

THE CULTURAL DOMINANCE OF WEST IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER***Imityaz Ahmad Wani****Satpal Singh****ABSTRACT**

The current research paper is an attempt to analyze the brilliant work of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* with special reference to cultural imperialism in the present ultra-modern world. Novel highlights the core issues of Indian society like identity crisis, cultural discrimination, political corruption, class discrimination, complexity in the socio-economic, influence of foreign culture and degradation of traditional values and fanatic nature of Indian societies towards the west. The novel explores the issues related to the dark side of Indian village life, their struggle for their survival. It is the complete postmortem of the India's developing nature of the city life. Adiga explores the dark heart of the shining India by comparing the dark (rural) and light (Urban) sides of the Indian societies. Corruption, bribery and exploitation in the name of the politics and religion are the common things in Indian society. Projection of the protagonist in the novel is the projection of the growing middle class of ever developing India, those who are striving here and there for the identification and entrepreneur success.

The White Tiger, Booker prize award winning novel of 2008, showers the light on the ignorance of the Indian counterpart and the mere acceptance of the western culture without asking the question concerning the validity and adaptation. Novel is the eye opener for Indian masses for their frenzied outlook towards the western societies. This research work highlights the issues pertaining to the reasons behind the slugging down of the Indian culture in the face of the West. It too exposes how foreign cultures dominate the minds of the easterners. Influence of Western languages, sense of dressing and western life style are most concerning issues related to the cultural degradation of Indian society.

Introduction

Cultural dominance does not have a long history. The term emerged in the 1960s, and has been a focus of research since at least the 1970s. There are many terms which comes under the category of

it like "media imperialism", "structural imperialism", "cultural dependency and domination", "cultural harmonization", "electronic colonialism", "ideological imperialism", and "economic imperialism" all have been used to describe the same basic notion of cultural imperialism. Many sociologists believe that foreign cultures are influencing, mostly those cultures which are uncertain with in their own societies. Does it mean that Indian societies are uncertain about their ancestral heritage? Minds of Indian masses are controlled by those who are thousands of miles away. Westerners are using easterners as robots to boost their own economy and social values by degrading their customs, values and social norms. Easterners never try to inquire things about the validity and acceptance of those alien things in their society.

Aravind Adiga took some stocky issues in his debut novel, *The White Tiger* where he talks about the division of social groups, upper class and lower class, the cultural imperialism of western world. The writing skills of Adiga in the novel not only entertain us but also give a pause of thought.

"Neither you nor I speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English"

(Adiga 3)

In the first chapter of the novel, Adiga raises the issue of language. English language is not only needed to maintain our social status, but it has become a demand of our day to day life. We cannot deny the fact that highest reservoirs of the knowledge of the world are present in English language. Language is the best tool to hold the minds of the people whom we wish to control. Medium of instruction, philosophy in texts, ideology imparting in schools are the vivid examples of linguistic and cultural imperialism of west in India.

The cultural dominance is actually an economic, scientific advancement and cultural hegemony of the western industrialized nations, which regulates the directions of both economic and social progress of the whole world. It is only developed nations of the world who set the cultural values and standardized the civilizations. The whole world is becoming a common cultural hub, same kind of fashion, literature, technical products and same kind of cosmopolitan culture is manufactured, bought and sold. "Before we do that, sir, the phrase in English that I learned from my ex-employer the late Mr Ashok's ex-wife Pinky Madam is: What a fucking joke." (Adiga 7). They never got influence from our culture, but we love to follow them. Balram learned the terms from Pinky Madam without knowing the meaning of those terms. Adiga talks about the people, half- baked Indians, who love to follow western culture without having ample knowledge about it.

We got freedom in 1947, but we are still slaves, not physically but mentally. They manipulate our psyche such a way that we can not decide anything about good and bad. We accept only what they wish to accept us. Nowadays, a concept of living a good life is visiting night-clubs and beer shops etc. They decide our likes and dislikes e.g. concept of beauty that white and fair skin means beautiful and dark and black skin is a symbol of ugliness. "Well, that's not exactly right any more, sir. The 'blackish face' bit is still true although I'm of half a mind to try one of those skin-whitener creams they've launched these days so Indian men can look white as westerners" (Adiga 12)

Beauty is the reflection of the particular culture and their own taste but in India concept of beauty is limited to the White skin and golden hair. Millions of products are coming from west to change the skin tone of Indian masses. There are millions of Balram who are using these skin creams to look fair. By this way we are not trying to change the colour of the skin only but we are giving them a kind of edge to rule us and to hold our economy.

