

**ANIMALS IN LITERATURE, HUMANS IN NEED: DOGS AS MIRRORS OF HUMAN EMOTION, COMPANIONS, AND UNIFIERS IN ANURADHA ROY'S NOVELS**

**Ms. B. VIVILIA ARIVU MANI**, PhD Research Scholar, Department of English, Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu. [viviliabeya@gmail.com](mailto:viviliabeya@gmail.com)

**Dr. M. KANNADHASAN**, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu. [drmkту@gmail.com](mailto:drmkту@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT:**

Animals have long occupied a significant space in literature, serving as mirrors to human emotions, agents of moral guidance, and catalysts for social cohesion. In the novels of Anuradha Roy, dogs emerge not merely as background figures but as central companions whose presence shapes narrative development and deepens character portrayal. The paper explores the multifaceted roles that dogs play across Roy's novels, highlighting their capacity to reflect human vulnerability, offer emotional support, and foster connections within fractured social environments. Through close readings of her works, this study demonstrates that dogs in Roy's novels function as loyal companions who navigate human complexities, embody empathy, and bridge interpersonal divides. By analysing key episodes and interactions, the paper argues that these animals contribute to a richer understanding of human relationality and social ethics, reinforcing the broader discourse of human-animal studies in contemporary literature. Furthermore, Roy's portrayal of dogs challenges conventional notions of human-centred storytelling, suggesting that animals can serve as moral and emotional touchstones. This investigation situates Roy's canine characters within the framework of literary animal studies, illustrating how their presence illuminates universal themes of loyalty, compassion, and resilience. The paper argues that the recurring motif of the dog in Roy's novels highlights the interdependence between humans and animals, providing a nuanced perspective on companionship, emotional sustenance, and social unity in literary narratives.

**Keywords:** Anuradha Roy, dogs in literature, human-animal bond, literary companion, emotional support, social cohesion, contemporary Indian novels, animal studies.

**Introduction:**

Animals have long occupied a vital space in literature, serving as mirrors that reflect the depths of human emotion, morality, and social consciousness. From ancient fables and mythologies to modern novels, animals transcend their literal presence to become powerful symbols of loyalty, loss, empathy, and the fragile bond between humans and nature. They often act as silent witnesses to human suffering or as emotional catalysts who bridge the divide between solitude and connection. The paper focuses on how Roy uses dogs not merely as background figures but as profound extensions of her characters' inner worlds. Through their companionship, silence, and unconditional loyalty, dogs in her novels illuminate the complexities of human vulnerability, offering solace and unity in moments of grief, alienation, and moral crisis.

Dogs hold a unique and enduring place in human culture and novels, symbolising loyalty, empathy, and an unspoken understanding that transcends the limits of language. Across civilisations, they have been revered not only as faithful companions but also as embodiments of unconditional love and moral constancy "...self-reliance that is the common lot of stray dogs and cats in our country – animals who have historically been domesticated to the point that they cannot do without human beings and yet are so often rejected or brutalised by the very humans who domesticated them" (Roy, *Called by the Hills* 66). In literature, dogs often serve as emotional anchors for their human counterparts, creatures who listen without judgment, comfort in silence, and mirror the hidden depths of human feeling. Their unwavering devotion highlights humanity's yearning for genuine connection and trust, making them powerful narrative tools through which writers explore themes of companionship, loss, and redemption. Through their presence, novels often reveal the profound ways in which animals,

particularly dogs, nurture the human spirit and remind us of the simplicity and purity of love untainted by expectation.

Anuradha Roy, a celebrated contemporary Indian novelist, is renowned for her lyrical prose and profound sensitivity to the natural world. “A writer of extreme brilliance, humanity and grace” (Obioma). Her novels often blur the boundaries between humans and animals, granting her non-human characters remarkable depth, agency, and emotional resonance. In works such as *The Earthspinner* and *All the Lives We Never Lived*, Roy portrays animals, particularly dogs, not merely as background presences but as sentient beings with their own interiority and significance in the human story. Through her nuanced portrayal, animals become conduits of empathy, symbols of resistance, and mirrors reflecting human solitude, love, and moral struggle. Roy’s narrative world thus invites readers to reconsider the interconnectedness of all living beings and challenges anthropocentric perspectives that often dominate both life and literature.

