

Reading India as Represented in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*: A Socio-cultural Analysis

*A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Award of the Degree of*

Master of Philosophy
in
English

by
Durga K
(Reg. No. 1334103)

Under the Guidance of
Bhavani S
Assistant Professor



Declared as Deemed to be University under Section 3 of UGC Act 1956

Department of English

CHRIST UNIVERSITY
BENGALURU, INDIA

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Approval of Dissertation

Dissertation entitled *Reading India as Represented in Aravind Adiga's 'The White Tiger': A Socio-cultural Analysis* by Durga K, Reg. No. 1334103 is approved for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.

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Place: Bengaluru

Seal

DECLARATION

I, Durga K hereby declare that the dissertation, titled *Reading India as Represented in Aravind Adiga's 'The White Tiger': A Socio-cultural Analysis* is a record of original research work undertaken by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English. I have completed this study under the supervision of Ms. Bhavani S, Assistant Professor, Department of English.

I also declare that this dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other title. It has not been sent for any publication or presentation purpose. I hereby confirm the originality of the work and that there is no plagiarism in any part of the dissertation.

Place: Bengaluru

Date:

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation submitted by Durga K (Reg. No. 1334103) titled *Reading India as Represented in Aravind Adiga's 'The White Tiger': A Socio-cultural Analysis* is a record of research work done by her during the academic year 2013-2015 under my supervision in partial fulfillment for the award of Master of Philosophy in English.

This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other title. It has not been sent for any publication or presentation purpose. I hereby confirm the originality of the work and that there is no plagiarism in any part of the dissertation.

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Abstract

The research titled *Reading India as Represented in Aravind Adiga's 'The White Tiger': A Socio-cultural Analysis* provides a critical analysis of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. The research aims at interpreting the socio-cultural frame of India as represented in *The White Tiger*. Adiga in the work portrays the socio-political and cultural India of the twenty-first century and presents the life of a low-born man caught up in the politics and polity of the territory. Through the protagonist who acts as the mouthpiece of the writer himself, Adiga lays bare the socio-cultural world of contemporary India.

With the backdrop of the realities of the two contrasting images of India- the envisioned Independent India of post freedom movement and the modern India of the rich- Adiga voices his concerns over the 'othering' of the poor by the rich in the contemporary India. He projects the class and caste systems as the imperial barricade for democratic socialism and economic equality which results in the victimization of the poor. The penniless being the powerless, the poor sustains as the objects of exploitation by the elite capitalist class. With the context set, Adiga projects the voice of the neglected as a counter to the roaring economy of the nation. However, *The White Tiger's* demeaning projection of the country made it a widely critiqued work. The text's poignant projection of the country as the dark India and its eventual bagging of the Booker Prize made many scholars consider the work as tactically marketing a dark India image as a saleable commodity to the widespread readership.

Nevertheless, the researcher holds the view that although the essentialist notions of the Third World poverty and 'the text' as the real India need to be resisted, the existence of a dark less privileged side of India cannot be denied. The hegemonic class and caste structures and the ideological positioning extant in the society, reinforce subjectivity and inequality making life

vulnerable. Hence, to initiate any change in the existing scene, an acknowledgement of its existence is of prime importance.

The problem the researcher undertakes to study in the research – *Reading India as Represented in Aravind Adiga's 'The White Tiger': A Socio-cultural Analysis* – is the influence of socio-cultural conditions in shaping an individual. The problem is chosen with the intention of drawing attention to the psychic traumas an individual undergoes while struggling to cope with his/her life conditions in the politically and ideologically constructed present day India. The study attempts to read the behavioural patterns of the textually projected society and its characters interpreting it as a reaction to their socio-cultural background, using the sociological theory of anomie as laid down by Emile Durkheim and Robert Merton.

The study considers the text as a commentary on the often veiled absurdities of the Indian socio-cultural set-up and its likely threats. The thesis argues that a society in its attempt to condition an individual eventually constructs the individual morally or immorally, problematically or unproblematically; as ideological or anti-ideological entities. The thesis studies the images of contemporary India as represented in the text, its socio-cultural system and the survival status of its neglected masses and analyses how the socio-cultural factors affect an individual and how one tackles these conditions. The research method used in this study is textual analysis.

Keywords: Culture, mythology, class and caste stratification, ideology, conditioning, deviance and anomie.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

India is a land of diversity with a variety of languages, dialects, social groupings, castes and cultures. It is also the largest functioning democracy with its regular and freely contested elections. The philosophical and cultural heritage of India dates back to the Aryan civilisation, 4000 years ago, which still have its deepest imprints in the society. Every Indian has a stock of stories of myth and history imbibed onto his consciousness as his cultural heritage; a consciousness of the past which he readily abides by even in the present. The present India, adding on to its diversity, can be called as an amalgamation of two Indias, the urban and the rural. The urban cosmopolitan India is ever developing with its modern industries, national politics and foreign policies, the national media, the major universities, businesses, and scientific and technological developments. The rural, on the other hand, remains more or less unchanged, blanketed with illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and poor standards of living, but still blindfolded by the ideologies of myths and traditions. A thought-provoking image of the two Indias can be seen in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*.

Aravind Adiga is the fifth in the line of Booker Prize winning writers from India, the others being V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai. Being born in Chennai and having completed his schooling in India, Adiga migrated to Australia where he continued his education at the various universities like Columbia University, New York and Magdalen College, Oxford. Adiga began his career as a journalist interning at *The Financial Times* and later became a correspondent for *The Times*. His acquaintance with the real world around as being a journalist, and his life and education outside India, are two major influences identifiable in his works of fiction. His communion with societies that hold no class barricades

against its people made him ruminates over the stringent hierarchical system that India sustains. Also, his watch on the working class lives around intrigued Adiga contemplate deeper, the result of which was his entry into the literary field. He stepped in as a literary figure with his debut novel *The White Tiger* which won the 2008 Man Booker Prize. His other works *Between the Assassinations* (2008) and *Last Man in Tower* (2011) also perch on the themes of India- the various societal issues, the life here and its many problems.

The plot of *The White Tiger* is weaved around the life of the central character Balram Halwai. Balram Halwai is a young man who hails from one of the dark villages of India called Laxmangarh. After having been taken out of school, despite his intelligence and smartness, Balram starts his life as a worker in a tea shop breaking coals and wiping tables. His interest in things considered out of his limits makes him lose his job. He thus migrates to Dhanbad, a better town, gets trained as a driver, and the Stork family appoints him as a driver-cum-servant. When the America-returned son of the Stork leaves for Delhi, Balram too gets to accompany him as the chauffeur of his Honda City. Though Mr. Ashok is a kind and gentle master to Balram, his hypocrisy and guilefulness anger Balram. He finds Ashok too as mean as his landlord father and gets rid of him by murdering him. Balram soon journeys further to another city in the south and sets up his start-up there with the stolen money, positioning himself as a successful entrepreneur, and calls himself Mr. Ashok Sharma.

Published in 2008 and set in contemporary India, detailing events as can be related to the present political set-up, *The White Tiger* lays bare the socio-political world of everyday India; rather a dark side of India. Through the protagonist Balram Halwai, Adiga frames the work as a nativist narration of the nation, showcasing the socio-political world of contemporary India. With the backdrop of the two contradictory images of India - the highly sophisticated India of the rich and the vulnerable India of the poor, Adiga voices his concern over the Darwinian struggle the poor are engaged in here. The hegemonic ideologies of the rich use religious myths and traditions as the tools to condition the poor for exploitation. Halwai's rural

India is a territory of darkness, a land of poverty, feudalism, fraudulence, unemployment, child labour, despair and full of misery.

The researcher in the study, argues that a society in its attempt to condition an individual eventually constructs the individual - morally or immorally, problematically or unproblematically; as ideological or anti-ideological entities - a reflection of which can be identified in Adiga's representation. Precisely, the researcher identifies Adiga's India and its inhabitants, with the extremities in their behavioural patterns, as an outcome of the social conditioning practiced on them in the hierarchically positioned socio-cultural India. The research views the text as a product of its society that possess a duality in itself; the two contradictory images of India. The thesis, having analysed the various underlying themes and major issues discussed in the text, states that *The White Tiger* is a commentary on the often veiled absurdities of the Indian socio-cultural set-up, and its likely threats. Also, the writer's choice of a low-born man as his mouthpiece protagonist to attack the absurdities of the Indian socio-political and cultural scene has also led the researcher frame the above-stated statement as the thesis statement or research question. The writer's use of the first person narrative technique in his attack presenting the narrative as a nativist narration of the nation is also considered in framing the research question.

The various studies on the text have explored the different possible aspects of the text. *The White Tiger* was a well-acclaimed work both commercially and critically for its bagging of the Booker Prize and its poignant projection of India. The Booker Prize committee found the novel as a grabbing narrative on a man's quest for freedom and the terrible cost of that freedom. They commented the novel as attempting to give a literary voice to those often left unheard - the poor (*The Financial Times* 2008). The themes of slavery, the quest for freedom and escapism that seem to surface in the novel made reviewers compare it with the emancipatory slave narratives of Ellison, Richard Wright and Frederik Douglass. Elizabeth Sarah Glady in "Shifting Indian Identities in Aravind Adiga's Work: The March from Individual to Communal

Power” describes the novel as employing the motif of “the worth of the individual” from Ellison, Richard Wright and James Baldwin (1). Sara D. Schotland in her study on Adiga’s *The White Tiger* and Richard Wright’s *The Native Son* makes a comparative analysis of the two novels as she finds a “Manichean duality” of “rich/ master/ powerful” and “poor/ servant/ oppressed” reflecting in the two works (1). She examines the extent to which the elements of poverty, despair, frustration and humiliation figure in the novels and the use of crime as a resultant reaction to it though they are set in different cultural setups and timelines. Although at a first glance, neither of the works fit in the usual postcolonial mould with *The White Tiger* employing a native master and *The Native Son* with its setting in the US, she studies the two texts in a postcolonial perspective. Schotland finds an unbridgeable chasm between the marginalized, impoverished populations and the dominant wealthy elites mimicking colonizers surfacing in both the works.

Adiga’s India in which *The White Tiger* is set is a land of poverty, corruption, power hierarchies and stratification. The status of democracy in the world’s largest democracy is a highly questionable element in *The White Tiger*. William Ryan Brown’s “De-Democratisation and the Novels of Aravind Adiga” analyses the de-democratic state of the country that Adiga projects. Ryan Brown finds a system of slavery existing as more predominant than democracy in Adiga’s India. Brown states that the system of slavery that Balram identifies is “the Great Indian Rooster Coop” (Adiga 149) and, his escape from the coop is only illusionary as the democracy is itself de-democratised. In his analysis of the two novels of Adiga, *The White Tiger* and *The Last Man in Tower*, Ryan Brown argues that the “two novels function in tandem to demonstrate the phenomenon of de-democratization occurring in contemporary liberal democracies”(7). He suggests resistance as the way to clear the space for authentic democracy. Ryan finds Adiga’s master metaphor of the rooster coop, a critique of India’s political and economic structures (7). The researcher finds Ryan Brown’s views helpful in analysing the socio-cultural status of the represented India.

Entrepreneurship is another major theme in *The White Tiger*. Haitham Hind's "Discourse of Entrepreneurship in *The White Tiger*" is a critical examination of Adiga's take on entrepreneurship in India which he mouths through the sarcastic tongue of Balram Halwai. Hind here examines Adiga's critiquing of entrepreneurship in India by analysing Halwai's avatar as the advocate of entrepreneurship. According to Hind's analysis, Halwai's views appear to be contradicting the idea of entrepreneurship as a way to freedom and self-dependence for the common man. According to Hind's study entrepreneurship here is just another way through which the system reproduces itself. Analysing Balram Halwai's autobiographical narrative, Hind discusses on the nature of entrepreneurship that further exploits the dominated classes.

