



UGC Approved Journal



IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

ISSN-2321-7065



Editor-in-Chief

**Volume 6, Issue 5
May 2018
www.ijellh.com**

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DARKNESS AND LIGHT IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S THE WHITE TIGER

Literature is basically the reflection of society. And it is imperative that society is made up of darkness and light. This light and darkness can also be fictionalized for a better understanding. Great writers have always been able to dissect the society and bring out its defectives. It is not the duty of literature to be political and social, nor can one compartmentalize literature into politics and socialism, however, if literature deals with life in general then it is imperative to combine all the facets of the society.

Throughout the world, writers have written about their society with humour and despair. Some wanted to alter the course of history, and others were mere spectators or recorders of their society. Western writers are usually credited as being more radical, and daring to point out the foibles of the society. They wrote farcical plays, and satirical prose piece to incite the government. But in this century things have changed, and writers are not much radical like before.

Indian Writing in English to has continued to evolve. Writers of the present age write about issues that touch the soul of the country. They have found their voice in the vast democracy. It is as noted that the worst of times usually brings about the best in nations and Indian throughout its glorious history has encountered its fair share of hardships, whether they be in the form of invasions, slavery or famines and so on. As history is unique, the contemporary writers of that age happen to bring their own unique way of expression. Same is the case with

modern-day India in Which Chetan Bhagat, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh have become the voice of the nation.

The times have changed and the contemporary writers of India find it difficult than their predecessors. It is mainly because of India's diversity and divisions existing in its social, economic and cultural areas. As India is vast it is not an easy task to exhibit society as a whole. The writer tends to focus on certain sections of the society. The author under consideration Mr. Aravind Adiga has undertaken a dangerous endeavour. He has become the voice of the poor, downtrodden, the colossal underclass of the world's biggest democracy.

Aravind Adiga has written an epistolary novel which is written as a series of seven letters over seven nights addressed to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. The author presents a cynical, supercilious and romanticized picture of India where the education system is defunct, elections rigged and poverty is rampant. He also divides the nation into two distinct zones-

The western perceived the novel as a mirror of India. Nevertheless, the Indians decried it due to the bleak depiction of Indian society. Amardeep Singh Dismissed it as fundamentally fake and freelance editor Anjali Kapoor declared- "Adiga is the same as Naipaul focusing on everything that is bad and corrupt,"(The Telegraph, Oct 18, 2008). Though critics have pointed out that the depiction of the novel is not entirely true, it is evident and agreed that certain things in the novel are without any doubt true.

The reason for these two contrasting versions is primarily due to the fact that India as a concept has always intrigued the west. Some consider it as the land of ancient wisdom, and others consider it as a country floundering in poverty, hunger, naked bodies and hungry bellies. Some beliefs it to be the storehouse of intellectual knowledge while others can only view Adiga's "glistening lines of sewage". But among these one thing is pretty certain, Indian by all means will be an intricate puzzle for the west because it is probably none of these and even more possibly both of them.

The question here, however, is how much of Adiga's representation of India is realistic. But before the further exploration of the subject, it is chronologically important to dwell into a deeper analyzing of light and darkness in the novel.

The article in the *Guardian*: "Out of the Darkness: Adiga's *The White Tiger*" rides to Booker victory against the odds, describes the novel:

The novel takes the form of seven letters addressed by Balram to the Chinese premier on the eve of a state visit, and its tone is almost Dickensian, as the unpleasant reality of contemporary Indian society is revealed via mordant sketches of characters, from millionaires in their air-conditioned tower blocks to the unfortunates who are trapped in poverty and who live literally below them, catering to their every whim. (theguardian.com/2008)

The White Tiger certainly delivers an invincible central character and India that is bristling with economic possibility, competing loyalties and class struggle. It is, in short, the story of the rickshawallah's move from the 'darkness' of rustic India to the 'light' of urban Gurgaon. Darkness here refers to a life of living in poverty and sadness, whereas the other side focuses on all glitz and glamour.

