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HUMAN EXPLOITATION IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S NOVEL *THE WHITE TIGER*

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* explores the stark social disparities between the wealthy and impoverished in India, illustrating how systemic poverty perpetuates marginalization. The protagonist, Balram Halwai, narrates his journey from a lower-caste background to becoming a self-made, successful individual in India. Balram's story is not just one of personal ambition but also of navigating a rigidly stratified society. This study addresses two primary issues: the exploitation Balram endures due to his socioeconomic status; and his strategic actions are to attain freedom from the oppressive forces in his life. Using a library research method, the study integrates secondary sources, including books and articles, to deepen the analysis of the novel. Employing a psychological approach, this study examines the psychological complexities of Balram's character, supported by theories on character development, data credibility, theoretical triangulation, and reliability. Balram is depicted as an astute yet morally ambiguous character, exhibiting selfishness, cunning, irresponsibility, dishonesty, and a lack of remorse. The analysis reveals how his behaviors and attitudes—such as detachment from others and deviant tendencies—are shaped by his environment. India's entrenched caste system underpins various social issues in the novel, including poverty, unemployment, corruption in education, inadequate healthcare, exploitation, discrimination, and the persistence of hierarchical master-servant relationships. These factors collectively influence Balram's psychological development, and shape him into a figure both reflective and critical of the society he navigates.

Keywords: *caste system; discrimination; exploitation; violence*

1. Introduction

Exploitation is commonly defined as the misuse of power to benefit at another's expense, often for economic gain, without regard for justice, fairness, or the well-being of those exploited. This exploitative dynamic often targets marginalized individuals and communities, extracting resources, both natural and human, to serve the interests of dominant groups (Martaja in Rahman, 2007). While the term *exploitation* has broad applications across environmental, social, and political fields, Allen Buchanan provides a focused definition: it is "the harmful, merely instrumental utilization of a person or

their capacities for one's own advantage" (Buchanan, 1979). Exploitation, particularly of the lower-middle class, is a vivid example of self-interest pursued without regard for ethical boundaries, often seen in underdeveloped regions where people remain socially and economically disadvantaged (Saifullah in Muchtar, 2010).

In India, the exploitation of the lower castes is deeply ingrained and widely acknowledged, largely perpetuated by the caste system, which historically divides society into hierarchical categories: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Sudras, with Dalits occupying an "untouchable" status below these formal ranks. Originating over 2,000 years ago, this hereditary system initially reflected occupational roles but soon solidified into rigid social strata that determined one's social and economic opportunities—or lack thereof. Brahmins, the highest caste, avoid all forms of physical labor, while lower castes, particularly Dalits, are relegated to the most menial, physically taxing, and stigmatized forms of work. This entrenched hierarchy extends beyond labor, affecting access to education, healthcare, and social mobility. Even today, Dalit communities, and particularly Dalit women, often suffer from extreme exploitation, with sexual violence weaponized as a means of control and suppression. Due to their dependency on landowning castes, the lower castes are left vulnerable and powerless in defending themselves against such abuses.

India's population of over 1.4 billion makes it the second-most populous country in the world, and despite considerable economic and technological advancements, the caste system's remnants still shape the lives of millions. This stark social reality has been depicted in both non-fiction and fiction, such as in Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger*. This novel delves into the harsh realities of caste oppression, poverty, class disparity, and the lack of social mobility for the lower castes in India. Through its portrayal of Balram Halwai, a low-caste man determined to escape poverty, *The White Tiger* highlights the challenges faced by India's marginalized populations. The protagonist's journey—from rural poverty to working as a driver for an affluent family and eventually seizing an opportunity to transform his life—illustrates the lengths to which oppressed individuals must go to pursue autonomy and success.

