

# Social Realism and Class Conflict in the Works of Aravind Adiga and Rohinton Mistry.

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**Abstract-** The present study explores the representation of socialism and social realism in the selected works of Aravind Adiga and Rohinton Mistry. Socialism, as a socio-economic ideology, advocates equality, collective welfare, and the reduction of class divisions; however, its practical implementation in India has often revealed contradictions marked by poverty, corruption, exploitation, and social inequality. Contemporary Indian English literature reflects these realities by portraying the struggles of marginalized communities and critiquing the failures of political and economic systems. The study examines how Adiga and Mistry depict the harsh realities of Indian society through themes such as class oppression, poverty, labor exploitation, corruption, identity crisis, and social injustice. Aravind Adiga's novels, particularly *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower*, expose the inequalities of post-liberalization India where capitalist ambitions overshadow socialist ideals. His narratives present a satirical and confrontational critique of economic disparity, moral decay, and institutional corruption. In contrast, Rohinton Mistry's works, including *A Fine Balance* and *Such a Long Journey*, offer a compassionate and humanistic portrayal of ordinary individuals struggling against political oppression, social discrimination, and economic hardships. The research further compares the narrative techniques, ideological perspectives, and social concerns reflected in the writings of both authors. While Adiga emphasizes rebellion, survival, and individual ambition within a corrupt socio-economic structure, Mistry focuses on resilience, human dignity, empathy, and collective suffering. Despite their differing approaches, both writers critically examine the failures of governance and the widening gap between the privileged and marginalized sections of society. The study concludes that the works of Adiga and Mistry serve as powerful critiques of socio-political realities in contemporary India. Their fiction not only reflects the complexities of socialism and capitalism but also highlights the role of literature as a medium for social awareness, resistance, and the representation of marginalized voices.

**Keywords:** Socialism, Social Realism, Class Struggle, Poverty, Exploitation Marginalization.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Socialism, as a socio-economic ideology, emphasizes collective ownership, equitable distribution of resources, and the reduction of class hierarchies. In literary discourse, socialism often manifests through themes such as poverty, exploitation, labor struggles, systemic injustice, and resistance against oppressive power structures. Writers employing a socialist lens tend to focus on marginalized communities and expose the failures of political institutions in achieving social equality. Post-independence India witnessed the coexistence of socialist ideals alongside capitalist aspirations. While socialism promised equality, welfare, and collective progress, its implementation often revealed contradictions marked by corruption, bureaucracy, and persistent class divisions. Indian novelists have actively engaged with these contradictions, portraying the tension between ideological promises and social realities. In this context, the works of Aravind Adiga and Rohinton Mistry offer compelling narratives that interrogate the socialist framework and its impact on ordinary lives.

Socialism, as a socio-economic ideology, emphasizes collective ownership, equitable distribution of resources, and the reduction of class hierarchies. In literary discourse, socialism often manifests through themes such as poverty, exploitation, labor struggles, systemic injustice, and resistance against oppressive power structures. Writers employing a socialist lens tend to focus on marginalized communities and expose the failures of political institutions in achieving social equality. Indian English literature reflects socialism not merely as a political doctrine but as a lived experience shaped by historical, cultural, and economic forces. The literary representation of socialism thus becomes a critique of both ideology and governance, highlighting how policies intended for social upliftment frequently fail at the grassroots level. Aravind Adiga emerges as a sharp critic of post-liberalization India, exposing the stark divide between the privileged elite and the impoverished masses. His novels, particularly *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower*, depict a society where socialist ideals are overshadowed by ruthless capitalism, political corruption, and moral decay. Adiga portrays a system that claims to work for the welfare of all but, in reality,

perpetuates exploitation and inequality. Adiga's narrative voice is often satirical and confrontational, challenging the myth of India's economic success by revealing the darkness beneath its glittering surface. His treatment of socialism highlights its institutional failure, suggesting that the ideology has been hollowed out by greed, bureaucratic inertia, and political opportunism.

