

HYBRID IDENTITIES OF THE CHARACTERS OF JHUMPA LAHIRI'S STORIES IN INTERPRETER OF MALADIES

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study is to examine the hybrid identity of the characters and their issues in three short stories from *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri. Lahiri is an Indian American diasporic writer who examines the lives of diaspora community residing in the United States. The postcolonial theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha is used for the analysis of the text. The process of assimilation results in hybridity and creates a gap between the practices of host culture and the foreign culture. There are various events taking place in the stories because of characters' hybridity and resulting into different psychological and social issues such as fear of losing one's host culture, religious hybridity, hegemony, isolation, alienation, and separation.

Keywords: hybrid identity; assimilation; third space; alienation.

INTRODUCTION

Jhumpa Lahiri Vourvoulis, originally named Nilanjana Sudeshna, was born in London in July 1967 and raised in South Kingstown, Rhode Island. Despite being raised in America, she developed a strong affinity for her Bengali background at a young age. Lahiri has widely traversed India and has witnessed the repercussions of colonialism in addition to the challenges faced by the diaspora. She has a deep emotional connection to both her parents' native country and the United States and England. Lahiri's upbringing, which involved connections to all three nations, instilled in her a feeling of displacement and a lack of acceptance. Lahiri illustrates this phenomenon as an acquisition of her parents' deep connections to India, stating, "It is challenging to have parents who regard another location as their true 'home'." Despite residing outside for three decades, India remains their homeland. Due to our

constant retrospection, I never experienced a complete sense of belonging in this place. Lahiri articulated the lack of a sense of belonging, stating, "I do not have a motherland." Wherever I go, I consistently feel like an outcast in the place I visit. This is why I was compelled to write about individuals who live their lives in exile. The theme of exile is a recurring motif in Lahiri's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Interpreter of Maladies*. The film presents an intricate depiction of the challenges faced by Indian immigrants as they navigate between their Indian heritage and the pursuit of the American dream. The work received high praise for its elegance, perceptiveness, and empathy in depicting the experiences of individuals who had migrated from India to America. *Interpreter of Maladies* is a collection of nine short stories by an Indian American author Jhumpa Lahiri, who depicts the lives of Indian Americans as well as the

native Indians. She belongs to the diaspora community residing in the United States. The central themes in Lahiri's work include the difficulties that Indians face in adjusting to the American community (Lahiri, 1999). The other major works, *Namesake* and *Unaccustomed Earth*, also shed light on similar themes of assimilation and love. Hundt and Staicoy (2018), stated that the Indian diaspora is one of the largest worldwide. Maintenance of their culture is one of the significant aspects of the identity construction of diasporic community.

Lahiri's work portrays an encyclopedic picture of the experiences of people who suffer identity crises concerning changes in their surroundings (Dhingra, 2016). One can also notice that it digs out the differences between the roots of the person who is an Indian and the happenings of the new world leading towards high cultural pluralism. The conflict revolves around differences and difficulties of adjusting to life in America and its effects on the characters. Every character adopts Western values and suffers from nostalgia, alienation, double consciousness, hegemony, hybridity, and mimicry. It mainly focuses on immigrants' identity and their experiences.

Lahiri (1999) has composed stories in such a manner that keeps the reader thinking about what will happen next. Readers need to conclude on their own. The hybrid nature of the characters keeps on adding to the conflicts and theme (Firdous, 2015).

Therefore, this qualitative study aims to explore the plot's development through the characters' hybrid identities in Jhumpa Lahiri's five short stories. The postcolonial theoretical framework of Bhabha (1998) will be used for the analysis, which states that when cultures are mixed, identity becomes a question mark. The process of assimilation leads toward cultural hybridity affecting social connections. Lahiri (1999) has developed these characters and their hybrid identities in all five short stories through various events taking place throughout the plot of the stories. On the one hand, we have characters with a strong nostalgia for their place of heritage, and on the other hand,

they come up with the challenges of the new locality they want to adjust themselves in the study using designed to analyse the short stories through the characters' hybrid identities and their problems; three stories, "A Temporary Matter," "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," "Mrs. Sen,"

Research Objective

To explore the events in the short stories through the characters' hybrid identities and their problems. three stories, "A Temporary Matter," "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," "Mrs. Sen,"

Research Questions

How does Lahiri present the hybrid identities of the Indian diaspora community and their problems?

