

**The Cruel Topography of Grief: Psychological Trauma and Ecological
Consciousness in Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth***

Isayakala P¹

Ph.D. Scholar, Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal

Dr.R.Karthika Devi²

Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of English, M.V.Muthiah
Government Arts College for Women – Dindigul., (Affiliated to Mother Teresa
Women's University, Kodaikanal)

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Abstract:

Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth* does something fascinating: it pushes human identity to the sidelines to let the environment take center stage. This paper dives into how the novel uses landscape to unpack the messy reality of psychological trauma, focusing on the protagonist, Maya. After being disowned by her family and losing her husband, Michael, to a mountaineering accident, Maya retreats to the quiet hills of Ranikhet. But this isn't a simple story of spiritual healing in the mountains. For Maya, the Himalayas are a cruel, predatory rival—the very thing that stole her love.

Using Cathy Caruth's ideas on trauma, this study explores how Maya doesn't just remember her past; she actively relives it through intrusive thoughts and physical anxiety. We see her try to build a makeshift "therapeutic space" out of mundane daily routines and a deep, unconditional bond with the eccentric Diwan Sahib. However, this fragile peace is thrown out of balance when a new climber, Veer, enters the picture and stirs up hidden layers of grief and desire. Ultimately, the paper argues that *The Folded Earth* rejects the cliché of a clean, linear recovery. Instead, it shows that healing is a complicated, ongoing process of learning to live alongside the ghosts of the past while slowly reaching back out to the world.

Keywords: Anuradha Roy, *The Folded Earth*, Trauma, Cathy Caruth, Memory, Landscape, Grief, Healing.

Introduction:

Anuradha Roy in 'The Folded Earth' de-prioritizes human identity in favour of the environment. The surrounding topography is vividly presented initially rather than introducing the protagonist of the novel. Rather than seeking immediate human connection – Charu at her doorstep- Maya is deeply in-sync with nature. Maya, the

protagonist, awakens in the quiet blueness before sunlight. In her isolated world, her mind demonstrates a heightened ecological consciousness which might be the reflection of her cathartic state of mind.

“The Folded Earth” is a meditative and lyrical novel that explores the themes of grief, isolation and search for a safe space following psychological trauma. The story follows Maya, a young woman who has been disowned by her wealthy Hindu family for marrying a Christian man, Michael. Her world is shattered when Michael dies in a mountaineering accident in the Himalayas. Unable to stay in the city where everything reminds of her loss, Maya retreats to the quiet hills of Ranikhet. She takes up a job as a teacher and begins working for Diwan Sahib, an eccentric and aristocrat, who is compiling a collection of letters from his past. The title refers not just to the mountain landscape but to the folded layers of human memory and pain.

The Anatomy of Maya's Trauma:

The root cause of the psychological trauma of the protagonist Maya in *The Folded Earth* is exposed in the initial chapters itself by the author. Literature portrays Himalaya as a place of spiritual healing, peace and divine beauty but for Maya mountains are cruel and predatory entity. That's why she says, “My rival in love was not a woman but a mountain range. It was very soon after my wedding that I discovered this”. (6) Maya's disability in fighting with the eternal mountain makes her ease with the same later.

Psychological trauma is not a static event but fragments of an individual's perception of time and space. Cathy Caruth, the trauma scholar defines that trauma is characterized by how a overwhelming event is not fully experienced or integrated when it happens, but instead returns later to haunt the survivor through intrusive repetitions. Having been disowned by her family, Maya lacks a traditional familial support system. Instead of seeking reconciliation, she chooses an agonistic isolation, refusing to carry her grief back to those who rejected her, as doing so would feel like admitting defeat. She chooses to live with an enduring internal pain, carrying it like a stone, which forms the bedrock of her unhealed trauma. A trauma lens is not just about the ‘hurt’ – it's also about how people survive. It allows to study the process of healing and explores how Roy's characters use nature, memory and art as “therapeutic spaces” to rebuild their lives.

There is always a predominant negativity in Maya. This is proven when Michael lists out for the climbing survival, Maya's hidden trauma lists them out as the list of fatal which proves that he actively prepares to walk into an ancient frozen graveyard. She is doubtful of herself. Seeing the love letters of his ex-girlfriend, she becomes stressed thinking that she isn't enough to him on this earth.

