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1. Introduction

As the world's second most populous nation, India's unique diversity in ethnicities, languages and religions, as well as in flora and fauna immediately engrosses every visitor. Anyone who has ever been to India and experienced the subcontinent's mesmerizing, overwhelming but also polarizing society will be fascinated by Aravind Adiga's novel. *The White Tiger* portrays an unvarnished and shockingly honest depiction of the country, unlike the stereotypical representations of romantic and idealized *Exotic India*. Thus, an investigation of the novel's truth value seems to be a constructive contribution to the vigorous scholarly debate. Moreover, the topic of India and the broader context of the former Commonwealth play important roles in the Austrian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom, due to the close connection and interdependence of language and culture. Yet, the existing approaches to this topic area seem to be manifold, and the question remains whether the focus in teaching should be placed on the historic development of colonialism, or whether the actuality of Indian society should be highlighted.

The White Tiger permits the reader an unmediated and direct view of contemporary India through the frequent use of irony and sarcasm, as in the following portrait: "[O]ur nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, *does* have entrepreneurs" (Adiga 2). This precise and striking description of India, which reveals an abundance of problematic issues, aptly summarizes the novel's central arguments. Simultaneously, it discloses the author's main purpose of raising the readers' awareness of India's prevailing difficulties. The following contextualized reading investigates in how far the narrative's fictional setting reflects present-day reality in India and establishes reasons for the novel's implementation in the Austrian EFL Classroom.

The academic reception of the 2008 Booker prize-winning novel shows considerable variety, and a number of critics, such as Khan, accuse the author of trying to please the Western readership by painting a one-sided picture of India. These, predominately Indian, scholars claim that Adiga only presents a highly limited view of Indian society by foregrounding negative aspects, which thus results in an inauthentic narration. Other academics, as for example, Goh and Suneetha, regard *The White Tiger* as a valuable contribution to the Indian English literary canon. They illustrate how the author reveals social evils in India and aims at raising the readers' awareness. Among other scholars,

Tandon emphasizes the author's critical stance by outlining various aspects of inequality in India, which are mirrored in the story, for instance, religion or social class. Korte discusses that one of the main characteristics of Indian society, as it is depicted by Adiga, is poverty, and she further demonstrates that Adiga's portrayal adequately reflects contemporary Indian reality.

Structurally, this thesis is comprised of three main components: a theoretical, an analytical and a didactic approach. Initially, a brief overview of India's recent history is presented with a focus on economic and socio-political developments since its independence. The novel's cultural contextualization is further complemented by a survey of contemporary Indian society. By drawing on various sociological and socio-historical sources, this chapter investigates aspects, such as religion, caste, class or gender, and attempts to scrutinize the characteristics of 21st century Indian society. Thus, chapter 2 provides a sound basis for an insightful analysis of *The White Tiger* within its historical and sociocultural context. Chapter 3 continues with relevant biographical information about the author, summarizes the novel's plot and examines the controversial scholarly debate about the novel's truth value. Chapter 4 concludes the theoretical part by outlining the thesis' underlying analytical framework. Consequently, this chapter presents selected aspects of postcolonial studies, which will further be applied to the novel's narratological analysis. Chapter 5 and 6 proceed with an examination of *The White Tiger's* discourse level as well as its characters, before the novel's major themes and motifs are analysed in chapter 7. Additionally, the former are compared to their manifestations in contemporary Indian society, which offers an evaluation of the novel's degree of authenticity. Finally, chapter 8 investigates the text's didactic potential by drawing on the officially suggested pool of topics for the new standardized oral *AHS Matura* (2014/15).

In general, the contextualized reading and the literary analysis of *The White Tiger* try to examine the novel's themes, motifs and problems as well as the degree to which they reflect the reality of 21st century Indian society. Moreover, it is investigated in how far Austrian upper secondary students of English can be familiarized with the topics of India, its history, culture and society by means of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. Due to spatial limitations and the discursive nature of literary analysis and teaching methodology, this thesis cannot claim to present a complete picture of the aspects outlined above.

2. Cultural Contextualization

2.1 India: A Selective Geographical and Historical Overview

To ensure a deeper understanding of the novel and to facilitate an interpretation within its sociocultural context, a brief outline of India's history and its cultural developments appear to be essential at this stage. It may seem impossible or even pretentious to summarize the history of a whole subcontinent in a few pages, but the present attempt tries to summarize selective aspects of India's past that are considered to be relevant for a detailed reading of *The White Tiger*.

2.1.1 Geographic Aspects

Although the territory of India is clearly defined from a present perspective, the unity of this part of South Asia has not always been as definite. Several historical invasions, such as the arrival of Muslim tribes around 711 AD or the British colonialization in the 18th century, and a number of political conflicts have shaped the Indian borders over the last millennia (Robb 28; McLeod 70). Consequently, these processes have resulted in the country's familiar triangular shape. India's diversity is not only reflected in its varied landscape offering beautiful beaches in the South and vast mountain ranges in the North, compared to the world's most crowded and polluted cities. Its heterogeneity is also clearly visible in the mix of ethnicities, religions and cultures, which make it "the most diverse and complex country on the planet" (Sims 153).

Topographically, India's northwest borders on Pakistan, while the northeast is limited by Nepal and Bangladesh. In the north the Himalaya Mountains, which are the highest in the world, dominate the landscape, and the east as well as the west coast are surrounded by gulfs of the Indian Ocean (Stein 6). The country's name derives from the Indus River, which flows in present day Pakistan and whose valley was the origin of a great urban civilization over four thousand years ago, the Aryan culture (Wolpert 3). In general, the Indian climate is remarkably varied ranging from the snow-capped Himalayas in the northeast to the dry deserts in the northwest and the humid, subtropical plains in the southern coastal regions (Stein 7). Despite these climatic variations, heat is a prevailing factor in the subcontinent's overall climate and therefore, water has always played a fundamental role in India as an essential component of agricultural production. Interestingly, sun and fire are represented by gods in Hinduism and the holy water of

‘Mother Ganga’ is worshipped by all practicing Hindus (Wolpert 4f.). While vast areas of India’s south depend on seasonal monsoonal rains for agricultural activity, most of the northern parts rely on rivers, such as the Indus and the Ganges (Stein 7).

2.1.2 India’s Way towards Independence

Since the middle of the 18th century, India was in firm hands of British colonial rule. Although the colonizers did reform certain aspects of Indian society, such as education, healthcare or infrastructure, their hierarchical rule over the whole subcontinent resulted in widely repressive structures (McLeod 70ff.; Vohra 43ff.). A century later, emerging Indian nationalist tendencies emphasized the demands for independence. Concurrently, the Muslim underrepresentation in the Indian National Congress, which was founded in 1885 with the aim of increased political participation of native Indians, and their fear about discrimination in a democratic India, led to a revitalization of the Muslim League. Therefore, Jinnah, the League’s Muslim leader, stated in 1940 that a democratization of India had to include the establishment of free Muslim states without any Hindu control. Thus, the Muslim separatists strived to establish a Muslim state in the northeast and northwest of India, which would be known under the name of Pakistan (McLeod 118ff.). In the following years, the League experienced an immense growth and by 1945, it had become a mass party (McLeod 123).

Simultaneously, Britain’s economic and ideological interest in India had declined dramatically and its own post-war struggle as well as the hostile climate in India towards its mother country increased the possibility of an independent India (Stein 299). The larger obstacle at this point was not the conflict between India and Britain, but the one between Hindus and Muslims in India. Both strived for independence from the British, but the Muslim League insisted on an independent state of its own, which resulted in an increasing number of violent conflicts between Muslims, on the one side, and Hindus and Sikhs, on the other. Ultimately, these clashes culminated in a civil war in Punjab, in the northwest of India. Congress objected heavily against the League’s separatist ideas, as there lived a small percentage of Hindu population in the respective areas, although the majority were Muslim. Despite all the differences and conflicts, officials in the states of Punjab and Bengal (in the northeast) agreed to a partition of their states along religious lines. Thus, on August 14, 1947 the oddly shaped state of Pakistan, consisting of two different geographic areas separated by nearly 2,000

kilometres of Indian territory, declared its independence. A day later, on August 15, 1947 the Republic of India also obtained its state of independence (McLeod 124ff.).

2.1.3 Independent India

The long desired and hard-won independence evoked high hopes amongst Indian politicians and citizens likewise. These were, however, about to be bitterly disappointed in due course. Although it is one of independent India's main objectives to distance itself from any heritage of British colonial rule, Indian politics has not achieved any essential improvements of discriminating colonial practices between religions, castes and languages. On the contrary, these aspects continue to be decisive factors of distinction until the present day (Stein 285).

Due to his active role in the negotiations about India's independence, Jawaharlal Nehru was appointed India's first prime minister. Because of his father's political engagement in the Indian National Congress, Jawaharlal continued this political inheritance and led Congress, which had been transformed into a party, to victory in the first years of the Republic of India (Stein 369).

During the early stages of the 'new' India, the majority of the remaining princely states, which had not been under direct colonial rule, acceded to India. Subsequently, Indian politics ended with monarchy between 1947 and 1949 rewarding the royal rulers with special pensions, called privy purses. One of the exceptions was the state of Jammu and Kashmir, where the predominately Muslim population was ruled by a Hindu prince, which naturally led to continuous tensions. Kashmir is located in the northeast of India and the northwest of Pakistan. Thus, it borders on both countries and this geographic position would, theoretically, suggest unification with either of them. In October 1947, an inevitable Muslim revolt arose and subsequently, led to the first Indo-Pakistani war. Under the pretext of religious discrimination Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan fought about territorial expansion until the United Nations established a cease-fire in 1949. The conflict about the dominance in this region, however, continues until the present day resulting in an unofficial division of Kashmir (Stein 367f.). The violent establishment of the new Indo-Pakistani border led to "the largest transfer of population in the history of the world, as fearful Hindus and Sikhs fled Pakistan while Muslims left India" (McLeod 130f.). However, in total hardly one third of Indian Muslims emigrated to Pakistan, and

until today India remains one of the largest nations with a major Muslim population (Stein 386).

Nehru reacted to this increasingly violent climate with secularism. His definition of secularism, however, differed from the traditional conception. According to Nehru, secularism did not mean separation of politics and religion; it merely guaranteed freedom for religious minorities. For instance, it excluded Muslim women, who were subject to Islamic law, from the reformed Indian laws regarding women's rights of divorce (McLeod 131).

The new constitution, which was implemented on January 26, 1950 with the proclamation of the Republic of India, established a firm federal system. The strong Centre of the Government held considerably greater powers than any federal institution, and it was also enabled to temporarily seize power in every Indian state establishing the so-called President's Rule (Stein 370). The new Indian political system was headed by a president who assumed mainly representative duties, while the prime minister and his cabinet held the major political authorities. The former was nominated by the bicameral parliament, which consisted of the *Lok Sabha* (the House of People) and the *Rajya Sabha* (the Council of States). Of these two only the *Lok Sabha* was elected by popular vote. The universal adult suffrage was introduced, and separate elections for Muslims and other minorities were abolished. Nevertheless, a special regulation which guaranteed political participation of disadvantaged groups under certain circumstances was inaugurated. The lowest castes and tribal groups that were affected by this regulation were described in a schedule and thus, labelled Scheduled Castes (SC) or Scheduled Tribes (ST) (McLeod 131ff.). Simultaneously, the abolishment of Untouchability¹, which meant a guarantee of certain fundamental rights, was declared (Stein 335). According to the new constitution, there were further measures to support the poor and disadvantaged groups in India. The implementation of these so-called 'directive principles', however, potentially restricted people's fundamental rights. Thus, the prime minister was enabled to declare a national emergency, which allowed him or her to suspend basic freedoms. Thus, the formally well-intentioned 'directive principles' served as a justification for the government's authoritarian procedures (McLeod 133).

¹ Untouchables are outside the Indian caste system and their status is associated with certain social disabilities (*E.B.O.* s.v. "Untouchable").

Another obstacle for an equal Indian society was of linguistic quality. After independence, a large number of Indians advocated the substitution of English as the national language by Hindi, which was spoken by the majority of Indians. Contrary to India's policy of pluralism, however, this meant a disadvantage for all non-Hindi speakers in the country. Therefore, in 1966 the government finally agreed on the joint use of English and Hindi in all official contexts and even nowadays, English persists as the main language of business, higher bureaucracy and elite education. Moreover, since 1950 there are 18 officially recognized national languages in India and consequently, a number of linguistic divisions of multilingual states took place. This resulted, for instance, in the separation of Punjab, with its Punjabi-speaking Sikh majority, and the Hindi-speaking Haryana (McLeod 133ff.).

During the 1950s, not only Nehru's secularist and pluralist politics were a guarantee for Congress's success, the party was also supported by rich peasants that had acted as strong local political bosses since the 1930s. In this corrupt system the local bosses obtained votes for politicians in return for certain favours. As these practices seem essentially characteristic of Indian politics, they are also reflected in *The White Tiger*.

Whatever else might be said about Nehru's premiership, he did improve Indian economy, built a modern infrastructure as well as advanced education and healthcare. Most of his measures, however, only showed their effects in the long run. In general, the Nehruvian economic policy was characterized by communist ideas, such as central planning and government directed development. The National Planning Commission approached its target of industrialization by the means of Five Year Plans. Due to the nationalization of a number of important factories and a tight regulation of industry as well as imports and exports, the Indian economy did experience considerable growth. Nevertheless, this growth was modest compared to the simultaneous population increase. On top of that the government lacked the resources to fund the nationalized companies (McLeod 136ff.). Due to economic hardships, the government reduced its subsidies for agriculture, which increased poverty in rural India (McLeod 139ff.). According to McLeod, "39 per cent of India's land was controlled by 6 per cent of its households" in the early 1970s (140). These numbers reflect the importance of India's landowning class. Hence, the contrast between urban and rural India continuously became more apparent. The respective differences between urban and rural or *Light* and *Dark India* are also addressed in *The White Tiger*. Subsequently, Nehru's socialistic

attempts to ameliorate the living conditions of India's rural poor failed due to conservative opponents in Congress, and the rural population remained as disadvantaged as ever (Stein 372 f.).

Nehru's foreign policy was characterized by nonalignment with neither West nor East during the Cold War. On the one hand, this neutrality had the advantage of potential support from both blocs and on the other hand, it also facilitated Nehru's ideal of peaceful decolonization. Although he persuaded other Asian and African states to join his movement, Nehru himself violently attacked the Portuguese settlement of Goa in 1961, and finally defeated the last colonial power in India (McLeod 141). Another violent conflict resulted from the previously friendly relations with China in 1962, as China claimed territory in north-eastern and north-western India. Although Nehru immensely increased India's defence spending, he also sought military support from the United States during the Sino-Indian war. These developments as well as the failure of a number of his economic and socio-political measures led to a growing resentment and criticism towards the prime minister (McLeod 143f.). According to Stein, the 1960s were marked by "the persistence of mass poverty, illiteracy and backwardness" (385).

After Nehru's death in 1964, his successor Lal Bahadur Shastri was immediately confronted with the second Indo-Pakistani war (1963-1966) and died soon afterwards in January 1966 (McLeod 143f.). The renewed power struggle among the Congress members about the premiership was finally decided by Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, who "assumed more power than any previous leader in Indian history" (McLeod 147). The congruence of names between Indira and Mahatma Gandhi is a mere coincidence, as there is no degree of relationship between them. Nehru had left his daughter with a challenging economic situation that had resulted from bad harvests, on the one hand, and the budget deficits due to increased war expenses and reduced industrial expansion, on the other hand (Vohra 221). Moreover, Congress's inclusiveness and plurality led to accumulated tensions within the party. Consequently, it suffered heavy losses in the elections in 1967. Nevertheless, the party retained its majority in the *Lok Sabha* and Indira continued as prime minister. In order to regain control over the new non-Congress states, the Centre announced President's Rule in the respective states. This abuse of power was justified and manifested in India's constitution. Eventually, the differences within the party could not be overcome anymore, which produced a split in Congress. Indira's Congress (R) was opposed to the

Syndicate's Congress (O). Congress (R) had now lost its majority in the *Lok Sabha* and in order to restore her power, Indira sought support from various Communist parties. To prove her loyalty and strengthen her relationship with the Indian left, she assumed an anti-American tone, nationalized India's large private banks and articulated her opposition against the princes' privy purses. Moreover, Indira toured the country to meet the poor and foster her philanthropic reputation. In the *Lok Sabha* elections in March 1971, Indira was rewarded for her efforts and Congress (R) regained firm control of the Centre (McLeod 147ff.).

During the third Indo-Pakistani war in 1971, India supported East Pakistan's endeavour to declare an independent state under the name of Bangladesh. India's efforts to provide equipment and training for Bangladeshi guerrilla troops paid off and Pakistan had to recognize Bangladesh's independence. As the United States and China fostered friendly relations with Pakistan, Indira turned to the Soviets for support and thus, abandoned her father's nonalignment policy. Her victory over Pakistan guaranteed Indira successful state elections in March 1972, and due to her recently gained ubiquitous political power, she began to exchange critical voices in Congress with more loyal ones. This way of proceeding was a dangerous one, as it removed the local bosses, which were vital for the party's base (McLeod 151ff.). As Vohra observes, "Indira Gandhi had successfully used the structures of democracy [...] to gain her position of dominance, but she now proceeded to empty these structures of their democratic content" and established a one-person rule (228).

The 1970s bore various sources for discontent, as there was a considerable population growth. Indira's attempt to lower the number of new-borns resulted in heavy governmental spending on birth control and in violent and arbitrary sterilization practices. Moreover, there was an inflation growth, and an agricultural crisis increased the food prices. Consequently, Indira's popularity suffered tremendously, so that even her desperate attempt to increase public support and Indian patriotism by testing nuclear explosives did not yield much success. Naturally, Indira's opponents seized the opportunity of popular unrest and protests against Congress to found a new party, the *Janata Morcha* (People's Front). In June 1974, the *Janata Morcha* called for a nationwide *satyagraha*² to oblige Indira to resign as prime minister. Indira, however, did not surrender that easily and convinced the president of India to proclaim a state of

² A form of non-violent resistance that was originally established by Mahatma Gandhi (Stein 300).

Emergency (McLeod 155f.). This enabled the prime minister to establish a kind of dictatorship, suspend basic rights, censor newspapers, ban organisations and jail many thousands for political reasons (Stein 377). Officially, the Emergency was necessary because of recent strikes and protests, and Indira's rigid measures to counteract inflation and good harvests in 1975 succeeded in restoring the economic order (Wolpert 397f.). Nevertheless, Indira's popularity did not increase during the Emergency and slum clearances in Old Delhi encountered special disdain among the Indian population. As Indira ended the Emergency in January 1977 and scheduled a *Lok Sabha* election, all her opponents, except the Communist Party, joined the *Janata Morcha* to found the *Janata Party* (People's Party). In the succeeding elections, the new party won two thirds of the seats leaving Congress (R) with a minority in the *Lok Sabha* (McLeod 156f.).

The *Janata Party's* heterogeneity and the resulting economic deterioration after loosening the restrictive policies of the Emergency led to disagreements within the party and automatically weakened its coalition (Vohra 236). In 1980, the government members saw no other remedy, but to hold new elections. In the meantime, Indira had founded a new party, called Congress (I). As the (I) stood for Indira, there was little doubt that this party would follow authoritarian principles. Once again, Indira succeeded in mobilizing her supporters and won two thirds of the seats in the *Lok Sabha* (McLeod 158f.).

The belief in the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty and their allegedly divine obligation to rule became apparent once again after Sanjay Gandhi's unexpected death. As Indira's son and political heir he would have been supposed to follow his mother's example. Indira's immediate solution was to summon her second son, Rajiv, although he had no political qualifications, except his blood relationship with Indira. During the 1980s, there was a gradual "erosion of federalism" and the state governors, the bureaucracy and the police were increasingly converted to instruments of Congress (I) (McLeod 161). Moreover, public life experienced a wave of corruption and political violence, which led to elevated demoralization. Bribery was common practice and a growing number of criminals went into politics (McLeod 162f.). Hence, it was not unusual to send "suitcases full of currency notes" to the prime minister in order to obtain certain favours (Vohra 229). This aspect of Indian politics is also addressed in *The White Tiger* and will be analysed in greater detail in the following chapters of this paper. Another seed for public unrest was the call for separation of an exclusive Sikh state. Although the

majority of the population in Punjab was Sikh, their goal was the foundation of independent Khalistan, where the Sikhs' interests would finally be respected. As the conflict culminated in mutual killings of Hindus and Sikhs, Indira realized her need to intervene. Bhindranwale, a Sikh religious authority, was considered the leader of the conflict and therefore, the prime minister ordered the attack on the Golden Temple, where Bhindranwale was hiding. This violent act fostered the Sikhs' hostility against Indira and in order to show her loyalty to the Sikh faith, she employed two Sikhs bodyguards. Unfortunately, her naïve trust was disappointed and on October 31, 1984 Indira was shot dead by her bodyguards. This cruel manifestation of Sikh contempt led to horrendous riots and fights between Hindus and Sikhs all over India (Wolpert 416ff.).

Thereupon, Rajiv Gandhi assumed his duty claiming to continue his mother's politics. Further, he called upon all patriotic Indians, stressed Hindu values and thus, abandoned his grandfather's secularism (McLeod 166). Also economically, Rajiv distanced himself from Nehru's socialist approach and shifted to freer market strategies (Vohra 201). One of his main goals was to promote Indian entrepreneurial initiative by permitting the import of high-tech products, such as computers, and thus facilitating technological modernization (Wolpert 423). After a few prosperous years when the Nehruvian economics finally seemed to pay off, Rajiv's popularity suffered due to another Kashmiri conflict and because of his inability to control the situation in Punjab. Consequently, in the *Lok Sabha* elections in 1989 Rajiv's Congress (I) made huge losses and no party succeeded in obtaining a majority. Nevertheless, Rajiv's strongest opponent and former party member, V.P., attained enough support from oppositional parties and was proclaimed prime minister (McLeod 167ff.). However, V.P.'s premiership did not have a promising start because the violent conflict in Punjab continued, and the Kashmiri endeavours for independence resulted in the danger of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan. One day after the elections in May 1991, Rajiv was killed by political rebels. As Rajiv's only adult relative was his Italian widow, Sonia Gandhi, who declined the political offer, the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty was interrupted by a former cabinet minister under Indira and Rajiv, Narasimha Rao (McLeod 172ff.).

Unlike Nehru's policies, Indira and Rajiv Gandhi had abandoned their predecessor's idealistic view of democracy and turned it into a corrupt and repressive political system. For them, the main goal was to maintain power regardless of any social or humanitarian

considerations. Hence, after Rajiv's death "Congress had lost much of its prestige" (Vohra 219).

2.1.4 India's Recent Past

In the *Lok Sabha* elections of 1991, Congress (I) only obtained 42 per cent of the seats, but thanks to the support from other parties, its candidate, Narasimha Rao, was appointed prime minister. As the first serious party leader outside the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, Narasimha Rao was in a difficult situation without full support of his colleagues. Therefore, he tried to strengthen his position by announcing local and state elections for Congress committees for the first time since the 1970s and stood for election as party president. The fact that he was the chosen leader of Congress (I) as well as the received support from the newly elected committees legitimized his position (McLeod 177f.).

One of the new prime minister's priorities was an economic reform, in which he revised the Nehruvian planned development and Indira's nationalization processes. This liberalization was partly necessary due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, which used to be India's main supplier and export market. Because of a severe economic crisis in 1991, India was forced to request help from the International Monetary Fund. The former would only grant a credit, if India opened its market to foreign firms and investors and reduced government spending. Hence, the liberalization policy was continued by four consequent prime ministers from three different parties over the following ten years. The process basically included the abolishment of licensing for the majority of Indian industries and the termination of import restrictions. These measures provoked a rapid economic growth supported by a massive computer software industry. Moreover, it also ended the government monopolies (McLeod 179ff.). The actual economic growth by the end of the last millennium, however, did not meet its expectations and foreign investment remained low. Advocators of the economic reform argued that the process was not yet finished, whereas others accused India's labour laws, which prevented firms from firing workers, for the slow privatization. Apart from that, other factors also reduced India's attractiveness as industrial location, such as relatively poor infrastructure and unstable power supply. Consequently, India's deficits and debts increased to such an extent that half of the Centre's revenues were invested in interest payments, which automatically limited the resources for infrastructure and other developments (McLeod 181f.).

During the 1990s, increasing accusations of corruption and bribery against the government of Narasimha Rao were answered with a diminishing support for Congress (I) and thus, the elections of 1996 brought a radical change in Indian politics. For the first time since independence, a prime minister who did not belong to Congress took office. Nevertheless, no party was strong enough to maintain power without the support of other members of the *Lok Sabha* and therefore, a number of Congress (I)'s opponents joined together in the United Front. Although Congress (I) initially agreed to support the United Front, the plurality of the whole coalition finally led to its internal partition. Thus, new elections were announced in 1998 (McLeod 186ff.). Similar to the previous elections, Congress (I) only achieved poor results and neither of the other parties obtained a majority in the *Lok Sabha*. Therefore, a coalition of 18 different parties headed by the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), India's nationalist party, formed the National Democratic Alliance, which appointed the new prime minister. The continuous trend of political cooperation since 1989 had ensured the importance of parliament and limited the unrestricted presidential power that Indira and Rajiv had maintained (McLeod 188ff.). Although Sonia Gandhi replaced Narasimha Rao as head of Congress (I) in 1999 to evoke notions of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, the party could not achieve significantly better results. Sonia's lack of political experience and her weak leadership significantly reduced support for Congress (I) (McLeod 191ff.).

In the meantime, the National Democratic Alliance government received international attention because of its controversial nuclear policy. Since Indira's nuclear experiments in the 1980s, India was unofficial member of the 'nuclear club' that was formed by the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France. When the United States pressed India to give up its nuclear weapons, the majority of Indians advocated full membership in the club. On the one hand, they saw a need for India to protect itself against its nuclear neighbours, China and Pakistan, and on the other hand, a membership would prove India as world power and modern country. India's resistance to the United States' demands froze the relations between the two nations, and in 1998 the States stopped investments in the Indian market (McLeod 189f.). By the year 2000, however, the cooperation between India and the United States had ameliorated, especially after President Bill Clinton's visit to India. Since then, the US constitutes India's major export market, and nearly 10 per cent of imports into India come from the States (McLeod 191). Between 2005 and 2008, India and the United States negotiated India's

use of nuclear power. This US-India nuclear deal finally guaranteed India the status of a legitimate nuclear power (Narlikar 1611f.).

Another controversial issue during the 1990s was the Hindu-Muslim relations. Since the Muslim invasion on the subcontinent around 711 AD, there have been continuous tensions between Muslims and Hindus, which frequently resulted in more or less violent conflicts over the centuries (Robb 28). An especially strained climate arose in the 1990s, partly due to the war in Kashmir between Muslims and Indian authorities. As Muslim Pakistan was also involved in the war by training Muslim guerrilla, the conflict resulted in a war between India and Pakistan about territorial expansion under the pretext of religious discrimination. Although the Pakistani Muslims did not have a unanimous opinion about the annexation of Kashmir or its independence, the Indian government categorized the attacks in Kashmir as terrorism. Hence, the hostile climate between Muslims and Hindus spread all over India and resulted in frequent violent clashes, in which thousands of people found their death (McLeod 184f.). Apart from the religious tensions on the Indian subcontinent, the persisting conflict in Kashmir bears a far greater danger, as India and Pakistan are both nuclear powers (McLeod 192).

The more varied political spectrum and the increasing importance of regional parties since the 1990s have impeded the Congress Party to regain its unlimited power of former years. It was not until 2004 that a member of Congress returned to the post of prime minister. Thanks to Sonia Gandhi's relation to the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, her party had finally managed to regain political importance and by forming a coalition, called the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), it achieved a majority in the *Lok Sabha* (Rothermund 29ff.). Gandhi, however, chose to hand over her leadership to Manmohan Singh because her Italian Catholic origin had led to considerable political controversy (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* s.v. "Sonia Gandhi"). Interestingly, Singh was the first non-Hindu prime minister, as he was part of the Sikh minority, and he especially focused on the promotion of economic growth during his premiership (Jayal 63f.). In general, all recent Indian governments were headed by prime ministers from either the BJP (1999-2004) or the Congress (2004-2014). While the former is predominately characterized by its Hindu tendencies and the latter "is only a shadow of its former self", both parties clearly adhere to nationalist policies (Kohli and Singh 6). As the nuclear deal with the US cost Congress the support from India's Left Front, the party changed its approach to coalition building. Consequently, its tendency to national

alliances shifted to more regional ones since the *Lok Sabha* elections in 2009. Thus, this arbitrary coalition building processes do not exclude cooperation with rival parties in different states. Congress's only serious rival, the BJP adopted a similar approach (Adeney and Wyatt 132f.).

