



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

## CONTRASTIVE PORTRAYAL OF GLOBAL SOUTH IN THE FICTIONS OF ARUNDHATI ROY AND ARAVIND ADIGA

Prakhar Medhavi<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Vikash Mohan Sahay<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, PG Department of English & Research Centre, Magadh University, Bodh Gaya

<sup>2</sup>Professor (Retd), University Department of English, Magadh University, Bodh Gaya

E-Mail: [prakharmedhavi94@gmail.com](mailto:prakharmedhavi94@gmail.com)

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.12.1.44](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.12.1.44)



### Article info

Article Received:03/01/2024

Article Accepted: 20/01/2024

Published online:26/01/2024

### Abstract

The East-West binary, once seemingly defined by the Cold War's stark opposition, now manifests in a fragmented landscape of proxy conflicts like Syria, Ukraine, and Israel. Amidst this pro-West and anti-West narrative, the Global South remains largely unheard, its diverse voices silenced and its struggles obscured by the clash of superpowers. This paper argues that Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga, through their literary works, provide a crucial counterpoint to this simplified narrative, offering a platform for subaltern voices from the Global South to be heard and understood. For instance, Roy's *The God of Small Things* exposes the devastating impact of neo-colonial development projects on Kerala's marginalized communities, mirroring real-life conflicts. Parallely, Adiga's *The White Tiger* offers a scathing critique of economic inequality and the exploitation of India's underclass, influenced by the neoliberal economic model, highlighting their struggles for upward mobility within a rigged system. This paper is not just only about portraying marginalized narratives but it attempts to analyze and understand the impact of the hegemonic discourse of counter-narrative of the East-West conflict of the superpowers on the suppressed entities of Global southern communities. Applying Dependency theory in contrast with Post Development theory to the literary works of these two authors, it is to be verified here that the way Global South is exploited, oppressed, and remains unheard in the conflict of capitalist and autocratic superpowers. Focusing on two authors and a limited selection of works inherently limits this analysis of the vast and diverse Global South. While insightful, their narratives cannot encompass all voices and experiences within this region.

**Keywords:** - Global South, Subaltern Voices, Dependency Theory, Post-development Theory, Core, Periphery, Modernity, Local Knowledge, Ecology, Westernization, Neoliberalism, Marxism, Neocolonialism.

### Introduction

Literature on the Global South encompasses diverse voices, narratives, and perspectives

emerging from regions historically marginalized in the global discourse. Writers from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East have produced

works that vividly capture their societies' social, political, and cultural complexities. These literary expressions often challenge prevailing stereotypes and Eurocentric perspectives, providing a nuanced understanding of the rich sociocultural fabric of the Global South.

The dominance of the East-West dichotomy has overshadowed these rich and varied voices of the Global South, perpetuating Western-centric perspectives in literature. PM Narendra Modi stated in the G20 summit "Most of the global challenges have not been created by the Global South. But they affect us more. We have seen this in the impacts of the COVID pandemic, climate change, terrorism, and even the Ukraine conflict. The search for solutions also does not factor in our role or our voice" (P.M Modi 2023, G20 summit) This bias hinders a genuine understanding of Western cultures and targets a hierarchical worldview. "The term Global South has its origins in the Cold War and is thus deemed to be no longer relevant. It brings together countries that are now too vastly different – e.g. diverse economic sizes (least developed countries and emerging markets) as well as differential military capabilities." (Kürzdörfer and Narlikar, 2023) To rectify this imbalance, it is imperative to amplify and embrace the diverse narratives from the Global South, allowing for a more inclusive and nuanced representation in the global literary landscape. This approach challenges stereotypes, breaks down barriers, and fosters a more equitable dialogue reflecting the diversity of human experiences worldwide. The Cold War's ideological struggle has left the East-West dichotomy, which is ever-present, in stark relief on the global stage. However, even in its disjointed 21st-century version, with proxy conflicts erupting in Syria, Israel, and Ukraine, this oversimplified distinction frequently masks an important viewpoint: the actual experiences of the Global South. The various voices of this large region are "removed from all lines of social mobility" (Spivak 1998, p. 276) and hence become a subaltern subject in the din of pro- and anti-Western statements, their complexities and difficulties pushed to the sidelines of the dominant narrative.

