



## The role of corruption in Balram's transformation: Hero of "the white tiger" a victim or a villain

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### Abstract

Balram Halwai, the protagonist of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, is a complicated character whose transformation from an impoverished rural youngster to a prosperous businessman is influenced by institutional corruption. He was raised in poverty, understands that success is attained through fraud and corruption rather than hard work. Although he starts off as a downtrodden servant, he actively embraces corruption to get fortune and power, joining the very system he once opposed. *The White Tiger* raises concerns about whether corruption is a moral failing or a necessary weapon for people looking to advance in an unfair system. It also questions whether Balram is a victim of a corrupt society or a villain who takes advantage of it for his own benefit. Through an examination of economic, political, and moral degradation, the paper makes the case that Balram's transformation is the result of a corrupt system that compels people to use immoral actions to survive. It will discuss if morality is possible in a culture where corruption is prevalent.

**Keywords:** Corruption, transformation, degradation, immoral, unfair system

### Introduction

This paper explores the dual role of corruption in the transformation of Balram Halwai, the protagonist of Aravind Adiga's novel "The White Tiger." It examines how systemic corruption acts as both an oppressive force and a catalyst for Balram's evolution from a victim to a self-made entrepreneur, questioning the moral implications of his journey.

*White Tiger* is an epistolary fiction that chronicles the exciting tale of Balram Halwai, also known as Munna, a young man from a village. He is the son of Vikram Halwai, who pulls rickshaws. He addresses a series of letters to Chinese Prime Minister Mr. Wen Jiabao. He is an aspiring entrepreneur in Bangalore and a considerate individual. The circumstances of Balram's own life are most expertly described in these letters. He talks extensively about the hardships and poverty experienced by the people in India. He tries to emphasize India's sociopolitical structure and how Numerous harmful religious practices, superstitions, and corruption are caused by it. Kumar B (2022)<sup>[7]</sup>

### Corruption as an Oppressive Force

Initially, Balram is depicted as a victim of corruption. Born into poverty, he faces systemic barriers that limit his opportunities. The education system, healthcare, and employment sectors are rife with corruption, trapping individuals like Balram in a cycle of poverty. This environment fosters a sense of helplessness, as seen when Balram's family is exploited by landlords and government officials.

The rich, the police, and politicians are among the privileged people that Adiga eloquently portrays in this book living their lifestyles at the expense of the underprivileged. Adiga's work highlights the struggles of the poor against those who seek to repress them and fight for them. In ancient India, poverty created a clear division between the wealthy zamindars and the inferior strata. The impoverished are treated like necessities by the wealthy, who use them as laborers and pay them pitiful wages. Four landlords—Buffalo, Stork, Wild Boar, and Raven—are

portrayed in the book as representing their desire for riches. Adiga calls them "Animals" because of their unscrupulous actions. For example, the Stork's farming and riverine landscapes compel workers to touch their feet to do their jobs, which is akin to contemporary slavery. The poor are drained of vitality by vampire-like Raven and Buffalo. In Indian society, people with several daughters are considered cursed, and the novel also emphasizes the enduring social problem of dowries. MS, CV, MM Anwar (2024)<sup>[3]</sup>.

Adiga says in an interview "At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the west, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society. That's what writers like Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens did in the 19th century and, as a result, England and France are better societies. That's what I'm trying to do - it's not an attack on the country; it's about the greater process of self-examination". Jeffries (2008)<sup>[8]</sup>.

### Corruption as a Catalyst for Transformation

Despite being a victim, Balram's exposure to corruption also serves as a catalyst for his transformation. He learns to navigate and manipulate the corrupt systems to his advantage. His decision to murder his employer, Ashok, and steal his money is a turning point, highlighting his shift from victimhood to agency. This act, while morally questionable, is portrayed as a necessary step for Balram to break free from societal constraints.

