

ECONOMIC HEGEMONY AND SOCIAL DISINTEGRATION UNDER CAPITALIST CULTURE: A MARXIST ANALYSIS OF ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

Samina Yasmin, Lecturer in English, University of Education (Faisalabad Campus), Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. samina.yasmin@ue.edu.pk

Muhammad Afzal, PhD Scholar (English Literature), The University of Faisalabad, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. afzalmaqbool23@gmail.com

Dr. Mumtaz Ahmad, Principal, Government Post Graduate College Nankana Sahib. prof.mumtazahmad@gmail.com

Abstract

*This paper examines the theme of economic hegemony and its role in fostering social disintegration under capitalist culture in Adiga's **The White Tiger**, through a Marxist lens. The novel presents a stark portrayal of India's class divide, with the protagonist, Balram Halwai, embodying the oppressed lower class, struggling to ascend within a capitalist system that perpetuates exploitation and inequality. By analyzing the interplay between class, power, and economic structures, the paper argues that Adiga (2008) critiques the capitalist framework, highlighting how economic hegemony entrenches social disintegration and perpetuates cycles of poverty and corruption. Through Balram's rise from servitude to entrepreneurial success, the paper highlights the destructive consequences of a capitalist society that thrives on the subjugation of the working class, disintegrates the moral fabric of society, and fosters individualism and alienation.*

Key words: Economic hegemony, Social disintegration, Marxism, Capitalist system

Introduction

Marxism refers to the theories, critiques, and political ideologies developed by Karl Marx, which challenge Western capitalism as a materialistic system that has oppressed and distorted pre-imperial humanistic cultures. As a socio-economic and political theory, Marxism advocates for the equal distribution of wealth and the creation of a classless, exploitation-free society. It views history as shaped by class struggle, with capitalism replacing feudalism and communism envisioned as the successor to capitalism, achieved through revolutionary change. “[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” (Afzal et al. 2024, p. 875). It aims to create a society with equal distribution of wealth and production means, emphasizing the economy's central role in shaping and being shaped by social structures. 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).

Marxist literary theory is pivotal for analyzing literature, as it unveils the profound influence of economic forces on societal structures and literary production, emphasizing the critique of capitalism's divisive impact. Aravind Adiga, an acclaimed Indian author and recipient of the 2008 Man Booker Prize for *The White Tiger*, exemplifies this perspective through his staunch opposition to capitalism. He critiques capitalism for fostering social divisions, prioritizing economy and commodities over workers, eroding socialism, and promoting individualism in his novel, *The White Tiger*. He exposes how capitalist ideologies disrupt India's traditional value systems, highlighting the broader consequences of these forces on postcolonial societies worldwide.

The White Tiger serves as a powerful Marxist critique of capitalist hegemony, illustrating how economic dominance leads to systemic exploitation, alienation, and the disintegration of traditional social values in postcolonial Indian society. The issue of class conflict dominating postcolonial Indian society is central theme of the novel, as theorized by Marx. Adiga (2008) portrays Indian society as being fractured into two classes: the affluent capitalist class, represented by Ashok, and the impoverished working class, embodied by Balram. These two groups are

metaphorically described as convoys heading in opposite directions, living in entirely different worlds with distinct lifestyles, privileges, and socio-political rights. The affluent enjoy unparalleled material benefits and control over societal structures, while the working class is condemned to a life of exploitation, degradation, and poverty. Adiga (2008) illustrates this divide by describing India as being split into ‘an India of Light and an India of Darkness,’ with the materially dominant capitalist class perpetuating their hegemony through systemic exploitation. The rich not only control resources but also dictate societal norms and ideologies, convincing the masses that the capitalist good aligns with the common good.

Adiga (2008) critiques the effects of capitalism on postcolonial Indian society, revealing how it disintegrates local value systems and fosters alienation and individualism. Urbanization, westernization, and the erosion of the joint family system emerge as manifestations of this capitalistic culture. Adiga (2008) exposes the psychological and social manipulation inherent in capitalist ideology, wherein individuals like Balram and Ashok fall prey to its divisive principles. The suffering of marginalized communities, such as the residents of the ‘India of Darkness,’ highlights the systemic inequities perpetuated by capitalism, leading to the disintegration of traditional societal bonds and values. Adiga (2008) delivers a powerful critique of economic hegemony, demonstrating how capitalism fosters social disintegration and alienation, replacing communal harmony with individualistic pursuits and widening the chasm between classes. This Marxist critique highlights the broader impact of capitalist ideologies on postcolonial societies, emphasizing the urgent need to re-examine the societal structures that perpetuate such inequalities.

Literature Review

Sebastian (2009) asserts that *The White Tiger* vividly portrays class distinctions, with Balram representing the impoverished masses and characters like Ashok symbolizing the affluent elite. He highlights the stark differences between the rich and the poor, emphasizing the exploitation, humiliation, and dehumanization faced by the underprivileged. The wealthy are detached from the suffering of the poor. Deswal (2014) further notes that the novel reflects the socio-political conditions of Indian society.

