
**WRITING FROM THE MOUNTAINS: THE ETHICS OF CARE,
ECOFEMINISM, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN
ANURADHA ROY'S CALLED BY THE HILLS**

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines Anuradha Roy's *Called by the Hills* through the interconnected perspectives of ecofeminism and the Ethics of Care, highlighting how the memoir reimagines the relationship between humans, nature, and place. Set in the fragile Himalayan landscape, the text reflects on environmental degradation, ecological responsibility, and the moral significance of caring for both human and non-human life. The study addresses the research problem of how Roy's mountain writing challenges anthropocentric attitudes and articulates an ecological ethic grounded in interdependence, compassion, and environmental stewardship. The primary objectives are to analyse the representation of the Himalayan ecosystem, explore the convergence of ecofeminist thought and the Ethics of Care in the memoir, and investigate how environmental consciousness is constructed through personal memory, everyday experiences, and place-based narratives. The research adopts ecofeminism, particularly the ideas of Val Plumwood and Vandana Shiva, alongside the Ethics of Care developed by Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings, as its theoretical framework. Employing a qualitative textual analysis, the paper closely examines selected passages from the memoir to interpret its ecological, ethical, and feminist dimensions. The study finds that *Called by the Hills* presents the mountains not merely as a physical setting but as an active ecological presence that nurtures reciprocal relationships between humans and the natural world. Roy's narrative advocates an ethic of care rooted in empathy, sustainability, and coexistence, demonstrating that environmental conservation begins with attentive, everyday

practices of care. Ultimately, the memoir contributes to contemporary environmental humanities by offering a compelling vision of ecological belonging and responsible coexistence in an era of environmental crisis.

KEYWORDS: Ecofeminism; Ethics of Care; Environmental Consciousness; Himalayan Ecology; Nature Writing; Anuradha Roy; Mountain Memoir.

INTRODUCTION

Anuradha Roy is an acclaimed contemporary Indian novelist, essayist, and editor whose works explore the intersections of identity, memory, environment, gender, caste, and socio-political change. Born in Kolkata in 1967, she studied English literature before joining the publishing industry, where she worked as an editor with Permanent Black, an independent publishing house based in India. Roy's fiction is distinguished by its lyrical prose, nuanced characterisation, and deep engagement with the ecological and cultural landscapes of the Indian subcontinent. Her major works include *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2008), *The Folded Earth* (2011), *Sleeping on Jupiter* (2015), *All the Lives We Never Lived* (2018), *The Earthspinner* (2021), and *The Human Chord* (2024). Her memoir *Called by the Hills* reflects her profound attachment to the Himalayan region, portraying mountains as spaces of ecological consciousness, emotional refuge, and ethical responsibility. Through her writings, Roy consistently advocates environmental sensitivity, human compassion, and the interconnectedness of people, place, and nature.

The novel has been praised for its vivid depiction of the Himalayan landscape: "Roy brings the mountains alive not only in their floral, incandescent glory but also in their moodiness and nonchalance" (*The New Yorker*). *Called by the Hills* is Anuradha Roy's memoir, reflecting her enduring relationship with the Himalayan landscape and her journey of living among the mountains. Blending autobiography, travel writing, and nature writing, the memoir explores the ecological richness of the Kumaon Himalayas while documenting the everyday rhythms of mountain life. Roy presents the hills not merely as a scenic backdrop but as a living ecosystem that shapes human values, relationships, and ways of being. Through vivid descriptions of forests, rivers, wildlife, changing seasons, and local communities, she emphasises the need for ecological balance and responsible coexistence with nature.

The memoir also examines the growing environmental challenges facing the Himalayas, including deforestation, unplanned development, tourism, and climate change. Roy's personal experiences reflect broader ecological and ethical concerns, encouraging readers to recognise

the interconnectedness between humans and the natural world. Called by the Hills ultimately advocates an ethic of care grounded in empathy, sustainability, and environmental stewardship, making it an important contribution to contemporary Indian nature writing and the environmental humanities.

