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## Holocaust of Corruption and Credibility-Incredibility Dichotomy in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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This paper is a contribution to the vexed debate on the issue of the credibility of the image of India as portrayed in the above mentioned novel. It addresses how the holocaust of corruption is presented in the novel, how characters react to the corruption galore. As corruption also corrupts individuals we see the protagonist of the novel, Balram undergoes the corrupting influence of city life and ultimately kills his caring employer to become a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. The novel is a story of rottenness and corruption and many areas of Indian life—casteism, social exploitation, education, health care service, police, justice etc. The novelist's highlight on some areas verges on incredibility but some accounts lend credibility as they seem to be attested to real life. The general aesthetic appeal of the novel makes it a reading of perennial interest.

Aravind Adiga's 'The White Tiger' has been hailed as a novel about 'real India'. The publication of the novel has triggered controversy in terms of acceptable realism inside the country and outside. It has set the pendulum of readers' response. Critics and reviewers like Neel Mukherjee opines 'What Adiga lifts the lid on is also inexorably true: not a single detail in this novel rings false or feels confected'. Some have also criticized the novel as a western conspiracy to deny the country's economic progress and there are areas where the portrait of India verges on incredibility. Whatever the tempo of criticism be, the novel is a fascinating study of the social-political life in India. The present paper is an attempt to survey the holocaust of corruption and other social ills rife in new India. It also attempts to study the psychological state of Balram, how the empty syndrome prompts him onto murdering his caring master, Ashoke.

The immediate context of the novel is New India, a hugely populated country where blossoming Democracy and burgeoning population embrace Globalization. Adiga takes on poverty, corruption, asterism, deprivation, vote-politics, inequality and various social and political issues that crop up in early 21st century's India. He anatomizes and finds the maladies in a diseased society.

The whole novel is cast in form of a monologue of Balram. It is through his eyes we come to terms with the reality and imagination. Balaram's agony is two-fold. He was born poor, jilted and exploited by oppressors. He was brought up in darkness and while growing up, he is exposed to corruption of city life. Balram was born somewhat in a rooster coop in darkness, a state of existence in an underprivileged and deprived section of society in Laxmangarh in an Indian state identified by some critics as mythical Bihar. Laxmangarh is not an ideal village paradise where electric poles were defunct, water pumps broken. Children were undernourished "too lean and short for their age and with oversized heads from which vivid eyes shine like the guilty conscience of the government of India". The government run school was one of deprivation. Basic amenities provided for children were undreamt of in such a free school. The school teacher stole the lunch money and sold the government sent uniforms on a legitimate excuse of not having his salary for six months. Balram, the son of a rickshaw puller was admitted in such a school. However, such an account of a school teacher rarely tallies with reality. In India

popular beliefs teachers are held in high esteem as they are the mentors. They are generally accepted as persons having strong moral fibre. Adiga's voice has been criticized as 'the supercilious account of westernized Indian, detached from his home country by education and station of life.' Despite crunch economic situation Balram's father had flicker of hope for his son's education. Balram's prospect as a bright student was recognized by the school inspector who offered him the name 'white tiger'. The school inspector also offered to make arrangement for a scholarship. But Balram could not realize his dream and he was sent to a teashop as a 'coal breaker'.

Adiga portrays as caste-ridden society where exploitation, dowry system permeate all levels. Laxmangarh as ruled by four persons who are virtually beasts feeding on poor people—Stork, Wild Boar, the Raven and the Buffalo. The stork extorted money from fishermen and boatmen. The Wild Boar fed on day wages. Every body had to tax the Raven for grazing their cattles on land around the fort. Of all the fours the Buffalo was the greediest. Every rickshaw puller had to pay one third of his day's earning as road tax. Balram's family had to offer a new bicycle, cash and silver bracelet as dowry for his cousin sister Reena's marriage. In addition to it, they had to arrange for a lavish wedding ceremony. The family ran into debt. The creditor, Stork, from whom a big loan had been taken, wanted all the members of the family work for him and Balram was handed over to him. He had to sacrifice his dream of study for his family. Crunch financial situation dragged them onto slavery and exploitation. Balram, Kishan and Dilip—the trios are crushed human 'self' and pathetic victim working 'human spiders' in Dhanbad tea shop:

--- crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven in their thirties or forties or fifties but still 'boys'.

