CHAPTER V

Novels of Twenty-First Century

1. Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things (1997)
2. Kiran Desai’s The Inheritance of Loss (2006)

V.I. Arunthadhi Roy’s The God of Small Things (1997)

V. I. 1Introduction:

Arundhati Roy is an Indian novelist who won the Booker Prize in 1997 for her novel The God of Small Things. She was born in Shillong, Meghalaya. Her father Ranjit Roy is Bengali, a tea planter by profession, while her mother is a Keralite Syrian Christian, Mary Roy, a women’s rights activist.

The God of Small Things is a story of the childhood experiences of a pair of fraternal twins who become victims of circumstances. The book is a description of how the Small Things in life build up, translate into people’s behaviour and affect their lives. The novel takes up two important issues that envelop the everyday life of ordinary people in India. First is personal and private sexual behaviour and secondly, the hypocrisy in political and social life of India. The notion of God has changed with the passing of time. God has always played a vital role in the lives of Indians. Various rituals from birth to death are related to God. According to Roy, there are
two Gods. One is big, which is possessed by rich people. The second type of God is small and it rules the lives of ordinary, unprivileged sections of society. Thus, Roy has segregated the very concept of indivisible God into big and small in this novel.

The novel presents the story of a Syrian Christian family in Kerala in the changing socio-political scenario. The novel is a powerful indictment of those ugly social forces which crush an innocent young man Velutha, a person who belongs to lower class and untouchable caste. Caste divides society into low class and high class, working class and bourgeoisie, the touchable and the untouchable. Ammu and Velutha are representative characters of such difference and discrimination.

Arundhati Roy has also portrayed class antagonism and class exploitation, Marxism, patriarchal domination and callous police administration in this novel. The problem of Love Laws -

“Who should be loved. And how. And how much.” \(^1\) (pp.33,177)

Novel is about a forbidden relationship between a touchable and untouchable, a highly debated theme of incestuous relation between the twins. A striking style that matches the narrative is the strength of the novel. Malayalam words literally used throughout the novel capture prominent facets of Kerala life.

V.I.2The Plot in Brief:

The story takes place in a small town named Ayemenem in Kerala. The narrative moves back and forth in time from 1969, when the twins were seven years old, to 1993, when they are re-united at the age of thirty-one. Most part of the story is
narrated from the viewpoint of seven year old children, with occasional shifts to other prominent children.

Without sufficient dowry for marriage, Ammu spends a summer in Calcutta with a distant relative where she meets a manager of a tea estate and agrees to marry him rather than return home to an ill-tempered father and bedridden mother. She gives birth to the twins Estha and Rahel. Her husband turns out to be alcoholic who beats her and attempts to induce her to sleep with his boss so that he could retain his job. Ultimately, Ammu leaves her husband and returns to Ayemenem to live with her mother and brother Chacko, along with the twins. The household also hosts her aunt, Baby Kochamma. As a young girl, she fell in love with Father Murugan, a young Irish Priest who had come to India to study Hindu scriptures. In order to gain his favour, she became a Roman Catholic and joined the church. Unsuccessful in her love and tired of Church life and her father sent her to US for a couple of years. She came back with a degree in gardening which led her nowhere. Because of her own misfortunes, she took a keen interest in misfortunes of others and also hates those who are unfortunate, like Rahel and Estha.

While studying at Oxford, Chacko falls in love with an English woman Margaret and marries her. They have a daughter Sophie Mol. When Chacko discovers Margaret’s secret sexual relationship with another man, they get a divorce. Chacko returns to Ayemenem. Shortly after, Margaret marries Joe, who dies in an accident. Chacko invites his ex-wife and daughter to spend Christmas at Ayemenem. Chacko expands his mother’s business, ‘Paradise Pickles and Preserves’ in Ayemenem.
Velutha is a skillful and talented untouchable who is employed at the factory. The twins get attached to him and look upon him as a father-figure. His mother Ammu loves Velutha so she does not object to the twins doting on him. However, her relationship with an untouchable is not appreciated by other members of the family. So Ammu is kept under house-arrest. All the events proceed towards the climax when Sophie, sympathetic with twins, joins them in their escape to ‘History House’ in a swelling river by boat. The boat upturns, Sophie dies and the twins are missing. They are discovered by the police in History House along with Velutha. Baby Kochamma accused of kidnapping the twins and being responsible for Sophie’s death. She also blackmails little Rahel to bear witness against Velutha whom she actually loves. Ammu tells the truth to the police. But Velutha was dead due to their brutality. The cunning Baby Kochamma convinces Chacko that Ammu and her twins are responsible for Sophie’s death. He drives them away. Estha returns to his father. Ammu dies in a lodge, alone and penniless. Rahel goes to US, gets married, divorced and returns to Ayemenem. At thirty-one, the twins are re-united. They are drawn to each other day by day and it is implied that their intimacy grows in incest.

**V.I.3 Caste:**

The novel examines the historical roots of realities of life. It develops profound insights into the ways in which human desperation and desire emerge from the confines of a firmly entrenched caste society. Roy reveals a complex and long standing class conflict in the state of Kerala. She comments on its various competing forces.
Untouchability is one of the greatest evils that our country has been facing from times immemorial. Arundhati Roy, a great champion of humanity, points out those unnoticed shades of this social problem which generally escape the eye. Velutha’s grandfather Kelan, along with a number of other untouchables, embraced Christianity to escape the scourge of untouchability. The Syrian Christians of India claim to have descended from Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, yet they find it natural to perpetuate the shameful institution of untouchability. The people of this community are socially and educationally active and economically well off. Like upper caste Hindus, they are caste conscious and practice untouchability. Twenty percent of Kerala's population is Syrian Christians. They believed that they were the descendants of one hundred Brahmins whom Saint Thomas had converted to Christianity.

The Syrian Christians in Kerala were the high caste and class feudal lords. The Ayemenem house was a Syrian Christian family converted from Hindu into Christian without abandoning the Hindu traditions and caste-consciousness. Untouchables were not allowed to enter from the front door. They had to come from the back entrance. Velutha and his father Vellya Pappen always come from the back entrance to deliver the coconuts they had plucked from the trees in the compound. Paravans were untouchables; they were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. The members of the untouchable Paravan families in Kerala were not permitted to touch members of higher castes. Discrimination between two
human beings was deeply embedded in the Indian society starting from the time of
Portuguese Colonialism during which Christianity became a major religion in
Kerala. The untouchables were considered polluted beings. They had lowliest jobs
and lived in subhuman conditions.

The untouchables who became Syrian Christian soon realized their blunder. Though
they were given separate churches and priests and a separate Pariah Bishop, they
found that they were not entitled to any government benefits like job reservations or
bank loans at low interest. Since they were Christians, they were treated as casteless.
Roy says,

“*It was a little like having to sweep away your footprints without a broom. Or worse,
not being allowed to leave footprints at all.*”¹²

Untouchables are small, subjected to oppressions and humiliations. They are
overlooked and neglected as if they did not matter at all, not only to touchables but
even to orthodox untouchables like Vellya Paapen, Velutha’s father. Velutha
represents an entire community of the unprivileged, dispossessed and unprotected
untouchable people in India. His right to live as a human being, his right to self-
actualization is disregarded by his father, by the religious community to which he
belongs, by his employers, by his party and even by his state. Arundhati Roy
suggests that untouchability is a mindset. It is ironic that even Christians who believe
in the equality of all children of God have untouchability among themselves. Velutha
who becomes an innocent victim of callous society, is more cultured than the
Brahmin converted Syrian Christians. He treats the children with love and care. He
respects them and plays with them and tries to fulfill all their wishes. The children
love him by day and their mother by night.

Vellya Paapen was born and brought up in the age when Paravans had to crawl
backwards so as not to leave their footprints and pollute the ground. He takes the
social disabilities imposed on untouchables by tradition for granted like Bakha’s
father in Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable. He dares not violate the caste rules. He
believes that it will be sinful to deviate. That makes him a guardian of conformity,
highly fearful of change. He is superstitious by nature. He believes that Kari Saipu
has become a ghost because he committed suicide with his deep-rooted faith in
traditions. He fears the nature of his younger son Velutha. He fears Velutha’s self-
confidence, his self-assuredness.

Velutha disappears from the town and returns after four years. Vellya Paapen is
grateful to Mammachi and her family who have done much to him for generations.
Rev. Ipe gave Vellya’s father tilt to the land in which his hut stood. Vellya had lost
an eye in an accident and Mammachi had paid for his glass eye. Mammachi had also
arranged for Velutha’s education and given him a job in the pickle factory. It did not
occur to Vellya Paapen how the Mammachi family too benefitted from their labour.