Socialism, as both a social ideology and a literary concept, emerges from a critical response to inequality, exploitation, and class oppression produced by capitalist systems. Socially, socialism advocates collective ownership of the means of production, equitable distribution of resources, and the prioritization of social welfare over individual profit. It seeks to dismantle class hierarchies and promote justice, solidarity, and human dignity, especially for marginalized and working-class populations. Thinkers such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and later socialist reformers provided the theoretical foundation by highlighting the structural injustices embedded in economic and social institutions. In literature, socialism functions not merely as a political doctrine but as a powerful interpretive lens through which writers explore class struggle, poverty, labor exploitation, and social alienation. Literary texts influenced by socialist thought often foreground the lived experiences of the underprivileged, exposing the moral failures of unequal societies. Through realism, satire, allegory, and social critique, authors depict the tensions between wealth and poverty, power and powerlessness, individual ambition and collective responsibility. Literature thus becomes a medium of resistance, giving voice to those silenced by dominant socio-economic structures.

As a literary concept, socialism also encourages writers to question hegemonic narratives and challenge bourgeois values. It reshapes character construction, plot development, and thematic concerns by emphasizing social context over individual destiny. Whether explicitly ideological or subtly embedded, socialist ideas in literature aim to raise social consciousness and inspire reform. Consequently, socialism bridges the social and the literary, transforming creative expression into a tool for critique, awareness, and potential social change.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To analyze the concept of socialism as depicted in the selected works of Aravind Adiga and Rohinton Mistry.
2. To examine the socio-economic conditions and class structures represented in their novels.
3. To compare the narrative techniques and ideological perspectives employed by both authors.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness and limitations of socialist ideology as reflected in their literary works.
5. To understand the role of literature in critiquing socio-political systems in India.

## III. ARAVIND ADIGA AND THE CRITIQUE OF CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Aravind Adiga has emerged as one of the most incisive literary voices critiquing contemporary India in the post-liberalization era. Through his fiction, Adiga interrogates the contradictions of a rapidly modernizing nation marked by spectacular economic growth on one hand and deep-rooted social, economic, and moral inequalities on the other. His works expose the fault lines of Indian society class divisions, corruption, exploitation, erosion of ethical values, and the persistence of feudal mindsets often challenging the celebratory narratives of "Shining India."

Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* (2008), which won the Man Booker Prize, is a powerful indictment of India's socio-economic structure. By narrating the rise of Balram Halwai from rural poverty to urban entrepreneurship, Adiga reveals the brutal realities of class oppression, the failure of democratic institutions, and the illusion of social mobility. The metaphor of the "Rooster Coop" encapsulates the systemic entrapment of the underclass, suggesting that inequality is not accidental but structurally sustained. Adiga's India is one where capitalism thrives by exploiting the poor, and success often demands moral compromise. In subsequent works such as *Last Man in Tower* (2011) and *Selection Day* (2016), Adiga shifts focus to urban spaces and middle-class aspirations. These narratives critique the aggressive real estate culture, the commodification of dreams, and the psychological costs of ambition. Mumbai, in particular, becomes a symbol of contemporary India dynamic yet ruthless,

aspirational yet dehumanizing. Adiga exposes how market forces infiltrate personal relationships, reducing human values to profit and utility.

What distinguishes Adiga's critique is his unapologetically realist tone, often bordering on satire and cynicism. Unlike earlier Indian English writers who emphasized cultural hybridity or postcolonial identity, Adiga foregrounds material conditions and economic injustice. His narrative voice is confrontational, compelling readers especially the privileged to confront uncomfortable truths about complicity, silence, and moral indifference. In essence, Aravind Adiga's fiction serves as a mirror to contemporary India, reflecting both its achievements and its failures. By giving voice to the marginalized and demystifying the rhetoric of progress, Adiga positions himself as a chronicler of the darker realities of modern India. His critique is not merely literary but socio-political, urging readers to rethink notions of development, success, and justice in a deeply unequal society.

