

Myth Analysis in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga has used the style of ancient Indian mythology in his novel *White Tiger* to showcase the relationship between servants and their masters. With a great resemblance to the myth in the Ramayana in which the Valkim's Hanuman Myth shows to show the rooster coop style of relationship in which countless servants were made to serve their unquestioned master even in the modern age. Once held captive in the rooster coop style of control the poor Indians abstain from breaking free for their freedom as they associate their fate to religion and faith as well as morality of not rebelling against their superiors. Exploiting this their masters do whatever they please with them and the servants are too amenable to resist until a character façaden the form of Balram Halwai comes and façades determined to challenge the rooster coop mentality in his individual quest for freedom. The rest of the oppressed people are not happy with the situation but they remain loyal to their masters despite all their subjugations. But Balram Halwai fights back and gains his freedom by rebelling against his master and thereby breaking the rooster coop mentality that had kept his people under siege for thousands of years. This article is a study of how Adiga has managed to associate the age old myth of rooster coop in his narration of *The White Tiger* and to what effect.

Key Words : Rooster coop, myth, myth analysis, Valkim, Bhagvad Gita, Ram, Sita, Krishna,

Hanuman, social ladder, subjugation, exploitation, lower caste, freedom, oppression Aravind Adiga's Man Booker Prize for literature winning novel is a genuinely firsthand type of account from a man from the lower layers of the strata in a society that is riddled with poverty, exploitation, corruption, and social injustices. It is realistic presentation of the situation in a very impoverished part of India and it is true to many lives even in the postmodern India. The novel takes the angle of the narrator who is from the oppressed side as he and his predecessors were servants. The symbolism of darkness is used to represent the situation of the narrator and his kind in the unequal systems widespread in India in which the oppressed are ever engaged in a struggle to either change or cope with their suppressed situation at the bottom of the strata. The first person point of view of the narrator presents the dire situation of the poor the servants credibly and believably in his letters to the Chinese premier and to the readers as well as in the dialogues between the characters in the novel. Adiga therefore manages to narrate the intricate and complex history of exploitation and degradation of human rights in India due to power and class differences that were sustained from ancient times. It is a story of not just a struggle to survive but predominantly a story of a man's quest for his freedom. That man is the character of Balram Halwai, who is the narrator in the novel. He fights for his rights to change his fate from being a victim to a successful man. By a strong will and determination as well as some dirty tricks and crimes he manages to escape the slave-like situation in which he was born and belonged to. He does an audacious thing in order to escape from the abject poverty and oppression in which his predecessors were held captive by killing his master and taking his wealth. There is no attempt to hide the dirty game he had to play in order to get out of his situation as he doesn't shy away from

telling his story and the story of his people honestly, making the novel a vivid and realistic presentation of a grim picture in Indian society. According to Moonvendham:

The fiction depicts the journey of Indian society from aspirations to disillusionment by focusing on vital socio-cultural issues of national importance such as poverty, hunger, corruption, violence, fanaticism, terrorism, and child-labour and so on. It also deals with economic, political and social exploitation and discrimination of the weaker, marginalized sections on the basis of caste, class, gender and religion. Moonvendhan, 2019 (337)

The myth of the gods and the servants in the novel is reminiscent of James Joyce's and Homer's characters Ulysses and Leopold Bloom, respectively. There is a great deal of reference to myth of the gods which are almost parallel in their messages. Adiga uses the myth of Valmiki, Ram and Sita from the ancient Hindu Mythology to give the readers a parallel story of the rise of a servant to a higher level of authority by breaking the ceiling of his designated position at the lowest strata of the power hierarchy. His master and mistress Mr. Ashok and his wife as Ram and Sita, are presented as Ram and Sita, while Hanuman is presented as Balram Halwai. He uses the narrative in the mythology of how Valmiki was loyal to his masters Ram and Sita by showing how Balram tries to impress Mr. Ashok and his wife in order to get what he wants. There is no real feeling of respect in him or any desire to continue to serve them as his only motto is to rise above his servitude and become a master himself whatever the cost may be. It was important in the myth of Valmiki for Hanuman to be loyal and it was also important for Balram Halwai to appear to be a devotee to his masters and gain their trust for his scheme to work without any glitches. According to: Deepak Jana

