



## “Unveiling Social Structures: Class, Power and Inequality in Select Indian English Novels”

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### Abstract

The current paper critically evaluates how the interpretation of social structures on the selected Indian English selective novel specifically dwells on the aspect of the division of classes, power structure and inequality pervaded in the system. The Indian caste set up, economic imbalance and globalization, the Indian English fiction has long been a reflection of the socio-political reality within the country and the hierarchy firmly entrenched within the traditions of colonialism, Indian caste system, globalization and economic inequality. The paper will analyze the reflection of literary narratives on lived experiences of marginalized peoples and militate against the processes of dominance and contestations. This paper asserts that these novels do not just represent the issue of inequality but also challenge the issues of hegemonic structures, by not only foregrounding the voice of subalterns, but also by raising ethical questions about how justice and human dignity can be achieved. In making the literary analysis situational in terms of the larger socio-cultural contexts, this study helps us understand the mechanisms through which fiction attains a sense of potency as a social critique and social change agent.

**Keywords:** Indian English novels, social structure, class inequality, power relations, marginalization, postcolonial literature, socio-economic disparity

### Introduction:

Indian English fiction has risen to the level of a strong literary space where the complexities of the Indian society are not only described but are experimented with and critically analyzed. The works of the English language novels by writers over the centuries since the colonial period through to the contemporary globalized world, the novels have consistently dealt with the reality of social stratification and how the interplay of three primary aspects of social stratification-class, caste, and power-intersect and define individual and collective lives. Print written Indian novel in English, then, turns out to be more than a way of narration, it is a cultural document, which traps, the tensions, contradictions, and inequalities which are inherent in the social fabric of the nation.

One is the concept of social structure in India, deep-rooted in the history of hierarchical organization of a century old. Historically, social status, occupation and access to resources, was determined by the caste and other traditional systems which in turn further increased inequality. The structures have been in new forms even after the structures acquired independence and equality as well as justice is assured in the constitution. The new opportunity has been offered with the economic liberalization, urbanization and globalization, but it has created uneven development, and has reinforced systemic inequalities. As a result, the contemporary Indian society has been portrayed as a complex landscape where privilege and the absence of it co-exist, and oftentimes are in strict and real opposition to each other.

It is in this socio-historical context that the Indian English novels become relevant in the realisation of the experienced reality of inequality. Fiction is a genre where authors have challenged warehousing of relations of class and power, and have depicted how people negotiate these systems, which are not generally equitable and inclusionary. By such a gesture, this prefigures the marginalized discourses and voice (of the poor, working classes, social oppressed communities, etc.) that are to come along. The annals by the authors captures the interest of the readership; economic exploitation, social discrimination and exertion of power are an object of interest to the writers of both novels. The theme of understanding thematic issues of several Indian English novels revolves around the relationship that exists between class and power. Class divisions are not just the economic ones; they are closely tied to the



social identity, cultural capital and access to the institutional power. People occupying privileged classes tend to have power over resources and decision-making processes, whereas the marginalized groups are systematically locked out of such decision-making environments. These dynamics are best captured in literature, where characters whose lives are shaped by their socio-economic statuses are central to the storytelling. By doing this, novels reveal the processes of how power is upheld, challenged and at times outwitted.

The other important attribute of Indian English fiction is that it addresses the concept of inequality as a moral issue and on the social reality. The ethical character of a society that tolerates huge amounts of inequality in wealth, opportunity and dignity is often questioned by novelists. Through the stories of struggle, resistance and survival, they challenge the readers to think about the issues of justice, human rights as well as social responsibility. This ethical aspect takes the literary inequalities so far as they are depicted and it turns them to be the literary criticism that makes the reader reevaluate themselves in relation to these structures.

