

The Five Narrative Codes of Roland Barthes in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Evi Tarmila, Erika Citra Sari H.

Abstract

Aravind Adiga through his first novel *The White Tiger* brings the notion of the lower caste people. *The White Tiger* contains symbol, connotation, and cultures that exist in India like the dowry system, caste system and the social gap which appear among Indian society because of that caste system. This study attends to analyze symbol, connotation, and cultures in *The White Tiger* by using Roland Barthes's five narrative codes. Those five narrative codes are; hermeneutic code, proairetic code, cultural code, connotative code, and symbolic code. This study applies qualitative research design to analyze the source of data. The result of this study shows that the five narrative codes are appeared in *The White Tiger*. The hermeneutic codes are found in the title of the novel, and from fugitive expectation from the reader. The proairetic codes are found into five sequences of the plot; exposition, complication, climax, falling action, and resolution. The cultural codes are found in the stereotypes of the master toward the servant, and Indian cultures; the caste system and dowry system. The connotative codes are found through the characters of Balram Halwai and Ashok, and the places of the lower caste and the upper caste. And the last, the symbolic codes are found in the binary opposition of 'lower' and 'upper' caste or 'the Darkness' and 'the Light'.

Keywords: hermeneutic, proairetic, cultural, connotative, symbolic, lower caste, upper caste

Introduction

India is well-known as a unique country. It is because of there are many unique cultures that can be found only in India, for examples the culture about the caste system and the dowry system. Therefore, the writers of India might be inspired to adapt it into literary works as the expression of human feelings. Furthermore, there are many Indian writers that are quite famous in the world. Aravind Adiga is one of Indian writers whose works are recognized by many people. He has won Man Booker Prize for fiction in 2008 for his first novel, entitled *The White Tiger*, and he is the first Indian writer that brings the notion of the lower caste perspectives (in Suneetha, 2012: 164).

This novel consists symbol, connotation, Indian cultures like the dowry system and the caste system, and the social gap that appear among Indian people. This novel is arranged like a series of letter where the major character writes a letter toward Chinese Premier Minister, Wen Jiabao. Further, this novel tells about a fellow from Laxmangarh that tries to change his live in poverty to be a successful entrepreneur in order to raise his caste up in Bangalore.

Furthermore, there are several studies that have taken *The White Tiger* as the source of data. They are Sheikh (2009), Poonkodi (2009), Singh (2009), Schotland (2011), and Waller (2012). Yet, none of these studies analyze this novel by using the five narrative codes of Roland Barthes. They are hermeneutic, proairetic, cultural, connotative, and symbolic code. Therefore, this study is intended to analyze this novel by using these codes. These codes are appropriate to be used since this novel consists of many cultural aspects, connotations, and symbols that they are part of these five narrative codes itself.

This study applies qualitative research design, because the data are taken from the narrator's narration and the utterances of the characters. Therefore, this study uses content analysis to collect the data which focus to the content of the novel. The analysis of the novel is by gathering the data, interpreting the data, and writing the conclusion.

Discussion

a. Hermeneutic Codes

The hermeneutic code is the code of puzzles which the "questions are raised" (Scholes, 1985: 154).

- The Title

The title of this novel is *The White Tiger*. The readers who read this title will have some questions like what is the story would be like? The question will come up from the readers in the first time they read it. The answer is shown by Adiga in the chapter one in page 30. It is stated by the school's inspector, "'The white tiger.'/ 'That's what you are, in *this* jungle.'" (2008: 30) The title of this novel is the analogy of an animal that only comes along once in a generation, which reflects the major character who is different from another lower caste people who can rebel and break the Indian rule by become the upper caste.

- Fugitive

In the first chapter, Adiga has introduced that Balram, his major character, is described by the police in the poster that makes the reader assumes Balram as a fugitive. It is also strengthened by the word 'suspect' in page 11. The questions that rise are; what has Balram done that makes him become a fugitive? What is his motive to do violence? The first question is answered in page 37 that Balram states, "...I am not just *any* murderer, but one who killed his own employer (who is kind of second father)..." (2008: 37). Meanwhile, the second question is answered in along process through the eight chapters.

b. Proairetic Codes

The proairetic code is also called as code of action (in Hawkes, 2003: 95), and each action of the major character can be compiled into five sequences of the plot in flashback and flash forward structure.

