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PROJECTION OF SOCIALLY UNETHICAL PRACTICES AND RAMPANT CORRUPTION: *REVOLUTION 2020* AND *THE WHITE TIGER*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the projection of socially unethical practices and rampant corruption in contemporary urban India through a comparative analysis of Chetan Bhagat's Revolution 2020 *and Aravind Adiga's* The White Tiger*. Set against the backdrop of rapid urbanisation, political instability, and socio-economic inequality, both novels expose corruption as a systemic phenomenon deeply rooted in social, cultural, and political structures rather than as isolated moral failure. Bhagat's narrative foregrounds the nexus between politics and education, revealing how institutions meant for social mobility are transformed into profit-driven enterprises that exploit youthful aspirations. Adiga's novel, by contrast, presents a stark and satirical account of corruption as an inescapable condition of survival within a rigidly stratified society. Through a comparative approach, this study analyses representations of political malpractice, educational corruption, economic ambition, bureaucratic failure, and cultural complicity. While* Revolution 2020 *retains a reformist optimism that foregrounds ethical awakening and individual responsibility,* The White Tiger *advances a radical critique that views corruption as foundational to urban power structures. The paper asserts that despite ideological differences, both novels converge in portraying urban modernity as ethically compromised and morally ambivalent. By situating individual experiences within broader socio-political realities, Bhagat and Adiga compel readers to confront the contradictions of India's developmental narrative. The study contributes to contemporary literary conversation by highlighting how Indian English fiction functions as a critical lens through which social evils such as corruption are interrogated and complicated.*

KEYWORDS: *Corruption, Politics, Education, Law, Social Ethics, Socio-Cultural, Bureaucracy*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Indian English fiction has increasingly responded to the socio-political realities of post-liberalisation India, particularly the ethical challenges accompanying rapid urban growth and economic aspiration. Urban spaces often imagined as centres of progress and opportunity, simultaneously emerge as sites of moral compromise, institutional decay, and social inequality. Among the most influential fictional representations of this phenomenon are Chetan Bhagat's *Revolution 2020* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. Though markedly different in narrative style and ideological orientation, both novels highlights the corruption as a pervasive social evil sustained by political, cultural, and economic forces.

Bhagat's *Revolution 2020* examines corruption through the perspective of urban youth whose ambitions are shaped and often distorted by political interference in education. Adiga's *The White Tiger*, on the other hand, offers a scathing critique of urban India from the margins, exposing how systemic corruption governs the lives of the poor and sustains elite privilege. Together, these novels reveal how unethical practices become normalised within urban society, transforming corruption into a structural condition rather than an ethical aberration.

This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of these two novels to explore how corruption operates within socio-cultural and political frameworks of urban India. It argues that both Bhagat and Adiga depict corruption as an institutionalised practice reinforced by social acceptance and political complicity. While Bhagat retains a cautious belief in reform and moral choice, Adiga presents a radical vision in which ethical survival necessitates transgression. Through this comparison, the study seeks to highlight how Indian English fiction critically engages with contemporary social realities and questions the moral foundations of urban modernity.

Urban Society and the Normalization of Corruption

Urban India in the post-liberalisation era is characterised by economic ambition, competitive individualism, and widening inequality. Cities function as spaces of opportunity but also as arenas where moral compromises are routine. Corruption thrives in this environment because success is increasingly measured by material gain rather than ethical integrity. In both *Revolution 2020* and *The White Tiger*, urban society is depicted as a space where corruption becomes routine and morally justified. Ethical values are subordinated to material success, and survival often depends on one's ability to navigate corrupt systems.

Revolution 2020 and *The White Tiger*, urban society is depicted as ethically hollow. Institutions meant to uphold justice, education, politics, law enforcement, are deeply compromised. Adiga's protagonist bluntly states that corruption is the "true religion" of the nation. Bhagat exposes how political ambition contaminates educational institutions. The critic Rodrigues expresses how the private educational institutes in India cater to the dreams of millions and millions of Indian students; "the novelist very realistically tries to

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reflect the state of India's private education that is not just the lifeblood but sometimes the only hope for millions of students from small town and villages turning their bright eyes at an assured and uplifting future." (*Rodrigues, Joseph*). These narratives reflect a collective moral collapse where unethical practices are not aberrations but norms.

