

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

CHALLENGES OF MODERNITY IN INDIA AS PORTRAYED IN THE SELECTED NOVELS  
OF ARAVIND ADIGA

AMBEDKAR BODIGADLA<sup>1</sup>, Dr. APSARA STANLEY<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, <sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor

Department of English, Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology & Sciences,  
Allahabad.



AMBEDKAR BODIGADLA



Dr. APSARA STANLEY

ABSTRACT

Diachronically modernism is an ensemble of particular socio-cultural norms, attitudes and practices that arose in the wake of Renaissance, synchronically it can also refer to the subjective or existential experience of the conditions they produce, and their ongoing impact on human culture, institutions, and politics in any period in the history (Berman 2010, 15–36).

The writer is first one who captures, understands and evaluates the internal currents in society because he is 'antenna' of society. It is true that just as society affects the writer so does he affect society. Aravind Adiga is one such a novelist who reflects the theme of modernity in his novels *The White Tiger* (2008) and *Last Man in Tower* (2011).

The paper critically examines how the novelist tries to portray the core attributes of modern age like individualism, materialism, success syndrome, degenerated values and artificial relationships that are prevalent among modern people through the characters Balram in *The White Tiger* and Yogesh Murthy in *Last Man in Tower*. The discussion also focuses on how the deeply rooted modern mind practices corrupting in politics, education, medical field and law and order and eats into the vitals of our society. The paper also tries to trace out how the factors like scientific advancement, commercial orientation, globalization, urbanization, and various biased ideologies are causing these threatening issues more rampant day by day. As it is said reading Aravind Adiga knowing modern India is not an exaggeration but fact (Robins, 2008:12).

Key words: Modernity, Individual Modernity, Modernization, Law, Corruption, Individual protection, Rationalism, materialism, globalization

Arvind Adiga novels are said to be the reflection of modern India and are claimed by the author as literary weapons in highlighting the brutal injustice and corruption (Aravind, 2008:11).

Modernity is a way of life involving continual change of human conditions and humanity itself. The term individual modernity has been introduced by Alex Inkleles. According to him, modernism is "The concept of individual modernity

is focusing on the psychological effects of modernization on people. Individual modernity comprises all orientations that become dominant psychological traits as modernization processes, such as industrialization and urbanization, transform the living conditions of individuals. Characteristics of Modernity are Mobility, Human equality, secularization, science over superstition, urbanization and rise of poor and middle class (1978: 49). Society has changed significantly

through processes of modernization and these changes affected the way individual build up and develop their self- identities. Modern means relating to the present or recent times as opposed to the remote past. Modernism explores modern character, thought expression or technique. Modernity is a way of life involving continual change of human conditions and humanity itself.

The novel *The White Tiger* contains 12 chapters. Introducing himself as "The White Tiger," Balram Halwai writes a letter to "His Excellency Wen Jiabao," the Premier of China (1). The entire novel is narrated through a collection of these letters.

Balram Halwai, a village boy. He is a smart child but is forced to leave school in order to help pay for his cousin's dowry and begins to work in a teashop with his brother in Dhanbad. While working there he begins to learn about India's government and economy from the customers' conversations. Balram describes himself as a bad servant but a good listener and decides to become a driver. Balram's journey first to Delhi, where he works as a driver to a rich landlord, and then to Bangalore, the place to which he flees after killing his master and stealing his money, the novel examines issues of religion, caste, loyalty, corruption and poverty in India. Ultimately, Balram transcends his sweet-maker caste and becomes a successful entrepreneur, establishing his own taxi service. In a nation proudly shedding a history of poverty and under development, he represents, as he himself says, "tomorrow (2008:294)."

"The novelist points out the malady of dowry system which is a heinous blot on Indian people. In modern Indian political discourse the custom of dowry is often represented as the cause of serious social problems, including the neglect of daughters, sex-selective abortion, female infanticide, and the harassment, abuse, and murder of brides. Attempts to deal with these problems through legislative prohibition of dowry, however, have resulted in virtually no diminution of either dowry or violence against women. In contrast, radically different interpretations of dowry can be found in the literatures of structural-functionalist

anthropology, economics, and human behavioral ecology which muster wide-ranging forms of qualitative and quantitative evidence to support functional models of dowry as a form of inheritance or investment in daughters and/or their children". (Mary K Shenk, 2007:262).

*Last Man In Tower* is set in Tower A of the Vishram Co-operative Housing society in Vakola, Mumbai. It is an aging, run-down apartment building inhabited by the middle class. The novel takes for inspiration a phenomenon that has swept every Indian metro in recent years: middle class families wooed by sky-rocketing property prices sell their modest homes and move into penthouses, swapping their scooters for cars, Godrej *almaris* for imported teak cupboards, thrifty habits for a lifestyle of affluence.

