



## Loneliness as a Postcolonial Condition: Alienation, Migration, and the Quest for Belonging in Desai's *Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny*

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### ABSTRACT

The paper grapples with the elements of migration, displacement, and belongings in the novel: *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* by Kiran Desai, through the lens of post colonial theory by Homi K Bhaba and Edward Said. Migration and displacement is an essential part in human existence, when human beings are forced to move away from their own culture, land and religions, they will feel absolutely helpless and disconnected from their real identity. This study, however analyzes this strange state of behaviorism in order to unveil the reality through analytical discussion, especially through post colonial lenses by Homi K Bhaba and Edward Said. Additionally, the study also examines that, the displacements and cultural dislocations are profound sources of loneliness; how the concept of home and loneliness fractures the identities and Isolation.

### 1. Introduction

This paper critically creates an account to indulge with the state of Post colonialism being a primary literary and cultural theory is a term that qualifies as such, which provides a readers with a deep analysis of the consequences of colonialism that are reflected by society and culture, and even individuals. It is rooted in the examination of the power relationships, representations and resistances generated whenever the colonial powers are subdued with the emphasis not being only on the formal end of empires but also the existing inequalities associated with the world and the cultural mixture as it is in the present world (Ashcroft et al., 2007). In essence, postcolonial theory study how the colonial history assisted in shaping identities, narratives and social order which normally led to a confusing set-up pitting the established cultures and enforced westernization. It denounces accepted historic accounts and gives voice to the oppressed and offers a model upon which to decipher the subtleties of cross cultural encounter and psychological influences.

The theory of hybridity and the theory of Diaspora developed by Homi K. Bhabha and the ideas of displacement and Edward Said are not the last methods to be applied to such texts as *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025) by Kiran Desai. Bhabha (1994) has made it clear that hybridity is not merely a blurry intercourse of cultures but a Third Space of expression where new identities are elicited out of collision and negotiation of the colonizer and the colonized cultures. It is a territory that is asserted

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to be ambivalent and resistant in creating new forms of cultures since they are neither entirely indigenous nor Western. The close theory, which is Diaspora theory, examines the experiences of peoples that have been dispersed out of the countries and how they remain relating to the motherland, assuming new forms, typically floating in between the different cultural attachments (Brah, 1996). Besides, the concept of displacement by Edward Said (1978) argues how individuals are extremely dislocated and alienated because they are displaced out of their local cultural and geographical circumstances. This may be displacement physical, emotional and intellectual on the account of which sense of self is broken, and the quest of belonging will always be in deferment. These overlapping concepts present a fine prism through which to analyze the psychological and cultural struggle embodied in the postcolonial narratives. In the literal analysis, in the postcolonial studies particularly, the ego concept may be conceived of as the sense of the self of an individual which may also be theoretical explanation of elucidating meaning by a pair opposed to one another. Such an approach tends to be associated with the interpretation of binary oppositions such as colonizer/colonized, East and West, tradition/modernity, belonging/alienation and how these oppositions define the identity of characters, narrative tension, and the theme development (Derrida, 1978). By looking at the way that ego interacts with these opposing forces we can deconstruct the complexity with which individuals internalize external forces, trade off between competing demands across culture and form their identities that are constructed in a world that was made postcolonial. Such a cynical art provides a chance to analyze the interior conflict and exterior social organization further and how identities of characters are nonetheless created and ruined in their interrelation with these extremes. Kiran Desai is a writer of India who gained fame in other parts of the world thanks to her Booker Prize -winning novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006).

Desai is known to be a writer of very complicated stories and to explore the effects of globalization in a certain depth and her work is defined as sensuous intensity as well as sensitive depiction of human feelings. Her most recent novel *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025), a shortlist in the Booker Prize, came almost twenty years after her last book, demonstrating her thoughtful and thoughtful style of narration. It begins at the turn of a millennium, approximately fifteen years after the action of *The Inheritance of Loss*, and this expansive novel covers a large geographical space, a large cast of characters, and a convoluted plot. It explores the permanence of cultural differences, the overwhelming presence of families, the social class and gender, the creativity, and the complicated issues of disintegration and violence of postcolonial. The story is an even mix of realistic observations and magic thinking, which requires and rewards a voracious reading.

Sonia Shah and Sunny Bhatia, the two main characters in *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025), are going through tremendous transformations, one trying to cope with the intricacies of their mixed-race identity and another with the deep-seated sense of loneliness. Sonia is a prospective author and stands in a very rich family of Delhi and is experiencing extreme depression in Vermont as a student and becomes an easy target of the machinated artist Ilan de Toorjen Foss. It evolves with her returning to India where she tries to escape out of this devastating entangling. New York journalist, Sunny is no exception as he is entangled in family commitments and corruptions which lead to the violence. The wall of cultural and personal barriers is already created by an awkward match-making attempt of their grandparents even during their first encounter.

