



Marginality and Social Inclusion: Bridging the Gaps in Multicultural Landscapes

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Manuscript ID:
BIJ-SPL3-Nov25-ES-031

Subject: English

Received : 30.07.2025

Accepted : 16.08.2025

Published : 27.11.2025

DOI: 10.64938/bijsi.v10si3.25.Nov031

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Abstract

*This research initiates a critical inquiry into the seeming paradox of multiculturalism, posing the question: “Multiculturalism professes to construct bridges – yet why do so many still plunges into the chasm?” This examination explores the narrative of diversity within a purportedly globalized context. Beneath the vibrant surface of multiculturalism lies a persistent reality: marginality endures, silencing voices through patriarchal structures and racial hierarchies. This study investigates this paradox, analyzing how Anita Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting* and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* reveal the underlying fractures within societies that claim inclusivity while perpetuating exclusionary practices. The objectives of this research are twofold: First to investigate the complex relationship between marginality, social inclusion, and multiculturalism, clarifying the structural and psychological mechanisms that sustain asymmetry, second to extract narrative techniques within literature that challenge hegemonic norms and envision alternatives modes of connection. Grounded, in postcolonial theory, this discourse utilizes Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, Spivak’s subaltern theory, and Fanon’s psycho-existential analysis of coloniality. The constrained subjectivity of Uma within a patriarchal Indian domestic sphere and Pecola’s desperate desire for blue eyes serve as compelling symbols of the failed promise of multicultural inclusion, illustrating how internalized oppression reinforces systemic domination. This treatise asserts that literature transcends mere reflection to act as a counter-discursive tool – amplifying marginalized perspective, destabilizing conventional paradigms, and reimagining inclusivity liberated from coercive assimilation. By integrating theoretical rigor with narrative analysis, this study delineates pathways towards a genuine multiculturalism rooted in equity rather than superficial pluralism.*

Keywords: hegemony, marginalization, social inclusion and exclusion, patriarchy, binary, deprivation, gender bias, colonial mindset, divinity, multiculturalism, women empowerment, equality, power dynamics, psychic effect.

Introduction

In an era characterized by globalization and migratory pluralism, multiculturalism is frequently celebrated as the optimal model for social coexistence. However, beneath this celebratory discourse lies a complex landscape of entrenched

hierarchies – racial, gendered, and epistemological – that systematically marginalize and silence particular voices. Edward Said astutely observes, “No one today is purely one thing... Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale” (Said 336). Nonetheless, this cultural hybridity



does not inherently ensure equity; rather, it often obscures ongoing exclusion masquerading as diversity.

This research revisits the critical inquiry: What does it mean to be included? Is inclusion synonymous with visibility, or does it necessitate the deconstruction of very systems that establish the margins in the first place? Through a comparative analysis of Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, this study interrogates the paradox of inclusion – where belonging is granted only through processes of assimilation, silence, or invisibility.

Uma, the protagonist in Desai's narrative, exists within a constraining domestic environment shaped by gendered fatalism:

“It was her lot, her fate, her portion. There was no one to explain it to her because it needed no explanation; it simply was” (Desai, *Feasting* 32).

Her psychological suffocation reflects not only individual misfortune but also a culturally institutionalized marginality perpetuated by patriarchal traditions.

Conversely, Morrison's Pecola Breedlove, although situated within a democratic and multicultural framework, internalizes a sense of racial inferiority to the extent of self-erasure:

“It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes... were different, that is to say, beautiful, she would be different” (Morrison, *Bluest* 46). Pecola's desire for blue eyes transcends mere aesthetic preference; it represents a profound yearning for ontological recognition in a society that renders her invisible.

To provide context for these narratives, this paper engages with Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, illustrating how cultural difference serves as both a site of subversion and a mechanism of control. Bhabha asserts, “The very practice of domination produces a contradictory and split spaces of enunciation” (Bhabha 37). In a similar vein, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critical analysis in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Prompts a vital examination of

whether characters such as Uma and Pecola can assert agency within dominant linguistic and cultural constructs.

Rather than merely reiterating the research objectives, this paper advocates for an alternative methodological framework: Treat literature not merely as a reflection of reality, but as a counter-discursive terrain – an arena that challenges prevailing paradigms and re-inscribes marginalized subjectivities.

