## 27.3 BOOK REVIEW

Once we have understood how to write a movie review, writing a book review may not be a challenge. Writing an effective book review, however, requires dealing with some aspects of the book that are found primarily in a book and may not essentially figure in the discussion when it comes to writing a movie review. For writing an effective book review, consider the following points.

### *Provide the Basic Information*

Book reviews often begin with the details about the book, namely title of the book, name of the author and publishers, price of the book, and its page extent.

### *Discuss the Theme*

Thematic concerns of a book often characterize its other aspects. Therefore, telling the reader what the book is all about will establish its essential nature. In case of non-fiction books, we can focus on the issue raised by the book and its relevance in the contemporary context. If the book is a work of fiction, establishing its thematic concerns helps the reader establish his/her interest in the book. For instance, an initial thematic introduction will not let a reader confuse R.K. Narayan's *Talkative Man* with Amartya Sen's *The Argumentative Indian.*

### *Elaborate the Plot Line*

Plots and subplots often hold the structure of a fictional work. Therefore, while reviewing one, we need to let the reader get a feel of the main plot of the work, besides its subplots. Good structure of a novel is the result of the seamless fusion of its plot and subplots. An able reviewer therefore usually talks about the structure of the work and comments whether the book is able to sustain the reader's interest or not.

### *Talk about the Art of Characterization*

At times, a work of fiction becomes monumental owing to the great skill with which the writers sculpt their characters. A well developed and rounded character can instil in readers a sense of wonder and delight. While judging a character, we need to evaluate whether the characters created by the writer seem convincing and authentic. Since characters derive their conviction

from the milieu they are created in, reviewers often discuss the appropriateness of a character in a given context.

***Critically Appraise the Language and Stylistic Features***

In a work of fiction, it is often the language and style of a book that finally decides its worth. Therefore, it becomes imperative for a reviewer to comment on the stylistic devices employed by the writer. Often writers use analogies, metaphors, symbols, images, epigrammatic expressions, etc. to help them unfold their narratives with poetic and literary elegance. A good style often redeems even a theme on a mundane issue while a book on a significant theme may fail to click with the reader owing to its poor style. Style, therefore, holds the key to the reader's interest in the book regardless of it being a work of fiction or a non-fiction book.

***Refer to the Relevance of the Book***

As suggested earlier, books become classics owing to their continued relevance over the ages. On the other hand, books that are essentially temporal and lose their relevance over the years, are eventually forgotten. A reviewer should judge a book on the crucible of its relevance in the present and the coming ages. For example, a book that focuses specifically on social or political issues of a particular time will fizzle out of its relevance once that issue is resolved. A book concerning human predicament on the other hand, is likely to sustain the interest of the reader over many years. Novels at times are suffused with autobiographical elements or the author's point of view on some issue; a reviewer can help the reader relate the work to the author by dropping a hint about that.

***Cite Peer Testimony by Other Reviewers***

Often we come across various comments on the blurb of a book. These are mentioned to induce interest and curiosity in the reader's mind. Such comments may also heighten the impact of a book review as they may add to the significance of our own comments about the work under discussion.

**Sample Book Review**

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| Book | *The White Tiger* |
| Author | Aravind Adiga |
| Country | India |
| Language | English |
| Genre | Fiction |
| Published | Atlantic Books (UK) (2008), HarperCollins (India) (2008) |
| Media type | Print (hardback) |
| Pages | 318 |
| ISBN | 1-4165-6259-1 |

*The White Tiger* is the debut novel by Arvind Adiga. Published in 2008, the novel created ripples in the literary world as it saw Adiga bagging the coveted Man Booker Prize. The novel explores the journey of Balram, a 'tea boy' from a small, inconsequential village ignored in the tapestry of the country. Indigence draws Balram to Delhi where he finds employment as a chauffeur. With passage of time, he wins the faith of his master Ashok and his wife Pinky Madam. To everyone's shock however, he kills his kind master, steals his money, and flees to Bangalore.

Composed in an epistolary form, the novel presents an honest and frank onslaught on the complexity of Indian society that is firmly rooted in an age-old class-based feudal hierarchy. Through a unique narrative structure, Balram Halwai, the protagonist, writes to the premier of China and in the process, lays bare the underbelly of the divided, discriminating, and lopsided Indian social set-up. During its course, the novel throws open the seminal issues related to poverty, darkness, corruption, caste politics, feudalism, perennial social exploitation, etc. Negotiating such sociopolitical filth, Balram transcends his humble origins and shrugging aside his 'tea boy' tag, he metamorphoses himself into a successful entrepreneur, setting up his own taxi service.

In this ingeniously layered texture, Adiga makes Balram narrate his life-story, recounting how he got to where he now is—a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. And from early on, we learn that he is a wanted man, as he writes about a poster describing him and alluding to his misdeeds. The novelist flawlessly captures his bohemian spirit as coming from a tiny rural Indian town Laxmangarh and having suffered the pangs of discrimination, Balram eventually devises an escape from its tyrannical clutches, break the crippling rooster coop, and rewrite his own destiny. Essentially a prototype of the underprivileged lot from the society, Balram seems to herald a 'tomorrow', when the subdued voices from 'the Darkness' will eventually be heard, albeit in a tragic manner.