### 1.1 Research Objectives

- To examine the manifestations of cultural hybridity, as theorized by Homi K. Bhabha, in the experiences and identities of Sonia and Sunny.
- To analyze the migration experiences of Sonia and Sunny through Edward Said's concept of displacement.

### 1.2 Research Questions

1. How does the hybrid cultural identity of Sonia and Sunny, as theorized by Homi K. Bhabha, manifest as a form of psychological alienation at various points in the novel?
2. How do the migration experiences of Sonia and Sunny illustrate Edward Said's concept of displacement?

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it contributes to the broader interpretation of postcolonial literature by examining the psychological and cultural consequences of migration, displacement, and the colonial past on contemporary identity formation. The study, using Homi K. Bhabha's idea of hybridity and Edward Said's idea of displacement, examines the novel *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025) in terms of the complexity of the individual's experience in negotiating multiple cultural identities as they move between transnational spaces.

The study illuminates some of the personal experiences of Sonia and Sunny, including issues of cultural alienation, psychological dislocation and ongoing longing for belonging. It also shows the complexity of migration as it can present emotional and psychological issues for people finding themselves caught between cultures and societies. In this sense, the study offers a

discussion of post-colonial literature that transcends the political and economic issues to examine the emotional aspects of migration, identity, loneliness and cultural dislocation.

Moreover, this work provides a focused interpretation of Desai's novel based on the theoretical views of Bhabha, and Said. It explores the characters' experiences in relation to the larger postcolonial themes of identity, cultural hybridity, displacement and finding a sense of home. The study can hence benefit postcolonial literature scholars, students of migration studies, cultural studies as well as diaspora studies.

Lastly, the study is text oriented and further enriches the current scholarship by analyzing Sonia's and Sunny's experiences, identities and relationships in *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025). Using the theoretical frameworks of Bhabha and Said, it aims to explore how loneliness and cultural dislocation can be described as a part of the postcolonial condition as represented in Desai's work.

## 2. Literature Review

A literature review provides the foundation for a research study by presenting, synthesizing, and critically evaluating existing scholarship relevant to the topic under investigation. It helps the researcher to recognise already known arguments, theory and method, and the lack of knowledge. Fink (2019) says that a literature review can be used to help put a study into perspective and to help build a sound theoretical and methodological framework. The literature review for the present study centres specifically on the postcolonial notions of hybridity, diaspora and displacement as well as the theoretical work of Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said. The following concepts are useful in analyzing the experiences of the two protagonists, Sonia and Sunny in Kiran Desai's novel, *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025).

### 2.1 Edward Said's Concept of Displacement

Edward Said's postcolonial thought provides an important framework for understanding the psychological and cultural consequences of migration and displacement. His path-breaking book *Orientalism* (1978) illustrates the construction of Orientalism through colonial systems of power and knowledge. In Said's case, the discourse of the colonies was not only a description of cultural difference, it also made distinctions between the colonizer and the colonized. Such differences persisted as after-colonial cultural identities.

Said's notion of displacement is not solely geographical; it's also existential. Displacement also can be a psychological and cultural feeling of being removed from a familiar tradition, community and sense of "home. Gentrification can thus create a feeling of homelessness for migrants even though they are not physically displaced. This displacement can lead to alienation, dismemberment of identity and an ongoing craving for a lost, remembered or imagined homeland (Said, 2000). This view is especially relevant for the lives of Sonia and Sunny, who live their lives in the context of movement across India and western cultural settings.

Sonia's emigration to the United States and her return to India can be interpreted in terms of Said's concept of displacement as seen in *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025). She has to face the challenge of living abroad and is haunted by feelings of emotional insecurity and wondering about her place in the world. Her challenges in the process of becoming American illustrate that migration does not always lead to a desire to belong geographically, culturally, or psychologically. Likewise, Sunny's life in New York is still linked with his family and culture in India. He is caught between India and the U.S. and feels culturally and emotionally lost. In this sense, the displacements of both characters serve as an example of how to make the experience of displacement a reality rather than external to one's body and soul.

