

Microcosm and Macrocosm of Roy and Adiga: Deciphering Marxist Thrusts of Literature in Neoliberal Landscape

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Abstract

This research critically examines the dynamics of the microcosm and macrocosm in the context of Marxist ideologies in the novels of Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga within the contemporary neoliberal landscape. Focused on Roy's 'The God of Small Things' and 'The Ministry of Utmost Happiness,' and Adiga's 'The White Tiger' and 'Amnesty,' the study navigates the distinctive ideological currents present in the works of these two acclaimed authors. Arundhati Roy, self-identifying with Marxism, is scrutinized through the lens of her novels, revealing a discernible engagement with New Left or Postmodernist thought. The analysis encompasses narrative techniques, character constructions, and thematic preoccupations, illuminating how Roy's literary expressions transcend conventional Marxist discourse in these specific works. In contrast, Aravind Adiga, despite sidestepping explicit Marxist labels, subtly integrates Marxist principles such as dialectical materialism and centralized political economy into 'The White Tiger' and 'Amnesty.' The study delves into how Adiga's narratives resurrect Marxist ideologies within the neoliberal landscape, exploring interactions between characters and the socioeconomic structures they navigate. The implicit presence of Marxist thought in Adiga's works challenges conventional categorizations, positioning him as a covert advocate of Marxist ideas. This comparative analysis of two novels from each author unveils subtle nuances in their ideological affiliations. Additionally, the research delves into the association of macrocosm with Marxism and microcosm with Postmodernism. Macrocosmic elements within the selected novels align with Marxist tenets, advocating structuralism and collective action. On the contrary, microcosmic facets resonate with Postmodernist philosophy, embracing decentralized social orders and identity politics. This study contributes to a comprehensive exploration of how literature serves as a dynamic space for the reinterpretation and negotiation of Marxist tenets in response to the challenges posed by the neoliberal paradigm. The exploration of microcosmic and macrocosmic dimensions within these specific novels enhances our understanding of the authors' distinct literary voices. It sheds light on how literature, as a reflection of societal shifts, negotiates and navigates ideological landscapes. By examining the evolving relationship between literature, ideology, and socio-political realities, this research offers valuable insights into the nuanced ways in which contemporary authors respond to and reinterpret established ideologies in the face of evolving societal challenges.

Keywords: - Microcosm, Macrocosm, Neoliberalism, Postmodernism, Left, Marxism, New Left, Class Consciousness, Social Structure, Dialectical Materialism, Historical Materialism, Capitalism, Marginalization, Exploitation, Identity Politics.

Introduction

In contemporary neoliberal India, the literary landscape has witnessed a notable surge in Marxist, leftist, and socialist writings within the realm of fiction. As the country grapples with the complex implications of economic liberalization, authors are increasingly using their craft to scrutinize and challenge the prevailing neoliberal paradigm. These writers employ fiction as a powerful tool to explore the social inequalities, economic disparities, and political tensions that have emerged in the wake of neoliberal policies. In this literary resurgence, the works not only serve as a critique of the neoliberal system but also offer alternative visions of society, rooted in socialist ideals. As these authors navigate the complexities of contemporary India, their fiction becomes a catalyst for fostering critical consciousness and inspiring dialogue on the pressing issues of our time.

Arundhati Roy, an Indian author and activist who won the Booker Award for her debut novel *The God of Small Things*, incorporates Marxist-inspired themes in her writings, critiquing globalization, capitalism, and imperialism.

Roy's non-fiction works also delve into socio-political issues, expressing concerns about the exploitation inherent in global economic systems. She aligns with Marxist ideas by addressing environmental justice, critiquing imperialism, and advocating for marginalized communities. While not strictly confined to Marxist ideology, Roy's writings consistently reflect a commitment to social justice and a critical stance toward entrenched power structures. While her writings express Marxist-inspired critiques of capitalism, imperialism, and environmental injustice, they also resonate with the ethos of the New Left, emphasizing social justice and marginalized communities. Furthermore, Roy's narrative complexity and willingness to challenge established conventions align with postmodern literary tendencies, showcasing a multifaceted approach that transcends strict ideological boundaries.

