

Psychological Insights In Anuradha Roy's The Folded Earth

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Abstract: *The present paper deals with the various psychological undercurrents present in Anuradha Roy's novel The Folded Earth. It endeavors to study the emotional bearings of the characters by exploring the relevant psychological aspects of the novel. Here attempts have been made to gauge the untold facts of Roy's novel The Folded Earth written on various social and psychological themes. The present paper attempts to discover the reality behind the state of mind of the characters, general human tendencies, compulsive behaviors, psychological blockages and their possible reasons. The study also aims to understand how far the readers may be able to connect themselves with the emotions and feelings of the characters of the novel, so that it can be a helpful catharsis to comprehend some contemporary burning problems of human lives. Effort has also been made to suggest solutions to the problems so that it can be a step towards contributing to society with an aim to lessen human struggles for emotional wellbeing.*

Keywords/phrases: *psychological undercurrents, compulsive behavior, blockages, contemporary, emotional wellbeing.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Folded Earth is a novel with strong psychological undercurrents and depicts human emotions wonderfully. Through this novel one can find an opportunity to introspect deeply. Many aspects are talked about in this novel like- feminism, patriarchy, bad politics, societal pressure, betrayal, inequality and racism. Anuradha Roy detests inequality and racism. In an interview she says- "Inequality in India has never been more catastrophic" ("Inequality....", 2018). Roy portrays each character subtly through which it can be understood how human emotions work behind their actions. The novel showcases varied psychological aspects of life - loneliness, want of freedom, fear of loss, reclusion, betrayal, self-esteem, defense mechanism, depression, anxiety, insecurity, catharsis, hysteria and so on. Some of them are environmental, some are cosmic and some are inbuilt but, they are totally out of their control of the characters.

The folded earth is a story of Maya who is disowned and disinherited by her father on marrying a Christian man. Her father had so many dreams about her because she is the only child of her parents. Maya is the female protagonist, narrator of the novel. Having no other child, her parents are very conscious about her future. Her father is a dominant and conservative man who wants her to act the way he wants. He tries to make Maya a responsible individual, so she may be able to take care of his legacy as he does not have any son. He wants Maya to marry such a man who could come to their home after marriage and

take care of his work. He takes her to his office to make her understand business deals and manners. He doesn't pay attention to Maya's fantasies, desires and interests. Several times in the novel, it happens that Maya unwillingly goes with her father, leaving her favorite game and activities. Her father pressurizes her indirectly. Although he thinks that he is doing well to her but Maya seems reluctant. Consequently, later in her life, she finally does what she wants to do. She marries a Christian man, Micheal, against her father's will. Although she does not do all this purposely but perhaps freedom was a deep desire in her from childhood. Later her husband dies in a mountaineering expedition. Then a guide, named Veer, comes into her life and a love affair sprouts between them, but finally he also goes away, leaving her alone. Some other characters are also there who play a very significant role in the novel like- Maya's neighbor Ama, Ama's elder son Puran, her granddaughter Charu, Charu's beloved Kundan, Veer's Uncle Diwan Sahib and some politicians. When the actions of these characters are deeply studied from the point of view of psychology, then various psychological aspects come to light.

LONELINESS

Besevegis et.al. describe loneliness- "Loneliness is a common, universal human experience. When lonely, people experience subjective distress, because they perceive themselves as being alone, isolated, cut off, and they evaluate their interpersonal and/or social relationships as qualitatively and/or quantitatively deficient.(2010, p. 653). Loneliness in the modern times has become a burning issue of human lives. It voids humans completely from inside if not cured in time. Loneliness is a condition in which one feels isolated, unaffected with the fact of whether one is alone or with crowd. It is a mental state of a person and does not have to do anything with outer situation. One can feel lonely when one is isolated and even when, with others. Isolation and loneliness, though appear to be similar, are different.. Barran explains it very well:

...loneliness is different to social isolation. Social isolation is not necessarily a negative experience. Loneliness is. Social isolation is a relatively objective measure of the number of relationships someone has. Loneliness is located in the individual and how they feel. It explains why loneliness can be experienced within a crowd and that being alone does not necessarily mean being lonely (2020, p. 10).

