

# Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* as a Re-Incarnation of Modern India

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## Abstract

The image of contemporary India had become so media-hyped, and its success stories had begun garnering such a significant amount of tremendous consideration, that the plight of most of India's impoverished people, whether they lived in rural or urban areas, was lost in the chaos. The commercial, scientific, and technical growth in India had reached the point that it had been elevated to the new designation of major narratives for the country. This picture of a prosperous India glosses over the plight of the country's underprivileged citizens as well as the socioeconomic issues that impede the nation's capacity for further expansion and improvement. *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga's debut novel, which went on to win the Man Booker Prize, was written in 2008 with the intention of calling into question the prevalent picture of contemporary India. He endeavoured to re-inscribe the imagination of the current generation about the disgraceful deprivation of 99.9 percent of the people so that the research researchers, political leaders, and policy makers would obtain fresh ways to face the issue. This article has provided specific information regarding the ways in which landlordism, poverty, an educational system that is inadequately equipped, inadequate health facilities, corruption in government agencies, and a decline in morality have all contributed to the worsening of the plight of the underprivileged and to a retardation in the growth of the nation as a whole.

**Keywords:** aravind adiga, india, poverty, nation, modern

## Introduction

Since the beginning of the process of nation building, Indian English literature has been quite active in taking on new issues. India's search for its own identity began during the time of colonial rule when the country set out to rid itself of the harmful customs and traditions that were uniquely Indian at home. The nation, which is home to a diverse theological and spiritual fabric with deep roots, prioritised strengthening the nation from the inside out by combating the problems that were inherent to its own social, cultural, economic, and political life.

As R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao were writing their masterworks during a time when India was attempting to reassert her dormant identity in the political, social, religious, cultural, and ideological spheres of the world, their works of fiction can be regarded as ground-breaking. Even during that immensely glorious period of Indian nationalism and patriotism, rather than concentrating solely on depicting the more positive aspects

of cultural life in India, they saw the greatest challenge as being to bring attention to individual, social, and spiritual issues in order to work on resolving these problems in order to build a more progressive and prosperous India. This was true even though they were living during a time when Indian nationalism and patriotism was at an all-time high. As a continuation of that tradition, the fictional world created by Aravind Adiga shows how Indian society has been moving in the direction of moral and spiritual decadence as well as economic exploitation, and how the significant steps that R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao took to transform India are not yet fully realised.

In the face of India's economic, infrastructural, political, and technical advancement, Aravind Adiga is one of the few contemporary Indian novels to take on the issues of today's poor, including their social marginalisation and spiritual slavery. There are few recent Indian novelists who have done this. During an interview, Adiga discussed the inspiration behind his novel, *The White Tiger*, stating, "I

wanted to depict someone from India's underclass—which is perhaps 400 million strong—and which has largely missed out on the economic boom, and which remains invisible in most films and books coming out of India."

### **India, as Portrayed in the Novels of Aravind Adiga**

Adiga, with such an attitude, has taken a stride into the twenty-first century to bring to light the sad deprivation of both the rural and urban poor societies. This stands in contrast to the promotional pictures of a happy and successful modern India. Because this is a strength and a tradition of India as a nation, this is the reason why tackling the socio-economic problems to build India from within is both a strength and a tradition of India. Developing India from within is both a strength and a tradition of India. In order to accomplish this, he began by convincing the audience that there are two countries in India: "two countries in one: an India of Light". In order to accomplish this goal, the first thing that he did was to convince the audience that there are two Indias, he used the phrase "two countries in (Adiga, 2008, p. 10). The protagonist of the book, Balram Halwai, sent an email to the Premier of China in which he claimed that "Delhi is the capital of not one but two countries—two Indias." Both Light and Darkness are said to flood into Delhi in this verse (p. 150).

