

**DELINEATING SOCIAL CONFLICTS THROUGH INTERNAL
DISCOURSE AND LITERARY ANALYSIS OF
*THE WHITE TIGER AND THE SPACE BETWEEN US***

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Abstract

The significance of each piece of literature more or less depends upon literary techniques or elements used by the author which create an aesthetic sense as well as convey the author's message more efficiently. This study therefore is based upon the texts *The White Tiger* (2008) and *The Space Between Us* (2006) in which Aravind Adiga and Thrity Umrigar respectively have presented many socio-economic conflicts and political injustices through the different practice of language, satires, humour, metaphors, imagery and so on and so forth. The protagonists belong to lower class striving for identity where an attempt is made to set a contrast between two protagonists where one essentialise himself and actualizes his existence in capitalistic society but the other one suffers a lot and alienate from herself, family and from society.

Key words: Socio-political conflicts, political injustices, satire, symbol, metaphor, imagery, strategic essentialism

Literature is a tool by which the socio-political, environmental and economic conditions of the society have discoursed. In contemporary period, literature has broadened its domain where all kinds of texts contain the reference from each other. Julia Kristeva opined that the “importance of text’s structure is matched by its structuration” (qtd. in Childs and Fowler 123). These interconnected fields contribute distinctly and contain uniqueness to provide the social and moral contexts. In the fictional study, the author produces some artistic effects through different forms and structuration of the texts. But, the text on the other hand is deconstructed by reader where the multiple meanings are reproduced. Philip Stanhope opined that “style is the dress of thoughts; and let them be ever so just, if your style is homely, coarse, and vulgar, they will appear to as many disadvantages”. Similarly, in the selected texts, Aravind Adiga and Thrity Umrigar have exquisitely dressed their thought with the combination of aesthetic and practical involvements.

Aravind Adiga's artistic capability can be observed in his Booker Prize winning an epistolary novel *The White Tiger* (2008) which explicitly makes the entire plot more interesting. He has divided the text into seven chapters written in nights and contains the realistic conditions of the nation. He has developed his plot by revealing the fact that the exploited drivers cum servants start revolt against dominant masters. The poor people's predicament is sincerely brought into light where Balram [protagonist] as a poor boy examines the conditions and states "[h]e's half-baked. The country is full of people like him" (Adiga 10). He has contrasted and compared the lives of excessively poor and terribly rich in the society. Whereas *The Space Between Us* (2006) is a simple, straightforward prose narrative, begins with a prologue and structured in twenty-five chapters in all, escalates the endless war between two separate classes which presents a vivid picture of modern day Indian society. Umrigar's dedication to writing and crafting the story can be perceived when she asserts, "the story you are writing should feel more real to you than the life you are living" (Umrigar 15). Both the authors' plots are much concerned to predicament of dispossessed of this country.

Adiga characterized his protagonist as sharp, ingenious and successful whose development is made by himself only. He has a rare individuality in whole the narrative who earlier called Munna [Boy] then his teacher named him as Balram and ultimately bears the title 'White Tiger' which author sharply entitled the novel with the same title. Balram is rewarded with enough understanding of humane where he 'strategically essentialise' himself and actualize his existence in capitalistic society (Spivak 35). Adiga satirically or symbolically creates some of the characters and named them as per their greed. For instance, Buffalo a landlord, Wild Boar, owner of good agricultural land, Raven is an owner the worst land around the fort, and the fourth is Stork, a fat man who owned the river. Indeed, all the four character are named as per their excessive greed and symbolise the excessively feeding animals who have long long exploited the people in 'Darkness'.

