

Title The Light and the Dark: An Analysis of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Guiding Questions:

What role do economic systems play in creating and maintaining social class hierarchies?

Required Text: *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga

Recommended Resource: -[Documentary](#) India Untouched

Task:

This semester we have studied the unfair hierarchical structures (both economic and social) that trap so many at the bottom. Consider Balram's journey for success and what he gains and gives up along the way. You will write an analytic paper exploring how the social systems (hierarchical structures) impact Balram's choices.

“If absolute power corrupts absolutely, does absolute powerlessness make you pure?”
—Harry Shearer (American writer, actor)

The White Tiger written by Aravind Adiga, published in 2008, is a novel that is set in India. The story is told in first person by the protagonist Balram Halwai. Balram is a village boy of low caste, Halwais who are renowned for making sweets. Balram narrates his life in the form of flashbacks in a letter to Mr. Jiabao, The Chinese Premier. The fact that the story is told in flashback helps to serve as a contrast between the current Balram and the Balram of the past. Balram begins his autobiography when he is a young boy going to school. We are made aware of the fact that Balram was not given a name and was called “Munna(boy)” when addressed. While going over his experience in school, it is clear that Balram, unlike his peers, took education seriously. Being from one of the bottom castes and taking your education seriously was rare, this even earned him the nickname of ‘The White Tiger.’ However, due to his grandmother, Kusum’s greed, Balram was taken out of school and put to work like the rest of his family. Balram’s working experience led him to interact with the government on different levels. Throughout the text, whenever Balram speaks of the Indian government, he is very sarcastic. Readers can infer that Balram has lost all faith in the government because of the corruption. Similar to many other countries in the world, the government of India was highly corrupt. With a corrupt government, the entire country is bound to get corrupted. Aravind Adiga proves that corruption in politics leads to an overall corrupt country where both those in power as well as the powerless become corrupt through the events of *The White Tiger*.

Everything related to the government was corrupted. One of the most important aspects

of a country is the government. Thus, election time becomes one of the most important and influential moments in a country. After being forced to drop out of school, Balram was sent to work in a tea shop. One day while working, he along with the other workers were told to head to a school and there they met a government official. He then learns that the owner of the tea shop sold the fingerprints of all the workers in order to falsify votes. According to Balram, "This was supposed to be a close election; he had got a good price for each one of us from the Great Socialist's party"(The fourth morning, pg 57). For the poor in India, they didn't get the choice to vote. Every election was fought with money rather than the votes of the citizens, and the outcome was nearly always the same. This is significant because the 99% of India had no say in the direction their country went in. The author also used irony to show the state of corruption that the government was in. The main person who was buying votes was the great socialist. This is ironic because although the socialists' public agenda was that of "for the people", they were treating "The people" as slaves. The corruption of power doesn't stop at the level of the elections. The corruption of power also extended to the level of doctors. While attempting to take their father to the hospital for his Tuberculosis, they are surprised to find no doctors at the village hospital. They meet other patients with a variety of diseases/injuries and begin conversing. An old man explains to them, Now, you—Dr. Ram Pandey—will kindly put one-third of your salary in my palm. Good boy. In return, I will do this." He made a tick on the imaginary ledger. "You can keep the rest of your government salary and go work in some private hospital for the rest of the week. Forget the village. Because according to this ledger you've been there. You've treated my wounded leg. You've healed that girl's jaundice"(The Second Night, pg 29). After waiting a long time for the doctor who never arrived, Balram's father died. The corruption of power was so

bad to the point where the lives of people were being disregarded. This is significant because not only did they have no say in the elections, they couldn't even receive the help they needed.

In order to survive as a low caste, the "powerless" had to become corrupt themselves. When Balram first started working for Ashok, he was an honest, and innocent person. However, after living with the other servants for a while he began to taint himself. After arriving in Delhi, Balram's yearning for living a proper life only became stronger. This led to him stealing from Ashok, then eventually killing him to make his escape. During his rise to entrepreneurship, Balram became more corrupted himself. Balram explains to Mr. Jiabao, "Two days later, I called up the nice woman at the Internet company who had turned me down, and heard a shocking tale. Her taxi service had been disrupted. A police raid had discovered that most of the drivers did not have licenses. "I'm so sorry, madam," I said. "I offer you my sympathies. In addition, I offer you my company. White Tiger Drivers." "Do all your drivers have licenses?" "Of course, madam. You can call the police and check"(The seventh Night, pg 181). In order to make connections with the internet company, Balram bribed the police. He continued to pay off the police in order to get away with illegal deeds. A prime example was when one of his drivers killed a boy on a bike, and Balram simply used his connection with the police to sweep it under the rug. Although Balram became corrupt to live a better life, others around him in the same caste were also corrupt. His grandmother, Kusum was one of the people most involved in his early life, but also one of the most corrupt people in his life. When Balram first began to work for Ashok, Kusum siphoned most of the money he made. However, Balram wasn't the only

member of the family she was exploiting for money. After being summoned back to his village by Kusum, Balram points out, “Kishan had changed. He was thinner, and darker—his neck tendons were sticking

out in high relief above the deep clavicles. He had become, all of a sudden, my father... There was red, curried bone and flesh in front of me—and it seemed to me that they had served me flesh from Kishan's own body on that plate”(The second night, pg52). Executing her plan to get Balram married to make more money, Kusum attempted to entice Balram with a piece of chicken. Chicken was somewhat of a luxury for families in Balram’s caste. However, Balram makes the analogy of the piece of chicken and Kishan’s weak body, suggesting that Kusum overworked Kishan in order to buy that piece of meat. Although Kishan was working hard to provide for the family, he wasn’t fed proportionally to that.

Through the experiences of Balram, Aravind Adiga suggests that corruption in politics leads to an overall corrupt country. In societies like this, both those in power as well as the powerless become corrupted in their attempts to better their lives. In *The White Tiger*, everything on a political level was corrupted. From elections of government officials, to paying taxes, money ruled over everything. This of course negatively impacted those without power, subjecting them to uncomfortable lives. In order to survive as a member of the lowest caste, people had to become corrupt themselves. This all comes together to create a country with a lot of internal conflict. One important factor leading to the corruption of India, was the manner in which the British left. When the British abruptly left India, those living there clawed their way

into power. This led to an unorganized formation of government which in turn allowed for corruption in politics. This situation is similar to that of Rwanda in 1962. In 1962 after Belgium left Rwanda, violence broke out because the main power in the country was corrupt. All in all, a society/country where those in power are corrupted, the citizens will eventually become corrupt themselves.

Works Cited

Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*: a Novel. Atlantic Books, 2008.