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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DICHOTOMY BETWEEN THE DARKNESS AND THE LIGHT IN 'THE WHITE TIGER' BY ARAVIND ADIGA.

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Abstract

The White Tiger is a novel, in which Aravind Adiga deals with the issue of class and caste difference. The narrative attempts to highlight struggle and exploitation of the common and poor strata of society of India. It is in that sense it is a realistic novel identifying and reflecting over the burning issues of the society. Through the psycho realistic narrative the author presents the gloomier picture of the rural life at the protagonist's native, Laxmangarh. The protagonist is an aspirant of becoming entrepreneur, narrates his past in a conversation with an interlocutor, a Chinese premier, Mr. Wen Jiabao. Balram's past reveals his poverty and unemployment at his native. He also narrates his village life style and growing need of financial security to his family for which he shifts to the Light i.e. city, New Delhi. After migrating to urban area he is exploited by overburdened work in the Stork's family where he performs all sorts of house work alongside his main duty of chauffeur. But through this struggle he finally plans to overcome his status. He believes and propagates the socialist ideology. The paper explores and criticizes the capitalistic ideology having more self centeredness and utilitarianism which has its repercussions of class and caste conflict, unequal distribution of wealth and exploitation.

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Introduction:-

Widening income inequality is the defining challenge of our time. In advanced economics, the gap between the rich and poor is at its highest level in decades. Inequality within most advanced and emerging markets and developing countries has increased; a phenomenon that has received considerable attention- President Obama called widening income inequality the "defining challenge of our time." A recent Pew Research center (PRC 2014) survey found that the gap between the rich and the poor is considered a major challenge by more than 60 percent of the respondent worldwide. Taking this economic and relatively social concern into consideration the present paper analyzes the dichotomy and its influence on the lifestyle of the two extreme classes. (CCII p.5)

Aravind Adiga's 'The White Tiger' is a Booker awarded novel regarding a character named Balram Halwai who has transformed himself as an entrepreneur from a simple driver, breaking a rooster co-op, symbol of eternal servitude having no chance to emerge from the plight. Adiga's present novel talks of two India- the urban and the rural, informing about the real scenario of the privileged and the under privileged section of the society. The entire

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novel is an epistolary writing addressed to the Chinese premier, Wen Jiabao. It's a critique to the boastful account telling "how moral and saintly India is" that could be told to the Chinese premier by our prime minister.

The novel narrates socio economic conditions of India through the story of Balram Halwai who inferred out to be the title character, having a unique personality to overcome the marginalized communities and emerge as a creative entrepreneur breaking typical servant mentality of eternal servitude.

Injustice and inequality has always been around us and we get used to it. How long can it go on? Social discontent and violence has been on the rise. What Adiga highlights is the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor and the economic system allows a small elite group to prosper at the cost of the majority of minnows. The landlords such as the Stork, the Buffalo, the Raven and the Wild Boar occupy most of the property of the village and dominate the whole community.

"The Stork was a fat man with a moustache, He 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 to come to our village.

His brother was called the Wild Boar. This fellow owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangarh. If you wanted to work on those lands, you had to bow down to his feet, and touch the dust under his slippers and agree to swallow his day wages...

The Raven owned the worst land, which was the dry, rocky hillside around the fort and took a cut from the goatherd who went up there to graze with their flocks. If they didn't have their money, he liked to dip his beak into their backside...

The Buffalo was greediest of the lot. He had eaten up the rickshaws and the roads. So if you ran a rickshaw, or use a road, you had to pay him his feed- one third of whatever you earned no less."(TWT p.24/25)

The difference between the rich and the poor is explicitly exposed by recounting their physical appearance. The Stork having huge income and landlords' quarter was "a fat man with a fat moustache, thick and curved and pointy at the tips." (TWT p.24) While the appearance of Balram's father is described arouse pity. "I would find him shirtless, usually alone, drinking tea and thinking."(TWT p.24) The dichotomy between the two classes is expressed clearly in the following lines.

