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Translating Darkness into Light: A Cultural Semiotics Reading of the Nation and the Region in *The White Tiger*

Sachin Ketkar
Professor,
Department of English
Faculty of Arts,
The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda,
Vadodara, Gujarat

Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* (2008) an epistolatory novel written as a series of letters to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao by the protagonist Balram Halwai, a semi-literate son of a rickshaw-puller from a small village near Gaya, 'the India of Darkness' begins as:

'Sir ……Neither you nor I speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English… (3)' and goes on to reveal how the picture of India, Indian society, culture, politics and economy as promoted by the state and the elite hardly corresponds to the actual lived reality of millions of ordinary Indians and their everyday struggles, and goes on to challenge the official version of India as an emergent superpower and the land of opportunity.

Such a situation in the fictional text is culturally significant for several reasons. First though neither the narrator nor the addressee of the text is a speaker of English, the author and the implied audience of the text are speakers of English. This brings up the long familiar questions of cultural location and identity of Indian Writing in English and the well-worn charges of 'inauthencity' and 'playing it to the gallery' leveled against Indian Writing in English by the nationalists and nativists.

Secondly, such a fictional situation reveals that 'India' does not exist as an ontologically fixed entity whose truth can be revealed in a singular narrative, but existing more as a mode of narrative, a semiotic system, a language, which is open to contestations and alternative narrations, and whose functions vary according to its cultural contexts.

Besides, the fact that the novel is addressed to the Chinese Premier indicates a shift in geopolitics. The novel turns out to be dealing with cultural change in contemporary times, in a satirical and unsentimental way.

The paper explores these questions using the methodological framework of cultural semiotics as elaborated by the scholars of the Tartu- Moscow School of Semiotics under the leadership of the Russian cultural theoretician Yuri M. Lotman (1922-1993). The paper argues

that like any other literature in the world, Indian Writing in English is as much created by the process of translation and like any other literature in the world; it can be read as realization of the culture that produces it. Besides, like any other literature in the world, the texts of Indian writing in English are shaped by its audience. Hence the accusations of inauthenticity and playing to gallery made against Indian writing in English are theoretically redundant and are products of the asymmetry and skewed place of English *vis a vis* other languages on the sub-continent and its association with the process of colonialization and modernization

In the light of this framework, we can view the nation and the region as historical constructs, as semiotic languages or 'secondary modelling systems' whose function is to generate self-description, identity, structuredness and order in a given culture and divide 'us' from 'them'. When Balram Halwai, a semi-literate son of a rickshaw-puller from a small village near Gaya , 'the India of Darkness' , finds himself compelled to speak in English, the language of globalization, and ' the India of Light', to the Premier of China, our ' new big (br)other', the paper argues that the novel can be read as an allegory of *the aam aadmi's* unfinished struggle for freedom from 'The Rooster Coop' and ethical anomie of Indian culture in the face of the dismal failure of both anti-colonial model of national culture (often based on the glorification of 'national' or great traditions) and the post-colonial model of national culture (often based on the glorification of the regional, 'little' or desi traditions) in the globalized world to come up with adequate models of self-descriptions and generate structuredness and order.

Before detailed engagement with the issues, it would be in order to have a brief overview of the theoretical framework used here. Cultural semiotics or the Semiotics of Culture, a Soviet branch of poststructuralist cultural studies critiques and goes beyond the Saussurean and the Peircean model of semiotics and communication by applying more holistic approach, and incorporating findings of information theory, cybernetics, natural sciences and mathematics, especially the ideas of chaos, complexity and system thinking. It also draws upon the ideas from soviet philosophical schools like the Russian Formalism and the Bakhtin circle and the thinkers like Vernadsky and Vladimir Propp.

