

## **Aravind Adiga's the White Tiger: a Tryst with the Real Entrepreneur of India**

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**Abstract:** *The White Tiger* is presented as an epistolary novel, written to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao by the main protagonist, Balram Halwai, a self styled entrepreneur. The novel presents a sharp contrast between India's vertiginous economic growth and its dark side through Balram, who hails from crushing rural poverty. The India that we see in the this novel is not India shining but India of half baked people who are still struggling to find a place for themselves, amidst this over dazzling campaign. The term inequality truly defines the current economic condition of India, where a vast majority lives in acute poverty and the bridge between the rich and the poor is ever increasing. This paper reveals the murky side of existing entrepreneurship in India and through Balram's journey from darkness to light it exposes the shadowy side of shining India.

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Aravind Adiga's 'The White Tiger', won him the Man's Bookers Prize 2008. He is only the fourth Indian to receive this honor. The book has been published in at least sixteen languages so far and has received excellent reviews for its dark humor and the issues it raises.

*The White Tiger* is the story of Balram who reveries to flout all social restrictions in order to make a place in the world of the people who have enslaved his community for ages. Through Balram's tale Adiga exposes two contrasting worlds existing within India, an India of darkness and an India of light. The India of darkness represented through Laxmangarh, a small village in Bihar, was presided over by feudal lords. It was hidden under the dark cover of corruption, inequality, greed and barbaric attitude of these lords, described as animals living in "high walled mansions just out side Laxmangarh ... had there own temples inside the mansions and there own wells and ponds and did not need to come out into the village accept to feed." (WT: 25)

The names of landlords were derived from peculiarities of appetite they had like the stork, who owned the village river and took a toll from every boat man crossing the river. His brother, the wild boar forced the poor villagers to work on his fields for scanty wages. The raven, took a cut from the goatherds who went up to his rocky hill side to graze with their flocks. "If they did not have their money, he liked to dip his beak into their back side, so they called him raven." (WT: 25) The buffalo, greediest of the lot fed on one third of the daily wages of the rickshaw pullers. It is obvious that in the world of darkness, it was impossible for these poor people to escape from the ruthless clutches of these land lords.

The sarcasm with which the author describes the backwardness and ignorance of the villagers, poses serious question on the educational and developmental programmes in the country. Ironically, India boasts of having global educational centers, but in the far off villages people even do not bother to name their children. The way Balram gets this name highlights the triviality of human existence in this world. Here people live and die without a name, without any identity let alone getting quality education of shining India. In sharp contrast to the elite urban schools, the plight of education system in rural India has been laid thread bare through the description of the only existing school in Laxmangarh, where there was only one teacher who hardly had any interest in imparting education to poor children. His only interest vested in stealing the money from the school food programme and selling the uniforms meant for the students. No one blamed the school teacher for doing this for they believed his lame excuse of not being paid for the last six months.

Balram was not allowed to complete even his primary education. His intelligence was appreciated by the school inspector and he named him 'the white tiger, the rarest of animal, the creature that only comes once in a generation.' He was so impressed by Balram that he promised to arrange a scholarship for him. But the crippling poverty forced Balram into child labour. Although, India bans children under fourteen from working as domestic servants, in food stalls, or anywhere else but millions are continued to be employed. Even a bright student like Balram was forced to leave the school and was deployed at a teashop, to pay the debt taken for his cousin sister's marriage. The ground reality suggests until and unless one comes to moral and political grips, with the reality of poverty, with the divide between rich and poor, the struggle against the child labour will fizzle out.

Balram wanted to escape the hopeless squalor and terrible conditions existing in Laxmangarh, where his rickshaw puller father died of tuberculosis in a government hospital that was dysfunctional because of endemic corruption. Balram and his brother Krishan waited for the doctor with their father who was coughing blood. The doctor in the government hospital, who was being paid to take care of the poor in Laxmangarh, worked in some private hospital to make a few extra bucks, so he did not turn up till the evening and their father was permanently cured of his tuberculosis. After his father's death the infected blood on the floor was also cleaned up by the poor boys. This biased treatment with which poor are being dealt, is the biggest issue of the shining India that keeps on raising its ugly head every now and then, putting a question mark on India being an economic miracle as portrayed to the world in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In a place where there are no proper education centers, medical facilities, sewage, drinking water and other basic needs of civilized society, democracy seems to serve no purpose of upliftment of the poor. Here people in power make a mockery of world's largest democracy. Balram, a minor, was forced to be an eighteen year old, the legal age to vote, by the great Socialist Party, irrespective of his consent.

