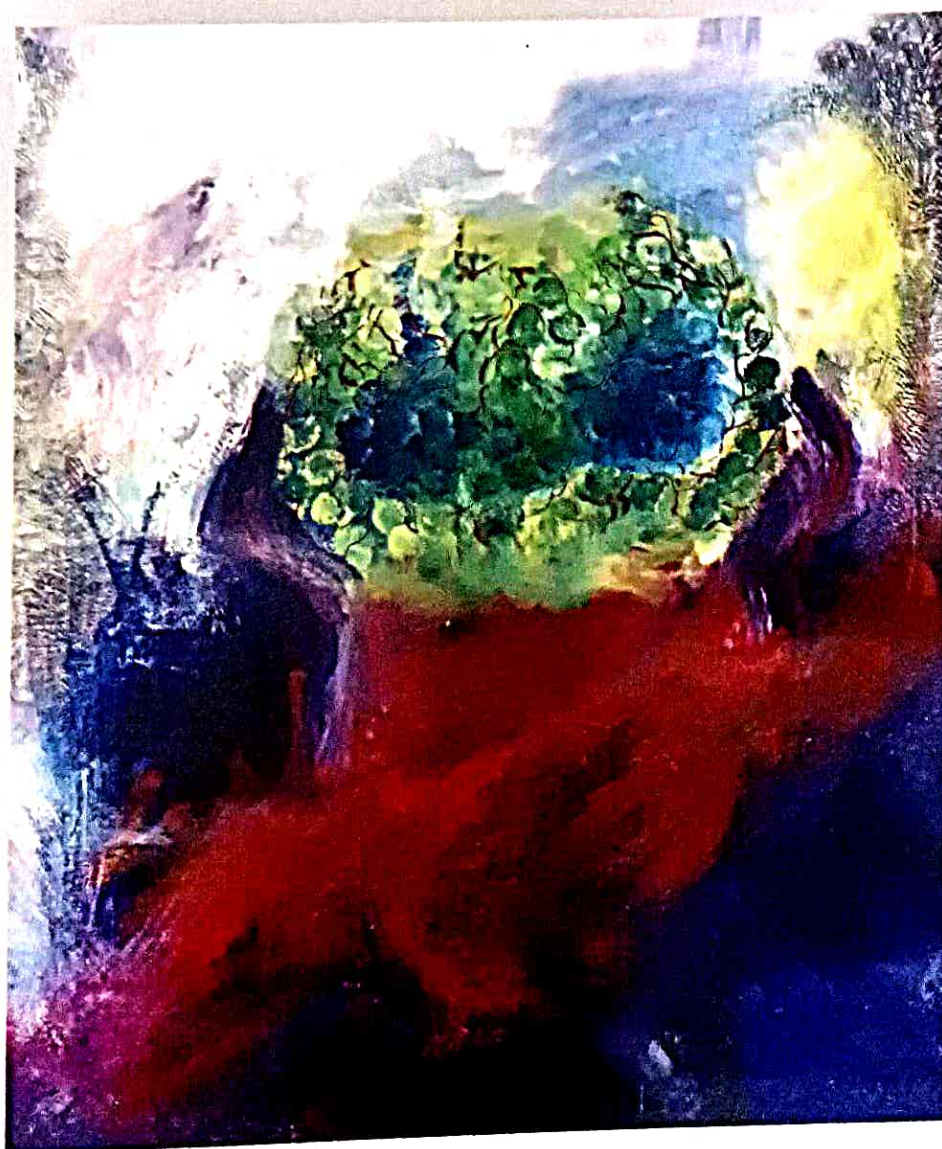




ISSN : 2321-4791
Vol-III, September, 2016

Bodhidroom



A refereed journal dedicated to
literature, culture and humanities

Bodhidroom, Vol III, September 2016

A refereed journal of annual periodicity promoting research in literature, culture and humanities published by Majuli College Literary Forum and printed at Bhabani Graphics, Guwahati-781007

ISSN: 2321-4791

BODHIDROOM

©: Majuli College Literary Forum

Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of the editors is prohibited.

