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Projection of Marginalized in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract:

The present paper examines the way the marginalized are projected in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* during pre-independence India, and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* in twenty-first-century India. The protagonist of Anand's *Untouchable* is Bakha, a young sweeper. He is marginalized from society because of his caste. He is denied of basic needs and often gets humiliated by the high caste people. Though he is strong and intelligent, he is not able to do anything against Pandit Kali Nath who molested his sister Sohini. His friend Chota insists him to take revenge for that incident. But Bakha tells that taking up revenge would be dangerous to him and his family. In Bulashah, after listening to the speech of Mahatma Gandhi, Bakha has a hope that their life will be changed soon in a better way but he does not take any step for the progress of his life, whereas, in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, the protagonist Balram Halwai is also marginalized due to his caste but, in order to become successful in life, he goes to the extent of killing his employer Mr. Ashok, takes money from him and becomes a triumphant entrepreneur in Bangalore.

Keywords: **untouchable, pre-independence, post-independence, marginalized, entrepreneur.**

Untouchable

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the finest writers of Indian Writing in English whose novel *Untouchable* depicts the life of the downtrodden and lower caste people through the life of the protagonist Bakha. A clear picture of the treatment of the lower caste such as humiliation, exploitation by the upper caste Hindus is given in this novel. Bakha, an eighteen-year-old boy, of a lower caste community, is a sweeper, latrine-cleaner who is considered an

untouchable in the society. Rama Jha states, "Anand is the first Indian novelist to present in the novel the stigma of this evil which isolates a man from his own society" (59).

The untouchables have to beg for food, wait near the well for upper-caste Hindu to pour the water into their pitcher. Though they work like cleaning the latrines, sweeping the streets and temple, the so-called upper caste Hindus do not give them their salary so they have to beg for food in front of their house and they are treated them like an animal. Not only that they give them only the leftover or stale food, sometimes they send them even without giving any food.

The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindus of the three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor were they allowed access to the near-by brook as their use of it would contaminate the stream. (Anand 14)

The untouchables are not supposed to do certain things such as taking water from the well or brook, touching the upper caste people, entering into the temple, and so on because the upper caste people have certain thought that if the untouchables touch anything, its purity will be lost and gets polluted. Even their presence in front of the upper caste is considered a bad omen. Bakha faces a lot of humiliation in this novel. One such instance is when he goes to a shop to buy cigarettes; the shopkeeper throws the cigarette box at him as if throwing a bone to a dog.

Bakha's sister Sohini is molested by Pandit Kali Nath. Though Bakha gets angry after knowing this incident, he is not able to do anything against Pandit Kali Nath. He just shares this incident with his friends Chota and Ram Charan. Of the two friends, Chota insists Bakha to take some action against Pandit Kali Nath but Bakha does not have the courage to go against him by thinking of the consequences to be faced by his family.

Bakha gets a chance to listen to the speech of Mahatma Gandhi who talks about the emancipation of untouchables. The Mahatma says,

I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should wish to be reborn as an Untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from their miserable condition. (Anand 138)

Though Bakha does not understand everything spoken by the Mahatma, he has got some hope in his life that one day everything will be changed in a better way, after listening to the speech of the Mahatma.

The White Tiger

Aravind Adiga, the recipient of the Man Booker Prize in 2008 for his first novel *The White Tiger* in which he points out both the positive and negative sides of twenty-first-century India such as the corruption, socio-economic conditions, caste discrimination, upper-class domination, poverty, slavery in democracy, laborious servants and their loyalty, the life of the poor in the village as well as in the city through his protagonist Balram Halwai who is also a narrator of this novel. Margaret Atwood says, “We all know that authors are private people, but until recently our authors were treated only as private people. Authors are also transmitters of their culture” (19). Adiga does justice to his job of being a writer. By reading this novel, anyone who does not know about India can get a clear view of it.

Balram as a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore shares his life experience with Mr. Wen Jiabao, Chinese Premier through an email in which he narrates almost everything of his journey of entrepreneurship. He portrays the real picture of India and Indians as “our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, *does* have entrepreneurs” (Adiga 4).

Balram was born in the village of Laxmangarh which was under the control of the four landlords mentioned in the name of animals such as the Stork, the Wild Boar, the Buffalo, and the Raven owing to their wild inhumane nature. They are rich leading a happy and sophisticated life by sucking the blood of the poor as their servants. They never allow the downtrodden to come up in life. These kinds of people even though they involve in illegal activities, they lead a peaceful life because of the trustworthiness of their servants who will take the blame for their master’s crime. This thing is clearly explained by Adiga as “The trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy” (175).

Adiga states “India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness” (14). Thus, the elite class people, the landlords, money lenders, powerful politicians, businessmen, and high salaried government employees live in an India of Light whereas the low-caste people, poor people such as daily wages, unemployed, and low paid employees live in an India of Darkness.

