

## REPRESENTATION OF THE MARGINALIZED IN ARVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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### ABSTRACT

*Arvind Adiga came into limelight when he won Man Booker Prize for his debut novel The White Tiger in 2008. This novel is about the plight of downtrodden sections of the society. The rich –poor divide which has widened in the twenty first century. Balram Halwai is the narrator and the protagonist of the novel. He belongs to Laxmangarh in Bihar, and he is the son of a rickshaw puller. He has to leave his school in spite of being a very intelligent student and had to work in a tea shop and break coal for burning to support his family. He learns driving and becomes a driver of US returned son of a landlord of his village. He accompanies the landlord's son Ashok and his wife Pinky to Gurgaon and becomes their driver. Balram kills Ashok and escapes with his money to Bangalore and owns a taxi company. Through this novel Adiga has tried to present prevalence of corruption and greed in society and ambition of people like Balram to become rich and live a luxurious life. In the case of Balram, he is aware that by honesty he cannot live luxurious life so he chooses the wrong path. As the novel progresses his character becomes more corrupt to achieve his goal and he finally kills his master. In my paper, I will be dealing with marginalization of people due to caste in rural and class in urban areas in India. The class struggle between rich and poor in cities and towns of the twenty first century in India. The failure of the welfare schemes introduced by the government for the upliftment of the poor in India. The inhuman manner in which domestic help servants like cooks, drivers and maids are treated by their masters and the unhygienic condition of the room given to the servants for accommodation and how they spend their time while their masters enjoy in shopping malls. And he also describes how accidents done by masters pass their blame over their servants as in the case of Balram who takes the blame of a road accident by Pinky wife of Ashok.*

**Keywords:** *Balram, class struggle, servants, caste, masters, corrupt.*

Arvind Adiga won the Man Booker Prize for his debut novel *The White Tiger* in 2008. The novel is a representation of the caste and class structure of the modern Indian society in the twenty first century. Adiga has tried to portray poverty by describing an imaginary village Laxmangarh near Bodh Gaya, where people of the lower caste live in the village while the upper class lives a few km away from the village in their mansions. There is a wide gap in the standard of living of both the former had to struggle for their daily food while the later live a luxurious life. The people of the village had to plead before the landlord to allow them to work in their fields so that they can earn for their livelihood. The exploitative practice of the landlords is expressed through the names given by the people of the village. He describes the name of the landlords of Laxmangarh according to their appetite in the novel. The Stork owned the river and took a piece from every fish caught by the fishermen and a toll from boat man who crossed the river.

His brother the Wild Boar, owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangarh, people have to accept his wages if they want to work in his fields and he looked towards the women of the village with greedy eyes.

The Raven owned the worst land that is dry, rocky hill side and to graze cattle people had to pay him. The Buffalo was the greediest he owned the road and the rickshaw, so if you own a rickshaw or want to use the road you have to pay one third of the money you earn every day. They lived in mansion and only came out to collect money from the poor but the kidnap of the son of the Buffalo by the Naxals, compelled them to send their sons and daughters to Dhanbad or New Delhi.

As Balram claims:

To sum up -in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies and Men with Small Bellies.

And only two destinies eat or get eaten up.(64)

In this novel, the condition of the marginalized in the Indian society is depicted. Balram Halwai is the protagonist and narrator of this novel, he belongs to a lower caste and as a servant two fold oppressed. He is oppressed by the caste and class structures of the society.

He went to the school but never finished his education but he possess practical education. He calls himself “a self taught entrepreneur”.(6)

He says in India here an entrepreneur “has to be straight and crooked, mocking and believing, sly and sincere, at the same time” (9)

As Shoban Saxena says:

*The White Tiger* protagonist exposes the rot in the three pillars of modern India - democracy, enterprise and justice – reducing them to the tired clichés of a faltering nation... that the West is holding *The White Tiger* as a mirror to us. It is telling us that India is not shining and, despite its claims of a booming economy, it is still “the near-heart of darkness”, which it has been since time immemorial (Saxena 9).

He prays to god to show light in his dark story. His lack of general knowledge about name of the first Prime Minister of India, number of planets in our solar system, the difference between a Hindu and a Muslim and name of our continent are an amusement for his Ex- employer Ashok and his wife Pinky. He calls himself half-baked. As he says:

The country is full of people like him, I'll tell you that. And we entrust our glorious parliamentary democracy' – he pointed at me- 'to characters like these. *That's* the whole tragedy of this country'. (10)

The importance of name is very significant in one's life but when he went to school and told his teacher his name as Munna, the teacher first named him Ram and then changed to Balram to avoid confusion in the class between the two Ram's. His father becomes happy after hearing his new name and says “If it's what he wants then we'll call you that”(14).

