

The elements of globalization in Aravind Adiga's the white tiger

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga's debut novel, *The White Tiger* studies the contrast between India's rise as a modern global economy of the leading character, Balram. The paper is an attempt to analyse *The Elements of Globalization* in Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger*. The novel dramatizes the modern phases of globalization in the novel *The White Tiger*. The novel studies the contrast between India's rise as a modern global economy and the main character comes from the rural poor. Throughout the novel, Adiga comments about the first world influence on the third world countries. He has emphatically underlined that the West is the judge and the jury of every facets of third world behavior.

Keywords: Globalization, Third world countries, first world countries

1. Introduction

Aravind Adiga won the Booker Prize for the novel *The White Tiger* on 14th October 2008 which was published in Harpercollins. *The White Tiger* described the two parts of India, on was dark and another was light. The reader has sympathy for Balram who is not a villain in the true sense. Since the very beginning of human life, there has been a conflict between good and evil. Human beings have this choice; they can live their life in a good and noble way or in an evil and ignoble way. They have to choose either of the two. One is free to choose or decide one's life style and life's principles. But there are certain things that are beyond human choices, these automatically come on their way. One cannot choose to get born in a rich family or in a desired caste destiny has to be admitted, though one can always make efforts to be rich or prosperous in life. In the journey from poverty to prosperity or from slavery to freedom, one has to choose which path to follow the good and the honest one. Since childhood one is taught to follow the good, the right path in life but the path of goodness, honesty, and nobility is a difficult one and needs a lot of courage, patience, will power and firm determination. On the contrary the path of evil and dishonesty is alluring, easy and smooth to tread on and it also promises an easy success. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is the story of a man who hangs between good and evil and is finally overcome by the devil. *The White Tiger* is the saga of making of an entrepreneur.

2. Globalization

Globalization exemplifies the greatest recent fashions in the creation of one world. The process of globalization has not only crossed national margins but also relied on worldwide tides of capital communications and mass produced good from region to region. Through these networks globalization has provided a social world, whose boundaries have become fluid and far more widespread. It has represented a world of unity and uniformity, and such a global world has brought about far more reaching changes in developing and developed countries. Globalization has supported and assimilated patterns of exchange, which include political

and cultural as well as commercial exchanges and interactions. It has denied the reality of local and regional structures. Aravind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* dramatizes the modern phases of globalization. The novel studies the contrast between India's rise as a modern global economy and the main character comes from the rural poor. Throughout the novel, Adiga comments about the first world influence on the third world countries. He has emphatically underlined that the west is the judge and jury of every facets of third-world behaviour.

Depiction of American cultures in Indian society is reflected throughout the novel. In *White Tiger* some form of America pop up in a key moment. It is suitable and the reader can easily pass over it without giving any second thought to the Maller, but each time it has its own significance. Take for example when Alarm is describing Ashok's corruption "You've got plenty of places to drink beer, dance, and pick up girls, that sort of thing. A small bit of America in India"(173). This goes back to the motif of identity, someone is trying to become something that they're not. Balram sees Ashok being transformed by the influence of American culture, the creeping globalization that is taking over Delhi. The next situation is ironical one that, when the fat ministers assistant spoke about drinking and elections. "Elections, my friends, can be managed in India. It's not like in America...Everyone has Whiskey didn't you know this? (181). The idea of being "better than" Americans and their politics is juxtaposed with drinking American Whiskey, in the hypocritical nature of their character. And finally, Balram describes it as a murder weapon. "It's a good, strong bottle, Johnnie Walker Black –well worth its resale value"(245). The leader can see just now embedded American culture is in the Indian society, while every person is trying to become their own individual.

The India described in Balram is in the throes of a major transformation heralded in part by the advent of globalization. India finds itself at the crossroads of developments in the fields of technology and outsourcing as the nation adapts to address the needs of the global economy. Balram recognizes and hopes to ride the 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 a Laxmangarh. Hence, he must change himself in order to compete in the new world Adiga, thus, vividly conjures the tension between the old and the new India, suggesting that succeeding in this world as Balram does requires a flurry of ethical and personal compromises.

The themes in Adiga's works are different from that of modern Indian English literature. He concentrates on an entirely new set of themes as well as narrative techniques. He has a penchant for the depiction of recent issues and has the courage for the exploration of realities without ignoring the dark side of new India. In *The White Tiger* he explores Balram's struggle against the world of big bellies to climb up the social ladder. He also focuses on the dark side of shining India, sarcastically touching the injustices and brutal practices prevalent in new India.

