# REPRESENTATION OF LIMINALITY AND HYBRIDITY IN MOYEZ.G. VASSANJI'S

## '*The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*'

**BY**

**MUKEYA STELLA**

**A Thesis Submitted to the School of Arts and Social Sciences, Department of Literature, Linguistics, Foreign Languages and Film Studies in Partial Fulfilment for the Requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts in Literature**

**Moi University**

**2022**

# DECLARATION

**Declaration by Candidate**

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

Sign: _____ Date: _____

**MUKEYA STELLA**

**SASS/PGLIT/03/17**

**Declaration by the Supervisors**

This thesis has been submitted with our approval as university supervisors.

Sign: _____ Date: _____

**DR. PAUL BUSOLO WEGESA**

Department of Literature Theatre & Film Studies

School of Arts and Social Sciences

Moi University

Eldoret.

Sign: _____ Date: _____

**DR. SAMUEL MACHARIA NDOGO**

Department of Literature Theatre & Film Studies

School of Arts and Social Sciences

Moi University

Eldoret.

## DEDICATION

To my mum dearest, Jane Caroline Mukeya,

You steered me towards the achievement of academic excellence in the perpetuation of your ideals. Forever shall I treasure your Christian faith and counsel, the brainchild of this thesis. Just but the beginning of greater heights, of the academic ladder, that I must climb on.

I will always remember that this is your thesis.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study owes its accomplishment to the significant assistance and support offered by my supervisors Dr. Paul Busolo Wegesa and Dr. Samuel Macharia Ndogo. It has been a great privilege and pleasure to do research under your mentorship. I acknowledge your critical insights, comments and your patience in my ups and downs during the writing process. Your constructive criticism, honest evaluation and suggestions provided me with the support and inspiration that have made the thesis come to this shape. I am indebted to you. I register my heartfelt appreciation to Moi University, particularly the Department of Literature, Linguistics, Foreign Languages and Film Studies for permitting me to pursue this degree in their institution.

I acknowledge with gratefulness the substantial, moral and scholarly input, as well as commentary on extensive range of subjects covered in this research, by my colleague Charles Rono. Finally, I register my profound appreciation to my siblings; Michael, Olivya, Kevin, Sospeter and Oscar Mukeya for their never-ending love, encouragement, moral and practical support. You have been an instrument in my accomplishments. To all those who contributed to the completion of this journey, I really express my sincere gratitude for your invaluable contribution. Thank you.

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of diasporic experiences of East African Asians as depicted in M.G Vassanji's novel *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003), a fictionalized autobiography in which the protagonist's life as part of an immigrant society in a new land is central. It analyses how these experiences are reflected in individuals and their society. The study analyses the in-betweenness or liminality of the Indian settler explicit in the identity of the protagonist Vikram Lall. The study also examines the effects of cultural hybridity and ambivalence as 'diaspora compromise' in the novel and the gendered extents of hybridity through the acts of gender stereotyping in the novel. This study is premised on the idea that the diasporic experience of the East African Asian community has an influence on the characters in order to produce hybrids. It is essentially hinged on Homi Bhabha's 'Third Space' theory as the framework for examining the diasporic experience of the society in question. Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, in-betweenness and third space are useful in understanding the Asian characters in the novel under study who are wedged between two phases of cultural existence and yet do not embrace visibly distinct positions within their social system and therefore feel marginalized and excluded, without identity. This research is a literary one and its primary methodology relies upon a social constructivist paradigm which proceeds through several stages including identification of the appropriate texts both primary and secondary and the formulation of a theoretical construct against which the texts are read and reread. The study hopes to contribute to the concept of diaspora especially in contemporary time and to the 'Asian question' in the context of Africa. The study establishes that *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* reveals an enduring elucidation of Asian African individualities. The identities of the Asians in the novel are positioned in-between the black and white identities replicating the multi-ethnic nature of the society in question. This in-betweenness, whether imaginary or existent, is the position of cultural contradiction that is the hall-mark of its occupiers. The characters negotiate their identity and belonging in a liminal space of multiple histories and cultures. The Asian characters in their eagerness to uphold their traditional principles and customs, progressively absorb the customs of the Africans. The immigrant characters thus cultivate an in-between identity whereby the migrants preserve their ethnic culture, while accommodating and connecting to the host culture, consequently functioning in a liminal space between the host and indigenous culture. The discussion in this study offers insights into the condition of being Asian but experiencing grander link with Africa. The story told in the novel under study supports fluid and already diverse identities in means that evade the easy categorisations of Asians, African or Europeans. East African Asians can embrace singular and manifold identities but their choices are partly personal.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION ..... ii
DEDICATION ..... iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..... iv
ABSTRACT ..... v
TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... vi
DEFINITION OF TERMS ..... viii
**CHAPTER ONE ..... 1**
**INTRODUCTION ..... 1**
1.1 Background to the Study ..... 1
1.1.1 The Asian presence in Kenya and indentured labour ..... 3
1.1.2 The winds of trade: the Indian diaspora in Kenya ..... 6
1.1.3 Categories of the Asian community ..... 7
1.2 About the Writer ..... 9
1.3 Statement of the Problem ..... 12
1.4 Objectives of the Study ..... 12
1.5 Research Questions ..... 13
1.6 Research Assumption ..... 13
1.7 Significance of the Study ..... 13
1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Study ..... 14
1.9 Review of Related Literature ..... 14
1.9.1 Studies on liminality and identity. ..... 15
1.9.2 Studies on hybridity ..... 21
1.9.3 Studies on gender in relation to hybridity ..... 30
1.10 Theoretical Framework ..... 32
1.11 Research Methodology ..... 36
1.12 Thesis Structure ..... 36
**CHAPTER TWO ..... 38**
**DIASPORIC IDENTITY AND LIMINALITY ..... 38**
2.1 Introduction ..... 38
2.2 Representation of Liminality ..... 38
2.3 Identity Construction and the African Connection ..... 49
2.4 The Transformative Power of the In-Between ..... 57

2.5 Conclusion ..... 60
**CHAPTER THREE ..... 61**
**HYBRIDITY AND CULTURAL PLURALISM ..... 61**
3.1 Introduction ..... 61
3.2 A Poetics of Hybridity ..... 61
3.3 Hybridity and Culture ..... 76
3.3.1 Food ..... 77
3.3.2 Language ..... 79
3.4 Conclusion ..... 83
**CHAPTER FOUR ..... 85**
**HYBRIDITY AND GENDER ..... 85**
4.1 Introduction ..... 85
4.2 Gender Stereotypes ..... 85
4.3 Subverting the Gender Stereotypes ..... 91
4.3.1 Renegotiating Gender through Dress Codes ..... 94
4.4 Conclusion ..... 96
**CHAPTER FIVE ..... 98**
**SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ..... 98**
5.1 Summary ..... 98
5.2 Conclusions ..... 99
5.2.1 Objective One: To Examine Liminality within the Context of Identity of the Indian Diaspora Presented in the Novel ..... 99
5.2.2 Objective Two: To Examine the Manner in Which Characters in the Novel Signify the Concept of Hybridity in Culture ..... 101
5.2.3 Objective Three: To Analyses the Gendered Dimensions of Hybridity Through Acts of Gender Stereotyping. ..... 103
REFERENCES ..... 105

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Asian African:** This term denotes inhabitants of Africa who trace their descent to South Asia (classically Bangladesh, India and Pakistan). This term attempts to theorise the extensive existence in several areas of Africa of persons from the Indian sub-continent. We use this term interchangeably with Indians to refer to all those people in Africa who are able to trace their lineage to the Indian sub-continent.

**Diaspora:** Ang (2003) defines diaspora as transcontinental, and temporally spreading socio-cultural constructions of individuals constructing imaginary societies whose indistinct and shifting borders are sustained by existent and /or representative ties to an original motherland. Additionally, Vertovec (1999) posits diaspora as a kind of 'consciousness' informed by an 'awareness' of multi-locality and include methods of traditional invention and reproduction enabled by new communication expertise. Moreover, Cohen (2000) describes diaspora in its original meaning as dispersed or exiled people or forcibly deported populations who are away from home or their origin. Hence there is usually a sense of homelessness, painful memories or wish to return that connect a diasporic people or community and links them in common memory to the lost original home they have been forced from. The study uses the term as Cohen defines it. This term is central to and designates the main concept that guides the study.

**Hybridity:** Homi K Bhabha developed the critical term hybridity to refer to the intermingling and transformation that results from new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures and ideas that counters absolutism of the pure. Hybridity is a way of addressing the mingling of cultural signs and practices that are reflected in the diasporic and multivalent cultural sites marked by their constant transgression of the original. In the course of our study, this concept makes reference to the differences within-subjects, rupturing and obscuring whole philosophies of identity but also discuss links

between subjects by identifying affiliations. Hybridity in this study refers to the nature of cultural mixing, the bringing together in innovative ways of indigenous and foreigners.

**Identity:** Iyer (2016) defines identity as the potentials, dogmas, personality, and /or expressions that make an individual or group distinct from the others. The process of identity can be destructive or constructive. This study uses this term in relation to selfhood grounded on distinctiveness and individuality which distinguishes a person or group from others.

**Liminality:** In *Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha discusses liminality as a transient, in-between space or state that is categorised by indeterminacy, obscurity, hybridity, the prospective for insurrection and change. The concept of liminality is so closely related to hybridity. Additionally, when Bhabha gives his wider description of hybridity, he denotes the in-between point where immigrants are. This study considers liminality or liminal space to refer to the in-between stage or state. It is thus a space for in-betweenness where hybridity or dissimilarity is acknowledged.

# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background to the Study

Contemporary communities are progressively more intercultural, with individuals from dissimilar traditional upbringings coming together and being expected to co-exist regardless of their occasionally diverse value structures, ethnicities and standards. As Varner & Beamer (2001) opine, universally, nation-states are acknowledging the increasing diversity of their populaces. Most people now, if they look carefully at themselves and their culture, are between at least two cultural situations. Additionally, the defines that migrants fathom in relation to acculturation and the creation of their multi-ethnic identity are imperative and pertinent matters to research particularly in the contemporary period where migration is aggregating more due to globalization. Shome (2012) affirms that globalization resulted in cultural interaction among world states albeit local resistance prevailed against it. Globalization promotes and allows diversity even though it weakens indigenous identities of local people.

Diaspora is located in multifaceted socio-cultural settings pigeon-holed by varied relations through which their individualities are shaped with dynamism as far through the diaspora mother country association, as a reaction to the segregation by the host culture. The experiences of the diaspora are subsisted ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ a ‘diaspora space’ that is fashioned by numerous axes of discrepancy and inequity (gender, class nationality, and traditions) (Brah, 1996). Diasporas encounter discrimination, resentment, merriment and ‘internal-group’ force to repel or/and conform to a clear ‘cultural identity’ in other words ‘in-between’ cultural process lived by diasporic groups.

Asian diaspora negotiation of diasporic identity portrays the double traits of cultural individualities; the societal proof of identity positioned by individuals and associations with the supremacy to categorise and tag others. Therefore, this shows the influence of peripheral forces like the government on indigenous groups and the immediacy between individuals partaking similar living involvements, solidarity and meanings (Jenkins, 1997). Moreover, a vital facet of the diasporic experience is when elucidating the 'diaspora space' that is tenanted by both migrants and their progenies and inhabitants who are fashioned and embodied as indigenous. Thus, the repercussion of this construction is that the day-to-day involvements of diasporic beings are constituent of the lives of the local people possibly evading the jeopardy being discerned as the 'other'. Most Asians residing in East Africa therefore embrace three features of diaspora; transcontinental social associations, contemporary customs of cultural practices through which racial identities are conveyed and a sort of cognizance that is local and universal (Jenkins, 1997).

M.G. Vassanji presents the complexities of South East Asian diasporic experiences and identities that have been fabricated and not grounded in an elaborated past which however, denotes the diverse positions in which they trace themselves within dialogues of antiquity and culture currently. Their cultural identity is formed out of similarities and continuity, difference and rupture. Vic, the protagonist in M.G Vassanji's novel *The In-Between Wold of Vikram Lall* is a child of the historical migrations of the South East Asians into Kenya. His grandfather, Anand Lall and other indentured labourers were hired from a variety of metropolises in India and transported to Kenya at the dawn of the 20$^{th}$ century. He falls in love with the country and makes it his home. Migrants, migration and the xenophobia that often

accompanies them are strong sub-themes in the novel under study, thus a backdrop of the Asian migration is necessary.

### 1.1.1 The Asian presence in Kenya and indentured labour

The tranquil old port of Mombasa belies the colonial history of Kenya. Ancestors of Kenya's Asian community first set foot on African soil at the old port of Mombasa. Additionally, they came in vessels having being recruited from India as indentured labourers to construct the Kenya-Uganda railway.

Fedders & Salvadori (1980) have written that in 1896, three hundred and fifty Asians reached Mombasa. In total, thirty two thousand Asians were brought in to construct the railway out of whom six thousand opted to remain behind when the job was done. Two thousand of the remaining Asians continued to work for the Railway Corporation in various capacities like stationmasters, mechanics and engine drivers. They were however denied land ownership rights and thus could only survive by becoming traders. This was bound to cause problems in terms of race relations as was seen in the statements made by Asian traders at that time.

According to Muthu (2014), labour on the railway was ferociously difficult and by the time it was completed around two thousand, five hundred men had perished. Additionally, the workers had to endure the overbearing high temperature and the natural peris such as the man-eater lions of Tsavo that killed many workers during the railway construction. Henry (2003) posits that the insatiable lions appeared on railway site for nine months and put up a sporadic attacks against the railway labourers in the locality of Tsavo. This therefore, culminated in terror forcing the railway works to be

brought to a complete standstill for over three weeks in December 1898. Additionally the indentured workers had to contend with sickness and different diseases.

The fundamental question that arises is why were Asians brought in and not Africans who lived around the areas where the British wanted the railway constructed? Siundu (2002) explores the reasons and one is that the Asians and the British had been in contact for a longer period of time since India had been brought under colonial rule much earlier than Kenya. Subsequently, the Asians had acquired more communicative as well as artistic skills that made them handy in constructing the railway. The most important reason is that due to the longer contact between Asians and the British, the former had been introduced to the money economy much earlier than the Africans, and it would therefore take a shorter time bringing in the Asians who would quantify their labour in terms of rupees than the Africans around the region where the railway was to be constructed, to whom the labour-for-pay concept was relatively foreign. The British expedited the displacement of Asians from India to East Africa to work on the Kenya-Uganda railway. Moyez echoes this in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* whereby Vikram, the protagonist, locates his Kenyan identity through the railway line.

The Asian immigrants came to the East Africa not only in pursuit of economic opportunities that were made available by the imperialist expansion of the former British empire, but also as a result of a series of occurrences such as widespread poverty, rapid population and natural calamities like famine in the 19$^{th}$ century India. These made emigration not only possible but necessary.

According to Siundu (2002), the railway was a big accomplishment which became economically vibrant to Kenya, connecting Lake Victoria and Indian Ocean. However, It is important to note, that the British facilitated the construction of the railway in order to continue exploiting the African colonies. They needed to transport plantation products harvested from the highlands like cotton, sugar, rice as the highlands were very rich in these resources. Additionally, upon the completion of the railway, some of the workers willingly remained in Kenya and transported family from India. The railway had unlocked the centre of commerce and people began drifting away from the Coastal metropolises. Over the succeeding years, huge numbers of Gujarati's and Punjabis travelled pursuing new commercial prospects in Kenya. Many Asians settled in Nairobi. Asians were however, allowed to live officially in Nairobi unlike Africans in what was then an escalating white settler city (Siundu, 2002).

The Indians came to control most of the retail trade in Kenya. Their gradual success in business brought upon Asians the envy of both African and Europeans during the later years of colonialism. The latter feared that richer Indians would out-compete them especially if they were to be granted land in the highlands which they were determined to keep 'white'. The Africans became jealous of the Indians' monopoly of small trading and junior office jobs (Frost, 1976). Furthermore, the European policy on land confined Asians to the towns and trading centres, which meant they would not interact with the majority of Africans to the full and their attempts to win African friendships were unsuccessful.

The independence period witnessed the Asian diaspora in Kenya face another stage of choice about belonging and home. Numerous decided to move to Britain, others decided to stay in Kenya as their homeland, while others

returned to India (Frost, 1976). Vic's father, Ashok Lall, chooses to stay in Kenya to exploit the economic prospects unfolding for the Asian migrants attributed to the exit of British colonialists.

The political and monetary state of affairs in Kenya in the 1980s and 1990s resulted in additional change in the relocation patterns of the Asian African diaspora in Kenya. Exploitation and financial worries dented the living standards causing in disappointment that instigated another surge of migration. The novel depicts this migration whereby Deepa, the protagonist's sister travels to America to reside with her children and later, Vikram shifts to Canada in order to get away from the police after the revelation of the massive falsification scandal he arranged. Additionally, Vic's alienated spouse and kids move to England.

### 1.1.2 The winds of trade: the Indian diaspora in Kenya

The Indian Diaspora has its roots not only in the indentured labour, but also because traders from India came to Mombasa prior to the building of the railway thus, the trade ways connecting Asia and East Africa were previously conventional. In the seaport's prime, there was , rhinoceros horns, dry skin, spice, timber, slaves, turtle shells and ambergris used for trade. Trade was central in the Coastal towns. (Gilbert, 2002).

According to Gilbert (2002), the Indian Ocean steam-powered business emerged in 1850. The initial tentative stimulations of huge relocations from Arabia and India to Africa and the predecessors of the foremost grand conquest of the next century began during this period.. From 1850 to 1950, was the great phase of trade because steamships abetted a boom in the previous 'traditional trade' which involved, dhows, which were the quality locally created vessels in the Western side of

Indian Ocean (Gilbert, 2002).Moreover, dhows and steamers expedited abundant relocations of persons from one area to another thus modelling a main new imperial conquest (Gilbert, 2002). The above explanation shows that Indians migrated into Kenya long before the start of the construction of Kenya-Uganda railway for trade purposes.

With the help of the Indian Immigration Act of 1883, Indians travelled without restrictions in East Africa and elsewhere, hence the entry into the hinterland by the Coastal-based Indian merchants who later financed the new immigrants. The intervention in 1883 by the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) and its establishment of trading routes and stations would have far reaching implications for inter-racial relations in the entire East Africa region with its ramifications being felt in the independent politics of East Africa.

### 1.1.3 Categories of the Asian community

Since the 1947 partition of India, the Indians officially have been referred to as Asians, in spite of the fact that there are various communities amongst them. Frost (1976) writes that 'although for official purposes, they were all classed as Asians, the various Asian communities were very different from each other in matters of custom and religion and also in their feelings of loyalty towards Kenya. They are grouped into sub-tribes which include: Sikhs, Punjabis, Gujaratis, Hindus and Goans.

The Punjabis are from Northern India mainly Punjab, Kashmir, Delhi and the Haryana. They follow Hinduism, but have great respect for Sikhism (Muslim). Sikh families and Hindu Punjabi families have intermarriages. They have dominated Bollywood and sports. There has been a continuous migration of Punjabi Hindus to

republics such as the United States of America, United Kingdom and Canada. Punjabis go to Hindu temples for worship and many visit gurdwaras too. They celebrate many festivals, for example Diwali. Many Punjabis are vegetarian people called Vaishno and others are non-vegetarian. (Hinduveer, 2011)

Gujarati is an indigenous group customarily originating from Gujarat (Western India). Additionally, the Gujarat are protuberant in production and important figures participated in the institution of the Swaraj and the triumph of the Indian Independence Movement in British reigned India in 1947. The Sikhs are Muslims and are members of the Ismaili Khoja, the Bohra and the Ithna'ashri sects (Hinduveer, 2011).

In the novel under study, we clearly see the different sub-tribes under the Asian community. Their uniqueness in matters of custom and religion is brought out significantly. The Lall's family is Punjabi and are confined to the Punjabi customs and religion. The Punjabi do not intermarry with the Gujarati. Vikram Lall attends the University of Dar-es-Salaam for his Bachelors and while there he meets Yasmin who is Gujarati. Their friendship is not allowed because of the difference in custom and religion of the two groups. Yasmin's brothers attack Vic and his sister Deepa, in order for Vic to break his relationship with Yasmin.

Commenting on the position of Asians in Kenya in the National Millennium Souvenir' Zarina Patel has written that while the concept of race relations in colonial Kenya focused largely on African-European interaction, in independent Kenya it invariably refers to the relations between Africans and Asians.

