



Postcolonial Oppression and Class Consciousness in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* significantly contributes to the postcolonial novel as an essential vehicle to discuss continuing forms of repression and the evolution of class consciousness in modern-day India. India has, politically speaking, liberated itself from British colonial rule; however, Adiga's story reveals how the country today is under deep-seated neocolonial forms of social and economic control, where systems of caste, class, and corruption continue to exercise power and suppress the disenfranchised. In a postcolonial context, repression comes no longer from an external power but domestic systems inherited from these former ruling powers. These oppressive structures are the political elites, capitalists, and upper castes who engage in certain forms of domination (i.e., colonialism) and reinforce and reproduce native modes of oppression and economic divisions that still exist throughout their transition. Balram Halwai is the story's narrator, and he goes from being a driver to an entrepreneur. It reflects on India's systemic inequalities through Balram's lens, relating them to India's independence from British colonial rule in 1947. The structure of autonomy created by the Indian Independence Act created a form of autonomy. Still, it resulted in widespread violence and led to a partition of India and the formation of Pakistan. Even though the caste system was abolished in the 1960s, Balram believed abolishing caste created more chaos and wider inequality.

Keywords: Aravind Adiga, postcolonial oppression, class consciousness, economic inequality, servitude and rebellion.

Introduction

The Novel's storyline travels back and forth through meaningful experiences in Balram's life. The key story event is Balram's murder of his boss, Mr. Ashok, which is the organizing act around which most of the Novel is structured. Balram's letter to a visiting Chinese dignitary is a confession and an effort to make sense of what he did while offering his perspective on success, ambition, and inequality in modern India. It is easy to identify Mr. Ashok as Balram's most crucial antagonist. Still, Balram finds many others in the story as adversaries or figures of intimidation, including his ice-cold grandmother Kusum, the powerful family of Ashok, the Stork, Mukesh Sir, and Pinky Madam. Even other household servants, like Ram Bahadur and Ram Persad, briefly pose as rivals in the house system

of competing hierarchies. The background of *The White Tiger* is an India that is changing rapidly. "Munna," Balram Halwai is the main character and narrator of *The White Tiger*. Born into a low-income family in rural Laxmangahr, he transforms into a wealthy entrepreneur in Bangalore. By adopting the name "Ashok Sharma," he symbolically distances himself from his past. Balram tells his story with biting sarcasm and a cynical view of morality, openly acknowledging the crimes that enabled his rise. He sees himself as a "white tiger" a rare individual with the intelligence and drive to escape the fate assigned to him by birth. For Balram, success comes not through virtue but through shrewdness, defiance, and a willingness to break the rules of a deeply unequal system.



A visiting inspector is so impressed with his academic capabilities that he gives Balram the honorary title of “White Tiger,” an animal that is both rare and indicates above-average intelligence in the jungle. Balram’s vision of himself as a “White Tiger” nourished his ambition by helping him understand that he desires to move beyond the constructions of circumstances. As soon as he became convinced he was a “White Tiger,” it was legitimate for Balram to abandon conventional moral and legal discourse: he wanted to live by his standards. Ashok, Balram goes to the Delhi Zoo, where he locks eyes with an actual white tiger. The encounter is transformative: he faints, then decides to go through with his plan while composing a letter to his grandmother Kusum explaining that he can no longer live “in a cage.” This moment of identification with the white tiger empowers him, and the conviction that he is entitled to escape at all costs. The “Rooster Coop” is Balram’s compelling metaphor for the institutional oppression of people with low incomes in India. The “Rooster Coop” is a significant metaphor in the novel that conceptualizes the psychological trap that encompasses the underclass of India. It depicts the societal space whereby the underclass has internalized subordination so they will not revolt, even while being systemically abused.

