The Criterion: An International Journal in English
Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed Open Access e-Journal
(ISSN: 0976-8165) Vol. 17, Issue-VIII, September 2026
Special Issue: World Literature
www.the-criterion.com

Resistance and Revolutionary Agency at the Margins: A World Literature Reading of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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https://doi.org/10.66376/criterion.v17.n8.18

Abstract:

This article examines the paradox of resistance and the agency in the novel *The White Tiger* (2008) by Aravind Adiga in the socio-economic context of post-liberalisation India. Although the novel has been frequently considered as an attempt to satirize neoliberal economy and a story of class mobility; yet this article hypothesizes the protagonist's regicide is a revolutionary agency influenced by the neoliberal economy. Using the insights of Frantz Fanon's idea of violence and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of mimicry, the article demonstrates that how Balram's transformation from a servant to an entrepreneur represents both rupture and reproduction: a breakdown of continuous servitude, and concomitantly follow the system of hierarchy. Locating the novel in the world-literature debate, this analysis also explains the global circulation of the text constituting the interpretation of subaltern narratives emerging from regional India. By integrating the postcolonial theory to the neoliberal subjectivity in the contemporary Indian English fiction, the articles affirms that resistance in the novel is not demonstrated as a collective revolution; but as an individualised agency that is internalised into the logic of global capitalism.

Keywords: subaltern agency, neoliberalism, world literature, caste, postcolonial theory, Indian English fiction, globalization.

Article History: Submitted-29/04/2026, Revised-30/06/2026, Accepted-20/07/2026, Published-30/09/2026.
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1. Introduction: Writing Resistance from the Margins

Published in 2008, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* came into a global limelight when the entire world flooded with the narrative of 'New India' a nation whose technology sparks the outsourcing centres in the world. With the rising of economic liberalization, the entire world was looking India as a market economy. Winning the novel the Booker Prize in the same year of publication, confirmed its international legibility and placed it at the central debates about contemporary Indian English fiction by the people and for the people. This discourse made the novel genuinely uncomfortable. However, it remained strictly non-partisan, refusing to join either side of the debate. Nonetheless, it was not a celebration of Indian modernity, nor a sentimental lament for those left behind. Rising the popularity of the novel, it was something harder to categorise an anatomy of the social architecture: rich and poor, concealed beneath the surface of the caste hierarchies. This hierarchies confirms the life before birth. The feudal structures that have survived and adapted rather than dissolved under market conditions. Adiga exhibits this very specific experience of Bihar's agrarian poor, for whom the 'India of Darkness' is not a literary device but a daily substantial material.

The novel's narrator Balram Halwai, addresses his confession in a series of letters to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, positioning himself as a self-made entrepreneur and an authoritative interpreter of the real India under the effect of its global image. His confession constitutes simultaneously a boast, a self-justification, and a diagnosis of power function in the contemporary India. He has escaped from his native place through an act of murderous self-assertion: killing his employer, stealing money intended as a political bribe, and using it to set up a taxi company in Bangalore. Though his narration throughout the novel is irreverent, satirical, and self-aware, yet also systematically unreliable. His confessional form simultaneously reveals and conceals. Balram carefully controls his emotions what he tells and

what he withholds, resulting a construction of a resistance that is as much performance as testimony.

This article examines that the form and content of Balram's narrational phase is a complex contemplation and meditation, on what resistance means under neoliberal modernity, and what it cannot be the same simultaneously. Resistance in the novel, is neither a collective uprising nor an ideological insurgency. However, throughout the novel, there is no Gandhian nonviolence or Marxist class consciousness, no peasant solidarity, no trade union consciousness exists. Instead, there is a single violent, morally compromised act of individual self-emancipation that inaugurates an entrepreneurial career rather than a political transformation persists. Deploying Fanon's theorisation of colonial violence, Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and ambivalence, Spivak's and Guha's subaltern frameworks, and Damrosch's and Casanova's world literature models, the article demonstrates that resistance in the novel is real but privatised, individual but not transformative, and ultimately absorbed into the very structures it appeared to contest.