Lotman and Uspensky (1978) point out that **'**culture' in cultural semiotics implies "the *nonhereditary memory of the community*, a memory expressing itself in a system of constraints and prescriptions". Culture can be presented as an aggregate of texts; however, from the point of view of the researcher, it is more exact to consider culture *as a mechanism* creating an aggregate

of texts and *texts as the realization of culture*. "The fundamental "task" of culture… is in *structurally organizing the world around man*. Culture is the generator of structuredness, and in this way it creates a social sphere around man which, like the biosphere, makes life possible; that is, not organic life, but social life. But in order for it to fulfill that role, culture must have within itself a structural "diecasting mechanism." It is this function that is performed by natural language." Natural language is thus considered to be the 'primary modelling system'.

Literature belongs to what Lotman terms as 'secondary modelling systems'. The secondary modelling systems are the ones which are modeled upon the primary modelling system i.e. natural language and involve translation into natural language. Explaining these concepts, Umberto Eco (1990) notes, "Semiotic systems are models which explain the world in which we live (obviously, in explaining the world, they also construct it, and in this sense, even at this early stage, Lotman saw semiotics as a cognitive science). Among all these systems, language is the primary modelling system and we apprehend the world by means of the model which language offers. Myths, cultural rules, religion, the language of art and of science are secondary modelling systems. We must therefore also study these semiotic systems which, since they lead us to understand the world in a certain way, allow us to speak about it."

Lotman in an article "Culture as a Subject and Object for Itself" notes that the main question of semiotics of culture is the problem of meaning generation (Cited by Peeter Torop, 2005).

The conventional understanding of communication and meaning generation can be captured by the famous Jakobson Model of communication (1960) which demonstrates how a message is transmitted by an addresser, to an addressee using an identical code and connected by a channel. It implies that what one says and what the other understands is exactly the same and that the addresser and the addressee have not just an identical code but also identical personal and cultural memory. It also implies that the transfer of meaning is a predictable process. This obviously is a simplification. It also does not explain how memory is stored in culture nor does it explain generation of new meaning.

The cultural semiotics model of communication is based on the view that what one says and what the other understands is not exactly the same and that the addresser and the addressee have non-identical memories. It implies that communication *is not entirely a predictable process.* Besides, the very idea of code, Lotman notes (2004), "carries with it the idea of an artificial, newly created structure, introduced by instantaneous agreement. A code does not imply history,

that is, psychologically it orients us towards artificial language, which is also, in general, assumed to be an ideal model of language. "Language", albeit unconsciously, awakes in us an image of the historical reach of existence. Language – is a code plus its history. (4)". A minimally functioning semiotic structure consists of not one artificially isolated language or text in that language, but of a parallel pair of mutually untranslatable languages which are, however, connected by a 'pulley', which is translation (1990:2). Cultural semiotics defines meaning as translation. Interpreting, reading and understanding are essentially processes of translation involving more than one semiotic system. Translation does not become an low-grade process of derivation but the very *basic* process of meaning-generation. Hence to label the process of translation as inauthentic would imply that all significant human activities are inauthentic.

If *all* meaning generation involves translation between semiotic systems, it would also imply that translation is the meaning-generating mechanism that underlies *all texts* including the literary ones, in *all* the languages and not just natural ones. In such a case, the texts classified as Indian Writing in English would be seen involving translation, which is not just translation in an obvious sense (e.g. from other Indian languages into English by the writer or from English to the reader's first language), but translations of multiple semiotic systems like dressing and fashion, food and cuisine, religion and the political discourses ('secondary modelling systems') and so on into one's first natural language ('primary modelling system'). Very often, the translation is from a visual experience into the verbal one.

Here one instance of how the writer has ' translated' the region – Laxmangarh-(the India of Darkness) into the trans-regional language, the language of ' Light' - for the Premier of China of course:

> There is one street in the village; a bright strip of sewage splits it into two. On either side of the ooze, a market: three more or less identical shops selling more or less identically adulterated and stale items of rice, cooking oil, kerosene, biscuits, cigarettes and jiggery. At the end of the market is a tall, whitewashed, cone like tower, with black intertwining snakes painted on all its sides- the temple. Inside, you will find an image of a saffron-colored creature, half man, half monkey: this is Hanuman, everyone's favourite god in the Darkness.