When Vellya Paapen learns about Velutha’s relation with Ammu, he cries before
Mammachi and offers to return his mortgaged eye. He even offers to kill his son
because his son and Mammachi’s daughter have ‘made the unthinkable thinkable and
the impossible really happen.’ Mammachi does not believe him and pushes him
aside. She calls him names as he lies sprawling in the mud. Thus Vellya Paapen’s feelings of loyalty and gratitude hasten Velutha to his doom.

Velutha’s elder brother Kuttapen is paralyzed and a good Paravan without progressive ideas. He becomes all the more paralyzed when Velutha is killed brutally by the police. Velutha is not illiterate like his father and brother. He has learnt carpentry from a German carpenter. Mammachi said about Velutha that,

“.....if only he had not been a Paravan, he might have been an engineer.”3 (pg.75)

According to Mammachi, if only he had not been a Paravan, he would have become an engineer. This statement is significant. Arundhati Roy wants to suggest that it was because of his caste that the outcastes are unable to take education in spite of their ability. Without an opportunity to et education, they are unable to make progress of any kind. They remain backward.

Velutha was a Paravan with a future yet he is looked down upon and maltreated in his life because of his caste. Velutha’s skill and his mastery could not help him when he gets emotionally involved with high-caste Ammu. He served Mammachi and Chacko well at the factory and the house with his various skills. He was allowed into the house when there was something to mend. Otherwise he was not allowed to enter the houses of the high caste. The touchable factory workers also despised him. Mammachi praised him for his skills. It is ironical however, that his remuneration does not correspond to his praise and his abilities are not duly rewarded. To his employers and also to his party leaders, he remains a Paravan.
Mammachi summons Velutha to her house after his father leaves. He arrives unsuspecting. She screams,

"Out! If I find you on my property tomorrow, I’ll have you castrated like the pariah dog that you are! I’ll have you killed." \(^4\) (pg.284)

Velutha keeps his cool. His restraint and good manners present a remarkable contrast to the ill-temper of the sophisticated lady who spit in his face.

Even the police make him a victim of their power. They could not behave well with untouchables who were believed to be animals. According to Komal Pandya, "Velutha certainly stands out as a very tall figure in the novel. It was his desire to ‘relive’ as a touchable that triggered the tragedy." \(^5\) (Mahida: 2011, 38)

M. K. Naik writes, “The irony is that Velutha and his father are both Christians, like their master but that does annul their age-old Paravan identity, which is the albatross round their untouchable necks.”\(^6\) (Naik: 2004, 226)

Baby Kochamma is another character in the novel who advocates the policy of discriminatory caste system and untouchability. Chacko expels his wife for her extramarital relations but has similar relations with women in the pickle factory. Though he himself does not possess any Christian virtues, he declines to bury Ammu in a Christian cemetery for violating Christian principles. Baby Kochamma and Mammachi conspired against Velutha.

Velutha and Ammu transgressed the love laws and established physical relationship with each other. In a way, both can be said to belong to the same class of
marginalized and oppressed because Ammu was an estranged and unloved daughter of Pappachi. She had married a Bengali man against her parents’ wishes, divorced him and was an unwelcome person in her parents’ house. Ammu’s twins Rahel and Estha interacted with Velutha without the consciousness of the barriers of caste and class. They were forbidden to visit Velutha’s house but they secretly went to meet him. Velutha loved them from his heart because they were the children of Ammu. He treated them like his own children. His heart was big enough to accommodate their love. The scandalous relation between Velutha and Ammu is one of the reasons of the closure of Chacko’s factory.

A love affair can generally take place among the individuals of the same class and caste of the society in India. There are certain guidelines set for love in the society. Anybody who violates these guidelines are said to be the transgressors. Ammu’s love for Velutha is an example of forbidden type of love. Madhumalati Adhikari writes, “Velutha the Paravan faces the enclosure of caste and class….Despite his many accomplishments he is not permitted to cross the Laxman Rekha….Bullied by all, *dalit* Velutha’s enclosures are imposed on him by society….Well aware of his social restrictions, he had never dreamt of scaling the barriers….His birth in a poor Paravan family had determined his destiny. Induced inferiority compels Velutha to construct a fence between the Ipes and himself. His poverty undermines his position further….Doors of escape for Velutha are always barred….A man like Velutha can never win.”7 (Bhatt and Nityanandam: 1999, 45-46)
Velutha does not belong to the Ayemenem family. Although an outcaste, he is more attractive than the men in the family. Once more, the writer wants to emphasize that physical and intellectual characteristics are not the domain of the rich alone.

**V.I.4 Class Struggle:**

The first theme in the novel is the ever dominating, ever present caste system in the Indian social system and its pernicious effects on people from the lower caste. The second theme that this novel deals with is the unbridgeable gap between the poor and the rich, privileged and unprivileged people of India. The novelist is concerned with the caste and class conflicts in the socio-economic and political life of the Indians. Discrimination between two human beings based on social and economic considerations is another important theme of the novel.

Baby Kochamma did not associate with Kochu Maria because she was a servant in her family for several years. The Ipes are considered upper class. They are factory owners, the dominating class. Through collusion between the upper cultures, the West and the East, collusion between Christianity and Hinduism, collusion between political ideologies Arundhati Roy has pointed out the degeneration of values that occurred as a result of economic progress. She writes,

"*Downriver, a saltwater barrage had been built, in exchange for votes from the influential paddy-farmer lobby. The barrage regulated the inflow of saltwater from the backwaters that opened into Arabian Sea. So now they had two harvests a year instead of one. More rice, for the price of a river...the river was no more than a swollen drain now.*"  

(pg.124)
The Kerala of 1969 is “not so much sultry as dripping with decay, disappointment, family pettiness and social classification.” Life in such a setting is bound to be full of problems especially for the weaker sections of society. The novelist has reinforced her line of approach by references to hybridization and degeneration of culture. The Ipe family is a conglomerate of degenerate people devoted to upholding bourgeois values at all costs. As Chacko admits, his family was ‘pointed to the wrong direction.’ Chacko has a Marxist mind and,

“He can’t help having a Man’s Needs.”

(PG.168)

Baby Kochamma nurtured a beautiful garden in the past. She restricted her drawing room on satellite TV today. The revolution in people’s tastes for Arundhati Roy “wasn’t something that happened gradually. It happened overnight.”

Pappachi was an etymologist. The ‘social profits’ of the urban and generous etymologist changed dramatically in private. He ill-treated his wife and children. Ideology divides and isolates as much as caste and class do. The class issue is dealt with through Marxist point of view. Velutha is a Paravan turned Comrade. He is held in contempt and distrusted by other party members. Prejudice is as deep-rooted in the party as in society. When Mammachi turns him out, Velutha goes to Comrade K. N. M. Pillai. Comrade Pillai turns him away with the explanation that party supports workers and not their indiscipline in their private lives.

Velutha is portrayed as the tragic hero of the novel who becomes a victim of all evils in the society. His political stance became evident to everyone. Velutha is seen and recognized by Rahel, as a participant in the political demonstration staged by Marxist
Labour Union against the Government. There is no certain evidence but Velutha is most likely one of the Naxalites. This is why he does not wish to be recognized. For one thing, the Ipes are his employers. In the end, Velutha’s fears prove more than justified. It is indeed Comrade Pillai the Communist boss, ditches him in the end, after waiting long for a proper reason. He has already a number of improper reasons – such as other worker’s resentment of Velutha’s diversity, his privileges and his Untouchability. Velutha is the only card-holding member of the Communist Party. His political extremism damages Chacko, the bourgeois, the class enemy. Chacko’s reputation is destroyed and his factory closes down after the scandal between Velutha and Ammu. The political motive is perhaps the most important in getting rid of Velutha.

V.I.5 Conclusion:

Velutha who is educated, skilful and has great ability is oppressed and underpaid just because he is an outcaste. The union between Ammu and Velutha is not only between people belonging to higher and lower castes but also between people from different social classes and ideologies.

While Kuttappen and Vellya Paapen, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma were conventional Ammu and Velutha were revolutionaries. Velutha has the courage to break laws and act. It can be concluded that the perception of the caste system did not change even with the advent of modernism and globalization.

The writer brings out the hypocrisy in religious and political lives of Indians. Christianity and Hinduism advocate mercy, pity, peace and love. Though Baby
Kochamma, Chacko and Pappachi claim to be Christians, they do not show mercy to Velutha. Communism is supposed to fight for equality and rights of labourers. But we observe that the caste system rules the communist party as well. Velutha is abandoned in times of dire necessity. Ammu and Velutha are punished heavily for their misbehaviour Baby Kochamma and Pappachi go to any extent to preserve their social identity. Four characters in the novel emerge with Communist ideology for different reasons. E. M. S. Namboodiripad is a confirmed Marxist. Comrade Pillai is more of a politician than a Marxist instigates workers against the management for his own personal gain. Chacko encourages a workers union in his factory and ultimately digs his own grave with the closure of the factory. Velutha adopts Communism as a protective shield.

