



CORRUPTION BEHIND THE FACADE OF PURITY: A STUDY OF ARVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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ABSTRACT

"Honesty is the best policy" is a universally accepted ideal. However, there has been a tendency of difference between ideals and reality, word and world and facts and fiction in case of human beings. Every person, every society, every nation strive to achieve high ideals but history has been a witness that no human being, no society, no nation can be said to be perfect in all spheres of ideal life. One of the most considerable limitations of human beings is corruption. It is almost impossible to give a standard definition to corruption because corruption is not a concept that can be applied to any one sphere, for say to government. Corruption can be in administration, it can be in education, it can be in society and moreover it can be in psyche of a person.

Generally, Corruption refers to a dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery. However, it is in no sense limited to only powerful people. Even a student's act of copying in examination can be called corruption. Moreover, one can be corrupt in mind. Relationships which are made just for selfish ends are also the example of moral corruption.

The aim of present paper is to study Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* wherein corruption refers to dishonest and illegal practices prevailing in the politics, administration, judiciary, education and other important fields in India.

Keywords: Society, Corruption, law, literature

Arvind Adiga has been considered as one of the most significant voices of modern Indian English Literature. He, after like V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, has his roots of consciousness in Chennai, India. He is the winner of the most prestigious literary award the *Man Booker Prize* for his debut novel *The White Tiger* in the year 2008. He is one of the foremost of 21st century Indian novelists whose works have captivated the hearts of common readers as well as the scholars of literature. Generally, modern writers

deal with the subjects like materialism, terrorism, racism, pragmatism, corruption etc.

The modern Indian English novels present many facets of Indian culture, and these writers become the voice of the nation. However, the new age writers of India will probably find the task of presenting India's diversity and divisions existing in social, economic and cultural areas. India, one of the most diverse nations in the world is almost incomprehensible and cannot be limited within the

realms of a single book. That is why; a far too dangerous endeavour was undertaken by Aravind Adiga in his book *The White Tiger*; that was to become the voice of the poor, down trodden, the colossal underclass of the world's biggest democracy. Adiga's fiction quickly expanded covering almost every aspect of social life.

The novel *The White Tiger* reveals the binary nature of Indian culture, the *light* and the *Darkness* and how the caste system has been reduced to "men with Big bellies and men with the small Bellies," The novel presents two extreme dimensions of modern India, on the one side is the changing face of the high-tech and rich India, particularly in the emergence of Bangalore as the IT city and out-sourcing capital of the world and on the other side is the darker side of India, revealing the culture of caste and the snare of corruption.

It is a story of a poor village boy named Balram who becomes an entrepreneur in Bangalore after killing his master. The protagonist Balram exposes the injustice that pervades Indian society. The novel describes the narrator's rise from a servant to the position of his master. The novel draws our attention to the fact that the poor people, like Balram, too have some aspirations—to make it in life, to become rich and to lead a comfortable life.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* offers a commentary on the drawbacks of Indian system. The protagonist, Balram Halwai, seems to be the mouthpiece of Adiga, as he has highlighted the *Dark* side of India in such an exaggerated way that it seems that India is not a country worth living because of the corruption prevailing in almost every sphere of country. The political system is the most affected by corruption. The more corrupt a politician is the more chances he has to win.

In India no government is stable the result of which is frequent elections. Election is not a means of political education to the people; rather it has turned into a disease. Balram Halwai considers it the worst disease. He shares this with the Chinese Premier, "There are the three main disease of this country, sir: Typhoid, Cholera, and election fever. This last one is the worst; it makes people talk and talk about things that they have no say in" (82).

The ideal of democracy is justice from every angle but it is more abused than used for social welfare. Corruption has embraced it and injected bribery in its veins. It is crying and voicing the common people but its voice is silenced because of the money power, the magic of which enwraps electors, politicians, bureaucrats and judges. The people now have, two castes—"Men with Big Bellies, and Men with small Bellies" (54). Caste does not count. What counts is the size of the belly. Hence, here are only two destinies, "eat—or get eaten up" (54).

There is no end of bribery in India under this domestic system. The government officials have the pictures of Gandhi but are more interested not in the ideals of Gandhi but in Gandhi on the notes. Mr. Ashok is fed up with the political system in India. He states, "We are driving past Gandhi, after just having given a bribe to a minister. It's a fucking joke, isn't it" (115).

Not only the politicians but everybody indulges in bribery. When Balram has settled in Bangalore he continues to give bribery to the police. At one point he says:

There is no end of things in India, Mr. Jiabao, as Mr. Ashok so correctly used to say. You'll have to keep paying and paying the fuckers. But I complain about the police the way the rich complain, not the way the poor complain. (266)

In India, with the help of bribery, one can come out of the mess. Mukesh tells Mr. Ashok, "This is India, not America. There's always a way out here. I told you, we have someone here who works for us—Ramanathan. He's a good fixer" (100).

