

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2018.2.6.07>

## **Literariness of Globalization: A Study of *The White Tiger***

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### **Abstract**

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* was published in 2008 and it reflects India after globalization. The thematization of globalization in literature and in turn the influence of globalization on literature has been the concern of many critics in last few years. James Annesley's *Fictions of Globalization* (2006) also treats globalization as a theme in a range of contemporary American fiction. But as it is evident that this project of analysing and discussing the relationship between literature and globalization is very vast and requires a lot of time and space, therefore the concern of this paper will be only *The White Tiger*. The process of globalization in India started with the introduction of New Economic process in 1991 after pursuing the import substitution for nearly forty years. Globalization as an economic activity has not remained detached with other cultural canons of the society. Not only in India, but the interchange of worldviews and ideas has resulted in a major transformation of the lifestyle living standard of people globally.

**Keywords-** *Globalization, Binary, Culture, Tradition, Myth*

### **Introduction**

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* received much acclaim as well as criticism when it bagged the Man Booker prize 2008. This novel reveals the binary nature of Indian culture; the Light and the Darkness and how the caste system has been reduced to "Men with Big Bellies and Men with small Bellies". The novel showcases two extreme dimensions of modern India, on one side is the changing face of high-tech and rich India, particularly in the emergence of Bangalore as the IT city and outsourcing capital of the world and on the other side is the darker side of India, revealing the culture of caste and the snare of corruption. The main purpose of this paper would be to explore this novel in the light of the representation of India in the age of globalization. The primary focus of this paper will be to show the negative impact of globalization on India, especially on the poor people and on Indian culture. Most importantly the paper would be based on textual examples and will attempt to justify its

arguments with the help of the text itself. It is very difficult to confine globalization to a single definition because the term or concept has come to refer to a range of interlocking variables and trends so much so that once the term is mentioned; it evokes a lot of passion and emotion. Whereas the dominant perception of globalization in Western Europe is the existence of the vast opportunities for economic development and significant contribution to improving people's condition of existence, the Third World perception of globalization is that of a dangerous process that increases inequality within and among states. Martin Khor has declared that "Globalization is what we in the third world have for several centuries called colonization". The people who are against globalization are convinced of the fact that international companies have taken up the place of colonizers. These have spread their branches into the economies of all the countries. There is hardly any need to stress the fact that literature has always been subject to socio-political and economic pressures. Marxist criticism always seeks to establish a link between actual, material conditions—the economy, salary, factory conditions, profits, forms of living, population—and cultural forms (art) and abstract representations in cultural forms. Therefore every artist is influenced by the society in which he lives and consequently this society is reflected in his art.

There is no doubt that Indian writers in English have contributed in exploring the effect of globalization on India's civilization and culture. But the way Aravind Adiga has dealt with the subject of globalization in the context of India and the way he has dealt with exposing the influence and effect of globalization on India in general and on poor people of India, in particular, is admirable. Adiga's *The White Tiger* is set in an India increasingly tending towards capitalism and global integration, its ambitious protagonist Balram Halwiah comes to realise that the only way to get counted in this throat cut competition is to employ illegal and immoral ways. There once used to be order in this country, thus mourns Balram:

See, this country, in its days of greatness, when it was the richest nation on earth, was like a zoo. A clean, well kept, orderly zoo. Everyone in his place, everyone happy (63).

But then with the advent of globalization in India, this order got changed. Though India is shown as an emerging entrepreneurial power in the world. Advancement in the field of science and technology, space, transportation, hotel industry, tourism, real estate, expansion of cities, mall culture, industries and outsourcing, etc., characterize the image of India. But despite all this, the life of underclass has not changed. The description of the body of Vikram Halwai, Balram's father stands witness to this terrible condition. Balram reports:

A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. Ours is different. My father's spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use in village to

pull water from wells; 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 hip bones into his buttocks. The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen. (26-27).

