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ECONOMIC DISPARITIES, CLASS STRUGGLE, INJUSTICE, POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN ADIGA'S 'THE WHITE TIGER'

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Abstract

The paper focuses on Economic Disparities, Class Struggle, Injustice, Poverty and Inequality in Aravind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* (2008) which won the Booker Man Prize. The protagonist of the novel is Balram Halwai who is fictional village boy from Laxmangarh who is known as the white tiger. He is the representative of the poor people, the underclass and represents its life –begging for food, sleeping under concrete flyovers, defecating on the roadside, shivering in the cold, struggling in the 21st century for freedom. The inequality between the rich and poor is a vital motive of the story. Even though, discrimination against lower casts is illegal in India under its constitution, it does still happen nowadays too. The Class and Caste issues have created two different India in one: “an India of Light and an India of Darkness”. The protagonist a typical voice of underclass metaphorically described through the voice of Balram Halwai about the “Rooster coop” which plays an important motive in the novel and struggles to set free the society from age-old slavery and exploitation. The novel *The White Tiger* symbolizes the power in East Asian cultures. Moreover, it is a symbol of individuality. The protagonist who represents the darkness who tries to move to light. Through the letter to Chinese Premier, Balram describes his own life story and how he raised prosperous figure he is now, presenting himself as an example of successful entrepreneurship. This novel is based on the disparities of two worlds dark and light sides of the life.

Keywords: Cast and Class, Poverty, Corruption, Economic Disparities, *The White Tiger*, Darkness, Light

Post colonialism is the critical destabilization of the theories (intellectual and linguistic, social and economic) that support the ways of western thought of law. Postcolonial theory thus establishes intellectual spaces for the ‘Subaltern’ peoples to speak for themselves, in their own voices and so produce cultural discourses of philosophy and language of society and economy which balance the imbalanced “us” and “them”, binary power relationship between the colonist and the colonial subject.

The postcolonial theoretical approaches may be divided into five main models. They are, “National/Regional models, Racial/Ethnic models, Comparative models, Colonizer/Colonised models, Hybridity/Syncretistic models”.

The National/Regional models emphasize distinct features of national or regional history and culture, for example the Subaltern Studies Group (India) rethinks history from the position of previously silenced indigenous peoples, and many types of Caribbean studies, which look at shared features, have shaped literary culture in neighbouring islands. Aravind Adiga who is the modern Indian novelist who highlights these disparities in his novel named *The White Tiger*.

Aravind Adiga was born in Mangalore in 1974 and immigrated to Australia in his teens. He studied English Literature at Columbia University, US and at Oxford University. He was dedicated towards studies and respectful towards teachers. Adiga has written novels like, “*The White Tiger* (2008), *Between the Assassinations* (2008), *Last Man in Tower* (2011), *Selection Day* (2016), *Amnesty*

(2020). He has written some short stories like, “The Sultan’s Battery”, “Smack”, “Last Christmas in Bandra”, “The Elephant”. Aravind Adiga was curious and troubled by the sight he saw during his travels in India as a journalist, he wanted to explore more.

The *White Tiger* (2008), is a tale of this underclass and its life- begging for food, sleeping under concrete flyovers, defecating on the roadside, shivering in the cold, struggling in the 21st century, for its freedom. India is multi-layered, exotic, beautiful, mysterious, colourful and mystical. Like all countries India has many problems. The primary problem in India is the huge disparity between rich and poor. There are few things in the “Light” and most of the problems were in “Darkness”.

In the debut novel **The White Tiger**, which bagged him Man Booker Prize 2008, created two different India in One “an India of Light” and “an India of Darkness” (14). It is the India of Darkness which is focused by the novelist articulating the voice of the silent majority, trying to dismantle the discrimination between the “Big Bellies and the Small Bellies” (64). Balram Halwai, the protagonist who is a typical central character of the novel who represents the voice of underclass, metaphorically described as “Rooster coop” (173) and struggling to set free the oppressed from age-old slavery and exploitation.

The life of the protagonist **Balram Halwai** clearly pictures his life in his letters to the premier of China. The novel **The White Tiger** is centred on Balram Halwai, a son of a rickshaw puller, intended to make sweets becomes Ashok Sharma. His transformation from Munna-Balram Halwai-The *White Tiger*-Ashok Sharma is the graph for the rise of underclass.

The protagonist Balram Halwai who represents the strong voice of the suffering community in which marginal farmers, landless labourers, jobless youths, poor, auto and taxi drivers, servants, prostitutes, beggars and unprivileged figure in the Modern Indian scenario. “Poverty, Illiteracy, unemployment, caste and culture conflict, superstitions, social taboos, dowry system, economic disparity, Zamindari system, poor health service, police and judicial working”. These forces are collectively operated to perpetuate the underclass which is known as “**Darkness of India**”.

The Modern India is clearly portrayed in the novel **The White Tiger**. The protagonist Balram Halwai is born in Laxmangarh which is the rural village located in Bihar. This village is known as the Darkness of India. The novel is in the epistolary form (novel as letters) the protagonist writes the letters to Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao. Balram begins the novel with the pictures his life in Laxmangarh. He lived with his father, mother, brother and his grandmother.

Halwai is forced to quit his school studies because he has to pay for his cousin sister’s dowry. At first, he works in a tea shop as a servant. Here, (In the tea shop) he learns the Indian economy from the conversation of customers. He decides to become a driver because he wants to earn more. Here, he was forced by the society to earn more to lead his life and his family. Here, the researcher finds out that Adiga clearly highlights the (the economic inequality) financial status of the middle class and lower-class people to compete to live peacefully among this high-class people. The economy is not sufficient to run his family. Here the novelist pictures the life of the economic disparity in the society.

