
Ecofeminism in the Folded Earth: A Critical Study

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ABSTRACT

Ecofeminism is a critical framework that examines the interconnected structures of domination that oppress women and exploit the natural environment under patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial systems. Contemporary literature provides a fertile space for exploring these intersections through narrative, emotion, and embodied experience. *The Folded Earth* (2011) by Anuradha Roy is a significant work of Indian English fiction that foregrounds ecological fragility, gendered vulnerability, and ethical responsibility within the Himalayan landscape. Set in the hill town of Ranikhet, the novel portrays the lives of women, animals, and marginalized communities whose existence is inseparable from the land they inhabit. This paper undertakes a comprehensive ecofeminist reading of *The Folded Earth*, arguing that Roy's narrative presents nature not as a passive background but as an active agent shaping memory, grief, identity, and resistance. Women's bodies and emotional lives are shown to parallel the condition of the land—both subject to surveillance, exploitation, and silencing, yet also capable of endurance and renewal. Through an analysis of landscape, gendered labour, development politics, animal ethics, spiritual ecology, and postcolonial history, the study demonstrates how the novel articulates a relational ecological philosophy grounded in care rather than control. The paper concludes that *The Folded Earth* contributes significantly to ecofeminist literary discourse by revealing the inseparability of feminist justice and environmental sustainability in contemporary India.

KEYWORDS

Ecofeminism; Himalayan Ecology; Gender and Environment; Postcolonial Landscape; Interspecies Ethics; Indian English Fiction

1. Introduction

The accelerating ecological crises of the twenty-first century—climate change, deforestation, species extinction, and environmental injustice—have necessitated a re-examination of cultural narratives that shape humanity's relationship with nature. Literature, as a reflective and imaginative medium, plays a crucial role in articulating ethical responses to these crises. Among the critical frameworks that address this intersection, ecofeminism has emerged as a powerful tool for analyzing how environmental degradation and gendered oppression are structurally linked. Ecofeminism posits that the domination of women and the exploitation of nature arise from the same ideological roots: patriarchal hierarchies, capitalist extraction, and colonial modes of control. These systems construct binaries such as man/woman, culture/nature, reason/emotion, privileging the former while subordinating the latter. In literary studies, ecofeminism

allows scholars to explore how narratives expose, reinforce, or resist these structures through representations of land, bodies, labour, and emotion. Within the context of Indian English literature, ecofeminist readings acquire particular significance. India's ecological crises are deeply entangled with colonial history, uneven development, rural dispossession, and gender inequality. Women, especially in agrarian and forest-based communities, experience environmental destruction not as an abstract issue but as a material and embodied reality. Loss of forests means loss of fuel, fodder, water, and livelihood; ecological degradation intensifies women's labour while rendering it invisible.

The Folded Earth (2011) by Anuradha Roy offers a compelling fictional engagement with these concerns. Set in the Himalayan town of Ranikhet, the novel follows Maya, a young widow who retreats to the mountains after the sudden death of her husband, Michael. Her personal journey of grief, memory, and tentative healing unfolds within a landscape marked by ecological vulnerability, colonial legacy, and social conservatism. The novel interweaves Maya's narrative with those of other women – Charu, Lakshmi, Mrs. Pant – whose lives are shaped by both environmental and patriarchal pressures.

Crucially, the Himalayan landscape in the novel is not a neutral setting. Mountains, forests, animals, weather, and seasons actively shape the narrative. The land absorbs grief, offers refuge, and occasionally turns violent through landslides, storms, and ecological instability. Development projects, tourism, poaching, and resource extraction threaten both ecological balance and social cohesion. Women's bodies and emotions mirror these conditions of precarity.

This paper argues that *The Folded Earth* can be productively read as an ecofeminist novel because it demonstrates:

1. the parallel oppression of women and nature;
2. the role of landscape in shaping feminine subjectivity;
3. a critique of patriarchal development and environmental violence;
4. the ethical importance of interspecies and community relationships;
5. a relational philosophy of belonging rather than ownership.

By situating Roy's novel within ecofeminist theory and postcolonial environmental discourse, this study aims to show how *The Folded Earth* contributes to contemporary debates on gender, ecology, and ethics.

