

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 7. Issue.1. 2020 (Jan-Mar)

ISSN
INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

ARUNDHATI ROY'S ESSAYS: A CRITIQUE OF POST-GLOBALISATION WORLD

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Article information

Received:26/02/2020

Accepted: 22/03/2020

Published online: 28/03/2020

doi: [10.33329/ijelr.7.1.190](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.7.1.190)

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore how one of the most loved-and-hated authors of our time, Arundhati Roy has used her essays to expose the negative outcome of the so-called development model being followed under globalization. Roy's hard-hitting essays like *Power Politics*, *The Greater Common Good*, *The End of Imagination*, *Algebra of Infinite Justice*, *Listening to Grasshoppers*, *War is Peace*, *Broken Republic* etc. not only express her deep concern for the gods of small things - the voiceless, dalits, adivasis, tribals and millions of displaced populace but also tear to pieces the imbalanced model of development being followed in the Third World. This 'electrifying political essayist' unmasks the hypocrisy of the Corporate-educated politicians and the corporate politics. Moreover, the essays also express her soulful cry of concern for the devastated Nature and natural resources on account of the construction of big dams and ever-increasing greed of the MNCs. Arundhati also exposes the false glorification of nuclear weapons in the name of nationalism and makes sarcastic attack on the fake war on terrorism and naxalism etc.

In a literary career spanning more than two decades, Arundhati Roy has emerged as one of the most sought after intellectuals of the post-globalization era. Starting her career with *The God of Small Things*, her sensational debut novel, she swiftly shifted to essay writing and pursuing her social activism. However, it is interesting to find that both her fictional and non-fictional writing supplement each other and appear different modes of narrating her essential human concerns. As Arundhati Roy herself says, "Fiction dances out of me and non-fiction is wrenched out by the aching broken world I wake up to every morning." (Hussain:157) Therefore, Arundhati Roy is a unique artist in the sense that fictional and non-fictional, the real and the imaginary, the creative and the factual are beautifully juxtaposed in her novel as well as her political essays. To quote Chomsky, 'Arundhati Roy calls for "factual precision" alongside of the "real precision of poetry". Remarkably, she combines those achievements to a degree that few can hope to approach.' (My Seditious Heart: inside cover page)

Arundhati Roy's concern for the suppressed and unprivileged common man, the evils of globalization, the neo-imperialistic policies of the developed nations, plundering of nature by the corporate world, the new format of development pursued by the Third world in general and India in particular etc, has established Roy on the highest position of contemporary consciousness. All these issues dominate her dozens of hard hitting essays. Essentially both her fiction and non-fiction deal with the oppression of the powerless by the powerful, indifferent and callous treatment of the marginalized – minorities, untouchables, women, children and of course, nature. She ridicules America's double standards in its policies regarding problems affecting the poor on account of the

neo-imperialist agenda of the developed world executed through corporate globalization; the aching of the dispossessed due to construction of Big Dams; and dreaded result of piled up nuclear weapons which could destroy the world in flashes. Therefore, it is obvious that Roy's wrath is directed at the 'Big Thing' and her mission is to awaken her readers to the ruthless use of power by the powerful and also to induce in the powerless a spirit of non-violent resistance to power. Her endeavour is to decentralize such kind of hegemonic practice by voicing her protest against such a culture. In the essay 'War is Peace' she states:

"This issue is not about Good versus Evil or Islam versus Christianity as much as it is about space. About how to accommodate diversity, how to contain the impulse towards hegemony - every kind of hegemony: economic military, linguistic, religious and cultural. Any ecologist will tell you how dangerous and fragile a monoculture is. A hegemonic world is like having a government without a healthy opposition. It becomes a kind of dictatorship. It's like putting a plastic bag over the world, and preventing it from breathing. Eventually, it will be torn open. (My Seditious Heart: 141).

Roy's essays targets specific incidents and events. She has a scientific bent of mind to argue things logically. The non-fictional world of Roy is all about atrocities and violence against the poor and the destitute; a world dominated by the powerful and the rich. Roy hopes against hope that a better tomorrow would be dawned upon this world. She takes her activist writings not as a profession but as a mission to answer the call of the millions of her people who endure pain in the name of development. The non-fictional writings of Roy are not the repressed emotion of hers but specific game plan to fight the future war. As Roy says in *The Greater Common Good*, 'We have to fight specific wars in specific ways, who knows, perhaps that's what the twenty first century has in store for us. The dismantling of the Big. Big bombs, big dams, big ideologies, big contradiction, big countries, big wars, big heroes, big mistakes. Perhaps it will be the Century of Small. Perhaps right now, this very minute, there's a small god up in heaven readying herself for us.' (My Seditious Heart: 28)

As a matter of fact, through her non-fictional writings Roy aims to teach and make the people aware about the seriousness of a host of contemporary challenges. In 1998 when India conducted the nuclear tests, the people of this country acclaimed it with great enthusiasm. The mistaken notions of the people have been corrected by the publication of '*The End of Imagination*.' This essay had an acute positive energy to delve deep into the heart of the people. "Bread, not Bombs, Homes not Tombs." (The End of Imagination: 14) In the Preface to *The End of Imagination*, Kizhakemuri writes: "The proliferation of nuclear weapons threatens the very existence of mankind. In *The End of Imagination*, Roy's concern for humanity, threatened by self-brought calamity is expressed with great sincerity and depth of feeling. It is an inspired outburst against the sinister attempts at dehumanization of man, the destruction of human civilization and the self aggrandizement of small minded politicians. She forcefully condemns the unwanted emphasis on national identity and the national security by the leaders of a nation that has come nowhere near solving its problems of poverty and backwardness. Her unsentimental lament for the bleak future of humanity is heart-rending." (The End of Imagination: preface)

