

Investigating the Failures of the Postcolonial State and the Prose of Counter-Insurgency: A Study of Arundhati Roy's Non-Fictional Writings

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Abstract

The present paper probes into the 'aporias' of the postcolonial state, marginalization of the neo-subalterns, citizenship rights, notion of empire, corporate globalization in today's world specially in India through the lens of Arundhati Roy's non-fictional works. In most of her essays and articles, Roy makes a comprehensive research on the issues of postcolonial violence, state coercion, hegemony, and the subaltern resistance that ultimately metamorphose into myriad forms of insurgency. The colonial policy of appropriation and exploitation is pervasive in the post-independence era through numerous modes of coercive strategies. Tribal lands and resources are usurped in the name of development projects. People are rendered 'Homo Sacer' in the words of Giorgio Agamben or bare human beings bereft of the basic requirements of existence. When the subalternized people try to speak the language of protest, they are silenced by various hegemonic or coercive forces. Roy lays bare the naked reality of the largest democracy of the world and unmasks its lies and hypocrisies. In the light of Roy's writings this paper attempts an unbiased evaluation of the failures of the state and negotiates the issues of neoliberalism, capitalism, state absolutism and the question of power and justice.

Keywords: Coercion, Hegemony, Subaltern, Appropriation, Neoliberalism

Arundhati Roy sees writing as a voyage to discover the depth of things. As a writer of fiction she could continue writing as a celebrity but she decided to write about autocracy of the postcolonial state and the atrocities inflicted upon its citizens. Since the publication of her award winning fiction *The God of Small Things* (1997) Arundhati Roy has been writing articles, and books of essays that probe into the ascending zones of exclusion, pauperization and the resultant dissident voices that foreground the outcries of marginalization and problematise the hegemonic templates of developmentalism in India today, a narrative that is getting further cemented with the emergence of the right wing political establishment. In most of her works Arundhati Roy focuses on the flawed paradigm of Indian democracy. India

has parliamentary democracy or representative democracy but in reality the democratic institutions have failed to offer stability, equality and justice to the citizens. Arundhati Roy's book *Broken Republic* that comprises three essays, "Mr. Chidambaram's War", "Walking with the Comrades" and "Trickledown Revolution" focuses on the autocracy of the state and the resultant Maoist insurgency in different parts of the country. On the one hand the country has ushered in an era of development in various fields, on the other a vast section of people have been plunged into extreme misery. The post independent India witnessed the marginalization of the already marginalized people. People have been relegated to the brink of existence. In the name of development project the resources and homelands of the tribal people are appropriated by the government. Arundhati Roy's disgust at the seductive narrative of democracy is manifest when she says in "Walking with the Comrades",

"The Indian Constitution, the moral underpinning of Indian democracy, was adopted by Parliament in 1950. It was a tragic day for tribal people. The constitution ratified colonial policy and made the state custodian of tribal homelands.....In exchange for the right to vote it snatched away their right to livelihood and dignity."(*Broken Republic* 43)

The hills in the south Orissa are believed to be residence to the Niyam Raja, the God of Universal law, worshipped by the Dongria Kondh. But as these hills contain bauxite they were sold to Vedanta, a multinational corporation. In the essay "Mr Chidambarams War", Arundhati Roy writes how the homelands of the tribal people are now appropriated by the corporate world. But that never bothers the policy makers. They feel no qualms to turn the original landowners into the inhabitants of the past of the country, as they know that '...any developed country, Europe, the United States, Australia- they all have a "past".' (*Broken Republic* 2) Such appropriation of tribal lands and resources is a common phenomenon in different parts of the country stretching from West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh to Andhra Pradesh. The mining companies give justification to their act of usurpation by telling that they would ratchet up the rate of GDP growth, and provide employment to the displaced people. But in reality a very small portion of the displaced get jobs and that too with poor wages. The government colluding with the corporate world in the loot of public resources shows utter apathy towards the deplorable condition of the tribal people. Ironically these tribal and dalit people who are "pitted against a juggernaut of injustices" (*Broken Republic* 3) are labelled as "the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country". (*Broken Republic* 3) The Maoists are basically the deprived tribal people living in such terrible condition that is similar to the famines of the sub-Saharan Africa. They are the people who have been exploited in every possible way. If they have taken up arms this is because they believe that the "innate, structural inequality of Indian society can only be redressed by the violent overthrow of the Indian State."(*Broken Republic* 6). In her essay "Walking with the Comrades" Arundhati Roy writes about her first hand experience with the Maoist rebels

in Dantewada, Chhattisgarh. Roy describes Dantewada as an 'oxymoron'. "It's an upside-down, inside-out town". (Broken Republic 38). She writes,

