



Spaces Of Power And Resistance: A Study Of Spatial Narratives In Adiga's Novels

Salman Khan^{1*}, Dr. Pragyan Paramita Pattnaik²

^{1*}PhD Scholar, Department of HSS, C.V. Raman Global University, Email: slmn.1990@gmail.com

Mobile: (+91) 993725634

²Professor and Head, Department of HSS, C.V. Raman Global University

Abstract

The novels of Aravind Adiga exhibit the influence of spatial narratives in modern literature while dealing with socio-political, socio-cultural and the psyche of contemporary society. Adiga blends geographical spaces, social spaces, and ideational spaces in his narrative to encounter oppression, class struggle, corruption, and moral dilemmas alongside the human condition in global discourse. Adiga uses distinctive spatial narrative in all three novels, *The White Tiger*, *Last Man in Tower*, and *Selection Day*, to showcase the different dynamics of this. The spatial analysis shows the transformative gloomy picture of urbanisation in *Last Man in Tower* and the rural-urban divide in *The White Tiger*. Both novels highlight the spaces behind the exercise of power at individual and community levels. Similarly, 'Cricket' becomes a space for aspiration and commercialisation of talents in the *Selection Day*. Analysing the findings concerning postcolonial literature and geographical spaces shows how Adiga's spatial narrative skilfully connects identity crisis, power dynamics and human resilience. Adiga uses spatial narrative to create innovative ways of storytelling by interweaving diverse socio-cultural issues, socio-political landscapes and postcolonial ideas, revealing complex societal changes.

Keywords: Spatial narratives, Urbanisation, Identity, Cultural spaces, Postcolonial critique, Socio-political landscapes

Introduction

Aravind Adiga won the Booker Prize in the year 2008 for his debut novel *The White Tiger*. He is well-known for his sharp criticism of modern Indian culture. His research addresses the economic, sociocultural, and even psychological dimensions of urbanisation, systemic inequality, and aspiration. Most remarkably, his storytelling focuses on Adiga's unconventional form of spatial narration. The use of spatial narrative assesses the contribution of physical, social and psychological surroundings in shaping the character in the social domain. In the novels written by Adiga: *The White Tiger*, *Last Man in the Tower* and *Selection Day*, one can equally well discover the analysis of social space as a mere geographical location of the events and a geographical space with meaning and ideas to enrich the narrative. His novels, namely *The White Tiger*, *Last Man in Tower*, and *Selection Day*, grapple with the cross-cultural experience from a spatial perspective, depicting places more fantastically and subtly.

Spatial narratives analyse how we can approach themes like systematic oppression, socio-political hierarchies, or identity construction by intertwining the social space, the physical environment, and the individual's psyche. Adiga uses spaces in his novels to highlight the inequalities and systematic loopholes with respect to the character and its belonging. His writings reflect the rapid changes in society and the world with respect to his narrative space. The framework brings Adiga's writing closer to extensive theoretical and literary traditions like spatial narratology and postcolonial critique.

Spatial narrative investigates the interconnections of space, power, and character's identity. Adiga employs spatial narrative in his writings, and this links him to his contemporary Indian Postcolonial authors. Rohinton Mistry's in *A Fine Balance* investigates how urban regions of India became centres for systematic oppression and lack of social cohesion in Bombay during the 1970s and 1980s. Salman Rushdie also uses spaces in *Midnight's Children*. He employs spatial narrative to represent the complex history of India and its progressive identity through the interaction of characters and their backdrops. Adiga addresses the issues of socioeconomic disparity, migration and human resilience in the postcolonial context to offer a kaleidoscopic view of the intersection of people and society in terms of spaces.

