

The Role of Stereotypes in Representing Marginalized Voices in Indian English Fiction: With Special Reference to Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Meenakshi Chaturvedi

Assistant Professor, Department of English, NWT College, Dehradun-India

Email ID: meenakshic87@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores how the voices of marginalized people in Indian English fiction are reflected through stereotypes in reference to Arvind Adiga's (2008) *The White Tiger*. The way the author of *The White Tiger* addresses the stereotypes of the loyal servant, the impoverished villager, the corrupt rich and the opportunistic businessman, before subverting and complicating them with humour, irony and the story of its protagonist, help us get a perspective on the past and the present. The paper also mentions that even as the "situationist" strategy seeks to amplify the voice of the voiceless in society; the novel fails to do so when it comes to women. Further, it is really hard to capture voices of marginalised people in a novel.

Keywords: stereotypes, marginalized voices, Indian English fiction, postcolonial literature, subaltern studies, Arvind Adiga, *The White Tiger*

Introduction

Indian English fiction is an important and controversial vehicle for articulating the diverse realities of postcolonial Indian society, including the voices of marginal groups. Writers like Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy and Arvind Adiga try offering a mix of poverty's cruelty and people's hope to readers around the globe. The core problem revolves around stereotypes and the literature that deals with them. As noted by Vidhyavathi Prasath (2023), stereotypes are images in our heads which are fixed images that simplify complex realities. Hall (1997) argues that stereotypes allow us to place people in a few simple categories and normalise unequal differences. In post-colonial literature these clichés cast the colonized as backward, stupid or corrupt in order to legitimize the authority of colonizers. Bhabha (2012) states that the stereotypes do not just operate as fixed labels but also reveal certain cracks and contradictions that may open up the possibility of resistance and new meanings. The contribution of Gayatri Spivak (1988) is as follows: "Can the subaltern speak?" According to Spivak, it is really difficult to hear the voices of those who are truly marginalized because all representations will be influenced by dominant systems (Suneetha 2011). The straddlership concept is vital to explaining most of the Indian English fiction in our times. Authors have no choice but to straddle. They have to weigh between granting voice to the marginalised and not entering the trap of the damaging binaries which sustain the status quo. *The White Tiger* (2008) by Adiga primarily centers on these tensions. The story revolves around Balram Halwai, who

risks from a poor village to become a successful business man. *The Road to Bullet* is filled with lies, betrayal, and even murder. Some difficult questions are raised about personal choice and morality in an unjust system (Adiga, 2008). Adiga uses tried-and-true clichés: the faithful servant, the ignorant villager, the fraudulent landlord, and the profit-hungry businessman. However, through irony, satire, and the voice of Balram as narrator, he also plays with these tropes. Opinions are split. In Agarwal's (2018) opinion, Adiga has consolidated Western stereotypes about India being poor and corrupt. Generally, Ars Artium (2014) interprets the novel as a thought-provoking commentary on injustice, which subsequently allows other voices to be heard. In this essay, it is asserted that Adiga, despite using familiar stereotypes, also subverts them. The male subaltern voice is given strong visibility but female experiences are still excluded. It shows how difficult it is to adequately represent marginalised voices.

Theoretical Framework: Stereotypes and Postcolonial Representation

To make sense of stereotypes in *The White Tiger* requires a model that shows how they may both repress and resist power. Lippmann was first to identify stereotypes as cognitive shortcuts and postcolonial theory further develops the idea.

Stereotypes are tools of power (Hall, 1997). They split people into “us” and “them,” which shows others inferior by nature. It was used during colonialism to justify control of people. Because of the frequency these ideas were repeated, they appeared to be true. They were created explicitly for political reasons.

Bhabha (2012) states that stereotypes undergo a constant change. His conception of ambivalence indicates that they contain contradictions. Colonized people mimic colonial behavior but also expose its weaknesses. This allows for areas of resistance even in what looks like agreement.

Gayatri Spivak brings up another issue. She asks if the subaltern are able to speak for themselves. Cristina Mendes (2010) explains that sometimes, the degree of distortion or silence will depend on voices being shaped by dominant systems. Concerns over ethical voice representation in literature have been raised.

Haitham (2013) comments on the way novels in Indian English fiction depict poverty, which in his opinion, is an inadequate regurgitation of tropes appealing to global readers. It matters a great deal when looking at *The White Tiger* which became very famous worldwide. The book raises the question of whether or not it is a true picture of Indian society or one designed for the West. Stereotypes play complex roles that serve literature's broader purposes.