Balram Halwai, the white tiger of the book, is a poor Indian peasant whose intense drive pushes him to the height of Indian business culture—the Bengaluru entrepreneur's society. Regarding the upcoming visit of the Chinese Premier to Bangalore, Balram sends him an email outlining his change and his experience working for an affluent Indian family as a chauffeur and servant, that he believes represents the complexities and inconsistencies of Indian society. Balram goes to Ashok and his wife, Ms. Pinky Madam, is in New Delhi. During their stay Balram becomes aware of to India's widespread social corruption in Delhi, including the government.

The contrast amongst the rich and impoverished city residents in New Delhi highlights the gap between the two groups even further. When Pinky chooses to travel alone one evening, she collides with an object. She fears that it was a child, but Ashoke's family members choose to blame Balram for the reckless driving incident. The police inform them that since no one filed a missing kid, fortunately, no additional investigation is carried out. a. Ashok's involvement with the dishonest government ultimately grows. After being repeatedly humiliated, Balram taunts his grandmother while returning to his home village and informs the reader and the Chinese Premier that he plans to murder his employer within the next eight months. Then, Balram determines that the one and only thinks he may get out of India's "Rooster Coop" by murdering and stealing Ashoke. Balram struggles with dishonest technicians, learns ways to steal gas, and refills and resells all the black labeling bottles of Johnie Walker. Additionally, he manages to escape the coop that is invisible to anyone else within. RR Narasiman VS Chowdhry (2013)<sup>[4]</sup>.

He uses a broken wine bottle to hit Ashok to death one rainy day. Then, he and his young nephew escaped to Bangalore. There, he assists launch his own driving service by bribing the cops. At the book's conclusion, Balram defends his behavior by claiming that his freedom worth Ashok and his family's lives as well as the money his new taxi brings in business. RR Narasiman VS Chowdhry (2013)<sup>[4]</sup>.

### Moral Ambiguity and Villainy

Money is the primary criterion for gaining regard, control, and position in current mammon- worshipping society. Moral voids, moral degeneration, compassion, and worthlessness are created in people by their pursuit of materialistic riches, luxury, and excessive pleasure-seeking lives. Thus, the drive to get affluent and the decision to use short cuts to achieve this goal led to moral degradation in society and polluted political institutions. S Sarkar (2012)<sup>[2]</sup> India is a country where "Lord Buddha received his enlightenment in this land, the river Ganga gives life our plants and our animals and our people. We are grateful to God that we were born in this land". Adiga (2008)<sup>[1]</sup>.

But everything is falling apart in the globalized world where India is not an exception rather here: "Everything is coming apart in this country. Families, marriages- everything". Adiga (2008)<sup>[1]</sup> The work portrayed harsh reality of India, including its widespread malpractices that cause the poor to suffer. The morality of bright India has been damaged by corruption and the bribing process. The situation is different since the government authorities are primarily interested in Gandhi on the notes, regardless of whether they possess Gandhi's statue or photographs. S Sarkar (2012)<sup>[2]</sup>. Thus, Mr. Ashok's statement goes on in that manner: "We are divining past Gandhi, after just having given a bribe to a minister. It's a fucking joke, isn't it"? Adiga (2008)<sup>[1]</sup> This type of inclination applies to everybody. Balram Halwai, the main character in the book, bribes the police to protect himself: "There is no end of things in India, Mr. Jiabao, as Mr. Ashok so correctly used to say. You'll have to keep paying and paying the fuckers. But I complain about the police the way the rich complain; not the poor complain". Adiga (2008)<sup>[1]</sup>.

