



Research Paper

## Impact of Caste, Religion, and Politics in Aravind Adiga's debut novel, The White Tiger

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### ABSTRACT:

*This research paper explores the impact of the caste, class, religion and politics in the society which has created a big gap between the rich and the poor, lower caste and upper caste in the society. In his novel The White Tiger Aravind Adiga has very smartly planned the story and selected the characters which represent both rich land lords, businessman and politicians as well as all those poor, lower caste and class who are the victims of the evil caste system, class discriminations and injustice because of the corrupt politicians who misuse their political powers to enjoy their luxurious life by all kinds of corrupt and malpractices. They use their money and political powers to save themselves from the criminal activities like murder and force the innocent poor and low caste servants to take their places in jails because of their no fault. Adiga in this novel has selected the characters of every man of every class, caste, region and religion of the society, which makes it the story of each man of the society.*

*In this novel Adiga through the character of Balram Halwai has tried to advise the youth not to be prey to the corrupt and evil system of discriminations on the bases of caste, class, religion on the hands of corrupt land lords, the rich and the corrupt politicians but make their own decisions and break the roosters coop to come out of this corrupt system and settle their better future. And if people will not do it, no one will help them grow up and live an independent and dignified life. They will exploit and try to let them fixed in this rooster's coop which is made for them by the rich, upper caste and politicians to enjoy their luxurious life on the cost of their miserable lives.*

**KEYWORDS:** caste system, religion, politics, corruption, injustice, rooster Coop, militancy, Naxal, murder, entrepreneurship.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Aravind Adiga is one of the youngest and fast growing internationally acclaimed writers. In his writings an apparent style of simplicity of life and true depiction of class, caste, gender, religious and political levels of discriminations and their changing styles prevailing in the globalised society are depicted very effectively by the way he has characterized his characters covering each and every section and situation of society in such a way which made him a great writer that of Charles Dickens, R.K Narayan and V.S Naipaul. In his works he explores the simple and complex life of a common man. In his novel Adiga depicts the concerns of discrimination and injustice on the bases of caste, creed, gender, class, region and religion in the contemporary society because of the misuse of political powers by the self interested politicians who run the government machinery.

The White Tiger is written in the epistolary and first person narration form e-mailed to Premier of China Wen Jiabao. The story of the novel is narrated through Balram Halwai the hero of the novel and is narrated in the flash back technique in seven consecutive nights. It is a story of transformation of Balram Halwai from Munna, an innocent village boy to Balram, Balram to The White Tiger and from The White Tiger to Mr. Ashok Sharma a successful entrepreneur of the city of Bangalore, the centre of world class technology.

Balram (Ashok Sharma) is sitting in the office in his luxurious apartment in Bangalore when a lady on All India Radio at 11:32pm announces that Wen Jiabao the premier of China is visiting the world class

technology city of Bangalore as he wanted to know the basic facts of success of entrepreneurship in India and develop the same in China. Balram decided to give him the knowledge when Jiabao comes to India but he thought that being a small entrepreneur he will not be allowed by the prime minister of India. So he decides to write e-mails and tell him the secret of real entrepreneurship which he offers free of cost. So he took his silver Macintosh laptop and starts writing at 11:42pm.

To tell Wen Jiabao about the secret of entrepreneurship in India, Balram offers to tell him his own story how he become a successful entrepreneur from an innocent village boy Munna to a successful entrepreneur of Bangalore, Mr Ashok Sharma. Balram tells Jiabao that his story of success is more advanced and practical for the present as well as future.

Don't waste your money on those American books. They're so yesterday. I am tomorrow. (P-6)

Balram who represents the poor lower caste tells Jiabao that being poor and lower caste could not continue his formal education despite being a sharp and intelligent student he had to leave school after two or three years of schooling and work at a tea shop to help his family to return the money his family has borrowed from a land lord called the Stork for the marriage of his cousin sister. But he had learned many things by listening to the customers at the tea shops and from his rich masters especially Mr Ashok and Pinkey Madam. He calls himself a self learned entrepreneur. Balram tells Jiabao that this is the reality of literacy in India as the majority of people like him are the half baked.

