

Encoding and Decoding the Reviews of the Film *The White Tiger*

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Abstract Ramin Bahrani's film, *The White Tiger*, is Balram's journey based on the New York Times bestseller novel by the same name. The film is publicly supported by an incredible number of reviewers. But some reviewers denounce it as a politically exploitative and unjust depiction of India and Indians. The present paper aims to explore the polysemic nature of the film through review analysis. Drawing insight from Stuart Hall's concept of encoding-decoding, the article analyses reviews of *The White Tiger* from the day the movie came out until the most recent ones on IMDb. As a result, two major perspectives emerged from the analysis: (1) an Orientalist perspective and (2) a nationalist standpoint. It also helps to understand different frameworks of knowledge through which the viewers decode the film.

Keywords *The White Tiger*; encoding and decoding; dominant-hegemonic position; negotiated code; oppositional code

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Introduction

Stuart Hall's work offers an insight into the relationship between producer and consumer of media text. Hall contends that consumption is not a passive act since it requires the creation of meaning. In his paper, "Encoding and Decoding

in Television Discourse,” he points out three different positions of the audience in the interpretation of media text. First position of the reader is “dominant-hegemonic position,” whereby audiences share the same subject position as the producer. In other words, the audience tends to concur with the dominant point of view presented in the media discourse he reads or watches. In this setting, there are few misunderstandings between the sender and receiver of a communication since they have the same cultural bias, which leads to the same assumption being made in a context. Here, the viewer is “operating inside the dominant code” (Hall et al. 126). Second, “negotiated code or position,” where the audience or recipient is able to comprehend the sender’s message within the context of dominant cultural and societal perspectives. The majority of messages are comprehended, but with varied interpretations from dominant-hegemonic views. This position’s recipients do not always work from a hegemonic standpoint, but they are familiar enough with the dominant group to decode texts in an abstract sense (126). Third, “oppositional code,” where the viewers may completely comprehend both the literal and connotative inflections of a discourse, but decode the message in an entirely different manner. It is because the viewers are not operating within “preferred code,” but they use “alternative framework of reference” such as their culture, their own community beliefs, and habitual factors and see the unwanted meaning in the message (127). Drawing insight from this concept of encoding-decoding, the article analyses reviews of *The White Tiger* from the day the movie came out until the most recent ones on IMDb. As Fiske (1987) stated that popular culture is not produced by texts but by the meanings that individuals generate via them. The article attempts to unfold the different perceptions created by the viewer’s comments. As a result, it appears that some reviewers viewed the film from an Orientalist perspective, while others saw it from a nationalist standpoint. Interestingly, it helps to understand different frameworks of knowledge through which the film as a “meaningful discourse” interpreted by the viewers (Hall et al. 119).

During the COVID19 pandemic, *The White Tiger* (2021) was watched by a wider audience across the globe. *The White Tiger*, a Netflix original, is a journey based on the New York Times bestseller novel by the same name. After being publicly supported by an incredible number of Western film reviewers on IMDb, it sparked a discussion when some Indian reviewers denounced it as politically exploitative and unjust depiction of India and Indians. Told in flashback from the point of view of Balram, a Bangalore based entrepreneur, the film narrates the story of an ambitious Indian driver who uses his wits and trickery to rise from underprivileged to the forefront. The story is divided into three parts: first, Balram’s life in the village as a

student, child labour and tea-shop worker; second, life in Dhanbad town and Delhi as driver cum servant and third, after Ashok's murder, as an entrepreneur.

