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POSTCOLONIAL INDIA AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT: VOICING THE SUBALTERNS IN ARVIND ADIGA'S "THE WHITE TIGER"

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ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to examine the essence of Colonialism and Underdeveloped and to determine how both played a role to subverted 'the third world' and its civilians within. It will also study the psyche of the coloniser and the colonised. Colonial period had been a very traumatic experience for the natives. The colonisers treated them as conquered. They imposed their liking and disliking on the natives. The colonisers devaluated, disempowered, appropriated, and humiliated the colonised. The third world became a place of merry making and exploitation. The Occident developed but they willingly exploited the East to remain underdeveloped. The effect of this Underdevelopment created the groups of landlords and subalterns in the third world and India. Though the English left India in 1947 but their place was occupied by landlords. They started exploiting the subalterns. Adiga's, character Balram Halwai is a victim of this system. But Adiga does not confine his characters like Anglophone novelists. He gives them opportunity to challenge the existing system of suppression and exploitation.

KEYWORDS: Colonialism, underdevelopment, postcolonialism, the third world, landlords, subaltern.

INTRODUCTION

The root word of Postcolonialism is Colonialism. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) colonialism is:

A settlement in a new country... A body of people who settle in a new locality, forming a community subject to or connected with their parent state; the community so formed, consisting of the original settlers and their descendants and successors, as long as the connection with the parents state is kept up.(Loomba 7)

Hence, colonialism indicates the total control of the colonisers on the resources and lands of the colonised. Frantz Fanon in his magnum opus work *The Wretched of The Earth* writes, "The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich."(Loomba 25) The difference between the Occident and the Orient was etched out on ground of black and white, rich and poor culture, belief, tradition etc. Highlighting the effect of colonialism on the mind and psyche of the colonised Fanon comments, "Colonised people as not simply those whose labour has been appropriated but those in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of it's local cultural originality." (Loomba 26)

Colonialism expanded the contact between the East and the West. It also promoted the exchange of ideas and images. In result, the West developed stereotypes about the East. They treated themselves to be superior, rational, civilized, intellectual, educated while the Orient to be inferior, irrational, savage, illiterate, snake charmers, cannibals, wild, black, nude, violent, sensual, ill-mannered, and barbaric. Hence, the Orient was to be 'other' and a perpetual threat to disrupt and defile the Occident's civilised society. Accordingly these stereotype became the stepping stones for the Occident to humiliate and to lodge the injustice on the Orient. Gilman writes:

Stereotype involves a reduction of image and ideas to a simple and manageable form, rather than simple ignorance or lack of 'real' knowledge , it is a method of processing information. The function of stereotype is to perpetuate an artificial sense of difference between 'self' and 'other' (Loomba 55)

The Orient took time to understand this discrimination and to give a befitting reply. Nehru in his legendary narration of Postcoloniality writes: "A moment comes , which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new; when an age ends; and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance (Gandhi 6). These influences were visible in Indian literature too.

Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is criticised for apocryphal portrayal of its characters. It is set in Post colonial India. The novel moves ahead Anglophone Novels. It talks about the memory of atrocities imposed upon the natives during company reign. Ashcroft et al's comment become important here:

The Post-Colonial text is always a complex and hybridized formation. It is inadequate to read it either as a reconstruction of pure traditional values or as simply foreign and

intrusive. The reconstruction of 'pure' cultural value is always conducted within a radically altered dynamic of power relations. (Ashcroft et al. 108-109)

In most of the Anglophone novels the subalterns are presented as victims, suppressed, punished. Adiga presents subalterns who change their status from poverty to an entrepreneur. Toral Gajrawala states:

The novel breaks with realistic traditions of representing poverty and backwardness in Indian Anglophone Literature. Instead it possesses a challenge to progressive traditions by framing the main characters revolt in Fanonian terms which challenges both the tradition of leftist movement politics as well as the liberal discourse of rights and privileges." (Gajrawala 21)

Adiga's character Balram Halwai is highly influenced with globalisation. Halwai, represents a voice who is capable of exploring the world and deciding his own life and fate. He is not Bakha of Mulk Raj Anand or Dukhi of Mistry's *A Fine Balance* who will bear the humiliation but one who stands for his rights and may go to any extreme even to murder, to achieve his goal.

