

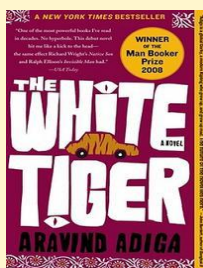
Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*: An Exposition of the Neo-imperial India and Subaltern Resistance

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Abstract: Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* has not been received favorably by some Indians, for it seemingly portrays India in shambles. The novel purposefully, however, exemplifies the ramifications of continuation of imperial structures of economy, polity and culture. Adiga, as a true cultural critic, is vividly providing the subaltern subjects an impetus to resist, subvert or idealize the existing democratic structures, otherwise there will be further subjugation of the subaltern denizens. They will be choked by the existing bureaucratic capitalism. The present system will breed further injustice, violence and corruption that will have devastating effects on the seemingly happy, independent nature of India. The present paper aims at scrutinizing the neo-imperial web of the novel, and thereby providing an insight into the sham pretenses of thriving democratic system, which is actually bureaucratic capitalism. The novel's protestant hero is just a question mark on the false glimmer that is projected by the elite agencies of India through media.

Key Words: Neo-imperialism; Bureaucratic capitalism; Subalternization; Media hype and Cultural aggression.



Book Detail

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Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* became an instant hit as soon as it was published in 2008. The Booker Prize to the book in the same year generated a contentious debate. For some, it received the award only because its narrative content danced to the tunes of Neo-imperial plot, and for some, it is an iconoclastic text that exposes the real facade within the existing structures of Indian polity, economy and sham culture.

Adiga as a true cultural critic purportedly has held the mirror unto the Indian society, to gloss over its sham pretenses and the claims of the largest democracy that strives for happiness of its populace. Adiga, through Balram Halwai, is interrogating why it is difficult for a lay man within the largest democracy to hone his skills perfectly? Why the characters have to change their names while seeking jobs? Are they commodities who have to paste different label unto them so that they are sold or bought in the market? Doesn't it provoke the reader to delve deep into the matrix of seemingly ideal cultural fabric, wherein human beings are reduced to mere things of no value at all? What justification Ashok, Balram's master, is going to give when he too contributes to the Darwinian spirit of competition that is mushrooming day by day in Delhi? Why Balram slits the throat of his

master? A simple answer appears that by doing this Balram suggests that he is cutting the throat of hallow democracy, and implicitly suggests a sort of anti-capitalist stance, because democracy in India has become the surrogate name of bureaucratic capitalism.

Adiga's hero is 'half-baked' indicating that the present political and economic policies are such, wherein the children of middle class are not able to complete their education. They are forced by the neo-imperial snare to seek menial jobs to support their families. Balram's tour-de-force is a saga of average Indian, who has to suffer every day in one way or the other. Balram started from the margin, and removed the carpet from below his master, Ashok, by slitting his throat. Through this peculiar case, Adiga gives it a dangerous cosmic touch, but what else Balram could have done? He must be appreciated for holding the mirror unto the contemporary citizens of India to deliberate frankly about the prevailing system of economic and political structures that exploit the average man in a well-knit manner.

Balram, through his antithetical stance, has been able to come out of the Rooster Coop. He even assumes his master's name Ashok, therefore pastes a new identity unto himself. This is an exemplification of the postmodern

society where only the hyper real circulates in the market. The illusory nature of the thriving Indian economy is exposed, which exploits the masses under the neo-imperial web. The celebrity shows daily on the t. v. channels generate such a hype of progress of India that the painful cries of the common men are silenced.

Adiga has brilliantly exposed the rot that has befogged the streets of Delhi, with homeless refugees from the Darkness:

Thousands of people live on the sides of the road in Delhi. They have come from the Darkness too – you can tell by their thin bodies, filthy faces, by the animal-like way they live under the huge bridges and overpasses, making fires and washing and taking lice out of their hair while the cars roar past them (The White Tiger 99).

Balram, the rebel, surveys the victims of the neo-imperial system with a sense of resistance, fear and pity:

I could see multitudes of small, thin, grimy people squatting, waiting for a bus to take them somewhere, or with nowhere to go and about to unfurl a mattress and sleep right there. These poor bastards had come from the darkness to Delhi to find some light – but there were still in the darkness. . . . We were like two separate cities – inside and outside the egg. . . . my father, if he were alive, would be sitting on that pavement, cooking some rice gruel for dinner, and getting ready to lie down and sleep under a streetlamp, and I couldn't stop thinking of that and recognizing his features in some beggar out there. So I was in some way out of the car too, even while I was driving it. (TWT 116)

Adiga is a novelist with a humane purpose. He has initiated a humane discourse that the elites of India hardly pay any attention to the sufferings of the poor people of India. The novel is making all the democratic institutions of India a butt of ridicule. When Balram's father is ill and becomes unconscious, his sons rush him to the local government hospital, they are warned at once to be wary of the cat roaming the wards that "has tasted blood" (TWT 40).

