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# STEREOTYPE AS A NARRATIVE STRATEGY IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE: A CRITICAL STUDY OF ARVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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## Abstract

This paper examines the strategic use of stereotypes in Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* using a postcolonial perspective. Arvind Adiga purposefully uses these stereotypes as a narrative strategy to cater to both the global audiences and the domestic cultural nuances. By looking at the works of Said's 'Orientalism', Bhabha's 'Ambivalence', Spivak's 'Subalternity', and Hall's 'Representation', the paper will ultimately show that Adiga's use of stereotypes, such as poverty, corruption, caste, and globalization, are employed in a similar manner as cliché - that is to say not simply from a critical framework positions but as intentional narrative strategies in which the contradictions of postcolonial India are best revealed. The novel, through the unstable narration of Balram Halwai, both reaffirms and unsettles Orientalist representations and readers' notions of authenticity, cultural identification, and socio-political reality. The analysis shows that stereotypes in *The White Tiger* work as both narrative seduction and social commentary: they attract international readers through familiar tropes while simultaneously complicating easy interpretations through irony and narrative ambivalence. This study contributes to a growing conversation in the field of Indian English fiction by positioning stereotype as a purposeful literary device and expanding important discussions around cultural representation and the politics of reception in world literature.

***Keywords:***
*Stereotype, Postcolonial Literature, Narrative Strategy, Orientalism, Unreliable Narrator, Indian English Fiction, Cultural Representation, Global Literary Market*

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## 1. Introduction

Throughout recent decades, contemporary Indian literature in English has gained a truly remarkable international visibility, and its reception has been viewed through an enduring set of so-called orientalist archetypes. Stories of hardship and divine grace of Indian mysticism and social strife, that is, exotic or dark images of India that are not so threatening to the audience's western world, have been received well and even sometimes enthusiastically by western readers. Concerning this, the study carried out by Lau (2014) on re-orientalism can be instructive. She suggests that unreliable narrators are a more recent tactic of re-orientalising (i.e. returning to Orientalism in a new way), deployed nowadays to exploit stereotypes about India and frequently to challenge them. Lau describes the novel, like *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga, as having narrators whose reliability ranges from the dishonest to unreliable. She concludes that several writers use the distorted or incomplete realities to perpetuate the stereotypes to devastate the problems of re-orientalism by compelling readers to contextualise and apply scepticism to the transnational reception of Indian stories within the world literary market.

In literary studies, a stereotype is usually defined as a simplified, rigid image or conception of a nation and culture. In postcolonial narratives, stereotypes generally live a double life. On the one hand, they are reminiscent of cliches related to the colonial period (e.g., the representation of India as an exotic land of poverty or mysticism) which serve as a literary device to establish a recognizable scene for the reader. On the contrary, the same stereotypes become a socio-political tool because of what they represent about the power relations and history of our perceptions. A deft writer might use stereotypical images merely to criticize them or complicate them. For example, an author might use an orientalist stereotype (corrupt official, servile servant) as a deliberate element in a story in order to draw attention to, and mock, this very stereotype. In this way, stereotypes present in postcolonial literature can work as a sort of ironic code. They call the alert reader's attention to tensions between the reader's expectations of what to read and what reality the author's narrative presents in subtle ways. Relating directly to this are Lau's notions of a "re-orientalising strategy" - she posits that IWE (Indian writing in English) both directly addresses the Western gaze by recycling orientalist images and subverts them by narrating through an unreliable source. Stereotype can, in brief, be both narrative seduction and criticism's target - taken together, in their multiformity, these reflections of multilingualism imply a multilayered intercultural power replication between author, text and global reader.

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Aravind Adiga represents this dramatism. His first novel, the winner of the Man Booker Prize and instant international bestseller, *The White Tiger (2008)* launched Adiga as a literary superstar (Bala 2024). By focusing on the confessional first person voice of an underclass Indian driver, Balram Halwai, the novel brings into sharp relief India's social inequities in raw, uncompromising terms. Balram's voice is both direct and mis characteristic, local in its flavor yet written to please the Western ear. Lau includes *The White Tiger* specifically among her case studies, because its unreliable narrator engages in the "novel re-orientalising strategy." Adiga's international stature (Booker Prize and near-ubiquitous translations) and his attention to Indian realities (caste, corruption, entrepreneurialism) makes him an intriguing object of study for how he negotiates Western expectations as contemporary Indian author. *The White Tiger* does an excellent job of depicting many of the stereotypes of India (slum life, superstition, injustice of class division) in the voice of the narrator whose own honesty and motives are questionable. This begs the question: is Adiga repeating the West's representation of India (the stereotype of 'Dark India') or criticizing India itself? Using his unreliable narrator, Lau reads Adiga as infusing these stock-in-trade images with layers of irony and self-awareness.

