



A comparative study of women characters and the cartography of emotions in the Novels of Arundhati Roy and Anuradha Roy

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Abstract

This paper presents a comparative analysis of the portrayal of women characters and the intricate mapping of their emotional landscapes in the novels of Arundhati Roy and Anuradha Roy. Though often linked by surname and nationality, the two authors employ distinctly different literary styles and thematic concerns. Arundhati Roy, in *The God of Small Things* (1997)^[1], uses a dense, poetic, and non-linear narrative to explore the lives of women shattered by the "Love Laws" - the rigid hierarchies of caste, class, and history. Her characters, particularly Ammu and Rahel, are conduits for a visceral, often traumatic, emotional experience. In contrast, Anuradha Roy's novels - *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2008)^[3], *The Folded Earth* (2011), and *All the Lives We Never Lived* (2018)—adopt a more measured, lyrical realism. Her protagonists navigate solitude, longing, and a search for identity against the backdrop of a changing India, their emotions often internalized and expressed through a profound connection to landscape and memory. This study argues that while both authors create emotionally resonant and psychologically complex women, Arundhati Roy focuses on emotions as a site of radical, transgressive rebellion, whereas Anuradha Roy explores emotion as a quiet, persistent force of inner resilience and existential inquiry.

Keywords: Arundhati Roy, Anuradha Roy, women characters, emotional cartography, Indian English fiction

Introduction

The literary landscape of contemporary Indian fiction in English is significantly enriched by the contributions of Arundhati Roy and Anuradha Roy. Despite the shared surname, their artistic projects diverge markedly. Arundhati Roy, a global public intellectual and activist, has, to date, produced one monumental novel and a more recent companion piece (*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 2017). Her work is characterized by its fierce political engagement and linguistic innovation. Anuradha Roy, an editor and novelist, has built a substantial body of work that is introspective, historical, and deeply invested in the inner lives of ordinary individuals. The common thread, however, is their unwavering focus on the experiences of women. This paper delves into the emotional worlds of their female characters, examining how each author uses emotion not merely as a character trait but as a fundamental narrative force that critiques social structures, defines identity, and shapes destiny.

Arundhati Roy: Emotions as Transgressive and Traumatic

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a masterclass in portraying emotion as a palpable, almost physical entity. The novel's famous opening line - "May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month" - immediately imbues the setting with a suffocating emotional weight.

1. Ammu: The Architecture of Defiance and Despair.

Ammu is the emotional core of the novel, a character whose life is a testament to the catastrophic consequences of feeling deeply in a world that forbids it. Her emotions are her rebellion:

- **Love and Desire:** Her love for Velutha, an "Untouchable" carpenter, is the ultimate transgression

against the Love Laws. Roy portrays this emotion not as gentle affection but as a desperate, life-affirming act of defiance. It is raw, visceral, and politically charged.

- **Frustration and Anger:** Ammu's frustration with her life - as a divorced woman, a burden to her family, a mother in a patriarchal society—manifests as sharp, lashing anger. Her famous declaration to her children, "I love you both very much, but if you don't behave I might have to kill you," is not a threat of violence but a stark articulation of her claustrophobia and powerlessness, an emotion born of societal suffocation.
 - **Despair and Tragedy:** Ultimately, Ammu's emotions lead to her destruction. Her despair is not passive; it is the direct result of a system that punishes her for her capacity to love. Her tragedy is that her emotional honesty is incompatible with the world she inhabits.
- #### 2. Rahel: The Aftermath and Emotional Fracture.
- If Ammu represents the transgressive act, Rahel embodies its aftermath. Her emotions are not explosive but implosive. The trauma of her childhood - witnessing her mother's destruction, her twin's fracture, and Velutha's brutal death - results in a profound emotional dissociation.
- **Grief and Alienation:** Rahel's return to Ayemenem is a journey into a landscape of grief. Her emotions are muted, fractured, and expressed through a childlike lens (the "God of Small Things"). She feels "emptiness" and a sense of being "unhooked" from the world.
 - **Love as Haunting:** Her relationship with Estha is the culmination of this shared trauma. Their incestuous union is less about physical desire and more about a

desperate, fractured attempt to become whole again, to return to a prelapsarian state before the "loss of Sophie Mol." It is emotion as a haunting, a ghost that must be confronted.

Anuradha Roy: Emotions as Landscapes of Longing and Solitude

Anuradha Roy's approach to emotion is more internalized and psychological. Her novels are slow, character-driven meditations on loss, memory, and the quiet yearning that defines a life. Roy's prose - with its neologisms, repetitions, and non-linear structure - mirrors this fractured emotional state. Emotions are not tidy; they are messy, dangerous, and ultimately, revolutionary.

