



## “THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S *THE EARTHSPINNER*

Professor Vinita Dhondiyal Bhatnagar, Department of Humanities, UIT, RGPV,  
[vinita.dhondiyal@gmail.com](mailto:vinita.dhondiyal@gmail.com), 9425004577

### Abstract

*This paper looks at Anuradha Roy’s The Earthspinner through the prism of the cognitive act of mind reading. The novel is presented to us through a mixture of modes of narration, including journal entries, letters and third person narration. The author allows us the illusion of peeping into the minds of the central characters and also captures the dynamics of their attempting to read each other’s minds. The potential for misinterpretation and misunderstanding make this enterprise fraught with anxiety and excitement. Through our understanding of what the author chooses to tell and what she chooses to withhold, we also attempt to read the mind of the writer. In the ultimate analysis this novel nudges us to try to read into our own minds as well. This is what justifies its categorization as literary fiction.*

**Keywords:** Mind reading. Cognitive rewards. Fictional Minds. Third person narrative voice.

**“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE**

**EARTHSPINNER** by **Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar** is licensed under **CC BY-NC-SA 4.0**



Why do we read fiction? What pleasure does it provide us?

“Every once in a great while, a novel comes along to remind you why you rummage through shelves in the first place. Why you peck like a magpie past the bright glitter of publishers’ promises. Why you read.”<sup>1</sup>

This stunningly effusive review of Anuradha Roy’s first novel was published in the Washington Post. This paper contends that it is the range, variety and reliability of the fictional minds of people who inhabit her books that make Anuradha an extraordinary storyteller. It is precisely the sheer scale of input required of readers in constructing the minds of characters that make *The Earthspinners* such an engrossing read

Liza Zunshine’s **Why We Read Fiction. Theory of Mind and the Novel** explores the relation between mind reading and the pleasure of reading fiction:

“Thus we engage in mind-reading when we ascribe to a person a certain mental state on the basis of her observable action (e.g., we see her reaching for a glass of water and assume that she is thirsty); when we interpret our own feelings based on our proprioceptive awareness (e.g., our heart skips a beat when a certain person enters the room and we realize that we might have been attracted to him or her all along); when we intuit a complex state of mind based on a limited

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



verbal description (e.g., a friend tells us that she feels sad and happy at the same time, and we believe that we know what she means); when we compose an essay, a lecture, a movie, a song, a novel, or an instruction for an electrical appliance and try to imagine how this or that segment of our target audience will respond to it; when we negotiate a multilayered social situation (e.g., a friend tells us in front of his boss that he would love to work on the new project, but we have our own reasons to believe that he is lying and hence try to turn the conversation so that the boss, who, we think, may suspect that he is lying, would not make him work on that project and yet would not think that he didn't really want to); and so forth. Attributing states of mind is the default way by which we construct and navigate our social environment, incorrect though our attributions frequently are.”<sup>ii</sup>

In other words, the pleasure afforded by a fictional narrative owes much to the excitement and the exasperation of mind reading. Mind reading is the ability to discern the thoughts of another. It is an adaptive response to increasingly complex primate social interaction<sup>iii</sup>

Mind reading is an evolved cognitive capacity which enables our interaction with each other and our ability to make sense of fiction. The cognitive rewards of reading fiction are aligned with the cognitive rewards of a leap in imagination which allows us to “try on” mental states potentially available to us but differing from our own. In Zunshine’s words: “It is possible, then, that certain cultural artifacts, such as novels, test the functioning of our cognitive adaptations for

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



mind-reading while keeping us pleasantly aware that the "test" is proceeding quite smoothly.” (pg.19). One of the pleasures of reading is being told how a variety of fictional people are thinking. The novelist can then experiment with our readiness to posit a mind where we observe behavior as they balance the amount of interpretation of the character’s mental state that they themselves provide with what they expect us to infer on our own.