Subaltern studies are fundamentally concerned with the unheard and marginalized

voices that are frequently neglected in mainstream discourse or deliberately ignored as Arundhati Roy asserts "There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard" (Roy 2006 p.330). In the age of neoliberalism, a micro-level type of marginalization has evolved and is now a primary subject of subaltern studies. This nuanced viewpoint plunges into the unique repercussions on individuals and communities, focusing on the Global South's experiences. The Global South, a key subaltern group in today's globe, is made up of a variety of countries dealing with issues such as economic disparity, political subjection, and cultural imperialism. Subaltern studies offer a framework through which to examine how these communities construct their identities and challenge dominant narratives in the face of persistent geopolitical difficulties. In essence, subaltern studies just not only amplify the marginalized voices but also highlight micro-marginalization within the Global South, leading to a deeper understanding.

Modern literary writing from the Global South reflects continuous efforts for social justice, economic equity, and human rights. Voices from these countries contribute to a global literary debate that embraces variety while challenging Western ideas' predominance, producing a more inclusive and interconnected literary world. Two titans of literature, Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga, stand out as potent counterpoints amid this brutal cold. Employing fiction, they craft stories that throw light on the human tragedies taking place in the Global South, defying the clash of geopolitical giants to have their voices ignored. Their creations can serve as forums for the voiceless of the Global South population, providing insights into the lives of people whose challenges and ambitions are all too frequently disregarded.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The objective of this research paper is to analyze Arundhati Roy's and Aravind Adiga's literary works as proponents of the Global South in the context of a broken East-West narrative. "In International Political Economy, there are competing theoretical perspectives regarding the

question of global inequalities and the North-South divide" (Frany, 2016) thus, it will use Dependency and Post-development theories as frameworks to examine how they reflect subaltern realities and contribute to global justice discourse. It is a dual-lens analysis of the respective authors' works applying these two distinct theories.

- **Dependency theory:** Dependency theory, a lens for understanding global inequalities, argues that developed "core" nations exploit developing "peripheral" nations through unfair trade and resource extraction. This wealth transfer, rooted in historical colonialism can be understood in the words of Theotonio Don Santos, a founding figure of Dependency theory, he defines Dependency as "a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected" (Dos Santos 1970, p. 231). This phenomenon keeps the periphery underdeveloped and dependent on the 'core' for technology, finance, and goods. As an advocating tool for Global South Dependency theory "can still be a useful tool for explaining global inequalities despite the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (Farny, 2016) Critics argue it oversimplifies complex realities and neglects internal factors within peripheral nations. Still, its core message resonates in critiques of neo-colonialism, unfair trade, and the exploitation of developing countries by multinational corporations.
- **Post-development theory:** post-development theory, a counterpoint to dependency theory, challenges the idea of "development" as a Western-imposed model that benefits the core at the expense of the periphery. As Stuart Corbridge explains "Having stepped outside the diseased circles of Modernity, Science, Reason, Technology, Westernization, Consumption, the Nation-State, Globalization and Development, the peoples of the social majority can then make and rule

their own lives at the grass-roots. The key to a good life would seem to reside in simplicity, frugality, meeting basic needs from local soils..." (Corbridge 1998, p.142) It argues that development often fuels inequality, disrupts local cultures, and prioritizes economic growth over social and ecological well-being. Proponents advocate for alternative paths to progress, valuing local knowledge, sustainable practices, and self-determination within diverse communities. While criticized for lacking clear solutions, post-development theory sparks crucial conversations about alternative development models and the need to empower marginalized voices in shaping their futures.

#### Analytical Study and Discussion

- **Arundhati Roy as a Post-development critique**

Roy's fictions, *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* become biting critiques of development methods imposed by the West when viewed through the prism of post-development theory. Her subversive stories and magical realism highlight the terrible effects on marginalized groups, frequently putting economic expansion ahead of cultural integrity, environmental sustainability, and community well-being. Roy's emphasis on marginalized groups, such as Keralan minorities, highlights an inevitable feature of post-development theory within the framework of Global South: the need to recognize local knowledge and alternative development paths. Her characters develop into resistance figures that challenge prevailing theories and promote community self-determination. In addition, Roy's post-modernist inclinations, seen in her fractured narrative and non-linear structures, serve as instruments for dismantling inflexible power systems.

