

Fractured Identity: Postcolonial Tensions, Cultural Conflicts and Identity Crisis in Adiga's India

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Abstract

*This paper examines the cultural complexities of postcolonial India, focusing on the themes of hybridity, mimicry and fractured identities of individuals in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. Through his protagonist Balram Halwai, the novelist explores cultural conflicts and socio-economic breach between the rich and the underprivileged. He condemns the lingering impact of colonialism and the enduring uncertainties of India's capitalism. The concepts of hybridity and mimicry help as a critical framework to evaluate Balram's quest for identity. Adiga exposes the fractured identities of people who are trapped between colonial downfalls and globalization. The main objective of this paper is to address postcolonial identity crisis and the resultant cultural complexities of contemporary India. Highlighting the concepts of Homi K. Bhabha's hybridity and mimicry, this research paper centers on how far Adiga is authentic in his portrayal of postcolonial India.*

Keywords: Cultural conflict, colonialism, postcolonial tension, hybridity and mimicry, and globalization.

Literature acts as a form of confrontation against unfair systems by voicing opposition and encouraging social change. It shapes identities by reflecting specific experiences, cultural values and societal norms through diverse narratives. It facilitates individuality, evolution and self-confidence among readers who evaluate their experiences reflected in the narratives. It epitomizes different identities which give courage to people who belong to the kinds of characteristics represented. Determining identity is imaginable only when the individuals validate their actuality and struggles. Individuals gather insights by reading literature that focuses on different circumstances and cultural empathies. It encourages readers to raise questions against conventional norms which aim to protect influential groups. Individual identity is formed through self-absorption as readers empathize with fictitious experiences, emotions and dilemmas.

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Received 15 March. 2025; Accepted 20 March. 2025. Available online: 30 March. 2025.

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

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The concept of identity in India is deeply connected with colonial hangover, as well as contemporary class encounters and cultural conflicts. Systemic disparities and the supremacy of influential colonizers aggravate the identity of colonized individuals vehemently. Aravind Adiga's literary work, particularly *The White Tiger*, deals with remarkable exploration of fractured identities in postcolonial India. This paper intends to analyze how Adiga represents the fractured identity of postcolonial subalterns and their uncertainty between resistance and responsibility. He vividly narrates the persistent socio-cultural and economic split-ups of postcolonial period that produce pervasive identity crisis in India. He depicts certain obscurities inherent in modern Indian society through his protagonist Balram who stands for hopefulness as well as disappointments. This study pours light on identity crisis that consistently lingers between colonial past and globalized present.

Colonial literature reflected the racial uniqueness of the colonial power with the purpose of establishing its authority over the native subjects. Being displaced from their own selves, the colonized people struggled hard to fit into the invading culture. Colonial discourses never gave any importance to the anxieties and sufferings of the colonized natives. In Postcolonial Studies: The Key concepts, colonized lands are depicted as "civilizations in decay, as manifestations of degenerated societies and races in need of rescue and rehabilitations by a civilized Europe" (Ashcroft et al. 142). Postcolonial literature came into being when the postcolonial writers started to question the colonizers of their supremacy and to persuade the natives of their subservience. Fanon says this as: "The human condition, plans for mankind and collaboration between men in those tasks which increase the sum total of humanity are new problems, which demand true inventions" (Wretched 252).

Frantz Fanon termed postcolonial literature as "fighting Literature" (Wretched 179) that was fighting against oppression, subjugation and discrimination imposed by the colonial imperialists on the natives. The key motive of this literature was to dismantle all kinds of oppression against the colonized. It was taken not merely as an effort to dismantle the power structure of the societal hierarchies but also as a means to liberate the voiceless individuals from the dominant class. It aroused the subalterns from their muteness and initiated a strong urge in them to eradicate inequalities and exploitations. Pointing to the colonial peculiarities in India, Homi K. Bhabha stated that that colonial identity was not a fixed one, but it was unequal, unstable and collaborative. Sticking to the Anglophone tradition of the colonizers, most of the South Asian writers started to employ English language to communicate with the expatriated rulers.

Indian writers in English expressed their views and confrontations with colonial imperialism in order to disseminate the seeds of revolution in the minds of Indians. While examining Indian English literature of 1930s, it was concluded that Raja Rao was the first novelist who successfully communicated the anguish of subaltern Indians to the world. In 1980s, the great contribution of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* was witnessed. In 1990s, young writers such as Amit Chaudhuri, Vikram Seth, Mukul Kesavan and Amitav Ghosh entered into the discursive space of postcolonial literature. In 1997, Arundhati Roy won the Booker Award for her debut novel *The God of Small Things*. Kiran Desai bagged the prize for her novel *The Inheritance of loss* in 2006. In 2008, Aravind Adiga received the prestigious award for his maiden novel *The White Tiger*.

