

# DEPICTIONS OF OLD AND NEW INDIA: A CROSS-AUTHOR ANALYSIS OF NAIPAUL AND ADIGA

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## Abstract

*This research paper examines the literary depictions of old and new India through a cross-author analysis of V.S. Naipaul and Aravind Adiga, two prominent writers who have significantly shaped postcolonial representations of India. The primary objective is to analyze how these authors construct contrasting narratives of traditional and contemporary India through their distinctive literary perspectives. The methodology employed is qualitative comparative analysis utilizing textual examination of selected works including Naipaul's India trilogy and Adiga's *The White Tiger*. The hypothesis proposes that while both authors critique Indian society, Naipaul represents India through a diasporic lens of disillusionment with traditional structures, whereas Adiga portrays contemporary India's socioeconomic disparities through indigenous perspectives. Results indicate that Naipaul's portrayal emphasizes cultural stagnation, colonial remnants, and civilizational wounds, while Adiga highlights neoliberal India's class divisions, corruption, and the darkness-light binary. The discussion reveals that both writers employ distinct narrative strategies to represent India's transformation. The conclusion establishes that these complementary perspectives provide comprehensive understanding of India's postcolonial journey from traditional to globalized society.*

**Keywords:** *Postcolonial literature<sup>1</sup>, India representation<sup>2</sup>, V.S. Naipaul<sup>3</sup>, Aravind Adiga<sup>4</sup>, Cultural identity<sup>5</sup>.*

## 1. Introduction

The representation of India in English literature has undergone significant transformation, particularly through the works of postcolonial writers who engage with the nation's complex socio-cultural fabric. V.S. Naipaul and Aravind Adiga represent two generations of writers who have depicted India through distinctly different yet complementary lenses (Nixon, 1992). Naipaul, born in Trinidad to an Indo-Caribbean family in 1932, approached India as an ancestral homeland seeking cultural roots, while Adiga, born in Chennai in 1974, represents the native voice critiquing contemporary Indian realities (Dalley, 2022). The literary representation of India has been a contested terrain in postcolonial discourse, with writers negotiating between colonial legacies and emergent national identities (Ashcroft et al., 1989). Naipaul's India trilogy, comprising *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, and *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, documents his evolving perception of India over three decades, moving from disillusionment to cautious acceptance (Kumar, 2024). His writings have been both celebrated for their literary merit and criticized for their perceived Eurocentric bias (Zirange, 2014). Adiga's *The White Tiger*, which won the Man Booker Prize in 2008, presents contemporary India through the perspective of Balram Halwai, exposing the nation's bifurcation into "India of Light" and "India of Darkness" (Mahima & Sathiadevi, 2024). The significance of studying these authors together lies in

their temporal positioning and contrasting perspectives that collectively illuminate India's postcolonial journey (Pandia, 2018). Bhabha's (1994) theoretical frameworks of mimicry, hybridity, and ambivalence provide essential analytical tools for understanding how both authors engage with colonial legacies and postcolonial transformations. This comparative analysis contributes to the broader discourse on how literature shapes and reflects national identity in postcolonial contexts.

