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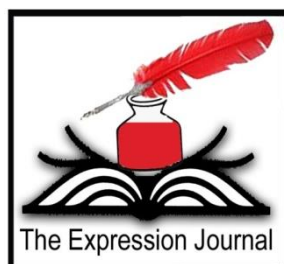


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An Ecofeminist Comparative Study of Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth* and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Chemmeen*

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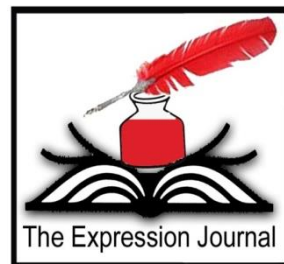
Abstract

Ecofeminism studies the connection between the oppression of women and the destruction of nature. It argues that systems of power that control women often treat nature in the same way as something that can be controlled and used for human benefit. Indian literature has contributed significantly to this area by presenting the close relationship between women and their natural surroundings. This paper compares Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth* (2011) and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Chemmeen* (1956) from an ecofeminist perspective. The two novels are set in very different places such as the Himalayan hills and the Kerala coast. However, both works show how women are affected by patriarchal rules and how natural resources are affected by human greed. Maya in *The Folded Earth* develops a close relationship with the mountains and finds comfort in nature. Karuthamma in *Chemmeen* lives closely with the sea, which is central to the life of her fishing community. The study uses the ideas of Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Karen J. Warren, and Val Plumwood to examine gender, nature, environmental exploitation, traditional knowledge, and social control. The comparison shows that both novels present nature as an important part of human life rather than simply as a resource. They also suggest that respect for nature and respect for women are closely connected. The study argues that these novels contribute to postcolonial ecofeminist discussions by presenting the need for environmental responsibility, gender equality, and peaceful coexistence with nature.

Keywords

Ecofeminism, Women and Nature, Environmental Justice, Patriarchy,
Postcolonial Literature, Comparative Study.

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1. Introduction

Ecofeminism developed as a field of study that connects the oppression of women with the exploitation of nature. Françoise d'Eaubonne introduced the term in 1974. Ecofeminist thinkers argue that patriarchal systems often create hierarchies in which some groups are considered superior and others inferior. Women and nature have frequently been placed in the weaker position within these systems. Ecofeminism therefore questions the idea that humans have complete control over the natural world. It also questions social structures that restrict women's freedom and independence. Instead, it supports equality, care, cooperation, and sustainable relationships between human beings and the environment.

In India, ecofeminist ideas are closely connected with women's experiences of forests, land, water, agriculture, and other natural resources. Vandana Shiva has emphasized the importance of women's traditional environmental knowledge and their role in protecting biodiversity. Indian literary works often show how women's lives are closely connected with their surroundings.

Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth* presents the Himalayan environment through the experiences of Maya, a young widow. After the death of her husband, Maya moves to Ranikhet and gradually develops a strong relationship with the mountains, forests, rivers, birds, and seasons. At the same time, the novel presents problems such as commercial development, land acquisition, and environmental damage.

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Chemmeen* presents the life of a fishing community on the Kerala coast. The sea is essential to the community because it provides their livelihood. The novel also presents cultural beliefs concerning the chastity of fisherwomen and the safety of fishermen at sea. Through Karuthamma's life, the novel shows how social customs can control women's choices and personal freedom.

Although the novels belong to different regions and cultures, both connect women's lives with the natural environment. The mountains in *The Folded Earth* and the sea in *Chemmeen*

are more than backgrounds. They influence the lives, emotions, identities, and survival of the characters.

This paper therefore compares the two novels through an ecofeminist approach. It examines how women's oppression and environmental exploitation are connected and how both novels present the importance of respecting women and nature.

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. To study the representation of women and nature in *The Folded Earth* and *Chemmeen*.
2. To examine the connection between environmental problems and patriarchal control.
3. To compare the importance of the Himalayan landscape and the sea.
4. To study the ecological awareness of Maya and Karuthamma.
5. To apply ecofeminist theories to the two novels.
6. To examine the contribution of the novels to postcolonial ecofeminist literature.

Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How are women and nature connected in *The Folded Earth* and *Chemmeen*?
2. How does patriarchy affect both women and the environment?
3. What do the mountains and the sea represent in the two novels?
4. How is traditional environmental knowledge presented?
5. How do the novels support environmental responsibility and gender equality?

Theoretical Framework

This study is based mainly on the ecofeminist ideas of Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Karen J. Warren, and Val Plumwood.

Vandana Shiva emphasizes the important role of women in protecting nature. Women in rural communities often have practical knowledge about forests, plants, water, agriculture, and biodiversity. According to this approach, modern development can damage the environment while also affecting the lives of local communities.

This idea is useful for understanding the relationship between women and nature in both novels. The characters and communities depend on their natural surroundings for their physical and emotional well-being.

Maria Mies connects patriarchy and economic exploitation. She argues that women and nature can both become objects of exploitation when economic profit becomes more important than human and environmental well-being.

This idea can be applied to *The Folded Earth*, where commercial development affects the Himalayan environment. It can also be applied to *Chemmeen*, where economic pressures influence the lives of the fishing community.

Karen J. Warren explains how patriarchal thinking creates divisions such as man/woman, culture/nature, reason/emotion, and human/nature. These divisions can be used to justify domination. Her theory helps explain the restrictions placed on Maya and Karuthamma. It also helps us understand how nature is treated as something that humans can control.

Val Plumwood questions the belief that humans are separate from nature or superior to it. She emphasizes that human beings are part of ecological systems. This idea is important

in both novels because the characters cannot separate their lives from their natural surroundings. The mountains and the sea directly influence their identities, relationships, livelihoods, and survival.

Together, these theories provide a framework for studying gender, nature, power, exploitation, and ecological responsibility in the two novels.

Ecofeminism in *The Folded Earth*

Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth* is set in Ranikhet in the Himalayan region. The novel follows Maya, a young widow who tries to rebuild her life after the death of her husband, Michael. Nature plays an important role in Maya's emotional journey. The mountains, forests, rivers, birds, and changing seasons provide her with comfort. Through her relationship with the natural world, she gradually finds peace and a new understanding of life. Maya's relationship with nature can be understood through Vandana Shiva's idea of ecological consciousness. Maya does not see nature simply as something that can be used. Instead, she observes and respects the environment around her. The mountains become a symbol of strength and continuity. They help Maya understand that life contains both loss and renewal. The natural world becomes an important part of her healing process.

The novel also presents environmental problems. Commercial activities and development threaten the natural beauty and ecological balance of the Himalayan region. Land is treated as a source of economic profit, while local people face the consequences of development. This situation can be connected with Maria Mies's argument that economic systems can exploit both women and natural resources. When profit becomes the main goal, environmental protection and the needs of local communities can be ignored. The novel also presents the importance of local knowledge. People living in the region understand seasonal changes, plants, water sources, and the natural environment. Their knowledge comes from living closely with nature for many years.

Maya's simple relationship with nature can also be seen as a form of resistance. She does not completely accept the materialistic and patriarchal values around her. Her connection with the natural world gives her a sense of independence. The landscape also reflects Maya's inner experiences. The mountains contain layers of history, just as Maya carries memories of her past. Nature therefore becomes both a witness to human experience and a source of emotional strength. From an ecofeminist perspective, *The Folded Earth* shows that environmental destruction affects human life. It also suggests that people should develop a respectful and responsible relationship with nature.

Ecofeminism in *Chemmeen*

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Chemmeen* presents the life of a fishing community in Kerala. The sea is central to the community because their livelihood depends on it. The sea is not simply a geographical setting. It is closely connected with the beliefs, traditions, emotions, and survival of the people. The community respects the power of the sea and follows traditional practices connected with fishing. Karuthamma is the central female character. She loves Pareekutty, but social customs prevent her from freely choosing her own life. She is expected to follow the rules of her community and family. One important belief in the novel is that the chastity of a fisherman's wife is connected with the safety of her husband at sea. This belief places responsibility for the man's safety on the woman's behaviour. From an ecofeminist perspective, this shows how women's bodies and actions can become controlled by patriarchal traditions.

