

***‘The White Tiger’ A Moneyed Beast from A Man***

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**Abstract**

The White Tiger is a Booker winner epistolary novel written by Arvind Adiga. The white tiger reveals the journey of an innocent man Balram who experiences the harsh realities, his poverty forces him to attain treacherous means so that he can stand up in the queue of rich people. While suffering the blows Balram realizes that monetary stability plays vital role to transform somebody as the human being. Arvind Adiga tries to focus on the steps which are taken by Balram to alleviate his poverty so that he can procure social dignity. How a virtuous culturally attached Indian man becomes a money minded carrying beastly streaks in his heart to attain power. This research paper shows the transformative self of Balram from an innocent, underprivileged to roaring, moneyed beast.

**Keywords:** Poverty, Rooster Coop, Entrepreneur, Necessity.

Arvind Adiga is the especially studied novelist of twenty-first century. Arvind Adiga is an Indo-Australian author who was brought up in Mangalore. He studied at Columbia College of Columbia University and Sinner School Oxford. He worked as a journalist he was working as the financial journalist for The Financial Times. He wrote about Stock Market and Investment Protocols. During this period he got the chance to interview Donald Trump. He wrote review on “Oscar and Lucinda” written by Peter Carrey in 1988 and his review was revealed in The Second Circle(an online literary Review). He also worked as the south Asian correspondent for Times Magazine. After that he started working as the freelancer and wrote The White Tiger. Arvind Adiga is the fourth Indian to receive The Man Booker Prize. In 2009 The White Tiger was declared for the adaption of a feature film with the same name The White Tiger on Netflix. The moment The White Tiger became the Man Booker Prize winner it sold instantly.

In an interview Arvind Adiga spoke about literary influences on himself. It might make more sense to speak of influences on this book rather than on me. The influences on The White Tiger are three black American writers of post -world warII era(in order) Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin and Richard Wright. The odd thing is that I have not read any of them for years and years- I read Ellison’s Invisible Man in 1995 or 1996 and have never returned to it – but now

that the book is done, I can see how deeply it's indebted to them. As a writer, I don't feel tied to any one identity; I'm happy to draw influences from wherever they come. Being a winner of The Man Booker Award he himself admitted that it was not easy to escape from the shadow of The White Tiger He was afraid of being eaten himself by The White Tiger. He spelt out:

"I had come out of complete obscurity, and at first I found it hard to deal with the fact I was a published writer. Once you have written a book like The White Tiger it's very hard to escape from the shadow of it I was frightened the white tiger would eat me too"(Interview)

Adiga says that he is grateful that his former profession had framed him as the kind writer. Arvind Adiga dedicated his debut novel The White Tiger to Ramin Bahrani, an American director and screenwriter who was the director of the movie The White Tiger. In 2009 he published Between the Assassinations a set of linked short stories. In 2020 Arvind Adiga released his novel Amnesty which depicts the piteous circumstances of immigrants. In 2021 this book was short-listed for The Miles Franklin Award.

The White Tiger discloses the huge gap between the rich and poor how it impacts India's masses who believe money as the symbol of power. Novel The White Tiger is an epistolary novel which is composed of seven letters written to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao from Balram alias Ashok Sharma a self-learned man, an entrepreneur. Balram after murdering becomes the replica of his master hiding heinous crimes within himself. Arvind Adiga has the specific view about servant- master relationship.

"The servant master system implies two things: one is that servants are far poorer than the rich 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 thing (for crime to occur) – a divide and a conscious ideology of resentment in India. The poor just assume that the rich are a fact of life ... But I think we're seeing I believe is a class – based resentment for the first time. (Sawhney,2008)

The protagonist of The White Tiger Balram is the subaltern voice who represents the poor hankering to meet both the ends. Balram's journey is the exemplum of rising India which has macabre twist. He is an entrepreneur hiding a heinous criminal within himself the background which makes him to become a double standard man are poverty, social injustice and corruption. Arvind Adiga highlights the fact that how economic disparity creates an ever-widening gap between rich and poor and this existing distorted system makes minority to govern majority. "At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is

likely to inherit the world from the west, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society...the great divide”(RaaJ,2008,p.9)

The novel starts with the monologue of the central character Balram a self-prepared entrepreneur, Balram Halwai is a car driver whose father worked as the rickshaw-puller his thrilling journey started when he killed his employer. Balram's intelligence is the worth which has to be used to groom himself. He shifts to Delhi from a small village Laxmangarh a remote area of Gaya Laxmangarh a poor land where people forget to give names to their children as they are so busy in making both the ends meet. BaramHalwai gets his name from the Government teacher. His teacher remarks:

“Munna? That's not real name  
He was right it just means boy”(13)

The shattered condition of village Laxmangarh is predictable from the fact this land is far away from advancement. Teachers are an example of corrupt system that chew paan and sleep in the class. 'The Midday Meal Scheme' is not benefitting to under privileged children but the resources are used for self-means. How corruption becomes the growth of ladder is known to Balram since childhood. How thick skin people survive.

