



“The Dual Faces of Modern India: Analyzing Class Struggle and the Quest for Identity in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*”

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ABSTRACT :

This research paper analyzes Aravind Adiga's Man Booker Prize-winning novel *The White Tiger* (2008) examines the Marxist criticism of both class conflict plus identity development in post-liberal India. This study investigates India's socioeconomic social classification called "Light" and "Darkness" by the author in the novel while explaining their impact on individual awareness and interpersonal connections. This paper studies how Balram Halwai's professional transformation from a lowly servant to a business owner helps foster his class awareness based on his experiences in the novel. A key part of the novel utilizes two metaphors to represent its symbolic meaning- the "Rooster Coop" which illustrates controlling power while the white tiger symbolizes social disruption that goes beyond the accepted limits. Through the title we learn about Adiga's depiction of India who uses darkness to symbolize wealthy elites while the light represents financially marginalized groups. This paper evaluates the class conflict and identity development observed in *The White Tiger*.

Keywords- marxist theory, the white tiger, rooster coop, light and darkness, caste, class, poverty, false consciousness, capitalism, neoliberal, identity

Aravind Adiga published his debut novel 'The White Tiger' in 2008 which showcases its main character Balram Halwai's tale of transforming from poverty into a successful entrepreneur while also giving a glimpse into the harsh realities of modern India. Through his bestselling Man Booker Prize-winning novel, Adiga breaks down the traditional view of India as a rising economic power as he reveals systematic inequalities that remain hidden under the surface of prosperity. The novel disrupts the widespread discussion about India and sheds light on its dark side during the economic growth.

Adiga grew up as a child in Chennai during 1974 and received his education at Columbia university and Oxford university before becoming a journalist at Time magazine. Adiga's father provided him with a privileged background. His background gave him both intimate knowledge of India's high society as well as intellectual independence from it. His journalist background can be seen through his detailed presentation of Indian social issues which shows readers the complete truth about the country's developing classes and corruption and sufferings brought by modernization.

Following India's economic reform during the 1990s post-liberalization period the nation has undergone massive economic advancement as well as technological progress and global growth. Adiga has divided modern India into two segments and defines them as "Light" versus "Darkness." The urban flourishing side of India known as Light features modern buildings and technological centers and fast way of living while Darkness shows rural areas with hierarchical system controls, poverty, illiteracy and exploitation. The economic split between these two parts extends into deep psychological variations as well as cultural and moral separations throughout Indian society.

Through his letter to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, Balram tells the story of how he evolved from being a simple driver into an entrepreneurial businessman by means of rebellion followed by criminal acts and murder. By using this framing mechanism the novel demonstrates that Balram's narrative represents wider societal elements which define contemporary India's social conditions.

Adiga depicts India as a nation plagued by absolute corruption alongside an empty democratic system which forces citizens to abandon morality to achieve economic success while ancient societal ranks maintain their cultural supremacy. The novel expands across three distinct locations: impoverished Laxmangarh, hierarchical Dhanbad and progressive Delhi and Bangalore. Balram's social transformation through class boundaries matches his geographical progression between locations which enables readers to understand diverse economic and social structures in India.

The scholarly study of present-day Indian fiction classifies *The White Tiger* as part of "new social realism" which arose due to India's economic reforms in the 1990s. Gyorgy Lukács, a Hungarian philosopher, through his research on 'Critical Realism and Socialist Realism' says that social realism shows both the real features of society and the embryonic social powers which form the basis of human connections. Social realism is an artistic and literary movement that depicts social and political contexts, and in particular the working class. Social realism reveals the truth and the injustices experienced by poorer groups and enlightens the citizens about social power structures. It differs from socialist realism in that it depicts reality as it is, rather than making it better relative to what it actually is. Social realism is also a critique of the social structures and encourages people to reflect on social wrongs and address them. Social realism functions as a movement that reveals workers hardships to critique social power systems according to critics. According to critics, social realism demonstrates our need to understand social problems in realistic terms which modern science and societal concerns have inspired. Through social realism Adiga presents his narrative while infusing dark humor and satire into his approach. Through his blend of political statements and engaging writing techniques, 'The White Tiger' comes out to be both engaging and insightful. *The White Tiger* explores growing social conflicts within

India during its era of national transformation. Through its narrative the book makes readers consider the various human conflicts associated with economic development. This research explores Adiga's novel through its themes and narrative styles to establish his work as an effective Marxist method for understanding India's modern conflicts.

