

Androcentrism vs. Gynocentrism: An Ecocritical Study of Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth*

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Abstract

*Ecocriticism, a literary counterpart to the environmental movement that emerged in the late twentieth century, provides a disciplinary lens for interrogating the representations of nature in cultural texts and the ideological frameworks that underpin human-environment relations. Within this framework, ecofeminism has crystallised as a significant sub-strand, foregrounding the gendered dimensions of ecological crisis and contending that valorised patriarchal domination, hierarchy, and dualistic logics pave the way for the suppression of women and depletion of the natural world. The research paper utilises a close reading approach to explain Anuradha Roy's depiction of the intricate relationship between humanity and nature in the novel *The Folded Earth*, set against the backdrop of the Himalayan foothills. It investigates how the novel reveals the extension of patriarchal dominance over both women and the natural world through the eco-critical concepts such as of anthropocentrism and androcentrism. The findings emphasise the novel's contribution to contemporary discourses on ecological conservation and gender justice, highlighting the role of literature in addressing the interconnected social and environmental issues.*

Keywords: Androcentrism, Anthropocentrism, Eco-centric, Ecocriticism, Eco-feminism.

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Ecocriticism emerged as an interdisciplinary field in the twentieth century in response to escalating ecological concerns. The term 'Eco-criticism' was first proposed by William Rueckert in 1978 in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*, where he defined it as the incorporation of environmental concerns into literary analysis. Ecocriticism emphasises the examination of the ethical and cultural ramifications of nature's representation in literature, critiquing anthropocentric narratives that justify environmental deterioration. Ecofeminism has established a significant niche within the broader field, focussing on the intersection of gender and ecology. It critically analyses how patriarchal ideologies conflate and subordinate both women and nature through common structures of domination that contribute to environmental degradation and gendered oppression.

The primary objective of this research paper is to examine Anuradha Roy's depiction of hierarchical dualism, such as culture over nature and male over female, through the lens of integrated ecocritical-ecofeminist theories in the novel *The Folded Earth*. Indian ecofeminist scholars like Vandana Shiva and Bina Agarwal have examined the entrenched patriarchal values marginalise women's ecological knowledge and subsistence practices, including land rights for women, notably in *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* and *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. Rayson K. Alex and Susan Deborah in *Culture and Media: Ecocritical Explorations*, assert that "Indian Novelists often employ ecological narratives that foreground the intricate human-nature relationship, drawing upon indigenous myths, folk traditions and spiritual ideologies to interrogate and critique disruptive forces of contemporary industrialisation" (Alex and Deborah). Chaitanya Datar in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* under the title 'Ecofeminism and Literary Criticism: An Indian Perspective' highlights that "the works of Mahasweta Devi, Kiran Desai and Arundhati Roy has drawn attention for the evocating ecofeminist dimension signifying the gendered and environmental violence which determines the relationship of women to land, community and memory" (Datar). While the works of writers such as Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai and Mahasweta Devi in Indian literature have garnered extensive scholarly interest in exploring feminism and ecocriticism, Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth* remains underexplored through a intricated perspectives of ecocritical and ecofeminist theory. This research aims to bridge that gap by applying an integrated ecofeminist-ecocritical framework to Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth*, using theoretical concepts such as anthropocentrism and androcentrism.

Anthropocentrism is a human-centred philosophical perspective that posits people as the principal bearers of value in the cosmos, seeing non-compassing animals, plants, and ecosystems, as resources for human utilisation. Anuradha Roy critiques anthropocentric ideologies in the novel *The Folded Earth* by highlighting the environmental degradation occurring in the fragile landscape of the Himalayan landscape, illustrating how human political encroachments and infrastructural development, obstruct a biocentric, ecologically balanced lifestyle. A striking

instance of this is depicted in the novel through the character Chauhan, the administrator of Ranikhet, in the line, “He would...off to inspect the site of a new amusement park, his flagship project, for which a swathe of oak forest was being cleared. It was pointless saying to tourists...Ranikhet was to have sights” (Roy 161). This scene reflects the violent encroachment upon nature under the guise of development, wherein a pristine oak forest, which represents ecological continuity and cultural rootedness, is sacrificed for a leisure project, an amusement park. This narrative instance of deforestation in the novel strappingly resonates with the historical Chipko Movement of the 1970s, a popular environmental protest led by rural women in Uttarakhand who physically shielded trees from being cut. Roy used the persona of a literary eco-activist to condemn the degradation of ecological ethics by demonstrating how capitalism and patriarchal ambitions for growth undermine the essential connection between humanity and the environment. In conjunction with the remembrance of the Chipko movement, her narrative re-establishes literature as a potent vehicle medium for promoting environmental justice and eco-centric principles.

