



## Class, Consciousness, and Criminality: A Psychological Study of Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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**Abstract:** Arvind Adiga is a popular Indian writer known for his novels based on Indian society and Indian reality. This paper is the study of first and one of his most popular novels "The White Tiger". His novel *The White Tiger* was awarded by Man Booker Prize in 2008. The novel is a letter written to a Chinese premier Wen Jiabao, who was about to visit Bangalore to learn the truth about India, the letter is written in seven consecutive nights by the protagonist of the novel, Balram Halwai who introduces himself as 'The White Tiger' A thinking Man. The novel is a portrayal of the struggles of a poor man to reach on the top and become a successful entrepreneur. The story of Balram Halwai presented by Adiga explores individual, social and psychological aspects of the problems faced by them in the society such as poverty, lower class issues and corruption are portrayed in the novel. It shows how the protagonist Balram tackles all the obstacles and breaks himself free from the rooster coop. This paper is a detailed psychological study of the characters of *The White Tiger* focusing specifically on Balram Halwai, the protagonist of the novel. The paper will also explore the psychology of other characters of the novel who work towards shaping Balram's character.

**Key Words** - Poverty, Lower Class, Corruption, Entrepreneur, Rooster Coop.

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### Introduction

"The White Tiger" is one of the best-selling novels by Arvind Adiga. The novel shows real image of Indian society and the struggles of the poor in society. The protagonist Balram Halwai belonging to a poor family, is forced to leave his school despite being bright in studies and earning the scholarship to study in a school in Delhi, just to support his family financially after the death of his father who was the only earning members of their family. His father suddenly died because no doctor came to visit the hospital and he was left untreated. After the death of his father, he was forced to quit his studies and contribute as an earning member of the family as there were debts to be paid off to the zamindars in the village. Balram was once called The White Tiger in his school because of his exceptional qualities, he left his school but his hunger for education made him learn a lot from the people visiting the tea shop, one day while serving tea he overheard conversation of two people who believed driving is one of the best profession to make money, he took money from his grandmother to take driving lessons and in return promised to send her all the money he would earn after becoming a driver. Eventually, he learned to drive and got a job at one of the Zamindar's place, from here the journey from Balram Halwai, the driver to Ashok Sharma the owner of *The White Tiger* Technology begins. The struggles, harsh decisions and losses in this journey made Balram Halwai not only a successful entrepreneur but also taught him how to deal with different situations, he learned



how to solve problems effectively and efficiently. This journey shows why Balram was called The White Tiger? The exceptional qualities in Balaram made him different from others, not everyone can break the rooster coop and live life according to their terms and conditions like him.

## **Literature Review**

Prof. Gaurav Gaud, Sagar Institute of Research and Technology, Bhopal. In his paper “The novel of Arvind Adiga: A Critical Study” is a detailed study of Adiga’s *The White Tiger*. It discusses the novel in detail and explores the condition of its protagonist Balram Halwai. The paper also provides a detailed biography of Arvind Adiga and then the main events in the novel are discussed. It also gives a clear idea of the society at that time and discusses the setting of the novel. The condition of the society presented in the novel is compared to Indian society. The paper also discusses the division of society as portrayed by Arvind Adiga in his novel and the situation of Balram and his acts shown in the novel are all regarded as the consequences of poverty. The paper is concluded with a reference of corruption in the country and its portrayal in the novel *The White Tiger*.

Dr. Ramandeep Mahal in the paper “An analytical study of Arvind Adiga’s “*The White Tiger*.” closely studies Adiga and his personal life, it brings out many facts about Adiga. After Adiga and his life, this paper explores the condition of the society portrayed by Adiga in his novel. The corruption in the country is explored deeply in the novel. The protagonist of the novel Balram Halwai is introduced and hardships of the protagonist and the behavior of the society towards him is mentioned. The journey of Balram Halwai from dark to light is also analyzed. As in the novel the circumstances and the social conditions of Balram Halwai are shown changing again and again his adaptive nature and Adiga’s understanding of a man with all these qualities are also explored.

