

Negotiating Identities and Beyond: An Analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's *In Other Words*

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Abstract

Jhumpa Lahiri abandons her principal language English, in which she has written four pieces of fiction and earned many international accolades including the prestigious Pulitzer Prize, and has learned Italian in a rigorous process of second language acquisition. She succeeds in speaking and writing in Italian fluently and as such comes up with her maiden autobiography In Other Words. She completely immerses herself in the Italian language and culture and constructs a new identity that is free from her previous familial and social strings; she finds a new tongue, a new independent voice. With language Lahiri has had an ambivalent relationship since her childhood; she learnt Bengali to talk to her parents at home, and as she grew up and went to school, she learnt English and mastered it. She finds these two languages to be in conflicting positions and they are imposed upon her. With Italian, she finds a third one which liberates her from the previous linguistic entanglements, and gives her a new life; she falls in love with her newfound language. Lahiri uses rich images and metaphors to explore Italian language and culture and the transformative power of language, which brings about her metamorphosis in her transnational and translanguing setting. This paper explores the themes of identity, language, and cultural immersion in Lahiri's nonfiction In Other Words. Drawing on the theories of identity, cultural hybridity, and the third space, this paper analyzes how Lahiri negotiates her evolving identities, the impact of her cultural immersion, and the ultimate transformation that shapes her sense of self and others around her. It finally argues and validates that Lahiri positions herself in the liminal hybrid third space and is destined to remain a diasporic subject who is never accepted either by the Americans or by the Italians to belong to them.

Keywords: Identity; ambivalence; cultural immersion; language; transnational; alienation; Italian.

1. Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri, the Pulitzer Prize-winning American writer of Indian descent, abandons the English language, learns Italian, and begins writing in “a language she has learned in adulthood and with which she shares no previous

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ties” (Wardle 2022, p. 197). A skilled storyteller, Lahiri presents a unique literary journey in *In Other Words*, an autobiographical exploration of linguistic transformation and its impact on personal identity. Published in 2016, this piece captures Lahiri's pursuit of self-discovery as she engages with the Italian language and grapples with her evolving sense of self. Chew-Bose (2016) observes, “not quite memoir or journal or essays collected in a traditional form, these fragmented meditations on immersion, a Why I Write inquest, a work in progress interpolated with some fiction ... author’s long abiding affair with learning Italian” *In Other Words* is her debut autobiography, a “sort of linguistic biography, a portrait” (Lahiri 2016, p. 191), in which Lahiri is now telling her own story firsthand in Italian language.

Lahiri is renowned for her adept handling of diasporic issues in her major works written in English. These issues include identity crisis, the liminal or 'third space of in-betweenness' (Bhabha 1994, 2006) that demands a re-articulation of cultural negotiation (Rascanu, 2020, p. 5), hybridity, ambivalence, anxiety, alienation, and the clash between the first generation of Indian American migrants and their second-generation children. Lahiri's proficiency in addressing these themes has garnered her popularity worldwide, especially among audiences in South Asia. Lahiri deals with all the mentioned diasporic realities in her four internationally acclaimed works written in the English language: her maiden book, a short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) which won her the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in 2000, her debut novel *The Namesake* (2003) which is an outstanding book dealing with diasporic issues and is extremely popular, other fictions *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), and *The Lowland* (2013).

Jhumpa Lahiri’s decision to abandon the English language has created a furor in the literary world, “Lahiri sets people off” (Cornetta, 2021), and she has produced her first non-fiction *In Other Words* (2016), which is written entirely in Italian and later translated into English by Ann Goldstein, editor of the *New Yorker* and internationally acclaimed Italian language translator. Literary critics, academics, readers, publishers, and reviewers have come up with mixed reactions. Cornetta (2021) records the reactions and states, “Lahiri’s pivot toward the Italian language made many critics dance around a series of unanswerable questions. *Why choose to abandon the language that gave you (and us) so much? Is that selfish? Why take up arbitrary one?*” Lahiri asserts her radical shift from English to Italian as she experiences “An exquisite tension. Love at first

sight” (Lahiri 2016, p. 17). Lahiri “achieved success in her previous books by talking about others, and their lives, based on places where she has never lived. But in her ... *In Other Words*, she is talking about herself- her own love story based in Italy” (Mahmood, 2016).

Building upon the cultural theories advanced by Stuart Hall (1990) and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the 'hybrid identity of third space' (1994, 2006), this study endeavors to delve into Jhumpa Lahiri's negotiation of evolving identities—explored through languages, cultural immersion, and self-expression within her inaugural autobiography, *In Other Words*. The argument posits that, despite Lahiri's efforts to relocate to Italy and forge a new identity, she remains a diasporic subject. She is neither fully accepted in America, with her English language proficiency and American birthright, nor is she embraced in Italy as an Italian, despite her mastery of the language and her literary contributions in Italian. Instead, Lahiri occupies the 'in-between space of hybridity' or the 'Third Space of enunciation' as postulated by Homi K. Bhabha.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Multifaceted Identities

Throughout literary history, cultural identities and the interplay of language and self-expression have been subjects of profound examination. Jhumpa Lahiri explores these realms in her work *In Other Words*. In this literature review, the study conducts a comprehensive analysis of Lahiri's work exploring how she negotiates identities through language, and it reviews critics' and contemporary researchers' explorations and views on intricate aspects of the book.

Many social scholars and theorists advocate multiple identities for the people of this modern time; they discard the idea of a single and fixed identity. In today's globalized world, one must have multiple identities; a single identity does not work, as Said (1993) notes, “No one today is purely one thing” (p. 407). This mobility of today's people across cultures is one of the defining factors of the evolving nature of culture and identity; it is a “mixer of cultures and identities” as further asserted by Edward Said. He advocates for the pluralities of identity.

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1990) asserts, “Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think” (p. 222). Hall contends that the notion of identity is

not straightforward, asserting that it is complex. He proposes two approaches to explore 'cultural identity.' Hall posits that the first perspective defines 'cultural identity' based on a collective shared culture, representing a fundamental 'true self.' However, he notes that this perspective oversimplifies cultural identity by assuming that there is a single, fixed identity that is common to all individuals within a particular culture or community. He suggests that this view ignores the complexities and diversity of individual experiences and identities within that group. It downplays the dynamic nature of identity and the ways in which people may adapt and adopt different aspects of identity based on context, personal experiences, and interactions with others. (Hall, 1990, p. 223).

In contrast, the second perspective recognizes that cultural identities are not fixed in the past but are constantly shaped by historical, cultural, and power dynamics. It emphasizes that cultural identity is not a static entity, but rather something that is continually "becoming." This perspective appreciates the complexity and fluidity of identities, acknowledging the influences of history and the ongoing transformations that cultural identities undergo over time. Which is "far from being eternally fixed ... they are subject to continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (p. 225).

