




## Globalization and Social Class in Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger"

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 10.46303/cuper.2023.10

### How to cite

Mahato, A. S. (2023). Globalization and Social Class in Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger". *Current Perspectives in Educational Research*, 6(2), 26-34.  
<https://doi.org/10.46303/cuper.2023.10>

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### ABSTRACT

The novel "The White Tiger" by Aravind Adiga offers a scathing critique of India's social class dynamics in the era of globalization. In light of globalization, this article will examine the complex interactions between societal institutions, economic pressures, and personal identities. Adiga illustrates the terrible reality that the impoverished endure through her protagonist, Balram Halwai, shedding light on the growing divide between socioeconomic strata that is made worse by globalization. The story illustrates how globalization is a dual force that drives inequality and development at the same time, exposing the differences in power and possibilities it produces. The journey of Balram from a meek driver to a crafty businessman represents the extent people would go to in order to flee persecution and poverty. The book explores the conflict between Western influences and traditional Indian beliefs, showing the identity crisis that many people face as a result. Adiga's art offers a potent critique of the moral decay and the gap between the wealthy few and the underprivileged masses. This paper challenges readers to consider the ethical implications of a globalized society by highlighting the urgent need for societal transformation.

### KEYWORDS

Aravind Adiga; The White Tiger; globalization; social class; economic disparity; cultural clash; identity crisis.

## Introduction

*The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga is a gripping literary examination of the intricate relationship between globalization and socioeconomic class in modern-day India. Adiga explores the significant changes and inequalities in society that have arisen in an era of unparalleled economic growth and globalization. Adiga's work serves as a sobering reminder that, despite the world's unparalleled experience with integrating economies and cultures, globalization is a complex phenomenon that affects people and communities in various ways that are sometimes uneven. Adiga explores the levels of social hierarchy in her novel, which is set against the lively backdrop of India's economic development. The main character, Balram Halwai, comes to represent the millions of people who are caught in the maze of poverty and are trying to escape it while facing the forces of globalization. Through Balram's eyes, the clash between traditional values and the unrelenting advance of globalization highlights the moral compromises, identity crises, and ethical conundrums faced by those navigating this revolutionary time.

The story powerfully examines globalization as a double-edged sword, creating new economic possibilities while widening the gap between the rich and the poor. Balram's story is a symbolic microcosm that highlights the harsh realities and structural inequalities that exist even in the middle of the global spotlight. In light of this, the essay delves into *The White Tiger's* complex story of globalization's effects on social class, revealing the many facets of societal transformation, cross-cultural conflicts, and personal hardships that make this provocative tale so compelling.

### Globalization in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Globalization infuses every aspect of Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger*, significantly affecting both the Indian social scene and the lives of the protagonists. The protagonist, Balram Halwai, emerges as a symbol of the social class conflict made worse by the forces of globalization at the centre of this literary investigation. The book does a great job of illustrating the sharp economic divide that globalization has widened. While some, like Mr. Ashok and his family, can enjoy the conveniences and opportunities of living in a globalized world, others, like Balram, who were born into extreme poverty, are stuck in a never-ending cycle of hardship. As Shikha Shukla writes in her article entitled "The Impact of Globalization in Arvind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger*":

Arvind Adiga's novel 'The White Tiger' presents the live picture of this ugly face of globalization and urbanization which is sucking the blood of the deprived, downtrodden poverty-stricken multitudes dwelling in the remote corners of the villages and obscured areas of cities of India. It presents the realistic pictures of two Indias – the India of the men of 'Big Bellies and the small Bellies' – the exploiter class and the exploited class. (Shukla, 2020, p.953)

*The White Tiger* depicts globalization as fuelling an exploitative and corrupt society. Balram's transformation from a subservient driver to a cunning and ruthless businessman is a metaphor for the extreme measures individuals' resort to succeed in a globalized world. The book eloquently illustrates how unethical behaviour flourishes after globalization, resulting in moral decline and ethical concessions. Balram's metamorphosis into a "white tiger," a metaphor for his development

into an uncommon and deadly animal, represents the brutality of a globalized society where only the most cunning people thrive.

