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Inner Turmoil, Outer Worlds: Psychological Realism in Aravind Adiga's Novels

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga's novels offer a riveting portrayal of the fragmented human mind within the context of modern Indian society. The interplay of psychological realism, narrative strategy, and symbolism in his work is explored here in the context of representations of trauma, archetypes, and mental health. Through an examination of primary works like *The White Tiger*, *Amnesty*, and *Last Man in Tower*, the research calls attention to how Adiga uses stream of consciousness and symbolic imagery to make the internal worlds of characters living through issues of moral complexity, social injustice, and existential ambiguity. This paper also places Adiga's fiction at the crossroads of Eastern and Western literary traditions, tracing how his hybrid strategy synthesizes psychoanalytic and Jungian theory with culturally situated modes of narrative. Psychological struggles of characters are not individual but are mediated through social, economic, and political forces that mirror wider structural inequalities. With this in mind, Adiga's fiction shows the ability of literature to shed light on the intricate interplay between outside reality and inner experience. Ultimately, this paper focuses on psychological realism, which offers a richly textured method of understanding mental illness, trauma, and the archetypal aspects of human experience in postcolonial India.

Keywords

Modern India, Psychological Struggle, Symbolism, Experience, Reality

Introduction

Aravind Adiga, the 2008 Man Booker Prize winner for *The White Tiger*, is best known as one of the most important Indian English novelists of the present time. Adiga's work is characterized by a keen confrontation of the realities of postcolonial India, specifically the all-pervasive systems of class, migration, inequality, and identity. Adiga's works bring to the center stage the lives of the marginalized, highlighting the moral issues, social discontent, and existential fears that mark the quest for survival and social ascension in contemporary India. With his descriptions of city and countryside, Adiga examines the socio-political forces that determine human actions, rendering his work an abundant field for research into the interactions of social environment and inner life.

One of the most important aspects of Adiga's work, through which it can be analyzed, is psychological realism, a literary style aiming to illustrate the inner thoughts and workings of the human psyche with delicacy and truth. Psychological realism has also been theorized in Western literature by authors and critics such as Henry James, who focused on consciousness and perception, and psychologists such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, whose theories on uncon-

conscious drives and archetypes shed light on the complexity of thought and behavior. Simultaneously, Eastern philosophical currents—such as models of selfhood in The Bhagavad Gita and Buddhist models of suffering—present culturally mediated models of understanding consciousness and affective experience. Adiga's novels, based at this meeting place of traditions, reflect a hybrid narrative orientation that mediates between Western and Eastern models of representing the psyche.

Adiga uses narrative strategies like stream of consciousness and symbolism to represent the inner life of his characters, providing readers with intimate access to their fears, desires, and moral struggles. Dominating his work are issues of trauma, archetypes, and mental health, which reveal individual and collective struggles. Characters face internal struggles alongside societal forces, showing how personal psychological states are inextricably linked with the wider structural and cultural forces that engulf them. This research attempts to answer the research question: How does Aravind Adiga represent the psyche under social, political, and existential pressures? It contends that through the interaction of narrative technique and psychological realism, Adiga's novels express the complex interaction of inner consciousness and outer reality. His fiction not only charts the contours of personal mental spaces but also reveals the wider social conditions that shape and sometimes break the human mind.

Research Gap

As far as now, the novels of Aravind Adiga are categorised mainly under the darkness of India, Corruption, Poverty, Inequality, Identity Crisis. Many other existing studies focused on the societal realities in India. There arises a need to analyse the psychological struggles of his characters – alienation, moral conflict, fear of survival, which have very less concentration in Adiga's fiction. This research tries to fill the gap by examining how the inner turmoil of Adiga's characters reflects the real societal struggles in contemporary India.

Objectives

To examine the portrayal of societal reality and moral conflicts in the select novels of Aravind Adiga

To explore the psychological realism through the inner experiences of the characters

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative literary analysis method. This study uses the theoretical

perspective of psychological realism to analyse the character's inner conflicts and conscience.