“There was supposed to be free food at my school a government program gave every boy three rotis, yellow dal, and pickles at lunch time. But we never saw rotis or yellow daal, or pickles and everyone knew why: the school teacher had stolen our lunch money. The teacher had a legitimate excuse to steal the money – he said he hadn't been paid his salary in six months”

Extreme poverty forced Balram to reach to metropolitan so that he can feed himself and his needy family he starts searching how to find out survival. The caste barrier which is prevalent in India's male dominant set up where people are restricted to live according to the strata to which they belong. Balram's master is not ready to accept

Balram for being a lower caste on being enquired about the caste Balram said “Halwai”  
What caste are you? ‘Halwai’  
‘Sweet-makers,’ the old driver said shaking his head.

“That's what you people do. You make sweets. How can you learn to drive? He pointed his hookah at the live coals. ‘That's like getting coals to make ice for you. Mastering a car’ – he moved the stick of an invisible gearbox-“it is like taming a wild stallion- only a boy from the warrior caste can manage that. You need to have aggression in your blood. Muslims, Rajputs

Sikhs- they are fighters, they can become driver. you think sweet- makers can last long in fourth gear?"

Balram gets the chance to work under the rich land lord he becomes free from the caste, creed, color and religion. Mr. Ashok and Balram are born on the same soil but both of them stand on opposite poles former is the most important, educated and privileged and the latter one is lesser important, uneducated and lower caste. Unemployment is the biggest burning issue of India's masses who run in the convergent mode to get a government job the flourishing private business tycoon pay lesser to their employees keeping the generated revenue in their pockets. Government administration sits on the highest pedestal to accept money from economically upgraded private sector people. Munna alias Balram portends the rigid relationship between the rich and poor. Here Arvind Adiga introduces Marxism theory. Marxism is the economic struggle for power between the ruling class and the working class, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Arvind Adiga tries to focus on the fact that money can fade away caste and broadly there are two castes in India -rich and poor. There are various best references of eating and consumption, focusing on engulfing desire to be wealthier and powerful. In the snares are those people who fear of being eaten. Balram "These days, there are two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with small bellies. And only two destinies: eat or get eaten up" (9)

The White Tiger has different characters who belong to different economic and caste strata of society. Adiga wants to portray the huge gap between the rich and the poor and an existing social realism. Vijay a mimic character who changes herself according to circumstances so that he can be the most benefitted by land lords. There are four landlords named- The Buffalo, the stork, the wild boar and the Raven represent the conventional feudal system. They give harsh punishments to those who do not follow them. Balram's life moves according to the instructions of Ashok's father Mongoose. The granny of Munna is the mother figure who cares selflessly about Munna writes letters to him. The school teacher is the big fat man being corrupt, Ram Persad who disguises his true identity just to be employed as a driver. People of India live different lives depending on their needs, their economical position in society this what Arvind Adiga tries to reveal through The White Tiger Pinky Madam an American return who feels frustrated within sophisticated Indian society where she cannot drive freely in the country of zero traffic rules. When Balram introduces the feudal lords without names and names them with different animal names, he emphasizes it because of their monster within a man feature. Kevin Rushby in the review of the white tiger in The Guardian calls them "Dickensian grotesques"

Arvind Adiga tries to create similarities between a wild animal and his characters of The White Tiger. In the words of Neel Ahuja, "Race and species- concept that precedes modern scientific thought-were 'historically' unlisted in nature through a modern epistemology that

understood bodies in terms of resemblance in their deep organic structures” (12). The aim is to coalesce the physical appearances with inner hidden beast.

“There was another fellow inside the Ambassador; a stout one with a broad brown dimpled head, a serene expression on his face, and a shotgun on his lap  
He was the buffalo.”

