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**READING THE WHITE TIGER IN THE LIGHT OF ZOOMORPHIC METAPHORS****Samimuddin Khan<sup>1</sup> and Sambhunath Maji<sup>2</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Guest Lecturer of Vivekananda College, Burdwan, W.B., India.<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, W.B., India.**ABSTRACT:**

In *The White Tiger* (2008), Aravind Adiga tries to represent the contemporary Indian society, and successfully offers a portrait of fast- developing Indian scenario in the postmodern era. The central consciousness, by and large in both his texts, *The White Tiger*, and *Between the Assassination*, is down-trodden, urban and rural, landless poor tottering under the pressure of traditional tortures like casteism, and poverty as well as comparatively new problems of terrorism and sedition. However, the very objective of my paper is to make a critical study on Adiga's Booker prize winning novel, *The White Tiger*, and to show how the black heart of the shining 21<sup>st</sup> century India is depicted in the said novel through the animal imagery. And in the development of the arguments about the social construction this paper may bring the light of Marxism.

**KEYWORDS** – Post-Modern, Fast-Developing India, Casteism, Poverty, Animal Imagery, Marxism.**INTRODUCTION**

Speaking of the Indian novel in English, in particular, one cannot fail to notice that the authors writing today, by and large, focus their attention on the orphaned and challenged situation of a newborn nation. Its social construction, political and economical systems, and master servant relationship etc. Many contemporary writers like – Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhuty Roy are warmly honored for their prescience and skill in recreating the reality of the present state of India. Aravind Adiga, just two books old, subscribes to the school of the rooted, centred Indo-Anglian novelists who are interested in improving reality instead of questioning it. Traditionally, Adiga is closer to the trinity of Narayan- Anand –Rao than to the more distinctly pocopomo ethos of Salman Rushdie. In Adiga's writing we find a global India, racked and ridden by corruption. But it is India we immediately recognize and identify with. In *The White Tiger* (2008), Aravind Adiga tries to represent the contemporary Indian society, and successfully offers a portrait of fast-developing Indian scenario in the postmodern era. The central consciousness, by and large in both his texts, *The White Tiger*, and *Between the Assassination*, is down-trodden, urban and rural, landless poor tottering under the pressure of traditional tortures like casteism, and poverty as well as comparatively new problems of terrorism and sedition. However, the very objective of my paper is to make a critical study on Adiga's Booker prize winning novel, *The White Tiger*, and to show how the black heart of the shining 21<sup>st</sup> century India is depicted in the said novel through the animal imagery. And in the development of the arguments about the social construction this paper may bring the light of Marxism.



Before analyzing the presentation of contemporary India through animal imagery in Arvind adiga's novel *The White Tiger* we have to make a review of the history of animal imagery in Literature. Animals have held an important place in literature for thousands of years. Earlier animal imagery was used with strong religious and allegorical significance. Composed around the sixth century B.C.,

Aesop's fables continue to serve as standards of moral didacticism using animals as examples for human beings to follow or avoid. For the ancient Egyptians and Greeks, animals such as bulls and lions, as well as hybrid creatures like griffins and sphinxes, played important roles in the development of a complex mythological system that influenced human civilization. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, animals like lambs, snakes, and swine were used, both in the Old and New Testaments, with human and godly attributes. And in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Age of Enlightenment – moral allegories gave way to satire, which served not so much to teach as to ridicule human foibles and political corruption. Thus if we study the literary history critically we will find that animals are used frequently, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. Writers like D.H. Lawrence, Ted Hughes, and Ben Jonson have used animal imagery positively to celebrate the natural strength and freedom, while Jonathan Swift and George Orwell have used it negatively to satirize the meanness, falsehood, and greediness of human beings. Our chosen author, Arvind Adiga, has also used animal imagery both in positive and negative ways. He has brought about the abominable creatures like wild boar, buffalo, and the great and rare white tiger. Though, he has used the animal imagery primarily as a weapon to attack the degradable jungle-like condition of present India.