What are some social and psychological issues faced by the hybrid characters in adjusting to a foreign culture?

Literature review

In the current global context, the concepts of identity and cultural hybridity are highly valued and much explored. The issue of identification is consistently challenging. The issue of immigrants has been a topic of discussion thus far (Mishra & Kumar, 2018). Immigrants navigate between two distinct cultural environments, yearning for a clear and distinct sense of self. Seeking their identity, they engage in compromises and negotiations (Sumalatha, 2013). The proposed research aims to investigate the concepts of identity and cultural hybridity in the writings of Lahiri (1999).

The collection of short tales, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) by Jhumpa Lahiri, which won the Pulitzer Prize, possesses a distinct Indian identity but also holds universal relevance (Chandrakar & Diwan, 2023).

Diaspora is a loaded term that conjures up several contentious concepts and perceptions. It may be a sight that affirms one's identity or, on the other hand, it may be a sight that causes one to fear losing their identity (Grünert, 2022).

Diaspora has its roots in Greek which means dispersion and scattering of seeds during its process of sowing. However, today, the understanding of this concept of

the diaspora has changed, and it relates to the dispersion of people. Furthermore, diasporic communities experience a sense of nostalgic longing for their homeland. Moreover, diasporic literature can be defined as the literature produced by the displaced people who migrated from the colonial periphery in the global south and gathered in Britain, France, and America. Lahiri's (1999) diasporic Identity and migration history have created a unique location in the gaps between different cultures. She identifies herself as writing from a position of marginality (Harehdasht, Atae, Hajjari, 2018). For instance, she says that though she was born to Bengali parents, her knowledge of Bengali is only partial, and this sense of her lack of partial knowledge of her mother tongue informs her about her cultural identity.

Moreover, she states that though she was brought up in America, her desire to keep alive her connection with her Bengali roots has meant that Lahiri could only partially assimilate herself into America. The gap in cultures signifies a sense of loss or not belonging to any of the cultures. Moreover, this gives rise to hybridity. Lustig and Koester (2003) define identity as the combination of cultural, societal, and personal factors that shape an individual's self-concept. There are numerous variables that influence an individual's identity, such as family, culture, friends, education, and the environment in which they live. The diaspora is influenced by different aspects of contemporary life, including culture, space, time, language, histories, people, and place. The exploration of identity has been a prominent theme in nearly all of Lahiri's literary works. Her works explore the significance of identity in the lives of those who experience exile and relocate to foreign lands. The predominant theme in her short stories undoubtedly revolves around the concept of the "self" (Kapchan, 1999).

With the altered global economic, political, and cultural landscape comes a significant change in the viewpoint and identities of diasporas. Lahiri's fiction is an example of a new genre of literature that challenges oversimplified dichotomies of authority, origin, geography, and culture. Lahiri

encourages her readers to reflect on the fluidity and flexibility of hybrid identity by illustrating various facets of immigrant life and highlighting the benefits of flexibility and a shifting lifestyle for immigrants (Mathiavadana & Sinduja, 2020).

Much research has been done exploring hybridity in the characters of Lahiri's stories and the problems of the diaspora community (Rao, 2018, Thakur, 2016). Bhatt (2008) examined the concept of third space with reference to language mixing. To support the claim that code-switching creates a discursive space where two systems of identity representation converge in response to global-local tensions, he analyzed the use of Hindi in English newspapers in India. Based on this, he drew the conclusion that code-switching, as linguistic hybridity, is a third place where the people reposition themselves in relation to new communal speaking, reading, and writing practices. Actors are assumed to have the ability to synthesize and transform in this environment; code-switching is a visual indicator of this metamorphosis.

