



THE JOURNEY OF THE WHITE TIGER FROM DARKNESS TO A DARKER LIGHT IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

Dr. Ashitha Varghese¹, Anu Chandran²

¹(Research Supervisor, Department of English And Foreign Languages, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore – 641046.)

²(M.Phil Research Scholar, Department of English And Foreign Languages, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore – 641046.)

ABSTRACT



Post- Independent India is driven by corruption at its peak in all walks of life ranging from governance in education to the distribution of life resources. The growing corruption, which is a direct result of globalization, is characterized by capitalism and westernization. Privatization and capitalism has looted India of its rich ethics and morals it once had. It has aggravated the already existing economic and social class divisions that made the rich richer and the poor even poorer, due to the extreme exploitation of the poor and dumb rural human resources by the wealthy politicians and businessmen of the country. This paper aims to study the ever- rising corruption in India and its lethal effect on its people, through the novel *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga, which discusses in detail the crippling effects of corruption in globalized India.

Keywords: *India, Socio-Economic Divisions, Corruption, Exploitation*



India, a country with the largest youth population, has been ranked 81st among one hundred and eighty countries according to the Global Corruption Perception Index for 2017, by the Transparency International. According to the newly-published 2017 edition of the World Economic Forum's *Global Competitiveness Report*, the major factor hindering the progress of the nation is the fast-growing corruption. The World Economic Forum's Inclusive Development Index reports, "India's richest 1% own 53% of its wealth, up from 36.8% in 2000." The constant corruption has led to rising socio-economic divisions between the rich and the poor. Majority of the Indian population consists of farmers and manual workers living in villages, living off their daily wages. The minority few – the wealthy business elites and corporates do not just own wealth, but also power in all areas of life.

The government as well as the business corporates exploit the poor and makes profit at their cost. Nobody questions or challenges the widespread corruption throughout the nation. What is pretended to be unnoticed or unseen has been brought to the front by literature. There are several texts depicting the stark realities – the piteous plight of the impoverished and the exploited caused at the hands of the powerful authorities and officials. *The White Tiger* (2008) is a novel by Aravind Adiga that penetrates into the contemporary Indian society as a subject of the socio-economic divisions caused by the rising corruption in the country, accelerated by capitalism and privatization as a result of globalization. The novel is put in the form of a series of seven letters written on consecutive nights by the protagonist, Balram Halwai, a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore, to Wen Jiabao, Chinese Premier, informing him of "the truth about Bangalore" (4).

India has got thousands of entrepreneurs beaming up. The story behind these entrepreneurs ending up rich and successful, who were originally from the "Darkness", is no more a mystery. It's the story of many murders, bribery, and endless corruption that makes the poor rich and the rich richer in an overnight. But the plight of our country is such that the impoverished hardly finds an alternative to get rid of the crippling impacts of

immorality other than to outshine the depravity imposed on him. Balram Halwai, calls his story as "The Autobiography of a Half-Baked Indian", as he is called so (implying the underdeveloped status) by his employer, Mr Ashok, a wealthy industrialist who is an epitome of the corrupt and immoral Indian businessman, ready to do anything to maintain and enhance his name, fame and power.

The novel accounts Balram Halwai's tale of how he "was corrupted from a sweet, innocent village fool into a citified fellow full of debauchery, depravity, and wickedness" (197). Balram was born in the village of Laxmangarh in Gaya district, to a large and poor family of sweet makers. Though he was a gifted child, he could never complete his school education due to the poverty-struck family that couldn't afford to send him to school, and which needed him to assist them in earning for livelihood. Balram was not given a name by his parents or grandparents. They called him 'Munnah', which generally means 'boy'. But he was given a proper name by his schoolteacher. Once, when an inspector came to the class and asked questions, nobody except Balram had answered properly. And hence, the inspector called him as the white tiger – the rarest of animals that comes along only once in a generation. "The white tiger. That's what you are in this *jungle*" (35).

Balram's school is a typical government village school looted by the authorities. The teachers are not provided monthly salaries by the government; which in turn affects the students, as the teachers do not teach anything in the classes. They even steal the uniforms given in free for students, and sell them in the neighbouring villages for money. Hence, the very root of a nation's foundation – its educational institutions -- is corrupt to the core. These kinds of schools are sure to bring up corrupt and dishonest youths.

Hospitals are another section where corruption peaks, and that is well portrayed in the novel. Balram's father dies of tuberculosis as he could not get timely treatment. The village does not have enough hospitals. It just has three foundations laid out by three different politicians before the elections. Therefore, Balram and his brother take him to the only government hospital in the village. But



there is no doctor there. After bribing the ward boy, they learnt that the doctor might come up in the evening, and so waited till evening for the doctor to arrive. But his father dies by then. A man informs them about the prevalent corruption in hospitals. The doctors are appointed to the hospitals after being bribed a huge amount of money. They are allowed to be off duty if they give off one-third of their salary to the medical superintendent. He would make a tick on the ledger implying that the doctor was on duty. Hence, Balram's father, like thousands of patients in our country, is allowed to die mercilessly as a result of the absence and negligence of the doctors, and the brutality of the government.