This research reexamines the dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion, focusing on how multiculturalism, in practice, may inadvertently serve as a subtle perpetrator of inequality. As Iris Marion Young posits, “The idea of a universal citizenship masks the privilege of those who have the power to define universality” (Iris Young 102). Consequently, inclusion cannot be merely understood as access or visibility; it necessitates a critical interrogation as both a political and epistemic endeavor.

Through the works of Desai and Morrison, this inquiry examines how literary form – through fragmentation, silence, repetition, and inferiority – reconceives inclusion not as a process of assimilation but as a pursuit of epistemic justice. Thus, this study positions fiction as a vital cartographic tool for examining exclusion, illuminating the limitations of multiculturalism and the potential for resistance to flourish.

Critical Analysis

Multiculturalism as a Discursive Mirage: Exoticism, Ritual, and Cultural Translation

Multiculturalism, frequently portrayed as a liberal utopia of harmonious coexistence, is critically examined in both *Fasting, Feasting* by Anita Desai and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison as a discursive mirage. This construct obscures enduring hegemonies under the pretense of tolerance and visibility. A close analysis of the ostensibly multicultural spaces in these novels reveals them to be curated performances, wherein exoticism, commodification of difference, and intentional omissions supplant authentic intercultural understanding.



Culinary Borders and Ritualized Difference in Desai

In Fasting, Feasting, food emerges as a potent semiotic register of inclusion and exclusion, delineating cultural and ideological boundaries. The Indian foodscape – manifested through meals, rituals, fasts, and religious observances – reflects themes of identity, memory, and belonging. Through the domestic experiences of Uma and the alienation experienced by Arun in the West, Desai articulates how culinary culture serves as a language of both resistance and submission.

When Arun declines to eat meat with the Patton's, it transcends a mere dietary decision; it represents a scared resistance steeped in Hindu ethics, cultural continuity, and spiritual autonomy:

"No, I am a vegetarian... I do not eat meat, I never have" (Desai 170). The western culinary environment, characterized by a focus on protein, diets, and bodily control, starkly contrasts with the Indian spiritual perspective that regards food as *prasad* – a divine offering. Desai juxtaposes the sterilized nature of American abundance with the symbolic richness of Indian scarcity, thereby complicating the Western narrative of cultural superiority. Arun's sense of disconnection is articulated in the following observation:

"He watched the glint of bottles being thrown from car windows...the smell of cooked flesh rising with the smoke, a firework of grease and char" (Desai 177). In contrast, Mira Masi introduces Uma to scared Hindu customs, such as holy baths in the Ganges, temple visits, and mantras like "Om Namah Shivaya." These practices serve as both spiritual invocations and postcolonial symbols of reclaimed power for marginalized identities. Such moments signify a re-enchantment of the colonized self, where ritual is portrayed not as an obsolete practice but as an active counter-discourse to secular modernity.

Morrison's Counter-Narrative to Cultural Consumption

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison critiques the American multicultural ideal by unveiling how white culture

commodifies Black identity – not for true understanding, but to domesticate and neutralize it. Characters like Maureen Peal and Geraldine epitomize the tokenized exotic, performing a palatable version of Blackness that aligns with white norms. Conversely, Pecola and Claudia represent non-marketable Blackness, rejected precisely because they do not conform to the dominant paradigm.

Pecola's longing for blue eyes transcends mere self-hatred; it embodies a desire to be part of the dominant cultural lexicon, to be acknowledged in a system that equates whiteness with humanity:

"It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights – if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she would be different" (Morrison 46). Morrison thereby elucidates that multiculturalism is not an inclusive initiative; rather, it operates as a hierarchical aesthetic framework where the non-white is either excluded or aestheticized without agency.

The Myth of Cultural Plurality and the Reality of Displacement

The experiences of Arun in America and Pecola in her native country serve as a metaphor for cultural displacement. Despite their differing geographies and histories, their situations reflect a shared reality: multiculturalism devoid of equity is merely displacement cloaked in the rhetoric of diversity.

Homi Bhabha posits: "The recognition of cultural difference must be rearticulated from a position where it is not simply seen as a surface-level pluralism but as the site of agonistic negotiation" (Bhabha 2). This agonistic framework is explored by Desai and Morrison, focusing not on multicultural harmony but on tension, dissonance, and asymmetry; nevertheless, within that dynamic, there exist seeds of resistance and identity re-negotiation.

