

Narrative Techniques in Aravind Adiga's '*The White Tiger*'

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is a novel that is important not only for the story it tells but also for the narrative techniques its writer has employed. Starting from the title the writer has used symbolism as a means of enhancing the narration. The use of first person omniscient point of view combined with the use of dark humor plays a significant role in deciphering the meaning of the story of the novel. By painting a vivid picture through these symbols and metaphors the narrator in *The White Tiger* has been able to capture not only the story of himself and his family but also the story of the poor state of Bihar and the intricate situation of its people marred with abject poverty and incredible story of corruption. This article looks into the various narrative techniques and elements of stylistics which Aravind Adiga has used to tell his story in his Booker's winner novel, *The White Tiger*.

Key Words: narrative techniques, dark humor, symbolism, first person point of view, central character, metaphor, style, perspective, critique, social inequality, allegory, imager, poetic devices, voice, satire

Aravind Adiga's novel is titled *The White Tiger* but it is has nothing to do with the wild beast which is thought to be one of the most endangered animals in the wild. It is a symbolism used for the narrator of this novel Balram Halwai. But since it is a significant imager and important for the understanding of the novel, it suffices to say a few words about the characteristics of the wild beast white tiger. The white tiger is a very rare kind of animal and is very brave as it lives in solitude and is not afraid of any danger to stand up for itself by itself. Not only is its color different from the usual yellow and black stripes of its close relatives, other tigers and leopards, it is primarily known for its rarity of attitude to be a mysterious animal of which there is no comparison in terms of its not wanting to be confined to group and herd mentality. When the reader of this novel learns that the first person narrator is nicknamed a "white tiger" then, the immediate curiosity effect and interest it arouses can be easily imagined. It was the inspector of Balram's school who nicknames him the white tiger in the classroom when the narrator was quite young, signifying that the character was a personality of such a unique traits. Indeed the narrator ends up telling his story of how he was an outlier and a special character who had refused to succumb to the slave-like life of submission and amenability in his community. As a result of his determination to break the chains of his environment he does manage to get out and change his life doing whatever it took to attain his freedom. He narrates:

The inspector pointed his cane straight at me. 'You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots. In any jungle, what is the rarest animal – the creature that comes along only once in a generation?'

I thought about it and said:

'The white tiger.'

'That's what you are, in this jungle.' White Tiger (35) The narrative voice used by Aravind Adiga in *The White Tiger* is the first person point of view. This narrator is Balram Halwai, who narrates his story and the story of those around him in a dark humor and his perspectives are unrestricted. Through his outlook the reader is able to see with a unique point of view the harrowing socioeconomic

problems and the ethical conflicts in the characters involved in the story. Using this unique lens of viewing the community in concern, the first person narrator paints an agonizing criticism of the marginalization and discrimination in India as it happens around him. The narrator shows the rampant corruption even from the side of the police who were supposed to protect the law and the people in his narration of the poor state of affairs in the state of Bihar:

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 against. *The White Tiger* (64).

Aravind Adiga has used satire and dark humor to criticize the socio economic and political divides and marginalization that were rampant in his community. There was a great deal of corruption and unfair caste system that was making the lives of the lower caste and poor people such as his father very difficult. Therefore he resorts to the use of strong dark humor, irony and a great deal of exaggeration techniques to provide a critique of the unfair and repressing conditions under which many Indians were suffering. By using these techniques of satire the writer brings out the ills of the society to the world and exposes its ugly and aspects. He shows how the lives of many poor Indians were made very difficult as they struggle to survive from day to day and paints a clear picture of the disparities in the community as a result of rampant corruption, manipulative, greed and exploitation as well as the painful system of caste. Balram not only narrates his stories in the first person narrator but also provides unfiltered dialogues that are very important in understanding the narration of the novel as well. His use of dark humor paints a sarcastic image of the surroundings around which Balram lives.

His relentless use of satire and dark humor is captured by P. Kaviya:

Aravind Adiga's narrative style in "*The White Tiger*" is marked by its dark humor and biting satire. The author uses humor as a tool to shed light on the absurdity of certain situations and the incongruities within society. This satirical approach allows Adiga to critique the hypocrisy, corruption, and moral decay that he perceives in modern India. Balram's witty and sometimes sardonic narration offers readers a unique and thought-provoking perspective on the societal issues explored in the novel. Kaviya, 2023 (2591)