On the other side, Thrity Umrigar has created the protagonist poor but kind, illiterate but honest. Bhima unlike Balram lacks capabilities to recognize her own oppression in dominant Dubash Family. Her consciousness of devotion towards Dubash family reflects in her each action and behaviour. Getting late for even an hour is unbearable to her, so she rebukes herself, "Oh you stupid woman . . . what for you care about who works in their houses?" (Umrigar 311). Another appearance is of dominant character Sera Dubash, a mistress of Bhima who always maintain the 'space' between Bhima and herself. Sera's husband Feroz Dubash is also depicted as a dominant higher class man who is ungrateful and cruel to lower class people around him. Gopal a factory worker, underprivileged who ousted from his factory. Maya unlike Bhima, is vibrant, educated girl but unable to guard herself against the upper-class boy. Her robust nature can be observed when she convince her grandmother about the elite's hypocrisy, as; "[t]hat's incorrect, Mama," if the clothes and food are concerned "I am grateful to you, not to her" [Sera Dubash]. . . It is your sweet and hard work that produces them, not Serabai's generosity" (Umrigar 269). Maya has bitter feeling for Dubash family since Viraf's hypocrisy to rape her. Hence, she cannot accept her grandmother's advice to respect Dubash family.

The first person point of view in *The White Tiger* (2008) contain the experience of protagonist where he himself transmit the story. Unlike, *The Space Between Us* (2006) is voiced with omniscient narration. This traditional third person narrative is most prevalent method to narrate story and most novelists have assumed it and grant them license to virtual omniscience (Childs & Fowler, p. 182). The narrator addresses the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao who is programmed to visit India especially Bangalore where protagonist assures Jiabao; "If anyone

knows the truth about Bangalore, it's me" (Adiga 4). Whereas, Thrity Umrigar has given an unidentified voice to her novel depicting the life of slums and wealthy people in cosmopolitan city Bombay, begins with a prologue which gives a sight of its poor protagonist as; "The woman in the green sari stood on the slippery rocks and gazed at the dark waters around her" (Umrigar 1). The narrator seems to have a sympathetic feelings for poor people in the city of riches and deals with the domestic issues and possession of servants and maids by the elite class particularly.

The thematic concerns in both the selected texts illustrate the significant problems of the contemporary Indian society. In this respect, *The Space Between Us* contains the major theme of class inequalities, simultaneously focuses on other crucial issues such as; the domestic violence, and gender inequalities, existence or inexistence etc. Umrigar, while giving her own conception of the novel about the class conflict in general, asserts; "I always fascinated by this intersection of gender and class. . . It is a theme that interested me- haunted me, even-for as long as I can remember" (Umrigar 7). Similarly, *The White Tiger* deals with the binaries of Indian culture: 'Light' Vs 'Darkness', 'Big bellies' Vs 'small bellies', changing life in globalisation, politics and corruption, cultural influences and class and caste hierarchies. But, the dominant theme revolves around the idea of the "India of Light, and India of Darkness" (Adiga 14). Adiga in an interview, speaks about the text, "[a] lot of poorer Indians are left confused and perplexed by the new India that is being formed around them . . . Just ask any Indian, rich or poor, about corruption here. It's bad" (Adiga, Interview, An, Para 6). Thus, Adiga and Umrigar efficiently inculcate various issues in their respective selected texts which necessarily define the present day misery of Indian society.

The literary work especially the fictional writing gets fascinated when an author uses some satirical sense to "expose the failings of individuals, institutions or societies to ridicule or scorn" (Baldick, 2008, p. 299). Adiga humorously and satirically criticise Indian administrative system and mocks political leader as "the boss of darkness" (Adiga 97) who exploited the entire natural resources in the villages. A man lure the listeners in the radio channel by saying; "I have no ambitions for myself. I am simply the voice of the poor and the disenfranchised" (Adiga 269). It is actually a politician broadcasting on the radio channels and deceiving common people by mentioning "no ambitions" for himself, certainly misleads the masses. While describing the conditions of government schools in Laxmangarh, narrator mentions, despite the free food scheme "we never ever saw *rotis*. . . [and] if the Indian village is a paradise then the school is a paradise within paradise" (Adiga 32, 33) contrastingly compares the developed and underdeveloped places including the condition of government institutions. To protagonist, it looks difficult to progress these areas until the alliance between politician and landlords is not ended. His satirises:

The election shows that the poor will not be ignored. The Darkness will not be silent. There is no water in our taps, and what do you people in Delhi give us? You give us cell phones. Can a man drink a phone when he is thirsty? Women walk for miles every morning to find a bucket of clean-
 . (Adiga 269)