- Exposition

Exposition is the starting point in the story which the author of the story introduces Balram Halwai as the major character, his family that they come from the lower caste, and the landlords in the village where Balram lives, Laxmangarh or called the Darkness. It caused of this village is called the Darkness, therefore everything inside this village are bad. Thus, Balram tries to change his life in poverty to be a driver in the Stork's family, Dhanbad.

- Complication

In this part, the conflict is introduced to the reader. The conflicts happen between the major character, Balram, and other characters. First, the conflict is happened between Balram and Ram Persad. It is about the social status as the servant in the Stork's family that Balram feels jealous to the driver number one. Second, the conflict is happened between Balram and Kusum tht his granny tries to control Balram thorough the marriage. Third, the conflict is happened between Balram and his masters -the Stork's family. It happens when Balram is forced by the Stork's family to confess that he is a suspect in the accident hitting a child in Delhi that actually Pinky madam who did it –the wife of the Stork's son, Ashok. Besides that, Ashok is the master that Balram thought is different from other masters. As he states, "But this man...was different" (2008: 135). Yet, in the incident where Balram is forced to confess himself as the hitter, Ashok does nothing. He is too busy to care about Balram in his room. Therefore, Balram feels disappointed to him.

- Climax

In the climax, the conflicts that happen toward the major character are in the turning point. The conflict is happened between Balram and Ashok. Ashok makes Balram disappointed by his ignorants. When Balram's help in unnecessary in the accident hitting the child because it is not report to the police, but no one informs Balram includes Ashok. Ashok only focus playing the game rather than telling the truth to Balram. Besides that, Ashok also ignores Balram when Balram takes care of him after the leaving of Pinky. However, it does not have any sense for Ashok.

At the last, Ashok also ignores Balram when Balram tries to confess his bad thought that he wants to betray Ashok and steal Ashok's red bag which contains much money.

However, the braveness of Balram to admit his plan is ignored by Ashok. As Balram states, “But he wasn’t looking at me. He was busy with the cell phone and its buttons.” (2008: 220). Thus, Balram feels very angry to his master at this part that it is the turning point for Balram. In this point, Balram aware and realize that Ashok insults him as lower caste, by ignoring him who is only the servant. This is the highest part of Balram’s patience.

- Falling Action

In this part, the conflict that is happened between Balram and Ashok in the climax is fixed. He kills Ashok. By killing his master, the angriness, sadness, and disappointed of Balram because he is ignored by Ashok has been already fixed. As he states, “The Stork’s son opened his eyes –just as I pierced his neck- and his lifeblood spurted into my eyes. I was blind. I was a free man.” (2008: 246). According to this quotation, by killing Ashok, he can be a free man, that he can break the caste system in India and changes his life. By this murder, he can revenge to the ignorant of Ashok and he also can reach his dream to raise his caste up because he brings Ashok’s money.

- Resolution

In this part, the conflict has been resolved. Balram who brings Ashok’s red bag which contains much money, has opened a business from that money. By his business, Balram can change his position from the servant to be the master, which means he is included upper caste people. Balram also changes his name by becoming Ashok Sharma, as he states, “Yes, Ashok! That’s what I call myself these days. Ashok Sharma, North Indian entrepreneur, settled in Bangalore.” (2008: 258). Ashok is his ex master’s name. Meanwhile, Sharma is the name that is usually used by the upper caste people, the Brahmin –the highest *Varna*. It aims to show to the reader that he has changed his caste from the lower to the upper caste.

c. Cultural Codes

Hawkes (2003: 96) in his book states that the cultural code is the code that ‘everyone knows’ what the author means of established and authoritative cultural forms. Therefore, the cultural code is the code that is taken from the authoritative cultures which are known by everyone.

