

The Power of Fiction in Exposing Neo-imperial Agendas - A Case Study of Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga

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Abstract. The study explores the novels of Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga, which serve as critical counterpoints to the neo-imperialist objectives of global corporations. Roy's *The God of Small Things* decolonizes colonialism, while Adiga's *The White Tiger* critiques neoliberal economics and colonial undertones. His subsequent novels, *Last Man in Tower* and *Selection Day*, provide satirical insights into the impacts of neoliberal globalization in urban settings. His latest work, *Amnesty*, further targets the neo-imperialist strategies of global corporate institutions. Roy and Adiga emphasize the importance of recognizing the subtle ways : neo-imperial forces infiltrate daily life by focusing on marginalized voices and experiences. The transformative potential of fiction in raising critical awareness and understanding neo-imperial activities is highlighted. By engaging with these novels, readers gain insights into the mechanisms of neo-imperial power and are encouraged to question dominant power structures. These narratives inspire alternative futures grounded in justice and social upheaval, demonstrating the profound impact of literary works in challenging and reshaping societal norms.

Keywords : Liberty; patriarchy; self-discovery; interdiction; subjugation; suffering.

In the contemporary global landscape, characterized by the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism and the complexities of geopolitical power dynamics, neo-imperialism emerges as a formidable force shaping the trajectories of societies worldwide. Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga celebrated for their literary genius and unwavering social critique, occupies a prominent position in the discourse surrounding the intersection of literature and socio-political criticism. Since Švarc(2013) stated, "The neoliberal ideology of this neocolonial model of economy has often been criticized in the contemporary English novels" (106), through their works of fiction, Roy and Adiga present a subtle image of neo-imperial agendas, inviting readers to engage with the multi-layered neocolonial practices critically and revived imperialist biases in contemporary society.

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This research study thoroughly analyzes Roy and Adiga's fiction to reveal the complex nature of neo-imperialism and its manifestations in contemporary society. Roy's narrative strategies are distinguished by their nuance, complexity, and sharpness of storytelling as a prism through which readers are invited to reconsider alternate future and challenge established power structures. Parallely, Adiga shows how the promises of economic liberalization frequently worsen inequality rather than mitigate it, as he analyses the neo-liberal ideology and its consequences for the modern socio-economic fabric. This research aims to clarify the many forms of imperial authority and their effects on society by closely examining Roy's narrative techniques, character interactions, and thematic investigations.

Neo-imperialism is a complex form of historical imperialism that involves the economic, political, and cultural dominance of wealthy nations and multinational corporations over weaker states and regions. Since, Longo (2017) argues that the 21st century Border has evolved to emphasize bilateral border management, co-locating forces on either side, creating overlapping jurisdictions. This shift in understanding borders reflects globalized mobility and resembles economic and cultural boundaries, making them "spaces of joint maintenance" (768). Originating from the legacy of colonialism, it has evolved to accommodate global dynamics and technological advancements. Neo-Imperialism uses covert methods, such as military conquest and geographical annexation, to exploit resources and labor from weaker states, in the name of corporation and "joint maintenance". Uneven trade agreements, debt reliance, and corporate globalization characterize it. Cultural Neo-Imperialism maintains Western hegemony while marginalizing indigenous cultures and so, Spivak (1991) correctly remarks that "neocolonialism is the dismantling of old territorial imperialisms, which began with monopoly industrial capitalism. This narrative requires territorial imperialism to train subjects to establish markets and free labor and needs to be persistently critiqued" (220). Geopolitical Neo-imperialism prolongs cycles of violence and instability, escalates conflicts, and erodes areas. It poses serious threats to democracy, human rights, and environmental sustainability due to its focus on profit and power over morality and social justice.