Despite India's advancements, the oppressive caste structures persist, with limited public services or support for low-caste communities. Writers and poets in India have extensively portrayed these struggles, reflecting the social stagnation within a seemingly progressive nation. Adiga, born in Madras and raised in South India, spent much of his life abroad and has contributed significantly to the discourse on social inequities through both journalism and fiction. *The White Tiger*, which won the Man Booker Prize in 2008, stands as a powerful critique of caste-based oppression, revealing the enduring and often invisible barriers that continue to define the lives of India's most marginalized people.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Exploitation

Exploitation broadly refers to the excessive or arbitrary use of an individual or resource, often for economic purposes, without regard for justice, fairness, or proper compensation. According to experts, exploitation typically entails the unfair use or extortion of others for personal gain, often involving the exploitation of another's vulnerability or powerlessness. While benefiting from another's vulnerability is not always morally wrong, the ethics of exploitation are often questioned due to the inherent imbalance and misuse of power involved.

To fully understand the concept, it is helpful to consider definitions from scholars across disciplines. Martaja describes exploitation as the unethical use of others solely for personal benefit. Similarly, Joni defines it as the act of using others for self-serving purposes, while Suharto views it as arbitrary and discriminatory treatment towards those with less power (in Ibnu, 2021). Together, these perspectives emphasize that exploitation generally involves an imbalance of power and the extraction of benefits from those who are vulnerable or less advantaged.

Exploitation can be understood in transactional and structural terms. Transactional exploitation occurs in discrete interactions, often seen in situations such as sweatshops offering low wages or pharmaceutical firms testing drugs on economically disadvantaged subjects in developing countries. Structural exploitation, by contrast, is embedded within institutions or systems where the established rules unfairly favor one group at the expense of another. For example, Karl Marx argued that capitalism's economic and political structures inherently exploit workers, who are unfairly deprived of the full value of their labor. Similarly, contemporary feminists have critiqued traditional marriage institutions, arguing that they exploit women by reinforcing gendered inequalities.

Exploitation may also vary in terms of harm and benefit. Harmful exploitation leaves the victim worse off than before and deprives them of their rights, as seen in cases of coercive sex trafficking. However, exploitation can sometimes be mutually beneficial, where both parties might improve their circumstances yet the transaction remains exploitative due to unfair terms. In such cases, while both sides may gain something, the less powerful party is still taken advantage of, revealing the exploitative nature of the relationship.

Although the term "exploitation" was not commonly used to describe unfair advantage-taking until the 19th century, the underlying themes—justice in economic exchange, the labor-value relationship, and the ownership and abuse of property—have deep philosophical roots. Classical discussions on justice and economic fairness explored how systems and transactions either support or undermine equality and reciprocity, themes that remain central to modern understandings of exploitation.

2.1.1 Child Exploitation

Child exploitation is the act of using a minor child for profit, labor, sexual gratification, or some other personal or financial advantage. Child exploitation often results in cruel or harmful treatment of the child, as the activities she or he may be forced to take part in can cause emotional, physical, and social problems. Unfortunately, there is a large market and interest in using children of all ages for cheap labor, sexual purposes, child pornography, and other purposes. Many individuals taking part in child exploitation do it because there is a large profit to be made, essentially selling the services of children or the children themselves to others.

Laws regarding exploitation of children vary by state, and children are protected by federal laws as well. Penalties for those convicted of child exploitation in any form are severe. This crime can be divided into two types: exploitation, sexual, and economic. Economic exploitation of a child, also referred to as criminal exploitation of a child, Refers to the use of a child in any way for economic gain. This often includes child labor, child slavery, child sex tourism, and even the sale or illegal adoption of children for profit. Children are often used to help sell and distribute illegal drugs, and in some war-ridden countries, children are recruited as soldiers and forced to fight.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2008) defines child labour as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful to children, or work whose schedule interferes with their ability to attend regular school, or work that affects in any manner their ability to focus during school or experience a healthy childhood.

Such exploitation is prohibited by legislation wordwide. Although these laws do not consider all work by children as child labour, exceptions include work by child artists, family duties, supervised training, and some forms of child labor practiced by *Amish* children,as well as *by indigenous children* in the Americas (Larsen, 2004). Child labour has existed to varying extents throughout history. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, many children aged 5-14 from poorer families worked in Western nations and their colonies alike. These children mainly worked in agriculture, home-based assembly operations, factories, mining, and services, such as *new boys*, some of whom worked night shifts lasting 12 hours. With the rise of household income, the availability of schools, and the passage of child labour laws, the incidence rates of child labour fell (Cunningham and Viazzo, 1996).

