

Displacement & its Consequences in the Postcolonial Literature: A Brief Discussion on Naipaul, Coetzee and Desai's Representation

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Abstract

*Displacement is a vibrant issue in the realm of postcolonial literature for its vast range of consequences on the post-colonial human psyche and their societies. Although the postcolonial subjects are struggling to deal with this displacement in reality, it also provides advantages to elevate the position. Displacement occurs into two stages. One is physical and another is psychological. The postcolonial writers focus on both stages in their writings to portray the struggle of postcolonial subjects. The physical or territorial displacement forces the people to move to the alien land and it results psychological alienation or displacement. This article will examine the postcolonial writers' representations and struggles to encounter this issue of displacement. Here, Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*, Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*—these three novels' (which are also portraying three locations' struggle and their consequences) different representations of displacement will be analyzed from various perspectives critically.*

Keywords: Displacement, dislocation, alienating human psyche, postcolonial writers' struggle and hybrid human being.

A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being: the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or 'voluntary' removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model.

—Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 9

In the postcolonial literature, displacement, which is also known as migration, has turned into one of the burning issues because of its intensive and prolonged psychological, physical and cultural impacts on human beings. The postcolonial writers from various corners of the world are vividly representing this issue of displacement in their writings. Although this displacement issue is noticed as a recent phenomenon, it has deep-rooted history with various layers of complex

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relation among power, position and human psyche. Displacement flourished at the time of European colonialism specially British colonialism. The colonial mechanism speeded up the displacement issue in massive scale. The two continents, Caribbean and Africa were largely affected by this displacement which was entitled as a process of slavery at that time. The colonized African people, who were captured from different territories, were forcefully transported as slaves or workers for plantations and other enterprises in Caribbean Islands, North American and South American countries. This physical displacement made African people suffer a lot and the consequences of this displacement were horrific in construction of deformed psyche. As a result in the Caribbean Islands, the Africans were transformed as the native Caribbeans. For being displaced both physically and psychologically, the Caribbeans were changed completely adopting the colonizers' language, religion, literature and law. Along with this intercontinental displacement, African people also faced displacement in their homelands and culture. The colonial power destroyed the African indigenous histories, literatures, clans, societal norms, languages, religions and African subjectivities. This colonial power displaced every aspect of African subjectivity using the colonial weapons like education, language, religion as well as literature and administrative power. This colonial system created a hybrid African subject who was black in mind but white in outside or in other words, African in mind but British in outside. These two-way displacements constructed a hybrid human being. Simultaneously, colonized Indian Subcontinent, which was a part of the British Empire, was also affected by this issue of displacement or migration. The cultural displacement was strongly evident and that was done by education, literature and administration. Indians were displaced more in psychology comparing to physical displacement. Still, by constructing the cities, education at institutions and administrative centre or offices, British colonizers influenced the natives to migrate from one place to another which also provoked enormous change in constructing a self and position of an Indian human being. Through education which was used to be the substitute of Christian religion and morality, the British colonizers created a dream like a world of so called white powerful cultural society for native colonized Indians and by this the colonizers founded a psychological displacement or gap. This psychological displacement created colonized hybrid human being who was colonized in mind but colonizer in physic or in other word, primitive in mind but modern in physic. So the colonial era promoted this displacement in both physical and psychological spheres of the Indians. Initially, victimized by this displacement Caribbeans, Africans and Indians started to protest against the colonial oppression using the colonizers' language and sense of nationalism with revolution was emerged. In the course of time, the colonized people earned their independences and turned into different nations. Even though, the post-independent countries achieved their freedom, they were struggling to cope with the traumas that they experienced in the colonial time. Along with the nations, the natives also got the same experience of traumas. The physical and psychological displacements and their consequences have been carried on still in the post-colonial time and the post-colonial writers are representing the experiences, struggles and future through their writings from both the individual perspective and the national perspective. Post-colonial writers have addressed and analyzed this issue of displacement from critical aspects and predicted its controversial consequences in their writings like novels, stories, poems, essays etc. specially. Among those writings, if we observe Indian origin Caribbean writer V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), South African White writer J. M. Coetzee's

Disgrace (1999) and Indian female writer Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), we will find how these three locations and their people are encountering the issue of displacement in the post-colonial societies. In this article, these three writers from three continents and their three previously mentioned novels will be scrutinized critically to understand the relation among the various kinds of displacements in post-colonial cultures and societies and their represented respective consequences.

