

RESEARCH ARTICLE**Social Ethos in Anuradha Roy's Select Novels**

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Abstract:

This study examines the representation of social ethos in the select novels of Anuradha Roy, namely *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, *The Folded Earth*, and *Sleeping on Jupiter*. The novels reflect various aspects of Indian society such as social class, cultural traditions, religion, and interpersonal relationships. Roy portrays the struggles of individuals who attempt to balance personal desires with societal expectations. Through realistic characters and detailed settings, she highlights issues like class division, gender roles, and the tension between tradition and modernity. Her narratives reveal how social values and cultural practices shape human behaviour and identity in contemporary Indian society.

Keywords: Social Ethos; Indian Society; Culture.

Anuradha Roy is one of the significant contemporary Indian novelists whose works explore the complex realities of Indian society. Her novels present a deep understanding of social structures, cultural traditions, and the psychological struggles of individuals living within these structures. Roy's narratives often reflect the transformation of Indian society from traditional values to modern perspectives. Through her characters and storytelling, she reveals the conflicts between social institutions such as class, religion, gender roles, and cultural expectations. In her novels, social ethos emerges as an essential theme that shapes the behavior, relationships, and identities of individuals.

This study focuses on the representation of social ethos in Roy's select novels, particularly *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, *The Folded Earth*, and *Sleeping on Jupiter*. These novels portray various dimensions of Indian social life including class division, love relationships, regional identity, religion, sexuality, social consciousness, and superstitions. Roy's narrative technique allows readers to understand the emotional and psychological struggles of individuals who are affected by these social structures.

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One of the most prominent aspects of social ethos in Roy's novels is the representation of social class. Indian society has long been structured through a hierarchical system that divides people into different economic and social categories. Roy highlights the gap between the rich and the poor and the way class divisions influence relationships, opportunities, and social mobility. Her characters represent different social classes and illustrate how class identity determines their place in society.

In *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, Roy presents a detailed picture of class divisions through the lives of urban residents and tribal communities. The novel explores the relationship between the city people and the jungle tribe living in Songarh. Amulya Babu, one of the central characters, establishes a perfume manufacturing factory and employs members of the tribal community. This interaction between the two groups represents the economic and social hierarchy within Indian society. The tribal community depends on Amulya for employment and survival, which creates a relationship of power and dependency.

The novel also highlights the gratitude and respect that the tribal people show toward Amulya Babu for providing them with work and livelihood. During a harvest festival, a villager invites Amulya as a special guest and expresses appreciation for his support. The dialogue reflects the emotional bond and social awareness within the tribal community: "This is the first time people from outside the jungle have come as guests to our harvest festival... it's Cowasjee Sahib and Amulya Babu who gives us our roti and salt! We must repay them in our humble way!" (6).

The conflict between different social classes also affects personal relationships in the novel. One of the most significant examples is the love story between Bakul and Mukunda. Although they share deep affection for each other, their relationship is not socially accepted because of class and caste differences. Mukunda belongs to a tribal background and is considered socially inferior, while Bakul belongs to a respectable middle-class family. Because of this difference, their love remains incomplete.

Roy portrays the emotional pain caused by these social barriers. Mukunda's background as an orphan from a tribal community makes him unacceptable as a suitable partner for Bakul. Society places strict limitations on inter-class and inter-caste relationships, preventing individuals from choosing their partners freely. As a result, their relationship becomes an example of the social conflicts created by rigid class structures.

The theme of class division is further emphasized through the depiction of different lifestyles in the novel. Urban residents enjoy economic stability and social privilege, while tribal communities struggle for survival. Roy's narrative shows that these inequalities are deeply embedded in the social system and are difficult to overcome. Through her portrayal of characters and their experiences, Roy criticizes the rigid class hierarchy that continues to shape Indian society.

Similarly, in *The Folded Earth*, Roy continues to explore the influence of social class on individual lives. The protagonist Maya belongs to a middle-class background and faces numerous challenges after her marriage to Michael. Their inter-religious marriage leads to social rejection from their families and community. The couple lives in modest circumstances, which reflects their

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economic condition and social position. Maya describes their early married life in a small rented space: “We had defied our families to be together, and those first months we were exultant castaways who had fitted the universe into two rented rooms and one narrow bed” (6).

This description highlights the couple’s emotional attachment as well as their struggle to build a life independent of societal expectations. Their situation represents the reality faced by many individuals who challenge social norms in pursuit of personal happiness.

Roy also contrasts Maya’s modest life with the luxurious lifestyle of Diwan Sahib, a wealthy landlord who lives in a large house with numerous servants. His lifestyle clearly indicates his upper-class status in society. The description of his habits and possessions reflects the privileges associated with wealth and social power. Through these contrasting characters, Roy illustrates the significant differences between social classes and the impact of economic status on individual lives.

