

Negotiating Identity and Belonging in Anand Mahadevan's *The Strike*



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ABSTRACT:

Indo-Canadian literature has emerged as a significant branch of diasporic writing that explores the complexities of migration, cultural negotiation, and identity formation. Anand Mahadevan's novel *The Strike* (2006) offers a compelling portrayal of an immigrant subject struggling with questions of selfhood and belonging within a multicultural Canadian context. This paper examines how Mahadevan represents identity as fluid, fragmented, and continuously negotiated rather than fixed or essential. Through the protagonist's personal conflicts, social marginalization, and search for emotional and cultural anchoring, the novel reflects the broader experiences of Indo-Canadian immigrants who inhabit a liminal space between homeland and host nation. Drawing on theories of diaspora, hybridity, and belonging, this study analyzes how the novel articulates the tensions between cultural inheritance and individual desire. The paper argues that Mahadevan's narrative foregrounds belonging as a contested and evolving process shaped by race, memory, and socio-cultural displacement.

Keywords: diaspora, identity, belonging, hybridity and migration.

INTRODUCTION:

The growing body of Indo-Canadian literature represents an important site for examining the lived realities of migration, displacement, and cultural negotiation. Writers of Indian origin who have settled in Canada often engage with themes of identity and belonging, reflecting the psychological and social complexities faced by immigrants in a multicultural yet hierarchical society. These narratives challenge monolithic notions of national identity by foregrounding hybrid subjectivities shaped by both memory of the homeland and the pressures of assimilation in the host country. Anand Mahadevan, an Indian-born Canadian writer, contributes meaningfully to this tradition through his novel *The Strike* (2006), which explores the fragile and evolving nature of identity in a diasporic context.

Diaspora literature frequently focuses on the sense of in-betweenness experienced by immigrants who find themselves caught between cultural worlds. In the Canadian context, official multiculturalism promises inclusion and diversity, yet lived experiences often reveal exclusion, alienation, and identity conflict. Indo-Canadian writers use fiction to interrogate this gap between ideological inclusivity and social reality. The novel situates its narrative within this tension, presenting identity not as a stable category but as an ongoing struggle influenced by race, sexuality, class, and cultural expectations. The novel reflects how belonging is not automatically granted by geographic relocation or citizenship but must be negotiated through everyday encounters and personal self-recognition. Mahadevan's work is particularly significant because it moves beyond conventional representations of the Indian immigrant as merely

negotiating cultural difference. Instead, it delves into the internal conflicts of its protagonist, who grapples with self-definition in the face of marginalization. Identity in the novel is shown to be deeply personal yet socially constructed, shaped by the gaze of the dominant culture as well as by inherited cultural norms. This dual pressure creates a fragmented sense of self that complicates the immigrant's attempt to feel at home in Canada.

The theme of belonging occupies a central position in the novel, not only in terms of national or cultural belonging but also emotional and interpersonal belonging. The protagonist's struggle is emblematic of a broader diasporic condition in which individuals seek validation, acceptance, and coherence in environments that constantly mark them as "other." Mahadevan portrays belonging as conditional and unstable, dependent on conformity to dominant social norms that often exclude racial and cultural minorities. This portrayal aligns with contemporary diasporic theory, which views belonging as a dynamic process rather than a fixed state. This research paper aims to analyze how the novel articulates the themes of identity and belonging within the framework of Indo-Canadian diaspora literature. By examining the novel's representation of immigrant subjectivity, cultural alienation, and self-searching, the study seeks to highlight Mahadevan's contribution to discussions on diasporic identity formation. The paper argues that *The Strike* presents identity as fragmented and belonging as perpetually deferred, thereby challenging idealized narratives of immigrant success and integration in Canada. Through this analysis, the

paper situates Mahadevan's novel within broader debates in postcolonial and diasporic literary studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The study of diasporic literature has gained significant prominence in contemporary literary criticism, particularly in relation to questions of identity, belonging, and cultural displacement. Scholars of postcolonial and diaspora studies have emphasized that migration produces not merely geographical movement but also profound psychological and cultural transformations. Indo-Canadian literature, as a subset of South Asian diasporic writing, occupies a unique position within this discourse because it emerges from Canada's official multicultural framework while simultaneously exposing its limitations. Critical discussions of this body of literature often foreground the instability of identity and the persistent sense of unbelonging experienced by immigrants of Indian origin. These concerns form an essential context for understanding Anand Mahadevan's *The Strike*, which reflects many of the theoretical and thematic concerns articulated by diaspora scholars.

