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POLITICAL AND SOCIAL POWER IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S NOVELS

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Abstract

Following the international success of the Booker Prize-winning novel *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga emerged as a prominent voice in contemporary Indian fiction. Rather than celebrating the narrative of a prosperous and progressive “India Shining,” Adiga is recognized for his portrayal of the nation's social inequalities and systemic flaws. His second novel, *Last Man in Tower*, presents a critical examination of the erosion of moral values and ethical principles in modern Indian society. While *The White Tiger* exposes the darker realities of life in Delhi, *Last Man in Tower* explores the power struggles and socio-economic conflicts that characterize Mumbai. The novel highlights how real-estate developers exploit ordinary citizens and acquire land under the pretext of globalization and urban development. Through his fiction, Adiga articulates a clear critique of contemporary political and social structures. He portrays Indian society as being deeply entangled in networks of political corruption, social injustice, and institutional failures. This study examines how dominant socio-political forces, including caste, religion, democracy, and the justice system, often fail to support or empower the protagonists of his novels despite their longstanding presence within the framework of governance. Furthermore, the analysis explores themes such as corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and the breakdown of justice. Although Adiga's works are fictional, they offer a realistic representation of the political and social challenges that continue to shape contemporary India.

Keywords: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Humiliation, Poverty, Conflict, Corruption, Justice, and Political Power.

Aravind Adiga, born in Madras (now Chennai) in 1974, received his education in both India and Australia. He pursued higher studies in English Literature at Columbia University, New York, and Magdalen College, Oxford. Between 2003 and 2005, Adiga worked as a journalist for *TIME* magazine in India, and his writings have also appeared in prominent British publications such as the *Financial Times* and *The Independent*. His debut novel, *The White Tiger*, achieved international acclaim and was awarded the Booker Prize in 2008. Through his literary works, Adiga presents a penetrating critique of contemporary Indian society. The

White Tiger vividly portrays the stark divide between the privileged and the marginalized, symbolized as the “World of Light” and the “World of Darkness.” This division reflects the contrast between those who possess wealth, power, and opportunities and those who endure poverty, exploitation, illness, and social deprivation. Adiga's keen observational perspective further exposes several pressing social issues, including inadequate healthcare facilities, the persistence of the dowry system, prostitution, environmental degradation, water pollution, and widespread corruption. His narratives reveal how corruption permeates various spheres of public and private life, including government offices, business transactions, media institutions, electoral processes, and political administration. Despite significant social and economic transformations, many of these issues continue to shape contemporary Indian society. Adiga's fiction serves as a critical lens through which these enduring inequalities and systemic challenges can be examined. The following section discusses some of the major socio-political concerns reflected in his works.

Religion plays a significant role in shaping the culture and social fabric of a nation. It serves as a means through which individuals cultivate faith and spiritual beliefs in their pursuit of the divine. India has traditionally been regarded as a deeply religious country where religion commands immense respect and influences various aspects of daily life. The nation is characterized by its religious diversity, with people adhering to different faiths and belief systems. Through centuries of spiritual practices and devotion, religion has contributed to the formation of a disciplined and culturally rich society. However, with the advancement of science and technology, the influence of religion appears to be gradually diminishing in certain spheres of contemporary life.

India remains a profoundly religious nation where individuals practice a variety of religions and worship different deities according to their beliefs. Within Hinduism, rivers occupy a sacred position and are revered as divine entities. In *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga highlights the contradiction between the religious significance attributed to rivers such as the Ganga and Yamuna and their actual condition, which is marked by severe pollution caused by urban waste, industrial discharge, open sewage, and floating corpses. Through the protagonist Balram Halwai, Adiga presents a critical observation of this paradox. Balram describes the Ganga as the “Mother Ganga, daughter of the Vedas, river of illumination, protector of us all, breaker of the chain of birth and rebirth” (TWT 15), while simultaneously exposing the contamination that characterizes the river's present state.