This leads us straight to the central theme of the novel:

> Do you know about Hanuman, sir? He was the faithful servant of the god Rama, and we worship him in our temples because he is a shining example of how to serve your masters with absolute fidelity, love and devotion.
>
> These are the kinds of gods they have foisted on us, Mr Jiabao. Understand, now, how hard it is for a man to win his freedom in India (19).

The central theme of the novel: an ordinary Indian's struggle for freedom from what Balram Halwai would call 'the Great Indian Rooster Coop'. It also questions the whole elite metropolitan idea of entrepreneurship when in reality, "the trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy '(175).

The explanation of who Hanuman was or what a village in India is like is largely for people who are unfamiliar with these things, the non-Indian readers of the Indian Writing in English, of course. This brings us to the familiar accusation of Indian Writing in English as being a product meant to be sold overseas, rather than being for local consumption.

Lotman (1990) notes that any text is a 'process of movement', and that the communication with another person is only possible if there is some degree of common memory (63). The audience or the community of Indian Writing in English is different from the audience or the communities of many regional literatures as it is more scattered across the globe. It is inevitable that the Indian English has to *translate* what is regional and culture-specific into something which is trans-regional and trans-cultural in order to communicate. This translation does not make it 'in-authentic'. The only thing we can say theoretically that it is differently shaped owing to its readership.

Though Indian English may not have a single community of speakers, it has a trans-regional 'interliterary community' or the communities, according to the Slovak comparativist Dionyz Durisin (1984), which share interliterary processes and the communities which are related in an interliterary way. These are the spaces and communities which have shaped and consumed the archive of Indian Writing in English to the large extent.

Apart from seeing all meaning as translation, cultural semiotics sees meaning generation, 'as the ability both of culture *as a whole* and of its parts to put out, in the "output", nontrivial new texts' (Cited by Peeter Torop, 2005). This holistic emphasis is a distinctive feature of cultural

semiotics. Lotman argues that the Jakobson model of semiotics is largely 'atomistic', that is it starts from a single, simple element – a sign or a single communicative act based on the Jakobson's model. Such a model is reductive one as it reduces the complexity of the object to be studied to a totality of simple. He points out, "A schema consisting of addresser, addressee and the channel linking them together is not yet a working system. For it to work it has to be 'immersed' in semiotic space. All participants in the communicative act must have some experience of communication, be familiar with semiosis. So, paradoxically, semiotic experience precedes the semiotic act. (1990: 123)"

The Jakobsonian mono-semantic systems do not exist in isolation. They function only by being immersed in a specific semiotic continuum, which is filled with multi-variant semiotic models situated at a range of hierarchical levels. Such a continuum Lotman, by analogy with the concept of "biosphere" introduced by V. I. Vernadsky, calls the 'semiosphere'. (1984: 206). Against the traditional reductive and atomistic model of semiotics, Lotman proposes a holistic and complex model. He says, "Just as, by sticking together individual steaks, we don't obtain a calf, but by cutting up a calf, we may obtain steaks, — in summarizing separate semiotic acts, we don't obtain a semiotic universe. On the contrary, only the existence of such a universe — the semiosphere —makes the specific signatory act real (208)." The unit of semiosis, the smallest functioning mechanism is not the separate language but the whole semiotic space of the culture in question.

Just Punjabi literature can be read as realization of Punjabi semiosphere; Indian Writing in English can be read as a realization of Indian English semiosphere. It would be useful here to look at the theoretical notion of semiosphere in greater detail.

The semiosphere is that synchronic semiotic space which fills the borders of culture, without which separate semiotic systems cannot function or come into being. It is defined as, "the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages, not the sum total of different languages; in a sense the semiosphere has a prior existence and is in constant interaction with languages. In this respect a language is a function, a cluster of semiotic spaces and their boundaries, which, however clearly defined these are in the language's grammatical self-description, in the reality of semiosis are eroded and full of transitional forms. Outside the semiosphere there can be neither communication, nor language. (Lotman 1990: 122-123)."

