

**Adiga's Vision of Systemic Restructuration: A Deconstruction of  
*The White Tiger***

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- Arvind Adiga,
- Deconstruction
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**Abstract**

*This study is a deconstructive analysis of the plot of Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* from a postcolonial perspective. It has been argued that the author wanted - in the novel - not only to expose the despotic social order but also to offer a formula for its (re)structuration (Giddens, 1990). It has been argued that the author has produced this discourse of resistance not only to show how to challenge but also how to appropriate, restructure and, ultimately, resettle the existing power relations. But the transformation that the protagonist undergoes subverts the authorial scheme instead of supporting it. This self-undermining failure has been traced through strategic reading employing deconstructive techniques as a research method. It has been found in the investigation guided by such techniques that the person, erstwhile oppressed, manages to seize power not for change but as the new master with different guise and, somewhat, euphemized tactics.*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Genealogy of the Idea

This paper carries out a deconstructive study of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. The attempt has been made to establish that the story is thematically counterproductive. It is premised that the author attempts to exemplify a *modus operandi* - through the formulaic plot of the story - for the exposition, disruption and substitution of tyrannical social order but the end achieved subverts the end desired. Ironically enough, the protagonist snatches up and protect the ideological position that he rose to dismantle. The postcolonial concern of Adiga (Maji 2015; Schotland 2011; Svensson, 2020), against the prevalent exploitative conditions (Gagat, 2017; Pandit, 2017) was to propound a formula for emancipation and empowerment of the powerless in order to establish a new order. As per the authorial intent, Balram was expected to launch a symbolic struggle suggestive of a workable way for the displacement of the unjust to be replaced, in turn, by the just or, at least, more just. However, it has been found that Balram wins in the struggle, not for the desired change but, quite ironically, for the sustenance of the status quo much to the dismay of the reader. He becomes a master in his own turn and starts exercising the power of the capital (Khan, 2019). Thus, the end produced is counter to the end planned.

## 2. Literature Review

Postcolonial thought is typically concerned with the exposition of binary divide (i.e. 'self' and the 'other') and, subsequently, with challenging imperialistic hegemony and oppression (Ashcroft, 1995) to bring the uneven structure of the binary to equilibrium through mediation (Strauss, 1967). Post-colonialism is not contented with only exposing the tyranny but is also committed to finding a cure for it (Loomba, 2007). Apprehension regarding counter-productivity of postcolonial struggle is also expressed in postcolonial theory. Such a struggle is assumed to yield nothing more than a mere inversion of the binary structure. The result, thus produced, merely privileges the erstwhile under-privileged component of the binary and deposition of the privileged without any alteration in the oppressive principle behind the power structure or relation of the binary in point (Ashcroft et al. 1995). Deconstruction is the method used for the study of a text to see how it, inadvertently, undermines its own position and consequently leads to counter-productivity (Culler, 2014).

The idea, followed in this paper, is an intellectual engagement with the argument propounded in a paper by Mirjana M. Knežević (2015) on the same novel. The investigative framework of the said paper by Knežević is based on a poststructuralist and post-colonialist Derridean concept of binary opposites and Levi Strauss's idea of mediation between the opposite terms of the binary to minimize the tension as an attempt to lead the things towards a solution. According to the author the struggle between opposite terms of various binaries, constitutive of the deep structure of the novel, results in the creation of a locale as a newly created intermediary (and uncertain) space. The locus – thus created - has been viewed by the author as a position founded through (re)settlement as a solution. The current study agrees partially with Knežević's argument i.e. his idea of mediation. Mediation, as being the original intent of Adiga, is accepted hereby but it is, however, contended as not being compatible with (or exemplified by) the end achieved. Authorial intent is seen to have been undermined by the resolution phase of the story. Hence, the achievement – the solution or conclusion provided in the story - is viewed by this study as an exchange of positions, not mediation. Balram has, according to this study, failed in negotiating new terms for a

new social contract and in producing a new social order. The end produced is maintenance instead of mediation. It is viewed as merely a swap and not a reconciliation between the binary terms involved.

Adiga wanted to push the things, in the story, to a new social order through (re)structuration as conceptualized by Anthony Giddens wherein “all areas of personal and political life are increasingly ordered through dialogue rather than pre-established power relations” (Elliott, 2014, 161). The reflexive practices, according to Giddens, result in establishing the “mechanisms of dialogic democracy” (ibid). Achievement of such a social order as being the final agenda of Adiga is evidenced collectively by the available textual, co-textual and contextual clues as discussed hereinafter.