### 2.2 Homi K. Bhabha's Concept of Hybridity

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity provides an important theoretical perspective for examining postcolonial identities. The *Location of Culture* (1994) is where Bhabha states that culture is not monolithic or ascribable to a single cultural tradition. Instead, identities are continually created through processes of cultural interaction, negotiation, translation and transformation. The idea of a "Third Space of enunciation" is essential to Bhabha's theory, in which he describes a cultural "space on the margin" in which new meanings and identities are formed by the interaction of various cultural traditions (Bhabha, 1994). The Third Space allows the reader to question the notion of a pure, separate and stable culture, and instead focus on fluidity and complexity of culture.

Bhabha's (1994) view of hybridity is more than a blending of two cultures. A continuous process that involves negotiating and reconstructing cultural meanings. In this process neither the dominant nor the marginalized culture is completely unaffected.

People who are in an “in-between” cultural position may then come to construct identities that do not clearly align with their “cultural inheritance” or their “cultural adoption” (Bhabha, 1994). While hybridity may produce and offer possibilities for cultural expression or cultural formation, it can also produce ambivalence, uncertainty, and psychological tension if people find difficulty in establishing themselves in firmly defined cultural spaces.

Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity is most applicable to the experiences of Sonia and Sunny in Kiran Desai's *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025). Both characters have to deal with the demands of Indian culture and the life of the West. Through her experience in the United States, Sonia is also introduced to other cultural values and social conventions that are different than her Indian background. She has found it hard to assimilate into the foreign environment, indicating that her identity cannot be defined only within the context of Indian or American culture. In contrast, she is located in an inter-cultural space which may be understood in the light of Bhabha's notion of the Third Space.

Likewise, Sunny finds a conflict between his Indian family and his life in New York. He is not completely detached from his Indian cultural roots due to his interaction with western societies. Instead, these cultural influences intertwine and create an identity that is negotiated, contradictory and ambivalent. Hybridity in the novel then should not be viewed as a harmonious synthesis of culture, but as a complicated process which can lead to internal conflict, alienation and unstable self-awareness (Bhabha, 1994).

### 2.3 Homi K. Bhabha's Concept of Diaspora

Bhabha's discussion of diaspora further contributes to an understanding of individuals who live between different cultural and geographical locations. The diasporic identities are created through migration, cultural encounters, and ongoing relations with the homeland. Diasporic people do not have one static and fixed cultural identity; in fact, they are involved in the negotiation of multiple cultural identities and meanings (Bhabha, 1994). Their identities are thus constantly negotiated as they engage in the dynamic process of negotiating with their own inherited cultural traditions and the societies in which they live.

The diasporic experience is witnessed in *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025) in that the characters are continuously involved with Indian culture while also being related to Western societies. They are linked even when they are living in or engaged with western environments with their family, traditions, and expectations. This situation generates conflicts between cultural values inherited and individual aspirations. In a Bhabhaian perspective, the tensions reflect the fact that diasporic identity does not simply mean leaving one culture and entering another, but is an ongoing negotiation between the various cultural affiliations (Bhabha, 1994).

The dynamics of Sonia-Sunny's relationship can therefore be explored in this larger context of diasporic identity. Through their experiences they show that the challenges of maintaining cultural continuity in the face of changing social and individual expectations are many. Traditional family systems and traditions meet the ideas of individualism and personal choice of western culture. The tension conveys the complexity of diasporic identity, which is the concept that people feel attached to one culture without that necessarily interfering with their participation in another. Rather, people can be in a middle ground or occupy a middle cultural space where a sense of belonging is always negotiated and redefined (Bhabha, 1994).

### 2.4 Hybridity, Displacement, and Psychological Alienation in the Novel

The concepts of hybridity and displacement intersect significantly in the experiences of Sonia and Sunny. Said's (2000) notion of displacement has been useful in understanding their physical, cultural, and psychological dislocation from a sense of home, and Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity has been helpful in understanding the processes of identity-making that take place as they interact between cultural worlds. All these theories are useful for analyzing the migration, cultural identity and psychological alienation in the novel.

The novel doesn't only convey loneliness as a personal state but also as a result of wider cultural and social context. Sonia and Sunny struggle with a sense of belonging, since there are multiple cultural worlds that shape their identities. They are in a middle ground culture, and are both part of and outside of both the Indian and the western cultures. This condition is similar to that of Bhabha (1994), who understood the Third Space to be a space of negotiation and ambivalence, a space in which cultural identities are negotiated and constructed rather than determined by cultural boundaries.

Babita's comment that “trying to be not Indian was like being a patriot: were you a good Indian, you were an American” (Birch, n.d.) is an example of the paradoxes of cultural positioning. The idea is that sometimes it is not easy to belong to one particular culture and sometimes taking things from another culture may raise more questions about one's own cultural identity. These paradoxes can be understood within the context of Bhabha (1994), who has coined the term “hybridity”, especially his focus on

ambivalence and the fluidity of cultural identity. The characters' experiences therefore indicate that it is not possible to reconcile between cultural identities but that it can make them feel more alienated.

