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**POLITICAL CONFLICT, SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND
HUMAN STRUGGLE IN SELECTED INDIAN ENGLISH
FICTION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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Abstract

Indian English fiction is a product of the tensions between political struggle, social inequity and human struggle. This study critically evaluates four novels, namely Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008). The qualitative and comparative literary approach is used in the study to explore the field of caste discrimination, religious conflict, economic exploitation, political injustice, and individual resistance. Based on postcolonial, Marxist, and subaltern theorizations, it examines the power dynamics that affect the dignity, identity, and freedom of peoples. The results show that although there are differences in history and narration, the selected novels all emphasize the anguish of a marginalized community. Based on the findings, the study suggests that Indian English fiction is an effective means for challenging social inequalities, raising awareness about human rights, equality, and social transformation, and may produce some exposure to political injustices.

Keywords: Indian English Fiction, Political Conflict, Social Inequality, Human Struggle, Caste Discrimination, Postcolonial Literature, Social Justice, Comparative Literary Analysis.

1. Introduction

Indian English fiction has significant place in contemporary scholarship of literature as it has remained consistently concerned with political, historical, and sociocultural life of Indian society. In the colonial era, and much more recently, Indian writers have considered how people's versions of the political, social, religious, economic and cultural determinants affect their lives. Literature has hence since evolved into a significant domain through which overlooked experiences are represented, often in order to re-enter the dominant historical and political narrative. Indian English novelists take up the institution of power and its interaction with day-to-day life through imaginative narrative, characterization, symbolism, experimentation with narrative.

The use of has given rise to political conflict that goes beyond the typical ones involving government power or national independence in Indian English fiction. It encompasses the aggressions of colonialism, Partition, communal conflict, caste discrimination, corruption of the institution and economic deprivation, as well as ideological conflict. These struggles have an impact on issues of community and inter-personal relations and on questions of citizenship, morality and identity. The fictional depiction of such conflicts helps readers to recognize the impact of historical circumstances on personal decisions and the vulnerability and uncertainty within which an individual finds herself.

Social inequality is another significant theme in Indian English fiction. Historically, Indian society has had a variety of strata such as based on the caste, class, gender, religion and unequal resources sharing patterns. Political independence opened up fresh opportunities for democratic life and social change, but the inequalities of birth remained a factor in opportunities and the daily life. Pictures of marginalized people shows that inequality is not just present in formal institutions, but also in ordinary way of doing things, in families, in language, employment and in social expectations.

In the light of human struggle, the connection between political conflict and social inequality is particularly salient. People who suffer discrimination, displacement, poverty or political violence may find themselves facing hard decisions about survival, human dignity, loyalty,

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freedom and resistance. Struggling against these problems should not only be treated as private issues of individuals: they are often the result of wider structures of political and economic power. Through their characters' experiences and feelings, Indian English novelists illuminate this relationship, showing the emotional and ethical ramifications of structural injustice.

Untouchable, by Mulk Raj Anand, provides a compelling glimpse into caste oppression at the beginning of the 20th century, the story of Bakha, a young sanitation worker who is socially humiliated for his job. The novel is set in the larger context of the colonial India, religious orthodoxy, and rival competing visions of social reform. Anand focuses on one day in Bakha's life, illustrating how even simple social interactions can reveal the basis of Bakha's entire social structure.

Train to Pakistan by Khushwant Singh is a study of the human tragedy of Partition in British India in 1947. The novel tells stories about the fictional village of Mano Majra and how political decisions and communal tensions make it a community that is plagued by fear, suspicion and violence. Singh's approach is not merely to address the historical event of Partition but to raise the concerns of ordinary individuals' suffering and moral decisions.

The god of small things by Arundhati Roy is a book on caste oppression, gender inequality, family relationships and political hypocrisy in the social fabric of Kerala. Using the differing voices of Ammu, Velutha, Estha and Rahel, Roy exposes how the bonds of intimacy and identity are constrained by institutional power and conventional morality. The novel is also a reflection of the legacy of the inequalities in the seemingly progressive social environments.

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga explores the themes of economic injustice and political corruption in modern-day India, through the eyes of a young man seeking to break free from his poverty and his servile condition. This novel looks at the apparent and self-serving contradictions in the promise of economic opportunity and the entrenched problem of structural exploitation through satire and a confessional format. The transition of Balram's servant to an entrepreneur brings to mind complex issues of ambition, violence, moral responsibility and what it means to be socially mobile.