In addition to economic inequality, Roy’s novels also explore how class influences social relationships and cultural practices. People often choose marriage partners within their own class to maintain social status and family reputation. This practice reinforces the boundaries between different classes and prevents social mobility. Roy’s narratives reveal how these traditions continue to shape modern Indian society despite changing cultural values.

In *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, Roy presents several relationships that illustrate the complexities of love within a rigid social system. One of the most significant relationships in the novel is between Bakul and Mukunda. Their relationship represents a form of love that challenges social norms and expectations. Mukunda, who belongs to a tribal background, is considered socially inferior by the standards of Bakul’s family and society. Because of this difference in social status, their love becomes difficult and ultimately impossible.

Roy uses this relationship to demonstrate how class and caste divisions can influence personal emotions. Although Bakul and Mukunda share deep affection and emotional understanding, society does not allow them to be together. The limitations imposed by social structures show that individual feelings often become secondary to social expectations. Their love story highlights the conflict between personal desire and social obligation, which is a recurring theme in Roy’s works.

Roy portrays the early days of their marriage as a period filled with emotional intensity and excitement. Maya describes their life together as a joyful escape from social expectations: “We had defied our families to be together, and those first months we were exultant castaways who had fitted the universe into two rented rooms and one narrow bed” (6).

This quotation illustrates the emotional strength of their relationship as well as the sacrifices they make to remain together. Their decision to live independently demonstrates the courage required to challenge traditional social norms in Indian society.

Furthermore, Roy’s exploration of relationships also highlights gender roles within Indian society. Women in her novels often face greater restrictions than men when it comes to expressing love or choosing their partners. Social expectations regarding female behavior, modesty, and obedience create barriers that limit women’s autonomy. Roy’s female characters frequently struggle

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against these restrictions while attempting to maintain their personal dignity and independence.

For example, Maya's character in *The Folded Earth* demonstrates resilience and emotional strength despite the challenges she faces. Her journey reflects the broader experience of many women in Indian society who must navigate between tradition and modernity. Through Maya's story, Roy emphasizes the importance of personal identity and emotional self-expression.

The festival also demonstrates the relationship between the tribal community and Amulya Babu, the owner of the perfume factory who provides employment to many villagers. When Amulya attends the celebration, the villagers welcome him with respect and gratitude. One of the villagers openly acknowledges the support given by Amulya and his associate: "This is the first time people from outside the jungle have come as guests to our harvest festival... it's Cowasjee Sahib and Amulya Babu who gives us our roti and salt! We must repay them in our humble way! (6).

This moment illustrates how cultural celebrations bring together different social groups and strengthen bonds between individuals and communities. At the same time, the dialogue also reveals the economic dependence of the villagers on their employer. Roy uses this scene to show how cultural traditions coexist with social hierarchy.

Religion also plays an important role in shaping personal identities and relationships. In *The Folded Earth*, Roy explores the impact of religious differences through the relationship between Maya and Michael. Their marriage challenges traditional social expectations because they belong to different religious backgrounds. Inter-religious marriages are often viewed with suspicion in conservative communities, and Maya and Michael experience rejection from their families for their decision.

Despite these difficulties, the couple attempts to build a life together based on mutual love and understanding. Their willingness to challenge religious boundaries demonstrates the gradual transformation of social attitudes in modern India. Roy presents their relationship as a symbol of personal freedom and emotional courage in a society where religion often determines social acceptance.

In addition to religion and rituals, Roy also highlights the importance of language and cultural expression in shaping social identity. Language reflects not only communication but also social belonging and cultural heritage. In Roy's novels, characters from different regions and social classes use different forms of language, which reveals their cultural background and educational status.

For instance, the tribal communities in *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* speak in a simple and direct manner that reflects their close relationship with nature and traditional lifestyle. In contrast, urban characters use more formal and sophisticated language that reflects their education and social position. Through these linguistic differences, Roy subtly illustrates the diversity within Indian society.

Roy also addresses the persistence of superstitions and traditional beliefs within Indian society. Even in modern times, many communities continue to follow beliefs related to fate, astrology, and supernatural forces. Such beliefs influence decisions related to marriage, health, and

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daily activities. Roy presents these beliefs without judgment but encourages readers to reflect on their role in shaping human behavior.

The coexistence of tradition and modernity is another recurring theme in Roy's novels. As Indian society undergoes rapid social and economic changes, individuals often find themselves caught between traditional values and modern lifestyles. Roy's characters frequently struggle to maintain a balance between respecting cultural traditions and pursuing personal freedom. This tension reflects the broader transformation occurring within contemporary Indian society.

Through her exploration of religion, rituals, festivals, language, and cultural practices, Roy presents a comprehensive picture of Indian social ethos. Her novels demonstrate that culture is not a static entity but a dynamic system that evolves with time. While traditions provide stability and continuity, they can also create limitations when they resist change.

Roy's narratives therefore encourage readers to appreciate the richness of cultural traditions while also questioning the social structures that restrict individual freedom. By portraying the lived experiences of her characters, she reveals how social ethos shapes human lives in both positive and challenging ways.

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