### 2.1. Guiding Questions in the Light of Literature Reviewed

Following are the fundamental questions raised by this inquiry to be answered by the ensuing debate.

Q1. In what sense does Adiga’s real interest lie in making a case for systemic change rather than telling an individual’s success story?

Q2. How is the *end-achieved* of the story subversive to the *end-planned*?

## 3. Research Methodology

This study depends mainly on the propositions of Post-colonialism and Marxism as a broad base for theoretical grounding of the ideological notions involved herein. Anthony Giddens’ (1984) concept of structuration has been invoked to underpin critical self-awareness or reflexivity and systemic change. Giddens talks about structural changes at institutional and systemic levels. He argues that in the history of institutions forces of institutional self-awareness emerge as a natural outcome of the evolution. Such forces result in reflexivity within the system leading to the emergence of self-critical forces which ultimately restructure the systems for a shift and resettlement of the order and/or (dis/re)placement of status quo. Adiga’s attempt has been evaluated in this theoretical perspective. ‘White Tiger’ – the hero of the novel – is seen as an emerging force of self-awareness but is unable to replace or even displace the existing order instead he, ultimately, subscribes to it.

Moreover, the analytical design relies on deconstructive strategies to expose self-undermining tendencies in the thematic aspects of the novel. Content analysis of the novel has been carried out through a filter of the selected framework. For this purpose, primary text was used for its close reading and in-depth understanding. The plot of the novel has been the main focus. Balram’s struggle for emancipation has been viewed in the background of Fanon’s (1963) concept of violent reaction for decolonization after prolonged colonization.

The post-colonial perspective has been used in numerous studies of this novel to explain the relationship between the ‘I’ and the ‘Other’ in the internally colonized (Blauner, 1969) Indian Society infected by the worst examples of oppression and exploitation. Adiga obviously follows the Marxist division of the society by dividing people into only two classes i.e. ‘Big Bellies’ and ‘Small Bellies’. He exposes the troubled areas within the ostensibly comfortable relationship between these classes by defining their principle of coexistence as “eat or get eaten”. Balram intimates the Chinese prime minister;

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*Please understand, Your Excellency, that India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness. (p. 10)*

The basic premise of the study is that Adiga's concern was not only to provide an example of how to rise in India but to provide a complete framework of a new social contract free of oppression and tyranny. Balaram's struggle was expected to provide a successful course of action towards this end but in fact, it did not. Adiga achieved, no doubt inadvertently, an end subversive to his plan. Balaram succumbs to '*Kurtz Complex*' and partakes in the unspeakable rites of perpetrating what he stood up to check. This self-subversive tendency of the novel qualifies for a deconstructive study.

#### 4. Data Analysis

Discussion, guided by the objectives of the study, has been made to find answers to the research questions raised above under various headings in the following.

##### 4.1. Formulaic Plot

The author's vested plan in giving formulaic shape to the plot is clear. It has been done to lead the story to a prescribed end that is the establishment of a truly democratic social order through systemic shift illustrating – symbolically in the fictional world – a possible course of action for change in the real world. Adiga has deconstructed the viciously exploitative design of the existing order of Indian social fabric (Sangeeta, 2015) by exposing domination, aggression and tyranny through binary division of the existing order. The novel is based on a theme-driven plot designed to yield a prescribed end. However, the problem arises when the unfolding of the incidents serves to subvert the theme it was supposed to sub-serve. The incidents lead the plot astray to end up achieving contrary to what was aimed at.

Balaram has been presented as a model persona that lives out a form of solution aiming to show how the established order should be reconstituted after the demolition of its existing form (Maji, 2015). He has presented a model of an emancipator's attempt to unsettle the oppressive order of the hegemonic "coop" to restructure it on truly democratic or – at least – more democratic norms. There is authorial design in making the protagonist see through the oppressor's plan, scheme smartly, wait patiently, rebel timely, capture effectively and, then, behave differently after displacing the oppressor from the centre to replace him. A sense of Adiga's plan for setting up a new and better or – most probably - an ideal order is revealed after reading the novel to its end. One is easily carried away by the success of Balaram. However, a simple critical look at what Balaram becomes after his socioeconomic transition reveals a reversal of Adiga's plans. His failure, in demolishing the "rooster coop" for reconstitution of the existing hegemonic order in non-hegemonic form, is revealed when his deconstructive rendition (Maji, 2015) is subjected to deconstruction in turn.