The God of Small Things exemplifies Roy's ability to blend personal stories with larger socio-political concerns. Set in postcolonial India, the novel provides a heartbreaking depiction of colonial legacies

and their continuing impact on the social fabric. Roy's rich characterizations and evocative writing reveal the intersecting dynamics of caste, class, and gender hierarchies, putting light on the subtle ways in which imperial remnants continue to create socio-political ambience. On the contrary, Roy's more direct interaction with contemporary neo-imperialism is apparent in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The 2017 book offers a biting critique of corporate greed, governmental brutality, and neo-liberal policies. Roy urges readers to confront the persistent impact of power and exploitation by exposing the terrible reality of neo-imperial objectives using vibrant narratives that explore the edges of Indian society. Roy asks readers to consider their role in maintaining unfair systems of justice by elevating the perspectives and experiences of marginalized populations.

Aravind Adiga's novels, starting with *The White Tiger* and concluding with *Amnesty*, critique neo-imperialism by highlighting its perpetuation of inequality and exploitation in modern societies. *The White Tiger* explores neoliberal economic policies that foster corruption and entrenched social hierarchies, while *Last Man in Tower* delves into the urban development boom in Mumbai, where real estate developers displace long-standing communities for global capital gains. *Selection Day* exposes the neo-imperial strategy of exploiting local resources and populations for global capital gains, highlighting the commodification of young athletes within a global market that values profit over human potential and it also presents an image of cricket as a colonial symbol. *Amnesty*, ultimately, addresses the neo-imperial impact of corporate practices on immigration and labour, focusing on the vulnerabilities of undocumented immigrants in Australia, a core nation. Adiga's works serve as a literary indictment of contemporary imperial revival and a call to envision alternative futures rooted in justice and equity.

Furthermore, this article improves our understanding of the complexity of neo-imperialism and its societal implications by conducting a detailed examination of Roy and Adiga's fiction. Their novels are effective vehicles for challenging dominant beliefs and envisioning alternative futures based on ideals of justice and equality. By engaging with Roy's perceptive narratives, readers are urged to reflect on their places within power structures and to contemplate pathways toward meaningful social change.

Ultimately, the article argues for the enduring significance of fiction as a site of resistance and critique in the struggle against neo-imperialism. Roy's collection of work provides evidence of the transformational power of literature in fostering social justice and critical awareness. This study advances knowledge about the function of literature in addressing urgent global issues and picturing more just and equitable societies through a thorough analysis of Roy's writings.

The God of Small Things: Combatting with Colonial Hegemony and Reflecting the Precursor of Neo-imperialism

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a poignant exploration of the repercussions of British colonialism on India, particularly in the turbulent period between 1969 and 1993. The novel, set in Kerala, serves as a microcosm of India's postcolonial identity as Galentine (2015) outlined that "the Ipe family, based in Kerala, is a significant location due to their complex history of colonization and their connection to Christianity, likely influenced by Portuguese colonial and missionary efforts" (95), highlighting socio-economic inequities, strict caste systems, and cultural hegemony. The setting mirrors the nation's transitional state, with vibrant colors and tension. Roy's artwork reflects the duality of the promise of socio-economic development and the relics of the colonial past. The crumbling Ayemenem estate, once a symbol of imperial grandeur, serves as a metaphor for the nation's broken ambitions. The strict caste system, a legacy of British social hierarchies, symbolizes the persistent inequalities in Indian culture and therefore, Spivak (1991) rightly quoted, "Another way in which it works is to ignore the subaltern in the old colonized areas. Culturalism in the other Third World cultures is in itself also a class-based thing (226), remarkably illustrated in the novel, "Margaret Kochamma, Sophie Mol's English mother, wouldn't let Chacko, Sophie Mol's biological father, put his arm around her to comfort her. (*The God of Small Things*, 5). A similar portrayal is seen in Pappachi's thought about the superiority of Western values in the Indian mindset, "Pappachi would not believe her story – Not because he thought well of her husband but simply because he didn't believe that an Englishman, any Englishman, would covert another man's wife" (42) and this assertion is effectively portrayed by Švarc (2013) that "In the globalized market of contemporary India, English has become even more important due to the outsourcing of the communication industry" (112). The ostracization of

lower castes and their forbidden love affair highlights the colonial power's effectiveness.

