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Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*: A Study of Globalization

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Abstract

Globalization is a raging phenomenon in today's world and it has hit the traditional oriental culture(s) of India, very hard. While on one hand, Edward Said's *Orientalism* speaks about the Eurocentric view of the world for the oriental countries, on the other hand, India is slowly turning into a global power owing to its capability to adapt into the highly technological as well commercial aspects of the world. The snake charmers, the erotic sensibilities, barbaric traits are things of past, India has become a global nation. Globalization has led to the rise of economic stabilities among the general Indian mass. On the other hand, it has led to the death of native culture(s), sensibilities, identities etc. Aravind Adiga has explored various notions about globalization in the Booker prize-winning novel *The White Tiger*. The present paper aims to discuss the concepts of globalization in light of Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger*.

Key Words: Globalization, Hybridity, Individual Identity, Class Struggle, Native Culture, Economic Power, Neo-colonialism

Introduction

Aravind Adiga came into limelight through his Booker Prize-winning novel *The White Tiger* (2008) at the fortieth edition of the Man Booker Prize ceremony. He was the third (fourth, according to some sources) Indian to win this prestigious award. He is a postmodernist writer known for exposing the unfortunate indecencies, threatening shades of malice, a shady game of politics and social shameful acts pervasive in Postcolonial India. He is a trademark postmodern novelist who depicts defilement, disparities and the social indecencies that endure notwithstanding India's motto of advancement and thriving .i.e. striving under the pangs of globalization. Adiga was a student of English Literature at the

University of Columbia, New York. Adiga is also an alumnus of Magdalene College, Oxford. Adiga worked as a freelance journalist and he was also associated with Time magazine where he filled in as a South Asian correspondent for a long time. Adiga's article has appeared in topmost daily like The Times of India Financial Times, Sunday Times and New Yorker. Adiga's second novel *Last Man in Tower* (2011), narrates the story of a retired school teacher Mr Yogi A Murthy fighting the real estate sharks in Mumbai and protecting his old world ethical values and norms. Beside these two novels, Adiga has been credited with another novel known as *Selection Day* (available for pre-orders in Amazon) and a collection of twelve inter-linked short stories, known as *Between The Assassinations*.

The novel's narrative technique goes back to that of the earliest form of narrations in novels. It was initially used in *Pamela* by Samuel Richardson. Aravind Adiga follows the theory of tradition and individual talent, where he used the epistolary technique to bind the reader with an old world charm and experimented with a postmodern style to provide the reader an unique experience of its kind. He is one of the few Indian English novelists to use this technique. The incidents, the dilemma of the protagonist as well as the psychological framework of Balram Halwai are mapped through this traditional technique of telling a tale through the exchange of letters.

Globalization: A Study

There is a lot of ambiguity in defining the term Globalization in context of India, a third world country. It generally alludes to the notion that it exploits the distinction between castes, creeds and genders throughout various regions in India. It also suggests the existence of a continuous struggle to develop the social and financial position within the society

Globalization plays a very crucial aspect in the narrative of *The White Tiger*. Globalization or to be very specifically Americanization not only acts as subvert theme in the novel but it actually performs the role of a character in the novel. Besides the protagonist, Balram Halwai Globalization acts as a robust catalyst which drives the whole plot of the novel.

Adiga draws two different sides of Indian Society, the upper class namely the oppressor and the lower class namely the oppressed. It is a story of village lad

experiencing the dichotomy of social structures in his village, where the Babus exploits their power and his family thrives on the mercy of these four landlords namely Buffalo, Stork, Wild Boar and Raven. These masters with colonial attitude and feudal ways of exploiting the villagers, suck up their finance and other family assets like parasites and in return provides nothing. They are the sequel to the colonial masters who ruled these lands before political decolonization. Adiga provides the reader with an intensive survey of the large-scale exploitations that was taking place at the native village of Balram Halwai :

The Buffalo was one of the landlords in Laxmangarh. There were three others, and each had got his name from the peculiarities of appetite that had been detected in him. The Stork was a fat man with a fat moustache, 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 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 money, he liked to dip his beak into their backsides, so they called him the Raven. The Buffalo was the greediest of the lot. He has 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. (Adiga , 24-25)

Adiga's communist sensibilities are visible as the lead character tries to reach the social as well as economic equilibrium by coming out of the periphery of the concentric circle and moving towards the centre of power. Balram excelled as a student and the school inspector names him as the White Tiger, one of the rarest animals of the jungle.

Young Balram manages to acquire basic education in his village school but owing to the financial burden he is forced (by his granny, Kusum) to work in a tea shop and he gradually eavesdrop the conversations of the customers and makes up his mind to break the pessimistic life style and move forward in life . He later on bags the duty of a family chauffer through sheer play of diplomacy i.e. well played cards and lands up in Delhi as the driver cum confidante of his owner Mr Ashok and Pinky Madam.

