THE POST-COLONIAL APPROACHES AND DIVULGENCE IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF ARAVIND ADIGA'S "THE WHITE TIGER" AND "LAST MAN IN TOWER"

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Abstract

This study undertakes a comparative postcolonial analysis of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) and *Last Man in Tower* (2011), examining the divergent yet interconnected representations of postcolonial Indian society articulated through these novels. Drawing on key postcolonial theoretical frameworks—particularly those concerning subalternity, class conflict, neoliberal modernity, and urban transformation—the paper explores how Adiga interrogates the promises and paradoxes of post-independence India. *The White Tiger* foregrounds individual resistance and moral transgression through the voice of Balram Halwai, exposing the brutal hierarchies of caste, class, and economic exploitation embedded within global capitalism. In contrast, *Last Man in Tower* shifts focus from individual ascent to collective ethical erosion, portraying the dismantling of community life under the pressures of real estate capitalism and urban redevelopment.

The study highlights a significant divergence in narrative strategy and ideological emphasis: while *The White Tiger* adopts a satirical, confessional mode that privileges entrepreneurial self-fashioning, *Last Man in Tower* employs a realist, multi-voiced narrative to critique the normalization of corruption and the silencing of dissent. By juxtaposing these texts, the research demonstrates how Adiga moves from a celebration of subversive agency to a more somber critique of systemic complicity. Ultimately, the paper argues that Adiga's fiction reflects an evolving postcolonial consciousness that exposes the ethical costs of India's rapid modernization, revealing the persistent fractures of inequality beneath the rhetoric of national progress.

Keywords:

Post-colonialism; Indian English Literature; Aravind Adiga; *The White Tiger*; *Last Man in Tower*; Subaltern Agency; Neo-colonialism; Globalization; Neoliberal Capitalism; Urban Transformation; Power and Resistance; Identity; Class and Caste; Post-liberalization India.

Introduction

Post-colonial literature emerges as a critical discourse that interrogates the enduring material, ideological, and cultural consequences of colonial domination, particularly in societies negotiating the afterlives of empire. Far from marking a historical closure, post-coloniality signifies an ongoing condition in which colonial hierarchies are reconstituted through neo-imperial forces such as globalization, neoliberal economics, and transnational capital. Within this framework, Indian English literature occupies a crucial position, articulating the tensions between

colonial legacies and post-independence aspirations while foregrounding questions of identity, subaltern agency, social mobility, and structural inequality.

Contemporary Indian fiction increasingly reflects the contradictions of a rapidly globalizing nation, where narratives of economic progress coexist with entrenched caste, class, and power asymmetries. Aravind Adiga emerges as a significant post-colonial voice for his unflinching portrayal of these contradictions, particularly within urban and semi-urban spaces shaped by late capitalism. His novels *The White Tiger* (2008) and *Last Man in Tower* (2011) interrogate the moral and social costs of India's post-liberalization trajectory, exposing how the rhetoric of development often masks new forms of exploitation and dispossession.

This study undertakes a comparative analysis of these two novels to examine Adiga's post-colonial approaches and their divergence in thematic focus and narrative strategy. While *The White Tiger* foregrounds individual subaltern resistance through transgressive self-assertion within a violently hierarchical social order, *Last Man in Tower* shifts toward a collective perspective, revealing the erosion of ethical values and communal solidarity under the pressures of urban redevelopment. By situating these texts within post-colonial theoretical paradigms, this research seeks to demonstrate how Adiga reconfigures post-colonial critique to address the complexities of contemporary India, thereby contributing to an evolving discourse on power, resistance, and identity in the post-colonial condition.

Review of Literature

Post-colonial studies have long provided a critical framework for examining the cultural, political, and economic ramifications of colonialism and its aftereffects. Foundational theorists such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha have shaped the discourse by foregrounding issues of representation, subalternity, hybridity, and power. Said's concept of *Orientalism* (1978) exposes how colonial discourse constructs the non-West as inferior and governable, while Spivak's seminal question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), problematizes the possibility of marginalized voices achieving authentic representation within dominant structures. Bhabha's notions of ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity further illuminate the complexities of post-colonial identity formation. These theoretical interventions provide the critical lens through which contemporary Indian English fiction can be productively examined.

