

ARVIND ADIGA'S THE WHITE TIGER: A TALE OF TWO INDIAS

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The White Tiger, a remarkable novel of 'New India', is a brilliant Man Booker Prize Winner (2008) novel by Arvind Adiga. Arvind Adiga was born in Madras in 1974 and subsequently lived in India, Australia, the US and the UK. Presently he lives in Mumbai. The White tiger is his first novel. It is an unexpected journey into a new India; rather it is a tale of two Indias.

The Novel revolves around two INDIAS; an affluent India, and an India of the common men facing tremendous problems at every step of life. In this novel, Adiga has pointed out everything about everything in India that is Hindus, Muslims, Brahmins, roads, films, animals, rivers, the poor, the rich, the Government hospitals, the liqueur shops, the brothels, Indian caste system, politics, religion and so on and on.

It is a story of the journey of a man from darkness to light. Balram Halwai, born in a poor family in the darkest part of India, has an innate ambition to be high and mighty like the landlords. But he realizes that there is no future for him in the village and feels to flee away breaking family bonds to make his living as per his intense wish. While living in the metro city, he uncovers the sordid, bitter and biting truth underlying the glittering city and shining India.

This sorrowful but real picture of India is so vivid that there is a uproar against Arwind Adiga that he wrote this novel purposely for Booker Prize. He painted India's ugly picture for Booker and so on. Many critics have been drying their throats by saying, 'Adiga sold India to claim Booker Prize.'

Is this attack on Arwind Adiga really has some point in it or something different? To probe it this paper attempts to take a review of the two real Indias. The White Tiger, on the one hand, depicts the wretched condition of the poor people, their helplessness, exploitation and injustices inflicted upon them. On the other hand, it depicts the shining, glistening India of the shopping malls, call centers and metros, technology and electronic cities and what not.

The novel The White Tiger is narrated by Balaram Halwai, a self-styled "entrepreneur", born in a village in the dark heart of India, a son of a rickshaw puller. The book follows his progress from a child labourer, via humiliation as a servant and driver, to a mysterious new life in Bangalore.

The novel is written in the epistolary form as a seven part letter to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao

"From The Desk of:

The White Tiger

A thinking Man

And an entrepreneur

Living in the World's center of Technology and outsourcing

Electronic City Phase I (Just off Hosur Main Road)

Bangalore, India.

The novel revolves around Balram, his efforts to become an entrepreneur, and his coming into the 'Light' of prosperity. He is born in a small village Laxamangarh in North India. His parents could provide him only the world of darkness, of extreme poverty and not even the name to him. While at school, Balaram was spotted by the school inspector:

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

I thought about it and said:

'The White Tiger'

'That's what you are, in this jungle" (35).

The school inspector even offered to get a scholarship for his education. Even then Balaram was taken out of school and kept deprived of schooling like most children of his age group in India. His parents put him to work in a teashop. But Balram has an innate ambition to be high and mighty like the landlords in the village. Very soon, he realizes that there is no future for him in the village. So he learned driving and fortunately was employed as a chauffeur by Mr. Ashok at Dhanabad. This is how, he breaks the family bonds to make his living and starts his further journey.

Then Mr. Ashok takes him to Delhi. We get a detailed picture of two Indias when Balram was taking Ashok and his brother Mukesh to the Congress Party Headquarters. Here, in the novel, we get one picture of India.

Rush hour in Delhi. Cars, scooters, motorbikes, auto rickshaws, black taxis, a jostling for space on the road. The pollution is so bad that the man on the motorbikes and scooters have a handkerchief wrapped around their faces-each time you stop at a red light, you see a row of men with black glasses and masks on their faces, as if the whole city were on a blank heist that morning. (133)

This is but a picture of over populated and polluted Delhi. Everywhere there is a crowd and people in hurry and haste resulting into traffic jams, the various horns, continuous wailing, fumes filled air and headache and tension. Further we see another world of India there on the same road.

