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An analysis of Indian social milieu in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* was published in 2008 and could achieve the 40th Man Booker Prize in 2008 only. His novel provides a darkly humorous perspective of India's class struggle in a globalized world as told through a retrospective narration from Balram Halwai, a village boy. The novel deals in issues like religion, caste, loyalty, corruption and poverty in India. The paper attempts to evaluate the prominent themes of the novel through which it hopes to make the writer's intention clear to the reader.

Keywords: Entrepreneur, rooster coop, globalization, capitalist society

Introduction

The novel has been well-received, making the New York Times bestseller list in addition to winning the Man Booker Prize and holds the rating of 4 stars out of 5. Aravind Adiga, 33 at the time, was the second youngest writer as well as the fourth debut writer to win the prize in 2008. In this novel Adiga tries to utter the Agony of the marginalized areas of rural India, and he wanted to do so without sentimentality or portraying them as mirthless humorless weaklings as they are usually.

The White Tiger takes place in modern day India. The novel's protagonist, Balram Halwai is born in Laxmangarh, Bihar, and a rural village in "the Darkness". Balram narrates the novel as a letter, which he wrote in seven consecutive nights and addressed to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao. Balram in his letter discusses the emergence of his life from son of a rickshaw puller to be a successful entrepreneur.

Balram learns how to drive and gets a job, driving Ashok, the son of the Stork, the local landlord. During a trip back to his village Balram disrespects his grandmother and tells the reader and the Chinese Premier that in the next eight months he intends to kill his boss. Balram moves to New Delhi with Ashok and his wife Pinky Madam. Throughout their stay in New Delhi, Balram is exposed to the extensive corruption in Indian society, including the government. In New Delhi the discrimination between the poor and the wealthy becomes even more evident by juxtaposition of the wealthy with poor city dwellers.

One night Pinky decides to drive the car by herself and hits something. She is worried that it was a child and the family eventually decides to frame Balram for the hit and run. The police, however, corrupt and lazy, tell them that no one reported a child missing so that luckily no further inquiry is done. Ashok becomes increasingly involved with the corrupt government itself. Balram then decides that the only way that he will be able to escape India's "Rooster Coop" will be by killing and robbing Ashok. One rainy day, he murders Ashok by bludgeoning him with a broken liquor bottle. He then manages to flee to Bangalore with his young nephew. There he bribes the police in order to help start his own driving service. When one of his drivers kills a bike messenger, Balram pays off the family and police. At the end of the novel Balram rationalizes his actions by saying that his freedom is worth lives of Ashok and his family and the monetary success of his new taxi company.

Globalization is one of the major themes in this novel. *The White Tiger* takes place in the modern day world where increased technology has led to world globalization, and India is no exception. Especially westernization in India has played its role in the plot, since it provides an outlet for Balram to alter his caste. Globalization has assisted in the creation of an American atmosphere in India.

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A strive for freedom is one of the major themes of this novel. In an interview with Arvind Adiga, he talked about how *The White Tiger* was the book about a man's quest for freedom. Balram, the Protagonist in the novel, worked his way out of his low social caste (often referred to as "the Darkness") and overcame the social obstacles that limited his family in the past. Climbing up the social ladder, Balram sheds the weights and limits of his past and overcomes the social obstacles that keep him from living life to the fullest that he can. Here Balram explains his condition as if he were in a Rooster coop and the way he could get free of his coop. The novel is somewhat of a memoir of his journey to finding his freedom in India's modern day capitalist society. Another prominent theme is corruption which at a certain point overshadows all the other themes. Balram was born to a low caste in India, meaning that he couldn't enjoy any privilege. He was an intelligent child, but his upbringing led him to lot of corruption and immoral behavior, such as the time when his mother was being burned and it looked as though her foot was resisting the fire. His childhood moulded the person he was going to become in the future. Balram ends up doing anything to forgo in to a higher caste to accomplish his aim.

The author frequently mentions the 'Rooster Coop' while describing the situation or characteristics of the servant class in India and he also defends himself for murdering his master with it. The author first describes how the Rooster Coop looks like in the market in Old Delhi, in order to give the visualization to the target audience.

However, the chickens are not trying to escape from the poor-constructed cage. Hence, the author compares those chickens living in a miserable condition with the poor class in India. From his analysis of the structure of the inequality in the country, the author comes to believe that liability for the suffering of the servant also lies with the mental state of lower class, which he refers as "perpetual servitude".

A key component in *The White Tiger* is the discussion of the Indian caste-system. The caste system in India is a social system that divide the Indian population into higher and lower social classes. Although said to be disappearing in urban India, the caste system still remains in rural India. A person is born into a caste, and the caste one belongs to determines his or her occupation. By birth Balram belongs to the 'Halwai' caste that means sweet maker but was destined to be the son of a rickshaw puller and not a sweet maker because his destiny was stolen by some powerful and influential persons of being a sweet- maker from him.

Adiga brings awareness to the corrupt India caste system by having Balram work the country's system to get what he wants and to become an entrepreneur by any means necessary, including murdering his boss. Balram educates the Chinese Premier throughout his letters about the corruption and immoral ways of India's caste system and its economic gap. Although it may seem that Balram's position in society will forever remain the same, he manages to go from a sweet shop worker, to a personal driver for a rich man and finally to an owner of a small business. Balram's quest to becoming an entrepreneur shows the oppression of the lower caste system and the superiority of the upper caste. He tells the story, of how India still has a caste system and political and economic corruption is still present.

Arvind Adiga's work has an unusual wit, and with it, he takes the responsibility and completes his task, awaking the reader about the loop holes in the servant-master

relationship, as well as mocking the ill systems prevailing in India. Written in the form of a series of letters addressed to Wen Jiabao, the Chinese premier, the book reveals exquisite humour, wit and is a powerful satire at the country which is full of entrepreneurs but where many people still lack access of pure drinking water and electricity. A country marred by corruption and rampant poverty, and the protagonist, a victim of the system hounds conventional at times but the same, however, is presented in a witty and satiric manner. Each page of the novel; each phrase, each sentence seems to pin point the existing system revealing its underline dynamics that further help in understanding the power management that operate in the Indian society and how these are maintained. All this is woven, into an interesting and comic skin tailor made for the cynical Indian audience. The presentation is so attractive that the readers wish to read it many more times and enjoy the pungent satire.

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