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Flow, Stagnation, and Renewal: Understanding the Symbolic Dimensions of Water in Anuradha Roy's 'An Atlas of Impossible Longing'

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ABSTRACT

Water is one of nature's gifts to the earth, carrying a multitude of meanings and interpretations based on its context. Water in literature is studied from a variety of theoretical perspectives due to its rich symbolism and different narrative roles. This paper aims to explore Indian writer Anuradha Roy's novel, "An Atlas of Impossible Longing," through Gaston Bachelard's water symbolism theory and investigates how numerous types of water bodies, including rivers, ponds, and rain, each with its own meanings and thematic importance, with the river playing a central part in the novel. This study explores the symbolism of water through three key themes: "Flow and Transformation," "Stagnation and Reflection," and "Renewal and Destruction." It examines how water functions as both a healing and destructive force in human life. Using a qualitative approach, the study combines textual analysis with theoretical interpretation based on Gaston Bachelard's symbolism theory from *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. Through a close reading of the novel, it highlights how water serves as a metaphorical device, reflecting characters' emotional states, personal growth, and existential challenges. This research stands out by providing a comprehensive analysis of how Anuradha Roy integrates water symbolism in contemporary Indian Literature through her narrative structure and highlights its multidimensional role in the story. The

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novelty lies in its comparative analysis of Roy's water imagery with broader literary traditions, creating new insights into how water symbolism functions both as an ecological signifier and a transformative metaphor in the human experience.

Keywords: Symbolism; Water Bodies; Transformation; Imagination; Reflection; Destruction; Multidimensional; Ecology

1. Introduction

The life in us is like the water in the river. It may rise this year higher than man has ever known it, and flood the parched uplands; even this may be the eventful year, which will drown out all our muskrats^[1].

Water has symbolic implications in different belief systems. It contains the quality of chemical composition, physical properties, and biological origin. It is uniquely adaptable, existing in three states: solid, liquid, and gas. Water has always been revered as a sacred item, and it has served as a metaphor and symbol for poets and authors alike. It has long been a potent and diverse emblem in literature. Water represents purity, nourishment, survival, renewal, unity, mystery, escape, adventure, transformation, freedom, refuge, and reconciliation. Anuradha Roy is an Indian-born contemporary writer. She is a world-renowned novelist, editor, and journalist from Uttarakhand, India. Her novel, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, was published in 2008^[2]. She employed water bodies such as rivers, ponds, and rain, yet throughout the narrative river flows as the primary theme.

Anuradha Roy splits her novel into three sections centered on the idea of water: 'The Drowned House', 'The Ruined Fort', and 'The Water Edge'. She puts out a few pieces of velvet strands and then weaves them together to form a tapestry of three generations' lives told through a succession of surprising and enigmatic subplots. Similarly, this study looks at water symbolism in three ways: 'Flow and Transformation,' 'Stagnation and Reflection,' and 'Renewal and Destruction'. It also investigates how water functions as both a healing and destructive force in human life. This analysis is rooted in water symbolism through Bachelard's work, drawing from "Water and Dreams – An Essay on the Imagination of Matter"^[3], which emphasises the importance of language and symbols in shaping human desire. Bachelard's key concepts, such as Elemental Imagination, Water as a Symbol of the Unconscious, Poetic Image and Reverie, and Water and Emotion, provide a comprehensive framework for analysing Roy's use of water. He proposed that human

desires are structured like languages, with symbols playing an important role.

The most common instances of water symbolism in literature are Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and H.W. Longfellow's *The Tide Rises*, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* ^[4], *To the Lighthouse* Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. These theoretical frameworks provide diverse lenses through which water can be understood in literature, offering insights into its symbolic, thematic, and narrative roles. Similarly, in Anuradha Roy's 'An Atlas of Impossible Longing' characters are depicted using Bachelard's core principles in an ecological style of narrative, with a description of the fort, and its regional context, near the forest area and the local area in Calcutta. Finally, the river's margin is represented in minute detail with aquatic scenes. This study digs into a unique assessment of the relationships between humans and water (environment) in Anuradha Roy's novel, "Atlas of Impossible Longing." The research focuses on Roy's use of water symbolism to portray water's potential via literature and character development, both explicitly and subtly. It specifically tackles a gap in previous research by drawing on Bachelard's work to investigate the complex symbolism of water and its diverse significance in the novel's tales.

2. Literature Review

The literature review is a critical component of this research as it helps to contextualize the study within the existing body of knowledge. Reviewing key works in the field establishes the theoretical foundation and identifies gaps that this research aims to address. It ensures that the study builds upon previous research, thereby avoiding redundancy, and helps to frame the research questions in a manner that aligns with prior findings. Ultimately, the literature review provides the scholarly context necessary for understanding the significance of the current research and its potential contributions to the field.

'If There Were Only Water: Water Symbolism in The Waste Land'^[5] the researcher seeks to interpret Eliot's fundamental Modernist poem *The Waste Land* through a set of ideas that exist in and arguably created Modernism as we know it: the mythology of water as the fundamental but fickle fluid Other, subsisting at the basic level of the world and giving life to it while constantly needing to be controlled and tamed by a superior civilising force - usually masculine - colonising and taming the unruly savage. This water mythology revolves around the theme of katabasis/nekylia, a symbolic night trip over water inspired by old imaginaries that leads to Hell and returns. The trip begins with exile from the rational, stable civilised world and plunges into the irrational, chaotic, watery depths of the subconscious.

