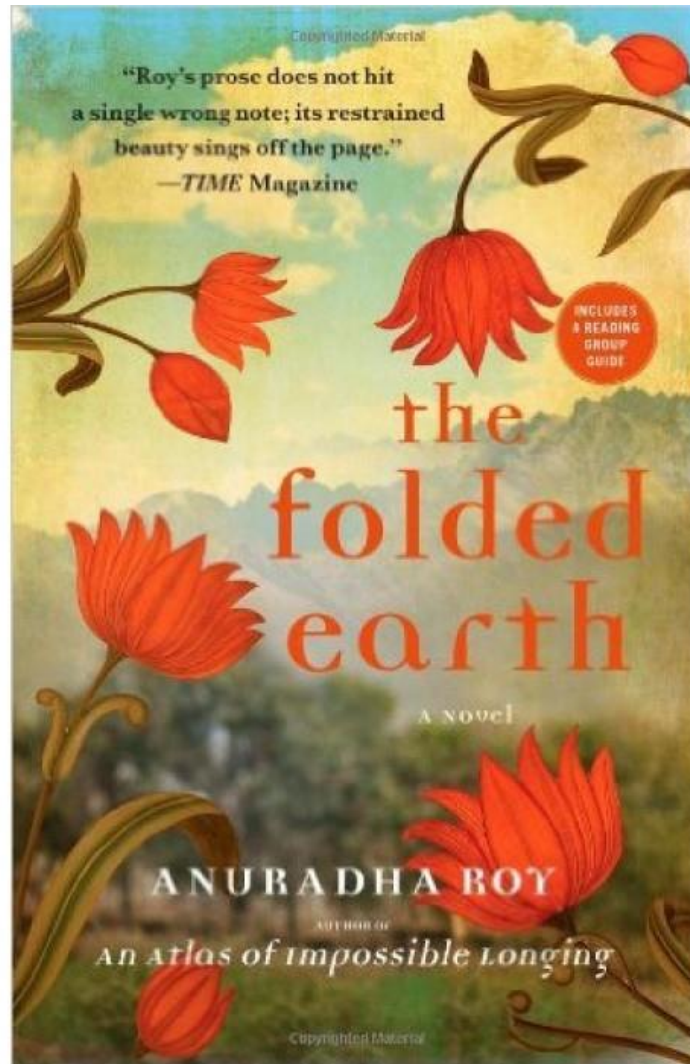


Portrayal of Women in Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth*

N. Arularasi and Dr. S. Kumaran



Abstract

The role of women in literature is often quite wide in spectrum. Women have been writing in India since 1000 BC. Women are portrayed as secondary characters as per the literary history is concerned. Among the women writers of Indian English fiction, Anuradha Roy has earned a distinct space for her particular attention towards the plight

of women and social injustice. Her sensitive portrayal and understanding of intrinsic human nature makes her writings relevant to current interests.. This article will discuss the representation of women in the contemporary literature written in English by Indian woman writer. It is an attempt to analyse the role and position of the contemporary middle class Indian women portrayed in Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth*. Women characters portrayed in this novel depict the changing role of women in Indian post-colonial literature. Their struggle to overcome the submissive stereotyped characteristic qualities imposed by the patriarchy is brought out clearly in the novel.

Key words: Women in contemporary literature, Anuradha Roy, *The Folded Earth*

Introduction

Indian English fiction of this era gives more focus on women characters present in the works of great novelist. Women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabwala, Nayantrara Saghal, Anitha Desai, Jumpha Lahiri are well known for their characterization of women in their novels which shows the sufferings, oppression, suppression and domination faced in a patriarchy society. They apparently depict a new consciousness to the works emerged in the twentieth century that raises questions about female identity which adds a new dimension and depth in the interpretation of Indian English Fiction. Many novelists have significantly brought this 'new woman' who is no longer emotional bond or victim in a patriarchal society and they also reveal the various perspectives of women in this modern world.

The Role of Women in Literature

The role of women in literature is often quite wide in spectrum. Women are always depicted as secondary characters as per the literary works. Among the women writers of Indian English fiction, Anuradha Roy has shown particular attention towards the plight of women and social injustice. Her sensitive portrayal and understanding of intrinsic human nature makes her writings relevant to current interests. . This article will discuss the representation of women in the contemporary literature written in English by Indian woman writer. It is an attempt to analyse the role and position of the contemporary

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Anuradha Roy

Courtesy: <http://dscprize.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Anuradha-Roy.jpg>

Anuradha Roy

Anuradha Roy won the Economist Crossword Prize for Fiction for her novel, *The Folded Earth*, which was nominated for several other prizes including the Man Asia. Her first novel, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, has been translated into 15 languages across the world. It was named by World Literature Today as one of the 60 most essential books on modern India and was shortlisted for the Crossword Prize. She won the Picador-Outlook Non-Fiction Prize in 2004. Anuradha Roy's journalism and book reviews have been published in Outlook, India Today, Outlook Traveller, National Geographic Traveller, Biblio, Telegraph, Indian Express, and the Hindu. She works as a designer at

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Permanent Black, an independent press which she runs with her husband, Rukun Advani. She lives in India.

