



Hybrid Identity and Cultural Negotiation: A Bhabhian Analysis of Of White Hairs and Cricket by Rohinton Mistry

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Article History

Received
12-02-2025

Accepted
25-03-2025

Published
28-03-2025

Abstract & Indexing

 WORLD of JOURNALS

 Crossref doi



ACADEMIA



Abstract

Colonial impacts on native identity have often been portrayed under the guise of civilization and humanization, suggesting an elevation of indigenous societies through foreign intervention. However, when viewed through a postcolonial critical lens, these interventions are revealed as strategic efforts to manipulate and reshape long-standing cultural realities for the benefit of colonial powers. Rather than genuine attempts at upliftment, these actions often functioned as tools of control, systematically undermining native traditions and replacing them with colonial ideologies. This study aims to explore the cultural consequences of British colonialism on Indian identity and tradition, as represented in Rohinton Mistry's short story *Of White Hairs and Cricket*. Through qualitative textual analysis, the research examines how Mistry employs literary techniques such as symbolism and narrative structure to portray the complexities of hybrid identity and cultural negotiation. The protagonist's internal struggle and his interactions with family reflect the lingering effects of colonial rule, particularly the tension between traditional Indian values and the pervasive influence of British culture. The narrative illustrates how colonial domination extended beyond political control into the personal and cultural domains of life, leaving a lasting impact on identity formation. Mistry subtly exposes how colonial ideologies became ingrained within everyday experiences, shaping the perceptions, aspirations, and behaviors of postcolonial subjects. Ultimately, the story offers a nuanced portrayal of cultural hybridity, revealing the deep and often conflicted negotiation between the colonial past and indigenous identity. It highlights the resilience of native culture while acknowledging the profound and persistent influence of colonialism.

Keywords:

Postcolonialism, Colonial Impact, Native Identity, Cultural Hybridity, British Colonialism, *Of White Hairs and Cricket*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The world once lingered with the burden of colonialism and most of the nations experienced this tendency before the mid-term of the twentieth century. The colonial period altered the political structure of the world at one end and shaped the sociocultural nature of multiple nations on the other. In the post-global wars period, most of the nations were decolonized, and for the first time breathed under the shadow of independence. However, though the colonized nations gained freedom from imperial powers, yet never freed themselves from the influences of colonial culture once they embraced. Therefore, the long existence of colonial mindset and culture in the decolonized region remained timeless symbols of colonial rule.

The emergence of postcolonial literature provided a room to trace the colonial footprints in those regions where colonists once ruled. Literature is more than a process of representation in colonial terms, it seeks, examines and critiques policies which are identical to imperial notions. This is a set of critical approaches, ideas and critical methodologies that analyze colonial practices and structures. It refers to a mode of reading, intellectual work, political analysis and cultural resistance used by formerly colonized nations (Nayar, 2015). In fact, postcolonial literature provides a deeper level of understanding of the hidden traces of former colonists in a decolonized region. It may not persuade indigenous people to decolonize themselves intellectually but remind them of influences they hold for time being. Kishan (2021) mentions, postcolonialism tries to unmask or disclose the operation and political and economical ideologies during the period of colonization.

Homi K. Bhabha is one of those theorists, in postcolonial study, who put sensitive observations over literature in terms of colonial dominance. In 'The location of culture (1994)' he emphasizes cultural interaction between colonists and colonized and hybrid identity of indigenous people. The theory of Homi K. Bhabha is based on the existence of such space where cultural borders open to each other, and creation of a new hybrid culture that combines their features and atones their differences (Milostivaya et al., 2017). Hence, Bhabha changed the traditional binary viewpoint of postcolonial literature in-between colonist and colonized and developed complex and dynamic approaches to understand cultural interaction.

Of White Hairs and Cricket is a postcolonial short story by Rohinton Mistry, published in 1987. The story manifests an Indian middle-class family in post-independence India. It reflects subsistence of colonial mindset in Indian society. To shed light on narrative structure in postcolonial viewpoint, the theory of Bhabha and Cleanth Brooks' textual analysis method provides a deeper understanding of the text.

The study aims to explore hybrid postcolonial identity through narrative structure and symbolism by applying Bhabha's postcolonial theory. It uses textual analysis method developed by Cleanth Brooks. This method emphasizes text and its separate reality from authorial and historical background, focusing on narrative, symbol and imagery to hold a deep textual understanding. Moreover, the study provides a space for combining analysis of *Of White Hairs and Cricket* applying postcolonial lens with close analysis of the text. It explores how Indian families, culture and identity became hybrid even long after the decolonization. Therefore, Brooks' method of textual analysis is used to observe the story closely in context to postcolonialism.

