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NARRATIVES OF INEQUALITY: A MARXIST READING OF CLASS CONFLICT IN *THE MURDER OF AZIZ KHAN* AND *THE WHITE TIGER*

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Abstract

This research paper undertakes a comparative analysis of inequality and class conflict as represented in Zulfikar Ghose's *The Murder of Aziz Khan* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. Although situated in distinct national contexts — Pakistan and India —the two narratives offer incisive examinations of the socio-economic frameworks that entrench marginalization and injustice. Ghose depicts the disintegration of traditional agrarian life under the pressures of relentless capitalist encroachment, whereas Adiga exposes the stark realities of an entrenched class hierarchy upheld by systemic corruption and exploitation. Adopting a comparative perspective, the paper investigates how each author articulates a trenchant critique of class stratification, economic disparity, and the ethical compromises demanded by oppressive social structures. Particular attention is given to narrative perspective, symbolic motifs, and character construction as means of illuminating the intertwined dynamics of resistance and complicity in unequal societies. The research paper concludes that the selected works offer potent indictments of postcolonial South Asian realities marked by persistent class domination and economic injustice. Despite their differing national settings, the novels converge in their portrayal of the entrenched exploitation of the working class by a dominant capitalist elite.

Keywords: *Capitalism, Class Conflict, Corruption, Economic Disparity, Resistance And Complicity, Social Inequality, Subaltern Voice*

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1. Introduction

[Marxism] holds the potential to inspire resistance, catalyze transformative change, and advocate for progress and revolutionary ideals, making it an essential instrument in the pursuit of social justice…It seeks to empower the proletariat to confront the injustices and inequalities imposed by the bourgeoisie. Through this collective awareness and activism, marginalized groups can free themselves from the dominance of the privileged elite. (Afzal et al. 2024, p. 875)

Eagleton (2002) accentuates that that Marxism views history as shaped by continual class struggle. It seeks to dismantle entrenched hierarchies through fostering class consciousness, enabling the proletariat to challenge bourgeois dominance. By exposing structural inequalities, Marxism envisions a classless, egalitarian society achieved through collective emancipation from ruling-class oppression. As Eagleton (2002) asserts, "Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and the practice of transforming them," reflecting its commitment to narrating the collective struggles of individuals striving to free themselves from "certain forms of exploitation and oppression" (p. 65). Within this framework, literature is not regarded as mere entertainment or passive consumption, but as a potent medium for cultivating critical awareness, inspiring resistance, and fostering transformative social change. From a Marxist perspective, literature becomes instrumental in representing the experiences and aspirations of the working class and in advocating for social justice. As Eagleton (2002) explains, Marxist literary criticism is "not merely a sociology of literature," concerned with references to class or publishing contexts, but rather aims to "explain the literary work more fully," which necessitates an analysis of form, style, and meaning rooted in the historical and material conditions of its production (p. 3). Class conflict, in this light, remains a central theme in postcolonial South Asian literature, where writers often engage with the socio-economic disparities inherited from colonial rule, perpetuated by feudal structures, and exacerbated by modern capitalist transformations. In both Pakistani and Indian contexts, literature functions as a powerful tool to expose structural inequalities and to narrate the lived realities of marginalized individuals navigating deeply entrenched class hierarchies. Zulfikar Ghose's *The Murder of Aziz Khan* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* exemplify such portrayals of class struggle, offering distinct but parallel critiques shaped by their respective national and historical settings.

Ghose (1967) presents a Marxist-inflected critique of capitalist encroachment into rural Pakistan during the post-independence era. Set in the agrarian village of Kalapur, the narrative charts the steady disintegration of traditional rural structures under the dominance of an emergent capitalist elite intent on consolidating landownership and political influence. Central to the plot is Aziz Khan, an autonomous landowner whose refusal to sell his property to the affluent Shah brothers positions him as a symbolic figure of resistance against economic dispossession. Employing a realist narrative mode, Ghose (1967) exposes how the rhetoric of modernization and development is appropriated to facilitate elite enrichment while deepening peasant marginalization. The Shah brothers' calculated use of legal loopholes, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and entrenched social hierarchies illustrates the porous boundary between legality and injustice in systems skewed toward the powerful. Aziz's moral steadfastness and attachment to his land render him vulnerable in a profit-driven order where ethics are subordinated to economic gain. Grounded in Marxist critique, the novel frames Aziz's fate as emblematic of structural inequalities that erode democratic ideals, weaken communal solidarity, and dehumanize those who resist capitalist exploitation.

Adiga (2008) offers a penetrating critique of post-liberalization India, exposing how narratives of national progress mask enduring social and economic inequalities. Set against the backdrop of globalization and rapid urban transformation, the novel interrogates the illusion of upward mobility in a society where structural poverty and servitude remain deeply entrenched. Narrated by Balram Halwai — a chauffeur who ascends to entrepreneurial status from the impoverished "Darkness" — the text delivers a scathing indictment of a rigidly stratified social order sustained by entrenched class antagonism. Through irony and satire, Adiga (2008) dismantles the myth of meritocracy, illustrating that success in "new India" often necessitates moral compromise, calculated defiance, or complicity in systemic corruption. Balram's rise, far from an inspiring narrative of ambition, reflects the ethical costs imposed by an inequitable system. The symbolic binary of the "India of Light" and the "India of Darkness" underscores spatial, moral, and economic divisions, revealing how wealth enables elites such as Ashok and the Stork to dominate political, legal, and bureaucratic structures. By foregrounding persistent class exploitation, *The White Tiger* exposes the corrosive effects of capitalism on moral values, institutional integrity, and individual autonomy.

