



## An Atlas of Impossible Longing

*Anuradha Roy*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# An Atlas of Impossible Longing

*Anuradha Roy*

## **An Atlas of Impossible Longing** Anuradha Roy

On the outskirts of a small town in Bengal, a family lives in solitude in their vast new house. Here, lives intertwine and unravel. A widower struggles with his love for an unmarried cousin. Bakul, a motherless daughter, runs wild with Mukunda, an orphan of unknown caste adopted by the family. Confined in a room at the top of the house, a matriarch goes slowly mad; her husband searches for its cause as he shapes and reshapes his garden.

As Mukunda and Bakul grow, their intense closeness matures into something else, and Mukunda is banished to Calcutta. He prospers in the turbulent years after Partition, but his thoughts stay with his home, with Bakul, with all that he has lost—and he knows that he must return.

## **An Atlas of Impossible Longing Details**

Date : Published April 5th 2011 by Free Press (first published 2008)

ISBN : 9781451608625

Author : Anuradha Roy

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, India, Historical, Historical Fiction, Literary Fiction

 [Download An Atlas of Impossible Longing ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online An Atlas of Impossible Longing ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online An Atlas of Impossible Longing Anuradha Roy**

---

## From Reader Review An Atlas of Impossible Longing for online ebook

### Elizabeth Joseph says

It requires a bit of courage and ability to write a sad story without actually making the reader depressed. I think that is the most commendable part of Anuradha Roy's writing.

This book makes you sad, but it is not depressing. And I loved the Bengali village scenario and the pre-Independence era portrayed set in West Bengal.

One of the best novels written in an Indian setting :)

**Verdict:** Great Read.

---

### Brenda Youngerman says

An Atlas of Impossible Longing by by Anuradha Roy is without a doubt the best book I have read in the past six months! It is the kind of book that stays with you throughout the day. The kind of book that resonates within your mind as you think, feel, breathe, do your daily chores. The kind of book that makes you stop and take notice of things around you that you would not otherwise stop and take notice of.

An Atlas of Impossible Longing is really three books in one telling stories of three distinctly different time periods but of the same familial personage. It takes place in India in the 1920's through 1950's and it is an insider's view of their caste systems, their social structures, their views on women and men relationships, and so much more.

The way it is written is spellbinding and intriguing. It brings the reader right into the lives of these people. Ms. Roy describes the sights, smells, tastes and feelings as if we were there. I love reading a book where I can learn so much from an author. She is simply mesmerizing!

I was given this book as a free copy from Free Press Book Tours on Book Blogger.

I highly recommend it!

---

### Smitha says

A simple, well-narrated story set in the modern day West Bengal, starting in Colonial India of the 1920s, and ending in the 50s. I got a glimpse of the ordinary lives without much mention of the political upheaval of those days, except for a passing mention of the partition. I got acquainted with a myriad of characters; Mukunda- the orphan, Bakul his playmate, and Nirmal Babu, her father , staying fresh in my memory. Loved the cultural and regional cuisine references.

---





????? ?????? ??????

---

## Jennifer Rayment says

### The Good Stuff

- \* Beautifully almost lyrically written.
- \* The landscape feels so real you could reach out and touch it.
- \* You can feel the authors love for the countryside
- \* This is not my sort of book, so please if you think you will like it, go get it, the author has talent. Check out the more positive reviews from other people listed below
- \* Some light humour - enjoyed the swearing bird

### The Not so Good Stuff

- \* This one was a painful read for me as I just couldn't get into it, but too stubborn to not finish it
- \* Very slow
- \* The men are self involved selfish misogynistic bastards and quite frankly just didn't give a rats ass about any of them. Mukunda had potential but he ended up hurting people due to his own selfish desires too
- \* I don't understand the choices made by many of the characters and it is in a world I do not understand
- \* quite depressing and bitter at times

### Favorite Quotes/Passages

"Submerged just beneath the surface of their talk was the sense that his departure was a scorning of their lives, the redrawing of a pattern that had already been perfected."