Kalua (2009) explored Bhabha's third space with relation to African Identity and proposed a perspective that sees postcolonial African identity as relational, fluid, and always changing. Rastogi (2015) found that cultural hybridity is the most common theme of Lahiri's work, primarily in the story "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" (Lahiri, 1999 p. 23). A young character, Lilia enjoys the third space of her diasporic life. She is curious to know both Indian and American cultures. On the other hand, the story "This Blessed House" talks about the character Sanjeev, who finds it challenging to keep the Christian artifacts in his house even as a decorative material.

We visit Cambridge to see him or bring him home for the weekend so he can speak Bengali and eat rice with us with his hands, two things we occasionally worry he won't be able to do when we pass away (Lahiri, 1999, p. 197).

Bess (2017) explored hybridity in "Hema Kaushik" by Lahiri. She states that the short story cycle epitomizes formal hybridity and helps authors to

communicate not only personal difficulties but pressures inherent in diasporic identity. The lack of closeness Jhumpa Lahiri's characters feel in "Hema and Kaushik," the first book in the *Unaccustomed Earth* trilogy, is tied to their mixed identities since each one of them has a unique, entangled history of rootedness and floating. Ghasemi, Sasni & Nemati (2018) explored hybridity, third space and mimicry in "Blood knot" by Athol Fugard. Authors like Athol Fugard were instrumental in reclaiming their civilization through their writing. Grunert (2022) expressed that the 'Diaspora' community encounters cultural and emotional conflicts and feels nostalgic about their native land in a foreign country. Though India is a multicultural land but Indian immigrants in other countries still find it problematic to adjust themselves to different environments. Most Indian diasporic writings talk about the immigrants' social and psychological problems and its effects on them. Lahiri has written many diasporic novels and stories. She takes readers across the nations to visualize the life of migrants from a developing nation to a developed one. As a woman writer, her representation of different characters is highly realistic and profoundly moving.

Sumalatha (2013) examined the works of South American woman writers, Bharati Mukharji and Jhumpa Lahiri. Both contributed to the notion of hybridity and third space in their diasporic writings. However, the primary focus was on second-generation characters and the tactics they create to negotiate their identity status and show their daily lives in a multiple environment.

Hamaltha (2019) argues that diaspora community and their related issues lead them towards hybridity, where they find it difficult to live with the memory of their homeland. They suffer from identity crises, alienation, and displacement, which creates a generational gap. When adjusting to foreign societies, the diaspora community tries to be more committed to maintaining their original homeland. Consequently, they become isolated from the world around them.

Sevilla (2019) explored the notions identity and space and their relationship in Lahiri's short stories. Findings concluded that those subjects who adjust in the 'third space' mostly end up alienated, while those who succumb to the foreign culture end up in hybridization (Bhabha, 1984). Both scenarios depend on the subjects' interests. Hence, Lahiri suggests that the diaspora community has mixed emotions and experiences adjusting to the foreign community.

According to Amachee (2020), "The Namesake" is one of the best examples of diasporic literature by Jhumpa Lahiri. She writes to demonstrate that, particularly for Indians, the United States is not an easy society to integrate into; she wants to highlight the realities of an Indian immigrant who arrived in the country only to find themselves in an odd environment with a completely different cultural and ideological climate. This paper analyzed the key events and concerns that Lahiri has given in this book. In the eponymous, the ambitious writer utilizes her pen to uncover the world of immigrants. The novel's events revolved around the socio-cultural facets of the characters, concentrating more on the protagonist Gogol and his mother. Ashima Ganguli was examined as a person who experienced dislocation and struggles to fit in with American society, whereas Gogol battled being Indian by origin and American by birth. It also looked at what he went through because of his name. The primary goal of this research was to depict the exiled feeling and the idea of belonging to nowhere while addressing the concepts of alienation, identities, and assimilation.

Yulistiyaniti (2022) explored that Shoba and Shukumar in "A Temporary Matter" experience cultural hybridity regarding clothing, food, and language. They could not escape because they needed to interact and socialize with people from other cultures in American society. Due to this cultural gap, they not only feel isolated, but it also affects their relationship adversely.

Method & Procedure

The study used postcolonial theory, Bhabha's which analyzed hybridity, the third space, ambivalence, and mimicry. The colonizers introduce new things into native culture, and in return, the natives also introduce cultural differences in the colonizer's culture, and this causes hybridity. For Bhabha, hybridity is a more productive and complex space. It also creates space for cultural differences.