Dr. Sasikanth Reddy in "Unselfing of the Self in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*" finds the divide between the haves and have-nots that Adiga portrays in the text as a true depiction of the harsh realities of India. He finds the scenes of corruption and poverty that harness the noble democracy as authentic. He finds Adiga's work as an attempt to uncover the dark realities behind the veil of the booming India image. Dr. Sasikanth Reddy finds the novel interesting and energetic and as a real portrayal of the complex Indian society. He finds the characterisation extremely realistic with a powerful voice of the underclass echoing throughout the text.

Adiga's attack on the Indian politics and polity depicting it as a land of corruption and darkness was immensely critiqued both nationally and transnationally as in the case of Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire*. However, Ana Christina Mendes considers *The White Tiger* as an unravelling of the subsumed Dark India to the global literary front. She questions the premises that underpin the most vehement critiques directed at the novel; on the one hand as Adiga's work offering a creative shift from Salman Rushdie's, and on the other hand on his characterization strategies as presenting a class reprove fashioned with an 'inauthentic' re-Orientalized title character.

Interestingly the projected 'dark India' led Sudhir K. Arora question the authenticity in Adiga's depiction of the nation and its political system as corrupt and erring in "Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger: A Political Feast*". Arora vehemently opposes Adiga's views and the hailing of the text for its projection of a 'dark India' for the Western gaze. He rejects Adiga's focusing on the backwardness of the nation alone projecting it as dark and faulty. Arora argues that every system has its faults, and there is no flawless system ideal enough to be replaced with since the real fault is not with the system but with the people who operate it. However, it is worth considering that when the governing people are biased and corrupt, the governing system too can become biased and corrupt under which only the unprivileged and neglected suffer as reflected in O V Vijayan's *Saga of Dharmapuri*. As Adiga himself expressed in an interview to *The Guardian*, he feels it as the responsibility of writers like him "to highlight the brutal injustices of society ... [*The White Tiger*] is not an attack on the country, it's about the greater process of self-examination" ("Roars of Anger"). On his projection of the class divide in India he writes; "...class and the big divides we have in the world today between the better-off and the worse-off, it doesn't get written about much...to me, it is the most pressing concern around today" (qtd. in Reddy 156).

The White Tiger attracted careful studies initiating revolving discussions on realism, faithfulness, authenticity and the potential of the novel, describing the work as brutal, blunt, stark, and harrowing. Adiga's sketching of his characters too invoked serious distaste among the critics as they find the portrayals unrealistic and melodramatic. Amitava Kumar as he reviews in *The Hindu* finds Adiga's characters "utterly cartoonish, like the characters in Bollywood melodrama". He finds Adiga's presentation of ordinary people "not only trite but also offensive" (Kumar). For Kevin Rushby, Adiga's characterisation seems as "Dickensian grotesque" (Rushby). Alan Davis finds the existential facts being used like a "dagger to dramatize the Darwinian nature of life in India for the poor" (Davis 169). For him, Halwai is a narrator who "cooks up droll self-serving portraits and tells us how India's tangled, extended

families oppress individual initiative as much as they provide subsistence-level support in return for fealty” (Davis 169). Dr. Bhagabat Nayak, on the other hand, considers the work as a narrative of “unremitting realism”. In “Contextualising Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* in Postcolonial Paradigm” he interprets Balram’s letters as true accounts of India, which we deny acknowledging. He finds the neurotic behaviour of Balram as the outcome of the poverty stricken life he lives.

Reviewing the varied perspectives on the text the researcher views that, even though the notion of the Third World as a land of misery or darkness and the image of a text as ‘the real’ country need to be rejected, the existence of a dark less privileged side of India cannot be ignored. To initiate any change in the system, an acknowledgment of its existence is of prime importance. The research, considering the heterogeneity in every society, studies the differences in the behavioural patterns of Adiga’s characters, from the villainous anti-social hero to the ideological minor characters. The objectives of this research are:

- i) To analyse the images of contemporary India, its socio-cultural system and the survival status of its neglected masses as presented in the text and
- ii) To analyse how the socio-cultural factors affect an individual and how one tackles these conditions.

The research uses the sociological theory of anomie as its methodology of research and textual analysis as its method. The social disintegration, lawlessness and the breakdown of cultural and normative structures, giving prominence to materialistic goals resulting in deviant behaviours, well illustrates the ensuing anomie in *The White Tiger*’s social structure.

Anomie is one of the most influential twentieth-century theories on the study of society formulated and developed by the sociologists Emile Durkheim, Robert K. Merton and others. In general, anomie refers to lawlessness, normlessness, irregularity or confusion. In religious terms, anomie is considered as guilt and assault to holy things (Heydari 1086). Emile Durkheim represents anomie as an unhappy, asocial condition generated by an absence of moral regulation

or norms and, as a deep and enduring threat to the society (Law 14). As Durkheim states in *Anomic Suicide*, “no living being can be happy or even exist unless his needs are sufficiently proportioned to his means...[and] if nothing external can restrain this capacity for need fulfilment it can only be a source of torment to itself leading to a state of perpetual unhappiness” (qtd. in Bagley 110). Promoted by the goal of insatiable monetary gain, individuals though materially well-off, resort to despair or abnormal illegitimate rebellion. In Durkheim’s view while poverty forces the individuals to be modest and restrained, wealth is a source of torment developing insatiable demands or greed in them (Law 14). In Durkheim’s sense anomie develops from a lack of moral regulation and can be prevented with strengthened moral codes and regulatory norms (Law 17).

Durkheim’s concept of anomie as the decline of sacred institutions and moral authority was later countered and developed by the later theorists like Robert K. Merton. As Law puts it, Merton gave an innovative twist to the concept of anomie as the imbalance that exists between unequal social structures and the universal value of social success. Merton uses anomie theory in analysing social structure and makes a distinction between cultural aspirations and social aspirations. Merton states anomie as the resultant product of the imbalance between the two fundamental components of society- cultural structure and social structure. As Merton says, monetary achievement and social position have become the cultural aspirations of the modern world. And since, the means to achieve them are not distributed egalitarian among social classes not everyone gets the opportunity to attain the cultural goals of success. The unequal distribution of means along with equal emphasis on achieving cultural aspirations, cause a kind of pressure in certain members of the society which has serious consequences. Those with inadequate legitimate means to acquire social success, such as the poor, may pursue deviant strategies to acquire success, even if this means criminality. The aberrant emergent behaviour is a symptom of dissociation between culturally prescribed aspirations and socially structured avenues for realising these aspirations.

Merton developed a paradigm of social deviance based on the actor's acceptance or rejection of cultural goals and the institutionalized means for reaching these goals. Merton's analysis describes the social structure as accountable for deviant behaviour. An example of this kind of deviance is the behaviour ensuing from the limiting of aspirational goals by the hierarchical elements of the social structure (Bagley 111). In this case, the lower class individuals resort to deviant behaviour because of their inability to reach the middle-class goals on account of the unequal socio-economic and cultural structures. The lower class youth's aspirations like the achievement of middle-class material standards, are not limited but are moderate and are clearly defined. For him, the social structure is not lacking in constraint but is over-constrained which prevents his reaching of goals. Since the access to legitimate means differ depending on one's position held in the social structure, while the goal of material success remains the same, anomic pressure is found to be stronger for the socially disadvantaged strata of society in Merton's terms. Meaningless, powerless and distrust feelings and money fetishism are manifestations of anomie in an individual's behaviour.

The concept of anomie has long been used and applied in different disciplines and contexts in different ways. Christopher Bagley in "Anomie, Alienation and the Evaluation of Social Structures", tries to analyse and validate the use of the three concepts in sociological literature. Bagley examines the extent to which it is legitimate to derive an evaluation of social structures from a description of them. In his analysis, Bagley refers anomie as "a lack of ethical precision in society about the conduct of individual roles - a normative weakness of the collective life which allows different normative standards to conflict" (116). Bagley's study identifies that in the case of anomie, the individual has no precise normative goal and fails to identify any normative constraints on his means of goal achievement. He follows no normative guide nor any normative reference group to restrain his actions. In his analysis of his life conditions he finds himself alone and alienated, which will eventually lead to an anomic behaviour developing in him (Bagley 119). As Durkheimian theory states, for the anomic

individual the society that he inhabits lack any strict regulations or moral conducts and fails to observe any strict boundaries between what is right and what is wrong. It is a lawless, normless society where only the cultural goals have significance while the means to achieve them lacks any value (Bagley 119). When explained in Merton's perspective, the actor seems free to choose a variety of means which often involve deviant reactions. In a Durkheimian sense, the actor's acts of deviance are part of his anomic state (Bagley 119).

Arash Heydari et al. in "Revising the Assessment of Feeling of Anomie: Presenting a Multidimensional Scale" attempts to build a multidimensional scale of anomie for Iranian society. Their study describes anomie as a state of the mind and a set of attitudes, beliefs and personal feelings which make the person feel that his surrounding is full of chaos and confusion which does not bear any regularity or systematic rules. For the anomic person, the norms that regulate behaviours are weak and vague and the moral principles are collapsed. Anomie encompasses alienating from society and social institutions, a sense of disappointment, powerlessness and distrust to authority and society. In Merton's views, aspirations have its deep roots in culture, and the most important of the cultural aspirations are money and wealth (Heydari 1089). Fetishism of money develops in the individuals as monetary assets encompasses progress in economic achievements. Fetishism of money stays as one of the most important causes of anomie which Heydari et al. evaluated in their quantitative analysis.

Stephanie Thiel in "Global Anomie and India: A Conceptual Approach" tries to relate the current developments in modern India with the social theory of anomie. Interestingly, she opens her essay with a quote from Adiga's *The White Tiger* concerning India's socio-cultural state and the life there, especially of the powerless; "These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with small bellies. And only two destinies: eat- or get eaten up" (Thiel 17). Owing to the ideas of Robert Merton she outlines the four ideal types of anomic reactions: conformity, innovation, ritualism and retreatism. On societal and individual levels, she tries to relate these to the various phenomena prevalent in the Indian social set-up of today,

like the rising rates of corruption, the surge of suicides, growing community tensions and so on. As she explains Merton's views; anomie on an individual level is a disjunction between personal goals and the access to legitimate means to reach these goals. On a societal level, anomie means a state of social disintegration, a breakdown of the cultural and normative structure. As the theory shows, both forms of anomie are intertwined and exert mutual influence.

Thiel's study points out anomie theory as an adequate explanation of crime and other deviant behaviour of the lower classes. However, considering the heterogeneity in any society she opines that since any society provides more than just one goal that can be attained every individual need not necessarily resort to just material success even those from the lower strata. And contradictorily, since material success cannot be defined objectively and is a dependent variable, an ambition for monetary wealth can emerge in socially advantageous individuals too. As Thiel explains, as soon as they compare themselves with a more successful reference group, they feel inferior. These feelings can be a strong motivator for the application of illegitimate behaviour. Thus, even materially well-off individuals are not free from anomic tensions, explains Stephanie Thiel. Thiel's assessment of the modern Indian society relating it to an anomie-theoretical background is rightly applicable to Adiga's India too. Although the present study rejects the notion of the text as a realistic representation of the nation, it attempts to link the context and characters with an anomic background considering the existential facts about the Indian politics, polity, social structure and culture.

As discussed, anomie ensues when goals become disproportionately stressed while the legitimate means to achieve them lose its importance and the materialistic goals gain prominence; a prototype of which can be seen in Adiga's context and characters. Merton's theory adequately explains the social deviance of Adiga's Balram Halwai. His social position, the constraints of the set ideologies and his limited access to the legitimate means to success, creates in him an insatiable ambition to succeed promoting the deviant behavior in him. The

anomic pressure to reach the materialistic goal of social success creates a ‘fetishism of money’ in him. He cuts right his path by slitting his master’s throat and absconding with the red bag of money.

