



Social Issues in *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga

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Abstract

The fourth Indian born to win the prestigious Booker prize given to an outstanding author from the Commonwealth for his debut novel *The White Tiger*, the youngest of the finalists, a 33-year-Old Australian-Indian dual citizen, Aravind Adiga. He wanted to be a novelist since he was a boy. He was born in Chennai in 1974 to K. Madhavas and Usha Adiga, Kannadiga parents hailing from Mangalore, Karnataka. *The White Tiger*, thus become the fourth Indian to achieve the Man Booker Prize.

The White Tiger first published in 2008, has been translated into more than sixteen languages and has received excellent reviews in publications ranging from New Yorker to the Times, London. 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” (30). *The White Tiger* is the ninth winning novel to take its inspiration from India or Indian identity. This novel reveals the disparity between India’s ascending as a prevailing international economy and the foremost character which comes from crushing rural penury.

The White Tiger reveals the binary nature of Indian culture, the Light and the Darkness and how the caste system has been reduced to “Men with Big Bellies and men with Small Bellies” (23). The novel showcases two extreme dimensions of modern India, on one side is the changing face of high-tech and rich India, particularly in the emergence of Bangalore as the IT city and Outsourcing capital of the world and on the other side is the dark side of India, revealing the culture of caste and the snare of corruption. It is a story of a poor village

boy named Balaram who becomes an entrepreneur in Bangalore after killing his rich master. The narrator protagonist Balaram exposes the injustice that pervades Indian society and the foot-licking approach that seems necessary to succeed in the culture.

Adiga has written the novel giving expression to his voice, searching for identity: the novel is written in “voice” in Balaram’s voice and not in mine. “some of the things that he is unhappy about like corruption is easier for me to identify with. When talking to many men whom I met in India, I found a sense of rage, often suppressed for years and years that would burst out when they finally met someone they could talk to Balaram’s anger is not an anger that the reader should participate in entirely. It can seem at times like the rage you might feel if you were in Balram’s place but at other times you should feel troubled by it, certainly” (54).

The novel is labelled an angry exposure of injustice and power: But Tiger isn’t about race or caste in India. It’s about the vast economic inequality between the poor and the wealthy elite. The narrator is an

Indian entrepreneur detailing his rise to power. His India is a merciless, corrupt Darwinian jungle where only the ruthless survive. Adiga’s protagonist emerges from his experience of poverty and corruption in India.

The White Tiger a tale of two India’s tells the story of Balaram, the son of a rickshaw puller in the heartlands, one of the “faceless” poor left behind by the country’s recent economic boom. Thus it charts his journey from working in a teashop to entrepreneurial success. The White Tiger takes a sharp and unblinking look at the reality of India’s economic miracle. This is a furious and brutally effective counterblast to smug “India is shinning” rhetoric that particular slogan is never mentioned, but the election it lost is crucial to the plot which also directs hard, well aimed kicks at hypocrisy and thuggery on the traditionalist Indian Left. 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.

Accordingly, *The White Tiger* highlights the brutal injustices of changing India, which is on the verge of inheriting the world from the west. This is creating ripples in India for its defiantly unglamorous portrait of the country's economic miracle. This incisive, engrossing novel attacks poverty and disparity without being sentimental or condescending, and for this reason it is a groundbreaking Indian novel as well as one of the contemporary Slumdog millionaires. For a novel that is supposed to be a portrait of real India *The White Tiger* comes across as curiously in authentic, especially his presentation of ordinary people who are not only trite but offensive.

His description of the Bihari migrant workers returning to their village after hard labour,"a month after the rain, the men come back from Dhanbad, Delhi and Calcutta leaner, darker, angrier but money in their pockets. The women were waiting for them. They hid behind the doors, and as soon as the men walked in, they pounced like wildcats on a flesh. They were fighting waiting and shrieking. My uncle would resist and keep some of the money but my father got peeled and skinned every time. I

survived the city, but I couldn't survive the women in my home" (174). He would say sunk into a corner of the room. "...he women would feed him after they had the buffaloes". The novelist seems to know nothing about either the love or the despair of the people he was writing about. All the varied view only show what Shashi Deshpande aptly says in *The Hindu* "Being ignored is definitely worse than hostility, it is like your work falling into the abyss. A bad review is better than no review".