Adiga's approach to spaces is similar to the investigation of spatial dynamics in world literature, especially in Africa and Latin America. Writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ngugi wa Thiong'o also explore the tension of colonial roots and the impact of modernisation in both rural and urban settings. Gabriel Garcia Marquez uses spatial narrative in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to convey the cyclical nature of time to depict cultural memory, resilience and socio-economic struggle, similar to Adiga. The spatial narrative is used globally to explore the interconnections of geographical spaces in nurturing individual identity and thought processes. Writers such as Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja put the foundation stone of spatial narratives in their writing. Foucault uses the idea of heterotopia to question the dominant cultural norms, which becomes the core of resistance and change. Lefebvre, in his book *The Production of Space*, reimagines space as a socially created reality influenced by power relations and human actions rather than an unbiased



circumstantial. Soja advocates Thirdspace theory, founded on these notions by highlighting the blending of physical, social, and imaginary environments. This study aims to explore the theoretical insights by examining how Adiga uses spatial narratives to address issues of social inequalities, changes in urban landscapes, and human conditions. It provides a multifaceted view of the sociopolitical forces that create his characters and their worlds.

Adiga uses spatial narrative as a technique and analytical tool to examine society. In *The White Tiger*, the socio-economic inequalities are presented by the 'Darkness' of rural Laxmangarh and the 'Light' of the urban metropolitan of Delhi and Bangalore. Rural spaces confine individuals in poverty and caste discrimination, while urban spaces represent opportunities along with corruption. The resident society of Mumbai and its residents become a central subject of conflict in *Last Man in Tower*. Mumbai, which is a synonym for dreams, people chase their dreams and compete with each other to diminish the socio-economic barriers. The ethical compromise and sacrifices for achieving financial success are beautifully depicted in the novel. In *Selection Day*, cricket pitches, slums, and affluent metropolitan areas of Mumbai represent ambition and systematic inequalities, questioning the commercialisation of individual aspiration and the change of identity with social constraints. Adiga uses the following three spaces in his spatial narrative.

1. **Geographical Spaces:** The rural-urban divide represents the social inequalities and moral shifts in individual perspectives concerning geographical space.
2. **Social and Cultural Spaces:** The intricacies of interpersonal relationships and social structures influence the concept of tradition and modernity. It encompasses the individual, family, society and social constructs.
3. **Ideational and Psychological Spaces:** These reflect the internal and ideological conflicts influenced by desire and social constraints.

Adiga uses a spatial narrative to connect individual and societal, rural and urban, and national and international narratives. Adiga's spatial narrative helps the readers to analyse modern India's socio-political, cultural, and psychological elements. The present research paper examines Adiga's spatial narrative within the contexts of literary theory, cultural commentary and post-colonial studies. This paper also argues the use of spatial narrative in providing critical insights into interchanging human conditions in the era of rapid development.

1. Geographical Spaces: Mapping Transformation

Adiga's spatial narrative extensively examines of modern India's socioeconomic disparity and cultural variables. It goes beyond the conventional narrative of geographical spaces by investigating the relations of space, culture and their psychological consequences on the character. He uses a multi-layered narrative where physical, social and ideological spaces act as reflection and critique on human experiences. He highlights the complex problems of modern India through his investigation of physical landscapes, social relationships and individual issues in his novels, *The White Tiger*, *Last Man in Tower*, and *Selection Day*, respectively.

Adiga's examination of geographical regions in his spatial narrative is commendable. Geographic environments play an important role in shaping the character and their thoughts. Laxmangarh, Delhi and Bangalore each of these spaces have their distinctive importance, as narrated in *The White Tiger*. The Vishram Society, Mumbai, play an integral part in *Last Man in Tower*. Cricket, Mumbai metropolises and slums play a significant role in *Selection Day*. This section explores the changes in socio-economic conditions and human experiences with respect to geographical spaces. Space is a transformative element in Adiga's narrative that influences the characters and reflects the sociocultural conditions of the society mentioned. The geographical settings in the narrative are more vibrant, serving as the battleground for struggles, aspirations and the creation of identity.