#### **IV. ROHINTON MISTRY AND HUMANISTIC SOCIAL REALISM**

Rohinton Mistry stands as one of the most significant contemporary writers whose fiction embodies the spirit of humanistic social realism. His novels and short stories present a deeply compassionate yet unflinching portrayal of human suffering, social injustice, and moral resilience, particularly within the socio-political landscape of postcolonial India. Through an empathetic narrative voice and meticulously realistic detail, Mistry gives voice to marginalized individuals while affirming enduring human values such as dignity, empathy, and hope. Humanistic social realism in Mistry's works is rooted in his commitment to portraying ordinary lives shaped by extraordinary hardships. In *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1995), and *Family Matters* (2002), Mistry focuses on characters drawn from lower and middle-class backgrounds Parsis, Dalits, slum dwellers, and the urban poor whose lives are constrained by political corruption, economic inequality, and social prejudice. Rather than reducing these individuals to mere victims, Mistry humanizes them by exploring their emotional depth, ethical struggles, and capacity for endurance.

A defining feature of Mistry's realism is its historical and political grounding. Events such as the Emergency

(1975–77), forced sterilization campaigns, communal tensions, and bureaucratic oppression form the backdrop of *A Fine Balance*. These realities are not presented abstractly but are experienced intimately through characters like Dina Dalal, Ishvar, Omprakash, and Maneck. By embedding macro-political forces into micro-level human experiences, Mistry exposes the human cost of authoritarian governance and systemic injustice.

At the same time, Mistry's realism is profoundly humanistic. Despite the bleakness of social realities, his fiction resists nihilism. Acts of kindness, friendship, humor, and solidarity persist even in the harshest conditions. The quilting circle in *A Fine Balance*, for instance, becomes a symbolic space of cooperation and shared humanity amid chaos and suffering. Such moments underscore Mistry's belief in the moral strength of individuals and the possibility of compassion within oppressive systems. Narratively, Mistry employs detailed description, linear storytelling, and a balanced emotional tone, hallmarks of realist tradition. His use of memory, irony, and gentle satire further enriches his social critique without diminishing its seriousness. The Parsi community, frequently central in his works, serves as a microcosm through which broader national concerns identity, decline, and survival are explored.

#### **V. SOCIAL ISSUES OF EARLIER TIMES**

The social issues of earlier times such as dowry, unemployment, child labour, discrimination, and caste-based injustices have today been compounded by more alarming problems like gang rape, terrorism, prostitution, gambling, crime, and bribery. Additionally, the hardships faced by people living below the poverty line, coupled with illiteracy and the inability to read or write, continue to be major global concerns. Aravind Adiga powerfully brings these contemporary social issues especially poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment into focus throughout his novels. His characters struggle with identity crises, loneliness, alienation, and a lack of belonging, leading to existential dilemmas vividly portrayed in *"The White Tiger"*. Adiga suggests rehabilitation as a meaningful solution to many of the challenges that threaten societal well-being.

Adiga's writings predominantly revolve around the social realities of the common man. He presents an unflinching portrayal of the suffering and

marginalization endured by the downtrodden, probing into the forces that drive ordinary individuals to commit crimes such as murder or theft, or to drift away from moral paths. His exploration of life is grounded in realism, reflecting the true conditions of common people. An analysis of his character's reveals that they are deeply rooted in reality, with situations that are convincingly authentic rather than supernatural. Many distinguished novelists such as Shashi Deshpande, Rabindranath Tagore, Rohinton Mistry, and Aravind Adiga emphasize social concerns in their literary works. Their writings not only depict stark realities but also expose the undue privileges enjoyed by a select few in contemporary society.

