

Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences (2009) Vol 1, No 2, 229-245

Poor-Rich Divide in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

A.J. Sebastian, Ph.D., Nagaland University (Kohima, India)

Abstract: *Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger, which was awarded the Man Booker Prize in 2008, is singular in its fictionalized portrayal of the relationship between Balram Halwai and his master Mr Ashok. The story exposes the poor-rich divide that surrounds India in the backdrop of economic prosperity, in the wake of the IT revolution. As Michael Portillo commented the novel "shocked and entertained in equal measure" (Portillo, 2008). Written in the epistolary form, the novel is a seven-part letter to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, from Balram alias Ashok Sharma, a self-styled 'Thinking Man / And an entrepreneur' (TWT, 2008, p. 3). Balram the killer, metamorphoses into his master's replica after his heinous crime. By crime and cunning, in the name of the social injustice due to existing rich-poor divide in India, Balram rules his entrepreneurial world. This paper attempts to trace the great poor-rich divide manifested through The White Tiger, having dangerous consequences, if unresolved.*

Speaking on the servant-master relationship, Adiga says:

The servant-master system implies two things: One is that the servants are far poorer than the rich—a servant has no possibility of ever catching up to the master. And secondly, he has access to the master—the master's money, the master's physical person. Yet crime rates in India are very low. Even though the middle class—who often have three or four servants—are paranoid about crime, the reality is a master getting killed by his servant is rare.... You need two things [for crime to occur]—a divide and a conscious ideology of resentment. We don't have resentment in India. The poor just assume that the rich are a fact of life.... But I think we're seeing what I believe is a class-based resentment for the first time. (Sawhney, 2008).

Poor-Rich Divide in Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger"

Balram Halwai, is presented as a modern Indian hero, in the midst of the economic prosperity of India in the recent past. His climbing the ladder of success is by murdering Mr. Ashok, his employer, and stealing his bag full of money – Rs.700,000/-, based on a philosophy of revenge, ambition and corruption.

Balram is representative of the poor in India yearning for their 'tomorrow'. His story is a parable of the new India with a distinctly macabre twist. He is not only an entrepreneur but also a roguish criminal remarkably capable of self-justification. The background against which he operates is one of corruption, inequality and poverty (Kapur, 2008).

Injustice and inequality has always been around us and we get used to it. How long can it go on? Social discontent and violence has been on the rise. What Adiga highlights is the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor and the economic system that lets a small minority to prosper at the expense of the majority. "At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the west, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society... the great divide." (Raaj, 2008, p. 9).

It has been pointed out that the period since the neo-liberal economic reforms were introduced in India, there has been greater economic disparity. There is a growing consumption by the rich and the urban upper middle income groups. Side by side we see the lives of the poor becoming more vulnerable and precarious. The National Sample Survey Organization, through its study, has shown that up to 1998, there has been relatively flat consumption per person and no decline in poverty. There was a dramatic revision of poverty figures in 1999-00. 9 surveys from 1989-90 to 1998 had shown no poverty reduction. A minority of the population (around 20 per cent) has benefited from the economic policies in the last decade, while the majority of the rural and urban population have not benefited. But for 80 per cent of the rural

A.J. Sebastian, Ph.D., Nagaland University, India

population per capita consumption has actually declined since 1989-90 (Ghosh, 2004).

In a paper entitled “Democratic Practice and Social Inequality in India” Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen examine the role of democratic practice in contemporary India. They examine the achievements and limitations of Indian democracy, especially the adverse effects of social inequality. They point out how the quality of democracy is often compromised by social inequality and inadequate political participation, though democratic practice itself is a powerful tool of elimination of social inequality (Dreze, 2002). The White Tiger is an exceptional fictionalized study in human inequality that is gnawing into our democracy.

Statistics show how poverty is on the rise in India: i) 4 in every 10 Indian children are malnourished according to a UN report. ii) India Ranks a lowly 66 out of 88 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2008. The report says India has more hungry people – more than 200 million – than any other country in the world. iii) One third of the world’s poor live in India, according to the latest poverty estimates from the World Bank. Based on its new threshold of poverty - \$ 1.25 a day – the number of poor people has gone up from 421 million in 1981 to 456 million in 2005. iv) India ranks 128 out of 177 countries in the UN’s Human Development Index. Aravid Adiga’s story of a rickshawallah’s move from the “darkness” of rural India to the “light” of urban Gurgaon reminds us of the harsh facts behind the fiction (Raaj, 2008, p. 9).

