

## تشريع الأساطير ومحنة الطبقات الدنيا في رواية "النمر الأبيض" لأديجا

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الكلية التربوية المفتوحة

Legitimizing Myths and The plight of The Lower Classes  
in Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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## Abstract

India lives a social system based on a strict hierarchical class, with some powerful groups at the top of that hierarchy, and they are in a constant struggle to maintain their position. The struggle for survival, submission to the orders and policies of the most influential groups, and the plight of the lower classes are among the most important topics presented in the global novels, including the Adiga's *The White Tiger*. The novel is analyzed based on textual analysis method. The social aspects of the novel are analyzed according to Pratto et al. theory of "Social Domination". The article focuses on the characters and events of both the lower and upper classes in the addressed novel to analyze the suffering of the lower classes and the motivations of the upper classes to enhance the caste system. It adopts the social framework to explain the consequences of the dominant groups' adherence to the class system. Legitimizing myths are one of the means used by the dominant groups to consolidate beliefs and policies that restrain the role of the lower classes and reinforce their position at the top of the hierarchy.

**Keywords:** Adiga, Hierarchical classification, Legitimizing myths, Plight, Pratto, Social dominance, Submission.

## المخلص

تعيش الهند نظامًا اجتماعيًا قائمًا على طبقية هرمية صارمة ، مع وجود بعض الجماعات القوية في أعلى هذا التسلسل الهرمي وهم في صراع دائم للحفاظ على مركزهم. من اهم الموضوعات المطروقة في الروايات هي الصراع من أجل البقاء ، والخضوع لأوامر وسياسات المجموعات الأكثر نفوذاً ، ومحنة الطبقات الدنيا ، بما في ذلك رواية اديجا /النمر الأبيض. لتحليل الجوانب الاجتماعية للرواية الموجهة ، تستند الدراسة في تحليلها لنظرية براتو واخرون "الهيمنة الاجتماعية". تركز الدراسة على شخصيات وأحداث كل من الطبقات الدنيا والعليا في الرواية لتحليل معاناة الطبقات الدنيا ودوافع الطبقات العليا لتعزيز النظام الطبقي. تتبنى الدراسة الإطار الاجتماعي لشرح عواقب تمسك المجموعات المهيمنة بالنظام الطبقي. إضافة الشرعية على الأساطير هي إحدى الوسائل التي تستخدمها الجماعات المهيمنة لترسيخ المعتقدات والسياسات التي تحد من دور الطبقات الدنيا وتعزز موقعها في قمة الهرم. لخصت الدراسة إلى أن النظام الطبقي في الهند لا تدعمه فقط الطبقة العليا والمهيمنة ، ولكن أيضًا يدعم من قبل معظم الطبقات الدنيا والمضطهدة للحفاظ على مكاسبهم ، حتى لو كانت شبه معدومة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التصنيف الهرمي ، شرعنة الأساطير ، المحنة ، الهيمنة الاجتماعية ، الخضوع

## Introduction

### Social Background

Indian society, according to customs and traditions, is based on a strict social class system. It is affirmed for certain groups to be classified among the ruling groups. At the same time, it was decided for other groups to be among the lowest groups that fall into the distress of hunger and deprivation. This strict categorization has become a hereditary social constitution that defines the lower and upper classes and justifies the persecutions and violations committed by the higher classes against the lower classes in their pursuit of clinging to their social position and authority. That classification and those groups gain legitimacy and standing from the Indian social heritage supported by religion and economic factors. Besides, it is based mostly on myths and legends transmitted from one generation to another. Not only do the upper classes of society confine themselves to seizing the country's goods and deprive the lower classes of it, but rather those dominant classes exploited the lower classes to meet their needs and instincts.

