

# Cultural Synthesis in Turmoil: Material Forces Shaping the Hybrid Identity of Salman Rushdie's *Victory City*

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**Abstract**—Salman Rushdie's *Victory City* (2023) intricately examines the intersection of cultural identity, political power, and historical transformation through the dual lenses of cultural hybridization and Raymond Williams' cultural materialism. The novel unfolds the story of Pampa Kampana, a visionary woman who establishes the city of Victory, a microcosm of both indigenous cultural resilience and colonial dominance. Set within a context of ongoing postcolonial dynamics, *Victory City* interrogates the formation of identity and the material forces that shape this process. Through the characters' cultural negotiations and transformations, the novel becomes a site for exploring the tension between cultural assimilation and resistance, highlighting the profound complexities of the postcolonial condition. The theoretical framework of cultural hybridization, particularly as articulated by Homi K. Bhabha (1994), plays a pivotal role in understanding Rushdie's portrayal of cultural identities in flux. According to Bhabha, hybridization is not a simple fusion of two cultures but a complex negotiation that creates a third, liminal space where identities evolve through interaction, resistance, and adaptation. In *Victory City*, the city itself becomes a representation of this "third space," where colonial and indigenous elements collide, giving rise to hybrid identities that emerge in response to external domination and internal struggles. Through the city's emergence and transformation, Rushdie vividly illustrates how cultural identities are continually shaped by the interaction of disparate, often contradictory, cultural forces. Raymond Williams' theory of "cultural materialism" complements Bhabha's hybridization theory by providing an essential framework for understanding the material conditions that underpin cultural forms. Williams argues that culture cannot be divorced from its social, political, and economic contexts. The practical aspects of colonialism, including, social hierarchies, economic inequalities, and exploitation, influence how cultural identities are developed in *Victory City*. The political and economic

conditions of colonial subjugation influence the creation and representation of cultural practices, imbuing the city's hybrid identity with layers of resistance and accommodation. The city's eventual downfall underscores the fragility of hybrid identities in the face of unresolved contradictions between cultural forces and material conditions. Rushdie's novel navigates the tension between the cultural autonomy Pampa attempts to create and the underlying forces of colonial oppression and material exploitation. Pampa's efforts to forge a space for indigenous cultural practices within a colonial framework illustrate the dialectical relationship between identity formation and the material conditions that shape it. The city of Victory is not merely a symbolic construct but a reflection of the complex and often contradictory nature of postcolonial identity, where power struggles, economic exploitation, and cultural resistance intersect. Ultimately, *Victory City* provides a nuanced commentary on the ongoing struggles for identity and autonomy in postcolonial contexts. By synthesizing the theories of Bhabha and Williams, the novel demonstrates how hybrid cultural identities are not static but continuously evolving through negotiation, resistance, and transformation. Rushdie's depiction of *Victory City* as a space of cultural hybridity and material tension allows for a deeper understanding of the complex forces that define postcolonial societies.

**Index Terms**—Cultural Hybridization, Cultural Materialism, Postcolonial Identity, Hybridity Colonialism, Indigenous Resistance.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Salman Rushdie's *Victory City* (2023) unfolds a captivating tale of cultural hybridization, colonial legacies, and identity formation set against the backdrop of an imagined city. The novel offers a complex narrative centered around the protagonist

Pampa Kampana, the founder of the city of Victory, which stands as a microcosm for postcolonial struggles and aspirations. *Victory City* delves into the tension between colonial domination and indigenous resistance, illustrating how hybrid identities and cultural practices emerge in response to the complex interplay of these forces. Through the dual lens of Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity and Raymond Williams' cultural materialism, this study aims to illuminate the intricate process of identity construction in the postcolonial context, as represented in Rushdie's work.

The concept of identity formation in postcolonial literature has long been a subject of academic inquiry. One important subject that has arisen is the study of hybrid identities, which are dynamic outcomes of historical and cultural struggle rather than simply being blends of cultures. As Homi K. Bhabha (1994) argues, the colonial encounter produces new cultural forms that transcend simple assimilation. Instead, it leads to the creation of "hybrid" identities, which occupy a liminal space between colonizer and colonized. Bhabha's theory of hybridity, especially his concept of the "third space," challenges the binary opposition between colonizer and colonized, suggesting that new, fluid cultural forms emerge in the space between these two forces. In *Victory City*, Rushdie imagines this third space through the city of Victory, where colonial and indigenous elements interact and evolve. As Bhabha observes, "the 'third space' is not an additional space but a negotiation of all the differences that comprise the cultural condition" (Bhabha 38). Through the story of Pampa and her city, Rushdie embodies this negotiation, revealing how cultural identities in postcolonial settings are never fixed but constantly redefined through interaction and contestation.