The film begins in New Delhi in 2007; Balram, in his early twenties, dressed as a Maharaja, is settled in the back seat of a speeding car. He notices the statue of Gandhi leading the procession of Dandi March. Pinky, NRI wife of Ashok, both in their early thirties, drives the car in a fog of pollution. Balram Halwai, the only narrator, spends some nights writing the mail to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao. The film seems to provide a journalistic view of Indian society since most incidents are like news commentaries by a journalist. *The White Tiger* is a record of Balram's journey to discover and rediscover himself and identities in different phases of life. The film depicts two extreme sides of India, "an India of Darkness" and "an India of Light." In the India of Darkness, the film depicts the situation of a government village school, where he studied and labelled himself as "the White Tiger." It focuses on the miserable life of Balram as child labour at tea stall, the harsh condition of government hospitals in villages where his father died as doctors were busy serving in private clinics. In "an India of Light," the film depicts the prosperous life of Stork's affluent family, corrupt politicians and government officials. Metaphorically, the Darkness stands for village life and the light stands for city life. The cinematographer uses darkness and light to convey the dichotomy of Indian society. A handheld camera was primarily used to shoot the village life at Laxmangodh of Balram with vivid colours. Dolly and Steadicams shot the life of Dhanbad with softer camera movements and with a clear and bright scene to make viewers realize the terrible dirt inside "an India of Light." The film has used wide lenses and zoom movement to give a closer look into Balram's life and make the audience sympathize with the life and condition of poor Balram. Paolo Carnera's realistic cinematography using dim lighting and desaturated look brings to light the issues related to poverty and corruption the film is presenting. The cinematographer was inspired by the colours of the Indian flag and utilised them in the film to create a dense reality. The film's cinematography is outstanding, and it helps to convey Balram's narrative more convincingly.

Ramin Bahrani described India as a totally different India from the one that is currently being represented by Bollywood. His India is dominated by feudal landowners who are described as vicious creatures by the narrator. They swallow the property and lands of the peasants and create destitute, causing them to suffer. Balram is the son of a landless farmer who after losing his land to the feudal landlord, became a rickshaw puller to support his family. Despite the fact that Balram is a member of the Halwai caste and is supposed to be a confectioner by trade, he works

as a coal breaker and a tea boy in a little tea stall in his hometown. After killing his master Ashok, a rich businessman in Delhi and stealing his money Balram flees to Bangalore. He takes up his master's name "Ashok Sharma" and runs a business as an entrepreneur by bribing the police and politicians. He becomes an entrepreneur, one of the members of the bourgeoisie, in "The India of Light." He believes that the future of the world capital lies in the East indicating the emergence of China and India as economic superpowers. The film through the narrative of Balram comments on poverty, education, corruption, caste, and class.

