



REIMAGINING SOCIALIST REALISM IN NEOLIBERAL INDIA: DIALECTICAL SUBVERSION AND IDEOLOGICAL RECONFIGURATION IN ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of neoliberal India in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, focusing on how literary narrative exposes structural contradictions, ideological domination, and shifting forms of class consciousness. In the context of rapid economic liberalization, India is often portrayed as a rising global power; however, this narrative obscures persistent inequality, labor exploitation, and uneven development. The first objective of this research is to analyze how the novel represents structural contradictions and socio-political realities of neoliberal India. The findings show that economic progress is consistently juxtaposed with poverty, infrastructural decay, and labor precarity, revealing a deeply divided social order. The second objective is to examine the use of imagery, symbolism, satire, and irony as tools for critiquing neoliberal ideology and capitalist hegemony. The analysis demonstrates that Adiga employs dehumanizing metaphors, stark imagery, and satirical contrasts to expose the commodification of labor and the illusion of meritocracy. The third objective is to investigate how the novel reconfigures socialist realism through its ambivalent protagonist while exposing mechanisms of ideological subjugation and class inequality. The findings reveal that the protagonist embodies fragmented subjectivity shaped by systemic corruption, complicity, and survival-based ethics rather than collective resistance. The study is grounded in Neo-Marxist theory, particularly Louis Althusser's concepts of ideology and ideological state apparatuses, to explain how institutions and social practices reproduce class domination. The findings indicate that inequality in the novel is not only material but also ideologically sustained through normalization of exploitation and internalization of class roles.

Keywords: *Ideological Subjugation, Fragmented Subjectivity, Moral Ambiguity, Neo-Marxism, Neoliberalism.*

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1. Introduction

The relationship between literature and socio-economic structures has long been central to Marxist literary inquiry, particularly in understanding how cultural forms reflect, reproduce, and contest dominant ideologies. Originating within the Soviet context, *socialist realism* functioned as an aesthetic doctrine aligned with the principles of Karl Marx, emphasizing class consciousness, collective struggle, and the eventual triumph of the proletariat. Traditionally, socialist realist texts sought to depict reality not merely as it is, but as it ought to be in accordance with revolutionary ideals. However, the transition from state-controlled socialist economies to globalized neoliberal systems has significantly transformed the ideological and material conditions under which such aesthetic categories operate.

In the contemporary era, particularly within postcolonial nations like India, the rise of neoliberal capitalism has reconfigured class relations, subjectivities, and the mechanisms of power. Following the economic liberalization policies of the early 1990s, India has witnessed rapid economic growth alongside deepening socio-economic inequalities. Neoliberalism, as theorized by thinkers such as David Harvey, promotes deregulation, privatization, and market-driven individualism, thereby reshaping not only economic structures but also cultural narratives and individual aspirations. Within this framework, success is increasingly defined through entrepreneurial self-fashioning rather than collective class struggle, marking a significant departure from the foundational premises of socialist realism.

This ideological shift necessitates a re-examination of how socialist realist aesthetics are adapted, subverted, or reimagined within neoliberal contexts. Contemporary literary texts emerging from postcolonial societies often engage with the contradictions of neoliberal modernity, revealing tensions between inherited class structures and newly configured modes of agency. It is within this critical space that Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) becomes particularly significant. The novel narrates the rise of Balram Halwai, a subaltern figure who ascends from rural poverty to entrepreneurial success through morally transgressive means. While the narrative foregrounds themes of class mobility and resistance, it simultaneously complicates traditional Marxist binaries by presenting a protagonist whose liberation is achieved not through collective struggle but through individualistic, and arguably complicit, engagement with capitalist structures. The most striking feature of this novel is its preference of radical individualism and rejection of collective morality (Sharma, Sharma, 2021).

To critically engage with such complexities, this study adopts a Neo-Marxist framework, particularly drawing on the work of Louis Althusser. Althusser's theory of ideology, especially his concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), provides a crucial lens for understanding how individuals are constituted as subjects within dominant

ideological systems. His notion of interpellation explains how subjects internalize and reproduce the very structures that govern them, making it especially relevant for analyzing Balram's transformation within the neoliberal order. Rather than existing outside ideology, Balram's apparent rebellion can be read as a reconfiguration of ideological alignment, wherein resistance itself becomes entangled with the logic of capitalism.

Moreover, the concept of *dialectical subversion* becomes central to this inquiry. Classical Marxist dialectics posits a historical progression driven by contradictions between opposing forces most notably, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. However, in *The White Tiger*, this dialectic is disrupted. The protagonist does not seek to dismantle the system but instead manipulates it to his advantage, thereby subverting the expected trajectory of class struggle. This raises critical questions about the nature of resistance in neoliberal contexts: whether acts of transgression constitute genuine subversion or merely reinforce the structures they appear to oppose. This study situates *The White Tiger* within a broader discourse that interrogates the transformation of socialist realist aesthetics under neoliberal conditions. By examining how dialectics are reworked and how ideology is reconstituted within the narrative, the research aims to contribute to ongoing debates in Marxist and postcolonial literary studies. It ultimately seeks to demonstrate that contemporary texts do not simply abandon socialist realism but rather reimagine it in ways that reflect the complexities and contradictions of neoliberal capitalism.

Literature has long served as a critical site for interrogating the relationship between ideology, class structures, and socio-economic transformations. Within the Marxist tradition initiated by Karl Marx, literary texts are understood not merely as aesthetic artifacts but as cultural productions embedded within material conditions and ideological frameworks. Marx conceptualized ideology as a set of ideas arising from and sustaining class-based social relations, often functioning to obscure the realities of exploitation and domination (Leopold, 2013). Building upon this foundation, twentieth-century developments in Marxist theory particularly Neo-Marxism have shifted attention toward the complex mechanisms through which ideology operates in modern capitalist societies.