There was a good reason for the face masks; they say the air is so bad in Delhi That it takes ten years off a man's life. Of course, those in the cars don't have to breathe the outside air -it is just nice, cool, clean air conditioned air for us. With their tinted windows up, the cars of the rich go like dark eggs down the roads of Delhi. Every now and then an egg will crack open a women's hand, dazzling with gold Bangles, stretches out of an open window, flings an empty mineral water bottle. Onto the road - and then the window goes up, and the egg is resealed. (133-134)

What more else is required to describe the gulf in two Indias? Another realistic picture of affluent India we witness when Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam are divorced. Balram says that-every rich man these days is divorcing his wife. 'These rich people...' His reaction 'No respect for God, for marriage, family nothing.'

reveals the outlook of modern Indian people of rich India. Whereas the poor people coming from dark India try to live somehow by doing adjustments and compromises at every step of their lives carrying innumerable questions in their minds. They very honestly try to follow the age-old traditions and conventions of another India. It is reflected in the following question.

'Why had my father never taught me to brush my teeth in milky foam? Why had he raised me to live like an animal? Why do all the poor live amid such filth, such ugliness?' (151)

While in Delhi, Balram experiences two kinds of Indias: with those who are eaten and, those who eat, prey and predators. Balram decides to be an eater with a big belly. He wants to come out of the Rooster Coop. Here, we get the real picture of India in Delhi. Adiga uses the metaphor of the Rooster Coop:

"Hundreds of pale hens and brightly coloured roosters, stuffed tightly, into wire-mesh cages They see the brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country." (173-4)

Isn't this the whole truth about India? I think it's the sole and naked truth Adiga has unearthed here. Also Adiga has shown the typical Indian tendency of not breaking out of the coop. Indians always prefer to live in the rooster coop. Adiga explains:

"That's because we have the coop. A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 percent - as strong as talented, as intelligent in every way - to exist in perpetual servitude ---- can a man break out of the coop?" (175).

In our democratic India, the policies are made and implemented for the rich, the traders and the upper classes and not for the common man. There is an exhaustive network of middlemen who create a wide gulf between the Government and the common masses. The poor are working hard for the rich. In return, the rich are exploiting the poor very cruelly; we see it as described below-

"These people were building homes for the rich, but they lived in tents covered with Blue tarpaulin sheets, and partitioned into lanes by lines of sewage. It was even worse than Laxmangarh. I picked my way around the broken glass, wire, and shattered tube lights. The stench of faces was replaced by the stronger stench of industrial sewage.

The slum ended in an open sewer- a small river of black water went sluggishly past me, bubbles sparkling in it. And two children splashing about in the black water." (260)

After getting the experiences of Delhi life Balram comes to know that to advance in the life he has to become an eater. So he kills his boss Ashok. By killing his boss, Balram becomes an entrepreneur and his India is merciless and cruel. This is how Balram is a representative of a NEW INDIA; quick witted, half backed, self mocking, awesomely quick to seize an advantage and always seeking short-cuts for being at the top.

Now Balram, escaping from the coop, is a servant turned into villain and a murderer who becomes a self-proclaimed entrepreneur who calls himself "I am tomorrow" (6).

Balram is confident that he will not be caught by law and is quite comfortable in his office who has become a successful entrepreneur. Thus we experience Adiga's 'New India' in *The White Tiger*. Adiga has shown us everything about India, and everything in India; Hindus, Muslims,

Brahmins, roads, films, animals, rivers, poor, rich, Indian caste system, politics, religion, corruption and so on.

Is all this narrated in *The White Tiger* not a picture of India we witness around us? All and all it's true and true only. As Adiga himself has said:

"Well, this is the reality for a lot of Indian people and it's important that it gets written about, rather than just hearing about the 5% of people in my country who are doing well.... At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the West, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal on justices of society" (Jeffries: 2008).

So the novel is a social commentary and study of injustice and power in the form of a class struggle in India that depicts the anti-hero Balram representing the downtrodden sections of the Indian society juxtaposed against the rich.

All this narrated in '*The White Tiger*', don't we notice and witness around us? In Arvind Adiga's words, "There are lots of self made millionaires in India now. Certainly, lots of successful entrepreneurs". Thus, *The White Tiger* is an eye opening, must-read novel portraying our True India. *The White Tiger* is telling us that India is not shining and, despite its claims of a booming economy, it is still "the near-heart of darkness" (Saxena:2008:9).

In this manner, throughout the novel, we experience the conflicts and struggle between two Indias. The novel exposes the India Rising and its rotting hearts. So *The White Tiger* describes the desperate struggles of the deprived. In my opinion though unwillingly, we will have to accept these realities of our two Indias.

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