"In Dantewada the police wear plain clothes and the rebels wear uniforms. The jail superintendent is in jail. The prisoners are free (three hundred of them escaped from the old town jail two years ago). Women who have been raped are in police custody. The rapists give speeches in the bazaar." (Broken Republic 38)

The war between the Maoists and the state seems to be never ending. But instead of addressing the grievances of the dalits and adivasi people the government adopts coercive strategies to eliminate them. Every type of dissent, even the non-violent protest is seen as crime. People are branded as Maoists under draconian, undemocratic laws. The insurgencies are confronted with military actions. Acts like 'Armed Forces Special Powers' ACT that allows the army legal authorities to kill on suspicion are employed. Military forces are deployed to curb the Maoists. Arundhati Roy writes,

"To get the bauxite out of the flat-topped hills, to get iron ore out from under the forest floor, to get 85 per cent of India's people off their land and into the cities (which is what Mr. Chidambaram says he'd like to see), India has to become a police state. The government has to militarize. To justify that militarization, it needs an enemy. The Maoists are that enemy." (Broken Republic 34)

Planning Commission appointed an expert committee headed by D. Bandopadhyay in May 2006. In the report the committee made a strong plea to deviate from the usual ways of handling the Naxalite issues and address the development issues to achieve a long term solution to the problem. In an article in *Outlook*, B.G.Vergehese, a senior journalist mentioned that Indian democracy and constitution would prevail and Maoists would vanish sooner or later. In reply to this statement Cherukuri Rajkumar who is known to his Maoist Comrades as Azad said,

"In which part of India is the Constitution prevailing, Mr Verghese? In Dantewada, Bijapur, Kanker, Narayanpur, Rajnandgaon? Jharkhand, Orissa? In Lalgarh, Jangalmahal?...Your constitution is a piece of paper that does not even have the value of toilet paper for the vast majority of the Indian people." (Broken Republic 176)

Arundhati Roy writes, "So here's the Indian state, in all its democratic glory, willing to loot, starve, lay siege to, and now deploy the air force in 'self-defence' against its poorest citizens." (Broken Republic 186) In the book titled *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* published in 2014 Arundhati Roy comprehensively talks about the dark realities of India's democracy. The book presents a horrid picture of a country haunted by the specters of the dead farmers who chose to commit suicide to avoid the burden of debt and thousands of those who are branded as criminals and killed by the state in various parts of the country. Roy highlights the fatally serious, even frightening phenomenon generated by the modern capitalist society. As in Marx, there is the sense in which capitalism manages to cover its true mechanism, and so

the ghosts here are the marginalized, excluded from the outward veneer that forms the official society in capitalism of today. In the essay *Dead Men Talking* Arundhati Roy writes how the potential threats to the State are curbed. In September 23, 2011 the US radio-journalist David Barsamian was deported from Delhi airport because he came to India to have interviews with the people who are the so-called dissidents. Professor Richard Shapiro , a San Francisco anthropologist was deported perhaps because his partner Angana Chatterjee , a co-convenor of the International People's Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice, who first brought international attention to the unmarked mass graves in Kashmir. Lingaram Kodopi, an Adivasi from Dantewada was arrested on September 26, 2011 with the allegation of offering monetary aid to the banned CPI (Maoist). Countless people are charged with sedition with no legal assistance to defend them. Doctor Binayak Sen who raised questions against the activities of the Salwa Judam was accused of being a Maoist and was given life imprisonment in 2007. Later on Piyush Guha and the filmmaker Ajay T.G. were also arrested on the charge of being Maoists. Just as the State Human Rights Commission was had to shamefully acknowledge the existence of twenty-seven hundred unmarked graves in the three district of Kashmir, similarly in Dantewada the dead men, dead rivers, dead creatures assert their existence. The state will have to accept the responsibility of the atrocities inflicted upon the poor. Patrolled by more than fifty thousand soldiers Kashmir is the most militarized area of the world. Kashmiris have been engaged in a militant insurgency against what they describe as India's occupation. Ordinary people equipped with stones confront the Indian force. This unequal clash rendered seventy thousand dead and thousands wounded. Countless people have fled away from Kashmir. The number of militants is diminishing but the number of soldiers is constantly increasing. A whole generation of people who have grown up in the midst of web of checkpoints, interrogation centers, 'catch and kill' operations, have turned more desperate against the state. Civilians are killed and are branded as terrorists. But still they carry on the insurgency without any political party's support. Arundhati Roy has exposed the long suppressed stories of Kashmir in her works, lectures. She has been branded as a traitor or white-collar terrorist for calling Kashmir a disputed region and not an inseparable part of India. Politicians and some news anchors of paid news channels demanded that she be booked on the charge of sedition. This shows how democracy is under threat in India. The problems of the Kashmiri people are not properly addressed. The real history of that region is not highlighted. The state colluded by the media presents a distorted picture of Kashmir, which has alienated people's sympathy from the injustices of the Kashmiri people. Kashmir's fight for justice and liberty is projected as a fight against the integrity and solidarity of the country. In the essay titled *Azadi: The Only Thing Kashmiris Want* Arundhati Roy writes,

