

Social Realism a comparison: In Shanthi Barathwaj Rakesh's *Dare to be free* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract: This article attempts to bring out the social realism and the dynamic solutions for a prolonged social problem revolving in feudal and modern India. The selected works are Shanthi Barathwaj Rakesh's *Dare to be free* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. The intention of comparing these two novels is to bring out the difference between the social realism of Rajasthani writer Shanthi Barathwaj Rakesh and an Indian diasporic English writer, Aravind Adiga. The protagonists of both the novels suffer in darkness like the feudal system, social hierarchies, financial hinges, etc. The moment they decided to move from the feudal village, their life starts changing completely. They felt the measurable freedom from the darkness of India only in the cities. The results of comparing both these novels bring out the Practical solution for our modern social problems.

Keywords: Dark Village, Social Realism, Feudal India, Caste, Corruption, Politics, Bureaucracy, City, Entrepreneurship.

Introduction

The novel *Dare To Be Free* by Shanthi Barathwaj Rakesh and *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga are compared here to explore how they project the darkness of feudal India. *Dare to be free* is an indigenous work in Rajasthani language by Shanti Bharadwaj Rakesh as *Uj Ja Re Sua* (1998), a Sahitya Akademi award-winning novel. It depicts the feudal India of the 1950s. It is the story of Chameli, a female protagonist born in the concubine society of Rajasthani village. The English translation was by Neeta Banerjee, and later the novel was translated in Tamil as Vittu Vidutalaigi. The Novel *The White Tiger* (2008) is by Aravind Adiga. He is an Indian English writer. *The White Tiger* is set in modern India, still under feudal clutches. It tells the story of the protagonist Balram Halwai, who is described as a dark side hero of this novel.

The researcher has chosen these two novels for his study, as he finds many thematic similarities between them. However, they are set some fifty years apart, a very crucial period in the history of modern India after Independence. The researcher attempts to study these two novels, *Dare to be Free* and *The White Tiger*, based on the concept of social realism found in these two novels.

Social realism and Fiction

Social Realism has a long way to go; with the help of great minds, changes and reforms could be achieved in the global society. The contributions of Bernard Shaw, Henrik Ibsen, and others stand to prove this concept. Their works were filmed and included social realism plays.

Social realism is different from socialist realism; it is a soviet art form that was institutionalised by Joseph Stalin in 1934 later adopted by communist parties. "Social Realism" draws attention towards the life of the working class, the poor and the oppressed, where as "Socialist Realism" glorifies communist values. It realistically supports the emancipation of proletarians. It is a predominant art in the Soviet Union, which developed in the 1920s later felt in the works of 1960's writers like 'Joseph Stalin', Nikolai Bukharin, Marxism Gorky, Andres Zhdanov nodded for the adaption of social realism to the Marxist approach.

In India, writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Sarat Chandra, Prem Chand were prosecuting this term and the Victorian writers who were closely revolving in realism. Still, in India, though, it is slightly different. 'Leo Tolsto' also a follower of Social realism theory, says the real world presented for the sake of art' is also not up to the purpose.

Reality, for the sake of art, is like a fantasy only.

Literature is a mirror of life, reflecting the reality of life in the name of realism.

The author's emotions and thoughts are brought out through the term realism, the dark side of society, and its real face through literature. A good creative writer can create a character to depict the reality of life like Charles Dickens's – David Copper Field and Oliver Twist. A writer can't take a model character from his contemporary life, and he can't take an incident directly. She/he can observe the nature of the incident or character, which can be reflected or symbolised in his/her work, e.g. Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

Social Realism in the Novel *Dare to Be Free* and *The White Tiger*

The novels taken for the study - *Dare to Be Free* and *The White Tiger* travel in a parallel line to depict the life of the oppressed people in the society.

Though there is more than a half-century set difference between these two novels, it proves the status of the poor people remains the same in the country. Such things were picturised and criticised by the authors of both novels.

Both the novels have Protagonists who struggle with casteism and oppression. In the novel *Dare To Free*, Chameli a female protagonist was born in a concubine society of Rajasthani village, which is ruled by wealthy Rajputs called Thakurs. They were dominating over the Lower Caste People.

