

WAGGING TALES OF RELIGION IN ARVIND ADIGA'S THE WHITE TIGER

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Religion which is abstractly chimera in its concept and doctrine is an organized approach to human spirituality. From the beginning of human civilization it usually encompasses a set of narratives symbols, beliefs and practices, often with a supernatural or transcendent quality, that gives meaning to the practitioner's experiences of life through reference to higher power, God or gods, or ultimate truth. It may be expressed through prayer, ritual, meditation, music and art, among other things. It may focus on specific supernatural, metaphysical, and moral claims about reality (the cosmos and human nature) which may yield a set of religious laws, ethics, and a particular lifestyle. The religion also propounds ancestral and cultural traditions in its writings, history, and mythology, as well as personal faith and religious experience.

Religion is sometimes defined as "faith" or "belief system" but when it is used in social discourses it acculturates personal convictions, and entails specific behaviors corresponding to overall norms of a specific religious community. East and west both have tried to define and categorize 'what is religion'? Or 'what it means to be religious' and share conception that the hallmark of religion is division of the world in two comprehensive domains, one sacred, other profane. West was quicker to relocate or redefine religion with progress of science and coming changes in the lives of humanity. It brought out a new version of religion that

suited life-style of a modern, scientific, rational, and democratic and freedom loving man. It might have some pitfalls but no one can deny the fact that it produced an anthropocentric religiosity wherein man was at the centre and determinant of everything, be it definition of good or bad, moral or immoral. This is where East failed. The religion in the East remained static, unresponsive to the changes of the new demands of the age. It could not incorporate the change of science in it and burdened the life of the practitioners with rigid fundamentalism, orthodoxy and superstition. It could not practice its own definition *Daharayati iti Dharma* which means whatever (beneficial) is put on is religion. Religion could not include the economic aspirations of its followers and aspired to remain unpolluted and untouched to evil of money. It could not understand that individuals do need freedom and always ought not to be a slave to conventional moralities. It could not abandon its ancient theocratic pattern of societal organization, and continued with modern social evils including caste system, hectic ritualism and unscientific mythical explanation of the world. This is where East failed and remained a dark continent.

Arvind Adiga projects his novel *The White Tiger* in an angry young man mode and presents these aforementioned dark aspects of shining India to expose the other side of the ongoing developments and corruption in country. Even at the threshold of twentieth first century, the old order has not yet changed though the new is already born. The novel accurately exposes contemporary India's political, economical, sociological, infrastructural scenario and social evils including caste system, prostitution, the problems of poor and labours, tortures and miseries in household of which women are subjected in day today life. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the novel with specific focus on the notion of religion and religiosity to figure out its presentations and re-presentations in the novel amidst the hurly-burly of emerging globalized, market- driven, and if not thoroughly then at least so called secular India. The paper is an attempt to show how religion and religious values are declings due to advancement of modern civilization in India.

In the very beginning of novel, the narrator of novel is introduced as protagonist, servant, philosopher, entrepreneur, and *the white tiger* as named by his school teacher. Balram (school name of protagonist) was born in a small village named as *Lakhamgargh* in the darkest heart of India-Dhanbad (a city in Jharkhand). Balram is son of a rickshaw puller. He is taken out of school by his family and compels to work in a teashop. Balram as a child crushes coal and wipes dirty tables of tea stall, he nourishes the “dream of escapes-of breaking away from the bank of mother Ganga into whose murky depths have seeped the remains of the hundred generations”(7). His ambition inspires him to learn to drive car and in due course of time he becomes a well trained driver. His fortune begins when he is hired by a landlord of his village as chauffeur for his newly arrived son and daughter-in –law who have come from London. From behind wheel of the Honda city Balram first sees Delhi and here re-education of Balram begins to become rich like his master Ashok. The other fellow servants or drivers like Balram flick through pages of murder weekly; by engaging their conversations among them in trivial subject which result in balderdash. But Balram begins to see how tiger might escape his cage. He begins to machinate to remove, Ashok, his master from his way and flew away with his money. He thought that it is essential for sure and successful man must spill a little blood on his way for going on the top. He finally murdered his master and flew away with booty to Bangalore and starts a new life there as business man.