Sonia's experience of life in the U.S. and back in India illustrates the connection between being physically moved and psychologically dislocated. Her move to a new geographical area doesn't automatically give her a stable sense of belonging. Likewise, Sunny's life in New York doesn't completely separate him from his Indian family and culture. Both characters are tied to several cultural contexts, and they both struggle to feel comfortable in any one cultural context. Their experiences thus offer a fruitful textured site on which to bring together Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity and Said's (2000) concept of displacement into one theoretical analysis of the situation.

This is the prism through which psychological alienation can be seen as a result of the interaction between cultural hybridity and displacement. The characters' lives in-between cultures instill uncertainty in their identity, belonging and home. Bhabha's (1994) theory can be used to understand their cultural 'in-betweenness' and Said's (2000) theory can be used to understand their sense of separation and homelessness. The theoretical perspectives are then combined to allow the study to consider loneliness as a psychological effect of postcolonial cultural dislocation.

## 2.5 Research Gap

Existing scholarship on postcolonial literature has extensively examined themes such as migration, diaspora, hybridity, cultural identity, displacement, and belonging. But there is a need for a specific look into the interaction of these ideas that results in psychological alienation and loneliness in Kiran Desai's novel *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025). In particular, there is a need to explore the psychological sense of belonging of the characters due to their hybrid cultural identity and migration experiences.

The loneliness found in the novel is not a simple and personal feeling of isolation. It is also an interpretation of a postcolonial state of (cultural) hybridity and displacement. Sonia and Sunny are in a liminal cultural space, where they are urged to stay connected to their Indian identity while also embracing Western cultural values and lifestyles. Because they do not feel fully at ease in either of the cultures, there are questions to be raised regarding the intersection of migration, cultural hybridity, displacement, and psychological alienation.

These themes are throughout the novel but there is scope to perform a systematic, text-centred analysis of how Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity and Said's (2000) concept of displacement can explain the experiences of Sonia and Sunny. Specifically, how cultural "in-betweenness" is related to psychological alienation needs to be explored further. To fill this gap, the present study focuses on the sense of loneliness, cultural disorientation, and belongingness evoking experiences of Sonia and Sunny due to their hybrid identities and migration experiences.

This study thus aims to make a contribution to postcolonial literary studies by presenting a focused examination of the psychological aspects of migration in *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025) in which Bhabha's concept of 'hybridity' and Said's concept of 'displacement' come together. The study is based on close study of the text and is designed to show how Desai portrays loneliness, not just as an individual's feeling but as an important psychological aspect of the postcolonial identity.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology because its primary purpose is to interpret and analyze the representation of cultural identity, migration, hybridity, displacement, loneliness, and psychological alienation in Kiran Desai's *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025). In the context of literary research, a qualitative approach is used because it allows the researcher to go into meanings, experience, culture, and text representations in-depth, not by number but by meanings or even by interpretation (Creswell, 2014; Kothari, 2004).

The present study is interpretive in character, text-oriented and uses close textual analysis as its main procedure. The major sources of the study is the novel, *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025), by Kiran Desai and scholarly books, journal articles, research papers and other academic publications pertaining to the themes of postcolonial literature, cultural identity, migration, hybridity, diaspora, displacement and alienation.

The characters of Sonia and Sunny are given special focus in the study. The novel will be read for relevant passages, dialogues, descriptions, events and character experiences that will be analyzed with the research questions and objectives. The text will

be analyzed for evidence of cultural hybridity, movement, migration, psychological alienation, loneliness, cultural conflict, and the characters' search for belonging.

Creswell (2014) states that the main difference between quantitative and qualitative research is that while quantitative research tends to focus on numerical data, measurement, and statistical analysis, qualitative research tends to focus on meanings, interpretations, experiences, and contextual understanding. This approach is suitable for the present study because it wants to explore the manifestations of psychological alienation in Sonia and Sunny's hybrid cultural identities, and also the displacement in the experiences of their migration to the UK can be understood as an Edward Said term. Questions in this type must be interpreted in terms of literary language, character and cultural context, and experience in narratives and should not be answered numerically.

Research will be done in a systematic way, using a close reading of the novel. The researcher will identify text passages relevant to the research questions first. Second, the passages chosen will be arranged in terms of the major themes and theoretical concepts of the study. Third, the passages will be analyzed in the light of Homi K. Bhabha's notions of hybridity, the Third Space, diaspora and Edward Said's notion of displacement. Lastly, the results will be discussed in relation to the research questions and objectives.

