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Prof. Sonba Salve



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 Prof. Sonba Salve^{1*}

Professor of English Literature, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad,
India

*Corresponding Author's Email: sonba@efluniversity.ac.in



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Abstract

Proverbs are short and complex linguistic tools used in conversations as well as texts. Their brevity and power of expression is utilized by speakers and writes to say much with fewer words. Proverbs are used in literature such as dramas and novels. Writers use them to enhance meaning in their stories and create perspectives to make the unbelievable become believable. The perceived inherent general truth and element of universality of wisdom in proverbs is the reason as to why it is an important tool of writers who strive to convince their readers. Aravind Adiga has used proverbs in his novel, *The White Tiger* to that effect. This article is an investigation as to how the novelist has employed proverbs in the novel to create an enhanced sense of meaning. It explores the stylistical value they have added to his narration and the reason why the writer has depended on using proverbs in his work.

Keywords: *Paremiology, Enhance Meaning, Sensationalize, Proverb, Irony, Sarcasm, Poetic Form, Wisdom, General Truth, Style*

INTRODUCTION

There are different definitions given to ‘proverb’ by different writers and in different times. But one definition which has endured the test of time and has encapsulated the essence of the word is Cervantes’ definition. Elizabeth C. Hood writes in her article:

CERVANTES defined proverbs as "short sentences drawn from long experience." Certainly brevity is the most striking aspect of the linguistic form of proverbs, and an effective way of demonstrating its value is by an etymological study such as the following: I should be foolish to release the bird I have in my hand, in order to pursue another. Aesop, Fables: The Nightingale and the Hawk (c. 570 B.C.) Of more worth is one bird in the hand than two in the bush. J. Werner, Latin Sprichwörter, p. 70 (c. 1400) A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. John Bunyan, Pilgrim's Progress, Pt. 1 (1678). (Hood 972)

The use of proverbs in literature, especially in drama and novels is quite common and effective way of communicating congested ideas in a short and simplified manner. When writers use proverbs, it gives some form of innate credibility to the argument they are pushing on in their texts. The main reason for this is that the place of proverbs in any society is high and its legitimacy is almost guaranteed as a method of transmitting wisdom. For this reason, writers or speakers often say their proverbs with initials such as “the ancestors say”, “wise people say”, “our fathers say”, and so on.

When the source of the proverb is a holy text, then, the message is taken with even more sense of trust by audience as the source of the proverb is considered to be a divine authority. To this effect, writers employ proverbs in their writings when they want to make a statement about a certain philosophy or argument they want the reader to take in. On a literary aspect, proverbs sensationalize and give colour and art to the way a story is narrated. So their role in enhancing meaning in texts is very high and effective.

Aravand Adiga’s novel, *The White Tiger* has employed proverbs as part of its literary elements and style of ancient Indian mythology. This is primarily done to enhance meaning in the novel and to clarify beyond ordinary phrases and sentences the power struggle between the haves and the have-nots in the society of that time. With a mixture of original and ancient proverbs from the communal conversation practice, Adiga has been able to create a stylistical use of proverbs in his novel. The novel narrates with proverbial flair how the majority of the society of the time, which the novel is concerned about, were living in a ‘rooster coop’ sort of life struggle for survival. The proverbs help the reader in understanding the need on the side of the rich sector of the society for control and the struggle of the poor to break free.

The resistance against freedom is described in a proverbial way as having to come even from the people held in the ‘rooster coop’ themselves. They don’t have an adequate experience to understand freedom and to fight for it the right way. They were caught in a kind of a syndrome, which held them captive against their own kind who were fighting for their freedom. For the rich people the narrative is important as it was a guarantor of the status quo, which was perfectly working for them at the expense of the poor. The poor, even when they are not resisting, they are timid and amenable for exploitation by foreign invaders. As a result of this failure to fight for their freedom, the exploiters find it easy to want to continue exploiting them. However, everything changes when the protagonist Balram takes matters into his own hands and fights for

freedom with questionable tactics. He is finally able to raise himself out of his situation through murdering his own master. The narrator in Aravind Adiga spends almost all of his time trying to justify the actions of Balram Halwal as a necessary for the struggle against economic oppression. It seems that the only way to explain such kind of an uncouth behavior was through a strong linguistic metaphorical style of proverbs that he uses them in abundance.