It is a point also made by Alan Palmer in *Fictional Minds*:

“My thesis is a fundamental one: narrative fiction is, in essence, the presentation of fictional mental functioning. I state my thesis here in this bald, stark manner for purposes of clarity. The full implications of it will emerge later on. If I am right, then it follows that the study of the novel is the study of fictional mental functioning and also that the task of theorists is to make explicit the various means by which this phenomenon is studied and analyzed. This is another way of making the point made earlier that the study of fictional minds should be established as a clearly defined and discrete subject area within literary theory.”<sup>iv</sup>

The centrality of the study of fictional minds also informs the work of Zunshine. She analyzes Nabokov’s **Lolita** and Richardson’s **Clarissa** among other texts and concludes that fiction helps us to pattern in newly nuanced ways our emotions and perceptions; it bestows "new knowledge or increased understanding" and gives "the chance for a sharpened ethical sense" and it creates new forms of meaning for our everyday existence.(pg.128)

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



## Sara

The *Earthspinner* begins with Sara’s journal entry for Thursday, October 11<sup>th</sup>: “It is autumn and I am at a university in England”. Sara’s sister’s voice playing in her head is recorded in the journal entry “You always manage to get away, you always have it easy”. Those were the parting words that she had spoken at the airport, “though she did not utter them out loud.” (pg.9) Right from the opening page we are privy to Sara’s process of the cognitive act of mind reading. She is interpreting what Tia might possibly be feeling or thinking. The accuracy of that reading is almost immediately confirmed when Tia complains: “Now you have gone, I can never leave. I’ll be stuck here, looking after Amma my whole bloody life.” (pg.10) Sara can imagine her throwing punches at her reflection in the mirror next to the phone as if she were aiming her blows at me. Of this I am sure.” (pg.10)

This seemingly effortless act of mind reading extends to her mother “armouring her heart against absences” (pg.21) It reaches beyond the human realm to a possible mind reading of Chinna, the dog, “I wonder how Dog is making sense of it-abandoned over and over again.” (pg.21)

While Elango and Zohra are trying to make sense of their relationship the young Sara has no problem understanding what is happening. In an act of effortless mind reading Sara is aware of a fizzle in the air, something invisible that exists between men and women, when Zohra comes down to the pond. It was the same fizzle that accompanied the prolonged goodbye at the door

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



between the couple that had moved into the house opposite theirs. It was the same fizzle that crackled on her television set as a buxom actress approached her marital bed with a large glass of milk. It had no name but Sara recognized it when she saw it between Elango and Zohra. “I was sure that for all the hours between the moment Zohra left the pond and the next afternoon, Elango would think of nothing other than that she had walked the entire scrubby distance to the pond—despite her limp—to seek him out.”(87)

Yet for all her mind reading skills Sara is unable to read into her own actions and behavior. When she goes down to Elango’s pond to help him make his clay horse, she notices him in a singlet, stripped down to his shorts “the bare arm he held towards me was long and sinewy, its muscles moved visibly with each gesture he made. I could not understand why, when he looked this way since I was a toddler, I was suddenly self-conscious and shy.” (pg.81) She is aware of the sensations rushing through her in the gleaming water.

The intimacy of their work done secretly together, the sensuousness of their preparation of raw clay by immersing their feet in it and treading it, the conversations about pottery and traditions are interrupted by Zohra’s arrival and sharp intake of breath.

“She was startled to find me there, I could tell. I did not know that she too came to the pond; I had thought it something between Elango and me.” (84) the resentment, the jealousy is apparent to the reader though not to the character herself.

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



Zohra tells Sara to wash her feet before she goes home and Sara is tempted to tell her that for Elango and her clay was not dirt. This is something they have in common and Zohra lacks. It is Sara who helps Elango prepare the clay for his dream horse, not Zohra.

None of this makes any difference to Elango. He is in love. He forgets everything that he had been talking to Sara about and seems to be in a daze. Sara has also heard of their rendezvous. Elango never calls Sara back to the pond after this and she is convinced that Zohra must have asked him not to. Elango practically abandons Sara as his love affair with Zohra flourishes. Akka is the only one who seems to understand what she is going through:

“Even today, I thought, she understood what suffering it was to sit alone making pots. It was clear to me that Elango did not care at all.” (pg.102) All this time, she had been making things with Elango’s help. Alone, she felt lost. Baffled resentment churned up her insides. She had been told that once the clay horse was made she would be the one to decorate it. Now Zohra’s grandfather was embellishing it with Urdu calligraphy and both Elango and Zohra had inscribed their names on it.

