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REFLECTIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN ARAVID ADIGA'S NOVEL "THE WHITE TIGER"

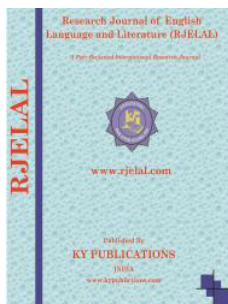
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ABSTRACT

The modern man is facing ecological disasters. Ecological disasters are manmade disasters. They are nuclear wars, rapid growth of exploitative technology, water pollution, air pollution, and excessive growth of population and depletion of valuable natural resources. In this context Eco criticism is born as literary theory in the twenty first century. Eco criticism, in the literature studies the relation between man and nature especially with physical environment. It focuses on the Green issues, the present world is facing. Water pollution, Air pollution and Garbage dump and Population growth are the major ecological issues the present modern India is facing. The present paper attempts to show how does the author, Aravind Adiga describe in his novel *The White Tiger* about the ecological problems like air pollution in cities, water pollution in the sacred rivers like the Ganga and the growth of population in India.

Key words: Eco criticism, Ecological disasters, Green Issues, Physical environment, pollution, Population growth, Nuclear Wars Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Literature and Physical environment

Romantic poets like William Wordsworth, John Keats, S T Coleridge and American writers like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson described the beauty of nature. Most of them personified nature as a goddess. But for the sake of industrialization and development, the modern man destroys the beauty of nature and degraded the environment. Beautiful environment is degraded because of air pollution, water pollution and population growth which resulted in slum colonies and sewages. Hence Eco criticism emerged as a recent phenomenon. It studies the relation between literature and environment. It allows us to study fiction from a new perspective that is nature

perspective. It explains the consequences of environmental degradation on the life of humankind and its long lasting impacts on the planet, earth.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Aravind Adiga as a journalist for the Newspaper, "The Times of India" visited different places of India and depicted all the sights, scenes and the places where he had visited in his novel, *The White Tiger* which won him Booker prize in 2008. Balram, the protagonist of the novel explains the present burning environmental issues, the modern India is facing. Most of the novels of Aravind Adiga focused on the theme of globalization, a major guiding force in moulding the socio-economic and cultural values in twenty first century in India.

Globalization as a leading force has created umpteen opportunities to the Indians which gives rise to corrupt methods and approaches to obtain money and muscle power to reach their goals. Materialism and consumerism as the fruits of globalization has degraded the cultural values which influence the present physical environment.

Keeping the present environmental issues in India, this paper takes an attempt to see how air pollution, water pollution and excessive population growth and other environmental issues find, reflection in the novel, *The White Tiger*.

Aravind Adiga expresses his deep concern for the non-stop pollution in the river, Ganga. The Ganga is a perennial river. It is born at Gangotri glacier in the Himalayas. It flows through the states of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar and Jarkhand and joins the Bay of Bengal in the state of West Bengal. It provides water facilities to domestic purposes, agriculture, hydro-projects and industries situated on the bank of the river, Ganga. Famous pilgrimages like Kasi, Haridwar and many temples are constructed along the bank of the river, Ganga. A wide range of flora and fauna are developed on the plains of the Ganga.

The Hindus worship the river, Ganga as a feminine river. It is personified as Devi, goddess Ganga. Indian mythology states that the Ganga is the daughter of Himavat, the king of the Mountains. The river Ganga is mentioned in Rig-Veda as nadistuti. Hindus believe that the king named Bhagiratha brings down the goddess Ganga to earth from the Lord Shiva after a great tapas to release his cursed uncles who are cursed by a great saint called Kapila. It is believed that his uncles will get salvation when the river Ganga flows over their ashes. Therefore all the Hindus believe that taking a bath in the river Ganga in certain occasions will get moksha. Most of the Hindus perform their rituals on the bank of the rivers. The ashes of the cremated bodies will be immersed into the rivers as they believe that the departed souls may get salvation from the physical life. So the river Ganga is called the breaker of the chain of birth and rebirth. It is also called the river of emancipation. The people who pay a visit to Varanasi and Haridwar will carry holy water from

the Ganga preserved in the copper pots in their pilgrimage. They believe that the souls of the dying persons who drink the water of the Ganga at the time of last breath will be taken to heaven. They also believe that life is incomplete without taking a bath in the river Ganga once in a life time. Thus the life of the journey of every Hindu from the birth to death is connected with river Ganga.

