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FRAMES OF POSTCOLONIAL MARGINALITY: A SUBALTERN STUDY OF ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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ABSTRACT

The present essay reads the novel *The White Tiger* and dissects and articulates different levels of marginalization prevalent in the society of postcolonial India. While India gets the Independence, the British colonization has left a lasting legacy of their two hundred years' reign and that legacy came to shape each and every social fabrics of the society. Writers like Salman Rushdie, Arvind Adiga, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy emerge to re-shape the whole structure of Indian society by exploring and dissecting, in their writing, the wounds incurred on the society by the colonization. *The White Tiger* is one of the attempts by Adiga to hold up the mirror of different social marginalization that had been projected long ago by the Eurocentric colonization. The present paper studies the novel from the point of view of a subaltern and it puts its arguments by drawing theories and concepts from literary and cultural critics like Spivak, Gramsci, Althusser, Foucault.

Keyword: marginalization, postcolonial India, colonization, Eurocentric, subaltern.

The debut novel *The White Tiger* by Arvind Adiga came to the highlight for winning the 2008 Man Booker Prize. It divulges the mind sets of Indian people and their attitude towards castism. The book was intellectually debated and the chairman of Booker committee praised it as for its attention to "important social issues: the division between the rich and the poor, and issues on a global scale." (qtd in Higgins). Adiga too was the victim of social discrimination and this was highlighted through the protagonist Balram Halwai. He affirms in an interview that he wanted to expose the "... brutal injustices of society. That's what writers like Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens did in the 19th century and, as a result, England and France are better societies. That's what I'm trying to do - it's not an attack on the country, it's about the greater process of self-examination." (qtd in Jeffries).

The novel traces the whole life history of Balram and studies how a subaltern turns towards entrepreneurship. He writes up seven letters detailing his relationship with the master Mr. Ashok. He thinks the master loves him as much as he loves. But he later learns that the master classes are the bourgeois who lives at the expense of the servant class. He then struggles to break own this stereotype ideology. Halwai engages himself in immoral activity; steal money from Mr. Ashok but soon faces a bigger coop. Mr. Ashok was fully aware of how to safeguard his business. He plans to offer money to the politicians so that he is not to pay the actual taxes. Balram but administers his plan and uses the money to begin his taxi service. Balram thought his name and title is problematic to the Indian society. Therefore he changes his name Ashok Sharma which helps him to rent vans and able to hire drivers.

Halwai also applies the same policy of his master – bribes the policemen to avoid taxes. Therefore this novel studies the mechanism by which the subalterns are subordinated. The upper class always apartheid to the downtrodden people. Despite of much argument this is undoubtedly the novel which exposes the social reality and educes both universal praise and admiration

Subaltern, a modern developed literary theory refers to the group of people who are inferior in rank. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as a postcolonial critic views the universe through deconstructive interpretation of imperialism which seeks to grill the power relation of Marxism, feminism, deconstruction and post structuralism. She identifies subaltern as a group of people who have been suppressed and decentralizes their contribution and their voices is unheard. The subalterns therefore become a belief system that they are the part of inferior race and unfit to contribute for nation-building. The subaltern basically studies and remembers their past – how they were under subordinate section. Every colonized nation has their past subaltern identity where the bourgeois dominated their ideology over other for personal gain. The subaltern thus is the identity of difference which “celebrates hybridity and cultural polyvalency” (Barry 198). Peter Barry says:

The notion of the double, or divided, or fluid identity which is characteristic of the post-colonial writer explains the great attraction which post-structuralism and deconstruction have proved to be for the post-colonial critic. Post structuralism is centrally concerned to show the fluid and unstable nature of the personal and gender identity, the shifting, „polyvalent“, contradictory currents of signification within texts, and the way literature itself is a site on which ideological struggles are acted out. This mind-set is admirably suited to expressing the numerous contradictions and multiple allegiances of which the post-colonial writer and critic is constantly aware (195 - 196).