Thus, the current study will explore stereotypes as a narratological tool in Adiga's fictional work. Questions guiding the research will be the following:

a) How does Adiga use stereotypes of India and Indian society in his fiction? (For example, what stereotypical images of caste, poverty, family, religion, etc. turn up, and how are they foregrounded?)
b) How does Adiga's writing support or challenge colonial/Western constructions and configurations of India? (That is, does Adiga reinforce an oft invoked "Orientalist" trope, or does he expose it as an oversimplification?)
c) What discursive operation and implications does such stereotyping have in international relations? In particular, what are the implications of the unreliable narration for international readers' knowledge about India, and does it transform the literary marketplace for Indian-English novels?

These questions are raised in relation to Lau's argument that unreliable narrators force readers into a more critical engagement with text and as a result undermine ready consumption of stereotyping. In *The White Tiger*, for example, the use of Balram as an unreliable narrator, dirty, unscrupulous, self-serving, may be used at first to validate Western underdog notions of Indian nature, but the

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commentary provided by Balram himself often contradicts such notions. We therefore hypothesise that Adiga actually and deliberately utilises stereotype as a narrative strategy: on the one hand, he meets the demand from the West for a certain exotic image of India (feeding into the re-orientalist market), and on the other he critiques the socio-political ills of India for both Indian and Western readers. In other words, Adiga's fiction can be at once concerned with performing set stereotypes, yet at the same time critical of them; performing them in order to satisfy the expectations of the Western world, yet at the same time betraying the full complexity which underpins those expectations. As Lau's study reveals, this infirm narration may "undermine the problems of re-Orientalism" by demanding from readers "more contextual knowledge, more critical judgement." Adiga's texts will be read closely in relation to Lau's framework in the present research which will specifically test the hypothesis of this relationship by analysing the different ways in which stereotype functions in his narrative technique and the various ways through which it has been developed in his international reception.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework and Narrative Strategy

Postcolonial Criticism as a tool of analysis for *The White Tiger,* Edward Said's (1978) Orientalism presents this vision of the West constructing an "Orient" as its exotic Other; in Said's words the Orient has become one of Europe's "deepest and most recurrent images of the Other", which identifies non-Western people (including India's poor) as a threatening 'Other'. Homi K. Bhabha's focus on ambivalences of colonial discourse: The colonized subject is ambivalent between mimicry and parody of the colonizer. In this "vicissitude of space," in Bhabha's terms, "ambivalent affiliation," the colonial subject is never simply "complicit" or "resistant" and stereotypical identity becomes an unstable mirror which plagues colonial power. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2023) makes claims about the subaltern's assertion of inability to "speak" within this structure of power. She is known for the argument that in colonial contexts "The subaltern has no history, no speech" and especially "The Subaltern cannot speak" within the patriarchal colonial discourse. Together these theorists draw attention to the ways that Western discourse defines and often silences the voices of those colonized.

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Drawing on postcolonial theory, representative scholars are interested in the ways that narrative choices and stereotypes operate. Richard Stuart Hall notes that stereotypes work to "fix" identities by having people embody "a very limited range of definitions of who people can be". In other words, stereotypes will become "powerful" images that narrow possibilities and knowledge. For Hall, the political challenge is to "open up" stereotypes so that new and less homogeneous identities can emerge. Adiga's narrative technique in *The White Tiger* illustrates these points: In casting the novel as a letter to a Chinese premier (a foreign audience), Balram's voice unavoidably "over-explains" India for outsiders. By virtue of its position, this apparatus/representator requires the narrator to occupy both an internal/external position in a Bhabha sense of ambivalence. Adiga's employment of first-person confession and sharp satire may therefore be conceived of as deliberate methods: Balram's tone is both one of disclosure and self-defence, one through which he is able to justify morally questionable actions (e.g. At the same time, in the narrative to the reader, they criticize the social injustice.