The Folded Earth

The Folded Earth is Anuradha Roy's second novel which was long-listed for the 2011 Man Asian Prize. The *Folded Earth* is narrated by Maya, a young Hindu woman disinherited by her pickle-industrialist father for marrying a Christian. When her husband dies on one of his mountaineering expeditions, Maya abandons the Deccan to move to Ranikhet, a hill station in the Himalayas. As she hides herself within the simplicity of village life Maya forges relationships with those around her that includes plucky village teenager Charu, her half-wit uncle Puran and mother Ama, and aging aristocrat Diwan Sahib, who keeps alive the memory of pre-Independence India. Mr Chauhan is present as well, a stuffy, self-important civil servant, as is the General, even older than Diwan Sahib, and Veer, Diwan Sahib's nephew, whose arrival in town threatens to upend Maya's semi-frozen existence.

The Women Characters

The women characters depict their yearning, love and desires in very subtle way. They suffer silently. Roy explores the issues of education, independence and ambition; she also addresses the continuing difficulties that even a relatively independent woman faces in a patriarchal society. The main protagonist Maya is disowned by her industrialist father because she has married Michael, a Christian. The parent rejects the relationship with their only daughter to keep up their status and dignity in the society. This definitely points out the system of patriarchy, racism and class discrimination is present in the novel. Instantly, Charu's love with Kundan a cook is rejected by her grandmother because of the employment and its standing status in the society. Roy depicts it clearly that women cannot show their needs and expectation because it is only the patriarchal society and culture that determines the life of women. Most of the female characters in "The Folded Earth" highlight the "traditional" role of women in a particular culture.

The Focus of This Paper

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This paper explores The Folded Earth depiction of women and their physical and psychological suppression in the patriarchal society. The women characters in the novel reveal the struggle and oppression on women and the denial of human rights for women. Anuradha Roy has deftly characterised the life of Indian women in the present world. She has done a stupendous job by depicting the life of Maya, the protagonist, a “sick-thin-coffee-coffee-coloured” Hindu girl. Maya’s struggle starts with her love marriage with Michael, a Christian which is not accepted by her father, society, religion and custom. Maya, the daughter of wealthy and well educated family was brought up with all love and luxurious life but her decision to marry Michael shatters the relationship with her parents. This definitely points out the system of patriarchy, racism and class discrimination is present in the novel. She gets detached herself from her birth place and parents for the sake of her love for Michael. Thus leaving behind everything Maya, marries the love of her life, crossing all of the boundaries set by society, religion, and caste.

Use of Religious Consciousness

Anuradha Roy deploys religious consciousness that prevails in the Indian society and for the sake of religion Maya is disowned by her family. Maya’s mother plays the role of a submissive mother who couldn’t overcome her husband’s order; she is split between the orderly words of the husband and her love for her daughter Maya. She had to meet her secretly without the knowledge of her husband “My mother was too intimidated by him to do more than steal out for occasional trysts with me at a temple” (11) through which Anuradha Roy points out the incapability of Indian women who remains voiceless and helpless under the control of their husband. The women are always denied of being self, individuality or an identity in the patriarchal world.

Estranged from Family

In marrying a Christian, the narrator, Maya, has become estranged from her wealthy family in Hyderabad. Her father instantly disowns her, but Maya and her husband, Michael, begin their life together in Hyderabad (in the south of India) in bliss. Maya struggles begin soon after her marriage with Michael. Having given up everything for the love of Michael, Maya’s marriage life with him didn’t last longer for Michael’s

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passion for Mountaineering was so strong than his love for Maya. She senses the feeling as “He is with me, but not with me” (6) which shows that Michael has given much importance to his passion of trekking and mountaineering but not to Maya who hasn’t received any concern. She is seen only as a object that has been procured in the name of love and marriage. Her inner feelings are ignored and remain unidentified in her marriage life. Maya realises that her “rival in love was not a woman, but a mountain range” and that Michael’s “need for the mountains was as powerful as his need for me” (6-7).

As a trekker, Michael often goes on long expeditions to the statuesque mountains sitting on India's northern border, and in his last dangerous climb to reach Roopkund, he breaks his ankle and meets his fatal death, leaving Maya as widow at the age of twenty four. Life becomes miserable for Maya who has lost her parents for her love marriage and her husband in a very short span of time spent with him. The death news of Michael makes Maya to behave insanely “I had been out all day on scorching streets, walking at random, getting into buses without looking where they were going, pausing at parks, shops, then walking on, until shops shut and traffic thinned”(10-11) which shows the restless condition of Maya. She is left alone to face the terrible truth of her loneliness.

