

STUDY OF POWER DYNAMICS AND CLASS STRUGGLE IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S THE WHITE TIGER

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to study the elements of Power Dynamics and Class struggle in Aravind Adiga's debut and Man Booker prize winner novel "The White Tiger". The novel was published in 2008 and the same year Adiga was awarded the Booker Prize for it. The story the novel moves around Balram Halwai, who is the protagonist and the narrator. At the end of the novel, the reader finds him as a self-taught entrepreneur. He was born in an extremely poor family of a small village, Laxmangarh of Gaya district of Bihar. Because of being socially backward and poor background of his family, he had to work as servant at rich families, where he is tortured and exploited. After some years, he moves to Delhi where he becomes a personal driver to a business man, named Ashok. The world of city of Delhi seemed totally different to Balram from his village in Bihar. Delhi provides him an opportunity to develop and expand his mental horizons. In Delhi he finds a great divide between people as rich and poor, and how the rich treat the poor. He also realizes the entire mechanism of the power dynamics and its functioning in the world. He comes to understand the real Existence of his life and decides to make his own plan in future. At the end of the novel, the reader comes to know that Balram has murdered his boss Ashok. He steals his money and settles in a far off city Bangalore, becomes an Entrepreneur and starts his business of Taxi. He has become a modern, slave turned Master/ Boss who has fulfilled his dreams into reality by adopting illegal and unethical means.

Keywords: Power Dynamics, Caste and Class Relations, Family and Education, Corruption, The White Tiger

INTRODUCTION

Aravind Adiga was born in Madras in 1974. He completed his school Education in India and Australia. For his higher Education, he moved to Columbia University, New York and Magadalen College, Oxford. He has worked in India as a journalist for the Time Magazine from 2003-2005. His work has also appeared in British newspapers like the Financial Times and the Independent. *The White Tiger* is his first novel. Now he lives in Mumbai. His debut novel, *The White Tiger*, won the 2008 Booker Prize for him. He is the fourth Indian-born author to win the prize, after Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai. Till date he has written four novels which centre round the theme of changing India. His novels written around serious issues and social problems of our society like corruption, illiteracy, unemployment, class conflict, social discrimination etc. (Indurkar, 02)

The White Tiger is about the journey of Balram Halwai from a poor village servant to a big entrepreneur (businessman). This novel provides a darkly comical view of modern day life in India through the narration of its protagonist Balram. The story of the novel is epistolary as the story of *White Tiger* is narrated in letter form. The narrator writes letters to Wen Jiabao, the Chinese Premier about entrepreneur skills in India in 21st century which Chinese can learn. The theme of the novel is the contrast between India's rise as a modern Global Economy in 21st century on one side; and its working class who live in crushing and deplorable conditions on the other. Balram Halwai was born in a poor family of Laxmangarh village of Bihar which he derogatively calls as Darkness. As his parents were poor, they could not afford for better life and education to their children. After his father's death in his adolescent age, he had to do different types of menial works. He had to work as a servant at a rich man's house at his village where his landlord abused him and treated inhumanly. Because of lack of proper education and being illiterate, Balram involves into illegal activities and does not hesitate from committing murder of his master. If he had good education, he might not have been exploited by the people and would have got a good and decent job. In India, a major portion of Population is illiterate and uneducated,

which forces them to do petty jobs and sometimes they resort to illegal activities like smuggling, looting, murder, extortion etc. Because of lack of proper education, people do not get secured and safe jobs. Balram is such a person who tries his destiny at different places to get job. Later he moved to Delhi (Light), where he worked as Chauffeur (driver) to a rich man Ashok. He finds the world of Delhi of wonders, but full of stench and corruption. He also comes to know that Delhi's people are morally corrupted and degraded.