Riches do not imply good manners Velutha, although of a low caste, has better manners and self-control compared to Mammachi who not only abuses Velutha and his father but also spits in his face. Baby Kochamma does not hesitate to speak lies in order to save the honour of the family. She uses small child to speak lies against a man whom he loved dearly. All these are signs of high born. The outcastes like Velutha can be honest, faithful and trustworthy. They do not forget the goodness showered on them.

The rich and privileged avoid association with the outcastes, yet, they do not hesitate to take advantage of them. Velutha was employed in the pickle factory for his skill, hard work and honesty. He deserved what he got, yet, he was underpaid. Mammachi did not mind Velutha’s entry in the house for repairing gadgets. Chacko did not care for the women’s caste during sexual intercourse. Velutha mended radios, clocks,
water pumps. He looked after the plumbing and the electrical gadgets in the house. Velutha knew more about the machines in the factory than anyone else. Velutha showed his excellent skill to maintain the new canning machine and the automatic pineapple slicer. He oiled the water-pump and the small diesel generator. Velutha was too much for the factory. When Chacko resigned his job in Madras and returned to Ayemenem with a Bharat bottle-sealing machine Velutha was the only skilled worker at his hands. Velutha was valuable to Chacko even though he was a Paravan. Chacko knows,

“Velutha practically runs the factory...and we can't solve the problem by sending the Paravans away.”

The socio-economic hierarchy is still prevalent in India. Women, children, untouchable and poor are an oppressed lot. The structure of the society is responsible for their oppression. Patriarchy, upper caste, the Church, political parties and the police use their power to oppress the less powerful. The Church disregards human values by treating Ammu and her children as outcastes. The Church refuses to bury Ammu after her death. The ‘touchable’ policeman Thomas Mathews beats Velutha and sexually harasses Ammu.

The Ammu-Velutha sexual relationship is a protest against the existing norms of society. It attacks the institution of family, religion, politics and public administration. The Syrian Christian family is shocked by Ammu’s brave contacts with ‘untouchable.’ The communist party people preach that ‘religion is opium.’ But
actually follow traditions. Velutha is finally eliminated and his ‘footprints’ are totally erased by the caste-conscious society.

Church which is a very powerful religious institution is always partial towards weak persons. Ammu, a Syrian Christian marries a Bengali Hindu and is therefore disowned by her staunch Christian family. After the marriage Ammu is a half Hindu. Her children are betrayed because they are considered Hindu Hybrids whom no self respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry. On the other hand her brother Chacko marries a Roman Catholic. Margaret Kochamma lives with him happily till Margaret divorced him. He comes back to Ayemenem and is welcomed home. Chacko belongs to the upper caste and class therefore no one acts against him. The women in his factory are victims of his “feudal libido” because he exercised the employer’s power. The women workers there suffered silently because the owner of the factory was a man from upper caste. The Church never points a finger at him when he begins to satisfy “men’s needs”. The upper caste and class people – Pappachi, Chacko, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Inspector Thomas exercise their power on lower caste and class Paravans and poor factory labourers. Ammu and her twins are supposed to be outcastes. Margaret and her daughter Sophie Mol are preferred to Ammu and her twins. Even Kochu Maria, the family cook, prefers Sophie Mol to Rahel and Estha.

The novelist attacks institutionalized Christianity and the Pseudo-Communist party precisely because they deny their own values. Marxism, a western ideology is accepted in Kerala. But Marxism as a force that works for the economic equality is not practiced there. Politicians like Comrade Pillai are professional people who will
destroy the very principles in order to maintain power. The Communist Movement was supposed to aim at a classless society. But the Party in Ayemenem functions with the caste considerations. This institution like Christianity is opportunistic. Comrade Pillai lies to Inspector Mathews about Velutha. The policemen and politicians make sure that nobody contradicts their interests. Velutha is,

“…..abandoned by God and History, by Marx, by man, by woman and by children.”\textsuperscript{11} (pg.310)

C. L. Khatri writes, “Ayemenem must be regarded as a sample to project Kerala’s natural beauty and the failure of the system – social and governmental – to provide a healthy life to its people.”\textsuperscript{12} (Khatri: 2008, 98)

The novel comments on the contemporary socio-economic-political situation in Kerala with harsh comments. The failure of Marxist ideology is emphasized in the Communist State. But the novel proved that the mind-set of the society is impossible to change. The exploitation of the poor class and lower caste people takes place in the power-structure. The Indian society is a patriarchal capitalist caste-ridden traditional power-structure. In this society men dominate over women, the rich over the poor, upper caste over the lower caste, touchable over the untouchables, the educated over the illiterate, capitalist over the proletariat. The individual aspirations are crushed under the heavy feet of powerful hierarchy of caste and class. It is difficult to protest the traditional, conventional, religious and social laws. The problems of social inequality, patriarchy, casteism, conservatism cannot be resolved by Marxism. Marxist ideology totally failed in the caste-ridden society. The Marxist
movement started to replace God with Marx, Satan with the bourgeoisie, Heaven with a classless society, Church with the Party. But it all failed miserably.

Trishit comments, “This book shows that how small things in life can affect a person's life but there is always a ray of hope sent by the almighty himself. This book is narrated brilliantly from the third person point of view and also from Rahel's point of view. The book's beauty lies in its way of narration, a non-sequential way of narration with the words chosen enticingly. A simple story of the complicated Ipe family set in the backdrop of social discrimination, communism and caste system, this book is mainly based on the betrayal and always pops the question into the mind of the reader 'Can we trust anyone? Can we trust ourselves?'”

V.II. Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006)

V.II.1 Introduction:

*The Inheritance of Loss* the second novel by Kiran Desai was first published in 2006. It was the winner of the Man Booker Prize in the same year and also the National Book Critics Circle Fiction award later.

The novel is set in Kalimpong, which is situated at the foot of mount Kanchenjunga in the North-Eastern part of post-Independence India. It deals with events that take place in India, England and New York. It goes into the past as the characters reflect on it, from time to time. Through a myriad of seemingly disjointed events and a handful of characters who share almost nothing in common, the writer highlights
some outstanding issues of contemporary society such as globalization, marginalization, economic inequality, exploitation, poverty, nationalism, insurgency, immigration, hybridity, racial discrimination and political violence. The novel presents a kaleidoscopic picture of different countries, continents, climates, peoples, their struggles, conflicts, their dreams, frustrations and the loss, which seems to be common everywhere.

V.II.2 Brief Outline:

The novel centers round two main characters. The first is Sai, a young girl living with her grandfather, a cook and their dog, in Kalimpong. Second is Biju, an illegal Indian immigrant living in the U.S.A. The narration switches between these two main characters, occasionally taken over by Gyan, the Cook or one of the neighbours. The novel begins with the insurgency activities in Kalimpong and Darjeeling – North-East part of India. Decades of exploitation and deprivation have given birth to the GNLF. The Indian Nepalese’ demanded for a separate state during the 1980s. The Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) had been formed by the Indians. Their main complaint is that though they and their forefathers have sacrificed a lot for India, they have been treated in the country only as slaves. The Gorkhas consider it their birthright to fight for a separate homeland. They still remember how the British Army and later the Indian Army had used the brave Gorkha soldiers in the war. Their political argument was that in 1947 the British left India granting the Muslims Pakistan but there was nothing left for the Nepalese of India. The Communist Party of India demanded a Gorkha land. At that time their demand was ignored.
Biju immigrated to U.S.A. with false testimonials and tried to make a living there by working as a cook. He comes across humiliation and insult one after another and flees from one job to another, underpaid, and living a miserable life of hard work and suffering. He pines for the ever eluding Green Card, but finally, frustrated with his experience and sense of alienation, returns to his father in Kalimpong.

Sai is brought up by Christian missionaries till she is six years old. Then she is handed over to a retired Judge Jemubhai Patel, her granddaughter, who showers more love on his dog Mutt than he had ever showered on a human being. Stories of Sai and Biju run the theme of colonialism and its effects, the loss of identity and a sense of loss.

Major themes of the novel are the class and the caste system. Indians have a very rigid class system. It is perfectly legal for them to treat other members of society as their slaves, as the judge treated the cook. Every character is exposed to this class divide. Sai and Gyan are the only ones that temporarily cross that line, harboring an innocent and free romance, which is later killed by social differences. The upper class believes that the lower class can never be trusted. They believe that the lower classes are almost incapable of feeling such civilized emotions as love and respect. However, they never want to go deep into the lives of the lower class. Lola and Noni did not want to know much about their maid.

