"Socio-Cultural Hierarchies and Marginalization in Contemporary Indian English Fiction: A Comparative Study of *The God of Small Things, The White Tiger,* and *The Namesake*"

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Abstract:
This paper examines the representation of socio-cultural hierarchies and mechanisms of marginalization in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. Although the three novels emerge from different social and historical contexts, they collectively reveal how unequal social structures continue to influence individual experiences and opportunities. Roy exposes the persistence of caste and patriarchal authority in postcolonial Kerala, Adiga critiques class inequality and the contradictions of economic liberalization, while Lahiri explores questions of cultural identity and belonging within immigrant communities. Through characters such as Velutha, Ammu, Balram, Ashima, and Gogol, the novels illustrate different responses to social constraints, including resistance, adaptation, mobility, and self-discovery. The novels offer complementary perspectives on contemporary Indian experience by highlighting the relationship between individual lives and broader social structures. A comparative reading of these novels demonstrates the continuing relevance of socio-cultural issues in contemporary Indian English fiction.

Keywords: *Indian English Fiction; Socio-Cultural Hierarchies; Marginalization; Caste; Class; Gender; Migration; Identity; Diaspora; and Globalization.*

Introduction:

Contemporary Indian English fiction has emerged as an important literary space for exploring the social, cultural, and political realities of modern India and its diaspora. Since the late twentieth century, Indian English novelists have increasingly engaged with issues such as caste discrimination, class inequality, gender relations, migration, identity, and globalization. Through diverse narrative styles and settings, these writers have examined how individuals negotiate social hierarchies and cultural change in a rapidly transforming world. As a result, Indian English fiction has become a significant medium for understanding both the continuities and transformations within contemporary Indian society.

Among the most influential voices in this tradition are Arundhati Roy, Aravind Adiga, and Jhumpa Lahiri. Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) explores the intersections of caste, gender, family, and social power in postcolonial Kerala. Through the experiences of Ammu, Velutha, Rahel, and Estha, the novel reveals the continuing influence of social hierarchies on personal relationships and individual freedom. Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) shifts attention to the economic realities of contemporary India and examines class inequality, poverty, and social mobility through the story of Balram Halwai. Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), in contrast, focuses on migration, cultural identity, and belonging, tracing the experiences of a Bengali immigrant family in the United States. Although these writers address different social realities, all three are concerned with the relationship between individuals and the social structures that shape their lives.

The selection of these novels is based on their thematic relevance and their representation of distinct yet interconnected dimensions of contemporary Indian experience. Together, they provide a broad perspective on caste, class, gender, migration, identity, and globalization. While *The God of Small Things* examines social exclusion within India, *The White Tiger* explores the inequalities of a liberalizing economy, and *The Namesake* investigates the challenges of diasporic life. Thus, these novels offer valuable insights into how socio-cultural hierarchies operate across different social and geographical contexts.

Aims and Objectives:

1. To analyse how caste, class, gender, and migration function as socio-cultural structures that shape the experiences of marginalization in the selected novels.
2. To examine the ways in which family, identity, belonging, and resistance are represented in the lives of individuals negotiating social and cultural constraints.
3. To compare the perspectives of Roy, Adiga, and Lahiri on contemporary Indian and

diasporic experiences, with particular reference to globalization, social mobility, and cultural transformation.

Research Questions:

1. How do *The God of Small Things*, *The White Tiger*, and *The Namesake* represent socio-cultural hierarchies and their impact on marginalized individuals?
2. How do caste, class, gender, and migration function as mechanisms of marginalization in the selected novels?

Hypothesis:

The God of Small Things, *The White Tiger*, and *The Namesake* portray caste, class, gender, and migration as interconnected socio-cultural structures that shape experiences of marginalization. Despite their different settings and narrative concerns, the novels collectively reveal how individuals negotiate identity, belonging, and resistance within unequal social systems.

Research Methodology:

The present study adopts a qualitative, interpretative, and comparative literary approach to examine socio-cultural hierarchies in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003). Using close textual analysis, the study investigates the representation of caste, class, gender, migration, identity, and globalization through significant characters, events, and narrative situations. The analysis is informed by socio-cultural, feminist, postcolonial, and diasporic perspectives. Primary texts are examined alongside relevant scholarly criticism to identify similarities and differences in the portrayal of marginalization and contemporary Indian experience.

Social Hierarchies and Mechanisms of Marginalization:

One of the most significant concerns in contemporary Indian English fiction is the persistence of social hierarchies despite the promises of democracy, modernization, and globalization. All the three novels are set in different social and geographical contexts, yet they examine how inherited and socially constructed identities shape individual lives. Roy explores caste discrimination in postcolonial Kerala, Adiga investigates class inequality in liberalized India, and Lahiri examines the cultural marginalization experienced by immigrants in the United States. Together, these novels suggest that marginalization is not simply the result of individual circumstances but is produced by powerful social structures that determine who belongs, who is excluded, and who is permitted social mobility.

