

How to Cite:

Ratchagar, M., & Florence, S. (2022). Depression and dislocation in Anuradha Roys *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S5), 8023–8029.
<https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS5.10737>

Depression and dislocation in Anuradha Roys *an Atlas of Impossible Longing*

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Abstract--This article explores how the two masculine characters, Nirmal and Mukunda of *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* by Anuradha Roy dislocate themselves due to depression, they face in their life. It is the human tendency to escape from any circumstance that deteriorates peace of mind. Despite the differences between genders both men and women dislocate themselves in order to save themselves from an unfavourable ambience. In a fear of facing a loss, defeat, betrayal, dispute, depression or quarrel, human beings tend to escape from that scenario. Even though men are considered to be very strong and courageous, they also fall prey to depression whereby they dislocate themselves from their dwellings. Some men vent their anger through words, some through actions, and some when an untoward incident happens, escape from the situation. In *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* the two masculine characters, Nirmal and Mukunda face an untoward incident that dislocate them to faraway places to free from the depression causing situation either deliberately or by compulsion. Nirmal dislocates from his native place after the death of his wife, Shanti. Mukunda is forced by Kamal and Manjula to dislocate from his master's house to a boarding school in Calcutta. Thus, Nirmal dislocates from his native place due to depression, whereas, the orphan Mukunda's dislocation from his master Nirmal's house leads to depression.

Keywords---Depression, dislocation, anxiety, masculine, incident, situation.

Human beings in general have different capabilities to face the problems in their life. Some will be lost totally, some leave it to God, some tackle it boldly, and some do not take anything serious at all. There are some who in a fear of facing the

adverse situation in life dislocate their place before or after the incident. Dislocation is one of the ways, which some use to save themselves either permanently or temporarily from the untoward incidents. Edward Said considers dislocation as an intellectual ability to exile oneself from what is given, what is customary, and to see it from a point of view that looks at it as if it is something provisional and foreign to oneself. "That allows for independence commitment but independence and a certain kind of detachment." (Said 13)

The effect that dislocation has, not on the writers' work, but on the writers, themselves is also another perspective of the study. Many writers explore the various nuances of dislocation in the domain of literature. One such writer is Shelly. His exile from society was so acute that in one of his letters to Mary he expresses his desire to desert all human society. He wrote, "I would retire with you and our child to a solitary island in the sea, [. . .] and shut upon my retreat the floodgates of the world" (Simpson 216).

Anuradha Roy is an Indian novelist, journalist, and editor. She has written five novels. *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2008), *The Folded Earth* (2011), *Sleeping on Jupiter* (2015), *All the Lives We Never Lived* (2018) and *The Earth Spinner* (2021). She has written many essays and reviews, which appear in newspaper and magazines in India. She is best known for her Man Booker Prize long listed novel *Sleeping on Jupiter* (2014) and also for having won the DSC Prize for South-Asian Literature. Her debut novel, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, with its intensive storytelling instantly won the readers' hearts all over the world, and the novel was picked among the best books of that year. Like Shelly, Anuradha Roy predominantly deals with the issue of dislocation of characters in her novels. *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* is her first novel which revolves around three generations, which explores the theme of depression and dislocation undergone by the two characters. The first-generation story is about Amulya Babu and his wife, Kananbala; the second generation, about the two sons of Amulya Babu namely Kamal, his wife Manjula and Nirmal and his wife Shanti; the third generation, about Mukunda, the servant in Nirmal's house and his daughter, Bakul.

Nirmal is the younger son of Amulya Babu and Kananbala. "He was almost eight years younger than his elder brother" (31). Of her two sons Kananbala loves Nirmal very much. Immediately after returning from school and later college, Nirmal narrates stories that happened on the day to his mother. He would not do anything without consulting his mother. "Kananbala also thinks that their dependence on each other is absolute, Nirmal was twenty-four now, and he had just got himself a job in the district college teaching history" (25). He works as a lecturer and is considered as an eligible groom for, he belongs to a wealthy family. Amulya's cousin turns up to his house to talk about the possibility of setting up an alliance between Amulya's family and Bikash Babu's family through the marriage between Nirmal and Shanti.