Paradox between performed liberation and testified constraint is a central object of analysis in this article. As the abstract states that Balram's agency is structurally constrained by neoliberal capitalism and it constitutes 'revolutionary agency' requires justification on three fronts. First, to characterise Balram's murder of Ashok Sharma, his master as resistance rather than crime is to follow. In the novel, Balram says "am I not a part of all that is changing this country? Haven't I succeeded in the struggle that every poor man here should be making" (Adiga 318). He says further in the novel that in order to succeed in your life, "Kill enough people and they will put up bronze statues to you… All I wanted was the chance to be a man- and for that, one murder was enough" (Adiga 318). Guha, an Indian historian critic, claims that subaltern violence possesses a political logic whose meaning exceeds its legal designation. Guha says "insurgency affirmed its political character precisely by its negative and inversive

procedure. By trying to force a mutual substitution of the dominant and the dominated in the power structure it left nothing to doubt about its own identity as a project of power" (Guha 9).

Additionally, situating this resistance within 'the margins' is to designate simultaneously the spatial periphery of Bihar's bypassed agrarian economy and the epistemological position of the subaltern speaker within the global literary system, both produced by the same articulation of caste hierarchy and neoliberal capital. As Balram states about the rapid transformation of India, he contrastingly says about Bangalore is a city "may turn out to be decent city, where humans can live like humans and animals can live like animals. A new Bangalore for a new India…I helped to make New Bangalore" (Adiga 318).

Moreover, contextually in this discourse, the world literature frame is analytically essential. The novel's Booker Prize recognition and translation into over more than forty languages make it a global literary circulation and along with that it shapes the interpretation of subaltern voice. Balram's conversation in the epistolary form is purely global, where he speaks in English, diction, the choice of words, phrase and the structure form exhibits his potential rather his confession that he doesn't know English. Balram writes in English to the head of country, Wen Jiabo. He mocks "Neither you nor I speak English" (Adiga 3), and later he writes "I had to say that in English" (Adiga 4). The article advances the one organising concept of performance-testimony holding these three fronts in a single analytical frame. Performance-testimony names the structural gap between what Balram's narration performs (individual triumph, entrepreneurial self-making) and what it testifies to against its own intentions (caste reproduction, absorbed transgression, foreclosed solidarity). This gap is not a feature of Balram's individual unreliability but of his ideological formation: the class, caste, and market-interpellated subjectivity that determines what he structurally cannot see.

Bring to bear on this concept five theoretical frameworks from Fanon, Bhabha, Spivak-Guha, Ambedkar, and Damrosch-Casanova are discussed and deployed, not in sequentially, but

in productive friction. Each framework's explanatory limit illuminating the necessity of the next throughout the articles.

2. Literature Review and Critical Context.

Since the publication of the novel *The White Tiger*, the critical responses have grown massively. Initial criticism frequently lodged on how the novel controlled the theme of corruption, stratification, and the ethical ambiguities of economic liberalisation. Observing the negligence in postcolonial criticism, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee asserts "the materiality of environmental conditions and the dynamics of capital" (Mukherjee 3), a gap that becomes vital in reading of the novel. It foregrounds the ethical hypocrisy underpinning India's global economic uprising, where development is inseparable from systemic violence. Adiga speaks through Balram in the novel as "to break the law of his land- to turn bad news into good news- is the entrepreneur's prerogative" (Adiga 38). Similarly, Pramod K. interprets the text as a narrative of neoliberal India in which the rhetoric of progress coexists with the exploitation and violence. He states "neoliberalism emphasizes the free market, privatization, and reduced state intervention" (Nayar 82), a framework where the novel discovers the rhetoric of progress coexists with exploitation and inequality. This paradox is also inscribed onto the body of the subaltern subject, as the central character in the novel, Balram illuminates "the story of a poor man's life is written on his body" (Adiga 27). Such descriptions align with Aijaz Ahmad's argument that "globalization intensifies internal inequalities" (Ahamd 112), and with David Harvey's critique of neoliberalism as the expansion of capital across all domains of life (Harvey 33). Collectively, these perspectives reveal the novel in the postliberal economy as a powerful indictment of neoliberal developmental ideology. Another scholar, Elleke Boehmer suggests in her work *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* that postcolonial subjectivity in the contemporary period is progressively mediated by global economic forces

rather than colonial power structures, enabling a reading of Balram as a neoliberal subject moulded by market ideology (Boehmer 233).

