

**THE JOY OF BONDING WITH THE WILD IN ANURADHA ROY'S *THE FOLDED EARTH* .**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The Folded Earth* is about a young widow Maya, who abandons her native soil to live in Ranikhet, a village in the foothills of the Himalayas. This tiny town, she believes, would help her combat her personal tragedy and to live in peaceful co-existence with nature. The present paper tries to analyse the joy of bonding with the wild in Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth*.

**Key Words:** Bonding, wild, combat, personal tragedy, glimpse, selfless and sympathetic.

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*The Folded Earth* is about a young widow Maya, who abandons her native soil to live in Ranikhet, a village in the foothills of the Himalayas. This tiny town, she believes, would help her combat her personal tragedy and to live in peaceful co-existence with nature. Her aged landlord Diwan Sahib and the family of Ama, residing in a cottage nearby with her granddaughter Charu and her son Puran are the ones who add colour and hue to her faded life. The setting of the novel lends a refreshing glimpse into the beauty and glory of nature, with a freshness and fragrance that is breath-taking. Anuradha Roy has presented a colourful canvas of nature infusing life and breath into it as much as she infuses life into the characters who live in harmony with it. Though Charu and Maya too are impressive enough in their love for the wild, it is Puran, who stands out as a selfless and sympathetic superstar of the wild.

Puran who lives with his mother Ama and niece Charu is better known as a half wit. He is called 'Sanki Puran' because "he did not seem to have all his wits about him". The author delineates Puran as blessed with innate goodness and generosity which the world around could little sense. His physical appearance reveals nothing of his inner beauty. He is shabbily dressed in a khaki army uniform "never taking it off save a bathe a few times when the summer grew too hot "(57) . He enjoys his every day chores of herding his cattles in the lush green slopes of the hills and could

connect with the wild around with ease and empathy. Going by worldly standards, he is a despicable dull head and is scorned at by all, especially Mr. Chauhan, the town administrator who professes to keep the town and its people clean and tidy.

Puran's love for his fellow creatures is selfless and heart-warming. He communicates with birds and animals receiving a fond reciprocation. His love for the voiceless creatures is unconditional and pure. He stands as a sharp contrast to the modern man whose senses are benumbed and bereft of any emotions not even for his fellow humans. His retreat into the wild and staying in nature's midst makes him oblivious to the concerns of the material world. His disposition and kindness to the animals is never understood by a man like Mr. Chauhan. "I have seen this mad man sitting on Mall Road in that dirty uniform, feeding stray dogs... "(58) and warns that he " will tackle this with immediate effect " (58). People harass him and call him crazy and though Puran is as " defenseless as a child " (58), he could "talk to animals... gave dead birds and bats tender burials and allowed monkey to pick lice off his head " (58).

Anuradha Roy adds an aura of charm and grace to Puran by showing him as the 'good samaritan ' to the co-habitats of the wild. The human world baffled him and his comfort zone is not where there are people around, but animals with whom he shared a special bond. As stated by Thoreau (1980:116) in the wild "there is the strength, the marrow of nature". He immersed himself most often in the green canopy of the forest herding his cattle and being their guardian angel. Each day in the forest slopes is an enterprise to Puran. One such morning, he comes back holding an animal in his arms. It is a young deer which looks delicate and beautiful with its long eyelashes and big moist nose. As Puran sets it down for his family to see, the fawn refuses to let anyone touch or come closer to it. Puran delights at the sight of the young one and " knelt next to it, and groaned and cooed and slapped the sides of his thighs " (70).

Puran's unique ability to befriend animals is obvious by the way the young deer he rescues responds to his touch. When Puran cooed, " it turned its head in his direction, took a step towards him and even allowed him to touch it "(70) . His infinite tenderness is seen as he makes the young deer, a soft cushioned bed with piled pine needles and dry grass. He names it Rani and carries it like a baby whenever he goes to the forest and feeds the animal with milk and " muttered to it day and night "(70). The

young deer would listen to his fond entreaties " with the distant patience of a diva before an acolyte "(70) . The clerk, his neighbour playfully mocks at him saying " Puran has a lover at last, a princess no less and she's playing as hard to get as any pretty woman... Sanki, shall we arrange a wedding? " .

The fun poked at his expense leaves Puran untouched. His boundless love for the harmless and helpless animals can never be understood by those around who consider him insane and crazy. Neither praise nor blame could affect his sweet disposition. He stands a sharp contrast to the modern man who has no time to stand and stare at the beauty of the wild and whose mind is preoccupied with earning material gains. Neither the beauty of the wild nor the vibrancy of its creatures hold him in wonder. He stays blinded to the infinite bliss that nature could offer. To quote Fromm (1996:32) "Man's comfortable life amidst the convenience of technology has caused him to suffer a spiritual death".

The 'good samaritan ' instincts in Puran is a rare and admirable quality. His ability to communicate with animals and the reciprocation from them in turn is a pleasure to witness. He is able to build trust and connect with the non-humans quite effortlessly. Diwan Sahib's comment is fitting and appropriate in this regard. " It was extremely rare, though not unknown, for wild animals to trust human beings... why should they, when we have destroyed their world? Puran's affinity to animals was a lost treasure. Puran was the sanest of all, because animals knew whom to trust. They were imbeciles themselves who called Puran half witted " (74) . It is true indeed that Puran, judging by the world's standards is looked down upon as crazy, while, he is better at sanity check than the rest of the world. He stays blissful and content the way he is, far from the madding crowd, unmindful and oblivious to the material comforts and joy, the modern man is frantically after.

