



CORRUPTION IN INDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON THE NARRATOR AS DEPICTED IN ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*.

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ABSTRACT

Indian literature has succeeded in creating a space of its own among the world literatures. A number of literary works produced in India, especially after independence have highlighted the issues of Indian society at large. *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga, an Indian-Australian journalist and writer is one such book. It received the Man Booker Prize 2008. *The White Tiger* is a supremely candid novel representing the 'dark' aspects of Indian society. It's a rags to riches story of the narrator, Balram Halwai, who is born in an impoverished family and rises to be a successful entrepreneur by sheer wit and cunning. He brings to limelight some of the major issues and challenges that the Indian society faces, viz. corruption, the caste divide, poverty (unequivocal economic division) etc. He is initially a victim and observer of corruption and later becomes one among the corrupt. Balram has got a strong urge to succeed in life and this strong yearning gives him an edge above others and a first hand experience of the snare that corruption has woven on society. Fraudulence and deceit have become such an integral part of both the village and city life that the narrator cannot remain unaffected and he headlong plunges into it.

KEYWORDS: Society, Bribery, Embezzle, Extricate, Success, Corrupted.

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INTRODUCTION

The White Tiger, winner of the 40th man Booker prize, is the debut novel of Aravind Adiga. It is narrated by Balram Halwai, son of a rickshaw-puller, born in the village of Laxmangarh. He as such belongs to the marginalized and unprivileged section of the society. However, he has got a venturing approach towards life and as a result he stands on a vantage position to comment in and analyze the predicaments that are a part and parcel of the Indian Society. His is an idiosyncratic point of view and narration. He reiterates how the corruption in society undid him initially and how he used corruption as a tool to carve his way towards being a

successful entrepreneur. In the process however, he becomes morally bankrupt.

THE NOVEL:

The novel is written in the form of a seven part narrative letter addressed to Wen Jiabao, the Chinese Premier, who is scheduled to visit Bangalore to learn about Indian entrepreneurship. The White Tiger (Balram Halwai) takes up the task of conveying the true facts about Indian entrepreneurship. He asserts that the American books on entrepreneurship are "so yesterday" and he is "tomorrow"(6). He proclaims that he is a "self-taught entrepreneur"(6). However, in this process of self-learning and self-teaching, the society as he

beholds it, plays a crucial role and he inevitably becomes corrupt.

As Adiga states in an interview, it is corruption along with some other issues that are "...holding us(the Indians) back...". Balram Halwai is a victim and product of corruption. It has a discernible impact on every sphere of his life.

Balram is enrolled in a government school. However, he describes the school as having " ...two-foot-long lizards the colour of half-ripe bananas hiding in its cupboards..."(32), there are "...holes in the walls or red discolourations."(33) The school sans duster, chairs and there are no uniforms for the students. Government takes negligible steps to improve the basic amenities of life and the steps taken do not materialize due to corruption. The national program of free food and uniforms stood flouted. The teacher had embezzled the funds and had sold the uniforms. He was not going to teach anything either, as he demanded his six month pending salary in first place and had as such vindicated himself of being unjust in embezzling funds and uniforms.

"...There was supposed to be free food at my school... But we never ever saw *rotis*, or yellow *dal*, or pickles, and everyone knew why: the schoolteacher had stolen our lunch money.

The teacher had a legitimate excuse to steal the money- he said he hadn't been paid his salary in six months...He was going to do nothing in the class... Once, a truck came into the school with uniforms that the government had sent for us; we never saw them, but a week later they turned up for sale in neighbouring village..."(33)

The villagers don't hold him guilty either and appreciate that the school teacher could extricate himself from being found culpable so easily.

The corrupt school teacher is a part and parcel of the society at large, so the narrator says,

"...You can't expect a man in a dung heap to smell sweet..."(33)

Balram willy-nilly has to quit the school, even if he is the most bright student in the class. He is forced into child labour as his cousin-sister got hitched and they have to arrange cash and kind for the groom.

To add to their woes of the rural folk, there are four landlords in Laxmangarh, nicknamed as the Buffalo, the Stork, the Wild Boar and the Raven. They fleeced

villagers out of every penny they could extract from them.

The village sans basic amenities, including hospitals, although there are three foundations laid by different political parties with the intention of winning the elections. When Balram's father contracts tuberculosis, he is unable to receive apt medical attention. The government hospital he is taken to is in dilapidated condition and there is no doctor in the hospital to save the life of this succumbing man or other moribund patients.

"...There was no doctor in the hospital...