Karuthamma's situation can be understood through Karen J. Warren's ideas about patriarchal domination. She is not given complete freedom to make decisions about her own life. Her personal desires are placed below social expectations. The novel also shows the community's dependence on traditional knowledge. Fishermen understand the sea, tides, seasons, weather, and marine life through knowledge passed from one generation to another. However, economic ambition creates problems. Chembankunju becomes increasingly interested in wealth and material success. His desire for economic improvement affects family relationships and disturbs the traditional balance of the community. This can be connected with Maria Mies's idea that economic interests can lead to the exploitation of both people and nature. The tragic ending of the novel shows the serious consequences of social restrictions, personal conflict, and disrupted relationships. The sea becomes a powerful symbol of life, livelihood, danger, and moral belief. Through Karuthamma and the fishing community, *Chemmeen* shows that the lives of women and the natural environment are closely connected.

Comparative Ecofeminist Analysis

Although *The Folded Earth* and *Chemmeen* are set in different geographical and cultural environments, both novels present a strong relationship between women and nature. In *The Folded Earth*, the mountains are central to Maya's emotional and personal development. They provide her with a place to heal and understand herself. In *Chemmeen*, the sea is central to the survival of the fishing community. It provides livelihood but can also become dangerous. Thus, the mountains and the sea have different functions, but both influence the lives of the characters.

Maya and Karuthamma are women who live within strong social structures. However, their experiences are different. Maya uses her relationship with nature to rebuild her life after personal loss. Her connection with the environment gives her emotional strength. Karuthamma, on the other hand, faces strict cultural expectations. Her love and personal choices are restricted by the traditions of her community. Both characters therefore show different forms of women's struggle within patriarchal societies.

Both novels show forms of domination. In *The Folded Earth*, commercial interests threaten the Himalayan environment. Development and economic interests can damage land and natural resources. In *Chemmeen*, social and economic pressures affect both the fishing community and its relationship with the sea. The two novels therefore show that uncontrolled human desires can affect both people and nature.

Traditional knowledge is important in both novels. The people in the Himalayan region understand their local environment and its resources. Similarly, the fishing community in *Chemmeen* possesses knowledge about the sea, weather, tides, and fishing. These forms of knowledge show that people can live sustainably when they understand and respect their environment.

Maya's relationship with nature is mainly emotional and restorative. Nature helps her recover from grief and develop a stronger sense of self. Karuthamma's relationship with the sea is connected to her community, culture, livelihood, and identity. Although their experiences differ, both women are closely connected with the natural spaces in which they live.

Discussion

The comparison of the two novels reveals several important ecofeminist ideas. First, both works show that women cannot be separated from their social and ecological environments.

Their lives are influenced by the natural world as well as by social structures. Second, both novels question systems of domination. Women experience restrictions because of patriarchal traditions, while nature is affected by human greed and economic interests. Third, the novels recognize the importance of traditional ecological knowledge. The local communities understand their environments through long experience. Their knowledge offers an alternative to development models that focus mainly on profit. Fourth, the mountains and the sea are presented as living parts of the characters' worlds. They influence human emotions, relationships, livelihoods, and survival. Finally, both novels suggest that human beings should develop a more responsible relationship with nature. Environmental protection cannot be separated completely from questions of social justice and equality.

Conclusion

The Folded Earth and *Chemmeen* present important ideas about women, nature, society, and power. Although the novels are set in different parts of India, both show that women's lives are closely connected with their natural surroundings. Maya finds strength and emotional healing through her relationship with the Himalayan landscape. Karuthamma's life is deeply connected with the sea and the traditions of the fishing community. Both women, however, experience restrictions created by social and patriarchal expectations. The novels also show different forms of environmental concern. *The Folded Earth* focuses on the effects of commercial development and the exploitation of land, while *Chemmeen* highlights the dependence of a fishing community on the sea and the effects of economic and social pressures. The theories of Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Karen J. Warren, and Val Plumwood help explain these connections between gender, nature, and power. The comparative study therefore suggests that the protection of nature and the well-being of women are closely related. Both novels encourage readers to question systems of domination and to value equality, traditional knowledge, environmental responsibility, and coexistence. In this way, *The Folded Earth* and *Chemmeen* contribute to the discussion of postcolonial ecofeminism in Indian literature by showing that a healthy relationship between human beings and nature requires respect, equality, and responsibility.

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