

Rural Depiction in Aravind Adiga`s novel *The White Tiger*

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Abstract: This paper entitled `Rural Depiction in Aravind Adiga`s novel *The White Tiger* depicts various aspects of a typical Indian village like education system, cultural values, zamindari system etc. The novelist shows how the protagonist, Balram Halwai did struggle to live a good life. Also shows how Balram makes difference between village life and life in a big city. The novel describes the positive and negative changes in post independent Indian villages. Through this novel the author wants to throw light on the life of the poor and downtrodden people and also shows how they are crushed under the heels of the ignorance, poverty and exploitation.

Keywords: Rural depiction, Downtrodden, Cultural Values, Ignorance, Poverty, Exploitation

1. INTRODUCTION

Booker award winner Aravind Adiga was born on 23 October, 1974 in Madras. He has written four novels, `The White Tiger`, `Between the Assassination`, `Last Man in Tower` and `Selection Day`. Today Aravind Adiga is the great name in the galaxy of the modern English novelists. His greatness is recognized through the English speaking world through his conspicuous recognition by the Booker`s prize that he received in 2008 for his work, *The White Tiger*.

There are a number of novelists who write in the contemporary world such as Chetan Bhagat, Amit Kumar, Anita Nair, Kiran Desai, Manju Kapur, Jhumpa Lehri who raise the issues prevalent in present day society.

Adiga is studied especially as a novelist of 21st century, his novels consider to be more attractive for the youth. The youth of contemporary society more or less have declared a revolt against the social and moral values.

The White Tiger is developed through a plot containing a series of letters. These letters are written by the hero of the novel, Balram Halwai to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao who is on a visit to India. In the letters, Balram recounts his fall of poverty and crime. It is a self-reflective novel, which throws light on a man`s journey from darkness to light India and ignorance to knowledge. The central theme of the novel is that the uneducated or powerless people are exploited or crushed under the heels of powerful people. The novel also depicts that rich get richer and poor get poorer.

The novel starts with the monologue of the main character Balram Halwai, who is self-made or self-taught entrepreneur. Balram Halwai, a car driver whose father was a rickshaw-puller had begun his journey from murdering his employer. Balram had nothing in the beginning but his intelligence made him successful entrepreneur. He comes to Delhi from a village named Laxmangarh, a remote area of Gaya. It is the mystic place where the Mother Ganga emancipates the lives of people and also the place where people forget to give names to their children. In the novel, the protagonist gets his name Balram Halwai from his Government School teacher instead of his parents. In the rural areas, poor people are busy in making both ends meet they don`t think it important to give a fantastic name to their children. His real name was Munna given by his parents. His teacher remarks:

“Munna ? That`s not real name

He was right it just means boy” (13).

Like many villages in India, Laxmangarh the village of the protagonist is just far away from advancement, repaired roads, lights, sewage system and many other basic facilities. Educational institutions are the temples of teaching and learning where one gets knowledge and strength to face the harsh realities of life.

But the school of Laxmangarh is quite opposite. Balram's teacher always chews paan and sleeps in the class. The money of world's largest scheme 'Midday Meal Scheme' is stolen and government supplied free uniforms for poor students are sold in the neighbouring villages. These social evils are committed by the teachers who are considered to be the ideals of the society. As the protagonist remarks:

“ There was supposed to be free food at my school a government programme gave every boy three rotis, yellow daal, and pickles at lunchtime. But we never ever saw rotis, or yellow daal, or pickles, and everyone knew why: the school teacher had stolen our lunch money. The teacher had a legitimate excuse to steal the money –he said he hadn't been paid his salary in six months” (32).

Here in this village, the electricity poles are defunct, water taps are broken children are too weak and short for their age and with oversized heads. The novelist describes the inside house activities of Balram's house in his own words:

“Once you walk into the house, you will see- if any of them are still living, after what I did – the women working in the courtyard. My aunts and cousins and kusum, my granny. One of them preparing the meal for the buffalo; one winnowing rice; one squatting down, looking through the scalp of another woman, squeezing the ticks to death between her fingers”(20).

Such kind of scenes could be seen in every Indian village of that time. India was developing in the medical facilities but the condition of the government hospitals especially in villages were still miserable. In Laxmangarh medical facilities are not available for anyone.

There is no hospital in Laxmangarh .In one hospital across the river Where Balram and his brother Kishan go for the treatment of their father, the scene is very pathetic. The Protagonist describes that there were three goats sitting on the steps of the large and faded white building .The glass of the window was broken; a cat was staring out at them from one window. The beds had metal springs sticking out of them.

People who were sitting on the newspaper and waiting for the doctor. Both brothers were also waiting for the doctor and facing the bitter reality. At last his father died in the lack of treatment.

After Independence, in Indian villages a majority of uneducated people either joined the tea shops or became drivers in big cities. Balram also joins a tea shop with his brother and sleeps on the road. He decides not to die like his father in the government hospital. As Balram was born in low caste, he expelled from landlords and employers. Everyone who comes to know about his caste shows doubts and makes fun of him. Even his master who is teaches him driving asks him about his caste and puts a question mark on his learning. The old driver said ,

‘What caste are you?’

‘Halwai’.

‘Sweet-Makers,’ the old driver said, shaking his head.

‘That's what you people do. You make sweets. How can you learn to drive?’ He pointed his hookah at the live coals. ‘That's like getting coals to make ice for you. Mastering a car’- he moved the stick of an invisible gearbox-‘it is like taming a wild stallion –only a boy from the warrior castes can manage that. You need to have aggression in your blood. Muslims, Rajputs, Sikhs, - they are fighters, they can become drivers. You think sweet – makers can last long in fourth gear?’(56)

In this way we see that Balram is questioned for his caste. Hiring by rich landlords, he gets a chance to get free from the shackles of caste, creed and cultural inferiority. Mr. Ashok was born on the same soil where Balram was born but both become two opposite poles of the same society one is rich, educated, and an important person of the society, whereas (Balram) is poor, least educated and less important. According to B.R Ambedkar, all are equal and one should be discriminated on the basis of castism. The caste system in India has been studied with three perspectives: ideological, social- anthropological and sociological. The ideologists have viewed caste from the scriptural point of view, social anthropologists from the cultural point of view and sociologists from the stratification point of view in Ambedkar social ideology in the society. B.R. Ambedkar was a noted jurist, the chief architect of Indian constitution. His goal of writings and speeches leads to the development of social, economical and political history of India.

Unemployment is also an issue in rural areas of India. There is no job in the villages. They have to depend on their fields and fields solely on rain. They have to sit in the tea shops sitting lazily as they have given up the fight. The desire of becoming a government employee like Vijay, Balram heard the rich men's conversation while doing his work in the tea shop. Somehow Balram learns driving. He is hired by a Delhi based rich businessman Ashok, who is a politician as well as a chauffeur. As Balram drives his master and his wife to the shopping mall, he becomes aware of the sources of immense wealth and opportunity all around him. This awareness compels him to think over the status of the master and servant.

Munna heralds war and conflict between the rich and the poor. Here the novelist propels the theory of Marxism. The Marxist Theory of social history initially emerged from the cauldron of social consciousness in the Nineteenth century. It was the product of a period of turbulent social change fuelled by new sciences, new technologies and new political institutions. According to the Marxist view it is the economic struggle for power between the ruling class and the working class, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

The story of Balram shifts from Bangalore and Laxmangarh village to Delhi, the capital of India as the novelist again focuses on economic divides. Delhi is viewed very closely by Balram, a rustic driver. Globalization and urbanization has arrived big time but this progress is cultivated by the hard labour and exploitation of the poor.

Thus in his novel Aravind Adiga gives a graphic realistic minute analysis of Indian society. His analysis leads to the conclusion that in today's India, there are only two castes in India: rich and poor.

In the novel *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga represents socio-economic realities of Modern India based on the rural villages. It has identified how the landlordism, low standard schools, unhygienic hospitals, and corruption in police, political leaders etc. have been impeding the growth and development of the nation and degenerating the human values of the society. Adiga rightly gives a message that the marginal or rural people are still waiting for their rights and betterment. If the suppression and domination may continue they can take turn to become criminals.

We see the other important element in the novel *The White Tiger* is social realism. The term 'realism' was coined for the first time by *Champfleury's Le Realism*. It hasn't acquired any specific meaning and always tugged with terms like materialism or 'local colour'. A productive writer always sees all the background and the life with an intrusive mind and always seeks his raw material in them that will feed his creative genius. Realists admitted the Aristotelian dictum that man is a social animal. They always opened their eyes and mind to their surroundings and placed man and his environment as the central theme of their work. Aravind Adiga depicts the social reality by using various characters in the novel. The purpose of his entire writing is to discover then describe and convey the truth of life. Aravind Adiga focuses his attention more on characters rather than the plot and delineates them by sinking deep into their psyche and showing their agony, anger, dissatisfaction and frustration. All characters in the novel play important role. There are some characters that depict some realities of Indian villages like; Vijay a mimic character, who changes according to the environment for getting more benefits from landlords and from society. The four landlords named-The Buffalo, The Stork, The Wild Boar and The Raven represent the past Indian tradition. They give harsh punishments to those who don't follow them. Mangoose plays an important role in Munna's life who always instructs his son Ashok. All the time, he orders to Munna and forbids him to do the things that the drivers do in the city. The Granny of Munna here represents the caring nature of an Indian mother who writes letters to Munna sometimes for reminding him to send money and sometimes for offering marriage proposal to Munna. The school master represents corruption in India. Ram Persad; number one driver in Mangoose family represents unemployment in India because of unemployment he does the job of driver in the guise of typical Hindu but in reality he is Muslim. In India many things can happen; a Muslim can become Hindu and a poor man can become a rich entrepreneur. Kishan, the elder brother of Munna represents the responsibilities of a father. He takes care of Munna and helps him to learn to drive. All these characters depict rural India where the villagers face the harsh realities. On the other hand Pinky madam and, Mr. Ashok represent the sophisticated culture of America. Madam Pinky doesn't like the Indian city life where she cannot drive herself as she used to do in America. Here nobody takes care of traffic rules, so Mr. Ashok forbids her to drive. There are many more reasons that Madam Pinky doesn't want to live in India. She insists and sometimes fights with Ashok to go back to America. The main protagonist always describes the darkness in the letters that he writes to Mr. Jiabo.

Thus we can say that Aravind Adiga presents the social realism through each and every character of his novel.

By highlighting these social and economic issues, Aravind Adiga highlights the same problems in present day context which put obstacles in the way of its development. The novelist conveys a message that it is high time we

should tackle these serious issues in a serious manner or else they would take the shape of monsters. As Chengappa remarks:

“There are big issues to tackle: put the economy back on the growth path, ensure that there is enough food, clothing, drinking, water, shelter, healthcare and education facilities for the have –nots, take to secure the nation against external and internal threat and keep our citizens safe, be generous and kind to weak and needy and tough and unsparing to the wicked and the crooked.”

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