Stuart Hall's influential conception of cultural identity has been central to literary analyses of diasporic texts. Hall argues that identity is not a fixed essence inherited from the past but a continuous process shaped by history, culture, and representation. This understanding has been widely applied to Indo-Canadian fiction, where characters are often portrayed as negotiating multiple cultural affiliations rather than inhabiting a single, stable identity. Scholars note that Indo-Canadian protagonists frequently exist in a state of "becoming," constantly redefining themselves in response to new social realities. This theoretical framework is particularly relevant to *The Strike*, where identity is shown to be fragmented and shaped by both personal desire and external social pressures.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the "third space" has also played a crucial role in diaspora criticism. Bhabha suggests that cultural meaning is produced in an in-between space where dominant and marginalized cultures intersect. Many critics have used this idea to analyze Indo-Canadian narratives, arguing that such texts resist binary oppositions between East and West. Instead, they portray hybrid identities that challenge notions of cultural purity and national belonging. However, scholars have also pointed out that hybridity is not always empowering; it can be accompanied by confusion, alienation, and psychological strain. This ambivalence is evident in Indo-Canadian fiction, where the third space often becomes a site of struggle rather than liberation.

Canadian multiculturalism has been another major focus of critical inquiry in relation to diasporic literature. While Canada officially celebrates cultural diversity, literary critics argue that multiculturalism

often masks underlying racial hierarchies. Indo-Canadian writers frequently expose the gap between the rhetoric of inclusion and the lived experience of marginalization. Scholars such as Smaro Kamboureli and Himani Bannerji have critiqued multicultural discourse for commodifying cultural difference while failing to address systemic inequalities. In this critical context, Indo-Canadian novels are read as counter-narratives that reveal the emotional and social costs of racialization. *The Strike* aligns with this tradition by portraying belonging as conditional and fragile rather than guaranteed. The theme of belonging has been extensively examined in diaspora studies, where it is understood as both an emotional and political condition. Belonging involves recognition, acceptance, and a sense of home, yet diasporic subjects often experience what scholars describe as "partial belonging." This condition is characterized by simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, where immigrants may be legally recognized as citizens but remain socially marginalized. Literary critics note that Indo-Canadian texts frequently represent belonging as an ongoing struggle rather than a resolved state. Characters may adapt outwardly while continuing to feel internally disconnected. This understanding of belonging provides an important lens for reading Mahadevan's novel, in which the protagonist's search for acceptance remains unresolved.