In an effort to explain the differences between the two Indias, Cristina Mendes (2010) made the following observation: "The India of Light is that of wealth, technology, and knowledge, while the India of Darkness is that of misery, destitution, and illiteracy." The fact that the achievements of a relatively small minority are being exploited to construct a metaphor for India as a powerful and prosperous nation is, however, a regrettable development. This is necessary in order for the media, academics, policy makers, and political leaders, instead of carrying the false glory, to address the problems in order to eradicate them.

The fundamental purpose of Adiga's novel was to open people's eyes to the plight of the country's majority population, who has been suffering for a significant amount of time. Their existence has turned into a nightmare for them. In spite of the fact that those at the top of the economic and scientific food chain have reaped the benefits of the nation's progress, those at the bottom of the

social ladder have seen their living conditions deteriorate. The images that are constantly presented about modern India are those of a rising economic, scientific, and political force in the context of the global scene. According to Adiga, in order for India to claim independence in social, cultural, economic, and educational terms, the country needs to ensure that the vast majority of the poor receive an education of sufficient quality and improve the conditions under which they live. Adiga is of the opinion that there is an immediate requirement to re-educate the populace regarding the disparity in quality of life that exists between the lives of the majority population and the lives of the extremely small minority. Adiga portrayed how the ruling elite in India maintains a distance from the common people in both rural and urban settings. This is done so that they do not experience the same hardships that the poor face in their homes, which are often located in slums or villages. As a result of this re-education, at least the rich and the ruling class may obtain an understanding of what it is like to live a dirty and sad life among the underprivileged through his works. When it comes to poor people's exploitation and social subjection, Adiga believes that the rich need to be re-inscribed in their mind since they are unable to recognise the pains and are swept away by the media's depiction of modern India as a thriving and prosperous country.

To awaken our senses to "the abject poverty," Adiga draws on his background as a journalist to present readers with unique perspectives on life in the constantly evolving Indian culture. The book "India of Darkness" by Adiga (2008) focuses primarily on the culture of the region (10). It shows "the suffering of the underprivileged class" as well as "how the rich people, politicians, policemen, and the higher society people are enjoying their life." Because Balram Halwai came from "an anonymous and birthday-less background", he was forced to fight "against the prosperous middle-class elites and politicians". The reader is led to understand, from a journalistic point of view, how the recent changes in economics and technology have not improved the quality of life for the poor, but rather have only served to widen the gap between the rich and the poor. The author of the work attempted, with the help of the character Balram, to convey the message that the

weak and financially vulnerable are always at risk of being taken advantage of.

### **The Journey of Balram**

Balram tells the story of how he rose from obscurity in the village of Laxmangarh to prominence as a businessman in the city of Bangalore in his autobiography. He went on to establish himself in Bangalore. In the course of doing so, the story illustrates "the sensations, emotions, aspiration, miseries, and the boiling wrath and hatred of the till now invisible poor". According to his few queries, the history of oppression in his area as well as today's plight of people living in poverty is made obvious. These questions also reveal aspects of his upbringing, such as, "But if we were Halwais, then why was my father not making sweets but pulling a rickshaw?" Why did I have to spend my childhood sweeping floors and sweeping embers when I could have eaten gulab jamuns and delectable pastries whenever and wherever I pleased? Why was I thin, dark, and crafty, when a boy who was brought up on candy would have been thin, light-skinned, and happy? (Adiga, 2008, p. 38).

The history of Laxmangarh is one of oppression and exploitation of the socially powerful. This can be seen throughout the history of the city. One of the people who were being persecuted at the time was a man named Balram. Balram dubbed the landlords the Wild Boar, the Stork, the Buffalo, and the Raven because of his dislike for them. He was of the opinion that the landlords' animals were a good representation of their personalities, therefore he gave them animal names.