“The global climate crisis brings significant consequences for Central and South Asian countries. The region is characterised by highly complex geographic and climatic regimes, as well as low resilience to climate-related threats due to each country’s own sociological and political structures” (Rochholz 120). India is witnessing an unprecedented ecological crisis marked by climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, pollution, and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. The Himalayan region, often described as the ecological lifeline of South Asia, is particularly vulnerable to these challenges. Rapid urbanisation, indiscriminate tourism, hydroelectric projects, road expansion, and changing climatic patterns have accelerated environmental degradation, resulting in landslides, glacier retreat, water scarcity, and habitat destruction. In this context, mountain literature has emerged as a significant literary form that documents the ecological, cultural, and emotional realities of mountain communities while advocating for environmental conservation. Indian writers increasingly portray the Himalayas not merely as landscapes of beauty but as living ecosystems requiring ethical responsibility and care.

Ecofeminism is about connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice. It asserts the special strength and integrity of every living thing. For us, the snail darter is to be considered side by side with a community's need for water, the porpoise side by side with the appetite for tuna, and the creatures it may fall on with Skylab. We are a woman-identified movement, and we believe we have a special work to do in these imperilled times (Mies and Shiva 14)

The relationship between women and nature has become a central concern in contemporary literature, reflecting the principles of ecofeminism. Women’s traditional roles in nurturing families, managing natural resources, and sustaining local communities often position them at the forefront of environmental protection. “The dualistic construction of nature as a sphere apart from and inferior to the human has been a major factor in legitimating its domination” (Plumwood 4). The interconnected struggles against the exploitation of both women and nature emphasise compassion, sustainability, and ecological justice as essential for preserving the fragile Himalayan environment.

Research Problem

The increasing ecological degradation of the Himalayan region has raised critical questions about the relationship between humans and the natural environment, yet literary responses to these concerns remain insufficiently explored. Anuradha Roy's *Called by the Hills* offers a profound reflection on mountain ecology, environmental responsibility, and everyday life in the Himalayas; the memoir has received limited scholarly attention compared to her novels. Existing studies primarily emphasise eco-critical or feminist perspectives in Roy's fiction, leaving unexplored how *Called by the Hills* integrates ecological consciousness with an ethic of care. There is a need to examine how the memoir represents the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and place through the theoretical frameworks of Ecofeminism and the Ethics of Care. This paper investigates how Roy's mountain memoir promotes environmental stewardship, reciprocal human–nature relationships, and sustainable coexistence amid contemporary ecological challenges.

Research Objectives

To examine the representation of the Himalayan landscape and its ecological significance in Anuradha Roy's *Called by the Hills*. To analyse the memoir through the theoretical framework of Ecofeminism, focusing on the relationship between women, nature, and environmental justice. To explore how the Ethics of Care is reflected in Roy's portrayal of human–nature relationships, empathy, and ecological responsibility. To investigate how the memoir fosters environmental consciousness and advocates sustainable coexistence with the natural world. To demonstrate how *Called by the Hills* contributes to contemporary Indian nature writing and the environmental humanities by promoting an ethic of care toward fragile mountain ecosystems.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study: How does Anuradha Roy's *Called by the Hills* represent the Himalayan landscape as a space of ecological and ethical significance? In what ways does the memoir reflect the principles of Ecofeminism by highlighting the interconnectedness of women, nature, and environmental justice? How does the Ethics of Care shape Roy's portrayal of human–nature relationships and ecological responsibility? How does the memoir cultivate environmental consciousness and advocate sustainable coexistence in response to the growing ecological challenges facing the Himalayan region?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative textual analysis to examine Anuradha Roy's *Called by the Hills* through the theoretical frameworks of Ecofeminism and the Ethics of Care. The research is based on a close reading of the memoir, focusing on its representation of the Himalayan landscape, human–nature relationships, environmental degradation, and ecological responsibility. Concepts from ecofeminist theorists such as Vandana Shiva and Val Plumwood provide the analytical framework for interpreting the text. Relevant secondary sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and critical essays on ecofeminism, environmental humanities, and Indian nature writing, are also consulted to support the analysis. Through an interpretative and interdisciplinary approach, the study investigates how Roy's memoir constructs environmental consciousness and advocates an ethic of care toward the fragile Himalayan ecosystem.

