Chapter III
The Globalized Identity: What Lies Between

In *Orientalism*, Said approaches the discourse of identity with a view to observe the polarity enmeshed in the canonical narration of colonial experience and to challenge it on the grounds of homogeneity, universalism and ideological prejudice. He further establishes that the creation and iteration of the discourse about oriental identity is intended to justify the colonial authority of the occident and, on a more psychological level, to provide as an ‘other’ for the projection of the western ‘self’ in opposition to it.

Though Said succeeds in debunking the essentialist definitions of oriental identity, he fails to provide an alternate account for it. Challenging the authenticity of the occidental projection of oriental identity, Said also raises the question of an authentic (and essentialized) orient. He envisions an idyllic picture of a secular world in the Conclusion of his *Culture and Imperialism* [1993] where narcissistic antagonism of various cultures and communities is replaced with a sense of mutual harmony. He concludes his work by saying that ‘[n]o one today is purely one thing. . . . Imperialism consolidated the mixtures of cultures and identities on a global scale’ (*Culture and Imperialism* 407). But the issue of multiple identities is resolved to quite an extent by considering that they can be ‘consolidated’. Further in the hope of there being no desire to dominate the other in a heterogeneous society, Said euphorically envisions an absence of hierarchy. His analysis is an important starting point for the study of identity beyond binary oppositions but does not go very far in it.

Identity in post Saidean terms, is conceived as a site of constant definition and redefinition, between the politics of self and other. It is defined in a state of mixed affiliations. The colonial experience is logically viewed as one that mutates the traditional identity of the orient and the occident transforming them into a community of culture received from either of the factions. Homi Bhabha elaborates upon this mixedness of hybridity in *The Location of Culture*.
Although Bhabha furthers Said’s challenge to essentialist definitions of identity, there is a marked difference in his approach towards the issue. While Said’s analysis concerns the issue of discourse formation and the construct of oriental identity, Bhabha’s focus is not the authentic representation of oriental identity but rather identity in the culture of hybridization. Bhabha investigates the development of interstitial and overlapping identities and abstains from developing a theory of the authentic orient. In his study of hybridization, Bhabha magnifies his scope to include both the subject positions of the colonizer and the colonized. His work is not restricted to the study of the orient as in the case of Said. Finally, while Said’s attempt to question the discourse of polarity concludes in a euphoric resolution of conflict, Bhabha claims to accentuate the complexity of identification by observing fissures within the categories of self and other.

Bhabha’s area of focus can be divided into two phases. In the first, he emphasizes the concept of identity and its nuances in the colonial period, and in the second, asserts the collective existence of various communities of the world in a multicultural society (Moore-Gilbert 115). While the first phase marks a rather minute study of identity and its development with respect to colonialism, the second phase is devoted to the postmodernist study of postcolonial societies.

Closely referring to Bhabha’s The Location of Culture, this chapter is designed to critically analyze the first phase of his work. Focusing on Bhabha’s theory of ambivalence and identity defined in the interstitial space between the colonizer and the colonized, this chapter aims to elaborate the concept of identity with respect to the question of hybridity. Bhabha’s treatment of identity and his theory about hybridization are closely observed in the colonial context along with a critical analysis of the key terms of hybridization in postmodern terms. But before venturing into a critical analysis of Bhabha’s thesis on third-world identity, a brief introduction to The Location of Culture is pertinent.

In The Location of Culture, Bhabha challenges the definition of identity as a fixed state of being. He approaches it rather as a constant attempt towards being. To him, identity is not a static concept but an endless process. In order to understand the endlessness of this process, it is relevant to understand how the concepts of space, time and being are perceived in the context of postcolonial hybridization. The categories of space, time and being are not observed as linear terms of existence, but rather split in the hybrid plane. Bhabha approaches space as inclusive of that which lies beyond the borderlines and boundaries. In so doing, the spatial aspect of identity
offers not only that which is affiliated but also that which may be antagonistic (Introduction 1). With reference to time again, Bhabha observes that the present is not a ‘synchronic’ continuation of the past into the future because of its movements, parallels, conflicts, hierarchies and complexities (6). Finally, being is not restricted to presence but includes a constant reference and allusion to absence as a polar opposite. Further, if identity is construed as a constant attempt towards being, and not being as a final entity, every definition of identity includes its presence as well as lack of it (1). By so splitting the fundamental bases of identification, Bhabha approaches hybridization as an endless process of erupting differences and efforts to negotiate them. In so doing, his analysis is one that dissects identity further and elaborates the inclusion of the other in the self at various levels.

Bhabha’s work begins with a revised survey of the colonial discourse theory and a clarification on his perspective regarding theory. Countering the theory of binary identification systems with a theory of hybridization, Bhabha acknowledges the inevitable recourse to discourse in counter-theory. In a Foucauldian sense, he observes an ostensibly antagonistic relation between theory and counter theory. He suggests that the attempt to dismantle a discourse theory is generally associated with an urge to counter its authority and canonicity with a counter-authority and counter-canonicity. He identifies an ‘adversarial authority’ in counter-theory which is ironically directed against the structures of authority (‘Commitment to theory’ 33). But this authority is only a theoretical phenomenon and remains at a distance from the ‘truth’ or the real social apparatus. Bhabha urges us to think of political phenomena beyond the theoretical relations of causality/reaction (33-34). His views on theory and the lapse of reactionary conclusions place his ensuing discussion of identity in a space which is not defined by structured and received perceptions. He begins his analysis by disclaiming stratified conclusions ‘refusing to let his terms reify into static concepts . . . to avoid . . . repeating the same structures of power and knowledge’ (Young, White Mythologies 187).

In defining the subject of contemporaneity or the political truth of the day, he advocates a critical position neither left nor right, but one which can split the experiential being into both. The resultant is not a liberalist or secularist definition but rather one that splits the consciousness into here and there and then creates itself in the passage. With Bhabha, negotiation, translation, change, dialogue and exchange become important terms, all locating culture and identity in media res. He suggests that one must take an inclusive subject position in order to theorize the
concept of identity and culture. This is clearly reminiscent of Bakhtin’s definition of hybridization as

[A] mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor. (358)

Referring to Bakhtin, Bhabha emphasizes that identity must also be observed as ‘dialogic’ in nature. He questions the Manichean system of identification based on binary oppositions, and places the concept of identity out of the scope of closed definitions (‘Commitment to theory’ 44).

With respect to identity, Bhabha’s work exhibits certain elementary changes. He contradicts the idea of conceptualizing and categorizing identity in terms, polar or otherwise. He suggests that identity is constantly in a state of flux and never reaches a final closure. Identity is defined as a process and not as a final and determinable concept. He insists that identity is constantly under transformation and mutation by experience or influence. This implies that communities and identities have very little in common. To remember Said here,

No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are no more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. (Culture and Imperialism 407)

Identity based on communal or national categorization then, is only a way of beginning to penetrate into an individual’s being and loses importance very soon. In the colonial context, Bhabha begins by challenging the polar categories of self/other, white/black, occident/orient, west/east and so on, and suggests that these categories are dependent upon the stereotypical discursive categories which are of little importance. He rejects the system of binary codification and suggests that the colonial experience influences the culture and identity indelibly and causes them to be constantly differentiated.

Bhabha refutes the polar view of identification as negative. To him, the idea of identifying something by telling what it is not is clearly based on separatist opposition. He emphasizes the importance of locating culture and identity in interstitial space. He suggests that:
It is in the emergence of the interstices — the overlap and displacement of domains of difference — that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. (Introduction 2)

He defines identity and culture in the space of ‘negotiation’ rather than that of ‘negation’ (‘Commitment to theory’ 37). Identity as negotiation depicts a sense of being in process and also draws attention to the structure of iteration which informs political movements that attempt to articulate antagonistic and oppositional elements without the redemptive rationality of sublation or transcendence. (38)

Using Derrida’s concept of différence, Bhabha defines identity and culture as categories which are defined by constantly erupting differences which defer a final signification (‘Commitment to theory’ 38). Attempts towards identification are only attempts towards negotiating these differences and defining with them rather than against them. In this process of negotiation, identity becomes inclusive of the past and does not stand in discontinuity with it. Further, it does not reflect a ‘unitary or homogenous political object’ but one in ‘philosophical tension, or cross-reference with others’ (38).