The Rural-Urban Divide in *The White Tiger*

"India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness." (*The White Tiger*, p.10).

Adiga highlights the systematic inequalities and moral quandary in *The White Tiger* by assigning the adjective 'Light' to Delhi and 'Darkness' to Laxmangarh. Rural space presents a state of confinement with cast struggle and entrenched poverty. Balram's journey presents the misery, moral erosion and degradation of social norms in Laxmangarh. Thus, he presents the economic stagnation and social malaises of rural space.

"The road is a jungle; the animals on it are wild—the poor on bicycles, the slightly less poor in small cars, and the rich in their SUVs". (*The White Tiger*, p.112)

Adiga artistically uses metaphors to demonstrate hierarchy and disparities through the physical regions in the novel. The road connecting rural communities to urban cities represents both opportunities and a path of exploitation. Adiga ascertains the importance of roads for the change and growth of people. Balram's journey to Delhi and Bangalore presents both physical and psychological challenges. Adiga uses metaphors to depict the infrastructure of Delhi, such as crumbling bridges and hectic traffic, to present the fragmented identity and



prevailing injustice. Urban spaces help people with their upward mobility in life, but they are full of corrupt institutions and ethical challenges.

Secondary characters like the members of the Balram Family residing in Laxmnagarh are confined to limited opportunities because of the rural area. The people living in rural areas of India still do not get independence in terms of all the basic facilities of life available in urban areas. Ultimately, rural life is deprived of economic advancements and facilities. The rural life is surrounded by so many unethical practices and oppression. In contrast, Mr. Ashok, who belongs to a rural area, gets the financial advances and opportunities to live in Delhi with all the amenities of life. The above contradiction represents the duality of spatial experiences influenced based on class and power.

Mumbai: A City of Contrasts in *Last Man in Tower*

Mumbai presents a multifaceted space in *Last Man in Tower*. It stands for both people's hopes and despair. Vishram Society's Tower became the centre of discussion in the novel. This tower serves as a lens of the rapid economic proliferation and redevelopment of modern India. Meanwhile, the surrounding regions, Kurla, Bandra, and Andheri, are the glaring examples of Mumbai's economic divide.

Adiga depicts the dual faces of urbanisation through Mumbai's infrastructure, sprawling slums, skyscrapers and congested roads. The rapid commercialisation of spaces takes place in the name of real estate developments in Mumbai. So many towering structures are built near the slum areas to showcase the dual faces of Urbanisation. Adiga criticise the unequal growth of Mumbai's Urban regions and the greedy opportunists living in them.

"A banyan tree has grown through the compound wall beside the booth. Painted umber like the wall and speckled with dirt, the tree stem bulges from the masonry like a camouflaged leopard; it lends an air of solidity and reliability to Ram Khare's booth that it perhaps doesn't deserve. The compound wall, set behind a gutter, has two dusty signs hanging from it." (Adiga, 2012, p 6)

This image emphasises nature's endurance in the face of human-caused degradation, exemplifying how Adiga's spatial narratives combine the physical and metaphorical dynamics of urban life.

Other characters like Kothari, the watchman and Mrs Puri struggle with their moral concession, which reflects Mumbai's sad reality. Kothari's life represents the fragile condition of the working class in the urban regions of modern India. Mrs Puri's opposition to Dharmen Shah's offer represents the oscillating state of middle-class spatial identity. Adiga, through his narratives, emphasises how geographical spaces play an essential role in fostering individuals' identities and thought processes. These geographical spaces are the battlegrounds where aspiration clashes with systematic injustices and ethical quandary.

