

**The White Tiger: An Exploration of the Inexplicable Angst of
Incredible India.**

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India, the land of wonders is also the land of sufferings. Beneath the veil of a developing nation, she weeps a lot inside. Numerous writers have dared to penetrate into the suffering psyche of India. For them, it was the Indian society, which proved to be the background. Mulk Raj Anand was the pioneer in this group who stood as the spokesman of the 'poor' during 1930s. He had a rare genius to explore the neglected psyche. In his *Untouchable* (1935), he introduces Bakha, a boy of eighteen, who is a scavenger and belongs to the outcaste from Hindu society. Munno the fourteen year old orphan boy in *Coolie* (1936) is also a representative of those who struggle to exist in this cruel and hostile society. Aravind Adiga also travelled through a similar path to that of Anand and tried to portray the underclass very authentically. His *The White Tiger* belongs to this genre of social realistic novels as it probes in to the wounded psyche of Balram Halwai, the protagonist.

India's progress is unquestionable. Adiga's text becomes a glowing tribute to India's progress. India has always been hailed as glorious, a land to which, even the West looks with admiration and at times with a prejudice. Many perceive India as a country that will supplant China in this century as the main Asian power. But this requires a new generation of Ideologists – more sincere, less attached to their outdated values and people who are more proud of their own culture and less subservient to the West.

India catches global attention in two ways – through 'India of Light' and 'India of Dark'. Adiga's *The White Tiger* depicts the eternal disparity between these two 'Indias'. 'India of Light' holds the attention with its access to education, health care, transportation facilities, electricity, running water, hope and justice, and its emergence as a supreme entrepreneurial power in the world by surpassing China. India has made rapid advancement in the field of science and technology, space, real estate, yoga, meditation, hotel and tourism industry, expansion of cities and mall culture etc. and these aspects make it a

unique country. Delhi, the capital of India, is adulated as the 'young America' in India. Ashok, the employer of Balram observes the shining India: "The way things are changing in India now, this place is going to be like America in ten years" (TWT 89). Bangalore city, the soul of India's technology and development is another epitome of India's changing face. Balram reflects on Bangalore:

When I drive down Houser Main Road, when I turn into Electronic city phase and see the companies go past, I can't tell you how exciting it is to me. General Electric, Dell, and Siemens—they're all here in Bangalore. And so many more are on their way. There is construction everywhere. Piles of mud everywhere .Piles of stones .Piles of bricks. (TWT 317)

Adiga being a contemporary Indian writer could not neglect the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, rural and urban, and the brutal reality of an economic system that allows a minority to prosper at the expense of the silent majority. Adiga's protagonist, Balram, is the strong voice of the underclass in which marginal farmers, landless laborers, jobless youth, poor auto rickshaw drivers, servants, prostitutes, beggars and unprivileged figures are included. Yet Balram, the son of Vikram Halwai, a rickshaw puller crosses all the barriers of yielding and becomes an entrepreneur. His transformation from Munna to Balram Halwai and then to 'The White Tiger', later to the 'Country Mouse' and finally to Ashok Sharma, the owner of White Tiger Drivers, underlines the blue print of the rise of the underclass. When Balram finishes his story of survival over seven nights to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, readers are introduced to the poverty of rural Bihar and the evil shadow of the feudal proprietors.

The rise of the underclass happens because of the country's polity, illiteracy, unemployment, caste and culture conflict, superstitious social taboos, dowry practices, economic disparity, zamindari system, corrupt education system, poor health services, and judicial working. These forces collectively perpetuate the underclass, who constitute the dark India. Zamindari practice is a powerful source of exploitation and subjection of underclass. Buffalo, Stork, Wild Boar, and Raven, the four landlords portrayed in the novel possess some peculiarities of appetite that had detected in them. Stork owned the river that flowed outside the village, and he took "a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman in the river, and a toll from every boat man who crossed the river" (TWT 24), to reach Laxmangarh. Wild

Boar, his brother owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangarh. Men who wanted to work on those lands, “had to bow down his feet, and touch the dust under his slippers, and agree to swallow his day wages” (TWT 25). The Raven owned the worst land, which was dry, rocky hillside around the fort, and he “took a cut from the goatherds who went up there to gaze with their flocks. If they didn’t have their money, he liked to dip his beak into their backsides, so they called him Raven” (TWT 25). Due to their exploitative tendencies, Adiga calls them “Animals” (TWT 25), who lived in high walled mansion, who owned wells and ponds and did not need to come out into the village except to feed. These landlords also align with regional political parties for their selfish motives.