### 2.2 Existing Studies on *The White Tiger*

*The White Tiger* has been widely discussed in terms of its treatment of class, globalization and power. Shagufta and Qasmi (2013) state that Adiga offers a "dystopic vision" of India, wherein Balram achieves his success not for doing good things but by taking advantage of "loopholes of a morally bankrupt system." Similarly, Gupta (2015) observes that the novel has contradictions of globalization - the prosperity of the few are built on structural exploitation of the many. Mehrotra (2010) adopts a classist discourse stating that Adiga deconstructs the myth of a homogenous "great Indian middle class." In Mehrotra's reading, Balram's collective upward mobility results only in being "trapped in a feudal framework" of guilt and moral decay. However, Huebert (2015) turns the attention to the subaltern narrative itself: they argue that *The White Tiger* ‘grants its low-caste narrator power that is not always obvious.' But rather than mere victimhood, Balram's ambivalent actions add up to a kind of resistance-so long as we accept that it's a morally complicated one.

Other studies single out Balram as typical of India's marginalized. One scholar identifies *The White Tiger* as "an explicit appropriation of Balram as a stand-in for a multitude of marginalized and destitute Indians" to represent "how individuals from a low caste are treated by those of a higher caste status." Throughout the novel, it is clear that members of the "upper class use their position to establish power over their lower class," while Balram expresses his "poor, oppressed, and mistreated comrades." Krishna Singh (2009) notes that Adiga "ably highlights the subaltern

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problem," in which the underclass is seen as having "an instrumental role" in the progress of the country and even which "presents a convincing case for a classless society". More recently, one analysis has observed how Balram's use of writing to China's premier symbolically cracks his silence: he "appropriates voice through transgression" and becomes a hitherto invisible subject now responding to the gaze of global capitalism. Interpreting Balram's tale in a similar way, another reading above, drawing upon Spivak, argues that Balram's story instead shows evidence that the subaltern can resist and hold their own when faced against a hegemonic power - then his triumph is a way of "speaking back."

Taken together, these studies highlight *The White Tiger's* approach to the critique of India's social fabric (poverty, caste, corruption, inequality). They bring out Balram's distinctive narrative tone and class consciousness. *The White Tiger* has been characterized in the literature as a "short, sharp, fast-paced satire on India's neoliberal era" and as an "important study of India's class relations." However, most scholarship involves the interpretation of Adiga's images and stereotypes (hunger, corruption, caste labels, etc.) as content to be analysed, rather than as consciously rhetorical figures or narrative techniques in their own right.

### 2.3 Stereotypes of Poverty, Corruption, Caste, and Globalization

*The White Tiger* uses the full range of stereotypes to paint its picture of India. One of the best known is the extreme inequality between the poor and rich. Adiga clearly states that in India, "there are always two India's, one Light and the other Darkness." This metaphor is repeated throughout: coastal areas glow with post-modern wealth ("light") and the landlocked villages are mired in darkness ("despair"). Villagers are shown to be starving and weak (e.g. 'Electricity poles - not working... children... thin frames and short stature'). The novel even invents a "new caste system" of "men with big bellies and men with small bellies" as a metaphor for this rich-poor dichotomy; commentators point out that this picture reduces India to a stereotype - it is as if there are only high-rolling and low-rolling Indians.

Accordingly, corruption is depicted as widespread and pervasive. Corruption and the need for money tinge many scenes (bribed government doctors, unscrupulous landlords, etc.). For example, Adiga makes Balram state that in such a corrupt society "money really is the root of all evil" . Even the famous "Rooster Coop" metaphor for the novel emphasizes that India's poor are caged in by institutionalized corruption and feudal cruelty. The criticism is that Balram's story makes it seem

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like only "corrupt actions of power," in words, truly employ a person to gain status. In other words, the story seems to show that violence is the only way out of the poverty-a cliche that critics have traced back to Western stereotypes.

