



**THE PORTRAYAL OF THE DEPRIVED AND EXPLOITED
IN *THE WHITE TIGER* BY ARAVIND ADIGA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how Aravind Adiga's novel, The White Tiger, portrays the lives of impoverished and exploited individuals in contemporary India. The central character, Balram Halwai, is a man from the privileged class who struggles against social inequality, corruption, and the supremacy of the rich. Through his story, the author reveals how the poor are deprived of opportunities, forced into servitude. The study shows that Balram's journey symbolises the harsh realities behind India's development. The author has tried to give a voice to those who are frequently unnoticed. The central theme of the novel is to show how exploitation shapes a person's life, and another important thing is how the desire for freedom can lead to both courage and violence.

INTRODUCTION:

Aravind Adiga is an Indian author and journalist. He is well known for his first novel, *The White Tiger*, which was published in March 2008. The Novel won the prestigious Man Booker Prize in later year. He was the fourth Indian author to win this prize. Adiga born in 1974 in Chennai, India. He brought up in Mangalore and later on studied at Columbia University and the University of Oxford. His writing often focuses on themes of social discriminations, corruption, and the impact of globalization on India's lower classes.

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The White Tiger is a sarcastic assessment of modern India. It explores the deep gap between the rich and the poor through the story of Balram Halwai. He is the protagonist of the novel, a driver who upsurges from poverty by committing murder. The novel reveals the humiliating effects of class discrepancy and corruption. Following the success of his debut novel, Adiga published other prominent works such as *Between the Assassinations* published in 2009. It is a collection of interrelated short stories set in the fictional town of Kittur. Other novel is *Last Man in Tower* published in 2011; this examines the moral confusions faced by inhabitants of a Mumbai apartment seized by a developer. Adiga's works are characterized by insightful and sharp social critique, highlighting the struggles of the marginalized and the moral complications of modern urban life in India.

The selected novel probes into the harsh realities of class discriminations, economic differences, and along with this persistent corruption in India's socio-political system. In *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga narrates the story of Balram Halwai. He is a poor villager from Laxmangarh, who rises from poverty to become a wealthy entrepreneur in Bangalore, but he gains the position by unethical way. The novel is written in epistolary form, structured in a series of letters Balram written to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao. While writing the letters he recounts his own journey from "a slave in the Darkness" to "the free man in the Light."

In the beginning, of the course of the novel, Balram's left his job of a worker in tea shop and become a driver of the wealthy family in Delhi. In the city, he becomes aware of the corruption and discrimination is deeply rooted in Indian society. Frustrated by his enslavement, mistreatment and exploitation, one day Balram kills his employer, Ashok. He stole a large sum of money and fled to Bangalore. He started a taxi business there, using corruption to prosper in India's new economy. The novel highlights Balram's moral degradation, exposing the deep-rooted issues of class discrimination and systemic corruption in modern India. The novel depicts the structured exploitation of the lower class in a fastly modernizing yet extremely uneven society. Through the role of protagonist, Balram Halwai, the author criticizes the Indian caste system. At the same time, it focuses on the widening rift between the rich and the poor people of India. By doing so, he exposed the desensitizing effects of capitalism. The present research paper tries to explore the portrayal of the underprivileged and oppressed people of the lower classes in *The White Tiger*. He had focused on the socio-economic issues, power politics, and power dynamics, as well as individual agency within an oppressive structure.

Deprivation

Adiga's novel, *The White Tiger* is set in such a society where the gap between the wealthy and poor is sheer; it was truly symbolized by Balram's references to the "Light" and the "Darkness." He writes, "India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of



Darkness” (Adiga 12). The “Darkness” here embodies the rural, backward, underprivileged areas where illiteracy, poverty, and corruption are common, and the poor people are at the mercy of rich landlords, selfish politicians, and the elite class. Laxmangarh, the birthplace of Balram, shows this wretched situation.

The reality is that Balram’s family is trapped in a bad cycle of poverty and servitude. In the novel, Balram described the landlords as the “Four Animals” such as the Buffalo, the Stork, the Wild Boar, and the Raven. This metaphor embodies the tyrannical system, which is draining wealth from the villagers and leaving them bankrupt. Balram’s father was a rickshaw puller; he worked hard and tirelessly but died in a government hospital due to negligence. It is a severe reminder of the government’s failure to care for the underprivileged. Here, Balram writes, “My father’s spine was a knotted rope, the result of a lifetime of bending” (Adiga 27). This utterance emphasises the extreme physical hard work imposed on the poor in systemic exploitation.

Class Division and the Exploitation of Poor

The central concern of the novel is the rigid class structure that controls life in India. The few number of rich people controls power, wealth, and opportunities in society. Instead, the majority of the poor are fated to lives of slavery. Balram was hired as a chauffeur by the rich man, Ashok, for himself and his family. He becomes deeply aware of the divide between rich and poor due to this discrimination and mistreatment by his owner. He learned that the rich people live in a “different world” where their needs are ranked and preferred, and the poor class exists merely to serve and work for them. Adiga writes, “The dreams of the rich, and the dreams of the poor—they never overlap, do they?” (Adiga 254).

