

Social Evils in Aravind Adiga's the White Tiger

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Abstract - This paper attempts to show the social evils like corruption, poverty in India. This thesis deals with the ugly side of social problems to show how such problems have created incorrigible circumstances to the under privileged Indians. Aravind Adiga tries to show the true face of India through his novel "The White Tiger". His writings are dealt with the welfare of the humanity. Adiga evinces the painful social evils of India in the twenty-first century. This obviously shows that India conditions and sorrows extend in every century without much changes and that nothing is uprooted. The present thesis entitled "Social Evils in Aravind Adiga's novel, The White Tiger" is a close study of the novel ad its role in creating the social awareness in India.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is the mirror image of our life. It is depending upon the writer who places the mirror in its perfect place. Many writers have been writing in all dimensions of the connections between human and society. Every period has shown its preoccupation and logic which portrayed the works of that time.

Aravind Adiga was born in Chennai in 1974. He is highly disturbed by the unresolved problems of India and tries to explore the cruel and dim sight of the nation through his writings. He moved with his family to Australia after the death of his mother. After fifteen years of exotic life at Australia, he returned to India as a journalist. When he returns, he could see numerous differences had taken place in the development of the cities but not in the lives of the poor Indians. He feels very sad on seeing the bad transformation in India which lost its human values.

Aravind Adiga is one of the great writers of intelligence. He has written three novels till now. The White Tiger, Between the Assassinations, Last Man in Tower. In all is novels, he pursuits to provide his views of humanism as a remedy against social evils like corruptions, starvation etc. his novels are known as narrative point of view on social life of modern India.

They reflect his sophisticated attitude towards Indian life and preference for unpalatable characters and situations. His characters in novels are real human beings who stand at the lowest step of social and political ranks. He has written four short stories and they are The Sultan's Battery, Smack and Last Christmas in 2008 and The Elephant in 2009. As a Journalist Cum Writer, he has recognized for his works and he has received many awards. He has received Man Booker Prize in 2008, for Fiction. He has received four envious prizes for his writings such as British Book Awards Author of the Year, Commonwealth Writer's Prize and John Llewellyn-Rhys Memorial Prize.

Adiga is an enlightening star of Indian English novel writing. His literary voice portrays the miseries of the impoverished ones. The social and political turmoil that are taking place in India make the main theme for his novel. His works show hidden moral purpose and positive commitment as well as present India stalking confidently towards the better future.

This novel The White Tiger is presented in epistolary form, a series of letters written over a period of seven nights, in which the protagonist, Balram, narrates his rags to riches story, to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, who plans to visit Bangalore on a fact-finding operation about the entrepreneur starting his journey from a small village, Laxmangarh to the city, Bangalore. The White Tiger is a sharp, mind-boggling, groundbreaking Indian novel. Adiga speaks of suppression and exploitation of various fields of Indian Society. It shows focus on themes like crime, corruption, and injustice in India.

Social Evils in "The White Tiger"

The White Tiger is a smart narration of contemporary scenario of Indian society. Adiga shows the needs for social reform towards the formation of unequivocal and strong moral values. The White Tiger is the story of Munna, alias Balram, White Tiger whose digressive life story narrates his role as a teashop helper, a car

driver, personal servant, mindful critic, a pseudo philosopher, a thief and a murderer and finally scales the high pedestal of an entrepreneur, enjoying all the pleasures and luxuries of this materialistic world. He moves from the village Laxmangarh and settles down in Bangalore.

In his interview Adiga expresses his experience while creating the character of Balram. He states that:

Balramhalwai is a composite of various men I have met when traveling through India. I spend a lot of time loitering about train stations or bus stands, or kind of continuous murmur or growl beneath middle-class life in India. And this noise never gets recorded. Balram is what you would hear if one day the drain and faucets on your house started talking. (BookBrowse.com)

The title *The White Tiger* is also very symbolic as extraordinary. Here, Adiga has applied the epistolary form to narrate Balaram's sail from virtual zero to a modern hero. While in Bangalore, Jiabao, the visiting Prime Minister of China should not be misled by a bootlegged copy of an American business book, entitled, "Become an Entrepreneur in Seven Easy Days!". (The White Tiger6)

To give more push to his argument, Balram states that he is a self-made entrepreneur, and When you have heard the story of how I got to Bangalore and became one of its most successful (though probably least known) businessmen, you will know everything there is to know about how entrepreneurship is born, nurtured, and developed in this, the glorious twenty-first century of man. (The White Tiger7)

He explains to Mr. Jiabao that he knows better about entrepreneurship than anyone else. His varied experiences as a shop servant, a servant driver, a murderer, and a successful entrepreneur can guide him best about India. To further convince Mr. Jiabao, Balram narrates his life story that unravels his ascent from a slum dog to a millionaire.

Balram is born in the family of Halwai at a small village of Laxmangarh, a dark and backward place where cruel landlords have the sway, grabbing all the good lands and losing a reign of terror and nasty exploitation of the poor, downtrodden and innocent villagers where 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.

The family calls him Munna. His father is Vikram Halwai who is a rickshaw puller. He would not cringe

or beg before the landlord for help. He is rather a man of honor and courage. Balram has always seen him shirtless standing behind the teashop, drinking tea. His father has always desired that at least one of his sons should break loose of the ever-tightening chains of poverty and servitude and lead a different type of life. As he says, "How many times have I told you: Munna must read and write!"

He further adds, "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." (The White Tiger30)

At school, Balram proves to be sharp and intelligent. The school inspector is impressed by his qualities of quick learning and general awareness. He gives the name of White Tiger. The whole exercise of his earning this new name is quite funny.

