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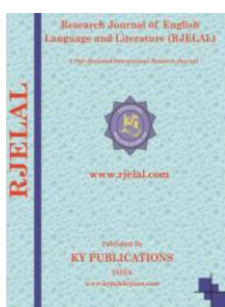
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## ARAVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*: A MIRROR TO SOCIO-POLITICAL MALAISE

Dr.PINKI NEGI BORA

Asst. Prof. REC, Mainpuri

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### ABSTRACT

Arvind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* highlights the unglamorous yet real picture of modern India. The poor education system of India has been successfully depicted in the novel. How poor people do not have access to formal schools and hence remain 'half-baked'. Education which enlightens one's thinking and makes one aware of one's rights is also considered the right of the rich only. No education or lack of education keeps them in dark throughout their lives with a belief that they are destined to serve the rich.

The author was bitterly criticized by the critics for ruthlessly exposing the naked truth of the so-called democratic country, India. In my opinion Arvind Adiga rightfully deserves the Man Booker Prize 2008 for *The White Tiger* because unlike other writers he dared presenting and accepting the fact that a nation cannot progress and be a developed one unless it has honest and assiduous politicians and bureaucrats. Corruption begets corruption and undoubtedly corruption and lack of education hamper the progress and development of any nation and undermine the strength of a country. To evade corruption, it is essential to equip our children with value education. Crook politicians should be dethroned and corrupt government officials should be punished. It is high time to act now before it gets too late. Unite and stand against corruption to make India a clean, corruption free nation.

**Key Words:** Education, nation, progress, develop, politicians, corruption

Arvind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* brought him accolades and won him the 40<sup>th</sup> Man Booker Prize in 2008. The novel is an unflattering presentation of the dark side of India. It beautifully juxtaposes the contrasting image of the two sides of India "an India of Light, and an India of Darkness" (*The White Tiger* 14). Adiga attempts to exhibit the experiences which poor Indian people go through their entire lives. *The White Tiger* is a story of an oppressed, uneducated boy, Balram, who through illegitimate means rises to success and becomes a successful entrepreneur. Balram Halwai, the central character unfolds the experiences of his life to the readers through the seven letters which he writes to Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao. The letters highlight

the unglamorous yet real picture of modern India, "though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, *does* have entrepreneurs" (*The White Tiger* 4). The poor education system of India has also been successfully depicted in the novel. How poor people do not have access to formal schools and hence remain 'half-baked'. Balram could also have made a meaningful contribution to the society, had his education not been discontinued. As Preeti Chaudhary writes:

The book is set in present day India. *The White Tiger* brings to contrast the disparity between progressive Indian

cities and regressive Indian villages. It depicts the different faces of urban and rural corruption, brings to light various cultural stigmas associated with caste and religion, and is able to pinpoint multiple other societal malaises. (111)

Balram was the smartest and the brightest of all the students. He was named "*The White Tiger*" by the inspector during a surprise inspection because in the entire crowd he was the only one who could answer all his questions correctly. The inspector found him "an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots"(The White Tiger 35). The inspector realized the potential of Balram and therefore wanted him to go to a formal school to get formal education and hence before leaving he said that "I'll write to Patna asking them to send you a scholarship. You need to go to a real school-somewhere far away from here. You need a real uniform, and a real education." (The White Tiger 35). But fate has something else stored for Balram which completely changed his life-from an innocent child to a criminal.

His life took a drastic turn because of the huge loan taken by the family from the Stork to arrange for Reena's (Balram's cousin) big wedding and to give a lavish dowry to her in-laws. The novel portrays dowry system as a deep rooted social evil of India where many times a girl's family has to bear irrational demands of the groom's family. For the same reason, girls in Indian society hold an unfortunate position. They are often regarded as burden on the family and the society. Balram's entire family underwent suffering because of the loan taken from the Stork. He was taken out of the school, for the Stork wanted all his family members to work for him. That's a way to suppress poor people, deprive them of their right to education, to keep them in dark and ignorance throughout their lives, to restrain them from holding a respectable position in the society and to make them feel like human beings with emotions and self-respect.

