

RESEARCH ARTICLE



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**Between two Worlds: Homi Bhabha's hybridity in Kavery Nambisan's  
*The Scent of Pepper***

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**Abstract**

Kavery Nambisan's *The Scent of Pepper* is a novel deeply intertwined with the culture and tradition of Kodagu people in Coorg and also explores how their practices change under the influence of British colonialism in India. This paper examines the text through Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity, which suggests that when two culture meets, they do not remain fixed or separate but blend to create a Third space of negotiation. This negotiation is illustrated several times throughout the novel. The marriage of Nanji and Balliyana illustrates how social rebellion and ritual continuity can coexist, while Chengappa's anglicization of his family's names is an example of mimicry an imperfect imitation that also questions colonial authority. Similar to this, Balliyana illustrates ambivalence since; despite receiving his education in England, he maintains his strong Coorg customs, demonstrating that Western influence could enhance but not eradicate native values. Nambisan presents hybridity as an active process of cultural negotiation as opposed to passive surrender through these figures. In order to demonstrate how cultural identity endures and flourishes in the luminal space between tradition and modernity, this study makes the case that Nambisan promotes hybridity as a source of resilience.

**Introduction**

Kavery Nambisan is an Indian writer and surgeon who was born in Kodagu, Karnataka and completed her medicine in Bangalore. She balanced both careers with outstanding dedication and her experience as a doctor strongly influenced her writing, which

often explores themes like culture, tradition, social change and identity. Nambisan has received awards such as the UNICEF- CBT Award and Tata Excellence Award for her contributions to Literature and Medicine. Her well-known novels are *Mango-colored Fish*, *A Town like Ours*, *The Scent of Pepper* and *The Hills of Angheri*. She also had written children's books

and a memoir, *A Luxury Called Health* which portrays her journey as a doctor.

Homi K. Bhabha, one of India's most influential postcolonial theorists, introduced the concept hybridity in his seminal work, *The Location of Culture*. The hybridity theory says that when two cultures meet, they won't be pure or stand separate. Instead they mix and create new identity, culture and customs which he mention it as Third Space where it became a place of change and resistance. It questions the concept that colonial and native culture remains different or that one that simply dominates others. According to Bhabha,

"Hybridity is 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" (*The Location of Culture* 112.)

*The Scent of Pepper* by Kavery Nambisan delves into the culture and tradition followed by the people of Coorg, which slowly changing under the influence of British rule and modern India. The story portrays Nanji and her family through three generations and detailing their daily rituals, feasts, ancestor worship and sense of warrior pride. However, the younger generation begins to challenge traditional norms like arranged marriage and clan loyalty as education and urban employment. They embrace contemporary lifestyles while maintain their Coorg heritage. This blending of the old and new is symbolized by the constant image of pepper, the spice that grows in Coorg but spreads everywhere. The novel illustrates how culture doesn't disappear but rather evolves into a hybrid of tradition and modernity, with

individual existing somewhere between the two worlds.

The novel demonstrates how the culture shifts rather than vanishes when new idea arrives. In *The Scent of Pepper*, the elder generations of Nanji's family stick on ancestral customs, clan loyalty and age old customs, whereas the younger generation look toward city jobs, western education and the freedom to choose their life partner. Even though they adopt modern culture, they values Coorg tradition. This reflects the Homi Bhabha's idea of hybridity.

### Rituals in the Third space

Nanji's marriage to Balliyana in *The Scent of Pepper* explores the concept of Third Space, where tradition and modern interchange to introduce a new cultural perspectives. Although Kodava culture was progressive in its treatment of women, it strictly enforced clan borders and looked down of widow remarriage. Meanwhile, Balliyana, a western educated Veterinary doctor denies all those norms and fall for Nanji despite her widowhood. This represents what Bhabha calls a space "The meaning and the symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (*The Location of Culture* 37). The marriage ceremony carefully maintained all the tradition like Nanji entered the Kaleyanda house in a boxcart and dropped a pinch of saffron rice into a copper pitcher as the house filled with the festival sound of kombu, kottu and dudi.

Even though the marriage is healthy, but it wasn't a good match because the members of hook-nosed clans did not marry each other. The coexistence of ceremonial loyalty and social defiance illustrates hybridity is an in-between space where customs and new ideas interact rather than replace one another.