Cricket Grounds and Urban Dreams in *Selection Day*

In *Selection Day*, Adiga presents the geographical areas of Mumbai's cricket pitches, stadiums, slums and posh neighbourhoods as an intersection of human desire and exploitation. The tiny house of the Kumar family in the slum area of Mumbai represents entrenched poverty and parental expectations. In contrast, the cricket stadium reflects a hope for financial advancement and the sad realities of the competitive game of sport. Cricket represents both the advancement and platform of commercialisation in Mumbai. Cricket promises to be a passport to success for middle-class people, but power politics and the privileged class control the game of cricket. Kumar brothers leave their rural area to come to Mumbai to chase their dreams of cricket. Their journey is marked by many difficulties and oddities while chasing to meet familial expectations. Being born in the middle class has left them with limited scope in the face of economic proliferation.

Secondary characters like the coaches and sponsors emphasise the complex inequalities of city life. These characters continuously exploit the talents of the poor young players by turning the pitch of cricket from hope to despair for them. They commercialise the young talents and the game of cricket in the name of franchise and selection. Ultimately, Adiga presents the mass passion of Indians towards cricket and the power politics behind selection in *Selection Day*. He sharply criticises the commercialisation of talents and systematic barriers to achieving a niche in urban India.

Adiga cleverly uses spaces in his novels *The White Tiger*, *Last Man in Tower*, and *Selection Day* to highlight the influence of spatial relationships on his characters' lives and the intricacies of socio-political problems they encountered. Adiga creates a multilayered narrative through the rural-urban divide, social hierarchies and the symbolic representation of infrastructures. It includes the deteriorating social condition of Laxmangarh, the bustling streets of Delhi, the slums of Mumbai and exploitive cricket grounds. Adiga examines systematic disparities through the lens of spatial narrative, highlighting the paradoxes and social malaise of both rural and urban India. His writings give a detailed view of geographical spaces and their role in shaping individual life and thought in the changing world.



2. Social and Cultural Spaces: Intersections of Community and Conflict

Adiga explores the social and cultural spaces as a stage for the intersection of tradition and modernity. These spaces range from homes to public places like conference halls, tea shops and cricket fields. All these spaces bear the impression of social institutions and human behaviour. Adiga uses these settings to emphasise the tension between individual aspiration and social forces and highlights the elements of greed, persecution and human resilience behind this.

"My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine—at least one—should live like a man." (*The White Tiger*, p.19)

The above lines of Balaram's father reflect his aspiration to see his son a successful person in life. Adiga portrays the hierarchies based on caste and community in *The White Tiger* through the spaces of Balaram's master house at Laxmangarh and the busy streets of the metropolis. Balaram's interaction with his master in different spaces, from personal to social contexts altogether, displays different kinds of realities. The conversation inside the car represents the injustices, bribery and the settlement of deals with the corrupt politicians. Public spaces such as tea stalls become a centre of gossip and friendship. The bustling streets of Delhi and Bangalore represent the chaos and economic disparities of modern India. Adiga depicts the personal and public spaces to illustrate the fragmentation and intersections of Indian society through the interactions with Balaram Halwai. In *Last Man in the Tower*, Adiga uses Vishram Society as the locus of individual and public spaces to represent fragile human relationships. The conference hall in the society represents the chaos and disintegration of communal unity after the Dharmen Shah's proposal of redevelopment. Vishram society represents the middle-class aspiration, rooted values, and moral dilemmas corresponding to one of the required facets of globalisation. Social gatherings and shared rituals in society earlier represented oneness, but later, the lucrative offer of shahs scattered it. Individual aspiration clashes with collective obligation that challenges the cultural values of the society.

"Masterji's question to Ajwani conflates Shanmugham's approach to the 'kingdom of earth' and 'instruments of torture'... 'Did they fall down the stairs? Or were they pushed?'" (*Last Man in Tower*, p.224).

The situation shows increasing tension and hostility among community members, depicting how greed and external pressure destroy social relationships within Vishram Society.