Religion in India also plays a major role in strengthening that class system. According to the Hindu religion, which represents the most Indians people, the child's fate and class are closely related to his birth date. Concerning the connection between a person's destiny with his birth; Altekhar writes, "The one thing that now sustains the caste system is the factor of birth or heredity. Everyone takes up that vocation which he chooses, or is forced to choose, irrespective of his caste which is now entirely the result of the accident of birth and of nothing else" (184). If the individual is born within the lower classes, most of his rights are forfeited, and he is not entitled to mix with the upper classes. Mason Olcott in his article refers to Hinduism's role in supporting the caste system through relates human's class to his previous lives; he writes "Hinduism lends weighty support to the hierarchy of caste by declaring that a man's caste is the exact index of his soul's behavior and piety in previous births" (648). Religion does not only determine the category of the individual, but it also determines his job and his colleagues at birth, he had no choice in that. Concerning this matter, Olcott writes, "Caste status prevented personal choice and lessened maladjustment... Friends and companions did not have to be carefully selected by the individual, but were decided for him by birth" (655).

The economic aspect also has a role in promoting and supporting India's social class system. The upper and wealthy classes control the state policy that aims to reinforce and support higher groups, limit the role of the lower classes, and increase their suffering. Those upper classes monopolize the easy and beneficial jobs for their members, unlike the dirty and exhausting jobs specified for the lower classes. Concerning that issue, Raj writes:

The conquering, or dominant ethnic group forces the weaker, conquered or enslaved group to adopt lower and menial occupations... The dominant ethnic group considered that occupational pollution, taboos and concepts of cleanliness legitimized segregation and the grading of castes, clans or tribes who were engaged in such occupations. (11)

According to this concept, society is classified according to jobs. The groups that occupy menial jobs are at the bottom of the hierarchy, and they are not allowed to bypass that. As for groups with sovereign functions, they are at the top of the hierarchy and have the right to control the rest of the groups. Despite all recent attempts to reduce the huge gaps between the classes and try to include the lower classes with some rights and privileges, but the Indian social system remains largely based on the hierarchical classification.

**The problem of the study**

The dominant groups' pursuit to legitimize the myths that enhance their position at the top of the social hierarchy and the persecution and discrimination of vulnerable groups and forcing them to remain at the bottom of the hierarchy.

**Significance of the study**

The significance of the present study lies in revealing the suffering and plight of the lower classes in Indian society due to the persistence of the dominant groups to enhance their position and hegemony through the use of several methods, including the legalization of myths.

**Objectives of the study**

The real purpose of the present study is to discuss and analyze the rational and realistic reasons that lie behind the dominant groups' insistence on promoting myths and the consequences of legitimizing the myths on the lives of the lower classes.

**Questions of the study:**

- 1-How did the legitimizing of myths contribute to strengthening the position of the dominant groups in Adiga's *The White Tiger*?
- 2-Does the vulnerable groups' acceptance for these myths have a role in enhancing the hegemony of the dominant groups?

**Methodology**

The present study is a qualitative and analytical study that aims to discuss the persecution and discrimination that Indian people are exposed to due to the endeavors of dominant groups to impose their hegemony on the others by legitimizing myths. The document analysis approach will be used in the present study for data collection. The data collected from Adiga's *White Tiger*, which includes the methods used by dominant groups and individuals towards vulnerable groups, and the reasons for these groups' tendency to subjugate the other, will be analyzed according to Prato et al. "Social Dominance" theory.

**Discussion****Hierarchy-enhancing Vs. Hierarchy-attenuating**

Inevitably, in all societies that are based on social hierarchy in their arrangement, there are groups that work hard to maintain this arrangement that is in their favor, which are the dominant groups. Instead, there are groups trying to reduce the gap between those classes, which are the lower groups. De Oliveira et al. refer to that tendency of dominant groups to maintain their position, they write:

Individuals holding a "high-power position" would tend to agree to maintain hierarchical relations between groups which would, in turn, lead them to endorse a set of ideologies legitimizing the asymmetries of power and the unequal distribution of social resources between groups. Thus, the hierarchical organization of society is preserved and justified by the existence of legitimizing myths, ... In other words, dominant groups or individuals will use these ideologies to establish their dominance by legitimizing social inequalities. (868)

The dominant groups are not only satisfied with the acquisition of power, but they tend to persecute and discriminate groups that fall below them in the hierarchy for fear of these groups threatening their power. Power is not confined to the political aspect, but extends to economic, ethnic, regional, and other aspects on the basis of which classifies society into classes. On the tendency of the dominant classes to reinforce binary differences between their class and others, Abdul Jan Mohammed writes "white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence

and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object.” (63). These forces have the greatest influence on the Indian society because it contains many races and religions that take their place in the hierarchy according to their power.

