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Connotation of Darkness in Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the connotation of darkness in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* which had bagged the reputed Man Booker Prize of 2008. Adiga was born on 23 October, 1974. He is an Indo Australian writer, who studied English Literature at Columbia College, Columbia University in New York and Oxford. Through this novel he highlights the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor and the economic system of the Indian society. Besides the hollowness of political system, health sector and class distinction are portrayed as the greatest factors that are responsible for overall miseries of people of the country, who suffer for no fault of their own but because of the failure of superstructure of the said society. When we see in reality the core sub-structures of any society should be welfare centered but in what condition we find them in the novel makes us to bow our head with disesteem.

Keywords: Democracy, diversity, dissatisfaction, entrepreneur, humiliate, representative, pathetic

India is known for its cultural diversity and the largest democracy, where people are free to elect their representatives. Representatives are supposed to work for the welfare of those who represent them. In Indian government, there is multiparty system, which is ideal for proper and smooth functioning.

When we delve deep in the Indian democracy, its functioning is not up to the mark so for its portrayal in the novel is concerned. The political system is often riddled because, due to the lack of accountability, corruption, dominance and casteism. In any country, elections are meant to elect loyal and efficient representatives for elective and proper functioning of government and India is no exception. But present dissatisfaction with Indian Political System becomes quite evident, because everywhere eye meets with absolute poverty, unemployment, illiteracy etc. which shows the inefficiency of our political system. Reality is not shown; elections are won through wrong means. In this condition poor remains poor because the unsatisfactory work or we can say the failure of their representatives. Balram the protagonist of the novel says; "The elections? All wrapped up. It's landslide. The minister said in this morning. Elections my friend, can be managed in India. It is not like in America". (Adiga, 213 2008)

It becomes obvious that political system and bureaucratic setup, according to *The White Tiger*, refer to the darkest areas of our country which evolve, "rottenness and corruption" (Adiga, 50: 2008) in Indian society and hamper all developmental and welfare schemes. Balram sees that elections are rigged in India. He finds "The Great Socialist" very smart who handles the landlords cleverly. "The Great Socialist", a politician knows how to humiliate and blackmail the landlords. Balram wonders to see statue of Mahatama Gandhi at Delhi who always tried to lead people towards the light. But, instead it "The Great Socialist" leads people to the darkness. Adiga satirizes Indian Democracy when Balram says:

O Democracy!

Now Mr. Premier, the little take-home Pamphlet that you will be given by the prime minister will no doubt contain a very large section on the splendor of our democracy in-India-the awe-inspiring spectacle of one billion people casting their votes to determine their own future, in full freedom of franchise, and so on and so forth. (Adiga, 95 2008)

Adiga curses the Indian political system for its faults because most of the politicians are “half-baked”, that’s the whole tragedy of this country”. (Adiga,10: 2008) Obviously there is no improvement in electricity, water supply, health services, police administration and education system. It is because politics is the last refuge for scoundrels. In order to fulfill their vested interests, entrepreneurs, government doctors, tax payers all have to befriend a minister and his sub-ordinates. Mukesh and his brother Ashok the two landlords in the novel also bribe the minister to settle income tax accounts. Bitter truth about Indian political system is revealed by Balram when he reports:

I gather you yellow-skinned men, despite your triumphs in sewage-drinking water, and Olympic gold medals, still don’t have democracy. So politicians on the radio was saying that that’s why we Indians are going to beat you: We may not have sewage, drinking water, and Olympic gold medals, but we do have democracy. (Adiga, 95-96: 2008)

It is very heartrending that the rulers of present government fail to fulfill the expectations of common masses. Instead to lead the common masses to light, they lead them to the darkness and in darkness where, the majority is reconciled to their pathetic condition. One of disappointing features of Indian political system is its negligence shown towards the common masses. It is the main reason that rural Indians are exploited and deprived of their rights and sustenance. Rural Indians are living sub-human life because they are deprived of the facilities which urbans have, like good road connectivity, drinking water supply, school infrastructure, health services, and telephone communication etc. there in rural India people are struggling for every loaf of bread. Adiga wants to say that common masses in the rural areas are facing grave problems. He wants India should have “sewage pipes”, “water supply” and all the basic needs, amenities as only then does democracy have a meaning and value for the poor.