The contemporary metropolitan culture and economic wealth remain significant factors in our day- to-day existence. Balram Halwai from a rural background

overcame adversity to become a skilled chauffeur and reside in Delhi, the Indian capital. As a typical and rural guy, Balaram undergoes a complete transformation into a person who is egotistical, greedy, and most importantly, criminal. He is caught by moral deflation and degradation, and this type of loss in him is caused by the corrupted forces of Delhi and its "fucked up system." The following sentences illustrate the ethical decline: "All these changes happened in me because they happened first in Mr. Ashok. He returned from America an innocent man, but life in Delhi corrupted him- and once the master of the Honda city becomes corrupted, how can the driver stay innocent". Adiga (2008)<sup>[1]</sup> Balram's actions raise questions about morality and villainy. While he is a product of a corrupt system, his willingness to engage in unethical behavior blurs the line between victim and villain. His transformation is marked by a rejection of traditional moral values, suggesting that success in a corrupt society requires moral compromise.

### Impact of corruption on social inequalities

Adiga divides India into two parts, the "India of Light", and "The India of Darkness". "You see, I am in the Light now, but I was born and raised in Darkness. But this is not the time of day I talk about, Mr. Premier! I am talking of a place in India, at least a third of the country [...] [called] the Darkness" Adiga (2008)<sup>[1]</sup> This compelling piece discusses inequalities, destitution, and oppression without taking sides. The growing gap between the affluent and the poor is vividly portrayed in the book. The wealthy live in opulent apartments and shop at malls on the one hand, yet on the other, The impoverished live in slums, shop in dirty places, and dwell in basements. Poor folks go to cities for their better living. What occurs in India is reflected in Aravind Adiga's portrayal of "Rooster Coop". He claims that the area behind Jama Masjid in Old Delhi is home to a chicken market in which hundreds of roosters are brutally murdered each day. They don't revolt even though they know they will be the next. They embrace their good fortune as it is intended to be. R Ahlawat (2016)<sup>[5]</sup> Some of the inequities in Indian society are highlighted in the book. In addition to describing Balram's place in the lowest strata of Indian society, this will also highlight the corruption Balram deals with on daily basis because of his master's bribery of public servants. The wealthiest citizens in India frequently employ servants, yet although having servants helps the wealthy, it maintains the impoverished in a state of perpetual slavery and inequality. The author focuses on the depressing aspects of living in India's lowest classes and corruption. In addition to portraying India as a nation of widespread exploitation as well as oppressed slaves, The White Tiger leaves out the impression that India is a civilization built on corruption, dishonesty, and the mistreatment of cheaper labor in the form of manservants. S Nerz (2017)<sup>[6]</sup> "The trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy" Adiga (2008)<sup>[1]</sup>.

In addition to class divisions like wealthy and poor, the outcome is a community that is sharply split along moral lines—or rather, the absence of them. Contrary to the industrious but perpetually impoverished lower classes, the wealthy populace is characterized by avarice and self-interest. "Adiga's novel reflects how our economic system today creates socioeconomic gaps that create a big division in society. It limits opportunity, social mobility, health, and other rights and pleasures that should be given to all." RR Narasiman and VS Chawdhry (2017)

## Conclusion

In this novel, corruption plays a major role in Balram's transition from a meek servant to a merciless businessman. Balram was raised in poverty and socialized to fit into India's repressive social structure. Over time, he comes to understand that corruption is what propels achievement and power. Balram finds that morality and honesty do not provide a way out of servitude as he makes his way through the treacherous world of the Indian elite. He becomes convinced that accepting the exact system that oppresses him is the only way to escape after learning about the corrupt actions of his superiors, especially Ashok and his family. In the end, this insight turns him into a "white tiger"—a unique, crafty survival in a cruel world—by driving him to murder and steal fortune.

Balram's transformation is not only a personal revolt but rather a mirror of a profoundly corrupt system in which exploitation is used to hold onto power. His journey highlights the novel's condemnation of systemic corruption by demonstrating how moral sacrifice is sometimes necessary to survive in such a brutal society and made a victim a villain. While he begins as a victim of systemic corruption, his eventual success is achieved through morally ambiguous means. This duality challenges readers to consider the ethical implications of survival and success in a corrupt world.

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