



Mulish Propensity Overtaking Multifarious Hurdles in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on contemplative condition of the poor in some locality and how they are tortured. Facing all the torments how they feel and what type of ideas they have in their mind. This novel proves that no one is criminal by birth but circumstance sometimes forces a person to be more than a criminal only in the quest to be free from the shackles of abjectness or to live a proper life like others. It depends on the conditions or the mulish propensity of a person to what extent he can reach to overtake the barriers of his life. Balram, the protagonist, who has seen the sacrifices and the piteous condition of his family, does not like to tolerate the same. Getting an opportunity, though not predetermined for this inhumane deed, Balram murders his master and becomes an entrepreneur.

KEYWORDS : Entrepreneur, contemptible, circumstances, propensity.

Aravinda Adiga, adorned with Man Booker Prize in 2008, is known as one of the best younger Indian English writers. He is the second younger Indo-Anglican writer and fourth Indian to achieve this award. As a student he has been topper of his classes. After PUC (intermediate) he immigrated to Canada where he completed his graduation and settled there with his family. Besides studying in Magdalen University he studied at James Ruse Agriculture High School, Sydney and completed his graduation in English Literature at Columbia University in New York where he was valedictorian in 1997. He started his career as a financial journalist in Financial Times. He has been a former correspondent for Time magazine. Jane Sullivan writes about Adiga "He's such a wonderful essayist; he helped me to understand what it takes to stay a writer, that it can be destabilising."¹

Born on October 23, 1974 to Usha Adiga and Madava Adiga, brought up in middle class family in Madras (now Chennai) a famous and popular city of South India, he has observed every type of milieu in his locality. He knows the poor people and their society very minutely that's why he aptly describes the routine activities of the poor and their life style. Due to recognizing the poor's feelings, mentality, span of their ambitions, ups and downs of their heart and soul, Adiga has depicted the real image of the poor and the rich relations, and place, dignity and limitations of each in the society, though the palpable image of present India is different from Adiga's depiction in the novel.

Being an Indian writer his writing style is too simple and understandable that the non-English readers can understand it properly. It is his writing style and creativity that has made him reach to the crest of popularity and he has become very dear to his readers. He has made a permanent place in the heart of his readers who always wish to read Adiga more and more.

"He has a large international English audience as well for his novels, which get better and better. Readers everywhere can delight in the Indian verbosity, the elaborate insults, and the slightly mangled English, some of it "delivered with a lopsided grin and an unstable head."²

Motive of writing

The major objective to draft this article is to focus on contemptible condition of the poor in some locality and how they are tortured. Facing all the torments how they feel and what type of ideas they have in their mind. This novel proves that no one is criminal by birth but circumstance sometimes forces a person to be more than a criminal only in the quest to be free from the shackles of abjectness or to live a proper life like others. It depends on the conditions or the mulish propensity of a person to what extent he can reach to overtake the barriers of life. It is prima facie in achieving something

one has to sacrifice much or he has to pay a lot. Balram, the protagonist, who has seen the sacrifices and the hapless condition of his father, family and fore fathers, does not like to legitimate the same. He, an illiterate and unskilled person like other members of the poor community, watches all activities and the real mentality of the rich. Getting a suitable opportunity, though he was not predetermined for this inhumane deed, Balram murders his master Mr Ashok, the best and the most sympathetic person of the Animal family and becomes an entrepreneur.

Introduction

Balram, the protagonist, is the son of a rickshaw puller and becomes a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore, a famous city, known for the hub of IT jobs and a better place for entrepreneurs in India. The story of the novel presents the pathetic condition of some communities and how these people think about themselves and their wards. The novel is written in epistolary form that sculpts the predicament of a low caste servant who tries to be free from the physical and mental chains that fabricate his fate. Balram, the protagonist writes these letters to Mr Wen Jiabao, Chinese premier who is coming to visit India. Besides exposing the relations between the rich (ruling people) and the poor (ruled people), the novel indicates how the poor are tortured, suffered and think to which extent only to come out from the Rooster Coop or the caged life. The novel points out how the people achieve their desired destination. Sometimes they do what they are not inclined to do. Ashok was the best and soft hearted person in the ruling family, full of cruelty. He always shows sympathy for the poor and the weak but he is murdered by his own driver not because the driver hated him but because the driver wanted to luxuriate in his life unlike his father and forefathers.