Chapter one directly starts by saying What's in a name... that too of an obscure village!" (*Dare To Be Free*, p-5) shows Chameli is ready to tell her tragic story and village history. Chameli's village *Badi Badam* is officially called *Badam Khurd*. Chameli narrates the ruling feudal system of the village.

Feudalism is the caste system where lower-class people never dared to cross the threshold of Thakurs Palace without paying obeisance. The lower caste person takes their slippers or shoes from a respectable distance and wraps them up in their *Odhines* (A shawl-like wrap for the upper part of the body).

The novel *Dare To Be Free* picturised an incident, A bridegroom's legs were severed for not paying obeisance by quoting freedom in Independent India. Though it was a transition period, Thakurs dominated the village by the name of customs and traditions. Chameli, the daughter of a concubine, lives with her mother in Daata Hukums house.

She is an illegitimate child for her father, Daata Hukum, yet she lives in Daata Hukums house and enjoys a royal life. The death of Daata Hukum brings decline to livelihood for Chameli and her mother. Though Chameli belongs to the Concubine Society, she doesn't want to live like a Concubine. She wants to be a Revolutionist in her life by breaking the Concubine system. Shanthi Barathwaj Rakesh reveals the real status of the Feudal Society and the people of the period of the 1950s.

The Rajasthani people celebrate the festival of Holi, and unity in the celebration is picturised in Chapter three. The festival of Holi is celebrated by different people of different castes in Indian. Festivals are the only occasions where people are united together. Though each religion said different reasons for the celebration, they are united in their happiness of the festivals. Though there are communal discriminations in society, it goes smoothly.

The White Tiger novel consists of seven consecutive letters to The Premier, a Chinese official who comes to India and soon planning to visit Bangalore entrepreneurs.

Balram Halwai, the protagonist, lives with his family in Laxmangarh, a village of Bihar. He writes letters to the Premier about the life of the villagers and the feudal lords who oppress and rule the village. Such a system exists in modern India even after half a century of Independence. The village is shown as being in the grip of the rapacious feudal economy, which has made it into a living hell for those at the bottom of society. The novel portrays the village and the four landlords who dominate the village.

There are some Feudal Lords in his village. A stout one with a bald, brown, dimple head, with a serene expression on his face, and a shotgun on his lap, he was the Buffalo; the Buffalo was one of the landlords in Laxmangarh. There were three others, and each one had the names of animals from the peculiarities of appetite detected in them. Balram introduced them using the pervasive animal imagery of predator and prey.

The stork was a fat man with a fat moustache, thick and curved and pointy at the tips. He owned the river that flowed outside the village, and he took a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman in the river and a toll from every boatman who crossed the river to come to our village. His brother was called a 'wild Boar'. This fellow owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangarh. If you wanted to work on those lands, you had to bow down to his feet, and touch the dust under his slippers, and agree to swallow his daily wages. When he passed by any woman, his car would stop; the windows would roll down to reveal his grin; two of his teeth, on either side of his nose, were big and curved, like little tusks. The Raven owned the worst land, which was the dry, rocky hillside around the fort; he used to take a cut from goatherds who went up to graze with their flocks if they didn't have their money; he liked to dip his beak into their backside, so they called him to Raven. 'The Buffalo was the greediest, he had eaten up the rickshaw and the roads, so if you ran a rickshaw or used to the road, you had to pay him his feed one-third of whatever you earned. (*The White Tiger*, p-25) Adiga's *The White Tiger* picturises the politics and government in modern India. He portrays the corruption of Politicians and the officers, starting from Balram Halwai's schoolmaster's corruption to politicians' bribes for coal mine allocation for the stork's family.

Balram recounts an incident in his village with a government agent, who marked him eighteen years old when he was under eighteen, even though Balram didn't know his exact birthday. His vote could be counted, and his vote needed to count since the tea shop owner had already sold his employees votes to the party of the great socialist.

The darkness was seized by the election fever, which Balram describes as a disease that "makes people talk and talk about things they have no say i" (*The White Tiger* p-82). Balram describes the Great Socialist politician in the novel, and People disagree about the loyalty of politicians whether the politician began with good intentions and then became corrupt, or if he was "dirty from the start" (*The White Tiger*, p- 81). Regardless, it had become impossible to vote him out of power, even though he holds 93 pending criminal cases against him and his ministers. The charges range from murder to rape and gun-running. Despite the corruption, several convictions had already been handed down. Balram's witnessed various political and corruption activities, from the sale

vote, bribe to own a coal mine, parties turning blind to corruption, and dominant landlords turning to be politicians to escape judicial eyes. (*The White Tiger*, p-89).