Water Pollution-the present scenario of the River, Ganga

Adiga depicts the present scenario of how the river Ganga is being polluted. The Ganga is the largest river in India which becomes significant threat to human health and the environment. It provides water facility to about 40% of the population across eleven states in India. Today it is one of the most polluted rivers in the world. It is polluted with human faeces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion and seven different kinds of industrial acids. All devotees are told that it is the place of Lord Siva who is destined to give salvation. Now it is the place where the dead bodies are cremated and dipped the funeral ashes into the river. Now the decomposed bodies are immersed into the river. The pale-skinned dogs would start licking the charred dead bodies. In the words of Balram "Nothing would get liberated there". In his own words of Balram "I stopped breathing. This was the first time in my life I fainted. I haven't been back to see the Ganga since then. I am leaving that river for the American tourists". Balram urges Mr. Premier not to dip in such holy water to remove the sins as Indians think. Balram participated in the funeral procession carrying his mother's body to the river Ganga when he was six or seven or eight years old (no one in the village knows his or her exact age of them) at the sacred Ghats, the holiest spot on the bank of the river Ganga-the city of Banaras.

Balram picturizes the image of the funeral pyre on the ghat at the bank of the river, Ganga. Balram remembers that some four bodies were burning there. His mother's body was waiting. The body was covered with satin clothes. The cloth was pulled over her face. There was a gigantic noise, the fire wood being split. A wooden platform had been built by the edge of the ghat just above water. Logs

were filed up on the platform, and men with axes were smashing the logs. Chunks of wood were being built into funeral pyres on the steps of the ghat that went down into the water. The panda set his mother on fire.

Balram portrays the platform with the piled-up fire logs. There was a giant oozing mound of black mud where the river washed into the shore. The mound was littered with ribbons of jasmine, rose petals, bits of satin, charred bones. Balram looked at the ooze and he watched at his mother's flexed foot the mud was holding her back: this big, swelling mound of black ooze. She was trying to fight the black mud; her toes were flexed and resisting; but the mud was sucking her in. Soon she would become part of the black mound and pale-skinned dog would start licking her. Balram watched the condition of his mother's charred feet.

The narrator explains the present scenario of the river Ganga. This was the real god of Banaras- this black mud of the Ganga into which everything died, and decomposed, and was reborn from and died into again. The same would happen to me when I died and they brought me here. Nothing would get liberated here. I stopped breathing. This was the first time in my life I fainted. I haven't been back to see the Ganga since then: I'm leaving that river for the Americans tourists. (Page 18).

Adiga describes the present holy river, the Ganga as Death whose banks are full of rich, dark and sticky mud. The river Ganga is the daughter of the Vedas, the river of illumination and the protector of all of us, the breaker of the chain of birth and rebirth. The Ganga is called the river of emancipation. Hundreds of American tourists come each year to take the photographs of naked Sadhus at Hardwar or Banaras.

The physical environment of the village, Laxmangarh

Aravind Adiga depicts the environment where Balram is born. His place of birth is a fertile soil, full of rice fields, wheat fields and ponds in the middle of those fields choked with lotuses and water lilies. Water buffaloes are wading through the ponds and chewing on the lotuses and lilies. Adiga

describes India is two countries in one: an India of Light and an India of Darkness. Every place in the map of India near the ocean is well-off. But the river brings darkness.

Balram is born in the village, Laxmangarh, the world famous district of Gaya. It is called Bodh Gaya- the town where the Lord Buddha sat under a tree and found his enlightenment and started Buddhism. One of the smallest branches of the river Ganga flows beside the village, Laxmangarh. The boats from the world brings supplies to the village every Monday. Adiga describes adulteration in the village where some shop keepers used to sell adulterated and stale items of rice, cooking oil, kerosene, biscuits, cigarettes and jaggery. Every street in the village would have one God's temple of Hanuman- half man and half monkey. People in the village believe that Hanuman is the faithful servant of God, Rama. They also believe that Hanuman is the best example for serving the Masters with absolute love and devotion.

Laxmangarh is a typical Indian village paradise without running water, electricity or roads. Its paths are littered with sewage and its women starve to feed buffaloes which are the only source of income. It's four landlords own and extracts rent on all the resources and molest the women, forcing most of the villagers to migrate to the cities. The only thing that scares the landlords is the attacks by Naxalites- violent pro-poor revolutionaries. The village school with its crumbling walls and unpaid alcoholic master is a satire on the governments' school education schemes. There are many bright children like Balram who cannot afford even this pathetic schooling and are forced into child labour.

Air pollution and sound pollution in Delhi and Bangalore

Air pollution is one of the most dangerous pollutions in the world. It can spread fastly and can harm all kinds of living creatures in the world. Modern man is not able to breathe natural air in the lap of Mother Nature. In the form of development and industrialisation man removes all the natural vegetation which releases oxygen. Rapid growth of industries and transport sector release poisonous gases like sulphur dioxide Carbon monoxide,

Nitrogenous oxides. They pollute the natural environment of the living creatures. The people who are exposing these polluted gases are experiencing irritation of the eyes, throat infection and breathing difficulties like asthma. Long exposure to this air pollution can cause cancer and lot of damage to the immunity, neurological, reproductive and respiratory systems. In extreme cases it can cause death. They also change the climate. Now a days most of the metropolitan cities are struggling with the urban smog and toxic pollutions.

