

## POVERTY AS PROPERTY IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

R. NITHYABOOMA<sup>1</sup> & M. ARASU KAVITHA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Prist University Madurai campus, Arasanoor, Sivagangai, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Prist University Madurai campus, Arasanoor, Sivagangai, Tamil Nadu, India

### ABSTRACT

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, the debut novel, which was awarded the Man Booker Prize in 2008. The *White Tiger* is Sharp, Fascinating, attack poverty and inequality without being sentimental. The novel provides a darkly humorous perspective of India's class struggle in a globalized world as told through a retrospective narration from Balram Halwai, a village boy. To describe the present Indian condition in which poor people try to make both ends meet, the narrator uses the strange word 'the darkness'. *The White Tiger* is a story about a man's quest for freedom. Balram, the protagonist in this novel, the entire novel deals with how the protagonist overcome the social obstacles and how he has transformed to become a successful entrepreneur. We could see that Aravind Adiga is the one who makes the difference in his writing & makes all his novels unique from another. Thus, the paper will analyze the issues of caste, loyalty, corruption and poverty in India

**KEYWORDS:** Poverty, Property, Injustice, Social, Loyalty, Rights & Humanity

### INTRODUCTION

The *White Tiger* is the debut novel by Indian author Aravind Adiga. It was first published in 2008 and won the 40<sup>th</sup> Man Booker Prize in the same year. The novel provides a darkly humorous perspective of India's class struggle in a globalized world as told through a retrospective narration from Balram Halwai, a village boy. In detailing the Balram's journey first to Delhi, where he works as a chauffeur to a rich landlord, and then to Bangalore, the place to which he flees after killing his master and stealing his money, the novel examines issues of religion, caste, loyalty, corruption, and poverty in India. Ultimately, Balram transcends his sweet-maker caste and becomes a successful entrepreneur, establishing his own taxi service. In a nation proudly shedding a history of poverty and underdevelopment, he represents, as he himself says, "tomorrow."

### “POVERTY AS PROPERTY” JUSTIFICATION

Adiga created two different India's in one: "... an India of Light and an India of Darkness. Adiga says his novel "attempts to catch the voice of the men you meet as you travel through India — the voice of the colossal underclass." According to Adiga, the exigence for *The White Tiger* was to capture the unspoken voice of people from "the Darkness" – the impoverished areas of rural India, and he "wanted to do so without sentimentality or portraying them as mirthless humorless weaklings as they are usually".

The *White Tiger* deals with the miserable life of the people living on the dark side of India. In the very beginning of the novel, the author divides India into an India of Darkness and an India of Light, the kind of division into Bharat and India in the Common Parlance.

The novel is divided into *First Night, Second Night, Fourth Morning, Fifth Night, Sixth Morning, Sixth Night, Seventh Night*. The Sixth Night changes everything the protagonist 'The White Tiger' and the spirit of white tiger enters his body.

*Everyone! he shouted. 'Take off your shirts! I've got to see a man's nipples before I give him a job!' looked at my chest; he squeezed the nipple- slapped my butt- glared into my eyes-and the poked the stick against my thigh: "Too thin! Fuck off!"*

*Give me a chance, sir- my body is small but there's a lot of fight in it- I'll haul cement for you, I'll— ' I sat on the ground, rubbed my ear, and watched the truck leave in a big cloud of dust.*

- (WT,55)

This is an excerpt from the Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* which demonstrate how 'Capital' buys 'Labour' with its own choice of the best physique which may be strong enough to work continuously to produce the maximum output. Here, the buyer is a Sikh, a man with the blue turban and the laborer is himself a commodity for sale. The buyer examines the physical bodies of the laborers before hiring them or buying their labor. He rejects the hero Balram Halwai on the ground of his thin physical figure despite his continuous requests for hard work for him. This is a visual presentation or a live telecast of the scene of selling, or rather marketing the Indian Poverty in the Western market to tempt the western buyers (readers) who enjoys themselves and takes pride in being superior to the East which, for them, is simply 'other'. No doubt, the Indian landscape is dotted with poverty, liberty, violence, corruption, unemployment and many other dark shades.

Capital is responsible for creating economic disparities. A man with capital is a human being otherwise his life is no better than an animal. A poor man in sandals is not allowed to enter a mall simply because he is not a human being from the capital's angle. Balram is a different man and knows the way to tackle such situation. He makes up his mind to enter the mall, but as a driver, he cannot enter and so takes a new white T-Shirt, Wears it and enters the mall through the rear entrance. But, as long as he is there, he tastes "The fugitives life"(WT,152) because of fear of the guards in grey uniform.