1. **Mukunda and Maya (An Atlas of Impossible Longing): The Emotion of Belonging.** In an Atlas of Impossible Longing, Roy explores the emotion of longing through characters who are outsiders. Mukunda, an orphan, longs for a place to belong and for the love of Bakul, who is out of his reach due to class differences. His emotional journey is one of silent pining and self-creation. Similarly, Bakul's mother, Shanti, and later, Bakul herself, navigate the emotional confines of widowhood and societal expectation. Their emotions are often suppressed, expressed through stolen glances, unspoken words, and a deep connection to the physical space of the house and the garden, which becomes a metaphor for their inner lives.
2. **Maya (The Folded Earth): Grief and the Search for Anchor.** In the Folded Earth, Maya is defined by a profound, quiet grief following her husband's death. She flees to a Himalayan town, and her emotional state is mirrored in the majestic, isolating landscape.
 - **Solitude as Emotion:** Maya's primary emotional experience is solitude - not loneliness, but a chosen state of being where she can process her loss. Roy meticulously charts her small daily routines, her interactions with the town's eccentric characters, and her relationship with the natural world as the channels through which her grief slowly transforms into a tentative new identity.
 - **Longing for Meaning:** Her emotion is not the explosive rage of Ammu but a deep, persistent ache for meaning in the face of loss. It is an emotion that seeks connection with place and history rather than transgression against law.
3. **Myshkin (All the Lives We Never Lived): The Son's Longing.** In Roy's most recent work, the emotional lens is male, but it is focused entirely on a woman - his mother, Gayatri, who abandoned him. Myshkin's entire life is shaped by the emotion of abandonment and a desperate longing to understand his mother's inner world. The novel is an excavation of a woman's emotional life (her desire for freedom, art, and self-expression) as seen through the grief and love of the son she left behind. It highlights how Roy uses emotion as a historical force, connecting personal longing to the larger political turmoil of pre-Independence India. Roy's prose is elegant, descriptive, and atmospheric.

Emotions are woven into the fabric of the setting; they are in the "folded earth," the "impossible longing," and the "lives never lived."

Comparative Analysis: Transgression vs. Resilience

1. Narrative Style.

- **Arundhati Roy:** Lyrical, non-linear, explosive, politically charged.
- **Anuradha Roy:** Linear, lyrical realism, measured, introspective.

2. Primary Emotions.

- **Arundhati Roy:** Traumatic love, rage, despair, transgressive desire.
- **Anuradha Roy:** Longing, grief, solitude, resilience, quiet desire.

3. Expression of Emotion.

- **Arundhati Roy:** Externalized, visceral, bodily, and often destructive.
- **Anuradha Roy:** Internalized, psychological, expressed through landscape and memory.

4. Social Context.

- **Arundhati Roy:** Emotions are a direct assault on caste, class, and patriarchal laws.
- **Anuradha Roy:** Emotions are a personal negotiation with societal expectations and history.

5. Arc of Characters.

- **Arundhati Roy:** Tragic downfall; emotions lead to systemic punishment.
- **Anuradha Roy:** Journey towards understanding or resilience; emotions lead to introspection. |

6. Metaphor for Emotion.

- **Arundhati Roy:** A bomb, a suffocating heat, a fractured piece of glass.
- **Anuradha Roy:** A folded map, a hidden valley, a slow-growing tree.

Conclusion

Both Arundhati Roy and Anuradha Roy are indispensable voices in Indian literature for their profound and unflinching portraits of women's inner lives. Their comparative study reveals two powerful, yet distinct, approaches to the cartography of emotions.

Arundhati Roy charts a topography of radical feeling. For her characters, emotion is a weapon and a wound - a force of transgression that challenges the very foundations of an oppressive society. The emotional lives of Ammu and Rahel are landscapes of ruin, but within that ruin lies a terrible, beautiful truth about the cost of love in an unjust world.

Anuradha Roy, conversely, maps the quieter, more enduring terrains of the heart. Her characters' emotions are not weapons but companions to their solitude. Their journeys are inward, towards a reconciliation with loss and a discovery of self through longing. Their resilience is found not in dramatic rebellion but in the daily act of enduring and feeling deeply.

Ultimately, Arundhati Roy shows us the hurricane of emotion - its devastating power and its necessity. Anuradha Roy shows us the deep, steady current of the same ocean - its persistence, its depth, and its capacity to carve canyons

over time. Together, they offer a complete and devastatingly beautiful picture of the female emotional experience in modern literature.

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