"Bitterly she muttered "God's ways are strange, that he should give children to those who don't care for them and leave me childless"

"But Nirmal could not disguise it from himself. He had brought in the child when it was convenient for him, and now that Bakul was growing up it was no longer convenient."

### What I Learned

- \* That I really am not a huge fan of flowery prose
- \* Seems I am a bit of a feminist after all

### Who should/shouldn't read

- \* Not for those like me who need a more exciting storyline -- if you like character pieces this may be for you
- \* Probably better suited for those who are far more well read than I

2.5 Dewey's (This is based on MY enjoyment NOT on the talents of the author)

## Bonnie Brody says

An Atlas of Impossible Longing - The title of this book alone drew me in; that and I'm partial to books about India. This is a fine book on many levels and I was not disappointed. It's a multigenerational novel, a great love story, a cross-cultural learning experience, and a book about yearning, hope, loss, money and betrayal. It captures the big themes of life and does a great job of keeping the reader turning the pages.

The story starts out in 1907 when Amulya takes his family from Calcutta to Songarh, a small town on the edge of the jungle. He has a wife and two grown sons, along with one daughter-in law. He builds a house in the middle of nowhere. There are no other houses nearby except for one belonging to an English couple across the street. There is dirt, mud, the screech of monkeys and not much else. Kananbala, Amulya's wife, gradually loses her sanity from the loneliness and utters irrelevant profanities at the oddest times. Amulya confines Kananbala to her room so as to avoid embarrassment. There she languishes, for the most part alone and lonely. She takes to watching the comings and goings of the English couple across the street and is witness to a murder. Her interpretation of what she sees has a fascinating outcome.

Amulya owns a spice factory where he concocts herbal remedies and perfumes that he sells. The language in Solgarh is Hindi whereas the language in Calcutta, where they came from is Bengali. Gradually, the family becomes fluent in Hindi but it is a struggle. While Amulya is alive, the factory does very well financially and the house he builds for his family is quite grand.

As time progresses, Nirmal, the single son, takes a wife named Shanti. They have a daughter named Bakul but Shanti dies in childbirth and Nirmal is left to raise Bakul on his own. Nirmal is an archeologist and geologist who is also a roamer. He is home very infrequently and sometimes does not see Bakul for years at a time. It just so happens that Amulya is sponsoring Mukunda, a young boy in the local orphanage. He brings Mukunda home to provide a friend for Bakul. Bakul is four and Mukunda six when Mukunda comes to live in Amulya's household. This causes a whole set of difficulties because Mukunda's caste is unknown. He may even be a child from a jungle tribe.

Mukunda and Bakul grow up together and are close in every way. They love to play at Mrs. Barnum's house, the Englishwoman from across the way. She lives under the shadow of suspicion as her husband was killed on her front stoop and she has always been a suspect in the murder. Nevertheless, Mrs. Barnum, who likes to drink a lot, stages monthly birthday parties for herself and the children are always invited. She has a huge library that Mukunda goes through, reading just about every book there.

As Bakul and Mukunda grow older, the family starts to worry about improprieties. What if they were to be too intimate with one another? How do they know the appropriate way to act? They stay out together to all hours and all their time is spent with one another. A decision is made to send Mukunda away to boarding school. The reason given is that it is necessary for him to get a good education. However, he feels betrayed, thrown out just like he was thrown out when he was put into the orphanage. He becomes bitter and resentful, blaming Nirmal for his perceived exile.

The years go by and we learn about Mukunda and Bakul's adulthood. There are many surprises in this book and as the story unfurls there is a lot of tension and build-up towards the finale. Parts of the book have coincidences that seem too much like a *deus ex machina*. However, it all falls into place beautifully. The novel is in the third person except for the last part of the book which is told in the first person by Mukunda. This part is his story. The writing is lyrical and the story is gripping. Though this is a debut novel, the reader would never know it. Anuradha Roy writes with a polished hand and the result is a reader's delight.

## mai ahmd says

... ..