2. Ecofeminism: Theory and Critical Context

Ecofeminism emerged in the late twentieth century as a convergence of feminist thought and ecological activism. The term was first introduced by Françoise d'Eaubonne, who argued that patriarchal systems of power are responsible for both the oppression of women and the destruction of the natural environment. Since then, ecofeminism has evolved into a diverse and interdisciplinary field encompassing philosophy, literature, sociology, and environmental studies. One of the foundational insights of ecofeminism is the critique of dualistic thinking. Val Plumwood identifies a set of hierarchical binaries – man/woman, culture/nature, mind/body, reason/emotion – that structure Western philosophical thought. These binaries not only marginalize women and nature but also justify their exploitation by framing them as

passive, inferior, and available for control. Ecofeminism seeks to dismantle these binaries by emphasizing interconnectedness, relationality, and mutual dependence. Ecofeminist theory is not uniform. Cultural ecofeminists emphasize women's closeness to nature through biology and nurturing roles, while social and materialist ecofeminists caution against essentialism and focus instead on historical, economic, and political factors. Contemporary ecofeminism often adopts an intersectional approach, recognizing that gender intersects with class, caste, race, and geography in shaping environmental vulnerability.

In the Indian context, ecofeminism is deeply shaped by colonial history and development politics. Scholars such as Vandana Shiva argue that colonial forestry policies transformed diverse ecosystems into commercial resources, undermining indigenous knowledge systems and women's traditional roles in ecological management. Bina Agarwal emphasizes women's material dependence on natural resources and highlights how environmental degradation disproportionately affects rural women. Indian ecofeminism thus foregrounds lived experience, everyday labour, and survival. Movements like Chipko, in which women physically embraced trees to prevent deforestation, symbolize resistance rooted in care rather than conquest. These movements challenge both capitalist development and patriarchal authority.

In literary studies, ecofeminism examines how narratives represent:

- nature as sentient, sacred, or agentive;
- women's embodied ecological knowledge;
- environmental injustice and development violence;
- ethical relationships with animals and non-human life;
- alternative modes of dwelling grounded in care.

The Folded Earth exemplifies these concerns. Roy's narrative presents ecology not as scenery but as a moral and emotional force intertwined with women's lives. The novel's slow pace, sensory detail, and focus on everyday acts of care align with ecofeminist aesthetics that value attentiveness over domination.

Landscape as Character: The Himalayas as an Ecofeminist Space

3. Landscape as Character in *The Folded Earth*

In ecofeminist literary criticism, landscape is not treated as a passive backdrop against which human action unfolds; rather, it is understood as an active presence that shapes social relations, emotional life, and ethical imagination. In *The Folded Earth* by **Anuradha Roy**, the Himalayan landscape occupies precisely this role. The mountains, forests, weather, animals, and seasons function as agents that influence the narrative's emotional rhythms and ideological concerns. The novel thus aligns with ecofeminist thought by rejecting anthropocentric hierarchies and foregrounding the agency of the natural world.

Set in the hill town of Ranikhet, the novel situates its characters within a fragile ecological zone where life is shaped by altitude, weather patterns, and seasonal change. The Himalayas are not romanticized as static symbols of purity or transcendence. Instead, they are portrayed as living, unpredictable, and demanding entities—capable of nurturing as well as destruction. Landslides, storms, forest fires, and animal attacks

punctuate the narrative, reminding readers that nature operates according to its own rhythms rather than human desire.

This portrayal resonates strongly with ecofeminist critiques of modernity, which argue that treating nature as inert matter leads to environmental violence. Roy's landscape resists such treatment. It refuses mastery and demands attentiveness, humility, and ethical responsiveness.

3.1 The Folded Landscape: Memory, Time, and Ecological Depth

The title *The Folded Earth* itself offers a crucial interpretive key. "Folding" suggests layers, depth, concealment, and continuity. The mountains are described as folded like fabric, holding within them multiple histories—colonial, ecological, emotional, and personal. This imagery challenges linear and extractive ways of knowing the land.

Ecofeminism emphasizes that landscapes are not empty spaces but repositories of memory. In the novel, the land remembers migration, hunting, deforestation, love, grief, and death. Maya gradually learns that to live in the mountains is to unfold these layers slowly, through dwelling rather than possession. Knowledge emerges not through conquest or classification but through prolonged, embodied engagement.

