

Metropolitan Culture and the Politics of Gender and Class in the Fiction of Namita Gokhale and Aravind Adiga

Dr. Anshu^{1*}, Preeti Prami²

1 Assistant Professor, D.J. College, Baraut (Baghpat) U.P. India

anshu.ujjwal11@gmail.com

2 Research Scholar, D.J. College, Baraut (Baghpat) U.P. India

Abstract: The concept of metropolitan culture has become quite an important subject of investigation in present-day literature and urban studies, considering the various aspects of urbanization, globalization, social inequality, and cultural transformation. The metropolitan culture in Indian English fiction has been represented in such a way that not only as a physical place, but also as a living channel for negotiations of identity, power, and experience. This paper reviews metropolitan culture in the writing of Namita Gokhale and Aravind Adiga, especially focusing on the interconnections of gender and class. Using an interdisciplinary approach that involves urban studies, postcolonialism, and literary criticism literature, the paper combines the review of existing literature to demonstrate how both authors challenge the existing ideas of metropolitan modernity. The major difference between the two authors is the emphasis made by Gokhale on the experiences of women in elite urban places, while for Adiga the existing discrepancies between the rich and poor layers of society and the impact of neoliberal development reflect the important role of structural inequalities. The comparison of two authors reveals that the gender and class are communicated through their conjunction in terms of identity, mobility, and feeling of belonging in modern Indian metropolises. Furthermore, this review paper indicates towards the possibility of interdisciplinary future research and stresses the significance of metropolitan fiction for understanding cultural and social realities of post-liberalization India.

Keywords: Metropolitan Culture, Indian English Fiction, Urban Studies, Gender, Class, Postcolonial City.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indian encounter with the city has long been marked by tension. In the colonial times with port cities like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, but also up to the present in the age of globalization with cities such as Gurgaon, Bangalore or the satellite towns of Delhi. This duality has been in evidence in India from colonial times to modernity and will continue to display itself overtly or covertly in the present as seen from the developments post-1991 economic reform policy of liberalization and deregulation of the Indian economy [1]. The modern Indian city is an epitome of aspiration and displacement where the New India is an embodiment of consumerism and globalization. Yet the emergence of New India was at the cost of the sacrifices made by Old India. There is a deep divide between the glorious New India symbolized by the cosmopolitan cities of shopping malls and gated communities and the hidden slums of helpless roadside dwellers. Namita Gokhale and Aravind Adiga

have been two of the prominent chroniclers of this duality. Their methods are different. Gokhale's hero in her novel *Paro* is a woman from the elite metropolitan society and the protagonists of her stories have typically been women who have to navigate their way through the glittering inter-relationships in metropolitan Delhi [2]. Her novels represent a blend of serious and satirical. On the other hand, Adiga's breakthrough work is *The White Tiger* which is narrated by the protagonist himself detailing the social issues in an unflattering fashion [3].

The divergence of subject matter appears to be a crucial factor in the comparative reading of two authors. Together, Gokhale and Adiga give contrasting but complementary accounts of the problem of metropolitan culture for Indian society. Gokhale looks at the psychological and moral consequences of urban modernity on women navigating the world of desire, aspiration, and inherited patriarchy, while Adiga examines the consequences of urban modernity for the poor, the low-caste, and the migrant, trying to penetrate the globalized economy that is indifferent to their dignity. The phenomenon that they demonstrate in both cases is that of a metropolitan culture, promising transformation and freedom from the rigidity of village, caste, and family but, at the same time, reproducing the old hierarchies in new, often brutal, forms.

My study aims to position this comparative discussion within the context of urban theory, which has been going since the early 20th century, exploring the metropolis not simply as a demographic or economic concept but as a distinct cultural and cognitive phenomenon. The classic essay on metropolis and mental life by Georg Simmel [4], the sociology of urbanism by Louis Wirth [5], conceptualization of urban as a site of everyday physicality and struggle by Henri Lefebvre [6], and Arjun Appadurai's work on the cultural aspects of globalization [7] provide a vocabulary for the analysis of specifically Indian experience of metropolitan culture that is marked by sorts of colonialism, caste, and uneven development. The concept of cultural hybridity propounded by Homi K. Bhabha [8] enables my work to understand the Indian metropolis as a genuine postcolonial site where tradition and modernity, indigenous and global, exist together and are redefined continuously. The structure of this writing is comprised of four key sections. The first section sets up the theoretical framework that shapes the discussion of metropolitan culture, including both the sociological and literary aspects as it relates to Gokhale and Adiga in relation to that tradition of Indian English fiction identified [9] and the scholars covering the subject that follows. The second section gives a close reading of Gokhale's metropolitan fiction through an examination of gender, myth, and social satire as seen in *Paro*, *Priya*, and *A Himalayan Love Story*. Then, the third section covers Adiga and examines the ways that his books *The White Tiger*, *Between the Assassinations*, and *Last Man in Tower* show class, caste and urban redevelopment through a dramatic lens. The final section links the previous two sections' examinations of both authors, arguing that both social class and gender should not be analyzed separately in their work.