Caste is also reduced to stereotyping. Balram often uses his caste ("Halwai" or sweet-maker) as his conduit to explain his position in society. The novel often treats caste as but another manifestation of the "big belly/small belly" divide. As one critic points out, the film adaptation even issues the cheeky comment, "there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies and Men with Small Bellies," completely ignoring India's complicated caste system. Adiga collapses caste into a class metaphor, and ignores subtler social distinctions for a stereotype. The animal names given to the landlords at the village level ("the Buffalo, the Stork, the Wild Boar, the Raven") indicate their brutality. This strong imagery - though effective - has been criticized for pandering to a stereotyped image of India. For example, calling villagers 'The Buffalo' or 'The Wild Boar' is an example of how Western stereotypes of India as a feudal zoo are perpetuated, Chawdhary (2014) contends, that it "plays into the Western stereotype of the 'rough and lazy Indian'." Finally, globalization itself enters the picture by way of a stereotype of an India divided by modernized economics. There are multiple studies highlighting how *The White Tiger* highlights the Light/Dark divide in India in a globalizing context. As one recent study notes, post-1991 economic reforms have effectively divided India into two countries - one of high-tech affluence (Light) and one of despair and destruction (Darkness). This rural-urban divide is also dramatized in Adiga's narrative: Balram's upward mobility from a village in Bihar to the IT hub of Bangalore is an example of this. Some reviewers point out that Adiga paints globalization's promise as shoddy: the financial blossoming in India is achieved "at the expense of social, cultural, moral and human values". Balram absorbs this worldview; in the end he cynically concludes that money trumps morality. In short, poverty, corruption, caste, and globalization, are all presented in the novel in broad, almost hyperbolic terms. Each stereotype taps into common images of India undernutrition, venal bureaucrats, feudal landlords, rapacious capitalism to prove a point about inequality, but at the same time runs the risk of reducing a complex society to a set of symbols.

### 2.4 Debates: Authentic Voice vs. Western Gaze

Critics have no agreement as to whether Adiga's use of stereotypes is a portrayal of actual Indian thought or a story designed for the Western audiences. Some will say that The White Tiger panders to the Western gaze. Chawdhary (2014) argues that Adiga deliberately shapes India to fit into the

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expectations of the West, pointing out "much supporting evidence of what looks like a touristic exoticism" designed "to fit his Western readership's expectations." In this perspective the East is "exotic and corrupt" because that is the interpretation the Western reading perspective makes of it. Similarly, the navel's frame (a letter to a Chinese leader) and a cast of non - Chinese actors are points of reference for Western audiences, say critics. Professor Anuja Jain notes that the film "is not meant for Indian viewers," but "still perpetuates a stereotypical view of India as a sprawling, corrupt and chaotic place, packaged nicely for American viewers." Another commentator, on the other hand, argues that the framing of Balram's narration as explanations for foreign audiences imposes an outsider's outlook on Balram: Balram "has no option but to bring outsider's eyes to his country" and as a result the narrative "is easily digestible to foreign readership." Even Adiga's background has been called into question: some Indian critics have asked whether an author raised in privilege is qualified to speak so bluntly for the poor.

On the other hand, many of *The White Tiger*'s defenders maintain that the book merely reveals the truth that other writers in the past have been afraid to confront. Because of its satirical edge and irreverent voice, Balram's narration is said to cut through the romanticised images of India. For example, as Adiga himself points out, the novel showed Balram rationalizing murder as a path to freedom from the "darkness," a message that was disturbing but nonetheless appealing to those who would have read it particularly India's budding entrepreneurs. Singh (2009) appreciates Adiga for "doing a commendable job in foregrounding the subaltern cause" and providing a substantial discursive role for India's underclass. In this perspective, the stereotypes are not mis-constructions, but rather a way to shock readers into seeing injustice. By using radical images of poverty and corruption, the novel may be viewed as a literary reflectional surface, albeit cruelly, of inequalities existing side-by-side with India's wealth.

## 3. Research Gap

Despite the abundance of scholarly work done on *The White Tiger*, there has been a surprising lack of critical examination focusing on the conscious use of stereotypes - what some might call a conscious decision to employ an artistic technique in writing. Much of the criticism above has focused on simply listing the novel's vivid imagery-hungry children, corrupt politicians, greedy landlords, and the overall poverty-versus-prosperity dichotomy-and then discussing whether or not these images were realistic or not. Yet, however useful, criticism of Adiga's representations as naturalistic expressions of Indian society has less potential than criticism of these representations

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as self-consciously created rhetorical choices. In other words, much scholarship treats stereotypes as things to be explained rather than as tools to be analyzed.

What has not been sufficiently theorized is the possibility that Adiga purposefully uses these well-known images to produce a literary effect: to belittle Western expectations of India, to dramatize the disjunction between global geographies and local truths, and most importantly, to highlight the ambiguity of Balram's narrative voice. Though Adiga's work reads as a strategy that points both to the stereotype as a kind of fixating pain and ambivalence, I'd argue that it does so in the spirit of Homi Bhabha, who theorized the stereotype as a zone of ambivalence. The gap in research therefore develops from the need to analyse stereotype not so much as a descriptive shorthand but as a necessary narrative tool through which Adiga interrogates questions of how we understand representation, the authenticity of culture, and its commodification.