Singh (2009) argues that the underclass, represented by Balram in *The White Tiger*, endures deprivation, subjugation, loneliness, and neglect, unable to escape their marginalized status due to systemic constraints. The underprivileged are metaphorically trapped in the ‘Rooster Coop,’ with factors like illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, cultural tensions, and corruption perpetuating their exploitation and disenfranchisement. These interconnected issues sustain their subjugation within society.

Yadav (2011) argues that *The White Tiger* highlights the decline of religious values in a globalized, market-driven Indian society. He contends that religious beliefs are weakening due to advancements in Indian civilization. The protagonist critiques religion by comparing the gods of darkness to politicians who, like religious figures, do little beyond winning elections year after year.

Sindhu (2013) argues that *The White Tiger* addresses the challenges of urbanization, particularly the migration of the poor from rural areas to cities due to economic changes. She describes the novel as portraying the transformation of an “innocent village boy” into a morally corrupt, materialistic, and criminal individual, highlighting the negative impact of urbanization on the protagonist’s character.

Narasiman (2013) views *The White Tiger* as a story of Balram’s quest for freedom, as he seeks to escape a life of servitude and poverty. He achieves his freedom through criminal acts, including murdering his master, Ashok, and fleeing to Bangalore with stolen wealth. Narasiman (2013) argues that social inequalities drive individuals like Balram to criminality in order to break free from oppression.

Sheoran (2013) argues that *The White Tiger* reflects modernized India, highlighting social injustices amid the country’s economic prosperity. The novel follows Balram, the protagonist, who

represents the poor and experiences suffering, servitude, class discrimination, and economic inequality. Upon moving to a metropolitan city, he encounters an exploitative system, ultimately breaking free from the “Rooster Coop,” engaging in illegal activities, murdering his master, and challenging the autocracy of the wealthy.

Choudhry (2014) argues that while Indian society progresses economically, scientifically, and technologically, the image of success obscures the suffering of the marginalized. Despite advancements, the poor continue to face issues like inadequate education, poor healthcare, corruption, and moral decay. He highlights that the elite benefit from progress while ignoring the hardships of the underprivileged, who remain victims of exploitation by the rich.

In sum, despite significant studies on class and caste in *The White Tiger*, few have explored the role of economic hegemony in fostering social disintegration under capitalist culture. There is limited analysis of how capitalist ideologies erode traditional values and communal structures. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the impact of economic dominance on social fabric through a Marxist lens.

Research Methodology

This paper employs a Marxist theoretical framework to analyze *The White Tiger*, focusing on the economic hegemony and social disintegration under capitalist culture. Through close reading and textual analysis, it examines themes such as class struggle, exploitation, and alienation. Secondary sources contextualize these themes within postcolonial India’s socio-political conditions.

Theoretical Framework

Marxism, founded on the works of Karl Marx, views history as a series of struggles between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Marx opines that history consists “of class struggles” (Marx, 1968, p. 1). Marxism is a materialistic philosophy, focused on raising awareness about individuals’ social, economic, political, and cultural lives, aiming to transform the real world into a better place. It advocates for equal wealth distribution and state ownership of production, aiming for income equality. However, income inequality is widening, with the rich growing richer and the poor growing poorer, creating societal instability. This disparity leads to exploitation, dehumanization, and potential social unrest. Marx (1968) argues that while philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways, the key objective is to change it. “The point, however, is to change [the exploitative capitalist system]” (Lukacs, 1971, p. 1). Marx (1968) argues that society needs change due to the poverty and exploitation under capitalist hegemony. He asserts that the ruling bourgeois class controls production and enjoys wealth, while the proletariat class struggles for basic needs. Marx (1968) advocates for the development of class consciousness and the overthrow of the bourgeoisie as essential steps toward establishing a classless society.

Marx (1844) argues that the bourgeois class exploits the proletariat, resulting in alienation, which is the worker’s estrangement from the entire process of production. He states that “The worker becomes all the poorer the more he produces, the more his production increases in power and size” (Marx, 1844, p. 40). He further explains that as workers create more commodities, they themselves become cheaper. Thus, labor not only produces commodities but also the worker as a commodity, highlighting the alienating effects of capitalist production (Marx, 1844). Marx (1844) contends that the value of human beings diminishes in comparison to the growing value of commodities. The worker becomes no more significant than a commodity in the capitalist system. Marx (1844) identifies four distinct forms of alienation: alienation from the product of labor, alienation from the process of production, alienation from the self, and alienation from fellow workers. Consequently, the alienated proletariat undergoes the process of reification, which is defined as the act of “transforming human properties, relations, and actions into properties, relations and actions of man-produced things which have become independent (and which are imagined as originally independent) of man and govern his life” (Bottomore, 1983, p. 23). Under reification, human beings and their relationships are commodified, treating workers as mere objects of profit.

Marx (1967) argues that the capitalist system exploits workers by depriving them of the surplus value they produce, while capitalists accumulate wealth for its own sake. This leads to class struggle, as the working class is driven to unite politically to challenge capitalist exploitation. The capitalists manipulate working conditions, wages, and hours to maintain control and ensure the workers' focus on material pursuits.