The novel set in rural Bihar probably to portray the darkness of the society. People are frantic to be socially acceptable and to live with status. Adiga with a tinge of black comedy deprecated this greed and corruption that can be seen rampant in the Indian society.

In short, *The White Tiger* is about a man who is determined to succeed by any means possible. The protagonist travel is from an "India of darkness" to an "India of light". Aravind takes the reader into the world of darkness and devastation. He brings to the forefront the sinister facets of class division, corruption and inequality. He also explores how the consequence of these issues can lead a nation and an individual. The darkness of the society is brought out brilliantly in the novel.

The novel set during an economic boom. It also covers bloody acts, opportunism, and entrepreneurial success of Balram and also discusses the emergence of Socialists in India. It is also given as a reminder that the voice of the underclass cannot be ignored for long. The major focus in the novel is on the India of light. It focuses on India which has access to education, healthcare, transportation facilities, roads, hospitality, electricity, the rapid growth of technology, running water, hope, justice, emerging entrepreneurial power in the world surpassing China.

The novel also shows the rise of India in the global economy, and the author also shows how bribery and corruption are part of the nation. The Protagonist Balram witnesses the transaction of black money in hundreds of thousands. Major problems like bribery and corruption are part of the growth of the nation, and the author gives a vivid picture of a feudal democracy.

The author takes the present challenges and the economic exploitation done around it. He focuses more on the dark aspects of political deprivation, the social marginalization and the spiritual suppression of the poor. Of course, all these are taking place in the background of the Indian society.

Aravind presents the darkness of Indian society more than the light. He is deeply alarmed by the vast disparity between the poor and the rich. Adiga certainly has the influence of three black American writers of post-world II, namely Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and Richard Wright. Because of the influence of these writers, Adiga portrays the problems of the deprived class in India.

First, the India of darkness can be examined. He calls it, “Big Bellies and Small Bellies”. It seems Adiga has focused and observed sharply the darker side of India. Cristina Mendes remarks: “The India of Light is that of wealth, technology and knowledge, while the India of Darkness (Where the majority of Indians live) is that of misery; destitution and illiteracy”. However, the tragedy is that the successful are in the minority, and this minority is being used to create a metaphor for a strong and shining India. This false image of India needs to be changed. The sufferings of the poor must be highlighted, and there is no greater avenue than a novel to showcase the true colours of the nation.

The novel makes a departure from the most of the mainstream ideas by portraying the emotions, and problems of the invisible poor. Adiga looks at India as an outsider and also an insider, and that is an added advantage for him. His protagonist makes these remarks that India lacks these important things:

Balam goes on to explain the political corruption in rural India. He explains about a great socialist who worked for the welfare of the poor, but ironically he was the centre of corruption. He takes, “four hundred thousand rupees” as a bribe to sell a vacant post of the physician. The socialist does not care if the doctor attends to the patients are not.

Balam even names his life’s story as ‘The Autobiography of a half Baked Indian’. He goes on to say that there are many half-baked Indian’s because they are not allowed to complete their schooling. Balam says that during the British Rule people of India were kept in their own cultural cages. There was very little trouble, however, after the Independence, they came out of the cage and they started to loot the resources. “The cages had been left open, and the animals had attached and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law.

As days went by such economic exploitation, moral degradation, and social deprivation left the society with only two options, ‘only two destinies: eat- or get eaten up’. However, when Balram narrates only good things about his master Mr. Ashok, and how good he is, Balram’s character becomes ambiguous when in fact he was one to kill Ashok. The larger canvas of the novel tends to discuss the dark picture of India. Some critic, on the other hand, thought it was a blunt attack on the growth of India.

In India due to poor health services and non-implementation of government policies, rampant malpractice has made the poor people suffer more. In Laxmangarh, there were three different foundation stones, and they were all laid down by three different politicians. Due to lack of hospital and proper medical facilities, Balram’s father dies. The great socialist inaugurates Lohia Universal Free hospital for the purpose of election, however, there is no doctor and even the rooms are not safe. Balram says:

Cat has tasted blood. A couple of Muslim men had spread a newspaper on the ground and were sitting on it. One of them had an open wound on his leg. He invited us to sit with him and his friend. Kishan and I lowered father onto the newspaper sheets. We waited there, the Muslim men kept adding newspapers to the ground, and the line of diseased eyes, raw wounds, and delirious mouths kept growing.

