

Representation of Dark Aspects of India in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract: Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) has been acclaimed as an unexpected journey into a new India. The novel is set in present situation in which the writer portrays the hard reality of contemporary Indian society. He collates the rural India with urban India through satire and black humor. He brings to contrast the disparity between progressive Indian cities and regressive Indian villages. The novel is centered on Balram Halwai, the son of poor rickshaw puller, Vikram Halwai. He is the strong voice of underclass in which the subalterns, landless laborers, unemployed youths, poor auto drivers, servants, prostitutes, beggars and unprivileged figures. This paper aims to study the darker aspects of India as enumerated in this novel by Adiga along with a contrast with the light aspects of cities.

Keywords: Dark, Light, Corruption, Satire, Unemployment.

Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* has been acclaimed as an unexpected journey into a new India. The novel is set in present situation in which the writer portrays the hard reality of contemporary Indian society. He collates the rural India with urban India through satire and black humor. He brings to contrast the disparity between progressive Indian cities and regressive Indian villages. He presents the murky face of contemporary Indian society and got the Booker Prize for his novel but he was criticized by so many Indian writers. As Gouri Shankar Jha says, it is, "a bundle of nonsense" (84). He was charged with the selling of Indian poverty and social customs in the western market to get the benefit of Booker Prize. Santwana Haldar says, "The author is accused of selling an inauthentic picture of Indian poverty to the western market for coming into the limelight" (73). As Sudhir K. Arora says, Adiga "has operated India on the Western table with the English knife. No doubt, the operation is successful and for this he is appreciated by the western media which makes him forget the body of India that cries in pain to the extent that her genuine sons hear her cries even outside. He feels the pain of India in his heart, but the west has taught him only how operate, not how to cure. His condition is just like Balram who himself does not know what he has done. He fails to connect the things which confuse him like the wires in the bonnet of a car." (7) *The White Tiger* has been written in epistolary form. It consists of letters written by Balram Halwai under the pen-name 'The White Tiger', to the Chinese Premier, Mr. Jiabao, on his proposed visit to Bangalore. The novel contains seven chapters that revolve around the story of protagonist Balram Halwai and his employer Mr. Ashok. Letters narrate, "An autobiography of a half-caked Indian" (*Reflection* 78). The tone of the narrative is confessional. Through the protagonist Balram Halwai, the writer disgorges his anger, because he is not happy with the prevailing conditions in India. The purpose of Mr.

Jiabao's visit is to know the truth about Bangalore and learn how to make a few Chinese entrepreneurs. The novel is centered on Balram Halwai, the son of poor rickshaw puller, Vikram Halwai. He is the strong voice of underclass in which the subalterns, landless laborers, unemployed youths, poor auto drivers, servants, prostitutes, beggars and unprivileged figures. The underclass is the result of corrupt Indian political and bureaucratic set-up. The victims of this corrupt system are called the underclass society which constitutes 'dark India'. As Krishna Singh asserts:

The novel gives the detailed accounts of the Indian society-rural as well as urban and its various facets. Laxmangarh, Gaya, Dhanbad, Delhi and Bangalore are generic and represent the portrait of India. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, caste and culture conflicts, superstition, dowry practice, economic disparity, zamindari system and exploitation of marginal farmers and landless labourers, rise of Naxalism, corrupt education system, poor health services, tax evading racket, embittered master-servant relationship, prostitution, weakening family structure, entrepreneurial success and its fallout constitute the basic structure of Indian society which largely forms the dark image of India. (97-98)

