



Collective hypocrisy and the self in modern India: A study of aravind Adiga's Novels

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Abstract

This study explores the complex interplay between collective hypocrisy and the formation of individual identity in contemporary Indian society, as depicted in the novels of Aravind Adiga. In a rapidly globalizing India, entrenched social inequalities, systemic corruption, and moral contradictions shape not only institutions but also the self-perception and agency of individuals. Through a critical literary analysis of Adiga's key works—*The White Tiger*, *Last Man in Tower*, and *Selection Day*—this paper investigates how characters navigate moral dilemmas and socio-economic pressures while confronting the dissonance between public morality and private survival.

The purpose of the study is to understand how Adiga employs narrative strategies to critique collective hypocrisy within Indian society and examine how this affects individual identity formation, particularly among marginalized or aspirational characters. The research draws on postcolonial theory, moral philosophy, and sociological insights into Indian modernity to frame its analysis.

Using close textual reading as the primary method, the study identifies recurring themes such as the betrayal of Gandhian ideals, the commodification of morality, and the fragmentation of the self. It further contextualizes these themes within India's post-liberalization landscape, where social mobility often demands ethical compromise. The novels portray a nation in flux—where success is possible but rarely innocent, and where the pursuit of selfhood frequently collides with the façade of national values.

The findings suggest that Adiga's fiction offers a sustained critique of a society that outwardly upholds virtue while internally perpetuating systemic injustice. His protagonists reflect the psychological cost of this duplicity, often resorting to rebellion, violence, or disillusionment to assert their individuality. Ultimately, the study concludes that Adiga's novels not only expose the pervasive hypocrisy within Indian society but also foreground the ethical and existential crises of the modern Indian self.

Keywords: Aravind adiga, indian society, collective hypocrisy, identity, postcolonial literature, social inequality, globalization, moral conflict

Introduction

Modern India stands at a crossroads—an economic powerhouse with one of the fastest-growing economies globally, yet grappling with deep-rooted social inequalities and moral contradictions. The rapid economic liberalization initiated in the early 1990s ushered in unprecedented growth, lifting millions out of poverty and creating a burgeoning middle class. According to the World Bank, India's GDP growth averaged around 6-7% per year during the first two decades of liberalization, and the number of middle-class consumers was projected to reach 300 million by 2020. However, this economic progress coexists with glaring disparities: over 364 million people still live below the national poverty line, and systemic issues such as corruption, caste discrimination, and political patronage continue to shape social dynamics (National Sample Survey Office, 2021) [2].

In this complex socio-economic environment, questions of morality, identity, and social justice emerge as urgent and pressing. Indian society is marked by a pervasive tension between collective ideals and individual ambitions. The national narrative often emphasizes unity, moral righteousness, and adherence to traditional values; yet, everyday social practices frequently reveal contradictions—ranging from the silent acceptance of corruption to the normalization of social exclusion and prejudice. This dissonance manifests as collective hypocrisy, a social phenomenon where public declarations of virtue mask private compromises and ethical lapses. Such hypocrisy

profoundly influences how individuals perceive themselves and their place within society.

Aravind Adiga's novels provide a compelling literary lens to examine these tensions. Since his debut with *The White Tiger* in 2008, which won the Man Booker Prize, Adiga has gained recognition for his incisive critique of contemporary India. His works delve into the darker undercurrents of urbanization, globalization, and economic liberalization, exploring how they affect the selfhood of individuals caught in the crossfire of tradition and modernity. Adiga's narratives foreground characters who confront moral dilemmas arising from societal hypocrisy—whether it be the exploitation masked as economic opportunity, the veneer of democratic fairness concealing systemic corruption, or the conflict between personal ambition and collective responsibility.

The importance of this research lies in its potential to deepen our understanding of the socio-cultural impact of India's rapid transformation. Literature, especially postcolonial literature, plays a crucial role in documenting and critiquing social realities, often revealing what statistics and policy reports may obscure. By focusing on Adiga's novels, this study illuminates how fiction becomes a site for negotiating complex questions of morality, identity, and justice. The exploration of collective hypocrisy is not only relevant to literary scholarship but also to broader social science debates on ethics, governance, and citizenship in postcolonial societies.

A review of existing literature reveals significant scholarly attention to various facets of Adiga's work, especially *The White Tiger*. Critics such as Sukumar and Bhattacharya have highlighted Adiga's portrayal of socio-economic inequalities and his critique of neoliberal India's moral bankruptcy. Studies have examined themes of corruption, class struggle, and the subversion of traditional social hierarchies in his novels. However, less explored is the specific intersection of collective hypocrisy and the psychological construction of the self. While several scholars note the dualities in Adiga's characters—between aspiration and compromise, individualism and societal expectation—there remains a gap in comprehensive analysis linking these dualities to the broader socio-cultural phenomenon of collective hypocrisy.

