



## BALRAM'S STRATEGY OF USING SYMBOLIC CAPITAL IN ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

### STRATEGI BALRAM DENGAN MENGGUNAKAN MODAL SIMBOLIK DALAM *THE WHITE TIGER* KARYA ADIGA

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#### Abstract

This research focuses on exploring Balram's strategy in using symbolical capital to level up his classes. Society lives in the field where symbolic capital impact over the other capital. It can be also reflected in the story, from Balram's life to the other characters he witnessed. Therefore, this research's problem focuses on how Balram uses symbolic capital as his strategy to survive in society in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. To accommodate the analysis, the research uses Bourdieu's theory of symbolical capital that explains its importance for Balram. This research is qualitative and the approach is phenomenological approach. The data are the quotation from the novel. The source of the data is Adiga's *The White Tiger*. The technique of data collection is documentation. The technique of data analysis is interpretation. Based on the analysis, it can be resulted that symbolic capital is crucial to drag up someone's life. Symbolic capital can be used as the strategy (class distinction) to survive in the field where capital is exchanged. Balram's driving certificate, status, environment, and others have exposed how it adheres symbolical status. Other characters are also helpful in explaining how symbolical capital affects their life, especially in the issue of dominance.

**Keywords:** *Balram, symbolic capital, class distinction, and field.*

#### Abstrak

Penelitian ini berfokus pada eksplorasi strategi Balram dalam menggunakan modal simbolik untuk menaikkan level kelasnya. Modal



simbolik menjadi faktor yang sangat penting dalam masyarakat kapitalis. Permasalahan ini terefleksi dalam narasi dari kehidupan Balram dan karakter-karakter lain yang dia saksikan. Penelitian ini berfokus pada bagaimana Balram menggunakan modal simbolik sebagai strateginya untuk bertahan hidup di masyarakat dalam novel *The White Tiger* karya Aravind Adiga. Penelitian ini menggunakan konsep Bourdieu tentang modal simbolik. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif dan pendekatannya adalah pendekatan fenomenologis. Data penelitian ini adalah kutipan dari novel, sedangkan sumber data adalah novel *The White Tiger* karya Aravind Adiga. Teknik pengumpulan data adalah dokumentasi, sedangkan teknik analisis data adalah interpretasi. Hasil dari penelitian adalah modal simbolik sangat penting untuk meningkatkan kualitas kehidupan seseorang. Modal simbolik dapat digunakan sebagai strategi (perbedaan kelas) untuk bertahan hidup di mana modal tersebut dipertukarkan. Sertifikat mengemudi Balram, status, lingkungan, dan lainnya telah mengungkapkan kepemilikan status simbolis. Karakter-karakter lain juga membantu dalam menjelaskan bagaimana modal simbolis mempengaruhi kehidupan mereka, terutama dalam masalah dominasi.

**Kata kunci:** *Balram, modal simbolik, perbedaan kelas, dan arena.*

## Introduction

Adiga's *The White Tiger* narrates a well-established process of a poor boy to be a rich man. The poor boy realizes that his life must be better than before. In his struggle, Balram takes steps to gain a successful executive owning the great transportation mode in the world. Unschooled but clever boy, Balram knows how to change and shift his life from obscure and unfortunate life into the highest rank in his arena. By denying the fictitious narration of how he killed his boss to raid money and became success, Balram's success is not by far from his social strategy. It is not the money that emphasizes the pointbreak, but symbolic capital he collected that turned his life out. The prosperous life symbolizes the mastering and controlling a power upon the class in his arena.

To trace it out, Balram's narration logically leaves ideas that he was not as stupid as he was. He grew up in the dark side of India. He was sent out of school for helping paying his sister's dowry, working as a coal breaker, followed by being a driver of corruptors, and ended by being murderer of a young politician. He becomes the breadwinner of the family. Without social strategy, Balram is out of the chronology. In Bourdieu's term, Balram's strategy can be traced from how he changed the exchange from sweat to skill and from muscle to symbol. Working as poor indicates the exchange process of hard skill, but Balram exposed that driving certificate brought him to meet his destiny: richness. In Bourdieu's term, social strategy positions subjects in the field where capitals are paid off, but symbolic capital controls its win (Harrits, 2011).