He says that he was born and raised in the Darkness but now he is in the Light. And he describes it by saying:

I am talking of a place in India, at least a third of the country, a fertile place, full of rice fields and wheat fields and ponds in the middle of those fields choked with lotus and lilies, and water buffaloes wading through the ponds and chewing on the lotus and lilies. Those who live in this place call it the Darkness. ...India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well-off. But the river brings darkness to India- the black river. (14)

He was born in a joint family and his grandmother Kusum was the head of the family. His father was a rickshaw puller and his mother died due to tuberculosis. Her last wish was to educate Balram so that he may lead a comfortable life. His father tries his best to send him to school and even kills a lizard in his class room due to the fear of which Balram did not go to the school. As his father says:

‘My whole life has been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one of mine – at least one – should live like a man’. (30)

He calls his father as “a man of honour and courage” because he chose to become a rickshawpuller and not to plead for work before the landlords and he never sat on the ground as other rickshawpullers when he has to wait for passengers at the bus stand.(23)

But after his father’s death he dropped out of the school and work in a tea shop to repay the loan taken from the Stork for the marriage of his cousin Reena. His Brother Kishan was taken out of the school when his cousin Meena was married.

After his father’s death he goes to Dhanbad to earn money and starts working in a tea shop. He starts hearing the conversation of the people who came to the tea shop as a result the owner of the shop gets angry and burns his ear with hot syrup and a part of his ear turns pink. This incident shows the physical torture undergone by the working class in a small tea shop.

He decides to become a driver and earn more money to live a comfortable life, for this he needs three hundred rupees to learn driving. He tries to get a job as a labour in a mine, but due to his weak body he is rejected as he says people with strong body are taken while others are driven away by sticks.

He had to undergo caste discrimination when he goes to an old driver to learn driving for three hundred rupees. The old driver discourages him to be a driver because he is a Halwai by caste and it is the work of warrior caste Muslims, Rajput and Sikhs but after much pleading he agrees to teach Balram. He starts learning driving and a free mechanic in the garage. While teaching the old driver calls road as a jungle and a good driver must roar to get ahead on it. This episode in the novel shows the exploitation of the marginalized to work as a free mechanic after paying fees for learning driving.

When he learns driving and starts searching for a job he starts telling lie about his driving experience and as a result he is employed as the driver of Ashok, American return son of the Stork but here also the category of his caste is asked if it is upper or lower caste. He calls his caste as a middle caste then the Stork says he does not mind if one servant of a lower caste works in his house with other servants of the upper caste. It shows that the importance of caste in judging the qualities of a person in the contemporary India society.

He becomes a driver but performs all the duties of a servant. He swept the floor, made tea, cleared cobwebs with a broom or chase a cow out of the compound and wash and massage the legs of the Stork and wash the dogs Cuddles and Puddle.

He says that Hanuman is the favourite god of the people of Darkness because he was a faithful servant and showed how to serve your master with fidelity, love and devotion. He says it is hard to live with freedom in India.

The life of the working class in cities is shown in the novel when Balram goes to Gurgaon with Ashok and his wife Pinky as their driver. It is shown that the drivers read cheap road side magazines to spend their time while their masters are busy in the shopping malls or night clubs. The wretched condition of the room of servants in the building is also described in the novel. All servants of the building sleep in the dormitory of the building and use common toilet, an electric bell is attached to their room so that their master can call them at any time. Balram decides to sleep in another room to escape the teasing of other servants with unfinished floor and cockroaches roaming and eating limestone on the walls shows the unhygienic condition of the servant quarters in the cities.

Through the discussion between Ashok and Pinky Balram tries to say the treatment of servants is inhuman in India as compared to the western countries where servants do not bring tea or biscuits to the bed of their employer because there a servant perform for limited hours and only for the work for which he is paid.

Through the character of Ram Persad it is shown how a Muslim hides his religion to get a job. He leaves his job when his religion is revealed to Balram. This shows discrimination on the basis of religion is also prevalent in the contemporary society.

Balram is framed in a case of an accident which he has not committed when his master's wife Pinky kills a child in a road accident due to drunken driving. He is compelled to sign a declaration admitting that he had killed the child but he is saved when he is informed that no one has reported about the accident. This incident shows the vulnerability of the families living on the footpaths of the cities. It shows how the drivers in the cities are sent to jail for the crime committed by their masters.

Later on when Balram lives in Bangalore as Ashok Sharma pays money to withdraw the case of an accident when a boy dies due to the mistake of his taxi driver. He also becomes a member of the upper class who think they can buy anything with their money.

The incident of searching of one rupee coin of Mukesh in the car by Balram and when he is unable to find it he gives a one rupee coin from his own pocket. It shows that people like Mukesh can pay bribe of a million rupees to the politicians for the evasion of income tax but cannot allow a servant an extra rupee.

Balram kills his master to get the money in his bag and escapes to Bangalore to start new life as the owner of an entrepreneur company. He chooses the path of crime to fulfill his ambition in life because he knew that by honesty and hard work he will never achieve what he wants to achieve in his life.

The act of killing his master is against the idea of Rooster Coop according to which a servant will always be faithful to his master because if he betrays his master then his whole family will be destroyed. He gives an example of a servant who worked for the Buffalo in his village who was arrested for the kidnap of his son and later killed along with his whole family for the crime he had not committed because the Naxals had kidnapped the Buffaloes son.

This story shows the life of the youth of the lower caste who decide to spend their time doing nothing because they have accepted that they will not get any job or to migrate and work as servant in the cities.