According to Marx's historical materialistic theory people's "social being determines consciousness" (Marx and Engels 47) because the economic situation controls both perception and social alignments. Throughout history all human societies have revolved around class conflict according to Marx and Engels who proclaimed "the history of all hitherto existing society" (Marx and Engels 14). A basic understanding of alienation according to Ollman emerges from his explanation that "the separation of workers from their labor, products, fellow humans, and species-being" (Ollman 131) reveals the psychological dimensions of working-class exploitation under capitalism.

Through the study of *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga, readers can make a successful Marxist analysis of the book. The novel displays clear social disparities between classes throughout its narrative as well as economic dominance while societal conditions determine human understanding. The analysis in this chapter demonstrates how the modern Indian portrayal found in the novel matches Marxist ideas and also shows how the character's development reflects economic conflicts.

The economic structure of India reveals its social and political dimensions in a detailed manner according to the way Aravind Adiga depicts it in *The White Tiger*. The novel uses the "Light" versus "Darkness" distinction as a symbol for when development becomes mismatched and unbalanced. According to Balram, India operates as one nation with a pair of opposite societal halves between a Light India and a Dark India. The economic system of Laxmangarh amounts to a semi-feudal structure because Marxist analysis classifies it as such although India remains a capitalist country. The four landlords known as Wild Boar, Stork, Buffalo, and Raven rule the village by forcing peasants to give them surplus value through different systems of exploitation.

Karl Marx's concept of alienation describes the estrangement of workers under capitalism from their labor, its products, and their human essence. The concept emerges in both his works 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts' of 1844 and *Capital* where he explains that workers surrender their control of their labor while performing meaningless work against their will. Workers experience alienation which transforms their solidarity into competition when dealing with fellow employees. According to Marx, capitalist systems turn work into a product so workers become component parts of production systems whose main value derives from profit generation instead of human dignity preservation. The root cause of Marxist criticism against capitalist exploitation originates from the alienation which devalues human work while fueling social class tension between capital owners and workers.

Marx's theory about alienation shows vivid illustrations through Balram's experiences as he works as a driver and becomes disconnected from his work and its products as well as his human nature along with other people. In his interaction with Ashok and Pinky Madam he becomes a mere tool rather than a thorough human being. Adiga writes on page 56 that "The rich don't have drivers, no, they have chauffeurs. A chauffeur is a driver who wears a uniform. A smart white uniform. What the fuck, I thought. If this is the way things are, I'm going to be the first driver in Dhanbad with a uniform". This part shows how Balram becomes disconnected from himself as his professional position and symbolic attributes of that role take control of his identity. Balram points out through this statement on page 275 - "If you taught every poor boy how to paint, that would be the end of the rich in India" which shows how the distortion of exploitative social structures serves to preserve social classes.

Balram describes his condition as the "Rooster Coop": Throughout its entire ten thousand year history the Rooster Coop represents the outstanding accomplishment of this country. The roosters in the coop notice as the executioner removes organs from their brothers leading them to understand that their time for death is approaching. Yet they do not rebel. The roosters within the coop refuse to attempt escaping from their confinement. This treatment method exists in its exact form toward citizens within this nation.

Friedrich Engels in his letter from 1893 to Franz Mehring talks about "false consciousness" which is the condition that emerged when worker classes fail to identify their interests because controlling beliefs shaped their mindsets. In 1923, György Lukács in his book 'History and Class Consciousness' explored this concept in depth.

The servants remain loyal by using their families as collateral because traditional values along with family ties act as control mechanisms. Balram's gradual development of class consciousness or his recognition of his position within the class structure and the exploitative nature of that structure drives the novel's narrative arc.

Control over the society remains in the hands of dominant groups by achieving natural acceptance from subordinate groups who have received their perspective worldview. The ruling class upholds its hegemony by establishing several cultural practices combined with religious beliefs and social norms which justify unequal status. Through his statements Balram describes "In the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India." Men with Big Bellies and Men with Small Bellies represent the only social divisions prevalent in contemporary times. Two fates exist in life: consuming food or becoming prey to another. A simplified economic structure that divides India has emerged to create new class awareness that confronts traditional power systems that dominated the past.

Through his violent act of killing Ashok Balram takes a revolutionary stance against societal control. Balram views his act as a personal escape rather than a collective movement because he lacks realization of class solidarity which reflects his restricted understanding of his class status.

In his letters to the Chinese Premier, Balram implements his personal life as a blueprint that illustrates Indian economic progress. By stating "I am tomorrow" Balram establishes himself as a future face of emerging India by being someone who freed himself from established barriers through personal effort.