The paper also studies the division in the society as India is a country with diverse culture and religion, it is divided into many parts based on caste and religion the novel shows Balram belonging to the lower class of the society and facing hardship whereas his master Mr. Ashok belonging to upper class is living a luxurious life. All the hardships come to Balram, and he is discriminated in most of the parts of the novel. The work also indicates the increasing inherent flaws and stains in society.

## **Social Dilemma among the Characters of *The White Tiger***

The white tiger is based on the life of a major character Balram Halwai a poor lower-class boy who has faced hardships since childhood. There are social dilemmas in the character of Balram, mainly the Caste System and Social Mobility. Balram was from a lower caste thus we can understand his social standings and opportunities, he was always kept away from the things he deserved, his dilemma revolves around the injustice he had to face since childhood because of his caste and his desires to break free from all the injustice he had ever faced to achieve social mobility. Another social dilemma Balram had was Corruption and Exploitation. Balram was stuck in corruption and exploitation both as a victim and as a perpetrator, his social dilemma lies in navigating a society where corruption is rampant and individuals must choose between becoming victims or participating in the corrupt practices for personal gain. Balram was from the village Laxmangarh, he had never seen city life till he was allowed to move to Delhi with his master Mr. Ashok thus he had the dilemma of Urban Rural Division. Balram always wanted



to gain education but because of his financial conditions and the sudden death of his father he was forced to work in a tea shop and quit his studies so Education and Social Status became a social dilemma for Balram, he was unable to match the social standards of the society he had to deal with in Bangalore.

The second character we can explore is the character of Mr. Ashok the ex-employer of Balram, and the younger son of The Stroke, he had many social dilemmas as he lived in America for a long time and after returning to India he had to face difficulties in coping up with the cultural differences. The very first social dilemma we can witness in his character is Cultural Identity and Modernity. Mr. Ashok had modern thoughts which made him different from his family members. Having lived abroad he had experienced a very different culture, so he had a tension between the cultural identity and the modern world. His dilemma includes reconciling traditional Indian values with the influence of the culture he witnessed in America. Ethical Business Practices and Profitability Personal, Ashok's family used to bribe the politicians to get rid of the taxes imposed on their business, Ashok never wanted to support them in all these activities but he was forced to stand by them because either they can practice ethical business practices or look after their personal profit. Ashok chooses personal profit keeping ethical business practices aside. Ashok was bound to his duties towards the family but in this process, he had to sacrifice his personal mobility he had a social dilemma of Duty towards Family and Personal Morality.

The third character we can explore in this series is the character Pinky Madam. She had clashes with Ashok's family because of the differences in perception towards certain things. She had social dilemmas regarding Female Empowerment and Traditional Roles. She was an independent woman. Being raised in an independent culture, she was unable to accept the way women were treated in Ashok's family. Thus, she acted as a rebel and failed to fulfil the traditional roles towards the family. She was kind and genuine she understood her responsibility towards the staff and when Balram was to be blamed for the crime she committed, she was unable to choose between her responsibility towards staff and family expectations. She was bound to obey the directions of the family and agree to Balram being the culprit.

### **Internal Conflicts among the characters of The White Tiger**

Internal conflicts are the conflicts one has with one's thoughts or it can be said to be one's war with oneself. In the novel, many characters have internal conflicts. Most of the conflicts can be seen in the character of Balram the protagonist of the novel. Balram Halwai is a poor boy from Laxmangarh who was forced to quit his studies and start working in a tea shop. He worked hard to achieve what he had at the end of the story, in between his struggles he had many internal conflicts. The internal conflicts Balram had are the result of the socio-economic and cultural challenges he faces in his journey from darkness to light.

The very first appearance of internal conflict is between Hope and Reality. Balram wanted to be independent from the beginning. He wanted to be rich and to break the rooster coop and set himself free from all the restrictions, but the reality was different, he was bound to fulfil his duties and obey his master despite his harsh behavior and ill-treatment. The second internal conflict we find in this character is Ambition and Morality. Balram was ambitious since the beginning of the novel he wants to do something to escape the poverty he had since he was born, but to become successful, he has to do something extraordinary he plans to kill his master



Mr. Ashok, take that red bag of money from him and escape to a place far away from Delhi, he was not sure if he should do this or not and it was necessary to fulfil his ambitions but it was also morally incorrect, he at the end choose his ambition, murders his master and runs away to Bangalore.