1.1. Problem Statement

Postcolonial literature often exposes the subtle interaction between colonial legacy and native identity. Rohinton Mistry's *Of White Hairs and Cricket* presents a complex yet profound investigation of British colonial impacts pursuing to alter cultural practices, language, and identity in post-independence India. This hybridity is apparent in the characterization, where characters grasp colonial elements such as cricket, the English language, and modern foods,

often at the expense of long-standing customs symbolized through characters like Mammaji. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity and Third Space and ambivalence, the current study attempts to interpret how cultural negotiation and mimicry results in a hybrid identity. By using Alan McKee's method of textual analysis, the research explores how symbols, language, and narrative elements highlight identity transformations in the postcolonial Indian context.

1.2. Research Objectives

1.2.1. To examine how *Of White Hairs and Cricket* represents hybrid identity through cultural symbols such as cricket, language, and food.

1.2.2 To analyze how the narrative demonstrates postcolonial mimicry and cultural negotiation in context to Homi Bhabha's theoretical framework.

1.3. Research Questions

1. 3.1. How does *Of White hairs and Cricket* reflect hybrid identity through characters' involvement with both colonial British and Indian cultural elements?

1.3.2. How does the narrative display postcolonial mimicry and cultural transformation justify Bhabha's postcolonial framework?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Postcolonial literature served to reflect colonial subsistence in particular regions where colonists ruled once. Sawant (2012) mentions the concept of post-colonialism deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. Though colonists left the occupied lands, but their dominance over culture and identity remained for long. Hamadi mentions:

A powerful colonizer has imposed a language and a culture, whereas cultures, histories, values, and languages of the Oriental peoples have been ignored and even distorted by the colonialists in their pursuit of dominating these peoples and exploiting their wealth in the name of enlightening, civilizing, and even humanizing them (Hamadi,2014).

Disregarding the economic exploitation and shaping political structure, colonists had always grim impacts on cultural and social life of the indigenous masses. In guise of advancement and civilization they imposed their identity and culture over occupied land. "The indigenous populations of the nations that colonise are often subjected to attempts by colonial powers to impose their own languages and traditions on them" (Shirke et al, 2024).

Postcolonial studies investigate how colonial histories continue to influence societies, cultures, and identities in the post-independence era. Leela Gandhi (1998) emphasizes postcolonialism as both a critical and political engagement with colonial legacies, examining how power, knowledge, and representation intertwine. Robert Young (2003) explores the ideological structures that sustain imperialism, emphasizing how resistance and cultural reappropriation emerge through literature and theory. Ania Loomba (2015) offers a comprehensive view of how postcolonialism engages with questions of race, gender, and nationalism, arguing that identity is shaped through complex historical processes of domination and negotiation.

Cultural hybridity and identity in postcolonial contexts reflect ongoing negotiations between tradition and modernity. Ien Ang (2001) discusses the multiplicity of identity in diasporic contexts, where individuals live between cultures, navigating tensions of belonging and exclusion. Avtar Brah (1996) introduces the concept of "diaspora space," highlighting how hybrid identities are formed at the intersections of displacement, memory, and cultural transmission. Nikos Papastergiadis (2000) also explores how globalization fosters hybrid cultural forms, stressing creativity rather than conflict. Françoise Lionnet and Shumei Shih (2005) advocate for "minor transnationalism" as a framework for understanding cultural exchange beyond dominant colonial paradigms. These perspectives together underscore how hybridity challenges static notions of identity and open space for postcolonial cultural reinvention.

Rohinton Mistry's short fiction *Of White Hairs and Cricket*, primarily published in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), exploring themes of identity, colonial legacy, generational conflict, and cultural dislocation. Set in a Parsi community in Mumbai, the story subtly sketches the lived experience of postcolonial subjects navigating the remnants of British colonialism. The narrator's commentary displays a hybrid cultural identity in a postcolonial context. Mistry's narrative provides a localized but significant depiction of postcolonial identity clash. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) note, postcolonial literature frequently engages with the "problematic of identity" and the struggle to reconcile traditional values with imposed colonial legacies.

Scholars such as Bhabha (1994) emphasize the concept of *ambivalence* in postcolonial discourse, wherein colonized subject mimic colonial behaviors but never fully adopt them. This ambivalence is mirrored in the narrator's conflicting feelings toward his father: he both admires and resents him, reflecting the broader ambivalence toward inherited cultural and colonial legacies. The family's cricket ritual, itself a colonial sport, becomes a site of cultural tension where colonial heritage is domesticated and reinterpreted through local, familial contexts.

Furthermore, Mistry's portrayal of domestic spaces as microcosms of colonial influence aligns with Spivak's (1988) critique of how the private and public domains are intricately woven in postcolonial societies. The narrator's home becomes a contested space, where traditional roles are both upheld and questioned. As the boy moves toward adolescence, his shifting perspectives also signify the emergence of a new, hybridized identity, a concept central to postcolonial theory.