## 4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative and interpretative framework based in post-colonial literary studies. The research questions relate to the narrative role of stereotypes, and its reception in local and global contexts. *The White Tiger (2008)* by Aravind Adiga has been used as a close textual analysis. Qualitative is an appropriate means for investigation in this case, because it privileges interpretation and contextual analysis rather than quantifying it and allows for an examination of the how meaning is made through narrative strategy.

The analysis draws on important post-colonial theorists i.e. Edward Said's notion of Orientalism, Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of ambivalence and hybridity, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's understanding of subalternity, and Stuart Hall's theory of representation. These frameworks provide important analytical tools to help interrogate the way stereotypes operate as ideological constructs in the novel. Specifically, Said embeds the novel among the expectations of a Western reading audience while Bhabha is useful in understanding the ambivalent nature of stereotype as both repetition and rupture; Spivak helps to shine a light on the limitations of referring to Balram's narrative voice as subaltern and Hall helps clarify that stereotypes seek to "fix" cultural identity but remain unstable and contestation point.

The use of close reading as a methodology permits the Work to foreground the interaction of stereotype, irony, and unreliable narration in *The White Tiger*. The close reading method does not simply treat stereotypes as passive reflections of Indian society; rather, it views stereotypes as

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active literary strategies by which Adiga works with the politics of cultural representations, readership, and global literary markets.

## 5. Analysis & Discussion

### 5.1 Stereotypes of India in Adiga's Fiction

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* showcases many familiar tropes of "Dark" India grinding rural poverty, entrenched caste hierarchies, official corruption, and urban squalor while the narrative frequently complicates these clichés. In the first pages, Balram Halwai narrates a vision of postcolonial India that simultaneously indulges and subverts these clichés. He famously describes pre-independence India as

> "See, this country, in its days of greatness, when it was the richest nation
> on earth, was like a zoo... the day the British left the cages had been let open;
> and the animals had attacked and ripped each other apart
> and jungle law replaced zoo law."(Adiga 39)

The zoo-to-jungle image evokes the tendency to think through the stereotype that when colonialism ended, chaos broke out in India. In a complimentary fashion, Balram reduces India's complicated social structure into an oversimplified binary."in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies…and only two destinies: eat—or get eaten up" (Adiga 2008 p 39).

This reductive schema of "big-belly/small-belly" datasets dramatizes the stereotype that in present day India, economic status prevails over ancient distinctions of caste, and compresses India into oppressor and oppressed. The novel presents a stark contrast between "Dark" and "Light" Indias. Balram's home region is persistently called "the Darkness" (Bihar, basically), while urban sites of power such as Delhi are "the Light." Critics have completely identified the Dark vs Light binary as a theme of the book. Shingavi (2014) remarked how Balram promises to tell expose the "crushing rural poverty which relegates half the population to 'The Darkness' (the novel's label for Bihar) and the brazen corruption and cruelty by which the rich hold on to their fortunes in 'The Light' (New Delhi)". In Balram's own words, this distinction even shows up in miniature when he and his bosses were driving in the car: he observed he and his employers were

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We Were like two separate cities—inside and outside the dark egg.

I knew I was in the right city. But my father,

if he were alive, would be sitting on that pavement...

So, I was in some way out of the car too, even while I was driving it.(Adiga 81).

In one chapter Balram flatly declares,

This city has its share of thugs and politicians…

Here, if a man wants to be good, he can be good.

In Laxman garh his village, he doesn't even have this choice.

That is the difference between this India and that India; the choice (Adiga 185).

The similar verbiage unambiguously evokes the Western association of "two Indias" with one being modern and merit-based and the other being archaic and corrupt - both aspects of deep-seated popular stereotype of the inner conflict in India. In his portrayals of poverty and caste Adiga describes the paradox often times in stark detail. For example, Balram depicts the social order in the colonial era as follows:"Goldsmiths here. Cowherds here. Landlords there… The untouchable cleaned feces" (Adiga 2008 p.39).

This passage, while partly tongue-in-cheek, plays into the exoticized view of India with rigid, archaic social roles. Balram later cynically remarks, "Stories of rottenness and corruption are always thebest stories, aren't they?" (Adiga 2008 p.30), explicitly acknowledging that the narratives of India's decline align with audience expectations. He sometimes invokes the myth of the "two Indias" as literal cities or mentalities, indicating that half the population lives in neglect and non-existence, a stereotype that is reminiscent of Orientalist ideas of slums and filth. In other words, The White Tiger is filled with poverty, chaos and caste oppression themes that readers are familiar with from the Western depictions of India. As Shingavi (2014) notes, Adiga winning the 2008 Booker Prize made it "a sensation" because it "tackled the dark truth of India's poverty and… broke stereotypes of what sorts of Indian fiction could be marketed worldwide."

