

## Reflection of Indian society in Aravinda Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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### Abstract

*The literature written during a particular period reflects the popular notions- the social, cultural, and political perspectives of that society. Aravind Adiga's Booker prize novel The White Tiger, 2008 reveals the contemporary Indian society divided by caste-class-politics, the rampant corruption, the Indian joint family system, exploitation, the stark distinction between city and village life, the emerging mall culture, the buzzing outsourcing companies, and the emerging entrepreneur – breaking these watertight compartments.*

**Keywords:** society, contemporary literature, caste, democracy

The literature written during a particular period reflects the social, cultural, and political perspectives of that society. As literature represents life, it is popularly known as the 'the mirror of the society'. Works of literature during a particular period reflect major social beliefs, prejudices, limitations, and eccentricities, as the author acts as a critique of his society. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* reflects contemporary Indian society divided by caste-class-politics, rampant corruption, the Indian joint family system, exploitation, the stark distinction between city and village life, the emerging mall culture, the buzzing outsourcing companies, and the emerging entrepreneur breaking these watertight compartments.

The literature of a particular period reflects the stark realities of its society exposing the popular notions and also voices the voice of the unheard. There are several examples of literature depicting the popular trends of that period. For example, Charles Dickens novels reflect the society of Victorian England - the harsh lives of the poor forced to work under the worst conditions, the immoral lives, and the illegitimate money-making through his works like *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*, etc. Daniel Defoe's *The Journal of the Plague* written in 1722 reflects the bubonic plague that struck the city of London. Although it is a fictional account the work is peppered with statistics, data, charts, and government documents. Lorraine Hansberry's *The Raisin in the Sun* wonderfully traces the thought process and beliefs of the three generations of African American women. The work brings forth racism; pan-Africanism, and the American dream.

In Indian English contemporary literature, Arundati Roy's *The God of Small Things* wonderfully reveals the deep crevices caused in the minds of the fraternal twins, Rahel and Esthappen by the caste and patriarchal set up in Ayemenem. The novel brings the beliefs and prejudices of Indian society. Bama's *Karukku*, the first Dalit autobiography published in 1992, discusses the Dalits' oppression at the hands of state panchayat, upper castes, and at the church. Bama also highlights the voice of a Dalit woman who is victimized by a Dalit man at home. The excessive suppression of Dalit women in the name of caste and patriarchy is shown through the character of Sivakami. The selected work, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* speaks about the class and caste distinctions that have caused deep fissures in independent India. "The influence of British culture of divide and rule in 1947 the British left, but only a moron would think that we became free then." Pg22 These words reveal the failure of democracy in India and the narrator's frequent comparison with a communist country like China. He reveals several instances where India despite being a democracy was infested with corruption and underdevelopment whereas China though a communist country showed marks of development.

The setting of the novel is a small village named Laxmangarh and it revolves around Balram Halwai. 'Halwai' means sweet maker and Balram in various instances states that most of his family members either worked in tea shops or did menial jobs and that they could not dream of becoming landlords or entrepreneurs. He portrays the village school and the village landlord as the symbol of corruption in independent India. Aravinda Adiga speaks about the exploitation of the poor by the rich

through these words “These days there are only 2 castes Men with big bellies, and Men with small bellies. And only two destinies: eat-or get eaten up.” (Pg 64 The White Tiger)

Balram Halwai narrates the servility with which a worker is employed by the rich and the submissiveness that he is expected to exhibit. Balram is not expected to ask for wages but has to do all kinds of work for his employer which included sweeping, dusting, and even cooking. He was even forced to sign the murder of a small child in a drunk and drive case committed by Pinky Madam. Balram states that a worker is required to follow the model of lord hanuman. “... hanuman is the symbol of a worker no individuality and mere servility...” (pg 19 The White Tiger) Balram’s father who had slogged throughout his life reveals his wish to see at least one of his sons live like a man.

Balram’s ambitious ego finds a lot of feed in the busy city, Mumbai. He is enamored by the vibrant city and the sprawling malls, the call centers the effects of globalization, and its stark distinction from the village. Balram is attracted to the consumerist culture of the city in contrast to the village. The village Laxmangarh is a symbol of any village in India. The village is consumed by poverty and the uneducated people are completely exploited by the village landlords. Balram narrates the sad demise of his father due to the absence of doctors in the government hospital. There is no proper infrastructure in the government schools and the teachers embezzle all government funds making education impossible for the poor. The tea shop owner seems to own the voting rights of his employees that he also sells their votes to the politicians.

Balram time again states how corruption is rampant in every rung of society. The village landlord earns money through illegal mining and bribes the ruling party to avoid taxes. Balram in several episodes reveals how the police are hand in hand with the politicians. Balram is able to set his business only after bribing the police and states clearly that he has to time and again grease their hands to thrive in his business. He speaks of the rooster coup syndrome that is prevalent among the poor. He states that all the exploited behave like the hens in the rooster coup.

Although the hens see the butchers killing one after the other, they patiently wait until their turn comes and never retaliate. Similarly, the exploited in the country are very submissive and never try to oppose or break their shackles.

A lot of light is thrown on the Indian joint family system and how it works. Balram through several instances reveals how his father and his brother Kisan, were forced to slog for the family. He states how his grandmother always tortured them for money as there were a lot of mouths to be fed. He described her as “She had grinned her way into control of the house; every son and daughter-in-law lived in fear of her.” Pg 16 Balram had to convince her to learn driving classes and to work as a driver. In the later part of the novel, he refuses to succumb to her tricks, marry and send all his money. Balram with a lot of humor brings out the system of dowry that allows the bridegrooms family to fully exploit the bride’s family. These instances reveal the Indian marriage system that is infested by dowry.

Thus, the literature written during a particular period reflects the popular notions of a particular society and gives voice to the voiceless sections of that society. The story reveals the life of a son of a puller who escapes the life of servitude to become a successful businessman. The novel is a satire and uses humor, vivid imagery, and unapologetic criticism of the economic and political constructs of democracy.

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