Aravind Adiga, also a Booker winner, similarly incorporates a mosaic of influences in his works. While not strictly aligned with a single ideological framework, unlike Roy, his writings often echo Marxist critiques, particularly in the examination of class disparities and societal inequities. Adiga gained acclaim for "*The White Tiger*," which explores the darker aspects of India's economic landscape. His narratives reveal a concern for the exploitation of the underprivileged and a critical perspective on systemic inequalities. Adiga's approach, though rooted in social critique, reflects a complexity that transcends easy categorization, embracing elements that align with both Marxist and postcolonial sensibilities.

In socio-political dynamics, the concepts of microcosm and macrocosm serve as invaluable lenses through which we can decipher the complexities at different scales of society. At the microcosmic level, we often find localized communities or specific demographic groups that function as microcosms, encapsulating the challenges, aspirations, and societal nuances experienced by individuals within these smaller entities. For instance, exploring a neighborhood or a particular socio-economic group may offer profound insights into issues such as economic disparities, access to resources, and community cohesion. Conversely, the macrocosm represents the broader canvas of society and politics, encompassing entire nations, global alliances, and overarching political ideologies. Issues like governance structures, international relations, and large-scale policy decisions operate at this macrocosmic level, influencing the collective destiny of societies. Recognizing the interplay between microcosmic experiences and macrocosmic structures becomes imperative for a holistic understanding of socio-political systems.

The distinguishing factor between microcosm and macrocosm lies in scale. Microcosmic observations grant us access to localized perspectives, allowing us to comprehend specific challenges and dynamics within smaller communities. And, on the other hand, macrocosmic perspectives afford us a panoramic view of overarching societal structures and global interconnections. So, this nuanced understanding not only enriches our comprehension of socio-political issues but also forms the bedrock for more informed dialogue and the formulation of effective, inclusive policies that address challenges at both the micro and macro levels.

Marxism, initially rooted in a macrocosmic analysis of society, gradually underwent shifts in interpretation over time, as Peter Barry points out "Marx and Engels themselves did not put forward any comprehensive theory of literature. Their views seem relaxed and undogmatic..." (Barry, 2009, p.152), particularly under the influence of postmodern ideas and the advent of the New Left. Karl Marx's theories traditionally justified societal dynamics through broad macroeconomic structures, emphasizing class struggle and historical materialism. However, as postmodernism gained prominence, Marxism evolved to incorporate microcosmic elements. The tragedy of Marxism lies in this transformation. While the macrocosmic perspective highlighted overarching societal structures, the shift towards the microcosmic concept reflects a fragmentation and diversification of focus. Thus, it is here when micropolitics engendered and the New Left overshadowed the traditional Left. This change has led to critiques suggesting that Marxism's original strength in explaining systemic issues has diminished, as attention turns to individual experiences and localized struggles. The challenge for contemporary Marxist thought involves reconciling these macro-micro tensions, acknowledging both systemic forces and localized dynamics within the complex tapestry of social reality.

As the Indian literary landscape experiences a resurgence of Marxist, leftist, and socialist writings in response to the challenges posed by neoliberalism in the influence of Postmodernism, as Fredric Jameson affirms in his book *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*,

"I believe that the emergence of postmodernism is closely related to the emergence of this new moment of late, consumer or multinational capitalism. I believe also that its formal features in many ways express the deeper logic of that particular social system." (Jameson, 1991, p. 95)

The works of Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga stand out for their nuanced exploration of macrocosmic and microcosmic dimensions within this sort of changing socio-political context. While Roy, self-identified with

Marxism, engages with New Left or Postmodernist thought, Adiga subtly integrates Marxist principles into his narratives, challenging conventional categorizations. The juxtaposition of their approaches raises questions about the evolving role of Marxist ideologies in literature within the neoliberal paradigm. Additionally, the study examines the association of macrocosm with Marxism and microcosm with Postmodernism, exploring how these authors negotiate these concepts in their novels. The central problem lies in understanding how literature, as a dynamic space, reinterprets and negotiates Marxist tenets, addressing both systemic issues and individual experiences, in response to the socio-political challenges presented by the neoliberal era. This research aims to contribute to a comprehensive exploration of the dynamic interplay between literature, ideology, and societal shifts, offering valuable insights into how contemporary authors navigate and reinterpret established ideologies within an ever-evolving cultural and political landscape.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws upon a theoretical framework that integrates Marxist, postmodernist, and literary theoretical perspectives to comprehensively analyze the works of Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga within the context of the contemporary neoliberal landscape.