Another conflict in this character is Servitude and Independence. The day Balram was born to a lower-class which was Halwai, that too in a poor family, his father was a rickshaw puller and they had so much debt of the zamindars to be paid off he was destined to serve but he had different plans for himself, he chose independence and freedom over servitude and being a servant for all his life.

One more internal conflict visible in the character of Balram is Traditional values and Modernity. Balram finds it difficult to choose between the moral values given to him by his family and the modern culture he encounters in the city, many traditional values were given to Balram by his family in the village but after coming to the city i.e. Bangalore, Balram had to leave behind his values to survive the cut-throat competition he had while establishing his business. This is evident from a part of the letter where he confesses that he bribed the police in Bangalore to remove his competitors (other taxi drivers) from his way. He again leaves his traditional values behind and chooses to go with modernity.

The most important internal conflict that Balram overcomes is Guilt and Redemption. Balram has been planning to kill Mr Ashok for a long time. He was just waiting for the right time when he could attack him and take all the money he was about to give to the politician to get rid of the taxes, once Balram got a chance he murdered Ashok and took all the money with him to Bangalore, once he reached Bangalore he was in guilt, he stayed in a room for four weeks as he was unable to forget the crime he had committed but eventually he came out of this guilt and started working towards his goal of being independent.

The second character with many internal conflicts is Mr. Ashok Sharma, the employer of Balram. He was the younger son of The Stroke, one of the zamindars in the village Laxmangarh. Mr. Ashok took his education from America where he married an Indian American women, Pinky Madam. He is polite and understands the feelings of people around him. The first internal conflict he faces after returning from America is Traditional Values and Modernity as he had returned from America, he was habitual of the culture he had there, and he was not satisfied with the culture he was forced to accept after returning to his family. He didn't like the way they treated other people or the malpractice his family did to make things work in their favour. He was unable to cope with the two worlds he had to live in.

Another important internal conflict portrayed in the character of Ashok is Duty and Morality. He was witnessing the way his family was supporting corruption by paying huge amounts of money to politicians to get rid of the taxes imposed on them. He wanted to stop all this as he found all these activities immoral but he was bound to fulfil his duty because of his family.

The character that comes next in this series of internal conflicts is the character of Pinky Madam, the America-based wife of Mr. Ashok. The very first conflict she had was Conformity and Independence, Pinky was an independent woman but she had to live with Ashok's family members, the rules in Ashok's family were set and Pinky was forced to live according to the already set rules. Pinky had to choose what she wanted in life and she chose her independence, she left Ashok and returned to America. Another conflict that can be found while understanding the character of Pinky Madam is Cultural identity. Pinky was an Indian by origin, but she was brought up in America. She was not able to leave her American culture and fulfil the expectations of her Indian family. Pinky also felt guilt for her actions when the accident



happened, she wanted to take the victim to the hospital, but she had to leave it to save herself from the consequences, when Balram was blamed for the accident by Ashok's family she was against this idea and wanted to accept her crime.

## Conclusion

There is a reason for every action, every person thinks of both positive and negative aspects of a situation. It is evident from this study that every action done by an individual is the reflection of something they had to deal with in the past. All three characters explored in this paper show different characteristics and are affected by the social conditions they had at their end.

The psychology they have is also according to the values given to them. Balram makes his personal development his priority and thus leaves his family behind unbothered by what would have happened to them, he looks after his new life and his business forgetting about the life, he had back in Lakshmanarh.

Ashok finds a sense of responsibility towards his family and starts supporting them in unethical business practices for their gain. Pinky Madam, being brought up in America had a different perception towards everything, she wanted to live independently and uninterrupted, but her independence was not acceptable in Ashok's family and she ended up returning to America leaving Ashok behind.

This study helps us understand the psychological side of the novel and the reason behind the decisions taken by different characters.

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