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The New Indian Renaissance: An Exploration of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract--The image of contemporary India had become so popular in the media, and its achievements had become so widely publicized, that the plight of the great majority of the poor, both in rural and urban India, went unnoticed. India's economic, intellectual, and scientific development have earned it a new label in the country's major narratives. This picture of a prosperous India distorts the plight of the poor and the socio-economic issues that impede the country's advancement. *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga's Booker Prize-winning book, is about the shifting status of the fiercely contested "proletarian self." The proletarian self is as much mandated as imprinted in and recorded by human and metropolitan geographies, which have been termed the "New India" as a socio-historically established idea, one would argue. This article explains how land ownership, poverty, a poorly equipped school system, inadequate health facilities, government corruption, issues of contemporary society and moral degradation have exacerbated the poor's miseries and slowed the nation's progress.

Keywords--Contemporary, India, Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger*, New-India, Proletarian self.

Introduction

India is a diverse country with multiple languages, ethnicities, social organizations, classes, and traditions. With its regular and openly contested elections, it is also the world's biggest functioning democracy. India's cultural and philosophical legacy stretches back to the Aryan civilization, which produced its deepest impressions on society. Every Indian has a store of myth ingrained in his mind as part of his cultural heritage; a sense of the past that he readily adheres to even now. In addition to its variety, today's India may be described as a hybrid of two India's: rural and urban. With its contemporary industry, national politics and foreign policy, national media, major universities, enterprises, and scientific and technical advances, urban globalized India is always evolving. The countryside, on the other hand, has mostly remained unaltered, plagued by unemployment, illiteracy, misery, and low living conditions, but blinded by ideology. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is an intriguing depiction of the two India's. Aravind Adiga is among the few contemporary Indian novelists who has taken on the current challenges of economic oppression, political destitution, extreme poverty, and spiritual subservience of the poor that is occurring in India behind the veil of infrastructure, economic, political, and technological advancement. He has taken a twenty-first-century stride in bringing to light the terrible suffering of both the rural and the urban impoverished communities against the propaganda pictures of a happy and prosperous contemporary India by addressing the socioeconomic issues from inside. To accomplish so, he first persuaded the readers that there are two Indias: "two countries in one: a Land of Light, and a Land of Darkness," and this is evident even in metropolitan settings that should have been free of the traditional social and cultural dominance of the ruling middle class over the oppressed. Adiga is concerned with living in the "Land of Darkness." It portrays both "the suffering of the impoverished class" and how "the wealthy, legislators, police officers, and upper-class individuals enjoy their lives." The writer attempted to demonstrate that the poor are constantly exploited due to their lack of financial might through the characterization of Balram. Balram Halwai came from a "shadowy background" and had to fight "affluent middle-class intellectuals and bureaucrats" to survive. Adiga highlighted the affluent and the impoverished in rural India as well as sophisticated places like Delhi and Bangalore in this novel. The novel shows the readers how, from a journalistic standpoint, recent economic and technical development has had little impact on the poor's quality of life, and that the gap between the affluent and the poor is widening day by day. Balram described how he rose from humble beginnings in the village of Laxmangarh to become a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore in the novel. The story shows "the sentiments, emotions, ambition, sufferings, and seething rage and hate of the till now hidden poor" as a result of this process. The history of Laxmangarh is the history of the affluent class of society's enslavement and oppression. Out of his hate for the landowners, Balram, one of the downtrodden, gave them symbolic names such as the Wild Boar, the Buffalo, the Stork, and the Raven. He believes that these animal names accurately reflect the landlords' actual qualities. Authored in 2008 and cast in modern India, outlining events that can be related to the current political set-up, *The White Tiger* lays bare the socio-political world of everyday India: rather, a dark side of India. Adiga expresses his worry about the Evolutionary struggle the poor are involved in here against the backdrop of two conflicting images of India: the extremely

