



Original Research Article

A Sociological Analysis of Power, Class and Social Inequality in the Select Works of Aravind Adiga

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Abstract: Aravind Adiga's fiction offers a powerful sociological critique of contemporary Indian society by exposing the deep-rooted structures of power, class hierarchy and social inequality. Through novels such as *The White Tiger* (2008), *Last Man in Tower* (2011) and *Selection Day* (2016), Adiga presents a stark representation of the divide between the privileged elite and the marginalized masses. This paper examines how Adiga portrays the dynamics of power and class through the experiences of ordinary individuals trapped within rigid social systems. The study argues that Adiga's narratives function as social documents that reflect the contradictions of post-liberalization India, where economic growth coexists with persistent inequality, exploitation and moral decay.

Keywords: Aravind Adiga, power, class, social inequality, Indian society, sociology of literature.

INTRODUCTION

Literature has long served as a mirror of society, revealing the underlying structures that govern social relations. In contemporary Indian English fiction, Aravind Adiga emerges as a significant voice for his critical portrayal of socio-economic realities in modern India. His works interrogate the myth of "India Shining" by foregrounding the experiences of the poor, the working class and the socially marginalized.

Adiga's fiction is deeply sociological in nature. It engages with issues such as class stratification, power relations, corruption, caste-based discrimination and the widening gap between the rich and the poor. His characters are often individuals struggling within

oppressive systems, where mobility is restricted and survival requires moral compromise.

This paper attempts a sociological analysis of power, class and social inequality in Adiga's select works, primarily focusing on *The White Tiger*, *Last Man in Tower* and *Selection Day*. It argues that Adiga uses narrative realism, satire and irony to expose the structural injustices embedded in Indian society.

Theoretical Framework: Sociology of Literature
The sociology of literature examines how literary texts reflect, reproduce, or challenge social structures. Thinkers like Karl Marx, Max Weber and Pierre Bourdieu emphasize that class relations and power dynamics shape human consciousness and social

behavior. From a Marxist perspective, society is divided into classes based on control over economic resources and literature often reveals the tensions between these classes.

Adiga's novels can be read through a Marxist and neo-Marxist lens, as they depict capitalist exploitation, alienation and class struggle. His works highlight how economic power determines social status and how institutions such as education, politics and corporations function to preserve elite dominance.

Power and Social Control in The White Tiger

The White Tiger is perhaps Adiga's most powerful critique of social inequality. The novel narrates the story of Balram Halwai, a poor village boy who rises to become a successful entrepreneur by murdering his master. Balram's journey exposes the brutal realities of class oppression in Indian society.

The metaphor of the "Rooster Coop" represents the system of social control that traps the poor. Just as chickens remain submissive even when they see others being slaughtered, the poor accept their exploitation due to fear, conditioning and lack of alternatives. Power operates not only through violence but also through ideology and psychological domination.

Balram's employers symbolize the ruling elite who maintain control through money, political connections and corruption. The police, politicians and businessmen form a nexus of power that marginalizes the poor and protects the interests of the rich. Balram realizes that social mobility is nearly impossible within legal and moral boundaries.

From a sociological perspective, Balram's crime is not merely personal but structural. It reflects what sociologists call "deviance produced by inequality," where individuals break moral codes due to systemic injustice. Adiga suggests that in a deeply unequal society, crime becomes a rational response to survival.

Class Conflict and Urban Inequality in Last Man in Tower

In Last Man in Tower, Adiga explores class conflict within an urban middle-class setting. The novel centers on a real estate developer who attempts to demolish an old apartment building to construct a luxury complex. Most residents agree to sell their homes, tempted by money and upward mobility. However, one man, Masterji, refuses to comply.

Masterji represents moral resistance and ethical integrity, while the other residents symbolize collective greed and moral compromise. The power struggle between the capitalist developer and the

powerless residents highlights how urbanization intensifies inequality.