The gradual decline of religious values, faith, ethic and moralities were announced by Irish poet, dramatist, and politician named W.B. Yeats in his well known poem *The second coming*. Which sings this destruction as *Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world* This announcement made by W.B Yeats was indication that old values, morality and being religious and religiosity which were based on truth and religion but were designed to dupe mass, was understood by the healthy pattern of social norms as fake and were on the way of disappearance. This chaos and psychological schizophrenia was termed as modernity. What fell apart in modern era were the values of eighteen century, the age of

enlightenment, also known as age of reason .probably main values of age besides reason, was the idea of progress. In eighteen century thinkers become optimistic by thinking that by using the universal values of science, reason and logic they thought that they could get rid of all myths and holly idea that kept humanity for progressing. They thought that this would eventually free humanity from misery, religion superstition, all irrational behavior and unfolded belief. Humanity would thus progress to a state of freedom, happiness and progress

The current world scenario especially India in which Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* came into being is postmodern age in which there is no certainty of anything everything is in the state of topsy-turvy condition. From nineteen century to present days has been period of mind and reason not soul and religion. The religion its belief, sacredness, ethical values and moralities are not essential part of life. They do not have significance for twenty four hour in life of an individual but their significance resides on some particular occasion such as on religious activities merely not as durable feeling for forever.

Arvind Adiga's *The white tiger* is compendium of religious ferment. The novel portrays the real picture of Indian society including problem of caste and class, poor, labours, women and politics. The novel exposes decline of religious values from all sphere of life in derogatory and blasphemies ways. In the novel Adiga is not just discarding religious values and its significance but he is presenting them in sardonic terms. In another way Adiga's perception of Indian religion and its relevance is orientalist in its approach and nature.

The entire narrative of the novel is set in seven night and one day. This gradual narrative technique of Adiga's novel exposes strategies of a simple man; Balram Halwai's tactis to make himself free from the blind taboos of religious ethics and religion thus pays the way of his success. In the first night narrator of the novel Balram Halwai later Mr.Ashok Sharma introduces 'Premier Jiabao' who is coming from china and is scheduled

to visit Bangalore to have a glimpse of the world's centre of technology and outsourcing. He is welcomed by Ashok Sharma and is introduced as “Mr. Jiabao is on a mission: he wants to know the truth about Bangalore. You hope to learn how to make a few Chinese entrepreneurs, that is why you are visiting” (2). Here the narrator of novel is happy to know about arrival of Mr. Premier Jiabao’ but at the same time he is sardonic in his approach and sarcastically mocks on existing traditional ritual that is to “welcome a guest with garlands, sandalwood and small statue of Gandhi and a book full of information about India’s past, present and future” (4-5). It is traditional religious convention in India when a guest of great value arrived or some great work which bears benefit or values for mass is initiated; such kinds of religious rituals are being performed for successful accomplishment of that task. Adiga in his novel seems to question logically very basis of these performing religious activities and considers them baseless without much deliberation:

Now, I no longer watch Hindi films – on principle but back in the days, just before the movie got started, either the number 786 would flash against the black screen –the Muslims think this is magic number that represents their god – or else you would see the picture of woman in white sari with gold sovereigns dripping down to her feet, which is goddess *Lakshami* of the Hindus’ venerated custom of the people in my country to start a story by praying to a higher power (8).

The concept of religion as it has been defined and presented in Indian society has been understood by Adiga thoroughly. He seems to be aware of its merit and demerit both. His vision of religion is much more influenced by the modern globalised world with scientific progress and advancement. This is the reason that he is critical of established religious beliefs and tries to challenge them with ambivalent nature of Balram Halwai. Adgian narrative of religion exposes strong impudent notions for all religion of Indian society and questions their relevancy in postcolonial India.