Kishan, Balram's brother, too had to leave his school after his cousin sister Meera's marriage which also had been a big affair. Kishan and Balram met their tragic fate because of the hefty loan taken

by the girls' family to satiate the greed of the grooms' family. They both after taken out from the school worked as child laborers at a tea shop. Yogesh Atal writes "Illiteracy, ignorance and poverty characterized the vast population of rural India" (101) and undoubtedly the same prevent the poor to make efforts to erase the class disparity and articulate their sufferings. Consequently, at a very early age, they are deprived of their childhood, innocence, ability and self-esteem. Certainly, this practice is detrimental to the mental, moral, social development of any nation. Corruption, poverty, illiteracy are the factors responsible for wide spread child labor. We cannot dream of a strong and developed nation unless each citizen of the country is educated and the rich free from the tendency to suppress and exploit the poor. To eradicate poverty and child labor the government should take some firm measures like making education free and mandatory to every individual. Make the poor people aware of their rights. Make them understand that education can help them lead a dignified and productive life without being fearful of one's power and money.

The White Tiger is an attempt to expose the unpleasant conditions in which the poor people live and suffer throughout their lives without articulating a word of oppression and injustice. It depicts rural India and the role of zamindars in it. The zamindari practice has been one of the causes of the poor state of underclass in rural India. For centuries zamindars have enjoyed affluence and prosperity by exploiting and oppressing the poor people. They are treated as slaves and considered as negative, powerless, passive creatures that are not provided with enough rights to create themselves as equivalent, sensible human beings, dare to negate their subjectivity. The novel presents how oppression, repression, and silence become the root cause of the pitiable status of the poor people. Through the characters of the four landlords, Aravind Adiga attempts to highlight the cruel and ugly picture of rural India where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. To make money and exploit the poor, the four landlords confiscated the public property on which every individual has the right. The roads, the river, the fertile and even the

infertile lands were owned by these landlords. In this connection Pratibha Nagpal says, "Together they form a mafia that controls everything-the river, the agriculture land, the roads and the hillside".(153) The four landlords are named as the four animals as per their distinct peculiarities-The Buffalo, The Stork, The Wild Boar, The Raven. The Buffalo was the greediest of all the four animals. He owned rickshaws and roads of Laxmangarh and therefore the rickshaw pullers and the people had to pay one-third of their earnings to him for using the roads.

The Stork named Thakur Ramdev owned the river and excised taxes on fishermen and boatmen for catching fish and crossing the river. The Wild Boar owned the best agricultural lands around Laxmangarh. If people wanted to work on his agricultural lands they "had to bow down to his feet, and touch the dust under his slippers, and agree to swallow his day wages"(The White Tiger 25). The Raven owned the worst dry, infertile land but he made the use of that infertile land also by extracting money from the poor goat herds. He sucked them in financial terms by taking the cut for using the infertile land to graze their flocks. He was named Raven because if the poor did not have money to pay him "he liked to dip his beak into their backsides." (The White Tiger 25) The novel depicts the brutality of zamindars for whom the life of the poor does not have value. They subjugated and treated them like slaves and even tortured and killed them without any fear of law. The lawlessness and impunity certainly made them more powerful, fearless and increased the plight of underclass.

The Buffalo shot his domestic servant dead as he was sure that for money the servant deliberately let the naxals kidnap and kill his infant son. The barbarism of the landlord (Buffalo) did not end here. He finished off the entire family of the servant consisting of his brother, sister-in-law, and an unmarried sister. Their house was also set on fire. He massacred the entire family of his servant to set an example and also to assert his dominance in Laxmangarh. Even though being exploited by the rich beyond all limits, the poor never attempt to rebel or escape the situation. They bear all the sufferings taking as their fate. This incident breathes

out the cruelty and evils prevalent in rural India even in today's times. Krishna Singh rightly says:

The lack and deprivation, loneliness and alienation, subjugation and subordination, the resignation and silence, the resilience and neglect mark the lives of subaltern, even when they resist and rise up, they feel bounded and defeated by their subject positions. They have no representatives or spokesperson in the society they live in and so helplessly suffer and get marginal place or no place at all in the history and culture of which they are the essential part as human beings. (98)

Oppression, exploitation, injustice, ill-treatment do not characterize only the 'dark India' but also features the 'India of Light' which externally seems beautiful, modern, and devoid of inequality and injustice. But the reality is totally reverse and bitter. In Light India too, the poor are deprived of their privileges and treated as passive and inessential beings.

Through the character of Balram, Aravind Adiga exposes the employer-servant relationship in India. He depicts the tendency of the rich to treat their servants like chattels. They exploit them by making them do all the domestic chores ranging from cleaning, cooking, washing clothes, utensils, baby sitting, house-keeping, walking dogs, bathing dogs and that too all in a meager salary. He tells that "the rich don't have drivers, cooks, barbers, and tailors. They simply have servants." (The White Tiger 68). The Mongoose, the son of the Stork could not tolerate Balram sitting idle for a while and if he ever saw him "waste even one moment, he would shout, 'Driver, don't loiter there! Clean the car.'