The problem of migration of the people from rural to urban is portrayed in the novel. The people with no land migrate to the cities to work as servants or manual labourers. Balram describes it by saying:

When the buses came, they got on – packing the inside, hanging from the railings, climbing onto the roofs and went to Gaya; there they went to the station and rushed into the trains—packing the inside, hanging from the railings, climbing onto the roofs—and went to Delhi, Calcutta, and Dhanbad to find work. (26)

Their families wait for their arrival with money so that they can live a comfortable life. An example of this is the depiction of Balram's uncles returning to Laxmangarh after working in the city and the women are shown to be ready to snatch away the money from his uncles as soon as they enter the house.

When he starts working in Dhanbad, he himself sends his salary to Kusum and on one occasion when he is in Gurgaon, Kusum complains to his master that he is not sending any money to his family. It shows that the family of the working class is totally dependent on the member of the family who earns money.

The health related problems of the marginalized due to the use of contaminated water of the Ganga is also discussed in the novel. He says Ganga which is called as “daughter of the Vedas, protector of us all, breaker of the chain of birth and rebirth. Every where this river flows, that area is Darkness (15)”

He says that the American tourists go to Haridwar or Benaras to feel the spirituality of the river and our Prime Minister says to take a dip in it. But he says that do not take a dip in the river as it will lead to many diseases. He says:

I urge you not to take dip in the Ganga, unless you want your mouth full of faeces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and seven different kinds of industrial acids.

The pollution of the Ganga is expressed by him when he says Bodh Gaya is just a few miles from Laxmangarh and Buddha must have run away as Ganga flows just outside Laxmangarh.

The truth about the development of his village on paper and reality is different on paper his village is a paradise with electricity, telephone and water and children are raised on nutritious diet as our Prime Minister says in the UN but in reality no electricity poles and water tap. He says:

Children – 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. (20).

The reality of the government schemes for the marginalized is depicted in the novel. The teacher of the school sells the uniforms of the students and meals provided by the government. The excuse which the teacher gives is that he has not received his salary for six months but none blamed him but supported him and felt proud for his act of stealing. Balram describes this as:

There was supposed to be free food at my school- a government program me gave every boy three *rotis*, yellow *daal*, and pickles, at lunch time .But we never ever saw *rotis*, or yellow *daal*, or pickles, and everyone knew why: the schoolteacher had stolen our lunch money.(33)

Due to this act of the school teacher the future of the children of the lower caste is further darkened. But in the case of Balram even scholarship does not help him to continue his education. The order of the landlord for the payment of the loan compels him to work in a tea shop.

The teacher of the school sleeps in the class and spits of the walls and floor of the class room, it shows the deplorable condition of government schools in India. It is proved when an inspection is conducted by an inspector, except Balram none of the students are able to answer questions asked by the inspector. Balram is named as the White Tiger and awarded a scholarship by the inspector as a reward.

The plight of the government hospitals is described when Balram and his brother take their father to a government hospital where animals roam freely in the hospital and the doctor is busy working in his private hospital. His father was suffering from tuberculosis. As he says:

He had been ill for some time, but there is no hospital in Laxmangarh, although there are three different foundation stones for a hospital, laid by three different politicians before three different elections. When he began spitting blood that morning, Kishan and I took him by boat across the river. We kept washing his mouth with water from the river, but the water was so polluted that it made him spit more blood.

They crossed the river and went to the government hospital but “it had no doctor they bribed the ward boy with ten rupees and he died when the doctor did not arrived”. (49)

In contrast to the government hospital is a private hospital where patients are treated like in a five star hotel. It shows the defects of the government free schemes.

The condition of the auto rickshaw drivers in Delhi is worse because they have to breathe in acid air which leads to lungs related problems.

The description of slums in the cities is described as people live in tents covered with blue tarpaulin sheets. Balram says they are worse than Laxmangarh. The slum ended near the open sewer and the children played in the sewage water and they will run to catch a note of hundred rupees flowing in the black water irrespective of the disease which may infect them. The people living in the slum defecated in the open which may lead to infectious disease.

In he novel he gives reference to Vijay who belongs to the pigs herd community of the village, one of the lowest caste. He starts his journey as a bus conductor and later on joins politics and becomes a leader in the Great Socialist Party. The people of the village are happy with him because he humiliates the landlords of the village.

In this novel it is shown how the right to vote granted by our constitution is snatched away from the marginalized section of the society. In Laxmangarh they are never allowed to enter the voting booth although their names are present in the voters list. As Balram says his vote must have been caste though he is in Bangalore and he has never seen inside of a voting booth till now. He gives a reference to a rickshaw puller who tried to cast his vote, was beaten to death by the political party workers.

Adiga in his novel has tried to portray the condition of the marginalized in the twenty first century Indian society. They are oppressed on the basis of caste and class. He shows that class has taken precedence over caste discrimination. Through this novel he says that the marginalized have progressed but more effort should be made by the government so that the divide between the rich and the poor may be narrowed. The working class should be taught about their rights as a domestic servant so that no one can exploit them and they are paid for the work they perform in the houses of the rich people.

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