

Ingrained Indian Philosophy in the Anglophone Novels of R.K. Narayan and Aravind Adiga

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The intricate fabric of Indian philosophy, enriched by the profound wisdom of ancient texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita, alongside the influential teachings of philosophers and spiritual leaders like Buddha and Gandhi, permeates the literary works of numerous Indian authors writing in English. This essay aims to elucidate the nuanced interplay between Indian philosophical principles and the narrative structures of R.K. Narayan's "The Guide" and Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger," revealing the profound impact of these ideas on the characters' quests for identity and moral compass amidst the complexities of contemporary Indian society.

The philosophical concepts of Atman (the self) and Brahman (the universe) are omnipresent in the thematic tapestries of these novels, often underpinning the characters' struggles with identity within broader metaphysical frameworks. Both narratives grapple with the interplay of karma (the law of cause and effect), dharma (moral duty), maya (the illusion of the material world), and moksha (spiritual liberation), each approached from distinct yet complementary thematic angles.

R.K. Narayan's "The Guide" presents a compelling exploration of these philosophical tenets through the transformative journey of the protagonist, Raju. Initially, Raju's existence is steeped in personal ambition and material pursuits, reflecting a lack of adherence to the principle of dharma. Upon his incarceration under false charges, he confronts his past actions and their moral vacuity, prompting a profound introspection into the nature of duty and truth.

The novel delves into the philosophical underpinnings of karma as a determinant of fate, with Raju's life serving as a testament to the inextricable link between actions and consequences. His eventual self-realization and metamorphosis into a spiritual leader, despite the initial pretense, exemplifies the complex nature of the Atman's quest for understanding. The concept of maya is also central to the text, with the illusory nature of his former life as a charming tour guide giving way to a deeper, more authentic existence as a figure of spiritual guidance.

Raju's narrative arc culminates in a poignant act of renunciation, as he embraces the role of a selfless servant to the village, a path that echoes the philosophical tradition of sannyasa and the pursuit of moksha. His willingness to endure physical hardship for a greater good reflects a transcendence of egotism and a nascent understanding of the true nature of reality.

Conversely, Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger" employs the philosophical constructs of karma, dharma, and maya to dissect the social and moral fabric of modern India. The novel's protagonist, Balram Halwai, confronts the stark realities of the caste system, corruption, and the illusions perpetuated by the "Great Indian Dream."

Balram's deliberate act of violence against his employer, Ashok, serves as a radical departure from the karmic cycle of his ancestors, who suffered the consequences of their actions passively. This act embodies the novel's exploration of the interplay between personal karma and societal dharma, challenging the notion that one's fate is solely a product of past actions. His subsequent rise from a position of servitude to entrepreneurial success can be interpreted as a form of personal liberation from the cycle of samsara.

The philosophical concept of maya is central to Balram's narrative, as he becomes increasingly aware of the illusions that uphold social hierarchies and the deceptions inherent in the pursuit of wealth and power. The novel critiques the "American Dream"-inspired myth of meritocracy in India, revealing the underlying structures of corruption and exploitation.

While "The White Tiger" may not explicitly engage with the metaphysical dimensions of moksha, the tale of Balram's emancipation from poverty and the shackles of the caste system can be seen as an allegory for breaking free from the cycle of samsara, achieving a form of social and economic liberation. His violent assertion of free will and redefinition of dharma underscore the novel's central themes of agency and self-realization.

In summary, both "The Guide" and "The White Tiger" serve as conduits for the examination of Indian philosophical concepts within the context of their respective narratives. While Narayan's work emphasizes the internal spiritual growth of the individual, Adiga's narrative underscores the external forces that shape personal destiny and the moral landscape of modern India. Both texts, however, converge on the pivotal role of self-

knowledge, ethics, and the pursuit of truth in the characters' quests for meaning and authenticity. The philosophical odysseys of Raju and Balram, as portrayed by Narayan and Adiga, encapsulate the enduring relevance of Indian thought in the evolution of the human condition and the quest for self-realization. Their journeys, fraught with ethical dilemmas and existential questioning, resonate deeply with the core principles of Indian philosophy, providing insightful commentary on the intricate dance between individual desire, moral responsibility, and societal constructs.

References

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- [2]. Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2008.