The study is not intended to be generalizable to a larger population. Rather, it aims to interpret the chosen literary text in detail, contextually, and with a theoretical perspective. Thus the qualitative methodology enables the researcher to investigate the complicated relationship between cultural identity, migration, displacement, psychological alienation, loneliness and the quest to find a place to belong in Desai's novel.

### 3.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the present study is restricted to loneliness as a postcolonial condition, particularly its relationship with alienation, migration, and the quest for belonging in Kiran Desai's *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025). The study focuses on the concept of hybridity used by Homi K. Bhabha and Third Space/ displacing used by Edward Said, which examines these dimensions. These ideas create a specific postcolonial lens through which to examine how migration and cultural displacement can be a source of alienation, loneliness, and questions of belonging.

The concept of hybridity of Homi K. Bhabha 1994 is especially important in the connection between cultural identity and loneliness. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha counters the notion that identities are static and that they are always associated with a single cultural tradition. He interprets cultural difference in terms of the "overlap and displacement of domains of difference" (Bhabha, 1994: 2). This idea is that people will be exposed to different cultures and will have more than one identity based on that. This cultural negotiation can result in an ambivalent situation with feelings of not knowing where or who they belong to.

This condition can be attributed to Bhabha's idea of the Third Space. It is because of these two locations that he says "the production of meaning requires that these two places are mobilized in the passage through a Third Space" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 53). The Third Space represents a transitional culture space in which the cultural meanings of various cultures are negotiated and new identities created. This is a "cutting edge of translation and negotiation," as Bhabha phrases it (1994, 38). In the context of the present study, this concept is relevant as it offers an insight into alienation as a result of cultural in-betweenness. People who struggle to feel fully part of their original culture or the culture they've adopted into can end up feeling uncertain, alone and/or lost between cultures.

This theory is helpful for analyzing the case of Sonia and Sunny. Their experiences include negotiating around between Indian and Western cultural contexts, and their identities are therefore negotiated as a result. The theory of Bhabha enables the study to look at alienation as related to their place in between cultures instead of it being a personal or emotional issue. Their sense of loneliness is therefore interwoven with the challenges of developing a firm cultural identity and a sense of belonging.

The second of the principal theoretical underpinnings of this study is Edward Said's idea of displacement. Said (2000) equates exile with "isolation and displacement" (p. 177), stressing that displacement is not merely a physical separation. It can also have emotional and psychological impacts for those who have to leave their familiar cultures. The significance of this understanding in the present study is that migration is not just physical but an experience which impacts upon identity, belonging and emotional security as well.

Said also stresses the ongoing connection with the homeland of the displaced person: "Exile is connected to the existence of and love for and bond with one's native place" (2000: 180). This is an observation that is important for the quest for belonging. A migrant can be residing in a new country physically, have emotional ties with the country of origin, and have cultural ties with

the country of origin. Therefore, there is no absolute sense of belonging in the two cultures, the home culture and the host culture. This conflict can be a source of psychological isolation and loneliness.

Said's idea of displacement thus provides the grounds for the present study to explore the link between migration, alienation and loneliness. The journey of Sonia and Sunny in terms of physical relocation across geographical and cultural contexts and contexts of psychological sense of detachment, cultural dissonance and need for home will be examined. Displacement is therefore defined both geographically and as an internalised experience of cultural/emotional dislocation.

The loneliness as a postcolonial condition can be analyzed by focusing on Bhabha's and Said's theory. The concept of hybridity, which Bhabha developed, is an explanation for the characters' cultural in-betweenness, and concept of the Third Space, which Bhabha developed, is an explanation for the negotiation of identity between different cultural contexts. Said's notion of displacement, however, accounts for the sense of alienation that comes with migration and separation and the ongoing relationship one must maintain with the homeland. Combined, these perspectives allow the study to go beyond the view of loneliness as simply an individual emotional experience to the view of loneliness as a result of cultural and psychological displacement.

The aim of the present study is therefore to look at the interconnection between migration, displacement, cultural hybridity, alienation, loneliness and the search for belonging. These will be the bases for analysing the texts of *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025). The study will specifically explore the experience of migration and cultural hybridity and its relationships with the sense of alienation and loneliness that Sonia and Sunny feel and how their experiences of seeking a sense of belonging are a reflection of a larger postcolonial experience.

Therefore, loneliness in Desai's novel has been made central to the argument of the study and is closely linked with migration, cultural displacement, hybrid identity, alienation and the everlasting human search for belonging in a postcolonial world.

