The White Tiger Unveiled: Exploring Identity in Aravind Adiga's Indian Literature

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the theme of identity in Indian literature through a study of Aravind Adiga's novel "The White Tiger." Adiga's work presents a scathing critique of social stratification and economic disparity in contemporary India, foregrounded through the protagonist Balram Halwai's journey of self-realization and rebellion against the oppressive structures of society. Through a close reading of Adiga's narrative, this paper delves into the complexities of identity formation amidst the intersections of class, caste, and morality in Indian society. It examines how Balram negotiates his identity as he transcends his socio-economic background and asserts agency in a world marked by corruption and exploitation. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks of postcolonialism and cultural studies, this paper aims to elucidate the ways in which Adiga's portrayal of identity resonates with broader socio-political contexts in India. By analyzing key motifs, character dynamics, and narrative techniques, this study sheds light on the nuanced exploration of identity in "The White Tiger," offering insights into the complexities of contemporary Indian literature.
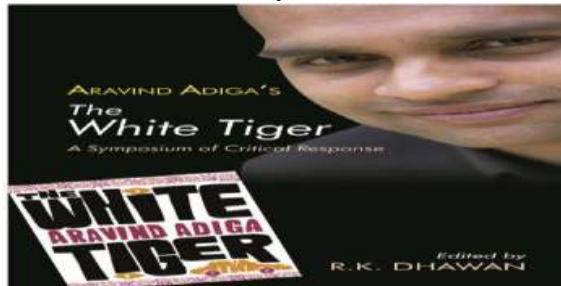
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INTRODUCTION:

Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger" stands as a seminal work in contemporary Indian literature, offering a piercing commentary on the complexities of identity in a rapidly changing socio-political landscape. Set against the backdrop of India's burgeoning economy and the stark divide between the affluent elite and the marginalized underclass, the novel interrogates notions of identity through the lens of its protagonist, Balram Halwai. Born into poverty in rural Bihar, Balram navigates the labyrinthine structures of class, caste, and corruption as he seeks to carve out a place for himself in the stratified society. Balram Halwai, the protagonist of The White Tiger (2008), is a semi-literate son of a rickshaw-puller from a small village called Laxmangarh. During his visit to India, the protagonist writes seven confessional letters to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, with the hope of learning how to make a few Chinese entrepreneurs. The letters are written in an epistolary style. Based on Balram's account, "The Autobiography of a Half-Baked Indian" (p. 8), the entire book revolves on his ascent from darkness to light, and it tells the story of his identity creation in a society that has become increasingly globalised. After murdering and robbing a wealthy landlord, he takes a job as his chauffeur and eventually becomes a wealthy entrepreneur who runs his own taxi service. Much discussion ensued regarding the novel's veracity and whether or not the Man Booker Prize winner adheres to a re-orientalist, and hence, inaccurate, portrayal of India. Critics claim that it portrays India's impoverished primarily through the lens of the country's identity crisis, hybridity, class discrimination, political corruption, poverty, the impact of foreign culture, and the erosion of traditional values (Mendes, 2010, p. 286). In this vein, critics like Lily Want (2011) argue that Adiga fails to maintain his integrity as a writer in The White Tiger due to the lack of realism regarding India's postcolonial achievements. Want claims that the novel manages to silence certain vices but ultimately embraces the narcissism of Western culture. Put another way, he is unable to get over the colonial bias that led to the devaluation of indigenous peoples' traditional and cultural practices. A Construct of... on the Levels of Identity, Society, and Performativity In the work, Golchin Pourqoli & Firouzeh Ameri depict a world devoid of moral principles, where wealth is the one good, and brutality and corruption are unavoidable. IHe renders a story of social mobility but reinforces and legitimatises [sic] the stereotypical and discursively framed images of the Indian just to create laughter. (p.76)In spite of this, Judy Polumbaum, writing about the novel's themes in a scholarly book on political economy that came out the same year, lauds it, calls it a supplement to the theoretical work, and says that Adiga delves headfirst into the intricate webs of power and control that are at play in the book (2008, p.436).

Discussions continue, but this study aims to provide light on other parts of the book, like the

characters' subjective experiences, which have been mostly overlooked because to the concentration on the arguments. Of course, there is some literature on the subject; some critics have broken down the text to determine the characters' identities, while others have discussed hybridity, subaltern resistance, and the dominant system's subversion.