*The God of Small Things* offers an insightful review of post-development philosophical thought in the context of the Global South. The book provides a detailed depiction of the socioeconomic hardships in the Indian state of Kerala while critically engaging with and challenging traditional Western development models. Roy's story deftly intertwines

historical legacies while highlighting colonialism's lasting effects on marginalized people. In line with post-development concepts, the project tackles urgent ecological issues, opposes cultural uniformity, and emphasizes the value of local knowledge. To expand this notion Roy critically targets the Western model of development as Ammu sarcastically taunts "Ha Ha Ha! Going to Oxford didn't make a person clever" (Roy, 1997 p.56) The novel enhances our comprehension of many viewpoints and the challenges associated with the post-development theory. This theory prioritizes local and cultural knowledge and belief over modern and Western thinking often unreasonably as Erica Prosser remarks "post-development encourages alternatives to development but is condemned for failing to conceptualize realistic alternatives" (Prosser 2010, p.36) Roy is found with this state of allusive dilemma throughout the novel as narrator once illustrate "They didn't know then, that soon they would go in. that they would cross the river and be where they were not supposed to be, with a man they weren't supposed to love." (Roy, p.55) furthermore Roy's novel, through its portrayal of the consequences of industrialization, resonates with the post-development critique by highlighting the potential hazards and imbalances created by unbridled economic progress. Roy describes River Meenachal "was warm,...Grey green.... With fish in it. With the sky and trees in it. And at night, the broken yellow moon in it" (p.123) but the beauty of the ecosphere has now faded away due to western development model. In this way, Roy steadily criticizes industrial development in favor of nature and ecology throughout the novel.

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* expands on the post-development discussion that she started with her previous works. This book examines post-colonial legacies that continue to influence contemporary society while critically challenging Western-centric modernity against the backdrop of India's changing sociopolitical environment, as Boston Globe writes in a review about the novel "Once a decade, if we are lucky, a novel emerges from the cinder pit of living that asks what increasingly appears to be the urgent question of our global era." (Boston Globe,

2017) The story welcomes cultural heterogeneity by combining subdued marginalized experiences and a range of viewpoints that go against the homogeneity that is frequently connected to conventional development paradigms. We meet the character of 'Gulabiya Vechania' in the novel, who is victimized because of a development project. He is forced to be exiled from his home as a mega-dam project has to be launched and the trauma of Gulabiya is reflected in this poetic verse "You've snatched poor folks' daily bread... And have slapped a fee on their shit instead" (Roy, 2017 p. 112). Another similar portrayal we trace in this novel is of comrade Revathy, who is striving for forest land. The government wanted to acquire the land of tribals "Adivasis" for again modern development, since, "Operation Green Hunt is announced by the Government." So that "they can make a steel township and mining" (p.421) Roy's examination of how political and economic advancements affect regional communities is consistent with post-development criticisms of major initiatives that might exacerbate inequality and marginalization. The book also incorporates ecological and environmental justice issues, which helps readers gain a deeper knowledge of the intricate interactions between local dynamics and global pressures in the Global South.

• **Aravind Adiga reviving Dependency Theory Perspective:**

Turning our attention to dependency theory, Adiga's books, *The White Tiger*, *Last Man in Tower*, *Selection Day*, and *Amnesty* paint a vivid picture of the continual exploitation that peripheral countries endure and the reality of neo-coloniality. Adiga highlights the brutal dynamics of class struggle and structural exploitation ingrained in the global order via the struggles of his characters with economic disparity and the unrelenting search for upward mobility within a rigged system.

