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Intentional Use of Second-Person Narration: A Postcolonial View of Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*

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Abstract

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Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) is one of the few novels in contemporary fiction that is narrated almost entirely in the second person. This paper is a postcolonial study of this intentional choice of narrative voice. It examines how the technique contributes to the representation of economic advancement, corruption, moral compromise, and capitalist ambition in present-day Asia. Hamid addresses his protagonist as "you." In doing so, he makes the experience of one man appear universal and, at the same time, makes the reader a partner in his pursuit of wealth. The study pays special attention to the phrase "Rising Asia" in the title. It argues that the novel's picture of economic mobility raises questions about the association of corruption with Asian societies. Corruption, exploitation, and unethical business practices are global phenomena. They are not the exclusive characteristics of any one region. However, when they are concentrated in an Asian setting, it becomes necessary to examine the Western gaze and the international circulation of postcolonial literature. The discussion draws on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, Arjun Appadurai's understanding of globalization, and David Harvey's critique of neoliberal capitalism. The methodology is a qualitative textual analysis of the relationship between narrative perspective and ideological representation. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) has been taken as a comparative text to bring out the similarities and differences in the representation of corruption and capitalist mobility in South Asian fiction. The study argues that Hamid's narrative is ideologically ambivalent. It exposes the inequalities of global capitalism, but it also invites scrutiny of the ways in which Asian economic realities are presented to international readers.

Keywords: *Mohsin Hamid; second-person narration; postcolonialism; Orientalism; corruption; neoliberalism; Asian identity; global capitalism; Aravind Adiga*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The paper advances a specific claim about form rather than proposing a moral inventory of a geographical region. Its hypothesis is that the apparent openness of the second-person address expands the protagonist's story beyond one biography, while the words "Rising Asia" narrow the setting through which the same story is culturally decoded. These impulses do not cancel each other. They make it possible for readers to encounter the protagonist's business practices both as recognizable responses to competitive accumulation and as features of a particular postcolonial urban economy. The question is not which reading must prevail but what in the text enables each one.

The analysis distinguishes three objects that are often confused. Narrative address is an observable formal property of the novel; ideological implication is an interpretation built from patterns of representation; and actual audience reception would require independent evidence from reviews, interviews, readership data, or other records. A literary argument can investigate the first two without claiming to have measured the third. This distinction is especially important where the study discusses Western expectations, for it guards against replacing close reading with assumptions about unknown readers.

South Asian fiction in English has, in recent decades, become increasingly concerned with economic development, social inequality, globalization, and the legacy of colonialism. The rise of a global literary market has given South Asian writers the chance to speak to international audiences while representing the political, cultural, and economic realities of their own societies. Mohsin Hamid holds a significant place among these writers. He is a Pakistani novelist whose works deal with identity, migration, capitalism, class, and the relationship between the East and the West. His novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) is particularly interesting for two reasons: its experimental narrative structure and its satirical portrayal of economic advancement in an unnamed Asian metropolis.

The novel follows an unnamed protagonist who leaves rural poverty behind and moves to the city in search of prosperity. His journey is a chain of personal, professional, and ethical compromises, through which he gradually establishes himself as a successful businessman. His involvement in the bottled-water business is especially telling. It reveals the links between entrepreneurship, scarcity of resources, corruption, and the commodification of a basic human necessity. Hamid does not present economic success as the reward of hard work and fair competition alone. He depicts a world in which manipulation, opportunism, and questionable dealings become the ladder of upward mobility.

The most striking feature of the novel is its second-person narration. Hamid does not use the familiar first-person or third-person point of view. He addresses the protagonist as "you." This turns the novel into something that looks like a self-help manual, with chapter titles that seem to offer instructions for becoming rich. The reader is thus made an indirect participant in the protagonist's life. In effect, the narrative does not only describe how the protagonist becomes rich. It appears to teach the reader how to do the same.

This strategy raises important questions about the relationship between literary form and ideological meaning. The pronoun "you" lends the story a sense of universality, as if the protagonist's experiences could belong to almost anyone. At the same time, it places the reader in an economic environment where success often requires one to abandon conventional morality. The protagonist's story is therefore more than an individual account of social mobility. It becomes a satire on the workings of neoliberal capitalism.

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Angelia Poon (2017) argues that the novel satirizes the neoliberal idea of the self, which holds that individual determination and personal agency are the main roads to prosperity. Her reading is relevant because it connects Hamid's narrative experiment with the assumptions of the self-help genre. This paper seeks to take the discussion a step further by examining the geographical and postcolonial implications of the narrative. It asks whether the novel's association of opportunism and corruption with "Rising Asia" unintentionally strengthens an old discourse in which Asian societies are represented through images of moral instability, weak institutions, and economic dysfunction.

The geographical label in the title is very significant. Hamid does not call his novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in a Globalized World* or *How to Get Filthy Rich under Capitalism*. He deliberately places the pursuit of wealth in "Rising Asia." The phrase recalls the widely circulated discourse of Asian economic emergence, in which developing economies are seen turning into important centres of production, investment, and consumption. Yet the Asia that appears in the novel is dominated by inequality, corruption, exploitation, and moral compromise.

