

Socio-Economic Inequality in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger***Sangeetha M**

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* examines the real nature of the rich and he portrays the struggle of the deprived people in the society. The novel is set in the backdrop of economic boom in India that has ushered in a great chasm between the haves and have nots. It offers a window into the rapidly changing economic situation. He portrayed how the poor are suffering under the clutches of the rich and the unpleasant condition of the unprivileged in metropolitan cities and rural areas of India. Balram commented that the rich men show their humanity, love and affection only towards their pets. The people are the victims of economical discrimination were they are working as servants to cope up with the present globalised society. The masters never understand the situations of the servant. He grabs the attention of the readers and shows that India which is like a moon shines brightly on one face and is utterly dark on the other side. Adiga has awakened the mind of the reader by pointing out the socio economic inequality in the society.

Keywords: class division, poverty, bribe, and discrimination

The history of Dalit literature can be traced back to centuries. But Dalit literary/cultural expressions were never taken into consideration due to the hegemonic nature of the field of literary production. The emergence of Dalit as a political category and identity coincide with the emergence of Dalit literature. Current researches by scholars reveal the widespread character of

Dalit writings in various parts of India. Research also shows that Dalit literature had long before acquired a distinct language through its heterogeneous and plurivocal character which challenged dominant literary canons. Dalit literature acquired a recognizable identity towards the middle of the twentieth century.

The term 'Dalit literature' – 'Dalit' meaning oppressed, broken and downtrodden — came into use officially in 1958 at the first conference on Dalit literature in Mumbai. The emergence of the Dalit Panthers (a political organisation formed in 1972 in Maharashtra) is a significant moment in the history of Dalit literature which was furthered by various political/literary movements across India. Dalit literature for a long time was disregarded and not taken seriously in the literary circles. Dalit literature cannot be reduced to an engagement with victimhood. Dalit Literature today has established itself as a new mode of literary/aesthetic imagination and writing.

Arvind Adiga shot into international limelight by winning the coveted Man Booker prize for his debut novel *The White Tiger* in 2008. The novel, highlighting the age-old worries, anxieties of the downtrodden, is a pulsating critique of the deep-rooted socio-economic inequality rampant in India.

The novel presents a startling contrast between India's rise as a global economy and the plight of the marginalized class of society living in devastating rural and urban poverty through, Balram Halwai, the narrator and the protagonist. Balram belongs to Laxmangarh, in Bihar, is a son of a rickshaw puller. In spite of being an intelligent and a promised child he is forced to leave the school at an early age, works on a small tea-shop and has to break coal in order to support his family. He learns driving in order to earn more money. He gets a chance to meet the rich landlord and powerbroker, named _The Stork due to his long nose, of the village and is appointed as a driver. He is the chauffeur to drive a luxury car of his U.S.A. returned son, Ashok, settled in Gurgaon, near New Delhi.

At Gurgaon and New Delhi he often drives his master and his wife to various shopping malls and marts and is exposed to the glitterati of the _shining? _ and 'rising?' India. He

becomes aware of the immense wealth, corruption and opportunity all around him realizing at the same time that he would never be able to reach there.

He contemplates over his situation and realizes that there is only one way in which he can achieve his target/aim, join the bandwagon of the affluent class/ society and be a part of this glamorized world – to murder his employer, Ashok and get away with this penurious life. Balram takes advantage of Ashok's faith and trust in him and kills him with an empty whisky bottle and along with his cousin ,Dharam and escapes to Bangalore.

He changes his name to Ashok Sharma, owns a Taxi company and becomes a wealthy entrepreneur in India's most technologically advanced metropolitan city. Negating Gayati Chakravorty Spivak's concept that subaltern cannot speak, Adiga made Balram speak of course through crime in a manner of a typical psychopath. Jennifer Copley has rightly stated, —While most people's actions are guided by a number of factors, such as the desire to avoid hurting other people, the psychopath selects a course of action based on only one factor—what can he get out of it. This cold-blooded mode of reasoning enables the psychopath to commit acts that most people's consciences would not allow. Silence, pain, oppression and exploitation constitute the raison of these marginalized classes who are now globally struggling for their survival , their voicelessness, and right to self representation:

Since the marginalized have known only the language which has been handed down to them by their exploiters, they should if need be, as Fanon would have probably suggested, use the language of violence at their disposal to give at back and at the same time continue to deconstruct it from within.(Randhawa 33).

Marginalised class is entwined in sub-human social subsistence, utter deficiency, economic exploitation, representing a subculture of compliance and political subjection.

Balram, is able to achieve that he craved. He is now an entrepreneur but with a cost, he at the same time is also a criminal, a murderer. He achieved success by leaving behind the traditional virtue. His success reveals that through underhand means a subaltern too can become an entrepreneur overnight. Balram's breaking the system is a clarion call for the Indian society that the traditional social structure in India is losing its ground.

Balram is Adiga's 'Gatsby' realizing fully that his penurious condition made him both a misfit and unfit in the society. He was well aware of the consequences of his crime and realized that if caught it would be an end for him but taking no risk meant a confirmed and guaranteed end. He believed that in order to succeed he has to be a thick-skinned guy, in fact, truly pachydermatous. He is symbolic of those 'new' Indian young men, who are ready to commit even more heinous crimes to achieve their target.

Balram's act empowers the marginalized by retrieving their voices, spaces and identities suppressed by colonial surrogates in the postcolonial environment. His act is a rebellion against prevalent dominant ideology, cultural supremacy and investigates the petrified condition simultaneously issuing a warning for struggle of the marginalized because humiliation, resentment and grief are the fundamental components of the process of their struggle.

Thus, for the advancement and growth of the country in true sagacity, this ever increasing socio-economic inequality has to be bridged because the educated population of youth belonging to the marginalized sections is increasing at an alarming rate and their helplessness and vulnerability is obvious either from their reticent suppression or intrepid rebellion. They have a right to enhance their social status and in order to achieve this, they are in a catch position, to follow the path of virtue or to leave the traditional moral values and follow the dangerous road chosen by Balram because they are to survive at any cost.

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