- Stereotypes

A stereotype is “the notion or opinion which people have about that group and could equally be applicable to other groups.” (Suryani, 2013: 66). These stereotypes may or may not be true. Furthermore, Master has an opinion about their servants that they are mostly foolish. Yet, it is not merely true at all. It can be seen from Balram that comes from the Darkness but

he can be an entrepreneur, as Balram states, “I am a self-taught entrepreneur.” (2008: 4). According to this quotation, Balram successfully becomes an entrepreneur that he learns on his own. Besides that, the masters think that the servants wait for their master to hit them in order to know that their master cares about them. However, in fact, the servants let the master do anything to them because they are in the Rooster Coop. It can be seen from Balram’s utterance that states, “The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they’re next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop.” (2008: 147). The coop here refers to the caste system in India that the lower caste people are dominated by the upper caste. Thus, the servant receives what the master had done to them without any rebellion since they are in the Rooster Coop. Therefore, the stereotypes of the master that the servants respect the master for the hitting had been in the wrong decision in along time.

- Caste System

The word caste “has its origin from the Spanish word ‘*casta*’, meaning ‘race’.” (National Institute of Open Schooling). However, many people say that there are four castes, they are; *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, and *Shudra*. In fact, these four are are *Varnas*. Yet, those *Varna* is the textual model of Indian social system that is found only in the text today. Whereas, *Jati* is Indian social system that can be found in the reality today. In *Varna*, the status of the person can not be changeable while in *Jati*, one can change one’s status with improved socioeconomic condition (National Institute of Open Schooling). The caste system that exists in *The White Tiger* is *Jati*, because Balram can changes his caste from the lower to be the upper based on his economic condition.

- Dowry System

Haveripeth argues that dowry refers to “the property, money, ornaments or any other form of wealth which a man or his family receives from his wife or her family at the time of marriage.” (in Singh, 2013: 40). It means that, the dowry system in India is different from other places. The dowry in India is given by the women’s family and received by the men’s family. The dowry is given in the time of marriage. In this novel, the practice of the dowry system is also described a little by Adiga in Balram’s family of the wedding of Balram’s cousin-sister, Reena. As he states, “Because we were the girl’s family, we were screwed.” (2008: 30). Therefore, the men’s family will get the advantages from his wedding, unlike the women’s family.

d. Connotative Codes

Connotative code is hint and flickers based on Barthes's explanation. Besides, this code is also known as code of themes or thematic code that the theme of the story is developed by this code. Furthermore, the connotation can be sticking on the characters, and places.

- The Major character

The main character in this novel that comes from the lower caste is known as Balram Halwai. In this case, he has changed his name several times which reflects his characterization. His names have a reflection to his characterization which can lead the reader to theme of the novel.

1. Munna

The name of the main character firstly is 'Munna'. In India, *Munna* means 'boy'. According to the novel, the name of Munna is used before the late childhood. Hurlock (1980: 146) states that during this period, children are in the process of self-development. It means that, the major character is still innocence. Therefore, this name symbolizes the purity of his. Yet, this name is also used by the major character when he has already become a driver and drives his master in Delhi. He introduces his name as Munna to certain character. Through his act, it is shown that the major character can use his name properly. It is his trick to deceive other characters about his characterization.

2. Balram

When the major character enters to the school, his teacher gives him a name, namely Balram. When he enters to the school, it is the period of the late childhood. Hurlock (1980: 167) states that when children enter to the late childhood period, there is an adaptation process or known as self adaptation. Hence, self-development has built in this period to the major character. Furthermore, '*Balram*' itself means the sidekick of the God Khrisna. Therefore, the given name of 'Balram' here indirectly shows that the major character has trapped to be a servant. This name also tries to influence the major character of this novel to be the same characterization as God's sidekick characteristic that is loyal and obedient. It is the progress of the major character from Munna to Balram, from the innocence to the servant.

3. The White Tiger

The White Tiger is the third name of this major character. This name is given by the school's inspector that has an inspection to Balram's school. Balram gets The White Tiger name because the inspector thinks that Balram is the fellow that is different with other kinds of him, just like The White Tiger that is the rarest animal that comes along only once in a generation. He is different from other lower caste people in the Laxmangarh because he has a

hope to change his life in poverty and unlike the others that “they’ve given up the fight” (2008: 46). Through this name, he can break the influence of the name ‘Balram’ from a servant to be an entrepreneur.

4. Ashok Sharma

Ashok Sharma is the last name of the major character of this novel that is created by himself. As he states, “Yes, Ashok! That’s what I call myself these days. Ashok Sharma, North Indian entrepreneur, settled in Bangalore.” (2008: 258). This name is taken from the name of his ex master, Ashok. Meanwhile, Sharma comes from Sanskrit of “*Sarma*”, which means pleasure or protection. Sharma is the name for Brahmin, so that this name is used by the people from the highest caste. Through Ashok Sharma name, he states that he is already successful to raise his caste up, and he has already included as upper caste people.