In *The White Tiger*, Adiga presents corruption as an omnipresent reality that governs every aspect of urban life. Balram Halwai's observations reveal that bribery and exploitation are embedded in everyday transactions, from law enforcement to political representation. Similarly, Bhagat portrays urban society as one where corruption is tolerated, if not actively encouraged, as a means to achieve stability and success. Characters in *Revolution 2020* rationalise unethical practices as necessary adjustments to social reality.

Both novels suggest that corruption thrives because it is socially internalised. Rather than resisting unethical practices, individuals adapt to them, reinforcing a culture of complicity. Urban modernity, as depicted in these texts, thus emerges as ethically fragile, sustained by compromise rather than integrity.

Political Corruption and Power Structures

Political corruption forms the backbone of unethical practices in both novels. In *Revolution 2020*, the character of Shukla Ji epitomises the nexus between politics, business, and education. His rise to power is facilitated by manipulation, bribery, and exploitation of public funds. The establishment of engineering colleges, ostensibly symbols of progress, becomes a lucrative enterprise grounded in corruption. Bhagat reveals how political leaders capitalise on youth aspirations, transforming education into a commercial commodity. The view of the narrative supports as; "Many private college owners have personally admitted to me that they had to pay bribes at every stage of opening the college from getting land and building approvals, to approving the course plan and to set fee structures." *(Bhagat's blog, The Boottlegging of Education)*

Similarly, *The White Tiger* presents politics as irredeemably corrupt. Elections are reduced to spectacles controlled by money and muscle power. Balram observes how politicians exploit the poor by buying votes with alcohol and cash; "I still can't believe it. The people of this country had a chance to put an efficient ruling party back in power, and instead they have voted in the most outrageous bunch of thugs. We don't deserve." (*White Tiger*, *169)*

Democracy, in Adiga's narrative, functions as a façade concealing systemic exploitation. The novel suggests that political power in urban India is sustained through the deliberate maintenance of inequality. While Bhagat adopts a reformist tone, suggesting that change is possible through awareness and resistance, Adiga's vision is deeply cynical. For Adiga, political corruption is not an aberration but the foundation upon which urban power structures rest.

Corruption in the Education System

One of the most significant contributions of *Revolution 2020* is its exposure of corruption within the education system. The novel portrays engineering colleges as profit-driven institutions that exploit students' aspirations. Gopal's transformation from an ambitious youth to a corrupt businessman reflects how systemic corruption shapes individual choices. He becomes complicit in unethical practices not out of inherent immorality, but due to structural pressures and personal desperation. When Gopal tries to express his anxiety on paying the bribes and the necessity to pay the bribes, then MLA Shukla explains; "If we had a straightforward and clean system, these professors would open their own colleges. Blue-chip companies and software firms could open colleges. The system is twisted; they don't want to touch it. That is where we come in." (R 2020, 166)

Education, traditionally regarded as a vehicle for social mobility, is depicted as deeply compromised. Admission processes, infrastructure development, and faculty appointments are controlled by political influence and bribery. Bhagat critiques how urban society equates education with financial success rather than intellectual growth or ethical development. The novel exposes the bitter realities of the political interference and authoritative dominance on the education system. "The role of politicians who are not very literate but still holds the courage of opening an institute of higher education has been comically depicted by the author." (*Rodrigues, Joseph*)

In *The White Tiger*, education functions differently but remains equally corrupt. Balram's lack of access to quality education ensures his entrapment within social hierarchies. Schools exist merely as symbolic institutions; "There is no duster in this class; there are no chairs; there are no uniforms for the boys. How much money have you stolen from the school funds," (*White Tiger*, 21) Adiga highlights how educational deprivation perpetuates inequality, reinforcing the dominance of the elite. Both novels, depict education as a failed institutions, either commercialised or neglected, contributing directly to the persistence of corruption in urban society.

Economic Aspirations and Moral Compromise

Urban society in both novels is driven by intense economic aspiration. The promise of wealth and upward mobility exerts immense pressure on individuals, compelling them to compromise ethical values. Gopal in *Revolution 2020* embodies this conflict. Initially motivated by love and ambition, he gradually adopts corrupt practices to achieve financial stability and social recognition. Balram's

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journey in *The White Tiger* represents a more radical response to economic oppression. His rise from servitude to entrepreneurship involves deception, betrayal, and murder. Balram rationalises his actions as necessary for survival in a system that offers no ethical alternatives. His assertion that moral values are luxuries reserved for the wealthy underscores Adiga's critique of urban capitalism.

