

# Exploring Socio-Economic Disparities and Power Dynamics in Aravind Adiga's 'White Tiger': A Critical Analysis

Muhammed Swalih C.V<sup>1</sup>, Dr. M. Mohamed Anwar<sup>1\*</sup>

## Abstract

This paper, titled "Exploring Socio-Economic Disparities and Power Dynamics in Aravind Adiga's 'White Tiger': A Critical Analysis" delves into issues faced by marginalized groups in Indian society, including caste disparities, prostitution, cultural clashes, dowry practices, economic status, the zamindari system, poverty, and a corrupt educational system. The focus is on how Aravind Adiga, through narrator Balram Halwai, voices opposition against corruption, advocating for the oppressed in India. The narrative emphasizes Balram's journey in overcoming societal challenges to become a successful entrepreneur, portraying him as a catalyst for change. Referred to as the "white tiger" in the novel, Balram symbolizes breaking free from societal constraints, transforming his life from darkness to light.

## Keywords

Indian society, Entrepreneur, Social strata, Class divide, Economic inequality, Marginalization

<sup>1</sup> PG & Research Department of English, Jamal Mohamed College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli – 620020

## 1. Introduction

Aravind Adiga's debut novel, "The White Tiger," earned him the Booker Prize in 2008. Through this work, Adiga advocates for the impoverished, shedding light on their struggles against those aiming to suppress them. The protagonist, Balram Halwai, born into a lower caste, rises to power through resourcefulness. The novel explores subaltern issues in Balram's life, illustrating the stark contrast between dark and light aspects of India's postcolonial condition. In a society where subaltern individuals, marked by their caste, class, and gender, find themselves voiceless and vulnerable, Balram, despite limited education, navigates multiple languages and religions. Accused of murdering his master, Ashok, Balram faces no societal consequences, highlighting the gaps in India's social fabric at that time. This narrative underscores the potential for individuals to seek recognition legally and morally within society.

## 2. Exploring Socio-Economic Disparities and Power Dynamics

In this novel, Adiga vividly depicts the privileged, including the wealthy, police, and politicians, enjoying their lives at the expense of the deprived. "The White Tiger" is a gripping tale, brimming with suspense and ethical questions, narrated by the unique Balram Halwai. Balram is a complex figure, embodying roles of an entrepreneur, servant, philosopher, and even a murderer. Across seven nights, he recounts his journey to success, highlighting his intelligence as his primary asset. The village of Laxmangarh, described as a place of

darkness due to its extreme poverty, worships Lord Hanuman as a symbol of unwavering servitude. Balram admires China for its commitment to freedom, emphasizing that only a few nations, including China, have never succumbed to foreign rule.

"The White Tiger" critically addresses Indian social issues, reflecting on the stark contrast between dark and light India. It's a self-reflective novel, tracing a man's transformation from the shadows to the light while searching for identity. The central theme revolves around the oppression of the powerless by the powerful, illustrating the harsh reality of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. Through Balram's narrative, the novel effectively captures and condemns various subaltern issues prevalent in Indian society.

This novel unfolds through letters from Balram to Jiabao, adopting an epistolary style. Adiga skillfully captures not just Balram's voice but also the collective voice of the underclass, exposing the harsh realities in Indian society – poverty, caste disparities, educational denial, political corruption, and superstitions that contribute to the suffering of the poor. Kiran Desai also points out the hard-hitting attack on the corrupt political system in India: "Not one truthful politician in the whole country. Yes, our parliament is made of thieves, each one answerable to the Prime Minister, who is the biggest thief of them all" (Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard, 20). The residents of Laxmangarh, facing these challenges, seek a better life in the city for sustenance. India's prevalent poverty, exacerbated by overpopulation, denies basic needs to its people. Unemployment and overpopulation intertwine to breed poverty, pushing some to resort to crime for economic survival.

Balam, a victim of poverty, transforms from an innocent boy ("Munna") to a murderer, driven by the desperation caused by his economic status. His journey reflects the transformative impact of poverty on individuals, shaping them into unrecognizable versions of themselves.

In *The White Tiger*, poverty leads to a stark divide between two classes in ancient India – the rich zamindars and the lower-class individuals. The wealthy exploit the poor for labor but pay meager wages, treating them as mere necessities. The novel portrays four landlords, named Buffalo, Stork, Wild Boar, and Raven, symbolizing their hunger for wealth. Adiga refers to them as "Animals" due to their exploitative behavior. For instance, the Stork, with river and agricultural lands, forces laborers to touch his feet for work, resembling a form of modern-day slavery. Raven and Buffalo, akin to vampires, drain the life out of the impoverished. The novel also highlights the persisting social issue of dowry, labeling those with many daughters as cursed in Indian society.

In *The White Tiger*, Balam quits school to work in a tea shop, aiming to borrow money from the Stork for his cousin Reena's wedding. Prostitution is a prevalent issue in India, with red light areas in cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore, where women are commodified based on class, virginity, and even hair color, with a preference for "golden-haired women." Balam, influenced by his master Ashok, desires such encounters. The corrupt administration and biased law enforcement worsen the plight of the underclass, as police prioritize the wealthy through bribes, neglecting the equal treatment mandated by law. The novel illustrates this corruption when Balam is handed a case involving Pinky, Ashok's wife, exposing the police and magistrates' negligence. Caste discrimination further compounds social issues, with individuals assigned castes based on birth. Balam, born into the Halwai family responsible for making sweets, navigates a society deeply entrenched in caste divisions.

In *The White Tiger*, Balam's father was a rickshaw puller, and caste plays a significant role in Indian society. When Balam becomes a driver for Stork, he's questioned about his caste, highlighting the societal focus on this rather than individual qualities or talents. Caste discrimination remains a prevalent and damaging issue in India, ( V.S Naipaul has highlighted the darkness of India in his "An Area of Darkness"-1964 ). Even impacting the marriage of Pinky and Ashok, leading to significant challenges in their relationship.

The novel uses the metaphor of the White Tiger to symbolize individuality and freedom. It depicts how Balam, once marginalized, transforms into a successful entrepreneur using his intellectual abilities. The term "White Tiger" also represents power, and Balam embraces this identity, rejecting the role of a slave to pursue personal freedom. Despite Balam's morally questionable actions, the narrative reveals a focus on personal interests rather than ethical considerations.

*The White Tiger* delves into the societal divisions of rich and poor, exploiter and exploited, and haves and have-nots. Balam's journey from darkness to light involves breaking

free from oppression and supporting the voiceless. He aims to address subaltern issues in Indian society, demonstrating a determination to overcome societal pressures and stand against oppression.

### 3. Conclusion

In the post-liberalization era of India, corruption is prominently evident, serving as the arena where Balam learns the ropes. Despite his personal success and ascent from darkness to light as an entrepreneur, he becomes entangled in the same corrupt system that facilitated his rise. While socially moving upward, he remains a prisoner of the pervasive corruption in the Indian system. This transformation involves leaving behind his family, emblematic of the old system, and reflects shifts in class and caste dynamics.

Balam's journey highlights changes in the service class, suggesting that future opportunities might allow a second generation to move upward. Currently, individuals like Balam breaking free from the "Rooster Coop" and achieving success are rare, symbolized by the term "White Tiger." Adiga skillfully explores the lives of these invisible service workers serving the urban affluent, examining the complex master-staff relationship. The novel also underscores the growing flaws and tensions, brought about by media exposure and awareness of labor rights.

### References

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