Content

John Tomlinson, author of the book, Cultural Imperialism, A Critical introduction, defines the term as "The use of political and economic power to exalt and spread the values and habits of a foreign culture at the expense of a native culture." (John Tomlinson 3)

Cultural imperialism is possible by mainly two ways, forced acculturation of a subject country or willing acceptance of the particular country, like India. Language and Economic factors are the most important factors in the process of cultural imperialism; if we observe the current situation of the world, we will find that the so called global culture or globalization everywhere. It is nothing except the hegemony of few countries, which are economically sound and technologically advanced. These countries are holding world's large share of economic power and telecommunication which helped them to define and spread their own culture. Cultural superiority can be achieved through many ways, e.g. to bring change in attitude of a subject population, to apply formal policies on them politically and socially. Military action can also be an option but by this way it is possible only when a country remains under the rule for a long time to enforce its own culture.

Globalization of products and distribution of same quality goods are welcome moves for some critics but for others it comes with lots of questions about the validity of local and regional brands. These foreign made products made us feel that whatever comes from the west or the developed nations and economically sound countries are good and rest of products from the less developed

countries are looked down by their own people. Globalization of products not only affects economy of third world but also their culture and their mentality. The validity of local products is no more considered as up to date. They loss their value at their local markets, e.g. Availability of ready made food from foreign countries in local markets is often presented at cheaper price rate which displaces the local food items, which usually come from the poor section of the society. The expansion of foreign goods trade and interaction with new products are not coming only with economic profit for west but also with exposure of cultural and social values to the countries whom they want to dominate. Usually foreign cultures are creeping in those countries that are uncertain with their own culture; these societies can be easily dominated and conquered by foreign culture. Countries like India that have multicultural system can be easily dominated by the foreign cultures because of their uncertainties and having effect of many regional and local cultures.

Language is the vital tool in the hands of the western people to control the minds of Indian masses. English language has become a unique fascination amongst the youth and the masses in general. Foreign languages have swayed our minds, thus, adaptation of those became a kind of addiction to our young generation. Situation in our society is such that people learn English language reluctantly only to maintain their social strata. Nevertheless, in today's society the use of foreign language has gained a rapid momentum and seems to be the need of the hour for this ultra-modern society. Adiga explores the typical Indian psyche of masses and their infatuation towards foreign languages and displays the dominant role of English not only in speaking level but also about their psychological point of view. Balram shows the obsession towards English language. Learnt by eavesdropping and showing extra ordinary interest of protagonist towards the foreign language is the thought provoking concept of Adiga for the general Indian people.

English has been rooted so strongly and its gaining momentum is the biggest threat to our local languages. Obsession is much higher than a common person can think about it. Names of buildings, roads, pets etc. are in English. Balram's description of roads in Delhi shows the love for English and its demand in urban areas. Neither he could remind the English names of those places, nor could he speak them properly. Adiga shows the strong rooted English language in the light part of India; wherever person came from he has to prove himself that he can speak English in city to get a good job. "You ask someone, "Where's Nikolai Copernicus Marg?" And he could be a man who lived on Nikolai Copernicus Marg his whole life, and he'll open his mouth and say, "Hahn?" Or he'll say, "Straight ahead, then turn left," even though he has no idea". (Adiga 73)

Education system of India is still a tool in the hands of the colonizers. For example, we are still following masters like lord Macaulay's minutes related to the medium of imparting education in India. According to the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968, special emphasis needs to be laid on the study of English and other international languages. World knowledge is growing at a tremendous pace, especially in science and technology. India must not only keep up this growth but should also make her own significant contribution to it. For this purpose, study of English deserves to be specially strengthened. Language is the main source of distribution and change in the outlook.

"The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation...and then I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture". (Ngugi 9-11)

Thoughts and ideologies are still imparted through the languages of west. Ngugi says, language helps in 'spiritual subjugation'. It is the language that the west has been using in the race of imperialistic rule to govern and impoverish the subordinate nations from their cultures. They have seeped in their culture and lifestyle in many of the eastern countries through English language. They themselves gave the status of 'international language' to English. By and large it is the strategy of the European world to govern the rest of nations. Every nation is forced to keep English language as part of the curriculum in their education system thus; the West gets every opportunity to get into the minds of the young learners.

