

# The struggle to overcome



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga adopts an epistolary form to depict the plight of a low caste servant, trying to escape the physical and mental chains that forge his destiny. Adiga initially presents a protagonist in Balram, who is engaging, despite confessing to horrific crimes. His language, thoughts, and deeds convey his initially good nature. However, this good nature is also a huge weakness in his journey to freedom as the India Adiga presents is sharply divided into two, the Darkness, and the Light. The Light is where the upper castes reside, filled with malfeasance and nepotism; a hotbed for corruption; whereas the Darkness is where the lower castes dwell, filled with poverty and an archaic sense of duty to family. Balram, being bogged in the Darkness, was forced to overcome his kind but weak nature to escape this Rooster Coop, freeing himself from slavery.

Born with the name "Munna", and by the end of the novel known as "Ashok Sharma", Balram goes through a steady transformation from a kind-hearted boy to the animal that "comes only once in a generation", *The White Tiger*. He begins as a mere child and a peasant in The Darkness, completely unimportant and unloved, and expected to be completely submissive to the will of his family. Forced to drop a lifetime opportunity without even getting a say in it, he gets a job in a teashop, working with no pride for little pay. After being hired as a driver, he recognizes that his family want to "scoop (him) out from the inside and leave (him) weak and helpless" by using him for monetary gain. Learning this, he rebels, refusing to get married and refusing to dedicate his life to their ends. This signifies a major transition for him, the beginning of his corruption. He blackmails the number one driver into leaving, causing Balram to become the new number one driver, also marking

his first malicious act. While he feels some guilt upon doing this, he becomes happier, realizing that his happiness is proportionate to his ruthlessness. The more ruthless he becomes, the stronger his sense of himself as a person becomes, a person that was raised like an animal, made to provide dumbly until he died unceremoniously. Balram needs ruthlessness. Balram values individuality and freedom more than he does morality. To him freedom is a cause worth dying for, and thus it must be a cause worth killing for. Balram's good hearted nature holds him back, thus he must overcome it to free himself from the Rooster Coop.

Transforming into "The White Tiger", Balram murders Ashok, finally freeing him from the shackles of the Darkness. Throughout the book, their relationship changes as Balram develops. In the beginning, Balram looks up to Ashok, seeing him as a good man, so he doesn't cheat him. However, when Ashok forces Balram to take the blame for the traffic accident, it shatters that illusion. This devastates him, feeling betrayed and used. When Pinky Madam leaves Ashok, Ashok becomes corrupt. He starts sleeping around and partying, partaking in every sin from gluttony to lust. He sleeps with a Russian actress whilst Balram sits in the car "hoping he'd come running out... screaming "Balram, I was on the verge of making a mistake!"". Balram becomes disillusioned with Ashok because of this, losing all respect for him. Ironically, this makes him imitate him, following his corruption by stealing petrol, using the car for himself, using it as a taxi, and by going to corrupt mechanics. Finally, the idea of stealing the red bag emerges. The idea of taking 700,000 rupees and be free. The red of the bag symbolizes the blood-stained wealth he will obtain. He sees what he may

gain by killing Ashok, freedom. Knowing he would lose his family didn't affect his decision, as to them he was just a resource. The instant Balram murders Ashok with the whisky bottle, he starts referring to Ashok as an "it". Using this symbol of wealth as a murder weapon is his final step into The Light. Before, he was a servant, treated like an animal and acting like a piece of furniture. This is how Balram was granted freedom, by escaping his weak nature.

The polarized realities of India are geographically represented. The Light is found in large cities close to the ocean, such as Bangalore which "is the future" with "one in three new office blocks... being built (there)". The Light radiates from the fast-paced social energy and massive wealth of new industries, such as Balram's own business which boasts "sixteen drivers... with twenty-six vehicles". In this rich milieu, entrepreneurial activity, corruption, and social mobility thrive. By illustrating this, Adiga shows that while the nefarious few who sit in offices inside skyscrapers enjoy the Light of the sun, the Darkness cast by the shadows of these edifices engulf the poor. The Darkness is found in inland river villages, particularly along the traditionally sacred northern river system, the Ganga. The Darkness is symbolized as a "Rooster Coop" by Adiga, using zoomorphism to lend animalistic characteristics to people. Roosters in a coop watch one another slaughtered one by one, but are unable or unwilling to rebel and break out of the coop. Similarly, India's poor people see one another crushed by the wealthy and powerful, defeated by the staggering inequality of Indian society, but are unable to escape the same fate. Liberation from this unforgiving environment forces Balram to adapt, inducing him to murder,

cheat, steal, as well as abandon his family. He even had to take on a new identity, but in his own eyes had an “ amazing success story”. As he writes “ a few hundred thousand rupees of someone else’s money, and a lot of hard work, can make magic happen in this country.” Such is the relentless India that Adiga illustrates, conveying the irony in the Darkness and The Light, as to be in The Light, one must darken their heart. His weak nature was the main thing holding him back, and thus he had to overcome it to escape slavery.

Summarily, in *The White Tiger*, Balram overcomes his weak nature with a nefarious one as Adiga demonstrates that demonstrates that the cloth of progress and innovation in the highly wealthy Modern India is tightly interwoven with corruption, which is absorbed by Balram. The polarized sides of Modern India, and the rampant corruption forces him to overcome his weak form as a mere rooster, stuck in “ the Rooster Coop”, into the animal that “ comes along only once in a generation”, “ *The White Tiger*” to free himself from slavery.