



Healing through Nature: Ecofeminism in Anuradha Roy's '*The Folded Earth*'

^{*1}Pathan Rubeena Parveen Vazeer Khan and ²Dr. Shaikh Kalimoddin Rashid

^{*1}Assistant Professor, Department of English, Maulana Azad College of Arts, Science & Commerce, Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India.

²Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, Maulana Azad College of Arts, Science & Commerce, Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India.

Abstract

The present research paper attempts to define the connection between woman and nature through Anuradha Roy's second novel '*The Folded Earth*.' It highlights the tension between urban and rural existence, as well as the clash between traditional provincial life and the forces of modernity in contemporary India. Further, it discusses the struggles of Maya, a young widow seeking refuge from personal trauma amidst the pristine, yet slowly degrading, landscape of Ranikhet. This paper offers a vivid and refreshing portrayal of natural beauty, interwoven with the nuances of hill life, detailed landscapes, and the tranquil setting of Ranikhet. It further reflects Anuradha Roy's technique to build a rich and intricate story that covers the key concepts such as love, grief, loneliness, and how the environment being harmed.

Keywords: Nature, women, ecofeminism, patriarchy, environmental degradation, gender, oppression.

Introduction

The Folded Earth (2011) is the second novel by Anuradha Roy, an acclaimed Indian author, editor, and publisher known for her evocative story telling. It is a poignant and evocative novel that delves into the complexities of human relationships, the search for identity, and the struggle for survival amidst the backdrop of the majestic Himalayan foothills, set in the picturesque town of Ranikhet in Uttarakhand, India, the novel intricately weaves together the lives of its diverse characters, each with combat with their hopes, dreams, and sorrows. It depicts the life of the protagonist, Maya, a young widow who moves to Ranikhet seeking solace and a fresh start after the tragic death of her husband, Michael, her husband, was a passionate trekker who could not stay away from the mountains for long. His deep love for the mountains led him to embark on a trek to Roopkund, where he tragically passed away after getting trapped in a snowstorm. Maya's journey of self-discovery and healing forms the emotional core of the narrative as she navigates the way of rebuilding her life in a new environment while grappling with grief and loneliness. As Maya thinks,

Even so, I felt a cloud of dread grow and darken as the day for his departure neared. I found myself looking at him with an intensity I had forgotten over six years of being married to him. (Roy 8)

As she recounts sudden leaving of her husband makes her realize how much she still loves and needs him. These

emotions had been hidden or forgotten, but now they come back strongly. This shows a blend of fear, love, and emotional confusion. It tells us that even in long relationship, feelings can surprise you, especially when loss is near. As Maya confronts the ghosts of her past, she ultimately finds redemption and healing in the most unexpected places. The mountain setting of the novel lends a refreshing glimpse into the beauty and glory of nature with a breath-taking fragrance and freshness, alongside the shades of hill-life, rich description of nature and the peaceful locale of Ranikhet which is a sad reminder of what modern man is missing out. As Maya says,

The disheveled small towns are soon left behind, and then you pass gushing mountain rivers and barren cliff sides pin cushioned with cacti, deep forests and still grey-blue lakes. By the time you are in Ranikhet. (Roy 17)

It illustrates the beauty of Ranikhet, reflecting the emotional escape Maya seeks after Michael's death. A detailed description of landscapes shows her transition from tumult world and memories to isolated place where she hopes to heal. Nature here, plays a powerful role for offering comfort. Against the backdrop of Ranikhet stunning natural beauty, Maya immerses herself in the rhythms of daily life in Ranikhet, she encounters a cast of characters who each leave a profound impact on her journey. From the spirited schoolgirl Charu to the enigmatic caretaker Mohan, Maya

forms unexpected connections that challenge her preconceptions and broaden her perspective on life. Central to Maya's journey is her quest to uncover the truth about her husband's mysterious past and the circumstances surrounding his death. As she delves deeper into the secrets of Ranikhet tight-knit community, Maya discovers shocking revelations that force her to confront the complexities of love, betrayal, and forgiveness. Through Maya's eyes, Roy explores themes of loss, resilience, and the enduring power of human connection.