Whereas, in *The Space Between Us* (2006), the narrative is neither much satirical nor humorous but simple and comprehensible. In spite of it, a little sarcastic sense can be observed in her narration which helps one to understand the discourse between characters from different sections. Viraf satirises Bhima and degrades her; "you eat this family's salt . . . and now you curse us" (Umrigar 302). The author makes harsh speech when Viraf satirically refers to a poor woman by saying; ". . . when you try turning a stray dog into a family pet. Sooner or later that

dog is going to bite you” (Umrigar302). Viraf satirically compared Bhima with a dog and her resistance to Dubash family is considered as ‘bite’ of dog. Aban, another wealthy woman mocks at the situation by pointing out Bhima as “precious Bhima” like “Kohinoor diamond or something” (Umrigar 170) where she indirectly makes fun of Bhima and her being from lower status.

However inconsistently, Balram’s criticizing the whole system, Bhima is left fighting with the domestic atrocities by Dubash family. The hypocrisy of Viraf is observed when he scoffs at Maya [Bhima’s granddaughter] by stating; “she can be a whore with fifty men” (Umrigar303). He regardlessly refers Maya as ‘a whore’ because he knows the poverty and inaction of Bhima and her granddaughter, he exasperates; “do you see what you have created, Sera mummy? . . . this is your reward for treating your servant like a family member”. (Umrigar301). It depicts the elite’s consciousness that servant cannot be treated equally. The satiric depiction of both the authors’ have little difference that the narration of Balram is aimed at whole social system but Umrigar’s satirical speech is centered on the individuals in a limited space.

The quality of expression of Adiga can be observed through his excellent use of symbols which provide the alternate meaning to the ideas that create a distinct literary sense. The term symbol therefore can be applied to either words or phrases signifying “an object or event which in its turn signifies something, or suggests a range of reference, beyond itself” (Abrams & Harpham, p. 304). In this respect, the protagonist exquisitely says; “It’s amazing. The moment you show cash, everyone knows your language” (Adiga 300). Here, his use of ‘cash’ directly signifies the bribery and the phrase ‘knowing language’ signifies the equal greed to get illegal income. The capable narration of Adiga provides an entirely different implication of human beings in India and compares “ten thousand years of its history” with the history of “rooster coop” (Adiga 173). His use of the phrase ‘rooster coop’ symbolically refers to those dispossessed who live under the bridges having no order of life and are left with no hopes and aspirations for the generations. Some of the given symbolic phrase represent the corruption of government officials, landlords, and politicians when protagonist states; “money in the air of Dhanbad” and “men with the gold in their teeth” (Adiga 53) symbolises the luxurious life of the people in Dhanbad. The narrator also gives some indication of illegal wealth storage by asserting that “. . . all this glass and gold—all of it came from the coal pits” (Adiga 53) which certainly symbolises the illegal income of rich people in these cities. The author’s use of the auspicious symbols to classify his concept of ‘two Indias’ that ‘India of light’ and ‘India of Darkness’ and his classification of “big bellies” and “small bellies” respectively symbolise the people who are excessive rich and those who are deprived of even single pieces of bread. However, Umrigar’s speech is less symbolic but indeed the title of her selected text contain the word “space” which symbolises the distance or class between two people or two groups. Bhima strongly compares ‘Dubash house’ with hell when she is dragged out from the house by Viraf. She relates herself to a devil who is at “the gate of hell” and comparatively reconstructs her thought and points to Dubash house; “hell is on the other side of this door” (Umrigar 304). Hence, the ‘gate’ of Dubash house is symbolically referred to the gate of hell.

To successfully depict the complexity of the present world Aravind Adiga employs the metaphors in his speech. In Aristotelian sense, a metaphor is “departure from the literal use of language” can be considered as a “condensed or elliptic simile” (Abrams & Harpham, A Handbook of Literary Terms, 2009, p. 166) and that evolves an implied comparison between two dissimilar things but bear the similar characteristics. Adiga’s metaphorical use of ‘coop chicken’

