



Animals Living in the World of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

In *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga has used a lot of animals, birds, insects and sea creatures in his novel. This paper attempts to explore the world of the animals in the stylistic devices. Adiga has profusely used animals, birds, insects and other living creatures to evoke the strong feelings in his readers. In comparison, metaphor, simile, metonymy, irony and other stylistic devices, Adiga has relied heavily on the faunal realm to create an active, fresh and electric atmosphere to his novel. We have made a sincere attempt to throw light on the various animals caught in the web of literary devices of Aravind Adiga.

Keywords: Animal Imagery, Literary and Stylistic Devices

Introduction

Human beings are the rational beings, superior to the other species on this very planet. The basic difference that makes human beings superior is their power to become learned, cultured and well-mannered by virtue of their faculty of being rational. They possess moral values and work constructively to develop their culture and society.

Today the developed living style of human beings makes it difficult to discover any social relations between them and animals. The animalistic personas are deep rooted in them. It takes us to the view that the human beings are the tamed animals; tamed through the religion, ethical rules, social norms, and their cultures. However, when they catch a chance to get wild, they do not miss it and express their inert instincts, which are the animal instincts.

Every civilization looks at animals, birds and sea creatures in its own special way. In India, many generations have seen all species as their cohabitants. They have been presented in beautiful forms in arts, paintings and sculptures. "The Romans saw animals as fierce and the Greeks as symbols of power living in a separate world of their own. But ancient Indians saw them as they should be seen – friendly, loyal and graceful," says Dr. Kumud Kanitkar, who has conducted an exhaustive study of animal motifs in Indian culture. "Animals have not undergone any major changes in their shapes or behaviour, but their perception by human beings has changed from age to age. The depictions of animals, birds and sea creatures in



sculptures, paintings and arts like dance and fabric printing as well as architecture are expressions of human imagination and are often used as religious symbols of power, grace, beauty, dignity, opulence and wisdom.”

E M Forster has expressed wonder at the powerful presence of animals in Indian culture. His novel ‘Passage to India’ portrays animals as inspiring growth, promoting unity and love between animals and human beings and shown as exotic symbols of Indian culture.

He says, "Indians believe that birds, animals and human beings – as indeed everything else – are an integral part of divinity. This is the central belief of all Indian religious and cultural thought and thus, all forms of life must be respected equally. Thus human beings and elephants, horses, cattle and birds like the mynah, the peacock, the parrot and the koel are woven into many fables and religious treatises. Water creatures like the crocodile, the turtle and fish are considered sacred and are associated with sacred rivers like the Ganges and the Yamuna. India’s belief that animals, birds and sea creatures are sacred is a dominant and beautiful aspect of Indian culture for millenniums. They are earthly and spiritual companions of human beings and thus equal sharers of the world and its resources.”

Modern writers around the world likened human beings to animals whenever they are degraded. Many negative feelings and emotions, thoughts and actions of human beings reminded them of the acts of animals, wild and domestic. They observed horrors and horrific conditions, upsetting men’s dreams and endeavors. They expressed their empathy in their theme, using vibrant animal imageries. Indians employed this art in their conversations, deliberations and philosophical discourse. Metaphorical language is the common phenomenon in Indian literature.

Animal Imagery has been used in expressions of minds, reinforcement of ideas, illustration of their inner vicissitudes, evoking emotions, and as objective correlative. Steeped in this rich tradition of using animals in literal and figurative language, Aravind Adiga exploited the use of animals to the hilt. But his treatment of animals is modern writers of the West. The entire gamut of animals, big and small, wild and domestic, good and evil, graceful and cruel brought alive the characters and coloured their actions and achieved complicated meaning with limited words.

‘The White Tiger’ consists of figurative language that is full of images and symbols. Imagery is built up through the repeated use of the same images in a literary work. According to Earl J. Wilcox “imagery, in its basic sense, is a product of literary language. Simply defined, imagery is the impression or impressions, we receive when one or more of our senses are stimulated by language” (Wilcox 186). Usually, the authors repeat an image continuously to make the readers aware of the subject matter of their writings. Imagery obtains the readers’ attention



and guides them towards the view point of the authors.

The Title

The title of the novel *The White Tiger* is itself a thematic imagery of the main character, Balram Halwai, a sweet maker by caste, a son of a rickshaw puller, a driver of a rich man and replaced his master. *The White Tiger* is a genetically mutated animal, rarely found in wildness of India forests. They are bigger at birth and tend to grow faster than the normal variety of tiger. This condition is true in the case of Balram Halwai when he was brilliant in answering questions of a school inspector. His growth darkness to light from finding a good job with the rich landlords, replacing the driver, Mohammed alias Ram Persad and his sojourn in New Delhi is quite fast like that of a white tiger.