As Maya, a young widow who moves to Ranikhet after her husband passes away; she faces rejection from her family for defying her father's wishes and marrying someone from a different religion. Her father is portrayed as the first example of a patriarchal mindset in the novel, as he completely disregards Maya's freedom to live life on her terms. Meanwhile, Maya's mother embodies the typical product of the Indian patriarchal system, submissive to her husband's wishes and lacking the authority to make and act on her own decisions. This situation reflects the experiences of many women who have been oppressed and controlled by their husbands. As she thinks,

I realized when I went for the party that the hotel manager had intended to invite only those he considered people of consequences, as a penniless teacher I was out of place among the generals, brigadiers, bureaucrats. Even Miss Wilson had not been thought grand enough for the occasion. (Roy 48)

According to Maya, when I went for the party, I understand that the hotel manager only wanted to invite important people. As a teacher without money, I didn't fit in with generals, officers, and bureaucrats. Even Miss Wilson wasn't considered important enough to be invited. It highlights Maya's sense of social exclusion and how she feels like an outsider in a world that values status and power. It also reflects the social divisions and class. Ecofeminism posits a fundamental link between the exploitation of the environment and the subjugation of women, both rooted in patriarchal structures. These systems uphold hierarchical binaries—such as man versus woman, culture versus nature, and reason versus emotion—where the former in each pair is privileged and idealized. Within this framework, masculinity is associated with rationality, culture, and the mind, while femininity is aligned with emotion, nature, and the physical body. Consequently, both women and the natural world are rendered subordinate, viewed as passive and dependent entities within male-dominated systems. This perceived affinity between women and nature stems from their shared roles in nurturing and sustaining life: women through childbirth and caregiving, and nature through its life-giving resources. Both are often romanticized for their generative capacities, yet simultaneously devalued and exploited. The story takes a new turn when she met Veer, a mountain trekker and nephew of Diwan Sahib, a venerable elderly gentleman, the owner of her cottage. As she says,

But his eyes were kind and the care with which he took each thorn out made me think, for the first time since Michael's death, that I might one day feel less alone. (Roy 72)

After losing Michael, Maya has been feeling very lonely. But this gentle moment makes her think that she won't feel so alone any more. But at the end of the story she realized Veer

betrayed her. The story shows conflict between the city life and rural life, as well as the struggle between the traditional ways and modern changes in contemporary India. Despite the fact that desolation and dejection imbued the entire novel, nature's magnificence and abundance additionally encompass it. The mountain setting of the novel lends a refreshing glimpse into the beauty and glory of nature with a breathtaking fragrance and freshness, alongside the shades of hill-life, rich description of nature and the peaceful locale of Ranikhet which is a sad reminder of what modern man is missing out.

The two people most precious to me, my mother and Michael, were dead, and my father was growing alone in that vast, echoing house in Hyderabad while I was alone in mine, thousands of miles away. (Roy 89)

This moment highlights Maya's sense of loss and emotions not just for her mother and Michael were dead but also for her father, although he is alive and alone in his silent house deepening her loneliness. In the end of the novel Maya become independent woman by running a pickle shop which makes her identity. As she writes,

The old parapets, lush with ferns and little pink lilies, were to be torn down and replaced with neater cement ones. (Roy 160)

It shows how beautifully Roy defines the exploitation of natural environment as the ancient stone parapets, overgrown with ferns and delicate pink lilies, were to be demolished and replaced with cement structures. It portrays women as having an intrinsic bond with the natural world, emphasizing how their experiences are intertwined with the environment. The female characters in the novel, each navigating their unique circumstances, embody resilience and resistance against patriarchal norms and environmental exploitation.

The Folded Earth handles strong emotions like love and pain, as well as hatred and pride, with great storytelling skill. India Today reviews it as,

'*The Folded Earth* negotiates passion and pain, hate and hauteur with a deftness of narrative skills that is distinctly acrobatic'

To be specific, the main character Maya, finds emotional and spiritual comfort in the natural world of Ranikhet after her husband's death. For her mountains become a place for healing, solitude, and self-reflection. This paper reflects important ecofeminist themes through its depiction of women, nature and environmental damage in the Himalayan setting. Overall, the female characters such as, Maya, Charu, and other women in the story resist the challenges they face, and their relationship with nature symbolizes their inner lives and struggles. Their emotional strength and ability to survive represent a calm but powerful form of ecofeminist resistance.

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