Apparently the author, Adiga, adopts a Manichean vision of power and weakness, against the backdrop of unforgotten historical materialism, by creating opposing classes or forces, the rich and the poor, the urban elite and the rural peasants, the educated entrepreneurs and the rough workers, the people who own luxury cars and the people who drive these cars. So, it can be seen as a Marxist vision where class and inequality are the core issues. The author's story telling increasingly acquires darker tones and goes beyond the superficiality of social injustices and neglected human rights. It also tries to concentrate on the perpetuation of societal construction, often disguised under the catchy keywords of democracy, welfare, and modernity. Almost like a Marxist, Adiga has presented the class relationship and the subjugation of the proletariat through a wickedly acid prose style. Adiga has used animal-based imagery to stage what is often overlooked and marginalized, conveying in deep sense of hopelessness where India regresses to a sort of "primordial" community, dominated and lacerated by the voices of the "powerful" (capitalists) animals, viz. the Wild Boar, the Buffalo, and the Tiger.

The novel adopts the epistolary tradition, the letters being written on seven nights to the Chinese Prime Minister, Mr. Wen Jiabao, who plans to visit India for a week with the specific purpose of wanting to know the truth about Bangalore and a keen desire for interacting with some Indian entrepreneurs and hearing their story of success in an attempt to create some successful Chinese entrepreneurs. Balam Halwai, the protagonist, is the very author of these letters. He informs the Chinese Premier that he may not get an accurate representation of India in the company of the Minister and the foreign Minister of India whereas a common man, who by his grit and skill has risen to be an accomplished businessman, may be the right person to narrate the success story to the Chinese prime minister. And in the way of telling the truth of Bangalore, which serves as the microcosm of the whole India, reveals his own history of life. Better to say, while revealing his own history of life, the truth of India comes to the front. Balam Halwai, alias Munna, is the son of Vikram Halwai, a rickshaw puller. He was born and raised in the darkness as he sees two Indias, India of darkness and India of light. (The world of darkness constitutes of the people who are the oppressed, suppressed, deprived, and unprivileged, and live a life of slave. On the other hand, the world of light is lighted by adequate electricity, running waters, working telephone, proper education, and the children raised on a nutritious diet of meat, egg, vegetables, and lentils etc.) Both his parents were smitten by fatal diseases and died prematurely. Due to the lack of financial support, he has to make an end of his schooling and join a tea shop near the coal mines of Dhanbad. Vikram Halwai, though a rickshaw puller, had higher plans for his son while his mother could also visualize that her son had adroitness and aptitude to make a mark for himself. The school inspector had also invented the rarity in him. But the situation drives him to a tea shop instead of his outmost dislike. As he was a man of higher aspiration, though he lives in the gutter, he kept his look on the stars. He used to notice the customers of the tea shop and kept an attentive concentration on their conversation which gave him knowledge and ideas about the other better works. Balam resolves to become a car driver after listening to the conversation of other drivers at the tea shop and getting the information about the

better salary of a car driver. Then he managed to get the driving training and began working in the house of a landlord from Laxmangarh, popularly known as the stork. Later he moves to Delhi along with the landlord's son, Ashok and the daughter in Pinky where he gets ample opportunity to intermix with other drivers thereby learning myriad lessons and survival techniques. Consequently he wins the confidence of the couple as he cooks, cleans and drives for them. While driving Mr. Ashok around he discovers that his master keeps the family business going on by monetarily gratifying various officers and dignitaries of influence. Mr. Ashok so much believed him that Balram was entrusted to carry the suitcase of currency. Later he witnessed the separation of the couple. And one day while driving Mr. Ashok with a red bag containing seven lakh rupees to be given as bribe, the tiger in Balram awakens and used the opportunity. He killed Ashok on that rainy night by slitting his throat with a broken bottle of whiskey which he had hid in the glove case of the car. Then he escapes to Bangalore changing his identity to Ashok Sharma. Thus he moves from the world of slave to the world of master and in the process gathers a true picture of the present India.

Balram Halwai, the protagonist of the novel *The White Tiger* is a successful entrepreneur and claims that only the entrepreneur like him who has come to the position from the lower stage of life can offer the truth about India and proves to be true. He has narrated the pros and cons of the 21st century India while telling his own life story. If we minutely study his journey of life, from a slave to a master we will have a crystal clear picture of contemporary India. Primarily, he has divided India into two worlds- world of darkness and world of light. The world of darkness constitutes of the people who are the oppressed, suppressed, deprived and unprivileged, and live a life of slave. On the other hand, the world of light is lighted by adequate electricity, running waters, working telephone, proper education, and the children rose on a nutritious diet of meat, egg, vegetables, and lentils etc. Balram Halwai was born in the world of darkness. His family was suffering from utter poverty and that's why he could not have any chance for school education. From the childhood he has to bother about his survival. Due to the extreme poverty and lack of proper treatment his parents died prematurely. On the other hand, Mr. Ashok, another character who was the master of Balram belongs to the world of light where there is no lack to survive. It can be seen from the Marxist point of view where inequity is the mark of society, where a section of society is feasting and the other is fasting, where the capitalists are the owner of everything and the proletariat are nothing but the slaves.

