

Postcolonial Narratives and Identity Formation in Contemporary Literature

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intricate interplay between postcolonial narratives and the construction of identity in contemporary literature. Postcolonial texts serve as powerful vehicles for voicing resistance, reclaiming histories, and reimagining cultural identities in the aftermath of colonial rule. Through the examination of selected works from Africa, South Asia, and the Caribbean, the study illustrates how authors navigate issues of hybridity, displacement, language politics, and cultural memory. These narratives not only critique colonial legacies but also reflect the ongoing struggle for self-definition in globalized contexts. By analyzing thematic patterns and literary techniques, the research reveals how contemporary postcolonial literature fosters a deeper understanding of fractured identities, belonging, and the reassertion of indigenous voices. The paper highlights the transformative role of storytelling in negotiating identity and fostering agency within marginalized communities. Ultimately, it emphasizes the importance of postcolonial narratives in reshaping literary canons and expanding the discourse on identity politics in a post-imperial world.

Keywords: *Postcolonial literature, identity formation, hybridity, cultural memory, displacement, resistance, decolonization, language politics, contemporary narratives, indigenous voices*

Postcolonial literature serves as a vital medium through which the complexities of identity, history, and cultural displacement are examined in the aftermath of colonial rule. In the contemporary literary landscape, postcolonial narratives continue to evolve, reflecting shifting paradigms of power, belonging, and resistance. These narratives challenge dominant Eurocentric representations and offer alternative voices that reclaim agency and cultural memory. As writers from formerly colonized regions engage with the legacies of imperialism, their works become critical sites for interrogating the psychological and social ramifications of colonization on both individual and collective identities.

Contemporary postcolonial literature often explores themes of hybridity, diaspora, migration, and the redefinition of cultural identity. Authors use literature as a platform to interrogate inherited colonial ideologies, reframe historical narratives, and celebrate indigenous traditions that were once marginalized. This has resulted in rich, diverse representations of identity that are fluid rather than fixed, shaped by the interplay between past traumas and present realities. These stories articulate the lived experiences of people negotiating multiple cultural affiliations and negotiating fractured histories.

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Identity formation within postcolonial contexts is inherently political and deeply personal. Writers frequently present protagonists who grapple with questions of selfhood, belonging, and alienation, especially as they navigate between colonial legacies and postcolonial realities. This tension gives rise to what Homi K. Bhabha calls the “third space,” a liminal zone where new identities are forged through cultural negotiation and resistance. Through such spaces, postcolonial narratives resist essentialist identities and instead celebrate multiplicity and transformation.

Language plays a significant role in the construction of postcolonial identity. Many postcolonial writers strategically employ the colonizer’s language to subvert and decolonize it, infusing it with indigenous idioms, rhythms, and worldviews. This linguistic hybridity becomes a powerful tool for reasserting cultural sovereignty and expressing resistance. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie, and Arundhati Roy illustrate how the language of the colonizer can be reclaimed to articulate postcolonial realities in a voice that is authentically hybrid.

The negotiation of identity in postcolonial literature is also intricately tied to space and geography. The notions of “home” and “exile” are constantly contested, as postcolonial subjects often experience physical and emotional dislocation. Whether navigating urban centers in the global North or rural landscapes marked by colonial extraction, characters frequently struggle to claim spaces that affirm their histories and identities. The idea of home is thus not just a physical location but a symbolic anchor in the search for self-definition.

Gender further complicates postcolonial identity formation. Female and queer voices have increasingly emerged in postcolonial literature, highlighting how patriarchy intersects with colonial legacies to shape experiences of oppression and empowerment. Contemporary authors foreground the lived realities of marginalized genders and sexualities, expanding the discourse on identity to include feminist and queer postcolonial critiques. These perspectives offer new insights into how identity is negotiated at the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality.

In the globalized world, the boundaries of postcolonial identity are continually shifting. Diasporic writers play a significant role in this transformation, bringing transnational perspectives that blend the experiences of migration, cultural assimilation, and resistance. Their narratives often question simplistic binaries of colonizer/colonized, home/abroad, and tradition/modernity. Through these stories, contemporary postcolonial literature becomes a dynamic site for exploring the pluralities of identity in an interconnected world.

