

CASTEISM IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S THE WHITE TIGER

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga's debut novel, *The White Tiger* won the 2008 Booker Prize. He is the fourth Indian born author to win the prize, after Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai. The novel studies the contrast between India's rise as a contemporary global economy and therefore the lead character Balram, who comes from crushing rural poverty. Adiga's style is essentially satirical. Within *The White Tiger*, he explores the unhappy social realities, like poverty and hypocrisy in India, largely through dark humour. Success in Adiga's novel does not necessarily equate with honest work or moral righteousness and this is often reflected within the style. This satirical attention is additionally reflected in Adiga's choice of narrator, Balram, an unrepentant killer and thief who nevertheless seems more honest than the people around him. By choosing such a narrator, Adiga gives the reader a unique view of Indian society from less privileged position.

Keywords: Casteism, Subaltern, Individualism and Globalization.

The caste system in India still prevails. India is a country which is known to be very cultural throughout the world. The culture is rooted deep in the country also and it has various problems of Casteism. Casteism refers to discrimination based on the caste of a person. It is a great social evil. It is responsible for stopping a country's

development. And it also causes oppression which is very bad. Basically, the religious

and social circles dictate Casteism in India. Mostly, people live in rural areas are facing this problem. This practice was strictly followed in old days but it is time to be abolished completely. During the early periods, the villagers were separated on the basis of the caste. They were made to live in separated colonies. Even the place for buying food or getting water was separated from those of the upper caste.

The novel *The white Tiger* mainly focuses on the theme of Casteism. Aravind Adiga has portrayed the Indian caste system and about the two classes in the society, the upper and lower classes. The protagonist of Adiga's novel is Balram, who belongs to the lower class family. In this novel, Adiga deals not only with the Casteism but also shows how the lower caste people undergo acute sufferings by the domination of the upper class people.

The White Tiger examines the typical Indian caste system and their life style.

For centuries, caste has almost every aspect of Hindu religious and social life in which each group occupies a specific place in this complex society. Rural communities have been arranged on the basis of castes. The upper and lower classes, they almost lived in separated colonies. The water wells were not shared. Brahmins would not accept food or drink from the Shudras. In this novel, *The White Tiger*, Adiga also highlights this point. Balram being born in a lower caste was tortured by the upper caste people and landlords. Adiga portrays the four landlords. They belonged to the upper caste. They behaved like animals, so Adiga had given the animals' name to the four landlords. The four landlords are Stork, Wild Boar, Raven and Buffalo. The narrator had explained about these four landlords and their qualities:

All four of the animals live in high-walled mansions just outside laxmangarh, the landlords' quarters. They had their own temples inside the mansions, and their own wells and ponds and did not need to come

out into the village except to feed. Once upon a time, the children of the four animals went around town in their own cars; Kusum remembered those days. (TWT 25)

Through these lines, Adiga clearly shows the theme of Casteism. The Four landlords belong to the upper caste. So, they made to live in the separated quarters. They never came out into the village except to feed. Because they had all the facilities in the quarters. They never mingled with the lower caste people in the village. Ankhi Mukherjee opines:

That caste comes to dominate over religion and sex in this novel is important too, as the debates around caste have become central to debates about corruption India. Crucially Adiga's novel may be complicit in reformulating the terms of class and caste to be interchangeable he succeeds in making the upper-caste criticism of caste based reservations the lower caste's critique of class inequality.

In this novel, Adiga portrays how the lower caste people suffered and were oppressed by the landlords and upper caste people. The lower caste people had struggled for their day today life. They were highly exploited by the landlords. Balram also suffered under the landlords. Through the character of the landlords, Adiga deals with the theme of "Casteism". Being born in an upper caste family, they would treat the lower caste people as servants; not like a human being. The poor and the lower caste people were highly exploited by the landlords. Though they belonged to the high caste, they suppressed the lower caste people.

After the narrator's father's death, his brother Kishan only took care of his family, but Balram, did not have any identity on his own. At this time he had no idea about Entrepreneurial thought. After that he went to the tea shop with his brother

Kishan for working. In the tea shop Balram learnt many things from the landlords and politicians. So, he decided to learn driving. But his Granny has refused at first and finally she accepted his opinion. So “Balram went to all the taxi stands; down on my knees I begged random strangers; but no one would agree to teach me car-driving for free”. (TWT 54) Being a lower caste man the recruited people never recruited him. Balram also faced the same situation.

When the narrator went to learn driving, there was an old driver. At first he asked the narrator, “What caste are you?” Balram answered him. He belonged to the Halwai community. Halwai means sweet-makers, the old driver asked Balram, that how the sweet makers would drive the car. The sweet makers would make only sweet; but Balram said that, his father also belonged to the Halwai family. But his father was a rickshaw puller. So he confidently said that he would learn driving. Adiga unveils here, the upper caste people’s mindset, they thought that, the upper caste people only would drive the car. The lower caste people could not drive the car. They did not accept the lower cast people, equal to them. They always suppressed those people. So the narrator wanted to become a successful Entrepreneur. So, Adiga explains how the lower caste man Balram was insulted by the upper caste driver.

