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Class Delineation as Potrayed in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to analyze the issue of class delineation in Arvind Adiga's debut and Booker Prize winning novel The White Tiger. It showcases the path breaking journey of a chauffeur: Balram Halwai who proclaims to have come from the 'rotting darkness' to escape village and move to Delhi after being hired as a driver by a wealthy landlord. His story has been narrated by Balram himself in crude prose with a witty and sarcastic edge to it that endears him to the readers, even when a simpleton village boy turns into a cold blooded murderer. The story exposes the poor-rich divide that surrounds India in the backdrop of economic prosperity, in the wake of the IT revolution. Adiga has graphically portrayed the different images of India— India of Light and India of Dark. But his focus is on the latter and as a communist manifesto, pleads strongly for the classless society. He had wanted to write about the ordinary the routine life of Indians who are not Kings and Gods. The White Tiger exposes the division between the rich and the poor that rule India even as India is becoming one of the economically forward country.

Keywords: journey, light, dark, class, society, communist

After having landed in Delhi, Balram encounters two kinds of India; one the prey and other the predator. After having been the prey for long, he now longs to be the predator. After having been trapped as a chicken in a rooster coop for long, he wants to become a white tiger. He wants to break the shackles of the rampant class delineation that runs like poison throughout his life.

“Because Indians are the world's most honest people...No. It's because 99.9 per cent of us are caught in the Rooster coop just like those poor guys in the poultry market. The Rooster Coop doesn't always work with miniscule sums of money... Masters trust their servants with diamonds in this country!... handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 per cent – as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way – to exist in perpetual servitude... can a man break out of the coop? ...the Indian family, is the reason we are trapped and tied to the 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 (TWT 175-7).”



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India is shown as an emerging entrepreneurial power in the world. Advancement in the field of science and technology, space, transportation, hotel industry, tourism, real estate, expansion of cities, mall culture, industries and outsourcing etc. characterize the image of India. But all these developmental activities depend on underclass with distinct identity:

“Thousands of people live on the sides of the road in Delhi. They have come from the Darkness too—you can tell by their bodies, filthy faces, by the animal-like way they live under the huge bridges and overpasses, making fires and washing and taking lice out of their hair while the cars roar past them. These homeless people...never wait for a red light. (119-120)

These poor bastards had come from the Darkness to Delhi to find some light—but they were still in the darkness. (138)

To live under some concrete bridge, begging for their food, and without hope for the future. That’s not much better than being dead. (314-315)”

“The dream of the rich, and the dreams of the poor – they never overlap, do they? See, the poor dream all their lives of getting enough to eat and looking like the rich. And what do the rich dream of? Losing weight and looking like the poor” (p. 225).

Adiga’s reference to class delineation akin to the evils of untouchability, caste discrimination and social injustice, showing a semblance to works of Mulk Raj Anand, strikes most poignantly when he presents the humiliation faced by Balram when he is not allowed to enter the mall because he is a driver:

“The glass doors had opened, but the man who wanted to go into them could not do so. The guard at the door had stopped him. He pointed his stick at the man’s feet and shook his head – the man had sandals on his feet. All of us drivers too had sandals on our feet. But everyone who was allowed into the mall had shoes on their feet...the man in the sandals exploded, ‘Am I not a human being too?’ (148).”

Balram is the true prototype of the entire class of drivers that constitutes a big fragment of the under privileged inhabiting big cities. His life is the manifestation of their misery, humiliation, struggle for existence; their dreams and aspirations. He finds himself torn apart by two aspects of his own personality: on one side he aspires to be a loyal servant and the other side fulfill his own



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desires which makes him devise a middle path: an entirely new morality which displays righteous indignation. To achieve his dreams and escape the rooster coop he decides to kill and loot 7,00000 from his master. His subconscious tells him that he is not committing a crime by taking what is rightfully his. He feels a rage of being falsely implicated for a murder he did not commit, instead of guilt, while hatching the murder conspiracy. And in a way satisfies his deep rooted grudge he carries against these upper classes. He attributes his moral downfall to his master. He says all these changes were first seen in Ashok-“Once the master of Honda City becomes corrupt, how can the driver stay innocent?”(197):

“See- Mr. Ashok is giving money to all these politicians in Delhi so that they will excuse him from the tax he has to pay. And who owns that tax, in the end? Who but the ordinary people of this country – you! (p. 244).”

As Adiga says: “Balram's anger is not an anger that the reader should participate in entirely—it can seem at 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” (Di Martino 2008).

After having committed the act, he absconds to the newly developing IT hub of India: Bangalore and goes on to become a successful entrepreneur. Now begins his new life in Bangalore. He discovers the most important business aspect, which is outsourcing. He develops the idea of a taxi service. He changes his name to Ashok Sharma, bribes a police commissioner who needs extra money to meet his expenses, as his two sons are studying in America. Finally Balram manages to open his own taxi company. Soon his ‘start up business’ (301) grows into a big business with twenty six vehicles and sixteen drivers. He becomes a wealthy ‘entrepreneur’ in India’s new technological society.

He admits in the letter that he writes to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, that India has thousands and thousands of entrepreneurs even though it is unable to provide its citizens the basic facility of drinking water, electricity, sewerage system or public transportation. The reason for choosing the Chinese Premier to confess his guilt is because the narrator himself acknowledges:

“the future of the world lies with the yellow man and the brown man now that our erstwhile master, the White skinned man has wasted himself through buggery, mobile phone usage and drug abuse” (5-6).



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Thus the novel presents a startling contrast between India's rise as a global economy and the plight of the marginalized class of society living in devastating rural and urban poverty. It is a powerful commentary on the ever widening rich-poor divide that has gripped India in the twenty-first century. He is surely right when he writes that "the difference between ... this India and that India [is] the choice". Adiga's narrator quotes with approval the Urdu poet Iqbal, who said: "They remain slaves because they can't see what is beautiful in this world." *The White Tiger* exposes the rot in the three pillars of modern India— democracy, enterprise and justice—reducing them to the tired clichés of a faltering nation.

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