*The White Tiger* is the story of Balram Halwai, a rickshaw driver's son who skilfully climbs the social ladder to become a successful businessman. The novel portrays the life of Indian culture and how globalization affects the Indian culture through various incidents. In the novel, Balram Halwai is a poor Indian village boy who turned Indian business culture and became a successful entrepreneur. When he writes a letter to the Chinese Premier visiting Bangalore, he states:

You Chinese are far ahead of us in every respect, except that you don't have entrepreneurs. And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy or punctuality does have entrepreneurs. Thousands and thousands of them especially in the field of technology. (Adiga, 2017, p.4)

The successful entrepreneurs have their own companies and run them successfully. In the globalized world, corruption plays a vital role, which automatically affects the Indian culture. The corruption is not limited to the city only but also in villages where landlords are deeply involved themselves to earn more money. The novel presents how corruption plays a vital role in the village in this globalized world. In the past, people did not have any political representation. However, in today's globalized world, low-income people have a voice. The lives of poor people are complex, as Adiga explains in his writing. He highlights how poor people were bought off with little money and how politicians and wealthy landlords-imposed power on them. Supporting each other to elect leaders who represent their interests is crucial for poor people who have been historically unrepresented. However, in today's globalized world, low-income people have a voice. The lives of poor people are complicated, as Adiga explains in his writing. In his observations, he points out that individuals who belonged to the lower strata of society were appeased with meagre sums of money. At the same time, politicians and wealthy landowners wielded their authority over them. To achieve progress, poor people should offer mutual assistance to each other and vote for leaders who will genuinely uphold their interests during elections. Balram states:

There was election coming up and the tea shop owner had already sold us. He had sold our fingerprints – the inky fingers, which the illiterate person makes on the ballot paper to indicate his vote. I had overheard this from a customer. This was supposed to be a close election; he had got a good price for each one of us from the Great Socialist's party. (Adiga,2017, p.97)

Poor people get corrupted, and to the core, they are ready to sell even their votes for money. Unemployment is another major problem due to globalization. Marsida T. Najdeni, in his website post entitled "In What Way Has Globalization Effected Unemployment?" comments:

Globalization has affected unemployment by moving the job patterns wages almost everywhere have gone up and down immigration labour from developing countries to developed countries in much easier and imports and exports have increased tremendously. (Najdeni, 2016, para. 3)

Balam, when talking about the village people, states:

When buses came, they got on – packing the inside, hanging from the railings, climbing onto the roofs – and went to Gaya; there they went to the station and rushed into the trains – packing the inside, hanging from the railings, climbing onto the roofs – and went to Delhi, Calcutta and Dhanbad to find work. (Adiga, 2017, p.26)

People living in villages leave their families and move to cities for work. It shows how globalization affects people in the form of unemployment. In the novel, Balam comes to Delhi as chauffeur to Mr Ashok and adapts to the city's lifestyle. He used to visit several malls, become aware of opportunities around, and know the lifestyle of wealthy people.

In the novel, Mr Ashok's wife, Pinky Madam, becomes a cruel mistress to Balam. After killing a young child in an accident, she wants to fly back to America. She is an American, which in turn affects the marriage culture of India, which ends in the separation of two souls. The primary reason is the impact of Globalization; she is rich and able to dodge any legal proceedings.

The protagonist, Balam, epitomizes the transition of globalization. In the globalized world, manipulation is another aspect that is spreading very fast. It is clear that in some places, women are portrayed as commodities in the place. Globalization has spread its wings all over the world. It has created both positive and negative impacts on our country. The significant negative impacts are alarming in our country.

In the framework of globalization, Adiga examines the collision of cultures and the resulting identity problem. The book eloquently illustrates how, in the face of unrelenting globalization, conventional social institutions are crumbling, and cultural values are becoming less relevant. Balam's personal battle to balance his morality and identity in this fast-changing environment highlights how globalization has confused people's cultural and personal identities. His experience offers a microcosm of the more significant difficulties people have in a globalized world where conventional wisdom clashes with contemporary goals and cultural identities are constantly reshaped in the face of swift change.