"The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture this is the harsh realities of the influence of the western education in the eastern part of the world. The English language has done equal harm as it has done well". (Ngugi 9-11)

If we take the survey of the education system of India today, most of the youth in schools, colleges and universities speak and use English language not by force but by choice, why? The intensity of the western influence is so much that the east has started looking at themselves from the eyes of the west. A good speaker of English is given more importance, in and out of the work place. Local or the native language is getting downtrodden not because it has gone obsolete, but it is the coming of English with its hypnotizing glaze that the easterner have themselves sidelined the very essence and existence as Indian-ness, as in the case of Balram. He compares everything with the western part of the world. He wants to see his nephew, Dharam as complete English gentleman. He admitted him in an English school a good school. "He goes to a good school here in Bangalore—an English school. Now he pronounces English like a rich man's son. He can say "pizza" the way Mr. Ashok

said it". (Adiga 317)

In Indian schools and colleges medium of instruction is English and the books are also written by foreign authors. This type of education system is taking us away from our own culture and clearing the ways for the acceptance of foreign cultures. How a person can know the value and importance of those values which he has never practiced or taught in the schools? In our universities the literature is imported from the western world (Shakespeare, Milton, and Eliot). We are not only importing their literature but also their ideas, value, thoughts and ways of living. "That's what you are, in *this* jungle." Before he left, the inspector said, "I'll write to Patna asking them to send you a scholarship. You need to go to a real school—somewhere far away from here. You need a real uniform, and a real education." (Adiga 38)

Europeans are using number of ways to capture the minds of eastern masses, to spread and vindicate their contemplations. They used different ways to make us believe that whatsoever they are undertaking and following is right, and advocate the eastern counterpart to follow it. One of the best examples is the advertisement of the products. They are not only highlighting the products by these advertisements but also spreading their hegemonic ideology to rest of the world. Balram became so much frenzy of those advertisements; he demands everything like the same as it was shown in the advertisement. "High-class or low-class? Virgin or non-virgin? All depends." "I don't care. She just has to have golden hair—like in the shampoo advertisements." "Cheapest is ten, twelve thousand." (Adiga 228)

Adiga conveys the message about the fake advertisement through his hero, Balram. Whatever is shown in the posters and televised advertisements is not all true. Balram realized this shallowness of western world as he got an Indian woman with dyed golden hair. He is no more running after the advertisement after being cheated by the manager by the name of western product but got only Indian women with new colour and packaging. There are millions of people who are just running after the name of the western products and western brands. Products of west make us proud and native products give us feeling of inferiority. It is only because of that there products can be highlighted to whole world while our local made products do not have that much publicity in other nations. We can use the same way as European media is using to highlight their culture and products. We can also create new identification of our own culture by using these ideas. Does it suffice the entire concept of beauty, staying it is just skin deep? This is what the west has been propagating, to possess fair skin and golden hair. Definitely, this is not the ultimate truth about beauty. India is a land with diverse thoughts

and immense wealth of culture and human values, so an individual's persona is judged by his ethical code of conduct rather than the colour and the texture of his skin.

Imperialism is not a thing as it was, but that does not mean in ultra-modern times there is no dominance. It is still present in contemporary world but the ways to colonize the countries are different. In present world, there is no need to use armed influence to control states, but one can control other by getting hold on their mind through education. "British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand and fears of native insubordination on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education". (Viswanathan 1987; 17)

Nationalism and nationality is conveyed through the medium of instruction and the textbook and their philosophy, but if the medium, textbooks and other ideology is being divulged in foreign language certainly the cultural fate of the country is very murky. Balram does not have formal education but he can speak some English words and he can recognize the English alphabets. The education system in India is so corrupted; teachers are stealing money from the mid-day meals and policies of the government schools.