Due to official apathy, no doctor is available. In sharp contrast, when Mukash Sir takes his father to the private hospital in Delhi for a slight stomach ache, they are graciously received inside a "beautiful glass building. Doctors walked in and out with long white coats and stethoscopes in their pockets . . . the hospital's lobby looked as clean as the inside of a five-star hotel" (TWT 154).

Adiga's tone throughout the novel is sarcastic. The way he in a sarcastic manner assigns names to the

landlords, amply reflects that he is deeply hurt by seeing how the poor farmers are exploited by the landlords. The first of the landlords is the Buffalo; he owns the roads, and keeps a shotgun handy to back up his demand for one-third of all the money anyone earns using transportation as part of their daily business – including rickshaw drivers like Balram's dad, the human donkey. Stork, the second landlord, owns the river that flows through Laxmangarh; he contributes to the efficiency of river commerce by exacting his usurious slice of the pie from every penny earned from each boat that floats and every single fish that's caught. As Balram squeamishly massages the Stork's foul-smelling, filthy feet, he wonders why the landlord is neglecting his self-appointed duties back in the village: "why isn't he back home, screwing poor fisherman of their money and humping their daughters?" (TWT 51). The third landlord, Wild Boar, owns all the arable land in the area, so if anyone wants to grow food, they'll have to subordinate to his whims and wishes, which he enforces with a predator's sharp teeth:

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 [on which one can barely survive, we learn]. 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 (TWT 21).

A mysterious spell has befogged the minds of intellectuals of India, who blindly follow the neo-imperial policies, without realising its ramifications. Government ministers prey on local elites, who in turn exploit the underprivileged classes. Families become the battle grounds. Family affection and cohesion disintegrates under extreme economic pressure; Kishan is destroyed, just as his father was before him:

Kishan had changed. He was thinner, and darker – his neck tendons were sticking out in high relief above the clavicles. He had become, all of a sudden, my father (TWT 73).

Adiga has been bold enough to project the truly horrific image of India. He describes in detail how the bogus elites of India have converted India to a Rooster Coop in which:

Hundreds of pale hens and brightly colored roosters, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and shitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a horrible stench – the stench of terrified, feathered flesh (TWT 147).

In any case, the subalterns know fully well that any sort of resistance will inevitably lead to disastrous consequences: "only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed – hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the masters – can break out of the coop. That would take no

normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature. It would, in fact, take a White Tiger (TWT 150)

Balram possess some humane qualities. The way he behaves after killing Ashok, is a potent sign of protest of average man of India, especially aiming at the elite babus of India who have been dehumanized by the bogus materialism. It gets amply clear when Balram's driver accidentally kills a little boy, Balram insists on giving the bereaved family 25,000 rupees in compensation, and offers the boy's older brother a job as a driver with his company. Further, in observing the rapid development occurring in Bangalore, he ponders alternative possibilities for the future:

Maybe it will be a disaster: slums, sewage, shopping malls, traffic jams, policemen. But you never know. It may turn out to be a decent city, where humans can live like humans and animals can live like animals. A new Bangalore for a new India (TWT 273).

He even contemplates starting a school for White Tigers. He wants that youth of India should emulate his behavior so that they are not exploited by the elites easily, rather coaxes them to snatch their share in the contemporary jungle which the India of 21st century has turned out to be. The subaltern resistance has been projected very accurately by Adiga, for example, in his depiction of women in the Darkness leaping ferociously on their men when they return home, after long periods of absence, with the meager wages they have earned in distant cities. The scene in question is extreme, and obviously exaggerated for effect:

A month before the rains, the men came back from Dhanbad and Delhi and Calcutta, leaner, darker, angrier, but with money in their pockets. The women were waiting for them. They hid behind the door, and as soon as the men walked in, they pounced, like wildcats on a slab of flesh. There was fighting and wailing and shrieking. My uncles would resist, and managed to keep some of their money, but my father got peeled and skinned every time. . . . The women would feed him after they fed the buffalo (TWT 22).

Besides women, there are some other groups who are deprived of their right like the Naxals, the communist guerillas who wage constant war against military and paramilitary forces who are employed to protect the super-rich.

The *White Tiger* offers a scathing critique and scornful condemnation of the inhumanity fostered by the neo-imperial system; we can say that Adiga's representation of this self-made man, Balram, offers the world a hope for a brighter future. Balram symbolises the type of resistance that the subalterns of India should offer to the neo-imperial snare. Adiga doesn't distort the reality, but exposes it.

Works Cited

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