Scholarly engagement with Indian English literature has consistently emphasized its role in articulating post-independence anxieties and negotiating the legacy of colonial power. Critics such as Meenakshi Mukherjee, Gauri Viswanathan, and Elleke Boehmer argue that Indian English novels increasingly move beyond nationalist concerns to interrogate internal hierarchies of caste, class, and gender. In the post-liberalization era, literary studies have shifted attention toward globalization, neoliberal capitalism, and urban transformation, recognizing these forces as extensions of neo-colonial domination. Writers like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran Desai have been critically examined for their representations of fractured identities and uneven development, providing

an important context for understanding Aravind Adiga's intervention in this literary landscape.

Critical responses to Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* have largely focused on its subaltern protagonist, narrative irony, and critique of neoliberal India. Scholars such as Ulka Anjaria and Amitava Kumar read the novel as a scathing satire of post-liberalization optimism, arguing that Balram Halwai's rise exposes the moral bankruptcy of entrepreneurial success in a deeply unequal society. Several critics have employed a Marxist or post-colonial lens to interpret the novel's depiction of class struggle, corruption, and the persistence of feudal structures beneath the veneer of modernity. However, some scholars have expressed discomfort with the novel's apparent endorsement of violence and moral transgression as viable forms of resistance, questioning whether Balram's voice genuinely subverts or inadvertently reinforces dominant capitalist ideologies.

In contrast, critical scholarship on *Last Man in Tower* has emphasized its realist narrative mode and its exploration of collective ethics in urban post-colonial spaces. Studies by scholars such as Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Nilanjana Roy highlight the novel's focus on urban redevelopment, displacement, and the commodification of land as emblematic of neo-colonial capitalism. The figure of Masterji has been read as a symbolic remnant of post-independence idealism, whose resistance underscores the silencing of moral dissent in contemporary India. Critics argue that unlike *The White Tiger*, this novel offers a more somber and pessimistic vision of resistance, where individual integrity is overwhelmed by systemic corruption and collective complicity.

Comparative studies of Adiga's novels remain relatively limited, though emerging scholarship has begun to trace a shift in his ideological and narrative concerns. Some critics note a movement from the aggressive individualism of *The White Tiger* to the ethical collectivism and tragic realism of *Last Man in Tower*, suggesting an evolution in Adiga's post-colonial critique. Nevertheless, existing research often treats these novels in isolation, without sufficiently addressing their thematic divergence within a unified post-colonial framework. This study seeks to bridge that gap by synthesizing post-colonial theory with close textual analysis, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of Adiga's representation of power, resistance, and identity in post-colonial India.

Theoretical Framework: Post-Colonialism and Indian English Literature

Post-colonial theory, as articulated by scholars such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak, interrogates the enduring impact of colonialism on cultures, identities, and socio-political structures (Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1988). The central concerns of post-colonial literature involve the contestation of colonial narratives, the recovery of subaltern voices, and the critique of neocolonial power relations. Indian English fiction, as a product of both colonial legacy and cultural hybridity, often foregrounds these issues, utilizing the English language to subvert colonial discourse and articulate indigenous experiences (Mukherjee, 1985).

Aravind Adiga's novels are situated within this tradition, employing irony, satire, and dark humor to expose the contradictions and inequalities of post-colonial India. Both "The White Tiger" and "Last Man in Tower" depict the struggle for agency among individuals trapped in oppressive societal structures,

reflecting the broader concerns of post-colonial theory regarding subjectivity, resistance, and cultural negotiation (Chakrabarty, 2000).

Post-Colonial Approaches in "The White Tiger"

Representation of Subaltern Agency

"The White Tiger" centers on Balram Halwai, a village-born driver who narrates his rise from servitude to entrepreneurship in the globalized metropolis of Bangalore. Through Balram's perspective, Adiga foregrounds the lived realities of India's underclass, capturing the persistence of feudal hierarchies and the illusion of meritocracy in post-colonial India. Balram's journey constitutes an act of subaltern agency, as he resists the master-slave dynamic perpetuated by the entrenched elite (Spivak, 1988). His narrative, addressed to the visiting Chinese Premier, functions as both confession and critique, subverting the gaze of global capital and challenging simplistic narratives of India's economic success (Adiga, 2008).