Method

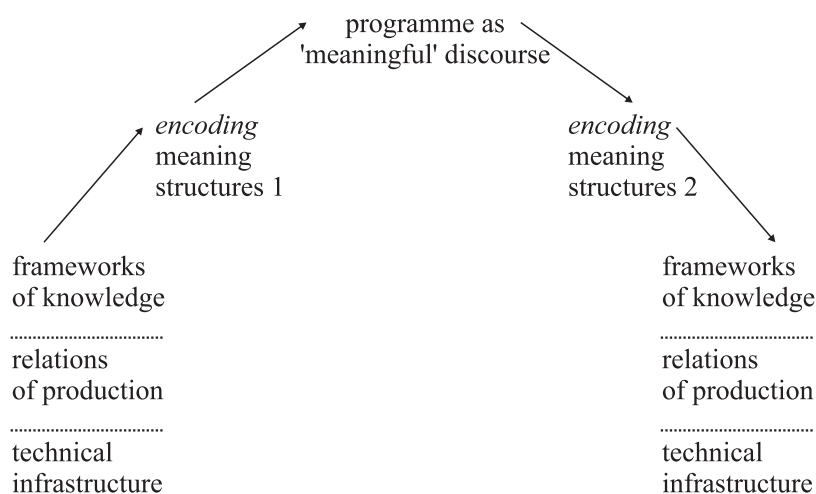


Fig. 1

The article analyses reviews of *The White Tiger* from the day the movie came out until the most recent ones on IMDb. It follows Miles & Huberman (1994) model for the thematic analysis process (Alhojailan 39-47). It is possible that the viewers can form different kinds of perceptions about the incidents, people and places depicted in the film. Different scholars argue that the meaning of a text is determined not only by the text itself, but also by the readers (Barry 35). Similarly, Reader-response theory is founded on an attempt to shed light on the reader-text connection (Ruppert 20). It is based on the notion that during a reading experience, readers, just like the text, play a role in making an interpretation. Its underlying idea is literary texts "frequently contain social dilemmas and conflicts. Such reading demands personal responses from readers" (Yang 50). Particularly, in the context of the media text, Hall is arguing that consumption is not a passive act, as it needs the

production of meaning. Without meaning, there is no consumption. Consequently, meaning cannot be formed passively. We do not passively acquire meaning; rather, we have to actively create it (Davis 62). Here, what Hall refers to as “the technical infrastructure, frameworks of knowledge and relations of production” (fig 1) all combine to encode the film *The White Tiger*. Adarsh Gourav as an actor wants to communicate an emotion; Bahrani as a director wants to say something about a social issue; Netflix wishes to fulfil a remit to supply programmes of an educational nature. These communicative acts rely on “a shared understanding of language and culture” (Davis 63). Similarly, to decode the film audience also depended on the “the technical infrastructure, frameworks of knowledge and relations of production” (120).

The majority of the viewers’ opinions differ from one another, and the cause for these differences may be the viewers’ own experiences or the information they have read and seen about Indian culture. Observably, some reviewers accepted the portrayal of Indian culture, but others rejected it and questioned its authenticity. In order to understand the reviewer’s response in depth, reviews were thematically divided into different parts. Here, as a product of the technical infrastructure *The White Tiger* is produced by the Western film director Ramin Bahrani with the help of online streaming platform Netflix. The West’s portrayal of Indian culture as uncivilised and backwards dates back to colonial times and persists to this day. The perpetuation of such a trend of stereotypical portrayal in contemporary literature and films could be seen as an example of an Orientalist perspective. The representation of India throughout the film continues within the “White Orientalist perspective” (Said 241). Thus, the dominant-hegemonic position of the viewers can be decided on their favourable reviews of the film because they accept and enjoy the film. The reviewers have an “Orientalist perspective” of India because they see India as a country with a lot of issues without any constructive solutions. On the other hand, oppositional code or position of reviewers decided upon comments which rejected the film for its pessimistic representation of India. From the oppositional position, the reviewers criticise the film with the sense of Nationalism. The reviewers try to defend the way the director portrayed the country. Here, “Nationalism” is typically used to refer to two distinct but related phenomena: first, “the attitude” that individuals within a nation have when they care about “their national identity,” and second, “the actions” that individuals within a nation take when attempting to attain (or maintain) self-determination (Nenad). Negotiated code or position of the viewers also reflected in some comments.

The reviewers were not divided by whether they came from the East or

the West because only a few of the reviewers mentioned where they were from. However, the majority of the Indian reviewers could be identified due to the fact that they used particular types of arguments to protect the image of their country. In other cases, reviewers mentioned their Indian origins, yet because they live in the West, their opinions can be interpreted as re-Orientalist or Nationalist on the basis of their perspective. Here, the term “re-Orientalism” refers to the depiction of Eastern culture from a Western point of view by certain Asian diaspora writers seeking their own position in the Western world (Lau). The analysis of reviews uncovers not just the different perspectives of the audience but also how the portrayal of Indian culture can develop a problematic perception of Indian culture among global audiences.

