

The Wheel of Creation and Conflict: An Analysis of Anuradha Roy's *The Earth Spinner*

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Abstract:

“Pottery, as a craft that has been with humans globally since forever, is like a clay diary of how humans have evolved; our struggles and achievements....” says Bisila Noha, a Contemporary Ceramic Artist, in *Plural Magazine* . This quote effectively supports the perspective this research paper. The paper examines Anuradha Roy's novel, *The Earth Spinner*, focusing on the intersection of artistic creation, memory, and religious intolerance. By exploring the central metaphor of pottery, this paper investigates how the act of shaping clay serves as a place of solace against the violent societal divisions of modern India. The study highlights the tragic consequences of sectarian violence on personal relationships and artistic expression. Through an analysis of the protagonist's journey and the interwoven lives of the artisan community, the paper demonstrates how creative passion can both bridge profound cultural divides and provoke devastating communal wrath. The paper underscores the resilience of art and the enduring nature of human connection in the face of bigotry.

Keywords: Pottery, Religious Intolerance, Creation, Memory, Artistic Resistance

Introduction

"The wheel turns, I place a ball of clay on it, I cover the clay with both my hands, and if I close my eyes I have the planet spinning in my palms to the hum of a motor"(5). This quotation captures the essence of creation that lies at the heart of our chosen title, "The Wheel of Creation and Conflict." It reflects the fundamental duality present in the novel, the peaceful, almost divine act of molding earth on a spinning wheel, juxtaposed against the destructive and violent conflicts manufactured by human prejudice. It also analyzes the centers on the devastating impact of religious intolerance on artistic expression and personal love, using the medium of terracotta pottery.

The paper is to investigate how Anuradha Roy utilizes the metaphor of the potter's wheel to illustrate the fragility of human connections in a deeply divided society and to show how art serves as a repository for memory and grief. The title perfectly encapsulates the tension between the protagonist's desire to construct a beautiful, unified world and the reality of a society intent on tearing it apart which systematically explore both the creative processes of the characters and the subsequent societal conflicts that destroy their peaceful existence. Furthermore, it is intimately connected with today's scenario, where deep-seated sectarian divides, religious intolerance, and the policing of cultural boundaries continue to ignite violence and displace innocent people, much like the tragic events that unfold in the novel. Anuradha Roy employs this concept in her novels to portray art as a powerful force that transcends cultural and religious boundaries, while also revealing its vulnerability to the harsh realities of prejudice, hatred, and intolerance. In the novel, the creator's vision is pure and unifying, but the society surrounding the creator is divided and exposed to harm. Roy uses the earthen medium to suggest that while human beings are all spun from the same earth, their artificial divisions cause immense suffering.

A brief overview of Roy's life and career reveals that she is a highly celebrated author who lives in Ranikhet, India, and works as a graphic designer at Permanent Black, an independent press. She has penned several notable books, including *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, *The Folded Earth*, *Sleeping on Jupiter*, and *All the Lives We Never Lived*. She is the recipient of numerous prestigious honors, including the DSC Prize for Fiction, the Crossword Book Award, and the Tata Book of the Year Award.

A concise analysis of the selected novel reveals a story of love, loss, and the tactile art of pottery. The protagonist Elango, an auto-rickshaw driver and dedicated Hindu potter living in Kummurapet, who falls deeply in love with a Muslim woman named Zohra. Inspired by a vivid dream, Elango sets out to create a monumental terracotta horse by a secluded pond, a project that consumes his physical and emotional energy. To complete his masterpiece, he enlists the help of Zohra's grandfather, a blind Muslim calligrapher named Usman Alam, to carve beautiful Urdu verses onto the Hindu temple horse. When the surrounding community discovers this fusion of Hindu and Islamic cultures, religious extremists led by local figures like Akka and Taatha incite a violent mob that destroys the horse, burns down Elango's home, and forces him and Zohra to flee for their lives. The story is largely filtered through the perspective of Sara, a young girl who learns pottery from Elango and who later struggles with the grief of her father's death while studying at a university in England.

