
Adiga's '*The White Tiger*': A Comprehensive Reflection of India's Law and Constitutional Framework- A Study

G. Ranga Suryanarayana

Asst. Prof. of English

MVS Govt. Arts & Science College (A)

Mahabubnagar, Telangana State,9652257015

surya.browning@gmail.com

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2022.4.12.165

Abstract:

This research paper explores the portrayal of India's legal and constitutional framework in Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger*. By analyzing the novel's themes and characters, the study examines how Adiga reflects India's socio-legal realities. Focusing on the journey of the protagonist, Balram Halwai, the paper highlights his navigation through India's legal system and his challenge to established norms. It investigates the intersections of power, corruption, and social inequality, revealing the novel's critique of the effectiveness and shortcomings of India's legal and constitutional systems. Additionally, the research examines the contrast between the ideals of justice and the lived experiences of marginalized communities. Using insights from literary analysis and legal studies, this study underscores *The White Tiger* as a significant work that engages with issues of social justice and governance, inviting readers to reflect on the complexities of India's legal landscape.

Key words: Marginalization, Legal, social justice, oppression, systematic inequalities, corruption)

Introduction:

Aravind Adiga, a prominent contemporary Indian author, has garnered international acclaim for his thought-provoking literary works that delve into the complex social, political, and economic dynamics of modern India. One of his seminal works, 'The White Tiger,' published in 2008, is a striking commentary on the multifaceted nature of Indian society. Set against a rapidly transforming India backdrop, the novel follows the gripping narrative of Balram Halwai, a resourceful and ambitious protagonist who rises from humble origins to become a successful entrepreneur. Adiga's exploration of Balram's journey provides a lens through which the intricate interplay between India's law, constitutional framework, and societal hierarchies can be dissected and understood. The portrayal of India's law and constitutional framework in 'The White Tiger' holds immense significance as it offers a nuanced examination of the country's legal system and

governance. Adiga's vivid narrative exposes the stark disparities between the ideals enshrined in India's constitution and the stark realities experienced by its citizens, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. By delving into Balram's experiences with the legal system, the novel invites readers to critically engage with the effectiveness of justice delivery mechanisms, corruption's prevalence, and socio-economic inequalities' influence. This exploration is particularly relevant in the contemporary context as India grapples with social justice, human rights, and equitable development issues. Adiga's work mirrors the intricacies of a nation undergoing rapid modernization while grappling with age-old traditions and power structures. Through an analysis of the character's interactions with the legal apparatus, the novel sheds light on how constitutional principles can be compromised, manipulated, or subverted, raising fundamental questions about the efficacy of India's legal institutions and the extent to which they uphold the rights and dignity of all citizens.

In 'The White Tiger,' Adiga's motivations appear rooted in a desire to unmask the contradictions and hypocrisies that persist within India's societal fabric. Through the character of Balram, Adiga presents a platform for challenging prevailing narratives, often overlooked in mainstream discourse. Balram's journey from a subservient driver to a self-made entrepreneur serves as a vehicle for Adiga to voice his critique of a system that perpetuates exploitation, particularly along the lines of class and caste. Balaram said, "That's my caste—my destiny. Everyone in the Darkness who hears that name knows all about me at once.... The owner thought, *Ah, they're Halwais, making sweets and tea is in their blood*" (p.38). Adiga's choice to engage with law and constitutionalism underscores his intention to expose the dissonance between legislative ideals and their real-world application. During this era, India experienced a paradoxical blend of modernity and tradition, characterized by the coexistence of tech-driven progress and age-old power structures. Rapid economic growth, while leading to increased prosperity for some, highlighted the disparities between urban affluence and rural poverty. Corruption, often intertwined with bureaucratic and political spheres, further exacerbated these inequalities. The novel's setting reflects the post-colonial legacy of India's legal and constitutional framework, which strives to establish a just and egalitarian society. The actual implementation and enforcement of these principles are often hampered by corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of access to justice, particularly for marginalized communities.