Analysis: The Continuation of Orientalist Perspective

The majority of the audience’s responses are emotional expressions such as happiness, sadness, contempt, fear, surprise, embarrassment, and thrill. Although there has been some disagreement on whether the film is an accurate representation of India. The majority of positive feedback has come from “dominant-hegemonic position” of the Western audiences who believe that the film is an authentic portrayal of India, providing an eye-opening look at rural and urban life realities for poor Indians in a country rife with corrupt politicians and government officials. The audience thought the film was enjoyable and educational, and they felt it deserved to be nominated for an Oscar. Some viewers thought of the movie as a social reflection on the realities of Indian society. After watching *The White Tiger*, several Western reviewers from their dominant-hegemonic position seemed to validate the representation of India as a place of poverty and corruption, citing the film’s excellence in its capacity to entertain cinematically while also educating about “an India of Darkness” and “an India of Light.”

The representation of India from a Western perspective by filmmaker Bahrani seems quite apt to dominant-hegemonic positioned viewers. As reviewer writes: “A brilliant take on the facade of a liberal democracy” (parnild), he finds the film’s plot to be strikingly realistic as it shows corruption and crime at its height. Moreover, the filmmaker has created some striking scenes which show the class divide in India. As reviewer comments on it, “You get a very hard-hitting reality of India where people on the roadside slums and people inside air-conditioned cars are juxtaposed” (Crashtextr). The settings depicted in the film cannot be contested and it is also impossible to deny that in the majority of Indian cities, migrant domestic and construction workers endure such circumstances. The problem is that film

contributes to the viewer's perception of India as a country where the majority of the impoverished live on the streets of Indian cities. The situation of India can be comparatively similar to any developing nation in the world and the film avoids many positive aspects of India. The film holds its camera on India's extreme form of deprivation and poverty. "Cinematography is perfect, truth is shown clearly" (Tuhinghatak). In this sense, the cinematographer's role in the selection of specific scenes continues to play a crucial role, as it helps to understand India within the limits of the Orientalist notion.

The dominant-hegemonic positioned viewers' comments can be understood with reference to Orientalism. According to Said "the Oriental is contained and represented by dominating frameworks" (Said 40). It seems that *The White Tiger* continues "dominating framework" that allows the filmmaker to decide the Western audience as ideal audience who share the same subject position as the producer. Furthermore, the article discusses the reviewer's comments thematically.

Maligning India

The film depicts Indian culture in such a way that after watching the film, whatever comments reviewers make are interestingly constructing a certain type of narrative about India. The fascination for Indian culture, casting of Indian actors and cinematography made the film an entertaining and educational experience for most of the viewers. The dominant-hegemonic positioned reviewers felt that watching the film was an extremely enjoyable and entertaining experience. For the negotiated positioned reviewers, the film follows the trend of Oscar winning films like *Parasite* (2019) and *Joker* (2019), and tries to represent the anguish and suffering of the lower classes of society. Most of the reviewers liked the technical aspects of the film, most of the audience liked the charismatic lead of Adarsh Gourav, while the oppositional positioned reviewers remained shocked by the ending of the film.

The film represents class/caste divide, corruptive system and bizarre thinking of Indian entrepreneurs. The dominant-hegemonic positioned reviewers go through a wide range of emotional involvement, many of them expressed their sympathy for poor Indians and delighted by watching poor Balram breaking the coop. The depiction of class divides and treatment of the lower class by the affluent in the film provoked sympathy from the audience, as a reviewer noted; "few scenes were disturbing for me because I don't like to see the poor getting treated badly" (Carlalbert). For them the story is filmed at ground-level, putting the viewers in the dirty, smelly, impoverished streets of different places across India, generating a realistic atmosphere. The film shows servitude in the Hindu culture and less

opportunity for lower caste people to improve their life. Some audience members compared the journey of Balram with other fictitious characters and called him as “Hindu robin hood” (Sharon sf). Especially for some Western reviewers the film worked magically, reviewer noted;

This was a remarkable experience and a stunning eye opener to see this part of the world that I was completely blind to before. The way this movie portrays the Indian culture with such honesty and openness was really incredible and worthy of all the attention this movie gets.” (Questl)

Furthermore, some reviewers expressed their desire to watch such types of films dealing with other cultures of the world on platforms like Netflix. Some audiences perceived the film as an authentic representation of the way the caste system locks poor people into misery. Thus, they felt that the film sheds light on a few typical aspects of Indian culture and provides insights on it. Most of the Western audience found the film convincing on the Indian culture, reviewer noted; “I am so relieved and impressed by such an intelligent authentic portrayal of what it means to be rich or adversely to be desperately poor, both creating traditional psychological enslavement (being of service)” (Lindfilm).