The political system, which is supposed to make the country democratic, also contributes to the quandary. It creates undemocratic deeds in the Darkness. Political system and bureaucratic setup, according to the novel refers to the darkest area of our country which breed “rottenness and corruption” (TWT 50) in our society and hamper all developmental and welfare schemes. It restricts half of this country from achieving its potential. Bribery becomes a common hidden truth. Mukesh and Ashok, the sons of Stork, also bribe the ministers to settle income tax accounts. Election, through which India feels proud of its glorious democracy is always manipulated and the power transfers from one hand to another but common man’s fate remains unchanged. Adiga considers “typhoid, cholera and election fever are the three main diseases of this country and the last one the worst” (TWT 98). Voters discuss about the election helplessly as “eunuchs discussing the Kamasutra” (TWT98). Money bags, muscle power, police, are the various threats that suppress the underclass and assure the victory in the political game. Balram reports “I am India’s Most faithful voter, and I still have not seen inside of a voting booth” (TWT 102). This rotten system has created a new caste system, “men with Big Bellies, and men with Small Bellies” (TWT64).

Even though Balram was hailed as “The White Tiger, the creature that comes alone only once in a generation” (TWT 35), by the school inspector, his position as a half-baked fellow was quiet tragic, yet a turning point too. It was the cruelty of the dowry practice that moulds the destiny of the protagonist. In order to repay the money which was taken from Stork (to give dowry to Balram’s cousin Reena), he was compelled to stop his schooling and seek a job in a teashop and do every kind of menial jobs. But there he begins to nurse his dreams of escape. Longing for a proper education of the poor is reflected in Balram’s words. He says:

Me, and thousands of others in the country like me, are half baked, because we were never allowed to complete our schooling. Open our skulls, look in with a penlight, and you'll find an odd museum of ideas; sentences of history, mathematics remembered from school textbooks (no boy remembers his schooling like one who was taken out of school, let me assure you). (TWT10)

Balaram reflects the Dark consciousness of every citizen. So, as he sees the rich regions of Bangalore and Delhi, it never fascinates him, instead makes him think of the exploitations and suffering through which he passed through during his Darkness days. He was a constant witness who always wondered at the political eyewash and exploitation of the government policies for the poor. The life of the underclass becomes more miserable when corrupted and defunct education system operates in the society. In Laxmangarh, there is a typical school teacher called "Big Paan- and Spit Man" (TWT29), who goes to sleep by moon, and drinks toddy on his way to school and exploit the institution in every possible manner and gives legitimate excuse for it – "he hadn't been paid his salary in six months" (TWT 33). Truck, full of uniforms that government had sent to school is not issued to the children, "but a week later they turned up for sale in the village" (TWT 33). Balram could not forget his school master who sells the poor children's uniforms, rotis, daal, or pickles to fill his pocket. The whole education system is governed by the "crowd of thugs and idiots", which Adiga calls "jungle" (35). The caste concern of the secular country is exposed when Adiga presents Balram as a job seeker.

The real face of Darkness with its social taboos, rigid caste distinctions and culture conflict is reflected in Balram's journey to seek the job as a driver. Wherever he goes, he was rejected due to his caste. Man is known and recognized by his caste. The old driver of Stork asks Balram: "What caste are you?" (56). Similar question is asked by Stork: "Halwai..... What caste is that top or bottom?" (62). Ram Persad, the servant or first driver of Stork hides his identity because, the prejudiced landlord didn't like Muslims – he claimed to be a Hindu just to get a job and feed his starving family. But when the truth is revealed, he was sacked from the job.

The ever-cherished dream of the 'Subaltern' is to overpower the rich and reach at the top of the ladder. But even in the liquor shop what they see is the evil

discrimination between the rich and the poor. There are “Indian liquor and English liquor” (TWT 72), the former was for village boys and the latter was for the rich, which include “rum, whisky, beer, gin-anything English left behind” (73). The long line of the poor servants who struggle to get a rich bottle for their masters were a common and pathetic scene.

The apartments, teashops, book shops, and even prostitutes are quite different to rich and poor. In Delhi, when Ashok resides in an AC Room in the Bucking Harm Towers B-block, Balram spends his leisure time in the servants’ quarters, which presents two contrasting life styles. There, amidst the cockroaches, the 36,000,004 gods, the shopping malls, the brown envelops and the crippling traffic jams, Balram learns about the new India. Yet, the glorious sight of Delhi is not free from the pathetic figures from the darkness, who wanders along the street.

Balram’s journey from Laxmangarh to Dhanbad, then Delhi and finally to Bangalore endorses that, the socio-psychological conditions of the underclass remains unchanged. Though the cities provide ample opportunities of job, social behavior and comfort, psyche of the upper-class is identical everywhere whether it is landlord or politician, bureaucrat, upper caste people, industrialist or entrepreneur. Everywhere, the underclass is trapped in “Rooster Coop” (TWT173), and struggles to come out of the cage. Balaram’s is the conscience of underclass. Their anger, frustration, protest and revenge, ready to adopt a new moral code of conduct to succeed in life etc. are quiet visible in Balram. Murder of Ashok by Balram is the result of his deep-rooted frustration and bitter experiences of the polarities between the upper class and the lower class. His entire acts are nothing but a protest against the rich.

