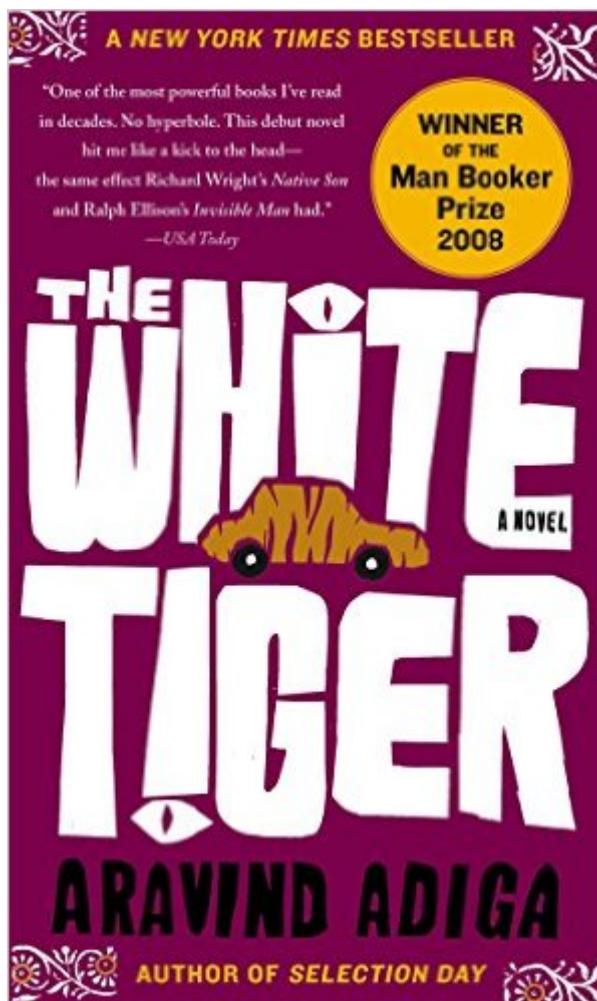


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# The White Tiger: A Novel



## Synopsis

A stunning literary debut critics have likened to Richard Wright's *Native Son*, follows a darkly comic Bangalore driver through the poverty and corruption of modern India's caste society. "This is the authentic voice of the Third World, like you've never heard it before" (John Burdett, *Newsweek*). The white tiger of this novel is Balram Halwai, a poor Indian villager whose great ambition leads him to the zenith of Indian business culture, the world of the Bangalore entrepreneur. On the occasion of the president of China's impending trip to Bangalore, Balram writes a letter to him describing his transformation and his experience as driver and servant to a wealthy Indian family, which he thinks exemplifies the contradictions and complications of Indian society. Recalling *The Death of Vishnu* and *Bangkok 8* in ambition, scope, and narrative genius with a mischief and personality all its own. Amoral, irreverent, deeply endearing, and utterly contemporary, this novel is an international publishing sensation—and a startling, provocative debut.

## Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Free Press (October 14, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1416562605

ISBN-13: 978-1416562603

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 716 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #8,150 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > Asian > Indian #8 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Epistolary #39 in Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > Australia & Oceania

## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. A brutal view of India's class struggles is cunningly presented in Adiga's debut about a racist, homicidal chauffeur. Balram Halwai is from the Darkness, born where India's downtrodden and unlucky are destined to rot. Balram manages to escape his village and move to Delhi after being hired as a driver for a rich landlord. Telling his story in retrospect, the novel is a piecemeal correspondence from Balram to the premier of China, who is expected to visit India and whom Balram believes could learn a lesson or two about India's entrepreneurial underbelly. Adiga's existential and crude prose animates the battle between India's wealthy and poor as Balram suffers

degrading treatment at the hands of his employers (or, more appropriately, masters). His personal fortunes and luck improve dramatically after he kills his boss and decamps for Bangalore. Balram is a clever and resourceful narrator with a witty and sarcastic edge that endears him to readers, even as he rails about corruption, allows himself to be defiled by his bosses, spews coarse invective and eventually profits from moral ambiguity and outright criminality. It's the perfect antidote to lyrical India. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In this darkly comic but novel set in India, Balram, a chauffeur, murders his employer, justifying his crime as the act of a "social entrepreneur." In a series of letters to the Premier of China, in anticipation of the leader's upcoming visit to Balram's homeland, the chauffeur recounts his transformation from an honest, hardworking boy growing up in "the Darkness"—those areas of rural India where education and electricity are equally scarce, and where villagers banter about local elections "like eunuchs discussing the Kama Sutra"—to a determined killer. He places the blame for his rage squarely on the avarice of the Indian elite, among whom bribes are commonplace, and who perpetuate a system in which many are sacrificed to the whims of a few. Adiga's message isn't subtle or novel, but Balram's appealingly sardonic voice and acute observations of the social order are both winning and unsettling. Copyright ©2008Click here to subscribe to The New Yorker --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Reading this fascinating novel is like getting a glimpse through a keyhole. Mr. Adiga's writing style is easy to read though it is sometimes a little difficult to follow the story line when he has a flashback. Not being from India, I have no idea if he is telling the absolute truth, but I have no reason to disbelieve him either. If the situation is as he describes, I truly hope that this novel helps to initiate some change, however small. Well done Mr. Adiga.