For a lonely person, a kind of dependency on others, emptiness inside and fear of losing loved ones or caring ones, take place. It becomes very intricate to come out of this feeling of loneliness. Winch also says, "Unfortunately emerging from loneliness is far more challenging than we realize Loneliness distorts our perceptions, ... makes us view our existing relationship more negatively" (Oct, 2015).

Loneliness must be talked here as it is the alchemy of this novel. Most of the characters are submerged in loneliness which reminds readers of their own deep unseen wounds, if any. Studies show: " Feeling alone is, therefore, a growing phenomenon in modern and post-modern society, in which demographic change and the urbanization of rural areas also play a role. It is likely to become more widespread in the near future, and requires an urgent solution" (Azeredo & Maria, 2016, p. 315). Loneliness seems to affect older people more. Courtin and Knapp studied- "Out of the 32 papers on depression, 25 looked at its association with loneliness...loneliness is an independent risk factor for depression...." (2017, p.210).

Maya suffers from loneliness the most in this novel. Her heart laments on separation from her family as she gets disowned and disinherited by her father. She is even forbidden to meet her mother. Consequently she meets her secretly. These lines of Maya affirms it- "...I used to go with mother in Hyderabad. She and I would meet there, unknown to my father, after I left home" (Roy 65). Maya feels lonely because she is already separated from her family completely. This pain of loneliness starts making her guilty of her deeds. Repenting on her decision, she says- "I could have chosen differently. I could have found a better-paid job elsewhere. I could have returned to my own family....All I had to do was to tell him that I had been wrong and misguided, and I beg him to trust me again" (20). These lines of Maya show that loneliness was piercing her heart, and somewhere thence she was lamenting on her decision. Generally it happens that when people are in grief, they start repenting on their own actions because of losing confidence as calamity ends their self-reliance. Later in the story, when Maya's husband dies in a mountaineering expedition, Maya breaks into pieces. It increases her loneliness very much. These words explain her loneliness: "I was alone. I had no contact with friends: I had lost them over the years of being wrapped up in Michael. I had in fact no family although my parents did live in the same city" (11). Further again some lines of Maya confirm her loneliness- "I felt utterly, absolutely alone. Wrapping my arms around my knees, I held myself as body shook with sobs" (246). When Maya meets her new beloved, Veer, then also she realizes that she needed someone to talk to. She comments, "Until Veer arrived, I had found no-one in town to spend time with" (182). Maya's loneliness is also conveyed metaphorically, "In winter the barbet calls all day from its lonely perch high in a leafless tree. Its plaintive, monotonous cry is the distillation of solitude and sadness" (235). Being a woman, probably enhances her loneliness as studies have suggested that women feel more lonely than men. "Loneliness was more frequent in women, in participants without a partnership, without children and in those living alone. Socioeconomic status declined with increasing loneliness" (Beutel et. al, 2017, p. 7).

Diwan Sahib, the other significant character of this novel, also experiences loneliness but in a different way. Although no direct reference to Diwan Sahib's loneliness is given, but there is a clue in Maya's lines "Diwan Sahib had thrust away memories of past grandeur and lived a solitary life as the local eccentric" (197). Diwan's loneliness can also be sensed from these lines of Maya, "Diwan Sahib was fiercely private knowing that he now wanted to be alone. He was not the kind of person who could share his life with anyone else he disliked constant company" (30).

Maya's father is also an insecure man. He doesn't want to lose Maya at any cost. May be he is also afraid of loneliness in his heart unknowingly. This can be evident by an incident when Maya herself tells about her father's insecurity- "Once when my mother protested, 'She will be married, she won't be your daughter anymore, she'll have her own life and she may want other things,' my father snapped at her, 'She will live here and run the business, and I'll arrange a husband for her who lives with us'" (63). Maya describes her father's fear of being left behind in loneliness, "I can see now that my father sensed even then that he was losing me, and everything he did was an attempt somehow to corral me, to reclaim our lost days of easy happiness when I was willing disciple and he my unquestioned master" (63).

