

# Rupturing From the Rooster Coop: Characterising Subaltern in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper will critically analyze the characteristics of subaltern through the hero Balram Halwai in the highly applauded novel **The White Tiger** by Arvind Adiga. The rise of one downtrodden man who destined to work as a slave is the central theme of this paper. This paper will deal with a vivid study of India's class struggle told through the characterization of a village boy who becomes the chauffeur to a rich man. This paper is based on the disparities of two worlds: darkness, inhabited by poor and underprivileged who cannot even meet their bare minimums; and the lighted world, inhabited by zamindars, politicians, businessmen etc who shamelessly exploits the ones from darkness, making them even poorer and grows their own opulence. This paper is an observation of a voyage from the darkness of village life to the light of entrepreneurial success is absolutely unethical, brilliantly disrespectful, deeply appealing and altogether unforgettable.*

**Key words:** Rupturing, Rooster coop, Subaltern, Chauffeur.

## Introduction

Arvind Adiga wrote his master piece **The White Tiger** considered as a radical novel confronting with the brutal India's class struggle in the shadow of oppression of subaltern also won Man Booker Prize in the year 2008. One can see Adiga's novel as a vigorous, heated and darkly witty novel about a subaltern's voyage from Indian rural life to capitalist triumph. The protagonist of the novel, Balram Halwai, who belongs to a down trodden family, conveys the ugly humorous viewpoint of India's class resist. It has been conveyed through a series of letters from the unfortunate protagonist Balram Halwai to Wen Jiabao. In a flash, it's a roller coaster ride of the life of Balram as 'no one' started from a remote village and completes at the urban city as 'someone'. He started his quest from Delhi where he works as a chauffeur to a wealth property owner, and then to Bangalore (now known as Bangaluru), the fortune turned place as he flees after murdering his boss and burgling all his money. Similar to this, the novel also raises question regarding issues of religion, caste differences and loyalty, corruption and poverty in India. Ultimately, Balram rises unethically from his sweet maker caste and becomes a flourishing tycoon, establishing his own taxi service. In a nation proudly holding the history of deficiency,

Balram represents, as he himself says, "tomorrow".

## Decoding the term "The Rooster Coop"

Through the medium of this novel Adiga brings to attention the India under the shadow of caste differences, articulating the voice of the marginalised and oppressed, trying to exclude the bias between the –Big Bellies and the Small Bellies|| (64), and make an ideal society based on the ethics of sameness and integrity. Balram Halwai in this novel comes out as a representative voice of underclass and metaphorically described as –Rooster coop (173). In **The White Tiger**, one can find many similes of humans existing like animals. Balram says –Let animals live like animals; let humans live like humans. Both the rich and the deprived –pass life like nonhuman because they equally opt wicked choices due to anxiety. The poor of India is often referred to as roosters in a rooster coop whose life is at the mercy of the slaughter. The metaphor of the Rooster Coop coveys the bitter truth of the Indian society that how corruption is deeply rooted into the society due to the deep rift between the rich and the poor. Everywhere the subalterns are ensnared in Rooster Coop and trying to come out

of the coop. Balram is the psyche of below class—their rage, disappointment, rebel and revenge, ready to accept a new ethical code of manner to succeed in life. Murder by him is the reaction of deep-rooted annoyance of underclass experiencing the contrarieties between the above class and below class.

### **Life in "the Darkness"**

As the novel is narrated through the series of letters by Balram to the Premier of China, who is soon going to visit India, seems to be a biography of his past experience. A typical Indian man Balram belongs to a poor background, born in the village of Laxmangarh one of the dark corner of India. In his home town, Balram was raised in a large, not well to do family from the caste of Halwai, a caste that indicates sweet-makers. The caste to which he belongs is being identified as one of the low caste in region of India. Balram has been experiencing the injustice and oppression since his childhood as he witnesses the suppression of the villagers of his caste by the four devils of his village. Balram is brought up in such condition where no one cares or sympathy for any one in both cases; siblings or cousin. The routine suppression made them that much of feeling less that they never realises any kind of sense or emotion for anyone. Unfortunately, Balram was removed from school to labour in a tea stall with his brother, Kishan. But it proved to be a turning point of his life as he came in contact of different people at his shop which gives him a vast sense of wisdom. Thus his education still continues there at the tea shop as he eavesdrops on the conversations of shop customers. For earning money Balram starts working as chauffeur and his ambitious nature for him to raise more money by taking drive course from a cab driver. Thus further in the novel this shift of Balram proves to be the rise from darkness to dawn.