From a methodological perspective, this paper executes a qualitative and comparative-textual approach through an analysis of a few selected novels through close reading but also through analysis of secondary sources, such as sociology, urban studies, and postcolonial approaches to literature. The selection of the novels that encompasses the works of Gokhale is chosen from his previous texts, such as *Paro*, *Priya* and *A Himalayan Love Story*, while the novels of Adiga evaluated are *The White Tiger*, *Between the Assassinations*, and *Last Man in Tower*, which make for a more valid examination of both authors in their use of polysiotropic urban/metropolitan settings. It is possible for other works to be referenced to support claims, for instance mythic novels of Gokhale like *The Book of Shadows* and *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* [10,11] along with the works of Adiga, such as *Selection Day* and *Amnesty* [12,13].

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE METROPOLIS IN INDIAN FICTION

In order to critically engage with the representation of the city in Indian writing in English, it is important to develop a vocabulary adequate to the cities' nature. The Indian city is not merely a demographic spot or an economic center; it is instead a unique cultural and psychological phenomenon that has arisen from the interaction of colonialism, the process of nation-building, economic liberalization, and globalization. To read the works of Namita Gokhale and Aravind Adiga is to read them in light of various theories, which offer a richer understanding of the metropolis as both a project of desire and a realm of alienation, both a place of creativity and the perpetuation of existing hierarchies. In this section, I shall outline the major theoretical paradigms—from urban sociology to postcolonial cultural studies—that serve as theories for the analyses conducted in this paper.

The sociological framework for discussing the metropolis as a unique mode of living can be traced to Georg Simmel's essay "*The Metropolis and Mental Life*," published in 1903. The main idea that Simmel posits is that urban life creates the need for a "protective organ," whereby, as the individual spends a lot of time in a more and more stimulating environment, he or she learns to protect himself or herself from the total disarray of the world outside [14]. In relation to this, Simmel maintains that, instead of experiencing everything emotionally, the metropolitan person is primarily intellectual in his or her reactions. Therefore, "the emotional reactions of the metropolitan type are displaced into less sensitive and less deep-intimated areas of mental functioning, thus depriving them of direct emotional expression and binding them firmly to the unemotional experience and rational analysis." Such rationality characterizes life in the city as opposed to the existence of people in smaller communities which value emotions and relations among individuals. Blasé attitude is another phenomenon discussed by Simmel as being typical for urban dwellers and meaning that the human ability to experience stimuli becomes exhausted. He also describes the process of getting used to the urban conditions that results in apathy. The sociological considerations of Simmel in regard to the city as a peculiar space filled with

the potential for the development of the human self and at the same time as a space that poses a threat to the individual's unique identity can be closely related to Gokhale's works, where the characters act in the sophisticated, emotionally poor salons of Delhi, and those of Adiga, who describe the protagonists' desire for establishing their own identity amidst the economic/global challenges.

Henri Lefebvre's *The Urban Revolution* (1970) changed the analytical focus away from the psychological adjustment necessary for living in cities and on to the urban environment as a site of day-to-day practice and political struggle [15]. Lefebvre's thesis was based on the idea that urbanization is an inevitable activity that requires its own mode of interpretation, which recognizes the urban area as a complex concept. Lefebvre's construction is grounded in Henri Bergson's philosophy, which turns attention away from abstract intellectual analyses in favor of emphasizing the experience of living and mobilization as more significant to understanding urbanization [16]. According to Lefebvre, cities comprise a place where abstract space, made by capital and the state, is constantly contested by differential space created through everyday encounters and social struggles. This particular scheme helps clarify the conflicts present in both Gokhale's and Adiga's fictional works. In Gokhale's work, the domestic and social milieu of the elite Delhi serves as a platform through which gender, status, and desire are expressed, contended with, and enforced. In Adiga's work, Lefebvre's critique of the capitalist system reaches literal expression through the gentrification process depicted in *The Last Man in Tower*; thus, illustrating how the alliance of state and capital creates abstract space by displacing the individual's incapability of competing in the new urban environment. The complex reality of the "shining" metropolis based on global capital and the "shadow" metropolis built on slums and migrant labor serves as a literary expression of a Lefebvrian contradiction.