Adiga's *The White Tiger* was praised as a 'courageous exposure' of the grim realities of contemporary India. Michael Portillo, the chairperson of the Booker jury, stated that *The White Tiger* was a unique novel about India. He added that the novel puts forward the incredible task of achieving the reader's empathy towards a criminal. The novel depicts a stubborn protagonist who exposes an India that advertises economic possibilities, exciting loyalties and class struggles. Adiga discloses the huge difference between what India really is and what it appears to be. He mends the story around the main character Balram Halwai, the son of a rickshaw puller, who desires to escape from the wretched darkness of his village. He describes his successful journey to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabo. Being a disciplined servant, Balram obeys his master's command, but he is so eager to erase his browbeaten identity in the public. He gradually learns the lessons to grab his opportunity amidst the corrupted city life and he soon frames a plan to murder his master, Ashok. In no time he commits the crime, grabs money and migrates to Bangalore where he emerges as Ashok Sharma and settles there as a successful entrepreneur. His ultimate goal is to run an English-speaking school, a school full of White Tigers, for the underprivileged children. He wants to give factual teaching that encourages rational aspirations. He dislikes allowing moral preaching of Mahatma Gandhi or any sort of moral stories in his school.

Reviewing literature is quintessential for identifying the research gap. Key concepts such as identity crisis, hybridity, mimicry and cultural conflicts have been explored. S. K. Singh (2008) examines the realistic picture of the metropolitan lifestyle in Adiga's novel. He states that the novel peels off the mask of 'India Shining' and discloses the real India. M. Srivastava (2009) suspects that Aravind Adiga is selling murky India to the Western world. Dhote (2010) traces the growth of the protagonist Balram. The transition of Munna to Balram Halwai and to Ashok

Sharma is brilliantly evaluated. V. Pathak (2010) examines various social theories such as Reference Group Theory, Strain Theory and Labelling Theory to assess the character of the criminal Balram. Wankhede (2010) examines Adiga's depiction of the postcolonial society and looks at how Adiga throws light on the fluctuating communal relationships between the fortunate and the defeated in the novel. Gill (2010) evaluates how the protagonist Balram paints a true but complex picture of post-independent India. Batra (2011) looks upon the novel as a bildungsroman type of work in which the protagonist acquires devilish proportions. Arora (2011) focuses on the ideological prejudices of Adiga.

The aim of good literature ought to portray the world accurately so that the literary product is free from the ideological prejudices of the writer. Here the study revolves around the postcolonial concepts such as hybridity and mimicry. The colonized Indians appreciate the Western culture and imitate the same in their daily life. The duality of colonized Indians is subjected to detailed analysis to assess their colonial hangover. This research paper centers on how far Adiga is authentic in his portrayal of postcolonial India. Subsequently, pertinent research questions arise: Does the novel reflect genuineness in depicting the fractured identity? And will the novel leave any authentic note to posterity?

Postcolonial writers depict the 'in-between' realities of their native land in their works through the concepts of hybridity and mimicry. Bhabha states that hybridity assures an 'in between space' in cultural uniqueness. The hybrids in the margin demonstrate a change within their own group and experience an 'in-between reality' in their group. The postcolonial writers are branded as 'mimicists' because they comprise an 'in-between reality' in their feelings, thoughts, perceptions, judgements and realizations. To Ashis Nandy, everyday Indian is a mixture of both the Indian and the Western. Bhabha's 'Third Space of enunciation' (Location 37) identifies the 'in-between' space that plays a new role between two cultures. He further says that the concept of 'Third Space' is an ambivalent space where cultural fusion can take place. In *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, we see "how hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen as the characteristic feature and contribution of the post-colonial, allowing a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth" (Ashcroft et al. 183).

Mimicry is a form of mockery that ridicules and challenges the never-ending imitations of colonization. It is known as a complex pattern of behaviour and is very often recognized as shameful. It covers no uniqueness of its own because it is identified as 'double vision' or

‘partial representation’. Colonized society imitates the language, dress, politics or cultural attitude of the colonizers. To Bhabha, “Mimicry represents an ironic compromise between two ideas—that things are eternally the same and that there is continual change” (Location 86). Thus, mimicry is considered as a sign of ‘double articulation’ which reveals a change that connects the colonial power with the anglicized.

In *The White Tiger*, Adiga employs the concepts hybridity and mimicry to expose the dual identity of postcolonial India. Balram decides to confess his criminal deeds before the Chinese Premier so that he praises the Chinese people as “great lovers of freedom and individual liberty” (5). He derides the colonial supremacy of the British, but he emphasizes the importance of English as the medium to narrate the dark secrets of post-independent India. “Mr. Premier Sir, neither you nor I speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English”, Balram says (3).

