

Urban Space as Battleground: Housing, Precarity and Class Warfare in Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* and Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom*

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between urban space, housing insecurity, and class conflict in Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* (2011) and Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* (2017). Both novels portray the contemporary Indian city as a contested site where neoliberal capitalism reshapes social relations, intensifies economic inequality, and transforms housing into a mechanism of exclusion and power. Drawing on theories of urban studies, Marxist literary criticism, and spatial politics, this study argues that housing in these novels functions not merely as shelter but as a symbolic and material arena of class struggle. Through comparative textual analysis, the article explores themes of dispossession, precarity,

speculative urban development, and the erosion of collective ethics under neoliberalism. The study concludes that both authors expose the violence embedded within urban modernization while foregrounding the vulnerability of marginalized citizens in contemporary India.

Keywords: Urban Space, Housing Politics, Precarity, Class Warfare, Neoliberal Urbanism, Marxist Literary Criticism, Spatial Theory.

Introduction

The rapid urbanization of post-liberalization India has fundamentally altered the relationship between citizens, property, and the city. Economic reforms initiated in 1991 accelerated private investment, real estate speculation, and global capital flows, producing unprecedented urban growth alongside widening social inequalities. Housing, once considered a social necessity, increasingly became an economic commodity subject to market forces. Consequently, urban space emerged as one of the primary sites where class divisions are negotiated and contested.

Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* and Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* vividly portray these transformations. Rather than depicting cities as spaces of opportunity, both novels reveal them as battlegrounds where competing claims over land, housing, and survival generate conflict between different social classes. The narratives demonstrate how neoliberal capitalism converts everyday life into an arena of competition, where economic insecurity, displacement, and social fragmentation become normalized.

This article argues that housing in these novels serves as a critical lens through which broader structures of capitalist exploitation, urban violence, and class warfare can be understood.

Review of Literature

The relationship between urban space, housing, and class conflict has become a significant area of inquiry within contemporary literary studies, particularly in scholarship

examining Indian English fiction in the context of globalization and neoliberal urbanization. Following India's economic liberalization in 1991, scholars have increasingly focused on the transformation of metropolitan spaces into sites of speculative capitalism, uneven development, displacement, and social exclusion. Literary representations of cities have consequently shifted from celebrating urban modernity to exposing the contradictions of capitalist development, making urban fiction a productive field for interdisciplinary research involving literature, sociology, geography, and political economy.

Early studies of contemporary Indian English fiction primarily explored themes of postcolonial identity, migration, globalization, and national consciousness. Critics such as Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Arjun Appadurai established important theoretical foundations for understanding globalization, cultural hybridity, and transnational identities. However, these studies devoted comparatively less attention to housing politics, urban redevelopment, and spatial inequality as literary concerns. With the growing influence of Henri Lefebvre's concept of "the production of space" and David Harvey's theory of "accumulation by dispossession," literary criticism gradually began examining cities as politically contested spaces rather than merely narrative settings.

Within urban literary criticism, Henri Lefebvre's argument that space is socially produced has become particularly influential. Lefebvre contends that urban spaces are continuously shaped through political, economic, and ideological forces rather than existing as neutral geographical locations. Building upon this premise, David Harvey argues that neoliberal capitalism reproduces itself through urban redevelopment, privatization, and dispossession of vulnerable populations. Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession has become one of the most widely adopted theoretical frameworks for analyzing literary depictions of urban redevelopment, gentrification, and housing crises.

Scholars studying Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* have consistently interpreted the novel as a critique of neoliberal capitalism and speculative urban development. One of the earliest critical discussions examines the novel's representation of globalization and Mumbai's changing socio-economic landscape, arguing that Adiga portrays the city as a space where economic liberalization transforms ethical relationships into market transactions. The study emphasizes themes such as migration, corruption, materialism, and the commercialization of everyday life but pays comparatively limited attention to housing as a site of ideological conflict.

A significant contribution to the study of urban spatial politics is offered by Sadaf Mehmood, who investigates *Last Man in Tower* through David Harvey's theory of accumulation by dispossession and Henri Lefebvre's "Right to the City." Mehmood argues that urban redevelopment in Mumbai produces spatial inequalities by privileging elite consumption while marginalizing ordinary residents. The article demonstrates how redevelopment projects convert residential spaces into commodities, thereby producing displacement, alienation, and social fragmentation. While this study provides an important spatial analysis, it remains confined to a single text and does not comparatively examine broader patterns of urban precarity in contemporary Indian fiction.

Ana Cristina Mendes and Lisa Lau further extend discussions of Adiga's novel by situating *Last Man in Tower* alongside the Brazilian film *Aquarius*. Their comparative analysis introduces the concept of "new logics of expulsion," arguing that neoliberal redevelopment creates new forms of middle-class precarity alongside traditional forms of economic marginalization. Rather than emphasizing spectacular acts of violence, they identify systemic and institutional violence embedded within redevelopment processes. Their work broadens the discussion of urban displacement but focuses primarily on comparative urban redevelopment rather than the intersections of housing, class warfare, and literary representation in India.

