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Nature, Identity, and Artistic Freedom in Anuradha Roy's "All the Lives We Never Lived"

*¹ M Pavithra

*¹ Assistant Professor, Department of English Literature, Cheran College for Women, Tirupur, Bharathiar University, Tamil Nadu, India.

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Abstract

Anuradha Roy's "*All the Lives We Never Lived*" intricately weaves together themes of landscape, art, and personal freedom. The novel captures how identity and belonging are shaped by nature and artistic pursuit. This paper explores how Roy employs natural landscapes not only as a physical setting but also as a mirror of emotional states. Drawing comparisons with Arundhati Roy's "*The God of Small Things*", Kiran Desai's "*The Inheritance of Loss*", and E.M. Forster's "*A Passage to India*", Amitav Ghosh's "*The Hungry Tide*" the study analyzes how colonial histories, personal quests, and ecological sensibilities converge to create a tapestry of human and environmental interdependence.

*Corresponding Author

M Pavithra

Assistant Professor, Department of
English Literature, Cheran College for
Women, Tirupur, Bharathiar University,
Tamil Nadu, India.

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Introduction

Anuradha Roy's novel "*All the Lives we never lived*" was published in the year 2018 by Hachette India, among the best known Indian Writer of India. The novel stands as one of the most lyrical explorations of landscape and identity in contemporary Indian fiction. Anuradha Roy was born on 1967 at Calcutta, West Bengal. She wrote five novels and her Fourth novel *All the Lives We Never Lived* won the Tata Book of the Year Award for Fiction (2018), Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction (2018), and the International Dublin Literary Award 2020. In December 2022, it won India's most prestigious literary prize, the Sahitya Akademi Award, specified by India's literary academy to a work written in any genre in English. The Protagonist of the Story is Myshkin Rozario, an elderly man narrated his childhood trauma as he attempt to sketch his mother's abrupt disappearance when he was a child. Anuradha Roy's other well-known novels are *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2008), *The Folded Earth* (2011), *Sleeping on Jupiter* (2015) and the *Earth Spinner* (2021). All the characters are portrayed in these novels as the quest of freedom, culture, family, fear and Identity. Roy, an Award winning author and potter, often

merges themes of freedom, displacement and belonging. This Paper explores the depiction of landscape intertwined characters with art in Anuradha Roy's "*All the Lives we Never Lived*" how the natural phenomena connected the characters with physical and emotional life. This paper also suggests that people are emotionally attached with the native place where they are born. So they are adopted the mannerism what they learned from their childhood, it gives the comfort zone for their whole life. Each character in this novel sketched out to perfection from the main protagonist Gayatri. Myshkin Rozario was an abandoned by his mother Gayatri and he spends his whole life as waiting for her return and Myshkin's point of view this story was heart wrenching. But his mother's point of view, her character was portrayed as in quest of her Identity and art. Myshkin's father Nak Chand who gives attention in Myshkin's Half part of the life and remaining life his father abandoned him and went to jail for against the British Role. Myshkin's Grandfather was the sole pillar of dependability for the child in this extremely volatile household.

Set against the backdrop of colonial India, the novel delves into the life of Myshkin Rozario and his mother Gayatri,

whose search for freedom through art reflects a broader longing for liberation from both personal and political confines. Roy's narrative intertwines art, memory, and environment, making nature not just a backdrop but a living character within the story.

As Myshkin recalls, "In my childhood, I was known as the boy whose mother had run off with an Englishman. The man was in fact German, but in small-town India in those days, all white foreigners were thought of as British" (Roy 1). This statement opens up a discourse on colonial identity and cultural misperception, highlighting the intersection between personal trauma and collective history. Through Myskin's nostalgic narration, Roy transforms memory into a living dialogue between history and environment.

Art, Nature, and Identity

Myshkin was a Superintendent of Horticulture a mere municipal department that watered the parks and planted bougainvillea. The whole district of Mundazir is need Horti cultural division involved ecology, city planning, botany, water management. His Horti cultural work made Tea gardens in Assam and orchards in Himachal and consultant at a butterfly park, advisor at a national park. The protagonist's connection to the natural world becomes his refuge and his inheritance, as he declares, "Where other people have fixed deposits and money and houses to bequeath their descendants, I point to avenues of trees and say, 'I am leaving you those'" (Roy 12). All the memories he carried through his writings because of the past pitiful events remain painfully vivid. Images are passed through him like flashes of light enveloped by darkness reason of her mother abandoned him in childhood. Myskin's emotional inheritance is thus rooted in ecology.

