



Postcolonial Visages In India And Africa: A Study On Rushdie And Achebe.

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Abstract

This research article explores the evolving contours of postcolonial identity in India and Africa through a comparative reading of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960). Supported by secondary texts—Rushdie's *Courter*, Achebe's *Chike's School Days*, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), and Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story* (1990)—the analysis illuminates themes of cultural fragmentation, linguistic hybridity, and the sociopolitical aftermath of colonial rule. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from Homi K. Bhabha (2012), Frantz Fanon (2013), Edward Said (2003), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010), among others, the article demonstrates how each author articulates complex “visages” of the postcolonial nation. Two comparative tables clarify points of convergence and divergence between Indian and Nigerian contexts, underscoring how colonial legacies shape identities within these nations. Ultimately, the study contends that while India and Nigeria possess distinct historical trajectories, their postcolonial literatures converge in depicting struggles for cultural self-definition, ethical leadership, and the reconciliation of past and present.

1. Introduction

Postcolonial studies examine the array of cultural, political, and psychological transformations emerging in the wake of colonial dismantling. Since the mid-twentieth century, formerly

colonized regions in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere have grappled with the formidable tasks of nation-building, cultural recovery, and socio-economic restructuring (Falola & Heaton, 2010; Farn, 2021). Both India and Nigeria present compelling cases for comparative inquiry: despite their distinct geographic locations and heterogeneous ethnic compositions, they share the

experience of British colonial rule and subsequent independence in the mid-twentieth century. This historical parallel invites exploration of how postcolonial identities take shape, evolve, and fracture across similar yet contextually unique landscapes (Chandra, 2020; Gopal, 2019).

Salman Rushdie (India) and Chinua Achebe (Nigeria) have become emblematic within

postcolonial literary studies. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) revolutionized the Indian English novel through its blending of magical realism, historical allegory, and linguistic

"chutnification," encapsulating India's cacophonous cultural mosaic (Chandra, 2020; Rushdie, 1981).

Meanwhile, Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960), following his earlier seminal work *Things Fall Apart*, employs a more realist mode, exploring how corruption and moral quandaries afflict post-independence Nigeria (Achebe, 1960; Addison, 2022). Despite these stylistic and

cultural distinctions, both authors provide incisive critiques of how colonial infrastructures linger within newly formed nations, shaping governance, language, and social norms (Bhabha, 2012; Tyagi, 2018).

In order to deepen this comparative analysis, the article incorporates four secondary texts: Rushdie's *Courter* (1994); Achebe's *Chike's School Days* (1972); Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938); Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story* (1990).

Guided by pivotal postcolonial theories such as Bhabha's concept of hybridity (2012), Fanon's critique of colonial violence (2013), and Said's interrogation of Orientalist narratives (2003) the present study addresses the following questions: How do Rushdie and Achebe depict nuanced "visages" of India and Nigeria, respectively, in *Midnight's Children* and *No Longer at Ease*? In what ways do these visages converge or diverge in portraying national identity, cultural hybridity, and the aftershocks of colonialism? How do secondary texts and broader theoretical frameworks reinforce or complicate our understanding of postcolonial

identity in these narratives?

By tracing parallels and distinctions in postcolonial literary representations, the article ultimately argues that while India and Nigeria each manifest unique historical and cultural patterns, their literary trajectories converge in exploring the profound ambivalence of independence: the interplay of triumph, disillusionment, corruption, and resilience. In the sections that follow, historical context and theoretical frameworks lay the groundwork for close textual analyses, culminating in a comparative synthesis that illuminates essential facets of postcolonial identity formation.