**V. II. 3 Caste:**

Caste is an evil reality that still prevails in certain communities in parts of India. It had started losing its intensity and acuteness, at least among a slice of the Indian
society. This novel does not deal with caste clashes in the way Untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand deals with it. The Inheritance of Loss shows the internal conflict between the Muslim Groups and the Buddhist Groups in India. The partitions are political rather than religious, but the feelings of hatred and jealousy are similar to those that arise out of caste conflict. The consequences too are the same. It divides the society into socio-economic groups. The usual conflicts between the East and West, between past and present go hand in hand. There is rejection and attraction at the English way of life, an attraction for opportunities in the U.S. for earning money and hate for living in India. Many leading Indians had become like the English and had forgotten the traditional ways of Indian life. They even looked down upon Indian ways and traditions. This is best exemplified in the character of the Judge. The sisters Lola and Noni take pride in their English habits. Sai finds the English way of life very natural and sees no reason to make an issue of it. The Judge hated the wife his father had sought for him and always rebuked her for her traditional ways. He was angry when he discovered that she squatted on the toilet seat. He had conveniently forgotten that he had his roots in the same soil and had lived in the same way as she did, before he went abroad. Sai does not see any harm in celebrating Christmas or Diwali, as long as there is joy in it. She fails to understand why festivities are tied up to religion.

The post-colonial period offered a wonderful opportunity for highly educated Indians to enter administrative services. The judge was the first lucky member of the Patel community to get this opportunity. His father arranged for his fare to England by marrying him to a daughter of a rich Gujerathi for a handsome dowry. The story of his mortification, humiliation, marginalization and oppression starts from the
beginning of his journey from his native place to Cambridge and does not end till his return to India from England. In England, he is alienated due to his dark complexion and naive accent. He is humiliated by his peers for his Indian race and ethnicity. He loses his confidence and begins to consider himself disgraceful and unworthy. He is timid, lonely and an introvert. Nobody befriends him in the college. He is ignored by his classmates and girls for stinks of curry. He did not speak to anyone for days. He was completely crushed in spirit by the time he returns to India. He loathes the Indian culture and heritage and his wife. All his efforts to teach her Western etiquettes and manners fail. He tortures her physically and mentally. Ironically, his beastly behaviour with his wife proves to be a mockery of all his English education. He sends her back when she becomes a cause of blocking his promotion, when she unintentionally joins the crowds to welcome Nehru at the station. He sends her back to her parents, where she gives birth to a daughter. Unaccepted by her family, she finally commits suicide. Thus, the judge remains ‘a foreigner in his own country,’ choosing the quiet and serene spot Cho Oyu in Kalimpong to spend his days of retirement. He never opens up and is left incapable of loving any human being. He dotes in his dog Mutt.

The journey of the Judge from India and back to India is almost similar to Biju’s journey. Although Biju travels abroad several years later, their common experience is the insult and humiliation that they face in foreign lands. The Judge was rich and educated and was there to study while Biju is poor, has migrated illegally and has to work hard and live a miserable life. In spite of this difference, the treatment they receive is ill.
Biju’s unendurable struggle and miserable existence as an illegal immigrant in New York is a social reality. He almost lives like a fugitive. Both, the judge and Biju are marginalized due to ethnic difference, skin colour and racial prejudice. Biju and his colleagues are constantly exploited. They have to live in basements, amidst dirt and rats. The workers are allotted space to sleep in the restaurants according to their racial origins. The French are given space upper floors of in the restaurant but down Mexican, Indian and Pakistani were placed in the kitchen. On the whole, the Colombian, Tunisian, Ecuadorian and Gambian are generally preferred to Asians. Workers from third world countries and especially from the East are accorded only the lowest positions. The restaurant owners are well aware of the precarious conditions of the immigrants. They are eternally chased by the police; they take undue advantage of their services. Biju and his lot are compelled to accept their conditions and at the same time, they face the pressure of people from their native places. What is notable in the two cases of the Judge and Biju is the effect that humiliation can cause on Indians. The Judge returns to his homeland, pretending to be westernized, hating his own people, his country and its customs and traditions.

Being alienated abroad, it becomes his habit to be alienated in his own country. He severs ties with his kith and kin, cannot tolerate his Indian wife and loses the capacity to love his people. Biju returns to India, happy to be back home and united with his father.

Most of the residents in the neighbourhood of Cho Oyu share one thing in common. They have all chosen Kalimpong as a picturesque and peaceful, serene place, to spend the remaining part of their lives. The Bengali sisters Lola and Noni also live
retired lives in their small villa called Mon Omi. Noni is a spinster and Lola a widow who has lived there since the death of her husband Joydeep. She has a daughter in England, and is very proud of her success in the media. Every time she visits England, she fetches jams and sauces all that are symbols of British ways. The sisters indulge in sandwiches and sausages as they openly despise the Indian food, its people and ways. They are obsessed with the English way of life. They constantly try to put up an elevated image of themselves by denying to themselves their true middle-class position.

Lola Banerjee and her sister Noni didn’t like Sai’s intimacy with the cook because he was poor. They thought Sai would have long ago fallen to the level of the servant class herself. It was important to draw proper lines between classes or it harmed everyone on both sides of the great divide. Servants got all sorts of ideas. When they realized that the world was not going to give them anything they got angry and resentful. Lola and Noni constantly had to warn their maid, Kesang for divulging personal information. They have a Nepali night-watchman, Bahadur. But they do not rely upon him because he belongs to Nepalese group.

Lola and Noni are representatives of the bourgeois class. The Nepali insurgency captured the open area of the sisters’ property. They had seen only inadequacy of living and faced hardship. They had thought that there was quite enough land to accommodate a thin line of huts. They will get a powerful supply of electricity. The market was very close; a beautiful tarred road was right in front they can walk to shops and schools in twenty minutes instead of two hours. The economic discrimination makes the poor people raise their voice against it. For centuries the
upper class and caste people have exploited the lower class and caste people. Lola and Noni were comfortable in their cozy house. They realized,

“The wealth that seemed to protect them like a blanket was the very thing that left them exposed. They, amid extreme poverty, were boldly richer, and the statistics of difference were being broadcast over loudspeakers, written loudly across the walls. The anger had solidified into slogans and guns, and it turned out that they, they, Lola and Noni, were the unlucky ones who wouldn’t slip through, who would pay the debt that should be shared with others over many generations.”14 (pg. 242)

Life of Father Booty, the Christian Swiss, who had illegally settled in Kalimpong stands in contrast to the life of Biju in America. He is loved and respected by all in the neighbourhood, is a special friend of Sai. He is allowed to live peacefully and do what he likes. Surprisingly, it is he who has taken great efforts for the welfare of the people in the region. In the end however, he too becomes a victim of the Nepalese insurgency and has to sell his house at a very small price. He is packed off to England.

V. II. 4 The Socio-Political Tension:

The novel focuses on the problem of insurgency in Kalimpong and Darjeeling. The Nepalese in India had formed the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) and demanded a separate state. The Nepalese were strong, hefty men and had fought for the British in the World War. After Independence, the Muslims were given Pakistan, but the demands of Nepalese were ignored. They were treated as minorities in a place where they were a majority.
All that they could do was work as labourers on tea plantations, coolies dragging heavy loads, doing menial jobs, living in filthy conditions. They were denied privileges and disallowed to become doctors, government servants, or owners of the plantations. Anger of the natives was chiefly directed towards outsiders, especially Bengalis, who had been the main cause of their distress and hardships.

Gyan Sai’s tutor is the representative of the Nepalese. His father had migrated from Uttar Pradesh to Gujarat. His forefathers had left their village in Nepal and settled in Darjeeling. During war, they joined the British Imperial Army. After Independence, they were ignored and ill-treated, which led them to protest and violence. They formed eighty per cent of the populations there. The novelist wants to show that hardships and sufferings of the poor coupled with injustice cause feelings of hatred and jealousy. Such social discrimination can lead to disastrous and far reaching consequences. The life of all the residents in Kalimpong was severely affected by the Nepalese insurgency.

