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Exemplar Essay

A Marxist Analysis of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Today, Marxism is generally recognized as an ideology of fear, oppression, and dictatorship. The experience of the Soviet Union has rendered the populace unaware of the wider goals of communism, elucidated fully in Marx's and Engels' groundbreaking work, *The Communist Manifesto*. In this historically influential work, Marx declares, "Society as a whole is more and more splitting into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat" (Marx 80). The work then comes to a crescendo with Marx's famous lines: "Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!" (Marx 120). These two quotations demonstrate the true intentions of communism: the improvement of the proletariat's living standard, a disdain for the rich bourgeoisie, the belief in human equality, the destruction of traditional institutions or superstructures, and the formal criticism of organized religion. According to Marxist Scholars, such as Terry Eagleton, literary works are considered Marxist if they display such Marxist values (Eagleton 14).

Through Balram Halwai's goal to realize his essential human dignity and fulfill his father's wish that he become a real man, Aravind Adiga's novel, *The White Tiger*, is therefore a manifestation of Marxist beliefs. The novel widely criticizes traditional institutions in India, offers a cynical view of religion, and calls for proletariat revolution in line with Marxist values. He offers a compelling and poignant view about the current

struggles of India. Being the ideal rural Indian poor man, Balram allows the audience to identify with his struggles and to overlook his many inaccuracies stemming from his lack of formal education. Adiga effectively criticizes the traditional caste, institutional, and religious systems that define modern industrializing India. Through Balram Halwai's quest to escape a grinding life of poverty and the suppressing Rooster Coop that prevents social mobility, the novel demonstrates clear Marxist tendencies. The novel is a call for the reawakening of India's long dormant poorer castes to recognize their essential human dignity and rebel against the oppressive dominant castes, in line with Marxism's main goal of the ascension of the proletariat.

Through the use of Balram's scrutiny of Indian institutions, the author enforces the Marxist belief that ruling superstructures must be closely challenged and questioned. For Marxists, overturning traditional institutions is the first step in a revolution. Balram commences his critique of India's institutions by criticizing the country's poor infrastructure, resulting from government inefficiencies. At the outset of the novel, Balram is clearly cynical of India's infrastructure and government:

Apparently, sir, you Chinese are far ahead of us in every respect, except that you don't have entrepreneurs. And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, courtesy, or punctuality, *does* have entrepreneurs. (Adiga 2)

This criticism of India's institutions is echoed by Adiga's and Adams' experiences in the slums of Mumbai, where three million people sleep on the street every night (Adams, 2009). At fault for this lack of infrastructure is democracy, according to Balram. He says, "If I were making a country, I'd get the sewage pipes first, then the democracy" (Adiga

80). Balram is taking direct aim at democracy for many of India's faults. His admiration of Fidel Castro, the communist Cuban revolutionary of the 1950s, demonstrates Balram's and, by extension, the novel's Marxist tendencies.

The novel also attacks the corruption of India's institutions and furthers the criticism of superstructures that Marxism endorses. According to Balram, "One fact about India is that you can take almost anything you hear about the country from the Prime Minister and turn it upside down and then you will have the truth about that thing." (Adiga 12). Later on, Balram declares, "We're driving past Gandhi, after just having given a bribe to a minister. It's a *fucking joke*, isn't it?" (Adiga 115). Evidently, Balram is deeply critical of the corruption in his country and directly blames the current democratic system for it. He goes so far as to say, "Delhi...The capital of our glorious nation. The seat of Parliament, of the president, of all ministers and prime ministers...That's what *they* call it." (Adiga 98). This book clearly reflects the turmoil, both economically and politically, that is taking place in India. India is currently grappling with the stresses of capitalism and, at the same time, the deeply ingrained traditions of the Indian past. It is clear that this novel shows this tension in Indian society through the eyes of Balram Halwai, who ultimately chooses release over the repression of the caste system. Thus, the book fulfills the Marxist requirement that literature should directly reflect modern social and economic times (Eagleton 16). This book captures the struggles of a populace to embrace modernity, and by doing so, demonstrates the muted history of class-conflict in India.

Through the use of extensive attacks on religion and traditional family structures, Balram promotes Marxist atheistic beliefs and Marxist division of families in the name revolution.

[Paragraphs about the novel's critique of religious structures, as well as the call for a proletariat uprising would follow here]

Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* is a Marxist critique of the caste, institutional, and religious systems that are present in modern industrializing India. Balram Halwai, the unreliable yet genuine protagonist, insists on the right for basic human dignity for all Indians. Through his attempts to escape the "rooster coop," he becomes the example that all Indians should strive to emulate. The novel is an effective attack on the dominant ruling classes of India who currently keep the poor as their servants. In line with Marxism's main goal of spurring on a communistic revolution that favours the working class, Balram demonstrates the complacency of the rich and the pauperized state of the Indian poor, and urges the proletariat to rise up against their oppressors. Through the poignant use of juxtaposition, the author frames the rich as morally corrupt, religion as a tool of subjugation, traditional familial ties as costly, and Indian institutions as dysfunctional. Marxist themes permeate throughout the work and reach a crescendo as Balram murders Ashok. This book, according to Adams, is considered extremely controversial in India, not because of the criticism of corruption, religion, and the rich, but rather for its attack on Indian family values (Adams, 2009). The existence of the metaphorical 'rooster coop', further enforced by backward family values, is highlighted by the author in order to demonstrate the tie to servitude that the rural Indian poor exhibit. The author's reflections generate controversy because they directly attack the strong family values that traditional Indian families still uphold. As the economy is looking forward to prosperity and free markets, society is still looking backwards to the rituals and traditions

of the past. In order for India to truly develop into a world superpower, the forces of the economy and the social structures must be reconciled under the banner of progress.

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