



SOCIAL WORRIES IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S *BOMBAY TIGER* AND ARAVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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Abstract

Literature is not only a reflection of society, but it also stocks a congenial bond with it as it uses an aesthetic approach to address issues regarding the fact and welfare of humanity. No essayist has grown up totally unexposed to their general surroundings, they know about the issues that plague people while they adapt to society and writing is the best instrument to feature these issues. Authors, for example, Kamala Markandaya and Aravind Adiga have contemplated the multicolored situation of India and talked about different social issues in their works by creating realistic characters that live in society and struggle through these social issues. Their novels portray the Indian socio-economic system, where individual lives are encircled by various social issues that reach out outside their ability to control. This paper presents the social worries featured by Kamala Markandaya and Aravind Adiga in their individual books *Bombay Tiger* and *The White Tiger*. The two writers see Indian society as one with different shades of malice wherein riches as well as human rights are inconsistently conveyed. Through their stories and profound examination, they articulate the Indian ideal world, and the burning issues in the present state of affairs, such as destitution, child labour, ineffective education system, single motherhood, corruption, and rustic mass migration.

Key-words – Aesthetic, migration, motherhood, social issues, socio- economic system.

Introduction

Kamala Markandaya and Aravind Adiga are both socially-conscious writers. Their novels *Bombay Tiger* and *The White Tiger* explore the root causes of social issues in India that must be eliminated before they loosen its foundation. Both novels are set in the metropolitan cities, Mumbai and Delhi, and reveal the ugly truth about so-called developed societies, where equal opportunities remain inaccessible for the marginalised sections of

society. As a socially-conscious writer, Markandaya observes the social lives of various strata and portrays their conflicts, sufferings, and aspirations. In addition, she delineates the predicament of working class, marginalised women in the race for industrialisation and modernisation. She has written eleven novels along with *Bombay Tiger*, which was posthumously published. Aravind Adiga is also a socially-conscious writer, similar to Markandaya, and is best known in the literary sphere for his Booker Prize-winning novel, *The White Tiger*. The

novel has been translated into more than sixteen languages and has featured in the New York Times bestseller list. The novel is a social criticism that focuses on the poverty and misery rampant in India under the guise of modernity, globalization, and economic growth; and it also provides examples to gross malpractices in Indian democracy.

Discussion

Markandaya's *Bombay Tiger* is set in the post-independence era of a society that claims to be technologically developed but remains gripped under the claws of various social issues that devour the lives of the marginalised people. Unlike her previous novels, it is set in the metropolitan city, Mumbai, and depicts the rapid economic growth of the city through the character Ganguli, who hails from a rural area, called Srirangapatnam, and makes his way to the fast-paced city, Mumbai. Securing a position among the influential industrialists in the city, Ganguli emerges as an emblem of the evolving nature of Mumbai's business world. His unstoppable success triggers the jealousy of his competitors, particularly that of Mr. Rao, who ventured into the business world at nearly the same time. Mr. Rao soon becomes eager to see Ganguli's empire collapse noting that "He visualized it somewhat hazily as a version of the domino theory, which his friend Eagleburger had complained to him, where the columns supporting Ganguli collapsed one after another" (*Bombay Tiger* 126).

Markandaya explores the stark realities of metropolitan cities, such as Mumbai, where people are rendered emotionally barren in the rat race for materialistic success. The author also depicts the miserable plight of the working class, who are destined to be trampled under the colossal weight of socialism. A notable incident in the novel highlights the thought process of successful tycoons like Ganguli towards the lower strata of society. Ganguli considers the lower strata of society a hurdle in his materialistic progress. His heart does not melt even when the homes of poor people are evacuated to procure land for setting up more industries and commercial places. Markandaya observes, "It was their home that were being pulled down, they came out squalling and cursing and it's