"The thing is, he probably has... what, two, three years of schooling in him? He can read and write, but he doesn't get what he's read. He's half-baked. The country is full of people like him, I'll tell you that. And we entrust our glorious parliamentary democracy"—he pointed at me—"to characters like these. That's the whole tragedy of this country." (P- 10)

To explore the religious beliefs and customs Balrams tells Jiabao that he will start his story by praying to some God or Goddess and in India we have to opt out of 36,000,004 Gods, one God of Muslim, three of Christians and 36,000,000 gods of Hindus.

It is an ancient and venerated custom of people in my country to start a story by praying to a Higher Power.

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Finally Balram with his folded hands prays to God to shower light on this dark story of his life from his child-hood life in Laxmangarh, a well developed town in the government records having good schools with good teachers, with facilities like uniforms, Mid day Meals etc. Good hospitals with good doctors and health facilities but the fact is far behind it. There is nothing on the ground due to corruption of politicians. The teachers do not teach their students claiming that they did not get their salaries from last six months, spit paan on the classroom walls. They stole the Mid Day Meals money, scholarships on the back of the corrupt politicians who take bribes from them. The level of corruption is at the highest in the village among the government departments, but due to illiteracy and ignorance of the public everything is going smoothly as the public has become used to it from the decades and centuries back.

No one blamed the school teacher for doing this. You can't expect a man in a dung heap to smell sweet. Every man in the village knew that he would have done the same in his position. Some were even proud of him, for having got away with it so cleanly.

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Balram tells Jiabao that there are two countries with in one country in India viz. India of Darkness and India of Light and Laxmangarh is the heart of darkness having all kinds of vices and evils the deep rooted caste system, religious evil customs and corruption on part of the corrupt politicians. The acronym Dark represents the poor, lower caste and depressed sections of the society and the Light represents all those rich, land lords, upper caste and the corrupt politicians.

The model village of Laxmngarh is controlled by the four land lords called the four animal's viz. [1]. The Buffalo. [2]. The Stork. [3]. Wild Boar & [4]. The Raven. They all are full of all kinds of evil deeds and vices in them. They have completely scolded the poor, low caste and unprivileged people of Laxmangarh by making them stick to their ancient caste and religious customs and practices of doing things. They had made all these poor, lower caste and depressed people to live from hand to mouth with no money for food, clothing or to send their children to school and if someone does so, had to remove their children from school to work in some coal mine, tea shop or somewhere else on a meager salary to help their parents to return the borrowed money of some land lord.

If we talk about hospitals, there is no hospital built in Laxmangarh till date despite the false promises made by the corrupt politicians during elections by installing the foundation stones of hospital many times.

I came to Dhanbad after my father's death. He had been ill for some time, but there is no hospital in Laxmangarh, although there are three different foundation stones for a hospital, laid by three different politicians before three different elections.

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Balram and Kishan had to take their severely ill father to a hospital by crossing a river in a boat took a rickshaw to the hospital but there were no doctors. The condition of the hospital was worse than a cow shed. The patients and their attendants were sitting on the newspapers waiting for the doctors. The ward boy after getting ten rupees as bribe from Balram told them that the doctors will come in the evening. There was no doctor in the hospital. The ward boy, after we bribed him ten rupees, said that a doctor might come in the evening.  
(P- 48)

The doctors were out working in their private clinics or private hospitals to earn huge money. A Muslim boy told Balram that the Great Socialist had already collected huge money as bribe from them for their appointment in the department and now they are behind their malpractices putting the fate of the poor, and marginalized people on stake.