This understanding contrasts sharply with developmental and colonial epistemologies that seek to map, name, and control the land. The folded landscape resists transparency and surveillance, protecting both ecological and emotional secrets. Such resistance aligns with ecofeminist critiques of patriarchal desire for domination and visibility.

3.2 The Mountains as Shelter and Witness

For Maya, the mountains function initially as a refuge from grief. After the sudden death of her husband, she finds herself unable to breathe in the plains, surrounded by people who demand emotional explanations and timelines of recovery. In the mountains, however, grief is allowed to unfold without scrutiny. The land does not judge or demand productivity.

Ecofeminist theory emphasizes the importance of spaces that allow emotional vulnerability, particularly for women whose suffering is often minimized or disciplined. The Himalayan landscape offers such a space. Maya experiences the hills as a maternal presence—absorbing her sorrow, offering silence, and allowing her to exist without justification.

At the same time, the mountains are witnesses rather than healers in any simplistic sense. They do not erase grief; they hold it. This distinction is crucial. Ecofeminism does not propose nature as a cure-all but as a relational presence that enables ethical engagement with pain. The mountains accompany Maya through mourning rather than resolving it.

3.3 Nature's Autonomy: Violence, Instability, and Ecological Agency

A key ecofeminist insight is the rejection of sentimentalized views of nature. Roy's portrayal of the Himalayas emphasizes autonomy rather than benevolence. The landscape can be harsh and unforgiving. Roads collapse during monsoon rains, landslides cut off villages, and wild animals threaten human settlements.

These moments underscore the fact that nature does not exist for human convenience. Ecofeminism insists on respecting the agency of the non-human world rather than framing it as a resource to be managed. Roy's narrative dramatizes this agency by showing how human plans are repeatedly disrupted by ecological forces.

Importantly, ecological violence in the novel is often linked to human interference. Development projects destabilize slopes, deforestation weakens soil, and tourism strains fragile systems. Nature's "violence" thus exposes the consequences of human arrogance. The land reacts not out of malice but out of imbalance.

3.4 Seasonal Time and Ecofeminist Temporality

Time in *The Folded Earth* follows ecological rather than industrial rhythms. Seasons structure the narrative: winter fogs, monsoon rains, spring blossoms, and summer heat shape daily life and emotional states. This seasonal temporality stands in opposition to capitalist time, which prioritizes speed, efficiency, and productivity.

Ecofeminist scholars argue that patriarchal modernity values linear progress and accumulation, whereas ecological thinking emphasizes cycles, renewal, and limits. Roy's narrative structure reflects this ecological temporality. Events do not rush toward resolution; instead, they unfold gradually, allowing space for reflection and relational growth.

Maya's healing follows this pattern. Grief is not overcome but slowly integrated into life, much like a season that returns with different intensity each year. The novel thus models an ecofeminist understanding of time as cyclical and relational rather than linear and extractive.

3.5 The Garden as an Ecofeminist Microcosm

One of the most significant ecofeminist symbols in the novel is Maya's garden. Unlike industrial agriculture or commercial development, the garden represents small-scale, care-based interaction with the land. Maya tends plants, waters soil, waits for growth, and accepts failure. Gardening becomes an ethical practice grounded in patience and attentiveness. Ecofeminist theorists emphasize care as an alternative to control. The garden exemplifies this ethic. Maya does not dominate the land; she collaborates with it. Growth occurs on the land's terms, not hers. This contrasts sharply with development projects that seek immediate results regardless of ecological cost.

The garden also functions as a space of emotional grounding. It allows Maya to participate in cycles of life that continue despite loss. Planting and nurturing become acts of quiet resistance against both grief and ecological destruction.

3.6 Spiritual Ecology and Sacred Landscape

The Himalayan landscape in the novel is also infused with spiritual significance. Local beliefs attribute agency to forests, rivers, and mountains. Shrines, rituals, and offerings acknowledge dependence on non-human forces. This spiritual ecology reflects indigenous cosmologies that treat nature as kin rather than commodity. Ecofeminism values such spiritual frameworks not as superstition but as ethical systems that promote restraint and reciprocity. Roy presents these beliefs without romanticization, showing both their vulnerability and their power. As younger generations neglect rituals and development projects encroach on sacred spaces, spiritual ecology itself becomes endangered. Maya observes these practices with respect,

even when she does not fully participate. Her openness reflects an ecofeminist ethic of listening rather than appropriation. The land teaches through presence rather than doctrine.