In Roy's novel, caste operates as the most visible mechanism of exclusion. Although the narrative is set in a period after Indian independence, caste continues to regulate personal relationships and social behaviour. The relationship between Ammu and Velutha becomes the strongest example of this reality. Their relationship challenges a deeply entrenched social order because it crosses caste boundaries that society considers inviolable. Roy presents their love not merely as a personal relationship but as an act that threatens the authority of family, community, and tradition. The tragic consequences that follow reveal the continuing power of caste despite constitutional guarantees of equality. As Aijaz Ahmad observes, Roy's novel exposes the contradictions of postcolonial India, where democratic ideals coexist with deeply rooted social inequalities. He states: "The most remarkable achievement of Arundhati Roy is that she takes these elements of deeply rooted social prejudice – of caste, of gender, of claustrophobia of familial relations- and shows how they operate as natural and determinant factors in the daily lives of people…" (Ahmad, 104)

The violence inflicted upon Velutha further demonstrates how social institutions reinforce caste hierarchy. The line "In Mammachi's time, Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Syrian Christians and Brahmins wouldn't defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's footprint" (Roy, 74) provides a direct evidence of caste-based exclusion. His arrest and custodial torture are not presented as isolated incidents but as outcomes of a system that already assumes the guilt and inferiority of the marginalized. The police accept accusations against him with little scrutiny because his social position makes him vulnerable. Through this episode, Roy illustrates how institutional authority often serves dominant social interests. Brinda Bose argues that the novel exposes the hidden forms of violence through which social respectability and hierarchy are maintained. The tragedy is intensified by Estha's forced involvement in the process. As a child, he becomes an unwilling participant in a system that demands conformity and silence. The novel therefore demonstrates that caste oppression affects not only its direct victims but also those who are compelled to sustain it.

While Roy focuses on caste, Adiga examines class as a mechanism of marginalization. Like Velutha, Balram Halwai occupies a position determined largely by birth. From childhood, his opportunities are limited by poverty. Despite his intelligence and promise as a student, he is forced to leave school and contribute to his family's survival. The statement: "A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. Ours are different. My father's spine was a knotted rope... The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen" (Adiga, 27) reflects that poverty is socially inherited rather than individually chosen. The scene exposes the structural nature of economic inequality. Balram's failure to continue his

education is not the result of personal shortcomings but of social conditions that deny access to opportunity. In this respect, Adiga challenges narratives that portray success as the outcome of individual effort alone. The tea-shop episode reinforces this critique. Instead of receiving an education, Balram enters a cycle of labour that reproduces existing inequalities. His experiences reveal that economic growth has not necessarily translated into social mobility for the poor. Shonaleeka Kaul notes that Adiga's novel exposes the uneven consequences of globalization and economic liberalization, particularly for those who remain excluded from its benefits. The contrast between India's image as a rising economic power and Balram's lived reality becomes one of the central tensions of the novel. This tension reaches its clearest expression in the metaphor of the "Rooster Coop' and it is expressive in the line:

"A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 per cent – as strong, as talented as intelligent in every way – to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hands, he will throw it back at you with a curse." (Adiga 175-176)

Balram explains that poor people remain trapped not only because of economic hardship but also because of social conditioning. Fear, family obligations, and acceptance of hierarchy prevent meaningful resistance. The metaphor suggests that domination is sustained through ideology as much as through material deprivation. Priyamvada Gopal argues that Adiga's critique extends beyond poverty itself to the psychological structures that normalize inequality. Like Roy's portrayal of caste, Adiga's representation of class demonstrates how social systems reproduce themselves through institutions, beliefs, and everyday practices.

