

Unveiling Narration of Nation in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract:

This research paper explores the nuanced portrayal of India as a nation in Aravind Adiga's seminal work, "The White Tiger." Through a meticulous examination of the novel's narrative structure, character development, and socio-political context, the study aims to unravel the ways in which Adiga employs storytelling as a powerful tool to critique and deconstruct the prevailing notions of nationhood in contemporary India. The paper delves into the protagonist Balram Halwai's journey from a rural servant to a successful entrepreneur, investigating how his narrative functions as a subversive commentary on the complex and often oppressive socio-economic landscape of the nation. Analyzing the use of first-person narration, the study dissects Balram's voice as a subaltern perspective, challenging dominant discourses and offering an alternative narrative that exposes the fractures within the national fabric.

Key Words: Nation and Narration, India, Janus Face, Globalization, Political Satire

Nation and Narration : Homi K. Bhabha

“Nation and Narration” (1990) is a seminal work by Homi K. Bhabha in the field of post-colonial studies. It tries to study how national identities are created and how cultural narratives are produced and circulated. Bhabha argues that creation of national identity is an ongoing process that is mediated through storytelling and other cultural practices. Bhabha contends that the construction of national identity is always a complex and contested process, and that cultural narratives are key to shaping the ways in which people understand and relate to their

national identity. He argues that cultural narratives are never static or fixed, but are always open to interpretation and re-interpretation. As a result, national identity is always subject to ongoing negotiation and contestation, and cultural narratives are an important means through which this negotiation and contestation takes place. According to Bhabha 'Nation' is not a natural phenomenon but rather a product of cultural and historical processes that are formed by power. According to Homi K. Bhabha, Nation – the *modern Janus*: the uneven development of capitalism inscribes both progression and regression, political rationality and irrationality in the very genetic code of the nation – it is by nature, ambivalent. In short, 'Nation and Narration' explores the ways in which literary work can reinforce or challenge dominant national narratives. (Bhabha)

A Study of *The White Tiger*

Winner of 2008 Man Booker Prize novel 'The White Tiger' by Aravind Adiga is one of the hotly debated since its publication, not just because it received such prestigious prize but because of its graphic and realistic portrayal of India. Novel presents naked, crude and darker shades of India. In an interview with 'The Guardian' Adiga says that "*The White Tiger* didn't just win the Booker, it was a bestseller,". "I had come out of complete obscurity, and at first I found it hard to deal with the fact I was a published writer. Once you have written a book like *The White Tiger* it's very hard to escape from the shadow of it. I was frightened the White Tiger would eat me up too". (Moss)

The entire plot of the novel pivots round the protagonist Balram Halwai, a young man born and brought up in a remote village of Bihar, who narrates his story of life in the form of a letter on a foreign dignitary, the Chinese Prime-Minister who is on his visit to Bangalore on an official assignment. In his talk Halwai begins to tell the Chinese Premier the story of his life. We are introduced to the poverty of rural Bihar, and the evil of the feudal landlords. While unfolding his life of adventure and struggle, he is mainly concerned with painting a realistic picture of his village, his people, the feudal Zamindars of India and particularly all those entrepreneurs who have arisen from dubious position to the great heights of business magnets. But it is the graphic picture of the country and the portrayal of the characters that really matter in the novel. (KHAN)Rano Ringo in his essay 'Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*: An insight into the facets of Globalization' notes that "its critics see globalization as harmful, bringing about increased domination and control by the wealthy over the poor, thus increasing the hegemony of the

“haves” over the “have-nots”. Globalization critics assert that globalization produces an undermining of democracy, a cultural homogenization, and increased destruction of natural species and the environment.” (Ringo) This is what exactly Arvind Adiga has brilliantly captured in the novel. There is not a single object left out by Adiga. Whatever has come to his way, he has bluntly criticized it. Corruption in politics and education, pollution, prostitution, Hit and run, failure of governmental institution, feudal mentality, Rich-poor conflict, Religion, Capitalism, Marxism, Business model of India(entrepreneurs), Globalization and changing morality, two sides of India-Darkness and Light are beautifully merged into single plot in humorous and satirical way. The novel critically analyses the effects of unbridled capitalism on an emerging economy like India, and the social injustice and inequalities that it entails. The White Tiger throws into relief the discrepancy between the crushing rural poverty from which the protagonist Balram emerges, and India's new -found status of a Modern global economy. The major theme of The White Tiger is the difference/ contrast between India’ s rise as a modern global economy and the working class people who live in crushing rural poverty. Other themes of novels are Hindu-Muslim tension, globalization, feudalism, poverty, corruption, experience of returning to India from America.

When Balram comes to know that Chinese premier Wen Jiabao is coming on official visit to Bangalore to learn how to make a few Chinese entrepreneur, he mockingly says to Chinese premier that *‘Apparently, sir, you Chinese are far ahead of us in every respect, except that you don’t have entrepreneurs. And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, does have entrepreneurs’*. (Adiga 4)

Aravind Adiga divides India into two distinct categories : ‘India of Light’ and ‘India of Darkness’. One India that got benefits of globalization, is westernized, rich, glittering with offices of MNCs, shopping malls, high quality roads, new technologies, new gadgets, new huge apartments, and 24*7 working construction sites. Whereas ‘India of Darkness’ is feudal and poor which is left behind from all these developments and people like peasants, drivers, servants, struggling middle class, still living without basic facilities of life like jobs, drinking water, electricity, sewage system, health care, education, transport, and communication facilities.