3.7 Landscape and Gendered Belonging

Finally, the novel reveals how landscape shapes gendered experiences of belonging. Maya's relationship with the mountains contrasts with the experiences of male characters who often approach the land through ownership, nostalgia, or control. Maya belongs without claiming. She rents a room, tends a garden she does not own, and walks paths shaped by generations of others. Ecofeminism critiques ownership as a patriarchal mode of relating to land. Roy's narrative offers an alternative model of belonging grounded in care and attentiveness rather than possession. Those who seek to dominate the landscape remain outsiders; those who listen become part of its rhythms.

In *The Folded Earth*, the Himalayan landscape functions as a central ecofeminist agent shaping memory, grief, ethics, and belonging. Through its folded terrain, seasonal rhythms, and spiritual presence, the land challenges anthropocentric and patriarchal modes of relating to nature. It shelters vulnerability while asserting autonomy, offering a relational space where healing and responsibility can emerge.

Women, Ecology, and Gendered Labour: Body, Care, and Marginalization

4. Women, Ecology, and Gendered Labour

A central concern of ecofeminist criticism is the recognition that women's lives are materially and symbolically entangled with ecological processes. In *The Folded Earth*, **Anuradha Roy** foregrounds this entanglement by depicting women whose daily labour sustains both households and ecosystems, even as it remains socially invisible and undervalued. Women's bodies, emotions, and work mirror the condition of the land itself—exploited, monitored, and taken for granted, yet essential to collective survival. Ecofeminist scholars argue that environmental degradation intensifies women's burdens, particularly in rural and semi-rural contexts where access to water, fuel, and food depends directly on ecological stability. Roy's novel vividly illustrates this reality through characters such as Charu, Lakshmi, and Mrs. Pant, whose lives unfold at the intersection of gendered labour and environmental precarity.

4.1 Everyday Ecological Labour and Feminine Survival

In the hill town of Ranikhet, women's daily routines are inseparable from the rhythms of the land. Fetching water, collecting firewood, grazing animals, growing vegetables, and maintaining households are not merely domestic tasks; they are ecological practices that sustain life. Yet these forms of labour are rarely recognized as work within patriarchal or capitalist frameworks.

Charu's life exemplifies this condition. She walks long distances to gather grass and firewood, carrying heavy loads that strain her body. Her labour is repetitive, physically demanding, and largely invisible. Ecofeminism identifies such labour as "subsistence work," essential yet systematically devalued because it does not generate monetary profit. Charu's body, like the mountain paths she traverses, bears the marks of endurance. Lakshmi's work in maintaining households similarly reflects gendered ecological responsibility. Her labour is cyclical, unending, and tied to natural rhythms—cooking, cleaning, caring for

others, adjusting to seasonal scarcity. These practices sustain community life, yet they are taken for granted as feminine duty rather than recognized as ecological stewardship.

4.2 The Female Body as Ecological Site

Ecofeminist theory emphasizes that women's bodies are often treated as extensions of nature – objects to be controlled, regulated, and exploited. In *The Folded Earth*, this parallel is most starkly evident in Charu's story. Her body becomes a site of surveillance and moral judgment once her relationship with Diwan becomes visible. Charu's pregnancy transforms her from a labouring body into a spectacle. The community watches her movements, speculates about her morality, and anticipates scandal. Roy's language draws an implicit comparison between the monitoring of Charu's body and the monitoring of the land. Both are subjected to scrutiny, regulation, and punishment when they defy social norms. Ecofeminist critics argue that patriarchal societies fear both female sexuality and untamed nature because both represent forces beyond complete control. Charu's body, like the monsoon or a landslide, becomes a source of anxiety precisely because it resists containment. Her eventual suicide exposes the lethal consequences of this fear.

4.3 Marginalization, Shame, and Social Policing

Charu's tragedy is not merely personal; it is structural. Her marginalization results from intersecting forces of gender, class, and ecological vulnerability. She lives on the edge of the town, geographically and socially. Her economic dependence and lack of familial protection make her particularly vulnerable to social judgment. Ecofeminism insists that environmental injustice and social injustice are inseparable. Charu's precarious housing mirrors her precarious social position. She lacks both secure land and secure belonging. When she transgresses patriarchal norms, there is no safety net – emotional, economic, or communal.