Memory and nostalgia have also been central concerns in critical discussions of diasporic literature. Scholars argue that memory functions as both a source of continuity and a site of conflict for immigrants. While memories of the homeland can provide comfort and identity, they can also intensify feelings of loss and displacement. In Indo-Canadian fiction, the past often intrudes upon the present, complicating the immigrant's attempt to fully belong in the host society. Critics suggest that such narratives resist linear models of assimilation by emphasizing the persistence of memory and emotional attachment. This critical insight is relevant to *The Strike*, where the protagonist's internal conflicts are shaped by unresolved connections to the past. Another significant area of scholarship focuses on the body and subjectivity in diasporic writing. Scholars influenced by poststructuralist and feminist theory argue that identity is experienced through the body, which becomes a site of regulation and difference in the host society. Racialized and immigrant bodies are often subjected to surveillance, stereotyping, and exclusion, shaping how individuals perceive themselves. Indo-Canadian literature frequently reflects this embodied experience of marginalization, highlighting how identity is negotiated through everyday interactions. Mahadevan's work can be situated within this critical framework, as the novel portrays identity as deeply personal, vulnerable, and affected by social judgment.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on Indo-Canadian literature, Anand Mahadevan's work has received relatively limited critical attention compared to more established writers such as Rohinton Mistry or Anita Rau Badami. Existing studies that reference the novel tend to situate it within broader discussions of South Asian Canadian writing, emphasizing its focus on internal conflict and identity formation. Critics note that Mahadevan's narrative style is introspective and character-driven, prioritizing psychological depth over external action. This focus distinguishes *The Strike* from other diasporic novels that emphasize family or community narratives, making it a valuable text for examining individual identity and belonging. Overall, the existing literature on diaspora, hybridity, and Indo-Canadian writing provides a strong theoretical foundation for analyzing the novel. Scholars consistently emphasize that identity in diasporic contexts is unstable, negotiated, and shaped by power relations. Belonging emerges as an elusive goal rather than a stable condition, reflecting the complexities of immigrant life in multicultural societies. By engaging with these critical perspectives, this study positions Mahadevan's *The Strike* as a significant contribution to Indo-Canadian literature, one that deepens our understanding of identity and belonging in the contemporary diaspora.

DIASPORA, IDENTITY, AND BELONGING IN THE NOVEL:

Anand Mahadevan's *The Strike* presents a deeply introspective narrative that foregrounds the psychological dimensions of diasporic identity and the persistent struggle for belonging within a Canadian socio-cultural landscape. Unlike many diasporic novels that emphasize collective histories or family sagas, Mahadevan's work focuses intensely on the individual immigrant subject, revealing how identity is shaped, fractured, and continually renegotiated in response to displacement. The novel situates identity not as a stable inheritance but as a fragile construct shaped by memory, desire, and social exclusion. Through the protagonist's internal conflicts and lived experiences, Mahadevan articulates the complexities of Indo-Canadian subjectivity, emphasizing the emotional costs of migration and the ambiguity of belonging.

Identity in the novel is portrayed as inherently unstable, reflecting the diasporic condition of living between cultures. The protagonist's sense of self is marked by uncertainty, as neither the cultural framework of the homeland nor the social structures of the host country provide a complete or secure foundation. This instability aligns with contemporary diaspora theory, which views identity as fluid and relational rather than essential. Mahadevan's narrative demonstrates how the immigrant self is continuously shaped by external perceptions, particularly within a society that subtly reinforces

racial and cultural hierarchies. The protagonist's awareness of being marked as different intensifies his internal struggle, leading to a fragmented sense of identity that resists coherence. The Canadian setting in the novel plays a crucial role in shaping the protagonist's experience of identity and belonging. Canada is often imagined as a space of multicultural inclusion and liberal tolerance, yet Mahadevan's novel reveals the limitations of this ideal. The protagonist encounters a social environment that, while outwardly inclusive, operates through unspoken norms that privilege whiteness and cultural conformity. This contradiction exposes the conditional nature of belonging in a multicultural society, where acceptance is granted only to the extent that difference remains non-threatening. Mahadevan uses this tension to critique the superficiality of multicultural discourse, suggesting that cultural diversity does not necessarily translate into emotional or social inclusion.

Belonging in the novel is depicted as an elusive and contested state rather than a stable achievement. The protagonist's efforts to integrate into Canadian society are repeatedly undermined by feelings of alienation and invisibility. Despite physical presence and social participation, he remains emotionally detached, unable to fully inhabit the space he occupies. This condition reflects what diaspora scholars describe as partial belonging, where immigrants exist within the nation yet remain outside its symbolic boundaries. Mahadevan emphasizes that belonging requires recognition and affirmation, not merely legal status or economic participation. The absence of such recognition leaves the protagonist suspended in a state of perpetual uncertainty.

The novel also explores the role of memory in shaping diasporic identity. Memory functions as both a source of continuity and a reminder of loss, anchoring the protagonist to a past that cannot be fully reclaimed. Recollections of the homeland provide moments of emotional grounding, yet they also intensify the sense of displacement by highlighting the distance between past and present selves. Mahadevan portrays memory as a destabilizing force that complicates identity formation rather than resolving it. The protagonist's inability to reconcile memory with present reality underscores the fragmented nature of diasporic identity, where the past persists but does not offer closure.