Address for correspondence:

Editors, *Bodhidroom*

Department of English, Majuli College

P.O. - Kamalabari

Dist: Majuli (Assam), PIN-785106

Subscription Price: ₹ 150

DISCLAIMER: The views and facts presented by the authors in their papers in this issue are their own. The editors and publisher are in no way responsible for plagiarism of any sort. All disputes concerning the journal shall be settled in the court of Garmur, Majuli, Assam.

CONTENTS

Haute Couture or 'Hot' Couture? A Rhetorical Reading of 'Fashion' in Lifestyle Magazines • Mridul Bordoloi ■ 1

The Poetics of Polyphonic Discourses: A Critical Reading of J.M Coetzee's *Disgrace* • Subhajit Bhadra ■ 23

Universality of Human Rights:
A Philosophical Discussion • Reepa Sarmah ■ 37

Delineation of Rasa in *SVAPNANĀTAKAM* • Profulla Borah ■ 43

Importance of Skill Based Education on Generating Employment: Special Reference to Majuli • Gobinda Krishna Borah ■ 50

✓ Unlocking the Untouched Part of India's Development Story: A Reading of *The White Tiger* • Anjan Saikia ■ 57

Plato and His Concept of Soul with Particular Reference to His *Dialogue Phaedrus* • Ranjit Bhattacharyya ■ 67

A Reading on the Discourse of Sexism in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* • Ritushmita Sharma ■ 73

Unlocking the Untouched Part of India's Development Story A Reading of *The White Tiger*

Anjan Saikia **

Introduction:

The White Tiger by Arvind Adiga is a seminal work for which the India born Australia settled writer bagged the prestigious Man Booker Prize in 2008. Based on his journalistic experiences while working for Time, Adiga has presented here a tale of two India in the form of an epistolary communication to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao from the desk of the protagonist, Balram Halwai. Adiga has candidly brought into light the political, social and entrepreneurial successes of India in the 21st century globalised world besides contrasting India with the second world power, China.

Objective:

This article aims at bringing into light the evils and perils prevalent in Indian society in the 21st century even after achieving robust growth and scientific and technological successes as well illustrated in the novel *The White Tiger* by Arvind Adiga. Through close scrutiny of these

perils, the article puts serious questions to counter the slogan being spread across the world that India is shining.

Methodology:

This article has been written on the basis of available secondary sources of data and

information. To make the cited points candid and support the argument, textual evidences are borne at a large length.

The novel is written in the form of an epistolary communication between a former car driver from Laxmangarh namely Balram Halwai and the Chinese premier, Wen Jiabao. Chinese premier has been chosen deliberately to unlock the untouched part of the much vaunted growth story of India. The novelist has clearly stated the reason behind choosing the Chinese premier. He says:

"the future of the world lies with the yellow man and the brown man now that our erstwhile master, the white-skinned man, has wasted himself through buggery, mobile phone usage, and drug abuse." (Adiga, 5-6)

Most importantly, the visit of the Chinese premier demonstrates China's interest in India's advancement in various key areas including entrepreneurship. A massive transformation in India is going on these days and this is what Ashok also observes in the novel besides Balram. Adiga writes:

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

India has been projected globally as one of the fastest growing countries having access to vital sectors like education, health care, transportation facilities, electricity, running water, and justice.

India has even left China behind in respect of entrepreneurial ventures and interestingly such a success of India in entrepreneurship has become a major cause of concern for China as stated in the novel. Apart from that, India's rapid progress in such areas as science and technology, space, yoga and meditation, hotel and tourism industry, expansion of cities and mall culture and real estate have worried many in the world especially the Chinese. Yet India is far behind from the Chinese in reality. Those amenities which are thought to have access in India are virtually absent in the lives of people in actual terms. The novelist writes:

"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 a real estate entrepreneurs." (Adiga, 4)

