

White tigers: the not so colourful truth

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The White Tiger. The name itself is characteristic to the whole book's purpose. Aravind Adiga carefully weaves together vibrant symbols to provide the reader with a profound understanding of the book. He exposes corruption throughout all of India's institutions. While corruption breeds corruption, a greater revolution remakes society. This is a fault in Balram's character as he is certain that in order for him to escape the corruption, he must become part of the system, adding to the quantity of exploitation. He is able to highlight India from different perspectives, addressing various heavy topics while including a light sense of humour. This book is saturated with several pairs and dualities. He discusses the "Light" versus the "Dark," the stark binary opposition every society has. He is able to correspond with rich and poor halves, men with big bellies and small and the privileges the rich have where the poor do not. While the rich bask in the skyscrapers enjoying comforts from the light, the poor slave away in the darkness, cast by the shadows from the very same skyscrapers. Aravind Adiga has crafted a book with such an advanced use of symbolism, is has significantly driven the whole novel.

Balram was set apart at a young age by his intelligence and integrity. He is very different from those back in his home environment. A White Tiger is rare and as the school inspector called it, "Exists once in every generation." It represents power, freedom and individuality, many things Balram claims to identify with. This motivates him to advocate for himself and fight for his own advancement. He chooses to live life by his own turns, disobeying traditional morals and legal standards. This book documents a man's quest for freedom and sheds the weight and limits of his past. It is somewhat of a memoir of his

journey in India's modern day capitalist society. Balram has overcome all social obstacles that society has tried to prevent him from living life to this fullest.

Over the course of the book, Balram undergoes different transformations to construct his own identity. He dedicates himself to self-improvement and he is even willing to destroy who he once was and any connections to his past life. He sees identity as fluid and later takes the identity of his late master, Ashok Sharma. He changes who he is to compete, he decides to start a taxi company as he realises that is how to become successful in the city of Bangalore. The book depicts the modern day Indian society with a free market and free business but it illustrates how it can create economic division. Balram has labelled them the "Light" and the "Dark." The light shamelessly exploits the ones from darkness, in result, making them even poorer. It shows how our economic system today creates socioeconomic gaps that create a big division in society. This economy limits opportunity, social mobility and health for the poor. It takes extreme measures for someone to escape and earn the same rights as the rich. Balram chooses to commit murder and free the chains and control his own identity. The chandelier in his office is more recognised to belong to richer class but Balram owns one in his 150-square-foot space in Bangalore. Balram has always been weary of lizards, once in his childhood, he does not attend school in fear of a lizard that lurked in his classroom. Not much has changed as he is an adult. A lizard signifies darkness, fear and phobia. Lizards choose darkness over light and love. The Chandelier keeps the lizards away. "Its the truth, sir. Lizards don't like the light, so as soon as they see a chandelier,

they stay away. This chandelier represents Balram's transformation into a man. It shows the materialistic success he encountered when he finally became an entrepreneur and independent businessman. It not only sheds light on him as he is awake at night, it also casts light on him, amidst the darkness that still exists in everyday India. Balram refuses to give in to the power of darkness. The darkness that surrounds others is distinguished by a shortage of ambition, leading lives of servitude and unable to choose the paths of their own lives. The servants surrender to their masters and accept the lives they were born into, unlike a white tiger that prefers to determine his own fortune.

We can see the inner conflict Balram has with himself when he recognises that the darkness is inescapable without some form of resistance. He faints only twice in his life, once including when he went to this zoo with his nephew Dharam. ".... as it paced back and forth in a straight line was a tiger. Not any tiger. A White Tiger." He perceives the white tiger trapped in a cage and sees himself. His current predicament of servitude serves as his own cage. He was hypnotizing himself by buying into his life of servitude just like the tiger. " He was hypnotizing himself by walking like this-this was the only way he could tolerate this cage. Balram embraced his master wholeheartedly, he treated Ashok Sharma with great love, to distract himself from the fact that he was living the life his father desperately wanted him to break free of. The look Balram shares with the tiger to the look Ashok shares with Balram, as if Balram himself is the caged tiger in Ashok's eyes. When the white tiger vanished, Balram had fainted. However, this vanishment meant that the caged version of Balram no longer endured. Hatred began

forming in Balram as he saw the harsh ways they tried to drain the life out of his father preventing either of them from every advancing up the social ladder.

Adiga uses graphic animal imagery to leave a vivid picture of India in your mind comparing it to a zoo-like state. Characters like the stork, the buffalo, the raven and the wild boar are all animals in Balram's mind. He compares it to the way animals live and how people in India live. " On the fifteenth of August, 1947 – the day the British left – the cages have been left open; and the animals and attacked and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law. By stating that the cages had been " opened" it resembles people of India being animals, ripping each other apart having been imprisoned by the British. When the Indians had a " master" – the British, they were controlled animals in a zoo. However, as soon as they didn't have a " master," they were animals in a jungle; wild and hostile. " Why had he raised me to live like an animal? Why do all the poor live amid such filth, such ugliness? This proves that the lower class are dependent on the upper class for survival and " stuck in cages." A larger cage that exists on the civilisation is the " rooster coop." Roosters feel uncomfortable together so when one gets taken away to be slaughtered, they're happy. The rooster coop is guarded from the inside. They watch each other get slaughtered one by one but none are willing to rebel or breakout. Kusum, his grandmother wants Balram to get married so they can be given a dowry from the girl's family but short-term fortune. Nevertheless, Balram recognizes this and refuses. The rooster coop further their own oppression through short-term thinking and family obligation such as Kusum's motives. Rather than protect

Balram's best interests, Kusum compromises his future. Balram expressed how the water buffalo was the master of the house. It was the fattest one hence it is the one that survives. As Balram wanders through the butcher's quarters in Old Delhi, he notices the big buffaloes standing in each shed. As he stares at the buffalo, his mind imagines the consequences of his own rebellion against his master. As he breaks away from his daydream, he notices a buffalo pulling a cart full of dead buffalo heads, he leaves as the dead buffalo pictures his family if he were to commit the murder against Ashok.

The lives of the lower class are determined by when it is convenient for their masters. In Bangalore, the workers work all night and sleep all day, like animals. This is all inconvenience for their masters in the US who are on different schedules. Although the servants understand the lives they live in, they don't even look for freedom, this emphasizes the impoverished conditions in which they live in. "A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 per cent – 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. Vijay, Balram's childhood idol managed to renew himself in society. All the poor are unwilling to confront the truth and the possibility of social mobility so freedom still remains out of their grasp.