

Theme of Ethnicity in Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger

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Abstract

India has a rich heritage in all aspects of life. One unique quality of our nation is 'the unity in diversity' which is inherited in India from the persons like Buddha, Mahaveera, Basavanna, Gandhiji and Dr. Ambedkar. It was never shattered with the constant invasions of the East and the West. The certain patterns of rigidity are deeply rooted in its social life, though it becomes number one country in the world for its excellence in human resource management. In reality there is a darkness when you go deep into the society. Only twenty five percentage of Indians are progressive and a large number of people under the control of the rich and landlords, the capitalists. They never tried to come out of their pathetic condition. If they do, the system never allows them to come up. This racial segregation in the form of ethnicity, the pathetic strain of the poor and, the growing consciousness against the age old suppression that deep rooted in Indian society is focused in the novel *The White Tiger* as a major issue.

Keywords: social segregation, ethnicity, progress, growing consciousness

The novel *The White Tiger* voiced out the conflict of every poor Indian who belongs to ethnic group aspires to become rich in the progressive country but fails to find their identity in the postmodern world, where the rich become getting rich and the poor becomes getting poor. The fiction narrates the story of Balram, the son of a Rickshaw puller, who breaks the system and crosses the limits restrains by illegal means and becomes the great entrepreneur, which he could not achieve in reality by means of goodwill and just means. The novel owns the Booker Prize for its unique pattern of representing intuitively India's Heart of Darkness to the external world. It narrates the story of success of a poor and an ordinary village boy Balram who, with the struggle could become a driver first and then the great entrepreneur in the later phase of his life. The novel unlocks the untold misery and inexpressive voice in the tale of mankind. It is a story as Mohsin Hamid puts, "compelling, angry, and darkly humorous, *The White Tiger* is an unexpected journey into a new India and Aravind Adiga is a talent to watch."

It is set in the atmosphere of corruptions, sexualities,

tortures sadism and jealousies and hypocrisy. The novel mainly focuses on Balram, the son of a Rickshaw puller, a neglected car driver who would become world popular and renowned entrepreneur. The fiction is centered around the seven letter Balarama Halwai the car driver-turned entrepreneur, writes to Chinese premier Jaibao to explain his success story. Born in a non-descript village near Bodh Gaya, Balram (named after Krishna's sidekick for his school teacher) fights impossible odds to break out of servitude, son of a rickshaw-puller, he is pulled out of school in spite of the promise he displays, he is condemned to work in a tea shop. His drive to escape the clutches of fate ensures that he learns driving, and soon he is working for the landlords of Lakshmangarh.

Business deals, in the family of Lakshmangarh, are as shady as the coal they sold and take. Ashok the youngest of the family, the American return and his wife Pinky come to live in Delhi, and Balram Halwai accompanies them in his capacity as a driver. In the corrupt capital city, he learns the trade secrets that run this burgeoning nation. In the lanes of power of the city, he burns with the desire to break out the "rooster coop". He succeeds by murdering his master, moving to Bangalore with a large sum which Ashok keeps to corrupt the politicians in business deals, taking on a new identity and setting up a start up and becomes a business icon in the Silicon Valley.

The main thread of the novel is the story of success, not by just means, but by means of a long-suppressed riot, rebel, and bloody murder. It reveals the two-fold picture of India, i.e., the heart of darkness and the darkness of the hearts, the tragic tale of heartless landlords and poorest of the poor victims of the system. When we look into the social issue, the novel focuses on the racial discrimination based on ethnicity within the nation as a deep rooted pattern and not accompanied by colonization as we find in Africa, or a tragic history of mankind, as slavery witnessed in the United States of America, It is a different story here, it is developed through the history of mankind, deep rooted within the patterns of the society and prevail as being the constitution of man from the beginning in favour of the privileged class and continue to exist in fulfilling their ever never satisfying needs and desires.