Sociologically, the novel reflects the commodification of space in neoliberal India. Homes are no longer emotional or cultural spaces but financial assets. The developer's power lies in his economic capital, legal resources and political influence. The residents, driven by aspiration, internalize capitalist values and turn against their own community.

Masterji's eventual murder reveals how power operates through both institutional and collective violence. The society eliminates those who resist economic progress. Adiga thus critiques the moral cost of development, showing how capitalism destroys human relationships and social solidarity.

Dreams, Masculinity and Class in Selection Day

Selection Day focuses on two brothers from a lower-middle-class background who aspire to become professional cricketers. Their father views cricket as a means of social mobility and escape from poverty. The novel exposes how dreams are shaped by class conditions and economic desperation.

The boys' lives are controlled by external forces: parental pressure, sports institutions, corporate sponsors and social expectations. Power here operates subtly through ambition and discipline. The body itself becomes a site of exploitation, trained and molded for profit and fame.

Adiga also explores the intersection of class with masculinity and identity. The boys struggle to define themselves in a society that values success, money and performance. Their emotional needs and individuality are suppressed in the pursuit of social mobility.

From a sociological angle, Selection Day reveals how neoliberal ideology promotes competition while ignoring structural inequality. Success is portrayed as personal achievement, but failure is blamed on individual weakness rather than systemic barriers.

Caste, Class and the Persistence of Inequality

Although Adiga primarily focuses on class, caste remains an underlying factor in his works. In The White Tiger, Balram belongs to a lower caste and his social position is predetermined by birth. Despite constitutional equality, caste continues to influence access to education, employment and dignity.

Adiga shows that modern capitalism does not eliminate caste; instead, it reconfigures it. Economic inequality overlaps with social discrimination, creating multiple layers of marginalization. The poor are excluded not only materially but also

symbolically.

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "social capital" is useful here. The elite possess not only wealth but also networks, cultural knowledge and institutional access. The poor lack these resources, making upward mobility extremely difficult.

Satire as a Tool of Social Criticism

One of Adiga's distinctive narrative techniques is satire. His ironic tone, exaggerated characters and dark humor expose the absurdities of social life. Satire allows him to criticize power structures without moral preaching.

In *The White Tiger*, Balram's letters to the Chinese Premier serve as a satirical commentary on Indian democracy. The narrative mocks political rhetoric, exposing the gap between official discourse and lived reality.

Satire functions as a sociological tool by making readers aware of systemic contradictions. It destabilizes dominant narratives of progress and success, forcing readers to confront uncomfortable truths about inequality and exploitation.

Adiga's Vision of Contemporary Indian Society

Adiga's novels collectively present a bleak vision of modern India. Economic growth benefits a small elite, while millions remain trapped in poverty. Institutions meant to ensure justice—education, law, democracy—often fail the marginalized.

His characters rarely achieve liberation through ethical means. Success requires deception, violence, or moral compromise. This reflects what sociologists describe as "structural violence," where social systems produce harm without visible physical force. Adiga does not offer easy solutions. Instead, he presents a diagnostic portrait of society, revealing how deeply inequality is embedded in social structures. His fiction urges readers to question

dominant ideologies and recognize the human cost of economic progress.

Conclusion

A sociological analysis of Aravind Adiga's select works reveals a consistent critique of power, class hierarchy and social inequality in contemporary Indian society. Through *The White Tiger*, *Last Man in Tower* and *Selection Day*, Adiga exposes the mechanisms through which elites maintain dominance and the marginalized struggle for survival.

His fiction demonstrates that inequality is not accidental but structural. Power operates through economic control, institutional authority and ideological manipulation. Class determines life chances and social mobility remains an exception rather than a norm.

Ultimately, Adiga's works function as social narratives that challenge the celebratory discourse of globalization and development. They compel readers to confront the moral and human consequences of inequality, making his fiction not only literary but profoundly sociological in significance.

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