In villages the underclass is ruled by the landlords. These poor people never raise their voice against their masters and landlords, if they do it; they have to lose their jobs. As Dashrath asserts, "The high-class Indians have no respect for their service-providers- cooks, drivers, sweepers-whatever the nature of their job may be, they just fit into one class-servants or slaves" (238). The servants have no respect in this society, they are treated like slaves but they are satisfied with their position at least they have two times meal and having shelter on their head. Balram says, "I had a covered room to sleep in. True, I had to share it with the other driver, a grim-looking fellow named Ram Prasad, and he had the nice big bed, while I had to sleep on the floor- still a covered room's and much nicer than sleeping on the road, as Kishan and I had been doing all the time we were in Dhanbad" (*The White Tiger* 67). These helpless classes have no alternate to earn money, so they remain silent and satisfied with their job-providers and bear the oppression of their masters. So the rich take benefit of their helplessness and used them like multipurpose machines. As Shilpi Saxena says, "Adiga makes a striking comment on the terrible condition of Indians drivers who have been appointed as drivers but in the country like India they have to perform every type of work" (137). Aravind Adiga feels the anguish of the servants and reveals their pain through this novel. Indian servants do all the works, inspite of that they are humiliated and tortured by their employers. Balram recites about his anguish that, "I had to heat water on the stove carry it into the courtyard, and then lift the old man's feet up one after the other and immerse them in the hot water and then massage them both gently" (*The White Tiger* 70). In big cities, there are such poor classes who come from the rural India to cities for employment but they couldn't get. They have to sleep on the roads and footpath. They poor people live like animals and look like also animals. Their filthy appearance and dirty clothes show their penury. They pick the food from garbage. They come to cities to

search the light but they remain always in darkness. As Sudhir k. Arora says:

The financially weaker people who fail even to get employment in the village come to the cities in the hope of better opportunities that will bring light into their lives but unfortunately they are more exploited than ever and are left in darkness amidst light. This is the miserable condition of the *dalits*, particularly economically weak ones who not have even enough to earn bread for their livelihood. (129)

The urban society has become modern. The rich people have immersed themselves in western culture. It is a great travesty of India in which some people don't have two times meal and the rich people spends a lot of money on wine. In this westernized culture, father and son drink wine together, "The sons would wait for father to take the first sip and say, "Ah...Whiskey. How would we survive this country without it" (*The White Tiger* 70-71). Even the women also drink in high profile society. In this modern culture, women pretend to be equal of man and drink wine. There was a time when Indian women were worshiped and called the goddess, *Laxmi*, they are known for *lajja*, but now the situation has been changed. The Indian women have lost its glory in the influence of modernization. The novelist have studied about India intensively and tried to show the real face of urban society. As Amarjeet Nayak says, "It is a novel written in the realistic mode that holds a mirror to the Indian reality, especially its ugly side" (158). In this novel, Adiga focuses only on the dark aspects of Indian society. In cities, like Delhi in which servants have to go wine shops for their masters once a week, Balram says, "If we came after eight o'clock on a weekend night to Jackpot, it was like a civil war in front of the counter" (*The White Tiger* 74). The rich lead a luxurious life, but there are some people in urban India who yearn for food. Even some helpless people have to live without food. In big cities, some poor people pick the left food from the dustbins like animals. Outwardly, urban India looks very shining. It has good roads, big mansions, everywhere lightening, and shines like European countries, but the ground reality is very harsh in urban India. The rich lead a luxury life, but the rest generation who are poor, leading a miserable life in Indian cities. Behind these big mansions, there are tiny slums which are always ignored; the residents of these slums live in the darkness in these shining cities. A large part of India lives in slums; they don't have proper residence and leading their life like pigs. Indian government and politicians ignore them. As Savitri Tripathi reports:

Slums become the topic of discussion during election months and rests of the months are only for the rich and the politicians. All these are facts, and the young writer Aravind Adiga dares to depicts the real situation of dark India. This dark side needs light. His novel is fact not fiction. Attacking on the false commitment of politicians during election and daily problem of poor. (202)

Indian government and politicians pay attention in the favour of rich and poor's problems are always ignored. Therefore the rich are becoming richer and the poor are poorer. In urban India, there is such poor class who has no shelter to reside; they have to live without roofs. They spend

their life on footpaths, railway stations, bus stands, under the bridges and flyovers. They have to beg alms for their surviving. They are totally illiterate and don't have the knowledge of good and bad. Their only aim seems to devour their stomach with food. They produce a numbers of children and don't provide them education. They don't know the meaning of education and there is no one, who teaches them. The government doesn't pay attention on the worse condition on these people. Only election times, they are promised by the politician to provide the shelter, when elections over, they forget everything. Their filthy and dirty appearance like animals, tarnish the glory of Indian cities. This class is ignored by everyone; and they people are not treated like human beings, but they are also a part of Indian society, that how can one say that India is great and progressive. As Sunita Agarwal asserts:

India is emerging as a prominent power in the globalization world. Indian economy, science and technology, its democratic political system, its social and cultural heritage, its social kinship- all speak of its rapid progress. The glitter and glamour of the nation shines on the world map. But behind this bright shine there are still billions of people who are deprived of the basic necessities of life, who are leading a life of stark penury, who are illiterate and exploited and oppressed, who are treated like animals leading a life of servitude, who are discriminated on the basis of caste and class. They have a different world altogether and they always aspire to rise in their life and cherish a desire to be treated at least like human being. (149)

The urban society is entirely different from rural society. In villages, people's thinking is very conservative; they are illiterate so their thinking is confined yet. They believe on caste and religions rigidly. Inter- caste and inter- religion marriages are not accepted, who break the rule, they are banished from the society but in urban area, people don't bother. In this novel, Mr. Ashok did inter-religion marriage with Pinky, Christian by religion but society had accepted her. Stork's servants converse, "She is a Christian, did you know? No way. Yes! And he married her? They married in America. When we Indian go there, we lose all respect for caste" (*The White Tiger* 76). In middle class and rich society, dog are treated like human beings, they pamper and fondle them. They wash their dogs and take care like their own child. Stork servants say, "There were two white Pomeranians in the house- Cuddles and Puddles. The rich expect their dogs to be treated like humans, you see- they expect their dogs to pampered, and walked, and petted, and even washed!" (*The White Tiger* 78). But the same house, their servants are treated like dogs. They are exploited and humiliated at every step by their employers. As A.K. Chaturvedi asserts, "Treating servants as inferior to dogs is the norm in the houses of the rich" (34). It looks mocking, that in India, animals are treated like human beings and servants and poor are treated like animals. The dog's value is higher than the poor people in high profile society. In this novel, Stork shouts on his servants, "Don't pull the chain so hard! They're worth more than you are!" (*The White Tiger* 78). The increasing population creates so many problems in urban India. The writer fleshes on the rotten image of Indian cities where traffic system is very chaotic. Nobody follows the traffic rules. The traffic police is very

corrupt, it takes bribe and leave those people who breaks the traffic rules. The old vehicles, which are unable to drive, also run on the roads. These old motors release a lot of smoke which becomes the cause of air pollution. People have to waste a lot of time in traffic jams. Mr. Ashok says, "You can't drive in India, just look at this traffic. No one follows any rules- people run across the road like crazy-look-look at that..." (*The White Tiger* 81). To see the chaotic traffic system of Indian cities, Mr. Ashok says, "If I drive here, I'll go completely mad" (*The White Tiger* 81). Delhi is very congested city where everything is very hectic. The roads overlap and it is very difficult to drive there. In the beginning, Balram was caught in mistake by Mukesh (Ashok's brother), he says, "Take a left from the fountain you idiot! Don't you know how to get to the house from here?" (*The White Tiger* 122). Balram was astonished to see the corruption of that city. He noticed that an honest man can't survive there. The police are very corrupt, it takes bribe to people. Balram says, "The main thing to know about Delhi is that the roads are good, and the people are bad. The police are totally rotten. If they see you without a seat belt, you'll have to bribe them a hundred rupees" (*The White Tiger* 124). In this novel, the writer portrays the heinous face of corrupt Indian police. The government appoints police for the security of people but it does opposite. Police's duty is to control over the corruption but they work for the corrupt politicians. They keep good relations with politicians, when they caught indulge in corruption, these politicians defend them and when politicians charged with any case, police help them. So it seems that corruption is ineradicable in India. Politics is the main root of corruption in India. It is like incurable diseases, as Balram writes in letter to Mr. Jaibao, "These are the three main diseases of this country sir: Typhoid, Cholera and election fever. This last one is the worst" (*The White Tiger* 98). The politicians have pervaded corruption all around in country. At the time of elections, the leaders approach the poor public for votes and keep promises with them for the sake of winning, when they win, they forget everything. The politicians of our country are corrupt a lot; they spend a lot of money on elections. The rich give them financial assistance at election time. When they win the elections, the rich take benefits from them and made illegal works from them. These politicians pretend to be loyal for nation but they have a numbers of criminal cases on their head. As Balram reports:

You see, a total of ninety-three criminal cases for murder, rape, grand larceny, gun-smuggling, pimping and many other such minor offences-are pending against the Great Socialist and his ministers at the present moment. Not easy to get convictions when the judges are judging in Darkness, yet three convictions have been delivered, and three of the ministers are currently in jail but continue to be ministers. The Great Socialist himself is said to have embezzled one billion rupees from the Darkness, and transferred that money into a bank account in a small beautiful country in Europe full of white people and black money. (*The White Tiger* 97-98)

It is a great travesty that the criminals fight elections in India. In this novel, the great socialist pretends to be social worker, but in reality he is very wicked person and he has a number of criminal cases on his head.