Vassanji portrays the life struggles among the rich Africans as they engage in the wheeling and dealing of the business world. We also see how expatriates attempt to fit in the Kenyan fabric, and generally how rich Africans work together with whites and Asians in order to achieve greater success in business. What is more the depiction of the anxieties of an Asian through three generations shows the general fears and aspirations of Kenyan-Asians.

**1.2 About the Writer**

Moyez G. Vassanji was born on 30th May 1950 in Kenya Nairobi and raised in Tanzania. Like the narrator Vikram Lall, Vassanji's blood relation migrated from India to Africa (Malik, 1993). Additionally, Moyez attended high school in Tanzania at Tambaza Senior High School formerly known as the Aga Khan Boys' School and moved back to Nairobi for his university education at the University of Nairobi. He secured a grant to study in the United States of America. He left Kenya at 19, for the United States to study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where he majored in Physics. He later received a Doctoral degree in Nuclear Physics at the University of Pennsylvania (Foran, 2014). According to the description above, Vassanji has a personal history of moving and this has affected his writings in great depth. Chepkosgei (2010) posits that Moyez has documented the manifold dislocations of African Asians, their relocation from India, alienated life in East Africa and occasionally, leaving for Europe or North America where the sense of estrangement remains.

Foran (2014) posits that Moyez relocated to Toronto as a post-doctoral fellow in 1978 after operating at the Chalk River nuclear control station . Vassanji and his spouse, Nurjehan Aziz, created the *Toronto South Asian Review*, in 1981, which continues currently as *Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad*.

From 1980 to 1989, he was a research associate at the University of Toronto (Foran, 2014). In the course of this period, Moyez, developed curiosity in feudal Indian writings and history. It was during this period, that he explored and found success in the literary world. Moreover, In 1980, Vassanji started working on his pioneer novel *The Gunny Sack* first published in 1989. Vassanji, therefore commenced writing permanently, thus ending his Physics career which was instigated by the study of Sankskirt and Indian philology. During a conversation with Chelva Kanaganayakam (February 31, 1991), Vassanji noted this on his choice to abandon his physics career:

> It is the kind of thing you can keep on doing. I had reached a point when I could just churn out things. Unless you are at MIT or Harvard, or a place like that, you are not really at the forefront. Sometimes I miss that life because of the way of thinking it demands. My writing, however, is much more important. It seems to be the mission in life that I finally achieved. (Kanaganayakam, 1991, p.2)

Vassanji in his writing career has produced a biography of Mordecai Richler, eight novels, a memoir of his travels in India and two collections of short stories. Vassanji's novels include: *The Gunny Sack* (1989), *No New Land* (1991), *The Book of Secrets* (1994), *Amriika* (1999), *The in Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003), *The Assassins Song* (2007), *The Magic of Saida* (2012), *Nostalgia* (2016). Short stories include *Uhuru Street* (1992), *When She Was Queen* (2005) and *What You Are: Stories* (2021). Non-fiction collection include *A Place Within* (2008), *Extraordinary Canadians: Mordecai Richler* (2007), *And Home Was Kariakoo: A Memoir of East Africa* (2014).

Vassanji's identity stretches across three continents: Africa, South Asia and North America. He is thus a man of many identities and as such a Canadian, African,

Asian writer (Malak, 2001). Vassanji's works deal with Asians residing in East Africa. Most affiliates of this immigrant society afterwards experience a subsequent relocation to European countries. Moyez therefore, is interested in how these relocations exert influence on the individualities of his characters, a subject that is peculiar to him too: "The Indian diaspora is very important….once I went to the U.S, suddenly the Indian connection became very important: the sense of origins, trying to understand the roots of India that we had inside us." (Kanaganayakam, 1991).

Vassanji has a personal history of moving and this has affected his writings in great depth. Movement is actually part of his writing. In an interview by Shane Rhodes, he says "I have moved and have seen the world transform, that to live a stationary life seems impossible, but even if you have never left Toronto, Toronto itself has left you. It is always a different place from what it was and what you remember year from year. A place changes overtime. In that sense, we have all lived through tumultuous transformations. Some of us through greater changes than others." His characters are always defined by their in-betweenness. He concentrates on the intersection between the South Asians and the Africans as well as the expatriate government.

An additional interest of the writer is how the past influences the contemporary and how individual and communal pasts can intersect (Malak, 2001). Vassanji's demonstration of history evades the imprint of, a modest, undeviating, historical certainty because in most of his writings the obscurities of the past linger unsettled (Kanaganayakam, 1991). Vassanji's literatures have progressively received consideration by various literary scholars who have concentrated on

subjects like relocation, diaspora, nationality, gender and traditions (Malak, 2001).

### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

This study interrogates the representation of diasporic experiences of the South East Asian immigrants to East Africa in Vassanji's novel *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. Additionally, the study focuses on the liminality of the Indian settler, the effects of hybridity upon identity and the gendered dimensions of hybridity manifested through stereotypes. Moreover, this study proceeds from the fact that literature employs or utilises characters, situations or narration through which we can read meanings. As these terms, hybridity and in-betweenness have become key concepts in recent literary criticism, this study will revisit them in connection with Vassanji's representation of people whose existence has been shaped by movement. Our interest thus in the study is to see how the complex identity of the diasporic experiences can be unwoven from the intricate pattern of the work.

### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

This research is grounded on the listed objectives:

i. To examine the concept of liminality within the context of identity of the Indian diaspora presented in the novel.
ii. To examine the manner in which characters in the novel signify the concept of hybridity in culture.
iii. To analyse the gendered dimensions of hybridity manifested through acts of gender stereotyping.

### 1.5 Research Questions

i. How is liminality represented in the text in connection to identity construction of the Asians?

ii. How are hybrid identities created and negotiated within the novel?

iii. How do individuals negotiate gender when defining their hybrid identities?

### 1.6 Research Assumption

The diasporic experience of the East African Asian community has an influence on characters in order to produce hybrids.

### 1.7 Significance of the Study

The main focus of this research is the representation of liminality and hybridity in Moyez Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* by investigating the diasporic experience of the East African Asians. Since creative writing reflects the human experience and society, albeit subjectively, it is possible to understand how individuals in a multi-racial society view themselves and others through analysing literary texts by writers from different races.

Our interest in Vassanji is due to the fact that he is an African Asian writer and has published about the numerous dislocations of African Asians: their movement from India, isolated life in East Africa and occasionally subsequent exit for America or Europe where the estrangement continues.

This study hopes to make a significant contribution to Kenyan and African literature at large. We also hope that this study contributes generally to the concept of diaspora in contemporary time and to the 'Asian question' in the context of Africa.

### 1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study concentrates on one novel: *The In - Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003) written by Moyez G Vassanji. In the analysis of the aforementioned novel, the study reads the work within identity, hybridity and liminality of the Indian settler margins.

*The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* is one among Moyez G. Vassanji's works. All the works by Vassanji that are left out of this study provide secondary reading or reference where necessary. Moreover, the selection of the text was on the basis that it is set in colonial and postcolonial East Africa within the period that this study focuses on and it has characters from the three races (Africans, Europeans and Asians) who play significant roles.

### 1.9 Review of Related Literature

A survey of the scholarly literature on Moyez Vassanji's creative writing, reveals various fundamental subject. These subjects can be classified as: East African Asian identities frequently allied to debates on African nationalism, colonial history, and the Asian debate on citizenship: Simatei (2011), Malak (1993), Omuteche (2010), Omuteche (2011), Turner (2011), Steiner (2014). Additional subjects in discussions centres on relocation to the North and consequential ambiguous communal associations: Chepkosgei (2010), Cooper (2008), Abbas (2016).

This study takes cognizance of the various views. It also recognizes a number of studies of Vassanji's work that are related and demonstrates how it benefits from them and the points of departure realized. This section is organized into three sub-sections in line with the objectives of the study.

### 1.9.1 Studies on liminality and identity.

Steiner (2014) examines Moyez Vassanji's thematic concerns of movements, reminiscence and the construction of migrant subjectivities. Furthermore, Steiner states that these thematic concerns can be understood by considering the interconnecting pathways through global air travel round the world. The paper explores the depiction of diverse means of transportation in Vassanji's writing and the forms of belonging they facilitate.

Steiner focuses on different transport means as represented in Vassanji's stories such as cruises, train voyages and air tours that gesticulate to the antiquity of East African transportation nation. Vassanji's writings highlight the Indian Ocean as connective means between Asia and Africa. Moreover, Steiner's paper posits that Moyez' story plan to solidify historical entitlements of fitting in from the retroactive location of the memoir writer permits Vassanji to bemoan archaic means of conveyance that facilitate a specific self-narrative. The account of Indian toil in the building of the Ugandan railway permits entitlements of ingrained belonging that consents characters to assert an African individuality and nationality authenticated by an account of labour on the land. The paper explains that the railway work turn out to be a less constant anchor, particularly since it endorses British financial interests which impede indentured labourers' expectations for substantial attainment in contrast to farming labour, which frequently reinforces autochthonous accounts of belonging in African narratives. Vital for our argument is the emphasis on train travel and the past of Indian manual labour in the building of the Ugandan railway, supports rights of deep-rooted belonging that permits characters to affirm an African identity and citizenship.

According to Omuteche (2010) diaspora communities are also usually under different pressures as they struggle to settle minorities, adding aspects of re-negotiation and struggle for survival and acceptance to the understanding of the concept of diaspora. This understanding of diaspora can account in a way, for the diasporic identities depicted in Vassanji's novel due to some aspects of apparent compulsion in the original immigration of Asians into East Africa, though not of the same intensity and scale of victimhood reminiscent of classical Jewish diaspora or American ones. How is home and identity experienced in the diaspora within the reality of displacement and globalization? Omuteche responds in the sense that the physicality of movement from one space-place to the other informs the interface between globalization and diaspora. Some movements may have some element of coercion. The push factors are what forces one to leave the original home or pull factors in the receiving community. Push factors may be characterized by pressure placed on the individual or group psychologically or economically. This is pertinent to our study as the protagonist's grandfather Anand Lall immigrated into Kenya because of pull factors and push factors; The former is due to the fact of railway indentureship and trade along the Indian Ocean Coast, the latter is related to a series of occurrences such as widespread poverty, rapid population and natural calamities like famine in the 19$^{th}$ century India.

As ongoing processes, globalization, immigration and resulting diasporas are constantly re-inscribed as groups and individuals continuously re-work and re-negotiate their identities. Choice and constraint permeate the dynamics of migration, the migrant and host communities' relationships to 'home' thus the examination of force and choice in the shaping of diasporic identities must encompass the analysis of the migrant and the host communities and those who remain in the sending community. This awareness in our research helps us understand the processes of

diasporic integration and socio-cultural or symbolic relationships of the immigrants to their natal home depicted in the novel. Within this context, the migrants re-construct diasporic home in *The in Between World of Vikram Lall.*

The diaspora that characterizes the current world have backgrounds in European domination that climaxed in the 19th century since imperialism emphasized differences in chain of command, modern-day identities in the global sphere are conveyed in places permeated with inequities hence resulting in fractured identities and sense of belonging (Omuteche, 2011). *The in Between World of Vikram Lall* represents fixity- movement whereby the book is full of descriptions of travelling around, leaving and homecoming. Moreover, worldwide and diaspora involvements are principally spatial henceforth the subsequent identities are disconcerted and in flux. Dichotomies continue inside-outside and disturb the diaspora experiences. (Omuteche, 2011).

Additionally, although the diaspora strive for to augmentation of commercial and certain facets of traditional interests in the host country and pursue individualities that surpass ethnic or traditional gaps, they still recourse to social control to uphold distinctive identities (Omuteche, 2011). Differentiation, therefore is usurped as an instrument of conservation and intensification of benefits and positions. Often, the group that has a superior position, traditionally or economically set up rigid barriers thus using taboos and other precincts as social controls. The dispersed societies strive to preserve some degree of uncontaminated culture, individualities or custom, but some recourse to voluntary isolation. They therefore, amalgamate in groups and launch in-groups to repel permeation by ‘other’ (Omuteche, 2011) Our study benefits from this study as it discusses issues of identity formation among the South East Asian communities.

Simatei (2011) demonstrates how writings such as those of Moyez Vassanji and Jameela Siddiqi gesture toward the diasporic imaginary while insistently going back to the location of the nation-state to sanction the dissimilarity of the diasporic subject. Additionally, in these works, there is evidence of a disavowal and a re-inscription of the state that gestures towards the impact of the nation as a site of sanctioning identity politics. The action of documenting the presence of Asians in East Africa can be considered an effort to reveal links to pasts of struggle that get repressed through the amplification of Asian stereotype as agents of colonialism within the authorised nation-building discourse. These connections are in turn complicated by other competing claims of affiliation such as gender, class and religion.

Simatei further posits that the Asian diaspora in East Africa can be distributed into two: the ancient diaspora constituted in the late 19$^{th}$ century as a result of movement of indentured labourers to places such as Trinidad, Fiji, South Africa and Mauritius, and the new diaspora which is basically a post-war formation constituted by the crossing of the descendants of the first diaspora into the metropolitan centres of the West. The new diaspora is roughly constituted by the third and fourth generation East African Asians, now dispersed across four continents namely, Africa, North America, Europe and India. The writers featured in Simatei's paper belong to this generation and it is their fictional affirmation of the multiple.

The protagonists in this literature, Simatei posits, are often migrants in Europe or North America who, confronted with generalized racism against Asians, strategically perform their East African identities as a mark of difference. Yet this relating back to East Africa is itself problematic to the extent, that East Africa emerges contradictorily both as home and as the site of expulsion and pain, promising no clear affiliation to the subject. As it can be seen in the writings of Vassanji, it is the recognition of this

contradiction that enables a demystification of diaspora theoretically produced by hyper-reality, a demystification that leads to the historicization of diaspora as a condition of pain. The diasporic texts of Moyez Vassanji disavow the nation-state, but for different reasons. Where the former locates the collapse of the teleological discourse of nationalism and its emancipatory project in the nation-state's failure to radically disconnect with colonialism and assaults it for this as it searches for alternative forms of nationhood, in the latter, nationalism's reterritorialization of the British empire is mourned as a loss. At this point, the critique of nationalism, voiced through the ordinary Asian's fear of the uncertainties of African independence, is not founded in an epistemological skepticism on the emancipatory potential of nationalism, that is, British imperialism. Throughout his novels, Vassanji suggests that the collapse of the ambivalent position of relative privilege occupied by Asians in the expatriate set up and that of colonial authority, itself long projected as absolute and inviolable, is what creates panic that leads to the first wave of departures from East Africa.

*The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* portrays demonstrates the Asian complex entanglement with Kenya's equally contested histories. In colonial Kenya, Indians create a buffer zone between white privilege and black misery, but several years later, African nationalism throws their safe haven into disarray as the British Empire collapses. The question posed by the novel is whether the perceived collaboration with colonial authorities erases the contribution of Indians to the new Kenya; for if the new Kenya is also understood in terms of physical symbols of modernity like the railway, the shop and the bazaar, then the appreciation of Asian participation in the making of it was inevitable. The history of Asian participation in radical activism, colonial and post-colonial is of course well documented in historical narratives, but

what Vassanji does is to activate such histories and align them with progressive forms of nationalism. Throughout the essay, Simatei points out ways in which nation despite its tendency towards monolithic, exclusionary and hegemonic politics is reconstituted by diasporic logic as a multivalent space within which can be enacted contending narratives and identities. His argument is that the nation space is available for re-ordering by both essentialist and decentring narratives and is not therefore always already constituted in one absolute way. The arguments raised by Simatei are without a doubt is relevant to this study as we get to know other perspectives in which the novel under study can be analysed.

According to Turner (2011) *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* is an autobiographical narrative described by the protagonist Vic. Turner employs Philippe Lejeune's framework in *Le Pacteautobiographique* (1975), to qualify Vikram's double-dealing life as a rogue memoir because it 'cheats' with the features of the genre. Turner's study emphasises that the text functions inside such a framework and the usual cypher is used or tainted for purposes of confusion and satire.

The introductory part of book, dismisses the critical outline of the autobiographical narrative presented by Philippe Lejeune in his seminal writing *Le Pacteautobiographique* (1975). Lejeune's 'autobiographical pact' highlights the reliance concerning the reader and narrator inferring that the text presented as fiction is not autobiographical. Moreover, the framework is slanted in a multiplicity of ways in Vassanji's novel which guides Hanquart to qualify it a 'rogue' autobiography. A forthright memoir, in contrast to a biography, conventionally concludes prior to the demise of the main character. This therefore, affords another interrogative in line with the author's rigorous purpose with regarding the genre of the text. The pretext of the title page was given as factual fiction, adopts the structure of the autobiographical

narrative of a main character who shares a number of similarities as the author. Vikram, like Vassanji, is a Kenyan Indian staying and writing in Canada. The two are age mates therefore their childhood was spent in the same political atmosphere. Vassanji establishes with his audience a novelistic treaty in contrast to an autobiographical pact in which there is acceptance that the story owes to a fictional protagonist, and a reader assenting to an enthusiastic interruption of mistrust since there is no equivalence between the narrator and author. Thus, Vassanji is roguish with his audience by giving the readers a somehow misleading story.

Hanquart concludes by positing that the writer has conscripted actual characters like Kenyatta and Ngugi as well as fictional ones. Additionally, citing specific years of proceedings ostensibly connected by the main character contributes to the authenticity of the novel. Turner qualifies *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* as a pseudo-autobiography which functions outside usual controls of the autobiographical genre, meant to mystify the reader about its actual purport. Our study differs from Hanquart's in terms of the theoretical approaches, whereas our study is anchored on Freudian psychoanalysis and Homi Bhabha's Third Space theory, her study is hinged on Philippe Lejeune's *Le Pacteautobiographique*. Turner's study will, however, be useful as we are interested in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* as a political novel in terms of the aftermath of colonialism in Kenya as represented in the novel.

### 1.9.2 Studies on hybridity

Gromov (2014) examines the usage of several languages comprising Kiswahili by the writer Moyez G. Vassanji alongside the English backdrop focusing on two texts, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* and *The Gunny Sack.* Additionally, Moyez employs various literary techniques like code-switching and shifting which Gromov analyses from a literary point of view. Gromov affirms that language mixing creates local

colour and designates the characters' quest for a new identity. Through the use of Kiswahili expressions, Vassanji succeeds in expressing the character's ethnic background and communal stand, therefore, allowing him to construct the precise atmosphere of "East Africanness".

Gromov writes that in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, languages, particularly Kiswahili play a role the quest of identity for the Asian characters. Vassanji quotes the titles of Indian food and fabric for example; "*bhajias, samosas, dhokrasbhel-piri, chappals* and *shalwar-kameez"* (2003, 8), terms related to Hindu religion for example "*swastika* and *silaks"*, local healers and sorcerers "*mundumugos* and *maalims*" (2003, 278), African traditional clothes like *buibui, kanzu, kofia* and *khanga* (2003, 111). Swapping to Kiswahili is important: for instance to express the profound Swahili upbringing of the Tanzania, Vassanji employs Kiswahili words instead of English - "we had *maandazi* and *chai*" in place of tea and buns and "we stood waving *ahsante* to the seller" instead of gesturing thanks.

Furthermore, Vassanji makes evident that languages are influential elements in the communal life of the characters, executing numerous purposes, particularly in the case of the protagonists of the novel, aiding them in articulating and' fashioning their varied individualities. In the case of Vikram Lall, language is a survival tactic and way of adaptation for a person with belonging and identity issues. The enquiry, if the Asians in East Africa achieved new identity, is seemingly left open by Vassanji, his writings are relatively unfolding the procedure of searching identity, a pursuit that in the two novels was highly exhibited through the language medium. Nevertheless, Gromov assumes that both Salim and Vikram failed because they end up relocating to the West far away from East Africa Our study benefits from Gromov's study in that

we get to understand language-mixing as a way in which African Asians use to construct their identities.

Recent East African Asian writing, unlike pioneer writings such as those of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, configures postcolonial identities and spaces as plural, heterogeneous and even hybrid (Simatei, 2010). Simatei reads Ngugi's '*Matigari'* side by side with Vassanji's novels in order to show how the latter moves away from nationalist discourses engendered in Ngugi's writing in order to encounter contemporary issues of cultural pluralism. Simatei's concern is not with the apparent antagonism between the two discourses but with how, in countering the hegemony of the official discourses of identity formation, the novel envisages diverse and heterogeneous social formations. Not all East African novels articulate the desirability of such complex and multiple identities but Simatei refers here to those texts that can be termed post-national in the sense that they celebrate models of cultural heterogeneity, hybridization and political plurality. We take cognizance of this study as the novel under study is an evocation of the postcolonial figures.