Results

Hybrid identities of people living in diaspora communities experience emotional exile and excruciating pain. Bhabha argues in "The Location of Culture" that human beings have no pure identity or the sense of eternal belonging; therefore, the concept of pure identity and culture does not make any sense to him (Bhabha, 1994, p. 46). When inquiring about diasporic culture, people neither stick to the customs of motherland nor to the residing country but rather stand somewhere in between, which Bhabha calls "third space." We observe several cases of residing in the third space in Lahiri's short stories, which has some positive as well as negative sides. For instance, the young Lilia in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" enjoys "the third space" (Lahiri, 1999, p.23). She is curious and delighted to learn about both American and Indian cultures. She feels secure in America in comparison to many teenagers who are deprived of such a secure environment in their homeland. One of her delightful experiences includes her parents and Mr. Pirzada, who migrated from different countries, but they appeared similar, laughed at the same jokes, and spoke the same language (Lahiri, 1999, p. 28).

On the contrary, Lilia's parents are always desperate to welcome someone from the subcontinent to overcome the nostalgia of their homeland. They are always in search of making friends from their community to avoid isolation. Likewise, Mr. Pirzada tries to overcome that deprived sense of belongingness by adjusting to Lilia's family and bringing sweets daily for Lilia. Lahiri has depicted different attitudes and contradictory ways of handling the third

space. In "The Blessed House," the man Sanjeev is strictly restricted to the old customs, whereas his wife Twinkle is willing to go through the third space. She is flexible in her attitude and does not follow any traditional customs. She is neither biased nor opposed to Christianity. She is comfortable buying food. She buys pre-roasted chicken from the supermarket with potato salad that was made without knowing when it was sold in tiny plastic containers (Lahiri, 1999, p. 156). Once, she finds a full vinegar bottle that her husband asked her to "throw away", but she uses that bottle and cooks a delicious new dish (Lahiri, 1999, p. 148). On the other hand, Sanjeev is sad and lonely, observing her interest in Christian artifacts. Another positive instance can be observed in "The Third and the Final Continent." The barrier between the unnamed narrator and his wife breaks when they are at Mrs. Croft's house, and she calls Mala "a perfect lady." Before that, the narrator never approved of his wife strictly following Indian traditions and culture, wearing Sari, and proving herself to be a typical housewife. After listening to Mrs. Croft's remarks, Mala chuckled. Her eyes were brilliant with humor, and her voice was filled with kindness (Lahiri, 1999, p. 212). The narrator also laughs and claims that it is the first time they see each other laughing in their married life. He likes to think of that moment in Mrs. Croft's parlor as the moment when the distance between Mala and him began to lessen (Lahiri, 1999, p. 214). Moreover, he states that he has come to America for "his fortune far from home" (Lahiri, 1999, p. 216). He believes human nature is so flexible that one can survive on three continents.

By portraying different aspects of immigrants' life, Lahiri leaves the reader to conclude whether the immigrants can free themselves from the restrictions and strict commitments towards their old values and customs within the "third space" of diasporic life or whether the hybridity in their nature keeps on provoking the need of "pure identity" in a foreign land.

Hybridity in Mrs. Sen's character made it difficult to adjust to foreign culture and led her towards psychological issues:

Considering Bhabha's theoretical notions of hybridity and third space, Mrs. Sen's response to her conflicting condition and difficulty adjusting to a foreign community makes her question her identity. Mrs. Sen is a thirty-year-old Indian-Bengali housewife. She has moved from Calcutta to the United States and has become the subject of unwanted displacement. She has started feeling a sense of loss and alienation. To overcome the feeling of isolation, she decides to babysit. Mrs. Sen and Eliot's cultural differences and comparisons are very apparent. Mrs. Sen asks Eliot if he misses home and his mother, whereas Eliot compares Mrs. Sen and his mother. Throughout the story, the notions of "home, identity, and belonging" are strongly related to Mrs. Sen.