'Cleaned it already, sir.'

'Then take a broom and sweep the courtyard.'" (The White Tiger 75).

Balram, though hired as a driver also had to clean the courtyard, massaged the Stork's feet in warm water, he had to go to liquor shop with another driver, Ram Persad, to buy the 'first class whisky' for the Stork and his sons-Mr. Ashok and Mr.

Mukesh. He also had to take care of the two Pomeranians-Cuddles and Puddles. He was supposed to treat the dogs-Cuddles and Puddles like humans because the rich “expect their dogs to be pampered, and walked, and petted, and even washed!” (The White Tiger 78). For an employer the relationship between master and servant is of Subject and Object, domination and subjugation. Aravind Adiga mocks at rich Indian people who treat their servants like animals and animals like human beings. Don’t pull the chain so hard! They’re worth more than you are! (The White Tiger 78). The savage treatment meted out to servants is a regular feature in India. We cannot imagine a better society, a better nation unless we consider one another as human beings. Let poor people also affirm their identities. Stop exploiting them, stop enslaving them, and stop murdering them.

The strife between the rich and the poor class is the root cause of all the problems in society. Unless education becomes integral for every individual, slavery and servitude can never come to an end. The rich will keep feeding on the poor until the poor also articulate their rights for equal education and equal opportunities. It is only education which can enlighten them and make them understand that they live in a democratic country and even being poor they are entitled to every right which strengthens their position as equal beings like the rich. The whole tragedy with poor people is that due to poverty many of them fail to complete their schooling and they spend their entire life in serving the rich class. To make both ends meet they even forget that they too have their own existence. Poverty and struggle to earn their livelihood consume their entire life and do not give them enough time to give even an identity to their own children.

It was Balam’s teacher who gave him the name Balam. When the teacher asked him his name he replied- ‘Munna’. The teacher said that it was not a real name, and then he realized that he had never been given an identity or a name by his poor parents. His mother’s illness and father’s worry to earn livelihood for the family did not give them enough time to name him. Adiga calls this section of the society as dark, underprivileged who are always

busy in making two ends meet, devoid of basic necessities of life. He portrays the nation which has two sides dark India and Light India. It is very unfortunate that a so-called civilized nation, India, is ashamed of its dark side. Its poor population and their menial works make the nation and its elite class feels let down. “Rickshaws are not allowed inside the posh parts of Delhi, where foreigners might see them and gape” (The White Tiger 27). Through this novel, the novelist delineates the miserable life of underclass. The poor spend their entire lives in dearth, in want of basic needs, in worn out clothes, in penury. When they are alive, their aspirations and desires never get fulfilled due to financial constraints but when they die their dead bodies are adorned with new clothes and flowers. It’s an irony that the poor Indians make death august and life deplorable. What is the point of decking up a body with new clothes when with the body, the desires and emotions are also dead and when we know that now nothing can make the corpse happy. Balam recounts his mother’s funeral who died in penury.

My mother’s body had been wrapped from head to toe in a saffron silk cloth, which was covered in rose petals and jasmine garlands. I don’t think she had ever had such a fine thing to wear in her life. Her death was so grand that I knew, all at once, that her life must have been miserable. My family was guilty about something. (The White Tiger 16).

Balam not only lost his mother but after sometime his father too who could not receive any medical treatment due to the absence of corrupt doctors in government hospitals. The novel highlights the corruption prevalent in India not only at high level but also at low level. Through the letters written to Wen Jiabao, Balam exposes the corruption prevalent in education and health system. His letters bring to light an incident of embezzlement done by the village school teacher. As per the government programme students were supposed to get free meals at school but the poor children never ever got “rotis, or yellow daal, or pickles” (The White Tiger 33) simply because the school teacher had embezzled their money.