These four novels allow an examination of comparisons to be made between varying historical periods and literary movements. Anand's voice brings the content of colonial social reform; Singh's the voice that asks what needs to be done to prevent the nation's conflict from becoming a permanent divide; Roy's is the voice that tracks the enduring effect of caste and gender inequality in post-Independence India, while Adiga is the voice that interrogates inequality in the context of today's capitalism. The novels show the development of political and social conflicts, yet how they continue to shape the potential of individual freedom.

The current study consequently explores their articulations with regards to the intersection of political conflict, social inequality and human struggle. It also reflects on the literary approaches used to turn specific experiences of suffering into more general reflection on power, justice, identity and social change which are adopted by the selected authors.

2. Review of Literature

Power relation of political disagreement and social disparity in Indian English fiction had received a significant attention from literatures scholars in postcolonial literary studies, cultural criticism, Marxist literary theory, gender literature, and the subaltern literary theory. It is important to look at theory and criticism more recently, as they are windows through which the interplay of literary representation and the enactment of historical processes that impact upon marginalized life becomes apparent.

Edward Said wrote Orientalism (1978), which examines the understanding and imagery that help to create and maintain a colonial power structure. He is mainly focused on western representations of the east, but within the theoretical perspective, he takes up the issue of the

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dynamics of political power and cultural discourse in Indian English fiction. His work is the inspiration for thought and reflection on the process of literary representation and not a mirror image of social conditions, many of which show inequality in history. In the context of colonial institutions, legacy of power and politics of identity this is particularly relevant.

A chapter by Ranajit Guha (1982) in a book just published in Subaltern Studies I initiated a debate on the dominant articulations of Indian history that largely focused on the solitary few and the political agency of elite groups of social actors and left little room for the independent agency of the subaltern majority. He introduced a posture which preceded the approach of peasants, workers and the 'other'. This is noteworthy in the novels of Indian English where the political changes are narrated in terms of activities of the foreground characters lacking institutional power but with direct consequences of such power.

In the provocative essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* A widely used Indian philosopher, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) asks, when and how the subaltern can intervene in dominant thought and politics. Spivak concentrated on the layers and layers of voice, authority, knowledge and power. Her theoretical discussions on Bakha or Velutha as characters subordinate to the social institutions, and losing their own power to produce identities and to socially intelligize' grievances are also very insightful.

Homi K. Bhabha explores the transnational and temporal nature of culture in *The Location of Culture* (1994) and, the use of colonial and postcolonial actors in shaping power. His ideas of hybridity and ambivalence offer a means of imagining and thinking the paradox of a postcolonial society striving to be democratic yet retaining hierarchies. Though his entire theory cannot account for everything that expresses economic and caste disadvantage, it does lend itself to a more general discussion of the process of identity formation in an unequal cultural power matrix.

A book by Partha Chatterjee that seeks to discuss the Nationalist issues of culture, politics, colonialism and political identity, titled, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993). His analysis extends to the study of the literary representations of national belonging inasmuch as he offers a valuable illustration about the fact that the inclination to establish a political nation isn't sufficient to ease the internal social divisions. This view leads towards a reading of *Train to Pakistan*, characterised by the formation of national boundaries and the annihilation of local boundaries and the disruption of co-nominalist.

In a study of the colonial modernity, the nationalism of Gandhian discourse and Ambedkar's anti-caste discourses in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, S. Shankar highlights the continuities between these discourses (2017). The beauty of this reading is that it is a reading that goes against the other readings that would describe Bakha's experience as a humiliation or would make general readings of societies suffering. Instead of paying attention to the competing ideologies in which two opposing views of the existence and/or alternative to caste oppression are presented. Through an analysis of Shankar's fiction, her approach contributes to the afflictions of the social and social-cultural context of Anand as a site of contestation on how to reform the social, political agency, and possibilities of the representable.

The scholarship of Partition and its memory is a positive strength, for the study of *Train to Pakistan*. *The Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia (1998), looks at personal memories and experiences of the Partition of India. Her writings reveal the negative consequences of patriotic modes of representation on human life, particularly as they are kept "in check" by scientific representations of nation histories. It is important to understand the present as part of a history of communal violence, displacement and breakdown of trust in everyday life which offers a context to the ways in which Singh imagines it.



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The work and concept of Indian English Fiction is also seen from a feminist and intersectional point of view. It is easy to see how systems of discrimination can intersect, as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) illustrates in several examples. While her work is set in a law and society very distinct from that experienced in India, it is useful to look at *The God of Small Things* as a comparative consideration because not only are caste, class, gender and social status related to each other, but one of the most important aspects is that the subject of the film is fiction. As can be seen from the cases of Ammu and Velutha, there are distinct but interrelated pockets of exclusions.