Recent scholarship has increasingly adopted Marxist perspectives to examine Adiga's portrayal of Mumbai. Studies investigating neoliberal urbanism argue that *Last Man in Tower* represents the transformation of Mumbai into a city governed by speculative capital, informal economies, and unequal access to resources. These analyses employ David Harvey's theories to explain how urban development privileges market interests over social welfare and demonstrates the erosion of collective ethics under neoliberal capitalism. Although these studies substantially contribute to understanding class conflict, they seldom engage with broader questions of housing precarity across multiple contemporary Indian novels.

Other scholars have interpreted *Last Man in Tower* through postcolonial frameworks by examining the persistence of neo-colonial economic structures in contemporary India. These studies argue that multinational capital, private developers, and market-driven urban planning reproduce forms of domination that resemble colonial patterns of resource control and social hierarchy. Housing emerges as a symbol of both aspiration and exclusion, yet these interpretations often privilege postcolonial discourse over sustained engagement with urban spatial theory or comparative literary analysis.

Critical attention to Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* has largely centered on themes of migration, inequality, social fragmentation, caste, labour exploitation, and ethical responsibility. Critics have praised Mukherjee's fragmented narrative structure for illustrating the interconnectedness of privilege and deprivation within contemporary India. Several studies emphasize the novel's exploration of structural violence, mobility, and the illusion of freedom in neoliberal society. However, despite recognizing the novel's concern with poverty and displacement, relatively little scholarship specifically examines housing insecurity, urban spatial politics, or the commodification of domestic space as central organizing principles of the narrative.

Recent interdisciplinary scholarship in urban studies further strengthens the theoretical basis for examining literary representations of housing crises. Studies on neoliberal housing policy in India demonstrate that privatization, financialization of real estate, shrinking public housing, and speculative investment have intensified inequalities in access to affordable housing. Researchers argue that neoliberal housing policies increasingly prioritize market efficiency over social welfare, thereby transforming housing into a financial asset rather than a social right. These developments provide an important socio-economic context for understanding literary representations of displacement and housing precarity in contemporary Indian fiction.

Beyond literary criticism, urban theorists such as Saskia Sassen, Neil Smith, Doreen Massey, and Edward Soja have expanded scholarly understanding of global cities, uneven spatial development, and socio-economic exclusion. Sassen's work on global cities explains how financial globalization intensifies urban inequality, while Neil Smith's theory of gentrification reveals the role of capital in restructuring urban neighbourhoods. Doreen Massey's relational understanding of space and Edward Soja's concept of spatial justice further illuminate how power operates through geographical organization. Although these theoretical contributions have significantly influenced urban studies, they have not been systematically integrated into comparative analyses of recent Indian English fiction.

A noticeable trend within existing scholarship is the predominance of single-text analyses. Most researchers investigate *Last Man in Tower* independently, concentrating on globalization, capitalism, redevelopment, or Marxist urbanization. Likewise, studies of *A State of Freedom* often foreground migration, social inequality, and ethical dilemmas without placing the novel within wider debates on housing politics and urban space. Comparative research connecting these two novels remains remarkably limited.

Another limitation concerns the treatment of precarity. Existing scholarship generally approaches precarity as an economic condition or labour issue while paying insufficient attention to housing insecurity as a multidimensional experience encompassing belonging, citizenship, memory, identity, and social exclusion. Similarly, class conflict is often discussed in abstract economic terms rather than being examined through everyday negotiations over residential space, property ownership, and urban redevelopment.

Furthermore, relatively few studies synthesize Marxist literary criticism with contemporary urban spatial theory to examine how neoliberal capitalism reshapes domestic spaces into arenas of ideological struggle. While scholars frequently invoke Harvey's accumulation by dispossession or Lefebvre's production of space independently, fewer studies integrate these frameworks with Judith Butler's theory of precarity, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital, and contemporary debates on spatial justice. Such an interdisciplinary approach offers richer possibilities for understanding how literature represents the lived consequences of neoliberal urbanization.

The present research seeks to address these gaps by undertaking a comparative study of Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* and Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom*. Rather than treating housing merely as physical shelter or economic property, this study conceptualizes it as a contested social, political, and ideological space where neoliberal capitalism produces new forms of class warfare, dispossession, and precarious citizenship. By integrating Marxist literary criticism, urban geography, spatial theory, and precarity studies, the research aims to contribute an interdisciplinary perspective that extends current scholarship on contemporary Indian English fiction and the politics of urban space.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates Marxist literary criticism, urban spatial theory, precarity studies, and the sociology of capital to examine

the politics of housing and urban space in Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* (2011) and Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* (2017). As both novels portray contemporary India within the context of neoliberal globalization, no single theoretical perspective sufficiently captures the complex intersections of class inequality, urban redevelopment, displacement, and housing insecurity represented in these texts. Accordingly, this research combines the theoretical contributions of Karl Marx, Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Judith Butler, Pierre Bourdieu, and Saskia Sassen to construct a comprehensive analytical framework.