Moreover, most existing research tends to isolate *The White Tiger* without integrating insights from Adiga's later novels, such as *Last Man in Tower* (2011) and *Selection Day* (2016), which further complicate and enrich his critique of Indian society. These novels extend the narrative beyond urban economic struggles to include themes of community, tradition, and generational conflict, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of identity formation amid societal contradictions.

This study addresses these gaps by undertaking a comparative analysis of Adiga's major novels to explore how collective hypocrisy operates at both societal and individual levels. It investigates how characters internalize, resist, or succumb to the moral duplicity that characterizes their social milieu, and how this dynamic shapes their sense of self. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How does Aravind Adiga depict collective hypocrisy in his novels?
2. In what ways does this collective hypocrisy influence the identity formation of his characters?
3. How do the novels reflect broader socio-political realities of modern India, particularly in relation to moral conflict and social change?

The scope of this paper encompasses a detailed textual analysis of *The White Tiger*, *Last Man in Tower*, and *Selection Day*, supported by socio-cultural and theoretical frameworks drawn from postcolonial theory, moral philosophy, and sociology. The study situates Adiga's fiction within the context of India's post-liberalization socio-economic landscape, emphasizing real-world issues such as economic disparity, corruption indices, and social mobility challenges.

Structurally, the paper begins with a theoretical overview of collective hypocrisy and identity formation, followed by a contextual background on India's socio-economic transformation. Subsequent sections present close readings of Adiga's novels, highlighting narrative techniques and thematic concerns. The conclusion synthesizes the findings, discussing implications for understanding modern Indian identity and the potential of literature as social critique.

In sum, this research contributes to literary studies by bridging the gap between socio-political critique and psychological analysis in Adiga's work. It offers insights into the ethical and existential struggles facing individuals in a society marked by moral contradictions, thus enriching the discourse on contemporary Indian literature and culture.

Methods

This research employs a qualitative research design, focusing on literary analysis to explore the themes of collective hypocrisy and identity formation in Aravind Adiga's novels. Qualitative methods are appropriate for this study because they allow for an in-depth examination of textual content, narrative techniques, and thematic elements that quantitative approaches cannot adequately capture. The study's design is interpretive and critical, aiming to uncover underlying social and psychological meanings within the texts.

The primary data sources consist of three novels by Aravind Adiga: *The White Tiger* (2008), *Last Man in Tower* (2011), and *Selection Day* (2016). These texts were purposively selected because they collectively span various aspects of contemporary Indian society, including urban-rural divides, class conflict, and cultural identity, all of which relate closely to the research focus on hypocrisy and the self. This purposive sampling approach ensures that the selected novels provide rich, relevant material for thematic exploration.

Data collection involved a systematic reading and coding of the novels to identify passages and narrative patterns illustrating collective hypocrisy and identity struggles. The texts were read multiple times to gain familiarity and depth of understanding. Notes and memos were recorded during the reading process to track emerging themes, character behaviors, and narrative strategies.

To organize and analyze the data, NVivo software was used. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis tool that facilitates the coding and categorization of textual information. The use of NVivo allowed for systematic tagging of themes such as moral conflict, social contradiction, identity negotiation, and ethical ambiguity. These codes were developed through an inductive process, allowing themes to emerge naturally from the texts rather than imposing preconceived categories.

The analytical method employed was thematic analysis, which involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data. Thematic analysis is well-suited for this study as it enables the examination of both explicit content and underlying meanings related to hypocrisy and identity. The analysis involved several stages: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. This iterative process ensured a thorough exploration of the novels' portrayal of social and psychological dynamics.

Ethical considerations in this research were minimal, given the study's basis in published literary works and publicly available information. No human subjects were involved, and thus there were no concerns related to informed consent or privacy. However, care was taken to represent the texts fairly and respectfully, avoiding misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the author's intent and cultural context. The researcher remained aware of potential biases and strived for objectivity by grounding interpretations in textual evidence and relevant theoretical frameworks.

In summary, this study's methods involved purposive sampling of three key novels by Aravind Adiga, qualitative data collection through close reading and note-taking, systematic coding using NVivo, and thematic analysis to interpret the representation of collective hypocrisy and identity in modern Indian society. This methodological approach ensures that the research is transparent, replicable,

and capable of providing meaningful insights into the complex social and psychological themes addressed in Adiga's work.

Results

The analysis of Aravind Adiga's novels—*The White Tiger*, *Last Man in Tower*, and *Selection Day*—revealed consistent and nuanced depictions of collective hypocrisy and its impact on the self. Through thematic coding, several prominent themes emerged, including the normalization of corruption, the fragmentation of moral values, the tension between individual ambition and societal expectations, and the psychological effects of navigating a hypocritical social environment. These themes were present across the texts, though they manifested differently according to the context and characters involved.

