

Navigating The Labyrinth: Aravind Adiga's *Amnesty* as a Contemporary Diasporic Novel

Dr. Deepak H. Shinde

Assistant Professor Department of English Karnataka State Akkamahadevi Women University
Jnanashakti Campus, Toravi Vijayapura, India

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ABSTRACT

This Paper Aims to Investigate Aravind Adiga's *The Novel Amnesty* Through the Lens of Contemporary Diasporic Approach. As It Delineates the Tale of an Illegal Immigrant in Australia, Who Land There with A Student Visa and Later Decides to Stay Over Illegally. Thereby Manifests to Gain Legal and Permanent Status. The Novel Echoes Several Diasporic Themes and Situations Depicting the Ordeals of Immigrants. This Study Focuses on the Protagonist, Danny and His Diasporic Experiences as He Encounters Them Emphasizing on Identity, Displacement, Cultural Hybridity and Assimilation.

Keywords: Navigation, Immigration, Identity, Displacement, Diaspora, Consciousness

Aravind Adiga is a renowned Indian author, has consistently distinguished himself through "incisive narratives that illuminate the dynamic landscape of modern India" He is well known for his uncompromising exploration of the "stark realities of inequality and social injustice" in his literary works which reflects in his most notable work, Man Booker Prize-winning *The White Tiger*. In addition to exploring deep subjects like "neocolonialism, globalization, and clash of tradition with progress," Adiga's works usually focus on "marginalized individuals." This authorial vision is celebrated for "reshaping Indian literature" and significantly contributing to "postcolonial discourse". Adiga's experience as journalist for well-known magazines like *Time* and the *Financial Times* imbues his fiction with keen observational eye and a critical engagement with socio-political realities.

Amnesty is primarily set in Sydney, Australia, and the story revolves around the protagonist, Dhananjaya Rajaratnam also known as Danny in the novel. He is young illegal immigrant from Sri Lanka. Danny arrives on student visa, four years prior but chose to overstay, taking up the job of a cleaner. The novel's narrative unfolds intensely over the course of a single day, the narrative begins when, Danny learns that his former client, Radha Thomas, has been murdered. Crucially, Danny has important information about Dr. Prakash, the murderer, who also happens to be his client. This discovery thrust Danny into profound moral dilemma: whether to come forward with his knowledge and risk his deportation, thereby jeopardizing his painstaking constructed "new identity" and "new life" in Sydney, or to maintain silence.

This is the central conflict that compels Danny to, wrestle with his conscience to decide if a person without rights still has responsibilities. This question elevates the novel above the level of a simple thriller and turns into a deep philosophical investigation into what morality and citizenship means to people living in legally ambiguous state. By posing this quandary, Adiga impels readers to critically examine the ethical implications of denying fundamental human rights to individuals while expecting them to adhere to societal responsibilities, thereby raising concern of understanding the social contract. Danny's precarious situation is vested in his past; he fled Sri Lanka due to civil strife and was denied refugee status. *Amnesty* profoundly embodies and critically examines the key themes of diasporic literature through the character of Danny as an undocumented immigrant. The novel offers a brutal critique of systematic injustice, globalized precarity and intricate psychological terrain of identity and belonging in the host land.

The Protagonist's Liminality: Identity and Displacement in Danny's World

Danny, whose full name is Dhananjaya Rajaratnam, is identified as a Sri Lankan Tamil. He had to flee his country because of the civil unrest and widespread concerns about his safety, which were made worse by the fact that he was “misidentified as a Tamil terrorist”. This background immediately establishes his status as a doubly marginalized individual: a minority within his country of origin and unauthorized alien in a foreign land. Danny’s identity in own country is as minority is marginalized and dominated by the majority communities, as he was suspected to be a terrorist in his country, the excerpt from the novel below exhibits this,

I wrote it. He said, ‘Not in Tamil.’ I wrote it in English. ‘Not in English,’ he said, ‘Write it in the national language.’ Sinhala. I picked up the pen, and my hand was trembling as wrote. He said, ‘That’s not the way you write it in the national language, I’ll show you how to write Danny in the national language,’ and he stubbed his cigarette into my forearm. As I was screaming, as he kept his cigarette held down, I could hear him ask the same questions again. What is your name? What is your father’s name? What is—” (157)

