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## **Re- establishment of Dharma in White Tiger**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*One of the four purusharthas, Dharma, is inextricably linked with Indian ethos. Aravind Adiga in his novel The White Tiger narrates how Indians have moved away from dharma in its normative sense which includes practice of religious rituals, family life, social system, state administration, and moral principles. He calls for a radical paradigm shift in the unfair social functions in religious, political, economical, democratic, bureaucratic systems and calls for revolution for the same. As Arjuna fought in the kurukshetra war to establish dharma, each person has to stand on his feet and establish his/her rights. The White Tiger, the story of Balram who changes his destiny in the democratic India, is a challenge before each person.*

Dharma is inextricably linked with the ethos of India and the entire personal, social, ecological, and spiritual life is guided by it for ultimate liberation. “This [dharma] term and the notions underlying it clearly constitute the most central feature of Indian civilization down the centuries, irrespective of linguistic, sectarian, or regional differences. In a special way, the centrality of dharma to the understanding of Indian religions has been recognized by all scholars” (Olivelle, vii). Franklin Edgerton tries to give an all-encompassing definition to dharma: “Dharma is propriety, socially approved conduct, in relation to one's fellow men or to other living beings (animals, or superhuman powers). Law, social usage, morality, and most of what we ordinarily mean by religion, all fall under this head” (Franklin, 2013). For modern reformists dharma is not mere laws but values which guide moral uprightness. Their focus was on sanatanadharma (universal norms) and varnasramadharma (dharma related to each one's varna). In short, dharma interprets the cosmic order and is a touchstone for human beings to coordinate all the aspirations and activities to empower the cosmic balance.

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga narrates how Indians have moved away from dharma in its normative sense which includes practice of religious rituals, family life, social system, state administration, and moral principles. It is made clear while the narrator says about his early period at Laxmangarh, the place where he is born and brought up, is a place near Bodh Gaya, where Lord Buddha was enlightened. Balram says that Indians have lost not only the spirit of Buddhism but of every religion. ‘I thought there was no need to offer a prayer to the gods for him, because his family would be offering very expensive prayers all along the Ganga for his soul. What can a poor man's prayers mean to the 36,000,004 gods in comparison with those of the rich?’ (WT316-317). Not the rituals but dharma liberate the people. The reflection of dharma in the novel can be studied under four headings: religion, inequality, environmental consciousness, and re-establishment of dharma.

The prevailing imbalance of purusharthas (Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa) in India is presented through the ineffective education system, sexual abuse, child labour, unjust policy system, corrupted political system, in disciplined bureaucrats, exploiting economic system, hollowness of government welfare schemes, and unholy religions. The condition of the poor is getting worse in villages as well as in cities. ‘These people were building homes for the rich, but they lived in tents covered with blue tarpaulin sheets, and partitioned into lanes by lines of sewage. It was even worse than Laxmangarh’ (WT 260). The novel uses the image of rooster coop to express the unjust system where the majority is exploited by the minority. More than the suffering, the narrator takes pity on the under privileged for their passive and submissive attitude to the discriminatory system. Adiga severely criticises the unassertive nature of the deprived. ‘The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they’re next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop’ (WT 175). The most pathetic situation is that even though the poor know that they are exploited by the rich, they have not moved against them. Balram asks a question ‘Why doesn’t that servant take the suitcase full of diamonds? He’s no Gandhi, he’s human, he’s you and me’ (WT 175). He gives an image as the answer that the servant is in the rooster coop. Government itself is in dilemma and seeing no other means to come out of the unjust social system, but the promotion of revolution. ‘that’s why the government of India publishes [Murder Weekly] and sells it on the streets for just four and a half rupees so that even the poor can buy it’ (WT 125).

Adiga calls for a radical paradigm shift in the unfair social functions in religious, political, economical, democratic, bureaucratic systems and calls for revolution for the same. ‘Speak to me of civil war, I told Delhi. [...] Speak to me of blood on the streets, I told Delhi’ (WT 221). However, like Arjuna who was confused about his svadharma as a Ksatriya, common people are in confusion. Balram expresses this dilemma very clearly. ‘An Indian revolution? No, sir. It won’t happen. People in this country are still waiting for the war of their freedom to come from somewhere else’ (WT 303 -304). As Arjuna fought in the kurukshetra war to establish dharma, each person has to stand on his feet and establish his/her rights. The White Tiger, the story of Balram who changes his destiny in the democratic India, is a challenge before each person. He transforms himself into Ashok.

In order to attain the balance of Purusharthas, Krishna in Bhagavad Gita says : “Do engage yourself in action that is necessary; activity is indeed better than non-activity” (86). Krishna justifies Arjuna’s act of fighting based on certain reasons. Firstly it is an indispensable act to establish dharma to keep the social order. Secondly, fulfilling one’s dharma which is the Karmayoga, (the path of action) is a means to attain moksha which is the ultimate aim of life. Thirdly, it is necessary to fulfill the dharmic obligation to the society. Finally these actions should be out of selflessness or without attachment to attain moksha since the attachment to the action and expectation of fruits bond one to the world. The killing of Mr. Ashok, the crucial moral question in the novel can be read as an allegory as the Kurusetra war in the Bhagavad Gita. Munna, whose destiny is to be a sweet-maker, fights in the battlefields of Laxmangarh, the dark village; Delhi, the crazy city; and Bangalore, the entrepreneur’s city. A constant war is taking place between good and evil, order and disorder, justice and injustice, greed and generosity, luxury and substance, and submission and progress in the democratic country. This continuous fight takes place not only outside but also within oneself. This

conflict helps human beings to advance in social, intellectual, economical, political, and personal levels. Only through this war Munna is transformed to Ashok Sharma. Thus narrator justifies his act of murder.

