

# Sub: Humanization of the Working Class: Reading *En la orilla* and *The White Tiger* from a neo-colonial Perspective"

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**Abstract**—*The present article intends to analyse the psychosocial state of the working class in Spain and India.*

*The White Tiger and En la orilla, the two novels and their respective authors Arvind Adiga and Rafael Chirbes from India and Spain respectively try to turn their reader's attention towards the miseries of the working class. The readers are made aware of the corporate exploitation in today's changing work culture. Rafael Chirbes in his work points out the subhuman condition of the working class and how the society, in general, look down upon the proletariat. Similarly, Adiga through its protagonist uses a deductive method to create a vivid picture of the Indian working class among the claims of rapid economic development and India's potentials of becoming a "super-power". Both the authors are equally concerned about the deteriorating situation of the working in the present day socio-economic structure.*

**Keywords:** *working class, exploitation, corporate, injustice and sufferings.*

*En la orilla* is the Spanish novel published by Rafael Chirbes in the year 2013. The main themes of the novel are poverty, crisis, unemployment, immigration etc. The novel is divided into three parts and its main protagonist Esteban connects us to the other characters of the novel through his monologues. The novel depicts the reality of the economic crisis that Spanish society has suffered since 2008 and its effects on the working class and their lives. Similarly, *The White Tiger* is the novel by Indian author Aravind Adiga. Published in 2008 it won the Man Booker Prize in the same year. The principle themes of the novel are: identity, quest for freedom, insecurity, exploitation, caste system and inequality.

The novel reflect the two faces of India i.e. "India of Light" where the dreams of the protagonist can be fulfilled and where everything is full of life, opportunities and development is at its epitome and "India of Darkness" where people are still struggling for their livelihood and there is no development and not even there are chances of it because there only poverty rules where people are still struggling for basic amenities like water and food. This side of India exhibit the image of rural India like Laxmangarh as shown in the novel. As Manuel Castells figures out, "globalisation is both inclusive and exclusive. It includes everything that has monetary value and excludes everything else". (Manuel Castells, 2006:10) In this novel one see the "India of Light"

and "India of Darkness" both represent the metaphor of globalisation i.e. in one part where there are benefits, industries and growth like in metropolitan cities, positive aspects of globalisation may be seen and in the another part, like rural places, where big corporate see no advantage may be seen as exclusive nature of globalisation that Castells points out and the example of this exclusiveness is Laxmangarh the village of our protagonist Balram which he calls darkness.

The novel *The White Tiger* narrates the story of a Balram Halwai a village boy of a lower social status, and his struggles to become a successful entrepreneur. The novel is written in the form of long letter where the protagonist narrates his life story to Wen Jiabao the Chinese official Premier. Balram the protagonist of the novels unfold the pains, sufferings and problems of the rural world where hunger and poverty rules. He calls his hometown "The Darkness" because it is a place that is still under the dominance of the local landlords. Balram who excels in studies quits his studies and works in a tea shop to support his family. Balram Halwai a son of rickshaw puller who in hope of good future leaves his village where people have no clean water and electricity, where corruption is at its zenith not in private sphere but in public also, where local police, doctors and politicians are all corrupt.

*Now, each time the post of medical superintendent falls vacant, the Great Socialist lets all the big doctors know that he is having an open auction for that post. (Adiga, 49)*

As we also see in the novel, the teacher earns money by doing fraud in the food given to students, as he is unpaid. The government doctors of the village are always absent from their duties as they work in the private hospitals to earn more money. Here our protagonist sees no hope of progress. Therefore, he learns driving and becomes a driver. In the place where Balram lives is opportunity strapped and the people of the village can only see themselves in the inferior position and in menial jobs as Balram. In this place that is called "Darkness" children are taught from their childhood to become good servants.

*This is Hanuman, everyone's favourite god in the Darkness. Do you know about Hanuman, sir? He was the faithful servant of the god Rama, and we worship him in our*

*temples because he is a shining example of how to serve your masters with absolute fidelity, love, and devotion.* (Adiga, 19)

In the novel one observes the master- servant relation. Balram is mistreated most of the times by his masters, as if he were not a human being but a machine that works on the command of his master. The novel reveals the dark reality of the people of higher status who treat servants and labourers like a commodity, blinded by the power and money. These people who do really important work for the society by doing jobs like servants, labourers, sweepers etc, the jobs that are below the dignity of any human are always mistreated. For example, in the novel, we see Balram representing this in human side of the so called modern society where there is no value of people like Balram, but their dogs are getting lavish treatments, more attention and value than any human being. This type of conduct of people of higher classes exposes their exploitative nature and inhuman side. *The rich expect their dogs to be treated like human, you see— they expect their dogs to be pampered, and walked, and petted, and even washed! And guess who had to do the washing? I got down on my knees and began scrubbing the dogs, and then lathering them, and foaming them, and then washing them down, and taking a blow dryer and drying their skin. Then I took them around the compound on a chain while the king of Nepal sat in a corner and shouted, ‘Don’t pull the chain so hard! They’re worth more than you are!’* (Adiga, 78)

Here in, for the people like the master of Balram their dogs are more valuable than their servants like the protagonist, who spend their whole life in serving these heartless people. Same preoccupations are seen in the novel, *En la orilla* where the most of the characters see themselves stuck in the financial crisis that the country is going through. Due to lack of opportunities in the time of recession and job insecurities, they suffer exploitation in the hand of their bosses. For example, in the novel we see the character, Liliana, a Colombian immigrant in Spain, who is mistreated by her husband and due to lack of resources in her country moves to Spain in hope of a better future. She works as a caretaker of the father of the protagonist, Esteban, he runs a carpentry business. For Liliana this job is as an opportunity and at the same time her source of income. But due to a loss in the business of the Esteban. She also loses her job, as he is not able to pay her so he discharges her of her duties. Here one sees the pessimism in the life of the workers whose lives are completely dependent on the fortunes of their masters and this incident reflects the situation of millions of workers and their pain in Spain and other part of the world in recession.

