



## **Socio-Economic Pragmatism in the Novels of Chetan Bhagat and Aravind Adiga**

**Rajesh Kumar Neekhra**

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of English, Barkatullah University, Bhopal, India

**Dr. Aprajita Sharma**

Head of Dept., Department of English, PMCOE Government Hamidia, Bhopal, India

### **ABSTRACT**

Socio-economic pragmatism is a defining thematic concern in the novels of Chetan Bhagat and Aravind Adiga, both of whom present contemporary Indian society through distinct yet complementary narrative lenses. Bhagat's works, such as *Five Point Someone* and *2 States*, reflect the aspirations and struggles of India's burgeoning middle class, emphasizing practical decision-making in the face of educational pressure, career uncertainty, and social expectations. His characters often adopt a pragmatic approach to overcome systemic challenges, prioritizing employability, financial stability, and personal relationships over idealistic pursuits. Through accessible language and relatable scenarios, Bhagat highlights the compromises and adaptive strategies required for upward mobility in a competitive socio-economic environment.

In contrast, Adiga's novels, particularly *The White Tiger* and *Selection Day*, present a darker, more critical perspective on socio-economic realities. Adiga explores the stark inequalities and structural constraints embedded within Indian society, where pragmatism often manifests as moral ambiguity or survival-driven opportunism. His protagonists navigate oppressive systems marked by class disparity, corruption, and limited social mobility, revealing how socio-economic conditions shape individual choices and ethical boundaries. Unlike Bhagat's relatively optimistic outlook, Adiga underscores the harsh consequences of systemic injustice, portraying pragmatism as a tool for both empowerment and exploitation.

Together, these authors provide a comprehensive portrayal of socio-economic pragmatism in modern India. While Bhagat focuses on negotiation within the system to achieve success, Adiga exposes the necessity of subverting or confronting the system itself. Their works collectively illuminate the complex interplay between ambition, morality, and socio-economic constraints, offering valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of Indian society.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic pragmatism, Social mobility, Economic inequality, Class disparity, Pragmatic decision-making

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Socio-economic pragmatism has emerged as a significant thematic framework in contemporary Indian English literature, particularly in the works of Chetan Bhagat and Aravind Adiga. These authors, though stylistically and ideologically distinct, offer compelling insights into the evolving socio-economic landscape of India in the era of globalization and liberalization. Their narratives reflect the lived realities of individuals negotiating complex intersections of class, ambition, opportunity, and systemic constraints. By foregrounding pragmatic choices made by



their characters, both writers illuminate how socio-economic forces shape human behavior, aspirations, and moral frameworks in modern Indian society.

Chetan Bhagat's novels are primarily centered on the aspirations of the Indian middle class, a segment that has experienced rapid transformation in the post-liberalization period. His works portray young individuals grappling with academic pressures, career dilemmas, familial expectations, and the desire for upward mobility. Bhagat adopts a realistic yet accessible narrative style that resonates with a broad readership, particularly the youth. In his stories, socio-economic pragmatism is reflected in the characters' inclination to prioritize stability, financial security, and personal happiness over rigid societal norms or idealistic pursuits. His protagonists often challenge traditional structures such as the education system or arranged marriage conventions, but they do so with a practical mindset aimed at achieving tangible success. Thus, Bhagat's fiction presents pragmatism as a constructive force that enables individuals to adapt and thrive within an increasingly competitive and dynamic socio-economic environment.

In contrast, Aravind Adiga's works offer a more critical and often unsettling exploration of socio-economic realities. His narratives delve into the stark disparities between different social classes, exposing the harsh conditions faced by the underprivileged and marginalized sections of society. Adiga's portrayal of pragmatism is deeply intertwined with themes of survival, power, and resistance. His characters are frequently confronted with oppressive systems characterized by corruption, exploitation, and limited opportunities for social mobility. In such contexts, pragmatism assumes a more complex and morally ambiguous dimension, where individuals may resort to unconventional or ethically questionable means to escape poverty and assert their agency. Adiga's incisive storytelling challenges the reader to confront uncomfortable truths about inequality and the structural barriers that perpetuate socio-economic divides in India.

Despite their differences, both authors underscore the significance of pragmatic thinking as a response to socio-economic pressures. While Bhagat emphasizes negotiation within the system, highlighting the possibilities of success through adaptation and perseverance, Adiga exposes the limitations of such an approach, suggesting that systemic change or disruption may sometimes be necessary. Together, their works provide a multifaceted understanding of socio-economic pragmatism, capturing both its empowering potential and its inherent complexities. In the broader context of literary studies, examining the works of these two authors allows for a deeper exploration of how contemporary Indian fiction engages with real-world issues. Their narratives serve as cultural texts that document the shifting values, challenges, and aspirations of Indian society in the 21st century. By analyzing socio-economic pragmatism in their novels, one gains valuable insights into the ways individuals navigate the tension between ambition and constraint, idealism and realism, and morality and necessity. Ultimately, the writings of Bhagat and Adiga contribute significantly to the discourse on socio-economic transformation, offering nuanced perspectives on the human condition in a rapidly changing world.