The study is grounded primarily in Marxist literary criticism, which views literature as a reflection of the material conditions and economic structures that shape social relations. Karl Marx argues that every society is fundamentally organized through its mode of production, and that class conflict emerges from unequal ownership of economic resources. Within capitalist societies, property functions not merely as material wealth but also as an instrument of social power. Marx's concepts of commodity fetishism, alienation, ideology, and class struggle provide essential tools for understanding the transformation of housing into an object of exchange rather than a social necessity. In *Last Man in Tower*, the apartment complex becomes a commodity whose exchange value supersedes its emotional, ethical, and communal significance. Likewise, in *A State of Freedom*, unequal access to housing reflects broader patterns of economic exploitation and social exclusion that characterize neoliberal capitalism.

While Marxist criticism explains the economic dimensions of class relations, Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space provides a spatial understanding of capitalist power. In *The Production of Space* (1974), Lefebvre argues that space is not a neutral geographical entity but a social product continuously shaped by political, economic, and ideological processes. Urban space is therefore produced through the interaction of state institutions, market forces, and everyday social practices. Lefebvre further introduces the concept of the "Right to the City," emphasizing that all inhabitants should participate in the

production and use of urban space rather than being excluded by market-driven redevelopment. This perspective enables the present study to examine how both novels portray cities as contested spaces where redevelopment projects, private capital, and speculative investment restructure everyday life while marginalizing vulnerable communities.

Building upon Lefebvre's spatial theory, David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession serves as one of the central analytical frameworks of this research. Harvey argues that neoliberal capitalism sustains itself by continuously appropriating common resources through privatization, commodification, financialization, and urban redevelopment. Rather than relying solely upon industrial production, contemporary capitalism increasingly generates profit through the displacement of existing populations and the conversion of public or residential spaces into commercial assets. In *Last Man in Tower*, the redevelopment of Vishram Society exemplifies this process, as residents are pressured to exchange their homes for financial compensation while developers accumulate enormous profits. Similarly, *A State of Freedom* illustrates more diffuse forms of dispossession through migration, insecure employment, and the absence of stable shelter. Harvey's theory allows the study to interpret these narratives as literary representations of neoliberal urban restructuring rather than isolated personal tragedies.

The framework further incorporates Judith Butler's theory of precarity to explain the unequal distribution of vulnerability within neoliberal societies. Butler argues that precarity is not simply an individual condition but a politically produced form of differential exposure to insecurity, violence, and economic instability. Certain populations become disproportionately vulnerable because social institutions fail to provide equal protection, recognition, or access to resources. Housing insecurity in both novels exemplifies this condition. Masterji's vulnerability in *Last Man in Tower* demonstrates that legal ownership alone cannot guarantee security when economic and political pressures override individual rights. In *A State of Freedom*, migrant

labourers, domestic workers, and marginalized communities experience chronic precarity through unstable employment, temporary housing, and social invisibility. Butler's concept therefore broadens the analysis beyond economic poverty to include psychological insecurity, social exclusion, and the fragility of everyday existence.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital further enriches the study by explaining how unequal access to economic, cultural, social, and symbolic resources shapes urban experiences. Bourdieu argues that power operates not only through financial wealth but also through education, professional status, social networks, and cultural legitimacy. Urban housing functions as a form of symbolic capital that signifies class identity and social prestige. In Adiga's novel, ownership of property represents middle-class respectability and economic security, while redevelopment transforms this symbolic value into financial capital. In Mukherjee's novel, characters lacking economic and cultural capital remain excluded from stable housing and meaningful participation in urban life. Bourdieu's multidimensional understanding of capital therefore enables the research to examine how housing simultaneously reflects economic inequality and social stratification.

To contextualize these literary representations within global urban transformations, the study also employs Saskia Sassen's theory of the global city. Sassen argues that globalization has reorganized metropolitan centres into strategic locations for finance, transnational capital, and corporate investment. This restructuring produces highly polarized urban societies characterized by affluent professional elites alongside expanding populations of informal workers, migrants, and precarious labourers. Although Indian metropolitan cities have become symbols of economic modernization, they simultaneously generate widening inequalities in housing, employment, and public infrastructure. Both *Last Man in Tower* and *A State of Freedom* depict these contradictions by illustrating how urban growth benefits privileged

groups while intensifying the vulnerability of marginalized populations. Sassen's framework therefore situates the novels within broader processes of global capitalist urbanization.

The integration of these theoretical perspectives provides a multidimensional approach to understanding urban space as a site of ideological contestation. Marx explains the economic foundations of class conflict; Lefebvre conceptualizes space as socially produced; Harvey reveals the mechanisms of neoliberal dispossession; Butler interprets precarity as politically manufactured vulnerability; Bourdieu demonstrates how multiple forms of capital structure social hierarchy; and Sassen situates these dynamics within global urban capitalism. Collectively, these theories illuminate how housing operates simultaneously as shelter, commodity, symbol of identity, instrument of exclusion, and terrain of political struggle.

This interdisciplinary framework enables the present research to move beyond conventional thematic analysis by investigating the interrelationship between urban space, housing, and class warfare across both novels. Rather than viewing displacement or homelessness as isolated social problems, the study interprets them as structural consequences of neoliberal capitalism and uneven urban development. The framework also facilitates a comparative analysis of Adiga's concentrated depiction of real estate speculation in Mumbai and Mukherjee's fragmented portrayal of mobility, migration, and precarious citizenship across contemporary India.