Maya's mother also couldn't remain untouched with loneliness. Her feeling of loneliness is told by Maya at one place, "For much of her later life, even before I left home, my mother had stopped sharing father's bed. She seldom allowed anyone else into her own bedroom, cleaning it herself and guarding it as an inviolable refuge...." (190). It's really a pitiful situation of an old lady. The poor lady is forbidden to meet her only child. Maya's

lines portray her mother's loneliness, "the only thing she dreamed of now, she had said in the letter's three dipping lines, was a glimpse of me, and after that, death" (197). It is indeed very hard for a mother to live without her child forever. So these are the drastic consequences of loneliness. Callanan illustrates, "Loneliness is most frequently associated with a sense of the loss of contact with other people, or with personal feelings of isolation, and is often counted among the factors which bring about depression" (1997).

In addition, Veer, Maya's beloved, also feels lonely in his life. Although it is difficult to believe because he seems as a betrayer in the novel but it is not the whole truth. Sometimes, people who hurt others, are themselves hurt. Bad circumstances are responsible for bad tendencies in human beings. "When children experience loneliness along with abuse, neglect, and abandonment, the strength of isolation can effect children the same as soldiers experiencing Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Apsche & DiMeo, 2010)" (Quoted in Blossom, 2013, p. 28). One can sense Veer's loneliness through Maya's words: "...he was sent from the house of one relative to another as a child, parceled out between them on school holidays How, by magic, he would know where he belonged and would have a real home....How Veer had hungered for affection and never found any....How I had yearned to comfort Veer in his loneliness then" (256).

FEAR OF LOSS

Fear of loss has been seen at many places in the novel. In most of the cases, characters are afraid of losing their loved ones like- Maya is afraid of losing her husband, Micheal. Maya's fear is evident in these words: "I felt a cloud of dread grow and darken as the day for his departure neared...His fingers went down my spine and up my neck while an iron ball of fear grew heavier inside me" (8). Maya's father is also afraid of losing Maya, "I can see now that my father sensed even then that he was losing me, and everything he did was an attempt somehow to corral me, to reclaim our lost days of easy happiness when I was a winning disciple and he my unquestioned master" (p.63). Maya's mother is also not spared of it. She is afraid of losing her husband. When Maya's father disinherits Maya for marrying a Christian, he forbids Maya's mother from visiting her. So Maya's mother starts meeting Maya secretly. At one more place Maya narrates, "My mother was too intimidated by him to do more than steal out for occasional trysts with me at a temple. She had no way of getting news of me unless I contacted her" (11). Charu (a neighbor of Maya) is also afraid of losing her beloved Kundan. When Kundan had left Ranikhet for his job in other city, then he used to write love letters to Charu but once it happens that love was a little less visible in the letter written by Kundan. Kundan was very happy staying in the smart city and he hardly misses Ranikhet where his beloved Charu lives. Through the lines narrated by Maya, it can be understood better: "Kundan sounded different, as if he were turning into a pragmatic, city-smart young man. It was more than a half year since they had last met. As I read the letter, I saw Charu's face withdrawing into the expressionless immobility in which she took refuge when she was upset...Her head hung low and she stumbled on a rug, not looking where she was going" (196). Charu gets afraid of losing Kundan. Charu's grandmother 'Ama' also gets very upset when Charu gets lost. This narration of Maya reveals Ama's fear of losing Charu: "On the evening of 11 October, after we came back from the hospital, I had only just shut my door when Ama came out and shouted: "Is Charu over there?"...When bad things start happening, they never stop." She went into her rooms in confused agitation" (207). Maya also does not want to lose Veer. She feels utter insecurity because she has already lost her husband Micheal earlier. The few lines she utters, expresses her fear of losing Veer: "I was stabbed by a sudden, fierce need to bury my face in his shirt although it hung grimy with

dirt. But I remembered the way he had driven away without a look at me” (143). Maya’s impossibility of living without Veer gets clearly depicted when she refers to Veer, “Sometimes it worried me that he could disappear for weeks, when no-one had any way of telling, except in the most general sense, where he was” (149).