This leads to a basic postcolonial question. Why should corruption be associated with the economic experience of Asia when it is not limited to any one region? Western capitalist economies have their own long record of corporate fraud, financial manipulation, exploitation of labour, political corruption, and unethical accumulation of wealth. To treat Asian corruption as exceptional while ignoring comparable Western practices would reproduce a selective moral geography. The association of corruption with Asia, therefore, needs to be examined as a literary and ideological construction, not as a settled geographical fact.

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism offers a useful framework here. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said shows how Western representations construct the East as an object to be known, interpreted, and dominated. Hamid is a Pakistani writer and not a Western observer. However, his place in the international literary marketplace makes his representation of Asia worth a postcolonial investigation. A postcolonial writer may challenge Western stereotypes and, at the same time, take part in the global circulation of stories that make certain images of the East attractive and familiar to international readers.

It would be unfair, though, to conclude that Hamid knowingly endorses Western stereotypes or presents corruption as an Asian trait. His satire can just as well be read as a criticism of neoliberal capitalism and of the unequal structures that push people towards morally questionable means of earning wealth. The aim of this paper, therefore, is not to guess the author's personal intentions without sufficient evidence. It is to study the ideological implications of his narrative choices.

The commercial and literary position of the novel also needs attention. Hamid writes within an international publishing environment, and his fiction is read in both the East and the West. Whether representations of Asian corruption appeal to Western readers is a legitimate question for literary analysis. However, the assumption that Western readers outnumber Pakistani readers would have to be supported by publishing and sales figures. It cannot be taken for granted. This study therefore treats international readership as a context to be kept in view, not as proof of the author's motive.

A comparative reading of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) strengthens the argument. Both novels present protagonists who try to escape poverty through economic activities that cross moral and legal limits. Adiga uses first-person narration through Balram Halwai, who tells the story of his rise from a poor servant to a successful entrepreneur. Hamid, on the other hand, uses the second person to trace an unnamed protagonist's journey towards wealth. Their

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techniques differ, but both novels explore the relationship between economic mobility and moral compromise in contemporary South Asia.

In this paper, we shall examine the point at which narrative perspective, postcolonial representation, and capitalist ideology meet in Hamid's novel. The paper argues that the second-person narrative is not just an experimental device. It is the means through which the protagonist's experiences are universalized, the reader is drawn into the pursuit of wealth, and an image of contemporary Asia is constructed. By reading the novel alongside *The White Tiger*, the paper hopes to contribute to a broader understanding of how South Asian fiction represents corruption, capitalism, and the complexities of postcolonial identity.

1.1. Research Questions

This study will look for the answers to the following questions:

- How does Mohsin Hamid use second-person narration to construct the protagonist's journey from poverty to wealth in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*?
- To what extent does the novel associate economic advancement in Asia with corruption, manipulation, exploitation, and moral compromise?
- How does the geographical label "Rising Asia" contribute to the construction of an image of Asian society in the novel, and can this image be examined through the framework of postcolonial Orientalism?
- Does Hamid's representation of corruption challenge the global capitalist order, or does it risk strengthening Western perceptions of Asian economic and social realities?
- How does the representation of corruption and social mobility in Hamid's novel compare with that in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, particularly in terms of narrative perspective and ideological position?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Read together rather than separately, these interventions reveal a productive tension in the scholarship. Poon’s account explains why the apparently empowering language of self-help should be understood ironically, while Neti’s work places a particularly important commodity within a longer history of unequal access and legal authority. Anwer and Ratti help prevent a reductive account of the comparison text: the ethically compromised protagonist can be understood neither as an uncomplicated hero of mobility nor as a transparent representative of a nation. The present study joins these lines of inquiry by asking how a form of address organizes the tension between structural criticism and geographical readability.

This also clarifies the essay’s more modest claim to originality. The discussion does not assert that earlier scholarship overlooked the second person, globalization, water, or Orientalism as independent topics. Rather, it proposes to examine their convergence through a recurring contradiction: an apparently transferable formula for success is enacted within an explicitly regional title. The gap is therefore synthetic and interpretive, not the discovery of an entirely unstudied feature.

The relationship between narrative form, neoliberal capitalism, and postcolonial representation in contemporary South Asian fiction has drawn considerable scholarly attention. Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* has generated a good deal of critical discussion because of its unusual narrative perspective, its satirical use of the self-help genre, and its portrayal of economic mobility in a rapidly changing Asian society.

Angelia Poon's article, "Helping the Novel: Neoliberalism, Self-Help, and the Narrating of the Self in Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*" (2017), provides one of the most relevant foundations for this study. Poon examines the novel's relationship with the self-help

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genre and argues that its satire targets the neoliberal notion of individual agency. In her reading, the novel questions the belief that one can achieve prosperity through personal determination and self-transformation alone. The protagonist's life shows that economic advancement is shaped by historical circumstances, technological change, and unequal social structures (Poon, 2017). Poon's contribution is significant for this paper because it links the novel's form with its ideological concerns. The present study, however, extends the discussion towards the postcolonial implications of placing corruption within the geographical frame of "Rising Asia."