Joel Baetz mentions (2009) popular as this historical narrative is, it is not the version that turns up in *Firozsha Baag*. For sure, Mistry's stories recognize cricket's colonial history, but they refuse to acknowledge the sport as an opportunity for resistance. Cricket is neither a forum in which mimicry gives rise to a meaningful ambivalence (as Homi Bhabha might understand the game) or an opportunity for subaltern groups to challenge "the domination imposed on them" (as Michael Messner puts it) (13). Indeed, no mimicry in *Firozsha Baag* disturbs colonial authority, no appropriation overwrites or obscures imperial origins. However, When the story is read through **Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity**, the text emerges as a subtle critique of cultural in-betweenness, where characters inhabit a "third space" marked by ambivalence and contradiction (Bhabha, 1994).

Mistry's utilization of cricket, a colonial sport now established into Indian identity, emphasizes the thought of **cultural clash**. Cricket serves as a site of colonial residue that the narrator both embraces and resents. This dynamic supports Bhabha's idea of the **unhomely** where familiar spaces like the home or a sport field feel strange and politically charged due to historical forces (Bhabha, 1994). The protagonist's discomfort within his family home parallels his uncertain position in a hybrid culture where traditional Parsi values and postcolonial Indian reality collide.

Critical responses to Mistry's work support this interpretation. Scholars like Chariandy (2005) and Nayar (2008) note that diasporic and postcolonial writers often frame ordinary domestic scenes as sites of ideological negotiation. The narrator's home, seemingly apolitical, becomes a stage for postcolonial identity struggles, mirroring broader issues of cultural dislocation and generational change.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses textual analysis as a research method to analyze the text of *of white Hairs and Cricket* to explore cultural collide and hybrid identity in the story. Alan McKee's textual analysis is a qualitative research technique used to analyze and comprehend the meaning creation in texts (literature, or cultural products). According to McKee, texts are mere signs of ideologies and cultural values beyond the superficial structure. To him, text should be

analyzed contextually in which historical, cultural and social realities subsist. He is of the belief **Open-ended interpretation** encourages investigate multiple meanings.

Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial idea of hybridity, the mixing of cultures can be explored through McKee's model by observing how characters, narratives, or symbols in a text reflect hybrid identities. Bhabha evaluates how colonial mindset prevails in postcolonial societies. McKee's method allows scholars to interpret how texts either produce or resist these ideologies through narrative strategies, character portrayals, and symbolism. Bhabha's **Third Space** represents a position of negotiation between cultures where new identities appear. McKee's textual analysis can help identify where texts create or depict such spaces of cultural negotiation.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

Homi K. Bhabha's Postcolonial Theory

This study is placed in **Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory**, which provides observation tools for investigating cultural hybridity, identity, and resistance within postcolonial literature. Bhabha's key concepts **hybridity**, **mimicry**, **ambivalence**, and the **Third Space** challenge static views of identity and focuses on the complexity of cultural clash in postcolonial contexts. He claims that colonial and postcolonial people are formed through **in-between** spaces, where identities are not determined but continuously formed through interaction and resistance (Bhabha, 1994).

Bhabha's philosophy of **hybridity** deals with the cultural mingling that interrupts colonial dominance and creates new forms of identity. This process does not produce a harmonious blending but instead explores clash and chaos that undermine dominant narratives. As Young (1995) mentions, hybridity in Bhabha's concept "poses an antagonistic challenge to the purity of colonial discourse," unveiling the instability of cultural power structure. Likewise, Rutherford (1990) stresses that Bhabha's **Third Space** prefers a critical site for the outgrowth of **alternative narratives**, where marginalized voices can articulate resistance and transformation.

By using Bhabha's theoretical lens, this study explores how *Of White Hairs and Cricket* become in position of ideological conflict, where characters and narratives indicate the fluid, contested nature of identity in postcolonial settings. The framework thus enables a nuanced understanding of how **cultural difference**, **hybrid Identity**, and **reconstruction of identity** operate in the shadow of colonial legacies.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Bhabha discusses hybrid identity as a cultural clash between colonists and colonized. He was of the belief that dominant powers, such as colonists hold a cultural dominance over the indigenous. In his Third Space, he emphasizes that the blending of different cultures creates a hybrid identity among the masses. Considering the words of Bhabha, Mistry's exploration of the Indian culture intertwined with English, creates a sense of mixed identity.

4.1. Colonial Echoes in Cricket: A Hybrid Identity

Before all, the story symbolizes the cricket match as a major concerned point of the characters that develops the storyline at one hand. While on the other hand, it is a cultural sign that Indians adapted from the colonists. Cricket continued to manifest British cultural dominance over its former colonies, whereas Indian culture is no exception.

