

**“Breaking the Rooster Coop: Subaltern Resistance and Voice in  
*The White Tiger*”**

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**Abstract:** Indian literature in English is the medium of representing India on global level, and Arvind Adiga is widely acknowledged for his writings. This paper studies his novel *The White Tiger* (2008) through the angle of subaltern studies; it focuses on the dynamics of resistance and the emergence of a revolutionary voice from the oppressive socio-economic structures. The metaphor "rooster coop" used in the novel is the symbolic meaning of the systematic entrapment of the underprivileged class of subjugated people in India, where they face poverty, servitude, and fear. Seeing the theoretical insights from the subaltern discourse, a question arises whether the marginalized people can truly "speak"; this study analyses the character of Balram Halwai, how he acts as the subject of the novel, and the agent of resistance.

This research paper describes Balram's transformation from being a submissive servant into an established entrepreneur, which signifies him as a radical, morally ambiguous freed man who has freed himself from the hegemonic control of the society. The protagonist's epistolary narration addressed to a global political figure becomes a powerful medium through which the subaltern voice is articulated, negotiated, and ultimately asserted. However, the attempts of Balram confront ethical contradictions, as his freedom and establishment of entrepreneurship are achieved through violence and complicity in the very structures he critiques.

The novel's global-level interface with the class mobility and neoliberal capitalism, the study highlights the resistance of subaltern Balram in the novel which is neither purely laboratory nor wholly subversive. this novel deals with the complicated interplay between agency and exploitation, voice and silence. the paper concludes that the novel challenges the traditional notion of resistance by displaying protagonist's attempts in which he liberates himself from the socio-structure and overcome from societal hegemony.

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Indian writing in English continues to ripple, to make its presence felt on the international scene. Indian writers have made their mark and critics may not like it. They have been writing from India or from the diasporic spaces and winning international awards like the Nobel Prize, Booker Prize, Pulitzer Prize, Commonwealth Prize, Sahitya Akademi awards and many more.

It's not just Indians, but writers from across the subcontinent who are getting noticed globally. There are far more writers and readers. It's about to get even more exciting over the next decade. What a distance from the days when there were a few Indian writers in English like R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk raj. Today we are witnessing a great awakening and we have a host of writers, especially women, who are making major contributions to life and literature by interrogating and exploring their own and other women's lives.

The social evil as shown in the novel *The White Tiger*.

Adiga emerges as an angry young man of India who shouts at the politicians for not taking basic steps to lift the 400 million Indian's who live in extreme deficiency at the executives whose unethical practices erode the success of the meager anti-poverty programs currently in place, at the religious fanatics who are behind riots and tensions, and last but not least at the well-off citizens who go on arguing about corruption, but never do anything to prevent the pervasive corruption. Adiga is a creative narrator who tries to help his fellows to appreciate the world we live in.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* presents the voice of the subaltern through the character of Balram Halwai, who resists the oppressive social structure of India's class hierarchy. Drawing upon the ideas of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, especially her famous question "Can the Subaltern Speak?", the novel demonstrates how marginalized individuals struggle to gain agency within dominant power structures. Balram declares, "The moment you recognize what is beautiful in this world, you stop being a slave" (Adiga 237). This statement symbolizes his awakening against economic and social oppression.

The "Rooster Coop" in *The White Tiger* is a potent metaphor for the psychological and social entrapment of India's underclass. Aravind Adiga uses this image to demonstrate how poverty, fear and loyalty are used to prevent the oppressed from rebelling against exploitation. Balram Halwai says, "The greatest thing to come out of this country in ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop" (Adiga

147). Servants are obedient because they are afraid of getting punished not only for themselves but also for their families. Like roosters locked in a cage waiting to be slaughtered.

The Rooster Coop exemplifies the hegemonic control of the upper class over the subaltern masses. "Even when the servants see injustice," Balram says, "they serve silently." His later rebellion and assassination of Ashok is an attempt to break free from this social cage. As stated by a critic of postcolonial literature "the struggle of marginalized individuals against structures of domination" (Naik 223). Adiga also casts Balram as a voice of dissent against systemic oppression and class inequality in contemporary India. The novel uses the metaphor of the 'Rooster Coop' to condemn a society that accepts exploitation and praises economic development.

Resistance is one of the central themes in the novel *The White Tiger* where Aravind Adiga depicts the struggle of the subaltern class against social, economic and psychological oppression. Balram Halwai's rise from servant of a poor village to a successful entrepreneur is a rebellion against the rigid class hierarchy of Indian society. Balram refuses to accept the destiny that has been forced upon him and proclaims, "I was looking for the key for years. But the door was always open" (Adiga 260). This realization is his awakening and resistance to the "Rooster Coop" system that keeps the poor in servitude's resistance is not simply individual but representative of the oppressed classes in search of freedom and identity. His killing of Ashok is a radical act of resistance to exploitation and inequality. It is viewed as, "The oppressed will always believe the worst about themselves" (Fanon 18). This shows how the structures of class and colonialism can create a psychological inferiority in the marginalized. Adiga argues that Balram's voice and transformation overturns this sense of inferiority. Thus, the novel depicts resistance as a force of destruction and liberation in which the subaltern seeks to regain agency, dignity and social visibility in a highly unequal society.