Considering the theoretical views on anomie, the researcher identifies the anti-ideological shift in Halwai’s character and the attainment of his goal of social success through murder and theft as anomic behavior, and views *The White Tiger* as a commentary on the hierarchically set Indian socio-cultural milieu, and its likely threats. To substantiate the argument that the society in its attempt to condition an individual eventually constructs the individual, the researcher intends to interpret Adiga’s India and its characters using the theoretical concepts of anomie on both societal and individual levels.

The thesis is divided as follows:

Chapter 1. Introduction - A brief introduction along with a review of the existing literature on the primary text as well as the research methodology and its applications. A summary of *The White Tiger* is also provided here.

Chapter 2. India and *The White Tiger*: A Thematic Analysis – A reading of *The White Tiger* analysing its representation of the socio-political and cultural India of the twenty-first century. The chapter provides a critical analysis of the various themes and concerns dealt with in the text.

Chapter 3. Deviance and Anomie in *The White Tiger* – The chapter provides an analytical study of the instances of deviance and anomie in the textually represented society. The context, as well as the characters, are scrutinised interpreting them as anomic products of ideological conditioning to substantiate the stated argument.

Chapter 4. Conclusion

The heterogeneity of India reflects in every aspect of its life like its language, religion, caste and ethnicity. India had witnessed dramatic changes in its economic and social fronts, since the major economic reforms of the 1990s. The country is now perceived as an upcoming global player with its marked developments. However, the dark side of India's development exists as a flipside of the societal and economic structures like corruption, corporate fraud, communal violence, and crimes. Adiga's modern India is a society of bourgeois capitalism, corrupt politics, class and caste systems, exploitation and ideological positioning, which eventually give rise to resistance and crime.

The society that Adiga represents is one that is hegemonic and ideologically conditioned; a society in which money and name become the metaphors for power. Unbalanced economic structure and the hierarchical class and caste system extant in the society reinforce subjectivity and inequality in society ensuing anomie. The societal set-up that Adiga represents, as an image of contemporary India, can be viewed as the author's voicing of his resistance to the deformed state of the Indian polity. Through the text, the writer makes an attempt to forefront the harrowing realities of the blanketed parts of rural India. Instances of socio-economic inequality, injustices, class and caste divides and so on are seen recurring throughout the narrative making it a serious work of social criticism. The researcher finds the sociological theory of anomie as much explanatory in interpreting the socio-cultural milieu of *The White Tiger's* India. The text's representation of the sociopolitical and cultural scene of India, the various characters' responses to it, their behavioural patterns like their conformance or nonconformance to it, deviance and the element of crime are the major areas of scrutiny in the study. The present study is limited to a sociological reading of the text in an anomie theoretical perspective.

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Chapter 2

India and *The White Tiger*: A Thematic Analysis

The theme of India or the Indian identity is a well-conferred area in literature mostly in Indian Writing in English. *The White Tiger* is a pressing commentary on the socio-cultural and political India. It presents itself as an unravelling of the hidden darkness of India and as a voice of the underclass. As stated in the introductory chapter, the present chapter titled 'India and *The White Tiger*: A Thematic Analysis' is a reading of *The White Tiger* analyzing its representation of the socio-political and cultural India of the twenty-first century. This chapter intends to be a reading of the themes and concerns expressed in *The White Tiger*. The chapter is a discussion on the issues like society, system, hierarchy, culture, tradition, power, class and caste divide, resistance and crime. Among the stated objectives of the research, the present chapter will be analysing the images of contemporary India, its socio-political and cultural system and the survival status of its neglected masses as being caught up in the power politics of Indian societal set-up as represented in *The White Tiger*.

“The story of my upbringing is the story of how a half-baked fellow is produced” in India, writes Balram Halwai, the protagonist and the narrator of *The White Tiger* as he sets forth to narrate the story of the white tiger (Adiga 11). The white tiger in the story is Balram Halwai himself. The story he narrates is the story of his progressive journey from a downtrodden underdog evolving from one of the heaps in a fictional Indian village called Laxmangarh in Bihar to a successful business entrepreneur “who virtually run America”, operating from one the metropolis of India (Adiga 4). The story of Balram Halwai is unveiled through the seven epistles he writes to the Chinese Premiere Wen Jiabao, in the course of seven nights. The life of Balram Halwai unravels as his narrative progress through the seven letters. When the novel

opens, the narrator is a young man, one of the successful entrepreneurs operating from the IT hub of India, Bangalore. He claims to have assumed the responsibility of writing to the Premiere as he learns from the All India Radio that the Chinese Premiere is visiting India to know about entrepreneurship, and as he thinks “if anyone knows the truth about Bangalore”, it is he alone (Adiga 4). Thus, he sets to write to the desk of Wen Jiabao from his office in Bangalore, although he never sends the letters in the novel. He calls his account “the Autobiography of a Half-Baked Indian” (Adiga 10).

He begins his story scrutinizing a wanted poster that the police had posted all over, featuring him as a wanted murderer, intriguing the reader’s curiosity. The novel is framed as a first person narrative, where the reflective narrator takes the reader through the various episodes of his life. He takes the reader to his past, to his childhood, to his school and family in Laxmangarh, Bihar. The writer uses the technique of flashback to take the reader to the different stages of Balram’s life as he moves back and forth between his present and the past. As Anita Bhela in “The White Tiger: A Bakhtian Reading” writes:

In Adiga’s novel we are simultaneously presented with three levels of contemporary time: the immediate present - Balram writing the letters to the Chinese Premiere; the immediate past – the distributed references to sections of the wanted poster; and the not too distant past of Balram and his *bildungsroman* interspersed with episodes describing his life with Ashok sir and Pinky madam. The contemporaneity of events strikes the reader on every page of the novel (Bhela 162).

The reader sees him as a successful entrepreneur, as a wanted criminal, as an innocent and intelligent schoolboy and as a loyal servant to his master through the course of his loosely structured plot. Halwai himself frames it as the story of his journey from “a social entrepreneur to a business entrepreneur” (Adiga 299). From the bottom of the darkness in India, Halwai builds his road to success through misery and neglect to the capital centre of progressive India, New Delhi. As he journeys, his character transforms from an innocent, taintless boy to a tainted

and corrupt criminal. To make his journey progressive enough, he claims his master's life, name and money. He becomes a murderer, and a wanted criminal as he slits his master's throat and steals his money. Trying to position himself better in the social hierarchy, he lets his character fall, invoking in the reader the question whether the journey was in fact progressive. Krishna Singh writes in the article "Socio-linguistic Study of Kiran Desai's 'The Inheritance of Loss' and Aravind Adiga's 'The White Tiger'" in *Postmodern Indian English Fiction*:

Balram's journey from the darkness of village life to the light of entrepreneurial success is amoral altogether, brilliantly irreverent, deeply endearing and completely unforgettable. Balram is a typical voice of underclass metaphorically described as "rooster coop" (173) ... His anger, indulgence in criminal acts ... [and] grabbing all the opportunities and means fair or foul endorse deep-rooted frustration and its reaction against the 'haves'. (Singh 129)

Balram Halwai continues his growth to emerge as a wealthy and socially well-off entrepreneur in another part of the country. Further, being unable to satiate his insatiable desire for money and social success he decides to journey forward towards more wealth and success. As he moves forward, he abandons his past identity, his village, and his family and past links, exploring the well-lit glory of modern India.

The India that Balram Halwai talks about is a corrupted, miserable land with "half-baked cities built for half-baked men" (Adiga 53). It is the land of poverty, corruption, hunger, unemployment, illiteracy, slums, filth, crimes; precisely, a land of thugs and criminals. It is this tainted image of India which surfaces as the recurring motif of the novel around which the whole plot is built. The two contrasting images of the country the India of the rich and the India of the poor appear as the recurring motif in the text, the chasm between the rich and the poor being the major underlying theme. The other social issues like the power play, the rampant corruption prevalent in the socio-political scene, the unhealthy and filthy state of the villages are also matters of concern in the text. The stringent familial system, caste and class divide, the

oppression and exploitation of the poor by the rich, unemployment and the final resistance to it are too dealt with in the text as its other themes.

The Indian village that Halwai portrays is a land of misery, hunger, humiliation, indignities, exploitations, oppression and neglect. As seen through the eyes of the native narrator belonging to the darker side, Adiga paints before the reader a disturbing picture of the Indian villages and the poor lives the people live there. Halwai explains to Wen Jiabao:

I am talking of a place in India, at least a third of the country...Those who live in this place call it the Darkness. Please understand, Your Excellency, that 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 near the ocean is well-off. But the river brings darkness to India – the black river. (Adiga 14)

The ‘black river’ he refers to here is the Ganga. Adiga here is presenting a distorted image of the ‘holy’ river calling it a “river of death” (Adiga 15). He warns Wen Jiabao that a dip in this holy river can fill “your mouth full of faeces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and seven different kinds of industrial acids” (Adiga 15). Throughout the narrative, the Ganga stands as a symbol of contempt and disregard the narrator has for his land and its cultural values. Balram Halwai says:

...[the] river of Death, whose banks are full of rich, dark, sticky mud whose grip traps everything that is planted in it, suffocating and choking and stunting it...I am talking of Mother Ganga, daughter of the Vedas, river of illumination, protector of us all, breaker of the chain of birth and rebirth. Everywhere this river flows, that area is the Darkness. (Adiga 15)

Balram mocks at the mythical belief of the Ganga as “the protector” by calling it as the symbol of Death (Adiga 15). The religious rite of cremation at the banks of the holy river is also a matter worth scrutiny in the eyes of the scornful narrator here. As he details the grand

funeral of his mother to Jiabao explaining the ritualistic way in which her body was wrapped from head to toe in a saffron silk cloth and covered in rose petals and jasmine garlands, he says, her death was so grand though her life was miserable (Adiga 16). His words pose a critique on the cultural practice of India, which holds death as a grand event while life remains miserable.

Halwai further adds:

as the fire ate away the satin, a pale foot jerked out, like a living thing; the toes, which were melting in the heat, began to curl up, offering resistance to what was being done to them...it would not burn. My mother wasn't going to let them destroy her...I looked at the ooze, and I looked at my mother's flexed foot, and I understood...This mud was holding her back...She was trying to fight the black mud; her toes were flexed and resisting; but the mud was sucking her in... (Adiga 18)

Halwai projects the Ganga as the un-liberative force that holds everything back to it. Halwai overturns the mythical ideology of Ganga as the mother and the real God of Banaras. He laments that the black mud of Ganga is the ooze in which everything died and decomposed. He laments that nothing will ever get liberated from its black ooze (Adiga 18). Halwai finds the cultural values and beliefs as chains on liberty from which the people here have no escape. Reflective to the colonial history of the country he says India "has never been free" (Adiga 22). For him, the belief of India as a free land post its independence from the British is only a make-belief (Adiga 22). He finds the ideologies and mythical beliefs that form the conscious of India too as un-liberative. Balram mocks at the absurdities of the Indian minds on matters of religion and beliefs. The Stork corrects his grandson when he calls himself Azharuddin asking him to call himself Gavaskar as Azharuddin is a Muslim. The family's indifference to Pinky Madam was also because of her religion as Mukesh sir confesses to Ashok. Ram Persad's leaving of the house after Balram's exposing of his identity too was a matter of religion. The cultural chains over freedom are further commented upon with Halwai's allusion to the mythical story of Lord Hanuman. The Indian mythology hails Hanuman as the true embodiment of bhakti for

his self-less 'samarpan' to his Lords Sri Ram and Sita. However, in his social criticism Halwai overturns the mythical idea of 'samarpan', antithetically stating it as 'servitude'. His hostility towards the Indian cultural codes is evident as he introduces Hanuman to the Chinese as the "faithful servant of God Rama", his master. He explains; "we worship him in our temples because he is a shining example of how to serve your master with absolute fidelity, love and devotion" (Adiga 19). He laments that these are the kinds of beliefs the mythology has bred into them. Adiga here poses a vehement attack on the Indian tradition and mythical values of beliefs and customs.