Considering the background of colonial era, the postcolonial writers are struggling with an uncomfortable situation to tackle the issue of displacement in reality. Now the questions can be raised by asking – what is displacement? How does this displacement affect human beings? How are the postcolonial writers representing displacement in their writings? And what are the ways in which the postcolonial people are fighting the consequences of displacement? This article will further take attempts to find out the answers to all above questions by analyzing the three novels – *The Enigma of Arrival*, *Disgrace* and *The Inheritance of Loss* from three physical and psychological perspectives.

For being the former colonized people, the postcolonial (who are also peripheral) people including the writers have the desire to go and live in the center (which/who is the colonizer). Although the postcolonial people are free from the colonizers and colonizers' dominations, they follow Western (former colonizers) culture, ideology, education, language and lifestyle to transform them like the Westerns to enter that world. Apparently, these cause the psychological and physical displacement in the postcolonial societies. Inspired by the dream to be Westerner, the postcolonial people ignore their own culture. As a result, they gradually become detached from the native culture. Ultimately, they lose their own identity while running after the glittering power and superior position showed by the former colonizers. They want to take a new identity which rejects their inherited identity. This is how the postcolonial people are continuously dislocated. To define displacement, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin write in their book, *The Empire Writes Back* that –

A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being: the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place ... A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or 'voluntary' removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. (9)

It is important to look at what Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point out about the 'relationship between self and place'. Self and place are intermingled. The human subjectivity is constructed on the basis of its surrounding environment and place. If one is displaced, one's subjectivity becomes fragmented. It happens because the psychological development is linked with his lived

place. A peaceful relation grows between individual and place. But displacement interrupts that peace. It creates psychological disturbance that leads the human being into a violent world where violence produces the wars, killings, blood sheds, rapes and madness. Although displacement brings many disruptions in human psychologically as well physically, it has some positive aspects which are detected by the Indian origin Caribbean writer V. S. Naipaul. He shows the opportunities created for displacement in his autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival*.

The migration, within the British Empire, from India to Trinidad had given me the English language as my own, and a particular kind of education. This had partly seeded my wish to be a writer in a particular mode, and had committed me to the literary career I had been following in England for twenty years. (55)

Naipaul is grateful for the migration or displacement. He doesn't accuse the British Empire which compelled his forefather's family to move from India to Trinidad. He thinks because of this displacement he is able to receive the English language and education as his own. He finds the opportunity to go near the imperial power and position. And later those help him to become a renowned Caribbean English writer in the realm of postcolonial literature. Although he is displaced first physically from India to Trinidad and second culturally, he is further dislocated when he is attracted to England and goes there. In both cases, British colonization has a role to make him displaced. Interestingly, Naipaul feels an attraction for being a British citizen while he is taking education. Education makes him to see the world through the eyes of the English writers who established England as the land of wealth, civilization and discipline. Evidence further is found in *The Enigma of Arrival*:

The London I knew or imaginatively possessed was the London I had got from Dickens. It was Dickens – and his illustrators – who gave me the illusion of knowing the city. (144)

This passage indicates that Naipaul is culturally and ideologically displaced from his own native (which is also displaced) culture as well as ideology. The English writers like Dickens create an illusionary impression of England. The peripheral people, who go through English education, learning the English language, believe in that illusion. They like Naipaul want to be part of English culture and literature. Naipaul's desire to be like the British and how his illusions are washed away after he fulfils that desire, is revealed in the words below:

... I had dreamed of coming to England. But my life in England had been savourless, and much of it mean. I had taken to England all the rawness of my colonial's nerves, and those nerves had more or less remained, nerves which in the beginning were in a good part also the nerves of youth and inexperience, physical and sexual inadequacy, and of undeveloped talent. And just as once at home I had dreamed of being in England, so for years in

