

## **The Depiction of Contemporary Social and Political Issues in Arvind Adiga's Novel *The White Tiger*: A Thematic Study**

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### **Abstract:**

Literature is the mirror of society; and through his writings a successful writer exposes the social and economic problems. The novel 'The White Tiger' shows a clear picture of contemporary society; and highlights the struggle and exploitation of the poor and the low class people. The Booker Prize-winner 'The White Tiger' reflects the burning issues of class, caste, and religion in the society. Arvind Adiga is a contemporary novelist who has given a new orientation to Indian Fiction in English by creating a new idiom in the fiction 'The White Tiger'. He discussed various issues in his novels. He deals major socio-cultural issues such as hunger, poverty, corruption, anti-religion texts and violence. He accepted art as the best means of portraying life. He never believed in art of propaganda. He sacrifices the nation for the narration. Adiga did write 'The White Tiger' with the intention of reformation but it is not acceptable. The novel deals with the word 'dark' to depict the current situation in India, where the poor are trying to attain a dual goal. The narrator shows the lives of the poor in India in a realistic manner. Adiga classifies India into two parts-The dark part and the light part. The land of Darkness belongs to the cow belt states of North India-Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and MP. The land of Light belongs to the states of the South.

**Keywords:** The White Tiger, Democratic values, corruption, poverty, prostitution, freedom, caste-discrimination, injustice, anti-religion texts.

**Methodology and Approach:**

The novel '*The White Tiger*' highlights the problems of democratic environment and an imperfect administrative approach, corruption, caste system, unemployment, mockery of religion relationship between master, sex, light versus dark and servant and effects of Globalization. Adiga says that the nation has moved away from true independence and social equality. The discrimination and corruption are common in many spheres. The people have been divided into various classes. Earlier there were many castes in India. It seems to be divided into types-large ships and small ships; and there are only two doctrines- to eat and to be eaten. India has embraced democracy since her independence. Today, India is the largest democracy in the world. Liberty, equality and justice are the core values over which the edifice of democracy rests

**Outcome:** '*The White Tiger*' is the story of one man's search for freedom. Balram is a protagonist of the novel. He is a victim of poverty and injustice. He is a low caste man from North India and how he triumphs over his slavery to the feudal, upper caste lords and becomes an entrepreneur in the IT city of Bangalore. He is the representative of the poor people and under trodden people. He addresses the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao through a series of seven letters. Balram achieves his goal by escaping his lower class. He overcomes all the societal problems that once beset his family. He becomes a successful businessman by murdering his master, Ashok. He steals all his money. The novel paints painfully honest picture of modern India.

**Introduction-**

Arvind Adiga has become the most successful and famous novelist with his debut fiction '*The White Tiger*'. He has discussed on the contemporary social issues in this novel. The novel is an excellent social contemporary on the poor-rich divided in India. Adiga may be a Marxist or any. He has full freedom to propagate what he wants. But he has no right to hurt the others' religious

feelings. The novel *'The White Tiger'* is well-planned and well-constructed in the frame of Marxism, though it is a different thing that the protagonist Balram is neither a Marxist nor a capitalist. He is rather an opportunist who changes not only the side but also colour-sometimes red and sometimes white. While the reality is that he is black in spirits. He does not believe in any religion. His anti-religious feelings create the atmosphere of violence. *'The White Tiger'* is a novel that mocks everything- it may be religious, political, social system or human beings. The white tiger is a tiger-an animal in the form of man but inwardly he is not a human being from any angle. He is a puppet in the hands of Adiga who propagates his agenda through the character of Balram. But he remains silent on Buddhism because he is afraid of China where this religion still exists or his intention is to get favour – *The main thing to know Delhi is that the roads are good, and the people are bad. The police are totally rotten*". (*The White Tiger-124*) The novelist expresses his ideas about Mumbai and says- *everyone goes to Mumbai in the films after they kill someone*. (*The White Tiger-297*) Adiga says that India is not a right place for him to live; however, she is a good deal for him because of her salability in the Western market that showers gold, awards and rewards to see her nakedness.