The enthusiasm, force and power lent to Balaram as the symbolic character for emancipation are to make him representative of the oppressed. It signifies the struggle of have-nots as a class and not that of an individual success story (Yadav, 2011). The representational nature and symbolic value of Balaram's character have been debated by a large number of studies. For example, Sangeeta (2015) observes:

*Some critics may denounce the hasty and haphazard ways of Balaram in killing his master and possessing his capitals to rise. It seems that Balaram who was on periphery comes to be the centre and this is how on ethical grounds, his*

*action may be said to be too individualistic and Machiavellian. But then none can deny the human elements of protest and desire for social change in Balram's action. (p.3)*

This is the cause of Adiga's interest in making him an emblematic hero of a formulaic plot as the destination of Balram seems to have been pre-determined. The school inspector is made to say while pointing his cane at Balram:

*You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots. In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals—the creature that comes along only once in a generation?" I thought about it and said: "The white tiger." "That's what you are, in this jungle. (p. 22)*

Thus, the end was planned to offer a solution to the troubled relationship of the binaries. But the solution, instead, is an initiation of a new troubled relation inverting the binary link in the one-on-one relation but without any change in the larger social fabric based on oppressive binary structure. Balram undergoes a circumstantial as well as mental or spiritual change. His shift needed him to change so as to present an ideal contrast to the exploiters of the system (i.e. the masters sitting privileged in the existent pattern of binaries). Thus Balram ends up undermining his own stated or anticipated position to the disappointment of the reader. The intended position is undermined by the position achieved. The internal change of Balram transforms him into his ex-master - as a kind of metamorphosis - whom he stood up to eliminate as a symbol of unjust power. Balram, presumably, is more sinister as he carries out the master's plan with complete awareness of the evil that he himself had fallen prey to. Thus, it can be counted as Balram's fall instead of his rise in ethical terms - he stood up to implement after their adequate redefinition. It is a fall from a *rooster coop* to another *rooster coop* different, superficially, in form but not in the essence. The change does not occur in the structural principles of the oppressive and exploitative social fabric determining the loci of various nodes: functioning as the defining spaces of agential possibilities. This point is emphasized because it is the underlying principle that awards discriminatory positions to the entities which the entities (individuals), per se, cannot assume (Benson, 2002).

#### **4.2. Balram's Heroic Villainy**

Balram Halwai (later, the White Tiger), a symbolic character and the titular anti-hero (Deswal, 2014), is made to show heroic villainy as part of the author's design. The ironic undertone used by Adiga, in sketching Balram's villainy, is suggestive of the author's intention. It is by authorial design that his virtue and benignity are masked behind his apparent vice and malignity; while his heroism is masked behind his apparent villainy. Balram is an ironic depiction of a character that commits heroic villainy all knowingly and in compliance with the author's deliberate design. This can be found reflected in his confusion with regard to the perpetration of the deeds that he finds very difficult to determine the moral value of. It is especially where individual cases of his deeds can be judged on conflicting moral standards. For example, he commits murder not merely for the freedom of millions of people but to rescue them from a type of life worse than death. His character is paradoxically heroic. He is not presented as an outright villain so that his metamorphosis may be justified. Therefore, Adiga seems to have been misled in making an Ashok of a Balram.

Balram has probably been used as an instrument by disgruntled Adiga to give vent to his feeling of disgust and extreme hatred against the status quo infested with

oppression, injustice, inhumanity and what not. His acute disgust for the opponent's tyranny makes him create a tool tyrannical enough to subdue his most hated enemy. He hates the oppressor because he loves, sympathizes and sides with the oppressed. This hatred drags him to a morbidly hyperbolic reaction which plays a strong role in the creation of a white tiger from Balram Halwi. The character, as a result, is infused with such an amount of devilish energy which leads him, ultimately, to break out of the control of his creator (the author). The White Tiger upsets the plan by producing something quite opposite to the authorial intent.

The world of Balram's heart has been presented in attractive colours as part of the scheme for the ennoblement of his character. He is in no way utterly depraved; Adiga, instead, depicts him in such a light that proves Balram to have no other way except to do what he did for a greater cause. He had to uproot the evil that had roots so deep - in reach - and so complex - in manner - that any attempt to uproot them without collateral damage was found to be impossible. Removal of some healthy parts became inevitable to get rid of the cancerous sore. It makes Balram a case of ennobled villainy. This can be detected in his feelings when he rebels against his granny by not agreeing to marry and by spilling the chicken curry especially cooked for him. It is not only a case created to show the coexistence of vice and virtue but to show the existence of vice for virtue. .