In sharp contrast to the concept that India is shining, Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* brings forth the rots prevalent in the three pillars of modern India, i.e. democracy, enterprise and justice and eventually comments that all these rots have added feathers to the tired clichés of a faltering nation. The novel puts forward the idea that India is not shining in reality and India's claim of progress is ironically still "near heart of darkness". India of

today is, according to Adiga, also frequently in world news and limelight for all such bad reasons as murder, manipulation, absconding, malpractices, opportunism, bribery, corrupt judicial practices and many more. Adiga deliberates upon all these malpractices being rampantly practiced in India in the novel. In short, Adiga counters the much vaunted growth story and successes of India through a close scrutiny of the perils of Indian society existed even in the 21st century in spite of scientific and technological developments.

The novel became an issue of much heated discussion immediately after its publication among critics because of its negative portrayal of India. Still it can be well considered as a conscious effort on the part of the novelist to cure the slackening Indian society. The rousing slogans of the much vaunted developments of India have proved to be false for many Indians because of the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor, and the rural and the urban. In India, everything seems to be at its bad shape- be it in the case of political culture of India, voting behaviour, social milieu, caste and culture conflict, superstition, social taboos, exploitation of underclass, zamindari practice, emergence of naxalism, unemployment especially in rural India, prostitution, master- servant relationship, nexus between the criminals, politicians

and the police, mockery of education system, hollowness of governments' welfare schemes, poor medical services, harmful impact of scientific, technological and industrial developments or many other such areas. In the aftermath of intense discussion and debate among the critics over the negative portrayal of India in the novel, Adiga justified his position while giving an interview on "Sunday Times of India" on Oct 19, 2008 saying that China and India are marching ahead and would inherit the world from the west. Therefore, it has become necessary to highlight the brutal injustices to make the necessary rectifications in time and arrive at the desired goals.

However, it must be kept in mind that India's slums have already become subjects of many other novelists prior to Adiga. The Booker winning novels of V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai are fraught with instances of such infamous slums known to be peculiar to India. In this novel, two pictures of polar opposite of the same India are being painted with emphasis on the prevailing evils. Readers here find 'an India of light' on the one hand and 'an India of darkness' on the other hand. V.S. Naipaul also in his *An Area of Darkness* (1964) exposes blatantly this darkness of India much before Adiga. In the book, Naipaul candidly pointed out the prevalence of the rigid cast system in

India, dilapidated lavatory and kitchens, underclass people, open defecation, labour degradation, poverty, homeless people, lack of hygiene and sanitation etc which unmistakably counters the theory of the much vaunted growth of India. Kiran Desai, another Booker Prize winning novelist, unearthed this peculiar Indian system of the big 'thieves' in both of her famous novels *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and *The Inheritance of Loss*.

The entrepreneurial success of Balram, the protagonist of the novel, even after coming from the darkness of village life is brilliantly fabricated here in the novel. He has been presented as a typical voice of underclass metaphorically termed as 'rooster coop'. The people of the underclass, as stated in the novel, are found to be worked relentlessly to set free from age old slavery and exploitation. These people have their own anger and frustrations which become evident in Balram's indulgence in such immoral activities as drinking, prostitution, chasing etc. The underestimation of the underclass, however, can't be ignored further. Such happenings as the outbreak of bloody revolution within India, emergence of socialists in India, use of lethal weapons, etc. distinctly epitomise the growing disappointment among the underclass of Indian society in the wake of exploitation and inexplicable sufferings India often boasts of as the largest

democracy in the world. Ironically this democracy has been turned into nemesis which breeds away only "rottenness and corruption" as explicitly stated in the novel. Such an uncalled for breeding of corrupted politicians and bureaucrats on the part of so called 'democracy' subsequently hampers all developmental and welfare schemes in our society. The most lamenting fact of our democracy is that most of the Indian politicians are "half-baked". Their 'half baked' stance has pushed the country into a faltering status. Quite a considerable segment of Indian people including doctors, taxpayers, entrepreneurs, industrialists etc. fulfils their vested interests by befriending ministers and his sidekicks at the cost of national interests. Bribery has become a routine affairs in India. Mukesh and Ashok in the novel have bribed the minister to settle income tax accounts. Even elections are found to be manipulated in India. Transfer of power from one hand another appears to be nothing but a farcical activity since the common men's fate doesn't witness any change every time. Adiga nicely points this worst practice prevalent in India in the following way:

"Now that the date for the elections had been set, and declared on radio, election fever had started spreading again. These are the three main diseases in this country, sir: Typhoid, cholera, and election fever. This last one is the worst; it makes

people talk and talk about things that they have no say in." (Adiga, 98)

Moreover, the position of the voters is equally pitiable. The hapless voters discuss about the elections fruitlessly at tea shops in the following manner:

"Would they do it this time? Would they beat the Great Socialist and win the elections? Had they raised enough money of their own, and bribed enough policemen, and bought enough fingerprints of their own, to win? Like eunuchs discussing the Kama Sutra, the voters discuss the elections in Laxmangarh". (Adiga, 98)

Political wins can only be possible in India for those who have money, muscle power, police and strategic alignment of various factions and powers. All these weapons are used to woo the voters basically people of the underclass. In short, India is lagging far behind China because of "this fucked system called parliamentary democracy. Otherwise we'd be just like China". (Adiga, 156)

Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, rigid caste system, superstition, dowry practices, economic disparity, zamindari system, exploitation of farmers and labourers, rise of naxalism, faulty education system, poor health services, tax evading racket, conflicted master-servant relationship, prostitution, weakening family structure etc. are some of the common elements that the typical Indian

society is known for. All these testify the darker side of the traditional Indian society.

Unlike the ancient time where there had been the presence of thousand castes and destinies, this rotten system has created just two castes in modern India: "men with big bellies and men with small bellies" and only two destinies: "eat or get eaten up." After the departure of the British from India, the situation of the country is virtually like this-

"And then, thanks to all those politicians in Delhi, on the fifteenth of August, 1947-the British left- the cages had been let open; and the animals had attacked and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law. Those that were the most furious, the hungriest, had eaten everything else up, and grown big bellies. That was all that counted now, the size of your belly. It didn't matter whether you were a woman, or a Muslim or an untouchable: anyone with a belly could rise up." (Adiga, 64)

Extreme poverty is the rolling force behind the darkness in the life of these Indians especially the rural. Other facts which have added fuel to the sufferings of the underclass are illiteracy, zamindari practice, unemployment, social taboos, rigid caste discrimination, caste and culture conflict, corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, economic disparity, superstitions, corrupt education system

and health services etc. Extreme poverty has led to mass exodus of thousands of jobless youths of Gaya and Laxmangarh to big cities to get rid of this lifelong shackle. The protagonist Balram Haliwai and his brothers are no exceptions to who have also migrated to big cities for better future and prospects.

Balram is a scapegoat of this hypocritical and slackening Indian society. He is the white tiger who had to leave the school due to economic backwardness and worked later in a tea stall washing utensils and doing every kind of menial jobs. Quite surprisingly poverty has extended the grip in such a way that even parents have no time or don't bother to name their kids. Neither the mother nor the father as showed in the novel is concerned about naming their children. Balram says- "She's very ill, sir. She lies in bed and spews blood. She's got no time to name me". (Adiga, 13)

Poverty snatched away all the dreams of Balram's father too. It is only his school teacher who named him as Balram and marked his age in the school ledger. The physical stature of Balram's father itself testifies the life and sufferings that this man has undergone in his poverty stricken life. Balram utters in the novel: "A rich man's body is a like premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. Ours are different. My father's spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use

in villages to pull water from wells; the clavicle curved around his neck in high relief, like a dog's collar; cuts and nicks and scars, like little whip marks in his flesh, ran down his chest and waist, reaching down below his hipbones into his buttocks. The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen."

(Adiga, 26-27)

Such descriptions of poverty, sufferings etc. are also abundant in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. All these are well marked in her descriptions of such characters as 'the cook' and 'the poverty'.