Symbols of Water: Exploring the Visual Representation^[6] investigates how water is important to our lives; not only physically and practically, but also culturally and spiritually. The researcher's goal is to investigate the features of various religious beliefs and rituals derived from water. Hamad^[7] expresses that water is used throughout Arabic literature, including poetry, short stories, and novels. His research with numerous poetries attempts to explore the water represented in Arabic literature and deploys the meaning and symbolism with many types of water bodies in the literary imagination. The Researcher finds six significant implications for water in ancient and contemporary Arabic literature. Water symbolises life, purity, the revelation of truth, separation and death, fertility and sex, land and country, brightness, and creativity.

Mohamad Ali Hassan Alakhdar^[8] analyses eco-critical and narrative interpretations of Harjo and Hogan's poetry, focussing on Native American lineage and the spirit of hope and rebirth expressed in their poems. Using eco-critical and narrative methodologies, the researcher places environment and spirituality, with a concentration on water symbols, at the core of creative expression, without ignoring stylistic and linguistic aspects of the portrayal of human consciousness in the selected poems. Chandel^[9] brings out the literary significance of water in Anita Desai's novel 'Fasting and Feasting' which depicts how the female character's life functions as a source of transportation, entertainment, daily cleansing and religious rites, opening up new possibilities. According to the researcher, it is not only a fluid required for the physiological activities of the living world, but also an element

deeply associated with humans' emotional, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual lives; it exists in various forms that depend on personal perception and differ from person to person. According to Eom^[10], water is a metaphor for potential which acts as a symbolic intermediary, illuminating human concerns and giving the possibility of healing. Further, the visual representations of water-assisted the heroine in discovering and accepting her identity when she was unsure of herself and dealing with anxieties and isolation. Oklopčić^[11] examines one of Faulkner's books and short stories about the Yoknapatawpha area, focussing mostly on the development of water symbolism. Water emerges in Benjy's, Quentin's, Jason's, and Dilsey's discourses in all of its physical forms and expressions (branch, river, rain, tears, ice, wet pants, wet clothing, bathing, bathroom, dropsy, filth, and so on), resulting in numerous metaphorical meanings. Readers understand the themes of purity, restoration, feminine sexuality, resistance/subversion, and control/manipulation. For further studies can adopt textual analysing techniques^[12] to understand the themes in our study clearly

3. Methodology

This study employs a Qualitative Methodology to explore the symbolic representation of water in Anuradha Roy's *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*. The research adopts a thematic approach, focusing on how water functions in the novel through three key symbolic dimensions: 'Flow and Transformation,' 'Stagnation and Reflection,' and 'Renewal and Destruction.' By using Bachelard's water symbolism theory from his work *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*^[3], the study analyzes the interplay between water, human psychology, and emotions, as reflected in the characters and narrative.

Primary data for the analysis is drawn directly from Roy's text, focusing on descriptive passages that feature water imagery in various forms (rivers, ponds, rain, etc.). Secondary data includes academic articles, reviews, and theoretical texts, particularly Bachelard's, to support and frame the analysis. The study also engages in close reading and textual analysis, highlighting the significance of water as a narrative tool and symbolic element within the larger ecological framework of the novel. Additionally, intertextual comparisons are made between Roy's work and other literary

texts that utilize water symbolism to offer broader insights into the theme.

4. Theoretical Background

The French philosopher, Bachelard, is widely regarded as one of the most important modern thinkers. His idea of material imagination is based on the four elements: fire, water, air, and earth. Each element operates instantly, as sensual and physical stuff, in the lyrical imaginations of authors throughout history, resulting in potent analogies and symbolism. Bachelard's water symbolism theory has given a comprehensive framework for analysing the usage of water bodies in Anuradha Roy's "An Atlas of Impossible Longing." Bachelard's book, "Water and Dreams – An Essay on the Imagination of Matter"^[3], investigates how water is inextricably linked to human psychology, emotions, and imagination. Bachelard writes,

"Liquidity is, in my opinion, the very desire of language. Language needs to flow." For Bachelard, poetry – ideal, creative poetry – is the language that best embodies liquidity. He seems to acknowledge that narrative can do so as well^[3].

He seems to acknowledge that narrative can do so as well. Anuradha Roy's love of universal components and environmental narrative combine to reveal the water symbolism discussed in *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, which is considered a poetic novel. Roy's characters are characterised utilising Bachelard's key concepts, such as Elemental Imagination, Water as a Symbol of the Unconscious, Poetic Image and Reverie, and Water and Emotion. Sibley^[13] mentions that Bachelard's work emphasises the methodological importance of distinguishing between the realms of material imagination and instructed materialism, but a deep articulation of these domains may be glimpsed in the context of ecological issues. Building on Jonathan Bate's work, the further development of Ecocritical techniques influenced by Bachelard's phenomenology was expressed to emphasise the potential functions of the imagination in raising awareness of essential links between individuals and their environments.

5. Discussion and Analyses

5.1. Symbolism of Water in "An Atlas of Impossible Longing"

'Without water, there is no life: so water is not an image or simile, but a symbol of life.'