Balram gets the job as a driver to Ashok who is the son of a landlord. Balram had a chance to move to Delhi with his boss Ashok. In Delhi Balram has an expose to see the corruption in India. There is a deviation between the rich and the poor very clearly. One night Ms.Pinky who is the wife of Ashok drives the car and she hits somebody in the street. But Balram was blamed for hit and run. Due to Balram’s economic disparity and his poverty he accepts this case instead of his master’s wife.

Balram thinks that the only way to escape from this case is to “Rooster Coop”, to kill Ashok who is the master of him and rob his properties. At the end of this novel Balram feels his mistake by saying that his freedom is worth to lives of Ashok and his family and the monetary success.

The plot of the novel lingers around the protagonists, where the villagers, family and friends are subjected to exploitation and torment by the village landlord. They collect money for moving the rickshaw on the roads. It is the tax they collect. Balram hates such things. He tried to evade school and his father takes him to school and says,

“My whole life, I have been treated like donkey. All I want is that one son of mine- at least one- should live like a man” (30)

Adiga clearly represents the problems faced by the poor in their life through his protagonist Balram. It is poverty of Balram in Laxmangarh, Gaya there is jobless youths toward the big cities and the protagonist Balram Halwai and his brother is no exception.

The Zamindari system is effectively pictures in this novel to highlight the exploitation and subjugation of the underclass as well as the middle-class people’s life. The land lords were personified as “**Buffalo, Stork, Wild Boar and Raven**”. They are the four different types of Land Lords which is pictures by the novelist. Adiga metaphorically explains the characters of the Land Lords who are treated others inhumane.

“a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman in the river, and a toll from every boatman who crossed the river” (24)

Boar, his brother owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangarh. Men who wanted to work on those lands,

“had to bow down to his feet, and touch the dust under his slippers, and agree to swallow his day wages.” (25)

The Raven owned the worst land which was dry, rocky hillside around the fort, and “took a cut from the goatherds who went up there to graze with their flocks. If they didn’t have their money, he liked to dip his “beak into their backsides”.

The Buffalo was the greediest of all. He had “eaten up the rickshaws and the roads: So, if you ran a rickshaw, or used the road, you had to pay him his feed –one-third of whatever you earned, no less”. Due to their exploitative tendencies, Adiga calls them “Animals”. These land lords also align with regional political parties for their selfish motives.

The poverty of Balram forces him to turn ‘**The White Tiger**’ to leave the school and work in a tea stall, washing utensils and doing every kind of menial jobs. In the poverty-stricken society young kids are given no formal names “Munna: It just means boy” (15).

Adiga has converted the two notions as men with **Big Bellies** and the men with **Small Bellies-the rich and the poor**. Politically it may be the ruler and the ruled. It is extreme poverty that creates Darkness in the life of the rural as well as urban people and it perpetuates the sufferings of the underclass. Illiteracy, unemployment, social taboos, rigid caste discrimination and culture conflict, corrupt politicians, economic disparity, corrupt Education system and poor health services are the problems faced by them.

It was the school teacher who named him Balram and marked his age in the school ledger. Vikram Halwai, Balram’s father is hit by poverty and tough manual work. His body tells the history of his life and sufferings that represent the world of Darkness abound with social taboos, rigid caste distinction, superstitions, caste and culture conflict. In India man is known and recognized by his caste. The old driver of stork asked Balram: “What caste are you?” (56) Similar question is asked by Strok: “Halwai.... What caste is that top or bottom?” (62) Ram Prasad, the servant of Strok disguised his identity because the prejudices landlord didn’t like Muslim- he claimed to be a Hindu just to get a job and feed his starving family.

The marriage of Ashok and Pinky is not appreciated by the society because Pinky is not a Hindu. Later, due to caste and cultural differences their relationship is snapped. Socio-cultural slavery is perpetuated in our society by elite through the process of socialization. Sarcastically, the novelist comments:

“The greatest thing to come out of this country in ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop” (173)

The researcher gets very minute observation after going through this novel. The readers know the auto and taxi drivers constitute a big fragment of underclass inhabiting in the cities. Balram is true representative of this class marked with the miseries of their struggle, humiliation, and dreams.

Another important topic which is a social point of view is prostitution. In the big cities like Delhi, because of the poverty most of the women have to adopt this profession. In Dhanbad, Delhi and Bangalore, there are red light areas one can negotiate a price with these women. And price depends on, "High class or low class? Virgin or non-virgin? (227). In Delhi especially rich people prefer "golden-haired women" (232)

Throughout this novel **The White Tiger** the richer can come across the reality of our India which Adiga wanted to depict. This is just the second dark side of India. The richer can't say it is the reality of India which the researcher discusses in this paper with the study of this particular novel. There are drawbacks of our country and each and every Indian should try to oppose and remove these things from our India.

The researcher observed that Balram suffer humiliation after humiliation. He is expected to take it. The domination of upper-class people is revealed when a child is killed by Pinky madam while driving the Honda city can and the responsibility is being entrusted on Balram's head by the Stork family.

A man who is himself forced to change his religious identity only for getting a job as a driver. The higher caste people treat the low caste people like Balram as animal as or worse than them. He is chided and abandon by the Nepali servant when he handles brutally two pomerians in chains: "Don't pull the chain so hard! They are worth more than you are!" (78) This comment shakes the inner consciousness of the protagonist and accelerates him to get success in his life at any cost.

Hence, the researcher brings out the economic disparities, class struggle, injustice, poverty and inequality in this novel *The White Tiger* which are all faces by the people who belongs to the low class even the middle-class people also. Adiga's protagonist Balram Halwai is a typical representative of the low- and middle-class peoples struggle in the society. Their voices are still inside the water. Through this kind of the novel the novelist brings out the voice in the society.

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