Mrs. Sen feels as if the ability to assimilate into a foreign culture will threaten her traditional role of being a perfect Indian woman. Orange paisleys are woven throughout a white Sari she wears, and that shimmers giving a traditional look (Lahiri, 1999, p. 112). On the other hand, Eliot's mother dresses herself in revealing clothes. Moreover, she finds it difficult to feel attached to the land despite babysitting. She still thinks about and memorizes the communal cooking she used to do in India with the bonti blade, the fish she used to cook, the "chauffeur in India" (Lahiri, 1999, p. 113). And she "hates driving" (Lahiri, 1999, p. 131). Through this comparison with the present living conditions, Mrs. Sen violates her responsibility to Eliot due to a car accident and gets fired from her duty.

All the above-discussed instances of the hybrid lifestyle of Mrs. Sen show her struggles to adjust to a foreign land. However, at the same time, she feels emotionally alienated. Her job as a babysitter, adjusting with her husband, and learning to drive a car show her courage to withstand in a foreign land. However, she ends up alienated and isolated with a lack of confidence when she hits the car, and the accident occurs too quickly. Eliot claims it was so simple when he sat beside

his mother, but when he sat with Mrs. Sen, he observed how the same queue of cars caused her to shake, have pale knuckles and have her English slur. (Lahiri, 1999, p. 121).

Despite Sanjeev's denial of religious artefacts, Christian culture continues to dominate his family and marriage

In "This Blessed House," the opposition to Christian artifacts led to inevitable personal marital conflicts, and this rejection of religious objects served as an essential tool for all the fear Sanjeev had of Christian influence at his place. Sanjeev and Twinkle are an Indo-American couple. Sanjeev is an Indian born working for a renowned company in Connecticut, while Twinkle is a second-generation Indian American residing in California with her parents. Before marriage Sanjeev "had never been in love" (Lahiri, 1999, p. 156). He relied on his parents to provide him with a wife of his caste who must follow Hindu tradition.

On the other hand, Twinkle is more Americanized and independent of all the religious and traditional customs. It can be claimed that Sanjeev has more of a homogenous identity, but Twinkle represents more of a hybrid identity with different social practices. Therefore, their marriage provides us with different conflicting experiences.

Sanjeev kept on claiming throughout the story, "We are not Christian" (pp. 137, 146, 151, 152). However, Twinkle shows an unusual interest and perceives those objects as "holy" and the house to be "blessed." Sanjeev tries to preserve their religion, traditional values, and cultural identity, but his wife succumbs to the "hegemonic" religion and culture. Sanjeev thinks that instead of stopping Twinkle from assimilating to the foreign religious values, which will turn him into a more "traditional and narrow-minded" person, he should take over the household silently instead of asking Twinkle. Though Twinkle regularly eats Indian food but is never enthusiastic about preparing it, she proudly wears a shalwar-kameez, and, most importantly, it was Twinkle's willingness and interest to enter a more traditional Indian wedding. This whole

narrative of distinct social practices is what Bhabha calls "hybridity" (Bhabha, 2008).

On the other hand, the inevitable diasporic hybridity makes Sanjeev question his identity. Thus, hybridity results in fragmented identity, culture, and ideology. Lahiri has developed this cultural hybridity in the story's characters through Christian artifacts, which are a product of migration and globalization. This cultural hybridity eventually leads Sanjeev to extreme anxiety even at the housewarming party, which is the story's main event. He fears what his guests would perceive about their religious identity and heritage when observing all the Christian artifacts around the house. Nevertheless, for Twinkle, the artifacts are naturally occurring objects and a source of beauty and joy. As Bhabha says, no identity and culture are pure, fixed, and stable; they are mixed and fluid. The story ends when Twinkle takes all the guests to the attic, which is still undiscovered. Lahiri so experiences hybridity with Twinkle and Sanjeev, along with the repercussions that lead to arguments and the breakdown of their marriage. Most importantly, it was the destruction of the patriarchy Sanjeev wanted to live with, like every other Hindu-traditional man.

