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ARVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY

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Abstract

Arvind Adiga's Man Booker Prize winning novel *The White Tiger* presents realistic image of modern India. It is a saga of man's voyage to freedom. Balram Halwai, the protagonist is mouthpiece of the novelist to expose contemporary social evils of the society. The novel highlights the transformation of a village boy into a great entrepreneur. Poverty, inequality and injustice are discussed at large. Despite being a democratic country, the poor are still sufferer. So, the paper aims to examine the novel through the lens of post colonialism. Postcolonial criticism draws attention to the issue of cultural difference in the literary text. The ultimate goal of Post colonialism is to trace the effect of colonialism on culture. Post colonialist thinkers recognize many of the assumption which underline that the logic of colonialism is still active together and focus of postcolonial theorist is clearing space for multiple voices. Further, the paper endeavors to unfold various subaltern issues painted in the novel.

Keywords: Realistic image, transformation, subaltern, postcolonialism.

The term "post colonialism" refers to the ways in which race, ethnicity, culture and human identity itself are represented in the modern era, after many colonized countries achieved independence. Discussing about 'post colonialism,' the Dictionary of Human Geography says, "Postcolonial theory provides a frame work that destabilizes dominant discourses in the West, challenges 'inherent assumption', and critiques the material and discursive legacies of colonialism" (561). Postcolonial critics are concerned with the literature produced by colonial powers and works produced by those who were colonized. Postcolonial theory looks at issues of power, economics, politics, religion and culture and how these element work in relation to colonial hegemony. Such types of study became popular in the 1990s. It got currency with the publication of books like, *In Other Worlds, The*

Empire Writes Back, Nation and Narration and Culture and Imperialism. The beginning of Postcolonial study can be traced with publication of Frantz Fanon's French book *The Wretched of the Earth* in 1961, in which Frantz argued that if colonized people want to ascertain their identity they have to dig their past. European colonizing power has devalued the nation's past by teaching them their European culture. This is especially of those voices that have been previously silenced by dominant ideologies. Postcolonial criticism also questions the role of Western literary canon and Western history as dominant forms of knowledge making. Edward Said's *Orientalism (1978)*, is canonical text in this perspective. It is a specific expose of the Eurocentric universalism which takes for granted both the superiority of European and inferiority of what is not. Said exposes the European

culture which identifies East as other and inferior to the West. "The Orient, he says, features in the Western mind 'as a sort of surrogate and even underground self'"(qtd in Peter Barry 186).

The White Tiger realistically presents the ugly picture of India through the narration of main protagonist, a village boy, Balram Halwai. Adiga has made a very meaningful statement about the current position of Indian politics which may be taken as a new form of colonialism, as in present time though India has got freedom but even today a large strata of society is forced to live life of a colonized people. Now Black is colonized by another Black. India got independence from colonial power but traces of that power get transferred in Black powerful Indian as at one place Balram's these words, "The cages had been left open; and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law. Those were the most ferocious, the hungriest, had eaten everyone else up and grown big bellies" (64), presents very apt situation of India.

As the story unfolds, it is a tale of the boy from Darkness, Balram Halwai. The author represents the hero as the White Tiger, who has taken birth once in a generation. This 'White Tiger' narrates his life story to Wen Jiabao, the Chinese Premier, in the series of letter. The protagonist intends to tell the truth to the Chinese Premier about modern India, in which the native born monarchs are creating 'hegemony'. The novel describes his journey from darkness to light, from Laxmangarh to Delhi and from Delhi to Bangalore. During this journey, it also throws light on his struggle for identity from "Country mouse" (122) to a "White Tiger" (Tiger 35). The protagonist calls himself "half baked" (10) like many others in the country and he is not allowed to finish his school, even though his smartness is recognized by school visiting inspector, who gives him name "the white tiger" (35) firstly, "The rarest of animal the creature that comes along only once in a generation"(35). But this white tiger, though has a scholarship promised by the school inspector, his family takes him out of school and puts him to work at a tea shop. Though poor understands value of education but before social and economic circumstances they become helpless. This is clearly reflected in his father's

intention when he yells at kusum, "How many times I told you? Muna must read and write" (Tiger 28). Vikram Halwai, Balram's father shows his concern about future of his son and also presents inner desire to secure their respect and place when he 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). But as we know all these dreams proves false as circumstances forces Balram to leave his study.

Though Balram has to leave his study but he himself has a desire to be like a white tiger. His quest for identity forces him to learn driving and work at stork's house as driver cum servant. Being driver of Stork's son Ashok, he moves with Ashok in Delhi too. The pomp and show of this city fascinates Balram and corrupts his mind and changes his outlook towards the world, he himself proclaims "I was corrupted from a sweet, innocent village fool into a citified fellow full of debauchery depravity and wickedness" (197). In National Zoo, Delhi after seeing 'The White Tiger,' he decides not to be slave any long as he makes it mentioned by Dharam in letter " I can't live the rest of my life in a Cage, Granny I am so sorry"(278) and makes up his mind to murder his master. Here, the protagonist shows sign of revolt and gives an indication that they are no longer going to suffer silently.