The exploitation of labour is vividly described in the novel, in the form of a master-servant relationship between Balram and Ashok’s family. The servants are disgraced as tools for the comfort and ease of the wealthy. The novel emphasizes how the rich class systematically mistreats the poor, demeaning them to just labourers without any rights or dignity as human beings. In one incident, Balram expresses his position of being a driver: “A driver in India must be like a coiled cobra...waiting. Waiting for his employer’s voice, for his employer’s touch on the steering wheel, waiting for the small instructions to change his life” (Adiga 157). These expressions of Balram demonstrate that servility and exploitation are inherent in the role of a servant.

The Rooster Coop

The most powerful metaphor in *The White Tiger* is the “Rooster Coop,” which is entrapment. Balram uses it to describe the psychological and social habit that keeps India’s underclass in their place. He explains, “The greatest thing to come out of this country...is the Rooster

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Coop. The trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy” (Adiga 175). This metaphor highlights how the poor are trapped in a cycle of exploitation, where their loyalty and submission ensure the continued dominance of the rich.

The Rooster Coop represents the psychological aspect of exploitation, as the poor are habituated to accept their fate without opposition. Balram remarks that even though the servants witness their own kind being “slaughtered” daily, they never attempt to escape. They are, he says, “caught in the Rooster Coop, with the coop’s blinders on” (Adiga 147). This metaphor condenses the idea that the poor peoples are physically exploited as well as mentally imprisoned, unable to imagine a different life.

Corruption and the Betrayal of Morality

Adiga’s novel discloses the persistent corruption that continues the exploitation of the deprived. Politicians, police officers, and businessmen manage the system to their advantage, while the poor remain marginalised. Balram’s life is shaped by this corruption from an early age. He remarks, “Everywhere in this country, in every state, rich men are pissing on poor men” (Adiga 64), emphasising the widespread abuse of power.

Balram’s own progress to success is marked by his decision to reject the moral values that have kept him and his kind obedient. To escape from his position in what he called the Rooster Coop, he decided to betray his master, Ashok, and adopted the same ruthless strategies of the very system he seeks to relieve. His decision to murder Ashok is an act of revolt, at the same time it reflects the degrading influence of the socio-economic structure. Balram defends his actions by claiming, “I had no choice but to break out of the coop” (Adiga 276).

In short, the novel suggests that in this dishonest world, success is not achieved through honesty and hard work but through exploitation and moral compromise. Balram’s upsurge to entrepreneurship is symbolic of this critique. He reflects on the corrupt nature of society, stating, “A White Tiger keeps no friends. It’s too dangerous” (Adiga 254). His journey exposes the hollow nature of individual liberty in a world dominated by discrimination.

Individual Agency and the Quest for Freedom

The White Tiger not only focuses on systemic exploitation of the poor class, but also emphasises the individual’s journey. Balram’s progress from a poor villager to a wealthy entrepreneur is motivated by his willpower to escape from his class restraints. But he achieved success at a great moral cost. Balram’s growth is not a victory over oppression but an imitation of the very exploitation that trapped him.



Balam's story highlights the paradox of freedom in the novel. His desire for liberation leads him to commit murder, which raises moral questions about the nature of liberation in a corrupt society. Adiga criticizes the capitalist system by giving the example of Balam, looking for escape from exploitation, he becomes an exploiter himself. He muses, "I've switched sides: I'm one of those who cannot be caught in India" (Adiga 302).

Balam's success questions the validity of meritocratic success in a society. His success is not the result of talent or honest hard work but rather his inclination to involve in the very corruption that continues the exploitation of the poor. Adiga's assessment of this system is clear: "The moment you recognize what is beautiful in this world, you stop being a slave" (Adiga 273). Though he got recognition, Balam cannot escape the system.

CONCLUSION

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* offers a deep observation of the exploitation and deprivation experienced by India's poor class. Through the character of Balram Halwai, the novel highlights the planned discriminations, the corrupt power structures, and the psychological mindsets that continue exploitation. The depiction of the underprivileged class is not only limited to economic poverty but encompasses a broader sense of dehumanization and moral deterioration.

The White Tiger criticizes a capitalist system that ranks wealth and success over humanity and justice. It is the core of the novel. The novel shows how deprived are trapped, by both external forces and their own internal sense of helplessness. Balram's eventual rise to power seems victory over exploitation, finally it reveals the void nature of freedom in a deeply corrupt and unequal world.

Adiga's representation of the deprived and exploited in *The White Tiger* is a powerful reminder of the need for systemic change in the fight for social and economic justice. The novel challenges readers to oppose the inequalities of the world where the prosperity of the few is based on the suffering of the many.

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