The Murder of Aziz Khan and *The White Tiger* offer incisive critiques of postcolonial South Asian societies marked by deep economic inequalities and entrenched class divisions. Though set in distinct national and temporal contexts — 1960s rural Pakistan and early 21st-century urban India — both novels converge in their depiction of systemic oppression exercised by a dominant capitalist elite. In *The Murder of Aziz Khan*,

the Shah brothers' calculated dispossession of Aziz Khan exemplifies how economic power subverts justice and reinforces elite control. Conversely, *The White Tiger* narrates Balram Halwai's ascent from servitude to entrepreneurship through the morally fraught act of murdering his employer, exposing the corrupt mechanisms that render upward mobility possible only through ethical compromise. Both works reveal capitalism's capacity to dehumanize the poor, corrupt institutional structures, and perpetuate colonial-era hierarchies under the guise of post-independence governance. While Aziz embodies principled resistance that ends in defeat, Balram's trajectory reflects subversion from within, underscoring the grim choices available to the marginalized. Together, Ghose (1967) and Adiga (2008) affirm the enduring relevance of Marxist critique in analyzing postcolonial socio-economic realities.

2. Literature Review

The Murder of Aziz Khan and The White Tiger occupy prominent positions within the literary traditions of Pakistani and Indian English fiction, respectively. First published in 1967, Ghose's novel emerges from the milieu of early industrialization and socio-political instability in post-independence Pakistan, and has achieved international scholarly recognition as a seminal text in the canon of Pakistani Anglophone literature. Adiga's *The White Tiger*, awarded the Man Booker Prize in 2008, represents a landmark in Indian English fiction, stimulating sustained critical discourse on the intersections of class stratification, economic inequality, and the contested narratives of modernization in contemporary India.

Scholars have examined *The Murder of Aziz Khan* through multiple critical lenses. Rehman (1991) highlights the novel's concern with capitalist alienation and its consequences for individual identity and community structures. *The Murder of Aziz Khan* exposes "Pakistan's social realities in the nineteen sixties" (Rahman, 1991, p. 89). Ross (1989) asserts that Ghose's narrative surpasses context-specific concerns to explore universal moral and historical questions, emphasizing the persistence of evil across time. Hashmi (1994) identifies land not only as a central theme but as a powerful metaphor for resistance and dispossession, as the protagonist endures systemic exploitation at the hands of industrial capitalists. Ahmed (2009) reinforces this view by pointing to the novel's realistic portrayal of socio-economic inequalities in postcolonial Pakistan. "The plights of exploited working class (the ruled) in the hands of upper class (the ruler) are projected effectively by Ghose in Pakistani context" (Hussain et al., 2023 p. 154). Jajja (2012) applies a Marxist framework to argue that the text reflects how economic foundations shape political and legal superstructures. Ali (2016) similarly explores class antagonism, asserting that the Shah brothers represent the bourgeois elite, while Aziz Khan embodies

the proletariat, whose lives are regulated by mechanisms of economic domination. *The Murder of Aziz Khan* "examines the plight of post-independence India's marginalized Muslim community in which a lower-class family is exploited by the upper-class family by having approach to the power structure of society" (Khan, 2024, p. 317).

Sebastian (2009) highlights Adiga's incisive portrayal of class stratification in *The White Tiger*, presenting Balram as a representative of the marginalized and a foil to elite figures like Ashok. Singh (2009) reads the novel through the lens of subalternity, arguing that systemic forces — such as illiteracy, poverty, bureaucracy, and corruption — trap the underclass within the metaphorical "Rooster Coop," preventing them from asserting agency. Yadav (2011) builds on this critique by examining the erosion of moral and religious values in a globalized India, noting Balram's disillusionment with both religious and political institutions. Sindhu (2013) focuses on the corrupting influence of urbanization, tracing Balram's transformation from an innocent village boy to a morally compromised individual as he navigates city life. Similarly, Sheoran (2013) emphasizes the protagonist's confrontation with capitalist exploitation and urban injustice, culminating in his violent rebellion against the oppressive structures symbolized by the "Rooster Coop." Shagufta (2013) reinforces this by highlighting the growing divide between the rich and the poor, arguing that Balram's ambitions are constrained by entrenched socio-economic hierarchies. Narasiman (2013) interprets Balram's journey as a struggle for freedom from servitude and inequality, suggesting that his resort to crime is a direct response to the structural violence of a deeply stratified society. Choudhry (2014) critiques the illusion of India's economic and technological progress, contending that these developments obscure the continued marginalization of the poor, particularly in areas such as education, healthcare, and governance. Complementing this view, Deswal (2014) asserts that the novel vividly reflects India's contemporary socio-political conditions, offering a critical lens on inequality and exploitation.

While both novels have been studied individually for their depiction of class division and capitalist exploitation, existing research lacks a transnational Marxist analysis. This paper addresses that gap by examining how both narratives portray class conflict as a destabilizing force that corrodes traditional values, disrupts moral frameworks, and undermines human agency within the broader context of postcolonial capitalist modernity.

3. Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in Marxist literary criticism. It conducts a comparative analysis of both novels to examine how class

conflict functions as a central narrative force. Using key Marxist concepts — such as alienation, false consciousness, and the base-superstructure model — the paper explores how capitalist structures erode moral values, cultural traditions, and individual agency in the postcolonial contexts of Pakistan.