Characters

Adiga has presented his protagonist, Balram, as a White Tiger in the novel. The White Tiger hunts alone at night and remains alone and quiet, does not make friends and likes to stay alone. If we closely take a look on the whole life story of Balram, as a child, he was seen as an intelligent child, the son of an honest rickshaw-puller. He decides to hunt alone and escape from this servitude and transforms into an aggressive mood, compelling him to murder his meek master. However, growing up, he was exposed into a lot of corruption and immoral behaviour, such as the time when his mother was being burnt and it looked as though her foot was resisting the fire. His childhood molded the person he was going to become in the future. Balram ends up doing anything to get himself into a higher caste and into the light. He steals his money and easily makes his way to Bangalore and becomes a successful entrepreneur and leads his life with impunity. He breaks the vicious cycle of servitude to become an entrepreneur, “full of debauchery, depravity and wickedness” (197). He is remorseless and his conscious act of crime does not diminish his pride and belief of being special and unique as the white tiger. He continues to be the white tiger of Bangalore.

Balram becomes very selfish; many of his actions are ambiguous in nature. Surprisingly, it is not just Balram who has indulged himself in this immoral path to get money but almost all the characters of the novel present this very phenomenon of the current postmodern culture. At least animals cannot be blamed for their natural instinct but human beings behave like animals.

As a poor man, the images used for Balram are of weak and meek animals. But as he is a different person from his lot and becomes an entrepreneur afterwards that is why the title of a white tiger is attached to his character. Throughout the novel, there are references to how Balram is very different from those back in his home environment. A white tiger symbolizes power and in East Asian cultures, such as in Vietnam, it is also a symbol of freedom and individuality (Warness). Balram is seen as different from those he grew up with. He is the one



who got out of the Darkness and found his way into the Light.

As Balram says:

“The journey from Darkness to the Light is not smooth...only a White Tiger can do this” (Adiga250).

He also says “A White Tiger keeps no friends” (Adiga302).

White tiger never hunts in groups because it cannot share its prey with the others. The description of the white tigers continues throughout the narrative side by side. At the end of the novel, Balram decides to open a school for the poor children and they will be given the education to become white tigers as well to destroy the rich of the country.

When comparing the human greed to animals, Adiga presents a menagerie with most appropriate and relevant words. All the masters are compared to “The Buffalo”, “the Wild Boar”, “the Stork” and “the Raven”. Altogether, their images suggest “the peculiarities of appetite that had been detected in him (them).”

The Buffalo devours all the rickshaws and the roads of Laxmangarh. There were three others, and each got his name from the peculiarities of appetite that had been detected in him. The stork owned the river and he took a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman. His brother, Wild Boar, owned all the arable land around Laxmangarh. The Raven owned the worst land, which was dry, rocky hillside around the fort, and took a cut from the goatherds who went up there to graze with their flocks.

Adiga explains the theme of novel through animals like some of the Indian writers but differs in many ways. The White Tiger has a vast imagery of animals. Animal imagery is used in literature to present the hidden associations of human beings and the animals. Adiga has portrayed the inner souls of his characters by giving them animal titles, which can show their animalistic instincts. He never fritters any chances of using animals for portrayal of the scene, exploration of the psyche of the character. He narrates the entire novel with the help of animals creating zoomorphic effect. Masters are compared with predatory and carnivorous wild animals and the poor are with domestic, ugly and meek animals.

Here is a list of animals used in *The White Tiger*:

Insects: silverfish, cockroaches, spiders, mosquitoes, moths

Birds: roosters, chicken, peacock, parrot, raven, crow, pigeon, eagle, stork



Reptiles: snake, lizard,

Wild Animals: Tiger, elephant, lion, lioness, squirrels, cow, goat, tadpoles, mongoose, monkey, deer, mouse, hippopotamus, wild cats, wild boars,

Domestic Animals: buffalo, dog, stallion, horse, cat, bulls, donkey, ass, pig, goats,
Lamb

The frailty, imperfection, weakness and sufferings of poor are ascribed to animal natures.

Balram's father was a beast of burden" (27) and he was "treated like a donkey" (30). To break this vicious cycle, he wants his son to be educated. But the Buffalo's appetite for money, sends him to tea shop, where he works like "human spiders that go crawling in between and under the tables with rags in their hands, crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven, in their thirties or forties or fifties but still boys "... (51) Adiga relentlessly captures animals in metaphors with dehumanizing effect to bring nuanced effect he intends to project; no matter whether it is their birth or death, joy or sorrow, celebrations or commiseration, sanitation or ugliness, animals are integral part of the novel.

Adiga voluntarily brings in the images of goat and cat to demean the human status in a hospital. The animals rule the premises whereas human beings are slaves of the system. Balram's father does not get medical assistance, and he dies unattended. With no sympathetic feeling for the dead, they cajole the goat feeding it with carrot:

"A goat came in and sniffed as we were mopping the blood off the floor. The ward boys petted her and fed her a plump carrot as we mopped our father's infected blood off the floor."(51)

Adiga uses Alsatian dogs to compare sardonically of government servants' haughtiness. (150)

Adiga's obsession with animal continues with Balram's Safari from Darkness to Light, New Delhi, a city with the outer appearance of huge buildings, glitter, glamour and the inside of bribery, immorality, cruelty, sex and other mean acts.