## **2. REVIEW**

The selected body of literature, comprising both primary texts by Chetan Bhagat and Aravind Adiga along with a wide range of critical and scholarly analyses, offers a comprehensive understanding of socio-economic themes in contemporary Indian English fiction. Bhagat's novels such as *Five Point Someone*, *One Night @ the Call Center*, *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*, *2 States*, and *Revolution 2020* collectively portray the aspirations, dilemmas, and pragmatic choices of the Indian middle class in a rapidly globalizing economy. These works emphasize issues like educational pressure, employment challenges, urbanization, and the pursuit of financial stability, presenting characters who navigate societal expectations through practical decision-making. Scholars like Sharma (2013), Patel (2016), and Sinha (2017) further reinforce this perspective by analyzing Bhagat's focus on youth culture, identity crisis, and middle-class ethos, highlighting how his narratives resonate with contemporary readers due to their realism and relatability. In contrast, Adiga's novels, including *The White Tiger*, *Last Man in Tower*, and *Selection Day*, provide a more critical exploration of socio-economic disparities, class conflict, and systemic inequality. His works expose the harsh realities of poverty, corruption, and limited social mobility, often portraying characters whose survival depends on morally complex decisions. Critical studies by Kumar (2014), Rao (2015), Mehta (2013), and Banerjee (2021) examine these themes in depth, emphasizing Adiga's portrayal of power dynamics, exploitation, and resistance within a stratified society. Furthermore, broader scholarly contributions by Mukherjee (2010), Singh (2012), Nair (2011), and Chatterjee (2018) contextualize these literary works within the frameworks of globalization, capitalism, and postcolonial transformation, illustrating how socio-economic factors influence narrative structures and character development. Additional studies by Gupta (2017), Das (2020), Iyer (2019), and Verma (2018) expand the discussion by addressing youth representation, realism, and socio-economic challenges in Indian popular literature. Collectively, this body of research underscores the significance of socio-economic pragmatism as a central theme, revealing how both Bhagat and Adiga, despite their contrasting approaches, contribute meaningfully to the discourse on contemporary Indian society by portraying the complex interplay between ambition, class, morality, and opportunity.

## **3. HISTORY OF CHETAN BHAGAT AND ARAVIND ADIGA**

The literary contributions of Chetan Bhagat and Aravind Adiga mark two significant yet contrasting trajectories in contemporary Indian English literature, both shaped by the socio-economic transformations of post-liberalization India.

Chetan Bhagat was born in 1974 in New Delhi, India, and grew up in a middle-class family, which later became the foundation of his literary themes. He pursued Mechanical Engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi and later completed his MBA from the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad. Before becoming a full-time writer, Bhagat worked as an investment banker in Hong Kong. His transition into literature began with the publication of *Five Point Someone* in 2004, a novel inspired by his experiences at IIT. The book gained immense popularity among Indian youth, establishing him as a leading voice in popular fiction. Over the years, Bhagat authored several bestsellers such as *One Night @ the*



Call Center, *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*, *2 States*, and *Revolution 2020*. His writing is characterized by simple language, relatable characters, and themes centered on education, career struggles, relationships, and middle-class aspirations. Often regarded as a pioneer of youth-oriented fiction in India, Bhagat's works reflect optimism and pragmatism, focusing on how individuals navigate socio-economic challenges within the system. In addition to novels, he is also a columnist, motivational speaker, and screenwriter, contributing significantly to popular culture and public discourse in India.

Aravind Adiga, born in 1974 in Madras (now Chennai), India, presents a different literary journey marked by critical realism and global recognition. He was educated at prestigious institutions such as Columbia University and the University of Oxford. Before entering the literary world, Adiga worked as a journalist for reputed publications including *Time* magazine and *The Financial Times*. His literary debut, *The White Tiger* (2008), brought him international acclaim and won the prestigious Man Booker Prize. This novel offered a stark and unflinching portrayal of class disparity, corruption, and socio-economic inequality in India, distinguishing Adiga as a powerful voice in contemporary literature. He continued his exploration of social issues in subsequent works like *Last Man in Tower* and *Selection Day*, which further examine themes of urbanization, ambition, and systemic injustice. Unlike Bhagat's accessible and optimistic narratives, Adiga's writing is marked by dark satire, complex characters, and a critical examination of power structures. His works often challenge the notion of equal opportunity in India, highlighting the struggles of the marginalized and the moral compromises required for survival.

