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## The Image of India in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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### **Abstract:**

India is wrongly associated with the history of colonization however in the whole canvass of fiction India has been appreciated by the writers of Indian English Literature. This is the country of such glorious past that attracts the people from the entire world. The image of India in the past was like a fairy's land and a world of dreams, rich in tradition and culture but far away from reality.

The Booker Prize Winner Aravind Adiga has changed the glamorized image of India in his debut novel *The White Tiger*. His portrayal of country reflects the realistic aspect and attitude towards life. This very novel provides a dark comical view of modern day life in India. There is a contrast between India's rise as a modern global economy and the working class people who are bound to live in crushing rural poverty.

This paper will analyze the major issues that reflect the real picture of India. For instance corruption endemic to Indian society and politics, religious tensions between Hindus and Muslims, competition and globalization, through the narration of Balram, the protagonist of the novel; *The White Tiger* who comes only once per generation. Adiga has presented the two pictures of India that determine the destiny of people. For the poor people India is a country of darkness but for the rich there is light of illumination, however, the living situations for the people of darkness do not improve while the people of light continue to live in the lap of luxury.

**Keywords:** Colonization, Darkness, Realism, Corruption, Religious Tension, Slavery, Exploitation

From ancient times to modern scenario India is widely recognized as a favorite subject among the Indian Booker Prize Winners. Initially India was regarded as a land of riches, pearls, magic, rope trick and mysticism, the country was called 'Golden Bird'. The image of India in the past was like a land of fairy, a dream world which was far away from reality. But Adiga has changed the glamorized image of India and his portrayal of the country reflects the realistic attitude towards life by showing the true picture of the country with all its shortcomings.

Just as India was regarded by Mill as a backward place, a society that was still barbaric, a picture that was on the whole negative. Furthermore, Evangelicals and Utilitarian's replaced the earlier view of India as a rich and highly developed civilization offered by conservatives like Hastings and Burke with the one which pictured India as existing in the grossest sort of degradation.

Adiga denies to present glorified picture of the country. He has focused on poverty, corruption, aggression and the brutal struggle for power in the Indian society. A society in which his biting and scathing criticism sounds out of place, when Deshi Indians are dreaming of manned flights to the moon, outer space and mountains of nuclear arsenal against China or any other neighboring states that might try to flex muscles against Hindustan. Adiga does not romanticize poverty but truthfully presents all its ugliness and its potential to create monsters such as the protagonist himself. Balram Halwai observes with rare keenness the goings on in India and provides the readers a faithful picture of what happens among the rich in Delhi as well as the call centers in Bangalore. He eventually grows rich and employs all the knowledge of corruption he has gathered to cleverly turn a successful entrepreneur himself.

Adiga has created two different India in one: "An India of Light and an India of Darkness". (WT, 14) It is the India of Darkness which is focused by the novelist articulating the voice of silent majority, trying to dismantle the discrimination between the "Big Bellies and the small Bellies" (WT, 64) and create a society based on the principles of equality and Justice. Balram Halwai, the protagonist is a typical voice of underclass metaphorically described as "Rooster Coop" (WT, 174) and struggling to set free from age-old slavery and exploitation. His anger, protest, indulgence in criminal acts, prostitution, drinking, chasing, grabbing all the opportunities means fair or foul endorse deep rooted frustration, and its reaction against the "haves". Bloody acts, opportunism, entrepreneurial success of Balram, emergence of Socialists in India alarm that the voice of the underclass cannot be ignored for long.

The fiction gives the detailed account of the Indian society- rural as well as urban and its various facets. Laxmangarh, Gaya, Dhanbad, Delhi and Bangalore are generic, represent the portrait of India. Poverty, Illiteracy, Unemployment, Caste and Culture conflict, Superstition, Dowry practice, Economic disparity, Zamindari system and exploitation of marginal farmers and landless laborers, rise of Naxalism, corrupt education system, poor health services, tax evading racket, embittered master-servant relationship, prostitution, weakening family structure, entrepreneurial success and its fallout etc. constitute the basic structure of Indian society which largely forms the Dark image of India.