The Rich or Ruling Community

In *The White Tiger* two types of communities are presented- the rich or ruling community and the poor or ruled community. Though the ratio of middle class family in India is more than either of these two and it is the middle class that works as a bridge to hook up the rich and the poor classes but Adiga has ignored the middle class completely. It may be his approach of calligraphy style or to attain the focus on only the rich community and the poor one. "Adiga is a novelist, and one who has grown in his art since his Booker prizewinning debut, *The White Tiger*, he knows how to talk about all these matters through his characters and their compelling stories."³ The rich community is not only affluent and well-heeled but politically opulent too. They have very good relations with the ministers. Both the ministers and these prosperous people are presented as crooked and unscrupulous in the novel. They just show the dreams to the downtrodden people and pretend to do the social and moral works while palpably they suck the poor, use them, torture them and become millionaire. Though the novel unmasks and categorizes the Indian community in different category on the

basis of caste, creed, religion or monetary level but especially it shows only two main categories. "... in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat – get eaten up." (*The White Tiger* 64) Adiga sees even two types of country in India and aptly mentions "... that India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness." (*The White Tiger* 14)

The novel demonstrates that the well to do people dwell in mansions with much comfort and full of all facilities though they also belong to the village but these villages are only for their benefit like for election or to rule over the people there. They never deal with any problem even in the villages "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.... they're communists just like you, and go around shooting rich people on principle – the four Animals had sent their sons and daughters away, to Dhanbad or to Delhi." (*The White Tiger* 25)

For these well off people the animals are treated better than the slaves. The slaves are never cared for their health or even a handful salary they get to fulfill the primary needs of their family while "The rich expect their dogs to be treated like humans... they expect their dogs to be pampered and walked and petted and even washed!" (*The White Tiger* 78)

Their contribution to corruption and mentality for the poor

The rich are shown, in the novel, doing nothing special as their profession but they are too rich as they are always busy in illegal works full of corruption. Adiga introduces the village school in very piteous condition and it is due to corruption. The government and the ministers do not heed on the teacher, his salary, or the basic requirement of school. "There is no duster in this class, there are no chairs; there are no uniforms for the boys. How much money have you stolen from the school funds, you sister-fucker?" (*The White Tiger* 34)

The government provides lunch, books and uniforms to all students in the school "But we never saw *rotis*, or yellow *daal* or pickles and everyone knew why: the schoolteacher had stolen our lunch money. ... Once, a truck came into the school with uniforms that the government had sent for us; we never saw them, but a week later they turned up for sale in the neighbouring village." (*The White Tiger* 33) In spite of it nobody blamed that teacher as everybody knew that the teacher was also a victim of corruption. He was not getting his salary and the school was at the worst and stinky place but anyhow he was surviving. This corruption was not due to the teacher but due to the corrupt system. All knew the situation but this type of problem did not seem to be important for the affluent ministers or the government as they were busy just in making the money and befooling the public.