The novel also gives a detailed account of the Indian society-rural as well as urban and its various facets. The writer created two different Indias in one, when he makes Balram to say to Mr. Jiabo you will see, "an India of light and an India of darkness"(14). He makes discrimination between the "Big Bellies and the small Bellies" (64). Balram highlights the dark practices of the rich. All places whether it is Laxmangarh, Gaya, Dhanbad, Delhi or Bangalore depicts that poor remains poor in every city no matter it is a large city or a small city. The novel depicts underclass people striving to secure their place amidst upper class in every respect. The world of Darkness abounds with social taboos, rigid caste system, superstitions, culture conflict. 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 Stork: "Halwai... what caste is that, top or bottom?"(62) Moreover, Stork's

old driver Ram Singh who is a Muslim by caste has to conceal his identity. In order to feed his striving family he disguises himself as Hindu. The consciousness about caste is started to be embedded in childhood of a person. Once while playing football when grandson of Stork calls himself Azaruddin, Stork reacts quickly, "Call yourself Gavasker, Azarudin is a Muslim" (70).

Along the long way Adiga does a decent job of describing the gulf between the haves and have-nots. He also highlights the way in which servant class is treated. Economic condition of poor people is responsible for creating Darkness in their lives and perpetuates the struggles of the underclass. It is poverty in Laxamangarh which forces villages to leave their native place and migrate to cities. Balram is no exception. He has to leave school as well as village and has to do menial jobs. More bitter truth of the poor is that they even don't bother to name their child. In school when Balram tells him name "Munna'- simply a boy" (13), then teacher enquires why he is not named properly and Balram answers, "Mother's very ill...she's got no time to name me... He's a rickshaw puller...he's got no time to name me"(13). It was school teacher who calls him Balram, his first name. Balram's father is also victim of poverty like other villagers and his body is epitome of condition of all poor, Balram reports; while talking about difference: "A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. Ours are different" (26).

Zamindar is responsible for suffering of the poor. Buffalo, Stork, Wild Boar and Ravan are four Landlords who leave no chance to exploit villagers. Due to their exploitive tendencies Balram calls them animals who live in high walled mansion. These Landlords have relations with regional political parties for their selfish motives. Balram tells how these rich make use of votes of poor people and exposes hypocrisy of democracy when he tells that he has never seen inside of the vote booth. The most appalling event of Zamindar's cruelty is the accident when Balram is compelled to make a false statement of killing a child and it shows how poor persons are toys in hands of rich person.

The novel also depicts how men of darkness are idealized in the society by different modes. In Laxamangarh villagers consider their duty to serve their master. Balram is also no exception of it. He tries his best to serve his master and his whole family. He is driver as well as servant of the family and he never complains about it. He neither shows anger nor demands additional money for other works than driving. He prepares meal, takes care of Ashok and offers prayers for reunion of Ashok and Pinki. Once when Ashok comes in his room he request him to go upstairs saying, "This is not a place for a man of quality like yourself" (237). Balram is treated as other by his owners. He himself when starts telling story says that it is the story of a half baked. He is considered a man from darkness as colonizer used to think about colonized. He is recognized as an untouchable, marginalized, dehumanized and oppressed person. Peter Leonard defines this social marginalized as "being outside the mainstream of productive activity and / or social reproductive activity" (qtd. in Nimsarkar and Mishra, Language 92). Ashok and Pinki make fun of Balram's style of speaking.

Balram has always a desire to move from Darkness of the village. He wants to escape from the world of Darkness to become man of big belly. Being driver of Ashok when Ashok moves Delhi Balram also goes with him and he is greatly influenced by the way of living of Delhi. He has always a desire to adopt culture of upper class. Whenever Ashok and Pinki go to mall, Balram also has a desire to visit mall but his consciousness of being a driver always forbids him to do so. He wants to wear clothes as Ashok does, take liquor of good quality but his economic conditions do not allow him. He becomes aware of the difference that exists among the haves and have not's in India. He decides to escape from the coop. In order to live privileged life he stilt his master and runs Bangalore. Balram attains here everything he has yearned for freedom, money and power. He does not repent for what he did though he is sorry for Mr. Ashok. In Bangalore he has completely adopted culture of upper class. He bribes police for his own interest. He does not even wants to know about where about of his family. But at the same time he is not like village landlords. Though he

has attained culture of upper class but he does not seem satisfied with the world. He wants such a place where man can live like a man and animal can live like an animal. Balram gives vent to his desire when he says:

...It may turn to be a decent city, where humans can live like human and animal can live like animal. A new Bangalore for a new India. And then I can say that, in my own way, I helped to make New Bangalore to Ajay Sharma. It entrepreneur has desire to establish a school which will be, 'A school where you won't be allowed to corrupt anyone's head with prayers and stories about God or Gandhi-nothing but the facts of life for these kids. A school of full of White Tiger...' (319).

