**COLORISM, IDENTITY FORMATION, & PSYCHOSOCIAL DISRUPTIONS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF BLACK TEA BY MADHU S. MADHUKAR**

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**Abstract**

*Colorism continues to shape identity, relationships, and self-worth within communities of color, yet its nuanced psychological and intergenerational effects are still underexplored in Indian literature. The purpose of this study is to examine how colorism operates within familial and social dynamics in Madhu S. Madhukar’s novel Black Tea. Through the application of Critical Race Theory and Psychoanalytic Theory, this study analyzes the ways in which characters internalize, resist, and unconsciously perpetuate skin-tone bias in an Indian society where fair skin is associated with beauty, virtue, and social success. A close textual analysis of the novel reveals recurring themes such as identity disruption, internalized prejudice, and the use of psychological defense mechanisms like projection and denial. Key findings showed that despite an awareness of colorism’s irrationality, characters reinforce its ideologies across generations, leading to emotional distress, fractured family relationships, and diminished social mobility. The experiences of Maya, Kamla, Radha, and Natasha illustrate how both victims and enforcers of colorism participate in maintaining a harmful social hierarchy. This study contributes to postcolonial literary discourse by highlighting the cyclical and often invisible psychological damage caused by internalized colorism. It also affirms literature’s potential to challenge discriminatory cultural norms and promote awareness of the lasting effects of color-based prejudice.*

**Keywords:** Colorism, Critical Race Theory, Psychoanalysis, Generational trauma, Identity formation, *Black Tea*

**Introduction**

In many ethnic societies around the world, skin color is a common criterion used to evaluate people. It is unquestionably a discriminating trigger (Harris, 2008). According to Hall (2016), skin tone has an impact on all aspects of life—marriage, relationships, education, and public affairs, to mention a few—for people of color worldwide. People who are subjected to colorism manage their oppression to some extent, but they frequently give in to emotions of inferiority and the idea that their skin tone makes them less.

In India, skin tone may be seen as a type of social capital, according to Umer (2020), which could result in differences in social standing and advantages. In this context, social capital refers to the advantages in social domains like marriage and beauty standards, among others. Colorism leads to social, economic, and educational inequalities in North America, in contrast to India. Some notable works directly addressing the issue of colorism in African American literature include Wallace Thurman’s *The Blacker the Berry* *(1929)*, Chester Himes’s, *The Third Generation (1954)*, Dolores Phillip’s *The Darkest Child (2004)* and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple (1982.* On the other hand Indian authors majorly make indirect mention of colorism in works addressing racism or colonization.

This paper examines the novel *Black Tea* by Indian author Madhu S. Madhukar using relevant concepts from the Critical Race Theory and the Psychoanalytic Theory specifically Defense Mechanisms. The novel, which takes place in India, shows a family coping with ridiculous notions about colorism. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the novel and the societal problem of colorism as it appears in a particular aspect of Indian society, the analysis looks at how the characters in the novel are impacted by colorism and their response to it.

**The Concept of Colorism**

The skin tone complex, commonly referred to as colorism, is a global issue that entails prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping based on skin color within races. It is a byproduct of racism (Burke, 2015). In his article "Colorism" in the *Encyclopedia of African American Society,* Jaynes (2005) asserts that colorism is a broad term that incorporates a variety of attitudes, preconceptions, and behaviors based on skin color. He affirms that, it holds to assumptions that link behavioral characteristics and personality traits to skin pigmentation.

According to Harris (2008), colorism is when someone is discriminated against because of their looks, regardless of their perceived race. Likewise Mathews (2013), posits that there is a "system" in place in colored communities that provides chances and benefits to people with lighter skin tones. Based to his theory, colorism is associated with skin color stratification that results from racism in society, maintaining racial classifications and causing differences in treatment based on lightness or darkness. White people controlled this stratification, which led to either favorable or negative behavior toward people of color. As defined by Fultz (2013), colorism is a form of internalized racism that has varying effects on people of color. It also can be further defined as the individual institutional, and structural discrimination towards a person of a particular skin color and tone, by people of the same ethnicity; a process that privileges light skinned people of color over darker skinned people in area such as income education, housing, relationships and the marriage market (Cavale, 2018). Renowned feminist Alice Walker, in her essay “In Search of Her Mother’s Garden,” first coined the term *colorism*. She defined it as the “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color.”