Chetwynd^[14] reinforces these points in his book *A Dictionary of Symbols*. Water is a powerful symbol in Anuradha Roy's 'Atlas of Impossible Longing,' which weaves together many themes and character encounters with water bodies. Water is represented throughout the story by many states and behaviours of water bodies, including water flowing, stagnant, connecting, and isolating^[15]. Water Symbolism in Eminescu's Poem "Memento Mori" explores six different interpretations of water in ancient and modern Arabic literature: water as a metaphor for life, purity and the revelation of truth, separation and death, fertility and sex, land and country, and genius and creativity. Similarly, Anuradha Roy's novel, *Representing Indian Writing in English*, explored water symbolism in *Flow and Transformation*, *Stagnation and Reflection*, and *Renewal and Destruction*, with her important characters' life journeys paralleling the river's route, with its twists and turns, and finally merging with the sea, symbolising the culmination of their individual and collective experiences.

5.2. Flow and Transformation

The water represents the continual flow of life, the passing of time, and the unavoidable changes that come with it. The characters' lives are ever-changing and developing, much like the river's everlasting flow.

In the novel, Mukunda's character is motivated by ambition and a desire to establish himself, much like a river cutting its way.

For hours I leaned over Kalighat Bridge, watching the murky waters below. At a low tide, there was hardly any water and the banks revealed years of filth. But at high tide, it was brimming, a quiet, and liquid brown. A mud hut preached halfway down its right bank, and coconut trees peered into the water^[2].

Mukunda, on seeing the river from Kalighat Bridge, unintentionally considers betraying Suleiman Chacha's property for sale or rent, because he is always struggling in his life to obtain money, but his current job is stagnant with no progress. When he lights up Suleiman's house, he may live like Zamindar and labourer for pleasure. He started thinking that, he could write novels, make music, and travel. He believes he can become a true gentleman. Mukunda's connection with water sources such as rivers, rain, and ponds reflects his inner emotional state and psychological journey. For instance, his moments of contemplation by the river symbolise his search for identity and solace. He navigates the uncertainties of life with determination, symbolised by the relentless and often forceful flow of water. Here symbolism of water is considered Mukunda's character as Flow and Ambition.

In literature, water bodies such as rivers, lakes, and seas are frequently depicted as luminal regions where characters experience great personal growth and transformation. One of the most well-known uses of water as a metaphor for metamorphosis is found in Hesse's novel "Siddhartha"^[16]. In the novel, the river represents the protagonist Siddhartha's path of self-discovery and enlightenment, with his interactions with the flowing waters providing him with calm and knowledge. Similarly, in Anuradha Roy's novel the protagonist Mukunda's life experiences substantial metamorphosis, as symbolised by the shifting properties of water. From his youth in Amulya's home to his ultimate desire for his place, his experiences illustrate water's changing power.

For a while I was alone, a man who might do anything with his life I looked at the river and allowed myself to linger over the memory of the pond at Mrs. Barnum. I thought of the saltiness of Bakul's lips, the cutgrass scent of her breath came back to me, the hard shoulder blades under her blouse, and her hair which tickled my nose and made us laugh^[2].

Water serves also as a metaphor for the character's emotional and psychological depths in the novel. Anuradha Roy reveals this via Mukunda's character, who unintentionally recalls his memories while crossing the Hooghly River. Mukunda unconsciously considers how his life has changed as he moves from one place to another. He believes in commitment, being stuck in the family, and having duties. He felt

as if after months of observation, he had been set free from his wife, child, pet parrot, and house. According to Marrin^[17], "Water Symbolism," the Post-Renaissance view of water differed from ancient views in many ways, yet water and its distinct flow forms remained symbols of power, beauty, wisdom, and the essence of nature. In today's postmodern culture, water is most commonly linked with a commercial commodity that is bought, sold, collected, and distributed in response to market forces. This transformation in human vision had many unexpected effects on the environment and biosphere. Similarly, from Anuradha Roy's character Mukunda's perspective, the pond in the Barnum house with Bakul was a pleasant and ever-memorable time. It remained the symbol of power, beauty and wisdom for him. Here, river water represents the character's major periods of transition in transformation.

Trants clanged by, reduced by the crowd and the bridge to mechanical toys. I walked along looking at the river and one barge that had an orange and green tattered flag fluttering from its prow. Besides me, the superstitious were bowing and whispering prayers to the Ganga. I felt speechless and prayerless my mind in turmoil^[2].

Mukunda considers his travel to Songarh to be a wonderful and uplifting experience in his life because, after many years, Mukunda got a letter from Nirmal Babu, Amulya's son, whom he had sent away from Songarh to Calcutta. He set off straight for Songarh. It was late afternoon; he had no idea what he had packed or how he had gotten there before the train arrived. He ended up at the chaotic chaos of the Howrah Bridge, staring in wonder at the creaking ships across the filthy, level river. He longs to have Bakul with him forever because of his fantasies about his former home and family, especially Bakul. Using this sort of imagination, Bachelard notes that dreams and reveries play significant roles in his philosophy.

Bachelard uses "dream" in the sense of "reverie". It is very different from a night dream. He points out that the night-dreamer loses his subjectivity and his existence, "the night-dreamer is the shadow without self; but in the centre of reverie, if he has the philo-

sophic disposition, arises a ‘cogito’”^[18].

