



Representing Postcolonial India: Identity, Hybridity, and Cultural Displacement in *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss* and *The White Tiger*

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Abstract— *The emergence of Indian English fiction in the post-independence period has significantly contributed to the articulation of postcolonial identities and the interrogation of colonial legacies. Indian novelists writing in English have transformed the language of the former coloniser into a medium for representing indigenous experiences, cultural complexities, and socio-political realities. This article examines three influential Indian English novels—Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things (1997), Kiran Desai’s The Inheritance of Loss (2006), and Aravind Adiga’s The White Tiger (2008)—through the theoretical framework of postcolonial studies. Drawing upon the concepts of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon, the study investigates how these novels negotiate issues of identity, hybridity, marginalisation, displacement, and resistance. The article argues that these texts collectively reveal the persistence of colonial structures within contemporary India while simultaneously exposing the contradictions of globalisation, capitalism, caste hierarchy, and cultural alienation. Roy explores the intersections of caste and colonial memory, Desai examines the fractured identities produced by migration and globalisation, and Adiga foregrounds class oppression within neoliberal India. Through different narrative strategies, the three novels challenge dominant representations of India and expose the continuing effects of colonial discourse in shaping postcolonial realities. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that Indian English fiction functions as a critical site where the complexities of postcolonial existence are negotiated and reimagined.*



Keywords— *Postcolonialism, Indian English Fiction, Identity, Hybridity, Cultural Displacement, Globalisation, Subalternity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of Indian English literature represents one of the most significant literary consequences of British colonialism in South Asia. Introduced as an instrument of colonial administration and cultural control, the English language was gradually appropriated by Indian writers and transformed into a powerful medium of self-expression. Following independence in 1947, Indian English fiction emerged as a vital literary space for exploring questions of national identity, cultural memory, social transformation and political resistance. The postcolonial novel became a particularly important form through which writers

examined the continuing effects of colonial domination upon individuals, communities, and institutions.

The intellectual foundation of postcolonial studies rests upon the recognition that colonialism was not merely a political and economic system but also a cultural and epistemological project. Colonial rule sought to construct the colonised subject as inferior, irrational, and dependent while simultaneously legitimising European superiority. As Edward Said demonstrates in *Orientalism*, colonial discourse produced a system of representation through which the East was imagined as the exotic and subordinate ‘Other’ of the West. Such representations did not disappear

with political independence; rather, they continued to influence cultural perceptions, social hierarchies, and global power relations.

Postcolonial literature emerged partly as a response to these colonial constructions. Writers from formerly colonised societies began to challenge dominant narratives by reclaiming histories, identities, and voices that had been marginalised or silenced. In the Indian context, this literary project has involved not only confronting colonial legacies but also examining the internal contradictions of postcolonial society itself. Issues such as caste discrimination, gender inequality, religious conflict, economic disparity, and cultural displacement have become central concerns of contemporary Indian fiction.

Among the most influential works of contemporary Indian English literature are Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. Although distinct in style and thematic emphasis, these novels share a common concern with the unfinished realities of postcolonial India. Each text explores the tensions between tradition and modernity, local and global identities, and individual aspirations and structural constraints. Together they provide a compelling literary archive of postcolonial experience.

Roy's *The God of Small Things* examines the enduring power of caste hierarchies and social exclusion within a society that continues to bear the marks of colonial history. Through its fragmented narrative and linguistic experimentation, the novel reveals the complexities of identity formation in postcolonial India. Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* shifts attention to migration, displacement, and cultural alienation, exploring how colonial mentality and globalisation shape the lives of individuals across national boundaries. Adiga's *The White Tiger* offers a scathing critique of contemporary India's economic inequalities, exposing the contradictions of neoliberal development and the persistence of systemic oppression. These novels are particularly significant because they move beyond simplistic celebrations of national independence. Instead, they interrogate the social and cultural realities that continue to structure postcolonial life. Their narratives reveal that colonialism's legacy survives not only in institutions and economic systems but also in attitudes, desires, and forms of self-perception. Consequently, the postcolonial condition appears not as a completed historical stage but as an ongoing process of negotiation and contestation.