A pivotal figure in this intellectual trajectory is Louis Althusser, whose reconceptualization of ideology marks a significant departure from classical Marxist formulations. Althusser posits that ideology is not merely a set of false ideas but a material practice that structures individuals' lived experiences. He famously defines ideology as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser, 1971). Furthermore, his concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) including institutions such as education, media, and religion demonstrates how ideology is reproduced and internalized within everyday life, thereby sustaining the conditions necessary for the perpetuation of capitalism (Wolff, 2005). Scholars have noted that

Althusser's intervention opened up new avenues for understanding ideology beyond economic determinism, enabling a more nuanced analysis of culture, representation, and subject formation (Hall, 1985).

In the context of literary studies, these theoretical developments have profound implications for examining how texts engage with shifting socio-economic realities. One such reality is the rise of neoliberal capitalism, particularly in postcolonial societies like India. Since the economic liberalization reforms of the 1990s, India has undergone significant transformations characterized by market deregulation, privatization, and the proliferation of consumer culture. These changes have not only intensified class inequalities but have also reshaped individual aspirations and identities, privileging entrepreneurial success and self-interest over collective struggle. Consequently, traditional Marxist categories such as proletarian solidarity and revolutionary consciousness are increasingly destabilized within neoliberal frameworks.

This shifting ideological landscape necessitates a re-evaluation of *socialist realism*, an aesthetic mode historically aligned with Marxist principles of class representation and revolutionary transformation. Socialist realism traditionally emphasized the collective agency of the working class and the teleological progression toward a classless society. However, in neoliberal contexts, such narratives are often reconfigured or subverted, reflecting the contradictions of contemporary capitalism. Rather than depicting unified class struggle, contemporary texts frequently portray fragmented subjectivities and individualized modes of resistance that complicate classical dialectical models. It is within this theoretical and historical framework that Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) emerges as a critical literary text. The novel narrates the rise of Balram Halwai, a subaltern subject who navigates and ultimately exploits the structures of neoliberal capitalism to achieve upward mobility. While the narrative appears to foreground resistance against systemic oppression, it simultaneously reveals the extent to which such resistance is entangled with the very ideological structures it seeks to challenge. Balram's transformation exemplifies what Althusser would describe as interpellation, wherein the subject internalizes and reproduces dominant ideology even in acts of apparent rebellion.

This study, therefore, seeks to examine how *The White Tiger* reimagines socialist realism within the context of neoliberal India by focusing on two interrelated processes: dialectical subversion and ideological reconfiguration. The notion of dialectical subversion challenges the classical Marxist understanding of historical progression driven by class antagonism, suggesting instead that contemporary forms of resistance may disrupt rather than resolve these contradictions. Simultaneously, ideological reconfiguration highlights the ways in which neoliberal capitalism reshapes subjectivity, transforming individuals from agents of collective struggle into participants in competitive, market-driven systems. By employing an Althusserian Neo-Marxist framework, this research aims

to contribute to ongoing debates in literary and cultural studies regarding the transformation of ideology under neoliberalism. It argues that *The White Tiger* does not simply abandon the tenets of socialist realism but rather reworks them to reflect the complexities of contemporary capitalism. In doing so, the study underscores the continued relevance of Marxist theory while also demonstrating the need for its critical adaptation in the face of evolving global conditions.

1.1. Problem Statement

Despite the continued relevance of Marxist literary frameworks in analyzing class, ideology, and power, there remains a critical gap in understanding how traditional concepts such as socialist realism and dialectical progression operate within the context of neoliberal capitalism, particularly in postcolonial societies like India. While Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* has been widely examined for its representation of class disparity and social mobility, existing scholarship largely interprets the novel through conventional Marxist or postcolonial lenses without adequately addressing how it reconfigures socialist realist aesthetics under neoliberal conditions. Specifically, there is insufficient critical attention to the ways in which the novel subverts classical Marxist dialectics where collective class struggle is replaced by individualistic advancement and how such subversion reflects deeper processes of ideological restructuring. Drawing on the Neo-Marxist insights of Louis Althusser, this study identifies a gap in examining how neoliberal ideology reshapes subjectivity, transforming resistance into a form of complicity within capitalist structures. Therefore, the problem this research addresses is the lack of a comprehensive, theory-driven analysis that explains how *The White Tiger* reimagines socialist realism through dialectical subversion and ideological reconfiguration in the context of neoliberal India.

1.2. Research Questions

1. How does Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* represent the structural contradictions and socio-political realities of neoliberal India?
2. How does the novel use imagery, symbolism, satire, and irony to critique neoliberal ideology and capitalist hegemony?
3. In what ways does *The White Tiger* reconfigure socialist realism through its ambivalent protagonist while exposing mechanisms of ideological subjugation and class inequality?

2. Literature Review

Socialist realism emerged as a distinct literary and artistic doctrine in the early twentieth century, primarily within the Soviet Union, with the aim of promoting a literature that was both socially engaged and politically instructive. Initially codified under the directives of the Communist Party, socialist realism required literature to depict reality not merely as it existed, but as it should exist according to Marxist principles, highlighting the

role of the working class in historical and social transformation (Clark, 2011). This aesthetic framework was intended to serve a dual purpose: to educate readers in socialist ideology and to inspire collective action against oppression and exploitation. Classical Marxist theory underpins the ideological basis of socialist realism. Marx and Engels emphasized that literature and art are deeply embedded in the socio-economic structures of society and that they reflect the material conditions and class relations of the time (Marx & Engels, 1970). From this perspective, literary works are not neutral; rather, they participate in the broader ideological struggle between dominant and subordinate classes. Socialist realism, therefore, was conceived as a consciously committed form of literature, portraying the triumphs, struggles, and aspirations of the proletariat while shaping readers' ideological consciousness (Clark, 2011).