Regarding identity renowned postcolonial theorist Bhabha (2006) posits that there has been a departure from exclusively emphasizing categories like 'class' or 'gender' as the primary determinants of identity. Instead, there's a growing awareness of the complex interplay of various factors such as race, gender, generation, institutional context, geopolitical location, and sexual orientation. These factors collectively shape and inhabit any assertion of identity in the modern world. In essence, Bhabha highlights the multifaceted nature of identity, which is influenced by a diverse range of subject positions beyond traditional categories (p. 2). Nayar (2011) in his study of Bhabha's concept of identity sums up thus, "Identity, therefore, is constantly shifting, liminal and displaced" (p. 69). Identity is always fluid, it generates mobility.

In the context of the issue of multiple identities in a globalized world, Nobel laureate and scholar Amartya Sen's (2006) analysis of identity suggests that individuals may have the ability to navigate and negotiate their various identities in a way that promotes their well-being and that of their communities by enhancing their 'capabilities'. Sen argues, "... main hope of harmony in our

troubled world lies in the plurality of our identities” (p. 17). He emphasizes the pluralities of identity. He further notes, “The Illusion of unique identity is much more divisive than the universe of plural and diverse classifications that characterize the world in which we actually live” (p. 17). Sen stresses that the notion of a singular identity is far more divisive than the multitude of diverse classifications that define the world we inhabit. He further observes, “We do belong to many different groups, in one way or another, and each of these collectives can give a potentially important identity” (p. 24). Sen reiterates the importance of having multiple identities.

2.2. Hybridity and Third Space

In the general sense of the term, hybrid refers to something that is not original, a cross-product. Easthope (1998) makes an elaborate analysis and asserts:

Hybridity can have at least three meanings—in terms of biology, ethnicity, and culture. In its etymology, it means the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar, *hybrida*, and this genetic component provides the first meaning. A second definition of hybridity might be understood to mean an individual “having access to two or more ethnic entities.” Bhabha develops his notion of hybridity from Michail Bakhtin, who uses it to discriminate texts with a “single voice” (lyrical poems) from those with a “double voice” (such as novels, whose narrator cites characters speaking in their voice – these texts are hybridic). (p. 146)

To this end, hybridity is, according to Nayar (2015), “A term from botany—referring to cross-breeding—hybridity in postcolonial studies refers to the mixing of races (miscegenation) and cultures so that new forms of culture are produced” (p. 91). While Young (1995) makes an elaborate discussion on this issue, he opines in the subsection titled “Hybridity and Fertility” thus:

In the different theoretical positions woven out of this intercourse, the races and their intermixture circulate around an ambivalent axis of desire and aversion: a structure of attraction, where people and cultures intermix and merge, transforming themselves as a result, and a structure of repulsion, where the different elements remain distinct and are set against each other dialogically. (p. 358)

Young examines the concept of race mixing and how it is characterized by a dual dynamic. One aspect involves attraction, where people and cultures blend and transform as a result of their interactions. The other aspect involves aversion, where different elements remain distinct and engage in

dialogue-based opposition. This suggests that the concept of race mixing is complex and involves both unifying and divisive forces.

Theorist Bhabha (2006) examines the in-between positioning thus, “These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining of the idea of society itself” (p. 2). Bhabha explores how being in between different spaces provides a platform for individuals or communities to create new identities, collaborate on innovative ideas, and engage in discussions that redefine our understanding of society. From the space of in-betweenness, Bhabha (1994) advocates the “Third Space of enunciation” (p. 38), he further asserts:

it is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes possible to begin envisaging national, 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. (p. 39)

Bhabha emphasizes the importance of an "in-between" space, which he calls the "Third Space of enunciation." This space, characterized by translation and negotiation, is where culture's true meaning lies. It enables us to imagine diverse, non-nationalistic histories and escape binary political thinking, leading to a deeper understanding of our identities. According to Bhabha, “Third Space of Enunciation” challenges the traditional view of culture as a unified and historically continuous concept rooted in the past and maintained through national traditions. It suggests that culture is more complex and ambivalent, with meanings and references constantly evolving, rather than being fixed and uniform.

While Mitchell (1997) observes, “With both diaspora and hybridity it is the spaces in the margins, the unfixed spaces in-between states and subject positions that are vaunted as the location of resistance and intervention in hegemonic narratives of race, culture, and nation” (p. 260).

The third space is significant for both diaspora and hybridity, which emphasizes the fact that this space offers the opportunity to the marginalized or hybrid individuals and communities to challenge and intervene in the dominant narratives and power structures that shape the society. This third

space is a site for resistance and transformation in the context of issues related to identity, culture, and nationality.

Scholars and researchers have explored Lahiri's *In Other Words* and have come up with diverse observations and assertions. Bergantino (2022) explores the issue of multifaceted identities Lahiri constructs throughout *In Other Words*, and observes, "the pervasive presence of the author's 'I' and the function of Italian as a channel for voicing intimate reflections, the theme of identity represents a key aspect of Lahiri's linguistic autobiography in conjunction with translation and exophony" (p. 6). The researcher further explores the themes of translator and self-translator to finally draw the lines between 'translation and identity, which intermingles with that of 'translation and culture' (p. 12), thus, he examines and asserts Lahiri's multiple identity constructions.

Sales (2013) discusses Lahiri's *In Other Words* from the perspective of transculturation and argues that "Transculturation is concerned with necessary and helpful conception of culture as a living, malleable and active entity, and not of culture as either a static model of monolithic fetish" (p. 71) and contends that transculturation emphasizes the essential and constructive view of culture as a vibrant, adaptable, and dynamic entity, rather than a rigid and unchanging model of a single, fixed belief (p. 71). The researcher finds that "transculturation is a hybrid, cross-cultural process that is constantly reshaping and replenishing itself" (p. 72). And she aligns her concept with theorist Bhabha's (1996) concept of "in-betweenness" or 'hybridity' which, she thinks, is "able to deal with difference and multiplicity" (p. 72). She finally posits that writers in transnational settings create transcultural contexts and narratives and the elements in those realities exemplify complex cultural encounters, revealing how they mediate differences and create spaces for resistance, skepticism, dialogues, and continuous interactions. Through their transcultural perspectives and experiences, they adeptly negotiate their disparities (Sales, 2013, p. 86).

Adami's (2017) analysis of Lahiri's book *In Other Words* delves into the concepts of 'identity, translanguaging, and split-self.' To explore Lahiri's intricate and translanguaging identities within her writing, Adami identifies four distinct paths that unveil language's role as an interpretive key to life: 1) the significance of the mother tongue, 2) language as a stepmother figure, 3) the idea of a new language, and 4) the utilization of maternity metaphors. (p. 88). She examines

the “narrative and translingual representation of identity” (p. 86) throughout *In Other Words* (2016).

Lutzoni (2017) argues that Lahiri does not intend to convey any moral or political message in a postcolonial context. Additionally, she does not delve into feminist perspectives concerning gender issues. Instead, Lahiri's primary purpose appears to be narrating human relationships and the lack of communication among individuals in a new environment, where they experience a shared sense of loss similar to what Salman Rushdie describes in his renowned 1991 essay.

