

**Psychological Dimensions of Passion, Regret, and Cultural Context in
the Novels of Anuradha Roy**

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Abstract

The novels of Anuradha Roy portray complex psychological experiences through the lives of her characters. Her narratives explore emotional conflicts, cultural identity, passion, regret, loneliness, and memory within contemporary Indian society. This article examines selected aspects from Roy's novels with particular attention to the psychological dimensions of regret, passion, and loneliness. The study also considers how cultural elements such as dress, language, and religious practices contribute to shaping the identity of characters. By applying theoretical perspectives from scholars such as Zeelenberg and Pieters and Robert Vallerand, the article demonstrates how psychological realism functions as a major narrative technique in Roy's fiction. The analysis highlights that obsessive passion and rash decisions lead characters to emotional suffering and regret, while loneliness and painful recollections intensify their psychological conflicts. Ultimately, Roy's novels reveal how individual choices and social expectations influence human psychology and personal identity.

Keywords: Psychological Realism, Regret, Passion, Loneliness

Introduction:

Literature has long been associated with psychology because literary texts often portray the emotional and mental struggles of human beings. Even before psychology developed as an academic discipline, writers had explored the complexity

of human behaviour through their creative works. Contemporary Indian English novelist Anuradha Roy continues this tradition by presenting deep psychological insights in her novels. Her works frequently portray characters struggling with emotional turmoil, loneliness, regret, and the search for identity.

Roy's novels such as *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, *The Folded Earth*, *Sleeping on Jupiter*, and *All the Lives We Never Lived* present the psychological conflicts experienced by individuals living in changing social and cultural environments. Her characters often face dilemmas between personal freedom and social expectations. As a result, they suffer from mental conflicts, emotional isolation, and deep regret.

The present article examines the psychological dimensions found in Roy's fiction by focusing on themes such as passion, regret, loneliness, and cultural identity. The discussion is supported by theoretical perspectives and textual references that illustrate how Roy's characters experience emotional suffering due to their choices and circumstances.

One important aspect of Roy's novels is the representation of cultural identity. The author depicts Indian society through detailed descriptions of social customs, dress, language, and religious practices. These cultural elements shape the identity of characters and influence their personal relationships.

Food, dress, and language are used as symbols of culture in Roy's fiction. Indian cuisine itself reflects the diversity of the country. The Indian food system includes "spices, herbs, a large assortment of recipes, and different cooking styles," (35) which represent the cultural diversity of Indian society. Similarly, the novelist describes regional food habits in her narratives to portray the everyday life of different communities.

Dress also functions as a marker of cultural identity. Traditional Indian clothing such as sari, dhoti, and kurta symbolize regional customs and social identity. The novel describes how Bakul's attire reflects the beauty of Indian tradition: "Bakul's sari was the green of a tender banana leaf...with tiny fish-shaped gold studs in her ears" (Roy, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, p.136). Such descriptions emphasize the importance of cultural symbols in shaping the characters' social identity.

Language is another important cultural element in Roy's novels. India is a multilingual nation, and the novelist uses regional expressions to portray cultural diversity. Words like "Boudi," "Babu," and "Ma" appear in the narratives to reflect

Bengali and Hindi cultural contexts. These linguistic expressions create authenticity and demonstrate how language functions as a vehicle of culture.

Through such depictions, Roy illustrates that culture is deeply embedded in everyday life. Cultural values influence the characters' beliefs, relationships, and decisions. Therefore, understanding cultural context is essential to analyse the psychological experiences presented in her fiction.

Passion is a central psychological theme in Roy's novels. Many characters pursue their desires with intense determination, often ignoring the consequences of their actions. This uncontrolled pursuit of passion frequently leads to emotional suffering and regret.

According to Robert Vallerand's theory, passion can be classified into two forms: harmonious passion and obsessive passion. Harmonious passion contributes to psychological well-being, while obsessive passion creates internal conflict and emotional distress. As Vallerand explains, "Harmonious passion for a given activity will generally lead to the experience of positive emotions...while obsessive passion may facilitate some deleterious effects" (67).

The character Gayatri in *All the Lives We Never Lived* exemplifies obsessive passion. She desires absolute personal freedom and artistic expression. However, her relentless pursuit of independence causes conflicts within her family and ultimately leads her to abandon her husband and child. This decision results in long-lasting regret and loneliness.

Gayatri's emotional turmoil is revealed in her confession: "I've destroyed everything. I can never go back... it is as if a giant black mouth of a volcano is before me" (Roy, 2018, p.218). This statement illustrates how obsessive passion can drive individuals toward destructive decisions.

The conflict between Gayatri and her husband Nek further intensifies the psychological tension. Nek believes in discipline and responsibility, whereas Gayatri prioritizes personal freedom and artistic pursuits. Their opposing perspectives lead to frequent quarrels, which negatively affect their son Myshkin. The novel demonstrates that familial conflicts often have long-term psychological consequences for children.

Through this portrayal, Roy emphasizes that passion must be balanced with responsibility. When individuals allow passion to dominate their decisions, it may result in emotional instability and regret.

