

Human-Animal Love in the Novels of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to explore Human-Animal love in the novels of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai through a comparative study framework. Roy is an expert in giving voice to the voiceless. Following the same fashion she has provided a dignified place to animals in both of her novels. She stands tall for the causes of humble humanity and in the case of animals her love is no less. She becomes such involved with her animal characters that she doesn't hesitate to provide them actual names just like her human characters. She has presented the positive side of human-animal bonding, which work as a tragic relief during the intense moments in her novels. On the other hand her counterpart Kiran Desai shows the dependability of her human characters over her animal characters that may be a docile dog or mischievous monkeys. Desai provides convincing roles to animals who are not introduced for a decorative purpose, but for their aesthetic pleasure. Her characters value their relationship with animals and deem them as an integral part of their lives. The paper discusses human-animal love, which is a step ahead from human-animal bonding, relationship or association.

Arundhati Roy keeps a sharp knowledge of the various intricacies of love. Apart from several types of love between human beings, she clearly advocates love for animals. She, not only cares about the love for humanity but also for the humble animals, birds, and insects. They have been used extensively for their aesthetic appeal as well as their utmost significance. She is an ardent supporter of love and dead against the violence against animals. The exuberant presence of animals, birds, and insects in her novels is an intense inkling of her passion for them. In both of her novels she offers ample role to them and provides proper names as well. Estha's beloved dog is named as Khubchand and the temple elephant is called Kochu Thomban in *The God of Small Things*. The list becomes quite exhaustive in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, a book that has collected its multidimensional coatings like a sedimentary rock within a huge span of two decades. Here, Birbal is a talkative parakeet of Kulsoom Bi; Payal is the name of Saddam Hussain's mare; Biroo, a dog that Saddam has found got in fact a second name called Roobi also; Chihuahua, a Mexican dog is addressed as Prince Charles; a red-haired mongrel is named as Comrade Laali; A huge German shepherd dog of Captain Jaanbaaz is known as Jimmy; Agha and Khanum are the kittens whereas Sultan is an orphan rooster of Gulrez; a lame donkey is called Mahesh and finally Guih Kyom is the name of a dung beetle. Roy is very particular in providing them highly convincing and important roles. Their inevitable presence takes the novels to different heights of eagerness and mystery. Her human characters seem to have developed a harmonious relationship with her animal characters. Zainab, the adopted daughter of Anjum is less interested in singing and more in animals. She tries every possible means to protect animals and birds of her locality:

Zainab's real passion, it turned out, was animals. She was a terror on the streets of the old city. She wanted to free all the half-bald, half-

dead white chickens that were passed into filthy cages and stacked on top of each other outside the butcher shops, to converse with every cat that flashed across her path and to take home every litter of stray puppies she found wallowing in the blood and offal flowing through the open drains. (Ministry 36-37)

Roy and Desai are well aware of the mutual benefits that human-animal companionship brings forth. They have dexterously used the human-animal interactions to release the stress of their characters along with that of the readers. Froma Walsh presents a detailed study about the importance of human-animal bonds in her research paper entitled, "Human-Animal Bonds I: The Relational Significance of Companion Animals." The relationship between the two in various countries has been discussed at length. Her study demonstrates highly positive results of human-animal interactions:

To understand the contributions of companion animals to our physical, mental, and relational well-being, a broad systemic perspective is required, considering animal characteristics in interaction with personal needs and preferences, relational dynamics, life situation, and sociocultural context. To fully appreciate the strength of close, long-term bonds with pets, we need to explore more deeply their meaning and significance for their human companions. (Walsh 467)

The scientific approach of Froma Walsh has very well been incorporated by Arundhati Roy in her second novel. Saddam Hussain loves his mare Payal as though she is a family member. The moment he gets a shelter in Anjum's Jannat Guest House, a graveyard, he immediately constructs a

stable for his mare as well. He doesn't treat her as an animal, but a human being and considers her as his business partner also. Both of them make a good business by befooling the relatives of patients to supply them her hooves in order to bring good luck for them:

Saddam built a temporary stable abutting the bathroom for Payal. She stood there all night, snuffing and harrumphing, a pale night mare in the graveyard. In the daytime she was Saddam's business partner. Saddam and she did the rounds of the city's larger hospitals. (*Ministry 77*)