In the case of Michael, his detachment functions as an echo long before he becomes a ghost. His body is on flat land but his mind is always climbing the mountain. The concept of 'ghost clapping' in the Golconda Fort literally foreshadows his approaching death. When he dies, Maya is left living in the 'echo' of his life. Michael's death is not just a loss to Maya. It is a heavy loss encircled with unanswered questions, emotional discardment, scary and painful landscape.

Coping Mechanisms and Routine in Ranikhet:

Instead of mourning, she moves to Ranikhet with blankness- directly into the shadow of the Himalayas which is a rival to her. Though her mind is shaded with predominant negativity about mountain, she chooses to live permanently inside the 'echo' of Michael's death. So, it's her voluntary decision to dwell with 'ghost clap' to escape from current trauma. Cathy Caruth argues that the survivor is not 'remembering' the event, they are re-living it. The flashback is a literal return of the past because the past is never successfully turned into a 'memory'. The ghost of the experience follows them because they haven't found a way to 'claim' it as part of their history.

Maya's life in Ranikhet is entirely different from Hyderabad's routine. She takes this normal life as healing mechanism. She starts to live in the moments even though they are so trivial. Going to school regularly, returning with newspaper to Diwan and sharing Newspaper with a cup of tea make her day normal. Her traumatic mind finds solace and safety in her routine.

She creates a beautiful relationship with Diwan Sahib. Though it is unnamed it is like father-daughter, guru-shishya or old-young friendship. It becomes unconditional to both because they too are displaced and lonely souls. Comparing to the Nawab of Surajgarh's horses which are shot by himself due to his exile and his feel that no one would take care of them like him. Diwan says if Maya leaves for someone else, he will shoot both Maya and himself. Not only Diwan but also Maya is possessive one another. Maya's possessiveness is revealed when Diwan's attention shifts from Maya to Veer which shatters her safe routine.

The Intrusion of New Desires:

Maya's quiet consumption of rum shows her hidden "traumas in her head". It is the anchor that connects her genuine present calmness with her haunting past. She is torn between the present longing for Veer and the loyalty of Michael's love in past. Despite Maya being cool and satisfied in Ranikhet, she inwardly carries the Rocky indelible and undeniable memories of Michael. Burying Michael's ashes in Ranikhet's Christian cemetery determines her ever-staying decision in the same hill station. But her regular visit to the cemetery portrays her sustaining love and loyalty to Michael. On her way back from the cemetery, she takes Veer's hands for support to clamber down the stones forgetting it's her casual everyday task. She takes effort to ask questions about wildlife to Veer which makes him interested in her, like "Why

does the woodpecker peck a tree trunk? How does the magpie fly with such a long tail? Where did all the tigers of these hills go?" (45).

This effort of Maya is only to get five minutes undivided attention of Veer to her. While Veer is talking about Diwan Sahib's romantic and heroic past, suddenly he moves to his bitter parentless childhood. At that time Maya terribly wants to reach out for his hands for compassion but holds them behind her back. While Veer is eating and talking about his mountaineering clients, Maya is mesmerized by a trace of spinach clinging to Veer's lower lip.

Veer is a climber, a professional trainer for people on climbs and treks. On seeing his sophisticated and expensive equipment from trips, Maya is wracked with compassion for Michael's ill-equipped attempts, armed with little more than his passion for the mountains. Maya feels this contrast too painful and also this comparison itself is disloyal to Michael.

Maya becomes fragmented and loses the power to define herself. She is helpless to stop her mind's trauma from emerging out to feel her heavy. Though she tries to disconnect her completely from the past and reconnect her to the present, she mentally misses the experience. There is silence in her due to fragmented images of Michael. Her trauma returns in the form of intrusive thoughts. She starts to relive those moments. Now she cannot turn her past into a memory. Her body reacts to the mountain air as if the tragedy is happening in the present moment. The trauma is literal because her physical response like shivering and breathlessness are exact repetitions of the original shock she couldn't 'claim' when Michael dies. She reacts as if the past were happening in the present moment.

Conclusion:

By the paradox of truth, Maya is haunted by something which is the most painful part of trauma that she can't even name it. She hated the adventure of Michael once even when Michael was alive. But now she gets a taste for adventure of the strong-headed Veer. But she feels bad for herself for the new change and wishes Veer had never come to fling a stone into her calm pond. Ultimately the novel demonstrates that healing is not a linear departure from pain, but a complex process of learning to coexist with the "ghosts" of the past while tentatively reaching out to the present.

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