A certain amount of fortunes sparks for him and he gets a chance to go to Delhi with his master. Eventually getting a chance to move out of his village Laxmangarh, Bihar is an opportunity for him to escape from 'the darkness', and feels excited to enter Delhi, 'India of light'. Over time he realised the importance and influence of money in the upper-class society. He tries to break the law to an extent in order to uplift his life from darkness to light. Ultimately he cuts the throat of his master Ashok and steals his money. He ran to Bangalore to start his own taxi business with the stolen money and finally becomes a successful entrepreneur. Balram, a victim of suffering, isolation, and despair reaches an apogee of self-defined success by committing murder becomes a free bird of liberation.

Social disruption and social disparity

The setting of *The White Tiger* revolves around places like; Laxmangarh, Dhanbad, Delhi, and Bangalore. Adiga portrays many images of India, India of Light, and the Darkness. Here Rural India is depicted as 'dark India' where people are tormented in poverty and injustice, regulated by the rapacious landlords and corrupted politicians. 'India of Light' is the picture of another side that has the privilege of having all sorts of amenities and justice. Oppression and exploitation are not only the malady of 'dark India' but also the characteristic of 'India of Light' that seems to be beautiful, ultra-modern, and devoid of inequalities. But the truth is very much bitter and as well as unpalatable. In 'India of Light', the poor are also deprived of their privileges and treated as slaves. Adiga in his writing differentiates the nation into two sides 'dark India' and India of light'. It is really unfortunate that democratic India is ashamed of its dark side. It is the rich who feel the existence of poor people and their low status let them down. "Rickshaws are not allowed inside the posh parts of Delhi, where foreigners might see them and gape" (*The White Tiger* 27). This type of ideology not only brings injustice and inequality in society but also heightens the miserable plight of the poor class. There is discrimination between the poor and the rich in the society where even the poor do not have the right to speak in the society. The so-called cast system deprived the poor of availing basic facilities of life like jobs, good education, and health services. Ultimately this cast system

gives birth to Master-servant relationships between the rich and poor people in the society. The caste system in society is like a classification of people in terms of predefined hierarchy patterns. It classifies a rigid system of inequality that directly influences society. The caste system is based on birth that one's inherits caste from parents and passes it on to their next generations and it continues. The caste systems are associated with certain occupations; there is a connection between the different levels of caste and respective economic standards. Higher caste people are more prosperous than the lower caste. Lower caste people live in poverty and are deprived of all the social advantages. Poor people children cannot get a good education because of financial constraints and hardly find a good job. Where the rich children go abroad for their higher education and have their lavish life. As per the government program students were supposed to get free meals at school but the poor children never got "rotis, or yellow daal, or pickles" (*The White Tiger* 33) simply because the school teacher embezzled students' money. The poor children of Laxmangarh are also deeply affected by the poor education system as their teacher practices corrupt activities that serve as glaring examples from the beginning of their careers. The teachers even do not hesitate to steal students' lunch money which is free for the students by the government. Teachers even sell students' uniforms in the neighbouring village which are meant for school students. Coming to the health services for poor people who are handicapped like their fortunes. There are no medical facilities available in Laxmangarh. The people of Laxmangarh have to go far and cross the river in order to go to the hospital. And the designated doctors of the hospital occasionally visit the workplace and they privatise their services for the sake of money. It is very unfortunate the facilities intended for the poor people never reach them. Dowry as usual playing an adverse role in the financial conditions of poor people's life. The poor people are trapped in debts by landlords. At the time of Balram's cousin sister's marriage, Reena puts the family in debt. This leads Balram to drop out of school and work with his older brother, Kishan as a cleaner in a tea. Balram is an ambitious character who wants to live a better life. He was not at all ready to compromise with his socio-economic and so-called caste system. He started his professional career as a cleaner in a tea shop where he was smashing coals, wiping, and cleaning tables. "The owner thought, ah, they're Halwais, making sweets and tea are in their blood" (*The White Tiger* 63). He was dissatisfied with his destiny, he decided to make himself free from social obstacles and decided to become a chauffeur. But it's very difficult to change the prevailed ideology of society. When Balram went to an old taxi driver to learn driving, he asked him:

The old driver asked,
"What caste are you?"
'Halwai.'

