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**Resilience and Identity in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*,  
Anita Nair's *Idris: Keeper of the Light*, and Jeet Thayil's *Names of the Women***

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**Article Received:** 02/03/2025

**Article Accepted:** 03/04/2025

**Published Online:** 04/04/2025

**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.04.106

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**Abstract:**

Contemporary Indian fiction offers a vivid exploration of the country's social dynamics, addressing themes of resilience, identity, and transformation against the backdrop of its diverse cultural and historical contexts. This research article examines the themes of resilience and identity in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, Anita Nair's *Idris: Keeper of the Light*, and Jeet Thayil's *Names of the Women*. Each novel offers a different viewpoint on how people overcome social and cultural norms to claim their identities and overcome hardship. This investigation highlights the diverse expressions of resilience by comparing and contrasting Balram's forceful self-assertion, Idris's adaptive resilience, and Thayil's female characters' quiet endurance.

This scrutiny highlights the intricate process of identity development in modern Indian fiction by concentrating on these themes, which mirror the characters' experiences navigating social and personal obstacles. Adiga, Nair, and Thayil provide important insights into the study of self-hood and the human spirit in Indian literature by illustrating resilience as a transforming force that enables people to reinvent themselves rather than just as a means of survival.

**Key Words:** Resilience, Identity, Contemporary Indian Fiction, Aravind Adiga, Anita Nair, Jeet Thayil, Survival, Self-hood, Postcolonial Literature

**Introduction**

Themes of resilience and identity are frequently explored in contemporary Indian fiction, which reflects the social, cultural, and individual struggles people encounter in a variety of changing environments. Three distinct novels that explore these themes—*The White Tiger* (2008) by Aravind Adiga, *Idris: Keeper of the Light* (2014) by Anita Nair, and *Names of the Women* (2021) by Jeet Thayil—offer a glimpse into the challenges of self-discovery and survival.

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Through the character of Balram Halwai, who escapes slavery to reclaim his identity and overcome social and class constraints, Adiga exemplifies resilience in *The White Tiger*. As the protagonist balances his beliefs and identity while navigating India's cultural and religious diversity, Nair's *Idris* provides a historical voyage that highlights cultural resilience. *Names of the Women* by Thayil reclaims lost voices by emphasizing the inner strength of women who defy constrictive social constraints in their quest for autonomy and acceptance.

Through their unique locales and story-lines, these novels show resilience as a force for change as well as survival. In order to contribute to a more comprehensive knowledge of cultural and personal survival in the Indian sociocultural framework, the study will look at how each author builds resilience and identity as interconnected notions. The intricacies of self-hood in the face of structural constraints are further highlighted by this thematic study.

### **Resilience as a Means of Survival**

*The White Tiger*, *Idris: Keeper of the Light*, and *Names of the Women* all highlight resilience as a crucial quality for surviving in difficult sociocultural environments. In *The White Tiger*, an impoverished farmer named Balram Halwai escapes slavery to become a successful businessman in the city of India. The story, which is told as a letter to a Chinese premier, reveals the sinister underbelly of class conflict, poverty, and corruption in India. Balram's path, which ultimately represents resilience over systematic oppression, entails morally difficult decisions, including murder, as he rejects the strict caste system to assert his self-made identity.

A Somali trader named Idris sets off on a voyage across 17th-century India in search of riches, a spiritual purpose, and his estranged son in the novel *Idris: Keeper of the Light*. Idris considers identity, belonging, and faith as he travels through several cultural and religious contexts. He faces many obstacles on his journey, adjusting to new cultures and battling his own convictions while exhibiting fortitude and the pursuit of self-awareness.

In *Names of the Women*, Jeet Thayil brings to life the overlooked and unnamed women of the New Testament, reimagining their stories with depth and voice. By examining these women's quiet tenacity and fortitude in the face of patriarchal and religious systems, Thayil provides them a voice. The novel reclaims their position in history and demonstrates resilience within social constraints by highlighting their inner strength, self-hood, and quiet disobedience through their own viewpoints.

Every novel explores resilience in a different way, showing how people exercise their agency and face their limitations. Adiga, Nair, and Thayil provide insights into the complex ways that survival is shaped by resilience through their characters. In exploring the fluid and adaptive nature of postcolonial identity, Homi K. Bhabha emphasizes the concept of hybridity, stating that, "Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal."<sup>i</sup>

**Balram's Resilience in *The White Tiger***

Balram Halwai, the protagonist of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, is a prime example of perseverance in the face of systematic persecution and poverty. Balram was born amid the "darkness" of rural India, where his position as a servant is determined by a strict class system. Balram views resilience as a way to redefine himself and resist the constraints imposed on him. The imprisonment of those without social mobility is shown by Balram's usage of the "Rooster Coop" metaphor to characterize India's class system. Balram has to get out of this coop by using his inner strength to outsmart a system that is meant to repress the poor.

