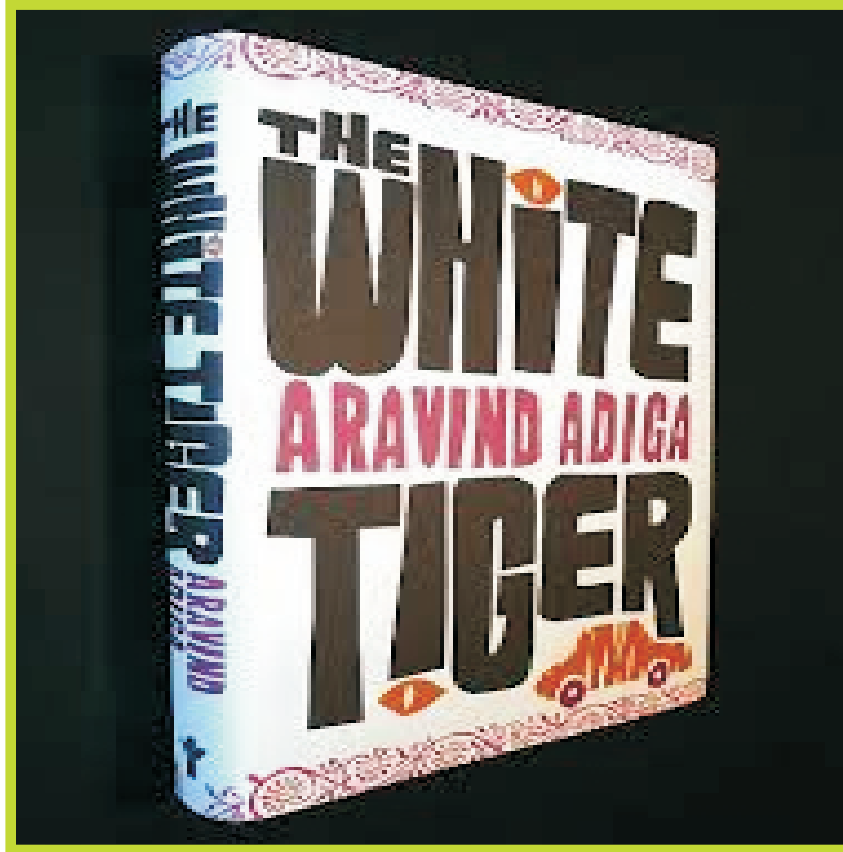


# INDIAN STREAMS RESEARCH JOURNAL

## A STUDY OF ARVIND ADIGA'S THE WHITE TIGER



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### Abstract :

In Postmodern literature there is a tendency to deconstruct the traditional values and stereotypes which have been reigning in the world of literature and culture. The critics like Derrida, Barthes, Stanley Fish, Homi K. Bhabha, Raymond Williams have radically departed from logocentric and absolutist preoccupation with fixity and stasis of language and literature. This is a significant critical trend in contemporary literature. The present paper is an endeavour to focus on the reinterpretation of reality in terms of content, form, language, point of view of a current Indian novelist like Arvind Adiga whose *The White Tiger* took the post-colonial writers by storm by its innovative technique of narration of revolutionary theme of social change.

**Key Words:-** The White Tiger, Derrida, Barthes, Stanley Fish

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### INTRODUCTION

Adiga himself says : "I wanted things in the book to correspond to reality, but filtered through Balram's views" (The Tribune, 19-10-2008). He makes the reader see that he is the product of the system that is discriminatory, biased, inequitable and therefore faulty. Born in low caste & poverty, his life is a tale of sufferings – physical and mental. Deprived of even the bare necessities of life, Balram feels cut off from the mainstream of Indian society where snobbery, glamour and disparity abound. Hence **The White Tiger** deals with the social exclusion of the persona who carries with himself incorrigible wounds of social stigma and destitution. The actions and reactions of Balram Halwai result from his plight. He suffers from endless existential crisis from which there is no escape. The present paper is an attempt to illustrate the deep sense of social exclusion of the hero of the novel and his nameless existence which necessitates him to search for his identity thereof. It seems that all the post-colonial writers of the East and the West emphasize re-interpretation of reality to human being and human life in the light of emerging challenges and situations. In the present novel the writer has sought to focus on the social exclusion and the marginality from the view point of the underprivileged (Balram), rather than from the vantage point of the privileged persona.