In contrast, the reverie maintains the twilight of awareness; “cogito” is never absent in a reverie. However, the intricacy of this “cogito” differs from Descartes’ definition. Thus, Bachelard invents a new cogito based on reverie and labels it the “cogito of kneading”. As evidenced by his work, Bachelard highlights in *Water and Dreams* that, ‘How deep our consciousness would be through the imagined connection with the matter, with the aim of consideration of the onset of the image in an individual sense’^[19]. In his phenomenological analysis of the origins of images, Bachelard contends that as images are subjective, they can never be separated from our intentions toward the subject matter. Only in the soul of depth do pictures portraying the depth of matter appear. Likewise, Mukunda’s persona, the sole material from his past life with Bakul and the images are deeply ingrained in his existence. In “The Secret River” by Grenville^[20], the river symbolises both the flow of life and the transformation of the protagonist, William Thornhill. The river represents his journey from England to Australia and his attempt to adapt and transform his identity in a new land. The constant movement of water reflects the changes and the fluidity of his new environment. Similarly, Anuradha Roy sees the symbolism of water to be Mukunda’s character as Flow and Transformation because, like a river seeking its course, Mukunda’s character begins as an orphan boy taken in by Amulya and is characterised by a deep sense of longing and search for identity, then loss of love and affection, separation from the adopted family, and finally rejoined with his love. His yearning for identity is considerate and parallels the river’s journey to the sea. Anuradha Roy expresses her main concern through the close juxtaposition and blending of past and present, which is the delayed effect of past painful, damaging, and dreadful events on Mukunda, as well as his traumatised return to the family in Songrah and incestuous reconnection in adulthood. Similar to how water represents the Mukunda character as Flow and Transformation, Shanti’s persona represents the essence of change and transformation in the form of a river.

What is this household I’ve been married into?
What am I doing here, without a single friend?
If I could run back for a day and see everyone
and be in Manoharpur in my room. And Mala,
khuku, Bini, do they ever think of me? Has
some new friend replaced me for them? Do

they still walk along the river laughing about everyone in Manoharpur? Should I tell Baba about this? No, that would only worry him. Is he all alone? What is he doing with his time all alone? Does Kripa remember that he liked the Lemon pickle I made? and his mango saplings? Does he still measure them every week with that foot ruler?^[2]

Shanti remembers her early years spent with her father and friends as she looks at the river. Shanti’s head is still filled with recollections, and the uncontrollably flowing past and anxieties cause her to reflect on her current situation. Shanti begins to make connections between her previous and current lives. She plays games and talks to her friends about everything; they spend a lot of time laughing and having fun by the river. The only thing the river water knows about us is the gossip we spread about the residents of Manoharpur. She assumed that a new acquaintance would go with them. Subsequently, her thoughts turn to her Baba, who is currently alone in the house and worries that her Baba will be alone without her. She asked herself Why she had to get married. Why did she have to give up everything from her early life? This kind of indication is expressed by the Bachelard theory of water symbolism.

Dreaming by the river, I dedicated my imagination to water, to clear, green water, the water that makes the meadows green. I cannot sit beside a stream without falling into a profound reverie, without picturing my youthful happiness .. does not have to be the stream at home, water from home. He nameless waters know all of my secrets. The same memory flows from all fountains^[3].

This kind of state also reveals the longing of women in Indian culture to give up some part of their wishes to live with their in-law’s families. Shanti’s demeanour is described as calm and carefree when she was at her father’s house, but her life altered as she became more committed to her family and her duties in her husband’s home. In certain reveries, it appears that each element craves either marriage or conflict, occurrences that either calm or thrill it.

For certain reveries, everything that is reflected in water has feminine traits. Here is a good

example of this fantasy. One of Jean-Paul's heroes, dreaming by the water, says suddenly without the slightest explanation: "From the midst of the pure lake waters rose the summits of hills and mountains which seemed like so many women bathers coming out of the water" No realist challenged to do so could explain this image. Any geographer may be questioned; unless he leaves the earth for dreams, he will never have any reason to confuse an orographic profile and a feminine proof^[3].

In following reveries, water is represented as the element of compromise and the foundation of combinations. Anuradha Roy's fundamental preoccupation with literature and the environment is founded on the notion that nature and culture are inextricably linked and interconnected, as reflected in Eco-criticism analysis. According to Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, the first law of ecology asserts that "everything is connected to everything else"^[21]. According to Indian traditional beliefs, Shanti's voyage is characterised by adaptation, expansion, and development, which indicating same as the river's ability to strike new paths and overcome obstacles. Thus the symbolism of water is analysed with Shanti's character with the nature of change and transformation.

The clouds that had collected and exploded over Manoharpur two weeks before had hardly paused over Songarh. There had been just enough rain to fill the shallow pond at the fort, to wash dust off the trees and to make the earth breathe a warm, moist breath. After the brief rain stopped, Nirmal went to his college and Kamal and Amulya to the factory^[2].

Anuradha Roy depicts a scene that combines the natural environment with the daily lives of the characters, highlighting the interplay between the weather, water and their routines. The sensory details of the warm, moist breath of the earth, add to the tactile and cool factory experience, enhancing the reader's immersion in the scene. This provides that symbolising the fleeting nature of change and renewal. The brief rain brings temporary relief and refreshment, paralleling how moments of respite or transformation in life are often short-lived. Roy pens it as,

Quite far from the house, from the veranda, I could see the river a sluggish stream now. It had returned some distance from its original bed. "There is a Dam upstream now"... so this house is a viable proposition again. It once had two acres of garden, most of which has been under water all these years, now it's surfaced again. There are a good many acres of fields as well^[2].