As far as the economy is concerned, there has been a gradual transformation from Nehru's socialist tendencies towards a globalized market, but the state still holds an important regulatory function at the Indian market. In general, the economy is not export-orientated, but rather inwardly focused. Although Indian economy has experienced a gradual growth since its liberalization, it still remains one of the poorer economies in the world (Adeney and Wyatt 191f.). One of the causes of India's poverty is the agricultural development since the Green Revolution in the 1960s, when technological innovations were used to modernize agriculture and to increase food production (Adeney and Wyatt 195ff.). This intensification of agriculture, however, also caused environmental problems and although there was a certain growth on the labour market, agriculture still remains the least productive sector, while simultaneously "carr[ying] the burden of providing [the majority of] employment" (Adeney and Wyatt 197). More precisely, while in 2007/08 agriculture only contributed 17.8 per cent of India's GDP (Gross National Product), about 52 per cent of its workforce depended on land for a living (Adeney and Wyatt 195). In 2004, the Congress-led coalition invested in aid packages for rural regions and the budget of 2008 included resources for rural funds (Adeney and Wyatt 197). As opposed to India's most traditional economy, its growing IT industry is the country's most recent economic development. Its success concerning the export of software since the 1990s is mainly due to the highly skilled staff with a sound command of the English language and the fact that Indian salaries are far below the international average, which results in a considerable cost advantage for companies (Adeney and Wyatt 208ff.). Therefore, a number of European and American IT companies have outsourced their business operations to India. A similar process in the opposite direction is the so-called 'body shipping', through which Indian IT experts work abroad, but only receive an Indian salary (Rothermund 103). Moreover, only a small proportion of Indian workforce is employed in the IT sector. Consequently, these economic successes have only minimally reduced India's overall poverty (Adeney and Wyatt 209).

India's continuous GDP growth rate since the early 1980s did not only foster the amplification of its middle class, but also emphasized the country's international importance. Thus, its role in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as initiator of southern coalitions has gained considerable recognition (Narlikar 1610f.). However, India can still not be considered as a major power because of its prevailing poverty, considerable economic inequalities, widespread corruption and a number of other factors that classify it as a third world country (Nayar 318). India's major international competitors are Pakistan, on the one hand, due to the continuing Kashmir conflict and China, on the other hand, with which relations are somewhat strained since the Tibet crisis that resulted in the India-China war in 1962 (Sáez 320ff.). While the economic relations with China have ameliorated since 2000 on the basis of bilateral agreements, the conflict with Pakistan has not eased to a notable extent (Sáez 327). As Pakistani supported terrorist groups from Kashmir attacked the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001, Indian officials demanded an immediate withdrawal of Pakistani support for such *jihadi* groups. The following US-administered peace process between India and Pakistan found its abrupt end with the violent attack in Mumbai in November 2008 by Pakistan-based terrorists (Ganguly 335).

Aug 1947	Independence (Nehru)
Oct 1947	1 st Indo-Pakistani war
Jan 1950	Republic of India
1962	Sino-Indian war
1963-66	2 nd Indo-Pakistani war
1964	Shastri (prime minster)
1966	Indira Gandhi (PM)
1971	3 rd Indo-Pakistani war
1974-77	State of Emergency
Oct 1984	Rajiv Gandhi (PM)
1991	Narasimha Rao (PM)
1990s	IT boom
1996	United Front government
1998	National Democratic Alliance government
1999-2004	BJP government
2000	President Bill Clinton visits India
2004	Sonia Gandhi enters politics
2004-2014	Congress government
2008	US-India nuclear deal
Nov 2008	Terrorist attack Mumbai

Fig. 1: Chronicle of Relevant Historical Events

2.1.5 The Nature of Indian Democracy

As India is the world's largest constitutional democracy with a population of over one billion people, it is little surprising that its implementation is problematic in various aspects. The present chapter tries to outline the main characteristics of India's contemporary political system with a focus on potential drawbacks.

With the emergence of coalition politics since the 1990s, the Election Commission of India has increased its significance. Consequently, the transparency of electoral processes has increased, as the Commission tries to counteract various types of electoral fraud (Rothermund 31). Moreover, the Supreme Court and the high courts in various states are determined to counteract corruption at all levels. The greatest assets of India's recent coalition governments are the decentralization of power from Delhi towards the states and the resulting pluralistic politics (Sharma 90). Hence, India's major parties are the Hindu-nationalist BJP, the Congress Party, the *Samajwadi Party* and the *Bahujan Samaj Party*. While the former two are predominantly voted by upper castes, the latter ones represent the interests of OBCs and *Dalits* (former Untouchables) (Sharma 86f.). Although the growing political fragmentation has led to increasingly transparent democratic processes, the Indian state continues to be relatively ineffective and corrupt. Especially, politicians at the lower levels of Indian politics cease to follow public causes, and rather tend to focus on personal interests (Kohli and Singh 6f.).

The universal suffrage, which was introduced alongside the new constitution in 1951, led to an empowerment of the broad masses including previously subordinated and discriminated groups, such as OBCs, SCs or religious minorities (Sharma 84f.). This development, however, did not exclusively yield positive results, as it gave rise to "particularism and localism" (Sharma 85). Indian society is a highly fragmented one with narrow caste, ethnic, regional or religious ties, all of which are reflected in political processes. Thus, the majority of parties follow particular ideologies, which in turn often results in hostile confrontations between the advocates of different parties. In other words, society's increasing politicization in combination with a weak state and inconsistent political institutions has reinforced ideological, political and socio-economic differences (Sharma 85f.). Further, the politicization of these differences has caused an ideological partition of India (Adeney and Wyatt 156f.).

Hence, the political opening to all layers of society has, unfortunately, also promoted political groupings and mutual discrimination, as well as corruption and fraud in the

competition for resources. Although India nominally is an electoral democracy, various official procedures are characterized by “arbitrariness and abuses”, for example in the spheres of judiciary, the ‘free’ press, political freedoms and civil rights (Sharma 89).

2.2 A Survey of Indian Society in the 21st Century

The present chapter attempts to provide an overview of distinctive characteristics and aspects that define contemporary Indian society. As the concerns addressed, such as religion, caste or gender, can only be discussed in general terms due to spatial limitations, the thesis cannot claim to present a comprehensive or complete picture. Nevertheless, the mentioned aspects are treated on a general level in order to enable a deeper understanding of the whole range of the novel’s facets.

It is important to call to mind that India will be the world’s most populous country with 1.5 billion inhabitants between 2045 and 2050, according to the United Nations. Without doubt, it already is South Asia’s dominant power, and due to the extreme dimension of its population, the resulting cultural diversity may appear exotic to members of Western societies (McLeod 192f.).

2.2.1 Religion and its Riots

As the plurality of religions on the subcontinent can be explained in terms of historical processes that shaped the character of present-day India, its cultural and religious diversity is vital for the national unity. Moreover, religion can never be viewed as a separate entity because it is tightly interwoven with other elements of society and amongst other factors defines the 21st century Indian culture. As already mentioned, India’s first prime minister after independence, Jawaharlal Nehru, introduced the notion of secularism in order to guarantee national unity (Robinson and Upadhyay 340ff.). According to this political secularism, the state ensures minimal standards of living to the members of all religious communities, and Article 25 of the Indian Constitution gives every citizen the right to freely practise and propagate their religion (Robinson and Upadhyay 355).

A census that has been performed every ten years since the colonial period provides information about prevailing religious convictions in India and thus, shows that the vast majority of Indians follows the beliefs of Hinduism (about 80 per cent in 2001). The second largest religion in India is Islam with about 13 per cent, followed by

Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism (all between 2 and 0.5 per cent). Other religions recorded in the census were Zoroastrianism, Baha'i faith and Judaism. The main distinction between these religions lies in their classification as Indian or non-Indian religions. The former category denotes those religions whose development has taken place on the Indian subcontinent, i.e. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, whereas the latter are foreign systems that have been introduced, the main ones being Islam and Christianity (Embree 213f.).

As all four indigenous religions share a number of common assumptions, some scholars tend to think that their development was closely interrelated. First, the notion of reincarnation is found in all Indian religions, as well as the belief in *karma*, in other words the conviction that all actions have consequences after an individual's rebirth. The third assumption is that everyone has to fulfil their *dharma* (duties and obligations that come with birth) and finally, all these religions follow the concept of *moksha*, which denotes the release from the cycle of rebirth. Compared to most western religions, Hinduism is a relatively loose system of faith that consists of numerous traditions and practices of belief without a historical founder figure or any institutional structure. This reflects the local cultural importance of religion in India, which is manifested in the various regional expressions of faith that all share a common underlying worldview (Embree 214f.). The probably most distinctive feature of Brahmanical Hinduism is the importance of priests and gurus, where the latter function as teachers and mediators. Moreover, the plurality of deities with their numerous manifestations and the continuous creation of new gods and goddesses are typical of Hinduism (Embree 216f.).

Despite its status as one of the three great world religions, Buddhism nearly disappeared from India due to the dominance of Brahmanical Hinduism. Jainism with its emphasis on non-violence and Sikhism with its significance of gurus, however, have persisted despite the prominence of Hinduism (Embree 218ff.).

As has been illustrated in the history chapter of this thesis, there have been continuous conflicts between members of the two major religions in India, Hindus and Muslims, since the Arabic conquest of north-Indian kingdoms in the 8th century. However, it would be misleading to paint a picture of permanent violent struggle, as India's history is marked by coexistence rather than assimilation (Embree 224). Nevertheless, the lingering tensions have not diminished since the partition of Muslim Pakistan. A

considerable number of Muslims did not leave their homes in order to emigrate to the new Muslim nation and now represent one of India's marginalized groups, according to the 2006 Sachar Report. The report further shows that their social position is comparable to that of the *Dalits*, as they are socially and economically disadvantaged. Moreover, the literacy rate of Indian Muslims of 59 per cent is far below the Indian average of 65 per cent (qtd. in Rothermund 9). Although there is an abundance of examples throughout the whole country, where Muslims and Hindus live peacefully together, differences in their food habits, dressing styles, religious customs and festivities are clearly visible (Rothermund 10). Repeatedly, these differences lead to conflicts which are, for instance, exemplified in the issue of cow protection. Hindus, who consider the cow a sacred animal and associate it with the cowherd god Krishna, feel insulted by Muslim butchers for whom it is no sin to eat cow meat (Metcalf and Metcalf 151f.). One of the most terrible events as far as Hindu-Muslim violence is concerned, happened on February 27, 2002 in Gujarat where 50 Hindus were burnt to death aboard a train. Consequently, "horrendous killing, rape and looting of properties" of thousands of Muslims spread across the state (Robinson and Upadhyay 349). These "humiliating attacks on body, property, place of worship, and even monuments" have led to a growing ghettoization and marginalization of Muslims in the whole country (Robinson and Upadhyay 350). Although these religious differences have always been exploited and abused for political reasons, politicized violent Hindu-Muslim riots are a recent phenomenon in 21st-century India. As these riots frequently cost the lives of thousands of people, the Communal Violence (Suppression) Bill was introduced in 2005. Its agenda has, however, been heavily criticized by human rights organizations due to its harsh measures and the disregard of preventive measures (Rothermund 10ff.).

In comparison to Islam, Christianity, as another non-Indian religion, has coexisted peacefully with other religions in India. Contrary to the majority of other countries in the New World, there was only little missionary activity in India because the East India Company feared resentment among the Indian people. What has left an impact on Indian culture, however, was Christian institutions, such as schools, universities, hospitals and charitable foundations that introduced Western science and knowledge to India (Robinson and Upadhyay 228 ff.).

2.2.2 The Issue of the Caste System

The issue of caste as a unique organizing principle of Indian society originates from the Veda epoch and is, traditionally, a Hindu concept. However, the concept of caste was transferred to other religions on the Indian subcontinent, namely Sikhism, Islam and Christianity (Jaffrelot 249). The origins of this system of social classification relate to a myth mentioned in the *Rig Veda*, one of the oldest texts in Sanskrit literature (about 2000 BC). According to this myth, the world was created because the cosmic spirit sacrificed himself to the gods. Thereupon, the *Brahmans* rose from his mouth, the *Kshatriyas* from his arms, the *Vaishyas* from his hands and the *Shudras* from his feet (Stern 55). As the mouth is naturally higher than the arms or the hands, these four categories already represent a hierarchy including a fifth caste, the Untouchables, who are below the spirit's feet. The very name of this caste hints at the underlying principle of hierarchy, namely purity or impurity. Moreover, castes are also linked to certain professions according to their respective prestige. Hence, a person's status or caste can be derived from their degree of purity and their socio-economic function. *Brahmans* usually work as priests, while *Kshatriyas* are meant to be warriors, *Vaishyas* are typically merchants and *Shudras* act as artisans. Untouchables are left with the most despicable and unclean jobs, such as scavenging, meat cutting or leather work, which are condemned in Hindu culture, as the cow is regarded as a sacred animal (Jaffrelot 250). This original classification of castes is only effectively applicable for *Brahmans*, as all other castes are locally divided into numerous differing sub-castes or *jatis* (Tenhunen and Säävälä 34). As one is born into a caste without the possibility for change during one's lifetime, a further structuring principle is endogamy, which means that marriages only take place within one caste. This practice is widely spread in India and taken for granted by the majority of young people with a few exceptions in urban areas (Adeney and Wyatt 103ff.).

Although the significance of the caste system has experienced a remarkable transformation since the time of India's independence, it remains, especially in rural India, the primary source for identification and an important means of economic and social regulation (Tenhunen and Säävälä 37; Adeney and Wyatt 103). Despite the legal prohibition of discrimination on the basis of caste by the Constitution of India, one's socio-economic status is still widely defined by caste. Principally, in Indian villages the Untouchables, or *Dalits* as they prefer to be called, are forced to live in separate hamlets

with their own temples and wells, in order to avoid contamination of the rest of the village (Tenhunen and Säävälä 40f.; Jaffrelot 249). Apart from this residential segregation, their caste membership also imposes economic restrictions on them, as they are forced to do menial work, which is only poorly paid (Adeney and Wyatt 108).

In the 1990s, there were efforts to promote political participation of SCs (former Untouchables) and OBCs (Other Backward Castes), a category that had been created in order to support other disadvantaged castes, which did not bear the label of Untouchability. Since 2008, the implementation of the so-called Mandal Report does not only guarantee 27 per cent of civil service posts to the lowest castes, the same quota also applies to universities and other public institutions of higher education (Jaffrelot 257f.) These measures of compensatory discrimination, however, have stimulated caste wars and strong disagreements within Indian society because members of higher castes feel equally discriminated (Sharma 87f.). Nevertheless, these and other developments, such as Sanskritization, which refers to the imitation of upper-caste behaviour by lower castes, have led to social changes which resulted in the emergence of a growing Indian middle class among the lower castes (Tenhunen and Säävälä 40; Adeney and Wyatt 108). In general, caste does not only mean discrimination and differentiation, but also unification within the members of one particular caste group. Similarly, caste groups have developed into powerful interest groups that have also gained significant political importance. A simultaneous development was the *Dalits*' increasing political activity and their electoral importance, due to their large numbers (Jaffrelot 258ff.).

Moving beyond the caste hierarchy, the following sub-chapter focuses on the issue of class in Indian society, as these two terms are closely related. However, the terms 'caste' and 'class' are by no means synonymous.

2.2.3 The Issue of 'Class' in Indian Society

Class is usually defined by economic status and it is a decisive factor for identity formation. In India, however, there are various forms of identity that are associated with religion, caste, language and ethnicity, which are frequently more important than class. As class becomes an increasingly powerful identity marker due to economic and social changes, class and caste are often closely interconnected and reflected by each other (Adeney and Wyatt 111f.).

India's pro-capitalist and neoliberal ideology, which was, ironically, first promoted by the socialist prime minister Indira Gandhi, catalyses rural-urban and rich-poor divides. These growing inequalities are further reinforced by the Indian state's selective support. Hence, increasing public and private investments have been made in promising areas, such as computer industry, while agriculture has been widely disregarded. Simultaneously, the former development has led to an upsurge of an urban middle class (Kohli and Singh 9f.). This new middle class is characterized by its proficient command of the English language that differentiates it from other influential groups of Indian society. The origins of this development lie in the colonial period, when the British fostered higher education in order to obtain staff for the colonial bureaucracy. An influential sub-group of the urban capitalist class is the industrial bourgeoisie, which is rather small in numbers and distinguished by the prevalence of family-owned businesses. A further differentiation can be drawn between the national bourgeoisie and regional capitalists, who operate on a geographically more limited scale with their predominately family-run enterprises. The rural capital class, on the other hand, is mainly comprised by owner-managers of large farms, who obtain considerable local influence with which they frequently bend labour laws and ensure low wages. Moreover, members of the rural upper class can afford to hire labourers and their main sources of income are high interests from the money they lend to other villagers and the renting out of fields (Adeney and Wyatt 112ff.). In comparison to the new urban middle class, the rural middle class is financially notably disadvantaged. However, the growing rural middle class typically owns small farms and obtains a secure income. Several of these farmers have risen from lower castes, thanks to social mobility that was fostered by government initiatives and financial support. The fact that this class is very numerous increases the importance of its political lobby, which effectively influences governmental policies on agricultural subsidies. The base of the Indian class pyramid is formed by the large group of landless labourers, who only possess marginal holdings, which are often insufficient to guarantee a living for a single family. Therefore, members of this class often live under circumstances of extreme poverty in a very vulnerable position. Frequently, they can only rely on a very limited amount of resources and are, therefore, tremendously affected by poor harvests (Adeney and Wyatt 115ff.).

The rich-poor divide in India is partly reflected by the differences in urban and rural areas. Similarly, statistics suggest that the number of people living in absolute poverty is

higher in rural than in urban India. Moreover, there are considerable differences between North and South India, with higher population growth rates and consequently, greater poverty in the northern states (Sims 155ff.). Before continuing the discussion about poverty, the question about a definition of poverty arises. Common economic statistics, such as the GDP, seem little feasible for measuring the economic status of Indian citizens, as the recent economic growth did not translate into improved living conditions of the poor masses. Therefore, a different measure, such as the HDI (Human Development Index) that also takes life expectancy and level of education into account, seems far more appropriate. In 2011, India's HDI only occupied rank 134 among the 187 participating countries (Tenhunen and Säävälä 118). As many of India's poor frequently rely on the support of family and other social networks in cases of immediate crisis, an alternative definition of poverty is often related with the absence of family and friends (Sims 166). In any case, poverty is associated with a discourse about inequity, in other words the "relationship between the haves and the have-nots" (Tenhunen and Säävälä 117). This binary relationship between the economically privileged *Light India* and the disadvantaged *Dark India* is an important topic in *The White Tiger*. According to Sims, India has the world's largest poor population, and there remain significant gaps in its population's welfare (165).

While poverty in urban centres is predominately reflected in the poor living conditions of numerous slums, rural poverty is mainly caused by the seasonal character of agricultural economy. India's rural poor are mostly hired on a daily basis, but due to an oversupply of workforce and the limited demand for labour during agricultural low season, the rural working class cannot rely on a steady income. Moreover, the daily wages are not sufficient to save for seasonal shortages (Tenhunen and Säävälä 121). Thus, one of the most terrible manifestations of Indian poverty, which is especially prevalent in rural areas, is child malnutrition (Sims 165f.). As a growing number of people try to escape this vicious circle, a trend towards urbanization can be observed, which will most likely alter the profile of poverty in India (Tenhunen and Säävälä 122).

Urbanization of the rural poor automatically increases the demand for jobs for unqualified employees. Therefore, the new urban middle class usually hires domestic servants whom they often accuse of greediness and unreliability (Tenhunen and Säävälä 123). Interestingly, the Indian middle class is a highly diverse group with quite different connotations to the Western middle class. Members of the Indian middle class define

their status by referring to education. Moreover, they tend to adopt Western attitudes as far as consumerism is concerned, but simultaneously ignore Western ideas of social equality and justice (Tenhunen and Säävälä 135ff.). According to Tenhunen and Säävälä, 'Westernization' is associated with "efficiency, hygiene and affluence, but also with selfishness, immorality and a mercenary mentality" (138). People of the middle class further believe that the poor 'are used' to their miserable living conditions and they frequently refer to prevailing Hindu beliefs, such as *karma* and *dharma*, to justify their own privileges (Tenhunen and Säävälä 138). Similar ideas and concepts also appear in *The White Tiger* and thus, will be treated in more detail in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Various scholarly debates have been concerned with the ideological reasons for the persistence of inequality in Indian society. The question why the masses of the poor, who clearly dominate in numbers, have not rebelled against the highly hierarchical social order was, for example, explained with the Hindu concept of *karma*. The idea of reincarnation and 'deserved' social status, however, tends to be more prevalent as a justification among the higher classes. Another possible explanation that appears in *The White Tiger* refers to the significance of family networks. According to the novel's concept of poverty, the deprived do not rebel because disobedience to their masters would not only cause their own punishment, but also suffering for their families (Tenhunen and Säävälä 122f.). At the political level, there have been various government actions aiming at the reduction of poverty since Indira Gandhi's premiership. Her famous 1971 election slogan '*Garibi hatao*' (Beat Poverty) and several succeeding programmes promised to reduce rural poverty. They were predominately concerned with the compensation of agricultural labourers' seasonal employment and often followed the 'food for work' principle. However, until the present day no substantial eradication of poverty could be achieved. This is partly due to misuse of governmental funds and corruption. One example of such corrupt practices is the implementation of middle-men, who take possession of subsidies and force the poor into their dependence (Rothermund 214ff.).

2.2.4 Gender Concerns

India's patriarchal society has put women in the disadvantaged position that they have held throughout India's history. Until today there continue to remain considerable degrees of gender inequality and discrimination against women, which are partly due to

India's conservative society and the resulting gender-specific roles (Adeney and Wyatt 118).

Although discriminating traditions, such as dowry payments³, *sati*⁴ and female infanticide have already been criticized since colonial times, these practices could not be successfully abolished. On the contrary, these and other high-caste habits were imitated throughout all castes and have become even more widespread during the 20th century. Since foetal sex determination is possible, even though illegal since 1994, not only female infanticide, but also the abortion of female foetuses in order to avoid high dowry payments has increased (Stein 395ff.). Moreover, killings to avoid dowry, whereby women are soaked in kerosene and set on fire, still occur in present-day India. Many women also commit suicide in order to prevent their families from the humiliation of not being able to pay dowry (Adeney and Wyatt 119f.). Not even the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 resulted in the desired changes, and the dowry difficulty still remains a serious problem, predominantly in rural India (Stein 398). Similarly, statistics have shown unnatural ratios of sexes in recent population censuses (Robb 243). Apart from that, illiteracy is one of the major issues as far as gender inequality is concerned in India. Although the female literacy rate has risen due to general improvements in the educational system, it still remains far below the male rate with 75.3 per cent as opposed to 53.7 per cent in 2001 (Adeney and Wyatt 121). Another persisting problem as far as women's rights are concerned is the remarriage of widows. While Muslim widows are generally encouraged to remarry, strict Hindu traditionalism forbids a widow to marry again after her husband's death, which often leaves her economically dependent on her family in-law (Iyer 52; Robb 238). Consequently, they frequently suffer from ill-treatment and discrimination by their in-laws, as they are considered an unnecessary burden (Robb 238f.). An alternative 'solution' of the problem concerning the widows' economic dependence is the practice of forcing them to join an *ashram*. This custom, however, is not only common in poorer families, but also amongst the members of the middle class (Young 203). According to Young, "an ashram can be defined as a community formed primarily for the spiritual upliftment of its members, often headed by a religious leader or mystic" (208). Initially, the widows are taken to the *ashram* to pray for their deceased husbands, but in many cases they are obliged to stay there (Young 203).

³ Substantial gifts or payments by the bride's parents to the groom's family (Adeney and Wyatt 119).

⁴ "The ritual immolation of a wife on her husband's funeral pyre" (E.B.O. s.v. "Sati").

Generally, women are economically disadvantaged because longstanding traditions and gender roles pressure them to take charge of less prestigious tasks, such as domestic work. As they are often forced to do menial work for which they only receive a small income, they have to face problems concerning childcare (Adeney and Wyatt 121f.). Interestingly enough, in some lower castes women may obtain a powerful position within their families. As they manage the household and are in charge of the shopping, the men of these families usually pass all their money to the oldest woman of the household (Tenhunen and Säävälä 38). This practice is also addressed in *The White Tiger*, which is another indication of the protagonist's low caste status.

One of the major forces in the feminist struggle for equality was the All India Women's Conference, which was founded in 1926. However, it was not until the 1970s that issues of child marriage, dowry, sexual harassment, rape and domestic violence were addressed publicly by a strong Indian feminist movement (Stein 396ff.). Even Mahatma Gandhi, as the first initiator of the all-Indian equality, held a sexist view and regarded women's roles merely as "mothers and supporters of men" (Robb 242). The foundation of the National Commission for Women in 1992 has contributed significantly to the recognition of gender inequality. However, despite a number of state policies and initiatives to promote equality, the prevailing state discourse remains rather conservative and reinforces discriminating gender roles. Moreover, the existence of differing legal codes according to an individual's religion poses potential difficulties as far as women's rights are concerned. As already mentioned earlier, Muslim women are, for example, excluded from the Hindu women's right of divorce (Adeney and Wyatt 123f.).

2.2.5 *The Indian Welfare State*

Since the infrastructure of rural healthcare and public education as aspects of the Indian welfare state are addressed in *The White Tiger*, it seems essential to briefly discuss these issues in the present chapter of this thesis.

Independent India's recent governments have recognized the importance of education for a modern industrialized state as a prerequisite for socio-economic development. Therefore, "the provision of *free and compulsory elementary education* for all children up to the age of 14 years" is defined in Article 45 of the Constitution of Free India (Chauhan 228). Hence, recent social changes have created opportunities for all children,

including those of the lowest rural class, to attend school and obtain a basic education. However, not all of the lower class families can afford to send their children to school, as they depend on the extra income or their children's workforce (Adeney and Wyatt 117). In the early years of independent India, the programme of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) was launched in order to ensure an elementary education of eight years for all Indian children. For this purpose, the educational infrastructure of material and human resources was expanded and the enrolment-ratio increased (Chauhan 228). Despite these efforts, the overall goal of full literacy has not been achieved until the present day and India still has a long way to go until nationwide school education will finally be reality. The high drop-out rates as well as questionable teaching methods, such as an emphasis on rote learning, are only two obstacles in this process (Tenhunen and Säävälä 129ff.). Alarmingly high drop-out rates are observed amongst girls and in the rural areas of northern India. Further persisting problems in rural government schools are the inadequate teacher-pupil ratio and the poor or non-existing teacher education. Moreover, the mediocre quality of Indian education is closely linked to the substandard physical facilities (Chauhan 237ff.). Frequently, there is no or a delayed supply of teaching materials, and a lack of teacher supervision and evaluation enables misuse of resources and governmental funds (Chauhan 230). Although there are private English-language schools, which offer a higher standard of education, money is not the only prerequisite to enter such a school. Children from lower classes or castes often lack the cultural capital, such as adequate forms of speech, in order to enter private institutions (Tenhunen and Säävälä 130). A revolutionary nationwide governmental programme was launched in 2004 with the provision of a free midday-meal for every pupil of an Indian government-run school. Although the meals are simple, their impact is far-reaching, as it has reduced the overall drop-out rate, improved the children's nutritional status and increased their cognitive potential. Forerunners of this highly successful midday-meal scheme were already implemented as early as the 1980s in a number of Indian states (Tenhunen and Säävälä 132ff.).

Apart from education, also the status of health and healthcare play important roles as far as the modernization of a nation is concerned. Since the colonial period, the hegemony of Western medicine in India prevails, which has strongly suppressed indigenous systems of medicine (Nagla 173). However, this is not to say that India possesses a healthcare system similar to Western standards. On the contrary, absenteeism is a common problem in public health facilities, and there are great inequalities in the access

to medical care. Additionally, the low quality of the health services provided is partly due to the poorly qualified personnel, and the prevalence of substandard healthcare facilities in rural India contributes to the bigger picture of India's rural-urban divide (Nagla 177). In general, the inadequate rural infrastructure is not due to a lack of qualified staff, but to the absence of coordination and planning as the vast majority of doctors stay in the cities (Nath 1265ff.). Common shortcomings of the Indian healthcare system are not only problems concerning infrastructure and transport, but also the absence of staff during working hours and, as so often, corruption. For example, patients are frequently forced to bribe their doctors in order to get adequate treatments. Due to the poor standard and the scarcity of government hospitals in rural areas, the private healthcare market has been expanded in recent years, but as the costs of private treatments are high, only few people can afford them. Moreover, such private providers are often unqualified medical practitioners (Nagla 182f.).

2.2.6 Doing Business in India: Entrepreneurship and Corruption

As *The White Tiger's* entire story is constructed around Balram Halwai's success as an Indian entrepreneur, the topics of corruption and entrepreneurship are vital aspects of the Indian reality that feature in the novel. Therefore, both issues are briefly outlined and presented here.