In his further email to the west, Balram explains that “Delhi is the capital of not one but two countries –two India. The Light and the Darkness both flow into Delhi”. It bluntly shows that India is not shining despite its claim as a booming economy.

The India of Light constitutes the riches, influence, innovation and learning delineated after Balram achieves Delhi and later Bangalore. In the prior piece of the novel is the India of darkness in the town of Laxmangarh to which Balram has a place and with the mining town of Dhanbad where he works. This place is displayed as a place that is portrayed by wretchedness, desperation and lack of education.

To emphasise darkness as a metaphor in the novel, Adiga uses ‘the black river’. It is basically a reference to the River Ganges. Balram holds the river responsible for darkness to the country. He describes the river as ‘full of faces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and several kinds of industrial acids’. The river is considered sacred and it is revered by the Hindus. It is held to be the daughter of the Vedas, a protector, one who breaks the

chain of birth and rebirth. Nevertheless, in the novel, the river demarcates the Dark where Balram lives this abject poverty-stricken life.

Most importantly Balram has used 'darkness' as a metaphor for corruption in India. Everything including the cars, the roads, the times, the people and the places that are involved in corruption had always been described as 'dark'.

Adiga focuses mostly on the darkness. It depicts both "the struggle of the underprivileged class" (Kallappa 232). It depicts how the "the rich people, politicians, policemen and the upper society people are enjoying their lives" (Narasiman, 2013). Balram Halwai belonged to "a nameless and birthday-less past" (Waller 2) and so had to struggle "against the affluent middle-class elites and politicians" (Sheoran 172).

The novel also explores the theme of loneliness. This also can be considered as the darkness in the society. Mr. Ashok faces loneliness after her wife leaves him lonely in India and goes permanently to America. Ashok struggles to manage his life. He gets addicted to heavy drinking. He has become powerless and lost. Balram tries to take care. When Mr. Ashok was massaging his legs putting in a bucket, Balram as a dutiful servant puts his hands in the dirty water in the bucket and squeezes his feet. But "Mr. Ashok kicked the bucket, and the water spilt all over the floor". He insults Balram and asks him to get out. Balram thinks about this scene while waiting outside the mall.

The author also reveals that in India there are entrepreneurs like Balram Halwai who bribes the assistant commissioner when his driver named Mohammad Asif kills a boy in an accident. The commissioner does not file the F.I.R and intends that his own brother is responsible for the accident. He says that his bicycle lights were not working, and that was illegal. The further action of the police shows that the poor don't get justice. "The number plates will be changed tomorrow; we will say it was a hit-and-run. Another car will be submitted. We keep battered cars for this purpose here. You are very lucky that your Qualis hit a man on a bicycle."

It is true that Adiga refers to the darkness lot of times in the book; however, he also attempts to show the 'light' side of India. In the India of light one can pick for them what they want, but in dark India, even that is not possible. They are not given any choice to do in their life. Balram stands out because he had the guts to steal his chance to go beyond the boundaries set for him as a member of the dark; Unprivileged India. The Naxals seems to be attacking the

people in the villages, and furthermore, the politicians as usual dumb to the problems of the darkness and they are bluntly corrupt. Adiga talks about the life of Darkness:

Kishan had a lot of news for me – and since this was the Darkness, all of it was bad news. The Great Socialist was as corrupt as ever. The fighting between the Naxal terrorists and the landlords was getting bloodier. Small people like us were getting caught in between. There were private armies on each side, going around shooting and torture people suspected of sympathizing with the other. ‘Life has become hell here,’

The story seems to be revolving around the tiger imprisoned in the cage. It is like the low class being surprised by higher class. The situation is similar to a tiger that is chained in the cage. Balram’s ability is purely based on his ability to bribe. He is not able to differentiate between fairness and fraudulent behavior. He is living in a country where one can prove himself through money, power and industry. No one is committed to moral values. The tone of Balram throughout the novel is materialistic. He is a supporter of Marxist stance. To him, the labourers have no hang on the things they create. They fabricate houses for rich individuals. They themselves need to live in tents promotion unhygienic spots. The conditions in which Balram is grown up are of outrageous starvation and concealment. He takes connections in materialistic terms.

