

The portrayal of India: An Exploration of Arvind Adiga's selected Novels

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Abstract

Arvind Adiga describes the reality of modern India and exposes the defining exploitative hierarchy of Indian society. The paper is an attempt to understand the stark and contrasting truths of India in Arvind Adiga's novels 'The White Tiger' and 'Last Man in Town'. Several Indian English writers have explained explicitly the prevalent grim situated found in India in their novels. Like, Vikas Swarup's Novel, 'Slum Dog Millionaire', Adiga's novels have portrayed the realistic flaws in Indian societal structures. 'The White Tiger' was bestowed Man Booker Prize in 2008 is a perfect novel that raises the issue of poverty and discrimination without any prejudices. Through his characters, anecdotes and dialogues, the reader is elevated to a vantage point to empathize with both sides of India. The White Tiger and Last Man in Town focused on the opposed grim pictures of the Indian social order, and pursuit of a man for freedom from wrapped slavery of every kind. Adiga's novels triggered the perception and realistic portrayal of only incredible India but also explain the globalization has affected the lives of the poor class. The author has realistically depicted the role of the poverty and social injustices meted out by the dominant class in his novels.

Keywords: The White Tiger, Last Man in Town, India, globalization, Social Injustice, Neocolonialism

Indian English writings can be divided into two parts. During the pre-independence, Raja Rao, R K Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Rabindranath Tagore and other novelist have mainly emphasized the subjects of Indian traditions, Gandhian Movements, and freedom struggle. When we peep into the details of writing during British rule, we come to know that Indian English novels were written to promote the idea of the freedom struggle. The novelist had cast light on the socio-political agitation that emerged before 1947. But the readers witness a paradigm shift after independence, especially during the 1950s to 1990s. The novels written after independence have highlighted a realistic picture of the socio-political issues, customs, illiteracy, and patriotic uprising. The portrayal of social disorder and injustices based on religions, ethnicity and urban-rural life was the demanding subjects for the writers of Marxist centric affiliation.

In recent times, Arvind Adiga, a writer of The White Tiger and Last Man in Town, emerged as a new voice in the galaxy of Indian English Writing. Adiga, an ex-employee of Time Magazine, began his professional career as a financial journalist and authored five novels. His contribution was recognized with the publication of his debut novel, The White Tiger (2008) and awarded the Man Booker Prize in the same year. He has depicted the ambivalence scenario of modern and global India. His novels examine the debilitating effect of globalization on the Indian socio-cultural milieu. Born in Madras, Adiga introduces how modernization has brought about a sea change in the thinking of Indian people. The researchers have selected Adiga's The White Tiger (2008) and Last Man in Town (2011) to explore the representation of India. Adiga's The White Tiger is a bildungsroman novel that deals with the psychological and moral growth of Balram Halwai's complexity as an Indian people. On the other hand, Last Man in Town is a crystal clear picture of the post-independence scenario of the slum and its condition, problem of corruption, inactive leaderships, and loss of standard values of life. Famous historian, Benedict Anderson's significant work Imagined Communities explains the importance of nationalism. Likewise, in his third novel, Adiga portrays social evils and the shifting political and national boundaries.

The White Tiger throws light on the different aspect of India. The novel is written in the form of letters to Wen Jiabao, the Premier of China. It takes the reader to different parts of India and shows that dark India and so-called shiny India. It is a story about Balram's journey for freedom who suffers from social inequality, discrimination and poverty. Balram, who lives the life of poverty in a nameless rural community near Dhanbad in Bihar, worked very hard to overcome the social disruption and become a successful entrepreneur. Through this novel, Adiga exhibits the sensible and agonizing picture of contemporary India. The White Tiger, a novel that not only explores the inequalities between India's uncompromising commercial urban elite class and the persecuted rural poor but also exposes the excruciating world of the subjugated. After winning Man Booker Prize, Adiga, in an interview with Arthur J. Pais, stated that,

"It came out of my experience of coming back to India. Then I came back and worked for time magazine in 2003. As a correspondent for time, I traveled a lot in places I hadn't seen before, like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar. The book is a record of a discovery of a new side of India. These were an entirely new experience of India to me."

The story is divided into seven letters. In his confession letter to Jiabao who is interested to visit India, Balram presents ironic picture Indian villages beset with abject poverty. Balram says,

"Your Excellency, I am proud to inform you that Laxmangarh is your typical Indian Village paradise, adequately supplied with electricity, running water, and working telephones; and that the children of my village, raised on a nutritious diet of meat, eggs, vegetables and lentils, will be found, when examined with tape measure and scales, to match up to the minimum height and weight standards set by the United Nations and other organizations whose treaties our Prime minister has signed and whose forums he so regularly and pompously attends. HA!

Electricity Poles - defunct.

Water tap - broken.

Children - too lean and short for their age, and with oversized heads from which vivid eyes shine, like the guilty conscience of the Government of India." (WT 19)

The things in the novel show us the callous picture of day to day modern India. The story examines the darkest side of a growing superpower India. In the era of globalization and modernization, developing India has been classified into two parts. Through the story of Balram Halwai, the conflict between the superior and the working class, the issues of backward classes who survive in unhygienic shanties, the corrupted faces of politicians who sucked the blood and paralyzed the Indian economy have skillfully explained in the guise of hypocritical socialism. Halwai, a sweet maker was born and brought up in devastating poverty. He represents himself as one of the darkest lives in global India and far away from the mainstream social benefits. Balram, in his letter to Jiabao, narrates that, "Please understand, Your Excellency, that India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness" (WT 14).

