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Marxism in the Age of Globalisation: A Study of Class Consciousness and Ideological Hegemony in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

The White Tiger is a novel by Aravind Adiga. It represents the biting economic realities of India post-liberalisation, where globalisation only seems to be adding on to disparity between haves and have nots. The novel represents how money and power shapes people's relations, values and opportunities for social mobility. It revolves around two key concepts: class consciousness and ideological hegemony to explain how the rich and powerful not only retain power through wealth but by moulding how people think. The protagonist, Balram Halwai, articulates and aims to escape his servant's existence. His progress from village driver to entrepreneur symbolizes resistance to, as well as adaptation toward, the capitalist system. The novel gives us an understanding that true freedom does not come from opulence but from the realisation about the very forces that keep people oppressed. The paper examines how Adiga employs humor, irony and symbols to reflect the unjust face of modern India where success and suffering go hand in hand. It also considers how the novel criticizes globalization as a new type of colonial ruling, which continues to maintain inequality.

Keywords: Marxism, Class Consciousness, Social Advancement, Resistance, Acceptance, Ideological Hegemony, Capitalist System, Globalisation, exploitation.

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Introduction:

Aravind Adiga is an Indian novelist and journalist. He is best known for his sharp and fearless portrayal of modern India's social and economic realities. His debut novel, *The White Tiger* won the Man Booker Prize in 2008. It presents a bold and unsettling picture of a country caught between poverty and progress. Through the eyes of Balram Halwai, a poor driver who becomes a wealthy entrepreneur, Adiga captures the moral confusion, corruption, and inequality that define post-liberalisation in India. His writing reflects the voice of a generation that has witnessed the promises and failures of globalisation. *The White Tiger* recounts the gist of how a man moves from "Darkness to Light"; from rural India to urban success. But Adiga's story is not only of one man and his ambition; it has to do with the structures of power that have led him on this path. The novel examines to what extent economic growth and globalisation have made the poor poorer and the rich richer. It depicts a society in which worth is determined by wealth, and morality takes a seat when survival comes calling. Adiga's voice here is cutting, ironic, as he lambastes the hypocrisy of a nation that values success but doesn't care to think about how it happens.

In the beginning of the novel, Balram accepts his role as a servant. He has faith that loyalty and hard work can brighten his destiny. But watching how his wealthy white employers live, he comes to see the inherent injustice that holds him in place. His dawning realization is the Marxist concept of "class consciousness" in action, when oppressed people become aware of the truth about their exploitation. Balram's rebellion; in his determination to kill his master and seize control of his own life; represents both a denial of servitude and an embrace of the darker side of capitalist ambition. In becoming a businessman himself, Balram joins the same corrupt system he once resented. This article analyses *The White Tiger* from a Marxist perspective to reveal how Adiga depicts class consciousness and ideological hegemony in the era of globalisation. It reads Adiga deploying Balram's story to demonstrate how capitalism moulds human relationships and moral economies in contemporary India. The novel demonstrates that economic victory doesn't result in freedom, but usually moral degradation. The Adiga work poses the issue of whether, in a world organized along profit and competitive lines, a person can ever escape control.

Marxist Perspectives:

The Marxist theory provides a solid foundation in which to approach this book as it revolves around the themes of power, class and ideology. Karl Marx thought that every society is organized around class struggle, between those who control production and those who work for mere survival. In *The White Tiger*, the battle is played out in contemporary terms. The masters own not just the money and material goods that our society values; they also own what we, the workers, think; our ideas and ideals including about life and how to live it. Antonio Gramsci referred to this control as "ideological hegemony," in which the ruling class holds on to power by moulding the beliefs of others rather than resorting to direct force. That is the tension between submission and vision that Balram Halwai embodies. Adiga is true to the real India, yet symbolic. This narrative tells how the globalist dream of progress masks the continued power of the rich and never-quite-overcome helplessness of the poor. Its