In Ulysses, James Joyce presents his hero Leopold

Bloom as modern Ulysses. Ulysses of Homer and Bloom of Joyce are not the same though there are parallels between them. Likewise Adiga does not portray modern Rama i.e. Mr. Ashok and Hanuman i.e. Balram Halwai with the same pen as Valmiki did. To impress Ram Prasad, the number one driver of Mr. Ashok's family, is a devotee of Balram 'bought two dozen of the cheapest idols of Hanuman and Ram... packed them into the room.'

(77) Balram pretended to show his devotion to gods. His actual intention is to please his master, Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam would sit in the back and

Balram 'would drive them wherever they wanted, as faithfully as the servant-god Hanuman carried his master and mistress Ram and Sita.' (46) Jana, 2018 (134)

The myth of Valmiki in relation to Ram and Sita as well as the story of Balram

Halwai have one marked difference in that there was no reverence on the side of

Balram to his masters whereas Hanuman the half human half monkey god served Ram and Sita with utmost reverence. Balram had just one objective and that was a deep desire to deceive them and get what they want. Balram Halwai did not believe and accept his position as a loyal servant who was destined to live under the servitude like situation in which Mr. Ashok and his wife were the superiors. His sole desire was to break away from the chains of his subjugation and the poverty that his whole family and predecessors suffered from for many years and were incapable of doing anything about it. He neither believed nor was faithful to the gods of his masters when he was trying to impress them by giving them the appearance that he were a devotee. Therefore he didn't have a belief in the gods and he didn't pray from his heart or depended on them to save him from his situation. He took justice in his own hands and was always planning to do it as a human being without the intercession from the spiritual powers. But he shows that he was praying and that he was a believer when he buys the idols of gods to impress his master and mistress. By disarming them of any suspicion, he awaits for the opportune moment to take his chance and commit the crime that he hoped would take him out of his servitude.

Lena Khor writes:

By referring to prayer and gods with such irreverence, it is clear that Halwai places little faith in religion. Instead he prefers to rely on human actions, believing that his life has been shaped by others (his family and his master), and that it can be changed through his own actions. Khor, 2012 (49) Myth analysis in Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* gets its coronation by using symbolic metaphors

of animals of both predator and prey to represent human beings. The allegorical representation of the ancient India is represented by the postmodern India. In the mythological Indian story and ancient history of the nation, the roots of all caste systems and hierarchies were laid down. They were many in number and they had different complexities. However in the postmodern India that Adiga portrays there were metaphorically two categories of human beings represented as beasts or animals. They were the eater and the eaten. This he attributes to the postcolonial effect of the British administration that had left an economic class in which there these two important strata in which there were the haves and the have-nots. These two economic powers represented the political and power systems that determined who was to rule and who was to be ruled, who was to oppress and who was to be oppressed, and metaphorically, who was to eat and who was to be eaten. By using the mythological symbolisms of the animal metaphors Adiga represents a postcolonial India in which the democracy was a disappointment to the expectations of the people of India who had hoped that their troubles would be behind them once they got rid of the colonial master, Britain. However, the teething problems that the British colonizers left in the country proved to be equally devastating and divisive as it meant that the citizens of India were divided along sectarian and economic as well as caste divides and continued to live in an unequal and unjust system of a seeming democracy. The story shows the widespread level of corruption and class divisions under which the rich remained on top and the poor found it very difficult to break out of their situations and were kept in what he referred as the rooster coop.