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

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

See 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. (8)

This is probably secular views of Adiga that he does not talk of one God from one religious community but all gods of all religious communities who reside in India. Talking of one will lead to conflict with other i.e. he mentioned all without assuming one as superior. The narrator of novel is sardonic in his approach to religion when he compares these gods of darkness with our politician who are doing nothing but winning election year after year. India is such a country where the omnipresence of supreme authority cannot be denied entirely. The fundamental facts of religion which include beliefs, sacredness, moralities, honesty and values have been taught to humanity with inception of civilization. May human race become rational, progressive, mechanical, atheist, corrupted and degenerated but it cannot repudiate established values of our civilization. Even Adiga cannot escape from this impression i.e. after introducing Hindu, Muslims and Christian in Gods derogative terms narrator closes his eyes and folds his arms to pray to God to shine on his dark story. Even name of boys and girls (characters) are kept similar with the name of some god or goddess. Munna becomes Balram by his school teacher because his own name was Krishna. The school teacher named him Balram because he was the sidekick of lord Krishna.

The origin of the entire river in India has religious connotations. One of them is called mother *Ganga*, the daughter of Vedas, river of illumination, protector of us, all breaker of the chain of birth and rebirth. Millions of devotee each year's bath in the holy water of these sacrosanct river.() It is believed that if you bath in the holy water of Ganga all your sins will get washed at that very moment. White tiger suggests Mr. Priemam as: "No- Mr.Jiabao I urge you not to dip in the Ganga, unless you want your mouth full of faeces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion and seven different kinds of industrial acids" (15). Shiva's name is the truth'. It is ancient tradition of Hindu that death bodies are often cremated on the bank of river. On such occasion many mantra are chanted from *Vedas* and *Purana*. These religious rituals are done so that soul can liberate itself from worldly allusion and can achieve its eternal placidness in heaven. Balram At the time his mother's death, is in Varanasi and reflects as:

We walked past temple after temple, praying to god after god and then went in a single file between a red temple devoted to hanuman and an open gymnasium where three body builders heaved rested weights over their heads. I smelled the river before I saw it: a stench of decaying flesh rising from my right. I slang louder: the only truth (20)

The religious history of china had been framed on the basis of Gaya- that is centre of Buddhism. Adiga is appreciating Buddhism on the other he is castigating the teaching of God Buddha by stating "Buddha ran through Gaya as fast as he could and got to the other sides and never looked back"(). The lord *Hanuman* has been castigated as being half man and half monkey. He is the most famous god for the common man. He was the faithful servant of lord *Rama* and common men adore him in our temple because he is shining example of how to serve our masters with absolute fidelity, love and devotion. It should be our pride that we are living in glorious land. Lord Buddha received his enlightenment in this land. The river Ganga gives life to our plants and

our animal and people. We are grateful to god that we are born in this land. The grips of religion its faith, fidelity devotion are too strong in lay men that for each serious things they seem to be restless to take oath of god. The religious bias, animosity and contempt between Hindu and Muslim community is so much that even a Hindu man like Stork wants that his grandson should not call himself Azharuddin , the captain of Indian cricket team, Stork’s grandson says “ I am Azharuddin, the captain of India!’ the boy shouted every time he hit a six or a four. ‘ Call yourself Gavaskar. Azharuddin is a Muslim (70). But in same family there is an educated, man like Mr. Ashok for him religion, caste does not matter what matter is the humanity. He says “Father, what a silly thing to say! Hindu and Muslim, what difference does it make?(70). The animosity between one religious group to other is too much that even man like Ram Parsad had to hide his caste and religion to get job of driver. Being a Muslim he has to pray before Hindu god and has to say *Om, Om, and Om* (77). When his identity is revealed he has to leave his job without saying a single word. The second servant Balram who is man of action and wisdom is pretending to be a man of religion. He brought two dozen of the cheapest idols of Hanuman and Ram which he could find. He touches his nose by his finger while drivering his master’s car back from *Lakshmaganj* not on the one place but all his way whichever temple or sacred tree like banyan comes in his way he used to bow his head in respect and touch his eye and even nipples with his finger. The decline and degeneration of religious values and its significance is visible when the victory of great socialist is announced on the one hand priest are celebrating a special *Pooja* to pray for the great socialist’s victory on the occasion “mutton *Biryani* was distributed on the paper plates in the front of the temple; and in the evening, there was a free booze for all”(100).It indicates that if happiness and success increases it bring immoralities, corruption and competition which pays way for decay and destruction of our civilization. The driver Balram who everyday wipes the three magnetic stickers with the images of the mother- goddess Kali prays for the good and bad to her. The god is supposed to be with human beings who are basically doing well, but Balram when he is doing

unethical things prays to the goddess Kali for her assistance at the same time he wants to remove the picture of kali. “I yawned, closed my eyes, and slithered down my seat. With one eye open, I look at the magnetic sticker of the goddess kali- who is very fierce black-skinned goddess, holding a scimitar, and a garland of skulls. I made a note myself to change that sticker. She looked too much like Granny” (135). Even legal system too has the faith in religious oath when a baby is crushed under the tire of Honda city which was being derived by Pinky madam Balram is strategically force to sign a well confessed document that he has done that crime confession include “*I swear by almighty God that I make this statement under no duress and under instruction from now on*”(168).

