



# Mapping Displacement and Desire: A Perspective of Post Colonialism in Anuradha Roy's *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*

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## Abstract

*Displacement is a process in which people are exiled to a strange land to secure their lives. They face a lot of issues like losing identity, sense of displacement, longing for their homeland and unadaptable culture and tradition. Displacement is divided into three types: physical displacement, psychological displacement and cultural displacement. Desire plays both optimistic and pessimistic roles in postcolonialism. Through the characters like Amulya, Nirmal and Mukunda, play an optimistic role like possessing the desire to overcome all the struggles soon and lead a happy life, returning to their homeland or a comfortable place from the struggle, making a place through achieving success in life. Through the characters of Kamal, local politicians, opportunistic landlords and moneylenders play cruel roles like dominating others, quest of ruling power, and grasping others' prosperity to fulfill their wishes. It focuses on the role of displacement and desire, which takes place in the narration and with the characters in the text. The paper elaborates on the emotional and physical spaces of the people by mapping their achievements of every individual in opposition to the socio-political background of the postcolonial land. It also highlights their struggle in attaining identity, dislocation, memories and longing during displacement.*

**Keywords:** displacement, desire, post colonialism, identity, socio-political background, mapping and memories

Home is not only the livingplace; it holds the memories of love, sacrifice, unity and accountability. Good values and morality born from home. Members of our family support one another in their needs and it gives peace and protection in all the times. But in certain situations, humans are forced to leave their homeland due to natural disasters, political conflicts, colonization, economic crisis to search for a new life. It tends them to face a lot of issues like cultural conflicts, isolation, alienation and longingness. This is termed as displacement in literature. It makes them to lose their identity. They travel across multiple struggles like lack of communication,

discordant food, and strange cultures. Displacement often drives the beautiful movements of one's life in their memories and ends up with tears. It creates strong desires to return back to their past life. Even if a man practices to adapt new place, some people or some incidents remind him of the past. This paper explains the struggles of the protagonist and major characters who are forced to fly from their motherland and how they desire to return. It also maps their emotions and memories from the present to past experiences.

Anuradha Roy is an Indian author and a brilliant potter. She has participated at many literary programs



conducted by the British Broadcasting Corporation, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and all over the world, like Cornell and Cordoba Universities, Oxbelly Writer's Retreat in Greece and Messina, 2023 successfully. Roy has written five novels. Her novel *Sleeping on Jupiter* was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2015. Another novel *All the Lives We Never Lived*, has won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2022. Another novel *All the Lives We Never Lived*, has won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2022.

Her first novel *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* has been translated into nearly sixteen languages. It is also voted for the Book of the Year in numerous places like Seattle Times, Huffington Post and Washington Post. She has participated at many literary programs conducted by British Broad Casting Corporation, Canadian Broad Casting Corporation and all over the world like Cornell and Cordoba Universities, Oxbelly Writer's Retreat in Greece and Messina, 2023 successfully. The novel speaks about the social and political phases of twentieth century. It briefly delivers the transition period of India from British colonial period to the new independent country and its impacts.

The narration takes place from 1900 to 1970. It includes the three generations of a family who lives in Bengal and also how they suffer in the transition period. The book connects the modernity, caste, social order, hierarchal traditions which shape the individual after the departure of Britishers and their dominant rule. The novel opens in Songarh, a riverside small fictional town. It is almost crushed in colonial reminiscence. The fictional town displaces to cities such as Calcutta and its neighbour towns. It results in the loss of identity of the dislocated people. They start searching for their belonging and identity. It reflects the impact of the postcolonial exploration.

The novel opens in Songarh. There is no proper protagonist in the novel since it possesses multiple characters. Every character has its own individuality. The major character is Amulya, who runs a factory of herbal medicines in the small town of Songarh. Kananbala is his wife. They have two sons namely Kamal and Nirmal. Mukunda is an orphan from the family's circle. Bakul is the daughter of Nirmal and Shanti. Bakul lost her mother in her childhood. When Amulya relocates from his place, Kananbala also

joins him. But Amulya fails to understand the needs of Kananbala in the new place. It becomes mental stagnation. She starts to behave very strangely. She has become an angry woman. Later, she gets a good friendship with Mrs. Barnum. Barnum is an Anglo-English woman. She lives in a nearby house.

Mukunda is not only an orphan; he belongs to the intermediate caste. He has been taken into Amulya's family as a companion or friend to Bakul, who lost her mother at a small age. Being Mukunda and Bakul sail in the same ship their bond becomes strong. They feel happy to play with one another. They spend good time for each other. This becomes disturbance to Kananbala when the kids grow together. Because of Mukund's caste Kananbala decides to separate them. She sends Mukunda far away from their residential place. They are worried about sexual attraction, social hierarchies and caste variations. To avoid issues in future the family decides to do that to Mukunda. The boy was too good for the orphanage; they taught them very little, fed them even less and beat them if they disobeyed. Do we know what caste he is? (169)

Mukund is sent to Calcutta. There he becomes a prosperous man. He successfully completes his schooling and becomes a graduated man. But even though he reaches great heights in his life, his heart fails to move from the longingness for his home. He longs to get his loveable family and companionship of Bakul. Simultaneously, many changes also take place in Songarh regarding caste, social hierarchy, impacts of colonialism and partition. It affects the people in remote villages and towns. Mukunda gets a chance to visit Songarh. He is filled with the memories of Bakul, the garden and house. He recollects his past experience and feels very sad of thinking that he cannot get that back in the present.

