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ARAVIND ADIGA'S THE WHITE TIGER: THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

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Abstract:

India is the world's greatest democracy and a developing country. India is considered as the cradle of civilization. It has rich literary heritage which is reflected in folklore, folktales, and other available literature in different languages of India. 'The White Tiger' is the debut novel by Indian English author Aravind Adiga. It was published in 2008 and won the Man Booker prize in the same year. He is an Indian journalist and the author. He is the fourth Indian born author to win the prize after Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran Desai. Aravind Adiga was born in Madras on 23rd October 1974 to Dr. K. Madhava Adiga and Usha Adiga. The novel studies the contrasts between India's rise as a modern global economy and the main character comes from crushing rural poverty. The novel is about the transformation of a man from poor to rich. The rural life represents 'Darkness' and the urban life represents 'Light'. The village boy is transformed into a self-confident and economically strong entrepreneur. The novel depicts the story of the transforming India.

Keywords: *Identity, Freedom, Transformation, Rural, Urban, Poverty, Injustice, etc.*

The White Tiger is an epistolary novel. It begins with the protagonist Balram writing a letter to the Chinese premier Jiabao because Balram hears that Jiabao is arriving to Bangalore. Balram narrates his life in a letter, written in seven consecutive nights, explains how he, the son of a rickshaw puller, escaped a life of servitude for becoming a successful entrepreneur. The innocent village boy Balram fights for his freedom and social identity. Adiga also explores cultural conflict, Indian society, poverty, injustice, transformation etc. in this novel.

This research paper attempts to study the search for identity in Aravind Adiga's novel 'The White Tiger'. The novel is a story of a poor boy who has to discontinue his education due to his poverty and becomes a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. Balram has decided to transform from the darkness to the light. In this novel, Adiga has depicted the rural life and urban life in India. Rural life represents Indian culture and the urban life represents foreign culture. The novel contrasts between India's rise as a modern global economy and the lead protagonist, Balram, who comes from crushing rural poverty. "At a time when India is going through great changes and with China is likely to inherit the world from the west, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society (Indian). That's what I'm trying to do-it is not an attack on the country, it's about the greater process of self-examinations" (Bhakt, 121). Adiga explained that, "the criticism by writers like Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens of the 19th century helped England and France become better societies" (Bhakt, 121).

Adiga speaks about suppression and exploitation of various sections of Indian society. In explaining the Rooster Coop, Balram studies the devotion of servants and their controlled perception, "Every day, on the roads of Delhi some characters are driving an empty car with a black suitcase sitting on the back seat. Inside the suitcase is a million, two million rupees more money than the chauffeur will



see in his lifetime. If he took the money he could go to America, Australia, anywhere, and start a new life. Yet he takes that suitcase where his master wants” (Adiga, *TWT*, 174).

He then focuses light on the common behaviour of all rich or the upper class people who exploit the poor, ill treat them. Adiga thinks that one has to take risk in life to break this coop, “...Only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed, hunted, beaten, and burned alive by masters- can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature (Adiga, *TWT*, 175). Balram eloquently puts forth his philosophy, “Let animals live like animals; let humans live like humans. That’s my whole philosophy in a sentence” (Adiga, *TWT*, 237).

Here, the author displays the attitude of Balram is like the White Tiger which is different from other animals and it is dangerous too. Balram wants to live an independent life like the White Tiger. The novel intensely epitomizes the spreading void between the rich and the poor. On the one side, the rich shop in malls, stay in extravagant apartment while on the other side the poor shop in grimy areas, resides in basements, and lives in slums. Balram is from the poor class. Poor people migrate to cities for their better future life. Adiga’s description of Rooster Coop is a real representation of what happens in India. Adiga says that there is a chicken market where hundreds of roosters are mercilessly killed. Adiga explains, “There people were building homes for the rich, but they lived in tents covered with blue tarpaulin sheets, and partitioned into lanes by lines of sewage. It was even worse than Laxmangarh....The slum ended in an open sewer- a small river of black water went sluggishly past me, bubbles sparkling in it and...Two children were splashing about in the black water” (Adiga, *TWT*, 260).

In this novel, the protagonist Balram represents the true picture of Indian society. He is recounting his whole voyage from a small village named Laxmangarh to the IT City Bangalore. He is an intelligent but poor who has to discontinue his studies due to poverty and family circumstances. Balram gets a job as a chauffeur for a corrupted businessman Ashok at Delhi. He was many times humiliated by his master and family. Inspire of that, they tried to frame Balram as a murderer for that he was asked to sign declaration declaring that he has killed a child while driving in a drunken situation. The pressure enables him to kill his master and escape with the money of his bags. He was held for bribing a politician. He finds no other way for making him safe. Then, he started a taxi company at Bangalore and became a successful and prosperous entrepreneur.

Balram lives in the fictional village of Laxmangarh, a community deep in the ‘Darkness’ of rural India. He is the son of a rikshaw puller, his family is too poor that he has to finish school, and instead of it he has to work in a teashop, breaking coals and wiping tables. Through these experiences, Balram learns much about the world and later states that the streets of India provided him with all the education he needed. He gets an opportunity to go to Delhi through a job as Chauffer. As he drives his master and his family goes to shopping malls, and call centers, Balram becomes increasingly aware of immense wealth and opportunity all around him, while knowing that he will never be able to gain access to that world. Throughout the novel, Adiga has tried to contrast the rural and the urban India into two parts. Balram Said, “Please, understand Your Excellency, that India is two countries in one; an India of light and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well off. But the river brings darkness to India-the black river” (Adiga, *TWT*, 12).

This is Balram’s vision of two India. One part of the India of Darkness was Laxmangarh, the fictional village where the protagonist Balram was born and spent his childhood. This novel is about a compelling, angry, and darkly humorous man’s journey from Indian village life to an entrepreneur city life. Balram never turned back. He was annoyed with society. He thinks that the poor man in our country is half-backed and he compared them with chickens kept in the Rooster Coop. how Balram came out of this Rooster Coop and how the quest for freedom made him to face the difficult situation that involves murder, cheating, bribery and stealing are the major themes of the book. Balram is

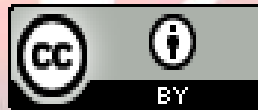


considered as the white tiger which symbolizes power, freedom, and individuality. He is the one who got out of the darkness and found his way into the light.

To sum up, 'The White Tiger' is a fascinating novel by Aravind Adiga. Adiga has focused on the life of Balram who comes from rural poverty and becomes a successful entrepreneur in the IT city Bangalore. It presents Balram's journey to search for his identity and freedom in modern day capitalist society. The novel reflects how our economic system today creates socio-economic gap that create a big division in society. It limits opportunity, social, mobility, health and other rights and pleasures that should be given to all.

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