This passage highlights the interplay between nature and human production. The dam represents human efforts to control and mitigate natural forces, making land habitable and productive. It also underscores the cyclical nature of water and land use, where periods of submersion and resurfacing can dramatically alter the landscape and its utility. In essence, Anuradha Roy captures the transformative power of water and human ingenuity in reclaiming and reshaping the land, making it once again suitable for habitation and cultivation. It also looks at how water acts as both a restorative and destructive element in human existence.

5.3. Stagnation and Reflection

The river acts as both a physical and symbolic border. It separates individuals, places, and stages of life. For the main characters in the novels, crossing the river usually denotes a transformation or a boundary crossing, whether emotional, social, or geographical. Water is a Symbol of the Unconscious, Bachelard views water as a metaphor for the unconscious mind due to its depth, fluidity, and ability to reflect and change. Amulya's goals cause divisions and turmoil within his family. His judgments and actions, motivated by his desire for advancement, frequently result in separations and feelings of alienation, similar to the river's role as a dividing line.

He reached the rim of the fort and sat on a block of fallen stone, a tall, greying, angular figure watching the blue and brown flash of a kingfisher swooping into a large shallow pool at the edge, which at this time of year had some water still. The folds of his dhoti spilt wave-like on his stone, lifting a little at times in the breeze, picking to set. The birds would know and begin to call out to each other^[2].

This is a notable line, which indicates Anuradha Roy's beautiful descriptions of the pond in her work. Roy uses water images to elicit emotions and establish the tone for various scenarios. When Amulya looks at the pond, it gives him emotion and feelings because it reminds him of his wife Kananbala, who was very cool and gentle like this pool, and he begins to think about her life when they got married. She never clashed with him, never said anything unkind, and never disciplined the kids. Now, everything has changed. He despised himself and tried to figure out what had happened to his wife. She moved to Songrah, where she felt a feeling of obligation and a limit to her life, from her vast family and homeland of Calcutta, all because of him. He alone bears responsibility for her predicament. This type of scenario demonstrates how Amulya, the character, thinks flow subconsciously when he sees the water, as Georges Poulet explained this point, "Our self flows into the matter and its images...while matter smoothly engages in the thought-deepening progress, thought fluidly flows into and involves the matter"^[22]. Then he was ready to listen to the birds and forget about everything else, but wave after wave of hearing wrenched his insides as he yearned for the Kananbala. He knew he had to return since Kananbala had gotten ill, and her demeanour and approach to family members had changed. Amulya's persona is shown as Boundary and Conflict through the symbolism of water. Kananbala, Amulya's wife, symbolises the stagnant waters of a pond, confined in her house and mental state. Her journey into lunacy is mirrored by the quiet, unchanging water that finally turns stagnant, representing her confinement and sorrow. Kananbala's character, Stagnation and Despair, is represented by the symbolism of water. Bachelard comments that,

I still live water images; I live them synthetically in their original complexity, according to my unreasoning adherence. I always experience the same melancholy in the presence of dormant water, a very special melancholy whose colour is that of a stagnant pond in a rain-soaked forest, a melancholy not oppressive but dreamy, slow, and calm. A minute detail in the life of water is often an essential psychological symbol for me^[3].

The proximity to water causes various changes in Anuradha Roy's characters Amulya and his wife Kananbala, they

walk near the pond disturbed in their heart and sometimes even unwell in body, but after a while return rejuvenated.

How closed the river seemed, she thought, this river of her childhood every year it seemed to come a little closer and, with a fatalism for which she ridiculed herself, Shanti felt her destiny tied to that wide liquid ribbon. The steps on which she remembered idling with her friends had disappeared underwater. She thought she saw her three friends floating immaterially below, tussled in mossy ferns. Staring down she saw her face a few feet below the water's surface, hair trailing like smoke, skin furry with slime, snakes slithering in and out of her dead ears^[2].

In the preceding lines, Anuradha Roy emphasises that the character Shanti engages in daydreams or contemplative periods beside the river, demonstrating how a change of place impacts human mentality and renders her subject to emotional instability. Shanti strolled with the precision of someone doubtful, peering speculatively at the garden and the river, ignoring prudent advice concerning her health. She was concerned about her house, which had gotten extremely near to the river below, and she feared that the river would drown her and others. This situation persists and is reflected in her nightmares. Shanti's character is represented by the symbolism of water, which represents stagnation and reflection. This also demonstrates how reveries help to comprehend the character's inner life. In this sense, Bachelard extols that dreams not only elevate the dreamer to the level of universal consciousness but also "to the metaphysical level of an I-Thou relationship"^[23]. According to Bachelard "I-Thou" presents the relation between dreamer and world, subject and object, hand and matter. Bachelard also remarks that,

For certain reveries, everything that is reflected in water has feminine traits. Here is a good example of this fantasy. One of Jean-Paul's heroes, dreaming by the water, says suddenly without the slightest explanation: "From the midst of the pure lake waters rose the summits of hills and mountains which seemed like so many women bathers coming out of the water

.... ” No realist challenged to do so could explain this image. Any geographer may be questioned; unless he leaves the earth for dreams, he will never have any reason to confuse an orographic profile and a feminine profile. The feminine image is forced upon Jean-Paul by a reverie surrounding a reflection. It can be grasped only by the long circuitous psychological explanations that we propose^[3].