Subashini and Saranya write:

This book highlights the problems of a democratic environment and an imperfect administrative approach. The nation has moved away from true independence and social equality. Widespread discrimination and corruption are common in many areas. This imperfect mechanism has resulted in unique classifications and classes. Earlier there were many castes in India. However, it now seems to be divided into two types: large ships and small ships. And there are only two destinies: to eat and to be eaten.” After independence, Britain empowered politicians. Here, a metaphor is used in the names of the animals to suggest that they fought with each other. The strong and hungry became a great crowd of people who ate everyone else and were satisfied. Now the most important fact is the size of the ship. “The important thing now is the size of the ship. Whether you're female, Muslim or untouchable, a man with a belly can buy it. Subashini and Saranya, 2023 (621)

The myth component gives the novel an element of divinity for the reader to accept Balram Halwai as the divine servant Hanuman in Valmiki's mythology. On the other hand the myth of the rooster coop in *The White Tiger* have a resonance of servitude and hardship of the subjugated peoples of India. The confinement of the rooster coop paints the picture of an India which was ripe with stories of poverty, unemployment, loss of faith in the political system, corruption, climatic degradation, political rivalry, embezzlement, caste system inequality, and so on. Through the novel Adiga is able to tell the story of the divided cultures and grim situations of oppression that owed its roots mostly to economic gaps between the rich and the poor. This was a situation that had been sustained across many generations and was exasperated by the colonization of the British and continued in the newly independent nation of India. The myth gives Balram Halwai a status of holiness and divinity as he tries to break out of the rooster coop that had captivated his predecessors for generations before him. He is the only one who challenges the system while others were passively amenable and tolerant of their oppression, owing to their religious allegiance and faith that their destiny was to remain in servitude as it were the will of the gods. But armed with a connotation of holiness, Balram manages not only manages to break out of the rooster coop but is also tolerated when he commits acts of crime and inhumanity in his quest to achieve his freedom. From a very young age, the story prepares Balram as someone who was chosen to hold the bull by the horn and still be justified as the injustice needed only such desperate measures. According to Alam and Singh:

The *White Tiger* puts the different vulgarities frameworks like joblessness, hopelessness, pollution, political race, abuse of government assist plans and direction with organizing. The story investigates the unpleasant Indian culture reality number of years & that's really has gone within the immense

opening between the rich and have not. Balram, the holy novel person, is an agent voice of the lower-class emblematically portrayed as a chicken coop with no associates. He is separate as a denied-class heavenly individual. The holy person attempts to be freed, subjugation & abuse. His move from a vulnerable town kid to a useful industrialist isn't a critical uncompromising stance battle to release from the endless class circle framework. His life begins with struggle at a youngest age when dad acquires advances to his town landowner to marry his cousin's sister Reena. Alam and Singh, 2022 (3837) Mythology in Indian culture is described in Aravind Adiga's novel, *The White Tiger* almost in real terms in addition to narration. There is a physical reference and description of one village with its river and localities in which the description gives a picture of a temple in which there was a picture of Hanuman in the novel. The story creates a connotation between him and the protagonist of the novel. In a letter that the narrator writes to the Chinese premier, he describes the place and focuses specifically on the idol of Hanuman and relates its significance to the faithful people of India. The statue was a reminder to the people that as Hanuman was a devoted servant to the gods Ram and Sita, so should be the people who were under the servitude of the people from the upper caste and those who were superior to them politically as well as economically. The people then had no choice but to accept servitude and subjugation as their destiny which ought not be questioned or challenged but accepted gracefully. He explains to the Chinese premier that these the kinds of hurdles that were keeping his people in a rooster coop kinds of situations in which they were unwilling to rebel against their oppressors due to their belief systems that taught them to just obey and not challenge the authority. This continued to be the situation until along came the narrator in the character of Balram Halwai who was seen as a uniquely symbolic of Hanuman but at the same time determined to break off his shackles and gain independence, come what may. This way Adiga is able to explain why the people are not able to challenge authority and why they are subservient to try and fight for their freedoms to their own detriment. Balram Halwai describes the effect of the Hanuman image in the temple:

There is a small branch of the Ganga that flows just outside Laxmangarh; boats come down from the world outside, bringing supplies every Monday. There is one street in the village; a bright strip of sewage splits it into two. On either side of the ooze, a market: three more or less identical shops selling more or less identically adulterated and stale items of rice, cooking oil, kerosene, biscuits, cigarettes, and jaggery. At the end of the market is a tall, whitewashed, cone like tower, with black intertwining snakes painted on all its sides—the temple. Inside, you will find an image of a saffron-colored creature, half man half monkey: this is Hanuman, everyone's favorite god in the Darkness.

