

A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF ARVIND ADIGA'S NOVEL *THE WHITE TIGER*

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Abstract

Arvind Adiga is the influential Indian writer who bags booker prize for his debut novel The White Tiger. This novel received wide appreciation and even it is critically acclaimed at national and global level. Arvind depicts a disparaging picture of the country and its people and the prevailing social discrimination of the Indian society. The novel is about an Indian man and his downfall from moral values and later his upliftment in his life. He presents an ambitious but unprivileged persona's endeavors to make a position in an aristocratic society. For achieving his dreams he falls into a world where theft and killings were the recurrent parts of life. The writer paints a society which is infused with poverty and injustice and the suppression of the underdog is a common thing. It is called a masterpiece of Arvind Adiga. The protagonist journey from underdog to riches, darkness to shine and from a tea vendor to a business tycoon represents many thousand youth of the country. Balram the hero of the novel is portrayed as a prey of bias system where common lives doesn't matter and considered worthless and irrelevant by the capitalist. However the writer projects realistic social problems of the modern India where he exposes the agony and oppression of the common people by the elite world.

Keywords: Arvind Adiga, scarceness, discrimination, misfortunes, Modern India, Social inequality.

Arvind was Indian born writer in an educated family. After completing school education in India he moved away to Australia and later to America where he completed his graduation. He started his literary career as a journalist and later worked as a freelance writer. He appeared in literary market with his milestone fictional work *The White Tiger* which gave a massive popularity. This novel presents a realistic picture of the Modern Indian society. This novel pictures India where booming Indian economy and rural poverty contrast each other and reveals the filthiness of the society. Arvind comments on India's rising economy at global level and loopholes of the country. He says; "At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, likely to inherit the world from the West, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society (Adiga)."

Further, he explains his objective to expose the drawbacks of the country is to bring change in the system, he asserts that; “the criticism by writers like Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens in the 19th century helped England and France become better societies. 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, the writer told *The Guardian*” (Adiga).” Arvind's second book that appeared in the form of a story volume concerned mainly with similar themes such as exploitation, injustice and oppression of the rural common people of the society by the capitalist and politically motivated people. Besides he also composed two more short stories which present painful pictures of the Indian society i.e. *The Elephant* and *Last Christmas in Bandra*. Another novel by him published in 2011 titled *Last Man in Tower* deals with the recurrent themes of poor people exploitation in the hands of business tycoons and corrupt politicians. The white Tiger is a story of a common man who is described as a dark natured and a committed Marxist who molded the concept of entrepreneurship and defines it in his own style. His different names given by different people at different stages also exhibit his journey from an underdog to a tycoon, such as the name Balram called by his teacher, white tiger by school inspector and country mouse by a fellow driver and lastly he named himself Ashok which shows his progress and upliftment as a Marxist which devalues his earlier life as a tea vendor. Earlier we find him a sympathetic and emotional human being but his changing behavior developed angst towards him but as Arvind believes that, his intention was to paint him as the upholder of the rights of the poor and exploited class. Balram thinks that the exploitation of the poor and underdog by the aristocratic society is not a new thing in the society. They are doing this since the ages and common people are being used by them for their own development in different aspects of life while the poor remains poor and didn't rise themselves. When Balram goes through numerous problems of life and struggles in that muddy society he becomes skeptic, sarcastic and also the enemy of all social, religious and political institutions of the society. Furthermore, we come to know that Balram truly embodies the life of poor, demoralized and exploited people in contemporary modern India. This novel clarifies the writer's objective that he brings forth a mixture of different themes here such as poverty, exploitation, and injustice to the poor, class struggle etc. Besides, the other aspects in the novel are the depiction of corrupt institutions like religion, politics, family, courts, judges, police, bureaucracy and the pseudo democratic ethos.