Research Gap

Existing scholarship on Anuradha Roy has predominantly focused on her novels, examining themes such as postcolonial identity, gender, caste, memory, and ecological concerns. While studies on *The Folded Earth*, *The Earthspinner*, and *Sleeping on Jupiter* have explored environmental and feminist perspectives, *Called by the Hills* has received comparatively little scholarly attention. As a memoir, it remains underexplored within the fields of environmental humanities and Indian nature writing. Moreover, no substantial study has examined the memoir through the combined theoretical lenses of Ecofeminism and the Ethics of Care. The interrelationship between ecological responsibility, gendered ethics, and mountain ecology has not been systematically analysed. The paper addresses the gap by investigating how Roy's memoir constructs an ethic of care through its representation of the Himalayan landscape, human–nature relationships, and environmental consciousness. In doing so, the study contributes to contemporary eco-critical scholarship by offering a fresh interdisciplinary reading of *Called by the Hills*.

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in three interconnected theoretical perspectives: the Ethics of Care, Ecofeminism, and Environmental Consciousness. "Care ethics is primarily interested in the establishment, maintenance, and enhancement of caring relations. The relation is prior even to the description of caring as a virtue; a person may be described as "caring" if that person regularly establishes and maintains caring relations" (Noddings 18). The Ethics of Care,

developed by Carol Gilligan and expanded by Nel Noddings, emphasises care, responsibility, relationships, interdependence, vulnerability, and moral responsibility rather than abstract ethical principles. It argues that humans are morally obligated to care for one another and the natural world. In *Called by the Hills*, Anuradha Roy portrays the Himalayan landscape as a living community in which everyday acts of care and ecological responsibility sustain both human and non-human life.

“Ecofeminism is a worldview that recognises that humans are part of nature, not separate. In their interconnectedness through life, nature and women are alive and autonomous, not dead passive objects to be exploited and violated by masculine power” (Shiva). Ecofeminism complements the perspective by examining the links between the exploitation of women and the degradation of nature. Thinkers such as Vandana Shiva and Val Plumwood argue that patriarchal systems promote the domination of both women and the environment. At the same time, indigenous ecological knowledge and care-based practices offer sustainable alternatives. Roy’s memoir foregrounds respect for local communities, biodiversity, and mountain ecosystems, reflecting these ecofeminist principles.

Environmental consciousness further strengthens the framework by highlighting ecological awareness, sustainable living, mountain ecology⁴⁴, human responsibility, and ecological ethics. Roy presents the Himalayas not merely as a landscape but as a fragile ecosystem threatened by deforestation, climate change, and unsustainable development. Through her personal reflections, she advocates environmental stewardship and harmonious coexistence with nature. Together, the Ethics of Care, Ecofeminism, and Environmental Consciousness provide an integrated framework for understanding how *Called by the Hills* promotes empathy, ecological justice, and ethical responsibility toward the natural world.

The Mountain as a Living Presence

In *Called by the Hills*, Anuradha Roy portrays the Himalayas not merely as a geographical setting but as a living presence that nurtures, teaches, and sustains life. The mountains emerge as active participants in the narrative, shaping the author’s emotions, perceptions, and ethical relationship with the natural world. “These hillsides look wounded, their trees and bushes gone, their untethered rocks tumbling down without warning” (Roy 156). Through vivid descriptions of forests, rivers, birds, changing seasons, and mountain villages, Roy presents nature as an interconnected community in which humans are only one part of a larger ecological system. Rather than treating the landscape as a resource to be exploited, she

emphasises mutual dependence, respect, and coexistence between people and the environment.

