

Social Consciousness in *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga

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Abstract

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga is a fantabulous counterpoint to the beautiful, lyrical Indian novels that have surfaced in the past decade. Adiga has not sugarcoated Balram's view of India, but has brought to light the true and unique view of a country we may have thought we understood. This novel offers a story of sparkling wit, blistering suspense, and questionable morality, told by the most capricious, captivating, and utterly inimitable narrator that this millennium has yet seen.

Key words: Social Issues, Caste System

The novel provides a darkly humorous perspective of India's class struggle in a globalized world as told through a retrospective narration from Balram Halwai. This paper delineates the Social consciousness like Individualism, Freedom, Corruption, Class and Caste

system found in the debut novel, which won the 2008, Booker Prize *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga.

"Munna", meaning "boy", is the reference given to Balram initially. His family didn't bother to name him. It was his school teacher dubbed him Balram. The boy proved himself intelligent and talented and was praised one day as a rare "White Tiger" by a visiting school inspector. Balram was raised in a large, poor family from the Halwai caste, a caste that indicates sweet-makers. He was a complicated man, Servant, Philosopher, Entrepreneur and Murderer. He was born in the dark heart of India in a village called Laxmangarh. He transcended his humble beginnings to become a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. Largely through the murder of Mr. Ashok, who was his employer. Balram also makes clear that because of the murder, it is likely that his own family has been massacred in retribution.

Balram was a smart child in his school days, but was forced to leave school in order to help pay for his cousin's dowry and begins to work in a tea shop with his brother in Dhanbad. It was there he learnt about India's government and economy from the customer's conversations. He describes to become a driver. After learning how to drive, Balram finds a job driving for Ashok, the son of one of Laxmangarh's landlords. He stops sending money back to his family and disrespects his grandmother during a trip to his village. Balaram moves to New Delhi with Ashok and his wife Pinky Madam. Throughout their time in Delhi, Balram is exposed to extensive corruption, especially in the government. In Delhi, the contrast between the poor and the wealthy is made even more evident by their proximity to one another. While Balram's peers flip through the pages of Murder Weekly, barter for girls, drink liquor and perpetuate the Great Rooster Coop of Indian society. He watches his employers bribe foreign ministers for tax breaks, barter for girls, drink liquor, and play their

own role in the Rooster Coop. Balam learns how to siphon gas, deal with corrupt mechanics, and refill and resell Johnnie Walker Black Label bottles. He also finds a way out of the Coop that no one else inside it can perceive.

Balam feels that there are two Indias: “The impoverished “Darkness” of the rural inner continent, and the “tiger” of urban coastal India.”(A.A.24) A mechanism that he dubs the “Rooster Coop” traps the Indian underclass in a perpetual state of servitude. It involves both deliberate methods used by the underclass on itself. He describes at length the corrupt nature of politics in the Darkness. Politicians who are called the Great socialist controls Darkness through election fraud. The stork’s family, involved in shady business dealings in the coal industry, must regularly bribe the Great Socialist to ensure their success.

Balam's eyes penetrate through India as few outsiders can: the cockroaches and the call centers; the prostitutes and the worshippers; the ancient and the internet cultures; the water buffalo and, trapped in so many kinds of cages that escape is almost impossible, the White tiger. And with a charisma as undeniable as it is unexpected. Balam teaches us that religion doesn't create virtue, and money doesn't solve every problem-- but decency can still be found in a corrupt world, and you be found in a corrupt world, and you can get what you want out of life if you eavesdrop on the right conversations.

One night Pinky Madam takes the car from Balam, while drunk, hits something in the road and drives away, finally left to assume that she has killed a child. Ashok's family pressurizes Balam to confess that he had been driving alone. Ashok becomes increasingly involved in bribing government officials for the benefit of the family coal business. This forces Balam to kill Ashok, the only way to escape India's Rooster Coop. After bludgeoning

Ashok with a bottle, stealing a large bribe, the red bag, filled with 700,000 rupees, and escaped to Bangalore, where he bribes the police in order to help start his own taxi business. When one of his drivers kill a bike messenger. Balram pays off the family which almost certainly killed by Ashok's relatives as retribution for his murder. At the end of the novel, Balaram rationalizes his actions and considers that his freedom is worth the lives of his family and of Ashok.

Every individual is part of the society. "Culture is not simply reflection of economic problem but nor it can independent of it"(B.T.177) In this concern we see there are references to how Balram is very different from those back in his home environment. He is referred to as the "White tiger". A White tiger symbolizes power in East Asian cultures, such as in vietnam. It is also a symbol for freedom and individuality. Balram is seen as different from those he grew up with. He is the one who got out of the "Darkness" and found his way into the "Light".

The novel highlights a man's quest for freedom. Balram, the protagonist in the novel, worked his way out of his low social caste (often referred to as "the Darkness") and overcame the social obstacles that limited his family in the past. Climbing up the social ladder, Balram sheds the weights and limits of his past and overcomes the social obstacles that keep him from living life to the fullest that he can. Balram talks about how he was in a rooster coop and how he broke free from his coop. The novel is somewhat of a memoir of his journey to finding his freedom in India's modern day capitalist society. In the beginning of the novel, Balaram cites a poem from the Muslim poet Iqbal where he talks about slaves and says "They remain slaves because they can't see what is beautiful in this world". Balram sees himself

embodying the poem and being the one who sees the world and takes it as he rises through the ranks of society, and in doing so finding his freedom.

Our society is vigorously affected by corruption. Balram grew up in a very poor living conditions, he was exposed into a lot of corruption and immoral behaviour, e.g., the shopkeeper selling his employees' votes to the Great Socialist during election time. His childhood molded the person he was going to become in the future. Balram ends up doing anything to get himself into a higher caste and into the "Light". Balram becomes very selfish, evident by his many of his actions being equivocal in nature. This can be seen as an immoral way to improve oneself. He cheats people to put himself in a position to gain for himself. Balram does everything in his power for personal gain, even killing his boss.

In India we find social class/caste predominant everywhere. The book shines light on a modern day, capitalist Indian society with free market and free business. It also shows how it can create economic division. In India there are not only social classes but also social castes. "culture is one of the several ideological state apparatus ,Culture is a site of conflict meaning and value ,which represent different class interest "(L .C.78) |The novel portrays India's society as very negative towards the lower social caste. This novel is based on the disparities of two worlds: darkness, inhabited by poor and underprivileged who cannot even meet their bare minimums; and the lighted world, inhabited by Zamindars, politicians, businessmenetc, who shamelessly exploits the ones from darkness, making them even more poor and grows their own grandeur.

Balram refers to it as the "Darkness", when Balram was asked which caste he was from, he knew that it could ultimately cause a biased stance in his employer and determine

the future of his employment. There is definitely a big difference seen in Balram's lower caste from back home and his current higher caste in their lifestyles, habits and standards of living. The novel shows how our economic system today creates socioeconomic gaps that create a big division in society. It limits opportunity, Social mobility, health, and other rights and pleasures that should be given to all. There is a big difference in the amount of money spread around in society today and this book is alluding to that fact.

A key factor in *The White Tiger* is the discussion of the Indian caste system. The caste system in India is social systems that divides the Indian population into higher and lower social classes. Although said to be disappearing in urban India, the caste system still remains in rural India. A person is born into a caste, and the caste one belongs determines his or her occupation. Balram gives his own breakdown of the caste system in India, describing that it was a "----clean, well - kept orderly Zoo"(A.A.134). But no longer - because that caste system broke down, and the powerful took over anything they could - and now there are only two castes in India - the haves and the have nots. Balram was born into the Halwai caste, meaning "sweet - maker", and was the son of a rickshaw puller - not a sweet - maker, because someone with power stole his destiny of being a sweet - maker from him.

Adiga brings awareness to the corrupt India caste system by having Balram work the country's system to get what he wants and to become an entrepreneur by any means necessary, including murdering his boss. Balram educates the Chinese Premier throughout his letters about the corruption and immoral ways of India's caste system and its economic gap. Although it may seem that Balram's position in society will forever remain the same, he manages to go from a sweet shop worker, to a personal driver for a rich man and finally to an owner of a small business.

Balram's quest to becoming an entrepreneur shows the oppression of the lower caste system and the superiority of the upper caste. He tells the story of how India still has a caste system and political and economic corruption is still present. Balram shows the country of India in which a person high on the caste system can bribe people such as police officers with money to cover up murders, sabotage political opponents by rigging votes and money, and have privileges such as shopping in a mall specifically for those of high social and economic importance."Culture is never quantity, it is all Material and Method. ways quality of knowledge; it is never an extension of ourselves "(B.C.17) He also who are born into poverty and low castes may forever remain there and so will, their children. Balram is a rare exception as he experiences both sides of the caste system and manages to move up the social ladder.

Today our society is obsessed with various things which hold us back. As Indians let us go beyond and take responsibility for what is holding us back. The Individual's identity, Freedom, Corruption, Class and Caste system and in addition lack of health services for the poor and the presumption that the family is always the repository of good is so important in the present scenario. Hope to visualize a clean India bloom in front of our eyes.

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