Stereotypical Constructions and Their Subversions in *The White Tiger*

The Stereotype of Servitude and the Rooster Coop.

In *The White Tiger*, Arvind Adiga employs and disputes a stereotype of the loyal and obedient servant. It is a stereotype that is commonly used. Balram Halwai begins his life as a driver, which leaves him to be in the middle of this stereotype. According to him, a servant has the duty to keep the master happy (Adiga, 2008, p. 148).

The traditional conception of servitude depicts obedience and self-sacrifice as something natural and even noble. However, Adiga quickly undermines this stereotype via Balram's ironic

tone and sharp observations. When Balram says, “A man in the servant’s quarters knows everything about his master” (p. 174), he highlights that the servants know everything about their masters and the master anticipates this fact about the servant. It challenges the passivity of the servant and presents this figure as one who knows and circumvents a social order.

The primary metaphor of the novel, the “Rooster Coop” is an indictment of this system. Balram uses an analogy about chickens in a coop to explain Indian servants. They are similar in that they aren’t happy or loyal but fear punishment. Servants fear punishment and harm to their families if they rebel (p. 147). According to Ratti (2020), the coop symbolizes the ways people in neoliberal India unconsciously internalize their exploitation to the extent where it is dangerous or pointless to resist.

Through his employer’s murder, Balram’s escape is a daring rejection of the stereotype. According to Sebastian (2009), however, this situation questions what price it has to pay to gain one’s freedom in an unjust system. Adiga’s representation initially seems to suggest that the stereotype is rigid, only to ultimately show how unstable and heavily polymorphic it is.

The Half Baked Indian and Education Divide.

Balram’s constant repetition of the phrase “I am a half-baked man” confronts the stereotype of rural ignorance and illiteracy directly. According to him, all of us who are half-baked Indians are forced to leave our villages in order to look for work in big cities (p. 10). At the outset, one gets the impression that the novel supports the idea that rural people are not ready for modern life.

However, Adiga reveals Balram’s lack of education is not his fault. On page 34, the individual says that, “The teacher had stolen our lunch money, and the inspector had stolen our uniforms.”

The system was at fault, not the fact his was able. The most powerful part is when Balram says, “Entrepreneurs are made of half-baked clay” (p. 12). The insult is converted to strength. Adiga questions the belief that only formally educated people are smart or ethical by using this. Balram’s achievement completely rejects such idea. By redefining incomplete schooling as a resource, Balram goes against the prevalent assumptions about the education of rural folks.

According to Suneetha (2011), such a remaking shows how subordinated groups can overturn systemic disregard by transforming seemingly negative disadvantages into resources of strength and novelty. What seems like a sign of deficiency transforms into the site of resourcefulness that will help survive in structures that attempt to displace some communities.

Corrupted Elites and Structural Critique.

The White Tiger also revolts and breaks the norms of elitist corruption. The landlords who are also called Stork and Wild Boar, the Western-educated Ashok, and the upper-class characters of the novel are portrayed by the established cliches of greed, hypocrisy and moral emptiness. According to Balram, the Indian family, at least the rich, is the real fortress for corruption (p. 197).

Some others like Vidhyavathi Prasath (2023) claim that these representations risk exaggerating corruption in order to meet the Western stereotype of Indian dysfunction. Nonetheless, through

a closer reading, one can see that the seeming stereotyping on Adiga's part is an act of self-aware satirical critique and not the process of reinforcing prejudicial images.

According to Agarwal, 2018, the hyperbole in the novel is meant to expose structural disadvantage, rather than merely sensationalizing an isolated instance of moral failure. When Balram states that Delhi has "more corrupt politicians than honest ones" (p. 180), it draws attention to systemic rather than exceptional corruption. Portraying elite as corrupt is not simply about reducing a character or translation, but is primarily about projecting the existence of unfairness patterns that lie beyond individual or moral agency.

This approach is consistent with Hall's view of stereotypes as being potentially critiqued to expose rather than indicate relations of power. (Haitham, 2013) By depicting elite corruption as institutionalized rather than deviant, Adiga urges readers to think in structural rather than strictly individual terms about responses to social problems..