Hybrid identities

In the story "A Temporary Matter," an Indian immigrant couple who are now Americanized still, at times, behave like Indians. Lahiri has developed their hybrid identities, which leads them towards isolation and later ends up with separation. Rogobette (Towards the Poetics of Small Things. Objects and Objectification of Loss in Jhumpa Lahiri's "Interpreter of Maladies", 2012 101) termed both the characters as "diseased souls." She characterizes the diseased souls as individuals who become isolated in their homes, families, or relationships, reduced to their inability to reach out and express their emotions, unable to find a sense of security in the small world they inhabit, and who instead turn to inconsequential objects that might offer them a solid, dependable support.

Hinduism is the predominant religion in India. They do, however, interact with other religious believers as they develop. These Indian descendants also mingle and socialize with other religious followers, such as Christians, when they reside in another nation as a diaspora community. For Shoba and Shukumar, there is a divide between the two religions of Hinduism and Christianity. Although they don't celebrate Christmas, they like participating in their friends' holiday customs by giving and receiving gifts. Even though Shoba and Shukumar hadn't observed Christmas that year, a friend had sent the calendar to them in the mail as a present. Shoba and Shukumar have not had the chance to celebrate Christmas. Nevertheless, they continue to honor the rite. It might enable Shoba and Shukumar to observe Christmas next year. Shoba and Shukumar have the chance to depart from the worldview of their forefathers by interacting and mingling with Christian companions. For Shoba and Shukumar, interacting with people who practice different religions best reflects liminality.

In addition to religious hybridity, their use of their mother tongue has decreased because of the employment of English in daily activities. Bengali poetry is not understood by Shukumar. Shukumar found it monotonous to hear the poem being read. He was unfamiliar with poetry. India was never his home or a halt for him. He recalled how they had first met in a Cambridge lecture hall four years ago, during a performance of Bengali poets.

Shukumar doesn't seem to have a strong grasp of Indian literature. Despite being from India, he often shows little interest in Indian literature. He was a psychotic American. He was fluent in Sanskrit and Urdu. He couldn't recall if the verse we had to choose as a ghazal sample was one or not. Shukumar's condition is described as having a predisposition to change from an eastern to a western culture. Shukumar spends a lot of time in western culture, which prevents him from introducing Indian literature to others. When Shukumar strives to comprehend the Bengali language and literature, liminality in language and literature occurs. He is aware that he is descended from Indians,

but he is not well-versed in their literature or language.

Shoba and Shukumar, the two major protagonists, encounter cultural hybridity or cross-cultural experience. They encounter hybridity in terms of their diet, language, and dress. They absorbed western culture's outcomes. They are unable to leave since they must interact and socialize with members of other cultural tribes to survive. They are influenced by the dominant western party, which is the majority.

Though the identities of the characters remained hybrid throughout the story, they could not fill the gap in their relationship. Shukumar's absence at the time of the birth of their child makes him feel worthless and guilty. He is unable to express and share his emotions even with Shoba. Both end up isolated and alienated in their home. This isolation causes extreme nostalgia for their homeland.

The hybrid identities of Lilia's parents urge her to know more about their host culture and question cultural diversity:

Lilia's mother is portrayed as a hybrid woman who maintains relationships well in a foreign land. Mr. Pirzada left his family and came to the United States to continue his studies. While he resides abroad, a historical war occurs between East and West Pakistan. Lilia's parents invite Mr. Pirzada to their place, but Lilia needs to learn about the differences between him and her parents. The story revolves around three countries Pakistan, Bangladesh, and America. Therefore, cultural diversity becomes a significant element of the story. Lilia had no idea that Mr. Pirzada was a Muslim and that her parents were Hindu. When the father exclaimed that the term "Indian" no longer applies to Mr. Pirzada since partition in 1947, it made no sense to Lilia (Lahiri, 1999, p. 25). She needed clarification about the national borders. She was confused to observe the similarities between her parents and Mr. Pirzada.

As Lilia and Mr. Pirzada struggle with the distance between the United States and South Asia, the story suggests that although living in diaspora may bring new opportunities and exciting cultural

exchange, it also means accepting feelings of alienation as well as a certain amount of cultural and personal loss.

Bibi's transformation from a marginalized other to a responsible social individual:

The story revolves around the treatment of Bibi Haldar, who is suffering from an unknown disease and the title of the collection of the short stories also contain the word "maladies."

