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**Breaking Boundaries: Exploring Neocolonial Exploitation and Decolonial Agency in Aravind Adiga's *Selection Day***

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**Abstract:** Aravind Adiga's *Selection Day* provides a compelling exploration of neocolonialism and decoloniality in contemporary India with the background of the game of cricket. Neocolonialism is evident in the hyper-commercialized cricket industry, where young boys, Radha and Manju are commodified for corporate profit, reflecting the economic exploitation characteristic of global capitalism. Father of Radha and Manju believe that cricket will help them to become rich. The novel portrays consumerism, class disparities, and dependence on cricket as a means of upward mobility which highlights the persistent colonial dynamics of wealth concentration and labor exploitation. The novel also interrogates themes of resistance and self-determination, aligning with decolonial thought. Manju's rejection of cricket, pursuit of biology, and exploration of his identity show the aspects of decoloniality. His journey symbolizes epistemic disobedience—a core tenet of decoloniality—by resisting the hegemonic knowledge systems perpetuated by the capitalist structure. *Selection Day* ultimately is a critique and resistance against neocolonial systems. It critiques how postcolonial India replicates colonial patterns of domination through capitalist exploitation, cultural commodification, and patriarchal values. At the same time, it offers hope for decolonial emancipation, as seen in Manju's reclaiming of his agency, voice, and autonomy. The novel underscores the enduring influence of colonial power structures while highlighting the potential for individuals to resist and redefine their identities. *Selection Day* is a nuanced reflection on the intersections of neocolonialism and decoloniality in modern India.

**Key words:** neocolonialism, decoloniality, hyper-commercialized, commodified, epistemic disobedience

**Introduction:** *Selection Day* by Aravind Adiga was published in 2016 after the sweeping success of his Booker winning novel, *The White Tiger*. The novel is built around the game of cricket. Cricket in recent times is viewed as an engine of upward mobility by millions of youth in India rather than as a game. The story is about the life of a poor villager from Karnataka who comes to Mumbai to make his sons the world's best batsmen. To enjoy the economic benefits, he selects the game of cricket for his sons. They come to Mumbai bare

handed, only with the hope of becoming rich through cricket. Adiga has shown how cricket is viewed as an engine of mobility by millions of Indians who are unable to enjoy any privilege of the economic growth which the country was boasting about. The growing aspiration of the poor factions of the society becomes the backdrop of the novel. Mohan Kumar, the father of Radha Kumar and Manjunath Kumar, makes his living by selling chutney in Dahisar, a suburb of Mumbai. But his real business is to train his sons both mentally and physically to make them the world's best batsmen. Mohan believes that his family's destiny can be changed and "attempts to break the chains that bring his family down in the class hierarchy" (Kuruvilla 1), through his mission of making his sons, the best cricketers of the world. He becomes partly successful by making his sons outstanding performers in the junior category. In the beginning of the novel, we find, the local newspapers of Mumbai hailing Radha Kumar as a promising star in an article called 'Young Lions'. Soon, the brothers become famous in the neighbourhood and get the attention from the coach, Pramod Sawant, who relates the prowess of the brothers to 'Tommy Sir, a writer, cricket scout, painter and a columnist who tries to bring out the best in every young cricketer. Tommy Sir gets a sponsorship of five thousand rupees per month from a Gujarati business man, Mr. Anand Mehta. In return, as per the agreement, Anand Mehta will get one third of the boys' earnings, when they become great cricketers. Anand will also get an opportunity to negotiate for the boys when companies like Adidas or Nike approach them for advertisements, once when they become famous. The family of Mohan Kumar move to better locale. Mohan Kumar urges his sons to practise well as the competition gets tough with new players.

As the boys grow up, they like to be free from the regimental control of their father. Radha likes to freak out with his girl friend, Sofia. The boys develop a hatred for their father and his eccentric policies. Manju develops a deep friendship with a Muslim boy, Javed. Radha and Manju slowly break away from the control of their father. On the selection day, both the boys fail to meet the expectation of their father.

After eleven years from the selection day, Manju remains an ordinary cricket coach and not a world-famous cricketer. His father's aspiration of representing India in the international game does not materialize. Radha is lame due to an accident, and is dependent on his brother for money. The novel closes with both the brothers unable to become what their father really wanted them to be.

The novel clearly portrays neocolonial exploitation and the aspects of decoloniality. Adiga subtly shows how the postcolonial aspects still shape the Indian society along with the themes of power dynamics, change in social structure and ambition of the poor. The impact of colonial legacy even after several decades in India is highlighted. The obsession with English and the game of cricket which were brought by British indicate that postcolonial influence still persists in India. Cricket, the colonial import, became a means for postcolonial India to assert itself on a global stage. Years after the colonial rule, a new form of colonialism

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called neocolonialism which is surreptitious gripped the developing countries of Global South.

Neocolonialism is the continuation of colonial patterns of domination, especially through economic, cultural, and social systems, even after the formal political independence. Neocolonialism crept into India after the country adopted the new economic policy in which Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization were prioritized. This economic policy resulted in a lopsided growth where one section of the society scaled up while other groups stumbled down. Ruchira Ganguly and Timothy J. Scrase in their book *Globalization and the Middle Classes in India*, show how globalization helped one group of middle class and affected the other. Their major finding shows the contradiction between the stark reality and the rhetoric of globalization in the life of middle class. They comment that “just as the working classes and the peasantry remain marginal to the process of globalization, so do the lower middle classes, principally because their aspirations are not matched by material gain” (177).