- Ashok

Ashok is the master of the major character and the Stork’s son. Ashok is different from his father and brother. Ashok also breaks the caste system in India by marrying Pinky Madam, an Indian woman who has been staying in New York for a long time. Therefore, Pinky does not understand about caste system in India. Besides that, according to the caste system in India, the marriage between the same Hindu is also highly recommended. Meanwhile, Pinky Madam is Christian. Thus, Ashok breaks the Indian rule in term of his marriage. It is shown by a Nepali’s utterance that states, “They married in America. When we Indians go there, we lose all respect for caste.” (2008: 65).

- Places

There are several places that develop the theme of the novel. Those places distinguish the upper and the lower caste’s circumstances and leading the reader to theme.

1. Balram’s House

Balram’s house is in the Laxmangarh village. His house is used by all the members of the family. As the lower caste, this place is narrow. It can be seen from Balram’s utterance that states, “At night, they sleep together, their legs falling one over the other, like one creature, a millipede.” (2008: 17). It can be seen that Balram’s house is narrow that all of his entire families are sleep in the same house that their legs are also fallen one to another. It can be concluded that there is no enough space for them to sleep.

2. The Storks’ House

In the Stork's house, as the upper caste people, it is explained in the novel that the house has "ten-foot-high walls, and a cage of iron grilles around each window." (2008: 50). There is the gate, garage which contains two cars, and a courtyard. Furthermore, every spouse of the family has their own room in the Stork's house. There is also a room for the drivers with one big bed. Further, there are two drivers, a guard, and cook in this house. Regarding to this, this place is great because it is kept by for about four servants.

3. Tea Shop

The tea shop is the place in the Laxmangarh that is the central point of the village. In the tea shop, there are many tables and plastic chairs for the customers. There are many coals for the oven. In the outside of the tea shop, there are many rickshaw-puller parked their vehicles, includes Balram's father. In the tea shop, Balram has changed his life. As he states, "And it was in the tea shop...that my life changed." (2008: 44). Therefore, this place gives great impact to Balram that can change Balram's life.

4. The Black Fort

The Black Fort is the hill in the Laxmangarh, in the Darkness. This place is the hill where Balram supposed to go in the childhood. His granny never let him to go to this place which makes him curious into this place. Yet, in the age of twenty-four, he can enter this place. Into this place, people can see the Laxmangarh clearly. Besides that, this place is also used by the people to graze and the place for the Raven to ask the money from the goatherds since the Raven "owned the worst land" (2008: 21).

5. Buckingham Towers B Block

Buckingham Towers B Block is the apartment building that there are many rich people or upper caste are living. This building has more than thirteen floors. This apartment is the best than other building besides it, as Balram states, "Buckingham Towers B Block was one of the best" (2008: 107). This place has a nice big lobby, and an elevator nears it. On the other hand, this building is also contained servant's quarters in the basement.

6. Sahara Mall

Sahara Mall is one of Pinky's favorite malls. Balram is often taking his maters to this mall. There are guards in grays uniform in every floor, and there are also in the door. There are golden lights and air-conditioned airs in this place, and elevators. There are also shops with walls of glass. However, the lower caste people are not allowed to enter this place. This is only the place for the tidy people that wear tidy cloth and shoes or the upper caste. Meanwhile, the lower caste people wear untidy cloth that is dirty, and sandals. Thus, they never allowed to

enter this building. In addition, based on the explanation of the characters and the places above, it can be concluded that the theme of the novel has close relationship toward the lower caste and the upper caste.

e. Symbolic Codes

The symbolic code is the code of 'theme'. Symbolic code discusses the theme based on something that have contrary thing. Furthermore, as it is explained in the connotative codes, it is explained that the theme of this novel has close relationship to the lower and the upper caste. Therefore, the theme of *The White Tiger* novel is the binary opposition between 'lower' and 'upper' caste.