Review of Literature

Many studies on Aravind Adiga's novels focused on his portrayal of contemporary India, concentrating on corruption, poverty, and globalization. Recent studies on *The White Tiger* were about the marginalisation, division of the upper class and lower class, and some studies carry the story of the transformation of the protagonist's self-actualisation. Some research on *Last Man in Tower* shows the representation of realistic urban life, modernisation, rather than depicting morality and survival. Recent trends in Adiga's novels are the narrative techniques by exploring the themes of identity and visibility. Many of the studies provide insights into social injustice and political problems, rather than providing psychological realism, struggle for survival, and moral conflict, which need much exploration.

Discussion

One of the most distinctive aspects of Aravind Adiga's fiction is his subtle employment of stream of consciousness, a literary technique that gives readers direct access to a character's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions in real time. This technique conveys the fragmented and frequently unstable nature of human consciousness, allowing Adiga to render psychological realism with stunning subtlety. Through interior monologues and broken narration, the reader is invited into the subjectivity of characters who confront social, moral, and existential issues, often in situations of strong personal and social constraint.

In *The White Tiger*, Balram Halwai's epistolary confessions to the Chinese Premier serve as a quintessential example of stream of consciousness in postcolonial Indian literature. The letters oscillate between immediate perceptions, memories, and reflections, creating a sense of a mind in constant motion and tension. Balram's narrative is highly personal yet deeply implicated in larger social structures, blending his inner anxieties, ethical rationalizations, and acute observations of societal inequities. "I stay up the whole night, Your Excellency. And there's no one else in this 150-square-foot office of mine. Just me and a chandelier above me, although the chandelier has a personality of its own" (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 7). The broken quality of his narration reflects his psychic instability and ethical ambiguity, highlighting the tension between individual consciousness and social-

political forces. Likewise, in *Amnesty*, Adiga uses a psychologically oriented interior voice to present Danny's anxiety-ridden thought patterns as he goes about his life as an unauthorized worker. Danny's stream-of-consciousness shows a constant switching between the threat, the aspiration, and the moral introspection, making the reader feel the tension and insecurity inherent in his tenuous life. The method not only freezes his emotional turmoil but also highlights the structural violence and bureaucratic forces informing his inner world. By prioritizing the subjective experience, Adiga turns social commentary into a personal psychological inquiry, demonstrating the intersection of inner disorder and outer reality.

Adiga's narrative techniques also find resonance in Eastern modes of storytelling, especially in their cyclical and layered approaches to consciousness. In mythic and classical Indian cultural contexts, stories tend to represent consciousness as a process that is fluid and interconnected, with memory, reflection, and perception conflating in a nonlinear fashion. This can be seen in Adiga's ability to intermingle past and present, individual and social, thought and action, developing a narrative rhythm that is both Western psychological realism and Eastern philosophical conceptions of selfhood. In bringing these together, he expresses the multiplicity and complexity of the human mind, positioning his characters' inner lives within a larger cultural and existential context. Through stream of consciousness, disjointed narration, and unreliable points of view, Adiga not only makes access to the psychological depth of his characters possible but also critically intersects the social forces that shape their minds and choices. The method highlights the interconnectedness of inner and outer worlds, placing the reader in a position to comprehend the psyche as both internally lived and socially constructed. Thus, Adiga's fiction is an example of the power of narrative structure to produce psychological realism that is ethically and socially informative.

Symbolism plays a central role in Aravind Adiga's novels, serving as a conduit through which characters' inner turmoil and psychological struggles are externalized and made tangible for readers. In *The White Tiger*, the titular white tiger functions as a powerful archetype, representing Balram Halwai's uniqueness, rebellion, and moral awakening. *The White Tiger* represents a symbolic animal of scarcity and trouble, reflecting Balram's fragmented mind and his resistance to the op-

pressive socio-economic hierarchies of Indian society. The repeated symbols of roosters and dogs tend to reflect vulnerability, survival drive, and domination vs submission tension, covertly inscribing class and power relations in the narrative.

Adiga's employment of spatial imagery also intensifies psychological and existential unease. Both the city and the countryside are not just geographical locations but representations of the characters' minds. The suffocating metropolis, complete with crowded streets and corporate skyscrapers, is synonymous with institutionalized corruption, desolation, and moral sell-out, while rural areas tend to offer memory, nostalgia, and moral rightness. "Too many people come into the city, it's a fact, Mrs Puri said, 'Everyone wants to suck on our...'" (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower* 39). Things like closed rooms, skyscraper apartments, and the symbolic tower of *Last Man in Tower* are symbolic boundaries that indicate characters' loneliness, ethical problems, and the weight of social and personal responsibility.