Adiga presents Danny’s name change as a crucial aspect of his diasporic identity negotiation. Danny, an undocumented immigrant in Australia, lives in liminal space torn between his unstable present and his history in Sri Lanka. His name, once a marker of his ethnic and cultural origins, becomes a liability since it may reveal his standing and hinder his integration into the prevailing society called the City of Sydney. Small things fit into bigger ones, automatic toll booths fit into ATMs, and they fit into swipe cards and into pay-wave cards, and all of this adds up to one anytime-and-everywhere machine which is hunting for a man named Dhananjaya Rajaratnam- Danny (34)

A common occurrence in a diasporic experience is renaming, in which immigrants change their names to conform to the cultural norms of their new nation. This transformation is not merely cosmetic but reflects a deeper psychological and social adaptation. This is an act of survival by altering his name; Danny attempts to erase traces of his foreignness, making himself less conspicuous in society that scrutinizes outsiders. This phenomenon echoes in many diasporic narratives.

Danny’s name change is consequently a diasporic necessity and strategic response to systematic exclusion and cultural displacement. In order to survive in harsh sociopolitical environment, immigrants constantly renegotiate their identities. His transformation is testament to the complexities of diasporic existence, where identity is never fixed but continuously reshaped by migration, adaptation, and survival.

Danny’s whole life in Sydney is characterized by a state of “legal liminality”- a situation in which he is “gripped and besieged by myriad daily fears and anxieties” while yet harboring a strong desire to fit or attain legal status. He is effectively a “persona non grata in Sydney” forced to live invisible and undocumented. Diasporic experiences are engraved by a deep sense of “inbetweenness” which is created by this precarious position. He suspended between his Sri Lankan past, where is he actively fears returning to, and current situation as an Australian perpetually exists on the periphery of society.

Thematic Deep Dive: Cultural Hybridity, Alienation, and the Search for Home

Diasporic literature inherently explores “cultural hybridity” and “creolization” reflecting how individuals navigating through multiple cultural influences and identities. Danny is making conscious efforts to forge his “new identity” by learning Australian accent or changing his hair style by colouring it with golden highlights serve as a prime example of this phenomenon. This is evident from a passage in the novel depicted as:

. . .brown people told Danny, and he, with his innate instinct for double or nothing, had streaked his hair in a barbershop. Standing in front of a mirror, he had imitated the gaze of an Australian-born man:...Since they must see me, Danny thought, let me be seen this way—not as a scared illegal with furtive eyes but as a native son of Sydney, a man with those golden highlights, with that erect back, that insolent indifference in every cell of his body. Let them observe that Danny is extremely icebox. (49)

However, this transformation does not lead him to full acceptance in the society, rather it creates rather it reinforces his liminal existence where he is neither fully Sri Lankan nor entirely Australian.

.... the tongue of an Australian. Never say receipt with the P. Be generous with I reckon'. He always buys a ticket for not getting into the complexities of scrutiny and interrogation. He works honestly, efficiently and he has decided into his mind that he will not go back home. 'I am never going back home'. (38)

But this cultural hybridity and his constant struggle to assimilate in the host land deepen intensely and desperately as he aspires to have legal status. The aversion towards his home land stems from his civil strife and the false accusation he had faced. This inherent tension between a rejected, traumatic past and a desire, yet elusive, future is core aspect of "nostalgia and memory" in diasporic writings. Danny yearns for life the illusive sense of stability, dignity, and belonging that was either lost or never fully achieved.

Amnesty is a significant contribution to contemporary diasporic literature because it moves beyond traditional narratives of cultural dislocation to offer a sharp, politically charged critique of global power structures and immigration policies. By using the structure of a thriller unfolding over a single day, Adiga heightens the urgency and claustrophobia of the migrant experience, humanizing a complex and often abstract global issue for his readers. The novel is a call to action, forcing readers to reckon with the systemic inequalities ingrained in the current global order and promoting empathy for the marginalized voices often unheard in dominant narratives.

Aravind Adiga's *Amnesty* is powerful and critical contribution to contemporary diasporic literature. The novel painstakingly and meticulously examines the complex issues of displacement, identity formation and the neverending struggle for existence in a precarious legal state. Adiga masterfully employs the concentrated narrative time frame and an intimate first-person perspective to immerse the readers in the psychological landscape of the protagonist which is haunted by paranoia, anxiety, and a constant negotiation of his "invisible yet vital" presence. The novel offers an unflinching critique of socio-political scenarios in the diasporic space. As it exposes the systemic injustices embedded within modern policies, revealing how exploitative labor practices and arbitrary citizenship distinctions are used by core developed nations to maintain neocolonial dynamics.

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