Antonio Gramsci -a Marxist critic pictirizes the subaltern concept through proletariat point of view where marginalized voices are excluded from hegemonic power structure. It's the historical

enquiry of Eurocentric method and studies the lives of non-Western in respect of culture, race, gender, and authority. The very word subaltern is the post-colonial critique. Edward said a prominent postcolonial critic values the voice of subaltern people and argues that marginalized people has the power to speak for their full fledged upliftment which Spivak negotiates as “such speaking is only the reflection of non-speaking and silence”. Thus, the postcolonial critique for Young:

Focuses on forces of oppression and coercitive domination that operate in the contemporary world: the politics of anti-colonialism and neocolonialism, race, gender, nationalisms, class and ethnicities define its terrain. Interest in oppression of the past will always be guided by the relation of that history to the present. In that sense, postcolonial theory's intellectual commitment will always be to seek to develop new forms of engaged theoretical work that contributes to the creation of dynamic ideological and social transformation (Young, 2007:11).

Arvind Adiga portrays the lives of subaltern people not in respect of White domination; rather it is a system of a nation which forces to feel themselves as a part of subordinate. And he unfolds a character who always tries to be a respected people to the constructed society which he finally supposes to gain that respect. The descriptive background of the novel is the subaltern scenario. The protagonist Balram Hawker opens the novel with exchange presenting the social system. His formal school education was not held being from lower class family. He even portrays the village Laxmangar through feudalism where four animal characters - dubbed the Buffalo, the Stork (Thakur Ramdev), the Wild Boar, and the Raven who have the full control over land, rivers, and road. Peasants were bound to the landlord who imposes the fees while using the resources. What types of discrimination over marginalized people are prevailing to the institution is also elaborated. Balram refused to come back to the school when his mates tormented him on the ground that he is in pathological fear of lizards .the situation comes in control while his father himself interfere. This matter never makes Balram to be

weak; rather he always wills to overcome the present situation. Balram was the great admirer of Allama Iqbal- a renowned Urdu revolutionary poet who wanted to free the subaltern from the clutch of colonialism. He wrote “They remain slaves because they can’t see what is beautiful in this world” (34). And Balram dares to challenge this in a positive note which he later saw “what was beautiful in the world,” and hence was not destined to remain a slave (35).

Colonialization has the affinity with power-structure on the basis of caste, religion, and color. The social structure also dominates this ideology. Earlier Indian society though still prevail, observes the hierarchical system where the game of power politics is played. Dr Ambedkar -a social reformist was very critical of the cycle of hierarchy system where the graded people enjoy the power. He in his essay “*Untouchability and the Caste System*” straight forwardly attacks the creed of castism:

In a social system based on graded inequality the possibility of a general common attack by aggrieved parties are not on common level. This can happen only when they are only high and low. In the system of graded inequality, there are the highest (Brahmins). Below the highest are the higher (the Kshatriyas). Below the higher are those who are high (Vaishya). Below the high are low (Shudra) and below the low are those who are lower (the Untouchables). All have the grievance against the highest and would like to bring about their downfall. But they will not combine. The higher is anxious to get rid of highest but does not wish to combine with the high, the low and the lower lest they should rise to his status and become his equal. (Ambedkar 40)

The author sarcastically reprints the ancient Indian caste system through the narrative imagery of zoo where all the animals are forced to lead their live in a systematic way and maintain their dignity according to their status and profession:

See, this country (India), in its days of greatness, when it was the richest nation on earth, was like a zoo. A clean, well-kept, orderly zoo. Everyone in his place, everyone happy. Goldsmiths here. Cowherds here.

Landlords here. The man called a Halwai made sweets. The man called a cowherd tended cows. The untouchables cleaned faeces. Landlords were kind to their serfs. Women covered their heads with a veil and turned their eyes to the ground when talking to strange men.(The White Tiger 63)

This novel in fact deconstructs the archetype mind set up of Indian people. Balram himself has to face the color of castism though Indians in literary sense believe in freedom of choice in profession. The difficulty lightens him when he was in conversation with a driver:

The old driver asked, ‘What caste are you?’ ‘Halwai.’ ‘Sweet-makers,’ the old driver said, shaking his head. ‘That’s what you people do. You make sweets. How can you learn to drive?’ He pointed his hookah at the live coals. ‘That’s like getting coals to make ice for you. Mastering a car,-- he moved the stick of an invisible gearbox-‘ it’s like taming a wild Stallion—only a boy from the warrior castes can manage that. You need to have aggression in your blood. Muslims, Rajputs, Sikhs—they are the fighters, they can become drivers. You think sweet-makers can last long in fourth gear?’ (WT 56)

But Balram is not the man of cage bird of castism; rather a man of action who always is in the process of deconstruction to have the proper social upliftment and directs a way for future subaltern populace how to overcome such discrimination. And this system has the long rooted history; Manu is the cause of cast based social structure and their professions. A dexterous driver, a contriver and a murderer as in the case of Balram is the clear indication of his upliftment. And he finally becomes an entrepreneur in Indian orthodoxy society.