The splintering of culture, tradition, self and home is the repeated themes which express postcolonial narratives. Literature plays an important role in understanding the emotions of the people's bond with their land, language, culture, history, identity and memory. Especially the consequences of colonialism are greatly discussed by numerous authors in their works. They have showed the light on both physical and emotional contradictories of displaced people.



“Unhomely” is the notable concept introduced by Homi K. Bhabha in which he says that it is the moment when home. He is denied acceptance as the place of consolation and steadiness, but rather as exotic and terrifying. Many of the characters in the novel *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* are shaped as instances of frightened homemakers who view their home like suppressed and dominating prison. Meera, who is represented as a widow in the novel is ensnared within the walls. Mukunda is exiled from his living place. Thus, the home turned out as a disputed space that reflects the country's postcolonial identity crisis.

Displacement plays a variety of levels in the novel *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*. Roy discusses the impacts of displacement literally and also metaphorically through her characters and setting. The literary movement is carried out in the journey from town to city and from home to banishment. The metaphorical displacement is expressed through the emotions of the characters, like the feeling of alienation, of being unbound from the origin, language, culture and self.

Social political displacements are reflected by the transplantation of the characters across many places. The family residence in the town Songarh is the center of life in the beginning and it is steadily grasped by abandoned. It turns as the sign of the disappearing feudal system and the temporality of home. In the novel, Mukunda is forced to exile from the family because of his origin and caste. He is directed to the orphanage and at last to Calcutta. The place he lives has never become his real home. They act as the places of aspiration, obscurity and isolation.

Only swapping the address is not spatial dislocation; it is about separation from native land, culture, identity, tradition, sense of belonging and self. The transplanted urban areas in the novel are represented as symbols of fragmentation and obscurity. Mukunda hardly tolerates the impacts of being an unknown parentage and a child of a lower caste. He denies being accepted by the family who raised him. His faces continuous struggles in his entire life journey. It covers his pitiful life in an orphanage, hostel and also adulthood. Even after becoming strong in economic status, the stain of his origin and background always remains.

The harshness of the caste system, which alienates every person in the society, against his or her good qualities and successful growth, is clearly sketched out by Anuradha Roy in this novel. Caste structures are Indian stand as a dominant force of banishment in the postcolonial era where justice, freedom, equality and republic are presumably to be core values. Cruelty of marginalisation is expressed in by both social and physical transplantation by Roy in her novel.

Social identity is also formed by the strict caste and class systems that control the way of people relate to each other. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar says, “Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated. We must realise that our people have yet to learn it. Democracy in India is only a top-dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic” (15).

Mapping in literature provides the themes and concepts in depth through visual representations. It helps the researchers to understand the core subject, symbols, settings and dialogues. It helps to connect every detail in the novel to explore widely. In the title of the novel *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* the word, “Atlas” is used as a metaphor by Roy which also reflects her narrative structure. In common, atlas denotes the map of the world which gives the visual representation of the land area of the continents, rivers and oceans. It also conveys how everything is interconnected with the another. Likewise, in this novel the word atlas represents the emotional mappings of memory, pain of longingness, alienation and loss.

Mukunda is affected by his past memories throughout the novel. It haunts him even when he achieves greater things in his life. His heart carries the scar of his wound he has earned when the family who rejects him as an orphan, Bakul's love and detachment from Meera. The novel describes memory as the incarnation of map which connects the present and past life of the protagonist. The memories are not only the compilation but emotional gap he continues to occupy.

The characters like Bakul who live constant in home also experience isolation, hope and desires which are diminished by the social hierarchies.



It is often represented by the term “Unbelonging” in postcolonial context. Such misery tone fills the text and clears that belonging is inconsistent. It is temporary and fictitious.

Displacement pushes the characters to discover more about themselves. Their sense of identity and the way they connect with others are deeply affected by both emotional and physical upheavals. Being placed in unfamiliar situations often makes them reflect on their past and rethink whom they are. Moving away from familiar places leads them to question their values and beliefs. The meeting of different cultures adds to the complication of shaping identity. As they struggle with their roots and the effects of migration and exile, the characters uncover new sides of themselves.”

The author elaborately maps the junction of displacement and desire in the perspectives of Post Colonialism. This tells how memory, belonging and love are sculpted by cultural imbalance and historical disruptions. Love and desire which shapes the good life is disturbed greatly by displacement and its cruel impacts convey the status of postcolonial actuality broadly. Roy’s novel emphasizes the hopelessness

of a constant identity and home by highlighting marginalization, gender discrimination and hybridity.

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