Cacophony of India: A Comparative Study of The White Tiger and Slumdog Millionaire

Nakul Kundra

Abstract

The paper attempts to find common social themes in Vikas Swarup's novel Slumdog Millionaire, Aravind Adiga's novel The White Tiger, and Danny Boyle's film Slumdog Millionaire. India has been represented, among others, as a country of filth, poverty, crime, illiteracy, prostitution, identity crisis, inequality, population explosion and corruption. The bright side of India has been largely ignored. The disharmony of Mother India haunts the Indian audience of the three works because they heat about the bush in their partial portrayals of India. In other words, these works exploit similar social issues in order to construct the plots and images of a gloomy country. Their concern for India raises suspicions as they do not offer any direct remedial solution for the cure of the so-called "social evils of India."

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บทความนี้พยายามพิจารณารูปแบบการสื่อสารในสื่อที่มีเครื่องมือจากนักเขียนอังกฤษภาษาไทยเรื่อง "Q&A เกมชิงวัล ฟิชิ่ง 1,000 ล้าน" (Slumdog Millionaire) โดย วิฑี ซารุป (Vikas Swarup), นักเขียนอังกฤษภาษาไทยเรื่อง ผดุงศุภชัยพันธุ์ (The White Tiger) โดย ธารุณ ศรีกุล (Aravind Adiga) และภาพยนตร์อังกฤษภาษาไทยเรื่อง "สลัมด็อก มิลเลนเนียม ตาดูปุ่มสูง อยู่หิวห้อ" (Slumdog Millionaire) ทั้งสามเรื่องยังคงเห็นได้ถึงวัฒนธรรม อัตราการเกิด การวิวัฒนาการด้าน ปัญหาสุขภาพ วิถีชีวิตความเป็นอยู่ของคนในสังคม ความเปลี่ยนแปลงในสังคม การบริโภคของประชากร (population explosion) และการสังคมการสังคม โดยเฉพาะที่เกี่ยวกับจำนวนคนในสังคม ความเปลี่ยนแปลงของประชากรในสังคมจากการเกิดการจดทะเบียน จำนวนของจำนวนคน เพิ่มขึ้นอย่างรวดเร็วการนำเสนอภาพลักษณ์ของสังคมโดยไม่ได้มีการสื่อสารในรูปแบบที่เหมาะสม การสร้างภาพลักษณ์ของสังคมโดยไม่ได้มีการสื่อสารในรูปแบบที่เหมาะสม การสร้างภาพลักษณ์ของสังคมโดยไม่ได้มีการสื่อสารในรูปแบบที่เหมาะสม การสร้างภาพลักษณ์ของสังคมโดยไม่ได้มีการสื่อสารในรูปแบบที่เหมาะสม การสร้างภาพลักษณ์ของสังคมโดยไม่ได้มีการสื่อสารในรูปแบบที่เหมาะสม การสร้างภาพลักษณ์ของสังคมโดยไม่ได้มีการสื่อสารในรูปแบบที่เหมาะสม
India has been a part and parcel of literature as well as cinema. The works under study, *Slumdog Millionaire* (N&CM) and *The White Tiger*, have been conspicuous for the controversial delineation of the country. They exaggeratedly focus on the underbelly of India. The other side of the coin is wittily or unwittingly ignored for unknown definite reasons. This criticism or negative portrayal may be due to the impact of Westernization or the authors’ political move to be caressed by the West. Perhaps, it is the time when we should widen the scope of Orientalism because it is not only the West's attempt to undermine and undervalue the East, but a good number of natives are also treading on the same path in the name of 'self-discovery'. Particularly, the Indian novelists, whose works are under study, try to 'mimic' their western counterparts by depicting the country in black colours. Thus, India has been presented as a country of filth, poverty, crimes, unemployment, illiteracy, prostitution, identity-crisis, inequality, child-exploitation, casteism, population explosion, pollution, gridlock, beggary, and dark democracy.