This article argues that *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The White Tiger* trace three interconnected phases of postcolonial India: the persistence of caste and gender hierarchies, the emergence of

transnational displacement, and the rise of neoliberal capitalism. Read together, the novels reveal how colonial structures survive in changing social, cultural, and economic forms, challenging narratives of national progress and modernity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Postcolonial scholarship on Indian English fiction has been shaped by the works of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon. Their concepts of Orientalism, hybridity, subalternity, and colonial psychology have provided important frameworks for analysing questions of identity, power, migration, and resistance in postcolonial literature.

Critical studies of Indian English fiction frequently explore how literary texts challenge colonial representations and negotiate complex questions of identity and belonging. Within this context, *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The White Tiger* have attracted considerable scholarly attention for their engagement with social inequality, cultural transformation, and postcolonial realities.

Scholarship on *The God of Small Things* has largely focused on caste oppression, gender relations, linguistic innovation, and narrative structure. Critics have highlighted Roy's portrayal of social exclusion through the character of Velutha and her critique of entrenched social hierarchies. The novel's use of language has also been examined as a form of cultural resistance that reshapes English to express local experiences. Studies of *The Inheritance of Loss* primarily address migration, diaspora, globalisation, and cultural displacement. Scholars have explored how Desai portrays the psychological effects of colonial education, the uncertainties of migrant life, and the tensions between local identities and global aspirations. The novel's exploration of belonging and alienation has established it as a significant text in contemporary postcolonial discourse. Research on *The White Tiger* has concentrated on class inequality, corruption, capitalism, and subaltern agency. Critics have interpreted Balram Halwai's narrative as a challenge to dominant representations of modern India, arguing that the novel exposes the contradictions underlying economic development and neoliberal progress.

Although these novels have been widely studied individually, comparatively fewer scholars have examined them together as interconnected representations of postcolonial India. This article addresses that gap by placing Roy, Desai, and Adiga in dialogue with one another. Such a comparative approach reveals how caste, migration, cultural displacement, and economic inequality intersect within contemporary Indian society. By analysing the three

novels collectively, this study demonstrates how they offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on the evolving realities of postcolonial India.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts a postcolonial framework informed by the works of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon. Rather than treating postcolonialism as a single theoretical model, it draws upon key concepts from each thinker to examine the selected novels. Said's concept of *Orientalism* provides a basis for understanding how colonial discourse constructed the East as the cultural and political "Other" of the West. His work highlights the relationship between representation and power, making it useful for analysing how Indian English novelists challenge inherited colonial perceptions and reclaim indigenous experiences. Bhabha's theory of hybridity offers a framework for examining cultural negotiation and identity formation. His notion of the "Third Space" emphasises how colonial encounters generate new and complex identities that transcend rigid distinctions between coloniser and colonised. This concept is particularly relevant to the cultural ambiguities and negotiations represented in the selected novels. Spivak's notion of the subaltern draws attention to the marginalisation of voices excluded from dominant structures of power and knowledge. Her work provides a valuable lens for examining issues of caste, class, gender, and social exclusion that recur throughout the novels. Fanon's analysis of colonial psychology illuminates the enduring effects of colonial domination on individual and collective consciousness. His insights into alienation, internalised inferiority, and resistance help explain the psychological dimensions of identity crises and social conflicts portrayed in postcolonial societies.

Together, these theoretical perspectives enable a multidimensional analysis of *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss* and *The White Tiger*. They provide a framework for analysing how the novels represent social exclusion, cultural displacement, and economic inequality while revealing the continuing influence of colonial structures in contemporary India.

IV. POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL HIERARCHY IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* offers a powerful critique of caste, gender, and social exclusion in postcolonial India. Set in Kerala, the novel reveals how colonial legacies and entrenched social hierarchies continue

to shape individual lives despite political independence. Through the experiences of a Syrian Christian family, Roy exposes the persistence of inequality and the limitations of social mobility.