1. Marxist Literary Theory:

- **Macrocosm Perspective:** Drawing on classical Marxist concepts, this perspective explores how the macrocosmic elements in the selected novels align with Marxist tenets, emphasizing structuralism and collective action. This involves examining societal structures, class struggles, and historical materialism embedded in the narratives.
- **Microcosm Perspective:** Focusing on the microcosmic aspects, this lens investigates how characters' experiences and localized struggles resonate with Marxist principles, such as dialectical materialism and centralized political economy.

2. Postmodern Literary Theory:

- **Microcosmic Elements:** Leveraging postmodernist thought, this perspective delves into how microcosmic facets in the novels embrace decentralized social orders and identity politics. The examination extends to the narratives' fragmentation, individual experiences, and challenges to overarching meta-narratives.
- **Deconstruction and Narrative Complexity:** Utilizing postmodern deconstructive methods, the study scrutinizes the narrative complexity and unconventional storytelling techniques in Roy's works, revealing how they challenge conventional Marxist discourse.

3. New Left and Postcolonial Literary Theory:

- **Arundhati Roy's New Left Engagement:** Within the New Left framework, the analysis explores how Roy's self-identified association with Marxism aligns with or diverges from New Left or Postmodernist thought. This includes an examination of her ideological nuances and their impact on narrative choices.
- **Adiga's Postcolonial-Marxist Synthesis:** Given Adiga's subtle integration of Marxist principles, the study employs a lens that combines postcolonial and Marxist perspectives to elucidate how his narratives resurrect Marxist ideologies in the neoliberal landscape.

4. Literary Criticism and Comparative Analysis:

- **Narrative Techniques and Character Constructions:** The research employs literary criticism to analyze narrative techniques, character constructions, and thematic preoccupations in both authors' works. This involves comparing and contrasting the distinct literary voices of Roy and Adiga concerning their ideological affiliations.

This theoretical framework allows for a multifaceted exploration of the complex interplay between Marxism, postmodernism, and literature in the context of contemporary Indian socio-political dynamics. It provides a lens through which to decipher the macrocosmic and microcosmic dimensions within the selected novels and contributes to a nuanced understanding of how these authors negotiate and reinterpret established ideologies within the evolving cultural and political landscape shaped by neoliberalism.

Analysis and Interpretation

- **Manifestation of New Left in *The God of Small Things***

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* subtly advocates ideas of the New Left through its narrative strategies. The novel critiques traditional hierarchies like caste, class, and patriarchy, highlighting the suffering they inflict on individuals. By centering the narrative around marginalized communities and their struggles, Roy aligns with the New Left's concern for social justice and emancipation. The novel's focus on environmental consciousness, individual agency, and resistance further reflects its thematic alignment with the movement. Additionally, the non-linear structure and magical realist elements challenge established norms, echoing the New Left's call for alternative perspectives. The novel's subtle critique of global capitalism and its emphasis on personal transformation also resonate with key principles of the New Left. While not explicitly referencing the movement, *The God of Small Things* effectively embodies its spirit through its powerful storytelling and its commitment to social justice and individual liberation.

In the novel, *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy rebels against the traditional left by critiquing its shortcomings, but she still operates within the framework of leftist thought. This strategy allows her to advocate for the ideas associated with the new left, as evidenced by the following quotation:

"As a reformist movement that never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community, the Marxists worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to." (Roy, 1997, p. 66)

In this passage, Roy attempts to highlight how the existing Marxist movement, despite its focus on economic equality, failed to address the deeply ingrained social hierarchies, particularly the caste system, that perpetuated injustice within the community. While the Marxists aimed to address economic exploitation, they did so without directly confronting the social structures that underpinned it. This ultimately limited their effectiveness in achieving true social justice. Roy's novel further criticizes this limited approach by showcasing the devastating consequences of unchallenged caste and class inequalities. Characters like Ammu and Velutha face ostracization and violence due to their caste and love, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive approach to social change that tackles both economic and social injustices.

