

## A QUEST FOR SELF IDENTITY IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S 'THE WHITE TIGER'

SUBHASH G. RAUT

Associate Professor in English, SPM Tatyasaheb Mahajan Arts and Commerce College Chikhli,  
Distt. Buldana (Maharashtra)

Arvind Adiga presents a continuous struggle of lower and unprivileged people in India not for the mere survival; but self identity and recognition as a human being. It is the revolt against exploiter and suppressors who for centuries had kept them at the secondary or no place at all. In India, varna and then caste system had forced the lower class to suffer, get marginal place of the main stream of the society. Adiga exhibits the realistic condition of marginalized people who are denied their socio-economic upliftment and forced to beg for food, sleep under concrete flyovers, defecting on the roadside, shivering in the cold etc. Zamindari system, rigid class discrimination, illiteracy of lower class, corrupt political system, economic disparity and unemployment contribute to the suffering of the lower class. On one hand, India gives perception of high quality standard of its rich people and on the other, this unseen, uncounted and unknown picture of exploited and suppressed people.

Adiga dramatizes this plight through his main character 'The White Tiger' an Indian citizen, from the lower castes, as rare as the animal from which it gets its name that has the courage to rebel against the identifications imposed on him by caste, family and religion. Unlike the stories of some of his literary predecessors, the story of Adiga's character is not one of resignation and submission but one of rebellion and freedom, ironically earned through violence. Adiga gives his character different names that reveal how others label him and how he tries to escape them, as he moves from the area of Darkness to the area of Light to show how the process of social identification works. His parents had given him no name; they had just called him "Munna," a kid. He was one more among so many. His teacher names him "Balram", after his own name, Krishna, and his father accepted it passively, if that would help his son have a better life. Finally, through murder, he appropriates his boss's identity and money, Ashok Sharma. However, he feels it beneficial to have no name at all and continues being an invisible *half baked Indian*, as Adiga ironizes through the police poster circulated after the murder.

Novelist has successfully interpreted modern Indian ethos from the point of view of lower class in his debut novel '*The White Tiger*'. He has portrayed indomitable central character Balram Halwai who is the strong voice of marginal farmers, landless labourers, jobless youths, poor auto and taxi drivers, and servants. He is unlucky to born in a teeming poor family and under the control of feudal lord Stork. For him, there is no straight or honest way to set himself free but to kill his own employee Ashok Sharma and emerge as a successful businessman. Adiga very successfully depicts the transformation from village simpleton to a successful entrepreneur. He has focused on changing mindset of unprivileged class that is to adopt any way, moral or immoral, to set himself free from master-slave system. He has realistically depicted the suffering, poverty, inferiority of lower class and their struggle to come out of it.

He places his narrative in what he calls Dark India (Bharat), the poor areas of the

subcontinent (closer to the Ganges than the ocean) where people are resigned to their condition and there is “no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality”(3); schooling is almost non-existent and professors are corrupt because, as they do not get their salaries, they use the money destined to books and uniforms; children starve; natural resources (like rivers and fish) are actually owned by the local mafia; politicians are corrupt; people have to beg for jobs; members of the extended families are constantly at each other's throats. This India is contrasted to the “India of Light,” associated with the life in the big cities where “the outsourcing companies that virtually run America” (3) are located.

Life is full of twists and turns in general and lower class in particular. Every one of them has to struggle here in this world to overcome every obstacle in the way to success. Struggle is an essential urge, an inner force in all human beings. The present novel is also no exception. Arvind Adiga, a modern Indian English novelist and free-lance journalist, in his Man Booker Prize winner magnum opus 'The White Tiger' deals with the struggle of oppressed class against age-old slavery and exploitation.

One needs to understand class and caste system in India in order to know the true picture of the society depicted in the novel. Class system is a socio-economic system under which certain persons known as lower class are deprived of social and economic upliftment and compelled to perform labour or services. As far as class system is concerned Arvind Adiga is seen most powerful and wide-ranging in depicting lower class who are marked by lack and deprivation, loneliness and alienation, subjugation and subordination, the resignation and silence, the resilience and neglect. They are subordinated in terms of class, caste, age and gender.

Balam Halwai, the protagonist of the novel, is a typical voice of lower class metaphorically described as “Rooster Coop” (Adiga, 147) and struggling to emancipate from age old slavery and exploitation. He is the son of rickshaw puller who gets his name from his teacher as he is called Munna and his intelligence and wit earn him the title the White Tiger “the rarest of animals the creatures that comes along once in generation.” (Mattin, David) His rise from a poor village boy to successful entrepreneur is not at all easy but hard-hitting struggle to earn separate identity from brutal class system. As a member of “India of Darkness” his struggle begins at very young age when his family borrows loan from village landlord known as Stork for the marriage of his cousin sister Reena. As a consequence all members of the family work for Stork and Balam is pulled out of the school and forced to crush coal and wiper tables at tea shop where he gets “better education” than “at any school” of life and its grim realities. In this context it is to be noted that many children in India are not allowed to complete their schooling on account of poverty, caste and cultural conflict. While working in tea shop, he nourishes a dream of escape from the socio-economic confinement. He always thinks he is not made for all that he does. His rebellious spirit echoes the voice, “I was destined not to stay as slave” (Mendes). He is also inspired by father's words: “My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one of my mines - at least one should live like a man.” (Sebastian, A. J.)

In search of self identity and emancipation from this slavery, protagonist Balam and his brother moves Laxmangarh, Gaya to India's capital city, Delhi. Balam learns driving and manages to offer his service as chauffeur to Stork's son Ashok Sharma and daughter-in-law, Pinky Madam. Here in the city his re-education of life begins. He makes use of every opportunity to prove his honesty and love in order to win favour of his master. His love and respect for Ashok and Pinky

Madam can easily be understood by his own words:

“I would drive whenever they wanted, as faithfully as the servant God Hanuman carried about his master and mistress, Ram and Sita.” (Singh, Krishna)

As a reward of his honesty and love, he is compelled to confess the crime committed by Pinky Madam. From this it becomes obvious that drivers and servants are forced to confess the crime their masters have committed. In this concern Balram rightly says, “The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters.”

It makes clear that servants are exploited, tortured and treated like animals. Moreover, the idea of master-servant system is deeply rooted in psyche of lower class. In this concern Adiga speaks in the words of Balram:

“Doesn't the driver's family protest? Far from it. They would actually go about bragging. Their boy Balram had taken the fall, gone to Tihar Jail for his employer. He was loyal as dog. He was the perfect servant.” (Saxena, Shobhan )

While describing the situation or characteristics of the servant class in India and defending for murdering the master the author frequently mentions the rooster coop. He first describes how the rooster coop looks like in the market in Old Delhi, in order to give the visualization to the target audience: “Hundreds of pale hens and brightly coloured roosters stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and shitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a horrible stench...The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them.”

But the fact, the chickens are not trying to escape from the poor-constructed cage. In the same way, the writer finds that the poor class in India living in a miserable condition like chickens. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country. 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 mentality of the servant class, which he refers as “perpetual servitude”. This ideology is so strong that “you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse”.

Novelist, Arvind Adiga has depicted the struggle of underprivileged class for self identity and empowerment from social, economic and cultural restrictions imposed on them by dominant class. The protagonist Balram Halwai is the representative of the changing mental make-up of the India's underprivileged class who is no longer content to spend their lives away in poverty but want opportunities, moral or immoral, to break away the age-old class hierarchy and to walk ahead in the race of life. His anger, protest, indulgence in criminal acts, drinking, seizing all opportunities indicate deep-rooted frustration and its reaction against the class system.

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**PURVA MIMAANSA**