In the world's poorest countries, around one in four children is engaged in child labour, the highest number of whom (29 percent) live in *sub-Saharan Africa*. In 2017, four African nations (Mali, Benin, Chad, and Guinea-Bissau) witnessed over 50 percent of children aged 5 – 14 working. Worldwide, agriculture is the largest employer of child labour. The vast majority of child labour is found in rural settings and informal urban economies, where children are predominantly employed by their parents rather than factories. Poverty and a lack of schools are considered the primary causes of child labour (ILO, 2008).

Globally, the incidence of child labour decreased from 25% to 10% between 1960 and 2003, according to the World Bank. Nevertheless, the total number of child labourers remains high, with UNICEF and ILO acknowledging that an estimated 168 million children aged 5 – 17 worldwide were involved in child labour in 2013.

2.1.2 Exploitation of Labour

Exploitation of labour is a concept defined as, in its broadest sense, one agent taking unfair advantage of another agent. It denotes an unjust social relationship based on an asymmetry of power or an unequal exchange of value between workers and their employers. When speaking about exploitation, there is a direct affiliation with consumption in social theory, and traditionally, this would label exploitation as unfairly taking advantage of another person because of their inferior position, giving the exploiter the power.

Karl Marx's theory of exploitation has been described in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy as the most influential theory of exploitation. In analyzing exploitation, economists are split on the explanation of the exploitation of labour given by Marx and Adam Smith. Smith did not see exploitation as an inherent systematic phenomenon in specific economic systems, as Marx did, but rather as an optional moral injustice. Marx's exploitation theory is one of the major elements analyzed in Marxian economics, and some social theorists consider it to be a cornerstone of Marxist thought. Marx credited the Scottish Enlightenment writers with originally propounding a

materialist interpretation of history. In his Critique of the Gotha Program, Marx set principles that were to govern the distribution of welfare under socialism and communism—these principles saw distribution to each person according to their work and needs.

Exploitation occurs when these two principles are not met, when the agents are not receiving according to their work or needs. This process of exploitation is a part of the redistribution of labour, occurring during the process of separate agents exchanging their current productive labour for social labour set in goods received. The labour put forth toward production is embodied in the goods, and exploitation occurs when someone purchases a good with their revenue or wages for an amount unequal to the total labour he or she has put forth. This labour performed by a population over a certain time period is equal to the labour embodied in the goods that make up the net national product (NNP). The NNP is then parceled out to the members of the population in some way, and this is what creates the two groups, or agents, involved in the exchange of goods: exploiters and exploited (Elster, 2007).

According to Marxist economics, the exploiters are the agents able to command goods, with revenue from their wages, that are embodied with more labour than the exploiters themselves have put forth—based on the exploitative social relations of Marxist theory of capitalist production. These agents often have class status and ownership of productive assets that aid the optimization of exploitation. Meanwhile, the exploited are those who receive less than the average product they produce. If workers receive an amount equivalent to their average product, there is no revenue left over, and therefore these workers cannot enjoy the fruits of their own labours and the difference between what is made and what can be purchased cannot be justified by redistribution according to need (Elster, 2007). According to Marxist theory, in a capitalist society, the exploited are the proletariat, and the exploiters would typically be the bourgeoisie. For Marx, the phenomenon of exploitation was a characteristic of all class-based societies, not just capitalism.

2.1.3 Exploitation of Natural Resources

The exploitation of natural resources is the use of natural resources for economic growth, sometimes with a negative connotation of accompanying environmental degradation. It started to emerge on an industrial scale in the 19th century as the extraction and processing of raw materials (such as in mining, steam power, and machinery) developed much further than it had in preindustrial areas. During the 20th century, energy consumption rapidly increased. Today, about 80% of the world's energy consumption is sustained by the extraction of fossil fuels, which consist of oil, coal, and natural gas.