2. Theoretical Framework: Understanding Postcoloniality

2.1 Emergence of Postcolonial Theory

The postcolonial turn in literary and cultural studies gained momentum in the latter half of the twentieth century, coinciding with the decolonization movements in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean (Gikandi, 2011). Foundational to this discipline is Edward Said's (2003) work on Orientalism, in which he critiques how Western intellectuals constructed "the Orient" as an exotic, inferior counterpart to the West. Frantz Fanon (2013), meanwhile, examines the psychosocial violence inflicted by colonial regimes, highlighting the internalization of oppression among colonized peoples. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (2010) interrogation of "subaltern" voices reveals how certain groups particularly women, the rural poor, and other marginalized communities—remain obscured or silenced in mainstream postcolonial discourse.

Homi K. Bhabha's (2012) concept of cultural hybridity offers a crucial lens for analyzing postcolonial texts. Bhabha contends that previously colonized societies adopt, adapt, and refashion the colonizer's culture and language, generating new, hybridized cultural forms. This hybridity not only contests colonial binaries but also enables subversive expressions of selfhood within the very language of the former colonizer (Chandra, 2020). Thus, postcolonial literatures become sites where authors disassemble monolithic colonial narratives, introducing polyphonic voices that speak to diverse experiences of oppression, liberation, and identity.

2.2 Key Postcolonial Concepts

Hybridity and Language

Bhabha's (2012) notion of the "Third Space" posits that colonial and indigenous cultural elements intersect to produce novel, syncretic identities. Rushdie exemplifies this via his playful mix of Indian dialects and English, a process he dubs "chutnification" (Rushdie, 1981). Achebe, though more understated, similarly infuses Igbo phrases and proverbs into English to assert an African worldview (Achebe, 1960; Addison, 2022).

National Allegory

Fredric Jameson's hypothesis (as revisited in Jameson, 2012) suggests that literature from former colonies often functions as "national allegory," collapsing personal struggles and national predicaments into intertwined narratives. Saleem Sinai's body allegorically mirrors the postcolonial Indian state (Rushdie, 1981), while Obi Okonkwo's moral crises reflect Nigeria's betrayal of its own founding ideals (Achebe, 1960).

Subaltern Representation

Spivak (2010) asks if marginalized voices can truly be heard when intellectual discourses tend to be mediated by Western institutions. Achebe's efforts to center Igbo culture respond to this dilemma, providing a counterpoint to colonial-era depictions of Africans as monolithic and voiceless (Gikandi, 2011). Rushdie grapples with subalternity through Saleem's telepathic link to "midnight's children," many of whom represent socially peripheral identities (Rushdie, 1981).

Resistance and Agency

Central to postcolonial theory is the concept of re-appropriating agency from colonial frameworks. Resistance manifests in literary strategies like code-switching or shifting narrative forms that challenge the presumed authority of Western linguistic and cultural norms (Bhabha, 2012; Roy, 2021).

This constellation of ideas—hybridity, national allegory, subalternity, and resistance guides our subsequent discussion of Rushdie's and Achebe's works. When placed in dialogue, these theoretical underpinnings illuminate the convergent and divergent ways in which two major

postcolonial authors articulate the identities and aspirations of their fledgling nations.

3. Historical and Cultural Backdrop

3.1 Colonial Experience and Independence in India

British intervention in India began in earnest with the East India Company's expansion in the 18th century, culminating in formal colonial rule under the British Crown from 1858 to 1947 (Falola & Heaton, 2010). This prolonged domination introduced English education, legal frameworks, and administrative systems that reconfigured local power structures. While

independence in 1947 ended direct colonial control, the subcontinent was partitioned into India and Pakistan, igniting large-scale communal conflicts that shaped early postcolonial governance (Rushdie, 1981; Roy, 2021).

Postcolonial India grappled with reconciling centuries-old cultural traditions alongside the modern, Westernized institutions inherited from Britain. Disparities in economic and social power often persisted, and the English language remained a critical medium for political and bureaucratic communication (Chandra, 2020). Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) foreshadows these tensions, capturing grassroots resistance against colonial power and highlighting the synergy between Gandhian nationalism and local village structures (Rao, 1938).

