

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Film is one of the most influential forms of media in contemporary society because it functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium for representing social realities. Through visual narratives, characters, dialogues, and settings, films can communicate values, ideologies, and social issues to audiences. As Badruzaman (2009) explains, social inequality occurs when wealth, power, and opportunities are not distributed equally among members of society. This imbalance creates a social hierarchy: those from higher economic backgrounds tend to have more privileges, a stronger voice, and easier access to education, jobs, and decision-making. On the other hand, people from poorer backgrounds often struggle with limited resources, which makes upward mobility difficult. In this sense, inequality is not limited to differences in income alone. It also reflects how the upper class holds power over the lower class, a relationship that affects many aspects of social life.

One of the most significant social issues frequently portrayed in films is social inequality. Social inequality refers to the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, privileges, and power among individuals or social groups within society. According to Therborn (2020), social inequality encompasses disparities in life chances, access to resources, and social recognition that create advantages for some groups while disadvantaging others. Similarly, Pleinen (2022) argues that social inequality remains a persistent global issue because social structures continuously reproduce unequal opportunities across generations.

One of issue that related with social inequality is social stratification. Social stratification refers to the hierarchical arrangement of individuals and groups based on wealth, status, power, and prestige. Individuals occupying higher positions generally possess greater access to economic resources, education, and political influence, whereas those in lower positions often experience marginalization and limited social mobility (Baranes & Bucher, 2022). Consequently, social

stratification contributes significantly to the maintenance of social inequality within society.

From a sociological perspective, inequality is not merely an individual problem but a structural phenomenon embedded within social institutions. Educational systems, labor markets, and political structures often reinforce existing class divisions, making it difficult for disadvantaged groups to improve their social positions (Monk, 2022). This condition is particularly evident in developing countries where economic growth frequently coexists with significant social disparities.

The issue of social inequality is strongly represented in *The White Tiger* (2021), a film directed by Ramin Bahrani and adapted from the novel by Aravind Adiga. The film tells the story of Balram Halwai, a young man from a poor family who struggles to escape poverty and oppression within a highly unequal social system. Through Balram's experiences, the film portrays the sharp contrast between wealthy elites and lower-class workers, highlighting how economic power and social status shape individual opportunities and life outcomes.

The film also illustrates how systems of domination are maintained through power relations and social control. This condition can be explained through Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which refers to the process by which dominant groups maintain their power by gaining the consent of subordinate groups rather than relying solely on coercion (Gramsci, 2021). In *The White Tiger*, this concept is reflected in the "Rooster Coop" metaphor, which symbolizes how oppressed individuals become trapped within systems of inequality and willingly conform to them.

Furthermore, the film demonstrates that social inequality is manifested in various forms, including economic inequality, social exclusion, exploitation of labor, and unequal access to opportunities. These forms of inequality influence Balram's decisions and eventually motivate his resistance against the oppressive social structure. Therefore, *The White Tiger* can be viewed as a sociological representation of the complexities of social inequality in contemporary society.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background above, the problems of this study are formulated as follows:

1. How is social inequality portrayed in *The White Tiger* Movie?
2. The relationship between the film *The White Tiger* and the social context of Indian society

## 1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study are:

1. To analyze how social inequality portrayed in *The White Tiger* movie.
2. To examine the relationship between the film *The White Tiger* and the social context of Indian society.

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide both academic and practical contributions to the field of literary and film studies, particularly in understanding the relationship between literary works and social realities.

Academically, this study contributes to the development of the sociology of literature and film by examining how social stratification, power relations, and social inequality are represented in *The White Tiger* movie. Literature and film are not created in isolation; rather, they are closely connected to the social conditions in which they are produced. As cultural products, literary works and films can function as representations of social realities, reflecting the values, norms, conflicts, and inequalities that exist within society. Therefore, this study is expected to enrich scholarly discussions on how cinematic narratives portray social structures and social issues through characters, settings, and conflicts.