While Bhagat portrays moral compromise as tragic but reversible, Adiga presents it as inevitable. This contrast highlights differing ideological perspectives: Bhagat believes in ethical reform, whereas Adiga exposes the brutal logic of survival within a corrupt system. Both novels illustrate how urban capitalism fosters moral compromise, transforming ambition into a catalyst for corruption.

Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Corruption

Corruption in both novels is sustained by socio-cultural acceptance. In *Revolution 2020*, bribery and manipulation are treated as routine practices, reflecting a collective moral apathy. Characters justify unethical actions as necessary adjustments to reality. The urban middle class, though critical of corruption, often benefits from it indirectly.

Adiga's portrayal is more critical. He reveals that Indian society actively normalizes corruption through caste hierarchies and servitude. The metaphor of the "Rooster Coop" symbolizes how social conditioning prevents collective resistance. "The Rooster Coop was doing its work. Servants have to keep other servants from becoming innovators, experimenters, or entrepreneurs."(*White Tiger* 115) Cultural values emphasizing obedience and loyalty perpetuate exploitation. Both novels suggest that corruption thrives because society internalises it. Ethical degradation is not imposed externally but sustained through every day practices and cultural attitudes.

Institutional Failure: Law and Bureaucracy

The failure of legal and bureaucratic systems further entrenches corruption. In *Revolution 2020*, regulatory authorities are complicit in illegal practices, enabling political leaders to evade accountability. Bureaucracy functions as an obstacle rather than a safeguard.

In *The White Tiger*, law enforcement is portrayed as openly corrupt. Police officers accept bribes, fabricate evidence, and protect the powerful. Justice is inaccessible to the poor, reinforcing systemic inequality. Both novels depict institutions as hollow structures that legitimise corruption rather than challenge it; law and bureaucracy as complicit in corruption. Institutional failure thus emerges as a central factor sustaining corruption in urban society. On the education system, Bhagat aptly comments; "When you have corruption in infrastructure, you have pot-holed roads. When you have corruption in education, you have pot-holed minds. We are destroying an entire generation by not giving it access to the world-class education it deserves." (Bhagat, *The Times of India*)

Narrative Perspective and Ethical Judgment

Narrative technique significantly shapes each novel's ethical stance. Bhagat employs a confessional, realist narrative that invites empathy and moral reflection. Gopal's regret suggests that ethical awareness persists despite corruption. Jayaranjan M. says, "He seems to be convinced that Raghav can be a role model for the future generations. He seems to be convinced that our nation requires people like Raghav who are pertinacious and perspicacious to lead the nation."

Adiga's epistolary and satirical style, addressed to the Chinese Premier, allows for a broader socio-political critique. Balram's unapologetic voice challenges conventional morality, forcing readers to confront uncomfortable truths about systemic injustice.

Reform and Radical Exposure

The key distinction between the two novels lies in their ideological conclusions. *Revolution 2020* advocates reform through awareness, resistance, and ethical choice. It retains faith in individual morality and social change. *The White Tiger*, however, exposes corruption as intrinsic to urban society. Adiga rejects reformist optimism, suggesting that liberation requires transgression rather than compliance.

Despite these differences, both novels converge in depicting corruption as a defining feature of urban socio-political life.

CONCLUSION

Chetan Bhagat's *Revolution 2020* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* offer compelling critiques of corruption in contemporary urban India. By exposing the socio-cultural and political structures that sustain unethical practices, both novels challenge dominant narratives of progress and development. Together, they highlight the moral contradictions of urban modernity and affirm the role of literature as a critical tool for social reflection.

Chetan Bhagat's *Revolution 2020* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* demonstrates that corruption in urban India is not an isolated moral failing but a systemic socio-cultural phenomenon sustained by political complicity and economic inequality. Both novels reveal how individuals navigate corrupt systems differently based on class location, access to power, and moral consciousness.

Bhagat's narrative reflects the ethical ambiguities of the urban middle class, portraying corruption as an adaptive strategy rather than an aberration. Adiga's work, however, highlights the violent consequences of systemic corruption on marginalised lives,

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presenting resistance as both necessary and morally complex. Together, the novels articulate a shared concern with the erosion of ethical values in contemporary urban society.

Bhagat envisions the possibility of reform through ethical awakening, Adiga presents a stark portrayal of survival within an unjust system. Together, these texts illuminate the moral contradictions of urban modernity and challenge readers to reconsider the cost of progress in a society where corruption has become normalised.

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