

Arundhati Roy's Non-Fiction: The Shadow of Social Activism

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Abstract: *This research paper focuses on the inevitable relation between a writer and her outcome through the writings. Arundhati Roy's non-fictional writings, reflect her shadows of thought and her vision for the world. It is the gateway to understand her novels more deeply in its true sense. Humanity is the central theme of her fiction and non-fiction. For her, both are different ways of presenting the same subject. She writes like a crusader who exposes the hypocrisy of conventional society. She does not want any celebrity status so she knows very well, which award should be received and which should not. She deals with the subject of the relationship between power and powerlessness. It is an endless war, but she is optimistic in her attitude. Even though she does not have any paranoia, but she hopes that empowerment of the powerless class is possible through continuous awareness and activism by adopting non-violent and true democratic ways. She emphasizes the true power of the public in a democratic society.*

Key Words: *Powerless class, powerful, globalization, fascism, freedom, humanity.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Arundhati is an exceptional post-colonial writer who is very popular as an activist in India and abroad. Her two novels, *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* are fictional power politics in society. Her non-fiction is nothing but an extension of the theme of the novel on practical ground. She aims to transform the smallness and insignificance of the downtrodden into something big and meaningful. Therefore, everyone has a role to play, discarding the costumes and identities because it is a fight for the survival of humanity. Otherwise, it would be the end of dreams, dreams of our children and children's children. Her fight is against the powerful-the fascists, communists, Nuclear weaponized states and their hegemony and dominations over poor countries and also against the rulers of the powerless, the powerless non-citizens like the Adivasis, the untouchables, the massacred and the displaced in Gujarat, Narmada, Iraq and Palestine. Apart from the two worlds of powerful and powerless, Arundhati Roy sees a third world-the neutral world of Mirrors. It is a world where men and women take a safe position without identifying themselves with any of the other two worlds. The people of this world do not transgress any of the social codes, even though they are stupid and unreasonable codes. The majority of displaced people don't have any voice and they are not treated as the citizens of the country. According to her, the people who suffer do not partake in the decision making process. The caste system is very deeply rooted in India and it is horizontally divided the society. The bottom of the society is suffering and this structural damage is dangerous to the existence of the entire society.

In her non-fiction, she wishes to free the victims of tradition. The non-citizens suffer because of the decisions of the powerful who like a clear understanding of human life or rather pretend so to achieve their personal selfish goals. She is a severe critic of corporate globalization because globalization increased the distance between the people who make decisions and the people who have to suffer due to those decisions. Arundhati Roy is the lonely crusader who is exposing the hypocrisy of the globalization. She reveals their vagaries and hidden agendas without fear or favour. When she fights against big dams, globalization, nuclear weapons, and massacres and genocides, she is fighting against the vitiated infrastructure, called the government. This government can build big dams and displace thousands from their living place, can conduct pogroms, can bombard cities and kill women and children, and can finance terrorism to make life miserable for the powerless and a host of such inhumane activities, just to feed the greed of those minions who matter from time to time. There will be an assurance from the government that big dams will not be built and there will not be large-scale displacement of the poor people from their native land. Arundhati Roy, in her non-fiction, struggles to protect the purity of the rivers when she raises her voice against the big dams and the consequent displacement of the millions. About big dams, she says that it is a guaranteed way of taking a farmer's wisdom away from him. It is the way of taking their water, land and irrigation from the poor and donate to the rich. The reservoirs displace huge populations of people from their places without any guarantee of rehabilitation leaving them homeless and destitute. She finds religion an instrument in the hands of the powerful for subverting social justice and handing large benefits to a perverted few. In Democracy, she tells: "People who have been uprooted from their homes and communities, who have lost their culture and language, are being made to feel proud of something. Not something, they strive for and achieved, not something they can count as a personal accomplishment, but something

they just happen to be. Or, more accurately, something they happen not to be. And the falseness, the emptiness of that pride, is fuelling a gladiatorial anger that is then directed towards a simulated target that has been wheeled into the amphitheatre.” (My Seditious Heart, pp.174) To achieve her goal, she makes an all-out effort to expose the fraudulent schemes of the patriarchal elite and to bring awareness among the poor, hapless dependants. In *Scimitars of Sun* a conversation, she claims that she tries and explains complicated things in simple language. “I find it offensive, this notion that things are too complicated to explain to an ordinary reader- again, this coterie, this club mentality. I write about things that vitally affect people’s lives.” (The Shape of the Beast, pp. 18-19) She reminds us that our freedoms were not granted to us by any government, but wrested from them by us. Once we surrender them, only a revolution can retrieve them. People have the right to refuse, refuse to fight, refuse to move the missiles, refuse to wave the flag and refuse the victory parade. Keeping freedom means, she comments:

It means keeping an eagle eye on public institutions and demanding accountability. It means putting your ear to the ground and listening to the whispering of the truly powerless. It means giving a forum to the myriad voices from the hundreds of resistance movement across the country who are speaking about real things-about bonded labour, marital rape, sexual preferences, women’s wages, uranium dumping, unsustainable mining, weavers’ woes, farmers’ worries. It means fighting displacement and dispossession and the relentless, everyday violence of abject poverty. (The Algebra of Infinite Justice, pp. 286-287) She continues, “Experts love to hijack various aspects of an issue – displacement, rehabilitation, drainage, hydrology- and carry them off to their lairs where they guard them against the curiosity of the interested layperson. However, eventually, it’s not rocket science. It’s about our daily lives. All these things must be understood connected up and explained-simply and cogently.”(The Shape of the Beast, pp.19) She uses all the recognition and the money that she gets towards the fulfilment of this aspiration. However, she is on guard as not to fall into the pit of stardom. She is always self-introspective and is beware of the ruinous touch of media and fame which can easily corrupt the personality and also the philosophy. She says, “the cars became sleeker, the gates grew higher and the poor were being stuffed like lice into crevices, and all the time my bank accounts burgeoned. I began to feel as though every feeling in *The God of Small Things* had been traded for a silver coin, and if I wasn’t very careful I would become a little silver figurine with a cold, silver heart” (Arundhati Roy: Critical Perspectives, pp. 130) This was what happened to all the social reformers of the past. Once they came to the fore of the society and became part of the social elite, they began to use the power to their political advantage as K N M Pillai did in her novel. Then, they proceed with the oppression and exploitation of the ordinary. They exaggerate the divisions and ignore humanity. Therefore, Arundhati Roy makes sure that she does not become rich with all the awards she gets. She rejects those, she thinks, which have strings attached to or are a bribe or a political reward. She has distributed the hefty sum she received as an award from the Lannan Foundation, among 51 individuals and organizations and the prize money from the prestigious French Cultural Award to non-violent movements all over the world. She disbursed the money to those organizations to ‘honour their resilience and refusal to take up arms, even in the teeth of extreme provocation’. She refused the Sahitya Academy Award by the Government of India as she felt that it was given as a political reward. She remains free; she remains pure, amidst a thousand attacks from a thousand quarters of self-motivated malignity. The agents of the government are out there to devour her entirely, but they are helpless except to use circumlocutory, false, and fraudulent arguments to tarnish her image. In her conversation with Shoma Chaudhury, There’s a fury building up... Arundhati Roy presents an alternative vision. The present world is a sum of an infinite number of decisions that have been made: economic, ecological, social, political, pedagogical, ideological etc. For each of those decisions that were made, there was an alternative. For any high dams, there can be no dams or less high dams. For every corporate contract, there is an alternative. For every repressive law, there is an alternative. A country cannot run like a corporation. All policies cannot be guided by commercial interests and motivated by profit. Citizens are not considered as employees and not to be hired and fired, governments are not employers. Newspapers and TV channels shall not be boardroom bulletins. Corporations like Monsanto and Wal-Mart are not expected to mould India’s policies. Signing our resources like forest and rivers over to giant corporations to increase GDP growth only increases the efficiency of the terrible exploitation of the majority and indecent accumulation of wealth by a minority, leading to the yawning divide between the rich and the poor and a kind of social conflict. She comments, “The keystone of the alternative world would be that nothing can justify the violation of the fundamental rights of citizens. That comes first. The growth rate comes second. Otherwise, democracy has no meaning.” (The Shape of the Beast, pp.216) She is for the equitable distribution of wealth. She wonders why taking from the rich is called appropriation and taking from the poor is called development. According to her, for the solution of social justice, bullets, bulldozers, and prisons are not remedies. There was a time when mass movements looked up to the courts for justice, but, she thinks, the courts have pronounced a series of judgements that are so unjust, so insulting to the poor in the language they use, they take your breath away. While conversing with Shoma Chaudhury, Choosing our weapons, she says that the judiciary has become the lynchpin of the neo-liberal project. The government has slammed the door against non-violent resistance.

However, Arundhati Roy is an optimist. She expects to dismantle all those are big, big bombs, big dams, big ideologies, big contradictions, big countries, big wars, big heroes and big mistakes. Perhaps there is a small world

down here for small things, small people. Just as Soviet-style communism fails, American style market capitalism will fail. Both are constructed by human intelligence and undone by human nature. She believes that the time has come. “Perhaps things will get worse and then better. Perhaps there’s a small god up in heaven readying herself for us. Another world is not only possible, she’s on her way. Maybe many of us won’t be here to greet her, but on a quiet day, if I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing.” (An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire, pp.44) All her energies are directed towards this single, but mammoth task. About her purpose, she writes: The theme of much of what I write, fiction as well as non-fiction, is the relationship between power and powerlessness and the endless, circular conflict they’re engaged in...So when I tell a story, I tell it not as an ideologue who wants to pit one absolutist ideology against another, but as a story teller who wants to share her way of seeing. Though it might appear otherwise, my writing is not really about nations and histories, it’s about power. About the paranoia and ruthlessness of power. About the physics of power. I believe that the accumulation of vast unfettered power by a state or a country, a corporation or an institution or even an individual, a spouse, friend, or sibling-regardless of ideology, results in excesses such as the ones I will recount here. (An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire, pp.13-14)

2. CONCLUSION:

It can be concluded that Arundhati Roy’s fiction or non-fiction, which cannot be separated from her basic thoughts, feelings and political philosophy. A spider cannot be separated from its web. The spider’s web is created out its body. Arundhati Roy’s writings deal with the theme of politics and relationships between the powerful and powerless classes. She stands honestly for the awareness and empowerment of this class and brings justice, equality and liberty in its true sense as a true democratic thinker and an activist.

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