Grounded in materialist philosophy, Marxism conceptualizes human history as a perpetual conflict between antagonistic social classes. As Marx and Engels (1888) famously state, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (p. 14). The dialectical tension between the oppressor and the oppressed propels historical change, with economic determinism positing that material conditions are the primary force shaping human relations. When the means of production are concentrated in the hands of a dominant class, systemic exploitation is perpetuated, entrapping the subordinate class in a cycle of deprivation and subjugation. Marxism offers a fundamental critique of capitalism as an inherently exploitative system, rooted in the unequal distribution of economic power. The industrial era brought forth two dominant classes: the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production, and the proletariat, who must sell their labor to survive. Marx and Engels (1888) define the bourgeoisie as the class of large-scale capitalists who, in advanced societies, hold near-exclusive control over both the means of subsistence and the productive forces — such as machinery, factories, and workshops — through which these means are generated. Opposed to them is the proletariat, a propertyless class compelled to endure the unfavorable conditions imposed by the bourgeoisie, having been stripped of any remaining economic independence.

This structural inequality fosters exploitation, alienation, and growing social unrest. Marx and Engels (1998) further argue that the bourgeoisie perceive the proletariat not as human beings, but as commodified entities to be manipulated for economic gain: "They view everyone as an object, a possession, or a subordinate being under their [bourgeoisie] control" (p. 313). This commodification is central to capitalist production, wherein labor is valued only in terms of its profitability. In *Theories of Surplus-Value*, Marx (1863) accentuates that "The proletariat is sacrificed to wealth" (p. 420), a dynamic that exacerbates class antagonism. As the wealth of the bourgeoisie accumulates, the condition of the proletariat becomes "more wretched and intolerable" (Marx & Engels, 1888, p. 48), reinforcing one of capitalism's core contradictions: the concentration of private property among a minority, while the majority remains dispossessed.

The Marxist framework also introduces the concepts of the economic 'base' and the ideological 'superstructure.' The base, consisting of the relations and forces of production, shapes the superstructure — encompassing institutions such as religion, law, education, and politics. As Marx and Engels (1998) observe, "The social organization evolving directly out of production and intercourse... forms the basis of the state and of the

rest of the idealistic superstructure" (p. 98). They emphasize that "there lies the connection of all existing relations with the economic foundations of society" (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 38), affirming that material conditions ultimately determine consciousness and social organization. This relationship enables the bourgeoisie to sustain ideological hegemony through institutions that legitimize their control.

Marx (1993) reiterates that it is not individual consciousness that determines existence, but rather "the mode of production of material life" which shapes "social, political, and intellectual life." Accordingly, changes in the economic base lead to transformations in the superstructure, impacting cultural and ideological frameworks. Marx and Engels (1888) envision communism as the remedy to capitalism's contradictions — an egalitarian society in which "every member... can develop and use all his capabilities and powers in complete freedom" (p. 37). This vision highlights their belief that justice and equality are contingent upon the radical restructuring of economic foundations.

Marx (1844) extends this critique through his theory of alienation, which describes how workers are estranged from the products they create, from the very process of production, from their own human essence, and from one another. He observes that increased productivity paradoxically deepens workers' impoverishment, as the expansion of production amplifies their exploitation. Within this framework, laborers — while producing commodities — are themselves transformed into commodities, their worth measured solely in terms of economic output. Marx identifies four forms of alienation: from the product, the process, the self, and from others. This alienation culminates in *reification*, a process through which social relations are objectified. Workers become mere objects within this profit-driven system of capitalism.

Lukács (1971) expands on Marx's insights by analyzing the ideological manipulation inherent in capitalism. He argues that the dominant ideology is a projection of bourgeois consciousness, presenting the illusion that individuals act autonomously, while in fact their actions are shaped by material and ideological constraints. As Marx observes, "To them their own social actions… take the form of the action of objects which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them" (Lukacs, 1971, p. 49). Lukács (1971) critiques the corrosive impact of commodification on social values, contending that the pervasive logic of commodity exchange alters the very fabric of society. He argues that the dominance of commodities not only restructures economic relations but also precipitates a qualitative transformation in social life, eroding traditional values and fragmenting established social bonds. Capitalism not only restructures material life but also erodes moral and interpersonal bonds, further entrenching class division and human alienation.

4. Textual Analysis and Discussion

The Murder of Aziz Khan by Zulfikar Ghose reflects strong Marxist influences, highlighting the class divide between the bourgeois (capitalist) and the proletariat (working class). Ghose (1967) vividly illustrates this division through the conflict between the Shah brothers — representing the capitalist elite — and Aziz Khan, a small landowning farmer, who symbolizes the oppressed working class. The novel critiques how capitalism corrupts society, dehumanizes the poor, and fosters greed and injustice among the wealthy. In Kalapur, rural farmers are compelled to sell their ancestral land under economic duress, orchestrated by the capitalist Shah brothers, who operate with the support of corrupt political figures. Ghose (1967) portrays how the Shah brothers exploit poor farmers, purchasing their land at unfairly low prices. Burdened by poverty and debt, the farmers comply, often internalizing a sense of helplessness. However, Aziz Khan resists. Unlike others, he refuses to sell his seventy-acre plot, viewing it not as a market commodity but as integral to his identity. Ghose (1967) emphasizes this connection: "These seventy acres, this place of earth, this world of Aziz Khan, did not appear to him as land, as a property with a market value" (Ghose, 1967, p. 16). Instead, it represents "a sufficiency of existence" (Ghose, 1967, p. 16), and "nobody could take the land away from him without first taking away his existence" (Ghose, 1967, p. 16). Aziz's resistance frustrates the Shah brothers, who seek the land to reduce cotton transport costs. Their initial irritation intensifies into hostility, revealing the violent lengths capitalists are willing to go to enforce economic control. Thus, Ghose (1967) presents Aziz as a symbol of resistance against capitalist oppression and defends the dignity of the peasant class.