The practice of consigning dead bodies to the Ganga is rooted in the religious belief that it liberates the deceased from the cycle of birth and rebirth. However, economic hardship often prevents many families from performing proper cremation rites, resulting in partially cremated or uncremated bodies being released into the river. Through Balram, Adiga offers a critique of organized religion, particularly certain aspects of Hinduism. The novel challenges the idealized image of India as a spiritually pure and morally upright nation. Balram emerges as a skeptical and non-religious character who questions the social functions of religion. He argues that religion often reinforces divisions between the rich and the poor, as well as between the privileged and the working classes, thereby maintaining existing hierarchies.

Balram demonstrates a strong awareness of social inequalities and civic realities. He expresses dissatisfaction with the poverty and underdevelopment that characterize Indian towns and cities, especially his native village of Laxmangarh. Traditional Indian society often associates the beginning of any undertaking with religious rituals and devotion to deities. In his letter to the Chinese Premier, Mr. Jiabao, Balram remarks that India has “gods of the rich” and “gods of the poor.” According to him, the poor are encouraged to worship Hanuman because Hanuman symbolizes absolute devotion and obedience to his

master, Rama. Balram contends that this model of devotion conditions the poor to accept servitude and legitimizes social inequality.

Balram openly criticizes Hanuman and other mythological figures, arguing that they contribute to the perpetuation of the master-servant relationship. Referring to Hanuman, he states: “This is Hanuman, everyone's favorite god in the Darkness... we honor him because he was a faithful servant to the god Rama and a shining example of how to serve your masters with absolute fidelity, love, and devotion” (TWT 19). Through such observations, Adiga critiques the ideological role religion can play in sustaining social and economic hierarchies.

Adiga further examines the divisive impact of the caste system, which has historically fragmented Indian society. He portrays caste discrimination as a persistent social evil and criticizes the traditional Varna Vyavastha for restricting individual freedom and mobility. Through Balram's perspective, the caste system is compared to a zoo in which people are confined to separate cages according to their social status. Balram argues that caste functions as a “coop,” limiting individuals and preventing them from transcending their assigned social positions. Employing the metaphor of a zoo, he suggests that India, once a prosperous nation, descended into social disorder after independence when political leaders failed to maintain social harmony, allowing individuals and groups to compete ruthlessly for power and resources.

Balram's own experiences illustrate the humiliations associated with caste-based discrimination. After obtaining employment as a driver for Ashok, he is questioned by Ashok's father, known as the Stork, about his caste identity. When Balram replies that he belongs to the Halwai caste, the Stork immediately asks whether it is a “top” or “bottom” caste (TWT 56–62). This interaction reveals how caste continues to influence social relationships and determine an individual's status within society. Through such episodes, Adiga exposes the persistence of caste prejudice and its impact on the lives of marginalized individuals.

Balram experiences further humiliation when Pinky Madam reprimands him while he is preparing tea. She notices that he is touching himself with one hand while making the tea and criticizes him for his unhygienic habits, particularly his stained teeth, which are covered with paan residue. She instructs him to clean his teeth properly and follow basic standards of personal hygiene. Balram feels deeply embarrassed and attempts to defend himself. Through such incidents, Adiga illustrates the social and cultural humiliations experienced by individuals belonging to lower socio-economic backgrounds. Adiga further explores the issue of caste and religious discrimination through the character of Ram Prasad, a driver employed by the Stork. Ram Prasad's real name is Mohammad, and he is a Muslim. However, in order to secure employment and support his impoverished family, he conceals his religious identity and adopts a Hindu name. As a member of the Muslim community, he fears social prejudice and discrimination, forcing him to hide his true identity. This situation reflects the realities of urban Indian society, where individuals may feel compelled to suppress their religious affiliations to obtain economic opportunities. When Balram eventually discovers the truth about Ram Prasad, circumstances lead to Ram Prasad's departure. Consequently, Balram is promoted to the position of chief driver and gains the opportunity to accompany Ashok and Pinky Madam to Delhi.