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protagonist, Balram, narrates the novel and helps elucidate the psychological chains that keep his fellow lower-caste underclasses resigned to their fates. What the novel makes clear is that real liberation isn't about getting fabulously wealthy; it's about becoming aware of the forces that shape and constrain one's existence. In this sense, *The White Tiger* is a story not just of one man's superior drive and determination, but it serves as mirror to the contradictions of an unjust society built on inequality and delusion. Marxism sprouted as a theory of political economy constructed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the nineteenth century. It describes how human society is based upon its economic system and that each period of history has represented a class struggle between conflicting social classes. According to Marx, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (*The Communist Manifesto* 14). This conflict is between the haves; who own and control means of production, the bourgeoisie; and the have nots; the workers/traders who labour to create goods/services-the proletariat. In Marxism's view, the origins of inequality, exploitation and injustice are not in the failing morality or uncontrollable greed of individuals but in the structure of the economic system.

He also contended that in all societies the dominant class not only controlled material resources but ideas too. This idea is the kernel of what later thinkers like Antonio Gramsci dubbed "ideological hegemony." The governing class, Gramsci argued, rules not just through force but also by consent. People are led to believe in their place in the system through beliefs, traditions and even dreams. Thus ideology becomes a major tool of domination. People may feel liberated, but they will normally be influenced by the values of the dominant class. This is what comes through loud and clear in *The White Tiger*: the social and economic system that keeps Balram Halwai, as well as countless others like him, in their place. The indigent are victims of the belief that their suffering is organic and unalterable. Balram dubs this mental trap "the rooster coop." Cock-throated like roosters that know they are to be slaughtered, the servants acquiesce in their place because they are trained into believing that loyalty and silence are virtues. The masters, meanwhile, use education and religion and money to rationalize being better than others. This is how ideological hegemony operates in Adiga's world; it compels human beings to cooperate in their own oppression.

Globalization Double Edge: Progress and Poverty in Adiga's India

Globalisation changed India's economy and culture after the 1990s. It brought new industries, jobs, and technology, but it also deepened the gap between the rich and the poor. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* captures this divided world. The novel shows how the dream of a modern India often hides a darker truth; the rise of a new kind of exploitation. Adiga's India is a land of contradictions: malls, call centres, and luxury cars stand beside slums, garbage heaps, and villages without electricity. The novel explores how globalisation creates both progress and poverty at the same time. Capitalism lies at the heart of this new India. It promises freedom and success through hard work, but in reality, it often benefits only those who already have power. Marx described capitalism as a system where "the worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces" (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* 71). The same idea is reflected in *The White Tiger*. The servants who make the rich man's life comfortable remain

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poor, while the masters grow wealthier through their labour. Balram, the main character, sees this truth in his daily life. He drives his employer, Ashok, through the shining streets of Delhi, yet he cannot afford a room of his own. This constant contrast between light and darkness defines his world.

Adiga takes Balram's narrative to illustrate how globalisation forms a new ruling class; people who speak English, are entrepreneurs, and live in global market-connecting cities. They consider themselves modern, open-minded and even liberal, yet their well-being relies on the enduring misery of those beneath them. Balram realizes this hypocrisy when he contrasts Ashok's Western behavior and treatment of servants. Despite Ashok's rhetoric about fairness and advancement, he continues to demand complete allegiance from Balram. That's how globalisation changes the way people look, but not the distribution of power. The novel also looks at how capitalism reduces every relationship to a transaction. Balram's loyalty is bought with cash, and his obedience by small presents. Not even kinship stands up to the pressure of economic necessity. When Balram sends money back home, it does not buy him love or respect; it merely ups the ante of expectation. Adiga demonstrates that in this system, morality warps to accommodate the logic of profit. People are put in a lose-lose situation, to survive or be honest. For Balram, success is only possible when he forsakes any notion of right and wrong.

