

The White Tiger: A Critical Insight into Multiple Marginalities

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to centralise the subject of multiple marginalities in the novel *The White Tiger*. This is a debut novel of Aravind Adiga, for which he has been awarded Man Booker Prize in 2008. The novel depicts the condition of the marginalised section in all its complexity in post liberalised Indian society. *The White Tiger* provides a dark picture of India's class struggle in a globalised world. The present paper is in fact negotiating two types of Adiga's India bifurcating one for the rich and other for the poor or subaltern. Adiga's message is mainly concerned to bring social consciousness in the society and concentrates to give liberatory space for subalterns. The level of exploitation is rooted that it is a matter of concern for thinkers, academicians, activists to deal with their issues and problems. The whole machinery of the ruling agency is working so subtly that common people do believe as if misfortune is happening to them that is beyond their capacity. In the novel the social evils are projected in India through the fictionalized relationship between Balram Halwai and his master Mr. Ashok Sharma. *The White Tiger* takes the readers to the heart of India and into the world of suspense. It underlines how Adiga present a scathing critique of the individual vices such as deceit, hypocrisy, avarice and false political system which working together for disintegration of human values society as a whole. We see Election manifesto has been a tool of wooing voters of rural areas this closely resembles today's time and politics. But poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, lack of basic- facilities in countryside are still social realities of India. This paper attempts to show how Aravind Adiga in his novel draws a dismal picture of the Indian society. In the novel he has adopted a very humanistic approach.

Keywords- *Marginality, Social - Consciousness, Poverty, Subaltern*

Introduction

Marginality is a widespread term in postcolonial literatures. Marginality is the byproduct of colonial subordination in terms of race, class, ethnicity or gender. According to Crew, it was in the earliest phase of deconstruction that “a key conceptual specialization was effected such that centre and margin became available as terms of a radical critique”. Later on, Chakravarty Spivak, taking this from Gramsci, Ranjit Guha, introduced the concept of the Subaltern- rewriting history from the bottom and thereby criticising 'elite historiography'. To this paper, marginality is defined as a complex condition of disadvantage which individuals and communities experience as a result of vulnerabilities that may arise from unfavorable environmental, cultural, social and economic factors.

Marginality is depicted in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* in the form of wretchedness of the deprived classes in Indian society. The novel came to the limelight for grabbing the 2008 Man Booker Prize. The book was passionately debated by the panel of judges for the global issues the book deals with the issues of gulf between rich and poor. The book exposes mechanism in which the poor are exploited and suppressed by the rich. The poor have no say in the present society and system. They live their lives as if they are born to dance to the time of the rich. The rift between the poor and the rich is widening with the development taking place in every sphere of life. The rich hold and exercise the absolute power over the poor which constitutes a kind of hegemony. And this hegemony is the characteristic of systematic marginality. As Adiga in *The White Tiger* depicts the Indian society reveals the fact about marginalized and sharp dichotomy between rich and poor.

A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, White and soft blank. Ours are different. My father's spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use in villages to draw water from the wells, the clavicle curved around the neck in a high relief like a dog's collar; cuts and whips and scars like little whip marks in his flesh, ran down his chest and waist, reaching down below his hipbones into his buttocks. (26-27)

The above description apparently underscores the sharp distinction between the rich and the poor. Here the rich man of the village in his couch and luxurious mansion has been metaphorically likened to a cotton pillow which is white, soft and blank while the rickshaw puller has been presented as a knotted rope with its cuts, nicks and scars. The rickshaw puller works here as a common man for the deprived section of the society: the story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen. The novel encompasses ages long dichotomy between the educated, wealthy, bourgeois and rural rustic illiterate proletarians with a feeling of striking back at an opportune time. Through an act of

violence they want to overcome their status of subalternity and marginality. They feel that this is the only option they are left with to make the deaf bourgeois to listen their long suppressed voice of angst. This is what precisely done by the protagonist, Balram Halwai.

In the novel, caste, class and poverty are traps in which Balram finds himself tied helplessly. He compares his condition to the rooster coop: The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they are next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. the very same thing is done with the humans in this country. The rooster coop symbolizes the oppressed, confined and helpless plight of the lower class Indian people. The people of Laxmangarh have been presented as worship of Hanuman. As Hanuman followed every dictate of Ram, his master, unquestionably, the people of Laxmangarh obey their master. Ashok tells his wife,

We have got people to take care of us- here our drivers, our watchmen, our masseurs, and where in New York will you find someone to bring tea and sweets biscuits while you are still in the bed, the way Ram Bahadur does for us (89).

Such customs and practices suffocate Balram. He knows well that if he has to survive, he will have to uproot such customs and practices. He has to demolish all orthodox establishments. He doesn't wish to remain as a rooster coop.