Don't waste your money on those American books. They're so *yesterday*. I am tomorrow. In terms of formal education, I may be somewhat lacking. I never finished school, to put it bluntly. Who cares! I haven't read many books, but I've read all the ones that count. (Adiga 7)

British and American literature and foreign books are supposed to be compulsory subjects in our schools and colleges and we never ask the validity of the ideology which is being provided to the students even though it is based outside of our native culture. Curiosity and hypnotism about the western world is developing in every institution. The dependence and belief in western education and western world is compelling Indian society to think about the social and cultural values of the west. Adiga highlights the compromising nature of the Indian societies against the western social trends. "I found the fellow selling T-shirts. "No," I kept saying to each shirt he showed me—until I found one that was all white, with a small word in English in the center."(Adiga 152) Balram was looking for that shirt which he actually does not like but his master and his master's colleagues like. He changed his mind and taste to look like them. His fluctuating mentality about the choices shows the uncertainty of the Indian masses towards their own culture and choice. He was looking for the T-shirt which was designed with the English alphabet. Products, with foreign brand tags, like Adidas, Puma, Nike, Ferrari, and many other brands, specially which show some glimpse of Englishness are the symbols of the

upper and elite class of the Indian societies.

Every culture comes with both positive and negative effects. If we talk about the western influences on the Indian culture by the Indian perspective, no doubt we will find many drawbacks in the newly adopted culture. But it is not a good idea to observe the only one side of the same coin. Every culture is the amalgam of some good and bad features. Western life style and mentality paved the way for the development but at the same time it took us away from our ancestral values. Culture is a way of life in a systematic manner as per the nature of the society. Same thing may have different meaning in different places. What is bad in our society is good and acceptable in the western world like short dress, freedom in marital relations, drinking Alcohol, live-in relationship etc. and what is acceptable in our society is bad and unacceptable in western society like earlier, child marriage, prohibition of the widow remarriage and covering faces of the women etc.

She wore pants; I gaped. Who had ever seen a woman dressed in trousers before—except in the movies? I assumed at first she was an American, one of those magical things he had brought home from New York, like his accent and the fruit-flavored perfume he put on his face after shaving.(Adiga 78-79)

Wearing short clothes, pants, and other attractive clothing was common thing for Pinky madam and her husband Mr. Ashok, because of their western origin but for Balram; being a typical Indian villager, it is not easy to accept all these things. However, Indian societies pretend to be like western societies and adopt their dressing and eating sense but the typical conservativeness can be seen even today in the large part of our population.

We have witnessed that every man young or old today has a strong fascination about the west. This has led the nation to a state of moral bankruptcy, cultural anarchy and inclination of the world towards the ideas propagated by the west. For instance, a simple and humble villager like Balram, who never had any kind of the formal education and exposure, nurtures the hope of being like his master Pinky madam. He uses English language in front of his driver colleagues and associates himself with the richness, standard and aristocracy, discarding every bit of his own culture and morality. Symbolically, every one of us has become Balram. We have impoverished ourselves to the extent that all our pristine culture (Indian), values including manners and etiquette have never ever existed. Mimicking the westerns people, the Indians have unknowingly sold themselves to the English people. People like Pinky madam and Ashok have created a sense of fascination in the minds of the

commoners like Balram.

Conclusion

Life is a race and every individual tries to win it but what is the ultimate aim? And whom do we want to prove that we are not behind in the race of life? The answer is, 'Western world' in both the cases. From times immemorial the East has been under the domination of the West, India's independence of 1947 was just the end of imperial rule but psychologically at the unconscious level the Indian citizens are still slaves of the western doctrines. The tag of superiority is self -assigned by the west on them but it is India and other non-European nations who have given the nod of approval. Today, this very folly has proved ever detrimental to most of the non-European nations as the West is propagating their culture, Concept of cultural imperialism.

Study of cultural dominance, from Adiga's novel, hints to wake up the Indian consciousness at larger level. Adiga exposes the important tool in the novel is Language, which at its best does fulfill every dream of the West. English language was the vital device left behind by the British to advocate their supremacy. Adiga exposes the bitter truths of western influences in a subtle ways with the tinge of humor. Language is everything indeed. With English language comes in the western believes, views and ideas, indeed the entire culture of the west. Balram is fanatic in nature towards the use of English language and English products like wine, clothes and ways of eating. He kept changing his taste of dressing as per his master.

The foreign policy of the western countries aims at enhancing domination over the other states of the world in a diplomatic manner. India and Indians are too innocent that they have not understood the ulterior motives behind the friendly and soothing steps taken by the western countries in the guise of trade relations and other mutual help because no nations do have permanent friendship or allies to each other, everything is interest and purpose oriented. So the ever increasing Indian trend of blindly supporting the western goods and ideas can crumble the nation down to the dust, thus Adiga through his novel *The White Tiger* gives the pinch of reawakening to the Indian thoughts and helping them to secure their own fences and guard their own thoughts before the west snatches away the nation for the second time.

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