Halwai, in his scrutiny of his society, finds the cultural set-up of his land itself an answerable factor for his destined life of slavery. Halwai's attack on culture and religion continues; no religion escapes his biting tongue as he says; "It is an ancient and venerated custom of people in my country to start a story by praying to a Higher Power...There are so many choices...the Muslims have one god.The Christians have three gods. And we Hindus have 36,000,004 divine ...for me to choose from" (Adiga 8). Nonetheless, Adiga's attack on religion has touched the sentiments of the critics like Sudhir K. Arora. Dr.Arora finds Adiga's exposition as an exposing of his "mindset" which is "certainly not religious", "if not anti-religious"('Arora 168).

In his avatar as the "social entrepreneur", Halwai unveils before the readers a harrowing picture of his village which, he says, is "a third of the country" (Adiga 299,14). Calling Laxmangarh a "typical Indian village paradise", he writes; "Ha! Electricity poles – defunct. Water tap – broken. Children- too lean and short for their age, and with over-sized heads from which vivid eyes shine, like the guilty conscience of the government of India. Yes, a typical Indian village paradise, Mr. Jiaboa" (Adiga 20). A direct attack on the administrative debasement of the country is to be identified here. He further adds drawing a reeking scene of the village's filthy unhygienic state:

There is a small branch of the Ganga that flows just outside Laxmangarh; boats come down from the world outside... There is one street in the village; a bright strip of sewage splits it into two. On either side of the ooze, a market: three or more less identical shops selling more or less identically adulterated and stale items of rice, cooking oil, kerosene, biscuits, cigarettes and jaggery...Down the middle of the main road, families of pigs are sniffing through sewage ... (Adiga 19- 20).

Further, “if the Indian village is a paradise”, the village school for Halwai “is a paradise within a paradise” with its walls decorated by the expectorate of the pan eating teacher who tactfully steals the funds meant for the children’s uniforms and mid-day meals (Adiga 32). However, for none of the villagers was the schoolteacher blameworthy because they felt that the schoolteacher had a legitimate excuse to justify his theft. The man was not paid his salary for six months. Halwai comments; “you can’t expect a man in a dung heap to smell sweet” (Adiga 33). The dung heap that Balram and his fellow villagers live is a place where no rights or wrongs exist but only survival matters.

The village hospital is not only a scene of misery and pain but also a seat of unrestrained corruption. Halwai presents before his reader a poignant picture of the government hospital while narrating the death of his father. As there was no hospital in Laxmangarh except for the three foundation stones for hospitals ceremoniously laid by “three different politicians before three different elections” they take the dying father to the government hospital crossing the river (Adiga 47). However, the government hospital had no doctor to treat his father. Exposing the extent of corruption and power play rampant in the sector Halwai draws a shocking picture of a filthy government hospital in the rural villages of India. An exposing of the corrupt and malfunctioning polity here can be seen as Halwai says that there were only three different foundation stones laid by three different politicians in the place of hospitals in his village, and sketches the unhygienic condition of the one they had in the neighboring village. Though the country has a multitude of policies and programmes meant for the poor, the reachability of these

aids to the deserving is questionable, thanks to the malfunctioning and corrupt system here (Adiga 47). He quotes as was told by one of the patients:

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 let 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... There's good money in public service. (Adiga 49)

The rampant rottenness and corruption engulfing the nation are a major area of attack in Adiga's narrative. The debased socio-political and cultural scene of India - amidst its much-pronounced advancements and growth - to which only the poor falls prey seems to be the writer's concern here, which he condemns through the sarcastic tongue of Balram Halwai. The themes of corruption and exploitation continue to be the topics of discussion in Halwai's letters as he details to the reader the whole process called 'an election' in India, the largest democracy.

The education that Halwai got from the roads and pavements make him understand the idea of democracy as the "awe-inspiring spectacle of one billion people casting their votes to determine their future, in full freedom of franchise, and so on..." (Adiga 95). He learns that every citizen of India, who is eighteen years of age, has a right to vote as India is a democracy. Thus, being a citizen of India, he too gets a chance to vote, as the officials themselves declare him as eighteen years of age, old enough to cast his vote. He mocks at the hollowness of the whole system called democracy as he says that he owes democracy even his birthday as the authority itself declared him eighteen, on an election day (Adiga 97). The powerful political parties themselves declare a person to have reached the legal age to vote and buy his vote to favour them, consciously leaving the respected system unharmed. Balram calls this the marvels of democracy in India. He adds his pun; "...we may not have sewage, drinking water, and Olympic Gold medals, but we do have democracy" (Adiga 96). Exposing the extent of corruption and crime prevalent in the political front of India, Halwai sarcastically calls himself

the most faithful voter of India who still has not even seen the inside of a voting booth (Adiga 102).

Narrating the experience of the poor rickshaw puller who wanted to cast his vote on the day of election only to get himself stamped back to the earth eventually, Halwai manifests to the reader that democracy in India is only superficial (Adiga 101-02). He records his father's words; "I've seen twelve elections – five generals, five states, two locals – and someone else has voted for me twelve times. I've heard that people in the other India get to vote for themselves – isn't that something?" (Adiga 100). In Halwai's satiric tongue; "like eunuchs discussing the Kama Sutra, the voters discuss the elections in Laxmangarh" (Adiga 98). The 'Great Socialist' who keeps himself win elections after elections democratically, seems to have some ninety-three criminal cases to his credit with charges against offences like grand larceny, gun-smuggling, pimping, murder, rape and so on (Adiga 97). Nevertheless, the Great Socialist rules over Laxmangarh.

Portraying India as a land of two countries in one; "an India of light and an India of Darkness", Adiga has painted the survival status of the exploited and oppressed poor at the hand of the rich (Adiga 14). The poor gets looted off their health, wealth, rights, body and even their souls by the rich. As Halwai puts it; "the masters still own us, body, soul and ..." (Adiga 170). Inaccessible to any rights they live being the victims of exploitation by the rich. The poor remains poor falling themselves prey to the greed of the landlords. The village women even fall victims to the lust of the rich landlords. As the landlords owned the whole of the village - the rivers, the land, the hillside and the roads, and "fed on the village" "there was nothing left for anyone to feed on" (Adiga 26). Unemployment and misery migrate the poor villagers to some better towns in search of work and some money:

[they] went to Gaya; there they went to the station and rushed into the trains – packing the inside, hanging from the railings, climbing onto the roofs – and went to Delhi, Calcutta and Dhanbad to find work. (Adiga 26)

A month before the rains, the men came back from Dhanbad and Delhi and Calcutta, leaner, darker, angrier, but with money in their pockets. The women were waiting for them...as soon as the men walked in, they pounced, like Wildcats on a slab of flesh. There were fighting and wailing and shrieking. (Adiga 26)

For the village women, the water buffalo was the only source of income and “all their hopes were concentrated in her fatness...If she gave enough milk, the women could sell some of it, and there might be a little money at the end of the day” (Adiga 20). The writer uses the image of “water buffalo” as the symbol of unemployment and misery in the village as he says; “she was the dictator of our house” (Adiga 20). The poor villagers are left with nothing but poverty and hunger as being always subjugated to exploitation. The only resistance the poor villagers were capable of was naming the exploitative landlords as animals - The Buffalo, The Stork, The Wild Boar and The Raven based on the level of exploitation they enforce on the villagers (Adiga 24, 25).

As seen through the eyes of the native narrator belonging to the darker side, Adiga unveils before the reader a shocking picture of the often neglected Indian villages and the harrowing lives the inhabitants live there. Posed against the highly sophisticated luxuries of development, prosperity and glory of the rich India, are presented the sewage sunk stinking village of misery, pain and hunger of the poor India. The dark India as being just a spectator and not a participant in the country’s march to progress stays deprived of a healthy life. A disturbing picture of a typical Indian village life of unemployment, poverty and hunger can be seen in Halwai’s sketching of his father’s physique:

A rich man’s body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. Ours are different. My father’s spine was a knotted rope ... the clavicle curved around his neck in high relief, like a dog’s collar; cuts and nicks and scars, like little whip marks in his flesh, ran down his chest and waist, reaching down below his hipbones into his buttocks. The story of a poor man’s life is written on his body, in a sharp pen. (Adiga 27)

As Halwai tries to highlight, survival of this strata often gets veiled behind the much-illuminated screen of development and prosperity that the country projects. Halwai explains to Wen Jiabao; “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”(Adiga 15). This unlighted face of India- the poor India, is the face forefronted in Adiga’s representation in *The White Tiger*, which appears as a paradox to the highly illumined glorious India. Halwai writes:

Thousands of people live on the sides of the road in Delhi. They have come from the Darkness too – you can tell by their bodies, filthy faces, by the animal-like way they live under the huge bridges and overpasses, making fires and washing and taking lice out of their hair while the car roar past them. These homeless people... (Adiga 119-20)

These poor...had come from the Darkness to Delhi to find some light but they were still in the darkness. (Adiga 138)

To live under some concrete bridge, begging for their food, and without hope for the future. That’s not much better than being dead (Adiga 314-15).

By picking up a man of meagre birth from the bottom of the heap from a deep dark Indian village and critiquing India through his eyes, Adiga brilliantly attacks the socio-cultural practices of India and its set-up. Its practice of the caste and class divide is a serious concern in Adiga’s agenda. Caste and class have always been a factor of discrimination in any given society. In his portrayal of the distorted other India, discussions on caste and class systems hold a larger space. Adiga’s protagonist Balram or Munna is a Halwai. As he explains to Wen Jiabao, the word Halwai means sweet maker, and that is his caste, his “destiny”. His caste is always a source of torment and oppression for Balram Halwai. He gives an instance of being questioned about his caste when he goes to learn to drive; “What caste are you?”. “‘Halwai’. ‘Sweet-makers’, ... ‘That’s what you people do. You make sweets. How can you learn to drive?’... 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?" (Adiga 56). The discovery of the driver that only Muslims, Rajputs and Sikhs can drive may sound melodramatic for the reader. However, Adiga makes his attack clear to the reader. The transformation of the character Balram Halwai to Ashok Sharma through his 'entrepreneurial act' of murder and theft extends a sharp sting at the class system of India, which positions the society in its hierarchical ladder based on monetary wealth and social status. The character conductor Vijay stands as a major symbol of the class system and its associated power play in the text, as he tactfully keeps shifting his position in the ladder.

Conductor Vijay is a pig herd's son, as Halwai describes; "the lowest of the low" in caste (Adiga 31). Nevertheless, as the narrative moves further, Balram witnesses the high caste landlord the stork bowing before Vijay, the son of the pig herd, the lowest of all the castes. Halwai calls this "the marvels of democracy!" (Adiga 103). Further, the scenes of class and caste hierarchy between the masters and Balram in the text, are seen shifting to a scene of power difference between the Great Socialist and the landlords as the landlords take up a slavish stance in front of the politician. Balram finds himself relaxed as the Great Socialist humiliates Mr. Mukesh. He says "that was the positive side of the Great Socialist. He humiliated all our masters..." (Adiga 105). Balram seems to be enjoying this shift in power of his masters - from the oppressive landlords towering over the poor to the slavish subservient underdogs crouching before the Great Socialist. The shift in power play is also one of the themes of the novel which plays a crucial role in moulding the character of Balram Halwai. The image of the shadow of an eagle that flies past him as he falls to the ground weak is also symbolic of the power play that works in the narrative, wherein the powerful overpowers the weak. Halwai thus resorts to make a shift in the power structure of his life too. Halwai finds the Black Fort that remains headstrong in Laxmangarh as a strong reminiscent of its people's oppressive state. For Balram freedom in free India is only an illusion, especially for the downtrodden. He writes; "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 moron would think that we became free then” (Adiga 22). Halwai conquers the black fort eventually as an initiation of his resistance to servitude; as an attempt to make a shift in the power structure of his life.

