

Reading Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* to Examine the Emergence of Entrepreneurial Subjectivity and the Problematization of Moral Authority under Neoliberalism

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Structured Abstract:

Purpose: Working class writings demand a new theoretic analysis in the context of contemporary geo-political and economic changes. New studies place them between the colonized and the postcolonial peripheries in order to examine the meaningful fissures within. Literary texts are re-read for engaging readers and critics into a 'compelling reading' of multifarious aspects of working class writing after globalization. The under theorized portions of plebian history and the history of class-discrimination now need to be rethought in the context of post-globalist scenario. The critical study also brings the shifting terrains of 'reality of difference' and the politics of representations into the light. Subaltern studies has undergone and sustained some glaring changes and issues. Working class solidarity, the engulfing pattern of colonial subjugation, positive notion in subaltern ethics, narratives of dislocation, agony of displacement, territorial differences due to migration, identity crisis of diasporans and discriminating labour politics-all these serve to the formation of the new ambit of 'working-class writing' with the backdrop of globalization and post globalist sphere. In this context, the novel *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga's Man Booker Prize winning debut work needs a mention here. It has got an extremely chiselled and fascinating narrative. The novel has got the trailblazing aspects to showcase the socio-economic mechanisms that rigorously work and crudely get manifested onto the living culture of a society. Through the protagonist, Balram, Aravind Adiga narrates the life of suppression and exploitation across the different layers of Indian society. Primarily, it is a young boy's journey from 'rags to riches'. As his father was a rickshaw puller, the whole family tried hard to

make both ends meet. Thus the protagonist was forced to leave education. So his journey from a rural guy working in a teashop to an entrepreneur is the focus of attraction here. Through this novel Adiga tries to portray the realistic and painful image of modern India. It exposes the anxieties of the oppressed. This piece of contemporary literature is instrumental in addressing the issues of individual-national and rural-urban divides presenting Indian trajectory under global neoliberalism. It speculates on Balram's capability to overcome the hurdles of life on actualities. It shows how he battles the adversities in his very own distinctive way and this way of living and surviving actually problematizes the sources of morals under the allegories of neoliberalism. Being an integral part of a networked world of global capital, the protagonist cannot afford to follow the dicta of 'juridico-institutional' authorities. He suffers from the fetters of moral authority due to the unrestrained function of capital across his life and experience. Thus this paper tries to analyse how the concept of entrepreneurial subjectivity faces the constraints of moral authorities under the influence of uncontrolled operation of capital.

Methodology: The paper here proposes an interpretative approach. This approach is engaging different theoretical nuances from different areas like working class fictions, postcolonial studies, life-writings, diasporic literature all through the corpus of this paper. It refers certain psycho-geographical aspects of displacement that foregrounds the basic thrust of the article. Besides these, my paper analyses the core of writer's language of crises.

Findings: The study exposes working class writings' demand of a new theoretic analysis in the context of contemporary geo-political and economic changes. It shows the importance of new studies on the colonized and the postcolonial peripheries in order to examine the meaningful fissures within. How literary texts need to be dissected to engage multifarious aspects of working class writing after globalization, is one of the major issues here. One of the findings is how the limitation of general categorizing of the term 'class' hinder the way to achieve a well nuanced study of 'working class writing'.

Value: The relevance of this write-up lies in the fact that it questions the straight and simplified notion of 'class' and 'working class writing'. The paper

asks for re-reading of the under-theorized ambit of 'working class literature' as 'world literature'.

Keywords Capitalism, Neoliberalism, Entrepreneurial Subjectivity, Moral, Authority, Empire.

The White Tiger was published in 2008. It was Aravind Adiga's Man Booker Prize winning debut novel. It displays poverty and injustice. It exemplifies various facades of Indian society in the light of emerging capitalism and neoliberal conditions. The novel takes us to the underneath a social system that functions adversely on the moralities of a human psyche. Socio-economic mechanisms here get manifested through the moral and cultural sides of a person. The personality of one gets designed in accordance to the facilities one tries to grab at the cost of one's moral living and mental health. Plights are normalised and almost get mundane at times. Aravind Adiga narrates the life of his protagonist as suppressed and exploited through different social layers. Here he creates the very Indian prospect to attract mundane characters from lower strata to take advantage of what they identify as opportune moments. The boy, Balram, primarily, as a young boy journeys from 'rags to riches'. It's not an uncommon journey from an Indian perspective. But the way of Balram's dealing his life is extremely unconventional. It may terrify the readers as they witness how the need of his life turns him completely different. He belongs to a low income group family where a father pulls a rickshaw and the whole family tries hard to make their both ends meet. In an obvious way the protagonist is forced to leave his formal education. So his journey from a rural guy working in a teashop to an entrepreneur attracts the focus. Thus in this novel Adiga tries to portray the realistic image of modern India. It exposes the anxieties of the underprivileged. This novel addresses various issues of contemporary Indian society in the leash of neoliberalism. The issues of individual-national and rural-urban divides gets depicted here. The focus here on the individual desire placed against the society's moral codes and

