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Arvind Adiga's "The White Tiger"- Designing New Themes of Contemporary India

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Abstract

Arvind Adiga's "The White Tiger" is a pressing commentary on the socio-cultural and political India. It presents itself as an unravelling of the hidden darkness of India and as a voice of the underclass. He highlighted the dark side of democracy in an exaggerated way that seems that India is not a country worth living in because of the corrupted political system's backwardness. Posed against the highly sophisticated luxuries of development, prosperity and glory of the rich India, are presented the sewage sunk stinking village of misery, pain and hunger of the poor India. Adiga therefore through the first-person narration expresses the various difficulties in the modern world such as poverty, caste suppression, lack of freedom and inequality. People in the modern world have incongruity towards society.

Keywords- Democracy, Suppression, Incongruity, Socio-political, Ambivalence.

Arvind Adiga is a journalist by profession & a novelist by passion. He is well-equipped with dual citizenship in India and Australia. His rich English background qualifies him for novel writing in English. What makes integrity doubtful is not the manner but the matter that he dishes out in the English plates are meant for English-reading people, particularly the Western reader. Adiga has honestly depicted true India with his imported Western pen that moves smoothly on the roads of big cities in and outside India. Arvind Adiga's "The White Tiger", the debut novel for which he won the Man Booker Prize for fiction in 2008 is narrated in the form of a long series of unanswered letters from the desk of Ashok Sharma, the White Tiger of Bangalore, erstwhile Balram Halwai. Through the letters to His Excellency, Wen Jiabao, the Premier's office, Beijing the capital of the freedom-living nation of China. The narration unfolds not only the life story of Balram but the corrupt system that works in two India: India of Light and India of Darkness. The theme of India or the Indian identity is a well-conferred area in literature mostly in Indian Writing in English. "The White Tiger" is a pressing commentary on the socio-cultural and political India. It presents itself as an unravelling of the hidden darkness of India and as a voice of the underclass. He begins his story by scrutinizing a wanted poster that the police had posted all over, featuring him as a wanted murderer, intriguing the reader's curiosity. The novel is framed as a first-person narrative, where the reflective narrator takes the reader through the various episodes of his life. Balram, the protagonist unfortunately because of the family, has to leave the school to work at a tea shop as a bonded labourer. But this white tiger continues to learn, as he is different, he learns to drive and finally becomes a Chauffeur to the Stork family. He removes the two hurdles - the Nepali guard & the old driver Ram Prasad, who comes to Delhi with Mr Ashok & Pinky Madam who has come from America and whose family marries Mr Ashok. As Balram is not born to be a

servant forever he wishes to do something different. He murders Ashok, takes his red bag containing seven hundred thousand rupees runs with Dharam and finally comes to Bangalore where he settles down with the help of the police whom he bribes, and becomes an entrepreneur. The writer uses the technique of flashbacks to take the reader to the different stages of Balram's life as he moves back and forth between his present and the past. As Anita Bhela in "The White Tiger": A Bakhtin Reading" writes: In Adiga's novel we are simultaneously presented with three levels of contemporary time: the immediate present - Balram writing the letters to the Chinese Premier; the immediate past - the distributed references to sections of the wanted poster; and the not-too-distant past of Balram and his bildungsroman interspersed with episodes describing his life with Ashok sir and Pinky madam. The contemporaneity of events strikes the reader on every page of the novel (Bhela 162).

Balram Halwai continues his growth to emerge as a wealthy and socially well-off entrepreneur in another part of the country. Further, being unable to satiate his insatiable desire for money and social success he decides to journey forward towards more wealth and success. As he moves forward, he abandons his past identity, his village, and his family and past links, exploring the well-lit glory of modern India. The India that Balram Halwai talks about is a corrupted, miserable land with "half-baked cities built for half-baked men" (53). It is the land of poverty, corruption, hunger, unemployment, illiteracy, slums, filth, and crimes; precisely, a land of thugs and criminals. It is this tainted image of India which surfaces as the recurring motif of the novel around which the whole plot is built. The two contrasting images of the country the India of the rich and the India of the poor appear as the recurring motif in the text, the chasm between the rich and the poor being the major underlying theme. The other social issues like the power play, the rampant corruption prevalent in the socio-political scene, and the unhealthy and filthy state of the villages are also matters of concern in the text. The stringent familial system, caste and class divide, the oppression and exploitation of the poor by the rich, unemployment and the final resistance to it are too dealt with in the text as its other themes.