Gyan is influenced by the protestion. He realizes that he cannot go to America for education and he is denied a good job. He is forced to tutor Sai for the payment of a small amount. The more he visits Sai’s house, the more he notices the difference between his house; his living conditions and that of rich people living in spacious houses, taking hot baths and eating rich food. He is ashamed of his poverty and does not wish that Sai should visit his house. He hides the truth about his life from her. He loves her hut is conscious of the class barrier between them. Angered by his circumstances, he betrays her and ignores her when he sees her in Darjeeling, while he was in the Gorkha procession. His hate for the upper class lifestyle of the Judge
and Sai increases in proportion to his anger towards her. As Gyan joins the GNLF movement, the love affair between him and Sai comes to an end. Gyan gives information about the guns that Sai’s grandfather possessed, and the GNLF workers threaten them and take away the guns, along with several other things. The premises of Lola and Noni is encroached upon by the GNLF workers. Lola meets their leader and appeals to him, but is shamefully insulted. The peace that prevailed in the neighbourhood is replaced by fear and terror. Shops are closed, roads are blocked, the library is destroyed and normal life comes to halt.

The Nepalese who migrated from Nepal are eighty percent of the population in Kalimpong. All tea garden workers are Nepalese but they do not own a single garden. They are treated like slaves in their own country. The Nepalese were laborers on the tea plantations, working as coolies and dragged heavy loads. They were not allowed to become doctors, government workers or owners of tea plantations. They were kept at the level of servants. They are laborers working barefoot in all weathers, looking thin as sticks. On the other hand the tea garden owners look fat and sit in their houses with their fat wives, with their fat bank accounts and their fat children going abroad. The Gorkhas demand jobs for their sons. They want dignity for their daughters who carry heavy loads on the heads, breaking stone on the roads. The young generation of Indian Nepalese has been affected by unemployment, poverty, deprivation and marginalization in the state. Therefore they fight for a separate state for Nepalese.

Gyan is the representative of youths who were disturbed by the economic discrimination. They envied the luxurious life of the rich and who were loyal to
Nepali identity. Gyan realized that his great grandfather and uncles did not get the same pension as the English men of the same rank. He realized that he had no money and no real job had come his way that he couldn’t fly to college in America, that he was ashamed of his home. He was not ready to show his house to Sai. Sai visited Gyan’s house in the Bong Busti in Kalimpong. She got a moment of shock. It was a small, slime-slicked cube. Its walls were made with cement corrupted by sand, the drain ran from the house under a rough patchwork of stones. The upper storey of the house was unfinished. It was abandoned for lack of funds.

Gyan was forced to tutor students in order to earn money. He was in search of a good job. The judge paid him a small amount. Gyan wondered why people lived in the enormous house, taking hot baths, sleeping alone in spacious rooms cannot afford to pay well for the services they receive. He compares his status with Sai. He is attracted towards her. He loves her but is always conscious of his own lower class. He knew the social barriers, therefore decided to betray her. He didn’t like her celebration of Christmas, giving up her identity as a Hindu. He knew her anglophile habits. He ignored her when he was in the procession of Gorkhas in Darjeeling.

Gyan belongs to a poor class. He hates the upper class life-style of the judge and Sai. He realizes that the real issue was Gorkhas poor economic conditions and their minority status in the country. Sai and Gyan’s love affair ends when Gyan was arrested in the political activities of the GNLF upheavals. Sai is alien to the problems of poors. She is totally shocked to know that Gyan had given information of the judge’s guns to GNLF workers. The insurgents entered their house and took away
several things along with the guns. Gyan betrayed Sai because she was better off than him.

The subversive activities of the insurgents cause untold miseries and unimaginable sufferings to people in the town. Looting and rioting led to a lot of confusion and total chaos. Though the GNLF represents the oppressed Indian Nepalese, it does not hesitate to create expatriate-like situation for people who have come from different regions and have settled down at Kalimpong for so many years. The law and order situation is disturbed in the town. Strikes, bandh and morcha are regularly organized to show protest. The common people face the insecurity and inadequacy of water, electricity, vegetables and grocery. A. K. Thakur writes, “Where people have been living hungry, thirsty, half naked and like living corpse from generation to generation; there the talks of nationalism become rather a sheer dishonesty…..the continuous flow of injustice breaks human life. And, from the broken pieces emerge rebels roaring with hatred, anger and vengeance.”15 (Chandra: 2010, 300)

The neighbours of the judge who have nothing to do with the actual problem of the Gorkhas have to undergo nightmarish experience during the troubled times. The situation in Kalimpong is tense due to the political violence by the GNLF. The insurgents are deadly against outsiders and especially the Bengalis who, according to them, have been the main cause of their distress and hardships. The two Bengali sisters Lola, a widow and Noni, a spinster, have been living at Kalimpong since the untimely death of Lola’s husband, Joydeep. One day they find that their house and land have been encroached upon by the members of GNLF. Lola goes to make a complaint to the head of the Kalimpong wing of the GNLF, called Pradhan. He
indifferently tells her that he and his men should be accommodated there. When Lola tries to convince him about the impracticability of his idea the leader humiliates her.

The judge’s neighbour, Father Booty, the Swiss Christian suffers due to the insurgency. He had been living in Kalimpong for nearly forty five years. He had been running milk dairy for the people in Kalimpong. He had done a lot for the development of the locals. He did not want to go back to his native country. Therefore he did not bother about renewing his residence permit. But the Gorkhas do not want outsiders to live in Kalimpong. The local administration takes step to deport the priest to his native country. When the news of Father Booty’s removal spreads, a Nepalese doctor forces him to sell his house to him for scanty sum. He tells Father that the latter will not get any other offer. He threatens him Father Booty has no choice but to surrender.

The beloved dog of the judge, Mutt, has been stolen by the insurgents. The insurgents assaulted the dog physically and mentally. The rally has been arranged by GNLF to march to the police station and set the documents on fire as a protest against the government’s indifferent attitude to Gorkhas’ problems. When the procession turns violent midway the police opened fire which resulted in terrible human loss. Thirteen local boys were dead.

The whole issue of insurgency is ultimately related to financial issues. The middle-class people like Lola and Noni stand out as rich amidst extreme poverty. The anger of the poor transforms into slogans, guns and violence against Lola and Noni.
At one end of the social pendulum are the rich and complacent people like the Judge, Lola and Noni. These people visit library, shop in Darjeeling and eat at expensive restaurants. At the other end are the poor persons like the Cook, Pannalal and the metal box watchman. The Cook is hired by the Judge since he had been fourteen years old. He considers it as degradation, since his father had served only white men. Family has a tradition of cooks stretching far back to his ancestors. His son Biju is also a cook. He is paid very little for many years. His only identity is his profession. As A. J. Sebastian Sdb observes, “This is the lot of the menial servants in India who are known only by the work they do, be it cook, sweeper, mali, cowman, dhobi.” (Sdb: 2011, 126)

The Cook is helpless and powerless throughout his life. He serves the Judge faithfully. His only ambition is to see his son settled in a good job in U. S. He lives with the single hope that one day, his son Biju would return with a lot of money and they will have a ‘sofa, a T.V. and a bank account.’ The Cook loves Sai in spite of himself and considers her to be his responsibility. He pities the orphan girl and forgives her even when she is rude to him. There is strange and unique relationship between the master and servant.

He is angry with the Judge for paying him little and giving him poor food to eat. This provokes him to misappropriate money that he sets to purchase daily supplies. He sometimes neglects his duties, like not taking Mutt for a walk. He sells liquor illegally to make extra income. Sometimes he feels guilty for his misdeeds. Although of a poor economic caste, he still retains a conscience and a capacity to love, whether
it be Sai or his son Biju. Lola and Noni do not approve of Sai’s intimacy with the Cook because he is a servant.

The story of Biju is the story of the agony of the temptations of the people from the Third World. The painful and alienated existence of Indian diaspora in New York is shown in the story of Biju. The poor and the jobless migrate to America for a better life. But they experiences racial prejudice, social and cultural oppression. Biju represents illegal immigrants who undergo agonizing experiences in the foreign countries. Harish Sawhney points out: “Desai portrays migration as a universal, multifaceted experience…….Almost fifty years after the judge went to England, Biju, the cook’s son, leads a grueling existence as an illegal immigrant in New York.”17 (Sawhney: 2006, 22)

Biju’s rat like life in America and the insurgency of Nepalese in Darjeeling expose the bitter truth that class conflict is the result of economic discrimination. Mr. Iype tells Biju,

“Nepalese making trouble…….They should kick the bastards back to Nepal, Bangladeshis to Bangladesh, Afghans to Afghanistan, all Muslims to Pakistan, Tibetans, Bhutanese, why are they sitting in our country?”18

He has forgotten that he is living in another country. The needy people have to migrate for survival. This is the law of nature which is deliberately neglected by well established people. Achootan tells his experience in England how those White people shout him to go back his country and Achootan responded as,
“Your father came to my country and took my bread and now I have come to your country to get my bread back.”\textsuperscript{19} (pg. 135)

V.II.5 Conclusion:

Discrimination in social and economic conditions leads to disastrous circumstances. The poor people have to struggle endlessly. In spite of hard work, intelligence and ability, they are always victimised. They are denied education so that they cannot improve their lot.