Nevertheless, having these insights, there is rare research that integrates the examination of violence, mimicry and the circulation of global literature with the aim of explaining the paradox of resistance that is evident in the novel. This paper fits into that conversation by showing the ways in which the rebellion of Balram destabilizes and recreates power structures at the same time. Similarly, another discourse on *The White Tiger* illuminates particular dimensions without resolving the core problem. Schotland demonstrates with the comparison of *Wright's Native Son*, that Balram replicates rather than dismantles the Rooster Coop's logic, but attributes this to individual moral failure rather than structural necessity. Khor (2011) and Viswanath (2009) recover the subversive potential of Balram's voice without asking what structural conditions determine the limits of that subversion precisely the question Spivak's (1988) framework demands. The present study fills this gap by grounding performance-testimony in the narratological literature (Phelan 2005; Nunning 2005), integrating Ambedkarite frameworks absent from prior work, and making a causal rather than analogical argument about world literary circulation and textual form.

3. Theoretical Framework

The article's argument rests on five theoretical frameworks held in simultaneous tension. Fanon's analysis of decolonial violence in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) provides the foundational account of internalised domination and the psychic rupture that subaltern violence enacts. Violence, as he argues in his essay, becomes a mean through which colonized subjects reclaims selfhood (Fanon 94). Although the novel *The White Tiger* is set in post-colonial India, the persistence hierarchical domination between master and servant, employee and employer suggests an internal colonization where the elites, or the higher authorities reproduce colonial patterns of power. Balram's murder of his master Ashok in the novel,

represents a Fanonian rupture, where this act of killing his master shatters the servility and produces a new subjectivity. Yet in Frantz Fanon's model of collective national liberation, Balram's violence produces no social emancipation; instead, it becomes a means of individual entrepreneurial self-fashioning within capitalist ambition.

Fanon identifies the three stages that postcolonial writers go through in their works- (i) the assimilation stage, (ii)the adaptation stage, and (iii) the fighting stage. On Fanon's matrix, *The White Tiger* considers in third-stage novel. Adiga is completely influenced by Fanon and his thoughts, where Fanon believes "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content" (Fanon 210). Influenced by Fanon, Adiga describes the place as diseased society where corruption siphons off money needed for education and schools, the environment, and public works.

Moreover, this article also considers Bhabha' s theorisation of mimicry in *The Location of Culture* (1994), where mimicry as a strategy that produces ambivalent and colonial subjects. It illuminates self-fashioning that follows Balram's act, the performance of dominant norms that is "almost the same, but not quite," (Bhabha 86), simultaneously subversive and reproductive. Mimicry of Balram to his master, disrupts authority even as it reinforces it. Balram's transformation into "Ashok Sharma" (Adiga 302) dramatizes this logic. He says that he "was a servant once" (Adiga 5) …once I was a driver to a master, but now I am a master of drivers" (Adiga 302). He adopts the language of corporate efficiency, managerial ethics, and urban sophistication. However, ambivalence thus defines the novel's ethical terrain and Resistance does not transcend power; however, it reconfigures it.

These two frameworks (Fanon and Bhabha) constitute the article's starting coordination, but each of them requires correction. Meanwhile, The Ambedkar correction in the novel is the article's most significant theoretical contribution, and it is what the article claims is of 'structurally constrained' agency that ultimately relies on. Mentioned in the above regarding

his idea, Fanon's colonised subject internalises, and inferiority imposed vertically by an external coloniser. Unlike them, another scholar Spivak and her interrogative work “Can the subaltern speak?” (Spivak 271) complicates celebratory readings of marginalized voice. For Spivak, subaltern speech is always mediated by dominant discourse. Balram appears to speak directly through first-person confession. Yet his narrative is shaped by global English, epistolary address to the Chinese Premier, and awareness of Western readership. His voice is therefore neither pure nor autonomous; it is strategically constructed. Ranajit Guha’s emphasis on insurgent consciousness outside elite historiography (Guha 40) provides another lens. Balram’s narrative recovers subaltern interiority but refracts it through neoliberal aspiration.