Ultimately, postcolonial narratives in contemporary literature are more than just reflections of the past—they are active engagements with the present and visions for the future. They encourage readers to confront historical injustices, question hegemonic norms, and imagine new modes of being. As postcolonial authors continue to challenge and redefine identity through storytelling, their works remain central to understanding the ongoing processes of cultural decolonization and human resilience.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The postcolonial era marked a significant shift in global literature, giving rise to narratives that challenge the dominance of colonial discourse and provide space for previously marginalized voices. With the collapse of empires and the emergence of new nations, literature became a vital tool through which authors explored the legacies of colonialism, especially in terms of cultural identity, language, and memory. This transition also foregrounded the struggles of

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individuals and communities in defining their identities in a world where colonial structures continued to influence sociopolitical realities. The postcolonial literary canon, therefore, grew out of an urgent need to reclaim histories, reassert indigenous voices, and critique the ideological remnants of imperialism.

In contemporary literature, postcolonial narratives continue to evolve, intersecting with themes such as globalization, migration, diaspora, and hybridity. Modern writers—often positioned between cultures—use fiction, poetry, and memoir to reflect on their fragmented identities and complex cultural allegiances. These narratives serve not just as historical reckonings but also as explorations of the fluid and dynamic nature of identity in the postcolonial world. Literature thus becomes a site of negotiation where past traumas, collective memory, and current realities coalesce to produce new cultural expressions and identity formations.

The importance of identity in postcolonial literature is deeply rooted in the psychological and cultural displacements experienced during and after colonization. Writers from Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean, and indigenous communities across the globe explore how colonial education, religion, language, and governance systems disrupted traditional notions of self and community. These disruptions are portrayed through characters who grapple with internal conflicts, alienation, and the desire for cultural restoration. Literature, in this sense, functions as a means of healing, resistance, and re-imagination for those attempting to redefine themselves after centuries of domination.

Language plays a critical role in the formation of postcolonial identity. Many contemporary writers challenge the authority of colonial languages by subverting and transforming them to reflect native sensibilities. Terms like “writing back” and “appropriation” characterize these linguistic strategies, where the colonizer’s language is used as a weapon against itself. Writers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and Salman Rushdie, among others, explore this complex relationship with language, navigating between cultural authenticity and global intelligibility. This dual engagement reveals the tensions between local identity and global participation that shape postcolonial literature.

Diaspora and migration have also significantly influenced postcolonial identity formation. The movement of people across borders—whether voluntary or forced—has led to new cultural spaces where hybrid identities emerge. Literature from diasporic writers often interrogates the notion of home, belonging, and cultural inheritance. These narratives emphasize the multiplicity of identity, showing how individuals can simultaneously belong to multiple cultural traditions and yet feel estranged from all. Such works challenge static notions of identity and contribute to a broader understanding of cultural fluidity in the modern world.