When Balram riding his ex-employers Mr. Ashok and Pinkey Madam in their Honda City car, Mr Ashok asks him number of questions to test his general knowledge and to show his wife, how do the poor people in India educate in their poverty and makes his wife to laugh at his poor learning, says, "The thing is, he probably has... what, two, three years of schooling in him? He can read and write, but he doesn't get what he's read. He is half-baked. The country is full of people like him. I will tell you that. And we entrust our glorious parliamentary democracy" he the pointed at him and says, "to characters like these. That is the whole tragedy of this country" then on words he calls his life story as *The Autobiography of a Half-Baked Indian*. (Adiga-10)

Speaking of the background of his village Balram shares his views about his village and the river Ganga with Mr. Premier and reveals his world of darkness "his place is fertile, full of rice fields and wheat fields and ponds in the middle of those fields choked with lotuses and water buffaloes wading through the ponds and feeding lotuses and water lilies. Those who live in this place call it the Darkness. Please understand your Excellency, that India is two countries in one: an India of Light and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings light to my country; every place on the map of India near the ocean is well-off. But the river brings darkness to India-the black river, particularly, the river of death, whose banks are full of rich, dark, sticky mud. But its inside is filled with full of faces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and seven different kinds of industrial acids"(14-15). No longer had it remained pure and holy. It carries the miseries of the poorest of the poor and dead bodies of all species to take away to the ocean. Describing the death scene of his mother when carried her to burn her body on the bank of the river Ganga, Balram remarks and reveals how poor the creatures that belong to their clan, "her body is wrapped from head to toe in a saffron silk cloth, which was covered in rose petals and jasmine garlands. I do not think she had ever had such a fine thing to wear in her life" (16).

In this dark world, there lived four landlords who suck the blood of these poor people around, The Buffalo, who suck the blood of rickshaw pullers, the Stork, who own the river and he took a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman in the river and a toll from every boatman, the Wild Boar, another landlord, owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangarh, as the narrator puts it, "If you wanted to work on those lands, you had to bow down to his feet, and touch the dust under his slippers, and agree to swallow his day wages. When he passed by women, his car would stop, the windows

would roll down to reveal his grin; two of his teeth, on either side of his nose, were long and curved, like little tusks" (25). Another land lord the Raven owned the worst land, which was the dry rocky hillside around the fort, and took a cut from the goatherds, "he went up there to graze with their flocks, if they did not have their money, he liked to dip his beak into their backsides, so they called him the Ravan" all of them lived in a high walled mansions just outside Laxmangarh, they had their own temples, ponds, wells only thing they were afraid of Naxals who had kidnapped once the Buffalo's son and had sent all their children to live in the city. All these four landlords had control over the people around the place and humiliate these poor creatures and had link with the ruling politicians and always exploit the poor workers.

Every year, leaving the women in the house, all the villagers migrate to cities like Delhi, Calcutta, and Dhanbad to find work and return to their village before the rains and their wives hunts them as wild wolves when they return from the workplace and grab all their money. The men were tired of their work their body looks like a knotted rope. They beg the landlords and work in the field the whole year, when it is a season, they had to forfeit all their earnings in the mercy of the landlords, whatever they give in return they have to satisfy. So Balram's father was not ready to work in the field in the mercy of landlords. He used to pull the rickshaw and wish to send him to the school after the death of his wife miserably in government hospital. When forced Balram to go to school, his mother Kusum, rejects his request and sends him to work in the tea stall along with his brother Kishan, his father gets disappointed and says helplessly, "you let Kishan drop out of school, but I told you this fellow had to stay in school. His mother told me he would be the one who made it through school. His mother said" (29) but Kusum refuses and shouts with an authoritative voice "Oh, to hell with his mother! she was a crazy one, and she is dead, and thank goodness. Now listen to me: let the boy go to the tea shop like Kishan that is what I say" (29). Thus, among this unprivileged class, they have no feelings and emotions over the dead and orphan children. They have to see what is in front of them for their convenience and comfort and not think of the future of their children. But Balram's father seems to be awakening from the slumber of suppression and humiliation, so he had an idea of educating his children so he says "My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine-at least one- should live like a man." (30)