Bhabha clarifies his approach towards identity as one which is beyond the antagonism of power struggles, inclusive of influences and depictive of continuous organic development in a state of conflict, rather than a finality of secular definition. His insistence upon ‘negotiation’ and ‘iteration’ shows his acknowledgement of the conflicting resonances in identity and culture and the necessity of enunciating them. He approaches this dynamic with a view to collaborate the various forms of enunciation and their scope to theorize the attempt to define identity (‘Commitment to theory’ 38).

Bhabha illustrates the hybridity that characterizes the ‘moment of political change’ (‘Commitment to theory’ 41). The moment of change does not mean opposition of the erstwhile political situation but rather a multifold graduation from it. Not only is change affiliated and negotiated, it is also multileveled. For example, the postcolonial demand for liberty comes from various groups – the colonized, the depressed classes, women – all at various yet negotiated levels of marginality. There is a common element between them, yet a difference. Bhabha identifies hybridity not as a homogenous state but as a space of essential heterogeneity. He
explains that ‘the principle of political negotiation’ (41) is an endless process in the attempt towards identity. He also stresses that there can be ‘no final discursive closure of theory’ (44).

While critiquing the theory of an essentialist opposition between the east and the west established and strengthened by the colonizers, Bhabha dwells upon the idea of difference and explains that to him difference is an integral part of social and cultural identification, especially in the colonial context. Difference signifies the lack of sameness and creates the ground for the play of identity influence. He insists that the concept of identity should be located in the arena of ‘[c]ultural difference — not cultural diversity’ (‘Commitment to theory’ 47). He differentiates:

Cultural diversity is an epistemological object — culture as an object of empirical knowledge — whereas cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture as “knowledgeable”, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification. If cultural diversity is a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics, or ethnology, cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity. (49-50)

Whereas cultural diversity is viewed as a state of being in its final signification, a closure, cultural difference is a process of signifying a difference — a process of enunciation. Bhabha continues:

The concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation. And it is the very authority of culture as knowledge of referential truth which is at issue in the concept and moment of enunciation. The enunciative process introduces a split in the performative present of cultural identification; a split between the traditional, culturalist demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference, and the necessary negation of the certitude in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as a practice of domination, and resistance. . . . The enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address. (‘Commitment to theory’ 50-51)

Once again, Bhabha stresses upon the terminology of process rather than one of final signification. Identity, to him, cannot be defined as a static balance between diverse cultural presences. Rather, it is to be defined as a continuous effort towards negotiating a balance
between endlessly developing differences. He places great emphasis on the interstices or the ‘Third Space’ between cultures as constitutive of the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. (‘Commitment to theory’ 55)

Bhabha’s analysis is resonant with Fanon’s ‘moving metaphor’ with which he suggests that identity in terms of negotiation and translation is defined in a state of flux and is representative of the mobility of the signifier. Referring to Fanon and his liberatory theory, Bhabha says that when people move in a liberatory phase, they cannot be urged to chase a mythological nationalism. Signs signify different things at different times and subsequently, a new signification is developed in the third space of enunciation — beyond the binaries (‘Commitment to theory’ 56). This illustration allows a greater play to the process of signification through space and time. The sign is populated with a variety of meanings across space and time. It is this hybridization of the sign, or the identity in postcolonial terms, which is brought to a hypothetical closure in the moment of enunciation — only to signify the difference (space) and deference (time) in its signification. For Bhabha identity is a metaphoric category which is defined in mobility and not in stagnation. His ideas echo in his essay ‘Culture’s In-Between’ where he defines the multicultural as a ‘floating signifier’

whose enigma lies less in itself than in the discursive uses of it to mark social processes where differentiation and condensation seem to happen almost synchronically. (55)

Further, Bhabha explains in an interview with Jonathan Rutherford that the reference to diversity causes the eruption of two main problems: first, within the ostensible claim of encouraging cultural diversity, there is also always an effort towards the ‘containment’ of it, which leads to a bound and restricted articulation of difference within limits per se; and second (and more harmful), within the secular multicultural societies that promote a sense of variety and diversity, there are strong examples of prevailing racism as ‘the universalism that paradoxically permits
Cultural diversity, like multiculturalism, is a containing term that . . . denies contestation and hybridity through its assertion of simple plurality and the existence of pre-given cultural forms. By contrast, cultural difference focuses on the ambivalence of cultural authority, the split between on the one hand the demand for a cultural tradition and community, and on the other the political need to negate this homogeneity in the negotiation of new cultural demands. (141-42)

Bhabha’s aversion to diversity comes from a belief in the illusionary secularism of the term and its finality which seems to restrict the eruption and articulation of difference.

The idea of recurring as well as erupting differences and their negotiation to reach a sense of identity, leads to two qualifications: that the differences are present in a possibly conflicting state, and that they are negotiable and can be brought to signify an identity. Based on these aspects of difference, Bhabha develops his argument about the ambivalence caused due to the colonial encounter. Bhabha notes in close reference to Fanon, that with the disintegration of native identity under the colonial gaze, the frame of reference used for identification by the colonizer also disintegrates. There is a two-way neurosis or alienation in the colonial encounter: both in the colonizer and the colonized. With Fanon, Bhabha asks for a break from the ‘Manichean delirium’ (‘Interrogating identity’ 62). The post-Enlightenment white man includes a shadow of the colonized. This dual/parallel existence leads to an ‘ambivalent identification’ (62). This is not the parallel existence of the self and the other, but rather the ‘otherness of Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity’ (63).

The duality in colonial identity is one of simultaneous attraction and repulsion. Taking his cue from Freud and Fanon, Bhabha arrives at his thesis that colonial identity is informed with an ambivalent behavior of simultaneous attraction and repulsion for the other. For any subject to define his identity there needs to be an ‘other’. This other is not simply an opposite of the self but an image on which the contrasting perception of the self can be superimposed. The lines of difference then reflect the individuating features and points of difference, based on which, identity can be suggested and re-marked (‘Interrogating identity’ 62). There is a desire for difference from the other, to individuate the self, and at the same time, there is a derision of that difference as a necessary prerequisite for identifying the self in a state of supremacy. Bhabha
develops his theory of ambivalence based on his observation that the self and the other do not exist in parallels but are inscribed within each other (63). He observes a perversity in the identification process which brands it as one informed by simultaneous attraction and repulsion.

The colonial relation reflects a complicated system of identification. The idea of black is a white creation and a basis for white identification. Identity is then split at both ends. 

[It]s split representations stage the division of body and soul that enacts the artifice of identity, a division that cuts across the fragile skin — black and white — of individual and social authority. (‘Interrogating identity’ 63)

This split comes not as a forced phenomenon, but rather emerges from a colonial desire. The existence of the self in the colonial context bears an indelible inclusion of the other. In such a scenario, identity cannot be enunciated but with reference to the other, which ‘permits the dream of inversion of roles’ (63). This ‘dream’ posits a strong sense of ambivalence in the system and execution of authority and hierarchy. Further, colonial desire and demand of authority cause the native to crave for the space of the master, maintaining his anger all the while. This state of ambivalence leads to the emergence of colonial otherness and liminality. It is the in-between spaces of colonial contact that are populated with liminal identity (‘Interrogating identity’ 64). To add to this ambivalence the process of enunciation of identity is never a simple affirmation of a given definition, but rather an attempt ‘to be for an Other’ (64). It is willingly inclusive of the other and also attempting to be away from it. In the effort to react to a disintegrating identity of otherness, identification becomes a process of returning to ‘an image of identity that bears the mark of splitting in the Other place from which it comes’ (64). The self’s reaction to the other is then, ‘not a simple rejection of difference but a recognition and a disavowal of an otherness that holds an attraction and poses a threat’ [my emphasis] (Childs and Williams 125).

To increase the anxiety of a splitting self, colonial contact also offers the anxiety of an invisible gaze. The colonized identity is an invisible identity, in that it is identified by a sense of negation and absence. The identity of the other is defined in a vacuumized state where it cannot be ascertained or acknowledged as it is defined in negatives/absences. The polar other then becomes impossible to identify and face. The identity of the self created for this invisible other, then, is an image which is inclusive of the stereotypical invisibility of the colonized. Bhabha’s other has its identity under erasure by the white gaze (‘Interrogating identity’ 68). But the
invisible other has a gaze too and looks on the white self. The anxiety of an invisible other gazing on the self creates the anxiety of identification — it leaves no room for self-affirmation.