In the history chapter of this thesis, the origins of Indian entrepreneurial activities are attributed to Rajiv Gandhi's premiership, as he launched economic policies to promote Indian entrepreneurial initiative. In general, the term 'entrepreneur' is a French loanword that derives from the verb *entreprendre*, which means 'to undertake'. Accordingly, Santhi and Rajesh Kumar define an entrepreneur as someone "who undertakes innovations, finance and business acumen in an effort to transform [them] into economic goods" (14). The authors further list a number of qualities that characterize entrepreneurs and are, as will be illustrated later, also distinctive of Balram Halwai. First and foremost, they claim that entrepreneurship is a mind-set rather than any theoretical or technical knowledge acquired at university. This mind-set denotes an ambitious innovator who thinks that he/she can improve existing services or products and is passionate enough to take necessary risks. Apart from a strong belief in him- or herself, good negotiation skills and a willingness to change are further essential characteristics of an entrepreneur. In general terms, an entrepreneur is someone who rejects to work for someone else and rather sells their innovative idea (Santhi and

Rajesh Kumar 14f.). The cultural context of India poses special challenges for entrepreneurs, such as the importance of family and tradition. Usually, men are expected to follow their fathers' footpaths and engage in the family business. Therefore, it is often a difficult task for innovative Indians to persuade their families of the promising potential of the business of their choice. Moreover, a number of experts tend to think that, due to the size of India's population, there is a vast potential of creativity and talent (Santhi and Rajesh Kumar 15). As will be illustrated by the story of Balram, Indian entrepreneurs are often forced to bribe officials and engage in corrupt practices as necessary means for doing business (Jalan 141).

According to Corbridge, "corruption is usually defined as the abuse of public office or entrusted power for private gain" and the author further distinguishes between bureaucratic and political corruption (222). The former is caused by India's administrative system, in which the public depends on the goodwill of the civil service in order to get permissions and licenses for the most ordinary things, such as driving licences and registrations of land. Moreover, bribes are paid on a regular basis to municipalities, telephone or electricity companies for basic services that are necessary for the continuation of ordinary life (Jalan 138f.). Political corruption, on the other hand, takes place on local as well as on state levels and describes payments for representatives and bureaucrats in return for certain favours (Corbridge 224). Further, this type of corruption is often closely linked to other public institutions, as for instance legislatures, judiciary and media (Jalan 119).

Driving factors for various types of corruption are, on the one hand, considerably low wages of the majority of public officials, who seek personal enrichment through bribes and, on the other hand, the scarcity of basic services, such as power supply, general infrastructure, places in higher education and middle-class housing (Corbridge 224f.). Moreover, corruption is widely accepted as an essential element of India's democracy, and as the investigations of most cases of corruption remain incomplete and sanctions stay low, there is little possibility for change (Jalan 118; 129). Nevertheless, experts tend to think that corruption hinders economic growth, as it affects investment choices and involves the illegal transfer of governmental funds from one party to another (Jalan 121). In general, corruption is about "power and powerlessness" (Corbridge 227) and as such, the lowest layer of society is worst affected. The poor depend on public agencies for essential services, such as healthcare, but as they are often unable to pay bribes, they

are even denied vital treatments. Consequently, corruption in India further amplifies the inequality of society (Jalan 123).

Although all governments of independent India have taken measures against corruption, the administrative system has, paradoxically, become even more corrupt. Due to exhaustive regulations and controls of government approvals and services, there are tremendous delays in decision-making processes. This in return has increased payments of the so-called 'speed money' for accelerating bureaucratic processes (Jalan 126f.). The only effective measure to reduce corruption levels seems to be transparency of decision-making processes and financial matters (Jalan 138). Similarly, the national Right to Information Act was passed in 2005. On the basis of this act, citizens are entitled to access information about actual spending of governmental funds (Corbridge 228). Nevertheless, corruption and bribery still remain common practices in the Indian bureaucracy, its politics, public services and business transactions. *The White Tiger* illustrates two kinds of corruption: voluntary payments and corruption as theft, both of which will be analysed in greater detail in succeeding chapters of this thesis (Corbridge 223). The former is evident in the bribes that Balram's employers pay to influential politicians in Delhi, while the latter occurs during Balram's childhood, when the school teacher misuses governmental money intended for the pupils for his own benefit.

3. Literary Contextualization

3.1 The Author

Aravind Adiga was born in 1974 in the south-Indian town of Madras (today's Chennai) as the son of a middle-class family. At the age of sixteen, after his mother's death, his family moved to Australia. After finishing high-school in Australia, he was educated at Columbia and Oxford universities and started a career as a journalist, writing, for example, for the *Time* magazine, the *Financial Times*, *The Independent* and *The Sunday Times* (Adiga 277; *The Man Booker Prize*). For his debut novel *The White Tiger*, he received the 2008 Man Booker Prize, which aligns him with Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie, who are the only other Indian writers awarded with the Man Booker Prize (Mayer). Currently he lives in Mumbai, where he has published two subsequent works, *Between Assassinations* (2008) and *Last Man in Tower* (2011) (*The Man Booker Prize*).

3.2 The Plot

The White Tiger narrates the success story of Balram Halwai, who manages to escape from his low-caste background in the *India of Darkness* to the realm of business in the *India of Light*. Over the course of seven nights, the protagonist exemplifies his life as the rise of the typical Indian entrepreneur in letters to the Chinese premier Wen Jiabao. Balram is born in the village of Laxmangarh, in rural Rajasthan, as the son of a rickshaw puller into a traditional Indian family. Although he is a smart child and enjoys studying, he is forced to leave school and work in a tea shop in order to support his family's income. Thanks to his strong will and his ambitious character, he manages to escape from his rural background, learns how to drive and finds a job as a driver for one of Laxmangarh's landowning families. He follows his new boss, Ashok, to New Delhi, where he continuously learns about the functioning of the capitalist *Shining India* and gradually adapts to his new environment. In New Delhi, he is introduced to a world of corruption, bribery and fraud. As he is made responsible for a car accident in which Ashok's wife killed a child, Balram is finally determined to change the status quo and the story culminates in Balram brutally killing Ashok. Thereafter, Balram adopts Ashok's identity, steals his money and flees to the city of Bangalore, where he continues to live incognito as an entrepreneur, founding his own taxi business. Although his escape from the depressing environment of *Dark India* involved highly criminal

behaviour and has almost certainly cost the lives of his family, Balram does not regret his decisions because he thinks that no one deserves to live the life of a servant under inhuman circumstances.

3.3 Critical Assessment of the Novel within the Indian English Literary Canon

The White Tiger, the Booker prize-winning novel 2008, has received tremendous attention in literary circles and is known as one of the most powerful recently published books in the Indian English literary canon. As such, a considerable number of scholars dedicated their research interest to the authenticity value of the novel's fictional setting and its degree of resemblance to India's present-day reality. In general, some scholars seem to perceive Adiga's work as generalizing, stereotypical and exaggerated, while others praise its accurate and graphic depiction of Indian society.

Khan, a rather sceptical reviewer of the novel, accuses Adiga of trying to please his Western readership. Khan further argues that the author paints a very one-sided picture of India for this purpose, exclusively foregrounding *Dark India* with its poverty, underdevelopment and slums (Khan 93f.). To support his argumentation, Khan builds on and refers to a number of Indian literary critics, for example Murari and others, who claim that Adiga presents India from a very personal angle depicting only a limited aspect of their nation. Hence, Khan concludes that the novel lacks authenticity (92ff.), as it is "selling poverty in the world market" without presenting the modern *Shining India* (94). Finally, he insists that Indian English writing can never be considered as authentic Indian literature because it presents "India in the wishful thinking of the average westerner" (Khan 97). Mendes argues on similar terms as far as the *Dark Turn* in Indian English writing is concerned, underlining the assumption that many Indian English writers allude to the literary trope of *Dark India* and thus foreground a negative depiction of their nation (276f.). However, Mendes also shows that Adiga deliberately constructed an inauthentic protagonist in a likewise inauthentic environment in order to question the reoccurring image of *Exotic India* (284f.). Additionally, Mendes links the concept of authenticity to the idea of 'real' Indianness and points at the difficulty of defining the same (285f.). Moreover, Mendes demonstrates that although Adiga, as an educated author, tries to lend his voice to the Indian underclass, this does not result in "aping the voice of an imaginary subaltern" (287). Rather, Mendes shows that Adiga constructs an ironic representation of his protagonist against a deliberately inauthentic background and therefore, deconstructs the notion of authenticity by emphasising that

The White Tiger remains a work of fiction (287f.). Nevertheless, it is made clear that Adiga based his story on his own real experiences in contemporary India as a resident of Mumbai (Mendes 288f.). Furthermore, Anwer affirms that it was not Adiga's aim to ventriloquize the subaltern's voice, but to "divulge the ugly truths" of Indian society (307). Drawing on Spivak's theory, Anwer continues by stressing Adiga's aim to 're-present' (*darstellen*) India's poor, rather than to 'represent' (*vertreten*) them. According to Anwer, one day the subaltern will be able to write for and re-present themselves (308). Interestingly, Anwer further remarks that Balram, the narrator, is not a real subaltern voice that articulates his thoughts, but rather an Indian entrepreneur who has been able to escape from the vicious circle of poverty. Accordingly, "Balram's ex-subalterneity acts as a buffer that protects Adiga from taking full responsibility for all that he says" (Anwer 309). Concerning the issue of authenticity, Walther observes that the story's narrator is presented as a white tiger, which characterizes the novel as some form of fable or morality tale. This description of Balram as the white tiger "[justifies] the perceived authenticity of his voice" to a certain extent (Walther 582). Walther further elaborates on the irony that Adiga creates by the tiger's fabular narration. With this narrating mode, the author indicates his awareness of the problematic claim for authenticity, while simultaneously perceiving the need "to expose the contemporary social and economic injustice" (Walther 591).

Similar to Mendes, also Haldar discusses the accusations against Adiga of selling Indian poverty to Western readers and of presenting an inauthentic picture of the nation (66f.). Haldar likewise rejects these accusations and points out that Adiga does reveal Indian reality by, for example, breaking the myth of the poor but honest Indian people (74f.). According to Haldar, the protagonist's portrayal as a typical middle class member criticizes the former's double standards of despising the members of the upper class, on the one hand, and of aspiring to their lifestyle, on the other hand (77f.). As justification for his arguments, Haldar refers to an interview with Adiga where the author affirms that his novel is not a critique of his country, but rather intended to serve as an impetus for self-realization (82). Al-Dagamseh argues on similar terms and considers narratives in general, and thus also *The White Tiger*, "as historical documents which re-present the socioeconomic and political consciousness" (2). Consequently, Al-Dagamseh affirms the novel's importance of exposing *Shining India's* inequalities and selective exclusion (3f.). Similarly, Singh postulates that Adiga has been attacked by Indian scholars for his social criticism because they fear that the novel reveals an abundance of negative

aspects of their nation (114). Anwer, as another scholar who does not question the novel's authenticity, rejects Khan's and Murari's critical perception as mere vanity. He notes that Adiga's straightforward account of India's poverty "hurts the neoliberal myth of *Shining India*" and thus, harms the national elite's self-image (Anwer 306).

As one of the negative aspects portrayed by Adiga, poverty is a central theme in *The White Tiger*. Therefore, it was the author's intention, according to Korte, to grant the subaltern opportunities to speak (294f.). Hence, Korte links her interpretation of the novel to Spivak's ideas and positions it within the framework of postcolonialism. Further, she indicates that Adiga does not portray the canonical *Dark India* with its stereotypical representations of poverty, as the story takes place in a globalized India with a booming economy. The issue of poverty undoubtedly persists in the setting of the novel, but the story's events also provide opportunities to escape from poverty and inequality. Consequently, Korte confirms that Adiga treats poverty in a non-generalized way and does not follow the cliché-ridden 'from-rags-to-riches'⁵ pattern (296f.). Moreover, Korte also rejects the critique of a number of Indian scholars who accuse Adiga of the creation of an inauthentic protagonist, who shows a considerable degree of sophisticated language use despite his humble origins (298). As opposed to her Indian colleagues, Korte does not detect a contradiction between the protagonist's social background and his language use. She rather concurs with Mendes and suggests that Adiga intentionally constructed his protagonist in an atypical way. In Korte's view, it was Adiga's intention to raise the socially privileged Indian readers' awareness of the poverty in their own country (304f.). Korte's arguments are supported by Tandon, who affirms that Adiga illustrates a highly realistic picture of poverty in India, which correlates with Indian reality. Tandon indicates that the novel raises important social issues by portraying numerous aspects of social inequality and discrimination, such as religion or social class (57f.). Irrespective of any discussions about authenticity, Anwer, like Korte, concentrates on Adiga's intended readership and maintains that the novel is aimed at an educated Indian readership as a mirror for the privileged middle class that seems to be unaware of Indian society's inequity (Anwer 307). Likewise, Anwer interprets the story as a warning to the Indian English-literature bourgeois reader, as far as the problematic servant-master system is concerned. Accordingly, Balram's life serves as an exaggerated and ironic example of what might happen if servants are not

⁵ Used to describe a person's rise from a state of extreme poverty to one of great wealth (*Oxford Dictionaries* s.v. "Rags to Riches").

treated with a minimum of respect, and the book thus “becomes almost a treatise of management gurudom” (311f.). Detmers, on the other hand, hypothesizes that Balram’s character “may not serve as a model for identification”, due to his exaggerated and ironic representation. Nevertheless, she underscores the interpretation of the novel as an “inducement [...] to rethink globalized, freelance capitalism” (Detmers 544). Lau and Mendes postulate that the authenticity issue in IWE (Indian Writing in English) texts is discussed to such an extent because these writings are considered to contain truth claims. However, Lau and Mendes correctly illustrate the selectiveness and subjectivity of all kinds of representations (140f.). Nevertheless, they concur with Korte, Tandon and Anwer as far as IWE’s responsibility to highlight darker aspects of Indian society is concerned. The authors also demonstrate that it is simultaneously important to refrain from exploiting the issue of poverty and authenticity (Lau and Mendes 142). Al-Dagamseh notes that Adiga shows “another reality” of India far from modernity, development and progress that was partly caused by the neoliberal reforms in the 1990s (8). According to Al-Dagamseh, Adiga illustrates and likewise criticizes “the marginalizing nature of the neoliberal capitalist system” by exposing the uneven geographical development of health and educational institutions in India (6f.).

Although a number of critical voices accuse Adiga of the creation of an inauthentic protagonist in an exaggerated and highly stereotypical setting, the majority of critics consider his work as a valuable contribution to the canon of Indian English literature. Similar to these scholars, also Goh refers to the *Dark Turn* in Indian literature, in which ‘Darkness’ can be seen “as a symbol of India’s social condition” (333). Hence, Goh describes how Adiga’s protagonist could be “India’s Everyman” who shows “deep moral malaise which lies at the heart of modern India” (333f.). Furthermore, he observes that the novel does not only criticize India’s tremendous poverty, but it also questions other aspects of Indian society, such as Hinduism with its caste system, or the corrupt political system (334ff.). According to Goh, *The White Tiger* is a realistic account of India’s society, which includes an awareness of its prevailing problems. This pessimistic portrayal of Indian society is underscored by Suneetha, who illustrates more aspects which are presented with a critical stance in the novel, such as the education system, or the public health system (168 ff.). Suneetha concludes that the novel presents “an authentic view of contemporary India” including urban, as well as, rural Indian life (174). Thus, it can be inferred that Adiga’s main achievement lies in the unvarnished portrayal of India’s social issues, as far as poverty, inequality, and class struggle are

concerned. While it can be argued that the novel concentrates on these ‘dark’ aspects of India and does not elaborate on its recent economic boom correlating with improvements of urban life, Suneetha, Goh, Korte and others correctly highlight the significance of such an awareness-raising narrative, which appears to outweigh the claim for its absolute truth value. Khor similarly affirms the novel’s social and ideological importance, but rather concentrates her analysis on possible reasons for the protagonist’s actions. She shows that Adiga illustrates an aspect of Indian society, where people are considered as goods or services, rather than human beings (58). Likewise, Al-Dagamseh underscores that the neo-liberal structures portrayed in *The White Tiger* “prioritize profits over human lives” (8).

To sum up, *The White Tiger* has generated a large body of conflicting critiques and interpretations both inside and outside India, and it can, undoubtedly, be considered as one of the central works in contemporary Indian English writing. The author’s controversial approach and his socially critical representation of Indian society have provoked an outcry, especially among Indian critics. The majority of western scholars, as well as a considerable number of Indian academics, however, analysed the novel on different terms, appreciating its realistic account of India’s population. Although it might be comprehensible that Indian scholars, such as Khan, dismiss Adiga’s work as unilateral and limited for possible patriotic reasons, the novel’s socio-critical importance cannot be denied. Essentially, *The White Tiger* remains a work of fiction and as such, it does not aspire to provide an accurate portrayal of reality, irrespective of the validity of its socio-critical and realistic claims.

4. The Theoretical Framework: Postcolonial Studies

India's colonial past, which was characterized by political and economic dependence from its mother country, England, suggests postcolonialism as a possible framework for the analysis of *The White Tiger*. Although the following reading will not exclusively focus on postcolonial studies, a brief overview of relevant theories and concepts appears helpful at this stage.

Postcolonial criticism emerged in the middle of the twentieth century when the majority of European-ruled colonial countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America were struggling to reach independence (Leitch et al. s.v. "Homi K. Bhabha"). In general, postcolonialism refers to a worldview that explains present conditions of wealth and poverty, or development and underdevelopment in terms of colonial conquest and domination. According to this theory, the free-market ideology combined with unregulated capitalist growth is considered as the source of the world's economic inequity (Krishna 3f.). Closely interconnected with this free-market economy is the process of globalization, which aligns itself with a time-space compression. Thus, the increase in international trade has been accompanied by an acceleration of communications and transportation (Krishna 2). In general, postcolonialism is critical of the "domination of the West over the world in realms of knowledge production, and culture" (Krishna 4). This so-called Eurocentrism is heavily opposed by postcolonialism, which calls for terminating economic domination by means of cultural decolonialization. Hence, 'postcolonialism' stands for a broad perspective in this thesis, while the terms of 'postcolonial theory' and 'postcolonial studies' are used to refer to authors and writings based on postcolonial thinking. According to *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*,

postcolonialism refers to a historical phase undergone by many of the world's countries after the decline of the European empires by the mid-twentieth century. Following the dismantling of the empires, the people of many Asian, African, and Caribbean states were left to restore their precolonial culture, assess the cultural, linguistic, legal, and economic effects of colonial rule, and create new governments and national identities. Postcolonial literature [...] centers on the conflicts and contradictions, as well as the advantages and sense of liberation, that accompany life as an individual in a postcolonial state. (Childers and Hentzi)

Frantz Fanon, a francophone pioneer in postcolonial studies, published his first book *Black Skin, White Masks* in 1952, years before the term postcolonialism as such was introduced into the academic discourse (Döring 51). Fanon concentrates his work on the

anticolonial struggle in Africa, in which he assigns a vital role to the African intellectuals. As a Marxist thinker, Fanon considers the “social, economic and political oppression in the third world [...] as a matter of class” and criticizes the mere replacement of the white colonial bourgeois leaders with a black African postcolonial bourgeois. The latter imitate their Western models and will therefore never be able to establish new postcolonial societies (Leitch et al. s.v. “Frantz Fanon”). In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon laments the laziness of the educated middle class and its unpreparedness to lead the new nation-state in its emancipating struggle (119). He further sees the bourgeois as “the tool of capitalism” that merely transforms colonial politics into a form of neo-colonialism (Fanon 120f.). In 1961, Fanon already predicts the incapability of the national middle class to implement humanist practices and policies, despite their affirmation of certain democratic ideas (131). Hence, he regards “[c]losing the road to the national bourgeoisie” as the only means of preventing a nation’s moral decline and corruption, as the middle class is a “direct product of [...] the economic conditions” (Fanon 142f.).

According to Fanon, the colonial world is separated along the lines of Western values into two different entities: the settler’s town and the native town. The two zones are clearly opposed to each other and no conciliation seems possible (Fanon 29f.). The settler’s town is described as “strongly-built [...], all made of stone and steel [...] [and] brightly-lit” (Fanon 30). The native town, on the other hand, “is a hungry town, [...] a crouching village, a town on its knees” (Fanon 30). Consequently, he calls the colonial world with these binary oppositions “a Manichaeian world”⁶, in which the native is perceived in a highly pejorative way. The Manichaeian discourse even dehumanizes the natives and transforms them into animals by describing them in zoological terms (Fanon 31f.). However, for Fanon there is still hope and a way of escape for the native, who is aware of the Manichean discourse “and it is precisely at the moment he realizes his humanity that he begins to sharpen the weapons with which he will secure his victory” (33).

Another important concept which Fanon introduced in the postcolonial discourse is the idea of ‘white masks’. The adoption of a white mask by colonized people describes their conformation to Western values and ways of behaviour. Although this imitation of

⁶ The term ‘Manichaeian’ derives from Manichaeism, which was “a dualistic religious system [...] founded in Persia in the 3rd century [...] and based on a supposed primeval conflict between light and darkness” (*Oxford Dictionaries* s.v. “Manichaeism”).

white culture enables their access to the dominant discourse, it simultaneously devalues and subordinates their own traditions (Wisker 185f.). On the other hand, wearing a white mask also implies undermining colonial authorities; an aspect which Bhabha further elaborates in his theories (Döring 52f.). Thus, Homi K. Bhabha, an India-born postcolonial writer, introduced the term ‘mimicry’ into the colonial discourse describing an “act of reproduction [while simultaneously creating] difference” (Döring 57). He illustrates the concept of mimicry by referring to colonial education in India. Although the anglicized education in colonial India taught the Indians to adopt foreign cultural norms, they could never be ‘real’ English people, but only imitations (Döring 57). Hence, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha 86). As mimicry is always an imperfect imitation and reproduction of colonial power, it challenges the authority of colonial discourse by altering and undermining the dominant structures (Wisker 192). Moreover, Bhabha focuses on ‘hybridity’, i.e. the variability and compositional character of postcolonial subject positions. Thus, he deconstructs the binary oppositions inherent in the postcolonial world based on the dichotomous structure of Western thought. For Bhabha, the distinctions between the oppressor and the oppressed are too limited because there is no unitary or homogenous culture (Leitch et al. s.v. “Homi K. Bhabha”).

At the core of postcolonial studies, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explores the situation of women in postcolonial India by drawing, for example, on the theories of Marxism, feminism and psychoanalysis. As Spivak states that each discourse inevitably excludes certain aspects, she continuously questions her own assumptions by deconstructing her lines of arguments (Leitch et al. s.v. “Gayatri Spivak”). Spivak’s most famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) analyses whether postcolonial studies serve to improve the situation of the suppressed people. Her negative answer to this question paints a highly critical picture of postcolonial societies with very limited possibilities for members of subordinate groups (Wisker 206). In its literal sense, a subaltern is “a person holding a subordinate position, originally a junior officer in the British army” (Leitch et al. s.v. “Gayatri Spivak”). Antonio Gramsci later used the term to refer to groups in society that are subordinated to the control of the ruling classes. Spivak transfers the concept of the subaltern to the marginalized positions of Indian lower caste women. Her pessimistic interpretation of the subalterns’ possibilities derives from the assumption that they were assigned to their position by the elite. Should anyone be able

to escape from their subaltern position, they could never do so by “using the language which itself constructed them as secondary, subordinate” (Wisker 206). Thus, anyone with enough command of sophisticated language to participate in the dominant discourse cannot claim to form part of the subaltern group and hence, is not in the position to speak for them (Wisker 206). Spivak further proposes that intellectuals and scholars merely repeat the silencing that they aim to counteract by trying to give the subaltern a voice. In other words, by representing the oppressed, scholars simultaneously illustrate the subalterns’ need for support and thus, reaffirm their weak position (Leitch et al. s.v. “Gayatri Spivak”). As “[t]he whole world is organized economically, politically, and culturally along the lines of Western discourses”, the only logic consequence is a reinforcement of the marginalization of non-white peoples (Leitch et al. s.v. “Gayatri Spivak”). Nevertheless, Spivak points out that it is crucial to speak *about* people who are not in the position to speak for themselves. It should, however, be avoided to speak *for* others, as this can never be achieved due to each individual’s distinctive subject position (Wisker 204f.).

Having discussed the necessary theoretical concepts, as well as relevant historical and cultural background information, the thesis will now move on to a narratological analysis of *The White Tiger*, which will similarly be discussed from an ethnic and cultural perspective.

5. The Discourse Level

5.1 The Text Type

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is written in the form of an epistolary novel⁷ addressed at the former Chinese premier Wen Jiabao. Although the story takes place in the 21st century, the traditional form of this text type is maintained and written in letters that present the protagonist's subjective point of view. Additionally, the text is a fictional autobiography because Balram narrates his life story in these letters over the course of seven nights. As such, it could also be classified as a *bildungsroman* "which relates the experiences of a youthful protagonist in meeting the challenges of adolescence and early adulthood [...] [and] typically develops themes of innocence [and] self-knowledge" (*Oxford Companion* s.v. "Bildungsroman"). These experiences are inevitably connected to the protagonist's social and economic advancement, which is typical of a 'from-rags-to-riches' story. A further generic classification refers to the novel's highly critical character and thus, defines the text as a social satire. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, a satire is "[a] mode of writing that exposes the failings of individuals, institutions or societies to ridicule and scorn." Undoubtedly, it is exactly this purpose that Adiga pursues in his novel, in which he openly criticizes certain aspects of Indian society.

5.2 Time and Setting

The whole story is set in contemporary India and moves from the rural village of Laxmangarh to the modern and progressive city of Bangalore in the course of its events. Therefore, the plot is placed within the historical and political context as outlined above. Adiga deliberately constructed a binary setting between the *India of Darkness* and the *India of Light*, in order to illustrate the huge inequalities in contemporary Indian society. As has already been discussed earlier, India's vast class divide is predominately reflected in the rural-urban gap. The country's economic growth and expansion, which is considered to surpass the US economy within the next 30 years, mainly takes place in urban centres and thus, only enhances the economic status of a limited group of people. Terms like *Shining India* or *Amazing India* frequently appear in economic as well as political discourses and perfectly embody the image of India as a modern and

⁷ An epistolary novel is told through the medium of letters written by one or more of the characters (*E.B.O.* s.v. "Epistolary Novel").

progressive world nation (Kundu 541f.). Despite these advancements in urban areas, widespread poverty still continues to be a serious problem in rural India. Consequently, the gap between the rural and urban per capita income as well as the respective consumption expenditure has widened alarmingly in recent years (Kundu 553f.). In *The White Tiger*, these social and economic differences are metaphorically expressed by the contrast between 'Darkness' and 'Light', whose inherent ideological and symbolic connotations are quite obvious for the reader. According to the protagonist's point of view, "India is two countries in one: an India of Light and an India of Darkness", which are further associated with different kinds of waters (Adiga 12). The ocean and thus also India's coastal areas are part of the *India of Light*, whereas the *India of Darkness* is characterized by its geographical proximity of the river Ganges (Adiga 12). This categorization is not only due to the fact that the majority of important Indian cities are located close to the ocean (e.g. Mumbai, Madurai or Chennai) or in the south of India (e.g. Hyderabad or Bangalore), whereas the less developed states (e.g. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh or Jharkhand) are in the north at the banks of the Ganges (Kundu 555). Balram's distinction is also connected to the symbolic meaning of the respective waters, according to which the river Ganges is generally associated with death, but also with spiritual purification in Hindu culture. If possible, the traditional burning ritual of a dead person is performed at the banks of the sacred Ganges and if this possibility does not exist, believing Hindus always keep a small container of Ganges water at home (Firth 683). This deadly association with the river Ganges is also underlined by the general symbolic meaning of rivers as the borderline between the world of the living and the dead (Bernstorff s.v. "Fluss"). As opposed to the river's mortal connotations, the ocean is generally associated with challenges and adventures (Schneider s.v. "Meer"). The ocean's apparently infinite vastness could also be connected with an individual's seemingly unlimited possibilities in the 'Light', as opposed to their suppressed and restricted life in the 'Darkness'. This binary representation of the postcolonial world is already mentioned by Fanon, who differentiates between the settler's town and the native town. The former, which is "brightly-lit", as mentioned above, can be compared to Adiga's *India of Light*, while the latter, "the crouching village", can clearly be associated with the *India of Darkness* (Fanon 30).