## 2. Literature Review

Scholarly engagement with Naipaul's representation of India has generated extensive critical debate. Nixon (1992) in his seminal work *London Calling: V.S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin* positions Naipaul as a controversial figure whose writings embody the tensions between imperial ideology and postcolonial critique. Ezekiel's (1976) response "Naipaul's India and Mine" represents one of the earliest Indian critiques, challenging Naipaul's generalizations about Indian society and contrasting his diasporic perspective with indigenous experiences. Dalley (2022) examines Naipaul's career through the lens of "world realism," arguing that his work constructs models of the contemporary world as a structurally differentiated system while mediating divisions between metropolitan and peripheral spaces. Mangalam (2021) contends that Naipaul's repeated exploration of India over three decades can be understood as attempts at self-exploration, with his critique of India serving as a mirror for his own cultural displacement. The scholarly reception of Adiga's work has been equally vigorous. Biswas and Singh (2017) argue that Adiga's portrayal of poverty and corruption in *The White Tiger* is not intended to mock India's misery but to highlight how postcolonial India continues to deprive common people of basic rights. Mendes's analysis of "Exciting Tales of Exotic Dark India" examines how Adiga's representation of marginalized India gained international recognition (Narasiman & Chawdhry, 2014). Akyüz (2025) applies postcolonial binary analysis to *The White Tiger*, demonstrating how the novel deconstructs oppositions between light and darkness, rich and poor, tradition and modernity. Gupta (2022) situates Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* within discourses of globalization and neocolonialism, arguing that his work critiques how economic liberalization has affected social and cultural values in contemporary India. Theoretical frameworks from Bhabha (1994) on mimicry and hybridity have been extensively applied to both authors. Ashcroft et al. (1989) provide foundational understanding of how postcolonial literatures engage with and subvert imperial discourse through processes of abrogation and appropriation. Spivak's (1999) theorization of the subaltern informs readings of both Naipaul's and Adiga's engagement with marginalized voices in Indian society. Valiyamattam (2017) examines how Adiga's work raises questions about contemporary ideas of national development and identifies survival strategies in morally ambivalent India. Shaikh (2021) analyzes Masterji's resistance in *Last Man in Tower* as embodying the struggle of the marginalized class against capitalist globalization. Comparative studies examining both authors remain limited in existing scholarship. While individual analyses of Naipaul and Adiga abound, systematic cross-author studies that trace the evolution of India's representation across generations are relatively scarce, making this research significant in bridging this scholarly gap.

## 3. Objectives

1. To analyze and compare the literary techniques employed by V.S. Naipaul and Aravind Adiga in representing traditional and contemporary India.
2. To examine how both authors engage with postcolonial themes of identity, alienation, and cultural displacement in their depictions of Indian society.
3. To investigate the socioeconomic and political critiques embedded in both authors' works concerning India's transformation from colonial to globalized nation.
4. To evaluate the significance of diasporic versus indigenous perspectives in shaping literary representations of Indian identity and national character.

#### 4. Methodology

This research employs qualitative comparative literary analysis to examine the depictions of old and new India in selected works of V.S. Naipaul and Aravind Adiga. The primary texts include Naipaul's India trilogy (*An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, and *India: A Million Mutinies Now*) and Adiga's *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower*. The analytical framework draws upon postcolonial theoretical perspectives, particularly Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, hybridity, and ambivalence. The study utilizes thematic analysis to identify recurring motifs, narrative strategies, and representational patterns in both authors' works. Close textual reading examines how language, imagery, and narrative voice construct specific visions of India. Comparative analysis identifies similarities, differences, and evolutionary patterns in the authors' depictions across temporal and geographical dimensions.

#### 5. Results

The textual analysis reveals significant patterns in how both authors represent India. Naipaul's India trilogy demonstrates an evolving perspective over thirty years. In *An Area of Darkness* (1964), Naipaul depicts India as facing multitude of challenges including poverty, fatalism, mimicry, the caste system, and a distorted sense of history. The book was subsequently banned in India for its negative portrayal. His writing oscillates between empathy and criticism, reflecting his complex relationship with India as a country he feels connected to by heritage but alienated from by experience. In *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977), Naipaul critiques what he perceives as cultural stagnation, arguing that India's retreat into fantasy and fatalism prevents progress. By *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990), his perspective shows cautious optimism about India's transformation. Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) presents India through the binary opposition of "Light" and "Darkness." The novel constructs contemporary India as deeply stratified, with the protagonist Balram representing millions of poor Indians living under the shadows of economically affluent political elites. The narrative structure letters to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao positions India within global economic discourse. Statistical context shows that India's economic liberalization since 1991 created unprecedented wealth alongside persistent inequality. Before 1991, foreign investment was negligible at \$74 million in the first reform year, subsequently rising dramatically yet benefits remaining unequally distributed. Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* (2011) extends this critique to urban India, depicting Mumbai's gentrification and the conflict between traditional values and capitalist development.