Balram becomes a true professional busy handling crisis situations sitting in his office. He recall what poet Mirza Ghalib wrote about slaves: *“They remain slaves because they can’t see what is beautiful in the world”* (TWT, 2008, p. 40). His thirst for freedom came alive when he visited his native village while Mr. Ashok and wife Pinky went on an excursion.

...It was a very important trip for me... while Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam were relaxing...I swam through the pond, walked up the hill...and entered the Black Fort for the first time...Putting my foot on

Poor-Rich Divide in Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger"

the wall, I looked down on the village from there. My little Laxmangarh. I saw the temple tower, the market, the glistening line of sewage, the landlords' mansion – and my own house, with that dark little cloud outside – the water buffalo. It looked like the most beautiful sight on earth. I leaned out from the edge of the fort in the direction of my village – and then I did something too disgusting to describe to you. Well actually, I spat. Again and again. And then, whistling and humming, I went back down the hill. Eight months later, I slit Mr Ashok's throat (Ibidem, pp.41-2).

Adiga is so pictorial in his description of the protagonist, who plans his crime well in advance. His disgusting act of spitting repeatedly in the direction of his village could be a sign of final rejection of everything he holds dear, to escape from the Rooster Coop of misery.

His schooling in crime begins with the reading of *Murder Weekly* as all drivers do, to while away their time. "Of course, a billion servants are secretly fantasizing about strangling their bosses – and that's why the government of India publishes the magazine and sells it on the streets for just four and a half rupees so that even the poor can buy it" (Ibidem, p. 125). He feels degraded as a human being, deprived of basic human rights to enter a shopping mall. A poor driver couldn't enter a mall as he belonged to the poor class. If he walked into the mall someone would say "Hey, That man is a paid driver! What 's he doing in here? There were guards in grey uniforms on every floor - all of them seemed to be watching me. It was my first taste of the fugitive's life (Ibidem, p. 152). Balram reminisces one of the newspaper reports on the malls, in the early days entitled 'Is there No Space for the Poor in the Malls of new India?' (p. 148). The security guards at these shopping malls identified the poor wearing sandals let in only those wearing shoes, while a poor man in sandals was driven out. This made a man in sandals explode 'Am I not a human being too?' (Ibidem, p. 148).

He knows full well that Ashok comes from a caste of cooks (Ibidem, p. 155) and yet now he has to serve the

A.J. Sebastian, Ph.D., Nagaland University, India

wretch who is moneyed. He decides to break out of this fate of the poor in India, as from a Rooster Coop.

In the programme "You ask the question," replying to a query on poverty, internal unrest and terrorism in India, Adiga said:

These problems have been brewing for a long time. The causes are complex, but one common theme I find is the heightened tension within the country that's caused by the growing gap between the rich and the poor. The flare-ups can often take the form of ethnic or regional protests, but the underlying grievances are often economic: "those people who live over there are doing much better than we are." Fixing the economic disparities has to be part of any attempt to address India's growing unrest. The country's intelligence and police agencies need to be reformed and modernised; right now they seem way behind the terrorists (Adiga, 2008).

Balram's master Ashok lived in a new apartment called Buckingham Towers A Block, which was one of the best in Delhi. Ashok spent a lot of time visiting malls, along with Pinky Madam, his wife and Mongoose. Balram's job was also to carry all the shopping bags as they came out of the malls. The mean and stingy behaviour of the rich is shown through the lost coin episode where Mongoose insults Balram for not having retrieved a rupee coin he lost while getting out of the car. He was so bothered about a rupee coin after bribing someone with a million rupees:

'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.

'What do you mean, it's not there? Don't think you can steal from us just because you're in the city. I want that rupee.'

'We've just paid half a million rupees in a bribe, Mukesh, and now we're screwing this man over for a single rupee. Let's go up and have a scotch.'

Poor-Rich Divide in Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger"

'That's how you corrupt servants. It starts with one rupee. Don't bring your American ways here.'
Where that rupee coin went remains a mystery to me to this day, Mr Premier. Finally, I took a rupee coin out of my shirt pocket, dropped it on the floor of the car, picked it up, and gave it to the Mongoose (TWT, 2008, p.139).

