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**Marxian and Neo-Marxian Materialistic Ideology in Arvind
Adiga's *The White Tiger***

Farooq Ahmad Sheikh

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Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, the Man Booker winning novel, presents a hard realistic and graphic picture in front of thousands of Indian readers. The book, in its realistic picture, presents the crude, dark and naked facts about India and takes our attention from one side where India is an emerging economic giant to another side, the dark side. Plot of the novel revolves round the protagonist Balram Halwai, a young man born and brought up in a remote village of Bihar. The protagonist narrates his story of life in the form of a letter to the Chinese Prime Minister who is on his visit to India on an official assignment. The letter begins by an introduction about the poverty of rural Bihar amidst the evils of the feudal landlords.

In the present paper the focus of the study is the Marxist outlook of the narrator. The narrator acquires Marxist point of view while describing the social reality in India. Human beings, as Marx put it, do shape the development of their society but in this they do not have

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complete freedom, instead they are constrained by the conditions of the material conditions around. History of all hitherto societies is the history of class struggle. Balram Halwai puts this idea of Marx in his own social context in this paragraph:

Mr. Premier, I won't be saying anything new if I say that the history of the world is the history of a ten-thousand-year war of brains between the rich and the poor. Each side is eternally trying to hoodwink the other side: and it has been this way since the start of time. The poor win a few battles (the peeing in the potted plants, the kicking of the pet dogs, etc.) but of course the rich have won the war for ten thousand years. That's why, one day, some wise men, out of compassion for the poor, left them signs and symbols in poems, which appear to be about roses and pretty girls and things like that, but when understood correctly spill out secrets that allow the poorest man on earth to conclude the ten-thousand-year-old brain-war on terms favorable to himself. (*The White Tiger* 141, 142)

Balram does not consider any other reality of the history than the war and conflict between the rich and the poor. The theory of Dialectical materialism opposes philosophical idealism as well as the theological concepts of religion, so does Balram as a narrator. Philosophical idealism and religious theology believe that ideas are the ultimate reality and in imagining that the development of the world, as they put it, takes place apart from matter, or took place at least in the beginning apart from matter, and is the result of the action of spirit, God, or divine forces. Balram does not show any respect for non-material things such as religion, values, beliefs and morals. He satirises the Hindu religious rituals and practices from the beginning to the end of the narrative. The satirical tone is obvious in these lines from the novel:

Now, I no longer watch Hindi films—on principle—but back in the days when I used to, just before the movie got started, either the number 786 would flash against the black

screen—the Muslims think this is a magic number that represents their god—or else you would see the picture of a woman in a white sari with gold sovereigns dripping down to her feet, which is the goddess Lakshmi, of the Hindus.

It is an ancient and venerated custom of people in my country to start a story by praying to a Higher Power.

I guess, Your Excellency, that I too should start off by kissing some god's arse.

Which god's arse, though? There are so many choices.

See, the Muslims have one god.

The Christians have three gods.

And we Hindus have 36,000,000 gods.

Making a grand total of 36,000,004 divine arses for me to choose from. (*The White Tiger* 6)

Balam, as the narrator, seems to prefer communism and atheism as the alternatives to the religion. He seems to respect Marxian ideas about religion. Marx said that more a man puts on God the less he retains for himself. Balam advocates Marx in this passage:

Now, there are some, and I don't just mean Communists like you, but thinking men of all political parties, who think that not many of these gods actually exist. Some believe that *none* of them exist. There's just us and an ocean of darkness around us. I'm no philosopher or poet, how would I know the truth? It's true that all these gods seem to do awfully little work—much like our politicians—and yet keep winning reelection to their golden thrones in heaven, year after year. That's not to say that I don't respect them, Mr. Premier! Don't you ever let that blasphemous idea into your yellow skull. My country is the kind where it pays to play it both ways: the Indian entrepreneur has to be straight and crooked, mocking and believing, sly and sincere, at the same time. (*The White Tiger* 6)

Politics to Indians is a game, Balam Halwai goes on, played by means of media and All India Radio. The health minister announcement to eliminate malaria, the announcement to eradicate malnutrition by chief minister, and special budget announcement for the entire

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electrification of India by Finance Minister are all falseness the people are fed with. Indian politics, like Marx, is considered as the superstructure by Balram. The money, in the novel, is able to make the impossible possible. The politicians are not the public servants in the novel as they are supposed to. They are being portrayed as the robots who are being programmed as by the means of money by the business and corporate houses of the country.