Mahadevan's focus on interiority allows for a nuanced exploration of the emotional dimensions of identity and belonging. The protagonist's inner monologue reveals the psychological toll of living in a society that constantly demands self-adjustment. Identity becomes a site of negotiation, where the desire for authenticity conflicts with the pressure to conform. This tension reflects a broader diasporic dilemma, as immigrants often feel compelled to reshape

themselves in order to gain acceptance. Mahadevan resists presenting this process as empowering, instead highlighting its exhausting and destabilizing effects. The novel thus challenges celebratory narratives of hybridity by exposing the emotional strain of constant self-redefinition.

The body emerges as a significant site of identity negotiation in *The Strike*. The protagonist's awareness of his physical presence within the social space of Canada underscores the embodied nature of belonging. His body becomes a marker of difference, subject to observation and judgment, reinforcing his sense of otherness. This emphasis on embodiment aligns with critical perspectives that view racialized bodies as sites of regulation within dominant cultural frameworks. Mahadevan's narrative suggests that identity is not only culturally constructed but also physically experienced, shaped by everyday encounters that reinforce exclusion.

Mahadevan also engages with the theme of isolation, which operates as both a personal and structural condition in the novel. The protagonist's isolation is not merely the result of individual choices but a consequence of systemic marginalization. Social interactions are often characterized by distance and misunderstanding, preventing the formation of meaningful connections. This isolation intensifies the protagonist's identity crisis, as belonging is intimately tied to relational bonds. By foregrounding loneliness and emotional vulnerability, Mahadevan reveals the human cost of diaspora, moving beyond abstract discussions of cultural difference.

Language and communication further complicate the protagonist's experience of belonging. While linguistic competence enables functional interaction, it does not guarantee emotional connection or acceptance. Mahadevan illustrates how language can both bridge and reinforce cultural divides, highlighting the limitations of communication in overcoming structural exclusion. The protagonist's struggle to articulate his inner conflicts reflects the broader difficulty of expressing diasporic subjectivity within dominant cultural frameworks. This linguistic tension contributes to the sense of fragmentation that defines his identity.

The narrative structure of the novel reinforces its thematic concerns by privileging introspection over resolution. Mahadevan avoids providing a clear trajectory toward integration or self-acceptance, instead presenting identity as an ongoing process marked by uncertainty. This open-endedness reflects the lived reality of many immigrants, whose experiences do not conform to linear models of progress. The absence of closure challenges readers to reconsider assumptions about belonging and success, emphasizing that diasporic life is characterized by ambiguity rather than completion.

Mahadevan's portrayal of identity and belonging also engages with broader questions of agency and self-definition. While the protagonist is constrained by social structures, he is not entirely passive. His reflections and emotional responses demonstrate an ongoing effort to assert a sense of self, even in the face of marginalization. This tension between constraint and agency highlights the complexity of diasporic subjectivity, which is shaped by both external forces and internal resilience. Mahadevan thus presents identity as a dynamic interplay between individual experience and social context.

The novel's contribution to Indo-Canadian literature lies in its emphasis on interiority and emotional depth. By focusing on the psychological dimensions of diaspora, the novel expands the thematic scope of Indo-Canadian fiction beyond family narratives and cultural nostalgia. Mahadevan's work foregrounds the individual's struggle to make sense of displacement, offering a deeply human portrayal of identity and belonging. This focus allows for a more intimate engagement with the immigrant experience, highlighting the subtle and often invisible challenges of living between worlds. The novel presents identity as fractured, belonging as conditional, and diaspora as a state of continuous negotiation. Mahadevan resists idealizing migration or multiculturalism, instead offering a critical examination of their emotional and social implications. The novel suggests that belonging cannot be achieved through assimilation alone, nor can identity be stabilized through cultural memory. Instead, both remain provisional, shaped by ongoing interactions and internal reflection. Through this portrayal, Mahadevan contributes a powerful and nuanced voice to Indo-Canadian literature, deepening our understanding of diasporic identity in the contemporary world.