A retired sixty-one year old teacher, 'Masterji', is the last man to resist the builder's offer. Masterji's resistance in the face of the rising bribes and threats of the builder find a parallel with the struggles of men and women, all over India, who resist the clearance of their homes to build dams, bridges and factories. These changes, promising prosperity, often endanger something intangible but important — a way of life — in Adiga's novel; not to forget middle class integrity and decency. In the new India of the skyscrapers that replace low-rise apartment buildings, respect is accorded in proportion to income, and software engineers and investment bankers command more respect than teachers like Masterji.

Balram in *The White Tiger* struggled a lot to find his identity. By observing socio, economic issues, he got aspiration to become a rich man. In order to build up his life he had faced many challenges in this modern scenario. Finally he becomes an entrepreneur. Masterji challenge was fighting for justice. He did not like to sell his flat and he tried his level best to solve his problem legally. As builder, lawyer and police are corrupted, He could not get justice. It was sad that he was murdered brutally.

In *The White Tiger* Aravind Adiga shows how the Medical field is corrupted. When Munna's father was brought to the government hospital

during duty hours, no doctor was available and they had to bribe the ward boy to know when the doctor would be available.

The compounder said to Balram:

“Oh it’s TB. I’ve seen it before in rickshaw-pullers. They get weak from their work. Well, may be the doctor will turn in the evening.’ He did not.” ( *The White Tiger*, 2008: 50)

At last, Munna’s father died in want of treatment in the campus of the government hospital. By doing so, the novelist projects the deep-rooted corruption of the government hospitals where the poor are cheated. Hospitals are not modernized with latest equipment and facilities but the employees are corrupted.

As cancer is a fatal disease to a man, likewise corruption works as cancer to society. Presently, India is advancing in the medical facilities, but the conditions of the government hospitals in the many areas are still pathetic. Government hospitals are supposed to be giving better treatment to the citizens, but ironically these medical facilities are not utilized for the needy, so the real picture of Indian towns and villages is quite different. To know whether the doctor is there or not, one has to give bribe. The government doctors take their government postings and they maintain private clinics.

Balram tried to save his father and took him to the hospital but the problem is the hospital unable to provide treatment. Balram thinks there is no use in government hospitals. It resembles to present society people prefer to go private hospital than to government hospital. Its surprise to see that in private hospitals treatment is done to even dead bodies in order to get money by making patient family fools. In government hospital, treatment is not possible for living patients. There are several issues like no doctor, no equipments etc.

One night Pinky Madam takes the wheel from Balram, while drunk, hits something on the road and drives away; we are left to assume that she has killed a child. Ashok’s family puts pressure on Balram to confess that he had been driving alone.

Ashok spoke to police and he offers some bribe and problem gets solved. Police, Politicians and rich join hands in hands. By taking bribe the commissioner, manipulates the case very smartly. Now the police commissioner threatens the brother of the dead boy and tries to pressurize him by saying that at the time of the accident his brother was at fault:

The police told to victims’ brother like this:

“see, at the time of the accident, your brother’s bicycle had no working lights. That is illegal, you know”. ( *The white Tiger*, 2008:309)

In modern scenario common men are used like animals by their masters or rich. Servants are not treated as human beings. Rich changes law according to their benefits. In India everything is possible with money. Fortunately, the situation clears in a different way. Otherwise, Balram is supposed to be kept in jail and his identity would have been changed as a criminal. Like this incidents are very common India.

Dharman Shah and Ajwani in *Last Man in Tower* do not bother about human values, but are totally mercenary minded. Sha is owner of a big real estate business in Mumbai, who fulfils his goals by hurting others. Ajwani is a broker or agent who has no concern for humanity. They send a letter to Vishram society flat owners to vacate the flats. Sha fixes a price for the flats. He demands them to vacate in order to collapse it and to build a new elegant tower for the sake of the rich people.. This kind of threats is common in modern days. Public and private offices are projected as the places where common man like Master ji exploited physically, mentally, economically, and psychologically. Corruption is a cancer which originates, exists and flourishes without check in every nook and corner of our society”. As a result of these, the poor people struggle to live a peaceful life.

The sun is everywhere like that corruption is everywhere in India. In Adiga’s novel corruptions is depicted in Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore. Corruption is highly depicted in politics, educational Institutions, hospitals and of course all the fields.

Balram decides that killing Ashok will be the only way to escape India's *Rooster Coop*. After bludgeoning Ashok with a bottle and stealing a large bribe, Balram moves to Bangalore where he bribes the police in order to help start his own taxi business. After becoming an entrepreneur, Balram gives the below statement relating himself and his employees.