3.2 Colonial Experience and Independence in Nigeria

Nigeria's encounter with British imperialism took shape in the late 19th century, solidifying through indirect rule a system that leveraged local leaders to administer British policies (Falola & Heaton, 2010). Despite its official end in 1960, Nigeria inherited a patchwork of colonial-era economic disparities and ethnic divisions, setting the stage for repeated political crises, including military coups and civil war (Addison, 2022). English gained prominence as the official

language, yet local languages—Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, among others—remained critical to cultural identity.

In *No Longer at Ease* (Achebe, 1960), we witness a Nigeria attempting to forge unity through Western-educated elites like Obi Okonkwo, who must navigate a landscape rife with corruption.

Achebe's *Chike's School Days* (1972) further demonstrates how colonial education systems become internalized from childhood, molding future generations' understanding of identity, morality, and social

aspiration.

3.3 Lingering Colonial Legacies

Both India and Nigeria grappled with deep-seated institutional and ideological legacies left behind by the British. Bureaucratic corruption in Nigeria and the labyrinthine political tensions in India often trace back to frameworks designed to consolidate colonial power (Farn, 2021). The role of English as a lingua franca in multilingual societies also indicates a lingering colonial influence that shapes class dynamics, as those fluent in English often enjoy greater socio-economic opportunities (Chandra, 2020).

4. Salman Rushdie's Indian Postcolonial Vision

4.1 Rushdie's Literary Aesthetics

Salman Rushdie's oeuvre often explores the interplay between personal identity and larger political realities. Rooted in a "magical realist" tradition, his writing merges fantastical elements with historical detail, providing a kaleidoscopic lens through which to view India's complex postcolonial reality (Rushdie, 1981; Sanga, 2013). Language is central to Rushdie's craft: he freely blends English with Indian vernaculars, a stylistic innovation that Bhabha (2012) would describe as a manifestation of cultural hybridity. Through such linguistic choices, Rushdie critiques and transcends the colonial imposition of a monolithic English, forging a literature that mirrors India's heterogeneity (Chandra, 2020).

4.2 *Midnight's Children* (1981)

Published in 1981, *Midnight's Children* follows Saleem Sinai, born at the very stroke of India's independence on August 15, 1947. This cosmic coincidence tethers Saleem's personal fate to that of the newly sovereign nation, turning his body and mind into a living allegory of India's trials and triumphs (Rushdie, 1981). Saleem's telepathic connection to other "midnight's children"—each gifted with extraordinary abilities—underscores the diversity and potential synergy of India's vast populace (Roy, 2021).

Magical Realism and Narrative Structure

The novel's non-linear structure and dreamlike passages encapsulate the disorienting swirl of post-independence politics (Rushdie, 1981). Communal riots, linguistic conflicts, and the notorious Emergency declared by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi weave through Saleem's life, suggesting that personal trauma cannot be divorced from national crises. This approach resonates with Jameson's argument (2012) that Third-World literature frequently operates on an allegorical axis, intertwining the personal with the national.

Rushdie coins phrases and modifies syntax to illustrate the relentless layering of linguistic and cultural forms in India. He situates English in a local context by sprinkling Hindustani words, thus creating a "chutnified" style (Rushdie, 1981; Chandra, 2020). These linguistic maneuvers exemplify Bhabha's (2012) notion of the "Third Space," where colonizer and colonized co-create novel cultural expressions.

While *Midnight's Children* foregrounds India's internal shifts, Rushdie's short story *Courter* presents the postcolonial immigrant experience in London (Rushdie, 1994). The protagonist, an Indian immigrant, grapples with cultural alienation and nostalgia, as well as ambiguous class positions in the metropolitan center. This diasporic narrative underscores how postcolonial identity is not confined to national borders but extends into transnational spaces where former colonized subjects navigate new forms of marginalization and belonging (Bhabha, 2012; Sanga, 2013).