Elections, though we feel proud of glorious democracy of ours, are manipulated power transfers from one hand to another but the conditions of underlings remain unchanged. On election system of India Balram satirizes because he has seen that votes of the servants have been sold by their masters. He reports as:

there was an election coming up, and the tea shop owners had already sold us. He had sold our fingerprints-the inky fingerprints which the illiterate person makes on the ballot paper to indicate his vote. I had overheard this from a customer. This was supposed to be a close elections; he had got a good price for each one of us from the great socialist party. (Adiga, 97: 2008)

Poor masses are highly influenced by the politicians and their false promises, when they go to meet them during elections rallies. These marginalized people are their vote banks. Politicians commonly promise of “Roads”, “Water supply” and “Health services” but it is easier said than done. Politicians use rhetoric to excite common masses for their selfish motives. Sometimes these politicians use to lay foundations of schools, Hospitals and inauguration of roads. But it takes decades to see the said foundations of schools and Hospitals in real structures and roads in real way. No doubt the background of some

politicians is very bad but still they won elections. They employ corrupt means to turn everything and everyone in their favour. The “Great Socialist” is also not a worthy man to be a representative of people but still emerges victorious. He is a man of dark deeds but still they cannot vote him out. He is the head of darkness. Every landlord of darkness works according to his will. Some customers discuss about the “Great Socialist” at the tea shop and Balram listens:

The Great Socialist started off as a good man. He had come to clean things up, but the mud of Mother Ganga had sucked him in. Others said he was dirty from the start, but he had just fooled everyone and only now did we see him for what he was. Whatever the case was, no one seemed to vote him out of power. He had ruled the darkness winning elections after election. (Adiga, 97: 2008)

Adiga considers, “Typhoid, cholera and election fever the three main diseases of this country and the last one the worst”. (Adiga, 98: 2008) Why the last one worst because people waste their time in discussions related to elections. They remain busy in these discussions from dawn to dusk as “enunchs discussing the Kama Sutra”. (Adiga, 98: 2008)

The innocence of poor Indian masses and their destitute compels them to hear the politicians. They hear the motivating political speeches in the hope, so that their condition may be ameliorated. They may be provided with work so that they can feed their hungry families. While Balram drives his master Ashok and his wife to Gurgaon, he finds “hordes” of the great socialist supporters “pouring in from the Darkness”. These underclass people can be led where these politicians want to because Balram reports “They drove where they wanted, did what they wanted, whistled at any woman they felt like whistling at”. (Adiga, 269: 2008)

In Indian politics practice of muscle power, Money bags, police strategic alignment of various factions and power to woo the underclass assure the victory in the political game. Balram reports: “I am India’s most faithful voter, and I still have not seen the inside of a voting booth” (Adiga, 102: 2008). Adiga observes Indians are very far lagging behind China, it is because of “this fucked up system called parliamentary democracy otherwise, we’d be just like china” (Adiga 156: 2008).

Besides it in *The White Tiger*, Adiga also curse on Feudalism that is the most darkening powerful source of exploitation and subjugation of lower-class in India. Stork, Buffalo, Raven and wild Boar the landlords who get their names from the peculiarities of appetite that had been detected in them. The worst is stork, father of Ashok and Mukesh. He is very wealthy man because of his ill practices. He owned the river that flowed outside the village, and he took; “a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman in the river, and a toll from every boatman who crossed the river to come to our village” (Adiga 24: 2008). Wild Boar brother of stork owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangarh. People who wanted to work at his lands, “had to bow down to his feet, and touch the dust under his slippers, and agree to swallow his day wages” (Adiga, 25: 2008). Another landlord is Raven who owned the worst land, which was dry, rocky hillside around the fort, and “took a cut from the goatherds who went up there to graze with their flocks. (Adiga, 25: 2008). The Buffalo was the greediest of all. He had “eaten up the rickshaws and the roads. So if you ran a rickshaw, or used the road, you had to pay him his feed-one-third of whatever you earned, no less” (Adiga, 25: 2008).