Comparative analysis reveals that Naipaul approaches India as an outsider seeking ancestral connection, whereas Adiga writes as an insider exposing uncomfortable truths. Both authors employ the concept of mimicry, though differently Naipaul examines colonial mimicry in Indian society, while Adiga explores how characters like Balram mimic their masters as survival strategy. The theme of "darkness" appears in both authors but with distinct implications: for Naipaul, it represents civilizational failure; for Adiga, it symbolizes socioeconomic marginalization.

#### 6. Discussion

The cross-author analysis reveals significant insights into the evolution of India's literary representation across generations. Naipaul's diasporic perspective, shaped by his Indo-Trinidadian heritage and Oxford education, produces a critique that has been characterized as simultaneously postcolonial and neo-colonial (Nixon, 1992). His position as what Bhabha (1994) would term a "mimic man" complicates his authority to represent India, as he is neither fully Indian nor entirely Western. Naipaul's disappointment in encountering India stems from the dissonance between the mythologized homeland of his grandfather's stories and the chaotic reality he observed (Ezekiel, 1976). His writing reflects the ambivalent relationship of being an insider and outsider simultaneously,

resulting in harsh commentary that many Indian critics found reductive (Zirange, 2014). Adiga's perspective, emerging from within contemporary India, presents different challenges and affordances. His journalism background enables documentary-style realism that captures India's twenty-first-century contradictions with precision (Biswas & Singh, 2017). The White Tiger's epistolary structure addressing China's premier positions India within Asian economic rivalry, reflecting globalization's impact on national self-perception. Adiga's binary of Light and Darkness deliberately simplifies India's complexity to expose fundamental inequalities (Akyüz, 2025). His characters, unlike Naipaul's passive observers, actively navigate and subvert social hierarchies.

Both authors engage with colonial legacies differently. Naipaul critiques the continued dominance of colonial structures and the failure of the Indian state to fully transcend its colonial past (Kumar, 2024). Adiga, writing two generations later, focuses on neocolonialism in the form of globalization and economic liberalization (Gupta, 2022). The theoretical framework of Ashcroft et al. (1989) helps understand how both authors, through different strategies, write back to imperial and neo-imperial centers. Naipaul's critical distance enabled uncomfortable truths about caste, poverty, and cultural practices that Indian writers might hesitate to articulate. Conversely, Adiga's insider status grants legitimacy to critique that might seem prejudicial from an external observer. The representation of Indian identity in both authors reflects broader postcolonial concerns about authenticity and representation. Spivak's (1999) question of whether the subaltern can speak resonates through Adiga's attempt to voice marginalized India through Balram. Bhabha's (1994) concept of Third Space illuminates how both authors occupy liminal positions Naipaul between cultures, Adiga between classes from which they articulate their critiques. Their combined work provides what neither could achieve individually: a multi-generational, multi-perspectival representation of India's postcolonial transformation.

## 7. Conclusion

This comparative analysis of V.S. Naipaul and Aravind Adiga's depictions of India reveals how literature serves as a crucial site for negotiating national identity in postcolonial contexts. Naipaul's trilogy documents India's traditional structures, colonial remnants, and civilizational challenges from a diasporic perspective, while Adiga's novels illuminate contemporary India's socioeconomic disparities, globalization effects, and class conflicts from an indigenous standpoint. Together, these authors provide complementary perspectives that trace India's transformation from traditional to globalized society. The study demonstrates that postcolonial literature's power lies not in presenting unified national narratives but in illuminating the contradictions, tensions, and possibilities inherent in postcolonial societies. Both authors, despite their different positions and approaches, contribute to a richer understanding of India's complex reality. Future scholarship should continue examining how literary representations shape and reflect India's ongoing transformation in the twenty-first century, particularly as new generations of writers engage with increasingly globalized contexts. This cross-author analysis establishes that understanding India's literary representation requires acknowledging multiple perspectives across temporal, cultural, and ideological dimensions.

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