The community's response to Charu reveals how patriarchal surveillance functions as a disciplinary mechanism. Gossip replaces dialogue; moral judgment replaces care. Her death is a stark indictment of a social order that values reputation over compassion, control over care. In ecofeminist terms, Charu becomes a casualty of a system that punishes vulnerability rather than protecting it.

4.4 Quiet Forms of Ecofeminist Agency

While Charu's story exposes the violence of patriarchal ecology, Roy also presents quieter forms of female agency that resist domination through care, knowledge, and persistence. Mrs. Pant, Maya's elderly landlady, embodies this alternative mode of power. Mrs. Pant's authority does not derive from property ownership or social status but from her intimate knowledge of the land. She understands animals, seasons, and weather patterns. Her care for cows, her use of herbs, and her attention to daily rituals reflect what ecofeminists describe as traditional ecological knowledge – wisdom rooted in lived experience rather than formal institutions. This knowledge is not romanticized. It is fragile, threatened by modernization and generational change. Yet it sustains an ethic of care that contrasts sharply with extractive development. Mrs. Pant's life demonstrates that resistance need not be loud or confrontational; it can be enacted through everyday practices that preserve ecological balance.

4.5 Maya's Body, Grief, and Ecological Becoming

Maya's journey offers another perspective on the relationship between female embodiment and ecology. Her body is marked by grief rather than labour, yet it too becomes an ecological site. Grief manifests physically – through exhaustion, withdrawal, and breathlessness. The mountains respond to this bodily

state by offering space rather than solutions. Ecofeminism recognizes that emotional labour is also ecological. Maya's mourning is not treated as pathology to be cured but as a process that unfolds through seasons and landscapes. Her body slowly relearns how to inhabit space, how to move, how to breathe. Gardening, walking, and caring for animals become practices of re-embodiment. Through Maya, Roy suggests that ecological connection can enable forms of healing denied by patriarchal cultures that demand emotional efficiency. The land does not rush Maya toward recovery; it allows her grief to exist. This patience reflects an ecofeminist ethic that values vulnerability rather than suppressing it.

4.6 Community, Care, and Female Networks

Despite its harshness, the community in *The Folded Earth* also provides spaces of female solidarity. Women share food, exchange stories, offer practical help, and care for one another during illness and crisis. These informal networks constitute an ecological system of support that operates outside formal power structures. Ecofeminist scholars emphasize that such networks are crucial for survival in ecologically vulnerable contexts. Care circulates horizontally rather than hierarchically. While gossip can harm, silence can also protect; while judgment can destroy, companionship can sustain.

Maya's integration into this community is gradual. She learns to listen, to observe, and to participate without imposing herself. Her relationships with women in the town teach her that belonging is not achieved through ownership or authority but through mutual care and attentiveness.

4.7 Gendered Labour and Environmental Ethics

The novel ultimately suggests that women's ecological labour carries ethical significance. Through daily acts of care—feeding animals, tending gardens, managing households—women sustain life in ways that challenge capitalist and patriarchal values. These practices embody what ecofeminists call an “ethic of care,” grounded in responsibility rather than domination. Roy contrasts this ethic with masculinized forms of power associated with development, hunting, and control. Where development seeks to reshape the land for profit, women's labour adapts to the land's limits. Where patriarchy values visibility and authority, women's work operates quietly and relationally. This contrast does not idealize women or demonize men; rather, it exposes how systems of power shape behaviour. Ecofeminism, as reflected in the novel, calls for a transformation of values rather than a simple reversal of hierarchies.

In *The Folded Earth*, women's lives are deeply entwined with ecological systems through labour, embodiment, and care. Roy reveals how patriarchal structures marginalize women's work and regulate women's bodies, producing vulnerabilities that mirror environmental exploitation. At the same time, she highlights forms of ecofeminist agency rooted in everyday practices of care, knowledge, and resilience. By foregrounding gendered labour and embodied experience, the novel demonstrates that ecological sustainability cannot be separated from gender justice. The land and the women who depend upon it endure together—both vulnerable, both resilient, both essential.