Bourdieu's discussion of social strategy is unleashed from doxa, orthodoxy, and heterodoxy in power relations. He also proposed habitus that exists in rural communities as a conceptual framework for discussing symbolic terms of capital. This

symbolic capital plays a role in establishing power relations in the system and social structure (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2013). For example, Bourdieu carries out more analysis of the habit of giving each other gifts as an economic practice, but for him, it is not that simple. When someone gives a gift of clothes to another who incidentally are workers, relatives, or neighbors, it may be considered solely as an act of generosity. Conversely, even though it seems that there is no power expressed by him, actually behind it all, there is a power in establishing the power relations that already existed before. In this point, so that the workers become obedient and have no demand too much against the giver.

Bourdieu's analysis of the existence of symbolic capital represented in the social activities or rituals is actually directed to provide a critic of how economic concepts that have been understood by economic theorists on capital and production considerations, as well as profit and loss, have proved difficult to apply to societies that have relations symbolic through the economic activities that it practices. In a society where the kinship system is still tight, all economic relation is cultural representations established from social relations of the existence of symbolic objects and events in ritual habits. In other words, it turns out that the economy does not stop at profit and loss calculations, more than that, the calculation that is not revealed is symbolic capital that control social relation. With this transition from economic to symbolic, obtaining symbolic capital can legitimize hierarchy (Pellandini-Simányi, 2014).

By conducting an in-depth analysis of habitus and symbolic capital in a society, Bourdieu actually wanted to emphasize the presence of symbolic power that is constructed in sociocultural relations. The symbolic power of the dominant class in society can carry on, if the agents involved are able to continuously change and renew the mode of domination that is carried out. The mode of domination here is not intended as a form of power introduction through coercion, but through sociocultural ways. There are two points to emphasize. First, the basis of social nature, where the relation of domination is constructed, is not created by subjects. Second, the basis of social formation is institutionalized mechanism where distribution of symbols (aristocratic titles, academic titles, etc.) produces domination, blurs out the reality of the objects, and affects symbolic power. Furthermore, Bourdieu said that symbol guarantees the process the reproduction of capital distribution. This distribution of capital is a precondition which reproduces the structure of domination (Grenfell, 2010).

The mode of domination is actively constructed not by the agents, but an objective mechanism that takes place in social relations. The domination is used for symbolic violence without being realized. The violence of this model manifests itself in the practices such as gifts, generosity, respect, loyalty, and so on. These practices, on a hand, have imply power practices. Behind these practices, there hides an exploitative force in social relations. This is what Bourdieu saw as socially compliant dominance; legitimate power can come through participatory of the subjects as if they are part while they are subjected (Wacquant, 2004). For example, an employer does not only give

wages to his workers, more than that, he gives more to be seen as a good boss who must be respected. For sure, there will be no resistance. Rules that already exist are made by a dominant group and it becomes manifestation of symbolic capital for the continuation of symbolic power.

It is this symbolic power that is brilliantly capable of transforming from merely economic capital into symbolic capital which will continue to reproduce power independently not through coercion, but generosity which is considered to be the social act of the helper. It is not a sort of surprise to see why Balram slaughtered Ashok's neck while he is generous to Balram. The statuses of Landlord, rich people, and other things, have exposed Balram's intuition to get in to it. Balram practices Bourdieu's assumption that symbol can be used to drag him up in the field he can win. Driver license can be seen keenly as the pivot that rotates Balram's axis to his success. Therefore, this research aims to reveal Balram's strategy in succeeding his obsession of being free from poor living through symbolic capital. Capital symbolic is crucial issue and most of researches in Adiga's *The White Tiger* focuses on poor-rich situation, Balram's ethic, and other general case, and no research sees symbolic capital as the point to see.

Priyanka Pasari (2015) wrote a research, "The *White Tiger* on Half Baked India and Social and Political Deterioration." She saw that everyone condemns corruption at a societal stage, no exception in India. India also has many problems such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, pollution, external threats, underdevelopment etc. For her, Adiga's *The White Tiger* explains all the problem in India and Balram is the representation of Indian who can transform the mindset that poor is not destined (Pasari 2015). Besides that, there is also research written by Lames W. Clarke, "Violence begets Violence" that explores Balram's violence is just the representation of how poor people in India is less ethic and humanist. He saw that violence grows and begets violence as it is the consequence of being poor, especially in India (Clarke, 2018). It seems to refer to the previous research written by Sara D. Schotland, "Breaking out of the rooster coop: Violent crime in Aravind Adiga's *White Tiger* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*" whose point is to relate the violence as the way to reach freedom for poor people (Schotland, 2011). Therefore, this research, comparatively speaking, attain its novelty to see that it is not the violence that succeeds Balram, but his strategy with symbolical capital.

