

# Reading Landscapes: An Exploration of Ranikhet in Anuradha Roy's

## *The Folded Earth*

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### **Abstract:**

Ecocriticism is the study of the interrelationship between human beings and the non-human world. It evolves with the writers like Lawrence Buell, William Rueckert, Rachel Carson and Margaret Fuller. There should exist a close correspondence between human culture and ecology. Literature has become a tool to reflect the environmental consciousness of writers to the readers. Indian writers depict the devastating condition of Nature in their writings. Nature is beautiful in all its forms. It deserves reverence and respect from mankind as it serves as a mother, healer, teacher and provider. But human beings for their selfishness destroy Nature in the name of modernization and Industrialization. The paper attempts to study the prominent role of Nature in the life of man through the landscape Ranikhet which is situated in the foothills of the Himalayas. Anuradha Roy portrays the exotic beauty of the village and how it gets destroyed by mankind in the name of scientific advancement.

**Keywords:** ecocriticism, Nature, modernization, the devastation of Nature

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Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between man and the planet Earth. As a theory, it is based on an interdisciplinary point of view to analyze the text which illustrates environmental concerns and problems. It examines the text in various ways and tries to interpret it from an environmentalist perspective. In the United States, the field of analyzing the interaction between Nature and human beings is called ecocriticism whereas in the United Kingdom, it is called Green studies. Ecocritical study finds out representations of Nature in writing, the role of man in destroying Nature, how man dominates Nature, the power of Nature, destruction of rare species of flora and fauna, Nature in its violent form etc.

Lawrence Buell, an American literary critic argues in his *The Future of Environmental Criticism* that environmental criticism “arises within and against the history of human modification of planetary space” (62). The power of Nature is superior to mankind, Nature proves it frequently through famine, earthquakes, tsunami etc., Human beings out of their avarice destroy Nature or try to adapt to Nature. Peter Barry in his *Beginning theory* views eco-centered reading as, “focuses outside, on the house and its environs, rather than inside, on the owner and his psychology” (251). Ecocriticism points out how mankind has been associated with its surroundings. In this aspect there are four environmental areas to be concerned. The first area, is the wilderness e.g., deserts, oceans, uninhabited lands. The second area, is the scenic sublime e.g., forests, lakes, mountains, cliffs, and waterfalls. The third area includes the countryside e.g., hills, fields and woods. The fourth area includes the domestic picturesque e.g., parks, gardens, and lanes.

Landscape plays a vital role in ecocriticism. Eudora Welty’s essay *Place in Fiction* points out place or landscape as “one of the lesser angels that watch over the racing hand of fiction relative to character, plot, symbolic meaning and especially feeling who in my eyes carries the crown, soars, highest of them all and rightly relegates place into the shade” (17). Landscape serves as a major character rather than a mere backdrop in many literary texts. Thomas Hardy creates a fictitious town named Wessex which is inhabited by the people who cut the gorse there. It serves an artistic role in all his novels as it represents Nature, progress and primitivism. Margaret Lawrence, a Canadian writer

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creates a fictitious town named Manawaka in the province of Manitoba. She creates Manawaka in resemblance to her hometown Neepawa.

Henry David Thoreau, an American Transcendentalist wrote a work named *Walden* giving more prominence to the landscape. He lives in a hut near Walden Pond for two years, two months and two days. It is an account of giving up the modern lifestyle and return to Nature. Thoreau declares after staying in Walden as follows,

We need the tonic of wildness...At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be indefinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of Nature. (238)

Paddy Woodworth says, "Landscape is as fundamental to literature as the setting is to theatre. Narratives always take place in landscapes, whether they be urban or rural" (1). There exists a close relationship between the writer and a wide range of landscapes. Landscapes have a powerful role in literature, as far as writers of literature are concerned landscapes serve as a muse for them. In Indian writing, many writers have depicted landscapes, Nature and its close relationship with Nature. India has vast kinds of ecosystems like the Himalayas, the Sundarbans, the Western Ghats, and the Thar desert. However, the environmental conditions of these areas are adversely affected due to the increasing population and usage of harmful chemicals by mankind. It is reflected in the Indian literature by the writers who are concerned about Nature.