... ..

... ..

... ..

... ..

... ..

---

## Ritu says

An excellent book! Very well written! The story line had me mesmerized. I empathised with all the characters which means that the author captured the essence of the person. One could see the progression of insanity in Kananbala and understand why she became how she did. I liked the beginning more than the ending. It is a love story and I wonder if the author tried to rush into ending the story at the end. I was

dissatisfied that Mukanda did not do more for Suleiman Khan. Mukanda did come out as a weak man in the end; succumbing to the intolerable business of extorting wealth at the expense of the weak. He also let down his family and gave up his son too easily. He grew up without a family and he left his son in an environment to grow up without a father. It was a romantic end with Bakul and Mukunda coming together. But what about his wife and son? They were not at fault. Similarly, Mukunda used Suleiman Khan's love, property and ended up taking advantage of him. Maybe the story is realistic - people today are living in a dog eats dog environment. A must read book!

---

### **Neha says**

What if a book offers you all those things which you have read and liked.. .. that is what this book brought for me... a Bengali author, setting of 1920s India, serenity of rural Bengal, hustle-bustle and noise of Calcutta, old mansions, story of three generations, family feuds, partition and Hindu Muslim relationships and fading British era,... All this sounded clichés but the newness of this novel is what makes it unique. Each aspect, character and moment is so well thought and well phrased that it creates a scene from the old Satyajit Ray's film.

The story moves from generation to generation and each generation brings with it its own set of aspirations, desires, dilemmas, challenges and fears. The will power of the patriarch to establish and run his business away from commercial and familiar comforts of Calcutta, loneliness of the wife who has never spoken a rude word in her life ending into unconscious bouts of abusing. The choice of a man between home or the desires of wandering and digging history, a dying mother and her legacy of a house and name to her child, the family of strangers with closer ties to those not bound by blood, the struggles of the orphan and the childless, the bonds of friendship and childhood memories. Growing up and leaving only to return. How life comes a full circle, how rivers change paths and cross paths of two strangers separating and meeting again.

The book has this aura of peace and soulfulness which touches you and leaves you with a heart warming feeling of leaving and returning, of loving and longing.

---

### **Amena says**

4.5 stars.

Just finished this wonderful book and I immediately want to be back in between those pages, in Bengal, with those characters that I fell in love with.

You can click on the book and read what it's about, I won't detail that on here. This is not a fast paced story. The writing is so so beautiful, almost poetic. It has been described to be flowery but I didn't think so at all. I adore stories that span generations and are told over a long period of time; this novel does just that in an extremely elegant and eloquent way. India was brought alive with strong yet tender characters, in a fascinating read.

---

### **???? says**

??? ?? ?? ?? ??? ???? ???? ??? ?????? ?? ???????? ?????? ?? ?? ?? ??? ??? ?? ??????????  
???? .. ????? ????????? ?????? ?????? ?? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????

?? ?????? ??? ?????? ??? ?????? ??????.. ?? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????  
????? ?????? ?????? ??????  
?? ?? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?? ?? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????  
?? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????  
????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????  
????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????  
????? ??????.. ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????  
????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????.. ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????

---

## Algernon says

[9/10]

**There was a house once whose garden I knew, every last tree, and where the stairs had chipped away and which of the windows would not shut. The ophtalmologist asked me once, "Do foreign bodies ever interfere with your vision? Floating black specks?" And I thought, not bodies, houses, and not foreign, ground into my blood.**

This is most of all a beautiful story about dreams, desires, hopes, longings – if you want, you can call it another atlas of clouds, less gimmicky, more heartfelt as it records the lives of three generations of lonely, almost broken, sad people struggling against a harsh climate and against a rigid social system. I like to think of the story as a sort of Indian version of 'Great Expectations' – and indeed you can find between the pages the tale of an orphan boy (Mukunda) educated in the exotic house of an old lady (Larissa Barnum) , a house that conceals a past murder and a boy that falls in love with a girl above his station (Bakul). I have a feeling though that I am oversimplifying the plot, and making light of the other dreamers in the story [slight spoilers here]: Amulya the businessman and gardener, the reclusive Kananbala, the grieving Nirmal, the poor relative Meera, the exiled professor from Calcutta, and so on...