Moreover, the researcher delves into the issue of Lahiri's identity, considering her birth in the UK and upbringing in America, with her parents hailing from India. The researcher finds that Lahiri shares the same feelings of displacement and alienation with her Indian heritage. This observation leads to the researcher's assertion that for Jhumpa Lahiri, identity is a multi-layered concept that intertwines Bengali, British, US, and Italian cultures and traditions, along with experiences of dislocation and hybridity. These elements overlap randomly in an endless process of self-definition and identity formation (Lutzoni, 2017, p. 112).

Islam (2018) opines that Lahiri has been grappling with her identity crisis since her schooldays between Bengali and English and has had ambivalence with language, and she “faces the challenges of a dual linguistic environment...she struggles and suffers psychologically; this is the primary stage of her language shock” (p. 40). The researcher asserts by mentioning different theorists and their assertions on the “necessity of multiple identities and discard restricted identities” (p. 42). Then the researcher examines Lahiri's nomadic position with linguistic tensions in different locations and her sense of dislocation, he asserts, “Lahiri feels that she has no specific place to return to, because she does not belong to anywhere as far as the true meaning of belonging is concerned. She is born in London and grows up in the United States, but her parental roots are in Kolkata, India” (p. 46). These tensions are common in diasporic realities, and Lahiri's position as a diasporic writer is quite explicit. Diasporic authors address immigrants' dislocation, alienation from their social connections, and cultural ambivalence. Lahiri skillfully portrays these concerns, especially the challenges of transitioning between languages and cultures in her work, *In Other Words*. (Islam, 2018, p. 47).

Walker (2021) contends that Lahiri's acclaimed English-language work portrays a fractured identity, but her collection, *In Other Words* arising from a passionate connection with the Italian language shows that 'self' takes shape in language. By engaging in reading, writing, and speaking Italian, Lahiri develops a distinct linguistic selfhood. This new language becomes a means for her to reflect on and come to terms with the painful sense of displacement associated with her first two languages, Bengali and English (p. 106). The researcher further asserts that in the Italian works, Lahiri's style and tone also change from "the particular and the personal to the abstract. In contrast to her earlier works" (p. 106). Walker argues that Jhumpa Lahiri's experimental project, *In Other Words*, offers an alternative experience of displacement, distinct from her English works. This deliberate displacement empowers her to reclaim authorial and linguistic agency, exploring questions of belonging and identity more personally. Embracing her imperfect knowledge of Italian as an adopted language, Lahiri challenges fixed notions of linguistic and cultural identity, liberating herself from perpetual foreignness and envisioning new possibilities (Walker, 2021, p. 106).

While researchers have extensively examined Jhumpa Lahiri's identity evolution and transcultural self, there's a notable gap in addressing the diasporic realities she encounters in Italy from her liminal, hybrid "Third Space." This study aims to fill this gap by contributing to the understanding of Lahiri's diasporic experiences, particularly in the context of her first autobiography, *In Other Words*.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research methodology, which allows for a close reading, an in-depth exploration of the themes and issues presented in the book, as well as a deep understanding of the personal experiences and perspectives of the author.

4. Discussion

4.1. The Evolving Identities, New Language and The Immersion

In Other Words, is a product of a deep love affair between the author and the Italian language, it is an obsession, a desperate attempt to discover a new identity, a new voice. She falls in love with the Italian language when she pursues her Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies. Her doctoral thesis is on "how Italian

architecture influenced English playwrights of the seventeenth century” (Lahiri, 2016, p. 23). She muses on the issue further by wondering why writers and playwrights were fascinated by the Italian setting while writing in English. She examines her fascination with the Italian language, and she states, “The thesis will discuss another schism between language and environment. The subject gives me a second reason to study Italian” (p. 23). It is this love that motivates her to learn about Italy and undertake the project of learning a new language. She makes a rigorous attempt to first learn the nuances of the language then tries to master it to fluently speak and write in it. She undergoes rigorous training with her teacher, reads and writes with the help of the dictionary, meets people, and tries to strike up conversations; she gradually manages to cope with the challenges that a new language offers. Yet she has a kind of duality, a sense of attachment and at the same time a detachment, this fluctuating nature of the tension as she recounts, “I feel a connection and at the same time a detachment. A closeness and at the same time a distance” (Lahiri 2016, p. 17). This uneasiness with her new language surfaces her sense of ambivalence which culminates in “An exquisite tension. A love at first sight” (p. 17). She falls in love with the Italian language.

With this love for the Italian language, she abandons English with which she has won international repute as a writer and the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for her work. She now risks losing her past glory in her pursuit of a new language. With this new language learned, she wants to construct a new voice, a new identity free from any kind of attachment or social or ancestral strings from her past, a free and independent identity. And she realizes the social, cultural, and even very personal impacts of this new identity, which is “a shelter from which a new reality springs forth” (Lahiri, 2016, p. 32).

However, with language, Lahiri has had a crisis since her childhood. At the age of two, she struggles to learn Bengali to please her parents, and at school, she masters English as an immigrant does to survive. Thus, Bengali is her first language, her mother tongue, though she does not know it much, and English “a stepmother” (p. 138) becomes her second language, and she has a crisis between these two languages. Lahiri (2016) states, “Those two languages of mine didn’t get along” (p. 139). Thus, she has had linguistic ambivalence since her childhood, which she can never resolve.

While growing up in America Lahiri has a continuous tension between her and her parents regarding the conflicting cultures of India and America, an inescapable strain between the two generations of the migrants living in America. Lahiri experiences the invisible walls, she states, "My mother has lived outside India for nearly thirty-five years; my father, nearly forty... But there were invisible walls erected around our home, walls intended to keep American influence at bay" (p. 1). The first generation of Indian immigrants try to keep a conscious connection with their native land by maintaining their long-held ideology, lifestyle, religion, and language; they as such try to keep their offspring away from foreign culture and lifestyle in the host country. This trait is a typical diasporic reality.

She further states people's categorization of her writing and of herself:

Take, for instance, the various ways I am described: as an American author, as an Indian -American author, as a British-born author, as an Anglo-Indian author, as an NRI (non-resident Indian) author, as an ABCD author (ABCD stands for American born confused 'desi' – "desi" meaning Indian – and is an acronym coined by Indian nationals to describe culturally challenged second-generation Indians raised in the US). According to Indian academics, I've written something known as "Diasporic fiction"; in the U.S., it's "immigrant fiction."" (Lahiri 2002, p. 1)

As a second-generation migrant with a fluid identity, Lahiri does not have a fixed sense of self; she does not have a place to belong to and to get back to. A sense of estrangement haunts her throughout her life. Lahiri's life, at this point, reminds one of Nobel laureate in literature, V.S Naipaul's life, and his crisis, who too experiences an ambivalent condition about his identity. Islam (2018) discusses the issue by quoting Magras (2016) in his essay, "In England I am not English, In India I am not Indian. I am chained to the 1,000 square miles that is Trinidad: but I will evade that fate yet" (p. 42).