Accordingly, the research conceptualizes urban space not merely as the physical backdrop of the narrative but as an active ideological arena in which competing forces of capital, state authority, market speculation, and everyday resistance continuously negotiate power. Housing emerges as a central site where questions of citizenship, belonging, memory, identity, and social justice converge. By synthesizing Marxist political economy with contemporary theories of spatial production and precarity, this theoretical framework provides a robust foundation for examining how contemporary Indian English fiction critiques

neoliberal urbanization and exposes the persistent inequalities embedded within the modern city.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative, interpretative, and comparative research design to investigate the representation of urban space, housing, precarity, and class warfare in Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* (2011) and Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* (2017). Since the research seeks to explore the ideological, socio-political, and spatial dimensions embedded within literary narratives rather than measure quantifiable variables, a qualitative methodology is considered the most appropriate approach. The study combines close textual reading with interdisciplinary theoretical analysis to examine how contemporary Indian English fiction reflects the changing realities of neoliberal urbanization.

The research is primarily analytical and descriptive in nature. Rather than testing predetermined hypotheses, it critically interprets literary texts within their historical, economic, and cultural contexts. The comparative approach enables the study to identify both convergences and divergences in the ways Adiga and Mukherjee represent housing, displacement, urban redevelopment, and social inequality. By placing these novels in dialogue with one another, the study aims to generate broader insights into the politics of urban space in post-liberalization India.

Research Approach

This research follows an interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that literary texts produce multiple layers of meaning shaped by historical, ideological, and socio-economic contexts. Unlike positivist methodologies that seek objective and measurable outcomes, interpretivism emphasizes the subjective construction of meaning through textual interpretation and critical analysis. Accordingly, the novels are examined as cultural texts that

engage with broader debates surrounding neoliberal capitalism, spatial justice, housing inequality, and class relations.

The study also employs an interdisciplinary approach, integrating concepts from literary criticism, urban geography, sociology, political economy, and cultural studies. Such an approach is necessary because the research problem—the politics of housing and urban space—extends beyond the boundaries of literary studies and intersects with contemporary debates on urbanization, globalization, and social inequality.

Research Method

The research method employed is comparative textual analysis supported by close reading. Close reading facilitates detailed examination of narrative structure, characterization, symbolism, imagery, dialogue, and spatial representations within both novels. Particular attention is paid to descriptions of housing, residential communities, migration, urban landscapes, and everyday experiences of economic vulnerability.

Comparative textual analysis enables the identification of shared thematic concerns as well as distinct narrative strategies. While *Last Man in Tower* focuses on the transformation of an apartment complex into a site of speculative capital and middle-class conflict, *A State of Freedom* portrays fragmented experiences of migration, labour insecurity, and precarious urban existence. Comparing these narratives reveals different literary responses to the social consequences of neoliberal urbanization.

The study also employs contextual analysis, situating both novels within the socio-economic transformations that followed India's economic liberalization in 1991. This contextualization considers the expansion of global capital, privatization, real-estate speculation, migration, and changing housing policies as important historical forces shaping literary production.

Primary Sources

The primary corpus of the research consists of the following literary texts:

- Aravind Adiga. *Last Man in Tower*. New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2011.
- Neel Mukherjee. *A State of Freedom*. London: Chatto & Windus, 2017.

These novels have been selected because they offer complementary representations of contemporary Indian urban life while foregrounding questions of housing, displacement, social inequality, and class conflict. Although their narrative structures differ significantly, both texts interrogate the human consequences of neoliberal capitalism and therefore provide a suitable basis for comparative analysis.

Secondary Sources

The research draws upon a wide range of secondary materials to establish historical context, theoretical grounding, and critical engagement. These include:

- Books and peer-reviewed journal articles on Marxist literary criticism.
- Studies in urban geography and spatial theory.
- Research on neoliberal globalization and urban development in India.
- Scholarly works on precarity, housing studies, and political economy.
- Critical essays on Aravind Adiga and Neel Mukherjee.
- Government reports and policy documents concerning urbanization, housing, and redevelopment.
- Academic databases such as JSTOR, Project MUSE, Scopus, Web of Science, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, Wiley Online Library, and Google Scholar.

The inclusion of interdisciplinary scholarship enables the study to situate literary representations within broader socio-economic and political contexts.

Theoretical Application

The research applies an integrated theoretical framework comprising Marxist literary criticism, spatial theory, and precarity studies.

Karl Marx's concepts of class struggle, alienation, commodity fetishism, and ideology provide the foundation for analysing capitalist relations embedded within urban housing markets.

Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space is employed to examine how urban environments are socially constructed through political and economic power.

David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession is used to interpret redevelopment, privatization, and housing commodification as mechanisms of neoliberal capitalism.

Judith Butler's theory of precarity explains the unequal distribution of vulnerability experienced by different social groups.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital facilitates analysis of the relationship between housing, social status, symbolic power, and class identity.

Saskia Sassen's theory of global cities contextualizes both novels within processes of financial globalization and uneven urban development.

