Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*: Precursor Narrative of Upcoming Unicorns in India under Globalization

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Abstract
India in the turn of the millennium has encountered with liberalization, globalization and privatization subsequently resulting in paradigm shift encompassing all activities along with trade and commerce. This transnational and transcultural phenomenon has brought to India advanced technologies with economic opportunities to provide talented and hardworking minds to grow by new exposure and unbiased platforms which eventually proved boon to the victims of restricted stratified society. To the parallel of legacy of family business, ran the entrepreneurship aspirations by many newcomers in the field to claim the share in emerging economy which had witnessed drastic change with the arrival of greater ideas and dreams. Aravind Adiga’s Man Booker awardee novel *The White Tiger*, published in 2008 has encapsulated the nuances of globalized contemporary society and foreseen the trend of entrepreneurial surge of startups to change the scenario to great extent in near future. The protagonist of the narrative, Balram Halwai, a village boy from Bihar emerges as a successful entrepreneur in the cosmopolitan and global backdrop of Bengaluru; the silicon valley of India. The IT/BT revolution in India post-Y2K has strengthened its socioeconomic status in global forum. Recently India has displaced the UK and occupied third position next to the USA and China in terms of the number of unicorns created in 2021. This paper attempts to analyse the dynamics of globalization as a paradigm shift as portrayed in *The White Tiger*.

Key Words: Globalization, Unicorns, Class-Conflict, Entrepreneurship, Cosmopolitan City-Space

Introduction
Globalization as a phenomenon observed as trend and studied as discourse enables us with diverse definitions. One of the definitions says “…..a set of broad socio-economic changes that began to occur in some geographical locations in the early 1970s and gathered a triumphant pace following the end of the cold war.” (Connell and Marsh xiv)

In India liberalisation of 1991 paved the way for the grand entry of globalization subsequently influencing not just trade and commerce but all walks of Indian society. Accelerated economic growth and exposure to English are the two factors to cause mobility in all dimensions. The transitional phase at the threshold of new...
millennium provided ample opportunities to dream big and work for higher aspirations for the citizens of hitherto referred as ‘developing country’ irrespective of their class which eventually makes India as an emerging nation within a span of two decades. Recently India became third largest country next to USA and China in producing ‘Unicorns’. This dynamic occurrence inspired many literary narratives in many Indian languages including English. *The White Tiger* is a novel by Indian author Arvind Adiga. It was published in 2008 and won the 40th Man Booker Prize the same year. The novel portrays the conspicuous struggle of the protagonist of the novel Balram Halwai, a victim of stratified society in terms of class and caste and his struggle to emerge as a successful entrepreneur in a globalised Indian cosmopolitan city Bengaluru. A village boy from Bihar, chauffer to rich landlord in Delhi later flees to Bangalore after killing his master and looting his money. Bengaluru one of the fastest emerging globalised cities and one of the five cosmopolitan cities (others are Mumbai, Delhi, Pune and Hyderabad) of India not only secures shelter and means of survival to him even proves as launchpad for his career. His complete evolution as *The White Tiger* is established in his assertive declaration of himself as a man of “tomorrow”. Adiga here remarkably represented the milieu of globalization in Indian scenario.

**Legacy of Family Business**

Post Indian economy has been strengthened by legacy of family business and still today a major share of business is in the hands of limited families like TATAs, Birlas, Ambanis and Godrej etc. It is mainly in post LPG phase after IT&BT revolution in India, entrepreneurships and start-ups got wings to fly high in National and International economic space. “Statistics indicate that almost 85% of IndiaInc. companies are family business and contributes around 70% of national GDP annually.” (Dewan Neha)

**Unicorns**

In business, a ‘unicorn’ is a privately held start-up companies valued at over $1 billion and it is aptly named after mythical animal to indicate exceptional rarity by venture capitalist Aileen Lee. India displaced United Kingdom recently and occupied third position with 54 unicorns next to USA and China.

**Thematic Approach**

Narrative begins with the hypothetical letter from Balram to China’s premier Wen Jiabao who is expected to visit Bangalore in the coming week and the sender’s address of Balaram, says a lot.  