Other two chief attributes of the semiosphere are its internal heterogeneity and asymmetry. The languages which fill up the semiotic space are various (heterogeneous), and they relate to each other along the spectrum which runs from complete mutual translatability to just as complete mutual untranslatability i.e. they are asymmetrical. With the mechanism of translation as the primary mechanism of meaning-generation, the entire semiosphere is considered as generator of information. (127). Lotman notes, asymmetry is apparent in the relationship between the centre of the semiosphere and its periphery. At the centre of the semiosphere are formed the most developed and structurally organized languages, and in first place the natural language of that culture. The discourses of self-description, including 'criticism' and theorization such as the one presented in this essay (as semiosphere studying itself, as culture studying itself) can be thought of as one of the unifying mechanisms of a semiosphere.

Using this notion, we can visualize, 'Gujarati' or 'Marathi 'semiosphere with the natural language of self-description at its core and multiplicity of complete and partial semiotic systems (languages) like clothing, recipes, political systems, caste system, visual languages of cinema, TV serials, commercial banners, architecture, literary and folk traditions of art and so on.

Indian English, as a language, obviously functions in a cultural context which is dissimilar from Anglophone native speaker varieties. If we are to conceptualize Indian English semiosphere we notice that it is steeped in the contexts of *multiplicity* of cultures and at its centre is the structure of English. It functions on the boundary lines of the bhashas (or non-English Indian languages) and is peripheral to the native speaker varieties of English. It may not have a territory of its own or community of its own, but has multiple territories and communities. This globalized semiosphere occupies non-bhasha spaces *within* bhashas cultures like dressing (jeans, tea-shirts ,shirt, trousers etc), city planning and architecture (there is no such thing like Marathi architecture today), technology, education, corporate work cultures, non-Indian films (primarily Hollywood), news, television , media- Web1.0 and 2.0…in short contemporary urban cosmopolitan/metropolitan spaces and small town educational institutions.

In the domain of Indian English fiction, you have writers from diversity of ethnic and cultural diversity brought together by a common language. The writers like Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth , Anita Desai and Kiran Desai write from multiplicity of urban locations abroad ('Diasporic 'writings) , while writers like Kiran Nagarkar, Shashi Tharoor, Vilas Sarang Aravind Adiga, Arundhati Roy write from urban

locations like Mumbai, New Delhi and Bangalore in India. Though these writers write in English, their works are in a dialogic and translational relationship to non-English Indian languages. This access to diversity of territories, cultural geographies, and heterogeneous semiotic spaces implies that instead of mourning over absence of geographical analogue or territorial locale, one can argue that Indian English semiosphere covers a great range of geographical territories and cultural locations. Hence instead of Chitre's view that the Indian English writer "is forced into an inner territory or surrogate landscape as a substitute for a linguistic homeland", we can see that she has an access to several geographical and cultural landscapes. She lives in a home with multiple homes.

While something like Gujarati semiosphere would cover Gujarat as a regional territory and a scattered Gujarati Diaspora, Indian English semiosphere would cover spaces like Shillong, Cuttack, Goa as well as many metropolitan locations across India and abroad. However, according cultural semiotics, Indian English semiosphere is not structurally very different from Gujarati or Tamil. What Indian English semiosphere lacks is its own traditional semiotic systems or what the Tartu- Moscow school terms as 'secondary modeling systems' like myths, festivals, cuisine, religious customs, castes, and so on, which it usually translates into itself from the regional cultures. This cultural material translated from multiplicity of spaces is critical for its identity. This lack of a range of traditional secondary modelling systems is another pertinent characteristic of Indian English semiosphere. However, the presence of this semiosphere alters the contexts in which the secondary modelling systems from other Indian languages function, e.g. the Gujarati festival of *garba* in a corporate cosmopolitan setup.