The Comparative study of *The White Tiger* and *Slumdog Millionaire* gives, or rather generates the idea of nation which appears to be quasi-imaginary and quasi-real. It puts light on the dark aspects of Indian society, and simultaneously constructs India as a nation on the canvas of novel. Obviously, the representation of the nation is likely to be debatable in this postcolonial era especially when it focuses on the underbelly of India. It eventuates in a never-ending battle of opposing discourses of nation and anti-nation in the field of literary criticism. Tagore also once said: "A country is not territorial, but ideational" (Alter 166). The present paper specifically attempts to spot the common social themes in the works under study. Interestingly, it shows that the works bear about the bush in the partial portrayal of India. In other words, Aravind Adiga, Vikas Swarup, and Danny Boyle attack almost the similar social issues in the construction of the plots as well India as a dark nation. The bright side of the country has been conspicuously ignored. The cacophony of Mother India haunts the reader throughout the three works.

All the three works under study describe two Indias- one is the rich, the other is the poor. Both the reflections of India are depressing. The poverty stricken part is obviously bad and the rich portion is tainted with crimes, cheating, artificiality, idiosyncrasies, slaughter of human values, corruption et cetera. The first person narrator Balram in *The White Tiger* writes to Mr. Premier:

> I am talking of a place in India, at least a third of the country, a fertile place, full of rice fields and wheat fields and ponds in the middle of those fields
choked with lotuses and water lilies, and water buffaloes wading through the ponds and chewing on the lotuses and lilies. Those who live in this place call it the Darkness. Please understand, your Excellency, that India is two countries in one: an India of Light and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well off. But the river brings darkness to India the black river. (Adiga 14)

Here, the Ganga is referred to as the river which brings darkness to India. Symbolically, the author alludes to Indian fantasies of supernaturalism and blind faith attached with religion in this techno-savvy era. It acts as a hindrance in the spread of scientific enlightenment. India is a country of binary oppositions where light and darkness (Adiga 14), the rich and the poor (26), real and false (320), marriage and cremation (51), "night and day" (75), "privacy" and publicity (190), though dialectically opposite, exist together. Ram Mohammad Thomas in Slumdog Millionaire (N) presents the gloomy picture of two-faced Mumbai: "Amidst the modern skyscrapers and neon-lit shopping complexes of Mumbai, Dharavi sits like a cancerous lump in the heart of the city. And the city refuses to recognize it" (Swarup 157). In the movie, during childhood Jamal Malik and Salim live in abject poverty. The slum area is filthy, dirty, unhygienic and a kind of temporary abode. Later, Jamal Malik works as a tea-server in a state-of-the-art call centre. It markedly beckons the technological developments in India amidst poverty. Salim joins the world of crime which is full of luxuries and wealth. This life is altogether different from his childhood days in slums.

The three works have picaresque qualities. Ram (Slumdog Millionaire [N]) constantly moves between Mumbai, Delhi, and Agra whereas Jamal (Slumdog Millionaire [M]) runs from Mumbai to Agra and again comes back. Balram (The White Tiger) starts his journey from the darkness and reaches the light. Finally, he leaves for Bangalore. This travelling simply reflects struggle for existence. It indirectly refers to nomadic lifestyle of Indian society. The protagonists appear to be escapists who set the myth that Indian life is not stable.

The deteriorating Indian education system, according to the writers and the director, is responsible for the birth of characters like Balram (The White Tiger), Ram Mohammad Thomas (Slumdog Millionaire [N]) and Jamal Malik (Slumdog Millionaire [M]). It has failed its target to provide essential academic knowledge to the main characters, the frogs in the well. Jamal along with his brother Salim gets corporal punishment from an irritating schoolmaster in an overcrowded class-room. Consequently, education is neither education nor entertainment, but an onus for them. On the other
hand, Ram Mohhammed Thomas does not ever find a chance to visit a real school. He hardly knows about The Taj Mahal, Gandhi and self-assertion. The classroom at the juvenile home is dilapidated.