Moreover, the material conditions of postcolonial life play an equally crucial role in shaping cultural practices and identities. Raymond Williams' cultural materialism, as articulated in "Marxism and Literature" (1977), provides a framework for understanding how culture is intertwined with the material realities of economic, social, and political structures. Williams argues that cultural forms are products of specific historical and material conditions, and thus, the ways in which people experience and express their identities are shaped by the power structures that govern their lives. In the case of *Victory City*, the rise and fall of the

city mirror the broader dynamics of colonial exploitation, political corruption, and social inequality. Williams asserts that "culture is a part of the social process of change, and it is affected by the material structures in which it operates" (Williams 87). The city of Victory itself is a metaphor for the material and cultural negotiations that define the postcolonial condition. One important subject that has arisen is the study of hybrid identities, which are dynamic outcomes of historical and cultural struggle rather than simply being blends of cultures.

The city's rise, cultural flourishing, and eventual downfall reflect the broader impact of colonialism and the power struggles that followed in the post-colonial era. Through Pampa Kampana's leadership, *Victory City* represents both resistance and adaptation, a site where indigenous traditions and colonial influences merge into new hybrid forms. The city's inhabitants, who occupy different social strata, embody the material consequences of colonial domination and the ways in which power structures shape cultural expressions. The material inequalities within the city highlight the tension between elite rulers who perpetuate colonial power structures and marginalized groups who challenge these structures through cultural resistance.

In Rushdie's portrayal, the city of Victory itself becomes a cultural battlefield, where competing ideologies and identities clash, overlap, and reconfigure. The people of Victory, both the privileged and the marginalized, navigate their roles within the ever-changing cultural and social landscape. In doing so, they forge hybrid identities that are at once products of their indigenous past and responses to the colonial present. This process of hybridization is not only cultural but also deeply political, as the city's inhabitants contest and transform the material structures that define their lives. As Robert J. C. Young (2003) argues in "Post colonialism: An Historical Introduction", postcolonial literature often dramatizes the contradictions of identity formation, especially in societies that are simultaneously shaped by colonial histories and the quest for autonomy. Young writes, "Rushdie's works consistently dramatize the collision of colonizer and colonized, which produces not just conflict but new forms of cultural identity that reflect the multiplicity of postcolonial experience" (Young 213).

This process of identity formation through hybridization is also informed by gender dynamics, which are central to *Victory City*. Scholars have noted that Rushdie's depiction of women, particularly Pampa, subverts traditional gender roles within postcolonial societies. Marlon James (2023) observes that Pampa's agency as the founder of Victory disrupts the conventional representation of women in historical narratives, particularly those that are shaped by colonialism and patriarchy. He argues, "Pampa's agency as the city's founder signals a rethinking of colonial and gendered power structures that often erase women from the historical narrative" (James 102). Pampa's ability to navigate and reshape the hybrid space of Victory underscores the intersectionality of colonialism, gender, and identity, highlighting how cultural hybridity operates not only along national and ethnic lines but also through gendered power dynamics.

In this study, the focus will be on how Rushdie's *Victory City* explores the intersection of cultural hybridity and material conditions, using Bhabha's and Williams' frameworks to analyze the complex interplay of identity, power, and resistance. The novel's portrayal of Victory, a city that is both a product and a battleground of colonial forces, offers valuable insights into how identities are formed and transformed in the postcolonial world. Through the theoretical lenses of cultural hybridity and cultural materialism, this study aims to deepen our understanding of how Rushdie's narrative represents the fluid, contested, and evolving nature of postcolonial identities.