In contrast, the reviews that generated the maligning India theme from the oppositional position, expressed outrage at the Western director and Indian actors. The oppositional positioned reviewers felt that through *The White Tiger*, the filmmaker is trying to maligning the image of India. The filmmaker claimed in his interviews that the film tries to show the reality of India because the film represents both rural and urban India facing poverty and corruption. Some reviewers felt that the film fails to provide a sprawling view of both rural and urban India, rather the film is only interested in the negative aspects of India. Most of the Indian reviewers felt that the relationship between the servant and master shown in the film is not the truth of India, they accepted that there may be few instances; they admitted that the film generalises it in order to show the extreme hatred of upper-class people towards lower class. The relationship shown in the film in which masters constantly use abusive language, some reviewers refute that such kind of caste and class abuse may be there but not in all cases. The reviewers felt that for the sake of showing vast gape between both classes the filmmaker has used such a narrative. Some reviewers denied that the filmmaker is accurately representing India but they claimed that the film is only fostering the Western imagination about poor India. Reviewer wrote: “They showed truth which is not truth which shows their bad thinking towards

india” (Hemuchauhan).

The oppositional positioned reviewers also expressed their outrage for actors in the film, Rajkumar Rao and Priyanka Chopra because of their popularity in Indian cinema. The negotiated positioned audience felt that Indian actors could have skipped the film because of its poor screenplay and most of the time the film tries to put India in a situation where India is only a destitute place. Reviewer also criticised Rajkumar Rao’s English accent saying that the Indian people living abroad don’t have such an accent. On the other hand, they admired the way the leading role was played by Adarsh but they also admitted that apart from his acting nothing is sensible in the film, not even Balram’s story. The role played by Priyanka Chopra as an American returnee and her take on arranged marriage and caste system enraged the audience, and the reviewer felt offended as an Indian. Some reviewers thought that she played a role in the film to please the Western audience and “capturing international viewers by belittling India!” (Annebandyo). Apart from being an actor in the film, she also played the role as executive producer in the film. Casting of Indian actors in the film remained a major concern for the reviewers because they felt that Indian actors actively participated with the Western director to defame India. A reviewer wrote from the opposition code:

To encourage a movie that shows poverty is only beaten by crime and politics is insulting to almost 800 million Indians who are considered poor and live a honest hardworking life to bring up their children. People who don’t victimize themselves for being poor or find shortcuts to become rich overnight. These people spend generations under poverty just to provide their kids with education. Stop supporting movies like these that only show you a story about one awful mindset. This does not represent India actors like Priyanka Chopra, supporting movies like these is deeply saddening. (IpyaarCinema)

The aim of the film maker was also questioned by several reviewers because it is based-on a Booker prize winning novel. The novel was also criticised by several people for its distortion of realities in India. Realising the popularity of the novel, some reviewers felt that the film is insulting India for its profit seeking motive. Several reviewers admitted that the acting of the leading actor and the cinematography in the film is top-notch, it helps the film to create a realistic atmosphere, as a result the Western audience may perceive the film as reality of India. Reviewer tried to justify through his opinion and wrote:

Nothing shown is a true fact about India. Created just to defame India and it's image. As an Indian it boils me to see how wrongly and poorly they have depicted India and more over as a person from Bangalore, not a even a single shot in the movie is from Bangalore, it's all shot in Delhi. (Ankitadiga)