The students never received the school uniforms also, sent by the government whereas they were turned up for sale a week later in the neighborhood village. These fraudulent activities reflect the pathetic condition of India where because of one's greed, the nation, its people, and its children, suffer hard. People restoring to corruption threaten economic growth, moral values and also undermine the development of any nation. Corruption in India is so deeply entrenched that even people from the lower strata give justifiable reasons to espouse immoral practice. It was very disgraceful on the part of the teacher who put a legitimate excuse for this embezzlement. He said that "he hadn't been paid his salary in six months. He was going to undertake a Gandhian protest to retrieve his missing wages-he was going to do nothing in class until his pay cheque arrived in the mail" (The White Tiger 33). The teacher whose sole duty should have been to educate and impart knowledge and values to students was himself indulged in making money through illegitimate means. Teachers who are torchbearers, nation-makers, if they themselves shrug off their responsibilities, how can we expect a nation to be strong and corruption free? If a teacher fails to perform his duty honestly he is dragging the entire budding generation towards darkness, ignorance and depression. A dutiful teacher imparts knowledge, inculcates ethical values in his students and leads them towards light and promising future. On the contrary, a bad teacher spreads ignorance and leads his students towards darkness and gloomy future.

Balam can be called unfortunate in that way as he being so bright and intelligent as a student did not get the opportunity and the right direction to excel in life and the reason being poverty and a corrupt teacher. Since childhood, he saw only corruption and poverty and somewhere absorbed the same dishonesty in himself believing that it was the only way to get rid of penury and misfortune. He got a corrupt teacher who did not impart ethical values in his students rather his unethical practices made Balam corrupt and a murderer in his later life. He saw his teacher indulged in evil practices and therefore imbibed

"dishonesty, lack of dedication, and insincerity" (The White Tiger 51) from him. Children learn from their elders, parents, and teachers but if they all fail to demonstrate good conduct it is difficult to expect from children to become responsible and productive individuals.

Adiga's *The White Tiger* mirrors the bitter truth of contemporary India and undoubtedly he has the courage to present the real ugly picture of India as a nation. Through the narrative of his character, Balam, he demonstrates the prevalence of corruption at every level-be it at a low level or at a high level. Corruption, bribery, fraud which have become commonplace in every section of the society is brilliantly portrayed by Aravind Adiga. Corrupt politicians and their dirty politics also get discerned in the novel. In a quest to gain power, name, fame, and influence, politicians do not hesitate to make unrealistic and unreliable promises to common public which they conveniently forget once elections are over. In the words of Verma "there is no certainty in the Indian political system. The elected members never bother about the real progress of the country. They are busy in befooling the poor by giving tall promises. They promise them of employment and other basic facilities." (94) Suddenly during election time, poor common people become important to all the political parties. The needs, the dreams, the problems become the needs, the dreams, and the problems of political parties at least for the time being until the elections are over. The malpractice of Indian politicians gets its glimpse in *The White Tiger* when to get vote and win elections three different political leaders of three different political parties before three different elections laid three different foundation stones for hospital in Laxmangarh which was never built. These political leaders played with the emotions of the poor villagers by promising them of a hospital in their village but like other un-implemented promises this promise also remained unfulfilled. In the absence of a good hospital in Laxmangarh, Balam took his severely ill father to a government hospital. But owing to the non-availability of a doctor at the hospital, the poor man died without receiving any medical care. It is unfortunate that the administration even after being aware of the fact

that the money, and the facilities intended for the poor never reach them, turns a blind eye to it. Diseases can be cured if one gets proper medical care on time but how we can cure corruption and poverty which has spread like an epidemic throughout the country. The abject poverty, corruption, and the adverse effects of rickshaw pulling on Balram's father eventually took his life. More than rickshaw pulling and poverty, corruption took his father's life. Balram witnessed the death of his parents in poverty which left a long-lasting impression on him and made him decide not to die in penury and deprivation. This determination to come out of the miserable life, to lead a happy, rich life and to erase the social inequality between him and the rich made him dishonest and eventually a murderer of his master, Mr. Ashok. It seems as if through the character of Balram, Aravind Adiga attempts to imply that poverty is a curse in India and it can crush anybody's integrity and make it difficult for an individual to lead an ethical life. He wants the readers to read between the lines that without being unethical, one cannot even dream of a comfortable, carefree life. Balram's journey from rags to riches illustrates the point of the author. Balram who only saw destitution and misery in life since childhood could not keep himself contented in that unhappy situation for long and to taste the comforts of life he began with minor fraudulent activities which ultimately culminated in the murder of Mr. Ashok for Rs. 700,000.

Aravind Adiga has also employed a number of examples in the novel to prove his point that it is corruption which hits any country the hardest and it has its adverse impact especially on the poor limiting their access to equal education, equal health services and equal opportunity. One cannot dream of a government job in India unless one has a hefty amount to pay as a bribe to politicians or higher authorities or has political connections with ministers. In India, it is money which makes even an unqualified and an undeserving candidate deserving and suitable for the job and the rest who cannot pay a huge bribe remain unemployed and gradually indulge in immoral activities and making the nation an unsecured place to live in. It is foolishness to

expect honesty and integrity from the one who gets the job through illegal means.