White Tiger: Aravind Adiga

Rahmat Setiawan and Ali Mustofa (2012) attempt to address the characters' "ambiguous" nature and "contradictory" behaviour by examining character identities through a Derridean lens. They begin by identifying the text's hierarchy of binary opposition, then reverse the opposition by pointing interdependence within the pair of binary opposition, and finally trace the absences of human identity (p. 4). The authors state that a person's "human identity is not constructed by only the outside of human but also the essence of human" (p. 1), which leads to "ambiguous and plurality towards the identity" (p. 15) because there is always another, absent identity within a single, presented identity. Consequently, they draw the following conclusion: "The absence of elements fundamental to human beings can actually contribute to the formation of an individual's identity, when viewed through the lens of human identity as an external construct influenced by factors such as culture, society, and institutions" (15). This research will show that, contrary to their claims, gender performativity, a person's sense of identity is based on social and cultural constructs rather than their inherent characteristics. According to Maji (2015), Balram's revolution causes a "shake at the very base of social structure," and some experts have recognised him as a powerful advocate for the underprivileged. According to Yadav, who concurs with Maji, Balram manages to "overcome to challenge and subvert the social hierarchy and the subaltern ideology imposed upon him" (as cited in Pourqoli & Pouralifard, 2017, p. 215). Thus, the primary goal of this research is to examine the transformations he goes through on his journey in order to determine the key factors contributing to his success, the extent to which he has achieved agency, and whether or not his identity is a product of his culture. Another important question is whether he actually challenges and undermines the social hierarchy and discourses. Therefore, the study will mainly focus on analysing Balram's performative acts at the expense of other characters, in order to show how, the desire to be a real man, a White Tiger, the phrase by which he is hailed for the first time, or in Butler's definition is interpellated by the authority (a school inspector), inscribes on his body and constructs his identity according to performative patterns of what he believes to be a White Tiger, that is, a social entrepreneur who ‗can break out of the coop' (Adiga, 2008, p. 104) or the cage, that is the societal restrains of the society in which he lives. The study aims to show the performative construction of identities and the extent to which characters attain agency via resistance, if any, in light of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Judith Butler's (2002) assertion that gender is only a "stylized repetition of acts" (p. 191), or a cycle of behaviour dictated by societal standards, suggests that gender is both learned and created through social interaction. The effects of institutions, practices, and discourses, not their "origin and cause," are what are being discussed (p. xxxi). Butler argues that our identities are formed through our interpretation and behaviour in response to societal and cultural norms and expectations. As a result, one's "gender style" is always constrained from the moment they are socially implanted (Salih, 2002, p. 46). According to Butler (2002), our sense of self also evolves in response to changes or disruptions to certain patterns of behaviour:The politically complex creation of enduring identity is revealed by the phantasmal effect of failure to repeat, deformity, or parody repeating (p. 192). It is possible to extrapolate from Butler's theory of performativity, which primarily addresses the performative aspects of

gender identity, to examine identities more generally. Therefore, this research utilises the theory of performativity to illustrate how characters' identities are constructed and transformed through repeated actions in postcolonial discourse, and to identify subversive acts as either the effects of power, recast in different forms, or acts of resistance to power mobility but reinforces and legitimatises [sic] the stereotypical and discursively framed images of the Indian just to create laughter. (p.76)

The Characters' Performative Identities

Balram was born and brought up in the village of Laxmangrah, which is located beside the Gang River. He and his extended family are impoverished and live under the strict rule of Balram's dictatorial grandmother, the "sly old Kusum" (Adiga, 2008, p.11). He wants to go back to school, but he has to drop out since he took out a debt to pay for his cousin-sister's expensive dowry, and the landlord wants everyone in the family to work for him (p. 23). Mr. Ashok, the Americanized son of his ex-landlord, is summoned back to India to resolve a tax issue pertaining to the family business. Following his father's passing, he moves to Dhanbad and takes a job as a driver for Mr. Ashok. While in Delhi, Balram murders his boss and absconds with his wealth. Despite the fact that he was murdered, Balram assures that he would not speak badly of him. During my time as his servant, I did my best to preserve his honour, and I have no plans to let up now. According to Adiga (2008), he owes me a great deal. According to Balram's letters to Mr. Jiabao, he admits that he doesn't comprehend how events relate to one other or how one reason affects another. The specific cause of Mr. Ashok's death remains a mystery to me (p. 67). In her essay, ―Exciting Tales of Exotic Dark India: AravindAdiga's The White Tiger‖, in relating Balram's slay of Ashok, Ana Cristina Mendes (2010) writes: ―Somewhat unaccountably, Balram conspires to murder his . . . master‖ (p. 278, emphasis added); and in their attempt to answer the ambiguous nature of Balram's behavior, Rahmat Setiawan and Ali Mustofa (2012) write: ―[s]omething ‗awkward' occurs . . . How can a religious one, a coward one, a good servant, murder a good master?‖