*From the desk of*  
‘The White Tiger’  
A Thinking Man  
And an entrepreneur  
Living in the world’s centre of technology and outsourcing  
Electronics City Phase 1 (just off Hosur Main Road),  
Bangalore, India. (Adiga 5)

Here it is observed that Balaram compares himself with the White Tiger since it is unique and rare as he himself outgrows the barriers of class and caste in this country. He prefers calling himself ‘A Thinking Man’ since he had refused to live in his minimal and wretched condition of a ‘Halwai’ by caste or serving as a driver to a snobbish family when he could have achieved a better living standards with his rationality. “I don’t just swear and curse. I’m a man of action and change” (Adiga 5) he refuses to accept his fate as a downtrodden and continue to live the suffocating life of drudgery and decided to act and take the best advantage of the situation. Further Bangalore
which happens to be a *karmabhoomi* for Balram has been mentioned by him as ‘world’s centre of technology and outsourcing’. Adiga is predicting futuristic growth of the city back in 2008 which in 2021 has reached culmination by securing the iconic position of India’s unicorn capital with the largest number of unicorns’ headquarters followed by Delhi (NCR) and Mumbai.

The protagonist elaborates the situation like this,

………sir, you Chinese are far ahead of us in every respect, except that you don’t have entrepreneurs. And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transformation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, does have entrepreneurs. Thousands and thousands of them. Especially in the field of technology. And these entrepreneurs –we entrepreneurs—have set up all these outsourcing companies that virtually run America now. (Adiga4)

Balram was considered as ‘Half-Baked Indian’ by his master Ashok due to his poor schooling and lack of knowledge. Hardly Ashok realizes the reasons behind driver’s plight but Balram says he and thousands like him remains half-baked as they were not allowed to complete their schooling. “The story of my upbringing is the story of how a half-baked fellow is produced” (Adiga 11).

This awareness enables him to act and change his fate once for all. Surprisingly he considers the same attributes of ‘half –baked’ the major instigator behind his aspirations when he says “Entrepreneurs are made from half-baked clay.”(Adiga11) and ridicules ‘fully formed fellows’ after systematic and complete schooling end up as taking orders from other men for the rest of their lives.

**Transformation through IT Revolution**

An absconded Balaram comes to Bangalore with looted money for shelter and survival after the killing of his master. That was the transitional phase for the city as well which was in the process of becoming IT/BT hub eventually as the Silicon Valley of India as a nation’s leading IT exporter of the country, a shift from its sober image of garden city and Pensioner’s Paradise and all. Here Balram goes under massive transformation from being rickshaw puller’s blackish thin and small build son MUNNA to ‘Fat’ and ‘potbellied’ man living the lavish life of cosmopolitan Bangalore’s rich food, beer and nightclubs. The transformation was not mere physical as he acknowledges the powerful impact of technology which equipped him with self E-learning advantages. Possession of silver Macintosh laptop the one he brought online from a store in a Singapore which really works like a dream provided him with greater level of pride and confidence to a boy who didnot even have a proper name while getting admitted to school at Laxmangarh the village of Bihar. The place where he is born and raised is a place of ‘Darkness’ for him. Despite of therich and fertile land Bihar remained one of the backward states of India and he says those who live in this place call it the place of Darkness. His journey from Bihar to Bangalore is like moving from the pit of darkness towards land of bright opportunities. Segregated citizens of same country……

“Please understand Your Excellency that India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness.” (Adiga 14)

His life got transformed from the life of servitude to freedom and from being ignorant to becoming an expert. His poor upbringing, pathetic childhood and inadequate schooling which he sarcastically calls as ‘paradise within a paradise’ all had concealed his innate intelligence only to be discovered later at Bangalore under favourable circumstances and that favourable circumstance is undoubtedly ‘globalization’. For him it is not just what he had achieved at this stage, given a chance many can prove themselves as skills are strongly inherent in many Indians like him. According to him Indians just take to technology like ducks to water for instance he hardly took an hour to learn scanning. Balram further records his schooling experience in government school bereft of all facilities due
to corruption by school teacher, to make it worse his corrupt practices were not only tolerated by the villagers even justified by believing that one cannot be expected to smell sweet in a dung heap. The system which places government school teachers in a victimized position, the condition of the students is inexplicable but the school inspector is astonished by Balaram’s performance as an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow devoid of any educational facilities and declares him, in the jungle full of idiots and thugs as ‘The White Tiger’ –the rarest of animals- the creature that comes along only once in a generation. School Inspector’s promise of scholarship and ‘real education’ doesn’t get materialized as an infallible fate of a boy caught in the big loan taken by family compelling the boy to work for the Stork discontinuing studies. In short, becoming ‘The White Tiger’ by gaining education and knowledge is disrupted by social realities only to turn in reality after his arrival at Bangalore. ‘Munna by birth, ‘Balaram the name given by school teacher and ‘The White Tiger’ the most appropriate identity to match his aptitude and endeavour is a bestowal of the Bangalore’s blooming IT environment. This environment in its true sense is ‘what was beautiful in the world’ in which he was not destined to stay a slave. It is explicit in the next letter’s sender’s address to the Chinese Premier