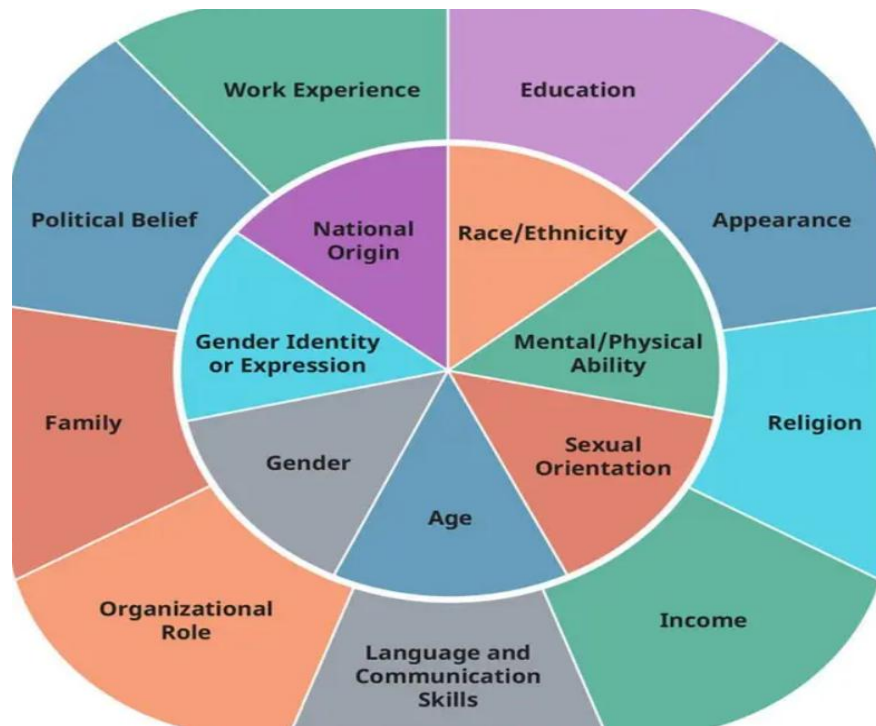
Gender is another critical dimension in postcolonial identity formation. Female writers and characters often contend with both colonial legacies and patriarchal traditions. Their narratives bring to light the intersectional nature of oppression and the unique ways in which women negotiate identity in postcolonial societies. Postcolonial feminist literature expands the discourse by foregrounding the voices of women who have historically been silenced or overlooked, allowing for a richer, more inclusive understanding of postcolonial experience.

Furthermore, contemporary postcolonial narratives frequently engage with memory, trauma, and history as tools of identity construction. Reclaiming historical truths and reinterpreting the past are crucial processes in forming a coherent postcolonial identity. Writers use narrative techniques such as non-linear storytelling, magical realism, and intertextuality to reflect the fractured yet resilient nature of identity in postcolonial contexts. These strategies allow them

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to articulate silenced histories and to challenge dominant historical narratives that continue to marginalize postcolonial voices.

The study of postcolonial narratives and identity formation in contemporary literature offers valuable insights into how individuals and societies navigate the aftershocks of colonization. It reveals the ways in which literature functions as a powerful medium for articulating resistance, reclaiming lost histories, and imagining new futures. By examining these texts, scholars can better understand the evolving nature of identity in a globalized world and the enduring influence of colonial legacies on the human psyche and cultural expression.



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Justification

Postcolonial narratives have emerged as a vital literary tool in addressing the long-standing effects of colonialism, particularly in the context of identity formation. Contemporary literature serves as a reflective space where authors from formerly colonized societies articulate their complex cultural, political, and psychological experiences. These narratives challenge the dominant Eurocentric perspectives and instead highlight indigenous voices, experiences, and histories. By doing so, they allow writers and readers alike to reconstruct identities that were historically suppressed or misrepresented under colonial rule.

The process of identity formation in postcolonial literature is deeply intertwined with themes such as displacement, hybridity, and resistance. Characters in contemporary postcolonial texts often grapple with fragmented identities, caught between the legacy of colonial influence and the resurgence of native culture. This duality reflects real-world struggles faced by individuals and communities attempting to reconcile multiple cultural affiliations. As such, literature becomes a space where these tensions are explored and negotiated, leading to more inclusive and pluralistic understandings of selfhood.

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Furthermore, contemporary postcolonial narratives often revisit historical traumas such as partition, slavery, and forced migration to assert agency and reclaim silenced stories. These retellings are not only acts of remembrance but also serve as tools for cultural preservation and resistance. They empower marginalized communities to take ownership of their histories and identities, thereby fostering a sense of pride and resilience. This is particularly significant in today's globalized world, where homogenizing forces frequently threaten local identities.

The importance of postcolonial narratives in identity formation is also evident in the linguistic choices made by authors. Many contemporary writers incorporate native dialects, oral traditions, and code-switching in their works, disrupting the linguistic dominance of the colonizer's language. This deliberate stylistic shift reclaims linguistic agency and affirms cultural identity. Literature, in this sense, becomes an act of political resistance as well as cultural affirmation, allowing for the reimagining and reaffirmation of postcolonial identities.