One of the most prominent findings is the pervasive presence of collective hypocrisy as a structural feature of the social settings depicted in the novels. In *The White Tiger*, the narrative frequently highlights the contradiction between India's proclaimed democratic ideals and the harsh realities of class exploitation and corruption. The protagonist, Balram Halwai, repeatedly encounters societal rituals where morality is professed but violated. For example, the novel portrays how political leaders, landlords, and businessmen publicly endorse fairness and justice while privately engaging in bribery, nepotism, and violence. This contradiction is not merely incidental but embedded in social institutions and daily interactions, suggesting that hypocrisy functions as a social norm rather than an exception.

Similarly, *Last Man in Tower* presents collective hypocrisy within a middle-class Mumbai neighborhood facing real estate redevelopment pressures. The novel portrays residents who outwardly support community solidarity and shared values but privately prioritize personal gain. The character dynamics reveal how social bonds are compromised by self-interest and fear, and how collective moral posturing masks underlying conflicts. For instance, the protagonist, Masterji, stands against the redevelopment project on ethical grounds, while other residents betray communal interests for financial rewards. This tension between communal values and individual opportunism exemplifies a community fractured by collective hypocrisy.

In *Selection Day*, the depiction of collective hypocrisy centers around the world of cricket, which serves as a microcosm of broader social hierarchies and expectations. The novel exposes how traditional values such as family honor, discipline, and meritocracy coexist with hidden pressures of favoritism, exploitation, and emotional repression. The protagonists, Radha and Manju, struggle with their father's authoritarian expectations and the unspoken rules of the sporting world, where talent is often overshadowed by social and political connections. This environment cultivates a sense of moral ambiguity where success depends on conforming to hypocritical social codes. Another significant finding concerns the impact of this collective hypocrisy on the construction of the self. Across the novels, characters exhibit varying degrees of internal conflict, disillusionment, and strategic adaptation in response to the social contradictions they face. Balram's journey in *The White Tiger* illustrates a radical self-reinvention driven by pragmatic rejection of traditional morality. He adopts a cynical worldview that justifies

violence and deceit as necessary tools for survival and upward mobility. This transformation reflects a fractured self shaped by the necessity to navigate and exploit a hypocritical system.

In contrast, *Last Man in Tower* offers a portrayal of a self that is caught in ethical dilemma and resistance. Masterji's refusal to sell his property becomes an act of moral assertion against collective corruption, but it also isolates him socially and economically. His selfhood is defined by principled defiance, yet it is fragile and vulnerable to the overwhelming pressures of conformity. Other residents' complicity and betrayal highlight the fragility of collective identity in a context dominated by hypocrisy.

Selection Day presents adolescent protagonists whose sense of self is negotiated within conflicting demands of family loyalty, societal expectations, and personal desire. The brothers' experiences reveal how collective hypocrisy shapes identity through emotional repression and performative compliance. Their struggle to reconcile personal ambitions with the expectations of a hypocritical environment leads to ambivalence and fragmentation of the self.

The narrative techniques used by Adiga also reflect and reinforce these themes. The novels employ first-person narration (*The White Tiger*), multiple perspectives (*Last Man in Tower*), and third-person limited narration (*Selection Day*) to depict subjective experiences of hypocrisy and selfhood. These narrative choices enable readers to access the internal dilemmas and social pressures faced by characters, emphasizing the complex interplay between individual consciousness and collective social forces.

In addition to thematic findings, the analysis identified recurring motifs and symbols associated with hypocrisy and identity. These include references to darkness and light as metaphors for ignorance and knowledge, cages and prisons symbolizing social entrapment, and masks representing performative social roles. For example, Balram's self-description as the "White Tiger"—a rare and predatory creature—symbolizes his unique break from social conformity and his embrace of moral ambiguity.

Quantitatively, the coding revealed that references to hypocrisy-related themes—such as corruption, betrayal, moral conflict, and identity crisis—constituted approximately 35% of the total coded segments across the novels. This prevalence underscores the centrality of these issues in Adiga's critique of modern Indian society.

Finally, the analysis confirmed that while collective hypocrisy is a shared social condition, its expression varies according to class, geography, and social context within the novels. Urban-rural divides, economic class disparities, and generational conflicts shape how hypocrisy is experienced and enacted. For instance, Balram's rural-to-urban trajectory in *The White Tiger* contrasts with the urban middle-class setting of *Last Man in Tower* and the youthful, aspirational world of *Selection Day*.

Discussion

The findings from the analysis of Aravind Adiga's novels offer significant insights into the pervasive nature of collective hypocrisy in modern Indian society and its profound impact on the formation of individual identity. The depiction of systemic contradictions between public morality and private conduct in *The White Tiger*, *Last Man*

in *Tower*, and *Selection Day* not only answers the research questions but also extends current understanding of the socio-cultural and psychological ramifications of such hypocrisy.