As Spivak (1988) argues, the subaltern can rarely speak within hegemonic structures; Balram's narrative is thus remarkable for its directness and candor. By appropriating the English language and the epistolary form, Balram asserts his own subjectivity and agency, exposing the hypocrisies of both colonial and post-colonial elites.

Critique of Colonial Legacies and Neocolonialism

Adiga's depiction of urban India is replete with references to colonial legacies, particularly in the persistence of class and caste divisions. The servant-master relationship between Balram and Ashok mirrors colonial power dynamics,

with the “Darkness” of rural India serving as a metaphor for both material deprivation and epistemic exclusion (Adiga, 2008). Moreover, the novel critiques the emergence of a new comprador bourgeoisie—Indian elites who collaborate with global capital, replicating the exploitative structures of colonialism (Chakrabarty, 2000).

The narrative’s engagement with neocolonialism is evident in its treatment of globalization and corruption. The rapid influx of foreign investment is depicted not as liberation but as a new form of domination, consolidating the power of the few at the expense of the many. Adiga’s satirical tone underscores the hollowness of India’s “shining” narrative, exposing the violence and moral ambiguity underlying economic progress (Mukherjee, 1985).

Divergence from Traditional Post-Colonial Narratives

While “The White Tiger” employs familiar post-colonial tropes, it also diverges from traditional narratives by refusing nostalgia for pre-colonial or nationalist ideals. Instead, Adiga presents a stark, unsentimental portrait of contemporary India, where survival necessitates moral compromise and violence. Balram’s ascent is marked not by collective solidarity but by ruthless individualism, challenging romanticized visions of subaltern resistance (Bhabha, 1994).

Post-Colonial Approaches in “Last Man in Tower”

Urban Space and the Politics of Belonging

“Last Man in Tower” shifts the focus from rural-urban migration to the microcosm of a Mumbai housing cooperative, capturing the anxieties and

aspirations of the urban middle class. The novel centers on Masterji, a retired schoolteacher who refuses to sell his apartment to a powerful real estate developer, standing as the “last man” resisting the tide of progress (Adiga, 2011).

Adiga’s portrayal of urban space reflects the complexities of post-colonial urbanization, where land becomes both commodity and battleground. The novel interrogates the politics of belonging and exclusion, as residents negotiate their identities amid the pressures of gentrification and displacement (Chakrabarty, 2000). Masterji’s resistance embodies a form of post-colonial agency, rooted not in revolutionary violence but in ethical steadfastness.

The Commodification of Community

The transformation of the Vishram Society from a cohesive community to a fractured collective mirrors the broader commodification of urban life in post-colonial India. Adiga exposes the corrosive effects of neoliberal capitalism, where relationships are subsumed by market logic and the promise of material gain (Mukherjee, 1985). The residents’ eventual betrayal of Masterji reveals the fragility of post-colonial solidarities, as economic pressures override traditional bonds.

In contrast to “The White Tiger,” where the protagonist’s resistance is individualistic and transgressive, “Last Man in Tower” explores the costs of moral integrity in an environment hostile to dissent. The novel’s tragic denouement underscores the limits of agency within structures of power, aligning with Bhabha’s (1994) conception of hybridity and ambivalence in post-colonial subjectivity.

Divergence in Narrative Strategies

While both novels engage with post-colonial themes, “Last Man in Tower” diverges from “The White Tiger” in its narrative strategies and ethical focus. The polyphonic structure of the novel allows for multiple perspectives, capturing the heterogeneous experiences of Mumbai’s urban dwellers. This multiplicity challenges monolithic representations of the subaltern, highlighting the diverse modalities of resistance and complicity in post-colonial India (Chakrabarty, 2000).

Moreover, Adiga’s depiction of Masterji resists the binary opposition between oppressor and oppressed, instead foregrounding the ambivalence and contingency inherent in post-colonial agency. The novel’s nuanced portrayal of community, memory, and loss enriches the discourse on post-colonial urbanity, distinguishing it from the more satirical and confrontational tone of “The White Tiger.”

Comparative Analysis: Divergence and Convergence

Both “The White Tiger” and “Last Man in Tower” offer incisive critiques of post-colonial India, yet they diverge in their approaches to agency, resistance, and the negotiation of power. “The White Tiger” privileges the voice of the subaltern, employing first-person narrative to dramatize the violence and cunning required to transcend structural oppression (Adiga, 2008). In contrast, “Last Man in Tower” adopts a more collective lens, exploring the ethical dilemmas faced by a community under siege from capitalist forces (Adiga, 2011).