Postcolonial literature is often concerned with the complex processes by which individuals and communities negotiate their identities in the wake of colonialism. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, first introduced in "The Location of Culture" (1994), has become a foundational framework for understanding the ways in which colonial encounters lead to the creation of new cultural forms. Bhabha rejects the idea of a simple fusion of cultures, arguing instead that the colonial encounter produces a space where identities are neither fully indigenous nor fully colonial but hybrid. This hybridization is a dynamic and ongoing process that challenges traditional notions of cultural purity and fixed identities. Bhabha's idea of the "third space" is central to understanding how cultural identities in postcolonial

contexts are always in flux, constantly negotiated in response to the tensions between colonizer and colonized. As Bhabha states, "The 'third space' is not an additional space but a negotiation of all the differences that comprise the cultural condition" (Bhabha 38). Rushdie's *Victory City* embodies this negotiation, as the city itself becomes a liminal space where colonial and indigenous cultural elements are in constant interaction.

Raymond Williams' cultural materialism, particularly as outlined in "Marxism and Literature" (1977), provides a complementary framework for understanding how cultural forms are shaped by the material conditions of society. Williams argues that culture is always embedded in the social, political, and economic structures that govern society, and thus the forms of identity that emerge in postcolonial contexts are closely tied to the material conditions of colonialism and its aftermath. According to Williams, culture is not simply an ideological construct but a product of the material realities of class, power, and production. As Williams writes, "culture is a part of the social process of change, and it is affected by the material structures in which it operates" (Williams 87). In *Victory City*, the cultural hybridity of the city is not merely a theoretical or symbolic phenomenon but is deeply influenced by the material realities of colonial rule, economic exploitation, and class divisions. The novel's portrayal of the rise and fall of Victory mirrors the larger processes of social change and cultural transformation in the postcolonial world.

Recent scholarship has further explored the themes of gender and power in *Victory City*, particularly the representation of women as active agents in the creation of cultural and political change. Scholars like Marlon James (2023) have noted that Pampa's role as the city's founder disrupts traditional gendered power structures in postcolonial societies, where women are often marginalized or erased from historical narratives. As James argues, "Pampa's agency as the city's founder signals a rethinking of colonial and gendered power structures that often erase women from the historical narrative" (James 102). In this sense, *Victory City* offers a rich site for examining how gender, cultural hybridity, and material conditions intersect to shape postcolonial identities.

Cultural hybridization, a concept emerging from postcolonial theory, challenges traditional notions of static, pure cultures and emphasizes the process by

which distinct cultural practices, beliefs, and identities interact, merge, and reshape each other. As articulated by Homi K. Bhabha in “The Location of Culture” (1994), cultural hybridization is seen as a dynamic process where cultures do not simply blend but evolve through negotiations of power, history, and difference. Bhabha introduces the concept of the “third space,” a site where cultural identity is formed through encounters that are both transformative and fluid. This “third space,” according to Bhabha, does not allow for a return to authenticity or purity but rather emphasizes the complexity and hybridity of identities as they emerge from colonial histories.

In *Victory City*, Rushdie explores this hybridity through the construction and eventual collapse of the city of Victory. The protagonist, Pampa Kampana, envisions Victory as a city where indigenous and foreign elements are intertwined, producing a new cultural order. In Bhabha’s terms, this city becomes a space where the hybrid identity of the city’s inhabitants cannot be understood simply as a combination of two cultures. Rather, it emerges as a new cultural form, negotiating between the past and the present, the native and the foreign.

Bhabha’s concept of hybridity emphasizes that identities are never fixed but are continuously shaped by the forces of cultural interaction. He writes, “The interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha 4). In *Victory City*, Pampa’s struggle to create a hybridized cultural space in the face of colonial pressures illustrates the inherent contradictions in the process of cultural adaptation. These contradictions are not simply the product of cultural exchange but are central to the formation of new, hybrid identities.

Raymond Williams, in his seminal work “Marxism and Literature” (1977), presents a theoretical framework known as cultural materialism, which asserts that culture cannot be understood in isolation from the material conditions of existence. Williams contends that culture is not merely a superstructure that reflects dominant ideologies but is embedded in the everyday practices, struggles, and economic realities of life. According to Williams, cultural forms emerge out of the material conditions that shape them, and they, in turn, influence and reshape those conditions.

In “*Victory City*” the material realities of colonialism, class, and economic exploitation serve as the foundation for the hybrid cultural forms that emerge. Victory’s rise and eventual collapse are not merely the result of cultural negotiation but are also shaped by the social, economic, and political forces at play. Williams argues, “Culture is a way of life... it is not merely the reflection of the dominant social order but the site of struggle” (Williams 12). In Rushdie’s novel, this struggle is manifested in the characters’ navigation of the complexities of identity and power, with Pampa Kampana’s vision of a hybrid city coming up against the material forces that shape its destiny.