Nirmal marries Shanti in March 1928. The wedding takes place in Manoharpur. Both Nirmal and Shanti are given a room at one end of the top floor terrace. The day after his marriage, Kananbala busts into his room and cleans it. But he doesn't like that. "Nirmal wanted to bundle his mother out and slam the door on

her. He wished he lived in an island far away from his family, his parents, and his cousins sly glances waiting downstairs" (35).

After his marriage, Nirmal starts coming to the house much early to the surprise of his mother who, wonders seeing Nirmal rushing home from the college half an hour or even an hour earlier some days. As every evening Nirmal comes to his mother's room first and chats with her, without any interest. Kananbala is worried because Nirmal who used to spend most of his time with her starts to avoid her after the arrival of Shanti. Even though he sits with his mother he is very much preoccupied with his wife's thoughts.

Shanti becomes pregnant and so leaves Nirmal's house to her father Bikash Babu's house in Manoharpur. "Nirmal squinted at the mirror as he shaved wondering if he looked different more fatherly. Perhaps it would seem real once he saw the child" (64). Nirmal sighs with pleasure and sits down on the parapet lighting his cigarette. Shanti is not there to say "what a horrible smell how can you smoke that?" (65). Nirmal yearns for Shanti even to quarrel with as he misses her very much.

It has been raining incessantly at Manoharpur. Since the house of Bikash Babu is near the banks of the river, many of his friends start advising him to move somewhere until the rain stops. But Bikash Babu believes that his house is built by very famous engineers and it would bear any kind of flood. Even Shanti asks him one day, "Baba, do you think the house is in danger?" She also utters "I was just thinking", Shanti begins, "maybe we should move to..." (71). During the first six months of her pregnancy, she walks every day. Later she develops migraines that makes her feel her head breaking into pieces. She also starts to be afraid of sleeping. "Some nights the snake headed bangles her mother-in-law had given her tightened noose like around her neck and she woke up her heart beating fast, still hearing her mother in law's voice in her ears" (71).

The river at Manoharpur starts to flood due to the heavy rain. Kripa, the housemaid of Bikash Babu also warns him to move somewhere as Shanti expects her delivery soon. But he does not lend his ears to Kripa. She asks him "Don't you even know poor Shanti's started her pains? A month too soon! Do you notice nothing? And nobody can get out for the midwife. Did you expect me to remember how to deliver a baby?"(73).

In a silent afternoon, comes a servant from Manoharpur to Songarh. Amulya Babu asks who he is. But the servant does not speak anything. After a few minutes he tells something and vanishes from the place. Amulya Babu is heartbroken and becomes very sad. "After many minutes he finished what he had to say and left the room. Amulya's normally rigid back drooped semi-circular and his skeletal face caved in further"(82).

Amulya Babu sends his servant to bring Nirmal immediately from the Dada Babu's college where he works as a lecturer. Nirmal returns home and rushes up to his father. Amulya Babu collects all his strength to tell what happens "Nirmal snapped at his father," what is it? Can you tell me what happened? What's the matter?" (86). Then Amulya Babu replies that there is a great flood in

Manoharpur and the flood water inundates Shanti's house. Shanti suffers from labour pain, one month in advance. Amulya says, "Nobody could get out of the house to get a doctor in time. The maid who had some midwifing experience had done her best but..... only the baby could be saved. Not Shanti"(86).

Nirmal has to go to Manoharpur to attend the funeral of Shanti and also to take care of Bakul, Shanti's daughter. Nirmal leaves for Manoharpur that night. In the house of Amulya Babu everyone waits for a fortnight and then a month to see the motherless infant. But nobody comes from Manoharpur. A month later Amulya writes to Bikash Babu asking about the whereabouts of Nirmal and his daughter, Bakul. Later twenty days after the letter is posted, a reply comes. Bikash Babu says:

Nirmal was almost unable to look at his baby. He was disturbed when he was here and did not speak much. He was incoherent when he did speak. He refused to come away from the room where Shanti had spent the last day. Nirmal was here for that night but the next morning when he woke up, he had already left. (88)

This pathetic situation makes Nirmal get depressed and in order to protect himself from the anxiety producing thoughts and feelings, he uses dislocation as a solution. Anuradha Roy portrays Nirmal not as a matured male father who despite the loss of his wife, collects all his strength and willpower and live like a single father taking care of his daughter, Bakul, rather he is shown as a coward who doesn't have the strength to face the heart-breaking loss, dislocates from his house at Songarh, leaving his daughter all alone. So it's very odd to see that a male character dislocating his place since he could not with stand the loss of his wife. Anuradha Roy stereotypically uses this theme of depression and dislocation undergone by the male character, Nirmal in *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*.