#### **4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC**

The socio-economic dimensions portrayed in the novels of Chetan Bhagat and Aravind Adiga provide a rich and layered understanding of contemporary Indian society, particularly in the context of post-liberalization transformation. Both authors, though differing significantly in tone and narrative style, focus on how economic conditions, class structures, and social expectations shape the lives, aspirations, and choices of individuals. Their novels function as mirrors of a rapidly evolving nation where ambition, inequality, and opportunity coexist in complex ways.

Chetan Bhagat's works primarily revolve around the Indian middle class, capturing its struggles, dreams, and pragmatic mindset. His novels depict young individuals navigating the pressures of education, employment, and relationships within a competitive socio-economic environment. For instance, his characters often confront rigid institutional systems, such as the education sector or corporate culture, which demand conformity but also offer pathways to upward mobility. Bhagat highlights how economic aspirations influence personal decisions, including career choices and marriage, often leading characters to prioritize financial security and social acceptance over personal passion. His portrayal of socio-economic realities is generally optimistic, suggesting that determination, adaptability, and practical thinking can help individuals overcome barriers and achieve success. In this sense, Bhagat presents a version of India where the system, though flawed, still allows room for growth and transformation.



## **International Journal of Research and Technology (IJRT)**

**International Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Online Journal**

**ISSN (Print): 2321-7510 | ISSN (Online): 2321-7529**

**| An ISO 9001:2015 Certified Journal |**

In contrast, Aravind Adiga's novels offer a more critical and stark representation of socio-economic conditions, focusing on the deep-rooted inequalities that define Indian society. His narratives bring attention to the lives of individuals from marginalized or lower socio-economic backgrounds who are often excluded from the benefits of economic progress. Adiga explores themes such as poverty, exploitation, corruption, and class oppression, revealing how these forces restrict social mobility and perpetuate injustice. His protagonists are typically shaped by harsh realities, where survival becomes the primary concern, and moral boundaries are frequently blurred. Through his storytelling, Adiga challenges the idea of equal opportunity, instead presenting a society divided by privilege and deprivation. His works suggest that socio-economic advancement for the underprivileged often requires resistance against, or even subversion of, the existing system.

Together, the novels of Bhagat and Adiga offer a comprehensive exploration of socio-economic themes from two contrasting perspectives—one emphasizing hope and adaptation, and the other exposing systemic flaws and inequalities. While Bhagat's narratives resonate with readers seeking relatability and inspiration, Adiga's works provoke critical reflection on the darker aspects of socio-economic reality. Both approaches are essential in understanding the complexities of modern India, where economic growth has created new opportunities but has also intensified disparities.

Ultimately, the socio-economic narratives presented by these authors highlight the profound impact of class, wealth, and social structures on individual lives. Their works underscore the idea that personal ambitions and choices are deeply intertwined with broader economic and social conditions, making their novels significant contributions to contemporary Indian literature.

Socio-economic pragmatism refers to a practical, reality-oriented approach adopted by individuals in response to the social and economic conditions that shape their lives, and it emerges as a central theme in contemporary literature, particularly in the works of Chetan Bhagat and Aravind Adiga. In a rapidly transforming society like India, marked by globalization, urbanization, and widening economic disparities, individuals are often compelled to make decisions based not on idealism but on practical considerations such as financial security, social mobility, and survival. This form of pragmatism reflects how people negotiate the constraints of class, education, employment opportunities, and cultural expectations. In Bhagat's narratives, socio-economic pragmatism is portrayed through middle-class characters who strive to achieve success by adapting to the demands of modern life, often balancing personal desires with societal pressures. His protagonists demonstrate a belief in the system, choosing realistic pathways such as stable careers, professional growth, and socially acceptable relationships to secure a better future. On the other hand, Adiga presents a more critical and complex depiction, where socio-economic pragmatism is shaped by harsh realities of inequality, corruption, and limited opportunities. His characters often operate in morally ambiguous spaces, where survival and upward mobility may require bending or even breaking ethical norms. This contrast highlights that pragmatism is not a uniform concept but varies according to one's socio-economic position and access to resources. Furthermore, socio-



economic pragmatism also reflects broader structural dynamics, including capitalism, class hierarchy, and institutional inefficiencies, which influence individual choices and societal outcomes. It underscores the idea that human behavior is deeply conditioned by external circumstances, and that rational decision-making is often a response to systemic pressures rather than purely personal preference. Thus, socio-economic pragmatism serves as a crucial lens for understanding the interplay between individual agency and structural constraints, revealing how people navigate complex social realities in pursuit of stability, success, and dignity in an ever-changing world.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the exploration of socio-economic pragmatism in the novels of Chetan Bhagat and Aravind Adiga reveals the multifaceted nature of contemporary Indian society shaped by rapid economic transformation and globalization. Both authors, through their distinct narrative approaches, capture the essence of how individuals respond to socio-economic challenges with practical and adaptive strategies. Their works underscore that pragmatism is not merely a personal choice but often a necessity dictated by circumstances such as class position, access to opportunities, and systemic inequalities.