Adiga uses 'Cricket' as a recurring motif in *Selection Day* to represent desire and disparity. 'Cricket' is a space for financial proliferation in India, which attracts millions of Middle-class families to dream of becoming a part of it. Kumar's brothers, Radha and Manju, prefer cricket pitches to bring fortune and register themselves in upward social mobility. However, they are unaware of the politics and power dynamics that play an important role in the selection of cricket teams. Poor young talents remain unrecognised for the lack of wealthy patrons and coaches. Adiga shows the paradox of hell and heaven through the house of Kumar Borthar at the Mumba's slum and the lavish cricket ground in *Selection Day*.

"The cramped, dilapidated quarters of the Kumar family... stand in stark contrast to the cricket grounds, which represent both the promise of upward mobility and the harsh realities of competitive sports." (*Selection Day*, p.142)

The juxtaposition underlines the socioeconomic disparity and commercialisation of ambitions in metropolitan India.

Cricket in India has become a bridge and barrier among the people, irrespective of socioeconomic disparities. The game of cricket brings all the people together during the on-field match, but it fails to maintain the togetherness on the off-field. Skills and talents are required for the game but are commercialised based on sponsorships, coaching facilities and favouritism. This leads to the breakdown of socioeconomic balance in society. Adiga represents 'Cricket' as a ladder of financial success and a commodity for exploiting poor young talents. Cricket serves as the symbol of success and status in *Selection Day*.

Kumar's brothers come to Mumbai to fulfil their familial expectations and live in a small house in the slums of Mumbai. Mohan Kumar's behaviours do not go with the people of the slum, resulting in the shifting of homes. Mohan's dreams of seeing his sons as successful cricketers do not go with the established people of the urban setting. The gap between expectation and reality is shown in the spaces in the novel. The practice sessions at coaching venues not only show the physical strain but present the ruthless exploitation. Altogether, Cricket is used as a space in the novels to showcase the craze among the Indians and the dark side of the game of cricket.

Adiga's clever description of social and cultural spaces demonstrates how individual aspiration intertwines with cultural and economic frameworks, representing tension in the novels. These spaces- tea shops, conference hall, housing society and cricket field represent socio-cultural and socio-political currents of modern India. Through these spaces, Adiga highlights the tension, fragile nature of human relationships, universal effect of materialism and the breakdown of communalism in a fast-changing world.



3. Ideational and Psychological Spaces: Inner Worlds in Outer Realities

Adiga analyses the ideational and psychological spaces in his narrative to enrich it. These spaces highlight the interrelations between the character's internal conflict and exterior backdrop. They constantly change depending on the character's internal struggles and emotional encounters. This results in multifaceted narratives that transcend the geographical spaces in the novels. Adiga uses the metaphor 'Rooster Coop' in *The White Tiger* to represent the psychological imprisonment of underprivileged people who have accepted slavery. This ideational space represents Balram Halwa's internal struggle and attempts to escape this entrapment. Balram's encounters and interactions during this journey in the novel result in a change in psychological space. Balram battles to create his identity in the novels. So he declares his life journey as "The Autobiography of a Half-Baked Indian." (*The White Tiger*, p.8).

Adiga extends the psychological perspective in *Last Man in Tower* by portraying the impact of organised subjugation on secondary characters of Vishram society, Mumbai. These characters earlier show oneness in all the rituals of Vishram society and later fall prey to the temptation of financial gain and break their cohesion. Mrs Puri and Mr Kothari are the glaring examples of this who break the unity just merely for financial advancement. The above transformation reflects broader social concerns because of urbanisation, where systematic disparities compel individuals into conflict and chaos. As a result, people lose their moral values and community solidarity and throw away Master Ji from the Vishram society. This shows the contradiction between moral quandary and self-interest and the shifting of psychological space.

