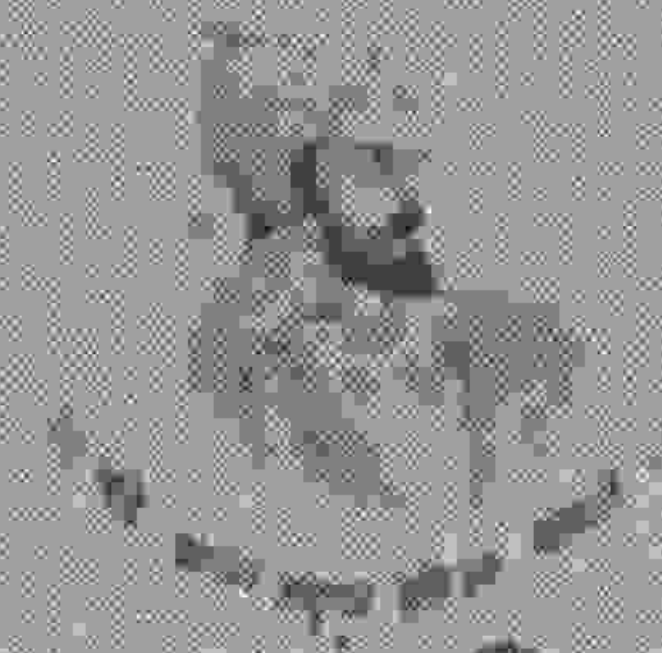


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& COMMERCE COLLEGE, VADUJ
Tal- Khatav, Dist- Satara (MS)

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Special Issue

Arts & Commerce College, Vaduj

THE VOICE OF THE SUBALTERN THE WHITE TIGER

Dr. Kore S. M.

Asst. Professor

R. S. B. Mahavidyalay, Aundh, Satara (MS)

Abstract: Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* depicts the fact that India was the nation which strongly followed the religious hierarchy in the past and follows the class hierarchy in present. The superior class dominates the subaltern and harasses them. Balram, the protagonist represents the subaltern consciousness. He reacts against the superiority in society and tries to establish his identity. Balram is an exception. He retorts against injustice and wins at last. What Adiga expects through the presentation of angry young protagonist is the equality among people of all classes and castes. The victory of Balram is the triumph of subaltern class. The novel depicts many illegal incidents which is a reality in modern India. Many have criticized Adiga for dark sided depiction of India, but how one can deny the facts of illegal activities, corruption, and injustice in the Indian society.

The term Subaltern means 'of inferior rank,' is adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer those working class people in Soviet Union who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern classes include peasants, workers and other groups who are denied access to hegemonic power. The concept of the Subaltern got importance with Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1985). History of subaltern is as old as that of dominant classes. (The group of subaltern studies- Ranajit Guha, Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Partha Chatterji, etc.)

Arvind Adiga, born in Madras belonging to Kannada family from Mangalore, completes his education at Columbia and Oxford universities. His career in journalism helps him in writing novels. His debut novel is honored with Man Booker Prize.

Arvind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* is the strong reaction of marginality against the superiority in the Indian society. The novel presents the two opposite ends of social classes, articulates

the success of the protagonist, Balram Halwai. The superior class relishes nearly every amenity and the subaltern class that actually strives for creation is thrown away. Balram, who served as chauffeur for The Stork family, murders one of brothers that is Ashok and steals away the money. India faces many problems like drinking water, regular electricity, sewage system, public transportation, hygiene, etc. The eradication of all such troubles, he knows, is possible, if the subaltern class awakens for their own rights. Adiga through his novel create two Indias in one: "an India of Light and an India of Darkness". (14) Balram's real education begins outside the class as he earns his bread serving in tea shop. His observation of people teaches him many lessons of life. His action of killing his master is the awakening of poor people against injustices. Through the character of Balram, he represents India of Darkness, the subaltern community retorts. Balram belongs to Laxmangarh, a village that represents darkness of rural life. The aristocratic superiority rules in the village

and the poor villagers are harassed without any fault of them. The poor people were treated with inferiority. This so called superiority and inferiority is based on the birth of a person into a particular family. Being a son of rickshaw puller, he is treated as marginal. In spite of being brilliant and a student of scholarship his poverty hinders his education. The critical condition of his family forces him to work in a teashop. The experiences of early life create the feeling of anger against the rich class in his mind. He observes the subaltern sweat and superior enjoy all comforts of life. This, probably, sets the background for his annoyance against the superiority. Being an adolescent, he decides to observe the people and their nature.