Ruskin Bond has depicted beautifully Dehradun and Mussoorie as the setting in his works. *An Island of Trees* reveals the great bond between the human world and the nonhuman world. In *The Young Vagrants*, he makes a point that human beings should co-exist with Nature. Nature became a source for many of his writings. In Anita Desai's works, Nature serves as the reflection of their inner characters. Her two novels *Fire on the Mountain* and *Cry the Peacock* portray the degradation of women and Nature. Arundathi Roy's *God of Small Things* has a beautiful description of Ayamanam, a small village in Kottayam and the river Meenachal. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* describes the Indian landscape especially, the Sundarbans. Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*

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describes the relationship between a boy and an animal. The author vividly describes the quixotic beauty of the jungle.

In this order, Anuradha Roy is an Indian novelist who has authored five novels so far. They are *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, *The Folded Earth*, *Sleeping on Jupiter*, *All the Lives We Never Lived*, and *The Earthspinner*. In her novels, landscapes have a vital presence. In her first novel *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, she beautifully portrays Songarh, a fictional town in Bengal. In her *Sleeping on Jupiter*, one could see the picturization of Jarmuli, a temple town in Puri. *The Folded Earth* has a beautiful description of the hill town Ranikhet which is situated in the Himalayas. This paper attempts to study the importance of the hilly region with all its lustful floras and faunas and how it gets destroyed by mankind. Due to the avarice of mankind, Nature gets spoiled and exploited. Man exploits the resources of Nature and converts them into money. Nature is more powerful than human beings, it has been proven this statement by natural calamities like earthquakes, tsunamis, tornadoes, hurricanes and famine.

Anuradha Roy sketches about Nature in her work *The Folded Earth*. She describes the landscape of The Himalayas and the lifestyle, customs and traditions of people in the hilly region. Anuradha Roy illustrates the life of a young woman named Maya. Ranikhet is a small village in the Himalayas. The people of Ranikhet enjoy their life by maintaining a sustainable relationship with Nature.

Anuradha Roy describes the beauty of the tiny village of Ranikhet. It is surrounded by trees and mountains. It reminds R. K. Narayan's fictionalized town Malgudi. There are a lot of trees in the place and the yellow light during night, looks like the dots, as it reflects between the gap of leaves. Maya describes her surroundings in the following lines: "In the hills, the sky is circumscribed. Its fluid blue is cupped in the palm of a hand whose fingers are the mountains around us" (16). The same mountain is a rival in her life. Her husband Michael, a trekker gives so much importance to his passion for climbing high ranges. He often leaves her lonely and goes on too-long expeditions. When he tries to climb Roopkund, he gets injured and dies. Maya says, "her rival in love was not a woman, but a mountain range" (6). Nature serves as a comforter and also as a destroyer in the life of Maya.

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After her husband's death, she moved to the remote village of Ranikhet which is situated amidst the foothills of the Himalayas. The village which is completely far off from the chaotic world provides comfort to her. She observes how people live happily in the natural environment. She becomes "a hill person who was only at peace where earth rose and fell in waves like the sea" (20). Roy depicts the quixotic beauty of the tiny village which is surrounded by mountain ranges. Maya portrays the village as follows:

Our town spans three hills. It is far away from everywhere and very small. On every side there are mountains and forests, stretching many miles, interrupted only by tiny hamlets and villages. To the north of our town is the high Himalaya: ice-white peaks on the other side of which lie Tibet and China. On clear days, eastward, you can see the five pyramids of the Pancha Chuli, which are at Nepal's door. (16)

It is a land which is surrounded by mountains on all sides. Tamil Nādu has a rich variety of landscapes as sung by Sangam poets. They sang about different varieties of lands to conserve the flora and fauna of the area. Ancient poets illustrate five important landscapes called as *thinai*: *kurinji* or mountainous regions, *mullai* or forest region, *marudham* or fertile land, *neithal* or the seashore and *palai* or the desert. Kurinji or the hilly region is the home of the hunters and nomads. They maintain an intimate contact with Nature.