something, men, but women and kids. Ganguli just stood—it didn't break bother him, he was used to abuse, it didn't break any bone" (*BT* 27). However, instead of offering compensation to them, he feels embarrassed to be a part of this scenario. Therefore, through Ganguli's character, the author portrays the reluctance of those in power to help ease the problems faced by poor people. Ganguli shares his opinion with Dr. Pandey, claiming that everything can be achieved through power and oppression. He believes in the idea of "our greed their stupidity" (*BT* 17) and conducts his business with the same philosophy, which sometimes puts him at odds with Pandey, who believes that power is the sole source of corruption. However, he turns a deaf ear towards Pandey's views and gains enormous materialistic success, soon earning himself the name *Bombay Tiger*. Lekha's friend Manjula comments about Ganguli: "He was not ashamed of being more than a tiger would be ashamed of being hungry" (*BT* 100).

After discussing the capitalistic tendencies of rising tycoons, the novel elaborates the "grim side of industrialisation," wherein the issue of child labour slowly rears its head. (Hurd et al. 2). The factory owners are not concerned about the future of these children; they instead prefer them to be cheap and easily accessible. Through Neela's character, Markandaya portrays the pitiful situation of the working class which compels their children to work in factories for more than 10–12, hours a day with very low wages. Neela works at the textile factory to assist her family financially, and while working her hands are chopped off because of the failure of a machine. This incident causes Pandey to ponder, "What was a child doing, doing a man's job in a paper factory? He could hear his outrage, the luxury of anger European in its genesis and scope, which overrode even his native caution" (*BT* 137). Moreover, the author also highlights the issue of migration, where thousands of families, such as Neela's, migrate from their village to metropolitan cities with hopes of procuring better job opportunities. However, they eventually attain low-wage jobs at factories or similar places.

Markandaya also tackles gender inequality as a major form of inequality that is distinct from socio-economic inequality, and is prevalent even in

metropolitan cities, such as Mumbai, where people rejoice when a boy is born, whereas if a girl is born, there is little to no celebration. The novel elaborates the hypocritical nature of Indian society by highlighting the contrast between thoughts and actions regarding female independence. Ganguli's daughter Lekha is his only child, but when she was born, unlike most parents, Ganguli was not happy because he had always wanted a son who would eventually inherit his business. Krishna says, "At her birth Ganguli had been strictly neutral . . . Left with the girl, not even a boy who could be groomed to step into his shoes—since even he, Ganguli acknowledge, could not last forever—he planned to dump the burden as swiftly as possible" (BT 61). As time goes by and Lekha grows up, he restricts her public appearances to protect her from the evil eyes of those around her, except for few occasions. Growing up without a mother, Lekha always feels alone in the house. Krishna sympathises with her feelings of loneliness: "What home, though—only that big empty mansion. Because he was never there, he worked all hours, often burned the midnight oil . . ." (BT 63). However, when she decides to rent an apartment by herself to solidify her independence, Ganguli insists on getting her married instead. Her friend Manjula comments about her predicament, "He wanted to marry her off because of her wanting a place of her own. How absurd can you get?" (BT 73) Lekha represents an ambitious girl with luminous wings but every time she attempts to fly high, her wings are clipped down by the evil schemes of society. Through the character Shakuntala, Seshu's wife, the author laments the subservient role of women in the setup of a strict South Indian family. Throughout the novel, Shakuntala is subject to her husband's reluctant attitude and never retaliates despite his disregard for her feelings. Seshu is indifferent to her rights as his wife, whom he ". . . wedded, bedded, seeded and delivered . . ." (BT 79). The same silent tradition is followed by Ganguli's wife, who tolerates his dominance without a word of revolt, "The girl bore it all remarkably, without a word of protest . . ." (BT 30)

The novel peeps into the heart of Mumbai city, the hub of Bollywood movies, and uncovers the

"cosmetic layer" (Garg 24) of this city. Markandaya argues that this city has witnessed the trampled aspirations of many girls, who arrive with dreams of becoming film stars but fall prey to the evil schemes of some people. To escape her life of oppression, Lekha has always nurtured dreams of becoming a film actress, despite strong opposition from her father. Throughout the novel, she is illustrated as a naïve character who ignores people's bad deeds and intentions. Manjula remarks about Lekha that she is "straight in every way, not like that crook of her papa who picked and choose where to be straight, where to be criminal" (BT 73). Therefore, she is easily trapped by Sebastain's lies about casting her in his films.