Moreover, the space of city is also likely to emerge in such novels as a principal location of the efforts to reveal the paradoxes of the modern India. Cities are represented as the sources of inspiration and opportunities and as the sources of exploitation and alienation. The overlay of seemingly glamorous and the life of a poor in the same geographical territory emphasizes the contrasting disparities in life today. Offering vivid accounts of urban experience, authors have indicated how globalization and capitalist development has redefined the content of social relations at the cost of further intensifying the pre-existing divides.

This paper dwells upon a few Indian English novels that are vivid in their depiction of class relationships, power and of inequality in the system. The analysis of the appearances will put the paper in a position where it will be able to show how literary narratives reflect social structures and offer a criticism of the social assumptions behind the literary narrative. The selected works portray the variety of perspectives, including a rural as well as urban environment, and personal experience and the general trends in society. They give a very wide perspective into the way in which inequality is created, lived in and revolted in the Indian landscape.

The main goal of the paper is to discuss the way Indian English novelists reveal and criticize the social structures that promote inequality. It seeks to explore how the literature could not just reflect the reality but would also have the functions of social awareness and change. By confronting the problems of class, power and marginalization, this study will help shedding light on the significance of fiction as the tool of critical inquiry, and commenting upon the society.

Overall, what this paper will do is to place Indian English novels as important cultural writings that explicate the intricacies of social life in India. With their subtle expressions of the inequalities and the power, these works promote a better insight into the forces that influence human experience. They serve as a reminder that literature does not represent solely an artistic enterprise but the crucial method of questioning and exploring the very forms upon which the society is based.

### **Review of literature:**

The description of the class, power and inequality in literary works in the Indian English novels has been constituted within a narration of over 30 years of literary work and its critical analysis. There was a big change in Indian English fiction with personal accounts being mixed with national history like their *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie (1981). The theme of the work of Rushdie predetermines the issues of identity, power, and change in the postcolonial society that was to be addressed later in terms of the socio-political realities. Similarly, in *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry (1995) we see the stark difference between socio-economic inequality in the Emergency period in India and the resultant effect of institutionalized oppression and poverty on the lives of oppressed people.



The other phenomenon that emerged towards the end of the twentieth century is the growing power of strong stories relating to such issues as caste, class and gender inequality. The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy (1997) throws the torch at the how the well-established order of caste hierarchies and social exclusion govern the relationship between a person and the social hierarchy. The novel has been much discussed due to the ability to potentialate the details of the process of marginalization and resistance to the finer details. Building these themes, The Inheritance of Loss by Kiran Desai (2006) looks at the implication of globalization, migration and identity crisis, particularly on the aspect of class division and cultural alienation.

In the twenty first century Indian English fiction continues to grapple with the issue of inequity in new socio economic realities. The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga (2008) places a keen emphasis on the theme of disparity in classes and corruption in contemporary India, shows the story of a main character who fights against poverty using questionable morality. In his second work, Between the Assassinations (2009) expounds further on the realities of ordinary societal disparities through unravelling various tales closely set in a fictitious Indian town. Similarly, the subsequent novel written by Roy, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness (2017), broadens the dialog through taking into consideration the issues of marginalization based on gender, religion and political conflict and thus reflecting the change nature of social structures in modern India. Critical scholarship of these literary works has been actively pursued that entails an analysis of their thematic interests. In every book of the book Andrew Said (1978) in his book orientalism gives a founding framework within which the colonial discourse forms power relations between the West and the East. Such concepts as the hybridity and negotiations of cultures are explored by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) in The Location of Culture as well. In her work of art, the masterpiece essay Can the Subaltern Speak? Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) emphasis the fact of silence of the oppressed voices that are an issue in the novels of Indian English that represent the subaltern experience.

Billing Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2002) in The Empire Writes Back adds more to the postcolonial theory by examining how the postcolonial literature challenges and re defines the colonial discourses. These are some of the most vital tools that could be used to examine the expression of the concepts of class, power and inequality in the Indian English novels.