Such mean behaviour of the masters continue when they instruct the servants about does and don'ts. Balram is told never to switch on the AC or play music when he is alone.

Taunting Balram for his lack of an English education was great fun for Ashok and Pinky Madam. It patched up their quarrels. When he mispronounced "Maal" for "mall" they had their ironic laughter. The pizza episode is similar in nature. On Pinky Madam's birthday, Balram was made to dress up like a maharaja with a red turban and dark cooling glasses and serve them food. The lady to amuse herself trapped Balram to repeat PiZZa as Balram always pronounced it piJJA.

The same happens when he is blackmailed when Pinky kills a man on the road in drunken driving. He has to suffer humiliation in the hands of his masters with ever increasing menial duties which climaxes in his being blackmailed when Ashok's wife Pinky kills a man in drunken driving. He was forced to sign a statement accepting full responsibility for the accident:

TO WHOM 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 of this year...I swear by almighty God that I make this statement under no duress and under instruction from no one (Ibidem, p. 168).

A.J. Sebastian, Ph.D., Nagaland University, India

When Pinky Madam left Ashok suddenly in a rage, Balram had driven her to the airport in the middle of the night for which he was rewarded with a fat brown envelop filled with forty-seven hundred rupees. Introspecting on the tip Balram recounts:

Forty-seven hundred rupees....Odd sum of money – wasn't it? There was a mystery to be solved here. Let's see. Maybe she started off giving me five thousand, and then, being cheap, like all rich people are – remember how the Mongoose made me get down on my knees for that one-rupee coin? –deducted three hundred. *That's not how the rich think, you moron. Haven't you learned yet?* She must have taken out ten thousand at first. Then cut it in half, and kept half for herself. Then taken out another hundred rupees, another hundred, and another hundred. That's how cheap they are.

So that means they really owe you ten thousand. But if she thought she owed you ten thousand, then what she truly owed you was, what – ten times more?

'No, a *hundred* times more.' (Ibidem, p. 206).

He is educated in the mean ways of the rich which he imbibes himself in course of time. Balram, a victim of rich-poor divide, reverses the role and becomes 'master like servant'. When he is alone he takes pleasure in masochisms.

He plays the games people play who cannot reach out to be like the master. He had seen Mr Ashok enjoying life with girls, frequenting malls and hotels. Out of sheer spite for the rich he serves, he expresses his frustration in mean acts like those mentioned. His going to the redlight area in search of a prostitute is to satisfy his suppressed revenge as well.

He searches for strands of golden hair of women who frequently traveled with Ashok in the car and had sex. He takes pleasure in collecting every strand of female hair:

I held it up to the light.

Poor-Rich Divide in Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger"

A strand of golden hair!
I've got it in my desk to this day. (Ibidem, p. 222).

He has to do all menial jobs like massaging Mongoose, carry cash to ministers and politicians, bring liquor and women for the men, and entertain people serving liquor while driving with one hand.

While in Delhi Balram experiences the two kinds of India with those who are eaten, and those who eat, prey and predators. Balram decides he wants to be an eater, someone with a big belly, and the novel tracks the way in which this ambition plays out (Walters). The key metaphor in the novel is of the Rooster Coop. Balram is caged like the chickens in the rooster coop. He, being a White Tiger, has to break out of the cage to freedom.

Go to Old Delhi ...and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly coloured roosters, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages...They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country (Ibidem, pp.173-4).

He decides to ape his masters to become a big-bellied man, by resorting to corrupt ways he has learnt through bribery, crime, disregarding all civilized ways of life. His violent bid for freedom is shocking. Is he made just another thug in India's urban jungle or a revolutionary and idealist? (Turpin, 2008). Adiga "strikes a fine balance between the sociology of the wretched place he has chosen as home and the twisted humanism of the outcast" (Prasannarajan, 2008). Through his criminal drive Balram becomes a businessman and runs a car service for the call centres in Bangalore.