The author tackles the issue of single motherhood and people's attitudes towards them in this novel. In the Indian social setting, pregnancy outside wedlock is considered a humiliation that is hurled upon the woman and, her family, which sometimes makes the woman's situation unbearable because she has to bear the responsibility of the child as well as the jibes of others in society. In this novel, Lekha falls prey to the false promises of Sebastian to cast her in his next film. Her life is jolted when she finds out about her pregnancy and Sebastain blames her for it, hoping she will have the child aborted instead of marrying her. To make matters worse, Sebastain and other people treat her pregnancy as if it is a business deal that needs to be fixed as soon as possible: "Though he did his best, called a meeting, they sat round discussing even a priest hauled in—as if it was some kind of business and decision as pending" (BT 212). Lekha's entire life seems to be ruined because everyone frowns over her tainted character. However, Sebastain easily escapes this situation with nobody questioning his character. Eventually, during her operation, she passes away, and the bud that could have bloomed into a beautiful flower withers away too early. Manjula comments on her death, "The Gods, or someone, gave her back all her beauty, everything that she had been drained away. It made difficult to accept she was dead" (BT 243).

Therefore, the novel takes up various social issues that are stuck to the roots of Indian society, and are gradually nibbling at its foundation. She

presents the social issues that are closely attached to human life through the lens of heart-rending realism. Her motive for writing about these issues is to attract readers' attention towards them and help them understand that social issues do not always refer to a situation that must be solved but sometimes, to a topic that must be discussed by every section of society.

Similarly, the next novel, *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga, also addresses the issues of progressing Indian society, such as corruption, poverty, class struggle, exploitation of the poor class, through the life struggles of the protagonist, Balram. The novel takes the readers through the protagonists' journey from the ". . . squalor and narrow streets of rural areas to the industrialised areas of Delhi and Bangalore" (Atal 65). The entire story revolves around Balram, who, in the course of his journey, is exposed to the injustice prevalent in the Indian society. Through the process of confronting social injustice, he learns the approach of flattery, which seems necessary to ascend the ladder of materialistic success.

The novel is written in the epistolary form, which consists of a series of letters written by Balram to the fictitious character, Chinese Premier Mr. Wen Jiabo, to help him learn the essential steps to become a successful tycoon. Through flashbacks, readers are introduced to Balram Halwai, also known as Munna, who is the narrator of the story and guides readers through his native village, Laxmangarh, thus highlighting the miserable situation of villagers in so-called developing countries like India. The author argues that although the country is growing on the economic front, still a vast number of citizens are grappling with exploitation at the hands of those with "big bellies" (WT 23). In his village, Laxmangarh, the poor suffer under the grip of brutal landlords, being forced to pay in one way or the other to attain permission for using basic facilities. This injustice raises questions regarding the validity of democracy in India. The author provides yet another proof of landlords' control over the lives of poor villagers in the novel. When the landlord's son is kidnapped by the Naxals, and he is unable to trace the whereabouts of his son, Balram recalls how the landlord vented all his

frustration and anger on the family of his son's caretaker. They were brutally beaten to death for a crime that they had not even committed. The author expresses his frustration at the present social scenario, where there is an unequal distribution of not only wealth but also human rights.