From the Desk of:
His Midnight Educator
On matters entrepreneurial:
‘The White Tiger’ (Adiga 45)
He even mentions the URL of his start-up! www.whitetiger-technologydrivers.com (Adiga 46)
He further comments on many expeditious entrepreneurs of Bangalore although he was annoyed with ‘whole fucking Bangalore attitude’ listening them boasting of “my start-up has got this contract with American Express, my start-up runs the software in this hospital in London, blah blah.” (Adiga 46) This clearly shows the upward trend of call centres and outsourcing jobs and flourishing start-up projects in abundance for future. Back in Bihar he had to struggle to get odd jobs to meet minimum expenses of livelihood, he could not even afford learning driving. (Ironically he becomes the owner of travel agency with considerable number of vehicles and employees later) On the contrary in Bangalore later he faces dearth of employees for his business which is well implied in the advertisement given by him,

Bangalore-based Business Man Seeks
Smart Men for his Business
Apply at Once!
Attractive Remuneration Packages on Offer
Lessons in Life and Entrepreneurship Included for Free! (Adiga54)

It was the talk of the town of those days “Go to any pub or bar in Bangalore with your ears open and it’s the same thing you hear: can’t get enough call centre workers, can’t get enough software engineers, and can’t get enough sales managers. There are twenty, twenty-five pages of job advertisements in the newspaper every week” (Adiga54)

But the situation was entirely opposite in the ‘Darkness’- the place he came from. Balram once gets very much impressed by the following lines of the Muslim poet “You were looking for the key for years/ But the door was always open!” Start-up projects driven by well-timed ideas executed with innovative strategies are the ‘open doors’ for many including the people from place of ‘Darkness’. After coming to Bangalore he notices the gap between demand and supply ratio and decides immediately to utilize it for his prospect.

“Everything in the city, it seemed, came down to one thing ‘Outsourcing’, which meant doing things in India for Americans over the phone……” (Adiga 298).
His plan was ready in two and half minutes and reached the stage where he receives the offer of four thousands of dollars for his start-up from American and at present he is in a commanding position of demanding more. As a man “who sees ‘tomorrow’ when others see ‘today’ (Adiga 319) he is going to continue with new ventures as hinted in the narrative. Ultimately the metamorphosis from servant to master gets complete by literally obtaining his ex-master’s identity. His signoff regards,

Yours for ever,
Ashok Sharma
The White Tiger
Of Bangalore
boss@whitetiger-technologydrivers.com
(Adiga 521)

Conclusion
On the turn of the new millennium India under globalization had been shredding the image of underdeveloped nation to rapid developing economic force indeed coincides with the evolution of the protagonist of the narrative, The White Tiger by Adiga. The paper attempts to juxtapose India’s contemporary socioeconomic status in its ‘dark’ and ‘bright’ spaces based on the Aravind Adig’s narrative The White Tiger. The protagonist of the narrative successfully subverts the social structure by being in an advantageous position of globalization. ‘The white Tiger’ and ‘Unicorn’ serve as appropriate metaphors (unique and rare the latter more exceptional as it is mythical) for superficial as well as deep implications.

The narrative foresees an exceptional growth of start-ups and entrepreneurships in India very similar to the statement in a cautious tone by Barak Obama on ‘Bangalore and Beijing’ regarding IT bloom in these places as threat to Americans. One such speculation was by Tony Blair way back in September 2005 at Labour Party conference,

“I hear people say we have to stop and debate globalization. You might as well debate whether autumn should follow summer. They’re not debating it in China and India” (Connell and Marsh xv).

India anticipating ‘Decacorns’ ($10 billion valuation)….

Reference