Lahiri's *The Namesake* introduces a different but related form of marginalization. Unlike Roy and Adiga, Lahiri's characters are not excluded primarily because of caste or poverty. Instead, they experience the uncertainties of migration, cultural difference, and divided identity. Ashima's arrival in the United States illustrates the emotional and social challenges of immigrant life. Removed from familiar cultural networks, she struggles with loneliness and dislocation. The line: "For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy—a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts" (Lahiri, 49) reflects Ashima's loneliness and cultural displacement. Her experiences demonstrate that migration involves more than geographical movement; it also requires adaptation to unfamiliar social and cultural environments. The question of belonging becomes even more prominent through Gogol Ganguli. His discomfort with his name reflects a deeper uncertainty about identity. The name constantly reminds him of a cultural heritage that separates him from the society in which he grows up. His attempts to redefine himself, including his decision to adopt the name Nikhil, reveal a desire for acceptance within mainstream American culture. However, Lahiri shows that identity cannot be transformed simply through a change of name. As Vijay Mishra argues, diasporic subjects often occupy a space between cultures where belonging remains incomplete and constantly negotiated. Gogol's relationship with Maxine further highlights this struggle. Through Maxine's family, he encounters a world that appears culturally confident and socially effortless. For a time, he attempts to distance himself from his Bengali background and immerse himself in this new environment. Yet the relationship ultimately reveals the limits of assimilation. His family's values, memories, and cultural practices continue to shape his identity. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity, many scholars have interpreted Gogol's experience as an example of living in an in-between space where identities are continually formed and reformed. Lahiri therefore presents migration as a social condition that produces its own forms of marginalization and uncertainty.

Despite their different settings, the three novels reveal striking similarities in their treatment of social hierarchy. Velutha, Balram, and Gogol inhabit different worlds, yet each encounters barriers created by forces beyond individual control. Velutha's life is shaped by caste, Balram's by class, and Gogol's by cultural difference. In each case, personal aspirations are constrained by larger social structures. The novels challenge the belief that freedom and success are solely matters of individual choice. Instead, they demonstrate how social institutions, cultural expectations, and inherited identities influence the possibilities available to individuals. At the same time, the novels differ in the forms that marginalization takes. Roy depicts a rigid social hierarchy maintained through caste prejudice and institutional violence. Adiga presents inequality as a consequence of economic structures and ideological control. Lahiri focuses on the psychological and cultural dimensions of exclusion within diasporic life. These differences broaden the understanding of marginalization by showing that it can operate through social status, economic power, or cultural belonging. Collectively, the three novels offer a powerful critique of contemporary society by exposing the mechanisms through which inequality is created, maintained, and normalized. Through their portrayals of caste, class, and migration, Roy, Adiga, and Lahiri demonstrate that social hierarchies continue to shape human lives even in an age that claims to value equality and freedom.

Gender, Family, and Regulation of Desire:

While caste, class, and migration shape social identities in the selected novels, the family serves as the primary institution through which these social hierarchies are maintained and reproduced. In *The*

God of Small Things, *The White Tiger*, and *The Namesake*, family is not merely a private space of affection and support; it is also a site of discipline, expectation, and control. Through their portrayals of Ammu, Ashima, Moushumi, Pinky Madam, and other female characters, Roy, Adiga, and Lahiri reveal how women's lives are shaped by patriarchal norms that regulate sexuality, marriage, mobility, and personal choice. Although the forms of oppression differ across caste, class, and diasporic contexts, the novels collectively suggest that family remains one of the most powerful mechanisms through which social values are transmitted and enforced.

Among the three novels, Roy presents the most direct critique of patriarchy. Ammu's life illustrates the limited choices available to women within a society structured by both caste and gender. Her marriage is not represented as a union of companionship but as an attempt to escape the restrictions imposed upon her in her parental home. However, the marriage quickly becomes another site of oppression. Her husband's alcoholism and willingness to compromise her dignity expose the vulnerability of women who lack economic independence. When Ammu leaves her husband and returns to Ayemenem with her children, she does not gain freedom. Instead, she encounters another form of control exercised through family and community expectations.

The family's response to Ammu's relationship with Velutha demonstrates how female sexuality becomes a matter of social regulation. While male characters such as Chacko enjoy considerable freedom in their relationships, Ammu's desires are treated as a threat to family honour. Ammus challenges patriarchy and caste system, "They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much" (Roy, 31). Roy repeatedly exposes this double standard throughout the novel. Ammu is condemned not only because Velutha belongs to a lower caste but also because she asserts her right to choose her own partner. As Brinda Bose observes, Roy's novel reveals how patriarchal societies often perceive female desire as dangerous because it challenges established structures of authority. The violent punishment that follows illustrates the extent to which family and society collaborate to maintain these boundaries.

Roy's critique of patriarchy is further developed through Mammachi's relationship with Pappachi. Despite suffering years of physical and emotional abuse, Mammachi continues to accept her husband's authority. The novel does not portray her submission as weakness but as evidence of a social order that normalizes male dominance. Significantly, Mammachi herself later participates in the condemnation of Ammu and Velutha. This contradiction demonstrates how patriarchal values are often internalized and reproduced by those who have themselves suffered under them. As Anuradha Dingwaney Needham argues, Roy's female characters reveal the complex ways in which women may simultaneously resist and reinforce patriarchal structures. Through Ammu and Mammachi, Roy shows that family functions as a powerful institution through which gender norms are preserved across generations.