From a Jungian point of view, these symbols could be interpreted as expressions of the collective unconscious. Archetypes like the hero (Balram), the afflicted moralist (Masterji in *Last Man in Tower*), and the exile (Danny in *Amnesty*) are repeated throughout Adiga's work, expressing general patterns of psychological experience. Symbolism, then, serves as a passage between the personal psyche and larger cultural myths, demonstrating how internal conflicts are informed by social and historical forces. By projecting symbolism and archetypal imagery onto his characters, Adiga externalizes their inner conflicts, enabling readers to apprehend their fears, moral issues, and aspirations in tangible forms. This makes the novels' psychological realism all the more telling, connecting individual consciousness with socio-cultural and existential realities. Using symbols-both natural and man-made, literal and figurative-Adiga lends form to the intangible processes of thought and feeling, producing a text that is multidimensional in its appeal to Eastern and Western narrative traditions.

Aravind Adiga's fiction tends to bring forward the psychological consequences of social, political, and existential pressures, laying bare how trauma and mental health issues are individually and structurally created. His characters tend to live in zones of economic, cultural, and moral instability, which create deep

inner turmoil and anxiety. For Danny in *Amnesty*, his life as an illegal migrant worker in Australia subjects him to chronic fear of deportation, social isolation, and legal vulnerability. "After four years, he was still learning things, still making notes to himself: Never walk and eat in daylight. They see you" (Adiga, *Amnesty* 4). These states appear as increased anxiety, paranoia, and moral ambivalence, showing how trauma is not only an individual event but also an adjustment to systemic oppression. Danny's interior monologues grant readers direct access to these states of mind, showing how chronic stress works its way into cognition, decision-making, and identity formation.

Similarly, in *The White Tiger*, Balram Halwai's trajectory from a low-caste villager to a successful entrepreneur is punctuated by intense psychological strain. "Are you from a top caste or bottom caste, boy?" (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 64). The oppression of the caste system, exposure to violence, and moral compromises required for social mobility produce internalized guilt, fear, and ethical conflict, reflecting the interplay between structural injustice and individual mental states. His crimes of transgression, such as murder, are situated within a narrative that both excuses and questions the psychological toll of survival in an unjust society. Here, Adiga represents trauma as an intersection of exterior oppression and interior restlessness, illustrating how social hierarchies and destitution can lead to moral and psychological crises.

Adiga's representation of mental illness reaches beyond individual characters to examine archetypal patterns of distress, underscoring the universality and continuity of human experience. Invoking Jungian theory, characters' neuroses and anxieties are to be understood as manifestations of the collective unconscious, with repeated motifs of fear, estrangement, and moral conflict indexing shared psychological themes. In addition, Adiga's narrative technique—broken, reflexive, and psychically responsive—is itself a reflection of the experience of trauma, in which linearity, coherence, and affect regulation break down. The novels also take up Eastern philosophical views of suffering and the self, presenting mental health as inextricable from ethical and social duty. The distress of characters is typically couched in terms of moral obligation, social isolation, and existential confusion, implying that the psyche cannot be reduced to any explanation independent of societal and cultural

forces. By locating psychological trauma in a sociological context, Adiga emphasizes the interdependence of personal and structural determinants of mental health.

Overall, Adiga's fiction demonstrates trauma and mental illness as rich, layered events influenced by both environmental forces and internal reactions. "He told her nothing about the bump on his left forearm. One thing would lead to another, and she would find out in the end that her man was just an illegal. The shame" (Adiga *Amnesty* 130). His thoughtful representation of anxiety, moral struggle, and emotional vulnerability is a hallmark of psychological realism, enabling readers to understand the multifaceted interaction between social injustice and personal psyche, and rendering his novels vital texts for an understanding of the mental and moral aspects of modern Indian existence.