White Tiger (Mann Booker Prize Winner) is an epistolary story related in letters from an Indian entrepreneur, Balram Halwai, to the Chinese prime minister, prior to his visit to India. Balram's name, age and date of birth were bestowed upon him by his schoolmaster, without aid of any documentation. The notes Balram sends are written in the wee hours of the morning. He runs a fleet of chauffeurs that carry Indian workers to and from jobs that are outsourced from the U.S. Since his clients do American jobs, they must keep American hours, so Balram's days and nights are

reversed. His letters describe his rise through Indian society, from abject poverty to his current place as a wealthy entrepreneur, that is to say, his escape from the rooster coop of poverty on his way to becoming a White Tiger. The reader is provided a long, disheartening look at the two extremes of Indian society; the great majority of citizens in this populous nation (over one billion strong) live in dire poverty, while only a few (the fortunate one percent) live the good life, all at the expense of the masses beneath them. This situation is certainly not unique to India. One can easily find such sharp divides--rich and poor--in any number of nations around the globe. Balram's rise is a bit more daunting because of the rigid caste system that dominates Indian society. To see his future, he only has to look at his father, a stick of a man who pulls rickshaws, and always will. Balram is also locked in by the expectations of his family. His grandmother, Kusum, demands that he send his wages back to her, and her demands carry the weight of social law. Any son who doesn't comply becomes an outcast and brings shame upon the family. So, to achieve his goals, Balram must battle on two fronts. He succeeds by murdering his boss, and then hides in plain sight. In one humorous incident, a man sees Balram's likeness on a wanted poster, but can't read the text that follows. Balram concocts a ludicrous story, giving himself great credit for the poster, and goes on about his business. *White Tiger* is apparently a debut novel, and is quite well written for an initial effort. Even though the main character is somewhat less than admirable, the story line is entertaining and makes for a lively read.

Kind of a roundabout way to a straightforward story with little pay off. Disappointed by the lack of a deeply felt, engrossing story this was made out to be.

This is a book I am considering to recommend for my Book Club. Funny, witty, with enough information to understand the custom and traditions of India. I had been in India, for that, I loved the humor of the author, it touches deeply one's heart as you read about differences and yet how strong the different castes are, how unfair is poverty, yet the author with his tremendous description of reality makes it bearable, how he understand deeply then heart of the one who without nothing bends every day to the floor, to make his job and his employer a priority, yet, never closing his eyes in order to learn from difficulty and learn to progress. This is India, the modern India, the very Human India, the very poor India, yet, the India with pride and beautiful people and long standing Culture and traditions.

The *White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga is a novel in the tradition of Dostoevsky's *Notes from*

Underground and Ellison's Invisible Man. That is to say it is not your traditional Indian novel, but one that presents the hero as the outsider, a man who is both literally and figuratively underground and invisible. The novel is narrated by Balram Halwai, "The White Tiger" who over seven nights shares his life story in the form of a letter to a Chinese official. In Balram the author has created an anti-hero who, with both charisma and charm, shares a very dark story about corruption, death and escape from the most extreme poverty into the wealth of successful entrepreneurship. The author uses the metaphors of light and dark to help us understand his traversal of a side of India seldom seen in most tales of that country. The theme of naming/identity also plays an important role as Balram takes on different names as he grows and changes from the simple munna to his eventual magisterial identity as "The White Tiger". The author has created a sort of modern journey, much as Ellison did where the hero overcomes his beginnings, and the corruption he finds everywhere, to create a new life for himself. It is, however, a new life that is strangely cut off from society so he remains an outsider to the end. The brilliant conception of the author impressed me as he presented believable characters, the realistic details about the best and worst of Indian society, and a clear depiction of the nature of the hero at the center of the story. There is black humor that is sometimes excruciatingly funny alongside true regret, and underlying it all hints of a fear (of the past) that cannot be completely eradicated. The author's voice is original and challenging as he takes you on a journey that, while seemingly straightforward, has many layers of meaning and leaves you with questions to ponder. Genuinely deserving of the Man Booker Prize of 2008, The White Tiger is both an engaging enjoyable read and a thought-provoking meditation on life.

Right now my state is "Wow, simply wow!" I will add more to this review when the story will sink in my psyche like all good stories do.

I loved the story and the characters and all the details. So dramatic and drastic. A very long definition of entrepreneurship but worth the plot.

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