

# AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ARTS AND HUMAN SCIENCE (AJAHS)

ISSN: 2832-451X (ONLINE)

**VOLUME 3 ISSUE 4 (2024)**



PUBLISHED BY  
**E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA**

## Alienation and Nostalgia: A Diasporic Reading in *The Little Buddha in Tokyo*

Ram Prasad Rai<sup>1\*</sup>, Raj Kumar Gurung<sup>1</sup>

### Article Information

**Received:** October 30, 2024

**Accepted:** December 04, 2024

**Published:** December 15, 2024

### Keywords

*Diaspora, Dispersion, Homeland,  
Host Land, Involuntary,  
Voluntary*

### ABSTRACT

The main aim of this paper is to explore 'alienation' and 'nostalgia' as diasporic features in the story *The Little Buddha in Tokyo* by Parashu Pradhan. The protagonist Palden falls in love with a Japanese tourist girl in Kathmandu. They get married and fly to Tokyo in Japan. In the hostland, Palden's discomfort begins as he is confined to the house of his wife Silvia Sann. He is not allowed to go out and work. His dream of earning a lot of money and having a happy life in Kathmandu, his homeland, faces a big problem. He feels alienated totally. He becomes nostalgic for his home, families, and homeland landscape in Nepal. Palden stands as a diasporic character in the story. This is a qualitative research. It implements the theories of 'alienation' and 'nostalgia' in 'diaspora' introduced by Fernando Galvan, Mahinder Kumar, Wayne O'Donohue and Lindsay Nelson, Karl Marx, Scott T. Allison and Jeffrey David Green and so on. It applies APA 7th edition as the research format. We have consulted library books, journal articles, magazine articles, and internet sources for e-journals and e-books reading related to the concepts 'alienation' and 'nostalgia' in connection with 'diaspora.' So, we, as researchers study how Palden faces 'alienation' and 'nostalgia' and becomes a diaspora in Japan, the host land. The certain lines from the story contain the protagonist's experiences of 'alienation' and 'nostalgia' and they are analyzed as diasporic features to interpret him as a diasporic character. He is a Nepali diaspora in Japan. This paper will be a support to other prospective researchers in diaspora area.

### INTRODUCTION

In this modern era, people's mobility around the world has heightened far more than in the past. They leave their home countries and go to foreign countries for various purposes. According to Angelina Stanojoska (2012), "Push and pull factors synthesize conditions that exist in the two worlds- the poor and rich countries". They complete their certain degrees of study in their country and go abroad to study further. They believe that their education in foreign universities can be of better quality than that of their own countries. They think that there are better- qualified professors in the universities abroad. Most people fly abroad for job opportunities. They earn much more money in foreign countries than in their own. Some people reach in abroad for trade purpose. K. Thet Kyaing (2014) notes that the main reasons behind their mobility to foreign nations are "low productivity" and "unemployment" in their native land. They run business there for "capturing richness" (Bajuwaiber, 2024). In addition, sometimes people make religious visits to abroad. They attend religious programs and stay there for a long time without returning home countries. People's movement to foreign countries has been a popular matter at present.

Though people reach in advanced nations in matters of education, communication, and technology, they do not become fully satisfied in the foreign land. They accomplish higher degrees of education there, but it can not give them full satisfaction. They get jobs and earn a lot, but this also does not make them confident enough to live happily there. They have to go through different troubles by being 'outsiders' in the land abroad. For Rita

Joshi (2004), they have "difficulties in adjustment" in the host land. The employers, administration, and the management in the host land, keep them in the second position of emphasis to their citizens and "they face discrimination, hatred, prejudice, and bias" (Bajuwaiber, 2024). Moreover, they can not speak their language, follow their culture, and other food items. They have "feeling of alienation and rootlessness" (Shukla & Benerji, 2014) in the foreign land. Furthermore, they suffer from nostalgia for home. They miss their home, family members, and relatives. They love to return to their homeland, but some sorts of challenges stop them from going back home. The situation like it is diasporic.

