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A Critical Reading of Conscious Wrestling in Aravind Adiga's Amnesty

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Abstract
The celebrated Indian-born-Australian Writer, Aravind Adiga, stands against unethical, inhuman and ill state of mind, whoever stands with those unaccepted discourses. His finest piece of writing, Amnesty (2021), revolves around the protagonist Danny, an undocumented Sri Lankan living in Sydney, whose daily survival is gloomily marred by conscious wrestling and ethical ambiguity. This paper discusses Danny's psychological toll of living in authorised limbo and continuously bargaining with survival against mental state and physical state.

Keywords: Conscious, Psychological, Identity, Immigrant, Survival.

Full Paper
Born on October 23, 1974, in Chennai, Adiga's early life was one of both geographic and cultural convergence. His family, rooted in Mangalore, Karnataka, provided him with a strong sense of traditional values even as he was exposed to an evolving modern India. From his formative years in Chennai and Mangalore, he absorbed the subtleties of Indian society, its rigid hierarchies, regional diversities, and the persistent social inequalities that would later become central to his literary explorations. During the launch of Amnesty, Dwight stated:

> I like to read Adiga's novels almost as much as the poet James Dickey liked to drink. He has more to say than most novelists, and about fifty more ways to say it . . .Adiga is a startlingly fine observer, and a complicator, in the manner of V S Naipaul ... Reading him, you get a sense of having your finger on the planet's pulse . . . This novel has a simmering plot . . . [but] you come to this novel for other reasons, nobody for its author's authority, wit and feeling on the subject of immigrants' lives . . . Keep reading.

Adiga's novel *Amnesty* delivers a moving tale that wrestles with guilt, inequality, and the thorny calculus of personal survival in a turbulent, corrupt landscape. Set in modern India, the story trails Danny, an undocumented Sri Lankan migrant worker whose life pivots between conscience and self-preservation. Danny's inner turmoil exposes the brutal realities of exploitation and the emotional sacrifices demanded when one compromises core values merely to stay alive.
*Adiga's*novel captures a powerful paradox at the heart of immigrant identity: the tension between being marginalised and being exoticised. Danny, a Tamil man living illegally in Australia, reflects on how his difference, his ethnicity, and his appearance are both a source of vulnerability and a strange kind of desirability. In Australia, Danny's weirdness becomes a currency. Sonja's compliment reveals a society

that craves the novelty of the other, especially when that other is confident and unapologetic. The golden highlights in his hair aren't just fashion, they're a symbol of defiance, of claiming space in a world that often tries to erase him. This moment illustrates how immigrants can be fetishised for their uniqueness, even as they are excluded from full participation in society.

However, Danny's reflection also reveals the bitter irony of this dynamic. In Sri Lanka, his Tamil identity marked him as a persecuted minority, unwanted, unsafe, and invisible. In Australia, that same identity makes him visible, even desirable, but only within the narrow confines of cultural curiosity. He's wanted not for who he is, but for how he stands out. The "intoxicant" of being wanted for his difference is seductive, but it's also precarious. It doesn't guarantee safety, rights, or belonging.

The present study highlights the superficial inclusivity of multicultural societies. Danny's experience shows how immigrants are often caught between two extremes: invisibility in their homeland and hypervisibility abroad. Neither offers true acceptance. Adiga uses Danny's internal monologue to expose the psychological toll of this dual rejection, how the immigrant is always navigating between being too much and not enough. Perhaps, Danny's golden hair becomes a metaphor for the immigrant's struggle, a bold assertion of identity in a world that both celebrates and punishes difference. It's a moment of pride tinged with the knowledge that belonging, in either country, remains elusive. Adiga imprints:

> He remembered the way Sonja's eyes lit up when she saw his hair. "Weird." That was what she'd said. That was a compliment. Because people in Australia were famished for what was weird, self-assuredly weird, even belligerently weird: like a Tamil man with golden highlights in his hair. A minority. And once you found out what that word minority means over here, tasted the intoxicant of being wanted because you were not like everyone else, how could anyone possibly tell you to go back to Sri Lanka and once again live as a minority over there? (06).

Adiga's Amnesty encapsulates a profound psychological tension experienced by immigrants: the need to reconcile personal chaos with the structured order of a new society. Danny's reflection, "Many of us flee chaos to come here", speaks to the trauma and instability that often drive migration. Whether escaping war, persecution, or economic collapse, immigrants arrive carrying emotional residue from environments where rules were either oppressive or absent.Australia, in contrast, is portrayed as a land of optimism and lawfulness. For Danny, this legal rigidity is both reassuring and alienating. The phrase "the rule that cannot be broken" suggests a cultural reverence for order that demands conformity. Immigrant psychology often involves navigating this shift from survival in chaos to adaptation in order. It requires internal rewiring: learning to trust institutions, suppress impulsive survival instincts, and embrace predictability.

Yet, this adjustment is not seamless. Immigrants like Danny live in contradiction. They must respect the law while simultaneously breaking it to survive their undocumented status, being the clearest example. This duality breeds cognitive dissonance, a psychological strain where one's actions conflict with internal values or societal expectations. Danny's awareness of this contradiction becomes a source of growth, as the quote implies: "Through my contradictions you grow."