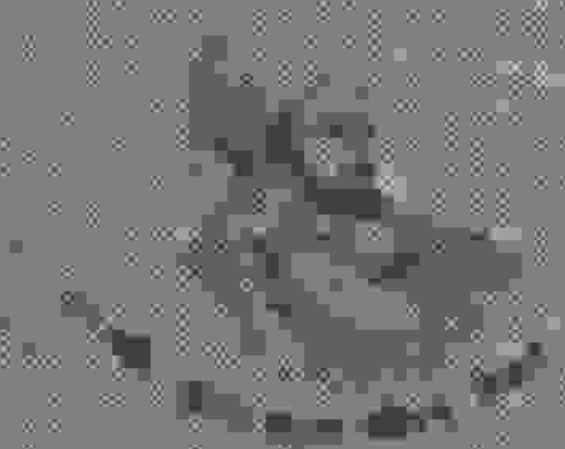
Balram's experiences of the differences among rich and poor class shapes slowly his rage against the superior as he reaches Dhanbad to learn driving. Adiga presents the fact that the class distinction is a reality whether it is a village or city. His luck gives chance him to see the Storks landlords who hire him as a chauffeur. He is appointed to serve as the driver for Ashok, the son of Storks and Pinky Madam, Ashok's wife in the metropolitan city Delhi. He becomes aware of the immense wealth and opportunity around him. The streets of India provide him the real and practical education that he could not get in the four walls of school. The life in Delhi strengthens the differences between poor and rich. Balram has the great attraction for rich life style. He observes the stylish life of Ashok and Pinky Madam. Like other poor drivers, he steals the wine of his master and drinks it. Balram does not feel guilty as the

collection of wine and money by Storks is actually the harassment of poor people. Speaking on the servant-master relationship, Adiga says:

The servant-master system implies two things: One is that the servants are far poorer than the rich—a servant has no possibility of ever catching up to the master. And secondly, he has access to the master—the master's money, the master's physical person. Yet crime rates in India are very low. Even though the middle class—who often have three or four servants—are paranoid about crime, the reality is a master getting killed by his servant is rare.... You need two things [for crime to occur]—a divide and a conscious ideology of resentment. We don't have resentment in India. The poor just assume that the rich are a fact of life.... But I think we're seeing what I believe is a class based resentment for the first time. (Sawhney, 2008)

Being the driver for Ashok and Mukesh, Balram experiences the dirty politics, corruption, inequality, social taboos, caste system and prejudice of people in India. In all such troubles, it is the subaltern class that faces difficulties. He knows that he cannot change it by normal way of living. Therefore, it is unusual way that he accepts to succeed in life.

Balram thinks over his situation. His family suffers due to the landlord family. Although he is appointed as the driver, he is treated as the servant. He has to do all the works that a servant is expected to do. The way rich people treat him shapes his anger against them. He plans to be rich and be the part of new India. He knows he cannot become rich by working hard. All the businessmen, those who have become



rich, have probably done something wrong like corruption, illegal acts, etc. he decides to murder Ashok and carry away the bag full of money. His act of killing the landlord's son is the retort of subaltern against the superiority. It is the anger that he has experienced for so many years. This is the spontaneous reaction against the injustice done to them.

Although one feels restless to know Ashok is murdered, Balram might not to be blamed completely. He kills such a man who is engaged in many illegal activities like corruption. Therefore, his act of murdering Ashok is actually the murder of corruption. What Balram does after settling in Bangalore and starting the White Tiger Drivers' Company to serve the girls working at BPO's in nightshifts is more significant. He follows the social responsibility though he runs the company to earn money. When one of the drivers kills a man in a car accident, he offers compensation and job to one of the victim's family members. This contrasts to the accident that the Pinky Madam is responsible for and Balram is forced to accept the crime. Though he is relieved after bribing the concerned officials, it is the insulting life drivers lead because of mistakes of rich people. The following scene reflects the attitude of rich towards poor.

'Get down on your knees. Look for it on the floor of the car.'

I got down on my knees. I sniffed in between the mats like a dog, all in search of that one rupee.

'What do you mean, it's not there? Don't think you can steal from us just because you're in the city. I want that rupee.'

'We've just paid half a million rupees in a bribe, Mukesh, and now we're screwing

this man over for a single rupee. Let's go up and have a scotch.'

'That's how you corrupt servants. It starts with one rupee. Don't bring your American ways here.'

Where that rupee coin went remains a mystery to me to this day, Mr Premier. Finally, I took a rupee coin out of my shirt pocket, dropped it on the floor of the car, picked it up, and gave it to the Mongoose. (139)

Balram's act is symbolic. He, who represents the subaltern community, wants to end all which is bad, corrupt and illegal in society. Though, he himself is engaged in illegal activities, he compensates it with some social responsibility. Therefore, Adiga allows him to live the life. The title is symbolically used in the novel. The white tiger is rare animal that is born only once per generation. The school inspector names him The White Tiger because of his aggressive nature. He lives up to the expectation and reacts against injustice. Therefore, the journey of Balram is the retort of marginality against superiority.

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