The neo-liberal country like India widens the gap between the rich and poor with its pro-capitalist, free market policies that privilege a few. "This will come as no surprise to most people... to see the enormous increase in conspicuous consumption by the rich and even the urban upper middle income groups and also to see side by side how the lives of the poor have become even more vulnerable and precarious" (Ghosh 86). Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* highlight the effects of globalization in a neoliberal country like India. It shows how the gap between rich and poor widens with free-market policies consequently making rich people richer and poor people poorer. *The White Tiger* is a story about the existential and class struggle of the protagonist. The protagonist was born to a Rickshaw – Puller in a small village of Laxmangarh, Balram calls it "the Darkness", (57) because this paradise on papers, but in reality the amenities provided by the government like electricity, tele-communications are defunct and broken. The people of the water and nutritious food. The poor parts of India are referred to as the servitude and life long debt. Like many poor people, Balram was not allowed to finish his school education. Instead he becomes a child labourer. He was an intelligent boy and was recognized as a 'White Tiger', the rarest animal that only appears once in a generation. Balram was forced to take up a job as a cleaner in a tea shop. Later, he was hired as a chauffeur by stork a village landlord, for his foreign returned son Ashok. Balram's re-education begins as he watches Delhi from the driving seat of the Honda City. The city is a revelation.

A strong striking contrast in the living style of the different class of the people is projected in the novel. The contrast in the living standards of the poor and rich comes out as Balram watches the realities of Delhi. He observes huge apartments, shopping malls, call centers and traffic jams, that expose the complexity of a metro city. For him, Delhi is not just a shift of locality, but a shift from native culture roots to high tech commercial society. It reorients his Behaviour, mind and sensibility. The city life becomes a metaphor for Balram's transformational matrix. His transformation from innocence to criminality, from a morally conscious sensibility to a violent, conspiratorial sensibility takes place. He learns the amoral culture and ways of deceiving the masters from other drivers. He changes "from a sweet innocent" (197) village fool into a citified fellow full of debauchery, depravity and wickedness. Initially, Balram is an innocent driver. He possesses all the

virtues of honesty and integrity. But the mall culture and its associative practices add new dimensions to his consciousness. The crime magazine murder weekly stands to be another source of information for innocent cooks, drivers and attendants. They develop a kind of discontent and revenge for the wrong doings of their masters. Though his master Ashok was sympathetic to Balram, others in the family humiliate him. A feeling of hatred towards the master – class is generated in his mind. When Ashok's wife Pinky kills a child during a drunken driving, his masters force him to sign a legal document confessing that he had seen over the child. This incident increases his anger and rage against the master's class. His grudge is revealed as he says;

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, and soul and arose...we all live in the world's greatest democracy...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. (169)

Human beings change due to the complexity of the state. The complexity of the city on one hand, the growing grudge against the master's class system on the other transforms the consciousness of Balram. Adiga compares the condition of servants poor and underprivileged with the 'rooster coop' situation. Go to old Delhi, behind Juma Masjid, and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly coloured roosters, stuffed tightly into wire mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and shifting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage gives the horrible stench of the terrified, feathered flesh. On the wooden desk above this coop sits in grinning young butcher, showing off the flesh and organs of a recently chopped up chicken, still oleaginous with a coating of a dark blood. The roosters in the coop smell it, from the above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with the human beings in this country.

The poor are treated like caged animals, bonded labourers, and slaves. *The White Tiger* not only presents the humiliations, atrocities and cruelties perpetuated by one class over the another, but also comments of the rising global power and neo-liberalism which have created a rift between the rich and the poor. Apart from the slave like attitude of the servant class, the capitalist society privileges the individuals self-interest causes the socio economic disparities. Balram Halwai alias *The White Tiger* wants to break from this rooster coop because he decides not to remain like a slave. He desires to break the cage and unchain himself from the bond of servitude. Waiting for the ripe time, he seizes the moment when Ashok withdraws a large amount of seven hundred thousand rupees from the banks. For Balram the money "was enough for a house, a motorbike and a small shop, and a new life (280)". After a great deal of conflict between loyalty and disloyalty, honesty and dishonesty; Balram resolves to murder Ashok. This alone can fulfill his ambition and his dream of leading a happy life, this murder can transform him as a master and not a slave. Finally he roams the bottle of wine down the head of his master and smashes it. With large amounts of

money Balram boards a train to Bangalore along with his nephew. In Bangalore, he starts a new life afresh adopting the name of his master.