All these landlords control the village and humiliate all people, suppress and oppress them as much as possible by means of money, labor, coolie, and, sex. The life of the

poor workers in the village is highly miserable and they have to live on the mercy of the rich. These animals fed on the village and everything that grow in it, until there was nothing left for anyone else to feed on. So the rest of the villager left Laxmangarh for food, each year all the men migrate to Delhi, Calcutta and Dhanbad and other places to search work and feed the family. But Balram's father a rickshaw puller extinguishes his complete life in pulling the rickshaw and experiencing all the miseries of life and witnessing the suppression and oppression of the landlords in Laxmangarh, from childhood to his end. He dies in government hospital without getting proper treatment coughing blood in the nasty corner of the hospital. He is the man of self respect, his only wish was that his children should not take his profession and they must earn the money without the mercy of landlords, they should not live on the mercy of landlords. So he used to cry to Kusum many times, "how many times have I told you: Munna must read and write!" (Adiga-28). When Balram left school being afraid of lizard, he himself goes there to kill it and said to him "My whole life I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine -at least one son- should live like a man.

One day when the school inspector visited his school, he gives him right answers to the questions out of the knowledge he obtained from his observation of the society, the inspector makes an interesting statement that proves how the people of this kind live on and how Balram is different from them. He asks him after receiving correct answers to many questions from Balram, "You, young man, is an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots. In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals- the creature that comes along only once in a generation?" Balram says, "The White Tiger". Then the inspector replies, "That's what you are, in this jungle" (35). That is how Balram has become The White Tiger and revolts against the rigid slavery of his class in his village. When he has to leave the school and join the tea stall to repay the debt of his cousin-sisters lavish marriage, despite of his humiliations from his friends that he could not prove himself as a white tiger and to work as a coal breaker, he says to himself very often, "Even as a boy I could see what was beautiful in the world: I was destined not to stay as a slave." (41)

After the lavish marriage of Kishan, he goes to work with him in the tea stall at Dhanbad where the condition of the workers in the tea stalls along with the river Ganga is not good. As Balram narrates, " the men working in that teas shops - men, I say, but better to call them human spiders that go crawling in between and under the tables with rags in their hands, crushed humans in crushed uniforms,

sluggish, unshaven" Adiga brings the two parallel world of human beings who searches the job and find their way of life one is the light world which gives the advertisement in the news paper for the unemployed

"BANGALORE BASED BUSINESS MAN SEEKS SMART MEN FOR HIS BUSINESS, APPLY AT ONCE! ATTRACTIVE REMUNERATION PACKAGES ON OFFER, LESSONS IN LIFE AND ENTERPRENEURSHIP INCLUDED FOR FREE" (54) on the contrary, here at the village every week a truck comes from the city and takes the boys who are strong and sturdy to work in the hotels, bars. Whom they appoint must remove their shirts and pants to expose their body to the authority. A Sikh, a man with a big blue turban Aft holding a stick in his hand and swinging the sticks to drive back the crowd shouts " Everyone!, he shouted , "Take off your shirts! I've got to see a man's nipples before I give him a job" when Balram requested him to give him a job he looked into his chest, he squeezed the nipples, slapped his butt and rejects him and finally he forced him to take he swung his stick hard to his ear and he fell down. This is how cruelly they exploit the poor unemployed in the villages. They do not have other chance to remain unemployed or to be the slaves of the landlords like their forefathers.