Despite of that he is fighting the election. Indian politics is depended upon the poor people, because the large part of Indian voters is poor and illiterate and it is easy to buy those people. The poor and illiterate don't know the value of their votes. Their only aim is to get the food anyhow. The politicians delude these people and get the votes. Even some ministers bribe the corrupt bureaucrats and policemen, in lieu of that they work for the politicians. Balram says:

One morning I saw a policeman writing a slogan on the wall outside the temple with a red paintbrush. Do you want Good Roads, Clean water, Good Hospitals? Then vote out the Great Socialist! (*The White Tiger* 98).

In this corrupt Indian society, the rich people support the leaders at election time, when they win, the rich take benefits from them. Indian politics has been become the game of only rich and corrupt people. A poor and honest person can't contest the election in India, because elections need a big amount of money to buy the people. In election time politicians distribute blankets, wine and mobile phones to allure the people and earn votes. Fraud votes are also casted in India. As Balram says, "This happens every time, at every election in the Darkness" (*The White Tiger* 100). India is called a secular country in which the people of every religion live. But, here people are recognized by their caste and religion; they hate each other and quarrel for their religion. In this novel, Ram Prasad was Stork's old servant. His real name was Mohammad-Mohammad, and he was Muslim. But he had to disguise his identification to get the job to feed his starving family. Balram says, "...this Mohammad -Mohammad was a poor, honest, hardworking Muslim, but he wanted a job at the home of an evil, prejudiced landlord who didn't like Muslims- so just to get a job and feed his starving family, he claimed to be a Hindu! And took the name of Ram Prasad" (*The White Tiger* 109). He was a *namaji* Muslim, but due to the fear of society, he had to conceal his real identification. This is the real face of urban Indian society, where man has to disguise his religion to get the job. Ram Prasad had to leave the job when Balram came to know the truth. Ram Prasad slinked from there and Balram got the place of number one driver. He was Hindu so he got the chance to go to Delhi with Mr. Ashok and with his wife Pinky. To conclude, it can be said that the novel gives the detailed account of Indian society rural as well as urban and its various facets. India has its two names: 'India' and 'Bharat', likewise it has two faces also: 'India of light' and 'India of dark'. The writer presents both sides, but especially focuses on the 'dark side'. As Savitri Tripathi says, "India is developing but 'Bharat' needs better education and facilities regarding the roles and rights. There is problem of population which needs revolution. Poor India doesn't care for the better education of their children" (202). Rural India (Bharat) is very backward yet. It has a great need of development. But urban India has been developed; the urban society has become civilized, it knows the value of education. Indian cities are progressive and look like European cities. But if we see the dark side of Indian cities, it is also some dark aspects which tarnish the glory of Indian cities. Delhi, the capital of India, looks very progressive and shining metropolitan city, but inward this shining, there is darkness

which is always ignored. Balram asserts:

Remember, Mr. Premier, that Delhi is the capital of not one but two countries – two India. The light and Darkness both flow into Delhi. Gurgaon, where Mr. Ashok lived, is the bright modern end of the city, and this place old Delhi, is the other end. Full of things that the modern world forgot all about – rickshaw, old stone building and Muslims. (*The White Tiger* 251-252).

Indian urban society is progressive, developed and have changed a lot, but it has forgotten its own culture and has colored itself in westernization. It has become self-centered. Behind the shining of urban India, there are some dark aspects which blemish the glory of India. Poverty, corruption, bribery, begging, violence, exploitation, the discrimination between weak and strong, caste, religions, are such aspects which are richly prevalent in urban India. The writer reminds us the old image of India when it was called the richest nation on the earth, “See this country, in its days of greatness, when it was the richest nation on earth, was like a zoo. A clean, well kept, orderly zoo. Everyone in this place, everyone happy” (*The White Tiger* 63). But, now India has very bad image in the world and the novelist has very minutely observed it through this debut novel.

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