

UNVEILING THE COSTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE INDIAN DREAM IN *THE WHITE TIGER* BY ARAVIND ADIGA

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Abstract

The Indian Dream is described as a double-edged sword in Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger, offering upward mobility at the cost of great moral concessions. The Indian Dream is confronted by socioeconomic barriers faced by protagonist Balram Halwai in The White Tiger in this essay, which also explores how his ambition forces him to be immoral. To understand the true cost of the Indian Dream, the wider social implications of his journey are explored. This research tries to demonstrate how the novel's construction of the Indian Dream is associated with a cost that is exceedingly ethical and aids systemic injustices in Indian society.

Keywords: indian dream, morality, socio-economic society.

Introduction

The White Tiger is a novel by Aravind Adiga, an Indian journalist and writer. *The White Tiger* is his first novel, which he won in 2008 with the Man Booker Prize. The novel is the story of two Indias. *The White Tiger* is a novel depicting some major themes like social mobility, corruption, morality, etc. This research work, 'Unveiling the Costs and Consequences of the Indian Dream in *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga', concentrates on the remarkable presentation of the challenges that are part of seeking the Indian Dream, which is parallel to the American Dream but in the socioeconomic reality of contemporary India. This research, by viewing the character-building process of the protagonist Balram Halwai, aims to study ambition, morality, and social mobility in a critical sense. "Indian Dream" in Adiga's work represents the hope for upward mobility, success, and freedom from socio-economic determinism. Balram, who is a subaltern servant from a village, weaves through the serpentine avenues of ambition and opportunity amidst the stratified Delhi society. His rise from subservience to

entrepreneurial achievement is not only a personal victory but a narrative strand that unwinds the ethical issues and moral trade-offs surrounding the pursuit of wealth. At the very center of this research journey are the prices—both overt and covert—that Balram and those around him pay as they pursue the Indian Dream. Adiga's searing critique uncovers the seamy side of economic growth, revealing the corruption, exploitation, and systemic discrimination that characterize India's development story.

Discussion

The White Tiger introduces readers to the stark realities of the moral trade-offs that accompany upward mobility in a stratified society and the concessions that ambition requires. It achieves this through vivid imagery and clever sarcasm. *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga is a critical look at the concept of the Indian Dream, revealing a messy and often dismal reality behind the illusion of prosperity and upward mobility. Similar to the American Dream, the Indian Dream is rooted in the notion that anyone can make it and prosper in life with hard work and determination despite their economic condition. However, for most

individuals, particularly those who are from poor backgrounds, this ideal turns out to be an illusion, as the book by Adiga portrays. A more prosperous life, freedom from poverty's shackles, and advancement toward affluence are all the Indian Dream promises. Tens of millions of individuals are motivated toward their aspirations by this very compelling narrative. The reader sees aspiration as a tool for acquiring dignity, independence, and voice in a culture that has traditionally silenced individuals from lower castes and classes, alongside economic development, through the eyes of the narrator, Balram Halwai. For this specific ideal, he went from the small sleepy town of Laxmangarh to the cosmopolitan city of Bangalore. He poignantly states,

"I am in the Light now, but I was born and raised in Darkness.

Each time I caught a glimpse of the chandeliers and the sofas, my dream grew stronger.

I wanted to escape the rooster coop, to break free and taste the fruits of success.

The city of Bangalore became my beacon.

It was there that I could reinvent myself, rise above my station, and truly be seen" (Adiga, 2008, p. 273).

Serious social mobility in India is highly constrained by India's socio-economic institutions, which are characterized by entrenched caste hierarchies, corruption, and economic inequality. Balram committed some moral mistakes and indulged in criminal activities, including bribery and murder, to go from a lowly chauffeur to a successful businessman. The vast psychological and moral costs involved in climbing the social ladder are underscored by this journey. The moral and ethical price that individuals must pay for success only works to reinforce the myth of the Indian Dream. A wealthy-over-morality society has a corrupting effect on individuals such as Balram, who evolved from being an idealistic, clean-souled young man to being cynical and suspect. The novel contends that without significant moral concessions, the Indian Dream is impossible in its present form.