Laxmangarh, for example, which is the starting point of Balram's story, is a village in the 'Darkness' of rural India. It is described as "a fertile place, full of rice fields and wheat fields and ponds in the middle of those fields choked with lotuses and water

lilies, and water buffaloes wading through the ponds and chewing on the lotuses and lilies” (Adiga 11). This paradisiacal description of rural India clearly refers to the agricultural character of its economy, but the critical reader will also notice the underlying irony. Despite the apparent beauty of rural India, most of its inhabitants live in circumstances of extreme poverty and what seems like paradise on earth at first glance proves to be hell for its inhabitants. Laxmangarh is located in the district of Gaya in the backward state of Bihar and “there is a small branch of the Ganga that flows just outside” the village (Adiga 15). In his ironic depiction of Laxmangarh, the narrator returns to the image of the “typical Indian village paradise” and adds his critique of the government’s empty promises concerning the reduction of poverty (Adiga 16). “Ha! Electricity poles – defunct. Water Tap – broken. Children – too lean and short for their age” (Adiga 16). Moreover, Laxmangarh, as a typical Indian village, is associated with an insufficient infrastructure in aspects, such as health or education. The closest hospital is at the other side of the Ganges, but its standard of medical care has declined to such an extent that the patients are abandoned to their fate without the assistance of nurses or doctors. As far as the limited human and material resources in Laxmangarh’s school are concerned, the narrator ironically refers back to his paradise metaphor and mentions that “[i]f the Indian village is a paradise, then the school is a paradise within the paradise” (Adiga 28). Another ‘dark’ aspect of rural India, which is closely connected to the prevalence of poverty, is its lack of employment. As discussed above, the majority of rural labourers are hired on a daily basis without the guarantee of a stable income (Tenhunen and Säävälä 121). In the novel, Balram also illustrates the daily struggle for employment and mentions the resignation of “tens of thousands of young man [...] that have no job to do today. They know they won’t get any job today. They’ve given up the fight. They’re the smart ones. The stupid ones have gathered in a field in the center of the town” (Adiga 45f.). Yet again, the narrator surprises with his sarcastic tone and his unembellished and sober portrayal of rural reality. In order to escape the vicious circle of poverty, rural male workers tend to migrate to urban areas to find employment (Tenhunen and Säävälä 122). This mainly involuntary practice is also common in Laxmangarh and Balram states that “[a] month before the rains, the men [come] back from Dhanbad and Delhi and Calcutta, leaner, darker, angrier, but with money in their pockets” (Adiga 22).

The White Tiger foregrounds the domination of Laxmangarh’s landlords as one reason for its poverty and unemployment issues. The entire agricultural land, as well as the

river and the roads in and around the village are controlled by four landowning families who “fe[e]d on the village, and everything that [grows] in it, until there [is] nothing left for anyone else to feed on” (Adiga 21). Thus, “the four Animals” (Adiga 21) with their significant local influence personify the rural capital class, which has been described above in the theory chapter of this thesis. In the ‘Darkness’, and hence also in the village of Laxmangarh, the common people live under the oppression of the ruling classes, i.e. the landlords and India’s governing parties. For example, there are no free elections in Laxmangarh and the universal suffrage of the Indian people is just an empty concept of the ‘world’s largest democracy’. Hence, Balram characterizes himself as “India’s most faithful voter, and still [has] not seen the inside of a voting booth” (Adiga 86). It has already been elaborated in considerable detail in the theory chapters of this thesis that official procedures in India are frequently perceived as arbitrary or corrupt and that the right for political freedom is often undermined. Therefore, this discussion will not be further deepened at this point.

The protagonist’s journey from the ‘Darkness’ to the ‘Light’ leads him from Laxmangarh to Dhanbad, which already represents a social advancement compared to rural India. Nevertheless, Dhanbad and similar provincial towns “have the pollution and noise and traffic of a big city – without any hint of the true city’s sense of history, planning, and grandeur (Adiga 44). Moreover, the town is located in the state of Jharkhand, which is one of India’s least developed states, and would certainly be classified as part of the ‘Darkness’ (Kundu 555). In Dhanbad, however, “there [is] money in the air” (Adiga 44) because it has been and continues to be one of India’s largest coal mining towns for over a century (Chatterjee, Tarafder, and Paul 137). For Balram, Dhanbad represents the stepping stone between ‘Darkness’ and ‘Light’, as he overhears a conversation that changes his life at the tea shop where he is employed as a “human spider” (Adiga 44). After this revealing experience, Balram decides to become a driver, learns how to drive a car and is lucky enough to be employed by one of Laxmangarh’s landowning families. According to Sudhir and Katharina Kakar, the relationship to the person in question is often a decisive factor for professional decisions in Indian society (16). Similarly, it is Balram’s origin from Laxmangarh that connects him with the Stork’s family and finally, enables him to escape from the ‘Darkness’.

The novel’s journey continues to India’s capital Delhi, which “is the capital of not one but two countries – two Indias. The Light and the Darkness both flow into Delhi”

(Adiga 215). According to the narrator, New Delhi, which is “the bright modern end of the city”, represents the ‘Light’, while the ‘Darkness’ with all its negative aspects is located in Old Delhi (Adiga 215). Kundu states that “inequality in poverty across states and districts has gone up both in rural and urban areas” (555). This development is possibly due to the recent urbanization trend of unskilled labourers and their difficulties to access social and public institutions in the cities (Kundu 564). Therefore, Delhi does not exclusively represent the image of *Shining India*, but also the reality of poverty and underdevelopment. Similarly, the narrator emphasizes the dichotomy which is characteristic of Delhi “where civilization can appear and disappear within five minutes (Adiga 241). On the one hand, there is the ‘Light’ with its numerous western-style malls, the modern apartment blocks and housing colonies where the rich live, and with the parliament’s and president’s seats. The *Delhi of Light* is “[t]he showcase of the republic”, as the narrator sarcastically remarks (Adiga 98). On the other hand, there are “[t]housands of people liv[ing] on the sides of the road in Delhi” and in numerous slums under inhuman conditions (Adiga 99). The slum dwellers are “building homes for the rich, but they [live] in tents covered with blue tarpaulin sheets, and partitioned into lanes by lines of sewage” (Adiga 222). This negative image of the *Delhi of Darkness* is expressed by one of Balram’s driver colleagues: “The main thing to know about Delhi is that the roads are good, and the people are bad. The police are *totally* rotten” (Adiga 103). One of the places in Delhi that is foregrounded in the novel is Mr. Ashok’s and Pinky Madam’s home, which is “a gigantic apartment building” with the name of Buckingham Towers B Block (Adiga 107). This shiny and new apartment building with “a nice big lobby and an elevator in the lobby that takes [the characters] up [into their apartment on] the thirteenth floor” is contrasted to the miserable circumstances under which the servants live in the basement of the very same building (Adiga 107). In Balram’s room “[t]he floor ha[s] not been finished, and there [i]s a cheap whitish plaster on the walls in which you [can] see the marks of the hand that ha[s] applied the plaster. There [i]s a flimsy little bed, barely big enough even for [Balram], and a mosquito net on top of it” that prevents the cockroaches from falling onto Balram’s face at night (Adiga 109f.). This contrastive description of living conditions within one and the same building illustrates the immediate proximity of ‘Darkness’ and ‘Light’ in Delhi. According to the novel’s narrator, “the difference between this India and that India [is] the *choice*” (Adiga 262). Hence, irrespective of the geographical proximity or distance between ‘Light’ and ‘Darkness’, the decisive differentiating factor between these two

areas is the freedom of choice because “if a man wants to be good [in the Light], he *can* be good” (Adiga 262).

Balram’s final destination of his journey to the ‘Light’ is Bangalore, the city “where the future is” (Adiga 233). Bangalore in South India is mainly associated with IT industry, as the first multinational IT firms were located there. Since the economic liberalization in the 1990s, India, besides China, has become an important location for IT production and related services. The majority of multinational IT firms, such as *Texas Instruments* or *Hewlett Packard*, took advantage of skilled labour at comparably cheap rates and have settled in Bangalore. The services provided by Indian IT firms include direct contact, such as call centres or customer services, and various back office functions. According to a recent estimate, India presently has the highest number of IT export-related jobs and revenues in the world (Aranya 446f.). Adiga’s narrator describes Bangalore on similar terms asserting that “[e]verything in the city, it [seems], [comes] down to one thing. Outsourcing” (Adiga 255). In Bangalore’s Electronics City Balram observes SUVs arriving in the evening and leaving in the early hours of the morning, when the American working day has come to an end. This modern, developed depiction of Bangalore does not only illustrate the image of *Progressive India*, but also reflects Balram’s personal success and social development, as he “changed from a hunted criminal into a solid pillar of Bangalorean society” (Adiga 250). However, even after Balram’s arrival in his *India of Light*, there are still people in the same place who live in the ‘Darkness’. “In a city where so many [have] streamed in from the outside, [the locals are] the ones left behind” (Adiga 259). Once again, the close link between ‘Darkness’ and ‘Light’ is foregrounded at this point, and their inevitable coexistence is underlined.

Apart from the locations in India, there are also two foreign countries, to be specific America and China, which play significant roles in *The White Tiger*. America, or rather the United States of America, as the country of freedom and unlimited possibilities for everybody is frequently juxtaposed to the traditional and conservative India. Thus, Mr. Ashok, who has lived in the United States for a couple of years, is generally described as open-minded and modern in a pejorative way, as opposed to his brother Mukesh, who believes in the good old Indian values. Similarly, the US’ liberal character is foregrounded in the description of one of New Delhi’s most modern parts where “you’ve [...] got plenty of places to drink beer, dance, pick up girls, that sort of thing. A

small bit of America in India” (Adiga 173). In short, America is not only seen as a liberal country with personal freedoms for every individual, but also as a place where justice rules and the laws are respected by everyone. The idealized image of the United States is contrasted with the corrupt and highly unjust Indian system. This dichotomy is, for example, illustrated in a conversation between Mr. Ashok and his brother Mukesh, where Ashok says, “It’s a *fucking joke* – our political system – I’ll keep saying it as long as I like.” Mukesh just answers dryly to his brother’s aggressive statement, “Things are complicated in India, Ashok. It’s not like in America. Please reserve your judgement” (Adiga 115).

China, on the other hand, the addressee’s home, is clearly presented as the ideal South Asian country and as India’s role model. There is, however, one aspect in which the Indians feel superior to the Chinese, according to the narrator: “Apparently, sir, you Chinese are far ahead of us in every respect, except that you don’t have entrepreneurs” (Adiga 2). Consequently, the relationship between China and India, as presented in the novel, is a competitive one with continuous remarks about China’s communist system. This competitiveness is, for instance, portrayed by the narrator’s following comment, in which he directly and mockingly addresses the premier, “I gather you yellow-skinned men, despite your triumphs in sewage, drinking water and Olympic gold medals, still don’t have democracy. Some politician on the radio was saying that that’s why we Indians are going to beat you: we may not have sewage, drinking water, and Olympic gold medals, but we *do* have democracy” (Adiga 79f.). Within the context of the novel, one immediately detects the underlying irony of this statement and the sarcastic tone that alludes to the failings of the Indian democratic system. Adiga’s depiction of the strained Sino-Indian relations is not mere fiction, but they are reflected in the nations’ struggle for dominance on the Asian continent. According to Ganguly and Pardesi, the simultaneous rise to power of the two nations has led to considerable rivalry about the influence in South and Southeast Asia (479f.). The US, as China’s primary competitor on the South Asian market, have been replaced by India since its liberalization policies in the 1990s (Ganguly and Pardesi 471ff.). The roots of the Sino-Indian conflict, however, do not only lie in economic reasons, but also in territorial disputes. The most predominant of these is the border conflict in the Tibetan region, which resulted in the Sino-Indian war in 1962. Until the present day, this conflict could not be solved satisfyingly and it still continues to be a source of trouble between the two nations (Ganguly and Pardesi 474ff.). While the Sino-Indian relationship remains strained, the

previously problematic relations between India and the United States have eased and there “has been [an] emerging US-India strategic partnership” (Ganguly and Pardesi 482). Thus, it can be observed that Adiga artistically, but subliminally, included these dynamics into his narrative.

As far as the novel’s specific temporal context is concerned, there are no explicit dates given within the narrative. Nevertheless, there are some temporal markers, such as a number of technical devices, like computers, the internet, cell phones, etc. or references to various contemporary artists, for example, Enya and Sting, which locate the story in the 21st century. Moreover, one of India’s most influential members of Congress, Sonia Gandhi, is mentioned in the novel. As outlined above, Sonia Gandhi regained substantial political influence in 2004. Consequently, it can be inferred that the novel’s action takes place at some point between 2004 and its date of publication in 2008.

5.3 The Narrative Technique

The story is told by a first-person narrator-protagonist who frequently switches from the *narrating I* (or extradiegetic narrator) to the *experiencing I* (intradiegetic narrator), a distinction first introduced by Dorrit Cohn (qtd. in Herman and Vervaeck 27f.). The difference between these two narrator types can, for instance, be illustrated by an example on page 104 of Adiga’s work, when Balram talks about his first encounter with the *Murder Weekly* magazine. First, the *experiencing I* portrays the immediate situation in the carpark: “He gave me a magazine with a catchy cover – a woman in her underwear was lying on a bed, cowering from the shadow of a man.” Right after the accurate depiction of the wording on the magazine’s cover, the *narrating I* continues: “Now I have to tell you about this magazine, *Murder Weekly*, since our prime minister certainly won’t tell you anything about it.” Similar changes between the *narrating I*, who directly addresses the Chinese premier, and the *experiencing I* frequently occur throughout the novel. While the *narrating I* does not intend to accurately retell what the character has said or felt, the *experiencing I* often implements the self-narrated monologue in which the narrator’s thoughts and feelings are rendered via a stream-of-consciousness in free indirect speech (Cohn qtd. in Herman and Vervaeck 29). The application of this technique causes an effect of immediacy and enables the reader to identify with the narrator-protagonist. One example of such a self-narrated monologue occurs on page 195 of the novel, when Balram reflects about the possible consequences of his forced false statement after Pinky’s accident, “*You should have asked them for*

money when they made you sign that thing. Enough money to sleep with twenty white-skinned girls. [...] Twenty? A hundred. Two hundred. Three hundred, a thousand, ten thousand golden-haired whores. And even that would still not have been enough. That would not start to be enough.” Another interesting example of the former is Balram’s internal soliloquy that starts on page 209, which is an illustration of his internal struggle. “Go on, just look at the red bag, Balram – that’s not stealing, is it?” However, the protagonist predominantly appears as the *narrating I* and instances of the self-narrated monologue are rather rare, compared to the occurrence of direct speech events. The high frequency of dialogues and the occasional direct quotation of Balram’s thoughts lead to an increased immediacy and a sense of instantaneousness.

According to Herman and Vervaeck, this differentiation between *narrating I* and *experiencing I* can be indistinct at times, but such a variation may create a manifold reading experience as it counteracts a monotonous narration (29f.). In *The White Tiger* the *narrating I* is often recognizable by his direct address of the story’s narratee, the Chinese premier Wen Jiabao. Although the premier is frequently mentioned by the narrator-protagonist, he never appears in the story, but remains absent throughout the entire novel. Considering the novel’s epistolary character, the prevalence of the *narrating I* is little surprising, as letters usually lend themselves to indirect accounts of the narrator’s experiences. Moreover, the letters contain numerous instances of direct satire, “in which the writer directly addresses [...] the recipient of a verse letter with satiric comment” (*O.D. of Literary Terms* s.v. “Satire”). Balram’s ironical remark about the Indian democracy is one of the frequent examples of direct satire. “Now, Mr. Premier, the little take-home pamphlet that you will be given by the prime minister will no doubt contain a very large section on the splendour of democracy in India – the awe-inspiring spectacle of one billion people casting their votes to determine their own future, in full freedom of franchise, and so on and so forth” (Adiga 79). Apart from instances of direct satire, also the alternative form of indirect satire is found in the novel, which “allows [the reader] to draw [their] own conclusions from the actions of the characters (*O.D. of Literary Terms* s.v. “Satire”). Such an indirect satire and criticism of the self-centred and greedy behaviour of the Indian upper class is implemented on page 220 of the novel, where the illusion of Mr. Ashok’s benevolent and altruistic character is destroyed. “I saw him take out a thousand-rupee note, put it back, then take out a five-hundred, then put it back, and then take out a hundred. Which he handed to me.” As the larger part of the novel is told by the *narrating I*, in other

words by Balram, the entrepreneur, Adiga does not enable a subaltern voice to speak. Anwer underlines this argument and thus, proves Spivak's point that the subaltern cannot speak (309). Nevertheless, Adiga tries to deconstruct the dominant Western discourse by speaking about India's marginalized groups. With the use of a critical and ironic narrator, the author questions the structure of India's postcolonial society and simultaneously produces an alternative discourse.

Referring to Stanzel's classification, *The White Tiger* is a typical *I-narrative*, in which the reader perceives the events through the narrator's internal view. While the story is merely presented through the eyes and the mind of the narrator-protagonist, the teller-character is also clearly present as an overt narrator, and the reader is aware of the personal perspective that is being presented (qtd. in Herman and Vervaeck 33). Thus, Adiga created an autodiegetic narrator, according to Genette, who has experienced that which he is narrating as the story's protagonist (qtd. in Herman and Vervaeck 84).

Another important narrator's property that is worth discussing at this point concerns reliability. A critical reader should always be aware of the narrator's reliability, as this aspect has a strong influence on the interpretation of a text. However, there are no determined factors that establish the narrator's reliability, and the perception of the former is frequently connected with the reader's implicit values and prejudices. Lanser suggests a possible framework to discern the narrator's reliability, which examines the narrator's status. On the one hand, the narrator's *diegetic authority* should be taken into account, which is inferred on the basis of personality. Thus, their social identity is relevant in this respect, which compromises aspects such as "profession, gender, nationality, marital situation, sexual preference, education, race, and socioeconomic class." On the other hand, Lanser analyses the narrator's *mimetic authority* that is expressed through their style of narration. In other words, the reader should judge a narrator's "honesty, reliability and competence" (Lanser qtd. in Herman and Vervaeck 89f.). Although it can be claimed that an objective and neutral account of these aspects seems hard to achieve, an investigation of Balram's reliability still appears to be vital for an understanding of the novel's ideological meaning. As far as his diegetic authority is concerned, Balram certainly does not represent the typical white, middle-class, male narrator, who is attributed with a high degree of reliability. Quite on the contrary, Balram belongs to one of India's lower castes, does not have a very profound formal education and he comes from a poor rural background. These ideological aspects will be

discussed in greater detail in the 'Characters' chapter of this thesis, but for now it can be noted that Balram would traditionally not qualify as a highly reliable narrator on the basis of his diegetic authority. Balram's mimetic authority can be inferred by an analysis of his descriptions of characters, settings and events. Although his depictions of various places in the 'Darkness' as well as in the 'Light' seem unembellished and realistic, his portrayal of Mr. Ashok is clearly idealized. For example, Balram is sure that "[Mr. Ashok] returned from America an innocent man, but life in Delhi corrupted him" (Adiga 167). Moreover, Balram himself comments on his limited reliability as the story's narrator and remarks that "[he] cannot be certain that the story, as [he] will tell it, is the right story to tell. [He] cannot be certain that [he] know[s] exactly why Mr. Ashok died" (Adiga 95). Consequently, it can be said that Balram is a subjective narrator-protagonist, whose narration does show certain marks of unreliability and personal judgement. By and large, however, Balram's presentation of India and its society appears to be realistic and trustworthy.

Drawing on Plato's distinction between *mimesis* and *diegesis*, a text can either be rendered by way of a highly accurate, dramatic representation, or in a more condensed, narrative one. *Mimesis*, thus, refers to a mode of narration which quotes verbatim what is said in the story's reality, while *diegesis* presents the narrator's subjective summary of certain events (Herman and Vervaeck 14f.). As far as these modes of presentation are concerned, in *The White Tiger* narrative presentation, or 'telling', prevails over dramatic presentation, or 'showing'. However, there are also considerably frequent instances of mimetic narration, reflected in the numerous scenes rendered in direct speech. By means of this effective use of direct speech the narrator achieves the effect of immediacy in and evokes the notion of liveliness.

An analysis of the temporal aspects includes three criteria, according to Genette: duration, order and frequency (qtd. in Herman and Vervaeck 60 ff.). The novel's narrated time amounts to about 30 years, from Balram's childhood in Laxmangarh until his social advancement as an entrepreneur in Bangalore. Although there are no exact temporal markers, one may suggest that the story has a time span of approximately 30 years. The time of narration, however, which is associated with the time of reading, is considerably shorter depending on the reader's individual reading pace. This difference

results from the frequent use of ellipsis⁸ and summary, which are commonly applied devices in novels. *The White Tiger's* epistolary form automatically produces regular ellipses in between the various letters, i.e. chapters. This does not mean, however, that there are no scenes or descriptive passages, which emphasize the importance of certain events. One example of a scene which “indicates an almost perfect overlap of the duration of an event with that of its representation or reading” is found after Balram’s long-desired meeting with the golden-haired prostitute (Herman and Vervaeck 61). “I slouched toward my room, kicked open the door, and froze. Someone was inside the mosquito net. I saw a silhouette in the lotus position. ‘Don’t worry Balram. I know what you were doing.’ A man’s voice. Well at least it wasn’t Granny – that was my first thought” (Adiga 201f.). The tension that is created by the use of the scenic representation of this event illustrates Balram’s fear of being discovered by Mr. Ashok, and it increases the degree of the reader’s identification with the protagonist.

As far as order is concerned, the anachrony of the novel’s events already characterizes the mode of narration from the first pages onwards. One of the first instances of this anachrony is a flashback (or analepsis), that is to say an episode rendered from memory. The narrator recounts his knowledge about China and remarks that “[he] read about [its] history in a book, *Exciting Tales of the Exotic East*, that [he] found on the pavement, back in the days when [he] was trying to get some enlightenment by going through the Sunday secondhand book market in Old Delhi” (Adiga 3). Simultaneously, this passage could also be considered as an example of foreshadowing (or prolepsis), which can be defined as an anticipation of the story’s content (Genette qtd. in Herman and Vervaeck 64f.). Due to the narrator’s highly anachronistic way of narration, the distinction between prolepsis and analepsis may not always be clear-cut, which contributes to the narrative’s complexity. The novel’s most important instance of foreshadowing, which likewise includes various examples of flashbacks, is found in Balram’s first letter to the premier. As Balram presents his police poster to the reader, he reveals that he is searched by the police for murder, while simultaneously introducing himself by means of several references to his childhood (Adiga 10ff.).

⁸ An ellipsis is “an event that does happen in the story, [but] is absent from the narrative” (Herman and Vervaeck 61).

6. Characters and Characterization

E.M. Forster introduced a frequently applied distinction between ‘round’ and ‘flat’ characters, referring to the degree of dynamism and profoundness of a character. This typology was further developed into a three-dimensional one by Rimmon-Kenan, who considers a character’s complexity, their development, and the degree to which the text reveals their inner life (qtd. in Herman and Vervaeck 55f.) According to Rimmon-Kenan, another important distinction needs to be drawn between direct and indirect characterization. As these labels are already quite revealing little has to be explained about these categories, but it is important to note that indirect characterization often includes the characters’ actions and their discourse (qtd. in Herman and Vervaeck 67f.). The following sub-chapters try to reveal the main traits of the characters in *The White Tiger* by drawing on some aspects of Forster’s and Rimmon-Kenan’s frameworks.

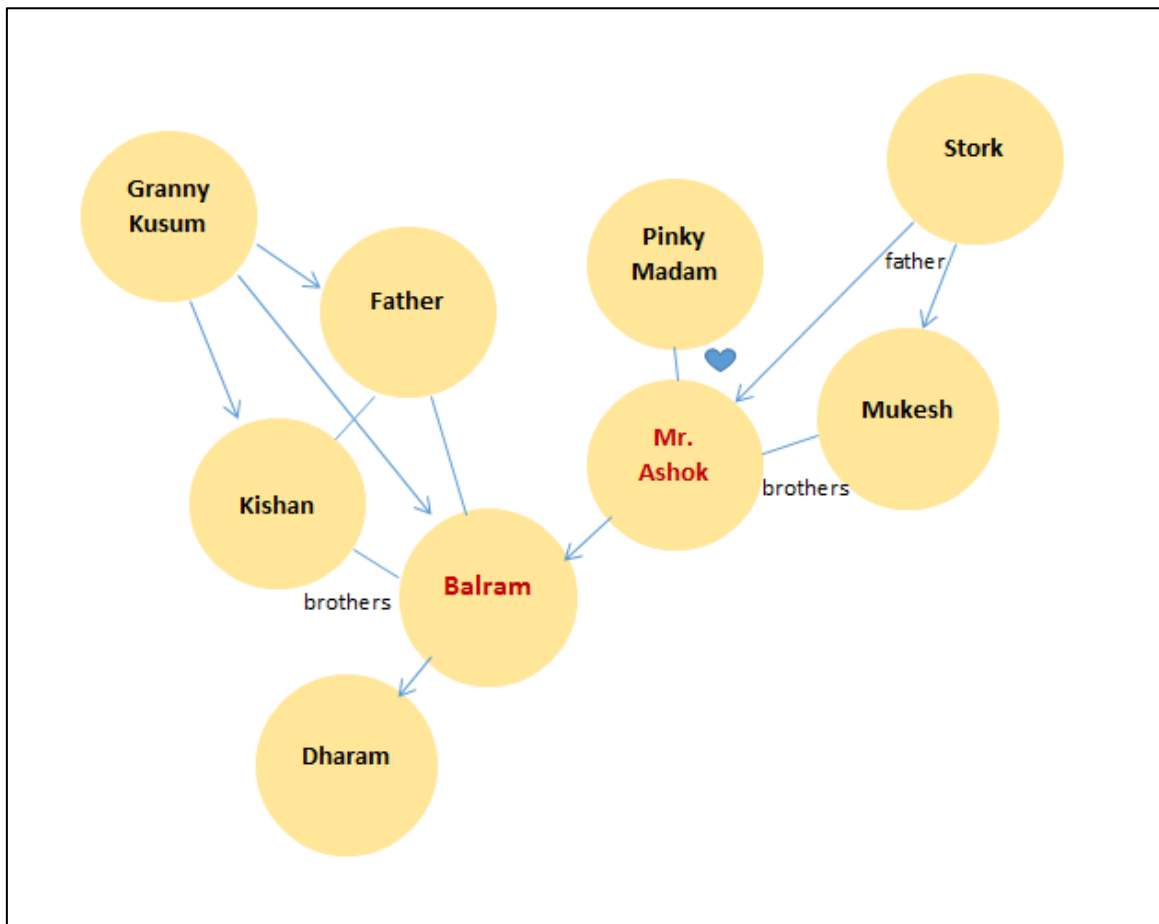


Fig. 2: Hierarchy and Relationships

6.1 Balram

Balram Halwai, as the story's first-person narrator, is predominantly characterized through his discourse, behaviour, thoughts and actions. This indirect characterization creates a highly complex person, who undergoes a tremendous change throughout the novel and whose thoughts are frequently revealed to the reader. Therefore, Balram is a prototypical example of a round character, as Adiga created an impressively elaborated and individualized personality with a highly unpredictable behaviour.

Considering *The White Tiger* as an example of a *bildungsroman*, it is especially the protagonist's internal and external transformation that dominates the story. This development from a half-baked, lower-caste Indian to a successful business entrepreneur is simultaneously mirrored by his adoption of different names. The story's protagonist is born as the youngest son of a typical Indian low-caste family in a poor village in the Indian countryside. His mother dies when he is still an infant and being one of many children in a so-called Indian "joint family [...] in which brothers remain together after marriage and bring their wives into the paternal household", the protagonist receives little attention (Kakar and Kakar 9). Likewise, his family just calls him 'Munna', which is not a proper name, but merely means 'boy' (Adiga 10). By initially naming the protagonist Munna, Adiga illustrates that this boy, who starts out as India's everyman or, in other words, as a prototypical Indian nobody, achieves the impossible and in doing so reverses his humble fate. At the village's school, the teacher chooses to call him 'Balram' who "was the sidekick of the god Krishna" (Adiga 11). As the teacher himself happens to be called Krishna, the boy's new name can be understood as a metaphor for Balram's future role within the context of the school and his dedication to studying. Hence, Balram fulfils his role as the teacher's sidekick during a surprise inspection in his class, where Balram saves the teacher's reputation as he is the only pupil who can read and answer the inspector's questions. Due to his exceptional knowledge, as compared to the other pupils, the inspector calls Balram a 'white tiger', which "is the rarest of animals – the creature that comes along only once in a generation" (Adiga 30). This incident foregrounds Balram's exceptional nature and is a metaphorical foreshadowing of his future success story. Balram will be one out of millions of poor Indians who manages to leave his modest origins behind and rise in Indian society. His last name, 'Halwai', is an indication of his low origins, as it means 'sweet-maker' and denotes the family's inferior caste. A further name is imposed on

Balram during his time in Delhi by his driver colleagues. They nickname him 'Country-Mouse', which alludes to Balram's inexperience in the context of the corrupt city life and directly characterizes him as a naïve and innocent newcomer. The protagonist's final name is the first one that he chooses himself and is not imposed on him from outside. Hence, this name emphasizes his liberation from his oppression due to Indian society's hierarchical order. As a successful business entrepreneur, Balram adopts the name of his former master and calls himself 'Ashok Sharma', which illustrates the fact that he has finally reached the stage where he is his own master and no longer dominated by someone else.