Leila Neti's "Filthy Water, Filthy Rich" (2025) offers another important interpretation. Neti reads the protagonist's journey through the combined frameworks of the bildungsroman and the self-help manual. She draws attention to the second-person narrative and to the empty, replaceable "you" that invites the reader to identify with the protagonist. Neti also connects the protagonist's business with colonial legal history and with the regulation of water in South Asia. Her discussion shows that his criminality cannot be understood apart from the historical structures that have shaped access to natural resources. It is significant that she traces how colonial laws turned water from a communal right into controlled property, and how this shift continues to affect the relationship between property, criminality, and human rights (Neti, 2025). This perspective enriches the present study. It shows that the protagonist's practices are not simply personal moral failures. They are also linked to long-established structures of inequality.

The postcolonial implications of representing Asian societies are further brought out in Megha Anwer's article, "Tigers of an-other Jungle: Adiga's Tryst with Subaltern Politics" (2014). Anwer examines the conflicting critical responses to *The White Tiger*. Some critics believe that the novel feeds an Orientalist fantasy of India as an impoverished and underdeveloped country. Others praise it for breaking the myth of a shining "New India." Anwer questions this either-or approach and looks instead at the contradictions within the novel itself (Anwer, 2014). Her analysis is relevant to this study because it shows that literary representations of corruption, poverty, and subaltern experience can challenge and reproduce dominant assumptions at one and the same time.

Manav Ratti's "Justice, Subalternism, and Literary Justice: Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*" (2020) examines the relationship between justice, class, caste, poverty, and violence in Adiga's novel. Ratti studies how the protagonist's marginalization shapes his understanding of justice and his decision to win economic freedom through morally and legally questionable means (Ratti, 2020). His analysis helps us understand the relationship between subaltern agency and capitalist mobility. It also offers a ground for comparison with Hamid's protagonist, whose rise likewise involves a complicated relationship between individual agency and structural inequality.

The link between neoliberalism and postcolonial development has also been explored in the scholarship on Hamid's novel. Studies of the commodification of water and of market-driven development show that the protagonist's commercial success cannot be separated from the unequal distribution of essential resources. Neti's (2025) discussion of colonial water legislation and Poon's (2017) examination of neoliberal subjectivity are especially valuable in this regard. Taken together, these studies suggest that the protagonist's rise to wealth is not simply a personal achievement. It has to be examined within the wider structures of economic inequality, privatization of resources, and capitalist expansion.

The theoretical framework of this paper also draws on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), and David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005). Said's work provides a framework for examining how the East is constructed through practices of representation. Appadurai's discussion of globalization helps us understand how cultural images circulate and how local identities interact

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with global economic processes. Harvey gives a critical account of neoliberalism as an economic and political project that favours market-driven development and the expansion of capital.

It is noticeable that, despite these contributions, an important area remains open. Existing scholarship has examined the second-person narrative, neoliberal selfhood, the commodification of water, and the postcolonial dimensions of economic inequality in Hamid's novel. However, the relationship between the novel's second-person perspective, its geographical label "Rising Asia," and the possible ideological implications of associating corruption with Asian development still needs an integrated examination. This paper addresses that gap by bringing narrative analysis into dialogue with postcolonial criticism and comparative South Asian fiction.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The unit of analysis is a narratively consequential passage or episode rather than an isolated occurrence of the pronoun. Passages were selected because they involve at least one of four intersecting features: direct second-person address, an imperative self-help heading, an ethically consequential stage of the protagonist's economic advancement, or a description connecting local conditions with a broader vocabulary of development. These criteria focus the reading on how a recurring formal device organizes social experience. The comparison with Adiga is purposive: it examines a comparable trajectory of class mobility narrated through a notably different grammatical and rhetorical position.

Analysis proceeded in a sequence of interpretive steps. First, the discussion identified the formal invitation created by an instructional heading and its continuation in the narrated event. Second, it examined whether the ensuing episode validates, complicates, or undermines the implied advice. Third, it situated the scene in relation to resource distribution, social hierarchy, and institutional access. Finally, it considered a counter-reading: the same textual feature that invites a reader to imagine inhabiting the protagonist's role might also produce critical distance because the reader recognizes the irony of the self-help frame. This sequence is a transparent guide to textual interpretation, not a claim that interpretation is mechanically reproducible.

The theoretical lenses serve different, limited functions. Said helps frame questions about representational asymmetry and the historical construction of an "East"; Harvey assists in identifying the relation between private accumulation and uneven access to resources; and Appadurai supplies a vocabulary for the circulation of cultural images across national boundaries. None of these theories substitutes for evidence from the novel, and none by itself establishes how actual readers respond. The study also makes no statistical claim about rates of corruption, nor does it infer the novelist's private commercial intentions from formal decisions.