The novel thus depicts the drawbacks of democracy and society in forms of maladministration, Citizens being deprived of liberty or equality, prevalence of injustice, widespread corruption. This rotten system has created new distinctions and classes. In the old days there were one thousand castes a destinies in India. Now just two castes remain: "Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat or get eaten up" (64). After independence the British left the cages had been let open; and the "animals" (metaphorically for politicians) had attacked and ripped each other. Those that were the most ferocious, the hungriest, had eaten everyone else up, and grown big bellies.

That was all that counted now, the size of your bellies. It didn't "matter whether you were a woman, or a Muslim, or an untouchable anyone with a belly could rise up" (64).

The White Tiger is a tale of this underclass and its life begging for food, sleeping under concrete flyovers, defecating on the roadside, shivering in the cold, Struggling in the twenty first century; for its freedom. V.S.Naipaul has also highlighted The Darkness of India and in his Area of Darkness, "rigid castes-distinction". "English mimicry", "Indian lavatory and kitchens, the Visitors nightmare", "clubs of Bombay and Delhi Poverty", "all his duty is, by whatever means, to make money", "symbolic actions", "irrational" reservation policy places responsibility in the hands of the unqualified.

It is extreme poverty which creates Darkness in the life of the rural as well as urban people and it perpetuates the sufferings of the underclass. Illiteracy, unemployment, Zamindari practice, social taboos, rigid caste discrimination, caste and culture conflict, corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, economic disparity,

superstitions, corrupt education system and health services, shrewd entrepreneurs, flood, mall culture,ect., contribute to the sufferings of underclass. It is poverty in Laxmangarh, in Gaya there is an exodus of jobless youths towards big cities and the protagonist Balram Halwai and his brother are no exception.

The secrets of success in a modern globalized world been summed up in the last section of the novel. Murder, manipulation, malpractices, opportunism, bribery, absconding police and judicial proceedings all are justified for success and teaching based on the facts of life:" A school where you won't be allowed to corrupt anyone's head with prayers and stories about God and Gandhi nothing but the facts of life for these kids. A school full of White Tigers" (319). Agida's *The White Tiger* provides samples of gross malpractices in Indian democracy and society. It is a social criticism focusing on the poverty and misery of India and its religio-socio-political conflicts, encapsulated in humour and irony. Gross violation of people's liberty and equality, poor and rich divide, Untouchability, utter suffers of the subalterns and anarchism is the theme of the novel.



But the three hundred million or so, Indians living in acute poverty are being crushed by inaction. If they ever thought that washing the floors, driving the cars and cleaning the windows of the middle class would open the doors to a better life, they know now that they are wrong. With pricing rising, their savings are being eating away. Higher food and fuel prices are being driven by big changes in the global economy that look set to continue. Even the most cheerful optimist for the past decade has seen the huge divide between the haves and have-nots, but the hope has persisted that it would somehow go away. Inflation has best like cement into that divide solidifying the gap between the two Indians. The future of the country is two futures; rosy and grim. For years or decades to come, we'll not be able to talk of one destiny for all the people of the country. But it is precisely the accelerated growth by globalization that has provided the additional resources to alleviate if not yet to remove them.

To sum up, *The White Tiger* is a fascinating portrayal of the divisions between the world of rich and the poor of new India. However, it misses out a very

important dimension and that is spiritual dimension, the love and warmth that is inherent in every India whether rich or poor, and that is part of life in India. Among the causes ascribed for the high level poverty in India are its history under British rule, large population, low Literacy societal structure including the caste system and role of women, dependence on agriculture, and the economic policies adopted after its independence. Adiga puts emphasis on the population explosion as the reduction programmes have failed. The growth of the middle class, which was virtually non-existent when Indian became a free nation in August 1947, indicates that economic prosperity has indeed been very impressive in Indian, but the distribution of wealth is not at all. It is not the work of one economist, sociologist or a writer, rather each one of us can contribute in our own.

Primary source

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