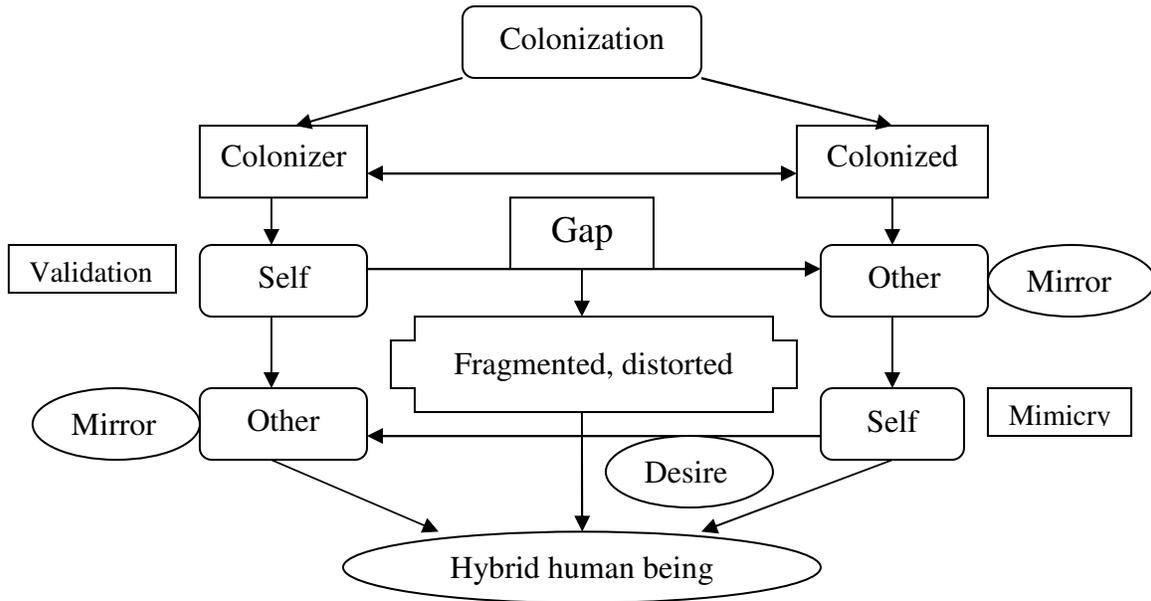
England I had dreamed of leaving England. I dismantle the life I had bit by bit established, and prepared to go. (110)

In *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul finds it difficult to settle down in England because of his realization about the importance of the undeniable past on which he comments 'I had given myself a past, and a romance of the past' (179), but he turns into a hybrid human being who roams around an 'in-between' domain between Trinidad as postcolonial Caribbean Island and England as the former colonizer country. It reminds us the concept of 'mirror image', which is discovered by the famous Indian postcolonial theorist critic Homi Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture*. It is true that Bhabha has constructed this concept from the colonial perspective but it is still appropriate for the postcolonial world where the postcolonial countries are dominated by the same colonizer's countries in different fashion through politics, ideology, education, social and economic, calling the postcolonial countries as 'Third world or under-developed countries'. In the 'mirror image' concept, Bhabha shows how the colonized people are psychologically subjugated and how the colonized human subjectivity is entrapped between the colonizer and the colonized positions. According to Bhabha, every colonized man desires to possess the power and position of the colonizer. He dreams about that by setting an imagined mirror in the place of the colonizer. He attempts to fulfil his imagination by learning the colonizer's language as well as going through the colonizer's educational system. He tries to imitate the British following the image of himself in the positioned mirror. His mimicry takes him ahead and helps him to reach near the colonizer's power and position. But reality does not permit the colonized subject to occupy the colonizer's power and position totally. Unfortunately, the colonized subject can neither achieve his desired colonizer's place nor he can retreat to his own previous colonized position because he knows two cultures, languages, environments, ideologies and identities. The two streams influence him. Though the colonizer's culture, language, ideology and identity are associated with power, the colonizer's world dominates the colonized lifestyle and thought process where the colonized world is marginalized. The colonized individual remains in the gap or in-between domain between the colonizer and the colonized. Bhabha says about the colonized in *The Location of Culture*:

It is true for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place. It is always in relation to the place of the Other that colonial desire is articulated: the phantasmic space of possession that no one subject can singly or fixedly occupy, and therefore permits the dream of the inversion of roles ... The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master's place while keeping his place in the slave's avenging anger It is not the colonialist Self or the colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness- the white man's artifice inscribed on the black man's body. (44-45)

The colonized psyche becomes displaced, alienated, isolated and psychologically distorted. The fragmented subjectivity creates hybrid human being. Bhabha points out that a hybrid being turns

into ‘otherness’ because the other is no more in his status. He is altered. If we look at the graphic image below, then the process will be more understandable.



Significantly, Bhabha discovers this concept by looking at the psychological relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and ultimate colonial outcome for analyzing the European colonization critically. But his concept can be implicated for observing the postcolonial world and at the same time the postcolonial subject which becomes hybrid not only the psychological displacement but also the physical dislocation. And here, V. S. Naipaul and the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* are the best examples of hybrid human being of colonial realm and postcolonial world.

Up to this discussion, we have seen how the displacement turns into the complicit opportunities for the postcolonial Caribbean people to enter the central powerhouse or England with psychological complexities between past and present identities and experiences. But if we move our concentration from Caribbean to African, it will be clearly visible how the desire to displace ‘the other’ creates violence. This intention is revealed in the South African writer J. M. Coetzee’s *The Disgrace*. In this novel, the apartheid in the postcolonial South Africa is portrayed. The action and reaction of the apartheid on the individuals are highlighted. The reason behind those is to eliminate the white’s domination and establish the black’s power. But to do that, black indigenous South African people force the white to leave the country. This force creates bi-folded displacements such as psychological and physical displacements. At the beginning of the European colonization in Africa, the native people are displaced both psychologically and physically by the white colonizers. This bi-folded displacement has destroyed African oral history

and literature, including culture, social values, discipline and notion of lifestyle and culture for many generations. On the other hand, the native South African black people press the white people to leave their place and power in post independence South Africa. The white people, who are children of colonizers and who have lived in that country for several generations, are unwilling to give up their homeland. Interestingly, many of the white people have gone to their mother country but some of the white people haven't escaped. They have stayed, accepting the new reality, although most of them are physically and mentally humiliated. In *The Disgrace*, we see that the protagonist Lucy represents the white South African young generation who doesn't want to leave their place and environment. Lucy doesn't want to be displaced. She has been willing to live in the place where she is living for many years. Having the opportunity to escape in the foreign country, she ignores that choice. She is sexually humiliated and raped by three men who are thought to be sent by her protector and manager Patrus to compel her to leave the land and country as well. She accepts that disgrace, thinking that she is only undergoing the suffering and torture that her white ancestors had done to these native Africans. She doesn't wish to be displaced even after learning of her insecure position and the threat of being murdered for her land and farm. She allows the domination of native countrymen like Petrus by marrying him and at the same time, by becoming pregnant from the rape. Here, the issue of displacement is intermingled with the tensed situation of apartheid in the conversation between Lucy and his father, David Lurie, in *The Disgrace*.

'No, you wouldn't. I am not blaming you, that is not the point. But it is something new you are talking about. Slavery. They want you for their slave.'

'Not slavery. Subjection. Subjugation.'

He shakes his head. 'It's too much, Lucy. Sell up. Sell the farm to Petrus and come away.'

'No.' (159)

Lucy refuses to leave her farm. After looking at Lucy, her father also goes back to her firm. He has lost his university job because of an allegation of sexual harassment. He goes to her daughter's farm for shelter and involves himself in that. Although he is an outsider in Lucy's farm, he also finds the pressure to go to exile. So it is evident that postcolonial displacement is a critical issue not only for the black Africans but also for the white Africans and how the Africans from both the sides are struggling to adjust with multi-dimensional displacement.