This paper is based on a qualitative study that uses textual analysis and interpretive literary criticism. The primary text is Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013), and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) has been taken as a comparative text. The study investigates the relationship between narrative perspective, ideological representation, corruption, and capitalist development through a close reading of selected episodes, characterization, thematic patterns, and linguistic strategies.

The study is interpretive and not empirical. It does not try to measure the actual extent of corruption in Asian or Western economies. Instead, it looks at how corruption and economic opportunism are represented in the fictional worlds of the two novels, and how these representations may shape wider cultural and ideological perceptions.

The analysis follows three interconnected approaches.

3.1. Narrative analysis

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The first approach examines Hamid's use of second-person narration. Special attention is paid to the pronoun "you," the namelessness of the protagonist, the instructional chapter titles, and the relationship between the narrator, the protagonist, and the reader. The analysis explores how this perspective creates identification, distance, complicity, and universality.

3.2. Postcolonial textual analysis

The second approach draws on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism to examine the representation of Asian economic and social conditions. It asks whether the novel's geographical framing of corruption reproduces familiar images of the East as a space of weak institutions and moral instability. It also considers the possibility that Hamid's satire challenges such images by exposing the inequalities built into global capitalism.

3.3. Comparative textual analysis

The third approach uses *The White Tiger* as a comparative text. It examines how Adiga and Hamid represent corruption, entrepreneurship, class mobility, and moral compromise through different narrative perspectives. The purpose of the comparison is to bring out similarities and differences in the ideological treatment of economic advancement in South Asian fiction.

The secondary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and established theoretical works on postcolonialism, narratology, globalization, and neoliberal capitalism. The paper follows the APA (7th edition) style for in-text citations and the list of references.

Throughout the discussion, a distinction has been kept between the author's intentions and the possible ideological implications of the text. Authorial intention cannot be established through textual interpretation alone. So, the study focuses on the effects and implications of Hamid's narrative choices rather than making unsupported claims about his personal motives.

4. DISCUSSION AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

4.1. Analytical Findings

The close reading yields four interconnected findings. First, the second-person address makes the experience of social advancement seem transferable without erasing the protagonist's particular circumstances. Second, self-help imperatives are repeatedly exposed to narrative irony as the cost of advancement becomes visible. Third, the bottled-water business makes the conversion of collective necessity into private opportunity a central ethical problem. Fourth, the title positions these contradictions within "Rising Asia," even as their economic logic extends beyond the region. The comparison with Adiga confirms that narrative perspective alters the reader's ethical position: a retrospective first-person advocate is not the same as a protagonist constituted through an externally narrated "you." These are interpretive findings about textual organization, not measurements of audience behavior.

Second-Person Narration as a Narrative and Ideological Strategy

The effect of "you" should not be described as an automatic merger of character and reader. A fictional second person may designate a character within the story, summon an implied reader into a hypothetical position, and leave an actual reader free to resist that position. Hamid's technique is interesting precisely because these functions coexist. The protagonist remains socially situated and biographically distinct, yet the grammatical form withholds the reassuring separation offered by "he." A reader can temporarily occupy the space opened by the address while still judging the behavior attributed to it. Complicity, then, is a rhetorical possibility produced by the narrative, not an empirically established psychological outcome.

The sequence of chapter imperatives also transforms advice into a test of its own adequacy. "Move to the City" and "Get an Education" at first appear to offer widely endorsed routes to self-

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improvement; later formulations such as “Avoid Idealists” and “Befriend a Bureaucrat” bring the moral qualifications of advancement into the open. Their imperative grammar masks the unequal conditions under which the protagonist acts. The chapters do not simply teach a stable rule for success: read alongside the increasingly compromised events of the life-story, their apparent clarity begins to sound ironic. Formal repetition gives the reader a pattern against which the ethical instability of each new stage can be measured.

This irony also affects temporality. The instructional voice speaks as if the future can be managed by a series of correct decisions; the narrative life, by contrast, unfolds through contingency, changing relations, bodily vulnerability, and eventual decline. Economic growth may be represented through successive steps, but a human life cannot finally be reduced to them. The second person becomes the medium through which ambition’s promise and the non-transferable costs of living are held together.

The most distinctive feature of *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* is its use of the second person. Fiction has traditionally relied on the first or the third person to set up the relationship between narrator, character, and reader. Hamid breaks away from this convention by addressing his protagonist as "you." This choice creates an unusual bond between the character and the reader. The protagonist is never given a name. His experiences are narrated through a pronoun that refers to him and, at the same time, speaks to the reader. As a result, he becomes an almost universal figure whose life can be read as representative of a broader human condition. The chapter titles strengthen this effect. Titles such as "Move to the City," "Get an Education," "Work for Yourself," "Learn from a Master," "Avoid Idealists," and "Befriend a Bureaucrat" read like instructions from a commercial self-help book. The novel thus takes on the appearance of a guide to financial success.