“The Indian military occupation of Kashmir makes monsters of us all. It allows Hindu chauvinists to target and victimize Muslims in India by holding them hostage to the

freedom struggle being waged by Muslims in Kashmir. It's all being stirred into a poisonous brew and administered intravenously, straight into our bloodstream.

At the heart of it all is a moral question. Does any government have the right to take away people's liberty with military force?"(*Kashmir: The Case for Freedom* 43)

Arundhati shows how Indian media have been influenced by the corporate world. Huge amount of revenues of the media houses come from the commercial advertisements. Interestingly some media houses have direct corporate connections. Mukesh Ambani's Reliance India Limited has twenty-seven television channels. Media house Dainik Bhaskar is the owner of sixty-nine private companies. Reliance India Limited, Tatas, Jindals, Vedanta, Infosys are some of the corporations that not only rule the market economy but also control the fields of literature, film and activism. Corporate-endowed foundations are appropriating the domain of social sciences and arts by offering fund and scholarship for various development studies, cultural studies. Infosys funded the *New Indian Foundation* offers prizes and scholarships to people from social science. Mining companies have started providing funds for arts and literary festivals. Vedanta, the company mining the land of the Dongria Kondh for Bauxite, sponsored an event called "Creating Happiness" a film competition meant for young film students. Tata Steel and Rio Tinto were the sponsors of Jaipur Literary Festival. People taking part rarely said anything against these companies' role in creating war in different forested areas of the country. Nobody talks about the evil effects of privatization. The so-called philanthropoids are meant to create a cadre that think that capitalism has a positive impact on their lives. Non-Government Organizations such as the World Bank, and the Rockefeller and the Ford Foundations shape activists into participants. Roy mentions the '60s development of Black Power into Black Capitalism, along with the shift which tempted Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress into a genial appreciation of capitalist principles. The Rockefeller Foundation founded Ramon Magsaysay Prize for Asian community leaders in 1957 and in that way they determine what type of activism can be appreciated and what cannot. Anna Hazare's movement had three Magsaysay awardees - Anna Hazare Kiran Bedi and Arvind Kejriwal, One of Kejriwal's NGOs is sponsored by Ford Foundation whereas Kiran Bedi's NGO gets fund from companies like Coca-Cola and Lehman brothers. Roy considers Hazare's movement for Jan Lokal Bill to be UnGandhian and elitist. It was expected to be a people's movement but surprisingly it chose not to say anything against capitalism or privatization. Media turned the spotlight from the corruption of the corporate world to the scandals of the political world. The movement made demand of withdrawal of discretionary powers from the government, herby indirectly seeking space for further privatization. In the essay titled *I'd Rather be not Anna Arundhati* writes,

“While his means may be Gandhian, Anna Hazare’s demands are certainly not. Contrary to Gandhiji’s ideas about the decentralization of power, the Jan Lokpal Bill is a draconian anticorruption law, in which a panel of carefully chosen people will administer a giant bureaucracy, with thousands of employees, with the power to police everybody from the prime minister, the judiciary, members of Parliament, and all of the bureaucracy, down to the lowest government official.”(*Capitalism: A Ghost Story* 51)