Balram's commentary is replete with Irony, paradox, and anger that run like a poison throughout every page (Andrew). "Above all, it's a vision of a society of people complicit in their own servitude: to paraphrase Balram, they

A.J. Sebastian, Ph.D., Nagaland University, India

are roosters guarding the coop, aware they're for the chop, yet unwilling to escape. Ultimately, the tiger refuses to stay caged. Balram's violent bid for freedom is shocking" (Turpin, 2008).

The protagonist confirms that the trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy. This is a paradox and a mystery of India.

Because Indians are the world's most honest people... No. It's because 99.9 per cent of us are caught in the Rooster coop just like those poor guys in the poultry market. The Rooster Coop doesn't always work with miniscule sums of money.... Masters trust their servants with diamonds in this country!... handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 per cent – as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way – to exist in perpetual servitude... can a man break out of the coop? ...*the Indian family*, is the reason we are trapped and tied to the coop....only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed – hunted, beaten, and burned alive by masters – can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature (TWT, 2008, pp. 175-7).

Balram wants to escape from the Rooster Coop. Having been a witness to all of Ashoke's corrupt practices and gambling with money to buy politicians, to kill and to loot, he decides to steal and kill. Adiga delves deep into his subconscious as he plans to loot Rs.700,000 stuffed into the red bag.

Go on, just look at the red bag, Balram – that's not stealing, is it?

I shook my head.

And even you were to steal it, Balram, it wouldn't be stealing.

How so? I looked at the creature in the mirror.

See- Mr. Ashok is giving money to all these politicians in Delhi so that they will excuse him from the tax he has to pay. And who owns that tax, in the end? Who but

Poor-Rich Divide in Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger"

the ordinary people of this country – you! (Ibidem, p. 244).

The money is sufficient for him to begin a new life with a house of his own, a motorbike and a small shop. He hatched the murder plan in quick succession: “The dream 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? Losing weight and looking like the poor” (Ibidem, p. 225).

Adiga makes the protagonist spell out the way enterprising drivers make a little extra money by: i) siphoning petrol and selling, ii) repairing the car under a corrupt mechanic who gives inflated bills, iii) studying his master’s habits and capitalize on his carelessness, iv) risking to make his master’s car into a freelance taxi. Balram thought of making a confession of all these misdeed, but instead of guilt he felt “Rage. 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” (Ibidem, p. 230).

Ashok confesses to Balram about his filthy life. “My way of living is all wrong, Balram. I know it, but I don’t have the courage to change it. I just don’t have... the *balls*.... I let people exploit me, Balram. I’ve never done what I’ve wanted, my whole life” (Ibidem, pp. 237-8).

Balram’s comment on the two puddles of red spat out by a *paan* chewing driver, discloses his mental frame:

**The left-hand
Puddle of spit
Seemed to say:**

Your father wanted you to
to be an honest man

Mr Ashok does not hit you
Or spit on you, like people
Did to your father.

Mr Ashok pays you well,
4,000 rupees a month.
He has been raising your
Salary without your even
Asking.

**But the right-hand
puddle of spit**

seemed to say:

Your father wanted you to
to be a *man*.

Mr Ashok made you take the
blame when his wife killed
That child on the road.

This is a pittance. You live in
A city. What do you save?
Nothing.

A.J. Sebastian, Ph.D., Nagaland University, India

<p>Remember what the Buffalo did to his servant's Family. Mr ashok will Ask his father to do the Same to your family once You run away (Ibidem, p. 246).</p>	<p>The very fact that Mr Ashok threatens your family makes your blood boil!</p>
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Such a monologue makes Balram weigh the consequence of his hatching his plot and the consequent theft and murder. Adiga brings out powerfully Balram's unexpressed thoughts in several conversations punctuated with soliloquies. The stream of consciousness leads him to justify his plans of murder with growing meanness of Ashok in treating him. Balram had planned to confess his criminal thoughts, but Mr Ashok interrupted him thinking that he wanted to ask him for some money to get married:

'I understand, Balram.'
...'
'You want to get married.'
'Balram. You'll need some money, won't you?'
'Sir, no. There's no need of that.'
'Wait, Balram. Let me take out my wallet. You're a good member of the family. You never ask for more money ...but you never say a word. You're old fashioned. I like that. We'll take care of all the wedding expenses, Balram. Here, Balram – here's... here's...'
I saw him take out a thousand- rupee note, put it back, then take out a five-hundred, then put it back, and take out a hundred. Which he handed to me (Ibidem, pp. 257-8).