Health care service to burgeoning population is a thing India can be proud of. Hospital is one of those age old institutions offering service to millions of average people in a democratic set up. It also comes in sharp scrutiny. Adiga finds sorry state of affairs in government run hospitals in darkness. The doctor visits such a hospital once in a week. The corrupt supervisor forces him to hand over one third of his salary and sends him to practice in some private hospital for the rest of the week. It is the supervisor who virtually takes the doctor's position and treats patients. Balram's father had tuberculosis and he was taken to such hospital. After day-long waiting the doctor did not turn up. Balram's father died of utter neglect without having any treatment of his disease. Adiga perhaps wants to highlight that such poor. Hapless fellows born and die, what counts is the loss of a life. However, this is not the generalized situation of the healthcare service in India as the novelist depicts. Had it been so, millions of average people could not have anchored their faith in hospitals. Adiga probably had in mind a particular hospital in 'Darkness:

Balram's journey from village to city is a journey from darkness to light. It is an eye-opener for the village boy to the rottenness, corruption, debauchery, of city life. The contrast is so glaring in his proximity with the pulsation of city life. His slow exposure to the affluence of the haves and deprivation of the have-nots brings him face to face with the realization that: 'India is two countries in one: on India of light and an India of Darkness. The first is represented by rural life in backward states where but to think of poverty, unemployment, exploitation, casteism, foul politics prevails is to be full of sorrows.

The White Tiger is one of the best political novels in the sense that it captures a web of Indian politics. Politics and political leadership have been put under scanner. As the locale shifts to Delhi, the showcase of the republic, we get a view of the undercurrents of Indian politics. Balram gets his job as an entrepreneur driver of Ashoke's family. Ashoke's family thrives on

colliery business, a rotten business. It is a society where corruption and business go hand in hand; corrupt politicians are hand in glove with coal smugglers. The corrupt nature of Indian political leaders is presented through the character of the Great Socialist. Corrupt politicians like him amass money on money. Their black money flows into Swiss Bank and:

The Great Socialist himself is said to have embezzled one billion rupees from the Darkness and transferred that money into a bank account in a small beautiful country in Europe full of white people and black money.

Corruption has scandalized India politics more than ever. Rising scams one after another in the last two decades has made corruption perhaps a palpable reality and Adiga is making on superfluous talk. Those at the helms of power continue to occupy their position and dominate the scene by virtue power politics and manipulate over voting system in India, particularly in Darkness. Votes are bought and sold. The Dhanbad teashop where the trio--Kishan, Balram and Dilip worked, has been described virtually a transaction counter of votes:

All of us in the teashop had to be eighteen, the legal age to vote. There was an election coming up and the teashop owner had already sold us. He has sold our fingerprints.

Ironically the largest democracy of the world has a democratic system of election just like a festival that run by money and muscle power. Election is a disease, a euphoria, a fever that grips the entire country:

“These are the three main diseases of this country, sir: typhoid, cholera and election fever.

Needless to say, if the representatives of the people come to power by malpractice, they will malfunction and resort to various other malpractices. Bribery, nepotism are quite common practice among the ministers. If ministers are corrupt ‘police are totally rotten’ (124). This is abundantly evident in Pinky Madam’s car accident. Pinky Madam runs over a child while driving furiously in a drunken state at night. Balram, though innocent, is projected before police as if the culprit. It is arranged that Balram is to take the blame. Balram reluctantly accepts it and police is to take a forced confession from Balram. He was supposed to go to jail (for a killing he had not done) except for the police who turns the table:

---- he’s (the police) told us that no one has reported seeing the accident, so your help won’t be needed. (177)

Of course, police lets him free and Pinky is absolved but she can not escape the pricks of conscience. As for the law even the judges are not free from corrupting influence of money. In Darkness, justice meted out, is a foregone conclusion:

The judges? Wouldn’t they see through this obviously forced confession? But they are in racket too. They take their bribe they ignore the discrepancies in the case. And life goes on.

Adiga never loses his faith over average people. His faith is solidly anchored upon credibility of common people. He seems to be suggesting that unlike the leaders and people on the upper echelons of society average people at large are honest. He is convinced that the trustworthiness of servants is the basis of entire Indian economy. He makes a eulogy of that common honesty:



Everyday millions wake up at dawn-stand in dirty, crowded buses-get off at their masters posh houses and then clean the floor press the feet-all, for a pittance.

The novelist exhibits his conviction over common people and that is a redeeming feature, an assurance that average Indians are, at large, honest. *The White Tiger* is a novel that contextualizes 'fantastic cravings of the rich' as well as 'desperate struggles of the deprived.' (Pankaj Mishra)

Adiga eschews photogenic presentation of reality and he has recourse to a mode of presentation which involves dichotomy between credibility and incredibility, fact and fancy dialectics. He brings to the surface hard hitting realities of life and sometimes exaggerated portraits which puts heavy strain on the credibility of the narrative. It should be kept in mind that humanity can not bear much reality. The diehard supporters of India would disbelieve the decadence depicted in the novel as factual truth. Indeed there are areas such as the humorous description of the naming by the teacher and particularly '(Balram's (formerly Munna) statement that none of his family have the time to name him appears incongruous. The picture of the dishonest teacher, judges as appears in the novel is also not in tune with reality. However, amid the crosscurrents of beliefs and disbeliefs the aesthetic appeal of the novel can solely be enjoyed by what Coleridge prescribed as the willing suspension of disbelief. Written under the background of twenty first century India, Adiga's *The White Tiger* offers a captivating reading of new India.

**Works Cited:**

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