Yet the instructional surface is misleading. As the story moves forward, these instructions gradually reveal an uncomfortable relationship between the accumulation of wealth and moral compromise. The protagonist's success does not come only from honest business, professional skill, or personal determination. His commercial activities depend more and more on exploitation, manipulation, and connections with powerful people. This is why the second person is so effective here. It places the reader inside the protagonist's moral world. The reader is not simply told that corruption exists. The reader is addressed as the very person who carries out the actions through which wealth is gathered. The technique can be seen as a form of literary provocation. By saying "you," Hamid asks readers whether they too would make the same compromises if their survival and social mobility depended on questionable practices.

The universalizing effect of the second person, however, also creates an ideological difficulty. When the protagonist's experiences are turned into a seemingly universal journey, the conditions of one particular Asian society may begin to look like the general experience of economic development. Poon's analysis of neoliberal subjectivity is helpful in understanding this tension. The novel borrows the language of self-improvement while exposing the limits of the belief that individuals can control their economic destinies through personal ambition alone (Poon, 2017).

4.2. The Ideological Significance of "Rising Asia"

The tension begins in the title’s combination of a universal commercial promise and a specific regional designation. The infinitive “to get” and the intensifier “filthy” imitate the aggressively practical language of self-optimization, while “Rising Asia” evokes the scale of investment narratives and macroeconomic optimism. The irony of the title therefore operates in two directions. It mocks the premise that enrichment can be taught as an orderly personal method, and it asks what

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is obscured when the transformation of an entire region is measured by opportunities for private gain. The region is neither a neutral backdrop nor a self-sufficient cause of the protagonist's conduct.

An interpretively responsible account must also leave room for the novel's resistance to exoticization. The city's commercial arrangements are shown through ordinary transactions, material needs, and recognizable asymmetries of power rather than through an explicit claim that Asians possess a distinctive moral defect. The risk of stereotyping arises at the level of possible circulation and selective reading, not from any necessary equation between literary depiction and endorsement. This distinction permits sustained criticism of exploitation without demanding that fiction portray postcolonial societies in uniformly affirmative terms.

The title of the novel is important because it sets up the geographical frame through which the protagonist's experiences are read. The expression "Rising Asia" belongs to a wider discourse that presents Asian countries as increasingly important players in the global economy. It suggests industrial growth, urbanization, technological change, entrepreneurship, and rising economic influence. Hamid's picture of this emerging Asia is far more complicated. The protagonist's path through economic development is marked by poverty, weak institutions, corruption, unequal access to resources, and the exploitation of vulnerable people. The novel thus presents economic emergence alongside deep social and ethical contradictions.

The central question is whether this representation simply exposes the realities of contemporary Asian capitalism, or whether it feeds a wider discourse that links Asian development with corruption and moral instability. From a postcolonial point of view, geographical representation is never entirely neutral. When a social problem is tied to a particular region, it influences the way readers understand that problem. If corruption becomes the defining feature of a story set in "Rising Asia," readers may begin to associate it with the region itself rather than with the larger structures of global capitalism.

This does not mean that Hamid's representation is necessarily Orientalist. Rather, the novel gives us an opportunity to study the complicated position of a postcolonial writer who represents his own region through a story that circulates internationally. The distinction is important. Postcolonial criticism should not assume that every unflattering portrayal of an Asian society reproduces Western prejudice. A writer who exposes the inequalities, institutional failures, and exploitative practices of his own society is fulfilling a responsibility, not betraying it. This paper, therefore, treats the title as an important ideological signifier. The label "Rising Asia" is examined in relation to the narrative's repeated linking of economic advancement with corruption. It is not taken as evidence of a fixed authorial intention.

4.3. Corruption as a Global Phenomenon and the Problem of Geographical Attribution

For this reason, the analysis benefits from separating the social fact represented from the explanation attached to it. The protagonist's relations with intermediaries and officials can be read as mechanisms that allocate access in an unequal economy. Calling such mechanisms "Asian" would turn an institutional and historical problem into an inherited cultural quality. Equally, calling them simply "global" should not erase the specificity of urban poverty and uneven infrastructure in the novel. A stronger postcolonial account moves between scales: the local arrangement through which profit is secured and the transnational ideology that celebrates accumulation as evidence of progress.

This scalar distinction qualifies the paper's use of Orientalism. Said's argument concerns historically powerful regimes of representation; it is not a diagnostic rule by which every disagreeable picture of the East is automatically Orientalist. The appropriate question is whether a

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literary frame makes a particular society unusually legible through familiar images of disorder while leaving the structural equivalents elsewhere unnamed. The answer must remain provisional unless supported by the specific narrative patterns and, for reception claims, by evidence beyond the novel.

One of the central arguments of this paper concerns the geographical association of corruption. Corruption is neither an exclusively Asian phenomenon nor a defining feature of developing economies. It exists across political systems, economic structures, and regions. Corporate fraud, political patronage, financial manipulation, exploitation of workers, tax evasion, and unethical business practices have all been documented in economically advanced Western societies. The difference between Asian and Western corruption, therefore, should not be turned into a difference between corrupt and ethical societies.