• Lower Caste (Poor) versus Upper Caste (Rich)

In the novel, the contradictions between the upper and the lower are shown very different just as 'rich' and 'poor'. Therefore, they are opposite each other. The binary opposition between poor and rich are shown in the opposition of the Darkness and the Light.

1. The Darkness versus The Light

Adiga as the author of this novel has created an idea of the Darkness and the Light among Indian people. It states in Balram's utterance that says, "... India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness." (2008: 12). Further, the Darkness and the Light are two different places that exist in India. The Darkness identically means dark, black, and poverty, while the Light identically means bright, white, prosperity, and etc. Laxmangarh is the village which is called as the Darkness. It includes the Darkness because anything inside this place includes the people, the facilities, jobs, and education are bad. It can be seen from the utterance of Balram who states:

"Ha!

Electricity poles –defunct.

15

Water tap –broken.

Children –too lean and short for their age, and with oversized heads from which vivid eyes shine, like the guilty conscience of the government of India."

(Adiga, 2008: 16)

According to Balram's statements above, it can be seen that the facilities in the Laxmangarh and the children within it are in bad condition. Therefore, people inside this village are living in improper ways. Besides that, the Darkness is also ruled by the landlords

who own every single thing in the Darkness. Therefore, people within the Darkness are living in poverty. Furthermore, there are many people that have no job in the Darkness because there are lacks of vacancies in this place. Therefore, there is no hope and future in this place. As Balram states, “They have no job to do today. They know they won’t get any job today. They’ve given up the fight.” (2008: 47). Besides that, “There was no doctor in the hospital.” (2008: 40). It means that, the healthiness of the people in the Laxmangarh is in bad condition. In addition, the education of this village is also told in bad condition. As Balram states, “Me, and thousands of others in this country like me, are half-baked, because we were never allowed to complete our schooling.” (2008: 8).

On the other hand, the places that include into the Light in the novel are Bangalore and Delhi. Unlike in the Darkness, there are many job applicants in the Light, and there are also many vacancies for them too. As Balram states “There are twenty, twenty-five pages of job advertisements in the newspaper every week.” (2008: 45). Besides that, there is Max, the private hospital that is famous in Delhi. Unlike in the Darkness, “Doctors walked in and out with long white coats, and stethoscopes in their pockets.” (2008: 154). Not only that, the lobby in this hospital is also clean as clean as the inside of a five-star hotel, unlike in the Darkness that is quite dirty. It can be seen from Balram’s utterance that states, “Kishan and I carried our father in, stamping on the goat turds which had spread like a constellation of black stars on the ground.” (2008: 40).

Furthermore, there are many educated people in the Light. It can be seen from Balram’s utterance who states, “He and Pinky Madam would sit in the back of the car, chatting about life...mixing Hindi and English together...” (2008: 39). It can be seen that people in the Light like Ashok and Pinky Madam have well education that they are able to speak English. They also have good facilities like malls, hotels, apartments, and restaurants, which do not exist in the Darkness. Therefore, this place is called as the Light and this is very different from the Darkness. Thus, the Darkness and the Light are opposite each other.

In addition, the binary opposition of Darkness and Light are like the binary opposition of ‘black’ and ‘white’ that are shown very often in the story. Further, the colors of The White Tiger are the combination of black and white too. Therefore, the theme of the novel is The White Tiger itself. Meanwhile, The White Tiger here refers to the major character of this novel. Therefore, the whole story of this novel is talking about the life journey of the major character from the Darkness to the Light, or from the lower caste to the upper caste.

Conclusion

This study concludes that this novel can be analyzed by using the theory of Roland Barthes which is divided into five narrative codes. First, the hermeneutic codes are found in the title of this novel and the explanation in the first chapter of the poster that concludes the major character as fugitive. Second, proairetic codes are found in exposition, complication, climax, falling action and resolution, and this novel included into flashback and flash forward structure. Third, the cultural codes are found in the stereotypes, caste system, and dowry system. Forth, the connotative codes are found from the characters of Balram and Ashok and the places of the lower caste and the upper caste. Therefore, the theme of the novel is the relation of the lower and the upper caste. The last, the symbolic code is the code of theme of the binary opposition between lower and upper caste or the Darkness and the Light. As the result, the White Tiger is the theme of the novel since it is also the opposition of the Darkness and the Light or 'black' and 'white'.

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