The Marxist critique of capitalism involves understanding the concepts of 'base' and 'superstructure'. According to Marx and Engels (1998), the economic structure of society, or the base, governs and shapes the superstructure. The superstructure includes social, political, religious, and ethical systems that form ideologies to justify the dominance of the bourgeois class over the proletariat. The bourgeois class, both materially and intellectually, creates this superstructure to secure the compliance of the masses. As Marx and Engels (1998) argue, "morality, religion, metaphysics" (p. 14) etc. are not independent but are shaped by the material conditions of society. They assert that the economic base, consisting of the relations of production, shapes and controls the social superstructure, including politics, culture, and ideology. The base determines the structure of society and influences consciousness, while the superstructure justifies the power of the bourgeoisie, legitimizing their control over the means of production. The capitalist class manipulates the superstructure to perpetuate exploitation and class antagonism. Ultimately, economic forces drive societal divisions and human behavior, shaping the relationship between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Lukacs (1971) references Marx's assertion that social relations are products of human activity and are influenced by economic conditions. Capitalist institutions dominate both the economy and the ideological structures that shape society, reinforcing the power dynamics between the bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Lukacs (1971) critiques the role of the bourgeoisie's dominant ideology, describing it as the projection of the ruling class's consciousness. He argues that the proletariat is deceived into believing they live according to their own will, while in reality, they are controlled by the physical and ideological hegemony of the capitalists. As Marx remarks, "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). Lukacs (1971) also shows how capitalist culture disintegrates established social values, replacing them with materialistic pursuits. He notes that commodity exchange affects not only the external but also the internal structure of society, ultimately reshaping it. He elaborates: "We note that the observation about the disintegrating effect of a commodity exchange... clearly shows the qualitative change endangered by the dominance of commodities" (Lukacs, 1971, p. 49).

Textual Analysis and Discussion

The White Tiger offers a scathing critique of capitalist exploitation, vividly depicting the economic hegemony that perpetuates class oppression and social disintegration. Through a Marxist lens, the novel unveils the stark realities of economic disparity and the dehumanizing impact of the capitalist culture on the working class in contemporary India. Adiga (2008) realistically portrays the class antagonism between the capitalist and working classes in postcolonial Indian society under capitalism. Balram, the protagonist, represents the working class, while Ashok Sharma symbolizes the affluent capitalist class. The novel's narrative centers on the interaction between these opposing classes, reflecting deep social disparities and injustices. Balram aspires to break free from the societal, moral, and religious constraints that have enslaved him since birth to join the capitalist elite. Aligning with Marx's (1848) theory of societal class division under capitalism, Adiga (2008) presents these contrasting classes, stating "India is two countries into one, an India of Light and an India of Darkness" (Adiga, 2008, p. 14). The prosperous 'India of Light' symbolizes wealth, progress, and privilege, inhabited by the affluent capitalist class enjoying all facilities of life while 'India of Darkness' represents marginalized, poverty-stricken areas, devoid of even basic necessities. This divide highlights the suffering and humiliation faced by the working class in 'Dark India' at the hands of the capitalist elite.

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)

“The capitalist system widens the gap between the material prosperity of a privileged few and the socio-economic degradation of the majority. It facilitates a select few while consigning the masses to lives of struggle and suffering” (Din et al., p. 318). Adiga (2008) portrays the ‘India of Darkness’ as a region plagued by pervasive poverty and deprivation. The poverty rate continues to escalate, with essential resources and facilities reserved for the affluent, leaving the impoverished segments of society neglected. Balram’s birthplace is a stark depiction of this destitution, surrounded by laborers, rickshaw pullers, small shopkeepers, tea vendors, and coal collectors, all struggling to survive under dire circumstances. The wealth generated in this region is siphoned off to enrich the accounts of the capitalist class. This part of India is characterized by a bleak and desolate image, marred by corruption and greed emanating from the wealthy elite. Capitalists prioritize the comfort of their pets over the basic dignity of workers, whose living conditions often deteriorate below that of animals cared for by the rich. The rich want their dogs to be pampered, washed, and shampooed. As Balram notes, “The rich expect their dogs to be treated like humans” (Adiga, 2008, p. 78).

The protagonist, Balram, observes a societal division based on the type of liquor consumed, symbolizing the broader class disparities in India. He identifies two distinct groups: The English liquor drinkers, representing the affluent, and the Indian liquor drinkers, signifying the underprivileged. English liquor, catering to the wealthy, is prioritized by sellers, who serve these customers promptly. In contrast, Indian liquor, consumed by the poor, is associated with delayed service, with these buyers often waiting longer to be attended to. This distinction reflects the entrenched inequalities between the privileged and marginalized segments of society, as articulated by Balram, the protagonist: “‘Indian’ liquor is for village boys... ‘English’ liquor, naturally, is for the rich” (Adiga, 2008, p. 73).

The residents of India of Darkness and India of Light are also distinguished by their attire, reflecting their socio-economic divide. The affluent inhabitants of India of Light typically wear Western-style clothing, such as pants and shirts, symbolizing their wealth and modernity. In contrast, the impoverished residents of India of Darkness often dress themselves in traditional garments like shalwar kameez, highlighting their limited resources, and adherence to cultural norms amidst economic hardship. The protagonist, Balram states, “blue chequered polyester shirt, orange trousers...those are the kind of cloth sir, which would appeal to a servant’s eye” (Adiga, 2008, p. 22).

