

Contours of Identity: A Polychromatic Study of Aravind Adiga's *Oeuvre*

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Abstract

In this post-modern era, "Identity" has become a contingent concept. Identity is now a hypernym of ethnicity, nationality, religiosity, sexuality, multiplicity, and commonality and so on. This article attempts to make a comprehensive evaluation of the various aspects which contribute to the formation of multiple identities of individuals. With the radical structural change in society, identity has also lost its stable meaning. To deal with this fluid sense of identity human beings have to be more adaptive and selective at the same time. A person always remains in a maze of complexity because of the malleability of identity. Every human being in society is connected to a vast network of identities which lead them to a state of bafflement. Social, cultural and theological institutions of a society assign some fixed and stable identities for individuals. These acknowledged and institutionalized identities instead of becoming boons create more obfuscations and disorientation in their mind. Each of them lives with an array of complex and contradictory identities. Some identities serve instrumental purposes in sustaining inherent inequality, some accelerate the growth of narcissistic self and some other compel to cultivate pseudo superiority. So, this article taking into view Aravind Adiga's oeuvre offers a polychromatic study into the formation of layered identity.

Keywords: layered identity, caste, hierarchy, stereotype, homogeneity, consumerism.

Introduction

The notion that identity developed merely to reinterpret and reconfigure a variety of pre-existing concerns regarding the self has already undermined the historical uniqueness and originality of the concept of identity. It is now a complex signifier because of its multi-faceted and indeterminate meaning. As identity is closely linked to political, cultural, and social concerns of the era, it possesses an innate power of defining human beings in particular fashion, determining their course of actions, shaping their material conditions. It functions as a divisive and categorization tool with the intent of segregating and labeling human beings in terms of color, race, gender, and religion. Globalization and identity are two influential forces that significantly shape our planet, our society, and individual lives. So, this conflict causes a rupture from any particular locale; destroys the sense of belonging, wholeness, and stability. Ultimately, the postmodern individual is produced, distinguished by the absence of permanent, fixed, and fundamental identity. This study intends to show how Aravind Adiga portrays his characters' identity struggle through their personal journeys, interactions, and experiences within hierarchical structures. By depicting their internal conflicts and external pressures, Adiga invites readers to reflect on the complexities of identity in a globalized world.

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Discussion

Balram, the protagonist of *The White Tiger*, proves himself to be a chameleon like figure as he believes in rapid refashioning of his self. He adopts different roles according to the demand of the situation. He claims himself a 'thinking man' and 'a self-taught entrepreneur'. While working in a tea shop and also in his master's house, he continues to overhear people's conversation around him. Thus, he leads himself into a self-grooming process and tries to create a solid sense of identity. Erikson notes, "Identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves."¹ In spite of being an uneducated one, Balram unexpectedly develops a critical eye towards life. Sometimes, long time suppression makes people passive as they begin to normalize their pauperized condition. But it creates also a reverse effect for some other people. So is the case with Balram. He becomes painfully aware of this existence. He is not passive rather every bit an opposing one to this imposed identity. Balram is given a title "The White Tiger" by the school teacher. This is the first time that this given identity works as a positive reinforcement in his life. When he sees a tiger walking to and fro as if hypnotized to tolerate the cage, he realizes this to be a pictorial image of his own life. He has been living like this hypnotized animal and has long been in a hibernated, pacified state. So, he decides this to be the penultimate time to show the ravages of hunger, not to be swallowed by it. By killing his master, he sets himself free from master-slave relationship, hence freeing himself from the age-old bondage. So, he decides to forge his new identity as a successful entrepreneur, leaving behind all the set identities that have been confining him to take a radical turn in his life.