This caste system is clearly embodied in Adiga's *The White Tiger* through the "Misters" and their server classes. Balarm and his family represent the lower servants caste while Mr. Ashok and his family represent the upper dominant caste. This classification did not come randomly, but rather power enables Ashok and his family to occupy the top of social hierarchy and exploiting poor families, including the Balarm family. Concerning the formulation of this kind of classification, Pratto et al. write:

An arbitrary-set system, in which groups constructed on “arbitrary” bases, that is, on bases not linked to the human life-cycle, have differential access to things of positive and negative social value. Arbitrary-set groups may be defined by social distinctions meaningfully related to power, such as (in various contexts) nationality, “race”, ethnicity, class, estate, descent, religion, or clan. (273)

Concerning the hegemony of the dominant group over the inferior groups and forcing them to obey their orders, Adiga writes, "For this land, India, has never been free. First the Muslims, then the British bossed us around. In 1947 the British left, but only a moron would think that we became free then" (34). Adiga's speech is considered an affirmation of the continuation of slavery and the continued hegemony of the dominant higher groups, even if it is with different names or native powerful individuals. According to his words, the liberation of India did not make a difference to the lower groups, as it represented a change in the members of the dominant group only from foreign individuals to local individuals.

The tasks that Balram has to do from cleaning the house, playing with the children, making tea, massaging his master's feet, bearing the insults and beating, in addition to his job as a driver is part of the tasks that the lower subordinate classes have to present to the upper and dominant classes. In addition, it represents the advantages obtained by individuals belonging to the dominant groups that justify their orientation towards preserving those differences between groups and supporting the inequality. These lower-class individuals are treated as slaves rather than laborers. Concerning the treatment of dominant groups' members to people who work to them, Balram says "in India—or, at least, in the Darkness—the rich don't have drivers, cooks, barbers, and tailors. They simply have servants" (80). Balram's speech summarizes the Indians society classification into two castes only according to power: Masters and servants.

It is not necessary for the individual to be from the upper classes in order to promote and support the class system, so the individual can act superior, even if both of them are from the lower classes, but higher than the other in his employment or economic status. This is what the study finds in the behavior of other servants with Balram. Because he is the oldest in the job, the other driver always intends to assign all tasks to Balram and force him to sleep on the ground while he is content with driving tasks and allocates a comfortable mattress for himself. The reason the older driver supports the caste system is at least ensuring that he is not equated with the new driver, Balram, in that his duties are limited to driving and spending most of his time hanging out with the other server without any work, while Balram should do all other tasks. In addition to bearing the greater part of the work, he had to endure the insults and harassment of other older servants, while he was cleaning the dogs, the Nepali servant shouted at him saying "Don't pull the chain so hard! They're worth more than you are!" (102). Regarding the reason for the first driver's tendency to persecute Balram, who

belongs to the same lower group as the first driver, Prabhat Patnaik writes "Everyone in society can have a sense of belonging to, or of being at home with, a particular group, ' a caste-group, and yet there can be oppression, rooted in continuing disrespect of one group towards another, even if social progress has been made on the front of material equality among the groups."(74).

Regarding the customs and traditions which are related to inherited myths that imposed on the lower groups' members, Adiga writes, "They were not allowed to sit on the plastic chairs put out for the customers; they had to crouch near the back, in that hunched-over, squatting posture common to servants in every part of India" (13). Balram's Village and the surrounding villages are dominated by one family consisting of four brothers, each of whom is responsible for collecting taxes on a specific part of the service. Ashok and his family members, who represent the dominant group, began dealing with the villages who are subjected to them as slaves. People from these villages were forced to pay fees to the Ashok family for almost anything they use, for example, road taxes, water use, and even the lands where the cattle graze.

