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Organized By

Department of English in collaboration with

Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University Nanded

On

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Editor : **Asst. Prof. Atish Akade**

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:: Editor ::

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SOCIO-CULTURAL DEPICTION IN ARVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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ABSTRACT:

The current research paper is an attempt to explore how Arvind Adiga in his novel *The White Tiger* depicts the social and cultural conflict in Indian society. The novel is in the form of epistolary novel, a series of letters written over a period of seven nights, in which the protagonist, Balram writing a letter to the Chinese Premier Jiabao who plans to visit Bangalore on a fact-finding mission about the entrepreneurial spirit of the country. He is the character stands for every poor people in India struggling for better future. Story of Balram is a symbol of new India. It focuses on the ill practices, social discrimination and exploitation prevailing in India. It criticizes social, cultural conflicts like social inequalities, oppression, poverty, westernization, untouchability, injustice based on caste, religion and class etc. The novel is the journey of the protagonist, Balram, from the village Laxmangarh to the metropolitan city Bangalore. Indirectly, Adiga suggests reforms in social, economic and political system by eradicating individual vices, social evils and cultural conflicts.

KEYWORDS: cultural conflict, social inequalities, oppression, westernization,

The English novel in India generally classified into pre-independence and post-independence period. The novelists of pre-independence period mainly focused Gandhism and nationalism in their works. It is mostly seen that they mainly wrote about various social problems, customs and traditions, rites and rituals, poverty and illiteracy, east-west meetings and spreading patriotic ideas. The novelists of post-independence reflect various socio-cultural issues like individual problems, industrialization, urbanization, globalization and modernization. Literary creation and human society have shared relationship to each other. Writers create an ideal society with social concern in order to get rid of all the predicaments and acquire advancement and betterment in the life of people. Many renowned novelists including Arvind Adiga represented the present scenario of rural and urban life of India by depicting the social disorder, cultural dominance, identity and western influence.

The present paper attempts to investigate the social and cultural aspects in the novel *The White Tiger*. The story of the novel can be analyzed as the social and cultural encounters that Balram faces. The readers along with the protagonist of the novel brush with the cultural diversity and social inequality in India. Singh elaborates about the book as

The novel gives the detailed accounts of the Indian society- rural as well as urban and its various facets. Laxmangarh, Gaya, Dhanbad, Delhi and Bangalore are generic, in fact they represent the portrait of India. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, caste and culture conflict, superstition, dowry practice, economic disparity, Zamindari system and exploitation of marginal farmers and landless labourers, rise of Naxalism, corrupt education system, poor health services..... which largely forms the Dark image of India (Singh 102).

Economic growth of India has been increasing constantly but the poor people of India remain in the same position. This is the main theme of Arvind Adiga's debut novel, *The White Tiger* for which he was awarded the Man Booker Prize in 2008. It is an epistolary novel mainly belong from the state Bihar in India, Nepal and Bangladesh. The poor people work as drivers, cook, domestic helper, gardeners, construction workers, full-time workers to fulfill all the requirements of their masters. Arvind Adiga has depicted a realistic picture of rural and urban life. He throws light on the political, economic, social disturbances affect the poor people. The novel is in the form of epistolary novel, a series of letters written over a period of seven nights, in which the protagonist, Balram writing a letter to the Chinese Premier Jiabao who plans to visit Bangalore on a fact-finding mission about the entrepreneurial spirit of the country. Balram Halwai narrates his life in a letter, written in seven consecutive nights, explains how he, the son of rickshaw puller from a small village, Laxmangarh becomes a successful entrepreneur to the IT city, Bangalore. This journey of Balram from a weak and oppressed village boy to a wealthy entrepreneur has several social and cultural dimensions that change his outlook and his understanding of the complex Indian society.

Balram Halwai's village, Laxmangarh, in Bihar is adversely affected by poverty. He is an intelligent student, named as a 'rare white tiger' by the school inspector. Unfortunately, he was forced to discontinue his education because of his poor family circumstances. He put to work in a tea shop to repay their family debts, incurred for his sister's marriage. He was trapped in the brutal cycle of exploitation. But Balram declares that he would not stay as a slave and would make his life beautiful. Anupama Shenoy states it in her research paper as

Below the thin veneer of a so called booming, growing economy lies the reality of a struggling surviving India in which beats the hearts of millions of aspirational Indians who possess a strong will and aspiration to emerge out of the hell hole into a better world, where humans can live like humans and animals can live like animals (Shenoy 317).

Balram is the white tiger, a unique species, who is observant and clever and desires to shine like the rich class of the cities. Adiga tried to contrast the rural and the urban India into two parts. He writes:

India is two countries in one: an India of Light and an India of Darkness.... (Adiga 14).

Laxmangad, the village where Balram, the protagonist, was born, represent the Darkness. However, since his childhood Balram seems to hate the life of poverty and struggles to improve his status in search of a better future. The two sides of India are such a contrast that any person coming from Darkness to Light, will get a social and cultural encounter. The India of Light is very developed and adopted western culture while India of Darkness is full of dirt, ignorance and poverty. At the beginning of the novel, Adiga raises the issue of language.

Neither you nor I speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English (Adiga 3)

In the first chapter, Adiga explains about English language. English language is important to maintain our social status as well as it has become a demand of our day-to-day life. One can not deny that language is the best tool to hold the minds of the people. The western industrialized nations are regulating the social and economic progress of the whole world. Developed countries of the world set the cultural values and standardized the civilizations. The whole world is becoming a common cultural hub, same kind of fashion, literature, technical products and same kind of cosmopolitan culture is manufactured, bought and sold. Pinky madam likes the free culture of America. Consequently, Ashok, Pinky and Balram shifts to Gurgaon to fulfill the desire of Pinky madam to

live freely. Adiga depicts about the people, half-baked Indians, who love to follow western culture without having sufficient knowledge about it.