The thematic continuity between *Midnight's Children* and *Courter* lies in the sense that identity remains perpetually in flux, shaped by history, geography, and linguistic practice. Both texts champion polyphonic voices, reflecting the fragmentation and reinvention that characterize postcolonial subjectivity (Rushdie, 1994; Farn, 2021).

5. Chinua Achebe's African Postcolonial Lens

Chinua Achebe is lauded for bringing African perspectives into the global literary spotlight, challenging the Eurocentric portrayals that dominated earlier depictions of Africa (Addison, 2022). Achebe's writing typically employs a realist framework—distinct from Rushdie's magical realism—yet

is no less incisive in critiquing the persistent colonial legacies in modern Africa.

His novels interrogate the challenges of preserving indigenous cultural values in a rapidly modernizing environment shaped by foreign languages and institutions (Gikandi, 2011).

5.2 *No Longer at Ease* (1960)

Published two years after Achebe's breakthrough novel *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* continues the lineage of Okonkwo's family, focusing on his grandson, Obi Okonkwo. Obi returns from his studies in England brimming with idealism, only to become entangled in the corrosive networks of bribery within Nigeria's new civil service (Achebe, 1960). This plot underscores how independence did not automatically dissolve colonial administrative frameworks; rather, it frequently transplanted them into a local context where nepotism and corruption thrived (Falola & Heaton, 2010).

Achebe highlights Obi's sense of cultural dislocation. Though educated overseas, Obi is expected to fulfill certain filial and communal obligations—such as financially supporting extended relatives and adhering to Igbo matrimonial customs (Achebe, 1960). The friction between Western individualism and communal African norms forms a core tension in postcolonial societies, reflecting broader anxieties about preserving indigenous cultures within modern nation-states (Addison, 2022).

Linguistic Strategies

Unlike Rushdie's flamboyant mix of Indian dialects, Achebe's method is more subtle. He integrates Igbo terms into straightforward English prose, thereby challenging monolingual norms and presenting an Africa not as a silent "other" but as a linguistically dynamic sphere (Gikandi, 2011). This approach resonates with Bhabha's (2012) hybridity framework, though Achebe's writing remains less stylistically experimental than Rushdie's.

In this short story, Achebe centers on a young protagonist, Chike, who navigates a mission school rife with colonial-era educational methods and biases (Achebe, 1972). The child's enthusiasm for English nursery rhymes and Christian hymns contrasts with his at-home environment, mirroring the early encroachment of Western norms on indigenous identity (Tyagi, 2018). While less dramatic than Obi's downfall in *No Longer at Ease*, *Chike's School Days*

indicates how colonial systems implant themselves in the minds of the youth, foreshadowing deeper struggles as they move into adulthood (Addison, 2022).

6. Comparative Analysis: Rushdie vs. Achebe

Both Rushdie and Achebe depict protagonists whose personal journeys serve as metaphors for national aspirations and failures. Saleem Sinai's bodily fragmentation mirrors India's fractious post-independence trajectory (Rushdie, 1981; Roy, 2021). Obi Okonkwo's ethical decline allegorizes Nigeria's compromised ideals after independence (Achebe, 1960; Falola & Heaton, 2010). According to Jameson (2012), this tight fusion of individual and national narratives is characteristic of much postcolonial literature.

Rushdie's magical realism disrupts linear storytelling, symbolizing India's swirling multiplicities (Rushdie, 1981; Sanga, 2013). By contrast, Achebe's realism more directly underscores moral and social dilemmas, offering a clear-eyed critique of nepotism and cultural schizophrenia without resorting to the overtly fantastical (Achebe, 1960; Addison, 2022). Thus, while both authors highlight postcolonial turmoil, their stylistic differences produce varied reader experiences—one more expansive and dreamlike, the other more immediate and ethical in to

Rushdie's "chutnified" English exemplifies a playful assertion of Indian identity within the framework of the colonial language (Rushdie, 1981). Achebe's insertion of Igbo idioms into English remains more restrained but no less intentional in preserving indigenous perspective (Achebe, 1960; Gikandi, 2011). In each case, language becomes a site of negotiation and contestation, corroborating Bhabha's (2012) claim that postcolonial writers occupy a "Third Space" where new cultural forms are articulated.