#### 4. Data Analysis

The present section analyzes Kiran Desai's *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025) through the postcolonial concepts of hybridity, the Third Space, and displacement developed by Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said. The analysis is specifically on loneliness as a postcolonial condition and how cultural alienation, migration and the search for belonging affect the experiences of Sonia and Sunny. Selected passages from the novel are analyzed using the theory presented in the preceding chapter.

The analysis of the study has been structured around the major concerns: hybrid cultural identity and psychological alienation, migration and displacement of Sonia and Sunny, and the complexities in their search for belonging in between the different cultural worlds.

##### 4.1 Hybridity and Psychological Alienation in Sonia and Sunny

The first research question is concerned with the manifestation of hybrid cultural identities of Sonia and Sunny as psychological alienation as theorized by Homi K. Bhabha. In Bhabha's (1994) concept, cultural identity is negotiated between various cultural positions. The idea of the Third Space is of special significance to Sonia and Sunny due to their cultural "in-betweenness" in relation to Indian and Western cultural environments.

Sonia and Sunny are not completely part of one culture in the novel. Sonia's family is from India and she has a dual citizenship of both India and the USA, while part of his life is in the USA and he is still connected to his Indian family and culture. The experiences they provide therefore illustrate a conflict between the cultural expectations they have been given and the values they have learned in their adopted or surrounding culture.

Because this cultural in-betweenness does not always offer them a harmonious multicultural identity it becomes significant. Rather, it creates confusion over their place. This is explained by Bhabha's (1994) Third Space, which is a space that contains identities in a process of constant negotiation instead of secure fixing. For Sonia and Sunny, this negotiation is an additional step to further psychological alienation because neither Indian nor Western cultural space offers a simple sense of belonging.

A significant textual expression of this cultural contradiction is:

*"Trying to be not Indian was like being a patriot: were you a good Indian, you were an American."* (Desai, 2025, p. 45)

The statement does not offer a binaristic view of cultural identity as a binary option, but rather as something that is problematic to negotiate. It argues that "modernism" or "Americanism"—what is considered sufficient in either regard—is paradoxically associated with the issue of "good Indian." The contradiction is seen in the cultural identity from a Bhabhaian point of view, where cultural identities are overlapping and competing. Sonia and Sunny are shaped by western cultural values but are still bound to the Indian cultural expectations. Their sense of loneliness may be understood as a result of their difficulties in finding a sense of identity in either culture.

In the novel, hybridity, therefore, is not only a sign of cultural richness or successful multicultural appropriation. It also reveals the psychological challenges of being bi-cultural. Sonia and Sunny's cultural "in-betweenness" adds to their sense of uncertainty, to feelings of being different, and their ongoing struggle to find a home where they can experience a sense of belonging.

##### 4.2 Sonia's Hybrid Identity and the Experience of Loneliness

Sonia is a strong representation of the relationship between hybrid identity and loneliness. Her transnational journey between India and the United States carries her across a variety of cultures and worlds, and she is exposed to divergent cultural beliefs and ideals about individualism, family and belonging.

The loneliness becomes an important aspect for her as it is in contrast to the collective culture she finds in her family in India. When Sonia tells her grandparents that she is feeling lonely, she has an experience which illustrates the psychological ramifications of her separation from a familiar communal setting. Loneliness is not just a feeling, but also an expression of her changing relationship with her culture and community.

Her schooling and experience in the U.S. fosters individual independence, whereas her Indian past is linked with family, community and collective identity. Such cultural expectations produce an internal conflict. Sonia's solitude is then a product of her struggle between her own independence and the expectations she carries of being part of a group.

Bhabha's (1994) idea of the Third Space can be used to explain this situation. Sonia remains in a cultural liminal space between the Indian context and the American context, but she does not necessarily take on a firm hybrid identity. Rather it creates a sense of not knowing where she fits in. This self-isolation is then psychologized as cultural in-betweenness.

The experience of Sonia shows that migration can serve as an antidote to loneliness. For her, loneliness is related to a physical distancing from familiar cultural environments and psychological ambiguity about identity and belonging. Her experience thus reinforces the main thesis of this study, that loneliness in Desai's novel is a form of postcolonial experience of cultural displacement and hybrid identity.

#### 4.3 Sonia's Migration and Psychological Displacement

Sonia's journey of immigration may also be explored through the term displacement as described by Edward Said. Said (2000) points out that displacement is more than just being separated from one's homeland. It can also include psychological and cultural isolation, especially if people can find it hard to feel at home in their new surroundings.

