

The White Tiger: A Sociopragmatic Response

Dr. Nagendra Kumar¹, Devendra Kumar Sharma²

¹Associate Professor, ²Research Fellow

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee-247667 (India).

¹naguk20@gmail.com, ²devendra999iitr@gmail.com

Abstract-*The paper in the context intends to trace and examine the gradual growth of Balram Halwai, the protagonist of the novel, from an individual to a subject. The complex reality of Foucauldian 'Governmentality', 'Althusser's 'Interpellation' and Zizek's 'Subjetivization' have been elaborated and explained how they have contributed in Balram's subjectivization and objectification. The present paper also provides us a critique of capitalist society and power structure.*

Keywords: Govern mentality; Interpellation; Subjetivization; Objectification

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* traces the growth and epistemological construction of Adiga's self and consciousness which is evidently clear through the complexes of the narrative structure of the novel. The narrative plot of the novel is constructed beautifully and the narration flows spontaneously and eloquently. To present the subaltern Halwai Adiga uses the first person narration as it exemplifies the importance given to him. This has been amply supported by the following statement of Robert Southey in his 'Letters from England,' '[A] remarkable peculiarity is that they (the English) always write the personal pronoun 'I' with the capital letter. May we not consider this great 'I' as an unintended proof how much an Englishman thinks of his own consequence?'" (Robert Southey, 2010: 29-35)

The White Tiger is itself a metaphor. The White Tiger is an animal of the grand effort. He has the capacity to build his own path. It's a unique creature in the forest. The protagonist of the novel Balram Halwai belongs to a subaltern society. The story expounds the harsh reality of the colonizer and the colonised. As Memmi says, "[C]ould the colonized deny himself so cruelly....How could he hate the colonisers and yet admire them so passionately?" (1968: 45). His caste is not mentioned in the novel but he belongs to a Halwai family (A low caste in Indian social hierarchy). Actually, the whole *fabula* and *syuzhet* of the novel is based on the journey from darkness of Dhanabad (a backward township in Bihar) to the high-tech city of Bangalore and the writer Aravind Adiga unravels a lot of cultural and social differences which constitute the vast panorama of the contemporary reality of India. Further, it reflects upon the underlying reality of the construction of one's abstract and concrete predicament. It depicts that the behaviour of a person depends on the society and culture which weigh upon the content and form of the person with

heavy pounds. As American anthropologist Clyde Kuloohn (1962) defines the culture:

Culture consists of patterns explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as product of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action (47).

It is universally acknowledged that India is a culturally rich country which is vividly reflected in her linguistic diversities and the heteroglossic realities. The linguistic diversities allow the subjects to employ the dialogic reality as far as its contextual and pragmatic competence is concerned. Balram Halwai, the protagonist of the novel, exhibits the dialogic function of language which is evident through his shift of language as text along with changes in time and space. His use of language during his childhood instantiates that he has gradually moved away from the tabula rasa state of mind to a well scribed consciousness. Balram is afraid of lizard as he describes, "The lizard's face came right up to my face; and then opened its light green mouth and then I fainted for the second time in my life." (29) But when his father comes at school to kill him, at that time he wants to save the lizard and shouts- "[D]on't kill it, Daddy- just throw it out the window, please? Don't kill it, Daddy- please!" (30). He knows that lizard can harm him but again he wants to save it. He is a very brilliant student. One day in the school the inspector comes and asks a few questions from the children especially when he points out to Balram, "[Y]ou 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

generation? The White Tiger...That's what you are in this jungle." (35)

From that day the protagonist Balram becomes 'The White Tiger.' His father is a rickshaw-puller and the miserable predicament of his family does not allow him to continue his study and hence, he quits the school education while his father wants him to study. It becomes clear when he avers, "[M]y whole life, I have treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine- at least one- should live like a man" (p. 30). It represents that it is the metaphor that constitutes his mind and his world of ideas and ideology. Metaphor, as the cognitive device constructs the reality of one's epistemological construction which is clear when Lakoff and Jonson point out how human thought processes are largely metaphorical. Here the metaphor Donkey is used to present the Balram's father because he toils audaciously from morning to evening but remains at the same position in the society. His wretched condition as a rickshaw-puller and the psychology of economic absence and the hegemony of power make him to dream about his son to be an educated person. Balram's childhood infancy doesn't allow him to understand the complexity of the world and also the pragmatic reality of his life.