Sports was considered secondary to academics in India till recent times. Many parents thought that it was an unnecessary distraction from studies, and it was opted less as a career. “The traditional belief is ‘Games and play ruin your career whereas education makes you a great man’. This in fact summarizes the Indian attitude towards sports” comments Lunghar Jajo (707). The sponsors for the sports activities were less in number. The public sector like railways, Air India and Indian Airlines and private parties like TATA group sponsored sports events. People selected sports for employment opportunities in railways, banks and other government departments. Sports, before liberalization did not promise any great economic benefit as it does now. Though, many policies were made by the government to improve sports in India, a serious attention was given to these policies, after the Asian Games in 1982. The Sports Authority of India took many initiatives to develop sports both at centre and state, prioritizing the rural regions. From time to time, government took steps to improve the infrastructure facilities in school for a congenial sports development. Sports was introduced into the curriculum, and many schemes like National Sports Talent Contest Scheme, Panchayat *Yuva krida Aur khal Abiyan* were introduced, and funds were allotted for its successful implementation. All these measures by the government tried to develop sporting spirit among Indians. But sports became more attractive and was considered a good career after globalization when compared to the times earlier to it.

Globalization brought a sweeping change in almost all fields including sports. Interest to participate in sports activities developed after globalization. The craze for fitness increased, sports channels like Star Sports, Ten Sports and ESPN brought home a special interest for sports and geopolitical power structure of global affairs was shifting away from Atlantic hub to the Asia Pacific. The International Cricket Council moved from Lord’s ground in London to Dubai. This change occurred mainly because of Indian money in global sport. In the World Cricket, nearly 70% of income is made in or from India, and so, the ICC’s gaze fell on the sub-continent from Dubai. The emergence of the Indian Premier League

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modeled on English Premier League was a great move in India that took cricket to the next level. Television rights to broadcast this series for the Indian audience were sold at a higher price of US\$1.89 billion. The India's biggest property developers the DLF group came forward in 2008 to sponsor the championship's title for the event for three years. IPL series is expected to contribute nearly US\$1.5 billion dollars to Indian cricket board of India. With all these factors, BCCI has a strong hold in international cricket council in recent times. The players were paid exorbitant money during the IPL bid and from the label of sports, cricket slowly took the label of lucrative career. The eight IPL teams are owned by big corporate, and players of the series are auctioned for millions. Apart from this, cricketers are also chosen as brand ambassadors for several consumer products. The money and fame enjoyed by the cricketers attracted many Indians, who now consider cricket as a profitable profession. These aspects together changed the Indian's attitude towards sports.

In India cricket is dominated by sponsors and it reflects how economic forces commodify young aspirants. Radha and Manju, become a mere product whose value lies in their potential to make money for corporations, agents, and sponsors. The neocolonial systems convert human beings into economic resources. The game of cricket, which was a game of British Raj is transformed into a hyper-commercialized industry where Indian players are sold to franchises, reflecting the commodification of labor under global capitalism. Tommy Sir and Anand Mehta act as brokers of cricketing talent, which mirrors the neocolonial relationship between global capital and local labor. The boys are not seen as individuals but as investments with "market value." The promise of upward mobility that cricket gives becomes the ray of hope for the family of Mohan Kumar. This promise of upward mobility is shaped by the success stories by global capitalist. The neocolonial logic here is that the only path to a "better life" is through participation in a globalized system of competition and consumption.

The class divide between the slums where the boys live and the wealthy neighborhoods of Mumbai induce them with the spirit of competition. Mohan Kumar, believes only cricket will ameliorate his status echoing the post-colonial dependency on Western-style "success" stories. Wealth and good quality of life remain concentrated with the rich. This aspect mirrors the Global system of Global North dominating the Global South. Tommy Sir and Anand Mehta symbolize the powerful North and Mohan Kumar stands for the marginalized South. The relation between these groups mirrors the situation where the former colonies provide raw labor for wealthy corporations or powerful nations.

Decoloniality challenges the neocolonial knowledge, values, and power structures, aiming to liberate marginalized communities from colonial mindsets. The pressure imposed by neocoloniality is looked as restricting force. Radha accepts and submits to the power structure, but Manju defies this by overthrowing cricket. Unlike his father and brother who consider cricket as the purpose of life, he challenges it and decides to opt science. Manju's interest in education, biology, and his exploration of personal identity beyond cricket reflect a search for self-determination, a core element of decoloniality. The epistemic disobedience

is visible when he decides to step away from the pressures of "being a star". He rejects the dominant framework that defines success in neocolonial terms.

Cricket is a hyper-masculine, patriarchal space which every male fantasizes in India. This reflects the colonial logic of "manhood" as tied to discipline, control, and success. Manju likes to have relationship with Javed, though many consider them as gay. This defies the conventional notions of colonial system. The subtle hints about Manju's possible queerness challenge the patriarchal model of masculinity deeply embedded in Indian cricket. By not conforming to the cricket machine, Manju resists not only the neocolonial capitalist logic but also the colonial idea of "manhood" as defined by physical prowess and domination. Mohan Kumar thinks only cricket can save them from harsh reality of poverty. But Manju is confident of finding a promising career through biology and science. He believes emancipation need not through cricket, but can through education.

Aravind Adiga's *Selection Day* criticizes the neocolonial commodification of sports talent, the economic subjugation of lower-class families, and the reproduction of colonial forms of labor exploitation within a neoliberal global order. At the same time, the novel also embodies decoloniality, particularly through the character of Manju, who rejects cricket, normative sexuality, and pursuit of self-determined knowledge. All these factors highlight the epistemic disobedience central to decolonial thought. Manju represents decolonization when he seeks liberation from the expectations imposed by cricket, family, and society. He reclaims his agency, voice, and autonomy from neocolonial systems of control. In summary, *Selection Day* serves as a subtle but powerful reflection on how colonial patterns of control continue to exist in postcolonial India. The novel also points to decolonial possibilities, where individuals like Manju resist these forces and carve out their own path.

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