"A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. Ours are different. My father's spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use in villages to pull water from wells ..., like a dog's collar; cuts and Nick's and scars, like little whip marks in his flesh... The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen."(TWT p.24/25)

His uncle also did such back breaking work. As soon as the rainy season starts, they would go the field with their rust sickles and beg for some work to the landlord.

The discourse on inequality often makes distinction between inequality of outcomes as measured by income, wealth and expenditure. Further, it leads to inequality of opportunities to grow. Inequality of outcomes arises from a combination of differences in opportunities and individual's efforts and talent. At the same time, it is not easy to separate effort from opportunity, especially in an intergenerational context. E.g. children's opportunity to obtain education is mainly determined through parental income. The same applies to the case of Balram whose father is a rickshaw puller therefore he and his brother Kishan lacks opportunities to get adequate formal education.

"My father was a poor man..." and he was "son of Vikram Halwai, rickshaw-puller."(TWT p.23)

"In terms of formal education, I may be somewhat lacking. I never finished school, to put it bluntly. Who cares! I haven't read many books, but I've read all the ones that count. I am a self-taught entrepreneur (TWT p.6)... Me, and thousands of others in this country like me, are half-baked, because we were never allowed to complete our schooling."(TWT p.10)

Balram never had a chance to focus on his education; his plight forced him to do child labour which disrupted his studies. His grandmother wanted him to join with his elder brother Kishan to work at tea shop, but his father had other aspirations, he wanted him to study as his mother had her last wish. But Balram's fate was in his grandmother's hand and he had to go to work.

"Let the boy go to the tea shop like Kishan, that's what I, say." (TWT p.29) "I broke the coal against the brick... (TWT p.37) "Working in a tea shop. Smashing coals. Wiping tables." (TWT p.38)

The worse thing was that the teacher recruited was also corrupt. The government has launched mid day meal free to all students was not provided to them. The teacher made most of them by stealing the money allotted for the students' lunch and school dress by selling them.

"There was supposed to be free food at my school- a government programme gave every boy three rotis, yellow daal, and pickles at lunch time. But we never ever saw rotis, or yellow daal, or pickles, and everyone knew why: the school teacher had stolen our lunch money... uniforms that the government had sent for us; we never saw them, but a week later they turned up for sale in the neighboring village." (TWT p.33)

Despite such deprived conditions, Balram knew reading and was intelligent eavesdropper. He received an accolade for passing a test of reading sentences from the board and answering questions asked by the inspector.

"You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious in this crowd of thugs and idiots...the white tiger...in this jungle." (TWT p.35)

Being aware of Balram's low education, his master and his wife makes fun of Balram's ignorance by asking various questions which is quite insulting and embarrassing.

"Balram, I have a few questions to ask you, how many planets are there in the sky?...who was the first prime minister of India?...what is the name of our continent?" (TWT p.9)

Both Mr Ashok and Pinky Madam laugh at his poor knowledge. They consider that the whole country is full of people like him, "half-baked", illiterate and poor in knowledge that is grim reality of this country. They many times find fault in Balram's pronunciations and laugh at his vulnerability in speaking other than his language.

"They laughed again. It's not PiJJA. It's piZZA. Say it properly."
"It's not maal, it's a mall...Say it again." (TWT p.154)

Thus, Balram is intellectually victimized by his master.

In terms of medical facilities, the binary opposition is visible. The have-nots are the one who are suffering, unable to avail desirable services. They can't afford the private hospitalization because of the unaffordable prices of medication. Balram's father suffered from TB but there was no hospital for his treatment in Laxmangarh although there are three different foundation stones for hospital, laid by three different politicians before three different elections. As the cost of private hospitalization is out of their reach, they carried their father to a government hospital. The situation is worse as the government hospital is unguarded and lack of maintenance is observed. The animals stroll in the rooms, defecate and feed. There is no hygiene at a very highly hygienic place. No medical staff is on duty. Medical treatment is totally neglected. Patients are not taken care of and no medical attention is paid. When it is inquired that why the doctor was not available, it is came to know that, it is the only hospital on either side of the river. Thus, there is no medical vigilance.