The character of Velutha, an untouchable carpenter, embodies the marginalisation of the subaltern. His relationship with Ammu challenges caste boundaries and ultimately leads to his tragic destruction. From a Spivakian perspective, Velutha represents a silenced voice whose humanity and agency are denied by dominant social structures. His fate illustrates how caste oppression remains deeply embedded in postcolonial society. Roy also explores cultural hybridity through her innovative use of language. By blending English with Malayalam expressions and local rhythms, she transforms the colonial language into a medium of indigenous expression. This linguistic experimentation reflects Bhabha's concept of hybridity and challenges the cultural authority of colonial discourse. The novel further portrays characters such as Chacko and Baby Kochamma as figures caught between Western influence and local traditions, revealing the complexities of postcolonial identity.

Gender constitutes another important dimension of the novel's critique. Ammu occupies a marginal position within both patriarchal and caste-based systems. Her relationship with Velutha defies social conventions and exposes the double oppression experienced by women in conservative societies. Through Ammu's struggles, Roy demonstrates how gender and caste intersect to restrict personal freedom and agency.

The novel's fragmented narrative structure reinforces its postcolonial vision. By moving between past and present, Roy challenges linear notions of history and foregrounds personal memories over official narratives. This emphasis on "small histories" recovers experiences often excluded from dominant accounts of the nation and reveals how historical trauma continues to shape contemporary realities. It can be argued that *The God of Small Things* presents postcolonial India as a contested space marked by caste discrimination, gender inequality, and cultural conflict. By foregrounding marginalised voices and exposing hidden structures of power, Roy challenges simplistic narratives of national progress and offers a profound exploration of identity, resistance, and social justice.

V. CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT, MIGRATION, AND HYBRIDITY IN *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) explores the cultural and psychological consequences of colonialism, migration, and globalisation in a rapidly changing world.

Set in Kalimpong against the backdrop of the Gorkhaland movement, the novel connects local struggles with transnational experiences, demonstrating how colonial legacies continue to shape identity and belonging beyond national boundaries. Through its diverse characters, Desai reveals the complexities of living between cultures and negotiating fractured identities in the postcolonial era.

The most striking representation of colonial influence is Jemubhai Patel, the retired judge. Educated in England during the colonial period, he internalises British values and develops a deep sense of alienation from his own culture. Despite experiencing racism and humiliation abroad, he comes to view himself through the eyes of the coloniser, illustrating Fanon's argument that colonialism leaves lasting psychological scars. His emotional detachment, self-loathing, and inability to form meaningful relationships reveal the destructive effects of internalised colonialism.

The theme of displacement is further developed through Biju, the cook's son, who migrates illegally to the United States in search of a better life. Instead of achieving prosperity, he encounters exploitation, insecurity, and cultural isolation. Constantly moving between low-paid jobs and fearing deportation, Biju occupies a marginal position within American society. His experiences challenge idealised notions of migration and expose the inequalities underlying global mobility. Through Biju, Desai suggests that globalisation often reproduces rather than eliminates historical patterns of exclusion and dependency.

Bhabha's concept of hybridity is central to understanding the novel's representation of identity. Characters frequently exist between cultures, unable to fully belong either to their homeland or to the societies they aspire to join. This condition creates both possibility and anxiety, highlighting the emotional costs of cultural negotiation. The setting of Kalimpong itself symbolises this hybridity. Situated at the crossroads of multiple cultures and histories, the town becomes a microcosm of the postcolonial condition, reflecting both diversity and fragmentation.

The Gorkhaland movement provides an important political backdrop that further complicates questions of identity and belonging. By foregrounding demands for recognition and autonomy, Desai challenges unified notions of national identity and reveals the internal tensions that persist within postcolonial India. The novel suggests that independence did not resolve all forms of marginalisation, as various communities continue to struggle for visibility and representation.