Development, Power, and Environmental Violence: An Ecofeminist Critique of Modernity

5. Development, Power, and Ecological Violence

A defining concern of ecofeminist criticism is its interrogation of “development” as an ideological project that often masks violence against both nature and marginalized human communities. In *The Folded Earth*, **Anuradha Roy** presents the Himalayan landscape as a contested terrain where competing visions of progress collide. Tourism, real estate speculation, hydropower projects, and wildlife exploitation threaten not only ecological balance but also the social and emotional fabric of the community. Through an ecofeminist lens, these conflicts reveal how patriarchal capitalism treats land, animals, and women as resources to be controlled and consumed. Ecofeminism argues that environmental destruction is not accidental but systemic. It arises from a worldview that privileges profit, speed, and domination over care, sustainability, and relational ethics. Roy’s novel dramatizes this critique by showing how development projects disrupt fragile ecosystems and intensify gendered vulnerabilities.

5.1 The Rhetoric of Development and Its Discontents

In *The Folded Earth*, development enters the Himalayan town through the language of progress – tourism, infrastructure, modernization, and economic growth. Outsiders view the mountains as untapped potential, a scenic commodity to be marketed and consumed. Hotels, resorts, and roads promise employment and visibility, yet they simultaneously erode ecological stability. Ecofeminist theorists caution that such rhetoric often obscures the costs borne by local communities, particularly women. Roy’s narrative exposes this gap between promise and reality. Roads collapse during monsoons, forests are stripped for construction, and springs dry up. The land responds to intrusion with instability, revealing the fragility ignored by planners. This form of development is deeply gendered. Men often occupy decision-making roles – engineers, officials, investors – while women bear the consequences in the form of increased labour, scarcity of resources, and social disruption. Development thus reinforces existing hierarchies rather than alleviating them.

5.2 Land as Commodity versus Land as Relationship

A central ecofeminist tension in the novel lies between two competing conceptions of land. For developers and outsiders, land is property – something to be bought, sold, reshaped, and exploited. For local residents, particularly women, land is relationship: a source of water, food, memory, and spiritual meaning. Maya’s evolving relationship with the mountains highlights this distinction. She does not seek to own land; she learns to live with it. Her attentiveness contrasts sharply with the extractive logic of development. Ecofeminism critiques ownership as a patriarchal mode of relating to nature, one that prioritizes control over care.

Roy’s narrative suggests that ecological crises emerge when relational bonds with land are replaced by transactional ones. Those who attempt to dominate the mountains remain alienated, while those who listen and adapt find belonging – even if that belonging is fragile and uncertain.

5.3 Poaching, Masculinity, and the Domination of Nature

Wildlife poaching in *The Folded Earth* provides a stark example of how environmental violence intersects with constructions of masculinity. Leopards, deer, and birds are hunted to satisfy profit and thrill, reducing living beings to trophies. Ecofeminist scholars argue that such practices reflect a culture of domination that

links the control of nature with the assertion of masculine power. Roy portrays poachers as figures who equate violence with authority. Their guns symbolize technological dominance over the natural world. In contrast, animals in the novel are depicted as sentient beings capable of loyalty, fear, and suffering. The killing of animals is not framed as necessity but as violation. Maya's grief over the poisoning of dogs underscores the emotional and ethical dimensions of interspecies violence. Ecofeminism insists that compassion toward animals is inseparable from feminist ethics. The exploitation of animals, women, and land forms a continuum of domination.

5.4 Colonial Legacies and Environmental Memory

Development in the Himalayan region cannot be separated from colonial history. British forestry policies transformed diverse ecosystems into regulated resources, introducing scientific forestry, hunting practices, and land control. These legacies persist in postcolonial development strategies that prioritize extraction over sustainability. The figure of Jim Corbett looms over the novel as a symbol of this ambivalence. Celebrated as both hunter and conservationist, Corbett embodies colonial masculinity's contradictory relationship with nature—domination tempered by nostalgia. His presence in local memory reflects how colonial narratives continue to shape environmental attitudes.

Ecofeminism urges critical engagement with such histories rather than uncritical celebration. Roy's narrative neither glorifies nor condemns Corbett outright; instead, it reveals how the past remains folded into the landscape. Environmental violence is shown to be cumulative, layered across generations.

5.5 Development and the Feminization of Vulnerability

Ecofeminist scholars argue that environmental degradation disproportionately affects women because of their roles in subsistence and care. In *The Folded Earth*, this feminization of vulnerability is evident in the increased burdens placed on women as resources become scarce. As forests recede and water sources diminish, women must walk farther and work harder. Their bodies absorb the costs of development. Yet their voices are rarely included in planning or decision-making processes. This exclusion mirrors broader patriarchal patterns in which women are expected to adapt silently to structural changes imposed upon them. Charu's life exemplifies this vulnerability. Her economic dependence and ecological marginality leave her exposed to both social judgment and material insecurity. Development does not offer her protection or opportunity; it intensifies her precarity.