**The Relationship between Racism and Colorism**

Racism and colorism are used interchangeably in discussions about discriminative acts especially those done to and within communities of color. Present day society has made skin color a signifier of identity and value. Racism is “the belief that humans maybe divided into separate and exclusive biological entities called ‘race’; that there is an unexpected link between the inherited physical traits and personality, intellect, morality and other cultural and behavioral features; and that some races are superior to others” (Smedley, 2021). Racism is the bias or mistreatment of a person simply because they belong to a different ethnic group, irrespective of their intelligence or financial standing. It is primarily rooted in the individual's skin color and manifests through behaviors, attitudes, and is ingrained in societal systems and institutions. It can be subtle in nature. Racism encompasses all obstacles that hinder individuals from certain racial or ethnic backgrounds from receiving dignity and equal treatment.

Colorism conversely, occurs within a particular ethnicity, especially among colored individuals. It is a by- product of racism wherein the individuals affected by racism perpetrate on a micro-scale similar prejudices and discrimination as experienced in racism. They do so in an effort to be closer to the supposed superior race or ethnicity and distant from the unwanted parts of their ethnicity that cause them to be victims of racism. A basic difference between the two is that racism is discrimination based on a person’s ethnicity or race and colorism is discrimination based on a person’s skin complexion (Gandhiok, 2020).

**Pigment of Prejudice**

The idealization of light skin is an increasingly relevant phenomenon. There exists a direct connection inherent of dark skin as a vehicle of scorn and lower socio-economic standing. Western influences precipitate a social hierarchy to discourage any notion of merit of attractiveness to be attributed to people of dark skin tones. Hall (2016) postulates that all western nations played a role in the creation of the skin color hierarchy, as it exists in every country colonized by the Europeans. Ancient India is not noted as having the skin tone complex as it has been noted in their ancient texts the Mahabharata and Rig Veda, which reference and praise many dark-skinned heroes and heroines like Lord Krishna, goddess Kali, Draupadi, etc. (Gandhiok, 2020). However, Mishra (2015) posits that skin tone discrimination has existed in the diverse society of India for a long time. The people were conditioned to view fair skin tone as equal to a fair and good character. It is a pervasive issue in India with significant social and economic consequences, particularly for women. It negatively impacts career aspirations and opportunities (Sims & Hirudayaraj 38-53) and influences various aspects of life, including income, education, housing, and marriage prospects (Pande, 2020). It has recently become more widespread, yet unlike the “colorism” of the Western world.The phenomenon is deeply rooted in cultural beliefs, social institutions, and media (Sims & Hirudayaraj, 2016), differing from Western colorism due to additional variables such as caste, class, and religion (Mishra, 2015).

In India, colorism significantly impacts marriage prospects, especially in the case of women. Rooted in historical and cultural factors, including the legacy of colonialism and the caste system, colorism privileges lighter skin tones over darker ones (Narula, 2018). In the context of marriage, colorism plays a significant role, especially for women. In manifests in various ways, including the devaluing darker-skinned women in matrimonial advertisements and demanding higher dowries (Utley & Darity, 2016). Matrimonial advertisements frequently mention skin tone, with a clear preference for fairness. (The People Fighting ‘Light Skin’ Bias, 2020) This bias can result in diminished marriage prospects for darker-skinned women and reinforce the notion that lighter skin equates to beauty and desirability (Kukreja, 2021). Moreover, the detrimental effects of colorism extend beyond marriage prospects to deeply affect self-esteem and mental health (Hall, 2017). The emphasis on fairness as a desirable trait leads to a sense of inadequacy and lower self-worth among darker-skinned individuals, impacting their confidence and overall well-being. These manifest as low self-esteem, body image issues, and even depression. The pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards also leads to the use of harmful skin-lightening products, further perpetuating the cycle of colorism and its negative consequences. (Nagar, 2018) The psychological toll of colorism can be significant, impacting an individual's sense of self-worth and their ability to thrive in various aspects of life. Additionally, Vijaya & Bhullar (2022) assert that colorism can also influence employment opportunities, with darker-skinned individuals potentially facing discrimination in hiring and promotion. The cultural traditions that followed colonialism reinforced Western ideals. Among colored people, the lighter-skinned, mixed-race offspring of the colonized people attained higher economic status and managing to gain control in the public and private sectors of their societies. Thereby occupying positions of power and gaining economic advantage over their more common dark skinned counterparts.