In *The White Tiger*, influential figures such as the Stork, the Raven, the Buffalo, the Wild Boar, the Mongoose, and Ashok conduct their business activities with the support of powerful politicians and bureaucrats. Adiga illustrates the close relationship between political power and economic privilege through the character of the Great Socialist. The politician reminds the landlords that he helped them rise from poverty to wealth and now demands substantial bribes in return. He threatens and humiliates them, declaring: “You've got a solid scheme going here, extracting coal from government mines for nothing.

Because I allowed it to happen, you've got it going... You are what you are today because I created you, and by God, you have crossed me.” (TWT 104)

To further demonstrate his authority, the politician orders Mukesh, the Mongoose, to hold a spittoon and then spits paan saliva into it. This incident symbolizes the power dynamics that characterize the nexus between politicians and influential businessmen. Adiga also addresses the issue of corrupt public officials who claim to work for the welfare of the nation while misappropriating public funds intended for development and poverty alleviation. His novels repeatedly draw attention to the widespread nature of corruption and its damaging effects on society. One of the most striking examples is found in his depiction of government hospitals. Through the experience of Balram's father in *The White Tiger*, Adiga reveals the failure of anti-poverty initiatives and public healthcare systems. When Balram and Kishan take their seriously ill father to Lohia Universal Free Hospital, they encounter an environment characterized by neglect, filth, and inhumane conditions. The hospital doors remain open, the beds are broken, and “metal springs protrude from them” (TWT 48).

Patients are forced to lie on floors covered with newspapers, while stray cats and dogs roam freely through the wards. Medical services are portrayed as commodities that can be bought and sold. Balram observes that appointments for doctors are often obtained through bribery rather than merit. As he notes, “The Great Socialist informs the great doctors that the position is up for grabs in an open auction. These days, the going rate for this position is around four hundred thousand rupees” (TWT 49).

The corruption extends further, as senior doctors reportedly appoint junior doctors on the condition that they surrender a portion of their earnings. In return, these doctors are allowed to prioritize private practice while maintaining false attendance records at government hospitals. Consequently, poor patients are neglected by doctors, ward boys, and hospital staff. Through this portrayal, Adiga presents a severe criticism of a system that fails to provide basic healthcare services to millions of citizens. The deterioration of public healthcare and the ineffective implementation of government welfare schemes expose the negligence and unethical conduct of public officials, thereby intensifying the suffering of the poor.

In his debut novel *The White Tiger*, Adiga employs the metaphor of “men with Big Bellies” and “men with Thin Bellies” to highlight the stark socio-economic divide that exists within Indian society. As noted by Nona Walia of *The Times of India*, these categories symbolize the duality of contemporary India, where prosperity and deprivation coexist side by side. Through this metaphor, Adiga exposes the unequal distribution of wealth, opportunities, and justice that shapes the lives of millions of people.

Adiga's fiction consistently portrays the darker realities of Indian society. The inhabitants of impoverished towns, villages, and urban slums endure harsh living conditions and struggle to satisfy even their most basic needs. A significant section of the population continues to live below the poverty line, facing unemployment, economic insecurity, and limited access to essential resources. The shortage of adequate nutrition and opportunities for social mobility further compounds their suffering. Through his narratives, Adiga presents a realistic depiction of these socio-economic challenges and exposes the persistent inequalities that characterize contemporary India.

The condition of Balram Halwai's family in Laxmangarh, as portrayed in *The White Tiger*, serves as a representative example of this reality. Like many impoverished individuals, including manual labourers and cycle-rickshaw pullers, Balram's family endures poverty, humiliation, and social marginalization. Their

lives reflect the hardships experienced by those who remain trapped within oppressive social and economic structures.