## Method

The approach is phenomenological approach. The data are quotations that can be sentences, clauses, phrases, or words from Adiga's *The White Tiger*. Adiga's *The White Tiger* is the source of the data. The technique of data collection is documentation because the source of the data is a book. The steps to collect the data are: (1) reading repetitively to make understanding to the problem and interpretatively to understanding the implied problem specifically, (2) making notes that functions to

highlight points related to the problem, and (3) taking quotations. The technique of data analysis is interpretation because the data implies problem to discover. The steps to analyze the data are: (1) proposing problem that functions to initiate the discussion, (2) data display for proving the case or problem, (3) interpreting to discover implied problems behind the data, and (4) concluding that functions to take the point or the result of the analysis.

## **Finding and Discussion**

In this discussion, Balram's struggle in conquering capitalist society is vividly depicted. Among all capitals, he focuses in the symbolic capital for it can play an important role in society and bring prestigious values that can bring a higher status of him. Here, symbolic capital is described as the main capital that can strengthen a power relation. Balram's symbolic capital is shown in the discussion below:

### ***Balram's Symbolic Capital***

Living with people through social interaction in capitalist society, Balram, as the main character in *The White Tiger* is confined by the structural restraints in which classification systems reproduce layers or classes in consequence the hierarchy is created. Hence, it can strengthen the power relation, which causes interdependence between the agent who keeps a power and the objects of power.

As the poor man, Balram becomes the objects by the agent who has power. His poverty brings him into a condition that he becomes the tender target under one's authority. Becoming the object of power changes Balram into the agent who unconsciously applies that practice. By collecting capital, which considered as the strength concentration, he thinks he can compete and struggle in the battle of field to reach a better life.

The optimization of symbolic capital is deemed to be needed to reach symbolic power, therefore it is necessary for Balram to keep symbols, which considered as the society's symbol of power to provoke recognition, respect, dignity, and prestige. Although he was born as a poor man, he finds a way to reach symbolic capital by mastering a car. It can be seen in the statement "Mastering a car"—he moved the stick of an invisible gearbox—"it's like taming a wild stallion—only a boy from the warrior castes can manage that." (Adiga, 2008). Mastering a car seems like something impossible to be mastered by poor man. Only rich men or people from upper castes can do that. As a sweet-maker descendant, Balram belongs to a poor man from lower caste and he is believed for not being able to get that skill. It is still considered as a great skill in society because in mastering a car, someone has to take a driving class that spends much money and comprehends the way operating gears of car. They are all rich people's grips, but Balram with his strong desire wants to proof to the society that a poor man

like him can reach a confession from society through his skill conquering a car that becomes a symbol of prestige.

Balram's choice to sharpen his skill in driving is a kind of effort to achieve symbolic capital because mastering a car followed by driving license ownership can emerge a recognition from society about his position. Mastering a car and having a driving license are very prestige for people in Balram's environment for he knows the taste of his surrounding, so he acts based on the taste in society. Not all people have good driving skills, like Balram. We know that he lives in a slums environment in India with various walks of life with diverse classes. In the arena, Balram is labelled as a good driver who has the best driving skills. With his skill, he clearly holds the power of the car that is considered a luxurious car at that time in the neighborhood. It is clear that this becomes symbolic capital for Balram. The strategy he uses to raise his social class in the arena he controlled. Moreover, his driving license can be used to control the society where the arena he lives.

His skill in mastering a car drives Balram into a driver of the rich family. He realizes that his occupation as a driver of a rich family is capable to invite confession from people around him because of the prestige he gets. Being a driver of a rich family is identic with high salary and wealth, besides being a private driver of the rich family is a prestigious job for he will be completed by prestigious attributes, which represent luxury. His struggle to achieve the number one driver in that family turns him into the one who has privilege to drive the most sophisticated car, Honda City. *"The Honda City is a larger car, a more sophisticated creature, with a mind of his own; he has power steering, and an advanced engine, and he does what he wants to."* (Adiga, 2008). Honda City is not only a car, it becomes a symbol of prestige for the owner and also the driver who is trusted to drive it. The symbolic power emerges from the thing called Honda City because it has power to construct reality by leading people to confess and to change their opinion about someone's status through the sophisticated machines, the modern system and the size that the car has. It offers prestige and pride for whoever who sit in that car.

Balram and other drivers have to fight over to occupy the main position and be the number one driver to drive Honda City, the great car which invites respect whoever drives it. That description is supported by the statement *"Honda City, staring at it with pride, though too frightened to touch it."* (Adiga, 2008). Balram strategy to gain symbolic capital is a kind of his effort to struggle in the battle of field in which it is the arena of power where he has to fight over the capital for achieving particular goals, in this case status and prestige. Instead of collecting another capital, Balram prefer to gain symbolic capital first because he does not have any money and he comes from a poor family that cannot send him into a higher education to reach any intellectual qualification. Therefore he chooses symbolic capital by being a driver of a rich family and become the main driver to be able to drive the prestigious car, Honda City.