Balram's transition from the Darkness to the Light illustrates the ethical issues that come from seeking success in a hierarchical world. He shows the downside of ambition by being willing to sacrifice his ethics to move out

of poverty. As Balram acknowledges, "I was searching for the key for years but the door was always open" (Adiga, 2008, p. 255), and this implies that the quest for the Indian Dream frequently entails a recognition that moral sacrifices must be made. In a society where there are limited opportunities, this presents troubling questions regarding the morality of aspiration and the cost of success in a society marked by considerable socioeconomic inequalities. Balram's actions carry broader implications on society as they reflect a society where lapses in moral code are a reality and where there is massive corruption in institutions. The usualizing of bad morals in the context of attainment influences community belief greatly and cohesion socially. As Balram wryly points out, "The trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy" (Adiga, 2008, p. 175). Individuals such as Balram undermine the moral fabric of society and give rise to an atmosphere of mistrust and cynicism when they prosper through unscrupulous means. This means that concerted effort needs to be made to fix the underlying systematic issues, such as corruption and social inequality, for genuine progress and social mobility to be achieved (Putnam, 2000). Balram's story illustrates how acting for one's interest can lead to social cohesiveness collapsing. While his actions are driven by a need to escape the stultifying conditions of his caste and socioeconomic status, they help sustain a dynamic of mistrust and moral failure. Trust needed for a healthy, functioning society is eroded by the widespread acceptance of corruption as a tool towards an end (Banerjee & Duflo, 2019). Increasing wealth inequality between the rich and poor compounds the impact on social cohesiveness. Balram's own growing wealth and subsequent alienation from his previous village highlight the social collapse that arises from economic differences. This separation undermines the possibility of collective progress and cooperation by fostering a sense of alienation and animosity among those left behind (Chancel & Piketty, 2017). Lastly, *The White Tiger* presents a powerful critique of the Indian Dream by highlighting the ethical dilemmas and societal repercussions associated with seeking success within a highly differentiated society. The author extends an invitation to readers to contemplate the broader impact of their search for success and the importance of maintaining moral ideals despite socioeconomic hardship.

In Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, the quest for the Indian Dream is revealed to be the source of intense disillusionment and cynicism. The novel's protagonist, Balram Halwai, sets out believing strongly in the Indian Dream's promise of climbing up the ladder of success with diligence and loyalty. As he experiences the stark reality of India's entrenched social and economic hierarchies, this faith is methodically broken. The Indian Dream that one can make if one tries hard enough is revealed to be a myth that benefits only those in power, while the poor are left to endure the steep price. Balram's disillusionment comes from the understanding that his hard work and toil as a servant will never be returned with social mobility or even the respect that he desires. Rather, he observes that rulers use the system to ensure that they continue being in charge with no hope of allowing a fellow from his neighborhood to get into power. Because of this awareness, Balram ditches his ethical values because he realizes the system is preprogrammed to keep individuals from his side in the back seat. His disillusionment is not only with the elusiveness of the Indian Dream but also with the larger social and moral order that sustains inequality and corruption.

As Balram becomes increasingly disillusioned, cynicism becomes the hallmark of his belief system. He comes to believe that attainment in this life is not a function of either virtue or hard work but of lies, manipulation, and eventually crime. This cynical worldview is beautifully described when Balram speaks for himself, saying, "The moment you recognize what is beautiful in this world, you stop being a slave" (Adiga, 2008, p. 34). This line highlights his contention that to become truly free and successful, one must eschew traditional morality and adopt a more ruthless, pragmatic philosophy of life. Balram's evolution from an innocent, optimistic servant to a cynical, self-interested businessman reflects the larger critique Adiga makes of the Indian Dream. The novel implies that the dream is not only out of reach for the majority of the population but also that chasing it can make people lose their moral compass. Thus, *The White Tiger* uncovers the seedy underbelly of the Indian Dream, where disillusionment and cynicism are the inescapable consequences for those who dare to believe in its promises.