Furthermore, this study highlights the relationship between literary works and their social context. *The White Tiger* can be viewed both as a reflection of social realities and as a critique of the unequal social system portrayed in the film. Through the depiction of class divisions, power imbalances, and limited social mobility, the film illustrates the experiences of marginalized groups within society. At the same time, it challenges audiences to critically examine the structures that

sustain inequality. Thus, the study demonstrates how literary and cinematic works can serve not only as mirrors of society but also as instruments of social criticism.

Practically, this study is expected to increase readers and viewers awareness of social inequality and its impact on individuals lives. By understanding how social stratification and power relations operate within the narrative of *The White Tiger*, audiences may develop a deeper understanding of similar social issues that continue to exist in contemporary societies. The findings of this study may also encourage critical thinking regarding social justice, equality, and opportunities for social mobility.

Finally, this study is expected to serve as a useful reference for future researchers who are interested in exploring literary and cinematic representations of social issues, particularly those related to social inequality, class structure, social stratification, and power relations from a sociological perspective. Through this contribution, the study seeks to strengthen the understanding that literary works and films are not merely forms of entertainment, but also meaningful cultural texts that engage with and respond to the social realities of their time.

### **1.5 Methodology of the Study**

This study use a qualitative descriptive approach paired with a close reading technique to analyze the relationship between the film *The White Tiger* and the contemporary social context of India. Rather than relying on numerical data, this research focuses on interpreting the meanings, social phenomena, and systemic inequalities embedded within the narrative and cinematic elements of the movie. By evaluating these visual and textual components through the lens of established sociological frameworks, the analysis exposes the stark disparities in wealth, class mobility, and power dynamics depicted on screen. Consequently, this methodological framework provides a systematic understanding of how popular cinema reflects and critiques the complex socioeconomic realities of modern Indian society.

The primary source of data is *The White Tiger* (2021), a drama film directed by Ramin Bahrani and adapted from the novel of the same title written by Aravind Adiga. The film was produced by Netflix in collaboration with Lava Media and

Noruz Films and was officially released on the Netflix streaming platform in January 2021. The movie serves as the primary object of analysis because it presents a strong depiction of social inequality, class division, and power relations within contemporary Indian society.

The analysis is conducted using a structural approach to film studies. The researcher examines the intrinsic and cinematic structures of the film, including narrative structure, characters, plot, setting, cinematography, and mise-en-scène. These elements are analyzed to understand how the film constructs meanings related to social stratification, power relations, and social inequality. Through structural analysis, the study identifies the ways in which cinematic elements contribute to the development of the film's central themes and social messages.

After analyzing the structural elements of the film, the findings are interpreted through the perspective of the sociology of literature and film. According to Alan Swingewood (2020), literary and cultural works can be understood as products of society that reflect, respond to, and interact with the social conditions in which they are created. From this perspective, literature and film are closely connected to social reality because they may function as reflections of society, representations of social experiences, or critiques of existing social structures. Therefore, the sociology of literature approach is applied to examine how the portrayal of social stratification and power relations in *The White Tiger* relates to the broader context of social inequality in Indian society.

Through the combination of structural analysis and the sociology of literature approach, this study seeks to reveal how the film represents social inequality and how its narrative reflects and critiques the social realities that exist within contemporary society.

## **1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study focuses on analyzing of social inequality in film *The White Tiger* adaptation of the novel of the same title. In this study, the author will explore key themes such as residential segregation: the luxury high-rise vs the underground garage, the legal vulnerability of unorganized labor (the forced confession),

structural corruption and crony capitalism, and the degradation of human dignity as class conditioning.

This study analyzes social inequality in the film "The White Tiger" through a sociology of literature approach. The author contextualizes these fictional findings with the social reality occurring in India. To analyze this phenomenon, the author uses the film "*The White Tiger*" as primary data. Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained from historical literature, scientific articles, and theoretical references relevant to the sociology of literature.