The phrase "cricket on Sunday mornings became a regular event for the boys" powerfully explores the idea that indigenous Indians embraced English culture in India. Cricket daily is more than just a game; it is a sign of habit and way of life. The expression evokes a sense of identity related to cricket and British civilization, underscoring the Indians profound attachment to this. Even though cricket is taken as a prominent activity in their life, who engaged with it in depth. The terminologies narrator put in use, "*he taught us the leg break and off break*" justify their broader engagement with this colonial game.

Indians in the story, reflects Bhabha's concept of mimicry, in which colonized attempt to mimic colonial elements and culture, infusing them with their own meanings. Identically, here cricket is not just a colonial element and adapting it as an influence but reflection of cultural negotiation what inevitably formed hybrid identity.

4.2. Mammaji's Food and Cultural Negotiations

Alan McKee in his model of textual analysis emphasizes that culture is a site of struggle where meanings are negotiated rather than imposed. He emphasizes active participation of the people in cultural concern and rejects the idea that people are passive consumers of culture. Applying this concept on the story, Mammaji's food does not only make a traditional sense, but its signification is in flux. The narrator does not reject it straight forwardly, but his uninterested frame of mind reflects the way cultural artifacts (like food) can lose their importance and be explained in a new context. He mentions:

"I promised my Mummy and Daddy never again to eat what Mammaji's offered and confessed all my past sins." Food, historically considered, is a cultural symbol and social values any human community own. It represents national and communal taste along with regional practices a nation owns. In other words, it is a major substance of the identity a nation lives with. Here in the story, Mammaji's resistance with modern food and maintaining an appetite for traditional food showcases the cultural clash. And the narrator is characterized by grandmother's traditional world and his personal desire to embrace modern or westernized one. He lingers in-between Indian cultural heritage and British colonial influence. Thus, clash of both different identity and cultural reality put the narrator in hybrid condition where he finds himself in the third space of Bhabha neither a pure Indian nor a British.

4.3. Language and Education: Colonial Mimicry

According to McKee, identity is a system of signs which can be constructed through meaning. On the other hand, Bhabha's postcolonial perspective deals with the following identity transformation or negotiation in the same way but reflects the attitude of mimicry. He emphasizes that colonized always attempts to mimic the colonial way to justify its advancement and civilization.

In the story, the narrator despite belonging to a Parsi family and background speaks English fluently: "it was a ritual, the plucking of white hairs. I had been performing it for years". following the McKee's model, language should be considered as a text of identity. So therefore, the narrator with the fluent English language demonstrates a sense of constructed identity. He is characterized as someone with a Parsi backdrop aligning with Western values. Not only the language that matters shaping his identity, but his deep Indian experience makes contradiction while constructing a dual identity.

This seems a prominent example of mimicry of colonists which Bhabha stress on discussing how colonized transform and construct their ways of life to balance with the dominant culture.

4.5. Blending traditional values with modern fashion

Mistry explores Indian rich civilization blending with English popular culture. In fact, the colonial period was not only geopolitical domination over the countries, but a mere cultural adaptation of the West into dependent lands. Therefore, hybrid identity and colonial mimicry like terms emerged in the postcolonial study. Here in the storyline, Mammaji's characterization metaphorically reflects the traditional Indian values, who not only represents Indian cultural food but also beliefs to live by. Although, English popular culture comes to intervene and create a sense of chaos between both civilization in the story. '*Sunday dawns and he makes the child do that duleendar thing again. It will only bring bad luck* (Mistry, 1987 pg. 338).

Historically, after Greek civilization, India preserves a major multicultural reality and beliefs. Therefore, resisting against traditions in India cannot go without notice. Only in the post-independence era, owing to cultural domination colonial mindset contributes in this regard

to devalue indigenous beliefs no matter how long they practised and believed on them. 'Plucking out hair as if it was a slaughtered chicken. An ill-omened thing. I'm warning you, Sunday after Sunday, but no one listens' (Mistry, 1978, pg. 338).

The Mammaji is a traditional cultural metaphor in the story who is neglected by the characters while embracing the English popular culture of looking young and smart. This act shows how colonized pushed back their own identity and cultural reality to construct a hybrid one.

5. Conclusion

Thus, McKee's analysis provides a pathway to analyze the symbol, signs and narrative techniques to understand a text. Applying McKee's model, considering Bhabha's postcolonial lens, the story showcases how an Indian family transforms its cultural identity adapting a new and different identity in post-independence India. McKee's analysis focuses on metaphor symbol in order to delve deep understanding of the story as a postcolonial literature. Symbol like: Cricket, cultural food along with using Mammaji as a cultural metaphor of belief and changing the characters' attitude toward them, construct a hybrid identity in the postcolonial India.

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