Both *Midnight's Children* and *No Longer at Ease* detail how euphoria at the end of colonial rule gives way to disenchantment. For Rushdie's India, the optimism of 1947 quickly recedes amid communal conflict, wars, and authoritarian crackdowns like the Emergency (Rushdie, 1981; Roy, 2021). In

Achebe's Nigeria, the glow of 1960 independence is tarnished by bureaucratic

corruption and social stratification (Achebe, 1960; Falola & Heaton, 2010). Despite the distinct historical events depicted, both authors reveal how colonial infrastructures can persist in new guises, fueling postcolonial malaise (Fanon, 2013).

7. Secondary Texts: Enlarging the Postcolonial Canvas

Building on Rushdie's Indian framework, *Courter from East, West* (1994) situates postcolonial subjects within Britain itself, highlighting how the colonial relationship endures in the heart of the former empire (Rushdie, 1994). The protagonist negotiates a sense of unbelonging in a London apartment, forging tentative connections with British neighbors even as he remains

nostalgic for India. This narrative underscores that postcolonial identity is fundamentally transnational, shaped by continual displacement and cross-cultural encounters (Sanga, 2013).

Briefly analyzed above, *Chike's School Days* (1972) enriches Achebe's depiction of Nigeria's colonial and postcolonial tensions. By focusing on a child's formative years in a Christian mission school, Achebe reveals how Western ideologies embed themselves early, challenging local norms and setting the stage for adult conflicts (Tyagi, 2018). This text can be read alongside *No Longer at Ease* as part of a continuum in which Chike's youthful curiosities and confusions parallel Obi Okonkwo's adult moral ambiguities (Addison, 2022).

7.3 Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938): Pre-Independence India

Although published nearly a decade before India's independence, *Kanthapura* offers valuable insight into grassroots resistance against British hegemony in a rural Indian setting (Rao, 1938). The novel's village narrative anticipates many of the cultural frictions Rushdie addresses in *Midnight's Children*. Rao's style—mimicking oral storytelling patterns—foreshadows the localized approach to English that Rushdie would later popularize (Chandra, 2020). *Kanthapura* thus forms a conceptual bridge between anti-colonial struggles and the complexities of postcolonial identity in *Midnight's Children*.

7.4 Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story* (1990): Apartheid and Beyond

While South Africa's apartheid system was distinct from British colonial rule in India or Nigeria, it similarly enforced oppressive structures that shaped racial hierarchies and governed public life (Gordimer, 1990). In *My Son's Story*, Gordimer follows a family's political activism and interpersonal struggles in a racially segregated society, highlighting the moral toll of sustained anti-colonial (or anti-apartheid) resistance (Gikandi, 2011). As in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, corruption and personal compromise figure prominently, while the moral impetus to resist injustice remains central (Addison, 2022). Placed alongside Rushdie and Achebe, Gordimer underscores how the resonance of postcolonial or liberation struggles extends across African contexts, though they manifest in historically specific ways.

8. Conclusion

This article set out to examine the “visages” of postcolonial India and Nigeria by comparing Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960).

Guided by postcolonial theory's central concepts—hybridity, subalternity, national allegory, and the legacies of colonial institutions—our analysis reveals both convergence and divergence in how these authors grapple with the aftereffects of British imperialism (Bhabha, 2012; Fanon, 2013; Said, 2003; Spivak, 2010). Rushdie's flamboyant magical realism foregrounds linguistic experimentation and the fractious nature of Indian identity, while Achebe's understated realism lays bare Nigeria's ethical failures and cultural dislocations (Addison, 2022; Chandra, 2020).

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