This bleak social reality is further evident in Adiga's portrayal of Balram throughout the novel. Although India achieved political independence from British colonial rule, Adiga suggests that a large segment of the population continues to remain imprisoned by poverty, inequality, and systemic exploitation. In this sense, true freedom remains unattained for many citizens. Adiga's perspective reflects elements of Marxist thought, particularly in his emphasis on class divisions, social inequality, and the need for greater equality among all sections of society. According to his representation, India is divided into two distinct spheres: the "India of Darkness" and the "India of Light." These categories symbolize the profound disparities in wealth, power, opportunity, and access to justice that continue to define the social structure of the nation.

"Your Excellency, India is two countries in one: a Light-filled India and a Darkfilled India. My country is illuminated by the sea. Everywhere near the ocean on the map of India is prosperous. However, the black river spreads gloom to India." (TWT14)

The distinction between individuals with "big bellies" and those with "thin bellies" symbolizes the disparity in wealth and the privileges, indifference, and arrogance often associated with economic power. In contrast, those belonging to the lower economic strata have become accustomed to lives marked by hardship, suffering, and deprivation. Balram encounters this social inequality firsthand when he is employed as a driver and is immediately questioned about his caste and social status.

Although officially hired as a chauffeur, Balram's responsibilities extend far beyond driving. In addition to transporting his employers, he is required to perform numerous domestic and personal tasks. These include massaging his masters' legs while they consume alcohol, carrying bags filled with money intended for bribery, procuring alcohol and women for their entertainment, transporting shopping bags from commercial establishments, washing utensils, cleaning floors, preparing food, and caring for household pets. Through Balram's experiences, Adiga illustrates the constant psychological pressure and exploitation faced by members of the oppressed classes. Regardless of their personal desires or well-being, they are compelled to serve the interests of the wealthy elite. Balram and others belonging to the marginalized sections of society endure continuous mental and emotional strain. They are expected to work for a privileged class that shows little concern for their needs, dignity, or satisfaction. Balram's poverty is further highlighted when he is denied the basic freedom to enter a shopping mall because of his social position as a driver. For him, entering such a space requires unusual courage and self-confidence, revealing the invisible barriers that separate the poor from the affluent. This experience provides Balram with an early understanding of social exclusion and marginalization.

Adiga suggests that poverty often generates frustration, resentment, and a persistent sense of injustice. The poor frequently find themselves without adequate legal protection or institutional support. Through his novels, Adiga emphasizes the need for collective resistance against exploitation and inequality. The impoverished are often deprived of access to legal representation and social resources, which contributes to the perpetuation of poverty across generations and limits opportunities for social mobility. At the same time, Adiga also portrays the contrasting reality of affluent India. This is the India inhabited by wealthy individuals who enjoy economic privilege and social influence. Through characters such as Dharmen Shah in *Last Man in Tower*, Adiga presents a powerful depiction of the upper class and the mechanisms through which wealth and power are accumulated and maintained.

“When his chappals wore out, he tied leaves over his feet and continued walking” (LMIT 62). This description highlights the extreme poverty and determination that characterized Dharmen Shah's early life. Despite facing severe hardships, he persisted in his pursuit of economic advancement. Subsequently, he became involved in smuggling activities, transporting cartons of foreign-made watches and alarm clocks into Gujarat and Bombay using trucks disguised as carrying “Emergency Wheat Supplies.” As he later remarks, “Man has risen from the earth, he might as well put his money back into the earth” (LMIT 88), reflecting his belief in real-estate investment as the ultimate source of wealth and power. Shah's strategy for achieving success is clearly depicted throughout the novel. He entices individuals with lucrative financial offers and deliberately exploits their greed to accomplish his objectives. For instance, when workers at a construction site demand leave, he offers to double their wages to prevent delays in his projects. To Shah, workers are viewed merely as components of the construction process, no different from bricks, cement, or mortar used in erecting a building. This perspective illustrates his utilitarian and profit-driven approach toward human relationships.