5.6 Resistance through Care and Ecological Ethics

Despite the violence of development, *The Folded Earth* also presents modes of resistance rooted in care rather than confrontation. Maya's gardening, Mrs. Pant's animal care, and Veer's conflicted wildlife protection represent attempts to preserve life within destructive systems. Ecofeminism recognizes such practices as political, even when they lack overt activism. Caring for land and animals challenges the logic of exploitation by affirming relational responsibility. These acts may not dismantle structures of power, but they sustain alternative ethical worlds. Roy's novel suggests that ecological resistance need not always take the form of protest. It can be enacted through attentiveness, restraint, and refusal to participate in exploitative practices. This quiet resistance aligns with ecofeminist critiques of heroism and domination.

5.7 The Failure of Modernity's Promises

Ultimately, *The Folded Earth* exposes the limitations of modernity's promises. Development does not deliver security, stability, or justice. Instead, it produces fragmentation—of landscapes, communities, and identities. Ecofeminism interprets this failure as the result of a worldview that denies interdependence.

The Himalayan landscape resists being reshaped according to human ambition. Roads crumble, buildings crack, and ecological imbalance manifests as disaster. These failures are not accidents; they are symptoms of a flawed philosophy that prioritizes control over coexistence. Roy's narrative thus aligns with ecofeminist calls for a reorientation of values. Sustainability, the novel suggests, requires humility and relational ethics rather than technological domination.

Through its portrayal of development, power, and environmental violence, *The Folded Earth* offers a sustained ecofeminist critique of modernity. Roy exposes how patriarchal capitalism commodifies land, animals, and women, producing ecological and social harm. At the same time, she gestures toward alternative modes of living grounded in care, restraint, and attentiveness.

Interspecies Ethics, Relational Belonging, Conclusion, and References

6. Interspecies Ethics and the More-than-Human World

A crucial dimension of ecofeminism is its insistence on ethical responsibility toward non-human life. Ecofeminist theorists argue that domination operates along a continuum: the exploitation of women, animals, and nature arises from the same hierarchical worldview that privileges human—particularly masculine—authority. In *The Folded Earth*, **Anuradha Roy** foregrounds interspecies relationships as central to moral life, thereby extending ecofeminist ethics beyond the human. Animals in the novel are not symbolic ornaments; they are sentient participants in the narrative. Dogs, cows, birds, deer, and leopards inhabit the same fragile ecosystem as humans, sharing vulnerability and dependence. Their suffering is neither incidental nor expendable. Roy's sustained attention to animal life challenges anthropocentric assumptions and aligns with ecofeminist calls for an expanded moral community.

6.1 Companion Species and Emotional Ecology

Maya's relationship with the dog Buzo exemplifies interspecies companionship grounded in care rather than utility. Buzo is not a guard animal or property; he is a presence that offers emotional security during Maya's grief. Their bond is quiet, tactile, and reciprocal—rooted in shared vulnerability rather than dominance. When Buzo is poisoned, Maya's grief is profound. The loss is not diminished because the subject is non-human. Ecofeminist theorists argue that patriarchal cultures often trivialize grief for animals in order to normalize violence against them. Roy resists this logic. The dog's death is treated as an ethical rupture that exposes the cruelty embedded in human systems of control. This interspecies grief reinforces an ecofeminist understanding of emotional life as ecological. Loss reverberates across species boundaries, reminding readers that ethical responsibility does not end at the limits of the human.

6.2 Wildlife, Fear, and Ecological Coexistence

Wild animals—particularly leopards—occupy a complex position in the novel. They are feared, revered, and hunted. Ecofeminism rejects simplistic binaries of predator and victim, instead emphasizing

coexistence within shared habitats. Roy presents wildlife encounters as moments that expose the limits of human control. Leopards are not portrayed as villains but as displaced beings whose habitats have been encroached upon. Their presence near human settlements reflects ecological imbalance rather than inherent aggression. Development projects push animals closer to humans, intensifying conflict. Ecofeminist analysis reveals how environmental disruption produces fear that is then used to justify further violence. Veer's conflicted role as a wildlife protector illustrates the difficulty of ethical action within compromised systems. He inherits colonial hunting legacies yet seeks conservation. His struggle embodies ecofeminism's insistence on complexity: ethical living requires negotiation, accountability, and humility rather than moral purity.