### 1.7 Status of the Study

Several studies have been conducted on *The White Tiger*, examining the work from different perspectives and theoretical approaches. These studies provide valuable insights into the novel and film; however, they focus on different aspects from those explored in the present study.

The first study was conducted by Moh Afif Badjeber (2023) entitled *Oppression Experienced by Balram in Adiga's The White Tiger*. This study focuses on the oppression experienced by the main character, Balram Halwai, using Iris Marion Young's theory of oppression and a Marxist perspective. The findings reveal various forms of domination and exploitation experienced by Balram throughout the story. Although the study discusses social problems within the narrative, its primary concern is oppression rather than the broader issue of social inequality and its relation to social structures.

The second study was conducted by Anil Kumar (2024) entitled *Arvind Adiga's The White Tiger: A Study of Real and Royal India*. This study examines the contrast between wealthy and impoverished groups in Indian society as represented in the work. The research highlights the division between what the author refers to as "Shining India" and "Dark India," emphasizing the gap between privilege and deprivation. However, the study mainly focuses on socioeconomic conditions and does not specifically analyze social stratification and power relations as literary representations of inequality.

Another study was conducted by Gohar Ayaz and Snobra Rizwan (2021) entitled *Nietzsche's Ubermensch and Crime: An Analysis of Aravind Adiga's Novel*



*The White Tiger*. This research analyzes Balram's transformation through Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* and explores the philosophical dimensions of crime, morality, and self-realization. The study focuses on philosophical interpretation rather than examining the social structures that shape inequality within the narrative.

Based on the studies above, it can be seen that *The White Tiger* has been analyzed from the perspectives of oppression, socioeconomic disparity, and philosophy. However, limited attention has been given to the representation of social inequality through the perspective of the sociology of literature. Most previous studies focus on individual experiences, philosophical interpretations, or economic conditions, while the relationship between literary representation and social reality has not been examined extensively.

Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing social stratification and power relations as representations of social inequality in *The White Tiger* movie through the perspective of the sociology of literature. This approach is important because literary and cinematic works are closely related to the social context in which they are produced. Literature and film can function as reflections of social realities while simultaneously serving as critiques of social conditions that exist within society. Through this perspective, *The White Tiger* can be understood not only as a story about an individual's struggle for success but also as a representation of social inequality and class relations in contemporary Indian society.

This study is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between literary works and social realities, particularly how films can portray, reflect, and criticize social inequality through narrative and cinematic representation.

### **1.8 Organization of The Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Each chapter is arranged systematically to guide the reader through the background, theoretical framework, analysis, and conclusion of the research.

Chapter I is the Introduction, which presents the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study,

the methodology of the study, the scope and limitations of the study, the status of the study, and the organization of the study. This chapter provides the foundation of the research by explaining why *The White Tiger* is chosen as the object of analysis and how the study is conducted.

Chapter II is the Review of Related Literature, which discusses the theoretical framework used in this study. This chapter explains the elements of film, the sociology of literature, and class structure and social context. These theories serve as the conceptual foundation for analyzing the narrative and cinematic elements of the film as well as its relationship with Indian society.

Chapter III is the Structural Analysis of *The White Tiger* Movie, which examines the intrinsic and cinematic structures of the film. This chapter analyzes the narrative structure, including characterization, plot, and setting, as well as the cinematic elements, including mise-en-scène and cinematography, to understand how these elements construct the film's themes and meanings.

Chapter IV is relation *The White Tiger* movie with Indian Sociological Context, which interprets the findings of the structural analysis through a sociological perspective. This chapter discusses four aspects that reflect the social reality of Indian society between 2007 and 2010, namely residential segregation, the legal vulnerability of unorganized labor, structural corruption and crony capitalism, and the degradation of human dignity as a form of class conditioning.

Chapter V is the Conclusion and Suggestions, which presents the conclusions drawn from the analysis in Chapter III and Chapter IV, as well as suggestions for future researchers, the English Literature Study Program, and general readers.