sophisticated India of the affluent and the fragile India of the poor. Religious myths and traditions are used by the rich's hegemonic ideologies to prepare the impoverished for exploitation. Rural India in Halwai's world is a realm of darkness, a land of misery, corruption, fraud, illiteracy, childslavery, despair, and suffering. Aravind Adiga painted a vivid picture of the country's educational system. Balram began his primary school education in his rural school. The instructor recognized his potential and gave him the name Balram. His parents didn't think it was important to give him a formal name. Munna, which simply means "boy," was his nickname. A teacher praised him as intelligent and clever, and a school inspector referred to him as a "White Tiger." Adiga's India and its people, with their extreme behavioral tendencies, are identified in the study as a result of social conditioning conducted on them in the bureaucratically structured socio-cultural India. The literature is viewed as a product of its society, which has a duality of its own; the two opposing perceptions of India. *The White Tiger* is a reflection on the sometimes-disguised absurdities of the Indian socio-cultural setup, and its potential dangers. *The White Tiger* is set in Adiga's India, which is a nation of poverty, corruption, power structures, and stratification. The novel raises serious concerns about the state of democracy in the world's greatest democracy. The essay "De-Democratization by William Ryan Brown and the Novels of Aravind Adiga" examines the de-democratic status of the country depicted by Adiga. In Adiga's India, Ryan Brown discovers that slavery is more prevalent than democracy. Brown claims that the system of enslavement identified by Balram is "The Great Indian Rooster Coop," and that his liberation from the coop is merely a mirage since democracy has de-democratized it. Ryan Brown claims that Adiga's two books, *The Last Man in Tower* and *The White Tiger* work in tandem to show the phenomena of de-democratization occurring in contemporary liberal democracies" in his study. He proposes that resistance be used to clear the path for genuine democracy. Ryan discovers Adiga's master metaphor of the rooster coop, which is a critique of India's political system. Adiga's portrayal of Indian politics and polity as a place of corruption and gloom was widely panned both domestically and internationally. In his description of Pinky Madam's hit-and-run disaster, the writer had subtly hinted at the deteriorating state of the law and justice in Delhi. The story highlighted the nature and scope of Delhi's corruption. The tale immersed readers in the Dhanbad mining industry and how wealthy businessman such as Mr. Thakur Ramdev makes huge sums of money by defrauding the government of taxes. He has used the metaphor of "darkness" to describe India's corruption. Cars, highways, periods, individuals, and places associated with corruption have long been characterized as dark. Aravind Adiga tried to represent the socioeconomic realities of Modern India based on rural communities and urban squalor in the novel, to assist India's reconstruction through more thorough development initiatives. This project aims to examine the pictures of modern India, its socio-cultural system, and the survival status of the country's marginalized masses as shown in the book, as well as to examine how social and economic variables impact an individual and how they are addressed. The subsequent anomie in *The White Tiger*'s social structure is clearly shown by social disintegration, lawlessness, and the breakdown of cultural and normative frameworks, giving emphasis to materialistic objectives and leading to abnormal behaviors.

Globalization and the Society Inequity

India is well-known for its diverse culture, flora and fauna. In the name of religion, marriage, culture, and beliefs, there were many age-old beliefs in the society. But in this “new India,” we can see a significant shift in all of these age-old taboos, with one of the main reasons being

Americanization. What exactly is this Americanization? Endowing a person or thing with American characteristics or ethnicity. Many changes occur as a result of the Americanization of India, and as a result, people are freer than in the past. Even with this Americanization, we cannot claim that everyone’s life is better. The poor are still at the mercy of the rich and privileged. As technology advances, we can see that poverty is becoming more prevalent. The poor work day and night to improve their quality of life. All of these things occur as a result of globalization. Globalization has reshaped our current societal environment, and this has had a greater impact on Indian heritage. Aravind Adiga’s novel *The White Tiger* addresses all of these contemporary issues. The effects of Americanization can be seen in each of the characters. When anyone adopts this concept, they will begin to think and behave in a westernized manner. It is clear from the protagonist, Balram. He was born into a poor family, and being born into such a family never dampens his spirit, but rather illuminates it, and he faces all the adversities in his life and strives to become a well-known businessman in Bangalore. He had to overcome many obstacles in his life. He was the son of a rickshaw driver, and his mother died when he was a child. He was later sent to school because his father had high hopes for him. However, due to family circumstances and poverty, he was forced to discontinue his studies, and he later went to work in a teashop. This is something we see in an Indian society where the families are not very stable. The novel vividly paints a picture of Indian society and how globalization affects it through a series of incidents. Adiga’s novel primarily depicts the changes that have occurred and will occur in India as a result of the effects of globalization. Even Balarama’s attitude of worrying about what will happen tomorrow or worrying about the future is related to western culture. Pinky madam represents Americanization in this novel. She is an American who returns to India after marrying Ashoke. They were both studying in America, and she was living a western lifestyle. Even after living in India for a while, she longs to return to her native land and constantly complains about her life in India. So, in order to make her feel at home in the United States, Ashoke takes her to Gurgaon, where everything is Americanized, with large malls, American Express, and even offices of major American corporations. Ashok even believes that with advancement in every sector, India will be an America in ten years.