Bhabha deals with the concept of image and stereotype in great detail. But the concept of image bears direct consequence with ambivalence as an attribute of identity. He explains that identity as image is both representative of sameness and difference. It is an attempt to ‘double’ the self in reproducing it as an image, but at the same time it is a strong reminder of the absence of the self in its being. The image, by virtue of being an image, is not the self but only a simultaneous effect of presence and absence. In the identification of what is present in terms of absence, identity becomes a phenomenon of doubling:

Its representation is always spatially split — it makes present something that is absent — and temporally deferred: it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition. (‘Interrogating identity’ 73)

This makes an image/representation always an attempt to double identity. It is never ‘mimetically . . . the appearance of a reality’ (‘Interrogating identity’ 73). Bhabha finds a basic flaw in the representation of image as identity. Image, by virtue of its being is always pretence of a presence: ‘a metonym, a sign of its absence and loss’ (73). Image can be understood only as suggestive of the identity, marking a beginning of the presence of identity. Bhabha suggests then, that the image in its partial mimesis is constantly an iteration of absence and presence, representation and repetition, making it only a ‘liminal reality’ (73). Bhabha locates identity in the liminal space where it is present but also absent. But this absence should not be seen in terms of loss. Rather it should be observed as a productive field of doubling (absence and presence), in which hybridized identities can be enunciated. The inscription of absence in identity as image is depictive of a sense of otherness, marking its ambivalence. Bhabha attempts to understand the ambivalence of presence and absence and that of desire and authority as the means to dismantle the duality in identity as simultaneously being ‘decentered’ and ‘consciously committed’ (‘Interrogating identity’ 93).

Bhabha elaborates that the stereotype is a paradoxical entity. He finds the representation of the stereotype at once stagnant in inherited perspective and mysterious, inscrutable and repetitive. He sets out not only to deconstruct the definitions of self and other, but also to understand the ‘productivity’ of ‘colonial power’ (‘The other question’ 96). He undertakes the
task of analyzing the other which is simultaneously the object of ‘desire and derision’. Through an analysis of this ambivalence of the other, the definitive boundaries in colonial discourse can be crossed over (96).

In discursive readings of the other, the other is not accessed but created. Bhabha notes that:

There is in such readings a will to power and knowledge that, in failing to specify the limit of their own field of enunciation and effectivity, proceeds to individualize otherness as the discovery of their own assumptions. (‘The other question’ 100)

Like Said, Bhabha believes that the orient is created out of the ‘unconscious positivity’ (latent) and the ‘stated knowledges’ (manifest) about it (‘The other question’ 102). Subsequently the colonizer, identified in contrast with the discursive construct of the colonized, also occupies the discursive space. In order to maintain the fundamental superiority of the colonizer, the stereotype of the ‘other’ must be maintained in its inferiority. Bhabha observes this stereotype in terms of fetishism. He elaborates using linguistic terminology:

Within discourse, the fetish represents the simultaneous play between metaphor as substitution (masking absence and difference) and metonymy (which contiguously registers the perceived lack). The fetish of stereotype gives access to an ‘identity’ which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it. (‘The other question’ 107)

There is simultaneously an acknowledgement of attraction and repulsion, difference as well as sameness:

The stereotype, then, as the primary point of justification in colonial discourse, for both colonizer and colonized, is the scene of familiar fantasy and defence — the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the difference of race, colour and culture. (‘The other question’ 107)

The anxiety caused due to this ambivalence marks the definitive point of fetishism. Basing his argument on the Freudian definition of fetishism in sexual contexts, Bhabha suggests that the stereotype causes a tension with the identity of the self in terms of its unfamiliar status, and at the
same time, reiterates the familiar or discursive definition of the other which is desired to be so. The simultaneous recognition and disavowal of the other as a fixed definition complicates the relation between the colonizer and the colonized in taking them from the space of absolute opposition to one of vacillating reactions of desire and derision. This space of ambivalence is the space of negotiation of identity in the postcolonial context. The colonizer and the colonized serve as a site of fantasy for each other in being symbolic of opportunity as well as threat. The excitement of the colonial experience, alongside its anxiety, creates this fetishism and allows for an excited as well as anxious self-definition in relation to each other.

Bhabha furthers the dynamism of this space of ambivalence by explaining that the simultaneous attraction and repulsion brings in the play of mimicry. Referring to Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, Bhabha notes how in the title ‘the disavowal of difference turns the colonial subject into a misfit — a grotesque mimicry or “doubling” that threatens to split the soul and whole, the undifferentiated skin of the ego’ (‘The other question’ 107). The stereotype is then seen as a site of ambivalence and doubling. It is not explored as a point of fixedness but rather as a point of fixation, where the self fixates with the other and iterates its identity based on the acknowledgement and disavowal of the other (108).

Referring to Lacan’s ‘mirror phase’, Bhabha suggests that the subject position is marked by the experience of the ‘Imaginary’. With reference to the development of a child’s psyche, Lacan notes that with the mirror stage, a child begins to identify himself and approach visual images with reference to a self-image. Any encounter of difference from his own self or the image of his self brings a sense of aggression owing to the narcissism of the image of the self. When the white man confronts the colonized, there is already a historical imaginary of the colonized to create the latter in the former’s experience. Establishing sameness with that imaginary, the white man experiences the colonized with narcissism and aggression:

It is precisely these two forms of identification that constitute the dominant strategy of colonial power exercised in relation to the stereotype which, as a form of multiple and contradictory belief, gives knowledge of difference and simultaneously disavows or masks it. Like the mirror phase “the fullness” of the stereotype — its image as identity — is always threatened by “lack”. (‘The other question’ 110)
Identity is created between the tropes of fetishism and the Imaginary on the one hand, and narcissism and aggression on the other. Bhabha explains that the stereotype requires repetitive encounter with the image in order to be fixed in the metaphor. Hence discourses are strengthened by repeated and static definitions, for example, African beastliness or Indian lethargy. But a repeated encounter of the stereotype is not the same every time. With an encounter of a stereotypical other that presents a difference with the imaginary of the self, there is bound to be a sense of narcissism and aggression. Further Lacan explains that the image one sees in the mirror marks a simultaneous sameness and alienation in the form of confrontation leading to aggression.

In the colonial context then, Bhabha locates the space of identification in the arena of fetishism and ambivalence between the self and the other, as well as within the self (‘The other question’ 109-110).

The devices of ‘metaphor’ and ‘metonymy’ are central to the discussion of the stereotype. The fetish-object, as a metaphor, masks the difference with the self and metonymically, shows the association with it too. The metaphoric sameness of the other and the narcissism of the self, coupled with an opposing metonymy of lack and aggression, constitutes the ambivalence of colonial relation (‘The other question’ 110). Bhabha’s ‘four-term strategy’ of studying the discourse of the other — metaphoric/ narcissistic and metonymic/ aggressive elaborates the creation of the discourse of cultural mumification and its fetishism. With Abbot’s views on repression, Bhabha explains that discrimination or colonial discourse is not based totally on disavowal or rejection. Repression of an object with total disavowal leads to its slipping into the unconscious, but in the colonial context, the object of repression is continually brought into consciousness, as a repetitive iteration of difference (113-4). This analysis of Bhabha becomes significant in two ways: firstly, it elaborates with greater clarity the conflict resulting from colonial interaction as opposed to earlier theories of vague mysteriousness and inexplicable affiliations; and secondly, despite offering a specific definition of the dynamic of colonial interaction, Bhabha maintains the deferral of final signification, through the use of terms like ‘trope’, ‘metaphor’ and ‘metonymy’.

The analysis of the stereotype as the site of ambivalence becomes important as a link between the colonizer and the colonized in their attempt towards identification. Bhabha almost echoes Said’s observation in the ‘Introduction’ to Orientalism, where he says that ‘the main thing for the European visitor was a European representation of the Orient and its contemporary fate’
He couples Said’s observation with Fanon’s theory about the significance of repetition in discourse. These stereotypes may be ‘told (compulsively) again and again afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time’ (‘The other question’ 111). With a repeated and close reference to Fanon, Bhabha identifies the presence of the ‘stereotype-as-suture’ (115). The stereotype is a layered and split identity. It has a stereotypical definition in terms of body, race and ancestors. Bhabha marks how the stereotype is split into multiple identities connected under an amoebic definition (115).

The area of ambivalence and stereotype is not restricted to movements of attraction and repulsion simply, but is complicated further. Ambivalence and fetish are defined as mutating into various proportions, so that there is a play within the conflict as well. As mentioned before, Bhabha extends the theory of ambivalence to the process of mimicry. The presence of a stereotype in discursive terms makes the identity of the other a fixed concept which is recreated for solidifying the colonial hierarchy. But Bhabha takes a different view of the colonial relation. He rejects the binary codification and lays emphasis on the creation of a race of colonized people appropriated to the culture and identity of the colonizer. For him, mimicry is a tool used by the colonizer to produce a class of ‘approved’ other (Childs and Williams 129).