Postcolonial narratives in contemporary literature are not just artistic expressions but serve as powerful instruments for understanding and reconstructing identity. They offer a platform for exploring the enduring impacts of colonialism while celebrating the resilience and richness of postcolonial cultures. The significance of these narratives lies in their ability to challenge dominant discourses, foster critical self-reflection, and contribute to the ongoing process of decolonization and identity reclamation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore how postcolonial narratives contribute to the construction of cultural and national identities in contemporary literature.
2. To analyze the role of memory, history, and displacement in shaping postcolonial identity.
3. To examine the representation of hybridity and cultural conflict in selected contemporary literary texts.
4. To identify recurring themes and strategies used by postcolonial authors in articulating identity.
5. To evaluate the impact of colonial legacy on personal and collective identity formation in modern narratives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Postcolonial literature has evolved as a dynamic field that interrogates the cultural, political, and psychological aftermath of colonization. One of its central concerns is the reconstruction and negotiation of identity in the wake of imperial domination. Postcolonial narratives challenge dominant colonial discourses by offering alternative perspectives and reclaiming silenced voices. Scholars such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak have laid the theoretical groundwork for understanding how literature becomes a site of resistance and identity reformation. Contemporary literature continues to explore these themes, reflecting how identity is continuously shaped by the legacies of empire, migration, hybridity, and diasporic experiences. The concept of hybridity, introduced by Homi Bhabha, is crucial in understanding identity formation in postcolonial contexts. Hybrid identities arise from the interaction of colonizer and colonized cultures, challenging fixed notions of selfhood and nationhood. Contemporary postcolonial texts often portray characters who navigate dual or multiple cultural affiliations, negotiating spaces between tradition and modernity, homeland and hostland. This liminal positioning destabilizes binary oppositions such as East/West or self/other, allowing for more fluid and complex identities. Works by authors like Chimamanda

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Ngozi Adichie, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Zadie Smith exemplify such negotiations of identity in transnational and multicultural settings.

The role of language in postcolonial identity formation is another prominent area of scholarly focus. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, for instance, critiques the use of colonial languages in African literature, arguing for a return to indigenous languages as a form of cultural reclamation. However, many contemporary writers strategically employ colonial languages to subvert and deconstruct colonial ideologies from within. The linguistic hybridity and code-switching seen in works by Salman Rushdie or Arundhati Roy reflect the complexities of postcolonial identity, where language becomes both a tool of oppression and resistance. Such textual strategies illuminate the intricate relationship between language, power, and identity.

Memory and trauma also play pivotal roles in postcolonial narratives, shaping how individual and collective identities are constructed. Literature that engages with historical events such as slavery, partition, or genocide often explores the lingering effects of violence and displacement on identity. Toni Morrison's novels, for example, foreground the intergenerational transmission of trauma and its impact on African American identity. Similarly, postcolonial South Asian fiction frequently revisits the partition of India to interrogate notions of nationhood, belonging, and memory. These narratives do not merely recall the past but reconstruct it, offering alternative histories that challenge official versions.

Diaspora literature is another significant strand within postcolonial studies that enriches the understanding of identity formation. Writers of the diaspora often grapple with feelings of exile, nostalgia, and cultural dislocation. Yet, these conditions also allow for the creation of hybrid and dynamic identities that resist singular definitions. The diasporic subject, as depicted in works by Hanif Kureishi or Edwidge Danticat, often exists in a state of in-betweenness, fostering a unique perspective that bridges multiple cultural worlds. Such narratives emphasize mobility, transnationalism, and the continuous rearticulation of self in response to shifting contexts. Gender and identity in postcolonial literature have also received growing attention, particularly through the lens of intersectionality. Postcolonial feminist critics like Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Trinh T. Minh-ha argue that gendered experiences of colonialism and identity cannot be understood in isolation from race, class, and nation. Contemporary literature by authors such as Tsitsi Dangarembga and Buchi Emecheta explores how colonialism and patriarchy jointly shape the identities of women in postcolonial societies. These narratives provide nuanced insights into the ways in which postcolonial subjects resist or internalize multiple forms of domination.