The oppositional positioned viewers thought that the film represents Indian culture in such way that it seems that reporter is trying to show the problems of the deprived Indian urban and rural people to the Western world. Moreover, the film is made in such a way that it creates the impression that the filmmaker is exposing the dark realities of India which were hidden by Bollywood's feel-good movies. The film always maintains the distinction in the behaviour of American returnee people and Indian people. It constantly references West for its technological progress and its superiority in every aspect of life while creates contrast with uneducated poor people and mannerless rich people. The film focuses more and more on the problems of India's oppressed society dragged in the slum and poverty by the corruptive system of affluent people. As an oppositional reviewer felt that the film "just made to show that the so-called Western countries are "pure" and India still lives in slavery and problems" (Zwpkvanyg).

Glorification of Crime

The dominant-hegemonic positioned reviewers viewed Balram as a different human being with goals and aspirations compared to most of the people trapped in the coop. For some of the dominant positioned viewers it's a dog-eat-dog story (Evanston) which allows them to compare with their privileged position and enjoy the romantic "representations of the Orient as exotic locale" (Said 118). But, Balram seems to essentialize crime as the only way for lower-class people. Balram's words at the end of the film:

The real nightmare is the other kind—where you didn't do it, that you didn't kill your master, that you lost your nerve, and that you're still a servant to another man. But then you wake up, the sweating stops, your heartbeat slows. The nightmare is over. You did it. You killed your master.

Balram's character is not a psychopath, but the way he delivers a speech at the end of the film, emphasizing murder as a tool for breaking "the coop"; reduces him into both criminal and psychopath. He celebrates crime as the catalyst for his success as an entrepreneur. Balram is portrayed as a revolutionary who leads illiterate, impove-

rished, rural, and downtrodden people searching for economic opportunity. Balram believes himself to be in the rooster coop with the entire lower-class population, unable to break out and ascend above the lower class. People are unjustly bound to their masters by their ‘trustworthiness’ and serve them blindly. Balram believes he is brilliant enough to climb the social ladder by murdering his masters and attempts to justify his crime as an act of breaking the coop. Apart from this, the film shows the massacre of Balram’s family in his nightmare and two accidents take place in the film without any legal investigation.

The oppositional positioned viewers felt that the film lacked essence and promoted a morally unacceptable way of success. They felt the film looked like it was promoting servants to kill the masters and conveying that it is easy to get away with such a crime too (Foxysuma). They felt that the filmmaker described the worst scenario possible to try to convince that “poor kill rich is right thing to do” (Felipesaloma). Moreover, others expressed their fear that there are millions of people still living these conditions who can get wrongly influenced and start picking up weapons for their anxiety disorders (Ajleohero). Some felt that the ending of the film where Balram tries to justify crime is nothing more than an Indian tv shows Crime Patrol and Swadhan India. Several criticised Netflix for its preference for “ultra-violent” content in the film. It provides platforms to those who want to show India in a less than positive light. They felt that Netflix is creating “gratuitous violence for the sake of shock value” in films based on India for a global audience (Bigdgun). Several wondered what the director attempted to convey using foul language. Some thought that the film is misleading the youth with dark content just because it sells more.

Promoting Wrong Message

Commenting on the moral of the story, both the negotiated positioned audience and oppositional positioned Indian viewers felt the film fails to convey sensible meaning at the end. The hegemonic positioned reviewers opined that the film has deeper meaning, it explains that the Indian system is corrupt, that politicians are bribed on a regular basis, that the rich treat the poor like trash, and that the poor live in perilous conditions with no access to health care or adequate living conditions. It is this repressive system that produces individuals like as Balram, who, fed up with being treated unfairly and realising that his future contained nothing meaningful for him, did the right thing by murdering his master. Moreover, the reviewer argues that no one learns to murder their bosses in order to become wealthy in the film, and everyone understands that murder is not the correct path to take. What is required

is a systemic change that prevents people from even considering such an option by creating conditions that allow everyone to live a decent life regardless of their circumstances. “Balram is a product of the system, the big message is: we must change the system” (Jcarlos).