Such mean and ironic behaviour on the part of Ashok drives Balram crazy for vengeance. There is perfect communication gap between the two. This is symbolic of the rich-poor divide that is fermenting to take revenge. Balram's plans are confirmed while visiting the National Zoo in Delhi.

He tells Dharam: "Let animals live like animals; let humans live like humans. That's my whole philosophy in a sentence" (Ibidem, p. 276). When he chanced to see the white tiger in the enclosure, he began his musings: "...Not

Poor-Rich Divide in Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger"

any kind of tiger. The creature that gets born only once every generation in the jungle. I watched him walk behind the bamboo bars... He was hypnotizing himself by walking like this – that was the only way he could tolerate this cage....The tiger's eyes met my eyes, like my master's eyes have met mine in the mirror of the car. All at once, the tiger vanished... My knees began to shake; I felt light" (Ibidem, pp. 276-7).

Balam associated his symbolic life of freedom with that of sitting under chandeliers. "Sometimes, in my apartment, I turn both the chandeliers, and then I lie down amid all the light, and I just start laughing. A man in hiding, and yet he's surrounded by chandeliers! There – I'm revealing the secret to a successful escape. The police searched for me in darkness: but I hid myself in light" (Ibidem, p. 118).

He sums up his success story as an entrepreneur in Bangalore. He moves from success to success- from being a social entrepreneur to a business entrepreneur. What does he mean by 'social' to 'business'? He has perhaps become another incarnation of Mr Ashok by christening himself Ashok.

Yes, Ashok! That's what I call myself these days. Ashok Sharma, North Indian entrepreneur, settled in Bangalore... I would show you all the secrets of my business...my drivers, my garages, my mechanics, and my paid-off policemen. All of them belong to me – Munna, whose destiny was to be a sweet-maker! (Ibidem, p. 302).

All that he can remember is his past juxtaposed with his present status. From a sweet-maker to a business tycoon. The circle is complete in his case like that of his boss Mr Ashok, who was from a cook's family. He claims to be different from Mr Ashok.

Once I was a driver to a master, but now I am a master of drivers. I don't treat them like servants – I don't slap, or bully, or mock anyone. I don't insult any of them by calling them my 'family' either. They're my employees, I'm their boss, that's all. I make them sign a contract and I sign it too, and both of us must

A.J. Sebastian, Ph.D., Nagaland University, India

honour that contract. That's all. If they notice the way I talk, the way I dress, the way I keep things clean, they'll go up in life. If they don't, they'll be drivers all their lives. I leave the choice up to them. When the work is done I kick them out of the office: no chitchat, no cups of coffee. A White Tiger keeps no friends. It's too dangerous (Ibidem, p. 302).

Balam sounds very pragmatic. His philosophy of individualism comes close to Mr Ashoke's Machiavellianism. Balam's individualism stresses [independence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individualism) and self-reliance disregarding any morality (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individualism>), while Ashok's Machiavellianism describes his tendency to deceive and manipulate others for personal gain. He prompts his drivers to imitate him if they wished to succeed in life, becoming White Tigers. He dreams of establishing a school for poor children in Bangalore where he could train them in facts of life:

A school full of White Tigers, unleashed on Bangalore! We'd have this city at our knees, I tell you. I could become the Boss of Bangalore. I'd fix that assistant commissioner of police at once. I'd put him on a bicycles and have Asif knock him over with the Qualis. All this dreaming I'm doing – it may well turn out to be nothing (TWT, 2008, pp.. 319-20).

He know how to escape from being caught through corrupt means. He has got the roles reversed and justifies having masters like Ashok to enable White Tigers like him to break out of the Coop.

I think the Rooster Coop needs people like me to break out of it. It needs masters like Mr Ashok – who, for all his numerous virtues, was not much of a master – to be weeded out, and exceptional servants like me to replace them....I have switched sides: I am now one of those who cannot be caught in India....
I've made it! I've broken out of the coop! ...I'll never say I made a mistake that night in Delhi when I slit my master's throat (Ibidem, pp. 320-21).