Balam watches Indian people in Delhi wearing ethnic costumes and cultural codes mixed with American styles. People spend their time in malls and enjoying having westernized food, talking on Nokia cell phones, and nightclubs open where men and women go together for parties. All these in the novel can be viewed as how globalization affected Indian Culture. Thus, the writer discusses the issues of globalization in the work *The White Tiger*. It is a testimony of Indian Culture in the globalized era.

### **Social Class in *The White Tiger***

*The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga delves deeply into the issue of socioeconomic class through a comprehensive exploration woven throughout the story. The book painstakingly peels back the layers of India's social structure to show how deeply class differences affect the lives of its people. Adiga creates a striking portrait of the economic divide that characterizes life, from the destitute rural to the lavish metropolitan areas. This glaring gap not only represents income disparities but also acts as a prism to look at moral decay and corruption. Lower-class characters, personified by the main

character Balram, are caught in a vicious circle of exploitation and must navigate a society where it is frequently necessary to compromise one's morality to survive.

The book dives deeply into the moral dilemmas that those trying to advance in society encounter, illuminating the merciless quest for achievement in a corrupt society. Furthermore, *The White Tiger* highlights how socioeconomic class influences identities and goals, emphasizing the challenges faced by those trying to escape the limitations of their birth. Balram's voyage highlights the conflict between tradition and modernity and challenges accepted standards, encapsulating the pursuit of social mobility. The work has a lasting effect on the reader's comprehension of the intricacies and injustices that permeate the social strata in modern India by exposing the complicated power dynamics and cultural conflicts inherent in social class via the experiences of its characters.

The novel portrays Indian society as deeply divided along class lines, with the wealthy and powerful upper classes exerting control over the poor and powerless lower classes. The protagonist, Balram comes from a lower-class background, and his journey towards freedom is marked by his struggle to escape the limitations of his social class. The novel portrays the lower classes as being trapped in a cycle of poverty and oppression, with little hope of upward mobility.

At the same time, the novel also portrays the upper classes as being corrupt and exploitative, with little regard for the welfare of the lower classes. The wealthy characters in the novel are shown to be willing to engage in all sorts of immoral and illegal activities in order to maintain their power and privilege. Throughout the novel, Balram is forced to confront the realities of social class and the limitations it imposes on his life. He is constantly reminded of his lower-class status, and he is forced to navigate the complex social hierarchies of Indian society in order to achieve his goals. The novel provides a dark picture of India's class struggle in a globalized world. *The White Tiger* takes the readers to the heart of India and into the world of suspense. The novel examines religion, caste, loyalty, corruption, and poverty in India.

The novel is centred on the crime Balram commits, and he recounts how he became an entrepreneur after coming into the 'Light' prosperity. Balram belonged to a poor background and was born in a tiny hell-hole called Laxmangarh in northern India; his impoverished parents merely called him 'Munna' – 'boy,' and they raised him in the world of darkness where everyone is suffering from extreme poverty. While at school, he was spotted by the Inspector of schools who offered to get a scholarship for his education:

You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots. In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals – the creature that comes along only once in a generation? (Adiga, 2017, p.35)

Balram considers himself "half-baked" as he was deprived of schooling like most children of his age group in India. Due to his poor conditions, his family preferred him to work in a teashop; however, he gained knowledge in another way by listening to the conversation of customers who were visiting the tea shop, and the feudal lords of his village took him with them as a chauffeur and began to experience the world of light. He took experience and learned to drive and was employed as a chauffeur for Mr Ashok at Dhanbad.