Balram is born into extreme poverty in Laxmangarh village. He has a father who is a rickshaw puller. Since Balram was seven years old, he has been under the rule of landlords. The landlords are called “The Animals.” Four men are The Raven, The Stork, The Buffalo, and The Wild Boar. Balram also has a bit of intelligence. He receives the name “The White Tiger” from a school inspector. The social and economic inequalities that divide Balram Halwai, a destitute villager from “the Darkness,” and his employer Ashok, an elite foreign-educated man, fulfill a colonial legacy that continues the hierarchical structures of the colonial era within contemporary India. Within The Rooster Coop metaphor, we can see the pathways of oppression that integrate and depend on internalized forms of control that colonialism left behind: we as individuals are warped into submission by following orders, being obedient beings, and policing ourselves. When Balram learned that it was not simply chains that created his

servitude, but a form of psychological conditioning loyalty to family obligations, fear of retribution, and feelings of inferior caste, the internalized quality of postcolonial forms of oppression made sense.

Balram Halwai begins looking for jobs with wealthy families in Dhanbad. Coincidentally, he arrives at the Stork’s house, one of the powerful landlords from whom he originally came in Laxmangarh, when his son, Ashok, comes from America with his wife, Pinky Madam. He quickly becomes Ashok’s driver, though his duties deviate from that, placing him below the other senior driver, Ram Persad. It’s not long after taking the job that Balram discovers the secret of Stork family wealth: it is based on the illegal coal mining operations that extract coal from territories owned by the government and through bribes and corruption.

“You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots. In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals the creature that comes along only once in a generation?”

“The white tiger.”

“That’s what you are, in this jungle.” (TWT 22).

The story addresses the concept of oppression and what it means to internalize it, culminating in the metaphor of the Rooster Coop. Balram sees a market where we chickens are crammed into a flimsy metal cage with no fight or resistance, all waiting to be slaughtered. He believes this is analogous to the poor in India, whom he describes as chickens conditioned to accept their fate as unavoidable and who never aspire to escape the grip of poverty or servitude. Low-income people are ensnared by more than just a tangible, external barricade. They are ensnared by a mentality that convinces them their plight is predestined, governed by caste and circumstance. He is right; the Rooster Coop is “guarded from the inside,” with servants arresting each other and gaining satisfaction from their petty little acts of power over fellow servants. Culture reinforces servitude. There is no escape from caste or class because family loyalty bonds you to caste and makes you doubly bound to your social order.

Slavery represents the most extreme form of social inequality, subjecting individuals to the harshest conditions and stripping them of fundamental human rights. The abolition of slavery, which took place



in 1838, marked a significant step toward a more equal society. The efforts of many sociologists and reformers were instrumental in changing public attitudes and advancing the cause of human equality. "They remain slaves because they can't see what is beautiful in this world" (TWT 25). When Balram meditates upon the Black Fort, he identifies an uncommon capacity to see beauty in the world outside himself; for Balram, it is more than mere appreciation of a physical surface; it contains the promise of something more profound: the liberation of the mind and soul. He differentiates between two groups: those who live like "slaves," limited by their conditions, constrained mindsets, or otherwise, and those who, like himself, possess the deeper vision of a free thinker, or what he calls a true entrepreneur.

Balram's understanding of life: freedom is not the sum of a man's wealth or class but rather a sense of meaning and purpose when others stare at a monotonous life or even hopelessness. This was Balram's inspiration; the fact that he can observe beauty mingles with his desire to change his life, believing that beauty lay hidden in the world for those who could see it serves as one of the driving forces behind his journey through servitude to success. "The Rooster Coop was doing its work. Servants have to keep other servants from becoming innovators, experimenters, or entrepreneurs. Yes, that's the sad truth, Mr. Premier. The coop is guarded from the inside." (TWT 115). Balram has previously mentioned servants in Ashok's house who tried to stop him from achieving success. He has to reconcile with family members like Kusum Granny, who prevent him from escaping as they drag him back when he starts to escape.

Balram uses this knowledge to justify withdrawing from his family and fellow servants, which he thinks will eliminate part of the pulling force holding him in the Coop. As a part of Balram's journey, he makes several different transitions in identity, each represented in the various names he identifies with. He is born without an official name, known only as Munna, meaning "boy." When he attends school for the first time, a teacher gives him the name Balram. When he becomes a white tiger, the inspector from the British school calls him the "White Tiger" and sees him as an extraordinary

figure in the complicated lives of others the White Tiger, a rare and powerful animal in this world, marks Balram's identity.