Elaborating on the concept of colonial mimicry, Bhabha explains that it requires a sense of difference or ‘slippage’ and the construction of an ambivalent identity which is ‘almost the same but not quite’.

Mimicry emerges as a representation of difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which “appropriates” the Other as it visualizes power. (‘Of mimicry and man’ 122)

The process of mimicry is initiated by the ‘mission civilisatrice’ (Culture and Imperialism 33). It is manifested in Charles Grant’s vision of providing the colonial with ‘a sense of personal identity as we know it’ [my emphasis], and in Thomas Macaulay’s attempt to create ‘a class of interpreters’ between the colonizers and the colonized, who are ‘Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’ (qtd. in Bhabha, Location 124). Further, this metamorphosis also takes place in the Imaginary and is reiterated through literature to gain discursive authority. But mimicry in its ambivalence and slippage allows only a ‘partial
presence’ to the colonized peoples by providing them with the authority of identifying themselves with the colonial self but all the time maintaining a control on that authority by restricting them in a state of difference. This incomplete mimesis is purposed to land the identity of the other in the space between the binaries of white and black, occident and orient. While the colonizer attempts to create a class of ‘middle men’ among the colonized in an image of the self there is always a gap in the cloning process which restricts the colonized from being completely white. He always remains restricted by ‘some strategic limitation or prohibition within’ the authoritative discourse itself (123). Tracing the presence of these ‘mimic men’ through the works of Kipling, Forster, Orwell and Naipaul (125), Bhabha explains that colonial mimesis is an endeavour to purposely and emphatically land between the binaries of self and other, white and black, orient and occident. Bhabha insists that the urge to historicize through mimicry is ironically the urge to authenticate the imitation. The repetition of mimicry/ the duplication and multiplication of imitations by the colonial writers and their characters is an erratic attempt at authenticating ‘partial representations’ (126).

Contrary to Fanon, who approaches mimicry as a manifestation of colonial narcissism used to exhibit power (hence as an imposition of identity on the colonized), and Césaire, who calls it a sort of camouflage, Bhabha sees it as a menacing concept. He elucidates that:

The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. . . . [It is] a partial vision of the colonizer’s presence; a gaze of otherness, that shares the acuity of the genealogical gaze which, as Foucault describes it, liberates marginal elements and shatters the unity of man’s being through which he extends his sovereignty. . . . [T]he look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and “partial” representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence. (‘Of mimicry and man’ 126-7)

The menace of mimicry is not depictive of an opposition or tension between the colonizer and the colonized. It is a factor of colonial identity. It is a play of mimicry whereby identity of the mimicking colonized splits into dual and simultaneous existence. This existence is always tending to an identity and is characterized by first, an acknowledgement of the presence of the colonizer and the colonized; secondly, an essential disturbance of the polarity in identity that served as the basis of colonial discourse; thirdly, a redistribution of the authority of
representation; fourthly, the creation and validation of a counter-gaze from the colonized to the colonizer; and finally, a disruption of the discursive notions about the colonial, causing a state of partial knowledge, and rendering the authority of representation to no one in absolute terms. The partial availability of authority to the colonized allows for the dismantling of the discursive constructs of colonial identity. This suspension of identity discourse leads to a partial/incomplete cognizance of identity.

To Bhabha, mimicry is a ‘metonymy of presence’. With Lacan, he believes that mimicry is similar to camouflage, as it does not repress difference but rather presents it metonymically (128). While Cézaire also defines mimicry as camouflage, his definition focuses on the element of similarity. Mimicry undoubtedly is an attempt towards making similar, but it does not refer to making the same. Mimicry only presents the threat of replacing the original, but always falls short of becoming the original. Bhabha places identity in the space between the polar categories and necessitates their suspension in the magnetic field of constant attraction and repulsion. Identity is affected by the influencing polarities and is constantly attracted to the other, but is essentially different from it too. Bhabha’s approach towards identity is one which places it in the space between the self and the other and necessitates that it be maintained in the space between and not be identified with any one absolutely. There is similarity but not exact duplication. It is this element of being ‘almost the same but not quite/white’ (‘Of mimicry and man’ 128), that Bhabha focuses on. Where Cézaire defines mimicry as a camouflage meant to repress difference, Lacan and Bhabha see camouflage as a form of resemblance that ‘differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically’ (128). Bhabha defines mimicry not as a convergence or harmonic mélange but rather as a resemblance, necessarily not complete and still posing the threat of becoming the object itself. This identity represented through mimicry is ironically authorized by the process of colonial objectification. By this colonial objectification of mimic identities, or the ‘identity effects’ (130), the menacing authority of mimicry is established which poses a threat to the absolute colonial authority. The power to represent shifts partly to the resemblance and causes a menace in that split. The narcissistic authority of colonial rule now splits and returns from the other side as a menace (131).

From mimicry, Bhabha shifts to the ambivalence in civility in colonial rule. He finds an ambivalence in the approach of the colonizer towards the colonized in being ‘father and oppressor, just and unjust, moderate and rapacious’ (Macaulay, Warren Hastings 21). This
reveals a split in the identity of the colonizer as well as the colonized owing to the simultaneity in their civility.

What threatens the authority of the colonial command is the ambivalence of its address – father and oppressor or, alternatively, the ruled and the reviled – which will not be resolved in a dialectical play of power. (Bhabha, ‘Sly civility’ 138)

Further:

[B]oth colonizer and colonized are in a process of miscognition where each point of identification is always a partial and double repetition of the otherness of the self – democrat and despot, individual and servant, native and child. (‘Sly civility’ 138-9)

As the concept of authority is ambivalent, the self includes the other. In this scenario of ambivalence then, with the colonizer and the colonized being ‘less than one and double’ (‘Sly civility’ 139), the authority of the colonizer is challenged because its premise of civility is challenged. Similarly, the subservience of the colonized is also transformed to a sly civility as he is not only a thankful beneficiary, but also an exploited victim. The civility of the colonizer displays the ‘paranoia of power; a desire for “authorization” in the face of a process of cultural differentiation’ (142), and that of the native displays a sense of hatred repressed only because of lack of authority. This hatred along with the colonizer’s authority leads to the development of the ‘litigious, lying native’ (143).

The ambivalence of power meets the difference of the other with the will to be completely acquainted. The ambivalence of authority makes this will oscillate between the desire for love as well as power. In the repeated encounter of difference and inaccessibility of meaning comes the paranoia of hatred which is returned along the ambivalent lines of authority. The anxiety of simultaneously being father and oppressor splits the code of civility and creates a paranoid system of surveillance constantly dreading the native and his existence but still probing him. With this analysis, Bhabha brings the concept of colonial identity into the space of conflict and negotiation, as opposed to the discursive resolution of polar identification. Identity acquires a state where it is affiliated to no category completely, but is resonating between two ends.
Further, when the signs of colonial authority, that is, the English language and western culture are imparted to the colonized, they derive an aberrant signification and a repeated encounter with these mutated signs leads to a disruption of authority.

The colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference. It is a disjunction produced within the act of enunciation as a specifically colonial articulation of those two disproportionate sites of colonial discourse and power: the colonial scene as the invention of historicity, mastery, mimesis or as the “other scene” of displacement, fantasy, psychic defense and an “open” textuality. (‘Signs’ 153)

The simultaneous encounter of the discursive authority and its transformed signification subverts its claims to absolute power. The encounter with these mutated conclusions forces the colonizer into retrospection and revision, often resulting in a deviation from the erstwhile received discursive perceptions. It is in retrospect that Marlow’s presumptions of colonial superiority are decoded through the African experience and he observes the ‘horror’ (Conrad, The Heart of Darkness 106). It is apparent then, that the colonial experience carries within it the ability to dismantle its foundational discourses. Referring to Derrida’s Dissemination, Bhabha observes ambivalence in the re-reading of colonial authority:

Whenever any writing both marks and goes over its mark with an undecidable stroke... [this] double mark escapes the pertinence or authority of truth: it does not overturn it but rather inscribes it within its play as one of its functions or parts.