Akka asks Sara about his project, asks her who else comes down to the pond.

“I thought of Zohra reaching out for the amulet, I thought of the look that had passed between them, of the sketch of a woman I had seen in his book, the letter Z he had written

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



and adorned over and over again. I thought how Elango had given me very little time after she had entered his life. “There was only one person, a lady...” (pg.135)

We already know that it was Sara who had found the amulet and handed it over to Elango. We guess that Sara is jealous. Her pottery classes have stopped. Elango no longer has time for her ever since Zohra entered his life. Is that why she tells Akka what is going on at the pond where Elango works?

She retracts the statement almost immediately but the damage has been done. Akka knows about the horse, knows about Zohra and Elango. The tragedy that follows can directly be traced back to what Sara told Akka that day. In her dreams Sara sees herself chasing after Akka trying to stop her, sees herself falling over the body of Elango, trying to stop his hands from being pulverized. She wakes up at night crying in her sleep. Her subconscious knows what her conscious mind will not accept. She was jealous and she acted on that jealous impulse and set a tragic course of events into action.

### **The Elango-Zohra love affair**

The Elango-Zohra love affair brings the reader’s mind- reading abilities further into play. “For how long had he lived with Zohra in his head?” (pg39). It’s a question seemingly addressed to the reader and we scramble for a reply even as we realize that it might be a question Elango is

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



asking himself in an act of self-communion. Zohra has lived in his neighborhood for a year without him noticing her: “That whole year now felt like lost time: crazy not to have stored away those glimpses for sustenance.” (pg.39).

The moment it all began is imprinted in his mind. She stopped at his stall and their hands touched when reaching out for the same lamp. She jokes with him, she smiles. Does she like him? The reader wants to know as much as Elango does.

“The next week she had come back-why? What was he to her? She had come again not to buy a pitcher but because she had felt something stir inside her too-he wanted to believe this, and by degrees it grew into a certainty in his mind.” (40) Is he fooling himself? Is he projecting on to her his own desire much like Lovelace in *Clarissa* and Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*?

Elango is engaged in the act of attempted mind reading and we are his accomplices at this juncture. We are also attempting to read her actions and her behavior. We are worried that he may possibly have misread her. She is the granddaughter of a well-known calligrapher. He is a potter. They belong to two different religions in a world where this is an insurmountable problem. “The space between the two was a charnel house of burnt and bloodied human flesh, a giant crack through the earth that was like an open mouth waiting to swallow him.” (44) We are reading in a context where misreading and misinterpretation of women’s nonverbal language can lead to dire

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



consequences. We cannot fully accept Elango’s reading of her mind. How can she possibly love him? Even if she does, what future can they have together?

Zohra has the answers. “She never interrupted his list of worries. When he finished, she said this was not her way of thinking, and everything would fall into place, just as his shapeless masses of mud became beautiful pots.”<sup>v</sup>

It is Zohra who makes all the initial moves in their relationship. She is the one who asks him to drop her to the post office to collect her grandfather’s pension. She talks to him as if they were friends. He joyously drives fast. She laughingly asks him to slow down. “When women are in love, he told himself, they cry out to the man to go slow, to stop. It was both a cry for rescue and a plea for captivity-in the movies it was always so.” (76) This makes us distinctly uncomfortable with its sexual overtones. If the language of love is a code, then Elango is relying upon the only experience of sexual love that he has had-the vicarious experience of watching two lovers on screen- to decode her language. He looks at her in the rear-view window and he is positive that the same thought has passed between them both. We are not so sure.

He volunteers to drive her everywhere. She says she only goes to the post office and to the dispensary at Kuttipally. They begin to go to both places together, him driving the auto, she sitting behind. Is he seeing too much into it? Are we seeing too much into it? Then we are told he took

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



no money and she never offered to pay. Now the needle of suspicion turns to her. Is she taking advantage of his infatuation?