In Adiga's novel we come across many asymmetries which are typical to the Indian English semiosphere. Apart from the distinction between the India of Darkness and the India of Light, Balram Halwai makes another distinction which is actually a hierarchy, an asymmetry:

> I should explain to you, Mr. Jiabao, that in this country, we have two kinds of men: 'Indian' liquor men and 'English' liquor men. 'Indian' liquor was for village boys like me- toddy, arrack, country hooch. 'English' liquor naturally is for the rich (75).

You can also read this novel as an attempt to translate the world of 'Indian' liquor into the language of 'English' liquor: translation of country hooch into English whiskey.

English obviously is in an asymmetrical and unequal relation to bhashas, the non-English Indian languages. There is a widespread perception that it can provide an easy access to material success in life and it creates a boundary between people into 'English haves' and 'English-have not's, giving rise to lot of resentment. This historical asymmetry, as a mechanism, makes possible its dual and contradictory deployment as a language of oppression and othering (due to its use by the colonizers and postcolonial elites) as well as language of liberation and modernity (as often articulated by the Dalit, or even by some conservatives like Vishnu Shashtri Chiplunkar (1850-1892) who called English *vidya* 'the Milk of Tigress'). Most of the political discourse regarding English in India works with this contradiction.

Indian English as a dialect of English is again in a hierarchic asymmetrical relationship with the Anglophone native varieties. This gives rise to the perception that proximity to the Anglophone variety implies intrinsic cultural superiority and the dialect-like variations are merely parodies or butts of jokes (e.g. Ezekiel's 'Very Indian Poems in Indian English' or Rushdie's comments about chutneyfication of English) or depicting 'local colour', necessary for representing one's rootedness-basically implying its secondariness or inferiority.

There is of course a presence of *asymmetries* and hierarchies with the urban and modernist varieties having a privileged presence and the romantic and small town writings (like from the North East) occupying the margins. These urban languages are in a translational relationship with non-English languages and translate multiple semiotic systems from the regional languages, and many of Indian English poets are accomplished translators from the regional languages. These asymmetries play a critical role in canon formation of Indian English literature. All semiospheres and cultures have in built mechanisms of asymmetries and hence Indian English semiosphere is no different structurally from other semiospheres.

Another significant attribute of the semiosphere, in cultural semiotics is the notion of the boundary. Every culture begins by dividing the world into 'its own' internal space, and 'their' external space. Paradoxically, the internal space of a semiosphere is at the same time unequal yet unified, asymmetrical yet uniform. Composed as it is of conflicting structures, it none the less is also marked by individuation. One of the primary mechanisms of semiotic individuation is the boundary. This space is 'ours', 'my own', it is 'cultured', 'safe', 'harmoniously organized', and so on. By contrast 'their space' is 'other', 'hostile', 'dangerous', 'chaotic'. (Lotman 1990:131).

The notion of boundary, in cultural semiotics, is an ambivalent one: it both separates and unites. It is always the boundary of something and so belongs to both frontier cultures, to both contiguous semiospheres. The boundary is bilingual and polylingual. The boundary is a mechanism for translating texts of an alien semiotics into 'our' language, it is the place where what is 'external' is transformed into what is internal', it is a filtering membrane which so transforms foreign texts that they become part of the semiosphere's internal semiotics while still retaining their own characteristics (Lotman 1990: 136-137). The internal boundaries between multiple languages and the external boundaries between the semiosphere are semiotic hotspots, the translational sites for meaning generation.

The boundary English vs. non- English is a translational space and text-generating mechanism of great power and has played a significant role in constituting 'world literature' in the sense discussed by David Damrosch (2003), not as a canon of texts but as mode of circulation, reading and recontextualization in translation. In the context of Indian English this boundary marks off the space of English from non-English spaces which might be those of non-English Indian languages as well as non-English world languages. This is the translational boundary which assimilates non- texts and languages into English. This is boundary generates translated texts, idioms, codes, words from the bhashas (non-English Indian languages) into English leading to its 'chutnification' or ' biryanification' of English, as well as generation of translated texts from other Indian languages in English, e.g. translations of significant literary texts by writers like AK Ramanujan, Dilip Chitre, among others. It also generates texts from other global languages into English, for example, Vikram Seth's translation of Chinese poetry.

