

Turbulence of Globalization in Rising Metropolis- A Case study of Toltz's *A Fraction of the Whole* and Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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“Literary accounts are important, accessible and useful ways of understanding values, ideals and ideas in society....despite the regular flow of academic studies, expert reports and policy position papers; it is arguably novelists who do a better job of representing and communicating the realities of international development.”(Lewis-Rodgers) Since globalization is the most talked about event in the contemporary world arena, there are multifarious depictions of it in late 20th and early 21st century world literature. Some writers have presented globalization as a spectrum of possibilities while others have viewed the phenomenon as an over inflated balloon. There have been writers like Shashi Tharoor who have viewed globalization as a supernatural boon which has changed the Indian economy from a ponderous elephant to a svelte tiger.

Early 21st century writers have also depicted globalization in variegated hues. Among the few who have wrestled with this latest fad in their creative works are Arvind Adiga and Steve Toltz. Both of them are unique writers in the lineage of modern fiction in having their maiden works-*The White Tiger* and *A Fraction of the Whole* respectively; achieve dizzying heights of spectacular success. Adiga became one of the youngest to win the Man Booker Prize for a maiden fictional venture while Toltz has achieved laurels by becoming a Booker Prize contender and risen as a fresh new voice in Australian writing. Both the writers have a close Australian connection with Toltz being of Australian origin while Adiga has spent some of his early formative years in Australia. Both of the above mentioned creative geniuses have derived aesthetic pleasure from their writing and have also scathingly commented upon contemporary human life or to be more precise, contemporary urban life. A brief synopsis of their masterpieces is imperative before evaluating their common concerns and thought patterns.

Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* unfolds in the Darkness, a very suggestive name for an anonymous Indian village. The protagonist Balram Halwai aka Munna aka Ashok Sharma has the misfortune of being born in a teeming poor family in the midst of this Darkness and under the control of feudal lords caricatured like characters from 'Beastly Tales'. The young Balram can foresee his future in the thin, lean, emaciated, diseased figures of the village men but he is a White Tiger, he stalks about finding ways to escape from the rural cesspool. He becomes

a second-in-command driver and puts an initial tentative step towards liberty when he is transferred to Delhi. Once in India's capital, his vision broadens, he interacts with fellow drivers and reading second rate crime fiction stirs ideas in his brain. He plots, plans and waits. For him and his class, there is no straight or honest road to success, the path has to be crooked with evil detours. He keenly eavesdrops on all kinds of conversation and the knowledge thus garnered becomes his first hand source of information about the world. As an ultimate step, he kills his grief stricken and gullible master, escapes with the red bag loaded with money and commences a new life in Bangalore aka Bengaluru as a successful Entrepreneur running a taxi service for BPOs. Adiga very skilfully shows the transformation from village simpleton to homicidal murderer which is a concomitant result of urban influence. He is the poor underdog with the avaricious over dog carefully hidden in him, waiting for the right moment to pounce.

“For one who has led a privileged life, Adiga has captured quite unbelievably, the psyche and thought processes of the Indian underdog.”(Massey) In spite of having spent most of his brief life outside India, Adiga has masterfully caught the changing mental makeup of the India's underprivileged class who are no longer content to dawdle their lives away in poverty but want opportunities, moral or immoral, to stride ahead in the race of life. The novel also exposes the myth of modern Indian prosperity built up by the media and exposes the true face of India's so called prosperous economic phase, “The White Tiger is a ferocious and brutally effective counterblast to smug ‘India is Shining’ rhetoric.... it directs hard, well aimed kicks at hypocrisy and thuggery on the traditionalist Indian left.”(Robins)