'Sweet-makers,' the old driver said, shaking his head. 'That's what you people do. You make sweets. How can you learn to drive?'... You need to have aggression in your blood. Muslims, Rajputs, Sikhs-they're fighters, they can become drivers. You think sweet-makers can last long in fourth gear?... 'Why don't you stick to sweets and tea?' (*The White Tiger* 56). The above-cited dialogues are proof that

someone's occupation is based on his level of caste. "Halwai" are the sweet makers and they cannot be a driver because their caste system does not permit other occupations. In the course of time Balram becomes a driver to the landlord's son Ashok. Though he was hired as a driver but he also had to clean the courtyard, massaged his landlord Stork's feet in warm water, he had to go to a liquor shop to buy the 'first-class whisky' for the Stork and his sons-Mr. Ashok and Mr. Mukesh. He also had to take care of the two Pomeranians-Cuddles and Puddles. He was supposed to treat the dogs-Cuddles and Puddles like humans because the rich "expect their dogs to be pampered, and walked, and petted, and even washed!" (*The White Tiger* 78). From a master's point of view, the relationship between master and servant is of Subject and Object, domination and subjugation. Rich people treat their servants like animals and animals like human beings. Don't pull the chain so hard! They're worth more than you are! (*The White Tiger* 78). The savage treatment meted out to servants is a regular feature in India. Aravind Adiga here appeals in order to create a better society, a better nation all we need to consider one another as human beings. Balram through his character exposes the master-servant relationship in India. He depicts the tendency of the rich to treat their servants like chattels. He witnessed the power of the landlords in many forms where the poor people suffer the most. His sense of gratitude continues in his professional life as a driver. He witnessed the lavish lifestyle of a rich boss and was able to differentiate the huge gap between his class and upper-class people. Things have been changed between Laxmangarh to Delhi but his social status remains the same from his childhood to professional life i.e poor servant. He still continues to call his boss 'master'. All the social sufferings are subsequently captured in a frame where the master exploits the servant class. In the novel, Balram says, "We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul, and arse (*The White Tiger* p. 96). Yes, that's right: we all live in the world's greatest democracy. What a fucking joke." From this, it can be concluded that inequality and suffering remain the same in the country. He observed the all these happen because of the sense of servitude that remains in the mentality of poor people. He also noticed that the whole system not only runs on money but rather the loyal attitude of the poor towards the masters. He addressed this as 'perpetual servitude', Balram asserts that this ideology is so strong in the servant class that "you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse." (*The White Tiger* p. 96). Balram witnessed the oppression, misery, and helplessness in the course of his life. His adverse situation made him dishonest and eventually a murderer of his master, Mr. Ashok. The hands of Balram that once cleaned the tea table and smashed the coals in his childhood later takes the life of his boss of Mr. Ashok for the sake of money and eventually, he escapes from the rooster coop. He went through the way of crime because it was needed for his freedom and to live a content life. Through the character of Balram, Aravind Adiga attempts to imply that poverty is a curse in Indian society and it can ruin anybody's integrity to become amoral.

In this way, *The White Tiger* exposes the unfair conditions in which the poor people live and bear the unmitigated pain of suffering throughout their lives without thinking of raising their voice against injustice. It depicts rural India and

the institutional power of landlords in it. The presence of master-servant tradition has been one of the main causes of oppression in rural India where the poor people are exploited the most. They are treated as slaves and are not provided with enough rights to create themselves as equivalent, reasonable human beings who think up to live subjectively and dependently. The novel presents how oppression, repression, and silence become the root cause of the pitiable status of the poor people. Through the characters of the four landlords, Aravind Adiga attempts to highlight the cruel and ugly picture of rural India where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Conclusion

The White Tiger gives a sardonic picture of the moral, social and political degradation of Indian society. The protagonist of the novel "Balram" ultimately through his journey of life reveals the dark picture of society. His bitter experiences are projected nicely in the novel which is perfectly blended with poverty, tyranny, corruption, caste system, and unfairness. The strife between the rich and the poor class is the root cause of all the problems in society. The novel highlights the corruption prevalent in Indian society not only at a high level but also at a low level. The novel portrays the gloomy picture of dark India where the poor people never get rid of landlords and spend their entire lives serving them. The poor financial condition and the debts from landlords never let these poor people lead an independent life.

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