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Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*: A Post-Colonial Study

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Abstract:

The White Tiger from a Post- colonial reading portrays the situation of colonized people in the modern Indian Society. The novel is seen as a general condition that is sustained through the hegemonic exercise of power by one sect of people over another. An attempt has been made in this paper attempts to explain how colonization invades all aspects of the society - economic, political and social – in the novel. *The White Tiger* in present times that depicts the reality in all its endure.

Keywords: The White Tiger, Post-colonialism, Class Struggle, Injustice.

Introduction

The White Tiger is written by Arvind Adiga in 2008 and the novel got 40th Man Booker Prize in the same year. It is written in the epistolary form. The novel is a confessional addressed to the Chines Premier Wen Jiabao from Balram alias Ashok Sharma who calls himself the white tiger and self-styled intellectual and an entrepreneur. The Chinese Premier is exploring the entrepreneurial skills or lessons on a visiting tour in Bangalore, India. The novel discovers many postcolonial themes including class, cultural conflict, globalization, rural and urban life, social discrimination, corruption, master-servant relationship, disintegration of social system, rural emigration, violence, family, marriage, freedom etc. The White Tiger advocates the subversion of oppressed and subjugated, in wider context colonized (domestic/stately), into oppressor and subjugator. The story is about an oppressed man (Balram Halwai) and his big fabricated events that make up the fabric structure of novel in the small village of Laxmangarh situated in the darkness of India, Jharkhand and

consequently moving to Delhi and Bangalore. The novel portrays, existence of the small people in the subjugated condition of powerful people who shape and control the lives of oppressed. The author has written a novel which represents the resistance for their identity and their tussle seeking to be from periphery to centre of the subaltern.

Discussion

Balram Halwai is the protagonist of the novel. His teacher gave him the name Balram, earlier he was only called as 'Munna' the name people of villages generally give to a boy. Munna was born in the bog of poverty, in a small village named laxmangarh. His father was a rickshaw puller. He left his school due to the poverty of his home and started working to support his family. He started working at tea-shop, his work was to wipe the tables. But later on, he managed to learn driving. Balram's story is different from that 235 of Munoo in coolie by Mulak Raj Anand. His story I a straight answer to Spivak's subalterns cannot speak, because in the white tiger Arvind Adiga makes the subalterns speak. Balram pioneer to achieve the success he wanted and slaps the social and business entrepreneurs. One day a rich person named Mr Ashok from America hired him as his car driver. In order to come out of the poverty he decided to work. He was an ambitious person. The reader comes to know about the challenges he faces in his life and how he was triggered to take some serious steps. The novel is a true representation of post- colonial society where subalterns are colonialized and they urge for liberal life. Balram breaks the 'rooster coop' and got freedom from the cage of his sufferings. Adiga gets close to Antio Gramasci's term organic intellectual and become almost successful to construct a new social structure by questioning the contradicting the oppressive hegemony.

The attempts and struggle by Balram from Munna to becoming Ashok Sharma is tug of war between rich and poor. The dominator- rich or high caste people attempt to keep status quo in their favour while the deprived and disadvantaged ones strive for their rightful place in the world. The story commences from Jharkhand (Darkness) and ends up at Bangalore (Light), symbolically from darkness to light, exposing two India's, separated not only by geographically but also culturally, socially and economically. Balram belongs to the backward village Laxmangarh situated near Bodh Gaya in Bihar and belongs to a poor family with low caste shudra which is a badge of shame and humiliation as he admits "like all good stories; mine begins far away from Bangalore. You see, I am in the light now, but I was born and raised in Darkness" (14). His father who has been living like a 'donkey' wants at least

one of his sons should live like a man. Balram who is named as ‘white tiger’ ‘the creature that comes along only once in a generation, by a visiting inspector of schools, could not continue his schooling due to poverty. Balram is allured to be a driver in the imitation of Vijay by seeing his satisfactory life. As a driver number two in Dhanbad at stock’s house hold who is man of big bellies, suffers humiliation, exploitation and torture finally reaches Delhi as driver of Ashok and Pinky Madam. Gradually he became more and more ambitious and result of it that he murdered his master and with the booty reaches Bangalore and starts his journey as an entrepreneur thus he overcomes to challenge or subvert the social hierarchy and subaltern ideology imposed on him. In the social fabric of Indian society one’s fortune is determined by his religion caste and sex. Everything in the life is predetermined – who will do what and how he will have to conduct in the society. In the village of Lakshamgarh the reign, oppression and domination of four big guns – Buffalo, stork, wild Boar and Raven are perceptible and the rest of the villagers depend on their exploitative mercy. Balram is made to realise that driving is not the job for low people; it belongs to particular castes, and not of lowly shudras. The old driver tells Balram:

How can you learn to drive . . . it is like a taming a wild stallion- only a boy from the warrior castes can manage that. You need to have aggression in your blood. Muslims, Rajputs, and Sikhs – they are fighters, they can become drivers” land lord is also very much concern with Balram’s caste and family background, “are you from a top caste or bottom caste, boy... all our employers are top caste (64-65).