Delhi as a symbol of Power, Greed and Class Awakening:

Adiga's version of Delhi as a magnet for wealth but also venality resembles Marx's belief that capitalism results in both riches and moral decomposition. The city is a place of opportunity, but it also reveals greed and inequality. The gleaming towers of the global business elite conceal a darker world: the servants and drivers who toil simply so these rulers are never made uneasy. Balram refers to India as two countries in one: a country of Light, and a country of Darkness. This split reflects the division that exists around the world between those who benefit from capitalism and its wrought destruction. Globalization also has an impact on the way people think. It manufactures hopes through media, advertising and education. Balram aspires to be like his master, not because he is after justice but simply power. He finds out that in a capitalist world, money is respect, identity even. His last triumph as an entrepreneur illustrates how thoroughly he has taken these values to heart. By winning at the same ruthless game that once ruined him. Capitalism, Adiga proposes, not only transforms society but also forges the human mind. In the novel, Adiga offers readers a virtual tour of how globalisation has been operating in India. It promises advancement but fuels inequality. It rewards ambition and punishes honesty. The novel demonstrates how under capitalism, even rebellion is incorporated into the system. For Balram is not just a rag to riches story: he is also an avatar of what the globalised world does to everyman's dream, the new rat race where everyone dreams but only one can survive. In that book, the character of Balram Halwai is perhaps the most blatant embodiment of class consciousness in this novel about societal structure and oppression. At first, Balram does not question his lot as a servant. He has the same belief and thinks that obedience and loyalty is the only path to survival. This

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early experience reveals how deeply the social structure has conditioned him to accept his low status. He depicts his village and family life as part of the “Darkness,” where poverty is unremarkable but ambition appears perilous. Balram’s thoughts exemplify what Marxist theory refers to as the internalisation of oppression; people come to see their exploitation as simply natural.

As Balram moves into the city to work for Ashok, he begins to notice the unfairness of the world around him. He sees that no matter how hard he works, he remains powerless and poor, while his master enjoys comfort and luxury. This growing awareness is the start of class consciousness. He realises that the rules of society favour the rich and punish the poor. Balram begins to understand that the only way to change his fate is to challenge the system itself. His mind starts to question the moral codes and social norms that have kept him obedient for so long. Balram’s eventual rebellion; his decision to kill Ashok; is extreme, but it represents his full awakening. Marx argued that class consciousness leads the oppressed to take action against exploitation (Marx 15). Balram’s action shows that he recognises the system’s injustice and refuses to remain a passive victim. However, his rebellion is also complicated. By committing murder and entering the world of business, he embraces the very capitalist ambitions that once enslaved him. In other words, his rise is both a rejection and an adoption of the ruling system. Throughout the novel, Balram’s class consciousness develops gradually. Small experiences, such as seeing the corruption in city life, witnessing inequality firsthand, and understanding his employer’s hypocrisy, shape his understanding of society. He learns that social mobility in India is not about hard work alone; it requires awareness of power structures and a willingness to act. Balram’s transformation illustrates a key Marxist idea: the oppressed gain strength and agency when they become aware of their exploitation.

Moral Dilemmas and the Illusion of Freedom under Capitalism in Adiga’s *The White Tiger*:

Adiga also shows that class consciousness comes with moral dilemmas. Balram’s awareness forces him to make choices that challenge conventional ideas of right and wrong. His survival depends on breaking rules and violating social norms. The novel suggests that under capitalism, gaining class consciousness may require compromising personal ethics. Balram’s story demonstrates that freedom is not simply a matter of wealth but also a matter of understanding and navigating the system that keeps people powerless. In the end, Balram’s rise highlights both the possibilities and limits of class consciousness. He achieves personal success, but he becomes part of the same system that oppressed him. Adiga uses Balram’s journey to show how globalisation and capitalism shape not only economic life but also moral and social consciousness. The novel suggests that true liberation requires not only personal gain but also awareness of the larger forces controlling society. Balram’s story, therefore, becomes a lens through which readers can examine the struggles, compromises, and awakenings of the oppressed in a capitalist, globalised world. In *The White Tiger*, Adiga shows that the ruling class maintains power not only through wealth but also by controlling the minds of the poor. This idea, called ideological hegemony by Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, explains how the rich convince the lower classes to accept their position in natural way. Balram

