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Cell : 9595 359 435, Ph No: 02172372010 Email: ayisrj@yahoo.in Website: www.isrj.net**



## Economic Growth A Mirage In India In Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger

Irfan Ahmad Thoker

University, Jalandhar, Punjab

### Abstract:

*India, the largest democracy and the fastest growing economy after China, is even after sixty five years of freedom struggling with poverty. Aravind Adiga has exposed this reality through the character of Balram in The White Tiger. Balram having taken birth in a poor rural family without proper education faces the hardships of poverty. He also sees how other poor people live in so called economically developing India.*

### KEYWORD:

Mother, Balram, democracy.

### INTRODUCTION

India was the motherland of our race, and Sanskrit the mother of all European's languages: she was the mother of our philosophy; mother through the Arabs of our mathematics; mother through the Buddha, of the ideals embodied in Christianity; mother through the village community, of self-government and democracy. Mother India is many ways the mother of us all (Durant).

India is one of the developing nations of the modern world. It has become an independent country, a republic, more than a half century ago. During this period the country has been engaged in efforts to attain development and growth in various areas such as building infrastructure, production of grains, progress in science and technology and spread of education. India is presently considered as one of the possible emerging superpowers of the world. India's economic development has brought tremendous success for the country with a better global image.

A careful look at what lies beyond the gloss of 'Shining India' acknowledges the details of much harsh realities. This is the country where facts given by the government are contradictory to the reality. The development it has done is not sufficient for the country which has more than one thousand million populations. Out of this population more than seventy two per cent live in rural areas which are still without proper electricity, water supply, schools, hospitals and roads. The gravest thing about India is that the majority of the population's source of income is agriculture and cattle. There are land owners and landless labourers. Due to these landless labourers there is problem of unemployment which is the main cause of poverty in India. It is also a big hurdle in the progress of the country. It is an irony that on one hand, Indian economy has been rated as one of the fastest evolving in the world and on the other hand people are surviving on incomes of 1.25 US dollar a day.

Aravind Adiga has zoomed deeply into the reality about Indian economic growth. The narrator cum hero of the novel The White Tiger, Balram Halwai, overthrows the veil from the face of the so called economically the 2nd fastest growing and the world's largest democracy, India, to show the truth that is behind this veil. It has surprised many scholars and analysts that India on the one hand is competing with China but at the same time it shows the alarming figures of people living in a wretched condition of poverty. Thus after seeing the present situation, Balram's words are apt; "India is two countries in one: an India of Light and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings Light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the Ocean is well-off. But the river brings darkness to India- the black river" (p14). This division is so deep

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that we see in the Indian society the rich and the poor are two opposite entities of the same society. The rich on the one side are rolling in wealth while the poor on the other side are starving, struggling for every morsel of food and dying with diseases. To know "One fact about India is that you can take almost anything you hear about the country from the Prime Minister and turn it upside down and then you will have the truth about that thing" (p 15).

There is a vast difference between the rich and the poor class, "But the White Tiger isn't about race or caste in India. It's about the vast economic inequality between the poor and the wealthy elite. The narrator is an Indian entrepreneur detailing his rise to power. His India is a merciless, corrupt Darwinian Jungle where only the ruthless survive" (Donahue). Balram's father, a rickshaw puller from the Darkness i.e. the rural India, is the epitome of the Indian poor class society. He works day and night to feed his family. There is no schedule of work for the poor. A "Rickshaw puller, he may have been-a human beast of burden..."(p 27). Every poor has a dream to become rich but in India it is a Herculean task for him. The poor are beaten by the circumstances i.e. natural climatic changes and the irregularity in implementation of policies. Everything works against them. The natural climatic changes always prove fatal for the poor. These climatic changes destroy the crops of the poor and opportunities of their work. Unseasonal rains, long draughts and lack of proper dams for the protection from sudden floods have deteriorated the economic situation of the poor. The step motherly treatment given to them by the government is the worst factor that has left the poor in complete disappointment. There is no dignified job for the poor: "Go to a tea shop anywhere along the Ganga, sir, and look at the men working in that tea shop-men, I say, but better to call them human spiders that go crawling" (p 12). The people living below poverty line have less to eat, nothing to wear and nowhere permanent place to settle. They are living frustrated life "He took the largest piece of coal in his hand and squeezed it: 'imagine that each is my skull; they will get much easier to break'" (p 38). The life of the poor is full of troubles. Throughout his life he struggles for 'Roti', 'Kapda' and 'Makaan', the basic necessities for human beings which he hasn't. The poor would have improved their condition but unfortunately they are exploited by every rich man. Balram says when the Stork asks about his son: "What is he doing in Dhanbad? Why isn't he back home screwing poor fisherman of their money and humping their daughters?"(p 61) The village landlords are like gods for the poor. They are like the rulers of the villages: "The Buffalo was one of the land lords in Laxmangarh. There were three others, and each had got his name from the peculiarities of appetite that had been detected in him" (p 24).