After that, we must investigate the causes of the deeds to understand what befell Balram and his master, as well as why an obedient servant who would never stop defending his master's honour would murder a "good master" who was "always gentle... and kind to those around him, even his servants and driver" (Adiga, 2008, p. 27). "My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey," Balram says, reminiscing about his youth and his father's desire for one of his children to conduct their lives like a man. My only want is for at least one of my sons to lead a manly life (19). Barlam elaborates by saying that he identified with Vijay and that the meaning of "manhood" remained a mystery to him. According to Adiga (2008), it was implied that one should emulate Vijay, the bus conductor. Assumption of identity, argues Butler (2002), occurs when one refuses to let go of what is forbidden: According to page 88, when one denies loss, it leads to melancholy, which is a form of integration that preserves the disavowed love on a physical level. Then, he starts to identify with Vijay (and later, Mr. Ashok) since he is so depressed over never living up to his father's ambition of being a man. Regarding this matter, Pourqoli and Pouralifard (2017) elaborate in their article "The Subaltern Cannot Speak: A Study of Adigra Arvinda's The White Tiger" that Vijay was Barlam's initial role model. According to Barlam, "I wanted to be like Vijay—with a uniform, a paycheck... and people looking at me with eyes that said, How important he looks...". (original emphasis added on page 20). According to Lacan, "Desire and the unconscious are founded through the recognition of a fundamental lack" (Homer, 2005, p. 72). It follows that Balram's desire to appear important and masculine is at the root of his identity crisis. (216th page) As Balram admits, "All I wanted was the chance to be a man..." (Adiga, 2008, p. 192), his body bears the marks of his desire, lack, or what he is forbidden from—living like a man, like Vijay. This is because, as Butler (2002) explains, "the phantasmatic nature of desire reveals the body not as its ground or cause, but as its occasion and object." An aspect of the want strategy is the metamorphosis of the wanting body (p. 90). In other words, according to Salih (2002), "you are what you have desired (and are no longer permitted to desire)" (p. 57).

Thus, Balram's actions are not driven by his desire to be like a man, but rather by that desire. His behaviours and physical acts are just a repetition of Vijay's conduct, which he does to

achieve his desire to live a manly life—a desire that he is forbidden from—and thus inscriptions on his body. As Pourqoli and Pouralifard (2017) so eloquently illustrate in the example of Ashok, the identical phenomenon occurs: Balram aspires to be a complete man, a master, and thus to have a position that was "ideologically and socially restricted for him" (Yadav, 2011, p. 5), as he forms his ego by seeing Ashok as an idealised version of himself (Evans, 2006, p. 12). Thus, he takes Ashok's identity and wealth, which ultimately leads to Ashok's death at the hands of Balram: Ashok, I agree! At the moment, that's how I identify myself. According to Adiga (2008), Ashok Sharma, an entrepreneur from North India, made Bangalore his permanent home. (page 216) On occasion, this sense of belonging with Mr. Ashok reaches a point where he expresses, "inside that sealed car, master and driver had somehow become one body that night" (Adiga, 2008, p.117). "I wanted to go about shouting: "Balram is here too! Balram is here too!" (p. 78)! This is because identifying with the master also makes him need equal praise. As Ross (2002) explains, under the Hegelian master/slave dialectic, the only kind of acknowledgment that a master will acknowledge is from an equal, hence Ashok will not recognise him. [And] Because being a slave strips a person of the equality necessary for a meaningful acknowledgment, acknowledging a slave does not meet this criteria. (Lacan, A Very Brief Introduction, 50). Regarding this matter, Fernando Sánchez (2012) states in his article titled "Queer Transgressions: Same-Sex Desire and Transgendered Representations in Ardind Adiga's The White Tiger" that Balram wants to yell out "Balram is here too!" as he walks around the president's house and listens to important men make choices (78). Nothing would make him happier than to bask in the fact that he may be so near to such famous Indians after living a life of anonymity. Nothing is more important to Balram than the lack of closeness between him and his master, the recognition that "Balram is here" via both words and deeds. However, according to Butler, Balram has to stick to these performative patterns that confirm them if he wants to keep this identification, and it can be difficult to do so at times. Actually, there are always going to be two competing social standards: one says that Balram is "a good member of the family" and so equal to Ashok, and the other says that he is "the other" and thus worthless. The identification-affirming performative patterns collapse when the master's perception of him as "the other" prevents him from merging with him: When recounting the abrupt end of his intimate relationship with his master (as Balram attempts to soothe him after Pinky leaves), he writes, "The moment he [Mongoose] arrived, everything changed for me." As an example. My close relationship with Mr. Ashok had come to an end. On this occasion, I was merely the chauffeur (Adiga, 2008, p. 11).