Roy reveals the inherent conceit of anthropocentrism and class hierarchies in *The Folded Earth* through a scene in which nonhuman life is disparaged for encroaching upon a human-defined realm of privilege. A party was hosted by a hotel manager of Asphen Lodge, where high-ranking bureaucrats, generals, and brigadiers gathered on the hillside, a landscape traditionally inhabited by pastoral animals and local herders. When the party gets disrupted by a herd of cattle inadvertently entering the event because of the negligent watch of their caretaker Puran, Mr. Chauhan, administrator of Ranikhet furiously exclaims, “ “Enough!” he shouted towards Puran...lock you up...with your damned cows and Goats...I will tackle this with immediate effect” (Roy 59), he then erects a signboard prohibiting cattle symbolically renders non-human lifeforms as intruders in a shared ecological space which is now redefined as a domain solely for human purpose. Chauhan’s outburst and the enforcement of spatial boundaries against animals reflect the ingrained assumption of human superiority echoes the illustration of Lori Gruen’s epistemological foundation of anthropocentrism in *Critical Terms for Animal Studies*, “Anthropocentrism is expressed by individuals in particular acts or statements that indicate a chauvinist attitude to animals, such as ‘animals are mindless,’ but it also informs our epistemologies or what we think we know about animal ‘mindlessness’” (Gruen 48).

The research foregrounds the representation of androcentric ideologies alongside anthropocentrism in Anuradha Roy’s *The Folded Earth*. The term ‘Androcentrism’ describes the male-centred viewpoint where men’s experiences are treated as the norm and women’s as deviations or inferior. This foundational concept in feminist and ecofeminist theory was first formulated by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her seminal work, *The Man-Made World; or, Our Androcentric Culture*. Gilman argues that androcentrism is a systemic and epistemological bias centralising men’s preferences embedded within social institutions, cultural norms

and intellectual traditions, “Male of our species assumed the exclusive right to perform all social functions, he necessarily brought to that performance the advantages—and disadvantages—of maleness, of those dominant characteristics, desire, combat, self-expression” (Gilman 31).

Anuradha Roy’s *The Folded Earth* vividly illustrates androcentrism, where male perspectives and authority overshadow female experiences, especially in socio-political matters. The novel highlights how both women and nature, traditionally feminised entities, are rendered vulnerable under patriarchal structures. Roy mirrors the systemic exclusion in the same Aspen Lodge party scene where an elite woman musters her courage to raise a sensitive question to a brigadier about sexual violence perpetrated by the army, “Sir, what about all this we hear, of army men raping and molesting women in the Northeast – and in Kashmir –” (Roy 55). The brigadier, embodying institutional male power, dismisses the issue with a sweeping remark, “One rotten fruit here or there, Madam, doesn’t make a bad basket. We deal with deviants, we do it more swiftly than anyone else.” (Roy 55). Instead of addressing the gravity of the situation, his response trivialises sexual violence and silences the woman. The hotel manager’s attempt to quiet her further reflects the social mechanisms that protect patriarchal authority and suppress female dissent.

A compelling parallel between the exploitation of nature and the subjugation of women in *The Folded Earth* finds theoretical resonance in Mary Daly’s significant work, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, where she exposes the systemic massacre of women from various socio-cultural backgrounds through her radical feminist perspective:

Patriarchy appears to be “everywhere”. Even outer space and the future have been colonized...Nor does this colonization exist simply “outside” women’s minds, securely fastened into institutions we can physically leave behind. Rather, it is also internalized, festering inside women’s heads, even feminist heads. (Daly 7)

Mary Daly’s theory of patriarchal exploitation of women’s emotional and corporeal experiences, parallel to the deterioration of nature, is illustrated in the novel through an incident involving Beena, a deaf and mute child who is molested by a man in the forest. Rather than being protected, Beena is blamed by her own mother, “Beena says she was coming back from the bazaar through the forest, and a man molested her...Her mother says it’s her fault, she wears tight clothes and goes wandering in the market, and giggles at boys” (Roy 216). The response of her mother reflects how deeply patriarchal ideologies have infiltrated even maternal figures, forcing victims into silence and shame. The collective complicity is revealed when the villagers also fail to take a stand for Beena. Maya, the protagonist, is the only one who attempts to report the incident to the police. However, Ama insists that Beena’s mother would never allow it and adds, “Lati will never let you take her daughter to the police, and Beena won’t go. It’ll just add to their troubles” (Roy 216).