In a story rich in symbols, houses and gardens are raised as a bulwark against creeping jungle, against flooding river, against murderous street mobs.

*The forest watched. It was well known that leopards wandered its unknown interior. There were stories of tigers and jackals drinking together from streams that ran through it over round, grey and brown pebbles. Cows and goats disappeared, and sometimes dogs. It was useless looking for their remains. Until the mines came, and with them the safety of numbers, nobody from the town was foolhardy enough to venture into the wilderness at the edge of their homes: green, dark, alien, stretching for miles, ending only where the coal mines began.*

The first house is a palatial mansion raised by Amulya, a rich businessman self-exiled from Calcutta, in the small mining town of Songarh. His wife resents the move, the loss of her social life and the nearness of the jungle, his 'sahib' neighbors look down at him as a local upstart, but Amulya loves to be closer to nature in his quiet, undemonstrative way: **"He had created a garden where there had been wilderness"**

The second house is a place of learning, an oasis of peace in the middle of the Partition turmoil in Calcutta – the residence of Suleiman Chacha - a Muslim scholar who adopts the stray dog, penniless student Mukumba after he escapes from the Songarh small town mentality.

The third one, the one that left the strongest impression on me, and the one that features in the prologue, is another palatial mansion, this one built in the Western style on the banks of a reckless river by Bikash Babul. A girl named after a tree growing by the side of the house (Bakul) is haunted by this place she has seen only in a picture before it was overrun by a sudden flood.

The link between the three stories, the dreamer who starts as a nobody and ends up as a builder of new homes, is Mukunda, a casteless orphan in a country where social inflexibility still rules. First taken out of the orphanage by Amulya, Mukunda is then encouraged by the family son, Nirmal, to go and study in Calcutta. There his origins are lost among the multitudes of people struggling to make ends meet, and his intelligence earns him a job for a venal building constructor. Yet Mukunda still dreams of his childhood friend Bakul, still trapped in the now decrepit house raised by Amulya.

*He wanted to tell her that his dreams took him far beyond Songarh, beyond Calcutta, across oceans, towards icebergs. What would she say? "Take me with you! I want to come too!"*

Women in India have a much tougher time outside of the family house, and three generations of women have to abide by the ancient rules that make their lives a prison. Starting with the old lady Kananbala, locked in her room after her husband dies and after she develops a speech impediment, by way of her rich neighbour Mrs Barnum, whose half-blood origins make her an outcast both in the eyes of the British and of the locals, passed on to the childless daughter-in-law Manjula, envious of other people's happiness, this alienation culminates in the servant girl Meera, brought down on the social ladder because she is a widow.

*Some day, she fantasised, I'll again wear sunset orange, green the colour of a young mango, and rich semul red. Maybe just in secret, for myself, when nobody's looking, but I will.*

*Unknown to her, Nirmal was watching from outside. It had brought him to a standstill, to see her doing something so ordinary, looking at a sari, the kind of sari that a widow could never wear.*

—«»—«»—«»—

I read the novel a couple of months ago and got sidetracked before I could write a review. A lot of the details from this rich tapestry of human emotion that I wanted to talk about got blurred, but I do hope I will be able to revisit Songarh and its people at some point in the future, because I think Anuradha Roy is a gifted storyteller with an eye for the inner beauty of people in hard circumstances. The only reason I refrained from the full five stars is that I've read before other books set in India that left an even stronger impression, like "A Fine Balance", and I feel the need to reserve that top spot for something similar.

*Hand in hand, they stood in the middle of the empty fields under the star-filled sky, their troubles, fear, and the long way they still had to go before reaching home, all forgotten.*

---

## **Fleme Varkey says**

An atlas of impossible longing happened just naturally for author Anuradha Roy. The novel grew out of an image of a large house half-submerged by a river. It was a haunting photograph of an actual house that had to be abandoned by her aunt's family.