When there is a vacancy for the post of the medical superintendent it's filled by paying four lakh rupees. The attendance of the doctors is taken in an imaginary register. Even the treatment is done on paper and the patients are healed without being treated.

"According to this ledger you've been there. You've healed my wounded leg. You've healed that girl's jaundice." (TWT p.50)

“There was no doctor in the hospital. The ward boy, after we bribed him ten rupees, said that a doctor might come in the evening. The doors to the hospital’s rooms were wide open...There were three black goats sitting on the steps...it’s not safe in the rooms- that cat has tasted blood” (TWT p.48)

The situation is contrary, when the Stork had a little pain in his stomach, so the Mongoose made him drive down to Max, one of the prestigious private hospitals in Delhi. The hospital is well maintained with proper medical staff attending the patients. There is cleanliness and hygiene in the hospital.

“The beautiful big glass building. Doctors walked in and out with long white coats, and stethoscope in their pockets...the hospital lobby looked clean as the inside of a five star hotel.” (TWT p.180)

The financial situation is also worth exploring between the two classes, the circumstances are different in the Darkness. Young ones are unemployed. They spare time at tea shop, reading news paper, lie on a *charpoy* humming tunes or sit in their rooms talking to a photo of film actress. They have no job to do and have gathered in a field in the center of town. They outstretch their hands to climb on a truck to earn money in city. After getting informed about the salary of driver, Balram decides to learn driving and looks for the job.

“I was walking from house to house, knocking on the gates, and on front doors of the rich, asking if anyone wanted a driver. Everyone said no.” (TWT p.59)

This indicates that there is a great struggle to earn money, the whole family waits with a hope that he would get something to spend by the end of the month. Balram was pivotal person so far as his family’s financial condition is concern. Balram is employed at the Stork’s house at a salary of eight hundred rupees per month, but at the cost of too much of house hold work. He had to give hot water massage to Stork’s feet, sweep the courtyard, washing their dogs, tighten the badminton net, make tea, wash food plates, wash car alongside driving car.

“I had to heat water on stove...and then lift the old man's feet ...and immerse them in hot water and then massage them both gently.” (TWT p.70) “Then take a broom and sweep the courtyard.” (TWT p.75) “The rich expect their dogs to be treated like humans... I got down on my knees and began scrubbing the dogs, and then lathering them, then washing them down.” (TWT p.78) “I swept the courtyard twice over.” (TWT p.106) “When they were done, I scraped the food off the plates and washed them.” “I got the tea kettle ready and began making tea.” (TWT p.145)

Balram drove and did other ancillary services to the family without any excuses, day and night, tirelessly. He just obeyed what is ordered to him. Even though he was not in good health, he was at their service. Notwithstanding his loyalty and dedication, on many occasions he received smack on his head, was insulted, questioned his faithfulness and even almost trapped in an accident case. Once the Mongoose lost a rupee coin in the car, Balram was made to find it on the floor of the car despite being a meager amount.

“Get down on your knees. Look for it on the floor of the car.” (TWT p.139)

He is being constantly instructed,

“Wait. I have instructions for you...the air conditioner should be turned off ...music should not be played ... give us a reading of the meter to make sure you haven’t been driving the car on your own.” (TWT p.141)

When Pinky Madam leaves at night to America, Mr Ashok almost put Balram’s life in danger; the matter of fact was Balram was ignorant about her permanent departure leaving Mr Ashok alone and what Balram did was a part of his duty.

“He pushed me even a bit more I was in real danger.” (TWT p.182)

The Mongoose suggests Balram to give a forced statement regarding hit and run case which actually committed by Pinky Madam in her drunkenness. Even after all the false blames, Balram nursed and took care of Mr Ashok as empathetic servant, took pity on his master in the crisis.

