

Narratology in relation to theme in *The White Tiger* as postcolonial Narrative

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The study of narrative continues to grow more sizeable and wide-ranging as it is applied to an ever greater range of fields and disciplines, appearing more importantly in areas from philosophy to Religion as narrative theology it is a new kind of psychological treatment called narrative therapy. The present research paper ventures to explore to analyze the narrative and to relate it to the theme. The analysis is based on with the key concepts introduced by Genette's key points of homo or heterodiegetic, focalization, Chatman's concept of overtness or covertness; Stanzal's narrative situation, authorial and figural narrative with reflector.

Like many first-person narratives, Adiga's *The White Tiger* is a fictional narrative. Balram is a mature narrator who looks back in his past life, like first-person narratives, he has become not only older but also wiser. Looking back on his life, he writes his past, especially the murder of Ashok. The story's first-person narrative situation is uniquely suited for presenting Balram's insights about his past.

The story is told through the letter form and the way the narrator goes back to his past to retell the whole story makes the timeline quite accurate. The story's action begins with Balram's writing letters to the Premier's Office on the first night. The story moves forward with the passage of night after night. The narrator recalls each incident of his life clearly from how he got his name Balram or The White Tiger and the disguised identity as Ashok. It is clearly the case of homodiegetic narrator as Balram; the narrator is a character in the story. He is an overt narrator, open to readers. When the story begins Balram's experiencing I' is narrating the story of his being as Ashok. Taking narratological lines, Ashok is the "narrating self," and Balram Halwai/Munna are written about and could be termed the "experiencing self," i.e. the younger self whose story is related by the older (narrating) self (Stanzel, 201). And yet, we learn comparatively little about the attitudes and feelings of Balram/Munna, as everything is already filtered through the grim perspective of the entrepreneur Ashok, who is, obviously, no longer subaltern or indigent. If he had remained subaltern, he could not have told his story in the first place. He would have neither the means nor the time to do so, as he would be slaving away in a chai-stall. Ashok, the narrating self is confident, verging on the megalomaniac, cheeky and courageous, while Balram is subservient, humble, and constantly afraid. There is thus a considerable gap between the older narrating self Ashok and the younger experiencing self Munna/Balram.

The story's action focuses on Balram, when on the first night he writes to The Premier of China. He says this "The autobiography of a Half-Baked Indian" (*The White Tiger*, 10) The story bears in mind the struggle of underprivileged class for emancipation from the age-old slavery and exploitation. Lower class in India is

forced to suffer, get marginal place or no place in history and culture. They are denied their socio-economic upliftment and forced to beg for food, sleep under concrete flyovers, defecting on the roadside, shivering in the cold. Illiteracy, zamindari system, rigid class discrimination, corrupt political system, economic disparity, unemployment contribute to the suffering of lower class. Arvind Adiga has successfully interpreted modern Indian ethos from the point of view of lower class in his debut novel *The White Tiger*. He has portrayed indomitable central character Balram Halwai who is the strong voice of marginal farmers, landless labourers, jobless youths, poor taxi drivers, and servants. He is unlucky to be born in a teeming poor family and under the control of feudal lord Stork. For him, there is no straight or honest way to set himself free but to kill his own employee Ashok Sharma and emerge as a successful businessman. Adiga very successfully depicts the transformation from village simpleton to a successful entrepreneur. He has focused on changing mindset of underprivileged class that is to adopt any way, moral or amoral, to set himself free from master-salve system. He has realistically depicted the suffering, poverty, inferiority of lower class and their struggle of emancipation from it.

The theme of becoming self-fashioning and a transformative journey to construct his own identity by Balram has been depicted by the writer with suitable techniques. Unlike the ordinary well-spoken authorial; narrator who cannot himself be present as a character in the story, Balram's improvised background 's voice and diction is a functional and characteristic feature in Adiga's story. Note, for instance, the following: 'Neither you nor I can speak English, but there are something that can be said only in English.'*(White Tiger,3)*

The theme of recollection and reflection that runs through Adiga's story would, however, be well manageable in a first person narrative situation. In fact, Balram's telling his own story helps him think about his life and clarify his own thoughts and judgments. A reflector figure, in contrast, is not narrator, and cannot address a narrative. It is important to Balram not only to tell his story to an anonymous audience but in a sense also to himself. The text's dialogic quality comes out in one of its key passages:

To give you the basic facts about me –origin, weight, known sexual deviations, etc,-there's no beating that poster. The one the police made of me. (*White Tiger*,11)

Here, Balram explicitly keeps telling himself. The story moves forward and backward in a single breath. This shows the struggle and anxiety of a postcolonial man always in dilemma and shows his fragmented personality full of confusion. Inspired by his childhood hero, Vijay, who also rose from a humble background to achieve success in the upper echelons of Indian society, Balram even chooses a new identity for himself in imitation of his master, calling himself Ashok Sharma. And yet the novel is full of dramatic irony revealing that Balram cannot fully repudiate the person he once was. He remains full of unresolved guilt and provincial superstitions, reminding us that while identity might be entirely fluid, it is also entirely immovable as well. Barbara Korte correctly points out that Adiga's narrator is the master of a "pithy phrase" (299). I would like to add, however, that it is not the disenfranchised village boy Balram who utters his biting satire here, but Ashok, start-up and entrepreneur. Ashok knows about the dreams of the rich—he is one of them now. What is more, Ashok's name is reminiscent of the legendary emperor Ashoka of the Maurya dynasty, who ruled vast parts of the subcontinent

in the 3rd century BC. His very name thus shows how he is now part of the elite rather than the indigent class of India.

Balram Halwai, the protagonist of the novel, is a typical voice of lower class metaphorically described as “Rooster Coop” (*The White Tiger*, 4) and struggling to emancipate from age old slavery and exploitation. He is the son of rickshaw puller who gets his name from his teacher as he is called Munna and his intelligence and wit earn him the title the White Tiger “the rarest of animals the creatures that comes along once in generation.”(*The White Tiger*,173) As a member of “India of Darkness”(*The White Tiger*, 41) his struggle begins at very young age when his family borrows loan from village landlord known as Stork for the marriage of his cousin sister Reena. Balram is pulled out of the school and forced to crush coal and wipes tables at tea shop where he gets “better education” than “at any school”(*The White Tiger*,30) While working in tea shop, he says, “I was destined not to stay as slave.” (*The White Tiger*, 38) He is also inspired by father’s words:

“My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one of my mines –at least one- should live like a man.” (*The White Tiger*, 46)

To get rid of slavery, Balram and his brother go in search of job from Laxamangarah, Gaya to India’s capital city, Delhi. Balram learns driving and manages to offer his service as chauffeur to Stork’s son Ashok Shrama and daughter in law Pinky Madam. He makes use of every opportunity to prove his honesty and love in order to win favour of his master. Note, for instance, the following:

“I would drive whenever they wanted, as faithfully as the servant God Hanuman carried about his master and mistress, Ram and Sita.”(*The White Tiger*, 173)

His confesses the crime committed by Pinky Madam. From this it becomes obvious that drivers and servants are forced to confess the crime their masters have committed. In this concern Balram rightly says:

“The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters.”(*The White Tiger*,64)

It makes clear that servants are exploited, tortured and treated like animals. Moreover, the idea of master-servant system is deeply rooted in psyche of lower class. In this concern Adiga speaks through Balram:

“Doesn't the driver's family protest? Far from it. They would actually go about bragging. Their boy Balram had taken the fall, gone to Tihar jail for his employer. He was loyal as dog. He was the perfect servant.” (Singh, Krishan, *the Voice of Underclass*, 48)

Like parrot in cage, Balram is confined behind bars of class, caste, economic disparity, illiteracy, zamindar system and poverty. He compares his situation to the Rooster Coop:

“The greatest thing to get out of this country in the ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop. Go to old Delhi, behind the Jama Masjid, and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market. Chicken do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country.” (Saxena, Shobham, *The Times of India*)

It makes clear that though underprivileged people are being treated brutally, they are not aware of that or if aware not dare to rebel against it.

Adiga masterfully describes the city of Delhi with diegetic mode interspersed with mimetic mode of narration. In order to dismantle the discrimination between the “Big Bellies” and “Small Bellies”, Balram kills his grief stricken and gullible master Ashok Shrama and escapes with the red bag loaded with money and commences a new life in Bangalore as entrepreneur running a taxi service to BPO’s. He finds no other way to success. India’s underprivileged class who is no longer content to spend their lives away in poverty but want opportunities, moral or immoral, to break away the age-old class hierarchy and to walk ahead in the race of life.

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