As a result, Ashok was taken aback by the rapid development, and he wished to remain in India. He believes that, rather than returning to India, he could accomplish things there due to the country’s technological advancement. Corruption is a major problem in today’s globalized world, and it affects Indian culture as well. Balram, Adiga’s protagonist in *The White Tiger*, reveals corruption in all aspects of Indian government. The corruption in the educational institution, where the teacher Krishna stole money allocated by the government for school lunches and uniforms, which he justified by claiming he had not paid for six months. Another incident occurred when Balram took his father to a nearby

hospital and discovered that there was no doctor available. This is due to a corrupt scheme that allows doctors to earn extra money at private hospitals while neglecting the village hospital. Balram's father died on the hospital floor after failing to see a doctor. Those with power and money can easily escape even from murder. For example, Pinky madam told Balram one night after getting drunk that she would drive, but on the way, she hit a boy and he died. The next day, however, Balram was asked to sign a paper stating that he is responsible for the hit-and-run accident. This is how people in positions of power can change the laws to suit their purposes. It is quite obvious in a country like India that the oppressed are always crushed by the upper class's supremacy. Because of fear, the poor were always huddled in the shadows, unable to emerge and raise their voices. The rich cannot imagine a life other than the one they have, and they have such a life because of the presence of the poor, so the rich cannot have a life apart from the poor. They are always dependent on the poor, so they always wish that these people were poor so that they could make the best use of the poor to work for them. Adiga depicts this dark period of Indian history in his novel. The disparity between rich and poor people is a global issue. The rich treat the poor like animals, forcing them to toil for nothing in return; they are not compensated for their efforts. The main character in the novel, Balram, is from the village of Laxmangarh, which is portrayed by Adiga as a very poor place where people live a miserable life. People were oppressed during the nineteenth century, and conditions have not improved since the country's independence. The rulers have changed, but the oppression and enslavement of the poor has not. Caste and class were important in the past because of their diversity, and a hierarchical structure was in order. Since independence, there have been two castes: "men with big bellies" and "men with small bellies," with "only two destinies: eat or be eaten up." The lower classes emerge from the shadows to the city in search of light, but it remains a fantasy for the rest of their lives. Despite living in the light, they are forced to live a life of darkness in cities. They are constantly manipulated for the sake of belly by wealthy people who have no compassion for their plight. The novelist attempts to depict their pitiful and miserable situation when forced to live beneath massive bridges and city streets. The poor in the village of Laxmangarh work for the landlords. So, when Balram was hired as a driver for the Storks, they inquired about his family, because if he did anything against them, his family would be in danger. Because of such reasons, the poor who work for this landlord may not do anything wrong. These poor are like roosters in a coop; like the roosters, they wait for their turn to be exploited and accept it without protest. Balram's overview of modern India, which has been liberated from the old caste system but has transformed into a wilderness where people either eat or are eaten, is reflected in the landlords' animal names. Even without the roles prescribed by caste, one either rises to enormous wealth and becomes reliant on others, or falls to absolute poverty and is duped. Whatever development occurs, the inborn attitude within each individual will not die with the passage of time; rather, it will continue to grow day by day. In the novel, when a poor man tries to enter a shopping mall, he is stopped by the guard because the man is wearing slippers, which he considers to be a symbol of lower class.

