

Displacement and Identity in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* and *Way to Go*: A Contemporary Discourse

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Abstract

The themes of identity and displacement in Upamanyu Chatterjee's novels *Way to Go* (2006) and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000) are critically examined in this paper, which provides a thorough examination of how these works speak to current issues of postcolonial identity in the context of an increasingly globalizing India. Frequently set in urban, post-independence India, Chatterjee's protagonists represent an existential crisis as they are torn between the demands of neoliberal capitalism, the complexity of modernity, and the remnants of colonialism. In the *Mammaries of the Welfare State*, Chatterjee criticizes the welfare state and its people's disenchantment with a system that promises care but frequently fosters isolation through satire and dark humour. The protagonist's profound psychological and bodily experience of displacement reflects larger socioeconomic fractures. The protagonist of *Way to Go* similarly examines questions of identity and alienation as she negotiates the gap between conventional family structures and the quickly changing metropolitan landscape. Chatterjee illustrates how modernity has a destabilizing influence on both individual and collective

identities, exposing a generation's struggle to understand their position in a society that is becoming more divided and globalized. This essay contends that Chatterjee's books illustrate how psychological and physical displacement constitute a crucial component of the contemporary Indian experience, thereby engaging with current discourses of postcolonial identity. Through his subtle, sarcastic perspective, Chatterjee examines the conflict between personal preferences, governmental institutions, and broader social factors that influence modern identity.

Keywords: Displacement, Identity, Postcolonialism, Urban Alienation, Globalization, neoliberal capitalism, sarcastic

Introduction

In the context of postcolonial literature, the relationship between identity and displacement has emerged as a crucial lens for examining current global narratives, especially in Upamanyu Chatterjee's writings. The conversation about identity has grown more complex and contradictory as India moves out of the shadows of its colonial past and into the complexity of modernity. Chatterjee explores the existential, cultural, and psychological crises of his characters in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000) and *Way to Go* (2006) as they struggle with the conflict between the demands of neoliberal capitalism and the aspirations of the postcolonial state. These pieces highlight the revolutionary challenges facing modern Indian culture and examine how personal identity is formed and reformed within the framework of urbanization, globalization, and the remnants of coloniality. Global economic systems, national ideologies, colonial histories, and other socioeconomic influences are reflected in identity, which is not just an individual construct in the postcolonial setting. The hybridized nature of postcolonial identities is emphasized by theorist Homi K. Bhabha (1994). This idea is closely related to Chatterjee's writings, since the protagonists' sense of self is frequently trapped in a state of flux between traditional values and the demands of modernization. Chatterjee emphasizes the intricate relationship between an individual's identity and the social, political, and economic factors that contribute to a feeling of displacement while simultaneously criticizing the workings of neoliberal capitalism and the welfare state. Chatterjee parodies the Indian welfare state's unfulfilled promises in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* by contrasting its grandiose aspirations of protection and care with the obvious

disillusionment and estrangement experienced by common people. Like many of Chatterjee's characters, the protagonist of this book undergoes a profound psychological and physical upheaval. A deep existential questioning of identity results from the feeling that the state, which was formerly seen as the defender of post-independence hope, has betrayed people. According to critic Arundhati Roy (2002), Chatterjee's use of satire and black humour highlights the paradoxes present in the postcolonial state, where the realities of systematic inequality and bureaucratic in reality the female protagonist in *Way to Go*, who negotiates the conflict between the conventional family structures and the quickly shifting social and cultural dynamics of urban India, similarly examines concerns of alienation and personal identity. As societal changes brought about by global capitalism upend social and familial expectations, Chatterjee paints a picture of a generation torn between the "old" and the "new" in this book. The protagonist's experience is representative of what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996) refers to as "disjuncture's" in modernity, where traditional values and the forces of globalization are at odds more and more, resulting in a sense of fragmentation and rootlessness.