Aravind Adiga's fiction is a representation of a hybrid narrative style that combines aspects of Western psychological realism with Eastern literary and philosophical traditions. Western theories of narrative, especially those based on Freud and Jung, focus on the internal functioning of the unconscious, the power of archetypes, and the pervasive effect of suppressed desires on behavior. Freud's psychoanalytic theory sheds light on the influence of early life experiences, socialization, and moral dilemmas on figures such as Balram Halwai in *The White Tiger*, whose repressed anger and need for independence drive his moral deviations. "I was looking for the key for years But the door was open" (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 267). In the same vein, Jungian archetypes and collective unconsciousness offer a model for comprehending repeating motifs, symbols, and behavioral patterns within Adiga's novels, such as the conflicted moralist (Masterji), the solitary exile (Danny), and the gifted agitator (Balram). These Western models enable a rich reading of psychological nuance and moral complexity, positioning Adiga's characters within timeless schemata of human thought and feeling.

Simultaneously, Adiga's fiction carries the echoes of Eastern philosophies of self and consciousness that typically think of the mind and self in relational and circular terms. Indian philosophical literature, like the Bhagavad Gita, contextualizes human life as a balance between duty, desire, and conscience, whereas Buddhist thought stresses suffering, impermanence, and detachment. In *Amnesty*, Danny's recurring worry, moral thoughts, and estrange-

ment can be read in these terms: his agony is not merely psychological but ethical and existential too, representing the conflict between self-survival and social duty. "You nearly made that call. And once you make the call, you lose everything" (Adiga, *Amnesty* 234). Likewise, Balram's ethical and psychological dilemma can be read as a battle between karmic consciousness and brutal socio-economic realities in postcolonial India. In contrast to exclusively Western models, Eastern models tend to incorporate the social, ethical, and religious aspects of the psyche, providing a comprehensive understanding of consciousness that includes both internal experience and external situation.

Adiga's hybrid approach, therefore, situates psychological realism at the intersection of cultural, ethical, and existential frameworks. By combining Western techniques such as interior monologue, stream of consciousness, and archetypal analysis with Eastern notions of selfhood, cyclicity, and relational identity, he portrays characters whose inner lives are deeply enmeshed with social, political, and cultural forces. Spaces, symbols, and repeated motifs become vehicles through which the psyche is given a voice, enabling readers to see the interconnectedness of inner consciousness and outward reality. Finally, the synthesis of Eastern and Western viewpoints enhances Adiga's psychological realism by allowing a sophisticated comprehension of how trauma, moral conflict, and social pressures contribute to human consciousness. Inner struggles in his characters are at once individual and culturally contextual, combining common patterns of psychological experience with culturally specific concepts of duty, suffering, and identity. This blend of narrative style highlights the ability of literature to express the intricate interactions between mind, society, and moral universe, locating Adiga in the league of serious writers of global literature.

Conclusion

Aravind Adiga's novels provide a rich exploration of the psychological aspects of human experience in the socio-political and cultural realities of modern India. Using the tensions between stream of consciousness, symbolism, and archetypal imagery, his fiction brings to life the inner worlds of characters who are highly embedded in frameworks of class, migration, and inequality. The breakdown of Balram in *The White Tiger*, Danny in *Amnesty*, and Masterji in *Last Man in Tower* illustrates how Adiga characterizes the psychologi-

cal effect of social repression, moral complexity, and existential fear, underscoring the complex relationships between outward pressures and inward responses.

Adiga's application of psychological realism bridges Western and Eastern narrative and philosophical traditions. Western theories, such as Freudian and Jungian ideas, shed light on his characters' unconscious drives, ethical conflict, and archetypal patterns, whereas Eastern views place center stage the relational, cyclical, and ethical aspects of selfhood. Through synthesizing these frames, Adiga devises a hybrid narrative mode that places trauma, anxiety, and moral conflict within a socially and culturally situated context but addresses universal patterns of human awareness. The research highlights how Adiga outsources interior conflict in symbolic and spatial terms, providing a multi-faceted description of states of mind that are simultaneously personal and socially constructed. His writing uncovers the interdependence of society and psyche, presenting the evidence that psychological experiences at the level of the individual cannot be comprehensively understood in isolation from ethical, cultural, and structural contexts.

In the end, Adiga's novels embody the strength of literature to speak to the messy interaction of mind, society, and morality, locating him as an important voice in Indian and world literature today. His writing not only illuminates the mental and emotional landscapes of marginalized people but also promotes a greater understanding of the larger human and social circumstances that shape awareness, moral decisions, and psychological health.

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