The educational system of Dark India indicates the element of corruption. We are told ironically that “if the Indian village is a paradise, then the school is a paradise within a paradise” (Adiga, 2008, p. 32). The teacher of Dark India is an embodiment of corruption. He is no longer alive to the true spirit of teaching. He is a stealer of government’s grants for uniform and children’s lunch. The health conditions of Dark India are also in a poor state. Hospitals offer a sight of corruption, lacking medical staff and medicines. They are ignored in the mutual tussles going on among the politicians as the novelist notes: “Three different foundation stones for a hospital lay” (Adiga, 2008, p. 47) thrice. Balram’s father is suffering from T.B. When Balram calls at the hospital for his father’s check-up, he finds the absence of the doctor there. When asked, he is told that the doctor’s post is vacant. “Every time the post falls vacant” (Adiga, 2008, p. 49). The main reason behind this is that the Great Socialist does not let the vacant post of the doctor be filled as

the Health Department is under his control. He is the symbol of exploitative forces at work in the postcolonial Indian society in particular and in the postcolonial societies in general under capitalistic culture. The poor fall an easy prey to illness on account of poor health condition and poor food conditions. It is very difficult for the poor to afford costly medications. Balram's father dies as a result of lack of medical facilities in Dark India. The protagonist, Balram, states, "The diseases of the poor can never get treated" (Adiga, 2008, p. 237). This given line indicates the fact that the poor cannot afford costly medical facilities and resultantly, their diseases remain undiagnosed, and untreated. It signifies that poverty-rate is at its zenith under capitalistic culture, and it is out of reach of the working class to get medical treatment.

Balram, the protagonist, highlights the pervasive political exploitation endured by the impoverished masses in India of Darkness. Corrupt politicians exploit the electorate under the pretense of democratic elections, which are undermined by systemic corruption, bribery, and malpractice. Elections in this region are pre-determined, with votes treated as commodities to be bought and sold. From minor transactions to significant deals, everything is for sale in this corrupted system. Leaders secure electoral victories without genuine competition, often with fabricated voter counts and counterfeit identity cards to legitimize the process. This highlights the deep-seated flaws in the political framework of Dark India. The protagonist describes the Indian democracy satirically to the Prime Minister of China: "I tell you there is only one thing wrong with this place . . . we have this fucked up system [democracy]" (Adiga, 2008, p. 156).

According to Marx (1848), power is intrinsically linked to economic relations, with those who control the means of production holding the authority to influence society's institutions, either directly or indirectly. In a similar vein, Lukacs (1971) asserts that, those who possess economic resources, are also the controllers of both economic and social relations. He argues that the capitalists treat the working class as powerless, like puppets, while the institutions that govern the economy also shape and control the ideology of the laboring class. These institutions not only dominate the economic sphere but also govern individuals' relationships with others, with nature, and ultimately with themselves. Balram, the protagonist, observes that during elections, politicians make numerous appealing promises to the poor, but these promises are always left unfulfilled. He suggests that a change in government does not signify a shift in ideology, but rather a mere replacement of figures who continue to uphold the same oppressive systems. The poor, he notes, remain subjugated under these unchanging ideologies, blindly following the ruling class without questioning their continued exploitation. Balram ironically indicates the false promises of the politicians to poor public, "The elections show that the poor will not be ignored. The darkness will not be silent. There is no water in the taps and what do you people in Delhi give us" (Adiga, 2008, p. 269)?

The politicians in *The White Tiger* are portrayed as corrupt, hypocritical, and exploitative, with the Great Socialist embodying these traits. The Great Socialist is responsible for embezzling a billion rupees from Dark India, transferring the funds to a European bank, while the poor remain unaware of his actions. Democracy is depicted as a tool for oppression, offering empty promises of basic necessities such as food, healthcare, and shelter, which are never fulfilled. Adiga (2008) critiques the government's ineffective plans, such as broken water taps and the provision of mobile phones over essential resources, while portraying the malnourished children of Dark India as ghost-like figures with oversized heads:

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 government of
India* (Adiga, 2008, p. 20).