The primary protagonists in Chatterjee's novels are characterized by their feeling of estrangement from both their immediate environment and their cultural and historical heritage. Their displacement extends to the psychological and emotional sphere in addition to bodily movement. David Harvey (2005) contends that the dynamics of neoliberal capitalism, which worsen socioeconomic inequality and undermine social safety nets, are to blame for this displacement. The contradictions of globalization—how widespread poverty, alienation, and social disintegration combine with economic progress and development—are frequently faced by the protagonists of Chatterjee's works. Chatterjee's writings demonstrate how displacement is a psychological and physical state that is closely related to what it's like to live in a postcolonial, globalized world. Identity is ambiguous, shattered, and disputed in the metropolitan settings that Chatterjee's characters live in. The process of colonialism and its aftermath have a lasting effect on people's psyches, affecting how they perceive themselves and their connection with the state, as Edward Said (1978) claims in *Orientalism*. Within the framework of Chatterjee's books, the state is portrayed as a symbol of oppression and protection, providing a sense of security while also encouraging alienation. In the end, this essay makes the case that Chatterjee's investigation of identity and relocation offers a sophisticated perspective on the modern Indian experience. His writings provide a

comprehensive criticism of the factors influencing contemporary Indian identity by fusing the political and the personal, the little and the large. We are reminded by Chatterjee's cynicism and black humour that identity is a continuous negotiation between the individual and the more significant socio-political forces at work rather than a fixed or solitary concept. Identity is becoming more and more a result of displacement in the globalized world as people are tugged in different directions by the forces of global capitalism, technology, and tradition. The intricacies of these situations are not exclusive to India; they have universal resonance. As many postcolonial and developing nations face similar struggles in the wake of globalization and neoliberal reforms.

Displacement and Identity in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* and *Way to Go*

Upamanyu Chatterjee skilfully combines the themes of identity and displacement in his novels *Way to Go* (2006) and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000), illustrating the deep existential struggles his protagonists encounter while negotiating the intricacies of postcolonial India in the face of swift globalization. Chatterjee's analysis of the welfare state, neoliberal capitalism, and the lingering effects of colonialism shows how these factors undermine personal identities, especially in post-independence India's cities. By focusing on the psychological and emotional consequences of displacement, Chatterjee engages with broader debates about the destabilizing influence of modernity and globalization on personal and collective selfhood

Displacement as a Psychological Condition: *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*

Chatterjee depicts displacement in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* as a profound psychological state in addition to a bodily one. The main character, an anonymous middle-class man who lives in Delhi after independence, represents a generation that has grown weary of the welfare state's promises. Chatterjee illustrates the mismatch between the individual's psyche and the socio-political structures around him through the protagonist's internal monologue and fractured narrative style. The protagonist's disenchantment with the government and his enduring sense of estrangement from a society that promises well-being yet maintains isolation are clear indicators of his relocation. In order to comprehend this displacement, Chatterjee's use of sarcasm and black humour is essential. The protagonist's inner conflicts reflect a larger

disappointment with the Indian state's lofty ideals. It is not just his community that he feels estranged from, but also his own body. The recurrent topic of physiological processes and disappointments, for example, exemplifies the protagonist's dissatisfaction with his own physicality and serves as a metaphor for his psychological fragmentation. The gap between his ambitions and his experienced reality is something he is intensely aware of as he battles the banality of his life. This is exemplified when he describes his situation: *“My body, my flesh, my skin, my bones they are not mine. They belong to the state, to the system that has bound them together and turned them into a thing I cannot control. My own hands are alien to me”* (Chatterjee, 2000, p. 54) The protagonist's alienation from his physical body a type of displacement that extends beyond spatial displacement to include a profound sense of disconnection from selfhood is poignantly highlighted in this paragraph. It highlights the mental toll of residing in a system that, despite its claims of caring, causes severe disruption and indifference.

Chatterjee's criticism of the welfare state reflects his involvement with more general postcolonial discussions concerning the inability of state institutions to live up to the ideals of independence. The protagonist's estrangement exemplifies what Aijaz Ahmad (2000) calls postcolonial countries' “structural contradictions “contradictions that occur when the state, which is supposed to liberate and uplift, instead becomes a source of disappointment and indifference. Thus, the protagonist's experience of relocation is both personal and collective, reflecting a generation whose aspirations for a fair and just society have been shattered by the postcolonial state's dysfunctions.

Displacement and Alienation in *Way to Go*: The Female Protagonist's Struggle with Identity

Through the experience of a young woman trapped between the rapidly shifting demands of contemporary urban life and conventional family expectations, Chatterjee offers an alternative perspective on displacement in *Way to Go*. The protagonist, a nameless female character, represents the hardships of a generation of women who are caught between the freedoms offered by the contemporary, globalized world and the roles that their families have assigned them. Her internal sense of self is being torn between her family's expectations and her longing for independence, which is more significant than her actual physical relocation.