Balram challenges the economic system of India by showing how people suffer from exploitation yet he never advocates for changing the system instead focuses on achieving better standing within it. After murdering his master, Balram seizes or gets his money which is his base fund for becoming an entrepreneur. This relates to Marx's concept of 'original sin' which is the evil outcome of capitalism.

The drivers who work for Balram receive decent wages yet he gets an unfair portion of their earnings from his position as their employer. Balram replicates the exact exploitation system he endured himself when he was employed. Balram makes it clear his goal is to prevent the employees he pays from receiving "spoiled" benefits. When an exploited person transforms into an exploiter it reveals the recurring nature of capital growth under neoliberal economic systems.

According to Marxist analysis the ending of *The White Tiger* demonstrates the pros and cons of individual rebellion under capitalist social structures. The story shows that Balram's perspective falls short of telling the complete story about capitalist systems because he lacks a full grasp of total economic relationships and the vital system changes needed for transformation. Adiga crafts in his novel a multi-layered Marxist analysis of India by showing how class differences shape daily reality for people alongside highlighting that social advancement cannot resolve systemic economic differences.

Balram Halwai strives to seek his self-identity while migrating from "Darkness" to "Light" which goes above geographic and economic change. The analysis of character identity development follows as Adiga illustrates the processes of building and unmaking personal identity against India's emerging modernization by combining Marxist analysis with postcolonial theories.

The "subaltern" social groups conditioned by ruling class hegemony form the foundation for understanding how Balram develops his original sense of self. Balram represents the subaltern condition through his identity as the Halwai (sweet-maker) caste hailing from rural Bihar where his experience and background made him unfit for complete social participation in the dominant order. Because of his job, throughout his life, he was always made to feel like an inferior amongst everyone.

From the very start Balram lacks a true name because his subaltern caste position dominates his cultural background. His teacher calls him by the name Balram (sibling of Krishna) while every other person has always referred to him as Munna (boy). The Indian social system has denied him a proper name which represents the complete lack of acknowledgment regarding his individuality in society. The lack of knowledge about his birthdate shows how poverty prevents people from accessing official recordings of their existence.

The concept of alienation created by Marx demonstrates the multiple fragments of being which make up Balram's identity throughout his story. Through his role as a servant Balram experiences the concept of alienation described by Marx which refers to the separation of humans from their nature as creative self-determining beings. While looking in the rear-view mirror Balram experiences a sudden realization about his mysterious ability to smile. He says, 'I was smiling. My reflection showed me a smile for the first time in many months'. Balram's awareness of his unfamiliar smile exposes how his emotions have turned into an artificial show for his employers because he has lost touch with his emotional life.

Within *The White Tiger* Balram maintains dual identities because he serves his bosses while concealing his internal rebellion. He describes himself as "a man of two worlds" because he is submissive towards his employers while inside he fights against systemic oppression. The *White Tiger* shows how class position becomes literally visible through one's own body. In modern India class distinction is also in the way people put on their expensive scents and sweat on the other reveals different class positions because Balram compares his dark face and crossed teeth to his master's "clean, well-fed face."

The first step Balram takes when trying to reshape himself involves changing his physical appearance through weight gain and dress adjustments and speech modifications and adopting upper class body language. The way he transforms his body establishes a necessary component of his identity change because bodily movement acts as the performance of social class.

Through Balram's connection with Ashok who came back from America with Americanized ideals, we come across Homi Bhabha's work, an Indian physicist who describes how the colonizer and the colonized maintain a complex relationship. Balram feels both hatred and admiration toward Ashok as he tries to impress his boss while also dreaming about taking his place or living a life like him.

According to Bhabha the colonized people develop "mimicry" which represents their copy of Western ways yet remains slightly inferior. The transition of Balram from his master's perspectives through language use and their habits and references accounts for the mimetic process. His pursuit of self-advancement occurs through mimicry which includes listening to English news instead of Hindi programs while learning to speak as an educated man and attempting political discussions.

The form of mimicry Balram uses allows a hidden form of resistance to emerge. Balram's continuous performance of assumed roles results in the disappearance of his original self from his own perspective. His declaration, "I've made it! I've broken out of the coop!" shows his naturalization of the adopted self into his authentic identity arises from the combination of his self-identification with this new persona. Balram becomes a "self made entrepreneur" who uses his personal abilities to grow his economic worth in market systems.

In the narrative Adiga depicts this identity of entrepreneurship without treating it as if it were entirely liberated from problems. Success for Balram demands the replication of master-servant power dynamics while adopting suspicious business methods. The identity he created is the same as the characteristics of the system he left.