These theoretical perspectives are not treated independently but are synthesized to produce a multidimensional interpretation of literary representations of urban space.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeds through several interconnected stages.

First, the selected novels are subjected to repeated close readings to identify passages relating to housing, urban redevelopment, migration, displacement, neighbourhoods, class relations, labour, and social inequality.

Second, these passages are organized into thematic categories such as housing as commodity, urban precarity, spatial exclusion, displacement, redevelopment, class conflict, violence, belonging, and resistance.

Third, each thematic category is interpreted using the selected theoretical frameworks. Marxist concepts illuminate economic exploitation; Lefebvre and Harvey explain spatial restructuring; Butler analyses vulnerability; Bourdieu examines symbolic and cultural capital; and Sassen situates these narratives within global urbanization.

Fourth, the findings from both novels are comparatively analysed to identify convergences, divergences, and complementary representations of neoliberal urbanism.

Finally, the study synthesizes literary interpretation with historical and socio-economic contexts to demonstrate how fiction contributes to contemporary debates concerning housing justice, urban citizenship, and spatial inequality.

Comparative Framework

The comparative analysis focuses upon several key dimensions:

- Representation of urban space and city life.
- Housing as home, commodity, and capital.
- Neoliberal redevelopment and speculative real-estate markets.
- Experiences of displacement and dispossession.
- Forms of economic and social precarity.
- Construction of class identity.
- Violence, exclusion, and social fragmentation.
- Individual resistance and collective responsibility.
- The relationship between urban modernization and social justice.

These thematic categories facilitate systematic comparison while allowing each novel to retain its distinctive narrative characteristics.

Scope and Delimitations

The study is confined to two contemporary Indian English novels published after India's economic liberalization and focuses specifically on representations of urban space, housing, and class conflict. It does not undertake a comprehensive sociological investigation of Indian housing policy or quantitative analysis of urban demographics. Instead, the research examines how literature imaginatively represents these socio-economic realities.

Similarly, although caste, gender, religion, migration, and environmental concerns appear within the novels, they are discussed only insofar as they intersect with housing, urban precarity, and class warfare.

Reliability and Validity

To enhance academic rigour, the study employs methodological triangulation, combining literary close reading with interdisciplinary theoretical interpretation and historical contextualization. Interpretations are supported through engagement with established scholarly criticism, peer-reviewed research, and canonical theoretical texts. Comparative analysis further strengthens the validity of findings by identifying recurring patterns across multiple literary works rather than relying upon a single text.

The study also maintains transparency by clearly identifying theoretical assumptions, analytical procedures, and textual evidence. Such methodological consistency contributes to the reliability and credibility of the research.

Ethical Considerations

As this research is based exclusively on published literary texts and secondary scholarly sources, it does not involve human participants, interviews, surveys, or experimental procedures. Consequently, institutional ethical clearance is not required. Nevertheless, the study adheres to accepted standards of academic integrity by accurately citing all primary and

secondary sources, acknowledging intellectual contributions, avoiding plagiarism, and following the prescribed citation style throughout the research.

Summary

This research methodology provides a systematic framework for examining how contemporary Indian English fiction represents the politics of urban space within the context of neoliberal capitalism. Through qualitative comparative textual analysis informed by Marxist literary criticism, spatial theory, and precarity studies, the research seeks to demonstrate that housing functions not merely as a physical structure but as a contested socio-political space where questions of class, citizenship, identity, and justice are continuously negotiated. By integrating literary analysis with interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives, the methodology enables a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between urban development, economic inequality, and human vulnerability in contemporary India.

Results and Discussion

The comparative textual analysis of Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* (2011) and Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* (2017) demonstrates that both novels position urban space as a politically contested arena where neoliberal capitalism reshapes housing, social relations, and class identities. Although the narratives differ in structure, setting, and characterization, they converge in their critique of contemporary urban development by exposing the commodification of housing, the production of precarity, and the intensification of class inequalities in post-liberalization India. The findings reveal that housing functions not merely as a physical dwelling but as a symbolic, economic, and ideological site through which power, exclusion, and resistance are negotiated.

Housing as a Commodity under Neoliberal Capitalism

One of the most significant findings of this study is that both novels portray housing as a commodity whose exchange value supersedes its social and emotional significance. Applying

Karl Marx's concept of commodity fetishism and David Harvey's theory of accumulation by dispossession reveals that residential spaces are increasingly governed by market logic rather than human need.

In *Last Man in Tower*, Vishram Society initially represents an ordinary middle-class residential community built upon shared experiences, neighbourly interaction, and collective memory. However, once the real estate developer offers lucrative financial compensation, the apartments cease to function as homes and become highly profitable commodities. Economic value gradually replaces emotional attachment, and residents begin to perceive one another through the lens of financial gain. The collective identity of the community collapses as individual economic interests dominate social relationships.

This transformation illustrates Marx's argument that capitalism reorganizes human relations through exchange value. The apartment becomes detached from its cultural and emotional meanings and is instead evaluated according to its commercial profitability. Harvey's notion of accumulation by dispossession further explains how redevelopment projects facilitate capital accumulation by displacing existing communities under the rhetoric of modernization and urban progress.