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Halwai's world is a clear example of this. From an early age, he is taught that being a servant is his destiny. Obedience, loyalty, and silence are praised, while questioning authority is punished. This mental conditioning keeps the poor trapped in the "rooster coop," a system where they cooperate in their own exploitation. Adiga portrays this control in subtle ways. Balram sees how his employers, Ashok and his family, live in comfort and speak of morality, fairness, and modern values. Yet, they expect him to obey without question and treat him as less than human. The narrative shows that power is maintained not only through money or threats but through ideology. The poor internalise these ideas and often resist only at the cost of their own morality. They accept the rules of society even when it harms them, believing that compliance is virtuous or unavoidable. False freedom is another key theme connected to ideological hegemony. Balram's rebellion against Ashok is an attempt to break free from oppression. However, even as he gains wealth and independence, he becomes part of the same exploitative system he once despised. He may be free from his master, but he is not free from the logic of capitalism, which values profit over human relationships. Adiga shows that achieving true freedom requires more than material success; it requires awareness of the structures and ideas that shape human behaviour. The novel also highlights the psychological aspects of control. People like Balram are trained to believe that poverty is destiny and that resistance is dangerous. The "rooster coop" is more than a physical trap; it is a mental one. Ideology shapes how they see themselves, their ambitions, and even their morality. Balram's eventual awareness, or class consciousness, allows him to escape in one sense, but the narrative questions whether he truly transcends the system. By presenting this tension, Adiga critiques not only economic inequality but also the invisible mental chains that maintain it.

Through ideological hegemony, *The White Tiger* illustrates that oppression is as much about controlling minds as controlling wealth. Adiga shows that the poor are often complicit in their own subjugation because they accept the ideas and rules of the ruling class. Balram's journey demonstrates both the power of ideology and the difficulty of escaping it. Even when one breaks free materially, the social and moral pressures of capitalism continue to shape behaviour and decisions. The novel suggests that real liberation comes from understanding these forces and questioning the system itself, not just from accumulating wealth or status.

The Power of Voice and Symbolism in Revealing Class Divides in *The White Tiger*:

Aravind Adiga's storytelling style plays a crucial role in showing the social and economic inequalities in *The White Tiger*. The novel is written as a series of letters from Balram Halwai to the Chinese Premier, which gives readers direct access to his thoughts and feelings. This narrative style allows Balram to speak freely, sharing his personal experiences, ambitions, and observations. By using the first-person perspective, Adiga makes the story intimate and relatable, giving the reader a sense of being inside Balram's mind as he navigates the world of the rich and powerful. Adiga also uses symbols to highlight social divisions and moral corruption. One of the most important symbols is the "rooster coop," which represents the mental trap that keeps the poor obedient. Just like roosters waiting to be slaughtered, the lower classes accept their exploitation because society teaches them to obey. The division between "Darkness" and "Light" is another symbol that contrasts rural poverty with urban wealth,

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showing how economic development benefits some while leaving others behind. Even simple objects, such as chandeliers and luxury cars, represent status, power, and the inequality embedded in society. These symbols make Balram's experiences universal, showing that social structures and economic hierarchies shape human life everywhere.

Irony and dark humour are also central to Adiga's style. Balram often describes serious and violent events with a sarcastic or humorous tone, which highlights the absurdity of social norms. For example, he jokes about the hypocrisy of his wealthy employers while describing their corruption and moral failings. This use of irony makes the critique of capitalism and globalisation sharper and more memorable. Readers laugh at Balram's wit but are also forced to think about the deeper injustices he exposes. Through narrative style, symbolism, and irony, Adiga not only tells Balram's story but also critiques the society that shapes it. The first-person letters make readers feel the oppression and ambition personally. Symbols like the "rooster coop" and the division between "Light" and "Darkness" reveal the structural inequalities hidden in everyday life. Irony and humour ensure that the critique is engaging while still serious. Together, these techniques make *The White Tiger* a compelling study of class consciousness and ideological control in a globalised world.