Marx (1968) posits that society is fundamentally divided between the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production, and the proletariat, who must labour to survive. In *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, this division is vividly portrayed through the conflict between the affluent Shah brothers — Akram, Ayub, and Afaq — and Aziz Khan, a small landowner. Whereas the Shah brothers immerse themselves in material luxury and comfort "afforded by their economic power, Aziz and the majority of the people remain deprived of any comforts, they know nothing about comfort, joy and happiness – they suffer from hunger and poverty" (Afzal et al., 2024, p. 771). The Shahs embody capitalist privilege, indulging in lavish lifestyles, dining at elite hotels, and playing bridge. As Ghose writes, "Come, you silent lovers, we're going to Mansur's for a game of bridge" (Ghose, 1967, p. 49). Their wealth distances them from the struggles of the working class, as Marx (1848) and Lukács (1971) argue. This disparity is symbolized through transport: The Shahs drive jeeps while Aziz travels on foot. Afaq's luxury is evident when "driving soothed him, especially in a jeep" (Ghose, 1967, p. 40). Education further reflects this inequality. The Shahs send their

children abroad, while Aziz, illiterate, lacks access to even basic schooling. Razia dismisses local education, saying only Switzerland is suitable for her daughters (p. 160), underscoring elite arrogance and systemic exclusion. Moreover, under capitalism, the poor are denied economic rights, while the wealthy expand unchecked. The Shahs acquire vast lands and launch businesses across Pakistan. Ayub declares plans to take over entire industries (Ghose, 1967, p. 36), while workers like Riaz and Javed toil under exploitative conditions. The Shahs manipulate the legal system to destroy Aziz, framing his son Rafiq for crimes committed by Afaq. Rafiq is hanged, and Aziz is exiled: "Rafiq had been hanged… running to a hole in the darkness" (Ghose, 1967, p. 145). Ghose (1967) thus reveals a capitalist society where justice, education, and healthcare serve only the rich, leaving the poor to suffer in silence.

Marx (1848) and Lukács (1971) contend that the bourgeoisie maintains its dominance through the systematic exploitation of the proletariat — a dynamic that Ghose (1967) powerfully dramatizes in *The Murder of Aziz Khan*. The Shah brothers — Akram, Ayub, and Afaq — function as emblematic figures of postcolonial capitalism, manipulating political, legal, and economic systems to suppress labor rights and dispossess the rural poor. Akram coerces farmers into relinquishing ancestral land, while Ayub dismantles labor unions and exploits industrial workers. The plight of laborers such as Riaz, Salim, and Javed — summarily dismissed for demanding their rights — resonates with Marx's (1844) theory of alienation, as their identities are reduced to mere instruments of economic production. Riaz's assertion that "The worker has no identity" (Ghose, 1967, p. 209) encapsulates this process of dehumanization.

The Shahs' commodification of labor is starkly conveyed in Akram's boast: "Don't worry, we could dismiss ten times the men we employ... Not in this country" (Ghose, 1967, p. 207), revealing a worldview in which human beings are entirely expendable. Aziz Khan, a self-reliant farmer, stands as a symbolic representative of the oppressed proletariat. When financial desperation forces him to sell his land, the Shah brothers exploit his vulnerability, slashing their offer from 2,000 to 200 rupees per acre. Ayub's contemptuous remark — "He'll come crawling back... it'll be nothing" (Ghose, 1967, p. 142) — underscores the erosion of dignity under capitalist domination. As Afzal et al. (2024) observe, "The Shah brothers, in conjunction with the elite of society, symbolize the concentration of wealth in the hands of a privileged few. They embody the exploitation and plundering of the working class's hard-earned resources" (p. 883).

Ghose (1967) further critiques the alliance of capitalism with military and religious elites, which obstructs democratic reform. Aziz, once resilient in colonial times, is more brutally exploited in independent Pakistan. The Shahs inherit colonial tactics, thriving through manipulation rather than production. Ghose (1967) exposes this parasitism:

"middle men... who produce nothing and achieve nothing and yet acquire fortune" (Ghose, 1967, p. 20). Akram's amorality is summed up in his belief that human problems can be solved with "cash or... some insidious form of destruction" (p. 34). Akram's ascent through bribery and exploitation epitomizes capitalism's entanglement with political corruption in *The Murder of Aziz Khan*. Ghose (1967) critiques postcolonial Pakistan's ruling elite, portraying officials like the District Commissioner as indifferent to public welfare and obsessed with personal enrichment. Describing the elite as "thugs and mercenaries" lacking "ideas… ideals… justice… [or] humanity" but consumed by a "burning ambition… to make their fortune" (Ghose, 1967, p. 26), Ghose (1967) exposes a leadership as exploitative as its colonial predecessors. In Marxist terms, the state becomes a tool for advancing bourgeois interests while subjugating the proletariat.