Although *A State of Freedom* does not depict a single redevelopment conflict, it similarly represents housing as inaccessible to economically marginalized populations. The recurring absence of stable shelter underscores the unequal distribution of urban resources. Housing becomes a privilege rather than a fundamental social right, reflecting the broader financialization of urban life.

The comparative analysis therefore demonstrates that both novels critique neoliberal urbanism by revealing how market forces redefine housing as an economic asset while simultaneously eroding its social function.

Urban Space as a Site of Class Warfare

The analysis further indicates that urban space functions as an arena of class struggle rather than a neutral geographical setting. Guided by Marxist literary criticism and Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, the study finds that cities in both novels are socially produced environments where economic power determines access, mobility, and belonging.

In Adiga's novel, class conflict manifests directly through the struggle between private developers, property owners, and an individual resident who resists redevelopment. The conflict surrounding Masterji's refusal to sell his apartment exposes the unequal balance of power between financial capital and ordinary citizens. Although the residents possess legal ownership of their apartments, their property rights become increasingly vulnerable to corporate influence and collective coercion. Urban redevelopment therefore emerges as a mechanism through which capitalist interests reorganize residential space according to market priorities.

Mukherjee presents a more dispersed representation of class warfare. Instead of focusing upon explicit property disputes, *A State of Freedom* depicts structural inequalities embedded within everyday urban existence. Migrant workers, domestic labourers, and economically marginalized individuals experience continuous exclusion from stable housing, secure employment, and meaningful citizenship. Class conflict is therefore represented not through overt confrontation but through persistent economic vulnerability and social invisibility.

These contrasting narrative strategies collectively reinforce Lefebvre's proposition that urban space is continuously produced through political and economic relations rather than existing independently of social power.

The Production of Precarity and Differential Vulnerability

Another major finding concerns the centrality of precarity as an organizing principle of contemporary urban life. Judith Butler's theory of precarity proves particularly valuable in explaining how both novels represent unequal exposure to insecurity and violence.

In *Last Man in Tower*, Masterji's vulnerability demonstrates that legal ownership does not necessarily ensure protection within neoliberal cities. Despite possessing property rights, he becomes increasingly isolated as neighbours prioritize financial interests over ethical obligations. His eventual victimization illustrates how precarity extends beyond economic deprivation to include psychological isolation, political marginalization, and social abandonment.

In contrast, *A State of Freedom* presents precarity as a permanent condition experienced by individuals who lack secure housing, stable employment, or institutional protection. The fragmented narrative structure reinforces the instability characterizing the lives of migrants, informal labourers, and socially marginalized communities. Rather than depicting isolated episodes of hardship, Mukherjee portrays precarity as an enduring structural condition produced through unequal economic systems.

The findings therefore suggest that precarity in both novels should be understood as politically manufactured rather than naturally occurring. Housing insecurity, labour exploitation, and social exclusion emerge as interconnected consequences of neoliberal governance rather than individual failures.

Housing, Identity, and the Politics of Belonging

The analysis further reveals that housing functions as an important marker of identity, memory, and citizenship. Applying Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital demonstrates that residential property carries symbolic value extending beyond its economic worth.

For Masterji, the apartment embodies personal history, emotional attachment, and moral integrity. His refusal to sell signifies resistance against reducing human existence to financial calculation. The apartment therefore represents symbolic capital through which dignity and social identity are constructed.

In *A State of Freedom*, however, many characters remain permanently excluded from such symbolic ownership. Constant migration and temporary accommodation prevent the formation of stable relationships with place. Their mobility reflects not freedom but dispossession. Housing insecurity thus undermines the possibility of belonging, illustrating how unequal access to material resources also produces cultural and psychological exclusion.

These findings indicate that contemporary urban citizenship increasingly depends upon access to property and economic capital. Individuals lacking stable housing experience diminished social recognition and reduced participation within urban life.

Fragmentation of Community under Neoliberal Urbanism

The study demonstrates that neoliberal capitalism systematically weakens collective social relations. In *Last Man in Tower*, the residents of Vishram Society initially display elements of communal solidarity despite social differences. However, financial incentives gradually transform neighbours into competitors. Friendship, trust, and collective responsibility are replaced by suspicion, coercion, and individual economic ambition.

This process exemplifies Marx's argument that capitalist relations commodify social interaction while Harvey's analysis of neoliberal urbanization explains how market rationality increasingly governs everyday life. The destruction of community becomes a prerequisite for profitable redevelopment.

Mukherjee similarly portrays fragmented social relationships, although fragmentation results less from direct competition than from structural inequality. Economic insecurity limits opportunities for solidarity as individuals struggle merely to survive. The city appears less as a

unified community than as a collection of disconnected social worlds separated by class privilege.

The comparative findings therefore indicate that neoliberal urbanization contributes not only to economic inequality but also to the erosion of collective ethical responsibility.

Violence as an Instrument of Urban Development

A further finding concerns the relationship between violence and urban modernization. Both novels challenge dominant narratives portraying development as universally beneficial.