The characteristics associated with the postcolonial Indian city require theoretical frameworks that will consider its complex layered history. Bill Ashcroft's essay titled "Urbanism, Mobility and Bombay: Reading the Postcolonial City" delivers a focused examination of Mumbai as a postcolonial site of interest. Ashcroft maintains that Mumbai demonstrates cultural assimilation, having undergone significantly more comprehensive changes as a result of British colonialism than other cities in India; therefore, Mumbai is depicted as cosmopolitan by virtue of the efforts of its film industry to cope with modernism [17]. Ashcroft's work has created extensive application of the idea of "chutnification"—an expression Ashcroft derives from Salman Rushdie—within literature pertaining to this city. This idea of hybridity of culture and cultural blending is vital for examining the creative writing of both writers. Specifically, Dibyakusum Ray's *Postcolonial Indian City-Literature: Policy, Politics and Evolution* (2022) provide details on how Indian cities have been represented in terms of time in four categories: nation-building phase during the 1950s-1960s, authoritarianism in the 1970s, the neoliberal phase of 1980s-1990s, and the first decade of the 21st century. Each period provides a new origin of urban representations and responses in literature. It is imperative to answer the following question: "How

does the urban space and the literature describing it interact? ... The key question is: Given that the urban space has many other narratives, who does the urban space and narratives belong to?" [18]. The question has been answered by examining the writing of Gokhale and Adiga; the former discusses the advantage enjoyed by the urban elite through their narratives while the latter shows how the urban poor enter into an international economy with no dignity.

Tickell's analysis of the literary representation of urban India focuses on how urban fiction in English has been affected by the changing nature of cities in regard to their aesthetics—the concept of the “World-Class City” that has come about as a manifestation of the aesthetic governance described by D. Asher Ghertner that involves the determination of the identity of cities through their aesthetic qualities rather than through their physical transformation. According to Tickell, the issue of aesthetics finds expression in the “Colony” or “Society”—new forms of residential space that are seen as imaginative spaces for development in contemporary fiction. He examines works of fiction such as Adiga's novels that reveals the historical transformation of the urban area vis-à-vis what has happened to the city in terms of the convergence of the formal systems of governance towards urban spaces within the context of colonialism and postcolonialism [19].

Today, the field of urban studies has become more closely concerned with issues of rights and justice. For example, the article by R. N. Sharma in *Issues in Urban Studies*, “Mega Transformation of Mumbai: Deepening Enclave Urbanism,” introduces the issue of enclave urbanism in the sense of how the land mafia used political and bureaucratic power to confiscate people's rights while still denying them their fundamental rights [20]. The principles of David Harvey's theory of the right to the city, which involves the right of citizens to take back the common life of urban spaces from oppressive authorities, is also reflected in Eugene J. McCann's theory of urban rights and citizenship, which focuses on people taking responsibility for their rights to urban existence, including the right to different voices and personal development. Through these theories, we can better understand the structural inequalities put forth by both authors in their fictions. Balram's migration from the India of darkness to India of light in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* symbolizes the denials of urban rights by the poor and lower castes, who are required to claw their way into a globalized job market that is of no use for them in terms of dignity and respect. In the case of Namita Gokhale's novels, the issue of the right to the city has to do with gender, as women inhabitants of big cities must endure the pressure of patriarchal expectations that are reinforced through the use of newly developed post-colonial patriarchal practices, as represented in the novels. Beyond urban sociology, literary theory perceives the city as more than an environment. In specific cases, and particularly in the case of post-colonial cities, it is usually considered a venue for conflicts: "the battlefield of the contestation of the question of identity, rights and availability of resources in the milieu of neo-imperialistic global order". There are numerous contemporary researches in these directions and a abundance of results that show that

the question of the rightful owner of a city has become an issue of rich critical investigation. The idea of the city as a character that plays an active role in the development of a literary narrative is very relevant for Namita Gokhale's Delhi, where political salons and elite living rooms constitute a unique socio-spatial environment and Aravind Adiga's fictional cities of Bangalore and Mumbai, where motor highways, construction works and slums play a significant role in transformation.

3. GENDER, MYTH, AND THE METROPOLITAN IMAGINATION IN NAMITA GOKHALE'S FICTION.

Namita Gokhale's metropolitan fiction occupies an important space within contemporary Indian English Literature. Unlike Aravind Adiga's interest in class and caste based structural violence, the focus of Gokhale's novels is the psychological and moral cost of urban modernity on women who struggle to find their place between desire, ambition, and inherited patriarchal expectations. She depicts the transgressive New Woman of the city and contrasts her with the older archetypes of women derived from Hindu mythology, as well as Himalayan folklore. The metropolis of Gokhale's imagination is not simply represented by the physical city of Delhi or Mumbai but rather as a "psychological landscape" where identity is constantly defined, performed and redefined. This section explores the way in which Gokhale's metropolitan imagination can be found in three of her key novels—*Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984), *Priya in Incredible Indya* (2011) and *A Himalayan Love Story* (1996)—and highlights the consistent concern with the intersection of gender, myth and urban space.