The major crux of the novel around which the whole plot is built is the transformation in the character of Balram Halwai. The character grows from an innocent and intelligent schoolboy Munna -who gets praised as the white tiger that comes just once in a generation by an inspector who visits his school - through Balram Halwai, a curious but loyal servant to his master Ashok, and then to a plotting murderous criminal and finally to a successful entrepreneur operating from one of the metropolis of India. The two important themes that the writer has dealt with in projecting the two contradictory images of the country; the India of the rich and the India of the poor, are the themes of oppression and crime. The criminal behavior in the character of Balram can also be seen as a resultant outcome of the oppressive nature of the socio-cultural India, which possesses a threat in itself which the writer too wanted to convey deliberately. Halwai writes laying bear the status of the poor in India to Wen Jiabao:

Me, and thousands of others in this country like me, are half-baked because we were never allowed to complete our schooling. Open our skulls, look in with a penlight, and you’ll find an odd museum of ideas: sentences of history or mathematics remembered from school textbooks...sentences of politics read in a newspaper...triangles and pyramids seen on torn pages of the old geometry textbooks...bits of All India Radio news bulletin...all these ideas, half-formed and half-digested and half correct, mix up with other half cooked ideas in your head, and I guess these half-formed ideas bugger one another and make more half-formed ideas, and this is what you act on and live with. (Adiga 10-11)

Balram Halwai suffers humiliation at the hands of his masters because of his low status, education and language. During one of his journeys with Pinky Madam and Ashok sir, Ashok

questions him to test his knowledge of his country. Balram's answers make Pinky Madam "giggle" while Ashok sir seriously comments; "... he's half-baked. The country is full of people like him ... And we entrust our glorious parliamentary democracy ... to characters like these. This is the whole tragedy of this country" (Adiga 10). Further, Adiga makes an attack on the belief of possessing a knowledge of English as having an edge over the others who don't possess the knowledge of it. Pinky Madam and Ashok mocks at Balram as he mispronounces the word "pizza". His sense of pain and humiliation is to be seen in his continuous effort of trying to correct himself repeating the word to himself (Adiga 155). Lamenting on his life of servitude he writes:

A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 percent – as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way – to exist in perpetual servitude; a 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... . (Adiga 176)

Halwai believes that they remain slaves because they fail to understand what a good life is as the idea of perpetual servitude has been so ideologically imbibed onto their consciousness. He compares the Indian society to a "Rooster Coop" where hens and coloured roosters struggle under wire meshed cages. He writes to Jiabao:

...hundreds of pale hens and brightly coloured roosters [are] 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... 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. (Adiga 174)

He finds family and kinship as the institutions tying one back in the coop: "the Indian family is the reason [why] we are trapped and tied to the coop" (Adiga 176). On the repressive

nature of the rich over the poor, he says; "...only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed – hunted, beaten and burned alive by the masters – can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature" (Adiga 176-7). However, Halwai identifying himself as a 'white tiger', the rare species, resorts to breaking himself out of the coop leaving his family behind to its fate. He slit's Mr. Ashok's throat and makes a shift in the power hierarchy of his life. He liberates himself and asserts his power over his master's corpse:

...here's a strange fact: murder a man, and you feel responsible for his life – possessive, even. You know more about him than his father and mother; they knew his foetus, but you know his corpse. Only you can complete the story of his life; only you know why his body has to be pushed into the fire before its time, and why his toes curl up and fight for another hour on earth. (Adiga 47)

Halwai makes a reversal of power by becoming his master's master and protector by taking his life; "I protected his good name when I was his master, and now that I am (in a sense) his master, I won't stop protecting his good name" (Adiga 47). Analysing the socio-political set-up of his society, Halwai writes: "To sum up – in 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. And only two destinies: eat – or get eaten up" (Adiga 64). He resorts to grow a belly of his own (Adiga 196). Thus, Halwai resorts to redemption; posing himself as "a social entrepreneur", he finds it his prerogative to bring in a change to his world. He says:

"...history of the world is the history of a ten-thousand-year war of brains between the rich and the poor...The poor win a few battle (the peeing in the potted plants, the kicking of the pet dogs, etc.) but of course, the rich have won the war for ten thousand years. That's why, one day, some wise out of compassion for the poor, left them signs and symbols in poems...[which] when understood correctly spill out secrets that allow the

poorest man on earth to conclude the ten-thousand-year-old brain-war on terms favourable to himself". (Adiga 254)

He steals Mr.Ashok's red bag of money and flees to the bright India to set-up a life of his own. He claims; "I've made it! I've broken out of the coop" (Adiga 320). From his experience of the inhuman society that he inhabits, he calls for a revolution:

Every man must make his own Benares.

The book of your revolution sits in the pit of your belly, young Indian. Crap it out, and read. (Adiga 304)

Clad as a social and political critic of India in his narrative endeavour, Balram Halwai makes a sharp and striking attack on the socio-political and cultural sphere of India. The society that Balram Halwai projects is a territory of heterogeneity with a variety of myths, beliefs and ideologies ruling on one side, and hypocrisy, corruption and lawlessness ruling in the other. The inhabitants here are the helpless victims who find themselves being caught up in a Darwinian struggle for existence in the midst of the conventionalities and lawlessness of the country. As stated earlier, the society that Halwai talks about is two societies in one: An India of the rich and the India of the poor. The rich India that Halwai projects is a land of wealth, corruption, hypocrisy and dominance. The inhabitants here are the ruthless and domineering rich who hold the control of the territory with power and money. The other India to which Halwai too belongs stays distanced from the ornamental face of the country. It remains as the unliberated India striving under the colonial rule of the elite. In the darkness, the democratic idea of the right to decide upon one's existence for every citizen exists as nothing but another way of exploitation and repression. Contrasting the two Indias, he says: "...city has its share of thugs and politicians ... here if a man wants to be good, he can be good. In Laxmangarh, he doesn't even have this choice. That is the difference between this India and that India: the choice" (Adiga 306).

The social structure here is problematic as far as it fails to live up to its promise of equal opportunity. In a caste and class based society like India providing equal opportunity to all members of the hierarchical tree remains a problematic affair. Uneven distribution of opportunities and unequal accessibility to socio-cultural standards remain a major issue in Halwai's projected India. Uma Mahadevan –Dasgupta comments; the voice of the Dark India is “intelligent, savagely funny, and quite unforgettable it is also a voice of anger and protest, and it is almost completely unsentimental. It is a voice that seeks out and understands the power of beauty” (qtd. in Singh, “Politico-social” 203). *The White Tiger* poses itself as a serious warning on the societal upheaval that can evolve out of the ‘other India’ through its projection of the villainous anti-hero Balram Halwai and its careful selection of themes.

The language used in the narrative is sarcastic, contemptuous and scornful with poignant and humorous overtones. Diction is simple and vivacious but vulgar. The incorrect use of language especially phrasal verbs like ‘the teacher had passed out’ (Adiga 36), “...the plastic chairs put out for the customers...”, “...father put down his teacup...” (24), and the incorrect use of the tense and verbs like “...he were proud...” (261), “...the zoo were...” (275), “...the policeman would came...” (23) and so on make the narrative limping at times. Even though the narrator claims himself to be self-educated and half-baked, the many errors that surface, impair the syntax of the narrative. The repetitive use of images and phrases to highlight its significance in the plot like “the rooster coop” (Adiga 253) image, “the black fort” (267) and the phrase “I was looking for the key for years...but the door was always open” (275) and the imitative nature of the central character – like his love for chandeliers and his hanging of one in his bathroom like the way the stork wished for– are noteworthy. The style is exaggerated and at times melodramatic like Mukesh's raking over a lost one-rupee coin after having bribed a considerable amount to a politician and the distribution of mutton biriyani in paper plates in front of the temple (Adiga 100). The narrative style is reflective and techniques postmodern with a fragmented and loose narrative structure. The various metanarratives on the

contemporary socio-political and cultural issues incorporated into the narrative also make it a serious work of postmodern fiction with its fragmented narrative structure, depicting of chaos and its play within the chaos with a utilitarian protagonist who makes the best use of his situation for his personal feed.

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Chapter 3

Deviance and Anomie in *The White Tiger*

Anomie has long been a conceptual tool to understand the relationship between social structure, culture and deviant behavior. The conceptual roots of anomie can be traced back to the 1893 book of Emile Durkheim *The Division of Labour in Society*. Durkheim conceived anomie as a behavioral trait which evolves in a person as a consequent outcome of the limitless aspirations evolving in him when there exists a lack of sufficient regulatory norms to harness those boundless desires in the society that he inhabits. Precisely, for Durkheim anomie ensued due to normlessness or a lack of restraint to control the presumptuous aspirations and greed. The theory in its later stages underwent severe changes as in the hands of Robert Merton, Cohen and others. When Durkheim conceived anomie as a social condition of normlessness resulting from a lack of restraint on man's vaulting ambition, Merton hit it as a social phenomenon of conditioning and its effects on the individuals, patterning their behaviour. Merton studied "how some social structure exerts a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in nonconforming rather than conforming conduct"(Merton 672). Robert Merton in his approach focused more on the social order than on the individual and stressed the importance of normative structure in determining individual responses. Merton studied the individuals and their behavioural patterns as the resultant outcome of the normative structure of the society that they inhabit. As stated in the introductory chapter the methodology used in this research is the classical sociological theory of anomie.

The research accounting for its thesis statement, '*The White Tiger* is a commentary on the often veiled absurdities of the Indian socio-cultural set-up, and its likely threats' makes a thorough reading of 'the India' (dark and light), that Halwai paints through his letters. A critical scrutiny of his letters and his thought process revealed through his fragmented narrative makes

the researcher identify traits of anomie in them. A close reading of the projected society through the themes of corruption, crimes, power play, class divide, free will and so on make the researcher find the society as anomic. Thus, the researcher adopts the theory of anomie laid down by Emile Durkheim in the reading of Balram Halwai's India or 'the two Indias'. The researcher, in a Durkheimian sense, identifies the society as lawless and as a situation or condition in which there exist no normative constraints to restrain the limitless aspirations of the people who inhabits the society. Further, accounting for the research objective of analysing how the socio-cultural factors affect an individual and how the individual tackles these conditions, the researcher finds Mertonian analysis appropriate. Merton's theory performs a thorough reading of the behavioural traits of individuals. He states anomie as a social phenomenon where an individual's behavioural patterns are moulded in response to the societal pressures the person undergoes regarding the achieving of the cultural goals of monetary gain, material wealth, social status, power and so on. Considering the heterogeneity of every society, he postulates the different types of anomic behavior that can be traced in individuals, developed as a response to the societal pressures that they undergo. Hence in achieving a critical understanding of the characters, accounting for the third objective, the researcher finds Mertonian analysis more explanatory.