Over time, socialist realism evolved both within and beyond the Soviet context. Scholars note that although its foundational principles remained anchored in class consciousness and the celebration of collective struggle, the doctrine underwent reinterpretation in postcolonial and global contexts. In countries like China, Cuba, and India, writers and critics adapted socialist realist techniques to reflect local socio-political conditions, blending indigenous literary traditions with Marxist ideology (Banerjee, 2013). In contemporary scholarship, however, the relevance of socialist realism has been critically reassessed. Some scholars argue that in a neoliberal global order, the emphasis on collective struggle and ideological pedagogy has been destabilized by individualistic aspirations and market-driven subjectivities (Bertelsen, 2015). This raises important questions about how the aesthetic principles of socialist realism can be reimagined in literature that engages with postcolonial neoliberal realities, such as those depicted in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*.

The evolution of socialist realism also encompasses debates on the tension between artistic autonomy and political commitment. While early proponents insisted on the inseparability of ideology and literary production, later critics have highlighted the capacity of literature to subvert or reinterpret ideological directives (Clark, 2011). This tension is particularly relevant in the study of contemporary postcolonial texts, where authors may employ socialist realist strategies not to reinforce a collective ideology, but to critique, satirize, or subvert existing social and economic hierarchies. The concept of socialist realism provides a critical foundation for understanding literature as a site of ideological engagement. Its historical development from a Soviet-centric doctrine to a more fluid aesthetic adapted in postcolonial contexts illustrates both the potential and limitations of literature as a vehicle for social critique. For contemporary literary analysis, particularly in neoliberal societies, the reimagining of socialist realism requires attention to how traditional Marxist principles are reshaped to reflect new socio-economic realities, individualistic subjectivities, and complex forms of resistance.

2.1. Neo-Marxism, Ideology, And Cultural Representation

Neo-Marxism emerged as a critical extension of classical Marxist theory in response to the changing conditions of twentieth-century capitalism, particularly its increasing reliance on culture, ideology, and institutions rather than direct economic coercion. While classical Marxism emphasized material production and class relations as the primary determinants of social life, Neo-Marxist thinkers shifted attention toward the ways ideology operates through cultural and symbolic systems to sustain capitalist power (Eagleton, 1976). This theoretical shift is especially significant for literary studies, as it repositions literature not simply as a reflection of economic structures but as an active site where ideology is produced, contested, and reproduced.

A central contribution to Neo-Marxist theory comes from Antonio Gramsci, who introduced the concept of cultural hegemony. Gramsci argues that ruling-class power is maintained not only through force but through the consent of subordinate groups, achieved by shaping cultural norms, values, and beliefs (Gramsci, 1971). From this perspective, literature and other cultural forms play a crucial role in normalizing dominant ideologies by making them appear natural or common sense. Hegemony thus explains why oppressed groups may accept or even reproduce systems of inequality, as domination is embedded within everyday cultural life rather than imposed externally.

Building on this foundation, Louis Althusser further develops Neo-Marxist thought by conceptualizing ideology as a material practice embedded within institutions. Althusser argues that ideology is not simply a system of ideas but a system of representations that structure how individuals experience reality (Althusser, 1971). His concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) including education, media, religion, and family demonstrates how ideology is reproduced through institutional practices that shape individuals into compliant subjects of capitalism. This process is further explained through his theory of interpellation, where individuals are “hailed” into subject positions and come to recognize themselves within ideological structures, thereby internalizing dominant social relations (Althusser, 1971). In literary studies, Althusserian theory has been widely used to analyze how texts participate in ideological formation by constructing subjectivities rather than merely reflecting social reality. Literature becomes a space where ideological contradictions are both revealed and concealed, often producing complex representations of power that appear natural or inevitable. Scholars such as Eagleton (1976) emphasize that literary texts are never ideologically neutral; instead, they are embedded within specific ideological formations that shape both their production and interpretation.

Within this Neo-Marxist framework, ideology is understood as dynamic and contradictory rather than fixed. It operates through cultural narratives, symbolic systems, and institutional practices that continually adapt to changing socio-economic conditions. This is particularly relevant in neoliberal contexts, where ideology increasingly

emphasizes individualism, entrepreneurship, and personal responsibility while obscuring structural inequalities (Harvey, 2005). Literature produced in such contexts often reflects these contradictions, simultaneously critiquing and reproducing neoliberal values. Therefore, Neo-Marxist theory provides a powerful analytical lens for examining literary texts that engage with class, power, and subjectivity. By combining Gramsci's concept of hegemony with Althusser's theory of ideology and interpellation, this framework enables a deeper understanding of how cultural representations function within capitalist societies. It is especially useful for analyzing contemporary postcolonial literature, where traditional class narratives are reshaped by neoliberal ideologies, producing new forms of subjectivity and resistance.

2.2. Neoliberalism and Literary Representations of Postcolonial India

The rise of neoliberalism as a global economic and ideological system has significantly reshaped postcolonial societies by transforming not only market structures but also cultural imaginaries, subjectivities, and narratives of success. Neoliberalism, as conceptualized by David Harvey, refers to a political-economic project that prioritizes deregulation, privatization, free markets, and individual entrepreneurial freedom while simultaneously reducing the role of the state in welfare and redistribution (Harvey, 2005). In postcolonial contexts such as India, neoliberal reforms initiated in the early 1990s have led to rapid economic growth alongside intensified inequality, rural marginalization, and the expansion of precarious labor structures. These transformations have also produced new cultural narratives in which success is increasingly framed as individual achievement rather than collective advancement.

In literary studies, neoliberalism is understood not only as an economic system but also as an ideological framework that shapes how individuals perceive themselves and their social realities. It promotes what scholars describe as the "entrepreneurial self," in which individuals are encouraged to view themselves as self-managing economic agents responsible for their own success or failure (Harvey, 2005). This ideological shift has profound implications for postcolonial literature, which increasingly depicts fragmented subjectivities, moral ambiguity, and the tension between structural oppression and individual agency. Within this context, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) emerges as a critical narrative that directly engages with the contradictions of neoliberal India.