Adiga's *The White Tiger* offers a different perspective on gender by examining the relationship between patriarchy and class. Unlike Roy, Adiga places male experience at the centre of the narrative. Nevertheless, the limited presence of women in the novel is itself significant. Women often appear as marginal figures whose lives are shaped by economic dependence and social constraint. One of the most influential female characters is Balram's grandmother, Kusum. Within the family, she exercises considerable authority and controls major decisions regarding marriage, labour, and finances. At first glance, her power appears to challenge patriarchal assumptions. However, her authority ultimately serves to maintain the same social structures that limit individual freedom. She prioritizes family survival over personal aspirations and expects younger family members to sacrifice their desires for collective needs. The stamen "The family is the reason we are trapped" (Adiga, 176) reflects the reality. The near absence of women from Balram's public world is equally revealing. The women of the 'Darkness' rarely possess independent voices or opportunities. Their labour sustains families, yet they remain largely invisible within social and economic life. Critics such as Priyamvada Gopal have noted that Adiga's representation of women reflects the broader marginalization of poor women within India's unequal social order. Their silence functions as a reminder that economic exploitation often intersects with gender inequality.

The character of Pinky Madam introduces a different dimension of female experience. Unlike the women of Laxmangarh, she belongs to a privileged social class and possesses greater personal freedom. Her decision to leave Ashok and return to the United States demonstrates a degree of autonomy unavailable to many other female characters in the novel. Yet her situation is not entirely free from patriarchal pressures. Her dissatisfaction reflects tensions between traditional expectations of marriage and the individualism associated with her transnational upbringing. Through Pinky Madam, Adiga suggests that class privilege may expand opportunities for women without fully eliminating gendered expectations.

In *The Namesake*, Lahiri explores gender within the context of migration and diasporic life. Ashima Ganguli's experiences illustrate how immigrant women often carry the responsibility of preserving cultural traditions while simultaneously adapting to unfamiliar environments. The stamen "She has never known a person to enter the world so alone, so bereft" (Lahiri, 25) reflects the arranged-marriage context and Ashima's limited agency at the beginning of her

married life. When she arrives in the United States as a young bride, she experiences profound loneliness and cultural dislocation. Unlike Ammu, whose struggle is openly confrontational, Ashima's response is gradual and adaptive. She builds social networks, maintains Bengali customs, and creates a sense of home within a foreign country. Susan Koshy argues that Lahiri's immigrant women occupy a complex position between cultural preservation and transformation. Ashima's journey reflects this tension. At the same time, Lahiri demonstrates that migration alters traditional gender roles. As Ashima gradually gains confidence and independence, she begins to redefine her identity beyond the domestic sphere. Following Ashoke's death, she makes important decisions regarding her future and develops a more autonomous sense of self. Her story suggests that adaptation can become a form of quiet resistance to restrictive social expectations.

The experiences of Moushumi and Sonia reveal further changes across generations. Unlike Ashima, who largely accepts the responsibilities assigned to her, Moushumi resists expectations associated with marriage and cultural conformity. Her dissatisfaction with conventional domestic life and her desire for intellectual and personal freedom lead her to challenge both Bengali and American social norms. Vijay Mishra's discussions of diasporic identity help illuminate Moushumi's position as someone who refuses stable definitions of belonging and womanhood. Her choices are often controversial, but they represent a conscious rejection of prescribed roles. Sonia offers yet another model of female agency. Compared with Gogol and Moushumi, she experiences fewer conflicts regarding identity and cultural expectation. She navigates American society with relative ease while maintaining meaningful connections to her family. Through Sonia, Lahiri suggests that later generations may negotiate cultural expectations more flexibly than their parents. Nevertheless, her experiences do not indicate the disappearance of patriarchal norms; rather, they demonstrate changing strategies for dealing with them.

All the three novels reveal both shared concerns and important differences. Ammu, Ashima, and Moushumi represent distinct responses to patriarchal structures operating in different social contexts. Ammu openly resists the restrictions imposed upon her and pays a devastating price for doing so. Ashima adapts to the expectations surrounding her while gradually reshaping them to create greater personal autonomy. Moushumi rejects conventional expectations altogether and seeks to define herself outside established cultural frameworks. These different responses reflect the varying social realities depicted by Roy, Adiga, and Lahiri, yet they all point to the continuing influence of gendered power relations.