A valid explanation of the economic inequality can be attained by using class relations and material power, as a Marxist approach, to examine *The White Tiger*. But with the criticism of capitalist relations resulting from Karl Marx's book *Capital*, it turns toward the control of the labour, the control of the riches, the control of the economic opportunity is not equal. The image of a suffering character, expressed by Adiga's novel, is popularly conceived as one that is based on one person's act of violence rather than a political transformation in order to eradicate the suffering. Balram's liberation is open to interpretation because of the success that is brought by the fit of material benefits.

In Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Shankar (2017) explores the concepts of colonialism, nationalism and caste in India. The study talks about how Anand communicates the common difficulties faced by the downtrodden masses in the literature by means of Bakha. This also seeks to examine how Gandhian thoughts and social reform organizations shaped the depiction of the caste discrimination. In Shankar's work one can gain an understanding of the relationship between political change, social disparity and a fight for human dignity.

Jarin and Zahin (2023) analyzed the caste relation and gender relation in the two writings *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. They explore the role of social expectations in traditional societies on the life of people, especially the marginalized groups. Through both novels, it can be seen that social acceptance and personal freedom are constrained due to caste and gender discrimination. The study offers a helpful look at how social hierarchies remain as a defining feature of human relations and human identity.

The issue of caste and gender discrimination has been discussed in the novel *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy and *The Gypsy Goddess* by Meena Kandasamy by Mandal (2023). The study concentrates on the role of the solidarity among the women and the Dalit communities to fight against the existing social hierarchy. It points to issues at hand when it comes to challenges faced by people who challenge traditional systems of power and discrimination. Mandal's contributions to this genre are an expansion of understanding of resistance, social injustice and the quest for equality in Indian English fiction.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* has been the focus of a study by Meenu (2024) to explore the portrayal of caste and class politics in the novel. The study throws light on the inequalities in economic and social class which affect the circumstances of the disadvantaged in today's India. Balram Halwai's actions reveal the challenges of the people who try to rise above the problems of poverty and social limitations. The dialogue reveals the influence of social background, politics, and power differences on these economic opportunities. It also explores the links between people's ambitions and efforts to surpass their own class.

In Swadeshi (2025, date not given), Anna Maria Cade provided a comparative study of caste discrimination in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Both novelists are exploring social inequality, in their representations of characters who suffer discrimination and lack in opportunity. Roy is interested in the implications of transgression across caste lines while Adiga examines the interweaving of caste, class and economic progress. With the help of the comparison, one can explain how caste inequality

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manifests into various forms within social and historical contexts. The manuscript dates to around 2023, and its formal publication is still unknown.

In *The God of Small Things*, Ahirwar studied the relationship between gender, class and the caste in Roy's work (2026). It examines the role in the lives of Ammu and Velutha of social expectations, family authority, and discrimination. Their encounters show the impact of challenging and upsetting endemic traditions, from an emotional/mindful and social aspect. Roy's use of the narrative structure and characterization in his depiction of the plight of marginalized humans will also be taken into account. This Voice of Experience exhibits a perspective that brings an understanding of the relationship of personal relationships, inequitable societies and struggles for dignity.

3. Comparative Analysis and Discussion

3.1 Political Conflict and the Experiences of Ordinary People

The characters' lives and experiences in Indian English fiction have been affected by political conflict greatly. In Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, political and social happenings are revealed through the caste discrimination, the influence of the colonialism and the quest for social reform. *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh brings to light the violent effects of Partition religious violence, displacement, communal harmony and the wreckage. Established for formerly untouchable children of the Nazis, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy explores the social role of institutions, political hypocrisy, and caste restrictions. Likewise, *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga reveals political corruption, economic exploitation and a disparity of power relationships. The overall impression of these novels is that political conflicts influence the individual's freedom, human relationships and human dignity.

3.2 Caste-Based Inequality and Social Exclusion

In Indian English fiction, caste appears as a major problem for example, in *Untouchable* and *The God of Small Things*. Anand introduces us to Bakha, a young sanitation worker who suffers from experiences to his humiliation, discrimination, and social exclusion on the basis of caste. His experiences show how gender norms are limiting and constricting accesses of individual and human rights/elements of human dignity. Likewise, Velutha's tragic experiences, caused by a conflict with Ammu who challenges the rigid caste divisions, is presented by Roy. As a citizen of society, Velutha is subject to prejudice and injustice. Every single novel show person to be the same Blood was not blood in both the fiction of caste discrimination and its impact on social, emotional and personal freedom. In both novels, people are shown to be the same blood was not blood was caste discrimination persisting and people's personal identity, emotional state, and individual freedom being destroyed by social exclusion.