### **Research problem:**

The central research problem of this study lies in exploring how dogs in Anuradha Roy’s novels function as mirrors of human needs, emotions, and ethical consciousness. Rather than existing as passive companions, these animals embody emotional intelligence and moral insight, illuminating the fragility and resilience of human relationships. Roy’s portrayal of dogs reveals how human beings project their loneliness, grief, and yearning for unconditional acceptance onto these empathetic creatures. At the same time, the dogs’ silent companionship challenges the moral detachment of modern life, urging readers to reflect on empathy, responsibility, and interdependence across species. By examining these canine figures, the research seeks to understand how Roy uses them to question human-centred narratives and to highlight the possibility of emotional healing and ethical connection through cross-species bonds.

### **Research Objective:**

The primary objectives of this research are to analyse the role of dogs in Anuradha Roy’s novels as emotional mirrors, mediators of human connection, and symbols of ethical coexistence. It seeks to understand how Roy uses canine characters to reflect the emotional landscapes of her human protagonists, revealing their inner conflicts, desires, and capacity for empathy. The study further examines how dogs serve as bridges between isolated individuals, promoting communication, compassion, and healing in fractured human relationships. Finally, it aims to uncover the ethical vision Roy presents through these interspecies bonds, one that redefines companionship as a moral and emotional partnership, emphasising coexistence, care, and mutual understanding between humans and animals. In Anuradha Roy’s novels, dogs transcend their role as pets, becoming emotional mirrors and mediators, embodying human fragility, compassion, and the profound longing for connection in fractured societies.

### **Literature Review:**

The representation of animals in literature has evolved from symbolic and allegorical roles in ancient fables to deeply emotional and psychological presences in modern narratives. In early literary traditions, animals functioned as moral instructors or symbolic extensions of human virtues and vices, as seen in Aesop’s fables or the *Panchatantra*. With the rise of realism and modernism, however, writers began to portray animals as sentient beings with emotional depth, capable of evoking empathy and reflecting human alienation. Contemporary literature often blurs the boundary between human and animal consciousness, using animals to critique anthropocentrism and to highlight shared vulnerability, care, and companionship. This transition from moral allegory to emotional realism underscores how animals have become vital to understanding the complexities of human emotion and ethical relationships in novels.

Theoretical perspectives from Animal Studies, Posthumanism, and Eco-criticism have enriched the study of animals in literature. Thinkers like John Berger, in *Why Look at Animals?*, examine how modernity has estranged humans from animals, turning them into spectacles rather than companions.

Donna Haraway's *the Companion Species Manifesto* redefines human-animal relationships as interdependent and co-evolving. At the same time, Cary Wolfe's *Animal Rites* challenges human exceptionalism, urging a posthumanist rethinking of subjectivity and ethics. These frameworks highlight how literature can restore the moral and emotional continuity between species. Posthumanist and ecocritical readings position animals not as background symbols but as active participants in ethical and emotional ecosystems, calling for a recognition of non-human agency and shared existence.

In Indian novels, writers such as Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, and Amitav Ghosh have used animals to explore themes of belonging, ecological balance, and emotional resonance. Dogs, in particular, often appear as silent witnesses to human suffering or as connectors between fractured worlds. Anuradha Roy continues this tradition with a distinctive voice, granting her animal characters individuality and purpose. In *The Earthspinner*, the dog Chinna serves as a unifying force, bridging the spiritual, emotional, and moral divides between humans. Roy's portrayal of empathy, silence, and companionship through animals offers a profound critique of human isolation and moral rigidity. In an interview with John Freeman, Anuradha Roy affirms that "Chinna the dog, he is a very idealised street dog. In India, we have a lot of stray dogs who have very hard lives because they face quite a lot of violence they have. I mean it is a brutal life for them, but there are dogs like Chinna who I have encountered also who are the divine spirit of a particular stretch of street or a particular little square where everybody knows them as people do Chinna in the book..." (44:20). Previous studies have examined Roy's treatment of memory, art, and identity; the animal dimension, particularly the role of dogs as emotional and ethical mediators, remains underexplored. This research thus addresses that gap by examining how Roy's canine figures redefine empathy, connection, and coexistence in contemporary Indian novels.