This is also the boundary which generates texts in the non-English Indian languages and has played extremely important role in not only assimilating non- Indian texts, codes and languages into these languages but also translating texts from one *bhashas* into other via English translation. The translation from non- Indian texts, codes , languages into bhashas have played a critical role in shaping not just various literary movements like modernisms in Indian languages but also major literary genres like the novel , and the short story in non- English Indian languages. The reception and impact of World Literature in non- English Indian languages would not have been what it is without English. The 'English'- 'non-English' boundary is constitutive not just of Indian Writing in English but also modern literatures in other Indian languages. Besides, this boundary is critical not only to literature but also other cultural

phenomenon like films, TV soaps (e.g. the 'reality shows' like the Big Boss), popular music and so on.

The boundary 'Indian' –'non-Indian' is a far more problematic phenomenon as what constitutes 'Indian' cultural space involves the contested and tricky category of 'nation'. However, I would like to focus on what can be termed 'Indian culture' from a cultural semiotics perspective. As India has historically been a land of diverse communities, each with memory systems of their own, and with multiplicity of natural languages we obviously cannot conceptualize a singular monolithic 'Indian culture' with a single language and memory system at its core.

Efforts to consciously generate such a type of 'national' culture on the Indian subcontinent can be traced to the colonial period and is intimately connected to the project of anticolonial nationalism and modernity. Theorists such as Partha Chatterjee (2010) note how the Euro-American models of modernity and nation were not adopted wholesale as Benedict Anderson's analysis of nationalism and modernity (1991) seems to imply but adopted *strategically* by dividing the culture into ' spiritual- inner- essential' domain and ' outer- material' domain and asserting anti-colonial sovereignty in the domain of the former From the point of view of cultural semiotics, one can say that 'the anticolonial nationalist model' of Indian culture was constructed with the idea of spiritual sovereignty at its core. This core was built on exaltation of what Ramanujan (2004:348) following Singer and Redfield would call 'great traditions' or high-textual 'margiya' traditions which are pan- Indian. The language of self-definition of the anticolonial nationalist model of Indian culture is largely in terms of the Sanskritized and brahminical view of culture. This model was built not only upon the bilingual boundary of the colonizer the colonized but also the internal boundaries separating the 'materialistic' activities from the 'spiritual' ones. As Anderson demonstrates, the establishment of print-capitalism which allowed people to 'imagine' a community called nation, also created standardization of vernaculars. The processes of standardization Indian languages, the consolidation idea of 'nation', proliferation of prose, anticolonial modernity seem to be interconnected semiotic processes.

Following the events like the Partition and the Independence, the gap and the mismatch between the anticolonial nationalist model of Indian culture and the historical realities became sharply pronounced. The postcolonial model of Indian culture continued its anticolonial thrust on