When toured through the autobiographical notes of Halwai, the reader encounters the various characters in Adiga's assemblage. The three major social groupings that can be identified in Adiga's collection are the poor working class, the elite landlords and the corrupt politicians. Each group holds a different ideology and exercises some form of conformity and non-conformity to it. Any variant behavior that does not conform to the accepted norms or any discordance to the set social values and systems is termed social deviance. Deviance can be problematic or unproblematic. The deviance can either be just a harmless abandoning of the rules and being with one's self, or it can be a rejection of the set codes by resisting and revolting against it or acting against it. As a result of the ideological conditioning, the individual becomes

the product of his/her society acting in response to the values or codes imbibed onto his consciousness. However, as every individual is unique the behavioral patterns too vary accordingly. Hence, the social conditioning too can have varied results. If a person tends to consider a different set of ideas for him other than the attributed behavioral codes, there arises a deviation from the normal stream. Interpreting through the theoretical framework of anomie, the researcher identifies various forms of social deviance in the characters. Nevertheless, since the writer is invisible in the text and is presented in the first person narrative as seen through the eyes of Balram Halwai, elements of subjectivity can be found in the analysis of the characters and the context.

As discussed in the previous chapter '*The White Tiger: A Thematic Analysis*', the society that Balram Halwai inhabits is a flawed one which possesses a duality in itself: an India of Light and an India of Darkness. The vast chasm that exists between the polarities of the rich and the marginalized poor complicates its structural construct. The space of India where the domineering elites rule over is a land of luxury, comfort, plenitude, modernity and its many amenities. Precisely, this is the land which Balram calls, the India of light. As Halwai writes, this image of India is the one the country so fondly projects to his visitors while abandoning the not too adorable flip side of it. He writes to Jiabao:

Remember, Mr. Premiere, that Delhi is the capital of not one but two countries – two Indias. The Light and the Darkness both flow into Delhi. Gurgaon, where Mr. Ashok lived, is the bright, modern end of the city, and this place, Old Delhi, is the other end. Full of other things that the modern world forgot all about – rickshaws, old stone buildings, and Muslims. (Adiga 251)

However, diving deep into the land as “a thinking man” Halwai identifies darkness there too. At the surface level, the narrative seems to be referring to the rich and the poor Indias as the light and the dark. But, Halwai finds the Darwinian struggle for existence reappearing in the world of the rich too. While the poor strive to satisfy their hunger the rich struggle to satiate

their greed. The narrative's theme of widespread corruption in the socio-political scene of India is an exposing of the anomic or normless state of it. The struggle of the landlords being caught up in the labyrinth of power politics of India, which, in a way eventually led to the death of Mr. Ashok, is an exposing of their insatiable desire for money and wealth. They are emotionally distraught in their struggle, and deprived of any happiness, but they keep themselves moving with an insatiable fetishism for money. To seek escape from income tax they bribe the politicians huge sums of money and other comforts. Tired of the power politics of India; Mr. Ashok says "I hate doing that...The business I'm in ...it's a bad one" (Adiga 210). Lamenting on his own corrupt and fallen life Mr. Ashok comments; "We're driving past Gandhi, after just having given a bribe to a minister. It is a ...joke – our political system" (Adiga 137). Halwai's analysis exposes the image of Delhi as the site of corruption, bribery and lawlessness with a 'rotten' law and order system as against the projected image of it as "the capital of our glorious nation...the pride of our civic planning" and "the showcase of the Republic" (Adiga 118). As he narrates, he drives the reader pass the statue of Gandhi making a hint at the promised state of the nation and the present state of it. The image of Gandhi appears as a paradox to the democratic claims of the country and the undemocratic state of it.

Halwai's sarcastic tongue mocks at the idea of India as the largest democracy. Halwai unmasks the hypocrisies of the corrupt and shameless politicians of Delhi and tries to expose the extent of unfair play masked under the veil of democracy in India. Halwai learns money and power as the governing authorities in his land. The system gets degraded to nothing but a mockery of the noble idea of democracy. He mocks; "– in 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. And only two destinies: eat – or get eaten up" (Adiga 64). He later adds; "Many of my best ideas are, in fact, borrowed from my ex-employer or his brother or someone else whom I was driving about. (I confess, Mr. Premier: I am not an original thinker but an original listener.)" (Adiga 47). Listening to the voice of Delhi, the seat of the glory of

India, he understands it as an unconstrained world which works in two ways, as a two folded world. He chooses his best; the world of total dishonesty and treachery, which eventually proved to be an enriching experience for him.

Halwai identifies power as a license for crime in his land. The wealthy landlords portrayed in *The White Tiger* are the epitomes of corruption and crime. Placing them as involved in the illegal business of coal mining and by exposing the huge sums going in and out in bribe, Adiga portrays the unrestrained lawless condition of socio-political India. During his servile life under Mr. Ashok in Delhi, he learns the politics of India and its world of corruption, bribery, prostitution and so on. Halwai identifies his country as a poor and ‘faltering nation’ tumoured with corruption, inequality, marginalization and exploitation which all arise to a large extent from an uneven and imbalanced socio-cultural system, ruling over democracy. He identifies money, wealth, social status and power as the governing factors in his land. He finds himself amused at the sight of the landlords bowing before the pig herd’s son Conductor Vijay and holding the spittoon for the Great Socialist. As the fruits of monetary wealth and social success gain prominence law, order and moral codes fade to insignificance. When the rich, through crime and lawlessness ascends the ladder of wealth and power, Halwai finds the poor dumping themselves more into the filth of misery and darkness. The ideological chains of caste and class create barriers to the upward mobility of the marginalised. Halwai writes to the Chinese Premiere:

You’ll have to come here to see it for yourself to believe it. Every day millions wake up at dawn – stand in dirty, crowded buses – get off at their masters’ posh houses – and then clean the floors, wash the dishes, weed the garden, feed their children, press their feet – all for a pittance. (Adiga 176)

Expressing his hostility towards the inhuman fabric of the society he urges the society to let humans live like human beings. He feels the rich-poor divide in his country too vast and the notion of democracy in India as only superficial. He finds the elite as having one set of rules

and ideologies for themselves while forcing in another set of ideologies on the poor; in an Althusserian way, the ruling class ideology becoming the ruling ideology. Through the institutions of family, religion and law the ruling class enforce their rule on the poor, mocking at the notion called democracy. Thus poor get themselves interpellated into the ruling ideology of the elite class which Halwai tries to convey through the myth of Lord Hanuman. The illiterate poor even remain ignorant of their rights as the citizens of the country under the imperial rule of the powerful rich. He finds the society of India as a zoo where all the cages are opened replacing the zoo law with a jungle law. The ferocious and the hungriest lot get to eat up the weak as the landlords feasting on the weak villagers. Halwai rules out the belief of India as a free land (Adiga 40).

Through the arrogance and ignorance of Halwai's grandmother Kusum, Adiga portrays a typical rural Indian woman who follows the elite ideologies of destined servitude and misery for the poor at the expense of destroying the lives and dreams of her family and children. 'Idealised' by the ideologies she denies education for the children of her family, restricts any upward mobility for them and pushes them into servitude making her children "human beasts of burden" (Adiga 27). She believes servitude as the only destiny for her family. As Halwai quoting his favourite poet, poet Iqbal, says the poor remains poor living their lives of slavery because they have never seen what a good life is (Adiga 40). Interestingly, on the other hand, the rich master Mr. Mukesh Sir calls Kusum "a remarkable woman". Halwai laments that servitude as their destiny being so ideologically imbibed onto their consciousness, they remain incapable to "even begin to understand what a good life is" (Adiga 176). Halwai details to Wen Jiabao about the 'Murder Weekly' that the government issues, as a means of conditioning the people, with its examples of crimes and the punishments. He assures Wen Jiabao that if he finds his driver reading the 'Murder Weekly' he doesn't have anything to worry about as it talks about the scary consequences of any murder which keeps the person from any crimes. But, if the driver is reading Gandhi or Buddha, he warns the Premiere that he should be worried, as it

can enlighten the person, understand his condition and awakens him to a revolution, standing up for his right. Halwai finds the issuing of the weekly as the tactics that the upper hierarchy employs on the weak through the narratives of oppression and repression to ensure their safe play of power because, he says, they sell the weekly for such cheap rate that the poor can consume it (Adiga 126).

Furthermore; though a melodramatic picturisation, Halwai talks about Mr. Mukesh's raking over a lost one rupee coin while on his drive back home from a corrupt politician's abode after pleasing the man with half a million rupees for his business of coal mining (Adiga 138). Suspecting Balram of having taken his one rupee he tries to moralise Balram while standing stained with a much serious crime. Though the instance appears rather operatic for the reader, Adiga here tries to forefront the power dichotomy between the rich and the poor. For the rich master Mukesh, the theft of a one-rupee coin by a servant is a serious deviance from the notions of ideal servitude, which cannot be tolerated. As Halwai quotes the words of Mr. Mukesh to Mr. Ashok; "that's how you corrupt servants. It starts with one rupee" (Adiga 139). He further threatens Balram of the watchful cameras in Delhi and urges him to be honest while himself staying corrupted with anti-social deeds. He reminds Balram that he is no longer in the darkness but under the bright lights of Delhi with its strict codes of law. He warns Balram of the watchful cameras stuck inside the eyes of the statues of Gandhi and Nehru which keep its watch on him (Adiga 141).

He further gives Balram lessons on being an ideal driver: "the air conditioner should be turned off when you are on your own'... 'Music should not be played when you are on your own'... 'At the end of each day you must give us a reading of the meter to make sure you haven't been driving the car on your own'" (Adiga 141). Ironically, after a few pages in the novel we see Balram breaking all these rules to follow his own codes of existence. In the case of Balram Halwai, a brooding on his life of servitude and humiliation makes him enlightened of his own social position and oppressed status. Contemplating on the ideologically

bred nature of servitude in him which found its exposure in serving his master Mr. Ashok, Halwai writes:

The way I had rushed to press Mr.Ashok's feet, the moment I saw them, even though he hadn't asked me to! Why did I feel that I had to go close to his feet, touch them and press them and make them feel good – why? Because the desire to be a servant had been bred into me: hammered into my skull, nail after nail, and poured into my blood, the way sewage and industrial poison are poured into Mother Ganga. (Adiga 193)

Realising the need of resistance he decides to break off; “No, I said” (Adiga 193). As he remembers his father's slavish life; “My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine - at least one- should live like a man” (Adiga 30), and also the curling up of his dead mother's toes in the pyre fighting against the black mud, Balram resorts to deviate from his ideologically doomed servitude. As Halwai justifies himself a few pages later:

...I'll never say I made a mistake that night in Delhi when I slit my master's throat.

I'll say it was all worthwhile to know, just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant. (Adiga 321)

These words strongly expose the internal conflict of the character as being mazed within the duality of the country of luxury and hunger. The perpetual servitude bestowed on him; and his rage against it, ensued in him the anomic quest to feel a better day in life. His craving for a better day made him adopt the similar means to richness which his masters too undertook- cheating, corruption and debauchery. He says; “the strangest thing was that each time I looked at the cash I had made by cheating him, instead of guilt, what did I feel? Rage. The more I stole from him, the more I realized how much he had stolen from me...I was growing a belly at last.” (Adiga 230). Eventually, he reaches the status of claiming himself as his master, “I am my own master” (Adiga 231).

Deviation can take many forms. It can either be a silent abandoning of the unhealthy social conventions or can be a problematic social condition as in the case of Balram Halwai. Halwai's story as he narrates "...is the tale of how [he] was corrupted from a sweet, innocent village fool into a citified fellow of debauchery, depravity, and wickedness" (Adiga 197). A problematic deviance from the accepted norms amounts to an amoral, anti-social and anti-legal action. The first outbreak of Halwai's deviance is seen in his attempt to conquest the Black Fort. During his life of servitude under Mr. Ashok's family he returns to the Black Fort to make an attempt to conquer the Black Fort:

I ... entered the Black Fort for the first time...Putting my foot on the wall, I looked down on the village from there. My little Laxmangarh... I leaned out from the edge of the fort in the direction of my village – and then...I spat. Again and again.