But the incident touched Balram, a shadow of an eagle passed into his body and he burst into tears and he thinks in his mind's eye "White Tiger! There you are!"(55) Leaving his job at the tea stall he learns driving and begins to search a new job to seek bright future. When he goes to learn driving, an old driver makes fun of him saying, "Sweet makers, that is what you people do. You make sweets, How can you learn to drive, driving is like taming a wild stallion-only a boy from warrior castes can manage that, you need to have aggression in your blood. Muslims, Rajputs and,Sikhs.... They are fighters, they can become drivers". Paying three hundred rupees to a old driver he learns driving and appointed himself as a driver to Mr. Ashok and his wife Pinkey and comes to live in Delhi from Dhanbad.

Once he has been to Delhi, he begins to think in a different way, though he lives there in driver's dark room like rats, under the shadow of old mosquito net among the company of roaches, in his mind's eye he is looking an opportunity to break the age old aggression and to revolt from the dark position. He becomes so supportive to his master and stays with him as an ideal driver on the plain but in his inner most core of thoughts, he used to think how to get rid of it and escape from the dark world of slavery and humiliation in search of bright world outside. He thinks many times that he is succeeded to come out of

coop hills and the only thing remained is to fly to the sky as a successful entrepreneur. One fine day when Ashok loses Pinky and very much involved in corrupting the ministers to escape his family from the tax and illegal license to run the coal mines against his conscience, on the way he transforming the money in the car late evening, he makes a plan to finish him and runs away from Delhi. But he has a conscience which often forbids him to kill Mr. Ashok, because Mr. Ashok is a gentleman, good, has a concern for the poor and neglected class, moreover, he enhances the salary of Balram voluntarily when begins to stay in Delhi. He does not yield to the words of Uma his ex-girlfriend about the reality of Delhi drivers. Finally when it is dark and heavy raining he stops the car on the road side at the isolated place and pretends to take the help of Ashok in removing the wheel of the car to take the puncture, looking at the opportunity, Balram like white tiger attacks on him with a whisky bottle and murders him and then leaving the dead body there in the ocean of blood, escapes with Red Cash bag and come to live in the silicon valley as a great entrepreneur.

The social segregation on ethnicity is also find in the life of driving community in great cities like Delhi and Bangalore, they have to do all impossible task to save the crime of their masters, they have to wait during the late night in the cold outside when their masters are enjoying in the club or shopping malls. They all together sit and chat in their own world and talk everything about the God of small things and their humiliations, they wait near the parking lot of the hotel, in their usual key-swirling, paan-chewing, gossip mongering, ammonia-releasing circle. Crouching and jabbering like monkeys. They used to read "Murder Weekly" and involve in all kinds of other worldly activities in the absence of their masters. As Uma the ex-girlfriend of Ashok comments, "You should not be so trusting, Ashok. Delhi drivers are all rotten. They sell drugs, and prostitutes, and God know what else" (Adiga-210)

They also prove clever enough to blackmail their masters

in the case of supplying petrol and wine and women. They play all impossible roles in order to earn money. Even they are ready to go to jail in favour of their masters for the sake of money. But it is the different story with Balram when Pinkey madam drives his car and killed a little baby nearby flyover in her drunken state, Mangoose tries to put the crime nicely on Balram and makes a plan to send him jail and promises to take care of his family and release him from the authority on bail. And put the blame one him and nicely make to confession for the crime he has not committed saying he is part the family and a good boy! And takes a signature to the forced confession.

This is how every day wild extravagant, impossible story from some driver about being framed for a murder his master committed on the road. The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle class masters. This is how the country of greatest democracy everything works out with money and power politics. But fortunately the complaint was not lodged on any one so he was able to escape, otherwise he has to go behind the bar forever. In the same way when Balram became a white tiger and established a great driving agency in Bangalore with URL address www.whitetiger.technologydrivers.com and did the same thing when his driver hit the man and killed him, with the help of local police he bribes him and solves the case by giving money to the relatives of the victim and solves the case on the spot. Thus money and power rule the nation and all other things are immaterial. Aravind Adiga spreads light on these minor ethnical groups and their unfulfilled dreams in the fiction and their sudden revolt against the dominant class in the Indian society.

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