the one hand, but emphasized the democratic and inclusive aspects of Indian culture. It started defining itself on the regional, the local, the 'desi' or 'little traditions', especially the folk and the performative ones which were excluded from the high textual elite traditions. The language of the postcolonial model of Indian culture was the regional language. The various movements for linguistic reorganization of the states, the complex politics of scripts and linguistic chauvinism that followed the independence can be interpreted from this view point. The great obsession of many Indian English writers like AK Ramanujan, Dilip Chitre, Arun Kolatkar with the Bhakti poetry, the great treasure of the *bhashas* also has to be seen in the light of this shift in the language of self-definition following the independence. The rise of various kinds of nativists movements, the desiwadi movements like in Marathi and 'Parishkruti' movements in Gujarati. The search for 'indigenous modernity' and self-definition of 'authentic' Indian in terms of the dialects (as against standard languages), folk and performative traditions instead of textual traditions seem to characterize the postcolonial model of Indian culture. The agenda the noted critics like Namwar Singh in Hindi, Bhalachandra Nemade in Marathi and Ajit Thakor in Gujarati can also be understood in this context. However the region, to use Adiga's metaphor, is more of a 'Rooster Coop' with rampant casteism, feudalism, misogyny and communalism rather than being a reservoir of the 'authentic' Bhakti values. It is ruled over by the landlords nicknamed The Buffalo, the Stork the Wild Boar, and The Raven based on the peculiarities of their feudal appetites (24-25) and a sham democracy where a corrupt politician named The Great Socialist wins election by rigging. The fighting between the Naxal terrorists and the landlords is a constant feature and there are private armies going around shooting and torturing people suspected of sympathizing with the other. In his folksy twang, Balram Halwai says, "Like eunuchs discussing the Kama Sutra, the votes discuss the elections in Laxmangarh (98)."

The novel engages with the process of cultural change. Balram Halwai says, "To sum up- in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days there just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat – or get eaten up (64)."

What Adiga's novel suggests that *both* these models of self-description, identity and culture have in some ways losing relevance in the age of globalization. The iconic image of Gandhi keeps recurring ironically in the narrative depicting unbridled corruption not just in the high Govt offices of New Delhi and Bangalore but also in the school at Laxmangarh where the

school teacher siphons off the funds for students' food as he doesn't get his salary. Both the models of national culture: the anticolonial model of national culture which describes itself in terms of spirituality and margiya traditions as well as the postcolonial model of culture which describes itself in terms of regional ' roots' and identity appear to be irrelevant to the realities of contemporary culture. However these languages have not disappeared or lost their function from the Indian semiosphere. These languages are being driven to the margins. Then what are the new languages emerging in contemporary Indian culture? We can rely on Balram Halwai, the driver, who confesses to the Premier that he is not an original thinker –but an original *listener*. He eavesdrops on society around him his boss Ashok and his wife Pinky madam, picks up information about life, about India and about America and more importantly- English. Eventually, he overcomes the servant mentality which has tied him to the Rooster coop by killing and robbing Ashok and escaping to Bangalore. The original listener overhears the following:

> *I completed that computer program in two and a half minutes. An American today offered me four hundred thousand dollars for my start-up and I told him, " That's not enough!" Is Hewlett-Packard a better company than IBM*?
>
> Everything in the city, it seemed, came down to one thing. Outsourcing. Which means doing things in India for Americans over the phone. Everything flowed from it- real estate, wealth, power, sex. So I would have to join this outsourcing thing, one way or the other. (298)

The semiosphere is always a *dynamic system*. "So across any synchronic section of the semiosphere different languages at different stage of development is in conflict, and some texts are immersed in languages not their own, while the codes to decipher them with may be entirely absent. As an example of a single world looked at synchronically, imagine a museum hall where exhibits from different periods are on display, along with inscriptions in known and unknown languages, and instructions for decoding them; besides there are the explanations composed by the museum staff, plans for tours and rules for the behaviour of the visitors. Imagine also in these hall tour-leaders and the visitors and imagine all this as a single mechanism (which *in a certain sense* it is). This is an image of the semiosphere. (Lotman, 1990:127)"

The White Tiger overhears many languages of the contemporary Indian semiosphere changing at various rates: the languages of Mahatma Gandhi, the water buffalo, the languages of Darkness, the languages of Light, the dialects of Indian liquor, the languages of English liquor,

the languages of men with big bellies, the dialects of small bellies, the languages of corruption, the languages of the Storks and the Great Socialists, new emergent languages outsourced from America over the smart phones, the languages of the tabloids like Murder Daily, the languages of rickshaw pullers and the languages of car drivers, languages of malls and the languages of balls….in all probability a new language of self description is emerging : the language of half-baked entrepreneurs, the White Tigers…….

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