People leaving their homeland and living in the host land are diaspora. They are in foreign lands away from their native countries. While being in their motherland, they have their own language to speak to each other. They follow their own culture and tradition. They enjoy their own festivals. They wear their own cultural dresses and eat their traditional food items. They have their own society to work together for their well being as Wendy Chinonyerem Benaiah and Dolapo Osuntoki (2024) state that they have chances "to interact and exchange ideas, viewpoints, contacts, information, and experience". On the contrary, they do not have such easy situations in the host land. They are new to the language, culture, cultural activities, and people there in the foreign land. They can not follow their culture and cultural beliefs, or festivals comfortably in the new land. So, naturally, the diaspora people face "alienation and aloofness" (Sujaritha, 2009) being separated from their homeland and people. They feel lonely and experience "nostalgia for the homeland"

<sup>1</sup> Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal

\* Corresponding author's e-mail: [rairamprasad26@gmail.com](mailto:rairamprasad26@gmail.com)

(Shukla & Benerji, 2014). In the story, *The Little Buddha in Tokyo*, the protagonist Palden marries a Japanese girl Silvia Sann and goes to live in Japan. He aims to earn a lot of money and make beautiful house in Kathmandu. However, instead of having his dream fulfilled, he is confined into his wife's house. He can not go out and work for money. He suffers from displacement, alienation, and nostalgia a lot. He is a diasporic character in the story.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper majorly applies the theory of diaspora. There are two types of diaspora: i) Classical and ii) Modern. This study is based on the modern concept of diaspora. It implements the ideas of Mahinder Kumar, Rita Joshi, John McLeod, and so on. Moreover, this research work follows theories of 'alienation' explained by Karl Marx, Wayne O'Donohue and Lindsay Nelson, and M. H. Lystad and 'nostalgia' introduced by Scott T. Allison and Jeffrey David Green, Constantine Sedikites and colleagues, and Janelle L. Wilson as the features of diaspora to observe Palden's, the protagonist's position in the story as the primary text. Since this study is solely on the basis of a qualitative research approach in nature, it widely uses library and internet sources for books, reviews, journal articles, or magazine articles related to 'diaspora,' 'alienation,' and 'nostalgia.' It also highlights the ideas of 'push' and 'pull' factors to talk about the migration in modern diaspora.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The term 'Alienation' is a situation when people feel lonely being away from home and families. The people become upset being in a difficult host land environment and having lack of contact with the near and dear people or relatives in the homeland. Furthermore, O'Donohue and Nelson (2014) argues, "The term 'alienation' originates from the work of Karl Marx on the effects on workers of the capitalist labour process". Karl Marx takes 'alienation' as the separation between owner and the worker in the production process. Workers work hard but they do not get their sweat fully paid by the owners. The workers are alienated from their rights to be paid on the basis of their struggle as Karl Marx (1963) states, "Alienation is the separation and estrangement of man from other". However, in diaspora, people are alienated as they are discriminated and exploited in their working places of host land. In such a situation, they have 'personal dissatisfaction' and experience 'social isolation' (Lystad, 1972). In the host land, they remain aloof as they have no favour from the working place owners. They do not have frequent communication with their families at home. For Blauner, alienation is "The individual's feelings resulting from a lack of control, powerlessness and the absence of self-fulfillment –powerlessness" (qtd. in O'Donohue and Nelson, 2014). People often have the experience of alienation during their work process in the diaspora. 'Nostalgia' simply means the longing for the past that can

be events, things, people, or places. Usually, people have nostalgia for the past when they are lonely away from those places, things, and people. Allison and Green (2020) take nostalgia as "a sense of longing, and wanting to return to the past". While being in abroad, people often suffer from nostalgia for home and family members. They are in a distant place and they miss home and homeland either in happy or difficult moment. Constantine Sedikites and colleagues (2008) state, "Nostalgia, then, is literally the suffering due to relentless yearning for the homeland". Nostalgia is a desire for the past and that is usually the home, families, and relatives. When people are in foreign land, they have to face discomforts in the new cultural, linguistic, and political situations of the new place which often make them miss home, homeland, and people there. Wilson (2014) considers, "Nostalgia literally means 'homesickness'". The experience of being alienated, separated, and displaced from one's homeland and people trigger nostalgia in people in the host land. At least, it helps them manage pain and misery in the diaspora.

The term 'diaspora' signifies the people who are dispersed from their homeland into host land. They have left their motherland for foreign countries, either willingly or forcefully. In general, 'diaspora' is "the idea of 'dispersion,' 'scattering' derived from the Greek language *dia* 'through' and *speirein* 'to scatter'" (Galvan, 2008). Classically, diaspora mainly signifies the Jewish Diaspora. It indicates the dispersion of Jews into neighboring countries when their country was captured. Such a dispersion is caused by force. The Jewish Diaspora is known as Greek Diaspora and in this model of diaspora, people leave their homeland involuntarily due to wars, civil wars, political instability, famine or natural disasters. However, in modern sense of diaspora, people get dispersed into foreign land voluntarily. They go abroad for various purposes such as, employment, study, business, or visits. So, currently, diaspora's formation process has been widened about which Mohinder Kumar (2015) argues, "It refers to displaced communities of people, willing or forced, who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile". All types of dispersions of people into foreign land are diaspora and 'alienation,' 'displacement,' or 'nostalgia' become the characteristics of a diaspora.

