



International Journal of English Literature and Literary Theories

International Peer Reviewed and Refereed English Journal

Editorial Board:

Dr. R. Gobinath

Prof. Sharif Atiquzzaman

Dr. Dr. Aravindan Balakrishnan

Dr. Athisayaraj Jebakumar J

Dr. P. Dinakar

Dr.P.Chitra

Dr. M.K. Praseeda

Prof. D. Deepikadevi

Dr. K.Usha Savithri

Dr. D.Solomon

Dr. S.Subash

Dr. K.M. Keerthika

Dr. B.Lingeswaran

Mr. B. Damodhara Prasath

Ms. P. Sherli

International Journal of English Literature and Literary Theories (IJELLT) is a peer-reviewed, open access academic journal dedicated to promoting research and scholarship in the fields of English language, literature, and literary theories. Published monthly, IJELLT provides a platform for academicians, scholars, educators, and researchers to present their original work to a global audience. The journal upholds the highest standards of editorial integrity and academic excellence through a rigorous double-blind peer-review process. We welcome a wide range of submissions from theoretical and critical analyses to practical research, creative writing, and pedagogical studies related to English literature and language.

Literary Theories

Negotiating the 'Third Space' in Jhumpa Lahiri's Mrs. Sen's and The Third and Final Continent

Ms. S. Sherin, School of English and Foreign Languages, The Gandhigram Rural Institute (Deemed to be University).

Ms. G. Divya, School of English and Foreign Languages, The Gandhigram Rural Institute (Deemed to be University).

Abstract: This paper examines the concept of cultural hybridity in Jhumpa Lahiri's Mrs. Sen's and The Third and Final Continent, from her short story collection Interpreter of Maladies (1999) utilising Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial concepts of hybridity and the idea of the 'Third Space.' It speaks to the emotions of immigrants who struggle to balance the culture of their own land with the new environment. In Mrs. Sen's, hybridity is shown through feelings of alienation, fragmentation, nostalgia, and a battle between cultures. On the other hand, The Third and Final Continent presents a positive view of hybridity, beginning with a sense of adaptability and a feeling of belonging. Lahiri sees hybridity not as a delightful concept but as a complex idea influenced by gender, time, and individual strength. Thus, comparing these two stories, the concept of hybridity can be seen as a binary opposition. It can be either suffering or a change in the context of the South Asian American diasporic experience.

Keywords: Culture Hybridity, Third Space, Diasporic Writing



IJELLT

International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories

Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian American writer. She mainly writes about the sufferings of immigrants, having a cultural Dilemma and emotionally stuck between tradition and modern life. She was born in London to a Bengali family. She was raised in the United States. Her writings mainly focused on the Indian diasporic genre, especially the emotions of women who moved to another country for survival or marriage. She won the Pulitzer Prize for her debut short-story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). Lahiri is known for her simple style, deep psychological insight, and her exploration of displacement and family relationships.

Mrs. Sen's is one of the short stories by Jhumpa Lahiri from *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). The story speaks about the emotional imbalance Mrs. Sen had due to her immigration from India to the US after her marriage. The main themes of the story are isolation, struggling to adapt to the culture and loneliness.

The Third and Final Continent, another story from the same collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) explores immigration as a developing process. The narrator's struggle to adapt to the new culture, and the responsibility he must take on in his marital life is revealed. The character of Mrs. Croft plays a vital role in the life of the narrator. The concept of cross-cultural communication is seen in the story. Themes such as adaptability, loneliness, isolation, and the struggle for identity are identified in the story. This could be seen from a postcolonial perspective.

Postcolonial critique, Homi K Bhabha is a cultural critic and postcolonial theorist who, in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), explores the concepts of 'hybridity', 'mimicry' and 'Third Space'. The main idea behind these terms is to examine new identities, particularly in the colonial and immigrant contexts as Bhabha argues that identity is not fixed but depends on cultural exchange.

'Hybridity' is a concept in Postcolonial theory. The idea of blending or mixing two or more cultures that creates a new identity is known as 'Hybridity'. Usually, 'Hybridity' occurs when people move to another country or when cultures come into contact through migration or colonialism. Rather than being fully one culture, an individual develops a combination of different cultures.

Another essential concept in postcolonial theory is the 'Third Space.' The in-between space that occurs when two cultures interact to create something new is called the 'Third Space.' The identities of immigrant people are not fixed in this place. Experiences from different cultures and their traditional values are combined to form a 'Hybridity'.