An individual must shoulder the burden of social and familial relations. Everyone in society is born with identities which are superimposed. In a capitalist society, these identities are used as powerful instruments to sustain inherent inequalities, even to legitimize them. Balram's caste-based identity proves most disadvantageous for him. He receives constant discriminatory treatments as he belongs to a low caste. He repeatedly says, "My caste, my destiny" (*Tiger* 63).² In a Hindu community, caste-based identity matters more than anything. People are judged and treated according to the level of caste. Low caste people are labeled as untouchables and they are not given proper human recognition. Identity does not always depend on who we are, rather the enormous importance is pressed on how we are seen by others. Neutrality is never maintained in evaluating a human being as an active worker, as a good cook or as a skilled driver. When Balram as a driver tries to get a job in the landlord's house, he is asked if he is from a top caste or bottom caste. As Balram is from Halwai caste, he is at once taken for granted to be a 2nd class driver. Along with that he has to be an all-in-package kind of servant. He says, "the rich don't have drivers, cooks, bakers and tailors. They simply have servants" (*Tiger* 68-69). So, Balram must be prepared to be an omnibus one. But he is not allowed to touch the expensive car as it is meant for number one driver only. Adiga apprises his readers of the fact that even the root level of a society is hierarchy based. This iniquitous treatment among servants is also a subtle way to sustain the capitalist structure of society. This inequity also infuses competitive sense in them in order to survive.

Hierarchy based caste system persists in Indian society as it has been naturalized. It is so much ingrained in their psyche that higher caste Hindus think they deserve better on the basis of birth rights. Adiga's portrayal of Jayamma in one of his short stories "Valentia (To the first Crossroads)"³ reflects this higher caste Hindu's biased thinking. Both Jayamma and Shaila work as servants in an advocate's house. But Jayamma thinks it as a disgrace to work with Shaila, a lower caste girl. She thinks herself an outcast for working hand in hand with Shaila. A sense of impurity mires her mind as if her uplifted status as a high-born woman has been smeared by living next to her. Actually, it is not Jayamma who is at fault; her society makes her think like a sectarian. She has become so dogmatic and boastful of her caste identity that she cannot even think about her falsified position in society. To her master, both of them are alike. They receive equal treatment from their master but Jayamma always expects to be treated differently. Her master bears the responsibility of Shaila's marriage and education; this over privileged condition of Shaila becomes the root cause of her dissatisfaction. Society has hammered in her mind that lower caste girls are not meant to read and write. In this way, society retains its hierarchical structure by coloring the judgment of gullible and uneducated people like Jayamma. Her deep respect for higher caste and hatred for the lowers affect the course of her life greatly. She cannot come out of this caste-based social construction. She falls into an abyss of identity crisis. No one really tortures her; rather she is constantly being battered by her own thoughts. Poverty here works as an equalizer for them as it has brought them on the same axis.

The dependency on a singularist notion of identity may sometimes prove good for some people, but mostly it is bound to produce a disastrous effect on an individual, as it hampers individuation process and incorporates an individual into the collective psychology. Jayamma's narrow perspective and her thought process can be well described through the concept of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus". He thinks, "all human beings occupy a 'habitus', a practical sense and set of dispositions (modes of perceptions, thinking, behaviour) that generate particular attitudes and behaviours. 'Habitus' is the subjective component of a cultural practice. Further, every individual also occupies a 'field', i.e., social conditions that embody specific social relations. 'Fields' are the objective components of cultural practices. Social formations are organised fields – the family, religion, educational or economic domains. Individuals compete for the control of resources within a field."⁴ This is what Jayamma tries to acquire – a complete control in the sphere of her work. She does not see it ethically wrong to throw spiteful remarks upon Shaila and makes her feel inferior all the time. Jayamma has taken it for granted that her hierarchy-based religion makes her a naturally superior individual than Shaila. On the basis of her religion, she deserves more prestige, honour and recognition, and Bourdieu terms this tendency of individuals' competing for honour instead of material prospects as "symbolic capital". She constantly fights Shaila for her deserved position. Jayamma never even tries to come out of this structured space of laws and fixed norms which some specific relations in society and social conditions produce incessantly.

Certain groups of our societies are less advantageous, less privileged, and they are in a position with fewer options to enrich their life. They never pursue higher degrees or career like people from the privileged section of society. But no one ever questions this

discrimination; rather everyone normalizes it and unconsciously accepts this subtle hierarchy. In the process of growing up, every human being has been passively trained to see themselves as part of certain structure. They have accepted the visible and external manifestation of this hierarchy that everyone cannot be part of the higher ladder of society. Ideology has made this hierarchy well-perceived and well-accepted. Every relationship has a certain grammar and social relationships will always be hierarchical. There will be presence of domination and subordination, and it is socially represented. Ideology is a complex factor, and social phenomena make certain relationships possible. This is the reason Jayamma naturalizes the subordinate position of Shaila and refuses to acknowledge her as a human being of blood and flesh.