Abhay Pandey in his work, *Indian Diasporic Literature: Creative* expounds that a diasporic text can be investigated in terms of location, dislocation and relocation. "The changing designation of home and accompanying nervousness about homelessness and unfeasibility of going back are recurrent themes in diasporic literature" (23). In *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, there is also another character named Mukunda, the orphan who is brought under the custody of Amulya Babu. He is actually a child born to an unmarried tribal woman whose father is not disclosed in the novel. The theme of depression and dislocation could be seen in the life of Mukunda also. Mukunda, an orphan is brought up by Amulya in an orphanage. Once Amulya dies, Nirmal who returns from his absconding brings back the orphan Mukunda with him to be brought up along with his daughter, Bakul.

Mukunda is neither considered as one of the members of Nirmal's family nor as a servant who works for the family. In Nirmal Babu's house, Mukunda is not paid for his service rather he is just given accommodation. He does all the works assigned to him. He is also not given new dresses to wear but is given the old clothes used by Nirmal and Kamal. "A mop haired boy in a thin pullover and floppy shorts entered the puja room, swab cloth in hand"(93). He is treated badly by Kamal and his wife, Manjula. Once a priest comes to Songarh, he ill-treats

Mukunda. The boy hears the priest reciting the mantras and Nirmal sees the priest sprinkling the Ganga water over him. Mukunda warns the priest that he should not touch him, "I am sure I touched you purohitmoshai, you will need a bath now, won't you. And there's no hot water left!" The priest gives him a malevolent look and snapped, "you can stop your gob, you rascal! I will teach you to be cheeky!" (93).

The plight of Mukunda in the house of Songarh is explicable when one ponders upon this scene, when Meera is questioned by the priest about his birth and caste. Meera replies, "the boy who swabs the floor just now, lives here" (94). The priest asks about Mukunda's caste, "caste" Meera replies. "I am not sure. He is just a child! Does it matter? He is an orphan whom we" (95). The priest shuts his book and searches for his bag and questions Meera, Why should he be allowed in the puja room? Charity is all very well, but can it change his caste?" (95).

Mukunda, the missionary orphanage boy is thirteen when the third-generation story starts. He eats in the family but in a demarcated plate. He lives in the Songarh house but out in the courtyard. They give him clothes but old, and worn out. He has the practice of going to Mrs Burnam's house in the afternoon, where he used to read and play. Bakul studies in the Convent School but Mukunda studies in a school made up of a shed with only one classroom, a blackboard for children aged from four to fifteen, and there is only one teacher.

Despite the hatred of Kamal and Manjula, Mukunda earns the love of Meera, Nirmal, and Bakul. Both Mukunda and Bakul are one soul in two bodies. They resemble the characters of Heathcliff and Catherine who share a strong love between them in the *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte. In that novel Catherine and Heathcliff spent most of their times in the moors. They seem to use nature as a shelter from their home. Civilization is, in fact, what seems to hold an atmosphere of discomfort and uncertainty, while in the moors, Catherine and Heathcliff seem to find security. In her diary, Catherine says that her companion is impatient and proposes that " we should appropriate the dairy woman's cloak, and have a scamper on the moors, under its shelter" (53). Like them Bakul and Mukunda wander in the forest in Songarh and they believe that the forest is more lovable than their home. "Bakul and Mukunda had populated Songarh with their own secret places and people. To them it throbbed with magic and meaning which only the two of them could share. They had been together always ever since Mukunda had joined the household when he was six and Bakul four" (101). When the rest of the family eat and sleep in the afternoon, both Bakul and Mukunda wander in the garden of old trees and tall grass. Even though Mukunda lives in the Songarh house, he faces some hard times to fulfil his appetite. Manjula tells "The boy will eat us out of the house and home!"(119).