As Balram describes the sight of Ashok's "otherness," he writes: "I was ready for his touch, but he wrapped it around the Mongoose's shoulder." This means that for five nights, all I had was this driver. Finally, I have a genuine companion in you (p. 112). Just before the incident, Balram writes, "I swear, I was ready to make a full confession right there...had he said the right word...had he touched my shoulder the right way" (Adiga, 2008, p. 153, emphasis added), highlighting how important these moments of failure in consistency of his identification with Ashok are in his decision to carry out his plan and kill his master. Pinky Madam, who is inebriated, acts out her desire to run over Balram, leading Balram to write: "Behind the wheel I saw Pinky Madam, grinning and howling, while Mr. Ashok, next to her, was smiling." This situation further illustrates his disappointment. Was it my imagination that I saw Ashok's expression change to one of concern for my safety as he reached across to steady the wheel, preventing the car from crashing into me? (Adiga, 2008, p. 96) - I like to take that view.

Failures in Performing Identities

1. Class identity

Although Ashok and his physical deeds will receive more attention, the study does include the other characters' struggles to meet societal norms, such as Pinky and Kusum. The story of Balram's transformation from a naive villager into a corrupted individual characterised by gluttony, wickedness, and debauchery (Adiga, 2008, p.116) exemplifies the performative aspect of Balram's identity, and the transformation of Ashok into Balram is a perfect example of this. According to page 116, he came back from America a pure-hearted man, but Delhi life tainted him. If the boss of Honda City gets corrupted, how can the driver remain innocent?

The sons of Balram's ex-landlord were as dissimilar from one another as night and day, according to his description: Although Ashok was tall, broad, and handsome—the ideal traits for a landlord's son—and Mukesh—known as Mongoose at home—were both incredibly cunning and cunning, it was Mongoose who possessed the intellect of a master (Adiga, 2008, p. 45). Balram thinks Ashok lacked "the usual instincts that run in the blood of a landlord" (p. 83) because of his marriage to Pinky Madam, who was not part of his caste or religion, and because he got an education abroad. Even his own vegetarianism disqualified him from being a landlord or master; none of his relatives had ever heard of a landlord who was vegetarian, even his uncle the Wild Boar. His insistence on calling me a landlord persists despite my protests that it is not natural. "We are not vegetarians; the Brahmins are" (p. 50). In contrast to his family's cruel treatment of slaves, Ashok was known to be extremely nice and considerate towards everyone he encountered, even his driver and staff, as Balram further relates. Although he was often warned about being too trusting, Ashok, he was nice and trusted his subordinates, especially his driver. For example, he was told, "You'll have to check up on the driver" (p. 82). "All of the drivers in Delhi are terrible" (p. 125). Balram even goes so far as to say: "I realised that this... handsome, foreign-educated man, who would be my only master in a few minutes... was weak, helpless, absentminded, and completely unprotected by the usual instincts that run in the blood of a landlord." This statement highlights how often the warnings are and how unaware Ashok is of them. "We would have called you the Lamb if you were back in Laxmangarh" (p. 83, original emphasis). Therefore, he is unfit to be a master in every way, including his demeanour and physical actions, as well as his lack of the typical instincts associated with the position. However, as soon as Ashok's performance patterns change, he develops a new identity. This is because, according to Butler, identity is created by stylized repetition of acts inside a very rigorous regulatory framework. This leads Balram to the following conclusion: "It struck me that there really was no difference between the two of them [Ashok and Mongoose]" when Ashok scolds him for giving a rupee to a beggar. They were both descendants of their father (Adiga, 2008, p. 144). Members of each social class have always been expected to carry out certain duties that have been defined for them. Consequently, Ashok is compelled by the controlling forces to continually mimic the master's performance patterns, which "congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler, 2002, p. 46). According to Adiga (2008), Balram's description of Ashok as a "Lamb-that-was-born-from-the-loins-of-a-landlord" can be understood by considering this matter (p. 91). In the next chapter, Ashok's family has a strong influence over him, serving as an example of such regulatory influences. Balram describes how, halfway through our journey to Delhi, Ashok sat behind the wheel and transformed into the driver, while I remained a passenger. A situation that deserves a lengthy quotation: Ashak turned the key to the ignition. The event was suddenly crystal clear to the mongoose, who had been engrossed in a newspaper throughout. "Don't do this, Ashok." As far as masters go, the Mongoose was very traditional. His moral compass was spot on. It does feel strange, Mr. Ashok said. The vehicle halted... Once again, Mr. Ashok was the master and I was the servant and driver. Consequently, Ashotk is governed by Mongoose, who is a "old-school master" with a master's intellect and understands right from wrong. Interestingly, Balram is taken aback by Ashok's relentless questioning of his whereabouts and activities, as he has never been asked such a direct question before leaving the house. This highlights the profound impact of these controlling forces. According to the original focus on page 165, what has Ms. Uma done to you? Being at the accident scene just serves to highlight Ashok's theatrical character. The shift in his behaviour has converted him into a corrupted master, despite the fact that, according to Balram, he had come from America as a kind guy (p. 116). So, he still won't take the hit-child to the hospital, no matter how much Pinky begs him to. As Balram is made to shoulder the blame, he says nothing. Consequently, when he is among socially regulating influences, such his friends and family, he feels pressured to conform to expectations, which in turn shapes who he is. "My way of living is all wrong, Balram," Ashok admits to himself. I am aware of it, but the guts to alter it is lacking. I simply lack the courage... Balram, I allow