Talking about language used in the postcolonial novels, P.D Nimsarkar writes, "Language used in its various forms in the novelist have made it a vehicle to express contesting ideological difference between classes, castes, generations religions and races in the contemporary societal organization"(89). It is observed that the form of language the upper class people use is a mean by which they established their identity and control over others, the lower strata of the society. The lower class suffers and at the same time registers revolt with the help of language. Rebert Stam argues, "While the dominant class strive to make the sign uni-accented and endowed with an eternal, supra-class character, the oppressed, especially when they are conscious of their oppression, strive to deploy language for their liberation" (qtd in Nimsarkar and Mishra 122-3). In the novel Mr. Mukesh, the stork and Pinki, Ashok's wife leaves no chance to demoralize and humiliate Balram by their language. Balram is hit with the sandal foot into his back for pressing too hard the feel of stork, when Mr. Ashok questions upon this stork assures him, "They expect it from us...They respect us for it"(Tiger 72). Mukesh calls him idiot and moron. Thinking that he is an illiterate and coarse in behavior Pinky call him a "Yokal from the village" (119). Thus here the language is medium of power with the help of it the superiority of the upper class and inferiority of underclass is planted.

Balram also successfully makes use of language to show different shades of novel. The rich man of the village who is in couch and luxurious mansion, look like a premium "cotton pillions, white and soft and blank, "a representative of the class" (26), but the poor rickshaw puller is like a 'knotted rope with cuts and nicks and scars' (27) and his body displays the deprived condition of life: "the story of a poor man's life is written on his body in a sharp pen" (27). The protagonist father, so much exploited in his life feels that he was treated like "a donkey" (30). Ashok's brother Mukesh is being called 'Mongoose' (75). Balram uses language as a tool of identity assertion, revolting against the established social standard and politics of power. P.D Nimsarkar, comments on Balram's use of language, "Balram makes stylistic choices, focusing on the potential of the words and the meaning they acquire in particular set up based on his association with his social group. The manner Balram uses language is influenced by his social network and social situation" (103). The innocent and honest Balram has grown revengeful and rebellion to take revenge and his mind is haunted by the old experiences. Remorsefully he admits, "We have left the villages, but the master still own us, body, soul and arse" (175). Having experienced that truth and honesty have no value in the country, Balram tells a false story to get job. He is now clever enough to exploit the opportunity by using which would impress the landlord: "Our father is gone, Thakur Ramdev is gone, the best of the landlord is gone, who will protect us now?"(61). In this way we see that Balram makes apt use of language to expose the social structure of India whether he talks about upper class or under class.

As the novel, this simple village boy adapts himself in modern life style. He learns to grease the powerful wheels. The change in his attitude can be traced in his response to the affection and love towards his family. He stops sending money to his family. He wants to get rid of his family. After murdering his master, Ashok he even does not want to know about whereabouts of his family. At Bangalore, he uses foul means to establish his business. In spite of being a murderer he enjoys prestige without any sense of guilt. He compares

himself with Buddha, who is regarded as 'Light of Asia', he writes: "... I am just one who has woken up while the rest of you are still sleeping" (315). He considers himself in the world of light and is fully contented with his present situation without any sign of fear of police. Though being an entrepreneur he has lot of money and is counted as rich men but at the same time he is not as cruel as landlord of his village used to. He has attained all these for which he used to carve once when he was a driver of Ashok no matter by which mean. Talking about Balram, Krishna Singh writes: "Balram Halwai the protagonist is a typical voice of underclass metaphorically described as 'Rooster coop' and struggling to set free from age old slavery and exploitation. His anger, protest, indulgence in criminal acts, prostitution, drinking, chasing, grabbing all the opportunities means fair or foul endorse deep rooted frustration and its reaction against haves"(n.page).

Keeping in mind above aspects we can easily find traces of postcolonial in this novel. *The White Tiger* is a story of a country mouse that is suppressed and dehumanized by his masters and always associated with darkness. The white tiger is associated with brightness and power. After seeing white tiger Balram decides not to be lead a life of slave and in order to attain freedom from the cage of slavery he slits his master, Ashok. Through the life story of Balram Halwai the writer depicts how colonized are made to suffer socially, economically and mentally. But at the same place he gives an indication that Balram's act of murder is sign of revolt by the side of colonized. They are no longer going to remain silent sufferer. By comparing Balram with Buddha perhaps Adiga wants to persuade all colonized to revolt in order to get light so that they can search their identity. At the end of the novel Balram predicts a new completely changed world when he expresses his desire as: "White men will be finished within my life time. There are black and reds too... the radio never talks about them. My humble predication: in twenty year's time it will be just as yellow men and brown men at the pop of the pyramid, and we'll rule the whole world" (305). These depict sign of revolt against white men. Adiga wants to create a new world where everyone has his

existence and importance. To conclude, the novel *The White Tiger* has postcolonial leanings.

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