This division of landscapes is not only suitable for Tamilnadu but also to all the landscapes in the world. Kanchenjunga, the Mount Everest and the Himalayan mountains are examples of *kurinji* land. It has flourished with wild trees, animals, birds, lichens and waterfalls. In Tamil Literature, *Thiru Kuttrala Kuravanji* is a verse written by Thirikooda Rasappa Kavirayar. It describes strikingly the abundant resources of hilly region. A Soothsayer who foretells the future tells the prosperity of the hilly regions as follows:

வானரங்கள் கனிகொடுத்து மந்தியொடு கொஞ்சம்  
மந்தி சிந்து கனிகளுக்கு வான் கவிகள் கெஞ்சம்

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கானவர்கள் விழி எறிந்து வானவரை அழைப்பார்

கமன சித்தர் வந்து வந்து காயசித்தி விளைப்பார் (Kavirayar verse 54: 1)

These Akam poems describe the resources of the hilly region and it could be related that the people of the hilly region's life are completely dependent on Nature. They live harmoniously with Nature. Their culture, love, marriage and even fertility are determined by the landscape in which they live. In Ranikhet, people peacefully coexist with Nature as described in Sangam poems. Their lifestyle is determined based on the topography of the land.

Kiran Desai also describes the peak of Kanchenjunga in her work *The Inheritance of Loss*,

All day the colors had been those of dusk, mist moving a water creature across the great flanks of mountain possessed of ocean shadows and depths. Briefly visible above the vapor Kanchenjunga was a far peak whittled out of ice, gathering the last of the light a plume of snow blown high by the storms and its summit (IL 01)

Arnab Jan Deka also portrays the beauty of The Himalayas and its surroundings in his work *The Himalayas Mystic Meeting* as follows:

The majestic Himalayan Mountain range is much more stately and awe-inspiring than pictorial representation. In front of those sky-embracing snowy peaks, a strange sensation overtakes one's sense of identity and existence, the ironies of life looming large and bringing a sublime realization that we human being are near non-entities in the plan of the world's creator our essential vanity is overwhelmed in this mystical environ. (13)

In all these literary texts, the writers have beautifully portrayed the living conditions and prosperity of the land. The mountain view itself is a bliss to the human eyes. Many varieties of rare herbal medicines can be found in the foothills of these mountainous regions. Nature is always the best provider to mankind.

There is no transport facility in the village, Ranikhet. The sloping land of the village begins at Kathgodam. A few miles away they could see the trees like banyan,

mango, banana, and *sal*. Anuradha Roy asserts that if anyone gets poor eyesight, they will be cured by seeing the beauty of Nature in Ranikhet. Anuradha Roy affirms that “your bad eyesight has been inexplicably cured” (16-17). The flowers are blossomed from stone. Then Anuradha Roy describes the land, it is filled with colorful grasses. There is a grey-blue lake. These are Nature’s gifts that can be seen in Ranikhet. Their livelihood is based on cattle stocks. They are living a life dependent on Nature.

Maya, the protagonist is living in a rented house, which is situated at Light House. The estate is called a lighthouse because it is situated in the highest peak area which caught the first rays of sun. Maya says, “I found a cottage to rent, on an estate called the Light House because it was so situated that the mansion on the upper grounds caught the first rays of sun on its eastern windows, and the last of them on its western lawns” (17). She feels very lucky because the first rays of the sun come inside her house. She wants the divine power of Nature to be always with her. She also receives happiness from the pleasant Nature. She considers the rays as a life-stimulating factor that Nature provides her.