It (the juvenile home) has a classroom with ramshackle desks and a cracked blackboard. And teachers who have not taught in years. It has a sports ground where grass grows as tall as wickets and where, if you are not careful, you can graze yourself against stones the size of footballs... He (the sports instructor) keeps cricket and badminton equipment in a nice glass case, but never allows us to touch it. (Swarup 91)

Balram, though "an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in the crowd of thugs" (Adiga 35), does not get an opportunity for further studies. Ultimately, he becomes a driver who later slits his master's throat. He admits: "The story of my upbringing is the story of how a half-baked fellow is produced" (11). In his school, all the time, "The teacher was snoring at his desk behind him" (29). The narrator was an intelligent fellow who needed right and real education. Even, the village school inspector realizes it. "You need to go to a real school- somewhere far away from here. You need a real uniform, and a real education" (35). But, such needs remain dreams which are eternally unfulfilled in the case of the poor, as the novelist expresses. Mr. Ashok makes fun of Balram in particular and every half-baked Indian in general. "The country is full of people like him, I'll tell you that. And we entrust our glorious parliamentary democracy... to characters like these. That's the whole tragedy of this country" (10).

The neglected culture has been shown as the next pitiable aspect of India. The three works exclusively put light on the deteriorating culture of the contemporary "Bharat." In Slumdog Millionaire (N), Guddiya's father tries to molest his daughter. Salim's ideal hero, Armaan Ali, is a homosexual who hunts for young guys at public places. Neelima lives pompous and artificial life. Prem Kumar, a man with sadistic impulses, exploits women mentally and physically. Nita's brother acts as her pimp. Shankar's mother leaves him to die. The slum children are blinded to fulfill material pursuits. Pinky Madam, in The White Tiger, shows excessive love for the west and contempt for the country. She is the best example of modern day Indian people who have utterly ignored their culture under the impact of westernization. Balram knows that he will not hesitate to murder his nephew if he raises his voice against him in future. For him, familial relationships have no value in the world of materialism. He knows that his family would have to suffer after his escape. But, he has other material issues to bother. The world is presented as a "rooster coop," which is operated by Darwin's law of "struggle
for existence.” It literally reflects the forgotten humanity in the era of cutthroat competition. Adiga makes fun of Indian gods who are numerous: “Oops! Thirty-six million and five!” (Adiga 34). He also expresses his hatred for “namaste” (4), an expression deprived of feelings and emotions. Like the speaker in Browning’s dramatic monologues, Balram Halwai’s views of the contemporary generation indirectly comment upon his satanic side. “The new generation, I tell you, is growing with no morals at all” (316). And, at the time of elections, “The priest celebrated a special pooja to pray for the Great Socialist’s victory; mutton biryani was distributed on paper plates in front of the temple; and in the evening, there was free booze for all” (100).

Gandhi ji has been a prominent presence in the novels written under the impact of nationalism. For example, M.R. Anand’s Untouchable and R.K. Narayan’s Waiting for the Mahatma welcome the father of the nation with his ideology. But, in the contemporary fiction, Gandhi ji is confined to pictures and statues. Rather, he appears as a helpless creature with no tongue to speak and no identity to assert. In Slumdog Millionaire (N), the callous constable Godbole is proud of his illegal torture. “By the time I am through with this boy, he will be ready to confess the murder of Mahatma Gandhi” (22). His statement actually kills the man of vision who was alive in his ideology. Truth, morality, non-violence are outdated terms for the modern man. Gandhi ji motivated Indians to be self-dependent. But, “[...] in India every apartment block, every house, every hotel is built with a servant’s quarters” (Adiga 30). A large bronze statue of “Mahatma Gandhi, with his walking stick, and behind him follows the people of India, being led from darkness to light” (136), is very ironical as what was assumed to be light became the source of utter darkness later on. The Mongoose says, “We are driving past Gandhi, after just having given bribe to a minister. It’s fucking joke, is not it” (137). People have replaced Gandhian vision with high-tech cameras. “You know those bronze statues of Gandhi and Nehru that are everywhere? The police have put cameras inside their eyes to watch for the cars. They see everything you do, understand that?” (141). In The White Tiger, Gandhi ji’s picture hangs on the wall of the tea-stall where Balram worked as a child labour. One picture is in the school where hardly anything is taught. The other picture finds its place in the police station where Balram bribes the assistant commissioner. “Oh, thank God. There was one of Gandhi too. It was in the corner” (30). Gandhi ji is actually marginalized in both the novels under study.