These three postcolonial frameworks—Fanon’s theorization of colonial violence, Bhabha’s concepts of mimicry and ambivalence, and Spivak’s and Guha’s subaltern frameworks—are not merely thematic overlays applied to a literary text; they are, crucially, tools for understanding how and why certain narratives travel across global literary systems. Fanon’s account of psychic rupture as the condition of the formerly colonized subject explains what drives a text like *The White Tiger* toward the kind of morally unsettling, boundary-crossing narrative that Damrosch identifies as the hallmark of world literature: its violence and ambiguity are precisely what make it legible and compelling to readers far beyond its origin and culture. Bhabha’s mimicry, meanwhile, operates not only as a description of Balram’s behaviour within the novel, but also as an analogue for the novel’s own position in the global literary marketplace—it is “almost the same” as a Western narrative of individual entrepreneurial rise, but inflected by caste, Bihar’s feudal poverty, and postcolonial irony in ways that mark its difference and particularity. Spivak’s and Guha’s subaltern frameworks, finally, illuminate the conditions of enunciation that shape what Casanova calls the “world republic of letters”: the subaltern voice, as they insist, is never transparently self-present, but is always mediated by the discursive hierarchies of the literary field through which it must pass to

become globally legible. In this sense, postcolonial theory and world literature theory are not parallel or competing frameworks; rather, postcolonial theory names the social and psychic conditions of production and enunciation, while Damrosch's and Casanova's models describe the circuits of reception and consecration through which those conditions are rendered into global literary value. To read *The White Tiger* within both frameworks simultaneously is therefore to ask not only what the text means but how it travels, and at what cost to the subaltern subject it purports to represent.

4. World Literature: Circulation and Global Legibility

Damrosch defines world literature as works that circulate beyond their culture of origin and gain new meanings in translation (Damrosch 4). Casanova situates texts within a hierarchical "world republic of letters" in which literary prestige is unequally distributed and peripheral literatures must negotiate the terms of metropolitan recognition (Casanova 11). These models are particularly apt for analyzing a novel whose critical themes such as colonial violence, subaltern agency, mimicry, and mediated voice are precisely what postcolonial theory names and interrogates. Damrosch's framework of circulation helps explaining Adiga's text acquires new resonances as it moves outward from its Indian context. What reads domestically becomes as a critique of caste and neoliberal inequality. In global circulation, a parable of entrepreneurial survival legible to readers across very different social formations. Casanova's model, meanwhile, accounts for the institutional conditions of that circulation where the Booker Prize functions as a mechanism of consecration through which a peripheral narrative is granted entry into the world literary system. But on terms that inevitably shape how the text is read and what aspects of it are foregrounded. Together, then, Damrosch and Casanova provide the structural scaffolding within which Fanon's, Bhabha's, and Spivak's insights acquire their world-literary significance; Postcolonial theory illuminates the internal logic of the text, while

world literature theory illuminates the external circuits through which that logic is translated, recognized, and sometimes distorted.

The White Tiger exemplifies this dynamic. Its global success depends on rendering Indian marginality intelligible to Western audiences. Yet it retains regional specificity where Bihar's feudal landlords, caste oppression, electoral corruption thereby negotiating global and local demands.

5. Methodology

The article employs theoretically-informed close reading with two methodological commitments directly following from the abstract's argument. Initially it is the treatment of narrative form as a primary site of political meaning. *The White Tiger* is a deeply ironic novel whose political argument is encoded in the formal distance between Balram's narration and what the text reveals in excess of it; thematic reading alone cannot access this argument. Additionally, it is the application of theoretical frameworks in productive tension rather than sequence. Each framework is tested against the formal evidence of the text, and the point at which each framework reaches its explanatory limit where, Fanon's collectivism failing to account for Balram's solitary act; Bhabha's psychoanalytic register failing to engage material conditions— becomes a site of analytical interest.