The present study reveals that Anand Mahadevan's *The Strike* offers a complex and nuanced representation of identity that challenges traditional, essentialist understandings of the self within diasporic contexts. One of the most significant findings is that identity in the novel is depicted as fluid, unstable, and continuously negotiated rather than fixed or inherited. The protagonist's sense of self is shaped by ongoing interactions with the social environment, revealing how identity formation is deeply influenced by external forces such as race, cultural difference, and social exclusion. This finding reinforces contemporary diaspora theory, which emphasizes identity as a process rather than a completed state, particularly for immigrant subjects navigating unfamiliar cultural landscapes.

Another important finding of the study is that belonging in *The Strike* emerges as a conditional and precarious experience rather than a guaranteed outcome of migration or citizenship. Although the protagonist physically resides within Canadian

society, emotional and psychological belonging remains elusive. The novel demonstrates that belonging requires recognition, acceptance, and emotional validation, elements that are often withheld from racialized immigrants despite the rhetoric of multicultural inclusivity. This finding highlights the discrepancy between the ideological promise of Canadian multiculturalism and the lived experiences of Indo-Canadian individuals, suggesting that inclusion is often superficial and selective.

The study also finds that Mahadevan foregrounds the emotional and psychological costs of diasporic life, which are frequently underrepresented in celebratory narratives of migration. The protagonist's internal struggles reveal a profound sense of loneliness, alienation, and self-doubt that accompany the search for belonging. Rather than portraying migration as a linear journey toward success or fulfillment, *The Strike* emphasizes the enduring sense of incompleteness that characterizes diasporic existence. This finding underscores Mahadevan's contribution to Indo-Canadian literature as a writer who prioritizes interiority and emotional realism over external markers of achievement.

Memory emerges as another key finding in the study, functioning as both a stabilizing and destabilizing force in the protagonist's identity formation. The novel illustrates how memories of the homeland provide emotional continuity and a sense of origin, yet simultaneously intensify feelings of displacement by emphasizing what has been lost. This dual function of memory complicates the protagonist's attempt to construct a coherent identity in the present. The study finds that Mahadevan does not present memory as a source of comfort alone but as a force that deepens identity fragmentation, reinforcing the idea that the past cannot be seamlessly integrated into the present.

The analysis further reveals that the novel presents hybridity as an ambivalent condition rather than an empowering solution to cultural conflict. While the protagonist occupies an in-between space between Indian heritage and Canadian society, this hybridity does not result in a harmonious synthesis of identities. Instead, it produces uncertainty and emotional strain, suggesting that living between cultures often entails a continuous sense of imbalance. This finding challenges overly optimistic interpretations of hybridity in diaspora studies and aligns with critical perspectives that emphasize its psychological burden. Another significant finding is the role of the body in shaping experiences of identity and belonging. The study finds that the protagonist's awareness of his racialized body intensifies his sense of otherness within Canadian society. The body becomes a visible marker of difference that cannot be easily assimilated or concealed, reinforcing social exclusion and self-consciousness. This finding supports critical

arguments that diasporic identity is not only culturally constructed but also embodied, shaped by everyday encounters that reinforce difference and marginalization.

The study also reveals that social relationships in *The Strike* are characterized by distance and fragility, further complicating the protagonist's search for belonging. Interpersonal connections fail to provide lasting emotional anchorage, reflecting the broader difficulty of forming meaningful relationships in an environment marked by cultural misunderstanding and emotional reserve. This finding highlights the relational dimension of belonging, emphasizing that identity formation is deeply connected to the ability to establish and sustain social bonds. Finally, the study finds that Mahadevan deliberately resists narrative closure, leaving the protagonist's identity and sense of belonging unresolved. This open-endedness reflects the ongoing nature of diasporic negotiation, suggesting that identity is never fully stabilized and belonging is never fully achieved. Rather than offering resolution, the novel emphasizes continuity of struggle, aligning literary form with thematic content. This finding reinforces the argument that *The Strike* presents diaspora as a lived condition of uncertainty, making it a significant text within Indo-Canadian literature.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the novel offers a deeply introspective and critical exploration of identity and belonging in the Indo-Canadian diaspora. By highlighting fragmentation, emotional vulnerability, and the conditional nature of belonging, Mahadevan's novel challenges idealized narratives of migration and multiculturalism. The study confirms that *The Strike* contributes meaningfully to diasporic literary discourse by foregrounding the psychological realities of immigrant life and expanding the thematic scope of Indo-Canadian fiction.