Lahiri intends to get past all these pressurizing expectations and tags and decides to construct a new identity free from all these previous strings. She contends in an interview with Pellas (2017) regarding the motivation behind writing in a new language by referring to these "unpleasant" issues, "A sense of frustration, of dissatisfaction. I used to look for an identity that could be sharp, acceptable, mine" Lahiri immediately points out the fact by stating, "But now the idea of a precise identity seems a trap, and I prefer an overburdened one:

the Italian piece, the Brooklyn one, the Indian one. Identity is completely a fluid thing” (Pellas, 2017). This statement is important, for Lahiri is now inviting the pluralities of identity. Lutzoni’s (2017) observation is noteworthy:

It is a book where, investigating her discovery of the language, the author investigates her intimate self. Furthermore, it is a personal journal that contains autobiographical reflections, notes about identity, language and philosophy that the author keeps repeating, developing and revisiting through to the end in endless variations; a moving account of the novelist grappling with the difficulties of writing in Italian, her twenty years of devoted practice, her combinative attempts at perfecting her mastery of the idiom. (p. 114)

Lahiri conducts a probing investigation of her evolving identities, and her rigorous endeavor to learn the Italian language to be able to fluently read and write in it. She immerses herself completely in Italian language and culture and constructs a new voice and self-expression. She, in the process, traces her idea of herself and others around her. Stoican’s (2019) observation is apt as she posits, “The author believes that the contact with a cultural space different from the tradition that has shaped her is likely to provide a fresh perspective on identity, language and personal development” (p. 240).

In Other Words is structured into 24 chapters with two short stories in it. Lahiri, “a linguistic nomad” (Garner, 2016), expresses ‘her love affair’ with Italian, her momentary exile to Italy with her family, and her incessant efforts to learn the language. Throughout the book, Lahiri explores different themes: the evolving nature of identity, her rigorous attempt to learn the Italian language, and her complete immersion in the new language and culture.

In the first chapter titled “The Crossing” the author makes a metaphorical mention of a lake. Lahiri (2016) notes, “I want to cross a small lake. It really is small, and yet the other shore seems too far away, beyond my abilities” (p. 3). In this metaphorical expression, the author expresses the difficulties and challenges that a new language offers for its pursuers; and she is gradually learning it. Then she makes a steady movement by delineating her undertaking of learning the Italian language step by step, she states, “For twenty years I studied Italian as if I were swimming along the edge of that lake” (p. 5). She understands the nature and hardships of learning a new language and the difficulties that it poses for the pursuer. And she also understands the amount of labor and risk she must take as a new learner. She notes, “But you can’t float

without the possibility of drowning, of sinking” (p. 5), and she is ready for it, she goes on to state, “To know a new language, to immerse yourself, you have to leave the shore. Without depending on solid ground” (p. 5). As a part of her language learning project, she buys a dictionary, which “becomes both a map and a compass, and without it, I know I’d be lost” (p. 10). Lahiri shows her determination and tenacity in learning the new language by getting completely immersed in it- the efforts speak of her love for the language. Her indomitable spirit to learn the new language manifests her determination and excruciatingly engaging efforts, which is aptly stated by Hadley (2016), she states, “The fierce self-punishing discipline of her days in Italy – making endless lists of words and learning them, writing with painful effort and then correcting – are described with a zeal that is monastic, or revolutionary” Lahiri goes through a plunging discipline to learn the new language, which she expresses through different metaphors. Chew-Bose (2016) makes a fitting comment:

In Other Words is prone to metaphors. Swimming across a lake, the significance of a bridge, of scaffolding, an ex-boyfriend, falling in love and our relationship to forever ... all cling to Lahiri tropes of belonging and identity, only this this time, she shivers of insecurity constitute too her second adolescence. A chance to re-experience the disorientation she felt as a Bengali girl growing up in America, who perceived life dichotomously, “suspended rather than rooted.

Lahiri’s incessant yet painstaking efforts to learn Italian and thus to read and write in it—an effort to construct a new identity, align with the idea of her culturally “becoming” the perspective that embraces the complexity and fluidity of identities, acknowledging the influences of history and the ongoing transformations that cultural identities undergo over time. Which is “Far from being eternally fixed ... they are subject to continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (Hall, 1990, p. 225).

This cultural study advocates for a fluid identity, which generates multiple identities in the process, as Stoican (2019) posits by quoting Vertovec (2009) thus, “From a cultural studies perspective, transnationalism entails a mode of fluid belonging, shaped by individual’s “multiple identifications, de-centered attachments and simultaneous being here and there”” (p. 238).

The crossing metaphor delineates space, the crossing of the border, borderline living, and the challenges; crossing refers to distance, which may challenge one’s capacity to transcend either physically or figuratively. This trope of

spatial metaphor surfaces abundantly in the book, mostly “relating to the language, and in particular by the many images expressing distance and separation or both at the same time” (Grutman, 2018, p. 6). This feature reveals tension and anxiety in the author’s efforts to learn a foreign language that appears to be “small, and yet the other shore seems too far away, beyond my abilities” (Lahiri, 2016, p. 3). This dichotomy between distance and separation reflects her ambivalence and anxiety which are distinctively diasporic traits.

4.2. Willful Dislocation and The Liminal Space

The chapter titled “Exile” is very significant for many reasons, for this word, too, denotes the sense of distance, banishment, and separation. As Lahiri (2016) points out, “My relationship with Italian takes place in exile, in a state of separation” (p. 21). She embarks upon the state of exile; hers is a willful banishment from the geographical setting of America to Italy with a new language. She further comments, “Every language belongs to a specific place. It can migrate, it can spread” (p. 21). Lahiri’s position subscribes to the position of the immigrant writers, as she is situated between two countries with two different languages, her position is a hybrid, multicultural, and polyvocal position- she is in a liminal space. Turner (2007) asserts by stating, “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (p. 89). Lahiri’s position is at the in-between state of undefined position of a fluid and transformative nature of identity, as she is ready to navigate between the transitional spaces between societal norms and expectations. Her search for identity surfaces throughout the book. This feature is one of many features of diasporic writers characterized by margin and border. Lahiri muses on her spatial position and finds her in a liminal space, at the marginal space of hybridity. She comments, “I write on the margins of countries, of cultures. A peripheral zone where it’s impossible for me to feel rooted, but where I’m comfortable. The only zone where I think that, in some way, I belong” (p. 90). This peripheral space entangles the post-colonial concept of ‘center-periphery’ hierarchy and the subsequent repercussions. Theorist Anzaldúa (1987) posits, “A borderland is a vague and unprecedented place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (p. 3). Anzaldúa’s perspective suggests that borderlands are spaces of complexity and transformation, where identities, cultures, and ideas intermingle and evolve due to the presence of these emotional and cultural borders. Lahiri’s relocation to Italy and her new experiences situate her neither fully in her native cultural

context of “home” nor entirely in the Italian cultural landscape of “outside”; she is situated in an in-between position, and her position is characterized by ambiguity. The diasporic immigrants suffer from dislocation and alienation, and their attempt to reclaim the homeland or themselves in the host land is never realized as it only exists in their imagination- their ambivalence further intensifies. The divide between the home and beyond along with the back and forth, going and coming back characterized by travel and border crossing, the condition of the diasporic people in hybridity has explicitly been discussed by Bhabha (2006) as he asserts:

The ‘beyond’ is neither a new horizon nor a leaving behind of the past ... Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; ... we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. (pp. 1-2)

According to Bhabha, the in-between or third space represents a state of transition where space and time come together to form intricate intersections of differences, identities, and the balance between inclusion and exclusion.