Although Mr. Ashok considers Balram as half-baked, a person who "can read and write, but [...] doesn't get what he's read" (Adiga 7), and Pinky Madam thinks he is primitive and dumb, Balram shows his calculated and cunning personality as he pretends to be "the most religious servant on earth", which "seem[s] to [...] impress the two of them" (Adiga 77f.). Likewise, he explains that "[his] country is the kind where it pays to play it both ways: the Indian entrepreneur has to be straight and crooked, mocking and believing, sly and sincere, at the same time" (Adiga 6). Moreover, Balram's style of narration is idiosyncratically characterized by the frequent use of irony and his sarcastic and dry sense of humour. For instance, he ironically states that "thinking of Mr. Ashok, [whom he has brutally killed], is making [him] sentimental [and that he] hope[s] [he's] got some paper napkins here somewhere" (Adiga 38).

Independent of Balram's respective social context, he is portrayed as an exceptional person, different from the rest and as an outsider. These characteristics have already been discussed in relation to his nickname 'white tiger', but the school is not the only setting where Balram is the odd one out. Within his family, Kusum, his grandmother, repeatedly underlines that Balram is different by comparing him to his dead mother. According to Kusum, Balram is a dreamer who "is going to come to nothing good in life" (Adiga 35). Unlike Kusum, Balram's father is optimistic for his son because his mother always said "he'd be the one who [would make] it through school" (Adiga 24) and his only wish is "that one son of [his] – at least one – should live like a man" (Adiga 26). Also among his fellow servants in Delhi, Balram occupies the position of the outsider. He is the Country-Mouse, who prefers to sleep on his own in a horrible, small room inhabited by cockroaches instead of the communal sleeping room and who remains "loyal to the last" to his master, while all the others only think of their own

profit (Adiga 156). Even in Bangalore, Balram's final destination on his way to wealth and success, he initially feels misplaced, which is metaphorically expressed by his ignorance about the coffee drinking etiquette in South India. Balram wonders about Bangalore's coffee drinking customs, which are new to him, until he realizes that "[t]he city [is] full of outsiders" and strangers just like him (Adiga 253f.).

Considering the fact that Balram addresses the former Chinese premier Wen Jiabao, in order to explain Indian entrepreneurship, he proves to be self-assured and convinced of himself. "[He] consider[s] [himself] one of [the premier's] kind" and thus, establishes a horizontal relation between the two of them (Adiga 2). He sees himself as a role model for all successful entrepreneurs and thinks that the Chinese premier will highly profit from his letters. Thus, he even appears superior to Wen Jiabao at some instances, for example, when he overconfidently assures that "[he] will have to tell [the premier] all about democracy – something that [the] Chinese [...] are not very familiar with" (Adiga 78). Furthermore, the association of Balram with a white tiger because of his exceptional achievements are partly due to his ambitious and determined personality. Regardless of the obstacles that life poses to Balram's social advancement, he is prepared to fight for his dream and refuses to surrender. As he is forced to leave school in order to work at the tea shop, for instance, Balram does not give up, but educates himself by eavesdropping on other people's conversations and by paying attention to small details, such as "old textbook pages people in tea stalls use to wrap greasy samosas with" (Adiga 260). Thus, it is at the tea shop in Dhanbad, where he overhears a conversation that changes his life. As Balram is determined to become a driver, he visits all the taxi stands in the city and begs random strangers "down on [his] knees" to teach him how to drive a car (Adiga 45). Despite his success in finding a driving instructor, his struggle continues during his search for a job. Luckily, his origins from Laxmangarh help him to find an employer, but even as a servant for the Stork's family he still needs to assert himself against Ram Persad, the family's other driver.

The probably most apparent manifestation of Balram's determination and his strong will is his process of Westernization. As defined above, 'Westernization' is associated with "efficiency, hygiene and affluence, but also with selfishness, immorality and a mercenary mentality" (Tenhunen and Säävälä 138). Similarly, also Balram adopts western hygiene standards and ways of behaviour by brushing his teeth, wearing clean, plain clothes and preventing himself from "scratching [his] groin" (Adiga 123).

Simultaneously, Balram's Westernization results in his immoral and corrupt behaviour as he starts to cheat on his master and finally leads him to commit a murder, in order to guarantee his personal prosperity and material wealth. Thus, Balram adopts a white mask by imitating Mr. Ashok's behaviour. According to Fanon, this imitation enables his access to the dominant discourse, which finally contributes to his personal prosperity. Bhabha's elaboration of Fanon's theory explains that mimicry is always an imperfect imitation and reproduction of colonial power. In Balram's case, it seems that this imperfect imitation is intentional, as he attempts to act 'morally correctly' after one of his drivers has killed a boy. As opposed to Mr. Ashok and his family, who force Balram to resume responsibility for Pinky's accident, Balram personally takes charge of his driver's accident in Bangalore that similarly caused the death of a child. However, he mimics Ashok's behaviour in so far as he thinks that money can arrange anything. Moreover, the hybridity of Balram's character is illustrated by the reversal of Balram's and Ashok's roles. Interestingly, Balram turns into Ashok's oppressor when he forces him to leave the car shortly before the murder. His transformation into a capitalist subject is further visible at the train station in Delhi, where he gives a rupee coin to a homeless family, but not without "mak[ing] sure it was not a *two-rupee* coin" (Adiga 247).

Although Balram appears to be a highly loyal and trustworthy servant, who thinks of his masters as a father and mother, he is also a calculated and cold-blooded murderer, "a freak, a pervert of nature" as he describes himself, "a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed" (Adiga 150). Nevertheless, he feels guilty about his deeds and shows his preoccupation for his family, as he risks his strongly desired freedom in order to take Dharam, his cousin, with him. This highly complex and partly contradictory behaviour is explained at the very last page of the novel, where Balram clarifies that "[he]'ll never say [he] made a mistake that night in Delhi when [he] slit [his] master's throat [because] [...] it was all worthwhile to know, just for a day, just for an hour, just for a *minute*, what it means not to be a servant" (Adiga 276).

6.2 Mr. Ashok

Mr. Ashok is the son of the Stork, one of Laxmangarh's powerful landlords, and Balram's employer in Dhanbad and Delhi. He has just returned from the United States, where he lived together with his American wife, Pinky Madam. Therefore, he embodies the Western world with its democratic values and modern, liberal ideas. Similarly, he

does not agree with the corrupt practices of his family's coal business and opposes his father's plans to bribe certain politicians in order to obtain coal at favourable conditions from the government mines. His doubts, however, are immediately rejected by his father and brother by whom he is not taken seriously and treated like an inexperienced boy, "Quiet, Ashok. Let Mukesh and me discuss this" (Adiga 89). In another instance where Mr. Ashok questions his father's disrespectful treatment of their servants, he is silenced with a reference to the cultural contrast between India and the United States, "This is not America, son. Don't ask questions like that" (Adiga 61).

Mr. Ashok's difference from Laxmangarh's other landlords is further visible by the fact that he is the only one without an animal's nickname. Hence, one could assume that he is the only one who remains human, despite his wealth and powerful position in society. As opposed to the other landlords, Mr. Ashok treats his servants fairly and behaves respectfully. At least this is Balram's description of his master, who perceives a highly idealized picture of Mr. Ashok. According to Balram's direct characterization, Mr. Ashok is a benevolent person, whom he considers as a role model. Moreover, Balram senses a close relation to his employer and he expresses this intimacy, for example, by calling him "my ex" (Adiga 272). Additionally, Mr. Ashok "is a kind of second father" for Balram, and he is "always gentle [...] and kind to those around him, even his servants and driver" (Adiga 37f.). The concern about his servants even develops into guilt when he enters the drivers' room in Dhanbad and states that they "will [...] get a better room to sleep" (Adiga 68). His kind and peaceful personality is additionally mirrored in his eating habits. When he is criticized by his uncle for being vegetarian, which "is not natural" for a landlord, Mr. Ashok states that "[he doesn't] believe in killing animals needlessly", an idea that he acquired in America (Adiga 71). Continuously, Balram discovers Ashok's weaknesses and starts to perceive a more differentiated picture of his master. Thus, he sees him as a "tall, broad-shouldered, handsome, foreign-educated man, [who is also] weak, helpless, absent-minded, and completely unprotected by the usual instincts that run in the blood of a landlord" (Adiga 120). For example, when his wife leaves him he is devastated and behaves like a "*big, pathetic baby*" as he cries and vomits because of his exhaustive alcohol consumption (Adiga 160). Ironically, he even envies a family in a slum for being together, while he feels tremendously alone despite his economic prosperity.

In the course of the story, Balram's idealized direct characterization of Ashok is supplemented by an indirect characterization through Ashok's actions and his behaviour, which reveal his violent, materialistic and self-interested personality. Shortly after the separation from Pinky Madam, Ashok violently attacks Balram, "grabb[s] [him] and pushe[s] [him] against the balcony of the apartment", which leads Balram to the conclusion that "[t]he landlord inside him wasn't dead, after all" (Adiga 155). In another instance he insults Balram by shouting at him and calling him "stupid" (Adiga 164), and he considers to replace him with a local driver. When Balram gives a one-rupee coin to a beggar on the street, both Mr. Ashok and his brother Mukesh, attack him for offering money to the poor without permission. "That [is] when it [strikes Balram] that there really [is] no difference between the two of them. They [are] both their father's seed" (Adiga 206). Mr. Ashok's transformation from an innocent and benevolent man to an ill-natured, self-centred individual happens because "life in Delhi corrupt[s] him" (Adiga 167). As the reader mainly obtains Balram's view of Ashok's character, this change might be subjectively perceived by the narrator, while Mr. Ashok merely undergoes a limited change during the narrative. In any case, this internal development together with his complex personality defines Mr. Ashok as a round character, despite the reader's restricted access to his mind.

According to a postcolonialist interpretation of the novel, the character of Mr. Ashok could be analysed as the oppressor and member of the dominant class. Nevertheless, Adiga does not create a stereotypical character, but rather an atypical landlord. Therefore, he questions the postcolonial power structures, as he deconstructs the dominant colonial discourse and shows that there is not only one determined and homogeneous definition of the oppressor or the oppressed. Similarly, the hybridity of Mr. Ashok's character is portrayed in various instances throughout the novel where he is shown as the weak and sensitive landlord, as well as at the end of the novel when Ashok's and Balram's roles are reversed and Ashok is transformed into one of the oppressed.

6.3 The Mongoose

Mukesh Sir, or the Mongoose, is the complete opposite of his brother Ashok. He is portrayed as a typical landlord with a dominant, authoritarian and oppressing personality. Unlike his brother, he has the personality of a ruler and easily handles difficult situations, whereas Ashok is frequently portrayed in the position of the victim.

According to the narrator's direct characterization, "the Stork's two sons [are] as different from each other as night and day" (Adiga 64). While "Mukesh Sir [is] small, and dark, and ugly, and very shrewd [...], Ashok ha[s] his father's [powerfully built] body" (Adiga 64f.). This metaphorical description of the two brothers as night and day alludes to the frequently applied metaphors of 'Darkness' and 'Light' and thus, suggests a pejorative characterization of Mukesh. His capitalist and materialistic values and world view are, for example, illustrated when he allegedly loses a one-rupee coin in the car and accuses Balram of theft. Considering Mukesh's wealth and the value of a one-rupee coin, the irony and the hidden sarcasm of this incident become clear. His association with a mongoose probably derives from his physical resemblance to the animal. Moreover, the mongooses were introduced to numerous islands in order to control rodents and snakes, but, unfortunately, they affected the population of the native fauna. Therefore, they are associated with negative aspects, such as "potential destructiveness" (*E.B.O.* s.v. "Mongoose"). Overall, the Mongoose is an example of a flat character due to his static and simple personality.

6.4 The Landlords

Although Laxmangarh's landlords only appear in the first part of the novel and are merely portrayed as flat characters, they are important constituents of the story's main message. As members of the rural capital class, they embody the *India of Light* surrounded by the 'Darkness' of rural India, which they rule and control due to their strong local influence. Moreover, they frequently abuse their considerable political influence in order to obtain personal advantages. Interestingly, the village's inhabitants named their landlords after animals, according to their respective sphere of influence or, as the narrator expresses it, according to "the peculiarities of appetite that ha[ve] been detected in [them]" (Adiga 20).

The Stork owns the river just outside Laxmangarh and thus, demands a share of each catch from the river as well as a boat toll. His animalized nickname probably derives from a stork's natural eating habit of feeding "from small animals caught in shallow water" (*E.B.O.* s.v. "Stork"). Moreover, the adjutant stork of India primarily feeds on carrion, which might explain the name's negative connotation in the novel. According to the *Metzler Lexikon literarischer Symbole*, the stork occasionally appears as a symbol for misfortune and death (Novikova s.v. "Storch"). Similarly, the Stork brings misfortune to Balram, as he is forced to leave school and work in the tea shop because

of his family's loan from the Stork for his cousin-sister's wedding. The Wild Boar, who is the Stork's brother, owns all agricultural land in and around Laxmangarh, which he rents out at very high rates. As has been briefly outlined above, members of the rural capital class in India frequently obtain their income from loans with high interests or from the rent of their fields (Adeney and Wyatt 112ff.). As the Wild Boar optically resembles his animal patron due to his peculiar teeth, two of which "[are] long and curved, like little tusks" on either side of the nose, the origins of his nickname are not difficult to discover (Adiga 21). Similar to Adiga's derogatory depiction, the wild boar often stands for anger, rage or fury in literary texts (Ferber s.v. "Pig"). The Raven owns the dry, rocky land around the fort, which he rents to the goatherds. According to the narrator, his association with this particular animal comes from his violent and homoerotic behaviour. "If [the goatherds don't] have their money, he like[s] to dip his beak into their backsides, so they [call] him the Raven" (Adiga 21). Generally, the raven is a symbol of death and evil, due to his deep black plumage and the fact that he feeds on carrion (Rösch s.v. "Raabe"). "[T]he greediest of the lot" is the Buffalo, who owns the roads and the rickshaws (Adiga 21). Therefore, whoever uses the roads or has a rickshaw has to give the Buffalo one-third of his income. The water buffalo in general is associated with wealth and prosperity in *The White Tiger* and described as the most important member of Balram's family that wants to be fed all day long. Hence, it is little surprising that the greediest of all landlords received the name of this animal. Interestingly, the names of all four landlords derive from animals which have their natural habitat in India and whose connotations are negative to a certain extent.

Adiga's appealing approach of portraying Laxmangarh's landlords as voracious and fierce animals alludes to the literary genre of the fable and thus, aligns the novel in an old tradition of Indian literature. The first examples of humanized animals that cross the boundaries of species are found as early as the Aryan culture (around 1500 BC) in the Sanskrit epics (Olivelle 17). According to Olivelle, animal tales are often used to educate children, but even cultivated adults tend to appreciate fables due to their predominantly implicit meanings (19). Furthermore, fables frequently hold certain ideologies within the Indian tradition and are "effective tools of social control and instruction" (Douglas qtd. in Olivelle 20). Hence, as Anwer notes, Adiga's fable could be read as a warning to the Indian middle and upper classes as far as their disrespectful treatment of the lower classes is concerned (311f.). Similar to Adiga, also Fanon considers the national bourgeoisie as the source of "a nation's moral decline and

corruption” and laments their incapability of introducing humanist practices and policies (131ff.).

6.5 Pinky Madam

Pinky Madam, as one of the novel’s two most significant female characters, illustrates the women’s position within Indian society by embodying the antipode to a traditional Indian woman. Pinky does not fit into her husband’s life in India and she is unable to adapt to the patriarchal foreign culture. As opposed to conservative and traditional Indian society, Pinky, who is from the United States, personifies the Western culture with her modern, liberal and emancipated ideas. Thus, she plays badminton, wears pants and constantly complains to Mr. Ashok about their life in India. As a fair-skinned Western woman she is sexually attractive to Balram, who “[hates] her for wearing that [low black] dress” and is distracted by her short skirts and deep necklines (Adiga 121). Her critical attitude towards Indian society is also illustrated by her rude language use, which is highly atypical for women in India. “What a fucking joke” is her most frequently used expression to criticize India, may it be the frequent traffic jams or the everyday corruption and fraud (Adiga 5). After she has unintentionally killed a child in a hit-and-run accident, “the lady with the short skirt [is the only] one with a conscience”, as she wants to take the child to the hospital and look for his or her family (Adiga 153). In India, however, it seems that people with enough money tend to neglect the responsibility for their faults. Therefore, Balram is forced to take the responsibility for the accident. However, Pinky Madam, who is incapable of accepting this injustice, flees from her bad conscience and leaves India with its discriminating practices. In general, Pinky Madam undergoes some development, but as her character’s complexity is rather limited and her inner life is not accessible to the reader, she can be assessed as a flat character.

6.6 Granny Kusum

Although Kusum, Balram’s grandmother, is clearly a flat character, she plays an important role in the story’s development. As a rather simple character, her change is limited and the reader does not learn much about her thoughts and ideas. Nevertheless, Kusum represents Balram’s counterpart, as far as Indian traditions and values are concerned. Thus, she denies the importance of education and subordinates the well-being of the individual to the welfare of the whole family. As “[t]he family ha[s] taken a

big loan from the Stork so they could have a lavish wedding and a lavish dowry for [Balram's] cousin-sister", Kusum insists on Balram's financial support and he is forced to work in the tea shop with his brother Kishan (Adiga 31). According to Kusum, an arranged marriage is the ultimate goal every Indian should strive for. This appreciation of the deeply rooted customs of Indian society reflects her traditional views and ideas. With her strong and authoritarian personality, Kusum rules over the entire family. For example, after Kishan's wedding "Kusum Granny [takes] the five thousand rupees and the Hero cycle and the thick gold necklace" from the dowry of Kishan's wife (Adiga 42). This indirect characterization is further elaborated by the narrator's direct one, when he comments that "[s]he ha[s] grinded her way into control of the house; every son and daughter-in-law [live] in fear of her" (Adiga 13). As the head of the family, she blackmails Balram by sending a letter through the Mongoose, Balram's master. This clever gambit allows her to "blow the whistle on [Balram] – tell Mr. Ashok [he] [hasn't] been sending money home" (Adiga 165). Due to this bold behaviour, she could also be characterized as the cunning Indian woman. Kusum's powerful position within her family is an example of the above mentioned lower-caste practice, according to which the men of the family usually pass all their money to the oldest woman of the household (Tenhunen and Säävälä 38). Hence, Kusum embodies female authoritarian power, which is a rather rare phenomenon in Indian patriarchal society.

6.7 Balram's Male Relatives

Balram's father, his brother Kishan and his cousin Dharam all appear as marginal figures and are thus flat characters in the novel. Nevertheless, they do have an important function, as they represent Balram's counterparts as typical Indian low-caste men. Balram describes his father as "a poor man, but [as] [...] a man of honour and courage" (Adiga 19). He is very determined, has a strong will and always maintains his dignity, despite his low social status. Consequently, Balram considers him as a role model and looks up to him. He works as a rickshaw puller in Laxmangarh and is therefore, a "sticklike" man (Adiga 23). He frequently has to wait hours for costumers, but he "never crouche[s]" and "prefer[s] to stand" (Adiga 20). Nevertheless, just as Kishan, he is weak as opposed to the women in the family. Correspondingly, he states that "[he] survived the city, but [he] couldn't survive the women in [his] home" (Adiga 22). After their father's death, Kishan as the eldest son assumes his role and takes care of Balram in Dhanbad, where they work in the local tea shop. Like his father, also Kishan obeys

the traditional rules of Indian society, marries a girl whom he brings to their family's extended household and continues to live under Kusum's rule.

As Balram is the only member of the family who manages to escape from the 'Darkness', Kusum sends his cousin Dharam to Delhi. Dharam is very shy and introverted at the beginning, but he quickly learns from Balram and adopts his behaviour. He is a clever boy who immediately understands how the corrupt city life works and thanks to Balram, he has also managed to leave the 'Darkness' behind. As he even starts to blackmail Balram, Dharam's character illustrates that fraud and corruption are perfectly normal in Indian society and cannot be abolished very easily, even in the *India of Light*.

7. Themes and Motifs in the Novel and their Manifestations in Indian Life and Society

Considering the ample attention that *The White Tiger* has received in Indian as well as foreign literary circles, the widely debated issue of authenticity is one topic of discussion at this point of the thesis. Thus, the present chapter tries to explore the novel's most significant themes⁹, motifs¹⁰ and problems, as well as the considerations as to whether the novel reflects the reality of contemporary Indian society. Due to spatial limitations, however, only the most significant themes and motifs will be addressed here.

7.1 Inequality

Inequality is, undoubtedly, portrayed as one of India's most controversial issues and one of the novel's major themes. The contrast between rich and poor in India, which is also reflected in the rural-urban divide, is manifested in the novel's leitmotif of 'Light' versus 'Darkness'. Although the significance of this dichotomy has already been elaborated above, it seems vital to emphasize its importance for the theme of inequality. India's prevailing inequalities, and thus, the differences between 'Light' and 'Darkness', are, for instance, exemplified by the respective healthcare facilities. Balram's father, who suffers from tuberculosis, faces an inevitable death due to the insufficient medical institutions in rural India. Although modern sciences enable an easy treatment of this disease, tuberculosis remains a frequent cause of death in contemporary rural India (Nath 1265). Thus, Adiga disapprovingly implements the theme of disease in general, and tuberculosis in particular, in order to raise the readers' awareness of India's "social disaster" and its "moral [and] social decay" (Daemmrich and Daemmrich s.v. "Disease"). The terrible condition of the hospital in the 'Darkness', where Balram and Kishan take their father, is portrayed by the prevailing "stench of goat feces", the broken windows and the lack of beds for the sick and injured (Adiga 40). The absence of medical staff is compensated by the obvious control of the animals over the hospital and one of the patients observes that "it's not safe in the rooms – that cat has tasted blood" (Adiga 40). This motif of the wild and uncontrolled animal is

⁹ "[A] theme embodies a text's ideational substance [...] which manifests itself in conceptions and characterization of figures" (Daemmrich and Daemmrich s.v. "Theme").

¹⁰ A motif, on the other hand, is "a recurrent thematic element used in the development of a [...] literary work. [...] The motif is the concrete nucleus of a narrative; the theme [...] is the intellectual dimension. [Moreover], [t]he motif is a textual element that can persist in tradition" (Daemmrich and Daemmrich s.v. "Motif").

associated to the depiction of *Dark India* as underdeveloped and savage and is ironically juxtaposed to the hospital's inscription, which says "LOHIA UNIVERSAL FREE HOSPITAL – PROUDLY INAUGURATED BY THE GREAT SOCIALIST – A HOLY PROOF THAT HE KEEPS HIS PROMISES" (Adiga 40). The underlying sarcasm of this inscription irrefutably expresses the novel's awareness-raising aim. Later in the story, Balram is supposed to take the Stork to "one of Delhi's most famous private hospitals" because he has "a little pain in his stomach" (Adiga 154). In contrast to the disastrous condition of the rural hospital, this private clinic's "lobby look[s] as clean as the inside of a five-star hotel" (Adiga 154). Hence, the binary opposition of the two hospitals in the 'Darkness' and in the 'Light' serves as illustration of India's horrendous social inequalities and reflects aspects of contemporary Indian society.

Apart from the discriminating character of India's medical system, also its educational institutions contribute to a highly hierarchical society. The description of Laxmangarh's school fulfils all the clichés of the above outlined insufficiencies in India's rural education. The majority of students lack basic education, such as reading or writing, the teacher abuses governmental money intended for educational purposes and frequently neglects the teaching as he gets regularly drunk during the lessons. The narrator describes a typical day at school where he is "working on the alphabet on [his] own, [while] [t]he boys [are] chatting or fighting [and] [t]he teacher [has] passed out" (Adiga 31). Moreover, Balram, who embodies the motif of the model pupil, is forced to leave school because his family depends on his income from the local tea shop. As mentioned above, numerous Indian children from poor families, who cannot afford to send their kids to school, suffer from the same fate. Adiga introduces the motif of "the half-baked Indian" in order to describe their mediocre formal education. "Open [their] skulls, look in with a penlight, and you'll find an odd museum of ideas [...], half formed and half digested and half correct" (Adiga 8). Balram, however, the witty and inquisitive boy, discovers alternative ways of education in which the motif of eavesdropping plays an essential role. Thus, he receives his education about India's merciless reality by overhearing other people's conversations and extracting relevant information. The inferior status of education in the 'Darkness' is directly contrasted with the private education that the landlord's children receive in cities like Dhanbad or Delhi. Although their privileged access to private schools is only alluded to in the novel, it serves the purpose of juxtaposing *Light* and *Dark India*.

As so often in *The White Tiger*, irony and sarcasm greatly contribute to the novel's overall critical character and also emphasize the stark contrast between 'Light' and 'Darkness'. According to the narrator, "the Lord Buddha sat under a tree [in the Darkness, in the district of Gaya] and found his enlightenment and started Buddhism, which then spread to the whole world" (Adiga 15). The fact that a man who is greatly admired for his enlightened and omniscient personality emerged from the 'Darkness' of rural India, is ironically contrasted with the masses of the poor, rural Indians, who live in their half-baked realities without questioning their substandard lives.

7.2 Social Hierarchy

The theme of social hierarchy, which is prevalent in various contexts within the narrative, is conceptually and ideologically closely interconnected with the theme of inequality. Recapitulating the brief outline of India's contemporary society in previous chapters of this thesis, it becomes clear that hierarchical structure is, alongside inequality, a significant characterizing aspect of India's history and contemporary society. Caste and class are the predominant organizing principles, which divide Indian society into two main categories or castes, according to Balram: "Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies" (Adiga 54). The narrator further emphasizes this dark picture of India's capitalist society, as he observes that there are "only two destinies: eat – or get eaten up" (Adiga 54). This clear hierarchy has been established as India received its independence from the British in 1947 and the "clean, well kept, orderly zoo" of India with its numerous castes that put "[e]veryone in his place" turned into a wild jungle (Adiga 53). "[T]he cages ha[ve] been let open; and the animals ha[ve] attacked and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law" (Adiga 54). This ironic analogy with the animal kingdom superficially suggests that colonial India, in which the British abused India's native caste system to control and suppress the country's inhabitants, is preferable to the primitive and uncivilized independent India. A critical reading, however, reveals the narrator's underlying criticism of postcolonial, capitalist India. The free-market doctrine together with the 'survival of the fittest' ideology has created the two caste system, in which the rich live at the expense of the poor. A comparison of *The White Tiger's* pessimistic depiction of Indian society with India's contemporary 'reality' reveals a considerable overlap and a certain degree of authenticity cannot be denied.

In general, the overarching motif of animalization is not only applied to illustrate the development of India's society, but also in other contexts that refer to the theme of hierarchy. The servant's class, for example, is frequently associated with various kinds of animals and describe in zoological terms. This dehumanization of India's lower classes has already been observed by Fanon, who analysed the colonial world as a Manichean one (Fanon 31f.). Similar to Fanon, also Adiga attributes animalistic traits to the novel's servants. For instance, Balram's father remarks that "[his] whole life, [he] ha[s] been treated like a donkey [and he adds that] [a]ll [he] want[s] is that one son of [his] – at least one – should live like a man" (Adiga 26). The reference to the motif of the hard-working packhorse is obvious in this context and does not require further explanation. Another example of this dehumanizing discourse is the description of the drivers in Delhi as "[c]rouching and jabbering like monkeys" (Adiga 170). The monkey, as a reoccurring motif in literature, is related to imitation and often has comical and ridiculous attributes (De Vries s.v. "Monkey"). Thus, the narrator mocks the servants' arrogant behaviour towards him and laughs about their presumed superiority within the limited context of the servants' hierarchy because he is aware of the bigger picture and their position in society as a whole.

Moreover, the servants' class is repeatedly associated with dogs throughout the course of the story. "Servants need to abuse other servants. It's been bread into [them], the way Alsatian dogs are bred to attack strangers. [Servants] attack anyone who's familiar" (Adiga 109). This pejorative association with the dog motif describes the servants as violent and aggressive, characteristics that are often attributed to dogs (De Vries s.v. "Dog"). In another instance, when Mukesh forces Balram to search for the one-rupee coin that he has apparently lost, Balram describes how "[he] [gets] down on his knees [and] sniff[s] in between the mats, like a dog" (Adiga 117). After Pinky Madam's accident, Mukesh states that Balram is a "part of the family" because he wants him to feel comfortable and secure, in order to prepare him for the accusation of murder (Adiga 141). According to Lau, this use of kinship terms is not exceptional in Indian society and employers tend to exploit hypocritical "ties of familial allegiances" to their own advantage (39). Balram, however, who does not suspect anything mischievous, is very proud to hear his master's words and "crouche[s] on the floor, happy as a dog" (Adiga 141). This description alludes to the motif of the dog as a faithful companion that follows his master with complete devotion (De Vries s.v. "Dog"). This "deeply unequal power equation" that defines the servant-master relationship in India, is further

illustrated by the juxtaposition of Balram's treatment like a dog and the treatment of the Stork's two Pomeranian dogs that are washed and cared for like humans (Lau 36). In general, the wide acceptance and normality of servitude in India is due to religious beliefs and concepts, such as *dharma* and *karma*, which imply God-given attributes and duties for every individual. Moreover, the large influx of unskilled labourers from the countryside to India's urban centres has created an economic context with little possibilities for alternative employment (Lau 36).