6. Bihar, Caste, and the Geography of Post-Liberalisation India

Reading the novel, *The White Tiger* about resistance, one must understand that what the protagonist, Balram is resisting and where. The novel is insistently, specifically Bihari in a way that resists easy abstraction. Its opening chapters are rooted in the village of Laxmangarh, set in Bihar's Gangetic plain, a landscape that the novel positions as the structural antithesis of liberalising India's self-image. Balram's term for this world "the Darkness", is a spatial designation rather than a metaphor. It names the regions that the new economy has bypassed

and exploited in the process of generating its gleaming cities elsewhere. Bihar carries a specific historical landmark in the history of India. It was once a world centre of civilisation, a home to the Mauryan Empire, to Nalanda University, to the birthplaces of Buddhism and Jainism. However, combining the colonial persistence and the political failure has stripped it of the economic opportunities and cultural confidence in ways that still persist structurally in the present. It is the caste mechanism through which that stripping off is organised and continuously reproduced. In the novel, Balram's surname is Halwai, a sweet-maker and designing his caste marks him as a member of the Other Backward Classes, and this mark determines not merely his social standing but his presumed economic destiny. He is born into a family of rickshaw-pullers; his brief schooling is ended when he has to feed his family. So, he worked in the tea shop. Moreover, arguing the caste hierarchy in the system, B.R. Ambedkar in *Annihilation of Cast* believes that caste persists throughout not merely through external coercion but as it is "a state of the mind," sustained by the internalisation of hierarchy that compels each group to both endure and reproduce the system (69). He thinks that "caste is not a division of labour. It is a division of labourers" (Ambedkar 83). He further illustrates that caste is actually a hierarchical ordering of people, not simply is just roles. This idea of caste and its hierarchical system resonate with Frantz Fanon's work *The Wretched of the Earth*, where domination reproduces through the psychological complicity of the oppressed. Aravind Adiga's novel dramatizes this convergence through the metaphor "Rooster Coop," in which subordination is maintained not by the force alone but by an internalised discipline binding servants to their masters. As Balram describes his situation "family is the reason we are trapped and tied to the coop" (Adiga 176). However, Balram's eventual transgression does not dismantle this structure of hierarchy; rather, it reconstructs it, as he assumes the role of the exploiter within the same hierarchical logic. In this sense, the novel reveals the limits of individual mobility within systems of structural inequality. Suggesting in line with both

Ambedkar and Fanon that without a transformation of the underlying ideological framework, acts of resistance risk reinscribing the very structures they seek to escape. This construction of internalised domination is called by Balram as 'Rooster Coop' and it is the structure of hierarchy only, that his act of violence attempts, to break the same.

Further, the feudal landlords who dominate Laxmangarh are not relics of a pre-modern social order but active participants in the modern political economy. Landlords, who control the village, are the remnants of the older hierarchies in the new capitalism. The Stork and the Buffalo are figures who have feudal power and at the same time are involved in the modern economic networks. They invest their money in coal, business, bribe electoral officials during elections, and send their sons to study abroad. Whereas, they take rent, extra money from their agricultural labourers no having any other alternative source, but to comply their rules. This caste hierarchy and the landlord economy are not separable from the "new India" of liberalisation; they are among its structural constancy. This caste hierarchy and economic deficiency influence the early life of Balram. His father is a rickshaw-puller and the family is stuck in debt. When he was in school, an inspector discovers him intelligent and gave him a name -white tiger, an animal that lives "in any jungle, what is the rarest of animals- the creature that comes along only once in a generation" (Adiga 35).

7. Violence and the Possibility of Revolutionary Rupture.

The metaphor 'Rooster Coop' defines the psychological process that keeps servitude alive in the novel. Even upon realising that they are exploited, servants are still obedient since they know that rebellion would be met by violent only, means it goes against their families. Balram makes an irony and claims, "the greatest thing to come out of this country in the ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop" (Adiga 173). Before killing his master at that moment, he thinks that he cannot break his Rooster. He says in the novel, "had to go close to his

feet, touch them and press them and make them feel good- why? Because the desire to be a servant had been bred into me" (Adiga 193).

