

Population Growth and Environmental Issues: Reflections in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

Environmentalists claim that most of the current problems that humans are experiencing in terms of climatic change to rapid resource extraction are all caused due to human population growth. Population growth has contributed to some of the major environmental problems that we are experiencing today. Eco-criticism is an emerging theory and that studies the relationship between literature and physical environment. Keeping this theory in view this paper makes an attempt to see how population growth, water pollution, air pollution and other relevant environmental issues find, reflection in Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger".

Keynotes: Eco-criticism, Population Growth, Environmental Issues, Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Introduction:

The contemporary world is being largely affected by the third world countries. This indeed has become an imperative matter of concern. The present global rate of the human population has peaked since 1963, which has a stupendous rise in the use of certain fixed resources like food and most importantly Water. The demand for these resources have increased by two third times since then which presently indicates a figure of approximately 6.6 billion (the population count), and the figure is expected to rise even further by the year 2050.

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Population Growth and Environmental Problems:

Population growth has contributed to some of the major environmental problems that we are experiencing today. The Population Connection revealed that with the growth of population since 1950, 80% of the rainforest have been cleared, more than 10,000 wildlife and plant species have been lost, greenhouse gas emission has increased potentially by 400% and more than half of the surface land of the Earth has been used for commercial purpose, which still continues. With such a remarkable increase in these various factors, it is now expected that the population of the world is likely to be exposed to scarcity of water in the future. Scarcity of water or water stress will further intensify the difficulties in meeting the water consumption levels thus wreaking devastating effects on the ecosystem.

The Interconnection:

An interconnection between every living organism, starting from the germs to sharks and whales to humans and their interdependency is obvious. All these living organisms share a food chain which is dependent on the healthy habits for survival. With the population growth every living organism is likely to have lesser resources for survival. This actually implies how the human actions and the alarming growth of people are adversely affecting the environment.

Environmental Issues in India:

The rapid growing population and economic development is leading to a number of environmental issues in India because of the uncontrolled growth of urbanization and industrialization, expansion and massive intensification of agriculture, and the destruction of forests. Major environmental issues are Forest and Agricultural land degradation, Resource depletion (water, mineral, forest, sand, rocks etc.), Public Health, Loss of Biodiversity, Loss of residence in Ecosystem, Livelihood Security for the Poor and Environmental Degradation.

It is estimated that the country's population will increase to about 1.26 billion by the year 2016. The projected population indicates that India will be the first most populous country in the World and China will be ranked the second in the year 2050. India having 18% of the World's population on 2.4% of world's total area has greatly increased the pressure on its natural resources. Water shortages and soil exhaustion affect many areas.

Literature and the Physical Environment:

Eco-criticism is an emerging theory and it studies the relationship between literature and physical environment. The environment is not new to literature but eco-criticism allows one to study a fiction from a new perspective that is nature perspective. This also makes human to think in a bio-centric way. Human beings are the greatest aggressors on this biosphere. They have dominated this earth with their aggressive behaviour. Their only aim is to temper with nature's equilibrium and turn this ecosphere into something of their own liking. In fact they want to enslave the entire universe. Many great poets and writers have denounced human aggression on environment and its degradation in their works and sought to make people conscious about their responsibilities towards it.

Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger":

Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger" which won the Britain's Prestigious Booker Prize in 2008 studies a strong contrast between India's rise as a modern global economy and the lead character, Balram who comes from crushing rural poverty and the opening lines of the novel establishes this fact. Being an Indian Adiga has based his novel on the country as it actually is under the cover of "India Shining". The story in the novel revolves around *Two India's*. One witnesses an affluent India and an India that is beset by common problems like poverty disease unemployment, homelessness, environmental degradation, etc. that plague under developed and developing countries. The glitz and shine that is seen is confined to a very select areas and by seeing few flyovers, neon lights and massive malls one cannot delusory feel that India has arrived and are at par with western countries. It can rightly be said that the setting of Adiga's "The White Tiger" has been done after a good deal with research work. As a "Times of India" Journalist Adiga had travelled a lot and was well acquainted with all the sight, scenes and places he has depicted in his work.

Keeping the above discussion in view this paper makes an attempt to see how population growth, water pollution, air pollution and other relevant environmental issues find, reflection in Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger".

Adiga's "The white tiger" mirrors most explicitly the state of India's environment at the hands of uncontrolled human activities, resulting in ecological ailments threatening both the development of India and the outlook for its future.

Degradation of land, population growth, increasing air pollution, depletion of water resources and the background of overwhelming poverty are some of the environmental issues depicted across the novel.

Air pollution produced predominantly by the exhausts from vehicles and factories is on the rise with the expansion of India's business and transportation sectors creating a crucial predicament for residents who must breathe in the matter throughout their everyday activities.

“Rush hour in Delhi. Cars, scooters, motorbikes, auto rickshaws, black taxis, jostling for space on the road. The pollution is so bad that the men on the motorbikes and scooters have a handkerchief wrapped around their faces-each time you stop at a red light, you see a row of men with black glasses and masks on their faces” (Page-133).

“There was a good reason for the face masks; they say the air is so bad in Delhi that it takes ten years off a man’s life” (Page-133).

“To my left I saw the domes of the President’s House-the place where all the important business of the country is done. When the air pollution is really bad, the building is completely blotted out from the road...” (Page-134).

“The entire city is masked in smoke, smog, powder, cement, dust. It is under a veil. When the veil is lifted, what will Bangalore be like? (Page-317).

Many might not consider the issue of poverty an environmental struggle, yet it has a crucial stake in the prosperity of surrounding ecological systems. With between 20 and 40% of major city population living in slums, the highly visible squalor throughout India pounds upon local resources, especially considering the severe lack of sanitation infrastructure. Through startling and shocking images of line of men in the slums squatting in a row to defecate as small children play in a river of sewage behind them, Adiga brings home this truth is a brutal way.

“The men were defecating in the open like a defensive wall in front of the slums” (Page-260).

“The wind wafted the stench of fresh shit towards me” (Page-260).

“The stench of faces was replaced by the stronger stench of industrial sewage”. (Page-260)

With rise in population there is influx of human from the villages to the cities in search of greener pastures giving rise to various problems.

“I could see multitudes of small, then grimy people squatting, waiting for a bus to take them somewhere or with nowhere to go and about to unfurl a mattress and sleep right there. These poor bastards had come from Darkness to Delhi to find some light-but they were still in the darkness. Hundred of them, there seemed to be, on either side of the traffic” (Page-158).

Adiga’s has also highlighted the water pollution issue with special reference to the river Ganga.

“No!—Mr. Jiabao, I urge you not to dip in the Ganga, unless you want your mouth full of faces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and seven different kinds of industrial acids.” (Page-15)

Water Pollution is also a common enough sight in most of the villages around India, where men and animals partake of water from the same source.

“Ponds in the middle of those fields choked with lotuses and water lilies, and water buffaloes wading through the ponds and chewing on the lotuses and lilies...” (Page-14).

These are but a few instance cited from the book which are clear pointers to environmental degradation in our country.

Conclusion:

Through these reflections of environmental issues in “The White Tiger” Adiga sought to draw the attention of the country and the world at large to the imminent disaster threatening our planet in the form of ‘Environmental Degradation’. Time has come to protect and conserve our environment so that this unique planet remains a better place for life in generations to come. An organised peoples’ voice is the need of the hour and towards this end, literature can play a pivotal role in making mankind conscious of their responsibility towards the planet they live in.”

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