In Aravind Adiga's *the White Tiger*, the narrator Balram Halwal effectively uses the following proverb in order to show the power of money. He says "The moment you show cash, everyone knows your language." (Adiga 142). He cites how a corrupt police inspector changed his demeanor when the narrator bribed him with a bag full of money. The police man even asked for more money, which the narrator complied with more. As it were, the corrupt officer never hesitated to help the narrator after seeing the money. So, Aravind Adiga used the proverb to make a statement with the brevity and appeal of universality of a proverb to make a statement about the state of systemic corruption in the novel.

Adiga uses another proverb to change the conversation and show the other side of life in his story. That side was not the side of the rich and corrupt sectors of the society. It was the poverty which was rampant in his portrayal of postcolonial India. Instead of going a long way to explain what a poor man looks like, he gives the reader a picture of what a poor man's body signifies when he says: "The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen." (Adiga 22). This is a strong proverbial expression showing the reader an image of poverty in a few words in *The White Tiger*. Ironically, he narrates the contrast between the body of the poor man and that of the rich man in order to show the wealth gap that was rampant in the society. Wolfgang Mieder writes:

The internationally known paremiologist and literary critic Bartlett Jere Whiting rightfully warns that "the excerpting of proverbs from of a particular author should not be undertaken unless a special is clearly held in view." 6 By "special purpose" he most surely does mean the mere collecting of proverbs out of literary sources, for antiquarian "concern of folklorists with the identification [of proverbs nothing else] has resulted in sterile study of folklore for folklore's and it is precisely this emphasis on text and neglect of context estranged so many literary critics . . . Folklorists plunge into literary sources and emerge with dry lists of motifs and proverbs lifted from literary context ... A folklorist zoho limits his analysis to identification has stopped before asking any of the really important questions about material" 7 (my emphasis). (Mieder 611)

The above assertion by Meider shows us that it doesn't take a paremiologist (one who studies proverbs) to explicate the meaning of proverbs and sayings in a story. The reader quickly catches up in understanding and leaves the text with a certain amount of satisfaction of having added a proverb, which they could employ in their conversations and dealings, to their linguistic bank. However, writers always use proverbs with intention of stressing the importance of something they want the reader to understand and memorize for a long time afterwards.

As a result of its poetic form, exalted legitimacy, and sensational appeal, then a proverb makes the need for long explanations to be replaced with highly charged and brief musical sentences or phrases. A proverb will substitute for as much as a paragraph or more. For this reason, the reader makes a careful effort that the message that is intended to be disseminated and the proverb used are compatible and not haphazardly put, just for the heck of it.

Similarly, Aravind Adiga makes use of such proverbs that would go a long distance in increasing the reader's knowledge and wisdom in proverbs when he addresses the reader as "you". The narrator in *The White Tiger* says: "The moment you recognize what is beautiful in this world, you stop being a slave." (Adiga 131). Apart from its use in the conversation and context in the story, this proverb has a propensity to remain with the reader as a philosophy of life and as an advice.

The reader is likely to get more than understanding the meaning of what is being narrated in the story and would be satisfied from the reading experience. He mentions what aesthetic value one could get by looking at the Ganga, at the National Zoo in the Heart of New Delhi, trees, forts, lakes, bird life, greenery, poetry, music and many other beautiful things could be enough to liberate one from mental bondage. Adiga also uses a proverbial statement about being around old books does to people even without a reading experience. He says: "Strange thoughts brew in your heart when you spend too much time with old books." (122)

The writer or the speaker may need to add a little bit of explanation or illustration after the use of a proverb in their text or conversation. But it is absolutely minimal compared to what they would need to say or write had they not used one. It helps them provide an answer to the audience and make analogy in a philosophical way. By making things easier and by griping the attention of their audience, it provides conclusions, answers, justifications, and implied puns to their arguments. The reader will not only see them as acceptable and appealing as well as beautiful expressions but also will take advice and wisdom from them. There is a sense of general truth and universality that proverbs provide for conversation or narration that a very complicated issue could be answered with a good proverb.

