



Collective hypocrisy and self: An assessment of modern India in the select novels of Aravind Adiga

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga, the Man Booker Prize awardee of modern Indian English literature, portrays the multi-spectrum of Indian culture to international forum. His writings reflect the socio-economic and socio-political picture of modern India. He deliberately highlights the dark side of Indian society to bring a radical reformation in modern India. He is the master of storytelling and that makes him indisputable among the writers of India. *The White Tiger* highlights the befitting issues like scarcity, hunger, communal disparity and the fight of an individual to create his identity in modern India through unethical practices. Adiga's *Between the Assassinations* portrays the life and struggle of common people against the prevailing social system and hypocrisy. The novels of Adiga mainly deal with the theme of poverty, affliction and daily life adversities. Adiga's works depict multi-layered corruption prevailing in Indian society that has contributed for creating two facets in India that are "Dark India" and India of Light'. The present paper is an endeavour to emphasise to how collective hypocrisy and self are reflected in Adiga's select novels. And it also examines 'Modern India', which is afflicted with a social system of servitude and extensive socio-political corruption.

Keywords: corruption, darkness, hypocrisy, modern India, poverty

Introduction

Adiga has portrayed the sardonic picture of modern Indian society which is full of socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic issues that change the disposition of modern India. Adiga followed the footsteps of Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens to highlight the cruel inequalities of society to make it a better place to live. His criticism not only depicts the reality but also serves as an attempt to bring a change within self. Aravind Adiga projected two different sides of India – 'India of light' and 'Dark India'. He removes the glossy skin of the economic boom to picture the corruption underneath. His works are the grief-stricken display of humankind and an examination of the sad reality of the difficulties and sufferings of the poor class of India. Aravind Adiga's writings are marked with the analytical study of diverse corruption in India, the agony of the underprivileged downtrodden class, and the burning issue of the carnages against the deprived.

Adiga's three major works; *The White Tiger* (2008) ^[1], *Between the Assassinations* (2008) ^[2], and *Last Man in Tower* (2011) ^[3]. Adiga's Man Booker Prize-winning novel *The White Tiger* (2008) ^[1] highlights the journey of Indian society and culture from objective to disenchantment through the journey of Balram, the protagonist. Through the journey of Balram, Adiga portrays the quotient of desolation, pain, and anguish of an individual of the downtrodden class who has to strain in Modern India. Adiga highlights the existing dichotomy between rural and urban life in modern India. Adiga highlights the collective issues of national significance altogether with the disparity, poverty, hunger, misery and collective exploitation based on caste, class, and religion. Aravind Adiga's *Between the Assassinations* depicts a specific background of India between the assassinations of two former Prime Ministers of Independent India, Mrs Indira Gandhi, and Rajiv Gandhi.

These novels expose the political intrigues that were knitted during the mid-80 and the beginning of the 90's. *Between the Assassinations* is a collection of short stories pictured in a fictional town Kittur, a small town on the south-western coast of India. These collections of stories capture prevailed injustices, the disparity between rich and poor, communal disharmony, hypocrisy and violence and their impact on human beings. In *Last Man in Tower*, Adiga exposes the hearts and minds of people living in the modern Indian society of Mumbai, India. It is written on the theme of greed and how it has the power to drive common people to do things of which they never dreamed and are capable of.

The struggle for identity and the theme of darkness in *The White Tiger*

Adiga's masterpiece, *The White Tiger* is the story of a half-baked chauffeur, Balram, his expedition of varied distinct ranging from dejection to dominance and becoming an entrepreneur is finely projected in the novel. Balram, the voice of the downtrodden played an important role in the novel to bring the unpalatable truth of the society through his journey. The novel is written in 'epistolary technique', where Balram is writing 07 letters to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao. These letters highlight the sardonic picture of modern India. *The White Tiger* bears social injustice of modern India. The novel shows the disparity between the exuberant city life and the lifeless rural parts of India. 'Dark India' represents how poverty, disparity and injustice are controlled by greedy landlords and corrupt politicians. 'India of Light' represents privilege, facilities, justice and exuberant life. Oppression and exploitation are the maladies and only subjected to people of 'Dark India'. It is really unfortunate that modern India is ashamed of its dark side. The Rich class feel existence of poor people and their low status let them down. Adiga highlights the multi-layered

corruption of both the urban and rural society of India and highlights several socio-cultural shortcomings inherent in caste and religion along with many more social commotions. Adiga sharply attacks the so-called democratic system of India and exposes the illegal practices of corrupt Jamidars, politicians in all spheres of society.