Apart from the job exploitation and ill treatment, there are certain social demarcations fore grounded at particular narrative which vividly expresses the two classes and their status in the society. The city Delhi is mainly a divide of the elite and the downtrodden, some areas are restricted for the poor, e.g. *“Rickshaws are not allowed inside the*

posh parts of Delhi, where foreigners might see them and gape. Insist on going to Old Delhi, or Nizamuddin- there you'll see, the road full of them- thin, sticklike men, leaning forward from the seat of a bicycle." (TWT p.27)

Indians though achieved democracy with the pillars of unity, equality and fraternity; still there exists discrimination on the basis of caste and class. As per the protagonist, *"these days, there are two castes: Men with big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat – or get eaten up."* (TWT p.64) These suggest that the Storks have made the Halwaies their prey and Balram has decided to survive by the other way. The Stork straight away asks about Balram's caste as the Stork had all employees from top caste. *"Are you from a top caste or bottom caste, boy?"* (TWT p.64)

In India even the options of drinks are influenced by the class. Such distinction is chiefly due to affordability. The protagonist explains this to Mr Jiabao

"Indian liquor was for village boys like me- Toddy, arrack, country hooch. English liquor, naturally, is for the rich. Rum, whiskey, beer, gin..." (TWT p.72/73). The list of brands and their prices are mentioned, which signifies the class distinction. *"Black Dog was the first name in the first class category of whisky. It was the only thing that the Stork and his sons drank."* (TWT p.74)

Similar to caste division, the residential location is also different. The rich people live in big housing colonies like Defense Colony or the Greater Kailash or Vasant Kunj, whereas the poor, who are in numbers, don't have enough space to live. Not even a safety.

"Thousands of people live on the sides of the road in Delhi. They have come from Darkness too- you can tell by their thin bodies, filthy faces, by the animal-like way they live under the huge bridges and overpasses." (TWT p.119/120)

Such kind of grim reality is highlighted in the novel. It's this unequal distribution of wealth makes the author favor the Socialist ideology. Democracy is considered as failure to establish it's ideals in true sense of the term; instead it has widened the gap between the two classes.

In the so called democracy, the consumer is the king of the market; the poor are excluded from their fundamental rights. One of the news reports *"Is There No Space for the poor in the Malls of New India?"* (TWT p.148) It is aptly exemplified through a guard's stopping a poor man's entry into a mall, as the poor had sandals in his feet, only the men wearing shoes are permitted. The class tag creates a dichotomy. The man in the sandals protests this injustice, *"Am I not a human being too?"* (TWT p.148) The rich are well protected by conveniences that shelters them from different atmospheres by using luxury appliances such as electrical heater and gas heater even burn logs of wood in their fire place to survive in the winter. On the other hand *"the homeless or the servants like night watchmen and the drivers who are forced to spend time outside in winter."* (TWT p.156)

The novelist again shows the contrast in the lifestyle of the rich and the poor through big cinema complex where the rich spend lavishly on entertainment, drinks, dance and have bodily pleasures. On the contrary there is another entertainment place, i.e. *"market for the servants"* which is smaller, grimmer mirror image of the real market, tucked somewhere into a by lane. It's a place for the commoners and the poor.

"The scene of a big cinema...charges over hundred and fifty rupees per film...that's not all: you've also got plenty of places to drink beer, dance, pick up girls...Beyond the last shop begins the second PVR...this is the market for the servants ...the men work in the cinemas, and who sweep them clean, come here to eat. The beggars have their homes here." (TWT p.203/204) The common workers like Balram can only afford tea and potato vada.

According to the protagonist, Delhi is division of *two* Indias where there is both Darkness and light flows. The brighter part of the city is Gurgaon where rich people like Mr Ashok lived, and the Old Delhi, is the other end where cheap crowd have their shops, e.g. men selling fish, cheap shoe market, cheap shirt makers, second hand book market of Darya Ganj.