"Why not? There's good money in public service! Now, imagine that I'm a doctor. I beg and borrow the money and give it to the Great Socialist, while touching his feet. He gives me the job. I take an oath to God and the Constitution of India and then I put my boots up on my desk in the state capital."  
(P- 50)

The character of the Great Socialist represents all those corrupt politicians looting the common and poor people of the society. In addition to the bribe taken for the appointment of a person in a job, the Great Socialist continues his corrupt practices by collecting bribes from the employees or especially doctors for falsely filling their ledgers of performance of their duties. The government ledgers are filled properly showing that all those patients were treated, operated, provided medicines and treated satisfactorily.

"Next, I call all the junior government doctors, whom I'm supposed to supervise, into my office. I take out my big government ledger. I shout out, 'Dr. Ram Pandey.'" He pointed a finger at me; I assumed my role in the play. I saluted him: "Yes, sir!" He held out his palm to me. "Now, you—Dr. Ram Pandey—will kindly put one-third of your salary in my palm. Good boy. In return, I do this." He made a tick on the imaginary ledger. "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."  
(P- 50)

The Great Socialist frequently makes the posts of Government Medical Superintendents vacant, the responsibility of whom is to ensure punctuality of doctors in the hospitals; and put on sale and fill those posts on the cost of huge money.

"There's a government medical superintendent who's meant to check that doctors visit village hospitals like this. Now, each time this post falls vacant, the Great Socialist lets all the big doctors know that he's having an open auction for that post. The going rate for this post is about four hundred thousand rupees these days."  
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Adiga has also explored the fact that even the militancy or naxal is the creation of the caste and religious discrimination backed by the mean and corrupt politicians. The victims of severe harassment either do suicide, convert to Christianity or other religion or opted to choose violent ways like, murder or become the Naxals. The four landlords called four animals had looted the poor, depressed and unprivileged people of the society which paved way for the victims to choose Militancy or Naxalism to avenge the wrong doings by the rich, upper caste and the corrupt politicians.

To save their children from kidnapping by the Naxals, these politicians send them to other parts of country like Dhanbad and Delhi.

But after the Buffalo's son had been kidnapped by the **Naxals**—perhaps you've heard about them, Mr. Jiabao, since they're Communists, just like you, and go around shooting rich people on principle—the four Animals had sent their sons and daughters away, to Dhanbad or to Delhi.  
(P- 25)

Balram is the son of Vikran Halwai, the auto rickshaw puller, Halwai (Sweet Maker) by caste and lives in Laxmangarh. His father Vikram Halwai has to support a large family with many uncles, aunties and cousins controlled by his grandmother Kusum. Balram is admitted in school and is sharp in learning things. The ignorance is so much among the poor and lower caste people that they did not even think or get time to name their children. On the first day of his school Balram was asked his name by his teacher to note down on the register which he tells Munna, which simply means a boy. The reason for not giving him a name he tells that his mother died in his early age and father was ill, suffering from tuberculosis. So his teacher Krishna named him as Balram. To give it a religious fervor Adiga has made his character of Krishna the school teacher to relate the

name of both the teacher and student to the characters of the religious Hindu epic of Mahabharata. Here, Krishna tells his student Balram about the Balram of Mahabharata and also tells him that Balram was the side kick of Lord Krishna and so Balram is for him.

In his childhood Balram wanted to be like Vijay Kumar the bus cleaner, a lower caste pig herd's son. He has by some political connections got the job of a bus cleaner with a uniform and whistle in hand. Vijay is the inspiration for Balram as he thinks that Vijay has the authority to stop or run the bus by blowing his whistle. The inspector visiting the school found Balram a sharp and intelligent boy and as a reward for his efficiency named him The White Tiger. While asked about the white tiger, Balram replied that the white tiger is a rare animal kind of tigers who take birth only once in the span of hundred years and the inspector tells him that yes. And that is you Balram, The White Tiger. He also tells Balram that he will recommend his name for some good school and scholarship too. But after two or three years of schooling Kusum, his grandmother forces Balram to leave school and work at a tea shop in Laxmangarh with his elder brother Kishan in order to pay back the money borrowed from a land lord the Stark. After his father's death Balram with Kishan shifts to Dhanbad where he works with Kishan in a tea shop, washing utensils and to break the coal for the woven. One day he hears two customers talking that there is a lot of money in the job of a driver almost seventeen hundred a month, which changed the life of Balram. He takes help of Kishan to motivate Kusum, his Granny and gets three hundred rupees from her which he needed as fee for learning driving. She gave her consent on the condition that he will send all the money to Kusum he earns in this job. Balram joins driving institute, his instructor asks him his caste and tells him that it is not the job of a sweet maker caste to drive, it needs guts which only a upper caste, Rajputs, Sikh and Muslim have.