Marx (1968) asserts that bourgeois culture “has created enormous cities,” leading to an increase in “the urban population as compared with the rural” (Marx, 1968, p. 36). Many individuals from Dark India migrate to cities with hopes of a better life but remain trapped by their subservient attitudes and socio-economic constraints, preventing them from overcoming the barriers set by the wealthy. Their mindset and actions reflect the limitations of their socio-economic status. Pinky Madam’s departure for America leaves Ashok deeply distraught, creating a moment of emotional vulnerability. In this critical juncture, Balram, the servant, transcends the boundaries of his prescribed role, positioning himself as an active participant in Ashok's personal and professional affairs. As Ashok’s emotional support falters, Balram assumes responsibility for his master’s well-being. He takes Ashok to a hotel, where, despite his own inability to afford or consume such lavish meals, Balram orders a variety of dishes, demonstrating his temporary role as both caretaker and provider in this altered dynamic. He comments that the food is “enough to feed a rich man or a whole family” (Adiga, 2008, p. 238). Amid the rapid expansion brought by globalization, Balram observes the rise of modern infrastructures such as shopping malls, clubs, five-star hotels, and call centers. Tragically, the residents of the Darkness, who labor tirelessly to construct these gleaming glass edifices, are denied entry into them. In a symbolic act, Balram manages to access a shopping mall by donning a T-shirt with English lettering, mimicking the attire of his employer, Ashok. This moment highlights his deep lament for the systemic exclusion of the very builders from the spaces they create in a capitalist society. They are not permitted to look inside the glass buildings that they have built with their own hands. “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). The lines reflect Marx’s (1844) concept of worker’s alienation, wherein laborers are estranged from the products of their own work. Despite constructing grand buildings, workers are excluded from accessing or enjoying these spaces, illustrating their detachment from the fruits of their labor. Furthermore, in a society driven by capitalist values, workers are rendered less significant than commodities, highlighting the dehumanizing prioritization of profit and material wealth over human dignity.

Balram, the protagonist, keenly observes the harsh realities of societal disparity with insightful clarity. Despite being unable to pursue formal education, he immerses himself in worldly learning, absorbing knowledge from conversations on streets, at tea stalls, and in shops, which shapes his transformation into ‘The White Tiger’. Determined to shed his servile identity, he adopts the tastes and choices of his wealthy master, Ashok, as part of his journey toward self-empowerment. The stark contrast between the two Indias lies in autonomy— ‘India of Light’ allows freedom of choice, while ‘Dark India’ denies it, restricting the poor from shaping their destinies. Balram’s boldness to seize his chance defies these oppressive boundaries.

Marx (1968) argues that the economic exploitation of the working class by the capitalist elite is a pervasive feature of capitalist societies. Viewed through a Marxist lens, *The White Tiger* vividly portrays this dynamic of class conflict. The powerful landlords—symbolized by figures such as the Buffalo, the Stork, the Wild Boar, and the Raven—epitomize the oppressive capitalist class, relentlessly exploiting the labor and resources of the working class for their own enrichment, perpetuating systemic inequality and class domination. The Stork is the owner of the river flowing outside the village, and he takes “a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman in the river, and a toll from every boat man who crossed the river” (Adiga, 2008, p. 24) to reach Laxamangarh. The Wild Boar, the Stork’s brother, holds ownership over the most fertile and productive agricultural lands in Laxmangarh. This monopolization of land resources highlights the economic disparity and feudal control exercised by the elite over rural India, reflecting the entrenched class hierarchy central to the novel’s critique of capitalist exploitation. Those, who want to work on his land, have to “touch the dust under his slippers, and agree to swallow his day wages” (Adiga, 2008, p. 25). The Raven, owning the poorest-quality land on the village’s hilly outskirts, imposes levies

on goat-herders for grazing their flocks, symbolizing exploitation even in the least productive spaces (Adiga, 2008, p. 25). Similarly, the Buffalo exemplifies greed, taxing poor rickshaw drivers and road users, claiming a third of their meager earnings. Together with the Stork and Wild Boar, these landlords embody the forces of systemic exploitation in Dark India, plundering the economically vulnerable while living in opulence behind high-walled mansions. Furthermore, their alliances with regional politicians enable them to perpetuate their dominance, ensuring the continued marginalization of the downtrodden.

Under capitalism, the poor endure constant humiliation and cruelty. Balram, representing the oppressed class, is repeatedly degraded by his masters. When Mukesh loses a rupee in the car, Balram is unfairly blamed, treated like a dog, and forced to search for it. Unable to find the lost coin, he sacrifices his own rupee to appease Mukesh, highlighting the dehumanization he faces. Balram lowers himself to his knees, searching the floor of the car for it. He “[sniffs] in between the mats like a dog, all in search of that one rupee” (Adiga, 2008, p. 139). This line illustrates Marx’s (1848) concept that under capitalism, labor becomes dehumanizing and humiliating, leaving workers mentally and physically drained. When Balram begins to work as a driver of Ashok’s family, his fellow servant advises him to pamper the pet dogs of the family as “[dogs] are worth more than [Balram]” (Adiga, 2008, p. 67)! The comparison between the dogs of the rich and members of the poor class highlights the themes of degradation, mistreatment, and servitude. It highlights that, in the eyes of the wealthy, the poor hold no more significance than their dogs, symbolizing their complete dehumanization.

Under capitalism, individuals experience alienation, with the working class reduced to mere tools of production, devoid of autonomy or emotional fulfillment. Balram, the protagonist, becomes subjugated to the capitalists and endures numerous harsh experiences. He is subjected to the manipulative tactics of his masters, who foster division and animosity between the two drivers to prevent them from contemplating broader aspects of life. This strategy mirrors the exploitation faced by factory workers, who are kept under control and deprived of basic comforts. Balram, feeling oppressed, seizes an opportunity to assert his power over his fellow driver, forcing him to quit. This dynamic reflects Marx’s (1844) theory of alienation, where workers are disconnected from their true selves, their emotions, their labor, and their creativity, ultimately experiencing freedom only in their basic animalistic functions—eating, drinking, and procreation (Marx, 1844, p. 403).

