FROM DARK TO LIGHT: ARVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER* IN A POSTMODERN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Present paper aims at analyzing Arvind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* from Postmodern context. The novel exhibits characteristic of Postmodernism in theme and treatment both. Indian English Novelists have chosen postmodernism form to reject mere documentation of reality but to explore changed reality piercing into all traditional concepts. Fiction of nineties is different from its precursor's technique and sensibility yet it is not imitation or recreation of the Euro-American postmodern novel as it is chiseled out of socio-cultural reality of India. Adiga has incorporated mixture of stream – of- consciousness elements and description of factual socio-cultural scenario without high symbolism. The novel has epistolary form, containing seven letters each written in one night. Postmodern literature, as Lyotard has defined, shows incredulity towards metanarratives or grand narratives. No high symbolism is found in such work. Being journalist by profession, Adiga's narrative style is as plain as news without sentimentality. His cold and detached narration allows the playfulness in the text.

Key Words: Postmodernism, Flashback, Fragmented Narrative, Subversion of myth, Exposed reality of so called progressive India.

Postmodernism is often viewed as a tendency, a tendency to oppose established social, culture and literacy forms. According to Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh, "The historian Arnold Toynbee first used the term in 1947 to describe the current, fourth and final phase of western history, dominated by anxiety and irrationalism." (Rice, 67) Even though the origins of postmodernism lies in Architecture, as a literary tendency, post modernism has influenced various disciplines. Literary postmodernism doesn't debunk modernism totally as it questions and problematise the reality like modernism does. Basic characteristics of post modernism are anti-form, play, chance, pastiche, intertextuality. It totally abandoned the notion of assigning meaning, sense and order to life through literature postmodernists find centre itself an illusionary thing.

Various "-isms" have always influenced Indian English Novelists. The principal concern of Indian English Novelist is to reflect current social scenario. They have successfully incorporated elements of social, political, historical, religious, mythical, cultural or psychological aspects of life. Amitav Ghose observes : " For me, the value of the novel as a form, is that it is able to incorporate elements of every aspect of life, " (Ghose, 5) To reflect the spirit of common mass and their everyday life Indian English Novelists have often adapted foreign forms but have modified them as per the Indian socio- cultural realities.

It has always remained a matter of great debate that either postmodernism is applicable to IEN or not! Even Rusdie's *Midnight's Children* is seen as a deliberate imitation of western literary model by few critics. But on the other hand with the dawn of nineties, the nature Indian reality and society altered due to drastic changes in social, political, cultural and familial patterns. Post- Rushide generation has explicitly reflected the complexities and the anguish of new circumstances in their fiction. They have chosen postmodernism form to reject mere documentation of reality but to explore changed reality piercing into all traditional concepts. In brief novelist of post- independence period "have powerfully voiced the dismay and disillusionment, economic inequalities, class discrimination, social and communal prejudices, political chaos and religious superstitions and orthodoxical view points that came to govern the destinies men and women in every spectrum of existence in the nation reborn out of the thrones of slavery and serfdom." Thus, the fiction of nineties is different from its precursors technique and sensibility yet it is not imitation or recreation of the Euro-American postmodern novel as it is chiseled out of socio-cultural reality of India.

Arvind Adiga is the fourth debutant writer to win the man Booker prize for The White Tiger in the year 2008. Like Upmanyu Chatterjee has done in his novel *The Mammaries* of *The Welfare State*,Arvind Adiga also discloses India which is full of dark alleys, bribe taking, polluted by soul and environment both. The post modern novel debunks the myth and traditionality. Adiga, through his realistic nature of portrayal, has shattered the image of Gandhian India. Christopher Butter in his book *Postmodernism* states:

> The post modernist novel doesn't try to create a
> sustained realist illusion: it displays itself as
> open to all those illusory tricks of stereotype
> and narrative manipulation, and of multiple
> interpretation in all its contradiction and in-
> consistency, which are central to post mode-
> rnist thought.(56)

When the Indian fiction market is followed with the success stories of the IT revolution and progressing India , Adiga in his novel, *The White Tiger* undertakes the task to reveal the underbelly of the growth story of India. Adiga juxtaposes the social classes of India and reveals its reality composed of the highly unpredictable half baked men and their quest of leading a dignified life amongst poverty and apathy of the ruling class. Adiga describes the class distinction in following words:

> A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow white
> and soft and blank. Ours are different. My father's spine
> was a knotted rope… the story of a poor man is written
> on his, body in a Sharp pen… (TWT 26, 27)

The condition of subordinate class in India is vulnerable while the class of entrepreneurs lives comfortably by bribing police. In an interview with *Free Press Journal*, 2008. Adiga says that he " wanted captured the voice of the colossal underclass which can be found while travelling through India."

Exploring the marginalized aspects of life and marginalized elements of society became the prime concern of the postmodern writers. Adiga has explored that how under the excuse of castism lower class are denied to self-progress. Protagonist in the story Balram is described as a " half baked" man and "self-taught

entrepreneur" born in a small town in the darkness and craves for the light that symbolizes his struggle for involvement in the class of entrepreneurs. Balram's father desired a son who could leave like a man:

" All I want is that one son of mine- at least one- should live like a man."(TWT)

This word "man" makes Balram to search for the light, that search for his existence. The evil of castism puts question mark to the carrier talented young man. Balram is made to realize that driving is not the job for low people; it belongs to particular castes and not of lowly shudras. The old driver tells Balram " how can you learn to drive… it is like a taming a wild stallion only a boy from the warrior castes can manage that. You need to have aggression in your blood. Muslims, Rajput and Sikhs- they are fighters, they can become drivers.." The landlord is also interested in knowing his caste. He enquires:

"… are you form a top caste or bottom caste, boy all our employer are top caste."

(TWT,64, 65)

Postmodern literature, as Lyotard has defined, shows incredulity towards metanarratives or grand narratives. No high symbolism is found in such work. Being journalist by profession, his narrative style is as plain as news without sentimentality. His cold and detached narration allows the playfulness in the text. He has incorporated mixture of stream – of- consciousness elements and description of factual socio-cultural scenario without high symbolism. The novel has epistolary form, containing seven letters each written in one night. In an interview Adiga says that he "wanted to do so without sentimentality or portraying them as mirthless humorless weaklings as they are usually depicted" A postmodern text does not look for meaning, the prime duty of it is to play with existing chaos. The narration of the novel is fragmented that reflects the current socio- cultural scenario. Modernist literature explores fragmentation and extreme subjectivity as an existential crisis and often artist seek to resolve it. While post modern literature treats this chaos as insurmountable and artist as powerless. At the beginning of the novel Balram introduces the readers to one of his most prized possessions the chandelier. As a source of light it symbolizes Balram's successful escape from the world of darkness" that is life of poverty and servitude. But his escape from poverty has brought him to the darker world of degradation. Balram writes to Chinese priemer :

> Please understand , your Excellency , that India is two countries in
>
> One : an India of Light and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings light
>
> To my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well off .
>
> But the river brings darkness to India – the black river." (TWT,12)

Adiga exposes the two different Indias here. During his mother's burial, Balram observes mother's body against the thick mud. Adiga subverts the symbol of the river Ganga as redemptory. Instead , he presents it as a symbol of the oppressive cycle of repression that traps India 's poor people. Thus, Adiga has subverted the myth of progressive India along with traditional myth of river Ganges. He has exposed bitter reality of starving, poor and degraded India with postmodern narrative technique.

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