conducts. How an ambitious individual games with the hurdles of life in a way that can be easily tagged as immoral, is one of the findings here by the author. His strategy of surviving actually problematizes the sources of morals under the aegis of neoliberalism. Being an integral part of a networked world of global capital, the protagonist cannot afford to follow the dicta of 'juridico-institutional' authorities. He suffers from the fetters of moral authority due to the unrestrained function of capital across his life and experience. Here as a reader one should rethink to analyse how the concept of entrepreneurial subjectivity faces the constraints of moral authorities under the influence of uncontrolled operation of capital in the form of Empire as pointed out, more recently, by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. The new form of Empire totally tames every aspect of both individual and global aspirations.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is the narrative of a man belonging to the lower strata of our society. He is named as Balram Halwai. Apparently it is the story of the protagonist's fall from social values and moralities into crime and corruption. The author tries to depict an Indian society with all its demeaning aspects. He actually through this literary work addresses the issues of malaise in India in the form of social inequality. The story directs the readers towards the career-graph of an ambitious but impoverished youth and how he struggles as hell as he can in order to move into the upper echelons of society without hesitations. Balram always feels himself as an outsider. This very feeling of an exclusion accelerates his quest for affluence. It actually stoops him down to such a level where crimes like robbery and murder are the routine of actualities. He is a confidant of his younger master Ashok who lies in the corridors of power and capital. He is the witness of various deeds like, paying bribes, unfettered dealings of money and coordinating in different unethical works. Adiga thus projects the society from its dark core. This is a warped system and here one of the main issues is the functioning of this defunct society where political patronage and monetary game are deeply ingrained. This whole thing defines how the society serves the playing ground for

such a corrupt affluence and glitz. Here, in spite of being on the lower strata of the society, the way Balram in *The White Tiger* enables himself to get away with murder and theft successfully and start entrepreneurship, it points to the strange phenomenon of a dysfunctional 'juridico-institutional' aspect. This chapter appropriately incorporates the social dimensions displayed in the novel.

After reading this novel one can easily find the shift in a journey of an individual's fortune. The journey begins with hurdles for sliding through later. The author crafts the protagonist's journey in a way that it tries to project a strange interconnectedness between two trajectories-earlier plebian fictions and contemporary working class writing. This chapter will re-read this novel in the light of working class writing in the aftermath of globalization. The post-globalist scenario will fetch the real facts about the socio-economic lives of people.

We have already considered the thin line of demarcations between the earlier model of plebian writings and the present direction of working class writing. The form of Empire has completely changed now and thus its nature affects the world. The network of capital and power manipulates the socio-cultural living of people. The aim of people and the way of its translation get determined by such post-globalist scenario.

Adiga's novel charts the emergence of new trends in entrepreneurship. It is a new form of subjectivity that has got an immense entrepreneurial tendency. Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* explores the contemporary model of working class writing. Here we catch the difference between the early model of plebian fiction and its manifestation after globalization. Their natures and directions differ broadly in spite of being similar on some socio-capital aspects. To analyse *The White Tiger* in the light of working class writing is the prime focus of this chapter. Post 90s in our globalized world the nature of capital has totally changed. Earlier its spatiality or locational thrust gets the capital a tone of fixity. After