Economic inequality is a common thread throughout the novel, brought out by the stark contrast between the lives of the wealthy and the impoverished. Balram, who comes from a small village called Laxmangarh, sees firsthand the abject poverty that characterizes the lives of the majority of villagers. His family, as with many others, is in debt and toil, barely scraping by. When Balram goes to Delhi to become a chauffeur for the affluent Ashok family, he is brought into contact with a world of extravagance and decadence unimaginable to the villagers. The economic inequality between Balram and his bosses is not merely an inequality of income but a demonstration of a deeply rooted class structure in which the wealthy enjoy access to resources, opportunities, and privileges that are completely unavailable to the poor. Adiga shows how this economic inequality is sustained by institutionalized corruption and exploitation. The rich utilize their wealth and power to twist rules to suit them, while the poor are simply left with no option but to obey their requirements or suffer drastic repercussions. Such unequal distribution of wealth and authority results in a society where the rich get even richer, with the poor left in a life of bondage. A glaring instance of economic inequality in the novel is presented when Balram refers to the cities of Delhi and Bangalore as "the two faces of India: the Light and the Darkness" (Adiga, 2008, p. 14). The "Light" symbolizes the prosperous urban areas where the affluent reside in comfort and security, and the "Darkness" signifies the rural and poor regions where individuals like Balram are born and fight to survive. This metaphor highlights the profound gap between the haves and the have-nots in India, a gap that the Indian Dream is unable to close.

Limited Social Mobility is yet another serious implication of the Indian Dream as presented in *The White Tiger*. Balram's intelligence, ambition, and resolve to transcend his environment are repeatedly foiled by the strait-laced social hierarchy that holds human beings in their station. In India, as the novel presents it, birth calls the shots when it comes to destiny. As a member of the lower caste and a pauper, Balram's prospects for improvement are severely limited. The educational system, the job market, and even the law favor the rich and well-connected, with little option for someone born poor to better themselves by honest means. This lack of social

mobility is vividly illustrated in Balram's reflection on his life:

"I was trapped in the Rooster Coop. Don't believe for a second there's a million-rupee game show you can win and become a millionaire overnight. I'm just one of those who has woken up from his sleep" (Adiga, 2008, p. 273).

The "Rooster Coop" metaphor accounts for the social trap that will not allow one to escape one's predetermined place in society. It illustrates how the system works to keep the poor poor and prevent them from rising above their station. Balram's ultimate triumph, by crime, speaks volumes about the lengths one will have to go to to overcome obstacles to social mobility. Finally, *The White Tiger* reveals the brutal truths of economic inequality and restricted social mobility in India, critiquing the notion of the Indian Dream as a feasible option for the poor. Adiga's account of Balram's life shows how the dream of success is always an illusion to the poor who are bound by an extremely unequal society. The book challenges readers to think about the equity of a system that permits a select few to prosper at the cost of the many and shows the deep price paid for pursuing the Indian Dream.

The White Tiger by Adiga illustrates education in such a manner as to also identify the broader social implications of educational inequality. The novel implies that the impoverisher's failure to pay for top-notch education is not just a private disaster but also a pervasive social failure. Millions like Balram's are held back by the deeply entrenched system that denies the poor access to education, perpetuating a cycle of oppression and poverty. Balram's story underscores the contradictory role of education: while it has the power to liberate, it can be employed as a means of control and manipulation if abused. For instance, the privileged class in the novel keeps its dominance over the underclass through the application of their superior education. Politicians and landlords employ their understanding to maintain dominance. This scene illustrates how disparity in access to and utilization of education leads to inequality. Additionally, the novel implies that these educational inequalities need to be addressed as the only means through which India can genuinely progress. Withholding

education from a large part of the population hinders individual growth as well as hinders social progress. Therefore, education is thus seen to be necessary for both the overall development of the nation as well as the empowerment of the marginalized.

Summation

The White Tiger offers a critique of the Indian Dream by revealing its limitations and consequences through Balram Halwai's existence. The novel challenges the concept of meritocratic success by highlighting the ethical compromises and institutional barriers involved in striving for upward mobility in contemporary India. Adiga's book calls for the re-examination of the mechanisms of society that determine the Indian Dream's aspirations and realities through the revelation of educational deficiencies, rampant corruption, and individual ethical challenges. The research highlights how imperative it is to address these endemic issues to foster a fairer and more equitable society. With this paper, the researcher attempts to critically examine the complex costs and implications of the Indian Dream as they are revealed in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. Examining the journey of the protagonist, the paper sheds light on the harsh realities and moral issues that confront those who aspire for success in a very stratified society.

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