Adiga has used 'darkness' as a metaphor for corruption in India. The cars, the roads, the times, the people and the places that are involved in corruption had always been described as dark. While driving Mr. Ashok tries to bribe the government officials, Balram describes his journey, "I was taking my particular dark egg right into the heart of the city. To my left I saw the domes of President's house . . . when the air pollution is really bad, the building is completely blotted out from the road . . . It was

getting dark when the two brothers came out of the building (after bribing) . . . Mr. Ashok was dark and sullen when he got in" (112). Adiga gave a perfect picture of corrupt India.

Corrupt police, legal and administrative structure mark a dark spot of shining India. Police master minds the forced out confession to protect the rich men from the legal proceedings and get huge money in lieu of that. The hit and run case which legally belongs to Pinky is shifted to Balram:

The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind the bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters. We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul, and arse (145)." Even judges ignore to see forced confession, because they "are in racket too, they take their bribe, they ignore the discrepancy in the case. And life goes on" (145). The close nexus between criminals, police and media persons is also exposed.

Here Adiga has shown that how rich people use their chauffeurs. He says that drivers are made to write confessions of accidents they have not committed. They take their master's blame in order to save their masters. Balram has also done this in the novel, when his master's wife Pinky gets drunk and runs over a slum dwellers' child in the night, he has to sign a paper prepared by Mukesh that contained his confession of the crime.

Aravind Adiga writes candidly about Delhi Police. He narrates to Mr. Jiaboo, "The main thing to know about Delhi is that the roads are good and the people are bad. The police are totally rotten" (103). Balram says that if police see anyone without a seat belt, one has to bribe them a hundred rupees. Balram is a loyal son, so he works in a tea shop to help his father, but he also wants to make his life better and becomes a driver. Here he is also loyal towards his master, rather he worships his master but the reward which he gets from his master, changes his attitude of life and he learns a new morality of modern life. He is forced to take the obligation of the accident:

I, Balram Halwai, son of Vikram Halwai, of Laxmangarh Village in the district of Gaya,

do make the following statement of my own free will and intention: That I drove the car that hit an unidentified person, or persons, or person and object, on the night of January 23rd this year. That I then panicked and refused to fulfill my obligation to the injured party or parties by taking them to the nearest hospital emergency ward. That there were no occupant of the car at the time of the accident. That I was alone in the car, and alone responsible for all that happened. I swear by almighty God that I make this statement under no duress and instruction from no one. (143)

Here, Adiga has shown that police is also responsible to do so. It also does not care about the death of the poor people. This is the big tragedy of our India. As police does not bother to investigate the death of that poor child and Balram is saved in this way.

The novel *The White Tiger* demonstrates the nature and extent of corruption in Delhi. The story takes the readers in the mining business in Dhanbad and how the rich businessmen like Mr. Thakur Ramdev are earning millions of rupees by cheating the government of taxes. The businessmen, criminals, bureaucrats and politicians are all in the nexus making it an inevitable reality in public life. Balram, has, over a period of time, got an inside views of how the ruling class is mutually exploiting the wealth of the nation which should have served the causes of the poor Indians.

Neeru Tandon studying the theme of poverty in the 21st century Indian English novels comments that "Amid all the celebration of India's progress, Aravind Adiga's novels will perhaps provide a reminder to the wider world of how far India still has to come" (58).

However, in Santwana Haldar's opinion, "Aravind Adiga is accused of exaggerating India's poverty and corruption and of projecting a too dark picture of the areas marked as 'Darkness'" (66). According to Haldar, "Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* faces adverse criticism: the author is accused of selling an authentic picture of Indian poverty to

the Western market for coming into the limelight” (73). He says that it cannot be denied that the picture offered in the novel is real. Adiga presents the differences between the rich and the poor in Indian society. There are many instances in the novel which “may accuse the author of using India’s backwardness of self interest” (82).

To sum up, Adiga’s motive behind this severe criticism is to lash out the evils and reform the society. India is definitely inflicted by the problems he has brought to the world’s notice. Indian education system has a weak base in the rural region. The levels and quality of education being imparted deteriorates as we move from cities to villages. Corruption has weakened the roots of the nation and exists at all levels. Economic disparity has reached to alarming levels and continues to do so. And this economic disparity results in social inequality also. Now it is time that a policy of zero tolerance on corruption must be adopted in politics, administration and police. However, society is a sum total of human beings. One must start from itself. Each and every human being must strive for honest means of life. Honest people will create honest society and honest nation.

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