others to take advantage of me. Diga (2008) states that throughout her life, she has never accomplished her desires.

2.Gender Identities Not only does Ashok fall short in his duty as master and in understanding the differences between classes, but he also fails in other aspects of his identity performance. Also, he isn't acting out his gender identification. In spite of the fact that neither women nor any notable female characters are specifically mentioned in Adiga's The White Tiger, there is sufficient important material to assess the prevailing gender norms in the society she portrays. In the opening shot, Balram shows the women of his society going about their daily lives. There, he sees his mother's lifeless body battling with mud and fire. Balram describes his mother's resistance to the flames as, "My mother wasn't going to let them destroy her." This scene depicts his grandmother Kusum, who stands for patriarchal traditions, forcing his mother's foot into the fire. The black muck was entrapping her despite her best efforts to repel it with her flexed toes (Adiga, 2008, p. 12). In a patriarchal society where men hold all the power, this scenario foreshadows the end of the fight for women's rights, even after her death. According to Sánchez (2012), in the society that Balram portrays, people are bound to predetermined gender roles. As a result, «[Ashok's] Americanization leads to his feminised representation and, finally, his death» (p. 176). Nevertheless, Butler challenges the stability and self-evident ness of identity categories, which not only shows how gender identities are performed but also removes masculinity from its problematic status. If gender categories are not stable and innate but socially constructed, as Simone de Beauvoir in her celebrated sentence points out, ―one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one‖ (as cited in Butler, 2002, p. 12), then, characteristics of masculinity and femininity are not exclusively confined to one, and can be appropriated by either sex, which is very evident in Ashok and Pinky's behaviour, about whom Sánchez (2012) aptly writes, ―Pinky's ―unfeelingness‖ and lack of conscience in India create a dissonance with her female body (which is ―supposed‖ to carry with it the traits of nurturance and caring). That stands in stark contrast to Ashok's male physique, which is often thought of as passive. He owes his time in the United States entirely to his feminine characteristics. It appears like the two have a transgendered experience when they cross cultural and national borders. Ultimately, Pinky's triumphant escape suggests that masculinity can ebb and flow between these two realms, whereas Ashok's demise signifies that femininity is incompatible with and cannot endure neoliberal India.

Despite the fact that Sánchez's claim about the masculine-feminine trait exchange demonstrates how nearly impossible it is for a feminised person to survive in a patriarchal society, this does not mean that a woman can succeed in such a culture by adopting masculine traits and challenging the norms. Here, Jadhav (2014) adds: ―Feminists may be pleased with the female characters in The White Tiger that Balram's grandmother and Pinky have their own ways of living and following the norms. In pursuit of a living, they will not budge from their principles. Kusum, Balram's grandmother, exerts dominance over her household, while Pinky runs away from Mr. Ashok to find her own life. (page 5)

While it would be nice to think that Pinky is free of the gender-defined performative tendencies, the reality is that this is far from the case. Her marriage exemplifies the conventional notion of marriage as an institution where the guy brings status and money and the woman is merely a statue in the new culture she enters. As a result of their Americanization, Ashok, who is described as a caring and gentle husband who "always comes up with plans to make her [wife] happy" (p. 90), and Pinky, who is described as an aloof and difficult woman who engages in traditionally masculine behaviours like wearing trousers and swearing, are unable to conform to the appropriate gender norms assigned to them. Now that they are living in India, they are expected to adhere to specific cultural norms and behaviours. Thus, as we often penalise individuals who do not behave appropriately according to their gender, this failure not only results in one person's "feminised portrayal and, ultimately, his death" (Sánchez, 2012, p. 1), but it also causes the other person to feel alienated and excluded, which in turn causes their marriage to fall apart. Since Pinky was unable to actively change the gender role for her sex and instead conformed to her new patterns and society expectations, her successful escape

