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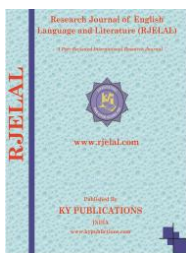
THE NARRATIVE ART IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S "THE WHITE TIGER"

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ABSTRACT

Adiga's narrative style in his debut novel *The White Tiger* is different and innovative. His narrator explores in an apparently simple style to state his past including his anger, suffering, humiliation and detachment. Adiga uses rhetoric as a weapon of his satire in *The White Tiger* to enrich its narrative style and also to make his ideas emphatically clear. Like the Ancient Mariner in S. T. Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* Balram catches his guest reader and goes on narrating his story including his feelings and emotions without waiting to listen to the responses of the listener.

Key Words: narrative style, epistolary technique, rhetoric, dramatic monologue, satire

INTRODUCTION

Adiga's narrative style is distinctive and innovative. His narrator explores in an apparently simple style to state his past including his anger, suffering, humiliation and detachment. It includes the ingredients of a drama like conflicts and dialogues. The dialogues of the novel reveal both the conflict as well as the information that helps in forwarding the story to its final goal. Adiga uses rhetoric as a weapon of his satire in *The White Tiger* to enrich its narrative style and also to make his ideas emphatically clear. Comparing the drudgery of the poor to the condition of the brightly coloured roosters Balram says, "*The greatest thing to come out of this country in the ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop*". Adiga thinks that the life of the common Indians is no better than that of the cocks and hens stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages. He finds the poverty stricken Indians in Rooster Coop

unable to improve their condition because they cannot go against the existing rules. *The White Tiger* is a single sided conversation. The speaker does not wait for the response of the listener. Like the Ancient Mariner in S. T. Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* Balram catches his guest reader and goes on narrating his story including his feelings and emotions without waiting to listen to the responses of the listener. Still it is the best and innovative technique which Adiga uses in this novel. Any other technique of telling his story might not have been so impressive.

THE NARRATIVE: Aravind Adiga's Booker Prize winning debut novel *The White Tiger* (2008) is the story of a simple rustic Balram Halwai and his journey from Luxmangarh, a village of Bihar to Bangalore via Dhanbad (Jharkhand) and Delhi. It is also the story of his transformation from a simple tea table cleaner to a driver and murderer and finally to an entrepreneur. The novel is composed of a series of letters addressed

to the Chinese Premier His Excellency Wen Jiabao. *'The writer of these letters, as it is known from the contents of the letters, is the protagonist Balram Halwai, the son of a rickshaw-puller who designates him in the letter-pad as 'The White Tiger', a thinking man and an entrepreneur living in Electronic Phase 1, Bangalore.'*¹ The occasion of writing the letters is an announcement by All India Radio that Wen Jiabao is to visit Bangalore to gather first-hand knowledge about the entrepreneurs in India, particularly in the field of technology, who have set up outstanding companies *"that virtually run America now"*.² The novel begins with a letter written in English and composed in Formal Official Letter Format according to the modern letter writing pattern – all set in left-hand side single row:

"For the Desk of:

His Excellency Wen Jiabao,

The Premier's Office,

Beijing,

Capital of the Freedom-Loving Nation of China

From the Desk of:

'The White Tiger'

A Thinking Man

And entrepreneur

Living in the world's centre of technology and outsourcing

Electronic City Phase 1 (just off 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."*³

Adiga has studied *'English literature'*⁴ and is aware of the feelings and emotions of the human heart. He understands the importance of the creation of the bond of emotions between the sender and the receiver in a letter. So, throughout the novel he

maintains an emotional bond with the reader who is interested in reading the letters. He also uses words like 'for' and 'from' to give it a genuine flavor and *'ends the novel making the readers spellbound with the story of his protagonist'*.⁵ He ends the novel following the same format of formal official letter:

"Yours for ever,

Ashok Sharma

The White Tiger

Of Bangalore

*boss@whitetiger-technologydrivers.com"*⁶

On the web there exists a site with the same name: www.whitetiger-technologydrivers.com. However, there is no evidence whether it is created by Adiga himself for giving a real touch to the information given in the book or by anybody else to get an extra attention for his website. The website seems to be created very recently as it is mentioned on the bottom of the page: *"Copyright©2013 whitetiger-technologydrivers.com. All Rights Reserved"*⁷ Besides, in the Google search of the website the following information appears which again makes the creation of the site doubtful. It seems, after seeing the message, as if somebody has created this domain for business purpose and assumes that someone (or Adiga himself) will buy it for some better end:

*"The domain whitetiger-technologydrivers.com is for sale. To purchase, call BuyDomains.com at +1 339-222-5147 or 866-836-6791. Click here for more details."*⁸

Adiga is a journalist and has travelled a lot. The idea of writing *The White Tiger* came to his mind when he visited Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. There he discovered a new India, where people's life was getting affected by continuous migration of labour and changing life style. Ms. Supriya Bhandari observes that:

*"His purpose is to introduce a new India to the readers, new aspects of master-servant relationship, class system and disproportion of income. The novel hints the restlessness in the servant class which might erupt in violence. He is not continuing the traditional image of an ideal servant in his hero Balram rather his narrator is an anti-hero."*⁹

Adiga himself says, "My novel attempts to look at what kind of man would be prepared to break the structure. You can in essence say it is a warning story, a fable of things that might be ahead for India"¹⁰ Dr. Sudhir Arora says that "Adiga's career as a journalist equips him with a journalistic mode of writing."¹¹ Nevertheless Adiga attempts to avoid giving journalistic touch to this novel, it apparently appears in the text. The wanted poster and information given in the FIR are purely journalistic in nature. The way he describes the missing man in the poster is purely a description expected from a journalist:

"Assistance Sought in search FOR MISSING MAN

*General Public is hereby informed that the man in the picture namely Balram Halwai alias MUNNA son of Vikram Halwai rickshaw-puller is wanted for questioning. Age: Between 25 and 35. Complexion: Blackish. Face: Oval. Height: Five feet four inches estimated. Build: Thin, Small"*¹²

Further, the way Adiga seeks information from the public regarding the missing Balram Halwai is also a typical detail expected from a journalist's notification. He writes:

"...any person having any information or clue about this missing man may kindly inform at CBI Web site (<http://cbi.nic.in>) e-mail ID (diccbi@cbi.nic.in), Fax No. 011-23011334. T No. 011-23014046 (Direct) 011-23015299 and 23015218 Extn. 210 and to the undersigned at the following address or telephone number or numbers given below.

DP 3687/05

SHO – Dhaula Kuan, New Delhi

*Tel: 28653200. 27641000"*¹³

The use of CBI website and contact details gives the novel a realistic touch. Adiga has made a sound research before writing this novel. He takes the information out of the CBI website and tries to look the novel as real as possible. His realistic description of Balram and his activities makes his writing journalistic and his journalistic touch to the novel

makes it easy to read and gripping for the readers who are accustomed to the English newspaper.

The White Tiger depicts Adiga's views on the growing gap between the rich and the poor and the failure of the police in tracing the criminals. He reveals the level of corruption spread among the politicians and the officials. His revelation of the grim show of the so-called progress such as electrification in rural areas and overall pollution is the product of his visit to the locales of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In an interview Adiga himself made his point clear about the origin of the internal unrest and outbreak of terrorism in India:

*"These problems have been brewing for a long time. The causes are complex, but one common theme I find is the heightened tension within the country that's caused by the growing gap between the rich and the poor. The flare-ups can often take the form of ethnic or regional protests, but the underlying grievances are often economic: "those people who live over there are doing much better than we are." Fixing the economic disparities has to be part of any attempt to address India's growing unrest. The country's intelligence and police agencies need to be reformed and modernized; right now they seem way behind the terrorists. In particular, the police have to make an effort to reach out to Indians of all religions – right now many religious minorities are intensely suspicious of the police and with good cause."*¹⁴