The old driver asked, "What caste are you?" "Halwai." "Sweet-makers," the old driver said, shaking his head. "That's what you people do. You make sweets. How can you learn to drive?" .....

He pointed his hookah at the live coals. "That's like getting coals to make ice for you. Mastering a car"—he moved the stick of an invisible gearbox—"it's like taming a wild stallion—only a boy from the warrior castes can manage that. You need to have aggression in your blood. Muslims, Rajputs, Sikhs—they're fighters, they can become drivers. You think sweet-makers can last long in fourth gear?"

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Balrams learns driving very quickly, and finds a job of a driver in the house of the Stark at Dhanbad. Ram Parshad is the first driver and Balram the second where Balram had to do all works of the house like a slave. In this particular episode, through the characters of Ram Parshad, Ram Bahadur, Balram, the house cook and the Stark family, Adiga has very beautifully tried to explore the fact and impact of the discriminations on religious bases and how much a person of belonging to a particular religion has to hide his identity to get a job in the house of a rich man or politician of the other religion. Also how a person of one religion is made prey of destruction by the other religion person by going through and using his loop holes. Ram Parshad is actually a Muslim who had to hide his religious identity to get a job in the house of the Hindu land lord and politician the Stork. Balram is working as a second driver and drives the Maruti Car, but Ram Parshad being first driver drives the sophisticated modern Honda City car. Balram wanted to become the driver of Honda City for Mr Ashok Sir and Pinki Madam but was not possible till Ram Parshad is there so Balram started spying of the Ram Parshad on the suspicion that from some days he was not eating with them and it was the month of Ramzan a holy month of fasting for Muslims. So, finally one evening Balram secretly followed him and saw him entering a mosque to offer Friday prayers. So, he finds the fact that Ram Parshad is not a Hindu but a Muslim. In Dhanbad no Hindu lets a Muslim enter in their houses. He thought that the Gurkha Ram Bahadur, the watchman helped Ram Parshad get the job and tells Ram Bahadur about it, the first Driver false Mr Ram Parshad left the job and house clearing the obstacles of Balram and so he became the first driver driving the prestigious Honda City car. In the next episode Adiga explores the impact of caste system in the minds of the people especially the old generation of Laxmangarh which represents the darkness. The people even relate the foods one eats to the caste. Mr Ashok sir and Pinkey madam made a visit to Ashok sir's native village Laxmangarh. Balram drove them to Laxmangarh in the Honda City car. In Laxmangarh, the lunch was arranged in the house of The Wild Boar and the servant, served him non-vegetarian food. Mr. Ashok asked for the vegetarian and tells that he did not want the animals to be killed for. And in his reply the Wild Boar tells him that he is the son of a land lord and not a Brahmin not to eat meat as it is the Brahmins caste, they do not eat meat.

"What crazy ideas do you boys pick up?" the old man said. "You're a landlord. It's the Brahmins who are vegetarian, not us."

(P- 82-83)

Simultaneously, same thing happens with Balram when he goes home. His granny forces him to eat the chicken which she told specially made for Balram as he returns home after a long time. Balrms rejects it feeling that all this is arranged with the toiled money of his brother Kishan so he feels it as the flesh of Kishans body. At that moment Kusum, his granny tells Balram that he was not a Brahmin who does not eat meat.

