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Corruption as Responsible Factor for Poverty in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract:

Adiga has written the novel *The White Tiger* in the phase of his career when India was facing problems of corruption, moral depravity deceit. In the realistic portrayal of Indian society. He has canvassed to us a class of people where are social status are being determined by economic status. In his debut novel. *The White Tiger*, Adiga exposes the real but ugly face of India's heart of darkness, mainly the rural India, Indian political system and government machinery. Politicians and bureaucrats misappropriate public money. Politicians and bourgeoisie follow the colonialist tendencies of exploitative methods. Adiga points out the problems of corruption

facing by the people in India. *The White Tiger* expresses the power of the rich and their domination to the poor.

Keywords: Corruption, Poverty, Political system, Social status

Poverty is a curse in which the people cannot live without the basic requirements. Many Indian writers have voiced their concern for poor people of India who are bound to live in abject poverty. There are many writers like Charles Dickens, Mulk Raj Anand and Aravind Adiga whose works are testimony to the society and manifest the ground reality in more crude form. Charles Dickens was champion of raising voice against poverty, class mobility and social evils. Mulk Raj Anand discusses the issue of poverty through some powerful characters. In this way, Aravind Adiga explicitly catapulting strong views in its unique manner.

The White Tiger is a first novel of Aravind Adiga which brought him literary glory in the form of Man Booker Prize in 2008. In the novel poverty and corruption have been glorified in India through the novelized relationship between the protagonist of the novel Balram Halwai and his master Mr. Ashok Sharma. India's economic growth is rapidly increasing but the condition of the poor remains the same. The daily wages of working class like poor people, servants, drivers and cooks has only been raised marginally. Adiga in the words of Balram equates the miserable condition of the poor from chickens in a rooster coop. They compared it from chain of servitude. Election manifesto has been a device of encouraging voters of rural areas this closely resembles today's time and politics. But poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, lack of basic- facilities in countryside are still social realities of India. Adiga points out the problems of poor people from current scenario by citing example of mobile phones. Speaking of the basic needs of water Balram says:

‘The Election shows that the poor will not be ignored. The Darkness will not be silent. There is no water in our taps, and what do you people in Delhi give us? You give us mobile phones. Can a man drink a phone when he is thirsty? Women walk for miles every morning to find a bucket of clean...’ (Adiga 269).

India is world’s largest democracy. Yet the poor peoples live in miserable condition. Adiga portrays the crude reality of election period and political power of the poor in the name of development which exemplifies failure of Indian election system. Corruption exists at every quarter of our society. It undermines the importance of all social and moral values and causes social pollution. In *The White Tiger*, Adiga signifies covert aspects of political parties, blackmailing and corruption. Mr. Ashok visits Delhi to sort out the matter regarding tax of coal mines. The rich people go to Delhi to settle black money into white money while the poor people go to Delhi in search of better livelihood.

These poor bastards had come from the Darkness to Delhi to find some light- but they were still in the darkness. (138)

Political system and bureaucratic set up depicted in *The White Tiger* discuss the darkest areas in India which breed, “rottenness and corruption” (50) in the society. In *The White Tiger* most of the politicians are half-backed. The country is flooded with people like him. And our glorious parliamentary democracy has characters like him.

Adiga describes the crude form of corruption and exploitation which is hitting the country to its core. For Adiga authority is everything and authority established through money power. Poor health services and lack of implementation of government machinery which breeds blatant malpractices and increased the human predicament. In Laxmangarh, there were “three different foundation stones for a hospital, laid by three different politicians before three different elections” (47). However, Balram’s father passed due to medical negligence and lack of medicine. Medical services are being shown as political gimmick and social ostracism. The

socialist inaugurated Lohia Universal Free Hospital in the light of election result. There is no doctor in the hospital, doctor occasionally visits the hospital. The rooms of the hospital are not safe, Balram says:

‘It’s not safe in the rooms- that cat has tasted blood.’ 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. He invited us to sit with him and his friend. Kishan and I lowered Father onto the newspaper sheets. We waited there [...] The Muslim men kept adding newspapers to the ground, and the line of diseased eyes, raw wounds, and delirious mouths kept growing. (48-49)

Balram depicted the political corruptions in rural India. There was the Great Socialist who was considered as messiah of poor and work for their caused but he generated negative publicity for himself. He takes bribe to sell the vacant post of the physician in the local government hospital. “The going rate for this post is about four hundred thousand rupees these days” (49). Balram success depends on the bribe he offered to political institution. Balram lives in a country where everything is being proved by money, power and industry. No one is committed to righteousness and traditional values. His lines draw the scenario;