Furthermore, it is argued that "old colonial disciplines, languages, and politics, rather than focusing on gossip and careless acquisition of knowledge, to maintain good politics" (Spivak, 229). The novel by Roy warns against the harmful effects of neocolonialism, a concept that emerged during colonialism's early stages. It highlights the power structures and social hierarchies that can manifest contemporary dynamics, such as the economic divide between the Ipe family and the Paravans, "Mammachi rehired Velutha as the factory carpenter and put him in charge of general maintenance. It caused a great deal of resentment among the other Touchable factory workers because, according to them, Paravans were not meant to be carpenters" (*The God of Small Things*, 77) and therefore, significantly Comfort (2008) has highlighted that the family's downfall is attributed to the failure of Pappachi, the grandson of Reverend Ipe, to become an "imperial entomologist" and the scandal of "Ammu's sexual liaison with Velutha" (3). The novel also highlights the exploitative business arrangements that often form the foundation for neocolonialism, with multinational firms exploiting social and economic disparities to maintain dependency as Comfort further explains, "the patterns of accumulation were imposed with divisions of labor that exploited, even intensified, existing caste and gender hierarchies" (5). The characters' preference for English and Western values may be precursors to the cultural uniformity promoted by neocolonialism. Roy criticizes those blindly adopting Western traditions but emphasizes the difficulty of resisting Western culture's influence in a global society.

Spivak (1991) clarifies that "Neocolonialism, a distinct form of colonialism, differs from postcoloniality by requiring a different policy approach, such as "territorial imperialism and loco parentis", (224) which promotes cultural relativism and right discussions in class-specific contexts. *The God of Small Things* is a critical work that highlights the legacy of colonialism and the emergence of neocolonial dominance. It critiques the similarities between colonial and neocolonial activities, urging readers to oppose exploitation strategies. The novel critiques cultural alienation, social hierarchies, and the psychological effects of dominance, preparing readers to recognize and oppose neocolonialism's deceptive strategies. Despite its limitations, *The God of Small Things*

remains a potent and timeless critique of colonialism, revealing the residual repercussions of colonialism and forcing readers to confront the complexities of postcolonial reality.

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness: Reflecting of Neo-imperial Repercussions

According to Chakrabarti (2012), in the late 1980s, the Indian economy faced a systemic crisis due to the collapse of Soviet-style command economies and the unsustainable state-sponsored economy, leading to the adoption of neo-liberalism and a competitive market economy (Para. 1). Neo-liberal proponents offered promises of wealth, development, and personal liberty. But as Roy shows in her book, this ideology frequently provides a front for more sinister injustices and inequities. Roy's characters live in a world where the affluent are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer due to neo-liberal policies that have increased resource exploitation and exclusion of the poor, as Baines (2020) rightly asserted that Neo-liberalism leads to economic and spatial inequality, reshaping biopolitics, generating surpluses, hindering city expansion, and acquiring valuable real estate, "furthering the economic agenda of the international and domestic capitalist class" (180). Roy uses the portrayal of Anjum, a transgender woman who lives in a cemetery, to show how marginalized groups suffer from discrimination, violence, and relocation as a result of neoliberal policies, "Anjum lived in the khwabgah with her patched-together body and her partially realized dream for more than thirty years" (*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 29). The greater battle of marginalized groups against the forces of neoliberal capitalism is reflected in Anjum's quest for identity and belonging, "Anjum actively rejects two principal positions ascribed to her by the national neoliberal development discourse: the victim and the subaltern" (Baines, 194).