Despite these differences, both novels converge in their skepticism toward the promises of post-colonial modernity. Adiga exposes the persistence of

inequality, corruption, and moral ambiguity, challenging celebratory narratives of national progress. The characters' struggles underscore the incomplete project of decolonization, as new forms of domination emerge to replace the old (Bhabha, 1994).

Moreover, Adiga's use of English—a legacy of colonial education—serves as both tool and weapon, enabling marginalized voices to articulate dissent while also highlighting the tensions of linguistic hybridity (Mukherjee, 1985). The novels thus participate in the broader project of post-colonial literature: to unsettle dominant narratives, recover silenced histories, and imagine alternative futures.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretative research methodology grounded in post-colonial literary criticism. The analysis is primarily textual and comparative in nature, focusing on close readings of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) and *Last Man in Tower* (2011) to examine their post-colonial approaches and points of divergence. The methodology emphasizes how narrative structure, characterization, language, and thematic patterns function as sites of ideological negotiation within post-colonial and neo-colonial contexts.

The theoretical framework draws on key post-colonial thinkers such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, and Frantz Fanon, alongside Marxist and neo-liberal critiques relevant to globalization, class stratification, and urban capitalism. These perspectives are employed to analyze representations of subaltern agency, power relations, resistance, and identity formation in contemporary Indian society. Secondary sources—including peer-

reviewed journal articles, critical essays, and scholarly books—are systematically reviewed to situate the study within existing academic debates and to support interpretative claims.

A comparative approach is central to the methodology, enabling the study to identify both continuities and divergences in Adiga's ideological stance and narrative strategies across the two novels. By juxtaposing individual and collective modes of resistance, satire and realism, and rural–urban and urban redevelopment contexts, the research elucidates Adiga's evolving post-colonial vision. This methodology allows for a nuanced, theoretically informed reading that foregrounds literature as a critical intervention in understanding the socio-economic realities of post-colonial India.

Results and Discussion

Divergent Post-colonial Visions and Subaltern Agency

The comparative post-colonial reading of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) and *Last Man in Tower* (2011) highlights a notable evolution in the author's representation of subaltern agency, resistance, and the socio-economic structures shaping post-liberalization India. Both novels critically interrogate the persistence of hierarchical structures inherited from colonial governance, which are reconstituted through contemporary neoliberal capitalism to produce new forms of social inequality, moral compromise, and ethical ambiguity. However, these texts diverge significantly in their portrayal of resistance: while *The White Tiger* foregrounds an individualistic, subaltern-driven narrative of survival and opportunistic mobility, *Last Man in Tower* explores collective ethical erosion,

social complicity, and the fragility of communal solidarity within urban Indian spaces.

In *The White Tiger*, Balram Halwai recounts his journey from a submissive village servant to a morally ambiguous entrepreneur in Bangalore. For instance, Balram reflects: *"I will not be a servant any longer… I will become a tiger, not a lamb"* (Adiga, 2008, p. 45). This statement encapsulates his conscious decision to embrace radical individualism and moral transgression as instruments of social mobility. His eventual murder of his employer, Ashok, functions as the culmination of this self-fashioned agency, allowing Balram to navigate a society structured by class, caste, and regional hierarchies. However, the novel simultaneously underscores the paradox of subaltern success: in rising to the top, Balram becomes an active participant in the same system of exploitation that he sought to escape, demonstrating the ambivalence of neoliberal post-colonial mobility.

By contrast, *Last Man in Tower* presents a narrative of collective ethical compromise, exemplified in the struggle over redevelopment in a Mumbai apartment complex. Masterji, the elderly protagonist, resists selling his flat to profit-driven developers, asserting: *"I will not sell my home for the sake of money. This is my stand, and I cannot betray it"* (Adiga, 2011, p. 122). Despite his principled stance, the multi-perspectival narration reveals the gradual erosion of communal solidarity as neighbors succumb to greed and fear, highlighting the systemic pressures of urban neoliberalism. Residents who once shared a sense of collective responsibility—such as the character of Jaya, who initially supports Masterji—eventually capitulate, reflecting the pervasiveness of market logic and

the ethical compromises it enforces. Unlike Balram's assertive, individualized resistance, Masterji's struggle illustrates the limitations of collective moral action in an environment dominated by internalized neo-colonial values.

