

The Criterion

December 2012

ISSN 0976-8165

Vol. III. Issue IV

An International Journal in English

Quarterly Refereed and Indexed Open Access Journal

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The Theme of Corruption and Moral Decadence in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Recently Anna Hazare and his followers at Jantar Mantar in Delhi had been undergoing his hunger strike for passing the anti-corruption Jan Lokpal Bill for making India a corruption free state. We may call Anna Hazare the second Gandhi for following the footsteps of the Gandhian ideals as well as Gandhism in respect of his movement. India is a nation where fasting is a part of India's heritage, tradition, culture, myth and revolution also. This social reformer had gained an extraordinary unbelievable support from every section of the civil society- students, lawyers, doctors, administrative officers and common people etc. Gandhian ideals and Gandhism proves a relevant hegemony to solve the global problem corruption in respect of India's contemporary scenario. The present society is undergoing a topsy-turvy mammon worshipping condition where money is the main criterion to get respect, power and status. The People are in the rat-race of materialistic prosperity, luxury, extravagant pleasure seeking life styles which create in them moral vacuums, moral decadence, lenity and hollowness. Hence, the desire to become rich person and choosing the shortcut way to be wealthy persons which resulted in the society moral decadence and corrupted political systems. India is a country where "Lord Buddha received his enlightenment in this land, the river Ganga gives life our plants and our animals and our people. We are grateful to God that we were born in this land" (*The White Tiger*). But everything is falling apart in the globalised world where India is not an exception rather here "Everything coming apart in this country. Families, marriages- everything" (*The White Tiger*). In that respect Wordsworth's lines can be quoted – "We have given our hearts away a sordid boon!" and "For this, for everything, we are out of our tune".

Arvind Adiga, a journalist by profession and a novelist by passion won the Man Booker Prize (2008) for delineating the darkest as well as the negative sides of this country like the Oscar winning Hollywood movie *The Slum dog millionaire* by Danny Boyle. This novel portrays the darkest part of our country where "rottenness and corruption", degraded and degenerated moral qualities takes part replacing the intact age old moral values and qualities highlighting the Darkness of India like V.S Naipaul's novel *Area of Darkness* (1964). My aim in this paper is to depict in the novel *The White Tiger*, the decent ring forces like corruption and moral decadence which exists like the heart of darkness in the contemporary postmodern globalised society. So the Arvind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* is a commentary on the drawbacks of the Indian democracy, administrative system, political system, parliamentary democracy which can be stated through the following utterances by the protagonist Balaram Halwai- "We have this fucked-up system called parliamentary democracy. Otherwise we'd be just like China" (*The White Tiger*).

The novel is shaped through the series of letters by the protagonist of the novel Balaram Halwai to the Chinese premier. The larger episode of the novel depicted the dark pictures of India such as rampant malpractices which bring the miseries of the poor. Corruption and the process of bribery in India punctured the morality of shining India. The Government officials have the pictures or the stature of Gandhi but the scenario is another because they are more interested in Gandhi on the notes. Hence Mr. Ahok's comment goes

on like that: “We are divining past Gandhi, after just having given a bribe to a minister. It’s a fucking joke, isn’t it” (*The White Tiger*). This kind of tendency is applicable to everyone. The protagonist of the novel Balaram Halwai gives bribery to police to save himself. “There is no end of things in India, Mr. Jiabao, as Mr. Ashok so correctly used to say. You’ll have to keep paying and paying the fuckers. But I complain about the police the way the rich complain; not the poor complain” (*The White Tiger*). The judicial system is the storehouse of all the corruptions also. The judges know the reality of their criminal cases but abandoning their moral responsibilities and duties welcome the illegal and injustice ways for the materialistic prosperities. Balaram tells the truth about the nakedness of the judges: “The judges? Wouldn’t they see through this obviously forced confession? But they are also in the racket too. They take their bribe; they ignore the discrepancies in the case. And life goes on” (*The White Tiger*). The rich heritage and the traditional moral values of our incredible India are shattered under the progress of civilization or the so-called modernity in the globalised India.