Another emerging trend in postcolonial literary studies is the ecological or environmental dimension of identity. Theories of postcolonial ecocriticism examine how colonization not only reshaped human societies but also altered relationships with land and nature. Writers like Amitav Ghosh and Kiran Desai foreground environmental degradation and displacement as integral to postcolonial experience. In such works, identity is entwined not only with cultural and political histories but also with ecological conditions. The land itself becomes a character in narratives that interrogate belonging, memory, and displacement.

Postcolonial narratives in contemporary literature continue to offer rich explorations of identity formation across multiple dimensions—cultural, linguistic, psychological, gendered, diasporic, and ecological. These texts resist monolithic representations and highlight the multiplicity, fragmentation, and fluidity of postcolonial identities. The field remains vibrant and ever-

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evolving, responding to new global developments such as digital diasporas, climate migration, and decolonization movements. By engaging with postcolonial literature, scholars and readers alike gain deeper insight into the ongoing processes of identity construction in a post-imperial world.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in interpretive textual analysis. The goal is to explore how postcolonial narratives influence identity formation in selected contemporary literary texts. The research is guided by postcolonial theory and identity construction frameworks, employing thematic analysis to interpret characters, settings, linguistic strategies, and cultural references. This design allows for a nuanced understanding of how authors use literature to reflect, contest, and reconstruct postcolonial identities in a globalized context.

Data Collection Methods

Data consists of a purposive selection of contemporary postcolonial novels and short stories written in English from various regions formerly under colonial rule, such as South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. Texts were chosen for their thematic focus on identity, displacement, hybridity, and cultural negotiation. Supplementary materials include author interviews, literary criticism, and scholarly reviews. Data was collected through detailed close reading, annotation, and coding of recurring narrative patterns and identity markers such as language use, cultural memory, historical allusions, and power relations.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria include:

- Works published after the year 2000 to ensure contemporary relevance.
- Texts authored by writers from postcolonial societies, preferably with lived experiences of diaspora, colonization, or marginalization.
- Literary works that explicitly or implicitly address issues of identity, migration, cultural hybridity, or resistance to dominant narratives.

Exclusion criteria include:

- Non-literary texts such as autobiographies or travel writing.
- Works set entirely in pre-colonial or strictly metropolitan contexts with minimal engagement in postcolonial themes.
- Texts not originally written in English (to maintain consistency in language analysis, unless translations are officially recognized and critically acclaimed).

Ethical Consideration

As this research involves the interpretation of published literary works, there are minimal direct ethical risks. However, ethical scholarship is maintained through proper citation, acknowledgment of original authorship, and avoidance of cultural misrepresentation.

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Interpretations are critically self-reflexive and grounded in established theoretical frameworks to avoid imposing ethnocentric or ahistorical readings. Any secondary sources used are properly referenced to maintain academic integrity and transparency. Furthermore, the study acknowledges the complexity of postcolonial identities and avoids essentialist or reductive conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study of postcolonial narratives in contemporary literature reveals a strong correlation between narrative strategies and the construction of identity in postcolonial societies. Through an analysis of selected texts, it becomes evident that authors use storytelling as a means to negotiate historical trauma, displacement, and cultural hybridity. These narratives serve not only as vehicles of memory and resistance but also as frameworks through which individual and collective identities are continuously reconstructed. The literature examined highlights how characters grapple with the lingering effects of colonization and seek to reclaim agency through language, myth, and cultural symbolism. One significant finding is the emergence of hybrid identities as central to contemporary postcolonial storytelling. Writers often portray protagonists caught between colonial legacies and indigenous traditions, resulting in fragmented yet evolving identities. This hybridization reflects the ongoing negotiation between past and present, and between global and local cultural forces. The texts show that identity is not static but fluid and shaped by a dynamic interplay of historical and socio-political influences. The tension between assimilation and resistance often drives character development and plot progression.

The use of multilingualism, code-switching, and intertextual references further enriches postcolonial narratives and underscores the complexity of identity formation. These linguistic choices allow authors to assert cultural specificity and challenge the dominance of colonial languages and perspectives. Moreover, the interweaving of oral traditions and indigenous storytelling practices with Western literary forms creates a space where marginalized voices are empowered. Such stylistic features not only emphasize the authenticity of the narrative voice but also reflect the layered realities of postcolonial existence.