Maya illustrates her garden and the climate of Ranikhet. Sometimes the place seems to be dry. But soon the dryness is replaced by wildflowers and butterflies. It does not last long. During the rainy days, it becomes fresh and green. Anuradha Roy states that “Everything smelled damp, cool, and fresh from the light rain that had fallen down, the first after many hot days.” (4). Her life is connected with wild animals too. Monkeys are the daily visitors and eat her peaches. The changing climatic conditions of Ranikhet could be compared with the life of Maya. Once her life was happy with Joseph, her husband. But after his death, her life gets collapsed. Nature with all its abundance provides her peaceful life again in Ranikhet.

Anuradha Roy has comprehensively presented the conditions of Ranikhet, a tiny village and Delhi, a metropolitan city with the two characters named Charu and Kundan Singh. Kundan Singh is staying in Delhi for his work, so he compares Delhi to Ranikhet in his letter which he sent to Charu. He compares Delhi as a city which is full of crowds and pollution but Ranikhet is a place filled with the crystalline beauty of mountains and greeneries. He admits that

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Delhi is a very big city. It has many cars, autorickshaws, buses. Sometimes there are elephants on the street. This city is so crowded that my eyes cannot go beyond the next house. I feel as if I cannot breathe. It smells bad. I remember the smells of hills. Like when the grass is cut. You cannot hear any birds here, or cows or goats. (5)

He longs for the rural life which is surrounded by greeneries and the chirping of birds. Then Charu compares Ranikhet with Delhi after she goes to Delhi. During her travelling time, she observes the landscape from the other side. She has seen traffic, factories, pollution and population. It gives a different experience to her. When she crosses the factories, she cannot breathe properly because of the pollution and dust. Roy points out the polluting atmosphere of the city through the character Charu. Roy proclaims, “What she was not prepared for was the stench. It smelt of putrid things, filthy drains, sewage, burning rubber, and smoke from factories. The stench came in through the windows of the bus, it was all around and she could hardly draw breath without coughing” (214).

Nature offers everything to human beings in abundance. But mankind failed to understand and respect Nature. The characters Charu and Kundan Singh clearly state that they cannot live in the polluted city, though it provides a livelihood for them. They are longing to get back to their village. The residential area in the city is overcrowded and polluted due to industrialization and modernization but the residential area in the villages is spacious with a lot of greeneries surrounding it. The village life is simple, quiet, and close to Nature. Though the city life seems to be a stylish one, it is dull and monotonous. Thoreau leaves the modern sophisticated lifestyle which provides a high quality of life to the remote Walden to live peacefully with Nature. He states “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life” (68). He compares modern life to, “the chopping sea of civilized life” (58).

The river plays an important role in all the living things in the world. The beauty of the river as described by Anuradha Roy in her work *The Folded Earth*, “if a giant's child had collected them from the giant's river and dropped them like marbles on a playing field” (16). Rivers are the main sources of agriculture, drinking, and habitat for



living beings. They nourish the entire ecosystems. Rivers are getting polluted by industrial wastes, sewage and nuclear wastes.

Arundhati Roy in her *The God of Small Things* points out the environmental degradation in the village Ayemenem, which is situated in Kerala. She depicts the present condition of the river Meenachal through the character Rahel as follows, “the river was no more than a swollen drain now. A thin ribbon of thick water lapped wearily at the mud banks on either side, sequined with the occasional silver fish” (124). Rahel, when she was in her childhood, she describes the same river as follows, “It was warm, the water green like reapplied silk. With fish in it. With the sky and it. And at night, the broken yellow moon in it” (123). The reason for the changed condition of the river is the pollution caused by the factories. The writer tries to point out the effects of industrialization and modernization. By describing the different conditions of the river, the author delineates the degenerated environment. She voices about the degradation of the environment through her novel *The God of Small Things*.

