



## Representation of Indian Social Issues: A Study of *The White Tiger* by Arvind Adiga

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### ABSTRACT :

Indian society is diverse and complex, shaped by its rich history, cultural heritage, and social norms. Caste system, class system, family and kinship are integral parts of Indian society. Indian society has various social issues, complexities, contradictions and challenges. All these issues are represented in the paper. The protagonist of the novel *The White Tiger* is Balram Halwai, who belongs to the Adiga's imaginative village Laxmangarh. Villagers of Laxmangarh are subjected to exploitation, torture and torment by the village landlord. Balram by nature is ambitious and he tries to improve his social position. In his very childhood he has experienced social, political, bureaucratic and moral challenges in society. Finally, he becomes a successful entrepreneur.

**Keywords:** Education, Unemployment, Bribe, Corruption, Politician, Darkness, Driver, Rooster Coop, Servant, Master.

Aravind Adiga is an Indian-Australian author and journalist. Adiga is best known for his novels that explore the complexities of Indian society and culture. Adiga began his career as a journalist, working for the Financial Times and later as a correspondent for Time magazine in India. His experiences as a journalist influenced his writing, which often explores the social and economic realities of India. Adiga's debut novel, *"The White Tiger"*, won the Man Booker Prize in 2008. The novel explores India's class struggle and rural urban gap.

The protagonist of the novel Balram was born in a rural village in Gaya district, where he lived with his grandmother, parents, brother and extended family. He is a smart child but is forced to leave school in order to help his family. He begins to work in a teashop with his brother Kishan in Dhanbad. In the teashop he used to spy every customer at every table, and overhear what they said. This was how he kept his education going forward. He remarks: "I have always been a big believer in education-especially my own" (*The White Tiger* p.52). While working in the teashop he learnt about the Indian government and economy from the customer's conversations. Balram describes himself as a bad servant but a good listener. In the tea shop he has seen that the rickshaw pullers were not allowed to sit on the plastic chairs put out for the customers. He decides to become a driver. But there was a question, how to learn driving? Because to learn driving he has to pay but he has no money. He somehow convinced his grandmother to pay fees for car drive learning. He went into the house where the taxi drivers lived. The old driver asked: "What caste are you?" (*The White Tiger* p.56).

When Balram was studying in village school, in a surprise inspection of the school, the inspector asked various questions to students and Balram answered most of the questions correctly. One of those questions was: "In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals - the creature that comes along only once in a generation? ... *The White Tiger*" (*The White Tiger* p.35) Balram replied. Then the inspector praised Balram that he was intelligent, honest, and vivacious in the crowd of thugs and idiots. The inspector gave him a book and promised him a scholarship to go to a real school somewhere far away from there.

Balram came to Dhanbad after his father's death. His father was ill for some time, when they reached hospital for the treatment there was no doctor in the hospital and his father died of tuberculosis without getting any treatment.

The physical appearance of the bodies of the rich and poor is also different. The rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow white and soft, while Balram's father's spine was like knotted rope. "The story of a poor man's life is written on his body in a sharp pen" (*The White Tiger* p. 27).

In independent India there are two classes in the country: rich and poor, men with big bellies and men with small bellies and there are "only two destinies: eat-or get eaten up" (*The White Tiger* p. 64). Laxmangarh is a Naxalite prone area of the Darkness. Rigged elections are a common affair. In Laxmangarh during election votes were sold. One of the voters who was celebrating to cast the vote was beaten.

Facing humiliation and discrimination he learnt car driving. He finds a job of car driving at the local landlord's house. The landlord's business was coal mining. For evading tax on coal mining, the landlord has to bribe local politicians. Once there was a disagreement between the landlord and local politician, Ashok, the son of the landlord, had to go to Delhi to bribe a big politician. To drive Ashok to Delhi Balram takes over the job of the main driver. Thus, Balram moves to New Delhi with Ashok. Throughout his time in Delhi, Balram is exposed to extensive corruption, especially in the government. In Delhi, the contrast between the poor and the wealthy, dark India and bright India is made even more evident.

Balram narrates his life to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao. He explains how, the son of a rickshaw puller, escaped a life of servitude to become a successful businessman. Describing himself as an entrepreneur in a letter to Chinese Premier Balram wrote:

Apparently, sir, you Chinese are far ahead of us in every respect, except that you don't have entrepreneurs. And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, does have entrepreneurs. Thousands and

thousands of them. Especially in the field of technology. And these entrepreneurs. We entrepreneurs - have set up all these outsourcing companies that virtually run America now (The White Tiger p.4).