In *Last Man in Tower*, violence appears both directly and structurally. Physical coercion accompanies economic pressure, demonstrating that redevelopment frequently depends upon intimidation and exclusion. The conflict surrounding Masterji illustrates Harvey's argument that capitalist accumulation often relies upon coercive mechanisms concealed beneath discourses of progress and modernization.

Mukherjee presents violence in more subtle forms. Structural violence manifests through chronic poverty, insecure employment, food scarcity, homelessness, and social invisibility. The absence of spectacular conflict does not diminish the intensity of suffering; instead, it reveals how everyday deprivation constitutes a persistent form of violence embedded within urban social structures.

The analysis therefore expands conventional understandings of violence by demonstrating that economic inequality and housing insecurity themselves constitute significant forms of structural oppression.

Spatial Justice and the Right to the City

Henri Lefebvre's concept of the "Right to the City" provides another important interpretative insight. Both novels suggest that access to urban space is increasingly determined by market participation rather than democratic citizenship.

In *Last Man in Tower*, legal ownership proves insufficient when confronted by speculative capital and political influence. Citizens formally possess rights yet remain vulnerable to dispossession through redevelopment.

In *A State of Freedom*, economically marginalized individuals rarely possess meaningful rights to urban space in the first place. Their movement through cities reflects continuous negotiation with exclusion rather than genuine participation in urban life.

These findings indicate that contemporary Indian cities increasingly privilege financial investment over social justice. The "right to the city" becomes unevenly distributed according to class position and economic capacity.

Comparative Interpretation

Although both novels critique neoliberal urbanism, they employ markedly different narrative strategies. Adiga constructs a concentrated narrative centred upon a single residential conflict that dramatizes the direct confrontation between ordinary citizens and speculative capital. Mukherjee, by contrast, develops a fragmented narrative that disperses experiences of inequality across multiple characters and geographical locations.

Despite these structural differences, the comparative analysis reveals four major points of convergence.

First, both novels represent housing as an instrument of capitalist accumulation rather than merely domestic shelter.

Second, both depict urban space as socially produced through unequal relations of power and capital.

Third, both expose precarity as a structural consequence of neoliberal economic policies rather than individual failure.

Finally, both challenge developmental narratives that celebrate economic growth while overlooking displacement, exclusion, and widening class inequality.

These shared concerns demonstrate that contemporary Indian English fiction increasingly functions as an important cultural archive documenting the social consequences of neoliberal urban transformation.

Discussion

The findings contribute to existing scholarship in several significant ways. Previous studies have generally examined *Last Man in Tower* through the lenses of globalization, redevelopment, or neoliberal capitalism, while scholarship on *A State of Freedom* has focused primarily on migration, inequality, and ethical responsibility. Comparative analyses integrating both novels remain limited.

The present study extends existing research by demonstrating that housing constitutes a central analytical category through which broader processes of class warfare, urban restructuring, and precarious citizenship can be understood. Rather than treating housing as a subsidiary theme, the analysis establishes it as the primary site where economic power, social identity, and political exclusion converge.

The interdisciplinary theoretical framework also broadens current literary scholarship. By synthesizing Marxist political economy with Lefebvre's spatial theory, Harvey's urban geography, Butler's concept of precarity, Bourdieu's sociology of capital, and Sassen's theory of global cities, the research develops a multidimensional understanding of urban literature. This integrated approach reveals that contemporary Indian fiction not only reflects neoliberal urbanization but actively critiques the ideological assumptions underlying market-driven development.

Furthermore, the study contributes to debates in urban humanities by illustrating how literary narratives illuminate dimensions of housing inequality that are often inaccessible through policy analysis or economic data alone. Fiction captures the emotional, ethical, and

psychological consequences of displacement, revealing how redevelopment transforms not only physical landscapes but also human relationships, identities, and collective memory.

Overall, the findings confirm that *Last Man in Tower* and *A State of Freedom* portray the contemporary Indian city as a battleground where capital, power, and social justice intersect. Housing emerges as the principal terrain upon which struggles over belonging, citizenship, dignity, and survival are enacted. The novels therefore offer a powerful literary critique of neoliberal urbanism and underscore the continuing relevance of Marxist and spatial theories for understanding the inequalities embedded within twenty-first-century urban life.

Conclusion

The present study has examined the representation of urban space, housing, precarity, and class warfare in Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* (2011) and Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* (2017) through an interdisciplinary framework informed by Marxist literary criticism, urban spatial theory, precarity studies, and the sociology of capital. By undertaking a comparative textual analysis, the research has demonstrated that both novels offer incisive critiques of the socio-economic transformations that have accompanied neoliberal urbanization in post-liberalization India. Rather than portraying the city as a site of progress, opportunity, and modernization, the novels expose it as a contested terrain where capital, power, and inequality continuously shape the lived experiences of individuals and communities.

A central finding of this study is that housing occupies a pivotal position in the literary imagination of contemporary Indian English fiction. In both novels, housing transcends its conventional function as physical shelter and emerges as a multidimensional construct encompassing economic value, social identity, emotional attachment, historical memory, and political belonging. The transformation of homes into marketable commodities reflects the broader commodification of everyday life under neoliberal capitalism, where exchange value increasingly displaces social relationships, ethical responsibility, and collective well-being.