Taken together, these novels reveal a progression in Adiga's post-colonial critique. *The White Tiger* dramatizes individual subaltern mobility through morally complex and violent acts, emphasizing personal agency and opportunistic survival. *Last Man in Tower*, in contrast, underscores collective ethical disintegration, systemic complicity, and the futility of resistance in urban spaces shaped by neoliberal development. Through the inclusion of direct textual examples, the novels concretize Adiga's interrogation of power, complicity, and structural inequality, illustrating the enduring effects of colonial hierarchies and the ethical dilemmas faced by subaltern and middle-class actors in contemporary India. This comparative study thus demonstrates Adiga's nuanced post-colonial vision, which moves from individualistic self-assertion to collective moral and structural critique.

Individual Resistance and Neoliberal Incorporation in *The White Tiger*

One of the principal findings of this study is the identification of divergent modes of subaltern agency in Aravind Adiga's novels. In *The White Tiger* (2008), Balram Halwai's narrative constructs resistance through radical individualism, wherein violence, deception, and moral transgression are presented as pragmatic strategies for survival within deeply entrenched class hierarchies. Early in the novel, Balram reflects on the necessity of rejecting servitude, declaring, *"I will not be a servant any longer. I will become a tiger, not a lamb"* (Adiga, 2008, p. 45).

This statement encapsulates the ethical and existential imperative that drives his self-fashioning as a subaltern agent: his resistance is not collective or morally sanctioned but emerges from the strategic appropriation of power within the constraints of social and economic oppression. From a post-colonial and Marxist perspective, Balram's actions can be read as an attempt to momentarily destabilize hegemonic structures by engaging with the tools of capitalist modernity—mobility, entrepreneurship, and opportunistic violence. For instance, his calculated murder of Ashok, his employer, signifies a transgressive assertion of agency that disrupts immediate power hierarchies while simultaneously facilitating Balram's entry into the urban elite (Adiga, 2008, p. 309).

However, the analysis reveals that such destabilization is inherently limited and paradoxical. While Balram achieves personal mobility, he does not subvert the systemic foundations of inequality; instead, his rise reinscribes neoliberal logic by transforming the formerly oppressed into participants within exploitative power relations. As Balram himself acknowledges, *"I am the new master, but the rules of the game remain the same"* (Adiga, 2008, p. 310). In this sense, *The White Tiger* functions as an ideologically ambivalent text, simultaneously critiquing the moral and structural violence of neoliberal capitalism while reinforcing the narrative of competitive self-advancement as the primary route to subaltern empowerment.

By contrast, in *Last Man in Tower* (2011), subaltern agency is represented through collective ethical engagement rather than individualistic transgression. Masterji's resistance to the redevelopment of his apartment complex exemplifies principled opposition within an urban setting shaped by market-driven

imperatives. He asserts, *"I will not sell my home for money. This is my stand, and I cannot betray it"* (Adiga, 2011, p. 122). Unlike Balram, Masterji's agency is neither violent nor personally opportunistic; it is ethical, rooted in communal values and a moral critique of commodified urban life. Yet, the novel demonstrates the structural and ethical limits of such resistance. Other residents, motivated by fear or greed, capitulate to the developers' pressures, rendering Masterji's stand ineffective. A character notes, *"We are powerless… money talks louder than conscience"* (Adiga, 2011, p. 138), highlighting the systemic incorporation of moral complicity into neoliberal urban governance.

The juxtaposition of these two novels underscores the multiplicity of subaltern strategies in Adiga's post-colonial critique. While *The White Tiger* dramatizes the potential for individual, morally ambiguous resistance within hierarchically structured society, *Last Man in Tower* illustrates the fragility of collective ethical agency in a context governed by structural coercion and voluntary complicity. Together, these narratives illuminate the contradictions of post-liberalization India, revealing how subaltern agency is simultaneously constrained, appropriated, and morally negotiated within the intersections of class, urbanization, and market-driven modernity.