Circumstances and opportunities uplift Balram as a fortunate man. But in his “collective unconsciousness” Balram always identifies himself with those who suffer. Even though he is inside the “dark egg” (134) in Delhi, whenever he sees a beggar or poor man, the scene reminds him of his family. Amidst the wonders and luxury of the city life, Balram observes the multitude of thin, grimy people who are announcing their poverty and origin through their very appearances. Then, Balram could not help but thinking of his past and family. Inside the city, many of them suffer as such in Darkness. So he can’t neglect the call of his heart and thus he says, “So I was in some way out of the car too, even while I was driving it” (TWT138).

It is the pathetic plight of the underclass that, they are sinned against than sinning. Corrupt police and legal and administrative structure, constitute to the dark life of the shining India. Police masterminds use their power to protect the rich men from the legal proceedings and get huge amount of money as reward for that. The hit and run case, which is legally belongs to Pinky is shifted to Balram. He reflects:

The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind the bars because they are taking the blame for their goods, solid middle-class masters. We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul and arse. (TWT 169)

Even judges ignore to see forced confession, because they are in the racket too. They take their bribe, they ignore the discrepancies in the case and thus life goes on. But Balram's luck or his master's relation with such people also help him to escape from the case.

The close nexus between criminals, police, and media persons are also exposed in the novel. Prostitution is another dark area of India of light. In the big cities, due to poverty, most of the women are forced to adopt this profession. In Dhanbad, Delhi and Bangalore, there are red light areas, where one can negotiate a price with these women. The prize depends on "High class or low class? Virgin or non-virgin?" (227). In Delhi, rich people prefer "golden haired woman" (232). Forgery also involves in this racket and suppliers present women dyed in golden hair to snatch the maximum price. Other than the Nepali girls and Ukrainian students, the poor labourers from the village who are working in construction of mall also allow their woman for prostitution. Being a poor driver, Balram is cheated even by the prostitutes. When he pays for an attractive girl who is for the rich, he gets a girl who is moulded by hiding all her dark aspects.

Pathetic situation of the underclass follows the institutions that are supposed to give solace to them. The poor health services and non-implementation of government policies expose the rampant malpractices which collectively enhance miseries of the poor. In Laxmangarh, there were three foundation stones for hospitals, laid down by three different politicians, before or during the time of elections. Balram's father dies due to the lack of treatment and medical facilities. Medical services are shown as an object of political mockery and social stigma. The Lohia Universal Free Hospital inaugurated by the great socialist, where Balram's father dies is in a contract to the luxurious hospital where Stork is treated when he feels a pain in his stomach.

The hospital with its dirty atmosphere reflects the exact life of the poor. The post of the doctor is auctioned because there is good money in private service. The doctor who is present only in the register and extends his service to the private hospital is a symbol of the reversal of destiny and Balram's father, man with wounded legs and the girl who suffers jaundice, whom the readers see in the hospital, are embodiments of the play things of destiny.

The White Tiger is an exception. Hence, it can think and perform in an exceptional manner. When Balram becomes the owner of the White Tiger Motors, he attempts to uplift the poor around him. He protects his relative boy and saves the poor driver who creates an accident that causes the death of boy. His act of offering job to the relative of the dead is also his attempt to redeem the poor.

Though Balram admires Alexander the Great, Abraham Lincoln of America and Mao of China for their concern for the slaves, he never expects a redeemer of slaves in India. So he inspires the poor "the book of your revolution sits in the pit of your belly, young Indian, crap it out, and read" (304). Balram, the subaltern redeemed, prophesies "My humble prediction: in twenty years time it will be just as yellow man and the pyramid, and we'll rule the whole world" (305). Balram is quiet away from his fellow sufferers. He says that "I have woken up, and the rest of you are still sleeping, and this is the only difference between us" (315). He sees 'tomorrow' when others see 'today'. Most of the cherished ambition of Balram and Dark psyche as a whole is to live as 'a man'. Balram dreams: "I'll say it was all worthwhile to know, just for a day, just for one hour, just for a minute, what if me means not be a servant" (321).

Adiga has successfully highlighted the Dark psyche of the Indian society in The White Tiger. Through Balram Halwai, the representative of underclass, he brought home the idea that, in the journey of India's progress, role of the underclass is very important. He, similar to The Communist Manifesto (1848), pleads strongly for the classless society. Adiga's exploration of the dark areas of India can be taken positively to cure the sick image of India. The novel makes a prophesy that if the government and people focus on those areas of shortcomings and work sincerely, undoubtedly a new India will emerge with all its glory and elegance.

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