

Pursuit of Belongingness in *All the Lives We Never Lived* by Anuradha Roy**Mrs. Annamma.J¹**

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“Life is God’s gift to man and how we live is our life is our gift to God” says Mahatria Rao. The pursuit of belongingness is the driving force for all human achievements. All achievements feed the human craving of recognition. This recognition gives a sense of belongingness to everyone one. To woman especially this sense of belonging is a never-ending pursuit.

Women are subjected to changes throughout their life. She has to face changes at both internal level and external environment. She could cope up with external changes, but her internal journey is a battle. The battle between who she is and who she is expected to be. To overcome this battle, it takes a life time. A woman can find her belongingness by building genuine connections with her dear and near one's by unveiling her heart, mind and soul to nourish her true essence and celebrate her unique self. But what if she didn't find such people in her life? Then comes the real battle to her sense of belongingness. She neither could live to her satisfaction not to the expectations of the society. Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived* (2018) is a depiction of one such battle of its protagonist, Gayathri who pursues her dreams in search of belongingness.

This paper aims to investigate how Gayathri's complicated connections, cultural limitations, and personal anguish influence her quest and how she balances the conflict between her own aspirations for success and the demands of society. It also focuses on her emotional journey which reveals a fight for self-identity. The paper explores how Gayathri's need for purpose and connection is influenced and her desire for independence. Ultimately, Gayathri's journey illustrates the universal human desire for belongingness, a quest that leads to the external spaces but towards the end it shows nothing is more important than the inward journey and inner peace.

Keywords: Belongingness, Emotional Journey, Identity, Self-Discovery, Relationships, Fulfilment

Life is a constant search for belongingness. Where we live and how we live gives this sense of belongingness. “You cannot belong to anyone else, until you belong to yourself” says Pearl Bailey. Human’s sense of belongingness is attained in being recognized, appreciated, and accepted for who one really is. Life has craved its own definitions for belongingness as per the circumstances. The true sense of belongingness is attained only when dreams are achieved.

Pursuit of attaining one’s dream and passion is always a driving force for every human being. People often seek to belong to something greater than themselves, yet it is crucial to follow one’s heart and remain true to whom we are. In a chaotic environment, our sense of belongingness should make life easier.

The quest for belongingness is one of the main themes in *All the Lives We Never Lived* (2018). The emotional journey of Gayathri and her unrelenting quest for belongingness is scrutinized in this paper. Jane Smith comments in “Breaking the Patriarchal Mould: A Feminist Analysis of Anuradha Roy’s *All the Lives We Never Lived*.” as, “Gayathri’s character challenges the traditional gender roles imposed by a patriarchal society, embodying a woman’s quest for autonomy and self-expression beyond domestic confines.” (47) It looks at how she seeks emotional connection and fulfilment in a society that frequently makes her feel alone and unanchored because of her personal challenges, the distance in her relationships, and her quest for self-identity.

The renowned Indian author Anuradha Roy, born in Kolkata in 1967 is well known for her richly detailed accounts of human emotions. Her writings explore the intricacies of identity, love, and grief. The fundamental woman’s urge for identity and connection is poignantly examined in Roy’s writings. Her research is significant, because it explores the nuances of belongingness and shows how connections, cultural norms, and personal hardships influence a woman’s search for life fulfilment. Ananya Patel criticizes in “Freedom, Loss, and Art: Unravelling Anuradha Roy’s *All the Lives We Never Lived*.” as “Roy intricately weaves art into the narrative, using it as a metaphor Gayatri’s pursuit of freedom and identity amidst societal constraints” (120)

The novel explores the interwoven lives of Gayathri, her son Myshkin, her husband Nek Chand, and the broader context of India in the middle of the 20th century. The novel is set in colonial and post-colonial India and the narration of *All the Lives We Never Lived* (2018) is expressed from the viewpoint of Myshkin, an adult who is thinking back on his

early years. His mother, Gayathri, is at the heart of the narrative, seeking passion and independence through her paintings.

The narrative of Gayathri starts during a period of social unrest and shifting gender norms in India. Nek Chand, her spouse, is a reserved guy who fails to provide for her emotional requirements. The story opens with a rumour that Myshkin's mother, Gayathri, has fled with an Englishman. She always enjoys painting anything that catches her eye and doesn't give importance to her looks. She is neither a typical wife nor a mother. She is a carefree woman without any responsibilities. In 1927, Gayathri is in Bali with her father, Agni Sen, at the age of 17. Gayathri's father, stands as a pivotal figure.

Agni Sen is an idealistic and passionate individual who profoundly influenced Gayathri's development. Every time he detects a spark in his daughter, he sets up tutors to teach her painting and languages. He has brought Gayathri to the port of Bali with the intention of meeting Rabindranath Tagore, a great Indian writer, in the hopes that Tagore's insight may help his daughter develop a greater appreciation for passion. Above all, he is a forward-thinker.

Inopportunately, Gayathri marries Nek Chand when the family determines that she must get married right away following Agni Sen's passing. Nek is a North Indian Anglo-Indian who is married to Gayathri, a Bengali Hindu from Delhi. Nek first encountered Gayathri as a teenage girl throughout the years. Upon hearing of Agni Sen's passing, he sees a chance to wed Gayathri. Their ages are sixteen years apart. Whereas Nek is 33, Gayathri is just 17. Gayathri gets married to Nek without her family consulting her. Gayathri is an inquisitive woman who wants more from life than her traditional, homely existence provides.