The analysis of Aravind Adiga's and Rohinton Mistry's contributions to contemporary Indian English literature reveals several significant directions for future research and academic practice. It is recommended that scholars undertake more comparative studies of Indian novelists to explore how differing historical and socio-economic contexts shape the literary representation of inequality, identity, and resistance. Future research should also integrate theoretical frameworks from Marxism, post colonialism, and subaltern studies to deepen the understanding of class struggle and caste oppression that underpin both authors' works. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches combining literature with sociology, political science, and urban studies can offer a more comprehensive interpretation of the social realities depicted in these narratives. Including the works of Adiga, Mistry, and similar writers in university curricula would further enhance students' critical engagement with contemporary social issues. Finally, empirical studies linking fictional portrayals of poverty, marginalization, and identity fragmentation with real-world data can strengthen the argument that literature not only reflects society but also influences social consciousness and public discourse.

Aravind Adiga and Rohinton Mistry, two significant voices in contemporary Indian English literature, approach social inequality and identity formation from markedly different ideological and stylistic standpoints, creating contrasting yet complementary portraits of modern India. Adiga's narrative world is shaped by the forces of globalization, neoliberal capitalism, and the aggressive pursuit of upward mobility. His characters often inhabit a brutally competitive environment in which moral boundaries

collapse under the pressure of economic survival. In "The White Tiger", for example, Balram Halwai embodies a radical form of individualism, rejecting traditional structures of caste, loyalty, and morality in his quest for freedom a journey framed through dark humor, biting satire, and stark depictions of corruption. Identity in Adiga's works is thus fragmented, unstable, and constantly negotiated amid social hierarchies that reduce individuals to economic units. Mistry, by contrast, constructs a more compassionate and humanistic literary universe in works such as "A Fine Balance" and "Such a Long Journey", where characters confront systemic oppression not through violent rebellion but through resilience, dignity, and mutual support. His narratives are deeply rooted in historical contexts particularly the Emergency, urban displacement, and ethnic tensions which shape characters' identities through collective suffering rather than self-centered aspiration.

While Adiga exposes the raw brutality of contemporary capitalism, Mistry highlights the emotional and interpersonal consequences of political and social injustice, portraying society as a web of interdependencies rather than a battlefield of individual ambitions. Although both writers critique class disparity, caste discrimination, and institutional corruption aligning them with Marxist and socialist concerns Adiga's tone is confrontational and cynical, whereas Mistry's is empathetic, reflective, and morally anchored. Together, their contrasting approaches enrich the landscape of Indian social realism, offering readers two distinct yet interconnected perspectives on how inequality shapes the psychological, moral, and social identities of individuals in modern India.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The study of socialism and social realism in the works of Aravind Adiga and Rohinton Mistry reveals the deep socio-economic inequalities and structural injustices present in contemporary India. Both writers critically examine the gap between the ideological promises of equality, justice, and welfare and the harsh realities experienced by marginalized communities. Their literary works expose the failures of political institutions, corruption, class divisions, and the exploitative systems that continue to shape modern Indian society. Aravind Adiga's fiction presents a sharp and satirical critique of post-liberalization India, where rapid economic growth and capitalism have

intensified social inequality and moral decline. Through novels such as *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower*, he portrays a society driven by greed, ambition, and survival, where the underprivileged struggle to escape systemic oppression. His narratives emphasize rebellion, individualism, and the breakdown of ethical values within a corrupt socio-economic framework.

In contrast, Rohinton Mistry adopts a more compassionate and humanistic approach in works like *A Fine Balance* and *Such a Long Journey*. His novels focus on ordinary individuals facing political oppression, poverty, displacement, and social discrimination. Mistry highlights the resilience, dignity, and emotional strength of marginalized people while exposing the human cost of authoritarian governance and social injustice. His narratives underline the importance of empathy, solidarity, and human relationships in times of suffering and instability. Although Adiga and Mistry differ in narrative style and ideological expression, both authors effectively employ social realism to critique inequality, exploitation, and institutional failure. Their works demonstrate that literature serves not only as a reflection of society but also as a powerful medium for resistance, awareness, and social criticism. By giving voice to the marginalized and challenging dominant narratives of progress and development, both writers contribute significantly to contemporary Indian English literature

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