Regret is another significant psychological theme explored in Roy's novels. Regret occurs when individuals reflect on their past decisions and imagine alternative outcomes that might have been better.

Psychologists Zeelenberg and Pieters describe regret as a complex emotional experience: "Regret is generally not considered to be one of the basic emotions... it stems from and produces higher order cognitive processes" (2007, p.5). This definition highlights that regret requires the ability to evaluate one's past actions and imagine different possibilities.

Gayatri's life clearly illustrates this psychological phenomenon. After abandoning her family in pursuit of personal freedom, she later realizes the consequences of her choices. Her remorse becomes evident when she admits, "I feel as dead as a stone for the grief and for the hideous sense of having made a mistake" (Roy, 2018, p.219)

According to Zeelenberg and Pieters, regret can influence future decision-making because individuals try to avoid repeating their mistakes. They explain that regret occurs when people "realize or imagine that their present situation would have been better had they decided differently in the past" (2007, p.15)

The theory also distinguishes between two types of regret: retrospective regret and prospective regret. Retrospective regret arises after a decision has already produced negative consequences, while prospective regret refers to anticipating regret before making a decision. Gayatri clearly experiences retrospective regret because she recognizes her mistakes only after abandoning her family. The novel further portrays her inner conflict when she confesses to Lisa, "How contradictory I am... one part of me fighting with another" (Roy, 2018, p.262). This internal struggle demonstrates how regret can create deep psychological distress.

Zeelenberg and Pieters also suggest several strategies to cope with regret, including reversing decisions, justifying past actions, denying responsibility, and engaging in psychological repair. These strategies aim to help individuals manage emotional pain and regain psychological stability.

Loneliness is another dominant theme in Roy's novels. Many characters experience emotional isolation due to separation, failed relationships, or unfulfilled desires. The characters Gayatri, Myshkin, and Nek all suffer from loneliness, though for different reasons.

Gayatri becomes lonely after leaving her family, while Myshkin suffers from the emotional trauma of his mother's abandonment. This loneliness shapes his personality and leaves him with painful memories throughout his life.

Psychological studies suggest that loneliness is becoming increasingly common in modern society. It is often associated with depression, insecurity, and fear

of losing loved ones. The emotional suffering experienced by Roy's characters reflects these broader social realities.

The novels show that loneliness often arises from personal decisions as well as social circumstances. For example, Gayatri's pursuit of freedom leads her to abandon her family, but this decision eventually isolates her emotionally. Similarly, Myshkin grows up without maternal affection, which deeply affects his psychological development.

Through these portrayals, Roy illustrates the destructive effects of emotional separation and lack of family support. Loneliness becomes not only a personal experience but also a social issue that influences human relationships.

Memory plays a crucial role in the psychological experiences of Roy's characters. Painful memories often continue to haunt individuals long after the events have passed. According to Cristina M. Alberini, repeated emotional experiences eventually become long-term memories that shape human behaviour.

In Roy's fiction, memories often intensify emotional suffering. Myshkin's memories of his mother's abandonment remain vivid throughout his life. These recollections cause continuous psychological pain and prevent him from achieving emotional stability. Similarly, other characters in Roy's novels experience trauma caused by past events such as war, abandonment, and failed relationships. These experiences demonstrate how memory can function both as a source of identity and a source of suffering.

Roy's novels can be understood within the framework of psychological realism. This literary approach focuses on the inner thoughts, emotions, and motivations of characters rather than simply describing external events.

Through psychological realism, Roy explores the mental states of individuals facing social and emotional challenges. Her characters are not portrayed as idealized heroes but as complex human beings struggling with their weaknesses and desires.

The psychological elements found in Roy's novels include depression, loneliness, regret, longing, separation, and post-traumatic stress disorder. These aspects reveal the darker side of human experience and highlight the emotional struggles that many people face in real life.

However, the novels also suggest possible ways to overcome psychological suffering. The characters sometimes attempt to confront their fears, accept their mistakes, and search for emotional healing. These efforts demonstrate that understanding the causes of psychological pain can lead to personal growth and recovery. The novels of Anuradha Roy provide a profound exploration of human

psychology. Through her detailed portrayal of characters and their emotional experiences, Roy highlights the complex relationship between personal choices, cultural expectations, and psychological well-being.

Themes such as passion, regret, loneliness, and memory are central to her narratives. Characters like Gayatri illustrate how obsessive passion and impulsive decisions can lead to emotional suffering and regret. The psychological theories of scholars such as Vallerand and Zeelenberg help explain these experiences and provide deeper insights into human behaviour.

Roy's fiction also demonstrates how cultural identity shapes individual experiences. Elements such as language, dress, and social customs influence the characters' relationships and decisions. At the same time, the novels reveal the universal nature of psychological struggles such as loneliness and emotional conflict.

Ultimately, Roy's works show that literature can function as a powerful medium for understanding human psychology. By exploring the emotional lives of her characters, Roy encourages readers to reflect on their own experiences and recognize the importance of emotional balance, responsibility, and self-awareness in human life.

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