6.3 Relational Belonging: Home Beyond Ownership

One of the most profound ecofeminist insights of *The Folded Earth* lies in its redefinition of belonging. Home, in the novel, is not established through ownership or permanence but through relational engagement with place. Maya never claims the land as hers. She rents a room, tends a garden she does not own, and walks paths shaped by generations before her. Ecofeminist thinkers critique ownership as a patriarchal mode of relating to land, rooted in control and exclusion. Roy offers an alternative vision of belonging grounded in attentiveness, reciprocity, and care. Maya belongs because she listens—to the mountains, to animals, to women in the community.

In contrast, developers and outsiders who seek possession remain alienated. Their buildings crack, their projects fail, and their connection to place remains superficial. The land resists domination, allowing belonging only to those who accept vulnerability.

6.4 Memory, Trauma, and Ecological Time

The novel's treatment of memory further reinforces its ecofeminist philosophy. Trauma in *The Folded Earth* is not confined to individual psychology; it is embedded in landscape. Grief unfolds through seasons rather than through linear resolution. The mountains become sites of memory where personal and historical losses coexist. Ecofeminism emphasizes cyclical time over linear progress. Roy's narrative structure mirrors this ecological temporality. Past and present fold into one another, resisting closure. Healing is ongoing, incomplete, and relational. Maya's grief for her husband does not disappear. It becomes part of her ecological identity, carried through walks, weather, and silence. The land teaches her how to live with loss rather than erase it. This acceptance of vulnerability contrasts sharply with modern cultures that demand emotional efficiency and productivity.

6.5 Community, Care, and Feminist Ecology

Despite its moments of cruelty and exclusion, the community in *The Folded Earth* also sustains life through networks of care. Women share food, labour, stories, and silence. These informal practices constitute an ecological system of support that operates beyond formal institutions. Ecofeminist scholars argue that such care-based networks are essential for resilience in environmentally fragile regions. Roy neither idealizes nor dismisses community life; she portrays it as ethically ambivalent yet necessary. Gossip can destroy, as in Charu's case, but companionship can also heal. Charu's tragedy stands as a warning: when care fails, vulnerability becomes fatal. Her death exposes the consequences of a social order that prioritizes control over compassion. Ecofeminism reads this not as individual failure but as structural violence.

7. Synthesis: Ecofeminist Philosophy in *The Folded Earth*

Bringing together the analyses across the preceding sections, *The Folded Earth* articulates a coherent ecofeminist philosophy grounded in relational ethics. The novel demonstrates that:

1. Women and nature share parallel histories of exploitation

Both are subjected to surveillance, control, and extraction under patriarchal and capitalist systems.

2. Ecology shapes identity and emotion

Landscape is not background but an active agent in grief, memory, and healing.

3. Development is a gendered and ecological issue

Projects framed as progress often intensify women's labour and environmental precarity.

4. Care is a political and ecological practice

Everyday acts of nurturing sustain life and resist domination.

5. Belonging emerges through relationship, not ownership

Ethical dwelling requires humility and attentiveness rather than control.

These insights position Roy's novel firmly within ecofeminist literary discourse, while also extending that discourse into the specific context of postcolonial Himalayan ecology.

8. Conclusion

The Folded Earth is a deeply resonant ecofeminist novel that reveals the inseparability of gender justice and environmental sustainability. Through its portrayal of women, animals, and landscapes bound together by vulnerability and endurance, the novel critiques patriarchal modernity while offering an alternative ethic grounded in care, relationality, and humility. Roy does not offer utopia. Landslides occur, animals are killed, women suffer, and grief persists. Yet endurance itself becomes meaningful. The mountains remain—not as symbols of permanence, but as witnesses to layered histories and fragile lives. Women, like the land, endure not through domination but through persistence and connection. In an era marked by ecological crisis and social inequality, *The Folded Earth* reminds readers that ethical living requires learning how to belong rather than how to control. Ecofeminism, as articulated through Roy's narrative, offers a philosophy of coexistence in which caring for the earth is inseparable from caring for one another.

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