

teaching position. She is successful with her colleagues and students but she prefers isolation as it offers 'the reliable silence of her room, the steadfast tranquility of evenings' (Lahiri, 2013). Actually she realizes that her loneliness or isolation is a fitting punishment for her crime which she had done over Bela. Though she has accommodated different roles to survive in her life, the feeling of estrangement and isolation has played an integral part of her life- 'From wife to widow, from sister-in-law to wife, from mother to childless woman. Layering her life only to strip it bare, only to be alone in the end' (Lahiri, 2013). The parents of Subhash and Udayan have some golden dreams and want to live with their two sons peacefully. But Subhash leaves Tollygunge and reaches at Rhode Island for his higher studies while Udayan gets involved in Naxalite Movement and brutally killed before their eyes. When Subhash has returned to Calcutta after the death of his brother, they want that Subhash should stay with them and marry a girl except Gauri. But he has left them again and marries the same girl. At that time, his father retires from service and spends his days by reading books. After his death, Bijola becomes lonely and silence pervades the whole house and her isolation is too pathetic to describe. She is haunted by the sense of isolation and the past memories of Udayan. To forget his memory, she regularly washes the memorial tablet erected by the party members in honour of Udayan's martyrdom and places flowers on it. Bela, the daughter of Guari, has also experienced the aspects of displacement, isolation alienation. When she had been in her mother's womb, her father Udayan Mitra was already killed by the police. So at the moment of her birth, she is fatherless and later devoid of motherly affection as Gauri has spent her time at the university campus and behaved 'as if Bela were a relative's child and not her own' (Lahiri, 2013). When she went to California and left her, Bela intensely feels her mother's absence. The feeling of isolation and alienation creates some observable changes in her behavior. She begins to travel to the other parts of the world and starts to live in Western Massachusetts where she gets a job on a farm. There she engages herself in irrigation lines, weeding, harvesting and cleaning animal pens so that she can be away from the feeling of her home. The trauma of isolation and alienation propels her to behave rudely with her mother 'I can't stand the sight of you... You are not my mother. You are nothing... You are dead to me as he [Udayan] is' (Lahiri, 2013).

Both Desai and Lahiri have not only presented the themes of displacement, isolation and alienation in their two mentioned novels but also reflected them within the framework of two important political movements of West Bengal. Gorkha Movement or Nepalese Insurgency serves as a fitting background in *The Inheritance of Loss* and Naxalite Movement in *The Lowland*. As Gyan was influenced by the ideologies of Gorkha National Liberation Front, Udayan was also moved by the revolutionary ideas of Naxalite leader Charu Majumder and Kanu Sanyal. A feeling of homelessness has always haunted Gyan and he never identifies with them- Finally he decides that they must fight against the Govt to manage their own affairs under the banner of Gorkha National Liberation Front. Similarly Udayan is affected so much by the police

action against the innocent sharecroppers and takes arms against the Government to eradicate inequality and poverty. Both these novels have multiple layers of meaning and have open endings. Desai and Lahiri have skillfully ended their novels with an aura of hope. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Biju becomes capable to leave America, reaches in his motherland India and finally meets his father Pannalal. In *The Lowland*, subhash marries Elise Silva and seeks to start a new life; Gauri attends conference at different places, teaches successfully and tries to live in her own way. Bela admits her daughter Magna in a Kindergarten, starts working again in a farm and keeps contact with Drew. It is evident that both Kiran Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri - the two gems of Post Colonial literature, have deliberately reflected the outstanding concerns of the present world. They have minutely described the traumatic experiences of the immigrants- looking their history backward and forward. Their characters are torn between their present life and past memories and the influence of globalization or immigration compels their characters such as Jemubai or Biju and Subhash or Gauri to live in an atmosphere of exile and social exclusion. They have established another fact that the immigrants not only feel isolated, alienated and marginalized in a foreign country but also people realize those mentioned things in their own country. So their characters often 'straddle two cultures...fall between two stools...and suffer a triple disruption comprising the loss of roots, the linguistic and social dislocation' (Rusdie, 1991).