Similarly, we the readers see the effect of displacement in India in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. The novel portrays the contribution of colonization to displace the native population of Kalimpong and shows how that train of displacement is continued in the post independence India. It gives a clear description by picturing the process – how violence has taken place in a peaceful land, a Himalayan town at India by the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga, called Kalimpong, and how it turns into a land of conflict and horror from the land of heaven for the tourists and the outsiders. So peace is lost. It has been lost since the British colonial era. The British administrators and rich British people made bungalows in Kalimpong to enjoy the natural beauty and mental peace. But

to do that, they displaced the local people. In the British colonial time, the anger of local people was suppressed because the settlers were powerful colonizers. Unfortunately, the trend of setting up houses and bungalows hasn't stopped even in the postcolonial era. Now the elite Indians have settled down on that land with the expectation of peace and prosperity. It turns the local inhabitants into minority group in their own land. This displacement creates a communal dissatisfaction and introduces the sparks of communal tension as well as violent conflict. All of these are revealed in a linear attitude which indicates the effect of physical displacement and this anxiety of displacement is well-expressed in the words below:

In Kalimpong, high in the northeastern Himalayas where they lived—the retired judge and his cook, Sai, and Mutt—there was a report of new dissatisfaction in the hills, gathering insurgency, men and guns. It was the Indian—Nepalese this time, fed up with being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority. They wanted their own country, or at least their own state, in which to manage their own affairs. Here, where India blurred into Bhutan and Sikkim, and the army did pull-ups and push-ups, maintaining their tanks with khaki paint in case the Chinese grew hungry for more territory than Tibet, it had always been a messy map, The papers sounded resigned. A great amount of warring, betraying, bartering had occurred; between Nepal, England, Tibet, India, Sikkim, Bhutan; Darjeeling stolen from here, Kalimpong plucked from there—despite, ah, despite the mist charging down like a dragon, dissolving, undoing, making ridiculous the drawing of borders. (Desai 9)