Aravind Adiga as a journalist for the newspaper, "The Times of India" observed the ecological issues like water pollution, Air pollution and sound pollution in the metropolitan cities like Delhi and Bangalore. His novel *The White Tiger* reflects the plight of water pollution, air pollution and sound pollution in the city of Delhi, the capital of India and in the electronic city, Bangalore.

Balam the protagonist of the novel, *The White Tiger* reports that there is a good reason for the public who wear masks in Delhi since the air is so bad in the city. It takes ten years off man's life. Balam says Of course, those in the cars don't have to breathe the outside air –it is just nice, cool, clean, air-conditioned air for them

Another character in the novel PinkyMadam, an American expressed her deep concern about the air pollution in Delhi. She used to use dozens of tissues each time to avoid air pollution in Delhi. Balam said that she had left her crushed and crumpled used tissues near the box and he had to pick them to throw out.

Balam reports how the automobile drivers contribute to the air pollution in their way. He says all the drivers in Delhi smoke cigars and cigarettes made of tobacco which create lot of air pollution to the city dwellers. Balam reports in his words; fumes of air filled the air. Wisps of blue exhaust glowed in front of every head light; the exhaust grew so fat and thick it could not rise or escape, but spread horizontally, sluggish and glossy, making a kind of fog around us .Matches were continually being struck- the drivers of automobiles lit cigarettes, adding tobacco pollution to petrol pollution (page 137).

Aravind Adiga observes the health hazards of the common people who are exposed to the air pollution in Delhi. He describes how the common people cough on the road sides of Delhi. In words of Balam "auto rickshaw drivers next to me began to cough violently- he turned to the side and spat, three times in a row. Some of the spit flecked the side of the Honda City". Mr. Ashoke another character in the novel says to his father "if you out there breathing that acid air, you'd be spitting like him too" (page 138)

Adiga describes how the living conditions of the Rich and the Poor contribute to the air pollution in Delhi. The people in Delhi use the electric heaters or gas heaters or even they burn the logs of wood in their fire places to survive in winter season. But the homeless or servants like watch men and drivers are forced to spend outside in winter. They used to burn cellophanes, the kind used to wrap fruits, vegetables and business books in, to keep warm in winter season .It gives off a white smoke and makes the environment polluted .Balam says " white smoke that makes your stomach churn".

Adiga portrays not only the air pollution in Delhi but also sound pollution and traffic jam of the automobiles which creates serious health threat to the urban people in Delhi. Balam explains the traffic jam in his words about the rush hours in Delhi. Cars, scooters, motorbikes, auto rickshaws, black taxis, jostling for space on the road. The pollution is so bad that the men 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 out on a bank heist that morning (page 133).

Aravind Adiga observers and describes the environmental pollution in the city, Bangalore. Bangalore is a city where humans can live like humans and animals can live like animals. Balam is astonished to see the piles of mud and bricks everywhere when he drives down to Hosur Main Road. Balam says there is a construction everywhere. Piles of mud everywhere. Piles of stones, Piles of bricks. The entire city is masked in smoke, smog, powder, cement dust. It is under veil.

When the vile is lifted, what will Bangalore be like? (page317).

Slums and sewages in the city, Delhi

Slums and sewages are also major environmental issues in India. Industrial sewage, municipal sewage are dumped in everywhere. It becomes a major threat to the city dwellers. Aravind Adiga describes the heaps of sewages and slums in the novel, *The White Tiger*. Balram reports about the slum locations in the novel in his words. The stench of faeces was replaced by the stronger stench of industrial sewage. The men were defecating in the open like a defensive wall in front of the slum. The wind wafted the stench fresh shit towards me. The Slum ended in an open sewer- a small river of black water went sluggishly past me, bubbles sparkling in it and little circles spreading on its surface.

The impact of population growth in the city, Delhi

India occupies the second place in the population of the world which becomes one of the ecological issues now days. Due to lack of proper employment facilities, people are migrating from the villages to the cities. Adiga describes how do the people of the village, Laxmangarh are migrating to the city, Delhi and how do they live in slums, lay down on either side of the traffic. In the words of Balram "I could see multitudes of small, then grimy people squatting, waiting for a bus to take them somewhere or with nowhere to go and about to unfurl a mattress and sleep right there. These poor bastards had come from Darkness to Delhi to find some light –but they were still in the darkness. Hundreds of them, there seemed to be, on either side of the traffic." (Page 158)

Conclusion

Aravind Adiga who received the Booker Prize for his novel, *The White Tiger* draws the attention of the public against the impending disasters especially water pollution, air pollution, sound pollution and sewage dumping in India. Aravind Adiga also makes an attempt to know how does the physical environment has been degraded by immoral cultural values resulted by materialism and consumerism in the present liberalization

period. The government of India has started some projects like Ganga action plan and Namami Ganga to protect the river, Ganga from pollution. Hence eco criticism as a part and parcel of literature should play a vital role to create awareness in the public about impending environmental disasters and remember the responsibilities of the public against the ecological issues to save the earth for future generations.

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