The zamindars are another segment of Indian society who have exploited as well as subjugated the underclass over the years through their merciless practices and impositions. The novel brings into light the references of four landlords namely 'buffalo', 'stork', 'wild boar' and 'Raven'. The names of these landlords have themselves been originated from the peculiarities of appetite that they usually have. Stork as referred in the novel grabbed the river while the Wild boar owned agriculture. Adiga writes:

"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." (Adiga, 24)

Again, the Raven owned the waste land

'which was the dry rocky hillside around the fort' while the buffalo had "eaten up the rickshaws and the roads" by forcefully and illegally extracting hard-earned money of the rickshaw pullers. .

Ironically these 'animals' confined themselves within the highly walled mansions and sent their sons and daughters to Dhanbad or Delhi when Naxalism was at its height. Balram himself was a victim of such exploitation of these perpetrators which is found to be a very common phenomenon in Indian society. It has already been mentioned that Balram was pulled out of the school and had to work at a tea stall where he got "better education" than "at any school". Again, it was the common men who had to bear the brunt of the infamous fighting between the naxal outfits and landlords who had their own private armies. Shooting and torturing people became routine affairs of these animals in India in those days.

The typical image of an Indian society is fraught with certain other dark areas such as social taboos, rigid caste distinction, superstitions and caste and culture. The novel brings into light such instances in great abundance. The old driver of the stork asked Balram, "what caste are you?" (56). The stork also asked a similar question- "halwai.....What caste is that, top or bottom?" Ramprasad, the servant of the stork, resorted to lies to introduce himself falsely as a Hindu

instead of a Muslim only to secure the job. Interestingly after the revelation of his actual identity, he was sacked from the job. Roshan, the grandson of the stork, called himself Azharuddin, the captain of India while playing cricket. Stork reacted quickly-

"Call yourself Gavaskar. Azharuddin is a muslim" (Adiga,70) Moreover, the typical society did not approve the marriage of Ashok and pinky because Pinky is not a Hindu. Their fragile relationship ended in a divorce due to caste and cultural differences.

Again, the novel is also replete with multiple superstitions like 'marriage brings more rain in the village' (Adiga-190), 'any diseases of body or mind cured when you penetrate a virgin' (Adiga-193), 'his buffalo died at once' because 'he stopped believing in God' (Adiga,186) etc.

Ill reputation of the Indian society also rests on another social stigma i.e. dowry system. The marriage of Balram's sister cousin, Reena pushed the whole family in to the world of misery. Balram had also been dropped from school in the wake of the monetary crisis of the family. Kishan's marriage also brought huge dowry.

Again, it is the underclasses who suffer much owing to the existing corrupt education system. Adiga poses questions on this education system of India which is virtually governed by the "crowd of

thugs and idiots." (Adiga, 35) This corrupt and defunct education system is also a part of the daily life of Laxmangarh. The school teacher called 'big paan-and-spit man.' (Adiga, 29) slept always at noon and drank toddy in the school itself. Again, supply of free food went into the pockets of the teacher not the children who were actually aimed at. The school teacher gave legitimate excuse for it saying that "he hadn't been paid his salary in six months" (Adiga, 33). Moreover, the uniforms that government had sent to the school were not issued to the children. Adiga comments:

"but a week later they turned up for sale in the neighbouring village' (Adiga, 33)

Poor health services and non-execution of government policies bring into light the rampant malpractices which actually add to the miseries of the poor. During election times, three foundation stones were laid by different politicians for a hospital in Laxmangarh itself. These foundation stones remained even after many elections. The death of the father of Balram was a consequence of poor health and medical services. Medical services are also under the clutches of the politicians in India. As described in the book, Lohia Universal Free Hospital was inaugurated by the Great socialist. In sharp contrast to the bombastic inauguration, there was ironically no doctor in the hospital. Even

the available rooms were not equipped with the minimum required amenities.