Similarly, in *Dare To Be Free*, chapter five shows the division of people from both villages by the two political parties: the Janata Party and the Congress party. Both the parties were campaigning for votes differently, but the people did not know what was happening. Some were deceived by a promise to bring water to the village, and some were asked to take note and give vote'. Later, people realised all were phony promises, and nothing would improve. People were verbally abused for not casting a vote on a dominant local leader Thakur.

The Indian Vote may be analysed based on the following Characteristics: -

- a. The Secular Vote.
- b. The Communal Vote.
- c. The Caste Vote.
- d. The Regional Vote.
- e. The Rural/Urban/Town Vote.
- f. The Communist Vote.
- g. The Minority Vote.
- h. The Tribal Vote.
- i. The Vote of women and men.
- j. The Vote for Privacy.

Casteism and Humanity- A View

Class and caste are deeply bound in *The White Tiger* with social and political corruption. Gandhi waged a life-long war against untouchability, claiming nothing in the shastra justifying it. But class seems to have taken a greater hold on contemporary Indian society, even though the country has achieved increased literacy, education, wealth, and social mobilisation. The most marginalised sections of Indian society, mainly the Dalit, tribal, minority communities, and lower-class people, also known as Untouchables. In *Dare To Be Free*, Shanthi Barathwaj Rakesh picturises the clash between the upper class and lower class. Chapter seven breaks the unfortunate rage between the village people, like Draught and Hail Storm, to farmers and war between Gujars and Meenas, who seems to be an opponent in the village. Gujars used to leave their cattle to mow off the field of Meenas.

Apart from humans, nature also took a toll on poor farmers with less rain, drought, flood, hailstorm, etc., such crises were always ready to spoil poor farmers. The ultimate threats are communal clashes between the upper and lower class when the cattle of the upper class were deliberately sent to destroy the lower-class people's crop field, leading to a violent clash. Animals joined for a multi-dimensional attack on farmers birds, and wild boars would take over the field.

Gujars climbed on the roofs of some Meena houses.

They challenged the Meenas and started shouting, "Kill these Meenas. Wipe them out" Now it was the wails of the Meenas womenfolk, which echoed through the village. (*Dare to be free*, p-41).

A report to the police or the Panchayat goes unheeded, Justice rarely favoured the poor, and Justice seemed unaffordable for the poor to spend the time and money to run around the court and police station. The accusation will become foolishness, and no compensation will be paid to the low-caste people. They have to accept it with a heavy heart.

Casteism in chapter eight brings the conflict of the protagonist. The love affair of Chameli and Gopal spread to the village. Though Chameli is a concubine's daughter, she falls in love with Gopal, an upper-class young man despite Gopal's parents' advice and pleadings not to marry Chameli, Gopal and Chameli decide to elope from the dark village.

When India is going through great changes and is likely to inherit the world from the west, it is important that writers like Shanthi Bharadwaj' Rakesh' highlight the brutal injustices of society. Injustice and inequality have always been around low-class and caste people. What Shanti Bharadwaj Rakesh" highlights are the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor and the economic system that lets a small minority prosper at the expense of the majority.

Caste is overshadowed in the novel by the spectre of economic class and Poverty, particularly those at the very bottom of society. In *The White Tiger*, the Protagonist Balram sees caste as meaningless being a member of the Halwai caste or sweet makers, and he knows nobody in his family made sweets. His father was a rickshaw driver.

Indian society is highly obsessed with the caste system in their life, and it plays a role in Marriage, Temple, Employment, Promotion, services and others. Casteism in *The White Tiger* played a major role in employment to Balram Halwai of the sweet maker caste and the co-driver who worked in stork's house.

Balram was employed as a chauffeur under the landlord called the Stork in Laxmangarh village. Balram was informed about his master's trip to Delhi. Balram was waiting for such an opportunity to escape from the Dark village, but a senior driver in the landlords' house would be the one to travel to Delhi and get the impressive five thousand salary. One night, Balram discovered the

secret of the senior driver's religious identity that he was secretly observing the holy month of Ramadan, and he hid his religious identity for his employment. That incident made Balram jump to a higher position as a senior driver.