In contrast, the oppositional positioned Indian reviewers felt that the film is harmful because of its misleading plot, which portrays the protagonist’s violent deed as the right thing to do in the eyes of the community. Some reviewers claimed that the film portrays both the stagnant past of Indian culture and the atrocious treatment of servants by their masters in the modern-day which is infact an “Ignorant depiction of India” (Detourto). Some reviewers felt that the perseverance of young entrepreneurs is not reflected in this claim but the film depicts a shabby and unscrupulous path to prosperity, which is not representative of India’s approach to achieving success. Some reviewers thought that the film glorifies criminality while simultaneously belittling the achievements of hardworking people. Others thought about serious consequences domestic workers may face because the director is “throwing them in the radar of doubt by every customer they get” making it incredibly difficult for them to earn their keep (Sonagohelodhari).

The oppositional positioned reviewers thought that the film’s screenplay was created by persons who do not reside in India and therefore have little knowledge of the country. Throughout the film, India is shown as an entirely destitute location that only exists in the director’s imagination, not in reality. Even the dialogues don’t have a very authentic tone to them. Some reviewers felt that Western filmmakers may even have resentment for India, as indicated by the film’s only focus on its inadequacies. The story may be acceptable to someone who is unfamiliar with India’s culture, but Indians who have fought their own struggles and worked hard to attain their goals would always be offended by it. Reviewer claimed that hundreds of thousands of people have been lifted out of poverty since India gained its freedom, and the country is still doing so. They questioned the filmmaker: Is it true that all of these people killed their masters in order to get wealthy? (Abhi). Some reviewers compared the film with *Slumdog Millionaire* and claimed that another attempt has been made to caricature, belittle, and disrespect Indian culture following the success of *Slumdog Millionaire*.

In order to get financial freedom, he goes through the process of murdering his boss, which is utterly unacceptable in the real world, perhaps such scenarios result in the commission of criminal offences. Most of the reviewers felt that the director has not given any consideration to the consequences of his film on the audience’s state of mind. The moral of a narrative is everything, and this film lacks it and

makes a joke out of the situations. The narrative concluded without regrets about the murder, looting, criminality, or greed. As a result, the film sends an immoral picture of humanity, one that is devoid of hope but also a false example of what it means to be successful in the world. The filmmaker has promoted the incorrect message and has employed deceptive methods to gain an audience. The film also demonstrates that only corrupt and unethical individuals can advance through the ranks in capitalistic cultures such as India. The moral of the story appears to be meant as a jest for the amusement of the Western audience.

Plot Hole

The oppositional positioned audience argued that the plot of *The White Tiger* is illogical, the reviewer questioned: What happened with the master's family? Why didn't they come after the driver knowing he killed the master and ran off with the money...and they still had the note that has the driver's admittance of murder too? (Rav-mistry). When Balram gets away with murder by paying a police officer at a station, for some reviewer it is difficult to believe that no one else in the police may be looking for a suspect who has committed murder, especially someone who has political ties in the first place. Another thing most of the reviewers noticed is that even though Ashok's family is wealthy, they like to travel via sleeper class coach, not even AC coach of train to and from New Delhi. They thought that the film maker fails to show class divide because he is more interested in showing how unclean Indian trains are and how poorly maintained the railway stations. Some pointed out that the film is "loaded with western stereotypes of India and gross exaggerations" (Maheshseshadri), and others felt that the script of the film is half baked. Some felt that the film seeks to convey a tremendous amount of information and the film makers "focus more on dark scenes about India" (Kohlisuraj). As a result, it takes a long time to get through the entire film; it is sluggish and has lots of unpleasant overuse moments. Some reviewers contended that the film is made for the Western audience because "each frame of the movie is colourless, artificially shaded yellow and foggy" (Didwania) and denied it as a true representation of India.