(qtd. in Bhabha, ‘Signs’ 154)

Subsequently then:

Resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the “content” of another culture, as a difference once perceived. It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the deferential relations of colonial power – hierarchy, normalization, marginalization and so forth. (‘Signs’ 157)

Bhabha observes that colonial execution of power and authority is based on the acknowledgment of difference. The rulers represent the colonized metonymically, ironically not by sameness but
by difference. In the act of discrimination, therefore, one finds not a sense of repression of otherness but rather an articulation of it as ‘something different – a mutation, a hybrid’ (‘Signs’ 159). The other here is a hybrid as he is educated in the colonial religion, language and code of civility.

It is such a partial and double force that is more than the mimetic but less than the symbolic, that disturbs the visibility of the colonial presence and makes the recognition of its authority problematic. (‘Signs’ 159)

Bhabha defines hybridity as

the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal. . . . Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but re implicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory – or . . . a negative transparency. (‘Signs’ 159-160)

The terms of vagueness about the identity of colonial objects arise not because of an inability on the part of the colonizer to arrive at an understanding but rather owing to a mutation of the original power function.

With the example of the reception of the Bible in India, Bhabha observes that when the book is offered to the natives in an Indian language they accept it partially. They accept the knowledge and its authority as the word of god but reject the English/ British/white connection with it. This baffles the power-knowledge function of the book on one hand and allows the Indians to interpret the book in their own way on the other. So they accept Christianity partially – ‘we are willing to be baptized, but we will never take the Sacrament’ – and reject the white connection with the ‘Word of God’ (‘Signs’ 171). The book is appropriated as per Indian sensibilities and a new meaning/identity is imparted to it. The establishment of white authority through the authority of the book is challenged and the created mimetic version doubles it but reduces its power. It is the creation of less than one and double.
Hybridity for the colonizer begins when the symbol of authority of colonialism is challenged as a sign which signifies difference to the colonized. It develops in this state of ambivalence where the symbol is accepted with its authority but also challenged. It is not a resolution of differences between different cultures but their suspension. It does not stand for moving from the ‘real’ originary to a middle space of recognition. It is rather a splitting of categories which causes anxiety by displacing the authority of signification. It does not mean a simple mix but a partial presence, or a ‘metonymy of presence’ ('Signs' 164).

In a hybrid cultural scenario, authority loses its identity or predictability of presence. Authority, power and identity are then only metonymically present. In this metonymical, partial presence there is desire for recognition in terms of narcissistic authority. In the lack of recognizable authority, a mimicry/mockery of it arises. With Freud, Bhabha explains that with two different affiliations and belief systems, the ego is split into two psychical attitudes, and forms of knowledge, towards the external world. The first of these takes reality into consideration while the second replaces it with a product of desire. ('Signs' 164)

Further:

The hybrid object . . . retains the actual semblance of the authorititative symbol but revalues its presence . . . It is the power of this strange metonymy of presence to disturb the systematic (and systemic) construction of discriminatory knowledges that the cultural, once recognized as the medium of authority, becomes virtually unrecognizable. . . . The display of hybridity – its peculiar ‘replication’ – terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery. (‘Signs’ 164-5)

It is the threat of the hybrid that challenges and dismantles the constructs of the ‘self/other, inside/outside’ (165). By so doing, the hybrid sign signifies a sense of ‘less than one and double’ in being less than what its original signification was and double in its old and new interpretations (166).

Once the foundational discourses supporting the colonial programme are challenged, the constructs of polar identities are indelibly disputed. With the splitting of the codes of civility and the subsequent hybridization of identity, colonial authority is mimicked and in the process,
mocked. Hybridity in its existence baffles the foundational myths about colonialist authority and discourse. The absolute polarity of identity, the myths of universal and timeless oriental inferiority and occidental superiority, the ‘non-dialogic’ nature of colonial encounter and history — all are challenged by hybridity (‘Signs’ 165-166).

In the event of mimicking the colonizer, the colonized mock his authority and an encounter with the mocking/menacing native creates the anxiety of colonial experience. The culture or knowledge of the colonizer is not received in its intended form but rather in the social and cultural context of the colonized. The colonial desire for authority or power through knowledge is betrayed in its native reception. Identity as represented through colonial discourse is received to create challenging doubles causing the anxiety of hybridity. The factor of challenging doubles creates an inevitable paranoia in the colonizer, ‘and once more resistance, in the shape of an anxiety spread throughout authority, is built into the application of colonial power’ (Childs and Williams 137).

This split identity, which is less than one and double, can be articulated only through silence. Articulation, by definition suggests closure of signification and the split identity can only be enunciated by a deferral of signification. Silence on the other hand, imparts a non-sense and defers meaning. Bhabha discusses the concept of signification of identity through cultural relativism and suggests that the problem of cultural signification/definition arises from the fact that it wrongly presumes that cultures are essentially diverse and that cultural relativism is a war between originally ‘holistic cultures’ (‘Articulating’ 179). Cultural signification is misconstrued as suspension of cultural difference to arrive at a so-called authentic account.

Bhabha places the culture of hybridity in the ‘colonial signifier – neither one nor the other’ (‘Articulating’ 182). This placing of identity ‘split[s] the difference between the binary oppositions or polarity through which we think cultural difference’ (183). But signification is deferred ever more by the eliminatory approach of *neither-nor*, which fails to signify what identity is. But simultaneously in this space of defining by what it is not, identity is in the space of cultural performance of ‘cross-reference’ (183). This furthers the discussion of Bhabha’s ideas on the silences and significations “being” and “not being” simultaneously.

From the hybrid space then, nation provides as a metaphor for the collective imagination of the migrated populace (‘DissemiNation’ 200). Bhabha locates culture in a mixed web of mythology, history, ideology, hybridity and many other influences, and explains that it is too
In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation*.

(‘DissemiNation’ 209)

The traditional and historical accounts of a nation and its culture which create finite boundaries for it (pedagogic) and their narration within the contemporaneous space (performative) together create a representation of the nation, and subsequently identity, which is defined on the borderlines of experience. Bhabha defines the pedagogical as the historical and traditional self-definition of the people. The performative dissociates the image from the binaries of self and other:

In place of the polarity of a pre-figurative self-generating nation ‘in-itself’ and extrinsic other nations, the performative introduces a temporality of the in-between. (‘DissemiNation’ 212)

The pedagogic notion of a nation as a homogenous entity is split by the performative that introduces heterogeneity within the nation. The borderlines, margins and liminalities within the nation reflect the ‘dissemination’ (‘DissemiNation’ 212). This split structure of the nation within itself suggests the absence of one authoritative ideology. With reference to Said, Bhabha emphasizes the hermeneutic of ‘worldliness’ as a critical endeavour. Raymond Williams’ concept of ‘residual’ and ‘emergent’ also becomes important here. Bhabha locates culture in the space of the residual and emergent effects and calls for a shrewd observation of the process of signification (213). He finds counter-narratives as extremely important in bringing the totalizing boundaries of imagined and essentialist nations under erasure (213):

Once the liminality of the nation-space is established, and its signifying difference is turned from the boundary ‘outside’ to its finitude ‘within’, the threat of cultural difference is no longer a problem of ‘other’ people. It becomes the question of otherness of the people-as-one’ (‘DissemiNation’ 215).
Liminality of culture or a nation is to be realized in its contemporaneity in order to challenge the imagined finitude of the nation and to identify the difference within:

The liminality of the people – their double-inscription as pedagogical objects and performative subjects – demands a ‘true’ narrative that is disavowed in the discourse of historicism. (‘DissemiNation’ 217)

Referring to Kristeva, Bhabha suggests that the boundaries of a nation are faced simultaneously with the pedagogical element of ‘historical sedimentation’ and the performative of the lack of identity in the signification process (‘DissemiNation’ 219). The ambivalence of signification of identity is caused by this ‘double writing’ (221). This liminality of identity which turns the difference from outside to within is the foundation of hybridization. Identity falls under the double writing of the pedagogic and the performative which causes its ambivalence of signification (221). However, the pedagogic and the performative are not to be misconstrued as oppositional to each other, but rather as complementary with reference to the study of identity. Bhabha studies the concept of culture as an entity under constant redefinition. He focuses on the idea of the nation and the challenges it faces from the double impact of the pedagogic and performative, to disseminate the construct of national signification and thereby challenge polar constructs of identity.