Balram knows who he is and does not mind being called a murderer. Though he is a wanted criminal and has been absconding from his village, ever since his eighteenth birthday, records show that he has voted in all the elections. The absurdity of his existence leaves him no choice, but to take pride in himself as “Indians most faithful voter”, though he “has never seen the inside of the voting booth” (60).

Balram considers the greatest thing to come out of India in its ten thousand years of history is the ‘Rooster Coop’ the central imagery in *The White Tiger* which comprehensively sets the idea of how power is exercised and discipline is maintained in the Indian context. In Foucault’s influential work *Discipline and Punish, the Birth of the Prison*(1975), he argues that discipline creates ‘docile bodies’ to maintain order, discipline keep the system functioning. This requires a particular form of institution, which Foucault argues, was exemplified by Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon. But in India the uneducated and repressed masses are disciplined by being imprisoned in the Rooster Coop where raw fear and terror is instilled in their hearts through the threats of brute force and extreme physical violence.

Long after escaping into the light Balram notices a growing discontent among the people. All sound India, he could hear stirring, rumours, and threats of insurrection. Men sit under lampposts at night and read. They huddle together and discuss and point fingers to the heavens. But the irony of the colonized is that they guard themselves and prevent their own members from escaping from their bondage. Like crabs pulling each other they conspire among themselves to keep themselves repressed for “slavery has seeped deep into their bones their blood” (Joshi and Pathak 102). But Balram could break free and wonder whether the rest will ever join together to destroy Rooster coop. Wistfully realizes that it might never happen. “It wouldn’t happen. People in this country are still waiting for the war of their freedom to come from somewhere else – from the jungles, from the mountains, from China, from Pakistan. That will never happen. Every man must make his own Benaras” (183).

Balram knows that it is foolish to look outside, saviour because salvation lies within every Indian, who sits in the pit of their own bellies. The Rooster Coop requires people with fire in their bellies to break out of it, he laments that instead of tapping their energies and bringing about changes “they’re all sitting in front of colour TVs and watching cricket and shampoo advertisements”(183).

It is by murdering his master, and sacrificing his family to a bloody retribution that Balram was able to reach his El Dorado in Bangalore and fashion himself into a successful entrepreneur aided by the gales of globalization sweeping across in India of light. The new India, with a vibrant free market economy, unleashes his creativity so much that he wants to cry out to the whole world even as far as America that he has made it he has “broken out of the Rooster Coop”(193).

The White Tiger portrays a discordant; blatant present day India filled with a caustically bitter economic, social and political satire. In a biting and ironical tone Adiga attacks the entire global economic system which is market oriented. He ruthlessly presents the reality underneath the logic of neo-liberal approach adopted after 1990 by many countries.

The neo – liberal policies operating throughout have increased the gap between the rich and poor. Adding to this the poor peoples like the hens in the rooster coop cannot think of improving their condition uses irony and black humour to bring out the seal condition of the social structure in India. The disparity of incomes and the master – servant relationship speaks of the defects. In fact the horrors of the apparently blooming Indian economy.

The working class of India is more and more suppressed in the name of globalization. One side people stand still without a penny and on the other side people stand still not knowing the way to spend their pennies. Globalization has embraced the developing nations like India, the result of which, is that the rich are becoming richer and the poor are becoming poorer. Humanitarian approach has lost its way in the jungle of materialism. Mall culture welcomes a rich man, and not a poor man. Politician, the so called people’s representatives welcome the rich who bribe them inside their offices and make poor people, who voted them stand outside.

Throughout the novel *The White Tiger* Aravind Adiga has portrayed the effects of globalization in the Indian scenario. It has made drastic changes in every sphere of Indian life. Globalization has provided a social world whose boundaries have become fluid. It has imposed universal culture by degrading local individualistic culture. In the Indian political arena too, globalization has made its unique impact which has been felt by every sensitive soul all over the world. It can be courageously concluded the first world countries are trying to impose their rules and laws upon the third world countries in the guise of lending out a helping hand.

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