This novel is written in epistolary form in which the protagonist narrates his story in a series of letters. As far as epistolary form is concerned it is devised by a renowned English novelist Samuel Richardson in his novels. Later this writing form got popularity and many writers use their hand in this and composed miscellaneous works. Arvind Adiga stands distinct in the use of this technique in his novels. The novel starts with Balram, a self-taught business tycoon and the protagonist in the novel, sitting in his Bangalore office and begun to write a series of letters to the visiting officials from China. We come to know that they visited

India to see the industrial and economic development in the country. Balram asks them not to visit India and advises him to not to waste their time because he is able to give all information to them about the recent developments in the country. His tone during his conversation with all the visitors of foreign nations and with the businessmen from India as well reflects his ironic and sarcastic nature and his outlooks towards these visits. He considers all these foreigners visits is purely farce and worthless because he called these entire journey a big “fucking joke” (Adiga, 7) in the novel. His ironical remarks about the progress in the different sections of the entrepreneurship is not uncalled for and we could observe this in his words in the novel, he says; “When you have heard the story of how I got to Bangalore and became one of its most successful (though probably least known) businessmen, you will know everything there is to know about how entrepreneurship is born, nurtured, and developed in this, the glorious twenty-first century of man, (Adiga, 6).” We could see the related views about the free enterprise in India in the column written by Chris Herman, as he says;

The image of entrepreneurial success as coming through crude crime is, of course, a caricature, but only a slight one. India’s other great software center is Hyderabad, where the authorities built a whole satellite town in the district Cyberabad to cater for Satyam Computers and its 25000 employees. The company’s boss, Ramalinga Raju, has been India’s young entrepreneur of the year... All the city’s political parties, including the Communist Party, declared their wholehearted support for his role in “creating jobs.” Two days later he admitted to a one billion dollar fraud on the company’s books and was arrested. (India)

Though the protagonist called himself social as well a business tycoon, yet we see in the novel how he reaches on this position by committing numerous crimes and wrongdoings alike many capitalist in the country. We come to know that Balram committed murder of his own master and run ways with all his wealth, looting and destroying another small businessmen i.e. a taxi driver. All these things committed by him show his real character and fake pretension of social entrepreneur in the novel. He believes that, in this world to make progressive and wealthy everyone destroy others and more you destroy more you become richer but he is not greedy so much not run behind such fame. He just wanted a chance to rise in the society and for this one murder is sufficient according to him. There are many instances in the novel which discloses the drawbacks of the country. The writer views that every system of the country is defunct from bottom down to high and because of this common people are suffering in this country and it is real cause of crimes. In a place, he portrays the duplicity of the government and their fake reports about the country small villages’ development, Laxmangarh town is described in the novel as:

Typical Indian village paradise, adequately supplied with electricity, running water, and working telephones; and that the children of my village, raised on a nutritious diet of meat, eggs, vegetables, and lentils, will be found, when examined with tape measure and scales, to match up to the minimum height and weight standards set by the United Nations and other organizations whose treaties our prime minister has signed and whose forums he so regularly and pompously attends. (Adiga, 19)

But, the reality is thoroughly different from the reports as the writer says in the novel that; “Kids are too lean and short for their age, and with oversized heads from which vivid eyes shine, like the guilty conscience of the government of India, (Adiga, 20).” Moreover another instance which exposes the corrupt system which becomes the cause of Blaram’s father death, as the protagonist believes, he says:

Kishan and I carried our father in, stamping on the goat turds which had spread like a constellation of black stars on the ground. There was no doctor in the hospital. The ward boy, after we bribed him ten rupees, said that a doctor might come in the evening... the cat began snarling at us the moment we stepped into the room... that cat had tasted blood. (Adiga, 48)

Nevertheless, Arvind Adiga depicts explicitly the division between rich and poor in the novel. The protagonist remarks sardonically that; “In this country, we have two kinds of men: Indian liquor men and English liquor men. ‘Indian’ liquor is for village boys like me- toddy, arrack, country hooch. ‘English’ liquor, naturally, is for the rich. Rum, whisky, beer, gin-anything the English left behind, (Adiga, p. 73).”

To conclude, it is asserted that Adiga has perfectly bring out the subaltern problems in the novel and it could be assess an extraordinary piece of writing which depicts a long gaps between underdog and rich class. Critic Deirdre Donahue labels this work as “an angry novel about injustice and power which creates merciless thugs among whom only the ruthless can survive, (Donahue).”

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