Another non-renewable resource that is exploited by humans is subsoil minerals, such as precious metals, that are mainly used in the production of industrial commodities. Intensive agriculture is an example of a mode of production that hinders many aspects of the natural environment, for example, the degradation of forests in a terrestrial ecosystem and water pollution in an aquatic ecosystem. As the world population rises and economic growth occurs, the depletion of natural resources influenced by the unsustainable extraction of raw materials becomes an increasing concern (McNicoll, 2007).

Some of the factors that put resources under pressure are:

a. An increase in the sophistication of technology enables natural resources to be extracted quickly and efficiently. E.g., in the past, it could take long hours just to cut down one tree using saws. Due to increased technology, rates of deforestation have greatly increased.
b. The number of humans is increasing. According to the UN, the world population was 7.6 billion in 2017. This number is expected to rise to about 10 billion in 2050 and about 11 billion in 2100.
c. Cultures of consumerism. Materialistic views lead to the mining of gold and diamonds to produce jewelry, unnecessary commodities for human life or advancement. Consumerism also leads to the extraction of resources for the production of commodities necessary for human life, but in amounts exceeding what is needed, because people consume more than is necessary or waste what they have.
d. Excessive demand often leads to conflicts due to intense competition. Organizations such as Global Witness and the United Nations (2018) have documented the connection.
e. The lack of awareness among the population is striking. People are not aware of ways to reduce depletion and exploitation of materials.

2.2 Caste and Exploitation

Exploitation arising from the caste hierarchy is a particular feature of the South Asian subcontinent. There was no such exploitative system on other continents or in countries outside of South Asia. But since caste exploitation has been a reality for 1500-2000 years, this shakes the belief that only class can be the basis of exploitation. And because of this, we have to transcend the attempt to find a way only pragmatically and deal with the issue on a philosophical and theoretical level. Dr. Ambedkar had argued that the form of this exploitation was that of an unequal hierarchy. Dr. Ambedkar had said in regard to the internal division of labour in the caste exploitative hierarchy that it was actually a division of labourers. The type of work that people in the castes at each rung of the hierarchy were to do was ordained from generation to generation by birth, this is a special, authoritative type of feature of the exploitation of the caste hierarchy.

The lowest castes will do the work considered dirtiest and requiring the most physical labour (these were the castes that were previously considered untouchable). The toiling castes above these do comparatively less polluting and fully physical labour (the farming castes and the artisans who were not considered fully untouchable). The castes in the rung above these do not do physical labour. They will do the planning, organization, deciding rules, and organizing of the mechanisms of violence (the castes considered to be kshatriyas). The Brahman castes at the highest level will do no kind of physical labour. This caste will have a full monopoly over the mental field (taking and giving knowledge). Not only will they do no type of work understood to be polluting, they will not even go near it.

2.2.1 Caste System in India

The system that divides Hindus into rigid hierarchical groups based on their karma (work) and dharma (the Hindi word for religion, but here it means duty) is generally accepted to be more than 3,000 years old. The caste system in India is the paradigmatic ethnographic example of the classification of castes. It has its origins in

ancient India and was transformed by various ruling elites in medieval, early-modern, and modern India, especially the Mughal Empire and the British Raj. It is today the basis of affirmative action programs in India as enforced through its constitution. The caste system consists of two different concepts, varna and jati, which may be regarded as different levels of analysis of this system.

The caste system as it exists today is thought to be the result of developments during the collapse of the Mughal era and the rise of the British colonial government in India. The collapse of the Mughal era saw the rise of powerful men who associated themselves with kings, priests, and ascetics, affirming the regal and martial form of the caste ideal, and it also reshaped many apparently casteless social groups into differentiated caste communities.