Within the transnational influence of culture (due to colonization, migration, diaspora) the ‘semblance and similitude’ of cultural symbols and their articulation; and the ‘natural[ized]’ ideas of nation, peoples and communities undergo a complex translation (‘The postcolonial’ 247). Bhabha calls for a ‘hybrid location of cultural value – the transnational as the translational’ to understand the concept of culture and identity (248). He finds a similar critical urge in other theorists, ‘to articulate the deferential (Jameson), contrapuntal (Said), interruptive (Spivak) historicities of race, gender, class, nation within a growing transnational culture’ (250). Bhabha’s concept of rewriting identity seemingly stems from the Derridean theory of ‘double writing’ which leads to the ‘irruptive emergence of a new “concept”, a concept that can no longer be and never could be, included in the previous regime’ (qtd. in Hall, Introduction 2). Further,

[i]identity is such a concept — operating ‘under erasure’ in the interval between reversal and emergence; an idea which cannot be thought in the old way. . . .
(Hall, Introduction 2)
Bhabha proposes that matters of culture and identity must be treated vis-à-vis the displacement caused due to postcolonial interaction and influence. Beyond the spatio-cultural boundaries of the colonizer and the colonized, postcolonial encounter gives rise to identity and culture that is constantly moving away from the absolute categories of orient and occident. The enunciation of identity in terms of its performance is fundamentally important in signification. Bhabha asks for an active/performative stance to identity rather than a passive/pedagogic repetition of it, so as to provide a counter-narrative for the inversion of discursive authority and ‘envisag[e] emergent cultural identities’ (‘The postcolonial’ 257).

Bhabha suggests that the absence of final signification does not mean no signification, but rather allows for the play of it. He brings the ambivalence into a productive phase similar to Derrida’s idea of ‘suplementarity’:

[A] not-dialectical middle, a structure of jointed predication, which cannot itself be comprehended by the predicates it distributes. . . . Not that this ability . . . shows a lack of power; rather this inability is constitutive of the very possibility of the logic of identity. (qtd. in Bhabha, ‘The postcolonial’ 258)

He insists that identity must not be forced to a final signification, but should always be tending to it — always in a state of ‘contingency’ (‘The postcolonial’ 267). Referring to the Indian Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, Bhabha explains the play of signification within the context of individual cultures as a productive phenomenon. The symbolic significance of the British sipahi uniform on the Indian soldier, the greased cartridges as a western propaganda, the circulating chapatti and its multiple meanings, all convey a hybrid signification, arbitrary in nature. The violence of mid-nineteenth century is depictive of the uncertainty of meaning. It is depictive of binarism in being anti-western, and hybridity in being a sepoy mutiny portraying rebellion as well as orderliness (‘By Bread Alone’ 296). The hybrid identity of the rebellious soldier is the result of a lack of final signification. This lack however is not a lack of power but rather a menace which threatens the order of polar signification:

The margin of hybridity, where cultural differences ‘contingently’ and conflictually touch, becomes the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experience. It resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups. . . . [T]he
political psychosis of panic constitutes the boundary of cultural hybridity across which the Mutiny is fought. (‘By bread’ 296)

These hyphenated identities defined in a state of contingency can always be something else. Difference, in social terms, becomes something different from the polarities of one/other. It is ‘something else besides in-between’ (‘How newness’ 313). The otherness of hyphenated identities locates their performative agency in a ‘future – that emerges in between the claims of the past and the needs of the present’ (313).

Differences in culture and power are constituted through the social conditions of enunciation: the temporal caesure: which is also the historically transformative moment, when a lagged space opens up in-between the intersubjective ‘reality of signs . . . deprived of subjectivity’ and the historical development of the subject in the order of social symbols. (Conclusion 346-7)

Bhabha further suggests that the attempt to racially identify a community is to make the error of universalizing within a ‘homogenous empty time’ (Conclusion 358). Bhabha attempts to write culture in a way that goes beyond the binaries and becomes reflective of a movement. That ‘projective past’ as he calls it, refers to the approach towards the present as a constant development of the past. In this sense of continuity, the past is always being made and the lag that he emphasizes in the creation and enunciation of the past and the present gives the space for this creation. He calls for a greater transformation than the acknowledgement of difference, one that allows for us to live ‘in other times and different spaces, both human and historical’ (Conclusion 367).

Identity then necessarily becomes a process of tending to signification, but never reaching it entirely. Bhabha’s concluding phrase of identity being ‘both human and historical’ posits in it the past as well as the executing present. The unusual bringing together of the historical and the human vividly describes Bhabha’s conception of identity as constitutive of the pedagogic traces of the past and the influences of the present affiliations and performances in an organic attempt to being (Conclusion 367). Bhabha’s attempts towards locating culture and identity emphasize the significance of bringing together the traditional past and the differentiating present into a state of negotiation. Within the space of hybridity, Bhabha attempts
Bhabha’s analysis of identity and culture in the space of hybridization undoubtedly marks a revolutionary leap from the Manichean system of homogenized branding that Said dealt with. The polarity that characterized identification in the colonial context was challenged by Said, but rather inconclusively. Though Bhabha achieves a ground breaking success in the field of postcolonial theory, his attempt to define identity in the interstitial space can be criticized on various bases.

His work begins with underscoring the importance of Derrida and Foucault in the area of identity politics. His dependence upon Foucauldian theory puts him on a similar ground as Said, but his insistence upon studying Foucault with reference to Derrida, and then Freud, takes him on a different and much more complicated tangent. David Huddart notes how Bhabha begins his argument about discourse mechanism with reference to ‘iteration’ and ‘statement’ in Derridean and Foucauldian terms respectively. The term ‘statement’ refers to the received beliefs about the other and ‘iteration’ refers to the continuous repetition of this statement to grant solidity to it. Bhabha explains that the discourse about orientalism was created by the iteration of the inherited beliefs about the orient. In a theoretical sense then, the idea of multiplicity and hybridity can also be granted currency through iteration. Further, every time identity or culture is articulated, it tends to aberate from the earlier statement and creates new meanings. Bhabha emphasizes the importance of this variability of the statement of identity by repeated articulation of it (Huddart 16-18). By bringing together Derrida and Foucault, Bhabha marks a shift from the static approach to identity as an unchanging discourse that Said was concerned with. The idea of mutability of identity explains the historical development of revolutions against colonialism and the unquestionable evolution of identity from binary stratification to hybridity.

Bhabha suggests that ‘enunciation’ is central to the understanding of identity and culture (‘Interrogating identity’ 50). In line with Derrida, he suggests that it is in the enunciation of identity and culture that the static categories of discourse are dismantled and the process of identification by difference is realized. Being defined as an approximation in the interstices, identity is not a state of being, but an attempt to being. Identity is not defined in terms of either-or, but rather in terms of ‘neither-nor’ (‘Articulating’ 182). Bhabha locates the postcolonial identity in the space that lies between the self and the other. In this space of interstices, identity is
defined by difference from the polar ends and owing to the continuous slippage in its location, its final definition is continually deferred. In his 1968 essay ‘Differance’, Derrida observes about language that:

[T]he substitution of the sign for the thing itself is both secondary and provisional: secondary due to an original and lost presence from which the sign thus derives; provisional as concerns this final and missing presence toward which the sign in this sense is a movement of mediation. (9)

Bhabha employs the theory of ‘provisional secondariness’ to the location of culture and identity and states that in the ceaseless process of identification, representation marks a moment of pause which provides a ‘provisional’ hint of identity through its doubling or imitation, making identity a ‘secondar[y]’ likeness of the subject; ‘almost the same, but not quite’ (‘Of mimicry and man’ 122). Identity by differance is only suggestive and never finally signifying. Further it is explained that identity and culture are not absolute terms and are constantly being constructed on the experiential plane. Bhabha applies the Derridean theory of ‘traces’ (‘Differance’ 12) on his study of identity and suggests that identity reflects the traces of the past tradition, the impact of colonial interaction and the influence of the other. Bhabha deconstructs the discourse of final and essentialist identities and brings the terms under constant writing and rewriting. This necessitates that identity be approached not as an absolutely reflective sign but be recognized in its slippage, and read between the lines.

But in his dependence on the Derridean school of thought, Bhabha repeats its errors. One of the main points of criticism levelled against deconstructive reading can be applied to Bhabha too. M. H. Abrams points out in his essay ‘The Deconstructive Angel’ that deconstructionists tend to be overly sceptical of the signification process and develop a system of reading too much between the lines, making all meaning contestable (246), as if the sole purpose of language were to signify its other. The same is apparent in the excessive ambiguity and incommensurability of identity in Bhabha’s theory of hybridity. Identity is characterized by an endless indeterminacy and is placed in a constant state of flux where no signification is possible. Though one is made to wonder that if no signification is possible for identity, how are the social and cultural hierarchies created and how do they function within this fluctuating apparatus? Bhabha seems to repeat the euphoric error of imagining an absence of ‘transcendentalism’ and ‘sublation’ in a state of
hybridity (38), that Said makes in his conclusion to Culture and Imperialism with secularism and a belief that in a total acceptance of difference, there would be no attempt to rule the other (407-8).