However, this is not to say the stereotypes Adiga uses are completely superficial. He often uses these stereotypes to critique them from within. Balram's zoo metaphor is revealing here, because he uses that metaphor to justify his own rise, claiming only an animal-like "belly" can find success in postcolonial India. Similarly, Balram's account of Delhi's divide for all its shock value comes

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with the self-awareness of a storyteller. As one critic observes, Balram's narration points back at the reader: the very concept of a "Darkness" is something Balram freely gives as a justification, which calls the reader to implicitly question whether they are accepting an overly simple narrative. Thus, the novel represents stereotypes as much as it interrogates them: what often starts as an image of "Rotten India" has an ironic twist or moral confusion that complicates the stereotype in the end.

### 5.2 Stereotype as Strategy

Adiga's intentional invocation of stereotype relates directly to audience and market. His use of "un-extraordinary" at the outset is an indicator that he is writing with a conscious awareness of Western/global readership. Although *The White Tiger* is in epistolary form directed to the Chinese Premier, this mitigates against the fact that Balram is not only addressing the Chinese Premier, but also the world, anyone interested in India's "truth." By foregrounding scandalous details of slums, corruption, and caste injustice, our protagonist speaks to the appetites of an audience that is expecting an unfiltered expose of India. Within a competition as international as the Booker Prize, this type of material will draw a discerning judge's eye. As Shingavi (2014) notes, this highly stylized novel is a "sleek, urban noir" that "like the erstwhile genre of cityscapes in the 1980s most notably written by Salman Rushdie, features India's chaos and cruelty," clearly differentiating and no doubt, offering a contrast to the Indians that came before it and were praised. In this respect, American and British reviewers felt *The White Tiger* offered a "perfect antidote" to the previous concept of "lyrical India," noting that the acclaimed work "revealed India's underbelly." In this case, Publishers Weekly called it an "antidote to India's lyrical myths", a judgment that Adiga was clearly aware of as it appeared on the cover of the book. The reception from Indian critics was less favourable. Many people in India accused Adiga of catering to Western stereotypes and of "treason" by short-selling his country's image. Jabeen Akhtar remarks that while Western media applauded Balram's candid voice, there were Indian reviews that pointed out a "condescending attitude toward the poor in India." This means that the novel was highly contextualized in different markets. The importance of this divided reception is Adiga's conscious recognition of global tastes; he provides the grotesquerie's foreign audiences expect (rotten hospitals, children crushed in traffic, untouchables cleaning human waste) yet simultaneously adds an ironic separation to them. Adiga has also stated in interviews that he conceptualized the book while viewing India through a reporter's eye - at times being critical of the narrator as well.

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A strategy of narrative irony underlies this, as Balram often plays out the very stereotype attached to him. Initially, he jests that he will become a writer of the slum: "My English is good … I hope now that I won't need to break coals and mop floors forever." By recognizing his role as storyteller, he is winking at the reader. More broadly, critics of postcolonial literature have commented that the stereotypes in these novels sometimes "point back to the reader." Mrinalini Chakravorty argues that South Asian fiction plays on the reader's "stereotype" of the subcontinent as a place of hunger, poverty and pollution, and that expectation shapes the text's images. In other words, stereotypes serve as an easy "translation device" for readers, and authors (either consciously or unconsciously) feed on their expectations. As one writer argues, Adiga "reiterates and echoes the Eurocentric perspective about the East which he intends to subvert" (Hamid 2023). By packaging the harsh reality in the frame of "slum fiction," Adiga ensures broad audience appeal, which he then subverts by revealing Balram to be cynical and unreliable. The narrative is self-aware: Balram even jests that India will not reveal the truth about its villages, "…you can take almost anything you hear about the country from the prime minister and turn it upside down, and then you will have the truth about that thing" (Adiga 2008 p.12).

The impact of global market and Booker context magnified this effect. A book that "shattered the stereotypes" of Indian-writing in one sense also exploits those stereotypes in another. Adiga is indeed known to have an understanding of publishing trends, and wrote the novel in 2005 while observing India's elite, as well as discussed writing with one eye on Western readers. As Faizan Hamid mentions in a recent paper, *The White Tiger* essentially reads like a 'tourist account of India' corruption and poverty become "rich data" for consumption for foreigners. In fact, Hamid points out that Adiga explicitly "serves the interests of his Western audience" by depicting India in terms of an exoticized, negative description of the country. The success of the novel in the international market by winning the Man Booker Prize only shows that it met the needs of the global marketplace, while at home it questioned authenticity.