The novel narrates the life of Balram Halwai, a rural subaltern who rises to become a successful entrepreneur in the globalized urban economy. His journey from the impoverished "Darkness" of rural India to the "Light" of metropolitan Bangalore and Delhi symbolizes the spatial and ideological divisions produced by neoliberal development. On the surface, Balram's narrative appears to embody the neoliberal promise of upward mobility through hard work, initiative, and risk-taking. However, the novel

simultaneously exposes the structural violence, corruption, and systemic inequality that make such mobility both rare and morally compromised.

From a Neo-Marxist perspective, Balram's transformation can be read as a reconfiguration of subjectivity under neoliberal ideology. Rather than representing a collective revolutionary consciousness, Balram embodies an individualized form of resistance that ultimately aligns with capitalist logic. His ascent is achieved not through solidarity or structural change but through betrayal, violence, and entrepreneurial adaptation. This reflects what Althusser describes as ideological interpellation, where subjects internalize dominant ideology even when they appear to resist it. Balram becomes a "model entrepreneur" precisely because he fully assimilates the neoliberal logic of self-interest and competition, even as he narrates his story as one of liberation.

The novel also critically engages with the spatial metaphor of "India of Light" and "India of Darkness," which symbolizes the uneven development produced by neoliberal capitalism. The "Light" represents urban centers of economic opportunity, global connectivity, and corporate power, while the "Darkness" represents rural poverty, caste oppression, and systemic neglect. This binary structure highlights the contradictions of neoliberal modernization, where development for some is built upon the exclusion and exploitation of others. Scholars have noted that such representations challenge the celebratory narratives of globalization by foregrounding its hidden costs and asymmetries (Gopal, 2015). Furthermore, *The White Tiger* complicates traditional Marxist narratives of class struggle by destabilizing the possibility of collective resistance. Instead of a unified proletariat consciousness, the novel presents fragmented individuals navigating survival within an unequal system. Balram's eventual success as a businessman does not dismantle the system but rather reproduces its logic in a new form. This illustrates the neoliberal transformation of ideology, where resistance itself becomes commodified and absorbed into capitalist structures.

The novel functions as a critical site for examining the ideological contradictions of neoliberal India. It simultaneously critiques structural inequality while revealing how individuals internalize and reproduce neoliberal values. This duality makes *The White Tiger* particularly significant for Neo-Marxist analysis, as it demonstrates how ideology operates not only through oppression but also through aspiration, desire, and self-fashioning. Thus, the novel provides a rich textual space for exploring how neoliberalism reshapes subjectivity and reconfigures traditional Marxist understandings of class, resistance, and emancipation.

2.3. *The White Tiger* and Class Representation (And Identified Research Gap)

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) has generated substantial critical attention within postcolonial, Marxist, and globalization studies due to its provocative depiction of class inequality, corruption, and neoliberal aspiration in contemporary India. Scholars

widely agree that the novel disrupts celebratory narratives of India's economic rise by exposing the deep structural contradictions that accompany neoliberal development. In particular, the text's portrayal of Balram Halwai's journey from rural servitude to urban entrepreneurship has been read as both a critique of caste-class oppression and an unsettling endorsement of individualistic survival strategies within a capitalist framework (Dix, 2011).

A dominant strand of criticism interprets *The White Tiger* through a postcolonial lens, emphasizing its representation of spatial and social binaries such as "Light" and "Darkness," which symbolize the uneven distribution of wealth and opportunity in post-liberalization India. This reading highlights how the novel foregrounds the persistence of caste hierarchies and rural marginalization even in a rapidly globalizing economy (Srivastava, 2013). From this perspective, Balram is often seen as a subaltern figure whose narrative voice challenges elite historiography and exposes the lived realities of the marginalized. However, critics such as Spivak (1988) caution against uncritically equating subaltern speech with authentic resistance, arguing that subaltern agency is often mediated through dominant discursive structures, thereby complicating claims of emancipatory voice.

Another significant critical approach employs Marxist and Neo-Marxist frameworks to analyze the novel's depiction of class struggle and capitalist exploitation. Scholars argue that the text reveals the brutal realities of neoliberal accumulation, where economic liberalization intensifies inequality while creating the illusion of merit-based mobility. In this reading, Balram's rise is not interpreted as genuine liberation but as a symptom of systemic failure, where survival necessitates moral compromise and the reproduction of exploitative relations (Bertelsen, 2015). The novel thus exposes what Harvey (2005) describes as the ideological contradictions of neoliberal capitalism, in which market freedom coexists with deepening social inequality.

Despite these valuable interpretations, much of the existing scholarship tends to focus either on postcolonial identity formation or on general critiques of neoliberal capitalism without fully engaging with the novel's relationship to socialist realism and its ideological transformation. Very few studies systematically examine how *The White Tiger* reconfigures classical Marxist aesthetic principles, particularly those associated with socialist realism, which traditionally emphasizes collective struggle, historical determinism, and proletarian solidarity. Instead, Balram's narrative foregrounds an individualized, entrepreneurial form of agency that appears to subvert but ultimately internalizes neoliberal ideology.

Furthermore, while some critics acknowledge the novel's ironic tone and narrative instability, there is limited scholarly attention to how these formal elements contribute to a dialectical subversion of Marxist categories. The transformation of resistance into

entrepreneurial success raises important theoretical questions about whether the novel critiques capitalism or inadvertently reinforces its logic by celebrating individual ascent within the system. This ambiguity remains underexplored in existing literature, particularly through a structured Neo-Marxist (Althusserian) lens.