Lahiri has an acute sense of ambivalence about her language, and her linguistic identity throughout her life. She does not have a firm linguistic identity, and the absence of it places her “in a kind of linguistic exile” (Lahiri, 2016, p. 21). Her sense of estrangement surfaces even more intensely when she comments on her linguistic root, she asserts, “My mother tongue, Bengali, is foreign in America. When you live in a country where your own language is considered foreign, you can feel a continuous estrangement” (p. 22). She feels an emptiness in her “an absence that creates a distance within you” (p. 22). There is a constant struggle in her as far as her sense of linguistic identity is concerned; she feels a constant distance in America because her mother tongue is foreign to them. This gap in her widens, and the distance continues to spread. She feels more estranged as she further relates, “In my case there is another distance, another schism. I don’t know Bengali perfectly. I don’t know how to read it, or even write it...as a result I consider my mother tongue, paradoxically, a foreign language, too” (p. 22). Lahiri feels a kind of existential void in her, and it is strange that her mother tongue is a foreign language to her; alienation engulfs her existence.

She recounts more of her childhood and her parents' expectations about her. They want to protect their children from the foreign linguistic and cultural invasion in their lives in America, which generates a kind of ambivalence in her. Now that she has come back to America for a month after spending a year in Italy, she starts missing Italy. She muses on her distant past about her parents' desperate attempts to keep an attachment with their homeland India, and their impatient wait for the letters to arrive from Kolkata. Lahiri states:

In America, when I was young, my parents always seemed to be in mourning for something. Now I understand: it must have been the language. ... they couldn't wait for a letter to arrive from Calcutta, written in Bengali. They read it a hundred times; they saved it. Those letters evoked their language and conjured a life that had disappeared. When the language one identifies with is far away, one does everything possible to keep it alive. Because words bring back everything: the place, the people, the life, the streets, the light, the sky, the flowers, the sounds. (p. 121)

Having lived for a year in Italy Lahiri now feels the same, as she is missing Italy now; now she finds an emotional commonality between her and her parents. She believes an "emotional distance is always more pronounced, more piercing, when in spite of proximity, there remains an abyss" (p. 122). Lahiri's ambivalence continues; she has a feeling of closeness and distance simultaneously, and this back-and-forth emotional movement in binary opposition continues in her. English does not enchant her anymore. the language that has earned her so many international accolades, name, and fame. She gets more confused and estranged, she comments, "The estrangement, the disenchantment confuses disturbs me. I feel more than ever that I am a writer without a definitive language, without origin, without definition" (p. 123). She profoundly laments her rootlessness. She does not belong to any place; she does not have a homeland to go back to. She does not have an original language either. A severe existential angst engulfs her. She relates to her precarious position thus, "In the end I realize that it wasn't a true exile: far from it. I am exiled even from the definition of exile" (p. 124).

Diasporic realities are pronounced in the immigrant writers, and this issue pervades their writings. Lahiri as a diasporic writer deftly deals with the issues in her writings. Islam (2018) observes:

Diasporic writers are concerned about how immigrants feel dislocated, alienated from their social ties, and suffer ambivalence about two cultures. Lahiri brings all these issues into her work, and *In Other Words* reveals her concerns about shifting from one language to another, from one culture to a different one. (p. 46)

Diasporic people suffer from different kinds of maladies, and they are unhappy people. Mishra (2007) makes an interesting observation, "All diasporas are unhappy, but every diaspora is unhappy in its own way" (p. 1), he goes on to add, "They are precariously lodged within an episteme of real or imagined displacements, self-imposed sense of exile" (p. 1). The diasporic writer, Rushdie (1991) claims, "exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt" (p. 10). He further comments that the act of reclaiming the lost past is impossible, and he relates, "... we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but visible ones, imaginary homelands" (p. 10).

Before leaving for Italy, Lahiri abandons English completely. She decides "not to read in English any more" (p. 37); she takes a vow "to detach myself from my principal language" (p. 38). Lahiri thoroughly prepares herself to read, write, and speak in Italian; she is ready to completely immerse in Italian. Through her painstaking reading of a book in Italian she feels thrilled, to her "it feels like a feat" (p. 39). She feels ecstatic and keeps an Italian dictionary to consult continuously; she maintains a diary too. Her love for Italian ripens and creates an aesthetic sense as she asserts, "When you are in love, you want to live forever" (p. 45). The Italian language generates the "emotion" and "excitement" in her, and she adds "Thus true love can represent eternity" (p. 45). Though she realizes that learning all the new words is impossible, she adores the words and wants to "hold them in my hand, I want to possess them" (p. 46). She feels the power of words, she feels an ecstasy. For her "Unknown words present a dizzying yet fertile abyss" (p. 46). She is completely immersed in the Italian language; her expression reaches a profound poetic height.

Lahiri's constant search for identity pervades *In Other Words*, as Adami (2017) notes:

Between the poles of a mother tongue and a stepmother language, there is a locus of identity formation, namely how the subject strives to live and come to terms with two, or more languages, accommodating, elaborating and sometimes rejecting some linguistic aspects. (p. 89)

Lahiri is negotiating her evolving linguistic identities throughout the book: between Bengali and English, and later with other languages. She has an identity of a writer as she resolves, "Before I became a writer, I lacked a clear identity. It was through writing that I was able to feel fulfilled. But when I write in Italian, I don't feel that" (p. 82). While writing in English Lahiri is fluent and creative, and English writing brings her international fame and recognition- an established identity as a writer, but writing in the Italian language, Lahiri is not confident, she is afraid of losing her previous identity as a writer. She experiences a fractured identity. She comments:

Because of my divided identity, or perhaps by disposition, I consider myself an incomplete person, in some way deficient. Maybe there is a linguistic reason – the lack of a language to identify with as a girl in America, I tried to speak Bengali perfectly, without a foreign accent, to satisfy my parents and above all to feel that I was completely their daughter. But it was impossible. On the other hand, I wanted to be considered an American., yet, despite the fact I speak English perfectly, that was impossible, too. I was suspended rather than rooted. I had two sides, neither well defined. The anxiety I felt, and still feel, comes from a sense of inadequacy, of being a disappointment. (p. 107)

Lahiri's split self about identity is profoundly pronounced. With identities, either Bengali or English, she has never felt complete, rather she experiences a constant oscillation between the two identities. She feels incomplete and suspended rather than rooted. A sense of inadequacy cripples her since her childhood. And it is all because of her entanglement with the elusiveness of language, a linguistic void, she believes, that keeps her anxiety deeply rooted in her. Her ambivalence is unambiguous.