globalization, the capital runs its flow. The power attached to the capital changes its systematic function too. The whole framework onto which the society spins round gets rebuilt. The transformation of the nature of job is glaringly done in the novel. The novelist meticulously hints at how the neoliberal allegories of socio-economic ambit pervades all through the layers of society. It influences the people irrespective of caste and creed to dream big and to aspire more. Sometimes the push of their aspiration becomes so hard they may try to evade the dicta of legal-moral codes of life. Such is the case with the protagonist of *The White Tiger*. Balram Halwai's venture throughout his life is steeped into challenges, crises and crimes. His narration is extremely interesting and ironical as he gives intimate details from his life. Balram Halwai has penned his life in seven consecutive nights and addressed it to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao. In his letter, Balram explains how being the son of a rickshaw puller, he escaped a life of servitude to become a successful person, particularly an entrepreneur. Balram was born in a remote village in Gaya district, where he lived with his family members, namely, parents, grandmother, brother and others. He is a sharp child but is compelled to leave school in order to help pay for his cousin's dowry. The situation forces him to begin work in a teashop with his brother in Dhanbad. In the whole process of his life, he conceives a quest for an individual position on the social ladder. He starts dreaming of his life onto a different frame. Thus, while being in the teashop, he begins to learn about India's government and economy from the customers' conversations. Balram is very observant and a keen listener. He now wants to test his life by becoming a driver. Eventually, he learns how to drive and find a job. Ashok, the son of one of Laxmangarh's landlords is his immediate boss. Balram takes over the job of the main driver. His handling of a small car to a heavy-luxury described Honda City is one of his earliest achievements. But ironically he stops sending money back to his family and disrespects his grandmother during a trip back to his village. Later Balram moves to New Delhi with Ashok and his wife Pinky Madam.

Throughout their time in Delhi, Balram gets exposed to extensive corruption, especially in the government. The class discrimination, primarily the rich-poor divide is glaringly exposed here in Delhi by the author. One night Pinky Madam, while drunk heavily, takes the car from Balram, hits something in the road and drives off afterwards; we are left to assume that her car just has hit a child. Ashok's family on the other hand pressurizes Balram to confess and in a way take the responsibility of that accident. Ashok gets incessantly involved in the bribing culture of the government officials for the benefit of his family coal business. In the meanwhile, Balram decides that killing Ashok will be the only way out to escape India's 'Rooster Coop'. It is the significant metaphor of Balram for describing the oppression of poor people. The situation remains same as roosters in a coop at the market watch themselves get slaughtered one by one, but are unable or unwilling to break the fatal chain awaiting them. Likewise, Balram too is portrayed as being trapped in the metaphorical 'Rooster Coop' but he is desperately searching the way to escape the fatal situation. Thus in order to surpass the situation he is increasingly tying himself into criminal activities. He stabs Ashok with a broken bottle to death and steals a hefty amount of money Ashok carrying that time. Then Balram moves to Bangalore where he follows the footprints of Ashok and bribes the police in order to help start his own taxi business. The same situation arrives before him when one of his drivers hits and kills the son of a family. Balram needs to pay for this. Balram explains how his own family is almost killed by Ashok's relatives as retribution for his murder. Towards the end of the novel, Balram tries to rationalize his actions and consider that his freedom is worth the lives of his family and of Ashok. Here ends the letter of Balram to Jiabao. This end certainly lets the reader think of the darkness underneath the extreme subjectivity that may be reached by Balram as an entrepreneur. He is aware of the tainted style of his living and leading and that is why he urges to justify the cause and consequences.

The White Tiger comes in a time in which technology immensely overpowers the world and that contributes to globalization. Thus India is no exception; it submerges into the vibes of techno-capital. In the 21st century, India runs one of the fastest growing economies undoubtedly. Specifically Americanization influences India a lot and it plays a significant role in the plot. The whole condition provides an outlet for Balram to alter his fortune. Ashok, Pinky, and Balram, all of them are so fond of such Americanized way of living that simply move them to Gurgaon. Ashoke instead of getting back to America, take Pinky to Gurgaon. Globalization has insisted in the creation of an American atmosphere in India. Ashok too justifies their cause of shift to Gurgaon with full of praises,

She will be happy in Gurgaon, it's the most American part of the city...Ten years ago, they say, there was nothing in Gurgaon, just water buffaloes and fat Punjabi farmers. Today it's the *modernest* suburb of Delhi. American Express, Microsoft, all the big American companies have offices there. The main road is full of shopping malls—each mall has a cinema inside! So if Pinky Madam missed America, this was the best place to bring her. (Adiga 121-122)

Balram blackmails Ram Persad, the other driver, in order to get promoted as the main driver for taking Ashok and Pinky to their new home. Ashok is even more convinced India is surpassing America. Every word of Ashok in support of his thought expresses the effect of globalization starkly. The power of fastest growing capital and the neoliberal aspects accompanied it get closely observed here in the depiction of these characters with their typical thoughts. As Ashok confirms,