The dominant class’s oppressive view comes to the light even in the hiring servant for their daily uses. It is also evident that subjugated or subaltern are also conscious about the status provided by their master. The consciousness of the servant reflects even for the possession of the small object too- as who will drive Honda city and who Maruti 800. The disparities between the religions are also presented in the novel. A man is himself forced to change his religious identity only for getting a job as a driver. And when it is revealed he is forced to quit his job. Religious impediment is evident in the fact when stork ordered his grandson to call himself Gavaskar rather than Azharuddin while playing cricket with Balram. The landlord- the buffalo, the stork, the wild boar, the raven have been represented as retaliation what they once attributed to the subaltern, as shorts of animals without the propensities in them. Their name has symbolic connotations. These animals treat the low caste people like Balram as animal as or worse than them. Balram is chided and abandon by the Nepali servant when he handles brutally two pomerians in chains: “Don’t pull the chain

so hard! They are worth more than you are!”(78). this comment shaken Balram’s inner consciousness and accelerates his rapacity to get success in his life at any cost. In the term of colonialism and exploitation the relationship between colonizer and the colonized is like master and slave. In India, this relationship is noticeable in novel *The White Tiger*. Indian has no respect for their service providers – cooks, drivers, sweepers- whatever the nature of their job may be; they just fit into one class – servants or slaves. The slavery is prevalent only in the third world countries not in the West. Ashok while boasting about India tells his wife, as he says:

We have got people to take care of us here- our drivers, our watch men our masseurs, and where in New York will you find someone to bring you tea and sweets biscuits while you are still lying in the bed, the way Ram Bahadur does for us?(89).

Adiga has represented in the novel two kind of India one presenting the darker aspect in other words – the world of subaltern or subjugated and the other of light means the world of colonizers/dominator/ oppressor and exploiter. The first represents the backward poverty ridden cow belt North India where the feudal Lord are the master of the life of the suppressed masses, and the progressive shining, educated south India where even the sun shines on the ‘half baked’. In India poor have no right to be part of democratic process. On the day of voting, they are brought like herds and do whatever they are asked to do. They are subject to be ruled by the bourgeois class and have to follow the rules set by the master. This is the case with the people of Laxamagarh, during elections, the hopeless and helpless people as described by Balram, “like eunuchs discussing the Kama Sutra, the voters’ discuss elections in Laxmangarh” (98). The people of the village feel rejoice when the oppressor are humiliated by those having the ‘bigger bellies’ like the great socialist and keep on voting for their enemy’s enemy, as Balram gives a piece of his mind when great socialist humiliates Balram’s master, “That was the positive side of the great socialist. He humiliated all our masters- that is why we kept voting him back in”(105). The real education of Balram to penetrate the restricted domain for subaltern began when he initiates to acquaint himself with metropolitan city and its life style. The initial attempts executed by him is even not enough to situate his status as respectful being for he is hired servant to his master. And in his attempt to educate himself to subvert the bourgeois ideology he is subjected for humiliation and exploitation by Pinky Madam and Mukesh. The domination of upper class people is revealed when a child is killed by the Pinky Madam while driving the Honda city and the responsibility is being entrusted on Balram’s head by stork family.

As a social entrepreneur, Balram is haunted by the scene of hens and rooster situated behind Jama Masjid and he concludes that they have no option so is the case with the lower class people. Adiga very intelligently finds 'Rooster Coop' analogy to compare with Indian psychology of the poor class. He thinks this is the reason that the rich or foreigners can rule them easily. The lower class people are helpless to raise their voice and powerless to resist the exploitations and humiliation imposed on them. So, they suffer culturally, socially and politically at the hands of bourgeois despite being conscious of their exploitation and vulnerability. Indian people cannot come out of the hibernations or this stand by state to make revolt to release or free them. This 'Rooster Coop' symbolizes Balram's conscious expression to describe the oppressed, confined and helpless condition of the average Indian people. 'Rooster Coop' is an image created by Adiga in the novel. He finds the roosters in the coop smell the blood and they see organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they are next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is with the human being in India. He concludes that 99.9 per cent Indians caught in Rooster Coop. Therefore, the people in darkness worship 'Hanuman' who is shining example of how to serve 216 for masters. Balram criticizes Indian attitude of slavery. In the market in New Delhi, hens and rooster are stuffed into wire cages where they peck and suit on each other as they fight to breathe. It is same for the poor of India. They are so busy in fighting each other. They cannot escape their cages. According to Balram:

The greatest thing to come out of this country in the ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop. Go to old Delhi, behind the Jama Masjid and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly coloured rooster, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages...The very same thing is done with human beings in this country. (173-74)

The rooster coop works because of perpetual servitude i.e. Indian family. The people have psychology to follow and the 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 being but a white tiger. These poor people are strong and talented but their mind set-up does not allow them to come out of the coop.

The theory of resistance has been implicated gradually with the development of Balram's character. He gradually comes out that hibernation or that state of inactivity and metabolic depression. The state of revolution against oppressor has gradually grabbed to him

by the forces and circumstances happened around him. Initially he was so coward, meek, soft and religious fellow. Later his attitude to his family has undergone drastic change as he also stops sending money to them. He turned his concern about his family members except his brother Kishan whom he has concern after his father. He was getting thinner and darker. Balram visited his village with Ashok and Pinky madam and his granny prepares chicken only for him. He imagines instead of chicken the woman "has served me flesh from Kishan's own body on the plate." (85) At that time, he also denies the proposal of marriage put by his granny for the sake of dowry like Kishan because he was destined something else.

Conclusion:

The culmination of the fiction is that in today's ever evolving India, it is safe to say that dogmas pertaining to caste are now being questioned and rejected. People no longer base their profession on their caste. Unfortunately, the existence of the wicked caste system in rural and backward parts of the country cannot be entirely denied. The caste system is not present as it is but is taking different contours. The casteism and the class politics have now merged and depicts the stark contrast between the privileged and the underprivileged.

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