The Stork (father of Ashok and Mukesh) always seems to be engaged in such money making or illicit deeds where they bribe or settle the bribe with the ministers or politicians. Though Ashok is not interested in such activities but he has to. "... we can deal with this income tax charge. This is India, not America. ... We need a fixer. He'll get us the interview with a minister that we need. That's how Delhi works." (*The White Tiger* 121) These people constrain the politicians to do these illegal works at any cost. When the politicians ignore them either for being honest or to get a tremendous share from the profit, Ashok becomes so irritated that he wants to unmask the politicians. "We need to go to the newspapers and tell them we're being raped by these politicians!" (*The White Tiger* 121)

Adiga ironically comments on India's system, its condition and the entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs always pretend as if they are always bothered and concerned for the country and contribute much for the country but genuinely they are too narcissistic and self-centered. These people of Big Belly are hollowing the country and filling their bellies. "... And our nation, though it has no drinking

water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, does have entrepreneurs. Thousands and thousands of them. Especially in the field of technology. And these entrepreneurs – we entrepreneurs – have set up all these outsourcing companies that virtually run America now." (*The White Tiger* 4)

This ruling or the rich community spends money lavishly and exorbitantly on their needs and even in bribes they are second to none. "We've just paid half a million rupees in a bribe." (*The White Tiger* 139) Being employers they must be involved with the poor's problems as "Employers are like mother and father..." (*The White Tiger* 162) but they are not concerned with the financial problems or even the basic needs of the poor; they have a different point of view even to have the drivers or the servants. They want to have a long life multipurpose slave. "The Stork shook his head, 'Catch 'em young and you can keep 'em for life. A driver in his forties, you get, what, twenty years of service, then his eyes fail. This fellow will last thirty, thirty five years. His teeth are solid, he's got his hair, he's in good shape.'" (*The White Tiger* 66)

The poor: Abjection, Ignorance, Inconsequence and Mindset Psychology

The poor have been posed as the worst in all facets- their health, clothes, homes, and living standard. Their destiny and professions are generally already decided as they are always confined by these capitalists or entrepreneurs endlessly. "... men, I say, but better to call them human spiders that go crawling in between and under the tables with rugs in their hands, crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven, in their thirties or forties or fifties but still 'boys'" (*The White Tiger* 51)

The poor have nothing new or energetic in their life what they can expect. They have no aspiration in life either from themselves or from the coming (new) generation. "Things are different in the Darkness. There, every morning, tens of thousands young men sit in the tea shops, reading the newspaper, or lie on charpoy humming a tune, or sit in their rooms talking to a photo of a film actress... They know they won't get any job today. They've given up the fight." (*The White Tiger* 54)

The plight of the poverty stricken people is too deplorable and pathetic that generally they do not get job. In case they get any, they are expected to do all the works. "But in India – or, at least, in the Darkness – the rich don't have drivers, cooks, barbers and tailors. They simply have servants. ... anytime I was not driving the car. I had to sweep the floor of the courtyard, make tea, clean cobwebs with a long broom, or chase a cow out of the compound." (*The White Tiger* 68)

Some of the poor switch to the metropolitan cities only to get a good life or to exterminate the darkness but unfortunately they have to pass same hapless and hopeless life there. "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..." (*The White Tiger* 119-120) The people working as chauffeurs in cities are considered in better position than those who are living in complete darkness, though these chauffeurs also suffer much as they have to live in "a warren of interconnected rooms where all the drivers, cooks, sweepers, maids and the chefs of the apartment block can rest, sleep and wait." (*The White Tiger* 130) They sleep in the dormitory where "the wall was covered with cockroaches" (*The White Tiger* 131)

Adiga has ironically presented the religion and gods but in the poor community earning bread for the family is the first priority. Sometimes they hide their religion, in spite of being orthodox, only for a job. Ram Prasad who "was a poor, honest, hardworking Muslim, but he wanted a job at the home of an evil, prejudiced landlord who didn't like Muslims – so just to get a job and feed his starving family, he claimed to be a Hindu! And took the name of Ram Prasad." (*The*

White Tiger 109) He goes to mosque every day and performs all rituals but stealthily only to save his job. "What a miserable life he's had, having to hide his religion, his name, just to get a job as a driver..." (*The White Tiger* 110)