Bureaucracy: As Adiga and S.B.Rakesh Shows in the Novel

The novels *Dare To Be Free*, and *The White Tiger* reveal how politics and Bureaucracy harass people's faith in democracy. They discuss how politics and politicians deceive people and rules. In, *Dare To Be Free*, chapter nine shows how those government officials cheat illiterate people.

The official camp of Bureaucrats like Collector, B.D.O etc., was announced in the village to solve and finalise various issues faced by the village people, including providing potable water for humans and animals. But the camp was postponed without proper clarifications and started very late on the next proposed day.

In the first case, a deserted octogenarian woman was denied an old-age pension because she has a son and grandson to take care of (*Dare To Be Free* -58); later, she was advised to approach the court for her rights by the Bureaucrats.

The second case, selecting a smaller number of unemployed youths for grant and the eligibility was less than five 'Bighas' (a measure of land). A Brahmin with just five 'Bighas' of barren land was left out, but the farmer with four and a half 'Bighas' of "Fertile land" got the grant.

The bureaucrats behaved like the government ruler. When a lame child complained that a doctor demanded a 200 hundred rupees bribe for a handicap certificate, the officer gave a knowing smile to convey that this was nothing new and he is also a part of the bribery for the works done. People felt betrayed by the freedom of India and the so-called democratic country.

Adiga's *The White Tiger* picturises the political corruption from the betrayal of Balram's school teacher to the coal mining scam of the Storks family. 'Mr. Krishna' the school teacher, named him Balram; he is the first corrupt man Balram sees.

A surprise inspection in Balram's Schools days was his first experience with corruption, and the Inspector questioned the teacher for swindling schools fund and groceries. However, the teacher bowed and pleaded for forgiveness. The teacher had a legitimate excuse to steal the money, he said- he hadn't been paid his salary for six months. And he plans to take Gandhian Protest to retrieve his missing wages. the villagers thought they would also do the same in this position, and some were even proud of him for being corrupt. (*The White Tiger*,p- 34-35)

Another corruption took place in the Hospital. Balram's father, dying of T.B., waiting at a hospital to which no doctor will visit, is 'permanently cured' of his T.B. at 6. pm that night 'as the government ledger no doubt accurately reported'-by dying. (*The White Tiger*, p-50) The doctors, by bribing the supervisor, were marked as present and released to earn money in private practice

The White Tiger ultimately brings the corrupted minister who is getting a bribe for allotting coal mines to the stork family. In another instance, a sale of workers vote by the master and a brave mad man was stamped to death by a local politician for demanding his voting rights. In both the novels, the issues of class, Poverty, and abandonment by corrupt officials are inextricable from the nation's failure.

Freedom and Empowerment in City Life

Gopal from *Dare to be Free* and Mr Ashok from *The White Tiger* are the Redeemers for both the protagonists. Chameli, the protagonist of *Dare to be free*, is a concubine's daughter. Though she loves the aristocratic man Gopal, she is forced to marry another lower-class person later, and she comes to know that he is impotent. Gopal and Chameli later decide to elope from the village.

Chapter fourteen rang the freedom bell to Chameli. Though we still revolve in the feudal system of our country, the only way to overcome such a filthy system is to get out of such villages and towns. In *Dare To Be Free*, the city of Kota is a place where Chameli feels freedom and happiness, and she easily hid the name 'Baandi' (concubine/slave girl).

'Bua' and her son and daughter- in law gave support for her life in Kota. She felt compassion and harmonies in Bua Ramkanwari's house. She saw beckon for her life.

"I am not sure about others, but I can say something for the Paswans that is the only way to make your life to leave the village and its age-old rules" (*Dare To Be Free*-95)

As a woman, Chameli has succeeded in her life; first, she has empowered herself as a household helper; later, with the help of 'Bua', she learned to Stitch and started to work as a tailor. Later, she bought a flour mill for five thousand rupees; with the help of a hard worker, 'Sarvan'. She started earning some good profit. Chameli helped Sarvan learn driving which will be helpful for his future, and she bought three-wheeler tempos.