The protagonist experiences alienation on her journey—alienation from society, from her family, and from herself. She has an identity crisis as she negotiates the conflict between conventional expectations and the opportunities brought forth by a globalizing world. She considers her views in one especially illuminating section:

"I am supposed to be the good daughter, the dutiful sister, the obedient woman, but there is something in me that doesn't fit the mould. I can't go back to being the person I once was, but I don't know who I am now." (Chatterjee, 2006, p. 112)

The psychological complexities of her displacement are revealed in this excerpt. The female protagonist in *Way to Go* is displaced by her very identity, in contrast to the protagonist in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, who is disenchanted with the government and society. Her effort to establish an identity outside of these limitations corresponds to the greater experience of women in a society that is undergoing fast social and cultural change. The strains of independence and familial duty produce a deep internal conflict. Modern feminist postcolonial theory contends that postcolonial countries frequently impose gendered expectations on women despite their promises of modernization and equality, and Chatterjee's depiction of the female protagonist's identity problem is consistent with this theory (Spivak, 1999). As a result, the protagonist's displacement is gendered and influenced by both global forces that challenge established conventions and societal expectations. Chatterjee illustrates the protagonist's inability to balance these conflicting identities, signifying the self-fragmentation that many Indian women experience today.

The Globalization of Displacement: Neoliberalism and its Discontents

Additionally, Chatterjee's two books highlight how neoliberal capitalism affects identity and relocation. The protagonists encounter the dehumanizing consequences of a market-driven society as India's integration into the global economy grows. The alienating consequences of neoliberal economic policies, which put efficiency and profit ahead of social welfare, exacerbate the protagonist's sense of dislocation in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*. The character's connection with the welfare state, which he perceives as a meaningless organization that provides only bureaucratic red tape in lieu of real care, is a particularly clear example of this issue. Chatterjee also criticizes how globalization affects the protagonist's sense of self in

Way to Go. The female protagonist grows more conscious of the contradiction between her ideals and the commercialized society around her as she is dragged into the fast-paced, consumer-driven world of the metropolitan elite. The market forces that rule her surroundings influence her sense of self, and she feels more and more cut off from both her past and her future. Neoliberal capitalism has profound human repercussions, altering not only economic but also cultural and emotional reality, as Arundhati Roy (2002) contends.

Thus, the books show how displacement is a part of broader socioeconomic institutions that influence identity rather than being solely the result of personal circumstances. The growing monetization of human relationships and identities in a neoliberal society is linked to the protagonist's alienation in *Way to Go*. The protagonist is pushed farther away from her sense of identity and belonging by the rise of individualism, where financial gain is used to gauge personal achievement

Identity, Displacement, and the Globalized Indian Experience

In conclusion, Upamanyu Chatterjee's *Way to Go* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* present a nuanced analysis of the socio-political dynamics that influence both individual and societal identities while offering a complex depiction of identity and displacement in modern-day India. Chatterjee demonstrates how people in postcolonial nations manage the conflicts between modernity, tradition, and globalization through his investigation of psychological and emotional displacement. Both stories' protagonists, who each represent distinct aspects of a postcolonial and globalized world, serve as excellent examples of the challenges of a generation torn between opposing social and cultural forces.

This study examines Chatterjee's writings to demonstrate how, in addition to being a physical occurrence, displacement is also a psychological and emotional state influenced by the socio-political forces of globalization, neoliberal capitalism, and the welfare state. These topics are relevant outside of India and provide insights into the common struggles people encounter in a world that is becoming more interconnected and divided. Chatterjee tells a gripping story of exile through his sarcasm and black humour, highlighting the difficulties of contemporary identity in a globalized world.

Comparative Analysis: Upamanyu Chatterjee and Aravind Adiga on Identity and Displacement

Through the *Mammaries of the Welfare State* and *Way to Go*, Upamanyu Chatterjee explores identity and displacement, offering a distinctive perspective on the intricacies of postcolonial Indian identity in a globalized world. Nonetheless, there are clear distinctions between Chatterjee's and his contemporary Aravind Adiga's approaches to the topics of identity, displacement, and social alienation as well as common thematic concerns when comparing their works, especially *The White Tiger* (2008). Although both authors address the consequences of neoliberalism, urban alienation, and the breakdown of conventional identities, there are notable differences between their depictions of characters and narrative strategies.