### **Methodology:**

This study adopts a qualitative literary analysis grounded in eco-critical and posthumanist frameworks to examine the role of dogs in Anuradha Roy's novels. Through a close reading of the novels, the research explores how Roy constructs dogs as emotional and symbolic agents that reflect human vulnerability, empathy, and moral awareness. The analysis emphasises textual interpretation, thematic parallels, and narrative tone to uncover how canine figures mediate human relationships and ethical reflection. Secondary sources from animal studies and eco-critical theory support the interpretation, highlighting the broader implications of human-animal coexistence in her work.

### **Dogs as Mirrors of Human Emotion:**

In Anuradha Roy's novels, dogs serve as powerful mirrors of human emotion, embodying the unspoken grief, love, and longing that her characters often suppress. They become extensions of their human counterparts, reflecting the vulnerability and moral depth that words fail to convey. Through their silent companionship, Roy's dogs translate emotional turbulence into visible gestures of empathy and endurance, allowing readers to perceive the interior worlds of her protagonists more clearly.

In *The Earthspinner*, Chinna, Elango's loyal dog, becomes a living symbol of steadfast devotion and silent suffering. As Elango endures rejection, heartbreak, and social ostracism, Chinna mirrors his emotional state through his constant presence and quiet loyalty. The dog's unwavering companionship highlights Elango's inner pain and isolation, offering comfort where human empathy falters. Chinna's death, paralleling Elango's spiritual and emotional exhaustion, underlines how deeply intertwined the two lives are, each bearing the burden of love, loss, and longing for belonging.

Chinna the dog, and this was what people called destiny. Best to embrace it and be grateful. Mysterious things happen in this world; we cannot know it all. This was what his grandfather had believed and handed him as a natural inheritance. Look at you now, Elango said to Chinna, we can't explain what brought you to me, what kept you alive in that forest all alone until I found you. But here you are, and if you leave again, I know I'll be done for. The wise knew better than to analyse every single thing, Elango told his dog (Roy, *The Earthspinner* 47).

Through such portrayals, Roy externalises the inner conflicts of her characters, using dogs as emotional translators between silence and expression. The presence of animals allows what is repressed within the human psyche to surface compassion, guilt, or despair, transforming private emotions into shared experiences. In this way, Roy's canine figures act as mirrors that reveal not only the depth of individual suffering but also the enduring capacity for empathy that sustains human existence.

### **Dogs as Companions and Emotional Healers**

In Roy's novels, dogs often function as silent companions to alienated or emotionally wounded humans, offering solace without judgment or expectation. Their presence provides a safe space where characters can express vulnerability, grief, or affection that may be constrained in human relationships. By existing outside the moral and social codes that govern human interaction, these canine companions allow characters to reconnect with their emotional core, rediscover trust, and navigate the complexities of human intimacy.

In *The Folded Earth*, Bozo, Maya's loyal dog, exemplifies this role as a stabilising emotional presence. Bozo's quiet devotion mirrors Mata's need for comfort, companionship, and continuity amid personal and social turmoil. Through everyday gestures following her, sitting beside her, or responding to her moods, Bozo becomes an anchor of emotional stability, reflecting Mata's inner resilience and offering her a consistent source of empathy that human connections often fail to provide. This companionship transforms both human and animal into reciprocal participants in emotional care.

Bozo would sit very straight in the front, staring solemnly ahead, while I had to make do with a corner in the back that I managed to free of clutter and dog-things. From behind, the big German Shepherd was a head taller than the General who – in his prime, no taller than the Army's mandatory five foot five inches – was shrinking every passing year. He held himself as high as his five remaining feet would allow, and as he drove, he alternated between humming songs from old Hollywood musicals and holding forth on the anarchy in the country. "It's going to the dogs," he would say and immediately apologise to Bozo: "Not you, dear boy, not you. You would rule with an iron paw ... "and in the same breath to me, ... (Roy, *The Folded Earth* 43).

Roy's depiction of dogs as emotional healers emphasises their capacity to restore empathy and humanity in fractured lives. Human characters frequently reveal tenderness, affection, and unguarded emotion more naturally with dogs than with other humans, highlighting the therapeutic role of interspecies bonds. By foregrounding these relationships, Roy not only underscores the moral and psychological significance of animals in human life but also challenges readers to recognise the ethical and emotional dimensions of companionship that extend beyond the human sphere.

### **Dogs as Unifiers of Divided Worlds**

In Anuradha Roy's novels, dogs often act as bridges between fragmented human relationships, transcending social, cultural, and religious divides. "The dog would sit and wait for her by the mailbox outside the main door until she came back" (Roy, *The Earthspinner* 86). Their unconditional loyalty and nonjudgmental presence create spaces where human prejudices and hierarchical barriers soften, allowing connection and understanding to flourish. By embodying trust, empathy, and emotional consistency, canine characters facilitate interactions that might otherwise be hindered by societal norms or personal biases, demonstrating the potential of interspecies bonds to foster unity and ethical reflection.

In *The Earthspinner*, Chinna exemplifies this unifying role by linking Elango, Sara, and the broader community. As a silent, observant presence, Chinna navigates social hierarchies and personal tensions without discrimination, symbolically bridging caste, religious, and emotional divides. His interactions encourage compassion and cooperation among humans who might otherwise remain isolated or conflicted, positioning the dog as an ethical connector whose influence extends beyond mere companionship. Through Chinna, Roy emphasises how animals can mediate empathy and moral

awareness, highlighting the transformative potential of cross-species relationships in overcoming human divisions.

Chinna was given to going door to door and resting a while at each, until someone came out with a bite to eat. The dog never begged, he sat at the doorstep as if contemplating the world, serene in the certainty that he was irresistible. There was no need anymore for him to spend the mornings at Devika's, but he made his way there out of habit—not to mention the bowls of meat and rice. It was now one of the several homes on which he deigned to call during his daily rounds, and it was their privilege that he consented to sprawl under their fans...Evenings, Chinna waited at Moti Block for the blind calligrapher who lived there, Zohra's grandfather... (Roy, *The Earthspinner* 68).

### **Silence, Language, and Understanding Beyond Words:**

Anuradha Roy's novels highlight the profound capacity of dogs for nonverbal communication, revealing an emotional intelligence that often surpasses human understanding. Through gestures, attentive presence, and intuitive responsiveness, canine characters interpret and respond to the unspoken needs, fears, and desires of their human companions. This silent companionship allows humans to confront their vulnerabilities and express emotions they cannot articulate, demonstrating that empathy and understanding are not solely dependent on verbal language. In Roy's narrative world, silence becomes a conduit for connection, and the dog's perceptive presence transforms emotional expression into a shared, interspecies dialogue.

Roy's portrayal aligns closely with Donna Haraway's concept of "companion species," which emphasises the co-evolution of humans and animals through relationality, care, and mutual influence. "The relation between human and animal is not one of hierarchy but of entanglement, where both are constituted in and through the other" (Haraway 32). By foregrounding dogs' ability to sense, respond to, and reflect human emotion, Roy challenges anthropocentric assumptions that privilege speech and rationality as the sole markers of intelligence or ethical awareness. Her canine characters embody a form of ethical and emotional literacy that transcends human limitations, illustrating how interspecies relationships expand the possibilities of empathy, understanding, and moral imagination. In this way, silence and attentive presence become vehicles for profound connection, redefining both human and nonhuman roles in the shared narrative of care.

### **Dogs as Symbols of Vulnerability, Innocence, and Emotional Resilience**

In Anuradha Roy's novels, individual dogs carry rich symbolic weight, reflecting the vulnerabilities, innocence, and emotional landscapes of their human companions. In *Sleeping on Jupiter*, Bhola, Johnny Toop's dog, represents both loyalty and fragility. His death within a sacred space underscores the cruelty and moral corruption that can pervade even ostensibly holy or protected environments. Bhola's loss magnifies the emotional and ethical stakes of the narrative, highlighting human vulnerability and the fragility of trust and innocence in a world marred by violence and betrayal. "I crouched by the window, watching in the dark as Bhola and the others appeared, dragging Jugnu behind them. They tied him to a tree. And then they kicked and punched him. In the orange light of the flames, I could tell that they were using rods, stones, feet, belts, and fists" (Roy, *The Folded Earth* 172).

