

Inequality in the novel of Aravind Adiga's the White Tiger

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Abstract—Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) presents a penetrating critique of social, economic, and moral inequality in modern India. Through the voice of Balram Halwai, the novel exposes the grim realities of class stratification, corruption, and exploitation that persist beneath India's façade of globalization and progress. This research paper explores how Adiga portrays inequality as an entrenched and cyclical system, perpetuated through poverty, servitude, and moral decay. Drawing upon postcolonial and Marxist frameworks, the study examines how Balram's narrative becomes both a symptom and a subversion of India's socio-economic imbalance.

Index Terms—globalization, poverty, servitude, Marxist framework, class stratification

I. INTRODUCTION

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* won the 2008 Man Booker Prize for its unflinching portrayal of India's class divide and moral corruption. Set in a rapidly globalizing society, the novel captures the contradictions of a nation torn between tradition and modernity, light and darkness, wealth and poverty. At its core lies the protagonist Balram Halwai's journey from a poor village boy to a successful entrepreneur and murderer. His ascent is symbolic of resistance against the oppressive hierarchy that traps millions in servitude.

II. ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND CLASS DIVISION

Economic disparity forms the foundation of *The White Tiger*. Balram's India is divided into two worlds—the urban elite, represented by the Stork, the Mongoose, and Ashok, and the rural underclass, symbolized by Balram and his village, Laxmangarh. The novel vividly contrasts the opulence of Delhi's upper classes with the destitution of rural India.

Adiga uses Balram's rise as a critique of capitalism's exploitative core. Though globalization promises opportunity, it only widens the gap between the rich and the poor.

III. SOCIAL AND CASTE INEQUALITY

While India has constitutionally abolished caste discrimination, Adiga shows its continued presence in subtle and systemic forms. Balram is born into the 'Halwai' caste, traditionally sweet-makers, which determines his social position and destiny. His family's servitude and unquestioning obedience to landlords reflect centuries of inherited oppression. Even when Balram leaves the village, caste follows him in new guises. In the city, it transforms into class and occupational hierarchy—drivers, servants, and guards forming the 'new caste system' of urban India.

IV. MORAL CORRUPTION AND INEQUALITY

Adiga connects economic inequality with moral decay. The novel suggests that in a society where wealth defines worth, ethical boundaries dissolve. Balram's murder of Ashok represents both liberation and moral downfall. Adiga refuses to romanticize Balram's rebellion, instead presenting it as a byproduct of a corrupt system where survival necessitates immorality.

V. THE "ROOSTER COOP" AS A METAPHOR FOR STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY

One of the novel's most powerful symbols, the 'Rooster Coop,' encapsulates the psychological dimension of inequality. Balram compares the Indian servant class to roosters in a coop—aware of their fate yet unwilling to escape. The coop symbolizes the

internalized servitude that sustains oppression. Balram's ultimate escape represents a rupture in this psychological structure but at the cost of moral innocence.

VI. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Adiga's representation of inequality can be best understood through three major theoretical lenses: Marxist criticism, postcolonial theory, and Foucauldian power analysis. From a Marxist perspective, *The White Tiger* depicts a capitalist society sustained by class exploitation. Balram, a member of the proletariat, recognizes that the bourgeoisie maintain dominance by controlling both wealth and ideology. From a postcolonial standpoint, Adiga critiques the legacy of colonial hierarchies that persist in independent India. Finally, Foucauldian theory explains how power functions not through overt domination but through self-regulation and surveillance.

VII. CONCLUSION

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is not merely a novel about a man's rise from poverty—it is a searing critique of the structures that sustain inequality in modern India. Through economic exploitation, caste hierarchy, and moral decay, Adiga exposes how the promise of progress conceals deep divisions. Balram's transformation from servant to entrepreneur mirrors India's own transformation—a nation striving for modernity while shackled by its social past.

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