Adiga does not have reverence or regards neither to Hindu nor to Muslims nor to any other religion. He makes a fun at the number 786 which can do miracle in life; and this magic number is associated with the religion. *"But back in the days when I used to, just before the movie got started, either the number 786 would flash against the black screen- the Muslims think this is a magic number that represents their God"* (*The White Tiger-08*). He calls the Muslims the illiterate and rude.-*"have you noticed that all four of the greatest poets in the world are Muslims? And yet all the Muslims you meet are illiterate or covered head to toe black burkas or looking for building to blow up"* (*The White Tiger-40*). His remark about the burkas is the

outcome of his mental sickness. All the Muslims are not the destroyer of the buildings. But black burkas is their dressing culture with a religion leaning. The novelist is prejudiced towards the Muslims who seem to be illiterate. But he is surprised by knowing that all the four great poets in the world are Muslims in spite of the lower ratio among the Muslims. He praises Iqbal for speaking truth about the slaves while his mental attitude is anti-Muslim: *“Iqbal, who is one of the four best poets in the world—others being Rumi, Mirza Ghalib, and a fourth fellow, also a Muslim, whose name I Have forgotten –has written a poem where beautiful in this world. That is the truest thing anyone ever said” (The White Tiger-40)*. The Stork is presented as anti-Muslim in his attitude. But Mr. Ashok is shown as cosmopolitan. The Stork’s grandson calls himself that he is Azharuddin. But The Stork asks him to call himself Gavaskar, not Azharuddin. We see the anti-Muslim feelings:

*‘I’m Azharuddin, captain of India’ the boy shouted every time he hit a six or four.*

*Call yourself Gavaskar, Azharuddin is a Muslim.’*

*It was the Stork. He had come into the courtyard to watch.*

*Mr. Ashok said, “Father, what a silly thing to say! Hindu or Muslim, what difference does it make?” (The White Tiger-70)*

There are the people like the Stork whose nature is narrow minded; on contrary, there are the people like Mr. Ashok who oppose this mean mentality. They create harmony through their humanistic attitude that all human beings are equal and the children of the same God.

*‘The White Tiger’* brings out a contrast between India’s rise as a global economy and the plight of marginalized class of society who are living in overwhelming rural and urban poverty.

The rich cannot live without the poor as the poor work for them. The monster capital creates a gulf between the poor and the rich. It separates them into two different paths which can never meet each other. The novelist has presented the gulf between the Haves and the Haves-Not in a realistic manner. The poor people are no better than mere commodities for the rich people who possess right over them and consider them as their possessions. Balram Halwai is the hero of the novel who lives in a village named Laxmangarah which is an ideal village only in the papers. The reality speaks a different story- *“Electricity poles –defunct*

*Water tank-broken*

....., *like the guilty conscience of the government of India” (The White Tiger-20)*. The people were subjected to torture, exploitation and torment by the village landlord. The poor people could not avail the proper food for their children because most of the people were unemployed and have no courage to face the advance circumstances. They migrate from the village to the cities in the search of employment. Their conditions are not better than animals. The people are seen everywhere in the search of work. Alas! They failed to get the work and due to poverty the people have to leave their village to earn the money in the cities so that may meet out the basic needs of the families.

Balram’s father is poor; however, he does not choose the traditional job (to work in the fields of the landlord) which makes man indebted to the landlord. He chooses the job of rickshaw puller and he wishes that his son should get education so that he may not be treated like the beast of burden- *“My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine-at least one- should live like a man” (The White Tiger-30)*. Balram started his primary education from his village. The teacher recognized his potential and called him Balram. His parents called him Munna which means to a boy. The school inspector called him ‘White Tiger’ by admiring

his brilliance. But a tragic event is happened in his life that he works at the tea shop as a big loan is taken for the marriage of his cousin from the Stork. The people have to work at the place like the tea-shop. These poor people lead their life without fulfilling their dreams. The villages are not the places for romance and peaceful living. Circumstances have become so bad that most of the people have become unemployed and hopeless. They failed to get any job and they are seen in the frustrated mood.