Voice is a significant element in *The White Tiger*, and Aravind Adiga allows the subaltern protagonist, Balram Halwai, to narrate his own story. Balram, in the form of letters to the Chinese premier, gives a first-person account of the experiences, frustrations and aspirations of the marginalised class in India. His narrative is a blow to the silence that has traditionally been imposed on the poor and oppressed. "I am tomorrow," Balram states (Adiga 319), asserting his identity and confidence as a self-made entrepreneur, who has escaped social oppression.

The novel is informed by the questions raised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in which she claims that the voices of the marginalized are often silenced by dominant structures. Spivak writes, "The subaltern

cannot speak" (Spivak 308), meaning that elite systems do not allow for authentic representation of oppressed groups. Adiga, however, challenges this silence by allowing Balram to become the narrator of his own journey. His voice is raw, ironic and rebellious, exposing the corruption, inequality and exploitation of modern India. Instead, the novel transforms the subaltern into a speaker who challenges social hierarchies and asserts his individuality through the narrative voice of Balram.

Class struggle is a dominant theme in *The White Tiger* as Aravind Adiga depicts the stark divide that exists between the rich and the poor in modern Indian society. The novel demonstrates the entrapment of the lower class in exploitation and the enjoyment of wealth, power, and social privilege by the upper class. The life of Balram Halwai as a servant is a mirror of the harsh realities of economic inequality and social subordination. He notes, "India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness" (Adiga 14). This statement is a symbol of the class divide between the privileged elite and the marginalized poor.

Balram's journey from a village boy to a businessman is a struggle against this oppressive class structure. His revolt against his master is the subaltern's desperation to get out of poverty and humiliation. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels declare, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (*The Communist Manifesto* 14). Adiga's novel illustrates this Marxist notion by portraying the incessant clash between exploiters and the exploited. Told through the voice of Balram, the novel is a critique of capitalism, corruption and social inequality, revealing how class struggle dictates identity, ambition and survival in modern India.

Neoliberalism plays an important role in *The White Tiger*. Aravind Adiga criticizes the economic transformation of India with globalization and free market capitalism. The novel presents a society where the rich get richer through rapid economic growth, and the poor remain exploited and unequal. Balram Halwai's journey from servant to entrepreneur is one of the opportunities that neoliberal India has created, but his success is achieved through violence, corruption and moral compromise. Balram says, "The old days are gone forever... today it is everyone for himself" (Adiga 98). This statement is indicative of the competitiveness and individualism that characterizes neoliberal society.

The novel demonstrates how neoliberalism widens the gap between the rich and the poor. Shopping malls, multinational companies and urban development are symbols of progress but the benefits of it are excluded to the marginalized. Neoliberalism is "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms" (Harvey 2). Adiga challenges this ideology by depicting how economic liberalisation

produces social injustice and moral corruption. Balram's tale exposes the evil underbelly of neoliberal capitalism, where the price of living is often exploitation, manipulation and abandonment of moral values.

The *White Tiger* is a novel that deals with the issue of social mobility. Aravind Adiga writes about the fight of the oppressed to overcome poverty and social oppression in the new India. The story of Balram Halwai's rise from a poor village servant to a successful entrepreneur is emblematic of the yearning for upward mobility in a society deeply scarred by inequality. But the novel does suggest that social progress for the subaltern is often about rebellion, corruption and moral compromise. Balram claims "I was destined not to stay a slave" (Adiga 254) showing his determination to break the boundaries of caste and class.

The novel depicts modern India as a site of economic opportunity made possible by globalization, but access to success is not equal. Balram's rise shows that social mobility is possible, but only through breaking traditional moral and social boundaries. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu theorizes that social mobility depends on access to economic, cultural, and social capital (Bourdieu 243). Balram initially does not possess these forms of capital but he gains them through manipulation and entrepreneurship. Adiga condemns a society in which the poor are compelled to resort to unethical means to get ahead. Thus, *The White Tiger* portrays social mobility as simultaneously liberating and problematic, revealing the harsh realities of class inequality and the price of individual ambition in neoliberal India.

Marginalization is a big theme in *The White Tiger*. Aravind Adiga depicts the oppression of the poor and lower classes in modern India. Balram Halwai is the voice of the subaltern, the marginalized who are denied education, dignity and social opportunity due to caste and economic status. He comments, "All my life I have been treated like a donkey" (Adiga 27) demonstrating the dehumanization experienced by the oppressed. The novel reveals how poverty and class hierarchy push people to the margins of society, into subservience and silence.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the subaltern cannot speak in the current social structures "the subaltern cannot speak" (Spivak 308). Adiga breaks this silence with Balram narrating his own experiences. Through Balram's voice the novel reveals the pain, anger and the hopes of the marginalized people who fight for identity and recognition in an excruciatingly unequal society.