Balram realizes that symbolic capital plays an important role in social reality. That capital has power to create hierarchy among people that can differentiate one and other. As people will be classified into several classes in society based on the capital ownership, Balram use the strategy to reach symbolic capital to fight for the position in society to distinguish him. The distinction a prominent strategy to compete in the field of capitalism society. Having symbolic capital is one way to conquer the arena or the battle of field.

He keeps maintaining symbolic capital when he was poor until being a successful entrepreneur because this capital is a kind of resource that should be optimized to reach a power in society. Therefore, Balram completes his office with luxury equipment to invite recognition because to be recognized in a huge society, symbolic power is absolutely needed. The symbolic capital that Balram uses to show his class is the chandelier in every corner of both office and apartment, which is stated below:

*I have a chandelier here, above my head in my office, and then I have two in my apartment in Raj Mahal Villas Phase Two. One in the drawing room, and a small one in the toilet too. It must be the only toilet in Bangalore with a chandelier!* (Adiga, 2008).

A chandelier is not only chosen to symbolize the taste of elegance and luxury, but also to create the distinction between the owner and other people. Those symbols will influence society's opinion about him and his business. Society's appraisal is one of the important things to keep his business run well, so that he has to be able to maintain the symbolic capital through setting up many chandeliers in every corner of his rooms, which can attract people's attention and confession. Prestigious values in the chandeliers represent the wealth of Balram as the owner that automatically places him in the higher position of social stratification that is followed by bearing the higher status, so that he can establish the distinction through the status he gets.

Balram's achieved status is a kind of his effort to be able to be received by society in the particular arena. The competition in the arena emerges Balram spirit about something at stake. He realizes the consequence of the rules of the game and the logic used in the arena, so that he is convinced that what he has done did not break the law. Balram has extended and comprehended the habitus and symbolic capital as the weapon in society since he was young and poor. They are internalized in Balram's life, so that he implements them in every aspect of his life. His strategy to combine the habitus and the symbolic capital is a kind of effort to improve his power position. He uses those symbolic capitals as the symbols of power that bring indirect domination to his workers or clients and he establishes his status in society.

The novel *The White Tiger* is not a new literary works, though it has many problems in the novel. It can be seen that several researches are conducted. Undoubtedly, this novel is severely interesting. This object material of this research is preceded by several researches. The first research is Kasbekar (2011) with the title "Use of Imagery

and Metaphor in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*". Kasbekar focuses on the using of imagery and metaphors in the novel. Setiawan (2015) conducted the second research with the title "Fantasi Ideologis dalam Novel *The White Tiger* Karya Aravind Adiga: Perjumpaan Subjek-Subjek Sastra Melalui Perspektif Slavoj Žižek". It is understood that Setiawan only focuses on ideological fantasy of Slavoj Žižek perspective. Adkins (2019) conducted the third research with the title "Neoliberal Disgust in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*". Adkins focuses on neoliberalism as a cynical political rationality in Adiga's *The White Tiger*. The result shows that the novel parodies through the language liberal disgust. Different with Kasbekar, Setiawan, and Adkins, this research focus on Balram's strategy of using symbolic capital to gain his class level. This research exploring the prominent strategy to accomplish the highest rank in society where Balram lives. Symbolic capital is fundamental and essential strategy in capitalist society in order to sustain Balram's life.

## Conclusion

Adiga's *The White Tiger* narrates a story of a struggle of a poor boy to hack himself from poverty. This research explores further that Balram's success is neither from his violence nor his economy capital, but it is from his strategy in using symbolic capital. Capital symbolic is functional to drag someone's status in social arena because social arena imposes symbolic capital over other capitals. It can be reflected from how the landlords are fearful for the poor. They are afraid of the landlords not because the landlords have a lot of money and the poor are in debt, but it is the domination of their status that makes the poor get down. Besides that, Ashok's kindness also explains his power to keep Balram bow down on him. In symbolic capital, coercion is not physical, but it is softer than that, it can be status, position, kindness, loyalty, and so forth. Balram saw it clearly thus he killed him. Balram himself realizes that his driving certificate has brought him this far and he could not deny it. From those all that can be found, symbolic capital is crucial in symbolic-social this day as it is reflected from Balram's story.

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