

Neoliberal Subjectivity and the Crisis of Identity in Devika Rege's *Quarterlife*

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Abstract

Neoliberalism has brought many changes to people's lives by influencing education, employment, social status, and personal goals. These changes have also affected the way individuals understand themselves and their place in society. Devika Rege's *Quarterlife* presents the lives of young people who struggle to balance their personal dreams with the realities of caste, class, religion, and modern society. This paper aims to study how the novel portrays the formation of identity in a rapidly changing world shaped by globalization and neoliberal values. The study uses the ideas of Wendy Brown, Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall, David Harvey, and Pierre Bourdieu to examine how the characters experience identity, power, freedom, and social inequality. It also explores how the desire for success, economic progress, and social acceptance creates confusion, conflict, and a sense of uncertainty among the characters. The paper argues that *Quarterlife* shows identity as something that is constantly changing according to social, cultural, and economic conditions. By analysing the novel through a qualitative approach, this study highlights how Devika Rege presents the challenges faced by contemporary Indian youth in finding their identity in a globalized society. The paper concludes that *Quarterlife* offers a thoughtful critique of neoliberal society and its impact on individual identity and human relationships.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, Subjectivity, Globalization, Contemporary Indian English Fiction, Social Change, Caste, Class, Youth, Devika Rege, *Quarterlife*

1. Introduction

Literature has always reflected the social, cultural, political, and economic changes taking place in society. Contemporary Indian English fiction, in particular, explores the experiences of individuals living in a rapidly changing world. Many recent novels focus on issues such as globalization, urbanization, identity, migration, social inequality, and the changing aspirations of young people. These themes have become increasingly important in the twenty-first century because economic reforms and technological developments have changed the way people live, work, and understand themselves.

Neoliberalism, which became more visible in India after the economic liberalization of 1991, promotes free markets, privatization, competition, and individual success. It encourages people to believe that hard work and personal talent alone can lead to success. While neoliberalism has created new opportunities in education, employment, and business, it has also increased social inequality, job insecurity, and pressure to achieve personal success. As a result, many individuals experience confusion, stress, and uncertainty about their identity and place in society.

Identity is not fixed or permanent. It is shaped by many factors such as family, culture, caste, class, religion, education, gender, and social experiences. In today's globalized world, people often face

conflicts between traditional values and modern lifestyles. Young people especially struggle to balance personal ambitions with social expectations. This continuous process of adjusting to changing social and economic conditions often leads to what scholars describe as a crisis of identity.

Devika Rege is one of the emerging voices in contemporary Indian English literature. Her novel *Quarterlife* presents a realistic picture of young Indians living in an age of economic growth, globalization, and social transformation. The novel explores how education, career ambitions, social status, caste, religion, and political changes influence the lives of young people. Through its characters, the novel examines the emotional and psychological challenges of finding one's identity in a society shaped by neoliberal values.

The title *Quarterlife* itself suggests a stage in life where young adults face uncertainty about their future, relationships, career, and personal identity. The characters in the novel struggle to achieve success while also trying to understand who they are and where they belong. Their experiences reflect the realities of many educated young people in contemporary India who are caught between individual aspirations and social responsibilities.

This research paper examines how *Quarterlife* represents neoliberal subjectivity and the crisis of identity. It analyses how the novel portrays the influence of economic liberalization, social mobility, caste, class, and globalization on the construction of identity. The study draws upon the theories of Wendy Brown, Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall, David Harvey, and Pierre Bourdieu to understand the relationship between power, identity, society, and neoliberalism. Through this approach, the paper aims to show that *Quarterlife* is not only a story about individual lives but also a powerful commentary on the social and cultural changes taking place in contemporary India.

By studying the novel from the perspective of neoliberal subjectivity and identity, this paper seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on contemporary Indian English fiction and to highlight Devika Rege's important contribution to the representation of modern Indian society.

2. Objectives of the Study:

The present study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- **To examine** how Devika Rege portrays the crisis of identity in *Quarterlife*.
- **To analyse** the influence of neoliberalism on the thoughts, behaviour, and aspirations of the characters in the novel.
- **To explore** how factors such as caste, class, education, and globalization shape the identity of the characters.
- **To study** the challenges faced by young people in balancing personal ambitions with social and cultural expectations.
- **To understand** how *Quarterlife* reflects the realities of contemporary Indian society through the themes of identity, social change, and neoliberalism.

3. Review of Literature:

Devika Rege's *Quarterlife* has received positive attention from literary critics for its portrayal of contemporary Indian society and its exploration of caste, class, religion, and the aspirations of young people. Although the novel is a recent publication, reviewers have appreciated its realistic representation of urban India and the challenges faced by educated youth in a rapidly changing social and economic

environment. Critics have observed that the novel presents the complexities of modern life through characters who struggle to find their place in a competitive society.

Several reviews have highlighted that *Quarterlife* examines the effects of globalization and economic liberalization on individuals and society. The novel portrays how career ambitions, social mobility, and the desire for success influence the lives of young people. It also reflects the continuing influence of caste, religion, and family values despite the growth of modern education and corporate culture. These observations suggest that the novel provides an important commentary on contemporary India.