Furthermore, the novel's focus on individual agency and resistance can be seen as a subtle critique of the limitations of a purely Marxist approach. By highlighting the power of individual actions to challenge societal norms and structures, Roy suggests the need for a multi-pronged approach to social change that goes beyond solely systemic reforms.

Ultimately, *The God of Small Things* does not explicitly reject Marxism but rather advocates for a more expansive and radical approach that addresses the interconnectedness of economic, social, and individual factors in perpetuating injustice. This aligns with the spirit of the New Left, which sought to go beyond traditional Marxist frameworks and encompass a broader range of social issues and perspectives.

- ***The Ministry of Utmost Happiness as a Souvenir of Micropolitics***

Micropolitics, while illuminating individual struggles, can dismantle collective understanding and clash with Marxist thought. By focusing on individual experiences and identities, it risks depoliticizing larger systemic issues and ignoring the power structures that perpetuate them. Sheila Jeffreys criticizes "identity politics" in his book *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism* as depoliticizing struggles by focusing on individual identities instead of power structures,

"Identity politics replaced structural political analysis and meant that people could claim identities that were seen to arrive from the heavens rather than from the power structures of sex, race, and class." (Jeffreys, 2014, p. 14)

Micropolitics, while shedding light on individual experiences, risks undermining collective understanding and contradicts Marxist principles. Its focus on individual narratives can de-emphasize the larger systemic issues and the power structures that perpetuate them. This directly opposes Marxist theory, which prioritizes analyzing class conflict and collective action as crucial elements for achieving social change. Without careful consideration of broader societal forces, micropolitics can lead to complacency with the existing system and impede the development of class consciousness necessary for collective liberation.

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* serves as a captivating exploration of micropolitics, highlighting individual struggles and the potential for collective action. However, it's imperative to critically assess the inherent tensions between micropolitics and Marxist thought. While micropolitics illuminates personal narratives, it risks veering away from a comprehensive structural analysis, potentially depoliticizing broader systemic issues and overlooking the entrenched power structures that sustain them. Furthermore, there are significant points to highlight that make Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* a significant "souvenir" of micropolitics, offering

valuable insights into the complexities of individual struggles and the potential for collective action in the face of social injustice. The novel delves into the journey of Tilo, a persecuted woman of a dominant social structure, and Anjum, a hijra who challenges traditional gender norms and builds a refuge for marginalized individuals, which makes it quite evident from the paradigm of microcosmic identity politics.

Beyond simply portraying marginalized individuals, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* explores the everyday forms of resistance undertaken by these communities. Tilo's defiance of patriarchal expectations and the creation of Jannat House serve as powerful examples of individual acts of resistance. Roy writes once in the novel "Who can know from the word goodbye what kind of parting is in store for us." (Roy, 2017, p. 24) This highlights the perils of the micro-marginalized in diurnal life. The hijra community's establishment of their social structures and traditions demonstrates the potential for collective action within marginalized groups. Acts of compassion and solidarity between characters highlight the importance of building alliances and fostering connections across social divides.

Roy's narrative boldly exposes and critiques various power structures that perpetuate injustice and marginalization as a postmodernist discipline which also sets her upon the opposite pole of the traditional left and a critic of structuralism, as observed in these lines "Was it possible to live outside language? Naturally this question did not address itself to her in words, or as a single lucid sentence. It addressed itself to her as a soundless, embryonic howl." (p.8) Roy's post-structural howl shatters rigid power structures, echoing beyond language and dogma. Her critique dances between left-wing fire and structuralist ice, seeking liberation in the "embryonic howl" of lived experience.