4.3. Acceptance of the Impossible and Imperfection Empowers

However, Lahiri comes to terms with the realization that it is impossible to reach certain heights, and she refers to Carlos Fuentes and his interview. On reading that interview Lahiri comes to know about this sense of limitation, as she states, "It's extremely useful to know that there are certain heights one will never be able to reach" (p. 87). She accepts the fact that she will never be able to write like Cervantes, Dante, and Shakespeare. But she is happy that she writes and contends "I have to accept the impossibility of reaching the height that inspires me but at the same time pushes me into a corner" (p. 88). She refers to her continuous splitting as she still feels about her ambivalent position with her new language, Italian, as she notes, "The closer I get, the further away" (p. 89)

Italian remains elusive toward her. She makes a probing investigation and comes up with the finding “Because in fact a language isn’t a small lake but an ocean” (p. 89). Her relocation to Italy is a willful dislocation, a self-imposed banishment, for she wants to construct a new voice in a new language free from previous strings, as she asserts, “I think that studying Italian is a flight from the long clash in my life between English and Bengali. A rejection of both the mother and stepmother. An independent path” (p.141). She reconciles with the crippling rift between Bengali and American identities in her life. Wardle (2022) contends that this is a typical phenomenon for multilingual subjects who associate their traumatic events and relationships with their languages and find a kind of respite in their first, second, or third language (Wardle, 2022, p. 204). He then explores the writings of a group of multilingual psychoanalysts by quoting Mehler (2003) thus, “We soon recognized the deep significance of memory, repression, splitting, and denial in their interweaving with the different internalized languages, embedded in a complex network of multilingual associations and pathways, within the stratifications of personal identity” (p. 204). It is evident that the multilingual writings convey deeper significance as far as the writers’ emotional attachments are concerned.

However, with the Italian language Lahiri’s acceptance of her imperfection coupled with the idea of the impossibility of reaching a certain height, as advocated by Fuentes, paves the way for her “Creative impulse”. She asserts, “In the face of everything that seems to me unattainable, I marvel. Without a sense of marvel at things, without wonder, one can’t create anything” (p. 90). Lahiri’s claim is profound, for a creative writer must marvel with wonder at things around, and then new ideas spring forth in the creative mind to give birth to new things. She then pays a glorious tribute to the sense of imperfection, which in turn empowers her with creativity. She asserts, “Imperfection inspires invention, imagination, creativity...The more I feel imperfect, the more I feel alive” (p. 108). Lahiri realizes the transformative power of language with Italian, which keeps her spirit kicking and alive.

4.4. Lahiri’s Self Translation Identity and Her Thoughts on Translation

In the chapter titled “A Hairy Adolescent” Lahiri expresses her first act of translation of her own writing into English. While attending a literary festival she had to translate her writing on the title of the festival, she wrote it in Italian. And when she has to translate it into English, despite her firm decision on not retrieving English in her in any form or way, she on her husband’s persuasion

decides to translate the piece from Italian into English herself. While translating herself Lahiri experiences a new kind of feeling and realization, she relates, "When I write in Italian, I think in Italian, I think; to translate into English, I have to wake up another part of my brain" (p. 112). The act of translation demands a certain amount of concentration and emotion along with the nuances of the language. Now Lahiri encounters her new identity as a translator. She muses further on the issue of translation and provides her own thoughts and ideas on it. She asserts, "I think that translation is the most profound, most intimate way of reading. A translation is a wonderful, dynamic encounter between two languages, two texts, and two writers. It entails a doubling, a renewal" (p. 115). Lahiri emerges as a translator and more as a self-translator. Wilson (2020) asserts by quoting her 2012 essay, "A pivotal concept for translingual writers, who fashion narratives that try to encompass both the self that took shape in the native language and the re-located cultural-linguistic self, is that of self-translation" (p. 218). She further asserts on the issue of self-translation by quoting Bhabha (1997) thus:

It is a way of enacting 'being-in-difference' an ongoing, vacillating process of translation that iteratively crosses the border between external /internal, psychic /somatic. The processes of self-translation reflect the identity of someone who is in constant movements between cultures, split and doubled by multiple allegiances to different languages and places. (p. 218)

The process of self-translation is ongoing and navigates internal and external boundaries and realms. This process reflects the identity of someone who is moving between cultures, languages, and places, leading to a sense of division and multiplicity in their allegiances.

Two short stories titled "The Exchange" and "Half Light" are narratives in 'abstractions' included in the collection of reflections of the author. These two short stories are autobiographical, based on Lahiri's lived experiences, she relates, "*In Other Words* is different. Almost everything in it happened to me" (p.195). "Half Light" is based on a dream from Lahiri's experience, while "The Exchange" is a third-person narrative also from her lived experience. The story "The Exchange" has a lone lady protagonist who "was a woman, a translator, who wanted to be another person" (p. 69). She had friends, money, good health, and everything one wishes to have. But she is prone to thinking of her past life, which she is always missing and regretting, for she thinks "she was that another

version would have been better” (p. 69). She is so unhappy that at times she thinks of removing herself from the earth. As she loves the world much, she has not killed her yet. In order to live in solitude, she goes to a city where she knows no one. The setting of the town and everything with it are undefined. On a rainy day the lady translator happens to find a place where other ladies are getting in, and so does she. Having entered a big hall room, the translator comes to a room full of clothes of many kinds and sizes. All the women are choosing and changing clothes there. The translator is wearing a black sweater, which she loses and doesn't find again. After a long deliberation with the owner of the house, the translator takes another black sweater, which is not her own. She receives this one, comes to terms with herself, and makes her feel content, as “She didn't want to find the one had lost, she didn't miss it. Now when she put it on, she, too was another” (p. 78). It can be assumed that this translator is Lahiri herself, and the swapped sweater is her new language. In the “Afterward” Lahiri makes it clear, “...but the protagonist, slightly changed, is me” (p. 195). Bergantino (2022) asserts, “Consistently with the autobiographical nature of *In alter parole (In Other Words)* this chapter too derives from lived experiences, and, hence, can be read as a fictionalised projection of the author's experience, in this case with self-translation – or translation of the self” (p. 7). This short story paves the way for Lahiri to project her fictionalized version from a different perspective. Quoting Bergantino (2022) again, “This shift is also signalled by the passage from the first person adopted throughout *in alter parole (In Other Words)* to the third person as if the author were stepping back to look at her own life from a distance, that of transfiction” (p. 7). This unique technique of including a short story in the book provides Lahiri with the opportunity to look and examine herself from a distance, from another perspective. He goes on to comment, “When she puts the ‘new’ jumper on, she figures out that it has always been her own. This dynamic of loss and retrieval arguably mirrors the translatorial ideas of losing and compensating to generate something new” (p. 7). She has lost English to find Italian. Meanwhile, Ravizza (2019) makes another probing observation from yet another perspective while commenting on the short stories, as she posits, “Lahiri contextualises and comments the two short narratives, elaborating on the conditions in which they were first conceived, and on how their meaning progressively became clear to her in the course of her language-learning process” (p. 242). She further comments on Stuart Hall's ideas on cultural studies, she contends:

... the metaphors are aimed at making the position of enunciation clear so that the author is enabled to clarify "the critical points of deep significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather – since history has intervened – 'what we have become.'" (p. 242)

Lahiri's rich images and metaphors reflect her diverse ways of navigating her position, and identities in her new place with a new language and culture, which aligns with Stuart Hall's proposition of cultural study as discussed above.