Capitalism's moral decay is reflected in a governance culture dominated by opportunism. Ministers and bureaucrats accumulate wealth, hoarding it in foreign banks, while the masses suffer. This aligns with Marx's (1968) assertion that capitalism concentrates property in a few hands. The Shah brothers embody this greed, expanding their capitalist empire across industries, exploiting both land and labor. Zakia notes, "some people can never have enough… they are greedy bunch" (Ghose, 1967, p. 54), emphasizing the ethical vacuum created by capitalist accumulation.

Lukács (1971) builds on Marx, observing that both the bourgeoisie and proletariat experience alienation under capitalism (p. 149). Ghose (1967) illustrates this through the Shah family, who, despite their wealth, are emotionally fragmented. Afaq confesses, "My brothers are bastards… they don't like me" (Ghose, 1967, p. 80), revealing the collapse of familial bonds. Zarina, similarly alienated, longs for identity and affection within a household that renders her invisible. Ghose (1967) captures her isolation: "Having no past other than being in an alien family, she increasingly dreamed of a future which would be creatively her own" (Ghose, 1967, p. 60). Thus, Ghose (1967) delivers a searing Marxist critique of postcolonial capitalism, exposing how economic greed, political complicity, and social alienation perpetuate structural inequality and human suffering.

Capitalism's moral corruption is starkly illustrated in Rafiq's unjust execution. Although Afaq Shah commits rape and murder, the Shah family's wealth enables them to manipulate the legal system. By bribing police, hiring lawyers, and silencing witnesses, they frame Rafiq, while Afaq escapes to London for "higher studies." The narrator's line — "Rafiq was dead. Jumila Bano was dead. And here he was riding the air like a vulture" (Ghose, 1967, p. 144) — captures the injustice and moral decay of a society where truth is subordinate to wealth. Through this, Ghose (1967) offers a potent Marxist critique of how capitalism distorts justice and entrenches inequality.

The capitalist class is portrayed as predatory, feeding on the fabric of postcolonial Pakistani society. The Shah brothers' economic power extends into political and judicial realms, exposing the complicity of state institutions. Police and courts, rather than safeguarding justice, uphold capitalist interests by criminalizing the poor. The murder of Javed by hired assassins and Aziz's subsequent ruin further exemplify capitalism's psychological and social destructiveness. Once a resilient farmer, Aziz is reduced to despair, symbolizing the ideological defeat of indigenous and socialist values.

Ghose (1967) portrays capitalism not merely as an economic system but as an all-encompassing ideological order that demands social conformity. Aziz's refusal to adopt capitalist norms leads to his complete marginalization, illustrating how state institutions — such as the courts and police — function as instruments of capitalist power. This dynamic reflects Georg Lukács's (1971) notion of ideology, in which the bourgeois worldview is naturalized and presented as universal, thereby concealing the structural subjugation of the proletariat. Ghose (1967) renders this process visible through the depiction of a populace that accepts systemic injustice as *kismet*, a fatalistic resignation that ensures the continued dominance of capitalist hegemony.

Adiga (2008) contrasts two distinct realms within Indian society: the ―India of Light, where the affluent capitalist class resides, enjoying unparalleled access to life's luxuries, and the 'India of Darkness', a realm bereft of even basic necessities of life. The 'India of Light' symbolizes prosperity and progress, while the 'India of Darkness' lags behind in all aspects, encapsulating the deprivation and marginalization endured by the working class, represented by Balram, the novel's protagonist. (Afzal et al., 2024, p. 777)

In alignment with Marx's claim that society is divided into "two great hostile camps… Bourgeoisie and Proletariat" (Marx, 1968, p. 32), *The White Tiger* portrays deep class antagonism in postcolonial India. Balram, representing the working poor, and Ashok, symbolizing the capitalist elite, embody this divide. Balram's journey reflects the proletariat's struggle to break free from entrenched moral, social, and religious constraints. Lukács' theory that economic forces shape societal behavior and relationships further illuminates this conflict. Adiga (2008) reinforces this binary by dividing India into "an India of Light and an India of Darkness" (Adiga, 2008, p. 14), a metaphor for the disparity between wealth and deprivation. The "India of Darkness" remains trapped in poverty, serving the affluent "India of Light." Adiga (2008) further elaborates on the pervasive poverty of "India of Darkness," where the protagonist Balram is born. His environment is characterized by severe economic deprivation, populated by laborers such as rickshaw pullers, shopkeepers, tea vendors, and coal collectors. The novel portrays a system in which wealth is extracted from impoverished regions and funneled into the coffers of the capitalist elite. This systemic extraction culminates in the dehumanization of the poor,

wherein the rich extend greater concern to the comfort of their pets than to the wellbeing of their human subordinates. As Balram observes, "the rich expect their dogs to be treated like humans, you see" (Adiga, 2008, p. 78).

Marx (1968) identifies the enduring nature of class disparity, noting that "in so far as millions of families live in economic circumstances which distinguish their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other class and make them more or less hostile to other class." This sentiment is vividly echoed in *The White Tiger*, where Adiga (2008) portrays postcolonial Indian society as deeply divided along socio-economic lines. He exposes how class stratification infiltrates not just wealth and education but also culture and everyday life. Alcohol consumption symbolizes this divide: "In this country, we have two kinds of men: Indian liquor men and English liquor men... 'Indian' liquor is for village boys like me... 'English' liquor, naturally, is for the rich" (Adiga, 2008, p. 73). Clothing also marks class, as poor servants wear "blue chequred polyester shirt, orange trousers…those are the kind of cloth sir, which would appeal to a servant's eye" (Adiga, 2008, p. 22). The divide extends to leisure and family planning, with the poor portrayed as having large families and limited legal recourse. Balram remarks, "You know how these people in the Darkness are...they don't know the names of their own children...won't go to the police" (Adiga, 2008, p. 164), revealing how class inequality erodes even the value of human life.