Moreover, the middle class and impoverished are granted limited rights as citizens. In India, voting system is also caste-based. Balram's father says that he has seen twelve elections but never seen the voting booth. It proves the façade of the system where without the participation of half of the population, the powerful class is ruling the roost. The consent of the majority to be ruled by a certain class has been taken for granted. Balram is forcefully made eighteen to be a legal voter. His 'inky fingerprints' are sold by his shop owner to make the voting system more validated. So, poor people like Balram and his father are never asked to express their opinions or to give their consent in any matters. Even the educated person, Masterji, has been denied of any positive reinforcement or strong support from the legal system. He repeatedly claims his legal rights to be free from any influences as a free citizen of a democratic country. He thinks he has the right to say 'no' to which majority conforms. But he becomes disillusioned seeing the laws only in black and white, not in practice. When a person's certain identity does not get buttressed enough, he suffers from inferiority complex. Hence, his wretched state makes him feel the indignation of his existence.

In *Amnesty*, the protagonist Danny is taken by his girlfriend to meet her mother in person, but the first question Danny encounters leaves him spellbound for a moment. With a terrified voice she asks, "Are you a Muslim?" (*Amnesty* 190).⁵ The absurdity of labeling someone with one single identity is projected here. At the same time, it is very unethical to push an individual within a rigid box and judge him in a way that his religious identity could only be the guarantee of his fairness and purity. Perhaps, Adiga here is keen on throwing a question upon the humanity – how is it possible that someone's religious identity can certify his character as good or bad? How can someone be so sure that people from other religions can never be terrorists? Even in this post-modern age the biased vision of people regarding Muslim identity is not gone; rather the fear of confronting a Muslim is still deep-seated in their mind. But Danny's reply is much more astonishing as he directly says, "I am not a terrorist" (*Amnesty* 190). It could have been possible that the lady might not have intended the meaning Danny complies with. Western Media has been able to generate Islamophobic people. Nonetheless, media's gearing up the clichéd image of Muslims has produced the intended effect on Danny in any way. His instant and natural answer to that question in his defense proves him more stereotypical.

In *Identity and Violence*, Amartya Sen critically examines the most serious defect of this civilization. He shows how this purist and absolutist notion of identity gives birth to violence. When we hold on to this reductionist approach to identity, we tend to overlook

the issues of choices in life and keep living in an illusion of pure and single identity. There is need to understand everything in their essential plurality and heterogeneity.⁶ It is obvious that people in general fail to deal with diversities and discrepancies. Through the production of stereotype, generalization and homogeneity, media has created a suspicion regarding the Muslim identity. This politics of reductionism of white people reduces the worth of human capacity and identity. Besides, the root of terrorism is the capitalist profit generating venture of Western arms industries. They try to create an illusion that only Islam is a Muslim's overarching identity and terrorism is in their blood. This categorization is in sharp contrast with the pluralistic vision of identity. It would be problematic diagnosis to see one's single identity as an all-engulfing one.

In *Amnesty*, Danny, being an illegal immigrant keeps living in Australia and tries to make a new identity so that he can remain invisible in an unknown country. Originally, he is a Tamil from Sri Lanka. He overstays his student visa and finds no other way but to live with the illegal status. He has been making notes of the peculiarities of Australian people for four years to spend life like natives. To live an undocumented life in Sydney, he has hammered himself with so many rules as Sydney is a "labyrinth of remembered errors" (*Amnesty* 188). He tries never to say receipt with the P so that he may sound like an Australian. He not only follows these rules with a certain level of sincerity but also goes to such a length to colour his hair golden to pick up a similar appearance. He can feel the aura of his gold-highlighted strands as no one in the city doubts him as an outsider. He becomes a mimic man who keeps himself "immaculately groomed" and immensely enjoys the pleasure of not being watched. He avoids practices of cracking the knuckles because white people do not like that sound. He tries to follow the eating styles of Australians to be a perfectionist in every respect so that no one would ever identify him as an outsider. Nonetheless, he understands that he is a living contradiction. He has "golden streaks in his hair, vacuum canister on his back, falsity in his heart and an Australian accent on his tongue" (*Amnesty* 56). He tries to assume a certain level of confidence as a cleaner so that he does not get caught by natives. He tries to prove himself as "Honest Danny. Intelligent Danny. Reliable Danny. Reliably intelligent Danny" (*Amnesty* 56). In a totally different social setting, he tries to explore his alternative self forgetting the real one. But sometimes this imitative self becomes more pervasive, enveloping and real. His adoption of Australian accent, learning cultural idioms of Australia, highlighting hair with red golden streaks, building up an image of honest Danny in the rich community of Australia, following the same eating habits of the natives, and his pretense to be a vegan in front of his girlfriend are some of his notable and unique strategies to be assimilated into a new culture. He takes off his true covering of a Tamilian man and masks himself with a protective Australian vest.