When *Paro: A Dreams of Passion* first came out in 1984, it arrived "like a slap, spark, scandal—a mirror held up too close"[21,22]. It is still considered one of the first Indian English Fiction novels to portray women's sexual desire both within and outside of marriage transparently during a time when Indian society and Bollywood were just beginning to show even what kissing would look like on-screen [23]. The dual narrative story of the fearless and iconoclastic Paro, and the conventional and reflective Priya, set in the elite classes in Bombay and Delhi during the 1970s and 80s [24]. Through Priya's diary, the reader sees how Paro relentlessly pursues pleasure and freedom; she gets married, divorced, takes multiple lovers and ultimately sees marriage as "a suggestion, not a sentence" Gokhale uses the social satire of the elite urban population to illustrate how hypocritical the urban elite is of their behaviour towards women and their sexuality [25]. Paro tells Priya, "I am me...I depend on no one. I am my own woman!", yet this declaration is a mask for deeper ambivalence, as Paro's 'liberation' is achieved by means of manipulating men for their wealth and power—B.R. the industrialist, Lenin the Marxist, Shambhu Nath Mishra the politician; using her beauty and sexuality as currency in what Gokhale has revealed to be a transactional town. When asked about requesting alimony, Paro cynically remarks, "They write the rules." Paro's tragic ending—the death of Paro and the burning of Priya's sari at the cremation grounds—implies that the true promise of the metropolis for women is illusive. The

city may provide women with an opportunity to free themselves from the confines of tradition, but the metropolis has only recreated patriarchy in a different, and often harsher way, and Paro's fate shows the ongoing tension between the individual's freedom and a cultural norm of collectivism [26].

Priya in *Incredible Indya* (2011), is also a return to the author Gokhale's first work in that it continues the story of Priya as the wife of Suresh Kaushal, Minister of State for Food Processing. The book is a satire on the rich elite of New Delhi: the politicians, arms dealers and cricketers, and Gokhale has used an easy, flowing prose style to do so. Priya retains her middle-class sensibilities and therefore is able to see through the emptiness of her life; yet she also navigates through the emptiness of it. Priya knows that she wears the "mask" of being a politician's wife and says, "I am the wife of a politician and must act as such, and be supportive". The metropolitan area around New Delhi is a very claustrophobic space where the drawing-rooms are the places where all the parties/activities take place like cocktail parties, Botox parties, and weddings, all of which are ritualized entertainment and all that goes along with them. Gokhale captures the nuances of the vernacular used by the affluent in New Delhi through satire, such as "Home is where the stainless-steel cupboard is" and "Mothers do not snoop; they rummage". Priya chooses to ignore her husband's philandering, and her acceptance of his infidelity is therefore a form of complicity in trade for what privileges she would hate to lose [27]. The novel demonstrates that although women at the highest levels of power in urban areas, have been held back by society's patriarchal views, Priya is shown to be "a powerful voice of a survivor," even though, it has compromised her moral foundation.

A Himalayan Love Story (1996) is a novel that carries the theme of metropolitan displacement, search for identity and desire from the metropolitan urban areas of New Delhi (to) the rural areas of the Kumaon Hills, but again Gokhale is examining the metropolitan experience, that is, displacement, desire and self-discovery [28]. Parvathi is the protagonist in this book and she carries with her, an "emptiness inside me" and struggles with that. She is an orphan and married to a homosexual man who denies her both physical and emotional satisfaction; therefore, following a series of affairs, including with her history teacher, Salman, and later, her husband's younger brother, she seeks out satisfaction through illicit relationships. The Himalayan landscape plays a role in preserving Parvathi's regional identity against the pressures of urban modernization, as it acts as a "memory-scape" for her, as described by scholars [29]. The novel details the journey from innocence to despair for Parvathi, culminating in the death of her husband and her eventual hospitalization in a mental asylum, as indicative of the dangers of feminine lust in a traditionally hierarchical society. The caste system discriminates against her ability to marry Mukul Nainwal; as a Thulidhoties Brahman, she cannot marry a Khasiya Brahman [30]. The story illustrates that traditional caste and patriarchy exist even in modernized environments and continue to shape and constrain women's lives.

Myth has a special place in Gokhale's metropolitan vision. Gokhale's recent work *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* is an example of how Gokhale "unbinding" the mythical figure of Shakuntala from the constraints of her patriarchal roots, converting the myth into a symbol of modern-day female empowerment. Shakuntala does not have the patience for waiting; she claims the memory of herself before anyone else remembers it [31]. The methodology Gokhale uses to revise the myth of Shakuntala critiques Urban India today through the lens of time-honored representations of women in myth, and reveals the spirit of women's oppression by the patriarchy over time. The theoretical constructs used to interpret Gokhale's work in this article are inspired by Simmel's concept of Urban Psychology and Lefebvre's critique of Capitalist Space. Simmel recognizes that the metropolis produces a feeling of detachment that has been depicted in Gokhale's portrayals of the elite; Lefebvre sees the city as a place where gender is both performed and controlled through social and domestic practice, which is reflected in Gokhale's writing.