Similarly, the novel lays bare the Indian government's oppressive tactics in Kashmir, challenging the official narratives of national identity, progress, and development. It questions the simplistic notions of national identity and exposes a sense of hypocrisy behind the government's claims of success, highlighting the disparities and inequalities that remain hidden beneath the surface.

Although, while focusing on individual experiences, the novel does not lose sight of the larger societal forces and power structures that shape these experiences. It demonstrates how individual lives are interconnected with broader political and social realities, highlighting the crucial role of individual acts of resistance within the context of social movements and challenges to power structures. However, the lack of clear solutions and open-mindedness of the novel can be seen as a form of micropolitical resistance. By refusing to provide easy answers, Roy invites readers to engage in critical reflection and participate in ongoing discussions about social justice and change. This open-mindedness reflects the uncertainty and complexity of real-world struggles and places Roy on the frontline of the proponents of Postmodernist micropolitics.

- **Defense of Dialectical Materialism in Neoliberal Context: *The White Tiger***

Balram's ascent from poverty to affluence in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* aligns with the Marxist notion of "historical materialism," a concept positing that changes in society are solely driven by shifts in material conditions. Balram's life trajectory is deeply influenced by his impoverished background and low-caste status, reflecting the systemic constraints imposed by economic disparities and social hierarchies.

In the context of historical materialism, Balram's initial lack of economic resources and his marginalized caste position represent the material conditions that set the stage for his journey. The Marxist perspective suggests that societal structures, including class divisions and caste systems, are rooted in economic relations. Balram's low-caste status and economic struggles underscore the interconnectedness of these factors. "Marxism is a materialist philosophy: that is, it tries to explain things without assuming the world, or of force, beyond the natural world around us, and the society we live in." (Barry, 2009, p. 150), this materialism reflects in Balram's Statement "The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen" (Adiga, 2008, pp.27) Balram's rise to prosperity, achieved through cunning and ruthlessness, exemplifies the Marxist belief that individuals, in their pursuit of economic betterment, play a role in shaping societal changes. As he navigates the challenges imposed by a stratified society, Balram's actions become a microcosm of the broader neoliberal societal transformations anticipated by historical materialism. His journey reflects a dynamic interplay between individual agency and systemic constraints, illustrating how personal choices within a given material context can contribute to broader social shifts.

Furthermore, delving into the depth of Marxist fundamentalism, the novel *The White Tiger* critiques the exploitative nature of capitalism and the vast inequalities it creates. Balram's experiences highlight the power dynamics between the rich and the poor, and how the system is rigged against those at the bottom. Marxist dialectics of rich and poor i.e. Proletariat and bourgeoisie are quite allusive throughout the novel in protagonist Balram's statements like "See, the poor dream all their lives of getting enough to eat and looking like the rich. And what do the rich dream of?"

Losing weight and looking like the poor.” (p. 225). This critique aligns with the Marxist perspective on contemporary neoliberal capitalism as inherently unjust.

Significantly, on the Marxist note, Balram's journey can be seen as a form of "class consciousness," where he comes to recognize his oppression and the need for systemic change. Despite his success, Balram remains critical of the social order and acknowledges that his story is not representative of the vast majority trapped in poverty. Balram says “*The moment you recognize what is beautiful in this world, you stop being a slave*” (p.275). Thus, Balram's journey in *The White Tiger* exemplifies the development of class consciousness. Initially exploited and aware of social inequalities, he seeks to escape his circumstances through ambition and education. While achieving individual success, he remains critical of the system that forced him into immorality, recognizing his story as atypical. Through his narrative and questioning, Balram not only acknowledges his oppression but also hints at the need for collective action, aligning his journey with the principles of dialectical materialism.