Desire and obsession of an individual exist in the unconscious state which is known as his identity. It is a child's natural desire which continues to develop as it grows. So, it is called an unconscious drive which stimulates him to become rich and break the "Rooster Coop". So that his urges make him cheat his master. At the extreme level, he kills his master Ashok and steals a red bag full of money. Balram frequently mentions the rooster coop when describing the situation or characteristics of the servant class in India. The servants in India are sincere to their masters but the masters try to suck their servants' blood. Balram's father is a real Halwai whose shop was caught by some other caste people with the help of the police. Likewise, the opulent people suck the blood of the poor as a leech. Balram despair and unhappiness lead him into emotional distress. Poverty is the root of all evil. Balram recognizes that the system is unjust, cruel, and brutal. In the rooster coop, chickens are not trying to escape from the poorly constructed cage. Likewise, Balram compares those chickens living in miserable conditions with the poor class in India. His thinking explains the ambivalence towards his master Ashok.

Balram Halwai shot in the gripping and entertaining mode with the window a camera that views the surface as if it has no power to peep into the depth. Throughout the story that he narrates in the letters addressed to the Chinese Premier, he seems to be mocking the religions, particularly the Hindu Religion, Rama, the ideal man. That's why he names his characters with the word Ram either in the beginning, as Ram Dev (Stork), Ram Pandey (the doctor), Ram Bahadur (Nepali Guard) or Balram (the protagonist) at the end. In the novel, the protagonist Balram considers himself Hanuman serving his Rama (Mr. Ashok) and Sita (Pinky Madam) Later, this Hanuman kills his own master, Rama. When he consoles his master Mr Ashok who has lost their charms when Pinky Madam leaves him after killing his master Mr Ashok and stealing his red bag full of money, Balram settles down assuming the name of Mr Ashok Sharma. But this Ashok Sharma does not follow any religion but rather keeps Dharam with him & intends to kill him. Halwai projects the Ganga as the un-liberating force that holds everything back from it. Halwai overturns the mythical ideology of Ganga as the mother and the real God of Banaras. He laments that the black mud of Ganga is the ooze in which everything died and decomposed. He laments that nothing will ever get liberated from its black ooze (18). Halwai finds the cultural values and beliefs as chains of liberty from which the people here have no escape. Reflective to the colonial history of the country he says India "has never been free" (22). For him, the belief of India as a free land post its independence from the British is only a make-believe (22). He finds the ideologies and mythical beliefs that form the consciousness of India too as un-liberating. Balram mocks the absurdities of the Indian minds on matters of religion and beliefs.

The white tiger, Balram Halwai and secures the job Chauffer in the Stork family and gets an opportunity to go to Delhi with Mr. Ashok and his wife Pinky Madam whom he regards as Sita, uses abusive words in her talks. Sita, an ideal for women, teaches not to speak harsh words to anyone. Here, for Pinky Madam, everything is "Fucking". For Hanuman, Sita is the mother but Balram is corrupt mentally because of his fantasy & lust for

Pinky Madam.

In the Ramayana, the Hanuman tells Rama and Sita about each other's welfare. But here, Adiga has written a new script. The role of Hanuman has become different and now he will separate the pair. Hanuman is a deity that is always called in adverse circumstances. It is believed that he is Sankat Mochan, one who removes all the troubles of life. Here, Balram Halwai makes his presence available in the hour of crisis. He is a "Man people call when they have a crisis". Balram Halwai is now a man who has established his identity. It does not matter to him that he had to murder his master. In this country, he shares with the Chinese premier. "Kill enough people and they will put up bronze statues near parliament house in Delhi. "The White Tiger" offers a commentary on the drawbacks of democracy. He highlighted the dark side of democracy in an exaggerated way that seems that India is not a country worth living in because of the corrupted political system's backwardness. When Balram has settled in Bangalore he continues to give bribery to the police.