Due to their exploitative tendencies Adiga calls them “Animals” (Adiga, 25: 2008) who lived in high walled mansion just outside the Laxmangarh. They had their own wells, temples and

ponds and do not need to come out into the village. These landlords are in close nexus with the regional politicians so that they can entertain their selfish ends. Particularly these rich people get afraid of any disturbance so that they send their children to the safer places. Same is the case with these landlords. With the emergence of Naxalism these landlords had sent their sons and daughters to Dhanbad or Delhi in order to save them from any danger, so that they may continue their inherited feudalism in future.

Feudalism in rural India shows that there is a wide gap between the people. Feudal lords own the big estates and the people who work for them are very poor. They make their own law and nobody can oppose them. One of the most disgusting things about them is that they keep keen vigil on the little economy of poor people and are always trying to gobble it up. Same is the case with the stork, his brother wild Boar, Raven and Buffalo. They are doing nothing themselves but through “Jungle law” they screw poor people for the part from their meager economy. It is possible only in rural Indian society because the victims are marginalized. It happens because of their illiteracy, poverty and ignorance. In conclusion Sanjay Subrahmanyam comments “Social Scientists reflecting on India tend to discuss class in its rural version (relations between landlords, peasants and labourers”. (Subrahmanyam, 42-43: 2008)

When we see in the present Indian society class distinction is present everywhere. The rich people have the upper hand where the poor have to content with their servitude. In the past caste system was the main cause of class distinction people were treated by their caste not by their mental ability. Brahmins were occupying the good posts of the society such as temple priests, teachers, doctors etc. But in modern society, caste system is least bothering thing for the poor. “In the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days there are just two castes; Men with big bellies, and Men with small bellies.” (Adiga, 64: 2008)

Now the present division of Indian society is on economic basis. From this the new inequality emerged in our society:

It didn't matter whether you were a woman, or a Muslim. Or an untouchable: anyone with a belly could rise up. My father's father must have been a real Halwai, a sweet maker, but when he inherited the shop, a member of some other caste must have stolen it from him with the help of the police. My father had not the belly to fight back. That is why he had fallen all the way to the mud, to the level of a rickshaw-puller. That is why I was cheated of my destiny to be fat, and creamy – skinned, and smiling (Adiga, 64: 2008).

The men with the Big Bellies or we can say the master class of the Indian society own rich, fertile and vast lands. Their other estates like big-buildings where they have everything inside like temples and wells. Their women have no need to come out to offer prayer or puja outside their mansions. On the other hand their servants work for the comfort of their masters. They have no identity of their own. Their only identity is that they are treated as sub-human. They have no worth than their master's dogs. They have to feed them (dogs) like their masters. Even they wash them like “the rich expert their dogs to be treated like humans, you see they expect their dogs to be pampered, and walked, and petted even washed.” (Adiga. 78: 2008)

The difference between the rich and poor man is “A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft.” (Adiga, 26: 2008) where as the poor man's body is different. In a beautiful way, Balram says about the body of a poor man as:

My father's spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use in villages to pull water from wells: the clavicle curved around his neck in high relief, like a dog's collar; cuts and nicks and scars, like little white marks in flash, ran down his chest and waist, reaching down below his hipbones into his buttocks. The story of a poor man's life is written on his body in a sharp pen." (Adiga. 26-27: 2008).

The worldly things now a days determine the class of people. The people having good and luxurious things in their possession are respected every where even the police salute them while they are travelling in the cars. But the poor people like rickshaw pullers are beaten by police or they are not allowed to enter in those parts of the cities where foreigners stay in India. Balram says:

Rickshaws are not allowed inside the posh parts of Delhi, where foreigners might see them and gape. Insist on going to old Delhi, or Nizamuddin – there you'll see the road full of them – thin, sticklike men, leaning forward from the seat of a bicycle, as they pedal along a carriage bearing a pyramid of middle-class flesh some fat man with his wife and all their shopping bags and groceries". (Adiga, 27: 2008)

In summary, at present in Indian society a common man does not meet with his expectations because of the faulty political system, defunct health sector, indifferent and tyrannical attitude of landlords and man's treatment on the basis of his economic status.

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