Nevertheless, Balram's tone never lacks for irony. Even as he describes the images foreign readers crave, he does so through a first-person voice that is sly and self-mocking. When he remarks that "stories of rottenness and corruption are always the best stories, aren't they?" (Adiga 2008 p.30). It is with a knowing smile at his own position as narrator. Through this kind of narrative distance and self-awareness, Adiga uses stereotype as both lure and critique - first bringing in a

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Western/global audience with familiar representations of tropes, then asking an audience to interrogate why they feel comfortable believing those tropes.

**5.3 Reinforcement vs. Subversion**

*The White Tiger* oscillates between perpetuating and subverting stereotypes. It sometimes plays directly into Western fantasy when Balram discusses India. For example, when Ashok and Pinky mistakenly kill a slum child with their car, Balram apathetically remarks about that class.“you know how those people in the Darkness are: they have eight, nine, ten children… Her parents…won’t go to the police” (Adiga 98).

This grim line reinforces that the poorest people of India are innumerable and unmoored: a disposable group completely severed from modern society. Balram says many crude clichés about Muslims, democracy, and caste order that, like Hamid (2023), demonstrate an Orientalist fashion of thinking. Even when Balram maintains that old India was a well-kept "zoo" that turned into a savage jungle (Adiga 2008 p.39), it appears he is simply feeding into a colonial era description. These moments can seem like exaggerated stereotypes deployed for a very deliberate effect: Balram seems to be telling the narrator what he thinks the Chinese Premier (and therefore the Western reader) wants to hear.

However, these same passages are not without a sting of subversion. Balram is not an unwitting messenger, he is an unrepentant self-interested dissenter whom the reader ought to judge for credibility. His glibness is often qualified by context. For example, he claims to have obtained "education" by listening to the patrons in the tea-shop (Adiga 2008 p.30), or as he candidly admits using "near total dishonesty" while he was maintaining his job. His glib stereotypes of the Darkness comes after a terrible car crash and is delivered with a brashness that is cruel; we sense that in the last one he is trying deliberately to provoke Ashok - it is an act. Adiga magnifies the stereotype in effect, only to reveal the moral vacuity of it. Balram's narrative arc itself threatens the stereotypes it conjures. He starts as the dutiful village son, fits the archetype of the "grateful servant" and then obliterates it. By the end of the novel he has killed his master, assumed his name and wealth, and reinvented himself as a "self-made entrepreneur". This trajectory refuses the stereotype of the compliant Indian driver who is doomed to servitude forever. Given that Balram outsmarts, and escapes, the caste/oppressed beginnings that he hailed from ("Darkness") to one who succeeds in the city ("Light") does little else but offer a pointed rebuttal: one poor Bihari can escape the

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confines of the stereotype, even if through violence. Critics have noted this contradictory tension: Balram's rise is a clichéd trope of underdog fortune, yet he is equally complicit in the precise corruption he bemoans. As Scheidler notes, Balram's murder of Ashok places him "out of the halo of trustworthiness" and makes him "the very object of his criticism", illustrating how subaltern characters can both embody and critique stereotypes.

Moreover, *The White Tiger* uses Balram's voice to satirize Western expectations. Whenever Balram allows himself a grim image, it is often imbued with a wry irony. His early biographical sketches mock the old order: Landlords, goldsmiths, Halwais, etc., all play out as parody. When he describes his village elders teaching him that a servant's chains are "guarded from the inside" (a metaphor known as the Rooster Coop), he is ironically critiquing the very fatalism that Western readers might assign to India. Also, even his occasional appeals to family and morality come full-circle as self-justifying rationalizations, which reminds readers that ultimately he is a storyteller. To summarize, *The White Tiger* often appears to cater to the familiar images of India, but its narrational self-awareness and final reversal both call those images into question. What seems, at first, to reinforce stereotype is quickly revealed to be a part of Balram's cynical "game."