Aravind Adiga explains how corruption begets corruption. To get a government job, connections with political players are used, huge amount of money is given and it is but obvious that the one who himself has given bribe to get the job will not be honest and he will also make money in an unscrupulous manner. Honesty, integrity, sincerity, and sense of responsibility cannot be expected from a doctor who gets the post of a Government Medical Superintendent after begging and borrowing a hefty amount. Now, the amount which one has borrowed to bribe the Great Socialist for the vacant post has to be recovered. The Government Medical Superintendent who was supposed to vigil that junior doctors visit village hospitals or not, he instead of monitoring them marked them present on ledger and illegally permitted them to work in private hospitals in lieu of one third of their government salary. There was a time in India when doctors held the status equal to god but in the present times many of them have defamed and disrespected this pious profession just for a small amount. Even the deaths of the poor due to the greed and carelessness of the doctors do not stir their emotions and make them realize their duties and responsibilities towards common public. Humanity is lost somewhere in today's times. The doctors have fallen from that godly state which they once enjoyed. They have become mere puppets in the hands of ministers, politicians and the rich class.

The character of The Great Socialist in *The White Tiger* presents the ugly reality of corrupt political system where votes are not earned, in fact bought. If a candidate works for the society and its people, he does not need to resort to malpractices. His work done for the poor and the society will earn him votes. But unfortunately, honesty is something rare to see in contemporary political system. The entire system is immersed in corruption and dishonesty. Once after being elected, the politicians forget the public and the promises made to them. They just remember that during their tenure they have to amass wealth by all means and due to this exploitative tendency they contribute to the miseries of poor common public.

India is a democratic country where people are free to cast their votes as per their choice. Each single vote determines their future. In contrary, the politicians determine their future and undermine common public's future by exploiting them economically, socially, and morally. The Great Socialist, as per the title signifies was supposed to work for the betterment and upliftment of the poor but along with his ministers he had ninety-three cases registered against him "for murder, rape, grand larceny, gun smuggling, pimping, and many other such minor offences" (The White Tiger 97). Aravind Adiga did not hesitate to mock at the political system of India where politicians with criminal records are allowed to contest elections and ministers detained in jail continue to hold office. The Great Socialist who had been in power for past ten years won election after election by paying huge amount to agents. Balram, like other illiterate people unknowingly marked his finger prints on the ballot paper and cast his precious vote to a wrong candidate. It happened because being illiterate they did not know the value of their votes. They did what their tea-shop employer asked them to do. They were completely unaware of the fact that their employer had sold their votes to the Great Socialist in lieu of money.

In one of the letters written to Wen Jiabao, Balram unveils the poor hollow state of democracy in India. He mentions that how politicians befool the poor public of dark India. The precious votes of these uneducated poor people are sold without their knowledge and unlike people in the light they cannot exercise their voting power. Taking advantage of their unawareness, agents make money by selling their votes to politicians and bring the unscrupulous politicians in power who increase corruption and nepotism in political system for personal gain. To illustrate the electoral fraud, Balram recounts an incident that how he even without being aware of his actual birthday was marked as 18 years old on the papers by a government agent and without his knowledge his vote was sold to the Great Socialist. By offering huge bribe to government officials the corrupt ministers rig elections and stay in power and suck the nation for a long period of time. In India majority of people

join politics not with an intention to serve the nation but to serve themselves. They come into politics to make money, to become powerful. The character of Vijay, portrayed by Aravind Adiga distinctly illustrates the argument. Vijay, a meager bus conductor, the son of a pig herder, soon rises to success and becomes a successful politician.

People like the tea-shop owner forget their responsibilities towards society, and nation and just for a small amount they bring to power corrupt politicians who have nothing to do with the sufferings of common public. These tainted politicians only aim at accumulating wealth without any fear of being enquired and punished. "The Great Socialist himself is said to have embezzled one billion rupees from the Darkness, and transferred that money into a bank account in a small, beautiful country in Europe full of white people and black money" (The White Tiger 98). It is an open loot and can never be ceased unless corrective measures are taken to curb corruption. Rooting out corruption requires effective punishment imposed on every one regardless of one's position and status.