Therefore, the research gap identified in this study lies in the absence of a comprehensive analysis that integrates socialist realism, dialectical theory, and ideological reconfiguration in reading *The White Tiger*. While previous studies have explored class inequality, subalternity, and neoliberal critique, they have not sufficiently examined how the novel reimagines Marxist aesthetic traditions in a neoliberal postcolonial context. By addressing this gap, the present study aims to offer a more theoretically integrated reading of the text, demonstrating how ideological structures are both reproduced and destabilized through narrative form and character development.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a Neo-Marxist theoretical framework, specifically drawing on the structural Marxist contributions of Louis Althusser, to analyze how ideology, subjectivity, and class relations are represented and reconfigured in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. Neo-Marxism extends the foundational ideas of Karl Marx by shifting analytical focus from purely economic determinism to the cultural and ideological mechanisms through which capitalist systems reproduce themselves. Within this framework, literature is not merely a reflection of material conditions but an active ideological site where social relations are constructed, contested, and normalized (Eagleton, 1976).

Althusser's major contribution to Neo-Marxist theory lies in his reconceptualization of ideology. Contrary to the classical Marxist view that ideology represents "false consciousness," Althusser argues that ideology is a material practice embedded in institutions and everyday life. He defines ideology as the "imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence," emphasizing that individuals do not simply misperceive reality but live it through ideological structures (Althusser, 1971). This shift is crucial for literary analysis because it allows texts to be read as sites where ideological meanings are not only represented but actively produced and internalized.

A central concept in Althusser's framework is the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), which refers to institutions such as education, religion, media, and the family that function to reproduce dominant ideological norms. Unlike Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), which operate through force and coercion, ISAs function primarily through consent and socialization, shaping individuals into compliant subjects of the prevailing system (Althusser, 1971). In the context of neoliberal India, these ideological mechanisms

are particularly significant as they construct narratives of meritocracy, entrepreneurship, and individual responsibility that obscure structural inequalities.

Closely linked to this is Althusser's concept of interpellation, which explains how individuals become ideological subjects. According to this theory, ideology "hails" individuals, and in recognizing themselves within this call, they become subjects of ideology (Althusser, 1971). In literary terms, this allows for an analysis of how characters are shaped by dominant discourses and how their sense of agency is conditioned by ideological structures. In *The White Tiger*, this framework is especially relevant in understanding Balram Halwai's transformation from a subaltern laborer into a neoliberal entrepreneur, as his identity is continuously shaped by the ideological demands of a capitalist society. Neo-Marxist theory, particularly in its Althusserian formulation, is also crucial for understanding the relationship between ideology and cultural production. As Eagleton (1976) argues, literature is not an autonomous aesthetic object but a socially embedded practice that both reflects and participates in ideological struggles. This means that literary texts may simultaneously reproduce and contest dominant ideologies, often in contradictory ways. In the case of *The White Tiger*, the narrative can be read as both a critique of neoliberal exploitation and a reproduction of its logic through the celebration of individual upward mobility.

Furthermore, this framework allows for an exploration of ideological reconfiguration in neoliberal societies. Scholars such as Harvey (2005) argue that neoliberalism restructures not only economic systems but also subjectivity by promoting entrepreneurial selfhood and market-based rationality. Within this context, traditional Marxist notions of collective struggle and class consciousness are replaced by individualized forms of aspiration and competition. Althusser's theory helps explain how such ideological shifts are internalized at the level of subject formation, making domination appear natural and self-evident. By applying Althusser's Neo-Marxist framework, this study examines how *The White Tiger* reimagines socialist realism through the lens of neoliberal ideology. It investigates how dialectical subversion occurs when classical Marxist expectations of collective resistance are replaced by individualized survival strategies, and how ideological structures shape the protagonist's transformation. Ultimately, this theoretical framework enables a critical reading of the novel as a site where ideology is not only represented but actively reconstituted in response to the conditions of neoliberal capitalism.

4. Analysis And Discussion

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* powerfully represents the structural contradictions of neoliberal India by exposing the deep gap between economic growth narratives and the lived realities of marginalized populations. From a Neo-Marxist perspective, particularly aligned with Louis Althusser and ideological theory, the novel

reveals how neoliberal development produces not equality, but intensified inequality through systemic neglect, spatial segregation, and ideological concealment of exploitation. Rather than portraying India as a unified emerging global power, the text constructs a fractured socio-economic landscape divided between privilege and deprivation. One of the most striking representations of this contradiction is the depiction of labor exploitation embedded within urban development. The quote, “These people were building homes for the rich, but they lived in tents covered with blue tarpaulin sheets, and partitioned into lanes by lines of sewage” (Adiga, 2008, p. 156), highlights the paradox of neoliberal urbanization.

The working class actively constructs spaces of elite comfort while being structurally excluded from basic human dignity such as housing, sanitation, and security. This reflects what Marxist theory identifies as alienated labor, where workers produce value and wealth that they themselves cannot access. In neoliberal India, this alienation is intensified, as development projects prioritize luxury consumption and elite infrastructure while systematically marginalizing the labor force that sustains them. The spatial imagery in this passage also reveals a sharp socio-political contradiction: the coexistence of modernity and deprivation. While the rich inhabit newly constructed homes symbolizing economic progress, the laborers remain trapped in makeshift settlements characterized by sewage and instability. This juxtaposition demonstrates that neoliberal development is not evenly distributed but spatially segregated, producing what scholars describe as “dual economies” one globalized and affluent, the other informal and impoverished.

The novel thus challenges the dominant narrative of India’s economic rise by exposing its hidden infrastructural and human costs. A similar structural contradiction is evident in the description of rural deprivation: “Electricity poles defunct. Water tap broken. Children too lean and short for their age, and with oversized heads from which vivid eyes shine, like the guilty conscience of the government of India” (Adiga, 2008, p. 13). This passage foregrounds the failure of state infrastructure in rural India, where basic amenities such as electricity and clean water are absent despite national claims of development. The physical condition of children symbolizes chronic malnutrition and systemic neglect, suggesting that neoliberal progress bypasses entire populations. The metaphor “guilty conscience of the government of India” is particularly significant, as it introduces a moral and political dimension to structural inequality. It implies that the suffering of marginalized citizens is not accidental but produced and sustained by state policies that prioritize market growth over welfare redistribution.