To talk of cultural-crisis in Slumdog Millionaire (M), religious feuds snatch the lives of the protagonist’s parents. As in the novel, the small children are blinded to make money. In Agra, the juvenile boys cunningly
know how to befool foreign visitors. Latika is first plundered by Salim. Later, she lives in Javed’s house as his keep. Throughout the movie, she as an adult is seen in the western attire. People, in the movie, are crazy for the television reality presented in the form of show named “Who Wants to Be a Billionaire?” Spiritualism, abstinence, compassion, self-abnegation, universal love, salvation etc. are rapidly being replaced by materialism, hedonism, cupidity, ego, passions for pleasures and narcissism. Prostitution, religious feuds, tainted relations, homicide etc. form the spirit of all the three works under study.

Indian economy is also an important point which demands discussion with regard to the works under study. At present, Indian economy is facing the problem of black money. The term “black money” refers to various types of unaccounted money, which could be gained, due to tax evasion, graft, smuggling, "hawala" dealing, and non-payment of taxes and carrying out a business without proper documentation. For the writers and the director, the country is known for corruption, unemployment and over population. Inflation and recession have become its inseparable parts. Consequently, money is one of the common themes in the three works. It indirectly reflects the financial status of Indians.

Money factor emerges as a ruling god. The White Tiger is about the black money earned by Mr. Ashok’s family, bribes given to political leaders in the metro city, abject poverty in the Darkness, and the dividing line between the rich and the poor. The poor are gradually dying whereas the rich are earning with unscrupulous ways. It is the elegy of developing India. Morality is dead; only money makes the mare go. Poverty and lack of employment opportunities throw one in the dark pit of crimes. Balram is its befitting example. As a child, he works at a tea-stall. Later, it is only his luck when he gets the job of a driver. Even then, he does not feel satisfied with his life and he finally murders his master for money. It is for money, Granny keeps on writing emotional, sugar-coated letters to the narrator. Marriage is also a source of earning money in the form of dowry. In this way, Kishan’s marriage was “one of the good marriages. We had the boy, and we screwed the girl’s family hard” (Adiga 51). Corruption under Gandhi ji’s photo is also the outcome of insatiable desire of collecting wealth. The school teacher has a legitimate excuse to steal money as he had not been paid his salary in six months. Parents’ incapacity to solve monetary issues leads to child labour. Money has power to diminish the strong bonds of blood. Balram leaves his family in the lurch after committing the murder. And, when Asif kills a cyclist, Balram compensates his family with the brown envelope containing twenty five thousand rupees. The mouth of dead man’s father starts watering
to see the envelope. "[...] the father was amenable; men are more reasonable in such matters." (312).

*Slumdog Millionaire* (N) is the story of a poor lad who tries his luck and becomes a millionaire. Johnson, the American man, remarks in the prologue: "Exactly. You see, the biggest tease in the world is not sex. It's money. And the greater the sum of money, the bigger the tease" (Swarup 16). The director of "Who Wants to Be a Billionaire:" has no money to pay off the winner. So, he falsely accuses the winner of cheating. And, it is important to note that it's only for earning money, the hero moves from one place to the other. Nita sells her body to earn her livelihood. Shankar’s mother gives preference to money than her son’s life. The maid servant steals money for her sister’s marriage. Guddiya’s father seems to be mentally imbalanced after losing his job. His source of earning is lost; it makes him frustrated. Maman stoops down to the extent of the exploitation of children and throws them in the dark pit of disability and beggary for money. Prakash Rao’s intense love for money becomes the reason behind his brother’s death. Ram successfully leaves indelible impression on Akshay with his fifty thousand rupees. "But with money you can have power over the minds of others" (180). Ahmed Ali is into satta (illegal betting) and contract killing just for money. Like the novel, the movie also revolves around an Indian slumdog. Salim becomes a criminal for money. It shows that Indians understand only the language of money.