The Entrepreneurial Trickster and Neoliberal Critique

Adiga's most complex use of modern stereotypes is Balram's evolution into a successful businessman. His rise demands that he eliminate Ashok and seize his resources, actions he rationalises by observing: I am tomorrow's entrepreneur today (p. 273). This depiction evokes both the heroic myths of entrepreneurial success as well as the darker traditions of the trickster figure who ascends through morally questionable means. The book furthers the notion of complication against the naive interpretation of entrepreneurship, through the success of Balram. Balram's success is set as one that is both empowering and exploitative. Logic reasoning "Only a man who is prepared for the destruction of his family will break out of the coop" discloses the grim costs of individual progress in systems which array personal survival against group loyalty.

According to Cristina Mendes (2010), Balram fits neither category and is more complex than stereotypical entrepreneurial heroics, both victim and oppressor. Sebastian (2009) reads the novel as being inherently critical of neoliberal capitalism, which shows that the promise of success for an individual leads to reproducing relationships of exploitations.

The representation also captures larger fears about India's economic liberalization, as stories of entrepreneurial success tend to camouflage social costs in India's rapid economic growth. The implication of the agency of individuals that Adiga provides is that the agency of individuals as a possibility can only be achieved at moral costs that do not alter but strengthen the systemic injustice.

Narrative Strategy and Politics of Voice.

The White Tiger by Adiga successfully utilizes stereotypes due to Adiga's incorporation of first-person narration to depict an individual's story. By allowing Balram to tell his own tale, Adiga permits stereotypes to be both exercised and challenged. A third-person narrator would make it more complicated to leave room for irony and critique, such as this technique does.

Balram's ironic way of speaking disrupts accepted ideas. His farcical portrayal of corruption in Delhi shows how an unfair system is normalised in life. According to Ratti (2020), this irony

allows Adiga to balance between the display of authentic social issues and the structures causing them.

Dark humor is another tool Adiga employs to focus on incongruities. The satire of the novel does not merely showcase injustice. Instead, it invites the readers to realise the strangeness of supporting injustice. Through this process the critique becomes more engaging and thought provoking.

Nevertheless, there are limits to this narrative style. Sekher (2008) states Balram's voice may be strong and detailed, the women are predominantly shown in fixed roles in the story. The depth and control over the narrative are not the same for them. This indicates that even a powerful way to tell stories can miss out important points, especially around gender. While Adiga's technique works successfully in many ways, it also reminds us of the need for other voices.

Gendered Silences and the Limits of Representation

The White Tiger questions class stereotypes but fails to provide nuances on gender. In the first part of the novel, we see the following women. What they mean to Balram and what limitations they represent? Lacking any voice or agency, they simply assist Balram's narrative. The silence speaks of deeper social inequalities and literature is socially conscious yet overlooks people without literature. Gender-based gaps are perhaps a limitation in the critique offered by the novel.

A graver problem arises on considering Gayatri Spivak's argument that the subaltern cannot speak in this context. The book presents a subaltern voice in male form but at the same time proceeds to silence a woman as was warned by Spivak. The lack of influential women's voices indicates that even socially aware fiction still can't cover all the groups.

Vidhyavathi Prasath (2023) states that Balram is an outspoken and well-spoken character but the female characters remain silent. This has caused the gender gap to become more noticeable, especially given the fact that the novel manages to break the stereotypes of the classes. It is even worse when one type of marginalization is addressed and another type is ignored.

It suggests that through even positive actions based on stereotypes will result in exclusions. Per Suneetha (2011), a real representation must consider not just one type, but a range of overlapping types of marginalization. To be sufficiently expansive and inclusive of all voices, literature must surmount identity difficulties and delve more deeply into the societal types of inequities.

Critical Reception and Interpretative Debates

The White Tiger has been taken in a manner that points to deeper issues in postcolonial literary theory as regards representation, authenticity and response. Some Indian critics feel that Adiga, by over-emphasizing poverty and corruption, is also catering to a Western audience when he presents the same old tropes of India as a failed or dysfunctional nation. According to Suneetha (2011), The White Tiger domesticates the Indian poverty for global readership, that takes away the complicated social realities and produces a story that is easily consumable. The novel may only reinforce Western conceptions of India, now popularly believed to be plagued with

corruption and hardship. This issue is part of a larger debate on how postcolonial literature circulates across the globe. When a novel goes international, it risks losing its content and quality. The success may come at the expense of authentic representation, questioning whose voices are being sounded, and how they are being sounded.

According to Ratti (2020), the text expresses the opinions of the subaltern as it critiques literature and popular discourse that most of the time excludes such views. International visibility assists in giving exposure to silenced voices rather than misrepresentation.