Balram narrates to Chinese Premier, wen Jiabao that

'You see, I am in the Light now, but I was born and raised in Darkness. I am talking of a place in India, at least a third of country, a fertile place, full of rice fields and wheat fields and ponds in the middle of those fields choked with lotuses and water lilies, and water buffaloes wading through the ponds and chewing on the lotuses and lilies. Those who live in this place call it the Darkness. Please understand, your Excellency, that India is of two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness (Adiga 14).

Thomas Friedman in his book *'Lexus and the Olive Tree'* elaborates in detail about the concept of *'Lexus'*, which stands for globalizing and modernizing world and *'Olive Tree'* which stands for tradition, roots and identity of every caste, creed and society. (Friedman) So in that sense fight between these two goes on perpetually. Its just like two sides of a coin which is visible in any society. This concept of *'Lexus and Olive Tree'* can be very well applicable in the context of India. Lexus stands for shining, globalizing, modernizing and progressing urban India. Olive Tree suggests poverty stricken and backward rural India. As Aravind Adiga says *"India of Light"* - is progressing with gigantic leaps, whereas *"India of Darkness"* is still fighting over caste and religion. More often than not there are news about multinational companies investing huge amount in the Indian market and making profit, similarly, we may find parallel news about India – Pakistan, corruption, poverty, riots, lynching, crimes and Terrorism in news channel & paper. We Indians also have our very own Lexus and Olive tree! This is the beauty of the novel, which captures these two sides of a nation in a perfect manner. There are many examples in the novel which can be elaborate here. There is no clean drinking water and electricity, children are thin and lean, doctors are not present in the hospital, school teacher selling students' uniform, landlords are sucking the blood of the poor, police, government officers and politicians are corrupt, there is no employment and therefore widespread poverty in the Darkness. Someone else is casting votes for someone else in world's biggest democracy. People are living without basic facilities of life. – This is the one world which Adiga portrays. Parallel to this narrative there is also one fastest growing India with glittering shopping malls, MNCs, private hospitals better than five star hotels, excellent roads, skyscrapers and whatnot.

'The White Tiger' is a scathing critique of the Indian caste system and the way it perpetuates social and economic inequality. Through the character of Balram, the novel exposes the corruption and injustice of India's upper classes, who maintain their power by exploiting the

lower classes. The novel suggests that the caste system is a cultural practice that is deeply ingrained in Indian society and is not easily dismantled. This analysis draws on cultural studies' emphasis on power relations and the way they are perpetuated through cultural practices. Novel also explores the impact of globalization on Indian society and culture. The novel portrays the clash between traditional Indian values and Western consumerism, highlighting the tension between the desire for economic growth and the preservation of cultural heritage. Balram sees himself as part of the new India, where Western ideas of individualism and capitalism are celebrated. However, the novel suggests that these values are at odds with traditional Indian values of community and social responsibility. This analysis draws on cultural studies' interest in the relationship between culture and globalization and the way cultural identity is shaped by global flows of goods, ideas, and people. It can be seen as a work of subaltern literature, which challenges dominant narratives about India and offers a voice to those who are marginalized by the dominant culture. Through Balram's story, the novel offers a counter-narrative to the romanticized depictions of India that are often presented in Western media. The growth of the economy and the influx of Western goods and ideas have transformed Indian society, creating new opportunities for some but leaving others behind. The novel suggests that globalization is a complex process that has both positive and negative consequences for Indian culture. This analysis draws on cultural studies' interest in the way cultural texts can be used to resist dominant cultural narratives and offer alternative perspectives. The rooster coop is a central metaphor in "The White Tiger," representing the way that the lower classes are trapped by their social and economic circumstances. The novel suggests that the only way to escape the coop is to embrace individualism and use whatever means necessary to gain power and status. This analysis draws on cultural studies' interest in the way cultural symbols and metaphors can be used to critique social and economic structures. The novel also examines the relationship between language and power. Balram, who is from a lower caste, struggles to speak English fluently and is often looked down upon by those who speak the language fluently. The novel suggests that language is a marker of power and privilege in Indian society, and that those who are fluent in English have a distinct advantage in the new India.

Conclusion:

Overall, *'The White Tiger'* offers a complex and nuanced exploration of the themes of nation and narration, and raises important questions about the relationship between individual and

collective identity in modern-day India. In the novel the idea of nation is narrated in various ways. '*The White Tiger*' narrates the idea of nation in a way that is both critical and nuanced. By exposing the contradictions and complexities of the nation's progress, the novel challenges readers to rethink their own understanding of India and its place in the world. In the novel, the idea of the nation is narrated through the protagonist Balram's personal experiences and observations of Indian society. Balram's journey from a poor rural village to a successful entrepreneur in modern-day India serves as a microcosm of the larger social and political changes taking place in the country.

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