The contemporary India is also suffering from the power game. The double mechanism of powerfulness and powerlessness is also pictured at work not only on the global scene by hinting at the multinational economics, but also in the local context. And in order to expose this endemic evil of traditional India the writer has specially used the animal imagery, since his postcolonial bestiary synthesizes the time honored corruption and immorality that devour villages and communities. The recourse to metaphorical animals may be vague and imprecise, but given the central role of animal archetypology, persistently shaping or affecting human perception, it substantiates and frames a system of clear identification into the collective unconsciousness. The landowning notables of Laxmangarh, Balram's native village, are described as anthropomorphized, "monstrous" animals that dominate with terror and violence the whole region:

The Stork was a fat man with a fat mustache, thick and curved and pointy at the tips. 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. When he passed by women, his car would stop; the windows would roll down to reveal his grin; two of his teeth, on either side of his nose, were long and curved, like little tusks. The Raven owned the worst land, which was the dry, rocky hillside around the fort, and took a cut from the goatherds who went up there to graze with their flocks. If they didn't have their money, he liked to dip his beak into their backsides, so they called him the Raven. The Buffalo was greediest of the lot. He had eaten up the rickshaws and the roads. So if you ran a rickshaw, or used the road, you had to pay him his feed—one-third of whatever you earned, no less (24-25).

This is how the Indian society is portrayed as a jungle where buffalo, stork, wild boar like landlord stayed and fed on the village. They eaten up everything grew on the village, until there was nothing left for anyone else to feed on. In this way the novel portrays the images to convey the carnivorous side of humanbeing which attempt to destroy every obstruction to gain what is hankered after.

After making a comparison between China and India Balram says that China is far more ahead than India in all the field. India is a country where there is no available drinking water, proper electricity, sewage system, hygiene but have entrepreneur. On the other hand in China, though there is no person to glorify it. To quote :

“ Apparently, sir, you Chinese are far ahead of us in every respect, except that you don't have entrepreneurs. And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, does have entrepreneurs”(4).

There is no doubt about the reliability of this statement. Even today's there are thousands of Indian people who does not have minimum water supply, thousands of them suffering from malnutrition, and died prematurely like the parents and brother of the protagonist Balram. Here a large part of children has to succumb to the child labor to support its financially handicapped family, leaving their elementary education. Instead of having a great liking and capability Balram has to leave his schooling. The condition of balram's family is so bad that it does have any time to name the children and the Name is given by the school teacher.

Once again India is compared with China in the field of freedom loving mentality and India gets surpassed by the Chinese. Chinese are the great lovers of freedom and individual liberty. British has tried and conquered and ruled almost all the world but they could not rule over the China for their indomitable spirit for liberty. On the other hand, India is ruled by the British almost 200 years for their servant like mentality. Servitude lies in their blood and psyche. They worship Bajrangbali who is the servant of Ram Chandra. So, those persons who are worshipping an obedient servant how can he be a supporter of freedom. By presenting the “rooster coop” analogy the author successfully shows the inactive, surrendered mind of the great part of India. Everywhere they are trapped in but they do not try to get out of it. In the word of Balram:

Never before have had so few owed s much to so many, Mr. Jiabao. A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9% - as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way – to exist in perpetual servitude; servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hand and he will throw it back at you with a curse.(175-176)

They are all trapped like the chicken in the rooster coop: “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 shitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a horrible stench – the stench of a terrified , feathered flesh. On the wooden desk above this coop sits a grinning young butcher, showing off the 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 are next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of off the coop. ‘The very same thing is done with human beings in this country’. (173-174)

Here the terrible truth of the poor, dark India is portrayed beautifully. This the real condition of the youth of India. They has no opportunity do some job and income money. And without money they live a dead life. Still they are living passively as if they are hollow and chicken hearted man not the white tiger who is dare to do such thing.