Poor-Rich Divide in Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger"

Balram proves to be a psychopath with his hysterical laughter with which he concludes his story of success in blood. A very dangerous philosophy of life, which is nothing but that of terrorists. Adiga has created two psychopaths who will destroy our social fabric. There seems to be play of Sado-masochism with the co-occurrence of sadism and masochism in both Balram and Ashok.

What difference is there between the terror mechanism employed by Balram and a terrorist. As Adiga opines, "Terrorism and corruption are linked. A corrupt system that fails to provide justice or to reduce poverty is one of the causes of terrorism. Terrorists in India are often middle-class, but one of the things that gets them worked up" (Adiga, 2008). Class struggle in India continues to be the focus of *The White Tiger*, where Adiga attempts to bring out the contrast between the haves and have-nots. However, some Indian critics wonder if Adiga intended the novel primarily to get western readership, projecting the protagonist, getting away with his crime, being a victim of perpetual servitude (Quari, 2008). Similar is the anguish of Amardeep Singh who is perturbed by Adiga's narrating about India's poverty for a non-Indian, non-poor readers, through a half baked Indian protagonist who is a socio-political caricature (Singh, 2008).

It may be remarked that Adiga wanted to show to the world the other side of India in the form of a fiction. As some readers point out why we should feel so pricked about it since fiction should be treated not as gospel truth. Our national pride shouldn't be hurt by it. How long can we ignore the cry of the poor made poorer day by day by corruption reigning supreme in all sectors in our democracy? Amitava Kumar finds *The White Tiger* inauthentic and points out how several non-resident Indian authors after Rushdie had taken refuge in magic realism and have gone farther in to inauthenticity (Kumar, 2008, p. 2).

In creating a protagonist like Balram in *The white Tiger*, has Adiga come forward to make subaltern speak through crime? Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of Subaltern leads to the premise that subaltern cannot speak. It not a classy word for oppressed, for other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie, but it signified "proletarian," whose voice could not be

A.J. Sebastian, Ph.D., Nagaland University, India

heard, being structurally written out of the capitalist bourgeois narrative (Kilburn, 1996).

In portraying the character of Balram, Adiga has excelled in projecting a typical psychopath / sociopath, our society can churn out. In “Behavioural Traits of Psychopaths”, Jennifer Copley points out: “While most people’s actions are guided by a number of factors, such as the desire to avoid hurting other people, the psychopath selects a course of action based on only one factor—what can he get out of it. This cold-blooded mode of reasoning enables the psychopath to commit acts that most people’s consciences would not allow” (Copley, 2008). Psychopaths are also known as sociopaths who are manipulative, deceitful, impulsive lacking self-restraint, and inclined to take risks. They are “Callous, deceitful, reckless, guiltless The psychopath understands the wishes and concerns of others; he simply does not care.... The psychopath believes that rules and morals are for other, weaker people who obey because they fear punishment” (Adams, 2008) . . . All these traits are found in Balram who goes about heroically planning his heinous crimes.

While most people’s actions are guided by a number of factors, such as the desire to avoid hurting other people, the psychopath selects a course of action based on only one factor—what can he get out of it. This cold-blooded mode of reasoning enables the psychopath to commit acts that most people’s consciences would not allow (Copley, 2008). Both Balram and Ashok are psychopaths/sociopaths with traits of the disorder shown at different levels as they are manipulative, deceitful, impulsive and inclined to take risks.

As Adiga says: “Balram's anger is not an anger that the reader should participate in entirely—it can seem at times like the rage you might feel if you were in Balram's place—but at other times you should feel troubled by it, certainly” (DiMartino, 2008).

Poverty trends in India has been debated by those claiming decline in poverty and those disproving it. Angus Deaton and Jean Dreze in their thought provoking essay “Poverty and Inequality in India: A Re-examination” state that some claim that

Poor-Rich Divide in Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger"

the 1990s have been a period of unprecedented improvement in living standards, while others argue that the period has been marked by widespread impoverishment (Deaton, 2005, p. 243).

It is imperative that our Government has the political will to fight corruption at all levels and take appropriate measures to fight poverty of its teeming millions with increased investment in basic education, medical care and farming.

The novel is an excellent social commentary on the poor-rich divide in India. Balram represents the downtrodden sections of our society juxtaposed against the rich (Saxena, 2008, p. 9). [Deirdre Donahue](#) labels *The White Tiger* an angry novel about injustice and power which creates merciless thugs among whom only the ruthless can survive (Donahue, 2008).

