

A Study of Dramatized Narration in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga has been criticized by critics for creating a fictional world that satisfies the urge of western readers and their superiority over third world. Present paper is an attempt to understand the wrong assumption made by them due to only understanding the kind of life presented in it. This article focuses on the way life has been presented in the fictional world by employing the narrative technique in it and how it has brought air of reality in the fiction. The character and life presented in it has been given a real touch by dramatizing the consciousness of the character.

Keywords: Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger*, Point of view, narrative technique, dramatization, consciousness, air of reality

The day Aravind Adiga was awarded Man Booker Prize for *The White Tiger* (2008), a debate started on the subject matter of the narrative. Some of the critics found it interesting enough to entertain and some of them found its narrative nothing but sensational sketches of an underdog chauffeur who had nothing to do but to opine. Most of the critics had one thing in common- an accusation to the author for selling Indian poverty to the western reader. Sudhir Kumar Arora declared *The White Tiger*: a freak, because it has shown the nakedness of India. He writes, "It becomes a part of the slavish imitation that a literary artist, if he bags a prize or an award from a foreign country, is honored in his native country and considered the real hero for bringing name to the country. The prize is taken into consideration, not the way he got it. (Arora: 1)" The lines quoted here states the problems of the critics who mainly focus on the subject matter of the narrative, not the way narrative has been constructed. In order to criticize they take every sentence of the texts as the point of view of the authors and consider the characters as their mouthpiece. It seems that they want authors to close their eyes to the reality like an ostrich and wants them to write only about the grandeur, beauty, success, past, history, myth etcetera of the country while letting the reality untouched. On contrary Aravind Adiga does explore the dark truth prevailing in the society and considers it nothing but an attempt of 'self-examination'. The self-examination which Charles Dickens, Ralf Ellison took their country to go through to make the world a better place.

The fictional world of *The White Tiger* (2008) is the portrayal of a world that one can counter in day to day life of the middle-class society. The protagonist Munna alias Balram Halwai considered him a 'half-baked Indian' who had nothing of his own, not even his name - 'Munna' which means merely a boy- he has received from his parents. He was born in a village called Laxmanpur somewhere in Bihar on the bank of river Ganga. He has witnessed the suffering one goes through in a family surviving on the meager amount earned by the men; and how it plants the seed of rebellion in a person is the story of the novel. The protagonist grows up witnessing the pain and trauma all around him. He saw how his mother was humiliated by his granny, how his father died due to tuberculosis, how his brother was treated in the family and how his life, till then, was manipulated to be a servant. This all made him a rebel as he always remembered the dream that his father had seen for him. The day he realized his nothingness in the household of a rich person, he decided to be free. He freed himself from the bondage of slavery not the way Gandhi did or Nelson Mandela did, rather he did it by killing the master and stealing his money that was kept in a 'red bag'. The currency that he owned after murdering his master made him an 'entrepreneur' who 'virtually runs America'. Balram narrates his life story to the Chinese Premier in the seven letters written in the seven nights. The India which Balram has witnessed is not one, rather two-India of light and India of darkness and this separation raised the eyebrows of the critics.

Adiga has truly followed the rules of narration by maintaining the distance between the narrative self and characters. The story shown here in the award-winning novel has been presented through the eyes of the protagonist-narrator. The protagonist of the novel is the reflector character as well as the narrative agent of the author. When he comes to know that 'Mr. Jiabao is on a mission and he wants to know the truth about Bangalore he writes, "My blood froze. If anyone knows the truth of Bangalore, it's me." (Adiga: 4) And he decides to narrate his life story to the Chinese Premier in order to inform him nothing but the truth. In the process of narrating truth, the protagonist not only recounts his past but also his frustration and anger that led him to use words like 'fucking joke', 'god's arse', 'Ganges as black river', 'half-baked', etcetera. Taking such uses of words as the thought and ideology of the author is the misinterpretation of the narrative. To understand such narrative, one must understand the narration and the basic concept of story-telling and the way story is being narrated in the fiction. Any fictional world would be considered good if it contains not only a good story but also the air of reality in it. Air of reality means the portrayal of realism in the fiction world. Ian Watt writes:

This use of 'realism', however, has the grave defect of obscuring what is probably the most original feature of the novel form. If the novel were realistic merely because it saw life from the seamy side, it would be an inverted romance; but in fact it surely attempts to portray all the varieties of human experience, and not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective: the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but the way it presents it. (Ian Watt: 11)

The critic who finds realism in the kind of life presented in the fictional world does simply not understand the narrative and makes superfluous mistakes while judging and analyzing a work of art. Ian Watts suggests not only to look at the kind of life presented in it but also to the way life has been presented in it. The way a life has been enlivened in the fictional world. This fundamental thing regarding the narrative structures of the stories are often missed by the critics. Though to understand a narration well, one has to have the basic information of the technique employed in creating the fictional world. The technique in fictional world refers to the basic structure, point of view, narrator etcetera.

