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POSTCOLONIAL SOCIO-CULTURAL LINGUISTICS IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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ABSTRACT

Linguistics is the pivot of literature determining its importance in the contemporary society. The merit of a literary text largely depends on the language as it reflects the politics evaluated by the author in an impressive way. In the research paper entitled "Postcolonial Socio-Cultural Linguistics in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*" explores the matter and manner in the linguistic narration. The discourse travels from postcolonial hybridity and marginality to postmodern co-existence. Various literary tools used by Adiga and the liberty taken by him to discuss the drastic change over in the attitude of the contemporary socio-cultural scenario are evaluated. The author has attempted to subvert the elitist historiography and to create a common platform for the co-existence of the elite and subaltern narratives. He has made use of the postcolonial discourse to erase the bordering perceptions and paved way for mutual coexistence where both the centre and periphery can overlap and take the other side with strenuous effort.

Key Words: linguistics, postcolonial narratives, hegemony, stylistics, historiography.

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Adiga has experienced linguistic colonization with imperialism, colonialism and globalization. He has a regional lingua-franca but has attempted to open up his literary leanings in the colonizer's language to have worldwide acclamation. This has been the case regarding national narratives treating themes of national importance in an international language. Postcolonial theory attempts to rewrite and subvert the coloniser's' view point as an expression of resistance.

The ideologies like the oppressed, colonized and the indigenous refer to the people of the postcolonial societies. But they have established their identity using the coloniser's language as a vehicle for creative expression. The issues of the contemporary society such as political unsteadiness, economic backwardness, cultural disintegration,

social exploitation, sexual violence and marginalized conditions are questioned in the colonisers' language and the same has been adopted as the language of the colonised. The postcolonial narratives claim to be a resistance to the colonizers representing the voiceless and authentically articulating the agony of the repressed. Gina Wisker says,

Language is a form of power and so the analysis of discourse is a key area in scrutinizing postcolonial writing and its context. Discourse analysis of verbal structures functioning within texts- the language, expression and arguments of texts that convey representations conditioned by culture and enabled by linguistic structures. The term postcolonial

discourse, however often groups together ex-colonial peoples and the texts they have produced as if there was everything in common in their experience and situation, which itself accords immense significance and importance to the colonial influence (53-54)

The dominant culture consciously or unconsciously questions the opponent and his cultural associations rather than accepting the validity of his opinions or behaviours. These insults trigger the spirit of revolt, resistance and revolution in the oppressed cultural group resulting in their own subaltern cultural narrative. They achieve prominence, as Ashcroft et al. say, "of constructing a 'unique' voice, distinct from the language of the centre (116).

Adiga is a postcolonial writer who has a shared experience of colonization in the postmodern temporal stance. His writings involve crucial compliance with the colonial structures like hybrid identity, cultural plurality, status of marginality, inferior otherness and binary perceptions. All the above said structures function with Gramsci's notion of hegemony. Hegemony, domination by consent, operates with the establishment of the all-pervasive codes which is neutral according to the dominant norm setters and biased to the others. Bill Ashcroft et al. support imperial and not cultural hegemony as "an 'empire' is distinct from a collection of subject states forcibly controlled by a central power by virtue of the effectiveness of its cultural hegemony" (116).

The White Tiger focuses on the hegemony at various levels in the form of hierarchy, power structure, social milieu, culture etc. working both at the external and internal verve of the characters. This authoritarian attitude gives right to the superior to exert supremacy over the inferior in the corporeal living where ethereal understanding is demanding. The peasants of the country, their difficulties and revolt have been documented right from the beginning and are implicit in the literature about them. As Luden discloses "The specificity of peasant spontaneity, the mainspring of their political action, and the persistence of their identity are all located in the pre-capitalist consciousness and ideology" (48).

