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## Mapping Colonial Aftermath: Identity Crisis, Homelessness, Desolation, Spatial Alienation, and Psychological Trauma in M. Mukundan's *God's Mischief*

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### Abstract

Colonialism, as a profoundly cataclysmic historical phenomenon, has been examined through multiple disciplinary lenses, including history, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies. Its enduring repercussions continue to shape contemporary societies, making it a central theme in post-colonial scholarship. Among the many avenues through which the colonial experience has been critiqued and re-imagined, literature occupies a particularly significant place. Literary narratives emerging from formerly colonised regions often illuminate the subtle, persistent, and deeply personal effects of colonial rule, offering insights that extend beyond conventional academic analysis. This paper seeks to conceptualise colonialism through the interconnected themes of homelessness, desolation, and psychological trauma, with a specific focus on Indo-French families represented in M. Mukundan's acclaimed novel *Daivathinte Vikruthikal (God's Mischief)*. Set against the backdrop of Mahé, a former French enclave in Kerala, Mukundan's narrative explores the emotional and cultural dislocation experienced by communities grappling with the withdrawal of colonial power. The novel apprehends the anxieties, ruptures, and identity crises that emerge in the marginal space between colonial domination and post-colonial reconstruction. By analysing the novel's portrayal of displacement and fractured belonging, this study highlights how literary imagination contributes to a more delicate understanding of colonial afterlives. It argues that Mukundan's work not only reflects the socio-political complexities of the Indo-French encounter but also foregrounds the psychological scars that persist long after formal decolonisation. Through this lens, the paper demonstrates the vital role of literature in interpreting, challenging, and reframing the legacy of colonialism in the post-colonial world.

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**Keywords:** Affective Geographies, Emotional Cartography, Narratives of Displacement, Psychological Trauma, Spatial Alienation

## Introduction

M. Mukundan remains one of the most influential and distinctive voices in modern Malayalam literature. Through his experimental narrative technique and evocative portrayal style of cultural identity, he is often considered a trendsetter in the post-1960s Malayalam fiction. Born in the former French enclave of Mahe (Mayyazhi), Mukundan's upbringing in this unique socio-cultural environment thoroughly shaped his literary imagination. Mahe's geography, people, history and cultural intersections make the town the cynosure of many of his writings. Among his notable contributions, *Daivathinte Vikrithikal* (God's Mischief) occupies a significant place in the Malayalam literary canon. The postcolonial anxieties experienced by a family of Indo-French descent are entwined in the novel due to the French withdrawal from Mahe. Mukundan examines the emotional and psychological turbulence of individuals caught between two cultural identities, portraying themes of displacement, nostalgia, and the search for continuity in a rapidly transforming world.

Media scholar and critic K. Kunhikrishnan correlated Mukundan's works with those of Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro as both the works bear a unique resonance. Ishiguro, though residing in England, often writes phantasmagoric and nostalgic narratives of Japan. Similarly, Mukundan, even when physically away from Mahe, returns to it repeatedly through his fiction, using memory, myth, and emotional geography as tools to reconstruct the town in literary form (Kunhikrishnan). This comparison highlights the universal human tendency to return to one's own place, at least through memory, nostalgia, to create narrative identity. Through his novels, essays, articles, etc, he always captures the attention of the readers about Mahe's traditions, rituals, folklores and everyday interactions with the local people. According to Menon, Mukundan always created a lasting cultural archive of Mahe by preserving facets of its identity that might otherwise fade from collective memory. As Malayalam literature continues to evolve, Mukundan's dedication to documenting Mahe's soul ensured that the town's stories, people and memories will resonate forever across generations.

## Postcolonial liminality, Residual coloniality, and decolonial rupture as postcolonial narratives

The experience of uncertainty, anxiety and fragmentation intertwined with the acquaintance of freedom. This thwart extends to the question of identity. Characters oscillate between incomparable extremes, as one is anchored in the residues of colonial presence and the other towards abstract and ungrounded.

For instance, "Madame Maggie had forgotten nothing about that day. The sound of the siren from the ship that carried the whites away had fallen on her ears like a scream of despair. Even now she woke up at night with that scream in her ears." (9). On the other hand Father Alphonse stood strongly for Mahe, 'Thoughts of the future did not trouble Father Alphonse. Though he possessed no skill other than his magic, he had no qualms about the future.' (9).

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Thus, the identity crisis and conflicts emerge. Individuals are compelled to negotiate their sense of place and belongings, which itself is transforming. These types of cultural hybrid identities reflect the “in-between” condition that Homi Bhabha associates with liminality. (Bhabha 53-56).