Adiga uses this tick to highlight how immigrant identity is forged not in clarity, but in contradiction. The immigrant must constantly negotiate between past trauma and present norms, between invisibility and hypervisibility, between fear and hope. The psychological journey is not just about assimilation; it's about reconciling the irreconcilable. However, a meditation on the immigrant's psychological metamorphosis. It acknowledges that growth often emerges from tension, and that understanding the host culture's rules is not just a legal necessity, it's a psychological survival strategy. He States:

> Many of us flee chaos to come here. Aussies are an optimistic and methodical people, and they are governed by law. Understanding the concept of the rule that cannot be broken is vital to adjusting here. ("Through my contradictions you grow: an immigrant addresses the native," page 24) (11-12).

Adiga explores Danny's mounting psychological toll, showing how prolonged silence erodes self-worth. The struggle transcends personal failing; it mirrors systemic issues of class, corruption, and the harsh choices imposed on society's fringe. Danny's dread of exposure and the catastrophic fallout it could unleash symbolises the daily reality of countless marginalised Indians, forced to weigh silence against annihilation by a system that offers them no safety net. As events escalate, Danny becomes ever more haunted by his complicity. Adiga uses his anguish to lay bare a social order in which government, police, and elites thrive on the muted suffering of those like Danny. His decision to remain quiet stems from a rational calculation: speaking out could destroy the fragile life he has cobbled together in a nation that refuses him basic protections.

Amnesty reveals the deeply psychological and performative nature of immigrant identity. Danny's experience of being mocked for his accent, yet winning over bullies through reason, illustrates the immigrant's constant negotiation between visibility and acceptance. His accent marks him as "other," but his ability to communicate effectively allows him to bridge that gap. It's a moment of psychological resilience and social adaptation. Danny's rehearsal of Australian speech patterns in Batticaloa, biting his lip to pronounce volleyball is a poignant metaphor for the immigrant's pre-emptive assimilation. It shows how identity is not just shaped by external forces but also internally constructed through mimicry, anticipation, and desire. He's not just learning a language; he's rehearsing a self that will be legible in a new cultural context.

The behaviour of Danny aligns with psychological theories of acculturation, where individuals adopt aspects of a host culture to reduce social friction. Danny's mimicry is a survival strategy, but also a form of self-creation. He's crafting a version of himself that can exist in Australia's social landscape, one that speaks the language, both literally and culturally. Adiga practically presented "Through my contradictions you grow" gains new depth here. Danny is both Sri Lankan and an aspiring Australian. He is mocked yet accepted. He is illegal yet morally grounded. These contradictions don't weaken him; they shape him. He suggests that immigrant identity is forged not in clarity but in tension. Danny's mirror practice is not vanity, it's a ritual of transformation. This moment is quietly radical: it shows that becoming Australian isn't just about paperwork or legality, it's about the psychological labour of belonging. Danny's story invites us to see immigrants not as passive recipients of culture, but as active architects of their own hybrid identities. He Writes:

> When I was new to Sydney, and I still spoke with an accent like some new immigrants do, I was picked on in school, but I talked sense and reason with the bullies, and they became mates. (Through my contradictions you grow, page 12). Even before he got to Australia, Danny was practising becoming Australian. Back in Batticaloa.In front of a mirror.Slowing down his V's.Biting his lower lip when saying volleyball (36).

The narrative then shifts to Sydney, where Danny, born DhananjayaRajarathnam, lives as an undocumented migrant cloaked in perpetual fear. Ordinary routines, from boarding buses to buying groceries, brim with anxiety. His private thoughts reveal a ceaseless duel between survival instincts and a nagging moral obligation. The reader is thrust into the isolating existence of someone who feels perpetually one step from capture.

The threat of deportation manifests in hyper-alertness: he scans crowds for immigration agents, jerks awake at faint sounds, and battles relentless insomnia. These symptoms illustrate how legal limbo corrodes any sense of safety. When Danny witnesses a vicious murder, his guilt intensifies the dilemma of reporting the crime versus preserving his anonymity, which becomes excruciating. His predicament captures the wrenching clash between self-interest and ethical duty.

Torn between his Sri Lankan identity and the mask of "Danny," he inhabits a liminal space, alienated from both cultures. Adiga wields this fractured identity to echo wider postcolonial anxieties about displacement. The conflict between Danny's moral compass and his survival instinct embeds a constant psychological grind. Flashbacks to the murder replay endlessly, deepening insomnia and emotional numbness defences that only isolate him further. Gradually, Danny retreats from would-be allies, trusting no one, immigrant or Australian. Every social encounter feels dangerous, confirming his belief that true belonging is impossible. His loneliness is both a product and an accelerator of his trauma.

Amnesty thus becomes a searing meditation on the psychic damage spawned by fear, guilt, and split identity. Danny's torment spotlights a universal human craving for dignity amid adversarial systems. The novel invites readers to reckon with immigration policies' hidden human costs: fractured minds, not merely controlled bodies.

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