### Mimicry and Cultural Negotiation

Chengappa Nachianda's decision of changing his wife and children name with

English sounding is considered as the best example of what Homi Bhabha calls mimicry. He renames his wife Muthamma into Pearlie and named his children as Shirley, Sally and Prince. Bhabha defines mimicry as "the sign of a double articulation; a compel strategy of reform, regulation and discipline with appropriates the other as it visualizes power" (The Location of Culture 86). Chengappa does not completely accept British culture or denied his Coorg heritage. Instead, he tries to showcase the world that his family is refined and polished. This mimicry almost same but not quite because it is strange to hear the village kid named Prince. It highlights the gap between outer appearance and inner reality. This type of imitation like taking British name, manner and dress shows how weak the colonial power is. This subdued combination of pride and imitation makes mimicry as a means of questioning authority rather than mindlessly following it, demonstrating the weakness of colonial power.

It not only an individual choice, but this habit of copying British has become a passion among Coorg society. During the Mercara week festival, the Coorg families dressed in western style clothes, they just imitate the English manners and rename their estate as Glenview or Windermere to look modern. Guests wore foreign shoes, hats and jackets. But the women feel insecure about wearing frocks with short sleeves or no sleeves because they think that it does not suit them and their strong black hair reveals their tradition, which they are unable to hide. This demonstrates what Homi Bhabha referred as mimicry, which is the imitation of the colonizer but not fully furnished. This shows that they try to balance the two culture rather than totally admiring British culture. This demonstrated that colonial power depended more on appearances then actual control.

#### **Chambavva's resistance and adaptation:**

Chambavva's decision to join the widows at Crystal palace means choosing her dignity on her own terms. Crystal palace is

considered as the symbol of wealth which is built by

Madaiah's great grandfather as a sign of family prestige. It had 28 rooms; colored glass windows and much of the British officer compare it with the famous glasshouse in London. But the meaning of the place changes slowly when widows began to live there.

Chambavva didn't become a silent or helpless figure in the Crystal Palace. She and other widows turned the British-styled mansion to Coorg warmth and resilience. They changed the colonial structure into a lively home for widows that was full of games and laughter rather than tears. By this we can understand that they had reshaped the British-influenced building according to their culture. This is exactly what Homi Bhabha calls hybridity, which means incorporating local meaning into the colonial power. Chambavva didn't reject or destroy the Crystal Palace; rather, she gave it a Coorg Heart. For her, adaptation meant resistance rather than weakness. She demonstrated that the colonized might live with dignity, happiness and freedom even within a building constructed on imperial ideals.

#### **Baliyanna's Ambivalent Identity:**

Baliyanna, a wealthy landowner and veterinary specialist, who completed his doctoral in England. In this novel, his character personifies the appealing combination of both Coorg tradition and Western culture. He gained discipline and respect from England but not deeper than his sense of belonging to Coorg. He doesn't have any feeling towards Western culture and also he worries about their people who were merely influenced by colonizers. Even though Clara Fox, who was an English woman, falls for him, he doesn't pay any attention to her. This ambivalence reflects Homi Bhabha's belief that colonial control is never absolute because education can strengthen indigenous identity rather than just civilize the community. Although he respects British efficiency, Baliyanna opposes its superiority and

uses what he has learned rather than dismantle his own community. Through his character Nambisan demonstrates how colonial influence results in a multi-layered, ambivalent selfhood that is almost the same but not quite.

### Conclusion

Kavery Nambisan's *The Scent of Pepper* demonstrates that traditional culture and custom won't vanish when two different cultures meet. Rather they combine and introduce something new. The novel illustrates how Coorg society adapted to British influence while maintaining its unique identity by utilizing Homi K. Bhabha's idea of Hybridity. The marriage of Nanji, the English name of Chengappa and his family, the vibrant Crystal Palace in Chambavva and Baliyanna's life demonstrate how colonial authority was unable to dominate people's life. The inhabitants of Coorg created a location where they can remain true to their traditions while embracing beneficial developments by combining both tradition and modern methods. This cultural fusion had become a sign of strength instead of weakness. Like Coorg pepper, this spreads everywhere while maintaining its distinct flavor, Nambisan's story serves as a reminder that identity may develop, evolve and remain strong simultaneously. It also shows that real progress occurs when societies adapt external influences to align with their own beliefs instead of mindlessly adopting them and emphasizes how education raised people to challenge unjust traditions without sacrificing their heritage.

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