The method that the narrator used is primarily narrating his story through letters he writes to the Prime Minister of China, Wen Jiabao. Using this unique perspective of story telling the narrator makes comparisons between the situation in India and that in China as well. He makes his narration not only personal but also political and thought provoking. These series of letters unfold the story of Balram and tell how he was the son of a poor rickshawwalla in a poor village neighborhood and how he managed through a lot of difficulty to become a driver of one of the ill-reputed community leaders and how ended up being a private entrepreneur in a successful business finally. The first person narrator Balram Halwai therefore succeeds in presenting the themes of socioeconomic disparity, class structures and privately subjective matters of the situation in one of the poor states of India through a peculiar lens of individual experiences. The first person narrator shows the development of his character through experience and using his unfiltered narrative style and the intricate moral conflicts in his personality and community he shows the reader what the condition of the poor people of his community was like. He writes his letters to the premier of China:

The First Night For the Desk of:

His Excellency Wen Jiabao

The Premier's Of ice

Beijing

Capital of the Freedom-loving Nation of China From the Desk of:

"The White Tiger"

A Thinking Man

And an Entrepreneur

Living in the world's center of Technology and Outsourcing

Electronics City Phase 1 (just of Hosur Main Road)

Bangalore, India

Mr. Premier,

Sir. Neither you nor I speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English. My ex-employer the late Mr. Ashok's ex-wife, Pinky Madam, taught me one of these things; and at 11:32 p.m. today, which was about ten minutes ago, when the lady on All India Radio announced, "Premier Jiabao is coming to Bangalore next week," I said that thing at once. White Tiger (1)

Symbolism is one of the techniques that Aravind Adiga has used in *The White Tiger* with a great impact in helping the understanding of the tale vividly. He has used several symbolisms and abstract representations to carry his narration and convey his themes successfully. The symbolism of the "Rooster Coop" is used by the narrator to show the very harsh prison and slave-like conditions under which the poor lower caste members of the community were trapped and the tribulations they were endured for mere survival. While it showed the way the oppressors used to entrap the poor lower caste members and how life was like for those trapped inside it, it also showed how the poor people were unable to escape from it as the rooster is unable to break free once it is placed inside of it. But it also demonstrates how determined Balram was to break away from it like no other before him and achieve his freedom. According to A. Divya:

Balram frequently mentions the rooster coop when describing the situation or characteristics of the servant class in India. The servants in India are sincere to their masters but the masters try to suck their servants' blood. Balram's father is a real Halwai whose shop was caught by some other caste people by the help of police. Likewise the opulent people suck the blood of the poor as a leech. Divya, 2022 (257)

The use of the "Rooster Coop" as a symbol has a strong resonance with the writer's use of "white tiger" as a title and as a nickname for his central character and narrator, Balram Halwai. While the former represented subjugation and oppression as well as confinement representing the majority of the poor lower caste members of Balram's community, the latter represents freedom and uniqueness as well as courage and determination to refuse to be confined in any oppressive environment. Obviously, Balram has identified himself as someone who was not willing to be confined to the herd mentality of his amenable community to just sit down and do nothing about his future. He was different for a reason and demonstrates that the only way to get out of his predicament was not by following the way his ancestors had conducted themselves in the face of oppression and confinement in their rooster coop. He shows what it takes and what he did to break out of the confines of his rooster coop. According to P.

Kaviya:

Throughout the narrative, the author employs powerful symbolism to convey the entrapment of the lower classes.

The metaphor of the "rooster coop" is particularly striking. Balram describes the coop as a place where individuals are conditioned to accept their servitude, much like roosters unaware of their fate. This symbolizes the oppressive conditions, lack of agency, and the psychological captivity experienced by the marginalized in Indian society. It is through this lens that we gain insight into the motivations and actions of Balram as he seeks to break free from this oppressive system. Kaviya, 2023 (2591)

Imagery is used in *The White Tiger* to enhance meaning of the story in several cases. One of the recurrent imageries that Aravind Adiga has used is the imagery of 'light' and that of 'darkness', or the contrast between them. He uses the imagery of light to express the hope, happiness, freedom, and satisfaction that he experienced as a result of his efforts to change his life. The darkness imagery is used as a symbol of unhappiness, oppression, depression, poverty and bad life in general that he and many other members of the lower caste in India suffer. As an example of a dark life, he Balram chose the poor state of Bihar in the Eastern part of India. It is epitomized in this novel as a very dark place, not literally in terms of light but in terms of the abject living conditions and the level of poverty and deprivation in it. Balram shows that his life in Bihar was very bad and that many low-life Indians were still continuing to live without change in their lives in that state of darkness. But when he compares it to Bangalore or Delhi, he uses the word imagery of light to signify that his life was better