Adiga's central metaphor that describes the reasons for India's prevailing hierarchical system is that of the Rooster Coop. Thus, the author compares the behaviour of Indian servants to that of the roosters at the market in Old Delhi, which observe the butcher as he kills their kind and yet are trapped in the coop and do not rebel. Similarly, "[a] handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 percent – as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way – to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse" (Adiga 149). The Rooster Coop is based on "the pride and glory of [the] nation: [...] *the Indian family*" (Adiga 150). As the former "is the glue that holds Indian society together" and family members usually stay highly loyal to each other, the pressure from the family guarantees the efficiency of the Rooster Coop (Kakar and Kakar 8ff.). An individual's escape from the Coop would not only ensure their personal freedom, but it would also imply the suffering and torture of their family. Therefore, the majority of Indians does not attempt to break the Coop. This motif of the chickens caught in small cages under miserable circumstances "pecking each other and shitting each other, jostling just for breathing space" symbolizes the depressing living conditions of thousands of Indian servants (Adiga 147).

7.3 Foreign Domination

As foreign domination was a central aspect in India's history, it is hardly astonishing that Adiga elaborates on this theme in his novel, which tries to deconstruct the transfigured and nostalgic image of the nation. Before the British established the Raj in the middle of the 19th century, India had been conquered by Muslim Arabs around 711 AD. The ruling power of the Delhi sultanate, which was in the firm hands of Turks and Afghans, was transferred to the Mughal dynasty in the middle of the 16th century (Wolpert 104ff.). The probably most famous achievement of the Mughal Muslim Empire, and a manifestation of its flourishing cultural life, was the construction of the

Taj Mahal, the tomb for Shah Jahan's beloved wife (Metcalf and Metcalf 17f.). In 1757, the British colonizing activities in India began with the increasing importance of the East India Company (EIC), which lasted one century until 1858, when the British crown took over control in the Indian territories (Vohra 43ff.). As outlined above, India finally achieved its independence in 1947, but according to Adiga's narrator, "only a moron would think that [they] became free then" (Adiga 18). Following the novel's logic, India now suffers from a dictate of the money and the market, as all capitalist societies do.

The novel's main motif for the theme of foreign domination is Laxmangarh's Black Fort. "The Turks, or the Afghans, or the English, or whichever foreigners were then ruling India, must have built the fort centuries ago. [...] Now the foreigners have long abandoned the Black Fort, and a tribe of monkeys occupy it" (Adiga 18). Assuming that capitalism together with India's politicians, who act corresponding to a free-market and profit-driven ideology, are considered as the dominators of present India, this sarcastic reference to the monkey tribe reveals Adiga's implicit criticism. The monkey is associated with negatively connoted attributes, such as imitation, inconstancy, as well as hypocrisy and dissimulation, which paint a highly derogatory picture of India's ruling class (De Vries s.v. "Monkey"). Moreover, the comparison of politicians, feudal lords, industrialists and other influential groups with monkeys creates an impression of ironical mockery.

Foreign domination plays an essential role not only in India's history, but also in Balram's life is this theme of vital importance. During his childhood in Laxmangarh, his family is controlled by the dominant Granny Kusum, who collects the money of the whole family and rules over the extended household like an empress. The motif of the malicious grandmother and the responsibility towards his family still continues to trouble Balram after the abandonment of his native village. Moreover, Laxmangarh is controlled by four families who exercise their power over every aspect of the village's life. As soon as Balram manages to escape from Laxmangarh's repressive structures, he becomes, however, an employee of the Stork's family and is dependent on their goodwill. Finally, he sees no other remedy than slitting his master's throat in order to terminate the foreign domination of his own will, power and agency. This atrocious act enables him to appropriate a large amount of money, which enables him to participate in the ruling class of India's capitalist society. Balram's act of emancipation is symbolized by his ascent up to the Black Fort, which he has always been afraid of as a boy. His

grandmother told him that “an enormous lizard, the biggest in the whole world, lived in the fort” (Adiga 34). Therefore, Balram only stands below and gapes at the Black Fort with great admiration. At this point in the novel, the narrator cites the Muslim poet Iqbal, who wrote in one of his poems, “*They remain slaves because they can’t see what is beautiful in this world*” (Adiga 34). Balram comments on this poem with an allusion to his future and remarks that “[e]ven as a boy [he] could see what was beautiful in the world: [he] was destined not to stay a slave” (Adiga 35). His fear of lizards serves as another illustration of Balram’s imminent emancipation. One day at school, Balram has an encounter with a lizard, which terrifies him to such an extent that he immediately runs home. As his father takes him to school in order to confront him with the horrifying animal, however, Balram realizes that “the monster [...] [is] no different from [him]; it [is] terrified” (Adiga 25). The animal that had such a power over Balram is just as scared as he is, and this insight can metaphorically be interpreted as a foreshadowing of Balram’s recognition that his masters, who control him, are actually not superior to him.

Balram’s ascent to the fort at the age of 24 is such a crucial point in the narrative that it is told twice, and by means of this repetition, the narrator emphasizes its importance. When Balram has finally managed to overcome his fear and stands on top of the fort’s walls, he spits. “Again and again. And then, whistling and humming, [he goes] back down the hill. Eight months later, [he] slit[s] Mr. Ashok’s throat” (Adiga 36). This unexpected turn in the last sentence of the first letter, exemplifies the symbolic meaning of Balram’s climb to the Black Fort. When the narrator refers to this incident for the second time, he returns to the poet Iqbal and his poem “in which he imagines that he is the Devil, standing up for his rights at a moment when God tries to bully him. [...] God says: *I am powerful. I am huge. Become my servant again.* Devil says: *Ha!*” (Adiga 75). Balram associates himself with the Devil, who laughs about God’s apparent kindness and grandeur considering all the injustice and suffering in this world. The ironical criticism is expressed when he says that he delivered “to the Almighty a gesture of thanks for having created the world this particular way, instead of all the other ways it could have been created” (Adiga 75). This particular gesture of thanks is “*spitting at God again and again*” (Adiga 75).

7.4 Poverty

Due to the fact that India has one of the largest poor populations worldwide, poverty is also a central theme in *The White Tiger*. As such, it is prevalent in its rural, as well as urban manifestations. One of the novel's central statements concerning poverty and inequality in India wittily and precisely expresses the narrator's criticism of our iniquitous world, "[T]he poor dream all their lives of getting enough to eat and looking like the rich. And what do the rich dream of? Losing weight and looking like the poor" (Adiga 191).

In general, poverty is, similar to the theme of hierarchy, partly portrayed through the motif of animalization. The people working at tea shops all over India, breaking coals, wiping tables and cleaning filthy floors, for example, are depicted as human spiders. They "go crawling in between and under the tables with rags in their hands, crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven, in their thirties or forties or fifties but still 'boys'" (Adiga 43). This motif of the human spider refers to the animal's connotation of despair and hope (De Vries s.v. "Spider"), as well as to a spider's typical crawling movement, which is compared to the workers stooped posture.

Poverty's urban character is mainly exemplified by the country's uncountable slums, where the inhabitants live under terrible circumstances. In the novel, Balram is led to one of Delhi's slums by following an animal's paw prints that have been left in the hardened concrete around Gurgaon's shopping malls. Metaphorically, this image can be associated with the marginalized position of India's poor within society. Although poverty is an indisputable part of India's, as well as Delhi's, reality, the rich and progressive inhabitants of the 'Light' tend to deny their existence. Nevertheless, there do remain traces of poverty, such as the evidence of a slum just behind modern, brand new shopping malls. As Balram follows the paw prints, he identifies with the animal and walks faster when "the spaces between the prints [grow] wider" (Adiga 222). Through this kind of animalization he reaches the slum behind the malls, where he has to stop because "a row of men [are] squatt[ing] on the ground in a nearly perfect straight line [...] defecating" (Adiga 222). This dehumanized illustration of the slum dwellers underlines their inhuman living conditions in a shockingly straightforward way.

A different view of poverty is portrayed by the motif of the poor but happy and innocent people. Mr. Ashok, for instance, envies Balram for his simple life because he "[is] sick of the life [he] lead[s] [and thinks that] [the] rich people [have] lost [their] way" (Adiga

203). Another example of Ashok's irrational envy of the poor is the harmonious family life in the slums, as opposed to his solitude. Moreover, Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam perceive "the villagers [...] so religious in the Darkness" (Adiga 77) and Mukesh thinks that "[s]ometimes they express themselves so movingly, these villagers" (Adiga 163). These diverse manifestations of poverty reveal various facets of the theme and thus, convey a realistic picture of contemporary India.

7.5 Uniqueness

The theme of uniqueness is, undoubtedly, embodied by the novel's protagonist, the White Tiger. As Balram's extraordinary personality has already been analysed above, his outstanding achievements in various contexts do not have to be repeated at this point of the thesis. It is especially the murder of his master, his most crucial deed, which results in life-changing opportunities. Thus, the homicide enables Balram to switch sides, to lead a life in the 'Light' and to start his business as a successful entrepreneur.

The main motif that sustains the theme of uniqueness is the *white tiger motif*, which became also the title of the novel. The white tiger's metaphorical meaning is not only derived from its description as "the rarest of animals – the creature that comes along only once in a generation" (Adiga 30), but also from its association with power, aggression and cruelty (De Vries s.v. "Tiger"). In general, the tiger "as night-prowler [...] is more often related with darkness" as well as "the dark, fear-inspiring side of a man's soul" (De Vries s.v. "Tiger"). Hence, Balram – the White Tiger – the exceptional creature, rises from the 'Darkness' into the 'Light' by committing an atrocious crime. He is one out of millions of lower class Indians who achieves the impossible, leaves poverty behind and succeeds as a self-taught business entrepreneur. As opposed to the Great Socialist's utopian promise that "[a]ny boy in any village can grow up to become the prime minister of India", Balram's story proves the contrary (Adiga 30). Balram's only possibility for social advancement is to slit his master's throat and to risk the lives of his entire family. Accordingly, Balram affirms that advancement in Indian society "take[s] no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature" (Adiga 150). India's traditional society divides its inhabitants into caste groups, which are usually linked to certain occupations. For innovative Indian entrepreneurs it might, thus, be difficult to persuade their families of alternative plans. Similarly, Balram's family, and in his case especially his authoritarian grandmother, does not support any of his ambitions neither in school, nor on the professional level. Balram's surname 'Halwai' actually means

“sweet-maker” (Adiga 53). His traditional occupation to work in tea and sweet shops and making sweet pastry was, however, altered due to his father’s obligation to work as a rickshaw puller in India’s corrupt, capitalist society. Consequently, also Balram and his brother are expected to do menial jobs, such as breaking coals and cleaning at tea shops. Nevertheless, Balram breaks all social conventions, escapes the Rooster Coop and succeeds as self-made entrepreneur in Bangalore.

According to Fanon, the natives can counteract the dehumanizing discourse of animalization as soon as they recognize their humanity (Fanon 33). Balram’s moment of realization, which characterizes him as exceptional, is illustrated by his encounter with the white tiger in New Delhi’s zoo. The desperation of his situation is previously represented by a dog that is trying to lick his own wound. “The wound [is] just out of reach of his teeth, but the dog [is] going crazy from pain – trying to attack the wound with its slavering mouth, it [keeps] moving in mad, precise, pointless circles” (Adiga 213). This metaphor of the injured dog that is unable to reach the source of his pain mirrors Balram’s hopeless attempts to attract his master’s sympathy in order to achieve social and economic benefits. Just as Balram meets the white tiger’s gaze, he recognizes the hopelessness of his situation and realizes the only possible way to escape. The tiger that is caught in the cage symbolizes Balram, who is trapped in India’s hierarchical society, and their encounter describes Balram’s moment of revelation.

As far as authenticity is concerned, one can say that entrepreneurs are an important factor in the development of India’s economy and that there are innumerable examples of the former (Alamelu and Baskaran 13). However, one has to bear in mind that Adiga created an entirely fictional story and does not suggest that it is not unusual for homicides to ensure personal success. Adiga’s exaggerated example merely serves to ironically deconstruct the idealized image of *Progressive India*.

7.6 Pursuit of Success

The novel’s main plot describes its protagonist’s pursuit of success and therefore, constitutes another of *The White Tiger*’s important themes. The leitmotif of this theme is the chandelier that features in various instances throughout the novel and represents material success and wealth. Right at the beginning of the story, the narrator states that “there’s no one else in this 150-square-foot office of [his]. Just [he] and a chandelier above [him], although the chandelier has a personality of his own. It’s a huge thing, full

of small diamond-shaped glass pieces, just like the ones they used to show in the films of the 1970s” (Adiga 5). The chandelier’s metaphorical meaning of affluence becomes clear when Mr. Ashok visits his father’s mansion in Laxmangarh, where there are chandeliers in nearly every room, “[h]e [even] wanted to put one up in the bathroom” (Adiga 71). This exaggerated display of wealth is ironically taken up by Balram as soon as he has established himself in Bangalore, where he mounts a chandelier in his office and two in his apartment, one of them in the toilet. “Why not?”, he wonders, “I’ve got no family anymore. All I’ve got is chandeliers” (Adiga 97). This quote emphasizes Balram’s willingness to risk his entire family’s lives in return for his own profit.

Balram’s pursuit of success is simultaneously accompanied by the motif of the cunning and parasitic servant who betrays his master in order to increase his own financial gain. “To go back to the analogy [of the Indian caste system], [he is] growing a belly” (Adiga 196). Consequently, Balram is prepared to take risks that are necessary to realize his dreams, which is an important characteristic of an entrepreneur. The motif of the cunning and parasitic servant is further exemplified by the narrator’s implementation of “[his] own ‘sidebar’ into the narrative of the modern entrepreneur’s growth and development” (Adiga 194). This sidebar lists various ways by which drivers can cheat their masters and earn extra money behind their backs. This highly comical form of sarcasm indicates the firm place that corruption and fraud have within Indian society.

7.7 Redemption

As Adiga portrays a protagonist with a highly complex personality who does not fit into either of the two categories ‘Light’ or ‘Darkness’, the theme of redemption is a logical consequence of Balram’s deeds. Although he commits a murder and gambles with his family’s lives, Balram is not the cold-blooded and calculated killer one might expect. On the contrary, he does feel guilty, especially about his family. An instance that reveals his remorse is the metaphorical foreshadowing, which takes place during one of his visits in Old Delhi’s butchers’ quarter. There he observes a buffalo that draws a cart full of skulls of dead buffaloes. Suddenly, the “dead skinned faces [...] [seem] to [him] [...] the faces of [his] own family” who accuse him of their deaths (Adiga 219). Nevertheless, in another instance he poses the question if “[he hasn’t] succeeded in the struggle that every poor man [in India] should be making – the struggle not to take the lashes your father took” (Adiga 273). He admits that murder “is a wrong thing to do”, but simultaneously affirms that this was his only possibility to change his miserable life

for the better (Adiga 273). As a further justification he claims that “everyone who counts in this world [...] has killed someone or other on their way to the top” (Adiga 273).

Furthermore, the motif of the personified city serves as justification for the homicide, and Balram consoles himself with the realization of how much Mr. Ashok and his family have stolen from him by exploiting his workforce. As Balram projects his inner struggle with his conscience onto the exterior world, it seems as if Delhi sends him signs of encouragement. The personified city that “[knows his] secret” talks to him and assures him that “[t]hey won’t see a thing [he does]” (Adiga 209). Even two puddles of *paan* that another driver has spat onto the road seem to justify his murderous plans, as they indicate the injustice of Indian society with the stark contrast between rich and poor. Finally, it appears that Balram does not believe in his redemption, nor does he consider himself condemned to lifelong remorse. He does not think of himself as “a man, [n]or a demon. [...] [He has] woken up, and the rest of [them] are still sleeping, and that is the only difference between [them]” (Adiga 271). Naturally, it is not an excuse, nor a justification that Balram saw no other possibility than to commit a murder, but it might be an explanation for his actions.

7.8 Corruption

One of the novel’s major points of criticism is corruption, a reoccurring theme of the narrative, which likewise is a problematic issue in contemporary India’s public life. The details which have already been outlined above show that corruption, bribery and fraud still continue to be common practices in the Indian state, despite its formal designation as the ‘world’s largest democracy’. Interestingly, Pinky Madam’s leitmotif “*What a fucking joke!*” expresses the novel’s critical attitude towards this and other controversial aspects of Indian society. As far as political corruption is concerned, there is a long tradition in Indian history that is connected to rigged elections, undermined personal freedom and the dictation of the rich over the poor. In *The White Tiger* this manifestation of power and powerlessness is, for instance, visible in the procedure of the electoral process in the ‘Darkness’. As the owner of the tea shop has sold his employees’ votes to the Great Socialist’s party, Balram “owe[s] democracy [...] [his] birthday” (Adiga 80). According to Adiga’s stereotypical representation of the people from the ‘Darkness’, little attention is paid to the birth of India’s innumerable children and similarly, “Balram’s parents didn’t make note of [his birthday]” (Adiga 80). India’s

legal voting age, however, is eighteen which leads the government officer to arbitrarily assign Balram a birthday that entitles him to take part in the upcoming elections. Once again, it is the narrator's dark humour that prevails in the description of these questionable methods and the witty irony serves to criticize the Indian democratic system. Similarly, the description of a rickshaw puller who demands his right to cast his vote freely and independently is full of irony and sarcasm. The man who embodies the *brave but mad man motif* stands up for his rights and rebels against India's oppressive practices. His behaviour is metaphorically compared to "a ray of sunlight [that] will break through" "[e]very now and then, even in a place like Laxmangarh" (Adiga 84). Shockingly, the violent and corrupt methods of the Indian government, as portrayed in the novel, culminate in the rickshaw puller's death because government officials beat him "until he [is] stamped back into the earth" (Adiga 85). Balram critically compares the police's violence to his own and concludes that they do not have the slightest right to accuse him of homicide considering their own record. Although the authenticity value of the described violence is difficult to assess due to a lack of official recordings, it is undeniably true that payments in return for certain favours as well as fraudulent elections are part of India's political life (Corbridge 224).

Another type of political corruption that is connected to voluntary payments by the Stork's family is illustrated as a typical example of India's political reality. As their family business consists of extracting coal from government mines at favourable conditions and selling it at the Chinese market, they are forced to forward bribes to various leading politicians, who allow them to continue their illegal business. When the Stork tries to distance himself from the Great Socialist, he is already caught in the net of corruption and bribery and obliged to pay continuously higher rates. Mr. Ashok, whose only occupation in Delhi is to distribute bribes, is desperate about the situation, but his brother Mukesh encourages him and emphasizes the difference between America and India, where you only need "a good fixer" (Adiga 100). Consequently, Mr. Ashok embodies the motif of the good and innocent westerner, whereas Mukesh is associated with the motif of the ruthless and corrupt Indian. One evening as Balram waits for his master, who is at some minister's house, Balram observes the beauty of nature, which is harshly contrasted to the dreadfulness of humankind. India's stunning nature is portrayed by "a peacock [that flies] up over the guard's booth [of the minister's house] and perche[s] there; for an instant its deep blue neck and its long tail [turn] golden in the setting sunlight" (Adiga 180). The peacock's splendour is juxtaposed with Mr. Ashok's

unpleasant and dishonest activities and, therefore, evokes the image of *Exotic India*. The theme of Mr. Ashok's bribery is symbolized by his red bag, which he always uses to transport exorbitant sums of money. Hence, for Balram the red bag exemplifies freedom and thus, he is tempted to steal it in order to escape his prison of servitude. As soon as Balram has realized his plans and finally reached the 'Light', he also changes from a victim of corruption into an agent of fraud and bribery. In order to be part of Bangalorean society, he bribes the police to surpass his competitors, and similar to Mr. Ashok, also for Balram the red bag symbolizes corruption. Balram, the entrepreneur, ironically calls the police "[his] friends" and describes them and their arbitrary and semi-legal behaviour as "fat, paunchy men swinging their canes, on Brigade Road, poking and harassing vendors and shaking them down for money" (Adiga 256).

Corruption as theft in *The White Tiger* is illustrated by the behaviour of Laxmangarh's school teacher, who only receives very poor payment for his government job. According to Corbridge, Indian public officials frequently use bribery in order to supplement their low income and thus, the novel portrays an authentic aspect of India's society (224f.). The teacher, for instance, steals the pupils' lunch money and sells their government-funded school uniforms at the black market in a neighbouring village. The normality of corruption and its wide acceptance within Indian society is expressed metaphorically by the narrator when he remarks that "[y]ou can't expect a man in a dung heap to smell sweet" (Adiga 28). He adds that "some [people in the village] [are] even proud of [the school teacher], for having got away with it so cleanly" (Adiga 28). Consequently, the school teacher personifies the stereotypical motif of the innocent poor as the victim of society's injustice. Within the course of the story, however, this motif is questioned by the representation of Balram as an unscrupulous murderer.

7.9 Political Hypocrisy

The theme of political hypocrisy in *The White Tiger* is clearly personified by the Great Socialist, who seems to be a blend of India's corrupt politicians. Although there is no evidence in Indian history for a particular politician that served as an example for the character of the Great Socialist, it is clearly a symbolic mockery of India's allegedly socialist politics. Therefore, one might assume that Adiga refers to India's past and the unrestricted political power of Indira Gandhi, who declared President's Rule in various states as well as a state of Emergency over the whole nation, which enabled her to establish a kind of dictatorship with authoritarian political methods. As Nehru's

political heir, Indira superficially followed his socialist example, but this ideology remained an empty shell rather than political reality. Another indication that Adiga critically alludes to the Gandhi dynasty is a direct reference to Sonia Gandhi whose face is on “two or three giant cardboard billboards” outside the President’s House (Adiga 112).

Similar to Indira Gandhi, the Great Socialist is also highly talented in giving reassuring speeches full of altruistic promises, while his political actions are rather characterized by egoistic and self-centred objectives. “[A]n old trick [...] from the Great Socialist [is that] just when his audience is yawning, he says ‘one final word’ – and then he goes on for two more hours” (Adiga 273). One of his empty promises that “[a]ny boy in any village can grow up to become the prime minister of India” has already been mentioned before, and it has been proven that Balram’s life serves as a sarcastic refutation of the former (Adiga 30). The Great Socialist’s real personality reveals itself to the reader when he visits the Stork’s home in Dhanbad. The ironic motif of the omnipotent and celebrated politician is, on the one hand, represented by Mr. Ashok, who “[stands] at the gate, waiting with a garland of jasmine flowers” and by the cheering as “the great man” arrives (Adiga 86f.). On the other hand, this motif is manifested in the Great Socialist’s behaviour, who “fold[s] his palms and bow[s] all around him” (Adiga 87). The politician’s ironically exaggerated reception at the Stork’s mansion nearly resembles the worshipping of a saint and thus, serves as criticism of his unlimited power. The scope of his influence is also underlined by his extortion of money from the Stork. According to the Great Socialist, “[the Stork was] just some little village landlord when [he] found [him] – [he] brought [him] [t]here – [he] made [him] what [he] is today” (Adiga 87f.). Due to these semi-legal practices, the Stork’s business depends on the Great Socialist’s goodwill who impudently abuses his hierarchical superiority for his own profit. “[This is] the positive side of the Great Socialist. He humiliate[s] all [the] masters” (Adiga 88).

Another manifestation of India’s political hypocrisy becomes visible in the character of Vijay, Laxmangarh’s former bus conductor. He embodies the Great Socialist’s promises and hence, represents the *rags-to-riches motif*. Vijay, the pigherd’s son, rose from the lowest layer of Indian society to its upper class by advocating the ideology of the dominant political leader. As the narrator sarcastically remarks, these are “[t]he marvels of democracy” (Adiga 86). The ambivalent character of his corrupt practices as opposed to his apparently socialist ideology is metaphorically portrayed by his appearance. He

wears “a white Nehru cap on his head”, which is an allusion to Nehru’s socialism, “and ha[s] rings of solid gold on eight of his fingers”, which suggest his accumulated wealth and capitalist values (Adiga 86).

7.10 Capitalism and Globalization

In terms of capitalism and globalization, *The White Tiger* is a commentary on India’s neoliberal society, in which money irrefutably rules the world. In the novel this motif is, for instance, illustrated by the parallelism of fatal car accidents before and after Balram’s social advancement. Although Balram pretends to be morally superior to Mr. Ashok in controlling the situation, both instances reveal the underlying materialistic attitude. Moreover, the *big versus small bellies motif* describes the stark contrasts that are inherent in India’s capitalist society. “[A]ll that count[s] now [in India, is] the size of [one’s] belly”, irrespective of gender, caste or religion (Adiga 54). Consequently, Adiga agrees with Fanon’s hypothesis that the bourgeois is a “tool of capitalism” that establishes a form of neo-colonialism by following the dictate of the free market (Fanon 120f.). Money rules the world, and whoever is lucky enough to own some, may be part of society’s dominating class.

The capitalism of Indian society is aligned with its globalization and is, according to Krishna, the source of the world’s economic inequity (3f.). In *The White Tiger* India’s globalization is portrayed by the availability of English liquor for the wealthy upper class, whereas lower-class Indians are used to drinking Indian liquor. According to the novel’s narrator, there are “two kinds of men: ‘Indian’ liquor men and ‘English’ liquor men” (Adiga 62). The inherent class divide further implies an increased enrichment of society’s upper strata. Adiga sarcastically refers to this class divide by depicting a “stick-thin” rickshaw puller who carries a gym advertisement against excess weight on his seat (187). Thus, the processes of globalization and capitalism are considered as continuations of colonialism’s unequal practices and as the source of India’s disproportionate distribution of wealth.

7.11 Western Hegemony

In respect of the theme of western hegemony, it is predominantly the character of Pinky Madam who personifies the ideal of the West. It has already been analysed in considerable detail that Pinky is a modern, liberal and emancipated person, quite unlike

the Indian women. The motif of the Western woman as an object of sexual desire is not only portrayed by Pinky, but also by a blonde prostitute, whom Mr. Ashok visits after his separation from his wife. “[T]he most remarkable thing about her [is] her hair – golden and glossy, just like in the shampoo advertisements!” (Adiga 186). Balram is completely fascinated by the woman’s hair and after cleaning the car, he keeps a “strand of golden hair” as a kind of talisman and symbol of the Western ideal that is worth striving for (Adiga 188). Because of his fascination with the beautiful Western woman, Balram also aspires to spend a night with a golden-haired prostitute. However, the prize for this adventure is considerably high because “[w]hite skin has to be respected”, according to Balram’s driver colleague (Adiga 193). This idealization of the western complexion over the native Indian one, undeniably, manifests the perceived ideological superiority of the Western world. Another exemplification of this ideal is expressed by the narrator when he describes the thoughts and the behaviour of an average Indian who encounters a fair-skinned person, “*An American!* You stop to gape; you want to go near and touch” (Adiga 102f.). Consequently, the motif of the fascinating and exotic Westerner can be considered as a consequence of the prevailing Western hegemony in India and the persisting dominance of the West as the social, cultural and economic ideal.

The dichotomy between East versus West is also visible in Balram’s Westernization as described above. He considers his appearance as well as his behaviour that characterize him as a typical Indian as inferior to Mr. Ashok’s more Western looks. Therefore, he changes his appearance and adopts Western behaviour in order to raise his self-esteem and increase his agency in Indian society. As a ‘Westerner’, Balram is able to enter New Delhi’s shopping malls because he looks like the upper-class Indians, who always act according to their Western role models.

7.12 Urbanization

Not only in Adiga’s narrative are masses of poor people from the ‘Darkness’ streaming to Delhi, but also in the reality of contemporary India a process of urbanization can be observed. Although this process has led to an increased degree of poverty in urban areas, it is generally associated with modernization and progress. Similarly, for Balram the journey to Delhi means a rise in India’s hierarchy. Each time they pass one of the buses or jeeps full of people migrating to Delhi, he wants to “yell at them, *I’m going to Delhi in a car – an air-conditioned car!*” (Adiga 94). This motif of the car as a status

symbol is also illustrated by its metaphorical description as a dark egg that protects its passengers from the air pollution on Delhi's roads. "Every now and then an egg will crack open – a woman's hand, dazzling with gold bangles, stretches out an open window, flings an empty mineral bottle onto the road – and then the window goes up, and the egg is resealed" (Adiga 112). This quote hints at another problematic aspect of India's massive urbanization, which is the difficult issue of effective waste management.

The link between the theme of urbanization and modernization is illustrated by New Delhi's ongoing construction works. The crane that Balram observes at one of those construction sites is compared to a monster "sitting at the top of the pit with huge metal jaws alternately gorging and disgorging immense quantities of mud" (Adiga 134). The construction workers obey the huge machine that is responsible for the modernization of India like slaves. The motif of mankind as the slave of technology is therefore a vital aspect of Adiga's themes of urbanization and modernization and represents the negative consequences of modernization and technological development.

7.13 The Indian Family

Traditionally, the family is the nucleus of Indian society and the most important source of identification for Indians (Kakar and Kakar 8ff.). Consequently, Adiga integrates the theme of the 'joint' Indian family-clan into his novel, which he examines from different perspectives.