The three works set the idea that India is a poor country at heart. Poverty leads to suffering and makes the native people helpless. Ram Mohammed Thomas says that the whole existence of the poor is "illegal" (Swarup 12), and scavenging is survival gear of a street kid. He faces utter disappointment at the time of Shankar’s untimely death because of rabies. "At no other time my poverty riled me as much as it does now. I wish I could explain the dog that bit Shankar that before biting he should have checked whether the person he was attacking could afford the antidote" (324). It is only his luck that he wins the prize money on the T.V. show. Otherwise, he knew that he was meant to "live like a dog and die like an insect" (29). And they are "all children of lesser god" (116). Basically, life is a bed of thorns deprived of human dignity. Throughout the novel, happiness becomes "the occasional episode in a general drama of pain." (Hardy 270) Just like in the end of a tragi-comedy, luck favours the individual character and happiness along with material pleasures results in. But, this happy ending is deceptive. Life in slums goes on as it has been since its origin. So, happiness is personal not universal. It does not shatter the image of the poor India. Resultantly, it reveals that India economy is crippled and unable to provide an ambience of social and economic freedom.
India is a land of saints; it is known for universal love, sacrifice, renunciation and spiritualism. But, *The White Tiger* is clearly written in the colours of Marxism which is a materialistic worldview. Balram Halwai sums up the history as “a ten thousand year war of brains between the rich and the poor. The poor men win a few battles (the peeing in the platted plants, the kicking of the pet dogs, etc.) but of course the rich have won the war for ten thousand years” (Adiga 254). Balram slits his master’s throat because there bore a kind of incompatibility between their relations. He breaks the rooster coop and becomes master himself. In *Slumdog Millionaire* (M), Salim kills his master and vice-versa because of some differences. In a more general way, marginalized class tries to empower itself in the works under study. According to Marxist Theory, social relations between men are bound to the way they produce their material life. Certain productive forces involve the social relations among various classes. Taken together, these “forces” and “relations” of production form what Marx calls “the economic structure” of society or the economic “base” or “infrastructure.” It is from this economic base that there comes up a “superstructure” in any age. The “superstructure” contains a certain kind of a state. Its function is to legitimate the power of the social class which owns the means of economic production. It also contains certain definite forms of social consciousness: political, religious, aesthetic. This is what Marxist calls “ideology.”

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As in *Slumdog Millionaire* (N), the police listen to the dominating and affluent rich director and his associates because their financial status bestows them the power to define “the truth.” “The truth” is based on the ideology set by the rich that the poor can not shine honestly. The same example is seen in the case of the movie. In *The White Tiger*, the masters, Mr. Ashok’s family, kick out the old driver when they come to know that he is a Muslim. They have an ideology against the Muslims, and power to justify and legitimize it.

Feminism challenges patriarchy and gender differences in life, art and culture. It has a definite political stance. Manu, the father of the Hindu caste system, who lived in 200 B.C. said “From the cradle to the grave a woman is dependent on a male: in childhood on her father, in youth on her husband, in old age on her son” (Singh 67). Centuries later this is the bitter truth that most uneducated and economically dependent Indian women have to
live with even today. Women represent Ibsen’s Nora in *The Doll’s House* whose awakening is suppressed, reveals the works. Unlike her, to mark the difference, they never slam the door. Adiga, Boyle, and Swarup figure out Indian woman as a helpless, passive creature who has no important role to play in the main storyline.

*The White Tiger* is conspicuous for the absence of major female characters. Madam Pinky is portrayed as a source of comedy. She is shown as a failed wife who does not maintain a perfect balance in tough times and ultimately leaves her husband in dejection. The other guest appearance is the Indian prostitute who tries to present herself as a Russian for more money. The protagonist’s grandma, a flat character, is projected as a typical Indian lady who is cunning and materialistic. The dead cyclist’s mother also has no radical role to play beyond wailing and crying. In comparison to the male characters, to conclude, the female characters are less in number, and undeveloped. *Slumdog Millionaire* (N) reflects the miseries of being a woman. Nita, in the novel, is a prostitute who is brutally beaten up by Prem Kumar. Latika, in the movie, faces cruelty of Salim and Javed. In the novel, the character of Shankar’s mother is portrayed in black colours and the maid is an unreliable woman who steals in the absence of her mistress. Rosie, Mr. Alfred D’Souza’s daughter, is a flirt. Guddiya’s father tries to plunder his daughter. “But what was Guddiya’s crime? Simply that she was born a girl” (Swarup 84). The narrator’s mother is confined to a blurred vision; she does not nurture, care and save her child from the cruel world. Neelima Kumari is badly bruised by Prem Kumar. She says, “It is the destiny of a woman to suffer in silence” (265). In the movie, there is no major female character except Latika who is mere a puppet in the hands of male figures. The female characters are presented as figures who usually suffer. Thus, they demand pity from the reader/the audience. In comparison to male characters, they are partially portrayed. Women are equal to men. But, they do not find equal place in the works under study. Self-awareness and self-assertion do not mark their identity.