The dreams of rich and poor are also highlighted according to their living. The poor lack basic needs- food, shelter and clothing. So, *"the poor dream all their lives of getting enough to eat and looking like the rich."* (TWT p.225) While the rich have a luxurious lifestyle, with all conveniences resulting overweight and obese therefore they dream

of losing weight and looking like a poor. Every evening the compound around the residential area of the rich become an exercise ground to lose the weight put on through *“late night parties, all that drinking and munching.”* (TWT p.225) So they walk to lose weight and become slim, while they walk their servants stand at various spots on that circle with bottles of mineral water and towels in their hands.

At one juncture Mr Ashok realizes that the rich have gone astray, and he wants to live life of simplicity. He hates the food he eats.

“I’m sick of the life I lead... we rich people have lost our way.” And when he eats the commoner’s food he relished it, *“this food is fantastic. And just twenty-five rupees! ... You people eat so well! I like eating your kind of food!”* (TWT p.239)

The novel presents an important symbol i.e. rooster coop, they are the pale hens and brightly colored roosters, tightly into wire-mesh cages, tightly packed, ready to be butchered. The rooster coop suggests the helplessness of the roosters. The same is true to humans who are unable to raise themselves due to exploitation by socio-economically elite class of the society.

“A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 per cent...to exist in perpetual servitude.” (TWT p.175/176)

Its few thousands of men govern the whole economy of the country. This is an unequal distribution of wealth. The proletarians are always at loss even though they are the core part of an economy and the bourgeois who make most of the services of the proletarians. The workers provide sincere services to the customers and remain faithful to their masters but reward they get is a trivial amount. The servants carry with them goods of worth thousands of rupees with without any deceitful intention, serve their masters honestly. *“The trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy.”* (TWT p.175) The paradox is that it is the proletarians who are suffering in the economic crisis. Thus, the protagonist decides to break the roosters coop and raise himself to the bourgeois class. But he admits himself as, *“social entrepreneur.”* He utters the voice of socialism; he wants to serve the nation especially the unprivileged section of the society.

“I have no ambitions for myself. I am simply the voice of the poor and the disenfranchised.” (TWT p.269) *The rich are always one step ahead of us...For every step he’d take, I’d take two* (TWT p.268). *I just love to see a rich man roughed up.* (TWT p.271)”

The protagonist desire the nation to be replaced by their ideology of democracy by socialism, because it has inclusive view of developing people together rather than only a privileged class. His philosophy is to let all the humans live in harmony and with respect. *“Let animals live like animals; let humans live like humans. That’s my philosophy in a sentence.”* (TWT p.276) He becomes a master now but unlike his previous masters, he would give due respect to his employees.

“I am a master of drivers. I don’t treat them like servants- I don’t slap, or bully, or mock anyone... they are my employees and I’m their boss, that’s all. I make them sign a contract and I sign it too, and both of us honor that contract.” (TWT p.302). The protagonist wants to establish an English school for the poor children in Bangalore to make more white tigers. *“I think I might sell everything, take the money, and start a school- an English-language school- for the poor children in Bangalore.”* (TWT p.319)

Thus, the protagonist favors the Socialist ideology and criticizes the Democratic set up of India where equality is deteriorated and the majority of the people who hail from the weaker sections bare sufferings.

The news on radio announces that the ruling party having elite class with utilitarian mind set had been hammered in the polling result. *“A new set of parties had come to power. The Great Socialist’s party is one of them.”* (TWT p.269) Delhi, the capital had been invaded by the votes of a big part of the Darkness. The road was blocked by vehicles full of men shouting: *“Hail the Great Socialist! Hail the voice of the poor of India!”* (TWT p.268) The election has brought the poor from the Darkness to the Light. *“The election shows that the poor will not be ignored. The Darkness will not be silent.”* (TWT p.269) Thus, the novel envisages the development and empowerment of the weaker sections that makes the nation stronger by eradication of inequality, class and caste discriminations.

Conclusion:-

To conclude the paper, the novel stresses the inequality between the proletarians and the bourgeois. The unequal distribution of wealth is explicitly recounted in the novel through epitomizing Balram, the white tiger, a revolutionary and a reformist, representative of the weaker section and the Storks symbolize the elite class and the conflict remains perpetual.

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