

The Politics of Skin: Colourism and the Quest for Belonging in *The Vanishing Half*

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Abstract: *This paper examines colourism as a central social and psychological construct that perpetuates inequality within and beyond racial boundaries. Colourism, defined as the discrimination or prejudice based on skin tone, privileges lighter skin over darker shades, shaping access to power, beauty, and belonging. The study analyzes how this hierarchy functions as both an external and internalized system of control, reinforcing colonial legacies and sustaining social stratification within communities of colour. By exploring the cultural and emotional dimensions of colour-based bias, this research highlights how individuals internalize societal messages that equate lightness with value and darkness with inferiority. Such conditioning influences identity formation, self-esteem, and social mobility, producing lasting psychological effects. The paper further argues that colourism operates through everyday interactions, family dynamics, media representations, and institutional frameworks that normalize inequality. It reveals how colour-based hierarchies intersect with gender, class, and race to maintain systemic imbalance and emotional fragmentation. Ultimately, this study emphasizes that dismantling colourism requires both social awareness and personal decolonization—a process of rejecting inherited standards of beauty and worth. By understanding colourism not merely as a by-product of racism but as an autonomous mechanism of oppression, the research calls for a redefinition of identity that values diversity, equity, and collective empowerment.*

Keywords: Colourism, Identity formation, Colonial legacies