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A Reading of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* : A Critique of Corruption

- Shalini Misra

Abstract: Corruption in simple terms may be described as dishonest, illegal or immoral behaviour by people in position of authority or power. Corruption has become a global phenomenon. It is prevailing in every society in some degree. It has progressively increased in our society also. Corruption occurs when any official (Govt. Sector or Public Sector) misuses his/her power or authority for his/her personal gains. Discipline and corruption both come from top. It would not be an exaggeration to say that from a peon to an officer, everyone is actively involved in the act of corruption. If we go to a government school, we find the teachers missing. We see the innocent children surviving without midday meal. If we go to a government hospital, we find the doctors missing. If we go to any other government office, we need to bribe the people to get our work done. Most of the government sectors are running on 'Give and Take' policy. To get a berth in the train compartment, we just need to fill the pocket of the ticket examiner. Even a peon in a government office asks for 40-50 rupees to trace an important file. The educational institutes are also infected by this disease. To get a certificate signed by the education officer, we have to grease the palm of the clerk. India is no longer an ideal state. It is, in fact, one of the most corrupt countries in the world. In Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, we find different forms of corruption, especially in government hospitals and schools. Adiga has portrayed India as a nation that is going to rack and ruin because of the corrupt practices. The present paper attempts to highlight how corruption prevailing in the society is reflected in the literature and how it sensitises the people to this serious issue.

Keywords: Corruption, Dishonest, Immoral, Illegal, Bribe.

Corruption has assumed alarming proportions at higher levels of Central and State governments. Reducing the discretionary powers given to ministers and top bureaucrats is one of the many steps that can be adopted to tackle corruption... The years 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 have seen public anger and protest against the widespread corruption at higher levels of central and state governments as well as in the electoral system of the country.(166) - **Sachidananda Murthy**, Resident Editor, *The Week* and *Malayala Manorama*, *Manorama Yearbook*.

The simplest forms of corruption are : Bribe (to offer money or other valuables to the concerned official to gain favours), Nepotism (misuse of power or authority by someone to give jobs to his/her family members instead of those who are really deserving) and Favouritism (unfair practice of offering someone help or expressing preference for someone without any justification). Corruption has become a global phenomenon. It is prevailing in every society in some degree. It can be observed in our daily life. If we talk of politics, we find the whole political

system corrupt. Almost all the political leaders are corrupt nowadays. As a reaction to this, a new political party AAP (Aam Admi Party) emerged in the recent past. This was really a revolution in the field of politics. But, this could also not stand the test of time. To win the elections, political leaders attract the public in various ways. At the time of election, they just befool the innocent people by making false promises and to justify themselves, they distribute the medicines, blankets, food packets etc. to the poor and needy in slums. After winning the elections, they are nowhere to be seen and the poor become poorer and the rich become richer. This kind of corruption can be termed as 'Political Corruption'. Corrupt practices are observed in govt. and public offices also. People bribe the officials to gain favours. This can be termed as 'Administrative Corruption'. There are other forms of corruption like 'Social / Moral Corruption' and 'Legal Corruption'. Social/ Moral corruption refers to the crimes like kidnapping, murder and violence etc. Legal corruption refers to breaking the rules or laws to gain personal favours in terms of money or reputation. The history of corruption goes back to the ancient times.

Various forms of corruption are highlighted in *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga. *The White Tiger* is the debut novel by the Man Booker Prize winner Aravind Adiga. This novel was first published in 2008 and won the Man Booker Prize in the same year. The novel presents a very realistic portrait of modern India. The novel is in the form of letters, the protagonist of the story (Balram) writes to the Premier of China. The main theme of the novel is the contrast between the rich and the poor. Other major theme highlighted in the novel is corruption in India. Balram is the protagonist of the novel who is born in a village of Gaya district. He belongs to a poor family, but his father, being the head of the family, is the sole bread-winner. He never wants his son to become a rickshaw-puller like him. He wants Balram to receive good education and enjoy a good life; but unfortunately, Balram is forced to quit school. He starts working in a teashop with his brother in Dhanbad. Since his childhood, Balram was exposed to the corrupt practices in the government schools and hospitals. In his school, the children were supposed to enjoy free food-a government programme gave every boy three *rotis*, yellow *daal*, and pickles at lunchtime. But, children were always deprived of their basic rights as they never saw *rotis*, *daal* and pickles. The school teacher used to steal their lunch money and they couldn't do anything about it. The following explanation reveals a humorous account of his act:

The teacher had a legitimate excuse to steal the money-he said he hadn't been paid his salary in six months. He was going to undertake a Gandhian protest to retrieve his missing wages - he was going to do nothing in class until his pay cheque arrived in the mail. (33)

In *India Rising :Tales from a Changing Nation*, Oliver Balch also comments on the similar situation in India. Balch presents a realistic portrait of rural India. Balch expresses his sympathies for the oppressed Adivasi communities. Such people are underprivileged and completely backward. Jeevan is a tribal and uneducated. He explains the pathetic condition of a primary school in Chavala:

The teacher is absent...Chavela has no health centre of its own..Malnutrition is commonplace too... No one in Chavela has motorised transport. People rely on bullock carts and bicycles...New India, with its bright lights and global aspirations ,might as well occupy another planet. (231-232)

No government officials are appointed to look into the problems these backward people face in their daily life. Jeevan comments:

Appointments are made via officials , and officials want bribes...fifteen lakh rupees will secure you a teaching post. Three lakh for a clerical position. 'I've not got enough money to get a job in government service.'(233)

Jeevan criticises the government for Chavela's problems. He comments, "Government agents never come. As for politicians, they only appear before elections. Nor do official funds arrive as they should" (233). Some other examples of professional / administrative corruption in *The White Tiger* are observed in government hospitals and public offices. When Balram's father was seriously ill, he and his brother Kishan took him to a hospital. No doctor was available in the hospital to examine the patients. Balram and his brother had to bribe the ward boy ten rupees just to receive the information about the doctor. There was practice of having an open auction for any post that fell vacant in the village hospitals. This speaks volumes of the corruption spread in the government hospitals. Adiga gives a very realistic pen picture of the poor facilities in the government hospitals:

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. (48)

Balram had a very miserable childhood. He grew up in very poor living conditions. He witnessed a corrupt world , a place which Adiga calls 'Darkness' and all that he learnt was corruption , dishonesty and immoral behaviour. He observed corruption in schools, hospitals and public offices. During his journey from a simple and innocent village teashop waiter to a successful entrepreneur, he becomes gradually more involved with the corrupt government. The following conversation between Mr Ashok, Balram's employer and Mr Mongoose depicts the corrupt political system:

The minister wants more. It's election time. Everytime there's elections, we hand out cash. Usually to both sides, but this time the government is going to win for sure... And then there are a couple of bureaucrats we have to grease. Get it? (239-240)

He reveals the fact about his employer Mr Ashok, "Mr Ashok is giving money to all these politicians in Delhi so that they will excuse him from the tax he has to pay" (244). He comments further, " And who owns that tax, in the end? Who but the ordinary people of this country-you!" (244). Through his association with the affluent people, Balram becomes ever more conscious of the malpractices in government offices and applies all these tricks when he himself becomes a successful entrepreneur and establishes his own taxi service. Once one of his employees (taxi driver) hits a boy riding a bicycle and the boy is killed. Balram goes to the police

station with the dead boy's brother and bribes the assistant commissioner so that the case is not registered. The assistant commissioner does not file the F.I.R. and holds the dead boy responsible for this misfortune. He persuades the victim's brother to go home:

See, at the time of the accident, your brother's bicycle had no working lights. That is illegal, you know.

There are other things that will come out. I promise you, things will come out. (308-309)

