

The cost of globalization: two accounts of india



In both Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and Katherine Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, a rapidly changing India threatens and deprives those adhering to a traditional way of life, such as Balram's family in Laxmangarh, and the community of slum-dwellers in Annawadi. Therefore, the two of these groups must change in order to compete in this new world. Both Asha and Balram are negatively affected by the globalization of India; however, they plan to escape the restraints of globalized India by sacrificing their morals and justifying their actions with the belief that economic success is more important. Balram justifies his actions by calling them "acts of entrepreneurship" (9). The reality of globalization is either the surrendering of one's morals to attain economic success, or being left stranded in the impoverished part of India that the other half has left behind.

Aravind Adiga and Katherine Boo vividly conjure the tension between the old and newly globalized India, indicating that succeeding in the modern world (as Balram does) requires a combination of ethical and personal compromises. The Americanization of India allows Balram to momentarily alter his caste. Balram also recognizes the nature of globalization and how to take advantage of it by saying; "I'm always a man who sees 'tomorrow' when others see 'today.'" (274). He makes the conscious choice sacrifice parts of himself and completely alter his identity in order to become successful. He states: "The tale of how I was corrupted from a sweet, innocent village fool into a citified fellow full of debauchery, depravity, and wickedness" (189). When he lived in the village, there is no doubt he was financially struggling, however he describes himself as sweet and innocent. By the time he is rich, he has become "full of debauchery" and even

describes himself as wicked. Through the process of escaping the restraints of globalization, he had to surrender parts of himself in order to attain what he considered to be success. Balram's recognition of the increasing competition resulting from globalization contributes to his actions that result in his corruption and loss of identity.

The effects of globalization in India do not stop at poverty and hunger. While the rest of the country is advancing quickly, those in economically unfortunate situations such as Balram and Asha are forced to sacrifice their identities, families, and morals. In the shadow of the other part of India which is reaping the benefits of globalization, the slum-dwellers of Annawadi struggle to survive. Capitalist globalization has resulted in hunger, unspeakable poverty and disease, racial and gender inequality, and an explosion of slums. Nevertheless, Asha has planned to become a slumlord and then "then ride the city's inexorable corruption into the middle class." (xvii) In a community of struggling families, there will always be those who are willing to abandon their morals and identities to achieve economic stability. Asha is selfishly driven by her poverty and greed. Similar to Balram, Asha has managed to overcome guilt because she cannot afford to feel it if she wants to be successful. "Guilt of the sort that had overcome Robert was an impediment to effective work in the city's back channels, and Asha considered it a luxury emotion." Gaining financial and political power in order to overcome the poverty globalization has caused take an emotional toll on Asha and Balram. Asha has to suppress her true feelings of guilt for what she does because she sees the emotion as an obstacle in the way of success. Surrounded by luxurious hotels and a large airport, Asha is in constant

reminder that she is facing all the detriments of globalization, while other parts of India are prospering. She takes advantage of the corrupt politics influencing India. The influence of Western society and foreign powers are the cultural invaders and have forced the natives of Mumbai and Bangalore into positions of inferiority and created a corrupt society. For the wealthy, the effects of globalization pose no problem, but as Boo demonstrates, the same cannot be said for the poor. New rules, customs, and designations of worth have shifted due to the influence of foreigners.

Globalization does not end at economies but extends even further and permeates into the cultures of nations. Globalization has won in destruction of native culture, distribution of colonial power, mechanization and westernization. It has destroyed privacy in all fields and has helped to promote consumerist culture. It spread the concept that westernization is a part of civilization. Everything is superior if it is western liquor, girls, language, dressing. Globalization replaces the native culture by consumerist culture. Consumerist culture aims in the destruction of native culture and identity. As globalization strikes India, citizens like Balram adopt a new perception of society - a perception that values Western culture over their own. " I should explain to you, Mr Jiabao, that in this country we have two kinds of men: Indian liquor men and English liquor men. Indian liquor was for village boys like me - toddy, arrack, country hooch. English liquor, naturally is for rich. Rum, whisky, beer, gin - anything the English left behind"(73). Balram describes the English liquor as being " naturally" for the rich, as if it is something so commonly ingrained into society that one can predict that the upper class primarily consumes English over Indian because of their

financial status. India has been divided into the rich and the poor. Due to Americanization and Globalization the cultures between the two parties are vastly dissimilar. “ ‘ Please understand Your Excellency, that India is two countries in one: and India of light and and India of darkness’ ” (12). Because of this segregation, if the poor want to find the “ India of light” they have to sacrifice a lot. The difference between the two Indias is mainly the advancement and globalization of the light India, compared to the traditional culture and poverty in the dark India. The issue with globalization for the characters Balram and Asha is that they are being taunted with a rapidly advancing society just out of their reaches. The faster the new India modernizes, the more different it becomes from the societies Balram and Asha are from. The towns left behind in poverty and hunger fall to corruption.

Those willing to, like Asha and Balram, recognize and take advantage of their corrupted governments: “ Now that she had the Corporator’s ear, she could fix more such problems on commission. And when she had real control over the slum, she could create problems in order to fix them - a profitable sequence she’d learned by studying the Corporator” (20). Asha recognizes that success is attainable by “ studying” others. She becomes ultimately corrupt when she plans to create problems just so she can fix them. She makes herself indisposable by sacrificing and suppressing parts of her identity. Those left behind from a globalizing India will only fall further and further back from the modernized society India is becoming unless they take full advantage of the corrupting the globalization has instigated in the slums. Getting out of the poverty of India comes at the high prices of internal

oppression and the abandonment of tradition and culture. Without the knowledge of the advancements of globalization, it's likely these character's lives would never change the way they did. The sacrificing of their ethics comes down to the pursuit of their goals.

Without the globalization of India, Balram and Asha would not have these ideas of success in their minds that influenced their actions and internal betrayals. From observing a new India where money is more important than culture, these characters are adoptive of the modernized India's societal expectations. The reality of globalization is exposed when it is shown that values and culture are not interchangeable with the new customs that a globalized society offers.