Steve Toltz's *A Fraction of the Whole* is a gargantuan family saga spanning 700 pages and 4 generations of the Dean family. The novel is episodic and the narrative burden keeps shifting from one family member to the next with the second narrator picking up where the first left off. The novel is narrated in flash back by Jasper who recounts the escapades of his father, Martin (who is the most hated man in Australia) and his uncle Terry (who is the most loved man in Australia). Their lives commence in a small Australian town which is branded as “the least desirable place to live in New South Wales” due to its proximity to a huge state prison. Martin, the elder suffers from a strange childhood illness and is in coma for 4 long years but can hear everything going round him while Terry is the sunny natured younger sibling who early on, has the makings of a sports prodigy. One is an introvert and has problems adjusting in school while the other is an extrovert and a local icon. Untoward incidents change their lives and Terry becomes partially crippled, has to give up sports, begins to mingle with street ruffians, and becomes a member of the school gang while Martin staggers on half heartedly in school. Martin has lots of ideas about social reformation and

decides to put them into action by putting up a Suggestion Box near the town hall. This Suggestion Box is an initial success with an observatory being built and other town reform activities commencing with full enthusiasm, but slowly the Suggestion Box turns into a Pandora's box unlocking disastrous incidents with Terry being locked away in a mental asylum, the whole town letting loose a vendetta like revenge against the Dean family and the eventual destruction of the whole town as well as the Dean family barring Martin. Terry grows up to be a criminal while Martin has problems adjusting to normal society for he is so full of contempt for it. Terry's criminal career intermixed with his childhood fascination for sports turns him into a crusading messiah out to cleanse sports of all its corruption and soon he starts exterminating players, rookies, umpires, coaches in his crusade to cleanse sports of all evil. He turns into a demigod for the fanatical sports loving Australian public. Terry is eventually caught, punished and perishes in the local fire leaving his lesser known brother Martin struggling in the shadow of his larger than life younger sibling.

Martin's life is one spoilt by constant ire for all his ventures, all his attempts at life fail for people refuse to acknowledge his individual existence and constantly hound him for the Terry Dean story, eventually leading to his taking voluntary exile from Australia. He has a child out of wedlock in France but the unrest born in Australia continues to hound him. He returns and becomes a single parent in Australia, rearing his son Jasper and making sporadic attempts to make a career for himself. Martin is a marathon reader, has a vast amount of book garnered wisdom and many ideas to change the world but he has no believers and no listeners. Eventually when he has lost all hope in life due to the onset of cancer, he manages to grab the attention of a media conglomerate family, who allow him to fulfil one of his visions, that of making each Australian a billionaire. The procedure is pretty simple and as the host of a TV reality show, Martin gets his long awaited opportunity to emerge from the eclipse his dead brother had long ago cast on his personality. Martin becomes famous overnight, is endeared by all the people of Australia, commences a bright career in politics to reform the whole Australian system and the public gleefully swallows whatever he says. But this basking in glory is short-lived; for his trusted friend betrays him and tampers with the lottery to let his own employees win the weekly billion.

Martin's fall from grace is quicker than his rise; he becomes the most hated figure in Australia, a symbol of the corruption which his brother had attempted to uproot. He, his wife and his son have to leave Australia for Thailand where miracle of miracles, they meet Terry who all along had not perished but had escaped from prison to form an anonymous co-operative of crime and simultaneously keep an eye on Martin. In Thailand, Martin's cancer revives, he misses his homeland, his

wife perishes in a futile vendetta and Martin dies in attempting to smuggle himself and his son back into Australia.

Jasper, Martin's son also occasionally takes on the narrative burden at specific points in the novel, detailing his childish misadventures with his paranoid father, who overanalyzes anything and everything and imparts his self-garnered wisdom to his only son. In the course of the father son adventures in locales like a Sydney strip club, a bush retreat hidden in a labyrinth, a Thai jungle, a mental institution, a smuggling boat, Jasper often wonders if he has inherited his father's pessimism and negative world view. "Martin – portrayed through Jasper's eyes and through his own diaries and writings – is eccentric, childish, moody, frustrating, inventive, hilarious, and lonely and above all, a philosopher who's spent his life thinking himself into a corner."(Tranter)

These details are only a small part of the entire story which simultaneously enfolds an overwhelming number of ideas ranging from inferiority complex to sibling rivalry to corruption in sports to media assassination. "There is plenty of plot, since the book has the dimensions of a family bible, if this is a fraction – my God, what is the whole?"(Lively) Toltz confesses that his inspiration for writing came from negative media attention and sympathy for people who were victims of media scorn, "Every nation needs somebody to hate at any different time but what if you look up and it was your dad, and the papers were saying your dad is the biggest scumbag in the country – that's what got me started."(Flood) Toltz focuses on the power of the media to mould public opinion and their own selfish news hunting like grubby cannibalistic parasites.

