

Aravind Adiga: A Profile in Courage and Conviction

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Article Received: 07/07/2026

Article Accepted:09/08/2026

Published Online:10/08/2026

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.08.254

Abstract:

Adiga is highly regarded in the world of contemporary literature as a great champion of social and political transformation through thought-provoking literary contributions. His works primarily reveal the existence of the rich-poor divide in India and plead for the transformation of dark, helpless and backward India into light, happy and prosperous India. Adiga calls upon the stakeholders of development to reverse the paradigm that would benefit the marginalised sections of society in India through his valuable literary works. The present study evaluated the socio-political perspectives in Aravind Adiga's literary works based on qualitative research methodology.

Preamble

The world has witnessed amazing and painful conflicts of interest between materialism and Marxism. Materialism increases worldly desires and demands, which result in certain negative consequences which affect humanity and mankind. Marxism provides materialistic criticism and aims at the creation of a classless society based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange by the working proletariat. Aravind Adiga has contributed meaningful, creative and constructive literary works which are primarily known for their Marxist orientation. Adiga's works strive for the emancipation of people from dehumanisation in the age of globalisation. The works primarily criticise traditional institutions, dominant powers, politics of oppression, economics of exploitation, and support proletariat revolution based on Marxist values and approaches.

Early Life and Education

Aravind Adiga was born on October 23, 1974, to Usha Adiga and Dr. K. Madhava Adiga in Madras. His parents basically hailed from Mangalore, Coastal Karnataka. He was born in Chennai, Tamil Nadu and brought up in Mangalore. His paternal grandfather was the late K. Suryanarayana Adiga, former Chairman of Karnataka Bank and his maternal great-grandfather, U. Rama Rao, was a reputed doctor and social worker based in Madras.

Adiga completed his schooling at Canara High School and St. Aloysius High School in Mangalore. He secured the first rank in Karnataka state in the SSLC examination in 1990. He also obtained the first rank in PUC in Karnataka state. His family went back to Mangalore and lived there until 1990. His father went to Australia after the death of Adiga's mother.

Adiga studied at James Ruse Agricultural High School. He got a fellowship to do an MPhil in English literature at Columbia College, Columbia University, New York. He studied along with famous British historian Simon Schama over there. He completed his graduation in 1997 and lived in New York till the age of 28. He then moved to Magdalena College, Oxford. He decided to switch over from academics to journalism.

Career of Adiga

Adiga entered the field of journalism as an internee with Financial Times and gained exposure to financial journalism. He covered stock market and investment areas and interviewed prominent business personalities including Donald Trump. His writings were also published in Financial Times, Money and the Wall Street Journal. His review of Peter Carey's book, *Oscar and Lucinda*, was published in The Second Circle, an online literary review. He also worked as a freelancer and wrote several literary reviews and gained popularity. He then moved to TIME magazine and served as the South Asia correspondent for three years in New Delhi during 2003-2006. He left TIME magazine and preferred to work as a freelancer in 2006. His journalistic stint in India enabled him to visit many parts of the country and observe the society and life at close quarters.

Adiga says: "I became a journalist to support myself, write my novel – and also to see more of the country that I was going to write about". During this period, he wrote the debut novel *The White Tiger* and earned the prestigious Man Booker Prize. He was the second youngest writer to win the award. It was a big hit and was popularised by many other Booker Prize winners. His novel was also adapted into a film in April 2009. He currently resides in Mumbai, India. He observes: "There is a hunger among readers in India to be told other stories, to read challenging, even confrontational/disturbing stories; but this hunger is not being satisfied by our literati here. Rather than be upset, I see it as an opportunity of some kind".

Michael Portillo, Chairman of the Man Booker Prize 2008, praises: "The short list had contained a series of 'extraordinarily readable page-turners', including Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*. However, Mr. Adiga's book had prevailed because the judges felt that it was shocking and entertaining in equal measure". Adiga comments: "See, the poor dream all their lives of getting enough to eat and looking like the rich. And what do the rich dream of? Losing weight and looking like the poor. I was looking for the key for years, but the door was always open".

The White Tiger primarily enlightened the leaders and masses about the menace of the real estate business and underworld activities. Adiga emphasised that the tumultuous changes of the past fifty years have overturned the traditional hierarchies and old securities of life in India. The novel is primarily based on the appalling realities and brutal injustices witnessed by the writer.

Adiga's second novel *Between the Assassinations* was published in India in November 2008 and in the US and UK in mid-2009. The novel comprises about twelve interlinked short stories dealing with various social and political issues which matter most in India.

The Last Man in Tower was the third book published by Adiga in the UK in 2011. It was indeed a work of social criticism on various social evils and problems experienced by the people. Adiga (2011) notes: "I hope to tell a story that will entertain and challenge my readers. I am not making a statement about society or politics. Any novel should attempt to create a dramatic situation that features compelling characters". This book speaks of the real estate mafia and the insensitivity of civil society and the government towards the basic needs of the people.

The third novel and fourth book, *Selection Day*, was published in September 2016. The novel dealt with the ugly face of modern cricket, which revealed that cricket was a fraudulent sport which deprived opportunities to the talented and resourceful players due to caste and cash considerations. The work emphasised that the novelist had taken a lot of risks in placing the truths about the new urban India, which has seen burning social and economic concerns. Cricket has been subjected to both political and economic considerations in India. There is also sexuality and criminality which polluted the young and talented minds in urban India.