This leads to a lot of dissatisfaction and frustration in the deprived class. It can take the form of protests and even violence. When it becomes intolerable, they resort to threats and loot and pour out their vengeance on the rich. They attack privileged people and rob whatever they can. They care neither for love nor for principles, as is evident in the case of Gyan. He does not hesitate in deceiving Sai. The Nepali youth were so possessed by their ideals that they cared for nothing. The writer shows that when hunger and poverty for generations become unbearable, entire cities can be destroyed. There are suffering, subjugation, hard work, insult and humiliation everywhere in the world. Very few really bother about it.

The novel also shows that intimate love relationships between the rich and the poor are possible. This is obvious in the closeness between Sai and Gyan, and the way she shares many things with the Cook. She feels sorry for the Cook when the police raid his hut. She is shocked to see the miserable conditions in Benali Basti, where Gyan lives. It is these socio-economic differences that give rise to feelings of dissatisfaction, hatred, jealousy and violence. Once these negative forces are let
loose, it becomes difficult to curb them. Love, morality, trust, faith and honesty cannot stand in the face of ill-feelings born out of poverty. Human beings begin to behave like animals.

The writer also points out that there is a general tendency on the part of the rich and the privileged to take disadvantage of the poor and helpless. This is observed in the case of Biju and his coworkers in U.S. and in India. The cooks in American restaurants had to overwork for wages and had to live in unhealthy conditions because they were illegal immigrants for restaurants owners. The Judge is aware of the old Cook’s helplessness so he does not increase his salary. Had the Cook been paid well, he would not have been induced to sell liquor illegally or tempted to misappropriate Judge’s money.

Criminal thoughts emerge when people think of ways and means to earn money for bread and butter. Who would think of troubling a harmless creature like the Judge’s dog Mutt unnecessarily? The Gorkhas put him in sack and took him away for sale. They treated dog cruelly and mercilessly. The same dog was like a family member in the Judge’s house and was well fed and looked after and loved by all. It must have been a traumatic experience for the dog. This kind of torture, violence and cruelty is the inevitable result of poverty. Hence, it can be said that poverty is at the root of all misdeeds and ill-feelings in human beings.

All the immigrants undergo bitter experiences of exile. The judge’s experience in England was not different. He faced the racial discrimination even though he was a legal migrant. Father Booty was banished from India to his Swiss country because he
V. III Arvind Adiga’s The White Tiger (2008)

V. III. 1 Introduction:

The White Tiger is Arvind Adiga’s debut novel which won the 2008 Booker Award. The novel studies the contrast between India’s rise as a modern global economy and its pernicious effects on Indians. Adiga shows the rise of Balram, the protagonist, who comes from a small village in Bihar and ends up as an entrepreneur in Bangalore. The writer’s intentions in telling the story of Balram Halwai, can be well understood through his own words, “…..the criticism by writers like Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens of 19th century helped England and France become better societies.”

(Adiga: Retrieved on 23/01/2013) He goes on to say that “At a time when India is going through great changes and, China is likely to inherit the world from the west, it is important that the writer like me try to highlight the brutal injustice of society (Indian). That what I am trying to do – it is not an attack on the country; it is on the greater process of self-examinations.”

(Adiga: Retrieved on 23/01/2013)

When it comes to self-examination, every aspect of self is under consideration. When it comes to self-examination of a nation, everything that happens in the country comes under scanner. The writer takes every opportunity of commenting
upon anything and everything about which he has something to say. The issues like caste and class have been recurring in Indian literature since ages. Adiga presents a picture of our nation and has much to say about the age old issues of which he himself is a victim. He also deals with injustice, corruption and politics in the rising global economy.

Balram Halwai has no identity of his own. He represents a common Indian man. He uses fair and foul means to fulfill his dream. He murders his boss and becomes entrepreneur in the call centre hub of Bengaluru. He calls his life story, "Autobiography of a Half Baked Indian."  

The novel is written in the form of a seven part letter addressed to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. In his letters, he confesses his guilt and explains his rise to the position of an entrepreneur.

**V.III.2 Summary:**

The White Tiger is a symbol of supremacy. He can change the jungle law by his prowess. Munna, an innocent boy was forced by the human law to change into a white tiger. Poverty teaches him that money is power. The feudal class, corrupt behaviour of masters and first-hand observation of the Delhi life teach him many things from his childhood.

Munna has seen the brutal treatment of four landlords from his childhood. They exploited the poor villagers in Laxmangarh. The village is a typical village in the Gaya district in Bihar without electricity, water taps, telephones etc. All facilities
exist on paper. The poor children look very pale, lean and short for their age because of mal-nutrition. The Buffalo, the Stork, the Wild Boar and the Raven are landlords in the village. They live in high-walled mansions. The country is rich with rice, fertilized fields but the feudal, moneylenders and zamindars force people to live in the “Darkness” of poverty. Balram observed,

“India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness”^23

(pg.14)

The landlords earn their money from Laxmangarh villagers. The Buffalo earns money from the rickshaw-pullers. The Stork owned the river and takes a cut of every catch of fish caught by fisherman and a toll from every boatman. The Wild Boar owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangarh. The land laborers are permitted to work if they agree to give share in wages. The Raven owned the dry rocky hillside land and took a cut from the goatherds who went up there to graze with their flocks. They have their own wells and ponds, their own temples inside the landlords’ quarters. Once children of the four landlords went around town in their own cars but the Buffalo’s son was kidnapped by the Naxals. The Communist workers fought against the feudalism and killed the rich people who exploited the poor. So the four Animals sent their sons and daughters away to Dhanbad and to Delhi for safety. The poor villagers cannot escape from the landlords’ grip because they are not rich like their landlords.

Balram lived in the village of Laxmangarh in Bihar. It consisted of a community deep in darkness of rural India. He is the son of a rickshaw-puller. When a large
dowry was paid for his sister’s marriage, he had to quit school and start working in a tea shop along with his brother Kishan. Despite being clever and being promised a scholarship, Balram is forced to work in a tea shop, breaking coals and wiping tables in Dhanbad. His parents originally named him ‘Munna’, but his school teacher Mr. Krishna wanted to give him a new name since Munna simply means ‘boy’ in Hindi. He named him Balram. His last name ‘Halwai’ means ‘sweet-maker’, in the Indian caste system.

He learns driving in Dhanbad when he learns about the high salary paid to drivers. A rich man from his village, known as the ‘Stork’ because of his penchant for taking a cut of the local fishermen’s profits, hires him as a driver. Balram drives for Mr. Ashok, the Stork’s son who has recently returned from America. Mr. Ashok soon moves to Delhi and takes Balram with him. The city is a revelation for Balram. As he drives his master and mistress to shopping malls and call centers, Balram becomes increasingly aware of immense wealth and opportunities around him, while knowing that he will not get access to that part of the world. Through these experiences, Balram learns much about the world and later states that the streets of India provided him with all the education that he needed.

Having recently returned from a stint in America, Ashok is disgusted by the corruption and harshness in India. He is also unhappy in his marriage with Pinky madam, causing further problems in life due to marriages within castes.

As Balram broods over his situation, he realizes that there is only one way to become part of the rich and glamorous world – to murder his employer Ashok, steal his
money and escape from servitude. Balram executes his plan neatly. He boards a train to Bangalore. He perceives an opportunity in providing transport facility to call center employees. He bribes the police to terminate the services of the previous transport company. Gradually, he purchases vehicles and sets up business office and a house in Bangalore where he lives with his nephew Dharma. He becomes an entrepreneur in Bangalore, the call-center hub in India. Balram sets up his own taxi company with the money he has stolen and changes his name to Ashok Sharma. Thus he becomes a wealthy entrepreneur in India’s new technological society and emerges as a part of the top class Indians.

V.III.3 Caste:

According to Deirdre Donahue The White Tiger is an angry novel. He says, “But Tiger isn’t about race or caste in India. It is about the vast economic inequality between the poor and the wealthy elite.”24 (Donahue: retrieved on 20/5/2008) The caste and related profession stick to Indian and cannot be shed easily. His school teacher renamed Balaram ‘Halwai’ as his father was a ‘Halwai’. Circumstances compelled Balram’s father to become a rickshaw-puller. He died of T.B. as most rickshaw-pullers died. The poor had no right to medical assistance, even in the government hospitals. Balram realized it and witnessed the tragedy of his father’s death. He was neglected and did not get timely treatment like other poor people.