The British Raj furthered this development, making rigid caste organisation a central mechanism of administration. Between 1860 and 1920, the British formulated the caste system into their system of governance, granting administrative jobs and senior appointments only to Christians and people belonging to certain castes (Nehru, 2004). Social unrest during the 1920s led to a change in this policy. From then on, the colonial administration began a policy of positive discrimination by reserving a certain percentage of government jobs for the lower castes. In 1948, negative discrimination on the basis of caste was banned by law and further enshrined in the Indian constitution; however, the system continues to be practiced in parts of India. There are 3,000 castes and 25,000 sub-castes in India, each related to a specific occupation.

India, after achieving independence in 1947, enacted many affirmative action policies for the upliftment of historically marginalized groups, as enforced through its constitution. These policies included reserving a quota of places for these groups in higher education and government employment. Varna literally means type, order, colour, or class, and was a framework for grouping people into classes, first used in Vedic Indian society. It is referred to frequently in ancient Indian texts. The four classes were the Brahmins (priestly people), the Kshatriyas (rulers, administrators, and warriors; also called Rajanyas), the Vaishyas (artisans, merchants, tradesmen, and farmers), and the Shudras (labouring classes).

The sociologist G. S. Ghurye offered what he thought was a definition that could be applied across India, although he acknowledged that there were regional variations on the general theme. His model definition for caste included the following six characteristics:

a. Segmentation of society into groups whose membership was determined by birth.
b. A hierarchical system wherein generally the Brahmins were at the head of the hierarchy, but this hierarchy was disputed in some cases. In various linguistic areas, hundreds of castes had a grade generally acknowledged by everyone.
c. Restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, with minute rules on the kind of food and drink that upper castes could accept from lower castes. There was a great diversity in these rules, and lower castes generally accepted food from upper castes.
d. Segregation, where individual castes lived together, with the dominant caste living in the center and other castes living on the periphery. There were restrictions on the use of water wells or streets by one caste over another: an upper-caste Brahmin might not be permitted to use the street of a lower-caste group, while a caste considered impure might not be permitted to draw water from a well used by members of other castes.

e. Occupation is generally inherited. Lack of unrestricted choice of profession, caste members restricted their own members from taking up certain professions they considered degrading. This characteristic of caste was missing from large parts of India, stated Ghurye, and in these regions, all four castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras) did agriculture labour or became warriors in large numbers.
f. Endogamy has restrictions on marrying a person outside caste, but in some situations, hypergamy is allowed. In some regions, there is far less rigidity on inter-marriage between different sub-castes than between members of different castes, while in some regions, endogamy within a sub-caste was the principal feature of caste-society.

2.2.2 Economic Inequality

A 1995 study notes that the caste system in India is a system of exploitation of poor low-ranking groups by more prosperous high-ranking groups. A report published in 2001 notes that in India, 36.3% of people own no land at all, 60.6% own about 15% of the land, and a very wealthy 3.1% own 15% of the land (Rural Poverty Report, 2001). Haque also reports that over 90 percent of both scheduled castes (low-ranking groups) and all other castes (high-ranking groups) either do not own land or own land area capable of producing less than $1000 per year of food and income per household. However, over 99 percent of India's farms are less than 10 hectares, and 99.9 percent of the farms are less than 20 hectares, regardless of the farmer or landowner's caste. The Indian government has, in addition, vigorously pursued agricultural land ceiling laws that prohibit anyone from owning land greater than mandated limits. India has used this law to forcibly acquire land from some, then redistribute tens of millions of acres to the landless and poor of the low caste. Haque suggests that Indian lawmakers need to reform and modernise the nation's land laws and rely less on blind adherence to land ceilings and tenancy reform (Hanstad, 2005).

In a 2011 study, Aiyar too notes that such qualitative theories of economic exploitation and consequent land redistribution within India between 1950 and 1990 had no effect on the quality of life or poverty reduction. Instead, economic reforms since the 1990s and resultant opportunities for non-agricultural jobs have reduced poverty and increased per capita income for all segments of Indian society.

Cassan has studied the differential effect within two segments of India's Dalit community. He finds India's overall economic growth has produced the fastest and most significant socio-economic changes. Cassan further concludes that legal and social program initiatives are no longer India's primary constraint in the further advancement of India's historically discriminated castes; further advancement is likely to come from improvements in the supply of quality schools in rural and urban India, along with India's economic growth.