Aravind Adiga painted a vivid picture for his audience regarding the educational system of the nation. Balram enrolled in the elementary school in his hometown and began his formal education there. The instructor recognised his potential and bestowed upon him the name Balram, a more respectable moniker. His parents did not give him a suitable name since they did not think it was necessary. They used to refer to him as Munna, which translates as "boy" in English. The instructor thought he was exceptionally bright and knowledgeable, and a school inspector referred to him as a "White Tiger."

The poor quality of his schooling, on the other hand, prevented him from fully fulfilling the potential of his personality. Despite the fact that the government is

providing funding for education, the extremely careless teacher at the school, Mr. Krishna, is "taking the money for the uniforms and the meals". Even this elementary school education that was "barely equipped with infrastructure" was "taken away" from him because the family needed him to earn money to pay for the wedding of his cousin sister. He pondered on his own education in an email that he sent to the Prime Minister of China. He wrote, "Me, and many of others in this country like me, are half-baked since we were never permitted to complete our studies.... The story of my childhood is the tale of how a man who is only halfway baked can come into being."

After detailing the catastrophic state of the school system and how it is unable to provide salvation to the public, Balram went on to describe in minute detail the cruel health infrastructures that are present throughout the country. According to what he related, "there is no hospital in Laxmangarh, despite there are three distinct foundation stones for a hospital, laid by three different politicians before three different elections". He went on to describe how individuals are enduring hardship due to the absence of primary health care services. Because of this, the lives of many people, including his father, were going to be taken. The corruption was the source of all of these problems: "Stories of rottenness and corruption are always the best stories." The actual hospital is filthy, in disrepair, and rife with poor hygiene practises. The physicians were keeping themselves occupied by bribing the local politicians while working in private practise and making money. There were hardly any medical professionals available to look after the disadvantaged people. Following the passing of their father, life drew Balram and his brother Kishan to the city of Dhanbad in the hopes of finding better employment possibilities. Balram, who was driven and enterprising at his core, decided that he wanted to transition from working as a tea-boy to working as a chauffeur. He made this dream a reality by meticulously planning for it and making significant personal sacrifices. He was intent on ascending to the highest echelons of society and was willing to make any sacrifice necessary to achieve this goal.

Mr. Thakur Ramdev, the local landlord, hosted Balram for a long period of time and offered him with a unique

perspective on how the upper class in India is governed by those below them. Balram dreamed of one day becoming one of the most successful people in society, despite the fact that he was content in his position and had begun leading a financially stable existence. In exchange for an immediate step up the career ladder, he did not mind threatening Ram Persad that he would reveal his true identity and causing trouble for him. In other words, he was a Muslim but was pretending to be a Hindu to get a job. The terrified Ram Persad quit his work, and he took over as the primary driver for the household shortly thereafter. He had rekindled his ambition for growth after a little career rise, from a tea-boy to a local landlord's head driver, and he was now keen to take things even farther. Because of this, the struggles he already has in life become even more taxing and difficult. In order for him to advance in his life and profession, he had to put up a fight against all of the sociocultural pressures, both from inside himself and from the outside world. To celebrate his success, his family members persuaded him to get married when he brought Mr. Ashok and his American bride Pinky Madam back to Laxmangarh. Pinky Madam was an American. He viewed marriage as a constraint that would prevent him from making steady progress in his professional life. He experienced a sense of estrangement from the surrounding community and ultimately decided to move away.

A short time later, Balram wrote about the widespread political corruption in rural India. One of the greatest socialists ever was supposed to be a champion of the poor and work tirelessly for their cause, but he is actually the root of all corruption. To get rid of the doctor's vacant position in the local government hospital, he accepts "four hundred thousand rupees" in exchange for the doctor's resignation. He is only concerned with selling the post. Sushil Sarkar (2012) made an insightful observation when he said, "The future of the country is uncertain since those in charge are corrupt, ignorant, self-centered, hedonistic, hypocritical, and ultimately murderers." These corrupt politicians are not only responsible for immorality, chaos, and disorder; they are also the ones who initially conceived of terrorist acts. (p. 4). Since more than 10 years ago, The Great Socialist has held the position of boss of the

Darkness. Although he wins elections by telling the poor that he will free them from the chains of rich landlords, he openly accepts bribes from the rich in order to allow them to exploit the land and labour of the poor in the coal mine industry.