One spring, Bibi was found pregnant. Women searched for the signs of assault but could not find any. She was unable to inform about the father of the conceived child and declared that she could not remember anything. When she gave birth to a child, women of the town especially her neighbors helped her and taught her how to take care and be responsible of a baby. The people of the town tried to investigate who had disgraced her, but no clue was found except for Bibi was cured. The "child" cured Bibi in such a way that she became responsible and composed herself. She put her life for the sake of the child. It, hence proved that Bibi needed a little attention and a relationship instead of being treated as an "other." The prospect that Bibi needed a man instead of medicine turned out to be true, which also indicates that the dominance of male figure was significant in the society where Bibi resided.

Discussion

In this study, we explored diasporic literature, which has become an integral part of the broader category of postcolonial literature. Firstly, the diaspora refers to communities of people living away from what they consider to be their homelands. Secondly, the diaspora is also closely associated with the notion of exile, which evokes a sense of nostalgic longing for a lost homeland. Moreover, it also evokes a desire to somehow return to the homeland. The diasporic identity of Lahiri, and the history of migration and exile has created the gaps of different cultures. She identifies herself as writing from a position of marginality where limits of different cultures meet. That gap creates a sense of loss, which is perfectly described

in the stories of Jhumpa Lahiri. In different writings and interviews, Lahiri says, though she was born to a Bengali parent her knowledge of Bengali is only partial. And this sense of lack of her partial knowledge of her mother tongue has informed her cultural identity. She was brought up in America but her desire to keep alive her connection with her Bengali roots has meant that Lahiri could only partially assimilate in America. Therefore, all her writings signify a sense of loss or not belonging to any of the cultures. We examined the characters of Lahiri's five short stories from *Interpreter of Maladies*. We used Homi K. Bhabha's theories of hybridity and third space. He states that culture cannot be fixed in time and space. Culture is continuously in motion. Over the past three decades, it has become clear that there is an Indian diaspora writing in English across the continents. This has recently led to a reexamination of cultural ideas of nation, race, and identity. The diasporic experiences of writers of Indian descent who have settled in nations like the US, Canada, England, Australia, the Caribbean, Africa, and other regions of the world are extensively read. We examined the everyday life experiences and identities of the characters. We concluded that the characters are already hybrid, and that hybridity negatively impacts their lives. Our findings revealed that the diasporic subjects could not fully assimilate into the foreign land. They find it challenging to adjust themselves. Having different cultural backgrounds, the challenging aspects of immigrants' life lead them toward isolation and alienation. Culture and identity are portrayed as floating, ever-evolving elements in Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. It is possible to say that Jhumpa Lahiri succeeds in depicting the issues and ills of immigrants in her stories with artistic awareness and skill. Her characters, who stand for two different universes, best illustrate postmodern ethnicity. Additionally, they are linked to various worlds and cultures, carrying with them images, metaphors, and feelings of cultural hybridity. The stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* try to depict the lives and struggle of torn-up Indian exiles

who lack effective ways to express their alienation and loneliness. In these situations, cultural hybridity turns into a psychological and personal coping mechanism for the exile. Though Shukumar and Shoba exchanged gender roles, the hybridity of their characters led them towards alienation and separation. Mrs. Sen feels isolated even after getting herself engaged in babysitting and various other activities. Still, she suffers identity crisis and ends up shutting herself in a room with a lack of confidence. Moreover, Mr. Pirzada finds it difficult to adjust to a foreign culture because of his deep roots of host culture. Whereas Lilia ends up exploring Pakistan's history while living in America. Sanjeev fantasized of a traditional wife, but the hybrid identity of Twinkle enjoyed Christian artefacts displayed all around and this devastated the patriarchal dominance of Sanjeev, resulting in conflicts. The ill treatment of Bibi Haldar by her own family led her towards alienation and the loss of her identity. Lastly, the narrator of "The Third and the Final Continent" ends up fearing about his son's hybrid identity if he would keep alive the Indian roots and practice Indian culture living in America. Thus, the hybridity in Lahiri's narratives creates a third space which leads them towards different psychological issues in a foreign land.

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