

Pitching Inequality: A Critical Analysis of Power Dynamics in Aravind Adiga's *Selection Day*

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga's *Selection Day* is a compelling narrative that explores the intersection of power, dynamic, and ambition within contemporary Indian society. This study critically examines how systemic inequalities rooted in class, caste, and economic structures shape the lives of the novel's characters, particularly the aspiring cricketers Manju and Radha Kumar. Through the lens of postcolonial and socio-political critique, the research highlights how power operates within familial, institutional, and capitalist frameworks, dictating access to opportunities and reinforcing hierarchies. The novel not only portrays the competitive world of cricket as a microcosm of broader societal struggles but also interrogates the consequences of social mobility on individual identity and aspirations. By analyzing Adiga's nuanced portrayal of power and oppression, this paper aims to unravel the complex dynamics of meritocracy, exploitation, and personal agency in a rapidly globalizing India. Ultimately, this novel serves as a powerful critique of the illusion of success, exposing the underlying structures that determine who gets to 'play' and who remains on the margins.

Keywords: Power Dynamic, Postcolonial, Adiga, Hierarchies, Critique

Introduction

Adiga's *Selection Day* (2016) is more than just a novel about cricket—it is a powerful exploration of social inequality, ambition, and the oppressive structures that govern individual destinies. The story, which is set in the cricketing world of Mumbai, explores the ingrained power dynamics that influence the lives of its main characters, especially the two young brothers Manju and Radha Kumar. Through their hardships, the novelist draws attention to the ways that the strict standards of success in contemporary India interact with class, caste, and economic inequality. The novel exposes how social inequalities determine access and opportunity by criticizing the monetization of talent and the constant pressure from oppressive parents and predatory coaches.

The narrative is a more general metaphor for the socioeconomic divisions that still exist in modern-day India, even outside of the sports world. The story challenges the systemic factors that govern and influence people, which makes it a valuable resource for critically examining power dynamics. This project will investigate how *Selection Day* subverts prevailing narratives of success and social mobility, drawing on theories of power and subjection.

Mohan Kumar, an impoverished yet obsessively ambitious father, is determined to transform his two sons into India's top-ranking batsmen. For him, cricket is not just a sport but a vehicle for escaping poverty and attaining wealth, making his sons mere instruments in his relentless pursuit of success. He raises them in an oppressive, hyper-masculine environment, enforcing strict discipline and resorting to physical punishment at the slightest mistake. His authoritarian approach leaves no space for the boys' personal aspirations or emotional well-being. With his wife having abandoned the family, Mohan's entire existence revolves around molding his sons into champions, treating them not as children but as assets to be cultivated and exploited. He monitors their progress obsessively, imposing stringent rules and forbidding anything he believes might distract them from their path to cricketing greatness. "Three dangers on the path to glory—premature shaving, pornography, and car driving," he declares, later adding another perceived threat—the left-handed Muslim player, Javed Ansari (63).

Mohan's controlling nature becomes even more apparent when Tommy Sir, the boys' cricket coach, orders him to leave the field during their training. Infuriated, Mohan lashes out, refusing to acknowledge any authority over his children but his own. "They are my children, I made them," he shouts, underscoring his belief that their identities and futures belong solely to him (28). Under this oppressive regime, the boys are deprived of a normal childhood, forced to endure grueling practice sessions and adhere to an existence stripped of personal freedom. Their exposure to the outside world is so limited that even basic experiences—like talking about shaving or interacting with girls—become acts of quiet rebellion. Yet, as they grow older, both boys begin to challenge their father's rigid worldview in their own ways. Radha finds fleeting solace in his secret relationship with Sofia, a girl who represents a brief escape from his father's control. Meanwhile, Manjunath, the more introspective of the two, struggles with an emotional void left by his absent mother, forming a deep and complex connection with Javed Ansari, a figure who embodies everything Mohan Kumar fears and despises.

As the brothers navigate their internal conflicts and external pressures, exposes the deep-seated inequalities and power struggles that define their existence. The novel critiques the exploitative nature of a system where dreams are commodified and success is dictated by rigid social structures. Through Mohan's obsession, Adiga highlights how power operates not just in institutions but within familial relationships, where authority and control become instruments of oppression. The boys' gradual resistance against their father's dominance serves as a broader metaphor for individual agency within a society that enforces conformity.

Ultimately, *Selection Day* is not merely a story about cricket but a poignant exploration of ambition, identity, and the suffocating weight of expectations in an unequal world.

Power Dynamic: A Foucauldian Discourse in the Novel

Michel Foucault, a towering figure in critical theory, has profoundly influenced various intellectual traditions, including postmodernism, post-structuralism, post-feminism, post-Marxism, and post-colonialism. His explorations of power, knowledge, and discourse have shaped disciplines as diverse as sociology, anthropology, philosophy, history, and literature. From the 1960s onward, Foucault's radical perspectives have consistently challenged conventional academic paradigms, sparking both intense criticism and constructive debate. What sets Foucault's methodology apart is his rejection of the notion that intellectual progress follows a linear trajectory. He refutes the traditional idea that a thinker must evolve in a direct path from immaturity to maturity, instead advocating for a more dynamic and flexible intellectual development. This perspective underscores the ever-shifting nature of knowledge and the intricate ways in which power structures influence the production of truth.

Foucault's redefinition of knowledge challenges the conventional view that knowledge systems are logically cohesive and objectively structured. His work urges scholars to look beyond hegemonic, institutionalized knowledge and critically examine the forces that shape discourse and meaning. By interrogating the assumptions embedded within dominant knowledge paradigms, Foucault compels us to question the underlying biases that determine what is accepted as truth. His critique highlights the intricate relationship between language, truth, and power, emphasizing that knowledge is not merely discovered but constructed within specific socio-political contexts. Through his *archaeological* and *genealogical* methods, he reveals the historical contingencies that govern what is deemed legitimate knowledge at any given moment, demonstrating how power operates within discourse to sustain particular ideologies while marginalizing others. As Foucault in his book *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* mentions:

All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has effects, and in that sense at least, 'becomes true'. Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice. Thus, there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations (Foucault 27).