She is busy with three businesses now; The Tempo Agent, The Flour Mill owner and A Tailor. On getting more orders on tailoring, she decided to give up her other two businesses and rest to her mother, who worked for her lifelong. She has accounts in two banks and is a shareholder in one of the banks.

Later chameli said this story after twenty-five years to her son Radhey Mohan, and he is identified as upper caste in the city. Chameli compared her son with erstwhile upper-class people of the feudal village; her son goes to college by bike while others are cycling.

Balram Halwai, in *The White Tiger*, enjoyed the company of Mr Ashok. He is the only person in stork's family to treat him as a peer human being. Mr Ashok was the redeemer to Balram to bring him out from the Dark village to Delhi.

While in Gurgaoan and Delhi, Balram has narrowly and personally experienced and seen two different India. One is the powerful rich and the other world of the oppressed. Adiga has used a powerful trope of “rooster coop of caged chickens and cockroaches, ever ready to be killed, the roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they are the next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop” (*The White Tiger*, pp 173-74). But Balram doesn't want to be a rooster 'in a coop'; he doesn't want to wait to be eaten 'rather is desperate to be the member of the eaters'.

Balram's freedom from the feudal society was a very horrifying part. Before he got the evil mind, he underwent several mental traumas about his family members, financial state, etc. The thrust to escape the dark feudal society made him end up with the cold blood murder of Mr Ashok, and he escaped with the cash bag of Mr Ashok to the city of Bangalore with his nephew. Balram thinks his life is more important than his family. Ignoring his father's thought, to be an honest and truthful man didn't brew him any wealth, rather than being in the rooster coop. Balram broke all his virtues and killed his master to get freedom from the darkness.

Balram thought hard work and the stolen money made magic in his life. 'Corruption' played a major role in his success when he started a taxi service. Success was very hard for him. The gratitude of ten thousand rupees to the nearest police station helped him survive the city. 'Ashok Sharma', the new name for Balram in Bangalore, hid his identity when he saw his dirty old poster in the wanted list at the Police station. The bribe of ten thousand rupees hid everything. The stolen money of seven lakhs and the hard work; made a Business Man. 'White Tiger Drives' is a company with twenty-six vehicles and sixteen drivers do shift work.

Bangalore is where Balram felt the freedom to express himself through the economic and desire of entrepreneurship that has subsumed the city. Balram climbed the ladder of success by murdering and stealing the red bag full of money –Rs. 7,00,000/-, based on a philosophy of revenge, ambition and corruption.

The city life of both the protagonists has changed their plight and filthy life, which they had in their ancestral village. A city is always where caste, religions, untouchability, and gender bias felt minimum. But the village always seems to be the hub for casteism followers. Members of different castes are often linked in with the caste system; Members of various service castes perform tasks for their patrons, usually members of the dominant, that is, the most powerful landowning caste of the village.

Households of service castes are linked through hereditary bonds, and the lower-caste members provide services according to traditional occupational specialisations. Thus, client families of launderers, barbers, shoemakers, carpenters, potters, tailors and priests provide customary services to their patrons, in return for which they receive minimal payments of grain, clothing, and money.

Ideally, from generation to generation, clients owe their patron's political allegiance in addition to their labours, while patrons owe their clients protection and security.

Conclusion

The novels *Dare To Be Free* by Shanthi Bharadwaj' Rakesh' and *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga is set in post-Independent India with five decades between them. Upon analysis, it is found that though there is a gap of fifty years between the societies portrayed in these two novels, there is not much difference in the lifestyle of these protagonists. Their struggles remain similar in feudalistic Indian society. Both the authors focus on the problems caused by the feudal system, class and caste stratification, and untouchability. Both the protagonists are seen as the representatives of common men and women in India who have been dominated and betrayed by the ruling upper-class society. Both the Protagonists of the compared novels are considered much lower in society. Both the novels say that the city is the only place where such social degrading factors are felt to a minimum. The society in any city has always been a mixture of people of different caste, classes and religions. The village identity is not realised in a city because their people of different castes and religions live together and worship together. The author also shared a similar view that both the protagonist employment and entrepreneurship in the city played a magical moment in their dark feudal life. The city doesn't divide people by caste, but by class, much better than so. The researcher feels that both the authors hint the government to make a slow move from reservations based on caste to economy-based reservations to achieve social equality.

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