

AN IMAGE OF INDIA AS AREA OF DARKNESS AS REFLECTED IN ARVIND
ADIGA'S THE WHITE TIGER

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Abstract

A great work of art has the capacity to decipher the life and its meaning to the common people whose lives are nothing but a journey from this need to that need. Most importantly, it throws light on “unseen” and “unknown” in the life, and makes reader “familiar” with “unfamiliar”. Having won the Man Booker Prize in 2008, Arvind Adiga's novel ‘The White Tiger’ belongs to this category. Adiga, through this novel, has really captivated the real image of our country. Like other areas of life, the literature succumbs to the vogue of the day. Therefore “the Archetype of India Shining” reigns Indian literature particularly Indian English literature in the post liberalized India in which a great number of the success stories are being written due to the “Invisible Hand of Market” (Adam Smith). Of course, this is true but partially; such kind of success comes only to chosen few, and rest of others grope in darkness for their basic human needs. In this novel, Adiga deals with “rest of others” who lives and strive in area of darkness. By the showing the ugly side of the contemporary Indian life, he has challenged the very “Myth of India Shining” and has forcibly drawn our attention to the great tragedy of Himalayan scale, which is brutally unfolding away from media glare in Indian hinterland and cities.

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Throughout the ages, India has been famous for a great luxury as well as misery. Our founding fathers, after the independence, adopted “Democratic Socialism” as a tool of policy making to put end to the misery of people. As novel shows, this lofty project has failed miserably for the miserable people of India. Therefore, in the early days of globalization of India, particularly Indian economy, many Indians have great hopes from “Trickle Down Theory” of globalization. But unfortunately for most of Indians, trickling of down of wealth as promised has never happened. They live in abject poverty as their ancestors lived throughout the ages. Earlier they used to be the prisoners of feudalism and caste structure, now they are caged in the mighty cage of globalization with facade of democracy. To the millions of Indians, the only nature of prison is changed, and most significantly, blood sucking exploitation goes on continuously. This is what Adiga conveys about India with the help of this novel.

According to Adiga, India consists of two parts, “an India of light, and an India of Darkness”. Balaram, the narrator of the novel, was born and brought up in the India of Darkness. His poor family lived in typical village called as Luxmangarh that was ruled by landlords, though the evil of landlordism was banned by the rule of the law in the post independent India. As Balaram shows, this ban only remained on the paper. Due to their greedy, selfish and inhuman nature, Balaram calls them as animals, and has named them as “Buffalo”, “Stork”, “Wild Boar”, and “Raven”. Most importantly, the fodder of these animals was common villagers of Luxmangarh. Balaram says,

“All four of the Animals lived in the high – walled mansions just outside Luxmangarh – the landlord’s quarters, and did not need to come out into the village except to food”.

Due to the high level of exploitation, the life was unbearable for the villagers. Therefore, many people migrated from village to other cities. Most importantly, this is the root cause of the migration and it was the migration of compulsion rather than of choice. Balaram says,

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

Because of such social oppression, the poor people have lost all their human dignity, and have degenerated into the level of animals. They cannot enjoy simple thing of human life such as safe and secure childhood, living with family, and living normal life. For example, after leaving school even though he was good in studies, Balaram started to work in tea shop. As a result of this work, the very “innocence of childhood” was replaced by the “brutality of experience”. As a child, he suffers pangs of separation, when he leaves his family to find work in Dhanbad. On the

contrary, the children of landlords are blessed with happy, carefree, and secure childhood. Most importantly, unlike the children of Darkness, they get quality education. Due to the “quality education” they became “owners” in “knowledge economy” once again. The denial of quality education makes children of darkness their servants once again. And life goes on! Balaram’s father pour out his anguish when he says,

“My whole life; I have treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine at least one – should live like a man.”

In short, the people of Darkness are nothing but a “beast of burden” for people of light. The unusual training of this process starts up from childhood, as the life of Balaram shows. These are the people who carry the burden of other people in their own ways. Thus, we come to know about “the Wretched of Earth” in our own country which often boasts and brags about the so called “Inclusive Growth” and “Superpower Status”.