One night Pinky, the wife of Ashok, takes the wheel from Balram, while she was drunk. She hits a child in the road and drives away. Ashok's family puts pressure on Balram to confess that he had been driving alone. This is how Adiga points out that life of the poor is so cheap that they can be used for self-conviction.

The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking blame for their masters. The poor left the village but the master still owns them and their body and soul. In Delhi prosperous and destitute can be seen obviously: "Delhi is the capital of not one but two countries-two India's" (The White Tiger p. 252). The Light and Darkness both flow into Delhi. Gurgaon where Mr Ashok lived is the bright modern end of the city, Old Delhi, is the other end. Full of things that the modern world has forgotten all about.

People of the Darkness are trained to exist in perpetual servitude: "a servitude so strong that you can put the key of emancipation in a man's hand and he will throw it back at you with a curse" (The White Tiger p.176). When Balram was wandering in Old Delhi, the second hand book market of Darya Ganj. In the book shop he pretended to be one of the book buyers. He was going through one book when a bookseller read for him an Urdu book: "You were looking for the key for years/but the door was always open!" (The White Tiger p. 253).

Ashok becomes increasingly involved in bribing government officials for the benefit of the family coal business. Balram decides that killing Ashok will be the only way to escape India's Rooster Coop. Rooster Coop is Balram's metaphor for describing the oppression of India's poor. Just as roosters in a coop at the market watch themselves get slaughtered one by one, but are unable or unwilling to break out of the cage. Similarly, Balram too is portrayed as being trapped in the metaphorical Rooster Coop. Adiga questions here, then why does Rooster Coop work? The answer to question is, "Only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed - hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the masters - can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human beings, but a freak, a pervert of nature" (The White Tiger p.176).

To break out of the coop Balram kills Ashok by stabbing him with a broken bottle and stealing the large bribe Ashok was carrying with him, Balram moves to Bangalore with his nephew Dharam. In Bangalore he starts learning and observing the life of the city. He learns that men and women work in outsourcing companies. They sleep in the day then work all night because their masters are on the other side of the world. He notices that there is no night bus system in Bangalore. That is where the idea of entrepreneurs comes into the mind of Balram. Then he bribes the police in order to help to start his own taxi business.

Balram becomes a successful entrepreneur of Taxi Service at Bangalore. Once when one of his taxi drivers was taking the girls home from the office at night, hit a boy on a bicycle. In the accident the boy on the bicycle lost his life. For the accident Balram takes responsibility for himself being the owner of the vehicle. He finds out the address of the family who lost their son. He expressed his sympathy to the family and said: "I want to express my deep sorrow at the death of your son...I know the pain that you have suffered. He should not have died" (The White Tiger p.312). He pays off the family with twenty-five thousand rupees. The act of showing sympathy for the afflicted family makes a great difference between Balram and his ex-master Ashok who forced Balram to take blame for the accident despite he was not driving the car when accident was caused. Ashok left injured on the road to die, not taking him to the hospital.

Balram thinks that his own family was almost certainly killed by Ashok's relatives as retribution for his murder. Dharam, his nephew, was the last of his family. He goes to a good English school at Bangalore and he pronounces English like a rich man's son. Balram thinks that if he goes to jail for killing Ashok Dharam will become helpless. But he rationalizes his action and considers that his freedom is worth the lives of his family and of Ashok. He has no guilt for what he has done. He justifies his act as worthwhile for the sake of life free from servitude. He wants to start an English medium school at Bangalore for poor children. Where no one is allowed to corrupt the brain of children. In his school, only the fact of life would be taught to the kids. He wants to see India on the top of the pyramid.

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## Conclusion:

The issues of difference between the life of the Darkness and the Bright are categorised. The Darkness of Metropolitan city is hell for the poor. Issues of economic disparity between rich and poor is evident in the paper. Poverty and unemployment are like evil in poor families. The issues like how the poor have to discontinue their education to support their family, on the contrary, rich people are taking bribes to educate their children abroad. The hierarchical society, mental slavery in Indian society is depicted. Rigged election, moral ambiguity is shown. Injustice and moral degradation are represented in the novel, *The White Tiger*.

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