The point of view, in the words of Marjorie Boulton refers is 'an inseparable part of the fiction. It is inseparable because fictional world will not have the essence of reality in it without, point of view. Like in real life a person has his own mind to speak; if not it means he is being controlled by someone superior to him. The person becomes a puppet in the hand of that superior being and does not get respect due to not having his own voice, his own point of view or perspective. In the same way the fictional world has character that looks like or behaves like a human being. This makes the fictional world alive and true. When an author gives to each of his character voice, he follows the path of dramatization in the fiction, and reality reflects in the fictional world. This is what Henry James wanted when he talked about point of view and 'central intelligence' in the fiction. He wanted the story to have a 'central intelligence' i.e. 'reflector' through whose eyes entire story would be narrated to the reader. He has given such example of writing in some of his popular novel like *The Ambassador*, *The Portrait of a Lady* etc. The concept of 'central intelligence' was later discussed by Percy Lubbock in *The Craft of the Fiction* (1921). He writes:

The narrative, then, the chronicle, the summary, which must represent the story-teller's ordered and arranged experience, and which must accordingly be of the nature of a picture, is to be strengthened, is to be raised to a power approaching that of drama, where the intervention of the story-teller is no longer felt. The freedom which the pictorial method gives to the novelist is unknown to the playwright; but that freedom has to be paid for by some loss of intensity, and the question is how to pay as little as possible. (Lubbock:46)

And the way, through which 'intervention of the story-teller' will be 'no longer felt', is 'the dramatizing process' and he explains it further by saying that, 'Everything in the novel, not only the scenic episodes but all the rest, is to be in some sense dramatized; that is where the argument tends.(46) The same technique of dramatization has been used by Aravind Adiga in *The White Tiger* by making the protagonist Balram Halwai as the narrative agent through whose eyes the story has been narrated. The narrator begins the story by saying, "Neither you nor I speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English." (Adiga: 3) The opening line itself is a comment on those intellectuals who discuss about the problem, faced by a person living in poverty, in the language (English) mostly unknown to them while sitting in an air-conditioned room or in their luxurious vehicle like Ashok Sharma and Pinky were doing in the novel itself.

The beauty of Aravind Adiga's narrative lies in its dramatized narration which grabs the consciousness of the reader at once and one feels connected to it. This connection has been possible due to the craftsmanship of the author who never lets himself come in between the narrator and narrative. The author - Aravind Adiga - has truly followed the guideline required to construct the architecture of the fictional world. He neither appears in the text nor intrudes in between the conversation of the character. He lets the character live on his own.

The narrator of the story is himself the protagonist and self-conscious too. He begins his narration, not in the classical omniscient narration, rather in the epistolary form which was adopted by Samuel Richardson in his first novel. The benefit of epistolary writing is that it can present the most private experience of the character without intrusion. The author will be present but in disguise, unknown to the implied author as well as to the implied reader. In *The White Tiger* the author has transferred his authority in the hand of the narrator which is visible in the lines when Balram tells about his education. He writes:

In terms of formal education, I may be somewhat lacking. I never finished school, to put it bluntly. Who cares! I haven't read many books, but I've read all the ones that count. I know by heart the works of the four greatest poets of all time—Rumi, Iqbal, Mirza Ghalib, and a fourth fellow whose name I forget. (Adiga: 6)

Above lines clearly state that the narrative is going to be narrated by a person who lacks in formal education but has studied all 'that count' and in any way his persona does not reflect the persona of the author. The words and phrases like, 'what a fucking joke', 'god's arse', 'black river', 'dip his beak' etcetera, which he has used is the result of the anger and frustration of the generation in which he lived and has been living. He is from a generation which is living in the state of flux, confused in between.