The exhaustive mind reading ends when a riot breaks out over a cricket match between India and Pakistan. Zohra seeks Elango out when it simmers down, slips her hand into his and does not let go until they have reached the end of the alley. Somewhere during that walk, she also managed to touch her lips to his. But we only learn of this in the next paragraph. So even as Zohra walks away, dupatta secure on her shoulders, bag strap firm in her hands, we are asking ourselves if the walk meant something. At this point of the narrative Elango has more knowledge than we do as readers. So, Zohra knew all along what was on her mind, Elango knows finally when she kisses him and we learn it when we read of the kiss. “Breathtaking how swiftly she had asserted her ownership of him, how needless his fears or his rehearsals of the precise manner in which he would tell her of his feelings.” (pg.94) Elango has never had anyone lay such a strong claim on him. On certain days he was taken aback by her need of him, the way her hands and her lips found him in the dark, the recklessness of her love for him.

It is not only Zohra whose mind Elango reads, As Taatha walks around Kummarapet making mental notes and stops to stare at the moringa tree Elango comments “No hair, no teeth, no balls, but he’s got his greed” he says to Chinna. Elango is also the most evocative character in the novel precisely because he is most often the subject for our own exercise in mind reading.

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



## **Elango and Chinna**

Take the instance when he first meets Chinna and decides to drop him off outside a wealthy home. Should he drop him outside the high walled suburban bungalows? But there was no watchman in sight. The dog might wander off and get run over. Then there were stretches with boulders but jackals could be lurking there. One after the other he rejects the various options till he has taken the dog home. While Elango believes he wants to leave the dog, we as readers are aware that he wants to keep him. We have read his mind on that long journey home and he is able to read his own mind only later. “Look at you now, Elango said to Chinna, we can’t explain what brought you to me, what kept you alive in that forest all alone until I found you. But here you are and if you leave again, I know I will be done for.” (pg 57). Elango may know it or not but we do. Elango has fallen in love with Chinna. The language used to describe Chinna’s effect on his life suggests as much: “His heart felt bigger, more alive, as if a clear spring had exploded inside him and soaked a parched wasteland crying out for water. Flowers had bloomed, new blades of grass. The desert had blossomed into a garden.” (pg.58-59). The dog had unlocked something in him that unnerved him with its power.

Chinna has that effect upon people. Even Sara’s mother forgets all her high principles and decides to keep the dog despite knowing that the owners are looking for it. She allows herself to believe that her husband “would not be able to survive losing Chinna” (pg.72) and at another point

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



in the narrative she calls Chinna a heart medicine and states that her husband would be bereft without him. But it is Devika herself who burns his old collar and leash and his old life with it. Again, the reader is reading the mind of the character and guessing at a truth that the character themselves do not know.

The letters that the woman writes to the agony aunt, Mrs Reddy, reveals her own relentless obsession for the dog. “My husband has told me we have to accept we have lost Tashi. But I cannot.” (pg.99) She combs the city looking for her lost dog. As readers we read her letters with a sense of uneasy anxiety, guessing at the thoughts that must run through Devika’s mind when she receives them. When Elango is persuaded to allow the dog to stay at Tara’s house after her father’s heart attack, Elango feels that without Chinna the courtyard feels empty and lifeless. Even the hens seem to be searching for their tormentor.

Chinna inspires deep affections, but that does not stop him from being abandoned. “He is witness to and sometimes survivor of all sorts of violence: a random carjacking, a thoughtless kick, a deranged mob. The endless cruelties unleashed by human hands seem all the more senseless from the point of view of a dog, and love too brings its own cruelties.”<sup>vi</sup>

It’s not just human beings or animals whose minds can be read. Sara reads into the mind of the clay. I thought maybe my clay did not want to be a cup-to be put into fire and transformed. Perhaps it was turning into puddles in my hands because it would rather go back to the earth.