The protagonist of this novel has different names when he is a small boy, his family members call him Munna, when he goes to school, his schoolteacher Krishna names him as Balram, later a visiting school inspector finds him quite different from other students and inspired by his intelligence gives him a name as the White Tiger which is a rare creature in the jungle.

‘You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots. In any jungle, what is the rarest animals – the creature that comes along only once in a generation?’ ...

‘The White tiger.’

That’s what you are, in *this* jungle.’ (Adiga 35)

Though Balram is a clever boy, he is not able to continue his studies due to the huge debt of his family. He starts working with his elder brother Kishan in a tea shop where he is educating himself by listening to the conversation of the customers. It is where he learned many things and, in that place, he meets Mr. Ashok whom he likes the most to be his master. Balram says,

I used my time at the tea shop in Laxmangarh to spy on every customer at every table, and overhear everything they said. I decided that this was how I would keep my education going forward – that’s the one good thing I’ll say for myself. I’ve always been a big believer in education – especially my own. (Adiga 52)

His father Vikram Halwai is a rickshaw puller, a poor but industrious man who died of tuberculosis without getting any treatment after being admitted to the government hospital. In India, government hospitals are built mainly to treat sick people especially the poor, but in some villages, the poor people do not get any treatment in the government hospitals mainly because of the private clinic maintained by the government doctors. This shows the pathetic condition of the marginalized, the poor people in villages.

Balram has an interest in driving, so he learns it with the permission of his grandmother Kusum by making a promise that he will give his salary to her after getting a job to run his family. After searching for a job in many places, he is appointed as a chauffeur at the house of the Stork. There he is not only a chauffeur but also a servant who does all the

household chores. At times he gives bath to their dogs, plays with the children of Mukesh, who is mentioned as Mongoose, son of the Stork, cleans the legs of the Stork in a bucket of water, and gives massage too. This is the pathetic condition of most chauffeurs in India.

Balram is a second driver who drives Maruti Suzuki whereas Ram Persad is the first driver who drives Honda City. One day Balram eavesdrops on the conversation between the Stork and his sons. He comes to know that they are doing an illegal coal business. To conceal this matter, they are planning to go to Delhi to bribe some important politicians and they will be taken to Delhi in a car by the first driver. So, Balram likes to get the place of the first driver and he starts collecting some details about Ram Persad. In that process, he finds that Ram Persad gets the job by telling a lie that he is a Hindu but actually he is a Muslim. By knowing this truth, Balram threatens Ram Persad, so he leaves the job. Then Balram becomes the first driver. As he planned, he has become the driver of Mr. Ashok, his wife Pinky Madam, and the Mongoose in Delhi. The character of Balram is gradually revealed here. In order to achieve his desire of becoming the first driver, he does not show any pity towards Ram Persad who tells a lie mainly to get a job to run his family.

Balram says “I would drive them wherever they wanted, as faithfully as the servant-god Hanuman carried about his master and mistress, Ram and Sita” (Adiga 46). This shows his submissiveness and loyalty towards them as the other servants of India. In Delhi, Balram’s masters stay in an apartment whereas he stays in servant quarters with other servants. When Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam go shopping, Balram has to wait outside for hours together because the poor people like him are not allowed inside the shopping mall. He has to endure the pollution, cold, and the bite of mosquitoes during his wait for the masters. This is the condition of other chauffeurs all over India. The Mongoose before leaving Delhi tells Balram that he should not take a car for his own purpose, do not use Air Conditioner for his own self, and also do not hear songs when Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam are not in the car. This shows that according to the rich man’s point of view, the marginalized should not have any rights to enjoy sophisticated life and they cannot allow them to have such things in their life

One-night intoxicated Pinky Madam drives the car and makes an accident in which a child died. The Mongoose tries to blame Balram, and compels him to admit the crime and go to jail instead of Pinky Madam. When masters do any crime, their servants should accept the punishment for them. This shows the pathetic condition of the helpless poor servants in India.

Throughout the night Balram thinks about this incident. But fortunately, the problem is solved since there is no witness to the accident.

Pinky Madam wants to give compensation to the affected family but it is not accepted by the Mongoose because he is a sort of people who gives money as a bribe to higher officials for their own benefit but not interested to give an excess of one rupee to their servants, be it a salary or compensation. Pinky leaves Mr. Ashok to New York. Afterward, Balram takes care of Mr. Ashok until the Mongoose comes to Delhi.

Balram is “destined not to stay a slave” (Adiga 41) and he says that these days there are “only two destinies: eat – or get eaten up” (Adiga 64). When Mr. Ashok goes with cash to bribe a politician, Balram pretends that the car breaks down and so Mr. Ashok gets down from the car, on that time Balram kills him by hitting him on his head using a broken liquor bottle. Then Balram escapes with a red bag which contains seven hundred thousand rupees. With that money he goes to Bangalore becomes an entrepreneur under his master's name Ashok Sharma by starting a taxi company for call centre employees.