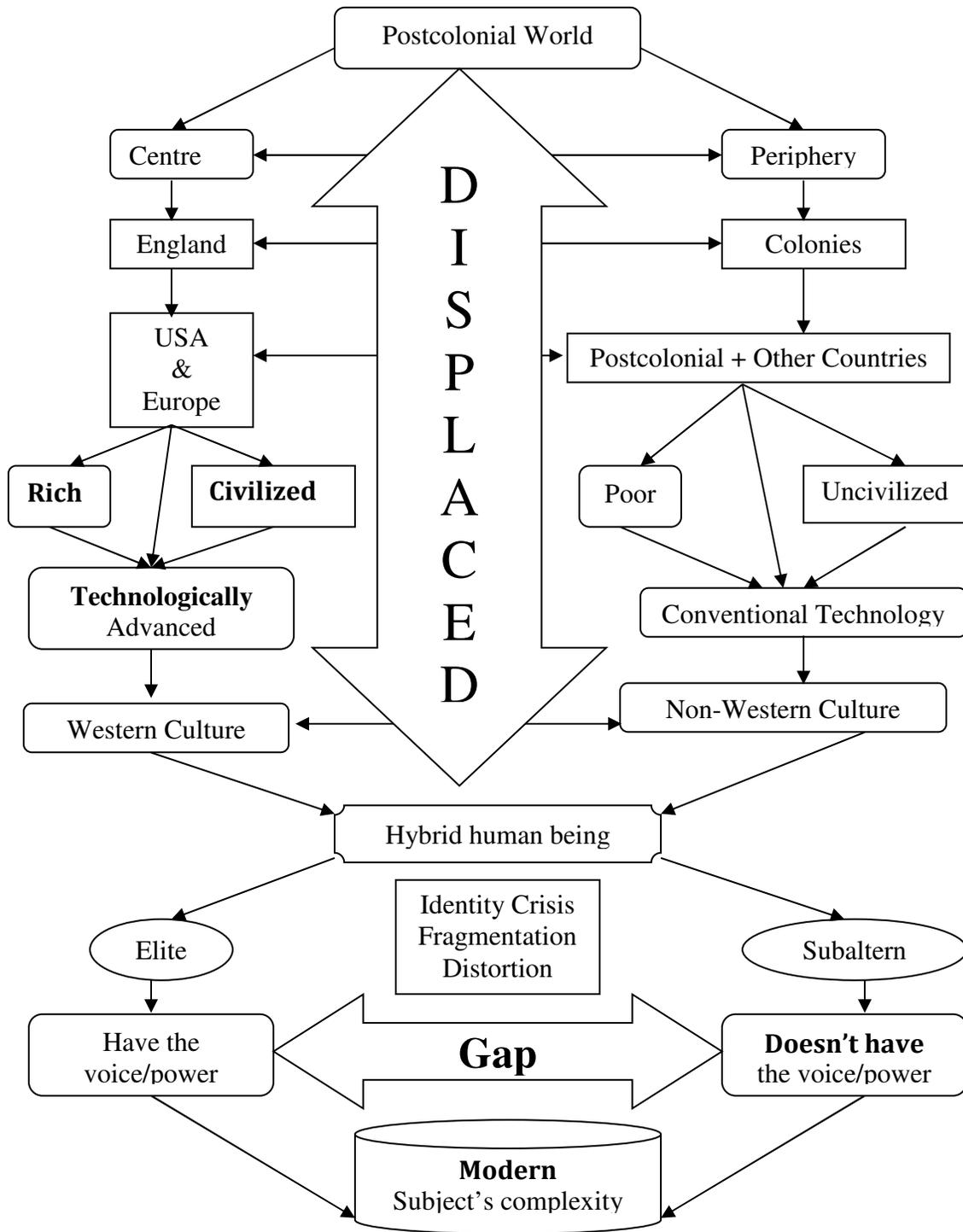
Kiran Desai portrays the characters and background of the novel in that restless mid 1980's Indian setting. Notably, the protagonists – the judge and her grand daughter Sai are from the elite group of Indians who are apparently not causing any harm to the local people. But they are also displaced willingly, influenced by British culture and ideology. The judge is passing his retired life with Sai after serving in the ICS both in the colonial and the postcolonial periods. With them, a cook lived. Ironically, his real name is not mentioned even a single time in the novel. He is from the lower class of India. But the cook is representing the subaltern class. He is a typical Indian with lots of dreams. On the other hand, his son Biju, who lives in New York, USA, symbolizes an emerging class of people in Indian society. Biju represents the new industrious and determined generation who goes willingly for migration or in other word displacement for hope to alter his fortune and elevate his status. Through Biju, the writer shows the miserable illegal immigrants in USA. Simultaneously his father's comment on Biju's coming back home gives the readers a critical thought on the twenty-first century's displacement which refers to the concept of international migration. "Stay there as long as you can," the cook had said. "Stay there. Make money. Don't come back here." (191). On the other hand, Gyan, a young educated and displaced Nepali Gurkha, is given a voice for exploring his and his community's views and thoughts. Although he is eager to elevate his social and economic position by getting an education, he fails to achieve that in the competitive globalized field. At the same time, for being a displaced

minority, he struggles to survive competing with the powerful majority. The unemployment problem and sense of oppression attract him to the agitating Nepali Gurkha rebels. He does not become a part of the armed resistance but he supports them psychologically and intellectually. His dissatisfaction in life conjures up an inner conflict that is revealed when he faces Sai. The conversation between Sai and Gyan (whose teacher-student relationship turns into romance but the communal and class distinction unstable their romantic time) turns into a small cultural battle.

“*Christmas!*” said Gyan. “You little fool!” Christmas had never bothered him before— Don’t you have any pride? Trying to be so Westernized. They don’t want you!!!! Go there and see if they will welcome you with open arms. You will be trying to clean their toilets and even then they won’t want you. (174)

At the same time, it has revealed those young, modern and Western educated hybrid Indians like the character Sai are really in a problematic situation because of their lack of communication as well as their restricted lifestyle which is partially outcast from the main stream of traditional Indian culture and lifestyle. The evidence is — ‘She (Sai) who could speak no language but English and pidgin Hindi, she who could not converse with anyone outside her tiny social stratum’ (176). So the three spectrums are represented by the judge, Sai as well as Gyan with Biju and the cook in the novel who are facing from psychological complication along with physical struggle and the reason is displacement.