Over time, Balram, the protagonist, begins to recognize the oppressive nature of the capitalist family that treats him not as a driver, but as a mere slave. He is assigned tasks such as cleaning the car, washing and sweeping the house, bathing the dogs, and massaging his master’s feet. These duties lead Balram to contemplate a way out of his predicament, especially after witnessing the exploitation of poor workers. His trip to Delhi with his master, Ashok, exposes him to a different reality, where the rich accumulate wealth by exploiting all available resources. Balram observes the rapid development of malls, glass buildings, and luxury hotels, yet the workers from Dark India, who labor to build these structures, are unable to access them, highlighting the stark divide between the rich and the poor. The poor workers “[are] building homes for the rich, but they [live] in tents” (Adiga, 2008, p. 222).

Balram gradually becomes aware of the objectification and alienation of workers, who are treated as mere productive machines, stripped of their emotions and humanity. This realization deepens his understanding of the corrupt and exploitative realities within his country, shaped by a capitalist system. When he moves from the village to the city, his idealistic dreams of urban life are shattered by the pervasive corruption, bribery, poverty, and the injustices inflicted by powerful elites and corrupt authorities. Balram is deeply disturbed by the mistreatment of the poor, which leads him to reflect on Marx’s (1844) notion that “the animal becomes human and the human becomes animal” (Marx, 1844, p. 403). In this context, Balram assigns animal names to the four

landlords in his village, symbolizing their inhumane treatment of their servants, while ironically suggesting that they, rather than their subordinates, are the true animals.

Marx (1968) asserts that “The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced family relation to a mere money relation” (Marx, 1968, p. 34). After acquiring wealth, Balram becomes consumed by selfishness and loses his sense of humanity. He adopts the behavior of his former master, Mr. Ashok, prioritizing material wealth over human connections. In doing so, he dehumanizes his workers, treating them as tools for his personal gain. As his ambition grows, the values of empathy and compassion are replaced by a cold, utilitarian view of others, where they are exploited and discarded once their utility is fulfilled. “When the work is done, [Balram kicks] them out of the office” (Adiga, 2008, p. 302). This line illuminates the devaluation of workers in a society controlled by a manipulative capitalist culture. It highlights the Marxist critique that under capitalism, commodities are valued more than human labor. As argued by Marx, Lukacs, and other Marxist theorists, the capitalist system exploits workers by reducing them to mere instruments of production, while prioritizing profit and material wealth over human dignity and well-being.

Marx (1968) points out capitalistic culture is leading to the extinction of the local culture of the Third World countries because “it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image” (Marx, 1968, p. 36). *The White Tiger* highlights the increasing influence of Western culture within Indian society, particularly among the wealthier class. It portrays the gradual dominance of bourgeois values, representative of Western ideologies, in the context of a Third World country like India. The novel suggests that the individualistic culture that traditionally defined Indian society is being overshadowed by capitalist practices, which are increasingly aligned with Western norms. Ashok’s wife, Pinky Madam, embodies this shift, as her lifestyle and attitudes reflect the growing Westernization among the affluent in India. Pinky Madam grows increasingly disillusioned with life in India, feeling alienated in a foreign land. She longs for the comforts and lifestyle of America, often reminiscing about the American culture and environment she left behind. This yearning for the familiar, Westernized world highlights the contrast between the life she envisions and the one she finds herself trapped in. The protagonist, Balram, takes his master, Ashok and Pinky Madam to Gurgaon which presents an exact copy of America: “The modernist suburb of Delhi. American Express Microsoft, all the big American companies have offices there” (Adiga, 2008, p. 101).

English has become a symbol of prestige, particularly among the affluent class in Indian society, where it is perceived as a tool of superiority. Balram highlights the widespread appeal of English, noting how people, especially in the upper echelons of society, prefer to express their thoughts and ideas in English. The novel’s opening sentence highlights the critical role that English plays in addressing important issues, signaling its status as a necessary medium for discussing significant matters in contemporary India. The protagonist tells the Chinese premier that, despite English being difficult, “there are some things that can be said only in English” (Adiga, 2008, p. 3). Balram, the protagonist of the novel, conveys to the Chinese premier that English, as the language of the elite, is essential for articulating important aspects of life. He suggests that English has become indispensable in all facets of life, serving as a crucial tool for communication and expression in a society increasingly dominated by the influence of the affluent class. The capitalist or wealthy class derives a sense of superiority from incorporating English into their everyday speech, reinforcing its status as a symbol of power and privilege.

English has made a profound impact on Indian society, significantly influencing various aspects of daily life. It has altered the names of newly constructed shops, buildings, and even pets. The dogs owned by Balram’s masters are named in English: “Cuddle and Puddle” (Adiga, 2008, p. 78). Balram demonstrates a keen ability to learn from others’ speech. He possesses a sharp mind and a strong capacity for acquiring new knowledge. Over time, he picks up various English terms

such as “red light district” (p. 250), “local,” “replacement,” “driver” (p. 268) and so on. Furthermore, Balram’s website, “www.whitetiger-technologydrivers.com” (p. 46), and his email address are both in English, reflecting the pervasive influence of English language in his life.