These differing views highlight how the same novel can be interpreted differently. The book's use of irony, first-person narration and satire can be viewed as a mechanism of resistance or as a means of wrapping stereotypes to the readers all over the world (Haitham, 2013). There is disagreement between two groups and that reflects in the theory by Bhabha which states that the stereotypes themselves are quite contradictory. The fact that the novel can allow for so many different interpretations, contributes to its power in breaking fixed ideas, opening up critical thinking.

The tradition Adiga follows is Indian English fiction. In opposition to the magical realism of Rushdie or the poetic disjointedness of Roy, Adiga employs realism. Cristina Mendes (2010) has written that this decision is more social and less experimental than the art of the novel, which made the novel more digestible but also challenged the hegemony of the narratives.

Conclusion

The White Tiger shows the merits and demerits of the use of stereotypes as a means of voicing subalterns in Indian English fiction. Adiga employs irony, satire, and first-person narration to disprove the stereotypes of the faithful servant, innocent villager, crooked elite and intelligent businessman. Balram's voice brings to light the injustices that are hidden and shows how social structures perpetuate hierarchies. However, the constant repetition of gendered silences in the novel indicates how even the most sensitive of literature can marginalise those left out.

This dialogue suggests postcolonial literature involved in stereotypes is complicated. Neither can they be classified as destructive, nor can they be classified as weapons of resistance. The meaning of something varies depending on its usage, understanding, and interpretation in a particular situation. With regard to Indian English fiction, that affects attention to intersectional strategies that incorporate overlapping marginalisation rather than understanding identity as a discrete phenomenon.

Critics and readers must figure out a mode of reading that recognizes both the possibilities of literary representation and the limits of that representation. The white tiger manages to give a voice to those that we may overlook but also reminds us that the struggle for full and fair representation goes on. The contradictory use of stereotypes in the novel reflects the broader tensions of postcolonial societies, which attempt to travel between the remnants of old systems of power and hopes for justice and equality.

References

1. Adiga, A. (2008). *The White Tiger*. Atlantic Books.
<https://www.ssgopalganj.in/online/EBooks/CLASS%20XI/The%20White%20Tiger%20by%20Arvind%20Adiga.pdf>
2. Agarwal, P. (2018). Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*: A Courageous Endeavour Exploring the Unheard Voices of the Marginalized. *The Achievers Journal: Journal of English Language, Literature and Culture*, 4(2).
<http://www.theachieversjournal.com/index.php/taj/article/view/257>
3. Ars Artium. (2014). *Mapping the Voices of the Marginal in Arvind Adiga's The White Tiger*. Ars Artium.
https://www.academia.edu/88636474/Mapping_the_Voices_of_the_Marginal_in_Aravind_Adigas_The_White_Tiger
4. Bhabha, H. K. (2012). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9780203820551/location-culture-homi-bhabha>
5. Cristina Mendes, A. (2010). Exciting Tales of Exotic Dark India: Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 45(2), 275-293.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0021989410366896>
6. Haitham, H. (2013). *Discourse of entrepreneurship in The white tiger*. Lehigh University.
<https://search.proquest.com/openview/544e14c299a455d459a6faecb8c0f5d8/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>
7. Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage Publications.
8. Ratti, M. (2020). Justice, subalternism, and literary justice: Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 55(2), 228-245.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0021989418777853>
9. Sebastian, A. J. (2009). Poor-Rich Divide in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 1(2).
https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&profile=ehost&scope=site&auth_type=crawler&jrnl=19441088&AN=46815711&h=oEva6JIP5SwJUoaJzAYv5XaCeOThTYKs%2BCrzV%2FWrGsV3IYXmUXfbNXmZgiKpOOzZO9Fj%2FS2xb4Ca0Ds2UWKcDw%3D%3D&crl=c
10. Sekher, A. S. (2008). *Representing the margin: Caste and gender in Indian fiction*. Gyan Publishing House.
https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Y5SKTrUWBaAC&oi=fnd&pg=PA9&dq=Role+of+Stereotypes+in+Representing+Marginalized+Voices+in+Indian+English+Fiction&ots=Hg LX_V5jhg&sig=1WVA_R5rtrGW6f6Mxa3VeZ3Po-k

11. Suneetha, P. (2011). Double Vision in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. *ariel: a review of international english literature*, 42(2).
<https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ariel/article/view/35202/29017>
12. Vidhyavathi prasath. (2023, April 15). *Marginalised: Finding a Voice in Arvind Adiga's the White Tiger*. Research Scholar.
https://www.academia.edu/100217969/Marginalised_Finding_a_Voice_in_Arvind_Adigas_the_White_Tiger