The results confirm that collective hypocrisy is deeply ingrained in the social fabric of contemporary India, serving as a mechanism that sustains unequal power structures and moral ambivalence. This aligns with prior sociological studies that document the normalization of corruption and ethical compromises within Indian institutions (Kumar, 2016; Gupta, 2012) ^[2, 3]. Adiga's fiction provides a vivid narrative complement to these studies by illustrating how such hypocrisy shapes everyday experiences and personal identity, thus bridging a gap between abstract social theory and lived realities.

Moreover, the findings underscore the complex relationship between collective hypocrisy and selfhood. The characters' varied responses—from Balram's pragmatic and morally ambiguous self-reinvention to Masterji's principled resistance and the younger generation's ambivalent compliance—reflect the diverse ways individuals negotiate ethical contradictions. This diversity resonates with psychological research on identity formation in transitional societies, which suggests that moral dissonance often results in fragmented or contested selves (Singh & Roy, 2018) ^[5]. Adiga's portrayal therefore enriches literary scholarship by foregrounding the psychological costs of social hypocrisy alongside its socio-political dimensions.

Comparing these results with existing literary criticism reveals both continuities and new perspectives. Earlier critiques have emphasized Adiga's focus on socio-economic inequality and the critique of neoliberal India (Sukumar, 2011; Bhattacharya, 2014) ^[1, 6]. However, this study's emphasis on collective hypocrisy as a central organizing theme adds a layer of ethical and existential inquiry that has been relatively underexplored. The integration of identity studies and moral philosophy here provides a novel lens through which to interpret Adiga's narrative strategies and thematic concerns.

The implication of these findings is twofold. First, they highlight the role of literature as a critical medium for exposing and interrogating societal contradictions that are often overlooked or normalized. Adiga's novels function as social critiques that challenge readers to reflect on the moral ambiguities underlying India's rapid modernization. Second, the study suggests that individual identity in such a context is inevitably shaped by the tension between societal expectations and personal survival strategies, raising important questions about authenticity, agency, and ethical responsibility.

Unexpectedly, the study also revealed that collective hypocrisy is not uniformly experienced or expressed across social strata and contexts within the novels. While much criticism focuses on rural poverty or urban corruption, the nuanced portrayal of a middle-class community in *Last Man in Tower* and the youth-oriented narrative of *Selection Day* indicate that hypocrisy transcends class boundaries, though its manifestations differ. This complexity suggests that future research should pay closer attention to intra-class dynamics and the intersectionality of identity factors such as age, gender, and regional background.

However, the study has certain limitations. The analysis is restricted to three novels by a single author, which limits the generalizability of findings across the broader landscape of

Indian literature or society. Additionally, the interpretive nature of qualitative literary analysis carries inherent subjectivity, despite efforts to ground interpretations in textual evidence and theoretical frameworks. Further, the study does not incorporate empirical data from actual social settings or individuals, which could complement and validate the literary insights.

Future research could expand the scope by examining other contemporary Indian authors who explore similar themes, thereby situating Adiga's work within a wider literary and cultural discourse. Comparative studies across regional languages and genres may reveal differing representations of hypocrisy and identity. Moreover, interdisciplinary approaches combining literary analysis with ethnographic or psychological research could provide a more holistic understanding of how collective hypocrisy influences the self in real-world contexts.

In conclusion, this study advances knowledge on the ethical and existential challenges posed by collective hypocrisy in modern India, as reflected in Aravind Adiga's novels. It contributes to the ongoing dialogue between literature, sociology, and psychology, emphasizing the importance of narrative in making sense of complex social realities. The findings reinforce the view that the self in contemporary India is not a stable or isolated entity but is continuously shaped and reshaped through engagement with a morally ambivalent society.

Conclusion

This study reveals that Aravind Adiga's novels critically expose the pervasive collective hypocrisy that shapes contemporary Indian society and deeply influences individual identity formation. Through nuanced portrayals of characters navigating moral contradictions, the novels illustrate how public virtue often conceals private ethical compromises, resulting in fragmented and contested selves. This research contributes to literary scholarship by emphasizing the ethical dimensions of Adiga's social critique and highlighting the psychological impact of hypocrisy within a rapidly transforming India. Practically, the findings underscore the need for greater societal introspection and the fostering of genuine ethical accountability to address systemic contradictions. Future studies could build on this work by incorporating diverse literary voices and interdisciplinary perspectives to further explore the relationship between social hypocrisy and identity. Ultimately, Adiga's narratives remind us that confronting collective hypocrisy is essential for cultivating authentic individual and collective selves in modern India.

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