Similar situation we see in the novel of Adiga where the protagonist Balram, wants to study but due to lack of economic resources he is unable to complete his studies and goes to work in sweet shop. Here one observes the same pessimism in the life of Balram also who excels in studies but fails to complete his studies due to lack resources, such incident are synonymous to the preoccupations and desires of

the people like Liliana in *En la orilla* and Balram in *The white tiger*, who due to lack of resources and opportunities remain downtrodden and become oppressed identities and their unfulfilled desires lie deep in their hearts. As, Abril Trigo figures out, *These migrants, many times undocumented, indentured workers kept under some form of slavery, are the invisible hands washing the dishes, breaking cement, and picking tomatoes for us to enjoy*<sup>1</sup>. In both the novels, we see the characters under some or the other form of slavery. Their lives are completely controlled by their masters. Both the works reflect how this economic system has made these workers slave of capitalists, where they are exploited at the fullest and suffer tortures of their masters.

Both the novels exhibit the piteous condition of the working class. These people who come from economically weak places are always working in a fear that, if they lose their job, they may have to go back to their hometown where they see only darkness. People who are shown working in the novel are people who have struggled a lot to come out of their places of origin. And due to this fact, most of the people mistreat and exploit them. As we see in the *The White Tiger*, the protagonist Balram who in hope of a Bright future first leaves his studies then works in a tea shop even then he does not see any improvement. Finally after learning driving he is able to move out of Laxmangarh a place which he recalls as “Darkness”. He becomes a driver of Mr. Ashok, son of a wealthy landlord of Laxmangarh . In the novel one sees he being hired as a driver but does the entire house hold chores from driving to cleaning and even giving bath to their dog. Here one sees the exploitation of the poor in the hands of his masters. In the novel one sees the effect of Mr. Ashok and his wife Pinky’s night driving habits in the life of Balram, where Balram has to wait outside the malls and discos many hours waiting for them to come sometimes outside talking with other drivers and sometimes in a chilling weather many a times he feels disgraced, he cannot enters a mall as he belongs to the poor class. Balram never complains and always maintains silence , no matter how much he is provoked, whether by his peer group or his masters because for him this job was a way to “India of Light”.

*We were outside the mall. We—a dozen or so chauffeurs—were waiting for our masters to finish their shopping. We weren't allowed inside the mall, of course—no one had to tell us these things... On account of the fact that he too was from the Darkness—he had of course guessed my origin at once—the driver with the diseased lips gave me a course on how to survive Delhi and make sure I wasn't sent back to the Darkness on the top of a bus.*(Adiga, 123-24)

Whereas, *En la orilla* such trepidation is shown by the Joaquín, one of the employees affected by the closure of Esteban’s woodworking business. Before entering into the work of carpentry, he used to work as a sweeper. They used to

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/TRI310A.html>

clean tourist areas where tons of waste Joaquin and his companions used to collect. Joaquin's work situation was similar to that of many Spaniards today. In the company in which he worked, he saw his salary reduced and was relegated to a position because many tourists used to shit in the parks where many children play and in the early morning when people used to see human waste in the garden they complaint that the Joaquin and his friend were not doing their work properly. Faced with this situation, he decided to go to work at Esteban's carpentry because it was a more stable job where his job was not at stake. He again meets with the same fate where again he lost his job due to the bankruptcy of Esteban. In both the works we see the pitiable condition of these people whose life is always full of fear and uncertainties. On the one hand they do the menial work for the society but on the other hand, the same society doesn't pay credit to their hard work rather curse them as reflected in the chosen works.

Both the works reflect the, humiliation and the oppression of the characters. As in the case of *The White Tiger*, Balram faces humiliation many a times in the hand of their masters.

Douglas Kellner reflects the exploitative nature of rich in the following lines: Workers remain exploited by capitalists and capital persists as the hegemonic force -- more so than ever after the collapse of communism<sup>2</sup>.

This mean and avaricious behaviour of the rich is shown through the lost coin episode where Father of Ashok insults Balram for not having discovered a rupee coin he lost while getting out of the car. He pays millions in bribe to a politician but when it comes to a poor fellow, he humiliates and curses him for a rupee. Similarly, we see another incident where Wife of Ashok kills an innocent man in a road accident and he was blackmailed and forced to take the responsibility of that accident. These incidents also reflect the cruel side of the capitalism which see the underprivileged people as a commodity.

Similar exploitation of workers is seen in the novel *En la orilla* where in one of the episodes Muslim workers demand time to pray during their holy month but their bosses deny saying that their work schedule doesn't permit time for such things and when they people protest their bosses call them fanatics. Here one observes that, in today's world the workers are seen only as a mode of production for their masters. Religion, culture and values have no place in this exploitative global world. We see in both the novels that the author exposes the reality of today's work culture and also the dark side of the Master- servant relations, where underprivileged people as shown in both the novels often bear the brunt of this exploitative globalised world.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/theoryglob.htm>