In Hamid's novel, however, the protagonist's rise takes place in a distinctly Asian setting. His journey reveals a society in which informal relationships, political connections, bureaucratic influence, and questionable dealings become important tools of economic success. The issue is not whether such practices exist in Asia. Their existence cannot be denied. The issue is how these practices are framed in literature, and how far their geographical association shapes the reader's understanding of Asian economic development. A postcolonial reading may ask whether the novel risks reproducing the familiar assumption that Asian societies are corrupt by nature while Western societies represent a more legitimate form of capitalism. A repeated regional label may make subsequent narratives seem to confirm an already established expectation.

Such a reading, however, has to be balanced against the novel's criticism of capitalism itself. The protagonist's practices do not arise in a moral vacuum. They are part of a system in which wealth, power, and access to essential resources are unequally distributed. The novel's portrayal of corruption can therefore be understood as a representation of local institutional problems and, at the same time, as a criticism of a wider economic system. In short, the more convincing argument is that corruption is a structural possibility of capitalist accumulation and not an exclusively Asian cultural trait. This distinction is central to the present paper. It allows us to challenge geographical stereotypes without dismissing the real social problems that Hamid's fiction represents.

4.4. The Western Readership and the International Literary Marketplace

One useful distinction is between a work’s address and its documented market. The title and use of English make transnational legibility a relevant subject for criticism, but these features do not establish the nationality of the majority of buyers or the preferences of individual readers. Claims about positioning would require paratextual and historical material such as publisher catalogues, cover designs across editions, interviews, contemporaneous reviews, and reliable distribution data. This study does not supply such a corpus. It accordingly treats international legibility as an interpretive question generated by the literary form and title, rather than as a verified causal account of the book’s commercial success.

Another important dimension of this study is the international circulation of South Asian fiction in English. Hamid occupies a transnational literary position. His works deal with South Asian experiences while taking part in an international publishing environment. The English language carries his fiction across geographical and cultural boundaries, particularly to readers in the United Kingdom, the United States, and other English-speaking markets. This raises an interesting question. Does the representation of Asian corruption, poverty, and economic dysfunction add to the international marketability of South Asian fiction? The question deserves consideration because literary works do not circulate independently of their publishing and

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reception environments. Titles, themes, narrative strategies, and representations of cultural difference can all influence how a book is presented to potential readers.

The title *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* is very suggestive in this regard. It combines the language of commercial self-improvement with a geographical reference that immediately ties the novel to an emerging Asian economy. The title may attract readers who are interested in economic transformation, globalization, and the contradictions of development in contemporary Asia. Its apparent self-help orientation also creates an irony that draws attention to the protagonist's morally compromised journey.

Nevertheless, it would be methodologically wrong to claim that Hamid deliberately highlights Asian corruption to win Western readers. Such a claim would need evidence from interviews, publishing records, marketing material, or reception studies. The more defensible argument is that the novel's international circulation is a relevant context for examining its representations. A postcolonial writer may criticize the inequalities of his own society while taking part in a global literary market in which certain images of the postcolonial world carry considerable cultural and commercial value. This creates a tension between literary criticism and international readership. The novel should therefore be studied not only as a representation of Asian society but also as a literary product circulating within a global system of cultural exchange.

4.5. The Relationship between Corruption and Neoliberal Capitalism

Water offers the clearest instance of the connection between the book's formal and economic arguments. A self-help imperative invites the addressee to consider how to transform a need into an opportunity; the story of supplying bottled water reveals the ethical asymmetry concealed by that formulation. Consumers require safe water, but access to this necessity is conditioned by infrastructure, payment, and unequal bargaining power. The protagonist's capacity to profit is thus inseparable from circumstances that make others vulnerable. The novel refuses the simple opposition between an ingenious individual and an otherwise level market.

An adjacent study by Raza and Bhatti (2021), although concerned with Marlowe rather than Hamid, likewise examines the literary conversion of social relationships and moral obligations into objects of exchange. The historical and generic contexts are different, and no direct influence is implied. Its limited relevance here is conceptual: it supports the value of attending to what a narrative permits to be priced, traded, or instrumentalized. In Hamid's fiction, the commodification of water is especially pointed because the product remains indispensable to life irrespective of the consumer's ability to pay.

Neoliberalism, moreover, should not be used as a total explanation that erases agency. The protagonist repeatedly makes decisions, but these occur within asymmetrical institutions and inherited deprivation. The analytic task is to examine how his choices become possible, rewarded, and morally costly at once. The self-help voice promises a direct relation between personal discipline and reward; the material narrative exposes the additional roles of connections, scarcity, and the availability of vulnerable customers. This discrepancy makes the satire more exact than a generic condemnation of capitalism.

The protagonist's rise to wealth also has to be examined through the lens of neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberalism places great emphasis on competition, entrepreneurship, individual responsibility, privatization, and market-driven development (Harvey, 2005). Within such a system, economic success is often presented as the result of personal ambition and smart decision-making. Hamid's novel questions this assumption. It presents a protagonist whose rise depends on circumstances that cannot be reduced to individual effort.

