

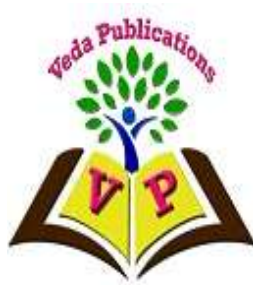


DYSTOPIAN TURN IN POST- INDEPENDENCE INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH, READING ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER* AND *BETWEEN THE ASSASSINATIONS*

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ABSTRACT



The writings of Aravind Adiga have always remained committed to the portrayals of Indian society that is fraught with socio- economic and caste conflict and discrimination. Historically speaking this society is the result of the onslaught of a change that took place with the adoption neo-liberal capitalism, industrialization and globalization in post colonial modern India. The plight of the lower caste, the poor, the down trodden and the marginalized reflect a social reality in which any hope of crossing the boundary proves futile. And when it happens it comes at a heavy cost. The struggle of young children, youth and millions of Indian poor people are all real and presents a society devoid of the promise and hope present in ancient Indian society. Thus Adiga's portrayal of society seems to take a dystopian turn .This paper intends to highlight to what extent most of Adiga's fictions have traversed a dystopian territory in Indian context.

Keywords: *Discrimination, Neo-Liberal Capitalism, Marginalized, Social Reality, Dystopian.*



INTRODUCTION

Indian fiction has predominantly been utopian in its worldview. If we go back to ancient Indian text we come across the cultures of happy ending where problems emerge but ultimately at the end all the problems are solved happily without any recourse to violence. We hardly find any revenge motif there. Ultimately things are restored with divine intervention. Philosophically Indian worldview has oriented towards the philosophisation of man. The evolution of man from mundane to the divine and the material man and the transcendental man somehow get unified. Domain of materiality and transcendent are combined in Indian philosophical frame work. So the idea of individuation becomes central in Indian philosophy. In 'Abhigyan Sakuntalam' the idea of Biraha, idea of segregation, separation and again the trope of reunion are present and all the orders that were disintegrating or collapsing, that were showing the tendency of falling apart are restored. So the idea of restoration is quite there in Indian Philosophy and Indian philosophy has always thrived on a sense of divine intervention; that the divinity is there and it's not outside rather inside human beings and when human beings realise that potential lying within them they know the ultimate truth of life. So every individual is individuated through an actualisation of the divine. So the idea of individuation becomes central to Indian philosophy. In western philosophy man has gained supreme importance from the time of enlightenment philosophy. Before that Man had more or less three concepts – man as fate, its reason/free will and human thought. If we think of classical tragedy like that written by Sophocles we find there a huge role

played by fate. Everything is predestined and this shapes the fate of the character. Simultaneously man has tried to avoid fate or at least endeavored to achieve greatness in order to fulfill life on earth against fate and destiny. Man has much to offer or contribute to change or counter his destiny. So fate intervenes and plays a crucial role in the life of man. The universe became Man centric. Here we don't have the concept of individuation of man; obviously we have the idea of becoming. This basic philosophical attitude is at the core of the emergence of dystopia in western literary context and its absence in Indian subcontinent. In the wake of modernity philosophical conception of the world and human society changed into something nihilistic. However in the post independent era the rise of social realism in Indian fictions has renegotiated the relationship between the self and its corollary space - time continuum. Post independence Indian fiction emphasis the pessimistic representation of the fear and anxiety of Indian society fragmented by millennial capitalist economy. Economic liberalism and transnational capital might have offered a glamorous appearance but it actually made people politically oblivious, illiterate. People got attuned to a society which is shaped around foreign goods, ideas, sentiments, ideologies. Urban riches are being driven by the desire of becoming like European/American, resulting in the increase of gap between rich and poor. All these got reflected in post colonial Indian fiction especially in genres of novel and other satirical writing. Different kinds of negative representations of modern life in the social realism of post-independence novels culminated in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* which guaranteed the



establishment of a dystopian aesthetics for Indian novels. As Mrinalini Chakravorty has rightly pointed out, "The contemporary Anglophone novel in India is decidedly dystopian". Here contemporary refers to post-colonial or post-independence India. So, India's transformation into a liberalized capital economy during the last few decades of the Twentieth century has changed its basic philosophical assumption- a turn into a dystopian world. The impact of which can be traced in the writings of Arvind Adiga. Adiga, like his other contemporaries, writes about political, social, religious and cultural issues of India. **The White Tiger**, the 2008 Man-Booker Prize winning novel, is set in capitalist India, talks about a protagonist who is portrayed as a master of his own destiny and **Between the Assassinations** (2008) on the other hand exposes contradictory pictures of India, before and after globalization. The title of the second novel refers to the condition of India during the period between the assassinations of Indira Gandhi in 1984 and Rajiv Gandhi, his son, in 1991. The White Tiger provides a kaleidoscopic view of India society in its various dimensions with reference to division and unmitigated gap between the rich and poor. In this novel the rise of India as a modern global economy is put in opposition to its working class people who live an extremely miserable life. The novel presents a dark picture of India's society where people are destined to be poor and they will have to live a life of perpetual struggle just for their livelihood, not to talk about the minimum luxury of life. The novel presents a society dominated not just by upper caste people but also by economically affluent and politically commendable people. If this is the outer reality of the society the internal reality is