These ruled people are too oblivious with the very common things as they are limited up to earning their bread and nurture of their family. Though Balram had been one of the most brilliant students of his class as the teacher informs the inspector - "He's the smartest of the lot. He reads well." (*The White Tiger* 34) The inspector also points his cane towards Balram and says - "You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots." (*The White Tiger* 35) However now he is an average person of his community as once Mr Ashok asks Balram the name of Indian Prime Minister, the name of the continent and even the difference between Hindu and Muslim but Balram really fails to answer any of these questions. "...two, three years of schooling in him? He can read and write but he doesn't get what he's read. He is half baked. The country is full of people like him." ... "Me and thousands of others in this country like me, are half baked, because we were never allowed to complete our schooling." (*The White Tiger* 10)

The people of this community are so inconsequential that they are not named properly. The protagonist is known as 'Munna' (boy) even in school though he has grandmother, uncles and aunts but all of these people don't have time to name him or they do not think it important. 'Munna' was not the proper name so the teacher gave him the name 'Balram'.

These poor people do not have any choice for their career. Most of the community serves the rich permanently generation to generation. In case some people get the job, they have to pay a lot. Adiga points out that hundreds of the poor are in jail only for their masters' sake. They do it in the pressure of the rich and only in the greed of some money that is given by the rich for their family. "The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle class masters." (*The White Tiger* 169) Balram also became the victim but only his luck prevented him to go to jail. They have a mindset psychology to be a slave constantly for long. "A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 per cent - as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way - to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in man's hand and he will throw it back at you with a curse." (*The White Tiger* 175-176)

Though all the poor community hates the rich but they can't dare to say even a single word to the rich in their presence. Moreover they accept their abjection as their destiny. Balram hates these people more than any other and he calls them animal though he can't dare to say it publicly but in his text he mentions "All four of the Animals lived in high walled mansions just outside Luxmangarh - the landlords' quarters." (*The White Tiger* 25)

Conclusion

Thus in the novel Adiga has used symbolical language as 'the Men with Big Bellies', 'the Rooster Coop', 'the Darkness' and 'the Light' etc. for the perspective of focusing on some sublime themes. Adiga has not presented the palpable image of India. All capitalists, entrepreneurs, or ministers cannot be cheat, dishonest, murderers or disloyal as painted by Adiga. Adiga has focused on only the phase of irresponsibility and disloyalty of the rich and the poor's pathetic condition caused only by the upper class people. Besides elaborating various themes in the novel Adiga focuses on Balram's mulish propensity that overtakes multifarious hurdles of his life. These barriers were not only due to adversity or being downtrodden but their mentality was also more responsible for this situation as this poor community always thought it was impossible to escape from this caged life. Balram, the protagonist, could not be proved as an exception because he could also not break that Rooster Coop but when he got an opportunity, though this inhumane deed was not concocted, Balram cashed it without fail and killed his master, Mr

Ashok who was the most loveable, sympathetic and the generous person in the brutal family. Some people of this community dare to escape and shift in metropolitan cities but it is other darkness and they fail to escape. Finally Balram overtook this situation by his endless efforts and he became entrepreneur. Being related to the poor community Balram is different from those brutal entrepreneurs who use the poor only for their benefits. He started his travel agency, gave jobs to various poor people and was sympathetic also to them. He mentions-

"I don't treat the like servants- I don't slap, or bully or mock anyone. I don't insult any of them by calling them by 'family'. Either. They're my employees; I'm their boss, that's all. I make them sign a contract and I sign it too, and both of us must honor that contract. That's all. If they notice the way I talk, the way I dress, the way I keep things clean, they'll go up in life. If they don't, they'll be drivers all their lives. I leave the choice up to them. 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* 302)

Pankaj Mishra writes, "with remorselessly and delightfully mordant wit, *The White Tiger* anatomises the fantastic cravings of the rich; it evokes, too, with startling accuracy and tenderness, the no less desperate struggles of the deprived."⁴

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