Arundhati Roy highlights the fact the state promotes the NGOs funded by various private companies and run crusade against the authentic common people’s movements like Narmada Bachao Andolon or the drive against Koodankulam nuclear reactor. The NGOs actually transform the revolutionaries into paid activists. Along with the loopholes in the democratic structure in India Arundhati Roy has been writing about global neo-liberal drives that influenced every part of the world in terms of their financial policies, their position to their people and also about their responses to democracy and rights of the citizenship. The book *An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire* was written to capture the post 9/11 scenario in geo-political trends, American empire and our attitude towards it. The neo-imperial drives of USA generated worldwide insurgencies and this book talks about that. This book presents an extremely critical estimate of democratic formation in the United States, India, and South Africa, along with mourning for the growing effect of corporate globalization. For the last two decades Arundhati Roy has been on a crusade against the globalized world economy in which the weakest are sacrificed. In this paperback, Roy attacks with vehement indignation against the new Empire being promoted in the USA and around the world. The essay *Confronting Empire* problematizes the definition of empire. It does not only specify the US government or its counterparts in European continent, or the International Monetary Fund and other multinational corporations but also several other dangerous branches- aggressive fervor of nationalism, fanatic religious zeal, fascist principles, and of course terrorism. All these collectively take part in the scheme of corporate globalization. *An ordinary Man’s Guide to Empire* contains her broadly circulated and provoking writings on the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the need to counter corporate power, and the deformities of democratic institutions across the world. Dexterously connecting the strings through disjointed issues and arenas, Roy gives special focus on the similarities between globalization in India, occupation of Iraq by American troopers, and the deplorable plights African-Americans in particular are plunged into. Her book opens with the first chapter called “Ahimsa” (Non-Violence) where Roy raises her voice against state-sponsored atrocities. “Ahimsa” focuses on the struggle of the Narmada Bachao Andolan movement to get its voice audible to the Indian policy making bodies. Roy tries to give voice to those Adivasis and Dalits who are killed by the state, when they try to defend their soil from encroachments — dams buildings, mining projects, various plants and other so-called development projects. She

believes that people are compelled to take violent forms of resistance in order to bring breaking news and headlines for so-called free Media. She believes corporate media has become the owner of the market in order to force people watch what the corporate people want them to watch. She also expresses her fear for the extinction of “Ahimsa”. Roy further fears that rage and irritation might be nurtured in people, which ultimately lead to violence. She puts blame on corporate globalization for creating link between religious fanaticism, hyper-nationalism and the pauperization of the already poor people. She holds aggressive nationalism responsible for the genocide across the globe. Continuing in the same strain Roy writes about her fears that there will be a time when free minded, critical thinking people will start to unite under national flags, when people from literary fields, musicians, artists filmmakers hang up their critical faculty and blindly yoke their art to nationalism. In *When the Saints Go Marching Out* Roy investigates the myths revolving around Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Their stories have been given commercial shape and commodified; but their activities and motives forgotten. Dreams have been shattered and for those who worship these legendary figures as heroes, it is time to accept their causes again, and abandon the T-shirts. Noam Chomsky showed that appearances are deceptive in the free world. He showed how terms like free speech, the free market and the free world have nothing to do with freedom. The huge quantity of study and analysis Chomsky performed on the American invasion of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in the book *For Reasons of State* is amazing. Arundhati applauds Chomsky for exploring the utter callousness of the American war machine, entirely cut off from the realities of war, blinded by fascist principles and willing to obliterate innumerable number of human beings, villages, cities, and whole ecosystems – with scientifically developed strategies of atrocities. In another chapter “*Peace is War*”, talking about the import of free media in the corporate globalization scheme, Roy mentions how neoliberal capitalists have been successful in disrupting democracy – by infiltrating into the judiciary, the media and the political domain, and shaping them to their objective. In the essay *How Deep Shall We Dig?* Arundhati Roy highlights the activities of terrorism in Kashmir and the North-East, the emergence of religious fundamentalism, application of acts like POTA, atrocities on minorities, and the chronic starvation or malnutrition thousands of people in India are subject to. It is increasingly hard for the citizens of the country to deal with their own government. She again writes about the genocide of Muslims in Gujarat, massacre of the Sikhs, and about killing, molestation and mysterious disappearances in Kashmir. *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* has realistically depicted the picture of state-sponsored terrorism. Governments bifurcates people in order to offer benefits to private companies. It is Roy's attempt at revealing a hard reality, even if it goes against the most powerful of the world politics. In the chapter titled *Instant-Mix Imperial Democracy* Roy problematizes the current situation of democratic system giving indication that the existing democratic structure is inscribed in the colonial order and what we identify as democracy today is not sufficiently democratic. In this mode Roy puts forward the dissent which is