These feudal lords have filled their bellies with the produce of the poor. They have grown to "Big Bellies": "The Stork owned the river," his brother the Wild Boar "owned all the good agricultural land," the Raven "owned the dry rocky hillside" and the Buffalo "had eaten up the rickshaws and the roads." If people want to work on these lands, they have "to bow down" to their feet "and touch the dust under" their slippers, "and agree to swallow" their "day wages." These land lords have their "teeth on either side of" their noses which are "long and curved, like little tusks." They have become greedy dogs who have snatched everything from the poor. They also take charges from the poor "goatherds" for grazing goats (p 24-25). Associated with poverty and unemployment, there are many social evils like beggary, prostitution, dowry system, alcoholism and increase in other crimes. The beggary is a social problem of great magnitude and a grave concern in developing countries. The increasing number of beggars in the society means improper utilization of available human resources and drags upon the existing resources of the society. There has been a phenomenal increase in the number of beggars in India. Since 1991 their number has increased more rapidly than before. It is now a day very common to find beggars at rubbish dumps, roadside and traffic lights and under flyovers. Balram mentions these beggars as:

The time next to the red light said that there were still thirty seconds to go before the light changed to green, I was watching the timer when the giant Buddha materialized on my right. A beggar child had come up to the Honda City holding up a beautiful plaster-of-paris statue of the Buddha. Every night in Delhi, beggars are always selling something by the roadside, books or statues or strawberries in boxes but for some reason, perhaps because my nerves were in such a bad state, I gazed at this Buddha longer than I should have (p 160).

Though there is not a proper data of beggary available in India, yet the surveys conducted by many social welfare organizations have shown that the number of beggars is increasing especially the number of women and children beggars. The 1991 census mentioned just 16% women beggars. The figure shot up to 49% in 2001 (Census). These beggars are living a very disgusting life. They wear rags. They do not have shoes or sandals in their feet "The beggar sitting by the side of the road, a nearly naked man coated with grime, and with wild unkempt hair in long coils like snakes, looked into my eyes"(p 221). It has been found that many beggars are physically so weak that they cannot do any physical labor. There are also beggars who are suffering from many diseases and the worst among them is psychiatric illness: "One beggar was carrying another on his shoulders and going from car to car; the fellow on his shoulders had no legs below his knees. They went together from car to car, the fellow without the legs moaning and groaning and the

other fellow tapping or scratching on the windows of the car" (p 240).