Danny's identity making process reminds one of Jack Gladney in *White Noise*. Jack adds initials in his name to give his name an aura of professionalism. Besides, he grows beard, and begins to wear heavy frame glasses with dark lenses. But he realizes that he becomes "the false character [who only] follows the name around".⁷ He depends on Hitler's power and fame to strengthen his own identity. He voraciously consumes the myth of Hitler because he needs something substantial which can make him feel safer

and stronger. But this illusion is soon to be broken. The way Jack's protective mantle of Hitler fails to shield him from the fear of death, Danny's false bearing of an Australian does not save him from deportation. Though the police could not catch Danny, he himself surrendered as he realizes the futility and hollowness of living with a false heart. His conscience does not let him live longer with split selves. This guilty conscience works as an incentive here which is necessary for him to take a moral stance. Incentive can be sometimes emotionally disturbing and painful but it is needed to trigger our principles of morality and to structure a new perception of the world.

Generally, people show affiliations with that identity which retains their objectives and interest most. Social security is like a lodestone to everyone. In *Last Man in Tower*⁸, Mrs. Rego is seen to abandon her dominant social identity in the name of gaining personal security and progress. She proves herself a futurist rather than a communist. Being a communist and a Christian, her first priority was to give importance to the downtrodden, to raise their quotidian issues. Because of this reason, she is popularly known as "communist aunty" in Vishram Society. Putting a period to this socially acknowledged identity, she gives primacy to the role of motherhood. But this is an act of justifying her yield to the offer of a capitalist. Ironically enough, people tend to think that they are making something through conscious choices. But actually, the choice making is illusionary here. Mrs. Rego is deeply affected by Dharmen Shah's great offer. She starts thinking of living in a luxurious apartment at Bandra which she never thought of before. She cannot help succumbing to the capitalists' promise of allurements. Free choice is not free at all anymore; it is constrained by financial prosperity. The promise of adversity, novelty and difference lure them to be integrated into the capitalist way of life. But this "diversity in capitalist societies is a mark only as what in reality superficial differences conceal the relentless logic of commodity which subsumes all ways of beings, issues, concerns, pleasures, desires to the logic of commodification."⁹

Social context affects greatly in identity formation of people. Education, taste, lifestyle choices are regarded as formative powers in shaping newer identities. In an advanced capitalist society, consumer identity continues to be the prime identity of people in general. Bauman argues that "consumerism arrives when consumption takes over the linchpin role which was played by work in the society of producers, turning human wants, desires, longings into the principal propelling and operating force of the society."¹⁰ Personal progress and identity are more important than normative social roles in consumer society. In such a society, status of a person is determined by the extent of his consumption of lucrative products. It subtly promotes the ideologies of a class-based society and strengthens its structure as it is inherently connected with the forces of production. The lives of individuals are greatly affected by the blow of consumerist culture. They tend to show more attachment towards group affiliations and conformism. Adiga shows in *Last Man in Tower* how people are connecting themselves more with products than with human beings. They relate their identity more with personal possessions and consumer products than with any other thing. Ajwani, the broker, buys Toyota Quails because he thinks this car is the prime marker of his identity. He tries to give the impression that he is important than anyone else of Vishram society.