The influence of the family network in contemporary Indian society is still remarkable. There are certain social and economic obligations within a family that ensure the proper functioning of society as a whole. For example, the family acts as life insurance of their individual members in cases of temporary unemployment or natural disasters. Consequently, "a man's worth and, indeed, his identity are inextricable from the reputation of his family" (Kakar and Kakar 11). This financial responsibility towards one's family is illustrated by Balram's obligation to work at the tea shop in order to contribute to his cousin-sister's dowry. This already hints at another feature of the typical Indian family, which is an extended one where grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins live together in one household. Contrary to Balram's family in *The White Tiger*, in which his grandmother Kusum is the powerful head of the family, contemporary Indian society remains a staunchly patriarchal one, in which women occupy clearly

subordinated roles (Kakar and Kakar 23). Thus, Adiga dismisses the possibility of directly portraying the oppressed position of the Indian subaltern women. Nevertheless, women only play marginal roles in the novel, which might be an indication of their marginal position in society as a whole.

Apart from that, the “unshakeable solidarity between brothers as one of the highest ideals of family life” is irrefutably visible in the relationships between Balram and Kishan as well as between Ashok and Mukesh (Kakar and Kakar 12). This motif of the brother as a loyal companion is, for example, evident when Kishan encourages Balram after his failures in finding a job, or when “he [is] overcome with joy [that] [s]omeone in his family [is] going to make it out of the Darkness and into New Delhi”, instead of being angry because Balram has not sent them any money (Adiga 93). Also Mukesh supports his brother Ashok after the separation from his wife Pinky. As Balram is driving them home from the train station, “[t]he Mongoose put[s] his hand on Mr. Ashok’s shoulder – just the way Kishan ha[s] put his hand on [Balram’s] shoulder so many times” (Adiga 161).

In general, it is not merely the presence of the family that represents an important aspect of this theme, but also its absence features prominently within the narrative. Interestingly, this absence has highly contradictory meanings for Balram and Mr. Ashok. The latter associates the abandonment of his wife and the absence of his father and brother in New Delhi with loneliness because “without family, a man is nothing” (Adiga 161). This motif of the abandoned spouse is juxtaposed to Balram, who personifies the motif of the free and independent man. Without his family he is free of any financial and matrimonial or paternal obligations, and he is only able to escape the vicious circle of poverty by completely forsaking his family, irrespective of their terrible fates.

7.14 Religion

The White Tiger’s underlying theme of religion and religious conflict in India is implicitly included in the novel’s main plot. There is no direct evidence of violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims, which are part of Indian history, as portrayed in previous chapters of this thesis, but the hostile climate between the members of India’s two major religions is revealed through a number of pointed remarks throughout the narrative.

India's predominately Hindu society and the disadvantaged status of Indian Muslims are allegorically represented by the Stork's anti-Muslim attitude and the character of Ram Persad. When the Stork's grandson calls himself "Azharuddin, captain of India", the Stork advises him to "[c]all [him]self Gavaskar¹¹ [because] Azharuddin is a Muslim" (Adiga 59). As opposed to his father, Mr. Ashok has a more modern approach towards religion and states that there is no difference between Muslims and Hindus, which reflects the liberal ideas that he adopted during his time in the United States. The depiction of the discrimination against Muslim citizens in India culminates in Ram Persad's concealing his religious beliefs. In order to find employment by one of Laxmangarh's landowning families, the Muslim Ram Persad pretends to be Hindu and hides his true convictions. He even keeps pictures of various gods in his room to whom he bows and prays 'Om, om, om' every morning. Although Balram feels sorry for his driver colleague, who is forced to conceal his religion and even his real name to get a job, he does not hesitate to use this information to his own advantage and immediately reveals his secret. This calculated behaviour enables Balram to follow his master to New Delhi and rise in the servants' hierarchy. Consequently, it might be a form of compensation to alleviate his guilty conscience when Balram, the entrepreneur, employs Muslim drivers at his taxi company. Nevertheless, there persists a trace of discrimination in Balram's mind, as he states that "[he has] come to respect Muslims [...]. They're not the brightest lot, except for those four poet fellows, but they make good drivers, and they're honest people, by and large, although a few of them seem to get this urge to blow trains up every year" (Adiga 267). This motif of the terrorist Muslim has, unfortunately, become a cliché that is often found in various discourses of the contemporary western world.

The four poets that Balram refers to are "Iqbal, [...] Rumi, Mirza Ghalib, and the fourth fellow, also a Muslim, whose name [he's] forgotten" (Adiga 34). By quoting lines of Iqbal's¹² poems, Balram shows a certain degree of tolerance and open-mindedness, despite his subjective interpretation of the quotes according to his personal situation. One of the quotes that Balram regards as an encouragement to break free from his condition of servitude is read to him by a Muslim bookseller in the Muslim part of Old Delhi, "*You were looking for the key for years/ But the door was always open!*"

¹¹ Gavaskar and Azharuddin are highly successful Indian cricket players (E.B.O. s.v. "Sunil Gavaskar").

¹² Sir Muhammad Iqbal was a Muslim poet and philosopher and an important figure in the establishment of Muslim Pakistan (E.B.O. s.v. "Sir Muhammad Iqbal").

(Adiga 216). Moreover, Balram tries to flatter the old man by calling him “a true-blue Muslim who ha[s] flown [t]here on a magic carpet all the way from Mecca” (Adiga 217). This stereotypical representation of a conservative Muslim underlines the narrator’s restricted worldview and his stereotypical image of Muslims as being underdeveloped and easy to impress.

Apart from the reference to India’s problematic Hindu-Muslim relations, Adiga’s narrator has a critical attitude towards religion in general. At the beginning of the story, for example, he sarcastically remarks “that [he] should start off by kissing some god’s arse” (Adiga 6). After a short recapitulation of Islam’s, Christianity’s and Hinduism’s deities, he claims that there is “a grand total 36,000,004 divine arses for [him] to choose from” (Adiga 6). Considering the tremendous injustice and inequalities in this world, the narrator further criticizes “that all these gods seem to do awfully little work – much like [India’s] politicians – and yet keep winning reelection to their golden thrones in heaven, year after year” (Adiga 6). Moreover, he detects possible causes of India’s highly hierarchical society in the teachings of Hinduism. The belief in castes, as well as in *dharma* and *karma* have resulted in a highly fragmented society, whose inequalities are not questioned but taken as divinely predestined. Similarly, “Hanuman [is] everyone’s favourite god in the Darkness, [...] [who] was the faithful servant of the god Rama. [Hence], [they] worship him in [their] temples because he is a shining example of how to serve [their] masters with absolute fidelity, love, and devotion” (Adiga 16). This statement clearly expresses Balram’s criticism of the abuse of Hinduism for the suppression of India’s lower classes. Another critical reference to religion and the omnipotence of God has already been discussed above. The respective reference is a quotation from one of Iqbal’s poems that expresses the ironical paradox between the belief in an almighty, benevolent God and the dismal reality of the world’s immense poverty and suffering.

7.15 Racism

Although racism is only a minor theme in Adiga’s novel, race is an important means of distinction not only within contemporary Indian society, but also in a more global context. As far as the specific setting of India is concerned, there is one reference to the supposed difference between North and South Indians in *The White Tiger*. In Vijay’s racist view, “[t]he south is full of Tamils. [...] Negroes. [As opposed to North Indians, who] are the sons of the Aryans who came to India. [They] made them [their] slaves”

(Adiga 233). This form of differentiation between north and south, Tamils and Aryans, by means of the motif of the inferior and underdeveloped south is not uncommon in contemporary India, and can be experienced by any tourist travelling across India.

Another form of distinction between races is the narrator's categorization of people according to the colour of their skin. Similarly, Balram distinguishes between the white, brown, yellow and black men, whereby the colour black has the most negative connotations. Thus, the narrator often refers to lower class Indians as being black. For example, his father has a "lean black body" (Adiga 42) and his brother has become "thinner and darker" after Balram's occupation at the Stork's family (Adiga 73). This negative association with darkness and the colour black, which is a leitmotif throughout the narrative, has already been discussed in previous chapters of this thesis. The novel's most apparent instance of ethnic difference is found right at the beginning of the first letter, where the narrator proclaims that "the future of the world lies with the yellow man and the brown man now that [their] erstwhile master, the white-skinned man, has wasted himself through buggery, cell phone usage, and drug abuse" (Adiga 3f.). This ironical use of racism deconstructs and subverts the white hegemonic discourse and simultaneously refers to India's colonial past.

8. *The White Tiger* in the Austrian EFL Classroom

8.1 Reasons for Teaching Postcolonial Novels in the EFL Classroom

Generally, reading in the EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom is understood to be teaching literature intended to increase the students' cultural knowledge. Although literature does play an essential role in the reading classroom, it is just one aspect of this complex area and teachers should be aware of the diversity of this subject. On a similar note, Bennett defines reading in his novel *The Uncommon Reader* as “untidy, discursive and perpetually inviting” (22). With this definition, he stresses the point that it is not a simple, linear process, but rather a more complex one that involves many aspects and is determined by a number of different factors. Further, Bennett applies the metaphor of a “reading muscle” that one must develop with training and effort (102). The implication for the EFL classroom is clear: Reading must be taught, explained and continuously practiced in order to ensure success. Irrespective of the teachers' broad responsibility to develop their students' reading skills, this thesis is mainly concerned with the importance of teaching novels in the EFL classroom.

Chambers and Gregory have noticed a recent crisis of the Humanities at universities and other educational institutions in contemporary Western societies (5). Consequently, the so-called “culture wars” between the Humanities and the “productive areas”, such as business, technology and the applied sciences, have also affected the study of literature (Chambers and Gregory 5). The students' acquisitions of productive skills, which increase their value as future employees, are frequently prioritized, whereas cultural, philosophical and social learning is commonly given little attention. Their “marketable” skills are defined by definite learning outcomes, which are institutionalized and assessed with standardized test formats (Chambers and Gregory 6f.). The claim that there is a certain degree of utilitarianism with regard to knowledge and education has also arisen in the Austrian context, but this thesis argues that it is still possible to convey a more humanistic education, which includes social and cultural contents, in Austrian schools. Through the example of *The White Tiger*, it will be illustrated how literature may serve as an appropriate means to discuss a variety of socially relevant issues that increase the students' general world knowledge. Moreover, an array of morally and ethnically complex aspects will be touched upon, which enable the students to broaden their horizon. Schwarz argues on similar terms when he remarks that “[w]e read to

supplement our life experience [...] reconfiguring the values we are taught” (3). According to Schwarz, literature allows us to view the world from different perspectives with varying gender, race or class (13f.).

Although the *neue AHS*¹³ *Reifeprüfung* is based on competences and has, therefore, been accused of fostering primarily skills-based language teaching with a strong neglect of factual and cultural contents, this thesis argues that there is room for extensive reading in Austrian EFL classrooms. Unfortunately, extensive reading is rarely practiced during regular English lessons, due to time constraints and a neglect of reading per se in favour of ‘more important’ aspects, such as grammar. Day and Bamford, however, argue that silent reading at the learners’ own pace can be a valuable experience and is certainly worth making time for (139). Extensive reading in and outside the EFL classroom has an impact on the learners’ language and reading abilities and introduces the students to the practice of foreign language reading. The probably most essential aspect as far as successful extensive EFL reading is concerned, is the students’ freedom of choice. Thus, teachers should provide a great variety of reading material for their students, from which they can pick and select according to their personal interests. The purposes for reading will, therefore, be pleasure, interest or information, which have an impact on reading pace and reading techniques. It is crucial to clarify that the main objective of extensive reading lies on the development of one’s reading fluency, while it is not necessary to know the meaning of every single word (Day and Bamford 136ff.). On a more practical scale, reading could, for instance, be integrated into Austrian EFL classrooms by means of individual reading portfolios, on which each student works over the course of a term or school year. Other possibilities are the implementation of students’ presentations about a book of their choice or the D.E.A.R. (“drop everything and read”) method. D.E.A.R. consists of an interruption of the regular English lesson in which the students stop their current activities, take out a book of their choice and just read (*D.E.A.R.*). This unorthodox but innovative approach to teaching reading does not require extensive temporal resources or complex preparations, but might, nevertheless, successfully encourage students to read. Similar to most other areas in the EFL classroom, teaching reading cannot be seen as an isolated aspect, but should rather be an integral part of every lesson, due to its diversified and manifold character. Indubitably, this chapter can only offer potential possibilities for the implementation of literary texts into the EFL classroom. The actual application of

¹³ *Allgemein bildende höhere Schule* is the Austrian term for ‘general secondary school’.

literature in the educational context is a highly individual task and every teacher can choose from and continuously expand a nearly endless variety of creative approaches.

Especially, postcolonial literature enables students to experience foreign cultures through the vantage point of less privileged characters and thus, represents a valuable medium through which intercultural competences can be acquired. Nevertheless, postcolonial aspects have only been integrated recently into the EFL classroom, and postcolonial literature still plays a subordinated role, as opposed to the British or American classics (Freitag and Gymnich 259). Apart from territorial knowledge and hard facts about regions, such as India, Australia, New Zealand, Africa or the Caribbean, students can also increase their capacity of participating in foreign language discourses. As postcolonial literature portrays foreign language realities, which are embedded into fictional stories, it creates room for the learners to respond and react to the respective realities. In general, fictional stories are usually more easily accessible for students than dry factual texts. Moreover, it is advisable for the teacher to choose texts which are close to the students' own realities. Similar to *The White Tiger*, a great number of postcolonial novels narrate the stories of adolescent protagonists. Hence, students tend to identify themselves more readily with these 'coming-of-age' narratives¹⁴, as they are similar to their own experiences (Freitag and Gymnich 261f.).

Freitag and Gymnich identify three categories of learning outcomes that students can achieve by means of postcolonial literature. First, the factual knowledge about Anglophone countries, which can be acquired by reading postcolonial texts, is summarized as the cognitive objective (261). Second, the pragmatic-communicative objective can be achieved through the novels' varieties of English, which might not be a standardized version, and by presenting alternative forms of communication. For example, *The White Tiger* portrays India's highly hierarchical and context-related formal or informal traditions of addressing older or socially more privileged people with "Aunty" or "Uncle". This form of address shows familiarity as well as respect (Sailaja 477). The third learning objective, the affective one, is connected to the decrease of stereotypes. Thus, it describes the students' capacities to recognize the interdependence of experiences and their respective socio-cultural contexts. Likewise, the general part of the curriculum for Austrian upper secondary schools states that it is "bewusst zu

¹⁴ "An English term adopted as an approximate equivalent to the German *bildungsroman*." The coming-of-age novel, however, generally has a shortened time span, which is limited to the protagonist's late adolescence (*O.D. of Literary Terms* s.v. "Coming-of-age novel").

machen, dass gesellschaftliche Phänomene historisch bedingt und von Menschen geschaffen sind und dass es möglich und sinnvoll ist, auf gesellschaftliche Entwicklungen konstruktiv Einfluss zu nehmen“ (BGBl. II Nr. 277/2004). Moreover, students should equally acquire “Sachkompetenz, Selbstkompetenz und Sozialkompetenz” and learn to assume responsibility for society’s existential problems (BGBl. II Nr. 277/2004). Hence, postcolonial novels, such as *The White Tiger*, can serve as valuable sources for the EFL classroom, through which sociological problems and phenomena can be experienced and discussed.

Within the context of postcolonial literature in the EFL classroom, Indian English fiction is not only relevant because it represents important aspects of the present-day Anglophone world, but also because the history of the English language in India reveals a number of interesting issues. It could, for example, be discussed why English seems to act as a unifying factor on the subcontinent, while Hindi remains India’s majority language with a vast population of native Hindi speakers. Only 3.5 to 5 per cent of the nation’s population have a competent command of the English language. Nevertheless, English is vital for various aspects of communication, be it in education, science, administration, politics or the media. Consequently, India is divided into two main camps: the critics, who reject English as being a relic of its colonial past, and the advocates, who consider the Indian English as a native variety and an indispensable means for communication (Mukherjee 148f.). Thus, Indian English literature can offer a highly diversified approach to teaching culture in an EFL context, independent of the literary content.

Apart from postcolonial literature’s unique possibilities for application in the classroom, literary texts in general or extracts of the former function as “pretexts for language training” (Szende 195). By means of literature, teachers tend to practise grammar, text comprehension and written as well as oral production. Furthermore, literary texts may serve as linguistic and/or generic models, evoke the learners’ interest in reading and transmit, as mentioned before, cultural information. Literature incites learners to express their thoughts in unusual and more creative ways and raises the students’ awareness of their pre-fabricated values and ideas of the world. Representing such a profitable medium for EFL teaching, it is vital to make literature accessible to students at all grades, irrespective of their language levels (Szende 197f.). Szende especially underlines the value of “self-narration [for second language teaching, as it] evoke[s] all

dimensions of daily life [...] at the individual scale” (199). Thus, cultural knowledge is predominantly transmitted through “identity processes” in “sociocultural worlds” (Szende 199). *The White Tiger* likewise narrates Balram’s identity processes in the sociocultural context of India through the protagonist’s self-narration.

Hayn and Burns foreground the importance of multiculturalism in teaching, as recent demographic trends have shown that the predominantly ‘white’ classroom is a thing of the past (135). This critical awareness should encourage EFL teachers to promote “inclusion through literature choice and selection” (Hayn and Burns 135). Thus, the traditionally white and mainly male-produced canon of literary classics should be amplified by more contemporary choices with an increased ethnical and cultural diversity. The majority of present-day teachers in the Western context come from a white, middle-class background and have never experienced any kind of suppression. Therefore, they are not prepared for the multicultural reality of contemporary Western society (Hayn and Burns 136f.). Nevertheless, teachers should integrate and “value all of their students’ personal histories” and address a diversity of cultures in their classrooms. This can, for example, be achieved through the implementation of multicultural literature, which portrays alternative lifestyles and the stories of marginalized individuals, such as *The White Tiger* (Hayn and Burns 149f.). The nature of foreign language education automatically creates an environment of intercultural education, which is, however, usually characterized by the absence of interculturalism. Therefore, literature, as a representation of the foreign culture that is studied, can serve to introduce the Anglophone reality into the EFL classroom. Such transcultural texts, which are produced in one culture and read in another, encourage the students to engage with the target culture. Simultaneously, foreign language pedagogy can counteract stereotypical representations of the target culture and offer alternative discourses (Perales Escudero 251f.). In order to ensure a critical reception of hegemonic foreign language texts, teachers should act as mediators and guide students towards an analytic discussion of literature. Hence, the students’ cultural context should always be taken into account and necessary background information needs to be supplied by the teacher (Gonçalves Matos 62ff.).

In conclusion, the close connection between language and culture, where one concept is seen as a feature of the other, should similarly be reflected in the foreign language teaching context. The significance of reading literature in foreign language education is

not only due to its function as a linguistic model and source of factual information, but also to its potential of enabling intercultural dialogue and understanding. Literature portrays the world from different perspectives and thus, creates room for transcultural communication.

8.2 Die kompetenzorientierte mündliche Reifeprüfung

Pedagogical and structural changes in the Austrian national curriculum have led to the development of a new standardized and skills-based testing format for the final exams. The new *AHS-Reifeprüfung* has been introduced nationwide in the academic year 2014/15, while the new *BHS-Reife- und Diplomprüfung* will be implemented a year later, in the school year 2015/16. According to the Austrian Ministry of Education and Women, these standards guarantee quality and fairness across various schools and regions throughout Austria (*Neue Reifeprüfung*).

The general examination format consists of three pillars: a written paper, three to four written exams and two to three oral exams. Throughout all school types, there is at least one obligatory exam in a modern foreign language, which tends to be English in the majority of cases. In terms of the oral exam in a modern foreign language, a pool of topics of 24 different target-oriented topics has been elaborated by an expert group on behalf of the respective ministry. This pool of topics for all Austrian *AHS* serves as a suggestion and useful guidance for the selection of relevant examination material for all modern foreign languages that are taught in Austrian upper secondary schools. The final responsibility, however, lies within each school's subject teachers. Consequently, the expert conference determines relevant topics for each graduating class based on the respective Austrian curricula and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)¹⁵. At the final examination each student selects two independent topic areas by chance, one of which he or she finally chooses for the exam. Thereupon, the student receives a skills-based task, which consists of two different competence areas based on the guidelines of the CEFR: spoken interaction and spoken production. In particular, the emphasis of the oral exam lies on a spontaneously and independently produced speaking performance that exceeds the mere reproduction of memorized knowledge. (*Kompetenzorientierte Reifeprüfung*). Therefore, it can be claimed that the

¹⁵ The CEFR is a framework of references developed by the Council of Europe, which provides “a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis” for language teaching and learning as well as the development of relevant materials and syllabuses or curricula (*Common European Frame of Reference for Languages*).

24 suggestions from the *AHS* pool of topics cover considerably broad areas, which can be interpreted differently, either individually by each teacher or generally among all subject teachers within one school.

Although one might rather relate the novel's importance for the Austrian EFL classroom to the development of reading skills, this thesis argues that it also represents a highly relevant basis for the elaboration of the topic areas for the final oral exam in English. The following chapter proves this point by drawing on the general topic suggestions from the *AHS* pool of topics.

8.3 *The White Tiger*: A Suitable Text for the Austrian Upper Secondary EFL Classroom

The present chapter tries to deconstruct *The White Tiger* in terms of the new standardized final oral exams and gives reasons why the novel is a suitable source for the Austrian EFL classroom. Apart from the novel's setting and plot, which clearly demonstrate its Anglophone background, there are a number of other factors that qualify the text for EFL teaching in Austria. These will be demonstrated below on the basis of the *AHS* pool of topics (*Kompetenzorientierte Reifeprüfung*). Moreover, a discussion about *The White Tiger* together with its sociocultural context enhances the students' intercultural competence and fosters their understanding of foreign cultures, as stated in the Austrian upper secondary curriculum (*BGBl. II Nr. 277/2004*). "Im Sinne einer humanistisch orientierten Allgemeinbildung ist bei der thematischen Auswahl fremdsprachiger Texte auch literarischen Werken ein entsprechender Stellenwert einzuräumen" (*BGBl. II Nr. 277/2004*). It is further stated that the selected literary works should provide manifold insights into the sociocultural reality of the respective linguistic areas (*BGBl. II Nr. 277/2004*).

Apart from the formal and legal aspects, *The White Tiger*, as a 'coming-of-age' novel, is likely to be an appealing text for adolescent students. As Balram narrates his story from his childhood in Laxmangarh until his entrepreneurial success in Bangalore, upper secondary learners of English might draw comparisons to their own childhood and adolescence. This possible identification with the novel's protagonist would increase the students' interest in the novel and its contemporary context. Furthermore, Adiga created a highly comical, fascinating and simultaneously thought-provoking narrative, which is very likely to be a stimulating reading for the majority of students.

In terms of the novel's language level, it seems to be an adequate didactic means for the 7th form of an Austrian AHS. Generally, students at this grade should have achieved a reading ability of B2 as defined in the CEFR. Although *The White Tiger* is an authentic text aimed at English native readers, the partially colloquial style in combination with reasonably short sentences qualifies it as an appropriate class reading.

8.3.1 “*Beziehungen und soziale Netzwerke*”

To clarify the choice of a German title in this and the following sub-chapters, it has to be mentioned that the official pool of topics was developed in German by the Austrian Ministry of Education and Women. The same pool of topics is used for all modern foreign languages that are taught in Austrian upper secondary schools, which explains the choice of Austria's official language. Consequently, this and the subsequent chapters are given German titles, which are translated in the text of the respective chapter.

As relationships in various contexts are central aspects in *The White Tiger*, the novel provides a sound basis for the discussion of this *Matura* topic. First and foremost, the importance of the Indian ‘joint’ family is evidently illustrated in Balram's narrative. The responsibility towards one's family is, for instance, exemplified by the protagonist's obligation to leave school and earn money for his cousin-sister's dowry as well as by the fact that he continues to send money home to his family in Laxmangarh when he is already working for the Stork's family in Dhanbad. Moreover, the family's significance for an Indian's self-identification in terms of caste, religion and general status could be discussed in this context. In contrast to the prototypical Austrian family, Indian families tend to be considerably larger with closer family ties. Therefore, a comparison to the students' own families and their personal experience could be a relevant link for this aspect. However, this and any other didactic suggestions in this thesis are only possible approaches to the implementation of *The White Tiger* in the EFL classroom and do not represent any universal truths. Teaching is a highly diverse profession and thus, a teacher's didactic methods, the material and the topics should always be chosen according to the respective class, the students and the class dynamics. Hence, any potentially sensitive issues should be avoided or treated with the utmost caution.

Another aspect connected to the traditional Indian family is the high degree of loyalty between brothers. Balram and Kishan, just as Ashok and Mukesh, have a very close

relationship and rely heavily on their mutual support. This exceptional form of relationship also lends itself to a comparison with the students' own lives and experiences.

A further distinctive feature of Indian society, as discussed earlier in this thesis, is its hierarchical order. The strict caste and class structure clearly divides its members into mainly separate groups with distinctly defined rights and duties. The resulting hierarchical relationships, which are characteristic of India, are represented by the relation of Balram and his masters. Closely connected to this hierarchy is the emerging servants' community, which is based on solidarity amongst the servants and their mutual hostility towards their masters. Within this tight-knit community, however, Balram is treated like an outsider and frequently suffers from the bullying behaviour of his colleagues. They laugh at him and call him names, which might be a behaviour that is familiar to some of the EFL students. Consequently, the topic of bullying could be treated in this context, linking it to the students' own experiences.

8.3.2 *“Wohnen und Umgebung”*

The topic of living and surroundings is predominantly portrayed by the dichotomy of rich versus poor in Indian society. The stark contrast between Mr. Ashok's luxurious apartment and Balram's miserable 'cubicle' is directly juxtaposed, as both living environments are located in one and the same building. While the former is on the thirteenth floor in one of the bright and modern apartment blocks in New Delhi high above the city's rooftops, the latter lies under the earth in the darkness of the basement.

Furthermore, the novel refers to the terrible living conditions in India's innumerable slums and realistically describes how people live like animals “in tents covered with blue tarpaulin sheets” without proper sewage systems or electricity (Adiga 222). Nevertheless, for a large percentage of Indians a house in a slum is the “best-case scenario”, which illustrates their humble aspirations due to their tremendous poverty (Adiga 171). This blunt and unvarnished portrayal of India's injustice and inequality might be a new and shocking experience for a number of Austrian students, who live comparably comfortable and secure lives.

8.3.3 “Mode und Trends”

Although the topic of fashion and trends is not directly addressed in *The White Tiger*, certain aspects are mentioned which might serve as a starting point to discuss the issue in class. On the one hand, there are references to Pinky Madam’s Western style, who wears pants, short skirts and dresses with deep necklines. This way of dressing is considered to be highly inappropriate for women in India’s traditional, conservative and patriarchal society. If desired, the classroom discussion could be amplified by an investigation of India’s various traditional dresses, their geographical distribution and current status.

Likewise connected to the topic of fashion and trends is Balram’s personal Westernization. Due to Pinky Madam’s dismissive remarks, he adopts a Western way of dressing and tries to adapt his style to Mr. Ashok’s. He considers western-style clothes as favourable in India’s hierarchical society and clearly follows this Western ideal. Consequently, a discussion about the students’ own role models in terms of fashion and style as well as the trends they follow could be stimulated at this point.

8.3.4 “Ernährung, Gesundheit und soziale Absicherung”

Regarding nutrition, health and social security, Adiga clearly implemented his criticism of India’s polarizing healthcare system in his novel. The rural infrastructure of healthcare facilities is extremely poor, as there are no sufficient hospitals and those that do exist are in a deplorable state. As described in *The White Tiger*, there are no doctors available in Laxmangarh’s nearest hospital and the place is inhabited by wild animals. “There [are] three black goats sitting on the steps to the large, faded white building; the stench of goat feces waft[s] out from the open door. The glass in most of the windows [is] broken; a cat [is] staring out at us from one cracked window” (Adiga 40). Although this description of the hospital as an animalized place may have been exaggerated for artistic reasons, it is certainly true, as discussed above, that India’s rural healthcare provision is shockingly substandard and certainly unacceptable. Contrary to India’s mediocre rural hospitals, the private hospitals in urban centres provide state-of-the-art medical treatments. Naturally, these treatments are extremely expensive and unaffordable for the masses of India’s poor. The probably most problematic aspect of this healthcare system is the inherent excluding character. Either one belongs to the rich and can afford medical treatments or one is part of the poor and forced to suffer due to

the lack of effective public healthcare facilities. Hence, in the EFL classroom the implications of this two-class society could be analysed in comparison to Austria's social security system, the structure of its society and the significance of Austria's middle class.

The aspect of nutrition is only briefly mentioned in the novel, despite its topicality in Indian society. Child malnutrition is one of India's most problematic consequences of its extreme poverty (Sims 165f.). Adiga refers to this fact when he describes the village of Laxmangarh and its inhabitants. "Children – too lean and short for their age, and with oversized heads from which vivid eyes shine, like the guilty conscience of the government of India" (Adiga 16).