In *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga presents globalisation as a modern form of colonialism. While India has gained independence politically, economic and cultural control continues in new ways. Foreign companies, multinational corporations, and urban elites benefit from global trade and technology, but the poor remain trapped in poverty. Adiga shows that globalisation, like colonial rule, creates winners and losers. The rich adopt modern lifestyles, speak English, and participate in global markets, while the lower classes continue to serve them without real freedom. Balram Halwai experiences this duality directly. He drives his wealthy employer, Ashok, through the shining streets of Delhi, observing the lifestyle made possible by global capital. Yet he also sees the ongoing exploitation of drivers, servants, and labourers, whose hard work supports the city's wealth. Balram recognises that economic development has created opportunities only for those who already hold power, leaving the majority behind. This mirrors colonial India, where wealth and modernity were concentrated in the hands of a few while the masses remained subjugated.

Adiga's Vision of Postcolonial India: Capitalism, Control, and the Myth of Liberation

Adiga highlights the cultural aspect of modern colonialism. The upper class embraces Western values, education, and materialism, presenting themselves as modern and progressive. At the same time, they maintain control over the poor through ideology, reinforcing social hierarchies. Balram notices this hypocrisy in Ashok, who talks about fairness and ethics but expects complete obedience from his servants. The novel suggests that globalisation spreads not only economic influence but also cultural and psychological control, shaping how people think and behave. Through Balram's eyes, Adiga critiques the promises of globalisation. It offers wealth, technology, and freedom, but often reinforces inequality and dependence. The poor, like Balram before his rebellion, remain confined by systemic exploitation and mental conditioning. By comparing globalisation to colonialism, *The White Tiger* demonstrates that

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economic independence does not guarantee social or moral freedom. True liberation requires awareness of both economic and ideological structures that maintain inequality, reminding readers that the legacy of oppression can persist even in a modern, globalised world.

The White Tiger provides a searing view of contemporary India and how the forces of globalization and capitalism impact human life and relationships. Aravind Adiga's novel tells the story of Balram Halwai, in a world ruled by money and muscle over morality or law, where the poor are penned inside poverty sties which define their place. Balram's ascendance from an almost feudal servant in a village to a successful entrepreneur shows the opportunities that can exist for social mobility, but also the constraints of systemic inequality. The story focuses on consciousness in counteracting oppression. Balram is conscious of his exploitation and that allows him to revolt and own his life. But his rebellion also reflects the moral ambiguities involved in escaping poverty in a capitalist world. Even as he grows wealthy and makes a name for himself, he is subsumed into the very arrangement of exploitation that he once resisted. This is consistent with Marxian views about the impact of economic arrangements on human behaviour and the difficulty to reach a place of real freedom. Adiga proves that being rich and successful is not the same as living free of constraint: it takes insight into the ways a society makes itself to be, and questioning it. Another theme of the novel is ideological hegemony. Adiga demonstrates that the ruling class rules not only through its wallets, but also by shaping beliefs, values and social codes. The "rooster coop" is a potent metaphor for how the poor internalise their own oppression, learning to abide by the rules that secure their oppression and accepting subjugation as normal. Even once Balram gains material freedom, he cannot shake off the psychological and cultural shackles capitalism and globalisation create. The book makes clear that true freedom is not born of wealth alone, but of an understanding how the structures that dictate life work.

Globalisation, as presented in the novel, says resembles a new-colonialism. Development is for a handful, and it means the enslavement of the majority. Adiga is a critic of the illusion of progress, and his work here holds up cities and technology as well as international connectivity as sources of wealth; but also re-creators of inequality. Through irony, symbolism and Balram's own voice, the novel lays bare a society that toasts growth while turning a blind eye on systemic oppression.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, *The White Tiger* is not only a tale of ambition, it is a critique of a world in which wealth, power and ideology keep each other all company while inequality reigns. Aravind Adiga wants his readers to look past material success and consider the social, economic and psychological pressures that shape human existence. The novel is a timely reminder that real liberation means understanding and contesting those forces, and an excellent study in class consciousness, ideological hegemony and the human costs of globalisation.

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