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5.

Balram's Transmutation from Darkness to Lightness
in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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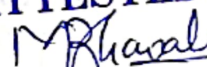
Arvind Adiga, the recipient of Booker Prize, was born 23 October 1974 in Madras (now Chennai), India. He has three novels, *The White Tiger* (2008) *Between the Assassinations* (2008) and *Last Man in the Tower* (2011) His very first and Booker Prize winning novel depicts the contradiction in the early free Indian villages.

Adiga's *The White Tiger* is the most heart rendering picture of imbalanced societies in India. The novel specifically refers to the cultural and social issues of marginal groups in the early free Indian villages. They always suffer for their daily bread and butter. They are usually discriminated, ignored and often suppressed on the base of race, gender, culture, religion, ethnicity, occupation, education and economy by the mainstream.

There are many books and films which are focused on the new idea of 'Shifting India', and also carried the life of underprivileged class who are neglected by the power position. In this Arvind Adiga also took a bold step by narrating the stories of the underprivileged people who live in the 'Darkness of the Society'. The central theme of the novel is to diagnose the Indian society which has many burning issues like illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, caste discrimination, corruption and most important population. The word Transmutation means the action of changing which is also called 'The Rise and Fall of Darwin's First Theory of Transmutation.' The present paper pays close attention to analyze Balram's transmutation from Darkness to Lightness, the protagonist of the novel.

Adiga writes about poor and exploitation in India. His most of the novels highlight the injustice and poverty prevalent in India. He brings out something new and different from what has been conventionally written. He highlights the real facts, which are unpleasant to many. In his interview with Vijay Rana he said,

I think so much of literature that comes out of India does portray a very romanticized and idealized India, a middle-class India. It's a particular literary India that has been created through novels and short stories and so forth. And anything that breaks the mould and tries to bring into focus a poorer person is immediately criticized for pursuing the 'dark side', showing poverty. I think, this term is unfortunate. What I am trying to do is to expand the literary canvas to 208 include a member of an Indian class, who is increasingly being written out not only from literature, but also from Hindi film. You will rarely see a character like Balram Halwai in the films, although you will see them all around Delhi. (The Indian Express)

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Adiga has a close observation of master servant relationship in India and knows how master treated their servant. He learnt many cases in India, when a servant kills his master for money. Such real life incidents inclined him to write about this shocking truth. He presents a rebellious character, who revolt against the injustice. About his characters, Adiga says to Guardian:

My character is someone who breaks the system and I began to wonder under what circumstances would a servant deliberately and cold-bloodedly kill his master and take his money. What kind of a man does he have to be? Increasingly, I have become convinced that the social structure in India is beginning to shake. I am not saying that it will fall apart, but the potential for social disruption is growing by the day.

When asked about his aim of exposing the darkness of India He says:

"This is the reality for a lot of Indians and it's important that it gets written about, rather than just hearing about the five per cent of people in my country who are doing well," the writer said. ("I highlighted India's brutal injustices: Adiga". Rediff. 16 October 2008.)

The White Tiger narrates a journey of Balram-son of a rickshaw pillar. It depicts how he transformed his life from an uneducated servant, and driver into a successful entrepreneur. The protagonist of the novel is in quest of freedom, freedom from his low social caste, freedom from his struggle to survive in the world of darkness. 'Stern about the White Tiger states: "An incredible trip into the dazzling and pulsating heart of India...an unlimited reading pleasure!" (Review qtd. In *The White Tiger*).

The novel caricatures Balram's transmutation from darkness to Lightness. Balram is the man from darkness. He wrote letters to the Chinese Premier Jiabo, who is about to visit India. Through the letters written to Jiabo during seven nights, Balram presents a sordid reality of Indian life and the suffering he gone through due to the social evils like poverty, caste system, class difference, corruption, exploitation and so on. He narrates a complete journey of his arduous life from a poor village boy of Laxmangrah to a successful entrepreneur of Bangalore. And how during the journey, he transformed himself too. Balram is affirming his identity and his place in the society.

The White Tiger is composed of the letters written by Balram over seven nights to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao; it narrates the life story of a servant, driver, philosopher and a murderer. The novel is written in a first-person narration. Balram presents the entire journey of his life from being a servant and driver to a successful Entrepreneur. Balram presents a sardonic picture of India. He presents two sides of India as he divides "India of Darkness" and 'India of Lightness' Balram writes the letter as he heard on the radio, "Premiere Jiabao is coming to Bangalore next week Mr Jiabo is on the mission: he wants to know the truth about Bangalore" (WT 3). Balram thinks that he can present a true and complete picture of India before Mr. Jiabo.

In the beginning of his letter, Balram accepts that he is a "half-baked" servant a man who can't complete his study and was forced to become a servant by his family. First, he started his service as a tea-boy. He is a sharp observer of the people and their conversation. He is an intelligent man. He has been named *The White Tiger* by the inspector in his school. He also mentions that police is searching him for questioning about the murder of his master Mr. Ashok. He clarifies how he got different names, as his family doesn't care of giving him proper name; they call him Munna. When a school teacher asks the name to him, he was unable to tell his proper name.