Under capitalistic culture, the traditionally unified family structure is losing its significance as self-centeredness becomes a dominant trait among individuals, who prioritize amassing wealth through any means—legal or illegal. Capitalistic culture, therefore, undermines socialism in favor of individualism. The cohesion that characterized family life is being replaced by the pursuit of personal gain, and individuals increasingly focus on gratifying their own egos. This shift results in the erosion of social ties; as collective values are displaced by capitalist individualism. In *The White Tiger*, several events highlight the rise of individualism within a capitalistic framework. The novel depicts how Ashok’s family becomes consumed by personal gain. The members of Ashok’s family are so engrossed in their materialistic pursuits that they lack time for one another, resulting in the breakdown of familial bonds. Ashok’s marriage ultimately fails as he becomes obsessed with his personal ambitions. Similarly, Balram, influenced by capitalistic values, grows increasingly selfish, arrogant, and corrupt. He refuses to send money to his family and behaves disdainfully during a visit, showing no affection for his grandmother or his relatives. He even avoids engaging with his own children, further exemplifying the disintegration of familial and societal values under capitalism. In this way, capitalistic culture undermines qualities such as selflessness, socialism, egalitarianism, and respect for elders, gradually eradicating these values from society.

Capitalism transforms individuals into materialistic entities, where human values are overshadowed by the pursuit of wealth. As Marx (1967) and Lukacs (1971) suggest, economic forces shape every aspect of society, with materialism becoming a central attraction. People begin to evaluate everything based on material wealth, placing greater importance on possessions and financial power. Those, who are economically privileged, like Ashok, hold the ability to dominate societal institutions. Their wealth grants them control over not only political and legal systems but also the police, judges, and other influential figures. In *The White Tiger*, the four landlords who govern Dark India, along with Ashok’s family and characters like Vijay, embody the power dynamics driven by economic prosperity, where wealth serves as a means of domination and control. Commenting on the selfish nature of bourgeois culture, Marx (1968) points out that capitalistic culture “has concentrated property in a few hands” (Marx, 1968, p. 36). The four landlords, who rule over Dark India, the members of Ashok’s family, and Vijay serve as embodiments of wealth concentrated in the hands of a few. Their substantial economic power grants them the freedom to act without restraint, manipulating systems to serve their interests. Through their wealth, they are able to escape obligations, such as taxes, by bribing those in power. For example, Ashok engages in bribery to safeguard his family from the burden of taxes, showcasing how the wealthy use financial resources to navigate and bypass societal regulations.

According to Marx (1848, 1967) and Lukacs (1971), the economic base, which consists of wealth and control over production, shapes the superstructure of social, religious, and political ideas. This base determines people’s ideologies and behaviors. The capitalists design the superstructure. In Balram’s family, a person is given importance because of the money which he earns. Balram’s family exemplifies how the value of an individual is tied to economic productivity. The buffalo, which provides milk for the family, is treated as the most important member because her ability to generate income sustains the family. As Balram observes, “If she [gives] enough milk, ...there [may] be a little more money at the end of the day” (Adiga, 2008, p. 20).

Balram’s inability to pursue his education stems from the financial limitations of his family, who cannot afford his schooling and rely on every member to contribute to the household income. His weak economic foundation confines him to learning through the experiences and conversations of others at the tea stalls where he works. In contrast, Vijay, born into a low-caste pig-herding family, gains respect in his village, Laxmangarh, after securing a job as a bus conductor. The

uniform he wears becomes a symbol of status in the village. As Vijay progresses into politics and rises as a prominent leader, his respect within the community grows, reinforcing the link between a strong economic base and societal recognition. When he reaches the cabinet, the landlord, the Stork, opens the door of car for him. Balram notes, “a landlord [is] bowing before a pig-herd’s son” (Adiga, 2008, p. 103)!

After attaining wealth, Balram becomes consumed by selfishness and a lack of humanity, mirroring the behavior of his former master, Mr. Ashok. He becomes fixated on material prosperity, disregarding the well-being of his workers, and views them merely as tools to achieve his goals, discarding them once their utility is fulfilled. Balram’s wealth also gives him the power to control various societal institutions, as he stresses, “The moment you show them cash, everyone knows your language” (Adiga, 2008, p. 300). This statement highlights the centrality of money in a society shaped by capitalist values, where cash becomes the dominant force that drives all interactions and institutions. It highlights the Marxist notion that in capitalist culture, relationships are governed by material gain rather than emotional bonds, reinforcing the argument of Marx (1848) and Lukacs (1971) that the economy underpins social relations and cultural structures.

The weak economic foundation of the first driver forces him to compromise his values and engage in actions that are socially unacceptable. To secure employment, he conceals his true religious identity, pretending to be a Hindu, as his economic survival depends on it. He succeeds in getting a job at Stork’s house under this false pretense. However, when Balram, the protagonist, un masks the truth about his religious identity, the driver is dismissed from his position. This situation demonstrates how his economic needs ultimately dictate his religious identity, illustrating the influence of material survival on personal beliefs and choices.