This novel has a very simple plot. The whole story moves around Balram Halwai, who is the son of a father whose body description stands witness to his terrible life. The title of the novel *The White Tiger* refers to Balram, who was a smart student of his class, but whose fault was that he belonged to a poor family. In order to return the loan which his family had borrowed, all his family members had to work and Balram is therefore pulled out of the school and started working at the tea shop. But his rebellious spirit echoes the voice: "I was destined not to stay slave" (41). His fortunes improved on getting to Dhanbad with Kishan, his elder brother after their father's death. He learned driving. Because in this age of globalization, he had to be technical as well as tricky, he has to be the white tiger in order to outsmart others, if he wanted to be counted. The meaning of the novel itself gives a clear cut idea that it is an exhausting struggle for the low-class people to break out of their oppressive cultural background to seek success. Balram realized this fact soon and learned driving. He got the job of driving for his boss Ashok. Driving his boss all over he came to know about the secret of success of rich people in India. He exposes all that lies beneath the glossy appearance of present India. He saw with his own eyes that how his boss and his associates are moving in life by all the foul methods. They bribe police and other officers to do whatever they want to do. His boss knows that anything is possible in India. His driver Mohammad Asif knocks down a bike rider but he easily rescues his driver from the police after bribing them. He says:

The assistant commissioner who sat in the in the station was a man whom I had lubricated often. He had fixed a rival for me once. He was the worst kind of man, who had nothing in his mind but taking money from everyone who came to his office. Scum. (308).

The village, Laxmangarh where Balram lives is a symbol of "Darkness" of rural India. He is paid meagre salary by his master. Balram is very weak and Ashok is very strong. Adiga exposes this marginalization and suppression of the protagonist, who has been suppressed both psychologically and physically in every way by his owners. It is shown that in this age of globalization human beings in this country are looked upon merely as machines without heart and soul, without feelings and emotions. This is what is termed as the commodification or objectification of humans. This theory of commodity fetishism is presented in the first chapter of *Capital: Critique of Political Economy* (1876). In the following lines Stork, the owner of Balram says that whom the job should be given and this is mere commodification. Stork says:

Catch 'em young, and you can keep 'em for life. A driver in his forties, you get, what, twenty years of service, then his eyes fail. This fellow will last thirty, thirty-five years. His teeth are solid, he has got his hair, he is in good shape (66).

One of the serious problems of globalization is urbanization. People migrate from villages to cities for different reasons. The need and wish for the better life induce them to move to cities, where there is a wide range of opportunities they are seeking for. This excessive migration is responsible for an increase in slums in metro cities. This serious problem also gets exposed in this novel:

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 the way they live under the huge bridges and overpasses, making fires and washing and taking lice out of their hair while the cars roar past them. These homeless people...never wait for a red light (119-20).

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

Entrepreneurial success and modern city culture that have become synonymous with globalization have negatively affected our life. A man-- innocent and gentle becomes a new man – selfish, opportunist, and criminal which are the greatest harm to humanity. Balram's journey from Laxmangarh to Dhanbad then to Delhi and finally to Bangalore proves this loss. Balram admits himself:

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

Marriage values also got affected in this age of globalization. Though marrying a woman or man of other country is not bad in any way but the fact can't be denied that in some contexts it has severe problems. In this novel, this problem gets highlighted. Balram learns this when he hears the conversation of a Nepali with Ram Prasad:

“She's a Christian, did you know?”

‘Noway.’

‘Yes!’ ‘And he married her?’

‘They married in America. When we Indians go there, we lose all respect for the caste,’ the Nepali said.

‘The old man was dead set against the marriage. Her people were not happy either.’

They got married that is good. But then what happened later is not good any case. Firstly, their families are not happy with this marriage. But most importantly Ashok's wife wants to return to

America because she is not able to adapt to the Indian way of life. She always quarrels with Ashok and tells him that they should return to America. She says: “You lied about returning to America, didn’t you, Ashok-you are never going back, are you?” (81).