Bhagat's narratives emphasize optimism and adaptability within the existing socio-economic framework, portraying characters who strive for success through education, career advancement, and personal resilience. His focus on middle-class aspirations reflects a belief in the possibility of upward mobility through perseverance and rational decision-making. On the other hand, Adiga presents a more critical and, at times, unsettling perspective, highlighting the deep-rooted disparities and injustices that limit such mobility for a large section of society. His depiction of pragmatism often involves moral complexity, where survival and success may require defiance of ethical norms.

Together, their works provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of socio-economic forces in shaping human behavior and choices. While Bhagat's fiction inspires hope and emphasizes negotiation within the system, Adiga's narratives challenge readers to question the fairness and sustainability of that system. This contrast not only enriches the literary discourse but also reflects the broader realities of a society grappling with inequality, ambition, and change.

Ultimately, the novels of these two authors serve as significant cultural commentaries, offering valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of modern India. Their portrayal of socio-economic pragmatism highlights the delicate balance between ambition and morality, reinforcing the idea that individual choices are deeply influenced by the structural conditions in which they are made.

## **REFERENCES**

1. Bhagat, C. (2004). *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications.
2. Bhagat, C. (2005). *One Night @ the Call Center*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications.
3. Bhagat, C. (2008). *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications.
4. Bhagat, C. (2009). *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications.
5. Bhagat, C. (2011). *Revolution 2020*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications.



6. Adiga, A. (2008). *The White Tiger*. New Delhi: HarperCollins.
7. Adiga, A. (2011). *Last Man in Tower*. New Delhi: HarperCollins.
8. Adiga, A. (2016). *Selection Day*. New Delhi: HarperCollins.
9. Mukherjee, M. (2010). "The Middle-Class Ethos in Contemporary Indian English Fiction." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 45(2), 215–230.
10. Sharma, R. (2013). "Youth, Aspirations and Reality in Chetan Bhagat's Novels." *Indian Journal of English Studies*, 50, 78–85.
11. Kumar, A. (2014). "Socio-Economic Realities in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*." *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 3(2), 112–118.
12. Singh, P. (2012). "Globalization and Its Impact on Indian English Fiction." *Literary Insight*, 3(1), 45–52.
13. Rao, M. (2015). "Narrating Inequality: A Study of Aravind Adiga." *South Asian Review*, 36(3), 67–82.
14. Patel, S. (2016). "Urbanization and Identity Crisis in Chetan Bhagat's Fiction." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 6(5), 150–156.
15. Nair, R. (2011). "Class Conflict in Contemporary Indian Novels." *Postcolonial Text*, 6(2), 1–10.
16. Gupta, D. (2017). "Pragmatism and Youth Culture in Indian Popular Fiction." *Journal of Literature and Aesthetics*, 17(1), 89–97.
17. Mehta, P. (2013). "Moral Ambiguity in *The White Tiger*." *Asian Journal of Literature*, 5(2), 23–30.
18. Chatterjee, A. (2018). "Capitalism and Social Mobility in Modern Indian Fiction." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 53(12), 45–52.
19. Iyer, L. (2019). "Realism in Post-Liberalization Indian Writing." *Journal of Contemporary Literature*, 4(1), 33–41.
20. Das, S. (2020). "Representation of Youth in Indian English Novels." *International Journal of English Research*, 6(3), 10–15.
21. Bose, K. (2014). "Narrative Techniques in Aravind Adiga's Fiction." *Literary Endeavour*, 5(4), 102–108.
22. Verma, N. (2018). "Socio-Economic Challenges in Indian Popular Literature." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, 6(2), 210–216.
23. Ali, F. (2015). "Contemporary Indian Fiction and Social Change." *Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(3), 55–63.
24. Sinha, R. (2017). "Thematic Concerns in the Works of Chetan Bhagat." *Language in India*, 17(6), 120–128.
25. Banerjee, T. (2021). "Class and Power in Aravind Adiga's Novels." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 57(2), 190–200.