His proclivity for socialist and Marxist doctrines with a Dickensian tone emphasizes even more his underlying criticism of the fundamental injustices of the capitalist system. Adiga's characters serve as cautionary tales, highlighting the limitations of individual upward mobility and the futility of

negotiating a system that is intended to perpetuate exploitation.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* serves as an outstanding case study for employing Dependency Theory. Examining the novel through this angle reveals how Adiga targets the exploitation and injustice inherent in the global economic system that maintains the "structure of dependence" (Dos Santos 1970), with a particular emphasis on the relationship between rich and poor countries. Balram addresses the Chinese premier "Neither you nor I speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English." (Adiga 2008, P. 3) this reflects a very true understanding of the hegemony of the 'core' countries of North over periphery of Global south. Central tenets of Dependency theory reflected in the Novel are Unequal Exchange, External Dependence, and the Historical context of the colonial legacy. Balram's journey from rural poverty to urban servitude exemplifies the unequal exchange between core and periphery. Balram describes the Rooster Coop as a place where cheap labor is extracted from Indian workers to enrich Western corporations and the local elite, he writes "Go to Old Delhi, behind the Jama Masjid, and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market...stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly... the whole cage giving off a horrible stench—...They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop..." (p. 173) He witnesses the extraction of resources and cheap labor from India, enriching Western corporations and the local elite while leaving him and countless others trapped in a cycle of exploitation.

Aravind Adiga's literary sword goes beyond exposing the frailties of the Western neoliberal model in his later works, *Last Man in Tower* and *Selection Day* broadens the attack's horizon, presenting its destructive repercussions on the social fabric of the Global South. In *Last Man in Tower*, Master Ji, a middle-class shopkeeper who values tradition and morality, becomes a heartbreaking symbol of the many people who are victims of crony capitalism resonates in the novel "Because in this world, there is a line: on one side

are the men who cannot get things done, and on the other side are the men who can. And not one in a hundred will cross that line. Will you?" (Adiga, 2011, p. 174) His struggle highlights the glaring inequities created by this economic paradigm, particularly in emerging countries striving for sovereignty in the post-Cold War era reflecting the turmoil of the Global South.

In a similar vein, *Selection Day* explores the toxic cultural entanglement of the West, demonstrating how seemingly neutral artifacts like cricket can be used as instruments of power, since, "The so-called West comprises states at very different living standards, models of development, military expenditures, and cultures." (Kürzdörfer and Narlikar, 2023) The novel's obsession with this Western-dominated sport subtly highlights the colonial legacies that continue to this day, "We are the brown boys playing the white man's game" (Adiga 2016, p. 84) influencing ambitions and even professions in the Global South and fostering a latent reliance on outside validation systems. Adiga, in this novel, presents a striking image of the complex ways in which the economic and cultural machinery of the West infiltrate and manipulate cultures in the Global South, leaving a legacy of exploitation and dependence through these deftly constructed tales. His powerful criticisms compel us to reconsider alternative possibilities for the Global South's advancement and self-determination and to think through the actual consequences of this approach.

Finally, in Adiga's *Amnesty*, Danny's refugee experience becomes a vivid microcosm of the Global South's battle against the neoliberal empire, as "the Periphery" or the 'South' is characterized by socioeconomic and political backwardness, measured against Western values and standards and this simply should not be ignored" (Frany 2016), and the marginalized south population looks at Core countries with hopeful expectations as narrator quotes "Many of us flee chaos to come here. Aussies are an optimistic and methodical people and they are governed by law. Understanding the concept of the rule that cannot be broken is vital to adjusting here." (Adiga 2020, p. 11) but Danny's experience throughout the novel is found contradictory and

“was confusing because Danny had always thought of himself as a man who had come to Sidney to wear suits. Tip-top woolen suits with silver buttons and a silk handkerchief in a pocket.” (p. 24) Also here we trace the North-South divide as Danny states further “only one tailor in Batticaloa could cut a high-class suit like that, only four people in town could afford something like that” (p. 24). As a downtrodden cleaner in Australia's capitalist neoliberal economic model, his low-wage work feeds a system that also marginalizes him. This reflects dependence theory's harsh critique: the West, which feeds on cheap labor and resources from the Global South, traps Danny and countless others in a cycle of exploitation.