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His involvement in the bottled-water business is particularly significant. Water is a basic human necessity, yet the protagonist turns its scarcity into a commercial opportunity. His business shows how a basic requirement of human survival can become a means of private accumulation. The relationship between water and wealth thus becomes an important symbolic dimension of the novel. Neti's analysis is useful here because she links the protagonist's business to the colonial history of water regulation and to the conversion of communal resources into controlled property. Her discussion complicates any reading that sees his criminality merely as a personal moral defect (Neti, 2025). Similarly, Poon shows how the novel challenges the neoliberal ideal of the self-made man (Poon, 2017).

Seen from this angle, the protagonist's corruption is not an Asian cultural characteristic. It is connected with a broader economic environment in which the pursuit of private wealth may take priority over collective welfare. The novel therefore raises a question that goes beyond the geographical boundaries of Asia. What happens to a society when economic success becomes the chief measure of human achievement?

4.6. Comparative Perspective

The formal contrast reaches beyond grammatical person. Balram's letters presuppose a named, prestigious addressee and a speaker who actively constructs a defence of his own actions. Readers receive a mediated confession whose justifications can be evaluated against the events reported. Hamid's addressee, by contrast, is grammatically incorporated into the protagonist's career without receiving control of the narrative voice. The reader's relation to responsibility is therefore organized differently: Balram argues that his transgression was necessary, whereas the apparently instructional voice in Hamid turns compromise into a sequence of practical decisions whose moral cost emerges indirectly.

Nor should the comparison flatten the ethical differences between the narratives. Adiga's plot revolves around a violent break with servitude; Hamid's protagonist accumulates advantages through a succession of commercial and social arrangements. Both works question the moral purity of entrepreneurial success, but they locate agency and harm in different narrative events. Their common concern is consequently not a single South Asian character type. It is the difficulty of describing class mobility as liberation when its conditions may reproduce the domination from which a protagonist seeks escape.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* provides a useful point of comparison because both novels examine the relationship between economic mobility and moral compromise in South Asian societies. Adiga's novel follows Balram Halwai, a young man born into poverty who becomes a successful entrepreneur after committing murder and escaping the oppressive social structures that have limited his opportunities. Unlike Hamid, Adiga uses first-person narration. Balram tells his story through a series of letters addressed to the Chinese Premier, presenting his life as a personal account of social mobility, exploitation, and entrepreneurial ambition.

The difference in narrative perspective is significant. In *The White Tiger*, the reader meets the protagonist's experiences through his own retrospective explanation. Balram tries to justify his actions by presenting them as responses to an unjust social order. His narration becomes an exercise in self-representation and self-defence. In Hamid's novel, the second person creates a different relationship between character and reader. The protagonist is not allowed to explain himself. Instead, the reader is placed inside his experiences through the pronoun "you." Both strategies, however, raise questions about individual responsibility and structural inequality. Balram's rise depends on his willingness to break the moral and legal boundaries set by society. Hamid's protagonist, in the same way, becomes more and more involved in questionable practices

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as he chases wealth. The two novels thus expose the contradictions of economic mobility in societies marked by an unequal distribution of power and resources.

Anwer's analysis of *The White Tiger* is especially relevant here. She shows how the novel has produced conflicting interpretations about Orientalism, subaltern agency, and the representation of contemporary India, and she suggests that its ideological implications cannot be reduced to a simple choice between criticizing and endorsing the existing economic order (Anwer, 2014). Ratti's reading of Balram as a subaltern who delivers justice to himself adds a further layer to this debate (Ratti, 2020). These observations can be extended to Hamid's novel. Both writers expose the failures of their societies, but their representations also invite questions about how such failures are read by international audiences. The comparison is not meant to suggest that the two writers hold identical ideological positions. It shows that South Asian fiction often uses morally compromised protagonists to investigate the relationship between poverty, social hierarchy, and capitalist aspiration. The main points of comparison are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

A Comparison of Hamid's and Adiga's Novels

Feature	Hamid	Adiga
Novel	*How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*	*The White Tiger*
Narrative perspective	Second person	First person
Protagonist	Unnamed businessman	Balram Halwai
Social background	Rural poverty	Rural poverty and caste hierarchy
Economic ambition	Business expansion and wealth	Entrepreneurial independence
Moral compromise	Exploitation and questionable business practices	Murder and escape from servitude
Central concern	Neoliberal ambition and social mobility	Class oppression and individual liberation
Reader's position	Reader is addressed as "you"	Reader receives Balram's personal testimony

The comparison supports the argument that corruption and moral compromise in these novels cannot be adequately explained through geographical or cultural generalizations. They must be understood in relation to class structures, economic inequality, and the organization of capitalist societies.

4.7. The Ideological Ambivalence of Hamid's Narrative

An additional counter-reading is essential to preserve this ambivalence. A reader who recognizes the self-help fiction as satire may see the title “Rising Asia” not as a claim about the exceptional corruption of the region but as a parody of development rhetoric itself. In that case the title exposes the euphemism by which economic ascent conceals dispossession and compromised public goods. A less attentive reader might instead detach the narrated corruption from that critical frame. The literary text accommodates debate about both possibilities, but it cannot demonstrate which interpretation predominates in any readership without reception research.