**Theoretical Framework**

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an academic movement formed by civil rights activists and scholars in the United States, officially organized in 1989. It examines race, law, and power dynamics, asserting that White Supremacy maintains its dominance through social, economic, and legal structures (Curry, 2019). CRT emphasizes the need of comprehending how racism and its offshoot, colorism, impact individual experiences and society institutions, and it asserts that racial disparity is deliberately fostered to preserve elite white interests. CRT believes that race is a social construct established to maintain white superiority, resulting in structural disadvantages for minorities. It was developed in response to the slow progress of civil rights in the 1960s (Critical Race Theory (1970s-present), 2019; Curry, 2019). The two main principles of CRT that are applied in this study are internalization and micro-aggression. According to Bodenheimer (2019), micro-aggressions are imperceptible, frequently unintentional acts of discrimination that encourage racial inequality. These behaviors can be divided into three groups: direct verbal or nonverbal attacks, known as micro-assaults; derogatory comments regarding someone's race, known as micro-insults; and statements that cast doubt on someone's racial experiences, known as micro-invalidations (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Adopting cultural biases against one's race causes internalization, which results in self-doubt, low self-esteem, and an acceptance of inferiority (Pyke, 2010).

Sigmund Freud developed the psychoanalytic theory, which offers a framework for examining the composition and evolution of the human psyche. Freud explained the unconscious forces that influence human conduct with his three-part model of the psyche: the Id (instinctual desires), the Superego (moral conscience), and the Ego (mediator between the two) (Dobie, 2012). This theory is especially pertinent to literary study since it shows how the experiences and unconscious ideas of an author shape the development of their characters (Abrams, 2012; Akinyele, 2016). Dreams, defensive mechanisms, and irrational behaviors are common manifestations of the unconscious, which is home to repressed wants and fears. Understanding how individuals deal with internal difficulties and social pressures is made easier by Freud's concept of defense mechanisms, which include repression, projection, and denial. Through the use of psychoanalysis, this study explores how the characters in *Black Tea* deal with colorism, exposing their innermost fears, conceptions of themselves, and reactions to it. It offers a more profound comprehension of the social and psychological effects of colorism by combining CRT and psychoanalysis.

***Black Tea* Synopsis**

In *Black Tea*, a seemingly ideal family is tormented by a conviction that transcends reason and logic. Because of their acceptance—or lack thereof—of their skin tones, the Srivastava family is often at odds. Maya Srivastava goes to absurd lengths to see her dark-skinned daughter get married, even if her attempts only serve to highlight her own hypocrisy and color obsession. However, Vikram, who is the ideal son in every way, including having the ideal skin tone, brings home the woman he wants to marry and the love of his life—exactly what his mother has been frantically attempting to shield her family and children from. Maya's irrational preoccupation with dark-skinned people leads to ongoing arguments with Om, her husband. The story starts with Maya racing home before the daylight goes out so she can snap a photo of her dark-skinned daughter, Natasha, to send to a family who are considering Natasha as a possible marriage for their son. She chastises her daughter for drinking black tea instead of milk, believing that it will make her Natasha darker, which soon exposes her ideas. Soon after, Maya and Om start fighting because she tried to lighten Natasha's skin tone by photo-editing her photo. Om is furious since she no longer looks like Natasha in the photo. In the end, he sends an unaltered photo. Maya discloses that she was rejected for marriage as a young woman due to the color of her skin, which sparked her illogical prejudice against people with dark skin. She understands the potential cost of her actions to her daughter after almost ruining Natasha's prospects at a wedding match. Because of Maya's dark skin issue, Vikram subsequently devises a complex plan to introduce his prospective wife, Megan, to his parents. He fears that she won't be welcomed because she is African American and has dark complexion. Sadly, Maya's absurd notions have infiltrated Natasha's mind by the story's conclusion. The cycle of bias continues when Natasha chooses not to call her mother for pregnancy support because she does not want to expose the skin tone of her unborn kid by pursuing a dark-skinned individual.