Adiga portrays Dharmen Shah as a master strategist who conducts his operations discreetly and effectively. He employs various methods of persuasion, manipulation, and division to achieve his goals. Shah understands that within a corrupt social system, virtually everyone has a price, whether they are residents of Vishram Towers, local politicians, police officers, tabloid editors, or lawyers. He skillfully exploits existing tensions, resentments, and conflicts among individuals, including those between parents and children, neighbours, and close friends. His philosophy is guided by a single objective: victory at any cost. As he confidently declares, “The builder is the one man in Bombay who never loses a fight” (LMIT 115).

Through the character of Dharmen Shah, Adiga demonstrates how members of the wealthy and powerful classes often suppress the rights and freedoms of the less privileged. Shah represents the image of a ruthless yet influential businessman who relies on bribery, coercion, and manipulation to achieve his ambitions, frequently at the expense of ordinary people. A similar representation of the affluent class can be observed in the character of Ashok in *The White Tiger*. Unlike many members of his wealthy family, Ashok returns from America with a comparatively gentle and compassionate disposition. Although he is troubled by the widespread corruption in India and recognizes his family's involvement in it, he ultimately continues the practices established by his predecessors by bribing government officials and cultivating relationships with influential politicians. Compared to other affluent characters in the novel, Ashok appears more sympathetic toward Balram and often demonstrates concern for his servant's welfare. He places considerable trust in Balram and treats him with a degree of kindness uncommon among members of his social class. After returning from the United States, Ashok and his wife, Pinky Madam, are provided with a Honda City car for their use in Delhi. Despite his relatively humane nature, Ashok actively participates in the corrupt practices associated with his class. He uses money to influence politicians and sustain systems that disadvantage and exploit the poor. Consequently, Ashok's character illustrates how even individuals who appear compassionate can become participants in structures of privilege and corruption. Through Ashok, Adiga reinforces the portrayal of the affluent class as the “India of Light,” whose wealth and influence are often maintained through unequal social and political systems.

The affluent households portrayed in Adiga's novels are supported by numerous servants whose primary role is to satisfy the needs and demands of their employers. Through these depictions, Adiga critiques the unequal and dehumanizing relationship between masters and servants, which stands in contradiction to the democratic ideals of equality and social justice. For Adiga, genuine human worth is determined not by material wealth but by compassion and moral integrity. He suggests that the wealthy are often so absorbed in luxury and personal comfort that they remain indifferent to the suffering of those who endure poverty,

hunger, and deprivation. As a consequence, they appear detached from fundamental human values and pursue materialistic ambitions while neglecting the importance of meaningful human relationships founded on empathy and self-sacrifice. Adiga expresses profound dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy in India. Through his protagonist Balram Halwai in *The White Tiger*, he presents a critical view of the nation's democratic system, arguing that despite decades of independence, many fundamental social and economic problems remain unresolved. The novel portrays a modern India in which material wealth and economic gain have increasingly overshadowed traditional moral values and social responsibilities. In this regard, *The White Tiger* can be read as a critique of the limitations and failures of Indian democracy.

According to the narrative, one of the greatest mistakes made by the leaders of the independence movement was the adoption of a democratic system that failed to address the needs of the masses effectively. Balram comments: "These are the three principal ailments of our country, sir: typhoid, cholera, and election fever," his spokesperson Balram (*White Tiger*) asserts. For political leaders, an election is an enormous business. The Great Socialist admits to embezzling one billion rupees from the Darkness and depositing it in a bank account in a little, lovely country in Europe populated by white people with black money." (TWT 98)

The novel further portrays elections as opportunities for political manipulation and financial gain. Political agents and intermediaries are shown registering voters and collecting their fingerprints on a large scale. Balram reveals that, despite being a registered voter, he has never actually entered a polling booth. The narrative also emphasizes the criminalization of politics, noting that many candidates contesting elections face serious criminal charges. The Great Socialist, for example, is associated with numerous cases involving murder, rape, arms smuggling, and other criminal activities. Despite such allegations, politicians continue to seek public support by presenting themselves as humble servants of the people.