In *The White Tiger*, Adiga not only sheds light on the tyrannical system of capitalism but also on the traditional dowry system. Balram mentions an incident where his family had to procure a loan from the Stork, a landlord, to give a huge dowry at his cousin sister's wedding. Unable to return the money, Balram is forced to leave schooling to work at the landlord's estate where he is treated as a slave. Thus, to pay a huge amount of dowry, a brilliant student like Balram is deprived of education, and his family becomes slaves, with nobody worried about their loss. This incident leaves us feeling apprehensive about the institution of marriage, which is considered a source of joy and festivity but carries some social evils with it.

In the present novel, Adiga laments the wretched condition of government hospitals, where a multitude of patients die while waiting for doctors to tend to them, whereas doctors remain busy minting money through private practice. Balram describes the situation of government hospitals, explaining that a rich person would rather die than visit there: "A couple of Muslim men had spread a newspaper on the ground and were sitting on it. One of them had an open wound on his leg" (*The White Tiger* 48). Balram recalls his tragic experience, recounting how he was forced to wait for a doctor the entire day with his ailing father, but the doctor did not even visit the hospital, leaving his father to die of tuberculosis. Balram recalls his harrowing experience: "The ward boys made us clean up after father before we could remove the body. A goat came in and sniffed as we were mopping the blood off the floor" (WT 50).

Furthermore, the author provides a realistic description of the squalor and contaminated environment of villages, which is a catalyst for numerous diseases and problems, "Down the middle of the main road, families of pigs are sniffing through sewage—the upper body of each animal is

dry" (WT 20). One is shocked to know how despite several government schemes to help the poor children, the ground reality turns out to be diametrically opposite. Adiga shows his anguish over the malnutrition of the children in the village realistically: "Children—too lean and short for their age and with oversized heads from which vivid eyes shine, like the guilty conscience of the government of India" (WT 20). Although Balram is born in extreme poverty, he finds his way to the city after learning driving.

Similar to Markandaya, Adiga also discusses migration as an important social issue in India, wherein a mass of people take exodus from the rural landscape and head towards urban areas to earn a living. However, the tough city life sometimes leads them to exploitation at the hands of the upper class; or they become involved in criminal deeds. The author observes that this trend is spreading rapidly across the world. He says, "They were all headed from the darkness to Delhi. You'd think the whole world was migrating" (WT 111). In the present novel, Balram Halwai and Ram Prasad want to go to Delhi, naïvely believing that the city will provide plenty of opportunities for them to ascend the ladder of materialistic success. However, to Balram's utter dismay, the shadowy side of India extended after him, even in metropolitan cities, such as Delhi and Gurgaon (WT 115). After coming here, Balram begins working as a chauffeur and dreams of becoming a part of the "light of urban India." His eyes dazzle as he becomes increasingly aware of the enormous facilities and wealth around him, however, he knows the ground reality that he will never be able to get access into this world. The novel portrays that the caste system has been reduced to "Men with Big Bellies and Men with Small Bellies" (WT 23).

The protagonist emerges as the typical voice of the marginalised sections of society, who struggle to set aside the age-old slavery and exploitation. Although Balram works as a driver at Mr. Ashok's house, he is also expected to do household chores, such as cleaning, cooking, and even washing his master's feet at times. He does everything that his master orders him to do. In addition, his master pressurises him to take the blame for an accident that Pinky Madam caused while she was driving in a

drunken state. Balram is coerced to sign a confession stating that he was driving the car at the time of the accident and that he alone is responsible for everything that happened. To make matters worse, nobody is concerned about the fate of the poor child who was hit by Pinky's car and died on the road. Thus, Balram's story represents the tragic fate of several drivers, who are forcefully thrown into the jail for their masters' mistakes and clearly illustrate the power that rich people have over the lives of the less fortunate. In his letter to Jiabo, Balram asserts, "What I am describing to you here is what happens to drivers in Delhi every day sir" (WT 70).