Saddam and his beloved Zainab are similar in their congenial love and understanding for the animals. Just like Zainab, he also provides shelter to stray dogs and brings them home without a second thought. Biroo, a beagle gets the same loving treatment from him and ultimately becomes a family member. Roy's compassionate handling of animal characters provides them a significant podium to voice themselves. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that she has given a loud and clear voice to not only the voiceless, which includes humans and animals, but also to the dead ones. Their voices, beyond doubt are extremely complex to comprehend hence a passionate as well as compassionate understanding is required to decode them. But she has successfully taught the trick of decoding these voices to many of her characters in her second novel:

Lolling next to them, as though he too had decided to take a day off after a hard, working week, was Biroo (sometimes called Roobi), a dog Saddam had found wandering down the pavement of a busy road, wild-eyed and disoriented, with a mess of transparent tubes dangling out of him. (82)

Biroo remains uncomfortable when he comes to stay in Jannat Guest House initially, but very soon he adapts as both Saddam and Anjum adopt him lovingly. Froma Walsh indicates in her research that the best way to get rid of the pressure of day to day life is to spend some quality time with animals. Roy seeks the same tragic relief for her characters by providing them the wonderful company of her animal characters. Froma Walsh's study states that, "pets increase neighborhood interactions and a sense of community" (Walsh 470). Anjum and Saddam develop the same sense of harmonious belongingness when Biroo enters in their life:

As lives have become more stressful and frenetic, pets offer relaxation and replenishment. With playful interactions, they bring their human companions into the carefree joy of the moment. Dogs and cats in particular give an abundance of pleasure; they generate whimsical humor, curiosity, enthusiasm, and a sense of possibility. In uncertain times of global threats and financial insecurities, pets offer a comforting respite from life's storms. (Walsh 470)

The love of the childless Anjum surpasses the love of Saddam for Biroo. She has deep motherly feelings that are

aroused every now and then; it may be in the case of human beings or animals. While narrating "the flyover story (the edited version)" (*Ministry 83*) to Saddam, she starts weeping and once again her motherly feelings get ignited. "I was born to be a mother," she sobbed. 'Just watch. One day Allah Mian will give me my own child. That much I know'" (83). So for the time being she showers her love on animals. She treats Biroo so generously that it gives him the feeling like that of a family member:

Anjum poured a little tea into a saucer and blew into it to cool it down for him. He slurped it up noisily. He drank everything Anjum drank, ate everything that she ate – biryani, korma, samosa, halwa, falooda, phirni, zamzam, mangoes in summer, oranges in winter. It was terrible for his body, but excellent for his soul. (83)

In *The God of Small Things* Roy mentions laws of love, which indicate whom to love. Estha is the one who has a regular tendency to break this law, sometimes in the case of his own sister and other times by emptying his whole bowl of love on a dog. The notions of Froma Walsh are rightly applicable on Estha who unties all bonds with his family members and seeks friendship in the company of his dog, Khubchand. "As family and interpersonal connections have fragmented, companion animals facilitate social contacts and new friendships" (Walsh 470). Estha's genuine affection for his darling dog is par excellence. He treats Khubchand like a friend and when the dog becomes ill, Estha nurses him like a doctor. Here, it won't be wrong to say that Roy's deep concern with animals is not a novice phenomenon in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, but she has already presented the same feelings in her debut novel as well. Estha's attachment with his mongrel is absolutely clear in the following lines:

When Khubchand, his beloved, blind, bald, incontinent seventeen-year-old mongrel, decided to stage a miserable, long-drawn-out death, Estha nursed him through his final ordeal as though his own life somehow depended on it. (*God 12*)

As far as the love towards dogs is concerned Kiran Desai also sails in the same boat. Like her counterpart Roy, Desai also creates some of the very emotional scenes that indicate the unfathomable love between the judge and his lovely dog Mutt in *The Inheritance of Loss*. "Mutt the dog" (1) has such a vital role to play in the novel that Desai introduces her in the very first page of the novel and retains her significance till the last chapter. The theft of Mutt by the miserable lady and her father-in-law gives a hammer blow to the dignity of the judge, but displays his hidden colours of kindness towards animals. He along with other family members searches Mutt almost madly. He calls her with all the possible pet names and the hidden language between them. "Biscuit, pooch, din din, milkie, khana, ishtoo, porridge, dalia, chalo, car, pom-pom, doo-doo, walkie" – He shouted all the language that was between Mutt and himself" (292). It shows the passion of hard-hearted judge for his dog. He becomes uncontrollably violent with his cook for his negligence, which has led to the misery of an innocent dog. With tears in his eyes he shouts as loudly as he can, "Walkie,

baba, muffin.... Mutt, mutton, little chop... he cried" (292). The judge turns out to be highly aggressive with a soldier who tells the judge to return due to the enforcement of curfew. His miserable plight and extreme love come in the forefront in the subsequent utterance:

*Please come home, my dear, my lovely girl,
Princess Duchess Queen,
Soo-soo, Poo-poo, Cuckoo, good good
smelly smell,
Naughty girl,
Treat-treat, dinnertime,
Diamond Pearl,
Teatime! Biscuit!
Sweetheart! Chicki!
Catch the bone! (293)*

Desai has rightly been successful in establishing a father-daughter bonding between the judge and Mutt. The affection of the judge for the dog is immense and in return the dog also reciprocates in the same manner. "Pets that are well-treated offer, in return, love, loyalty, and devotion that is unconditional, consistent, and nonjudgmental" (Walsh 471). The perturbed judge tries every possible means to locate his companion dog. After exhausting all the hopes from the worldly people including the police, he folds his hands and requests to the Almighty. He does whatever he never did in his life and finally the most arrogant Jemubhai Popatlal gets down on his knees just due to his sublime love towards a dog. He bargains with God to acknowledge His existence if He returns his dog. The novelist draws a very fine picture of human-animal relationship in the first paragraph of forty-ninth chapter of the book:

The judge got down on his knees, and he prayed to God, he, Jemubhai Popatlal the agnostic, who had made a long hard journey to jettison his family's prayers; he who had refused to throw the coconut into the water and bless his own voyage all those years ago on the deck of the SS Strathnaver.

"If you return Mutt, I will acknowledge you in public, *I will never deny you again*, I will tell the world that I believe in you – you – if you return Mutt –" (Inheritance 301)

Even in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, Desai dedicates most of the chapters to the love and communication between Sampath Chawla and the monkeys. Sampath establishes a unique type of bonding with the Mother Nature and monkeys that, "he heard the breathing of the leaves and the movements of the sleeping monkeys" (203). The association between them becomes so strong that his devotees start calling him "Monkey Baba" (119). The monkeys help him reaching to the peak of his charm and popularity. Initially the monkeys are calm and docile, but in no time they

turn out to be the hooligans. Under the influence of alcohol they become highly destructive. People get scared and start criticising them. The fatherly love of Sampath comes for their rescue and he shields, "Oh, they are only monkeys.' Sampath felt compelled to defend them. 'What can they possibly know? When the rest of the household is sleeping, the child puffs on his father's hookah'" (123). Some of the devotees and his father Mr. R.K.Chawla confront, but Monkey Baba crushes their arguments with his weird wisdom. His love for monkeys is indeed mature as he doesn't only defend them like a guardian but also warns them to mend their mischievous ways. A striking comparison between Anjum in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and Sampath in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* can be established, as both of them treat the animals just like their family members. Anjum considers Saddam and the dog as a family; similarly Sampath deems his mother and monkeys as a group, "His mother, the monkeys and himself, he thought, they were a band together. 'You had better change your ways,' he warned the monkeys. 'There will be trouble for all of us if you don't behave better'" (*Hullabaloo* 129).

Roy in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* shows the mingling of her human characters not only with dogs, but also with other creatures such as kitten, rooster and even dung beetle. Gulrez has such an amazing bonding with his kittens namely "Agha and Khanum" (356) that he keeps them in the pockets of his pheran most of the times. Sultan, an orphan rooster whom Gulrez loves the most meets with a deadly end in the brutal hands of Captain Jaanbaaz's huge German shepherd dog. According to Gulrez the dog is "bewakoof" (356) because he doesn't know the technique to live with the "mintree" [military] (356). Tilo gets inquisitive about Sultan and wishes to know about him from Musa:

'Tell me about Sultan ... the *bewakoof* person that Gulrez was so upset with. Who's he?'
Musa smiled.

'Sultan? Sultan wasn't a person. And he wasn't *bewakoof*. He was a very clever fellow. He was a rooster, an orphan rooster that Gul had raised since he was a little chick. Sultan was devoted to him, he would follow him around wherever he went, they would have long conversations with each other that no one else understood, they were a team ... inseparable. (364)

Roy intelligently innovates the bonding between her major as well as minor characters with a long list of her animal characters, through her skillful handling of the theme of love realistically. She hasn't introduced animals and birds for the decorative purposes, but they help the flow of the novel to lead to its final destination. The exceptional love between the human beings and animals sets a remarkable benchmark as far as different convolutions of love are concerned.

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