**Identity, Internalized Bias, and Social Struggles: The Effects of, and Responses to Colorism in Black Tea**

Colorism has profound and far-reaching consequences for its victims, shaping both their psychological well-being and social standing. (Hall 71-78; Chavez-Dueñas et al., 3-26) While those who perpetuate colorist beliefs may remain unaffected or unaware of the harm they inflict, individuals who experience colorism often grapple with its negative impacts on multiple levels. The effects manifest both internally, influencing self-perception and emotional stability, and externally, affecting social interactions, economic opportunities, and overall quality of life (Sims & Hirudayaraj 38-53). This is aptly portrayed in *Black Tea*. Maya, Kamla, Radha, and Natasha, all absorbed societal biases regarding skin tone. Despite the fact that they came from differing backgrounds, all four women end up accepting the social hierarchy that privileges fair skin and diminishes the worth of darker-skinned individuals. Maya’s internalization of colorism is shaped by the rejection and discrimination she experienced when she was young. She became a steadfast believer in the superiority of fair skin, associating it with beauty and success. Her past solidified the colorist ideologies to the extent that she actively projected and perpetuated them, even within her own family.

Kamla, Maya’s dark-skinned housemaid, also revealed damaging effects of internalized colorism, though from a different social position. She viewed herself as inferior, believing that she is naturally subordinate to those with lighter skin. This is evident in her extreme actions, such as apologizing to Maya for not covering her face, due to her fear that her dark complexion might somehow taint Maya’s unborn child. Consider the following excerpt:

Kamla understood why Maya suddenly walked out of the kitchen. “Mem Sahib, I did not know that you were coming here otherwise I would have covered my face.” Kamla apologized. (Madhukar 21)

This emphasizes the psychological toll of colorism on cultural understandings of identity and worth, as Kamla’s self-perception has been entirely shaped by societal messages that equate darkness with misfortune. Her behavior reflected a lifetime of conditioning that reinforced her lower social status. Her internalization is further reinforced by her decision to restructure her daily routine to avoid Maya during pregnancy, further implying that she genuinely believes her dark complexion could have a negative influence on the unborn child. Madhukar portrayed Kamla’s sense of inferiority as not self-imposed but a result of long-term societal conditioning, passed down from her mother, who attributed her misfortunes—including an unfavorable marriage—to her dark skin. Kamla’s automatic apology for not covering her face revealed that she has been conditioned to believe that her very presence is an inconvenience or even a danger to lighter-skinned individuals. It also revealed the generational transmission of colorist beliefs, as Kamla’s mother’s blamed Radha’s skin color on Kamla not being able to marry better thus having to see her dark skinned husband’s face all the time and giving birth to a dark skinned child. Natasha’s eventually adopting her mother’s prejudices, also illustrated how colorism perpetuates itself in cycles. While she initially resisted her mother’s obsession with fair skin, she ultimately surrendered to the same irrational fears, and mirrored Maya’s own transformation. Her capitulation revealed that even individuals who were in opposition gradually internalized colorist ideologies due to social and familial pressure.

The effects of colorism and society’s vilification of dark skin are further revealed through Maya and Kamla’s marriage experiences. Both women were repeatedly rejected in favor of their fairer-skinned younger sisters. This is evident in the following excerpt:

“When a boy would come to see my elder daughter I would make sure that my younger daughter was not around. Still the only man who married her was darker than her and 20 years older than her too. Moreover, I had to give them all my savings in dowry…” (Madhukar 17)

Kamla’s mother tried to shield her fairer daughter from the stigma of dark skin by keeping her away during marriage negotiations, trying her best to marry off her dark daughter. She even went further to offer all her saving as dowry just to secure the husband. However, despite Kamla’s intelligence and potential, her dark complexion rendered her undesirable. Kamla’s Mother’s desperate act showcased not only the social devaluation of dark-skinned women but also the extent to which colorism dictates life prospects, particularly in marriage. Unfortunately the dowry did not earn Kamla any respect from her in-laws. Even after securing a husband, she experienced constant discrimination, being blamed for birthing a dark-skinned child thus further entrenching the notion in her mind that dark skin is an inherent disadvantage. This also influenced how Kamla viewed herself, reinforcing her belief that her worth was tied to superficial features beyond her control. This trauma of being devalued in both the marriage market and within her own family shows the harmful, lasting effects of colorism on women’s self-esteem and social standing. Through the character of Kamla the depth to which colorism is embedded in societal structures, affecting both individual identities and familial dynamics is further revealed.