He refers God as 'arse' but he does not dare to deny His existence. He is going to narrate his story but not without invoking God because 'It is an ancient and venerated custom of people in his country to start a story by praying to a Higher Power.' (8) He simultaneously prays to God as well as to the rich tradition of China like any opportunist does. He writes:

Apparently, sir, you Chinese are far ahead of us in every respect...I read about your history in a book, Exciting Tales of the Exotic East, that I found on the pavement...it said that you Chinese are great lovers of freedom and individual liberty. The British tried to make you their servants, but you never let them do it. I admire that, Mr. Premier. (5)

He praises China in his letter to Chinese Premier in order to please him with the narrative. The lies quoted above show that he is an opportunist and can go on any extent if he sees benefit in someone else. He clearly recounts his first visit to the Landlord in Dhanbad. He writes:

You should have seen me that day—what a performance of wails and kisses and tears! You'd think I'd been born into a caste of performing actors! And all the time, while clutching the Stork's feet, I was staring at his huge, dirty, uncut toenails, and thinking, *What is he doing in Dhanbad? Why isn't he back home, screwing poor fishermen of their money and humping their daughters?* (61)

In his mind Balram hates him it is clear from his thought, but the way he praised him, shows his opportunist and greedy nature. He writes about his performance and how he played tricks to grab the attention of 'the stork'. Narrator Balram uses quotation marks to cite their conversation, a technique to separate the shift the point of view of in the narration, so that narrative would have a realistic tone it. He Writes:

"You're really from Laxmangarh?"

"Yes, sir. I used to work in the tea shop—the one with the big photo of Gandhi in it. I used to break coals there. You came once to have tea."

"Ah...the old village." He closed his eyes. "Do people there still remember me? It's been three years since I was there."

"Of course, sir—people say, 'Our father is gone, Thakur Ramdev is gone, the best of the landlords is gone, who will protect us now?'" (61)

Aravind Adiga has created a character that is true to his motive; he does not hide his treacherous thought and reveals it to the reader himself. He does not pretend to be innocent, while in the beginning of his arrival to Delhi he was referred as a 'country mouse' by vitiligo-Lips. He was like 'Hanuman' borne to serve his 'master' but he became a ruthless murderer and 'slit the throat' of his master. He turned to be a corrupt man because his master is not the same which he was earlier. He writes, 'All these changes happened in me because they happened first in Mr. Ashok. He returned from America an innocent man, but life in Delhi corrupted him—and once the master of the Honda City becomes corrupted, how can the driver stay innocent?' (197) 'Narrator Balram' justifies here the corruption of the 'reflector Balram' by referring to the corruption of the master.

The time he begins his career as chauffeur, he finds his master a very innocent man who behaves decently with the servants of the house. Due to the nature of Ashok, Balram calls him a 'lamb'; and once he refers him as a 'Lamb-that-was-born-from-the-loins-of-a-landlord'. Later on his assumption proved to be wrong when Ashok 'grabbed' and 'pushed' him against the balcony of the apartment, then only he realized that 'the landlord inside him wasn't dead, after all' (182). The cultured and refined Ashok -the lamb- calls Balram 'sister-fucker' when he finds that Balram took his wife to the airport. Even for a single minute he did not think that Balram was only a driver, a servant, who had to do what his master

wanted him to do. It might be possible that Balram would have known to the fact that she was leaving his master, but the way she had shown sympathy to him that led him to take her to the airport.

Reflector Balram did the job which he thought appropriate and correct to do; but when he found even his master to be the part of the same flock that has no respect for poor but pity. He revolted and decided that he would not be the part of that 'rooster coop' which prevents people to be free from all the restraints. Such change didn't come in the Balram suddenly rather it was gradual because whatever was the source of love and affection for him have been snatched by the social unit called family; and the society in which he lived did nothing to assist him in his tough time. Neither his mother nor father got respect from Kusum, the head of the family, his brother did nothing for his education, rather listened Kusum and took him out of the school. He was deprived of things like education, love, affection, care, which is required for any person to be a good human being. The day before he left his school, he was a 'white-tiger' and later he became 'human spiders that go crawling in between and under the tables with rags in their hands' and the fate of the most of these human spider is not more than a 'crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven in their thirties or forties or fifties but still "boys." (51)

The circumstances in which the protagonist narrator Balram lived, was enough to sow the seed of rebellion in him. The rebellion in him was in passive state till the time he was given respect, at least by Ashok; but the time he realized that he does not have any role to play in his master's life, he decided to be free. The way he has chosen to be free is the result of the suffering he has gone through. If he would have been treated like a human being, he might have learnt humanity and understanding of the human value. A person deprived of all the love, affection, education, respects, etcetera, either becomes hermit or criminal and in the case of *The White Tiger* it is the saga of a criminal who was not borne rather has been made.

Blaming an author for creating a character like Balram Halwai is not justified. Author has done full justice to the persona of the character. He has not created a character who has been pampered all his life rather a character which represents a class that often goes neglected. To bring verisimilitude in the fictional world, author followed the path of dramatization to enrich the narration with air of reality. And the decision of letting his character to be free is successful as Balram has echoed the voice of millions of people like him and serves as the statutory warning to the world which has neglected a common man by conspiring him to be an unknown citizen.

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