However, the crux of dependency extends beyond economics. Western media becomes a weapon, “policy-makers and think tankers in the West are rejecting the term (Global South), countries from the Global South are reclaiming it” (Kürzdörfer and Narlikar, 2023), influencing perceptions about Danny's native country, Sri Lanka, and hiding its complex realities, “Easiest thing in the world, becoming invisible to white people, who don't see you anyway;...” (Adiga 2020, p. 49) This command of the global narrative reflects potential subaltern voices, a reconsideration of who genuinely controls power in this age of globalization. Danny's narrative goes beyond simple victimization. There are glimpses of rebellion in his perseverance and thinking. He makes his way through the maze of bureaucracy, picks up the language of the structure, and even has moments of solidarity with other migrants, significantly with “periphery” nations as Adiga in *The White Tiger* quotes “the belief that the future of the world lies with yellow and brown man now that our erstwhile master, the white-skinned man, has wasted himself through buggery, phone usage, and drug abuse;...” (Adiga 2008, p. 5-6) Perhaps real amnesty consists of breaking down these exploitative systems and a legal stamp. It lies in the Global South finding its voice, rewriting the narrative of dependency, and paving the way for true independence.

### Conclusion

Both Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga emerge as significant literary voices arguing for the

Global South, with their narratives adopting distinctive critical stances. Arundhati Roy's books, when examined through the lens of post-development theory, reflect a strong indictment of the Western-imposed development model. Roy emphasizes the predicament of marginalized groups, advocating for the recognition of cultural knowledge and alternative pathways to Western development. Her narratives challenge dominant notions and emphasize the necessity of communal self-determination. In contrast, Aravind Adiga, when examined through the paradigm of Dependency Theory, decisively reveals the ongoing exploitation of the voices of peripheral nations in the global economic order. Adiga's characters serve as cautionary tales, emphasizing the inherent inequalities of the capitalist system and the failure of upward advancement within a rigged structure. His literary sword slices through the flaws of the Western neoliberal model, widening the critique by addressing its devastating impacts on the social fabric of the Global South. Both writers contribute to a deeper comprehension of the Global South's challenges and aspirations. Roy's post-development perspective emphasizes the need for cultural integrity and environmental justice, whereas Adiga's Dependency Theory criticism takes into the brutal reality of economic exploitation and class struggle. Together, their creative efforts encourage readers to rethink established development models as PM Modi asserted “The voice of Global South needs to set its own tone. Together we need to escape the cycle of dependency system and circumstances which are not of our making.” (PM Modi 2023, G20 Summit) and arguing for alternative approaches prioritizing the Global South's voices and self-determination.

### References

- Adiga, Aravind. *Amnesty*. Scribner, 2020.
- Adiga, Aravind. *Last Man in Tower*. HarperCollins India, 2011.
- Adiga, Aravind. *Selection Day*. HarperCollins India, 2016.
- Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. Free Press, 2008.

- Boston Globe staff reviewer(s). "[Review of The Ministry of Utmost Happiness by Arundhati Roy]." Boston Globe, September 6, 2017. Accessed January 13, 2024.
- Corbridge, Stuart. "'Beneath the pavement only soil': The poverty of post-development." *Journal of Development Studies* 34 (1998): 138-148.
- Dos Santos, T. "The Structure of Dependence," *The American Economic Review*, 1970, 60:2, pp. 231-236.
- Farny, Elisabeth. "Dependency Theory: A Useful Tool for Analyzing Global Inequalities Today?" *E-International Relations*, 23 Nov. 2016, <https://www.e-ir.info/2016/11/23/dependency-theory-a-useful-tool-for-analyzing-global-inequalities-today/>.
- Kürzdörfer, Nora, and Amrita Narlikar. "A Rose By Any Other Name? In Defence of the 'Global South.'" *Global Policy Journal*, 29 August 2023, doi:10.1515/omgc-2023-0052.
- Modi, Narendra. "Text of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Remarks at Opening Session of Voice of Global South Summit 2023." Narendra Modi website, January 12, 2023. <https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-remarks-at-opening-session-of-voice-of-global-south-summit-2023-567058>
- Prosser, Erica, "Applied Post-Development Theory: Case Study of Enda Graf Sahel" (2010). Volume 18 - 2010. Paper 16. <http://preserve.lehigh.edu/cas-lehighreview-vol-18/16>
- Roy, Arundhati. *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*. Penguin Books India, 2006.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. Random House, 1997
- Roy, Arundhati. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Penguin Books, 2017.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of*