Neo-liberalism brought with it the promise of globalization and interconnection, but it also opened the door for Neo-imperialism, a new breed of colonial imperialism. It sustains inequality on a worldwide basis using indirect military intervention, cultural hegemony, and economic domination, "Neo-liberalism is thus a space project, which produces not just economic but also spatial unevenness that impacts the bio-politics of the city and village scape" (180). In particular, Roy's account highlights how neo-imperialism appears in the context of India's geo-political context in the twenty-first century. Roy illuminates the predicament of Kashmiris

living under military rule through the character of Musa, a liberation fighter from that region. Since Longo (2017) argues that, “a state is a territorially defined political unit with borders, sovereignty, autonomy, and independence. The international state system recognizes units’ juridical equivalence, with borders playing a crucial role in internal/external divisions” (759). The struggle in Kashmir is a miniature version of Neo-imperialism, where corporate greed, military might, and geopolitical interests come together to sustain tyranny and bloodshed. The broader fight against neo-imperialist forces that aim to hold onto power and influence over the region’s abundant resources is reflected in Musa’s struggle for freedom and justice.

Siddiqui (2017) ascertains that the Indian domestic bourgeoisie is increasingly interested in being junior partners in international finance capital, not due to inherent characteristics but due to their historical situation and desire to align with “US imperialists” (150). Arundhati Roy eloquently depicts this subtle combination of corporate interests and political power that promotes natural resource exploitation and degradation of the environment and similar assertion Baines (2020) established, the novel highlights the significant impact of corporate-sponsored initiatives on the lives and human rights of the city’s poor, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive approach to addressing these issues, “international and domestic networks of capitalist neoliberal proponents are completely oblivious to the loss of shelter” (187). Roy illuminates the heinous effects of neoliberal capitalism on both people and the world via the character of Tilo, an ardent activist committed to opposing corporate greed and environmental catastrophe. This story thread is a scathing critique of neo-imperialist powers that prioritize wealth and power over environmental sustainability and social justice. At the heart of Roy’s portrayal is multinational corporations’ ruthless longing for profit, backed by complicit state institutions. Corporations plunder land and resources with impunity, driven exclusively by the desire for financial gain, as Roy (2017) illustrated in the novel “Our time is now. Kmart was coming. Walmart and Starbucks were coming, and in the British Airways advertisement on TV,” (97). The narrative eloquently illustrates how this predatory behavior devastates ecosystems, eliminates biodiversity, and irreparably transforms landscapes, leaving environmental scars that will last generations. Tilo’s unrelenting dedication to environmental justice acts as an argument against the unrestricted

exploitation of nature for profit. Tilo's activism and advocacy address neo-imperialist forces front on, challenging the current system and demanding justice for environmental crimes committed in the name of development.

The White Tiger, Understanding Colonial Hegemony under Neoliberal Economics

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga critiques India's neoliberal economic reforms and neo-imperialism, highlighting the persistent social stratification legacies and deep-seated inequities. The novel follows Balram Halwai's journey from a poor villager to a successful entrepreneur, highlighting how neoliberal economics perpetuates hegemony and marginalizes large sections of the population that push toward the recolonization of developing third-world states that signify neo-imperialism. Balram Halwai, the protagonist of the novel, is a character from Laxmangarh, a remote village that symbolizes the "world of the third." Thatšvarc (2013) rightly pointed "The India of Darkness is epitomized in Laxmangarh" (107). His life is marked by poverty and limited opportunities, exemplified by colonial social hierarchies as reflected in the novel "Typical Indian Village Paradise, adequately supplied with electricity, running water and working telephones" (Adiga, 19). Balram moves to Delhi to break free from these constraints, working as a driver for wealthy businessman Mr. Ashok. His exposure to urban wealth sharpens his awareness of systemic inequalities perpetuated by neoliberal policies and neo-imperialism. The city's facade contrasts with Balram's humble origins, highlighting the disparity between urban and rural populations.

