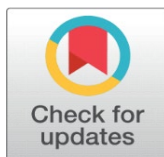
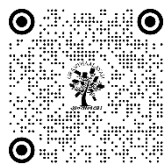


POLITICO-LEGAL PAGEANTRY AND LIFE IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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ABSTRACT

Corruption deters growth and development and consequently aggravates poverty and inequality. The ugly face of India hidden behind decent, equitable, progressive economic power with unbiased growth, indiscriminate equity-based programs and an efficient politico-legal system has been scathingly attacked by Adiga in this novel. The poor subalterns amidst these corrupt practices become a scapegoat to the corrupts and a wave of anger remains lurking inside them. The fluttering of sufferers to make themselves free from the suffocative rooster coops intermingled with misguided intelligence and desire to hit back against the violence imposers pose a threat to the nation's integrity and age-old value system. It is a grave concern that the sufferers are too adopting the corrupt strategy of 'survival of the fittest' in terms of money justifying the rationality of corrupt ways of earning it.

Keywords: Corruption, Democracy, Police, Poor, Violence

1. INTRODUCTION

"From the very top, where all power flowed, there also dripped the pus of putrefaction, injecting every stratum of society below." ¹

Violence is inseparable from oppression. The oppressor tries to establish dominance and exploit every possible situation for the gainful pursuit. The individual uses corrupt means to accomplish his unjust intents. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary corruption means "dishonest or illegal behaviour especially by powerful people. (Such as government officials or police officers) or inducement to wrong by improper or unlawful means (such as bribery)".² It is an undignified behaviour for personal benefit by the people vested with powers. Corruption is directly linked to economic events and it can be seen in all societies. It varies in spatial and temporal variations. It is visibly felt and seen at one time and space and the other not.

Democracy is the government of the people for the people and by the people. It ensures and protects the fundamental rights to education, liberty, justice and equality for all but corruption has invaded democracy too. Warren writes, "The common observation is that countries adopting competitive elections and market liberalization ("democratization") also experience a rise in corruption."³ Corruption in political systems is the exchange of public goods for private advantage and "Monetary influences" The convincing theory of representation in campaign finance is the

adequate standard of corruption. "Corruption of democracy is a violation of the norm of equal inclusion of all affected by a collectivity (unjustifiable exclusion)."³ The harm to democracy is that the rule of law becomes less certain, eroding legal rights, protections, and securities."³

The Political structures of society can collectively handle the socio-economic challenges and preserve their legitimacy. If the legitimacy of political structures has loopholes and there is a visible lack of Integrity, the powerful corrupt individuals take advantage of it resulting in national instability and disintegration. The corruption in the public sector is a surrogacy of political corruption, for example, bureaucratic corruption, contacts and influences. Grafters in Bureaucracy are a great challenge to growth and inclusiveness. This corruption is sometimes not highlighted because both sides the briber and the bribee are in the gainful pursuit. Contagiousness of corruption is expressed by Muktibodh in the following lines,

I scatter it,
give it away,
with fiery words and deeds.

Those who cross my path find this void in the wounds I inflict on them.⁴

One interesting fact about corruption is that it can exist only if someone is willing to corrupt and capable of corrupting. Sufferers of these unjust intents are poor people. The people whose motive is to somehow be successful in the endeavour to meet both ends. These people's labour is exploited and their lives are considered lower than the animals. They closely witness the whole reality but remain silent due to the dire consequences they can face if they try to raise their voices. Consistent unrest remains in them. Sometimes the anger bursts into a revolution and bloodshed and the other time anger remains silently hidden inside them. This paper deals with the post-independent agonizing and hidden tales of injustices, corruption and oppression imposed on marginalized people under the guise of democracy, modernization, and globalization.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

If the safeguards of law and nation become corruptible, what will be the impacts?

3. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- To show that corruption is flourishing in India under the pageantry of the politico-legal system.
- That the coalition of misguided intelligence with corruption threatens any society.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH GAP

To find and develop the research gap, the following books, and related articles are studied:

- Research paper *Aravind Adiga's Contribution to Indian Writing in English*⁵ explores three novels and one storybook of Adiga. The researcher infers from the study that materialism and corruption are deeply connected. The study also concludes that it is not enough to fight alone against corruption rather it needs a united endeavour that can uproot it from society.
- The book *A Critical Inquiry of Novels of Aravind Adiga*⁶ explores the factors deepening the gap between the rich and the poor where the two are studied as complementary parts of a coin. One side is bright with rich people enjoying life and the other is dark with pushed-down people trying to drag their lives.
- Technological innovations have brought the world together, it has led to a mass culture and globalised economy and also led to envious competition for capitalistic gains. This concept is investigated in the paper *Globalisation and Cultural Backlash: A Study of Aravind Adiga's Select Novels*.⁷
- This book titled *Aravind Adiga: An Anthology of Critical Essays*⁸ (Nimsarkar 2011) attacks Adiga for knowingly highlighting the darker aspects of the nation and hiding the positive ones.

5. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study under the lens 'Politico-legal Pageantry and Life in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* has been justified by applying descriptive methods with critical analysis of the research papers, Critical books and web materials from authentic sources like Google Scholar and Shodhganga. The study is based on a detailed analysis of the novel with a thematic viewpoint as the primary source.

Critical Analysis of the Novel

Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* delineates contemporary India of 2008. It captures the themes of deceptive democracy, the corrupt legal system, and the blind materialistic race in India with its suffocative consequences. Aravind Adiga's keen observation and his experience as a journalist created the character Balram Halwai. The story is written in first-person pronouns and epistolary form. The letters are written by Balram to Chinese Premier Mr. Jiabao. Democracy is a form of government where people participate equally in the proposal, development and creation of law, directly or indirectly through their elected representatives.⁹ Democracy promises fundamental rights to every citizen of the nation. In India primary education with uniforms and mid-day meals is free up to eighth standard under the scheme Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman

With a view to enhancing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children, the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) was launched as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme on 15th August 1995¹⁰

The government records authenticate the success of this scheme with the fair distribution of uniforms and mid-day meals to the students. But the ground reality is very different. Adiga highlights this sad reality through the observation of his character Balram, "Once, a truck came into the school with uniforms that the government had sent for us; we never saw them, but a week later they turned up for sale in the neighbouring village."¹¹ Adiga also reveals that the meals never reach the school children in the proper ratio. It is like the watery gruel served to the children and dal and nutrients stolen by the teachers. J. Akshaya quotes, "Teachers do forgery not only in providing mid-day meals of the students but also the uniforms which are sent by the government for the students that also misused by the teachers."¹² The moral decadence of society is visibly painful when society appreciates the corrupt for cleanly coming out of the scandals by maintaining a good record of the distribution of government supplies rather than raising their fingers against the corruption. Before freelance writing, career Adiga was a journalist. This profession was a great experience for him to acquaint himself with the ground realities of India. He used ironic and comparative methods to highlight the impact of his writing. On the international level, India represents itself as an ideal nation with every village having a supply of the basic needs of life and children fully nourished according to the standards of nutrition set by "The United Nations and other organisations whose treatise our prime minister has signed."¹¹ Adiga dissects the ostentatious statements in the words, "Electricity poles-defunct. Water tap-broken. Children-too lean and short for their age, and with oversized heads from which vivid eyes shone, like the guilty conscience of the government of India."¹¹ He mocks India for want of proper "sewage, drinking water and Olympic gold medals."¹¹

Democracy is of two types, representative and direct democracy. India's democracy is representative type. This democracy according to Encyclopedia Britannica is a "political system in which citizens of a country or other political entity vote for representatives to handle legislation and otherwise rule that entity on their behalf."¹³ Hence elected members are authorised by people to make various political initiatives and laws decisions. The basis of democracy is to move further inclusively, respecting everyone's right to vote, elect and make decisions. India's representative democracy is a mockery of it where to increase and control the votes various corrupt means are used like intimidation, bribing and selling the votes. At election times election officers are deputed to schools, colleges, panchayats and municipal areas to capture the records of all the voters who have attained eighteen years of age and are eligible to vote and elect the desired representative in the government. The poor, illiterate and underage children are recorded with arbitrarily coined birth dates. Balram's confusion regarding his birth date was immediately solved by the Govt. official by marking him eighteen years old on the records, so eligible for voting. Votes are sold in return for money and that money too is not received by the poor voters but by the brokers. The owner of the tea shop receives good money from 'The Great Socialist Party' and on the day of the election before the workers of the stall could go cast their vote, the tea stall owner already sold "the inky fingerprints which the illiterate person makes on the ballot paper to indicate his vote."¹¹ Adiga mocks democracy through a poster of the political party with "a pair of hands breaking through handcuffs – symbolising the poor shaking of the rich."¹¹ Along with selling the votes, proxy voting is also practised. Balram's father shows his anguish for the voting scam in words "I've seen twelve elections-five generals, five state, two local someone else has voted for me twelve