Sankaran Krishna in his book *Globalization and Postcolonialism* points out that the Underdevelopment approach raises many questions for unequal development and global inequality as he appropriately elucidates that a handful nations in the West swelled their prosperity and affluence and became developed on the cost of, "Conquest of the New World and the colonisation of Asia and Africa." (Krishna 16) The Underdevelopment school of thought states, "The third world was not undeveloped during the centuries in which countries like Britain, The United States or Germany achieved their take-offs." (Krishna 16) Moreover, the colonized new world, Asia and Africa were, "Actively Underdeveloped during that time." (Krishna 16) The root cause of Underdevelopment in Asia and Africa was colonialism as Krishna states, "Underdeveloped society is one that was part of the world economic system of trade and exchange, but in a subservient position and exploited in ways that primarily benefited the Western Colonial powers." (Krishna 16) Colonialism left the subalterns underdeveloped, only landlords developed, "Although a certain degree of economic growth and prosperity did occur as part of underdevelopment, it was confined to narrow enclaves and benefited only the elite classes, while leaving the rest of society worse off." (Krishnan 16)

It becomes unavoidable to discuss the impact of colonialism and landlords on the third world and its common people. Both played villains role, in Adiga's *The White Tiger* the villains are not the English but the landlords of the native land. They are carrying forward the image of master, ruler, dictator, and oppressor. Kim Knott comments:

There were great hopes that, after Indian independence, the secular government of India would change...through law. Such change has been disappointingly slow and even when new Acts were brought in, they proved difficult to enforce against the weight of religious

and social tradition and the force of rested interest. (Knott 91)

Balram Halwai is born of base stocks. He is a son of a rickshaw puller. He is 'half baked' in education and passing his life in socio economic disparity. Education is the prominent tool to change the society. Swami Vivekanand states, " The only service to be done for our lower class is to give them education, to develop their lost individuality...Now if the mountain does not come to Mohammad, Mohammad must go to mountain. If the poor boy can not come to education, education must go to him." (Tattwavidanand 60-61) Though his father is illiterate but he was "a man with a plan" (Adiga 27) He could have served the landlords of his village Laxmangargh but he chose to pull rickshaw and remain free from their slavery. He had been humiliated all his life for being illiterate and poor. He says, "My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine ... should live like a man." (Adiga 30)

The landlords have total control the resources of Lxmangargh. People of the village cannot even breath freely without paying any cost to them. Halwai describes that there are four landlords in the village and they have been named for their peculiar qualities of exploitations. The first is Stork who, " owned the river... and he took a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman in the river and a toll from every boatman who crossed the river" (Adiga 24-25) The second one is his brother Wild Boar. He " owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangargh. If you wanted to work on those lands , you had to bow down to his feet , and touch the dust under his slippers.(Adiga 25) The third one is the Raven, he, " Owned the worst land ... and took a cut from the goatherds who went up there to gaze with their flocks.(Adiga 25) And the fourth one is the Buffalo and he was the greediest among the four, " He had eaten up the rickshaws and the roads. So if you ran a rickshaw... You had to pay him his feed –one-third of whatever you earned, no less."(Adiga 25) Four of them have collectively exploited and drained out the hard worked earnings of the villagers.

The people of Laxmangargh are left with very less choices to select. Either stay in the village and be exploited by these landlords or migrate from the village. In result there was a bulk migration from Laxmangargh to cities. Halwai describes, "Each year the men in the village ... Went to the station and rushed into the trains- packing the inside, hanging from the railings, climbing onto the roofs- and went to Delhi, Calcutta and Dhanbad to find work." (Adiga 26)

The rich underdeveloped the poor, and poor underdeveloped each other.Halwai points out the loot of government programmes meant for the poor boys:

A government programme gave every boy three roti yellow daal and pickles at lunch time. But we never ever saw rotis, yellow daal, or pickles, and everyone knew why: The school teacher had stolen our lunch money ... Once a truck came into the school with uniforms that the government had sent for us...But a week later they turned up for sale in the neighbouring village. (Adiga 33)

There is a quest in the heart and mind of Halwai's parents. They want to be free from the exploitation of the landlords. Unfortunately they could not sail out of this atrocious umbrella. However they want their son Halwai to make it happen. They send Halwai to school to study. Though the English have gone, their memory of exploitation remains with Indians, in both concrete and abstract shape. Black Fort is one of the concrete shape that reminds them double exploitation - the English and the native landlords. Though the English have gone their place of exploitation of the weak is occupied by the Landlords and Shukars. Balram states, "India, has never been free." (Adiga 21) He comments further, "First the Muslims, then the British bossed us around. 1947 the British left, but only a moron would think that we became free then." (Adiga 22) Halwai is not scared of the Black Fort. He wants and tries to climb on it. Halwai's grandmother Kusum treats it ill omen. Because it was prohibited to go to near to it. Trying to enter or to enter Black Fort was a symbol of disrupting or challenging the hierarchy established since ages and generations, "Now the foreigners have long abandoned the Black Fort, and a tribe of monkeys occupied it," (Adiga 22)

It had been very challenging for Halwai to climb on the Black Fort. He had face innumerable hurdles to reach on the Fort's top, "I swam through the pond, walk up the hill, went into the doorway, and entered the Black Fort for the first time...Putting my foot on the wall, I looked down on the village from there." (Adiga 41-42) Halwai is born in Post- colonial, independent India. The government is expected to provide the basic facilities to its civilians without any discrimination. However, these expectations do not exist on the ground. Halwai, writes to the Premier of China, "India is two countries in one; an 'India of Light' and an 'India of Darkness'." India of Light stands for elites, capitalists, industrialists, sahukar's and landlords while the 'India of Darkness' stands for the suppressed, marginal, labours and subalterns. Adiga metaphorically compares the 'India of Darkness' to lotuses and lilies while the 'India of Light' to water buffalo. The landlords are eating to the subalterns as the water buffalo is eating to the lotuses and lilies.

'India of Lights' is enjoying all advantages while the 'India of Darkness' is cut of even, "Drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy or punctuality." (Adiga 4) The level of living standard and their poverty, misery can be guessed from Halwai's Statement upon his mother's death, "My mother's body had been wrapped from head to toe in saffron silk cloth...I don't think she had ever had such a fine thing to wear in her life." (Adiga 16) Health and hygiene of the children too are scary, "Children- too lean and short for their age, and with oversize heads from which vivid eyes shine, like the guilty conscience of the government of India." (Adiga 20)

Due to the lack of proper education and employment the villagers like Kishan are trapped in the hands of Sahukar's and landlords. To narrate the plight of the these people Adiga uses the metaphor of Rooster Coop. Halwai states:

Go to Delhi, behind the Jama Masjid and look at the way they keep chickens there in the

market. Hundred of pale hens and brightly coloured roosters, stuffed lightly into wire-mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other, jostling just for breathing space, the whole cage giving off a horrible stench- the stench of terrified , feathered flesh. On the modern desk above this coop sits a grining young butcher, showing off the flesh and organs of a recently chopped – up chicken, still oleaginous with a coating of dark blood. The roosters in the coop smells the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. (Adiga 173)

The metaphor of coop, chicken and butcher can be seen in Indian society. Lena Khor writes, "In this extended metaphor, the young the butcher represents the rich, while the hens and roosters represent the poor." (Khor 46). Moreover, "Both the butcher and the chickens are aware that one is profiting from the life blood of the other but neither attempts to change the situation." (Khor 46) Both chickens and underdeveloped are fighting too much among themselves to be in position to change the situation and the rich landlords, sahumars and leaders are fattening their belly and want the situation to remain the same forever. This is what the method in which the Rooster Coop works, poor are treated like chickens, like animals and contrary to it stands the butcher, an image of cruelty and harshness. He is getting richer on the cost of chickens life and blood. The landlords – water Buffalo, the Raven, the Stork and Wild Boar all have applied the same kind of exploitation, cruelty and insensitivity to become rich against illiterate and poor villagers. Khor adds, " and thus it is their destiny to fatten the rich as labour in the same way that chickens feed human beings literally." (Khor 47)

