



Examining Women's Portrayal in "The White Tiger" Through A Gendered Lens

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Abstract— Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger" explores the harsh realities faced by women in contemporary India, specifically those ensnared within the stifling grip of social hierarchy. The novel provides us with an unsettling glimpse into the multitude of women caught in the shackles of patriarchy. Through a simplistic narrative, it takes us through a multitude of such experiences, from the village women like Balram's grandmother and mother to the fiercely independent, foreign-educated Pinky Madam. Through a realistic portrayal of the daily struggles of these characters, Adiga vehemently critiques the system that denies these women the basic right to voice their opinions. He reveals the existence of the dowry system, the financial strain that families with daughters face, the barriers to female education and upward mobility, and the psychological oppression that women experience in a patriarchal culture. However, by downplaying the agency of some female characters, the story—which is told from Balram's self-serving point of view—may be perceived as maintaining some of these disparities. Notwithstanding this drawback, "The White Tiger" is an engrossing and uncompromising examination of the intricate and frequently tragic lives of women entangled in the webs of caste, poverty, and tradition. Their experiences highlight the severe social and economic divide that still exists in modern-day India.



Keywords— Catalyst, Narratives, Patriarchy, Resistance, Subjugation

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Role of Women in Indian Society

In Indian society, women have long had a varied and frequently complex role that has been influenced by a complex web of historical, religious, and cultural factors. Their positions have been intricately entwined with concepts of tradition, family, and community, reflecting the centuries-old patriarchal institutions that have dominated societal dynamics. Investigating the historical and cultural settings that have influenced women's identities and experiences is essential to comprehend their place in Indian society.

Indian civilization has always placed a high value on the cohesiveness of the family and the community, with women being essential to preserving these ties. At home, women were in charge of taking care of the family's needs,

administering the household, and rearing the children. The foundation of home life was built by their labor, both visible and unseen, yet their contributions were sometimes overlooked and underappreciated. Women were often placed in roles of subjugation and dependence, with little opportunity for autonomy or self-determination, despite their vital role in the family.

Moreover, the position and treatment of women in Indian society have been greatly influenced by religious and cultural customs. Patriarchal readings of religious texts and teachings have frequently perpetuated pre-existing power dynamics and inequities, despite the fact that Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and other faith traditions all offer unique viewpoints on gender roles and relationships.

Due to strongly ingrained societal norms and attitudes, women have been subjected to discriminatory practices such as child marriage, dowry harassment, and gender-

based violence. The introduction of Western concepts of gender equality and women's rights, in opposition to native cultural customs and beliefs, during British colonial administration further complicated the situation of women in India. Colonialism fostered Orientalist stereotypes and narratives that depicted Indian women as helpless victims in need of rescue and salvation, even as it cleared the way for social reform movements and legislative actions meant to improve the status of women.

India has made tremendous progress toward women's empowerment and gender equality since gaining independence, as seen by grassroots campaigns, educational programs, and legislative changes. But in spite of these developments, there are still gender differences in India in a number of areas, such as politics, work, healthcare, and education. Gender-based violence continues to be a widespread and systemic problem, and women continue to encounter obstacles in their pursuit of good education and economic opportunity. Furthermore, the difficulties underprivileged women encounter is exacerbated by intersecting characteristics like caste, class, religion, and ethnicity, which exacerbates inequality and disparities even more.

1.2 The Entangled Lives

"The White Tiger," the Man Booker Prize-winning book by Aravind Adiga, transports readers to the gritty underbelly of modern India. The story, which is told from the perspective of an ambitious young man Balram Halwai, who uses ruthlessness and cunning to leave his underprivileged background, highlights the harsh realities that those at the bottom of the social scale must contend with. Although Balram's story is compelling, the way the ladies in his life are portrayed offers a complex and moving picture of social injustices.

The narrative underscores the recurring pattern of women's reliance within the framework of patriarchy. The dowry system, which depends on young females like Balram's sister, is seen as a financial burden, further solidifying the idea that these girls are commodities. A cycle of domestic servitude traps women like Ashok's maidservant and Balram's mother, whose daughters are doomed to repeat the same experience. Many women find that marriage turns into a transaction rather than a happy place to be, with little chance of breaking free from their set positions. The difficulties of escaping a system that controls a woman's life from birth is highlighted by this cyclical reliance. This study scrutinizes Adiga's depiction of women in "The White Tiger," examining how these figures function as potent social critique tools and shed light on the nuanced

difficulties women endure in a society where caste, tradition, and poverty predominate.

II. STIFLED DREAMS- THE STORY OF BALRAM'S MOTHER

The restrictive ways in which patriarchy controls women's life is a recurrent issue in the book. This oppression is embodied by Balram's mother. She is mute and invisible, forced to work as a backbreaking domestic worker in the wealthy Ashok family's home. Her only goal is to fulfill the men's demands and indulge their whims. Her terrible demise amid a remorseless silence highlights the harsh reality for countless women caught in similar situations.

Born in the destitute village of Laxmangarh, she faces constant challenges in a culture that is characterized by ingrained poverty and hardship. She is forced into a life of domestic servitude and subservience after being denied access to economic and educational prospects. The crushing weight of tradition and cultural expectations also stifles her dreams. From an early age, Balram's mother takes on the role of providing for her family, working nonstop to meet their fundamental necessities in the lack of a dependable male wage earner. Her days are filled with labor and suffering as she faces the difficulties of rural life head-on with strength and resiliency.