The pre-capitalist ideology has been evolving with time and space but is an unremitting concept even in the globalised stance where the social disparities and oppositions are interminable. The worldly living of a landlord and the underdog existence of the peasants are apparent in Adiga's words,

His brother was called the wild Boar. This fellow owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangarh. If you wanted to work on those lands, you had to bow down to his feet, and touch the dust under his slippers, and agree to swallow his day wages. When he passed by women, his car would stop, the windows would roll down to reveal his gun; two of his teeth, on either side of his nose, were long, and curved, like little tusks. (TWT 25)

Topography is a means of cornering people and expanding territory. But "Electronic communications, the global extent of trade, of availability of resources, of travel, of information about weather patterns and ecological change have joined together even the most distant corners of the world" (Said 4). In spite of such affluence, it influences the language, position and behaviour of the individuals. Setting of *The White Tiger* involves four locations representing darkness and light as Adiga puts it. Laxmangarh, Balram's birthplace, Dhanbad, a nearest town where he starts his career, Delhi, the capital city where he learns and executes debauchery from and on his master and Bangalore, the technological spot where he debunks his expertise as a liberal entrepreneur. The transformation in Balram is persistent with the shift from the peripheral area to the vital places of the country.

From the description on the locale, Adiga establishes the action and the qualities of the characters. Thereby, he delves into the psyche and undertakes a journey into the subconscious terrain to demarcate the fake living which makes no difference in the personal life and interpersonal relationship of the characters. Due to the beastly selfish behaviour, human beings have lost their divinity and have become more of a beast. Balram's

interior monologue is a proof which justifies his worldly self:

Go on, just look at the red bag, Balram that's not stealing, is it? I shook my head. And even if you were to steal it, Balram, it wouldn't be stealing. How so? I looked at the creature in the mirror. See- 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 that tax, in the end? Who but the ordinary people of this country – you! (TWT 244)

This proves the importance of the linguistic structures and verbal representations in bringing out the psyche of the culturally deprived individual.

The socio-cultural linguistics in a work can be dissected if only the stylistics part is equally examined. Stylistics as a branch of applied linguistics relates linguistic form with literary functions of a text. It highlights the use of language and interpretation as a piece of unique communication. To recognize the matter in a literary text, the manner in which it is communicated has to be significant. The stylistic study of the language of the text leads to a greater understanding of both its meaning and style. It helps in the literary appreciation of the text as well as in instilling the spirit for change with its impending realism. Stylistics involves both linguistic and critical aspects with distinct but complementary traits.

Some of the stylistic liberty exercised by Adiga are the use of italics, capital letters, parenthesis, hyphenation, deviant spelling, fragmentary ideas, one word sentences, double adjectives, striking similes and metaphors etc. They authentically capture the predominant postmodern tendency to break conventions. This reiterates the subaltern ideology of writing back or rewriting of the history from the peripheral point of view and so language goes with the purpose of the depiction of the stark reality through harsh representations. "Ideology ... is a relatively formal and articulated system of meanings, values, and beliefs, of a kind that can be abstracted as a 'world-view' or a 'class outlook' (109).

The non-linear narration or the circumlocutory style reflects the disruptions of the

consciousness of the protagonist and narrator, Balram. A lurking sense of the event – when and how it happened – remains in the consciousness of the narrator who describes the time of the event at periodic intervals. The tone of the text is argumentative of the social ethics and the way of the world. It also gives a sense of unpredictability and uncertainty of the moods and behaviour of the protagonist. The effect of the short sentences is very powerful with the sense of rudeness and immediacy as the mouthpiece is a half-baked, uncivilised village fellow.

Simile, imagery and metaphor serve to animate the inanimate and make the inhumane the beasts. The extreme comparisons and personifications serve the purpose of pronouncing the reality through the literary devices like irony, black humour and sarcasm. The circumlocutory and descriptive style reflects the thought processes of the marginalised, half-baked narrator and his viewpoint of experiencing and seeing life and events.

To give us the illusion of direct experience of the narrator, Adiga's diligent language suits his purpose of the depiction of the inner consciousness and the external world. He has proved himself to be a master of narrative art with the use imagery. Each wicked men in the novel is associated with the character of animals. He compares animals to all the evils traits in the characters. He describes people through the comparison with animals. Balram's father at one moment says , "I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of me atleast one – should live like a man" (TWT 30).