*The White Tiger* shows the domination of the rich elite over the poor and marginalized classes in India. Power structure is a major theme in the novel. The novel depicts how the politicians, landlords and businessmen sustain their authority through corruption, fear and exploitation. According to Balram, "The rich don't know

what it is like to be poor and the poor know only too well what it is like to be poor” (28). The statement is a reflection of the unequal power and privilege in society.

The power structure in the novel is one that silences the subaltern and subjugates them into obedience in the “Rooster Coop.” Power, Foucault argues, is exercised through the mechanisms of control of individuals and of social behavior (Foucault 26). Adiga exemplifies this notion in the oppressive relationship of masters and servants. The rebellion of Balram against Ashok is an allegory of the resistance to hierarchical power structures and the marginalized desire to reclaim agency and identity.

The *White Tiger* is written in epistolary form and this is very important for the subaltern protagonist, Balram Halwai, to find his voice. The book is written as a series of letters to the Chinese premier Wen Jiabao, in which Balram describes his rise from poverty to entrepreneur. This narrative style creates intimacy and authenticity, and allows readers to have direct access to Balram’s thoughts and experiences. Balram says “I am in the Light now” (Adiga 6). It is a mark of his transformation and self-awareness.

The epistolary form is a mode of confession as well as resistance, and Balram questions the dominant social structures. As critic Janet Gurkin Altman explains, epistolary narratives create “a sense of immediacy and personal voice” (Altman 4). This method emphasizes the perspective of a marginalized person whose voice is often silenced in public discourse. Thus, the epistolary narrative further reinforces the novel’s critique of class exploitation, corruption and social inequality in modern India.

The *White Tiger* is a morally complex novel. In Aravind Adiga’s *Balram Halwai*, the boundary between good and wrong is blurred. Balram becomes an entrepreneur through robbery and murder, but the story portrays these activities as a reaction to systematic oppression and class exploitation. Balram justifies his conduct by saying: “A man who has not been permitted to dream is punished forever” (Adiga 315). This reflects his view that immoral activities are vital for survival in an unequal society.

Adiga offers a vision of modern India as a system ethically bankrupt, where wealthy and poor sacrifice ethics for prosperity and power. Friedrich Nietzsche (Nietzsche 43) suggests that the morality is often influenced by social conditions and power relations. Take Balram’s personal metamorphosis for example. He breaks away from conventional morality in order to escape poverty, to gain independence. The work thereby interrogates conventional moral judgements and reveals the moral difficulties of social mobility and resistance.

In *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga presents critically a postcolonial India, which is battling with poverty, corruption, class inequality and the repercussions of globalization following independence. The story shows that India's rise as an economic power has not ended the social oppression and exploitation that dominate the lives of the poor. Balram Halwai speaks of the nation being split into "an India of Light, and an India of Darkness" (Adiga 14), a metaphor for the separation between the wealthy elite and the disenfranchised masses in postcolonial society.

Adiga faults postcolonial administration for not delivering justice and equality to all its residents. Politicians, landowners and merchants are still fleecing the lower classes by means of corruption and economic domination. Balram's journey from servant to entrepreneur exemplifies both the possibilities and the moral decay of contemporary India. According to Homi K. Bhabha, postcolonial societies are built by the "unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation" (Bhabha 171). Adiga's story encapsulates this unevenness in the contradictory realities of growth and hardship. Thus, *The White Tiger* represents postcolonial India as a society where, despite national modernity, freedom and progress are still out of reach for many underprivileged people.

Finally, *The White Tiger* is a strong picture of subaltern resistance, social inequity and the quest for identity in postcolonial India. Aravind Adiga in the role of Balram Halwai reveals the brutal truths of the class oppression, marginalization, corruption and neoliberal exploitation which still rule the roost in the present Indian society. The "Rooster Coop" metaphor is a reflection of the psychological entrapment of the poor, and Balram's revolt is the subaltern's frantic effort to gain independence, dignity and social mobility. The work also touches on the inconsistencies of postcolonial India, where economic prosperity goes hand in hand with poverty and moral deterioration.

Furthermore, by using the epistolary narrative, Adiga speaks for the oppressed and breaks their silence, which is enforced by dominating power systems. The novel, drawing on postcolonial and subaltern ideas, exposes the power institutions that deny equality and justice to the oppressed classes. Balram's journey from servant to entrepreneur highlights the potential and ethical ambiguities of resistance within a capitalist society. Thus, *The White Tiger* remains a key postcolonial novel that critiques the class hierarchy, social injustice, and the developing realities of modern-day India.

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