



## Struggle for Individual Identity in Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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**Abstract :** *Identity in general describes a person's conception and expression of his individuality or group affiliations including national and cultural identity. A person's psychological identity relates to his self-image, self-esteem and individuality. In cognitive psychology, the term 'identity' refers to the capacity for self-reflection. The present research paper explores identity crisis, racial discrimination, individual and political corruption as portrayed in Adiga's debut novel The White Tiger. This depicts the vulnerable and dangerous conditions in Indian village systems and administration. The common people struggle a lot for their individual identity. The search for identity is one of the major themes in the novel. People struggle a lot to establish their identity.*

**Key words:** *individual and collective identity, ethnicity, corruption, struggles, racial discrimination.*

### Narration

Aravind Adiga was born on October 23, 1974 in Chennai. He has an excellent track record in education. He was the topper of SSLC, Karnataka. He was the recipient of Booker prize for his first novel *The White Tiger* in 2008. He has written three novels -- *The White Tiger* (2008), *Between the Assassinations* (2008) and *Last Man in the Tower* (2011). Adiga received Booker Prize for his debut novel *The White Tiger* in 2008. This depicts the vulnerable and dangerous conditions in Indian village systems and administration. *Between the Assassinations* deals with the caste, religion dominated stories and also assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi whereas *Last Man in Tower* deals with the story of the struggle for real estate in Mumbai.

In *The White Tiger* Aravind Adiga explores the most heart-rending picture of imbalanced societies in India. It refers to the social and cultural issues of marginal tribes in the early free Indian

villages. The novel steadily criticizes both the positive and negative developments in the places such as Laxmangarh and Dhanbad where the end of imperial rule meant new possibilities of cultural self-determination.

It is common to find unpleasant, down trodden people in the highly developed cities like Delhi and Bangalore. Both are metro cities and became power centers. Corruption is limitless in India and the corrupted people turns to Delhi to wipe away their sins by giving bribes to the administrative leaders. Poor people suffer for their daily bread and butter. In the present context marginality is used to analyze socio-economic, cultural spheres where deprived people struggle to gain access to resources and complete participation in the social life. Marginalized people are always discriminated, ignored and often suppressed on the basis of caste, colour, creed, culture, gender, religion, ethnicity, occupation, education and economy. In this novel, we can see the paralyzed part of society struggles for individual and collective identity.



Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* explores the struggle for individual identity. The narrator of this story comes from a nameless and birthday-less past with a written fate and addresses his agenda to China's Premier. Narrator Balaram becomes something not only as Indian but also as a part of global society under the symbolic pseudonym of 'The White Tiger'. It is wonder that Balaram appeals to China and speaks with understanding of the United States and world economies. Despite the lack of formal education, he knows multiple religions and languages. Balaram used to serve as a tools sweeper at hotel and worked as a car driver to a rich family. He observed the society and struggled for individual identity. Individual's free will is not just an action here, but a state of being and the ability to change what one's being is defined.

Balaram was not given a name nor knows his exact age. He has always been called "Munnna" or "boy", which his teacher claims is not a real name and subsequently named him Balaram. The teacher challenges the notion that we are born into identities by labelling Munna with the new name of Balaram and tells Balaram. Balaram is an elevated status of a name with less freedom of identity. However, Balaram's father seems to have no care what his son is called. Somewhat Balaram's father tries to design Balaram's career but he dies due to his ill health. Balaram was good at studies in his childhood. If he would have studied further, he might have become a great man. We can see his grasping power and intelligence in many situations. The inspection officer calls Balaram as "The White Tiger". White tigers are rare species of tigers and "only a dozen or so have been found in the wild". White

tigers are inbred in zoos, led to a larger population in captivity than in the wild, and forced breeding and caged concrete habitats make the lives of such kingly animals meaningless like Adiga's description of poor servants in India. Balaram first encounters with a white tiger at the National Zoo in New Delhi and notices the sign that reads: "Imagine yourself in the cage".

Balaram struggles to get food, shelter and identity. The deprived people never had been treated as human beings since ages in India. Balaram has also been treated as an animal since his childhood and he has to undergo lot of hardships before his grand success as entrepreneur in Bangalore. The rich expects their pets to be treated as humans and they expect their dogs to be pampered, walked petted, and even washed, but never treat their servants as human beings. Balaram describes how he takes dogs for walk.

*"Then I took them around the compound on chain, while the king of Nepal (Guest) sat in a corner and shouted. Don't pull the chain so hard! They are worth more than you are!"*  
(Adiga, 2008:78)

*The White Tiger* projects to evaluate dichotomies within society- rich, prosperous and other deprived. One develops socially, educationally, technologically, of course not in character. The poor people are mostly ignored or else treated as slaves. Some are still in slums with no food and shelter. The right to vote also divest.

Balaram's father says:

*"I've seen twelve elections- five general, five state, two local- and*



*someone else voted for me twelve times”*  
( Adiga, 2008 :170)

Balaram goes from darkness to light and drives his matser Ashok to Delhi. There he sees that in the developed cities also there are slum areas where people like Balaram lives. Balaram lives in a narrow room and suffered with mosquitoes and other inscets. There are many people who came to Delhi to survive, but they are still away from the equal rights for which Balram is struggling.

One day, a child dies in the accident made by Pinky madam but they force Balaram to take this accident on his part just to save Pinky getting trapped in the case. Fortunately, no one registers the case, otherwise Balaram should undergo through the punishment for the crime which he didn't perpetrate. Many Indian frauds like Mr. Ashok visits Delhi for giving bribe to hide their crimes. Adiga boldly pictures the internal affairs of political parties, bribe, black mailing and corruption.

*“The poor bastards had come from Darkeness to Delhi to find some light-but they were still in the Darkness”*  
(Aidga, 2008: 138)

Generally people struggle for identity. Pinky, the wife of Mr. Ashok gets bored of Delhi's atmosphere and asks Ashok to return to NewYork but he delays. So Pinky leaves for NewYork, her native, to acquire her own identity and status in her society. Aravind conveys that the world is a battle ground and the warriors are the rich and poor. Obviously rich kills poor or makes poor as his/her slave. Balaram was born as a servant but he didn't like to die as a servant. Bill Gates says that born being poor is not our mistake but dying being poor is our

mistake. Balaram does not like to die as a driver with an identity as low born member of Halwai community. He struggles to establish his identity. He finds a way to be out of cage to become 'The White Tiger'. Balaram thinks a lot about his past blames and how the poor is treated by the rich. *“Amazing how much money they have’ .... And yet they treat us like animals”*. The protagonist becomes corrupt and decides to do something violent as he thinks that will change his life completely.

Balaram not only thought to steal money but he thought to kill Ashok. Balaram planned to reestablish his own identity. For that one day he killed Ashok and escaped with his money. He settled in Bangalore and became successful entrepreneur. Balaram undertook various odd jobs as table swiper, coal crusher, servant, chauffer, and driver and at the end became murderer of his own master, Mr. Ashok. He had chosen crime to establish his identity.

Balaram's story resembles to India's present state of affairs and its hierarchical society. Balaram's lack of education and his history is related to crores of marginalized Indians. Marginalized people are searching for their rights and betterment. If suppression and domination may continue, they may turn into criminals. So we need to take steps to eliminate the discrimination between the rich and the poor.

#### References

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