4.5. The Triangle: Lahiri's Multilingual and Transcultural Belonging

The chapter titled "The Triangle" bears profound significance. Lahiri now meditates on her three languages: Bengali, English, and Italian. Lahiri's first language, her mother tongue Bengali is "handed down" (p. 137) to her by her parents, yet she loves speaking it with her parents until she goes to school at four. At the beginning of school, she feels "traumatized" (p. 137), and then she gradually learns and masters it. Bengali, then "took a backward step" (137). Amid this crisis, she recounts, "I realized that I had to speak both languages extremely well: the one to please my parents, the other to survive in America" (p. 138). Lahiri never feels at home with her split linguistic identity; she is desperately in need of a truce. The Italian language comes to her as a bridge between the two conflicting linguistic identities. She states, "The arrival of Italian, the third point on my linguistic journey, creates a triangle" (p. 141). It is this language she has been looking for since her coming of age, which serves, as she thinks about it "is a flight from the long clash in my life between English and Bengali. A rejection of both the mother and the stepmother. An independent path" (p. 141). Lahiri talks about the triangle in earnest and thinks of drawing it with pen and pencil, and draws a vivid picture of it with her words. She states:

If I were drawing it I would use a pen to draw the English side, a pencil for the other two. English remains the base, the most stable, fixed side. Bengali and Italian are both weaker, indiscreet. One inherited, the other adopted, desired. Bengali is my past, Italian, maybe, a new road into the future. My first language is my origin, and the last my goal. (p. 143)

Lahiri brings forth the three languages together almost in a tangible concreteness of an image with the power of her words and then examines her position with each of the languages. Lahiri, while examining her position

among the languages, expresses her belief that English, which is “permanent indelible” has a deeply rooted position in her, while the other two are weaker in essence as such might get erased in the future. The emphasis, however, is on her intention to be with all three languages that manifest her transcultural identities and she intends to bring about a fusion of all three languages and cultures together.

Wilson (2020) posits by referring to the triangle, “... illustrates not merely the act of distancing from her two main languages, but rather the interweaving of codes, signs and resources that is consistent with literary translanguaging seen as an overarching cultural phenomenon” (p. 217). Lahiri’s multilingual and transcultural positions are evoked, which surface multiplicity of identity through the fusion of all three languages that shape up her position and identity.

At this point, Stoican (2019) makes a very interesting and apt observation by making an analogy between Matisse and Lahiri, she states, “In analogy with Matisse’s metamorphosis, Lahiri’s transcultural transformation involves her ability to resemble her multiple facets. Like Matisse’s collage, her itinerary across cultures involves a rebellion against traditions that have shaped her” (p. 246). She argues Lahiri has no intention of denying her cultural root, rather she intends to “reshape her cultural duality into a triangle that links the Bengali source with the American and Italian” (p. 246). This issue of the fusion of cultures is crucial for understanding Lahiri’s constantly evolving self in a transnational setting.

Wilson (2020) adds further by quoting Chanady (2004), “When it comes to the choice of a writing language, the ‘necessity of free choice’ is key to the formation of translanguaging and transcultural identities” (p. 217). Lahiri’s navigation of a myriad of identities is an ongoing process of interaction with different points in time and space; her negotiation of those identities continues. Ravizza (2019) contends:

The triangle thus represents the possibility of connecting the three linguistic dimensions of her life in a way that allows free movement, border-crossing, and the traversing of other spaces. It stands for an identity which refuses to be static and monoglossic, but that is always ready to be redefined by new encounters with the Other.” (p. 242)

Lahiri tries to bridge the gap between languages by fusing them together.

4.6. The Wall and The Ultimate Shock

Throughout the book, Lahiri evokes an image of a wall in her life. The wall that remains between her and her parents stated and discussed above; is the wall she faces all the way to the navigation of her linguistic journey to Italy. This symbolic wall stands for obstacles that are both visible and invisible. It is a recurrent and profound metaphor for her evolving identity in various contexts of time and space. During her adolescent period at home and school, she grapples with trauma, ambivalence, and alienation as far as her linguistic identity is concerned. With time the crisis deepens, as she opines, "There is pain in every joy. In every violent passion a dark side" (p. 127). This philosophic statement or assertion reveals her internal sufferings, alienation, and ambivalence, and it points to her newfound happiness of learning to freely read and write in Italian under her rigorous project; this happiness is also tapped with harsh and unpleasant realities, which she cannot evade. A diaspora or an immigrant must encounter such unpleasant situations from the periphery in the dominant nation-state or culture.

Lahiri recounts such incidents of racial discrimination that take place both in America and Italy. Racial and cultural shocks remain recurrent themes for Lahiri, she recalls such incidents in America where she is a citizen and a recognized writer who speaks English as fluently as a native. Yet she encounters discrimination as she states, "In America, although I speak like a native, although I'm considered an American writer, I meet the same wall but of different reasons" (p. 132). She has to justify her name, color, and the reason behind writing in English. She adds, "Every so often, because of my name, and my appearance, someone asks me why I chose to write in English rather than in my native language" (p. 132). She further recalls the incident in Boston when she is running from the library without taking a flyer from an American trying to give her, the man growls out, "*What the fuck is your problem, can't you speak English*" (p. 132). Lahiri's identity is shattered; she has been "ghettoised and excluded from feeling...belong to a 'new country'" (McLeod, 2007, p. 208).

Safran (2011) makes an insightful observation of the contested diasporic community thus, "Members of diaspora communities are by turns mistreated by the host country as "strangers within the gates" or welcomed or exploited for the sake of the domestic and diplomatic interests of the host country" (p. 4)

These diasporic realities are harsh, and remain unavoidable for the diasporas.