Gayathri's desire for emotional fulfilment and intellectual independence paves the way for her ultimate rebellion against the limitations of her situation, but as a married woman and a mother of a nine-year-old boy, she is frequently perceived as emotionally aloof and distant from her son and the rest of the family. Gayathri feels neglected and abandoned as follows "She came and drooped against one of the veranda's white pillars as if she might sleep again, standing. She was a late riser, summer or winter. She lingered in bed for as long as she could in a tight embrace with her pillow." (*ALWNL 9-10*)

The novel's emotional centre is her son Myshkin, whose bond with his mother provides the reader with a prism through which to view Gayathri's inner conflicts. Despite her intense affection for her son, Gayathri is frequently emotionally aloof, torn between being a mother and a woman trying to find her own identity. Because of this, Gayathri chooses to accompany Walter Spies, a German who is portrayed as an artist with a free spirit who aspires to experience life to the fullest. He is renowned for his artistic ability, particularly in the fields of music and painting. A spirit of revolt is embodied by spies. He is a man who lives unusual lifestyle with a thirst for artistic expression.

Nek Chand's father, Bhavani Chand Rozario had a close friendship with Walter Spies. Bhavani Chand works as a doctor. On occasion, spies pay a visit to Bhavani Chand, who develops close to Gayathri. Gayathri's paintings and her artistic expertise are often admired by spies. He always supports Gayathri's love for painting and gives her the assurance that she may achieve great things if she puts her all into it. Gayathri's life is impacted by the intricate and profound relationship that Spies had with her.

Gayathri and Walter Sipes's common creative and intellectual interests shaped Gayathri's thoughts and perceptions of desertion. The entire family undergoes a sea change as a result of her friendship with Walter Spies. Her choice to depart with Spies pressures her bond with her family, and Myshkin, who deals with his mother's absence, feels incredibly derelict. The novel switches to Myshkin's point of view, emphasizing how he views the world as a little boy who has been profoundly impacted by his mother's elopement.

Myshkin's feelings of bewilderment reflect the emotional vacuums in Gayathri's life. The reader is shown the devastation brought by Gayathri's departure and her inability to balance her longing for independence with her responsibilities as a mother through Myshkin's eyes. He considers his mother's life decisions and the psychological wounds she left behind as he gets older. He tries to make sense of his mother's decisions and to comprehend Gayathri's behaviour.

By illustrating that the search for belongingness is not a straight line but rather a sequence of broken lives that mould who we are and how we relate to the world, the author ultimately conveys the fragility of the human condition through Gayathri. She is never able to reach her heart. She kept looking for it, but it had moved on ahead of her and into an area she couldn't see. Similar words are found in Jaya Bhattacharji Rose's *Confessions of an avid bibliophile*, in her blog, she makes a reference that "Gayathri comes as a modern woman but caught in the wrong time."

Gayathri's journey and her emotional state is captured in the following lines of Meena Chatterjee's "Quest of Identity in Culture: A Critical Analysis of Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived*." (79) She states that, "Through Gayatri's journey, Roy examines the complexities of identity formation within the cultural conflicts of a transitioning India". She is an Indian woman who is torn between her contemporary aspirations and traditional standards. Despite her desire for freedom, she is constrained by the social and familial norms that establish her positions. Her heart, which represents her need for fulfilment and connection, is never far away. Her emotion is crucial to comprehending her deeper need for a sense of belongingness, not just in her marriage but also in the larger frameworks of her identity and the outside world.

Gayathri's desire for intellectual and personal freedom frequently conflicts with the urge to fit in as a wife and mother. "What good will bring the great nation's freedom do for me?"

Tell that! Will it make me free? Will I be able to Choose how to live?”. “Even Myshkin is freer than I Am!” (ALWNL 90). These quotations demonstrate how Gayathri juggles between her roles as a mother and a wife who long for freedom and self-identity.

Gayathri's journey comes to a head at a turning point when she loses her son. Her sorrow turns into a place for introspection, forcing her to face her decisions and the results of her decision. Gayathri's character is shown as a source of solace and a painful reminder of the emotional distance that has harmed her relationships throughout the novel. Myshkin represents a significant loss in the novel, which makes Gayathri face her unmet expectations and the fallout from her quest for acceptance in places where she didn't belong.

Gayathri's pursuit of belongingness proved to be failure with the following lines in the letter written by Gayathri to her friend Lis where Gayathri says “I do feel rather more unwell”. “I'm a mean old woman now.” “How could it have ended this way? “I am furious about everything” “Once I have seen Myshkin and you again, I don't care what happens next” (ALWNL 303-304). In losing her son Myshkin, she had lost herself. This shows his loss compels Gayathri to face her own identity and feeling of belongingness. As Gayathri's path develops, she confronts her previous decisions and realizes that belongingness must be found inside oneself rather than being sought for from beyond. Gayathri's thoughts about her history and her deeds in the latter parts of novel represent a significant change in her perception of belongingness.

Gayathri's ultimate reunion with herself depends on her painful acceptance of loss and her realization of her own power. At last, she had come to terms with the fact that she would never find what she was looking for anywhere. She had to be the source of it. This declaration represents the pinnacle of Gayathri's journey, as she comes to understand that genuine belongingness is about loving oneself completely and without remorse rather than trying to fit into a specific position or location.

The finding of the paper concludes with the common saying called “satisfied life is better than a successful life”. Gayathri's pursuit of belongingness is a multifaceted journey. She chased her dream in pursuit of belongingness but her search of belongingness has become a failure. Throughout the novel, Gayathri navigates the tensions between her desires and her duties, ultimately, she realises that belongingness is not something that can be found externally but must come from within. Her journey is both painful and redemptive. Her story is a testament to those who struggles many faces in the pursuit of belongingness, and her journey is one of the ultimate self-acceptance and longing for her son Myshkin, which undoubtedly states pursuit of belongingness is always in one's mind.

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