

Ambivalence and Power: The Complex Portrayal of Women in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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ABSTRACT

Indian writers present their female characters as subordinate to cultural and socioeconomic standards in their writings. On the contrary Indian writer Aravind Adiga presents his female characters in a unique way. The purpose of this research is to examine how Indian women are portrayed in Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger*. Due of the portrayal of the lower and upper castes, this study focuses on two female characters from opposite castes: Kusum and Pinky Madam. The result shows how Adiga portrays the contradictory personalities of his female characters. Despite their subordinate position in comparison to cultural and socioeconomic standards, they are strong and powerful individuals. Additionally, while being portrayed as the victims of Indian ideals, they control men in some ways.

Keywords: Domination, Indian women character, power, ambivalence

INTRODUCTION

Aravind Adiga's debut novel, *The White Tiger*, was awarded the 2008 Man Booker Prize. He lives at present in India. *The White Tiger* narrates Balram Halwai's journey from Laxmangarh to Bangalore, emphasizing his struggles to become a successful Indian citizen. Being a poor Indian man, he must struggle to overcome social, cultural, and financial injustices as barriers to realizing his dream of becoming a successful entrepreneur. Written as an epistolary fiction, the novel has many voices. Balram writes letters to Wen Jiabao, the Chinese Prime Minister, about his journey from a place he calls to as 'The Darkness' to Bangalore, 'The Light,' where he succeeds as an entrepreneur. It is frequently stated that feminism can be used to analyze literary works which include female protagonists. In this novel, the female characters serve as supporting roles.

Kusum Balram's grandmother, is portrayed as an elderly woman from a family of a lower caste. She experiences inequalities in the areas of education, health, and finances. Women from lower castes in India are often characterized as ignorant, impoverished, and illiterate. Balram's grandmother Kusum through his perspective, possesses the ability to control any other family member, male or female. With her influence, she can control her family as to what they do and how much money they spend, making them all afraid of her. Despite her status as a woman, it is assumed that she possesses total authority inside the household. Generally Indian families are patriarchal and that the male head of the household has all authority, but that the male head of the household has all author Aravind Adiga outwards it with his writing.

Men hold greater authority than women, and a family head's wife simply helps the other women in the family administrations. Adiga presents as a powerful woman in this novel, with greater influence than the other family members. Kusum has control over the male family members, including Balram's brother Kishan, father Vikram Halwai, and Balram himself. Being the family's eldest male, Vikram is powerless to go against her wishes. The novel portrays about dowry, a cultural value that oppresses Indian women.

In Indian culture, especially in Hindu marriages, the dowry is not merely a gift from the bride's father to

the groom; it also has an impact on the family's social standing. As a result, this tradition affects women, especially those from low-income families, as their families must pay a large portion of the price of expensive things like cash, jewelry, bikes, etc. as dowry. If not, marriage will not be take place, bringing shame upon her family. To afford such things, every poor family needs to borrow a large loan from a landlord, which they are unable to pay back.

Balram's Cousin- sister Reena got hitched off to a boy in the next village, Because we were the girl's family, we were screwed. We have to give the boy a new bicycle, and cash, and a silver bracelet, and arrange for a big wedding which we did. Mr Premier, you probably know how we Indians enjoy our weddings- I gather that these days people come from other countries to get married Indian- style.(36)

Indian women are victims of their own cultural system, particularly those from lower social classes. Kusum naturally receives the largest portion of the dowry from her in-laws family because she is the most powerful member of her family. After Balram's brother Kishan's marriage, Kusum Granny took the thick gold necklace, the Hero cycle, and five thousand rupees. It indicates that she is benefited from the same caste and poverty-stricken family system that oppressed women in similar situations to her own. Consequently, women are not only the targets of discriminatory systems, but they also act as their own perpetrators by identifying other women as victims.

Balram's brother Kishan marriage. It was one of the good marriages. We had the boy, and we screwed the girl's family hard. I remember exactly what we got in dowry from the girl's side, and thinking about it even now makes my mouth fill up with water: five thousand rupees cash, all crisp new unsoiled notes fresh from the bank, plus a Hero bicycle, plus a thick gold necklace for Kishan. (51)

Ashok's wife, Pinky Madam, is portrayed as a contemporary Indian woman who has spent many years living in America. After her marriage to Ashok, they stayed in India to see Ashok's parents before returning to New York. She is considered as a clever woman who has studied in America. Ashok and Pinky Madam were considered by Balram as the ideal pair, similar to Ram and Sita. Pinky Madam dislikes traveling along with Ashok's family, even though she is staying with her husband's family in Dhanbad. She is described as a temper woman. She prefers to spend the entire day in her room and never interacts in conversations with her husband's family. She will never play badminton without her black glasses on.