Balram's readiness to question social norms and adopt a realistic perspective on the world is an example of his resilience. He adopts a morally dubious method to survival because he recognizes that the affluent frequently exploit social norms to preserve their supremacy. An extreme act of resistance, Balram's murder of his boss Ashok illustrates the extent to which a character's will for independence can push them. Even though his actions are morally dubious, they demonstrate how resilient the human spirit can be in harsh situations. As a result, Balram's survival and resilience are interwoven, changing his identity in ways that go against established social norms. "*The White Tiger*, authored by Aravind Adiga, stands as a compelling exploration of the underbelly of contemporary India. This novel presents a gripping narrative that revolves around the life and experiences of its protagonist, Balram Halwai, as he strives to transcend his impoverished background and societal constraints. Adiga's work is an unflinching portrayal of the harsh realities faced by the marginalized in India, unveiling a world of corruption, moral ambiguity, and the relentless pursuit of success."<sup>iii</sup>

**Idris's Cultural Resilience in *Idris: Keeper of the Light***

The protagonist's journey across the many and intricate landscapes of 17th-century India is the main subject of Anita Nair's *Idris: Keeper of the Light*, which places perseverance in a historical and cultural framework. A Somali trader named Idris travels to India hoping to make money but ends up taking a more introspective and intimate journey. His ability to maintain his personal values and ideas while navigating India's diverse ethnic and religious identities is the foundation of his resilience. Idris's resilience is about coexistence and adaptation, which enables him to flourish in the face of diversity and conflict, in contrast to Balram's fight against a clearly defined class system.

Idris faces several obstacles, such as religious conflicts and cultural misinterpretations, yet he shows the capacity to uphold his moral principles. Because of his cultural resilience, he is able to build relationships with people that cut across social boundaries. Idris's perseverance is portrayed by Nair as a complex strength that combines flexibility and tolerance, making him a symbol of solidarity in the face of conflict. His story demonstrates how being resilient can also involve balancing with one's environment while upholding one's moral principles, as opposed to overcoming obstacles with force. Thus, Idris's resilience is a potent kind of resilience based on cultural identification, one of survival via understanding rather than revolt. According to Jaya Bhattacharji Rose, "The novel is a

breath-taking adventure, a passionate love story and a voyage of discovery with the tall, dark, mysterious traveller, Idris, as the still centre of the story."<sup>iii</sup>

### **Silent Endurance in *Names of the Women***

*Names of the Women* by Jeet Thayil focusses on the unsung bravery of women whose tales are frequently left out of religious and historical accounts. The voices of New Testament women are re-imagined by Thayil, who, in spite of their marginalized roles, have a quiet strength that allows them to persevere and defy patriarchal norms. Through examining their tenacity as a means of surviving in a male-dominated environment, Thayil's tale gives these women agency.

In contrast to Balram or Idris, the ladies in *Names of the Women* are resilient because they can persevere and quietly express who they are. The portrayal by Thayil highlights the tenacity that endures, even when it is not acknowledged, and the strength that can be discovered in quiet. As a survival strategy, this endurance enables these women to maintain their self-worth and make their presence known in a culture that limits them. According to Thayil's methodology, resilience can manifest itself in a variety of ways, including silent, tenacious survival that surpasses historical erasure and occasionally as outspoken opposition.

Resilience is portrayed in each book as a complex survival strategy. The women in Thayil's book symbolize resilience as silent endurance within historical and religious constraints; Idris's resilience is cultural adaptability that maintains his identity in a pluralistic society; and Balram's resilience is a confrontational act of self-assertion against a strict class system. Collectively, these depictions show the different ways that resilience makes survival possible, acting as a transformational force that reinterprets identity and subverts social norms in addition to being a way to endure.

Adiga, Nair, and Thayil demonstrate that resilience is a highly personal reaction to the challenges that each character encounters rather than a universal quality through Balram, Idris, and Thayil's unidentified ladies. Resilience is a powerful theme in contemporary Indian literature because these stories show that it is essential for survival in a variety of sociocultural contexts, whether it be loud or silent.