The phrase *The White Tiger* refers to Balram himself. Once he was schoolchild, a school inspector compared him to a white tiger and he explains that “creature that comes along only once in a generation”. However, a real white tiger, Balram’s namesake of the cat family, is also required to qualify him as such. The scene in which Balram encounter’s *The White Tiger* at the zoo is as depicted as one decisive event that finalizes Balram’s murderous intention. He also undergoes a total identification process which is like a transformation which appears to tolerate its intolerable life in a cage with difficulty.

The novel shows that India has come to a place where the values are shifting quickly, and also without morals. Due to globalization, everything has changed into a commodity, and everything seems to be for sale. The Indian families have become like the western families who put more emphasis on materialistic values. The master Ashok and his wife Pinky madam in their excited position behave ‘like animals’, the master ‘pushing his hand up and down her thigh’. Even they don’t care they are in a car where driver Balram observes them in the

mirror. The master of the novel through crime, bribery, debauchery', savage animalism had degraded all the civilized ways of life.

The White Tiger also known as Balram has neither friends nor sentiments. He is tagged as "working class hero". The ways that he adopts are wrong and lead a man nowhere. But, the tiger cannot be caged breaks the law of his land in order to "turn bad news into good news".

Balram comes from a different kind of India, this India is stricken with poverty, and it typically shows darkness. He escapes this darkness by becoming a driver to a landlord from his village. He kills his master's throat and runs away with a huge amount of money. What Adiga highlights is the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor. The economic system lets a small minority to prosper at the expense of the majority. A critic Neelam Raaj Comments: "At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the west, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society...the great divide".

Balram describes that these poor bastards had come from darkness to a place like Delhi to find some opportunity. But the narrator still points that they are living in the darkness. He goes on to explain that to live under some concrete bridge, begging for their food and without hope for the future. That's not much better than being dead (314-315). In this chapter, he clearly shows the darkness of the Indian society. All the narrations and incidents showcase darkness. However, the slowing growth of India seems to be sidelined.

The end of *The White Tiger* emphasizes the immorality that results from the vast disparity in wealth but also hints at that things will improve. Balram murdered, stole and sacrificed his family to break out of the servant class. He also bribed the police to help him set up his new chauffeuring business for call centre workers in Bangalore. In many ways, Balram acted just like his former master Mr. Ashok as symbolized by Balram taking the name – Ashok when he moved to Bangalore. However, Balram changed when he moved to Bangalore and became a member of the upper class himself. In Balram's and perhaps, India's mind, America, as the leader of the world, is finished. This is despite the flourishing call centres, the tech industry and McDonald's.

India will openly take what the West has to give, while China is more circumspect about what it adopts. Balram supports India's outlook and challenges China's perspective. Though the ending is not a perfectly happy ending, it seems hopeful. Balram makes it out of poverty.

But he does not become desensitized and distanced from where he came from. This allows him to act morally more often.

The White Tiger is not the mere production of things or events, but an expression of social, cultural, economic and political patterns of Indian society and class. It is seen that the poor and proletarians are the part and parcel of society. But in the wish to break the rooster coop, they commit crimes. This novel is an example of social realism. The novelist is optimistic that many readers will listen to his voice and join his hands to take care the underdogs of the society. May his vision for the poor, underdogs and underclass come true so he would be satisfied to see a new social order free from all coops, discrimination, exploitation and inequalities.

The final picture of Aravind Adiga is to say that India is a feudal society that is disguised as democracy. The country might have gained Independence by 1940's; however, the majority of the people are still in servitude. In short, the novel is a description of the social and economic inequalities of contemporary India. It is penetrating a piece of social commentary, attuned to the dissimilarities that persist despite India's new prosperity.