The story shifts from the rustic setting of North Indian villages and slowly it moves towards the urban power hub of India .i.e. Delhi and finally halts in the silicon valley of India, Bangalore. Aravind Adiga uses

three different landscapes of India to portray the multicultural ethos that co-exists in India He speaks about native cultures and feudal way of life in the tiny hamlet of India. He shifts to the politics of power and corruption in the murky conurbation of Delhi and ultimately takes a halt at the technological and entrepreneurial hub i.e. the image of India as the fastest growing economy in Husoor of Bangalore.

Balram learns the way of life through keen observation and his nature of eavesdropping into the conversation of other people. Balram smelled the stink of corruption that was initiated by his owner's family in and around Delhi. He witnessed the marital discord between his master Mr Ashok and his wife known as Pinky Madam. Apart from concentrating on the wheels, he was all ears to the game of lust, power and corruption that were going on with the people in his back seat.

Ashok and Pinky returned from a healthy and post lifestyle of USA and both of them were frustrated to be back in the dirty and polluted roads of India. She wanted to go back to USA in search of all the earthy comforts and Ashok in order to please his wife eyed a business proposal that the hinterlands of Delhi could be metamorphosed into any glamorous city of the United States. Aravind Adiga pulls in the notion of the popular ethos of globalization directly over here, where a foreign returned wife wants to return to the material luxury of the States and the husband wants to bring the worldly pleasure (read American pleasure) to his homeland itself. Balram says

Ten years ago, they say, there was nothing in Gurgaon, just water buffaloes and fat Punjabi farmers. Today it's the modernist 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)

Ashok eyes to develop real estates .i.e. shopping malls, food plazas, hotels in and around Delhi and wants to provide his wife with a hybrid world of American (occidental) flamboyance constructed on the Indian (oriental) soil. The concept of hybridity, as theorized by Homi K Bhabha in his book *Location Of Culture* (1994), is highly visible in the plot line of *The White Tiger*. The owner of Balram Halwai, Ashok eyes an opportunity to recreate the American experience in India itself and thus becoming a seeker of globalization. The following quotes by Ashok in *The White Tiger* are as follows:

'...There are so many things I could do here than in New York now.'
(Adiga, 89)

'...The way things are changing in India now, this place is going to be like America in ten years (Adiga, 89)

The characters in the novel indulge themselves in luxurious items from all over the world. They listen to the discography of European musicians (Sting), they prefer to get cosy on Italian Leather seats. These characters like to take a ride on the Japanese

car Honda and prefer to drink the American Hard Liquor Jack Daniels.

One of the main aspects of Globalization is the notion of intercultural exchanges. Balram Halwai under the disguise of Mr Ashok exchanged letters with the Chinese head Mr Jiabao regarding the incredible experience as an Indian. He provides a sarcastic tales about the class division, casteism and financial hooliganism being practised all over the darkness i.e. the villages and townships near Indo-Gangetic plains. He believes that globalization will help them to reach the zenith of the modern global world. Adiga stresses the fact that the white i.e the colonisers will come to lowest strata of the global ladder and it will be ruled by the brown Indian men and yellow Chinese men.

Adiga constantly draws a comparison with the developmental mind-sets of Chinese people with that of shallow pride of the Indians being the largest parliamentary democracy. He satirises the inefficiency of the Indian Government to offer a healthy lifestyle to its citizen and praises the Chinese counterpart for their achievements. He mocks the gullible attitude of the Indian Politicians, where they boast of Gandhi's ideology, but rarely help out the common people. The quote from the text:

If I were making a country, I'd get the sewage pipes first, then the democracy, then I'd go about giving pamphlets and statues of Gandhi to other people, but what do I know? I'm just a murderer! (Adiga, 96)

The rich are getting richer and the poor in spite of migrating towards the urban areas

stayed poor and somewhat their condition deteriorated. In villages, they were the victims of feudalism of the rich people and in the city, they are the prey to rapid globalization. The labourers who visited Delhi for a better livelihood received daily wages but they were pushed away from the resources of the city and ultimately they became part of the shoddy slums which cropped up behind the large malls of Gurgaon and Noida. They are the urban poor suffering from tuberculosis and living in an utter state of unhygienic spaces. The protagonist one visits the posh mall and slowly walks towards the slum behind those malls and provides a hard-hitting description of the horrific lifestyle of the urban poor:

These people were building homes for the rich, but they lived in tents covered with blue tarpaulin sheets and portioned into lanes by lines of sewage. It was even worse than Laxmangarh. I picked my way around the broken glass, wire, and shattered tube lights. The stench of faeces was replaced by the stronger stench of industrial sewage. The slum ended up in an open sewer – a small river of black water went sluggishly past me, bubbles sparkling in it and little circles spreading on its surface. Two children were splashing about in the black water. (Adiga, 259-260)

Ania Loomba explains the notion of Sisyphus stratum in her book *Colonialism and Postcolonialism* in connection with feminism and globalization, where she explained that in spite the progress of economy of the third world country, the feminine population of the previously

colonized nations remains at the bottom of social strata. Their hard work and labour are still of no use and just like the myth of Sisyphus, the end result remains an ultimate story of deprivation and failure. She cites the phrase Sisyphus stratum in the chapter 'Challenging Colonialism', which was originally used by A.R Joseph in the book *Women's Movement in Global Perspective* published in 1995.