He gets the first lesson of corruption in his school by his master who steals the money from students' funds. He has experienced the harsh reality of the life. After leaving the school he labours at a tea shop, cleaning tables and smashing coals. Balram's physical labour germinates a seed of discontent in him and hence he decides to work as a driver. His struggle knows no bound because he belongs to a subaltern family. He begs from other to get a job, "[I] went to all taxi stands; down my knees I begged random strangers; but no one would agree to teach me car-driving for free" (54). A taxi driver agrees to teach him but he wants three hundred rupees "Three hundred rupees!" (54). The exclamation mark shows that he is surprised to hear three hundred rupees because he knows that he and his family cannot afford this big amount of money and therefore, he requests his master, "[G]ive me a chance, sir- my body is small but there's a lot of fight in it- I'll haul cement for you I'll" (55). After a great struggle he learns how to drive a car and in the process of learning how to drive a car he acculturates the master driver which is copiously reflected when he articulates, "[Y]ou have got to get the right attitude, understand? Anyone tries to overtake you on the road, do this'- he clenched his fist and shook it- 'and call him a sister-fucker a few time. The road is a jungle, get it? A good driver must roar to get ahead on it.'" (57). Now, Balram attains some proficiency in driving which provides him with some confidence to search a job of a car driver and he avers, "[S]o I went looking, from house to house, house to house, house to house" (59). Finally, his Olympic runner like abilities, bring a job in his hand but he feels a bit exacerbated when he ascribes, "[N]o Olympic runner could have gone in as I did through those gates" (61).

A systemic shift of his master Ashok brings him to Delhi where he is caught into a cultural whirlpool and

imbroglio which further makes him to realize completely alienated and culturally dislocated. He does not know the life style of Delhi so the other drivers says, "[H]e's raw from village, still pure. Let city life corrupt him first (148)". Moreover, the language that he employs does not suit the pragmatic reality of the spatio-temporal context. Balram is an illiterate person that's why he is unable to pronounce most of English words like when Pinki/Ashok goes to mall, he pronounces it 'maal' Pinky madam repeats, ' its mal', but he again repeats it 'maal'. Later he closes his eyes and repeats sounds "mool, mowll, or malla" (147). Another term 'pizza' he always repeats it 'pijja'. Again later he repeats sounds "pijja, pziija, zipjja, pizja" (155). Sometimes he feels guilty and asks so many questions to himself because of the cultural change. Balram finds himself completely shocked and culturally alienated and fractured which is explicitly clear through rhetorical questions that he interrogates, "[W]hy had my father never told me not to scratch my groin? Why had my father never taught me to brush my teeth in milky foam? Why had he raised me to live like an animal? Why do all the poor live amid such filth, such ugliness?" (151). Further, Fanon comments, "[I] came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the word and then I found that I was an object in the midst of the objects" (41). Fanon's first response is to experience the pain of, as he puts it, being "sealed into that crushing object hood" as Robert J.C.Young (2001:21) writes. In addition, it is clearly explained from the discourse and the narrative pattern of the novel that everyone and everything has gone under an unprecedented metamorphosis as it experiences the uncontrolled power of cultural and capitalist hegemony. Ashok has changed, "[H]e returned from America an innocent man, but life in Delhi corrupted him- and once the master of Honda city becomes corrupted, how can the driver stay innocent?" (197). Along with Ashok, Balram is also greatly shaped and reshaped by the socio-economic and cultural realities of his pragmatic world. The complex web of capital and currency entangles Balram and corrupts him from top to toe. He starts ignoring his family and their needs to which he promises to send them money every month. He also slaps his aunt's son in an ill manner. At night when Dharam wakes up and comes to mosquito net Balram become so angry that he behaves very rudely with him - "Turn on the light, you fool! Turn on the light! ... I'm not joking, you moron- get it out of my bed!" (266). He has known that if he wants to live he must break the Rooster Coop. 'Rooster Coop' as Frantz Fanon's says in *Black Skin White Masks* "[G]et him to eradicate this narcissism whereby he thinks he is different from other animals"(6).

Adiga uses the metaphor 'Lamb' for Mr Ashok because he is a simple man just opposite to his father and brother. As lamb is a soft and sacrificial animal (that's why he sacrifices himself for making Balram a colonizer). He doesn't misbehave with his servants. His voice is not ruthless like his father and brother so he says, "[O] Lamb-

that-was- born- from- the- lions- of-a- landlord” (155). It shows that he is not commanding and oppressive like land-lords though he is born in a land-lords family. It is commonly understood that a moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new; when an age ends; when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance.