Due to open electoral malpractices, the Great Socialist had politically become so powerful that it was difficult for others to dethrone him without themselves being corrupt. "Would they beat the Great Socialist and win the elections? Had they raised enough money of their own, and bribed enough policemen, and bought enough fingerprints of their own, to win?" (The White Tiger 98) Votes in return for cash and freebies is a common practice in India. Those who do not accept gifts or cash and willing to cast their votes to a candidate of their choice are prevented from going inside the polling booth and at times beaten to death. The man who tried to go inside the polling booth to cast his vote at his will was murdered by a policeman himself. It is better to call a nation autocratic than democratic where the law makers fearlessly become the law breakers and join hands with politicians with criminal background to refrain poor common people to stand upright against them, against oppression, against corruption. To receive favors from politicians the police also instead of serving the public, forget their duties and responsibilities towards common people and campaign for

hypocrite politicians. Balram narrates an incident to prove the irresponsible attitude of police in India. He tells how a policeman instead of performing his duty was busy in writing a slogan on the wall of a temple. "DO YOU WANT GOOD ROADS, CLEAN WATER, GOOD HOSPITALS? THEN VOTE OUT THE GREAT SOCIALIST!" (The White Tiger 98). Poor public cast their votes with a hope that the leader elected by them as their representative will set them free from darkness and poverty but their hopes and dreams soon shatter when the leader once after being elected conveniently forget them and the promises made to them. He mints money by putting faith of general public at stake and the public never realizes the devastating impact of these scams on them and their lives. They suffer hard without uttering a word of protest. Their silence becomes the cause of suppression. Night Gandhi correctly writes, "For silence is a form of participation" in oppression. Gandhi asserts, "Silence, neglect and indifference are indicative of the desire for the status quo to remain unchanged." The need is to articulate oppression if they want to come out of their miserable condition. These self-serving politicians perpetuate oppression, corruption and inequality and doom the entire nation to abject poverty, darkness and misery. The Great Socialist who was appointed by the poor to put their problems across served the rich and made his and their fortune by turning a blind eye to the scam done by the Stork and his sons. They paid bribe to the Great Socialist for "taking coal for free from the government mines" (The White Tiger 104). During elections the powerful and wealthy donors help politicians by funding them huge amounts for their campaigns and after winning and holding the position, the politicians consistently favour the rich at the expense of the poor. So basically, the politicians and the rich cater each other's needs and accomplish their objectives. Undoubtedly, Aravind Adiga's novel, *The White Tiger* invariably presents the sordid corruption prevalent in India where the poor are deprived of their fundamental rights and unjustly treated. Even without entering the polling booth their votes are cast and they because of corrupt political system remain stuck to 'rooster coop'

throughout their lives-victimized and terrorized by the rich.

Social evils like corruption, riots and casteism are threat to the democracy of any nation. The caste system in ancient India began with four main varnas or classes- Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras based on their specific occupation. Apart from these four castes there is also a fifth category of untouchables who are supposed to do menial jobs like cleaning faeces and therefore are treated with contempt. The caste system in India and particularly rural India is so rigid that it restricts the person to pursue an occupation of his or her choice. It is deemed that the son of a blacksmith is destined to be a blacksmith only which certainly infringes individual's freedom and potential. It forces the individual to practice the traditional occupation and restrains from trying his/her hand in other occupation(s) of his/her choice. "The caste system has always been a blot on Indian culture and society and it has caused to a number of Indians especially people belonging to lower strata of the society" (Wankhede 130). It is so unfortunate that even after 70 years of independence we Indians are still entrapped in cesspools of class and caste rigidity.

Balram who was ambitious and always aspired for better life was not ready to compromise with his destiny and age old caste system. Initially he stuck to the line of his caste and worked at a tea shop, smashing coals, wiping and cleaning tables. "The owner thought, *Ah, they're Halwais, making sweets and tea is in their blood*" (The White Tiger 63). But unhappy and dissatisfied with his job, he broke free from social obstacles and decided to become a chauffeur. But it's difficult to change the society, its people and their mindset. When Balram went to an old taxi driver to learn driving, he asked him:

'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?'.... You need to have aggression in



your blood. Muslims, Rajputs, Sikhs—they're fighters, they can become drivers. You think sweet-makers can last long in fourth gear?' ... 'Why don't you stick to sweets and tea?' (The White Tiger 56)

How can we expect a nation to be developed and corruption free where even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century people are tethered to age old caste system and rotten conventions? In Indian society irrespective of an individual's potential or aspiration one's caste determines the future of one's career. When Balram went to the Stork's house in search of a job, he also asked him about his caste before hiring him as a chauffeur for his son Ashok. "Are you from a top caste or bottom caste, boy?" (The White Tiger 64) In India, caste is given the utmost priority and one's caste becomes a deciding factor for one's job. Balram was very well aware of the fact that his lower caste may snatch the opportunity of his escaping poverty and servitude. Fortunately, his luck favored him and he got hired as a driver and from here onwards his life underwent a change—a drastic change.