### **The Tiger on the Hunt**

As the reading of the novel conveys Balram Halwai, the White Tiger- A rare creature on the earth, aspires to be a wealthy man. But his does not have the correct platform to flourish as he is living in the remote village of India. His over

ambitious nature takes him from rural to urban-a village to the metropolitan city Bangalore. His letters addressing to the Chinese Premier who is coming to visit India considers as the mirror to the reality of Indian society. In his letter he describes his shift and his experience as driver and servant to a wealthy Indian family, which he thinks exemplifies the contradictions and problems of Indian society. Ambitious Balram shifts from village to Delhi with his masters Ashok and his wife Ms Pinky Madam. One incident which turns the whole story is being made by Pinky Madam as One night she decides to drive the car by herself and gives a violent blow to something. She is bothered that it was a kid and the family ultimately decides to file a case against Balram for the hit and run crime. But luckily the police tell that no complaint has been reported for missing child so that fortunately no further inquiry is done. That was the first instance where Balram witnesses the deep rooted corruption as his master Ashok becomes more and more involved with the fraudulent government itself. After being insulted and humiliated immensely numerous times Balram coveys his intention to murder his boss to the reader and the Chinese Premier. Balram is so aware of the rooster coop inside which he has been suffocated since long. Now it's enough for him as he cannot tolerate this pain and wants to break it and searching an exit window. Thus while searching for exit window Balram plans one conspiracy. He decides the only way that he will be able to escape India's 'Rooster Coop' will be by killing and robbing Ashok. He also searches a way out of the coop that nobody else within it can make out.

Now extremely suffocated Balram wants to get rid of this slavery as soon as possible. Entirely jolted by an inner storm Balram on one rainy day he kills Ashok by bludgeoning him with a broken liquor bottle. Now it's time for him to fly in the sky and he does the same thing as he run away to Bangalore with his young nephew. The all worst of situation which one can find in the cheater and dishonest world like murder, cheating, bribery and stealing, Balram witnesses and handles every one of these successfully. His zeal and ability to learn makes all such nasty situation easy to handle for him. No one can ever assume from a driver

such intellect as being seen by Balram. It is him who recites his story of him shifting from one city to another with his master as a business need while driving car. But irony is of his fellow chauffeur, meanwhile, is simply pawns who are not aware of the role they play in the bigger picture in short dumb to aristocracy of the city. They are the most powerless ones who are destined for being subjugated by a very unfair and disgraceful society aiming on making them its doormat

A vicious sight of India's class struggle is shrewdly offered in Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger*. Balram Halwai is from the Darkness of village life, born where India's downtrodden and unlucky are destined to become rancid. Adiga's existential and unsophisticated writing style describes the battle between India's wealthy and poor as Balram suffers humiliating handling at the hands of his employers in other word masters. Novel is full of such instances where we can observe Balram being insulted very roughly as being a driver he has to offer his services of a servant carrying bags in the malls, cooking and polishing the legs of the stork, and so on. Fortune favours the brave, such proverb become true in case of Balram as his fortunes and destiny get better significantly after killing of his master and flee to Bangalore. Besides all his faults he is though an intelligent and inventive storyteller with a sharp and ironic edge that values him to readers, even as he rails about dishonesty, permits himself to be corrupted by his bosses, devilish mentality, sarcasm and in the end returns from moral ambiguity and absolute criminality. It is a bitter reality that in such rural corners of India the caste system still remains. As per the myths of India a person is born into a caste, and the caste one belongs to decides his or her profession. In his own word he describes caste system of India that it was a "... clean, well-kept orderly zoo" (63). The author of this novel brings to the notice of the readers the corrupt caste system of India by the character of Balram as he adopts the illegal way like 'by hook or crook' to fulfil all his desires and dreams including the murder of his masters.

The entire novel conveys that Balram is not an ordinary person like his caste mates but someone extraordinary with unique qualities and skills. The nick name given to him "White Tiger" is a symbol of liberty, freedom and eccentricity. He comes on the surface as a winner as he able to get out from the 'Darkness' and approach to the 'daylight.' Balram, the central character in the work of fiction, made his way out of his near to the ground social class and overcame the social shackles that restricted his family in the past. Adiga talks about how Balram was in a rooster coop and how he ruptured out from his coop made by caste system of India. The novel defines India's society as pessimistic towards the subordinate social caste. Many a times Balram forced to hide his caste as he knows that if he tells them the reality about his caste then no one will hire him for the job even for the labour work. This novel reflects how our trade and industry structure nowadays creates socioeconomic gaps that create a big division in society. It limits the rights given by the Indian constitution as well as opportunity, social mobility, health and pleasures that should be given to all citizens of this country.

### Conclusion

Balram's struggle for rupturing the rooster coop shows the subjugation of the lower caste system and the dominance of the upper caste. He narrates a story of certain social and political issues like caste system, corruption and dirty politics and tells how all these issues hurdles the progress of India as a fast developing country. Balram finds and shows how in the country of India the person coming from the high class bribes to get his work done. Such people use money as tool to get rid of any issues whether it is loyal or not. With this he also suggests that the person who born in the family of poor remains poor forever so as their children. It continues for generation to generation. Balram is a rare omission, as he experiences both sides of the caste system and manages to rupture the social class rooster coop. The novel is an intellectual and cold-blooded description of India in which downtrodden people like Balram is being manipulated by the rich and at last how does he

become successful in rupturing the rooster coop of class indifference.

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**Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance.**  
~ Will Durant