But...things have changed so much in India. There are so many more things I could do here than in New York now...The way things are changing in India

now, this place is going to be like America in ten years. Plus, I like it better here. (Adiga 89)

This type of cultural shift and that of in thoughts is very contagious. The pride and arrogance that characterizes Ashoke being a representative from upper strata soon contaminates the dreaming Balram. He is noticing the rapid growth and the way of living here in this affluence as well. From the very beginning of his journey, he knows for sure, that in order to rise above his class he must do something out of the box. He wishes to have a life of an entrepreneur. No matter how he steep himself into darkness to succeed in his feat, he remains nonchalant in his wrongdoings. Even he takes more pride in his misdeeds and boldly pens his thoughts to Premier Jiabao,

In fact, each time when great men like you visit our country I say it. Not that I have anything against great men. In my way, sir, I consider myself one of your kind...I'm a man of action and change. I decided right there and then to start dictating a letter to you. (Adiga 3-5)

Balram has somehow secured the so called 'entrepreneurial' attitude to face the international gaze. But he also aware of the bitter truths that he carries in his achievements. He blatantly admits that in the letter that eminent Chinese figure,

That's why I want to ask you directly if you really are coming to Bangalore. Because if you are, I have something important to tell you. See, the lady on the radio said, 'Mr Jiabao is on a mission: he wants to know the truth about Bangalore.' My blood froze. If anyone knows the truth about Bangalore, it's *me*. (Adiga 4)

Balram's confidence, rather overconfidence may portray the very nature of modern men's believing the way of their being on this neoliberal territory. This attitude and a strong individualized notion in a person after 1990s globalization is a prime fact of discussion. Balram epitomizes this type of nouveau riche in post-globalist society. His taxi service is not of an international fame yet he keeps planning to keep up with the pace of globalization and change the direction of trading while needed. He is as smart as the whole world appears to be in front of him as he says,

“I am tomorrow...I haven't read many books, but I've read all the ones that count.” (Adiga 6)

Balram's relentless competitive dealings results him his corruption. But Balram is somehow indifferent to the severity of his corruption rather he leaves no stones unturned while justifying each cause.

The novel vividly charts the shift in the nature of job Balram pursues. He begins his career in a tea shop. The career reaches at its peak in entrepreneurship. From a blue collar job to get beyond the “shirt and tie” concept of white collar one, he scratches a niche out of his adverse situation though with several unfair means that need to be addressed and justified throughout. In justifying his deeds Balram criticizes the darkness underneath prevailing in our social orders. Balram was once deprived of the facilities of his right to education. He was not into a well-to-do family set up. Poverty runs behind him all through. He was never preached the social values or the values of being into a close-knit family life. Financial crises drove the poor of their emotion and feelings leaving them unaware of the subtlety of life. It was the ‘darkness’ that grasped his life. From the very beginning of this novel the protagonist repeatedly utters ‘darkness’ whenever he narrates the story. Darkness stifles the conscience of Balram.

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...Please understand, Your Excellency, that India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness. (Adiga 14)

As per Balram's statement he is now in Light but we, the readers, cannot sense the true aspect of living in Light. The ambiguous statements here wreck the apparent success and dignity of life as a whole.

The issue of corruption in India's phase of post liberalization is vivid as a picture. It brings a game into the lives of many like Balram. But Balram's take on to this game and its playground is completely unique and dangerous. Balram learns the game well. He succeeds in moving from darkness to light through a self-fashioned personal strategy. Thus he traps him into the same corrupt system that runs under the skin of the society. The system evidently catapults him as a successful entrepreneur. In a way this whole system and the journey of Balram completes him as an economically uplifted person at the cost of his family. Here the family may be equal to old moralities of life. His breaking of the moral chains and social constraints and moving upwards also reflect the new changes in the system of class and caste. It shows the desperation in the heart of the lower strata people for grabbing the opportunity to become rich and powerful. Nowadays it is rare to observe a 'White Tiger' who tries to escape the 'Rooster Coop' through perseverance and rigorous work in a disciplined life. Adiga has meticulously entered in the ambit of struggle and class collision of invisible people. The constant state of differences between elite and unprivileged ones and the crises in the society and in the values of people's thought are dealt here in the novel. The narrative is gripping although. This novel thus digs deep into the oeuvre of the society where one see the wounds of entrepreneurial quest bleeds through the vein of corruption only to meet its legal-moral deficiency.

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