Ajwani's act of buying an expensive car in spite of his unaffordability can be interpreted as a pseudo-identity making process. Baudrillard analyses how these material objects are forming our identity as consumer citizens. Baudrillard writes,

When it comes to material objects, however, and especially to manufactured objects complex enough to lend them selves to mental dismantling, this tendency has free rein. With the automobile, for instance, it is possible to speak of 'my brakes', 'my tail fins', 'my steering wheel'; or to say 'lamb raking', 'I am turning', or 'I am starting'. In short, all the cars' organs and functions may be brought separately into relation with the person of the owner in the possessive mode.¹¹

Ajwani wants to be the object of jealousy; Mrs. Puri envies him for having such a possession. So, this envious cycle goes on and this is how capitalism survives. It completely takes over the mindset of the people in general. Later on, Mrs. Puri's psychological hunger is shown through her obsession with the idea of possessing an expensive apartment. The reality is "the possession of objects frees us only as possessors, and always refers us back to the infinite freedom to possess more objects."¹² Mrs. Puri is no exception here as she is totally blinded by the concept of possession.

But Masterji has a unique sense of self. He is not the man to be swayed by the consumerist flow of his time. The immutability of his real self indicates this different moral stance from others. He is not so susceptible like others that he can be blindfolded by the capitalist's promise of comfort, security. Masterji is an absolute individualist whose priorities are different as he does not actually belong to a modern era. The world that he belongs to is different and so is the essence of his era. For Masterji, it is an ethical choice for not to be dissolved within the system. As he is a non-conformist, he is entangled in an eternal conflict between self and social role. He gets caught in the throes of agony as he cannot expunge the past memories from his consciousness. He always trawls through old memories, not for deriving comfort or pleasure from those memories but perhaps he is looking for a confirmation to take control over the courses of his life. He does not follow the majority; he follows the right path. This may be an act of justifying his divergence from the norm. But it is also true that his personal evolution is thwarted because of his contrastive life-style from his neighbors. They want to keep in pace with the globalised world. Masterji's sense of identity is more in accord with the pre-modern world; he is literally an outdated one in the post-modern era. His traditional life-style, opinion, choices, perspectives differentiate him from other neighbours. Giddens captures this conflict of this late-modern time and he writes, "The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among diversity of opinions...[r]eflexively organised life planning...becomes a central feature of structuring of self-identity."¹³

The uniqueness of an individual depends on how he redefines himself through the interaction with other people. An individual can never be unique in isolation. As Masterji cannot go with the flow of time, he isolates himself from the rest of his neighbours. G. H. Mead, a sociologist, visualizes selfhood in the "internalized conversation of

gestures...the origin and foundation of the self like those of thinking [beings].”¹⁴ ‘Mind, self and society’ are similar in Mead’s theory. He repeatedly emphasizes their interdependency. Society works as a bridge to build up relations between individuals. Human beings would cease to exist if he steps outside of these relationships. The interaction and reciprocity in relationships add substance and meaning to this emerging “I”. But there is also space for reflexivity between “I” and “me” in the mind of the self. The function of the mind is to internalize the reciprocal conversation among people and present that “I” in acceptable forms. Initially, at the beginning of the novel Masterji and other residents of the society are seen to be on good terms with one another. Everyone respects him the way he always expects as a teacher. Before taking any decisions on grave matters, they consult him first and consider his advices with much satisfaction and certitude. The moment their opinion differs from Masterji, they not only begin to disrespect him but also bring willful charges against him. Every moment Masterji can feel the agony of living with them as he confronts their contemptuous gestures. He does not isolate himself just because he is unique or intellectually superior to them or his ego has been hurt. These are not the probable reasons of his isolation. An invisible hierarchy is created among them. Mead’s world is too much simple and unadulterated as it exists without any dynamics of power relations. Masterji actually never anticipated this much unexpected behaviour from his once cordial neighbours. He did not even think of how a monetary offer can tie them with a common interest- an interest which was never there before in their relationships; rather the interest is an artificially created one by the powerful Dharmen. To quote Goldstein and Rayner –

In practice, interest and identity claims are closely intertwined. What [a person] wants is in some sense shaped by [his] sense of who [he] is. On the other hand, in clarifying [his] interests [he] may sometimes begin to redefine [his] sense of self. But there remains for [him] a fundamental distinction between [his] objectives that do not threaten [his] identity and those that do.¹⁵

There is power embedded in Dharmen’s discourse. Though power as a concept is abstract and intangible, people can feel its effect any way. People always want something in life which is substantial and they are generally attracted towards power in hope of getting tangible rewards. If power structure exists in a community, it certainly affects the decision-making process. Dharmen artfully creates interests among individuals so that they can use all the resources and energy to fulfill their interest. Unfortunately, they begin to act in the nick of time more like a political body than neighbors.