In *Mrs. Sen's* case, even though Mrs. Sen stays in America, she emotionally stays in India. She tries hard to adapt to the new change by learning how to drive. She finds it hard to mix both cultures. Food, cooking and sari become symbols of Hybridity. She follows Indian tradition in American society. Her identity is not fully Indian or American, nor does it align with Indian traditions, which include wearing a sari. "She neatened the border of her sari where it rose diagonally across her chest," signifying that Mrs. Sen adheres to Indian tradition even in small details. By carefully adjusted and straightened the edge of her sari where it crossed her chest, making sure it looked tidy and properly arranged.

To speak Food, "This is how they cut vegetables in India "It clearly shows that by emphasising the Indian method of doing chores, even when it comes to cutting vegetables, she preserves her cultural identity and refuses to adapt to the new American Culture.

'Hybridity' is portrayed as incomplete and painful, rather than smooth or empowering. Mrs. Sen's apartment acts as a 'Third Space' in the story. The apartment is where the Indian culture exists in American society. This in-between world is the 'Third Space' in the story. The character of Eliot enters this space and experiences the food, customs, traditions, and language that form the basis of cross-cultural interaction. The cultural bridge between Mrs Sen and Eliot is cooking and storytelling. This shows cultural negotiation. The letters from India represent the distance and connectivity. But Mrs Sen feels uncomfortable with the atmosphere. Instead of positive change, the characters experience isolation and emotional weakness.

International Journal of English Literature and

In the story, the *Third and final continent*, the narrator develops a sense of hybrid identity through migration from India to England and then to America. At the same time, he also adapts to American work, lifestyle, culture and independence. His relationship with his wife, Mala, has evolved from a traditional husband mentality to a modern partnership. His language and food habits portrayed a mix of Indian and American culture. 'Hybridity' is seen as a positive, slow-developing process that authorises and leads to constancy.

When speaking about 'Third Space', Mrs Croft's house, where the narrator came across American culture while holding on to his own. Their friendship represents the cross-cultural relationship that creates mutual respect and understanding. The house of Mala and the narrator is also a 'Third Space', because it combines Indian tradition and American lifestyle. This in-between space gives the narrator a sense of belonging.

Jhumpa Lahiri compares two different immigrant experiences in *Mrs. Sen's* and *The Third and Final Continent* using the ideas of 'Hybridity' and the 'Third Space'. Because Mrs. Sen maintains her emotional and cultural connections to India despite residing in America, the Hybridity in *Mrs. Sen's* work seems broken and sad. She tries to adjust by learning to drive, but she still faces loneliness, fear, and a lack of freedom. She still maintains Indian customs by cooking and dressing in a sari. She is therefore unable to establish a substance 'Third Space' or negotiate between the two cultures, which leaves her identity fragmented and divided.

In contrast, *The Third and Final Continent* portrays a gradual and successful process of cultural negotiation. The narrator slowly adapts to American society while maintaining his Indian values, developing confidence, independence, and emotional stability. Through his growing relationship with Mala and his balanced acceptance of both cultures, he forms a harmonious 'Third Space'. Thus, Lahiri demonstrates that 'hybridity' can be either painful or progressive depending on how immigrants respond to cultural change and adaptation.

The Third and Final Continent, on the other hand, depicts a slow but effective process of cultural negotiation. The narrator gradually gains self-assurance, independence, and emotional stability as he assimilates into American culture while preserving his Indian values. "I came to accept the life I had made" The narrator's acceptance marks the formation of a Third Space where identity is continuously reconvened.

He creates a peaceful 'Third Space' by strengthening his bond with Mala and accepting both cultures in moderation. Lahiri therefore shows that, depending on how immigrants respond to cultural change and adaptation, 'hybridity' can be either unpleasant or progressive.

References

1. Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies*. Houghton Mifflin, 1999.
2. Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
3. Mambrol, N. (2020, July 2). Homi Bhabha's concept of Hybridity. *Literary Theory and Criticism*. <https://literariness.org/2016/04/08/homi-bhabhas-concept-of-hybridity/>
4. Raine, S. (2024). What is Third Space? Perlego Knowledge Base. <https://www.perlego.com/knowledge/study-guides/what-is-third-space>
5. Rishit, M., & Rishit, M. (2025, April 3). Hybridity Theory: A Comprehensive guide to Cultural identity and transformation. LitGram by MukeshRishit. <https://litgram.in/hybridity-theory/>



**International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories**