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Child Labour in Selected Novels of Aravind Adiga

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Abstract:

The paper attempts to read through the representation of gender in Usha Priyamvada's Pachpan Khambe Laal Deewari, translated in English as Fifty-five pillars, Red Walls. It presents the layered character of Sushma, a middle-class working woman trapped within the rigid structures of patriarchy and social expectation. Sushma emerges as a figure who performs roles of a daughter, provider, teacher, and caretaker—while suppressing her own emotional and personal desires. The novel critically examines how women "side ntities are, constructed "through sacrifice and duty in a patriarchal society. How shies put on a pedestal and worshiped but never really seen and heard in the true sense. Another question that arises, is of performance. Is Sushma essentially feminine or she performs masculinity? Sushma's life is plagued by emotional restraint and social performance. Her individuality is continuously subordinated to familiars' responsibilities, reveal in how patriarchy often exploits women's labor under the guise of duty and respectability. Judith Butler's idea of gender as performance becomes relevant here, as Sushma performs the role of the "ideal woman" according to societal norms, despite her inner dissatisfaction and loneliness. The relationship between Sushma and Neel highlights the tension between desire and social conformity. Although she experiences emotional intimacy and the possibility of personal happiness, she ultimately withdraws because society does not permit a woman of her age and status to prioritize her own desires. Her sacrifices not portrayed dichroic but tragic, exposing the emotional violence embedded within patriarchal structures. Sushma's limited agency reflects the condition of many middle-class Indian women who internalize social expectations and regulate their own behavior. The symbolic setting of the "fifty-five pillars" and "red walls" represents confinement, surveillance, and emotional imprisonment. Thus, the novel becomes a powerful critique of gendered oppression, illustrating how patriarchy schools' women into silence, endurance, and self-denial while denying them emotional freedom and autonomy.

Keywords: Gender, Identity, Performance, Patriarchy, Masculinity, Feminism, oppression, Internalization.

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INTRODUCTION:

Adiga is an Indian born Australian writer and journalist. Adiga returned to India, joined Times and got himself used to the trends in Indian society. He has got a natural instant to become a writer. The things not necessary for the profession have turned out to be a novel. Thus he has got immediate success with his debut novel. *The White Tiger* winning for him the glory of some prestigious awards. A collection of short stories entitled *Between the Assassinations* was published in 2008 and *Last Man in Tower* (2011), Selection Day in 2016 and *Amnesty* has got published in 2020, a novel about an illegal Sri Lankan immigrant living in Australia. It was also short listed for the 2021 Miles Franklin Award. He writes articles on politics, business and arts that are published in international papers and magazines like *Time*, *The Financial Times*, and *The Sunday Times*.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES-

To discuss and analyze the various reasons of child labour in the selected novels of Aravind Adiga. Also discuss the influence of parents in putting them in child labour.

LITERATURE REVIEW-

Adiga is not only the one to deal with child labour or poverty for the first time. The writers like Charles Dickens, William Blake and many others have worked on it in detail in British literature. In Indian literature also one finds R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao the first generation writers dealing with poverty and child labour.

METHODOLOGY AND DISCUSSIONS-

India, the sub-continent, has undergone and has been undergoing many changes, since independence till date. These include social, political, economic, and cultural and other such changes. The post-modern India, apart from being developing country, has many people who are not aware of it. A few people from these categories revolt against the existing conditions. While others face the situations in silence finding no options. Adiga's novels clearly portray these things in a realistic manner. Poverty is one of the main issues, attracting the attention of not only sociologists and economists but writers as well. It indicates a condition in which a person fails to maintain a living standard adequate for a normal life style. There appears to be a stubborn bond between art artists and poverty. Rainer Rilke said that one

cannot be a good poet (writer) until one loves poverty, indifferences and wretchedness. As if to prove him right, Dostoevsky, Kafka and others of the tribe lived their miserable life in ignorance and penury while producing master pieces.

India's poverty appears to be a major theme in the contemporary Indian English fiction too. Although Indian economy has grown steadily over the last two decades, its growth has been uneven when compared to different social groups, economic groups, geographic regions, and rural and urban area. In fact, exposing the little known dark under belly of modern India seems to be the most popular genre currently in print. One common thread one finds in this kind of writing is humanist approach to address poverty.

Aravind Adiga, the writer has used to postmodern techniques like minimalism and maximalism in the novels he wrote. Minimalism means using simplest and fewest elements to create maximum effect. These elements are often put to use. Maximalism is a quality of excessive redundancy often exhibited by the way of the accumulation of trappings that reflect the society. This is seen in the two later works for the writer too. *The Last Man in Tower*, *Between The Assassinations* and *Selection*

Day. Dowry, caste, slavery, poverty, corruption and politics at national level that are mentioned as backdrop to the action of novel, highlight the deep-seated implications of these issues. Present paper deals with three works of the writer which speak of child labour. They are *The White Tiger*, *Between The Assassinations* and *Selection Day*.

In Aravind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger*¹ the narrator and protagonist Balram Halwai is an intelligent man born into poverty. Aravind Adiga has concentrated on Balram Halwai and the poverty all around him in *The White Tiger*. He tries hard to make sure that anything in the novel has a correlation in Indian reality. Adiga presents a pathetic picture of poverty. Some people cannot follow their religion because they are poor and they want job in a house where a child cannot call himself captain of Indian cricket team, Azharuddin because the captain is a Muslim. Through the character and the story of the driver 'Ram Prasad', Adiga shocks the readers to the core that a Namazi Muslim is forced to become Ram Prasad just to earn his lively hood. (Dhawan R.K. p.57)².

Marriage is a social as well as cultural custom. It is a blending of happiness and sadness in *The White Tiger*. Marriage is a divine bonding between two unknown

persons, a boy and a girl which make them stay together as husband and wife for a life time. They take initiation in creating a new generation. Dowry is an offering by the bride's father to groom at the time out of happiness. In the recent days the happy occasion of marriage has turned out to be a sad one due to the commands and demands for dowry by the groom's family. This sometimes leaves the girl's family in helpless situation. The recent issues like domestic violence and violence against women are due to dowry. This has become one of the social evils of recent days. Balram's cousin's marriage has made him a drop out of school. The marriage has a linkup with dowry system in Indian culture. This has led to the financial crises for the family for generations. Balram and family members are called for the service under the landlord, when they have failed to repay the loan at the high interest rate. Balram was forced to break the coal in a tea shop. In this way Balram becomes a school dropout and a child labourer. But he hates the job of breaking coal. Even then he educates himself by roaming round the tables.

Balram's father does wish to become successful remains an allusive dream till such time that he becomes a deviant. "My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is one son of mine at least one

should live like a man" (p.30). Balram after seeing his friend Vijay from a lowly family becoming a conductor through a queer relationship with a politician he too wishes to be live him come what may. Probably for Balram it could be a confusing situation to know what a man should be. The shattered dreams turn him into an uncouth individual at all stages of life. Balram becomes an icon for dubious success. The notion and the reality get confronted and, in this process, Balram adapts a new ethic which ultimately makes him a successful business entrepreneur devoid of morals and ethics.

*Between The Assassinations*³ is the second book, a collection of short stories of Adiga, The Booker Prize winner. As the title refers the book speaks of the period between the murders of Rajiv Gandhi and Indira Gandhi who served as Prime Ministers. Some stories in the work speak of child labour which is forced on to them. First comes the story of Ziauddin. He was the Muslim boy, in search of work comes to Kittur as a daily wage child labourer resented by all and tolerated by Ramana Setty, a tea shop owner in the assurance that he would abstain from 'Hanky-Panky' and remain dedicated to work. There he makes friends and stays happily till the end of the season and sticks the instruction of his father to get back to the

village when rains come, so that he can help him on the farm. Ziauddin takes pride in his religion and establishes an identity for himself. Through he has other siblings, the father sends him to city without money, and give instructions to roam about in the market until somebody would take him to work. Raman Setty says to Thimma, “This fellow was left entirely on his own will” (3). As the days went by he was accused of stealing samosas from the hotel and was sent out. After that he works in many places and finally settles as a railway porter. He was identified by a stranger who comes to Kittur on a private mission, also happens to be a Muslim. That and the liberal tips the stranger offers, tempts Ziauddin to stay with the stranger.

On day three of the collection of incidents one encounters Keshava, the son of a barber from Gurupura who has come to Kittur along with brother Vittal. They came to the town in search of their Kinsman, Janardhan. As soon as they arrived they were cheated by autowallah. Kesava and Vittal are the orphans. Their uncle had taken care of them until he lived. After that they were now sent to city in search of relative. They are unwanted vulnerable and loners in the town Kittur. Janardhan a distant relative, an insignificant petty merchant, the only person

whom they know by name is the only contact for them. Reluctant to have them as his wards his makes a make shift arrangement at for them for a ‘stay in home’ run by thugs. The type live they are exposed to is a reflection on the society they are living. They are not only the sufferers, like them. There are many who compromise with life, in whose company they spend time. Once in a way, a ray of hope flickers and keeps them going. Adiga shows how anti-social elements thrive on monopolizing illegally occupied areas or slums, which belong to the government.

Vittal and Keshava part their ways, working in different places. Keshava becomes a conductor decides to live with dignity. There too fate plays havoc with him without work when he meets with an accident. Back on the pavement rear the garbage dump he ruminates about his life. Thugs, cheat politicians, prostitutes all have a role to play in the lives of these drifters to urban slums. The word ‘Hoyka’ keeps recurring in the story, the only fact that the boys know and associates themselves with. Politicians and caste are closely associated and collectively they are thriving is what Adiga suggests. Opportunity that comes doesn’t last longer when the victims contemplate on dignity.

The story of Soumya and Raju, the minor children of a construction labourer, is even pathetic. They are the victims of parental demands. Since the father happens to be a drug addict, they are forced into begging and procuring the drug called 'smack' for their father. Even at this juncture she sticks to the advice for her father not to beg on the roads but only at landmarks. The dreams and disappointments of the children very well captured by Adiga in this fragmented story of the two children. The perseverance of the children to accomplish the task given to them by their father is a reflection on poverty which can take ugly turns. The innocence of the two children is manipulated to such an extent that they learn only to dream and not live as they should looking forward to being citizens in modern India.

In *Selection Day*⁴ of Adiga one finds Mohan Kumar as a child labourer during his school days. Mohan Kumar takes birth in a poorest of poor family of Ratnagirihalli in remote area of Western Ghats. He led a very sad childhood in that remote area. He had worked as a child labour in a coffee estate. There he used to water the plants and then from there he would go to attend the classes. This would earn some money for the family. That way he completed some basic education and tried for many jobs. After some time

having attained the age of marriage, he got married with a view of improving the situation through the dowry he got.

After that Mohan Kumar got married in Kukki Subrahmanya temple of western gods. This was a custom for generations. After having children, he shifted to Mumbai slum area with a hope to rise up in life. There he worked in a flour mill which ground wheat in the morning and chillis in the evening. He tried photo copying the books and selling them in the market. That is black marketing of original books. On one such occasion he was caught to police. After coming home spending one night in jail, he saw his wife cheating on him. They both had a quarrel after which she was beaten up. With that incident the women folk came the next morning threatening him. He had nowhere to go but went out to roam here and there. Next morning, he came home only to see that she ran away with all his money and honour. With that incident he decided not to believe any woman. To control his anger and protest his bad luck with women, he had a thin Mustache. Since then he was trying hard to bring up his sons as cricketers. This was in a hope to have a better life.

CONCLUSION-

India is an independent fast developing country now. But one cannot forget that it is also a colonized country in the past. Some traces of that are still prevalent in the independent India as well. Some critics and political people are aware of the pros and cons of the situation. There are many writers who are in postcolonial and postmodern Indian English literature. They have written about the problems to be looked upon in India to be a developed country. Aravind Adiga is one of the postmodern writers who have come up with skillful observation of the society. His novels have similarities in names of cities which show the injustice going on in those areas. In the three novels mentioned above there are three different ways of dealing with poverty.

In *The White Tiger*, Balram poverty, illiteracy, corruption, injustice diseases all around. He chooses wrong way to become rich. He kills his master Ashok and gets money for his business. He says that as a freedom from Rooster Coop. He compares sorrows and sufferings as rooster coop. Balram starts a drivers association and lends them cars for rent. This way he becomes a rich man in Bangalore. In the second work *Between The Assassinations* the children are into child labour. They do that not intentionally but out of poverty. In case of

Raju and Soumya the situation is still worse. They even beg to feed their father. In Selection Day one finds Mohan Kumar, as a child goes to work in an estate until the time for school. Later, when he attains the age he gets married in the view of getting dowry for doing something. Later he does chutney selling as the father of Radha and Manju.

He puts his sons into cricket to earn money through them. Both the boys have different goals other than cricket. Radha is not qualified on the Selection Day while Manju does. This way he continues for some years. Later he forms an Institute for cricket coaching in India for Indian youth. Radha also gets engaged in that. These way children suffer due to family issues and discontinue or forget their education or goals. This gives rise to shattered family life. Adiga is very subtle in raising several sensitive issues ranging from the plight of farmers, child labour, disowning children, encouraging them to live on their own, relationships and bonding, terrorist scheming, identity crises to exploitation. These issues make the readers aware as well as react against the problems.

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