The film follows the story of a car driver whose master comes from a very wealthy family, and it tries to show urban and rural India's harsh conditions as well as servant-boss relationships. It also depicts the conditions the driver experiences while working in the environment of wealthy people, which leads him to kill his master. Several reviewers felt that the film presents a pathetic logic that there are only two ways for poor people to be set free from their cage: through crime and politics. While some reviewers felt that the film makes fun of those Indians who put

in the effort and sacrifice to achieve success in their lives. The film does not include any instances of persons from low-income families who have achieved success in their life by mastery of their talents, innovations that benefit humanity, or following their passions. Rather than, the film attempts to justify the use of unlawful means to achieve success.

A reviewer felt that the filmmaker is still under the influence of rural India in the 1970s when everyone was eager to go to urban areas. He claimed that significant improvement has occurred during the preceding two decades, and a considerable portion of the population now maintains a relatively decent living level (Nagarajusatya). Another reviewer explained the master-servant relation, it is true that domestic servants in India are readily accessible; yet, they are free to choose whatever service they like to work for on their own terms and conditions. The treatment of all domestic workers seen in the film is brutal and terrible, and it is all staged for the sake of theatrics and shock value. She felt that it is “insensitive and offensive coming from a team which is in fact Indian” (Jagetiasneha).

Self-Interest

The oppositional positioned reviewers also believed that Bahrani tried to recreate the magic of *Slumdog Millionaire*, following its strategy of focusing on poor India, but the film is far from being average in terms of entertainment value. Moreover, the film only focuses on displaying Hindus’ hatred for Muslims as well as upper-class hatred towards lower castes and subordinates. Priyanka Chopra claims to be informed about India because she was born and raised in the country, yet she has assisted the filmmaker in demonstrating Western version of modern India which is far from reality. It is another film produced by elites who believe they are capable of comprehending the challenges of the common person, but the reality is that they are not that capable. Reviewer felt that *Slumdog Millionaire* presented slum India in the hopes of winning an Academy Award, a separate yet identical scene of impoverished India was presented in *The White Tiger* in order to impress an elite American audience. Some reviewers felt that being both executive producer and star in the film, Priyanka Chopra tries to seek attention in the Western World.

Conclusion

It is found that the audience decodes *The White Tiger* as a “meaningful discourse” (130) to varying degrees. It appears that the interpretation of the film depends not only on the film itself, but also on the audience’s prior knowledge of Indian culture. The audience interpretation of the Indian culture seems to be concerned with

question of “shared meaning,”

To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other. Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and ‘making sense’ of the world, in broadly similar ways. (Hall 2)

For the viewer from the dominant-hegemonic position, framework of knowledge may depend on the books and films about the Indian culture. The Western director and hegemonic positioned audience share a similar framework of knowledge which enables them to communicate the message about Indian culture in a particular way. Here, framework of knowledge could be associated with Orientalist representation or more recent, *Slumdog Millionaire*’s effect. It appears that the hegemonic positioned audience continues a reinforcement of the “cultural stereotypes” by which the Orient is viewed (Said 27). Their views about the Indian culture depicted in the film provides distorted information about India. The success of Bahrani’s film may inspire other filmmakers to develop a film in the similar kind of setting with skewed representation of the Indian culture. Interestingly, it is also observed that some audience used alternate framework of the knowledge to decode the film. The negotiate-positioned audience accepted certain aspects of the depiction as accurate, while rejected the gratuitous brutality scenes. Most of the oppositional positioned audience seems aware about the Indian culture. They rejected the representation of India and questioned about the authenticity of the film. The analysis ensures the “polysemic” nature of the audio-visual text (Barker & Galasinski 7). Thus, Hall’s concept of Encoding/Decoding concept facilitates to understand the different meaning generated actively by the audience.

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