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



Maybe every substance knew what it wanted to be, and my clay had doubts about becoming a cup even as I was experiencing strong misgivings about being a potter.” (pg104)

### **Reading the mind of the author.**

We witness the events through the mind of Sara. The first chapter of the book deals with her journal entries from Thursday October 11<sup>th</sup> to Tuesday, November 6<sup>th</sup>. Perhaps she doesn't write every day? Or perhaps the author has chosen only those entries which are meaningful. Right from the start of the novel we are also trying to read the mind of the author. Chapter 2 recounts the traumatic incident on the highway when a man is wounded and his wife is temporarily abducted and then thrown out at a railway crossing. It is presented as third person narrative. Yet Sara's mind is still used to frame the incident. “I was just a girl then. I knew very little about the incident on the highway. I had only the bare bones from a newspaper report which ended in tiny italics with the name Devika Nanaiya.” (pg.34). This is Sara's mother's name. She was a journalist who covered the crime beat and wrote about the incident. She laid out the statistics, quoted the commissioner's statement, and bemoaned the fact that a corrupt police force meant that such crimes would become commonplace. So, while the opening passage gave us a glimpse of the horror of the incident especially in terms of the harrowing experience the woman had to go through, Sara's narrative pulls away from the personal details to more sociological facts. Her father says the village near the railway crossing is a den of vice. Tia wants to be a kingpin in a den of vice.

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY'S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



Sara denies her this possibility. “I was only eleven but already a cynic about the things people let girls do.” (pg.35) Tia could not be a king pin. At best she could be a queen-pin pasted to a dartboard for practice. Sara is only concerned about the missing dog in the story but we have been privy to the woman’s ordeal. Surely, we are sympathetic to her?

Yet when she begins to write her letters to the agony aunt column, we find ourselves distancing ourselves from her. What kind of person confides in an absolute stranger? Especially to an agony aunt column which will be published for all the world to see? “But tell me, Mrs Reddy, to whom can I say I am badly hurt too? As soon as I shut my eyes to sleep, I see them. The hands all over my body. The things they said still make my skin crawl as if a colony of worms is oozing and seething on me.”(pg.74).

Mrs Reddy may empathize, but we were there. As readers we accompanied the couple in their long drive past giant boulders, bullock carts and muddy huts. We saw the woman take the dog on a lead; we felt her heart turn “into an iron ball slamming against her ribs” (pg.32). We heard her scream and witnessed her being shoved into the car. Heard the obsessive question in her head as she bangs the window, claws the face of the man next to her “How to get out, how to get out?” (pg33). We feared the worst as the thin man who slapped her talks of the voyeuristic pleasure of watching a gang rape scene. We were relieved when she was thrown out of the car even though her head hit something hard. She has stitches on her head now and a painful shoulder. Everyone

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



says she got off lightly, especially in comparison to her husband who may have lost his sight in the right eye. Her wounds are not visible. But she lives with a husband who needs sedation, lives with the trauma and the grief of that evening. “I have nobody to talk to.” (pg.74) she says in partial explanation of why she is writing to the agony aunt. There is a relationship between a writer and a reader. The woman has been reading the column for years. She has begun to feel a sense of kinship. She feels the writer is a friend who understands her. That is why she turns to the writer of the column for advice. What should she do?

We don’t know what the reply is. We can only guess at it through the next letter that the woman writes. She has been to the police station to complain. Their attitude seems to be she deserved what she got. They have no interest in the missing dog. Her husband has advised her to accept the loss. But she cannot let go. Every day she marks a route on a city map and takes buses to different areas, walks and searches for the dog. “It may be pointless, but it keeps me sane.” (pg99). In the face of trauma and tragedy, the search for Tashi gives her life purpose and meaning. We understand her predicament. But by now we are well aware of Elango’s attachment to the dog, we are aware of what that dog has become to Sara’s family and to the community. We don’t want the woman to find the dog. We want her to give up the search.

What accounts for our sympathy for Elango and Sara and our lack of that compassion for the woman? For one thing we don’t even know her name. We don’t know where she lives or what

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



she does. What has happened to her has happened to others before her., the third person narrative voice informs us. “Things of this kind happen all over the world, every hour, perhaps every minute, more in some places than in others. The variations are infinite, and the particulars matters only to the people whose lives they touch.” (pg.14)

We take this as carte blanche to justify our indifference to her quest.

The letters keep streaming in documenting the woman’s search for her dog. Now we are getting anxious. She has laid out a scale model city in her guest room, with all the geographical details of the landscape. She has walked all the way to Penda hill. She has gone down every lane on the right side of Bharati Road and the next day she will explore the left side. She has counted the stray dogs. She is coming closer and closer.