She pushed the plate closer to me. Everyone in the household stopped to look at our tussle. Granny squinted. "What are you, a Brahmin? Eat, eat."

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After returning to Dhanbad, it was decided by the Stark and his elder son Mukesh Sir to send Mr. Ashok and Pinkey Madam to Delhi to have some direct link with the big ministers for their help in their coal mining business; as they were threatened by The Great Socialist and was demanding a huge amount as bribe for their coal mining business in Dhanbad which the Stark could not afford. So, Balram drove Mr Ashok sir and Pinkey Madam in Honda City car for Delhi. In Delhi they rented a flat in Gurgaon city based on American style, since Pinky Madam hated India and missed New York. Here, Adiga uses Balram as his strong and powerful tool who worked as a hawk eye to reveal the facts and impact of multiple evils and issues that badly affected the society because of the caste system, religious evils and corruption by the politicians. Mr Ashok works on his father's behalf to bribe the ministers in Delhi directly or through their assistants who take huge bribes and in turn they provide all kinds help to the Stark family in their business of coalmining and many other illegalities. The politicians take huge amount in bribes and in turn help them in all illegalities e.g. Tax theft, corruption, murder, blackmailing, prostitution, corruption of police and judiciary authorities, who in turn can declare a murder void and null or force a poor servant to accept the crime in place of his master or mistress. Adiga depicts that there are two countries with on India, viz. India of Light and India of Darkness. In Delhi the capital city of India are the people who do not have cloths, food and shelter living a miserable life. No justice is done to them because of their poverty even if a child of them is crushed to death by some rich people. No police registers their missing report or FIR's of murder.

If someone like Pinkey Madam tries to show her sympathy to the victim's parents for their child's death is forcibly stopped to avoid of being in notice of police and go to jail. The evidences are wiped out. The servants like Balram are forced by their masters like the Stark to accept the crime in place of the actual culprits. The police and judiciary also help those who kill an innocent and hence justice is denied to the victims. Adiga calls all this a Rooster's Coop as the victims of all these evils are used to it and did not dare to come out of it and it is just like those roosters who see from their wired cages the killings of their fellows, cutting the organs of their fellows and know that the next turn is of one of them. But they did not dare to break those cages and come out of it.

The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country.

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When Pinkey Madam having drunk accidentally kills a child to death with her rashly driven car she tried to go and see the child, take to hospital but Mr. Ashok stopped her. She also tells the family to meet the parents of the victim and provide some money as a compensation the Stark and Mukesh Sir warned Mr. Ashok to control his wife Pinkey Madam, as it was not in their family or religious cultures to put the woman on their heads.

Here Adiga tried to explore the impact and of caste and religious customs in the society where the women are not allowed to make decisions. The Stark and his son Mukesh forced Balram to accept the crime in place of Pinkey Madam by signing the declaration prepared by the lawyer on Balrams behalf that it was only he in the car when the car hit the child killing him on the spot and did not feel his duty to take him to a hospital and save his life and he is putting his statement without any pressure.

**TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN,**

**I, Balram Halwai, son of Vikram Halwai, of Laxmangarh village in the district of Gaya, do make the following statement of my own free will and intention:**

**That I drove the car that hit an unidentified person, or persons, or person and objects, on the night of January 23rd this year. That I then panicked and refused to fulfill my obligations to the injured party or parties by taking them to the nearest hospital emergency ward. That there were no other occupants of the car at the time of the accident. That I was alone in the car, and alone responsible for all that happened.**

**I swear by almighty God that I make this statement under no duress and under instruction from no one.**

**Signature or thumbprint:  
(Balram Halwai)**

**Statement made in the presence of the following witnesses:**

**Kusum Halwai, of Laxmangarh village, Gaya District**

**Chamandas Varma, Advocate, Delhi High Court.**

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Pinkey Madam is a modern lady of America and a Christian by religion and did not believe in caste or gender discrimination system. The Stork family was not in favor of Mr Ashok sir's inter-caste and inter religion marriage with a foreign, Christian girl Pinkey Madam. So they every time tease Mr Ashok by telling him that they had warned but he did not listened to them.