Adiga's protagonist Balram writes to the Chinese Premier, "A month before the rains, the men came back from Dhanbad and Delhi and Calcutta, leaner, darker, angrier, but with money in their pockets. The women were waiting for them. They hid behind the door, and as soon as the men walked in, they pounced, like wild cats on a slab of flesh. There was fighting and wailing and shrieking. My uncles would resist, and manage to keep some of their money, but my father got peeled and skinned every time.... The women would feed him after the buffalo."¹⁵ Amitava Kumar quoting the above mentioned passage in his article comments:

*"I had witnessed such men, and sometimes women, coming back to their village homes countless times. The novelist seemed to know next to nothing about either the love or the despair of the people he was writing about. And yet, my objection was not simply that I found Adiga's scenario implausible. Rather, I wanted to know if others, who might never have visited Bihar, read the last line of the paragraph quoted above and recognized how wrong it was."*¹⁶

Besides using epistolary technique Adiga chooses to present his story in an autobiographical style. Balram, the protagonist, who calls himself half-baked Indian, writes to Mr. Jiabao about his life story and makes him understand the meaning of half-baked. In the beginning itself, before starting his story formally he proclaims his story as 'the autobiography of a half-baked Indian' and explains it to his reader:

*"Me, and thousands of others in this country like me, are half-baked, because we were never allowed to complete our schooling. Open our skull, look in with a penlight, and you'll find an odd museum of ideas; sentences of history or mathematics remembered from school textbooks... sentences about politics read in a newspaper... triangles and pyramids seen on the torn pages of the old geometry textbooks which every tea shop in this country uses to wrap its snacks in, bits of All India Radio news bulletins, things that drop into your mind, like lizards on the ceiling, in the half-hour before falling asleep – all these ideas, half formed and half digested and half correct, mix up with other half-cooked ideas in your head, and I guess these half formed-ideas bugger one another, and make more half-formed ideas, and this is what you act on and live with."*¹⁷

Adiga's narrative style is different and innovative. His narrator explores in an apparently simple style his past including his anger, suffering, humiliation and detachment. Dr. R. K. Dhawan and Santwana Haldar observe that: *"The secret of Adiga's innovative narrative style lies in juxtaposing an insignificant act*

*of spitting on the hill top and the heinous act of slitting one's master's throat. The link between the two acts lies in the strong hatred generated in Balram's mind. His ability to reach the top of the fort is suggestive of his fearlessness that he gradually gained. Earlier when he had attempted to reach the fort, he was frightened by a lizard or even a cow. But this time there was no fear. He was fearless to express his hatred towards the master class people through spitting. And after he was released of the strong emotion, he whistled and hummed. This fearless attitude prompted him to murder his employer after eight months. It is a shocking experience for the readers to go through the lines and once they read the lines, they are made captives by a thrilling sense and are unable to shelve the book before completing it."*¹⁸

The White Tiger includes the ingredients of a drama like conflicts and dialogues. The dialogues of the novel reveal both the conflict as well as the information that helps in forwarding the story to its final goal. In the text of the novel Adiga has inserted some dialogues which give the novel a dramatic touch. For example:

"The old driver asked, 'What caste are you?'

'Halwai'

'Sweet-makers,' the old driver said, shaking his head.

*'That's what you people do. You make sweets. How can you learn to drive?'*⁹

Dr. Sudhir K. Arora finds the elements of dramatic monologue in *The White Tiger*. He says that *The White Tiger* can be called "a dramatic monologue in the sense that the protagonist Balram speaks but imagines that the Chinese Premier is listening to him. No doubt, he writes letters but thinks that he is narrating his life story to him."²⁰ When Balram Halwai drops Pinky Madam at the airport, she gives him a brown envelope. He opens the envelope and finds forty-seven hundred rupees there. He wonders why she gave him that odd sum of money. He begins to talk to himself to find out the answer which seems nearest to soliloquy:

"Forty-seven hundred rupees. In that brown envelope under my bed.