Fear of loss of a dear one may be a factor for one’s insecurity. Horne shares her findings: “In adulthood, losing a trusted partner is devastating. A series of losses in childhood, into adolescence, and over into adulthood can cause a giant spike of fear to grow as you age, and can lead to the outright terror of losing someone you love.” Of course Maya loses her husband in her adulthood as he dies in a mountaineering expedition. The idea of Horne fits in perfectly with Maya’s situation. Maya also loses her parents due to her disinheritance in her adulthood. She is left all alone at such a low age.

When Horne talks about ‘series of losses in childhood’ in the above lines, then it fits in the context of Veer. Veer’s search for security brings him to frustration. As a child Veer lives in several homes and hopes that suddenly someone would come and announce that he or she is his parent. But it does not happen. We can know this situation of Veer from the words of Maya:

...he was sent from the house of one relative to another as a child, parceled out between them on school holidays. How none of them ever had time for him. How he grew attached to one or two of them, and hoped they would announce all of a sudden that they were his parents. How, by magic, he would know where he belonged and would have a real home....How Veer had hungered for affection and never found any....How I had yearned to comfort Veer in his loneliness then (256).

Saul McLeod also explains: “Failing to acquire the virtue of hope will lead to the development of fear. This infant will carry the basic sense of mistrust with them to other relationships. It may result in anxiety, heightened insecurities, and an over feeling of mistrust in the world around them” (2018).

LONGING FOR FREEDOM

Freedom is a primary need of any creature. When one finds one’s freedom compromising at any level, one takes action. It happens knowingly or unknowingly. An in-depth analysis would reveal that Maya is suffering from a pitiful situation as she is suffering with many problems like loneliness, anxiety, hysteria, depression, repentance, insecurity etc, so it becomes a matter of concern. Sartre says, “Jean Paul Sartre writes on freedom, ‘no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free’ ” (Quoted in Suarez, 91). Subconscious longing of freedom is another important psychological aspect to study. Maya appears to carry subconscious feeling of being pressurized by her father. In her childhood her father never asked her about her interests and desires and kept on imposing his own wishes onto her. She says, “Twice, when I was still a pig-tailed teenager, he made me sit behind his big shining work desk ... summon a wretched employee, and inform the man that he was being sacked. If I knew something of this kind was in the offing and tried to hide from him, he forced me out of the house and into his car” (63).

Maybe Maya did not want to become a businesswoman but because of her father’s dominant nature she kept quiet all along. Maya’s psychological well-being was not sound that is why she remained an insecure personality and suffered its consequences. . Alfred Adler, an acclaimed psychologist, has casts light on this: “The unreasonable demands made on a child by a foolish environment are comparable to actual difficulties in the environment” (1927,

p.31). Maya was not permitted to become what she wanted to be and her father was trying what he could make her into. Osho says, “...The way children are brought up is the cause of this whole misery. No child is accepted as he is. He is rewarded if he follows the directions of the parents, the teachers, the elders. Those directions may go against his nature, because those directives were not made by him or for him....” (Loneliness is...., 2020). This could be an innate reason that she marries a Christian man. When people feel threatened with their freedom, then they react against the action or the person who creates this threat or what is called in psychology, show ‘reactance’. May be reactance had taken place in her heart therefore she did so. It occurs when one feels that his options or social liberty is taken away. Steindl et. al. define Reactance as “an unpleasant motivational arousal that emerges when people experience a threat to or loss of their free behaviors. It serves as a motivator to restore one’s freedom” (2015, p. 205). Reactance theory of Brehm and Brehm (1981), is proven helpful to understand desire and importance of freedom and can be understood through the following lines:

Within the field of social psychology the concept of freedom is mostly looked at in the context of the individual’s control and choice. Reactance theory (Brehm and Brehm, 1981) in particular emphasizes the importance of individual freedom and behavioral choices and defines conditions under which people react against attempts to control their behavior and eliminate their freedom of choice... Thus, reactance theory proposes that when we believe to be free to choose a course of action, we experience reactance if that freedom is eliminated or threatened. (Kayser et.al. 2016, p. 2).

So it can be Maya’s reactance as when she feels threat to her freedom subconsciously, she takes action. As a result, later in her life she marries a Christian man and her father has to bear the brunt of losing her daughter. As Vansteenkiste, Ryan and Soenens explain, “Oppositional defiance is assumed to be an unskillful way of expressing resistance against authorities (Parkin and Kuczynski 2012). Although defiance may be undertaken to restore threatened psychological needs and to regain a sense of independence and freedom...” (2020, p. 11). Probably Maya wants to claim her freedom back and to tell it to everyone that she is free in her actions. Usually people themselves are unknown of the turmoil of their subconscious mind. Studies show that nothing can be done until it is done in our subconscious mind. Tracy comments, “The function of your subconscious mind is to *store and retrieve data*. Its job is to ensure that you respond exactly the way you are programmed. Your subconscious mind makes everything you say and do fit a pattern consistent with your self-concept, your ‘master program’ ” (Subconscious mind power...). So perhaps it was Maya’s chronic will to be free. It was a restoration of freedom by Maya as Steindl et.al. describe:

In general, people are convinced that they possess certain freedoms to engage in so-called free behaviors. Yet there are times when they cannot, or at least feel that they cannot, do so. Being persuaded to buy a specific product in the grocery store ... and being instructed to perform work for the boss are all examples of threats to the freedom to act as desired, and this is where reactance comes into play. (2015, p. 205).

SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem is a vital component of psychology. One takes it as a measure to evaluate oneself. Most of the people want to increase their worth so that they can be accepted by the society. It happens either due to social pressure or sometime due to people’s own low confidence. People are afraid of doing anything against society due to fear of being rejected

so they choose to become what other people encourage. Sometimes people don't realize their actual worth and importance and worsen their case in pressure of other people. Appreciation by others feeds these peoples' ego. This ego is generally called self-esteem. Such people think that they are more worthy. They create a very good self-image in their own minds and feel good about self-conception. Deepu Abraham tells the importance of self-esteem:

Self-esteem is an extremely popular construct within psychology, and has been related to virtually every other psychological concept or domain, including personality (e.g., shyness), behavioral (e.g., task performance), cognitive (e.g., attribution bias), and clinical concepts (e.g., anxiety and depression). Environment of acceptance and success raises self-esteem, while environment of failures lower it (2010, p.9).

So the quantity of self-esteem depends on acceptance and rejections by others. Maya's father feels low when Maya rejects his command and marries Michael. His self-esteem gets hurt very much. On the other hand he thinks that people will take him as a weak man who failed to control his daughter. Maya's father is scared of criticism of society thus he feels low. In an act of making up for the loss of self-esteem, he shows to the society and his community that he is against inter-religion marriages and therefore he has disowned and disinherited her only child Maya.

Maya also gets too much affected by such decision of her father. She also becomes a victim of low self-esteem. That's why she gets afflicted to depression, withdrawal, repentance, low self-confidence and low self-esteem as Deepu Abraham says- "Low self-esteem has many different manifestations; withdrawal, depression and lack of self-confidence are all symptoms of low self-esteem" (2010, p.11). Researches have shown that loneliness also hurts on self-esteem. Al Khatib (2012) found that "loneliness is a product of lowered self efficacy and self esteem among college student" (Quoted in Tripathi and Asthana, 2015, p.103).