The book starts in 1907 and goes right up to the 1950s. It traces in its pages the lives and travails of a family over three generations. Amulya is quite a reticent man. A visit to a small town of Sonagarh changes his perception completely. He feels a certain kinship to the ruins, the life and the atmosphere there and decides to set base there. But this change from Calcutta did not go down well with his wife Kananbala, a young bride forced to stay at home. Slowly madness sets in and Amulya tries desperately to figure out where his young

wife had disappeared gradually.

The other pivotal character in the novel is Mukunda, a boy abandoned by his parents. Amulya takes responsibility of the child and later on his son Nirmal does too. Growing up alongside Mukunda in the house is Bakul, Nirmal's daughter, who uses photographs to enter the world of her dead mother.

The story does not feel too ambitious to begin with. In the first half Roy brings to the fore issues of patriarchy, the ill-treatment of widows, the stigma against patients with a mental condition and life during the British Raj, but then a flood happens and changes the whole scope of the story.

Roy's characters are the highlight of this book. The women especially cry out for attention. Be it the mad Kananbala, the lost in time Mrs Barnaum, the oppressed Meera or the rebellious Bakul, each have a tale to tell. Roy also effortlessly weaves in the history of India, which she says is what also affects her characters. For example the riots during the partition, the caste divide and the surveys done by the Archaeological survey of India etc. Though there is ambiguity in the relationships in the novel, Roy makes sure that it has optimistic ending. For by her own admission, her attempt was to show the possibility of friendships between unlikely people and the importance of relationships. For a debut Roy definitely deserves a pat on her back.

---

### **Doug says**

I read this several years ago, but having recently finished Roy's new Booker-nominated 'Sleeping on Jupiter', I wanted to re-visit it. It didn't disappoint. It's a deeply moving and beautifully written saga that covers the history of a Bengali family over 3 or 4 decades. The prose is astonishing accomplished, the characters vivid and varied, and doesn't betray any of the foibles common to a first novel.

---

### **Cecilia says**

When I took note of this book, I had mistook the author as the one who had written *The God Of Small Things*. In case you are in the same pickle, these are different authors - the other being Arundhati Roy. Close, but not the same. And it becomes obvious when I opened to the first page of *An Atlas Of Impossible Longing* when typical prose greets me instead of the lyrical joie de vivre of words that *The God Of Small Things* had.

But this is not supposed to be a comparison piece. So I'll get on with the review of *An Atlas Of Impossible Longing* now:

The story unfolds slowly - and while there had been a cast of characters at the beginning, I still got a little lost with putting names to the characters. It was especially hard to learn everyone's names since I was unfamiliar with them and could not tell between male and female names. Once the characters started to distinguish themselves by personality, I was able to focus more on the story and therefore dive into the dominant characters' inner conflicts.

*An Atlas Of Impossible Longing* is a story full of longing - for love, for attention, for respect, for revenge, for money, for comfort, for things that may never fall within one's grasp. As I got to know the characters better, their desires and needs swept me away like the river that acted as a catalyst for changing the family dynamics. I don't know much about Indian culture, but I am always shocked at how stifled / passive-aggressive / unfair things can be for both women and men, poor and rich, young and old, parent and child.

It was interesting to watch as the children - Bakul and Mukunda - grow up into their adult selves. I wish we had gained more insight of Bakul, but the story instead gives us the first-person perspective of Mukunda in Part 3. Don't get me wrong, I appreciated Mukunda's thoughts - but he is male, and I think that gave him a little leg up in the world than Bakul who has more limitations as a female.

While this is not the usual reading I go for, I am glad that I stuck with it because the story is truly well worth the journey. A slow start that does not seem to have a reason, but each character's yearning builds as the pages turn and I became anxious to see if they would become stagnant or finally find what they were looking for.

I can definitely see An Atlas Of Impossible Longing providing great food-for-thought in book clubs and classrooms.

---