Pedagogies of Power: Education, Spirituality, and Cultural Memory as sites of Resistance

Education and spirituality, often perceived as liberatory forces, can simultaneously function as



mechanisms of marginalization when intertwined with hegemonic ideologies. Within a postcolonial framework, both domains are deeply contested and possess transformative potential. Authors Anita Desai and Toni Morrison examine how the epistemologies of the colonizer persistently shape knowledge structures, effectively suppressing indigenous wisdoms and non-Western modes of understanding. Despite this suppressive architecture, both writers illuminate how memory, ritual, and alternative pedagogies can foster subversive re-imaginings of identity and cultural legacy.

Anita Desai: Epistemic Silencing and Spiritual Resistance

In *Fasting, Feasting*, the protagonist Uma's failed educational experience transcends mere academic inadequacy; it symbolizes the foreclosure of female intellectual agency. Her institutional rejection epitomizes a broader postcolonial reality, wherein educational systems – often modeled on colonial frameworks – contribute to the silencing of women's voices. Uma's expulsion from convent, attributed to poor manifestation of systemic apathy and patriarchal indifference, rather than a lack of intellect or ambition: "She was never clever... she could not see what others could" (Desai 37). This "not-seeing" contributes not a defect in Uma, but rather the educational system's failure to recognize non-normative intelligences, particularly those of a subaltern woman. Nevertheless, spirituality emerges as an alternative epistemology – through teachings of Mira Masi, temple visits, and sacred scriptures, Uma discovers a distinct mode of knowledge: sacred, cyclical, and embodied.

"The chanting... the ringing of bells... was like being held and rocked, told a story in a language not of words but of sound, of memory" (Desai 97). Desai thus reframes Hindu ritual not as superstition but as an alternative pedagogy, serving as a counter-discourse to Western rationalism.

Toni Morrison: Reclaiming Memory, Reimagining Identity

In *The Bluest Eye*, education is depicted as both a site of colonization and a mechanism for subversion. School textbooks, white dolls, and mass media reinforce a racial hierarchy that excludes Blackness from the domains of beauty, knowledge, and normalcy. Pecola, as a result, internalizes these messages until they dominate her reality. The prevailing narrative educates her into a state of invisibility: "It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question" (Morrison 39). Conversely, Morrison introduces Claudia as a resistant reader – a child who perceives the fallacies of her cultural curriculum. Claudia's act of destroying the white doll symbolizes epistemic disobedience, challenging the presumed universality of white beauty and the institutions that propagate it: "I destroyed white baby dolls. But the dismemberment of the doll was not the answer. It was the question" (Morrison 22). Furthermore, Morrison draws upon cultural memory – oral histories, ancestral trauma, and communal rituals – as pivotal sources in the formation of identity. Memory becomes an archive of resistance, transmitted through generations as a means of survival and rebellion.

Intersections: Education Beyond the Classroom

Both Desai and Morrison contend that authentic education for marginalized individuals resides not within formal institutions, but in embodied experiences, intergenerational memory, and spiritual practices. In Desai's narrative, Arun gains a more profound understanding of cultural dislocation and identity politics through the observation of American familial dysfunction that he ever did through formal education. Similarly, the tragedy of Pecola and the awakening of Claudia demonstrate how dominant pedagogies can destructively shape lives, while lived experiences can facilitate regeneration.

As postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak articulates: "The Subaltern cannot speak... not because she is mute, but because her language is



unrecognized by the dominant episteme” (Spivak, “Can the Subaltern” 1988). The works of Desai and Morrison aspire to restore legitimacy to those silenced languages – whether articulated through chat, memory, food, or grief – asserting that marginalized knowledges are not inferior, but systematically obscured.

Psychic Topographies of Marginalization

The concept of psychic topographies of marginalization refers to the internalized cartography of oppression, representing a conceptual mapping of psychological trauma, culture displacement, and existential erasure imposed by hegemonic structures. This notion posits that marginality operates not solely in spatial or socioeconomic contexts but is profoundly inscribed upon the consciousness of the subjugated individual. Such psychic inscriptions manifest as alienation, disembodiment, and internalized inferiority, especially within multicultural societies where surface-level inclusion often obscures systemic inequities.