This rupture compelled the community to imagine the paradigms shaped by colonial rule. It is not by triumphant liberation but by ambivalence, transitional instability and epistemic uncertainty. Rather than resolution, postcoloniality constructs a state of negotiation. Ultimately, the liminal temporality of Mahe and the disruptive force of decolonial rupture combine to form a complex, layered depiction of the postcolonial juncture. After decolonisation, as Anibal Quijano terms, “coloniality of power” (Quijano 538-540), the lingering administrative, cultural and psychological structures. The reminiscences of the colonial past remain embedded in everyday practices, and even the characters strive to create new forms of identity and belongings. The intricate interplay between memory, power and historical transition defines the experience of life after empire.

## **Emotional Cartographies of Loss, Displacement, and Geo-Cultural Haunting led to Affective Geographies**

The narrative world of Mahe is infused with the emotional residues of characters whose lives are shaped by displacement, longing and fracture. The island functions as an affective geography in which physical landscapes intersect with psychic states so that every grain carries a vessel of memory. Thus, the blended emotional and spatial registers construct an emotional cartography, mapping grief, nostalgia onto the island’s topography. Sara Ahmed argues that emotions “stick” to places and bodies and it functions as an Space functions as an emotional structure. (Ahmed 11–13).

Mahe’s natural landscape not only provides emotional experience but also amplifies affective intensities. Affective Spatiality lies at the heart of it. When the characters returned to their homeland, the landscape became culpable with affective dissonance. At a time, it becomes familiar and estranged, holding memories as comfort and wounds remain unhealed. “The son of Chathu-who-did-not-keep goats walked through the sand towards the road, big fish in both hands. Crows cawed and circled above his head. Father Alphonse walked far behind Dharmapalan with his empty bag” (73). Thus, affective spatiality turns into an emotional field in which the characters’ psychic states are mirrored and magnified by their surroundings.

Emotional insecurities crystallise the Topographies of Loss that populate the island. Ruined colonial buildings, abandoned homes, debased plantations stands not for physical absence but as metaphorical extensions of mourning and absence. An empty home stood not only as a structure but as a repository of unspoken histories, unaddressed traumas and unresolved separations. In the Foucauldian sense, the abandoned French quarters function as heterotopic spaces simultaneously real, symbolic and ruptured (Foucault 24- 27). Equivalently the shoreline becomes a liminal zone between life and death, past and present, homeland and exile. Furthermore, the characters defy what has lost can’t be retrieved.

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The characters Cartographies of Displacement, whether forced, chosen or accidental, shape the psychological thought processing of home and belonging. Even when they are physically present, perpetually oriented towards elsewhere. A sense of unsettled spatiality generate migratory anxieties. Mahe stood as a site of fragmented belonging where home is both desired and feared.

“When did you come, Phalgunan Master?”

Two days back.’

‘Do you have a lot of leave?’

‘I’m not going back. I’ve retired, Phalgunan said with great relief. And satisfaction of having achieved what he wanted to.

‘Very good! Even if life here is difficult, our own place is the best.’ (77).

So in the case of Phalgunan, the displacement unbearable. So he prefers to stay at home rather than to be with the other. Literally speaking displacement but it is emotional and existential. Consequently, the spatial cartography becomes inseparable from the characters emotional trajectories. Thus, displacement becomes a practise of emotional mapping across physical geography.

“You and your magic. We are starving,’ Madame Maggie accused him. ‘Oh Madonna! What shall we do now? Her eyes turned towards the eternal lamp burning before Madonna’s picture.

They had their meal with dried fish that day. Earlier whatever the state of the sea, however strong the wind and the rain, there was always fresh fish in Father Alphonse’s house. Maggie sighed, looking at the row of china dishes in the cupboard. (74).

The colonial architecture in Mahe, permeates the sense of Geo-cultural haunting that acts as a spectral presence in which reminding characters that the remains of past insistently unresolved. It embodies the island’s historical wounds allied cultural erasure and the psychic violence of colonial rule. Their presence generates a haunted spatiality rather than going away from it. It presses shaping emotional experiences and intergenerational trauma. Characters encounter through these spaces creates ancestral memories and colonial legacies that continuously shape their sense of self. In sum, mahe’s narrative inextricably intertwined grief, memory, identity turns the island into a living cartographic record of character’s inner worlds.

## **Exile, Displacement, and the Spatial Alienation of Hybrid Identities**

The characters from hybrid indo- French communities occupy a fractured world where cultural ballast have eroded and belongings becomes elusive. In the postcolonial landscape of Mahe homelessness stands as a pervasive existential condition rather than lack of shelter. The displaced characters not only geographical but also ontological shaping the individual perceive themselves and their place in a transforming social order.