Vassanji in his novels explores the historical drama of the Asian entrance in East Africa, their quest for belonging and challenges of acculturation and how the contact with the host community reshaped their identities and finally their subsequent exodus from the region (Simatei, 2000). Additionally, Simatei addresses Vassanji's depiction of the contentious existence of Asians in East Africa and also the structuring of memory and history in two texts: *The Gunny Sack* and *The Book of Secrets*.

Simatei further states that Vassanji's texts depict a discernment of colonialism as favouring the Asians in East Africa economically and socially unlike the independence period. In both *The Book of Secrets* and *The Gunny Sack,* Vassanji

envisages a society whose affluences, acquired under the guard of the empire disintegrate once independence is achieved. Whereas the concluding migration of Asians from East Africa is factually censured on dogmas like Africanisation, overextended to incongruous boundaries by the Ugandan tyrant Idi Amin, *The Gunny Sack* and *The Book of Secrets* suggest that the illogicality between the procedure of nation –formation with its homogenising propensities and the migrant predisposition towards borderlessness was a major source for such agitation (Simatei, 2000). This study is of benefit to the present study as Simatei addresses concepts that are relevant to this study.

Chepkosgei (2010) explores the construction of hybrid identities in Moyez Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land* by demonstrating how narration affects the multiple and ambivalent identities of the diasporic subjects whose histories the author is narrating. She aims to investigate the projection of hybridity as a positive aspect of cultural identity in postcolonial discourse and analyses how memory and history are harnessed through the retelling of multiple non-linear histories of postcolonial subjects as well as exploring the authors use of hybridity to question the concept of migrancy and nationhood, ethnicities and mapping as constructed by nationalists ideologies. Her study focuses on hybridity as a condition of the relation between the diasporic South Asian Community in East Africa and aspects of the Western culture particularly the Canadian culture. History and memory play a crucial role in her research going by the fact that it mirrors the process by which the diasporic community occasionally uses them as a fall-back position that helps in directing the community back to significant nodal points in their common history and social memory. This has the effect of sedimenting their ability to remain unique despite the pressure from dominant cultural forms. Through memory and history, the works

under her study point to the narrative of loss, exile and journeying and serve a mnemonic function in striking a balance between the infiltrating cultures of the metropolis to which they migrate and their unique cultural practices and in the end, are able to invent and maintain a hybrid identity which is constitutive and is more of a cultural ensemble.

Chepkosgei's study was guided by theories of post-colonialism. Post-colonialism assumes that identities are performative and that postcolonial subjects partake of multiple identities owing to histories of migration, dispossession and displacement. Diasporic literatures such as those of Vassanji celebrate rather than negate such histories. Chepkosgei posits that *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land* grapple with the idea that identities are about differences and that those differences are constructed through discourse. Her reading and analysis of the texts relayed the complexity of the historical relationship between the South Asian community and East African one that nourished the post-independence displacement on the one hand and their relationship to the West where they find accommodation. The hybrid identity of the South Asian community emerged in the narrative as one attainable only through striking a middle ground. This study is helpful to our study as it illuminates hybrid identities in Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land*, a concept we are interested in though in a different novel by Vassanji, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall.*

According to Abbas (2016), establishing a sense of affiliation to ethnicity is a major challenge for immigrants. The entrance of Indian rail workers is deliberated as kind of colonial drill, while their expulsion in the post-independence period is considered decolonization. The research inspects the theme of affiliation and the involvements of the immigrants. Abbas, confirms that South Asians in Canada are stringent in their affiliation to cultural principles. Additionally, the paper illustrates that cultural

affiliation is a foundation of authority for the immigrants in diaspora. Communal life may give an immigrant monetary liberation by allowing them to establish their own business, an opportunity that may shield one against discrimination in terms of occupation. Affiliation enables readers to determine that the personal experience of an immigrant should be scrutinised within rather than outside, the circumstantial record of his or her traditional society. *No New Land* is concluded by proposing that the immigrant's link with the motherland is of two categories; the initial is a sense of nostalgia for the native states. The second is an attachment to their traditional community in exile. This study will inform our study as the concepts of hybridity and affiliation are related.

Malak (1993) examines the indecisive associations and postcolonial state in the fiction of M. G. Vassanji. He writes that writers as diametrically diverse as V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie acutely probe, negotiate and represent varying degrees of ambivalence towards multiple affiliations within contexts of shifting values and constant flux. The ensuing discursive formations, often hybridized are illuminated by an awareness that postcoloniality is, in quintessence, a disrupting condition of "in-betweenness". Additionally, the saga of global uprootedness and unstable migration is dramatized in the three works of Vassanji's fiction: *The Gunny Sack*, *No New Land* and *Uhuru Street*. Salim, the protagonist in *The Gunny Sack* recalls with the sack's stories about his family's and community's collective histories, not all of which are pleasant or dignified, illustrates the casting of the narrator's lot with the fate of his cultural group. This approach represents a feature of postcolonial stories, whereby characterization implies a thoughtful undertaking at contextualizing a person's intention amid that of a clan's, or ethnic community (Malak, 1993).

Malak posits that Vassanji succeeds briskly in blending the public and the private, the indigenous and the universal, the serious and the ironic, thereby establishing himself as an accomplished writer of distinct voice, vision and technique. Moreover, Malak concludes by returning to the concept of ambivalent affiliation by proposing that the century that is coming to a close is not only the century of exiles but the century of multiple identities. Humanity's diverse heritages have 'broken loose', of ethnic and geographic hegemony: cultural inter-pollination is a forceful facet of life in the age of globalization and instant communication. The plea of Vassanji's work is consequently inherent in sarcastic ridicule of the claim of cultural or spiritual conservatives. Despite his character's instinctive equivocation toward 'others' and despite their justifiable gravitation toward their ethnic shelter, the narrative discourse suggests that the human in us is too outgoing, resilient and receptive to be boxed into a single, tribalistic identification snug as they may be. Gone then are the days of unicultures, monoidentities; in comes the ethos and mores of multiplicity, cross-pollination, interbreeding. This brave new world may induce ambivalence, at times even confusion, but that is the lookout and challenge. This study helps us internalize the concept of hybridity and gain a comprehensive understanding of the author Moyez Vassanji as Malak posits.

Siundu (2002) examines the vision of multiculturalism as it is projected in three novels that are part of Yusuf K. Dawood's writing, *The Price of Living*, *One Life Too Many* and *Water Under the bridge*. Siundu analyses characterization, ideology and narrative techniques in a quest to examine Dawood's concept of multiculturalism, his vision for a multicultural society as seen in his characters and to evaluate the writer's presentation or crafting of his texts through the narrative techniques. Siundu read the texts within the theoretical framework of New Historicism and Freudian

psychoanalysis. The former guided him in the sampling of the primary texts that say something about the society within which the very texts are found while the latter enabled him to understand the psyche of the characters together with the complexities that prescribe their actions. The study establishes that the vision of multiculturalism is more than just multiracialism. This is seen in the way the characters are portrayed as making conscious efforts and sacrifices in order to suit in an environment that is changing towards embracing differences. The efforts and sacrifices made are seen in instances like cultural activities, speech behaviour and modes of dress. It is Dawood's conscious portrayal of these sacrifices that guide him in concluding that his concept of multiculturalism goes beyond multi-racialism to encompass other aspects of cultural differences among the various cultural groups that inhabit Kenya. This study is of benefit to our study as the concepts of multiculturalism and hybridity are related.

Busolo (2011) analyses the representation of Africa in the travelogue and fiction of V. S. Naipaul. He examines the writer's perception of Africa as seen through the combination of the travelogues and the fiction on the continent. Our study is interested in the analysis of *A Bend in the River* as the protagonist in the novel, Salim shares the same storyline as Vikram Lall in Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall.* Salim, like Vic, continuously remains in the in-between situation of two cultures and he feels perplexed while living in one culture and thinking about another. In this complex situation, he tries to find out his cultural and social roots that find out his selfhood but at last, he feels disillusioned with himself. Salim is a migrant from an East African Muslim family who relocates into the inland; presumably, the Democratic Republic of Congo newly independent and ruled by the Big Man. Salim is armed with an existentialist worldview that has detached him from any encumbrances. By discarding his destiny, he is confronted with existential questions to which on his

own he must seek answers he remains lonely with no relatives and fetish. As Salim tries to get to the root of his own self-revelation, he becomes a witness to cycles of destruction around him both in the political order, human relationship and his own life. Salim like Lall scuffles to assert his individuality in the face of chastening conditions. This study is of immense benefit to our study as the readership of Salim enables us to understand our protagonist Vikram Lall due to their similarity of belonging in-between cultures.

According to Kumar (2011), the entire postcolonial diasporic literature exhibits mixed feelings through the essential dichotomies marking the lives of émigrés. Love-hate relationships, contradictions between 'self' and 'other' native-alien clash of cultures, hybridity, creolisation, nostalgia, mimicking tendency, sense of alienation and ultimate disillusionment prevail throughout the novel. The paper discusses the relevance of Bhabha's perception to understand the typical postcolonial 'halfness'. The absurdity of so-called civilizing mission is exposed in the novel by satirizing the concept of 'white man's burden'. The Africans feel perpetually trapped and shipwrecked in their land for the destined wretchedness making them embrace borrowed culture, language, fashion and style only to experience ever-prevailing and ever-tormenting ambivalence which destabilizes their lives in entirety. Kumar intends to explore the theoretical nuances which may be applied in the reading of the novel with a special focus on one of the most prominent postcolonial thinkers, Homi K. Bhabha.

The failure of the colonial mimic men determined hybridity, which according to Bhabha subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures. Though the ambivalence marks the lives of all colonials, hybridity and multicultural locale adds to its intensity. Ferdinand, an unprotected boy full of ambition and a native of mixed

heritage in *A Bend in the River* feels even more insecure as he has no cultural group where he can feel associated. Salim finds that Ferdinand's ambivalence is twice agonizing and his personality had become fluid. Kumar makes a conclusion that the entire postcolonial diasporic literature heavily relies upon concepts of mimicry and ambivalence but the exceptional handling of the diasporic sensibility in the novel. Diasporic literature is pertinent to our study, so a look at studies that have been carried out on other diasporic writers is a plus. Kumar's study is of benefit because she looks at hybridity, a concept our study is interested in.

### 1.9.3 Studies on gender in relation to hybridity

Jones (2011) traces a chronology of representations of Asian East Africans in literature written in English. Considering short stories, novels and films written over the past fifty years, she concentrates on affection tales between Asian and African characters. Jones' paper examines the importance of these love tales to the recreation of diasporic antiquities and the construction and defiance of nationwide mythologies. Jones is predominantly interested in the infrequent telling of interactions between Asian women and black men. The paper works towards an understanding of the sensitive and brittle symbolic significance of the love stories within the political historiographies provided by the texts. This paper provides a good read as the present study is interested in the sensitive topic of relationships between Asian women and African men.

Arup (2017) examines M.G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage*, to analyse how females in developing republics bound under the male-controlled ideals compelling them to agree to the old-fashioned standards, practices and spiritual dogmas out of helplessness, estrangement, apprehension, and encumbrance of domestic

responsibilities. He notes that Vassanji's novel expresses the subordination and suppression of the immigrant women in Canada bearing Indian heritage. Additionally, Chitra Banerjee's short stories portray the despondent situation of the Indian females wedded to Indians residing in America for expert establishment. Arup concludes that the authors of the select texts depict the subordinated and degrading condition of women perceived as sheer objects. The authors follow the females' expedition from self- sacrifice and denial to self-realization, assertion and affirmation. The women experience pressure between their indigenous culture and American life. The females thus preserve old-fashioned Indian principles with sentimental experiences, beliefs and models of morality. Arup's study is of significance in terms of the predicaments of the Asian women in the society, an issue that the present study is interested in.

Venegas Caro de la Barrera (2017) analyses the liminal aspect of postcolonial writings presented in the tales of Nadine Gordimer and Bessie Head. She posits that the books express hybrid subjects with regard to race and gender thus signifying the new epistemological space that such writings reveal. Concentrating on the fluctuating identities of the feminine characters in the texts, she establishes a link between the praxis of post-colonial literature as a constant redeploying of cultural inevitabilities and the repositioning of the accustomed in the uncanny. She concludes that postcolonial discourse appears to be an open warrant to rifle through history. This perspective tends to create imagined communities that find in heterotopic spaces that is the ground to contravene nationalism, and gender constructions. The fluid identities are typical of the perpetual incoherence of the liminal nature of post-colonial discourse as they escape the margins while transcending the centering, imperialistic notions of gender, race and nation. Therefore, their relation to these ethnic reproductions is catachrestical, since their creation is not a fetishized identity, but a

long-lasting liminal state that eludes description from an outsider centre. This study though on different texts is parallel to the present study as we also focus on shifting nature of the female identities.

According to the literature available to the researcher and as evidenced in the literature reviewed above, few studies have considered gender as a central axis on which hybrid representations are constructed and negotiated. Analyses of hybridity have tended to remain focused on its racial dimensions and transcultural manifestations. How gender might influence definitions of hybridity and determine individuals' experiences of its construction has, thus, so far been relatively ignored. In this regard, this study fills this gap by not only analysing how diasporic individuals negotiate gender when defining their hybrid identities, but also examining the liminality of the Asian characters as it applies to identity reconstruction of the East African Asians in the novel and the effects of cultural hybridity.

### 1.10 Theoretical Framework

This research is hinged on Homi Bhabha's Third Space Theory as its theoretical construct.

Third Space Theory is a postcolonial sociolinguistic theory of identity and community realized through language or education. It explains the uniqueness of each person, actor or context as a hybrid. This theory is associated with postcolonial terms; 'liminality' and 'in-betweenness'. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha refers to liminality as a transitory, in-between state or space which is characterized by indeterminacy, ambiguity, hybridity, the potential for subversion and change. This term has particular importance in postcolonial theory since it identifies the interstitial environment in which cultural transformation can take place and new discursive

forms are constituted. It is useful for describing an in-between space in which cultural change may occur, the transcultural space in which strategies for personal or communal selfhood may be elaborated, a region in which there is a continual process of movement and interchange between different states. In more general terms it marks the place, line or border at which a passage can be made from one space to another. The concept of liminality has been successfully adopted in literary, postcolonial and cultural studies to circumscribe a being on the border or on the threshold, dividing distinct spheres, identities or discourses.

The Third space or liminal space not only seems to be the juncture of translations and dialogues; it also raises questions towards the essentially rooted ideas of identity and national concepts surrounding the original culture. Third space marks a new beginning of possibility in terms of meaningful identification and even productivity that the new identity carries with it. These newer openings not only question the established notions of culture and identity but also provides new forms of cultural meanings and thereby it significantly suspends the limits of the boundaries. Instead of exclusion and rejection, the new space, thus, has the capacity and tendency to include and accept.

Homi Bhabha introduces the concept of hybridity along with Third Space. Bhabha posits hybridity as such a form of liminal or in-between space, where the cutting edge of translation and negotiation occurs and which he terms the third space. The hybrid identity is positioned within this third space, as a lubricant in the conjunction of cultures. The hybrid's potential is with their innate knowledge of transculturation, their ability to traverse both cultures and to translate, negotiate and mediate affinity and difference within a dynamic of exchange and inclusion. Hybridity is celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-

betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference. Bhabha talks about the partial culture which he describes as the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures. His concept of hybridity is based on the notion that no culture is really pure as it is always in contact with the other. The term hybridity conjures up the notion of 'in-betweenness' which is further elaborated by the accompanying concept of Diaspora.

The term 'Diaspora' evokes the specific terms of displacement but it loses its poignancy due to the effect of hybridity. This means that hybridity bridges the gap between the West and the East, the colonizer and the colonized. The terms diaspora, displacement and relocation exhibit the dynamic nature of culture. Since the historical narratives on which culture tries to define itself are inconsistent, culture must be seen along with the context of its construction. A significant aspect while dealing with diasporic experience is the concept of 'home'. Whether it is forced or voluntary migration, one leaves one's own country and settles in a foreign land. This migratory displacement leaves the migrant with a sense of homelessness and rootlessness. Bhabha candidly observed the migrant experiences which are full of dualities. He brings out the uncanniness of the migrant experience through a series of ideas like half-life, partial presence, gathering the past and edge of foreign culture. The migrants live a half-life in a foreign land as they are not able to accept the new land completely. Their memories haunt them and many times they live reviving their past. This experience of living a partial life is sometimes very disturbing for the migrants. This experience of being in-between two cultures is what the diaspora comes across in the foreign land.

Homi Bhabha's concepts of third space, in-betweenness and hybridity are relevant to this study in understanding the Asian characters in M.G. Vassanji's *The In-Between*

*World of Vikram Lall* who are caught in between two stages of development, who do not hold clearly defined positions within their social system and therefore feel marginal, excluded without identity or influence. The novel's main focus is on the position of Asians described as an in-between race and culture within opposition colonizer and colonized. Vassanji's narrator muses over this while comparing himself to his African friend Njoroge: "I was also aware that he was more African than I was. He was African, I was Asian. His skin was matte, his woolly hair impossibly alien. I was smaller, with pointed elvish ears, my skin annoyingly 'medium', as I described it then neither one (white) nor the other one (black)." (Vassanji, 19).

The in-between position of the Asians in the novel is continuously described as perilous and uneasy; they are defined as not belonging in Africa despite their professed allegiance to it. Through a narrative about the Lall family, Vassanji reminds of the specific experience of Indian migration to Africa which created a particular situation of an in-between race within the context of opposition white/European/colonizer versus black/African/colonized. It is the case of an in-between class that Vassanji describes: the class of railway workers, later shopkeepers and merchants and neither white nor black, but suspiciously brown; belonging to neither of the two opposite sides, suspicious to both. What Vassanji keeps coming back to is the feeling of belonging and not belonging, of not being accepted by the Europeans and Africans.

The Asians inhabit Bhabha's third or liminal space. They are caught up in a situation in which transitions from an old situation to a new one, one social position to another are hampered thus they feel marginal, excluded, without identity or influence.

### 1.11 Research Methodology

This research entails content analysis and textual interpretation of the primary text within the Third Space theory framework. The study did a textual analysis using the techniques of descriptive qualitative research. This involves selection of data in the form of statements from the text under study, these were analysed and evaluated in relation to hybridity and liminality.

The primary methodology relies upon the social constructivist archetype which highlights the socially constructed nature of reality. This approach does not start with concepts determined but rather seeks to allow these to emerge from encounters with the data.

The research involves an intrinsic reading of the novel under study to identify concepts of hybridity, belonging and in-betweenness. An extrinsic reading of other diasporic works particularly Asian writers was done and it provided a proper grounding on the thematic concerns treated by other African-Asian writers. Theses, dissertations, essays and newspaper articles related to the area of research were also read.

### 1.12 Thesis Structure

This thesis has five chapters. Chapter One is an introduction in which the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the research objectives and questions guiding the study, the research premise, the significance of the study, justification of the study, the scope and limitations of the study, theoretical framework underpinning the study, literature relevant to the study, and the methodology employed to the study are discussed. Chapter Two examines the concept of liminality, a state of in-betweenness and ambiguity as it applies to identity reconstruction of the East African

Asians in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. In Chapter Three, the study explores how hybrid identities negotiate and communicate their struggles with hybridity and acculturation in the novel under study while Chapter Four examines how individuals negotiate gender when defining their hybrid identities. Chapter Five is a summary of the study and conclusions derived from the study. A list of works cited is provided immediately after Chapter Five.

# CHAPTER TWO

# DIASPORIC IDENTITY AND LIMINALITY

## 2.1 Introduction

The chapter examines the representation of liminality, a state of in-betweenness and uncertainty as it relates to identity reconstruction of the East African Asians in the context of Moyez Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. The focus here is on limited and partial identity alterations where the characters are in-between and liminal. This chapter encapsulates the difficulty of the diasporic beings feeling displaced without any roots. This condition is associated with the desire of being affiliated with the homeland but unwillingness to challenge relations with the host country. We first examine the representation of liminality which is delineated through Vikram' predicament as he occupies the middle ground. It follows then with a discussion on identity construction among the characters and the African connection. The chapter relies on Homi Bhabha's terminologies of liminality, in-betweenness and hybridity for theoretical grounding.