3.3 Economic Inequality and the Struggle for Social Mobility

Economic inequality and class divisions are important themes in *Untouchable* and *The White Tiger*. *Untouchable*: Bakha's is brought into poverty and subjected to economic discrimination due to his caste identity. His struggle is indicative of the challenges experienced by the marginalized section of society to receive social recognition and economic opportunities. In *The White Tiger*, Adiga depicts the journey of a man who tries to progress from poverty and servitude in an unequal economic system, Balram Halwai. The novel reveals the ills of exploitation, corruption, and inequality of wealth through Balram's journey. Bakha is looking to be recognized in society and even seeks a change, whereas Balram tries to gain economic freedom in morally suspicious methods. In both novels, a clear example of how economic inequality affects individual aspirations and opportunities for social mobility.

3.4 Religious Conflict, Partition, and the Crisis of Human Identity

Train to Pakistan is heavily focused on religious strife, communal violence, and the social and political divisions that tore India apart. The novel depicts the terrible repercussions of the

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Partition of India in 1947, specifically when it destroyed amicable relations with different faith communities. Communal co-existence is first witnessed in the fictional village of Mano Majra, which ultimately is torn apart by political divisions and violence leading to fear, suspicion and hostility. With the help of some of these characters, like Jugga and Nooran, Singh tells what personal relationships and love do in the face of religious conflict. Jugga's final sacrifice emphasises why humanity and moral responsibility matters in times of violence in the masses. The novel uncovers the dangers to the human self-caused by political decisions and religious divisions to social harmony and individual security.

3.5 Gender Inequality and the Regulation of Personal Freedom

Another crucial issue that comes across the selected novels of Indian English is gender disparity. The God of Small Things explores those paternal limitations in the mind of Ammu, a woman whose desires are dictated by the expectations and conventions of her family. Her love affair with Velutha crosses gender and caste lines, with its touching consequences. Likewise, Train to Pakistan pictures the helplessness, vulnerability and trauma of women through the event of the displacement and communal violence as mediated through Nooran. Sohini's story of harassment reveals intertwined nature of caste discrimination and gender-based exploitation in Untouchable. These depictions illustrate the impact of the dominant expectations and male dominance on women that limits their freedom, dignity, and autonomy for decision making.

3.6 Human Struggle, Resistance, and Moral Responsibility

Throughout the selected books of novels, human struggle is the theme that links the theme of political conflict and social inequality across the novels. Untouchable is about Bakha's fight against caste discrimination and his quest for respect and social acceptance. During the communal violence in Train to Pakistan, Jugga practices moral acts of bravery by putting his life at risk to save another. The God of Small Things is about Ammu and Velutha's struggle and defiance of the narrow-mindedness of society around them through their friendship with one another, yet their defiance leads to tragedy and suffering for both. Balram resists the exploitation under capitalism by trying to find his way to economic autonomy, but is his act morally questionable in The White Tiger? Each character embodies some type of resistance; personal courage, sacrifice, emotion and personal ambition. Their experiences highlight the challenges that human beings face within a politically and socially skewed environment.

3.7 Narrative Techniques and the Representation of Social Reality

These novelists in the Indian English have used unique narration styles to convey political conflicts, social inequalities and human experience. The social realism technique employed in Untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand serves as a method of articulating the everyday caste discrimination by chronicling Bakha's story with-in a single day. Train to Pakistan follows a story-laden with fiction and truth, interwoven and intertwined based on historical facts, and with an aim to highlight communal violence and human suffering. In the God of Small Things, Arundhati Roy utilizes disjointed memories, symbolism and some nonlinear storytelling as a means of exploring social limitations, trauma, and emotional tension. In The White Tiger, Aravind Adiga satirically and through Balram's first-person narration, brings to light some of the economic exploitation and political corruption that is at the root of the book. Such multi-strategies narrative representations enhance the literary representation of social realities and showcase the conventions of storytelling in consideration of issues of inequality, resistance and human dignity.