"I was a driver to a master, but now I am a master of drivers. I don't treat them like servants- I don't slap, or bully or mock anyone. I don't insult any of them by calling them my 'family', either. They're my employees, I 'm their boss, that's all. If they notice my life, they will go up in life, otherwise remain as driver". (*The white Tiger*, 2008: 302).

Globalization has assisted in the creation of an American atmosphere in India. Ashok justifies this move by explaining "Today it's the *modernist* suburb of Delhi. American Express, Microsoft, all the big American companies have offices there. The main road is full of shopping malls—each mall has a cinema inside! So if Pinky Madam missed America, this was the best place to bring her".

Ashok Tells to Balram his servant about growth of India. Ashok is even convinced that India is surpassing the USA, when he says, "*There are so many more things I could do here than in New York now...The way things are changing in India now, this place is going to be like America in ten years*".

Balram is noticing the rapid growth as well. From the beginning of his story he knows that in order to rise above his caste he should become an entrepreneur. Although his taxi service is not an international business, Balram plans to keep up with the pace of globalization and change his trade when need be.

Balram says the following statement to Jiabao

"I'm always a man who sees 'tomorrow' when others see 'today.'" (2008: 294)

Earlier people moved to different parts of the world. Now, Ashok thinks that India also will become better

India. In globalization India is adopting technology and science but failed to catch the corrupted. The concept of globalization is to build a new world without caste creed and race, where an individual lives with a certain identity; we could say it as cosmopolitan identity.

Adiga narrates in *The White Tiger* about politicians thus:

"You see, a total of ninety-three criminal cases - for murder, rape, grand larceny, gun-smuggling, pimping, and many other such minor offences - are pending against the Great Socialist and his ministers at the present movement. Not easy to get convictions when the judges are judging in Darkness, yet three convictions have been delivered, and three of the ministers are currently in jail, but continue to be ministers. The Great Socialist himself is said to have embezzled one billion rupees from the Darkness, and transferred that money into a bank in a small, beautiful country in Europe full of white people and black money". (*TWT* 2008: 97-98)

Criminalization, horse trading, booth rigging, cash for vote and such have been the burning issues in politics. These play an important role in shaping the mode of present day politics. The latest court decision places the responsibility of giving the people a government free from criminality on the PM (Prime Minister) and CMs (Chief Ministers) and it is their moral responsibility also. Even though the rules were formulated, they are not followed the politicians. Here Adiga raises the similar issue of contemporary politics. Such issues are the blots on the face of our democracy. As the politicians break the rules, it is the common people who suffer.

"*The White Tiger*" was about a man's quest for freedom. Balram, the protagonist in the novel, worked his way out of his low social caste (often referred to as "the Darkness") and overcame the social obstacles that limited his family in the past. Climbing up the social ladder, Balram sheds the weights and limits of his past and overcomes the social obstacles that keep him from living life to the fullest that he can. In the book, Balram talks about

how he was in a rooster coop and how he broke free from his coop.

The novel is somewhat of an account of his journey to finding his freedom in India's modern day capitalist society. Towards the beginning of the novel, Balram cites a poem from the Muslim poet Iqbal where he talks about slaves and says:

"They remain slaves because they can't see what is beautiful in this world." (2008: 40)

Balram sees himself embodying the poem and being the one who sees the world and takes it as he rises through the ranks of society, and in doing so finding his freedom. For every common man it's possible to eradicate caste system by being radical and intellectual.

The twenty - first century is the century of technology. It has proved a boon to humanity. Due to this, the world has shrunk. But side by side, the novelist makes us aware of its side effects and seems to convey a message, that even when the growth of science seems very charming and appealing, in fact it is not so. This advanced technology invites many fatal diseases such as cancer, impotency, mental aberrations and such:

"Then white people use mobile phones too much, and that is destroying their brains. It's a known fact. Mobile phones cause cancer in the brain and shrink your masculinity; the Japanese invented them to diminish the white man's brain and balls at the same time". (*The White Tiger*, 2008: 305)

The author suggests using land line instead of Mobile phone which damages our brains. In recent days, we could observe from personal lives that man may live without bread and butter but he cannot live without a mobile phone and internet. The technology may give us an artificial life and artificial identity.

Dharmen Shah one of the characters in *Last Man in Tower*, orders the people of vishram society to vacate in a span of time. He offers the flat value price to them. People are happily living there. Sha has lot of benefits by occupying the vishram society.

He wants to collapse it and would like to construct new towers for the richest

His latest plan is to buy out the Vishram society, a housing co-operative near slum-land south of Mumbai's airport, and to redevelop it into a stack of luxury apartments. Shah has already built a building called the Fountainhead as part of his booming construction empire in Mumbai, a city which "like a practitioner of yoga, was folding in on itself".