This is despite the fact that he wins elections by making this promise. According to the description, "a total of ninety-three criminal cases—for murder, rape, grand larceny, gun-running, pimping, and many other such minor offenses—are pending against the Great Socialist and his ministers at the present moment," it is possible to determine the level of corruption and the diverse nature of the malpractices (Adiga, 2008, p. 57). The fact that it is difficult to punish these dishonest politicians "when the courts are judging in Darkness" is perhaps the most infuriating aspect of the situation (p. 57). The Great Socialist was able to "embezzle one billion rupees from the Darkness" as a result of the corrupt system of administration in the country (p.58). Adiga tackles rural India's socioeconomic injustices, corruption, and landlordism through the depiction of daily life in Laxmangarh and Dhanbad, two small towns in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

After demonstrating how the rural areas of India are split between the wealthy and the impoverished, and how the wealthy are able to keep their distance from the plight of the majority of the impoverished so that they can continue to live independently, the author states, "All four of the Animals lived in high-walled mansions just outside Laxmangarh—the landlords' quarters." They did not need to venture out into the town except to feed because each mansion contained its own temple, as well as its own wells and ponds (p. 16). Adiga demonstrated that the same distinction exists in the urban areas of India. "with their tinted windows up, the automobiles of the rich travel like dark eggs down the roads of Delhi," Balram observed, referring to the way that the wealthy in Delhi kept themselves separate from the plight of the city's less fortunate residents (p. 77). As a result, they won't have to worry about the air pollution or the awful human traffic that plagues Delhi's streets for the rest of their lives.

In his description of the accident that occurred to Pinky Madam, the author had subtly alluded to the

deteriorating state of law and justice in Delhi. This was done in the context of the story. She risked her life by driving herself after drinking heavily at a late-night party, and as a result, she was responsible for the death of a homeless youngster who had been resting on the side of the road. This tragedy has caused a great deal of anxiety and disarray, and it has shown the injustices and corruption of those in positions of authority in government and the upper class. She wanted to contact the child's parents to offer them mental support and financial restitution because she was truthful and felt guilty, but she was blocked from doing so by the pretentious members of her husband's family. They were resolute in their mission to shield themselves from the possibility of court penalty as well as financial losses. For example, in order to handle everything, they got in touch with an advocate named Mr. Chamandas Varma who works for the Delhi High Court. He was able to persuade them, saying, "The judge has been taken care of." The family of Mr. Ashok has demanded that Balram sign an affidavit, which was drafted by the attorney, in which he takes full responsibility for the death of the kid that occurred in the accident. They failed to warn him that signing the legal document would result in him being arrested and taken to jail.

The function of the police is also brought into question here. The police were aware of the person who murdered the innocent child, but they chose not to bring righteousness to the child's family because "no one has reported seeing the accident." After learning that he would have to serve time in prison as a result of the coerced confession, Balram's level of concern over the matter skyrocketed. Reflecting on the situation, he wrote an email to the Premier of China saying, "The jails of Delhi are filled of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their excellent, solid middle-class masters. They accept the money and choose to disregard the inconsistencies that are there in the case. Additionally, he cautioned his son, saying, "You need to have a better handle on that wife of yours, son." The way that things is done around here in the village" (p.106). Because of this, her wish to make amends to the family has been categorically denied.