### **Legitimizing myths**

The caste system is reinforced through several means, the most important of which may be to give legitimacy by the dominant groups to ideologies and practices that may not be based on logical and real constants with the aim of misleading and controlling the other. This process is referred to by Pratto et al. as "legitimizing myths", and they write:

Social dominance theory states that the decisions and behaviours of individuals, the formation of new social practices, and the operations of institutions are shaped by legitimising myths. Legitimising myths are consensually held values, attitudes, beliefs, stereotypes, and cultural ideologies. (275)

One of the examples of legitimizing the myth that was mentioned in the targeted novel is what a police officer declared about the need for the lower class to defend its authority and right through elections, saying:

Whatever was being done, was being done for our own good. The Great Socialist's enemies would try and steal the election from us, the poor, and take the power away from us, the poor, and put those shackles back on our hands that he, the Great Socialist, had so lovingly taken off our hands. Did we understand? (132)

What the police officer declared contradicts the existing reality regarding the role of the lower class in determining the elections. The electoral votes of the poor were sold by their employers. They were not allowed to approach the voting stations for fear that if they vote, they may break the suspicious agreements between the dominant parties. Concerning the stealing of the voters' votes, Balarm's parents address his son, saying "I've seen twelve elections—five general, five state, two local—and someone else has voted for me twelve times. I've heard that people in the other India get to vote for themselves—isn't that something?" (57). Based on the contradiction between the electoral reality and the police statement, we conclude that this statement is a kind of legitimizing myths to control people's minds and force them to submit and sell their votes willingly to the dominant groups.

One of the examples that are mentioned in the novel about the legitimizing myths, is when the old man driver tells Balram that he is not suitable for the career of driving as he is from the caste of "Halwai" who are only suitable for making sweets. The old man driver addressing Balram about driving, and he says "it's 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?" (31). Linking the driving career to certain classes without others is considered one of the myths promoted by the classes which are upper than the working class. The purpose of this is not to allow these lowest classes to compete with drivers for their jobs and to persuade them to continue their inherited jobs.

Concerning the way of imposing those legitimising the myths is what Adiga mentioned in his novel, he writes "One fact about India is that you can take almost anything you hear about the country from the prime minister and turn it upside down and then you will have the truth about that thing" (8). The dominant and ruling class tries to promote information and false ideologies to mislead as much of the public as possible to preserve their power and prestige. With regard to the positive traits that individuals of the dominant group keep for themselves and their attempt to impose negative traits on the subordinate groups, Pratto writes "People in high-power groups usually have more things of positive social value they can allocate to others, and more power to ensure that things of negative social value are allocated to people in other groups". (278). We can see the effects of this process among the lower classes, which were destined by the dominant groups to be misleading and uneducated. When Ashok tried to give an idea to his American wife about the thought carried by the servants, he deliberately asked Balram several simple questions, but Balram used to answer these questions arbitrarily because he did not have the answer. Ashok referred to those people like Balram who believe in myths as "half-baked", he said:

The thing is, he probably has...what, two, three years of schooling in him? He can read and write, but he doesn't get what he's read. He's half-baked. The country is full of people like him, I'll tell you that. And we entrust our glorious parliamentary democracy"— he pointed at me—"to characters like these. That's the whole tragedy of this country. (5)

Ashok's words explain one of the reasons for spreading and strengthening the principle of legitimizing the myths, which is controlling the minds of the majority or outgroups by providing them with ideologies that would lead that majority toward involuntary submission, which is like hypnosis.

Another example of legitimizing myths is the killings and raping crimes that are published weekly in a cheap magazine, *Murder Weekly*, directed at the poor. Millions of copies are printed to depict, for the poor or the lower class, the consequences of the rebellion against their masters. Concerning spreading stereotypes of the perpetrators of these crimes and spreading fear among the poor class, Adiga says:

You see, the murderer in the magazine is so mentally disturbed and sexually deranged that not one reader would want to be like him—and in the end he always gets caught by some honest, hardworking police officer (ha!), or goes mad and hangs himself by a bedsheet after writing a sentimental letter to his mother or primary school teacher, or is chased, beaten, buggered, and garroted by the brother of the woman he has done in. (153)

The purpose of the government's keenness to print and support this magazine is to create a certain ideology among the underprivileged classes and force them to submit to the status quo. The rebellious people are also portrayed as mentally ill or murdered, unworthy of sympathy and support, and the way to salvation is to follow the orders of the upper classes without objection. These kinds of stories establish an ideology that any person from the poor classes declares his complaint and rebellion from the upper classes may carry a criminal thought or be mentally disturbed, which drives the rest to turn

away from thinking about these topics for fear of their consequences. Establishing this type of ideology based on illusions is giving legitimizing for myths. Regarding the consequences of establishing such an ideology on the lower classes, Adiga writes "So if your driver is busy flicking through the pages of Murder Weekly, relax. No danger to you. Quite the contrary" (151). It becomes clear the true purpose of the government's support for such magazines that broadcasts a certain thought based on illusions and myths and legitimize them, which is the intellectual restriction and control of the minds of the lower classes.