4. CLASS, CORRUPTION, AND THE METROPOLITAN VISION IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S FICTION

While urban modernity has a tremendous impact on the psychological wellbeing of professional women, the literature produced by Aravind Adiga will examine how the Globalisation of India has manifested itself in the structural violence prevalent in its urban centres. In contrast to the neoliberal view of urban progress and development, which concentrates on how the lives of the wealthy are improving as they migrate away from their families and their roots, Adiga creates a 'counter-narrative to the neoliberal ideology' by flattening all preconceived ideas of development, using the perspectives and experiences of those who have lived and continue to live the lives of marginalized people in India—specifically, their domestic workers, slum people, and small business people. From the "Rooster Coop" in Delhi, to the battle for or against redevelopment in Mumbai, Adiga uses his artistic talent to 'strip away' all illusions that we have about how far we have come to globally develop as a country, revealing a 'brutal' reality where there is not only systemic inequality, but systemic violence [32]. In this article, we will explore three key works of fiction written by Adiga: *The White Tiger* (2008); *Between the Assassinations* (2008); and *The Last Man in the Tower* (2011), to demonstrate that Adiga focuses on class, corruption, and the destructive results of urban development.

As one of the earliest works of contemporary Indian Fiction published by Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger* has become the most literal study of class conflict found in the history of modern Indian fiction [33]. The story is told through the eyes of Balram Halwai, an impoverished, rural boy from India, who becomes an affluent entrepreneur through his time in Bangalore. Adiga structured the story as a confessional letter to the Global Sponsor of the World's Richest Person, who conveniently owns the 'White Tiger' (the animal). This provides the reader with an ironic view of how India is presented to

the World as a shining example of emerging economic power [34]. By dramatizing Balram's transition from 'the India of the Old' to 'the New India', Adiga emphasizes how disturbing and often violent an event can occur before one can rise above the barriers of the "Rooster Coop" that keeps the underclass serving their masters. As Balram asserts, "the entire economy of India is built on the belief that all servants are trustworthy." However, Balram does not have to rely solely upon the physical power of those above him; he cannot break free from being bound to the systems of internalized obedience and familial duty that keep people in their positions of servitude, the so-called "Cultural Hegemony" theorized by Gramsci [35]. Adiga's portrayal of the metropolis in *The White Tiger* is ambiguous in demonstrating how morally reprehensible these realities exist. While Delhi remains an example of both Darkness and Light for Balram—the city of rickshaws and old stone buildings juxtaposed against Vehicle Traffic Swamps, Toxic Air Pollution and the Corruption endemic to Delhi—Adiga's visual imagery of the city is raw and feral: "The ultra blue haze growing thicker, tighter and longer every moment, could not escape, just moved laterally, sort of like a thick, fat man, growing bigger and bigger, until it envelops you." Transformation is imposed on the individual as he/she is transformed into a different person than who they were when they migrated to the metropolis. Ashok went from being an innocent boy while in America to being corrupt after returning to his home country, whereas Balram would have been murdered had he not killed his employer. Adiga indicates that Balram's killing of his employer was symbolic of his break from the past. However, Adiga also indicates that Balram is not free from the ruthlessness of the structure of corruption; he still sends 'brown envelopes full of cash' to dishonest policemen and corrupt politicians, and even when he accidentally kills a child in a car accident, he still pays the police officer a 'bribe' to stay free. The aforementioned elements ultimately expose what Balram refers to as "zoo law": "The animals that fought for food and fought with one another grew increasingly violent as a result of having only one another to feed off of and have larger bellies (size wise).".

Between the Assassinations (2008), written alongside *The White Tiger*, showcases the fictional coastal town of Kittur that exists "between Goa and Calicut". Consisting of interconnected stories set within the time period separating the 1984 assassination of Indira Gandhi from the 1991 death of Rajiv Gandhi, the stories "could have occurred in contemporary India" since "nothing ever changes, nor will anything ever change". Adiga's diverse portrayal of poverty and socio-economic inequality reflects the "mother evil" that results in all other evils within the society. "The installation plan of suffering and horror" is in waiting for the poor to make their mark against the world, while the wealthy display their disdain for their position "in the midst of chaos and corruption".

The tale of Xerox Ramakrishna exemplifies this very well; as a Dalit book vendor, he was arrested twenty-one times for selling cloned copies of books. His father was a follower of the tradition of cleaning the toilets of wealthy landlords using his loincloth. The story of Xerox Ramakrishna's father's

profession elicited laughter from the police while they were arresting him. On the other hand, is the tale of Saumya and Raju, who, are children of a drug addict, a construction worker, were begging for smoked cigarettes for their father who was asleep with an empty stomach. Jayamma, the eighth of nine daughters and fed on the milk of an ass during infancy, represents a classic example of generational poverty in India. Her father did not have enough gold to give her away as a valid daughter since he had saved enough only for six daughters. In all these stories, Adiga writes in a "straightforward" and "utilitarian" manner; all of his characters have a human face and their aspirations and anxieties have been clearly defined. *The Last Man in Tower* (2011) examines the "dark side" of urban renewal in Mumbai, India. The novel takes up the struggle of the residents of the Vishram Society, a middle-class apartment building located at Vakola, which is located near the Santa Cruz Airport and includes one-fourth of Mumbai's slums [36]. When the real estate mogul Dharmen Shah comes to the Vishram Society with a lucrative development deal to buy the flats, it sets off a chain reaction of greed, fear and moral compromise among the residents. The residents, who live "neither too rich nor too poor," lose their community ties with the arrival of Shah. At the center of this story is Masterji, a retired school teacher, who refuses to sell his flat.