Writers employ proverbs in anticipation of readers' beliefs, values and anxieties that the latter would find the former as speaking for them or saying what was close to their hearts. Their highly charged poetic nature of form would also lead to a dramatic feeling of arousal or mind control on the readers to take action about something they had already been identifying with. They take the proverb's value beyond understanding the text at hand to a level of using it as a guide in their future lives. As proverbs are ready-made expressions, the reader doesn't need to possess a high level of creativity in using them. The only effort needed from the writer is selection of the right proverbs to express the right topic an association with few ordinary explanations. So they might not demonstrate the writer's witticism or creativity but a healthy skill of connotation. According to Joyce Bynum:

Proverbs provide a ready-made answer, thus rescuing the speaker from thinking of an original phrase or course of action; personal opinions or advice are usually not appreciated, in any case. In their use they are similar to superstitions, since both try to control anxiety situations, either actively to recommend a specific, immediate course of action, or passively to provide consolation. Archer Taylor, often called "the father of paremiology" said of proverbs, "As a guide to life's problems, the proverb summarizes a situation, passes a judgment, or offers a course of action." (Bynum 90)

Aravind Adiga justifies the way the poverty stricken characters in his novels were acting and the behavior of other characters. He stresses the fact that the background of the person is important before jumping into judgments about people. He says: "You can't expect a man in a dung heap to smell sweet." (24-5). The proverb is used as a ready-made answer to the questions that the reader

might raise when reading about certain characters' discourses or actions. He uses this proverb to justify the behavior of a teacher who stole money. A teacher is supposed to lead by example and not steal at all but the narrator explains with this proverb and the circumstances of the teacher that he was not paid his salary and that he had no other choice but to involve in the theft. The teacher even goes as far as selling students' uniforms as his salary was not paid. The use of such a strong proverb makes the reader feel as though they would have done the same had they been in the teacher's shoes.

Even though proverbs are not necessarily inventions of the writer in many cases, they do, however get appreciation as signs of robust stylistics when one uses them in literature. Their usage in literature comes with great responsibility as the reader demands that the narrator uses them appropriately and in a way that enhances the intended meaning. Any proverb which is inserted for the sake of proverbial use in literature would be quickly noticed and would fire back at the stylistical failure on the side of the author. For this reason, the story told and the argument presented need to be closely tied up to the proverb used. In many occasions, writers may coin their own proverbs and use them in their stories. A successful usage of such original proverbs would definitely result in stylistical novelty and greatness of the writer's name. That is the reason why writers have to be cautious that a more critical reader may study the usage of proverbs in literature separately from the entire conversation in the text just for their stylistical appraisal. Abrahams and Babcock write:

As a way of talking, set apart from the flow of conversation by their poetic and self-referring aspects, proverbs demand that we regard them separately from the rest of the discourse and in terms of a different set of stylistic rules. They are minimal devices of verbal art, which involve as an element of their artifice, a switching of communicational codes, from the (apparently) spontaneous and casual to a more formal and stylized code. This switching is even more self-conscious when proverbs are employed in a literary context. (Abrahams and Babcock 416 – 17)

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga has a narrator who dedicates much of his time convincing readers about why some of his characters are involved in questionable deeds. While trying to justify the ruthlessness of the criminality in which Balram Halwal is involved in order to elevate himself from his state of poverty, the narrator also gives a perspective in to what the mentality of the rich people in the novel is like. The following proverb shows how the poor want to break out of the chains of their poverty while the rich want to keep the status quo as long as it was working for them. The rich dream of trivial things while for the majority poor people it is a matter of survival itself. He says: "The dreams of the rich and the dreams of the poor – they never overlap, do they?" (Adiga 109). He cites an example of how the rich exercise every evening to lose weight while the poor are in a constant fight to find their daily meal. He further strengthens this polarity of dreams between the rich and the poor when he says the rich don't value freedom as they already are free while the poor are ever dreaming of freedom with all their hearts. He says: "Free people don't know the value of freedom, that's the problem." (Adiga 61)