Halwai describes that 99.9 per cent Indians are caught in the Rooster Coop and they have acclimatised themselves accordingly. They are so processed that have stopped rebelling or raising their voice for their own right. They have become mentally paralysed. The mind of these 99.9 have become so dull, numb and reluctant that if they find suitcase full of money, they will not use it for their uplift but they will call to the police and will return it to them, because the Rooster Coop works upon their mind.

Never before in human history have so few owed so much to so many, Mr. Jiabao. A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 per cent – as strong, as talented , as intelligent in every way – to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hand and he will throw it back at you with a curse. (Adiga 176)

Adiga's Rooster Coop seems to be the replica of Krishna's theory of "developed" west on the underdevelopment of the "third world". In colonial period the Occident controlled the assets of the Orient and the same kind of exploitation was imposed by the landlords on poor. They applied multiple tools that is represented by Rooster Coop. The jails of Delhi and other cities are full of full of drivers because the responsibility of accident committed by the rich was shifted on

any poor driver. The driver was offered a handsome money and family security for taking the responsibility of the accident and going to jail. Halwai too, is nearly trapped in this Rooster Coop. Pinky Madam committed an accident as per the law and morality she should be punished and go to jail, but the water Buffalo intervenes and asks H;awai to take the responsibility of the accident. He could not refuse their order and accepted it. Such is the plight of poor and the way the Rooster Coop works, "What I am describing to you here is what happens to drivers in Delhi everyday... The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good , solid middle class masters." (Adiga 168-169)

Halwai tells the method to Mr Jiabao the way the Rooster Coop works and how the rich trap the poor in it and what cost she/he had to pay to break it:

Why does the Rooster Coop work? How does it trap so many millions of men and women so effectively? Secondly can a man break out of the Coop? What if one day, for instance, a driver took his employers money and ran? What would his life be like?

I will answer both for you, sir.

The answer to the first question is that the pride and glory of our nation, the repository of all our love and sacrifice, the subject of no doubt considerable space in the pamphlet that the Prime Minister will hand over to you, the Indian family, is the reason we are trapped and tied to the Coop.

The answer to the second question is that only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed – haunted, beaten and burned alive by the master- can break out of the Coop. That would take no normal human.

It would, in fact, take a White Tiger. You are listening to the story of a social entrepreneur, sir.(Adiga 176-177)

This is very clear from the above statement that one will have to be strong enough and always be ready to sacrifice her/his family. However, Halwai had the guts to challenge this coop. he has the will power to do something different. He had courage to defy the existing chain. He killed his master Mr, Ashok and ran to Banglore. He became an entrepreneur. He started taxi services. Though, it is very disappointing that Mr. Ashok who was very liberal, supportive and does not behave rudely with Halwai is killed while the other landlords- the Stork, the Raven, the Water Buffalo- remain untouched. Moreover, in Halwai's view, to escape the Rooster Coop one must have to be ready to become abnormal human being, " a freak, a pervert of nature," (Adiga 176)

In colonies the Colonisers (the west) demoralise the colonised on the ground of culture, living style and treat them as filthy, savage. In result the colonised lose their confidence, culture,

tradition, faith and living style. The colonised become powerless, devaluated, duplicate, hybrid, domesticated, accommodated, dominated and controlled. The conquered culture is always open to be appropriated. The natives start mimicking their matters. Pinky Madam's comment on the behaviour of Halwai is a replica of mind set up and view of the West towards the East, "Stop scratching your groin with your left hand... You are so filthy! Look at you, look at your teeth, look at your clothes! There is red paan all over your teeth, and there red drops on your shirt- it's disgusting." (Adiga 146) Pinky Madam, who had grown up and lived in US, had become Westernised, finds Halwai to be disgusting. Halwai is shaken and starts accusing his parents:

Why had my father never told me not to scratch my groin? Why had my father never taught me to brush my teeth in milky foam? Why had he raised me to live like an animal? Why do all the poor live amid such filth, such ugliness?...