Rooster coop stands for ignorance (avidya). Though people have the potency within themselves, because of ignorance they are not liberated. ‘You were looking for the key for years/But the door was always open!’ (WT 253, 267). Avidya (ignorance) is the root cause of every evil. The appearance and experience move one away from the reality. Hence without transcendental intuition one cannot be out of maya. Bijayananda Kar says: “right knowledge (vidya) consists only in knowing something, as it ... To take something as something else is adhyasa” (Kar, 98). Adhyasa means misconception or mistaken notions and it is the root cause of all the problems. People behave as if they are liberated and it is their destiny. “The error in maya is not the appearance as such but the forgetfulness that the appearance is appearance” (Sivaramkrishna, 80). The wealthy trap the disadvantaged and have no escape from the slavery. ‘My life had been written away. I was to go to jail for a killing I had not done. I was in terror, and yet not once did the thought of running away cross my mind. Not once did the thought, I’ll tell the judge the truth, cross my mind. I was trapped in the Rooster Coop’ (WT 177). The narrator of *The White Tiger* wants to destroy ignorance ‘One night, will they all join together—will they destroy the Rooster Coop?’ (WT 305). The narrator calls for a new ethos for the poor.

Balram is a symbol of one’s self (atman). The fight is happening within each person and ‘the coop is guarded from the inside’ (WT 194). In order to attain good, each person should come out of the ignorance which is a hindrance for self-realization. Balram quotes the poem: ‘They remain slaves because they can’t see what is beautiful in this world’ and commend, ‘That’s the truest thing anyone ever said’ (WT 40). Balram does only his dharma nothing more or less. He kills his master to come out of rooster coop for the welfare of the society as Arjun killed all his relatives. Human beings have the right to protect one’s right and find a space for development. Balram wants to live like a man and it is a birth right. ‘All I wanted was the chance to be a man—and for that, one murder was enough’ (WT 318). The novel represents the eternal force or the paramathman, which dwells within each person i.e. the atman. ‘We saw a white tiger in a cage’ (WT 278). Ultimately man ought to be liberated from the rebirth. The dark Ganges represents the misleading rituals, teachings which are not able to liberate the atman. ‘The villagers are so religious in the Darkness’ (WT 90). Human beings are moved by distorted views and philosophy.

The family of Mr. Ashok stands for the challenges before each person to fulfill one’s dharma which are everywhere. ‘Even here, in the weight machine of a train station, they try to hoodwink us. Here, on the threshold of a man’s freedom, just before he boards a train to a new life, these flashing fortune machines are the final alarm bell of the Rooster Coop’ (WT 248). But without fear one should do one’s duty. The jobless, landless, marginalized farmers, exploited, and others are to take decisive decisions in their life for being free to fulfill one’s dharma.

The supernatural only operates in history and human societies through the mediation of human beings in so far as these consciously enter into contact with the transcendent reality of

the pure Good who is God. In a certain sense, therefore, it is the capacity of men and women who love justice and struggle for it which in a democracy represents the best warranty of right and freedom. In this sense, right may at times depend on force (Bingemer, 77).

People who do their dharma are the instruments of god. 'I think the Rooster Coop needs people like me to break out of it' (WT 320). If the white tiger can make the revolution everyone can make it.

The train to Bangalore is the chariot taken to liberation and it is a life long journey. 'It was a long trip by train' (WT 197). Each radical step in life is compared to a shift of train. 'He boards a train to a new life' (WT 248). The statement 'transfer myself from train to train' (WT 292) shows the continuous transformation happening within each person. People are afraid to make changes in life. The gap between the trains is a challenging time. 'The train station is a dangerous place' (WT 293). The transformation from Munna to Ashok Sharma is a hazardous journey. One has to pass through Munna – Balaram Halwai – to White Tiger - Ashok Sharma.

In the modern world, empowering a democratic way of life is the best tool for the elimination of social inequality, which gives to each person without discrimination the freedom to attain the purusharth as in a balanced manner. There exists the basic conditions for justice, such as (a) equity in the powers and capacities of persons; (b) cooperation largely based on reciprocal advantage; and (c) a situation where all parties are in a condition of moderate scarcity. Justice prevails in a society where there must be enough reciprocity around for all people to find some balance of reciprocal advantage (Nielsen, 234). In order to establish social justice, the post-independent India adopted democracy and urged people to establish JUSTICE, LIBERTY, EQUALITY, and FRATERNITY. The novel acknowledges the strength of the Indian constitution. The constitution envisages: 'Any boy in any village can grow up to become the prime minister of India' (WT 35). India succeeded a lot in fulfilling the dreams of the founding fathers of the post-independent India. Yet it has to go a long way to establish a just society. The novel narrates the dark side of India in neo-liberal period to liberate it. First and foremost the fight should start from within to win over one's own mind against injustice, committing oneself and then stand for social justice. 'I am in the Light now' (WT 313).

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