Adiga (2008) critiques systemic corruption and inefficiency in essential public institutions within the "India of Darkness." Education, supposedly a tool for upliftment, is depicted as deeply corrupt. Balram ironically asserts that "if the Indian village is a paradise, then the school is a paradise within a paradise" (Adiga, 2008, p. 32), highlighting how teachers misappropriate government resources meant for children. Similarly, healthcare is depicted as dysfunctional, with hospitals lacking staff and medical supplies. Political interference worsens the situation, as shown when Balram recounts: "Three different foundation stones for a hospital lay, by three different politicians before three different elections" (Adiga, 2008, p. 47). He further reveals that doctor positions are sold in auctions: "every time the post falls vacant, the Great Socialist lets all the big doctors know that he is having an auction for the post" (Adiga, 2008, p. 49).

These failures disproportionately affect the poor. Balram's father dies from untreated tuberculosis, prompting Balram's grim reflection: "the diseases of the poor can never get treated" (Adiga, 2008, p. 237). Political disillusionment is another central theme. Elections are fraudulent and manipulated. Balram denounces democracy: "we have this fucked up system called parliamentary democracy" (Adiga, 2008, p. 156). His father echoes this sentiment: "I've seen twelve elections… and someone else has voted for me twelve times" (Adiga, 2008, p. 100).

Lukács (1971) posits that economic power controls ideology and social relations. Adiga illustrates this through empty political promises and widespread neglect: "The elections show that the poor will not be ignored… There is no water in the taps and what do you people in Delhi give us" (Adiga, 2008, p. 269)? This neglect is vividly portrayed: "Electricity poles: defunct… vivid eyes shine like the guilty conscience of government of India" (Adiga, 2008, p. 20). This citation encapsulates the government's failure to meet the fundamental needs of its most vulnerable citizens. The children's physical deformities are a stark visual symbol of systemic neglect and social injustice.

Following Pinky Madam's departure, Balram assumes an emotional caretaker role for his devastated master, Ashok, ordering excessive food that is "enough to feed a rich man or a whole family" (Adiga, 2008, p. 238), highlighting both waste and disparity. Urban development fueled by globalization erects glamorous structures—malls, hotels, clubs — but the laborers who construct them are barred from entry. Balram gains access to a mall only by mimicking elite fashion, but laments the systemic exclusion: "These people were building homes for the rich but they lived in tents covered with blue tarpaulin sheets and partitioned into lanes by sewage line" (Adiga, 2008, p. 260). This reflects Marx's (1844) concept of alienation, wherein workers are estranged from the products of their labor.

Physical bodies also signify class difference. The suffering of the poor is etched into their bodies: "The story of a poor man is written on his body in sharp pen" (Adiga, 2008, p. 27), whereas the rich live untouched by hardship: "a rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow: white, soft and blank" (Adiga, 2008, p. 26). These contrasting depictions underscore the severe inequality embedded in capitalist society.

Adiga (2008) presents Balram as a keen observer of India's systemic inequalities. Though denied formal education, Balram engages in worldly learning by absorbing information from everyday interactions. This self-education helps him rise from servitude to entrepreneurial independence and become "The White Tiger." He models his lifestyle on Ashok's tastes and begins to reject symbols of servitude. The fundamental difference between the "India of Light" and "India of Darkness" is the freedom of choice. In the former, individuals can shape their destiny, while in the latter, the poor are deprived of autonomy. Balram breaks this cycle by asserting his will, challenging the rigid class boundaries imposed on him.

The economic stinginess and moral bankruptcy of the capitalist class are exposed through episodes such as Ashok's brother overreacting to the loss of a single coin, reflecting a larger capitalist tendency to hoard wealth. As Marx (1968) notes, economic exploitation is a fundamental feature of capitalism. The landlord figures—the Buffalo, the

Stork, the Wild Boar, and the Raven—epitomize capitalist oppression. They dominate rural India by extracting profit from every possible source: "a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman in the river," "bow down to his feet... and agree to swallow his day wages," and "a cut from the goat-herds" (Adiga, 2008, pp. 24–25). These exploiters live in "gorgeous, high-walled mansions" while the poor remain trapped in poverty.

Adiga (2008) dramatizes the dehumanization and alienation of the working class under capitalism. Balram endures repeated indignities, such as being ordered to search for a coin like an animal: "I got down on my knees. I sniffed in between the mats like a dog" (Adiga, 2008, p. 139). This humiliation reflects Marx's (1848) assertion that capitalism degrades labor both physically and psychologically, turning human beings into subjugated instruments of production. The protagonist is frequently likened to an animal, most explicitly when he is told to care for the family dogs who are "worth more than you are" (Adiga, 2008, p. 67). This symbolic equation strips the poor of dignity, reinforcing Marx's (1844) idea that capitalism alienates workers from their humanity and reduces them to subservient tools.

Balram's alienation intensifies as he is pitted against fellow workers, preventing class solidarity. He views his rival not as a comrade but as a threat, manipulating circumstances to eliminate him. This conflict illustrates how capitalist ideology isolates individuals. Identity alienation is also evident in the case of Ram Persad, a Muslim driver who poses as Hindu to retain employment: "Now this Mohammad... claimed to be a Hindu and took the name of Ram Persad" (Adiga, 2008, p. 92). This act highlights Marx's (1844) claim that workers are forced to abandon their essence for survival.