Critics stated about *The White Tiger*;

Mendes (2010) notices in this a certain artificiality, cleverly masked by irony, and remarks the "'cardboard cut-out' title character equipped with an inauthentic voice that ultimately undermines issues of class politics" (p. 277)

Balram grew up in Laxmangarh. He started his career by working in a tea shop in Dhanbad. In the novel, Balram says, "We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul, and arse (*The White Tiger* p. 96). Despite many adversities in his life, still he wants to rise in his social standards so later he migrates to Delhi to work as a driver. Balram becomes the driver of Mr Ashok and his wife, Ms Pinky Madam. During this tenure, he started learning about different government policy and economic affairs from the discussions among people. His encounters with oppression at Laxmangarh and his multifaceted corruption in Delhi made him a violent criminal in future. He decides to write his destiny so he killed his master and taken away all the money. Despite the son of a rickshaw puller he made his own fortune by practising unethical deeds and becoming a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. In his letters to Wen Jiabao he writes;

"The story of my upbringing is the story of how a half-baked fellow is produced. But pay attention, Mr. Premier! Fully formed fellows, after twelve years of school and three years of university, wear nice suits, join companies, and take orders from other men for the rest of their lives. Entrepreneurs are made from half-baked clay". (*The White Tiger*, 8)

Social injustice and poverty in adiga's *Between the Assassinations*

Between the Assassinations is set in Kittur, a small imaginary town on the south-western coast of India. Kittur, is one such town where many skilled youngsters are wandering aimlessly due to lack of employment. The novel recounts many of the happenings like: harassment of a street-side bookseller for selling a plagiarized copy of the Satanic Verses, a student who sets off a bomb in his chemistry class, and a girl who is forced to beg for a livelihood. The novel set is a time pre-liberalisation and Post Liberalisation era in India, between the assassinations of two Prime Ministers of India Mrs Indira and Rajiv Gandhi. The series of such events took place around the mid-80s and early 90s. The phase was marked by drastic changes in the political system; the common people encountered unbelievable socio-economic and socio-political issues. *Between the Assassinations* is classified further into seven-day series from 'Day One' to 'Day Seven' with each notable event at the specific landmarks in Kittur. Social injustice and hierarchy are the root cause of prejudice in modern society.

Adiga discovers ethnic conflict Ziauddin arrives in Kittur and searching for work. Being an outsider that to muslim leads him to take work with a man who is planning a terrorist attack on Indian soldiers. Ziauddin becomes later leaves the job and returns to his previous life after being frustrated from his present experience. Adiga showcases

corruption through the character Abbasi who closed his factory down because the women he employed were going blind from the work. Xerox, who makes a living by selling illegally copied books to school children and is frequently arrested by Police. Chanayya even after realising his work is painful and kill him bust still he give up his life before poverty. Finally, through the stories of Ziauddin, Shankara, Abbasi, and Ramakrishna, Adiga shows his anger against the hopeless state of affairs in the country. Like Hamlet, he too makes a cursed cry, "All the state of Denmark is corrupt!"

Greed is a double-edged sword: adiga's *Last Man in Tower*

Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* depicts high definition image of modern India. It displays the development of urban cities and the way of living of people who have accepted the cosmopolitan outlook. This novel shows the picture of the new Mumbai, an ultramodern city full of skyscrapers. The glamour and gimmick of Mumbai attract people; money plays a crucial role in all spas of life. Mumbai is full of money-minded people who think all the luxury of life can be purchased if you have money with you. These greedy thoughts even lead people to commit anything for money. Property buying and selling has become a good business nowadays. However, the common man's life is so cheap in this materialistic world. This novel deals with the power and voice of capitalism. The people of Mumbai need money to fulfil their dreams and dormant desires. By realising this, people like Dharmen Shah start exploiting helpless poor people for their benefits. Materialistic greed can be perceived from the conversation between Gaurav and his wife Sonal;

A month after her death, Gaurav called to ask for her diamond necklace, which she had bought at the Vummidi store in Chennai; Sonal was eager that her mother-in-law's jewel shouldn't be lost. Masterji said he did not remember such a necklace but promised to look in the cupboards. His son's coldness, he was sure, had started from this time. (76-77)

Last Man in Tower, is the story of a conflict between a common man and real estate owner; Masterji vs. Dharmen. Dharmen Shah, a property dealer makes a considerable offer to the inmates of Mumbai based Vishram Society in the name of renovation. Shah even gives bribes to those who oppose to vacate. All the people accept the deal except Masterji. In order the get Masterji's consent the element of fear has been employed and alienate by his own neighbours for not accepting the Saha's offer. Masterji fight against the real estate developer, Dharmen Shah. People in pursuit of wealth finally cruelly killed Masterji. The modern society where people give value to money can be exemplified in the words of Shah: "You have to respect human greed" (LMT 107). People in order to make their fortune did not hesitate to practise unethical and immoral means. This can be supported Shah's words:

"You should look around you, at people. Rich people. Successful people. You should always be thinking, what does he have that I don't have? That way you go up in life". (LMT 230).

Adiga to an extent disclose the dark side of the modern developing city. The carnages and inhuman realities of the redevelopment sector of big cities like Mumbai are brutally exposed in the novel.

Conclusion

Aravind Adiga's perspective on social realism remains constant in his creative imagination, which is reflected in his art of characterisation. He is a master of characterisation who brings all the characters from the real-life scenario. All his 03 novels describe the socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-political pictures of Indian society and the plot revolves around exploitation, corruption, and violence. He has highlighted the impact of globalisation on modern India and the inclination of Indian towards acceptance of modernity without validating it. Although modernity can be seen in the urban area still a major portion of India and its population is living under the shroud of crushing poverty and ignorance. He highlights the sensitive yet predominant evil practices of Indian society. All his writing is an attempt to bring back sanity, equality, and harmony in society. Adiga portrays collective hypocrisy, monolithic corruption, caste system, faulty democracy, dirty politics so realistically that stands him apart from other Indian writers in English.

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