Maya

Anuradha Roy depicts Maya as an individualistic character who stands steady with the spirit to leave an independent life. She never returns to her family asking for help or to apologize her mistake of taking a wrong decision. Her self esteem shows the new women identity that every woman in the modern Indian Society is exhibiting. With no one to support her and worn out completely Maya seeks refuge from her grief in Ranikhet.

Anuradha Roy has portrayed Maya as an independent woman who is ambitious enough to lead a successful life in a new environment. In order to start to new life Maya moves to Ranikhet amid the foothills of the Himalaya. The remote village gives her comfort and warmth that gives peace to disturbed mind. She abandons herself to the rhythms of the village, where people live happily with natural environment. But her calm

life is disturbed with the arrival of intruders like the power-hungry politicians and Veer the nephew of Diwan Sahib. Maya is unable to overcome her dilemma to choose between the past life she left and the present life she lives in. Maya trying to escape from her complicated past finally takes the village to be hideout place, she finds herself becoming “a hill person who was only at peace where earth rose and fell in waves like the sea” (20). But with the arrival of Veer, her idyllic world begins to fall apart when she finds herself attracted to Veer.

Dream for Solitude

Maya's dream of solitude is shattered and her relationship with Veer becomes the upheaval she desperately wanted to escape. And for Veer, he has just taken Maya's loneliness to exploit and use her to fulfil his needs from her. Other than that he has never shared his time with Maya. Only in the end Maya discovers the truth that Veer has cheated her and he has been the reason for the decline in sahib's health and death. And the most stunning truth chatters Maya when she finds that her lover Veer had been Michael's last trekking companion and that “he had left him to fend for himself in a snowstorm with a broken ankle when they both knew it meant certain death.” (Roy 2011.42)

Charu

Similar to the silent suffering of Maya, Charu, another character, also experiences the same feeling when she starts loving Kundan who comes to the village to cook for his employees. Roy depicts the changes that take place in Charu. In Indian system a woman cannot reveal her feelings and for Charu the best friend was Gowri Joshi to whom she was able to share her secret feeling for her lover. Roy points that after the entry of Kundan in Charu's life. Changes are witnessed by Charu's grandmother Ama and Maya. Charu is completely lost and behaves strangely as Kundan has completely taken over Charu's mind. She educates herself through Maya to communicate with Kundan who has left to Delhi with his employers. Love between Charu and Kundan develops strongly that

Charu leaves behind the only world she ever knew behind in the pursuit of her love. Roy depicts her as strong willed girl who makes her own decision in life and takes the decision to reach her lover very boldly crossing her only known village and people behind. On her way through the forest to the highway she encounters a truck. The driver and the helper seem to compel her to travel with them. But, Charu easily identifies them as men with bad habits and very smartly manages the situation as "wait a few minutes. My father and brother want a ride also" (203).

A Fact about Women

Anuradha Roy proves the fact that women are always not an easy prey for the cunning need of men. She was encouraging herself in her proceeding by singing songs and saying "Put one foot before another, and you will get there" (203). This shows that Charu is different from the conventional characters who loses hope and confidence whereas she remains ambitious in her life and finally meets Kundan. Charu successfully marries Kundan and settles in Singapore. The teenage village girl has gained a new woman identity because of her strong willed nature.

Ama, an Elderly Village Woman

Roy has characterized Ama an elderly village woman. She is the grandmother of Charu who plays an important role in the novel. Anuradha Roy elevates Ama's role by depicting her as a strong character. Though she belongs to a downtrodden community, yet she holds self dignity and honour. This illiterate woman proves herself to be independent even at the age of sixties. She has disowned her younger son, Charu's father because he is drunkard and always picks up quarrel and fight with his family and neighbours. His intolerable behaviour made his wife put an end to her life by leaving her only daughter Charu under the care of Ama. Roy characterized Ama as the most beautiful woman in Ranikhet and "she was not afraid of anything or anyone" (18). She courageously disowns her son and supports the family with her single income to raise Puran and Charu. Though she has two sons, no one is supporting her even Puran remains as a half witted person. Ama doesn't lose hope, she does all sort of work to give food for her dependents.

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Ama, though illiterate, prefers to give the best education to her granddaughter Charu and puts her in an English medium school. According to Ama, Charu should be educated so that” she won’t let a man get away with treating her badly”, but not so much that will stop her getting a husband. Through Ama’s point of view giving education to her granddaughter is seen as a mark of dignity in the society and that will help her to face problem. She is shown stereotypical but believable wise village woman because she was the first to sense mysterious character of Veer and had always suspected his disappearance and appearance. And she has been predicting that Diwan Sahib health deterioration takes place because of Veer, who supplies him more drink and worsens the health of Sahib. Anuradha Roy reveals that apart from education knowledge can be acquired from observing the real life and Ama believes that “A girl learns what she needs to know.”(19)

Feminist Attitude

Anuradha Roy’s women characters are sowed with the feminist attitude, which is fostered by the social issues they face with strong attitude. They are shown as independent entities, growing and developing according to their own preferences and finding social recognition. Thus the novel reveals the ‘new woman identity’ in modern context.

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