Themes of exile, diaspora, and migration emerge as crucial elements in the exploration of identity. Contemporary literature often portrays characters who navigate transnational spaces, negotiating belonging and alienation simultaneously. These narratives challenge conventional notions of homeland and nationality by depicting identity as relational and situated within global networks of power and culture. The recurring motif of the return—whether literal or metaphorical—highlights the desire to reconnect with roots while also acknowledging the impossibility of a pure or original identity. Finally, gender plays a pivotal role in shaping postcolonial identities, with many texts foregrounding the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. Female characters, in particular, are shown to resist both colonial and patriarchal structures, carving out new identities through acts of resistance and self-narration. The representation of gendered experiences reveals how postcolonial literature acts as a site of empowerment and contestation. In conclusion, the results affirm that contemporary postcolonial narratives serve as powerful instruments for identity formation, offering nuanced insights into the complexities of selfhood in a postcolonial world.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of postcolonial narratives in contemporary literature underscores the profound impact of historical colonization on individual and collective identity formation. These

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narratives provide a powerful medium for articulating the psychological and cultural legacies of colonialism, while also facilitating the reclamation of agency by marginalized communities. Authors across diverse postcolonial societies have utilized literature not only to chronicle the aftermath of imperial dominance but also to offer alternative histories and perspectives that foreground indigenous worldviews and experiences.

A recurring theme in the texts examined is the portrayal of hybrid identities, which emerge from the confluence of colonial influence and native cultural traditions. These hybrid identities reflect the fractured yet evolving self that characterizes postcolonial subjectivity. The protagonists often embody the struggle to reconcile disparate cultural elements, leading to identities that are multifaceted and non-linear. This hybridity resists essentialist definitions and instead embraces a fluid, adaptive conception of the self.

Linguistic experimentation is another key strategy employed by postcolonial writers to assert cultural autonomy. The incorporation of native languages, idioms, and code-switching within the narrative structure disrupts the dominance of colonial languages and reclaims linguistic agency. By blending Western literary forms with oral traditions and indigenous storytelling methods, these authors create hybrid literary forms that resist homogenization and celebrate cultural specificity.

Migration and diaspora are integral to the understanding of identity in postcolonial literature. Characters often navigate the liminal spaces between homeland and host nation, confronting issues of displacement, cultural dissonance, and alienation. These experiences are depicted not merely as disruptions but as conditions that foster new forms of belonging and identity. The concept of home becomes redefined, not as a fixed geographical space but as a dynamic site of memory, emotion, and negotiation.

Postcolonial literature also sheds light on the gendered dimensions of identity formation. Female characters frequently confront dual forms of oppression—colonial and patriarchal—and their resistance becomes central to narrative progression. These stories emphasize the intersectionality of race, gender, and class, illustrating how the postcolonial condition is experienced differently across social hierarchies. Women's voices in postcolonial texts often represent both personal and political emancipation.

Moreover, postcolonial narratives challenge monolithic national histories by presenting fragmented, pluralistic accounts of the past. Through memory, myth, and intergenerational storytelling, these narratives subvert dominant historical discourses and offer counter-narratives that validate the lived experiences of colonized peoples. The past, in these texts, is not merely a backdrop but an active force that continues to shape the present and future.

In addressing identity formation, contemporary postcolonial literature underscores the significance of cultural memory, resistance, and transformation. The characters are frequently positioned in a continuous process of self-discovery and cultural negotiation. This process reflects the broader societal efforts to redefine identity in the wake of colonialism and globalization, where the boundaries between tradition and modernity, self and other, are constantly renegotiated. Ultimately, postcolonial literature emerges as a vital arena for exploring the complexities of identity in a globalized world. It challenges reductive notions of culture and belonging, and instead, offers a vision of identity that is layered, contested, and evolving. By examining the interplay of language, history, migration, and gender, these narratives provide critical insights into how postcolonial subjects construct meaning and assert agency in the face of enduring colonial legacies.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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