Sonia's immigration to the United States is a physical displacement but also a psychological one. Her internal questioning is about whether she is in America, or should go back to India.

The following textual passage directly expresses this conflict:

*"Why not go back to India?"* (Desai, 2025, p. 201)

The question captures the notion between "situation" and "affectivity". Sonia, who has settled in the United States, still has a psychological connection with India. Being back in India at the same time is not certain to restore her sense of belonging since she has undergone a change in her identity as a result of her time overseas.

Thus, her displacement is uncertain in both the directions. America does not really make home, and India cannot be recaptured as the unquestioned home of her past. This factor aligns with Said's (2000) conception of displacement as a state of separation, alienation and ongoing attachment to the homeland.

The experience of Sonia therefore makes an example of how migration can create loneliness despite the opportunities it has offered for movement. Her displacement is a geographical, cultural and psychological one. Her loneliness is a sense of feeling out of place in a place that is both where she lives and where she feels like she belongs.

#### 4.4 Sonia's Vulnerability and Cultural Alienation

Sonia's relationship with Ilan further illustrates how cultural and psychological alienation can increase her vulnerability. She lives in a liminal space between two cultures and finds it hard to develop a secure feeling of belonging and identity. Being away from her native culture and family makes her more vulnerable to emotion.

The following text evidence shows the influence of this relationship in the novel:

*"Disregarding her to a ghost of herself."* (Desai, 2025, p. 89)

Sonia's transformation into a "ghost of herself" is especially relevant to the theme of alienation. There is a metaphoric sense of loss of self and psychological presence. As she moves away from her familiar cultural sphere, her sense of identity erodes, adding to her sense of loneliness at the heart of her experience.

The amulet attached to her family also has symbolic meaning as it represents her cultural and family legacy. So, its absence can be read as a sign of a reduced link between Sonia and the cultural sphere from which she comes.

The case of Sonia shows that cultural alienation can impact not just how she interacts with society, but also how she relates to herself. Her isolation thus turns into a psychological alienation created by her precarious cultural status.

#### 4.5 Sunny's Hybrid Identity and Psychological Alienation

Sunny provides another important example of hybrid identity and psychological alienation. He lives in the West in New York, but he has an Indian background. Thus, he feels the conflict between inheritance and adaptation in his culture.

Sunny is described in a series of vivid words in the novel:

“He is an impostor, a spy, a liar, a ghost.” (Desai, 2025, p. 180)

These descriptions have a special importance in terms of psychological alienation. The phrase impostor implies that Sunny does not feel his role in American society as real as it is. The ghost-like description of him implies invisibility, as if he were not present in the world, and a lack of social presence.

These descriptions can be understood in the light of Bhabha’s notion of the Third Space. Sunny finds himself in the middle ground of the culture but this middle ground is not a sense of full belonging for Sunny but rather an identity uncertainty. His experience is a good example of the psychological challenge that is encountered when having several cultural identities and feeling not fully at home in any of them.

Sunny’s hybridity is an integral part of his loneliness. He argues that the process of cultural mobility does not automatically ensure the absence of alienation. Rather, the capacity for trans-cultural mobility can promote the question of belonging in another place.

#### 4.6 Sunny’s Migration, Displacement, and the Quest for Belonging

Sunny’s experience may also be discussed by using Said’s term of displacement. His move to New York is a physical distance from his homeland but the cultural and familial ties with India permeate his sense of identity. He thus situates himself in a place that lies between his country of origin and his country of residence.

His search for a sense of belonging among Jackson Heights’ Indian immigrants is especially noteworthy. He believes cultural similarity will offer a sense of community, but it’s not an all-encompassing experience that alleviates his feelings of alienation.

This complexity is communicated in the following statement in the novel:

“It were better to be one Indian than two Indians.” (Desai, 2025, p. 195)

The claim shows that nationality and culture do not automatically make someone belong. Even when he is with people who share some parts of his culture, he feels psychologically removed from them because he is not part of them. His experience therefore supports Said’s argument that displacement involves more than geographical separation. Alienation can persist even after the displaced person has entered into a community that is connected to the homeland.

As a result of Sunny’s search for belonging, it remains an ongoing and unfulfilled quest. His migration from the mainstream of American society into the Indian immigrant community doesn’t end his loneliness. Rather, it illustrates the challenges of creating a cultural environment that will allow his plural identities to live peacefully.

#### 4.7 Loneliness, Alienation, and the Quest for Belonging

Migration, cultural hybridity and displacement are all closely connected to loneliness in *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025) with the experiences of these two characters. Both of the characters are in between cultures, but neither has a simple sense of belonging.