Odd sum of money – wasn't it? There was a mystery to be solved here. Let's see. Maybe she started off giving me five thousand, and then, being cheap, like all rich people are – remember how the Mongoose made me get down on my knees for that one-rupee coin? – deducted three hundred.

That's not how the rich think, you moron. Haven't you learned yet?

She must have taken out ten thousand at first. Then cut it in half, and kept half for herself. Then taken out another hundred, and another hundred. That's how cheap they are.

*So that means they really owe you ten thousand. But if she thought she owed you ten thousand, then what she truly owned you was, what – ten times more?"*²¹

Adiga is a master satirist. He satirizes everything he sees but his way of presentation is so skilled that he comes out clearly shedding the blames of criticism. He dips his pen in the dark ink of satires and expresses his simple words so skillfully that they emerge with antithetical meanings. Irony is his strongest weapon which he uses with great ability. He satirizes pungently but indirectly. For instance, in one of his letters he writes:

*"The police know exactly where to find me. They will find me dutifully voting on Election Day at the voting booth in the school compound in Laxmangarh in Gaya District, as I have done in every general, state, and local election since I turned eighteen.... I am India's most faithful voter, and I still have not seen the inside of a voting booth."*²²

Adiga has beautifully interwoven wit and humour in the fabric of *The White Tiger*. It is indeed difficult to maintain seriousness along with fun touched with wit. But Adiga is able to maintain this balance. Dr. Arora observes that: *"The novel is a serious comedy by virtue of its reflection on the predicament of life along with the entertainment that makes one light*

*and relaxed."*²³ Adiga has mastery over language but he likes to use simple words with rich effect. In Dr. Arora's words he has *"sharpened his language with the chisel to give it a proper shape."*²⁴ He uses short sentences to express his ideas clearly and avoids long and confusing sentences. He also prefers to use a phrase or a clause wherever they can replace a full sentence. He uses italics to emphasize his points and bold to highlight them. He does not waste time in giving unnecessary details. He describes only those points which are very necessary. Dr. Arora says that *'Superficiality does not grow in the fictional ground of Adiga who always has scissors or tools that either prune or remove the unnecessary weeds'*²⁵. Adiga takes his reader into confidence during his narration so that they feel comfortable while listening to his story. He also talks to them informally to eradicate their hesitation. He seems to be talking with the reader who begins to flow with him in his narration. His use of 'question tags' gives the readers a personal feeling. It makes his narration communicative and also creates a bond between the readers and his characters. His use of 'question tags' is a sign of his direct communication with his reader:

*"Everyone goes to Mumbai in the films after they kill someone, don't they?"*²⁶

and

*"But what is the use of winning a battle when you don't even know that there is a war going on?"*²⁷ etc.

Adiga uses rhetoric as a weapon of his satire in *The White Tiger* to enrich his narrative style and also to make his ideas emphatically clear. Comparing the drudgery of the poor to the condition of the brightly coloured roosters Balram says, *"The greatest thing to come out of this country in the ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop"*²⁸. Adiga thinks that the life of the common Indians is no better than that of the cocks and hens stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages. He finds the poverty stricken Indians in Rooster Coop unable to improve their condition because they cannot go against the existing rules. Elaborating the same comparison Balram remarks:

*"Hundreds of pale hens ... packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and shitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a horrible stench – the stench of terrified, feathered flesh The very same thing is done with human beings in this country."*²⁹