Toltz, in his maiden creative venture, has attempted to reveal some aspects of Australian psyche which he felt were easily discernible but not widely understood and acknowledged, "Look, a lot of these things are things i just noticed about Australia and nobody seemed to be really talking about them. You know when you see something on television and look around the room and think 'Is nobody else hearing this?' so a lot of it is about Australia, about their obsession with sport, obsession with criminals – i just thought i'd fuse the two together."(Tranter) Toltz's venture to detail the Australian psyche is immensely successful with each sentence a quotable aphorism, replete with profound observations on human behaviour.

In keeping with T.S.Eliot's belief that each new literary work adds to the sum total of the body of work already present, Toltz's *A Fraction of the Whole* is full of echoes of other literary masterpieces, "there's a section about a labyrinth that you could imagine Borges writing, another about a lottery gone wrong that made me think of Vonnegut, and a strange, lovely account of childhood illness that had echoes of Garcia Marquez. In some ways it plays like a modern Arabian Nights, with Martin as Sindbad."(Boyce in *The Guardian*)

After a brief analysis of the themes and treatment of both *The White Tiger* and *A Fraction of the Whole* separately, it is imperative to briefly compare the two books. Both Mr. Adiga and Mr. Toltz have attempted to delineate aspects of the contemporary globalized societies of their respective countries. Adiga has focused on the changing trends, mindsets, value systems in post globalization Indian society whereas Toltz has sketched contemporary Australian ethos with its finicky media attention, rampant corruption and maniacal pessimism with a comic twist. The protagonists of both the writers, Balram Halwai and Martin Dean, have different kinds of compulsions and different forces working behind them. Balram is caught in the rooster coop of family and society and cannot grab success till he breaks away and escapes from this coop. On the other hand, Martin is caught in the web of his own inferiority which doesn't let him lead a happy life away from his famous brother's shadow. He is haunted by the ghost of his brother whose notoriety follows him wherever he goes. Both the novels commence in a rural setting and then develop in the urban background. Both Adiga and Toltz try to break the mould of stereotypical portrayal of rural life as one of pristine innocence, instead showing rural life as petty, demeaning, hostile and retrogressive.

Adiga masterfully describes the city of Delhi and its influence on changing Balram's psyche "The rest of the narrative will deal mainly with the sorrowful tale of how i was corrupted from a sweet, innocent, village fool into a citified fellow full of debauchery, depravity and wickedness"(Adiga:197) Adiga gives detailed description of the chaos perpetrated by urban life on the mind of a rural simpleton. He painstakingly describes the impact of uncontrolled urban expansion and its impact on the ecology and environment. "There was a fierce jam on the road to Gurgaon. Every five minutes the traffic would tremble – we'd move a foot – hope would rise – then the red lights would flash on the car ahead of me, and we'd be stuck again. Everyone honked. Every now and then, the various horns, each with its own pitch, blended into one continuous wail that sounded like a calf taken from its mother. Fumes filled the air. Wisps of blue exhaust glowed in front of every headlight; the exhaust grew so fat and thick it could not rise or escape, but spread horizontally, sluggish and glossy, making a kind of fog around us."(Adiga:157) He also satirizes the senseless development and construction going on in urban areas and the face of poverty hidden behind urban glamour, "Even at night, the construction work goes on in Gurgaon – big lights shine down from towers, and dust rises from pits, scaffolding is being erected, and men and animals, both shaken from their sleep and bleary and insomniac, go around and around carrying concrete rubble or bricks."(Adiga:192) Balram's tale is one of gradual deterioration from Edenic innocence to Satanic corruption, aided and abetted by a scheming mind and the overwhelming inequality inherent in

urban life which defeats all theories of social justice. Entry into a mall is like a peep into the world of the privileged “I was conscious of a perfume in the air, of golden light, of people in T-shirts and jeans who were eyeing me strangely.”(Adiga:152)