Mr. Ashok treats Balram much better than the Mongoose and the Stork. Balram too likes Mr. Ashok. But his situation demands him to kill Mr. Ashok. He does not like to be a servant anymore. At the same time, he dares to meet up with the end. “The police searched for me in darkness: but I hid myself in light” (Adiga 118). Through his intelligence and money, he escapes from the murder case. After becoming a successful entrepreneur, he is having a plan to start a real estate business and also to open a school for poor children like him so that they will not suffer as he suffered at the hands of the rich.

Adiga portrays the life of the marginalized through Balram. The way he projects the marginalized is quite different from the other Indian novelists. Generally, Indian novelists show the life of marginalized people, their sufferings, predicaments, and their efforts to overcome the barriers through honesty. But Adiga shows Balram, one of the marginalized twenty-first-century figures of this novel, comes up in life by committing a murder that too his master. He is treated as a slave even though he resides in a democratic nation. It's been a century that India got independence but still, the Indian low-class servants' life depends on their masters. Balram faces a lot of humiliation, inhumane treatment, and suppression all over his life mainly because of being born into a poor low caste family. It is not his fault but a fate. No one in this world can decide their birth and death. It is not in anyone's hand but one can change the destiny in the meantime of birth and death. Though he is born into a poor family,

with hard work and some smart work, he changes his miserable and pathetic life into a sophisticated life.

Balram is shown as a person who does not have any close relationship even with his family members because that may turn him weak. This is one of the main reasons which makes him take risk of killing his master Mr. Ashok, “only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed, hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the masters – can break out of the coop” (Adiga 178). Many servants in India are caught in the Rooster Coop because of fear about their families. The employers of India tend to know all the personal details of their employees, especially about their family so that they can threaten them in the name of the family when they do anything wrong. Though the Stork and the Mongoose know about his family, Balram wants to liberate himself from the coop.

Exploitation is a key element that makes Balram to become an entrepreneur. As a grandson, Balram is exploited by his grandmother Kusum who needs only money from him. She sends him to work in a teashop to run her huge family, later she allows him to learn driving with a demand to give her the salary after getting a job. She also demands him to get married to get dowry from the bride’s family. There is no love, care, and affection between their relationships. Also in his family, water buffaloes are the major source of income so they are treated much better than humans. As a chauffeur, he is exploited by his masters to do all kinds of work at their home for a low salary. Mukesh tries to exploit him by going to the extent of sending him to jail for the murder committed by Pinky Madam.

When Balram realizes his life that he is not truly loved by anyone, no one has shown any mercy towards him, he prepares himself to take risks in his life. He is the kind of man who plans everything perfectly because he is a good observer who keenly observes everything that happens around him. He is not a man who gets knowledge from school or college but he educates himself from real-life experiences. Adiga projects Balram as a man of broad vision. He is a man who always “sees ‘tomorrow’ when others see ‘today’” (319).

Adiga also shows the gradual development of Balram, the marginalized, since his childhood. Balram says “Once I was a driver to a master, but now I am a master of drivers. I don’t treat them like servants – I don’t slap, or bully, or mock anyone” (302). After becoming an entrepreneur, Balram reflects certain qualities similar to his masters such as bribing the police to hide the accident made by his driver but he tries to save his driver, he himself goes

to the house of the dead person and gives them twenty-five thousand rupees and also he offers a job as a driver to their elder son. He tries to compensate a person's life with money. Since he is mistreated by his masters, he knows the pain of the servants. So he never mistreats his servants, at the same time, he does not maintain any close relationship with them.

Thus, Adiga in his novel *The White Tiger* projects his protagonist, Balram as a very rare person like the rare creature the white tiger because he is marginalized like the other Indian servants due to their caste and class but he succeeds in life unlike them. The way he goes might be wrong but he deserves all the qualities of an entrepreneur because he is a man who always has future plans. He represents the voice of the voiceless, and the predecessor of upheaval in the marginalized group.

Both novels have some similarities such as both the protagonists born in a poor family, belong to a lower caste, faced a lot of humiliation in the society as well as exploited by their masters. No one has shown any mercy on them. Both of them have expected some positive change in their life in order to emancipate from their crucial servitude way of life. But the way each novelist projected the marginalized is distinctive.

Mulk Raj Anand in his *Untouchable* depicts the life of the marginalized during pre-independence whereas Aravind Adiga in his *The White Tiger* portrays the life of the marginalized in twenty-first-century India. Both the protagonists' sufferings as being marginalized are almost the same but the way the novelists projected them is different. Anand depicts Bakha as a boy who waits for someone to bring some positive change in his life whereas Adiga illustrates Balram as "a man of action and change" (Adiga 5) who takes initiative in order to change his life and also of his people. He is a man who always thinks of the future and believes in self-education through his skill of listening.

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