In **The White Tiger**, the novelist employs a narrative which is episodic in the first half of the novel. Through flashbacks readers are introduced to the nameless and meaningless existence of the protagonist. While referring to his name, 'Balram Halwai' alias Munna, the narrator takes the readers back to his first day at school and narrates the incident when the teacher named him Balram for Munna just means a boy. He tells the reality dialogically :

Didn't your mother name you?  
She's very ill Sir. She lies in bed and spews blood.  
She's got no time to name me  
And your father ?  
'He' is a rickshaw-puller, Sir.  
He's got no time to name me.  
Don't you have granny? Aunts? Uncles?  
They've got no time either (TWT, 15)

The dialogues are followed by his remarks: "Now what kind of place is it where people forget to name their children?" (TWT,14)

Ironically enough, the child is named Balram and later **The White Tiger** to show his rare potentials, although he is ill-fed, ill-clad and extremely poor.

**The White Tiger** seems to take its origin from social inequalities obtaining in Indian society. Raymond Williams remarks : "In a class-society there are primarily inequalities between classes. Gramsci therefore introduced the necessary recognition of dominance and subordination in what has still, however, to be recognized as a whole process". (Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford University Press p. 108). The protagonist of **The White Tiger**, Balram Halwai is a low-caste talent, financially pedestalled at too low class to confront to coercive measures of the affluent class as represented by the Landlord (Ashok Sharma). In fact, Balram represents the proletarian ways whereas Ashok Sharma, the Bourgeois ways of the world. The sustained interaction between these opposite forces constitutes the chief interest of the novel. The entire novel is a ruthless delineation of the pathetic experiences of a servant (Balram) under the exploitative domination of the owner, Mr. Ashok Sharma. Hence out of the master-servant, employer-employee, bourgeois-proletarian, haves-have-nots nexus is borne the dialectic of the novel. Balram Halwai deploring the grinding poverty and deprivation of his rickshaw-puller father bursts out to India's present class-conflicts. He says : "in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes : men with Big bellies and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies : eat – or get eaten up" (TWT, 64)

The writer shows the snobbish & oppressive attitude of the rich, the employer and the poor servant like him have to bear all these social ills silently. He says :

Up in the blue skies, God spreads his palm over the plains below, showing the little man Laxmangah and its little tributary of the Ganga, and all that lies beyond : a million such villages, a billion such people. And God asks this little man : Isn't it all wonderful? Isn't it all grand? Aren't you grateful to be my servant?(TWT, 87-88)

Balram Halwai, like Mulk Raj Anand's Munoo realizes that slavery, the exploitation of the poor at the hands of the rich is a perpetual fact. And he feels that a servant like he has no suffer for his master's faults and for no fault of his :

The Jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters. We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul, and arse.7 (TWT, 170)

Not for nothing he comes to discover the fact that "the trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy" (TWT, 175). Hence the rebel in him boils with fury and he cannot help sharing his excruciating agony with Mr. Jiabao, the Premier of the Socialist Republic of China :

Never before in human history have so few owed so much to so many.... A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 percent – as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way – to exist in perpetual servitude, a

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servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse. (TWT, 176)

The oppression of the have-nots is an age-old reality in Indian society in particular, and world in general. Their plight is no better than brutes : "See, men and women in Bangalore live like the animals in the forest do" (TWT, 298). Balram feels that centuries of suppression have left indelible mark of servitude on the minds of servants/slaves. Balram feels : "Once a servant, always a servant : the instinct is always there, inside you somewhere bear the base of your spine". (TWT, 299)