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE METROPOLITAN VISION OF GOKHALE AND ADIGA

Namita Gokhale and Aravind Adiga have looked at the Indian metropolis from different perspectives as demonstrated in the preceding sections. Gokhale writes about elite women in Delhi's drawing-rooms, Adiga on servants, slum dwellers and the poor seeking to survive in India's globalized cities. However, this is not a significant distinction, as both authors are portraying a broken urban reality. Their imaginary city offers the possibility of freedom and re-imagining this city offers the possibility of freedom and re-imagining, but again and again, new hierarchies—their patriarchy, caste and class—are reproduced in more and more vicious forms. This section explores what unites their visions and where they part ways.

Gokhale and Adiga are highly cynical of the city as a safe haven for liberation. In Gokhale's work the city seems to provide women with a way to break free of traditional limitations. But her heroes find freedom in the city has its own set of land mines. Paro's search for pleasure in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is not a true liberation, but rather manipulation and eventually death. The city's pledge comes across as hollow. Likewise, with Adiga's *The White Tiger*, Balram leaves his village only to discover that the city requires a vicious act to make it up to the top—the murder of his master—and its corrupt government is a way of life [37]. The two writers both reveal what could be characterized as the "myth of the city," the notion that the city liberates people from traditions, caste, and family. It is a city that brings new opportunities, but new constraints. This mutual invitation to the city's failure to deliver the

promise is part of a growing pattern in the post-millennials Indian fiction that challenges the “shining India” agenda pushed by the global media and the neoliberal agenda [38]. The importance of urbanisation and economic development has raised the questions of whether it has brought about social progress and equality as it promised [39]. Gokhale and Adiga are a part of this literary movement, which abhors celebrating the city without addressing the price tag. Both writers also demonstrate the continuities in the older hierarchies within the urban landscape. As Delhi provides opportunities for women to work and freely express their sexuality, Gokhale shows how these opportunities create other forms of patriarchy, such as status anxiety, performative femininity, and transactional marriages [40]. The city is providing opportunities for the poor to climb the ladder of the economic ladder, yet at the same time, it is exploiting them in other ways: servants who rely on masters, slum residents being pushed out by developers, entrepreneurs caught up in corruption [41]. The city refuses to put an end to old inequalities in both sets of work, but instead translates them into new idioms. Caste turns to class, patriarchy to status anxiety, feudal obligation to neoliberal competition.

The main difference between Gokhale and Adiga is their main area of focus. Gokhale's basic issue is that of gender. Her characters are women coping with the mental and moral issues of modern city living. Their conflicts are psychological, spiritual and personal – regarding desire, marriage, identity and the burden of a man's expectations [42]. The struggle for liberation for Paro is one for sexual freedom, the struggle for survival for Priya is a struggle for compromise and complicity, the tragedy of Priya and Parvathi is the intersection of desire of the female and the constraints of caste and family. Not so with Adiga, however, for he is essentially a class and caste man. His heroes are servants, slum dwellers and small business men. Their struggle is physical, material and violent. Balram's path of liberation is coupled with murder and corruption, while Masterji's struggle for resistance is that of not selling out his flat; the poor of Kittur wait for "a blow against the world". Adiga's fiction reveals the economic and political systems which entrench the underclass. This distinction is due to different literary traditions each writer has. Along with other Indian English women writers, such as Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande, Gokhale has been writing about the internal workings of privileged women. This can be called "bourgeois feminist fiction" as it comes from and addresses a specific class situation [43]. Though critical of patriarchy, Gokhale's work continues within this strand of thinking about women's psychological and moral dilemmas in the corridors of elite urban life. Adiga's fiction, however, confronts the reality of the poor and low caste masses of India, where the "bourgeois feminist fiction" of the West is didactically wrong. His work shows what the heroes of the elite can turn a blind eye to, which is structural violence. However, Adiga's fiction is also produced with a privileged consciousness—he is a writer and an English educated one who writes for a global audience. This tension is part of his work; he reveals the inequality, but he is also a part of the mechanism that gives rise to the inequality [44].