and ‘rooster coop’ equally implies the condition of underprivileged of this country. The father of Balram is a daily wager, hard worker, an ambitious man who toiled in the field all his life, hence his physical condition is metaphorically phrased as “knotted rope” (Adiga 27) which implicitly compared with his father's skeletal figure, who ended his life fighting against poverty. Thrity Umrigar makes less but extensive use of metaphor in her speech. For instance; when Bhima ousted from household work she compare herself and Virafin Dubash family and avers; “blood is thicker than water” (Umrigar 311). Here, the ‘blood’ implies similar status particularly the relation between Sera Dubash and her son-in-law Viraf who are equally from higher status whereas ‘water’ implicitly implies the relationship of Bhima with her mistress who are not economically and socially equal to each other. Umrigar’s use of simile signifies the toughest and strongest character of Gopal, a factory worker as she asserts “[t]his new Gopal was hard as a hammer, tough as leather and smelled of sweet and ashes sour milk” (Umrigar 226). It is despicable to see the predicament of deprived section and authoritative masters’ control over the servants and drivers who gets treated like animals.

Dealing with some other significance of the authors’ narrative one can examine their unique practice of the stream-of-consciousness technique in both the selected texts. The phrase is initially used by William James in 1892, to describe the way to experience the “stream of associated thoughts, without rational ordering” (Abbott, p. 78) which represents the “multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind” (Cuddon, 1998, p. 866). Adiga’s epistolary form for his novel give some necessary twists with incorporating the element of the stream-of-consciousness. In its second chapter, the narrator feels exhausted while describing the tragedy of his country, and he curiously informs to Wen Jiabao that he wants to tell about “My ex.” and “. . . his wife” (Adiga 46). This is how he deep delves into the past lives of Ashok, Pinky, Kishan, Granny and especially of himself. Equivalently, Umrigar presents a series of flashbacks and tells the present-day encounters of Bhima’s struggle with an alien dominant world. After a lengthy description of incidents in *The Space Between Us*, Bhima recalls the moment spent with Gopal when they had enjoyed the lives and also agonized together. Maya too momentarily recollects her physical exploitation by an upper class man who is son-in-law of Sera Dubash. Thus, a new and pathetic turn overwhelmed the whole atmosphere around Bhima and Maya.

Both the novels contain the rich imagery of the characters, actions and the ideas which create a visual representation of intended thoughts. In *The White Tiger* (2008) the author’s use of the “Black Fort” (p, 21) and the “Chandelier” (p, 23) are the examples of the imagery of “Light” and “Dark” (p,14). The imagery of “The Black Fort” is a huge forbidding ruin located on a hill by Balram’s village, symbolizes the extreme poverty of Balram’s family including village. Once, the protagonist gathers courage to enter the Black Fort and asserts; “I leaned out from the edge of the fort in the direction of my village . . . I spat, and “Eight months later I slit Mr. Ashok’s throat” (Adiga 42). The author’s use of the ‘Chandelier’ is the opposite of the ‘Black Fort’ which pictured his entrance in the ‘India of Light’. The protagonist triumphantly says; “It makes me happy to see the chandelier . . . Let me buy all the chandeliers I want” (Adiga 117). He says whenever he thinks of the devil, a little black figure climbing the entranceway to a Black Fort appears in his mind. “I see the little man . . . spitting at God again and again, as I watch the black blades of the midget fan slice the light from the chandelier again and again” (Adiga 87). Such resentment among the people in Indian society are visualised through the perfect use of imagery.

The equal use of the imagery is examined in *The Space Between Us* which creates visual representation of ideas. Imagery covers the language that “evoke sense impression by literal or

figurative reference to . . . concrete, objects, scenes, actions, or states. . .” (Baldick, 2008, p. 164). The fading life of Bhima is visualized in the beginning of the story when she sits abruptly “rolling onto her left side on the thin cotton mattress on the floor” (Umrigar 5). It realistically appeals to mind that how her discontent life is going on. Like Adiga, Umrigar also uses the word ‘Darkness’ (Umrigar294), denotes the underdeveloped places such as slum colony of Bombay. She enormously used the phrase which immediately makes one to envisage the circumstantial problem. Bhima’s life after getting expelled from house, become more miserable, fighting with herself she exhaustingly expresses; “city had fallen away- taxi cab had vanished, the buildings had collapsed, the people had disappeared . . . the endless churning sea, the plowed fields of the sky, the loose gypsy wind-” (Umrigar 318). Such narrative of Umrigar expresses Bhima as depressed, harassed, exhausted to whom the whole world seems senseless and motionless.