At another occasion, when his cow had fallen in a deep gully, Puran takes turn with Charu to sit by it, stroking the helpless animal and applying his own concoction of herbs to its wounds and muttering and rambling something into its ears. Whenever the poor cow felt Puran's presence close by, its eyes "appeared to flicker with a suggestion of life, its pain seemed briefly soothed "(100). Puran towers tall and lovable in his tender and warm gesture towards animals. His empathy and the resultant sympathy towards them is hard to find among people of today whose

professed sanity has only stripped them of their natural goodness and made them apathetic. Living amidst the din and the bustle of crowded towns and cities in huge concrete jungles, modern man seems bereft of finer sensibilities and emotions.

Puran's richness of love is also evident when he feeds much of his own food to the animals he befriends and thus goes hungry most often. Whenever Puran gets his free quota of tea and bread from the local tea stall, a ring of dogs would surround him and Puran though being hungry himself, with no hesitancy would drop them scraps around and " the stray dogs lolled at his feet, contented after their snacks "(142). When there are forest fires, Puran's care and love stands out as he becomes adventurous and daring . "One year Puran had run into the flames in the middle of the night and come back with a singed fox cub; another year he had rescued a baby monkey from the burning forest "(142). Puran is indeed blessed with the beauty of the soul, however shabby and dishevelled he may look from without.

The intensity of Puran's love for the baby deer that he rescued from the forest is seen as he finds the deer missing one day. Under his special care, the fawn had grown steadily and he had tended it as his own child. Puran goes frantic over the missing deer and acts like one possessed. The prospect of dangers from the leopards, jackals and foxes sends a shiver down his spine and he calls out to her aloud. Charu assists him in his search but all in vain. The forest guard informs them that the deer had been taken away to the police station. When he is admonished " You crazy fool, Puran, don't you know it's illegal to keep those deer at home? What were you thinking? It's not a pet dog or a goat, it's a deer.... it's going to Nainital Zoo "(163), Puran acts in a flash. With Charu, he makes a lightening plunge into the wild, crossing boulders and bushes and barges into the station remaining deaf to the yelling of the Chowkidar. Puran stands devastated at the sight of the deer behind the bars pacing restlessly, sliding on the polished floor and knocking its head on the walls. Having no knowledge of the rules and laws of the world and unconcerned of any, he is grief-stricken at the plight of his deer in distress. Puran " held the bars and rocked back and forth. Something between a moan and a sob burst from him, then turned into rhythmic keening sound "(164).

Charu's pleading with the Chowkidar is of no avail and knowing that her words would not count with the people, she rushes out to get the help of Diwan Sahib.

When finally Diwan Sahib comes, the deer is nowhere to be seen and instead Puran is seen shut behind the bars. It is a distressing sight to see Puran huddling in a corner whimpering and groaning, scratching his head and slapping his thighs in despair. Sahib tries his best to explain things to the constable.

"Puran was a little different from others. He could not talk to people, but he could talk to the animals. Animals trusted him. Foxes came to him if he called them. Injured birds arrived on his doorsteps to be cured. Dogs with broken legs found their way to his cowshed. It was necessary that he be treated differently because he was incapable of understanding such things as wildlife laws.... Puran was not raising the deer with a view to eating it. He had rescued it from the forest. If he had not rescued it, the lost deer would have been devoured by other animals.... Puran is a special case." (170). To the constable, law is the only language she could understand and sentiments can have no relevance in her line of duty. She replies in a matter-of-factly tone, "The law is the law. I have work to do. It is illegal for people to keep wild animals at home whether as pets or as food. He is no different from anyone else in the eyes of law" (171).

Puran comes home after three days, a helpless and beaten man, having lost the love of his life for no conceivable reason. He seems lost in grief and confines himself to his ramshackle shed forgoing his meals. The deer which has been sent to the Nainital Zoo, also mopes and pines in its cage at her Zoo and refuses food and water. It stood immobile in a corner of her cage despite the vet's effort to coax it. The vet doctor finally hopes that if Puran be brought to see the deer, it might survive. "The deer might eat if he feeds it... that's the only hope" (172). But Chauhan, the town administrator, wielding stern control as always refuses permission and as a result, "on the thirteenth day, the deer died of malnutrition, dehydration and grief" (172).

Thereafter, Puran isolates himself taking refuge in the cowshed and despite his mother's knocks, entreaties and curses, refuses to come out or speak to anybody.

Roy's delineation of Puran sends potent message to the readers. He stands a glaring contrast to the other characters who, despite living in nature's midst are unable to connect to the non-human world. Maya and Charu also display their finer sensibilities but they nevertheless, pale in comparison with Puran's incredible intimacy with his fellow beings. His character is noble transcending petty concerns

that infect the modern world. His innocuous and protective nature is hard and rare to find in a world ridden with crime and violence. Roy's rich texture of nature and the peaceful locale of Ranikhet is a sad reminder of what modern man is missing out. Puran's inner peace and joy in spreading love and connecting with the wild is his veritable wealth, which none can snatch away from him. Interestingly, his love receives warm reciprocal and therein lies his bliss and contentment. Puran truly enjoys bonding with the wild.

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