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Social Issues in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*: An Investigation

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Abstract

The present research paper effectively highlights the social issues in the novel. The novel is described through letters by Balram Halwai to the Premier of China. The Premier of China will shortly be visiting India. The White Tiger is all about insignificant awareness in which the protagonist, Balram narrates his story of life. Balram, the protagonist of the novel, is a representative voice of lower class symbolically depicted as rooster coop. Balram, the White Tiger has no friends. He is labeled as deprived class hero. He is struggling to liberate from age old slavery and misuse. The protagonist was raised in a large, poor family from the caste of Halwai. Balram's village is conquered and exploited by the four landlords. Balram becomes class aware. He journeys from rags to riches on account of his education. Education plays a role as an instrument of liberation for him. Arvind Adiga has represented the struggle of deprived class for liberation from social restrictions imposed on deprived class by upper class. He correctly gives a message that the marginal are motionless waiting for their betterment and rights

Keywords: dominance; education; inferiority; suppression; underclass

Indian English literature has constantly been dynamically taking challenges in the country building procedure. The country focused on strengthening the nation from inside by fighting against its own evils in the economic and political life as well as social and cultural issues. The novel, *The White Tiger* deals with larger social issues in light of promising worldwide development. The novel powerfully highlights the broadening negated between the poor and rich. On one hand, the poor shops in dirty areas, lives in fallow basements, resides in slums neighbouring every superior area



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and have to convince themselves with facade prostitutes while on the other side the rich shop in standout malls, live in generous apartments, have offices in skyscraper houses characterizing industrial development and could bargain real flaxen prostitutes.

Aravind Adiga is winner of Booker Prize Award. His first novel, *The White Tiger*, won the Man Booker Prize for fiction in 2008. He was born in 1974 in Chennai and grew up in Mangalore (India). His education was at Magdalen College, Oxford and Columbia University in New York. He has written three novels entitled *The White Tiger*, *Between the Assassinations* and *Last Man in Tower*. His first novel focuses the challenges in the early free Indian villages with special reference to social issues. The second one focuses on the stories of the Assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the last one focuses on the story of the struggle and resist for real estate in Mumbai. He has written four short stories also entitled *The Sultan's Battery*, *Smack*, *Last Christmas in Bandra* and *The Elephant*.

Aravind Adiga is one of the contemporary Indian novelists who took the current day challenges against the economic, social and cultural exploitation, political deficiency and the spiritual suppression of the poor that is taking place in India. He illustrates both the subjugated, unhappy depressed place and the exceedingly developed cities such as Bangalore and Delhi. As common the insignificant are kept at the edge and border of the power centre. They for all time suffer for their every day meal. In the current milieu marginality is used to explain social issues, where underprivileged people fight to achieve access to resources and full involvement in the social life. Underprivileged people are generally suppressed, discriminated and often ignored on the basis of religion, ethnicity, education, race, gender, occupation and social status by the society.

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the protagonist, Balram narrates his story of life to Mr. Wen Jiabao, Premier of China, in 7 nights from his desk, which is a revolt of a underprivileged against the mainstream of the society, culture and social values, prepared by the power centre. Vikram Halwai's son Balram, the protagonist of the novel, who works as a rickshaw puller and born in dark corner of India, in Laxmangarh of Gaya district. He was born under the domination and depressed circumstances of his family. His native was under the domination of Land Lords. He forecasts the bright future for two nations by writing the following lines:

“.....speaks directly between the two contenders for
the future for the world in the century of the yellow
and the brown man. You and Me” (*The White Tiger* 5).

Balram has a considerable faith in his exceptional quality, thinking of himself as a “White Tiger” not joined to conservative ethics or social expectations. He was forced to leave school early to work, in spite of his intelligence. On the other hand, he continued educating himself by eavesdropping on discussion. As he improved himself through the echelons of the underclass, eventually being hired as a driver for Mr. Ashok and the Stork, he developed a severe bitterness against the upper classes, which finally prompted him to murder Mr. Ashok. His other assumed name includes Munna, the White Tiger, and Ashok Sharma.

Balram, the protagonist was raised in a large, poor family from the caste of Halwai. Balram's village is conquered and exploited by the four landlords known as the Stork, the Wild Boar, the Raven and the Buffalo. Balram's mother died when he was young and his father is a rickshaw puller. Balram was in the beginning named to simply as “Munna,” since his family hadn't bothered to name him. He didn't have another name until his schoolteacher called him Balram. In the deprived society young boy are given no proper names. And, neither the father nor the mother is concerned about his name. Balram says:



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“mother’s very ill.....she lies in bed and spews blood. She’s got no time to name and father is a rickshaw puller...he’s got no big loan from Stork who in lieu of that demanded all members of the family to work for him (*The White Tiger* 38).

Balram proved himself consistent and brilliant. One day Balram was appreciated by the school inspector in front of his teachers and fellow students being titled a White Tiger. This is what he obtains his symbolic pen-name which signifies totally a new side and his new place at school and outside too. Unluckily, Balram is pulled out of the school and forced to crush coal and wipe tables at tea shop where he gets better education. He started educate himself by eavesdropping on the conversations of tea shop customers. In this context it is to be noted that various children in India are not permitted to complete their school education due to caste and cultural conflict, economic inequality, poverty, dowry practice, superstitions, zamindari system and so many other social evils. All over the novel Balram performs and presents like accordingly. His voyage as a poor boy to a successful entrepreneur symbolizes a voyage from darkness to the light. As he once says:

The journey from Darkness to the Light is not smooth.....only a White Tiger can do this (*The White Tiger*, 250).