Even the doctors have to take resort to bribery for getting their posts in India. As said in the novel, the doctors are forced overtly or covertly to touch the feet of the socialist. Adiga says in the novel-

"you can keep the rest of your government salary and go work in some private hospital for the rest of the week. Forget the village. Because according to this ledger you've been there. You've treated my wounded leg. You've healed that girl's jaundice" (Adiga, 50) The underclass of Indian society is constituted of labourers working in the industrial set up, taxi and auto drivers, servants, prostitutes, beggars, poor and shivering lots hiding under flyovers, slum dwellers etc. Cities like Bangalore and Delhi epitomise India of two kinds having opulent segment on the one hand and underclass trapped in 'rooster coop,' struggling to come out of the cage on the other hand. The anger, frustration, protest and revenge of these exploited sometimes result in untoward incidents.

Although India has been much hyped as an emerging entrepreneurial power in the world in the wake of her unprecedented developments in science and technology, space technology etc., yet the condition of the underclass miserably remains the same even after six decades of our independence. Balram is a true

prototype of the underclass manifesting their miseries of life, humiliation, struggle and dreams.

In a shocking propensity in India, drivers and servants are forced to confess the crimes of their masters. Balram was utterly disgusted with the undignified life. Therefore, he didn't feel any sense of guilty for murdering Ashok. He wanted to experience "just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant."

Prostitution is another area which reflects the darkness prevailed in India. In cities, poverty is the root cause behind adoption of such a nasty area as profession. In cities like Delhi, Dhanbad and Bangalore, there are red light zones where one can negotiate a price with these women. The price of those involved in this profession is heavily dependent on factors like "high class or low class", "virgin or non-virgin" (Adiga,221). Interestingly in Delhi, rich people prefer especially "golden haired women".

Corrupt police, legal and administrative structure mark off another moribund and malaise area of shining India. Policemen are involved in nasty practices of falsely torturing drivers to confession crimes committed by their respective masters. By torturing drivers to confess crimes falsely, police actually want to protect the rich men from the legal proceedings and subsequently get huge

money as reward from the rich men. As described in the novel, the hit and run case which legally belongs to Pinky is shifted to Balram- "The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters. We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul, and arse." (Adiga,169)

Even judges ignore to look into such instances of forced confession because they "are in the racket too. They take their bribe they ignore the discrepancies in the case and life goes on" (Adiga,170) In brief, the novel blatantly exposes the close nexus between criminals, police and media persons.

The novel also puts forward references how India corrupts people. This is found quite clearly in the case of Ashok- "all these changes happened in me because they happened first in Mr. Ashok. He returned from America an innocent man, but life in Delhi corrupted him- and once the master of the Honda City becomes corrupted, how can the driver stay innocent?" (Adiga,197)

Vulgar phrases such as "sister fucker", "fucking joke" "dark", "half baked", "underclass" etc. are reiterated intentionally to expose the darkness of India in the entire novel. Thus, Adiga has successfully portrayed India of light and India of darkness in *The White Tiger*.

Conclusion:

Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is unmistakably a seminal work of art which unlocks the hidden aspects of India's development. The novel candidly stresses that there is no necessity to be complacent on the part of the Indians since India is still in darkness in spite of the tall clamours of development. If India want to rule the

world in the near or distant future, India must have address the perils and ills which have kept certain groups and communities under the tag 'underclass'. After all, the novel can be well judged as a conscious effort to rectify the slackening Indian society to turn India a perfect nation instead of a faltering and mischievous one.

References:

- Adiga, Arvind. *The White Tiger*. New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2009.
- Biswas, Sarbojit. Ed. *Indian English Fiction: A Reader*. Kolkata: Books Way, 2009.
- Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006.
- Nawale, Arvind M. *Insights into Indian English Fiction and Drama*. New Delhi: ACCESS, 2012.
- Sinha, Sunita. Ed. *Indian Booker Prize Winners: A Critical Study of Their Works, Vol-II*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors (P) LTD., 2010.

****Anjan Saikia teaches English at Kamargaon College, Assam**