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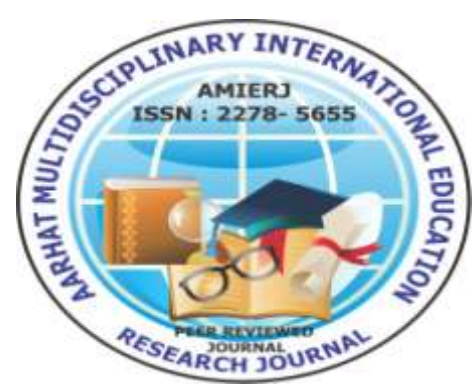
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THE WHITE TIGER: MARGINALITY RETORTS

ENGLISH

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Aravind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* displays the strong reaction of marginality against the wickedest superiority in the Indian society. The novel, which presents the two opposites ends of social classes, articulates the success of the protagonist, Balram Halwai. The superior class relishes nearly every amenity and the marginal class that actually strives for creation is thrown away. Balram, who served as chauffeur for The Stork family, murders one of brothers that is Ashok and steals away the money. India faces many problems like drinking water, regular electricity, sewage system, public transportation, hygiene. The eradication of all such troubles, he knows, is possible, if the marginal class awakens to their own rights. Adiga through his novel create two Indias in one: "an India of Light and an India of Darkness". (14) Balram's real education begins outside the class as he earns his bread serving in tea shop. His observation of variety of people teaches him many lessons of life. His action of killing his master is the awakening of poor people against injustices. Through Balram who represents India of Darkness, the marginal community retorts.



Arvind Adiga, born in Madras belonging to Kannada family from Mangalore, completes his education at Columbia and Oxford universities. His career in journalism aids him in writing novels. His debut novel is honoured with Man Booker Prize.

The protagonist Balram belongs to Laxmangarh, a village that represents darkness of rural life. The aristocratic superiority rules in the village and the poor villagers are harassed without any fault of them. The poor people were treated with inferiority. This so called superiority and inferiority is based on the birth of a person into a particular family. Being a son of rikshaw puller, he is treated as marginal. His family's poverty hinders his education in spite of being brilliant and a student of scholarship. The critical condition of his family forces him to work in a teashop. The experiences of early life create the feeling of anger against the rich class in his mind. He observes the marginal sweat and superior enjoy all comforts in life. This, probably, sets the background for his annoyance against the superiors. Being an adolescent, he decides to observe the people and their nature.

Balram's experiences of the differences among rich and poor classes shapes slowly his rage against the superiors as he reaches Dhanbad to learn driving. Adiga presents the fact that the class distinction is a reality whether it is a village or city. His luck chances him to see the Storks landlords who hire him as a chauffeur. He is appointed to serve as the driver for Ashok, the son of Storks and Pinky Madam, Ashok's wife in the metropolitan city Delhi. He becomes aware of the immense wealth and opportunity around him. The streets of India provide him the real and practical education that he could not get in the four walls of school. The life in Delhi strengthens the differences between poor and rich. Balram has the great attraction for rich life style. He observes the stylish life of Ashok and Pinky Madam. Like other poor drivers, he steals the wine of his master and drink it. Balram does not feel guilty as the collection of wine and money by Storks is actually the harassment of poor people.

Speaking on the servant-master relationship, Adiga says:



The servant-master system implies two things: One is that the servants are far poorer than the rich—a servant has no possibility of ever catching up to the master. And secondly, he has access to the master—the master’s money, the master’s physical person. Yet crime rates in India are very low. Even though the middle class—who often have three or four servants—are paranoid about crime, the reality is a master getting killed by his servant is rare.... You need two things [for crime to occur]—a divide and a conscious ideology of resentment. We don’t have resentment in India. The poor just assume that the rich are a fact of life.... But I think we’re seeing what I believe is a class based resentment for the first time. (Sawhney, 2008)

Being the driver for Ashok and Mukesh, Balram experiences the dirty politics, corruption, inequality, social taboos, caste system, prejudice of people in India. In all such troubles, it is the marginal class that faces difficulties. He knows, he cannot change it by normal way of living. Therefore, it is unusual way that he accepts to succeed in life.

Balram thinks over his situation. His family suffers due to the landlord family. Although he is appointed as the driver, he is treated as the servant. He has to do all the works that a servant is expected to do. The way rich people treat him shapes his anger against them. He plans to be rich and be the part of new India. He knows he cannot become rich by working hard. All the businessman, those who have become rich, have probably done something wrong like corruption, illegal acts, etc. he decides to murder Ashok and carry away the bag full with money. His act of killing the landlord’s son is the retort of marginal against the superiority. It is the anger of so many years. This is the spontaneous reaction against the injustice done to them.

Although one feels restless to know Ashok is murdered, Balram might not to be blamed completely. He kills such a man who is engaged in many illegal activities like corruption. Ashok represents corruption. Therefore, his act of murdering Ashok is actually the murder of



corruption. What Balram does after settling in Bangalore and starting the White Tiger Drivers' Company to serve the girls working at BPO's in nightshifts is more significant. He follows the social responsibility though he runs the company to earn money. When one of the drivers kills a man in a car accident, he offers compensation and job to one of the victim's family members. This contrasts to the accident that the Pinky Madam is responsible for and Balram is forced to accept the crime. Though he is relieved after bribing the concerned officials, it is the insulting life drivers lead because of mistakes of rich people.

The attitude of rich towards poor is reflected the following scene.

'Get down on your knees. Look for it on the floor of the car.'

I got down on my knees. I sniffed in between the mats like a dog, all in search of that one rupee.

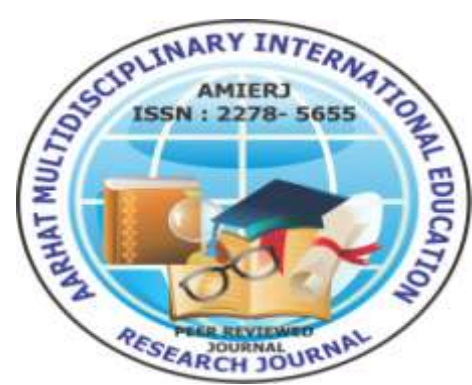
'What do you mean, it's not there? Don't think you can steal from us just because you're in the city. I want that rupee.'

'We've just paid half a million rupees in a bribe, Mukesh, and now we're screwing this man over for a single rupee. Let's go up and have a scotch.'

'That's how you corrupt servants. It starts with one rupee. Don't bring your American ways here.'

Where that rupee coin went remains a mystery to me to this day, Mr Premier. Finally, I took a rupee coin out of my shirt pocket, dropped it on the floor of the car, picked it up, and gave it to the Mongoose. (139)

Balram's act is symbolic. He, who represents the marginal community, wants to end all which is bad, corrupt and illegal in society. Though, he himself is engaged in illegal activities, he compensates it with some social responsibility. Therefore, Adiga allows him to live the life.



The title is symbolically used in the novel. The white tiger is rare animal that is born only once per generation. The school inspector names him The White Tiger because of his aggressive nature. He lives up to the expectation and reacts against injustice. Therefore, the journey of Balram is the retort of marginality against superiority.

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