Though Adiga has presented his views regarding India but in doing so he actually criticizes his own country through the voice of his narrator. The real picture of India shows corruption endemic to the society of India especially in politics, religious tensions, competition and globalization so on so forth. Indian people, generally, are not able to fulfill their basic needs of life such as drinking water, electricity, sewage system, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy

etc. but they love to show off. If they are small businessmen, they consider themselves as if they are entrepreneurs. As Balram addresses to Mr. Jiabo, “Apparently, Sir, you Chinese are far ahead of us in every respect, except that you do not have entrepreneurs. And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy or punctuality, does have entrepreneurs.” (WT, 4)

*The White Tiger* is a tale of the underclass and their life-begging for food, sleeping under concrete flyovers, defecating on the road side, shivering in the cold, struggling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Nobel Prize Winner V.S. Naipaul has also highlighted the dark aspects of India in his *An Area of Darkness* including rigid caste distinction, English mimicry, poverty, misfortunes of refugee family, underclass denied of opportunities; lack of hygiene and sense of degradation.

It is extreme poverty which creates darkness in the life of the rural as well as urban people and it perpetuates the sufferings of the underclass. It is poverty which compels Balram-the White Tiger to leave the school and work in a tea stall washing utensils and doing every kind of menial job and allows him to call himself a half and baked Indian. It is not the case of only Balram, there are number of people in India who are not allowed to complete their education due to poverty or some other difficulties of life. This country is full of half baked people. Thousands of people remain uneducated still they entrust their glorious parliamentary democracy. Adiga criticizes the democracy system of our country, India. How terrible it is...! Balram says: “The story of my upbringing is the story of how a half-baked fellow is produced.” (WT, 11)

A rural rickshaw puller’s son, Balram refers to the darkness of India in the following way:

“I am talking of a place in India, at least a third of the country, a fertile place, full of rice fields and wheat fields and 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. Those who live in this place call it darkness.” (WT, 14)

The Dalit hero, Balram Halwai’s lesson about the new India is drawn from the rags-to-riches story of his own life. He is an uneducated fellow but seems to be happy in his illiteracy and his impending destiny of lifelong slavery. He works as a car driver to his American educated feudal lord and finally murders him, steals his money and escapes to Bangalore.

Adiga sends his protagonist, Balram to the streets of Bangalore as a chauffeur and who eventually emerges as the smartest guy, evoking an atmosphere of struggle for survival in the jungles of concrete in India. In doing so Adiga vividly depicts a vision of the landscape and world of the rich as visualized by a downtrodden person. For instance his comparison of the cars of the opulent to sealed eggs. The description of poverty with such amazing exactitude, shorn of all sentimentalism is truly experienced by a poor man.

“Things are different in Darkness. There, every morning, tens of thousands of young men sit in the tea shops, reading the newspaper, or lie on a charpoy humming a tune, or sit in their rooms talking to a photo of a film actress. They have no job to do today. They know they won't get any job today. They've given up the fight.”(WT, 54)

His India is the combination of the two- India of Light and India of Darkness. Through the voice of his narrator he does not want to glorify the image of India but presents a real picture of his country. He distinguishes it in this way: “Please understand your Excellency, that India is two countries in one: an India of Light and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well- off. But the river brings darkness to India- the black river. (WT, 14)

He criticizes Indian people for believing Ganga as a sacred river or river of illumination and due to this image of the river hundred of American tourists used to come to see the river and to take photographs of naked sadhus at Hardwar or Benaras. But in reality the mother Ganga is not as pure as it was in the past because of the increasing pollution. That is why Balram urges Chinese Premier not to take a dip in this sacred river when our Prime Minister will ask him: “No! Mr. Jiabo, I urge you not to dip in the Ganga, unless you want your mouth full of faeces, straw soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and several different kinds of industrial acids.” (WT, 15)

Balram is a strong political voice and mirrors the Indian society which wants to present India in superlatives: superpower, affluent society and mainstream culture, whereas in reality there's tremendous darkness in the society of the subcontinent. It is not a new attempt of Adiga to describe downtrodden people but it is preceded by Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai who speak for the millions of underprivileged people and give them a voice through literature.

The careless attitude of the government of India is revealed through the prevalent corruption in the society of India. Even education system is not remaining untouched from the cruel insect of corruption. Adiga highlights the real state of education is getting worse in the Indian villages. This dark aspect of our corrupted education system is reflected by the statement of Balram:

“...The school teacher had stolen out lunch money. The teacher had a legitimate excuse to steal the money- he said he hadn't been paid his salary in six months...Once, a truck came into the school with uniform that government had sent for us, we never saw them, but a week later they turned up for sale in the neighboring village.”(WT, 33)

Besides this, the world of Darkness abounds with social taboos, rigid caste distinction, superstitions, and caste and culture conflict. In the modern times of India there is still the evil of the feudal lords. Man is known and recognized by his caste for example Ram Persad, the servant of the Stork disguised his identity because the prejudiced landlord didn't like Muslim- he

claimed to be a Hindu just to get job and feed his starving family. On disclosure he was sacked from the job. While playing cricket, Roshan, the grandson of Stork calls himself Azaruddin, the captain of India. Stork reacts quickly, “Call yourself Gavesker. Azaruddin is a Muslim.”(WT, 70) The marriage of Ashok and Pinky is not appreciated by the society because Pinky is not a Hindu. This is only due to caste and cultural differences their relationship is snapped.