*"No!" I pushed the plate so hard it went flying to a corner and hit the wall and spilled the red curry on the floor. "I said, I'm not marrying!" She was too stunned even to yell. (p. 52)*

And then next we find expression of virtuous intent behind this villainous reaction:

*I couldn't stop thinking of Kishan's body. They were eating him alive in there! They would do the same thing to him that they did to Father—... (pp. 52, 53)*

### 4.3. Systemic Shift as Reform Agenda

Adiga is concerned with the system as a whole and not the rise of an individual. His technique is definitely deconstructively grounded in postcolonial ideological position (Yadav, 2011). He exposes the power vested in ideological structures and involved in controlling, constituting and reproducing its object i.e. *the inferior other* (Yadav, 2011). Therefore, it has been rightly discussed as a symbolic rise of the subaltern that represents the whole population of *dark India* (Chittangadan, 2019). It is reflected in Balram's discourse when he propounds the same while addressing the Chinese prime minister in his letter:

*Do you know about Hanuman, sir? He was the faithful servant of the god Rama, and we worship him in our temples because he is a shining example of how to serve your masters with absolute fidelity, love, and devotion. (p. 13)*

Adiga's systemic-level interest is clear so, the case presented by him cannot be treated as an individualistic example of breaking the yoke. He wants to envision a land with new social order as he loathes the tyranny of the existing one. He expresses his disgust against the servility that the poor are subjected to when he discusses how he used to wash the dogs of his masters. The worst form of dehumanization is signified by the pungency of the tone that Adiga overloads Balram's words with when he makes him express how he was treated as inferior even to the dogs of the rich. Senior servant of his masters admonishes Balram to teach him how to treat the dogs thus:

*"Don't pull the chain so hard! They're worth more than you are!" (Pg47)*

He exposes the sinister design of the exploitative social structure but only this does not suffice for him. He sounds keen to present a possible solution i.e., to suggest a way how to challenge and change it. The solution provides a formula to the oppressed against the oppressor. Balram announces proudly having achieved the solution while commenting on the motive of killing his master.

*Yet even if all my chandeliers come crashing down to the floor—even if they throw me in jail and have all the other prisoners dip their beaks into me—even if they make me walk the wooden stairs to the hangman's noose—I'll never say I made a mistake... (p. 193)*

Balram remains successful in exposing and challenging the evil but fails in replacing it with the desired good. He does not become only 'his own master' but, shockingly enough, master of others as well. He ends up as a tool of power's nefarious design. With this, his basic plan of exposing, resisting and changing oppressive order comes crumbling down. Control of the capital gives him control over others and he differs from the master's technique only superficially. It is nothing more than the colonizer's camouflage (Loomba, 2007). The falsity of his proclaimed difference from the ex-master becomes transparent when his sympathy to his servants is juxtaposed to the way he coerces the parents of the boy - killed by one of his drivers - into accepting the blood-money.

*"There are twenty-five thousand rupees in here. I don't give it to you because I have to, but because I want to. Do you understand?" (p. 68)*

The agenda of renegotiating terms for a better social contract to constitute a new social order is obvious. Balram stands up to confront existing order characterized by oppression (Haitham, 2013). His symbolic value as *the White Tiger* is to challenge and unsettle the system and not to celebrate his personal success. Balram's struggle was not simply meant to represent the shift of a single individual from the periphery to the centre because it does not complete Adiga's project. It would mean a continuation of the oppression through the exchange of positions by the binary terms. It would be a matter of snatching the voice of the opponent without finding one's own resulting in mere inversion of the binary while keeping its tyrannical structure intact. Adiga's plan, on the contrary, is obviously not the replacement of the beneficiaries in the oppressive design but its demolition for reconstruction on a *truly democratic principle*. That he has such a plan is clear from the tone he sets right from the beginning.

Adiga is interested in problematizing and, then, mediating binary relations to bring them to a position of dialogic equilibrium. He is trying to show a course or, rather, the only course of action available for social mobility to the underdogs (Haitham, 2013). Balram has been made to act as a character-type of a rebel who uses a modus operandi for emancipation. He symbolizes an anti-oppression force that claims agential power required thereby to carve out his career and direct his own circumstances (Maji, 2015). But this force of anti-oppression, self-contradictorily, perpetrates oppression.