I am tomorrow. In terms of formal education, I may be somewhat lacking. I never finished school, to put it bluntly. Who cares! I haven’t read many books, but I’ve read all the ones that count. I know by heart the works of the four greatest poets of all time – Rumi, Iqbal, Mirza Ghalib, and a fourth fellow whose name I forget. I am a self-taught entrepreneur. (Adiga 6)

Politics is breeding ground of corruption in India. It is like irremediable diseases, as Balram says to Mr. Jiabao in the letter, "These are the three main diseases of this country sir: Typhoid, Cholera and election fever. This last one is the worst" (98). The politicians have permeated corruption all around in the country. When election comes, the leaders approach the common peoples in the name of growth and development but once they win, they forget

everything of their promises. The politicians of this country are morally corrupt. They are being funded by the bureaucrats at the time of election just to get their illegal works done. Politicians swindle the country in the name of being loyalist. There are many criminal cases against the politicians in this country. As Balram says:

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 moment. 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 account in a small beautiful country in Europe full of white people and black money. (97-98)

It is a great parody that the criminals contest elections in India. *In The White Tiger*, the Great Socialist dissembles to be loyalist but in fact he is corrupt and vicious person who is involved in criminal activities. Instead of that he is contesting the election. The voters of Laxmangarh discuss the election helplessly like “eunuchs discussing the Kama Sutra” (98). The fact that Balram says in *The White Tiger* “I am India’s most faithful voter, and I still have not seen the inside of a voting booth” (102). Ironically comments on the victory of power that is misused. It comments on the practice of corruption in the political game and its election too.

India has many such cities where the voters sell their votes either for money or a bottle of liquor. Balram gives the real picture of Election in India when he describes the elections in Laxmangarh.

I had to be eighteen. All of us in the tea shop had to be eighteen, the legal age to vote. There was an election coming up, and the tea shop owner had already sold us. He had sold our fingerprints – the inky fingerprints which the illiterate person makes on the ballot paper to

indicate his vote. I had overheard this from a customer. This was supposed to be a close election; he had got a good price for each one of us from the Great Socialist's party. (97)

The White Tiger, in the way, shows the short comings of the Indian Democracy and society in the form of rampant corruption, prevalence of injustice, misrule, maladministration, citizens being kept deprived of liberty and equality. This decayed system has given birth to new distinctions and classes. Adiga tells in the novel that in the ancient days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. Now just two castes remain: "Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat-or get eaten up" (64). These lines reverberate what Charles Darwin said in nineteenth century: "Survival of the fittest" where people who do not have the belly to resist like Balram's father falls all the way to the mud, and ultimately has to live the miserable life of a rickshaw- puller. His body tells the story of his by gone days and sufferings:

A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. *Ours* are different. My father's spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use in villages to pull water from wells; the clavicle curved around his neck in high relief, like a dog's collar; cuts and nicks and scars, like little whip marks in his flesh, ran down his chest and waist, reaching down below his hipbones into his buttocks. The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen. (26-27)

Adiga depicts India as an emerging entrepreneurial power in the world. India is portrayed as a country which is globally known for making stupendous advancement in the field of science and technology, space, transportation, hotel industry, tourism, real estate, expansion of cities, mall culture, industries and outsourcing. Despite all this success and progress, India's image on dealing with corruption is not good with Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), which places it at 78 Rank out of 180 nations in the year 2018.

Even in an interview Adiga's comment about Indian politics is as follows:

The fact that a lot of Indians have very little political freedom, especially in the north of India. That elections are rigged in large parts of the north Indian state of Bihar, and they're also accompanied by violence. There's like thirty-five killings during every election. If you were a poor man, you'd have to pick China over India any day because your kids have a better chance of being nourished if you're poor. Your wife is more likely to survive childbirth. You're likely to live longer. There are so many ways in which India's system fails horribly (Sawhney 2008).

To conclude it, we can say that Aravind Adiga is an optimistic writer who tries to make his fellowmen recognize the world we live in. Adiga, the contemporary writer, elucidates the major topics like poverty, corruption, caste and class discrimination. The burden of the novel *The White Tiger* is portrayal of shining India and people who live in abject poverty. The writing of Adiga brings out the touch of Dickensian feel. Adiga follows the Charles Dickens views which creates the characters of cruelties and completes the novel with a happy ending. Adiga is accused of exaggerating India's poverty and corruption and of projecting a too dark picture of the area marked as 'Darkness'. Before Indians can break free of the culture of corruption which is so deeply embedded in their nation's social and political structure, the people must express their will to change. It might signify someone like Balram who finds another way to succeed or perhaps it means providing people like him with other ways to succeed.

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