It has also certain specially concentrated works of Aravind Adiga. Anwer (2013) unravels The White Tiger as a work of subaltern affirmation and its relation to criticize the prevailing power formations. Mendes (2010) provides an explanation of how the novel discussed the world views regarding what is considered as poverty and even more so is corruption. One of the concepts of justice and shades of morality is the novel, where Ratti (2018) argues that the novel challenges the conventional idea of morality and the sides of ethical neutrality in the name of justice. The more recent works of Adiga, which may be due to the larger socio-economic shifts, also take into consideration the concept of social hypocrisy, individualism, and transformation of the Indian society.

The present-day research is going on to further the debate on inequality within Indian English fiction. Haileab and Salve (2023) compare the effect decolonisation had on the psyche of the postcolonial Indian and African novels, based on the psychological consequences of colonialism and socio-economic inequality. Yadav (2024) dwells upon the process of decolonizing the mind and argues that the contemporary novels question the process of internalized colonial attitudes and promote the process of cultural self-awareness. The orientalism of the works by the writers Anita Desai, is discussed by Gupta and Bedi (2025), and previously the motifs of alienation and identity in her novels were discussed when Anita Desai did not take part in any particular event or situation, but she did not ignore any issue or circumstance she had experienced before. Gupta and Bedi (2025) discuss the orientalist nature of the works of the writers Anita Desai, and previously the motifs of alienation



and identity in her novels have been discussed when Anita Desai did not take part in a particular event or a situation.

In recent scholarship, Sharma (2026) highlights the role of resistance and the agency of subalterns in Indian novels and suggests that it exists not only as a reflection of societal reality, but also that one can dispute dominant ideology and culture with the help of literature. Better said, such critical works as Book by Chandra (2008) and Book by Mukherjee (2000) give detailed information about the development, themes and techniques of Indian English fiction, with special attention to the way in which these fictions address the issues of class, identity and power.

Overall, the existing literature demonstrates that Indian English novels could be evaluated as the key resource to analyze the types of social structure and inequality. Though the previous ones were divided between the colonial and the post-independence reality, the present one is based on the strength of globalization and the alterations of the power relations. However it still appears that fully developed analyses need to be integrated the class, power, marginalization, etc. must be combined into a single conceptual framework. The following paper will seek to redress this gap by trying to establish how the different novels, which they will discuss could be utilized to represent and critique the intricate social set ups of the Indian society.

### **Analysis of the study:**

#### **Indian English Novels:**

Indian English novels represent a significant source of literary passages wherein Indian writers come out using the English language to play out situations of realities in their society. These novels are not just a story but they reflect the cultural diversity of India, historical and social changes and tensions. With time, they have developed beyond the themes on colonial experience and complex themes of globalization, identity and inequality. This form is generally used by writers to show daily lives of people belonging to various social backgrounds and makes visible the struggles, aspirations and contradictions that exist in Indian society. Consequently, Indian English novels are transformed into a potent tool of artistic, as well as social criticism.

#### **Social Structure:**

The term social structure is the systematic state in which the society is organized in terms of its institutions, relationships and hierarchies. This structure is conditioned in India because of several factors, which include caste, class, religion, gender and family systems. All these aspects combined define the ways in which individuals are situated in the society, and the opportunities that can be offered to them. Social structure does not necessarily manifest itself in a direct manner, but that it has a strong impact on daily life, whether it concern education and job, or social relations. These structures in literature, especially in Indian English novels where these structures are frequently brought out in the works, reveal the degree to which social arrangements have an impact on the lives of human beings.

#### **Class Inequality:**

Class inequality underlines the difference between various economic groups in the society. Its manifestation has been viewed in the inequitable allocation of wealth, resources as well as opportunities. Such inequality can be very visible in some places in India, particularly in the disparity between urban affluent and rural impoverished or between elite and working-class societies. The Indian English novels have also sought to explore this rift by showing characters who are unable to survive to live under harsh conditions as others live in comfort and privilege. These stories make readers comprehend how the economic inequality affects not only material conditions but also dreams, relations, and life decisions.