Eight months later, I slit Mr. Ashok's throat. (Adiga 42)

He thus initiates a power shift by spitting at slavery and liberating himself; "I am my own master" (Adiga 231). Balram views the Black Fort as a symbol of their destined slavery which was a haunting scene for him since his childhood. However, about him, he says: "Even as a boy I could see what was beautiful in the world: I was destined not to stay a slave" (Adiga 41). Interestingly, the way he chose to tackle his issues of poverty and servitude was through murder and theft. Balram attributes his deviance in behavior to his master Mr. Ashok:

All these changes happened in me because these first happened in Mr. Ashok. He returned from America as an innocent man, but life in Delhi corrupted him – and once the master...becomes corrupted, how can the driver stay innocent? (Adiga 197)

Moreover, he positions the corrupted political society of India accountable for Mr. Ashok's anti-social moves; "they corrupted him", as he identifies a shift in the attitude of Mr. Ashok henceforth his return from America to India (Adiga 217). Halwai sees the duality in

Ashok's character as a product of his familial background of the ruling class and also of his association with the corrupted society.

Social conditioning can mould people in both problematic and unproblematic ways too. As every individual is unique, the behavioural patterns too vary accordingly. Not everyone turns to deviance or turn as rebels taking cues from their socio-political or cultural conditions. When the society attempts to condition its people the resultant behaviour can be in a conformant fashion or in a non-conformant manner. According to Robert Merton's influential essay, *Social Structure and Anomie*, the root of deviance lies in the culture and structure of that society. Structural and cultural variables affect rates of deviance in an 'interactive' manner. For Merton, anomie is caused by the imbalance that results when cultural goals are overemphasized at the expense of institutionalized means. On a structural level, Merton's notion of anomie ensues from the uneven distribution of opportunities throughout the social structure. Due to the unequal and hierarchical structure in society, equal accessibility to the values remains a myth. Nevertheless, in a heterogeneous society, not every individual can respond to his society in a similar manner. When the emphasis on the cultural goals increases and the means to achieve them are not equally shared there arises an anomic pressure in some individuals. The pressure leads to the rejection of the set norms and conventions of the society, and the attainment of the cultural goals and social success, which results in a social deviance.

Balram Halwai in his avatar as a social and political critic of India finds the Indian society as open to individual success in spite of its numerous cultural barricades. He finds individual success as largely an outcome of monetary success. From his scrutiny of the Indian society, he learns monetary success as the channel to social success. Halwai, identifying a state of lawlessness in India, says: "My country is the kind where it pays to play both ways: The Indian entrepreneur has to be straight and crooked, mocking and believing, sly and sincere, at the same time" (Adiga 9). A vaulting ambition for individual success and social position appears to be the root of criminality in Balram Halwai's character. For him, "to break the law

of his land – to turn bad news into good news – is the entrepreneur’s prerogative” (Adiga 38). Here, for Halwai, his success goals appear more significant as the normative means loses its importance. This results in a situation of anomie or normlessness ensuing in him.

Merton in his study of the American Society explains five possible ways in which the society can respond to the success goals of individual success and monetary gain. He differentiates between conformity, innovation, ritualism and retreatism. An individual’s conformity to the social norms exists when equal emphasis is given to the success goals and the normative means of achieving them. Balram’s parents can be considered as conformant in their plans for Balram. Balram’s father is seen insistent on continuing his education as his mother wanted to have a better life for him. Balram remembers his father as a man with a plan and Balram being his plan. Even though they followed their ideological life of servitude, they wished and strived for a better life through Balram.

The second approach is ‘innovation’ wherein the cultural goals, monetary gain and social success gain prominence and the means turn to be less significant. Halwai’s fetishism of money can be likened to the American Dream of monetary gain and social success. When the cultural goals of social success gain prominence, the means to success loses its significance. The anomic individual resorts to deviance to reach up to the top in social hierarchy largely through illegitimate means. Interestingly according to Halwai; “All I wanted was the chance to be a man – and for that one murder was enough” (Adiga 318). As the means lose importance, norms and order sink and a social deviance ensues, often resulting in crime. An anomic tension ensues in Balram as he says; “What would be my destination if I were to come here with a red bag in my hand?” (Adiga 247). Balram’s dropping the of the note that reads “respect for the law is the first command of the gods” is symptomatic of his abandoning of the law (Adiga 248).

Merton’s study identifies innovation in the lower strata of the society since the basic requirements for social success like education, better job prospects or familial back-up lack in them. In Merton’s words, “they have little access to the convention and legitimate means for

becoming successful” (Haralambos 414). As the social structure, polity, culture and conventions deny them social mobility and better social status, they tend to deny the unsupportive norms and customs or the law and order system and innovate new ideas and ideologies for themselves. Halwai’s imbibed image of his society and its attitude towards the downtrodden is:

Men...human spiders that go crawling in between and under the tables with rags in their hands, crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven, in their thirties or forties or fifties but still ‘boys’. But that is your fate if you do your job well – with honesty, dedication, and sincerity, the way Gandhi would have done it, no doubt. I did my job with near total dishonesty, lack of dedication, and insincerity – and so the tea shop was a profoundly enriching experience. (Adiga 51)

Moreover, there are no definite limits for monetary success and accumulation of wealth and is a variable purely dependent on another wealthy reference group. The wealthier the reference group is, the poorer and ambitious the anomic individual feels. As the limit extends the desire to success gains prominence dissolving the significance of the channel to success. Thus even the socially well-off can resort to the committing of crime as can be identified in the deeds of the wealthy landlords and corrupted politicians that Adiga projects. The money fetishism of the culturally well-off landlords and the socially successful politicians lead them to take to illegal means of monetary gain. They get themselves indulged in corruption, bribing and other illegitimate businesses. The protagonist Balram Halwai in his journey to social success takes the character Conductor Vijay as his first reference. Halwai writes:

Vijay’s family was pig herds, which meant they were the lowest of the low, yet he had made it up in life...I wanted to be like Vijay – with a uniform, a paycheck, a shiny whistle with a piercing sound, and people looking at me with eyes that said, how important he looks. (Adiga 31)

Every time he gets a chance to see Vijay, his success inspires Balram; “That was the thing about Vijay; each time you saw him he had done better for himself” (Adiga 99). Balram finds himself astonished to see the landlords bowing before the pig herds’ son in the strict hierarchical society of India. Mockingly he calls it “the marvels of democracy” although his success was through anti-democratic means (Adiga 103).

He also finds his master Mr. Ashok as his reference entity as he learns to see “the room with his eyes; smelled it with his nose; poked it with his fingers – I had already begun to digest my master” (Adiga 79). A fetishism of money develops in him as he learns to see the world in the perspective of the rich and contrast it with his survival status; “how the rich always get the best things in life, and all that we get is their leftovers” (Adiga 233).

However not everybody, resort to anomie in response to their social conditions. Merton further talks about ‘ritualism’ as the third possible response. According to Merton, the ritualist belongs to the lower middle class who largely abandon the cultural goals to success and follows the ritualistic ideologies. Instances can be identified in Balram’s descriptions of his family and especially his grandmother Kusum. In a Mertonian view, they are highly socialised to abide by the social norms strictly. Merton considers the ritualists too as deviant as they merely abandon the cultural goals taking them as too insignificant to follow. Merton’s retreatism can be seen in the characters of the other servants of the rooster coop. Retreatism ensues when neither the success goals nor the legitimate means are followed. The other servants that Balram talks about are the embodiments of corruption, treachery and ruthlessness in them. However, they restrain themselves from moving out of the coop denying any upward mobility to them and others as well. Halwai writes; “Servants have to keep the other servants from becoming innovators, experimenters, or entrepreneurs...The coop is guarded from inside” (Adiga 194).

Anomie results when the power of social values to regulate the ends and the means of human conduct is weakened. Every society assures the conformity to these conducts by its members by ensuring various means of social control like law, government, religion, education,

family and also by ideologies, traditions and myths. Every society imbibes these codes of conduct to its members through the enactment of law and order system. Such situations arose discontent in the society. Deviance arises as an expression of discontent and non-conformity. As it gives rise to a disturbance to the social order and functioning, deviance draws attention to the malfunctioning social set-up. Deviance creates a blow to the collective sentiments of the society. As deviance arises as a reaction to the social circumstance, it is a product of the socio-cultural set up of that partial society. On his lawlessness, Halwai writes; “Being called a murderer: fine, I have no objection to that. It’s a fact: I am a sinner, a fallen human. But to be called a murderer by the police! What a ... joke” (Adiga 102). As Merton writes “the social and cultural structure generates pressure for socially deviant behaviour upon people variously located in that structure” (Haralambos 413). According to Merton’s theory, the over-emphasis on cultural goals and the institutionalised means for achieving these goals create pressure in the individuals developing a situation for anomie. This anomic pressure is highly dependent on the individual’s position in the society and is largely based on his position in the class and caste structure.

Halwai’s poignant projection of India as a land of corruption and darkness attracted much criticism and debate over the text. The present study in its analysis of the fictional and non-fictional India considers such kind of interpretations of the society important as it helps in provoking a rethinking among the society. Since a rather darker side of India too exists as against its well-lit side, an acknowledgment of its existence is significant to bring in any change in the system and in the lives of its inhabitants. The present study in its sociological approach to the literary text, *The White Tiger*, views the text as a product of its society though it denies any essentialist notions of India as a land of poverty or slums and the text as ‘the real country’. In its analysis of the various characters and the represented society, the research identifies them as the anomic products of ideological conditioning. According to the research the treatment of the characters as anti-social and villainous are functional as it attempts to attract attention to the

anti-social elements of the society that it represents. As stated in the introductory chapter the research argues that the society in its attempt to condition an individual eventually construct the individual. The social conditioning can have varied results, it can either moralize or demoralize an individual; shape them as purely ideological entities or as anti-social, anti-ideological beings as can be identified in Adiga's representation in *The White Tiger*.

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Chapter 4

Conclusion

Right from its inception in the Vedic literature, the notion of 'caste' had embossed itself in the Indian consciousness. The multiplicity of religious and caste beliefs adds to the plurality of India, further dividing and stratifying the society. The caste ideologies stratify and position the society based on the sheer virtue of one's birth. Subsequently, the marginalized sections of the scheduled castes and tribes get further pushed into the heap of vulnerability. The lives of these neglected strata often get veiled behind the much-projected image of the progressing India. Even though the country in its march to progress has not completely abandoned the weaker sections, and has implemented a multitude of programs and policies for the upliftment of the downtrodden hunger, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and malnutrition continue to persist in the country. Homeless dwellers of slums can be seen in any metropolis of India. In the country's present state of lawlessness, the safety of these homeless people sleeping on the pavements remains a mystery. Their lives exist as a scorn on the various programs and policies implemented by the government of India, thanks to the corrupt and malfunctioning system here. Moreover, adding to the rampant corruption and lawlessness the country strives through, the mythically build caste ideologies and the money based class politics here together make the country a sophisticated labyrinth. The Darwinian struggle and the existential angst of the inhabitants here surface as the major area of concern in Adiga's *The White Tiger*.

Owing to westernization and globalisation the Indian society has welcomed and reflected major changes in its outlook and polity. As the traditional ideologies on religious and caste beliefs gradually get relaxed, the class system gains prominence leading to a situation where money and power become the deciding factors in social positioning. The society stoops to a position wherein the wealthier one grows; the more respectable and powerful one becomes;

leading to a situation of anomic tension ensuing both in the society and in its inhabitants. Projecting the contradictory images of the two Indias and giving a voice to a character picked up from the silenced India, Adiga attempts to forefront the harrowing lives of the poor in India as being caught up in the labyrinth of the power polity of the country. By bringing in instances of caste and class, the writer well portrays the hierarchically divided society of India. The writer observes an oppressive colonial state of the country existing even in the twenty-first century which he portrays as largely a product of the class polity the country employs.