Further, in identifying by a sense of difference, Bhabha creates a binary opposition between presence and difference. The idea of a presence necessitates some state of stability from which difference can be marked. In his study of identity, Jonathan Rutherford observes that the discursive systems of knowledge are logocentric in nature as they privilege a central object of reference against which the marginal other is defined. Rutherford defines logocentrism as a system of knowledge that ‘rel[ies] upon some originating moment of truth or immanence, from which . . . [a] hierarchy of meaning springs’. It is a ‘dependence upon a guarantee of meaning that transcends signification’ (‘A Place Called Home’ 21). Antony Easthope observes that Derrida, and then Bhabha, treat presence as a ‘spatial identity’ in reference to which difference can be marked (344-345). The deconstructive moment of hybridity then brings back the theoretical irony of creating a logocentric system of identifying vis-à-vis a standard. Contradictory to this apparent fallacy, Bhabha, in his opposition to essential systems of knowledge refuses to define presence in stable terms, which raises two main problems: if presence is in fact uncertain, what are we marking difference from? And otherwise, if presence is granted any form of stability, the ghost of polar identification is exhumed once again in the form of an essential presence versus an essential difference.

Further, Bhabha seems to privilege difference over presence. In his repeated preference to the interstices as the appropriate location of identity and culture, Bhabha sounds like a spokesperson of the space between. He ‘invites us to try and live in difference, in a state of pure hybridity’ (Easthope 345). His steadfast inclination for the interstitial space and hybridity reflects his preference for difference over presence. This essential penchant after hybridity and difference raises the question of branding difference as a necessity. Further with a shifting presence to mark difference from, Bhabha’s invitation likens to an endless dislocation of identity and culture; a ‘state of psychosis’ in Easthope’s terms (345).

Bhabha places postcolonial identity in the interstitial space where it vacillates between the influences of the colonizer and the colonized. This identity is suspended in the space between, in a magnetic field, under the impact of simultaneous attraction and repulsion from both ends. This ambivalence towards the other is explained through the terms of psychoanalysis that
Bhabha depends upon for his study of identity. With a psychoanalytic reading of Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, Bhabha grounds his theory of ambivalence and mimicry on the Freudian and Lacanian models of fetish and camouflage respectively. Though Bhabha marks a revolutionary development in the treatment of postcolonial identity politics by including a psychoanalytic reading of the forces of response and resistance to the discourse machinery, his dependence upon psychoanalysis poses some incongruities. Bhabha begins with psychoanalysis as an aid to exploring identity politics, but very soon begins to emphasize it beyond bounds. One can almost wonder if Bhabha uses it as an analogy or supporting example or as a vital foundation for colonial relations (Childs and Williams 143).

Bhabha’s sweeping dependence upon psychoanalysis draws attention to his surprisingly unquestioning belief in psychoanalytic theory (Moore-Gilbert 141). To add to it, his application of psychoanalysis as a general and universal explanation for colonial relations suggests some rather simplifying assumptions. In his adamant repetition of psychoanalytic criticism to identity politics, he puts together the categories of the colonizer and the colonized together as the colonial subject (Childs and Williams 145; Moore-Gilbert 148-149; Young, *White Mythologies* 192). This marks a shift from Fanon’s application of psychoanalysis to colonial relations as explained in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon relies upon psychoanalysis to analyze colonial relations, but his analysis is strictly concerned with the psychodynamics of the interaction between the colonizer and the colonized within the political and historical colonial episode. Bhabha, on the other hand, refuses to define the colonizer and colonized in terms of self and other and insists upon defining them as ambivalent entities in the interstitial space. He subjects them to psychoanalytical observation irrespective of their political, social and historical place in the colonial power relation. In so doing, he harmonizes the colonizer and the colonized in a state of euphoric equality (even if it is characterized by being in a state of equal disorientation). In Said, Bhabha himself had criticized an attempt to theoretically simplify colonial power relations between the colonizer and the colonized (‘Difference’ 200). But here he seems to resolve the difference between the colonizer and the colonized altogether, which he ostensibly claimed to complicate. Further, his attempt to bring together the colonizer and the colonized in a unified subject puts his application of psychoanalysis to colonial relations in a contextual question. His psychoanalytic treatment of identity seems to be too general to be placed in the colonial context (Young, *White Mythologies* 192).
In a Foucauldian manner, Bhabha begins his analysis of colonial politics with reference to the dichotomy of power and knowledge and their execution as discourse. But almost immediately, he takes a Freudian tangent when he suggests that the Foucauldian system of establishing power through surveillance in colonial contexts is not characterized by fixity, but by fetishism. With the tropes of metaphor and metonymy, he makes an aberration from the Foucauldian premise of coupling surveillance with fixity. He accepts surveillance, but attaches fetishism to it. With this, Bhabha explains the development of narcissism and aggression in identity politics (Young, *White Mythologies* 184-5).

But Bhabha’s careful resistance to focusing centrally on colonial politics and his insistent reference to self and other outside the colonial hierarchy, suggest that his theory of fetishism is not depictive of his colonial perspective alone, but rather applicable in universal instances of othering (Childs and Williams 144). This makes fetishism a general corollary to attempts towards identity fixation and necessarily not restricted to colonial identity politics. Bhabha’s analysis becomes a general one as opposed to a specific study and cannot be applied to the understanding of colonial identity without skepticism. Fetishism may be a general behavioural phenomenon related to othering but within the matrix of colonial power struggle and its political and cultural attributes, it may derive deviant overtones, which have not been analyzed here. With a generalized view regarding fetishism then, the application of Bhabha’s theory in terms of colonial identity politics becomes an erroneous concept. Within colonial politics, the general theory of fetishism seems to collectivize all the colonizers and all the colonized in a homogenous category characterized by a simultaneous ‘fantasy and defence . . . recognition and disavowal’ (‘The other question’ 107). This collectivism points to a pervading sense of ambivalence in colonial interaction. This does not explain the extremist reactions to colonial encounter like the Swadeshi Movement of Mahatma Gandhi in India, or the Negritude Movement of Leopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire in Africa.

Bhabha’s excessive insistence upon the theory of fetishism brings him to the possible inadvertent error of homogenizing reactions of the self and the other. So he denies the hate and opposition syndrome of establishing polarity and homogenizing the colonizer and the colonized, but his model of fetishism homogenizes these groups again as being necessarily ambivalent. Hybridity becomes a branded necessity imposed upon postcolonial identity as a universal
phenomenon. This marks the beginning of a new essentialism in the global scenario, which is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Further, Bhabha observes colonial mimicry as a mode of resistance in that it allows the return of the colonizer’s gaze by the colonized. Bhabha uses the example of ‘human warfare’ and camouflage in a Lacanian sense to explain this agency granted by mimicry (‘Of mimicry and man’ 121). He also suggests that mimicry often turns into mockery when the grotesque ‘partial presence’ of the mimicked self becomes the means of countering the absolute authority of the colonizer. This is where the colonized other becomes the ‘unwitting and unconscious agent of menace’ according to Bhabha (Young, White Mythologies 188). But he fails to explain how the colonized other works as an unconscious agent in this form of resistance. He fails to describe it as “‘transitive” or “intransitive”, active or passive’ (Moore-Gilbert 133). Bhabha obscures the degree to which this resistance is conscious or unconscious on the part of the colonized. This is another example of his equivocal use of terminology and his insistence upon deference of any sort of final signified. His vague opinion about the consciousness of agency in the process of mimicry makes his theory insufficient to define identity politics. Further, if this agency is in fact unconscious, its ability to mobilize a ‘public’ resistance becomes dubitable (Moore-Gilbert 134). In such a case, mimicry as mockery may be threatening for the colonizer and his attempt to identify himself with respect to the mimicking/mocking other but would have little or no political effect.

With a strong reliance upon the Derridean theory of difference and the psychoanalytic observation of identity and discourse, Bhabha arrives at his theory of hybridization, where he locates identity in the interstitial space and suggests that identity in the postcolonial space is defined by endless negotiation and not by antagonistic negation of the Manichean system. But the interstitial space and its dynamics of identity pose very vital problems in the area of identity politics.