should not be seen as an act of agency but as an indication of her passivity. Despite Kusum's best efforts, she is ultimately unsuccessful in her quest to become dominant over men, particularly Balram, who states, "I did not want to obey Kusum," and she is punished for her attempt to reshape her identity and escape from her traditional gender role as a submissive and obedient woman. As a socially perceived act of rebellion, she attempted to alter her gender role in an undesirable way by blackmailing me (Adiga, 2008, p. 114). Since, according to Butler (2011), in the process of interpellation of an infant as a _she' or a _he', —[t]he girl is _girled', brought into the domain of language and kinship . . . [which] is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm‖ (p. xvii); therefore, taking her position in the society as a woman, Kusum is —compelled to _cite' the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject‖ (Adiga, 2008, p. 177). Balram is forced to 'cite' the norms in order to maintain his status as a legitimate and competent subject, as he is first called 'munna,' meaning 'boy.' This comes before any other interpellation on him, such as subaltern or White Tiger.

\On the other hand, in a patriarchal culture where men rule, the call grants him an advantage that women do not. As a result, Ashok faces consequences for displaying feminine traits, whereas Balram's attempt to assume a new persona and gain power is mostly ignored. In addition, Kusum faces harsh punishment for defying her gender and going outside her designated area. Then, even in seemingly insignificant parts of one's identity, being male or female makes a huge impact in a male-dominated culture when one is fighting for agency. Because women in patriarchal countries are inherently subordinate, they are economically dependent on men and hence exploited; this problem is consistent with these societal arrangements. According to Ramteke (2013), the novelist aimed to demonstrate that the impoverished are constantly taken advantage of due to their lack of financial resources (as cited in Choudhury 2014, p. 4). The same holds true for women; as Butler (2002) points out, it is difficult for women to break free of the limiting frameworks of masculinist dominance due to the gender reality that is constructed through ongoing social performances (p. 180). Then, it appears that the novel's female protagonists' relative anonymity is related to the social position of women in general. Despite the dearth of female characters, Balram portrays women solely in two ways: as sexual objects (prostitute) or as housemaids (helping out around the house and taking care of family members). It is clear from Pinky's desire to aid the families of the deceased that women, in contrast to men, have less power to act on their own volition.

Consequently, Balram has no problem being termed crazy as a guy, but Pinky is forbidden to do so since she is a woman. Kusum is ultimately punished for her efforts to dominate males, particularly Balram, and sit in a male chair, even though she and Balram both conform to societal rules to acquire authority, which are constrained to performative patterns for women. Then, even when it comes to noncontroversial parts of their identities or societal conventions, the unattainability of women's agency is shown by the destinies of Kusum and Pinky. The gender norms of a society are imposed on both men and women, but women face even more restrictions due to their femininity and financial dependence on men. As Spivak (1988) states, "if you are poor, Black, and female you get it in three ways" (p. 90), leading to a "double displacement" for women.

IDENTITY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRATA:
The Power of Socio-Economic Strata
Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger uses Balram's story to illustrate the profound impact of socio-economic strata on identity. Here's how:

Predetermined Identity: The novel exposes India's caste system, where social standing is largely fixed at birth. Balram, born into the "dark room" (the lower class), is treated as a servant, his potential limited by his caste. This system shapes his identity, making him feel invisible and voiceless.

Fluidity and Fragility: While the caste system limits opportunities, Balram's journey to Bangalore shows a degree of social mobility. He escapes the confines of his village and becomes a successful entrepreneur. This highlights the fluidity of identity within a changing economic landscape. However, this newfound success is fragile. Balram achieves it through violence, a constant reminder that his new identity is built on shaky ground.

Individual Agency vs. Systemic Barriers: The narrative explores the tension between individual agency and systemic limitations. Balram is ambitious and resourceful. He uses his wit and cunning to navigate the social hierarchy. However, his success is largely dependent on luck and exploiting a corrupt system. This highlights the limitations of individual agency within a society riddled with inequalities.

The Caste System's Grip on Identity

The caste system plays a significant role in dictating identity:

Entrapment: Balram constantly feels trapped. He refers to the rich as "the Ashok family in their flashy car" and himself as "a servant in the chicken coop." These comparisons emphasize the vast gulf between the classes and how his caste restricts his aspirations.

Internalized Oppression: Years of conditioning lead Balram to accept his place. He calls himself a "half-life" – existing but without full potential. This internalized oppression highlights the psychological impact of the caste system.

Economic Mobility and its Paradox

Economic mobility offers a glimmer of hope for changing identity:

Reinvention: Moving to Bangalore and becoming a successful entrepreneur allows Balram to reinvent himself. He takes on the name "Ashok Sharma," shedding his lower-caste identity.