One of the novel's most striking elements is the sexual awakening of Manju and Javed, which challenges traditional societal norms. Manju's ambiguous relationship with Javed becomes a site of speculation and control, as his father and brother—deeply embedded in patriarchal values—express their anxieties about his sexual orientation. Javed, on the other hand, embodies resistance to societal norms, embracing his identity without fear of judgment. Foucault's concept of power as a mechanism of normalization is evident here; society dictates acceptable forms of sexuality, and any deviation is scrutinized. However, with the decriminalization of Section 377, India has witnessed a shift in these norms, reflecting how power structures evolve over time through discourse. Manju's internal conflict represents the

tension between institutionalized heteronormativity and the individual's right to self-exploration—a key theme in Foucauldian thought.

Beyond sexual identity, the novel explores class struggle and the commodification of ambition, particularly in the world of cricket. Radhakrishna Kumar and Manjunath Kumar, born in the slums, are driven by their father's relentless ambition to rise from poverty to stardom. Mohan Kumar's obsession with wealth and status mirrors the capitalist drive that dominates post-liberalization India. When Anand Mehta, a businessman, offers to sponsor the brothers, Mohan commodifies his sons' futures, demanding, "Eight thousand for one boy. And fifteen thousand for both" (38). This transaction underscores how the neoliberal economy transforms human potential into a marketable asset, echoing Foucault's critique of biopower—where bodies are disciplined, controlled, and exploited for profit.

Capitalism's grip on cricket, once a sport symbolizing national pride, has turned it into a site of corruption and financial exploitation. The narrative aligns with Vivek Shanbhag's *Ghachar Ghochar*, where money is portrayed as an uncontrollable force: "It's not we who control money, it's the money that controls us" (49). Foucault's ideas on power and knowledge production come into play here, as capitalism reconstructs the very meaning of success, morality, and self-worth. The cricketing world in *Selection Day* is not just about talent but about networks, power dynamics, and economic leverage, revealing the deep entanglement of capitalism and identity formation.

The father-son conflict in the novel further illustrates Foucault's theory of power relations. Mohan Kumar's vision of success is rooted in a rigid, authoritarian structure, where his sons exist merely as instruments of his economic aspirations. Manju, in contrast, resists this imposed ambition. Fascinated by forensic science, he secretly visits a morgue, symbolizing his quest for a different kind of knowledge—one that lies outside his father's prescribed path. His statement, "I want to become a forensic scientist" (116), signifies his desire to escape the discourse of cricket and reclaim agency over his own future. However, the Foucauldian paradox of power emerges: even as Manju attempts to resist, he remains caught within the overarching structures that dictate his choices. His selection for Mumbai's under-19 team is less a victory of free will and more a testament to the pervasive power structures that shape individual destinies. In this context, Foucault writes:

The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus [...] on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in doing so subdue or crushes the individual. In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual [...] is, I believe, one of its prime effects. [...] The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle. (Foucault 98).

Adiga's novel also critiques the deep-rooted inequalities of postcolonial India, where economic mobility remains an illusion for the underprivileged. The stark contrast between the affluent and the marginalized is evident in Anand Mehta's interactions with Mohan Kumar. Mehta's condescension towards Kumar reflects the Foucauldian concept of disciplinary

power—where class hierarchies are maintained not through explicit oppression but through subtle mechanisms of exclusion and humiliation. The description of Mehta’s gaze—“a pre-liberalization stare”—alludes to how power manifests in everyday interactions, reinforcing social hierarchies.

The transformation of cricket into a financial empire, tainted by money laundering and corruption, further exemplifies Foucault’s notion of power as an omnipresent force that shapes ideologies and behaviors. The IPL, once a platform for sporting excellence, now serves as a capitalist enterprise where dreams are commodified and morality is negotiable. The postcolonial anxiety to escape poverty through sports mirrors the broader struggles of a society where ambition is simultaneously fueled and suffocated by economic disparity.

Ultimately, *Selection Day* presents a Foucauldian critique of modern India, where power operates through discourse, ambition is a constructed desire, and identities—whether sexual, professional, or social—are constantly negotiated within rigid structures of control. Adiga’s narrative compels us to question whether true agency exists in a world dictated by economic, social, and ideological power. As Foucault argues, power is not merely oppressive but productive—it creates realities, defines norms, and conditions human aspirations. In *Selection Day*, we witness characters navigating a world where power is omnipresent, shaping their dreams, desires, and destinies in ways they can scarcely comprehend.

Conclusion

At the end, this novel offers a critical lens into the mechanisms of capitalism and the relentless pursuit of wealth, exposing how financial ambition dictates human relationships and societal structures. The novel unpacks the entangled dynamics of power and money, illustrating how capitalist policies fuel an insatiable hunger for success, often at the cost of ethical and emotional integrity. The suffocating competition of a globalized, capitalist world erodes moral consciousness, reducing human interactions to transactions driven by financial gain and social dominance.

This novel also challenges conventional societal norms, particularly through the homoerotic undertones of Manju and Javed’s relationship. Their bond disrupts traditional expectations, symbolizing a broader shift in societal perceptions of identity and sexuality. By juxtaposing themes of ambition, economic disparity, and evolving social values, Adiga’s narrative exposes the intricate interplay between power structures and personal aspirations, ultimately questioning the price of success in an increasingly capital-driven world.

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