Balram quickly investigated the reasons why there could be no opposition from inside his own family. He was under the impression that the Indian servant class is imprisoned within the Rooster Coop. The end result is that they put themselves in a position of servitude. The impoverished are unable to escape their suppressed status because they blindly obey their landlords. This is the root cause of their inability to escape their situation. When asked to explain the rooster coop metaphor, Balram stated, " On the wooden workstation that is located just over this chicken coop, there is a young butcher who is beaming... The roosters notice that their siblings' internal organs are scattered all around them. They are aware that they are up next. But they don't put up any resistance. They do not make any attempt to flee the chicken coop. In this country, the same thing is done to human beings (Adiga, 2008, p. 102). By using the image of a rooster coop as a metaphor, Adiga wanted to investigate the ways in which the lives of the poor are ensnared for the purpose of unrelenting exploitation. The impoverished were kept so preoccupied with the fight for basic subsistence that they lacked the time and energy to challenge the authority of those who were in charge of them. In point of fact, they take great pride in their own subservience. Balram makes the following observation in response to Mr. Jiabao's question: "Never before in the history of humanity have so few owed so much to so many." A small number of powerful individuals in this country have educated the other 99.9 percent of the population—men who are physically capable, intellectually capable, and brilliant in every way—to live in indefinite servitude (p. 103). They have been intellectually and repressively conditioned in such a way that if "you can put the key to a man's emancipation in his hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse," they will behave in this manner (p. 103).

As soon as Balram started practising yoga to improve his mental and physical well-being, the other drivers started making fun of him. As a result, the landlords' hegemonic rule had grown so normalised and comprehensive. Saddened by the situation, Balram remarked, "The Rooster Coop was doing its work." In order to prevent other servants from becoming innovators, experimenters, or entrepreneurs, servants have to restrain

other servants from becoming innovators, etc (p. 115). The story shed light on the various forms and levels of corruption that exist in Delhi. Balram's other drivers began making fun of him when he started practising yoga to improve his mental and physical well-being in order to rise above the servitude. For this reason, the rule of landlords had grown so ingrained in the culture. They started making fun of Balram when he started practicing yoga in try to improve his mental and physical well-being so he might rise above his servitude. This is because the landlords' hegemonic rule had become so ingrained and accepted in the community. Specifically, Balram was able to see how the wealth of the nation was being used to benefit the ruling class. Balram's slow indoctrination into a corrupt environment in Delhi led to the development of his cynicism and dishonesty. After realising how badly he had been taken advantage of by dishonest people, he began to harbour resentment for those in higher social classes and began searching for a means to exact revenge on them. While he was driving Mr. Ashok, he once had the thought, "See, Mr. Ashok is providing money to all these politicians in Delhi in the hopes that they will exempt him from the tax he is required to pay." Who, exactly, is responsible for paying the tax in the end? Who else except the average citizens of our nation" (p. 146). After seeing the theft of millions of rupees from the general public, he discreetly began making plans on how to assassinate Mr. Ashok in order to steal his money. He was the one who admitted it, but he said that "all these changes happened in me because they happened first in Mr. Ashok. The author Adiga has used the word "darkness" as a metaphor for India's widespread corruption. The times, the people, the people and the places that are involved in corrupt activity have always been described as dark. This includes the cars, the roads, the times, and the places. Balram characterized his adventure as he was driving Mr. Ashok to bribe the government authorities as follows: "I was carrying my unique dark egg (indicating automobile) right into the centre of the city." When I turned to look, I noticed the domes of the White House off to my left... When there is a significant amount of pollution in the air, it is impossible to see the building from the road... When the two brothers came out of the building (after bribery), it was getting dark

outside... Mr. Ashok was dark and moody when he got in" (pp. 77-78). This recurring use of darkness as a metaphor for corruption brings to mind Charles Dickens' work *Bleak House* (1853), in which Dickens uses fog as a metaphor for corruption and writes, "Fog everywhere.