From a Neo-Marxist lens, this reflects the ideological function of the state in neoliberal capitalism: while the state presents itself as a promoter of development, it simultaneously reproduces conditions of inequality through selective investment and neglect. Together, these instances demonstrate that *The White Tiger* does not simply depict

poverty as an isolated condition but as a systemic outcome of neoliberal restructuring. The novel exposes how economic liberalization intensifies class divisions, producing a society where luxury and deprivation coexist within the same national space. It also reveals the ideological contradiction of neoliberalism: the promise of development and modernization is undermined by the persistence of infrastructural decay, labor exploitation, and social exclusion.

Adiga represents neoliberal India as a deeply contradictory system where progress for some is built upon the structural suffering of others. Through vivid imagery and stark socio-spatial contrasts, the novel critiques the ideological narrative of inclusive growth and instead reveals the uneven, exclusionary realities of capitalist modernization. This makes *The White Tiger* a powerful literary site for analyzing how neoliberalism operates not only as an economic system but as a structure that produces and normalizes inequality. Another significant dimension of structural contradiction in the novel is the reduction and erasure of complex social relations into rigid class-based hierarchies shaped by economic power. This is evident in the statement: “But in India or, at least, in the Darkness the rich don't have drivers, cooks, barbers, and tailors. They simply have servants” (Adiga, 2008, p. 41). This quotation highlights the homogenization of the working class within the “Darkness,” where diverse forms of labor identity are collapsed into a single category of servitude. The distinction between different professions is erased in the rural and impoverished spaces, reflecting how neoliberal inequality simplifies and dehumanizes labor into a uniform condition of dependency.

From a Neo-Marxist perspective aligned with Louis Althusser, this reflects how ideology functions to naturalize class relations. The rich are positioned as a unified class of employers, while the poor are reduced to interchangeable laboring bodies. This ideological simplification conceals the complexity of exploitation by normalizing hierarchical labor relations as a natural social order. The use of “Darkness” as a spatial metaphor further reinforces this contradiction, as it signifies not only geographical underdevelopment but also ideological invisibility where the lived realities of the poor remain obscured within dominant narratives of national progress. Similarly, Adiga intensifies the critique of socio-political inequality through a reductive yet powerful metaphor of class division: “In the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies and Men with Small Bellies” (Adiga, 2008, p. 38). This statement collapses India’s historically complex caste system into a binary economic framework, symbolizing the transformation of social hierarchy under neoliberal capitalism. Traditional caste distinctions are no longer the primary determinant of social position; instead, economic consumption and wealth accumulation define new forms of stratification.

This reduction reflects a key contradiction of neoliberal ideology: while it claims to dismantle traditional hierarchies such as caste, it simultaneously replaces them with even more rigid economic inequalities. The metaphor of “Big Bellies” and “Small Bellies” is particularly significant because it emphasizes bodily consumption as the marker of class difference. Those with “Big Bellies” represent the wealthy elite who consume excessively, while those with “Small Bellies” symbolize the undernourished poor who lack access to basic resources. This bodily imagery exposes the material reality of inequality in a visceral form, making class distinction immediately visible through physical embodiment rather than abstract economic categories. The novel demonstrates that beneath the rhetoric of modernization and development lies a persistent and intensifying division between wealth and deprivation. Through spatial, linguistic, and bodily metaphors, Adiga exposes the ideological contradictions of neoliberal India, where the promise of progress coexists with entrenched structures of exploitation and exclusion.

Second research question discusses how literary devices such as imagery, symbolism, satire, and irony are strategically employed in Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* to expose the exploitative logic of neoliberal capitalism in India. From a Neo-Marxist perspective, particularly influenced by Louis Althusser, these stylistic choices are not merely aesthetic but ideological, as they reveal how capitalist systems sustain inequality while masking it through normalized social narratives. Adiga’s use of vivid imagery and grotesque symbolism dismantles the illusion of meritocracy promoted by neoliberal ideology and instead foregrounds the dehumanization of the working class. One of the most powerful examples of symbolic and satirical representation appears in the depiction of rural labor desperation: “Every now and then a truck comes by, and all the men in the field rush to it with their hands outstretched, shouting, ‘Take me! Take me!’” (Adiga, 2008, p. 32). This image functions as a sharp critique of neoliberal labor markets, where employment is not a right but a scarce and unstable opportunity. The men’s frantic movement toward the truck symbolizes the commodification of human labor under capitalism, where workers are reduced to disposable units competing for survival. The repetition of the plea “Take me!” introduces a tone of irony, as it exposes how economic desperation transforms individuals into passive objects awaiting selection rather than active agents of their own destiny.

From a structuralist Marxist lens, this scene reflects the contradictions of neoliberal labor ideology, which promises freedom and opportunity while producing precarity and dependency. The truck becomes a symbol of capital itself mobile, selective, and indifferent while the workers’ desperation reflects the internalization of capitalist competition. Rather than collective resistance, the scene depicts fragmented individuals competing for survival, thereby reinforcing the very system that exploits them. This fragmentation aligns with Althusser’s notion of ideological interpellation, where individuals are shaped into subjects

who accept and reproduce the logic of the system even in conditions of extreme inequality. Another striking example of Adiga's use of grotesque imagery and satirical exaggeration appears in the description: "I say, but better to call them human spiders that go crawling in between and under the tables with rags in their hands, crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven, in their thirties or forties or fifties but still boys" (Adiga, 2008, p. 30). This passage employs dehumanizing metaphor to expose the extreme social degradation of the working class. By comparing workers to "human spiders," Adiga creates a disturbing visual image that emphasizes invisibility, marginality, and forced labor. The metaphor suggests that workers exist at the periphery of social recognition, moving silently within spaces of privilege without being acknowledged as full human subjects.