Roy, an envoy of peace with justice, retells through her activist writings to stop war and vengeance. War is not a solution to any of the issues of the world. The end result of war and terrorism is suffering and human casualties. Globalization and privatizations have changed the life styles of people and they aim at the culmination of human society. They should be eradicated with the intervention of powerful government:

"Terrorism is vicious, ugly and dehumanizing for its perpetrators as well as its victims. But so is war - you could say that terrorism is the privatization of war. Terrorists are the free marketers of war. They are people who don't believe that the state has a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence." (An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire: 324)

Arundhati Roy is the most vocal advocate of anti-globalization movement and a bitter critic of neo-imperial agenda of the Developed world and the super power USA and the policies of industrialization. She also criticises the pseudo development model being followed by the Third World under the pressure of WTO, WB and IMF which is creating a huge gap between the rich and the poor. Roy precisely says in her essay *Listening to Grasshoppers* –

“Two decades of this kind of progress in India has created a vast middle class punch drunk on sudden wealth and the sudden respect that comes with it- and a much much vaster desperate underclass. Tens of millions of people who have been dispossessed and displaced from their land by floods, droughts and desertification caused by indiscriminate environmental engineering and massive infrastructural projects, dams, mines and special economic zones. All of them developed in the name of the poor, but really meant to service the rising demands of the new aristocracy. (P.14)

Arundhati Roy does not hesitate to call spade a spade. Thus, she has been quite vocal on sensitive issues like India’s nuclear weapon program, Salwa Judam and Operation Green Hunt to curb naxal activities, brutal policy of the Sri Lankan Government against Tamils, State- Terrorism of Israel government etc. Her essays are a wake-up call for the people. Apart from her scathing attack on Big Dam projects and sharp criticism of the Indian Government toeing the US line by violently and ruthlessly pursuing policies of animalization of industrial workers, persecution of simple and innocent people in the name of Naxalism/Terrorism, the lop-sided vision of development, religious fanaticism, increasing militarization and economic neo-liberalization, Arundhati Roy is no less vociferous about the failure of all the pillars of democracy in providing justice to the marginalized. Roy says “The hoary institutions of Indian democracy-the Judiciary, the Police, the free press, of course elections, - far from working as a system of checks and balances, quite often do the opposite.....In the process they generate such confusion such a cacophony, that voices raised in warning Just become part of the noise” (Listening to Grasshoppers: xxx)

In her essays like *War Talk*, *Baby Bush Go Home*, *Animal Farm II*, *Capitalism*, *A Ghost Story*, the big-brotherly attitude of U.S and its policies are ruthlessly exposed. In these essays Roy criticizes the U.S Policies on Afghanistan, Iraq and Israel. The invasion in Afghanistan by the US, was thus commented upon by The Guardian:“The bombing of Afghanistan is not revenge for New York and Washington. It is yet another act of terror against the people of the world.”(The Algebra of Infinite Justice: 242) The then US President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair were guilty of it. According to them war is peace, remarks Arundhati ironically. In Orwellian style Arundhati writes, ‘When he announced the air strike, President George Bush said ‘we’re a peaceful nation, America’s favourite ambassador, Tony Blair, (who also holds the portfolio of Prime Minister of the UK), echoed him: We’re a peaceful people. ‘So now we know. Pigs are horses. Girls are boys. War is peace. (My Seditious Heart: 139)

Essays like *The Greater Common Good and Power Politics* are devoted to deromanticising Big Dam theory and the game plan of MNCs. In the former Roy has made an attack on the politics behind building Sardar Sarovar Dam which has displaced millions of Adivasis and Dalits without they being given proper compensation. While these grasshoppers were out of their habitat, politics on this issue was on pinnacle. However, Arundhati Roy has been taken to task for her over-simplified claims, particularly her dismissal of big dams. Therefore, B.G Verghese while complementing Arundhati Roy for her poetic writing rejects her arguments against big dams. “The poetry was charming. The facts wrong.” (Verghese) Similarly, Ram Chandra Guha, the renowned historian reacted to the essay as a mode of intervention into a highly debated area of political and social concern and found it seriously lacking. He regarded it as “An impassioned and over imaginative intervention it into a serious and sensitive area of specialized knowledge with an established history of academic research”. (Essaying Activism: The Political Essays of Arundhati Roy: 185) Nevertheless, Arundhati Roy tears to pieces all arguments defending long held beliefs regarding dams as ‘modern temples’, as Pt. Nehru called it and sharply attacks the forces (favoring Big Dam theory), comparing it with a character she calls ‘Rumpelstiltskin.’ “What kind of potentate is Rumpelstiltskin?” she asks. “Powerful, pitiless, and armed to the teeth. He’s a kind of king the world has never known before. His realm is raw capital, his conquests emerging markets, his prayers profits, his borders limitless, his weapons nuclear.”(Hussain:260)

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