The beds had metal springs sticking out of them, and a cat began snarling us the moment we stepped into the room..."(48)

The government medical superintendent's post is auctioned and when it's occupied by someone, he excuses the junior doctors for not attending their duties at the government hospital and permits them to attend private hospitals in return for a bribe. As such, no doctor generally turns up in the government run hospital, and the patients are left to fend for themselves.

Balram starts working at a tea shop initially. He attempts extracting as much information as possible from the customers by eavesdropping in order to keep his "...education going forward..."(52). He doesn't uphold Gandhian way of uprightness and rather acts contrary to it. He is deceitful and disloyal in his work and finds working at the tea shop a "...profoundly enriching experience..."(51) His childhood experiences stay with him forever. No wonder, he gradually becomes self-centered and selfish.

Balram acquires a job for himself by sheer chance and wit in Stork's household. He is taken in as driver number two, but finds out that Ram Prasad, driver number one of the household had hoodwinked the employers by pretending to be a Hindu, and is actually a Muslim. He uses this knowledge to his advantage and eventually replaces him as driver number one of the household.

Corruption is depicted as one of the important feature of Indian election. Balram narrates that they were enrolled in the voter list at the tea shop. All of the workers were mentioned as being eighteen years of age and their votes were sold out for a good

amount of money by the shop owner. As such, a lot of fraudulence is involved in the elections. "...All of us in the tea shop had to be eighteen, the legal age to vote... He(tea shop owner) had sold our fingerprints... he got a good price for each one of us..."(97)

Adiga states in *"The Guardian"*:

"...In India, corruption is a form of patronage; a politician or bureaucrat who takes the bribe then has to let it cascade among a series of lesser bureaucrats and elected officials, who will make sure that the pet projects are completed... political power in India is dispersed throughout a multi-tiered federal structure; a local official who has not been paid off can sometimes stop a billion-dollar project..."

Balram moves with Ashok and Mukesh to Delhi, as they have to bribe the politicians in order to keep their family business of coal running. Balram drives them to major political headquarters. Corruption in Delhi is described to be more severe than the corruption in "Darkness". They have to bribe the ministers day in and day out. Balram is a keen observer and mute spectator of all these undertakings.

Appallingly for him, he is framed for a hit-and-run case by the Stork's family for which Pinky madam(Ashok's wife) was guilty. She had insisted on driving the car while she was drunk and had presumably hit a child, most probably killing it. Balram was to serve a jail term on her behalf. The Stork's had already worked out the matter with the lawyer and he had in turn settled it with the judge.

"...The judge has been taken care of. If your man does what he is to do, we'll have nothing to worry about..."(166)

Law as such is a plaything in the hands of well-to-do class. They liberate themselves quite conveniently of the criminal charges. Fortunately Balram is extricated, as no one is a witness to the murder. However getting framed up for the murder by his employers traumatizes Balram. Even the thought of the incident outrages him, such that he later states, "...Even to think about this again makes me so angry I might just go out and cut the throat of some rich man right now..."(169)

He finds that the entire family lacks morality, except Pinky Madam who is the "one with conscience"(180), as she wants to compensate the family of the presumably killed child. She later leaves for America as she is not able to come to terms with her husband and life in India. Ashok becomes emotionally unstable for some time and becomes dependent on Balram. However, soon he becomes excessively involved in bribing ministers and immoral lifestyle.

This has an impact on Balram also, he starts cheating his employer of petrol, gets exorbitant bills from corrupt mechanics to have a cut for himself and picks up paying customers.

Balram yearns more for freedom and success. He wants to break out of the "rooster coop", cease thinking about his family and lead a fulfilling life for his own self. He in the meantime contemplates that killing Ashok and fleeing with the Bribe amount would be the only pragmatic way to triumph in his life and he carries it out at the opportune moment.

"...I rammed the bottle down. The glass ate his bone. I rammed it three times into the crown of his skull, smashing through to his brains..."(284)

After brutally murdering his employer, Balram leaves for Bangalore. He's fully acquainted with the magic that money can weave in a corrupt society, "...It's amazing, the moment you show cash, everyone knows your language..."(300). He bribes the police in order to start a business. The police comes in handy for him. Bribing them, he gets the start he desires- a taxi service for call center employees. He bribes the cops again to conceal an accident in which the driver of his company is involved in and is responsible. He thinks about new enterprises and opportunities without any sense of guilt or remorse about the past.

CONCLUSION

"...His actions might be justified from the standpoint that anything, since he was part of the losing crowd he might as well join the crowd that is winning, also known as "if you can't beat them join them."..."

Yet, equal or better opportunities for the underprivileged would have had a favourable impact on Balram right from his childhood. A better society could have eradicated or diminished the corruption

that he had undergone in his manoeuvre to come out from "Darkness" to "Light".

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