The Earth Spinner operates on multiple symbolic levels throughout the text. Literally, it refers to Elango, the dedicated potter who shapes clay from the earth into profound artistic creations. By extension, it also applies to Sara, who finds solace and psychological healing in the basement pottery studio of her English university, spinning earth

to reassemble her fragmented identity after the loss of her father. On a broader, more philosophical level, the title symbolizes the relentless, geological rotation of the planet itself. Sara's father, who possessed a deep passion for geology and ancient history, frequently spoke of plate tectonics and the shifting of continents over billions of years, imparting the wisdom that all human change and tragedy are ultimately just the work of the earth spinning.

The novel uses extensive descriptive passages to show how creation is a painstaking, loving process that requires immense patience, while destruction is swift, chaotic, and driven by blind hatred. Elango's creation of the terracotta horse represents a beautiful synthesis of different faiths and traditions. When the horse is finally fired and revealed, it stands as a majestic testament to artistic and religious unity. The following long quote from the novel illustrates the profound beauty of the calligrapher's work on the terracotta horse:

Listen carefully, Neither the Vedas Nor the Qur'an Will teach you this: Put the bit in its mouth, The saddle on its back, Your foot in the stirrup, And ride your wild runaway mind All the way to heaven.(184)

This inscription beautifully captures the novel's central theme that true spiritual elevation transcends the boundaries of organized religion. However, this vision of unity is violently rejected by the rigid, intolerant forces of society. The mob's reaction to the Urdu script on a traditional Hindu figure highlights the tragic reality of communal violence. The sudden and brutal destruction of Elango's masterpiece demonstrates how quickly prejudice can obliterate years of careful, loving creation. The ensuing violence is captured vividly in the following long quote from the text:

Taatha's sharp quaver cut into the deranged shouting. 'We can't have thieves living here. This is a neighborhood for decent people.' In the midst of it, we saw Giri stumble past holding his bloodied jaw with a wounded hand. I could not see Elango and began sobbing frantically, trying to tug my hand out from my mother's vicelike grip. Through moving slabs of people I saw someone pick up Giri's tortoise and fling it at the horse. It hit the hard terracotta and fell to the ground. You could not tell if it was a stone or a living thing. Someone shoved my mother to one side, she clutched me harder, shouting for my father in a voice I had not heard from her before or since, and there was a vast roar, voices indistinguishable, which echoed in my ears for days.(85)

This passage highlights the senselessness of the violence, where even innocent animals and bystanders are swept up in the mob's fury. The aftermath of this destruction leaves deep psychological scars on the characters, particularly Sara, who suffers from nightmares and carries the trauma of that night with her all the way to her university life in England. Yet, despite the overwhelming forces of destruction, the novel suggests that the urge to create cannot be entirely extinguished. Sara and her father meticulously glue the broken shards of the horse's head back together, turning the fragmented ruins into a symbol

of survival and resilience. Furthermore, Elango continues his craft in exile, eventually showcasing his magnificent terracotta animals in a London gallery, proving that his artistic spirit survived the flames of bigotry.

Conclusion

The main argument presented in this paper is that artistic creation acts as a profound form of resistance against a world determined to divide and destroy. Anuradha Roy's narrative demonstrates that while prejudice, religious intolerance, and mob violence can inflict unimaginable suffering and displace individuals from their homes, the fundamental human drive to create beauty remains indestructible. Through the act of spinning earth, characters like Elango and Sara find a way to process their grief, honor their lost loved ones, and transcend the artificial borders erected by society.

The study of this paper accomplishes its purpose by thoroughly analyzing how the metaphor of the potter's wheel connects the disparate themes of the novel. It also traced Elango's journey from a humble local artisan to an exiled master, examined the societal forces that violently opposed his cross-cultural masterpiece and explored how Sara uses the tactile memory of clay to navigate her own profound losses. By evaluating the novel's narrative structure, its socio-political commentary, and the author's biographical context, this research paper has provided a comprehensive understanding of how *The Earth Spinner* poignantly reflects the tragic conflicts of contemporary society while simultaneously celebrating the enduring, restorative power of art.

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