The Price of Success: However, this new identity comes at a cost. Balram commits a crime and lives a life of constant paranoia. His success is a paradox – a testament to his will, but also a symbol of the corrupt system he exploits.

The Takeaway

The White Tiger portrays identity as a complex interplay between socio-economic forces and individual choices. While economic mobility offers some freedom, it's ultimately limited by a system designed to perpetuate inequality. Balram's story is a powerful critique of a society where your birth dictates your destiny, and even success can feel like a betrayal.

The "Rooster Coop" vs. "The White Tiger": Adiga uses animal metaphors to represent the different social classes. The "Rooster Coop" symbolizes the limitations and powerlessness of the lower class, while the elusive "White Tiger" represents the ambition and ruthlessness needed to escape it. Balram's journey can be seen as a transformation from a trapped rooster to a cunning white tiger.

Corruption as a Ladder: The novel portrays corruption as a necessary tool for upward mobility. Balram navigates the system by exploiting loopholes and bending the rules. This highlights the moral ambiguity of achieving success in a corrupt society.

The Dehumanization of the Lower Class: The wealthy characters, like the Ashok family, often view the lower class as invisible or subhuman. Balram's constant struggle for recognition emphasizes the dehumanizing effects of extreme social and economic inequality.

The Allure of the "Shining India": The novel contrasts the harsh realities of the lower class with the flashy image of a modern, "Shining India." This disparity fuels Balram's ambition and resentment, highlighting the uneven distribution of wealth in a rapidly developing nation.

The Unreliable Narrator: Balram's narration is subjective and self-serving. He might be exaggerating or downplaying certain events to fit his narrative. This unreliable narration forces the reader to question the truth and adds another layer of complexity to the story.

CASTE, MORALITY, AND REBELLION:

Adiga's novel subverts traditional notions of morality and duty that are deeply entrenched within the caste system. Balram, as a lower-caste individual, is expected to adhere to his prescribed role as a servant without question. However, Adiga critiques this morality by depicting Balram's refusal to accept his fate passively. Instead, he seeks to carve out his own path and assert his agency. Balram's narrative serves as a powerful exploration of rebellion against the constraints of caste identity and social norms. His decision to break free from his predetermined role as a servant and seize control of his own destiny is a radical act of rebellion against the oppressive social structure. Adiga portrays Balram's rebellion as a necessary response to the injustices he faces, highlighting the resilience and agency of the marginalized. Adiga exposes the moral bankruptcy of the upper classes, particularly through characters like Ashok and his family. Despite their wealth and privilege, they are depicted as morally corrupt

and complicit in perpetuating the oppressive caste system. Their exploitation of Balram and others like him further underscores the inherent injustices within the social hierarchy. While Adiga critiques the upper classes for their exploitation and oppression of the lower classes, he also highlights the complicity of the lower classes in perpetuating their own oppression. Balram's initial obedience and acceptance of his servile position reflect the internalized oppression prevalent within marginalized communities. However, his eventual rebellion signifies a break from this cycle of complicity and submission. Balram's act of violence against his master, Ashok, serves as a symbolic manifestation of his rebellion and assertion of agency. It represents a drastic departure from the submissive role expected of him based on his caste identity. While Adiga does not condone violence as a means of resistance, he uses Balram's action to underscore the urgency and desperation of the struggle against entrenched systems of oppression.

Adiga explores how caste intersects with other identities such as class, religion, and gender, shaping individuals' experiences and opportunities. Balram's rebellion not only challenges the caste-based oppression but also reflects broader societal injustices rooted in intersecting systems of privilege and discrimination.

"In this country, it is not what you know but who you know that makes the difference" (Adiga, p. 78).

Balram's rebellion prompts a questioning of traditional values and beliefs upheld by society, particularly regarding the sanctity of caste-based roles and duties. Adiga challenges the moral legitimacy of these values, portraying them as instruments of oppression rather than principles to be revered.

"The dreams of the rich and the dreams of the poor – they never overlap, do they?" (Adiga, p. 51). This quote reflects Balram's questioning of societal norms and his recognition of the vast divide between the aspirations of different social classes.

While Balram's rebellion signifies his assertion of agency and autonomy, it also comes at a significant cost. Adiga portrays the consequences of Balram's actions, highlighting the risks and sacrifices involved in challenging established power structures. This underscores the complexities of resistance and the personal toll it can exact on individuals.

"I broke something tonight, and boy, am I going to have to pay for it now" (Adiga, p. 282).

Adiga emphasizes the role of education and awareness in fostering rebellion and social change. Balram's exposure to books and ideas outside of his prescribed social milieu expands his consciousness and fuels his desire for liberation. This underscores the transformative power of knowledge in challenging ingrained systems of oppression.