Aravind Adiga's short stories take the readers to a different world where other writers fear to tread. Adiga, too, has boldly gone where few Indian writers choose to venture, casting his gaze beyond the complacent smugness of middle-class drawing rooms to the anger and squalor lurking in the underbelly of urban India. Adiga's cast is limited, but his tableau covers a wide social and economic spectrum (Swarup, 2017).

Literary Influences on Adiga

Adiga was influenced by the three black American writers of the post – World War-II era: Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin and Richard Wright. In particular, Adiga was greatly influenced by Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Adiga was also shaped by English literature. He read the Complete Plays of Oscar Wilde and drew inspiration from the work. He had read the works of Gandhi, Nehru, R.K. Narayan, Nirad Chaudhuri, Khushwant Singh, M J Akbar, Salman Rushdie and V.S Naipaul and cultivated the spirit of patriotism. Adiga has made notable contributions to English literature through people-oriented novels and short stories. Adiga has examined certain factors which are solely responsible for social, cultural and economic changes in India. He has presented certain characters through which the wave of the new generation can be traced.

The Message of Adiga

Aravind Adiga was born in a rich, educated and cultured family. He grew up under the most joyful and rewarding circumstances as a talented literary personality. He gathered

knowledge from the world he saw around and observed all the traits of people that included his family, friends, relatives and society. The novels, short stories, characters and contents are studied in the light of the twenty-first century. His works are a significant part of this contemporary changing world. He has inspired the progressive youth of the present century to revolt against system-related failures. Adiga portrays a crystal-clear picture of the contemporary world when the old set-up of society is losing its ground. He has tackled the social and political issues very effectively and delivered the message that the people in India are still waiting for the dawn of their freedom from all of their exploitation.

Literature, like every other cultural artefact, reflects the changing equations and the emerging dimensions, including those in power structures. Literature is a prominent means of public education, enlightenment, emancipation and empowerment. Literature basically reflects the realities of life and offers solutions to the problems experienced by the people. The socio-political context marking the end of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, leading to fragmentation in political authority, simultaneous with the emergence of regional power structures, constitutes the literary works of Aravind Adiga. The works of Adiga primarily reveal the aesthetic response to globalisation in the Indian subcontinent. A comprehensive picture of the socio-political transformation through liberalisation in India emerges in the works of Aravind Adiga. The decentralisation of power, rise of the backward classes, the beginnings of caste politics and a potential shift towards regional power centres are presented in the works of Adiga. There is a striking absence of systematic investigation about the socio-political perspectives in Aravind Adiga's works in India.

Conclusion

Adiga has contributed four internationally recognised works such as *The White Tiger*, *Between the Assassinations*, *Last Man in Tower* and *Selection Day*, which have dealt with different aspects of life, culture, economy, society, politics and culture in India in the age of globalisation. *The White Tiger* is indeed a compelling, angry and darkly humorous novel which anatomises the fantastic cravings of the rich in India. The work has been rated as an excoriating piece of work by the scholars. It is a penetrating piece of social commentary. It is a missionary endeavour which pursues it with an undeviating determination and commitment. It has both social and political implications which really warrant the attention of the state, civil society, media, judiciary and other stakeholders of governance in India.

Adiga's second book *Between the Assassinations* is a collection of stories which portray the ground realities of Indian society. It deals with the lives of Dalits, Muslims, women and weaker sections of Indian society. It practically emerges as the moral biography of an Indian town and its ironies and agonies during the seven years between the assassinations of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv Gandhi. Adiga composes a group of portraits of ordinary Indians in a time of extraordinary transformation. It has been

observed that the novel is a triumph of the voice and imagination. The novel has dealt with the major social and political issues and concerns with reference to India in modern times.

Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* is a suspense-filled story of money and power. It primarily deals with the conflict of interest between the real estate mafia and civilians who remain at the receiving end in Indian society. Adiga has dealt with the nexus between the state and real estate mafia, which has made the lives of ordinary middle-class people highly miserable. It also talks about the helplessness of civil society, media and law and order agencies in modern Mumbai. It is a story of inhuman victimisation of Masterji who fights for his right to live in a place of his choice. The novel is richly insightful about business and character that it's hard to know in the present times. Adiga has enhanced his reputation as the preeminent chronicler of the country's messy present. The novel has both social and political connotations which focus the attention of policymakers and other stakeholders of administration and development in India.

Adiga's fourth work, *Selection Day*, is set in the world of cricket in Mumbai. The novel primarily deals with the hidden realities associated with Indian cricket in the present times. It also focuses on the conflict of interest between money and talent, caste and capacity and resourcefulness and manipulation. The novelist has also analysed the politics and economics of cricket, which has lost credibility and reputation in India over a period of time. The novel throws light on the social and economic aspects of Indian cricket. Adiga has delivered a clear message that cricket has been polluted because of the politics and other unprofessional considerations in India.

Adiga has emerged as a prolific writer in the present times. He gets under the skin of these characters and writes about them with insight, empathy, concern and commitment. All his works have great social and political concerns and implications. The works of Adiga are considered welcome additions to the body of knowledge in English Commonwealth Literature. All the works are indeed penetrating pieces of social and political commentary which warrant the attention of the stakeholders of governance and development in India.

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International Journal Of English and Studies (IJOES)
An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Journal; **Impact Factor:8.337(SJIF)**
ISSN: 2581-8333|Volume 8, Issue-8(August);2026

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