If we look at the three books sequentially, we shall find that *The Enigma of Arrival* which was published in 1987, show the opportunities and benefits with concealed sadness of displacement in the background. The second novel, *Disgrace* was published in 1999. This novel also exhibits the displacement through the apartheid horror and experience of the South Africans. And the last novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* which was published after seven years of publication of *Disgrace* in 2006, indicates the modern displacement by displaying the society’s inner suppression on the marginal group of people and the sparks of rebellious resistance which portrays the struggle of subalterns for their existence. All the three novels deal with the displacement as one of the key issues. This displacement problem is inherited from the colonial past. The protagonists of the three novels suffer from displacement. They are hybrid human being because of their interaction between two cultures (native & UK/USA), but they go through self-contradiction. Although the displacement creates uncomfortable situation for the postcolonial people, they have to cope with that for their own survival. If we look at the graph below, we shall understand how the postcolonial modern subject is affected by displacement.



The figure describes two essential elements – centre and periphery of the postcolonial world. As we all know that there is constant conflict between centre and periphery because of intense desire to earn and possess power and position. The peripheral individuals and countries always want to take over the power and position of the centre. At the same time, centre also tries to keep its superior status intact. This conflictual situation has started from the British colonization where England was considered as the centre and its colonies were the periphery. Unfortunately, the ideology and perspective about the centre and periphery do not change in the postcolonial time. Those are continued and gradually the ideology spreads intensively among the postcolonial and other countries. Still now USA and Europe are thought to be the center. The distinction between the center and the periphery in the present day world is widened by the inequality of economy, knowledge and technology. As a result, the cultural division emerges in the relation between the two sides. A non-stop battle is going on where Western culture (culture of the center) dominates the non-Western cultures (cultures of periphery). From Bhabha's 'mirror image' concept, it is clearly understandable—why the periphery people are attracted to the centre. Ironically, when the postcolonial people attempt to enter to the centre, they face cultural and psychological displacements. These displacements create the distortion in the self of peripheral individual. The outcome of all is the hybrid human being. Interestingly, this displacement does not only entrap the postcolonial subject in world perspective but also problematic in inner societal structure. By following the Western culture, education and language, the postcolonial hybrid human beings draw a demarcation line among the people of the postcolonial countries. And that is the partition between elite and subaltern in the postcolonial societies. The elite group of the society has the power and position to speak or have voice. But the subalterns, who are the poor common people, do not have the voice or do not have the ability to compel the elite to listen to the subalterns. If those subalterns by any means can earn the power to speak out, they will not be treated as subalterns any longer. This displacement also impacts the postcolonial writers significantly and this idea of displacement is reflected in Indian postcolonial critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'

Here, a gap is there between the elite and the subaltern. Although the three novels, Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*, Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, show the elite groups as the displaced and suppressed 'Other' in the world perspective, there are lot of subaltern representatives who are doubly displaced by colonizers in the colonial era and elites in the postcolonial era in respective societies of the novels. A subdued tension between elite and subaltern is constantly creating a resonance in all three novels' background where the displaced people are threatening to conquer the power of powerful, for example, the author himself (as displaced peripheral subject) in *The Enigma of Arrival*, Lucy and Petrus in *Disgrace* and Gayan and the Nepali Gurkhas in *The Inheritance of Loss*. Although these three novels are representing three different postcolonial societies, the struggle for displacement is a continuous fight. Sometimes this displacement brings benefits to the postcolonial people and that is found in *The Enigma of Arrival*. At the same time, it makes many unwanted things happen which changes the life of the people and that we have observed in *Disgrace* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. Even being the victims of displacement the postcolonial writers are fighting against the consequences of this displacement issue. So the displacement in the postcolonial world is one of the significant elements which not only increases the complexity of the modern subject but also complicates societal power play.

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