- ***Amnesty: A Marxist Critic of the Neoliberal Macrocasm***

Aravind Adiga's *Amnesty* serves as a powerful indictment of the neoliberal macrocosm through a Marxist lens. The novel's protagonist, Danny, a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee living illegally in Sydney, exemplifies the plight of the subaltern under the cold gaze of unfettered capitalism. Danny's experience as an undocumented worker highlights the inherent exploitation within the capitalist system. He labors long hours in precarious conditions, receives meager wages, and is denied basic rights. Draconian treatment of neoliberal capitalist structure can be seen in Danny's statement throughout the novel, once Danny curses,

“But for you, Nelson, this must be a terrible city, right? Some morning, it must be. A prison of light. I will try to help you, Cleaner. I know people in the government, and I'll ask them, without mentioning any names, of course. I'll ask if there's a way for you to say sorry and be forgiven for what you did. I will ask.” (Adiga, 2020, p. 47)

This reflects the Marxist critique, and disgust of capitalism as an engine of exploitation. Furthermore, the novel exposes the commodification of life under neoliberalism, where human beings are reduced to mere cogs in the economic machine, their worth measured solely by their productivity.

Marxism analyzes society as a whole and views the economic base as the driver of social and political structures. As Marx stated in *The Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (Marx, 1859, para 4.) It emphasizes the interconnectedness of various forces and how their interactions drive historical change. Additionally, it critiques systemic issues like inequality and envisions a large-scale transformation toward a more just society. These key aspects of Marxism make it a philosophical concept of macrocosm. Through Danny's struggle in the neoliberal macrocosm, “*Amnesty*” mirrors key elements of Marx's quote. His precarious labor and dependence on Dr. Prakash illustrate the exploitative nature of the capitalist system and the power dynamics favoring the wealthy. The legal and political systems upholding this structure contribute to Danny's alienation and loss of identity in postmodern society. This irony of time can be substantiated by Fredric Jameson's view on Postmodernism “It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place.” (Jameson, 1991, p. ix) Initially, fear and self-preservation dominate Danny's consciousness, reflecting false consciousness. However, witnessing injustice sparks a shift towards class consciousness. He recognizes his shared plight with other exploited workers and contemplates challenging the system. This shift highlights the dynamic relationship between social beings and consciousness, suggesting the potential for change through collective action.

Ultimately, “*Amnesty*” exposes the human cost of neoliberalism while hinting at the transformative power of collective consciousness and action, aligning with Marx's views on the potential for overcoming the limitations of the existing neoliberal capitalist macroeconomic structure.

Conclusion

The comparative exploration of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, along with Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and *Amnesty*, within the context of the microcosm, macrocosm, Marxism, and Postmodernism unveils the nuanced ways in which these esteemed authors navigate ideological landscapes in the contemporary neoliberal era. In Arundhati Roy's works, a subtle alignment with New Left ideas and Postmodernist micropolitics becomes apparent. Her narratives function as critiques of traditional hierarchies, offering a profound examination of caste, class, and patriarchy. The focus on marginalized communities and their struggles underscores her commitment to social justice and individual liberation, aligning with the ethos of the New

Left. Moreover, the novels exhibit a distinctive non-linear structure and magical realist elements, challenging established norms and echoing the call for alternative perspectives characteristic of Postmodernist thought. Conversely, Aravind Adiga's novels manifest Marxist principles, particularly dialectical materialism, within the neoliberal macrocosm. In "*The White Tiger*," Balram's journey from poverty to affluence reflects the interconnectedness of individual agency and systemic constraints, echoing Marxist notions of historical materialism. The narrative serves as a microcosm of broader societal transformations within the neoliberal macrocosm. In *Amnesty*, Adiga offers a potent Marxist critique of the neoliberal macrocosm through the protagonist Danny's experience as an undocumented worker. The novel exposes the inherent exploitation within the capitalist system and highlights the commodification of human life, reflecting core Marxist critiques.

This comparative analysis sheds light on the enduring relevance of Marxist and Postmodernist thought in shaping literary expressions. It provides insights into how literature navigates and reinterprets established ideologies amidst the complexities of our time. Through the lens of these novels, the author's responses to the challenges posed by the neoliberal paradigm showcase the evolving relationship between literature, ideology, and socio-political realities. These works serve as literary reflections of the interconnected nature of individual experiences, systemic structures, and the pursuit of social justice within the contemporary milieu. The outcome is a richer understanding of how literature serves as a dynamic space for the negotiation and reinterpretation of ideological tenets, offering profound insights into the complexities of the contemporary socio-political landscape.

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