The protagonist’s ageing and diminishing command over circumstances also complicate the category of success. A career that can be recounted as a chain of upward moves is not identical to a fulfilled life. The narrative’s later emphasis on mortality and attachment draws attention to the inadequacy of wealth as the sole unit of value. The second person retains its address while the self-help promise loses authority, suggesting that the novel’s critique extends from unethical means of enrichment to the impoverished measure of flourishing on which the genre depends.

The most important point that emerges from the discussion above is that Hamid's novel works through ideological ambivalence. On the one hand, it challenges the neoliberal promise that

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ambition and hard work will inevitably lead to prosperity. The protagonist's journey reveals that economic advancement is shaped by exploitation, unequal access to resources, political influence, and moral compromise. On the other hand, the novel's geographical framing raises questions about the representation of Asian economic development. By setting its story in "Rising Asia," the novel makes the region the main stage for a story in which corruption and unethical advancement are central concerns.

These two sides should not be treated as mutually exclusive. A writer may criticize capitalism and still reproduce certain geographical associations through the setting and language of a work. Likewise, a postcolonial writer may challenge Western economic dominance while remaining consciously, or perhaps unconsciously, responsive to the expectations of an international audience. The second-person narrative intensifies this ambivalence. It universalizes the protagonist's experiences, yet those experiences remain rooted in a particular geographical and socioeconomic environment. The reader is invited to identify with a universal pursuit of wealth while witnessing the specific social conditions through which that pursuit is carried out in "Rising Asia." The significance of Hamid's strategy, therefore, lies not only in his experimental use of the second person but also in its ability to connect individual ambition with wider questions of capitalism, geography, and postcolonial representation.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings are necessarily limited to interpretive relations within two literary texts. They do not establish the author's aims, the demographics of the novel's buyers, or the responses of Western and Asian audiences. Future work could test the reception dimension by comparing contemporary reviews, edition-specific marketing, interviews, and reader accounts across different markets. A comparative corpus of second-person novels could further determine whether the tension between universal address and local framing is distinctive to Hamid or part of a broader transnational narrative practice.

The revised argument is therefore not that literary criticism of corruption is itself a form of Orientalism. It is that the mode through which corruption becomes narratable and the geographical terms through which a narrative circulates deserve joint attention. Hamid's formal experiment makes the reader confront a commercial ideology that is neither solely Asian nor socially innocent, while allowing postcolonial criticism to ask how the local setting acquires representational weight.

Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* offers a complex picture of economic ambition, social mobility, corruption, and the contradictions of contemporary capitalism. Through its distinctive second-person narrative, the novel turns the protagonist's journey from poverty to wealth into an apparently universal account of human aspiration. The repeated use of "you" brings the reader close to the protagonist's experiences. Individual ambition and moral compromise become matters on which the reader, too, is made to reflect.

The discussion above has argued that the second-person narrative is more than an experimental device. It performs an important ideological function by connecting the protagonist's personal experiences with broader questions of economic development, capitalist ambition, and the representation of Asian societies. The self-help structure of the novel creates an irony between the promise of financial success and the unethical practices through which such success is often achieved.

The geographical label "Rising Asia" further complicates the novel's ideological implications. Hamid exposes genuine problems of economic inequality, corruption, and institutional weakness. However, the concentration of these problems in an Asian setting calls for a postcolonial examination of geographical representation. Corruption is a global phenomenon.

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Neither exploitation nor the unethical accumulation of wealth can be regarded as an exclusively Asian characteristic. The representation of corruption within the frame of "Rising Asia" thus raises questions about the possible reproduction of familiar Western perceptions of Asian economic and social realities.

This paper does not suggest that Hamid deliberately promotes Western stereotypes or endorses corruption. Rather, it identifies a tension between the novel's criticism of neoliberal capitalism and the geographical frame within which this criticism is presented. Hamid's position as a Pakistani writer in an international literary market makes this tension particularly relevant. His novel shows how postcolonial writers may challenge dominant economic structures while also engaging with conventions of representation that deserve critical scrutiny.

The comparison with Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* further establishes that corruption and moral compromise are recurring concerns in contemporary South Asian fiction. Both novels examine the relationship between poverty, ambition, and economic advancement, although their narrative strategies differ considerably. Adiga's first-person narration presents one man's attempt to justify his morally questionable actions. Hamid's second-person narration draws the reader into a seemingly universal pursuit of wealth.

In the final analysis, Hamid's second-person narrative is central to the ideological complexity of *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. It universalizes the experience of economic ambition while localizing its consequences in a particular Asian environment. This combination opens an important space for postcolonial inquiry into the relationship between narrative form, geographical representation, and global capitalism. The significance of the novel, therefore, goes beyond its satire of corruption and materialism. It invites readers to reconsider the geographical assumptions through which economic success, moral failure, and social development are understood. The novel thereby invites an analysis of capitalist practices that remains attentive to regional specificity without translating it into regional essence.

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