

## The Subaltern Elements in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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### Abstract

Indian Writing in English arouses attention in the World of English Literature during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In contemporary literature circle, Indian English literature becomes an important part in the World Literature. For instance, *The white Tiger*, written by Aravind Adiga, wins the Booker Prize. In the novel, Aravind Adiga pays attention to the subaltern's situation and also expresses the subaltern's demands. Aravind Adiga gives the power of speech to the subaltern, and then successfully shaped the awoken subaltern images. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* expresses and exposes the issue of the marginalized, through the character of Balaram the protagonist of the novel.

**KEYWORDS:** marginalized, marginalized

The term subaltern is used in postcolonial theory. The exact meaning of the term in current philosophical and critical usages is disputed. Some thinkers use it in a general sense to refer to marginalized groups and lower classes, a person rendered without agency by his or her social status.

The term subaltern in its original meaning refers to subordinate groups within military hierarchies. Antonio Gramscian in his *Prison Notebook* expanded its meaning to conclude the proletariat and other social groups who were outside the structure of political organization. But David Ludden states that, the project actually made itself original by divorcing itself from Gramsci to invent a distinctively Indian subalternity. Subaltern is a word used in British army to denote someone of inferior rank. It consists of the Latin word 'sub' and 'alter' which means under and other respectively.

AravindAdiga in his maiden novel *The White Tiger*, created two different India: "India of Light and India of Darkness" (140). It is the India of Darkness which is found by the novelist articulating the voice of the subaltern. The author is trying to dismantle the discrimination between the aristocracy and the suppressed. The novel is centred on Balram, a son of rickshaw-puller. He belongs to sweet makers and ultimately becomes Ashok Sharma. He is portrayed as subaltern who breaks out the Rooster Coop to come out from age old slavery. It is poverty which compels Balram, the White Tigerto leave the school and work in tea stall washing utensils and doing all kind of menial jobs.The protagonist does not have the proper name. He is named "Munna" and it just means "boy", (13). It was the school teacher who named him Balram and marked his age in the school ledger, whereas the rich people will have their proper name. For instance, the Landlord's son has formal name, Ashok Sharma.

AravindAdiga explicitly portrays the life of BalramHalwai and his family. The portrayal of the life of Halwai's family is the typical voice of subaltern. Vikram

Halwai, Balram's father is hit by poverty and tough manual work. His body tells the history of his life and sufferings.

Aravind Adiga also talks about Zamindari system in this novel, which exploits and subjugates the poor people. So Zamindari practice is also a powerful source of exploitation of the underclass. Adiga illustrates this by portraying the four big animals namely the Buffalo, Stork, Wild Boar and Raven. They are the landlords who got their names from the peculiarities of appetite that had been detected in them. Stork owned the river that flowed outside the village, and he took “. . . a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman in the river, and a toll from every boatman who crossed the river”(24) to reach Laxmangarh. Wild Boar, his brother owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangarh. Men who wanted to work on these lands “. . . had to bow to his feet, and touch the dust under his slipper and agree, to swallow his day wages” (25). This shows that the poor people are entirely subordinated by the young Landlords.

The portrayal of India's Darkness is something different in this novel. Adiga has described the city of Delhi. He talks about underclass people and how they struggle to get proper job for their survival. Things are different in the Darkness. There, every morning, more than ten thousands of young men sit in the tea shops, reading newspapers. They have no jobs to do today. They know that they won't get any job today. The stupid one have goat in a field in the centre of the town.

The caste system creates some problem in Ram Persad's life also. Ram Persad was the servant of Stork disguised his identity because the prejudiced landlords didn't like Muslim. So he claimed to be a Hindu just to get a job and feed his starving family. On disclosure he was sacked from the job. While playing cricket, Roshan, the grandson of Stork calls himself Azaruddin, the captain of India. Stork reacts quickly by saying “. . . call yourself Gavasker. Azaruddin is a Muslim.” (70) Similarly caste problem happens in the life of Pinky too.

The marriage of Ashok and Pinky is not appreciated by the society, because Pinky is not a Hindu girl. Later due to caste and cultural differences their relationship is snapped. Social-cultural slavery is perpetuated in our society by elite through the process of socialization. The poor are trapped and tied to the coop. Only a man who wants to see his family – hunted, beaten, burned alive by the masters comes out of the coop that would not be a normal human being but a White Tiger.

Balram's dreams of breaking free of his coop and come out of the free world and to be a powerful White Tiger. The novelist shows that the poor people can dream of being a White Tiger but even White Tiger which may appear to have power and strength are caught in their own cages. But in Balram's case he breaks the rooster coop and succeeds in life.

Adiga portrays the Indian subaltern context in the novel. As if they are caught in a vortex, these subalterns feel suffocated and strangulated in the rooster coop as their poverty illiteracy and ignorance are exploited by the microscopic powerful minority. Balram understands that in Indian social structure, there are only two groups - those who are eaten and those who eat preys and the predators. The poor and the voiceless know that oppression comes from various directions and the rooster coop is the destiny of the defenceless subaltern. The novelist uses the metaphor to show how the vulnerable subalterns are eternally exposed to tyrannical subjugation of the political, social and even bureaucratic structure of Indian.