As a result *The Inheritance of Loss* portrays postcolonial identity as an ongoing process shaped by migration, cultural displacement, and historical memory. Through the

intertwined experiences of Jemubhai and Biju, Desai demonstrates that the legacy of colonialism extends beyond political independence into the realms of psychology, culture, and global mobility. The novel expands postcolonial inquiry beyond the nation-state and offers a compelling exploration of belonging, alienation, and hybridity in an increasingly interconnected world.

VI. CLASS OPPRESSION, SUBALTERN AGENCY, AND NEO-COLONIAL CAPITALISM IN *THE WHITE TIGER*

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* presents a powerful critique of class inequality, corruption, and economic exploitation in contemporary India. Unlike *The God of Small Things*, which focuses on caste oppression, and *The Inheritance of Loss*, which explores migration and cultural displacement, Adiga examines the impact of neoliberal capitalism and the persistence of social hierarchies in postcolonial India. Through the voice of Balram Halwai, the novel exposes the contradictions of a nation celebrated for rapid economic growth while large sections of its population remain marginalised.

Narrated through a series of letters to the Chinese Premier, Balram recounts his transformation from a poor village servant to a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. His story functions not merely as a tale of individual success but as a critique of the social and economic structures that restrict mobility and opportunity. As a member of the underprivileged class, Balram represents the subaltern whose experiences are often excluded from dominant narratives of national progress. Yet, unlike passive victims of oppression, he asserts his agency by narrating his own story and challenging the silence imposed upon marginalised communities.

A central metaphor in the novel is the "Rooster Coop," which symbolises the system of fear and obedience that keeps the poor trapped in servitude. Balram argues that oppression survives because individuals internalise their subordinate status and accept inequality as inevitable. This idea reflects Fanon's analysis of psychological domination. Balram's eventual rebellion represents an attempt to break free from both social and mental constraints. However, Adiga complicates this act of resistance by showing that Balram gains freedom through morally questionable means, including the murder of his employer. The novel therefore raises important questions about the ethical costs of liberation within deeply unequal societies.

The novel also critiques neoliberal capitalism through the contrast between the "India of Light" and the "India of Darkness." The former represents urban centres of wealth, technology, and global connectivity, while the latter signifies rural poverty, corruption, and neglect. This

division highlights the unequal distribution of economic development in post-liberalisation India. Although globalisation has generated wealth and opportunity for some, its benefits remain inaccessible to many. Adiga thus challenges the assumption that economic growth automatically leads to social progress.

Neo-colonialism provides another important framework for understanding the novel. While colonial rule has ended, new forms of domination operate through global capitalism, consumer culture, and market-driven aspirations. The relationship between Ashok and Balram illustrates these inequalities. Despite Ashok's liberal appearance, his privileged lifestyle depends upon the labour and subordination of people like Balram. Their relationship exposes the persistence of hierarchical power structures beneath the rhetoric of modernity and development.

Corruption further reinforces these inequalities. Politicians, bureaucrats, and business elites manipulate institutions for personal gain, limiting opportunities for genuine social mobility. Adiga portrays corruption not as an exception but as a structural feature of contemporary society. Consequently, the novel questions whether political independence has fulfilled its promises of equality and justice.

The novel thus demonstrates that *The White Tiger* offers a compelling postcolonial critique of class oppression, economic inequality, and neo-colonial capitalism. Through Balram's rise from poverty to prosperity, Adiga exposes the contradictions of contemporary development and demonstrates that political freedom alone cannot eliminate exploitation. By foregrounding the experiences of the marginalised, the novel challenges dominant narratives of national success and reveals the continuing struggles over power, representation, and social justice in postcolonial India.

VII. COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

A comparative reading of *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The White Tiger* reveals both thematic continuity and significant differences in their representation of postcolonial India. Although each novel addresses distinct social realities, all three texts demonstrate that the end of colonial rule did not eliminate structures of inequality, exclusion, and domination. Rather, colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary experiences through caste hierarchies, cultural alienation, economic disparities, and global power relations.