once he had broken the chain of oppression and escaped his dark life in Bihar. So the imagery of darkness and light is synonymous to savagery and civilization. That's why Adiga uses a vivid imagery of comparison and contrast between the real life of Bihar and that of Delhi or Bangalore to show that stark difference that exists between poverty and wellbeing in the lives of the dwellers of these different states. By showing how the different states contrast to each other in the way their neighborhoods look like and their peoples live like, Adiga brings to life the tale of abject human degradation that he and his ancestors had been subjugated to in Bihar. According to Vishal Pandya: Perhaps Balram's favorite motif is the duality of "Light" and "Dark." From the very beginning, he attempts to navigate from his hometown in "The Darkness" to become a member of urban society. Light, then, becomes a multifaceted symbol of time (the future), wealth (lots of it), location (Bangalore), and obligation (none) – while Darkness represents the past, poverty, rural India – and most importantly – loyalty to family and master. These themes battle each other throughout the novel. Even after he has established himself in Bangalore, he continues to seek ways to differentiate himself from the "Darkness." When one of his White Tiger drivers runs over a boy, he visits the family and offers their surviving son a job. He realizes this decision may make him appear weak, but he argues he has no choice. "I can't live the way the Wild Boar and the Buffalo and the River lived, and probably still live, back in Laxmangarh. I am in the Light Now." Pandya, 2015 (2)

Foreshadowing is one narrative technique that Aravind Adiga has used in *The White Tiger* to enhance the understanding of his narration by readers. He uses the title to foreshadow and hint at what kind of a character the protagonist Balram Halwai is or would be like in the following pages as one reads the novel. He provides a kind of anticipatory remarks as to why he was different than the rest of his community who were simply amenable to their abject living conditions in the poor state of Bihar. Whereas his fellow low caste members of the community including his father were ok to continue with their situation and accept their life in the rooster coop, he was the one who was out to challenge the corrupt social and political systems to liberate himself from its grips whatever comes. He also indicates what he means by whatever it takes to break away from all the miserable life of abject poverty and oppression and in latter states we learn that he even commits murder to achieve his dreams. All of this was given in a technique of overshadowing narration at the start of the novel. The overshadowing effect as a narrative technique in *White Tiger* helps the reader to have a sense of anticipation and suspense, adding to the enjoyment of the story as well.

Irony as a narrative technique is repeatedly used by Adiga in *White Tiger* to express the expectations and the negative outcomes that readers find in the story, especially when it comes to the newly independent nation of India. When India got its independence the expectation was that it was going to lead to the land of milk and honey and that the departure of the colonial power Britain would be the end of India's and Indians' problems. However the greater part of India's problems were not resolved by just the territorial independence only. There was a great difference between the expectations and the realities. Even his name, 'Balram', which could be literally translated in Hindu mythology as 'Young Krishna', is an irony as it turns out to be that Balram is anything but a godly character and his actions are contrary to holiness and divinity. On the national level, he has shown that the great nation of India which was supposed to be a great democracy and equality had turned out to be a nation where there was rampant corruption and repressive social systems even after independence.

According to Stalin Nampelli:

Departure of the British in 1947 marks the beginning of the new age for India, but freedom for the masses is still a far-fetched dream. They are still in the clutches of the rich and the politician because they dominate over them in many ways. The avaricious animals called men are looting the country. Due to this, our contemporary country has been divided into two classes - Big Bellies and Small Bellies. The rich have converted our country into one of jungle law. As the novelist remarks: "The day the British left - the cage had been let open; and the animals had attacked and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law. Those that were the most ferocious, the hungriest, had eaten everyone else up, and grown big bellies...these days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies and Men with Small Bellies".

(TWT 64) Nampelli, 2023 (36) The narrative voice in *The White Tiger* gives Balram, the first person narrator to express his position and tell his stories in the form of a letter to the Chinese premier as well as to the readers in a vivid narrative style. The style that he uses is believable because it is poetic voice of first person narrator himself and that he uses the vernacular language and the colloquial voice that he employs gives it a true nature of one who had born the burden of the poverty in India's lower social and political as well as economic life.

To conclude, Adiga uses the voice of the narrator to be a representative to adequately express to the Chinese premier and the readers that what the politicians of India would show was not representative of the real life in India and that he was the true representative of the face of abject degradation. He criticizes Indian politicians even though he believes that the great nation of India has many aspects of greatness, its politicians were corrupt and repressive. He accuses the politicians:

You see, a total of ninety-three cases-for murder, rape, grand larceny, gunsmuggling, pimping, and many other such minor offences-are pending against the Great Socialist and his ministers at the present moment...the Great Socialist himself is said to have embezzled one billion rupees from the Darkness, and transferred that money into a bank account in a small, beautiful country in Europe full of white people and black money. The White Tiger (97-98) Cited Works Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. Harper Collins Publication, 2008.

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