What is the effect of these letters on Sara’s mother? We do not know. We have only seen her through Sara’s eyes as “chocolate truffle in human form” (pg.64), her crust has a soft, melting centre, we have been told. This allows us to adopt her perspective, to wish the woman would try to focus on other things and not fixate on finding the dog. Shouldn’t she be taking care of her wounded husband? Forget the fact that he has rejoined work but she has been so fatally wounded, “as if a bullet went through my brain and shot away my logic and focus on the evening I was attacked.” (pg 115)

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



While Sara’s journal entries give us some semblance of intimacy with her, the suppressed anger and grief of the woman’s letters push us away. “ No time does not heal. Let me tell you some wounds never heal. Have you ever had such a wound? It gnaws you from inside like termites deep in the leg of a chair which collapses when you sit on it though it looked whole and new. The termites are at my skull, Mrs Reddy, some nights I wake up and my pillow is gritty with powdered bone.” (pg.138).

Again, we can only guess at what Mrs. Reddy might have suggested as consolation but can we really ignore the fact that she knows where the dog is and could help this woman out of her agony but does not? Why are we dismayed rather than impressed with the woman’s determination to find the dog?

We do not receive another letter and as an epilogue to this story, are relieved to find that when Chinna does meet the woman, he does not like her. She smells of something that came from a bottle. He likes humans who smell of sweat, warmth and food. This woman makes very little sense to him. Yet in a flash of insight, we become privy to the feelings and sensations hidden in the dark depths of his mind. “That voice. Those sounds. It was confusing and alluring, a call to a place within him that had been locked away.” (pg.219)

He walks away from her. We walk away with him. We do not want to know what this distraught woman is thinking as she loses even that one purpose that gave some measure of solace

**[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)**

**[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)**



and strength to her life. We want him to stay with Sara’s mother whose daughters are far away, whose beloved husband is dead. We do not want her to be left alone. We do not care what happens to the woman whose name we do not know.

The author knows how our minds will work. She has deliberately brought us to this point by what she chose to tell us and what she chose to withhold. As readers we are quick to judge Taatha and Akka and the village that attacks Elango and Zohra. It is only through a more reflective reading that we also apply the same standards of compassion and understanding to ourselves.

This is why we read fiction. It helps us look into the minds of characters, and through their behavior, beliefs and actions, catch a glimpse of the hidden recesses of our own mind.

## References

[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)

[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)



- Marie Arana. “Book review: An Atlas of Impossible Longing.”  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/book-review-an-atlas-of-impossible-longing/2011/04/11/AFE4tbkE>
- Lisa Zunshine. *Why We Read Fiction. Theory of mind and the novel.* Columbus: the Ohio state university press. 2012. pg.13
- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/mind-reading>
- Palmer. *Fictional Minds.* Introduction pg. 6
- Pg.97 <https://asianreviewofbooks.com/content/the-earthspinner-by-anuradha-roy/>

## Bibliography

- Palmer, Alan. **Fictional Minds.** Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.
- Roy, Anuradha. **The Earthspinner** Gurugram: Havhette Book Publishing India Pvt. Ltd, 2021.
- Zunshine, Lisa. **Why We Read Fiction. Theory of mind and the novel.** Columbus: The Ohio state university Press. 2012

[“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE](#)

[EARTHSPINNER](#) by [Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)



- Arana, Marie. “Book review: An Atlas of Impossible Longing.” Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/book-review-an-atlas-of-impossible-longing/2011/04/11/AFE4tbkE>
  - Lawrence, Elizabeth. (2022). “The Earthspinner” by Anuradha Roy. Retrieved from <https://asianreviewofbooks.com/content/the-earthspinner-by-anuradha-roy/>
  - Dynamic self-processes Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/mind-reading>
- 

**“THIS IS WHY YOU READ FICTION AT ALL” MINDREADING IN ANURADHA ROY’S THE**

**EARTHSPINNER** by **Professor Vineeta Bhatnagar** is licensed under **CC BY-NC-SA 4.0**