Themes of Displacement and Alienation

Displacement is a major issue that both Chatterjee and Adiga explore, especially in light of metropolitan settings and the pressures of capitalism and globalization. The protagonist of Chatterjee's *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, an anonymous middle-class guy, experiences psychological estrangement in the disjointed and bureaucratic post-independence Indian society. His disenchantment with a system that offers care but encourages isolation, as well as his estrangement from the welfare state, are reflections of a larger breakdown in society (Chatterjee, 2000, p. 54).

In a similar vein, Balram Halwai, a rural Indian man who moves to Delhi and becomes disillusioned with the corruption and exploitation he experiences, is a character in Adiga's *The White Tiger*. The themes of alienation and despair are echoed by Balram's liberation from the bonds of poverty and his subsequent moral decline. The main characters in both pieces are victims of a broader socioeconomic structure, which makes them feel even more dislocated. Despite his external luxuries, Chatterjee's protagonist has profound emotional dislocation as he struggles with the state's inability to deliver substantial assistance (Chatterjee, 2000).

While Balram rejects the old hierarchical system in favor of capitalism's promises, Adiga views his path via a survival lens, in which he literally and figuratively "kills" his former identity to embrace a new, brutally pragmatic character (Adiga, 2008, p. 237).

Chatterjee vs. Adiga: Psychological vs. Physical Displacement

The nature of relocation that Chatterjee and Adiga depict in their novels is where they most differ from one another. The existential and psychological aspects of relocation are Chatterjee's main areas of interest. In contrast to Adiga's Balram, who literally moves from the countryside to the city, his protagonists are not physically uprooted. Rather, Chatterjee's characters undergo an internal displacement characterized by a fractured and unstable sense of self. In the *Mammaries of the Welfare State*, for example, Chatterjee's protagonist frequently muses about his incapacity to make sense of his body in relation to his surroundings, which he characterizes as becoming more and more foreign. This disjunction is exemplified when he says,

"My body, my flesh, my skin, my bones—they are not mine. They belong to the state, to the system that has bound them together and turned them into a thing I cannot control" (Chatterjee, 2000, p. 54).

Instead of being external, the protagonist's sense of displacement is rooted in his thoughts and how he perceives the world. This is similar to the alienation that postcolonial studies theorists like Frantz Fanon (1967) discuss, wherein colonial and postcolonial subjects have a fractured sense of self. I was born." Adiga's Balram, on the other hand, depicts a more overtly radical and tangible kind of displacement. The physical displacement that many postcolonial subjects go through when they face the harsh realities of a globalized capitalist economy is symbolized by Balram's move to Delhi. Balram's displacement shows up as a violent reclamation of power and a rejection of his previous identity, in contrast to Chatterjee's introspective protagonists. Alongside his physical relocation to the city, he undergoes a psychic metamorphosis, yet his moral decay and social ascent serve as external indicators of this metamorphosis. As he writes to the Chinese Premier in his letter *"in a darkness, and I have come to the light of the city. I have shed my old skin"* (Adiga, 2008, p. 73).

This is a more radical departure from the past, indicating his disapproval of traditional societal structures, whilst Chatterjee's characters display a more complex identity crisis

Narrative Techniques: Humour vs. Violence

Their narrative styles represent yet another significant distinction between Chatterjee and Adiga. In order to highlight the absurdities of postcolonial existence and provide a

dispassionate assessment of the socio-political structures that influence his characters' experiences, Chatterjee frequently uses satire and black humour. This is demonstrated in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, where the protagonist's sarcastic reflections on the state's shortcomings inspire both laughter and hopelessness. For example, Chatterjee's portrayal of the welfare state's bureaucratic inefficiency completes with recurring forms and promises of care is both humorous and damning. Instead of using the overt violence found in Adiga's work, this conveys the protagonist's isolation through wit, creating a sense of bitter irony.

Adiga's story in *The White Tiger*, on the other hand, is far more straightforward and combative. In addition to being physical, the violence in Balram's trip is both moral and psychological. Although it is tinged with violence and guilt, Balram's choice to murder his boss and steal from him is a clear act of self-liberation. Adiga's tone is more combative, highlighting the cruelty of the structures that lead to alienation and exile. The protagonist of Chatterjee is still stuck in his disillusionment, whereas Adiga's Balram makes a decisive, violent move to get out.