The white tiger is also the critic Indian government. It artistically explores how infrastructure, institution and their corruption affected to the marginalized people. The author also shows us that this faulty social structure will restrict a nation’s mobility. Balram is the author’s mouthpiece. The government discriminate the marginal on the medical service. The description is enough when he enters to a hospital carrying his dying father:

Kishan and I carried our father in, stamping on the goat turds which had spread like a constellation of black stars on the ground. There was no doctor in the hospital. The ward boy, after we bribed him ten rupees, said that a doctor might come in the evening. The doors to the hospital's rooms were wide open; the beds had metal springs sticking out of them, and the cat began snarling at us the moment we stepped into the room.

The hospital represents a tragic scene where Balram's father died but doctors hardly met him. The inauguration for new hospital is proposed by politician but the reality is totally different as the authors comments, "there are three different foundation stones for a hospital, laid by three different politicians before three different elections". A victim of hospital corruption clearly explains doctors as busy in private chamber and the politician how benefitted from that social system:

See, it's like this," the older Muslim man said. "There's a government medical superintendent who's meant to check that doctors visit village hospitals like this. Now, each time this post falls vacant, the Great Socialist lets all the big doctors know that he's having an open auction for that post. The going rate for this post is about four hundred thousand rupees these days.

The concept of Rooster Coop is the metaphor on caste system. This animal imagery presents the whole human sectarian division. It is the mechanism by which subaltern people are suppressed. A critic elaborates the coop in relation with social system: "The social relations among castes depend upon the ranking of the castes in the caste- hierarchy. When villagers meet either for council meetings or for gossips, they generally seat themselves with considerations to caste rank". Balram here is breaks down the archetype belief. The 'Others' are the subject of inhuman treatment and their continuous humiliation. Balram sees an inscription in Delhi's National Zoo which reads as "Imagine yourself in this cage". This remark is the pun for interpretation. The family from where he belongs is the cage of downtrodden caste. He in other hand wanted to rise in higher status; for he is the white tiger – symbol of strength and power to deconstruct the constructed

social norms. He says: "No. it's because 99.9 per cent of us are caught in the Rooster Coop just like those poor guys in the poultry market". He had deep belief in exceptionalism and his activity proves that. What the people around him thinks about him whether he truly will break the cage, he gives his practical reflection.

A far cry for Indian democracy system and its effect upon the subaltern is the matter of concern. Adiga powerfully describes the political corruption through Balram. His writing a letter to Chinese premier is about democratic system to satirize, "Some politician on the radio was saying that that's why we Indians are going to beat you: we may not have sewage, drinking water, and Olympic gold medals, but we do have democracy." (WT, 96) India was and is the victim of colonized people though India at surface level thrives for democratic way life style and profession. Election system directly and indirectly suppresses the subaltern minds. Even the dominated political party uses policemen as a means of torture and marginalized people are bound to obey the law and order. All types of hates and caste politics are discussed in print and electronic media, as it seems that India is about to against other nation. But it is sorry to say that the politicians fight within a nation country for their personal gain forgetting the polity of nation building:

Now the date for the elections had been set, and declared on radio, election fever had started spreading again. These are the three main diseases of this country, sir: typhoid, cholera, and election fever. This last one is the worst; it makes people talk and talk about the things that they have no say in. (98)

A man during election 'went mad', yet tried to vote rather than his vote is being sold. But it is the bourgeois sponsored policeman who obstructs his path and bested black and blue. Balram mockingly reveals that he himself is the murderer and become fugitive. Yet his vote is counted as valuable.