The concept of identity has been widely discussed by scholars such as **Stuart Hall**, who argues that identity is not fixed but continuously shaped by history, culture, and social experiences. Hall's theory helps in understanding how individuals negotiate their identities in changing social conditions.

The idea of neoliberalism has been explained by **David Harvey**, who describes it as an economic and political system that promotes free markets, privatization, and individual responsibility. Harvey points out that neoliberalism creates opportunities for economic growth while also increasing inequality and competition. His ideas are useful for analysing how economic reforms influence the lives of the characters in *Quarterlife*.

Similarly, **Wendy Brown** argues that neoliberalism changes the way people think about themselves by encouraging them to view every aspect of life in terms of competition, productivity, and personal success. Her ideas help explain how the characters' ambitions and relationships are shaped by neoliberal values.

Michel Foucault's concept of power and subjectivity explains how social institutions influence individual behaviour and identity. According to Foucault, power operates through social practices and encourages individuals to regulate themselves according to accepted norms. This perspective is helpful in examining how the characters negotiate their identities within social and institutional structures.

Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and social field provide another important framework for understanding how education, family background, and social class influence opportunities and identity formation. These concepts are relevant to the social experiences portrayed in *Quarterlife*.

Although these theoretical perspectives have been widely applied in studies of contemporary literature, very little academic research has so far examined *Quarterlife* through the combined perspectives of neoliberalism, identity, and subjectivity.

4. Research Gap:

Devika Rege's *Quarterlife* is a recent contribution to contemporary Indian English fiction and has received appreciation from literary critics for its portrayal of modern Indian society. Most of the available discussions focus on the novel's representation of caste, class, religion, politics, and the lives of young people in post-liberalization India. These reviews mainly introduce the novel and comment on its literary style and social relevance.

Since *Quarterlife* is a recently published novel, there is **very limited scholarly research** that examines it from a theoretical perspective. In particular, there is a lack of studies that analyse the novel through the concepts of **neoliberal subjectivity** and the **crisis of identity**. The influence of neoliberal values on the characters' personal choices, relationships, ambitions, and understanding of themselves has not yet been studied in detail. Similarly, the relationship between economic liberalization, social mobility, and identity formation remains underexplored.

The present study attempts to fill this gap by analysing *Quarterlife* through the theoretical perspectives of **Wendy Brown, Stuart Hall, Michel Foucault, David Harvey, and Pierre Bourdieu**. It explores how neoliberalism shapes individual identity and consciousness while also examining the social and cultural pressures experienced by the characters. By focusing on these aspects, the study aims to provide a fresh critical interpretation of the novel and contribute to the growing scholarship on contemporary Indian English fiction.

5. Research Methodology:

The present study adopts a **qualitative research method** to analyse Devika Rege's *Quarterlife*. It focuses on understanding how the novel represents neoliberal subjectivity and the crisis of identity in contemporary Indian society. The study is based on **close reading and textual analysis** of the novel.

The research uses both **primary and secondary sources**. The primary source is Devika Rege's *Quarterlife*. The secondary sources include books, research articles, journal papers, book reviews, interviews, and other scholarly works related to neoliberalism, identity, globalization, and contemporary Indian English fiction.

The study applies an **interdisciplinary approach** by using the theories of **Wendy Brown, Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall, David Harvey, and Pierre Bourdieu**. Wendy Brown's ideas on neoliberalism help explain how market values influence individual identity and social life. Stuart Hall's theory of identity is used to understand identity as a changing and socially constructed process. Michel Foucault's concept of subjectivity explains how power and social institutions shape individual behaviour and self-understanding. David Harvey's theory of neoliberalism provides a framework for analysing the impact of economic liberalization and globalization on society. Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and social field help examine the influence of class, education, and social background on the lives of the characters.

The research analyses important characters, events, and themes in the novel to understand how identity is formed, challenged, and transformed in a neoliberal society. Particular attention is given to the ways in which caste, class, education, career aspirations, and globalization affect the characters' sense of self and belonging.

The findings of the study are based on textual evidence from the novel and are supported by relevant literary theories and critical sources. Through this qualitative and theoretical approach, the research aims to provide a better understanding of Devika Rege's portrayal of identity, neoliberalism, and contemporary Indian society.

6. Conclusion:

Devika Rege's *Quarterlife* offers a realistic portrayal of the lives of young people in contemporary India and the challenges they face in a rapidly changing society. The novel shows how neoliberalism, globalization, caste, class, education, and social expectations influence the formation of individual identity. It highlights that identity is not fixed but is shaped by changing social, cultural, and economic conditions. The characters continuously struggle to balance their personal ambitions with family values, cultural traditions, and the pressures of a competitive world.

This study examines the novel through the theoretical perspectives of Wendy Brown, Stuart Hall, Michel Foucault, David Harvey, and Pierre Bourdieu. These theories help explain how neoliberal values, power structures, and social institutions shape human identity and consciousness. The analysis suggests that

while neoliberalism creates opportunities for growth and success, it also produces insecurity, inequality, and a sense of uncertainty among individuals.

Overall, *Quarterlife* presents a meaningful critique of contemporary Indian society by revealing the emotional and social consequences of neoliberalism. The novel encourages readers to reflect on the changing nature of identity and belonging in modern India. This study contributes to the understanding of contemporary Indian English fiction and provides a foundation for further research on Devika Rege's literary works.

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