Through the Legal system: Balram Halwai's journey through the legal system in 'The White Tiger' offers a glimpse into the complexities and challenges individuals from marginalized backgrounds face when navigating India's legal apparatus. Balram's encounters with the legal system are fraught with a sense of powerlessness and disillusionment, shedding light on the inherent flaws and inequities within the system. Balram's initial brush with the law occurs when he accidentally kills Pinky Madam in a car accident. Despite his lack of intent, Balram's status as a driver from a lower caste leaves him vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation by the wealthy and influential. Balram is forced to accept and sign on the murder statement,

I, BALRAM HALWAI, THAT I DROVE THE CAR THAT HIT AN UNIDENTIFIED PERSON, OR PERSONS, OR PERSON AND OBJECTS, ON THE NIGHT OF JANUARY..... 23RD THIS YEAR..... THAT I WAS ALONE IN THE CAR, AND ALONE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THAT HAPPENED. I SWEAR BY ALMIGHTY GOD THAT I MAKE THIS STATEMENT UNDER NO DURESS AND UNDER INSTRUCTION FROM NO ONE. (p.82)

Balaram attempts to seek justice are thwarted by his inability to access legal representation and his fear of retribution from those in power. This highlights the inherent bias and the unequal distribution of legal protection based on social standing. Balaram's experiences with law enforcement accentuate the corruption that permeates the system. When he tries to report the accident, the police officer demands a bribe, revealing how bribery and unethical practices are deeply entrenched within the law enforcement machinery. This delineation reflects the widespread perception of police corruption in India, where access to justice often depends on one's ability to pay.

Balaram's perspectives on justice are shaped by his experiences and social conditioning. "I was born and raised in Darkness". (p.17). His early life in the Darkness, a metaphor for rural poverty and obscurity, ingrains in him a sense of fatalism and submission to his circumstances. As he gains exposure to the world outside, his perspective on justice evolves, becoming increasingly critical of the system's failures. Balaram's interactions with legal institutions, such as the police station and the courthouse, reveal his growing awareness of the system's inherent biases. His observations of these institutions' inefficiency, corruption, and favoritism challenge his initial idealistic notions of justice. Balaram's eventual decision to take matters into his own hands, albeit through criminal means, can manifest his disillusionment with the legal system's ability to deliver justice to those on the fringes of society. Balaram's journey through the legal system serves as a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by marginalized individuals in India. Adiga uses Balaram's experiences to highlight the stark disparities in access to justice, the prevalence of corruption, and the systemic obstacles that hinder equitable legal recourse. Through Balaram's evolving perspectives, the novel prompts readers to reflect on the complexities of justice, the limitations of the legal framework, and the urgent need for systemic reform to address the needs of all citizens, regardless of their social or economic background.

Corruption, Inequality, and the Constitution:

Aravind Adiga vividly portrays the pervasive nature of corruption within India's legal and political domains. The characters' interactions with these spheres underscore how corruption becomes an integral part of the power dynamics and governance in the country. For instance, Balaram's experiences with the police and the judiciary reveal a system where bribery and nepotism are the norm rather than exceptions. His encounter with the police officer demanding a bribe following the accident reflects the casual acceptance of corruption to achieve desired outcomes.

Also, political corruption is exemplified through the character of the Stork, who exploits his political connections to further his economic interests and evade accountability. “The Mongoose squinted at the statue (Gandhi).....We’re driving past Gandhi, after just having given a bribe to a minister. It’s a fucking joke, isn’t it?”(p.69) The novel exposes how manipulating power and resources through corrupt practices perpetuates a cycle of inequality and hinders social progress.