Poverty itself becomes a rooster coop that forces a man to lead a life of slavery. But, Balram Halwai is not born to remain in the coop of poverty. He is white tiger that cannot be confined in the coop and with the passage of time; he breaks it and becomes the master. He reflects over India's past and finds that "The Greatest thing to come out of this country in the ten thousand years of its history is the rooster coop" (WT,173). He clarifies this term to the Chinese Premier in the letter and the States:

*“On the wooden desk above this coop sits a grinning young butcher, showing off the flesh and organs of a recently chopped-up chicken, still oleaginous with a coating a dark blood. The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they’re next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country”.*

- (WT, 173-174)

This is the picture of the poor people who remain silent and see each other, being killed by the butcher capital. The political system is also favours the rich people because of corruption at all levels. During election, promises are made to improve the condition of the villagers, but as soon as the election is over, the direction of wind changes. Mark the excerpt that reveals the reality of the election, promises and consequences:

*“The election shows that the poor will not be ignored. The Darkness will not be silent. There is no water in taps, and what do you people in Delhi give us? You give us mobile phones. Can a man drink a phone when he is thirsty? Women walk for miles every morning to find a bucket a clean”*

- (WT, 269).

Politicians lure the poor people in the name of bringing light through electricity, water-taps and education in the area of darkness. The great socialist claims to be “the voice of the poor at the disenfranchised”(WT, 269) while the reality is that no one cares for the development of the village. The poor are left to their own miserable condition. The democratic system also gives liberty to the judicial system in giving the decision in favour of the rich. Balram is to go to jail for the crime that has been committed by Pinky Madam. It seems that the rich masters have the absolute right over the body of their servants. “We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul and arse” (WT, 170). The poor also dream like the rich, but their dreams never clash. It is indeed a paradox that the poor wish to be rich and look like rich people who have become the fat dream of losing weight and looking like the poor.

The rich people survive because there are poor people. If the poor people become rich, who will give value to the rich? The rich people, knowingly, wish that the poor people may remain poor so that they may exploit and get maximum output out of their labor. Capital and labor are the two identities that never meet at any point at par. Capital has its nature of dominance with its property to buy while labor has its nature of submission with the power to sell. The poor people work because, first of all, they have to satisfy the hunger of the stomach. They pass their lives while struggling for earning money for keeping the body and soul together. They are not taught to develop the aesthetic sense. The poet Iqbal also thinks that the moment a man recognize the beautiful, he cannot remain a slave. This aesthetic sense will make him do something that will release him from the fetters of slavery. Hence, this is the conspiracy of the capital to keep the poor away from education so that they may not be so innovative and freedom-loving that they may ask for their encroached rights. Balram hints at the idea how the poor can make an end of their poverty.

*Iqbal, the great poet, was right. The moment you recognize what is beautiful in this world, you stop being a slave. To hell with the Naxals and their guns shipped from China. If you taught every poor by how to paint, that would be the end of the rich in India”.*

- (WT, 276)

Balram does not wish to marry because he thinks that it will result in children. Today he works as an ass for his master and tomorrow his children will become asses for the rich. He states:”And all I would do, if I had children, was teaching them to be asses like me, and carry rubble around for the rich”(WT, 193). Asses have no values for their own. They are valuable till the work. He sees the rich people who live in the palaces and bid buildings while the poor people have no shelter to live and if they have any, the whole family live together. He recalls the scene of the villages where all the members sleep in one room where they do all activities right from worship to courtship leading to Sex. He states: “In the village, there are no separate rooms so they just lie together at night and fuck like that” (WT, 190). There is nothing that can free the poor people from all kinds of oppression and exploitation. The novelist towards the end of the novel talks of a revolution that will free the poor people. The world history is simply a record of the clashes between the rich and the poor.

He also talks of treating human beings as human beings and animals as animals. But, the reality is the poor people are treated as animals and even worse than animals. “Let the animals live like animals; let humans live like humans. That’s my whole philosophy” (WT, 276) though the novelist himself does not follow what he proposes as his philosophy. The hero who himself belongs to the poor family calls the poor people “Bastrads” and thinks that they will remain in the rooster coop of poverty.

## CONCLUSIONS

No doubt, Adiga has presented the picture of “poverty” which is true to some extent, but to consider it as the whole truth will simply be a hoax. The image of poverty and poor people that he paints is incomplete and not authentic. It is painted from the blush of an outsider who has no knowledge of the village roots. He has presented India in such a way that after going through the novel it seems that India is not a place to live in. To present the dark shades of poverty in the name of “The greater process of self-examination” is not justified from any angle. What Adiga has done behind the scene is his sincere attempt to offer India as “other” and for this, he has given the proofs in the form of presenting the exaggerated picture of poverty. No doubt, poverty is a disease that India suffers from. But, it is not yet cancerous as the novelist has shown. The white man has entered the soul of the white tiger that has taken the burden of betterment of Indian Society and for this he makes “poverty” as his “property” and displays it with his dual policy that satisfied India with the plea of transforming her into a better society and West with the assurance of offering the proofs for selling India as ‘other’. The white man burden’ has become the White Tiger’s burden. Poverty, for him is not a burden, but a property that has brought him a name and fame in the form of Booker Prize. The Marketing agent has got his commission. The Broker with Booker is satisfied with what he has done for India as well as for the West.

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