Societal Evolution of Culture

Adiga manages to influence his audience effortlessly. He reaches the reader's heart by using the voice of the Indian locale. Adiga presents the Indian society as a concrete system and one of the main issues put forth is the functioning of a defunct society where patronage of those in power and material gain are interwoven and thus defining the arena of the affluent class. The most striking issue is the way Balram pays off the authorities to overlook his crimes, i.e., murder and theft and is able to successfully start an enterprise pointing to the strange phenomenon of a dysfunctional civilization. He paints a demeaning and vulgar picture of the Indian society that suffocates the youth who are aspiring for a transparency that will redefine the social norms. Balram who is excluded in his quest for affluence is the representative of the new Indian middle class his journey a routine of the thousands of the impoverished youth to reach the upper echelons of the society. His characters project the decadent values of the social set up that which shape the coming generations. He delineates excess of riches in the hands of few and the underlying dangers of a majority of underprivileged in a society. The rapid rise of the Indian Economy in the late nineties and the first decade of the century resulted in the rise of the individual wealth. It is a reality that this profited the affluent individuals. This process of material magnification was connected with the echelons of power in Delhi. While in Delhi Balram experiences the two kinds of India the people like himself who becomes the perverse and those like Ashok who are the predators. This upward movement of affluence and emergence of the upper middle class resulted in the migration of lots of deprived Indians from the poorer states of Central India seeking employment. These downtrodden laymen fulfilled the demand for menial services for the upward bound affluent Indian connected with the economic bloom. Unfortunately, these people did not earn enough to escape their impoverished life and were forced to live a vicious cycle of deprivation and servitude. The protagonist was definitely an exception and had mastered the qualities of observation, manipulation, planning and execution which served his purpose to break the social set up he was born and bred in. He tries to sort out the apparent malfunction of the society and the larger democratic process of India. It is not possible to condone his mode of obtaining success, but he also represents the people who are trained to just obey and serve without recognizing or nurturing the 'inherent qualities' of these individuals aspiring to attain a better life. The dynamics of Indian wealth and politics is described starting from the allies of darkness to the corridors of power in the capital. The narrative interweaves the lives of Balram and Ashok each a spokesperson for the impoverished and affluent respectively. Globalization remolded the mindset of the rich and poor alike the working class of India is subjected to more and more suppression in the name of globalization. On the one side, people struggle without money and on the other side, people are confused as to how to spend their money. India's post liberalization is the playground where Balram perfected his game and eventually succeeds in escaping the "Rooster coop". Adiga enters the realms of the shadow class who are in the service of the elite and successfully portrays the journey of one such invisible man from rags to riches. Balram, *The White Tiger*, chooses not have friends or sentiments. He is the "working class hero" (*The White Tiger* 264) who is in fact the tiger which cannot be caged. He concludes that collective will must be abandoned so that individual will can triumph. He evades the systemic

oppression and becomes a contributing member to the exploitation of India's vulnerable classes. Balram metamorphoses into the replica of Ashok after he masters his game. The novel is limited to articulating India's insufficient politics from an individual perspective. Halwai's individuality is synonymous with western notions of selfish interests and the value of the individual citizen. But the emergence of Indian individualism from a secular and democratic society can be traced in the growth of Balram. The counter-cultural currents of consumerism and capitalist regimes raise important philosophical questions of redefinition. Non-identity becomes a form of empowerment. Balram forsakes his true identity and adorned a new one to start his life in Bangalore. He is not the subaltern, the voiceless, and the poor but Halwai the new member of the master's class. As Adiga says: "Balram's anger is not an anger that the reader should participate in entirely—it can seem at times like the rage you might feel if you were in Balram's place—but at other times you should feel troubled by it, certainly" (DiMartino, 2008).

Conclusion

Adiga's treatment of the individual and the collective reveals a writer who has made great leaps in synthesizing many disparate issues into a single discourse. Adiga has made a value statement about a notion of identity he prefers and which he prescribes for India's welfare through his works. Understanding this dynamic between the rupee economy and the dollar economy is key to the future of India's markets, political regimes, and national identity. Through his work he paints the inception of natives and shows the influences of regal rule on India which were diverse, contradictory and hostile. Adiga speaks for the essential feelings of a man whose life is a blend of weakness, irritation, protest anguish and anxiety. It is a combination of usual Indian lives and life of numerous layers and all of the layers are intimately related with the others thus marking the dark side of the Indian renaissance.

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