The concepts of hybridity put forward by Bhabha (1994) and of displacement by Said (2000) can explain their situation between cultures and the psychological impact of their displacement from familiar cultural settings. Loneliness can be more than a feeling of isolation when such circumstances overlap. It transforms into a result of cultural uncertainty, and the challenge of creating a secure sense of home.

The sense of loneliness in Sonia is due to her conflict between the Indian cultural ideals and the ideals of western individualism. Sunny is lonely because he doesn’t feel like a part of the American society or the Indian diasporic community. Both characters show that it is hard to find belonging post-migration.

The novel thus depicts the search for home as a continuous journey, a journey that is likely to be incomplete. Home is not represented simply as a geographical location. Rather, it is linked to identification, familiarity to culture, emotional security and acceptance. Sonia and Sunny’s experiences indicate that traveling geographically can make meaning of home more complicated.

Loneliness, therefore, is an important postcolonial condition of the novel. It’s a result of migration, displacement, mixed identity, cultural alienation and the ongoing need for belonging. Desai’s characters of Sonia and Sunny show how the experience

of living between cultures can lead to psychological uncertainty: one that brings individuals into two or more cultural worlds but leaves them feeling entirely at home in none.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study has explored loneliness as a post-colonial experience in the novel *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025) by Kiran Desai with a focus on alienation, migration and search for belonging. The analysis clarifies the loneliness that cannot be regarded as a personal or psychological state of the subjects, Sonia and Sunny. Instead, it is significantly related with their cultures, migration, displacement and the challenge of finding a secure sense of belonging in new context or context changes. Ashcroft et al. (2007) claim that as a discourse, postcolonial studies offers a way to analyze the ongoing cultural and psychological legacies of colonialism and its legacy.

Firstly, the study explored the correlation between hybridity and psychological alienation in the light of Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity. The idea of hybridity and the Third Space by Bhabha (1994) shows that cultural identity is co-produced in a process of negotiation between various cultural positions. Sonia and Sunny are examples of this cultural in-betweenness. They are shaped simultaneously by Indian cultural traditions and Western cultural environments, but neither kind of character is able to find an absolute sense of belonging in either cultural sphere. As a result, their hybrid identities are linked to uncertainty, contradiction and psychological alienation. The study thus ends up with the conclusion that in the novel hybridity is not a positive cultural blend but is also a source of emotional and psychological tension.

The study also explored the experience of migration and displacement of Sonia and Sunny using the concept of displacement by Edward Said. Said (2000) shows that geographical mobility can be an emotional and psychological distancing. Sonia's story in the USA and Sunny's life in New York shows that moving to a new place does not make you feel at home. Both characters make links to new cultural contexts, but retain a psychological link to their Indian cultural histories. Their experiences show that displacement can create a pervasive feeling of being out of place, even when people have access to opportunities for education, work or social inclusion in their new place of residence.

Moreover, the study foregrounds the connection between migration and the search for belonging. Between India and the West, Sonia and Sunny's movements do not result in a simple resolution of their identities. Rather, migration makes their sense of home and belonging more complicated. Based on their experiences, they have learned that home is not just a place, but a feeling, a state of mind, a sense of familiarity and self and a sense of belonging and acceptance. Their sense of not fitting into either culture helps to make them feel lonely.

The results as a result do then show that loneliness is a post-colonial situation in Desai's novel. It is a product of the entanglements of cultural hybridity, displacement, alienation, and ongoing aspirations for belonging. The in betweenness of the characters is explained by Bhabha's concept of hybridity (1994), and the psychological impact of migration and losing familiar cultural environments is explained by Said's concept of displacement (2000). These two theoretical frameworks offer a useful lens through which to view the reasons for the loneliness that Sonia and Sunny are feeling despite their mobility.

The study also concludes that Desai's loneliness is taking a holistic perspective of the condition. In the post national and global world, Sonia and Sunny are the figures of people who live with multiple cultural identities. Their experiences illustrate how inter-culturally has the potential to bring new identities and also can bring about uncertainty, alienation and emotional isolation. Their belonging search is thus complex and problematic.

Overall, the study helps in understanding *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025) by interpreting loneliness with a focused post-colonial approach. Loneliness has been the focus of this study, but its interpretation does not focus purely on the individual's emotional state, but also on the links between loneliness and migration, cultural identity, alienation, dislocation and belonging. The novel by Desai can be read in terms of Bhabha's and Said's theories, as a way to show the psychological challenges people face when existing in between cultures. The novel ultimately implies that the quest for belonging can be a lifelong journey for anyone whose identity has been formed by migration and culture dislocations.

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