Two days later, Ram Persad and the slanty-eyed Nepali were gossiping. I took a broom, began sweeping the courtyard, and edged closer and closer to them.

"She's a Christian, did you know?" "No way." "Yes!" "And he married her?" "They married in America. When we Indians go there, we lose all respect for caste," the Nepali said. "The old man was dead set against the marriage. Her people were not happy either."

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So, Pinkey Madam one mid night insists Balram to drive her to the air port and leaves to America. Mr Ashok is shocked by this and took to drinking heavily, took to bars, hotels and prostitution in Delhi which he did not do before. Mr Ashok slaps Balram for driving Pinkey Madam to airport that night she left him but when it continues Balram also kicks him back. Balram starts breaking the rules of that rooster's coop. But Balram as an honest and faithful human feels it his duty to support his master Mr Ashok in the difficult times. But later he feels that it his fault if he did not want to come out of the slavery as despite avoided by his master of serving him with massage he insisted to do so. He decided to break this rooster's coop. Balram starts breaking the rules, he too took to fine dresses, drinking wines, going to prostitutes and enjoying all that. One day Balram drove Ashok sir from bank to bank, from street to street as Mr Ashok Sir was collecting all this money to bribe a minister next day. Mr Ashok fills the red bag which Mukesh Sir handed over to him with full of fresh currency notes for a minister as a bribe.

Balram kills Mr.Ashok by stabbing with a whisky bottle designed for and takes the red bag full of cash along with Dharam whom his Kusum sent to him for learning driving and shoulder his expenditure too in Delhi; runs away to Bangalore. In Bangalore, he sets up a driving company The White Tiger Drivers for the call centre girls and to run it he bribes the police who in return closes the already working company for the night services of cabs to the rich boys and girls working in the different companies by blaming of the drivers of that company had no licenses. Balram has already learnt all the corrupt skills of business from his previous masters and now applying in Bangalore as to secure his business and earn huge benefits. Once even a boy was accidentally hit and killed by one of his drivers namely Mohammed Asif, Balram now called as Ashok Sharma used his connections, bribed the police who in return did not register an FIR of the victims brother, but told him that nothing will be done of his case as the head lights of the bicycle the boy was plying and that was illegal and punishable.

He sighed. "See, at the time of the accident, your brother's bicycle had no working lights. That is illegal, you know. There are other things that will come out. I promise you, things will come out."

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But Balram now Ashok Sharma did not ignore the victims like his masters in Delhi totally. He searched the address of the victim and met his mother, offers her the cash which she did not accept. He considers himself to be a quintessential entrepreneurial success story that represents the future of India, and presents himself as such to the Premier.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* is a multifaceted novel which very brilliantly covers multiple issues within the ambit of a single novel. In this novel Adiga has very beautifully tried to put in light the dark humors of the society in which the poor, lower caste, depressed and unprivileged people suffered a lot on the hands of the rich businessman, land lords and politicians; due to the evil system of caste, class, region and religion due to the deep rooted caste, class and religious discriminations. The upper caste, rich, privileged, land lords and politicians has forced the lower caste, poor and unprivileged to live a miserable life. The corrupt politicians embezzled all government money on the name of development which is only in papers but not on ground. No one can raise the voice against and if someone does finds himself behind bars in some fraud crime or is murdered by the men of the politicians. Even the government jobs are sold and bought with the huge amount of money which the employed later recovers by not doing his assigned jobs but by working in private sectors getting huge amounts on the cost of the lives of the poor and depressed people. The poor servants are forced to

accept the crime of murder which they never did and go to jails in the place of their masters. These corrupt rich land lords, businessman and politicians has made the life of the lower caste, downtrodden and unprivileged people a miserable life.

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