In the same way, Anuradha Roy voices the destruction of forests in her work *The Folded Earth*. For the human existence, Nature is inevitable. The inhabitants of Ranikhet depend on the forest for their livelihood. Human beings depend entirely on the natural environment for their wealth and well-being. Even Animals and birds extend their hands to help humans. Birds help to spread the seeds on the land so that it helps to create the forest. Animals provide food to humans such as cow milk and meat as they are very helpful for human life and agriculture too. In Indian culture, people worship cows as goddesses. Here Anuradha Roy elucidates the sacredness of cow in her novel *The Folded Earth* through the character, Ramesh. It is as follows: “Ramesh said, “No, no, Brigadier! Cows are holiness apart from natural lawn mowers. Best way to use resources, I say! Two for the price of one—they get food, you get a neat lawn” (65). Without animals and birds, human beings could not survive on the planet Earth. Without bees, humans could not survive on the planet Earth.

All living beings in the earth are interconnected with one another. No one can separate the bond which exists between Nature and human beings. Inventions promote sophisticated lifestyles but they are in real destroying human life and health. One

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should know the importance of Nature and try to save it. Nature is so important for human beings. Without Nature, human beings can't live in this world. According to Gaia theory by James Lovelock, "all organisms and their inorganic surroundings on Earth are closely on Earth are closely integrated to form a single and self-regulating complex system, maintaining the conditions for life on the planet" (01). This theory proposes that Earth is a living organism and it has life in it. It tries in its utmost effort to fix itself. But it goes all in vain. It has gone beyond repair. Mankind destroys the resources of Nature ruthlessly without being aware of its consequences.

Here Anuradha Roy describes the ruins and ravages created by man towards Nature through the character of Diwan Sahib in her work. She portrays how trees are cut off by the power-hunger politicians for their sophisticated life is well explained by the following lines:

There are trucks that come and go, the entrance to the spur is piled high with logs from trees that have been cut from the forest all around. Have you ever heard the sounds of a tree being cut with saws-coming apart at the trunk? They are building a log cabin on the spur-for the entertainment of bureaucrats. They are building grand wooden gateway out of logs from these old trees. That is the forest now-it is a park, it is what is called a resource, a factory. It belongs neither to the people who owned it before, nor to the animals and plants that lived in it. (177-178)

Another important character in the novel is Diwan Sahib, who is an old man of Ranikhet. He cares much for the natural environment. He is the one who knows the history of Ranikhet, he feels sad because the purity and resources of Ranikhet are slowly being destroyed by the reason of scientific advancement and politicians. He cannot accept the ruins of Nature, he explains the ruins of Nature and its impact as follows,

Diwan Sahib was saying, looking up at the langurs, the land had belonged to these monkeys, and to barking deer, nilgai, tiger, barasingha, leopards Jackals, the great horned owl, and even to cheetahs and lions. It was extremely rare, though not unknown, for wild animals to trust

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human beings, Diwan Sahib said. Why should they, when we have destroyed their world? (74).

Anuradha Roy explains about the destruction of Nature in Ranikhet. Ranikhet is a place filled with natural resources but politicians plan to make Ranikhet a tourist place. They make the road to move trucks for the army. But the politicians destroy the forest and also the peace of Ranikhet. The main natural source in Ranikhet is the forest. The Forest is a basement for any developing country. Human life depends on trees. Trees give wood to make shelter furniture, and food to survive. Humans are responsible for everything that is happening in Nature. But human beings destroy Nature in the name of development. Deforestation results in Global warming, soil erosion, landslides and depletion of water resources.