"I was looking for the key for years but the door was always open. Only I was too blind to see it" (Adiga, p. 292). This quote symbolizes Balram's realization of his own agency and the transformative power of knowledge in challenging oppressive systems.

Through Balram's narrative, Adiga critiques the myth of meritocracy perpetuated by the upper classes. Despite his intelligence and ambition, Balram faces insurmountable barriers due to his caste identity. Adiga exposes how notions of merit are often used to justify and perpetuate existing inequalities, rather than serving as pathways to upward mobility for all.

"It is easy to see that he who has better clothes, better food, even better haircuts and vacations, is the one in whose hands we want to entrust the power to make everything right for us again" (Adiga, p. 21).

Adiga situates caste oppression within the broader context of colonialism's legacy, highlighting how colonial structures continue to shape social hierarchies and identities in postcolonial India. Balram's rebellion can be seen as a form of resistance against not only caste-based oppression but also the enduring effects of colonial rule on Indian society.

But they left us a legacy of bureaucracy, corruption, and casteism" (Adiga, p. 34).

Despite the challenges and complexities depicted in the novel, Adiga offers glimpses of hope for societal transformation. Balram's rebellion, while individualistic, symbolizes a broader desire for change and liberation among the marginalized. Adiga suggests that rebellion, coupled with collective action and awareness, holds the potential to challenge entrenched systems of oppression and pave the way for a more just and equitable society.

"I'm going to break out of the coop" (Adiga, p. 62).

POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES ON IDENTITY:

Colonial Legacies and Power Dynamics:

Adiga's novel meticulously examines how colonialism has left lasting imprints on Indian society, particularly in terms of power dynamics and identity formation. One of the key aspects highlighted is the entrenched hierarchies of power and privilege perpetuated by colonial rule.

In the novel, Balram reflects on the legacy of British colonialism, stating, "The British ruled the subcontinent for two hundred years, and they had the decency to never say thank you. [...] But they left us a legacy of bureaucracy, corruption, and casteism"

(Adiga, p. 34).

Impact on Identity Formation:

Adiga portrays how colonialism has deeply influenced the formation of individual and collective identities in India. Through characters like Balram, who emerge from marginalized backgrounds, the novel illustrates the ways in which colonial legacies shape perceptions of self-worth, agency, and social status.

Balram, reflecting on his own identity and aspirations, remarks, "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"

(Adiga, p. 51).

Critique of Colonial Hierarchies:

"The White Tiger" offers a scathing critique of the hierarchical structures perpetuated by colonialism, which continue to marginalize certain groups while privileging others. Adiga exposes the injustices inherent in these structures and challenges readers to confront the legacy of colonial oppression.

Balram, observing the disparities between the rich and the poor, reflects, "The lives of the poor are cheap. That's why the poor are poor"

(Adiga, p. 126).

Struggle for Liberation and Selfhood:

Balram's narrative serves as a microcosm of the broader postcolonial struggle for liberation and selfhood. His journey from servitude to independence mirrors the quest for emancipation from colonial oppression and the reclamation of agency and identity.

Balram, contemplating his newfound freedom, asserts, "I was looking for the key for years but the door was always open. Only I was too blind to see it"

 (Adiga, p. 292).

Intersections of Identity:

Adiga explores the intersecting identities of caste, class, religion, and gender within the postcolonial framework. These intersecting identities intersect and shape characters' experiences and opportunities, reflecting the complexities of identity negotiation in postcolonial India.

Balram, reflecting on the constraints imposed by caste and class, remarks, "In this country, it is not what you know but who you know that makes the difference"

(Adiga, p. 78).

CONCLUSION:

Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger" serves as a rich tapestry through which to explore the complexities of identity in contemporary Indian literature. Through the character of Balram Halwai, Adiga navigates the intricate webs of class, caste, and corruption that define Indian society, offering a nuanced portrayal of identity formation amidst socio-political upheaval. By interrogating notions of morality, rebellion, and postcolonial legacy, Adiga invites readers to critically engage with the myriad forces that shape individual and collective identities in the modern world. Looking at The White Tiger through the lens of Judith Butler's idea of performativity reveals that identities are not fixed and inherent but created through patterns of performance. Put simply, if there is a breakdown or disruption in the patterns, the regulatory forces constantly and repeatedly try to change the characters' subjectivity and identity. If left to its own devices, this could pave the way for novel patterns and the emergence of agency.

While the novel does show how people's identities and performance patterns can change over time, it also shows how society's rules are quite strict and how characters are punished harshly when they deviate from them. Consequently, the process emphasises that although new patterns of performance do lead to re-creation of one's identity, these transformations seldom include agency.

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