The novel portrays Gayatri's yearning for artistic freedom as inseparable from her relationship with nature. Her departure from her family mirrors her inner transformation, akin to the natural cycles of renewal. Roy's depiction of landscapes resonates with Kiran Desai's "The Inheritance of Loss" (2006), where Sai and her grandfather inhabit the misty terrains of Kalimpong, symbolizing both isolation and cultural hybridity. Desai writes, "Never again could they think they knew the world, for the world had changed before their eyes" (Desai 157). Both authors use landscape as a metaphor for shifting identities in postcolonial spaces.

Similarly, Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things" (1997) employs Kerala's lush topography to reflect forbidden desires and suppressed histories. When Rahel observes, "The air was full of thoughts and things to say. But at times like these, only the small things are ever said" (Roy 214), the intimacy between environment and emotion parallels Myshkin's reflections on memory and loss. Anuradha Roy thus situates personal identity within an ecological consciousness that transcends human limitations.

Similarly, Amitav Ghosh's "The Hungry Tide" (2004) portrays the sundarbans as a living organism, emphasizing the tension between human ambition and ecological balance. Roy's vision continues this ecological lineage, presenting nature as site of identity formation.

Ecofeminism and Post-colonial Identity

Gayatri's journey embodies ecofeminist resistance against patriarchal and colonial restrictions. Her artistic awakening recalls Vandana Shiva's theory in "Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development" (1988) which links women's liberation with environmental harmony. Roy aligns with this

by making Gayatri's rebellion not only personal but planetary. The novel situates feminine creativity within natural cycles of growth and decay, echoing Anita Desai's "Fire on the Mountain" (1977) where solitude and nature restore lost selfhood. Through Myshkin's and Gayatri's dual narratives, Roy articulates a postcolonial eco – consciousness, where landscapes preserve both trauma and recovery. As Huggan and Tiffin argue in "Postcolonial Eco criticism" (2010), postcolonial narratives redefine nature as a participant in historical recovery – a vision vividly realized in Roy's narrative.

Colonial Memory and Artistic Freedom

At the age of Seventeen, Gayatri with her father went to Bali; she met German artist and musician called Walter Spies. She learned there to languages and painting, dance and classical music. The Journey to Bali would be Gayatri's last with her father. Gayatri's tutors for dance and music were dismissed as soon as her father died. Fatherless Daughter was too much of a responsibility for her brothers. Gayatri's husband had contempt for categories such as caste and religion; he maintained that all humans were born equal in the eyes of nature. The only god he followed was the Nation.

Walter Spies, the German artist in "All the Lives We Never Lived", becomes a bridge between East and West, art and anthropology. His assertion, "Tagore is enthralled... many things seem to be preserved in Bali that have been lost in India," reveals how art preserves cultural memory even as political borders fracture it. The historical context of colonial India amplifies Gayatri's quest for autonomy. Her encounter with the German Artist Walter Spies in Bali symbolizes the fusion of East and West through art. Spies' influence allows Gayatri to transcend social boundaries, redefining freedom beyond natural and gender confines. This recalls Ruth Praver Jhabvala's "Heat and Dust" (1975) where western fascination with India contrasts with the inner awakening of Indian Women.

Similarly, Gayatri's artistic evolution under his influence evokes Forster's "A Passage to India" (1924), where the Marabar Caves symbolize the mysterious encounter between east and west. Forster writes, "India—a hundred Indias—whispered outside beneath the indifferent moon" (Forster 295), reminding readers that identity in colonial contexts is fluid and multilayered.

Conclusion

Through the intertwining of landscape, art, and emotion, Anuradha Roy creates a narrative that celebrates both individuality and interdependence. Her protagonist Myshkin finds solace in nurturing nature, while his mother Gayatri discovers freedom in artistic expression. Roy's prose invites readers to view the natural world not merely as scenery but as a repository of memory and identity. He addicted with nature cause of he expect the love from nature instead of his mother. Myshkin Explained that all the memories come to as images, feelings, glimpses sometimes fleshed out, sometimes in outline. Time solidifies as well as dissolves. When Myshkin quotes Tagore—"I cannot remember my mother, but when in the early autumn morning the fragrance of the shiuli floats in the air..." (Roy, 16)—the boundaries between art, memory, and ecology dissolve, affirming that the lives we live and those we never live remain entwined in nature's continuum. Ultimately, All the Lives We Never Lived is an evocative testament to the indelible power of memory and the enduring shadow of alternative existences on the human heart.

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