Balram commits the disgusting crime of murdering and becoming a cause of the massacre of his own family. But he has to do so against himself for the greater cause of emancipation. He is definitely so disgruntled with the exploitation and wants freedom at any cost. He seems to have come to the conclusion that enough is enough. It should be now or never whatever the cost. He believes such sins are necessary for the virtue so great to be achieved and that is uplift of the distressed, the much-cherished ideal of freedom, liberty and equality, in summary, reformation of the system at large.

#### 4.4. From Resistance to Perpetration

Adiga's intention is undermined by his rendition. The wild force of resistance turns into a polite power of oppression in the end. His chicanery, in the threatening tone, when he confronts the parents of the boy killed by his driver, serves as clear evidence.

*"There are twenty-five thousand rupees in here. I don't give it to you because I have to, but because I want to. Do you understand?" (188)*

Yet, the new coercion holds a different face as well as the technique with possibly and temporarily (as long as it is also seen through in turn) a more acceptable way. However, he forces the divorced *self* (because the hero has broken up with what previously was his own class and was covered by 'I') into the disciplined *other* with the erstwhile, abhorred force of capital. The villainous hero falls in Kurtz' style and partakes in the villainy that he had stood up to disrupt and discipline.

The new master exercises the power of the capital with changed strategies. The old imperial power is exercised in a novel manner by the new instrument - after replacing the old - with the result that the mediation efforts (Knežević, 2015) fizzle out and the binary tension remains unresolved. The efforts of Adiga abort and Balram is found trapped by the lure of verisimilitude in the search for real emancipation. The desired end sublimates into a merely utopian dream – failure of actualization. In intellectual terms, the 'rooster coop' is doomed for its absolute relativity and yields him no stable position. Balram comes out of one 'rooster coop' - that he finds his ilk trapped into - and gets trapped into another i.e. colonizer's coop.

*The last stage in my amazing success story, sir, was to go from being a social entrepreneur to a business entrepreneur. This part wasn't easy at all (180).*

Again:

*Once I was a driver to a master, but now I am a master of drivers (182).*

The story can be divided into these two phases of social entrepreneurship and business entrepreneurship. The objective of social entrepreneurship is undermined by the objective of business entrepreneurship. It is a kind of reversal. This business entrepreneurship - what he struggled against to expose, disrupt and uproot - is, later, ironically used as survival by Balram.

Balram's decision of selling everything and opening a school for real education sounds hollow if seen in the perspective of his power that he exercises through existent administrative machinery to hush the parents of the boy killed by his driver. It is nothing more than political chicanery and rhetoric of the colonizer (Caprio, 2017) for exploitative gains. The figure that Balram becomes is a story of the sustenance of capitalist control which clearly subverts the author's grand plan that went in Balram's making. It seems as if Adiga has been carried too far on the thrust of intense disgust he had against the exploitation in point. He has probably been misled by the force of his anger. Therefore, the launching pad he used to pitch Balram against the opponent proved a bit too powerful so as to carry Balram far beyond the target orbit.

#### 5. Conclusion

The anecdote of Balram's success is merely an incident of the triumph of capitalist exploitation. Balram's rise does not provide an example of successful disruption and modification of the foundational principle of the system as Adiga had evidently planned. It is clear that such a principle has been exposed but not (successfully)



disrupted, displaced and, in turn, replaced. The story better exemplifies an anti-absolutist stance about power as enunciated by Foucault (1991) than systemic (re)structuration consequential upon critical self-awareness or reflexivity as envisioned by Giddens (2013). It shows how an oppressive system can possibly be permissive to internal mobility but it does not serve as an example of a transition resulting in the systemic shift. Balram rises to represent the unprivileged component of the binary to negotiate terms with the privileged one to come to a balance (Knežević, 2015) as a result of mediation. For this, inevitably, Balram had to achieve some vantage ground to qualify for such negotiation. But once he ensconces himself to such a position through the counter design and necessary force, he succumbs to Kurtz Complex and partakes in master's nefarious design. This is the point where he loses legitimacy to represent the indigent or inferior component of the binary that he stood up for. Thus, Balram's reflexive efforts do not reproduce reality as propounded by Giddens by coming to a dialogic conclusion as aimed at by Adiga but result in the sustenance of the status quo.

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