In the history of mankind “from caves to malls”, usually the period of darkness has referred only to medieval period when feudalism and religious orthodoxy ruled over masses in hand in hand. Most importantly, The French revolution planted seeds of democracy in 1789, and therefore, this medieval curse slowly faded away all over the world except our country. Therefore, Adiga’s the use of Darkness is apt one, and has been relevant to the contemporary India that subsumes people from Stone Age to Globalized age. Balaram narrates his story of life to the president of China, which has communist lead authoritative government. In his narration, he contrasts and compares this form of government with Indian Democratic government. Through the device of contrast and compare, Adiga shows the real nature of the Indian democracy and government. Like other good things in India, democracy, its ideas and ideals only exist in name. Nothing more, nothing less. In the ideal world, democratic government is supposed to work for well-being of people like Balaram and his class. But on the contrary, the government is always works against the interests of such people in the real world. Most importantly, there are many examples of government’s apathy to such people in this novel. For example, the school education in Balaram’s village. The necessary school infrastructure is completely absent, the teacher dose the work of more sleeping than of teaching. Most significantly, the uniforms meant for students are sold in black market. This is how our government works for our people! Unfortunately, such kind of apathy, attitude, and working of government is not confined only to education but also spread other walks of life. “Instead of healing wounds of masses, our government turns them to incurable gangrene”. Therefore, the tale of Balaram becomes, the tale of anguish and loss. His father suffered from TB but could not get the treatment from the government hospital. They have to pay bribe to boy in order to know about doctors’ time. In the absence of proper treatment, his father dies in the hospital without ever meeting the doctor who is supposed to treat people like him. Balaram’s life is nothing but a “continuous saga of such man made tragedies”. When Pinky,

the wife of Ashok, kills the child when she drives after drink party. She is allowed to go free, and without any fault, Balaram is forced to confess the crime which he never committed in order to save Pinky from Law. “In India, all are equal but some are more equal than form others.” It shows that powerful people can manipulate law according to their wish, and on the opposite, weak people don’t have such ability, and hence they suffer in the hands of law.

Though India is democratic country, the poor people are not allowed to exercise their basic democratic right of voting due to the evil of booth capturing and bogus voting. Most significantly, the futility of voting is shown when Balaram says,

“I am India’s mast faithful voter, and I still have not seen the inside of a voting booth”.

In such scenario, these people don’t have any alternative but to suffer. In the opinion of Adiga, corruption is the “slow death” which kills poor people continuously and consistently in great numbers. Only because of corruption, these people are deprived of basic thing in life. Therefore, these people die slowly, bit by bit. But unfortunately no one is punished for the corruption and the characters like “socialist and stork prosper while poor decay”. Due to all these reasons, Balaram thinks that conventional morality is a sham, the trap to enslave the poor people psychologically as well as physically, and a strategic weapon to exploit people. Therefore, he never feel guilt of murder of Ashok, his master. He thinks that he should have murdered him earlier. Adiga, in this novel, not only questions the conventional morality but also warns the coming of national disaster if the situation is not improved quickly. In the words of Balaram,

“I signed, because this one looked nothing like Kim Basinger. Not half as pretty. That was when it hit me – in a way it never had before – how the rich always get the best things in life, and all that we get is their leftovers”.

There is gradual awakening in poor class as the character of Balaram shows and now they are not satisfied with leftovers of rich, and want best things as rich people do.

In this way, Arvind Adiga has highlighted an India of Darkness in this novel. Though an India of darkness offers grim tale of life, but it also humanizes of life people who are treated like animals. This novel deals with the truth, though it may be harsh. Balaram sup up the “complete truth” when he says,

“One fact about India is that you can take almost anything you hear about the country from the prime ministers and turn it upside down and then you will have the truth about that thing”.

Thus, by writing this novel, Adiga “turned it upside down” the narration of day, and has presented the truth about India.

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