Chakraborty (2012) affirms that the Indian economy has undergone structural remapping, focusing on the "circuits-camp of global capital" and its 'world of the third'. This expansion has excluded a large section of the population from income growth benefits and exacerbated existing social inequities, resulting in exclusion from economic growth (Para, 3). Mr. Ashok, Balram's employer, represents the urban elite in India's neoliberal economy and "Neoliberalism is commonly conceptualized as an economic doctrine with a negative relation to state power" (Rhee, 562). Despite his Western education and liberalism, Ashok is deeply entrenched in corrupt practices that sustain his wealth. His character reflects the complicity of the upper classes in maintaining the

status quo, mirroring colonial elites and neo-imperialist agents who exploit the masses while promoting progressive ideals. Ashok's interactions with Balram highlight the social divide, with his actions reinforcing Balram's subjugation, reflecting the neoliberal state's dual role in market intervention and exclusion of the poor.

The neo-imperialist framework, characterized by the exploitation of the wealthy and the perpetuation of poverty and dependence, is exemplified by the Stork, a former feudal lord who transitioned from traditional feudalism to modern capitalism. Mukherjee (2020) critiques capitalism through Balram's transformation from a poor Dalit boy to a business tycoon, raising questions about the production of criminals in new mega-cities and the impact of capitalism on society (32). His character demonstrates how the wealthy adapt to economic changes while still oppressing the lower classes, exemplifying the colonial system of economic extraction and social control.

Neo-imperialist systems, like the Rooster Coop, perpetuate systemic oppression and control, resembling colonial structures, Medhavi & Sahay (2024) remarkably pointed out "Balram describes the Rooster Coop as a place where cheap labor is extracted from Indian workers to enrich Western corporations and the local elite" (48). Despite the promise of inclusive development, the poor remain ensnared by social and economic pressures, highlighting the failure of neoliberal reforms to reach those at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy.

***Last Man in Tower* : Critique of Neo-liberal Economics as Justification of Neo-imperial Trends**

Last Man in Tower delves into Mumbai's urban development, highlighting the power dynamics and exploitation of neoliberal capitalism, leading to Neo-imperialism. The novel's central conflict revolves around a real estate developer's pursuit of luxury constructions, while the less powerful struggle against overwhelming forces. Nivetha (2017) argues that "Shanghaiization", a rapid real estate development model in Mumbai, involves gentrifying former industrial districts, redeveloping slums, and attracting foreign investment, displacing low-income residents and sparking movements for housing, livelihood, and governance (92). The Vishram Society, a middle-class co-operative in Mumbai's Vakola neighborhood, has successfully gentrified the area by clearing forests and building roads, overcoming challenges like bandits and mosquitoes.

As more middle-class buildings emerge, the area is on the brink of becoming a stable enclave, “until it reaches the front gate of the building, should be called “Vishram Society Lane.” (Adiga, 4). Thus, Chakrabarti (2012) rightly established that The Indian economy has been largely characterized by high growth rates, attributed to a competitive market economy. This has led to a strong defense of the, “state intervention/control, and global capitalism as against national capitalism” (para. 6). Hence, Adiga critiques neoliberal economics as a justification for neo-imperialism, highlighting the displacement of low-income Mumbai residents due to rapid urban development and gentrification, “in order to create modern luxurious apartment for the affluent population and thus add a great amount to their bank deposit” (Nivetha, 94). This thing highlights power imbalances and profit pursuits as social inequities.

Cricket as a Colonizing Tool: *Selection Day*

In Adiga’s *Selection Day*, cricket is depicted as a colonial legacy, with characters like Manju Kumar and Radha Kumar highlighting the impact of colonialism on Indian society. Medhavi & Sahay (2024) outlined “The novel’s obsession with this Western-dominated sport subtly highlights the colonial legacies that continue to this day” (48). Their father, Mohan Kumar, represents the relentless pursuit of success within a system that still reflects colonial influences. Mohan’s obsession with cricket as a means of social mobility highlights the historical pressures faced by Indians to conform to British institutions and excel as Verma & Mishra (2022) rightly pointed out “People, involved in the game of cricket have become part of it rather than making the sport a part of their life” (81). The narrative is set in Mumbai, a city blending colonial history and modern ambition. Mumbai’s cricketing infrastructure, including elite clubs and academies, perpetuates socio-economic exclusivity, reflecting colonial elitism as reflected in these words, “Now what are the characteristics of this Mumbai school of music expressed as cricket? All round defensive and attacking plays; a strong back foot;..”(Adiga, 101). Manju and Radha, aspiring to cricket greatness, navigate these deeply entrenched structures, reflecting how colonial legacies continue to shape individual destinies and perpetuate the elitism of colonial times.