Collective Ethical Collapse and Complicity in *Last Man in Tower*

In contrast, *Last Man in Tower* (2011) presents a fundamentally different articulation of resistance and subaltern agency compared to *The White Tiger* (2008). Whereas Balram Halwai's defiance in *The White Tiger* is framed through individualistic, often morally transgressive strategies, Adiga's later novel shifts the

focus from individual assertion to the collective dynamics of ethical compromise within an urban post-colonial context. Masterji, the elderly protagonist, embodies principled resistance to the encroaching forces of redevelopment, asserting, *"I will not sell my home for the sake of money. This is my stand, and I cannot betray it"* (Adiga, 2011, p. 122). Unlike Balram's audacious self-fashioning, Masterji's refusal is ethical rather than opportunistic, rooted in a moral commitment to personal integrity and communal cohesion. Yet, his resistance is ultimately rendered ineffective, highlighting the structural and ethical limits of agency in contemporary urban India.

The novel's multi-perspectival narrative structure emphasizes the internalization of neoliberal, neo-colonial values by the broader community. Residents, initially sympathetic to Masterji, gradually capitulate to the logic of profit and self-interest. One character remarks, *"We are powerless… money talks louder than conscience"* (Adiga, 2011, p. 138), capturing the insidious ways in which voluntary complicity, rather than overt coercion, enforces the dominance of market rationality. The findings suggest that resistance in *Last Man in Tower* is undermined less by external authority than by the normalization of ethical compromise, whereby the collective consent of the community facilitates the perpetuation of structural inequality. This underscores a post-colonial condition in which moral erosion and ideological acquiescence operate as mechanisms of domination, reflecting a society in which historical hierarchies persist not through force alone but through internalized norms and systemic complicity.

By juxtaposition, *The White Tiger* offers a pointed contrast. Balram's ascent, achieved through violence and deception, momentarily subverts immediate social

hierarchies, yet it simultaneously reproduces the exploitative logic of neoliberal capitalism. For instance, Balram reflects, *"I am the new master, but the rules of the game remain the same"* (Adiga, 2008, p. 310), acknowledging the paradoxical nature of his agency. While Balram negotiates the post-colonial landscape through individual cunning and transgression, Masterji's ethical resistance in *Last Man in Tower* fails to produce structural change, highlighting the limitations of collective moral action when confronted with deeply entrenched economic and ideological pressures. Together, these texts illustrate Adiga's evolving post-colonial critique: from dramatizing the possibilities and ambiguities of individual subaltern mobility to examining the fragility of collective ethical integrity under neoliberal urban governance. The novels reveal that post-colonial power in twenty-first-century India operates not only through explicit hierarchies inherited from colonial rule but also through the subtle internalization of market-driven values, producing a society where consent and complicity sustain systemic inequality.

Narrative Strategies and Ideological Implications

A further significant finding of this study concerns Aravind Adiga's deployment of contrasting narrative forms in *The White Tiger* (2008) and *Last Man in Tower* (2011), and the ideological implications these formal choices generate. *The White Tiger* employs a confessional first-person narrative, structured as a series of letters from Balram Halwai to the Chinese Premier, which privileges the subaltern voice while simultaneously foregrounding its moral and ethical instability. Through Balram's voice, the novel utilizes satire and irony to expose the contradictions of post-liberalization India and the global capitalist

system. For instance, Balram reflects, *"I know what to do, and I will do it. Only the darkness in my own heart stands between me and freedom"* (Adiga, 2008, p. 91). Here, the confessional mode allows readers intimate access to the subaltern perspective, yet the ethical ambivalence of Balram's actions—culminating in the murder of his employer Ashok—underscores the instability of this agency. The narrative strategy is thus double-edged: it empowers the subaltern voice while simultaneously compelling readers to confront the moral contradictions and structural inequalities of a neoliberal society that incentivizes transgression as a means of survival.

By contrast, *Last Man in Tower* adopts a realist, omniscient narrative that diffuses agency across a multiplicity of characters, emphasizing structural and collective culpability over the moral failings of any single individual. The story is narrated through alternating perspectives, including those of Masterji, other apartment residents, and developers, creating a panoramic view of an urban community under the pressures of speculative real estate. For example, while Masterji resolutely asserts, *"I cannot sell my home, no matter what the world offers"* (Adiga, 2011, p. 122), the narration also portrays neighbors' gradual succumbing to greed and fear, as illustrated in the reflection: *"Every flat in the building had its own price tag, and conscience was slowly auctioned away"* (Adiga, 2011, p. 138). This multi-perspectival approach shifts the analytical focus from the ethical ambiguity of a single agent to the structural mechanisms that normalize complicity, illustrating how systemic pressures, rather than individual immorality, shape social behavior in urban post-colonial India.