## 2.2 Representation of Liminality

According to Moore (2001), M. G. Vassanji is widely acclaimed as a writer who deals with the indistinct involvement of Asian Africans as an ethnic community in postcolonial East Africa. *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* presents the predicament of the East African Asians, who very often than not get oscillated between not here and not there, belonging and not belonging and are nostalgic of the past. The Asian characters in the novel fail to adapt fully to the African culture and European culture, they conserve the ideals and principles of their community. Due to ambivalence and ambiguity, they craft a virtual world to sustain themselves. Their

individuality is mired in the liminal or in-between space which is both ambivalent and ambiguous as Homi Bhabha puts it.

> In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Homi Bhabha refers to liminality as a threshold or transitory, in-between state or space which is characterized by ambiguity, ambivalence, indeterminacy, hybridity, the potential for subversion and change. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (4)

In-between and in-between existence is the main theme of the novel as the title suggests. The protagonist Vikram Lall's life truly is representative of incompleteness and avoid that an immigrant experiences in a foreign land. Vic is a drifter, a perpetual wanderer who is not at home anywhere but looking for home everywhere and finding it nowhere. Moreover, throughout the novel, Vic is seen floating around devoid of a fixed identity. Vikram's identity therefore is manifold, fluid and changing. He neither identifies with his homeland, an old-world nor with the new world which he desires. Kanaganayam (1999) posits that the concept of home becomes fluid and illusionistic to the immigrants. Like Vassanji, Vic, the protagonist is presented as fitting in and not belonging. Additionally, his in-between situation, replicates his sense of fitting in. Vassanji himself affirms that a diasporic belongs nowhere: "home is never a single place, entirely, unequivocally. But there is a reverse side to this in-between-ness: it is to belong precisely nowhere. One is pulled between places… in a surface existence. Nowhere is truly home" (A Letter). Vic is caught in-between, as these lines echo his bewildered state of mind:

> It's rather that 'we people' as you call us, don't have a place anywhere, not even where we call home. (p.269)

Vic's childhood world is relatively sophisticated in its ethnic and racial composition. Besides its multi-racial environment, which makes him aware at a young age of his

position as a member of an in-between race, the political turmoil around him makes the race a constant signifier of difference in his childhood; consequently, the ontological questions that confront him go beyond idiosyncratic concerns. His childhood interest is not so much with his place in the family as it is with his place in the neighbourhood, which is a microcosm of the nation. Questions about the self, the relationship of the physical and the psychological self are not the starting point of his concern with identity. Since family history is part of his everyday experience in the form of narratives and material form, he becomes conscious of his positioning within crisscrossing and marginalised histories as a child. Therefore, his relationship with other children, mainly Njoroge (African), Bill and Annie (European) happens with the knowledge of his indeterminate location as an Asian in Kenya, the liminal position.

Bhabha forefronts interstitial people in post-colonies, by privileging their ethnic and national individuality. Bhabha employs neologistic terminology like unhomeliness diasporic identities, interstitiality, unhomeliness, cultural ambivalence, and remembering is a reminder of the incongruity that permeates postcolonial and colonial humanities. Labeling such as Africans of Indian ancestry or Asian-African point to the interstitial nature of the East African Asian community.

East African Asians in the novel neither accept the African culture nor retain their original platform and individuality. Thus, their liminal or in-between situation averts one from embracing the mainstream culture. Vikram Lall represents the in-between stage of the community. They lost some part of them and gained some part of the new land. Their identity and ideology became an in-between identity and ideology. It is the new space between ‘here’ and ‘there’, between ‘home-land’ and ‘adopted-land’ where the immigrants like Vic live, a ‘third space’.

'Asian' placed against 'African' negates it. This is significant for its suggestion of extreme poles. These apparent extremes are however complicated by the interweaving contexts they participate in: geographical, political and epidermal. Whereas Asian and African may indicate distanced geographies, they are concurrently suggestive of race, with the meanings of Asian drawing from its implied alliance with Europe, which provides the metaphor of its guilt, Shylock, a term loaded with historical connotations. This means that even without its involvement in the sins of Europe 'Asian' threatens to contaminate the African country whose status as African is contingent on the purity of race, and its being non-European is a lack that makes it insufficient for the prestige needs of Africa. Asian is yet an indication of non-blackness and non-whiteness and this in-between position is one of culpability because it can only negate but cannot become either of the negations it keeps apart, as portrayed in Vic's life and by extension the Asian community in East Africa.

The Asian characters in the novel oscillate amid the African and Asian identities Vic unravels his firm sentiment and prerogatives of Africa as:

> This was my country _how could it not be? Yes, there was that yearning for England, the land of Annie and Bill and the Queen, and for all the exciting wonderful possibilities of the larger world out there. But these, all around me was mine, where I belonged with my heart and soul. (p.94)

Although Vikram is enthused being in Africa, the Asian culture is prevalent in his being. He inherited the customs from his prior generations unaware of the real connotation. He utters:

> Even now, even here in this wilderness, I cannot help but say my namaskars or salaams to the icons to carry faithfully with me, not quite understanding what they mean to me. (p.14)

Sheila, Vikram's mother, in a conversation with her husband shows her sense of belonging:

> This is Africa, he said to Mother, all this beauty and vastness. Have you seen anything like this in your country? She smiled sweetly. This is where I have married and made my home, she said. And this is my husband's and children's country. (p.94)

In another instance, she shows her deep sense of exile:

> When Rama's exile was the subject of the stories, it was never far from our consciousness that mother and her brother shared a deep sense of exile from their birthplace, Peshawar, a city they would never be able to see again because it had lost to Pakistan. And since Peshawar was the ancestral home also of my dada Anand Lall, the rest of our family could somehow share in that exile, though not with the same intensity. (p.72)

The liminal position where the immigrants are caught up is neither a place of reality nor a dream, but a comfortable makeshift thriving. It is a place free from any obligations and undemanding anonymity of identity. It represents an escape that Vic seeks after being alienated. It is a contrived space that exists and holds significance in Vic's life. Vic cannot get any permanent fulfilment anywhere. He fails to adjust everywhere. He leads a half-life:

> To me the world was what it was, a far from perfect and a tangled manifold. It was not for me to change the world. Moral judgements, therefore, I shied away from, and this became the secret of my success. As an eight-year-old I had seen my beloved Mahesh Uncle take up a moral cause. He desired a different world and ended up abetting the slaughter of my friend Annie and her family and being responsible for much more. I never recovered from the shock of those events, and I don't believe he did either. I, therefore, prefer my place in the middle, watch events run their course. This is easy, being an Asian, it is my natural place. (p.262)

The immigrants fail to reformulate their preceding identity, therefore maintain their individuality in between the old and the new, there and here. Drifting to diverse

geographical locations, immigrants construct interstitial psychological spaces despite the fact of living through alienation, displacement, dislocation, and ambiguity.

The relationship among the discourses that Vic grows up in, and even those of his adult life, is riven by conflicts, not just between but also within them. This, for example, is the case for the discourses of Africanness; in the colonial moment, Africanness is an ambivalent site, denied yet resisted in the colonialist discourse that insists on seeing Africans as 'natives'. In *The In-between World of Vikram Lall* the colonialists, in a bid to expunge 'African' which, with its meaning of belonging to Africa, would challenge their entitlement claims, prefer ethnic tags like 'Kikuyu' and skin colour. In the post-colonial period, Africanness is a totalizing category that envisages no in between, for it is the term for laying claim to citizenship and privileged historical experiences, chief among them being sacrifice 'for motherland'. It is in this context, that Vic cannot stake his claims to the nation within discourses that rejects him; he can only do it within the spaces that the practice of these discourses reveals to him. Vic's correct reading of the specific postcolonial situation he is in, where the polarized identities are not simply white versus black, makes it possible for him to negotiate the interweaving identities and the discourses behind them without being really passionate about any of them.

Vic's in-betweenness gives him the ability to swivel between the worlds that constitute him. He represents discrepancies without seeming to and it is only when we are able to recognise these discrepancies that sometimes manifest themselves as contradictions that we can fully access his character. That is for instance how we can understand his statement that:

> We have been Africans for three generations, not counting my own children. (p.10)

alongside the contradictory one that describes his first encounter with Njoroge:

> I came across an African boy sitting in our backyard on a stone shooting pebbles. (p.15).

This statement seems to disavow the claim to being African made in the first statement and therefore to challenge its truthfulness, for in referring to Njoroge as an African boy he foregrounds the latter‘s race and suggests that being African is what distinguishes Vic from Njoroge and that African is merely a matter of skin colour.

Liminality is psychological and physical for the migrants. The impact of numerous cultures initiates tension in the immigrants amid their individuality and the demand for its change and mimicry makes a compromise to the tension (Bhabha, 1994). The feeling abasement in the eyes of the Asian Africans in an alien terrestrial steers them to integrate the high standards of the dominant people.

As a child, Vic soon finds out that he cannot really fit into the neat categories of being the colonizer or the colonized. He soon learns to be conscious of his otherness vis-a-vis his European friends (Bill and Annie) as well as his African friend Njoroge. On one hand, he senses in Njoroge a zealous commitment to the Mau Mau and on the other hand, a crispness of accent in Bill’s English which disturbs him as he can never emulate it. He mulls over the mediocrity of his existence:

> Why was my own life so simple? Why did it seem so irrelevant? In that fateful year of our relationship, when we played together I couldn’t help feeling that Bill and Njo were genuine, in their different ways; only I who stood in the middle, Vikram Lall, cherished son of an Indian grocer, sounded false to myself, rang hollow like a bad penny. (p 40)

The term ‘genuine’ here beseeches the vision of authenticity, ethnic associations come to mirror the Asian community affiliates’ anxieties about fitting in Kenya after independence. Vikram’s thwarting is pronounced as a feeling of being caught amid a colonial encounter, between the Africans and Europeans, the rules of which were already set upon the Asians’ arrival:

> I would like to defend myself against that charge, give a finer shade of meaning, a context, to my relationship with the Africans around me. I wish I could explain to Joseph, a descendant of those people that the world was not of my devising. But I fear I already sound too earnest. (p.46)

The portrayal of in-betweenness that Vikram views as the central trait of his own position and in which is subsequently the focal characteristic of the Asian position, in broadly, is further stressed with the sense of not belonging. The musings below are accentuated with a sense that acceptance will never be achieved:

> I have wondered sometimes if I took the easy way out with the answer, No. To the African I would always be the Asian, the shylock; I would never escape that suspicion, that stigma. (p.244)

Vic, the protagonist lays emphasis on his ancestral linking to the indentured Indian employees who constructed the Kenya-Uganda railway thus heralding his grandfather’s title role in inaugurating the country’s current economy. Additionally, Vic’s frantic desire to fit in Kenya, leads him to romanticise that Anand Lall, his grandfather had a Masai mistress, a fantasy that appeals to the racialized background that marshals his belonging in Kenya into interrogation while offering an appropriate portrayal of the task of claiming the country as his indigenous birthplace. Outstandingly, Moyez shows that Vikram’s struggles to institute his legitimacy in Kenya is mediated through the country’s nationalist.

The ‘in-betweenness is perspicuously and vividly portrayed when Lall’s family starts hunting for a bridegroom for Deepa and through these customs, we can interpret the generation breach between the children and parents. Deepa who is in love with Njo wants to marry him but Sheila strictly opposes such a relationship:

> Mother took a deep breath and replied, there’s nothing wrong with being an African or Asian or European. But they can’t mix. It doesn’t work. (p.161)

On the one hand, Vic accepts and enounces to Njoroge as:

> It’s up to you and her Njo. You are my friend and she is my sister. You don’t have to worry about me. (p.182)

Deepa, on the other hand, strengthens as:

> This is a new Africa, Njo, they’d (parents) better not. We are the next generation. They will of course but I don’t think for long. I am stubborn as a mule, Njo, I hope you are strong too. (p.189)

More important to this study is the personality of Vic; his in-betweenness situates him outside any of the main racial discourses in operation in the Kenya he lives in. The in-betweenness is not just a matter of his race but, crucially, of his personality. Vic’s personality is characterized by ambivalent attitudes to those issues by which others, like his family, define themselves. He neither rejects nor embraces the notion of racial purity that is so important to his parents, especially to his mother. This attitude is best exemplified by his indifference to Deepa‘s affair with Njoroge, and the relative casualness with which he approaches the issue of his own marriage. Vikram therefore, as a narrator, is supposed to open up the world of the Indian and the African to analysis. He is located in both worlds without belonging to either. Through him, Vassanji avoids a simple answering back of one group (either Asian or African) to the other but instead produces a complex dialogic interaction between different communal

stances, in the process exploiting the trope of the stereotype which he manages to transgress and interrogate.

Vic's grandfather was from Peshawar. He and his fellow indentured labourer friends came from different metropolises in India and had helped in building the railway line from Mombasa to Kampala; what the narrator proudly calls "our claim to the land." His paternal grandfather, as well as his mother being from Peshawar, form a case of doubly displaced diaspora. Peshawar went to Pakistan after the partition and they could no longer have any claim on a place they once called home (10).

The inter-racial tautness augmented as nationalism intensified after independence in Kenya. Through an African viewpoint enunciated through Njoroge, the liminal position of Asians in Africa is pronounced in the following terms:

> You were in with the whites, so you had power over us. And you were so alien, more so than the whites. We never know what you think. You are so inscrutable, you Indians. (p.78)

The colonial history, therefore, does not stop to haunt the postcolonial present of the Asians; it does not let either side forget the context of their immigration to East Africa as part of the British colonial administration. In this way, the in-between position of the Asian community in East Africa becomes the site of constant anxieties about racial difference and belonging of its individual members. As a result, most of them eventually emigrate, more or less reluctantly. One of the reluctant ones pushed West primarily due to his own shenanigans and involvement in government corruption, turns out to be the narrator himself and it is from this dislocated, exilic perspective that Vic narrates the story of Asians in Kenya.

In the post-independent Kenya, African youth identified themselves with the cause of rebuilding their nation while the Indian community is disillusioned as to their role in this new socio-political setup. Njoroge harbours an ardent desire to uplift his nation. In sharp contrast to this stance, Vikram has no clear sense of where he belongs politically as he tells us:

> I also disliked politics, a hot topic in those times. Politics confused me; large abstract ideas bewildered me and was definitely incorrect in newly independent Africa. I had no clear sense of the antagonists, of the right side and the wrong side. (p.204)

Vikram's liminal position and by extension the position of Asians in East Africa is further portrayed in his loss of ambition and direction in the background hostility and negative public sentiments against Asians. Vikram, therefore, narrates his plight:

> Here I was, a young Asian graduate in an African country, with neither the prestige of whiteness behind me, nor the influence and numbers of a local tribe to back me but carrying instead the stigma from a generalized recent memory of an exclusive race of brown 'shylocks' who had collaborated with the colonizers. What could I hope to achieve in public service? Black chauvinism and reverse racism were the order of the day against Asians. (p.215)

In the 1970s with his new job in the government, Vikram is caught in between the whirlpool of neo-colonial corruption that besets a newly independent nation. He becomes a personal assistant to Paul Nderi, a man of power and a possible successor to the throne after Jomo Kenyatta. Neo-imperialism therefore creeps into the very vitals of the newly independent nation where bribes became as casual as handshakes. People like Vikram who stood in between the two stances: demonic corruption on one hand and a zealous ardour for his nation that would border on fanaticism; bears the brunt of being named and shamed. Even to his wife, he ends up being a 'mere middleman, a *Dalal*, an agent of others. He ends up being the first name in his

country's List of Shame given out by its Anti-Corruption Commission. However, it is his status as an Indian that makes him an easy scapegoat as he says:

> I had been, simply put and dropped because I was the convenient scapegoat, the disposable outsider and my usefulness had run out. (p.278)

Vic is caught between two worlds. Scenes from his childhood come rushing to his head. They are more real to him because they are more intensely felt than the life he now lives. Vic goes on and on with a question on his mind as:

> I told myself how desperately I loved this country that somehow could not quite accept me. Was there really something prohibitively negative in and those like me, with our alien forbidding skins off which the soil of Africa simply slipped away. (279)

*The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* employs the concept of in-between being both of the interstitial location of Asians between the Europeans and the Africans and the epoch of the period between imperialism and liberation. Vassanji constructs a politically conscious and passionate Vic that is as much an agency as he is an object, contrary to the suggested identity of Vic as a powerless recipient of the products of political action because he is caught in between two worlds. Vikram does not always belong to the two worlds simultaneously, but weaves in and out of them and sometimes even merges them though his decisions, thereby vacating the presumed object position.

### 2.3 Identity Construction and the African Connection

The construction of identity is legislated in the interaction between a person's self-identity and social identity whereby the innermost self-identity is predisposed by the exterior social identity. Additionally, self-individuality is the supressed opinion of the self whereby persons strive to uphold a specific narrative about the self while the social individuality is a site in which individuals draw on and are enacted upon by

exterior discourse. (Watson, 2009). The emphasis is on the change process and in particular when a person is between two identity constructions: when they are neither one thing nor the other.

The identity under contemplation is of the East African Asians, a community that has occupied all and none of the three identities present in Kenya. (Asian, African and British). Moreover, to be regarded as an East African Asian is apparently an anomalous grouping, that links individuals from diverse regions prior to similar terms like 'African American' became current. Although it is chastised akin to one part (East) of one continent, it is vague in relation to the other continents, where the specific South Asian would be more suitable. In spite of their South Asian roots, it is the dwelling that is most distant for all of them because many of the East African Asians have never been to India or Asia. Thus although they refer to themselves as Asian, it is an imaginary identity that conceals a good deal about the geographies and histories of movement, identity and settlement. In the text, most of the third and second-generation immigrants have never stepped in India. Vassanji's narrator posits:

> India was always a fantasy land for me. To this day, I have never visited my dada's birthplace. It was the place where that strange man with a narrow pointed face, bald head, and granny glasses, Gadhinji, had lived and died, and where the man with the white cap, Nehru, now ruled, and where the impossibly four-armed and pink-faced gods of my mother's statuettes and Lakshimi sweets' annual calendar pictures had fought their battles and killed devils, and where Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tensing had that year conquered Everest. (p.13)

Vikram's father, Ashok Lall went to India once in his lifetime:

> My father- proudly Kenyan, hopelessly (as I now think) colonial – went to India once, and brought back my mother. He found everything in India dirty and poor, and for the most part, he had a miserable time of it. Even to see the Taj Mahal you had to walk over gutters and push through a street fight, he would say. Beggars and touts everywhere; men standing around openly picking at their

> crotches. Even a taxi! You hail one, you want to feel posh and escape all the scum around you, you open the door, and what happens? You step into a lump of fresh shit! (p.14)

East African Asians who later moved to the West, refer to East Africa when they speak of return home not India. There are emotional ties between land and people, a sense of loss and pain at exiting the nations of their birth, either through expulsion or voluntary. When Vikram meets more or less old acquaintances in London, he witnesses that: Kenya was in their hearts; they would never become British. (p.300)

Vikram in Canada gets nostalgic all the time and has a deep sense of not belonging:

> Do I belong here- in this wonderful country where the seasons are orderly, days go past smoothly one after another? This cold moderation should, after all, be conducive to my dispassion? No, I feel strongly the stir of the forest inside me; I hear the call of the red earth, and the silent plains of the Rift Valley through which runs the railway that my people built, and the bustle of River Road; I long for the harsh, familiar caress of the hot sun. (p.317)

Individuality and belonging are formed from the experience of imagined and real connections and journeys that connect persons, dwellings and histories in methods that repel the categorisation of Africa with blacks and Europe with whites (Murji, 2014). This is an alluring, cosmopolitan and fluid mode to consider identities within which Asians in East Africa are ostensibly, individuals frequently in transit and capable of creating a home in diverse dwellings in the world. They are therefore, a case in point of individuals ingrained in either East Africa or South Asia whose travelling experiences shape individualities moulded on the road, due to movements across various regions. In the text Vikram's boss Paul Nderi utters the following words to Vic when he learns of his uncle's return to India:

> You people have your feet planted in both countries, and when one place gets too hot for you, you flee to the other. (p.269)

Vic angrily replies:

> It's rather that 'we people' as you call us, don't have a place anywhere, not even where to call home. (p.269)

Vic later affirms:

> Asians did not really belong; they were inherently disloyal. Such statements we had learned to grin and bear, the occasional but inevitable ill wind. (p.269)

The above lines show that the topographies of fitting in (Asians) restrict operation on a national gauge that confines the notion of identity and belonging. This encompasses rudiments of British, East Africa and Indian culture moulded over the cultural and historical relations the aforementioned parts of the world.