Where the rulers are oblivious to the needs of citizens, wildlife and landscapes, they exist only to be commercially exploited. An invisible web of plutocrats and corporations controls the ruling regime as well as its rivals. There is resignation, cynicism and fury as government after government ravages the country's forests and waters in a tight embrace with giant companies. Nobody can reverse this or stop it: it has been and will be coitus uninterrupted, continues until there is nothing left to destroy (Roy 150).

The mountains evoke responsibility, compassion, and attentiveness toward fragile ecosystems. Ecofeminist ideas are reflected in Roy's portrayal of the land as a life-giving force that resists domination and calls for protection rather than exploitation. The mountains also symbolise resilience and continuity, preserving ecological memory despite increasing threats from deforestation, climate change, tourism, and unchecked development. By presenting the Himalayas as a living entity with intrinsic value, Roy challenges anthropocentric attitudes and encourages readers to cultivate environmental consciousness. Thus, the mountain becomes both a physical habitat and a moral landscape, reminding humanity that caring for nature is essential for ecological balance and the survival of future generations.

Ethics of Care in Human–Nature Relationships:

In *Called by the Hills*, Anuradha Roy's relationship with her dogs exemplifies the principles of the Ethics of Care, emphasising empathy, responsibility, and reciprocal companionship. Rather than treating her dogs as possessions, Roy regards them as members of a shared ecological community whose lives are intertwined with her own. Their presence shapes her daily routines, deepens her awareness of the surrounding forests and wildlife, and fosters an ethic of attentiveness toward all living beings. Through acts of care, protection, and mutual trust, Roy demonstrates that meaningful relationships extend beyond human society to include animals. Her bond with her dogs challenges anthropocentric assumptions and illustrates that compassion toward non-human life is fundamental to environmental ethics. The memoir suggests that caring for animals nurtures a broader ecological consciousness, encouraging respect for the interconnected web of life that sustains the fragile Himalayan ecosystem.

Environmental Consciousness

In *Called by the Hills*, Anuradha Roy develops an environmental consciousness by portraying the Himalayas as a fragile ecosystem in which forests, rivers, animals, and climate are in a delicate state of interdependence. Her vivid observations of dense forests, flowing mountain streams, diverse wildlife, and changing seasons reveal the intrinsic value of the natural world while exposing the growing threats posed by deforestation, unplanned tourism, road construction, urban expansion, and climate change. Roy illustrates how human intervention disrupts ecological balance, leading to habitat destruction, declining biodiversity, water scarcity, and increased vulnerability to environmental disasters. Rather than presenting these issues as distant ecological concerns, she connects them to everyday life, demonstrating that the well-being of human communities depends upon the health of mountain ecosystems. Through personal reflection and attentive observation, Roy encourages readers to cultivate ecological awareness based on respect, responsibility, and sustainable coexistence. Her memoir ultimately argues that protecting forests, rivers, wildlife, and the Himalayan environment is not merely an environmental obligation but an ethical commitment essential for preserving the interconnected web of life for future generations.

From our garden, we can see that the flanks of the peaks on our horizon that were dazzling white when we came to live here twenty-five years ago are bare and black now in summer. They are still white on the top, but the ice seems thinner, as if the mountains are ageing and balding. The seasons are muddled; it is hotter, wetter, colder. In the spring of 2021, a glacial lake burst in the high mountains - its ice had melted - and the resulting floodwaters killed hundreds of people. Environmentalists and politicians argued over whether the flooding had been caused by global warming or by the profound, devastating environmental changes resulting from the construction of highways and hydroelectric power plants at very high altitudes in this fragile, young mountain range (Roy 155).