As stated firmly by Bachelard, The imagination will see only if it has “visions” and will have visions only if reveries educate it before experiences do, and if experiences follow as token of reveries. As D’Annunzio^[24] has said: “The richest experiences happen long before the soul takes notice. And when we begin to open our eyes to the visible, we have already been supporters of the invisible for a long time^[3].”

It showed a house, her mother’s house. The picture had been taken from across the river, or from a boat mid-stream, Bakul thought because between her and the house in the picture there was a stretch of river water. The house looked like the ones she had read of in stories there were tall pillars. A deep veranda, long windows, and columns of trees at its sides^[2].

Kananbala had shown Bakul the photo and told her it was a magical picture, convincing her that even her mother lived in it and could see them. She could hear all they said, but Bakul could not see her or hear her mother’s voice. She tried to inquire about her mother with her father, but he usually shifted the subject or seemed more distant than normal. Here, the water has a fundamental relation to Shanti’s death and has distanced Bakul from her. The river joins many people in many locations, but it also divides them. This dichotomy reflects the novel’s complex connections, which may bridge gaps while accentuating separations. In Indian culture, rivers have long been connected with feminine attributes, and they have been given female names. As stated by Salleh^[25] based on the researcher’s review on ‘Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Formation’, rivers were crucial to the formation of civilisation because they provided fertility, nutrition, and creativity. From this vantage position, Anuradha Roy explored motifs that represent memory, imag-

ination, and dreams concerning Shanthi’s deep link with the river and the home, as well as her existence before and after death.

She smiled a sudden, radiant smile of uncomplicated happiness, and then she saw, a shallow pool of water, faded arabesques on the floor around it. She almost ran towards the water, ungainly, wobbly, sari entangling her legs. Mrs Barnum let go, watching her. The pool was cool with water from the new rain, not much deeper than a big puddle, but Kananbala, forgetting she was a woman in her fifties, threw off her shoes as children do and sat dipping her toes, then let her feet slide in shivering at the touch of water^[2].

In the described narrative, Anuradha Roy illustrates how Kananbala’s character used water as a means to enhance her life. Her emotions and responses, when she finally ventured outside after a long period reflect a significant change. Having not stepped out of her home before sunset for months, Kananbala had only glimpsed the outside world through her window or during brief evening walks in the garden with Amulya. Kananbala is facing her daily humdrum loneliness. When Kananbala was outside and saw the water, she unconsciously cherished it as a child. As mentioned in Eom^[10], Water is an indicator of possibilities. Water represents the source of life, maternal imagery, vitality, cleaning, and knowledge, but it may also represent fear and destruction. Water is therefore a metaphor for all conceivable outcomes, both positive and negative. According to Roy^[2], Kananbala’s character became potential the moment she touched the water, yet her mental illness and incarceration symbolise the remoteness and repressive nature of her life. Kananbala’s existence is isolated from the world beyond her dwelling in the same way that stagnant water is isolated from the flow of a river.

The river will make this house its own. What are these grand houses but arrogance? “My grandfather would boast of the Italian grand house but arrogance? My grandfather would boast of the Italian marble. The marble will be the river’s bed now. Fish will swim in and out of our finest teak shelves and nibble our ivory figurines. Frogs will lay eggs in our En-

glish porcelain, water snakes will twine our pillars the window will fall off and flow down to the sea. My grandfather's bust will stare into weeds, the ink from our papers will colour the water black, moss will ooze out of burst bedding, beds and chairs will float out like boats, and the room will lie empty for fish to breed in them." Sharp lines of rain shot into the veranda. The breeze soaked his clothes and his spellbound face. His lips moved unheard. The arrogance, he whispered, the arrogance^[2].

Anuradha Roy conveyed her experience and the power of water in a very sensory way. Under the umbrella of the Poetic Image and Reverie idea, Bachelard emphasises the relevance of poetic pictures and daydreams (reverie) in comprehending the psychological and emotional influence of water. Shanti was unable to talk after watching the river flow, so she began screaming. "It appears like the river may flood the home today; it has burst its bank and is forging a new route," Shanti and others in the house could barely hear above the drumming of the rain. The maid yelled and asked Shanti's father 'Can you feel its power? He was very much afraid and said they must have gone away! Now look at the flood, and the baby on the way!^[2]' These phrases reflect the strength of the water, which will eventually fill everything. Water represents the origin of all possibilities, indeed the origin of the very universe, hence its strong associations with birth, femininity, and life^[26].

I walked around the garden to the back of the house and without warning, came upon a river. It went right past the house, a wide, pale-brown expanse. I walked down to the river bank, astonished by the nearness of it. The edge of the bank was only a few feet away from the steps that led up to the back veranda, which was deeper and grander than the one in front. It was empty- no chairs, no tray of tea left over from the morning. You would have expected such the veranda to be the chosen spot, whether for conversation or solitude, but it appeared to be abandoned^[2].

The link between rain and the land is a fruitful one. Anuradha Roy conveys a moment of discovery and reflec-

tion with the symbolism of water for the character Mukunda. His journey to the riverbank reveals the intimate connection between the house and the natural environment. The edge of the riverbank is only a few feet away from the steps leading up to the back veranda, highlighting how closely integrated the natural and human-made elements are in this setting. However, the veranda appears to be abandoned, with no chairs or leftover tea trays indicating recent use. This abandonment creates a contrast between the potential of the space and its current state of neglect. The absence of activity on the veranda could symbolize a sense of loss or disconnection, possibly reflecting the emotional state of the characters or the changes in their lives. This passage uses vivid imagery and contrasts to convey themes of discovery, connection with nature, and the passage of time. It invites readers to contemplate the significance of the river and the veranda, both in the physical landscape and in the emotional landscape of the character's lives.

