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Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*: A Courageous Endeavour Exploring the Unheard Voices of the Marginalized

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Abstract

*Aravind Adiga, a great exponent of Indian writing in English, had successfully highlighted the marginalized and subaltern issue in his very first novel *The White Tiger* (2008). He has tried to bring home the idea that in the story of India's progress, role of the underclass or marginalized is very important. Through the protagonist of the novel, Balram Halwai, Adiga has given a loud voice to the ignored and muffled voices of subalterns indicating that the unheard lower class of India now wish to get emancipation from the age-old traps of class and caste in Indian socio-economic fabric. Balram serves as the mouthpiece of the marginalized people who have never been allowed to speak. Through the story of Balram in the novel, Adiga offers a space to the marginalized people whose voice often gets silenced. He presents the struggle and the ultimate resistance of the underprivileged class through the character of Balram. In the portrayal of the character of Balram Halwai, Adiga lends voice to the ignored section of Indian population who are now globally struggling for their survival, their voicelessness and right to self-representation. The large canvas of the novel discusses the plight of the marginalized and Balram's voice becomes the voice of all the oppressed sections in society alarming that the voice of the underclass cannot be ignored for long.*

Key words: ignored; marginalized; emancipation; oppressed.



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Marginalized people are usually discriminated, ignored and often suppressed on the basis of race, gender, culture, religion, ethnicity, occupation, education and economy by the mainstream. This order results in the paralysis of one side of the society as Balram, the protagonist and his family as well as community in the novel *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga, recipient of Booker Prize award 2008. The novel specially refers to the Cultural and Social issues of marginal tribes in the early free Indian villages. Balram Halwai embodies the lower class struggling to be released from age-old suppression and exploitation by the upper class society as the novel is about an oppressed character Balram Halwai offering a space to the marginalized people whose voice often gets silenced. Adiga has chosen epistolary form of writing to make the readers aware about a sorrowful story of a downtrodden confessing that in the society of an unequal difference, the doors for success for poor people would be rather through an illicit way only. Balram is the son of a rikshaw puller, who starts his battle at a very tender age when he was compelled to leave the school and started crushing coal and wiping tables at a tea shop to help his family in earning the daily bread as well as to return the money borrowed by his parents from village landlord for the wedding of his cousin sister Reena. While working at the tea shop, he learns the real lesson of life when he says, “The Autobiography of a Half-Baked Indian.” That’s what I ought to call my life’s story. Me, and thousands of others in this country like me, are half- baked, because we were never allowed to complete our schooling.” (TWT 8). Balram writes a letter to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, who wishes to come to Bangalore “to meet some Indian entrepreneurs and hear the story of their success from their own lips” (TWT 2). At this moment, Balram feels the urgent need to tell the truth about his own life how he became an entrepreneur and to narrate his truth, he takes a metaphor of rooster coop to expose the bitter reality. He writes:

The greatest thing to come out of this country in ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop...



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The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop.

The very same thing is done with human beings in this country (TWT 147).

The Great Indian Rooster Coop. Do you have something like it in China too? I doubt it, Mr. Jiabao (TWT 149).

The story highlights the class divide and struggle of poor marginalized people in a village Laxmangarh where the life revolves around the rich landlords who are in their greed for power and money sucking the marrow from the bones of the poor labour class. Adiga has used the metaphor of 'Darkness' and 'Light' to show the difference between the life of the rich and the poor, the master and the servant and the upper caste and the lower caste as Darkness refers to the pathetic and miserable life of the poor whereas the Light refers to the comfortable and happy life of the rich people.. The people in Darkness try to manage their family with the earned money whereas the people in Light try to increase their wealth through all means and ways. The voice of Balram is not only a single voice given expression by the imagination of the novelist, in fact Balram becomes the representative of all those poor and marginalized people who are the victim of class, colour and race discrimination even in post-modern India. Adiga says:

When talking to many men whom I met in India, I found a sense of rage, often suppressed for years and years that would burst out when they finally met someone they could talk to. But their anger was not the anger of a liberal, middle-class man at a corrupt system; it was something more complex- a blend of values both liberal and reactionary- and I wanted to be true to what I'd heard. Balram's anger is not an anger that the reader should participate in entirely- it can seem at



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times like the rage you might feel if you were in Balram's place- but at other times you should feel troubled by it, certainly. (Nick)

The underprivileged section of this country is exposed to various forms of exploitation by myriad forms of hegemonic forces. Adiga presents the authentic picture of the city of Delhi and its impact on the growth of Balram's mental development which turns an oppressed poor into a ruthless criminal who has no hesitation in murdering his master only to become rich and to be free from the struggle of the underprivileged class. Balram has been a member of downtrodden class but he wants to feel free from all types of exploitation done by the rich people at every stage of life. Adiga tries to raise the unheard voice of all the downtrodden when he writes:

A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. Ours are different. My father's spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use in village to pull water from wells; the clavicle curved around his neck in high relief, like a dog's collar; cuts and nicks and scars, like little whip marks in his flesh, ran down his chest and waist, reaching down below his hip bones into his buttocks (TWT 22).

The novel is a large canvas where the novelist has tried to paint the brutal reality of the pitiable conditions of the marginalized community with true colours as the deprived people never been treated as human beings since ages in India and in the story also, only because of his low birth, Balram is also treated as animal since his childhood. Balram is not ready to die as a servant, driver or with an identity as a low born member of Halwai community so he finds a way to be out of cage to become The White Tiger being selfish and evil who decides not only to steal money from his master Mr. Ashok but also to kill him and escape from the clutches of exploitation. Adiga tries to give an authentic picture of crushed poor people in India when in one accident, Pinky, the wife of Mr. Ashok kills a child in reckless driving and Mr. Ashok makes a



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plan to frame poor Balram for the hit and run case as he is forced to admit the crime that he did not commit only because he is a helpless poor driver. Adiga writes:

I, BALRAM HALWAI, SON OF VIKRAM HALWAI, OF LAXMANGARH VILLAGE IN THE DISTRICT OF GAYA, DO MAKE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT OF MY OWN FREE WILL AND INTENTION:

THAT I DROVE THE CAR THAT HIT AN UNIDENTIFIED PERSON, OR PERSONS, OR PERSONS AND OBJECTS, ON THE NIGHT OF JANUARY 23rd THIS YEAR. THAT I THEN PANICKED AND REFUSED TO FULFILL MY OBLIGATIONS TO THE INJURED PARTY OR PARTIES BY TAKING THEM TO THE NEAREST HOSPITAL EMERGENCY WARD. THAT THERE WERE NO OTHER OCCUPANTS OF THE CAR AT THE TIME OF THE ACCIDENT. THAT I WAS ALONE IN THE CAR, AND ALONE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THAT HAPPENED.

I SWEAR BY ALMIGHTY GOD THAT I MAKE THIS STATEMENT UNDER NO DURESS AND UNDER INSTRUCTION FROM NO ONE (TWT 143).

The novel is the medium in the hands of the novelist to raise the voice of repressed marginal's socio-cultural and economical conditions even in 21st century where we talk about progress and development at a very loud voice. Through the character of Balram, Adiga tries to give a loud voice to every downtrodden who wishes to get free from the clutches of exploitation by the rich and powerful community in society in present day India too. Adiga rightly gives us a message that the marginal are still waiting for their betterment and liberty from the suppression and domination by the affluent community and the story of Balram expresses a ray of hope that



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the lot of low class can change and they too can become the makers of their own destiny if they have the potential to raise their voice against the imbalance in contemporary society.

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