DOMINANCE

One more important theme which is noticeable in the novel is dominance. It twists characters' lives especially Maya's. Maya's father is a dominant man who dominates Maya mostly for everything. Her father's dominance is evident when she utters, "From the day my father had found out about Micheal, he had become as watchful as an animal waiting to pounce...He said nothing, but no longer allowed me to leave the house, not even to go to college...He put a stop to friends, outings, telephone calls" (13). He wants her to acquire the ways in her life which he wants. He is not interested to know about her interests and hobbies and finally when Maya marries Micheal, against his command, he exiles her. Maya's mother is also not spared from his dominance. Through Maya's narration it can be inferred: "...My father snapped at her" (63). She is forbidden to meet her own daughter after her disinheritance which lastly brings her to death. So dominance can be proven disastrous as it can create emotional knots in human beings.

Dominance is a feeling of sovereignty for the person who dominates as they relish the feeling of autonomy. In the state of dominance people feel mirthful as if they have achieved control over everyone. They unknowingly create hurt and sometimes unsolvable psychological problems. Denise Dellarosa Cummins's theory is helpful to understand dominance better. She elucidates:

The core tenet of the theory is that social cognition (including the deontic advantage) was shaped by the continual need to survive within dominance (or status) hierarchies, the social organization that is ubiquitous in the societies of humans and nonhuman animals throughout evolutionary time. High-status individuals are essentially authorities in this type of social

organization, monitoring and controlling the behavior of subordinates in order to maintain priority of access to competitive resources (such as food and mating opportunities).

But studies show that people do not acquire dominance with interest rather they acquire it due to some necessities. Dominance becomes their need to survive. Sometimes it is a fake attitude which overwhelms people and sometimes a dominant person bears even more pain than that of dominated ones. According to Cummins, there are five indicators of dominance- “Dominance theory posits five main cognitive functions that were shaped by the exigencies of living within status hierarchies: rank discrimination, acquiring social norms, monitoring compliance with social norms, monitoring reciprocity, and flouting social norms through deception” (2018, p.2). This is why people like to dominate as it gives them a power to monitor others. These five cognitive functions can be seen in Maya’s father’s dominance too. He makes rank discrimination. Once he says- “That man you sacked was serving no purpose any more. His salary was a waste of our money. It had to be done” (64). May be he enjoys ruling others. The second cognitive function of dominance which Cummins talks about is acquiring social norms. Probably he wants to meet the norms of his community therefore he disinherits his daughter on doing inter-religion marriage. Maya says, “... and my father was contemptuous of all Christians” (p.123). The dominance of Maya’s father can also be explained through Cummins’ concepts of “monitoring compliance with social norms”, “monitoring reciprocity” and “flouting social norms through deception”. The manifestation of flouting social norms may be elucidated through her father’s paradoxical nature: “... and my father was contemptuous of all Christians- even though he was happy enough to send me to St George’s Grammar school for girls on the first rung of his grand plan to turn me into an industrial magnate. I had stopped early in life trying to make sense of my father’s paradoxes, as had my mother” (123). Maya’s father’s dominance was not confined to Maya and her mother only. He was dominant for all, as Maya comments, “He was the natural born Lord of all he surveyed, he needed to explain nothing. He ruled over factories and fields and two younger brothers. He spoke little and to the point... By the time I grew up, I was as afraid of him as his brothers were” (124).

2. CONCLUSION

All psychological aspects discussed, are interlinked and do not act in isolation. In the novel they influence the characters in unison. One can notice that they work together and have played significant role in shaping the personalities of the characters and their resulting social relationships. Moreover, Anuradha Roy’s novel *The Folded Earth* may be understood to suggest that in lives of human beings so many things remain unrealized on the superficial level. The book makes them realize about their suppressed emotions, unsolved issues, unrealized needs and many hidden realities of human life. Finally one may realize the point that problems cannot be solved until their real causes (perceptible or latent) and solutions are derived at.

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