The study has shown that the politics of housing cannot be understood merely in terms of property ownership or real estate development; rather, it must be interpreted as an ideological process through which urban space is reorganized to privilege capital accumulation while marginalizing vulnerable populations.

The comparative analysis further demonstrates that urban space functions as an active agent in the production of social inequality. Drawing upon Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space and David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession, the research has illustrated how redevelopment, privatization, and speculative investment restructure cities according to the imperatives of global capitalism. In *Last Man in Tower*, this process is dramatized through the redevelopment of Vishram Society, where financial incentives erode community solidarity and transform neighbours into competitors. In *A State of Freedom*, neoliberal urbanism is represented through fragmented narratives of migration, insecure labour, temporary shelter, and social invisibility. Although the novels employ distinct narrative strategies, both reveal that urban development frequently operates through mechanisms of exclusion, displacement, and unequal access to resources.

Another significant contribution of this research lies in its examination of precarity as a defining characteristic of contemporary urban existence. By applying Judith Butler's theory of precarity, the study has argued that vulnerability is not an accidental consequence of economic change but a politically produced condition unequally distributed across different social groups. The experiences of Masterji, migrant workers, informal labourers, and other marginalized characters demonstrate that housing insecurity intersects with economic exploitation, social isolation, and diminished citizenship. Consequently, precarity emerges not simply as material deprivation but as a broader condition affecting dignity, identity, security, and belonging.

The study has also highlighted the continuing relevance of Marxist literary criticism for understanding contemporary Indian urban fiction. Marx's concepts of class struggle, commodity fetishism, alienation, and ideology remain particularly valuable for interpreting the relationship between housing and capitalist development. The novels reveal that class warfare in neoliberal cities often assumes subtle forms embedded within everyday economic transactions, redevelopment policies, and market rationalities rather than open political confrontation. By exposing these hidden mechanisms of power, Adiga and Mukherjee challenge dominant narratives that celebrate urban growth while ignoring its unequal social consequences.

An important contribution of this research is its interdisciplinary synthesis of literary criticism with urban studies, political economy, sociology, and geography. Previous scholarship has generally examined *Last Man in Tower* and *A State of Freedom* independently, emphasizing themes such as globalization, migration, inequality, or redevelopment. Comparatively fewer studies have investigated the relationship between housing, urban space, and class conflict across both novels. By integrating the theoretical insights of Karl Marx, Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Judith Butler, Pierre Bourdieu, and Saskia Sassen, this study has developed a comprehensive analytical framework capable of explaining how literature represents the complex interactions between economic structures, spatial organization, and social exclusion. The research therefore contributes to the growing field of urban humanities by demonstrating that literary texts offer valuable insights into the lived realities of neoliberal urbanization that complement sociological and policy-based analyses.

The findings also have broader implications for contemporary debates on urban justice, housing rights, and inclusive development. As Indian metropolitan centres continue to experience rapid expansion driven by private investment and global capital, questions concerning affordable housing, forced displacement, gentrification, and spatial inequality have

become increasingly urgent. The novels examined in this study suggest that sustainable urban development cannot be measured solely through economic growth, infrastructure, or real estate expansion. Rather, it must also be evaluated according to its capacity to protect human dignity, preserve community relationships, ensure equitable access to housing, and uphold the rights of all urban inhabitants. Literature thus functions not only as cultural representation but also as a critical intervention that interrogates the ethical and political assumptions underlying contemporary urban policy.

Despite its contributions, the present study has certain limitations. The analysis is confined to two contemporary Indian English novels and therefore does not encompass the full diversity of literary responses to urbanization across regional languages, genres, or historical periods. Similarly, although caste, gender, religion, migration, and environmental degradation intersect with housing and class conflict, these dimensions have been considered only insofar as they illuminate the central concerns of urban space and precarity. Future research may extend this investigation by incorporating regional literatures, Dalit writing, women's narratives, or multilingual representations of urban displacement. Comparative studies involving South Asian, African, Latin American, or global postcolonial urban fiction may further enrich understanding of the transnational dynamics of neoliberal urbanism.

Future scholarship may also benefit from engaging with additional theoretical perspectives, including Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, Edward Soja's theory of spatial justice, Doreen Massey's relational understanding of space, Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, Loïc Wacquant's work on urban marginality, and contemporary research on financialized housing markets. Such interdisciplinary expansion would facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the evolving relationship between literature, urban governance, and social inequality.

In conclusion, this study argues that *Last Man in Tower* and *A State of Freedom* reconfigure the contemporary Indian city as a battleground where competing forces of capital, community, state power, and individual agency confront one another. Housing emerges as the principal site through which these conflicts are articulated, revealing the deep interconnections between material space, economic structures, and human experience. Through their nuanced portrayals of displacement, redevelopment, precarity, and resistance, Adiga and Mukherjee challenge celebratory narratives of neoliberal modernization and foreground the enduring realities of inequality and exclusion within twenty-first-century urban India. Their novels ultimately demonstrate that the struggle for housing is inseparable from the struggle for dignity, citizenship, and social justice, affirming the significance of literature as a critical medium for understanding and contesting the unequal geographies of the modern city.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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