The story *The Little Buddha in Tokyo* by Pradhan is a translated version. It was translated from Nepali language into English in 2004 by Mukul Dahal. Though it belongs to both Nepali and English literature world, it has not reached the hands of many readers yet. It is still waiting for eager readers. So, this story has not been researched on by any scholars. However, it carries a real like story of Palden leaving his homeland for Japan with his dream of becoming a rich man in future, but result is opposite in the host land. This story bears features of diaspora such as, 'alienation' and 'nostalgia' experienced by the protagonist. Hence, it is selected as a primary text for the study of Nepali diaspora in Japan.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Palden's Meeting with Silvia and Flight to Tokyo

Palden, a tourist guide in Kathmandu, is from Solukhumbu. He works in a trekking agency. He takes foreign tourists to different places of Nepal as "he worked as a tourist guide" (Pradhan, 2004) for the office. That is the way how he is living in Kathmandu for his every day meal. He is from mountainous region. He has already had a lot of experience of walking, working, and running in hills that are "matters relating to the nature of cognitive skills, including their contexts of acquisition, course of development and conditions of exercise" (Nash, 2005). So, he has no problem of walking in hills while guiding tourists in high and snowy mountains and hills. He can describe plants, trees, soil, rivers, and places comfortably to tourists. He is quite familiar with things in the hills because Pradhan (2004) says, "He was born in the Himalayas". He is glad to be a tourist guide. He is devoted to his duty. He has to guide tourists from various countries around the world. Among many tourists, Silvia Sann is from Japan. She becomes very close to him heartily very soon.

The beauty of Silvia Sann attracts Palden a lot. She too, likes him. Having a guest like Silvia, he becomes very excited. He feels lucky to get a chance of guiding a Japanese guest, Silvia. They sometimes go to eat in a restaurant. Silvia offers him alcohol. In an excitement, "He felt an undiminished happiness, entire pleasure, every festive moment all at once in a single day" (Pradhan, 2004). They enjoy talking to each other. They do not have much knowledge about each other's language to communicate well, but their eyes, faces, and hearts speak. Palden begins to imagine of going to Japan and earn a lot. Neha Mishra (2007) argues that migrant workers often do not like to be engaged in domestic work places due to low payment and they love to go abroad. Palden does not have good source of earning in Nepal. Pradhan (2004) avers, "Palden, on the other hand, fancied: 'If only I were in Japan!' What good fortune that would be! What a number of buildings he could have in Solu and in Kathmandu!". Like other many people, he is also attracted to go to Japan, a rich country. Important factor for them is they can judge what benefit and loss they have while working in their own country and abroad (Lee, 1966). Furthermore, they fall in a deep love of each other. They can not think of getting separated. Both of them respect Buddha. Silvia is in the land where Buddha was born. Most importantly, she loves Palden as a little Buddha. Finally, they get married and fly to Tokyo in Japan with desire of fulfilling his dreams in life. However, the situation turns negative for him in the host land.

### Palden Alienated in Tokyo

Though Tokyo is Palden's desired city to be in and earn a happy life, he feels alienated as he is confined to only the house by Silvia Sann, his wife. Palden wants to go to work outside, but Silvia never allows him to do so and in alienation Palden happens to question himself, "Why and

for what did you come to Tokyo?" (Pradhan, 2004). She asks him to stay home and do what she wants him to do because she says he is her husband. His desire in life or purpose of coming to Japan turn to be meaningless which makes him "feel totally frustrated and alienated" (Rosen, 1975). He does not become happy with all available eating things in the fridge and watching TV all day as Pradhan (2004) writes, "He did not know how long he could shut himself up in the room, alienated. How many nights or days or years? Be stuck in a room and keep on eating and drinking". He knows it is useless for him to sit and enjoy watching TV all times, but he can not do anything. He can not work with his interest. Silvia's order works in the house. For refreshment, he walks outside in Park, but he can not stay out as long as he desires to. He has to face questions from Silvia. He is "powerless" and it "reinforces his own alienation" (Lystad, 1972). Palden realizes himself that he has become a victim of his own wife. His freedom is looted away in Tokyo, the host land. He is totally upset for being separated from his people in Nepal.