Similarly, Maya's rejection in favor of her fairer sister revealed micro-aggression. This is portrayed in the following excerpt:

 “What is the use of all these trophies? If the girl is beautiful, the husband is happy and the life is happy.” (Madhukar 47)

The prospective groom’s family dismissed her accomplishments, intelligence, and domestic skills, emphasizing instead, that a wife’s beauty as all that is needed for a happy marriage. The statement subtly invalidated Maya’s worth beyond her appearance. They came to meet Maya but had no problem immediately offering for her fairer younger sister simply because they did not view dark skin as beautiful. Maya’s mother also attempted to manipulate circumstances by having Maya wear long sleeves and sit in a well-lit area to make her appear lighter, showcasing her denial of Maya’s darkness rather than confront the societal prejudice that devalued her daughter. This led to Maya internalizing and later enforcing colorist ideals in her household and continuing the cycle.

The novel thus illustrates how colorism not only dictates marriageability but also instills long-term psychological damage, fostering self-doubt, insecurity, and the unconscious projection of an oppressive social system. This is evident from the onset of the novel where Maya’s obsessive behaviors and rigid adherence to irrational rituals revealed her cognitive dissonance which led to psychological discomfort and her use of numerous schemes especially in response to her insecurities to reduce the dissonance. Regardless of being an educated and successful bank manager, colorist ideologies caused her to believe that her daughter’s dark skin is a personal failure rather than a natural genetic trait. This because she did not follow her regime of avoiding all things dark, from dark food to dark skinned people. Maya insisted on applying skin lightening cream on her body every night, judiciously avoiding black tea, drinking only white yogurt and milk coffee, eating cashews and only the white part of coconuts and she avoided meeting or seeing dark skinned people. She agreed to take Kamla reluctantly, on as a house-help, when she was pregnant with Natasha, though could not explain that her reluctance to do so was because of Kamla’s dark skin to her husband Om. Instead, she altered her schedule just to avoid seeing the dark house-help. Her extreme aversion to anything dark portrayed denial of scientific reality and credited her daughter's skin tone to her own actions, thereby allowing her to feel better about her colorist beliefs. Maya rationalizes to justify her actions and maintain control of her life while avoiding confronting the irrationality of her beliefs. This is portrayed in the following excerpt:

“Kamla, these are useless beliefs… I cannot let these children grow up with this crazy idea. I cannot do this. I cannot do this.” (Madhukar 31)

Maya was aware, and admitted to Kamla that what she was doing was ridiculous but she instantly repressed and the rational and returned to her fixation on producing a fair-skinned child as can be seen in following excerpt:

The thought of having a white child put Maya in a sweet fantasy and she immediately forgot about the mental torment she was going through… (Madhukar 31)

Her behavior revealed how cognitive dissonance can result in individuals who are otherwise rational and successful in other aspects of their lives. Maya’s overall treatment of Kamla during her pregnancy including restructuring her routine to minimize contact reinforced the social perception that dark-skinned individuals should be hidden or avoided and relegated to lower social positions and treated as contaminants rather than equals. The psychological effect of colorism on Maya is notable as her obsession not only dictated her daily habits, but also upset her emotional well-being. Her momentary self-awareness was immediately replaced by a return to her fantasies of having a fair-skinned child. Maya’s struggles expose how deep colorist ideologies can go affecting both personal identity and interpersonal relationships, even when individuals affected recognize its absurdities and find they are unable to break free from them.