3. Research Method

This research employs a qualitative approach, gathering data in the form of qualitative insights. Burhan (2008, p. 40–41) describes qualitative research as focusing on the description and analysis of phenomena, social activities, perceptions, beliefs, individuals, and thoughts. This study further categorizes as library research, as data collection relies on various forms of literature. Such literature includes not only books but also materials from journals, magazines, newspapers, and digital sources.

The research design is organized to collect and analyze data derived from *The White Tiger*, a novel by Aravind Adiga. An objective approach has been chosen for analyzing the theme of human exploitation, given that exploitation and caste differences serve as intrinsic elements of the novel. Hence, this approach is well-suited for the study's focus. Additionally, psychoanalytic theory is applied to investigate the specific research questions.

Data in this research serves to address predefined issues. According to Hornby (2010, p. 295), data consists of any information or facts used to make decisions or conduct discussions. Here, data comprises sentences from *The White Tiger*, particularly statements, dialogues, and descriptions offered by the author. The primary data source is the novel itself, containing 321 pages and eight chapters. To support the analysis, secondary sources—including literature theory texts, dictionaries, theory books, and online materials discussing psychological theories—were also consulted.

Data collection in qualitative research is the process of gathering and managing research-relevant information. In this study, data from *The White Tiger* was collected using documentation and note-taking methods. Arikunto (2002, p. 206) defines documentation as collecting data related to various records, books, periodicals, transcripts, and agendas. The second method, note-taking, is defined by Hornby (2010, p.1004) as the act of closely observing and documenting key information.

The final steps in qualitative research involve analyzing, interpreting, and presenting the results. Ary (2005, p. 465) describes data analysis as a process in which researchers systematically organize and interpret their data to enhance understanding and convey their findings. This study adopts a psychological approach, with the researcher carefully reading the novel to identify psychological aspects within specific passages. Central conflicts, in particular, are closely examined, as they are integral to the psychological dimensions explored in the text.

4. Discussion

4.1 Discrimination

Adiga depicts two contrasting images of India: the *India of Light* and the *India of Darkness*. The *Darkness* represents rural India, where people endure poverty and injustice under the control of exploitative landlords and corrupt politicians. Conversely, the *India of Light* symbolizes urban India, with access to education, healthcare, electricity, running water, hope, and justice. Social conditions in the *Darkness* reflect a reality marked by injustice and inequality. The poor lack the right to voice their concerns and face widespread discrimination and exploitation. The divide between the *big belly* and *the small belly* captures the economic and social disparities that harm the poor. Issues such as poverty, unemployment, a flawed education system, inadequate healthcare, the dowry system, and exploitative master-servant relationships are all rooted in the enduring influence of the caste system.

Despite claims that the caste system has been abolished, these assertions do not reflect the reality. Social distinctions in India, which separate the poor from the rich, are deeply embedded in the caste hierarchy. The caste system is a highly structured and rigid social hierarchy based on birth, where people inherit their caste from their parents and pass it on to their children. Each caste is linked to certain occupations, with economic prosperity often correlating to caste level. Those of higher castes typically enjoy greater wealth and opportunities, while lower-caste individuals face severe poverty and social disadvantage. Lacking access to quality education, lower-caste

families cannot afford to send their children to reputable schools, unlike wealthier landlords who can even send their children abroad. This lack of educational opportunity limits their access to stable employment, confining them to menial jobs like rickshaw-pulling, cart-pulling, or working as laborers on landlords' farms. Occupations are largely restricted by caste, reinforcing a cycle of economic and social inequality.