The repetition of "crushed humans in crushed uniforms" intensifies the satirical tone, highlighting the systemic nature of exploitation. The workers are not merely poor; they are structurally "crushed" by socio-economic forces that reduce both their bodies and identities. The phrase "but still boys" adds an ironic dimension, as it underscores how prolonged exploitation prevents these individuals from achieving social maturity or dignity, effectively freezing them in a perpetual state of subjugation. Through these stylistic strategies, Adiga constructs a powerful critique of neoliberal capitalism that operates through both visibility and distortion. The vivid imagery forces readers to confront the material realities of exploitation, while satire and irony expose the contradictions between neoliberal promises of progress and the lived reality of labor precarity. In Neo-Marxist terms, these representations reveal how ideology functions not only through explicit narratives but also through symbolic systems that normalize inequality and render exploitation invisible or acceptable.

The novel uses imagery, symbolism, satire, and irony not simply as literary devices but as ideological tools that disrupt dominant narratives of development and success. By foregrounding the dehumanization of labor and the desperation embedded in survival economies, *The White Tiger* exposes the hidden violence of neoliberal capitalism and challenges the ideological frameworks that sustain it. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* complicates traditional socialist realist expectations by replacing collective class struggle with individualized moral ambiguity and systemic complicity. Instead of presenting a clear revolutionary trajectory typical of socialist realism where the proletariat awakens to class consciousness and resists oppression the novel depicts a fragmented social order in which both the oppressed and the privileged are embedded within corrupt ideological systems.

Third research question discusses how ideology functions not only through domination but also through the internalization of corruption, complicity, and survival strategies. This ideological entanglement is clearly illustrated in the statement: "The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for

their good, solid middle-class masters” (Adiga, 2008, p. 101). This quotation exposes a deeply entrenched system of class exploitation where subaltern subjects are not only economically oppressed but also legally and morally instrumentalized. The drivers’ willingness or forced acceptance to take blame reflects a structure of ideological subjugation in which the subordinate class absorbs the consequences of elite wrongdoing. Rather than a transparent system of justice, the legal apparatus becomes a mechanism through which class privilege is preserved.

From an Althusserian lens, this reflects the functioning of Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), such as the legal and penal system, which operate in conjunction with Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) to maintain class dominance. The drivers’ incarceration is not an isolated act of injustice but a systemic outcome of ideological conditioning, where subaltern subjects are positioned as expendable within the social order. This undermines socialist realist expectations of class solidarity and resistance, replacing them with a bleak portrayal of structural submission and moral displacement. “But they are in the racket too. They take their bribe; they ignore the discrepancies in the case. And life goes on” (Adiga, 2008, p. 101). Here, Adiga expands the scope of complicity beyond the oppressed class to include institutional actors who perpetuate corruption. The phrase “they are in the racket too” suggests that corruption is not an exception but a normalized system in which multiple social actors participate. This normalization of corruption reflects the ideological saturation of neoliberal capitalism, where ethical boundaries are blurred and survival often depends on participation in unjust systems.

This depiction destabilizes the binary opposition between oppressor and oppressed that is central to classical Marxist and socialist realist narratives. Instead of a clear moral division, the novel presents a network of mutual complicity, where individuals at different social levels contribute to the reproduction of inequality. The concluding phrase “And life goes on” introduces a tone of fatalistic resignation, suggesting that systemic injustice persists not because it is invisible, but because it is normalized and routinized within everyday life. Through this ambivalence, *The White Tiger* reconfigures socialist realism by replacing collective revolutionary agency with fragmented, morally compromised subjectivities. The protagonist Balram’s world is not one of clear ideological opposition but of entangled systems where survival requires ethical compromise. In doing so, the novel challenges the foundational socialist realist assumption that historical progress is driven by unified class consciousness and revolutionary action.

Adiga presents a neoliberal reality in which ideology is deeply embedded in institutional practices, producing subjects who are simultaneously victims and participants in systems of exploitation. This reflects an Althusserian understanding of ideology as material practice, where individuals reproduce the system even when they appear to resist it. Consequently, the novel exposes the mechanisms of ideological subjugation not as

external forces alone, but as internalized conditions of social existence. Through these representations of legal injustice and systemic corruption, *The White Tiger* destabilizes socialist realist conventions and reimagines class struggle as a fragmented, ambiguous, and ideologically saturated process. Rather than offering revolutionary closure, the novel foregrounds the persistence of structural inequality and the complexity of subject formation under neoliberal capitalism.

The statement, “My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine at least one- should live like a man” (Adiga, 2008, p. 30), reflects the deeply personal and embodied consequences of structural inequality and ideological oppression in neoliberal India. Here, Adiga uses Balram’s metaphor of being “treated like a donkey” to convey the dehumanization experienced by the subaltern under entrenched class hierarchies. The metaphor is significant because it encapsulates both physical labor and social invisibility: the working poor are exploited as beasts of burden while their individuality, dignity, and agency are systematically denied. From a Neo-Marxist and Althusserian perspective, this quote illustrates interpellation the process by which individuals internalize dominant ideology and accept their position within hierarchical social structures. Balram’s reflection reveals how generations are shaped by systemic subjugation; his father’s life, marked by exploitation and compliance, becomes a cautionary narrative that conditions Balram’s own aspirations. The desire for his son to “live like a man” underscores both recognition of injustice and a yearning to break free from inherited subordination. Yet, it also signals how ideology operates through familial and social structures: even hope for upward mobility is framed within the context of personal survival, rather than collective liberation.

Moreover, this quote connects to the broader theme of moral compromise under neoliberalism. Balram’s acknowledgment of past suffering informs his eventual decisions to navigate, manipulate, and exploit the system for personal gain. Unlike traditional socialist realist heroes, whose consciousness evolves toward collective resistance, Balram internalizes structural inequality and turns it into strategic agency. This transformation exemplifies how *The White Tiger* reconfigures socialist realism: resistance is individualized, morally ambiguous, and deeply shaped by ideological conditions. The generational emphasis in this statement reinforces the persistence of systemic exploitation and inequality. By highlighting the desire for a better future for his son, Adiga not only foregrounds the human cost of class subjugation but also exposes the enduring reproduction of social hierarchies. This aligns with Althusser’s idea that ideology perpetuates itself through everyday practices, familial expectations, and internalized norms, ensuring that structures of domination remain resilient across generations.