Balram Halwai, in the novel as narrator, is of the opinion that the educational institutions in India do not produce independent entrepreneurs, instead these produce the workers, both manual and white collar, for the existing firms. This viewpoint is clear in the following paragraph of the novel.

"The Autobiography of a Half-Baked Indian." That's what I ought to call my life's story.

Me, and thousands of others in this country like me, are half-baked, because we were never allowed to complete our schooling. Open our skulls, look in with a penlight, and you'll find an odd museum of ideas: sentences of history or mathematics remembered from school textbooks (no boy remembers his schooling like one who was taken out of school, let me assure you), sentences about politics read in a newspaper while waiting for someone to come to an office, triangles and pyramids seen on the torn pages of the old geometry textbooks which every tea shop in this country uses to wrap its snacks in, bits of All India Radio news bulletins, things that drop into your mind, like lizards from the ceiling, in the half hour before falling asleep—all these ideas, half formed and half-digested and half correct, mix up with other half-cooked ideas in your head, and I guess these half-formed ideas bugger one another, and make more half-formed ideas, and this is what you act on and live with.

The story of my upbringing is the story of how a half-baked fellow is produced. But pay attention, Mr. Premier! Fully formed fellows, after twelve years of school and three years of university, wear nice suits, join companies, and take orders from other men for the rest of their lives.

Entrepreneurs are made from half-baked clay. (The White Tiger 7, 8)

Balram, in the above given paragraph, advocates the Marxist thinkers like Pierre Bourdieu and Louis Althusser. These thinkers maintained that the present educational systems in the capitalistic societies are the centres of cultural reproduction. In their opinion, education in this context not only transmit a general ruling class ideology which justifies and legitimises the capitalist system, but also reproduces the attitudes and behaviours required by the major groups in the capitalistic division of labour. This system of education, in their contention, prepares the working class to submit to their authority and exploitation. Balram presents his method, the only one method, of becoming an entrepreneur in India. He, in the same way, does not believe that Modern education in Indian society could produce entrepreneurs.

One more occasion where Balram seems to look at things through Marxian glasses is in the description of the Slums in Delhi.

Vitiligo-Lips had told me about this place—all these construction workers who were building the malls and giant apartment buildings lived here. They were from a village in the Darkness; they did not like outsiders coming in, except for those who had business after dark. The men were defecating in the open like a defensive wall in front of the slum: making a line that no respectable human should cross. The wind wafted the stench of fresh shit toward me.

I found a gap in the line of the defecators. They squatted there like stone statues. These people were building homes for the rich, but they lived in tents covered with blue tarpaulin sheets, and partitioned into lanes by lines of sewage. It was even worse than Laxmangarh. I picked my way around the broken glass, wire, and shattered tube lights. The stench of feces was replaced by the stronger stench of industrial sewage. The slum ended in an open sewer—a small river of black water went sluggishly past me, bubbles sparkling in it and little circles spreading on its surface. Two children were splashing about in the black water.

The institutions of justice exist for those only who are worth to live. The criterion for this worth stands on the footing of money and power. Power again is the grandchild of money. (The White Tiger 145)

Balam seems to support Marxian viewpoint that the workers have no rights over the products they produce. He says that the slums build the houses for the rich and live themselves in the tents of unhealthy condition.

The overall outlook of Balam, the narrator of the novel, is materialistic. He judges almost everything on material grounds. His attitude towards the world in general has turned materialistic. He analyses every situation on the causality of material. In his opinion, all the social and political systems of the country like the justice, the political bodies and controlling agencies could be controlled by money. The politics and the police agencies, in the novel, have been in the pockets of business firms.

Balam loses his sense of fairness, justice and compassion in the course of his development in the plot. He succumbs to the lure of crime as a path out of his abject conditions which in other words means that his consciousness has been shaped by external surrounding world. The novel ends with Balam pronouncing himself as “A Thinking Man” and a successful entrepreneur with a successful taxi company in Bangalore after he has unethically capitalised on opportunities. He succeeds by bribing the political office and justifying himself of the heinous crime of his master as an act of class war.

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