The novels also demonstrate that family plays a crucial role in maintaining social hierarchies. In Roy's work, family protects caste and patriarchal authority; in Adiga's novel, it reinforces economic obligations and gender inequality; in Lahiri's fiction, it becomes the site where cultural traditions are preserved and negotiated. Despite differences in setting and circumstance, the family consistently functions as a mechanism through which social norms are transmitted from one generation to the next. By foregrounding women's experiences, the three authors reveal the intimate ways in which larger systems of power enter everyday life. Their novels therefore show that the struggle against marginalization is not only fought in public institutions but also within the private spaces of home, marriage, and family relationships.

Identity, Belonging, and Resistance:

The social hierarchies discussed in the previous sections shape not only material conditions but also the ways individuals understand themselves and their place in the world. The marginalized characters struggle to construct meaningful identities within systems that seek to define them according to caste, class, or cultural background. The three novels suggest that identity is neither fixed nor freely chosen. Rather, it is formed through continuous negotiation between personal aspirations and social expectations. While Velutha seeks dignity within a caste-bound society, Balram pursues social mobility in a deeply unequal economic system, and Gogol searches for belonging between two cultures. Together, these characters represent different responses to marginalization and different forms of resistance to the identities imposed upon them.

In Roy's *The God of Small Things*, questions of identity are closely connected to memory, silence, and social exclusion. The experiences of Rahel and Estha demonstrate how oppressive social structures leave lasting psychological effects on individuals. The novel's fragmented narrative mirrors the fragmented memories of the twins, whose childhood is permanently shaped by the events surrounding Velutha's death and Ammu's punishment. Their inability to fully process these experiences reflects the emotional consequences of living within a society governed by rigid social rules. As many critics have noted, Roy's non-linear narrative structure itself becomes a representation of trauma, illustrating how painful memories resist coherent reconstruction.

The figure of Velutha offers a different perspective on identity and resistance. Despite occupying the lowest position within the caste hierarchy, he refuses to internalize the inferiority assigned to him by society. His skill as a carpenter, his confidence, and his intellectual curiosity distinguish him from the passive role traditionally expected of a Paravan. Roy consistently portrays him as a man of exceptional ability and self-respect. His relationship with Ammu represents more than a romantic transgression; it becomes an assertion of his humanity and his right to

exist beyond caste boundaries. In choosing to pursue a relationship that society forbids, Velutha challenges the social order that seeks to define his worth solely through caste identity. As Aijaz Ahmad argues, Roy's novel exposes the "pathology of the civil society itself, the extreme cruelty of its normalities, the lethal power of its taboos, and the way it utilizes state power (the police, the law) to enforce its own exclusions" (Ahmad, 105).

Yet Velutha's resistance remains tragically limited by the power of the structures surrounding him. His fate illustrates the difficulty of sustaining personal dignity within an oppressive system. The novel therefore presents resistance not as a guarantee of liberation but as an affirmation of human agency in the face of overwhelming social constraints. Velutha's significance lies not in his ability to defeat caste oppression but in his refusal to accept the identity that caste assigns to him.

A similar struggle for self-definition appears in Adiga's *The White Tiger*, although the social context differs significantly. Whereas Velutha seeks recognition of his humanity, Balram seeks escape from the limitations imposed by poverty and class. From childhood, Balram recognizes that the social system surrounding him offers little possibility of advancement. His response to this realization is not resignation but self-education. Even after leaving school, he continues to observe, learn, and analyze the world around him. Throughout the novel, knowledge becomes a tool through which he attempts to challenge the inequalities that define his existence. The stamen: "The moment you recognize what is beautiful in this world, you stop being a slave" (Adiga, 40) reflects Balram's intellectual awakening and refusal to remain confined by the identity upon him by the poverty and class. Balram's development demonstrates the relationship between identity and aspiration. He refuses to accept the role assigned to him by his social position and instead imagines a different future. This desire for transformation culminates in his decision to murder Ashok and take control of his own life. The act is morally troubling, yet Adiga presents it as the consequence of a social system that offers few legitimate paths to mobility. Critics such as Priyamvada Gopal have argued that Balram's actions expose the violence embedded within structures of economic inequality rather than simply celebrating individual ambition. His rebellion is therefore both personal and social. The establishment of his business in Bangalore further complicates questions of identity and resistance. On one level, Balram succeeds in achieving the mobility he seeks. He escapes poverty, acquires wealth, and becomes an entrepreneur. On another level, however, his success raises uncomfortable questions. The methods he uses to achieve freedom resemble the practices of the very system he criticizes. Adiga therefore avoids presenting resistance as morally pure or uncomplicated. Balram's transformation demonstrates how individuals may challenge oppression while simultaneously reproducing aspects of the structures they oppose. His story suggests that social mobility within an unequal system often comes at a significant ethical cost.