Balram becomes class aware. He journeys from rags to riches on account of his education. Education plays a role as an instrument of liberation for him. He learns from the people, from the world and from his experience as well as from experiences of others. When he moves to the multinational, he is unexpectedly conscious that this city is also divided; it is the capital of two different Indias. Balram thinks that there are two types of India- first is the light of urban coastal



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India and the second is impoverished darkness of the rural inner continent India. A mechanism that he calls the rooster coop traps the Indian underclass in a continuous state of servitude. It involves both a state of mind enforced by the underclass on itself and the purposeful methods used by the upper class.

“India is two countries into one, India of Light and an India of Darkness. Ocean brings light to my county. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well off but the river brings darkness to India” (*The White Tiger* 14).

Balram explains at length the corrupt nature of politics in the darkness. A politician known as the great socialist controls the darkness through election fraud. The family of Stork, involved in shady business dealings in the coal industry, must repeatedly bribe the great socialist to make sure their success. It is necessary to know class system in India in order to understand the factual picture of the society portrayed in the novel. Class system is a social, economic system under which definite persons identified as lower class are underprivileged of social and economic upliftment and forced to perform services as laborers. As far as class system is concerned the novel has focused most dominant and wide-ranging in describing lower class who are noticed by aloneness and unfriendliness, lack and deficiency, subordination and suppression, the silence and resignation, the neglect and resilience. They are subordinated in terms of gender, class, caste, and age. *The White Tiger* focuses the various evils systems like unemployment, poverty, corruption, election, misuse of welfare schemes and education system. The novel explores the terrible actuality of Indian society in the recent years. The novel, *The White Tiger* set in the milieu of economic explosion in India that has escorted in huge gap between the haves and have not.



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Balam, the protagonist of the novel, is a representative voice of lower class symbolically depicted as rooster coop. Balam, the White Tiger has no friends. He is labeled as deprived class hero. The protagonist is struggling to liberate from age old slavery and misuse. His rise from a poor village boy to successful industrialist is not at all simple but hard line struggle to liberate from vicious circle of class system. His struggle starts at very young age when his father borrows loan from village landlord for the marriage of his cousin sister Reena. As a result all members of the family work for the landlord, Stork. While working in tea shop, Balam nourishes a vision of escape from the socioeconomic imprisonment. He always feels that he is not made for all this. He is deeply encouraged by his father's lines. His father says:

“My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey.
All I want is that one of my mines – at least one
should live like a man” (*The White Tiger* 46).

Balam and his brother go in search of job from Laxamangarah (Gaya) to Delhi as a part of liberation from this slavery. Here in the city Balam's re-education of life starts. Balam learns driving and manages to offer his service as chauffeur to Stork's daughter in law Pinky Madam and son Ashok Shrama. He makes utilize of each opportunity to prove his love and honesty to get favor of his master. His honesty and respect for Pinky Madam and Ashok can simply be understood by his own words. He says:

“I would drive whenever they wanted, as faithfully as
the servant God Hanuman carried about his master and
mistress, Ram and Sita” (*The White Tiger*, 173-174).

Although, he was honest and clever in his activities, but, never been satisfied with his earnings. The major concern of their life was shelter, food and individuality. Balam faced so many misfortunes in his life so decide not to die like his father in the government hospital waiting for



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the doctor. Now even in the current it isn't simple for a low born to obtain work in India simply. Balram disqualified from various land lords and employers. His big opportunity comes when a rich Landlord appoints him as a chauffeur. Balram obtains a chance to be free from the restrictions of custom, caste and cultural inferiority. Mr. Ashok who is also the offspring of the same soil where Balram was born and raised, but both becomes two opposite poles of the equal society. Mr. Ashok, educated, rich and significant person of in the society on the other hand, Balram, least educated, poor, and insignificant person. Once Mr. Ashok says:

“His eyes seemed full of wonder! How could two such contrasting specimens of humanity be produced by the same soil, sunlight and water” (*The White Tiger* 80)?

Poverty results in untruthfulness, corruption, dishonesty and dissolute behaviour. The lack of money turns everybody bad in this novel. Adiga gives the readers many examples in this novel how human beings respond to the devoid situation of money. He performs the last rites for the family members after coming to Bangalore so that they may not come in his dreams. He prays for all his nephews, aunts, nieces, cousins and even the buffalo. He thinks the soul of his granny Kusum and brother Kishan and prays to let him live in peace. He is very emotional and social. Therefore, when he read the story of the murder of seventeen members of the family in a north Indian village makes him throw the newspaper in so disgust that he stops reading the newspaper for a few months.

Arvind Adiga has represented the struggle of deprived class for liberation from social restrictions imposed on deprived class by upper class. Balram Halwai, the protagonist is the envoy of the altering psychological make-up of the Indian deprived class. And, this deprived class is no longer satisfied to spend their lives away in deficiency and poverty but want opportunities to walk ahead



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in the race of life and to escape the longstanding class hierarchy. The protagonist's irritation, disapproval, anger, protest, extravagance in criminal acts, drinking, snatching all opportunities signify innate aggravation and its reaction against the class system or social evils. Arvind Adiga effectively highlights the social issues in the novel and brought home the suggestion that in the story of India's development role of the underclass is vital. As a communist manifesto, he appeals strongly for the unrestricted and classless society.

Thus, Arvind Adiga raises the voice of self-conscious aspects of the society and advises dominants to be careful through the novel, *The White Tiger*. He raises successfully the issues related marginal's social circumstances. He correctly gives a message that the marginal are motionless waiting for their betterment and rights. If the repression and dominance may prolong they can take turn to become criminals.

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