Since upper caste Hindus are caste and religion conscious so at times poor people in need of job disguise their identity, religion, and caste. The Stork was a prejudiced master and had a condescending attitude towards Muslims. Being aware of his disliking for Muslims, Mohammad disguised his real identity. To get the job and support his poor family, Mohammad the prime driver to the Stork, changed his name to Ram Persad. It was a small lie which was not causing any harm to anyone but caste discrimination, looking down upon one's religion, poverty, need, unemployment may make an individual—corrupt, criminal, immoral, and violent. In India, since the tender age religion is forced on children and they acquire religious beliefs of their elders. At times knowingly or unknowingly the elders cripple their tender minds by exposing them to wrong ideas or beliefs or by inculcating in them dislike and disrespect for one's religion and caste. The Stork who had strong disliking for Muslims said to his grandson, Roshan "Call yourself Gavaskar. Azharuddin is a Muslim" (The White Tiger 70) when while playing cricket and every time hitting a six or a

four, Roshan shouted, "I'm Azharuddin, captain of India!" (The White Tiger 69)! The Stork was also against of Ashok's marriage with Pinky Madam as she was a Christian and eventually because of caste and cultural differences their marriage failed.

The novel depicts even trivial incidents to bring forth the state of the poor in big cities like Delhi. Aravind Adiga tells how a poor man in India is prevented from going inside a mall just because unlike others he had worn sandals which indicated his poor class. This maltreatment made him ask a very relevant question "Am I not a human being too?" (The White Tiger 148)? The incident also shows that the poor even being the citizens of a democratic country are not entitled to enjoy the same rights and life like the rich. They get the status of human beings during election time only as their votes count otherwise for the elite class they are mere animals that have no aspirations, dreams and emotions. The ill-treatment meted out to them forces them to live in sub-human conditions with no existence of their own in the elite society.

The rich humiliate them, scream at them and make them feel that since they are poor, they are born to serve them. They forget that even being poor, they too have the right to live with dignity and without fear. Balram, a servant and driver to Mr. Ashok in Delhi was a hero for his family and villagers, since he was the one who made a move from dark India to Light India. He depicts the ugliness of light India from a servant's view point where servants like him are non-existent beings, callously treated by their masters.

*The White Tiger* also explores how rich people who are responsible for road accidents and deaths, use their drivers as scapegoats. They emotionally blackmail them to claim the responsibility for accidents. For a rich, the life of a poor does not cost much. Instead of being ashamed of their guilt and accepting the wrong done by them, they use other poor fellows, their drivers to assert the responsibility of being guilty. The Stork's family insisted Balram to take the responsibility of the mishap which was actually committed by Pinky Madam. Due to her rashless and negligent driving she mowed down a child with her car. But Balram

was being made a scapegoat to scot Pinky Madam free. The poor innocent driver who had nothing to do with the accident was compelled to undergo the punishment for the serious offence which he had not perpetrated. It was actually Pinky Madam who should face the consequences of her actions but since in India the poor are mere puppets in the hands of the rich they do not dare muster courage to plead that they are not guilty at all. They take blame upon themselves and attract imprisonment for the crime which they have not done and eventually these subservient suffer throughout their lives.

Balram was shocked and disappointed when Mr. Ashok did not raise his voice against the injustice being done to him. This incident made him realize that the rich always try to save their skin first by putting the life of the poor at stake. He expresses his rage against the rich class and the judicial system as he says:

The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters. We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul, and arse.

Yes, that's right: we all live in the world's greatest democracy here.

...

Doesn't the driver's family protest? Far from it. They would actually go about bragging. Their boy Balram had taken the fall, gone to Tihar Jail for his employer. He was loyal as a dog. He was the perfect servant.

The judges? Wouldn't they see through this obviously forced confession? But they are in the racket too. They take their bribe, they ignore the discrepancies in the case. And life goes on. (The White Tiger 169)

The Indian judicial system has become so corrupt that a rich man can easily influence the judgment with the power of money and his political connections. In the present time the quote 'justice is blind' has a very different interpretation. It may

refer to the blind judges who offer judicial favor in exchange of personal gains. 'Reason and rationality' in the judgment have been replaced by power and money. Now, the days have gone when justice was served with objectivity, without fear, or influence. The statue of Lady Justice in courts is mere a statue which no more carries any significant symbol of 'objectivity, fairness, truth, and equity'.