However, *The White Tiger* should make every right thinking citizen to read the signs of the times and be socially conscious of the rights and duties of each one, irrespective of caste, creed or economic status, to prevent create the types of Ashok and Balram in our society.

References

- Adams, David B. (2008). "Sociopaths." <http://www.geocities.com/lycium7/psychopathy.html>, Downloaded on 4/11/08.
- Adiga, Aravind. (2008). *The White Tiger*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers. (Abbreviated TWT).
- (2008). "Aravind Adiga: You ask the Questions". *The Independent*. November 10. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/aravind-adiga-you-ask-the-questions-1006643.html>. Downloaded on 14/11/08.
- Copley, Jennifer. (2008). "Behavioural Traits of Psychopaths." July 30. [com/article.cfm/behavioural_traits_of_psychopaths](http://www.com/article.cfm/behavioural_traits_of_psychopaths), downloaded on 14/11/2008.
- Deaton, Angus and Jean Dreze. (2005). "Poverty and Inequality in India: A Re-examination." *Reflections on the Right to Development*. Eds. Arjun Sengupta et al. London: Sage Publications.
- DiMartino, Nick. (2008). "Interview with Aravind Adiga." October 6, (<http://universitybookstore.blogspot.com/2008/10/nick-interviews-aravind-adiga.html>). Downloaded on 19/10/08.
- Donahue, [Deirdre](#).(2008). "Review." *USA Today* April 4. (http://www.usatoday.com/life/books/reviews/2008-04-23-roundup-debut-novels_N.htm) Downloaded on 19/10/08.

A.J. Sebastian, Ph.D., Nagaland University, India

- Drèze, Jean and Amartya Sen. (2002). "Democratic Practice and Social Inequality in India."
Journal of Asian and African Studies, Vol. 37, No. 2, 6-37.
- Ghosh, Jayati. (2004). "Income Inequality In India". *People's Democracy*. February 17.
<http://www.countercurrents.org/eco-ghosh170204.htm> downloaded on 17/11/08.
- Kapur, Akash. (2008). "Review". *New York Times*, November 7.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/09/books/review/Kapur-t.html>.
- Kilburn, Michael. (1996). "Glossary of Key Terms in the Work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak."
<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Glossary.html>. downloaded on 16/11/08.
- Kumar, Amitava. (2008). "Viewpoint." *The Hindu. Literary Review*. November 2. pp.1-2.
- Porttillo, Michael. (2008). Oct. 15, 08.
<http://www.themanbookerprize.com/news/stories/1146>
 Downloaded on 01/11/2008.
- Saxena, Shobhan. (2008). "Fact not Fiction", *Sunday Times of India*, October 19, p.9.
- Prasannarajan, S. (2008). *India Today*. April 17.
http://indiatoday.digitaltoday.in/index.php?option=com_content&issueid=50&task=view&id=7128&Itemid=1.
 Downloaded on 01/11/2008.
- Quari, Ahmad. (2008). "Review." Litmob October 9.
<http://litmob.com/2008/10/09/the-white-tiger/> Downloaded on 06/11/2008.
- Raaj, Neelam. (2008). "Any Tears for the Aam Aadmi?" *Sunday Times of India*, October 19, p.9.
- Sawhney, Hirish. (2008). "India: A View from Below." September.
<http://www.brooklynrail.org/2008/09/express/india-a-view-from-below>
 Downloaded on 01/11/2008.
- Singh, Amardeep. (2008). "Why I Didn't Like "The White Tiger." September 26.
[T-r-a-c-k-b-a-c-k address](#) · [Direct link](#). Downloaded on 08/11/2008.
- Turpin, Adrian. (2008). *Financial Times*. April 19.
<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/886f92c4-09c8-11dd-81bf-0000779fd2ac.html>.
 Downloaded on 22/10/08.
- Walters, Kerry. (2008). "Caught in the rooster coop". May 27.
http://www.amazon.com/review/R1PV1V1ICZXUE9/ref=cm_cr_pr_viewpnt#R1PV1V1ICZXUE9. Downloaded on 23/10/08.

Copyright of Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences is the property of Guild of Independent Scholars and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.