Adiga also highlights the close relationship between politics and economic power. Landlords, business owners, traders, and wealthy individuals who have benefited from political patronage are expected to provide substantial financial contributions to competing political parties. As Mukesh, the Mongoose, explains: "It's election time," Moongoose (Mukesh) informs Mr. Ashok. We give out money every time there is an election. In most cases, to both parties." (TWT 240)

The novel further critiques the culture of political promises made during election campaigns. Government leaders frequently announce ambitious schemes and development projects aimed at addressing issues such as poverty, disease, and rural underdevelopment. However, according to Adiga, these promises often remain unfulfilled. Consequently, ordinary citizens become increasingly skeptical of political rhetoric and view elections as superficial exercises lacking genuine commitment to public welfare. Political discussions in tea shops, bars, and public spaces reflect widespread disillusionment with the democratic process. Many citizens perceive elections, politicians, and democratic institutions as mechanisms designed to preserve existing power structures rather than promote meaningful social change.

The novel attributes the decline of democratic ideals to several interconnected factors, including widespread illiteracy, public ignorance, corrupt leadership, the influence of money and muscle power, and electoral manipulation. Such conditions often prevent honest, capable, and principled individuals from participating effectively in legislative institutions. Instead, according to the narrative, elections frequently enable the rise of individuals associated with criminality, corruption, and abuse of power. Adiga further argues that democratic politics has increasingly become a profitable enterprise rather than a form of public service. Political candidates invest substantial amounts of money during elections and subsequently seek to recover

those investments through corrupt means after attaining power. Public welfare and civic responsibility are often subordinated to personal gain and political revenge. This deterioration of democratic values is symbolically represented in the humiliation of Mukesh by the Great Socialist, who demonstrates his authority through an act of degradation: “Son, won't you hold the spittoon for me?” It was taken by the Moongoose. The Great Socialist then spat three times into the spittoon.” (TWT 105). This episode illustrates the unequal power relations that Adiga identifies within India's political system and serves as a broader critique of the corruption, arrogance, and abuse of authority that undermine democratic governance. Balram, who often serves as Adiga's spokesperson in *The White Tiger*, characterizes elections as a social disease affecting India. According to him, election periods generate excitement and agitation among voters, who become deeply absorbed in political discussions and electoral spectacles. Rather than engaging with the democratic process in a critical manner, people often treat elections as a form of entertainment. Balram observes that they watch the entire electoral drama as if it were a cricket match and describes them as “eunuchs debating the Kama Sutra.” (TWT 98)

The novel also highlights several malpractices associated with Indian democracy, including booth capturing, fraudulent voting, and manipulation of voter lists. Adiga suggests that those in positions of political authority frequently operate without accountability. Corruption, in his view, has penetrated all four pillars of governance, including the judiciary and the media. He criticizes politicians for exploiting educational institutions and public resources for personal gain. Government subsidies and welfare schemes intended for the poor are often misappropriated by corrupt officials. Although laws exist to punish offenders, the novel suggests that influential individuals can evade justice through bribery and political influence. A network of intermediaries and fixers facilitates this process, ensuring that the legal system serves the interests of the powerful rather than those of ordinary citizens. Balram's own experiences illustrate this reality. Throughout the novel, servants are often compelled to assume responsibility for the crimes of their employers. Bribes are paid to police officers and judicial authorities to suppress investigations and conceal wrongdoing. Balram himself learns to navigate this corrupt system and ultimately secures his freedom by bribing law-enforcement officials. Through such incidents, Adiga conveys his belief that Indian democracy suffers from deep structural flaws that undermine the rule of law and equal justice.