Fog up the river, where it flows among verdant aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled through the layers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a large (and unclean) city... Fog up the river, where it runs among green aits and meadows. "...in the very centre of the mist, in his High Court of Chancery, sits the Lord High Chancellor...." (Ch-1). Compare and contrast the following passage from Charles Dickens with the connotative use of smog and pollution by Adiga as a metaphor for corruption in the Indian government: "the President's House was covered in smog and blotted out from the road; it seemed as though there were no government in Delhi that day." And the thick smog that obscured the prime leader as well as all of his ministers and bureaucrats... (Adiga, 2008, pp. 146-147). The breakdown of law and order is the direct effect of the widespread corruption that has taken place. When Balram recounted the situation, he said that the people of India had been kept in their own cultural cages similar to the way animals in a zoo are kept, and there had been no conflict among them. But when the British withdrew in 1947, the animals broke free of their individual enclosures and began plundering the resources: "the cages had been let open; and the animals had attacked and ripped them other apart, and jungle rule replaced zoo law." Those who were the most vicious and the most ravenous had devoured everyone else in the group and had developed large bellies as a result (p. 38). The society has "just two destinies: eat—or get eaten up" during such a time of widespread economic exploitation, widespread social misery, and widespread moral decay (p. 38).

Pinky Madam chose to start a new life in the United States because she found the corruption, injustice, dishonesty, hypocrisy, social irresponsibility, and male dominance in India to be intolerable. She also left her husband, Mr. Ashok, behind. Mr. Ashok began a life of debauchery after moving to Delhi by himself. Balram abhorred this degradation of his lord and experienced a

profound sense of estrangement as a result. Soon after, he came to the conclusion that working with him would not be beneficial to his career. Earlier, he was required to accept the blame for the hit-and-run accident that occurred with Pinky Madam and was getting ready to go to jail. Now, his master was considering firing him from his job since he had to take the blame for the accident and was getting ready to go to jail. He was dead set on freeing himself from the shackles of such blind obedience and slavery, so one day, when the opportunity presented itself, he assassinated his master Mr. Ashok and fled to Bangalore with the money he had stolen from him. He launched a prosperous taxi service business with the money he received from Mr. Ashok and quickly became profitable. Between the Assassinations (2008), Adiga's second book, is a collection of short stories that centres on the "disparities between the poor and the rich, communal disharmony, corruption, violence, and hypocrisy". It takes place in a South Indian village called Kittur at a point in time between the murders of Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv Gandhi, and the setting represents the span of time between those two tragedies.

Kittur is one of a kind when compared to other works of modern Indian English writing because it combines a portrayal of real-life events with the author's idealistic vision (Mohapatra, 2009). Although it is a small local town, its social milieu represents the richness of India's culture; yet, it is "structured around the timeless principle of segregation"

### Conclusion

2011 saw the publication of Adiga's second novel, titled *Last Man in Tower*. Mr. Yogesh Murthy, popularly known by the nick name Masterji, was a veteran educator who eventually retired. He was the last person left in his building who was opposed to the builder Dharmen Shah's proposal to demolish the existing structure in order to make way for a new, more luxurious tower. "his commitment to resistance, secure in his trust in the power of cooperative life, resilient to bribes and threats alike" may be seen if one examines the character of the Masterji (Clark, 2011). The fact that Masterji refused to accept the offer made by the builder demonstrates how people of the middle class in India are resistant to accept modernization,

despite the fact that they face difficulties in their daily lives as a result of living in ancient dwellings.

In conclusion, Aravind Adiga aimed in the novel to (re)present the socio-economic realities of modern India based on the rural villages and urban slums with the goal of assisting in the reconstruction of India through the implementation of more all-encompassing development initiatives. One of the most important goals of this research is to debunk the myths that have been perpetuated about modern India by presenting the supporting data from the text. This image of a modern India is simply not accurate, as this essay demonstrates quite clearly. It has identified the ways in which landlordism, low educational standards, unhygienic hospitals, corruption in the police, political leaders, the judiciary, and bureaucracies, among other things, have been preventing the growth and development of the nation and degenerating the human values of the society.

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