The poor of this country has been made to believe the exploitation their fate by the hegemony forces. If a poor man becomes able to see through these hegemonic ideas, he is forcibly made silent. Adiga in the novel has very subtly presented the realities of the city of Delhi and how it moulds the character of Balram. Delhi broadens his mind. Here his reading popular crime fiction breeds an idea in him in order to transcend his condition he kills his master Ashok Sharma and flees with a bag filled with money to Bangalore to start his new life as an entrepreneur running a taxi service to BPOS. He thinks that it is the only way that would give him the life he has been neglected so far. Why Balram Halwai writes to Chinese premier has been made clear in the novel by Adiga. Balram realises that future of the world lies with the yellow man and the brown man now that our erstwhile master, the white skinned man has wasted himself through buggery, mobile phone usage and drug abuse. Balram's love and admiration for individual liberty makes him say, It is said that you Chinese are great lovers of freedom and individual liberty. The British tried to make you their servants, but you never let them do it.

Adiga gives a distinct picture of the portrayal of Balram in setting of human understanding and belief and takes a lot of pain in justifying the protagonist. The character, Balram strongly believes that man spends time uselessly in the snare of relation; the matter of the burden of norm from the relation bond structure that can be weird but one is compelled to follow it. It means we are guided by

the imposition of power structure. This structure passes through generation to generation and comes to people with their internal acceptance. Here the relation of master and servant can be the best example. However the master subjugates the servant, the servant cannot resist and even cannot speak few words against him. But Balram is directed by his belief. He understands well that in the society only fittest can survive well. He justifies that to live at the center, one will have to be fittest, otherwise a man is by the setting marginalized and put on the periphery. In their words it can be said he accords to Darwinian notion of survival of the fittest and tries to give the meaning in Indian setting by his complete involvement in making the driver out of job and also murder of his master.

Here Balram is shown to be a strong and passionate character for his own opportunity and ambition. He resisted against his own master breaking a filial bond and the frozen state of power structure. He crosses the boundary of so-called a gentle servant and instigates master against his fellow driver to remove him from his job. Now the master does so and the driver leaves the job. Now Balram becomes a sole servant where the master family is totally dependent on. It was quite natural for him that he could develop all his resistant motives and animosity against his own master. As the incidence takes place, he indulges himself in stepping out towards the progression of his plan. His childhood reminds the readers that he a part of a good family care but unfortunately he does not get privileged to take it. Dropping out of family care, he begins his career just working in tea stall. He was forced to work there because he had to pay the debt of wedding of Kusum. Apart from these, he learns driving and comes in contact with landlords and rich people. He gets the meaning in life that life is jungle where only fittest can survive and he shapes his mind as White Tiger a rare and fittest creature who rules over jungle.

Balram expectation is quite simple and basic. He belongs to a decent place. Where humans can live like humans and animal can live like animals (318). It is in this situation, that he decides to take the matter in his hands. He speaks out his stand and says- "All I wanted was the chance to be a man and for that- one murder was enough" (318). He is not a habitual and established criminal but a circumstantial victim. He is victimized by the marginalization and labeling theory. He explains and justifies his role in the New India.

Why not? Am I not a part of all that is changing this country? Haven't I succeeded in the struggle that every poor man here should be making-the struggle not to take the lashes your father took, not to end up in a mound of indistinguishable bodies that will not rot in the black mud of Mother Ganga? True, there was the matter of murder- which is a wrong thing to do, no question about it. It has darkened my soul. All the skin-whitening creams sold in the markets of India won't clean my hands again (318).

Adiga's *The White Tiger* imparts a social message: It evinces clearly the impact of slavery, impoverishment, distinction and displacement on the psyche of the protagonist. Though the character of the hero of the novel is not very convincing from sociological standpoint, Adiga tells candidly the purpose of his writing in an interview. He says:

I see this in a sense as a cautionary tale. What my narrator is a white tiger- he's unusual for his time. Very few servants in India actually kill their masters and take their money.

The way the servant class endures the troubles and travails in India, is heroic but I see signs that this endurance may be coming to an end the family bonds that hold people to their subservient post may be fraying.

Adiga conveys the same message in one of his interview. He puts forth his stand and role, “At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the West, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society (Indian). That's what I'm trying to do- it is not an attack on the country, it's about the greater process of self- examination.”

While reading *The White Tiger* readers mind get unsettled on the subject of Adiga's treatment of the theme of poverty and marginalities. But it can't be denied Adiga's very successfully portrays his characters and shows the realistic picture of the Indian society. He mainly concentrates, the main issue of suffering is inequality: The idea imposed by class elites and capitalists on poor and marginalised.

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