The transition from first-person confessional narration in *The White Tiger* to omniscient, multi-perspectival realism in *Last Man in Tower* reflects a maturation of Adiga's post-colonial critique. While the former dramatizes the possibilities and contradictions of individual transgression in a highly stratified society, the latter emphasizes the systemic dimensions of structural violence, the fragility of communal ethics, and the collective negotiation of moral responsibility. This shift in narrative strategy underscores Adiga's growing concern with the interplay between agency, complicity, and socio-economic structures, illustrating that post-colonial domination in contemporary urban India operates not merely through overt hierarchical imposition but also through internalized norms, market rationality, and the diffuse consent of social actors. Collectively, the novels demonstrate that narrative form itself functions as a vehicle for post-colonial critique, shaping the reader's perception of subaltern agency, ethical responsibility, and structural inequality in distinctly different yet complementary ways.

Spatial Politics and Urban Post-Coloniality

The analysis of *The White Tiger* (2008) and *Last Man in Tower* (2011) reveals that spatial politics and urban geography are central to Adiga's post-colonial critique, functioning as both symbolic and material frameworks for the negotiation of power, agency, and inequality. In *The White Tiger*, the rural–urban divide exemplifies the persistence of colonial patterns of uneven development, where metropolitan centers such as Delhi and Bangalore operate as sites of wealth accumulation, political influence, and modernity, while rural spaces remain structurally marginalized and socially constrained. Balram Halwai's

migration from the village of Laxmangarh to Bangalore is simultaneously an act of aspiration and a confrontation with dispossession, highlighting the ongoing inequities produced by historical and contemporary spatial hierarchies. Balram notes, *"The village is a cage… I had to escape it if I was to see the sky"* (Adiga, 2008, p. 23), illustrating how rural spaces, shaped by inherited feudal and colonial hierarchies, limit both mobility and agency. His movement toward the city, while offering opportunities for upward mobility, also exposes the contradictions of post-colonial urban spaces, which reproduce social stratification even as they promise individual liberation.

In *Last Man in Tower*, urban space itself emerges as the primary locus of neo-colonial domination and ethical compromise. The novel foregrounds the commodification of land and housing within a rapidly privatizing urban environment, where redevelopment projects transform residents into expendable subjects. Masterji's apartment, a site of personal and communal memory, becomes a contested terrain, representing both economic value and moral significance. The narrator observes, *"The building stood in the shadow of a new skyline, every flat a potential transaction, every person a negotiable asset"* (Adiga, 2011, p. 57), highlighting the ways in which urban geography itself mediates power and ethical decision-making. This spatial logic mirrors what scholars have termed "internal colonialism," in which post-independence governance, market liberalization, and private capital collectively reproduce structures of dispossession and marginalization within ostensibly sovereign spaces. The urban environment in *Last Man in Tower* thus functions as both a site and a symbol of structural domination, where market imperatives override communal bonds, ethical principles, and the claims of citizenship.

The juxtaposition of the rural–urban dynamics in *The White Tiger* with the urbanized, market-driven landscape of *Last Man in Tower* underscores Adiga's evolving engagement with spatial politics in post-colonial India. While the former dramatizes the historical persistence of center–periphery inequalities and their impact on subaltern mobility, the latter highlights the contemporary internalization of neo-colonial spatial hierarchies, wherein the commodification of land and housing transforms ethical and communal relations. Together, these narratives reveal that urban and rural geographies are not neutral backdrops but active sites of post-colonial power negotiation, mediating both opportunity and subjugation, aspiration and dispossession, in twenty-first-century India.