times.”¹¹ It is not that subalterns do not know about the misuse and denial of their fundamental rights to vote. But the revolting voices are curbed through acts of violence and abuses hurled at them. Adiga delineates one such incidence where a rikshaw-puller, a young energetic man walked to a voting booth shouting the party's tagline that the rich and the poor are equal and so “I'm supposed to stand up to the rich, aren't I?”¹¹ But before he arrived at the booth the ‘tally of votes’ was displayed on the wall showing 100% of the votes to Great Socialist. Adiga satirically uses the phrase ‘Great Socialist’ to address the corrupt political leaders. The poor protester was beaten mercilessly by the police and the party men with sticks, stamped all over his face and kicked till they “stamped him back into the earth.”¹¹ Adiga's deft writing style and sarcastic tone are visible through the experiences of his character Balram. Adiga prudently exposes the nexus of police, government officials and corrupt political leaders in these few sentences of Balram: “Police know exactly where to find me”¹¹ because he has voted in the elections since he was marked eighteen by the government official. He further adds “I am India's most faithful voter, and I still have not seen the inside of a voting booth.”¹¹ Adiga contemptuously describes the bribed gatherings at political rallies distributing the liquor “Already hundreds of men were getting into lines, where beer and quarter-litre bottles of rum were being distributed to them, as a bribe for having attended the rally and cheered the speakers.”¹⁴

Adiga writes sarcastically about the Police force in the words, “They were not the police force of the Indian Penal Code, but of the iron law of necessity: of the nation that every man has his price.”¹⁵ If safeguards of law and nation are corruptible; where the commoners should turn for protection and address of the grievances and what will be its impacts? These are the questions which are tried to be researched in the works of these two writers. The impacts of globalization, materialism on Indian subjects, crumbling value system and police atrocities are intermingled inseparably with the lives of commoners in Adiga's works. Balram suffers throughout the story and flutters for freedom. Eventually, he wins at one end but becomes a wanted criminal in the changing social milieu. Silenced subalterns are too changing and trying to hit the system hard to resonate their pains. Aravind Adiga mocks the working style of the police. Balram's ‘barely recognizable’ wanted posters due to poor quality were “blurred, blackened, and smudged by the antique printing press of some police office.”¹¹ were displayed at railway stations and other public places. The gravity of this blunder on the part of the police is further highlighted by Adiga by hammering at the same point when at last, Balram goes to the police station to settle a matter of taxi services in his favour in Bangalore. He wanted a poster hung over there on the wall but surprisingly even the policemen could not recognize him. The forced confession of crime from an innocent individual and protection of the criminal by hiding the facts by police could generate an anger in any individual. Balram was trapped by his rich owner Ashok and his brother Mongoose to accept the charge of killing a poor child by overriding it while driving alone in the car to save Pinky the wife of Ashok. It is a great agony that the law and order which are supposed to protect the rights, curb the injustices, and to the enactment of equality are ironically used for protecting the criminals and sheltering the injustices. Mongoose comes with a lawyer and makes Balram sign a confession that he was driving the car and accidentally ran over the child. The statement was shown to be recorded in front of Kusum his grandmother and the lawyer. However, the thumbprint of Kusum was already put in the appropriate place. Balram is saved because there was no eyewitness to the accident. This information was conveyed to Stork by a corrupt policeman. This whole episode and these ironical statements prove the rottenness of the legal system in India. “We have a contact in the police- he's told us that no one has reported seeing the accident. So, your help won't be needed, Balram.”¹¹