The story presents India that is divided into castes- 'men with small bellies and men with big bellies.' Man Booker Prize-winning novels were written by Indian English writers like Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things*, Kiran Desai in *The Inheritance of Loss*, Jeet Thayil in

Narcopolis, Adiga also explores the sarcastic perception of India's class struggle in a mordant tone. The people who lived in crushing poverty symbolize the dark side of uncivilized and brute India. And the shining malls are referred to the rich lifestyle and prosperous India. Balram, a driver of Ashok and his wife Pinky, is always curious to know and experience the luxurious life, and sometimes he feels as underprivileged that he could not enter the shopping malls. The novel presents a realistic yet contrasting picture of India with Halwai juxtaposing the rustic, subjugated groups of the Indian civilization as against the privileged class. It also narrates the conflict, disagreement and battle between marginalized and civilized class of India. Balram provides the class struggle and social inequality with the help of a variety of metaphors in his letter. He stated that,

"To explain this division he uses the metaphor of the Coop: "Go to Old Delhi... Hundreds of pale hens and brightly colored roosters, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages... They know they are next, yet they cannot rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with humans in this country." (WT 147)

Balram truthfully renders the details about 'this India and 'that India' in his monologue. The metaphor of rooster-coop keeps societal unfairness breathing. Even after the independence, the exploitation of the downtrodden or underprivileged class has come to an end. Balram believes that if you don't follow the rooster coop, you are considered to be a foolish individual. But one has to come out of the rooster coop to enjoy a healthier and happy life.

The story of Arvind Adiga's *Last Man in Town* happens to be in Mumbai, capital of Maharashtra state and deals with the struggle of Yogesh A. Murthy, a retired schoolmaster against his times. The detailed interpretation of the *Last Man in Town* brings out alarming pictures about the current scenario ideas of nationwide growth in the construction of buildings and recognizes the strategies accepted by the people in India. As the novel begins, Adiga records the historical consequence of Vishram Society, situated in Vakola slums. With the arrival of globalization, many perplexing situations have been generated and that lead to an era of chaotic psyche in the marginalized. In middle-class families, the Vishram society preserved their status and identity. In an essay, "Arvind Adiga's *Last Man in Town*: Survival Strategies in a Morally Ambivalent India" by Rositta Joseph Valiyamattam has mentioned some facts regarding the context of publication. She writes,

"It was published soon after the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, which resulted in the displacement of nearly 1.8

million people, according to Reuters. Similar incidents of displacement of the less privileged were reported from London and other cities that had hosted such major events. By the time the Last Man in Town was published, work was almost completed on Antilia, the world's first billion-dollar skyscraper home belonging to Mukesh Ambani of Reliance group."

The novel confronts the life of a melancholic protagonist known as Masterji, the 61-year-old retired physics teacher whose main concern is to protect his memories of the bygone past, specifically what he recalls of his defunct partner and daughter. In the novel, as the title states, Masterji is the Last Man in Town, an individual keeping his viewpoint and privileges while facing conflict and dispute in society. It is a powerful and darkly comic story of greed that lays bare the teeming metropolis of Mumbai. Adiga narrates an emotional story of power and supremacy, dispossession, dislocation, and neocolonialism. Last Man in Town reveals the outlooks and suffering of ordinary individuals in the name of globalization. The novel rotates around the subject of greediness and an appetite for a new identity in the capitalistic world. Dharmen Shah, a pig-headed businessman represents an imperialistic personality who resolute to do anything to attain his intentions. Adiga exposes the burning issues of capitalism in India.

Thus, after closely going through between the lines of the two respective novels by Arvind Adiga, they hammer the point where the hegemonic power of the dominant class is normalized with the justification that your lowest rung is your lot. Apart from oppressed practices for ages, globalization hands in glove with capitalism make the situation worst for already crushed subjugated people. The rupture between rich and poor is shown exponentially increased as the monopoly on technological centers of power is found established by the dominant class. A flawed Dimension of this tech-savvy era looks down upon the common man as a product instead of a constitutionally dignified man on the humanitarian ground. The reflection of this bitter reality is vividly found in the characters of Balram, Halwai, who does his best to ape the high standard of living of his owner. On the other hand, Masterji has shown his emotional attachment to Vikram society and his scramble to shun displacement. It shows a tragic flaw in the societal system of so-called modernistic India that promises on the ground of

democratic ethos to render equal access in every sphere of human life to lead dignified life on equal terms. With the increasing power of knowledge in the technology, the new dominant hegemony has emerged, the same dominant class possessing indiscriminately material-based assets previously, that ruthlessly trample down the conscience of itself and others, especially rural and ghettoized deprived of 21st century's demanding knowledge. Thus, in such chaotic and volatile scenarios, the slightest resistance and glaring overture from marginalized does not seem plausible, consequentially Balram like people would run from pillar to post to discard penurious stigma.

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