When the British left India they had already carved deep impressions on the minds of Indians. The language, culture and the values of life got seeped into the Indian society "Neither you nor I speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English: "My ex-employer the late Mr Ashok's ex-wife Pinky Madam, taught me one of these things..."(p 29). Indians who were slaves for nearly a thousand years to foreign rule never tried to emancipate themselves from the foreign influence instead they absorbed and adopted everything from them. The imperialism of the British is no more but the symbolic "Black Fort" is still working there in disguise. It is a symbol of the tyrannical rule of imperialists who subjugated the poor. The poor who were earlier treated as slaves are now treated as servants. These servants are supposed to do the job of Allah-u-Din's Djinn. The Master of Colonial Rule has been changed by the Master of post-colonial rule. The present master is not a human being but he is a monkey who grabs the produce of others. He is in human form but having the traits of beasts:

The Black Fort stands on the crest of a hill overlooking the village. People, who have been to other countries, have told me that this fort is as beautiful as anything seen in Europe. The Turks, or the Afghans, or the English, or whichever foreigners were then ruling India, must have built the fort centuries ago.

(For this land, India has never been free. First the Muslims, then the British bossed us around. In 1947 the British left, but only a morn would think that we became free then.)

Now the foreigners have long abandoned the Black Fort, and a tribe of Monkeys occupy it (p 28).

This ferocious tribe of monkeys has filled their stomachs with dirt and everything they found around. They treat their servants like true masters who strip their skin down with their powerful whips: "The day -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 ferocious, the hungriest, had eaten everyone else up, and grown big bellies." (p 64)

Today the class distinction is vivid in the Indian society. The rich dominates the society where as the poor has taken the place of the servant. Earlier caste system was the main cause of class distinction but in contemporary India caste system is least bothering thing for the poor "In the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes; Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies" (p.64). This division emerged from the inequality in the society:

"It didn't matter whether you were a woman, or a Muslim, or an untouchable: anyone with a belly could rise up. My father's father must have been a real Halwai, a sweet maker, but when he inherited the shop, a member of some other caste must have stolen it from him with the help of the police. My father had not had the belly to fight back. That is why he had fallen all the way to the mud, to the level of a rickshaw-puller. That is why I was cheated of my destiny to be fat, and creamy-skinned, and smiling" (p 64).

It's in Delhi that Balram comes to the realization that there is a new caste system at work in both India and the world, and it has only two groups; those who are eaten, and those who eat i.e, prey and predators. Adiga says;

What I fear is that too many middle class Indians look at some indicators of prosperity, like the spread of cell phones in the country; while ignoring other indicators, like the growing of shortage of fresh water. The worst-case scenario is that India wastes its immense potential and ends up as a country, that is significantly richer than it is today, but with deep, lingering class divisions, higher levels of crime and social unrest, and millions who will never have access to the education and economic freedom that is their birth right. In other words, India ends up as a kind of immense South American country in the heart of Asia. India can do much, much better than this, and I hope that its citizens force its government to give them this better future (Dubner).

The master class is the owner of big estates i.e. land, buildings, industries and factories and they have other establishments through which they earn a lot of wealth. On the other hand the servants work for the pleasure of their masters. They have only one identity, that is, they are servants. They do not enjoy life as their masters do. They suffer while their masters reap the fruits of their hard labor. The servants are encaged because of their poverty: "No. It's because 99.9 per cent of us are caught in the Rooster Coop just like those poor guys in the poultry market"(p 175). The servants are treated worse than animals. They do not have the worth of the pet dogs kept by their masters. The pet dogs of their masters have a better status and "the rich expect their dogs to be treated like humans, you see they expect their dogs to be pampered, and walked, and petted and even washed" (p 78). The servants have to look after these dogs and feed them like their masters. They are living a miserable life. They have lost the resistance. They are living a life of servitude and even if the "Key of" their "emancipation is given to" them; they will "throw it right back at you" (p 176). The family and the circumstances compel them to sell their bodies. They are in large numbers:

Go to old Delhi...and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly colored roosters, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and shitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving

off a horrible stench-the stench of terrified, feathered flesh. On the wooden desk above this coop sits a grinning young butcher, showing off the flesh and organs of a recently chopped-up chicken, still oleaginous with a coating of dark blood. The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brother are 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. (p.173)

This analogy gives the glimpse of the poor section of the society. They expire but they never get any success in changing their lot. Their pitiable condition has no effect on their masters. They are the noblest creatures of God. They have honesty, loyalty and sincerity for their masters. They win their masters because they are the most honest people in India. They prove their honesty:

Watch the roads in the evenings in Delhi: sooner or later you will see a man on a cycle-rickshaw, pedaling down the road, with a giant bed, or a table, tied to the cart that is attached to his cycle. Everyday furniture is delivered to people's homes by this man-the deliveryman. A bed costs five thousand rupees may be six thousand. Add the chairs and a coffee table, and it's ten or fifteen thousand. A man comes on a cycle-cart, bringing you this bed, table, and chairs, a poor man who may make five hundred rupees a month. He unloads all his furniture for you, and you give him the money in cash-a fat wad of cash the size of a brick. He puts it into his underwear, and cycles back to his boss and hands it over without touching a single rupee of it. A year's salary, two years salary in his hands, and he never takes a rupee of it...

Every day, on the roads of Delhi, some Chauffeur is driving an empty car with a black suit case sitting on the back seat. Inside that suitcase is a million, two million rupees; more money than that Chauffeur will see in his life time. If he took the money he could go to America, Australia, anywhere, and start a new life. He could go inside the five star hotels he has dreamed about all his life and only seen from outside. He could take his family to Goa, to England, yet he takes that black suitcase where he is meant to, and never touches a rupee (p 174).

It is not a new thing in India but it is an age old trait among Indians. Foreign rulers were successful only because Indians showed their honesty. They are perfect servants. To take orders with honesty is their greatness. They know well how to serve their masters because it is inherited in them. They are known for their absolute fidelity and devotion "If we were in India now there would be servants standing in the corner of this room and I would not notice them" (Jaffries). These Indian servants are always ready to serve their masters. The honesty of the Indian servants is the main cause of their servitude and poverty which are being inflicted on them for many centuries. It is so because they cannot identify the beautiful things in the world, still attained a status of being faithful servants. They have become trustworthy:

But leave a million dollars in front of the servant and he won't touch a penny. Try it leave a black bag with a million dollars in Mumbai taxi. The taxi driver will call the police and return the money by the day's end. I guarantee it. (Whether the police will give it to you or not is another story, sir!) Masters trust their servants with diamonds in this country! It's true. Every evening on the train out of Surat, where they run the world's biggest diamond-cutting and polishing business, the servants of diamond merchants are carrying suitcases full of cut diamonds that they have to give to someone in Mumbai. Why doesn't that servant take the suitcase full of diamonds? He's no Gandhi. He's human, and he is you and me. But he's in the Rooster coop. The Trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy (p.175)

It is the servant class whose hard work is responsible for the economic growth of the country. But this working class has to suffer because "a hand full of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 per cent- as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way-to exist in perpetual servitude, so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse" (p 176). Balram is a devoted typical Indian servant. He respects his master because he is helpless, a poor fellow and a rustic having this slavery inherited from his ancestors. The Rooster Coop is not difficult to break and he proves it by killing his master. Then he emerges as a successful businessman in a society where masters are still worshipped as gods and servants are treated as animal:

I want to challenge this idea that India is the world's greatest democracy. It may be so in an objective sense, but on the ground, the poor have such little power...I wanted something that would provoke and annoy people...the servant-master system implies two things: one is that the servants are far poorer than the rich-a servant has no possibility of ever catching up to the master. And secondly, he has access to the master-the master's money, the master's physical person. Yet crime rates in India are very low what is stopping a poor man from taking to the crime that occurs in Venezuela or South Africa? You need two things (for crime to occur-a divide and a conscious ideology of resentment. We don't have resentment in India. The poor just assume that the rich are a fact of life. For them, getting angry at the heat .But we are seeing what I believe is class resentment for the first time (Sawhney).

There is no doubt about the progress that India made in past two decades but at the same time it failed to eradicate poverty from its soil that has left a question mark for the leaders who boast of economic

progress. Aravind Adiga highlighted this grave issue of poverty to bring home the reality about India.

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