Tommy Sir, a cricket coach, represents the colonial hangover and his role in shaping the future of young cricketers as “Cricket has become ‘opium for the masses’ of India and forced them away from their

nature”(Adiga, 2:33). His manipulation and exploitation of talent exemplify the continuity of control and exploitation from the colonial era to the present day, “Australia is the reality principle in cricket, Tommy sir: otherwise, we Indian would think we are good at this game” (Adiga, 35). Adiga’s portrayal of Tommy Sir critiques the concentrated and corrupt nature of institutional power, mirroring the hierarchical nature of colonial governance.

***Amnesty* : Deciphering Neo-imperial Motifs**

Ultimately, Adiga’s most recently published novel *Amnesty* (2020) follows an undocumented Sri Lankan immigrant, Danny in Sydney, Australia, as he explores the complexities of modern-day immigration and the revival of the imperial nature of Western nations, highlighting the socio-economic disparities and enduring impacts of colonial exploitation, as Medhavi (2024) rightly mentioned, “Amnesty is fundamentally a biting criticism of neocolonialism, revealing the subtle ways in which colonial legacies still influence modern power structures” (345). Adiga’s portrayal of Danny’s life in Sydney highlights the systemic challenges faced by immigrants, resembling colonial subjugation. Danny, who works menial jobs and is constantly afraid of deportation, is marginalized and dehumanized by neo-imperialism. The power structures that dictate his existence perpetuate colonial hierarchies, where the former colonized remain subordinate to Western interests. Despite his contributions to the local economy and community, Danny is viewed as an outsider and a threat. Spivak (1991) suggests that the “New World Order” post-Gulf War necessitates a shift in neocolonialist practices, However, hyperreal war and imperialist reshuffling necessitate a new approach to neocolonialism, distinguishing it from traditional forms of colonialism and imperialism (221), *Amnesty* set in 21st century explores the “New World Order” and neocolonialism, an undocumented Sri Lankan immigrant in Sydney, as he navigates a world of control and subjugation as reflected in these lines”You’re not wanted to begin with in your own home. Then illegal immigrants come to your country, take what little you have, and force you to go to Australia and become an illegal there” (Adiga, 133). The novel highlights global conflicts and economic disparities driving migration from developing countries to the West, often rooted in historical imperialism. Danny’s internal conflict and quest for belonging reflect neocolonialism’s cultural dimensions.

Conclusion

The study of Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga's novels demonstrates the power of fiction in exposing the subtleties of neo-imperial agendas. Roy's works, such as *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, highlight the enduring legacies of colonialism and the systemic exploitation and marginalization that persist under neo-imperial influences. Adiga's works, such as *The White Tiger*, *Last Man in Tower*, *Selection Day*, and *Amnesty*, expose the consequences of neoliberal economic reforms and the resurgence of imperialistic tendencies. These works highlight the deep-seated exploitation and cultural hegemony that define contemporary societies. The critical engagement with these literary works underscores the transformative potential of fiction in fostering awareness and prompting societal change. By illuminating the mechanisms of neo-imperial power, Roy and Adiga challenge readers to question dominant ideologies and envision alternative futures rooted in justice and equity. Their stories amplify marginalized voices and experiences, offering a counter-narrative to the prevailing discourse and highlighting the urgent need for resistance against neo-imperialist practices. In conclusion, Roy and Adiga's novels exemplify the enduring significance of fiction as a potent tool for social critique and resistance. They invite readers to critically engage with the contemporary global order and strive for a more just and equitable world.

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