Balram is a social hybrid who desires to get colonial identity. He admires Mr. Ashok, the Americanized Indian, for his gentle behaviour among his tyrannical elite class. Mr. Ashok returns from America as an innocent man but life in Delhi corrupts him. Balram kills his master and changes his name as to Ashok Sharma and fixes chandeliers in his flat. He desires to adopt Westernized lifestyle by decorating houses with chandeliers. He believes that chandeliers liberate him from darkness. Mr. Ashok and his wife Pinky appear as the embodiments of Westernization. Their dressing, manners and routine were entirely different from that of Indians. Balram is very much attracted towards Mr. Ashok who wears plain T-shirts with foreign words on it. Ashok’s wife Pinky is a modern woman whose sexy outlook, heavy make-up, perennial smell of foreign perfume, stylish pants and short skirts represents her capitalist outlook.

Balram is wearing a maharaja dress, a red turban and a dark cooling glass during the birthday party of Pinky Madam. He is asked to serve food with the maharaja attire to please the rich people. Balram gets humiliated before the rich for his clown outlook. Balram feels like a fugitive when he is denied entry into the big malls. He hesitates to enter into the mall with his bright-coloured servant's uniform and sandals. However, he enters into the mall through the rear entrance after getting dressed like his master. Even if he changes his servant identity, he could not remove his appearance and complexion. He mutters as, “Why had my father never taught me to brush my teeth in milky foam? Why had he raised me to live like an animal” (151)?

Adiga is also addressing the cultural deterioration of Indian cities by portraying PVR Saket and Hotel Sheraton. Adiga is infuriated by the mall culture of the elite class. He states that colonial hangover in the cities distracts innocent men from their ordinary life. Hybridity is obvious in the liquor shop where Indians show interest in drinking English liquor because they assume that English liquor is superior to the indigenous one. Postcolonial vulnerability is obvious when Balram gets cheated in a hotel. He goes there to get a foreign prostitute, but he gets cheated with a local girl. The rich bribe the ministers to obtain illegal benefits from the government. Balram realizes that one million rupees bribery was not an issue, but one rupee coin was really a serious matter to their masters. He rebels against his master and kills him when he comes to know the irksome behaviour of his master.

Religion plays vital role in the life of mimic men in India as they persistently follow the tradition. The educated mimic men of India are tempted to follow the Westernized lifestyle but are unwilling to avoid traditional beliefs and customs in their life. Balram believes that religion is a sophisticated trap, and it is difficult for the underprivileged to come out. Feudal landlords of Laxmangarh give Western education to their children but encourage slave God worship among the villagers. He mocks at the worship of the Hindu God Hanuman in the Indian villages. While driving the car with his master and his wife, he feels like Hanuman carrying Rama and Sita. It is ironical that the ardent servant kills his mater to achieve his dream. He escapes from his eternal servitude by deviating from his trodden path.

Balram calls himself as a 'half-baked Indian' and he also alleges that the land of darkness holds a large number of 'half-baked Indians'. They are naturally gifted with wisdom, but the corrupt system of their society and the economic inadequacy of their family make them half-baked. Balram's colonial hangover is visible when he praises American outsourcing companies in India. He further states that colonial hangover persuades independent Indians to feel proud of working in the American companies. The black fort portrayal in the novel reveals the superiority of the English over native Indians. Balram sees broken walls and a group of frightened monkeys there. Here the broken walls imply colonialism, and the monkeys remind us of the mimic men of India.

Adiga states that British rulers classified native Indians as exotic animals. The colonized subjects of India were accustomed to the zoo laws of the colonizers for a long time. The zoo law of the colonizers was replaced by the jungle law of colonized Indians during postcolonial period. The democratic jungle raj is managed by the elected leaders who are known for

corruption and discrimination. Being denied of opportunities Balram resorts to criminality. He desires to escape from the colonial cage and tries to prove himself as the White Tiger. His passion to start an English medium school discloses his colonial hangover. Balram aligns himself with the Marxist ideology which is a Western ideology. The decision not to have any prayer or moral classes in his school reflects his socialist mindset. He achieves his entrepreneurship through moral depravity, but he does not exonerate the privileged classes who indulge in criminal activities.

Hybridity contributes a voice and the power of opinion to the marginalized whereas mimicry reveals various problems and threats of colonial power. Ridiculing the mimic men of the dark side of India, Adiga disseminates consciousness about the need for revolution. Even though the novelist raises consciousness among the readers, Balram, being a criminal, is not potent enough to trigger off progressive social transformation. The novel loses its credibility because a hard-core criminal cannot be the voice of the underprivileged. Khushwant Singh declares that half-truths are taken as sickening proofs. Thus, it is concluded that the novel reflects genuineness in depicting the fractured identity, postcolonial tensions, and cultural conflicts but it leaves inauthentic note to posterity.

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