Palden experiences fully uprooted in Tokyo from his native land, Nepal. He is forced to live a life in host land uselessly. He does not know what he has achieved by coming to Japan. Amidst all such confusions, he feels totally "dislocated and dispossessed" (Pal, 2016). In the new land, a foreign land, he is wasting his productive age with no any accomplishments. He is not sure how his life goes on. His all dreams have gone spoilt as Pradhan (2004) argues, "But he was left restless by the pain of being a rape victim every night. He felt he had transformed into a self-regulating machine and was crushed under Silvia's command". He can not go out and enjoy working and having a society with people. He has been like a criminal being confined in the house of his wife. He has "a loss of the sense of home; loss of roots; loss of place" (Boruah, 2016). He has no communication with his family members and friends in Nepal. He is passing a difficult life in the host land. He has lost hope in life because of which "He wished to end his life out there in Tokyo, commit a suicide" (Pradhan, 2004). He is not happy though his wife is with him. Palden has to fulfill his already assigned work. He is not glad to be in Japan now because of all such unnecessary dominations from his wife. He sometimes thinks to lose his life to be free from tensions.

### Palden in Nostalgia for his Homeland

In Tokyo, Palden has nostalgia for homeland when his freedom is exploited by his wife. Instead of working and earning money, he has to stay at his wife's house and serve his wife only. In his helplessness, "Palden couldn't help reminiscing about the small bazaar, Salleri, in his native district, Solu. He harked back to the narrow lanes of Thamel in spite of an unwillingness to do so" (Pradhan, 2004). It is very hard for him to stay lazily and fruitlessly at home alone and he is forced to do so which "creates desire for home in him" (Pal, 2016). As a living creature

and a human being, one has to move to places for a work, visit, business, or any other daily activities in life. Palden is deprived of all such freedom. Leela (2012) states that all such restraints cause “home sickness” and “longing for home” in him. In his loneliness, “Palden would traverse the forest of Solu and Salleri only in his dreams. Only on the TV screen could he catch a glimpse of the mountain peaks. The Palden inside Palden went dry and dead every day. He began to dream of returning to Nepal to resume the old job of trekking” (Pradhan, 2004). Though Palden is in such a rich and developed country Japan, he is not comfortable enough to live there for his further career. It is all due to unnecessary pressure upon him to be at home all days, but not to join any companies for job. He longs to be in his homeland, Nepal and continue his work he had before leaving for Tokyo.

Silvia’s insignificant pressure and boredom created by his every day’s tedious stay at home make Palden miss his past incidences and homeland. Tokyo’s beauty and advancement in development does not attract him any more, but McLeod (2015) asserts, he has “memories of home to explore in retrospect”. He remembers Silvia’s words of appreciation to him before their marriage in Nepal as she would say, “I revere the Buddha, Palden. Since a tender age, I’ve had in me a deep reverence and respect for the Buddha. Since you come from the Buddha’s land, you seem to me to be an embodiment of Buddha, a little Buddha in yourself, my dear” (Pradhan, 2004). However, the current attitudes of Silvia towards Palden sadden only him. Her dictatorship upon him becomes intolerable. He regrets marrying Silvia and coming to Tokyo. Things, places, and sceneries make him remember the past and the past is no other than his homeland, Nepal. According to Sujaritha (2009), “the diasporic community faces several problems and it lends them to be nostalgic about their home country always”. When it is cold and snowy in Tokyo, he misses snowy mountains and rhododendrons blooming in the forests of hills in Nepal. Pradhan (2004) writes, “The stagnant time evaporated and Palden was swung back to his past. He was carried to the vast expanse of gleaming snow and the chilling heights of the mountain. Palden merged himself with the rhododendron in the woods of a rocky slope”. He does not enjoy his stay in Japan at all. His days are full of discomforts. He often has nostalgia for Nepal and its landscape to manage his suffocating life in Tokyo.