Balram becomes a driver to the corrupted landlord 'the Stork' alias Ramdev in nearby city of Dhanbad. He gets a chance to go to Delhi with his master Ashok, landlord's son and his wife Pinky. But Balram is totally disappointed to see the inhuman behaviours of the rich people and decides to release him from his slavery existence. Balram's master and his family used to humiliate him. He realized the influence of money and wishes to become rich. He kills his master Ashok and steals the money. He escapes to Bangalore and starts his own taxi services and becomes a great entrepreneur.

The White Tiger tells the social injustice of modern India. The novel is the torch light in the darkness where the writer ventures the millions who live in undesirable circumstances. S. Senthilkumar quotes Neeru Tondon's remark, the words of Michael Portillo who comments about the novel *The White Tiger* as,

It changed my view of certain things like what is real India and what is the nature of poverty.... For many of us this was entirely new territory, the dark side of India.... It's a book that gains from dealing with very important social issues, the divisions between rich and poor and the impossibility of the poor escaping from their lot in India (Senthilkumar 4051).

The White Tiger represents socio-economic realities of modern India. Adiga beautifully brings out the business of media through the character of Gururaj Kamath, a journalist. He describes the fact that how the reality is suppressed by Gururaj who is on a mission to discover the truth involved in an accident. The author reveals here the fact that media is a means of doing business and nothing more than that and how rich people with the power of money and social status is able to manipulate both police and judicial system. Once Ashok's wife, Pinky killed a child while she was driving a car in a drunken condition. After that incident, Ashok and his family started to frame Balram as a murderer and forced him to sign a statement stating that it was, he who killed the child while driving. Balram had no other way but to escape his life. Arvind Adiga sheds light on the issue that if the bosses do something and mistakenly get involved in an accident, their drivers are blamed and they are sacrificed and sent to jail. It is stated in the novel as

In Delhi, almost every if not all jails are filled with drivers in the jails only because they were blamed by their rich bosses. We have left the villages but the masters still own us, bodies, souls and arse. Yes, that's right: we all live in one of the world's greatest democracies (Adiga 79).

These stresses made Balram to kill his corrupted master Ashok. Then he came to Bangalore with stolen money and started a taxi company. Adiga reflects here the mindset of the protagonist, Balram, is like the White Tiger which is totally different from another animal and is very dangerous. The novel represents the issues of democratic environment and the imperfect administrative approach. The poor people are kept away from true independence and social equality. Widespread discrimination and corruption are found in most of the parts of India. This imperfect mechanism gives rise to inequality and classes.

In post-independence, British have made space for politicians to take over. The most powerful and hungry were successful in suppressing the poor. Arvind Adiga depicts the real picture of the election, about the political power of poor people of India and the true reason behind the failure of India's election system. In the novel, it is seen that the stork is taken the fingerprints of all the poor people no matter whether they have attended the age of eighteen or not. These poor people are sold to the social activists for earning huge amount of money. They are forced to work for this

social activist until the election period is over. The poor people of India used to vote for the social activist dreaming of some better life which is never fulfilled. Adiga throws light on how venereal disease is an offensive in the society through the character of Ratnakar Shetty, father of three daughters. People do not go to hospitals for fear of criticism in society and suffer in the process. He works day and night to save money for the daughter's dowry. He accepts the profession of fake sexologist to fulfill the needs of the family in order to earn more money. To his horror, he discovers that the groom he has fixed as the match of his eldest daughter suffers from a sexually transmitted disease. Ratnakar suggest him to go to a doctor but the young man refuses to go for fear of social discrimination. It suggests the moral, social and cultural degradation in the country.

Adiga stated all problems of the poor people of India in the modern economy through this novel. Balram lost his father as he did not have enough money for the treatment of his father, suffering from tuberculosis. He describes how the poor people are treated in Government hospitals and how they die without proper treatment and lack of doctors. He reflects how the doctors appointed at Government hospitals take a bribe under the influence of social activist and appoint unqualified doctors. Adiga exposes Hindu-Muslim disharmony in Delhi through the life of a Muslim boy, Mohammad. Mohammad forced to change his name as Ram to get a job from a Hindu family. Adiga reveals many such incidents to bring forward the hostile relationship and religious conflict between these two communities.

The White Tiger is a story of the underprivileged society of India. These poor people are compelled to struggle for basic necessities like food and shelter. The severe lack of money heightened the issues and misery of rural and urban underprivileged society and has created darkness in their life. Lack of education, colonial practices in the name of Zamindari, unkind access to employability, reservation, extreme caste discrimination, cultural clashes, administrative system, financial discrimination, corruption, superstitions, education and health system, natural calamities like flood, mall culture and many such things are responsible for the misery of the poor people. The lack of money has resulted Balram and his brother affected the same turn towards the big cities to run away from unemployment. Balram is disgraced by each and every boss. He is the character stands for every poor people in India struggling for better future. Story of Balram is a symbol of new India.

To conclude *The White Tiger* is an awesome depiction of social and cultural conflicts in the name of rich and poor. It focuses on the ill practices, social discrimination and exploitation prevailing in India. It criticizes social, cultural conflicts like social inequalities, oppression, poverty, westernization, untouchability, injustice based on caste, religion and class etc. The novel is the journey of the protagonist, Balram, from the village Laxmangarh to the metropolitan city Bangalore crossing numerous phases of his life. His journey terminates in a new social identity for himself. Adiga beautifully portrays Indian society adopting western influence and the rural India is not able to manage with this change. Indirectly, Adiga suggests reforms in social, economic and political system by eradicating individual vices, social evils and cultural conflicts. This novel has varied issues covered under one umbrella.

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