### 5.4 Broader Implications

Postcolonial literature's uneasy union of stereotype and criticism puts Adiga in a line of controversial predecessors such as V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie. Naipaul also was renowned and reviled for his cynical representations of India and its neighbours, and Adiga's *The White Tiger* similarly rejects romantic nationalism. The fiction's "bare knuckle" realism is open to comparison with Naipaulian cynicism; the novel's felicitous treatment of corruption and poverty is as damning as that of An Area of Darkness. At the same time, Adiga succeeds Rushdie in the tradition of literary cosmopolitanism and irony, while streamlining it. Rushdie's Midnight's Children is crawling with magic and allegory, and Balram's India is overloaded with hard-headed concreteness. Yet both novels were mired in issues of authenticity: Rushdie was locked into debates over his exoticizing of India for a northeastern readership, and Adiga is no different.

Adiga's success has only served to catalyse already ongoing discussions about representation and cultural commodification the world over. As the White Tiger makes clear, diasporic or cosmopolitan writing is under close and difficult examination both in the homeland and in the broader global marketplace. The popular acclaim of the novel, even leading to its adaptation into

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a Netflix movie, is indeed an indicator of the resonance that accounts of 'poverty, violence and political upheaval' in South Asia hold for our global context (Chakravorty 2014). As Samuel Taylor Coleridge has written in “The Guardian”, that the view holds some truth: that Western publishers prefer writing which is "full of the platitudes of the lunch-buffet variety" - descriptions of arranged marriage, exotic landscapes and grinding slums - because it "sells India to its readers overseas". In this way, *The White Tiger* might be viewed as a product of those market forces: it provides the spectacle of India's underbelly we might expect, yet still Adiga purports to critique the impulse to fetishize that underbelly.

This doubly conflicted impulse to represent and problematize has other implications in their articulation of cultural authenticity. Adiga's novel entices the world's readers to question their own expectations. As Christine Okoth has pointed out in reviewing Chakravorty's work, the presence of a stereotype in a text "calls for a critical reading practice, one which is attentive to the ways in which the text works on the readers' expectations and the reactions to them." In other words, *The White Tiger* works equally as much to strip away the reader's gaze as it works to show the realities of India. In the general tradition of postcolonial writing, it reveals that authors like Adiga, Rushdie, and Naipaul are not merely conveying "objective" truth-they are engaging in a dialogue, and occasionally a commodified circus, about what images of India (or other "postcolonial" societies) are intelligible to the rest of the world. In this regard, the White Tiger is also significant for situating discourses of authenticity, as it performs the power of the clash between representation as persona and representation as stereotype.

Ultimately Adiga's fiction asks the question: Whose history of a nation? By simultaneously embracing tropes familiar in western modernity and attaching to them critical irony, *The White Tiger* highlights that all fictions-an object of entertainment and fantasy from wherever it happens to be in the world-come with "ideological baggage" (Chakravorty 2014). Adiga takes the stereotype, however, and uses it to "create an explosion of possible responses," in order to activate the reader in asking what they wish to see, and why. In so doing, he both reinforces and stretches the boundaries of the binary imaginings of Dark India, Light India. Adiga's work invites the perennial study of representation that is so prevalent amongst his postcolonial contemporaries. His achievement shows that images and fantasies of the third world-slums and devastation-remain marketable on the international stage; his own narrative strategies make us aware that these images

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are never simple, and that even a scathing depiction of the slums is, in part, narrative selection based on global seeing.

## 6. Conclusion

This research has explored how Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* deliberately utilized stereotypes, not as simply representational distortions of Indian reality, but instead as narrative strategies designed for both Western and Indian audiences. By foregrounding familiar tropes of poverty, corruption, caste, and globalization, *The White Tiger* engages cultural images, while simultaneously destabilizing the familiar through irony and unreliable narration. This dual movement illustrates stereotypes in the story as both critique and commodity which both suit the desire of global readers for representations of India and complicate just such representations. In relation to postcolonial theory, the critique argues that Adiga's narrative strategies recall Edward Said's definition of Orientalism, Homi Bhabha's notion of ambivalence, Gayatri Spivak's emphasis on subaltern voice, and Stuart Hall's theory of representation. Accordingly, the novel shows that stereotypes can be fluid or volatile, functioning as if they are fixed, but are ultimately always open to contestation, appropriation, or critique.

The evidence indicates that *The White Tiger* is more than simply a text that reproduces orientalist clichés. Instead, it is a novel that transforms stereotype into a literary strategy that mirrors the politics of cultural representation in world literature. By placing stereotype in a role of narrative design, Adiga brings out the contradictions of writing fiction in English for an international audience and queries the social realities of postcolonial India. Ultimately, The White Tiger offers an example of the capacity of fiction to reveal, complicate, and reimagine cultural identity in globalization, and the global literary marketplace.

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