Undermining Constitutional Principles by Systemic Inequalities:

Adiga skillfully highlights how systemic inequalities undermine the principles enshrined in India's Constitution. The novel's characters and circumstances serve as a lens through which these inequalities are magnified: Caste-based Discrimination: The caste system looms large and influences every aspect of the characters' lives. Balram rightly remarked, “The story of a poor man’s life is written on his body, in a sharp pen.” (p.22) Balram, hailing from a lower caste, is trapped in a cycle of servitude and exploitation. The Constitution's promise of equality is juxtaposed against the stark reality of a deeply entrenched caste hierarchy that limits social mobility and access to opportunities. Economic Disparities: The novel illustrates the chasm between the rich and the poor, with characters like Ashok and Balram representing the extremes. “The dreams of the rich, and the dreams of the poor—they never overlap, do they? See, the poor dream all their lives of getting enough to eat and looking like the rich. And what do the rich dream of?” (p.109) The Constitution's aim of ensuring economic justice and reducing inequalities is thwarted by the immense wealth distribution disparity perpetuated by corruption and the concentration of power. It is rightly remarked in the novel about freeing from poverty, but hesitated for Indians,

“Maybe once in a hundred years there is a revolution that frees the poor.... only four men in history have led successful revolutions to free the slaves and kill their masters, this page said:

Alexander the Great.

Abraham Lincoln of America.

Mao of your country.

And a fourth man. It may have been Hitler” (p.143)

Lack of Access to Justice: While theoretically designed to provide justice to all, the legal system often remains inaccessible to those without privilege or resources. Balram's futile attempts to seek justice following the accident underscore the gap between constitutional ideals and practical realities. Political Exploitation: The Stork's manipulation of political influence to protect his interests showcases how the powerful can exploit constitutional mechanisms to maintain their hold on resources and authority, leaving the marginalized further marginalized. The novel presents a scathing critique of how corruption and systemic inequalities undermine the foundational principles of justice, equality, and democracy laid out in India's constitution. “The minister wants

more. It's election time. Every time there's elections, we hand out cash. Usually to both sides, but this time the government is going to win for sure. The opposition is in a total mess. So we just have to pay off the government, which is good for us." (p.117) Adiga's characters navigate a world where constitutional ideals often crumble in the face of deeply rooted structural injustices, prompting readers to confront uncomfortable truths about the nation's socio-political landscape and the urgent need for meaningful reform.

Legal Discrimination and Impact on Marginalized Individuals:

The novel effectively illustrates how legal discrimination compounds the challenges faced by marginalized individuals. Balram's experiences expose the limitations of legal recourse for those on the fringes of society. His lack of access to quality legal representation, the demands for bribes, and the overall indifference of the legal system to his plight reflects the systemic barriers that prevent marginalized individuals from seeking justice. Furthermore, the caste system perpetuates a cycle of discrimination that extends beyond legal institutions. The novel's portrayal of Balram's interactions with employers, society, and even his family underscores the dehumanizing impact of caste-based discrimination. Balram's journey is a poignant example of how the intersection of caste and legal discrimination traps individuals in a cycle of poverty and exploitation. The legal discrimination faced by Balram and other marginalized characters highlights the gap between the ideals of justice and the harsh realities of life under the caste system. Adiga's narrative invites readers to confront the moral and ethical implications of a society where legal and social discrimination intersect, perpetuating a cycle of oppression and limiting the prospects for meaningful change. The novelist masterfully depicts how the caste system influences legal practices and exacerbates societal hierarchies, leading to legal discrimination that disproportionately affects marginalized individuals. Through its characters and their experiences, the novel prompts readers to critically examine the enduring legacy of caste-based inequalities and the urgent need for reform within the legal and social spheres.

Power Dynamics, Legal Loopholes and Perpetuation of Injustice:

Adiga skillfully navigates the intricate power dynamics between different social classes in India and how these dynamics intersect with the legal system. The novel's characters and interactions vividly portray how social status, economic privilege, and political influence shape the outcomes of legal proceedings. Balram's journey from a lower-caste driver to an entrepreneur offers a lens through which readers can observe the shifting power dynamics. Initially he is refused to learn driving, the old driver asked,

“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?” (p.35)

The humble position of drivers, often from lower castes, underscores their vulnerability within the legal framework. Balram's interactions with his employers, notably Ashok and Pinky

Madam, illustrate how the wealthy exploit their social and economic advantage to manipulate legal situations and evade accountability. The Stork's ability to manipulate legal outcomes demonstrates how social and political clout can overshadow the principles of justice and equity.