Adiga's protagonist Balram Halwai talks of inequalities between the rich and the poor but how to reduce them is not in his vocabulary. He calls himself "a half-baked Indian". People like him, remain half-baked they are not allowed to complete their schooling. This is not the case only for Balram but for many Balrams whom one taken out of school for various reasons and this remains devoid of proper education. The protagonist Balram Halwai holds parliamentary democracy responsible for India's system. He says, "There is no end of bribery in India". The people belonging to the upper caste exploit their servants emotionally making them ready to admit the crimes which they have not committed. It happens with Balram who is forced to go to Jail for the Crime that was committed by Pinky Madam. Pinky Madam in a drunkard state, drives and hits a boy but Balram is made to take the crime on himself. Says, "The master still owns us body and soul. They appreciate the servant and tag them as the perfect servant". "The White Tiger" has neither friends nor sentiments. He is tagged as a "working-class hero". Except the Chinese premier knows that this hero is "not a brave man. This hero rather than an anti-hero who was not considered superior to cuddles and puddles advocates the philosophy that "Let animals live like animals, but humans live like humans". So that people get their due place in society. The ways he adopts are wrong and lead a man nowhere. Balram Halwai is a split personality that oscillates between love and hate. He does not know when his hatred turns into love and love into hatred. Adiga has succeeded in giving spatial identity in "The White Tiger". He has mentioned the name of the other places but the story moves around only three places Laxmangarh, Delhi and Bangalore. He has come out from the place of darkness to the place of light. Balram, the protagonist narrates the story of his entrepreneurship. His journey from innocence to experience starts in Laxmangarh and reaches its end in Bangalore via Delhi. What Adiga tells in "The White Tiger" partially may or may not be true but what he narrates is fascinating. He has dipped his pen in the ink that contains irony, paradox and satire as ingredients.

The West may believe in Balram's story but one day, God will come to take him to his court where he will complete the incomplete truth. The novel is a mockery of the upper class, religion and traditional values. Though Balram Halwai is a loyal servant to his master, the chain of suppression by his master and his vengeance makes him take revenge against his master Ashok. These make a transformation in his psyche from a faithful servant to a murderer. Then he escapes to Bangalore changing his identity to Ashok Sharma. When Balram Halwai is in his village, he is an innocent village boy. But the city life fully corrupted him. His quest for freedom makes him kill his master, Ashok, by breaking the 'Rooster Coop' fence. At the same time, Balram's obsession and his ultimate goal to become rich urges him to kill his own master Ashok and steal the red bag which has full of currency. In psychological terms, this sort of ambition is called *idée fixe* which means fixed idea. One who is fixed with his or her context or never changes it, in the medical term, it is called monomania. Moreover, his ambivalence makes him break the 'Rooster Coop' which represents slavery. The White Tiger reveals how a royal servant turned into a murderer. The change in the human psyche is explained through "The White Tiger". Survival is the most important focus which takes the novel to the peak of success. Balram's motivation entirely drives him to reach his designations that become a rich fellow. Freud saw all human behaviour as motivated by drives or instincts, which in turn are the neurological representations of physical needs. Their life instincts drive Balram to obsess and satisfy his desire. These instincts kindle him or her to seek their needs. This sort of motivational energy instinct drives the powers to satisfy their needs. According to the great psychologist Freud, "Life is not easy!". Balram has undergone many struggles and hurdles to break the rooster coop and poverty. Balram Halwai is different from others. He is a rare creature like the white tiger. He wants to loyal to be his master. But his mind wants to possess his obsession while he wants to be truthful to his master. Based on the social values the servant should be loyal to his master. But his conscious mind tempts him to be a rich businessman. The struggle between

these two, his obsession won the battle. "The more I stole from him, the more I realized how much he had stolen from me".