Even being uneducated, Balram was very much aware of the vileness of the judicial system of India. He knew that it's very difficult for an ordinary man to seek redressal and justice in India because it is dilatory, costly and beyond the reach of the poor. Aravind Adiga has fearlessly attacked on the corrupt judicial system of India. He unmasks the underlying reality that the judges even being aware of the innocence and forced confessions of the drivers pronounce judgment against them and declare them murderers without keeping in view the impact of their decision on them, their family, and their future.

The humiliation which he now and then suffered at the hands of the Stork's family, the confession which he was compelled to make, gradually changed Balram from a loyal and caring servant to a vicious fellow and eventually a murderer. He employed various fraudulent techniques to embezzle money from his master, Mr. Ashok which included siphoning petrol, taking the car for repair to a corrupt mechanic who escalated the bill and Balram received his cut, selling empty whisky bottles to bootleggers, turning Mr. Ashok's car into a freelance taxi.

Since Balram never wanted to die in poverty like his father and was no longer happy in the state of subjection, this resentment against the rich eventually made him a murderer of his master. Unlike others he was willing to escape the rooster coop and eventually did what was ethically and legally wrong. The murder of Mr. Ashok helped him to come out of the 'rooster coop' as 700,000 Rs. of Mr. Ashok completely changed his life from a mere driver to a master of a taxi company. He commenced his new life with the forged identity of Mr. Ashok. Since childhood Balram saw corruption everywhere and people around him corrupt

therefore he also could not restrain himself from this contagious disease. He knew the ways of the world and the power of money that could buy anything even conscience of people. To run his taxi company successfully, he adopted wrong ways, bribed officials and soon emerged as a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. Balram's success presents the bitter reality of corruption in India. *The White Tiger* poses serious questions against the judicial system of India. Who has empowered policemen to infringe the fundamental rights of voters? Who has endowed the right to a policeman to prevent a voter to go inside the polling booth and beat him to death when he willingly wants to choose the candidate of his choice? How a murderer, Balram remains scot free even after committing such a nefarious action? Why the police for a meager amount support the culprit and suppress the victim? Why the police are only for the rich and not for the poor? Why all the citizens in India are not treated equally with objectivity, and fairness? Aravind Adiga was bitterly criticized by the critics for ruthlessly exposing the naked truth of the so-called democratic country, India. Gouri Shankar Jha writes that the novel *The White Tiger* is a "bundle of nonsense." (84) In my opinion Aravind Adiga rightfully deserves the Man Booker Prize 2008 for *The White Tiger* because unlike other writers he dared presenting and accepting the fact that a nation cannot progress and be a developed one unless it has honest and assiduous politicians and bureaucrats. He honestly delineates the ugly side of Light India which is dominated by the people who are more than parasites. They are sucking the country, its people and its resources and knowingly dragging the entire nation towards darkness and backwardness for their self-interest.

The novel brings forth the gloomy picture of dark India where the poor people never get rid of zamindars and spend their entire lives in serving them. The poor financial condition and the loan taken from zamindars never let these poor people lead an independent and a blissful life. Not only they but their children too become old and die in serving landlords. To unburden their parents from loan the poor children are pulled out from schools and employed as slaves or child laborers. It seems as if

the poor people are not endowed with the fundamental right to education. Education which enlightens one's thinking and makes one aware of one's rights is also considered the right of the rich only. No education or lack of education keeps them in dark throughout their lives with a belief that they are destined to serve the rich.

The existence of these non-existing, ignored creatures is felt during elections because more than these poor their votes count, the votes which enable the politicians to hold an office and become their voice but unfortunately the same politicians after being elected suppress the voice of the poor and become the voice of the rich. They bloat themselves with the money which actually comes from the government for the welfare of the underclass.

Aravind Adiga has portrayed the character of The Great Socialist keeping in view the actual corrupt image of Indian politicians. Nobody can deny the truth that corrupt politicians, bureaucrats, and government officials are the root cause of failure and destruction of any country. Corruption begets corruption and undoubtedly corruption and lack of education hamper the progress and development of any nation and undermine the strength of a country. To evade corruption, it is essential to equip our children with value education. Crook politicians should be dethroned and corrupt government officials should be punished. It is high time to act now before it gets too late. Unite and stand against corruption to make India a clean, corruption free nation.

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