The author's exploration of legal loopholes within the novel underscores their role in perpetuating injustice and enabling the exploitation of the vulnerable. The Stork's ability to escape consequences for his crimes by exploiting legal technicalities exemplifies how the wealthy can manipulate the legal system to their advantage. The impunity with which he operates exposes the inherent flaws in the legal framework that allow those in power to evade accountability. Balram's actions—his calculated murder of Ashok—highlight the desperation that legal loopholes can drive individuals to. Balram exploits the legal ambiguity to commit a crime, revealing how systemic deficiencies can push marginalized individuals to resort to extreme measures due to a lack of trust in the justice system. The juxtaposition of Balram's actions and Stork's maneuvering illustrates how legal loopholes can create a distorted sense of justice, where the wealthy and powerful can exploit gaps in the system. At the same time, the marginalized remain ensnared by its complexities. Through its characters and their experiences, the novel reveals how social and economic disparities intersect with legal processes to create an environment where justice is often elusive.

Reflections on Justice and Governance:

'The White Tiger' serves as a trenchant commentary on the effectiveness of India's legal and constitutional framework in delivering justice, particularly to marginalized individuals. The characters' experiences and interactions within the legal system offer a scathing critique of the system's limitations and shortcomings. Balram's journey, marked by his encounters with corruption, legal discrimination, and power dynamics, highlights the stark disconnect between the lofty ideals of justice enshrined in the Constitution and their actual implementation. The novel questions the notion of justice itself. Balram's transformation from a subservient driver to a cunning entrepreneur reflects disillusionment with conventional norms of justice. His actions, including the murder of Ashok, challenge readers to question whether justice can be served within a system plagued by corruption and inequality.

Implications for Governance and Social Order:

Adiga's exploration of justice in the novel extends beyond the legal realm, shedding light on its broader implications for governance and social order. The characters' experiences reflect a society grappling with the consequences of unchecked power, economic disparities, and systemic corruption. Balram's rise to power exposes the fragility of social hierarchies and the potential for upheaval when marginalized individuals assert agency. His subversion of traditional roles and his ruthless pursuit of success underscore the impact of inequitable governance on individual behavior and aspirations. The novel underscores the corrosive impact of corruption on social cohesion. The Stork's ability to exploit his political connections highlights the erosion of trust in institutions and the potential for those in power to exploit their positions for personal gain, thereby perpetuating a cycle of injustice and inequality.

Conclusion:

The characters in *The White Tiger* serve as lenses, each revealing a distinct aspect of India's complex socio-legal framework. Together, they illuminate the disconnect between constitutional ideals and the harsh realities faced by marginalized individuals. Adiga's narrative critiques the limitations of the legal and constitutional system, urging readers to reflect on its broader implications for social stability and justice. Through Balram Halwai's journey, the novel explores systemic corruption, legal discrimination, and the exploitation perpetuated by entrenched inequalities. Balram's story becomes a powerful allegory for the countless silenced voices oppressed by an inequitable system. His actions underscore the desperation fostered by a justice system that remains inaccessible to the marginalized, highlighting how legal loopholes often serve as tools of oppression for the disadvantaged while empowering the privileged.

Adiga's work calls attention to the urgent need for structural reform and governance that ensures equitable access to justice. It challenges readers to reconsider the foundations of a fair society, emphasizing the necessity of a legal framework that serves all citizens, regardless of their social or economic status. As we navigate the socio-legal labyrinth alongside Balram, *The White Tiger* compels us to confront the pressing need for a more inclusive system that genuinely upholds the principles of democracy, social justice, and human rights for all.

References:

- Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. Harper Collins, 2008.
- Baxi, Upendra. "Taking Suffering Seriously: Social Action Litigation in the Supreme Court of India." *Third World Legal Studies*, vol. 8, 1989, pp. 1-23.
- Chatterjee, Partha. "Democracy and Economic Transformation in India." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1993, pp. 79-87.
- Guha, Ramachandra. *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*. HarperCollins, 2007.
- Sen, Amartya. *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.