8.3.5 "Sport"

Similar to nutrition, also the topic of sport is only implicitly included in Adiga's novel. As Balram's family is part of India's lower class, their lifestyle poses little risk of obesity or excessive feasting. Quite on the contrary, their main preoccupation is to have enough to eat and their hard, mostly physical labour heavily strains their bodies. Physical exercise to remain fit and keep one's body in shape is merely a phenomenon of 21st century Western affluent society. This is also reflected in *The White Tiger*, as it is mentioned that "the rich tend to get fat in Delhi. So they walk to lose weight" (Adiga 191). The dichotomy between rich and poor is further underlined when Balram remarks that "the fatsos [make] their thin servants [...] stand on various spots on that circle with bottles of mineral water and fresh towels in their hands", while their masters are exercising (Adiga 191f.). Another instance of sarcastic criticism is the above mentioned juxtaposition of the "stick-thin" rickshaw puller, who is tired and exhausted of his physically demanding job, and the gym advertisement against excess weight aimed at India's upper class, which he carries on the seat of his rickshaw (Adiga 187). The narrator summarizes this grotesque antagonism of 'first-' versus 'third-world' problems in a short and telling statement, "[T]he poor dream all their lives of getting enough to eat and looking like the rich. And what do the rich dream of? Losing weight and looking like the poor" (Adiga 191). This controversial but true observation offers a powerful starting point of a potentially enriching classroom discussion.

8.3.6 “Schule und Bildung”

India’s education system is, like its healthcare system, socially unequal with high-quality private institutions, on the hand, and substandard public schools, on the other hand. Adiga emphasizes this point by the depiction of the poor state of Laxmangarh’s public school. “The teacher [who is frequently] lying in one corner of the room, reeking of booze [and] snoring soundly”, abuses governmental money, which is intended for the students’ daily lunch and illegally sells the students’ school uniforms for his own profit (Adiga 25). The pupils do not receive a proper education and the majority is not even able to perform basic skills, such as reading or writing. In the EFL classroom, these facts could be opposed to Austria’s educational system and to the students’ own privileged situation. Reading *The White Tiger* might be an eye-opening experience for Austrian students as they recognize the relativity of their own problems in comparison to the miserable lives of millions of poor children in developing countries all over the world.

8.3.7 “Arbeitswelt”

As far as the world of employment is concerned, it is especially India’s unemployment issue that is addressed in the novel. Balram, who is tired of working as a “human spider” in tea shops, cleaning the floor and breaking coals, is desperately looking for alternative employment (Adiga 44). According to the novel’s narrator, “tens of thousands of young men [in rural India] [...] have no job to do” (Adiga 45f.). Balram is finally lucky enough to find employment, but still remains trapped in the Rooster Coop. The tradition of servitude is firmly anchored in Indian society and clearly highlighted by Balram’s occupation as a driver. The roots of India’s strict hierarchy and the firm belief that some members of society are born to do menial jobs or to serve others lie within the customs of Hinduism. The earlier described concepts of *dharma* and *karma* serve as justifications for the abuse of the workforce of members of lower castes.

With respect to supranational aspects, India is known for the dimensions of its large IT industry and the outsourcing of numerous western companies. Cheap and simultaneously well-trained workforce is a great incentive for renowned IT corporations, which obtain economic benefits from outsourcing large parts of their back office work and costumer contact services to India. EFL students could, for instance, be

encouraged to analyse and discuss the implications of this large outsourcing business for the Indian as well as Austrian, German or US economy.

8.3.8 “Konsumgesellschaft”

The topics of consumerism and consumer society are in so far addressed in Balram’s narrative as they are closely related to the theme of poverty. According to the *Oxford Dictionaries* a consumer society is one “in which the buying and selling of goods and services is the most important social and economic activity.” This economic materialism in Indian society is personified by the “Men with big bellies”, who can afford to buy consumer goods, such as foreign alcohol (Adiga 54). One example that perfectly portrays the surfeit of food in India’s consumer society is Mukesh’s disrespectful attitude to food, which is metaphorically contrasted to the millions of poor Indians, who are forced to live a hand-to-mouth existence. Mukesh, as a man with a big belly, is in the privileged situation to have the choice of what he wants to eat and therefore, always has the potatoes removed from “his favourite snack, the *dosa*. [...] [While] he chomp[s] on the *dosa* in his seat [of the train]; down below on the tracks, a mouse nibble[s] on the discarded potatoes” (Adiga 163). In this image the mouse stands for India’s lower classes that depend on the leftovers of the rich. In general, Mukesh’s behaviour mirrors that of numerous members of Western societies who live in material abundance. Thus, a number of Austrian EFL students might be able to relate to this attitude, which could be a starting point for reflection.

Furthermore, Balram’s personal symbol for his success, the chandelier, clearly portrays his participation in India’s consumer society. “It makes [him] happy to see a chandelier” (Adiga 97). “Why not”, he wonders, “I’m a free man, let me buy all the chandeliers I want” (Adiga 97). This remark reveals that Balram equals purchasing power with personal freedom, which emphasizes the significance of money in a consumer society. Moreover, the Honda City, which “is a larger car, a more sophisticated creature”, exemplifies a capitalist status symbol and is, thus, a further manifestation of India’s upper-class consumer society (Adiga 52). Although the Honda City might not be considered as a luxury car in Western society, in India only the privileged upper class can afford to own a car, which transforms it into a luxury item. In various instances throughout the narrative Balram stresses the car’s air conditioning and its hi-fi system, which is a proof of his materialist mind-set.

8.3.9 “Tradition und Wandel”

Concerning tradition and change, *The White Tiger* naturally illustrates Indian customs and traditions, which are opposed to Mr. Ashok’s more liberal, Western values and beliefs. Especially, the importance of family, religion and caste are highlighted in Adiga’s novel as vital constituents of traditional India. Mr. Ashok, on the other hand, marries a Christian woman from the United States without his family’s consent. Balram occupies an intermediary position between his family’s traditional and conservative values and Mr. Ashok’s progressive and liberal ideas. The former are, for instance, expressed in Kusum’s letter, when she writes that marriage “*is good for the community. Every time there is a marriage there is more rain in the village*”, which in turn increases the water buffaloes’ milk production (Adiga 163). The development and change or the perpetuation of Indian traditions, such as arranged marriages, dowry payments or caste related discriminations, could, for example, be thought-provoking topics for the EFL classroom.

8.3.10 “Transport und Tourismus”

Although the topic of transport and tourism is not extensively addressed in *The White Tiger*, there is a short reference to India’s condition as a tourist destination. “[H]undreds of American tourists come each year to take photographs of naked sadhus at Hardwar or Benaras” (Adiga 12). Consequently, a discussion about the implications of India’s travel industry for the economy, the environment and traditional culture would be suitable topics for an implementation in school.

8.3.11 “Landeskundliche Aspekte”

As the novel’s setting in rural as well as urban India portrays multiple aspects of the country’s diversified culture, history and society, it represents an ideal source for the topic of regional and cultural studies.

Addressing the topic of history, Balram especially foregrounds India’s long-lasting foreign domination. “The Turks, or the Afghans, or the English, or whichever foreigners were then ruling India” all left a great impact on Indian society (Adiga 18). Nevertheless, the period of India’s British colonization and its annexation to the Commonwealth, undoubtedly, has most potential for the EFL classroom. Subsequent to an exploration of historical aspects, the class could proceed with an analysis of

contemporary India. As illustrated above, *The White Tiger* addresses a wide range of characteristics that define 21st century Indian society. The topics of religion, caste, politics, poverty as well as India's booming IT industry and the problematics of its welfare system are implemented in Balram's narrative and lend themselves to an elaboration of these and related aspects in class. Moreover, India's strong inequalities define its society and should certainly be included in every discussion about India. The rural-urban divide as well as the stark caste and class hierarchies strongly influence Balram's life and are profoundly illustrated in the novel. Additionally, there are frequent references to the traditional Indian cuisine, which might be an enriching aspect for the discussion about India's regional aspects.

8.3.12 "Natur und Umwelt"

As far as the topics of nature and environment are concerned, one could, for example, exceed the scope of the narrative and discuss India's diversified nature and wildlife. In this case, the novel's context would merely be the point of departure, and considerable input by the teacher would be required.

Nevertheless, an aspect that is closely linked to this topic and addressed in *The White Tiger* is the massive pollution of India's environment. The country's waste disposal problems, its enormous air pollution and the resulting smog formation, as well as the water pollution due to inadequate sewage systems are evident and immediately apparent to anyone who has ever visited the Indian subcontinent. Adiga, likewise, refers to these issues in various instances throughout the narrative. When Balram and Kishan take their sick father to the nearest hospital across the Ganges, "[they keep] washing his mouth with water from the river, but the water [is] so polluted that it [makes] him spit even more blood" (Adiga 39). Regarding Delhi's smog problem, the narrator states that "[t]he pollution is so bad that the men on the motorbikes and scooters have a handkerchief wrapped around their faces" (Adiga 112). Additionally, he emphasizes this point by proclaiming that "the air is so bad in Delhi that it takes ten years out of a man's life" (Adiga 112). The obvious lack of awareness, as far as adequate waste disposal is concerned, further contributes to India's environmental issues. This lack of awareness cannot only be observed among the mainly uneducated lower classes, but throughout all social strata, irrespective of the expected level of education. Similarly, Balram, the driver, frequently observes how the window of one of Delhi's numerous luxury cars opens and "a woman's hand, dazzling with gold bangles, stretches out [...] [and] flings

an empty mineral water bottle onto the road” before the window is shut again (Adiga 112). Moreover, Delhi’s upper class generally neglects the adequate disposal of their waste. Hence, while describing a housing colony in New Delhi, the narrator remarks that “[f]rom the amount of garbage thrown outside the walls of the house, you [know] that rich people [live] [t]here” (Adiga 185).

Consequently, these frank and provocative descriptions of India’s environmental issues could be related to the students’ own behaviour in terms of waste disposal and pollution, and thus, raise their awareness of environmental protection.

8.3.13 “*Moderne Technologien*”

The topic of modern technology and *The White Tiger* are in so far related as Balram’s final destination is Bangalore, India’s IT capital. As described above, in Bangalore’s Electronics City “[e]verything [comes] down to one thing. Outsourcing. Which means doing things in India for Americans over the phone” (Adiga 255). Moreover, Balram mentions “[his] silver Macintosh laptop [that he] bought online from a store in Singapore” (Adiga 9), as well as “[c]ell phones, [which] cause cancer in the brain and shrink your masculinity” (Adiga 262). Although the topic of modern technology is, surely, no major theme in Adiga’s novel, a few aspects are nonetheless addressed and could be further elaborated in the EFL classroom.

8.3.14 “*Persönliche Zukunft/ Pläne*”

As *The White Tiger* is a *bildungsroman*, it narrates Balram’s personal future and his plans for life. His “dark story” starts in his early childhood when his mother dies and the aspiring young boy, who is eager to attend school and study hard, is forced to work in a tea shop for his family’s benefit (Adiga 6). Nevertheless, his personal plans differ from his family’s, and he opposes the strict Indian traditions to marry a girl that his family has chosen for him, continue to live with his grandmother, father and other relatives in the village of Laxmangarh and follow his father’s example. As opposed to his brother Kishan, Balram is determined to leave the ‘Darkness’ behind and start a new life. By eavesdropping on other people’s conversations, be it costumers at the tea shop, his employers in Delhi or business men in Bangalore, Balram continuously adapts his plans and personal future. This way, he manages to proceed from a “human spider” (Adiga

44) in Laxmangarh's tea shop to a successful "self-taught entrepreneur" (Adiga 4) in Bangalore.

Without his dreams, ambitious ideas and determined plans Balram would have never succeeded on his way to the *India of Light*, but his aspirations helped him to cope with unexpected setbacks. His main motivation was to escape the forces of poverty and "live like a man" (Adiga 26). In this context, EFL students could discuss their own aspirations and plans for the future. As their lives are probably considerably easier than Balram's, they might be able to reflect upon their privileged situations and learn to appreciate them.

8.3.15 "Interkulturelle Aspekte"

As *The White Tiger* is set in India, there is an abundance of intercultural aspects that could be addressed in the Austrian EFL classroom. India's sociocultural background differs greatly from our Western culture and therefore, Adiga's realistic novel could serve to familiarize Austrian students with this oriental culture. With over one billion inhabitants India is the second most populous nation on earth (McLeod 192). Thus, chances are high that Austrian students might come into contact with Indians at some point in their lives, either in professional or private contexts. In that case, specific intercultural competence would be a strong advantage.

First, Adiga introduces India's particular forms of addressing a hierarchically higher interlocutor as "Aunty" or "Uncle", which might express familiarity and/or respect. Balram, for example, calls the Muslim bookseller at Old Delhi's book market "Muslim Uncle" in order to flatter him, on the one hand, and to show respect and inferiority, on the other hand (Adiga 216). Second, an awareness of India's various religions and spiritual beliefs is of vital importance for any foreigner who interacts in the Indian culture. Especially, the prevailing conflict between Hindus and Muslims on the subcontinent seems significant in this context. *The White Tiger* implicitly alludes to this conflict at several points in the narrative. The most obvious example of these tensions is personified by Ram Persad, who hides his Muslim culture and pretends to be a Hindu in order to please his employer. Closely associated with religion is the importance of caste in Indian society. As discussed earlier, caste and class strongly define an individual's position in society, their rights and obligations as well as their socioeconomic background. Members of distinct castes are treated differently in traditional Indian

society, which has certain implications for their individual possibilities and perspectives in life. Finally, the exceptional importance and influence of the Indian family has to be foregrounded in terms of intercultural understanding. As the nucleus of Indian society, the family has to be respected and honoured in every context. Moreover, it is the primary source of identification for traditional Indians and strongly shapes Indian society. As outlined earlier, Balram's as well as Mr. Ashok's lives exemplify the great importance of family throughout various social strata in Indian society.

The majority of these intercultural aspects will probably be unfamiliar to Austrian students and thus, *The White Tiger* may serve to introduce the pupils to this foreign culture.

8.3.16 “*Erwachsenwerden und Identitätsfindung*”

As the topic of growing up and personal identity is thematically closely associated with the topic of personal future and plans, the novel's quality as a *bildungsroman* likewise plays an important role in this context.

Balram's coming-of-age process is strongly shaped by his family's poverty and by his grandmother's dominance within the family. He perceives his father and brother, who subordinate themselves to Kusum's rule, as weak and pitiable and therefore, strives for more independence and agency. Referring to Kishan's subordination, Balram observes that “[t]hey [are] eating him alive in there! They would do the same thing to him that they did to [his] [f]ather – scoop him out from the inside and leave him weak and helpless” (Adiga 74). Thus, Balram's role model is Mr. Ashok, his employer, a successful business man with liberal and progressive ideas, an American wife and a sense for justice. Mr. Ashok embodies a Western identity, which is frequently contrasted to the Indian values. One of the corrupt politicians in New Delhi, whom Mr. Ashok is forced to bribe, dismissively remarks about the former's character that “[t]his kid has been to America and his head is full of shit” (Adiga 232). According to Mr. Ashok's understanding of justice, bribery and fraud should be strictly prevented in a democratic system, but India's reality disabuses him of this opinion.

Consequently, Balram's role model differs from the typical Indian patriarchal man, who accepts his position in society according to his caste and class membership and does not question India's hierarchical order. On the contrary, Balram opposes his predetermined and externally imposed life and chooses to adopt a more western-orientated identity.

This deviation from the traditions could encourage the students to reflect upon their own role models and ideas, which might differ from the expected national identities.

8.3.17 “Politik und Institutionen des öffentlichen Lebens”

According to *The White Tiger*, India is a highly exceptional environment, as far as politics and public life are concerned. The politicians of the ‘world’s largest democracy’ are portrayed as corrupt and unfair in a political system which is based on bribery and fraud. The fusion of all corrupt politicians is personified by the Great Socialist, who holds long speeches full of big promises, few of which will be fulfilled. An evidence of these empty promises is mentioned by the narrator when he states that “there is no hospital in Laxmangarh, although there are three different foundation stones for a hospital, laid by three different politicians before three different elections” (Adiga 39).

Corruption, as a major theme in the novel, is primarily illustrated by Mr. Ashok’s bribery in Delhi. Balram drives Mr. Ashok and his red bag full of enormous amounts of money from one politician to the other, in order to ensure the success of the family’s coal business. Moreover, the corrupt practices of Indian police are portrayed in Balram’s story. In India’s ‘democracy’ people with money, who can afford to pay bribes, have more rights than people from humble origins, whose lives seem to have no value. After Pinky’s accident, which involves the death of a child, Mr. Ashok realizes that the dead child “is one of *those* people [...] who live under the flyovers and bridges” (Adiga 140). Therefore, he does not fear a police investigation of the accident because no one will be missing this child.

The theory chapter of this thesis has already outlined the dimensions of corruption in Indian society. Consequently, *The White Tiger* is a stimulating source of information for the EFL classroom, as far as Indian politics and public life are concerned.

8.3.18 “Die globalisierte Welt”

The globalized world in the Indian context is visible by the on-going process of Westernization. According to the *Oxford Dictionaries*, globalization is “the process by which businesses or other organizations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale.” This economic aspect of globalization is described in *The White Tiger* by Bangalore’s IT industry and the local outsourcing companies of large US American companies. Moreover, the sale of English liquor, which might partly

be explained historically, is a manifestation of the globalized world in India. In New Delhi, the immense construction works of the growing number of western-style, luxurious apartment blocks, shining and modern shopping malls as well as 3D cinemas continuously assimilate the Indian capital to any contemporary US American city. Globalized India is a manifestation of the strong Western hegemony and its cultural assimilation to the West.

In the EFL classroom India's Westernization, as described in the novel, could be compared to similar processes in the Austrian context. Consequently, the influences of globalization on Austrian traditional culture and society could be discussed and analysed with regards to social, economic and cultural aspects.

8.3.19 “*Gesellschaftliche Gruppierungen*”

Due to its diversity in religions, ethnicities, languages and castes, India's society is a highly fragmented one. This fragmentation into distinct social groups is also alluded to in *The White Tiger*, although the full extent of India's social hierarchy is not completely illustrated in Balram's narrative.

In general, India's caste system fulfils society's primary division and allocation function. Depending on their caste membership, every Indian is assigned a certain position within society. As described above, the *Dalits* occupy a marginal standing in society and suffer from considerable discrimination. Alternative forms of exclusion are based on religious grounds and include the marginalization of Muslims and the domination of Hinduism throughout all strata of Indian society. Moreover, class is a further decisive factor for an individual's social status. These three factors – caste, class and religion – are closely related to each other and determine a person's socioeconomic status.

Although this strict division of society is unique to the Indian culture, it seems reasonable to draw a comparison to the Austrian context in the EFL classroom. An analysis of Austria's minorities and marginalized groups and their position within society could be an enriching and awareness-raising discussion for the students.

8.3.20 “*Regeln, Vorschriften, Gesetze*”

In terms of rules, regulations and laws, *The White Tiger* shows an image of the Indian democracy that is quite contrary to the Austrian system. As frequently mentioned

above, corruption, fraud and bribery are common practices in the Indian public life, where money seems to control everything. Even personal freedoms appear to be objects of material value that can only be obtained with sufficient monetary resources. Balram's personal freedom as a servant, for example, is subordinated to his master's well-being after Pinky Madam's accident. As he is forced to assume responsibility for Pinky's deeds, Balram declares that although "[the servants] have left the villages, [...] the masters still own [them], body, soul, and arse" (Adiga 145). It seems that anyone with enough money can break the laws as they please without any serious consequences. Irrespective of their guilt or innocence, the lower classes tend to be convicted for any violation of the law.

Whether Adiga's startling descriptions are realistic or rather exaggerated is hard to judge for the Western readership. Nevertheless, in the English teaching context the novel could serve as a starting point for a discussion about justice and personal freedoms in the Austrian legal system, as compared to the Indian structures. Independent of the students' knowledge about the legal systems, their personal opinions could be exchanged and analysed.

9. Conclusion

By means of a narratological analysis of *The White Tiger*'s 'discourse' as well as 'story level' including its characters as well as its themes and motifs, this thesis has demonstrated that the author's depiction of Indian society can be considered as relatively realistic and authentic, despite some fictional transformations, minor digressions and exaggerations due to artistic reasons.

As the initial historical overview has shown, the roots of a number of India's prevailing issues can be found in the country's eventful past, and a complete understanding of contemporary Indian society presupposes a certain degree of historical background knowledge. For instance, the continuous conflicts between Muslims and Hindus on the subcontinent date back to the Muslim invasion in the 8th century AD. As far as society's strong hierarchy is concerned, the reasons might partially be found during the time of British colonial rule in India. Moreover, the development of India's particular democratic system and the debatable character of Indian politics have been explained historically.

The subsequent survey of contemporary Indian society has revealed that *The White Tiger* includes a majority of features that define present-day Indian culture and society. The persisting tensions between Hindus and Muslims, society's hierarchical structure in terms of caste and social class, as well as the inequalities in the country's welfare system, and peculiarities in business and politics are all addressed in considerable detail in Adiga's novel. Nevertheless, the author's portrayal of women seems incomplete and unilateral. Although women only play minor roles in the narrative and there is a realistic reference to India's discriminating dowry customs, the novel's female characters are predominately depicted as strong, emancipated and dominant. In relation to the previous considerations about the women's status in contemporary, patriarchal Indian society, this thesis argues that Adiga neglected to present a truthful picture of India's gender inequality. In general, however, Adiga's frank and forthright depiction of India's dark aspects represents a necessary supplementation of the idealized and romanticized picture of *Exotic India*. The novel's emphasis on poverty and inequality serves to raise the readers' awareness of India's problematic politics and its continuation of colonialist structures.

Although the author has been accused by various, predominantly Indian, literary scholars of presenting an exaggeratedly dark and negative image of their nation, this

thesis has illustrated that the novel shows a considerable degree of authenticity. Referring to the theoretical framework of postcolonialism, concepts like animalization of the native people, the adoption of white masks, mimicry, hybridity and the subaltern have been applied to Balram's narrative. Thus, it has been demonstrated that Adiga criticizes the continuous domination of the West and the existing dichotomy between rich versus poor in the Indian context.

Regarding *The White Tiger's* implementation in the Austrian EFL classroom, the importance of postcolonial literature for the development of intercultural competences has been exemplified. Texts of this literary genre can provide meaningful insights into foreign cultures and offer alternative perspectives to the reader. Due to the close connection between language and culture, it has been argued that the readings of foreign literary texts constitute a vital component of the foreign language classroom. By means of the official pool of topics for the new standardized oral *AHS Matura* (2014/15), it has been demonstrated that *The White Tiger* effectively serves to familiarize Austrian upper secondary students of English with the topics of India, its history, culture and society as well as with an abundance of related aspects. 20 out of the 24 suggested topics could be applied to the novel, which perfectly justifies its use in upper secondary EFL lessons.

Moreover, Adiga's narrative is considered to be a fascinating, interesting and stimulating novel. Indubitably, it might be argued that the author's representations of the helplessly oppressed poor and the selfish and inconsiderate rich, who are exclusively concerned about their own benefits, are stereotypical exaggerations. Nevertheless, the novel's main achievement lies within the candid portrayal of *Dark India* that breaks with the romanticized myth of the *Exotic East*. Essentially, *The White Tiger* is a fictional text without an absolute claim for truth. Nevertheless, it has been revealed that there are significant parallels to the Indian reality, which are subject to substantial criticism. An abundance of literary devices, such as wit, humour, irony and sarcasm create a highly comical tone of narration that serves to question controversial aspects of contemporary Indian society.

To emphasize India's exceptional character and to conclude the thesis as it was introduced, with a telling quotation from the work under scrutiny, it remains to be mentioned that "[t]here's no end to things in India, as Mr. Ashok used to say" (Adiga 275).

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) has created a considerable degree of controversy among literary scholars in India as well as on an international scale. Adiga deliberately breaks with the romanticized myth of *Exotic India* and portrays an unvarnished and honest picture of contemporary Indian society. This thesis presents a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate by comparing the author's depiction of India with a number of sociological and socio-historical sources that try to define 21st century Indian society.

By drawing on the narratological analysis of the 2008 Booker prize-winning novel, this thesis deconstructs the novel's highly debated authenticity value. An analysis of the 'discourse' as well as 'story level' offers detailed characterizations of the story's main personae and identifies the narrative's major themes, motifs and problems. The preceding surveys of India's history and contemporary society provide the socio-historical and sociocultural context, whereby the novel's degree of authenticity is established. Moreover, the thesis discusses *The White Tiger's* potential for teaching in the Austrian upper secondary EFL classroom. The assessment of the novel's potential as teaching material is based on the official pool of topics for the new oral standardized *AHS Matura* (2014/15).

Characterizing features of contemporary Indian society include the diversity in religions as well as the resulting conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, the strict caste and class hierarchies, the prevailing gender inequality, tremendous poverty, inequalities in the country's welfare system, as well as corrupt and fraudulent politics. A number of these aspects can be explained historically, due to India's long period of foreign domination and the subsequent establishment of its democratic system, in which material wealth seems to determine an individual's rights and duties. A comparison of these aspects to Adiga's portrayal of contemporary India shows that *The White Tiger* does present a realistic depiction of Indian society, despite minor exaggerations and digressions due to artistic reasons. As far as the novel's potential for teaching is concerned, 20 out of 24 suggested topics for the new oral *AHS Matura* can be applied to *The White Tiger*, which qualifies the novel as a highly suitable reading material for the Austrian EFL classroom. Hence, it can be argued that the accusations against Adiga of portraying a unilateral picture of India can be dismissed on the basis of the analysis presented in this thesis.

Zusammenfassung

Aravind Adigas *The White Tiger* (zu Deutsch *Der Weiße Tiger*) (2008) rief eine bemerkenswert kontroverse Debatte unter Literaturkritikern in Indien sowie im internationalen Umfeld hervor. In seinem Roman bricht Adiga absichtlich mit dem romantischen Mythos des *exotischen Indiens* und präsentiert ein ungeschmücktes und ehrliches Bild der aktuellen indischen Gesellschaft. Diese Diplomarbeit ist ein wertvoller Beitrag zu der andauernden Debatte, indem sie die Darstellung Indiens in *The White Tiger* mit mehreren soziologischen und sozialhistorischen Quellen vergleicht, welche die indische Gesellschaft des 21. Jahrhunderts zu definieren versuchen.

Mittels einer narratologischen Analyse des Romans erfasst diese Diplomarbeit den Grad der Authentizität der, mit dem Booker Prize 2008 ausgezeichneten, Erzählung. Eine Analyse der Erzähl- sowie Handlungsebene des Romans bietet eine detaillierte Charakterisierung der Hauptpersonen und bestimmt die wichtigsten Themen, Motive und Probleme der Erzählung. Der Grad der Authentizität von *The White Tiger* wird sowohl anhand der, für den Roman relevanten, indischen Geschichte als auch der aktuellen Gesellschaft festgestellt und mit dem sozialhistorischen und soziokulturellen Hintergrund Indiens verglichen. Außerdem befasst sich die Diplomarbeit mit der Anwendbarkeit des Romans im Kontext des österreichischen AHS Oberstufenunterrichts. Die Bewertung des Potenzials als Lehrmaterial erfolgt aufgrund des offiziellen Themenpools für die neue standardisierte Reifeprüfung (2014/15).

Typische Merkmale der gegenwärtigen indischen Gesellschaft umfassen die Vielfalt der Religionen sowie die sich daraus ergebenden Konflikte zwischen Hindus und Muslimen, die strenge Kasten- und Klassenhierarchie, die vorherrschende Geschlechterungleichheit, die enorme Armut, Irregularitäten in Indiens Sozialsystem, sowie die korrupte Politik. Einige dieser Aspekte können historisch erklärt werden, aufgrund der langen Fremdherrschaft in Indien und des daraus resultierenden demokratischen Systems, in welchem materieller Reichtum über die Rechte und Pflichten eines Individuums bestimmt. Ein Vergleich dieser Aspekte mit Adigas Darstellung von Indien zeigt, dass *The White Tiger* ein durchaus realistisches Bild der indischen Gesellschaft darlegt. Dennoch weist der Roman einige unmaßgebliche Übertreibungen und Abweichungen auf, die vermutlich aus künstlerischen Gründen entstanden sind. In Bezug auf das didaktische Potenzial ist anzumerken, dass 20 der 24 vorgeschlagenen Themen für die neue standardisierte Reifeprüfung in Adigas Erzählung

enthalten sind, wodurch sich der Roman als äußerst adäquates Lehrmaterial für den österreichischen Englischunterricht erweist.

Daher kann aufgrund der Analyse in dieser Diplomarbeit argumentiert werden, dass die Anschuldigungen gegen Adiga, ein einseitiges Bild von Indien darzustellen, zurückgewiesen werden können.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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PERSONAL INFORMATION

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EXPERIENCE ABROAD

Aug-Dez 2012	Student at the University of Chile (Santiago de Chile, Chile) as part of the mobility agreement “Non-EU Student Exchange Program”
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