If only a man could spit his past out so easily. (Adiga 151)

Halwai start copying the clothing and living style of Mr. Ashok. Though he does not want to be an exact copy of the English man but he want to be more like his master and landlord Mr. Ashok. He had stopped scratching is groin, chewing paan, buys black T- Shirt and black shoes like Mr. Ashok. 'Mall's' in India has been another place which discriminates betw the rich and poor. The poor is normally not allowed to enter in it. The mall raises a sense of inferiority complex among the poor. However, Halwai, who is scared of being stopped and punished to enter the mall but dares to enter it.

Halwai had a rebellious soul that can not be cowed down. He is a man planning like his father. He had understood the way of the world and how to manage the things in it. He is ready to sacrifice or pay the price to escape from the Coop. He murders Mr. Ashok and is on run. He is wanted by the police but remains out of the catch. Moreover, his family had to pay the price for it. After reaching to Banglore, Halwai went to a temple and performed the last rites of his family members because he knew that his will be punished by the landlords.

Like Rohinton Mistry, Adiga does not make his character to be a victim and surfer only. But he makes him a man who kills his master and becomes an entrepreneur. He started Taxi service and became the owner of twenty six Taxis. He brought his nephew to Banglore to live with him. He had admitted him in an "English school" where he learns and pronounces "Pizza" in English " like a rich man's son."To achieve this liberty and social status both Halwai and his nephew had to bear the trauma of the loss of the family. Though, Halwai has become an entrepreneur and owner of twenty six Taxis but has not become cruel like the landlords. He respects the people of the Darkness. He stands with them and in their need. One of his drivers commits accident to a poor boy. Halwai, does not try to run away from the responsibility like Mr. Ashok. He does not try to trap hs driver but he takes the responsibility on himself. Though he manages the police and

comes out but he visits the bereaved family. He hands over twenty five thousand to the parents and offers a choice to them to send their other son to his home so he may employ him.

'First of all, I want to express my deep sorrow at the death of your son. Having lost relatives myself- so many of them- I know the pain that you have suffered. He should have not died.

'Second the fault is mine. Not the drivers. The police have let me off. That is the way of this jungle we live in. But I accept my responsibility. I ask for your forgiveness'...

'There are twenty- five thousand rupees in here. I do not give it to you because I have to, but because I want to. Do you understand?'...

'I want to help your other son.' I said 'He is a brave boy. He stoop up to the police the other night. He can come and be a driver with me if you want. I will take care of him if you want.' (Adiga 312)

CONCLUSION

The White Tiger is charged of apocryphal characterisation. However, Halwai, cannot be called an imaginary. He is a voice of mass, multitudes. His narration and story may not be true in all respect but he represents the voice of subalterns, downtrodden, exploited, deprived, appropriated, disempowered, devaluated, powerless, domesticated, accommodated, dominated and controlled. The west disempowered, underdeveloped, controlled, humiliated, dislocated, discriminated devaluated the East, and in the same manner the landlords in India treated the subalterns. Halwai, is an essential voice of subalterns and he shows the path of liberation to them. The most troubling part of the novel is that the the liberal master Mr. Ashok is killed, while the Raven, Mangoose, Stork and the Buffalo, who promoted feudalism and discrimination remain untouched. The situation of society created 'an angry' man who is a voice of common people. Modernity, provide an opportunity to overcome and raise his voice against the injustices performed by the haves.

The darkness where Balram's story begins is a reality that has been written over and removed from media coverage and public apprehension. The India that Balram Narrates is not a mindset...but rather a site of concrete lives, of the millions who are bystanders in the progress of Shining India. (Joseph 74)

Adiga's The White Tiger as a critique of Postcolonial India and Underdevelopment exposes the layers of suppression and its harmful effect upon the psyche and personality of the subalterns. Adiga brilliantly put his language into the mouth of Halwai. He achieves success in voicing the

subalterns, where the society is forced to listen to them and not to ignore.

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