equally disheartening. The story is told by the narrator Balram Halwai, a member of the servant class, navigating his ways through different hardship to establish himself economically as he encounters pressures of being lowly born in the village of Laxmangarh, where he lived with his large and extended family. Balram's mother died when he was young and his father is a rickshaw puller. He was neglected in the family to such an extent that he was not even given a name until his school master called him Balram. He was intelligent and doing well in study but his family forced him to leave school so that he can be engaged in a job in order to help pay for his cousin's dowry. While working in a tea-shop with his brother in Dhanbad he continued educating himself listening to the conversations of the customers there. This is how he came to learn many things about India's economy and the politics. He wanted to make himself free from the Rooster Coop which is the fate of people like Balram. He learned driving and found a job of driving Ashok. He pretends to be loyal to his employer, stops sending money to his family, forgets morality and family ethics, and disrespects his grandmother. Eventually Balram leaves his village for New Delhi with Ashok and Pinky. This change of his mind and the move to a prosperous place is indicative of the impact of neo-liberal capitalism among the people of India. This made people like Balram greedy and devoid of traditional morality that sustained Indian society for a long time. In Delhi he further discovers the role of money in each and every walks of life and how it controls any activity in politics, administration and so on. Balram realises the root cause of the problem - greed, corruption. The surrounding darkness of



corruption and mistreatment of Ashok make him feel that only involvement in illegal activity can make him prosper in life. His plan was ready and he was just waiting for the opportunity. One fine day he murders his master and eventually succeeds in executing the plan to become the entrepreneur in Bangalore. There he also bribes to safeguard one of his drivers. Balram knows very well the fact that Ashok's relative must take revenge either by killing his family members or may be by raping women members of his family. Balram hardly cares about that rather he prefers enjoying his long sought economic freedom. Balram has become addicted to economic prosperity disregarding his familial bonding. Such is the result of globalization and free economy felt in India that divides and intensifies the gap between the poor and the affluent class. Evidently this kind of society is bound to collapse. This is how 'The White Tiger' presents a society that is moving towards a dystopian world. Critics such as Dubey and Begum seem to dismiss Adiga's faith in free market capitalism as a redeemer of the underdog. They reject Adiga's choice of Bangalore as "the right place for the Dalit hero of the novel to escape and find emancipation," by pointing out that the majority of the resources in the city are appropriated by the upper castes who control all the major businesses and administration. (150-151) The realistic portrayal of the proximity of the downtrodden, destitute, dejected and the rich and affluent gets manifested in Adiga's another famous novel ***Between the Assassination***. The novel takes seven days in the life of a fictional Indian city called Kittur. Adiga's eye moves among the crowd with a restless precision to the realities of life. His subject is the everyday

frustration brought about by discrimination of status, class and religion. The novel is a collection of fourteen interrelated stories about the place called Kittur, a small town situated "on India's south-western coast, between Goa and Calicut' The standalone short stories in ***Between the Assassinations*** evolve into a larger narrative in the form of a guidebook to that town, as each story is given title like "Arriving in Kittur," "How the Town is Laid Out," and "The History of Kittur." Through this mechanism Adiga again draws attention to a series of wide known injustices – including "the disparities between the poor and the rich, communal disharmony, corruption, violence and hypocrisy' and their impact on human relationships. The very first story presents a bleak picture of that town where ethnic strife compel a Muslim boy named Ziauddin work with a man who fails to hide his plan from Ziauddin of a terrorist attack on Indian soldiers. In the end Ziauddin becomes disgusted and take up the job of a coolie. The other stories in the novel showcase similar fate of the characters, be it the story of corruption of Abbasi forced to keep on bribing the officials to reopen his factory, a little girl begging on the street to support her father's drug habit, a school boy setting off explosive in a classroom to protest against casteism, a childless couple takes refuge in a diminishing forest on the outskirts of a city or the lonely Marxist member gets rejected by a woman he loves and resort to corruption and violence to achieve his goals. The second person narrative that range from "Day One" to "Day Seven", establish a background of a darkly comical viewpoint of the modern day life in India. So be it ***The White Tiger*** or ***Between the Assassinations***, Adiga exposes through



his writings misery of the poor, unmitigated gap of the rich and the helpless wretched, exploitation of children, suffering of migrated people in the city. He does not leave any stone unturned to bring out every dark side of life. Although Indian philosophy is predominantly utopian in its approach and outlook, Indian fiction in English thrives on the construction of dystopian spaces. Sometimes these dystopian narratives emanate from a class-based anxiety about non-belonging to the ideological underpinnings of a neo-liberal city space; some other times, they originate from the broad social awareness about things falling apart. While Utopian worldview dangerously glosses over the narratives of disjunction and dislocation, dystopian frameworks remain embedded within them, and explore a dynamic of exchange where the desirable utopia comes just as a foil to the available discourse of dystopia.

CONCLUSION

Despite the utopian promise from the time past incidents like modernization, neo-liberal capitalism, political independence, globalization have changed the socio-political and philosophical assumption of India. As a result different dystopian elements began to appear in various fictions written by different writers especially after the independence of India. These elements of dystopia definitely subvert the utopian worldview so long nourished in Indian literature from the ancient past. Indian independence, that promised a better world to live in for all failed as post independence era saw violence of partition and surge in the gap of rich and poor, can be said to be a deciding moment in changing the trajectory of writing fictions in English into representation of dystopia. Adiga's *Between The*

Assassinations and *The White Tiger* can be said to indicate the change in direction from utopian to dystopian territory.

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