offshoot of a range of deficiencies of contemporary democracy. These deformities are created from the domains of globalization that is part of the so-called democratic governance across the globe. Roy depicts the mounting turbulence and confrontation among diverse segments of the population. Her coinage *imperial democracy* hints at the blending of democracy with imperial fabric or democracies that support imperial tendencies. In that manner Roy focuses on the deficiencies of democratic ideologies to thwart imperial penchant. Arundhati brings readability and immediacy to her passionate evaluation of imperialism, the nexus between the corporate world, media and the state and their neo-liberal project--what she defines as the means of those who are rich and powerful. In *Instant Mix Imperial Democracy*, she applauds the Americans for protesting against their government. Corporate globalization has shattered the fabric of democracy. Free voting, a free journalism and a free judiciary suggest nothing when the free market economy has turned them into objects on sale. Roy advocates non-violent modes—of resistance through boycotts, protest and open debate. In the non-fiction writing *The Cost of Living* (1998), Roy uses her powerful pen to reveal the despotic paternalism of the state that lies beneath a benevolent outer surface. She writes against India's gigantic hydroelectric dam projects that transform countless millions into homeless --and the testing of India's first nuclear bomb, with all its resultant Faustian bargains. Her book *The End of Imagination* (1998) that includes the essays *Power Politics*, *War Talk*, *Public Power in the Age of Empire*, also is a critical evaluation of the Indian state's nuclear policies. Blending her unflinching voice with a great ethical rage and imaginative radiance, Roy removes the mask of democracy to expose the ugly hegemonic forces lying beneath. *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2001) is a collection of Roy's writings on different political issues over the past five years. Apart from expressing her anger regarding the building of dams and the detonation of nuclear bomb, this book contains her views on various government policies and different undemocratic acts that criminalize the dissenters. In the book *Listening to Grasshoppers* Arundhati narrates how religious fundamentalism gives blow to India's democracy. She says that fascism has entered in India, observing that the country's so-called economic prosperity has turned homeless millions of people—through mining, dams and other projects—while the fascist state exploits the people belonging to the dalit,tribal and minority segment.*The Shape of the Beast*(2008), a mélange of fourteen interviews of Arundhati Roy, chart her journey as writer and political activist over the years. The beast in the title has obvious implication. Through these interviews, Roy critiques unapologetically the hegemonic and coercive apparatuses of the state, religious fundamentalism, neo-imperialism, corrupted corporate bodies and different oppressive social and cultural constructs. In an interview with David Brasamian in may,2003, Arundhati Roy talks about the Gujrat massacre that happened in 2002. Two thousand muslims were killed. Women were molested .Narendra Modi was the chief minister of Gujrat during this genocide. Interestingly he did nothing to stop this atrocity on the muslim people. More surprising is the fact that he was reelected as the next chief minister of Gujrat. The media proved utterly anti-

muslim manufacturing false stories and justifying the genocide. She also talks about the demonization of the muslims. Arundhati exposes the political context of this massacre. She writes,

It's important to understand that the killing in Gujrat had a long run-up. The climate was created soon after the BJP came to power and India conducted nuclear tests. This whole business of unfettered Hindu nationalism, where else was it going to lead?' (*The Shape of the beast* 119)

In an interview with P.G. Rasool, Arundhati Roy writes about the issues concerning Kashmir. Military occupation in this region has created a prison like situation. Instead of mentioning their names give Kashmiri people give their card numbers as though living in jail. The media distort and manufacture the truth about Kashmir. Arundhati writes in the interview titled *I Hope Kashmir will be in all the books I write*,

"When there is such massive army presence I do not understand how anybody, any agency, can say that there are free and fair elections in Kashmir, regardless of how many people turn out or do not turn out to vote. Because when you have a permanent army presence you do not need to send people on the end of a bayonet to voting booths." (*The Shape of the Beast*, 202)

My Seditious Heart (2019)) is a collection of formerly published writings by Arundhati Roy. Though a number of essays of the book were published some twenty years back, this book is still pertinent and startling. It exposes the bitter realities about current India. It talks about through various essays about the appropriation of tribal lands for so-called development projects, the testing of nuclear bomb, the privatization, new forms of colonization, corruption of the bureaucracy and hypocrisy in the name of nationalism. Towards the end of the essay "Trickledown Revolution" in the book *Broken Republic* she talks about reimagining a world that has gone awfully wrong. An alternative world would appear from the imagination of those who have resisted the hegemonic impulse of capitalism and imperialism. India has a surviving tribal population of around 100 million. The nation cannot move fahead when this huge population dwelling in the fringes is lagging behind. The policy makers need to wake up from the consumerist slumber and "stop the annihilation of those who have a different imagination-an imagination that is outside of capitalism as well as Communism" (*Broken Republic*, 214). Roy asks the custodians of our democracy, "Can you leave the water in the rivers, the trees in the forest? Can you leave the bauxite in the mountain?" (*Broken Republic*, 214). If they do so and allow some physical space, then we can arrive at a new philosophical space.

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