Balram is called as a "donkey" (145) and treated as a "dog" (139) by his masters and he is a "country-mouse" to the other fellow drivers. He wonders, "why had my father.... raised me to live like an animal?" (151). He is expected to be "loyal as a dog" (170) wag tail merrily when courtesy is tossed and thrown at his front and take „the blame for their good, solid middle-



class masters". (170).

The people of the darkness are confined to the "The Great Indian Rooster Coop" (175). Adiga gives a master stroke using this domestic fowl metaphor to describe the life plight of servants existing "in perpetual servitude; servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hand and he will throw it back at you with a curse." (176)

Adiga describes Indian villages with common animals found in India like pigs, hens and cocks and water buffaloes. Instead of traditional harmonious relationship between the human beings and the animals which are prevalent in the Indian culture and tradition, the villagers described are living like animals without much space in the house, proper nutrition and human values, whereas the buffalo outside the house enjoys all the facilities.

"She was the fattest thing in our family....All day long, the women fed her and fed her fresh grass; feeding her was the main thing in their lives. All their hopes were concentrated in her fatness... She was a fat, glossy-skinned creature... she sat all day in her own stupendous crap. She was the dictator of our house!"

At times, the readers feel that animals are in better condition than the animals of the village of Balram.

Different animals carry different meanings related to their titles. These meanings are usually associated with the social norms and interpretations of a specific paradigm. Various readers from the diverse societies conceive assorted meanings from the titles of the animals e.g. an owl is a symbol of wisdom in the West but in Eastern milieu it does not carry the akin meaning indeed a converse one.

Adiga rightly uses animal imagery to bring out the selfishness and ruthlessness of his characters. His characters exhibit the traits of animals in their behavior. Some of his major characters have been called by the animal titles, or certain situations have been portrayed with the presence of animals to express the concealed meanings. Social disparity is captured with different set of animals. He has connected the vicious and atrocious traits of the wild animals with the high class, whereas the low class is shown as the docile, meek and foolish animals. The cunning natures of the rich characters express that they are more wild and destructive in nature than the poor ones.

Adiga has portrayed the people with big belly, the high caste society and the people with small belly, the low caste society. Adiga has used diverse imagery for the distinctive social classes to present the inner nature of the rich and the poor. He basically emphasizes the wild emotions of the human beings who crave for money and power. They are ready to do



whatever things to snatch it from others, so that they would be capable of controlling the lives of the poor.

Adiga gives the title of “Mongoose” and “Lamb” to Mukesh, who is the son of Stork. The rich politician of Laxmangarh, The Socialist, is a corrupt person, who takes bribes. Adiga has described him as a person with “Bull neck” (Adiga 65). Again, bull is a dangerous animal. When Balram finalizes his plan of killing his master Mr. Ashok, he sees a dream of a bull that is very dangerous and terrifying. This “bull” represents the rich people who continuously terrifying the poor people throughout their lives. Balram calls the poor people dogs and donkeys repeatedly in the novel. He calls the other drivers donkeys many times. He also says

“One of the human spiders dropped a wet rag on the floor...” (Adiga265).

“They’re (the prostitutes) like parrots in a cage” (Adiga251).

“They (the car drivers) were crouching and jabbering like monkeys” (Adiga200).

“The Poor live like weak animals in a forest” (Adiga169).

There is an image of cockroaches presented by Adiga here, while working as a driver Balram’s room remains full of cockroaches and he kills these cockroaches ruthlessly. This killing signifies the change in his character. He decides to kill his rich master and wants to become so powerful like rich, as he kills the small cockroaches he wishes to control the other people’s lives as well.

The gentle animals like deer and squirrels are seen in the novel only on the walls of the school where Buddha’s mural is painted. They are not real but lifeless. Thus animals which indicate positive feelings are shown as inanimate animals which living people fail to be in their real lives. Cow appears only in the village of Laxmangarh but not in city. Even the cow is mistaken by Balram for some wild animal, and then he realizes his mistake.

Conclusion:

Animals in their natural habitat behave go by their instincts whereas human beings are expected to suppress their animalistic instincts and exhibit their mature behavior. But Adiga portrays people with the animalistic personality and they dominate the society like wild animals. In their quest for dominance, these people give in to animals in them. Animal imagery helps us recognize this evil in our society. We should tame animals in our thoughts, words and behavior. When the situation warrants we may get the chance to expose this wild instinct. Man should be master of his feelings but the slave of his feelings. Through his novel, Adiga represents animals in the society.



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