The novel provides additional examples of how power and privilege distort the administration of justice. Mohammad Ali, a driver, is involved in a motorcycle accident but escapes serious consequences with the assistance of law-enforcement authorities. Similarly, Pinky Madam causes a fatal road accident, yet she faces no punishment. Instead, Balram is forced to assume responsibility by signing a confessional statement on her behalf. These incidents demonstrate how the legal system often protects the wealthy while placing the burden of accountability on the socially and economically vulnerable. A similar pattern is evident in *Last Man in Tower*. Characters such as Mr. and Mrs. Puri, Kothari, and Kudwa participate in the murder of Masterji. However, the authorities manipulate the investigation and present the death as a case of suicide resulting from mental instability. The official account states: “Many people in Vishram and the surrounding area testified that the teacher had been becoming increasingly senile and erratic for some time. He was depressed as a result of his wife's death and his diabetes. As a result, Nagarker, the investigating officer, thinks that Masterji was “the major suspect in his assassination.” (LMIT 400)

Through this episode, Adiga illustrates how legal institutions can be influenced to conceal the truth and protect those responsible for criminal acts. The manipulation of evidence and official narratives reveals the vulnerability of justice within a corrupt socio-political system. Democracy is also associated with a wide range of government policies and welfare programs intended to improve the lives of citizens. However, Adiga raises an important question regarding the effectiveness of these initiatives. Although the Indian

government has introduced numerous schemes for social welfare and development, the crucial issue remains whether these benefits actually reach all sections of society, particularly the poor and marginalized. Through his novels, Adiga encourages readers to critically examine the gap between governmental promises and the lived realities of ordinary citizens.

Adiga suggests that many government policies exist largely on paper and fail to benefit the individuals for whom they are intended. The funds allocated for development projects are frequently misappropriated by intermediaries operating within a corrupt administrative system. As a result, numerous welfare schemes remain ineffective because the bureaucracy often lacks a sense of accountability, transparency, and national responsibility. In *The White Tiger*, Adiga presents a sharp critique of this systemic failure. For instance, the government's midday meal scheme, intended to provide food for schoolchildren, is undermined by corrupt practices. The schoolteacher misappropriates the benefits of the program, depriving children of their entitled meals. Similarly, funds allocated for school uniforms are diverted for personal gain. Through such examples, Adiga demonstrates how the exploitation of the poor is often facilitated by their limited awareness of government policies and welfare provisions.

India is portrayed as a nation of immense wealth coexisting with widespread poverty. According to Adiga, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small section of society contributes significantly to persistent economic inequality. The rich continue to accumulate greater wealth, while the poor remain trapped in cycles of deprivation. Although successive governments have undertaken numerous initiatives to reduce poverty over several decades, the limited effectiveness of these policies remains a major obstacle to meaningful social progress. A substantial portion of the benefits intended for the upliftment of disadvantaged communities fails to reach the targeted beneficiaries. Consequently, a considerable gap exists between policy objectives and actual outcomes.

The ineffective implementation of welfare programs, combined with the unethical practices of certain public officials and community intermediaries, results in the misallocation of resources. The intended benefits of government schemes are often lost due to corruption, negligence, and administrative inefficiency. In many cases, poor citizens remain unaware of their legal rights and entitlements, making them vulnerable to exploitation by government officials who take advantage of their ignorance for personal gain. This situation further complicates efforts to reduce poverty and improve living conditions among marginalized populations.

Another important aspect of Adiga's critique concerns the Indian education system. He portrays education as a sector severely affected by corruption and administrative inefficiency. In particular, he draws attention to the misappropriation of student scholarships, irregularities in the implementation of the mid-day meal scheme, and the negligence of teachers employed in government schools. In *The White Tiger*, Adiga presents the character of a village schoolteacher, described as a "huge pain and spit guy," who neglects his professional responsibilities and exploits the resources intended for students. The teacher frequently leaves school early, shows little commitment to teaching, and misappropriates school supplies, including uniforms and meals provided for underprivileged children. He is also depicted as stealing funds allocated to the school. Through this portrayal, Adiga exposes the deficiencies and corruption that characterize the educational system in Balram's village of Laxmangarh.