The subalterns have no right to enjoy the corruption free world. He is eternally doomed to the chicken coop which like a whirlpool pulls down a subaltern to its centre to destroy him completely. The door to the coop is always open but the present socio-political structure will not make the escape possible. In cities and towns in India, people are obsessed with the idea of a great revolution. Once in a hundred years, there is a revolution that breaks open the coop and frees the poor and the marginalized. As Balram reports,

. . . people in this country are still waiting for the war of their freedom to come from some-where else from the jungles, from the mountains from China, from Pakistan. That will never happen. Every man must take his own Benaras. (304)

Though the cities provide ample opportunities for jobs, social behaviour and psyche of the upper class are identical everywhere, whether it is a landlord or politician or upper caste or rich man. Underclass is trapped in a Rooster Coop everywhere. They are struggling to come out of the cages. Balram is conscious of underclass and is ready to adopt a new moral code of the conduct to succeed in life. Murder of Ashok by Balram is the reaction of deep-rooted frustration of underclass experiencing the polarities between the upper class and the lower class.

India is shown as an emerging entrepreneurial power in the world. Advancement in the field of science, technology, space transportation, hotel, expansion, mall culture, and industries characterized the image of India. But all these developmental activities depend on underclass with distinct identity. Although India has great growth in the field of science and technology still the poor people do not have place to live.

The rich people live in big housing colonies like Defence Colony or Great Kailash or VasantKunj, and inside their colonies the houses have numbers and letters, but this numberings and lettering system follows no known of logic. For instance, in the English alphabet, A is next to B, which everyone knows. Even people like Balram do not know English. But in a colony, one house is called A 231 and then the next is F 378. So once Pinky Madam wanted Balram to take her to Greater Kailash E 231, he tracked down the house to E 200, and just when he thought they were almost there, but the E Block vanished completely. Likewise the rich people got their houses in greater manner but still the under classes are struggling to get place in the Indian society.

Adiga has described another dark spot of shining India. Corrupt police, legal and administrative structure are the marks off another dark spot of India. The police support only the rich men. The police mastermind the forced out confession to protect the rich men from the legal proceedings and the get huge money in lieu of that. His master's wife Pinky hits a man, while she was driving. This hit and run case which legally belongs to Pinky is shifted to Balram.

According to Adiga, dowry system is a social stigma. They marriage of Balram's cousin-sister Rena pushed the whole family into the world of misery and thus Balram is dropped from the school. So the poor people of India even don't get married due this particular system. They are unable to give the dowry. Krishan's marriage also brings huge dowry. Balram says that it was one of the good marriages.

The author has also thrown light on the prostitution which is considered as a dark area of India of light. In the big cities due to poverty most of the women are

forced to adopt this kind of profession. In Dhanbad, Delhi and Bangalore, there are red light areas. One can negotiate a price with those women and the price depends on, “High class or Low class? Virgin or Non- Virgin?” (227) In Delhi especially the rich people prefer “Golden-haired Women.” (232) Forgery also involves in this racket suppliers present a woman died in golden hair to snatch the maximum price. Nepal girl, Ukrainian students and poor labourers from the village working in construction of mall allow women for prostitution.

One of the Indian women writers Shobha De also portrays the red light area in her novel *Sultry Days*. The protagonist God and Nisha go to the red light area in Kamathipuram in Mumbai. When God sees one of the girls wearing pink bra, five sizes too small for her, God jumped up “I want the-that’s here. That’s the one I want.” (De 53)

Adiga has successfully highlighted the subaltern issue in the novel and brought home the idea that in the story of India’s progress role of the underclass is important. He throws light on the master-servant relationship in this book. Balram is not only a servant but also a driver in the house of Mr. Ashok Sharma. As a servant he begins to understand the real relationship between the master and servant. It is meant that the servant is nothing more than a throwaway item to be used and discarded. The servant system implies two things - one is that servants are far poorer than the rich and a servant has no possibility of becoming a master. Secondly, he has to work for the master and carry master’s money. And also he has to work as a master’s physical person.

In India, the rich did not have drivers, cook, barbers and tailors but they simply have servants. And the servant has to do all those works in the house. The servant has to drive the car, sweep the floor of the courtyard, make tea, clean cobwebs with a long broom or chase a cow out of the compound. Balram explains his duty as a servant. Balram also explains his duty while driving the car. He has to steer the car with one hand and pick up a whisky bottle with other hand, pour it into a glass for his master, even when the car is moving. Balram explains this is how he suffered as a servant and driver.

As far as master- servant relationship is concerned, the servant has to obey his master. The drivers are compelled to accept the crimes of their master. Though the servants and drivers are humble and loyal to their master, they are humiliated and tortured a lot. Ashok Sharma and Pinky madam use to tease Balram now and then. Whenever they have their food together, they would tease Balram. They tease him about his face, nose and teeth. Drivers do not wear uniform in the city. If at all they wear uniform, it would be dirty. His master says that Balram looks like a monkey in that uniform. The poor people like Balram do not have proper dresses. They would wear torn and dirty dresses and so the rich people tease them. This is way how subaltern suffer in the poverty stricken society. The author beautifully portrays the master-servant relationship in this novel.

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