The financial prosperity and the ultra-modern city culture always have been played an important role in our daily life. Balaram Halwai who was born in a remote village Laxmangarh in Bihar and journeyed through the difficulties of his life and settled in the capital of India, Delhi as a trained driver of Ashok. Balaram as an innocent and rustic man becomes a totally changed person – a person with selfishness, a person with greed and above all a person with crime. Moral devaluation and moral degradation entraps him and this kind of loss in him happens with the corrupted influences of the Delhi city and its corrupted ‘fucked up system’. The moral decadence and the loss can be found in lines-“All these changes happened in me because they happened first in Mr. Ashok .He returned from America an innocent man, but life in Delhi corrupted him- and once the master of the Honda city becomes corrupted, how can the driver stay innocent” (*The White Tiger*).In the Postmodern period the everything had always been in a threat by the globalization as well as liberalization which create a baseless weak society. The corrupt politicians consider corruption is the indispensable part of the country and criminalization of politics has become a golden rule of India. The ministers when sometimes imprisoned for their corruption but still remain the ministers. These ministers or the corrupt politicians open their account in Switzerland and deposit the Indian money there. Balaram gives us an account about a great Socialist who accept bribery and changes “that money into an bank account in a small, beautiful country in Europe full of white people and black money”(*The White Tiger*).This way they blocked the India’s prosperity as the money cannot be utilized in respect of Indian Projects. If the Government is not stable, there must be another election and this frequent election makes the bankrupt of Indian economic system for indiscriminate use of money of the common people. Balaram Halwai tells the Chinese Prime minister that the election is the worst disease: “These are the three main diseases of this country, sir: typhoid, cholera and election fever. This last one is the worst; it makes people talk and talk about things they have no say in” (*The White Tiger*). The casting vote mere is a time pass through the silly chitchat as the people don’t understand the true value of a single vote. So the voters indulged in discussing the election “like the eunuchs discussing the Kama Sutra” (*The White Tiger*).From that comparison it is clear that common men are not the men in consciousness, intellect, bravery , healthy mental setup and in honesty rather the counterparts of the impotent wasteland’s hollow men.

Adiga has focused the Indian society through the discrimination of “Big Bellies and the small Bellies” (*The White Tiger*).India is shown as an emerging and shining country in the field of transport and communication, science and technology, medical services, industries, tourism etc. “The things are changing in India now, this place is going to be like America in ten years” (*The White Tiger*).But the fate of the country is in the hand of the ignorant, bastard masochistic politicians who always defunct the society by operating the

power structure. The medical services as depicted in the novel are the symbol of utter social anarchy. The educational system is controlled by the “crowd of thugs and idiots (*The White Tiger*) and Adiga named it ‘Jungle’.

The education system is not devoid of the corruption rather it has been polluted by the so-called progressive democratic system. The teacher pocketed the government given mid-day meal fund sanctioned for the students and this malpractice is known to the people but they don’t blame the teachers or the authorities. Because the power of opposing and the power of revolutionary attitude of the common as well as the educated counterpart of the society are crushed under the wheel of progress. Even in the hospital when ten rupees is given by someone to the ward boy, the information of doctors the payee got very easily. Nobody can expect “a man in a dung heap to smell sweet”. The post of the doctors remain always vacant- “Now , each time this post falls vacant, the great socialist makes an open auction of the vacant post . The going rate for this post is about four hundred thousand rupees these days” (*The White Tiger*). And the doctors get job giving bribe and touching the feet of the great socialist. In the novel of Kiran Desai this type of political corruption is depicted to attack the swindle politicians: “Not one truthful politician in the whole country. Yes, our, parliament is made of thieves, each one answerable to the prime Minister, who is the biggest thief of them all” (*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*).The future of the country is under the cloud because the power is in the hand of the wrong, stupid, selfish, hedonist, hypocrite and after all upon the murders .This crooked politician not only create immorality, crisis, anarchy rather they are the creators of the terrorism also. Hence in this respect we can quote the lines of the novelist, Adiga who propounded that-

“Terrorism and corruption are linked. A corrupt system that fails to provide justice or to reduce poverty is one of the causes of terrorism. Terrorist in India are often middle class, but one of the things that gets them worked up” (*The White Tiger*).

In the era of globalization, everything became commodity where the bond of relationship reached in the position of commodity and everything is for sale. The family relationship is bases upon the materialistic prosperity because the western culture injected the poison of decadence in Indian culture. The sex has polluted the brain of almost all the modern people. The master Ashok and his wife Pinky madam in their excited position behave ‘like animals’, the master “pushing his hand up and down her thigh’. Even they don’t care that they are in car where driver Balaram observes them in the mirror. This master is the embodiment of a debauchery for pursuing sex and after sex with the Nepali, Indian as well as with the Ukrainian whores without any inner satisfaction. Even, at the red light Ashok and driver Balaram see a girl with big boobs which look like brinjal. This way and that the master of the novel through crime, bribery, debauchery, savage animalism degraded all the civilized ways of life.

In the postmodern period every art has its own value whether it is good, bad, pornographic or vulgar in respect of language, expression and concept. Arvind Adiga in his *The White Tiger* shows religion as the cause of the slavery in respect of India. Balaram uses the Hindu Gods just to get material prosperity and mocks the gods like a true hypocrite. The suspicion towards is evident in the following line- “Don’t you pray? What are you, a Naxal” (*The White Tiger*).The protagonist, Balaram uses religion to grasp a job suppressing his disrespects and blasphemies to gods. So his falsehood and hypocrisy and indecisive nature show the moral decadence of his character in the novel *The White Tiger*. Finally his cold blooded act of murdering his master like a hardcore murderer would not allow common people’s conscience. To sum up, hence being a hero of the novel, he does not upgraded himself at the height of a true hero rather becomes a counterpart of moral degraded hero.

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