### **The Quest for Identity and Self-hood**

A major subject in *The White Tiger*, *Idris: Keeper of the Light*, and *Names of the Women* is the search for identity and self-hood, as each protagonist deals with particular situations that mould their sense of self. Through their hardships, Adiga, Nair, and Thayil examine the difficult process of self-discovery in a culture where gender, religion, class, and tradition frequently dictate one's identity. These novels show how the quest for identity serves as a means of opposition to social norms as well as a means of survival.

### **Self-Determination in *The White Tiger***

Balram Halwai's fight for social and economic independence in *The White Tiger* is entwined with his search for himself. Balram was born into a poor caste, and his family, village, and socioeconomic standing all shape who he is. His early life as a servant serves to further solidify his position within the "Rooster Coop," which is a metaphor for the inflexible

class structure that imprisons people who are born into poverty. Balram's exposure to money and power in Delhi, where he observes the disparate lifestyles of the wealthy and powerful, fuels his yearning for self-hood. His ambition is fuelled by this closeness to privilege, which also strengthens his will to break free and reinvent himself.

Throughout his voyage, Balram challenges the social order with acts of self-assertion. He rejects his assigned persona by deciding to murder and steal from his boss, which is a drastic break from his planned duty as a devoted servant. Balram regains his identity by escaping his assigned position in society, even though he does so in a way that is morally dubious. His journey from a "half-baked" guy to a prosperous businessman represents his transition from a passive to an active life, representing a self-defined identity that transcends the constraints of poverty and caste. By arguing that self-hood is frequently attained through acts of rebellion in a society that limits mobility to the marginalized, Adiga challenges the systemic injustices that imprison people through Balram.

#### **Cultural and Spiritual Identity in *Idris: Keeper of the Light***

As Idris, a Somali trader, negotiates the cultural intricacies of 17th-century India, Anita Nair's *Idris: Keeper of the Light* offers a more introspective search for identity. Idris is on a spiritual and physical journey as he looks for connection and purpose in a strange place. Idris is trying to comprehend himself in the context of various cultural and religious landscapes, in contrast to Balram, who wants to break free from his societal limitations. His experiences as an outsider have a profound impact on his search for identification since they mould his conception of self-hood and belonging.

Idris begins to doubt his own spirituality and sense of self as a result of his exposure to diverse religious rituals and ideas. His identity is enhanced by this exposure to diversity, which enables him to embrace a variety of viewpoints in his worldview. He has a more flexible and inclusive sense of self as a result of his encounters with people from other origins and faiths, where identity is not strictly defined by a single cultural or religious allegiance. Idris's journey highlights how one's openness to comprehending and appreciating many cultures may shape one's sense of self, which can be a mosaic of experiences.

Idris views his search for himself as a process of combining his past with fresh perspectives from his travels rather than discarding it. Nair portrays self-hood as a path of spiritual development and cultural adaptation, where resilience is the capacity to change without losing one's essential principles. Idris's identity develops into a synthesis of his Somali ancestry and the various influences he experiences, representing a flexible yet morally upright self.

#### **Reclaiming Female Identity in *Names of the Women***

By giving them an identity and self-hood that patriarchal history frequently denies them, Jeet Thayil reimagines the lost voices of biblical women in *Names of the Women*. The story turns the attention to women who are either unidentified or marginalized in conventional narratives, although playing important roles. These ladies are given a voice through Thayil's story, which delves into their inner lives, challenges, and resilience. In a

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historical setting that has historically made people invisible, their search for identity is an act of taking back their narratives and embracing their uniqueness.

Thayil's women find their identities via perseverance and subdued resistance rather than via insurrection. They demonstrate resilience by managing to maintain their identity in the face of social and religious pressures. Their unspoken power turns into a kind of identity that defies the erasure that patriarchal narratives impose. By telling these women's stories, Thayil challenges historical narratives that minimize women to supporting roles and highlights the significance of recovering female identity.

Thayil's reinvention of these women's viewpoints, in particular, illuminates their nuanced inner lives and demonstrates how they navigate identification in a society that restricts their freedom. His depiction makes self-hood an assertion of existence, a demand to be acknowledged and remembered in spite of attempts to marginalize or quiet them. Thus, the women's names symbolize identity as a survival tactic, whereby one's identity is maintained via recollection and individual fortitude. Thayil's method emphasizes how the search for identity can be a silent, persistent declaration of one's existence rather than always being a public act of resistance. According to The Times, "The risen Christ appeared first to Mary of Magdala... it was the women who were the first leaders of the Church. This is the book of the martyrdom of Jesus, and this is the book of the women who travelled with him." Thayil's narrator observes that "the names of the women are not spoken, or spoken too rarely. Most often they are forgotten or suppressed or erased."<sup>iv</sup>

The search for identity and self-hood appears throughout these novels as a very personal path influenced by the particular circumstances of each character. Idris's journey is one of cultural adaptation and spiritual inquiry, Balram's route is a rebellious quest for autonomy in a world that limits him to poverty, and the women in Thayil's story regain their identities through tenacity in the face of historical erasure. These stories collectively portray self-hood as a transformational force, a necessary component of survival that empowers each character to determine their own position in the world.