To get rid of this Rooster coop, to get freedom from servitude, a shift towards freedom is needed, and this fundamental break in this structure is performed when Balram decides to kill Ashok. Frantz Fanon's thought on violence shed some light on this point. The concept of violence in *The Wretched of the Earth* by Fanon expresses violence as a transformational process where the oppressed subject refuses to submit to the psychological domination of the oppressive systems. The gesture of Balram seems to have such a revolutionary break.

His killing of Ashok, his master, and taking of the bribe money from a politician; both incidents liberate him psychologically and breaks the bonds he holds. However, the novel also makes this framework of Fanon more complicated. The revolutionary violence presented by Fanon presupposes the collective fight in the system, and the rebellion of Balram in the novel is completely personal.

8. Mimicry and Neoliberal Self-Fashioning.

Balram's transgression from a rag to rich is a reflection of the concept of mimicry by Homi Bhabha. Mimicry by Bhabha is an idea where marginalized subjects adopt the cultural codes of dominant groups so that they can access authority and imitate likely the same as their masters. In the novel, Balram uses the language of corporate world and gives himself the ego-boosting title of a self-made businessman. He says" I was a servant once" (Adiga 5) and now "I am a self-taught entrepreneur" (Adiga 6). Further he declares himself as "I am tomorrow" (Adiga 6). His story reflects the neoliberal rhetoric of risk, ambition and self-discipline.

However, the hierarchy of his taxi company replicates the hierarchical relations he used to have. His drivers are still in need of him, and this shows how systems of exploitation do not disappear when people ascend them. Balram states "I was a driver to a master, but now I am a

master of drivers" (Adiga 302). Therefore, mimicry in this novel, thus reveals the ambivalence of the success of Balram.

9. International Literature and World Circulation.

The global fame of *The White Tiger* underlines its belonging to the world literature. David Damrosch believes that world literature is composed of texts that move beyond their culture of origin and acquire new significances in environments of reception. This circulation is evidenced by the translation of the novel into several languages and its presence in the curricula of various parts of the world.

The theory of the world republic of letters by Pascale Casanova focuses on how cultural hierarchies create an unequal literary status that determines global recognition of literary works. Peripheral works frequently become known only after having been confirmed by publishing centres in the metropolitan area. *The White Tiger* strikes a compromise on this equation through narrative techniques that are open to foreign viewers and description of regional life in minute detail. The epistolary format, the letters of Balram to the Chinese Premier, forms a transnational structure through which the economic transformation of India is located in worldwide discourses of development.

10. Revolutionary Agency or Neoliberal Adaptation?

At the end of the novel, Balram has grown to be rich and self-reliant. But the story will not display his triumph as a true emancipation. The hierarchy that created his oppression is still in place and his new status merely shifts him up and down the hierarchy. The narrative of Balram thus helps us see the boundaries of the revolutionary agency of neoliberal capitalism. Personal insurrection could facilitate individual promotion, but can hardly bring about structural reform. Rather, the system assimilates resistance through changing it into stories of entrepreneurial achievement.

11. Conclusion

This article has maintained that *The White Tiger* gives a nuanced account of resistance and the agencies in neoliberal modern world. The rebellion by Balram can be seen as a revolution since it breaks the servitude order by violently. His turn however, as a successful business man eventually replicates the hierarchical logic of the system that he tried to escape. The novel redefines resistance as strategic, individualized, and ethically fractured. Drawing on Fanon, Bhabha, and Subaltern Studies, the novel portrays agency as mediated and ambivalent. Engaging world literature debates, it demonstrates how marginal narratives attain global circulation while remaining entangled in unequal systems. Adiga's text thus occupies a complex position within contemporary Indian English fiction. It neither romanticizes subaltern purity nor celebrates neoliberal mobility uncritically. Instead, it exposes the paradox of emancipation in a world where rebellion is absorbed into market logic. Throughout the novel, resistance survives only but it is transformed, privatized, and ethically compromised.

Conclusively can say that through the combination of the postcolonial theory and the study of world literature, this article examines the novel *The White Tiger* as a revealing paradox of neoliberal agency and the potential of personal emancipation without the societal change. Where this paradox is further enhanced by the fact that the global dynamics of dissemination of the novel turn a regional story of marginality into a global literature text.

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