5.4. Renewal and Destruction

Water frequently represents cleansing and rejuvenation. In the novel, the river water serves as a source of purification, allowing characters to wash away the past and start again, even if the process is painful or difficult. In the notion of Water and Emotion, Bachelard states that Water often symbolizes emotions, ranging from tranquillity and purity to turbulence and danger^[3].

There had been a great flood in Manoharpur, Nirmal's father's voice said. It had come into the house and marooned it. Shanti had gone into labour too early, a whole month. Nobody could get out of the house to get a doctor in time. The maid, who had some midwifing experience, had done her best but.... Only the baby could be saved. Not shanti. A healthy baby, but at what cost^[2]?

Anuradha Roy reveals a deeply tragic event that intertwines natural disaster with personal loss. Shanti died while giving birth to a girl baby. Nirmal Shanti's husband wanted to travel to Manoharpuram right soon, even if it was too late to go to Shanti's residence. The region had grown too soggy for anybody to go to the next town, and there were no telephones, telegrams, or letters to contact with one another.

Nirmal and his family members want to be with Shanti, but grief and water have devastated both of their families. The flood symbolises nature's unrestrained and often devastating force. It serves as a reminder of how natural disasters may interrupt and destroy human life. It captures a moment of great sadness, heightened by the terrible power of nature.

Water always flows, always falls and always ends in horizontal death. In innumerable examples, we shall see that for the materializing imagination, death associated with water is more dream-like than death associated with earth: the pain of water is infinite^[3].

It poignantly illustrates the themes of loss, the fragility of life, and the high cost of survival in the face of disaster. The narrative is a powerful reminder of the profound impact of uncontrollable natural events on human lives and the heart-breaking sacrifices that sometimes accompany them. Water is a powerful natural element that represents both beauty and danger. It symbolises the unexpected and uncontrolled parts of life, reminding characters of their fragility and the secrets that exist. Here, the symbolism of water is addressed through Shanti's character experiences, separation and destruction due to water and the environment.

We walked across the clay to the placid water. It was no longer the wide river. I saw when I came to Manoharpur with Aangti Babu. This was a flat, tranquil stream. How could it have flooded the house, and caused Bakul's mother to die? It barely even disturbed the slit that disappeared into it, a smooth, silky, greyish black^[2].

The research on Water symbolises purification, vitality, and freedom, Shodiyevna^[27] explored that water is a contextual symbol in literature, which means that, it represents a variety of things depending on how it is utilised in a novel or tale. Frequently, the type of water in a tale or novel is as crucial as the fact that water is utilised as a symbol. Similarly, Mukunda's description and contrast emphasise the river's unpredictable and shifting character, demonstrating how something tranquil can turn harmful and devastating. Hear Mukunda's amazement at the strength of the water, which increased and flooded the home. This is a time of contemplation for Mukunda, who is trying to make sense of what

has happened in the past. It displays a difficult to fathom the immensity of the past catastrophe in light of the river's current tranquillity. Anuradha Roy analyses the flooded house through the character's narrations. These phrases let readers understand that the terrain's past and present are beautifully recorded in this magnificent book, and whether it is loss or gain is determined by the character's actions. The symbolism of water is reflected as a devastating element in practically every character's existence.

The trees around the lily pond had grown in height and now formed a canopy hiding most of the sky from view. The edge of the day's heat was blunted here by the cool darkness of the foliage. Large, purple water lilies floated in the leaf, scummy water of the pond. Had we ever been little enough to swim in it^[2]?

Mukunda reclined in the grass beside the water, holding his chin. Bakul, thinking he was in the water amid the weeds, was swimming by him, in and out of the mist. He attempted to shout out to her, but the water muffled the voice. His memory recalls his previous existence when swimming with Bakul at the pond. He reflects on the wonderful memories of his old life that he has lost. At the moment, he has landed in the same location, beside the pond, with great optimism that the same delightful existence would continue in the present. Bakul is also present, even though he is aware of the changes and situation. Anuradha Roy expresses Mukunda's longing for his past life and his memories with Bakul, which continue to impact their current lives. Here, his persona embodies the idea of water and memory which can be compared with "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald water frequently symbolizes the unchanging past and the illusion of the American Dream. Gatsby's mansion is located near water, and his longing for Daisy is often associated with the green light across the bay. The stagnant water around Gatsby's estate reflects his inability to move on from the past and his idealized dreams. Similarly, Anuradha Roy's Mukunda character is linked to the river, which preserves memories and secrets, representing the past that runs under the surface.

When at length a red flower came floating down the water towards him. I guided it to Bakul, hoping she would notice. She stopped hiding behind her hair and turned, and for the

first time that afternoon, she smiled at him in the old way. Her hand reached out for him and our fingers found each other's beneath the water and intertwined^[2].

While swimming, Mukunda noticed a red bloom drifting down the river towards him. He focused it on Bakul, hoping she would notice and accept him. Bachelard critically examines Keats' poem 'Narcissus', which states that

Flowers do not have eyes. But in the poet's dream, flowers must be seen because they are mirrored in pure water. Keats also expresses in a single passage of charming freshness, gathers together first the human, then the cosmic, then the floral legend of Narcissus which was expressed by Bachelard's words, 'When specific reveries in the presence of a specific reality are considered one at a time, as we are attempting to do, one discovers that certain reveries have a very regular aesthetic destiny. Such is the case of reverie before a watery reflection^[3].'