Puran is the character created by Anuradha Roy, through this character she depicts how one could create a bond with Nature. He is living with his mother Ama in Ranikhet. He enjoys being in the wilderness. He used to go to the top of the mountain with his herd of cattle. He talks with animals and birds. In the same way, the creatures respond to him. He is called a half-wit and scorned by the person Mr.Chauhan. Mr.Chauhan says, "I have seen this mad man sitting on Mall Road in that dirty uniform, feeding stray dogs" (58). He easily communicates with animals and "gave dead birds and bats tender burials and allowed monkey to pick lice off his head" (58). He demonstrates a selfless love towards his fellow creatures. He is like a guardian angel and protects animals and birds. He rescues animals from the forest fire. It is explained by Roy as follows, "One year Puran had run into the flames in the middle of the night and come back with a singed fox cub" (142). He has shown his immense love towards his fellow creatures and he is even ready to sacrifice his own life in protecting them. His character shows a glaring contrast to all the people in the modern world. The modern man has no time to enjoy the beauty of Nature. He is bereft of all emotions and focused on the material world. Interestingly, he finds infinite bliss in Nature and creates a strong bond with Nature.

The bond between man and Nature is indeed very deep. There is a harmonious bond exists between man and Nature. The word eco-system means balance between

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Nature and living creatures. Before inventions and development, the balance is very strong. The life of humans wholly depends on Nature, not machines. Nature starts to decline after the Industrial Revolution. When people start to depend on technology Nature gets destroyed rapidly.

Stephen Hawkins is a scientist who warned that “Technology has advanced as such a pace that this aggression may destroy us all by nuclear or biological war”(Hawkings). Scientists give warning to human beings to save Nature, but humans do not care to save Nature and the earth. Without any awareness and education humans are destroying Nature. Humans are destroying Nature for their own glorious, modern, and technological life and forget how their forefathers lived intimately with Nature. They forget that animals and birds are also a part of Nature like humans.

Nammalvar is a renowned organic farmer who belongs to Tamilnadu. He is a scientist who does extensive research on organic farming and formulated new successful techniques. The silent revolution of organic farming is sown by him. He practised what he preached as he lived a life close to Nature. In his interview with *The Hindu*, he appeals to the people that, “planting of atleast 10 plant varieties such as neem, amla, papaya, curryleaf and drumstick by every family” (Nammalvar). He travels to almost all the nooks and corners of Tamilnadu and visits the farmers, thereby creating awareness of the harmfulness of using pesticides and chemical fertilizers on the land. There are many such environmental activists living all over the world who work hard to protect the planet Earth.

Arundathi Roy in her *Walking with the Comrades* clearly explains the condition of people in the Dhandakarnya forest which is situated in Madhya Pradesh. The inhabitants are fighting against the government to save their land. They are tagged as Naxalites by the government. It is the battle between power-hunger politicians who want to exploit the forest for its mineral riches and the inhabitants of the forest who try to save their land. Arundhati Roy is an environmental activist and talks about Narmada Bacho Andolan as “The Sardar Sarovar Dam has more or less reached its full height now. And almost every single thing the Narmada Bachaon Andolan predicted would happen has happened. People who were displaced have not been rehabilitated” (25). The

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government has taken the lands from the common people in the name of advancements but not providing the proper shelter for them to live in. Many environmentalists are fighting against the government to safeguard the forest areas.

Nature is a healer, mother, nourisher, teacher, creator and destroyer too. Man thinks that he is more supreme than Nature. Without birds and animals, he could not survive on this planet. He should realize that animals, plants and birds are also a part of his world. The present paper attempts to study the importance of Nature through the landscape Ranikhet. It was once a village that flourished with all the beauties of Nature but in the name of advancement, it gets destroyed. Maya, a school teacher tries her best to conserve the forest from the tyrannical hands of the politicians. There should be balance in the ecosystem for the peaceful existence of human beings. It is necessary for every human being to have such knowledge. Man should realize his mistake in destroying the forest for his selfishness without knowing its consequences. The only way to retain the beauty of the earth is to plant more trees, thereby the earth becomes a suitable place to dwell on. The habit of planting trees should be inculcated among the students at a very young age in the schools by creating environment awareness clubs. There humans could fix the damage created on the Earth.

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