Apart from the poetic aesthetic that proverbs give to the style of the writer in literature, they also help in creating a sense of irony and elements of surprise. The writer may avoid having to use elongated explanations whenever trying to give a twist in a story just by employing the right set of proverbs. They are short and poetic in form and can bring down a constructed or presumed expectation in a different direction with their brevity and power of expression. The use of animal

analogies in the form of proverbs to represent some behavior of characters in a story is one such useful means. Different animals are used to represent different behaviors. The irony or sarcastic way of narration using proverbs adds vigor and stylistical elegance to a story. That's why they are very important elements of writers' tools in literary texts. According to Ruth Finnegan:

Irony or sarcasm as a way of getting at someone is, of course, widespread in many forms, but the proverb is a particularly good way of conveying this. This kind of implicit attack on another, already mentioned in the context of a formal law case, sometimes takes more unusual forms. An example is the elliptical language of names. Through this people can refer to another's fault while at the same time avoiding any direct commitment. (Finnegan 399)

In Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, proverbs are used which have animal connotations in them to imply the behaviors of different people. The title of the book itself is a personification of the wild animal tiger to represent a loner character of a human being who is very brave, careful and effective in what he does. The narrator uses a proverb to enhance the choice of the animal allegory to his protagonist Balram Halwal. He says: "A White Tiger keeps no friends. It's too dangerous." (Adiga 144). He clarifies why he lives in solitude and doesn't keep friends as he doesn't want to risk trusting other people which would mean exposure of his dark secrets and eventually dangerous for him.

In conclusion, proverbs are short and poetic sentences which are used in conversations and in texts to express general and universal truths beyond the topic of the moment. They could be old ones which had been coined by a known or unknown person or a community of people. Sometimes they have spiritual and divine connotations that people generally view them with respect and accept their connotations in their day-to-day lives. There is an inherent tendency by people to view proverbs as words of wisdom said by wise people for higher and novel purposes. The role of the writer is to identify which proverb fits his or her narrative style and his audience's desire and use them effectively to win the argument they push thorough in their stories.

The use of proverbs in literature enhances meaning and gives a stylistical advantage to the text. The proverbs used in literature vary from old ones used by society or novel ones coined by the author of a particular literary text. They provide the reader with a ready-made answer and conclusion to what otherwise could be a complicated affair to fathom. As a result, writers use them to create credibility and stylistical flair to their stories. Proverbs also save a great deal of the writer's effort to extensively explain an argument as one short proverb could be loaded with a heavy connotations and be powerful enough to explain a vast amount of experience in just a short sentence or a phrase. The brevity and poetic nature of the proverbial form makes it quite appealing for proverbs for the reader to appreciate and get satisfaction from its stylistical beauty.

Aravind Adiga has utilized proverbs in his novel, *The White Tiger* effectively to show irony and sarcasm but also enhance meaning and perspective to his narration. In his understanding of the need to navigate through with a highly controversial issue of criminality and its justification, he depends highly on his carefully selected and sometimes novel proverbs. Together with the other elements of literary art in the novel, proverbs contribute to our understanding of the novel in much deeper and philosophical ways.

The story, which the narrator in *The White Tiger* narrates, has some difficult situations, which are very difficult to accept in terms of morality. In order to present the immoral protagonist as a hero, the writer had to use extraordinary narrative skills and stylistically appealing language. The philosophy and the narrative style combine to create an ironic world in which morality and basic human decency are challenged in the quest by the oppressed lower class people who had no other way of survival apart from a violent fight. The use of irony, sarcasm, dark humor and proverbs come handy for the narrator to be able to produce a pseudo-reality in which the reader is invited to open for thinking outside the box.

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