Do you know about Hanuman, sir? He was the faithful servant of the god Rama, and we worship him in our temples because he is a shining example of how to serve your masters with absolute fidelity, love, and devotion. These are the kinds of gods they have foisted on us, Mr. Jiabao. Understand, now, how hard it is for a man to win his freedom in India. *The White Tiger* (19) The myth of the rooster coop is used to a great effect metaphorically to describe the situation with the poor people of India, mostly those from the lower caste. It served the interest of the rich and the powerful Indians who were very few in number. These were the haves who had the have-nots at their disposal and did whatever they wished with them as they had set up the rooster coop for them, making sure that there was no exit from it or breaking away from it. This rooster coop mentality he was refereeing to is in connotation with the democratic capitalist system that was in India and that was an exact opposite of the political and economic system of communism that was practiced in China. He asks the Chinese premier whether they had such rooster coops in China too but then quickly replies his own question by saying that in China there was no likelihood of having such a system as they already had a harsh dictatorial system which made sure that the gap between the haves and the have-nots was not wide, preventing the possibility that the few would oppress the masses. He reasons that in China there was state force applied to prevent such occurrence but that in India there was no need for a police state as the system of the few oppressors had already a convenient system devised to silence the majority. That system gave the few the power to rule over the masses with impunity and in an easy way. That power was the economic and caste system combined with politics and religion. Under that system the

oppressors did not even need to control the reins but only keep the mentality of the rooster coop very well cultivated in the culture and faith of the populace for them to keep and sustain it themselves without a duress. As the mentality of servitude had become such a strong belief system, it was very deeply imprinted in the minds of the masses that not only would they not dare fight or resist oppression but also advocate for the system that kept them in the dark and servitude. Balram Halwai describes the difficulty of breaking the rooster coop and its implications:

The Great Indian Rooster Coop. Do you have something like it in China too? I doubt it, Mr. Jiabao. Or you wouldn't need the Communist Party to shoot people and a secret police to raid their houses at night and put them in jail like I've heard you have over there. Here in India we have no dictatorship. No secret police. That's because we have the coop. Never before in human history have so few owed so much to so many, Mr. Jiabao. A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 percent—as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way—to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse. The White Tiger (175) Myth analysis in *The White Tiger* is closely intertwined with the ancient mythology of Valkimi's loyalty to his masters Ram and Sita in which an absolute obedience is upheld. When this translates into the modern Indian communities, it manifests itself in the form of the rooster coop. The rooster coop in turn manifests itself in terms of all the jails in Delhi and all other states of the country as well as the untold miseries and sufferings of the lower class communities under the privileged class rules. Those jails tell the stories of how the servants were totally devoted to their masters and how they took the blame for their masters' crimes. One example that the narrator tells is the story of how Delhi drivers went to jail and confessed for crimes they didn't commit just to cover for their masters who were responsible for the wrong doing. These kinds of acts had become rampant and quite normalized that as in the myth of Valkimi, the Hanuman serves the gods with utmost obedience, and drivers take the blame for their masters and go to jail and suffer as a result without rebellion. Everybody knows these kinds of practices were quite common including the police and the legal systems. However, nobody seems to do anything about it as long as it benefited the upper class at the expense of the poor lower class people. Balram Halwai was one such unfortunate driver who was expected to follow suit as all his predecessors had done but he was a special one who was in a quite unique position that gave him some latitude to challenge the system's corrupt ways. That is why Adiga introduced him as the 'white tiger' right from the start. With his mythical godly and divine attributes given to him by the narrator, he was able to become the only odd one to refuse to be owned flesh and body by his masters in the world's greatest democracy as India. The other drivers and servants don't protest or rebel but he becomes a champion of freedom and liberty by taking actions to break the rooster coop. The servants were even proud of being owned by and taking the fall for their masters and accepted it as a form of highest loyalty. Even Balram himself had gone to jail in Tihar for the crimes of his boss but he didn't want to live a life of dog for his master. But until he gets what he wants he serves his master with the utmost loyalty and devotion as the mythical Hanuman in the Valkimi myth. Balrm narrates:

The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters. We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul, and arse. Yes, that's right: we all live in the world's greatest democracy. What a fucking joke. Doesn't the driver's family protest? Far from it. They would actually go about bragging. Their boy Balram had taken the fall, gone to Tihar Jail for his employer. He was loyal as a dog. He was the perfect servant. The judges? Wouldn't they see through this obviously forced confession? But they are in the racket too. They take their bribe, they ignore the discrepancies in the case. And life goes on. For everyone but the driver. *White Tiger* (169) The myth of the drivers or chauffeurs in *The White Tiger* has a strong resonance to that of the history in the Bhagvad Gita. The narrator himself mentions how in the history of the ancient religious book Lord Krishna was chauffeuring a chariot which he stopped to communicate some words of wisdom with a passenger he was transporting. Adiga creates a parallelism with the mythology of ancient Hinduism to give Balram a sort of divine personality. The advice that the god gives the passenger was a matter of life and death and the reader of *The White Tiger* could clearly see that the driver Balram Halwai had a communication with his master about a

matter of life and death. Adiga is telling a story with a borderline closeness to the people of India's heart façade narrating to them a story to which they divinely associate and sympathize with. There is a clear gap of loyalty in the fact that Balram was not totally loyal to his masters in his heart as his prime motive was to take advantage of the trust he gained from his appearing to be a devotee but the parallelism is enough nonetheless to create some sort of deep meaning to the Indian reader who grew up reading and learning all the holy books, which have shaped their attitude and faith. By carefully crafting a story that gives a divine supremacy to the protagonist Balram Halwai and by showing how the condition of the oppressed people was utterly unjust the writer is able to create enough sympathy and use the myth of faith in the postmodern Indian narration to justify his agenda of destroying the rooster coop life inside which millions of poor and lower caste people were languishing. Balram Halwai relates the passage from the Bhagvad Gita:

I talked to him about the wisdom of my village— half repeating things I remembered Granny saying, and half making things up on the spot—and he nodded. It was a scene to put you in mind of that passage in the Bhagavad Gita, when our Lord Krishna—another of history's famous chauffeurs—stops the chariot he is driving and gives his passenger some excellent advice on life and death. Like Krishna I philosophized—I joked—I even sang a song—all to make Mr. Ashok feel better. Baby, I thought, rubbing his back as he heaved and threw up one more time, you big, pathetic baby. I put my hand out and wiped the vomit from his lips, and cooed soothing words to him. It squeezed my heart to see him suffer like this—but where my genuine concern for him ended and where my self-interest began, I could not tell: no servant can ever tell what the motives of his heart are. Do we loathe our masters behind a façade of love—or do we love them behind a façade of loathing? We are made mysteries to ourselves by the Rooster Coop we are locked in. *The White Tiger* (187)

Conclusion

The White Tiger is the first novel of Aravind Adiga's published in 2008 which won the Man Booker Prize for literature immediately within the same year. There is a combination of myth and reality in the novel narrated by an angry voice of a narrator who is also the protagonist of the novel, Balram Halwai. The novel uses dark humor and an enormous amount of symbolism that associates from the ancient India

to the modern India. The writer uses mythologies from the *Bhagvad Gita* and creates a parallel story with his protagonist's story who is moved by a compelling evidence of injustice and utter poverty to rise above his situation at all costs. Clear indications are presented by the narrator as he writes his letters to the Chinese premier, which is in itself an example of rebellion, as the two countries were not in the fondest of terms with each other. So he tells his story of how he was greatly dissatisfied with the situation of the modern Indian democracy which oversaw the human suffering at an unprecedented level. Whereas the ruling class and the economically upper class were quite too happy for the status quo to continue, the narrator demonstrates that the greater masses of the nation were suffering under such systems of economy, politics and caste. He creates a narrator and a protagonist that manages to break the shackles of oppression and attain his freedom, at least economically.

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