"So, Masterji became the prime suspect in his own murder. Many people, both in Vishram and in the neighbourhood at large, gave evidence that the teacher had been growing senile....and his diabetes made him depressed. In the end, the Inspector decided, since he didn't like unsolved mysteries, that it must have been suicide." (*Last Man in Tower*, p400)

Masterji's ethics foster a psychological space that encourages confrontation with social influences. His idealistic viewpoint based on justice and dignity contrasts with the material aspiration of the residents of Vishram society. The narrative shifts between his inner struggles and the external pressure of urbanisation. He fights against systematic oppression with his solitude and tragic fate, prioritising moral integrity over materialisation. Similarly, In *Selection Day*, Kumar's psychological spaces are filled with internal struggle and a journey of self-discovery. Radha's growing disillusionment with cricket, paired with Manju's struggle with his sexual identity. Both these contradict their father's and familial expectations. These ideational spaces are deeply connected to cultural and physical spaces, demonstrating the intersections of human identity with external influences. Familial pressure makes the kumar brothers' home a psychological battleground, restricting their uniqueness. Adiga depicts the psychological effects of Institutional exploitation on secondary characters such as Tommy Sir in *Selection Day*. Tommy Sir reflects weary disappointment over the commercialisation of young talents and their entrapment in the corrupt system. He plays a mixed role as a mentor, oscillating between genuine concern for talent and involvement in commercialising talent. This highlights how systematic oppression affects not just the marginalised but also those having good intentions to keep the system going.

Adiga's narrative explores ideology as a form of resistance against the harsh realities. In *The White Tiger*, Balaram's escape from the 'Rooster coop' is physical and psychological. His determination to become an entrepreneur is an ideological reaction to the system that exploits him. In *Last Man in Tower*, Masterji resists the encroaching forces of money and urbanisation by holding his dignity and morals. Though he fails in his struggle, he shows the power of ideational space in resisting the odds and oppressive force.

"It's the principle. A man must stand up for his rights in this world" (*Last Man in Tower*, p.412).

In *Selection Day*, Manju employs creativity as a means to navigate social and familial pressures. He combines his love for literature and defiance in finding his sexual orientation. This helps him foster an isolated psychological space where he can distance himself from his father's pressure and the cutthroat world of cricket. Despite its temporariness, this psychological space serves as an important space of opposition against a system that seeks to commercialise his aspiration and identity.

Adiga successfully demonstrated the psychological impact of organised oppression on his characters and their resistance. Adiga employs ideational and psychological spaces to provide significant dimensions to his spatial narratives by emphasising the resilience of the human spirit in the centre of systematic disparities.

Conclusion

Aravind Adiga's novels, *The White Tiger*, *Last Man in the Tower*, and *Selection Day* illustrate how spatial narrative can shape contemporary literature. Adiga's narrative weaves together geographical, social and psychological spaces, offering sharp criticism of modern India's socio-cultural and socio-political dimensions. His portrayal of geographical space ranges from dormant rural life and urban economic disparity in *The White Tiger* to the disputed society of *Last Man in Tower* and the cricket fields of *Selection Day*, which provides a vibrant context for examining systematic inequalities and resistance. These spaces act more than mere



backdrops; they serve as symbolic spaces for understanding the interplay between individual struggle and systematic forces. Adiga states, "*This land, India, has never been free.*" (*The White Tiger*, P.14) Adiga explores social and cultural environments, including housing societies, cricket fields, and slums. He highlights human temptation to materialism and the rooted systematic oppression. He analyses psychological elements, such as human entrapment, slavery, and moral struggles, that highlight the interconnection between internal conflicts and external circumstances. Adiga's writings transcend traditional narratives by utilising spatial narratology, situating them within larger frameworks of postcolonial and urban studies. In *Last Man in Tower*, Adiga aptly states, "Masterji contests outer space with inner resources. His undying spirit of questioning the things his conscience and conviction don't allow him to accept." (*Last Man in Tower*, p.162). Adiga utilises literature's ability to both examine and reflect on the evolving sociopolitical landscape of contemporary India. His writings showcase the complexities of urbanisation, systemic inequalities, and personal ambition while simultaneously addressing universal themes of resilience and identity.

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