A novel about India, no matter what the theme, is bound to touch upon the issue of caste directly or indirectly. As Balram relates his story to the Chinese premier, he also refers to caste issue in India. Caste is closely related to religion. India is a
secular nation and Christians, Muslims and Hindus form a majority of the population. These three religions have nothing in common. Their origins, paths, tenets and Gods are different. Balaram makes striking observations about castes. Balaram prays before beginning his story. He remembers watching Hindi films as a child. Before the movie began, sometimes the number 786 would flash upon the screen. It was supposed to be magical number for Muslim God. At other times, the picture of the Hindu Goddess Laxmi flashed upon the screen. Balram also mentions the ancient and venerated custom of Indian People to start the story by praying to a higher power. However, he cannot fix the God. As an Indian, it is difficult for him to make a choice. Muslims have only one God while Christians have three. But Hindus have 36,000,000 Gods! He does not know whether all of them really exist. All these Gods seem to do awfully little work, like Indian politicians. Just as the politicians win the elections year after years, the Gods manage to retain their Golden Thrones in heaven. Although, this is his opinion about the Gods, he tells Mr. Premier that he does not disrespect them. As an Indian entrepreneur, he has to play it both ways – he has to be straight and crooked, mocking and behaving, sly and sincere, all at the same time. Thus he thinks it worthwhile spending time for the Gods, hoping that they would shower light on his dark story.

One day Mr. Ashok, Balram’s boss asks him some questions. He asks Balram to explain the difference between a Hindu and a Muslim. Balram is unable to answer the question. Mr. Ashok concludes that it is because of incomplete schooling. The boss calls him ‘half-baked’. Although Balram doesn’t like it, he admits that it is true about majority of Indians. They are ‘half-baked’.
There is some discussion of Hinduism in the novel. It plays a number of roles throughout the story. Balram takes advantage of the limited knowledge of the upper class by making up signs of respect for temple, statue or tree. He tries to gain the favor of his masters by visiting the temples. He does not take religion seriously but makes fun of it. He takes the blessings of Goddess Kali, the goddess who wore a garland of human skulls, just before he executed the murder of his master.

Religion plays an important role in the life of Indians. Ashok’s father does not approve of Ashok’s marriage with American Pinky Madam because she does not belong to their traditions. There is not much love for the Muslim community in India. That is why Ashok’s Muslim driver pretends to be Hindu. Balram himself bears no grudges against Muslims. In fact, he respects them as good people. He makes several references to the four great Muslim poets who had ever lived.

Balaram was originally called just ‘Munna’, which means ‘little boy’. His teacher named him ‘Ram’ initially the first common and sacred name that occurred to him. He modified it to ‘Balram’ in order to avoid confusion. The teacher told him about it:

‘He was the sidekick of God Krishna. Know what my name is?’

‘No sir.’

He laughed, ‘Krishna.’

Munna became Balram a revered Hindu God.
Balram believes that India is two countries in one – an India of Light and an India of Darkness. According to him, the places near the ocean are well-off and a part of the India of Light. Darkness prevails where there is a river,

“....a river of Death, whose banks are full of rich, dark, sticky mud whose grip traps everything that is planted on it, suffocating and choking and stunting it.”

Here he refers to the sacred river of Ganga. Actually, every river is considered to be sacred by the Hindus. He calls it,

“......Mother Ganga, daughter of Vedas, river of illumination, protector of us all, breaker of the chain of birth and rebirth. Everywhere this river flows, that area is the Darkness.”

He thought that the Chinese Premier knew that Ganga is called the river of emancipation and that thousands of American tourists come each year to take photographs of naked Sadhus at Haridwar. He advises Mr. Jiabao not to take a dip in the Ganga. He describes his experience in childhood. His mother died and was cremated on the banks of the river and her ashes were dropped into it. He knew that the dirt and the filth of Ganga couldn’t liberate any soul.

All those who loved in the Darkness were born to serve according to Balram, thus he says,

“.....he is a shining example of how to serve your masters with absolute love, fidelity and devotion.”
Balram Halwai did not like to work in the tea shops. He wants to learn driving and become driver. When he approaches a taxi driver to teach him, the first question the taxi driver asks,

‘What caste are you?’ The taxi driver shakes his head when he hears that Balram is a Halwai. ‘Sweet makers,’ the old driver said; shaking his head. ‘That’s what you people do. You make sweets. How can you learn to drive? ...... That’s like getting coals to make ice for you. Mastering a car is like taming a wild stallion - only a boy from the warrior castes can manage that. You need to have aggression in your blood. Muslims, Rajputs, Sikhs – they’re fighters, they can become drivers. You think sweet-makers can last long in fourth gear?’ 29

So much caste is bound to profession. Balram, the Halwai, first learnt driving and later became a successful businessman.

One’s caste is one’s Destiny in India. That is why, Balram and his brother Kishan kept getting jobs at sweet shops. The owners thought,

“Ah, they’re Halwais, making sweets and tea is in their blood.” 30

The caste system keeps everyone in his place, like a well-kept, orderly zoo.

“Everyone in his place, everyone happy. Goldsmiths here. Cowherds here. Landlords there. The man called a Halwai made sweets. The man called a cowherd tended cows. The untouchable cleaned faeces. Landlords were kind of their serfs. Women covered their heads with a veil and turned their eyes to the ground when talking to a strange man.” 31

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This is a reference to the Muslim women wearing ‘burkhas’ among strangers. Male chauvinism and possessiveness are conveniently implemented through religion.

The caste system was redefined on 15th August, 1947 when India became independent. Balram says that the cages were opened and the animals were set free on the day of independence.

“Those that were most ferocious, the hungriest, had eaten everyone else up, and grown big bellies. That was all that counted now, the size of your belly. It didn’t matter whether you were a woman, or a Muslim or an untouchable: anyone with a belly could rise up. My father’s father must have been a real Halwai, a sweet-maker, but when he inherited the shop, a member of some other caste must have stolen it from him with the help of the police. My father had not had the belly to fight back. That’s why he had fallen all the way to the mud, to the level of a rickshaw-puller. That’s why I was cheated of my destiny to be fat and creamy-skinned, and smiling.”

Balram concludes that there were one thousand castes and destinies in ancient India. Today there are just two castes: men with big bellies and men with small bellies. There are only two destinies – eat or get eaten up.

While Balram is a mythological character Balram’s nephew who comes to Delhi is called ‘Dharam’ which means religion.

Arvind Adiga has looked at religion and caste from an entirely different perspective. Rather than harping on the miseries of the caste system and highlighting the sufferings of the untouchables and lower castes like Mulk Raj Anand or Kamala
Markandaya, he has depicted a true picture of it as it exists today. He has observed the changes that have taken place India rises in competition with other developed nations.

V. III.4 The Issue of Class:

Class in India is a continuation of the ancient caste system. However, Adiga has thinks that it has been affected and disturbed in the globalizing India.

This is exemplified in Balram’s story. Balaram Halwai makes it to the position of an entrepreneur in Bangalore. Clashes among classes cannot be avoided in a nation like India where there are extremely rich and extremely poor people both struggling to overpower each other.

Munna has seen the brutal treatment of four landlords from his childhood. The village is a typical Indian village in the Gaya district in Bihar, without electricity, water taps and telephones. All these government facilities are indicated on paper. In reality electric poles are without power, water taps are broken. The poor children look very pale, lean and short for their age because of mal-nutrition. The Buffalo, the Stork, the Wild Boar and the Raven are the four landlords in the village. They have been assigned these names on account of their characteristic habits. They live in high-walled mansions. The country as Munna calls “Darkness” is rich with rice, fertilized fields but the feudal, moneylenders and zamindars make the poor to live in the “Darkness” of poverty.

The rural India is crushed under the heavy feet of the landlords. Buffalo, Wild Boar, Raven and Stork suck the blood of the villagers. The Buffalo exploits the rickshaw-
pullers. The Stork owned the river and takes a cut of every catch of fish from fisherman and a toll from every boatman. The Wild Boar owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangarh. The land laborers are exploited there. The Raven owned the dry rocky hillside land and took a cut from the goatherds. They have their own wells and ponds, their own temples inside the landlords’ quarters.

The children of the four landlords went around town in their own cars. The Buffalo’s son was kidnapped by the Naxals. The four Animals sent their sons and daughters away to Dhanbad and to Delhi to keep them safe from Naxalites.

The novel relates the story of Balram from darkness to light, from village to metropolis, from poverty to riches, from servant to master, from bondage to freedom. The story unfolds the way Balram breaks out to his new found freedom from a caged life of misery, through crime and cunning.