The exploration of identity of these novels mirrors a larger conversation about the value of personal agency in cultures that frequently assign roles based on gender, class, or culture. Adiga, Nair, and Thayil emphasize the close connection between identity and resilience by using their characters to examine the various ways people can seek self-hood. The journeys of each character emphasize the idea that identity is deliberately created via self-discovery and personal resilience rather than being passively inherited or assigned.

### **Comparative Analysis of Thematic Representation**

Resilience and the search for identity are demonstrated by characters in *The White Tiger*, *Idris: Keeper of the Light*, and *Names of the Women* who face social, cultural, and individual obstacles in distinctive ways. These novels illustrate the many ways in which people exercise agency within constrictive frameworks by illuminating the intersection of identity and resilience through a comparative lens. In modern Indian fiction, Adiga, Nair,

and Thayil each contribute unique viewpoints to these subjects, resulting in a complex depiction of survival.

Resilience in *The White Tiger* is a strong, frequently defiant trait motivated by Balram's desire to flee an oppressive class structure. According to Adiga, resilience is a form of resistance, and in order for Balram to remake himself, he must upend the social order. His behaviour goes against conventional morals, implying that strong self-assertion is necessary for resilience in this situation. According to the novel, resilience is an act of defiance-based survival in which one deliberately reclaims one's individuality from social norms.

*Idris: Keeper of the Light*, on the other hand, defines resilience as both personal integrity and cultural flexibility. Idris's ability to develop a nuanced, comprehensive sense of self is influenced by his receptivity to the various cultures he comes into contact with. Nair portrays resilience as an internal strength that blends in with many cultural experiences rather than as an external rebellion. Idris's resilience is one of adaptability rather than confrontation since his search for identity is more about discovering oneself in a pluralistic world than it is about fighting against outside constraints.

Thayil presents yet another perspective in *Names of the Women*, describing resilience as silent perseverance. Although the women in his book make their identities known within the confines of patriarchal and religious systems, they do so without explicitly disobeying them. Their quiet perseverance, where identity is recovered via presence and memory, is what makes them resilient. Thayil's strategy emphasizes that resilience does not always have to be overt or combative; it may also be the subdued affirmation of one's value within set parameters.

In contrast, these novels demonstrate how identity and resilience are highly subjective reactions to particular sociocultural settings. Resilience is portrayed by Adiga as forceful revolt, by Nair as cultural coexistence, and by Thayil as subtle persistence. When taken as a whole, they demonstrate how resilience can be defiant, adaptive, or silent, depending on the situation and values of the individual. The depth of modern Indian fiction in examining many tales of resistance, self-hood, and survival is shown by this comparative viewpoint. Adiga, Nair, and Thayil's works are important explorations of the human spirit in intricate sociocultural contexts because they offer a wider perspective on identity development through their diverse manifestations of resilience.

### **Conclusion**

As individuals and societies evolve, they often face transformative challenges that shape their identities and resilience. Reflecting this notion, Dr. Vangeepuram Sreenatha Chary observes in his study of cultural evolution that, 'According to many anthropologists, a culture had to pass through several stages in the process of its evolution from the stage of savagery to barbarism and from barbarism to civilization' (Chary 19)."<sup>v</sup> Resilience and identity become major themes that influence each character's path in *The White Tiger*, *Idris: Keeper of the Light*, and *Names of the Women*. Adiga, Nair, and Thayil demonstrate the

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various ways people express their identities within narrowing societal institutions through disobedience, flexibility, and silent perseverance. Their characters serve as excellent examples of resilience, which is a very personal reaction to hardship that turns survival into a self-defining act. When taken as a whole, these books provide a sophisticated examination of identity development in modern Indian fiction, emphasizing the resilience of the human spirit and the variety of routes to self-realization in the face of social and cultural limitations.

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### Citation:

**Farheena Tabassum** "Resilience and Identity in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, Anita Nair's *Idris: Keeper of the Light*, and Jeet Thayil's *Names of the Women*" *International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2025, pp. 99-106. DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.04.106.