In *Fasting, Feasting*, Desai meticulously portrays the neurotic interiority of Uma, whose existence is governed by gendered orthodoxy and familial obligation. Her psyche resembles a palimpsest of thwarted desires, spiritual retreat, and unvoiced sorrow. Within the sanctified rituals presented by Mira Masi – temples, fasts, and scared mantras – Uma seeks refuge rather than transcendence. This religiosity, while ostensibly empowering, serves as a mechanism of passive subservience. “She wanted only to be allowed to drift into the calm of prayer and ritual, where no questions were asked, where no answers were needed” (Desai 93). Uma’s mental landscape is not autonomous; rather, it reflects a discursive echo chamber where patriarchal norms are internalized and perpetuated. Consequently, her psychic terrain constitutes an archive of silent acquiescence, shaped by the demands of tradition and the denial of personal sovereignty.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison’s depiction of Pecola Breedlove exemplifies psychic implosion under the burden of racialized beauty standards.

Pecola’s yearning for blue eyes transcends mere aesthetic preference, representing a symbolic annihilation of selfhood – a desperate endeavor to inhabit the locus of power through the effacement of her racial identity. Her self-perception is colonized by white visual regimes, resulting in a fractured subjectivity devoid of affirmation or coherence. As Frantz Fanon insightfully states: “Not only must the black man be black; he must be black about the white man” (Fanon 110). Fanon’s observation underscores the relational subordination of identity within a racialized epistemology. Pecola is rendered not merely unseen, but unseeable within the dominant cultural framework.

In contrast, Claudia Mac Teer embodies an embryonic form of epistemic disobedience. Her refusal to idealize white beauty and her symbolic destruction of the white doll exemplify an instinctive critique of hegemonic standards: “I destroyed white dolls... to find out what it was that everyone thought was so lovable” (Morrison 21). Through Claudia, Morrison provides a counter-discursive articulation of resistance, wherein the marginalized subject asserts agency through acts of cognitive refusal and emotional authenticity.

By emphasizing the psychic architecture of marginalization, both Desai and Morrison encourage a reconceptualization of multiculturalism as a contested field of internalized hierarchies rather than a mere mosaic of surface differences. Inclusion that lacks psychological validation perpetuates ontological exile, rendering marginalized individuals not only materially invisible but also existentially inaudible.

These internal landscapes – imbued with unexpressed pain and subterranean resistance – constitute the unseen geographies of social inequality. Through their intricate psychological portrayals, Desai and Morrison thus assert that genuine inclusion necessitates psychic emancipation, entailing liberation not solely from physical constraints but also from the epistemological violence associated with being rendered the Other.



Bridging the Gap between Marginalization and Social Inclusion in Multiculturalism: A Postcolonial Perspective

The divide between marginalization and inclusion within postcolonial multicultural societies extends beyond physical boundaries; it is inherently discursive, symbolic, and ontological. Inclusion is frequently constructed through the framework of tolerance rather than essential recognition, resulting in cultural differences being treated as manageable rather than meaningful. From a postcolonial perspective, bridging this divide necessitates the dismantling of the colonial structures that continue to influence identity, belonging, and visibility.

1. Multiculturalism's Unequal Terrain

Multicultural societies often celebrate diversity while simultaneously upholding a normative center, typically shaped by colonial legacies. A significant issue arises when inclusion becomes contingent upon the performance of civility or cultural acceptability. As Paul Gilroy articulates: "The postcolonial subject is offered recognition only when it confirms the cultural grammar of the dominant order" (Gilroy 114). This form of recognition ought to be supplanted by equity and epistemic respect, repressing a shift from merely tolerating the Other to engaging with them as collaborative architects of cultural narratives.

2. Resurrecting Cultural Memory and Embodied Ritual

In *Fasting, Feasting*, Anita Desai presents Indian rituals not simply as exotic embellishments, but as vital reservoirs of power. Mira Masi's devotional storytelling serves as a medium of resistance against the cultural erasure enforced by patriarchy and colonial modernity. Desai observes: "She murmured prayers as though they came from deep within her bones, as old as she was and older" (Desai 109). This invocation of the body as a vessel of ancestral voice resonates with Toni Morrison's characterization of Claudia, who rejects colonial narratives and recalls: "There were no marigold in the fall of 1941...because Pecola was having her father's baby

that the marigold did not grow" (Morrison 5). The use of ecological metaphors encapsulates cultural trauma, intertwining nature and memory into a counter-colonial knowledge system. Thus, bridging the gap requires an embrace of cultural memory as a form of epistemic resistance.