In a social context, class as a contour of identity is specifically significant, for it creates a sense of self-worth and nobility among those individuals who are capable of coupling themselves with that class. It is considerably a unilateral notion of identity formation as it attempts to make individuals desperate for class orientation. This class-based identity dictates the economic, political and social relations among people. It settles a divisional notion of alliance making on the basis of class as “...economic relations shape both society and the individuals within it. Class is first and foremost an economic category that characterizes the relation of specific groups within society to the mode of production. Yet class positions are also a crucial determinant in the formation of

subjectivity and identity.”¹⁶ In such a layered society, Balram as a servant identifies himself with his fellow worker Ram Persad. The only time they seem “ever like a team” when they are assigned by their masters to buy a ‘Black Dog’ from ‘English Liquor Shop’. Village boys like Balram and Ram Persad are supposed to drink ‘Indian liquor’ and the rich are meant to buy ‘English liquor’. These ideological cultural practices are already set on the basis of economic relations. This cultural demarcation thrusts individuals to live in the lower rung of society. Balram is an exceptional creation of Adiga who refuses to identify himself with his own class and to be categorically judged. Ironically though, his refusal would not dislocate his association with the working class.

A working-class person who exhibits no proletarian consciousness or any of the solidarity and forms of behavior appropriate to the class, and none of whose behavior reflects an unconscious expression of such solidarity or consciousness, is nevertheless said to have proletarian class identity, albeit with a false consciousness.¹⁷

Objectively, Balram surely belongs to the class but subjectively he does not want to identify himself with the lower strata of society. He has no sympathy for the defeated and bedraggled people of his class. He does not get frustrated for not playing the traditional role of a breadwinner of his family which would have certainly reinforced his ‘masculine identity’. His disorientation from his class is reflective of his gleaning up discursive harrowing experiences. At least for Balram, Marx’s concept of the emergence of “class in itself” and “class for itself” has lost its foothold as they do not have revolutionary spirit. The cultivation of passivity among the working-class people lessens the possibility of their point of convergence and consolidation. Balram expresses his doubt regarding Indian revolution, “No, sir. It won’t happen. People in this country are still waiting for the war of their freedom to come from somewhere else - from the jungles, from the mountains, from China, from Pakistan. That will never happen. Every man must make his own Benaras” (*Tiger* 304). So, he wants to weave that identity which would accrue him with a certain level of authoritative power. He tries to sculpt a new identity for himself by discarding all the constrictive others. In the end, Balram really proves himself a “thinking man” who is not destined to live like a slave forever.

According to Bauman, identities have such malleability that it “can be adopted and discarded like the changing of a costume.”¹⁸ Identity always refers to a more fluid sense of the self. Balram is seen to construct his identity preferring material success over moral scruples. He seems to be very pliable in identity shaping. He is always observant of his surroundings. Helene says, “In the vein of Michel Foucault, there are hidden power relations within any given discourse as if we are not wary of how their power relations work. We might get trapped in them and lured into thinking that our identity is somewhat which is not.”¹⁹ But Balram is aware of the intricacies of power relations around him. He is not the man to be lured into illusionary thinking. So, Balram always remains very watchful of every discriminatory treatment. His master always claims Balram to be the part of his family. But deep down in his heart he also knows that this is the biggest illusion which his master wants to infuse in his servant’s brain. This is the strength of sweet talk through which a master completely takes control over his servant. But Balram is aware of the imbrication of power relations around him. Balram is also perceptive of all these things. The moment he starts believing in his master’s kindness,