Conclusion

Balram's narrative is not simply one of economic ascent; it additionally serves as a meditation on identity, morals, and the cost of freedom within a highly stratified society. He has achieved upward mobility, but his ascension is marked by significant and brutal violence and betrayal. Balram's story challenges the systems and structures that confine millions of people to poverty at a systemic level while simultaneously revealing the deep-rooted darkness embedded within the gleaming advertisement of neo-liberal modernity in India. Aravind Adiga challenges the blind acceptance of India's unjust social hierarchy and the systemic wealth extraction from the poor at the hands of the wealthy. Balram's story fits and then very much contrasts the myth of upward mobility; the novel ultimately uses the identity transformation of Balram as Munna and then to the White Tiger to examine issues of identity and rebellion and the possibility of self-determination within a society defined by rigid societal boundaries. The White Tiger represents Balram's unique nature and purpose while also indicating that, to meet his ambition, he must be prepared to fight hard against a vicious, dog-eat-dog world. Slavery is the state of being owned by another person, and the enslaver has absolute control of where the individual lives and works. In slavery, people are treated as property, forced to work for no pay or, at best, appalling pay or profit sharing, none of which is fair in context. Slavery is the historically brutal and dehumanizing exploitation of humans in multiple societies. As with many labor situations, no labor without a wage is sometimes not worth being a slave. Slavery usually differs from some other forms of labor, such as bonded labor, where the worker acts to repay a debt and its usual exploitative conditions, in that in bonded labor, By saying "the Rooster Coop was doing" and "is guarded," he conveys that the system is practically agentic; it is performed and, at worst, a collective choreography, but it is part of the social structure and innate to the social system. Servants and family members are not vying against each other for scarce opportunities to advance; they



act as a unified barrier, unconsciously upholding the logic of their oppressors' logic and ensuring that no one escapes the cage. Balram describes himself as focused on the future rather than the present. He anticipates that his restless nature will soon drive him to sell his business and pursue new ventures. Already, he has begun investing in Bangalore real estate, expecting an influx of Americans to the city. He even envisions using his wealth to start a school for underprivileged children, provided he isn't apprehended for his crime. Still, Balram is resolute: even if caught, he will never regret his actions. For him, the chance to live free, no longer bound by servitude, makes everything he has done valuable. The social and economic inequalities that divide Balram Halwai, a destitute villager from "the Darkness," and his employer Ashok, an elite foreign-educated man, fulfill a colonial legacy that continues the hierarchical structures of the colonial era within contemporary India. Within *The Rooster Coop* metaphor, we can see the pathways of oppression that integrate and depend on internalized forms of control that colonialism left behind: we as individuals are warped into submission by following orders, being obedient beings, and policing ourselves. When Balram learned that it was not simply chains that created his servitude, but a form of psychological conditioning loyalty to family obligations, fear of retribution, and feelings of inferior caste, the internalized quality of postcolonial forms of oppression made sense. Balram's metamorphosis from Munna (a nameless, subservient character) to a successful entrepreneur, Ashok Sharma, mirrors Balram's developing class consciousness. Marxist theory defines class consciousness as understanding one's position within capitalist structures (along with the exploitative nature of these structures). While Balram begins as a relatively uneducated subject who is unaware of his oppression, having been conditioned to accept the righteousness of serving his masters, he becomes aware of the effects of the Delhi urban environment and that when he served his masters as well as his father's statement that

there is no greater honor than serving the master and believing himself, along with the other servants and the money they earned, was also a part of the meritocracy illusion that, in low caste society, does not exist. The moment in the Delhi Zoo where he locks eyes with a caged white tiger is the moment he psychologically realizes that he can't remain in the "Rooster Coop," escape the system of servitude, and ensure continued exploitation through violence.

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