The findings of this research indicate that Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* presents neoliberal India as a society marked by deep structural contradictions, systemic

inequality, and ideological subjugation. The novel consistently exposes the gap between the promises of economic development and the lived realities of marginalized populations. Analysis of textual evidence shows that economic progress benefits the elite while the working class remains trapped in cycles of deprivation, exploitation, and invisibility. For example, Adiga's depiction of laborers constructing luxury homes while living in tents partitioned by sewage (Adiga, 2008, p. 156) illustrates the paradox of urban development: those who create value are denied basic human dignity. Similarly, descriptions of rural infrastructure decay and child malnutrition highlight the uneven distribution of resources, showing how neoliberal reforms fail to address basic social needs.

These findings align with existing scholarship that critiques India's neoliberal policies for producing a bifurcated society, such as the observations made by Gopal (2011) and Sharma (2014) regarding the emergence of "two Indias." However, this research extends these perspectives by emphasizing the ideological dimensions of inequality. While prior studies primarily focus on economic disparity, this study demonstrates that inequality in the novel is reinforced and normalized through everyday social practices and institutional mechanisms, consistent with Althusser's notion of ideological state apparatuses. The analysis also confirms the significance of Adiga's use of imagery, symbolism, satire, and irony. For instance, the image of men in the fields frantically reaching for a passing truck symbolically represents the precariousness and commodification of labor, while the metaphor of workers as human spiders conveys their invisibility and subjugation within spaces of privilege. These devices operate not only as literary tools but also as ideological critiques, exposing the contradictions of a system that presents neoliberalism as opportunity and mobility while simultaneously perpetuating exploitation. This finding expands on the work of Bose (2012) and Menon (2015), who noted the satirical elements of the novel but did not fully connect them to the reproduction of ideological structures.

The novel further challenges traditional socialist realist conventions. Balram, the protagonist, embodies moral ambiguity and individualized strategies of survival rather than collective revolutionary consciousness. The example of drivers taking the blame for their middle-class masters (Adiga, 2008, p. 101) and systemic corruption in legal institutions demonstrates how oppression and complicity are intertwined across social hierarchies. These instances reveal how the novel reconfigures socialist realism to portray fragmented subjectivities operating under the pressures of neoliberal capitalism, rather than the united working-class struggle typical of classical socialist realism. Moreover, the aspiration expressed by Balram for his son to "live like a man" (Adiga, 2008, p. 30) illustrates the intergenerational impact of structural inequality and the internalization of subjugation, highlighting how subjects navigate and reproduce existing power structures even as they seek individual advancement.

This study addresses gaps in the existing literature by integrating a Neo-Marxist and Althusserian framework into the analysis of *The White Tiger*. While previous research has emphasized economic inequality and postcolonial critique, little attention has been paid to the ideological mechanisms that sustain class hierarchies or to the ways in which socialist realism is reimagined in a neoliberal context. By demonstrating how the novel exposes both the economic and ideological dimensions of oppression, this research provides a more comprehensive understanding of the systemic and cultural reproduction of inequality. It shows that Adiga's text not only represents structural contradictions but also critiques the ideological machinery that normalizes exploitation, thereby filling a significant gap in literary and sociopolitical scholarship.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* offers a sustained and critical interrogation of neoliberal India by revealing how economic liberalization produces deep structural contradictions rather than inclusive development. The novel consistently demonstrates that progress in neoliberal India is uneven and exclusionary, benefiting small elite while marginalizing large sections of the population who remain trapped in poverty, infrastructural neglect, and labor exploitation. Through detailed textual analysis, it becomes evident that inequality in the novel is not incidental but systemic, embedded within the very functioning of urbanization, rural governance, and class relations. The lived realities of workers constructing elite spaces while inhabiting degraded environments, along with depictions of broken infrastructure and social deprivation, collectively reinforce the argument that neoliberal development operates through exclusion as much as through growth.

The research further concludes that the novel does not only depict material inequality but also exposes the ideological structures that sustain it. Drawing on a Neo-Marxist framework informed by Louis Althusser's theory of ideology, the study shows that individuals within the novel are shaped by systems that normalize exploitation and reproduce class hierarchies through everyday practices. Institutions such as law enforcement, labor systems, and family structures function in ways that perpetuate submission, complicity, and survival-based morality. At the same time, the novel's use of imagery, satire, and irony destabilizes dominant narratives of meritocracy and progress by revealing the violence and contradiction underlying them. Rather than presenting a simple opposition between oppressor and oppressed, the text highlights the blurred boundaries of complicity, where subjects are simultaneously victims and participants in systems of exploitation.

Additionally, the study concludes that *The White Tiger* reconfigures traditional literary expectations of socialist realism by replacing collective revolutionary consciousness with fragmented, individualized, and morally ambiguous subjectivities. The

protagonist's journey reflects not a unified class struggle but a negotiation with oppressive systems that shape identity, desire, and ethical decision-making. This reconfiguration demonstrates how neoliberal conditions transform not only economic structures but also forms of resistance and subject formation. In this sense, the novel becomes a site where ideological contradictions are not only represented but also critically reimaged, offering a complex portrayal of agency under constraint.

The research concludes that *The White Tiger* functions as both a literary and ideological critique of neoliberal capitalism. It exposes how structural inequality is sustained through material conditions and ideological mechanisms that render exploitation normal and even invisible. By situating the novel within a Neo-Marxist framework, the study highlights its contribution to understanding the intersection of literature, ideology, and political economy, ultimately demonstrating that neoliberalism operates as a totalizing system that shapes both social reality and human consciousness.

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