The eating habits are associated with caste and class in the society. Mr. Ashok visited his ancestral mansion. He requested for vegetarian food to his uncle. The Wild Boar said,

“You’re a landlord. It’s the Brahmins who are vegetarian, not us”\(^{33}\) \(\text{(pg.83)}\)

Mr. Ashok wished to eat like simple man. He requested Balram to take him to the place where he ate his meal. Balram ordered okra, cauliflower, radish, spinach, and dhal for Ashok. Mr. Ashok ate it with relish. Balram was surprised by Ashok’s gesture.
Balram’s father was a rickshaw puller. His uncles also did backbreaking work. They would go out to the fields with sickles, begging one landlord or the other for some work.

“A rich man’s body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. Ours are different….The story of a poor man’s life is written on his body.” (pp. 26-27)

Munna’s father was brought to the government hospital for treatment. A Muslim was quick to recognize that the rickshaw pullers are the victims of tuberculosis.

Munna’s father knew that education will change the situation of his son.

“My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine at least one – should live like a man.” (pg.50)

Munna’s role model was Vijay. He was a bus conductor. He came from a family of pigherds. They were lowest of the low caste, yet he had shaped his life. Munna was fascinated by Vijay’s uniform. He had seen the posh dress of the School Inspector. It was a rare opportunity for him to see stately clothes.

The word used for the ‘poor class’ is a coop. The people belonging to poor class are treated like animals. The poor people are like the pale hens trapped in the coop who cannot stand and protest.

A coop represents the poor class of servants. They grow without the awareness of the coop. 99.9 percent of poor class people are caught in the Rooster Coop. A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining ninety-nine per cent people to exist in perpetual servitude. This is the story of the millions in India who wake up at dawn
and rush towards their master’s posh house to work. The rooster coop is tight and impossible to break.

There are so many poor people in the streets, doing honestly their hard work, pulling cycles or loads of furniture, sincerely carrying a valuable cash or gold in the car of his master never thinking of stealing. Poor Indians are the world’s most honest people. Though these servants work on a meager amount given by their owners, they never cheat their masters.

“He is no Gandhi, he’s human, and he’s you and me. But he’s in the Rooster Coop. The trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy.”

Dowry system is another major social evil in Indian society. The poor families borrow money from moneylenders and landlords. Land is mortgaged for dowry by the bride’s family. The family of Munna borrowed money from the Stork for Reena’s wedding. The Stork wanted family members of Munna to work in his land. Therefore Munna, his brother Kishan and cousin had to work in the tea shop to pay the loan. Munna was compelled to leave the school. Munna’s elder brother Kishan got married after his father’s death. It was boy’s marriage so they screwed the girl’s family hard. They received five thousand rupees cash, a cycle and gold necklace for bridegroom. Madhavi Nikam writes, “Marriages are more a deal than an emotional lifelong bonding. Girl’s parents are ill treated and pressurized for money. They spend under tremendous pressure from the bridegroom’s parents or under the false notion of dignity and status.” (Nikam: 2009)
Corruption and economic exploitation is exposed in the novel. The government gave free food to children in the schools. The government program gave every boy three rotis, yellow daal, and pickles at lunchtime. Munna never received the free meal. The school teacher had stolen their lunch money. He sold the truck full of the uniforms sent by government in the neighboring village. Everyone knew about that but no one held it against the teacher as he had not been paid his salary for six months. The doctors in the government hospitals were doing the same. Munna’s father died because of the doctor’s absence. The politicians are the most corrupted in the democracy. Politicians and landlords make money out of every bit. Mr. Ashok offers countless money as bribe to politicians in Delhi to save tax on money earned from the coal mines. Settling illegal matters with money is a common phenomenon. He saved his driver from the case of accident with settlement of money.

Balram considers him half-baked because he is deprived of schooling. Inspector calls him a white tiger. Though he is forced to work in tea shops but he constantly observes the life of the rich people in his village closely. He sees a good prospect in driving, succeeds in having his own way. As Ashok’s driver in Delhi, he learns many things. He learns about the life of the rich. He learns about politics and politicians. He learns about the foreigners who visit the big hotels, about servants, watchmen and about drivers. He takes lessons from a senior driver on cheating masters to earn money. The special talent of Balram is that he reflects upon everything that he sees and experiences. He can think about the past, present and future. He can visualize, imagine, dream and judge situations and people. So, although he is half-baked, he educates himself in practical life.
Balram’s language is full of irony, paradox and anger. He does not like to live in the ‘Rooster Coop’. He revolts against system. Yet, he has to suppress his embittered feelings, being confined to the rooster Coop. He is forced to accept responsibility for a crime he has not committed. He does not even think of demanding anything in return. He realizes that the trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the existence of rich. Pinky madam leaves his master, thrusting a substantial amount of money in his hands. He pays it for spending a night with a golden haired girl in a hotel. He is angry to discover that the girl had dyed her hair. In spite of money, the real and genuine is reserved for the rich people. He realizes that everywhere there is cheating and deceit. He realizes that the poor and the prostitutes also have to earn their living. All this has a collective impact on his mind that pushes him towards his decision to kill his master.

After Pinky Madam’s departure, he has to cook and attend to every need of his master. Ashok begins to drink heavily and regularly. Balaram had to bring him back home from late nights in posh hotels and put him to sleep safely. Having been a witness to Ashok’s corrupt practices and gambling Balram begins to wake from his reverie in the Rooster Coop. He decides to kill his master and steal his money. This is how he justifies his ill-deed,

“Mr. Ashok is giving money to all these politicians in Delhi so that they will excuse him from the tax he has to pay. And who owns the tax in the end? Who but the ordinary people of this country – you!”

(pg. 244)
Balram knew that his boss had collected Rs. 700,000/- to pay the ministers and he had stuffed the money in a red bag. It was sufficient amount for him to begin a new life with a house, a motorbike and a small shop. Balram kills his master in a perfect state of mind, determined to execute his plan with precision. He kills Ashok and is fully satisfied with the crime. It freed Balram from the Rooster Coop.

Adiga explains: “I want to challenge the idea that India is the world’s greatest democracy. It may be so in an objective sense, but on the ground, the poor have such little power … I wanted something that would provoke and annoy the people…… The servant-master system implies two things. One is that the servants are far poorer than the rich…..a servant has no possibility of ever catching up with the master.”

(Adiga: Retrieved on 9/9/2008)

Thus, Adiga highlights the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor. Novel is about the economic system that lets a small minority to prosper at the expense of the majority.

V. III. 5 Conclusion:

The social discrimination is not good for the health of the society. Many Balram can be created by inequality and injustice. The criminality and violence are the outcome of the social divide. The question of economic, socio-political inequality is troublesome.

This novel also serves a social purpose, a well-defined objective. Tone of this novel is humorous at the same time intensely sarcastic. The writer hits at the very root of issues like democracy, religion, caste, politics, success, economy, policies etc.
Adiga presents no pretext, no secrets. He shares his views and opinions frankly and freely. Balram is an anti-hero yet he gains the sympathy of the readers. Adiga succeeds in exposing the corruption, poverty, cheating and divide rampant everywhere in the nation, at every level. He does not spare even the prime Minister, nor the doctors in village hospitals, drivers, servants, watchmen.

He shares the views with Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. The poor are turning to untraditional methods to reduce the gap. The irony is that the rich people are doing the same to counter attack poor people. Anand’s character meekly accepts his lot and comes to terms with life. Ravi in Kamala Markandaya’s *Handful of Rice* retains his honesty in the end. Kajoli is forced to become a prostitute against her will. Balram on the other hand chooses a foul path without a sense of guilt or regret. The inner conflict and restlessness of the inmates of the Rooster Coop is brought out by Adiga. He points out the serious consequences of their revolt. He does not even get caught by the police after murdering a man. He shows the incompetency and limitations of law. He proves that those on the darker side of life can come to light if they are willing to act, irrespective of caste or religion.

Anger, restlessness and violence are common results of frustration. Breaking of filial ties is observed in Ravi in *A Handful of Rice* as well as Balram. But Ravi does not like driving out his family members. Balram knows the fate of all his family members in his village. He knows that they would not be spared by the Stork. Yet, he has broken off with them completely without any regrets or sense of shame.
Apu drives away Puttanna who steals his money. Perhaps even Balram’s family would not have approved of it. Balram does what his elder brother Kishan is unable to do. The only little streak of humanity that we note in Balram is his decision to go back to the apartment and take his nephew Dharam with him, in spite of the danger involved. His filial loyalty and attachment to Dharam is intact till the end.

At the end, we have a picture of havoc, chaos and bleakness in this country, on the backdrop of a rising global economy. One is reminded of the following lines by W. B. Yeats in his poem ‘The Second Coming’ –

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre*

*The falcon cannot hear the falconer;*

*Things fall apart, the center cannot hold;*

*Mere anarchy is loos’d upon the world.*
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