Certain parallels can be drawn between the works on inequality of both Gokhale and Adiga. Yet, among the privileged Gokhale demonstrates that gender inequality is not so visible. The caste system influences even her most personal decisions of love and marriage; one can only tell because of the way she depicted the caste system in a film called *A Himalayan Love Story*. Gender cannot be separated from caste and class: Parvathi is incapable of marrying the man of her dreams due to the discrimination of caste. This is because class and caste inequality is not gender neutral, as Adiga demonstrates. Poor women, the eighth daughter fed on ass's milk, mothers begging for their children and women living in slums come out in his stories, revealing the gendered nature of poverty and exploitation. The structural violence documented by Adiga is disproportionately suffered by women and lower caste. Combined, Gokhale and Adiga provide a better overall view of metropolitan India. Gokhale charts the psychological prices paid by high-caste women, Adiga the structural price paid by the poor and low-caste. One depicts moral corruption of privilege and the other shows physical violence of dispossession. Their fiction together shows that the Indian city is not one space, but many, and the experience of the city is deeply linked to the identity of the people [45].

The notions of agency and resistance are also different in Gokhale and Adiga. Gokhale's main characters are usually diminished in agency. The ways in which Paro rebels in spectacular ways that destroy her; complicity is the key to Priya's survival; Parvathi's quest leads her into madness and asylum. True freedom is still out of reach. Her women are ensnared in the buildings that they want to fly out of. Agency, however, is more assertive among Adiga's protagonists, but with a moral deficiency. Balram escapes from the "Rooster Coop" by killing and being a businessman. Masterji is a flat-owner who is not prepared to sell his flat; he has asserted his rights against the builder and his neighbors. Poor Kittur is given an explosive agency; they have it and it awaits to be unleashed. But their resistance is morally complex. The poor's blow against the world could never be delivered, Masterji's resistance is isolated and even though he is a warrior, it fails to save him; and Balram's liberation is founded in violence. This split is due to several different writing styles. Gokhale's fiction displays a tragic sensibility: protagonists are trapped in situations they cannot extricate themselves from, and they either perish, succumb to compromise, or fall mad. Adiga's fiction is equally dark, but his characters have a more ambivalent sensibility—these characters have brutal, sometimes violent agency, and the conflicts that they forge lead to liberation and new kinds of entrapment. As a whole, they provide a detailed description of what it means to live in the metro: the sense of freedom, the lack of innocence and the continuation of hierarchy, even in the most modern of the spaces. When the two are compared, it is found that the stories of Gokhale and Adiga complement, not contradict, one another in the context of metropolitan India. Gokhale reveals the psychological and moral burden of urban modernity on women. Adiga reveals the built-in expense of urban modernity of the poor and the lower caste. They both refer to something that is common: a culture that is metropolitan, and which promises to be

reinvented, cast free; however, at the same time it reinforces the very hierarchies it is supposed to replace, albeit in a new guise. Together in the fiction, they chart the entire landscape of metropolitan dispossession, from the moral choices of the elite woman to the physical abuse of the low-caste servant. Their research shows how the city of India is a fracture; the prospect of "New India" lives alongside the harsh realities of inequality, marginalization and the continued existence of previous forms of domination.

6. CONCLUSION

The present review paper is presented to show how the concept of 'metropolitan culture' can be used to explain the current Indian English fiction and their interaction with the social realities of post-liberalization India. The comparison of Namita Gokhale and Aravind Adiga highlights the dualities of the Indian city – on one hand it is a place of opportunity and on the other, it is a place of exclusion where inequalities of gender, class, caste and power continue to endure. Gokhale foregrounds the emotional and gender aspects of urban life, whereas Adiga foregrounds the structural aspects of economic inequality, migration and social marginalization. Their collective works provide a view of the metropolis as a space of contestation over culture, belonging, and citizenship, continually remaking its identities. The review paper also emphasizes the importance of literary criticism in conjunction with urban and postcolonial studies for the understanding of the complexities of contemporary Indian cities. It suggests that metropolitan fiction mirrors the change of the city but also critically examines the social, cultural and political drivers of these changes. This strand could be further developed by looking at other Indian writers, literatures from various regions, environmental urbanism, digital cities, and comparative approaches from the Global South. Overall, this review provides a basis for understanding the importance of the urban context of fiction in the changing relationship between urbanization, culture, and social justice in contemporary India.

REFERENCES

1. Varughese, E. Dawson. *Reading New India: Post-Millennial Indian Fiction in English*. Bloomsbury, 2013.
2. Gokhale, Namita. *Paro: Dreams of Passion*. Penguin Books India, 1984.
3. Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. HarperCollins Publishers India, 2008.
4. Simmel, Georg. "The Metropolis and Mental Life." 1903. *On Individuality and Social Forms*, translated by Kurt Wolff, University of Chicago Press, 1971.