India is the world’s largest democratic country but the status of democracy is miserable. Adiga sarcastically says, “We may not have sewage, drinking water, and Olympic gold medals. But we do have Democracy.” (WT, 96) In order to prove his point of view he gives the example of election in which legal age to vote is eighteen but as narrator tells here that during the time of election people sell the inky finger prints of the illiterate. Those who are elected they are supposed to clean the mud but they themselves indulge in this mud of corruption or darkness.

India of Light with access to education, health care, transportation of facilities, electricity, running water, hope, justice, emerging entrepreneurial power in the world surpassing China; India’s rapid advancement in the field of Science and technology, space, real estate, yoga and meditation, hotel and tourism industry, expansion of cities and mall culture. This light of India is shown in the metro city Delhi, is considered as a young America in India; the voice of the underclass is strongly articulated and attempts to give them proper recognition in the society. Entrepreneurial success is the hall mark of India. In other words India is shown as an emerging entrepreneurial power in the world.

While the novel moves from country to city, the whole world of underclass also migrates—their exploitation and sufferings. Furthermore Adiga sarcastically comments: “The greatest thing to come out of this country in ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop.” (WT, 173) The Rooster coop works because of the Indian family and poor are trapped and tied to the coop. Only a man who dares to see his family hunted, beaten and burned alive by the masters, can come out of the coop that would not be a normal human beings but a White Tiger.

Adiga has shown us different images of India. Prostitution is another dark area of India of Light. In big cities, due to poverty most of the women are forced to adopt this profession. Ukrainian students and poor laborer from the village working in construction of mall allow their women for prostitution. Dhanbad, Delhi and Bangalore are called red light areas where one can negotiate a price with these women. Another dark spot of shining India is corrupt police and administrative structure. They indulge in bribe and try to protect the rich men from the legal proceedings in order to get huge money in lieu of that. As the hit and run case which legally belongs to Pinky is shifted to Balram. As he says, “The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind the bars because they are taking the blame for their good. Solid middle class masters. We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul and arse.” (WT, 170)

Even judges to take bribe and they ignore the discrepancies in the case. The close nexus between criminals, police and media person is exposed in a way when Balram Halwai, a loyal

servant ironically transformed into Ashok Sharma- a Bangalore based successful entrepreneur who is confident that he cannot be caught in India. On the whole the modern city has deep rooted impact on our life and an innocent and rustic man becomes a new man- selfish, opportunist and criminal which is the greatest harm to humanity. So Balram's life journey from Laxmangarh to Dhanbad then to Delhi and finally to Bangalore proves this loss.

Whatever Adiga has seen through the eyes of his narrator is completely negative picture of India. Everywhere there is corruption around Balram even his own master Mukesh and Ashok bribe the minister to settle income tax accounts. This can be said the country of Rama and his follower Hanuman but irony lies in the fact modern times this is the country of Ashok and Balram. Though, we feel proud of glorious democracy of ours, are manipulated; power transfer from one hand to another but the common man's fate remains unchanged. He has compared voters' discussion about the election as if eunuchs talking of Kamasutra. This is the harsh reality of India where people are devoid of emotion, feeling, love and affection. He observes: "In the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. Now just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only destinies: Eat or get eaten up."(WT, 64)

After Independence the British left the cages open and the "animals" metaphorically refer to politicians who had attacked and ripped each other. The most ferocious, the hungriest, had eaten everyone else up and grown big bellies. Kiran desai also make hard- hitting attack on the corrupt political system in India. She considers the Parliament is made of thieves and our Prime Minister is the biggest thief of them all in her *Hullabaloo in Guava Orchard*.

The author of *The White Tiger* has graphically portrayed the different images of India- India of Light and India of Dark. The land of darkness is the cow belt states of North India- Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh while the land of light are the states of the South especially cities like Bangalore and Hyderabad. In doing so he has poured all the basic flaws of our country. As a consequence Adiga is successful to present the changing image of our country with all its ugliness and reality. He has successfully highlighted the subaltern issue in this novel and brought home an idea of India's progress role of the underclass with all its flaws. On the whole Adiga has vividly described the true picture of modern India in this novel.

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