> *The old driver asked, "What caste are you?"*
> *"Halwai."*
> *"Sweet-makers," the old driver said, shaking his head. "That's what you people do. You make sweets. How can you learn to drive?" He pointed his hookah at the live coals. "That's like getting coals to make ice for you; it's like taming a wild stallion-only a boy from the warrior castes can manage that. You need to have aggression in your blood. Muslims, Rajputs, and Sikhs-they're fighters; they can become drivers. You think sweet makers can last long in fourth gear?* (Adiga, 2008, p. 56)"

The quote reflects caste-based discrimination embedded in Indian society, particularly in limiting career aspirations based on one's caste. Here, the old driver dismisses the protagonist's ability to become a driver because he belongs to the *Halwai* caste, traditionally associated with sweet-making. This rigid stereotype restricts individuals' choices, assuming that one's caste defines one's natural abilities and limitations. The driver's comparison—saying that expecting a sweet-maker to drive is like "getting coals to make ice" or "taming a wild stallion"—illustrates the deeply ingrained notion that only certain castes, namely the "warrior castes" like Rajputs, Sikhs, and Muslims, possess the aggression or inherent strength needed for driving. This prejudice discourages cross-caste movement and reinforces occupational immobility, showcasing how caste hierarchies continue to hinder personal growth and opportunity. Adiga, through this dialogue, underscores the pervasive caste-based stereotyping that perpetuates inequality by denying individuals from lower castes the freedom to pursue their ambitions.

The caste system profoundly shapes the dynamics between master and servant, underscoring deep-seated social biases in Indian society. For Balram's masters, religion and caste are paramount in hiring decisions, as they prefer employees who are Hindu and from higher castes. This preference reflects a discriminatory attitude that reinforces caste-based social divisions.

> *"Are you from a top caste or a bottom caste, boys?"*
> *"Bottom, sir."*
> *The old man said, "All our employees are top caste. It won't hurt to have one or two bottom castes working for us* (Adiga, 2008, p. 64)".

In this exchange, the master's condescending acceptance—"It won't hurt to have one or two bottom castes"—reveals an attitude that tolerates lower-caste individuals only as an exception, reinforcing a deeply hierarchical mindset. Adiga uses this dialogue to expose the prejudice lower-caste individuals encounter, as they are considered inherently less suitable yet occasionally permissible in roles typically dominated by upper-caste employees. This interaction emphasizes the rigid social stratification maintained by the caste system and the challenges lower-caste individuals face within it.

Balram experiences profound humiliation at the hands of his master, who treats him with blatant disregard and condescension. This mistreatment is illustrated in an incident where Balram's master orders him to retrieve a single rupee coin lost in the car, despite having just paid a substantial bribe of half a million rupees. This demand underscores the master's demeaning attitude and his exploitation of Balram as a servant.

> *"Get down on your knees. Look for it on the floor of the car."*
> *I got down on my knees. I sniffed in between the mats like a dog, all in search of that one rupee.*
> *"We've just paid half a million rupees in a bribe. Mukhesh, and now we're screwing this man over for a single rupee."*
> *Finally, I took a rupee coin out of my shirt pocket, picked it up, and gave it to the Mongoose.*
> *There was a childish delight on his dark master's face* (Adiga, 2008, p. 139).

Here, Adiga illustrates the sharp disparity between the master's wealth and his stingy, almost sadistic pleasure in belittling Balram. The master's "childish delight" at reclaiming the coin reveals a twisted satisfaction in reducing Balram to a position of near servility, commanding him to "sniff" for the coin "like a dog." Through this interaction, Adiga exposes the ingrained class and caste prejudices, highlighting how masters exercise control over servants not merely economically but psychologically, dehumanizing them for their own amusement.

Balram faces yet another form of mistreatment and exploitation when he is coerced into taking responsibility for a crime committed by his master's wife, Pinky, who accidentally kills a child in a car accident. This act of blackmail forces Balram to become a scapegoat, bearing the consequences of his employer's actions.

> *To whomsoever it may concern,*
> *I, Balram Hawai, son of Vikram Halwai, of Laxmangarh village in the district of Gaya, do make the following statement of my own free will and intention:*
> *That I drove the car that hit an unidentified person or persons, or person and objects, on the night of January 23rd this year...*
> *I swear by almighty God that I make this statement under no duress and under instruction from no one* (Adiga, 2008, p. 167).