Although being a woman, she shows the same behaviours as other masters in this novel, including verbally abusing Balram. After understanding that Balram job does not meet his needs, she calls Balram with unpleasant remarks 'hick' and 'useless.' She can speak English fluently because she has lived in America for a long time. When Balram tries to say things like mall and pizza in English, she and Ashok make fun of him, which insults Balram. Adiga demonstrates how an Indian woman uses her status as a mistress to control men, especially Balram, through the role of Pinky Madam. "It's not piJJA. It's piZZa. Say it properly. Wait – you're mispronouncing it too. There's a T in the middle. Peet. Zah. Don't correct my English, Ashok. There's no T in pizza. Look at the box" (154).

Adiga portrays the unhappy marriage of Pinky Madam, who experiences violence at the hands of her husband. Adiga, however, characterizes Pinky Madam as a strong woman. When Pinky Madam causes a hit-and-run accident on Delhi Road. Ashok's family has sign a document admitting that Balram is the one who caused the tragedy. Then, it appears that nobody calls the police to report the accident; thus Balram is not imprisoned for something he did not do. However, Pinky Madam is the only member of Ashok's family who communicates with and looks out for Balram. She quickly discovers that her husband's family is faulty, and she no longer feels comfortable. She takes a night time flight back to America, leaving her husband alone.

She was too drunk to brake at once by the time she had, we had hurtled on another two or three hundred yards, and then we came to a complete stop. In the middle of the road. She had kept her hands on the wheel; her mouth was open. A dog? Mr Ashok asked me. It was a dog, wasn't it? I nodded. The Streetlights were too dim, and the object a large black lump was too far behind us already to be seen clearly. There was no other car in sight. No other living human being in sight. (162)

Ashok gets angry as she leaves and almost murders Balram. India considers the family as the most significant social unit; as a result, it strongly encourages family members to remain loyal to one another, including

wives and children to their husbands. The leaving of Pinky Madam indicates an error in the family's norms and values. She has insulted her husband's family, so her demand to establish her right to a better life becomes a tool to manipulate him. Pinky Madam is shown as a strong, independent woman who knows what's best for herself. She represents the idea of feminism, which is that women should have the freedom to select what they deserve.

These female characters are portrayed as victims of the social, economic, and cultural systems and are thought to hold a subservient position. However, in addition to being strong characters, his female characters often express ambivalence. Because Kusum is an Indian lady from the lowest caste, poor, and subject to numerous forms of persecution as a result of her status, she is portrayed as an object. She is depicted as a woman with the ability to control the other members of her household, however she is also described as a subject who controls both men and women.

Pinky Madam is another character that exhibits ambiguity. However, upon returning to India, she will have to live under the strict Indian laws enforced by her husband's family. It indicates that she is unable to break free from the patriarchal Indian cultural and socioeconomic structure, which views women as objects. Adiga portrays Pinky Madam's conflicted feelings by emphasizing how deeply rooted in her Indian ideals she is in her modern (Western) lifestyle. She uses her sexuality and fluency in another language as a means of controlling Balram, which makes him feel less than human. She needs to bow down to her husband and show obedience in her role as an Indian wife. However, she may have violated the patriarchal Indian family structure by leaving her husband behind and returning to America. She rejects the expectation of an Indian wife to be an acceptable wife. But in reality, her status as an object in the family gives her the ability to control Ashok and Balram.

Yet, despite their status as objects of the cultural and socioeconomic systems, they are regarded as subjects with the ability to rule males. According to Adiga, Kusum is a strong, powerful woman from a lower caste who uses her strength to maintain authority over her family. Adiga characterizes Pinky Madam as a contemporary Indian woman with the capacity to speak English and the sexuality to control Balram. She is a woman who could challenge the norms of an Indian family and wife because of her decision to speak up for her right to a better life and leave her husband, Ashok. Additionally, caste isn't considered in this novel as a set of limitations that prevents women from reaching their goals.

It can be accomplished to examine the novel as a mirror of the author, who had been brought up in a society that upholds traditional values and views women as less valuable than men. As a result, it affects the author's portrayal of his female characters, who exhibit ambivalence. On one aspect, they are seen as victims of Indian cultural and socioeconomic norms, but on the other hand, they also control over men and women.

WORK CITED

Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. Harper Collins Publishers India, 2008.