The boy shouts helplessly, "My brother is dead. This man is a killer. I don't understand what's going on here" (309). The boy feels he's been trapped. He utters in anger and frustration, "This is an outrage! I'll call the papers! I'll call the lawyers! I'll call the police" (309). But it's all in vain. This is what happens in most of the government offices in India. The voice of the poor is never heard. India is the largest functional democracy but the underlying reality is appalling. We talk of equality, justice, human rights and fundamental rights, but in fact, these ideals do not exist in the world of the common man. The other important theme in *The White Tiger* is caste system / religious biases in India. This is an apt example of social/moral corruption. Our society has been divided on the basis of caste and religion. The caste system separates lower class people from higher social classes. It is the caste of any individual which determines his occupation or profession. In the novel, Balram is the son of Vikram Halwai, the rickshaw-puller. So, he is destined to be a sweet-maker or a rickshaw puller. Following his family traditions, Balram works in sweetshops and teashops. Though he is a very bright student and titled 'White Tiger', the thing that comes only once in a generation, he is forced to quit his studies. We find reflections of religious hostilities when Mr Mukesh's son plays cricket and shouts every time he hits a six or four, "I'm Azharuddin, captain of India (70)!" Suddenly the Stork enters and comments, "Call yourself Gavaskar. Azharuddin is a Muslim" (70). Another similar instance, we find in the marriage of Mr Ashok and Madam Pinky. Mr Ashok's father doesn't approve of this marriage because Pinky is from a different caste. This has been commented on frequently in the novel especially when Pinky Madam divorces Mr Ashok. There are numerous instances reflecting the differences between Hindus and Muslims. The driver of Mr Ashok is a Muslim but he hides this fact as he fears he may lose his job if he reveals the truth because his employer hates Muslims. But, the day Balram gets to know this fact, he takes advantage of the situation and manages to get him out of this job. This shows the bitter hatred for Muslims in our country. In *India Rising: Tales from a Changing Nation* also, we find similar instances. The chapter *Bad Status, Actually* describes the struggles of Mohammad 'Babu' Sheikh, a Mumbai driver whose family had migrated to the millennium city during 1950s from neighbouring Karnataka. The theme this chapter highlights is religious biases in India. Culture is the soul of any society and religion reflects our culture and traditions. The differences between Hindus and Muslims are quite evident in India. Babu is actually a Muslim by religion. A Muslim (his formal name is Mohammed) in a Hindu-dominated city, always fears the worst. His niece, for example,

who keeps the faith and wears a burkha, loses her job as a teacher in the slum. Babu remarks very pathetically: After seven years there, they required her to change her religion. She chose to resign instead. (36-37). There are other remarks that speak of the ill treatment of other caste people in Mumbai which reflect another form of corruption i.e. Nepotism/Favouritism:

In Maharashtra, the party says only Marathi people should work...Every government office wants to employ their own man...The Mumbai-based party (which enjoys a somewhat turbulent alliance with the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party) is hell-bent on closing the city's doors to outsiders. The list of unwanted includes Muslims, whether Maharashtra-born or not. (37)

Babu hides his identity as he knows he will lose his job if he reveals the truth because his employer hates Muslims. Babu doesn't like his job but he can't afford to lose his job. He remarks, "Anyway, driver is not a good status job, actually" (70). Babu has many mouths to feed. He has to look after his wife and two children. He wants to provide them good education but he doesn't know where he'll get the money. Balch observes, "Babu works every hour to keep his dependents from starving. Hundreds of millions of industrious Indians are just the same" (67). Under such circumstances, an innocent is forced to break the law and commit the crime. The protagonist in *The White Tiger* also faces the same situation and turn into a corrupt human being. In his struggle to escape slavery and make a respectable position for himself in the society, Balram ends up cheating people, stealing money and committing the heinous crime like murdering his own employer. He is sick of the life full of misery, poverty and humiliation. The following extracts give some insights into his character, "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 enough to eat and looking like the rich. And what do the rich dream of? Losing weight and looking like the poor" (225). Poor people struggle hard throughout their lives but never earn enough to make ends meet. These people are happy with the little they get. The rich are generally over-fed and they spend money on unnecessary things. They pay to the dietician to look slim and smart; while the poor don't have enough to eat. Rich people have the right to enjoy their lives; while the poor generally curse life. There is one section of the society which enjoys luxury while the other section dies for want of food. Balram is full of hatred for the rich when he realises, "The rich expect their dogs to be treated like humans, you see—they expect their dogs to be pampered, and walked, and petted, and even washed!" (78). Then he gets down on his knees and begins scrubbing the dogs. He is filled with disgust when he is instructed to pull the chain properly. The following remark indicates how cruelly the poor are treated, "Don't pull the chain so hard! They're worth more than you are!" (78). Balram feels that the poor are destined to suffer. God has pre-destined their fate and they are bound to suffer hardships. Balram suffers much humiliation as a driver. Once Balram was driving his employer and his brother to a place and his employer's brother lost one rupee. He thought that Balram had stolen it. He ordered