The village of Laxmangarh was controlled by four bestial landlords, who are named after the animals suitable of their appetite -- the Buffalo, the Stork, the Wild Boar and the Raven. Being a village guy from the Sweet makers' community, Balram faced great challenges getting into a job. He was rejected by the coalminers as he approached them for a job there, saying that he is too small and lean to be selected for a job. Balram happened to approach the Stork (one of the village landlords) in Dhanbad, and he appointed him as their driver. Ashok, his son, was comparatively kinder to Balram and was devoid of the usual instincts that run in the blood of a landlord. "If you were back in Laxmangarh, we would have called you the Lamb" (142). Balram was thoroughly humiliated for his appearance, lack of English speaking skills and ignorance of the modern and corrupted city life as he comes to Dhanbad, Delhi; by everyone there from the fellow servants, drivers to his masters and mistress. He is put to embarrassment by his mistress, Pinky Madam, for his 'unsophisticated' manners and 'incivility'.

The stark socio-economic division in India is on constant rise. The poor labourers in Delhi who build mansions for the rich live in tents covered with tarpaulin sheets. They do not have a sewage system and defecate in the open, and live in the stench of the faeces and industrial waste. The servants or labourers or any poor-looking people wearing sandals instead of shoes are not allowed in the malls of Delhi. The life of drivers in Delhi is quite pathetic. They are mercilessly enslaved. They are subjected to take up blame for their masters' crimes and die in jail

proudly bragging of their 'loyalty'. "We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul, and arse. (169)". Balram was trapped in a similar loop. He was asked to take up the blame for Pinky Madam, who had accidentally killed a child while driving drunk. The rich, just because they own heaps of wealth, forget humanity and gets the poor dumb people punished for the crimes they commit. Even the judges take their bribes and happily give into the injustice. "And life goes on. For everyone but the driver" (169).

"Delhi is a city where civilization can appear and disappear within five minutes" (281). People here are corrupted to their roots, and have got no morals. They are fair-skinned and have big bellies. That's what all that matters here. The rich always get the best of whatever they want in their life, and the poor licks their leftovers. They bribe the ministers and politicians to get away from their crimes. Balram's master, Mr Ashok, is one such businessman in the coal industry, who bribes the ministers (with the money looted from the poor) to get exempted from paying income taxes. Ashok, though at first seems to be different from his father and brother, is equally cruel and selfish as realised by Balram. Balram revenged Ashok by cheating on him, siphoning his petrol, taking the car to corrupt mechanics who charged extra bills, and picking up paying customers. But he never felt guilty; instead it was rage and the realization that how much he had been sucked by Ashok and his family. "The more I stole from him, the more I realised how much he had stolen from me" (231). Balram takes his full revenge by murdering Ashok, and stealing away his seven hundred thousand rupees and leaving to Bangalore to launch his own taxi service centre, White Tiger Drivers. That is how Balram manages to free himself out of the Rooster Coop of slavery.

India, with its advancing infrastructural, technological and other developments have brought along a higher rate of corruption. The domination of the poor and lower class communities has intensified the socio-economic and class divisions. The poor have been deprived of their rights and exploited terribly. Power is in the hands of the wealthy authorities, politicians and officials holding a dignified status in the society. But at the same time,



here is where corruption breeds the most. Hence, higher the power, equally high is the corruption prevalent there. It turns out that the only way to come out of the wickedness is to fight back being wicked and corrupt. Out of the few lower castes that were to climb up the social ladder, they had to be corrupted in order to gain their freedom, to become a human being devoid of slavery. Such is the plight of the "saintly" India.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. India: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008. Print.

WEB SOURCES

- [1]. Balamurugan, M., S. Reehana Asmin. "Endless Corruption in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*". *Pune Research Scholar*. 2.6. np. Nd. Web. 10 Mar. 2018.
- [2]. Pasari, Priyanka. "The White Tiger on Half Baked India and Social Political Deterioration". *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. 20.5. 1-6. May 2015. Web. 10 Mar. 2018.
- [3]. "The White Tiger and the Indian Culture of Corruption". *Aspiring*. 11 Oct. 2011. Web. 09 Mar. 2018.
- [4]. Wani, Imityaz Ahmad, Satpal Singh. "The Cultural Dominance of West in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*". *The Dawn Journal*. 4.2. np. Nd. Web. 10 Mar. 2018.
-