The *White Tiger* has many instances of caste and class struggle. Caste plays a major role in an individual's life in Indian Society. As Balram belongs to the Halwai caste, a lower caste in Indian social structure, he is not given due respect and is badly treated. When he moves to city of Delhi, the caste stigma disappears and it takes a new name in the form of Class. The world of Delhi which is founded on the pillars of economic base, he finds its world divided into Rich and Poor and the rich are morally corrupt and fallen. Their entire superstructure is founded on the exploitation of the poor. Thus they accumulate lots of money, wealth and power by corruption and exploitation of poor. Because of wealth and power, they exert control over resources and social system along with people. They do not hesitate from doing any illegal work for the sake of corruption and for their self-interest. Balram is badly treated and abused not only by the family where he works, but also by the outsiders who stay around him. Sara D Schotlandin "*Breaking out of Rooster Coop: Violent Crime in Aravind Adiga's White Tiger and Richard Wright's Native Son*" states that through *White Tiger*, Adiga tells about through some animal metaphors which recall Franz Fanon's analogy of oppressed subjects to animals. In the world of Darkness, human beings are degraded and are treated lower than animals. (Scholand 5) This corruption does not even spare Balram himself who out of greed, kills his master and steals his 70,000 rupees and runs away. The politicians and businessmen shake hands to make their corruption legal and sometimes assort to bribery etc. Balram too does that after becoming an entrepreneur. Balram commits the murder of his boss in a much planned way. After the murder of his master, he settles in Bangalore and starts his own enterprise of Taxi. Now many drivers work for him. Balram who once used to be a servant, has himself become a Master of servants. Corruption as an evil has widely spread its wings in our society.

Though the main theme of the *White Tiger*, is the contrast between India's emergence as a fast developing economy on one side and its extreme poverty on the other. Apart from corruption, exploitation, poverty, social relations, *The White Tiger* is also about, power dynamics, class struggle and social relations; the role and function of power in society. According to Anton Gramsci, Power is always misused by the rich and is propagated in society through hegemonic institutions like caste, family, religion, education and caste etc. Adiga has tried to show these things work in *White Tiger*. Initially, Balram assumes his caste as his destiny; enters into servitude and is abused at the hands of rich. Even his grandmother, who holds central power in family, abuses him and demands money to fulfil family obligations. When Balram moves to Delhi, he is regularly spied by the family which he cannot resist. He is always threatened by his grandmother, Kusum to send money regularly. If he fails to send money, she will arrange her marriage. When he, he saw a Rooster Coop (a symbolic figure) on road side in Delhi; he felt that those birds were pushed inside in suffocating cage for butchering. This scene compels Balram to think on the plight of those innocent creatures.

Balram says:

"Go to Old Delhi, behind the Jama Masjid, and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly coloured roosters, stuffed tightly into wire mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly...." (Adiga, 173)

He feels that like these birds in the cage, the poor in India are dragged into this Rooster Coop like conditions because of poverty. He himself feels to be caged into Rooster Coop which he wants to break out. The birds in the cage knowingly do not try to come out of the Rooster Coop. They, like Balram and other people, are ideologically enslaved which do not allow them to break that Rooster Coop and come out. Sundhya Walther in "*Fables of the Tiger Economy: Species and Subalternity in Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger*" argues that The Rooster Coop is the central metaphor used by Adiga in *White Tiger* for the Social Organisation of Post-Independence India: this image of chickens kept in coops in the butcher shops of Old Delhi which do not rebel despite the intolerable conditions.... (Sundhya 884). The poor in India do not have life of dignity. Even their problems are not heard by the Government. They, like the Rooster Coop birds, cannot think to come out of it and rebel against their exploitative master.

"No. It's because 99.9 per cent of us are caught in the Rooster Coop just like those poor guys in the poultry market"

Balram feels that few rich men have amassed the resources, property and money of the whole country and have left a large number of people poor to die like dogs. There is a large gap between the rich and poor because of disproportionate division of resources and wealth. The rich exploit the poor because of their poverty and suck their blood as leech. If the poor wants to come out of such pathetic condition and exploitation, they have to fight against such oppression. For Marxist thinkers, there is always a struggle for power between the rich

(the Capitalists) and poor (working class). The capitalists always try to control the working class. Balram in *White Tiger* is controlled and abused. But the poor in *White Tiger* cannot come out such powerful, hegemonic, exploitative and corrupt system because of being submissive before such forces. The rich or the ruling class always tries to control the poor/working class and society as per their rules. Balram says:

“A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 per cent-as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way- to exit in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man’s hand and he will throw it back at you with a curse.”