Though he is employed as a driver, he yet has as well to work as a docile domestic servant. He has to wash and massage the feet of Ashok's father (Stork) or play cricket with any brat in the household at their whim. It is also a part of his duty to wash the two dogs and dry their skin. He has also his duties as a cook. Balram is, however, pleased with his lot. He saves money and helps his family with it every month. But there is something that disturbs his mind. He thinks that hundreds and thousands of castes of the past have been reduced to just two divisions in modern India - Men with big bellies and men with thin bellies. He has disturbing thoughts about the suffering of the poor men like him, "Why does the Rooster Coop work? How does it trap so many millions of men and women so effectively?" (The White Tiger176)

However, things begin to change fast in Balram's life. His stay in Delhi corrupts his mind. He starts growing selfish and Francis Bacon like worldly-wise. This is noted in his indifference for his family members. He has no regard or concern for them as he stops sending them any money. Now he has nothing to do with them. His behavior with his kith and kin during his first visit to the village is rather callous. He does not listen to his granny's pleadings to him. He pushes Kishan hard and treats the children as if they were untouchables.

The White Tiger is now on the prowl. He understands that the values of honesty, sincerity, and goodness are not always a passport of success in life. Fair or foul, it is money that makes the mare go in this modern materialistic world.

Thus, as the first step in his survival of the fittest, he pushes Ram Prasad out and becomes the master-servant himself. Next, he acquaints himself with other drivers who lure him to read "Murder Weekly magazine", taste the foreign wine, and do sex with the city prostitutes. He even stealthily enters the big shopping malls, dressed in a T-shirt and black leather shoes. This is a privilege that only A White Tiger can manage; for other drivers, such malls are simply out of bounds. The pain, anxiety, and anguish of his granny at his selfishness is well reflected in her letter to him- It has been a long time since you came to visit us- and an even longer time, a total of eleven months and two days, since you last sent us any money...I knew from the start that this would happen because you were a spiteful, insolent boy. (The White Tiger262)

He justifies his act of murder with the argument that only a violent thing that he did, can alone change a poor man's destiny in this changing world. Violence is the poor man's answer to move from the world of Darkness to the World of Light:

Why not? Am I not a part of all that is changing this country? Haven't I succeeded in the struggle that every poor man here should be making- the struggle not to take the lashes your father took, not to end up in a mound of indistinguishable bodies that will rot in the black mud of Mother Ganga? (The White Tiger318) Soon his 'start-up' grows into big business. He has now sixteen drivers on a roll with twenty-six vehicles. His success mantra to Premier Jiabao and the millions, billions of the youth of the world of Darkness is, "A few hundred thousand rupees of someone else's money, and a lot of hard work can make magic happen in this country" (The White Tiger301). He is now a big boss, having garages, machines, paid off policemen, and a spacious house to live in.

However, Balram has a unique identity and individuality. He has come out of the world of darkness, the world of poverty, servitude, and deprivation. He has himself seen and suffered the shameful destiny of a servant-driver. Therefore, he feels sympathy for all his subordinates.

Thus, he confesses-

Once I was a driver to a master, but now I am a master of drivers, I do not treat them like servants- I don't slap, or bully, or mock anyone... if they don't, they'll be drivers all their lives. I leave the choice up to them. (The White Tiger302)

But he has no sentimental attachment with any of them. The taxi drivers of his company are just his employees- not friends or family members, "When the work is done, I kick them out of the office: no chitchat, no cups of coffee. A White Tiger keeps no friends. It's too dangerous." (The White Tiger)

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He tells Asif:

"I can't live the way the Wild Boar and the Buffalo and the Raven lived, and probably still live, back in Laxmangarh. I am in the Light now". (The White Tiger313)

He goes to the accident victim's house and offers his father a sum of 25000/- rupees, expressing his grief to him, "Having lost relatives myself- so many of them- I know the pain that you have suffered. He should not have died. (The White Tiger312).

"He owns the fault of his driver on his head. The fault is mine. Not the drivers. The police have let me off. That is the way of this jungle we live in. But I accept my responsibility. I ask for your forgiveness". (The White Tiger312)

He also offers a driver's job to the victim's brother. This, however, should not be taken as the humanitarian side of his character. He is cold to all such feelings. He has already performed the last rites of all his aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces, and even for the water buffalo.

He is now a self-absorbed person. Whatever right or wrong he has done or is doing now, his every action is directed for self-betterment- the success story of a downtrodden, a slum dog which could not be possible without taking the evil path. He is now an 'achiever', in the American terminology- a world-wise- is-worldly successful man.

He boastfully tells Mr. Jiabao, "Put together my real estate and my bank holdings, and I am worth fifteen times the sum I borrowed from Mr. Ashok. See for yourself at my website. See my motto: 'We Drive Technology Forward.'" (The White Tiger301)

After all, the Stork, the Mongoose, and even his master, Mr. Ashok, and all those men of the Big Bellies have achieved success and prosperity that way. In the jungle of this materialistic world, only the White Tiger can survive and win. Thus, at the end of the

novel, he tells Mr. Jiabao- I think the Rooster Coop needs people like me to break out of it. It needs masters like Mr. Ashok- who, for all his numerous virtues, was not much of a master- to be weeded out, and exceptional servants like me to replace them. “I’ve made it! I’ve broken out of the coop!” (The White Tiger320)

CONCLUSION

Thus, The White Tiger is such an observable novel, a mixture of possibilities, and impossibilities. It creates negativity towards the Indian society which is suffering from many evils. But the main purpose of the novelist is to draw attention towards all the evils which are harmful to society and create obstacles in the path of the country’s progress and prosperity. Adiga seems to be worried about the present scenario of the Indian body- politics. He wants to strike a warning note to India’s rulers that conditions are getting worse.

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