Murji (2014) posits that the dual identity of Asians in East Africa is cumbersome to sustain. Additionally, there are other blatant methods in which Asians are excluded from Africa. A case in point is in Britain during 'Africa Year' 2005, where African proceedings were showcased through arts and traditional associations like the BBC and British Museum (Murji, 2014). However, there was no trace of Asian Africans in the showcase. Moreover, a prevalent BBC TV series in Britain 'Who do You Think You Are?' requests luminaries to trace their personal lineage. In 2006, one episode, presented Gurinder Chadha, a movie director who started by tracing her relatives in Kenya before embarking to India to trace the earlier generations. Furthermore, in the course of her trip to India, she terms it as an alien republic or culture, a remark that is under no circumstances made of her time in Africa (Murji, 2014). In view of Murji's posit, it is probable for Asians to feel more at home in a continent they are allied less than in the one from which their proof of identity is commonly derivative (India). Vic's father Ashok Lall despises India, He doesn't want to be associated with India. His sentiments are echoed in the following words:

> This is what Sita must have looked at in Ayodhya. My father was proud of her, of her beauty and of the fact that she was from India, a genuine article, even though he often despised that homeland as backward and barbaric. (p.74)

The ability to claim an African identity remains in question despite the strong feeling of connection to Africa in traditional terms such as cuisine and the combination of dialects. Moreover, there was antipathy towards Asians evidently in their expulsion from Uganda. Warah (1998) notes that President Idi Amin ousted approximately 70,000 Asians from Uganda in 1972. Additionally, there was ransacking and demolition of Asian-owned shops by unruly multitudes in Nairobi, Kenya after an aborted coup attempt. Kenyan Asians also became targets of scapegoating. Martin Shikuku, a Kenyan politician often disparaged Asians for being 'paper citizens' who intended to economically exploit the country while their allegiance lay in a different place (Rasnah, 2018). These declarations were echoed by other protuberant politicians, Kenneth Matiba, who controversially asked Asians to 'peacefully pack up and go' condemning Asians of racialism and economy dominance in 1996 (Rasnah, 2018). Vassanji reflects this in his novel. Paul Nderi, Vic's boss is disappointed in him because he married an Indian:

> So this is it, my friend, marriage to a virgin Indian girl, a pack of children, and the straight family life. Rice and daal and chappati forever. Paul Nderi was disappointed, he had meant to draw me out of the Asian quagmire as he called it. (p.243)

Vikram points out:

> What would Nderi draw me out into, when the week of my son's birth he gave a speech, which I proofread, calling for all government jobs to be Africanised, meaning kept for blacks only? I brought him to the task. Telling him even Julius Nyerere of Tanzania had made a distinction between citizens and non-citizens, regardless of race- that was the democratic constitution of our countries. He answered that what he had said was what the unions wanted to hear and not to be taken seriously. (p.244)

Ang (2001) cites that the fundamental view, that how individuals find their own identities are more important than their roots (a place of birth) exposes a problem in the celebratory and uncritical appreciation of diaspora and diasporic cultures, where a view of sameness in dispersal has obscured internal class and status divisions. This means that the Asians' roots in East Africa had far surpassed their origins in India. This account affirms Verma's view of East African Asians as mobile 'world citizens' whose roots in the place were if not shallow, at least transplantable.

The East African Asians in Vassanji's novel do support a picture of fluid and already mixed identities as shifting in odd and unexpected ways between the fluid and categorical. This means that East African Asians can adopt singular and multiple identities but their choices around these are partly self-made just as the characters in the novel.

It is important to note that Vikram's growing up parallels Kenya's struggle for freedom from the Europeans. It is a time when the Kikuyu Mau Mau fighters started killing the Whites as they believed it will rid the country of the colonizers. The British on the other hand, used the majority of the Kenyan Indians in hunting down the Mau Mau guerrillas because they could not distinguish the good natives from the bad ones at times of war. It is for this reason that Kenyan Indians become suspects in the eyes of the black African communities. The interracial tension is described by Njoroge in the following terms:

> You were in with the whites, so you had power over us. And you were so alien, more so than the whites…You are so inscrutable, you Indians. (p.78)

Thus, the Africans consider the Kenyan Indians as collaborators with the British colonizers.

Vikram substantiates:

> To the Africans I would always be the Asian, the Shylock; I would never escape that suspicion, that stigma… (p.244)

The racial intolerance towards the Indians in Kenya results in the sudden displacement for everybody. Vikram's family moves to Nairobi in order to find a safer home. Right after independence, Jomo Kenyatta becomes the country's president, and Vikram becomes an influential figure in the new government, due to his position as a personal assistant to Paul Nderi, Minister for Transport. It seems that he has finally constructed his African identity. Paul Nderi, a corrupt politician, uses him as a scapegoat to legitimatize his fraudulent money transactions. Later on, Vic is framed in the Gemstone scandal and is dropped.

Vic, though he observes earlier in the novel that they had been Africans for three generations (10), remains conscious of the uncertainty and consequent ambiguities of being African, an identity which in his case, because it has a starting point, may as well have a termination point. However, this uncertainty does not only apply to the term African but it is also the case with being Indian for, through Sakina, it is implied that the reverse is possible; one can abandon their African identity and become Indian; at least that is how the statement that ―Sakina-dadi was a Masai girl when Juma-dada married her long ago (30) can be understood. The past tense that describes her Masai identity expresses a sense of certainty about her new identity but this by no means clarifies the issue of transition between identities and the status of layered identities. It is a complicated issue that still puzzles these characters. In the following passage Vic relays his mother's confusion, ―Sakina-dadi speaks Punjabi so fluently, mother told Papa later, and then she added thoughtfully:

> What must it be like to be a Masai and also a Muslim Punjabi...Are we really Africans? (90).

What one hears in this passage is the question, what does it mean to belong to supposedly contradictory identities concurrently? Sheila's statement questions even Vikram's earlier assertion that they have been Africans for three generations and divests it of any certainty. At the base of all these confusions is the meaning of the terms themselves, African, Indian and Asian. Moving between extremes of significations, essentialist and pragmatic, the elusive meanings of these words are related to their arbitrary usages and the confusions they cause to those who supposedly experience the status they describe.

The difficulty that Anand Lall and Sheila have about the term Kenyan relates not just to their individual inability to define and transit into this identity but also because of the contradictory ways Kenyan is understood even in the state authorised discourses. The following passage echoes this:

> Like many others of my generation, I was confident that our parents would have to change their ways in our new world. They would take their time, but they would surely change. For now, however, they were too inconsistent and confused about where they stood and who they were, even as they called themselves Kenyans (p.135)

While it is possible, for example, to be legally Kenyan regardless of race, this is undermined by the epidermal-informed Africanisation policy that seeks to secure official spaces for Africans, for instance when Vic's boss Paul Nderi calls for Africanisation of all jobs.

This institutionalisation of African and, therefore, Kenyan identity inscribes it with meanings that are beyond those on the other side of the epidermal divide. The confusion and inconsistency of Vic's parents about ―where they stood and who they

were, even as they called themselves Kenyans are to be understood in this context; they are caught between the conjunctions of meanings. It is because of their entrapment between meanings that these characters have to oscillate between conceptual terms in their attempts to apprehend elusive subjectivities. Theirs is an attempt that can lead to despair, as expressed by Vic for instance (p.215) who doesn't hope to achieve anything in public service attributed to black chauvinism and reverse racism against Asians.

### 2.4 The Transformative Power of the In-Between

The in-between space is marked by the dynamics of negotiation and lacks predefined canons. Additionally, it is a space of openness without absolutism. Thus, being a space of continuous shared exchange, there is absence of definite paradigms and signifies the specific and general. This means that this space is transformative in the sense that the diasporic can negotiate their identity. The liminal space opens up a state of comfortability where the diasporic can swivel between both cultures. In this case, the African and Indian cultures.

Vassanji through his characters relativizes the racial and class boundaries that are often regarded as central to the South East Asian situation, indicating a domain where borders are crossed freely and individuals populate in-between spaces where new individualities can be formed (Bhabha, 1994). It makes clear that the in-between space is a centre of creativity where opposites meet and where new blends take place. The in-between space is similar to a liminal space, a melting pot of inventiveness. Liminality suggests an escape route of the antiquity dividing structures of the past as well as out of the impasse of being caught on the threshold between past and present.

It is the space of intermediation incipient in the traditional openings that present creative invention into reality.

Vikram looks upon the in-between space as a haven in a seemingly alien culture. This is a state where he is happy with the adopted land yet he does not give up his attachment with the native land and its reminders. He manages to live comfortably with two distinct cultures in the in-between space. For instance, Njoroge boasts to Vic that he is researching and accounting for the personal worth's of all the government powerful officials, all that they own- land in the villages, houses in the city, ranches in the Rift Valley, shares in industries, hotels, pubs and brothels. Vic, in response to Njoroge's words, affirms that he is comfortable being in-between and does not wish to change the world because to him the world was far from perfect, twisted and diverse. Vic, therefore, shied away from moral judgement successfully which he attributes to being an Asian thus occupying the middle place.

The second and third generation diaspora in Vassanji's novel, have the familiarity of being entangled in the 'third space' in which they negotiate two dissimilar cultures to reach geniality. However, this is a difficult chore as the 'third space' is continually nurtured and nourished by the bi-culturalism constructed in a diaspora situation. The third or liminal space is characterized by a leap from one identity to another, this means that the diasporic experience a social and cultural transition as well as transformation.

The diasporic identity is challenged by new cultural, social, economic and political factors in a new land, thus the individuality is pluralized. This phase of pluralisation is described as uncertain in view of the fact that it is a state whereby the diasporic being is divided between his desires on one side and his yearnings at the other along with

insignificant likelihood of the two meeting. The liminal space then becomes the medium or strategy of diasporic negotiation as Bhabha underlines the importance of borders and spaces (interstices) and in-between states which we can also call states of hybridity in the words below:

> The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as a social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent in-between space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The past-present becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia of living. (10)

The notion of being in-between is important because it highlights manifold practises of individuality and fitting in. The boundary crossings that these foreground are valued because it reveals how non-natural boundaries and borders can be. Vassanji ironizes Vic's language, something that can also be achieved through the internal dialogue of a character's language. The dialogue between Vic's languages takes two basic forms, one is that between the narrating Vic and the experiencing Vic, the other is between his own style and the language and style of others. For our purpose here it is notable that this is an image of his in-betweenness, which is equally a position of dialoguing with discourse of tradition. An ironic situation is seen in Vic's language. It is through this that he questions the world constructed by popular discourses like African and Asian crisscross in Vic's description of himself in ways that may suggest a contradiction. He confronts the contradictions and dilemmas of these essentialist terms from his position of marginality to show how unstable they are and to present his marginal position that rejects the African and Asian continuity narratives as an alternative one.

## 2.5 Conclusion

The chapter has demonstrated the ambiguous situation of the Asian diaspora in Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* and by extension the Asian community in East Africa, who are divided due to loyalty to more than one country and national culture. The chapter analyses the dilemma forced on to the diasporic Asian community of East Africa. It stresses the point that most of them cannot find refuge in the Indian sub-continent nor in the host country. East African Asians just like Vic the protagonist, never accept either worlds fully, relatively they embrace the transient world they inhabit. This means that to cross the threshold into the liminal space is to confront all of these possibilities and to emerge if at all, with shifted bodily boundaries. The discussion shows that occupying the liminal space is transformative and dynamic because it gives the characters a sense of moving forward as they do not always belong to the two worlds simultaneously, but weave in and out of them and sometimes even merge them through their decisions, thereby vacating the presumed object position.

# CHAPTER THREE

# HYBRIDITY AND CULTURAL PLURALISM

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how hybridized identities negotiate and communicate their struggles with hybridity and acculturation in Moyez Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. Diasporic characters have to acquire skill of traversing amid two cultures and find an equilibrium in order to acclimatise to the society that they are part of. They end up forming a bicultural or hybrid identity that is based on blending or balancing of the two cultures. This trait is patent in the second and third-generation immigrants than the first generation who face the challenge of developing a cultural identity based on both their family's culture of origin and the culture of the society in which they reside. How they develop their identity, depends on their acculturation attitudes. The first section of this chapter analyses the creation of hybrid identities and how they negotiate and communicate their struggles with hybridity as well as the feelings of homelessness. The second section analyses the parameters of culture like food and language in relation to hybridity.

## 3.2 A Poetics of Hybridity

An individual who executes diverse cultures, its language, rules and values, language is reflected to be a culturally hybrid being. *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* depicts hybridized characters who form an individuality of in-betweenness which involves integrating facets of the host and home culture into a single hybridized cultural identity. Nedumchira (2009) notes that, the aim of the migrant is to develop an individuality in the 'intercultural third' which conceptualizes the immigrant as conserving his or her original culture while relating to the host culture, therefore operating in an adopted prospective space amid his or her original and host cultures.

This thus means that the exposure of the immigrant to the host culture is vital for the hybridization process. Additionally, the hybridization of the identity occurs through the negotiation between African culture and Asian culture for the Asian characters in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* and by extension it applies to East African Asians. Vassanji propounds immigrants who alternate between cultures, with identities are experiencing a forming process. In Bhabha's words:

> The stairwell as a liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The thither and tither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. The interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (5)

Webner (2004) posits that diaspora's sense of identity is not fixed, but rather may form in different contexts. In other words, they are situationally determined, we opine that, as an alternative of striving to belong into categories such as Asian or African, or seeking to be answerable to all the demands of both of these cultures, East African Asians should accept that they are a blend of both and can solely be Asian African. This according to Bhabha, is what hybridity entails: it is about rethinking and translating one's principles when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you, translate your principles, rethink them and extend them (Rutherford, 1990). Thus by truly accepting the hybrid nature of his identity, Vikram Lall might finally be freed from the assumed or imposed hierarchies that surround him.

Hybridity is a very significant notion, due to the fact that it creates an interesting paradox. In order to fit it in better with their host culture immigrants are expected to integrate into the new culture and function within it. Therefore, they are required to

form a hybridized identity that combines elements from their home culture with elements from their host culture. However, this hybridization then puts them into a marginalized position within the host as well as the home culture, because as hybrid beings they do not conform to the cultural norms of either culture. Hybridization hence pushes them into the position of the 'other' an outsider who is not part of the dominant discourse. Sarup (1996) defines 'other' as the one who does not belong to the group, who is not 'one of them' A case in point in the text is during a friendship reunion of Njoroge and the Lalls where Njo tells them that Kenya had a great future as it was one of the most advanced countries in Africa but a lot of work needed to be done first, to lay the foundation for the future. Vic shows his marginalization in retaliation to Njo's views in the following passage:

> You couldn't help but wonder at his enthusiasm and ambition, the passion in those large eyes, and wonder too at how those words portrayed the passage of time: this used to be the boy who spoke bashfully and haltingly but proudly, the grandson of a gardener, who didn't know much about his mother and father but knew that Jomo was his saviour. Here I was now a young Kenyan of today, a leader of tomorrow. On the other hand, he couldn't have seen us very differently from what we had been. We were his old friends and sort of family; our concerns were mundane and ordinary; and we remained that enigma, the Asians of Africa. (p.134)

The above passage contends that regardless of the hybridization, the Asian are still not part of the dominant discourse in the country and are considered as outsiders. Their hybrid identity leads to the feeling of not knowing where one belongs because one is considered different from what some think of as the 'norm'.

Due to the struggles associated with acculturation or hybridity, many foreigners may experience identity changes and confusion because of their negotiation between integrating into the new culture, while at the same time trying to maintain their own cultural values. (Cross-cultural adaptation). In order to become part of the host

culture's community, the reactions and behaviours of the surrounding community towards the diasporic becomes essential. Social ties, hence are very important for foreigners during their process of cross-cultural adaptation. Creating a friendship base consisting of locals allows for immigrants to have an easier transition into the new cultural surrounding. While certain aspects and values of the host culture are adapted, for the sake of integration and a connection with the host culture is formed, other aspects of the home culture are still kept within the person's identity. Therefore, a hybrid identity is formed which allows the immigrants to function within both cultures.

The experience of moving between different cultures will inevitably result in some sort of cultural hybridization of the individual exposed to the different cultures (Jana, 2012). However, if one chooses to grow with one's hybridity and function within the liminal space that is created, then one is on the best way of moving away from being the 'other' and becoming part of a global, intercultural world. No one culture is alike; cultural differences exist and foreigners have to negotiate between their home and host culture. During this cultural adaptation process, the person's cultural identity is inevitably affected by the surrounding culture, the community, social ties and the host culture. A hybrid cultural identity is formed during this process, which allows the immigrant to function within the several cultural frameworks. Vikram Lall, the protagonist of Vassanji's novel is a hybrid being who even wishes that he had an affinity with the Masai through his grandfather, Anand Lall. This is echoed in the following lines:

> Because of my dada and dadi's close connection to the Molabuxes, I have often seen an affinity between myself and the Masai. I have even fantasised that dada perhaps sought comfort with a woman of that people, perhaps she had his child and I have cousins in some of the manyattas of the plains. There is no proof anything like this ever happened-and my fantasy has partly to do with a desperate need to

> belong to the land I was born in, but it is not impossible either. (p.51).

The novel portrays a love story between African Njoroge and Asian Deepa: _it is a romance as pure and natural and spontaneous as a starbust that rarely rises above earnest cliché (p.185). The study contends that the love affair echoes Bhabha's views on hybridity as a form of liminal or in-between space, where the cutting edge of translation and negotiation occurs and which he terms the third space. This is a space intrinsically critical of essentialist positions of identity and a conceptualisation of the original culture. Rutherford (1990) contends that the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to Bhabha is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. Thus the third space is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a productive and reflective space that engenders new possibilities. It is an interruptive, interrogative and enunciative space of new forms of cultural meaning and production blurring the limitations, of existing boundaries and calling into question established categorisations of culture and identity. This love affair blurs the limitation of the existing boundaries placed between the Asians and Africans. We suggest calling this hybrid identity, demonstrated by Deepa Njoroge as constructive. This is owing to the fact that on the one hand they do not deny their own cultural backgrounds and are deeply devoted to it. On the other hand, they show tolerance to and respect other cultures, religion and races.

Simonis (2012) posits two different types of the hybridization process. (Separation and Integration strategies) The separation strategy allows the immigrants to isolate themselves from the surrounding community as much as possible and maintain their home cultural identity. This is evident in Vassanji's novel in characters like Sheila,

Vikram's mother who believes that Africans and Asians should not mix or interact. Additionally, Vic's mother keeps a whole set of traditions and symbols alive, while she distinguishes sharply between making a home and being native to a country: this is where I have married and made my home, she said. And this is my husband's and children's country. (p.95)

The diasporic mother fiercely opposes the relationship, but significantly, she does not defeat the love between Deepa and Njoroge primarily through recourse to tradition, to a mythically pure cultural and racial past. She rather deploys arguments of what is natural and unnatural in more curious ways, and some of the most accomplished aspects of the novel derive from Vassanji's description of the contradictory arguments in which she embattles Deepa and Njoroge.

The integration strategy allows immigrants to find a balance between the values of their home culture and the values of the host culture, therefore, allowing the immigrants to form a hybrid identity that enables them to function within both cultures. Vikram and Deepa have formed their hybrid identities thus they appear to function well within both cultures: Deepa in an argument with his parents, Ashok Lall says:

> Get this in your head, Deepa, he is an African. He is not one of us.
> Not even in your wildest dream can you marry an African. (p.161)

She confidently responds:

> What do you mean? What's wrong with an African? I am an African.

Vikram commenting on Njo's and Deepa's relationship and by extension showing his hybridized identity says:

> My sister's situation was the first instance I noticed a certain detachment in myself. Whether she would finally marry Njoroge or not did not bother me. I personally did not favour circumstances-the possible outcome of the relationship to turn out one way or another. I found myself waiting passively for the situation to resolve itself. I would watch my sister and Njoroge flirting and feel only a bit saddened that I was alone; I would witness my parents' anxiety and comfort them. If I felt saddened by my own loneliness, I did not wish to get involved in a relationship either. (p.147).

Depending on which process of hybridization process is pursued, by the diasporic, the degree of hybridization varies. While hybridity may allow this diaspora to function within both their home culture as well as their host culture, they may face the loss of the full membership role in either culture. While hybridity may be related to feelings of loss of membership roles and some feel troubled and confused by the hybrid identity that they have, others see it as having the best of both worlds, this can be seen in the characters of Deepa, Vic and Mahesh Uncle. Hybridization, therefore, allows for greater acceptance into the host culture which is important for the socialization process as Bhabha notes that the hybrid, third space is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have primordial unity or fixity. Despite the exposure of the third space to contradictions and ambiguities, it provides spatial politics of inclusion rather than exclusion that initiates new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation.