For Neo Marxists Scholars, the Social and Cultural Relations in society are very complex. They are produced and determined by the people who are socially, economically and politically powerful. The people like Balaram who are socially and economically poor are directly or indirectly exploited by the rich and powerful. The poor are victimised and exploited either by the coercive forces of power or by ideological forces. In consequence, the poor stands against the rich and powerful either by direct rebellion or by rejecting their ideological forces. Balram realises the reality of his existence in exploitative and repressive system which is responsible for making his life degraded. He feels that he cannot live in such suffocating and exploitative atmosphere where he is inhumanly abused. He wants to get rid of such life as soon as possible. He correlates himself to the white Tiger which he saw in a Zoo at Delhi. He feels that he too wants to live a life of dignity out of cage like the tiger. He feels that if he has to get rid of such corrupt and exploitative system, he will have to break it and thus he murders his own master Ashok. To come out the imaginary world what Louis Althusser calls, ideological (imaginary) Rooster Coop, Balram has to fight against it and break it. Pramod K Nayar in his book *Contemporary literary and Cultural Theory* states;

“The ideology is, therefore, an instrument of power because it helps prop up the dominant classes by naturalizing an exploitative relationship and convincing the working classes that this how things. Ideology prevents the recognition of oppression by the oppressed. Thus, it is a blind, a veil that prevents the oppressed from proper understanding of their real existence. Ideology, in another sense, works as a power tool for the rich over the poor. (Nayar, 130) Repressive ideology is put into circulation by the ruling class to establish a consensus in society. It is a set of belief in which people deceive themselves. (Nagarajan, 226)

CONCLUSION:

Adiga is writing about Post-Colonial, Post- independence and Globalised India. He is writing about a modern India of 21st century where the values of society have changed and degraded by the developments in the fields of science and technology. Such developments have made India a shining country in the world. After Independence, we have progressed a lot in various fields and can stand with developed countries. But this progress of India has benefitted a small number of people. Even after 75 years, our Government could not eliminate the problems like poverty, malnutrition, hunger, corruption etc. Majority of people of India in villages, face such problems. Industrialisation and Urbanisation have replaced and destroyed many traditional and small businesses of people. In order to earn their living, these people migrate to city where they have face lots of challenges. Balram Halwai is also a victim of such developments. In order to earn his living, he had to move to Delhi where he is corrupted by its life. He becomes so much corrupted that he kills his own master Ashok, who treated him as a friend. By stealing Ashok’s money, he starts his business of Cab for call centres in Banglor. Now he himself has become a master and becomes the stereotype of his master, Ashok. His act of cold blooded murder of his master is the emergence of a new capitalist class in globalised world.

Sara Schotland says in “*Breaking out of Rooster Coop: Violent Crime in Aravind Adiga’s White Tiger and Richard Wright’s Native Son*” For Balram, murder fosters in him a sense of power and status and even a sense of ownership over the victim. (Schotland 11) Once he was a critic of such exploitative and corrupt system, now he himself has become corrupt and enjoys it. Given the corruption of today’s India, dishonesty is the only path to success, and violence replaces constructive protest. (Schotland, 817) He orders and scolds his men who work under him. But he is different from people like Ashok.

His act suits very much to Homi Bhabha’s theory of *Post -colonial mimicry* which helps to explain the apparent paradox through Balram. Balram kill a man whom he not only admires but also follows some of his habits (Ibid 10). Sundhya Walther in “*Fables of the Tiger Economy: Species and Subalternity in Aravind Adiga’s The White Tiger*” say that *The White Tiger* is the narrative of a poor village boy who rises to the top of the capitalist hierarchy of the so called “new India” by killing his master, Ashok. (Sundhya 580) Adiga has used much metaphorical / animal imagery in the story. The title itself is based on the White Tiger, a wild animal, which in some sense makes it a type of Fable where animals are attributed as human being. The Rooster Coop is the central and important metaphor which represents the social organisation of post-Independence India. Balram breaks that Rooster Coop, in order to survive in a free world and become a businessman. Some reviewers of *White Tiger* compare the book with Richard Wright’s *Native Son*. Some critics have labelled *White Tiger* as Fanonian novel. Franz Fanon in his “*The Wretched of the Earth*” writes that revolutionary violence is a

constructive means for the liberation and self-expression of the colonised people. (*Ibid* 2) Balram adopts the path of violence to get rid of the corrupt and inhuman system. But Balram's act of killing his boss and looting of his money is not acceptable in a modern democratic society ethically, morally and legally.

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