

# Loyalty Beyond Words: Understanding Animal–Human Affection in the Folded Earth

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## Abstract

This paper examines the delicate yet significant depiction of animal-human affection in Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth*. Through characters such as Maya, Puran, Charu, Diwan Sahib, and the faithful dog Bozo, Roy creates a narrative where animals serve as emotional anchors, moral guides, and links between broken human connections. By closely analyzing the text, the paper argues that Roy doesn't treat animals as mere decorative features; instead, she presents them as integral players in the emotional and ethical fabric of the novel. The analysis reveals that in *The Folded Earth*, animals take on roles as healers, stabilizers, and moral reflections for humans grappling with grief, loneliness, and political anxiety.

**Keywords:** Animal–Human Bond, Loyalty, Emotion, Ethics of Care, Ecocriticism.

## Introduction

Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth* truly shines in the realm of contemporary Indian English fiction with its sensitive exploration of the bonds between humans and animals. Set in the picturesque Ranikhet, where people, wildlife, and forests come together, the novel emphasizes how love between different species is vital for emotional survival. Instead of treating animals as mere symbols, Roy gives them real agency, emotions, and a significant presence. *The Folded Earth* demonstrates this shift beautifully, portraying animals as key players in the emotional survival of humans. Set in the Himalayan foothills, the novel depicts intimate interspecies relationships that shape the lives of the characters.

Maya's grief over her husband Michael's death, Charu's quiet suffering, Puran's emotional depth, and Diwan Sahib's understated loneliness are all expressed through their interactions with animals. Early on in the story, Maya's loneliness is softened by her dog Bozo, who "came bounding down from the verandah and leapt about me, barking his welcome" (Roy 17). This bond is instinctual and communicates feelings that words can't capture—a "loyalty beyond words."

This paper argues that the animals in *The Folded Earth* serve as emotional healers, moral guides, and connectors of relationships, highlighting Roy's examination of a care based ethics that is deeply rooted in Himalayan culture.

## Animals as Emotional Healers

The relationship between Maya and Bozo is central to understanding the emotional depth of the novel. After losing her husband, Maya finds her main source of comfort in Bozo's constant companionship. His cheerful morning greetings, "bounding... barking his welcome" (17), creates emotional stability.

Roy further illuminates Bozo's gentle companionship is a comforting presence during Maya's walks, as she often needs to "keep Bozo from chasing animals" (18). This simple, everyday interaction helps anchor her through the grieving process. The dog brings a level of predictability and affection to her life that she doesn't always find in her relationships with people.

Similarly, the novel depicts the emotional depth of other animals. Maya remembers a village goat that was so in tune with her surroundings that she remarked, "I've seen my goat tremble from head to hoof. She was frightened" (63). This acknowledgment of animal emotions bolsters Roy's portrayal of them as sentient beings capable of fear, attachment, and response.

Bozo also protects Maya, waits for her, and often becomes the first responder to her emotional changes. His natural ability to sense her feelings makes him a comforting presence, almost like a healer, guiding her through the challenges of widowhood.

### **Animals as Moral Touchstones**

Roy often underlines how the way we treat animals reflects our moral compass, showing us which characters are filled with empathy and which one's lean towards indifference or cruelty. Take Maya, Charu, Diwan Sahib, and Puran, for instance; they all display a deep ethical sensitivity through their natural care for animals. Diwan Sahib makes a compelling point when he claims that "animals knew whom to trust. They were imbeciles themselves who called Puran half-witted" (Roy 13). This observation not only highlights Puran's natural connection with animals but also suggests that animals can be reliable judges of human character. At the police station, Diwan Sahib passionately defends Puran by highlighting his deep compassion throughout his life: "He couldn't communicate with people, but he had a special way with animals. They trusted him completely. Foxes would come to him when he called, and injured birds would show up at his door for healing. Even dogs with broken legs found their way to his cowshed" (Roy 203). This clearly demonstrates his kindness towards animals and his strong moral values.