Memory, Belonging, and Ecological Identity

Anuradha Roy's *Called by the Hills* presents memory, belonging, and ecological identity as deeply intertwined, revealing how human lives are inseparable from the rhythms and vulnerabilities of the natural world. Jerry's tragic death, despite being surrounded by care and affection, symbolises the unpredictability of a fragile ecosystem disrupted by environmental imbalance. Roy observes,

In her brief life, Jerry went through a landslide and then was killed by a leopard in daylight, though she was surrounded by caring people and other dogs. Why she was tragically singled

out by nature, I will never be able to fathom. It is as if her small, soft body, bursting with energy and heedless joy, had within it a time bomb, inserted there as a warning from dying and warped nature about the devastation facing all the blithely unsuspecting infants of the world (Roy 161).

This poignant reflection transforms Jerry's death from an isolated incident into a powerful ecological metaphor. The leopard's unusual daytime appearance and the preceding landslide point to a disturbed environmental order in which the boundaries between human settlements and wildlife have become increasingly unstable. The memory of Jerry remains embedded in the landscape, reminding both the narrator and the reader that belonging to a place also entails sharing its ecological vulnerabilities. Roy thus suggests that identity is shaped not only by cultural memory or emotional attachment but also by the fragile coexistence between humans, animals, and their environment. Through this episode, the novel foregrounds an ethics of ecological responsibility, demonstrating that the loss of one innocent life reflects the broader consequences of environmental degradation and the fractured relationship between humanity and nature.

Nature Writing as Resistance

“Environmental texts are not, in general, reducible to thematic explorations of nature but rather seek to engage environmental crisis and to imagine more responsible modes of inhabiting the earth” (Buell 1–2). In *Called by the Hills*, Anuradha Roy transforms nature writing into a form of ecological resistance by exposing the slow violence inflicted on the Himalayan environment through unchecked development, consumerism, and capitalist exploitation. Rather than romanticising the mountains, she documents the gradual destruction of forests, rivers, wildlife, and local communities caused by road expansion, tourism, and commercial interests. Her narrative resists anthropocentric and profit-driven attitudes by advocating a slower, more mindful way of living rooted in care and ecological responsibility. Roy suggests that true progress lies not in exploiting nature but in preserving its biodiversity and cultural heritage. Through this perspective, the memoir becomes a powerful call for ecological resistance, urging readers to challenge unsustainable practices and embrace environmental stewardship.

Sum Up

The study demonstrates that *Called by the Hills* presents the Himalayan landscape as an ethical space that shapes human values and ecological responsibility, rather than merely

serving as a scenic backdrop. Roy redefines care as an ecological practice grounded in empathy, reciprocity, and sustainable coexistence with nature. The memoir highlights the interconnectedness of humans, animals, forests, and rivers, illustrating that environmental well-being depends upon relationships of mutual care. Women and local communities emerge as custodians of ecological memory and traditional environmental knowledge; the mountains function as living entities with intrinsic value. Through the combined perspectives of Ecofeminism and the Ethics of Care, the memoir exposes the shared vulnerability of nature and marginalised communities under environmental degradation and unsustainable development. Roy cultivates environmental consciousness by encouraging readers to recognise their ethical responsibility toward the fragile Himalayan ecosystem.

The study has examined Anuradha Roy's *Called by the Hills* through the theoretical frameworks of the Ethics of Care, Ecofeminism, and Environmental Consciousness. It argues that Roy transforms the Himalayan landscape into a moral and ecological space where care, responsibility, and interdependence shape human relationships with the natural world. By portraying forests, rivers, animals, and mountain communities as interconnected elements of a living ecosystem, the memoir challenges anthropocentric attitudes and advocates sustainable coexistence. Roy's contribution to contemporary Indian environmental writing lies in her integration of personal memory, ecological ethics, and nature writing to foster environmental awareness. Her memoir demonstrates that caring for nature is both an ethical and ecological imperative in the face of climate change and environmental degradation. Future research may compare *Called by the Hills* with other Indian mountain narratives or explore its significance within the environmental humanities, eco-memoir studies, and climate literature to understand better literature's role in promoting ecological justice and sustainability.

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