Martin’s move of migrating from his destroyed hometown to Paris also has an immense impact on his life. The city’s cosmopolitan atmosphere influences Martin’s mindset and he looks at the city not as a land of opportunity but as a huge landmass where he can be hidden in anonymity, away from the notoriety established by his brother. Martin’s diary entry on urban life is deeply revealing, “London too grim to be a sad sack with any dignity. O London! You grisly town! You cold grey cloud! You dense moan! You career town! You brittle town! You fallen empire!...and Rome..Venice...Athens...Spain...But Paris- beautiful poor ugly opulent vast complex grey rainy and French.”(Toltz:240) Eventually, as a single parent to Jasper he decides that parenting would be easier back home and returns to his much hated and despised homeland. He starts managing a strip club but his frustration against the world in general and his profession in particular, is so enormous that he rams his car into the club and destroys it. “It was an act that might have been taken as an unfortunate accident, only when he got through the window; he locked the steering wheel in a tight circle and spun the car around the dance floor, into tables and chairs, smashing up the place, destroying the bar. ...and now he was in the madhouse...Denouncing civilization takes its toll when you continue to exist within it.”(Toltz:330) Sydney provides no succour to Martin. He remains an anonymous and hostile stranger who wards off all attempts at familiarity and friendliness. Martin gets so disgusted with the urban hole he lives in that eventually he decides to build himself a house in a labyrinth outside the city, in a way voicing his hostility to being cramped up in an apartment with a view to the urban mess. Balram views a city as a conglomeration of immense opportunities like Bengalru where he can start a new life in complete anonymity but Martin cannot bear the anonymity offered to him by Thailand and pines away in cancer to return to his homeland. On the other hand, Balram decisively knows that his acts have effectively insured that the whole of his family will be exterminated off the face of earth so he never tries to ruminate or worry about their well being. Balram also prefers the anonymity offered by Delhi where he can easily commit a crime and vanish, without leaving a trail or clues. Martin is haunted again and again by his famous brother’s ghost and all attempts to lead a sane existence are cast awry again and again by people emerging from nowhere and prodding him about his brother’s past.

Both the writers craftily depict urban chaos and its influence on human psyche but they simultaneously comment on a number of issues of contemporary significance. For example, Balram voices the gaping loopholes in the country’s education system which emphasises on rote

learning and produces half-baked Indians “Open our skulls, look in with a penlight, and you’ll find an odd museum of ideas: sentences of history or mathematics remembered from old text books, sentences about politics read in a newspaper, triangles and pyramids seen on the torn pages of old geometry textbooks- all these ideas, half formed and half digested and half correct, mix up with other half cooked ideas in your head.”(Adiga:11) Martin also has supreme distrust for the Australian education system and has no faith in education for moulding his son’s personality so he keeps withdrawing Jasper from school to self-educate him.

Considering the fact that both Adiga and Toltz have wholly non literary backgrounds, their debut achievements in the literary sphere are colossal. Both of them have successfully depicted the chaos, suffering, frustration, inferiority and black misery hidden behind the global, glittering urban spectacle. The two writers have shown how individual aspirations and dreams are suppressed under mammoth social strictures and pressures. *The White Tiger* and *A Fraction of the Whole* are both fantastic depictions of life in two fast globalizing nations where the pace of life seems to be accelerating but human values and moral, ethical system seems to be fast declining and set for a downward spiral towards pandemonium. Both the works are “superbly crafted and passionate depictions of the perils and pitfalls of rampant capitalism...deftly highlighting the social injustice and moral corruption that underpin the apparently miraculous economic development during the past decade.”(Lewis-Rodgers)

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