The Stork was a fat man with moustaches, thick and curved and pointy at the tips. He owned the river that flowed outside. And he took a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman in the river, and a toll from every boatsman who crossed the river to come to our village.

Stork's brother is the Wild Boar who owns productive agricultural land. If somebody wants to earn money from these agricultural lands he has to do bootlicking of the Wild boar. He is born to dominate a woman whom he considers a mere object. When a woman passes, he stops his car, rolls down his car windows to reveal his grin, two of his teeth, on either side of his nose, were long, and curved like little tusks. The behavior of these ruling land lords shows that how the poor people live their lives they are every time in fear of being ruled.

The plight of Balram's father was lamentable he passed away in the lack of medical aid. Balram gives description of his father in the demeaning way from this moment only Balram realizes that how important money is? How money affects life? How money can fade away crimes? His father is paralleled with lesser powerful creature, meek and helpless. Balram had been facing the harsh realities of life with open eyes. His statement shows the dark realities of life how people are affected by the huge gap between rich and poor and how these circumstances compels a common man to adopt distorted ways of life to shed off the ethical values so that they can adjust in the real world life makes them what they are not they become what they never wished:

A rich man's body is just like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. Ours is different. My father's spine was knotted rope, the kind that women use in villages to pull water from wells; the clavicle curved around his neck in high relief, like dog's collar; cuts and nicks and scars, like little whip marks in his flesh, ran down his chest and waist, reaching down below his hip-bones into his buttocks. The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in sharp pen.

The words which Adiga puts in the mouth of Balram are heavy with the painful realization that how poverty forced his father to lose his battle for life?

According to Franz Fanon in *Black Skin white mask* says- “Man is the human only to extent which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed [...]. In order to win the certainty of oneself the incorporation of the concept of recognition is essential”<sup>16</sup>

Balam also loves to remain to being himself he loves his father's “dog's collar”. Balam considers it as the mark of identity, attached to his own inherited foundation which frames his cultural identity but in order to move forward he has to outset a new evil spirited Balam from the old, conventional Balam.

The term “animal mask” is introduced by Neel Ahuja in “Postcolonial Critique in a Multispecies World” which indicates the merger of animal and human “envisioning multispecies relationships” and related to “historical conjunctions of social differences and species discourse”. The *White Tiger* has the wide use of term “The Animal Mask” the streaks of animal within a man is an amalgamation which is the hidden nature and upholds the remnant of colonialism and colonist. This process is about de-meaning, devaluing, de-humanizing and further animalization based on culture, race. colonial discourses come out from the mediocre transformative stage which marks the inauguration of the animal into man.

The amalgamation of animal and human being which Arvind Adiga has brought through the protagonist Balam who is not only the victim of uncivilized culture but also the oppressed creature by ruled ones. Adiga wants to portray the bare truth. The *White Tiger* is in the format of first-person narration and addressed in the form of letters to the Chinese Premier story appears to be realistic one. The character of being animal, beast, untamed and with an ever power hungry appetite is the central feature of all the major characters The *White Tiger* – an extrapolate verb about the ruthless approaches of Balam. On the other side Balam, his father, his brother, his grandmother is the continued symbol of oppressed ones. The art of Arvind Adiga through which he engraved his characters with animal features is worth to recognize and applaud because in post -modern era how human beings are deviating away from human values how the gap between rich poor forces them to imitate the rich class no matter how to move upward but they have to move higher so that they can gain social dignity. This is how we are progressing towards monetary hungry desires and this is the way in which society stands.

In *The White Tiger* both oppressor and oppressed are in the form of animals the animal conduct of the upper class is brought up in one way. The family or village landlord who employs Balam represents their constant power mongering attitude that forms the dominant