#### **Power Relations:**



Power relations explain how power will work in society as well as who has it, how one utilizes it and how others are affected. Power is not restricted to political power, but can also take the form of social, economic and cultural power. Power in the Indian sense can be attributed to the levels of dominance and subordination, making class, caste, and gender be closely associated with power. In Indian English novels the dynamics in this regard are frequently indicated, in a manner that demonstrates how various groups are able to control resources and decision making and that other groups are in some way dependent or oppressed. Meanwhile, resistance is also manifested in these works, and people defy the authorities and attempt to alter their conditions.

#### **Marginalization:**

Marginalization can be defined as the process of being pushed to the far side of the society and having to perform without being fully acquainted with the social, economic and political life of a society. These populations can be lower castes, women, the poor, minority groups. Their voices are simply not listened or neglected, in the mainstream discourse. The novels written in Indian English can help in filling this gap by providing the space to such voices and accentuating their experiences. By using stories as a tool, authors can highlight the issues of injustice, discrimination, and in another way show the power and resistance of the oppressed and marginalized people.

#### **Postcolonial Literature:**

Postcolonial literature is about the effect of the colonial empire and how it has continued to affect the former colonies such as India. Although the independence occurred, various colonial structures and perceptions keep on influencing the people; be it language, education and administration. The effects of these influences are often reflected on in Indian English novels which dwell on questions of identity, cultural confrontation, and societal transformation. Another way this kind of literature disrupts the hegemony of Western attitudes, is through the presentation of provincial experiences and attitudes. This way contributes to a redefinition of cultural identity and the statement of the merits of indigenous traditions and voices.

#### **Socio-economic Disparity:**

Socio-economic disparity can be described as the variation in living standards, income, education as well as opportunities between different groups in the society. These inequalities are rampant and entrenched in India not only among urban but also among rural populations. These differences are very realistically described in Indian English novels, people of poor backgrounds have only few opportunities and continuously struggle. Simultaneously, they also depict the life of those who are advantageous, which also creates a clear contrast and emphasizes the lack of balance in society. Such literary manifestations prompt readers to consider the reasons and effects of inequality and necessity of social change.

#### **Conclusion**

The manner in which the Indian society, which is characterized by a class system, power and inequality has been highlighted through some of the Indian English novels has also been discussed in this paper. As a result of such a close contact between those two primary texts and the critical scholarship, it becomes quite evident that these novels are not merely some fountains of imagination, but rather very potent reflections of social realities. They reveal how the current trends in privilege and deprivation were shaped by the timeless impact of historical processes, such as colonialism, caste stratification, and economic globalization.

It has been discussed here that the problem of inequality in classes in such novels is not tied to the issue of economic inequality but to these issues, and to that of identity, access, and social mobility. Authors always express both the plight of oppressed and stigmatized people who are constrained within their rigid structures, and their alert on how power works through their institutions, social norms, day-to-day interactions. At the same time, there is no depiction of the people as the weak victims; they focus on striking back, and agency, and the promise of change, even in repressive regimes.



Further, the paper demonstrates that Indian English fiction stands out prominently in making the voices of the marginalized heard by the mainstream. These novels put into doubt the power of the dominant texts and question the validity of the existing power systems. They also relate to the other postcolonial problems and in this manner they demonstrate how the relationships and cultural identity of modern India is still influenced by the colonial past.

The other important lesson is that the problem of inequality in the contemporary world evolves within the framework of the globalized world. Contemporary novels are here a representation of the fast-moving society in which there is no exclusion of the persistence of poverty and exclusion. This duality brings about the need to view inequality as a complex and dynamic process, not a situation in itself.

To sum up, Indian English novels can be considered as one of the most important sources to analyze and evaluate the social systems according to which human beings live. They make the readers think of such issues as justice, equity and human dignity and also give the reader a point to come up with different possibilities as well. Assisting in making people appreciate the literary work as not only its ability to mirror the society, but social awareness and change as well.

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