The research article highlights the insidious infiltration of patriarchal violence in the domestic and emotional spaces of women's lives, with narrative testimonies in *The Folded Earth* to expose the normalisation of abuse within a male-dominated social order. Anuradha Roy does not depict violence merely as a physical act but as a sustained psychological and emotional structure that operates through silence, economic dependence and cultural complicity. In *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love*, Bell Hooks states:

Male violence in general has intensified...men who endorse patriarchy discovered along the way that the patriarchal promise of power and dominion is...fulfilled, men find themselves emotionally bereft. The patriarchal manhood that was supposed to satisfy...go forward they would need to repudiate the patriarchal thinking that their identity has been based on. Rage is the easy way back to a realm of feeling. It can serve as the perfect cover, masking feelings of fear and failure. (Hooks 78)

Hooks' observation critically illuminates how the patriarchal system not only enables but psychologically fosters violence among men as a coping mechanism for their emotional repression and internalised failure. This dynamic is tragically embodied in *The Folded Earth* when Veer recounts the horrifying story of a man who beats his wife to death, and Ama, an elderly woman, shares about a manipulative man named Vikki who exploits a widow's financial vulnerability under the guise of companionship. As Ama narrates:

Vikki is too shrewd for that. Gudiya's husband was a peon in a Gormint office in Haldwani. When he died, Gudiya started getting a fat Pension...So he just took Gudiya to a temple and told her, 'Now before God we are married, but if any Gormint babu asks, you must say you are a widow.' And every year she goes to State Bank and has to put her thumb print on a paper to swear she has not married. (Roy 137-138)

This unsettling narrative of Ama powerfully highlights the dual emotional and economic subjugation women face within patriarchal structures that disguise themselves as expression of love, duty or domestic normalcy. Vikki's coercion of Gudiya to remain publicly a 'widow' to access her late husband's pension exemplifies a systemic misogyny that commodifies women within intimate relationships. The symbolic act of temple marriage, rendered void by bureaucratic deceit, reflects a wider societal hypocrisy that allows men to benefit from systems meant to support vulnerable women. Roy's inclusion of this narrative within the broader tapestry of *The Folded Earth* amplifies the marginalised realities of domestic subjugation, demonstrating how female autonomy is systematically undermined by the pervasive logic of androcentrism.

Roy effectively juxtaposes the oppressive dynamics of androcentrism and anthropocentrism with the eco-centric lifestyle of characters like Diwan Sahib and Purana. Their profound connection and reverential coexistence with nature stand in stark contrast to the exploitative attitudes that drive both environmental

degradation and the subjugation of women. Diwan Sahib's deep ecological sensibility is poignantly captured in the line, "Halfway through the night we heard a loud creaking, cracking, splintering, groaning sound like a giant's death rattle, and then a huge falling...Diwan Sa'ab has taken a whole tree with him. The forest is mourning" (Roy 220), which suggests his symbiotic relationship with the natural world. Similarly, Puran's nurturing relationship with a rescued fawn named Rani depicts the elevation of the human-animal bond:

He made the fawn a soft, cushioned bed with piled pine needles and dry grass. He named her Rani...He fed her milk in an aluminium bowl and muttered to her day and night. She listened to him with the distant patience of a diva before an acolyte. After a while, having had enough of his adoration, Rani would get up and walk away to nibble at grass. (Roy 70)

Roy's depiction of Ranikhet as a locus of ecological and social equilibrium subtly subverts the prevailing patriarchal anthropocentric viewpoints, presenting a persuasive eco-centric ethos that embodies reverence, nurturing and interdependence, thereby contesting these detrimental paradigms.

The findings of the paper highlights Anuradha Roy's substantial literary contribution to eco-critical feminism in contemporary literature and identifies a critical imperative for intervention and reform in the tandem operations of anthropocentric and androcentric ideologies empowering men to subjugate both women and nature by positioning them as passive entities to be dominated, violated and exploited under the guise of progress and patriarchal entitlement. Through *The Folded Earth*, Roy asserts that neither nature nor women are commodities to be owned or violated. Rather, she advocates for an eco-centric approach grounded in respect, restoration, and the recognition of intrinsic value beyond human claims, such as balancing deforestation with reforestation and preserving animal habitats from human encroachment. Upholding this vision is vital for restoring ecological harmony and affirming women's agency and rights. This study thus offers a valuable addition to the growing body of environmental humanities research seeking to reimagine justice beyond anthropocentric and androcentric paradigms.

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