Adiga also compares the Indian people with that of the Chinese. He says that the Chinese are not like Indians because had they been so the Chinese Premier "wouldn't need the Communist Party to shoot people and a secret police to raid their houses at night and put them in jail".³⁰ Quite in a funny way he states that "Here in India we have no dictatorship. No secret police. That's because we have the coop".³¹ The coop is a great success in India. Above ninety-nine percent of the people despite their strength and intelligence exist in their 'perpetual servitude'. Moreover, they are not ready to change their this state of servitude at any stage. They are happy in their slavery and if anybody ever tries to give them a chance to break out their chains they would curse the person instead:

*"Never before in human history have so few owed so much to so many.... A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 per cent – as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way – to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse."*³²

In his novel *The White Tiger* Adiga uses 'Binary Opposition'³³ as a strong medium of his satire. He presents a series of *binary cuts* available in Indian society. Throughout the novel he contrasts Darkness and Light and also the people with big bellies and those with small bellies. He calls the areas by the side of the river Ganga Darkness and the big cities like New Delhi and Bangalore Light. Among all his binary presentations the presentation of Darkness and Light is the most elaborating. He contrasts Darkness with Light and makes his protagonist feel light in the light of the Light. Balram is obsessed with his chandelier which suggests that he no longer wants to live in

Darkness. In one of his letters to Mr. Jiabao he mentions about his chandelier:

*"I have a chandelier here, above my head in my office, and then I have two in my apartment in Raj Mahal Villas Phase Two. One in the drawing room and a small one in the toilet too.... Sometimes, in my apartment, I turn on both chandeliers, and then I lie down amid all that light, and I just start laughing. A man in hiding, and yet he's surrounded by chandeliers! There – I'm revealing the secret to a successful escape. The police searched for me in darkness: but I hid myself in light."*³⁴

In another instance Balram writes to the Chinese Premier clarifying how two Indias exist in one and how Delhi is the capital of not one India but two. He writes, "Remember, Mr. Premier, that Delhi is the capital of not one but two countries – two Indias. The Light and the Darkness both flow in to Delhi. Gurgaon... is the bright, modern end of the city, and this place, Old Delhi, is the other end. Full of things that the modern world forgot all about – rickshaws, old stone buildings, and Muslims."³⁵

Binary Opposition is the most suitable medium to present the contrast between things Adiga intends to present. The difference between the rich and the poor cannot be revealed in a better way than presented through this binary medium. Dr. Dhawan remarks that: "Binary opposition helps the writer express his bitter criticism of Indian society in a witty way"³⁶. Adiga finds that the rich are overfed while the poor starve. The rich live in mansions while the poor live on the pavement. The rich man has a soft body while the poor man has a hard one. He writes:

"A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. Ours are different. My father's spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use in villages to pull water from well; the clavicle curved around his neck 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 below his hipbones into his buttocks. The story of a

*poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen."*³⁷

Through his binary cuts Adiga pungently contrasts the people with big bellies and that with the small bellies. Dr. Dhawan finds this contrast most pinching and interestingly says, "*The most pinching satire in the novel is perhaps done by the binary of Big Bellies and Small Bellies*"³⁸. In one of his letters Balram writes contrasting the two types of people with two types of bellies detailing how the rich have grown their bellies so large :

*"Those that were the most ferocious, the hungriest, had eaten everyone else up, and grown big bellies. That was all that counted now, the size of your belly. It didn't matter whether you were a woman, or a Muslim, or an untouchable: anyone with a belly could rise up. 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 back. That's why he had fallen all the way to mud, to the level of a rickshaw-puller. That's why I was cheated of my destiny to be fat, creamy-skinned, and smiling. To sum up – in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat – or get eaten up."*³⁹

CONCLUSION

The White Tiger is a single sided conversation. The speaker does not wait for the response of the listener. Like the Ancient Mariner in S. T. Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* Balram catches his guest reader and goes on narrating his story including his feelings and emotions without waiting to listen to the responses of the listener. Still it is the best and innovative medium of Adiga which presents his narration uninterruptedly. Any other style of telling his story might not have expressed his heart as clearly as he is able to express through his innovative epistolary technique.

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