4. Critical Discussion

A key dichotomy emerges in the comparative study of the chosen novels surrounding the notions of agency and structure of power. The moral ambiguity and conflicts portrayed in the

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characters' ideas and behavior often occur in Indian English fiction where the protagonists are created having many emotional layers, personal ambition, moral insight, but faced with social situations that provide insufficient freedom to choose. This tension serves to establish the framework of literary struggle as well as to leave the chosen writers a free scope to explore the ethical implications of unequal social systems.

One important distinction, however, between political progress and social justice has received special mention. The transition from colonial to post-colonial and modern India could imply a growing democratic freedom. But the novels make such an interpretation difficult. *Untouchable* reveals the real nature of caste and oppression within a colonial setting; *The God of Small Things* shows how this issue continued to affect beyond the Indian Independence. Likewise, *The White Tiger* asks itself how economic development automatically enhances the lives of disadvantaged employees.

The comparison thus implies that political sovereignty or economic growth is not the only measure of social progress. Chosen stories focus on how publicly distributed dignity, opportunity, protection and autonomy are found in everyday life.

Yet another troubling issue is whether there is a link between 'marginalised' agency and literary representation. Authors of socially subordinate characters are challenged to represent the oppression of these characters without rendering them as petrified symbols of oppression. Anand's *Bakha* and Roy's *Velutha* are two reactions to this challenge, while for Adiga his *Balram* is the answer. Their labor calls to mind not only the experience of marginalization, but also the ways in which literary stories construct, represent and sometimes are missing from the voices of the marginalized.

There are differences in how each novel handles moral reactions to injustice as well. Collective violence is therefore called into question due to Jugga's willingness to sacrifice her life, while *Balram's* ultimate metamorphosis leaves room to doubt about freedom gained through the repetition of oppressive acts. These other options challenge the notion that resistance can always be emancipatory, or unethical.

The literary value of the works chosen is reflected in their ability to reveal contradictions instead of "solutions. They illustrate the dynamic interplay of socio-political, cultural, economic and individual ideologies, beliefs and desire, which create suffering and the potential for resistance.

The study also suggests that a comparative approach should be particularly helpful as it reveals relationships which might not be apparent in a single-author investigation. Anand and Roy emphasize the longstanding nature of caste control, while Singh and Roy make their social differences apparent through the nature of intimate relationships, and Anand and Adiga show the extent to which literary depictions of labor, dependency, and social mobility change over time.

The scope of the four novels chosen has limited the ability of these interpretations to be general. The results, therefore, have to be seen as a selective observation of certain literary constructions representations of Indian society/Indian English fiction, and not as an account of Indian society or Indian English fiction as a whole.

5. Final Conclusion

This paper has analyzed four fictional texts, three being Indian novels available in English, namely Mulk Raj Anand's work *Untouchable*, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, for their representation of political conflict, social inequality and human struggle. The research has shown through a qualitative and comparative literary approach that a central place of the political and social conflicts in the process of building characters, developing the story and establishing thematic

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meanings. The novels chosen are from a diverse range of time periods and cultures but consistently look at the connection between social inequalities and the lived reality of the people in everyday life.

The study shows that national movements, governmental institutions or ideological conflict are not the only lenses through which one could understand political conflict in Indian English fiction. The dynamics of social relations, employment, religious affiliation, family, and economic relationships also influence political power. In *Untouchable*, caste images Bakha's everyday/existential humiliation and exclusion. *Train to Pakistan* involves an inversion of familiar relationships and structures into fear and uncertainty. Sexual relationships and personal liberties are controlled by caste tyranny and discrimination in *The God of Small Things*. *The White Tiger* deals with the futility of disadvantaged people who are limited by the availability of opportunities due to economic dependence and political corruption. These images can be used together to bring to light the symbiotic nature of public power structure and private experience of suffering.

One of the main points is that social inequality is not a thing of the past, but remains a reality in different age periods. From colonial India to the present, there are significant political, cultural and economic changes that occur. However, in the novels that are chosen, the impact of inherited privilege, differential access to resources, and institutionalized discrimination has been repeated. These stories question in a highly disputable way the notion of formal political equality and modernization as agents of social justice. Instead, they recommend that freedom must be meaningful so that it must take account of the typical circumstances in which people experience dignity, recognition and opportunity.

An additional advantage of the comparative investigation is that it shows a considerable role for literary form in the fiction of political and social reality. The individual films offer varying conceptions of agency and of marginalization, through Anand's realism, Singh's historical product, Roy's fractured storytelling and Adiga's profane admission. The features of the story line, then, give direct support to the social and political relevance of the works selected.

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