he has been faked as a murderer and prepared to be a prisoner for a lifetime. Most of the time, Balram is treated as a complete asinine because of his mispronouncing of certain common English words. He becomes a source of jocularities of his owners, Ashok and Pinky. Sometimes Pinky insults him for not being acquainted with city life styles, even for scratching groins like village people. Balram may not be a formally educated one, but certainly these insulting remarks hurt his sense of worth. Even his peers, the city drivers, mock him because of his naivety. So, city life also shapes him to make a meaning out of his life. Stuart Hall says, "Identity is a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself."²⁰ Balram finally realizes that there is a vast difference between how he perceives his own worth and how his worth is seen by others. But this adverse environment teaches him that he has to modify himself in order to survive in such a city where morality has become a myth. So, all these things contribute to shaping his new identity—a successful entrepreneur but he compromises his moral self. The urge of becoming someone with considerable importance has made him an amoral person.

While living in a society, we tend to identify with someone charismatic or idealistic in nature. Likewise, Balram identifies himself with his master Ashok more than anyone. The long suppression has made him a power thirsty person. He craves for the power of control and agency which Ashok has. Grossberg thinks, "...agency involves relations of participation and access, the possibilities of moving into particular sites of activity and power, and of belonging to them in such a way as to be able to enact their powers."²¹ So, Balram tries to follow Ashok's every activity possible. To him, Ashok is an image to be imitated. He thinks he is corrupted from "an innocent village fool into a citified fellow full of debauchery, depravity and wickedness" (*Tiger* 197). He justifies his transformation saying, "All these changes happened in me because they happened first in Mr. Ashok. He returned from America an innocent man, but life in Delhi corrupted him" (*Tiger* 197). He changes his lifestyle according to his master's changing nature. Thus, he tries to appropriate himself in the template of Ashok. Balram becomes a womanizer like him as he thinks it can be the only means to take control over the action. He tries to feel the actualization of agency. He perceives that the sexual identity of rich people gets considerable positive importance as Ashok gets glamorous Ukrainian Prostitutes. On the contrary, Balram gets prostitutes of less than mediocre value. He understands that the poor always get the leftovers of the rich in every sector. So, in case of sexual identity, his ego has been hurt and it fills him with destructive negativities. So, he wants to reach the standard of his master. After killing Ashok, he assumes his master's identity. He disguises himself as a socialist and becomes a "solid pillar of Bangalorean society" from "a hunted criminal" (*Tiger* 292). He leaves the old mold of family, caste and religion-based identities. Though this stealing of identity enables him to make sense of his own experience of selfhood, it completely destroys his moral ethics. Moreover, his adoption of an exclusivist approach towards identity creates violence at the end.

In today's competitive world, people have minimal opportunities to fashion up their identities according to their own dreams because "young [men] from Mumbai or Delhi" are "scavenging for [their] identity" as "a vulture above the nations" (*Day* 275).²²

Selection Day, Mohan Kumar propels his younger son Manjunath Kumar to be the second best batsman of India. Though Manju has both skill and caliber to become a great batsman, he never wishes to become one. He secretly harbors to build up his identity as a scientist or forensic specialist. But he never gets the freedom to pursue his own dream. He remains confined within the blocks of his father's smothering rules. This long suppression affects him badly as he has never been able to give vent to his natural feelings. He sees everyone around him rejoicing over his budding identity as a cricketer. Adiga shows how Indians are deluding themselves with the flow of the cricket craze. A cricketer with a struggling background is like a film star to them. People like stories more than sports. They cannot accept a celebrity with all human frailties. Our blind reverence for idols limits their liberties and life choices. They worship just an image, not human capabilities and uniqueness. Ironically enough, as a human being, Manju has no existence in his society. A human with flesh and blood is only valued as a cricketer. He will become extinct when his career finishes. However, observing the popularity as a celebrity, Manju tries to conceal his homosexuality. He hides his homo affiliation in fear of stigmatization in society. He does not want his image to be bruised or be publicly vulnerable. In this way, Manju spends his life in concealment till the end. Neither he tries to forge his identity as a forensic expert nor does he express his homosexuality. The uncritical celebration of homogeneity not only mars an individual's freedom of choice but also leaves him with no other alternatives.