Firstly, the location of identity in the interstitial space is characterized by excessive incongruity. The interstitial space allows no final signification, and identity is suspended in a state of endless vacillation between the self and the other. For starters, the very reference to the self and the other as the polar ends of this interstitial space suggests Bhabha’s reliance on the binary opposition as a starting point. Where Said was criticized for questioning the credibility of the polar model, but not denying it absolutely, Bhabha seems to make the same allowance,
though it is incongruous with his own stand of there being no pure cultures (Childs and Williams 143; Young, White Mythologies 191). Moving further, the endless vacillation of identity between the self and the other indicates that identity cannot be determined in this space owing to the endless play in its signification. This brings us back to the observation made before that if identity is never finally signified, hierarchies or social/political power cannot be determined. But the fact that these powers do exist questions the credibility of this theory. Since hierarchies do exist, the interstitial space is perhaps not defined by a state of no final signification per se, but by levels of almost homogenously signified stages of hybridity. This homogeneity underlining hybridity is discussed in the next chapter.

Further, identity is defined in terms of neither-nor, as opposed to the antagonism of either-or, that surrounded the polar method of discursive identity fixation. Bhabha locates the culture of hybridity in the ‘colonial signifier — neither one nor other’ (‘Articulating’ 182). This placing of identity definitely refutes the binary system of locating cultural difference. But with the elimination of one and the other in this model, identity is deferred evermore. On a closer observation the ‘neither one nor other’ [my emphasis] model is ironically suggestive of ‘negation’, and not ‘negotiation’ which is Bhabha’s beginning premise for hybridization (‘Interrogating identity’ 37). In the neither-nor model, identity is necessarily defined as none of the polar entities and as something else. This goes contrary to Bhabha’s own idea of hybridity defining identities as ‘almost the same, but not quite’ (‘Of mimicry and man’ 128), and in the interstitial space between the categories of the self and the other. Nevertheless, the interstitial space has the tendency to define identity in liminality. This liminality or subalternity is defined by its location in a unique special condition which constitutes it as different from either alternative. Neither colonizer nor precolonial subject, the postcolonial subject exists as a unique hybrid which may, by definition, constitute the other two as well . . . marking an image of between-ness which does not construct a place or condition of its own other than the mobility, uncertainty and multiplicity of the fact of the constant border-crossing itself. (Grossberg 91-2)

On the plane of time and space, identity is to be framed as an amoebic category having in part from the unidentified, but existing categories of ‘one’ and the ‘other’ (which may/may not be polar attributes of each other). The space of identity would then be inscribed under time and
space and a third plane of experiential subjectivity, which would make identity an individuating phenomenon for each subject. This third plane is that of the unending play of signification of identity.

Graphically, identity can be sketched as:

Identity here is defined as an amoebic structure developed out of a fluctuating dependence upon the provisionally defined and unstable perceptions of the self and the other, on the intercepting planes of time, space and experiential subjectivity which can be openly referred to as the ‘third plane’.

Secondly, Bhabha seems to use the field of identity as a terrain for linguistic play of multiple meanings. Beginning with the structural codes of linguistic signification of ‘metaphor’ and ‘metonymy’ to define the ‘fetishism’ surrounding the play of colonial identification (Huddart 133).
Bhabha's view of translation is one which demands a sense of displacement or play of meaning within the linguistic sign. Enamoured with the linguistic play of meaning in the Saussurean and Derridean traditions, he seems to celebrate the possibilities of signification within the signs of culture and identity mischievously. Further in his conversation with Rutherford, Bhabha explains that 'negotiation' to him is not a state of 'compromise' but rather a state of 'subversion' and 'transgression' (216). He understands negotiation as a state of revolution, where the circumstances and their connected discourses are fused together to break free from in a gradual procedure of reform. He refers to 'political negotiation' as the negotiation he means to signify. Again, the sign is made to inhabit possibilities of varied significations necessarily apart from the general connotation of it.

The ambivalence that he gives to mimicry as a form of being 'almost the same, but not quite' ('Of mimicry and man' 128) has already been discussed in its capability of signifying an endless number of provisional hybrid identities. Bhabha splits the subject position too in housing the colonizer and the colonized, the self and the other in it simultaneously. Bhabha imparts a sense of overwhelming ambiguity to his work by stressing too far on the possibilities of meaning of all the signs used by him. So much so, that his work seems to lose certainty of signification:

[I]n the opacity of his discourse, his descriptions of slippage and ambivalence begin to seem equally applicable to the rhetoric of his own writings which produce the forms and structures of the material that he analyzes and thus simultaneously assert and undermine their own authoritative mode. (Young, White Mythologies 197)
Through all these attempts at displacing meaning and splitting signification, Bhabha seems to take identity into a state where the sign loses its linguistic/cultural signification and all meaning is floating and fleeting in ‘Terra Incognita’ as Stuart Hall calls it (‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’ 235).

Finally, Bhabha associates identity and culture with a constant flux and repeatedly appropriates his terminology to a sense of process and not one of finality. Subsequently, ‘diversity’ is replaced by ‘difference’ (‘Commitment to theory’ 47), ‘representation’ by ‘iteration’ (38), and finally ‘identity’ is substituted with ‘identification’ and ‘hybridity’ with ‘hybridization’. Bhabha emphasizes the importance of discussing ‘identification’ as a process, as opposed to ‘identity’ as a notion.

It is only by losing the sovereignty of the self that you can gain the freedom of a politics that is open to the non-assimilationist claims of cultural difference. (Rutherford, ‘The Third Space’ 213)

‘Identification’, as opposed to ‘identity’ suggests a sense of alienation with any solid illusions of the self, which can be productively harnessed towards the ‘construction of forms of solidarity’ (Rutherford, ‘The Third Space’ 213). Similarly, David Huddart observes in Bhabha a preference of ‘hybridization . . . hybridity’s ongoing process’ over ‘hybridity’. For him, ‘there are no cultures that come together leading to hybrid forms; instead, cultures are the consequence of attempts to still the flux of cultural hybridities’ (Huddart 7). Further, in Bhabha ‘negotiation’ (‘The Commitment to Theory’ 37) rather than antagonism, and ‘liminality’ (‘The other question’ 73) as opposed to purity and centered cultures become significant. His work is resonant with the mutability of identity and its negotiated metaphoric status. He attaches a strong sense of incommensurability with identity and his examples of ‘silences’ in colonial literature right from ‘the horror’ of Conrad’s Heart of Darkness to the inexplicable echoing ‘bourn ouboum’ in the Marabar caves of E. M. Forster’s A Passage to India reflect his aversion to the remotest definition of identity (175-6).

But while highlighting the silence, horror and ‘ouboum’ factor in hybridity, Bhabha fails to elaborate the element of signification in it. Hybridity is not a necessary/standard/universal phenomenon as Bhabha seems to suggest. He focuses on the process of identification and acculturation, but in his insistence upon the process, the concept of identity remains largely
unattended. His work seems to display a play in the title itself, where *The Location of Culture* [my emphasis] refers to ‘location’ as a central concept denoting the *process* of cultural development, and not as a means to delineate ‘culture’ or identity.

Nevertheless, Bhabha’s work is significant in substantiating the endless process of hybridization and the subsequent evolution of forms of identification. His work is central to all discussions of culture and identity in postcolonial global contexts. From the polar method of categorizing identity, the hybridized interstitial model of Bhabha definitely marks a sound development. It is with Bhabha’s work that the ‘contrapuntal reading’ that Said envisages finally becomes productive. Bhabha’s theory of situating identity and culture in the space between, and his theory of ambivalence in colonial politics grants a new meaning to colonial and postcolonial history. Identity is released from the pedagogic containing definitions and is allowed a free play in the performance of the received perceptions.

As we venture in the analysis of global cultures celebrating pastiche and variety, hybridity becomes an important phenomenon. Further, with the development of international trade and large-scale migration, identity becomes a matter of serious debate and deliberation. Bhabha’s theories and arguments about identity find extensive application in this era of capitalist globalism and are discussed in detail in the next chapter.
Notes

i. Ref: graph. It may be mentioned here, that the placing of the self in the positive and the other in the negative region respectively is not intended as an assertion of discourse. The definition of the other as a negative and opposite image of the self forms the foundation of polar identification system which forms the basis of the culture of imperialism as well as hybridization, to quite an extent. The discursive ideas of the self and the other are undisputed sources of strong influence on third-world identity and within their constructs they occupy essentially opposing positions, which have prompted such placing. The broken margins of the self and the other reflect their permeability and mutability.