Age limitation in Indian electoral system is also matter of Colonialization. It's not the election commission of Indian, rather a feudal and neo colonized politicians who decide the inclusion of name in voter-list and misuses their vote. The same

thing happens with the protagonist Balram- his corrupted school teacher enlisted his name though Balram could not remember his date of birth and his right to vote. All the friends associates with the same age were also included to the list:

I had to be eighteen. All of us in the tea shop had to be eighteen, the legal age to vote. There was an election coming up, and the tea shop owner had already sold us. He had sold our fingerprints—the inky fingerprints which the illiterate person makes on the ballot paper to indicate his vote. I had overheard this from a customer. This was supposed to be a close election; he had got a good price for each one of us from the Great Socialist's party. (97)

Adiga's picurization of India is much more similar to V. s Naipaul's India. Naipaul as being Diaspora faces the problem associated with Indian politics- caste, and their professions. He travels across India especially Kolkata, Chennai and Delhi. He even queries the downfall of Indian infrastructure and other parameters as compares to developed countries like China, America. He feels that castism and unequal contribution of Indian every citizen to the nation building. This system more marginalized the downtrodden people. He in his travelogue *An Area of Darkness*: His Discovery of India argues:

Class is a system of rewards. Caste imprisons a man in his function. From this it follows, since there are no rewards, those duties and responsibilities become irrelevant to position. A man is his proclaimed function. There is little subtlety to India. The poor are thin; the rich are fat. The petty Marwari merchant in Calcutta eats quantities of sweets to develop the layers of fat that will proclaim his prosperity. ' You look fat and fresh today' is a compliment in Punjab. And in every Uttar Pradesh town you might see the rich and very fat man in cool, clean white sitting in cycle-rickshaw being peddled by a poor and very thin man, prematurely aged, in rags...(An Area of Darkness 76)

Balram is the man who seeks liberation from colonial minded society. What the difficulty his father faces being a subaltern, he did not vision. His father was a rickshaw puller and was suppressed in

almost every sector – the hospital authority neglected during his fatal tuberculosis. Balram therefore visions a world where no domination, suppression will prevail and, thus it is the education which decentralize the castism and their profession:

The rickshaw-pullers parked their vehicles in a line outside the tea shop, waiting for the bus to disgorge its passengers. They were not allowed to sit on the plastic chairs put out for the customers; they had to crouch near the back, in that hunched-over, squatting posture common to servants in every part of India. My father never crouched—I remember that. He preferred to stand, no matter how long he had to wait and how uncomfortable it got for him. I would find him shirtless, usually alone, drinking tea and thinking. (23-24)

The character of Balram is the metaphor of resistance. He at the very beginning was a soft and obedient servant. The sense of intellectuality has developed and realized that his weakness is the cause of his marginality. He started to be cruel towards his master, friend, and even family after a long expanse⁴ of suppressed, dominated and subordinated. Balram then read the mind of the people who are unfit for revolution - “ An Indian revolution? No, sir. It won' t happen. People of this country are still waiting for their war of freedom to come from somewhere else That will never happen, Everyman must make his own Benares” (304) But he is an optimist who would like to direct his subaltern people towards a great rebellion for the betterment of future generation:

Have I not succeeded in the struggle that every poor man should be making- the struggle not to take the lashes that your father took, not to end up in a mound of indistinguishable bodies that will rot up in the black mud of the Mother Ganga. (318)

To the concluding keynote, it can be assumed that the modern Republic India opens up a window for social change. Every citizen has the right to choose their profession. Yet there is a need to deconstruct the social caste system for the upliftment of subaltern people. Because the Dalit and downtrodden people still has to fall on the trap of castism which questions on their existence. The

White Tiger unfolds all the problem and corruption concerns with Indian social system which gradually marginalizes the backward classes. Balram, a subaltern and superficial Byronic hero with criminal activity arises to the society and shows his strength with self justification. The background from where he belongs is full of corruption, colonialization, feudalism and more a caste politics. Adiga like Dickens, Thackeray, and Maria Edgeworth etc unveils the vile aspect of Indian society. A review of this book clearly states "*The White Tiger* is a penetrating piece of social commentary, attuned to the inequalities that persist despite India's new prosperity. It correctly identifies — and deflates — middle-class India's collective euphoria".

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