The government scholarship scheme is designed to provide financial assistance to economically disadvantaged students and promote educational opportunities. However, corruption and irregularities in the distribution of scholarships often prevent deserving students from receiving the benefits to which they are

entitled. As a result, many meritorious students are deprived of opportunities that could improve their future prospects. This situation is particularly detrimental in rural areas, where economically disadvantaged students frequently depend on scholarships to continue their education. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping students into responsible citizens and contributing to their intellectual and moral development. However, Adiga suggests that many teachers in government schools fail to recognize the significance of this responsibility. Some are portrayed as negligent and indifferent, attending school irregularly and showing little concern for the educational progress of their students. Such neglect adversely affects both the quality of education and student performance, ultimately undermining the objectives of educational development.

The government has introduced numerous educational schemes and invested substantial financial resources to improve literacy rates and expand access to education. Nevertheless, according to Adiga, the effectiveness of these initiatives is significantly diminished by corruption and administrative malpractice. As a result, many educational programs fail to achieve their intended outcomes and lose their credibility and effectiveness. Through these observations, Adiga appears to suggest that meaningful national progress requires addressing systemic issues such as corruption, inefficiency, and lack of accountability. At the same time, it may be argued that every political system possesses both strengths and weaknesses. Although Adiga focuses primarily on the shortcomings of Indian democracy, it would be inaccurate to regard the democratic system as an absolute failure. There is growing public awareness regarding democratic rights and civic responsibilities. Citizens have become increasingly critical of corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, demanding greater transparency and accountability in governance. Furthermore, recent electoral developments have demonstrated a gradual decline in the influence of vote-bank politics based on caste, religion, community, and family affiliations. Increasingly, voters—both educated and uneducated—appear willing to support candidates who present credible agendas and development-oriented policies. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. Corruption continues to permeate various aspects of public and private life, affecting institutions, governance, and social relations. Consequently, despite notable progress in democratic awareness and political participation, the struggle against corruption and administrative malpractice remains one of the most pressing challenges facing contemporary Indian society.

This study examines Aravind Adiga's portrayal of the widening socio-economic gap between the rich and the poor, as well as his depiction of the limitations and challenges faced by law-enforcement agencies in addressing crime and maintaining justice. His novels engage with a wide range of contemporary social realities, including exploitation, poverty, psychological oppression, political uncertainty, and class divisions. Through his narratives, Adiga exposes the complex social and institutional structures that contribute to inequality and marginalization in contemporary Indian society. Adiga suggests that individual shortcomings such as dishonesty, deception, greed, and excessive pride based on caste, religion, and economic status contribute significantly to the erosion of human values. At the same time, he critiques dysfunctional religious, social, political, and bureaucratic systems that perpetuate injustice and social fragmentation. According to Adiga, the decline of ethical standards in society is not merely the result of personal failings but is also closely linked to the corruption and inefficiency of institutions responsible for ensuring justice, equality, and social welfare. Furthermore, Adiga implies that meaningful change can be achieved only through comprehensive social, economic, administrative, and political reforms. He advocates, either explicitly or implicitly, the need to challenge both individual and institutional forms of corruption that hinder social progress. His works emphasize the importance of addressing systemic inequalities in order to create a more just and equitable society.

The themes explored in Adiga's fiction remain highly relevant to contemporary Indian society. Issues such as poverty, caste discrimination, social inequality, and institutional corruption continue to influence the lives of millions of people. While these concerns have been addressed by numerous Indian writers over the years, Adiga presents them through a distinctive narrative style characterized by sharp social criticism, irony, and realism. The *White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower* are significant literary works that capture the complexities of life in twenty-first-century India. Combining elements of satire, suspense, and social commentary, these novels offer a compelling exploration of the aspirations, struggles, conflicts, and moral dilemmas that define contemporary Indian society. Through these narratives, Adiga provides a powerful critique of the socio-political realities of the new millennium while highlighting the enduring challenges faced by individuals across different social classes.

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