Nirmal plans to go to a tour to Manoharpur along with Bakul, Mukunda, and Meera. "How would you both like to go to Kolkata? And then to Manoharpur?" (142). The children become very excited for they have not travelled by train still then. But Mukunda has a very bad reminiscence of the past. Once when he was in the missionary orphanage, Mukunda devised a plan to run away on a train. But the plan is not executed properly and so he is caught along with his friends by the warden. He also gets severe punishment for doing so. "Mukunda

remembers the caning they got when they returned and the ache in his stomach from hunger. The warden had made them stand in the corner and watch the others eat: they were to get no food that day or the next. That would teach them" (143).

Once Mukunda gets caught red handed when he attempts to read a letter written by Mrs Burnam's lover. Mrs Burnam happens to see him reading it and yells at him coldly. He is very much frightened and runs very fast from her house. He needs to share his feelings to Bakul and let his heart open and say that he does not commit anything wrong. He flings himself down at the base of the Banyan tree where he could see Bakul already there. She tells him about the demolishing of the ruins that her farther along with the archaeologists plan to do. Bakul says "come on it's bad, but not so bad. He says they won't spoil it all"(158). Bakul is frightened seeing the darkness and urges Mukunda to rush home. They start walking holding each other's hands as they scamper on as swiftly as they could, When Mukunda stumbled, Bakul clutches his sleeve harder and says, "careful there's a big stone there! hand in hand, they stood in the middle of the empty fields under the star filled sky, their troubles, fear and the long way they still had to go before reaching home, all forgotten" (159).

Mukunda and Bakul return home very late in the evening from the fort. Both of them move closer to each other. They could hear from the voices coming out of the windows that both Kamal and Manjula scold them for leaving home and wandering together throughout the forest. Kamal advises Nirmal to send Mukunda out of the house and admit him in boys' school. He also informs that Mukunda grows but the money Amulya keeps for him decreases. More over Bakul also grows and it is not advisable to bring both of them together." I tell you, having to be here, managing the boy and Bakul, it's not easy, Nirmal. The girls growing up so is he just the other day I was in a real fright when" (162). Nirmal replies that, "They have been friends since they were four and six. I trust them. They are like brother and sister". I don't think they are up to anything. It's true they are late tonight they just need a good scolding"(163). In a confused thought, Nirmal notices that both Mukunda and Bakul become matured physically and is in a dilemma whether Mukunda can be kept in his house or sent to a new boys school in Kolkata.

Ever since he hears about the decision of sending him out of the house, Mukunda stops speaking to Bakul. He hardly looks at her and also stops playing with her. Meera is the only person to whom Mukunda spends his time. But it happens one day that Kamal misbehaves with Meera and so she decides to leave the house. She takes a train one day to leave for her home, when Mukunda comes to send off her. Meera tells, "You and I came here, to the house, the same year and now we're leaving for new things the same year too". You'll go to a big school, see a big city, and become a real scholar! We'll meet again, won't we"? (172). Meera puts her hand through the train windows and touches Mukunda's cheek and says "look after yourself, Mukunda" and leaves the station (172).

A fortnight later, another tonga came to the door, a different set of luggage was piled into it and Nirmal and Mukunda left for the railway station in a cloud of dust. Bakul trailed back into the house after they had gone. She

passed by the well and by the mango tree. She kicked a pebble all the way to Mukunda's old room, could not enter it for the pain of seeing it empty then wandered back inside going from room to room, almost breathless with the terror of knowing she would not find Mukunda (172).

Mukunda joins a boarding school where he becomes a rootless man. He does not know his father's name and even the name, 'Mukunda' is also christened neither by his father nor his mother. He is not sure of his origin. He even does not know what religion he belongs to. So he is considered as an outcast in the school and in the college where he studies. With the help of the money, Nirmal Babu gives him, he completes his studies and searches his identity in this world. Thus, the dislocation of Mukunda from the house of Nirmal Babu to a boarding school depresses him completely and ruins his life. He struggles each and every day. Life is not a bed of roses for him. Thus, Anuradha Roy explicitly uses the theme of dislocation and depression in this novel *An Atlas of impossible Longing* through the masculine characters, Nirmal and Mukunda.

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