Today, when the world has achieved acme of progress, development on one side and nuclear and hydrogen’s weapon for destruction on other side. The emotion, sentiment, religion faith, love, devotion, in nutshell human values have lost their vital role from the life of human being and reason, practicality, professionalism have taken their place even then the values of prevailing religious important, caste system cannot be entirely ignored.

Mr.Ashok married a girl who is from the outside of his caste, religion community and even country when she left Mr. Ashok and went to hers country Mr. Ashok repents and emphasizes on the values of religions and castes that exists in Indian society. “Of course, in your caste you don’t ... Let me tell you, Balram. Men drink because they are sick life. I thought caste and religion didn’t matter any longer in today’s world’. My father said, “No, don’t marry her, she is of another”...I...’ (186)

It is well known fact that god is earnestly remembered in crisis, disappointment, sorrow and suffering. Mr., Ashok is disappointed due to the divorce of his wife he is thinking of life and death “Sometime I wonder, Balram. I wonder what the point of living is. I really wonder.’(186) Balram is trying to pacifying him

ridiculously not because whatever he is suggesting is based on truth but because he is receiving three and half thousands per month if his master will not live how he will get his payment. “You must believe in God, sir you must go on. My granny says that if you believe in God, then good things will happen” (186).

‘That is true, it is true. We must believe,’ he sobbed

‘Once there was a man who stopped believing in god, and you know what happened?’

‘What?’

‘His buffalo died at once.’

‘I see.’ He laughed. I see.’

‘Yes, sir it really happened. The next day he said, “God I am sorry, I believe in you” and guess what happened?

His buffalo came back to life?’

‘Exactly!’(186).

There is an episode in the Bhagavad-Gita when our lord Krishna – another history’s famous chauffeurs stops the chariot he is driving and gives his passenger some excellent advice on the question of life and death. Just like Krishna Balram is philosophing, in other words joking and singing song to make his master realize better. This indicates that myth from religious sermon not only gives peace and consolation to humanity in their miserable condition but they are the best guideline to lead a happy prosperous and religious life with moralities and human values. Praying to almighty endow particular spiritual power which unites inner being of human’s

soul and at the same time an expectation which is supposed to be fulfill in posterity. But the prayer offered by Balram at temple in Gurgaon for the reunification of Mr. Ashok and Pinky madam is mockingly sardonic for his offered prayer does not have that legitimate caliber to reunite his master and mistress.

The magnetic stickers of kali before which each day Balram used to pray before starting his daily duty for his fortune and goodness, is pulled out after murdering his master Ashok. “I (Balram) pulled out all the stickers of the goddess and threw them on Mr.Ashok’s body – just in the case they would help his soul go to heaven’ (286) Adiga is exploring rays of hope or religious faith that after murder of Ashok these magnetic stickers of goddess kali would assist him to go the heaven where his soul will resides in blissful state and will cherish the fruit of salvation. And at the time of death of Balram’s family members rites and rituals which are offered after the death of people is performed by Balram are of religious significance. At the same time thought of his master came to his mind ‘I thought there was no need to offer a prayer to the gods for him, because his family would be offering very expensive prayers all along the Ganga for his soul. What can a poor man’s prayers mean to the 36,000,004 gods in comparisons with those of the rich? (317)

The concluding lines of the novel are too much rationalistic and practical which exposes the real position of religion in contemporary age.’ After three or four year in real estate, I think I might sell everything, take the money, and start a school- an English language school-for the poor children in Bangalore. A school where you would not be allowed to corrupt anyone’s minds with prayers and stories about God and Gandhi- nothing but the facts of life for these kids

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