Balram's role extends beyond driving—he is made to clean, bathe dogs, and massage his employer's feet, revealing the feudal undertones embedded in Indian capitalism. In Delhi, he becomes conscious of the structural injustice wherein laborers construct lavish buildings yet reside in squalor: "These people were building homes for the rich, but they lived in tents... partitioned into lanes of sewage" (Adiga, 2008, p. 222). This echoes Marx's assertion that "the laborer becomes poorer the more wealth he produces" (Marx, 1844, p. 401). Balram's ideological shift emerges as he perceives development not as progress but exploitation. Disillusioned, he concludes that capitalism transforms humans into beasts, aligning with Marx's insight that "the animal becomes human and the human becomes animal" (Marx, 1844, p. 403), a metaphor reflected in the animal names of the landlords.

Adiga (2008) also exposes how economic power ensures impunity: "Mr. Ashok is giving money to all these politicians in Delhi so that they will excuse him from the tax he has to pay. And who own that tax, in the end? Who, but the ordinary people of the country

— you!" (Adiga, 2008, p. 244). This reinforces Marx's (1848, 1967) and Lukács' (1971) claim that the ruling class manipulates political and ideological structures to maintain control and exploit labor, embedding inequality into the fabric of society.

Economic productivity dictates social worth, even within families in *The White Tiger*. Balram ironically observes that the most valued member of his household is the buffalo: "She is the fattest and most cared for member of the family," illustrating capitalism's commodification of life. This reflects Marx's assertion that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (Marx, 1848). The novel critiques capitalism's corrosive effects on cultural, familial, and ethical structures, showing how deeply economic logic pervades identity and morality.

Balram's transformation from oppressed servant to ruthless entrepreneur mirrors the behavior of his former master, Mr. Ashok. Once he acquires wealth, Balram prioritizes profit over human connection, treating employees as disposable: "when the work is done, I kick them out of the office: no chitchat, no cups of coffee" (Adiga, 2008, p. 302). This echoes Marxist arguments that capitalist societies prioritize commodities over people (Marx, 1967, 1968; Lukács, 1971).

Adiga (2008) critiques how capitalist ideology, reinforced by both Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses (Althusser, 1971), shapes postcolonial Indian society. Economic value defines human worth in Balram's family, where a buffalo— "the fattest and most cared for member of the family"—is valued above human kin (Adiga, 2008). This illustrates Marx's (1848) argument that social being determines consciousness. Balram's journey from servant to entrepreneur mirrors the internalization of capitalist logic, resulting in alienation, commodification, and moral erosion.

Adiga (2008) also highlights literature as an ideological tool. The magazine *Murder Weekly* deters rebellion by portraying rebellious servants as "mentally disturbed and sexually deranged," always ending in their capture or death (Adiga, 2008, pp. 25–26). Servants are taught to distrust one another: "Servants need to abuse other servants... the way Alsatian dogs are bred to attack strangers" (Adiga, 2008, p. 130). This reflects Althusser's (1971) idea that ideology interpellates subjects to reinforce class submission. Religion functions similarly. The landlord's rejection of a Muslim cricketer's name in favor of a Hindu one (Adiga, 2008) and the veneration of Hanuman — "half man, half monkey"—for his loyalty (Adiga, 2008, p. 19), show how religion naturalizes servitude. Repressive State Apparatuses — such as the police — further protect elite interests through coercion. When Balram flees, the police target innocent locals (Adiga, 2008, p. 39). During elections, dissenters like the rickshaw puller are violently silenced (Adiga, 2008, p. 102).

Panoptic surveillance reinforces this control. Statues of Nehru and Gandhi contain "cameras inside their eyes" (Adiga, 2008, p. 141), symbolizing the appropriation of anti-colonial icons to monitor citizens. Ultimately, Adiga (2008) demonstrates that capitalist domination is sustained not only through force but also through deeply internalized ideological norms (Marx, 1848; Althusser, 1971), shaping oppressed subjects to unknowingly serve bourgeois power.

4.1. *The Murder of Aziz Khan* and *The White Tiger*: A Comparative Marxist Analysis

Both *The Murder of Aziz Khan* by Zulfikar Ghose and *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga offer searing critiques of postcolonial capitalism through a Marxist lens. They illuminate the enduring antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, echoing Marx's (1848) assertion that modern society is divided into two great hostile camps. In Ghose's novel, Aziz Khan, a self-sufficient farmer, resists selling his land to the Shah brothers — figures of bourgeois domination in post-independence Pakistan. In Adiga's narrative, Balram Halwai, a servant from India's underclass, rebels against his employer Ashok, who represents the urban capitalist elite. Both protagonists embody the struggle of the proletariat against a system rigged in favor of capital, yet their trajectories diverge: Aziz is ultimately crushed by the system he defies, while Balram survives by embracing — and eventually replicating — the very system he critiques.

The Murder of Aziz Khan lays bare the mechanisms through which capitalism exploits and alienates the rural poor, most visibly through the commodification of land. Aziz Khan's refusal to sell his farm constitutes more than an economic decision; it is an act of safeguarding personal and cultural identity. For him, the land embodies ancestral heritage, autonomy, and dignity. Yet this resistance proves futile in a socio-political order where the judiciary, police, and bureaucratic authorities — most notably the district commissioner — act in alignment with capitalist interests, ensuring the dispossession of those who challenge elite power. "As a distinguished novelist, Ghose critiques the capitalist system, revealing its detrimental effects on societal norms and values. He illustrates how capitalism disrupts pre-capitalist social equilibrium, leading to class conflict and socio-economic exploitation" (Afzal et al., 2024, p. 875).