The novel shows the real face of Indian society. Balram’s journey from Laxmangarh to Dhanbad, Dhanbad to Delhi, Delhi to Bangalore, tells us the difference between the life of rural and urban, rich and poor society. In the beginning of the novel, the novelists present the rural poverty and the deplorable condition of health and education system of India. It is extreme poverty which creates darkness in the life of the rural as well as urban society and it perpetuates the suffering of the lower class and Subaltern. Lower class and subaltern have no place in society, they are always deprived from their rights and they have to suffer and remain silent

When Balram went to Stork's home at first Stork asked him, "Are you from a top caste or bottom caste, boy?" (TWT 64) So, Balram replied him, Bottom. Then Stork's son Mukesh and Stork started talking about their servant's caste. "All our employees are top caste. It won't hurt to have one or two bottom castes working for us" (TWT 65) Balram belonged to the lower class and whenever and wherever he wanted to go for a job, he suffered a lot. Stork's employees mostly belonged to the upper caste; one or two only belonged to the lower caste.

Adiga shows the life of poor people in Delhi and how they are suffered and what were the problems they faced. Adiga portrays that the rich are very rich in Delhi; they were leading a luxury life. On the other hand, the poor are very poor; they were below the poverty line. Balram also suffered a lot in Delhi. At first it was totally different for him and then he adapted himself there. Balram lived in a drivers quarters in Delhi. There were many drivers living there; but Balram never mingled with the other drivers. In big cities, there are such poor classes who come from the rural India to cities for employment but they couldn't get. They have to sleep on the roads and footpath. They poor people live like animals and look like also animals. Their filthy appearance and dirty clothes shows their poverty. They pick the food from garbage. They come to cities to search for the light but they remain always in darkness

In the election time, The Socialist did not care about the poor. The Socialist would fulfill the needs of the rich people. There was no water in the taps so The Socialist had promised to do everything for the welfare of the people. But after the election, they never fulfilled their promise. So, the people asked the Government, "What do you do for the people?." The Socialist gave them mobile phone only. So, the people asked him, if a man was thirsty could he drink the mobile phone. Every day the women were carrying water from the long distance. So the people suffered a

lot. No one could take any action for that. "The election shows that the poor will not be ignored. The Darkness will not be silent. There is no water in our taps and what do you people in Delhi give us? You give us mobile phones can a man drink a phone, when he is thirsty?" (TWT 269) The Social discrimination was highly portrayed by Adiga.

Adiga depicts the relationship between the masters and servants. The masters never thought about their servants and their family. They were always money-minded and selfish. They did not have a humanitarian attitude. Throughout the story the narrator Balram suffered a lot, being born in a lower caste family. Because of his family situation he discontinued his education and went to the job. Balram wanted to become a successful Entrepreneur. At the end of the story Balram become a successful Entrepreneur. He was loyal to his master in the beginning. As Balram belonged to a lower caste and since he was poverty stricken, so the master treated him cruelly. This brought a change in the mind of Balram to go to level murdering his master and become an Entrepreneur.

Balram also throws light on the life of drivers. He expresses how the life of driver is miserable. He is treated as a servant. And many drivers are going to prison to save their master and conceal their wrong deeds. He mentions that the drivers are fond of the magazine called Murder Weekly, whom they read together and that inspires them to kill their master. Balram said that his master-servant relationship, he takes care of his master Mr. Ashok when Pinky madam left him. He tries to console his master. But his urge to become a rich and powerful was so high that he decides to kill master and steal his money. He thinks he can begin a new life with the stolen money. Once, finding the right opportunity, he kills his master on the barren road with a bottle of glass and there's no one to notice. He collects money and escapes from the place

successfully. Then he returned to Bangalore and he started his own taxi Service and become a successful entrepreneur. But he felt guilty. Because of his crime Balram's whole family suffered. He had a fear that anytime the police would catch him and he worried about it. And he always justified his murder. He never accepted it as a crime, because his master behaved in a heartless manner, he also reciprocated.

Balram is a loyal servant. Once Pinky Madam made an accident while driving with heavy drink but Balram is compelled and convinced to take the charge of this accident on himself. The innocent servant follows the words of his owner gladly. It is pity and ironies that we are living in such a devil society where the lives of the poor people are take to be the means of entertainment by the rich. Balram is asked to receive the punishment in a hit-and-run road accident in order to save Pinky Madam. They shall be ready to sacrifice everything for the prospects of the rich. They do not raise their voice to be a loyal servant and to get their daily bread.

The protagonist, Balram, was leading a life in darkness in village when he came to Delhi with his master; he feels that he is in light now. He was very innocent and obedient servant in the beginning as his master Mr. Ashok was, when he came to America. Mr. Ashok was also an honest person but he became corrupt when he came to India. The same thing happened to Balram, he was innocent when he came to village but the city's atmosphere changed him. As Savitri Tripathi says, "Delhi corrupted Ashok because he learnt the trick how to take work from politicians, leaders, ministers, brokers, police and judge" (20). Balram's master had become corrupt man, so how could a servant remain honest for a long time. Balram learns all the tricks to his master. By the arrogant behaviour of his master, he changed himself as a villain. At the end of novel Balram explains his life-story to Mr. Jiabao that how he became a corrupt man from an innocent person.

In this novel, Adiga's focus is on the dark aspects of Indian society. It had many interesting themes but the theme of Casteism and Social inequality placed a vital role in this novel. Adiga gave more importance to these two themes. He highlighted the theme of Casteism in many places. Because of caste system, the narrator explained how he struggled to overcome the hurdles and become a successful Entrepreneur.

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