Balram's brutal sufferings create an emotional and painful experience which traumatized him for a long time. Adiga therefore through the first-person narration expresses the various difficulties in the modern world such as poverty, caste suppression, lack of freedom and inequality. People in the modern world have incongruity towards society. They remain silent sufferers like how Balram Halwai's father Vikram Halwai is suppressed by politicians and opulent people. But Balram changes his fate through his intelligence to break the fence called rooster coop. His ambivalence towards his master Ashok made him at once a murderer and a successful businessman in Bangalore. The White Tiger explains the character Balram Halwai and his ambivalence towards his master as well as society. The psychological changes of the character Balram are explained through his doubts. Adiga has a clear vision of the impact of the poor and rich discrimination in India and corrupted society which changes Balram's psyche. Metaphorically he is considered to be a rare species like the white tiger and the corrupted society is considered to be a jungle. The corrupted society is considered to be a jungle where animals fight for their lives to survive. Likewise in modern society, man fights for his life to live and satisfy his needs, desires and feelings. In The White Tiger, Balram Halwai is considered the "survival of the fittest" (Spencer 320). He is the same as other human beings but his behaviour is different from others. In his Origin of Species, Charles Darwin stated, "I use the term struggle for existence in a large and metaphorical sense" (OS 50). Balram's obsession drives him to that murdered his master and steal red According to Charles Darwin, "strongest and most cunning - would survive" (BHA 28). In the jungle, the strongest and most cunning animals easily survive. Similarly, a cunning and shrewd person would easily survive in this modern world. Adiga compares Balram to a white tiger. White tigers are stronger than the golden variety. Such white tigers are intelligent and rare to find, hence treasured and protected with utmost care. The protagonist in the novel is the white tiger of his generation, an uncommon rarity because he has the aspiration to rise above his class and transcend his poverty. He says, "There - I'm revealing the secret of a successful escape. The police searched for me in the darkness: but I hid in the light". He successfully moved from darkness to light. Balram's character symbolically represents the life of a modern man. Balram wants to be a rich person soon like how a modern man wants to live a rich life without encountering hurdles and struggles. Moreover, Balram's loyalty towards his master Ashok shows his devotion. At the same point, his vengeance and move to kill Ashok show his detestation for Ashok. Likewise, in the struggle between his obsession and social value, his obsession has secured an upper hand. Balram's ambivalence towards his master and society led him towards his obsession. His approach towards his master is considered to be between the devil and the deep sea. If he leaves his master, he will lose his job at the same time he has a good job and enough comfort in his life so he stays as a driver to Ashok. His hard-headed approach towards his master is considered to be ambivalent. He is not a sentimental man. He breaks the rooster coop. For the sake of his welfare, he murdered his master Ashok and ran with a red bag full of currency. Even he did not care about his own family. Man is a fusion of good and bad. Circumstances play a vital role in one's life. Like-wise in Balram's life, he is an intelligent student but his family failed to give proper education to him. In the working place, he is treated like a beast. He is loyal to his master Ashok. But Ashok treats him inhumanly. Everywhere he was suppressed and he longed for recognition. His sole desire in the initial stages was to be treated as a human being. The pain of suppression made him a murderer. It is the fault of society. The world is a jungle and if people want to survive, they have to either fight or run forever. Balram knows the survival technique of when to run and when to fight against. He gives a counterattack to those who stabbed him in his back. His ambivalence taught him great lessons. He learns more from Indian roads and pavements. "The road is a jungle, get it? A good driver must roar to get ahead on it." Modern society is considered a jungle. Balram Halwai is the right one suitable to survive in modern society because he is a practical man. The rampant rottenness and corruption engulfing the nation are major areas of attack in Adiga's narrative. The debased socio-political and cultural scene of India - amidst its much-pronounced advancements and growth - to which only the poor fall prey seems to be the writer's concern here, which he condemns through the sarcastic tongue of Balram Halwai. The themes of corruption and exploitation continue to be the topics of discussion in Halwai's letters as he details to the reader the whole process called 'an election' in India, the largest democracy. As seen through the eyes of the native narrator belonging to the darker side, Adiga unveils before the reader a shocking picture of the often-neglected Indian villages and the harrowing lives the inhabitants live there. Posed against the highly sophisticated luxuries of development, prosperity and glory of the rich India, are presented the sewage sunk stinking village of misery, pain and hunger of the poor India. The dark India as being just a spectator and not a participant in the country's march to progress stays deprived of a healthy life. The various narratives on the contemporary socio-political and cultural issues

incorporated into the narrative also make it a serious work of postmodern fiction with its fragmented narrative structure, depicting the chaos and its play within the chaos with a protagonist who makes the best use of his situation for his feed.

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