Charu's quiet yet powerful tenderness shines through in her emotional reactions to animal suffering, especially when her beloved cow Gouri goes missing. The story portrays a vivid picture of her as she "wandered up and down every slope... hopeful, questioning, despairing" in her search for Gouri (Roy 139). Her deep sorrow over the cow's absence reveals just how compassionate she truly is, a quality often stifled by the patriarchal influences in her life. Similarly, Maya and Diwan Sahib's home becomes a safe haven for vulnerable creatures, reflecting their inner moral compass. Diwan Sahib's house not only provides shelter for Maya but also for "injured birds," "dogs with broken legs," and other animals instinctively drawn to safety (Roy 203).

In these moments, Roy portrays animals as moral guides in the story, entities whose trust, suffering, and responses reveal the true ethical nature of the humans around them.

### **Animals as Bridges Between Fractured Human Relationships**

In *The Folded Earth*, animals play a crucial role in bridging the gaps in human communication. Bozo, Maya's loyal dog, often takes on the role of a quiet mediator, who draws people into conversation and shared emotional spaces.

Every morning, "Bozo came bounding down from the veranda and leapt about me, barking his welcome" (Roy 17). His lively presence opens the door for neighbours to connect with Maya, easing the loneliness that grief has wrapped around her. Bozo's role in the village also affects how others see her; even Diwan Sahib humorously includes Bozo in his discussions about political decay, quickly correcting

himself— “It’s going to the dogs... Not you, dear boy, not you. You would rule with an iron paw” (Roy 68). His playful teasing with the dog happens right in front of Maya, drawing her into cheerful conversations that help lighten her emotional burden.

Maya and Charu find common ground in their deep concern for animals, particularly cows and dogs, which strengthens their bond. Charu’s profound attachment to her cow Gouri is evident in her frantic search, as she “wandered up and down every slope... hopeful, questioning, despairing” (Roy 96). This emotional experience resonates with Maya, who instinctively connects with Charu’s feelings. Their mutual compassion for these vulnerable creatures creates a bond that neither of them can quite put into words.

### **Reciprocal Affection: Animals as Feeling Subjects**

In *The Folded Earth*, Anuradha Roy takes a unique stance by not sentimentalizing animals. Instead, she depicts them as beings with their own emotions and thoughts. Take Bozo, for example; he’s not idealized but is instead depicted through lively verbs that emphasize his independence. When Maya recounts how “Bozo came bounding down from the verandah and leapt about me, barking his welcome” (Roy 17), it’s evident that the dog’s actions, bounding, leaping, and welcoming, reflect his own intentions and affection, rather than just being a mirror for Maya’s grief. His actions convey loyalty and protectiveness, indicating that in Roy’s narrative, animals are active participants in emotional exchanges, not just passive recipients of human feelings.

This focus on mutual emotions is key to how Roy portrays the bond between humans and animals. It’s not just a one-way street—humans don’t only find comfort in animals. Maya points out that “the goat... had a name and a personality... everything had changed after what I had seen: the way the goat trusted Puran and the butcher, the way it was betrayed” (Roy 64). In this moment, Maya’s moral shock stems from observing the goat’s trust from its own viewpoint. Her emotional response isn’t just about feeling sorry for the goat; it’s about recognizing the animal’s own agency.

A similar reciprocal dynamic unfolds in Puran’s bond with the fawn, Rani. When Puran comes across the scared creature, Roy notes its emotional response to him: “When Puran cooed, [the fawn] turned its head in his direction, took a step towards him, and even allowed him to touch it... he did [so] with infinite tenderness” (Roy 142). The fawn’s careful approach reveals its fear, trust, and the gradual connection it’s forming with Puran, another example of the emotional agency resting with the animal.

Throughout these scenes, Roy renders animals as sentient beings that can express emotions like attachment, fear, relief, and preference. This emotional connection enhances the moral and relational dimensions of the story. The humans in *The Folded Earth* become attuned to the emotional cues of animals—not simply reflecting their own feelings but also modifying their behavior in response to the animals’ needs. This way, Roy paints a picture of a mutually supportive relationship, where both humans and animals are recognized as emotional beings, influencing each other’s emotional experiences.