Living in such oppressive conditions, Balram's hatred for his birth place which is only a few miles away from Bodhgaya was justified. His resentment was obvious when he said, "I wonder if the Budha walked through Laxmangarh- some people say he did. My own feeling is that he ran through it- as fast as he could and he got to the other side- and never looked back!"(WT: 18) Undoubtedly, the struggle these poor fellows have to go through for the basic needs of human existence compels them to revolt against this life of subjugation, so Balram also decided to abandon this place for a better future. But to his utter dismay, the shadowy side of India was not limited to Laxmangarh only but for people like him, it extended to the light of Metropolitans- Delhi and Gurgaon where he moved as a driver to Mr. Ashok, the son of stork, one of the powerful landlords of Laxmangarh.

Delhi, the capital of our glorious nation, which has always been represented as the showcase of the Indian republic, too has just two discriminatory casts 'man with big bellies and man with small bellies.' Here men with big bellies own big luxurious mansions, imported cars, expensive clothes and showy life style and men with small bellies dwell in slums and sleep on pavements. Adiga has sarcastically pinpointed the difference between the attitudes of rich and poor in these lines---

The dreams of the rich and the dreams of the poor –they never overlap, do they?

See, the poor dream all their lives of getting to eat and looking like the rich.

And what do the rich dream of? Losing weight and looking like poor. (WT: 225)

The privileged members of the society seldom care for hardships that the poor go through. This reality dawned upon Balram when he reached Buckingham Towers, Gurgaon, the residence of his masters, where he got a menial and filthy place to live in as a driver. It had a flimsy little bed barely enough for him with noises of mosquitoes and cockroaches all around.

The description of beggars at the traffic stops, the pitiable condition of small children selling things on the roadside and the flocks of poor drivers waiting for their masters outside American styled malls blasts off the tall claims of shining India. It is clearly stated by Adiga in one of his interviews to Arthur J. Pais "...thing that struck me is the disparity in income. The rich are so rich. The Indian economy is booming but the money was not really getting down to the poor and the difference in the world between the rich and the poor was phenomenal."

The reality as it begins to surface is as astonishing as it is captivating for Balram, who after a few months of his stay in Gurgaon was determined to break the rooster coop and become a big bellied man. Adiga has appropriately used the metaphor of rooster coop to underline the tragedies of the servants trapped in the clutches of the life of darkness. The coop curtails their opportunities to make progress in life and move up in social hierarchy. Balram wanted to break free of this rooster coop like a white tiger- a symbol of power and independence. He raised this question in the novel and gave the answer himself—

Can a man break out of the coop? What if one day a driver took his employer's money and ran? What would his life be like? The answer is that only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed – hunted, beaten and burned alive by the masters- can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being but a freak, a pervert of nature. It would, in fact, take a white tiger. ....the story of a social entrepreneur.... (WT: 176-177)

So compelled by this strong desire, Balram broke out of the coop by following unlawful and immoral path of murdering his master, Mr Ashok for seven lakh rupees required to become an entrepreneur of shining India-a big bellied man.

Balram's journey from darkness to light presents the blatant truth, of independent India i.e. its reigning corruption, chaotic governance and deep rooted class divisions. The novel undoubtedly brings to fore the injustices and poverty present in the democratic shining India where poor are being ignored amidst the hype of economic boom and prosperity. It gives a voice to the poor fraternity who has always been deprived of education and economic independence-- life lines of progress in today's world. It is definitely an eye opener for the elite class and policy makers of India, on whom rests the responsibility to pacify growing resentment in the lesser privileged lot of the country.

Adiga's *The White Tiger* is an alarm, if tangible majors are not taken for the upliftment of subjugated people of Indian society there will be more and more naxal movement in every part of the country, and the silhouette of which will swallow up all the shines of the affluence. In order to come at par with the developed nations, the government will have to concentrate on improving the conditions of the lowest echelon of the society.

#### **Works Cited**

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