In signing this statement, Balram is forced to falsely confess to a serious crime, which he had no part in, to protect his wealthy employer. This act of exploitation is a direct result of the master-servant power dynamic, where Balram's lack of agency and social standing is ruthlessly manipulated. Adiga uses this scenario to shed light on the pervasive injustice servants face, who are compelled to sacrifice their own well-being for the comfort and security of their masters. Through this scene, Adiga criticizes the systemic abuse of power and class inequalities that allow the wealthy to escape accountability while the poor are left to suffer the repercussions.

4.2 Violence

In this analysis, Balram's journey highlights the theme of violence as a manifestation of class struggle and personal transformation. Negotiation, while traditionally viewed as a means to resolve conflict, is depicted here as a process that

often fails to address underlying power dynamics. Instead, it can lead to regressive solutions that do not challenge the status quo. Balram's perspective emphasizes that true change is necessary for personal growth, yet the societal structures surrounding him inhibit this change.

To explain the violence inherent in his situation, Balram employs the metaphor of the Rooster Coop, illustrating how India's impoverished population is trapped in a system that compels them to witness their own subjugation without the courage or means to escape. This metaphor poignantly reflects how the wealthy elite have so thoroughly oppressed the poor that they internalize their oppression, leading to a cycle of violence that is both self-inflicted and externally imposed.

Furthermore, Balram perceives the city of Delhi as a corrupting force that amplifies his feelings of anger and rebellion. His corruption unfolds as a passive experience, allowing him to detach from the moral implications of his actions. This detachment culminates in a lack of remorse for his unethical behavior, which Adiga critiques as indicative of a broader societal malaise.

> *"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?"*
> *"Range"*
> *The more I stole from him, the more I realized how much he had stolen from me.*
> *To go back to the analogy I used when describing Indian politics to you earlier, I was growing a belly at last* (Adiga, 2008, p. 231).

As Balram's idealization of Ashok fades, he begins to covet the very things that signify Ashok's power—wealth and sexual conquest. The act of stealing serves as a catalyst for Balram's growing rage, revealing the deep-seated inequality between them. This rage drives him toward violence, culminating in a pivotal moment of brutal retribution.

> *When I got the blood out of my eyes, it was all over for Mr. Ashok. The blood was draining from the neck quite fast; I believe that is the way the Muslims kill their chickens* (Adiga, 2008, p. 285).

In this chilling act, Balram's violence symbolizes a final break from his subservience and a desperate assertion of agency. The visceral imagery used by Adiga not only underscores the brutality of Balram's actions but also reflects the larger context of violence embedded in Indian society, where oppression breeds a cycle of retribution and moral decay. Through Balram's transformation, Adiga critiques a society that rewards unethical behavior while silencing the voices of those trapped within its brutal hierarchies.

5. Conclusion

Aravind Adiga's exploration of discrimination and violence in *The White Tiger* unveils the harsh realities of India's socio-economic landscape, starkly contrasting the *India of Light* with the *India of Darkness*. The depiction of caste-based discrimination reveals a deeply entrenched hierarchy that perpetuates poverty and restricts social mobility for the lower castes. Adiga emphasizes how the systemic nature of this discrimination not only limits individuals' aspirations but also dehumanizes them within the master-servant dynamic, showcasing the psychological and emotional toll of such

exploitation. Furthermore, the theme of violence serves as a critical lens through which Balram's transformation is examined. His experiences illustrate how economic deprivation and societal oppression can drive individuals toward moral decay and violent acts as a means of reclaiming agency. The metaphor of the Rooster Coop poignantly captures the internalized oppression faced by the impoverished, reflecting a cycle of violence that is both self-inflicted and imposed by the elite. Ultimately, Adiga's narrative critiques the societal structures that enable inequality and injustice, revealing a pervasive malaise that stifles progress and perpetuates suffering. The journey of Balram is not merely a personal struggle for empowerment; it is emblematic of a broader commentary on the entrenched disparities that define contemporary Indian society. Through Balram's evolution, Adiga calls for a critical examination of these inequalities, urging readers to confront the uncomfortable truths about power dynamics and the human cost of systemic oppression.

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