In Rome after Christmas, she along with her family visited Paestum and they spent a couple of days in Salerno. There Lahiri goes to a shop to buy clothes for her kids. She has long interactions with the saleswoman in Italian; her husband, a Greek-American, has a few monosyllabic responses with her. Having chosen the clothes, they approach the cash register to make the payment. The saleswoman asks her where they are from. Lahiri explains their trip to Italy from New York to her. Then, to her utter despair and shock, the saleswoman utters, "But your husband must be Italian. He speaks perfectly, without any accent" (p. 128). Lahiri, astonished and shocked, finds no word to speak out. She cannot understand how her husband, who is not American and speaks weak Italian should be termed as an Italian. She realizes, with double shock and pain, that it is the color of her skin that wrongly and unjustly puts a demarcating line between her and others with white skin. Her eyes get submerged with tears. Lahiri relates, "Here is the border that I will never manage to cross. The wall that will remain forever between me and Italian, no matter how well I learn it. My physical appearance" (p. 128). This racial discrimination towards men and women of color is one of the typical phenomena in diasporic realities, in the metropolitan centers where people from Asia and Africa migrate and make a home, real or imagined. Walker (2021) observes, "All of Lahiri's characters come up against walls whether geographical, or physical, but for the author herself, the wall is the cultural, linguistic, and physical barrier to her desire to take on her "Italianness" as part of her identity" (p. 117). Lahiri as an Anglophone writer has written all her four successful books in English by depicting the characters' manifold predicaments that the immigrants, first-generation and second-generation Indian Americans encounter, and now she manifests her own predicament which readily subscribes to migrant writers' predicament in the dislocated western settings. It takes a grave turn when Lahiri states "My husband's name is Alberto... because of his looks, because of his name, everyone thinks he's Italian" (p. 131). Lahiri, on the other hand, must explain and justify her position, she states, "When I continue to speak Italian, they ask me: 'How is it that you speak Italian so well?'...No one asks my husband that question" (p.131). Walker (2021) adds, "The color of her skin means that she will always be perceived as irreducibly other in Italy, despite her affinity for the language, culture, and people" (p. 117). Lahiri is made 'Other' by the Italians and is not accepted by them.

Lahiri adds some more accounts of discrimination, stating, "But when I go into a shop like the one in Salerno, I find myself abruptly hurled back to shore. People who don't know me assume, looking at me, that I don't know Italian" (p. 130). Lahiri is not welcomed in Italy by its people. Lahiri bitterly contends, "They don't understand me because they don't want to understand me; they don't understand me because they don't want to listen to me, accept me" (p.130). Italians do not understand Lahiri as they do not listen to her, or worse, they do not have a mind to listen to her. Racial discrimination is explicit; it gets worse when Lahiri makes a more bitter observation, "They don't appreciate that I am working hard to speak their language; it irritates them" (p. 130). She further adds, "Sometimes when I speak Italian in Italy, I feel reprimanded, like a child who touches an object that shouldn't be touched. 'Don't touch our language,' ... 'It doesn't belong to you'" (pp. 130-31). Racial discrimination is at its peak; Lahiri's predicament is almost complete. Walker (2021) rightly observes, "This episode functions as a kind of demolition, erasing an entire history of painstaking language acquisition. Lahiri's immediate mental response is the desire to cry out" (p. 117). But she cannot cry out either; she goes derelict; she feels "out of place" to quote Said's (1999, p. 3) word. Diasporic tensions are explicit; she is never accepted by the Americans as an American nor is she accepted by the Italians as an Italian; she falls short of that measure to be accepted there in both countries. Bhabha (2006) asserts, "The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from mimicry – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to menace – a difference that is almost total but not quite" (p. 131). Lahiri is successful in asserting her position as "almost total" but "not quite"; she remains a diasporic subject positioned in the hybridity of the third space.

However, Jhumpa Lahiri has relocated to Italy outside of America by crossing "multi-locationality within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries" (Brah, 1996, p. 194), and has empowered herself from the hybrid space of "Third Space" which is "a space where hybridity is never a loss of identity, but rather a premise to a constructive intellectual dialogue" (Lutzoni, 2017, p. 117). This Italian language is her "Third Space", which empowers her to construct a new and independent identity and immerse herself completely in the Italian language and culture. With multilingual capacities in transnational settings, Lahiri creates and recreates her spaces and identities through languages and navigates her evolving identities and her self-expression to examine her position with others around her. With her creative impulse, she is

“Searching, through a work of art, for something that alters” (p. 154), and she replies to her question of why she is writing, asserting that she writes “To investigate the mysteries of existence. To tolerate me. To get closer to everything that outside of me” (p. 83). Lahiri unravels her intention behind writing and she expresses her philosophy of life in a profound meaning- she, the writer-thinker, intends to untangle the deep mysteries of life. She, like Salman Rushdie and many other diasporic migrant writers, is creating meanings of her existence through literary art and its manifestations from the liminal space of hybridity or the third space of enunciation. Monaco (2015) observes, “Diaspora space is therefore a site of translation, a space in formation, which reveals the ephemeral nature of boundaries and includes all human beings in that location” (p. 76). Lahiri negotiates her evolving identities, translates cultures, and creates spaces for an inclusive dialogue between cultures and nations. Ramraj (2000) observes, “Those tending towards assimilation are less concerned with sustaining ancestral ties than with coming to terms with their new environment and acquiring a new identity” (p. 217). In Lahiri’s case, however, it is manifested so far that she is not accepted in her new setting with her new language; her abiding sense of assimilation is “mocked and discriminated against” (McLeod, 2007, p. 208).

Although Lahiri continuously endeavors to reshape her identity following her relocation to Italy, negotiating a truce with the surrounding differences, she is well aware that there is no escape for her from these diasporic realities. The study argues and validates that Lahiri, as a member of the diasporic community, lacks a departure from the realities imposed by her diasporic identity and position; she is destined to remain within the in-between space of hybridity, experiencing alienation, ambivalence, and ambiguity.

5. Conclusion

Jhumpa Lahiri abandons her principal language English to pursue Italian. She learns the Italian language in a rigorous process of second language acquisition, becomes able to speak and write, and eventually comes up with her maiden autobiography *In Other Words*. Utilizing numerous images and metaphors, she vividly expresses her love for the Italian language, portraying both her challenges in learning it and evoking the Italian landscape and culture. She eventually negotiates her multinational and multilingual identities and cultures and examines her self-expression and the idea of herself in a probing investigation. Her evolving transformation marks the identity of a

learner, reader, writer, bilingual writer, translator, and self-translator. Her transformation takes on a permutation of multifaceted identities in the process. She accepts her limitations and imperfections as a writer in the Italian language; her acceptance of limitations empowers her and generates her creative impulse. Moving between nations and cultures she tries to bring about a fusion of all three languages, Bengali, English, and Italian together, which shape her conflicting identities, and she tries to bring about a reconciliation between them. This act of fusion also manifests her sense of inclusivity in the diversity of language and culture.

Lahiri's final synthesis on metamorphosis and change is a complex and nuanced reflection on the transformative power of language and cultural immersion. She reconciles her long-held conflicting linguistic selves between Bengali and English and relocates herself to Italy, which serves her as a "Third Space" and with this language, she constructs a new independent identity free from all her previous familial and societal strings. While negotiating her evolving multifaceted identities through language and by completely immersing herself in the Italian language and culture, she encounters the harsh and inevitable walls of discrimination, and she comes to realize that she remains a diasporic subject at the liminal space of hybridity and "Third Space" propounded by Homi K. Bhabha. Jhumpa Lahiri is never accepted by both the Americans and the Italians to be partly or wholly belonging to them; she like many other diasporic writers is destined to remain in the liminal space of hybridity or third space.

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