Balram feels that the progress of India depends on the equality, not on the corrupting lives of the rich who have always victimized and marginalized the poor. So he feels the urgent need of "purging this country of the rich". (TWT, 303)

Balram is now fired with revolutionary zeal and he expresses his desire for a revolution to terminate all the bourgeois, the rich who have degraded the poor like him. As he considers himself to be a white tiger, full of original energy and creativity, he swears to take revenge against the rich (like Ashok Sharma) who are good for nothing and who have always downgraded a white tiger like him. So he cuts his master's throat out of his revolutionary impulses and then he feels the glory of freedom and says : "What it means not to be a servant" (TWT, 321). So Balram who comes to Dhanbad, Delhi and Bangalore as a servant becomes the master, the owner having freedom and individuality of his own. But like the snobbish rich, he does not shun his humanitarian virtues – humility, generosity and simplicity. He says :

"Once I was driver to a master, but now I am a master of drivers. I don't treat them like servants – I don't slap, or bully, or mock anyone. I don't insult any of them by calling them my 'family', either. (TWT, 302)

Nowadays, he calls himself "Ashok Sharma, North Indian entrepreneur settled in Bangalore"<sup>14</sup> (TWT, 302). Now he is no longer in India of darkness where countless talents like him are either stifled or exploited to live like brutes. He realizes now that he is a white tiger out to live like humans and presenting for his comrades a genuine role model. Even he dreams of freeing Bangalore city of "slums, sewage, shopping malls, traffic jams, policeman" (TWT, 318). He feels that the city of Bangalore "may turn out to be a decent city, where humans can live like humans and animals can live like animals. A new Bangalore for a new India. And then I can say that, in my own way, I helped to make new Bangalore". (TWT, 318)

In **The White Tiger**, Arvind Adiga showcases in Balram Halwai, a versatile talent from a have – not socioeconomic background having progressive, rebellious and innovative spirit. He is a man who thinks big to change the existing predicament of the poor. His clarion call is : "We Drive Technology Forward". (TWT, 301) Through beauty of brain and progressive attitude, Balram is wide awake to envision better and happier future for India. He says :

I mean – and head into a new line. I'm thinking of real estate next. You see, I'm always a man who sees, 'tomorrow' when others see 'today'. The whole world will come to Bangalore tomorrow. (TWT, 319)

And with positive attitude and hope in bright future where the lot of the poor is ameliorated and where the promising talents of the under-dogs and victimized community may benefit to reach the pinnacle of social stability and greatest good, the life of Balram becomes a live example of a progressive man "Changed from a hunted criminal into a solid pillar of Bangalorean society?" (TWT, 292) He shows his humanitarian and liberal attitude to the real education of the underprivileged masses. The real end of education is, Balram thinks, to make human beings real human beings full of human qualities. He says:

After three or four years in real estate, I think I might sell everything, take the money, and start a school – an English language school – for poor children in Bangalore. A school where you won't be allowed to corrupt anyone's head with prayers and stories about God or Gandhi – nothing but the facts of life for their kids. A school full of White Tigers, unleashed on Bangalore! (TWT, 319)

Thus Adiga's **The White Tiger** deconstructs the existing social and individual ethos of the underprivileged sections of the society and therefore presents a new interpretation of reality. We find that the post-colonial writers like Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh have also re-written reality about men and their relation to society in the light of post-colonial spectrum. The novelist gives us a faithful account of the eventful lives of the marginalized, the victimized like (Balram) who through hard work and rebellious endeavours rise to the success. Some critics may denounce the hasty and haphazard ways of Balram in killing his master and possessing his capitals to rise. It seems that Balram who was on periphery comes to be the centre and this is how on ethical grounds, his action may be said to be too individualistic and Machiavellian. But then none can deny the human elements of protest and desire for social change in Balram's action.

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