"Didn't your mother name you?"

'She's very ill sir. She lies in bed and spews blood. She has go no time to name.'



'And your father'
He's a rickshaw-puller, sir.
He's got no time to name me.' (WT 13)

He moved to Dhanabad with his cousins. Balram is not happy being a servant; so he started learning driving. Later, he got appointed as a driver at the landlord's house. When the landlord's son Ashok and his wife Pinky madam arrived, he moved to Delhi with them. There, he is exposed to the issues like bribery, corruption and class-difference. He also mentioned how the masters treat their servants. Once, when Pinky madam was driving the car, she run over the car on a child, it is assumed that the child died. The entire family of the master forces Balram to sign the legal document accepting that he was driving the car at that night. During this incident, Balram realized that he is caught in the Rooster Coop and he resolved to come out of it, he discovered that the only way to come out of the rooster coop is the individual action and strength. He decides to become rich and get the freedom. In between, he also points out the corrupt system prevailed in India as well as the election system. He mocks out such political parties who make big promises during elections but do nothing. He also criticizes the class system prevalent in India. Balram notices how his master is also a corrupt person taking bribes. He is purely aware of all the activities of his master. He observes the life of rich people and comments on their lifestyle.

Balram also throws light on the life of drivers. He expresses how the life of driver is miserable. He is treated as a servant. And many drivers are going to prison to save their master and conceal their wrong deeds. He mentions that the drivers are fond of the magazine called Murder Weekly, whom they read together and that inspires them to kill their master. Balram then, write about his master- servant relationship, he takes care of his master Mr. Ashok when Pinky madam left him. He tries to console his master. But his urge to become a rich and powerful was so high that he decides to kill his master and steal his money. He thinks he can begin a new life with the stolen money. Once, finding the right opportunity, he kills his master on the barren road with a bottle of glass and there's no one to notice him. He collects the money and escapes from the place successfully. Before living the place, he picks up his nephew Dharam with him. For four weeks, he stays in hotel. Then, he shifts to Bangalore where no one can find him and he can live safely. Coming here, he established his own taxi service and become a successful entrepreneur. He also takes care of Dharam and admits him in the good English school. He concludes his story with his future plan to open a school for poor children.

Then, he narrates a picture before India that he divided into two parts India of Darkness and India of lightness. And Balram starts to expose the sordid reality of Indian life before the Chinese Premiere. It shows his rise from Darkness to Lightness. He considered his stay in Village and later in Delhi being a Driver and a servant was Darkness, and that now he has come out of servitude and rich to Bangalore that reflects Lightness. Balram's journey is from darkness to lightness. Such quest for lightness, tempts Balram to surpass moral laws. As he writes: "Like all good Bangalore stories, mine begins far away from Bangalore. You see, I am in the Light now, but I was born and raised in Darkness." (WT 14)

To fulfill his father's ambition is another driving force for Balram, as his father is ambitious about Balram's future. He narrates how his father is concerned, and wants him to be educated and become something in life. He wants Balram to become a man. As Balram writes: "Rickshaw-puller he may have been—a human beast of burden—but my father was a man with a plan. I was his plan (WT 27)... Munna must read and write!" (WT 28) Further, his father said, "My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine—at least one— should live like a man"(WT 31)

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Balram has an intense desire to move out from his cast and establish his own identity. He narrates how people are type casted in India. He wants to come out of his caste of sweet maker and establish his own identity. As about the caste system in India and denying his belief in it. He claims at present, there are only two casts:

“In the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat—or get eaten up” (WT 64)

Balram once visited a zoo that reflects how he thinks himself to be The White Tiger: “There is a sign in the National Zoo in New Delhi, near the cage with the white tiger, which says: Imagine yourself in the cage. When I saw that sign, I thought, I can do that—I can do that with no trouble at all” (WT 177) This points out how he feels caged by his masters, his family and his responsibilities. Later, we find He faints in the zoo and cried: “I can't live the rest of my life in a cage, Granny. I'm so sorry” (WT 278) Balram's comparing him with the White Tiger in The Zoo reflects his agitation of being caged by the masters.

His voyage as a poor boy to the successful entrepreneur symbolizes a transmutation from the darkness to the light. As he once says:

The journey from darkness to the light is not smooth....only a White Tiger can do this (TW 250)

Finally Arvind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* was not only taking about the 'dark' living conditions of the miserable poor, but also representing that how the rich had been manipulating the country for their own self-centered end. The novel had played a major role in promoting the awareness of the people about the 'darker' aspects of both the poor and the rich representing their deep defeats. (Chaudhary)

This is the dark, realistic and immensely witty tale of one's transmutation from the hinterland of darkness to the mainland of light. Balram is the man of action and change. He was born and brought up in the darkness but his actions changed his life from darkness into a light.

Thus, Adiga's *The White Tiger* strikes a beautiful balance between the darkness and the lightness of the country. On one hand it showed the murky world of despair, violence and greed along the Northern Gangetic Plan of India and on the other hand, the novel narrates a promising tale about the rise of a self-made man.

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