The growth of narcissistic self has become a matter of real concern in this contemporary era. People now-a-days are not in accord with their outer and inner self. With a broken and unsatisfied psyche inside, individuals want to preserve their artificial image outside. Manju also wants to stick to this image which is not stable and he seems worried for a constantly fleeting image. This is the moment media enters with the lamp to enlighten that false image with flashlights and tries to cement the cracks. To come in the limelight glamorous materials like expensive clothes, brand new cars are needed to conceal those loopholes. For a time being, it can offer solace, security, comfort, a feeling of being an important one but soon to make him feel emotionally barren. This advertised identity cannot hold its foot longer. It makes him a readymade puppet whose only work is to be at the beck and call of media. It has the ability to uplift his identity but it has also the power to tarnish it. The kind of identity which Manju pursues needs a wide media coverage and it is dependent on the acknowledgement of audience. To quote Bassil and James Alan from "Faking Individuation in the Age of Unreality" –

The entire cultural framework can be seen as narcissistic in the sense that it relies on the individuals *not* having, or sometimes not even *seeking* as table individual character core. Not only does mass media, but consumer capitalism in general not support the concept of stable identity. Instead, it manipulates consumer demand by introducing multiple choice and uncertainty. The individual inhabiting such a culture does not feel psychologically safe; his or her sense of identity remains fluid and shaky, always keeping pace with the fast-moving life, always prepared to change direction of individual or professional development.²³

Individuals feel all the more vulnerable with this transient and consumable identity. In *Selection Day*, Adiga makes it obvious that media is interested in selling a new Manju – the Manju which media has created. To sell this image, he has to go through a constant

alteration of look, life style, and eating habits. But this state of dependency makes him more unstable and numbs his potential development as a good cricketer.

The short story "Market and Maidan" is thus a polemic presentation of dissimulating ventures of political leaders through which Adiga attempts to outline the entanglements of individuals into the artificial interstices of society. In parallel with this presentation, he mystifies the mercurial nature of identity formation. Keshava, a simple village boy, arrives in Kittur on the purpose of making fortune but gets disconcerted by sudden eruptions of so many chances to be fortuitous. He chooses a fast-paced gateway towards success by engaging himself in local politics and falls under the spell of deceitful big brothers of political parties. They make use of his innocuousness and gullibility to motor down the political activism in the locality. As a social being, he struggles to inculcate himself in the existing committee. Moreover, his religious sentiment has been hurt for his belonging to the lower Hoyka caste. In India, caste and politics are intertwined and both have reached at a junction of confluence. It is not unnatural to participate in political institutions if it appears compatible with religious affinity. But it is not the case with Keshava; he tries to take control over his own life by running after an egocentric ambition of proving himself different from other lower caste Hoykas. He has been provoked by the sidekicks of big parties that Hoykas are worth nothing, they are merely cowards. So, he seeks to elevate his image by becoming unique, reliable and trustworthy to them. This is the way the people of lower strata are used as pawns to spark up the political violence. Akeel Bilgrami says,

"People do imagine themselves to have various identities, and mobilize themselves politically on that basis. Thus, some group may thoroughly exaggerate its victimhood in the present in order to mobilize an identity in politics. But even here it is presupposed that at some stage they were victims, so it is also possible that some group completely fabricates an identity in order to make some political capital out of it."²⁴

Keshava's cutting of fraternal bond and his irrepressible urge to identify himself with the powerful people veers him off a world where he becomes lost in a throng of identities. As this world ceases to lend him a substantial identity, he becomes an amorphous individual. Keshava came with a brother, a name and a caste, but finally turns into an anonymous insane sannyasi.

Conclusion

Identity, as a concept, has many shades, many connotations, contradictions and unresolved ambiguities. Because of the substantiality and realness of every identity, individuals tend to cultivate an error of thought that they have no choice in the process of prioritization of one specific identity over the other. It is not necessary that they have to be entirely dismissive of all other affiliations. One should not take any extreme stance while forming an identity or prioritizing one identity over another. The role of individuals is to dismantle the dressed-up reality which has raised a bar of illusions around them. They are not really confined in socially assigned identity; rather their rigid sense of identity and resistance to making an active choice has made them the detainees of their own crammed thought.

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