CONCLUSION:

The present study has examined Anand Mahadevan's *The Strike* as a significant Indo-Canadian diasporic text that offers a nuanced and emotionally resonant exploration of identity and belonging. Through a close reading of the novel, the paper has demonstrated that Mahadevan conceptualizes identity not as a stable or inherited essence but as a fluid, fragmented, and continuously negotiated process shaped by migration, memory, and social exclusion. The protagonist's experiences reveal the psychological complexity of diasporic life, emphasizing that identity formation in a foreign cultural context is marked by uncertainty rather than resolution. By foregrounding interiority and emotional struggle, the novel challenges simplistic narratives of immigrant success and cultural assimilation. One of the central conclusions of this study is that belonging in the diasporic context remains deeply conditional and precarious. Mahadevan's narrative illustrates that physical

presence within the host nation does not automatically result in emotional or social inclusion. Despite residing in Canada, the protagonist remains on the margins of social life, experiencing a persistent sense of alienation and unbelonging. This condition exposes the limitations of multicultural discourse, which often celebrates diversity at a symbolic level while failing to address the lived realities of racialized immigrants. The novel thus functions as a critique of multiculturalism, revealing how inclusion is often governed by unspoken norms that privilege cultural conformity and racial sameness.

The study also concludes that the novel makes a significant contribution to Indo-Canadian literature by emphasizing the emotional and psychological dimensions of migration. Unlike many diasporic narratives that focus on family histories or collective memory, Mahadevan's novel centers on the individual immigrant's inner life. This focus allows for a more intimate engagement with the complexities of identity and belonging, highlighting the loneliness, vulnerability, and self-doubt that accompany displacement. The absence of narrative closure reinforces the idea that diasporic identity is an ongoing process rather than a completed journey, aligning literary form with thematic concern. Another important conclusion drawn from this research is that Mahadevan presents hybridity as an ambivalent and often burdensome condition. While the protagonist occupies an in-between space between Indian heritage and Canadian society, this hybridity does not offer resolution or harmony. Instead, it intensifies emotional strain, suggesting that living between cultures can result in fragmentation rather than synthesis. This perspective challenges celebratory interpretations of hybridity in diaspora studies and underscores the need for more critical engagements with the psychological costs of cultural negotiation.

The study further concludes that the novel underscores the embodied nature of diasporic identity. The protagonist's heightened awareness of his racialized body highlights how identity is shaped by visibility, perception, and social judgment. This emphasis on embodiment reinforces the idea that belonging is not merely an abstract or cultural concept but a lived experience shaped by everyday interactions. Mahadevan's portrayal of the body as a site of difference deepens the novel's critique of social exclusion and contributes to broader discussions in postcolonial and diaspora studies. In short, Anand

Mahadevan's *The Strike* emerges as a powerful and introspective exploration of identity and belonging within the Indo-Canadian diaspora. The novel resists romanticizing migration or offering easy resolutions, instead presenting diaspora as a condition of continuous negotiation and emotional complexity. By foregrounding fragmentation, uncertainty, and the conditional nature of belonging, Mahadevan expands the thematic scope of Indo-Canadian literature and offers valuable insights into the lived realities of immigrant life. This study affirms that the novel is a significant literary text that deserves greater critical attention within diasporic and postcolonial literary studies, particularly for its sensitive portrayal of the psychological dimensions of identity and belonging.

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