The Indo- French communities always caught between the fading remnants of French colonial authority and the emerging realities of socio political landscape which is of suspended identity. Here lies Exilic Consciousness. They are considered as ‘Other’ throughout. This exilic mindset creates a permanent liminality that extends beyond borders and became internalized.

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This exile is not from their homeland but also alienated from cultural or historical grounding. Finally the characters move from the sense of belonging to a perpetual outsiders in their own homeland.

This sense bought them to spatially as Spatial Estrangement. Characters navigate from inhabited domestic space to decaying urban zones in which they never reflect their inner selves. Home once marked as a space of stability and continuity becomes destabilized inherited colonial dissonance and fragmented memories. A room that once noted for ones' own becomes estranged when the cultural codes holds no meaning at all. Hence the lived space become incongruent with disconnectedness, emblematic of postcolonial spatial alienation. Character walk through Mahean landscape feel hostile because the social and cultural narratives once made them coherent have collapsed. Consequently space becomes disoriented one amplifying their sense of rootlessness.

Individualistic displacement in Mahe's narration signifies a breakdown in identity and physical relocation forming Displacement as an Ontological condition. Mahe's narratives signifies a deeper level of breakdown in identity and self -understanding rather than representing the physical relocation of individuals. Characters can't locate themselves within history, language or heritage and they felt themselves as homelessness as an innermost fracture in their psyche. Their dislocation acted both as psychological and existential condition in which they shape how they think, feel and relate to others. Their self becomes scattered between inherited colonial identities with emergent postcolonial redefinitions. It neither offer clarity nor comfort. The culminated level of these can be reflected in Rootlessness and Identity Dissolution. Cultural anchoring disintegrates after the collapse of the colonial order. For the hybrid or marginal communities, it triggers for the fragmentation of identity. All these types of uncertainties leads to create a void in which identity implodes rather than coheres. The order once they experienced from language, status or affiliation dissolves the connective tissue which are bound to their sociocultural environments. As a result, the characters oscillate between salvage meaning in a world where traditional markers of identity become obsolete. In Mahean narrative the deeply embedded existential reality reveals homelessness not merely as a social condition, once it reshapes the emotional, cultural and spatial dimensions of postcolonial life.

### **Fractured hybridity marked by conflict, mistranslation, and erasure**

Homi K Bhabha's hybridity as a productive space of negotiation and cultural creativity appears as a site of fracture, anxiety and destabilisation apart from the narrative version of M.Mukundan. The Indo- French characters trapped within its contradictions, in which mixed identity becomes synonymous with suspicion, liminality and vulnerability rather than hybridity as a liberating "third space". These collapse led to the identity crisis that penetrate both selfhood and communal belonging. Central to this crisis is Hybridity as conflict. Mukundan's world of hybridity is immobilising rather than generative. Anglo- Indian characters intertwined between two cultural orders, neither of which fully accepts them. Under the French colonial power they occupied the in between status of colonised majority and never fully assimilated into French identity. With decolonisation, these privileges disintegrates and the only remains is a fractured

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sense of self by created by social suspicion from the local population and abandonment from the French authorities. Thus, the double marginality internalises brings out a profound self-doubt. Identity became destabilised in hybridity instead it create contradictions that characters cannot reconcile. The characters geographical and ancestral roots delved into the historical postcolonial subjectivity of Mahe, their cultural memory rooted in French language and customs. These individuals always tries to rooted into the new sociopolitical order of Mayyazhi, but it deepens inner fissures.

Converting oneself always requires abandoning or muting one part of themselves to gain acceptance in the other world. The negotiation is not that much smooth. Thus the translation becomes a cultural trauma, exposing how postcolonial societies can't accommodate the complexities of Mahean individuals. M. Mukundan expressing through the characters to articulate their layered identities to expose the painful instability of cultural translation within the discourses that they can't hold on.

“The bungalow of the fair Thiyya, Advocate Kunhaman, stood isolated like a lighthouse. He too stayed aloof and isolated from others, surrounded by the sea and silence. Though it was years since the white men had left, he was unable to reconcile himself to the new situation. His wife and children suffered from his self- imposed imprisonment.” (108).

This profound sense of Subjectivity under Erasure emerges as Indo French identities validated. Its not symbolic but psychological. Characters experience disorientation in the linguistic, cultural, bureaucratic system. Their names, customs even their viewpoint too appear obsolete. Mukundan offers a nuanced critique of romanticisation of hybridity, embedded within hybrid identities. In 1954, French rule ended in Mahe, still its influence continues to shape Mahe's social memory and identity. Mukundan's narrative pattern highlights the lasting impression of French assimilation on the Mahean psyche.

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