### **The Politics of Care in a Changing Landscape**

In the midst of political strife, religious divides, and land disputes in Ranikhet, Roy highlights the simple yet profound acts of caring for animals as a subtle form of moral defiance. While figures like Mr. Chauhan chase after profits and the expansion of amusement parks by cutting down “a swathe of oak forest,” compassionate individuals step in to counter this devastation. Their love for animals serves as a moral counterpoint to the hostility brewing among humans. Puran is a perfect example of this resistance; his

instinctive and selfless bond with animals shines through when he rescues a delicate fawn, later named Rani, gently carrying her and creating “a soft, cushioned bed with piled pine needles and dry grass.” (Roy 94). Diwan Sahib explains to the police that “Animals trusted him. Foxes would come to him when he called. Injured birds arrived at his doorstep seeking care. Dogs with broken legs made their way to his cowshed” (Roy 60). These acts of kindness sharply contrast with the institutional cruelty that Rani experiences under the Wildlife Act, an irony that Roy cleverly uses to illuminate how laws can sometimes perpetuate violence against the most vulnerable creatures.

Puran’s deep compassion places him firmly within Roy’s larger ecological perspective. Even though he’s often ridiculed as “half-witted,” Diwan Sahib argues that he’s “the sanest of us all, because animals knew whom to trust” (Roy 61). His sense of right and wrong isn’t dictated by political views but by a genuine emotional and ethical connection to nonhuman beings. When Rani is locked away and in distress, Puran’s raw reaction, pressing against “the bars... rocking back and forth... a moan turning to rhythmic keening” (Roy 247), reveals not just his love for her but also his deep understanding of her fear. Later on, when she passes away due to negligence from those in charge, the overwhelming grief that fills the household highlights how animals represent continuity and innocence in a world shaken by distrust and political strife. Animals, in this sense, become quiet critics of human cruelty. Their fragility reveals the moral shortcomings of those in power, while their mere presence fosters empathy among those who choose to resist violence through simple acts of kindness. In Roy’s depiction of the Himalayan landscape, the ethics of care, most vividly illustrated by Puran, Maya, Charu, and Diwan Sahib, emerges as a form of alternative politics, one that values compassion over control, relationships over authority, and life over the machinery of state power.

## Conclusion

The *Folded Earth* dives deep into the complex relationship between humans and animals, exploring how our emotional survival, ethical understanding, and connections with others are influenced by our interactions with nonhuman beings. Roy skilfully incorporates animals into the daily life of the Himalayas, allowing them to evolve from simple narrative symbols into active participants that shape the characters’ moral and emotional experiences. Animals share the same emotional landscapes as we do, building connections rooted in recognition, response, and a shared sense of need. They act as emotional healers, offering comfort and companionship that sometimes eludes human relationships, Maya’s grief, Diwan Sahib’s loneliness, Charu’s confinement, and Puran’s vulnerability are all intertwined with their deep relationships with animals, whose constant and instinctual presence provides a quiet yet powerful source of healing.

Roy presents animals as moral barometers, suggesting that how we treat them reflects our character as humans. Compassionate characters like Maya, Charu, Diwan Sahib, and Puran consistently show kindness to animals, emphasizing their strong ethical core. In contrast, figures like Mr. Chauhan, who view living beings merely as legal issues, nuisances, or economic burdens, represent the moral blindness of institutions that value power over compassion. This contrast strengthens the novel’s ethical argument: our moral perspective becomes clearer through our relationships with animals, and our kindness toward the vulnerable is a true sign of ethical maturity. At the same time, animals act as important connectors, creating channels for communication and emotional connection where human conversations might struggle. Bozo helps Maya connect socially; the shared concern for animals strengthens the relationship between Maya and Charu; and Puran’s commitment to Rani unites the divided community in a shared sense of empathy.

By focusing on animals as central figures in our emotional, ethical, and relational lives, Roy makes a compelling case for a type of affection that transcends mere words. This loyalty is grounded in intuition, presence, and a mutual emotional exchange. The Himalayan backdrop of the novel unfolds as a dynamic environment where humans and nonhuman beings equally contribute to the creation of shared emotional landscapes. In a world marked by displacement, political strife, and social division, animals represent continuity, innocence, and the potential for healing. Their companionship becomes truly transformative because it's free from judgment or societal expectations. In the end, *The Folded Earth* pushes back against human-centered views by demonstrating that the most profound forms of care often come from bonds with those who can't speak our language. Roy's story stands as a powerful reminder of interspecies love, showing how the silent companionship of animals teaches humans to endure grief, rebuild empathy, and imagine new forms of community in a fractured world.

## Reference

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