5. Wirth, Louis. "Urbanism as a Way of Life." *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 44, no. 1, 1938, pp. 1-24.
6. Lefebvre, Henri. *The Urban Revolution*. Translated by Robert Bononno, University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
7. Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
8. Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
9. Naik, M. K. *A History of Indian English Literature*. Sahitya Akademi, 1982.
10. Gokhale, Namita. *The Book of Shadows*. Penguin Books India, 1999.
11. Gokhale, Namita. *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*. Penguin Books India, 2005.
12. Adiga, Aravind. *Amnesty*. Scribner, 2020.
13. Adiga, Aravind. *Selection Day*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2016.
14. Simmel, Georg. "The Metropolis and Mental Life." 1903. *On Individuality and Social Forms*, translated by Kurt Wolff, University of Chicago Press, 1971.
15. Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell, 1991.
16. Stanek, Łukasz, Christian Schmid, and Ákos Moravánszky, editors. *Urban Revolution Now: Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture*. Taylor & Francis, 2014.
17. Ashcroft, Bill. "Urbanism, Mobility and Bombay: Reading the Postcolonial City." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 47, no. 5, 2011, pp. 497-509.
18. Ray, Dibyakusum. *Postcolonial Indian City-Literature: Policy, Politics and Evolution*. Routledge, 2022.
19. Tickell, Alex. "Writing the City and Indian English Fiction: Planning, Violence and Aesthetics." *The Routledge Handbook of Urban Literature*, edited by Lieven Ameen, Routledge, 2018.

20. Sharma, R. N. "Mega Transformation of Mumbai: Deepening Enclave Urbanism." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 44, no. 10, 2009, pp. 45-52.
21. McCann, Eugene J. "Space, Citizenship, and the Right to the City." *New Geographies*, vol. 2, 2009, pp. 28-37.
22. Saran, Suvir. "Paro: Dreams of Passion — Namita Gokhale's daring debut still burns, still bristles, still bewitches." *The Indian Express*, 23 Dec. 2025.
23. Nithya, A., and Dr. K. Sivakumar. "Unconventional Love and Sexual Liberation: A Feminist Study of Namita Gokhale's Paro: Dreams of Passion." *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2021
24. Jaggi, Maya. Introduction. *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, by Namita Gokhale, HopeRoad Publishing, 2025.
25. "The Intersection of Tradition and Modernity in Namita Gokhale's Paro: Dreams of Passion." CORE, 2025.
26. Srilata. "A fine social comedy." *The Hindu*, 6 Aug. 2011.
27. "The Clash of Values in Namita Gokhale's Fiction: Earlier Phase." Shodhganga, inflibnet.ac.in.
28. Sharma, Urmila, and J. K. Sharma. "Hollowness of life in A Himalayan Love Story." *VEETHIKA-An International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2023, pp. 17-20
29. Patange, Dilip Kumar Chanabasappa, and Dr. Anita K. Mudukanna. "Myth, Memory, and Cultural Continuity in the Novels of Namita Gokhale." *International Education and Research Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2026.
30. "Psychological Trauma, Woman within Women, Adjustment and Restlessness: 'A Himalayan Love Story'." Shodhganga, inflibnet.ac.in.
31. "Shadows on the ghats: Unlike Kalidasa's heroine, this Shakuntala has no patience for waiting." *The New Indian Express*, 31 Oct. 2025.
32. "Navigating Inequality: Class Conflict and Socioeconomic Critique in the Fiction of Aravind Adiga." Zenodo, 2025
33. P. Suneetha. "Chapter 3: The White Tiger." Shodhganga, inflibnet.ac.in.

34. Britannica. *The White Tiger* (novel by Aravind Adiga). n.d.
35. Swarup, Vikas. "Caste away: Aravind Adiga's short stories take us where other writers fear to tread." *The Guardian*, 11 July 2009.
36. "Globalization and Redevelopment: the Crux of Aravind Adiga's Last Man in Tower." Neliti, 2022.
37. Mishra, Shivani, and Ritu Pandey. "Cultural Hegemony in Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger." *LET*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2025.
38. Santra, Sourav, and Mukesh Tiwari. "Urbanscapes and National Visions in Post-Millennial Indian English Fiction: Identities Renegotiated." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, 2024.
39. Varughese, E. Dawson, editor. *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First-Century Indian Fiction in English*. Taylor & Francis, 2024
40. Patange, Dilip Kumar Chanabasappa, and Dr. Anita K. Mudukanna. "Myth, Memory, and Cultural Continuity in the Novels of Namita Gokhale." *International Education and Research Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2026.
41. Gupta, Nidhi. "Poverty as the Explicit Theme in Aravind Adiga's Between the Assassinations." *The Creative Launcher*, vol. 5, no. 6, 2021.
42. Nithya, A., and Dr. K. Sivakumar. "Unconventional Love and Sexual Liberation: A Feminist Study of Namita Gokhale's Paro: Dreams of Passion." *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2021.
43. Sunder Rajan, Rajeswari. "The Heroine's Progress in Recent Women's Fiction." *The Contemporary Indian English Bourgeois Feminist Fiction*.
44. Coelho, K., and A. Sood. "Urban studies in India across the millennial turn: Histories and futures." 2021.
45. "Too Unattached': Literary Representations of Singleness and Gendered Aloneness in Urban India." Asian Studies Association of Australia, 2025