In the article "The Confused Whale Of The China Sea: Water Symbolism In The Works Of Hamzah Fansuri^[28]," the researcher focuses on water symbolism in Hamzah's treatises and poems, and it is presented that water-related metaphors occupy the highest place – both in terms of frequency of appearance and in terms of the profundity of their suggestive meanings. under seven headings: Waters of Life, Ocean of Unity, Currents of Creation, Waves of Manifestation, Bubbles of Identity, The Confused Whale, and The Brilliant Fish. Hear the writer emphasise water symbolism with fish in the sea. Similarly, Anuradha Roy claims that the blossom in the river water symbolises and nurtures the characters' mutual attachment. The imagination carries readers to a global vision in which water plays an unexpected role.

Our clothes were getting soaked in the grey river-bed, our feet were sinking in the mud, Bakul's hair had come loose, one of her gold studs had slipped off, the number of staring children on the opposite bank had gone up from two to seven, and they were leaping up and down, laughing and pointing and shouting things we could not hear. I took in none of this. All I felt was that life had finally floated down

the river and reached me^[2].

Anuradha Roy in her novel shows that Bhakul is resilient in character like a resilient river; Bakul navigates the complexities of her family and the losses she endures. Bakul (heroine) and Mukunda's (hero) love affair symbolise the enigmatic and profound elements of water. Her persona represents the intricacies and hidden depths of human emotions, much like the uncharted areas of a river. According to Bachelard, "Cogito of kneading" helps to understand the world through its intimacy with the material world. When studying on Bachelard, Joseph Chiari explains,

'We couldn't understand existence just through reason, but through the changeable senses cultivated by imagination, our senses usually operate on the edge between existence and non-existence, and out of unconsciousness and non-existence arises the understanding which is not improved by reason, but is trailed by the shadow of matter and rooted by the matter^[29].' While "a cogito of kneading" brings matter's image into the consciousness of a poet, it is also the same process that the river explores and deepens the gentle struggle with matter, accompanied occasionally by the seeming self-loss^[3].

Bhakul and Mukunda's characters represent the connecting power of water. Their interactions and discoveries link the past and present, bridging gaps and revealing buried stories, much like a river linking different regions. Bakul's presence evokes feelings of healing and reconciliation in Mukunda. Their partnership signifies the calming and restorative properties of water, which provide peace and a sense of completeness for them. Here, the symbolism of water reflects restored vitality in the hero and heroines' imperfect inner inclinations, their unachievable yearning owing to societal ethics, cultural ideals, and traditions of Indian Society.

6. Conclusions

Anuradha Roy's 'An Atlas of Impossible Longing,' exemplifies how the fundamental force of water changed the characters' lives and mirrors their inner journeys through

an ecological narrative style strengthened by Bachelard's theoretical concepts. Identifying Anuradha Roy uses symbolism in her plot to show not only the human struggles but also the dramatic imagery of the changing natural world surrounded by her characters Mukunda, Shanthi, Amulya, Kanabala and Bhakul to create a powerful, symbolic, and virtually visual relationship between the characters' flow and inevitable downfall and environmental disaster. Drawing on Gaston Bachelard's water symbolism theory, the universality element of water as a literary metaphor that weaves together the personal and the natural, emotional and ecological, to create a tapestry representing humanity's complex relationship with nature, it helps to demonstrate how water symbolism enriches the author's work by providing layers of meaning about life, metamorphosis, reflection, regeneration, and destruction. Whether it's a flowing river of transformation, a stagnant pond of contemplation, or the devastating power of a flood, water is a flexible metaphor in literature that adds emotional and thematic depth to a narrative. To conclude, Anuradha Roy's utilising of the universal element water in literature emphasises the importance of symbolism, as viewed through the lens of Bachelard's theory embodies all potential possibilities of water as a healing or destructive element in the novel 'An Atlas of Impossible Longing' which encourages readers to gain a better understanding of the profound connection between humans and nature (water); humans must save and remain connected to nature, eventually realising that one can not only highlight the human situation with water but also assert the fundamental link between art, literature, and nature. While this study provides a comprehensive analysis of water symbolism in Anuradha Roy's *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, it is limited in its scope by focusing primarily on a single theoretical framework—Bachelard's *Water and Dreams*. Even though Bachelard's insights are pivotal, future studies engage with other relevant theoretical perspectives, such as ecofeminism or postcolonial theory, which could offer alternative interpretations of water symbolism in Roy's work. Additionally, the study emphasizes water imagery and may deal with other significant environmental elements, like land or air, that also contribute to the novel's ecological themes.

Author Contributions

R.J. conceptualized and developed the arguments presented in the article and wrote the manuscript. M.S. contributed to the literature review; validation of the arguments presented, provided critical insights, methodology and ensured the overall clarity of the paper. A.B.R. contributed to the development of the arguments provided critical insights, edit and revision of the paper. P.A. contributed to the final edit and revision of the paper. We, authors, discussed the research findings, contributed to the interpretation of the results, reviews and approved the final version of the manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial or non-financial interest and/or personal relationships that could influence this research article.

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