Thus, if there is a 'Sisyphus stratum' consisting of people 'endlessly toiling at the bottom of the socio-economic stratification'..... (Loomba, 224)

Adiga dives deep into the sociological abyss where he comes up with the age-old tradition of Indian people to serve the other. He mocks that India's so-called glorious past, which never existed, just like Wole Soyinka mocks the so-called outstanding pre-colonial past of Africa in *A Dance Of The Forests* (1960). While addressing to Mr Jiabao, Balram writes that:

When you get here, you'll be told we Indians invented everything from the Internet to hard-boiled eggs to space-ships before the British stole it all from us. Nonsense. The Greatest thing to come out of this country in the ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop. (Adiga, 173)

Sisyphus stratum is applicable in Adiga's *The White Tiger*, where the people living in darkness in spite of migrating towards the urban township and tirelessly toiling over there don't bring any kind of financial and social equilibrium in society. Adiga comes up with a reason for this; he blames the mind-sets of the lower class people and

names it as the Rooster Coop. People staying within this system are destined to stay within it and unless one dares to come out of the system, it would continue for ages. People prefer to stay loyal in spite of getting oppressed and living in denial, they even are proud of their tradition of servitude. The following lines from the novel assert the claim of the researcher:

Because Indians are the world's most honest people, like the prime minister's booklet will inform you? No. It is because 99.9 per cent of us are caught in the Rooster Coop just like those poor guys in the poultry market....The trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the Indian Economy. (Adiga , 175)

Adiga criticizes the mentality of servitude among his community and countrymen at a large, where servitude has been taught through religion and mythology. He explains it sarcastically while narrating the story of Lord Hanuman to the Chinese Premier:

.Do you know about Hanuman, Sir? He was the faithful servant of the God Rama, and we worship him in our temples because he is a shining example of how to serve your masters with absolute fidelity, love, and devotion. (Adiga ,19)

Thus Adiga, like a social scientist comes up with a plan to murder his boos. He devised a path to break away from the concentric circles of rooster coop. He justifies his act of murder and getting the freedom to shape his own destiny by becoming an entrepreneur.

Conclusion

It is globalization which leads to the rise of Balram from being a rustic boy to a highly successful entrepreneur in the silicon valley of India. Indian society suffered from orthodox caste divisions on the basis of birth and labour. He surpassed his family profession of being a poor sweet maker (as the name suggests, but his father worked as a rickshaw puller) and slowly climbed up the financial as well as a social ladder. But on the other hand, it also putrefied his soul, from being an innocent boy to a cunning business tycoon; globalization came with its fair shares of cons.

Adiga's *The White Tiger* strikes a beautiful balance between the darkness and the light 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. Said's view about the Oriental life style and mind-set still exist but in some different forms. Adiga portrayed Delhi having a hangover of the postcolonial amnesia which is still thriving on the power of politics and corruption, while Bangalore as a thriving area for the new age globalized citizens like Balram Halwai, a successful entrepreneur. It provides the readers with introspection about the pros and cons of Indian traditions, mentality and the desire to be ruled, either by white men or by the brown men. This is a dark, realistic and immensely witty tale of one's journey from the hinterland of darkness to the mainland of light with the aid of globalization. It also asserts the claim made by Ania Loomba about globalization, that it is nothing but a fresher and meaner edition of

Postcolonialism. Globalization looks for virgin spaces for its social as the well economical entanglement of the newly liberalised nation. Unlike Colonisation which only aimed at raw materials, goods and labour, globalization exploits the psychological and domestic array of the third world population. It creates new zones made available by the colonial encroachment of lands, properties and other valuable assets.

'Globalization', as I have argued earlier, is a spectacular display of the energy of capital as it moves across the world in search of new markets and new raw materials, goods and labour, while there is certainly a redefinition of older colonial and neo-colonial boundaries through this process, the newer divisions build on

former patterns of dispossession.
(Loomba, 256-257)

Globalization is nothing but a conspiracy theory by the world superpower i.e. the USA which tends to make the people of previously colonised nation forget about the horrors of colonial rule. It has been projected as a therapy to deviate the mind of the third world nations' population. Globalization is making itself evident by encroaching the marketplace, livelihood, finance and lastly national culture(s). Adiga is a social mirror, while every other contemporary work show the fast booming economy of India, he provides the reader with a view of the horrific disease that is slowly engulfing the downtrodden under the disguise of an economic boom on a global scale.

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