By placing the various characters at the different levels of the class hierarchy, Adiga expresses his concerns over India's class system that calls for a revolution from the lower sects. Himself being a low-born man leading an insignificant life in his hierarchically stratified country, Balram breeds in him a desire for the cultural goals of monetary gain and social importance. Balram Halwai's obsession for greatness and a commendable social position led him to ruminate over his position as a trivial being, a low-class servant. The disturbing visions of inequality and injustice surfacing in his society imbibe in him a need for revolt. Halwai asserts that "every man should make his own Benaras" (Adiga 304). Like the way he failed the Black Fort, which was for him a haunting reminiscent of his race's past slavery, he resorts to taking on the present inhuman society too.

The neglected lives of the downtrodden surface as the prime concern in the seven epistles Halwai addresses to Wen Jiabao. In the text, Halwai rises from the heap, makes it to the top, and eventually gets himself incorporated into the corrupted system, leaving behind the chains of his history, family and identity. Though Balram Halwai as a man of action and change resorts to fighting the injustice as in a Marxian way, the way he eventually chose is paradoxically the customary way of corruption and crime. To incorporate himself into the social class he develops in him the attitude for criminality and fetishism for money. As the characters, conductor Vijay and the protagonist Balram Halwai imbibe the idea of money as power, they clamber to success. Taking cues from the economy based structure of his society and its way

of life, Balram rises to power leaving behind his caste identity of his surname Halwai, along with his history of servitude, and becomes Ashok Sharma, a socially respectable entrepreneur. However, in the later stage of his life, although he claims to have attained his goal of social success and wealth, finds himself unsatisfied. Calling himself a “first-gear man” who sees ‘tomorrow’ when others see ‘today’ he plans on leaving his start-up to some other entrepreneur and getting into real estate and then a school where the students’ heads are not corrupted by the stories of Gandhi; “a school full of white tigers unleashed on Bangalore” (Adiga 319).

Halwai’s insatiable desire for growth and achievements made him cut his own way out of the ‘rooster coop’. Analysing the society, its functioning and the existing system, he concludes the polity of existence in India as a system where anyone can make it to the top just by a sneaking out of lawfulness. Halwai finds the character conductor Vijay as his finest example and role model and imbibes the idea of money as power and decides to clamber to success. Balram rises to power and positions himself as a socially respectable entrepreneur, liberating himself from the chains of ideologies and myths of servitude.

Halwai finds that the notion of liberated India is nothing but an illusion. He likens its socio-cultural set-up to a rooster coop and calls it a lawless jungle. As Adiga portrays, family and kinship act as the tools of disciplining that the elite employs on the weak. The rich hegemonically oppress and ideologically repress the poor through the elements of family and kinship. Halwai thinks that the Indian family is what keeps the rooster coop unliberated. As he says that the “rooster coop is guarded from inside”, the ritualistic slaves from the weaker class facilitate the hegemonic oppression of the rich over them. As William Ryan Brown termed it in “De-Democratisation and the Novels of Aravind Adiga”, Adiga exposes the ‘de-democratic’ state of the other India, by sketching a colonial scene more than sixty years hence its colonial era. By bringing in the class polity as a major social disaster, Adiga portrays the oppressive colonial state of the country largely as an outcome of its socio-cultural set-up.

The landlord's bestowing of the hit and run case of Pinky Madam on him with the consent of his grandmother Kusum is one major element in the novel that initiates a serious deviation in Halwai's behavioural pattern. When Balram feels that Mr. Ashok too is the gene of a landlord because of his insensitivity to the servant, he develops a feeling of hatred towards him. This instance is also revelatory of the hypocritical nature of Mr. Ashok. Even though the element of realism in this instance is questionable as the characterization of Ashok might seem to be a deliberate attempt by the writer to reach up to his climax, it creates a major shift in the plot. Also, the involving of the 'idealised' Kusum in the scene also forces the protagonist Halwai to ruminate on the servile status of his people and then to initiate change. The researcher identifies this initiation as an act of anomic deviance because Balram's deliberation is not to bring in any revolutionary change in his society but to bring in a heightened social position and life status for him alone. The insatiable desire for a better social position evolved in him as a result of his study of the society that he inhabited.

Contemplating on his life of servitude Halwai realizes the extent of social conditioning the rich has exercised on them. Halwai finds them as so conditioned as to obey their masters' blindly as animals. The landlords hegemonically assert their power over the lives of the poor by socially conditioning them. The conditioned servants, being unable to realize the guile of the elite, believe the subjugation as an opportunity to express their loyalty towards their masters. As Balram Halwai puts it they not just own their body, but their soul and lives too. As the hypocrisies of the society unveil before him during his association with the landlords as their chauffeur, he innovates his own codes of morality and ideology. Halwai moves out of the make beliefs of the social and religious ideologies and its repressive institutions.

The anomic shift in the character of Balram Halwai is the resultant outcome of the disparate nature of the society that he inhabits. In a Marxian way Halwai interprets his society as a hierarchical structure built on the base of money. The dichotomies of rich-poor, master-servant and darkness and light keep resonating in Halwai's voice. Like a white tiger that cannot

bear its imprisonment, he roars his way to the upper hierarchy in society by initiating the power shift in his life. Taking cues from the ‘successful’ members of his habitat and tasting lawlessness, he adopts treachery and theft as the easiest means to success. Halwai adopts the ruthless landlords, the hypocritical Conductor Vijay and the corrupt politicians as his reference groups. An anomic tension ensues in Balram as he witnesses instances of law breaking in his encircle and the fruitful results of it. He gradually soaks up a demeaning picture of the law and order system as he sees the effortless sneaking out of it by the tricky elite. He finds the tactically enforced beliefs on the strictness and values of law a joke.

Halwai’s obsession for chandeliers shows his deep resent for the dark state of his land and the inhuman lives they lead there. He exposes the stench of darkness and servitude contrasting his bodily odor with the fragrance of the rich lives. Placing his characters and society against the backdrop of a hierarchical society of class and caste system Adiga makes a major attack on the money fetishism and the resultant lawlessness of the modern society. As in a time where reports of corruption, money scams and other crimes getting exposed every year with people from every walk of life being found red-handed, Adiga’s work appears as a major work of social criticism. In Balram Halwai’s projection of India, the rural India is a site of oppression and the urban, a land of corruption. Adiga attempts to picturise a darker side of India, largely by abandoning the much projected well-lit side of India, as an attempt to unveil the less thought of side of the frontier, the darker India.

In his critique of the class system in India, Adiga presents a society which is open to any form of social behavior. He presents a society which claims to provide equal opportunity to anyone who wants to make it to the top as the gift of democracy. Learning money as the metaphor for power, and wealth as the definition of social status, Halwai reverses his fate. From a village fool, he progresses to a social entrepreneur and then to an important business entrepreneur through his learning that he acquired from his own experiences in India. Considering himself as a “thinking man”; “a white tiger”; “the rarest of animals – the creature

that comes along only once in a generation” (Adiga 35), Halwai in a Marxian way resorts to initiate a change in his society. Nevertheless, in his attempt to change the society, he incorporates himself into it by adopting an upper-caste and upper-class identity through treachery and murder. Thus, the researcher identifies that it is the ensuing anomic behaviour in him that motivates Balram Halwai to climb the ladder of social hierarchy by choosing the best way he finds feasible for him. He thus resorts to the criminal act of wiping out his immediate block to success, his so-called master. Halwai’s insatiable desire for growth and achievements forced him cut his own way out of the ‘rooster coop’ abandoning his past identity. Though he was denied a formal education, he kept his education going forward learning from the places he could, from the roads and pavements of India (Adiga 52,302). Analysing the society, its functioning and the existing system, he concludes the polity of existence in India as a system where anyone can make it to the top by a sneaking out of lawfulness.

The present research titled “Reading India as Represented in Aravind Adiga’s ‘The White Tiger’: A Socio-cultural Analysis” views the text as a product of its society that possess a duality in itself; the two contradictory Indias. The protagonist’s deviance from his bestowed status is a revolt against the imperialist India of the rich, which for him is an alien society. Though he belongs to the liberated postcolonial India, Balram Halwai finds the freedom that India claims to offer its citizens, superficial. Placing the Gandhi image as the backdrop, he points at the contrast between the promised state of India during its move to freedom, and the present state of it.

The research argues that the anti-ideological deviance of Halwai that resulted in the murdering of his master and leading up to the probable killing of his whole family by the landlords is the resultant product of the social conditioning the society exercised on him in its attempt to condition him as an ideal member of the servant class. His deviant behavior is a revolt of his haunted self against the colonial selves ruling in the postcolonial India. For Halwai

freedom in India is only illusionary; for him, India appears as a rooster coop in itself. He finds the much-pronounced idea of democracy in free India incomprehensible.

The White Tiger is a telling commentary on the darker realities of India, which the country often tends to hide. Flattered by the charm of its growth, advancements and progress, the country tends to forget its less beautified face. This un-illuminated face of India is the concern Adiga forefronting through his text. He questions as to how long can the country deny its darker face. By bringing in a man of voice and courage Adiga warns the country of the forthcoming resistance which is likely to erupt at any moment. Through his work Adiga presents a disturbing picture of the harrowing lives of the darkness. He lays bare to the reader the constrained yet unrestrained socio-cultural and political India. The vast chasm that exists between the rich and the poor and the likely threat that he warns the country of are the major underlying themes of the text.

A considerable part of *The White Tiger* points its fingers at corruption on societal and political fronts of democratic India, making the very notion of democracy questionable. Through *The White Tiger*, the writer attempts a daring exposing of the corrupt and deformed governing system that the country sustains. The text with its criminal anti-hero is an outcry of the likely revolution from the underclass that the country is to face. The class and caste divide existing here leading to the subsequent power play make the country a lawless jungle where only the ones with big bellies survive.

Through *The White Tiger* Aravind Adiga had skillfully sketched a mockery of the politically corrupt democratic system of India. Almost all the elements that surface the socio-cultural and political front of the country, like the social set-up of hierarchy, class and caste divisions surface as the major areas of concern in the text. Also, the structure of the Indian families, kinship, the rituals of marriage pompous with the accompaniment of a huge load of dowry, the status of women in the family set-up and the role of men as sole breadwinners especially in the rural parts of northern India are too dealt with in the text. The juxtaposing of

the Indian village with the urban, and through the dualism of tradition and modernity, Adiga draws the rich-poor divide here, the dichotomies of the over-fed and the starving, the highly educated and the illiterate that exist here. Precisely, the text's focus is on the two contradictory faces of the country, the darkness and light, as Balram Halwai calls it.

The research views *The White Tiger* as a commentary on the often veiled absurdities of the Indian socio-cultural set-up and its likely threats. The researcher states so as having analysed the writer's choice of the underlying themes and the major issues discussed in the text. The use of the first person narrative in the text is also considered as a factor in reaching the conclusion. In his representation of India, the writer presents the narrative as a nativist narration of the nation seen through the eyes of a low-born 'underclass' figure Balram Halwai. The researcher limits the study to a sociological analysis of the literary text using the sociological theory of anomie as its methodology. The writer's presentation of the various socio-cultural issues like caste and class divide, hierarchical stratification, the system of family and kinship, the rampant corruption in the socio-political scene of India and so on made the researcher choose the sociological theory of anomie as the methodology of research. Reading the behavioural patterns of the protagonist, his social deviance, the behavioural patterns of the other minor characters, the use of crime and so on, the researcher felt the theory of anomie as well explanatory in interpreting the text. Various other readings of the text like Postcolonial, Psychoanalytic or Marxian readings can also be undertaken which remain as the scope for further research on the text, *The White Tiger*.

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