The whole atmosphere is full of humour and entertainment in *The White Tigereven* when the author satirizes an individual or the whole system. His humorous speech about the things such as “Murder Weekly” (Adiga 125), the books read by the drivers are hilarious but true. Adiga’s mentioning that “I had no idea what Pinky Madam wanted, but at least her boobs were covered-that was a big relief” (Adiga 145) make the story humorous as well as satirical which give delight to the reader. On the contrary, it is hard to have a light atmosphere in *The Space Between Us*, instead it is unpleasant, tense, dark and full of worries. The whole story revolves around the predicament of Bhima, Gopal, Maya, as well as the dominance of Sera Dubash, Feroz Dubash, and Viraf. The story begins with Bhima’s serving in Serabai’s house where she gets exploited all her life and lastly Bhima compares that house with hell like place. Such tense atmosphere is observed in her speech where the wretchedness or desolation of subjugated is depicted, for instance:

It was another thing to walk the narrow byways that led into the sprawling slum colony – to watch your patent leather shoes . . . to gag at the ghastly smell of shit and god knows what else; to look away as grown men urinated in the open ditches that flowed past their homes . . . the flies thick as guilt . . . stray dogs with patches and sores on their backs. . . children squawking like chickens as their mother hit them with their open hands.
 (Umrigar 113)

The narrations of both the texts contains a number of aesthetic tools including personification to convey their message. For instance, author personifies the glass by saying, “[t]he glass ate his bone” (Adiga 284) where a glass is considered as a man or a beast. In the literary sense, personification can be defined as the “abstract ideas or inanimate things . . . referred to as if they are human” (Baldick, 2008, p. 254). Adiga gives the quality of human being to an inanimate object, as; “you sleep in the car, and the mosquitoes eat you alive. If they’re malaria mosquitoes it’s all right, you’ll just be raving for a couple of weeks, but if it’s dengue mosquitoes, then you’re in deep shit, and you’ll die for sure” (Adiga 124). Through this combination of speech, the author is able to make aware the reader from such carelessness which can cause the diseases. The similar and significant use of personification is witnessed in Umrigar’s writing which create more attention towards the context. She personifies the brand of beer when Feroz was in drunk, he slaps her wife then reacts that it was not he but may be “kingfisher talking” (Umrigar 168). Umrigar’s best use of this technique can be witnessed when she personifies the country and its land as a human being. For example, the narrative, “[n]ow the country is broken. Too many people fighting over the poor land, and the land is sick in its heart. Night and day it is weeping. Now it cannot take care of its sons and daughters” (Umrigar 200). It

shows that how the lives of country people are ruined by some few rich people. As evident in the abovementioned quote, both the writers have efficiently presented an aesthetic sense in their narrative.

In addition to these thought provoking ways of writing, one can find unrestrained hyperbolic sense in Adiga and Umrigar's writing. It is an extravagant accentuation in degree to say "[a]s soon as the gate was open, I dived straight at Stork's feet No Olympic runner could have gone in as fast as I did . . ." (Adiga 61). In fact, it is not his gratitude to Stork but, a matter of employment for a poor boy, striving for a job who gets positive indication from Stork's house. Umrigar uses the exaggerative phrase, for instance, Bhima is ridiculed through a hyperbolic sense of Aban a rich woman, "Oh my god . . . they treat her [Bhima] like she is the Kohinoor diamond . . ." (Umrigar 170). Aban thinks the poor like Bhima should not be treated as Dinaz treats her servant. On the other side, author's hyperbolic expression also shows poor woman's enough gratitude to Dubash family by saying, "[i]f I live to be a hundred years old, I will not be able to stop thanking you for your help today" (Umrigar 217). In a similar way, Bhima again makes an expression, "Serabai, if I am doomed to take a million rebirths in this world, I will never be able to repay you" (Umrigar 305). Certainly, her excessive gratitude is the consequence of her being dispossessed and insecurity of living. While analysing the other characters, there is a senior mistress Banubai, a religious lady who insists Bhima, to pay respect to Lord Zoroaster before leaving the house. "Otherwise hundred years of darkness will fall on this house" (Umrigar 294). Certainly here the author wanted to create a hyperbolic sense to show excessive religious faith as well as fear of god inside Banubai who is much influenced by religion and now trying to influence her maid.