The use of cheap language has been shown as a part of Indianness in the works under study. *Slumdog Millionaire* (N&M) opens with abuses of the constable. The derogatory expressions like “motherfucker” (Swarup 23), “bastard” (22), “bloody bitch” (77), “fucking” (Adiga 7), or “[t]hat fellow has balls” (149), are woven into the fabric of daily conversation. In this case, the movie surpasses both the books. It starts with the barrage of abuses which would easily make one feel ashamed. Pinky Madam uses “what a fucking joke” as her pet phrase. The spooky ambience of abuses reminds of M.R. Anand’s novel *Untouchable*. 
The portrayal of Indian police is satirical and utterly black. Ram Mohammad Thomas shares his experience of the police:

Godbole has been punishing me for more than an hour but he has still not finished. Every half-hour or so he comes up with a new instrument of torture. First he inserted a wooden rod into my anus. With chilli powder smeared on it.... Then he thrust my head into a bucket of water and held it there till my lungs were about to explode. I spluttered and gasped and quite nearly drowned. (Swarup 23)

Johnson clinches deal with the commissioner at ten per cent. The cruelty of police is permanently entrenched in the Indian psyche. “Whatever you do, whenever you go, never go to the police. Ever” (Swarup 118). Balram knows that everything is on sale in India. Police are corrupt and get charged with "red bag" (Adiga 300). “You will see my friends when you visit Bangalore — fat, paunchy men swinging their canes, on Bridges Road, poking and harassing vendors and shaking them down for money. I’m talking of police, of course” (299). Balram’s escape from the police ridicules their slow, worthless functioning. On the same pattern, the movie shows the police men with canes in their hands chasing small kids. Ironically, their passivity during riots mocks at the functioning of the system.

The works reflect the superiority of English over native languages. In India, English is a second language; it came to India with the Englishmen. A strong foothold was provided to the language by Lord Macaulay who came to India in 1853 as a law member of the council of Governor General and stayed back as President of the board of education. Because of him, English education got permanently established in the country. By writing his famous Minute in favour of English, Lord Macaulay desired to produced, “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect” (Macaulay 314). With the departure of the British after independence, the English language has remained the most palpable evidence of India’s colonial past. At present, It is debatable whether we should give such a prominent place to a foreign language which has become “the magic language” (Swarup 93) for the natives. Even today, a person who speaks English in India is considered refined, educated and superior to the speakers of mother tongue. Some Indian authors like Vikram Seth left writing in English, the colonizer or the oppressor’s language. In the same way, the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong’o abandoned the English language in favour of Kikuyu, his mother tongue, as the medium for his creative expression. On the other hand, some writers write in foreign languages to prey the oppressor as in regional languages, the area of circulation is
confined. It reminds of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Speaking sarcastically, Caliban says his only benefit in learning language from Prospero is the ability to curse. “You taught me language; and my profit on’t Is, I know how to curse” (1.2.430-431). The best example can be found in Swarup’s *Slumdog Millionaire* (N) in which Ram Mohammad Thomas practises speaking like an Australian in the Taylor family. Later, he discloses the secret about Mr. Taylor being a spy to the Indian bureaucracy in Australian accent. It is an instance when the White man’s language is used against him.

Irrespective of whatever philosophy or theory works behind the (dis) use of English, the works under study have given due place to English. First of all, they are primarily in English language. Though, they were translated into many languages later. Balram Halwai in *The White Tiger* starts the first letter to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao with emphasis on the importance of the language. “Neither you nor I speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English” (Adiga 3). English here appears as a global language, a befitting medium to express feelings, emotions, sentiments, views, thoughts et cetera at international level. The irony of the situation lies in the fact that it is not English but Chinese which is used by maximum number of people across the world.