India is suffering from a severe disease that is corruption. And it has been spread away in all fields, in the field of education, administration, politics and socialist. The school teacher has degraded to the level of a thief. Instead of arranging the necessary equipments of the school like chalk, duster, chair, table, uniform of the students he has stolen all the money from the fund. The great socialist delivers great lectures but do nothing for the society; instead he is managing his own fortune. The picture of the activities of police is also portrayed here. Most of the cases they are the dogs of the rich man and do everything in favor of them.

When a person was killed by one of the drivers of Mr. Ashok Sharma (Balram), at that time we can see how the police perform their duty. They have made a deal with him and leave him without taking any step against him. When they cannot catch the real criminal they generally break some grocery shop and force some people for confession.

Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century India lacks proper hospital service. Though for the rich people the nursing homes are growing here and there but the number of hospital is very limited. Though there are a few numbers of hospitals, the irregularity of doctor is regular. In this novel Balram says that in Laxmangarh there is no hospital. Though there are three different foundation stones for a hospital, laid by three different politicians before three different elections. When their father had been smitten by tuberculosis they had to take him by boat across the river. The hospital was strewn with goats and cats. There was no doctor in the hospital after taking ten rupees as bribe the ward boy told them that the doctor might come in the evening. The patients were scattering on the floor spreading newspaper. There was no doctor and no treatment. After struggling for a long time Balram's father died spitting blood here and there. From the conversation of an old Muslim patient balram came to know that a deal was made between the great socialist and the doctor, on the basis of which the doctor works and earns more money from the private hospital. Like laxmangarh there are many villages where there are no hospitals and if there are hospitals , there is no proper treatment.

Unemployment is a great curse to the youth and the picture of unemployment in India is also justly portrayed in the novel *The White Tiger*. Balram has made a comparison between the world of darkness and world of light and says in world of light there are many opportunities of employment. There are multiple opportunities for the job in call centre, in software engineer, sales manager etc. There are twenty five pages of job advertisement in the newspaper every week. But the picture of the world of darkness is thoroughly different. Here every morning tens of thousands of young men sit in the tea shops, reading the newspaper, or lie on a charpoy humming a tune, or sit in their rooms talking to a photo of a film actress. They have no job to do. They know they won't get any job today. In spite of being the smart ones they are living as nothing to do. And the rest of them are fight, fight like dogs are fighting for foods.

Apart from the miserable condition of the hospital and unemployment of the young there are a number of social evils that have engulfed the whole India. The issue of child labor is one of the despicable curses in India. Despite many acts on preventing the motion of child labor since years ago, child labor is going on and seems unstoppable. In the said novel *The White Tiger*, the picture of child labor has been projected clearly. In spite of the great likings for education Balram has to leave his schooling earlier and join a tea shop. Although he has been recognized by the school Inspector as a distinctly brilliant boy he cannot continue his study due to a chilling poverty. Not only the protagonist, Balram gets deprived from the education and succumbs to child labor but his elder brother also has to quit his schooling and join hand with his father to earn money. So it is clear that poverty plays a vital role behind the system of child labor. It is highly condemnable that even in 21<sup>st</sup> century, so well progressed society the cruel act of child labor is going on. Another acute disease for which the present India is suffering is caste. There are a number of castes and the peoples position and ability are judged blindly on the basis of their caste. In this novel Balram and his family easily get the job in a sweet making shop but cannot get job in other field of workings. Because the conventional thought says that the caste, Halwai can only be a good sweet maker and nothing else.

Finally, it can be held that Arvind Adiga has painted the picture of contemporary India not fictionally rather realistically. And the picture is not a pleasant one. It is full of corruption, oppression, suppression, depression and exploitation. In this jungle like state the author has justly applied the animal imagery because in the world of such anomaly animal lives with their animosities, not human beings with their humanities. And here Arvind's 'animals' are the ghosts that haunt the individuals, striving for power or against the threatening power, and through the core analogy, they eventually become two types of animals- "men with big bellies, and men with small bellies. And only two destinies: eat or get eaten up"(65). Through the analogy of animal world Arvind has successfully depicted the social structure, man to man relationship

of the present, so called shining India. He also has projected the true condition of India, its system of marriage, dowry, castes, prostitution etc which almost like a self-forged-manacle tie India down to the stake.

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