Social ties help foreigners better negotiate the struggles of assimilation into a new cultural environment. A hybridized cultural identity can, therefore, foster new social ties since it seems to remove the label of 'other' to a certain extent and encourages cultural learning for immigrants as well as the surrounding communities. Jana (2012)

holds that hybridity is not a choice because it can happen consciously or unconsciously. This means that whether the immigrants try to integrate into the host culture or they try to separate themselves in order to maintain their cultural identity, a form of hybridization takes place. This hybridization is connected to many struggles that the participants experience during their cultural adaptation process. Nedumchira (2009) argues that when faced with identity confusion and struggle to define their sense of self, if immigrants can internalize aspects of both their host culture and indigenous culture, they can develop a sense of self in the intercultural third, allowing them to relate to their multiple cultural self-states. Developing a sense of self in the intercultural third world allows immigrants to consolidate a fluid sense of identity that is representative of their experiences.

Nakayama (2015) posits that a hybridized individual is significantly different from the person who is more culturally restricted. The hybridized person is neither a part of nor apart from the host culture; rather this person acts situationally. However, the hybridized life is fraught with pitfalls and difficulty. Hybridized people run the risk of not knowing what to believe or how to develop ethics or values. Vikram Lall has been formed by two experiences: as a member of a racial minority that does not rule, he has always felt that the colonizers and natives must be more at home in their bodies and in the world than he himself is. He is certain that Indians in India must also be more real than he is. He is unable ever to know love because, when he was eight, he had given his heart to a white girl who was murdered by the Mau Mau.

We can argue that while hybridity brings struggles and difficulties with it, it may also allow for an easier transition into different cultures. The identities of diaspora are never fixed but always in motion and so is hybridity. Hybridized identities have a different outlook on the world, learning to keep in mind the ‘both &and’ as opposed

to the ‘either/or of the experience is helping to appreciate these dual cultures that are each alive and well within.

Sakina Molabux, the wife of a neighbour who looks like all the other Punjabi women, is discovered to actually be a Masai. Once her ancestry is revealed, it seems obvious to everyone that she couldn’t possibly be Indian:

> It was so obvious afterwards: Sakina-dadi was distinct. She was taller than my dadi; skinnier and long-legged. She was dark, though in a way some Indians were. (p.48)

In the early days of Indian migration, the marriage situation was quite different because then it was deemed permissible to marry an African woman, at least where Muslim men were concerned. Talking about his friend, Vic’s grandfather explained that:

> Cohabiting with or even marrying an African woman was not entirely unheard of among Indians. And nothing in his upbringing forbade marrying someone from another community or race. (p. 31)
>
> The Indian railway workers were not known for their abstinence; reports of their British overseers, quoted in histories of the railway, attest amply to that. (p.51)

The above passages show that the Indians had embraced a certain percentage of hybridity through love affairs.

In a typical scene from *The In-between World of Vikram Lall* —the protagonist tells of the “stunned silence” and awkward looks that follow his grandmother’s inadvertent revelation that a woman from their grandparents’ generation is Masai, not Punjabi, (Sakina dadi) although she is a fluent Punjabi speaker and an integral part of the community. The story that emerges is one of both shrewdness and humour, in which a young Masai girl is traded but also given tenderly and lovingly, to Juma Molabux, a lonely Punjabi who became a trader after his indentureship with the railway. The

telling of this story is prompted by the son of the mixed-race couple (Saeed Molabux) being brutally handled by colonial police when they mistake him for a Kikuyu during the Mau Mau era.

> Jerom returned the next day. Well, have you decided? With him was a maiden who had caught Juma's fancy several times-tall, smooth and round-faced; she was beautiful, wearing discs of coloured beads around her neck, circlets of steel wire around her calves, and apparently nothing her robe. She looked shy. Meeting her eye, Juma Molabux made his decision, based upon his soul-searching of the previous, sleepless night. He was lonely, he had no family in the country and not much status, he badly wanted a woman. (p.31)

Vassanji's compulsion to understand these relationships as not only unique in their individual complex dynamics of love/exploitation/mutuality/misunderstanding but as more common and generally accepted than is now known or acknowledged. The specificity and romance of these interracial love stories promote the idea of both African and Asian communities as traditionally, inherently pragmatic and curious. Vassanji's novel is bound to the idea that recent racial tensions are not the culmination of intractable pasts, but a betrayal of much longer traditions and historical events of compromise and tolerance. It speaks in more complicated and agonized terms to the limits of this long history of community negotiation and tolerance. The context of the love story is explicitly the postcolonial nation, the new space enabling new relationships, Bhabha's third space.

The idea of East African Asians as being exemplars of transnational migrants overlooks the extent to which Asians had been 'Africanised', in East Africa, sometimes through intermarriage especially in the early 20$^{th}$ century when migrants to East Africa were mainly men. There was also the intermixture in the form of culture and cuisine in ways that could fit the Bakhtinian notion of heteroglossia. There are

traces of this in novels, for example in the cross-over words between Swahili and Indian languages.

The first and second-generation immigrants in the novel face trouble to merge with the foreign culture' On the contrary, the third generation immigrants practice Indian culture to pacify parents, but they live as Africans in their heart of hearts. The first and second-generation immigrants, Anand Lall, Ashok Lall and Sheila, tend to live in their individual, collective and historical past; while their children Vic and Deepa have already accepted the adopted culture and are ready for assimilation. Vic's father after meeting Njo for the first time since he left Nakuru tell Vic:

> Njoroge's a nice boy…. it's truly wonderful to have him back, but some things are not meant to be. I think you understand that, Vic. Your sister's still immature, it's your job to protect her as a brother. (p.135)

The third-generation immigrants are fascinated to adopt the Kenyan lifestyle. Njo and Deepa's love affair is an indication of the third generation immigrant's realization that an identity far from their own cultural roots is a necessity to live happily in a multicultural world. Vic muses:

> I was taken aback; how swiftly had come this word of caution. It was a typically parental pre-emptive thing to do. He threw a glance at me, awaiting my response, and I nodded dutifully, without a word. Like many others of my generation, I was confident that our parents would have to change their ways in our new world. They would take their time, but they would surely change. For now, however, they were too inconsistent and confused about where they stood and who they were, even as they called themselves Kenyans. (p.135)

Mahesh Uncle though a second-generation immigrant seems to have embraced the African culture and is ready to assimilate. When Vic asks him of what he thinks about Njo's and Deepa's affair, he says:

> I think it's a wonderful thing, he said. If my daughters Sarojini or Natasha were to do it, I would approve. But your mother won't let it

> happen. I've spoken to her. Our people are not ready for it, what can we do? (p.172)

Kenyan politicians like Tom Mboya had also seen the importance of intermarriages:

> The charismatic Kenya minister Tom Mboya, at a public meeting in Nairobi on Sunday, had called intermarriage a good thing for racial harmony. And this morning's paper reported that Carl Erikson, the younger of the Safari winning brothers, had announced his engagement to a Swahili beauty queen from the Coast. All these, signs of our galloping times that our parents could hardly ignore. (p.192)

Through these relationships between African men and Asian women Vassanji's novel suggests that a hybridized cultural identity can, therefore foster new social ties and relationships. This means that hybridity offers people the chance to not confine themselves to one fixed category. By accepting intermarriages, it shows that these characters (Deepa, Juma Molabux, Ashok Lall) are able to move fluidly between the Asian and African cultures)

This study opines that for the first-generation immigrants, the challenge of exile, the loneliness, the constant sense of alienation, the knowledge of and longing for a lost world are more explicit and distressing than for their children. For Anand Lall, who is a first-generation immigrant, life is a recollection of Indian mythology and Kenyan history. He tells his grandchildren, Indian tales of Lakshman and Rama and Sita speaking with monkeys and devils in the enchanted forests of distant land, but for the children, the lion stories of Kenya were always favourite, because they were scarier and so much immediate and realistic. This proves that the children had already accepted Kenyan history as their own than the history or mythology of a distant land. On hearing such sorts of myth, Vic comments:

> India was always a fantasy land for me. To this day, I have never visited my dada's birthplace. It was the place where that strange man with narrow pointed face, bald head, and granny glasses, Gandhiji,

> had lived and died, and where the man with the white cap, Nehru, now ruled, and where the impossibly four-armed and pink-faced gods of my mother's statuettes and Lakshmi Sweets' annual calendar pictures had fought their battles and killed devils, and where Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tensing had that year conquered Everest. (p.13)

In the 1950s Vic and his sister Deepa in Kenya growing up in Nakuru, the children of Indian merchants, have two British children, Bill and Annie as their friends along with Njo, a Kikuyu who lives with his grandfather, the gardener of the Lalls and other local families. While Vic, not white enough, is secretly in love with Annie and not black enough like his friend Njo, secretly in love with Deepa, both childhood relationships ignoring the cultural barriers of that era. This in itself shows hybridity.

> Njoroge who was also called William loved my sister Deepa; I was infatuated with another whose name I cannot utter yet, whose brother was another William; we called him Bill. We had all become playmates recently. It was 1953, the coronation year of our new monarch who looked upon us from afar, a cold England of pastel, watery shades, and I was eight years old. (p.1)

The readers are drawn into a child's ultra-clear sense of physical space and distinct geographical atmospheres. The Asian, white and black children play together in dusty public spaces outside shops, and apart in private spaces. The narrator Vikram magnifies certain incidents from his childhood, often moments that have remained intense in his memory because they deliberately subvert these usually unquestioned physical boundaries. When he remembers secretly leaving the house with Njoroge at night to take part in the child's grisly mock-up of a Mau Mau initiation ceremony, in which he and Njoroge become blood brothers:

> We passed through that arch seven times in turn, going around and returning. Then I followed him toward the stone and the slaughtered animal, a goat or a sheep, its guts spilled out of its side, it's head cut off and missing. The smell hit me like, yet I persisted, and we knelt at the red stone, on which strands of brown animal hair were stuck. Njoroge placed his wooden bowl on the stone, then produced a penknife from his pocket, flicked it open. Pressing the sharp point

> into his skin, hard enough that he gasped, he cut himself in the upper forearm, and blood spurted out from the small gash and dripped slowly into the bowl. The blood still pouring down his elbow, he motioned my arm, and I felt the sharp pain of the cut, and my blood poured out to mix with his in a shallow pool in the bowl. Using a twig, we mixed our blood, taking turns, and he said, now take the oath. (p.82)

Many of the memories that are magnified and lingered upon in this way involve Njoroge coming into his family's house, either to hide from police raiders looking for Mau Mau insurgents or because Vic's mother has invited him in to be part of a family or community celebration to the horror of the extended Asian family crowded in the living room:

> Everyone was staring at Njoroge. I will never forget the sight of Nirmala Auntie's horrified expression as she took in my friend's blackface. It was as if her eyes had lighted on a monster. Is it safe? She whispered to my mother, who replied, He is only Mwangi's grandson. (p.77)

Deepa's mother suggests that Njoroge presents a rakhi to both Njoroge and Vic:

> And little Deepa went about it with great enthusiasm. Thus, though unwittingly, she made Njoroge her brother, a fact that Mother would use as an argument in later years with much force (p.103).

When, in these later years, Deepa's mother forbids her to marry Njoroge, she uses arguments of cultural cohesion and continuity that do not affect Deepa. But when she forbids Njoroge, she uses a different argument:

> Looking him sternly in the eye, Mother issued a command: "William, Njoroge, I forbid you to see my daughter in the way you have been seeing her. You have been like a son to us, she is your sister.' At least let me have a normal family, where I can see my grandchildren grow up as Indians, as Hindus. I have dreams too, of children and grandchildren, whom I can understand, and speak to… and bring up in our ways. I have nothing against Africans. But we are different. You are a brother to my son and daughter, you are their best friend. But a husband for Deepa-no, Njoroge." (p.194-195)

Njoroge gives way, as a son who loves a mother who loves him and the novel offers a number of scenes that insist on the truth of her maternal love for Njoroge up until her death. He does not point out the deep contradiction at the centre of her argument, and even as the plot bears out the wrongness of her position, Vassanji/Vikram do not judge her. When, speaking of his mother, Vikram states,

> She was intuitive and not political, and though she had her prejudices, they were hardly consistent, her ability to see Njoroge both as a son and an outsider—as more redemptive than problematic. (p.113)

In the last part of the book entitled 'Homecoming' Vikram meets with his widowed father and before they part, just before Vikram's narrative ends, his father tells him that he is living with someone:

> Vic you know, am living with someone. You know she is African, Vic. She is a comfort to me and looks after me. Do you think it is wrong for me? A man gets lonely…. Is it wrong son? He desperately craves approval, acknowledgment-a lonely old man who wants to be loved. All I can do is tell him, you did the right thing, Papa. There's nothing wrong with it. You have to go on living, Mother would understand that. (p.341)

While awkwardly obvious, the revelation is not without power and speaks to the histories offered by the novel in subtle but limited ways. It thickens Vikram's earlier comment that:

> By the time Dilip died, the world had changed and interracial marriage did not appear as offensive as before. (p.315)

The relationship symbolizes a more tolerant future, but in another way, the relationship is nothing new. Vikram's father, Ashok Lall, like Juma Molabux generations earlier, starts the relationship because he is lonely and the African woman is a comfort to him. *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* continually testifies that African women have long been part of Asian East African genealogies. The father's new relationship can be figured as redeeming Deepa and Njoroge's tragic love. While

Vassanji's novel both understands and despises the community and national politics that ruined this love, the text does not imagine a literary future in which such love could be anything more or less complicated.

Turning back, right at the end, to yet again inscribe his faith in the historical and future tolerance of communities and nations through the relationship between an Asian man and an African woman, Vassanji more fully marks the limits of what can yet be envisioned. Portraying and defending the love between an Asian woman and an African man-this most taboo and threatening of love relationships is in itself hybridity where new history can begin. This echoes Bhabha's words that the ambivalence of passing through the third space or hybrid space undermines the homogeneity of cultural knowledge and disrupts the narratives of identity. It thus enables us to overcome both the idea that cultures are exotic and that they are irreducibly diverse and instead allows us to articulate the hybridity of culture. The hybrid space is the in-between space of translation and negotiation that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.

### 3.3 Hybridity and Culture

Culture is definitely a defining feature of a person's identity, contributing to how they see themselves and the groups which they identify with. Every community, cultural group or ethnic group has its own values, beliefs and ways of living. The parameters of culture such as food, clothing, celebrations, religion and language are part of a person's being. The shared values, customs and histories characteristic of culture shape the way a person thinks, behaves and views the world. A shared cultural heritage bonds the members of the group together and creates a sense of belonging through community acceptance.

The above-mentioned parameters of culture reflect the mixing up of the diasporic culture with that of the host country. These parameters are crossed and intermingled so that new, creative hybrid forms come into being. In Bhabha's opinion:

> The hybrid is not only double-voiced and double accented but is also double –languaged; for in it there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousness, two voices, two accents as there are (doublings of socio-linguistics, consciousness, two epochs that come together and consciously fight it out in the territory of the utterance. It is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms. Such unconscious hybrids have been at some time profoundly productive historically; they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new internal forms for perceiving the world in words. (163)

### 3.3.1 Food

*The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* portrays food as an important cultural signifier in keeping the adhesive forces animate and alive. Food as an important and powerful symbol does not only fulfill physical but also emotional and psychological needs. Food engages all the human senses; it brings a strong sensory and emotive response from the person. This emotion of association adds to the potential symbolic power of the food. Food is symbolic of the different and unique ethnicity for the immigrants. In a way food transports, the immigrants to the land where they spent their childhood. Family members' meeting over food forms an important way of linking them all together and sharing their similar nostalgia for the distant roots.

> That Sunday during the family lunch my uncles and father, all adult males except Dada, had begun another of those quarrels, episodes involving far too much talk and erupting in shouts and abuses, which always began by startling us children and ended up amusing us. (p.24)

The food is symbolic of the anchorage but it also reflects the mixing up with the culture of the host country. Thus, food is also symbolically mixed like other paradigms and signifiers of culture, it is dynamic. The diasporic culture cannot be

kept totally isolated from the native culture. The cultural platter cannot be all exclusive comprising only of African or only Indian or only European delicacies but it is like the overall aspect, heterogeneous and is full of variety. It is symbolic of the cultural amalgam of all the three races present in Kenya. The description of the dishes which were served when all the Indian family members and friends met is symbolic of the heterogeneous culture which forms part and parcel immigrants' life.

> Indian families having stopped over in their cars for *bhajias, samosa, dhokras, bhel-puri* and tea, which they consumed noisily and with gusto. (p.2)

> Vic visits his friends and he says: -For dinner, there is only peasant fare, *ugali* and spinach; there is plenty of tea. (p.230)

As the platter described above is a combination of both Indian and Kenyan dishes, so is the whole cultural bubble in which they live in. It is permeated with both the Indian and African cultures especially in the case of second and third-generation immigrants. This echoes Bhabha's view that despite the efforts to maintain the purity of the home culture, mixing is inevitable. This is a symbol of acculturation and adjustment also. As Bhabha puts it, 'No culture is completely pure, it is always in a process of hybridity'. In postcolonial discourse, the notion that any culture or identity is pure or essential is disputable (Ashcroft, 1998). Bhabha himself is aware of the dangers of fixity and fetishism of identities within binary colonial thinking arguing that all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity (Rutherford, 1990).

In the novel, the migrant characters experience the process of mutation (the premise of hybridization), not necessarily as something entirely positive, but by engaging in something forbidden, breaking the taboos of their own cultures. The result is that their identity has been changed, hybridized. Characters, like Vikram, Mahesh uncle and

Ashok Lall proceed against the prohibitions of their religion to eat meat and drink alcohol. Mahesh uncle visits. The following lines portray their hybridized identity:

> It was a hot night, and he was famished. He drank a glass of water, then the two of us changed into shorts and took off into the night for the Banda down the street, which served tea and snacks practically round the clock. On the way, we passed a man roasting meat, and the smell was strong. Do you eat meat nowadays? He asked softly. Sometimes, I hesitated. Chicken preferably. But not much…. Do you? He nodded. I had to fight my qualms and acquire the taste. You can't be in Kenya and not eat meat. (p.170)

> Although he did not mean it that way, the statement sounded rather ominous. He described his first time with meat, at a dinner party in Eldoret, when he discovered on his plate a shank of goat in a generous helping of plantain. He had expected to retch up the contents but he survived and learned. I did not tell him about my first time, the open land behind our house in Nakuru, the holy *mugumo* tree, the ritually sacrificed meat, and Njoroge. My first taste of the meat was probably rotten, a pinch from the spilled-out intestine of a goat or a sheep. (p.170)

The Lall's family during a visit to Mahesh Uncle's house are amazed when they find an African cooking Indian food. This strengthens the concept of hybridity:

> There was a small kitchen area at the side of the front anteroom that preceded the sitting room, where an African cook was quietly busy. There was deer meat, which my father ate with the *Singhs* and a lot of vegetarian fare with chapattis. It surprised my mother that the Africans had learnt to cook so well. (p.110)

The above passages show that through food there is a possibility to celebrate cultural heterogeneity, hybridization or cultural plurality. The characters are able to negotiate the multiple attachments they are heir to. This intermixture in the form of cuisine portrays a hybridized identity.

### 3.3.2 Language

The use of both Indian and Swahili words in the novel shows Vassanji's and by extension, the Indian community in East Africa sense of hybridity, in that they are maintaining their indigenous culture as well as accepting the host culture. Naturally, a

society that is hybrid is sure to be bilingual or multilingual. The Asian characters not only use the Indian language but recourse to Swahili and English. Vassanji destroys the purity of Standard or British English for the sake of authentically representing the migrant experiences of the society he speaks of. Vassanji bridges the gap between European culture or language and indigenous writings by resisting the structures of dominance embedded in the colonial language.

The concept of hybridity is made vigorous by the use of metaphorical expressions imagery, Indian words, Hindu expressions and capitals. He takes recourse to Swahili words, phrases and sentences to capture the spirit of the African culture as Simatei (2010) opines that one distinguishing mark of East African Asian writings is the complex blending together of different cultural ideas, languages and politics. Texts like those of Vassanji, freely mix languages like Kiswahili, English and Hindu to give their texts a rich melange of cultural landscapes or a patchwork of values, a hash of habits, traditions and histories. It is this kind of blending that gives the East African Asian writing the strategy for textualizing hybridity and plurality in East African cultures.