Maya’s internalization of colorism is further evident in her reaction to the birth of her daughter Natasha. Rather than celebrating the arrival of a healthy child, she immediately fixated on Natasha’s dark complexion, totally unconcerned with the rest of the details surrounding her daughter’s birth. Her internalization caused her to blame herself, believing she failed to follow the necessary rituals to ensure a fair-skinned child. This response revealed Maya projecting her distress on her child, treating her daughter’s skin color as a personal shortcoming despite being reminded by her husband that she was being irrational. Consider the following excerpt:

 “Maya the biology of pregnancy works in a complex manner and I don’t think I am qualified to give you a convincing answer, but I can guarantee that the child’s skin color is NOT determined by who you see during your pregnancy.” He continued after a pause, “And even if it does affect, then what is wrong with having a dark skin color? Our daughter is beautiful; she is smart, intelligent and caring. Is that not a reason to celebrate and feel lucky? Your… guilt must make Natasha feel a lesser human being. I am sure she can see that guilt in your eyes.” (Madhukar 37)

Om tried to reason with Maya and make her understand that she was projecting colorism and that her behavior and obsession would affect Natasha and make her feel inferior. Furthermore, his rational explanation highlighted the bold contrast between his acceptance of their child and Maya’s obsession, Despite Om’s logical explanation that Natasha’s skin tone is beyond anyone’s control, Maya remained unwilling to let go of her guilt further revealing the **inescapable psychological hold of colorism** on individuals who have been conditioned to believe in its significance. She continuously rationalized her obsession as an act of love. By convincing herself that her actions stemmed from concern for Natasha’s future, Maya avoided acknowledging the harm she was causing. She displayed **micro-aggression**, subtly reinforced the notion that dark-skinned individuals are disadvantaged and less valuable. Maya held on to the belief system, passed down from one generation to another, demonstrating how colorism operates as a **self-perpetuating cycle**, wherein victims of discrimination become its enforcers. Additionally, Maya’s inability to accept Natasha’s complexion affected not only her own mental state but also had **negative psychological consequences** for her daughter. Om warned that her guilt would inevitably make Natasha feel like a lesser human being. Ultimately, Maya’s actions foreshadowed the psychological burden Natasha would have to bear, growing under the weight of her mother’s internalized biases, and shaping her self-perception and sense of worth.

Maya responded to the colorism she faced by becoming so obsessed to the extent that she prioritized her daughter’s perceived marriageability over her individuality and self-worth, just like what happened when she was younger. Maya went to the extreme of making the decision to doctor Natasha’s photos and apply makeup designed to make her appear fairer, her sole focus being that the dark skin color was obliterated This reveals her denial of the reality of her daughter’s natural complexion. By altering Natasha’s features to resemble European rather than embracing her Indian heritage, Maya reinforced the Eurocentric beauty standards that dictated social hierarchies once again highlighting the psychological impact of colorism and how it shapes modern ideals of attractiveness and success even through deception. Moreover, Maya reacted badly to Natasha drinking black tea, making her feel guilty for a harmless action emphasizing her illogical beliefs that dark skin is undesirable and something to be corrected. Ultimately she conditions Natasha to internalize the same biases that plagued her. Despite Maya’s awareness that she is subjecting Natasha to the same treatment she once endured, her obsession with eliminating all traces of darkness and rationalization that her actions are necessary for Natasha’s future success, allow her to avoid confronting the true harm she is causing.

Kamla, Radha, Natasha and especially Maya’s journey in the novel illustrates the deep-seated effects of colorism and the responses it elicits. Maya and Kamla as victims of societal colorism, internalized the horrible ideals and eventually perpetuated the very discrimination they experienced. Maya failed to break free from the cycle of colorist oppression, consistently denying any wrong with her beliefs and behavior and convincing herself that she was doing it for the good of her children. However, the ultimate consequence of her obsession became painfully clear when she learns that her son, cooked up and elaborate scheme to “feel the room” in an effort to gage her reaction to his dark-skinned Black American, girlfriend Megan. Maya could not understand why her successful *gora* (fair-skinned male) son would go all the way to the America for a *kaali* (black or dark-skinned) wife. She had to begin to accept that her beloved son, Vikram had noticed her obsession with fairness and could not tell her that the very thing she feared was what he wanted to marry. Natasha perpetuated the same color biases against her own mother. During the birth of her child, Natasha excluded Maya from the process, fearing that exposure to a dark-skinned person might influence the baby’s complexion. That act served as Maya’s reckoning, forcing her to recognize the irrationality and destructiveness of her beliefs. This is evident in the following excerpt:

Maya stood there dazed as if she was struck by lightning. She turned toward Om with a bewildered look on her face. “Why did she do such a thing? Why did she not let me help her? Why did she lie to me? She stuttered. (Madhukar 161)

Maya is confronted with heartbreaking rejection from Natasha and emotional devastation she realizing that her own child has absorbed the very prejudices she struggled against. Natasha’s decision to exclude her mother from the birth of her child showcased the deep-seated and generational nature of colorism. Maya’s stuttering and repeated questioning, revealed her anguish, confusion and shock. She suddenly was not only a mother being denied a role in a significant life event, but also painfully realizing that the legacy of internalized racism had been passed on, due to her own actions. Om sumed it up for her. “Like a good daughter, she did exactly what she learnt from you.” (Madhukar 161) Madhukar aptly portrayed the corrosive effect of colorism within families and across generations.

**Findings**

This detailed analysis of Black Tea revealed that colorism functions as a deeply rooted psychological and social issue that profoundly impacts the lives of individuals across generations. Maya, Kamla, Radha, and Natasha, despite their differing socioeconomic and personal circumstances, all internalized the belief that dark skin is undesirable. Their experiences showed that colorism not only influences how others perceive them but also how they viewed themselves. Maya’s obsession with fairness, entrenched in past trauma and social rejection led her to impose ridiculous rituals and standards on her daughter. Kamla, the dark-skinned housemaid, internalized colorist ideals to the extent that she feared her presence could harm Maya’s unborn child. This revealed the psychological toll of lifelong social conditioning. These fictional narratives reflect broader systemic prejudices shaped by colonial legacies, caste hierarchies, and entrenched social norms in Indian society. Given the intergenerational reproduction of discriminatory behaviors and psychological distress, it becomes essential to treat colorism as a central theme in postcolonial literary and cultural studies, particularly in South Asian, African, and diasporic contexts. This article underscores the significance of combining Critical Race Theory with Psychoanalytic Theory in literary analysis, illustrating how this integration can expose the ways in which internalized biases and psychological defense mechanisms such as denial and projection work to sustain and reinforce societal oppression. By employing both theoretical perspectives, the analysis has revealed how deeply ingrained prejudices are perpetuated through unconscious psychological processes, thereby contributing to the ongoing marginalization of certain groups within society. Furthermore, both Maya and Kamla’s marriage experiences highlighted the extent to which dark-skinned women are devalued, irrespective of their other qualities. The effects of colorism manifested through psychological distress, self-doubt, and the reproduction of discriminatory behaviors within familial structures and across generations. The emotional weight carried by the characters suggests the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration between literary scholars and mental health professionals to better understand the real-life psychological effects of colorism. These findings highlighted the novel’s critical exploration of how societal prejudice operates both internally and externally to diminish the experiences of darker-skinned individuals. Black Tea also affirms literature’s potential as a pedagogical tool to challenge inherited prejudice and promote critical reflection, while inviting comparative cross-cultural studies that trace global patterns of colorism and resistance.

**Conclusion**

Through Maya, Natasha, Kamla and Radha’s experiences, Black Tea revealed the insidious psychological damage caused by colorism, emphasizing how deeply embedded prejudices shape identity, relationships, cause generational trauma colorism and the difficult path to self-awareness and change. The emotional culmination of *Black Tea*, in which Natasha excluded Maya from the birth of her child, offered a stark reminder of the generational nature of internalized colorism. Maya, once again became a victim when her daughter mirrored the behaviors she had exhibited. This act of exclusion symbolized the deeply entrenched and cyclical nature of colorist ideologies, highlighting how prejudices are passed down through generations can sever even the most fundamental human bonds. Madhukar’s novel showcased the tragic irony of a mother whose rigid adherence to skin-tone hierarchies led to her eventual alienation from her daughter. The novel thus served as a poignant critique of the insidious nature of colorism within families, particularly among women, who both suffer under and unknowingly uphold its standards. Through Maya’s psychological unraveling and Kamla’s silent suffering, *Black Tea* offered a sobering reflection on how social constructs of beauty and worth continue to marginalize individuals and corrode relationships.

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