Ram Mohammad Thomas learns English from Father Timothy. His command over the language wins him the status of leader in the juvenile home. “Without even trying, I became their leader. Not because I was bigger, not because I was more aggressive, but because I speak English” (Swarup 93). It helps him to get favours from the head warden, the sports teacher, the cook and the doctor. Moreover, he is never bothered by Mr. Gupta who calls boys to his room at night. With the Taylors, he proves himself as a trustworthy servant. “The fact that I have a Christian name and speak English helps, too” (127). In addition to it, when the penniless narrator reaches Agra, he gets special privilege to stay with Shankar for a week in the absence of spare room. It is just because his command over English language “softens” (285) Queen Swapna Devi’s features.

There may be a number of reasons responsible for the delineation of a narrow image of India. They, as it has been mentioned in the beginning, may range from personal to political. One of them is perspective. Both the novels are written in the first person point of view. Balram in *The White Tiger* and Ram Mohammad Thomas in *Slumdog Millionaire* (N) are the first person protagonists. Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch state “Employing a first-person point of view has several advantages. One of these is credibility. A strange or fantastic story is easier to believe if told by one who is supposedly relating with it. Another advantage is intimacy. The “I”
narrator seems to address the reader directly and from heart, sharing his personal observations and insights with an interested listener. But the first-person narration has its disadvantages also. The reader can see, hear and know only what the narrator sees, hears and knows. The reader’s perceptions of other characters are coloured by the narrator’s predispositions, prejudices, and personal limitations” (Morner and Rausch 170). Besides, vision remains one dimensional. Objectivity is marred to some extent as a persona is the mask of author who sticks to one ideology. Other views and perceptions are forcefully or obviously neglected. Its consequences are distinct in the portrayal of India in the novels. Personal/subjective tones of the authors are obviously noticeable in the portrayal of India. Consequently, the protagonists are partially masked. Perhaps, the authors need to understand that Indian “unity in diversity” is not limited to the underbelly of the society; it is vast, complex and perhaps beyond their literary powers. Although the movie, like the novel, is designed on the flashback technique yet its mode of presentation is not narration, but depiction. Danny Boyle, the director and producer of Irish descent who was born in England, hardly had had any connection with Indian life style before making the movie. His vision of India appears to be myopic and prejudiced. He has strengthened the stereotypical myth set by the West that India is a country of slums, cheats and criminals.

The artists’ concern for India in the works raises suspicions as none of the works offer any direct remedial solution for the cure of so-called “social evils in India.” The authors and the director try to sell India, particularly Indian poverty and other contemporary evils as a commodity to the west. That’s why, the works which got series of prizes abroad, arouse antagonism in India. While depicting Indian social evils, the works are politically designed to hurt Indian sensibility. It can be viewed as a literary attack on Indianess. India is a country of paradoxes; it has both positive and negative sides. But, the works under study pompously focus on the gloomy side and leave no place for hopes attached with the brighter side. It seems to be a totally different country from the one which has been envisioned as a great power in Kalam’s Vision 2020.

Notes

1. To differentiate between the novel and the movie, the following notation has been adopted in this article: (N) refers to the novel titled Slumdog Millionaire by Vikas Swarup, (M) refers to the movie by the same title directed by Danny Boyle, and (N&M) indicates both the novel and the movie.
2. India Vision 2020 was initially a document prepared by TIFAC under the chairmanship of Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and a team of 500 experts. Dr Kalam
further gave shape to this concept through his seminal work along with Dr Y.S. Rajan. India 2020: Vision for the New Millennium. Dr Kalam in one of his speeches elaborates the concept: “Transforming the nation into a developed country, five areas (Agriculture and food processing, Infrastructure with reliable and quality electric power, Education and Healthcare, Information and Communication Technology and Critical technologies and strategic industries) in combination have been identified based on India’s core competence, natural resources and talented manpower for integrated action to double the growth rate of GDP and realize the Vision of Developed India.”

References