Balram faces repeated humiliation throughout his life due to his weak economic position. Everything about Balram from his education to his religion, from his profession to his life style, from his ideology to his actions, is decided by his economic status. When he initially attempts to become a driver, he is belittled, told that he lacks the necessary “energy and fire” to succeed. As he moves to Delhi to work for Ashok, he is further insulted by other drivers from his own social class. He is made to serve his masters in demeaning ways, such as wiping and massaging their feet. The situation worsens when Pinky Madam accidentally kills a child in a hit-and-run, and Balram is coerced into signing a false statement taking the blame, absolving Ashok and Pinky of any responsibility. When Balram acquires wealth, he demonstrates compassion by offering compensation to the parents of a boy killed by his driver. This act creates a stark contrast, highlighting the societal reality that individuals with power, especially economic power, can often evade consequences. As Balram observes: “A man on bicycle getting killed—the police do not have to register the case. A man on a motorbike getting killed—they would have to register that. A man in a car getting killed—they would have thrown me in the jail” (Adiga, 2008, p. 309). This reflection highlights the differential treatment based on social and economic status within the capitalist system.

Lukacs (1971) critiques the role of dominant ideology in capitalist societies, arguing that it serves the interests of the ruling class. He asserts that the ideology propagated by capitalists fosters an illusion of autonomy for workers, while in truth, they remain subject to both physical control and ideological domination. This ideological hegemony obscures the worker’s exploitation, preserving power dynamics that benefit the capitalist class. Balram reflects, a small group of individuals in the country have conditioned the remaining 99 percent—equally strong, talented, and intelligent—to live in continuous subjugation. This subjugation is so profound that even when the opportunity for freedom is offered, “you can put the key of his emancipation in a man’s hand and he will throw it back at you with a curse” (Adiga, 2008, p. 176). This statement highlights the deep-rooted nature of the subjugation imposed on the working class, making it difficult for them to recognize or act upon their potential for liberation.

Conclusion

Findings of the paper demonstrate that *The White Tiger* offers a powerful critique of economic hegemony and social disintegration within capitalist culture, aligning with Marxist theory. The novel portrays the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat through the character of Balram, whose journey from servitude to entrepreneurial success exposes the exploitation, alienation, and commodification of human relations under capitalism. Adiga (2008) highlights how capitalism manipulates ideological structures to justify inequality, with the ruling class maintaining power through economic dominance. The capitalist system erodes traditional values, replacing them with materialistic pursuits and moral decay. Balram's transformation from a submissive servant to a ruthless entrepreneur reflects the corrupting influence of capitalist ideology.

References

- Adiga, A. (2008). *The White Tiger*. India: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Afzal, M., Arshad, I., Mukhtar, Z., & Moazzama, L. (2024). Disintegration of indigenous values under capitalist culture: A comparative Marxist study of *The Murder of Aziz Khan* and *The White Tiger*. *Jahan-e-Tahqeeq*, 7(3), 770-783.
- Afzal, M., Yasmin, S., & Usman, M. (2024). Impacts of economy on social fabric: A Marxist study of Zulfikar Ghose's *The Murder of Aziz Khan*. *Jahan-e-Tahqeeq*, 7(2), 875-888.
- Bottomore, T. (1983). *A dictionary of Marxist thought* (2nded.). Oxford & Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Choudhry, M. A. (2014). Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* as a re-inscription of modern India. *International Journal of Language and Literature*, 2(3), 149-160.
- Din, G. M. U., Yasmin, S., & Ahmed, S. (2024). Economic determinism and class struggle: A marxist critique of Chetan Bhagat's *Revolution 2020*. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)*, 7(4), 318-330.
- Lukacs, G. (1971). *History and class consciousness*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Marx, K. (1844). *The Alienation of Labor from Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. (Ed. David H. Richter. 3rd ed). Boston: Sega Publications.
- Marx, K. (1963). *Theories of surplus value part I*. Emile Bums (Trans.). Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Marx, K. (1967). *Capital* (vol. 1). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Marx, K. (1968). *Manifesto of the communist party* (6th ed.). Germany: Progress Publishers.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). *The Communist Manifesto*. London: Penguin.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1998). *The German ideology*. New York: Prometheus Books.
- Narasiman, R. R., & Chawdhry, V. S. (2013). Balram's quest for freedom in Adiga's *The White Tiger*. *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, 4(5), 1-10.
- Sebastian, A. J. (2009). Poor-rich divide in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 1(2), 229-245
- Sheoran, B. (2013). An odyssey from autocracy to outcry: A study of Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, 1(4), 171-176.
- Sindhu, V. (2013). *The White Tiger*: challenges of urbanization. *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, 4(6), 329-335.
- Singh, K. (2009). Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*: The voice of the underclass- A postcolonial Dialectics. *Journal of Literature, Culture and Media Studies* 1(2)78-81
- Yadav, R.B. (2011). Wagging tales of religion in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. *Lapis Lazuli – An International Literary Journal*, 1(1), 1-12.