The two languages (Indian and Kiswahili) are crossed, intermingled so that new, creative hybrid forms come into being. This follows Bhabha's argument that the ambivalence of passing through the third space, undermines the homogeneity of cultural knowledge and disrupts the narratives of identity. It thus enables us to overcome both the idea that cultures are exotic and that they are irreducibly diverse and instead allows us to articulate the hybridity of culture. The reason for this is that translation and negotiation are principles of difference; ways in which something new can emerge. The multiplicity of translations and negotiations between cultures means that all cultures are hybrid, and those interactions between cultures or different

systems of meaning, in getting articulated, invariably hybridize them. Bringing two frameworks into dialogue means passing through 'the third space of enunciation.

Vassanji has extensively used indigenous words and expressions to substantiate the characters' authentic ethnicity and cultural stand. There is thus a blending of indigenous and Western discourses resulting in another code, a third code, which is hybrid in nature, which is neither completely detached from its African nor its European sources. Arup (2017) posits that Vassanji intends to indigenise the colonial European English by means of decolonising its hierarchy to establish a hybrid sort of language. By using English mixed with African and Indian languages, Vassanji subverts the dominance of Western colonial discourse over African traditional discourse. In view of these words, Vassanji undertakes a significant change in his use of English by inserting or rather borrowing non-English terms, phrases and sentences to enrich his notion of hybridity in linguistic experiments.

Vassanji has employed for the sake of his praxis in stylistic approach non-English words basically Swahili terms or Gujarati expressions. The purity of the English language has thus been thwarted by the admixture of Hindi, Swahili and other Indian languages. Asians show their hybridized identity by speaking Swahili. This shows that Asians, Africans and the whites are all citizens of a new multicultural democratic nation. When the three friends (Vic, Njo and Deepa) meet after they had parted ways in Nakuru, Deepa can't help it but speak Swahili:

> *Sio*! No, you didn't. How could you have? I never received anything. Even her voice seemed changed in this new presence, before this returned avatar of our former friend. The odd bit of Swahili from her-sio_was charming and Njoroge and I both laughed. (p.129).

Njoroge talks to Vic's mother in Swahili:

> Yes, *nampenda*, he had told her, I love my mother, and my own mother smiled, very satisfied (p.40).

Mrs. Lall and her friend Sakina use the language while trying to help Mwangi, who was beaten up by the police:

> Hitherto they had been speaking in Swahili, of which mother's version was quite rudimentary. (p.96)

Vikram's uncle Mahesh and his friends speak in Swahili to an African blinded by British soldiers:

> Saeed and the other Indian reluctantly let go of the man, who shot off like an arrow and he was gently brought back with the words, *Ngoja, utaenda wapi*? Where will you go? (p.74).

Even the Bruces, children of a settler family decorate their letter, sent from England to their playmates, Vikram and his sister, with Swahili words:

> Say "Jambo" to old Njo. *Kwa heri*! (p.39)

Vassanji borrows such Hindu words as *dadaji* (grandfather), *dadi* (grandmother), dada (father), *daityas* (devils), *bhaiya* (elder brother), *Namaste* (a greeting), *kemche (*how are you), *achha mein jaunga* (I shall go), *paagal* (you mad), *is se ishqkehete hai* (this is called love) (Gromov, 2014).Additionally, the author quotes the names of Indian dishes and cloth, *bhajias, samosas, dhokras, bhel-puri, chappals* and *shalwar-kameez* terms related to Hindu religion, *swastika* and *tilak,* demon's names – *daitya, bhutlok* and *Ravana* and *sanyas, kismet* and *karma*.

This is followed by other Swahili expressions: *nyinyi Wahindi wenye adabu kwa kweli* (Indians are respectful), *ukiwa na udhia penyeza rupia* (when in trouble, offer a dollar), *popote niendapo anifuata* (he follows me wherever I go). Delicious food items are also mentioned. African traditional clothes like *buibui, kanzu, kofia* and *khanga*. Here, switching to Swahili also takes a special place: for example, in order to express the deep "Swahili-ridden" background of the Tanzanian capital, Vassanji uses Swahili words and expressions instead of English ones:

> We had *mandazi* and chai and we stood up, waving *ahsante* to the seller. (p.170)
>
> Indian families having stopped over in their cars for *bhajias, samosa, dhokras, bhel-puri* and tea, which they consumed noisily and with gusto. (p.2)

Vassanji demonstrates that languages are in fact powerful factors in the social life of the characters, performing various functions – first of all, especially in the case of the main characters of the novel, assisting them in expressing and, moreover, constructing their varied identities. Surprisingly enough, it seems that the Indian and even the European community start to perceive Kiswahili as part of their everyday life, and part of their already African identity, and exactly for this reason, the language builds bridges between races and communities. They use Kiswahili words to stress their African identity and belonging to the African soil.

### 3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that hybridity acts as a bridge between different cultures and people. It allows for mediation and connection between different cultures which can help the characters move towards becoming a more intercultural society where hybridity and intercultural relationships become more of the norm. On the one hand, diasporic characters who separate themselves from the African culture experience fewer feelings of displacement and homelessness, at the same time, they only experience hybridization to a minimal degree. One illustration of this character is the protagonist's mother Sheila. She kept all her life, her devotion to India, the country of her birth and youth, and it always remained for her a criterion of what is good and acceptable. She never perceived Kenya as anything but in her own words- the land where I have married and made my home, my husband's and children's country (p.95). On the other hand, diasporic characters who immersed themselves into the African culture and adopted certain values of the host culture into their cultural

identity showed a higher degree of hybridization but they feel troubled and confused by the hybrid identity. Consequently, these characters feel uncertain about their place in society. These characters include Vikram, Deepa and Mahesh Uncle. The first and second-generation immigrants face trouble to merge with the African culture. Anand Lall, Ashok Lall and Sheila tend to live in their individual, collective and historical past while the third generation immigrants like Vic and Deepa have already accepted the adopted culture and are ready for assimilation. The chapter also demonstrates that whether the Asian characters integrated into the African culture (Vic, Deepa, Mahesh) or they tried to separate themselves (Sheila, Aruna Auntie, Ashok) in order to maintain their cultural identity, a form of hybridization took place. This is on the grounds that hybridity happens consciously or unconsciously. Diasporic identities, through the process of cross-cultural adaptation and acculturation, create a hybridized identity that helps them in their negotiation between different cultural membership roles.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# HYBRIDITY AND GENDER

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the gendered dimensions of hybridity manifested in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* through the act of gender stereotyping. This follows the idea that gender is a central axis on which hybrid representations and identities are constructed and negotiated. The first section looks at the gender stereotypes and marginalization of women in the East African Asian community as depicted in the novel. The second part analyses the deconstruction of the stereotyped ideas of female subjugation and male domination in society. These women are marginalized by the patriarchal dominations in their own community. The chapter examines the extent to which the female characters succeed in remonstrating against the gender stereotypes to gain personal liberty, power of expression and empowerment. The final section of the chapter examines how material culture in the form of dress demonstrates the transformation of the female characters.

## 4.2 Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are the fixed are the fixed view points by which the male position themselves in the centre of social organisations and allocate a marginal space to the female (Ellemers, 2018). Stereotypes reflect general expectations about members of particular social groups. Stereotypical perception that a particular feature characterizes membership of a specific group leads people to overemphasize differences between groups and underestimate variations within groups (Amodio, 2014). Therefore, gender categorizations are immediately detected, chronically salient, seem relatively fixed and are easily polarized. This contributes to the formation and persistence of gender stereotypes and reinforces perceptions of

difference between men and women (Ellemers, 2018). Gender stereotypes reflect the primary importance we attach to task performance when judging men and to social relationships when considering women. Assertiveness and performance are seen as indicators of greater agency in men, and warmth and care for others are viewed as signs of greater communality in women (Kite et al, 2008).

*The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* portrays subjugated women who try their best to come out of the clutches of male-dominated society. The novel speaks of the inferiority and subjugation of the immigrant women, bearing Indian identity and heritage as Nabar (1995) posits that some acts or codes of conduct are expected from womanhood as ordained by fate. The basic patterns laid down by society for a woman confine her existence through the binary divisions of masculine and feminine.

This study opines that identities of the East African Asian women tend to be essentialised into binaries of what she is and what she ought to be. The voices of these women have been marginalized by traditionalist ideals of the patriarchal societies. When it comes to issues of agency, empowerment and self-expression, it is either imposed by Western ideals or regulated by traditionalist politics of the Asians. The second and third generation women in the novel like Deepa are often pulled back by the historical past of their ancestors. These women bear hybrid voices in order to resist and challenge the hegemonic discourses. They are caught between two cultures, yet with a completely different worldview.

This is quite reminiscent of Bhabha's hybrid third space where people oscillate between the centre and the periphery, the home and homeless. This ambivalent site is where cultural meaning and representation have no primordial unity or fixity. He points out that the dominant discourse constructs otherness in such a way that it

always contains a trace of ambivalence and anxiety about its own authority. Third Space destroys the mirror of representation facilitating the transfer between the Centre and its margins. It is the inter – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of meaning and culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national and anti-nationalist histories of the people and by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves.

Sheila, the protagonist's mother is a conservative woman who clings to and upholds her cultural values. Finney (1989) holds that such women instinctively cling to the traditional Indian ways. Sheila and her husband Ashok Lall are totally unconvinced of the love affair between their daughter Deepa and the African, Njoroge. The good relationship that Njoroge and Deepa's parents changed radically when Njoroge, started wooing their daughter. This turns Mr and Mrs Lall into furious warriors, defending their worldview based on hierarchical differences in gender, age, race, class, on the foundations of patriarchy, which found the concise expression in these words:

> Get this in your head, Deepa, he is an African, Papa said. He is not us. Not even in your wildest dreams can you marry an African….. Mother took a deep breath and replied, there's nothing wrong with being an African or Asian or European. But they can't mix. It doesn't work. (p.161)

In a striking scene in the novel, Deepa's father breaks in rage:

> What do you mean you will marry anyone whom you want? We are not Europeans, remember that, we are desis, Indians. Proud Indians, we have our customs, and we marry with the permission and blessings of our parents! You will do as you are told, girl! (p.147)

The above passage affirms Nabar's view that no female was allowed independence of action. A woman was to be under her father's control in childhood, her husband's

once married and her son's when widowed. In this case, Deepa was to marry a fellow Asian as her father wished and when married she had to abide by her husband's rules. Sheila declares that Hindu Punjabis were the strong preferences always. Mother being distraught scolds Deepa: There are ways of behaviour for a woman. This is not it, talking to a man intimately – where is our lajj, our dignity in that? (p.298)

The mother's reaction represents a woman who has been chained to the patriarchal autonomy compelling her to be conservative and accept the traditional norms, practices and religions out of powerlessness and burden of family responsibilities. Significantly, she does not defeat the love between Deepa and Njoroge primarily through recourse to tradition, a mythically pure and racist past. She rather deploys arguments of what is natural and unnatural in more curious ways.

We thus assume that Sheila bears an identity very close to that of her husband and his father only in her case it can be considered as a 'reverse' type of colonial identity. No matter how different or even opposed the sentiments may be, the founding traits of these two types of identity are similar. We seem to notice the loss of initial Indian identity, largely destroyed by ideological, political, and emotional fractures, and shift to an identity of a colonial subject identity founded on various well-soaked and/or newly generated prejudices – racial, social, gender – and largely stipulated by the same colonial and even pre-colonial structures.

In the third part of the novel, Deepa and Njoroge are unhappily married to other people, but they start to see each other illicitly. Not long after Njoroge's political mentor is assassinated, gunmen break into Deepa's chemist and shoot Njoroge. Deepa cradles Njoroge's head in her lap as he dies—an image that is photographed and published in the papers, adding another act of violation to the murder. It is only after

her husband Dilip has died that Deepa tells Vikram that she suspects he had hired the gunmen. Vikram asks: But why, Deepa . . . Why murder . . . something so extreme? To keep his family intact, she said ….

> But she never let on at home that she knew of her husband's role in the murder. For the sake of her children, and for him whom she had betrayed and made to suffer, she kept the knowledge to herself. She must even consider herself partly responsible for that murder. What point was there now in making a public fuss over the event and seeking further ruination? So she remained the dutiful, loving wife and mother. (p.313)

From the above passage, we can opine that women such as Deepa are often in a dilemma. They experience a kind of tension between their Asian culture and African life. They preserve traditional Indian culture with nostalgic experiences, certain duties, beliefs and norms of morality. They are in a dilemma between tradition and modernity, between family duties and self-discovery.

As much as Deepa's relationship with an African man is highly questioned, the novel creates a paradox as Vic's relationship with a white woman is celebrated. Sheila did not object to her different race and culture. Is it because of the reason that she belongs to the colonisers, the superior class, the people bearing white skin? Vic comments: She came home for lunch once and met my parents, who were delighted by her informal ways. (p.224)

When Vic spends the night with the Italian girl (Sophia) at her hotel, his father remarks: Shabash! He said, well done! With such a boisterous warmth in his enunciation as to totally flabbergast me. His son had become a man. (p.224). Vic says that his mother was completely fine with the affair:

> Mother, of course, knew what I had been up to, how could she not? Surprisingly, she had not objected to Sophia- not to her different race and culture, not to her occupation _though her inquiries on my behalf

> and her pressures upon me to settle down, meaning to get married, were well underway. (p.225)

The above situation portrays gender stereotypes where the fixed viewpoints by which the male position themselves in the centre of social organizations and allocate a marginal space to the female as Hand (2011) cites that during the years of indentured labour in East Africa, standards of sexual purity were less applicable to men and certainly the attraction of the African woman was understood and even condoned. The Asian male, so solicitous of his wife's and his daughter's chastity, was less likely to curb his own inclinations when the African woman threw temptation in his way.

The issue of race comes to play in this circumstance but what is of interest in the East African Asian context is the constantly lurking fear of miscegenation or hybridity with the African male. The opposite applies to Asian men and African women.

In a scene from the novel, the protagonist tells of the stunned silence and awkward looks that follow his mother's inadvertent revelation that a woman from their grandparents' generation is Masai, not Punjabi, although she is a fluent Punjabi speaker and an integral part of the community. The story that emerges is one of both shrewdness and humour, in which a young Masai girl (Sakina Dadi) is traded—but also given lovingly to Juma Molabux, a lonely Punjabi who became a trader after his indentureship with the railway ended. The telling of this story is prompted by the son of the mixed-race couple being brutally handled by colonial police when they mistake him for a Kikuyu during the Mau Mau era:

> Cohabiting with or even marrying an African woman was not entirely unheard of among Indians. And nothing in his upbringing forbade marrying someone from another community, or race, provided_ I will marry her, but I must make her Muslim. (p.31)

Vikram's father who vehemently prohibited the love affair between Njoroge and Deepa ends up marrying an African in the last part of the novel when Sheila had passed away. The specificity and romance of these interracial love stories promote the idea of both African and Asian communities as traditionally pragmatic and curious these interracial relationships emphasize the idea that the Asian society just like other societies in the world is patriarchal as women are expected to stick to certain codes and men are exempted from such codes. Contact between Asian women and Africans is limited to orders issued to servants in the case of middle classes and brief exchanges. The Asian women are painstakingly cossetted within their community and discouraged, if not openly prohibited from establishing friendships with African men.

**4.3 Subverting the Gender Stereotypes**

*The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* presents Deepa as a woman abstracted in national discourses, though with her education and knowledge of the world she attempts to transcend the boundaries of race by breaking down the barriers of nationalism constructed by male-dominated society. She is sometimes seen to make bold decisions with an independent spirit and vigour and at other times she succumbs to her male counterparts. However, from traditional self-sacrificing characters, Deepa represents women who have formed a sea change into women of individual identity defying the dominance of patriarchal society.

Certainly, Deepa's life is devastated but she contributes to the poly timbered voice of the women. Deepa is able to resist the mute miseries and helplessness that married women undergo. She is a hybrid character as she assimilates the western influences and native culture. Her opposition against the deep-rooted structure of male-dominated society is symbolic of the miserable position of highly sensitive and emotional women tortured by negligence and loneliness. Kapur (2002) cites that a

woman should have self- control, strong will, be self-reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense.

Although women in the text are obliged to sacrifice themselves on the altar of tradition, Vassanji shows how the younger generation fight, not always successfully, against these constraints. Deepa is a good example of this new generation. The in-betweenness or liminality of her situation leads her to live a life bereft of stability or fixity. In spite of her struggle against the patriarchal set -up she can hardly explore herself with a new identity rather she succumbs to her destiny surrendering to the male-dominated society. Deepa in her quest for love and hybridity proceeds against the prohibitions of her culture. Vic says:

> The dice had been cast. She did not seem to understand the seriousness of her offence, not to me but to the values of our times and people. We did not marry blacks or whites, or low-castes or Muslims; there were other restrictions, too subtle for us of the younger generation to follow; Hindu Punjabi's were the strong preference always. Times were changing, certainly, but Deepa in her typical impulsive way had leaped ahead of them. (p.158)

Deepa presents a totally different identity. The main difference between the worldview of Deepa and of the other characters in the novel lies, in our opinion, in the fact that her world view is largely based on idealism. In this case, we interpret the term idealism as the vision of a new world, a world where all the currently existent prejudices about race, ethnicity, gender, culture and religion will cease to be, and in which one will become a sole decision-maker in the matters of his or her life. The vision of such a world is expressed by Deepa through her love affair with Njoroge. When her parents object to her affair with Njoroge, she retaliates:

> What do you have against Njo anyway? All you Asians think is that these African men are after your innocent, virtuous daughters…Mother! I didn't say I was marrying him _but if I was, it would be my wish, wouldn't it? And what is wrong with it, we don't live in colonial times anymore, or in your India-desh, this is a new Africa…. What do you mean? What's wrong with an African? I am an African. What hypocrisy! And all the nice faces you showed around your Njoroge _William while he was here. (p.161)

Deepa's evolution of identity also seems to be accelerated by another idea that of self-independence, self-made decisions; the first episode that caused the major concern of her parents was, in fact, her statement –in reply to her mother's marriage arrangement, this time to a friends' son – that 'I'll marry whom I want, mother, and I am not going to marry Dilip' (p.148). We can see that in these and many other aspects Deepa's identity drastically differs from the colonial one. She wants to remain an Asian, an African, but an Asian African free from the ruins of both patriarchal and colonial subject-hood, when, in both cases, she is not allowed to make choices and decisions about her life, where she is told whom to like and whom to despise, and decisions are made by dominating others. Similarly, while retaining her Asianness, Deepa seeks to break from the cultural prohibitions that dictate to her, through her parents, that people of different races can't mix. Deepa feels the contrary as she wants to break from all the forms of subject-hood, be they indigenous by nature or created by colonial and post-colonial structures. In a bid to salvage her relationship with Njoroge, she suggests that they elope:

> Perhaps, he wrote in dejection once, we should call it off. I know your Indians too well, they will never allow their daughter to marry an African. It's no good my Deepa, don't you see? I've become an African terrorist for your parents, who once loved me so much. I sometimes wonder how it is even possible that we've come this far, from our respective ends, that we are able to talk so intimately, share so many thoughts. The most wonderful thing about us is that we've learnt, we've discovered a new terrain in human relationship, a new trait of the heart that proclaims that we can get as close to another

> human as to become one in body and spirit _no matter how different the details of our birth! Do you see this?..... Deepa replies----How can you say that! How can you have doubts! If you stop loving me I will die! Let's run away to London, she pleaded, that's what Indian girls do to marry outside their community or religion. You're right, they will never relent! (p.175)

Deepa stands for the next generation that feels that miscegenation is not a crime but a sign of successful integration of cultures. In a nutshell, Deepa subverts the gender stereotypes and embraces hybridity. This follows an awareness of the hybrid's potential the innate knowledge of transculturation, the ability to traverse both cultures and to relate, negotiate and mediate affinity and difference within a dynamic of exchange and inclusion.