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Life in Bangalore has to be that of a refugee *as* “White Tiger keeps no friends. It’s too dangerous.” (Adiga, 2017, p.302)

However, he has to keep in touch with the world of the road and the pavement where he received his education to freedom. Speaking of the socialist leaders in Bangalore on whom people placed their hope of revolution, he says:

Keep your ears open in Bangalore – in any city or town in India – and you will hear stirrings, rumours, threats of insurrection. Men sit under lampposts at night and read. Men huddle together and discuss and point fingers to the heavens. One night, will they all join together – will destroy the Rooster Coop? ...May be once in a hundred years there is a revolution that frees the poor. (Adiga, 2017, p.303)

The novel exposes the cruelty of the man who, after bloodletting through murder, will turn out to be a man-eater himself. What guarantee is there that he will not commit murders for reasons of rivalry in his entrepreneurial world of cutthroat competition? Revenge murder is no solution to bring about social justice. Subscribing to his principle of taking law into his own hands will lead only to anarchy and escalation of violence.

However, *The White Tiger* should make every right-thinking citizen read the signs of the times and be socially conscious of the rights and duties of each one, irrespective of caste, creed, or economic status, to prevent creating the types of Ashok and Balram in our society.

Balram’s story explores the complex realities of social class in rapidly changing India, where traditional structures are upended by economic growth and modernization.

Throughout the novel, Balram is confronted with the harsh realities of social class. He grows up in a small village in rural India, where he is forced to drop out of school and work in a tea shop to support his family. Despite his intelligence and ambition, Balram is unable to escape the limitations imposed by his lower-class background. When Balram moves to Delhi to work as a driver for a wealthy family, he is exposed to the stark inequalities in Indian society. He sees firsthand how the wealthy and powerful upper classes are able to maintain their power and privilege by exploiting the labour of the lower classes. He also sees how corruption and bribery are rampant in Indian society and how the wealthy can use their influence to avoid punishment for their crimes.

Throughout the novel, Balram struggles to find a way to escape the limitations of his social class. He is forced to navigate the complex social hierarchies of Indian society and to make difficult moral choices in order to achieve his goals. Ultimately, Balram’s journey towards freedom is marked by his willingness to change the status quo and to fight for a better life for himself and his family.

The novel explores social class through the character of Balram. Balram is a complex and nuanced character who embodies many of the contradictions and tensions that exist within Indian society. For example, Balram is a member of the lower classes, but he is also an ambitious and intelligent individual determined to escape the limitations of his social class. He is deeply resentful of the wealthy and powerful upper classes, but he is also willing to engage in immoral and illegal activities in order to achieve his goals.

Throughout the novel, Balram is forced to navigate the complex social hierarchies of Indian society. He is constantly reminded of his lower-class status, and he is forced to confront how his social class limits his opportunities and his freedom. For example, he is unable to marry the woman he loves because of his lower-class background. At the same time, Balram is also keenly aware of the ways in which the upper classes exploit and oppress the lower classes. He sees firsthand how the wealthy and powerful can maintain their power and privilege by exploiting the labour of the lower classes. He also sees how corruption and bribery are rampant in Indian society and how the wealthy can use their influence to avoid punishment for their crimes. Balram struggles to find a way to escape the limitations of his social class. He is forced to make difficult moral choices, and he is often torn between his desire for freedom and his sense of obligation to his family and his community. Ultimately, Balram's journey towards freedom is marked by his willingness to challenge the status quo and to fight for a better life for himself and his family.

*The White Tiger* portrays freedom as a complex and multifaceted concept beyond physical liberation. The novel explores the challenges and obstacles faced by individuals who strive to achieve freedom in a society marked by poverty, inequality, and corruption. The novel portrays social class as a significant theme, exploring the deep divisions and inequalities in Indian society. The novel presents the lower classes as being trapped in a cycle of poverty and oppression, while the upper classes are shown to be corrupt and exploitative. Balram's journey towards freedom is marked by his struggle to escape the limitations of his social class and to achieve a better life for himself. The novel is a powerful exploration of the realities of social class in India. The novel portrays the deep divisions and inequalities that exist in Indian society, and it challenges readers to confront how traditional social structures can limit individual freedom and potential. It is a powerful exploration of the complexities of social class in India. The novel challenges readers to confront how traditional social structures can limit individual freedom and potential, and it offers a nuanced and multifaceted portrayal of the realities of life in modern India.

The Raven is recognized for exploiting people sexually who go to graze their animals on his land:

The Raven owned the worst land, which was dry, rocky hillside around the fort, and took a cut from the goatherds who went up there to graze with their flocks. If they didn't have money, he liked to dip his beak into their backsides, so they called him Raven. (Adiga, 2017, p.25)

Poor people are rated as uncivilized monkeys and human spiders. They are 'half-baked' people as they do not get opportunities to continue their studies. They are exploited by the rich for their benefit. People with low incomes are subjugated and suppressed. They are denied to enjoy equal rights and opportunities. So, they fail to gain what they want or what they deserve. The attitudes of the rich suffocate them; as a result, they deviate from morality and break the shackles of moral values to get freedom. In a nutshell, class warfare is the result of the gap between the rich and the poor and the exploitative attitude of the rich. Indian society has two types of people – men with big bellies and men with tiny bellies. The tenacious hunger and poverty lead a man towards degradation. Balram

Halwai, who hails from a small village in Bihar, breaks the trap of caste and class to realise his dreams. He raises the revolt by adopting unfair means. Adiga does not justify the protagonist's acts; rather, he indicates that people with low incomes have to be treated with human dignity. There is a need for change in the social system. If appropriate steps are not taken, this may move towards social unrest. As S. Sakthivel and S. Ganesan write in the article entitled "Social Realism in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*":

Aravind Adiga, who belongs to the current crop of Indian writers in English has realistically projected the image of the postcolonial India which has had been experiencing varied effects of globalization. On the one hand, globalization has paved the way for making millions and has given birth to many Indian millionaires; on the other hand, the fruits/benefits of globalization have not reached the subalterns languishing in backward parts of India, the vast land of differences. (Sakthivel & Ganesan, 2022, p.2212)

### Conclusion

Globalization and social class are two topics in Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* to create a compelling and thought-provoking story. Adiga deftly analyses how globalization has affected India's social structure via the prism of Balram Halwai, providing an insightful analysis of the intricacies of modernity, economic inequality, and cultural transformations. The book shows how globalization is a catalyst that exacerbates already-existing social divides and forges new ones. Adiga's description of it shows the contradictory character of globalization. On the one hand, it promotes a sense of connection by offering chances for technical improvement and economic prosperity.

Conversely, it widens the divide between the rich and the underprivileged. The infusion of multinational firms, foreign cash, and Western ideas increases the socioeconomic divide and increasingly marginalises the poorest classes of society. Balram's path from a menial driver to a crafty entrepreneur illustrates the lengths people would go to to achieve social mobility in the face of the revolutionary powers of globalization. The book also explores the conflict between modernity and tradition in the context of globalization. Balram's identity issue reflects the more significant battle that many people who are torn between the attraction of a globalized, Westernised lifestyle and their cultural roots endure. A fast-changing world has profound implications, such as the loss of conventional values and the fracturing of cultural identities, leaving people questioning who they are and where they belong.

Adiga's work, *The White Tiger*, presents a striking analysis of the societal disparities that are sustained by globalization. It forces readers to face hard facts regarding the fallout from technology growth and global economic integration. The book makes us consider the moral ramifications of living in an unequal-opportunity society. Adiga forces us to consider the ethical conundrums, identity crises, and socioeconomic inequalities that arise at the nexus of globalization and social class through Balram's tale. In the end, the book serves as a potent call to action, imploring people to confront these problems, close the gaps, and strive towards a future that is more inclusive and egalitarian. There is a gleam of optimism and a call to action in *The White Tiger* in the face of the problems posed



by globalization. Adiga's story forces readers to acknowledge the agency of people like Balram, who, in the face of adversity, negotiate the intricate web of social class and globalization. Balram's journey from a victim of institutionalized oppression to a crafty businessman exemplifies the human spirit's resiliency and tenacity. His narrative inspires others to question the existing quo and work towards a society that is more just and equal.

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