The symbolic title, given after a rare animal, the white tiger is suggestive of the uniqueness in the protagonist. It is symbolically means courage and he escapes the rooster coop which symbolises servitude and darkness. Darkness and light form the basic binary and an important imagery to imply the dividedness among the people of India. Rooster coop form a core image for the maze nature of the country and the roosters in the coop are caught in it and have to either go for a revolution or exit the world as victim of the way of the world. The people's life, the way they live, their struggle for human existence etc are given through a single symbol of roosters in the coop.

The epistolary form and the first person narration have helped in the social commentary, shift in time and space, and direct appeal. . “...Delhi is the capital of not one but two countries – two Indias. The Light and the Darkness both flow into Delhi” (TWT 251). This very single statement symbolizes the condition of the whole country. Adiga has given the condition of Indian people through this symbol.

Adiga has used a number of similes and can be classified according to their manner. He has used different things to compare the appearance of human beings, their behaviour etc. Similarly, he has used the characters to compare with the things, nature etc. In a humoristic way, he has compared the humans with the animals. He has compared girls to fruits and vegetables because of their tenderness. The young girls are of the tastes of watermelons, “The girl would be so young – seventeen or eighteen – and you know what girls taste like at that age, like watermelons” (TWT 192) and the physique of a girl to a vegetable, “I had stopped the car at a traffic signal; a girl crossing the road in a tight T-shirt, her chest bobbing up and down like three kilogrammes of brinjals in a bag” (TWT 199).

Adiga’s use of simile is both entertaining and uncanny because he has compared most of his characters to animals to bring out the hegemonic attitude in the social culture. Animals are both the prey and the predator representing the downtrodden and the exploiter respectively. This comparison of animals to human reveals Adiga’s anger over the human race which supports to develop his theme of a prey for generations becoming a predator to alter the rule of the society. The activities of the people are compared to animals and birds to highlight the beast in every person, “the women were waiting for them. They hid behind the door, and as soon as the men walked in, they pounced, like wildcats on a slab of flesh” (TWT 26). It is also suggestive of a bloodshed with the animal instinct of the survival of the fittest.

Other animal traits in men are apparent through the animal comparisons. The drivers lusty run is compared to dogs, “Vitiligo-Lips closed the magazine and threw it into the circle of drivers were sitting; they made a grab for it, like a bunch of dogs

rushing after a bone” (TWT 126). The curious look of the drivers on the inaccessible mobile phones is put as “the drivers were passing his mobile from hand to hand gazing at it like monkeys gaze at something shiny they have picked up” (TWT 153). And when Balram laughs Mukesh asks ““why are you grinning like a donkey?”” (TWT 143). These silly comparisons with animals and animal traits illustrates the social conditioning of the people who are sill barbaric with beastly instincts.

The status of marginality of the poor people is clearly stated through the comparisons like, “they treat us like animals” (TWT 208) and “they’re like parrots in a cage” (TWT 251). The guilt of Balram is stated as “three small red drops had formed on my flesh, like a row of ladybirds on a leaf” (TWT 273-74), and “my hand trembling – it had been shaking all morning like a lizard’s tail that has fallen off” (TWT 274). The cultural plurality is evident through the life in city where “men and women in Bangalore live like the animals in a forest do” (TWT 298). Though Adiga has used a number of similes in his work he does not forget to use metaphor. His use of metaphor may be limited but the significance is great. He has used metaphor along with simile also.

My father’s spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use in villages to pull water from wells; the clavicle curved around his neck in high relief, like a dog’s collar; cuts and nicks and scars, like little whip marks in his flesh, ran down his chest and waist, reaching down bellow his hipbones into his buttocks. (TWT 26-27)

Balram’s slitting of his master epitomises the animal behaviour and his expertise as a entrepreneur subverts his beastly survival under his masters all his life. Thus critical and aesthetical narrative in the fiction has attempted to subvert the elitist historiography and to create a common platform for the co-existence of the elite and subaltern narratives. As Guha states, “elitist historiography should be resolutely fought by developing an alternative discourse based on the rejection of the spurious and un-historical monism characteristic of its view of Indian nationalism and on the recognition of the co-existence of the elite and subaltern domains of politics” (7). Adiga, in the postmodern

scenario, has made use of the postcolonial discourse to erase the bordering perceptions and paved way for mutual coexistence where both the centre and periphery can overlap and take the other side with strenuous effort.

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