Conclusion

Although Chatterjee and Adiga both discuss the issue of displacement in contemporary India, they take rather different tacks. *Way to Go* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* by Chatterjee critically examine the shortcomings of postcolonial state institutions while concentrating on the existential and psychological effects of relocation. Because they are unable to break free from the institutions that displace them, Chatterjee's heroes continue to be trapped in their isolation.

The protagonist's moral decline and rejection of his former personality, on the other hand, represent the brutal metamorphosis required to thrive in a neoliberal, capitalist world in Adiga's *The White Tiger*, which presents a more extreme, tangible kind of displacement. Adiga chooses a blunt, brutal critique of social structures, while Chatterjee employs satire and dark humour to examine his characters' hardships.

Though their portrayals vary in tone, approach, and the extent of their protagonists' reactions to the pressures of displacement, both authors provide insightful analyses of how globalization and capitalism impact postcolonial identity. In the backdrop of modern India, Upamanyu Chatterjee's *Way to Go* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* provide deep insights into the intricacies of identity and displacement. Chatterjee tackles the bewildering impacts of

modernity on people by investigating postcolonial fears, urban alienation, and the psychological ramifications of neoliberalism. His writings serve as a sharp critique of the economic, social, and political changes that have characterized India since independence and its growing globalization. Chatterjee illustrates the dislocation and fragmentation his characters go through in their quest for purpose and belonging by concentrating on the relationship between personal identity and the larger frameworks of state, capitalism, and tradition. Identity is a fluid, contested realm that changes in reaction to outside forces rather than a fixed or predetermined construct in either book. The contrasting pressures of a neoliberal capitalist state, the legacy of colonialism, and the social demands of family and tradition all influence the characters in *Way to Go* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* as they struggle with their sense of self. Through his characters, Chatterjee demonstrates the intricacies of postcolonial identity, where individual and societal histories converge and give rise to novel existential dilemmas the protagonist in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, for example, feels cut off from both his body and the welfare state's unfulfilled promises. His relationship with the state, which instead of caring for him, exposes him to isolation and bureaucratic slowness, continuously erodes his sense of self. Similar to this, the female lead in *Way to Go* battles to balance her personal preferences with those of her family and society, exemplifying the conflicts between tradition and modernization that define the postcolonial state.

Chatterjee's focus on psychological displacement distinguishes his writing from those of other modern writers like Aravind Adiga. The protagonists of Chatterjee exhibit an inner sense of fragmentation, in contrast to Adiga's *The White Tiger*, which depicts a more violent, physical type of displacement, personified by Balram's ruthless rejection of his past. They are unable to break free from the oppressive systems that define their life, and they continue to live in a state of alienation. Chatterjee's depiction of alienation is further distinguished by his use of satire and black humour. He presents a bittersweet picture of the contemporary Indian experience by fusing humor and critical criticism, where disenchantment is subdued by a sardonic disengagement from the very structures that oppress the protago. Through his characters' experiences of psychological displacement, Chatterjee underscores the destabilizing effects of modernity on identity. In a globalized world, where capitalist forces demand constant reinvention and the welfare state fails to offer protection, individuals are forced to navigate a labyrinth of conflicting identities. Chatterjee's works reveal that this struggle is not merely individual but collective an entire generation caught between the promises of a modern,

globalized India and the legacy of its colonial past. The protagonists' sense of self is thus shaped by forces beyond their control: a disillusioned engagement with the state, the pressures of family and tradition, and the alienating forces of capitalism and neoliberalism. In the end, Chatterjee offers a critical commentary on the postcolonial state of modern-day India through her investigation of identity and relocation. His books serve as a reminder that, in today's globalized world, the quest for identity is closely tied to the socio-political forces at work. Chatterjee offers a sophisticated perspective on how people deal with the intricacies of contemporary life in a culture characterized by injustice, alienation, and the legacy of colonialism by emphasizing the inner conflicts of his characters. His writings demonstrate the continued relevance of postcolonial discourse by demonstrating that the search for identity is still an open and continuous process, characterized by fragmentation, dislocation, and the ongoing renegotiation of selfhood in a world that is changing quickly

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