The novel presents the monster of corruption that is crawling in every nook and corner of the country and affecting the politicians, tycoons, and landlords in the country. Balram elucidates the greedy thoughts of rich people by citing the example of Thakur Ramdev, who had continuously been stealing the wealth of the country by cheating the government of taxes. Consequently, the money that could ameliorate the situation of the poor class passes directly to these swindlers. Moreover, corrupt police as well as a corrupt legal and administrative structure marks another dark spot of shining India. The corruption does not end here because it affects the education system, and correspondingly, turns it into a hollow sham, wherein a teacher is more concerned with hoarding the money meant for school food and uniform instead of imparting quality education. Adiga shows that in the present scenario, no field has remained untouched from the shadow of corruption, thus resulting in the degraded situation of the poor class.

Page after page, the author holds up a mirror to society, exposing the rot beneath the "... shining advertisement of India" (Gagat 85). Through the course of the novel, Balram emerges as the voice of the downtrodden, metaphorically described as a "rooster coop" (WT 173). The author says that situation of the poor people in India is similar to that of the hens captivated in a rooster coop, where they are slaughtered one after another, while the rest stand in a queue, waiting for their turn instead of thinking about ways to run away. He laments, "They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel ... the

very same thing is one with human being in this country" (WT 173). Balram broods over his situation and concludes that this coop continues to exist, similar to a never-ending oppressive system, until someone revolts against it. Voicing his anger, frustration, and protest for the poor class, Balram finally decides to break the rooster coop. However, he is well aware of the consequences for taking this extreme step. He ponders, "Only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed—hunted, beaten and burned alive by the master can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being but a freak, a pervert of nature" (WT 177). By representing the suppressed voices of thousands of poverty-stricken people, Balram drives the conclusion that to fulfil his aspirations, he has to murder his master Ashok. Although he feels the pangs of his conscience, which hinders him from taking this extreme step, he also knows that failing to do this will lead his whole life into the pit of eternal darkness. In addition, his plan to murder Ashok is inspired by the huge stack of money that his master has collected to start a business. He is aware that somewhere down the line, the law may punish him; nevertheless, for him, a moment of freedom is better than an entire life of slavery. He proclaims, "I'll never say I made a mistake that night in Delhi when I slit my master's throat. I'll say that it was all worthwhile to know just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant" (WT 321).

In conclusion, *The White Tiger* is an engrossing novel that draws our attention towards various social issues, which we are all aware of but hesitate to acknowledge. Adiga depicts the suffering of poor class that is hidden behind the dazzling malls of big cities, which comprise the majority of the population but remains unacknowledged to a great extent. Adiga writes, "India has never been free. First, the Muslims, then the British bossed us around. In 1947 the British left, but only a moron would think we became free then" (WT 22). He also admits that society is changing tremendously for the better, but the lives of the poor are destined to end miserably, unless someone like Balram dares to take the bold step of murdering his master, and getting

into his shoes, thereby becoming a self-proclaimed tycoon.

Conclusion

In light of the above discussion, both the novels discussed in this paper deal with notable social issues, and taunt democracy by revealing the growing disparity between riches and extremely poverty-stricken mass of India. Both the writers carve out a society that is developing in its unique way, but is unable to free itself from the clutches of social evils that influence a considerable amount of people. Adiga presents the protagonist Balram's struggle through various social issues that "obstruct his ascendance up the ladder of prosperity" (Gupta 16), ultimately forcing him to murder his master. According to Thakur and Dave, "Adiga proved that a writer cannot change the society ... but his presentation or views can convince the reader or can change the people to change the social affairs (259). Similarly, *Bombay Tiger* examines the evolving front of the business world through the character of Ganguli, and analyses the rapidly developing society of Mumbai, which is still struggling to overcome social evils, such as child labour and poverty. In addition, it also explores the stark reality behind the glamorous world of cinema. Therefore, this paper explores the social issues raised by Adiga and Markandaya and highlights the social criticism laced in their depiction of a flawed mindset of certain people.

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