The novel shows how Indian economic restructuring wiped out traditional social institutions but replaced them with no new forms of collective unity. By achieving his entrepreneurial goals Balram pays a steep price since he faces complete separation from social connections because he maintains neither relationships with loved ones nor positive links with others.

Through servant relationships the novel shows how unity between people begins to fade away. Although they occupy the same class position the servants in the novel never establish shared solidarity as a class group. The servants follow a pattern of competition and mutual surveillance and continuous betrayal toward each other.

In *The White Tiger* the search for identity arises from continuous development through a combination between material reality and ideological pressure and individual choice. Balram's statement during the novel's end shows the procedural character of identity through his declaration "I am tomorrow".

Within capitalist society, Balram's identity development shows how people can possibly create their own self identity yet also shows the boundaries they face when going through the journey of the search. Through his successful escape from predefined positions Balram attains new identity but he also finds boundaries within capitalist society and economic independence discourse. Through its narrative, the novel explores the complex interplay between self-creation and the ability to define oneself and live in a capitalist world.

Through multiple symbols and recurring motifs, 'The White Tiger' depicts the Marxist analysis of contemporary India. Through symbolic elements Adiga shows how his vision uses several different themes to express his perspective on class struggle while analyzing identity formation in a globalized capitalist system.

The novel's central symbol 'the white tiger' functions as a multifaceted metaphor for Balram's exceptional status. During his encounter with the school inspector Balram receives his first designation as a "white tiger, the rarest of animals, the creature that comes along only once in a generation" which separates him from ordinary people. Within the natural order the white tiger stands out from normal tigers in the same manner as Balram defies Indian social norms through his refusal to accept caste boundaries.

According to Marxist analysis the symbol of the white tiger in the novel has different meanings. The image seems to show how talented exceptional individuals reach success by their natural skills and drive. According to Balram the history of his transformation from his innocent country origins into his immoral big-city lifestyle stands as the right depiction of the white tiger.

Within the novel the "Rooster Coop" stands as a political simile to display how Indian social ranks function through controlled consent and force. Through his words on page 173, Balram defines this institution as "the thing that is the basis of everything in this country". He then elaborates on its meaning by saying that "the birds inside the chicken coop sense a scent of blood coming from the upper regions. Brothers understand their fate as the killers dissect fellow roosters before performing the same operation on them. Yet they do not rebel. The birds consciously decline attempts to escape from their restricted pen. The very same thing occurs with human beings in this nation".

The roosters, despite knowing how their fellow roosters suffer at the hands of slaughter, the birds maintain their acceptance of the situation like servants accept their lot of exploitation. The phenomenon of false consciousness occurs when people don't recognize their class position because they have been ideologically confused.

The foundation of Indian economic structure depends on servant loyalty as Balram depicts in the novel. Servants understand that family punishment follows betrayals and therefore accepting exploitation becomes equivalent to putting their families at risk of harm from such consequences. Such understanding matches Marxist principles that explain how capitalism uses pre-existing social relationships from pre-capitalist societies to extend its power and control for exploitation.

The novel revolves around the binary of "Light" and "Darkness", The Darkness signifies Balram's village of Laxmangarh and the impoverished rural regions, while the Light represents urban centers of wealth and power. This spatial division metaphorically captures the uneven development characteristic of capitalism.

Balram describes the Darkness as a place where "electricity forgets to go", suggesting not merely the absence of literal illumination but also the metaphorical darkness of ignorance, superstition, and political neglect. The maintenance of underdeveloped rural areas serves the interests of urban capital by providing cheap labor and resources.

Within urban spaces, the novel depicts further spatial stratification: the servants' quarters behind or in the basements of luxury apartments, the back seats versus front seats in cars, the basement level versus upper floors in shopping malls. These spatial arrangements are known as "social space" meaning the translation of social hierarchies into physical distance and proximity.

Through Light and Darkness Balram symbolizes two opposing zones- first he depicts Laxmangarh Village and other rural poor areas under Darkness and second he reveals wealth and power located in urban spaces. Through a conceptual separation of space the narrative reveals how unbalanced economic growth arises naturally in capitalism's late stage. Balram maintains that the Darkness becomes a place without functioning electricity which represents not just physical darkness but also the cultural ignorance and widespread superstitions plus regional political indifference.

In the Dhampur hotel Balram becomes mesmerized by a chandelier which embodies the beautiful yet fragmented aspects of modernity. He expresses his impression of the chandelier as "a huge thing made of glass" which looks like a trapped bug dipped in scented liquid inside an eternal metal prison. Luxury reveals its dualistic nature through this image because it appears beautiful yet monstrous and generates both compelling and restrictive effects. Via its visual allure the chandelier displays the way capitalism manufactures consumer desire until people define their aspirational selves through purchasing instead of creating.