When Pinky asks Ashok that why they need a driver and why can’t he himself drive, Ashok’s reply highlights the grim reality of globalization. He replies: “Pinky, that was New York – you can’t drive in India, just look at this traffic. No one follows any rules – people run Across the road like crazy ...” (81).

Ashok wants India to become like America. He considers American way of life superior to the Indian way of life. Indian food and even way of eating are disliked by young generations. Ashok is trying to convince Pinky that they should stay here in India and he says: “The way thing are changing in India now, this place is going to be like America in ten years” (89).

With the emergence of globalization and western culture, youth have started mixing up well with each other. The friendly approach and the socialising feature is worth appreciable. But the total breakouts of restrictions have adulterated mindset. The overwork approach is frustrating and people at times want to get relaxed through immoral ways, like prostration. Balram himself describes such an experience: “I moved closer to the woman on the bed. She neither resisted nor encouraged. I touched a touched a curl of her hair and pulled it gently to get her to turn her face towards me” (234).

Globalization has led to an increase in the transportation of the raw materials and food from one place to another. Earlier, people used to locally- grown food, but with globalization, people consume products that have been developed in foreign countries. The amount of fuel that is consumed in transporting these products has led to an increase in the levels in environmental pollution. Balram’s description of Delhi highlights this problem:

Rush hour in Delhi. Cars, scooters, motorbikes, auto rickshaw, black taxis, jostling for space on road. The pollution is so bad that the men on the motorbikes and scooters have a handkerchief wrapped around their faces – each time you stop at a red light, you see a row of men with black glasses and masks on their faces, as if the whole city were out on a bank heist that morning”(133).

With globalization Multinational fast-food chains such as McDonald’s, Subway, and Domino’s, for example, are seen as exerting America’s “soft power” on developing nations. Their “foreign” delicacies are often alleged to be grabbing market share from indigenous food items, thus creating a fear of cultural displacement with respect to food. Now people prefer foreign liquor over local food. This is how Balram explains it:

I should explain to you, Mr Jiabao, that in this country we have two kinds of men: ‘Indian’ liquor men and ‘English’ liquor men. ‘Indian’ liquor was for village boys

like me –toddy, arrack, country hooch. ‘English’ liquor naturally is for rich. Rum, whisky, beer, gin – anything the English left behind’’ (72-73).

Balram decided that he must liberate himself from the chains that bind his growth. Undoubtedly the will to break free has been infused into the society in the wake of economic liberalization and globalization. He succeeded but he had to sacrifice his family and his own identity in order to liberate himself from the bottom rungs of the feudal hierarchy and from the terror instruments that keep poor like him suppressed and weak. Balram with the help of knowledge of cars and drivers and with the help of money stolen from Ashok, he sets up a business that serves the needs of the burgeoning IT industry. He thus secures an indirect toehold in the outsourcing world and becomes himself an agent of globalization. But the cost at which he achieved all this is that has never been an original thinker.

Thus, the picture Aravind Adiga paints of India (The India of globalization/The India of Economic miracle) in *The White Tiger* is not the India which people have dreamt before independence. This novel is a depiction of the social and economic inequalities of contemporary India. It shows that Globalization did nothing to improve the life of poor people. It shows that what does an economic miracle mean when casual acquaintance with India shows that a large number of people live in abject shocking poverty. Past six decades have witnessed turbulent changes in Indian society, and these changes (some exceptions) have overturned the traditional hierarchies, and the old securities of life. A lot of poorer Indians are left confused and perplexed by the by the New India that is being formed around them. The most suitable way, to sum up, will be this exposing description of post-independence India by Balram:

And then, thanks to all those politicians in Delhi, on the fifteenth of August, 1947 – the day the British left – the cages had been left open; and the animals had attacked and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law. Those that were the most ferocious, the hungriest, had eaten everyone else up, and grown big bellies. (64) To sum up – in the old days there were there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are two castes: Men with big bellies, and Men with Small Bellies.

And only two destinies: eat – or get eaten up (64).

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**UGC Approved**

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