She makes an effort, but she can't break free from the cycle of exploitation and poverty because of social constraints on her autonomy. Balram's mother's hardships are a heartbreaking reminder of the systemic inequities that are prevalent in Indian society throughout the entire book, especially for women who reside in rural areas. Her narrative highlights the critical need for gender-sensitive policies and initiatives to address the underlying causes of inequality and oppression by illuminating the intertwining dynamics of gender, class, and caste that impact the daily lives of millions of women throughout the nation. In addition, the figure of Balram's mother emphasizes the fortitude and tenacity of rural women who face numerous obstacles in their struggle for dignity and survival.

III. THE MATRIARCH: ASHOK'S GRANDMOTHER

In 'The White Tiger' by Aravind Adiga, Ashok's grandmother takes on the persona of a strong matriarch, representing customs and family power in the Halwai home. Adiga's portrayal of the generational gap and the lasting impact of tradition in the face of the rapid changes sweeping through contemporary India is sophisticated and insightful. Ashok's grandmother emanates authority and veneration from the moment she first appears in the book, demanding

deference and obedience from both family members and domestic workers. Her steadfast observance of traditions and rites betrays a profound dedication to preserving the dignity and purity of the Halwai family lineage, carrying on norms that have been passed down through the ages. She embodies the archetype of the loyal wife and mother who puts the family's well-being and harmony above all else. Her unwavering devotion to patriarchal conventions and gender roles define her character. Her dedication to upholding family customs and values in the face of outside influences and cultural shifts defines her role as the matriarch.

Ashok's grandmother is a moral compass and a guiding influence in the Halwai household throughout the entire book, giving family members advice and guidance with gravitas and authority. Her steadfast dedication to preserving the prestige and dignity of the family name informs all of her decisions and deeds. This sense of responsibility and obligation runs deep.

Additionally, the character of Ashok's grandmother personifies the conflict between tradition and modernity as she clings firmly to the traditions and rituals of the past while navigating the complexity of a world that is changing quickly. Her conversations with the protagonist of the book, Balram, shed light on the conflicts of values and ideas that characterize the relationship between the old and new India.

Ashok's grandma is not immune to the flaws and uncertainties that come with ageing, even though she follows tradition. Her portrayal of a vulnerable, fragile figure highlights the universal human experience of ageing and mortality. In summary, Ashok's grandmother is a fascinating character in "The White Tiger," representing the matriarch's power and ageless wisdom while juggling the challenges of a shifting society. Adiga provides a subtle examination of custom, authority, and the lasting influence of familial ties on the social structure of modern-day India via her persona.

IV. PINKY MADAM: A GLIMMER OF HOPE

In 'The White Tiger' by Aravind Adiga, Pinky Madam appears as a poignant symbol of dissatisfaction among the wealthy urban elite of modern-day India. Her persona has been painstakingly designed to represent the intricacies and paradoxes of contemporary Indian culture, where privilege and discontent frequently coexist.

Pinky Madam is introduced as the spouse of Ashok, Balram Halwai's employer. She holds a position of relative wealth and social standing. She is a representative of a generation that aspires to overcome the limitations of tradition and

social expectations because she was educated overseas and is used to a luxurious lifestyle.

Pinky Madam appears to be a sophisticated and privileged person on the outside, but her inner struggle is evident. She struggles with a deep sense of alienation and disappointment throughout the book, which is a result of her failure to balance her own goals with the strict expectations that society and her family have placed on her. Furthermore, as she negotiates the complexities of her identity as a woman stuck between the opposing demands of tradition-bound household duty and individual autonomy, Pinky's character serves as a metaphor for the contradictions between tradition and modernity. But in the end, Pinky's attempts at self-promotion are rife with uncertainty and ambivalence. She is nonetheless trapped in a patriarchal society that inhibits female autonomy and favors male authority, despite her occasional acts of disobedience.

Her experience serves as a powerful reminder of the complexity of status and power as well as the frequently elusive pursuit of authenticity and fulfillment in a contradictory and unequal society. In summary, Pinky Madam, who represents the hopes, conflicts, and hardships of a generation torn between tradition and modernity, emerges as a powerful symbol of unhappiness in "The White Tiger." Her persona provides a compelling framework for examining the nuances of gender, class, and power in modern-day India. It also sheds light on the human cost of pursuing personal liberty and meeting social expectations.

V. CONCLUSION

Due to changing social, political, and economic factors, women's roles in Indian society are drastically changing. Even though women's rights and gender equality have advanced significantly, there is still more work to be done to remove structural obstacles and deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs that prevent women from exercising their full agency and participation in society. India has the opportunity to realize the full potential of its women and create a more just and inclusive society for all by questioning accepted norms and promoting gender-inclusive policies and practices.

Adiga explores the nuances of gender relations and the unequal distribution of status and power in Indian culture through the eyes of these many female characters. Their tales shed light on the many challenges and victories that characterize women's lives in a world that is changing quickly by acting as miniature representations of the larger socioeconomic dynamics at work. Readers can learn more about the complicated nature of

gender dynamics and how women deal with the challenges of their social and cultural contexts by analyzing the representation of women in "The White Tiger." Their experiences subvert traditional narratives and illuminate the agency, fortitude, and resilience that define women's lives in the midst of hardship.

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