If Velutha seeks dignity and Balram seeks mobility, Gogol Ganguli in Lahiri's *The Namesake* seeks belonging. Unlike the protagonists of Roy and Adiga, Gogol is not marginalized primarily by caste or class. His struggle emerges from the experience of living between cultures. As the child of Bengali immigrants growing up in the United States, he constantly negotiates competing expectations regarding identity, family, and cultural affiliation. This struggle becomes most visible through his relationship with his name. The decision to change his name from Gogol to Nikhil reflects his desire to distance himself from the cultural difference that the name represents. For Gogol, the name becomes a symbol of the awkwardness and uncertainty he experiences as someone who does not feel entirely at home in either Indian or American culture. The name change appears to offer an opportunity for self-reinvention and greater social acceptance. Yet Lahiri gradually reveals that identity cannot be transformed simply through external changes. Cultural memory, family history, and personal experience continue to shape Gogol's sense of self. His relationship with Maxine further illustrates this search for belonging. Maxine's family represents a world of confidence, ease, and cultural familiarity that Gogol finds deeply attractive. For a time, he immerses himself in their lifestyle and distances himself from his own family traditions. However, this apparent assimilation remains incomplete. The relationship highlights the persistent gap between his inherited cultural identity and the social world he wishes to inhabit. As Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity suggests diasporic identities often emerge in an in-between space where complete assimilation is impossible and cultural boundaries remain fluid.

The death of Ashoke marks a turning point in Gogol's understanding of himself. Confronted with loss, he begins to reassess the significance of family history and cultural inheritance. The novel does not resolve his identity conflict through a simple return to tradition. Instead, Lahiri presents identity as a process of reconciliation between different aspects of the self. Gogol realizes that identity canot simply be discarded through change of name and the statement "Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives, Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so, cease to exist" (Lahari, 289) reflects his reconciliation with family, history, memory, and cultural inheritance. By the end of the novel, Gogol develops a more mature understanding of his relationship to both his Bengali heritage and his American upbringing. His journey demonstrates that belonging does not require choosing one identity over

another but learning to live with complexity and multiplicity.

Together, the three novels reveal important differences in the forms that resistance takes. Velutha's resistance is rooted in dignity and self-respect. He challenges caste hierarchy by asserting his right to love, desire, and humanity. Balram's resistance takes the form of social mobility. He rejects the limitations of poverty and actively pursues economic advancement, even through morally questionable means. Gogol's resistance is less dramatic but equally significant. Rather than confronting external oppression directly, he resists the pressure to conform to a single cultural identity and gradually constructs a more flexible understanding of belonging. Despite these differences, the three characters share a common struggle against identities imposed by society. None of them passively accepts the roles assigned by caste, class, or cultural expectation. Their experiences demonstrate that identity is not merely inherited but continuously negotiated. At the same time, the novels recognize that personal agency operates within powerful social constraints. Velutha cannot escape caste, Balram cannot entirely escape the inequalities that shaped him, and Gogol cannot completely detach himself from either of the cultures that define his life. Through these characters, Roy, Adiga, and Lahiri offer complementary perspectives on the relationship between identity and marginalization. Their novels suggest that resistance begins with the refusal to accept socially imposed definitions of self. Whether through dignity, mobility, or belonging, Velutha, Balram, and Gogol each seek forms of freedom that extend beyond the limitations imposed by society. In doing so, they reveal both the possibilities and the limits of individual agency within unequal social worlds.

Globalization, Mobility, and Contemporary Indian Experience:

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries witnessed profound transformations in Indian society as globalization, economic liberalization, migration, and technological development reshaped traditional social structures. *The God of Small Things*, *The White Tiger*, and *The Namesake* engage with these transformations from different perspectives. While Roy examines the continuing influence of colonial history on postcolonial India, Adiga focuses on the inequalities generated by economic liberalization, and Lahiri explores the cultural consequences of global migration. Together, the novels reveal that globalization does not erase older social hierarchies. Instead, it creates new opportunities while simultaneously reproducing existing inequalities in different forms. Through their representations of mobility, migration, and cultural exchange, the three authors map India's complex encounter with an increasingly interconnected world.

In *The God of Small Things*, globalization appears primarily through the lingering presence of colonial influence. Although the novel is set after independence, colonial history continues to shape social attitudes, cultural values, and personal aspirations. One of the clearest examples is Chacko, whose education at Oxford symbolizes the prestige still attached to British institutions. His foreign education grants him cultural authority within the family and reinforces the perception that Western knowledge carries greater value than local experience. Roy uses Chacko's character to demonstrate how colonial power survives not only through political structures but also through cultural consciousness. The statement "History was like an old house at night. With all the lamps lit. And ancestors whispering inside" (Roy, 52) marks the continuing presence of the past within the present, means how history continues to shape contemporary life and identity. The admiration associated with his Oxford background reflects the persistence of colonial hierarchies within postcolonial society.