In the present scenario, people are busy by building houses and buying properties. They all try to build a cage for themselves. They might not be safe to live forever. Adiga explains that all the owners of the apartments are demanded to leave the place. Adiga conveys that rich people will not allow poor people to live happy life. Masterji and his neighbors struggled for survival and identify.

A retired teacher buys an apartment in vishram society, then the problems starts. He has to sell to it forcibly to Dharmen Sha, a builder in Mumbai. He was counseled by neighbours and children to vacate the flat instead of face a problem but Masterji did not change his decision.

Masterji's neighbor says:

"Boys Masterji was born, where he studied- these things don't matter now. What matters is this. He did what he believed to be right. He had a conscience. No matter what people said to him he never changed his mind, and never betrayed his conscience. He was free to the end" (*Last Man in Tower*, 416: 2011)

Only one man, Yogesh Murthy, retired teacher at the nearby school, has resisted the generous offer of the reputable... "It is a question of an individual's freedom to say Yes, No, or Go to hell" (*Last Man in Tower*, 2011:325)

In independent country, there is no independence. It has been given to certain sort of people. Individuals do not have rights to buy a house and live happily. Poor are always dominated by rich at all places.

Adiga reminds that Live-in relations are very casual in Indian cities. Parents, schools and colleges are unable to make their children human beings. Traditions has wiped away. The wave of modernism is affecting every sphere of life. But the changes are tangible on our social institutions. The norms of our century old institution such as marriage, family, education, economy and so on are being replaced.

As the novelist writes:

“Among young people today, it is a common thing for boy and girl to live without marriage, there is no sense of shame in the modern way of life, the modern, shame-free way of living counted for nothing”. (*Last Man in Tower*, 2011:22)

It's very surprise that same sex- marriages have started in the world and in some countries, it is legally approved. Like this the human identity in danger. The purpose of the human life, purpose of family would be break up in modern scenario.

**Modernity** is a way of life involving continual change of human conditions and humanity itself.

### Conclusion

During the course of his varied experiences, Balram learns a new morality which is the need for spilling a little blood on one's way to the top. He has gone through the all the circumstances of life. He struggled for his identity, moved from one place another. He observed corruption everywhere and all the departments. His aspiration was to get a rich identity. Balram did not maintain dual identity like politicians and some elite called Indians. He changed his identity one after one. By the end of the novel, we find Balram in a position that enables him to get away with murder. Balram aspiration is soaring higher. Balaram started an entrepreneurship by knowing his purpose of life and have become a rich man. Society has changed significantly through processes of modernization and these changes affected the way individual build up and develop their self- identities.

Masterji is the last man, entrenched in his commitment to resistance, secure in his belief in the power of cooperative living, impervious to bribes and threats alike. He was bought a flat with his own

efforts; he wants to live in that. He stood for the justice until the last breath of life. Araving explores through the character of Masterji that this country does not suit for the disciplined and sincere people like Masterji. While politicians, police, mafia joins hands in hands, we can't expect a developed country. Individual development is possible by having a modernity thought. Like Master ji many middle class people are unable to get justice, they are crushed under the rich of the society.

Modernization is meant to bring development in the society but because of the corruption that is prevalent in the society the poor are not getting the benefits and they struggle to find their identity. In *The White Tiger*, the individual struggle of Balram for Identity can be seen and in *Last Man in Tower*, the collective struggles of middle class people are visible. Cosmopolitanism is expected to see a better world. Balram struggled for cosmopolitan identity and Masterji struggled for his rights. Balram became successful to create his identity whereas Masterji lost his life in order to create his identity. According to cosmopolitan identity, all the human beings have a single identity in the world. Creating identity is a challenge in modernity, one may get it or one may loss it.

### References

1. Adiga, Aravind. 2008. *The White Tiger*, Harper Collins: New Delhi.
2. Adiga, Aravind. *Last Man in Tower*. New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2011. Print.
3. Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism*. London:John Murray, 1961.
4. Dalton and Klingemann: *The oxford book of political Behaviour*, Page 185-190.
5. Berman, Marshall. 2010. *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. London and Brooklyn: Verso. ISBN 978-1-84467-644-6
6. Robins, Peter ( 9 August 2008). "Review: The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga" *The Telegraph*. Archived from the original on 17 January 2010. Retrieved 2008-10-16.
7. Data Sateesh Gouda , T.V.Sekher, *Factors Leading to School Dropouts in India: An Analysis of National Family Health Survey-* ,

---

IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education, e-ISSN: 2320-7388,p-ISSN: 2320-737X Volume 4, Issue 6 Ver. III (Nov - Dec. 2014), PP 75-83 .

8. Shenk, Mary. (2007). *Dowry and Public Policy in Contemporary India. Human Nature*. 18. 242-263. 10.1007/s12110-007-9006-0.
-