## CONCLUSION

The protagonist Palden as a diasporic character reaches his desired land Tokyo, but he can not compromise with the difficulties over there because of which he experiences displacement and misses his homeland, Nepal. When he happens to come across Silvia in Kathmandu, he becomes happy. He falls in love with her and marries her. His dream of being in Japan, one of the richest countries in the world, is fulfilled. However, his dream of making a good life there turns to be failure. His wife restrains him going out and working for money. He has to stay at

home and eat things stored in the fridge. He is not happy living in the strict rules of Silvia, but he can not return to Nepal easily. He experiences a complete separation from his families, relatives, friends, and homeland. All such unhappy moments in the host land Tokyo, triggers nostalgia in him for homeland. His diasporic life in Tokyo is truly painful. In the story, the concept ‘here’ signifies Tokyo, the host land and the present time of Palden whereas, ‘there’ notifies his homeland, Nepal and his past moment. He was much happier there in Nepal than he is now in Japan. So, he experiences of being alienated in Tokyo and longs for his homeland and his past days. Hence, *The Little Buddha in Tokyo* by Pradhan is a diasporic story.

## REFERENCES

- Allison, S. T., & Green, J. D. (2020). Nostalgia and heroism: Theoretical convergence of memory, motivation, and function. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.577862>
- Bajuwaiber, N. M. (2024). Established and outsiders in the context of nationalism and islamophobia in Egyptian cinema. *American Journal of Arts and Human Science*, 3(3), 218-227. <https://doi.org/10.54536/ajahs.v3.3.2976>.
- Benaiah, W. C., & Osuntoki, D. (2024). The impact of social media on political mobilization in Nigeria: A case study of the obedient movement. *American Journal of Arts and Human Science*, 3(3), 228-238. <https://doi.org/10.5436/ajahs.v3.3.3336>.
- Boruah, J. (2016). Examining hybridity in V. S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas*. *The Literary Herald: An International Refereed English e-Journal*, 2(1), 395-403.
- Galvan, F. (2008). Metaphors of diaspora: English literature at the turn of the century. As You Write It: Issues in Literature, Language, and Translation in the Context of Europe in the 21st Century. *University of Ljubljani*, 1(2), 113-123.
- Joshi, R. (2004). Nations and alienations: Diaspora in recent Indian fiction. *India International Center Quarterly*, 31(1), 83-93.
- Kumar, M. (2015). Diasporic studies of V. S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas*. *DAV Academic Review: A Referred Research Journal*, 1(1), 122-128.
- Kyaing, K. T. (2014). Pull and push factors of migration: A case study in the urban area of Monywa township, Myanmar. *News from the World of Statistics*, 1(4).
- Lee, E. S. (1966). A theory of migration. *Demography*, 3(1), 47-57. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2060063>
- Leela, S. (2012). Homeland through diasporic judgement in V. S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas*. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (IOSR-JHSS)*, 35-37.
- Lystad, M. H. (1972). Social alienation: A review of current literature. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 13(1), 90-113.
- Marx, K. (1963). *Early writings*. Translated and edited by T. B. Bottomore, Watts.
- McLeod, J. (2015). Diaspora identities. Postcolonialism,

- Manchester UP, 205-238.
- Mishra, N. (2007). The push & pull of globalization: How the global economy makes migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation. *Human Rights Brief*, 14(3), 2-4.
- Nash, R. (2005). The cognitive habitus: Its place in realist account of inequality/difference. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 26(5), 599-612.
- O'Donohue, W., & Nelson, L. (2014). Alienation and managing human resources. *International Journal of Organisational Analysis*, 22(3), 301-316.
- Pal, G. S. (2016). Nostalgia through diasporic perception in V. S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*. *International Journal of English Literature and Culture*, 4(5), 84-87.
- Pradhan, P. (2004). *The Little Buddha in Tokyo*. Edited and translated by Mukul Dahal, Mahbubur Rahman Babu.
- Rosen, G. (1975). Nostalgia: A 'forgotten' psychological disorder. *Psychological Medicine, Cambridge UP*, 5(4), 340-354.
- Sedikides, C. (2008). Nostalgia: Past, present, and future. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 17(5), 304-307.
- Shukla, S., & Benerji, N. (2014). The theme of 'alienation' and 'assimilation' in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri: A socio-literary perspective. *International Journal of English and Literature*, 5(1), 19-22.
- Stanojoska, A. (2012). *Theory of push and pull factors: A new way of explaining the old*. Faculty of Security-Skopje, Republic of Macedonia.
- Sujaritha, S. (2009). *Diasporic chronotope in women's fiction: A select study*. Pondicherry University, PhD dissertation. <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/5365>
- Wilson, J. L. (2014). *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of meaning*. U of Minnesota Libraries Publishing.