The arrival of Sophie Mol further develops this theme. As the daughter of Chacko's English ex-wife, Sophie Mol occupies a privileged position within the family despite being largely unfamiliar with its social realities. Her arrival generates excitement and admiration that contrasts sharply with the treatment of local characters such as Velutha. Roy subtly exposes the unequal value assigned to Western and Indian identities. Critics such as Aijaz Ahmad have observed that the novel repeatedly reveals how colonial categories continue to influence social relationships long after the end of formal colonial rule. Sophie Mol's symbolic importance lies not in her actions but in the attitudes she evokes. Through her presence, Roy demonstrates that postcolonial India remains deeply influenced by inherited structures of cultural prestige and social distinction. At the same time, the novel suggests that globalization does not necessarily weaken traditional hierarchies. Despite exposure to Western education and culture, the Ayemenem community remains governed by caste prejudice, patriarchal values, and social conservatism. The contrast between outward modernity and internal inequality becomes one of the central tensions of the narrative. Roy therefore presents globalization not as a force of liberation but as a process that coexists with older systems of power.

Adiga's *The White Tiger* examines a later phase of India's engagement with the global world. Whereas Roy focuses on the aftereffects of colonialism, Adiga explores the consequences of economic liberalization and neoliberal development. The novel is set during a period when India was increasingly celebrated as a rising economic power. Urban centres expanded rapidly, multinational corporations entered the market, and a new middle class emerged. Yet Adiga consistently questions whether these developments

benefited society as a whole and it is clearly reflected in the statement:

"Please understand, Your Excellency, that India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness." (Adiga, 14)

The contrast between Delhi's elite spaces and the realities of poverty provides one of the novel's most powerful critiques. Through Balram's observations, readers encounter luxury shopping malls, expensive hotels, and gated communities that symbolize India's economic growth. However, these spaces exist alongside widespread poverty and social exclusion. Balram repeatedly notices that the benefits of development are concentrated among a small section of society while millions remain trapped in conditions of hardship. Critics such as Shonaleeka Kaul argue that the novel exposes the uneven distribution of globalization's rewards and challenges celebratory narratives of national progress.

The significance of Bangalore further strengthens this critique. Often portrayed as the centre of India's technological revolution, Bangalore represents the promises of globalization, entrepreneurship, and innovation. For Balram, the city becomes a place where social mobility appears possible. Yet the novel simultaneously reveals the inequalities that underpin this success. Economic growth creates opportunities for some while leaving existing power structures largely intact. Balram's eventual rise as a businessman illustrates both the possibilities and contradictions of neoliberal India. His success depends upon navigating a system characterized by corruption, exploitation, and moral compromise. Priyamvada Gopal notes that Adiga's novel suggests that economic mobility often occurs within structures that continue to privilege the powerful. Unlike Roy, who emphasizes colonial inheritance, Adiga focuses on contemporary capitalism as a force reshaping Indian society. Nevertheless, both novels demonstrate that modernization does not automatically produce social equality. Instead, old hierarchies adapt to new economic realities, creating fresh forms of exclusion and privilege.

Lahiri's *The Namesake* shifts the discussion from economic globalization to the global movement of people, cultures, and identities. The novel explores the experiences of migrants who live across national boundaries and maintain connections to multiple cultural worlds. For the Ganguli family, globalization is not an abstract economic process but a lived reality that shapes everyday life, family relationships, and personal identity. The transnational movement between India and the United States forms the foundation of the narrative. Ashima and Ashoke leave India in search of educational and professional opportunities, yet their migration creates a complex relationship between homeland and host country. They remain emotionally connected to Bengal while gradually establishing lives in America. Lahiri portrays migration as a continuous process of negotiation rather than a complete break from the past. Home becomes a fluid concept that extends across geographical boundaries and it is reflected in a statement: "True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere" (Lahiri, 276).

The Bengali community gatherings depicted throughout the novel further illustrate this dynamic. Through cultural celebrations, shared meals, and social networks, immigrant families attempt to preserve traditions while adapting to their new environment. These gatherings create a sense of belonging, yet they also reveal the challenges of maintaining cultural identity across generations. For Gogol and Sonia, who grow up in America, these traditions often appear distant from their everyday experiences. The resulting tensions reflect broader questions about identity and cultural continuity within diasporic communities.

Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity emphasizes the emergence of identities formed between cultures rather than within fixed national boundaries. Gogol's experiences exemplify this condition. He is neither entirely Indian nor entirely American but occupies a space shaped by both influences. Vijay Mishra similarly argues that diasporic identities are characterized by continual negotiation between memory, migration, and belonging. Lahiri's novel therefore presents globalization as a process that transforms personal identity and challenges traditional understandings of nation, culture, and home.

A comparative reading of the three novels reveals different stages of India's engagement with the global world. Roy's novel examines the enduring influence of colonial history and the ways in which postcolonial societies continue to be shaped by inherited cultural hierarchies. Adiga's work focuses on neoliberal transformation and the inequalities generated by economic liberalization. Lahiri's narrative explores the cultural consequences of migration and the emergence of transnational identities. Together, the novels trace a broad historical movement from colonial inheritance to economic globalization and finally to diasporic experience. Despite their differences, the novels share a common insight: globalization does not eliminate social inequality. In Roy's Kerala, colonial influence coexists with caste discrimination. In Adiga's India, economic growth occurs alongside deep class divisions. In Lahiri's America, migration creates opportunities but also produces uncertainty, displacement, and questions of belonging. The global world depicted in these novels is therefore neither wholly liberating nor wholly oppressive. Rather, it is a space in which older hierarchies are transformed, reconfigured, and sometimes intensified.

Taken together, *The God of Small Things*, *The White Tiger*, and *The Namesake* provide a comprehensive literary account of contemporary India's encounter

with globalization. Roy reveals the persistence of colonial legacies, Adiga exposes the contradictions of neoliberal development, and Lahiri explores the complexities of diasporic identity. Their novels demonstrate that globalization is best understood not as a single process but as a series of interconnected transformations affecting culture, economy, and identity. By tracing these changes through individual lives and family histories, the three authors offer important insights into the evolving nature of contemporary Indian experience.

Conclusions:

The present study highlights the way Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* represent socio-cultural hierarchies and their impact on marginalized individuals. Although the novels emerge from different historical, geographical, and cultural contexts, they share a concern with the ways social structures influence individual lives and shape experiences of exclusion, identity, and belonging. The study demonstrates that caste, class, gender, and migration function as significant mechanisms of marginalization in the selected texts. In Roy's novel, caste remains a powerful force that regulates social relationships and limits individual freedom despite the promises of modern democracy. Through the experiences of Ammu and Velutha, Roy reveals how deeply embedded social hierarchies continue to affect personal choices and life opportunities. In Adiga's novel, class inequality emerges as the central concern. Balram's journey from rural poverty to urban entrepreneurship highlights both the possibilities and the limitations of social mobility in contemporary India. The novel suggests that economic growth and liberalization have created new opportunities, but they have not eliminated structural inequalities. Lahiri's *The Namesake* approaches marginalization from a different perspective by focusing on migration, cultural identity, and belonging. Through the experiences of the Ganguli family, the novel explores the emotional and cultural challenges of living between different social worlds.

The study also shows that family plays a crucial role in maintaining social norms and expectations. In all three novels, family functions as a space where broader social values are transmitted and reinforced. Roy exposes how patriarchal and caste-based assumptions shape women's lives and regulate female desire. Adiga illustrates how economic hardship and social expectations influence family relationships and individual choices. Lahiri demonstrates how immigrant families negotiate cultural traditions while adapting to new social environments. Despite differences in context, the novels collectively suggest that family remains an important site through which social hierarchies are reproduced.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between marginalization and identity formation. The characters examined in this study do not passively accept the identities assigned to them by society. Instead, they attempt to construct meaningful lives within restrictive social conditions. Velutha seeks dignity in a society structured by caste prejudice, Balram pursues mobility within an unequal economic system, and Gogol searches for belonging between cultures. Their experiences reveal different forms of resistance, but they also highlight the limits of individual agency when confronted with powerful social structures. The novels therefore present identity as a process of negotiation rather than a fixed condition.

The comparative analysis further indicates that the three novels trace different aspects of India's engagement with modernity and globalization. Roy focuses on the continuing influence of colonial history and inherited social hierarchies. Adiga examines the transformations brought about by economic liberalization and globalization. Lahiri explores the consequences of migration and the emergence of transnational identities. Together, these perspectives provide a broader understanding of the social and cultural changes that have shaped contemporary Indian experience during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

While the novels differ in style, setting, and narrative focus, they converge in their attention to individuals whose lives are shaped by forces beyond their immediate control. Rather than presenting simple solutions to social inequality, Roy, Adiga, and Lahiri encourage readers to recognize the complexity of the systems that influence human relationships and opportunities. Their works demonstrate that literature can offer valuable insights into the lived realities of social hierarchy, cultural change, and identity formation.

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