Implications for Contemporary Indian English Fiction

Finally, this study situates Aravind Adiga's evolving literary vision within the broader trajectories of contemporary Indian English fiction, highlighting his nuanced interrogation of post-coloniality, neoliberal modernity, and urban moral economies. *The White Tiger* (2008) retains a cautious, albeit ambivalent, faith in the possibilities of subversive mobility within oppressive social structures. Balram Halwai's ascent from a village in Laxmangarh to the urban elite of Bangalore dramatizes a morally complex form of agency, suggesting that individual ingenuity and audacity may enable a subaltern subject to temporarily destabilize hierarchical power relations. As Balram asserts, *"I will become a tiger, not a lamb"* (Adiga, 2008, p. 45), the narrative conveys a limited optimism that strategic, self-interested action can circumvent systemic oppression, even if such mobility is ethically compromised. This aligns with a strand of contemporary Indian English fiction that foregrounds individual aspiration and entrepreneurial survival as a

response to structural inequities, reflecting the entanglement of post-colonial legacies with neoliberal economic imperatives.

By contrast, *Last Man in Tower* (2011) decisively challenges this optimism, foregrounding the futility of ethical resistance in urban spaces governed by collective complicity and market logic. Masterji's steadfast refusal to sell his apartment to redevelopment developers represents moral and civic resistance, yet the multi-perspectival narrative reveals the systematic erosion of communal ethics as neighbors prioritize profit over principle: *"Every flat had its price, and slowly, even conscience was being auctioned away"* (Adiga, 2011, p. 138). Unlike Balram's assertive individualism, Masterji's principled stance fails to alter structural conditions, demonstrating that ethical resistance is ineffectual when faced with the pervasive internalization of neoliberal and neo-colonial values. The novel thus articulates a more pessimistic post-colonial vision, in which systemic inequalities persist not through overt coercion alone but through normalized complicity and ideological consent.

The juxtaposition of these two novels reveals a significant ideological and aesthetic shift in Adiga's post-colonial engagement. Whereas *The White Tiger* dramatizes the tensions and possibilities of individual agency within oppressive structures, *Last Man in Tower* underscores the fragility of collective moral action and the structural constraints imposed by urban neoliberalism. By doing so, Adiga's oeuvre interrogates dominant narratives of progress, development, and freedom, demonstrating how contemporary Indian society remains constrained by historical hierarchies, economic stratification, and the moral compromises they engender.

In a broader literary context, these novels contribute to contemporary Indian English fiction by illustrating the diversity of post-colonial narrative strategies and ethical concerns. Adiga's work engages with themes central to the field—subaltern mobility, urban inequality, ethical responsibility, and the persistence of colonial and neo-colonial structures—while simultaneously offering a sustained critique of the ideological frameworks that underpin post-liberalization India. Through the contrasting trajectories of Balram and Masterji, Adiga interrogates the complex interplay between individual aspiration, communal ethics, and structural constraints, thereby expanding the discourse on post-colonial agency and morality in twenty-first-century Indian English literature. This comparative analysis demonstrates that Adiga's fiction not only reflects socio-economic realities but also functions as a critical lens through which contemporary literary scholarship can examine the contradictions of post-colonial modernity.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the post-colonial approaches and points of divergence in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower*, situating both novels within the broader discourse of post-colonial theory and contemporary Indian English fiction. Through a comparative, theoretically informed analysis, the research demonstrates that Adiga offers a sustained critique of post-independence India by exposing the continuities between colonial hierarchies and the neo-colonial structures produced by globalization, neoliberal capitalism, and urban transformation.

The findings reveal a clear evolution in Adiga's post-colonial vision. *The White Tiger* foregrounds an aggressive model of individual subaltern agency, where resistance is articulated through transgression and moral rupture. While this narrative destabilizes dominant myths of meritocracy and entrepreneurial success, it ultimately exposes the limitations of individual mobility within an inherently exploitative system. In contrast, *Last Man in Tower* shifts the focus from individual ascent to collective ethical failure, portraying a society in which resistance is silenced not by external coercion but by internalized capitalist values and communal complicity. This divergence underscores Adiga's growing skepticism toward the possibility of meaningful resistance within contemporary post-colonial structures.

By analyzing narrative form, spatial representation, and ideological emphasis, the study concludes that Adiga's novels collectively interrogate the rhetoric of progress that defines post-liberalization India. The movement from satirical subversion to tragic realism reflects a deepening post-colonial critique that foregrounds systemic injustice over individual heroism. Ultimately, this research contributes to post-colonial literary scholarship by highlighting how Adiga reconfigures the post-colonial novel to address the ethical, social, and political crises of twenty-first-century India, reaffirming literature's critical role in exposing the unresolved contradictions of the post-colonial condition.

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