One of the most important common concerns shared by the three novels is the question of identity. In *The God of Small Things*, identity is deeply influenced by caste, gender, and

social norms. Characters such as Ammu and Velutha struggle against rigid structures that define and restrict their social existence. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, identity emerges as a consequence of migration and cultural displacement. Jemubhai Patel and Biju experience profound uncertainty regarding their place within rapidly changing social and cultural environments. In *The White Tiger*, identity is closely linked to class and economic status, as Balram attempts to escape the social position assigned to him by birth. The novels also engage extensively with Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity. Roy's narrative language blends English and Malayalam expressions, creating a distinctly hybrid literary form. Desai explores hybridity through characters who exist between cultures and nations, neither fully belonging to India nor to the West. Adiga presents a different form of hybridity shaped by global capitalism, where traditional social structures coexist with modern economic aspirations. In each case, identity appears fluid, unstable, and continually negotiated rather than fixed or essential.

Another significant point of convergence is the critique of power. Roy examines the intersection of caste, patriarchy, and state authority. Desai focuses on the cultural and psychological consequences of colonialism and globalisation. Adiga exposes the exploitative mechanisms of contemporary capitalism and political corruption. Despite these differences, all three novels reveal how systems of power operate to marginalise particular groups while privileging others. The representation of the subaltern constitutes another important thematic connection. Velutha in *The God of Small Things*, Biju and the cook in *The Inheritance of Loss*, and Balram in *The White Tiger* occupy positions of social marginality. Their experiences expose the limitations of national narratives that celebrate progress while ignoring persistent inequalities. Through these characters, the novels foreground voices often excluded from dominant historical and political discourse.

The role of globalisation further distinguishes the texts while simultaneously connecting them. Roy presents globalisation as a continuation of unequal cultural and economic relationships. Desai emphasises its effects on migration, displacement, and cultural fragmentation. Adiga focuses on the widening gap between economic prosperity and social justice. Together, these perspectives suggest that globalisation often reproduces rather than eliminates historical inequalities. The three novels therefore offer complementary visions of postcolonial India. Roy foregrounds caste and gender oppression, Desai examines cultural displacement and migration, and Adiga critiques class exploitation and neoliberal capitalism. Collectively, they reveal the multidimensional nature of postcolonial

experience and demonstrate that colonial legacies continue to influence contemporary social realities.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study has examined Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* through the lens of postcolonial theory. Drawing upon the theoretical contributions of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon, the analysis has demonstrated that these novels provide powerful critiques of the social, cultural, and economic structures that continue to shape postcolonial India.

The study reveals that postcolonial identity remains a site of ongoing negotiation. Colonial history continues to influence cultural perceptions, social hierarchies, and individual consciousness. In Roy's novel, caste oppression and gender discrimination expose the persistence of exclusionary structures despite political independence. Desai's work highlights the psychological and cultural consequences of migration and globalisation, revealing the complexities of belonging in a transnational world. Adiga's novel exposes the inequalities generated by neoliberal capitalism and questions celebratory narratives of economic development. The concept of hybridity emerges as a central theme across all three texts. Whether expressed through language, culture, migration, or economic transformation, hybridity reflects the dynamic and contested nature of postcolonial identity. At the same time, the novels demonstrate that hybridity is not always empowering; it frequently produces uncertainty, alienation, and conflict.

The study further shows that the voices of marginalised individuals remain crucial to understanding postcolonial realities. Through characters such as Velutha, Biju, and Balram, the novels challenge dominant narratives and foreground experiences frequently overlooked within official histories. Their stories reveal the persistence of structural inequalities rooted in both colonial and indigenous systems of power. Ultimately, *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The White Tiger* demonstrate that postcolonialism is not merely a historical condition but an ongoing process shaped by the interaction of colonial memory, cultural transformation, and global modernity. These novels challenge simplistic notions of national progress and expose the contradictions underlying contemporary Indian society. By giving voice to the marginalised and interrogating established structures of power, they contribute significantly to the continuing project of postcolonial literary and cultural critique.

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