Similarly, *The White Tiger* constructs a vision of India sharply divided into the "India of Light" and the "India of Darkness," with the latter comprising spaces of deprivation, servitude, and systemic erasure. Within this landscape, landlords bearing animalistic epithets — the Stork, Buffalo, Wild Boar, and Raven — symbolize the predatory nature of entrenched privilege. They exact rent, bribes, and labor from the impoverished while enjoying lives of conspicuous luxury. This symbolic geography

underscores the enduring interweaving of feudal and capitalist structures in South Asia, revealing how historical modes of domination adapt to and persist within modern economic frameworks.

Both novels reveal how capitalism not only exploits labor but also alienates individuals from their labor, bodies, and identities. In *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, alienation is visible in how workers are discarded when they demand unionization or better wages. The Shah brothers, though materially affluent, are spiritually and emotionally barren — embodiments of capitalist alienation. Economic exploitation of the workers goes on unabated. Riaz, a worker in the Shah brothers' mill, points out economic exploitation of the workers as follows:

Our wages aren't guaranteed. There's no set scale for each type of work. There's no demarcation of jobs. There's no insurance scheme to pay us a minimum sickness benefit. There's no pension scheme" … "We work six days a week on normal wages and for overtime we get only twenty-five percent extra. We get no paid holidays except religious festivals. What sort of a social contract is that?" (Ghose, 1967, pp. 187-188)

In *The White Tiger*, Balram is dehumanized through repeated humiliations: forced to grovel "like a dog" for a lost coin (Adiga, 2008, p. 139), and told that his employer's dog is more valuable than he is (p. 67). These scenes vividly dramatize Marx's (1844) theory that capitalism reduces human beings to mere instruments of production. Alienation also fractures solidarity among the oppressed. Balram sees fellow drivers not as comrades but as competitors. Identity becomes transactional — as in the case of Ram Persad, who conceals his Muslim identity to secure employment. In both novels, class divides prevent the emergence of class consciousness, reinforcing proletarian fragmentation.

Ideological control, central to Marxist and Althusserian critique, permeates both *The Murder of Aziz Khan* and *The White Tiger*. Drawing on Althusser's (1971) concept of interpellation, Ghose (1967) depicts villagers' passive acquiescence to dispossession as the product of colonial and capitalist conditioning, echoing Fanon's call for collective political awakening. Similarly, Adiga (2008) exposes ideology's pervasive reach: sensationalist media pathologizes dissent, religious symbols like Hanuman sanctify servitude, and nationalist figures such as Gandhi and Nehru are co-opted into surveillance. Both authors reveal how capitalist systems absorb and neutralize potential resistance through cultural and ideological apparatuses.

Institutional corruption, a persistent feature of the capitalist superstructure, is central to both *The Murder of Aziz Khan* and *The White Tiger*. In Ghose's (1967) novel, the judiciary serves elite interests, as seen in Rafiq's wrongful accusation and execution, revealing law as a tool of domination. Adiga (2008) portrays politics as overtly

transactional: elections are bought, healthcare inaccessible, and education hollow. Balram's father dies untreated from tuberculosis, while environmental neglect underscores systemic decay. These depictions affirm Lukács's (1971) view that capitalist institutions prioritize economic power over public welfare, perpetuating structural inequality and social injustice.

The divergent trajectories of Aziz Khan and Balram Halwai exemplify contrasting responses to capitalist oppression. Aziz's unwavering refusal to commodify his ancestral land renders him a tragic figure of principled resistance, yet his defeat underscores the futility of isolated defiance against entrenched capitalist structures that replicate colonial exploitation under national elites. Conversely, Balram's rise from chauffeur to entrepreneur — facilitated by the murder of his employer and appropriation of his wealth — signals a morally compromised ascent. His transformation reflects the system's capacity to absorb and reconfigure dissent, converting former subalterns into participants in the very mechanisms of exploitation they once resisted.

The Murder of Aziz Khan and *The White Tiger* both deliver trenchant critiques of capitalism, revealing how resource extraction, institutional complicity, and ideological control sustain systemic inequality in South Asia. Ghose (1967) presents resistance as a moral duty, even when destined to fail, while Adiga (2008) depicts rebellion as ultimately subsumed into the capitalist order. Together, these works expose how postcolonial economic systems in Pakistan and India have undermined the egalitarian aspirations of independence, entrenching elite dominance and perpetuating the exploitation and dehumanization of the majority.

5. Conclusion

Both *The Murder of Aziz Khan* and *The White Tiger* powerfully dramatize the realities of class conflict in postcolonial South Asia. Though situated in different national and temporal contexts, the novels converge in their portrayal of entrenched socio-economic hierarchies, institutionalized exploitation, and the dehumanizing effects of capitalist expansion. Ghose (1967) presents a tragic tale of resistance in rural Pakistan, where Aziz Khan's moral defiance is crushed by the machinery of elite power, while Adiga (2008) depicts urban India's underclass through Balram's radical and morally ambivalent ascent. These contrasting yet complementary narratives reveal how class struggle remains central to understanding postcolonial identity, governance, and economic life. Both texts challenge the myth of postcolonial progress, illustrating how inequality persists — and even intensifies — under the guise of development, making a compelling case for the continued relevance of Marxist critique in literary and socio-political discourse.

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