Cultural materialism emphasizes that hybridity is not a free-floating process of cultural fusion but is constrained and shaped by the material conditions of its context. In “*Victory City*” the collapse of the city cannot be understood merely as the failure of cultural hybridity but must be viewed within the broader framework of social and material struggles. The hybrid city, like its inhabitants, is subjected to the pressures of power, inequality, and economic exploitation, which ultimately lead to its disintegration.

## II. CULTURAL HYBRIDIZATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF VICTORY

In “*Victory City*” the hybrid nature of the city is embodied in its very construction. Pampa Kampana’s dream of creating a city where indigenous traditions coexist with foreign influences reflects the dynamic process of cultural hybridization. The city is designed as a space where different cultural practices, beliefs, and forms of knowledge converge, creating a new urban landscape that transcends simple cultural amalgamation. Pampa’s vision for Victory represents what Bhabha would describe as the “third space” a cultural space that is not a mere fusion of the old and the new but a space of constant negotiation and transformation.

Victory’s hybridity is most apparent in its religious practices, which blend indigenous beliefs with foreign ideologies. As Pampa struggles to integrate these diverse practices, she creates a syncretic belief system that challenges the boundaries between the sacred and the secular. This hybridity is not only cultural but also political, as Pampa seeks to create a space of resistance to colonial power. In this sense, the city becomes a microcosm of the broader postcolonial world, where

cultural hybridization is both a survival strategy and a form of political resistance.

Pampa's creation of Victory is also an act of cultural adaptation, responding to the colonial forces that seek to impose their own norms and values. The city is a manifestation of what Bhabha terms the "space of in-betweenness," where identity is not static but constantly evolving through the interplay of different cultural forces. Rushdie writes, "Victory was to be a place of possibility, a city born of impossible dreams and yet set in the world's hard, unyielding reality" (Rushdie 2023, 245). This tension between the ideal and the real, the cultural and the material, is at the heart of the city's hybrid nature.

### III. THE COLLAPSE OF VICTORY AND THE FRAGILITY OF HYBRIDITY

While Victory begins as a symbol of hope and transformation, it ultimately collapses, revealing the fragility of hybrid identities and cultures. The city's downfall is a direct result of the tensions between its hybrid cultural forms and the material conditions of colonial exploitation, class division, and economic disparity. Rushdie's portrayal of Victory's collapse emphasizes the vulnerability of hybrid spaces in the face of entrenched power structures. The collapse of the city mirrors the limits of hybridity as a tool for resistance, as it becomes apparent that cultural hybridization alone is insufficient to overcome the material forces of colonialism.

Williams' theory of cultural materialism helps to explain the collapse of Victory. He argues, "Culture does not exist separately from the social order, and it cannot be analyzed without reference to its underlying economic and political structures" (Williams 16). In *Victory City*, the failure of hybridization to create lasting social change is directly linked to the material conditions that shape the city. The exploitation of labor, the social hierarchies that exist within the city, and the constant threat of colonial subjugation all contribute to the city's eventual disintegration.

The collapse of Victory also underscores the inherent contradictions of hybridity. While hybrid identities can serve as a space for resistance and cultural adaptation, they are always vulnerable to the forces of material inequality. As Bhabha notes, "The hybridity of colonial discourse...is marked by the ambivalence of its role in the processes of cultural domination and

resistance" (Bhabha 56). The hybrid nature of Victory, while providing a space for cultural negotiation, is ultimately unable to withstand the pressures of colonialism and the material realities of exploitation. Salman Rushdie's *Victory City* offers a profound exploration of cultural hybridization, blending postcolonial theory, cultural materialism, and historical narrative. Through the rise and fall of Victory, Rushdie examines the complexities of identity formation and the tension between cultural adaptation and material conditions. The city of Victory serves as a metaphor for the process of cultural hybridization, where indigenous traditions and foreign influences constantly negotiate and transform one another. However, the city's collapse highlights the fragility of hybrid identities in the face of colonial power, class division, and economic exploitation. As both Bhabha and Williams argue, hybridity is not a solution to the material conditions of colonialism but a constant process of negotiation, fraught with contradictions and struggles. In the end, *Victory City* reminds us of the precariousness of hybrid identities and the need to confront the material realities that shape cultural existence.

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