### 4.3.1 Renegotiating Gender through Dress Codes

Vassanji's novel presents two categories of women: women who are conservative and strive to maintain their cultural purity (Sheila, Sakina dadi) and women like Deepa who are ready to assimilate and defy patriarchy. Deepa's mother is an Indian woman and obstinate in her ways thus choosing to dress in Hindu traditional attire. Finney (1989) holds that these women instinctively cling to the traditional Indian ways. Women like Sheila prefer to wear traditional Indian clothing like *sari*, *salwar kameez* and *dupatta*:

> She looked beautiful that night in an orange and red sari that rustled and gold jewellery that chimed, her face made up, her eyebrows long and shaped something like the sweetest sweetmeat, that was what Sita must have looked like in Ayodhya. (p.68).

Sakina-dadi, a Masai woman who married Juma Molabux, an Asian is taught Punjabi ways and hence practices the Indian culture by sticking to the Indian way of dressing, food and language. This interracial marriage, while cautiously celebrating the possibility of such a union, nevertheless exacts extreme censorship on Sakina, who

has to sever all ties to her Masai community and acculturate seamlessly into the Asian family so that the narrator can hardly believe that she is not Punjabi because she is so complete in her transformation:

> Sakina Dadi, like any Punjabi woman, wore a *shalwar kameez* and dupatta spoke Punjabi fluently and perfectly, at least to my young ears and cooked formidable *kheer*, *karhi* and *dahi-wada*.‟ (37) -----It was so obvious afterwards: Sakina-dadi was distinct. She was taller than my dadi, skinnier and long-legged; her face was round and her eyes large. She was dark though in a way some Indians were. I never saw her hair, it was always covered by the dupatta. And there was a reserve about her, for instance when I went to her house to call my dadi; I don't recall her ever touching me. I have often wondered why. (p.30)

Dressing for both men and women is culturally defined. Cultural norms, expectations and the meaning of being a man or woman are closely linked to appearance. Thus, conforming to appropriate gender dressing can symbolically convey meanings about gender-specific to a culture. Sheila and Sakina-dadi have to dress in their traditional Indian attire to show their dedication to culture and hence this is a sign of bending down to patriarchy. Their type of dressing is an indication of the women's place in the social hierarchy.

Deepa represents the new woman. She uses dressing to combat patriarchal control. Finney (1989) cites that the New Woman is physically vigorous and energetic, preferring comfortable clothes to the restrictive garb usually worn by women of the era. She often has short hair, rides a bicycle, and smokes cigarettes – all considered quite daring for women at the turn of the century. The following passage shows Deepa's freeways:

> Njoroge and Deepa were together three days; they spent time on the campus mostly, but they took the bus to town one day and strolled on the main avenue, walked into restaurants, and later visited a night

> club. They held hands, they danced together. They were stared at, of course. But nobody knew her in Dar; she was doubly a foreigner. As a Punjabi she did not have a community here; and in her clothes, her speech, the accented Swahili she spoke, she was so very obviously a Nairobian girl _westernised, fashionable and presumably free in her ways. And so, except for a few poisoned arrows from the loafers who hung around the Odeon, an area best avoided in dubious situations, she was not harassed. (p.185)

This change in fashion wear reflects the Indian women sense of individuality. In a sense, this shows that these women don't shy away from making bold and stylish choices. The ability to digress from the traditional dressing shows that they are smart, confident and independent individuals who believe they can achieve anything in life and what they wear definitely reflects that.

### 4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Vassanji has focused on gender stereotypes, loss of freedom of women in patriarchal society, their suffering life in the alien situation and their struggle to adapt to foreign identities. The chapter shows that hybridity serves to destabilize essentializing categories of gender and consequently challenge patriarchal definitions of what these categories mean. The identities of East African Asian women tend to be embodied into binaries of what she is and what she ought to be and their voices have been marginalized by traditionalist ideals of the patriarchal societies. The ideologies of masculine superiority and feminine inferiority have been subverted in the text by women like Deepa to provide women proper strength and vigour to protest against the hegemonic patriarchal norms. She attempts to transcend the boundaries of nationalism constructed by male-dominated society. These women have questioned the patriarchal domination to promote the eradication of gender binaries and inequalities. However, these women still succumb to the pressures of patriarchy regardless of the fight they put up in defying the dominance of this society.

Deepa ends up marrying Dilip against her wish. The chapter also demonstrates that dress codes for Asian women are layered with many meanings such as culturally appropriate gender behaviour and gender socialization. Deepa chooses to embrace the Western way of dressing by not conforming to Asians' dress standards in order to subvert gender stereotypes.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 Summary

This study set out to examine the diasporic experience of the East African Asian community using the concepts of liminality and hybridity of culture signified in Vassanji's novel, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. It analyses the representation of liminality, a state of in-betweenness as it applies to the identity reconstruction of the East African Asian community in the context of the novel under study. It follows with an examination of the manner in which characters in the novel signify the concept of hybridity in culture and how diasporic individuals negotiate gender when defining their hybrid identities. The argument is that the diasporic experience of the East African Asian community has an influence on the characters thus producing hybrids.

Premising its discourse on Homi Bhabha's concepts of liminal spaces and hybridity the study contends that identity, especially in culture, is always subject to and constructed through a negotiation of difference in what Bhabha calls liminal spaces or the spaces of in-between. One of the major dilemmas that East African Asians face is the experience of neither being African nor European. This means that to the Asians, both African and European were the 'other' and this propelled them into carving out a clearly defined Indian space for themselves.

The discussion in this thesis has sought to offer some insights into the situation of being Asian but feeling some greater connection with Africa, explicit to the Asians in Africa. The story told in the novel under study and the context it is set in do support a picture of fluid and already mixed identities in ways that avoid the easy

categorisations of Asians, African or Europeans. East African Asians can adopt singular and multiple identities but their choices around these are partly self-made.

From the foregoing, this study concludes that the location of meanings of the Asian diasporic is not in complete positions but in the meeting points as suggested by the dual identities like Asian-African in which their identity rests not in any one of these categories but in their combination.

## 5.2 Conclusions

### 5.2.1 Objective One: To Examine Liminality within the Context of Identity of the Indian Diaspora Presented in the Novel

In our reading of Vassanji's novel, it is apparent that the author uses the notion of in-between in several ways; being both of South Asian and of East African, the liminal position of Asians between the white Europeans and the black Africans. This study shows that the variety of forms of being in-between is important because it highlights multiple forms of identity and belonging... *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* reveals an enduring interpretation of Asian African identities. We use the term 'enduring' in connection to the community's struggle to hold together as they tried to measure to the demands of their new home (Africa), and as they grappled with reshaping their identities. These identities are located in-between the white and black, Asia and Africa thus reflecting the multiracial nature of the society in question. This in-betweenness, whether imagined or real, is the location of cultural ambivalence that is the hall-mark of its occupants. The characters negotiate their identity and belonging in a liminal space of multiple histories and cultures.

Immigrants are transformed into hybrid beings (consciously or unconsciously) which we can term as a naturalness of transformation. They are thus required to learn to position themselves within different cultural frameworks and have to learn to act

within a space of in-betweenness (a liminal space). The Asian African characters develop an identity in the third or liminal space whereby they retain their indigenous culture while accepting and relating to the African culture.

As has been demonstrated, this study remains true to Homi Bhabha's concepts of liminality and hybridity, represented by that postcolonial moment in the text where characters are seen as being jolted out of the crucibles of their own cultures and begin to occupy, indeed, negotiate borderlands of other cultures in what Bhabha calls the Third Space of enunciation. Hence these characters come to experience culture as a mobile and performative commodity that transcends opposing positions. A case in point is the characters of Vikram Lall, Deepa and Mahesh Uncle.

The Asian characters continuously move forward and back from their position. They, neither completely accept the African culture nor do they fully retain their original platform. Their in-between or liminal position prevents them from being completely a part of the mainstream culture. This liminal space where these characters are caught up is neither a place of reality nor a dream, but a place free from any restrictions. It represents a space where these characters are trying to find something that can define them.

The discussion demonstrates that occupying the liminal space is transformative and dynamic because it gives the characters a sense of moving forward as they do not always belong to two worlds simultaneously, but weave in and out of them. This liminal state thus opens up a state of comfortability where the diasporic can swivel between both cultures.

### 5.2.2 Objective Two: To Examine the Manner in Which Characters in the Novel Signify the Concept of Hybridity in Culture

This study shows how the Asian immigrants face cultural dilemmas in foreign systems. The immigrants, in their enthusiasm, to stick to their own cultural beliefs and customs gradually imbibe the cultural ways of the Africans. The children of the immigrants, face cultural dilemmas and displacement more as they end up being bilingual and bicultural. It is very clear from *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* that hybridity in the present is constantly struggling to free itself from a past which stressed ancestry and which valued the 'pure' over its threatening opposite the 'composite'. The third-generation immigrants like Vic and Deepa stand for the next generation which feels that miscegenation or hybridity is not a crime but a sign of successful integration of cultures.

On the one hand, immigrants who separate themselves from the host culture like Sheila experience fewer feelings of displacement and homelessness at the same time, they only experience hybridization to a minimal extent. Immigrants who immerse themselves into the African culture (Vic, Deepa, Mahesh) on the other hand and adopt certain values of the host culture into their cultural identity, show a higher degree of hybridization. While the hybridization may aid the students in becoming part of the African culture, they tend to show a greater feeling of displacement and homelessness. Taken together, immigrants experience hybridization to a certain level whether they choose to integrate or isolate themselves from the African culture. The burden of the hybrid subject is thus no longer the question of rooting oneself in a stable past or history; it is how one can negotiate the multiple attachments one is heir to.

In a world that is globalized and multicultural, it seems that one should be able to move fluidly between many cultures and hybridity as a theory offers people the chance to not confine themselves to one fixed category. Hybridity becomes a condition that serves to reinforce the notion of static and unequal set of power relations where one (marginalized) group, in this case, the South Asian community reacts to the culture of the African in East Africa.

This study has led us to conclude that hybridity acts as a bridge between cultures and people. Hybrid identities have a unique connection between cultures which allows them to shift perceptions and lenses of cultural values, traditions and norms. By forming a bridge between different cultures, hybrid identities form a mutual intercultural situation. Hybridity thus allows for connection between different cultures which can foster a move towards a more intercultural society where hybridity is a norm.

We have demonstrated that food has constituted an ideal scenario for establishing community networks, and *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* offers ample examples of food as the way to cement family ties. Preparing a meal ceases to be a daily routine, undertaken out of necessity rather than choice; instead, it takes on a communal aura, becoming the manifestation of a shared culture. Through the exchange of recipes and culinary tips, women reconnect with their culture on a regular basis and by doing so, they weave together the separate threads of East African Asian identity. The recollection of these regionally defined ingredients is not, however, to close ranks and reject other cuisines. On the contrary, it serves to reinforce the communal cuisine and reflect the mixture rather than juxtaposition of different food traditions and at the same time, the reconstruction of these recipes works as symbolic cultural nourishment by defining who people are from what they eat and how they

cook it. It is in the descriptions of cooking and detailed recipes that Vassanji demonstrates not simply the hybridity of the cuisine but more importantly the borrowing and interchanging of Indian and African foodstuffs and cooking methods. Moreover, by including a variety of dishes suitable for different occasions, Vassanji recaptures past histories and rewrites the East African Asian presence through their cuisine. It is as though each recipe functioned as the physical pleasure of the taste of well-cooked food pointing to its comforting nature and conjuring up fond memories for the author and, by extension, for East African Asians familiar with the social context.

The study shows evidence that language is a powerful factor in the social life of the characters. The Asian characters start to perceive Kiswahili as part of their already African identity, thus language builds bridges between races and communities. The Asians use Kiswahili language to stress their African identity and belonging.

### 5.2.3 Objective Three: To Analyses the Gendered Dimensions of Hybridity Through Acts of Gender Stereotyping.

Hybridity can deconstruct boundaries within gender, empower marginalized collective and deconstruct bounded labels, which are used in the service of subordination. Hybridity can thus be seen not as a means of division or sorting out the various histories and diverse narratives to individualize identities but rather as a means of reimagining an interconnected collective.

This thesis has demonstrated that Vassanji has focused on gender stereotypes, loss of freedom of women in patriarchal society, their suffering life in the alien situation and their struggle to adapt to foreign identities. Hybridity serves to destabilize the categories of gender and consequently challenge patriarchal definitions of what these

categories mean. The identities of East African Asian women tend to be embodied into binaries of what she is and what she ought to be and their voices have been marginalized by traditionalist ideals of the patriarchal societies. The ideologies of masculine superiority and feminine inferiority have been subverted in the text by women like Deepa to provide women proper strength and vigour to protest against the hegemonic patriarchal norms.

## REFERENCES


Abbas, S. (2016). The Different Types of Ethnic Affiliation in M.G. Vassanji's No New Land. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 8 (1), 1-23.

Amodio, D. M. (2014). The neuroscience of prejudice and stereotyping. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, *15*(10), 670-682.

Ang, I. (2001). *On not speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West.* Psychology Press.

Ang, I. (2003). Together-in-difference: beyond diaspora, into hybridity. *Asian Studies Review,* 27(2), 141–154. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357820308713372

Arup, D. C. (2017). English not 'like the English': Mapping the narrative style of M.G Vassanji's novels, especially, The Gunny Sack, The In-Between World of Vikram Lall and The Assassin's Song.

Arup, D. C. (2017). Representation of Subjugated and Oppressed Women in Vassanji's The In-Between World of Vikram Lall and Chitra Banerjee's Arranged Marriage.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (1998). *Key concepts in post-colonial studies*. Psychology Press.

Beamer, L., & Varner, I. I. (2001). *Intercultural communication in the global workplace*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

Beech, N. (2011). Liminality and the Practices of Identity Reconstruction. *Human Relations,* 64 (2), 285-302..;/

Bhabha, H. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Bookman, H. (2014). Since When Has Paper Any Value? Reading Materiality and Meaning in M.G. Vassanji's Fiction. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature,* 3, 1-13.

Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of diaspora: Contesting identities.* Routledge.

Busolo, W. (2011). *Africa in the travel writing of V. S. Naipaul.* Doctoral Thesis. Eldoret: Moi University.

Chepkosgei, S. (2010). *Hybrid Identities in M.G. Vassanji's No New Land and The Gunny Sack.* Master's Thesis. Eldoret: Moi University.

Cohen, R. (2002). *Global Diasporas: An introduction*. Routledge.

Ellemers, N. (2018). Gender stereotypes. *Annual review of psychology*, *69*, 275-298.

Fedders, A., & Salvadori, C. (1980). *Peoples and Cultures of Kenya*. Nairobi: Trans Africa Book Distributors.

Finney, G. (1991). *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theatre at the Turn of the Century*. Cornell University Press.

Frost, R. (1976). *Race against Time: Human Relations and Politics in Kenya before Independence*. London: Rex Collings.

Gilbert, E. (2002). Coastal East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean: Long-Distance Trade, Empire, Migration, and Regional Unity, 1750-1970. *The History Teacher*, *36*(1), 7-34.

Gómez-Peña, G. (1996). *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems, & Loqueras for the End of the Century* (p. 97). San Francisco: City Lights.

Gromov, M. (2014). Facing the Language Border: Multilingualism in The In-Between World of Vikram Lall and the Gunny Sack. *Swahili Forum*, 21, 60-75.

Guarav, D. (2011). Ambiguity is the Driving Force or the Nuclear Reaction behind My Creativity: An E-Conversation with M.G. Vassanji. *Research in African Literatures*, 42 (3), 187-197.

Hand, F. (2011). Impossible burdens: East African Asian women's memoirs. *Research in African Literatures*, 42(3), 100-116.

Henry, J. H. J. (2003). The Man-Eaters of Tsavo and Other East African Adventures. 1867–1947.

Jenkins, R. (2008). *Rethinking ethnicity*. Sage.

Jones, S. (2011). The Politics of Love and History: Asian Women and African Men in East African Literature. *Research in African literatures*, 42(3), 166-186.

Kanaganayakam, C. (1991). Broadening the Substrate: An Interview with M.G. Vassanji. *World Literature Written in English*, 2 (31), 2-5.

Kapur, M. (2002). *A Married Woman*. New Delhi: Penguin Publishers.

Kerner, C. (2007). *Ethnicity and Every day*. London: Routledge.

Kite, M. E., Deaux, K., & Haines, E. L. (2008). *Gender stereotypes*. Praeger Publishers/Greenwood Publishing Group.

Kumar, S. (2011). Bhabha's Notion of Mimicry and Ambivalence in V. S. Naipaul's A Bend in the River. *International Refereed Research Journal*, 2, 118.

Makokha, K. J. (2011). *Ethnic Identities and Gender Themes in Contemporary East African Literature. Doctoral Thesis.* University of Berlin, Germany.

Malak, A. (1993). Ambivalent Affiliations and the Post-colonial Condition: The Fiction of M.G. Vassanji. *World Literature Today*, 2, 279-282.

Martin, J. N. (2015). Revisiting intercultural communication competence: Where to go from here. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 48, 6-8.

Moore, D. C. (2001). Where Are All the African and Caribbean Critics? The MLA, Honorary Members, and Honorary Fellows. *Research in African Literatures*, 32(1), 110-121.

Moyez, V. (2016). *Uhuru Street and Other Stories*. Kenya: Story Moja Publishers.

Moyez, V. (1989). *The Gunny Sack*. London: Heinemann.

Moyez, V. (2014). *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. Nairobi: Story Moja Publishers.

Murji, K. (2008). Mis-taken identity: Being and not being Asian, African and British. *Migrations & Identities*, 1(2), 17-32.

Naipaul, V. S. (2002). *A Bend in the River.* London: Picador Publishers.

Nalini, I. (2016). Multiple Migration: Partition and South Asian Canadian Writing. *South Asian Review* Vol 37 (1), 51-69.

Nedumchira, C. A. (2010). *Immigration and transitional space: The Development of the intercultural third.* Doctoral Thesis. The Chicago School of Professional Psychology.

Nowrojee, P. (2005). Interview with Shasi Tharoor. We're All Kenyans Here. http://Shashitharoor.com

Ojwang, D. (2013). *Reading Migration and Culture: The World of East African Indian Literature.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Omuteche, J. (2010). Marked Identities and Diasporic Belonging in M. G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall.* Research Paper, Masinde Muliro University.

Omuteche, J. (2011). Rootedness and Globalization: Identity and Belonging in M.G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. Research Paper, Masinde Muliro University.

Rutherford, J. (1990). The third space: an interview with Homi Bhabha. Identity: Community, culture, difference, 207, 221.

Said, E. W. (2012). *Culture and imperialism.* Vintage.

Sarup, M. (1994). *Home and Identity in G. Robertson Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*. London: Routledge.

Sayeed, A. (2015). *Writing Diaspora: Transnational Memories, Identities and Cultures*. Inter-Disciplinary Press, 12.

Shome, R. (2012). Mapping the Limits of Multiculturalism in the Context of Globalization. *International Journal of Communication (19328036)6*

Simatei, P. (2000). Voyaging on the mists of memory: MG Vassanji and the Asian quest/ion in East Africa. *English studies in Africa*, *43*(1), 29-42.

Simatei, P. (2010). Hybrid Identities & Cultural Pluralism in East African Asian Writing.". Indian Writers: *Transnationalisms & Diaspora,* 161-170.

Simatei, P. (2011). Diasporic Memories and National Histories in East African Asian Writing. *Research in African Literatures*, 42 (3).

Simonis, J. (2012). *Home and Identity: Displacement, Belonging, and Hybridity in International Students on US Campuses*. Research papers. Pp. 243. https.//www.opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/gs-rp/243.

Siundu, G. (2002). *Vision of Multiculturalism in Yusuf. K. Dawood's Novels*. Master's Thesis. Eldoret: Moi University.

Steiner, T. (2014). “Dwelling-in-Travel”: Of Ships, Trains and Planes in M.G. Vassanji’s Fiction. *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies*, 1(1–2), 39–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/23277408.2014.941754

Turner, E. (2011). The Rogue’s Progress: The In-Between World of Vikram Lall. *Brno Studies in English*, 37 (2) 2-7.

Venegas Caro de la Barrera, J. L. (2017). Identity as Liminality in Post-Colonial Fiction: Nadine Gordimer’s The Pickup and Bessie Head’s A Question of Power. ODISEA. *Revista de Estudios Ingleses,* (6), 201–213. https://doi.org/10.25115/odisea.v0i6.199

Vertovec, S. (1997). Three meanings of" diaspora," exemplified among South Asian religions. Diaspora: *A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 6(3), 277-299.

Warah, R. (1998). *Triple heritage: a journey to self-discovery*. Nairobi: Print.

Watson, T. J. (2009). Narrative, life story and manager identity: A case study in autobiographical identity work. *Human Relations*, 62(3), 425-452.