When Balram goes to the second hand book market of Darya Ganj he learns two lines of the urdu poem- “You were looking for the key for years/but the door was always open”!(253). He finds a meaning in this line indicating towards his ambition, his aim. He feels the door of a better life is always open, but it is he who has not been able to identify his way. Social twist and poverty keep a person down long enough to destroy his hopes and dreams. “Following Merton’s lead, the anomic situation, from the individual point of view, may be defend as one in which there is high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviours are required to achieve given goals (Lewis Coser & Bernard Rosemberg, 1982: 380).” Further, it is generally assumed that various social conditions lead to Over weening ambition which creates a breakdown for regulatory norms. But the insatiable greed of money propels him to conceive the worst ideas when he sees the red bag full of the seven hundred thousand rupees. After killing his master as he opens the red bag, “[A]ll at once, the entire stairwell filled up with dazzling light the kind that only money can give out” (243). The word ‘Rooster Coop’ is a metaphor used for all class of servants, which remain in sight awaiting their turn for sacrifice, ruled by their master, the butcher. In India, the poor people like servants and drivers are confined in a din, a kind of coop but the problem is that they “[D]o not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop” (174). Balram is the only person who breaks the ‘Rooster Coop’ and says “[I] have woken up, and the rest of you are still sleeping, and that is the only difference between us.”(315). He just wants to break the system of oppressor and oppressed, exploiters and exploited or the coloniser and colonised people that it is both possible and necessary to break with tradition and institute absolutely new ways of living and thinking. Balram does not want to live like slaves. He has no guilt for doing this that’s why in the last line of the novel he writes “[I] will never say I made a mistake that night in Delhi when I slit my master’s throat.”(320). He appreciates himself that he does something different to break this system. He consoles himself- “I think the Rooster Coop needs people like me break out of it. It needs master like Mr. Ashok- who for all his numerous virtues was not much of a master to be weeded out and exceptional servants like me to replace them... I’ve made it I’ve broken out of the coop!” (320).

This is true that later he becomes a businessman but he does not want to act like other exploiters do with their servants. As he says “[I] was a driver to a master, but now I am a master of drivers. I don’t treat them like servants- I don’t slap, or bully, or mock anyone. I don’t insult any of them by calling them my ‘family’, either”

(302). As he breaks the ‘Rooster Coop’ his feelings echo the thoughts of Fanon “[I] want to be recognized not as Black, but as white... I espouse white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. Between these white breasts that my wandering hands fondle, white civilization and worthiness become mine” (*Black Skin White Masks* 45). But from the start he can’t change his language from the slavery. When he goes to Toyota Qualis dealer in the city and says, in his sweetest voice, ‘I want to drive your cars.’ The dealer looks at him, puzzled. He couldn’t believe that he said that “[O]nce a servant, always a servant: the instinct is always there, inside you, somewhere near the base of your spine. I pinched my left palm. I smiled as I held it pinched and said –in a deep, gruff voice, I want to rent your cars” (298). This is one of the biggest problems/advantage of the language that the impact of profession, culture and society on language is always heavier than others. That’s why he changes his voice of slavery and starts with the deep, gruff, the oppressor’s voice. He wants to show that he is a businessman. In Bangalore he has confused to see the cultural differences from North to South India. He compares food and drinks, “[L]unch was four rupees a plate. The food is good value in the south. It is a strange food, though; vegetables cut up and served in watery curries. Then I went up to my room... I was eager to try coffee- you see poor people in the north of this country drink tea, and poor in the south drink coffee” (296-97).

There are a number of jargons used by Adiga in this novel. Slang is the poetry of everyday life and it vividly expresses people’s feelings about life, and about the things they encounter. Slang and Indian words have been used at some stage in few arguments. Balram uses slang, and Hindi words to give some Indian touch. Pinki most of the time shows her anger by using the expression ‘what a fucking joke’. Mr Mukesh uses the oppressive class slang ‘Basterd’, ‘Sister Fucker’, ‘Country-mouse’, ‘Son of Pig’, ‘Donkey’ etcetera. He also uses very vulgar words for sexual relationship ‘all of them begging me to dip my beak into them’, we’ll even fuck your wife for you Balram! He uses the Hindi words also like-namastes (49), ghat (16, 18), thug (52), pooja (100), paan (105). Balram’s journey goes from darkness to light but it is also important that those who have courage only they can break the ‘Rooster Coop’. The narrator has given the Indian as well as the foreign touch in the novel. It is a social criticism and the satire chartered through a comic mode of expression. The reader of the novel confronts a sympathetic fiction where the subaltern has been presented. The novelist has achieved an amalgamation of multiple points of view through the use of language as well as presenting the social reality of a particular class of society.

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Author's Biography



Nagendra Kumar is currently working as an Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee-247667 (India). Besides publishing a book on the fiction of Bharati mukherjee, he has publish scores of research articles in national and international journals in the areas of Indian writing in English, Indian Diaspora and Cross Cultural Communication.



Devendra Kumar Sharma is working as Research Fellow in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee-247667 (India). His area of research is Language and Linguistics.