Besides such thematic intensity and concerns, the novel offers a confluence of rich literary feast as Adiga composes his multi-layered text in poetic elegance. The novel abounds in symbols, imageries, metaphors, and analogies between the human and the animal world. Employed dexterously, all these stylistic devices run interwoven in the text. Most of the characters find an equivalent of themselves in some animal with Balram emerging as the White Tiger, surviving in starkly dark realities on his own terms.

Besides all the prizes, the movie has generated considerable critical speculation both in India and abroad. Some such remarks have been added for you to warm you up before you run into Adiga's literary world of intensity, guile, mendacity, and reckless hilarity.

Some other observations on *The White Tiger* are as follows:

*'As Balram's education expands, he grows more corrupt. Yet the reader's sympathy for the former tea boy never flags. In creating a character who is both witty and psychopathic, Mr Adiga has produced a hero almost as memorable as Pip, proving himself the Charles Dickens of the call-centre generation.'*

*– The Economist*

*'Aravind Adiga's first novel is couched as a cocksure confession from a deceitful, murderous philosopher runt who has the brass neck to question his lowly place in the order of things. His disrespect for his elders and betters is shocking -- even Mahatma Gandhi gets the lash of his scornful tongue. (…) Balram has the voice of what may, or may not, be a new India: quick-witted, half-baked, self-mocking, and awesomely quick to seize an advantage. (…) There is much to commend in this novel, a witty parable of India's changing society, yet there is also much to ponder. (…) My hunch is that this is fundamentally an outsider's view and a superficial one. There are so many other alternative Indias out there, uncontacted and unheard. Aravind Adiga is an interesting talent and I hope he will immerse himself deeper into that astonishing country, then go on to greater things.'*

– Kevin Rushby, *The Guardian*

*'Adiga's message isn't subtle or novel, but Balram's appealingly sardonic voice and acute observations of the social order are both winning and unsettling.'*

*– The New Yorker*

*'(A)t once a fascinating glimpse beneath the surface of an Indian economic "miracle," a heart-stopping psychological tale of a premeditated murder and its aftermath, and a meticulously*

*conceived allegory of the creative destruction that's driving globalization.* (...) *That may sound like a lot to take in, but* The White Tiger *is unpretentious and compulsively readable to boot.'*

– Scott Medintz, *The New York Sun*

*'His voice is engaging -- caustic and funny, describing the many injustices of modern Indian society with well-balanced humour and fury. But there's little new here -- the blurbs claim it's redressing the misguided and romantic Western view of India -- but I suspect there are few to whom India's corruption will come as a surprise. As social commentary, it's disappointing, although as a novel it's good fun.'*

– Francesca Segal, *The Observer*

*'Adiga's training as a journalist lends the immediacy of breaking news to his writing, but it is his richly detailed storytelling that will captivate his audience.* (...) The White Tiger *contains passages of startling beauty* (...). *Adiga never lets the precision of his language overshadow the realities at hand: No matter how potent his language one never loses sight of the men and women fighting impossible odds to survive.* (...) The White Tiger *succeeds as a book that carefully balances fable and pure observation.'*

– Lee Thomas, *San Francisco Chronicle*

*'(E)xtraordinary and brilliant* (....) *Talk of "lessons" should not be taken to suggest that* The White Tiger *is a didactic exercise in "issues", like a newspaper column. For Adiga is a real writer -- that is to say, someone who forges an original voice and vision.'*

– Adam Lively, *Sunday Times*

*'What Adiga lifts the lid on is also inexorably true: not a single detail in this novel rings false or feels confected.* The White Tiger *is an excoriating piece of work, stripping away the veneer of "India Rising". That it also manages to be suffused with mordant wit, modulating to clear-eyed pathos, means Adiga is going places as a writer.'*

– Neel Mukherjee, *The Telegraph*

*'Balram's cynical, gleeful voice captures modern India: no nostalgic lyricism here, only exuberant reality.'*

– Kate Saunders, *The Times*

*'Aravind Adiga's* The White Tiger *is one of the most powerful books I've read in decades. No hyperbole. This debut novel from an Indian journalist living in Mumbai hit me like a kick to the head* (.....) *This is an amazing and angry novel about injustice and power.'*

– Deirdre Donahue, *USA Today*

## RECAPITULATION

- ✓ The purpose of a movie review is to help the readers determine whether they wish to watch the movie. Besides this, writing effective reviews can help students improve their overall expression in language.
- ✓ It is advisable to start a movie review with a summary of how the story moves and what it essentially deals with. This will help a reader gauge his/her interest in the review further.
- ✓ A movie review also briefly touches upon the mise-en-scène elements of a film as it helps the reader appraise the technical features of a movie.
- ✓ A book review should be brief and specific. It needs to highlight all the salient features of a book without unnecessary repetitions and elaborations. One can begin with a brief idea about the story followed by discussion on some other essential elements such as theme, plot, structure, language, point of view, etc.
- ✓ Through book reviews, some readers also wish to know the opinions of other writers who too have read and evaluated the information contained in the book.
- ✓ Revise and edit your review uncompromisingly so as to send a neatly drawn, correct, and appropriate write-up.