Adiga aptly uses the simile ‘Fat, paunchy men’ for policemen patrolling Bangalore city with their canes. This analogy of policemen is a contrast to the ‘thin and shrivelled’ bodies of the poor who work persistently to fill their and their families’ empty stomachs. It is through bribing these policemen that they secure someplace illegally to sit with their small stalls or carts or to sleep on the pavements. If they fail to pay the money policemen could be seen, “Poking, harassing vendors and shaking them down for money.”¹¹ On one hand intimidation and blackmailing are used to shake out the hard earn money of the poor; on the other hand, rich corrupt people are welcomed and offered with special hospitality at the police station in return of large sums of bribing money to turn the right into wrong. To make the entrepreneurial taxi service a success Balram reaches the police station with a newly printed business card and red suitcase bag in hand. Balram's crude experiences with the police at once give him the idea to use the police as a means to remove the obstacles in his entrepreneurial path. He keenly ponders on the subject and skims out the corrupt people like him. He concludes, “You'll see my friends when you visit Bangalore-fat, paunchy men swinging. Their canes, on Brigade Road, poking and harassing vendors and shaking them down for money.”¹¹ He signals toward the policeman. The next day with a newly printed business card and red suitcase bag in hand he visits the police station showing himself as a rich businessman. He offers the inspector a bribe of rupees ten thousand saying “It's a gratitude for all the good you are going to do me, sir.”¹¹ The next day police raid the taxes and cancel the taxi permits with drivers without the licenses. Hence one's corrupt

business which was running under the surveillance of the police was handed over to other corrupt in exchange for money by the police. Balram's reflection proves it "I think the police must have put in good work for me."¹¹ The same incident is described by Adiga in the novel *Last Man in Tower*. As an educated and aware citizen of the society, Masterji is adamant about fighting back against the unjust intentions of the builder. He decides to go to the police station for intimidation by blank calls. Police expect money from everyone who comes to get the help of the police. Two characters are juxtaposed by Aravind Adiga here. On one side it is Masterji who is very honest and on the other side the most corrupt broker, Mr Ajwani, none is interested in listening to Masterji but the entry of Ajwani who collects huge sums of money from rich people to get them a certificate from police by paying some part of the money to them spread warmth in the police station. "This is the real business of this station, Masterji thought. I should get out of here at once."¹⁵

Balram adopts the same corrupt ways of the surroundings to hit it hard. To save his hired driver who overruns a cyclist, he bribes the Assistant Commissioner to curb every possibility of registering the case or highlighting the incident. Clearing Balram's doubts about the possibility of an accident case being reported to the newspaper by the boy; the commissioner slaps his belly and says, "I've got every pressman in this town in here."¹¹ The police inspector instead of filing the case against Balram and his driver hosts him with coffee and 'namstey' and intimidates the victim's brother to take action against the victim for cycling without headlights. The boy understands well that "the trap had shut on him."¹¹ It is astonishing to know the truth through the Assistant Commissioner's revelation that if a cyclist dies no case is registered, if a bike rider dies case is registered but if a man in a car dies due to an accident, then arrests are necessary.

Here we see Balram fall to the level of violence imposers and become a criminal. The brother of the victim cyclist undergoes the same mental agony as Balram. Later on, Balram accepts his crime in front of the family saying, "Police have let me off"¹¹ and tries to justify his crime against the crime committed by his owners by sympathising with the family of the deceased offering them rupees 25000/- and driver's job to the brother of the victim- the voice raiser. Balram plans to twitch into the business of real estate by 2010 and then he plans to open an English medium school for poor children after selling everything. He shows his desire that in his school, he would not "fill the heads of children with the trash of God or Gandhi- nothing but the facts of life."¹¹ Balram plans to finish all the rich corrupts by using a little of their meanness against them. He writes, "A school full of White Tigers, unleashed on Bangalore! We'd have this city at our knees, I tell you I could become the Boss of Bangalore. I'd fix that assistant commissioner of police at once. I'd put him on a bicycle and have Asif knock him over with the quails."¹¹

6. CONCLUSION

The novel is an eye-opener to the people of India whose moral foundations are crumbling swiftly. The intelligence, observation, suppression, cruelties and mental agony of subaltern Balram render him morally decadent, a complementary to the violence imposers with assumptions that his action, however, wrong is justified if put against the big picture of politico-legal cruelties imposed on the subaltern. The gravity of the crime is not measured with the parameters of the most level of sin or least level of sin based on its frequency. However, the morally decadent youth of modern India put the defending argument like this, "But isn't it likely everyone who counts in the world, including our prime minister (including you, Mr Jiabao), has killed someone or other on their way to the top? Kill enough people and they will put up bronze statues of you near Parliament House in Delhi but that is glory, and not what I am after all I wanted was the chance to be a man and for that, one murder was enough."¹¹ Scaring aftermaths of injustices hurled shudder our conscience. There is a need for a radical and sweeping movement to rebuke the foundation eaters of the nation.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

Non.

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None.

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