In *All the Lives We Never Lived*, Rikki embodies innocence and emotional solace amidst grief and dislocation. The dog provides comfort to the human characters, offering companionship that softens the harsh realities of loss and alienation. Rikki's presence emphasises the capacity of animals to stabilise emotional turbulence, creating spaces of empathy and tenderness in lives otherwise shadowed by trauma and separation.

I had animals and trees in my life from the start. There were our cows, of course, but my friend from the very beginning, and sometimes my only friend, was a dog, Rikki. It was my grandfather who found her—or she found him—he had many one-sided discussions with her about this in the years afterwards. One cold December when I was

three, there was a puppy on the street outside the clinic, playing alone, chasing bits of paper and her own stump of a tail (Roy, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* 63).

Through these canine figures, Roy underscores the moral and emotional significance of human-animal relationships. Dogs become more than companions; they are ethical and emotional anchors, reflecting both the fragility and resilience of human experience and highlighting the potential for empathy, care, and healing across the boundaries of loss and suffering. In *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, Meera's bond with an unnamed stray dog reflects her inner loneliness. The dog acts as a silent emotional anchor, mirroring her vulnerability and offering companionship. This relationship highlights how animals function as subtle yet powerful supports to human psychological states within Roy's narrative world. "She reached the edge of the ruins and paused. Nirmal was already there. The dog sat beside him, and the puppies tumbled over each other and around him as if they were old friends" (Roy, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* 152).

### **Broader Implications**

Anuradha Roy's portrayal of dogs conveys a powerful ethical message about coexistence, empathy, and the moral responsibility humans hold toward other species. "Animals are not merely metaphors in postcolonial texts; they are material beings whose lives are entangled with human histories of domination and resistance" (Huggan and Tiffin 12). By highlighting interspecies bonds, her novels contribute to eco-humanism and posthumanist ethics, challenging anthropocentric assumptions and emphasising relationality, care, and mutual understanding. Dogs in her novels act as moral and emotional catalysts, restoring faith in human connection amid modern alienation, loneliness, and social fragmentation. Through their loyalty, intuition, and silent presence, they model compassion and ethical engagement, reminding readers that empathy and emotional resilience are not solely human traits but emerge through shared existence across species.

### **Conclusion:**

In Anuradha Roy's novels, dogs operate on multiple narrative and symbolic levels, functioning as mirrors of human emotion, loyal companions, and unifiers across fractured social and emotional landscapes. As mirrors, they reflect the suppressed grief, longing, and vulnerability of their human counterparts, rendering the interior lives of characters visible and tangible. Through their silent yet intuitive presence, dogs articulate emotions that humans struggle to express, bridging the gap between internal experience and external understanding. As companions and emotional healers, they offer solace to alienated or traumatised characters, providing stability, empathy, and comfort where human relationships often falter. Dogs like Chinna, Bozo, Bhola, and Rikki illustrate how interspecies companionship can restore emotional equilibrium and nurture resilience.

Roy positions dogs as unifiers who transcend social, religious, and cultural divides, acting as ethical connectors that encourage compassion and shared understanding across human boundaries. By foregrounding these interspecies bonds, Roy articulates a vision of a shared emotional ecology in which humans and animals coexist in mutual recognition, care, and empathy. Her canine characters thus serve as moral and emotional guides, reminding readers that the essence of humanity lies not only in human-to-human relationships but also in the capacity to recognise, honour, and care for other beings. Roy's dogs remind us that to be human is, eventually, to care across species.

### **Works Cited:**

Haraway, Donna J. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003.

Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. Routledge, 2010.

Obioma, Chigozie. *Blurb on The Earthspinner*, by Anuradha Roy, Hachette, 2021.

Roy, Anuradha. "Anuradha Roy, *The Earthspinner* with John Freeman." *Interview by John Freeman*. YouTube, uploaded by Eliot Bay Book Company, 8 Aug. 2002, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icd2g0SDk-c>.

- Roy, Anuradha. *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*. Free Press, 2008.
- . *The Folded Earth*. Hachette India, 2011.
- . *Sleeping on Jupiter*. Hachette India, 2015.
- . *All the Lives We Never Lived*. Hachette India, 2018.
- . *The Earthspinner*. Hachette India, 2021.
- . *Called by the Hills*. Hachette India, 2025.