3. Counter-Narratives as Acts of Decolonial Speech

Language plays a pivotal role in processes of marginalization. In the works of both Desai and Morrison, silence emerges as a symptom of oppression, while simultaneously representing a space for dissent to develop. Postcolonial inclusion necessitates the reclamation of language not merely for representation, but also for counter-discursive disruption. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o emphasizes: "Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture" (Thiong'o 13). Consequently, the fragmented narrative structure of *The Bluest Eye* and Desai's elliptical, affective prose embody formal resistances to linear, Eurocentric storytelling. The marginalized articulate their experiences not in a singular voice but in a multiplicity of ruptures.

4. Deconstructing Normative Aesthetics and Ideals

Morrison's characters, such as Maureen Peal and Geraldine, exemplify the internalization of dominant norms, where proximity to whiteness determines one's social value. Conversely, characters like Claudia and Freida exhibit instinctive rebellion: "Anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth" (Morrison 18).

In Desai's narrative, Arun finds no comfort in American abundance, only a sense of dislocation: "To be surrounded by so much, and feel so void – it made the food lose its taste, the air its sharpness" (Desai 204). Such moments reveal the spiritual emptiness of cultural consumption, critically examining dominant cultural ideals from within. Inclusion must therefore commence with a critical



examination of the very standards that facilitate exclusion.

5. Epistemic Decolonization and Subaltern Agency

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's inquiry – *Can the subaltern speak?* – requires not a binary response, but rather a reconsideration of the mechanisms that silence or distort subaltern voices. Bridging the gap involves not only listening but also reconfiguring the discourse framework so that the subaltern is not compelled to articulate their experiences through borrowed linguistic constructs. Robert Young asserts: "Decolonization is not the ending of colonialism; it is the multiplication of worlds" (Robert Young 59). This multiplicity is exemplified by characters such as Uma and Claudia. Their modes of knowing – whether through prayer, domestic labor, dissent against beauty standards, or memory – serve as counter-epistemologies. They challenge the supremacy of Western rationality and colonial logic, offering alternative pathways to belonging.

To effectively bridge the divide between marginalization and social inclusion in postcolonial multiculturalism, it is imperative to move beyond superficial policies and token representation. It is essential to dismantle linguistic hierarchies, aesthetics orthodoxies, and epistemic exclusions. The works of Desai and Morrison illustrate that this bridging process represents a radical reimagining of cultural sovereignty, rather than mere an act of compassion or regulatory compliance.

Conclusion

In exploring the intricate psychic, cultural, and spiritual landscapes presented in *Fasting, Feasting* and *The Bluest Eye*, it becomes apparent that marginality is not merely a condition of exclusion, but rather a domain of complex negotiation involving voice, identity, and resistance. Anita Desai and Toni Morrison, despite their distinct geopolitical framework, converge in their examination of multiculturalism as a contested space where inclusion is frequently accompanied by erasure, and visibility may result in self-alienation. Both authors

deconstruct the illusion of multicultural harmony by revealing the hegemonic structures inherent in language, aesthetics, rituals, and educational practices. Through characters such as Arun and Pecola, they illustrate that the multicultural promise of acceptance often masks a more insidious expectation: conformity to prevailing epistemological norms – be it through white beauty standards, consumerist values, Western educational paradigms, or specific gendered expectations. However, both novels also signal avenues for subversion. By reclaiming cultural memory, indigenous rituals, culinary heritage, and spiritual resilience, these works propose alternatives for re-establishing identity beyond dominant frameworks. The sacred incantations found in Desai's portrayal of India – Om Namah Shivaya – and Claudia's defiance against idolizing the white doll in Morrison's depiction of Afro-American emerge as symbolic acts of reorientation, indicating a selfhood that is constructed not through mimicry but through a deep-seated connection to one's roots. This analysis suggests that bridging the divide between marginality and social inclusion necessitates not the homogenization of cultural differences, but a comprehensive reevaluation of what inclusion entails – one that affirms multiplicity, scrutinizes power dynamics, and validates alternative epistemologies. As Homi Bhabha articulates: "To be empowered is to engage in the rearticulation of cultural knowledge, not its duplication" (Bhabha 41). Consequently, genuine inclusion must originate from the act of listening to those rendered inaudible by dominant narratives and recognizing difference not as mere embellishment, but as the foundational framework of decolonized belonging.

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