Balram, the modern hero of the novel '*The White Tiger*', is conscious of the fact that there is a little chance for the poor people to overcome the rich. Ashok spent a lot of time in visiting malls, along with Pinky Madam, his wife. Balram's job was to carry all the shopping bags. The lost coin episode shows the mean and stingy behavior of the rich. Mongoose insulted Balram for the lost one coin after giving the bribe someone with a million rupees. The second incident is happened when Ashok bribed the ministers to get the contracts of coal mines. "*He made me go from one bank to another bank...he was collecting money from the automatic cash machines—from different ones... (The White Tiger-211).*"

The novelist describes the internal affairs of political parties, bribe, black-mailing and corruption etc. Corruption is taken a bad form in India. The politicians and the rich people have deposited their black money in the Swiss Bank. This money is called 'Black Money'. The success of any country depends on the honest politicians and their selfless working for the people. But now democracy has given the birth to the corrupt and illiterate politicians who get the power through the bad manners. Mr. Ashok visited Delhi to solve his tax problem regarding the coal mines. The rich people go the Delhi in order to settle their black money. On the contrary, the poor people go to Delhi in the search of job for better life but it remains only an illusion throughout their lives. They are forced to lead a life of darkness in the cities even while

living in the light. For the sake of their bread and butter, they are exploited by the rich people who never possess the sympathy to their wretchedness. The novelist attempts to present their miserable condition of the poor people- *“Thousands of people live on the sides of the road in Delhi. They have come from the darkness too- you can tell by their thin bodies, filthy faces, by the animal -like way they live under the huge bridges and overpasses, making fires and washing and taking lice out of their hair while the cars roar past them. These homeless people are a particular problem for drivers. They never wait for a red light...”* (The White Tiger-119-120).

Adiga throws out upon the conditions of these poor people. He calls these poor people ‘bastards’. He sees these poor homeless people on the pavement and passes the remarks which disclose his insensitiveness about them. He speaks through his hero Balram Halwai who poses to be uncomfortable while driving in the car. Balram thinks of the wretched people. Through this novel Adiga makes the people realize that how the poor people are suffering in the country. Life for them has been proved to be a curse. The animals are treated as human beings; while the human beings are as animals. The rich like to have the puppies that are treated as the human beings. They are also considered more valuable than the poor people. In the Stork’s family two white Pomeranians are treated as human beings.-*“The rich expect their dogs to be treated like human, you see they expect their dogs to be pampered, and walked, and petted, and even washed!”* (The White Tiger-138) Their condition has become worse in every walk of life; while the rich have been enjoying the fruit of the economic development of the nation.

Adiga has depicted the sex in the novel. The readers realize that the sex is for sale and the following lines the sexual landscape-

*“Now, it had been a long time since I had dipped my beak into anything, sir, and the pressure had built up. The girl would be so young—seventeen or eighteen—and you know what girls taste like at that age, like watermelons. Any diseases, of body or mind, get cured when you penetrate a virgin. These are known facts”* (*The White Tiger-192-93*). Balram, the hero of the novel, thinks of the sex. In Bangalore, he goes to the five-star hotels to buy girls and he thinks, *“It is not right to buy and sell women who live in bird cages and get treated like animals”* (*The White Tiger-304*). He was interested in golden hair women or in the homosexuality. His ideal icon is Vijay who became a bus-conductor. He makes the people his friends. A politician dips his beak in his backside. The forbidden fruit is made available for all—*“Men are marrying other men instead of women, the result of which is the decline of the white man.”*(*The White Tiger-305*). Balram serves Pinky Madam and consider her ‘Sita’ but her low black dress makes his beak big. He hears the sound of the shouting during the sex act of Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam. Mr Ashok enjoys sex with the whore as soon as Pinky Madam leaves for America. Balram Halwai proves to be a package for the old man who takes him to the red light area. He sees there the gorgeous women who beg him to have sex with them. It seems that these women are not the women but are commodities or the wares for sale:

*“The old driver explained the nature of the wares of on offer.....were ‘American’, girls in short skirts and high platform shoes, carrying pink handbags with names in English written on them in sequins. They were slim and athletic for men who like the western kind in the corner.....”*

*‘Good’, the old driver said. ‘I like that too-I always go for the foreign ones’* (*The White Tiger-58*). The novel deals with the colour of sex which makes the readers think of women and their miserable plight.

Adiga mocks at the democratic values as liberty, equality and justice. The novel points out the loopholes which have fractured the whole political system. Balram hates the Indian parliamentary democracy. He thinks that democracy is responsible for poverty, unemployment and exploitation. During the election time, the people talk of election and nothing else while the reality is that their voting rights are used by others. Corruption has embraced electors, politicians, bureaucrats and even the judges. The judges also give the judgments or decisions in the favour of the rich and the politicians. Balram has to go to jail for crime that he has not committed. But this crime has been committed by Pinky Madam. The rich masters have absolute the right over the body of their masters.- *'We have left the villages, the masters still own us, body, soul and arse'* (*The White Tiger-170*). He is a pervert and his thinking is different. He murders his master, Ashok. He breaks the cage to become free.

In India, election has become a disease because the system fails to provide a good government which takes care for the poor and needy people. What will the future of the country where the criminals rules and form the policy? The ministers are in jail but they continue to be the ministers. The voters are purchased for few money, a bottle of wine or the greed of flesh. Illegal practices are used for winning the election. The ruling party misuses the media and government machinery in its favour. Booth capturing is one of the malpractices practiced by the candidates. Balram is a voter but he never goes to vote because he is murderer. He has never seen the inside of the booth-

*'I turned eighteen.*

*I am India's most faithful voter, and I still have not seen the inside of a voting booth'* (*The White Tiger-102*). Voting right is a sacred right. Alas! It has not used by the person

concerned. In India election can be managed. Sometimes, the result surprises the people. The capitalists sponsor the candidates for their selfish motives. The people have two castes'- *'Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies.'*" The poor people work for their social activists till the election is over and vote for them dreaming of some better life but they get 'mutton biryani on the paper plates. The politicians never turn back. The Great Socialist himself is said to have embezzled one billion rupees from the Darkness, and transferred the money into a bank account in a small beautiful country in Europe and black money. He says:

*"There are the three main diseases of this country, sir, typhoid, cholera, and election fever. The last one is the worst; it makes the people talk and talk about the things they have no say in"* (*The White Tiger-99*).

Adiga presents two sides of India-India of Light and India of Dark: *"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 dark river"* (*The White Tiger-14*). The novel deals with the dark side of India with the example of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, caste system, dowry system and social taboos. It is seen that the whole system is corrupt. The poor people remain in control of the landlords who do not hesitate to make the poor people bond laborers. Illiteracy is the main reason of the poor people's state. The dowry system is still prevails in the society. On the contrary, there is India of light where all facilities are available. There is a ray of hope that makes the people positive. The people have running water, electricity, medical facilities, employment, justice and transportation. In the big cities there is the rapid advancement in the field of science and technology. There are huge buildings, hotel, industries and mall centres. It seems that America is in India-India of light.

Thus, Arvind Adiga has become the most successful and famous novelist with his debut fiction '*The White Tiger*'. He has discussed about the contemporary social issues in this novel. The novel is an excellent social contemporary on the poor-rich divided in India. It exposes corruption, injustice, discrimination, exploitation and unemployment etc. Adiga speaks for the poor. He identifies with the cities as well as the villages. He speaks of Indian politics, religion, belief, science and technology etc. Balram says that the democracy has become a total failure in providing justice and supporting the spirit of the entrepreneurship.

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