The scattered illumination from the chandelier stands for the split character of Indian modernity by merging futuristic zones with outdated social systems. The chandelier's installation in a provincial hotel which serves corrupt politicians and businessmen strengthens the connection between India's modern development with both corruption and social differences.

Cars in *The White Tiger* function as multivalent symbols of class relations. Through vehicle ownership the owners maintain their social ranking along with protection from poverty that afflicts the middle class. Balram's car expresses both his work as a taxi driver and his aspirational nature to reach higher social positions and travel freely. Servants represent two opposing elements in their role by opening doors of elite luxury but remaining forever outside positions of power and wealth.

Balram with his employer's car does not only depict his interaction with Ashok and Pinky but also a place where or through, he commits the murder. Inside the car Balram sits in the front seat because it symbolizes labor while Ashok remains at the back as he spends his leisure hours. His homicide of Ashok Balram allowed him to purchase a taxi company which gave him both personal mobility and social independence. The book indicates that Balram's increased power provides him only the ability to victimize others because he evolves from laborer status to become someone who employs workers.

Throughout his novel Adiga uses some images and even body excretions to represent capitalistic exploitation because he links these bodily substances directly to money. The connection between financial production and bodily processes becomes more clear as Balram portrays "cash as white as snow that had come floating down from the sky" despite it being obtained through corrupt government contracts. Balram learns that his Delhi apartment stands upon the site of an unsealed sewage drain where "this big open drainage hole by the side of the building" should have been sealed with a missing sewage pipe. Coal mines throughout Dhanbad serve as major representations of extractive capitalist operations. According to Balram the mines operate as "hell on earth" and miners resemble ocean creatures upon their surface emergence. The metaphor of coal spreads past literal mining operations to depict the economic value extraction from human bodies. Balram sees the servant bodies as if they were dogs because their spines are visible through their skin.

Throughout *The White Tiger* animal metaphors establish a network that portrays social class structures. The village landlords get their names from animals (Wild Boar, Stork, Buffalo, Raven) because their behavior mirrors a predatory existence with their peasant subjects. In numerous scenarios, servants are described as creatures like roosters confined to coops and monkeys performing for visitors and dogs that show submission to bosses.

Balram shows his training to live in a coop by demonstrating how the servant classes learn to accept their dehumanization as standard practice. The use of animal symbolism is used for exploring life as something which signifies physical existence stripped of political rights and social recognition.

Thematic elements of *The White Tiger* enhance the literary text by functioning as major components of the novel's critique on Indian politics. The novel's symbolic elements show both superficial elements while also demonstrating hidden conflicts of current Indian culture. The Marxist interpretation of these symbols presents them as "structures of feeling" according to Raymond Williams which are unexpressed social experiences that predate political discourse. The novel showcases developing class awareness about oppression before workers organize specific political campaigns to address it.

Symbols within the novel help in critical thinking as according to Marx by doing more than understanding the world, we can actively work for change. The symbols in Adiga's work show exploitation mechanisms and dominating systems allowing readers to develop critical understanding for social change. The symbolic world of the novel reveals all the problems which collective resistance needs to address.

Aravind Adiga's 'The White Tiger' offers a powerful critique of contemporary India through its portrayal of class struggle and identity formation. When Balram Halwai transforms from a servant to a businessman, the book reveals hidden contradictions in India's economic greatness and breaks down international development marketing myths.

A Marxist approach within this research shows how The White Tiger explores the hidden exploitation systems that continue as India advances development wise. The author uses the metaphor of the "Rooster Coop" to demonstrate the concept of hegemony which describes how dominated groups accept their subordinated position. The physical separation between "Light" and "Darkness" in the book represents India's geography which maintains an economic system based on city wealth generated through rural resource exploitation.

The search for personal identity by Balram reveals the psychological aspects of class conflict since he must navigate through the fragmented mindset that affects subaltern people. After becoming a master himself, Balram displays both rebellious actions against the system and continuation of exploitative practices in a way which demonstrates the clash of post-colonial capitalism. The symbolic elements throughout the novel including the white tiger and chandelier enable readers to understand how financial relationships lead to particular human losses under India's developing approach.

The White Tiger maintains its lasting importance due to its rejection of clear moral certainties. Adiga maintains dialectical tension between two opposing forces in his work to create what Marx considered fundamental for critical thought by uniting critiques with representations and individual agency with structural assumptions.

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