character of the ruling class. It is evident in *The White Tiger* that it is the socially superior class who diminishes the other people to the socially inferior or subjugated. The backdrop of novel rotates from Laxmangarh a backward village to metropolitan Delhi where Balram finds his employer Ashok who forms the prototype of malicious cycle – the animal creating another animal and in this prolonged process there is a trial to generate more animalism within a man. Balram has burning desire to captivate money he gets fascinated by the thought of marriage “Kusum would screw out of the girl’s family” the “twenty -four carat gold, all that cash fresh from the bank”<sup>28</sup> Balram’s fascination towards shows that in the matrimonial alliance the deal of money is more than a relationship. On the other hand he also contemplates about the grimy future of his children who would be another Balram without money “see I was like that ass now, and all I would do, if I had children, was to teach them to be asses like me, and carry rubble around for the rich” <sup>29</sup>. The aim of Arvind Adiga to show the Silicon valley of India Bangalore which has the enslaved minds like Balram who work day and night with zero conscious. Arvind Adiga employs a concept of “The Great Indian Rooster Coop”. Balram provides an exclusive description of “The Great Indian Rooster Coop” to the Chinese premier, “Hundreds of pale hens and brightly colored roosters, stuffed tightly into wire mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and sitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space, the whole cage giving off a horrible stench of terrified, feathered flesh and organs of a recently chopped-up chicken, still oleaginous with a coating of dark blood. The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they’re next, yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country” <sup>30</sup>

The rooster coop is the symbol for social putrescence measure for captivity and denigration, to consign somebody into the category of being inferior and subjugated.

Franz Kafka’s idea on captivity “There is a form of captivity that is constituted not by bars but by the very space where in onelives, acts and thinks. A prisoner is an ‘open space’... there is a captivity that is constituted not by enclosure but by a failure in the identity between the subject and object, the agent and the space of action” (34).

Balram annotates the enslaved minds of servants, the trustworthiness is the basis of the entire Indian economy...A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 percent-as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way -to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude 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...The rooster coop was doing its work. Servants have to keep other servants from becoming innovators, experimenters or entrepreneurs.

Yes, that’s the sad truth, Mr Premier. The coop is guarded from inside” <sup>35</sup>

Adiga elucidates How rooster coop hampers the way to exit. It is very difficult to breach the rooster coop Balram himself gives description how to break the circle of Rooster coop. Since the action upgrades social pedestal the person who has courage to do this becomes “a freak, a pervert of nature [...] a white tiger” (36)

The entrapment in which protagonist is found to be trapped is not only his class but rooster coop has broader sphere in which majority is restricted. Balram a rooster coop which represents people who are in gloom – a microcosm, while metropolitan cities like Bangalore are larger rooster coops or a bigger microcosm. It has the gloom of poverty, negligence and lack of privilege within the rooster coop which represents the third world economy. Balram being a small-town man always wants to remain within his limits but his poor condition forces him to get along the distorted ways so that he can lead the so called dignified life his achievements hides his crime which he committed, his constant and prolonged poor condition forces him to be an animal within a man. At the end, Balram emerges as the creature “comes along only once in a generation”- the White Tiger. He too has developed animalism to emerge as the white Tiger. Balram being the different tries to come out from the rooster coop.

The newly emerging Balram The White Tiger kills his own master to curb money. Balram is the predator who pounces the wealth of his own master, evident of his prowess. The White Tiger now a part of authority who hopes to counter darkness with strength. Balram, The White Tiger is an epitome of barbarism with beastly behavior. Now the cagey The White Tiger has more refined ways to outset an animal from the human being. He is not afraid of society he is not afraid from his inner conscious he sets himself free to become money mongering monster who believes money has the concealed power to stand anywhere and none can challenge him.

Balram seeks ways to find means so that his children should get an independent life Balram had been the victim of poverty since childhood he wanted to leave this mess, he wants to match up the standards of elite class in order to attain the socially accepted dignified life-style he adopts the distorted means to become powerful and well accepted. The journey of Balram from a ‘sufferer’ of Laxmangarh to The White Tiger is from being ruled to being a ruler, from a mere driver to social entrepreneur. What fuels Balram on the top is not any cultural or educational uplift but a monster within himself who kills his conscious of being right or wrong.’ The White Tiger knows how to prey upon weaker, to kill unsuspecting, how to harass someone. He adapted these treacherous means to become The White Tiger.

### **Conclusion**

Balram as The White Tiger appears the victorious who breaks that rigid rooster coop which has enslaved him. He proves himself as the true warrior of life either with odd or even means but he has won but he also realizes that the world in which he lives is the larger Rooster Coop



in itself, and there is zero escape from it but Balram finds his way to sustain 'survival of fittest' after being corrupt, vicious. Balram emerges as the civilized poster boy who is the leading element of vicious cycle which traps other people to transform them into rooster coops. Balram is the vigilant, capable character that is framed to The White Tiger who has caliber but in reality he is a hollow man from inside there is a built in vulnerability which has threat from external forces. It can be concluded that a monster within a man has fear from external forces which break him down into scattered pieces.

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