In addition, the members of the dominant group spread terror and fear among the subordinate groups to ensure their permanent loyalty and non-rebellion against them. The theory indicates that men are the group that the most exposed to violence and persecution by the dominant groups, Patto writes "the age system is focused on the control of children by adults, and the gender system is focused on men's control of women, social dominance theory argues that arbitrary-set hierarchy primarily focuses on the control of subordinate males by coalitions of dominant males. This, in fact, is a primary reason that arbitrary-set hierarchy is associated with extraordinary levels of violence."(274). These arbitrary procedures and threats declare by the masters in the event that their servants deviate from the path drawn for them, and the stories that are told about killing the families of servants and burning their homes, some of them may be real, while others may be imaginary, intended to maintain servants' loyalty. Regarding to the fears of the servants about their families and the fate that might face them if they rebel against their masters, Adiga writes "The Indian family, is the reason we are trapped and tied to the coop. The answer to the second question is that only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed —hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the masters—can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature."(150)

In another incident related to the effects of legitimizing myth, when Ashok's wife ran over a child while she was driving a car while she was under the influence of alcohol, her servant Balram justified to her that the accident was due to the child who was walking late in the street and did not blame his master, in response to Ashok's question Balram said "In that case, will anyone miss her...?" "I don't think so, sir. You know how those people in the Darkness are: they have eight, nine, ten children—sometimes they don't know the names of their own children. Her parents—if they're even here in Delhi, if they even know where she is tonight—won't go to the police."(145) Balram was not satisfied with blaming the child who was killed, but rather he blamed the family of that child and the class to which she belongs, forgetting that he is from the same class as the child who was killed and justifying to his master that these people are of no importance because they give birth to a lot and no one cares about them. In explaining why subordinates would stand with their masters, even when they are wrong, Patto write "Such disparate myths have been used to argue that inequality is fair legitimate, natural, or moral. Hierarchy-enhancing legitimising myths not only organise individual, group, and institutional behaviour in ways that sustain dominance, they often lead subordinates to collaborate with dominants in the maintenance of oppression."(276).

Subordinates believe that rebellion against their masters or rejecting those myths in which they believe in may deprive them of the benefits they receive from their masters, so they are willing to stand with their masters against the people of their lower class. Regarding to the efforts of the servants to limit the thought of any member of the servants in what they thought of deviating from the customs and traditions of the servant

class, Adiga writes "Servants have to keep other servants from becoming innovators, experimenters, or entrepreneurs. Yes, that's the sad truth. . . . The coop is guarded from the inside" (166). Adiga resembles the commitment of the servant class to myths and its legitimacy, like the commitment of roosters to their chains and staying in a cage.

### Conclusion

The present study finds that the dominant groups, whether socially or politically, tend to focus on spreading ideas that usually constitute obsessions and fears among the submissive groups, in order to show the consequences of rebellion on the social class arrangement. Also these myths aim to shake confidence in the submissive groups and plant within them the belief in the futility of rebellion. The study also finds that the insistence of the dominant groups to support magazines and radios that publish murders and rape among the submissive groups makes the members of those groups grateful for their work as servants and protected by their masters. On the other hand, the study finds that the submissive groups themselves tend to legitimize and support the myths in order to preserve their temporary gains. Their fear of the unknown or their expulsion from their jobs prompts members of submissive groups to mock or fight anyone who tries to discredit these myths. All in all, both the dominant and submissive groups support these myths and give them legitimacy, because each group has its own motives for preserving them. The motive of the dominant group is to ensure the subjugation of other groups, while the motive of the subjugated groups is their belief in the myth that their lives are linked to their existence as servants and subjugated.

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