The selected authors efficiently contrasted their ideas putting them together in speech. It can be termed an antithesis, i.e. "contiguous phrase or clauses that manifest parallelism" (Abrams & Harpham, *A Handbook of Literary Terms*, 2009, p. 22). Adiga too is sharp to create an effective commentary to highlight the despair in the lives of poor people, and for the sake he uses many artistic phrases antithetically. After committing murder of his master he triumphantly makes antithetical comments; "I was blind. I was a free man" (Adiga 285). His becoming blind and free at the same time is expressing his longing for liberation from the dominant structure. The protagonist is represented as an ambitious, generous, spirited and vibrant person who experiences every dominant situation and breaks all the 'rooster coops' and ends his slavery. Here, after committing murder, he triumphantly but repentantly contrasts his views; "[m]urder a man, and you feel responsible for his life- possessive, even" (Adiga 46). Hence, the phrase "murdering a man" on the one side then "feel responsible" on the other hand certainly depicts the heartless as well as humanly traits of the protagonist who was a driver cum servant, as well as a fellow of his master. Similarly, Thrity Umrigar efficiently uses such phrase, for instance when Bhima feels bound to express about the treachery of Viraf, she says to her mistress; "[I]t would be more merciful to stab you with a knife than to kill you with the poison of my thoughts" (Umrigar 296). There was a lot of anger inside Bhima which she never reveal before, but ultimately she feels compelled to take stand against Viraf and Dubash family and speaks out. Due to hypocrisy of rich people Gopal gets separated from her wife Bhima and writes a letter, that is why Bhima says; "[it] was a kiss and a murder at the same time" (Umrigar 281) which shows the effects of that letter on the poor wife. Author has also described the personality of Feroz Dubash, who is "husband and oppressor; lover and tormentor; victim and victimizer" (Umrigar 260) at the same time. Hence, the phrases as mentioned above through various characters are antithetically used by Umrigar to present the duality of minds.

The White Tiger (2008) and *The Space Between Us* (2006) contain an intimate portrait of a distant yet familiar world. The texts are set in contemporary India and witness the social upheavals through two compelling and real protagonists Balram and Bhima. The novels show that how the lives of the rich and the poor are intrinsically connected yet vastly aloof from each other. Arvind Adiga gives some clear indication to rural parts of the nation where humanity is deprived of their basic amenities. Many characters of Adiga are associated with villages and underdeveloped places what he calls 'Darkness' and some other are from metropolitan cities like Delhi and Bangalore. He observes the striking difference in living standard between higher and lower class people in these cities. On the other side, Umrigar sets his characters and places around Bombay and its slums colony. Like Adiga, she also gives an accurate picture of slums life on the one hand and the life in the giant buildings on the other. Hence, the selected novels are undoubtedly able to depict the social, economic and political grievances of the people.

Therefore, the socio-economic and political situations of the Indian society are represented by Adiga and Thrity Umrigar through their extensively and artistic use of literary techniques which realistically portray the political and elite's control over underprivileged lives in rural as well as urban parts of the country. This dominance of elite class culture later is given general 'consent' by masses which in Gramscian term is labelled as 'common sense'. The narrative styles and techniques therefore capably make reader to understand the intended contexts. But, in the post-structuralist sense, the reader is more important rather than the author, hence, it much depends on the reader to reconstruct the meaning of texts. In the 1960s when literary critics and philosopher start to rebel against the restrictive and limited practice to assume the world, Roland Barthes propose the idea that "meaning [is] not embedded within the text but within the reader who derived meaning from the textual process" (Nayar, 2010, p. 37). Similarly, Derrida's deconstructive turn aimed at the certain relationship of reading even not perceived by the author but, "[t]his relationship is not the certain quantitative distribution of shadow and light, of weakness or of force but a signifying structure that critical reading should produce" (Barry, 2014, pp. 66, 67). Hence, the intended meaning of both the selected texts more or less depends on the reader's deconstructive and analytic power to deconstruct its meaning.

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