

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

(i) Background and Rationale of the Study

A comprehensive study of the recent postmodern Indian English writings reveals profound, far-reaching and revolutionary changes in the writers' attitude towards socio-cultural, socio-economical and socio-political issues. Paradigm shift has been visible virtually in all the stretches of creative writing critiquing and interrogating the basic underpinnings and bringing under inexorable scrutiny some of the stereotypical rituals and customs along with the de-humanizing taboos. The series of fresh and newborn issues like - toil of the socially subjugated, pangs of disempowerment, diasporic liminality, eco-reading of nature etc. often come under direct scanner. There appears a deep yearning to explore and negotiate those areas soft-pedaled and kept in ignorance so long. A vigorous voice against the persistent gross social injustice is often distinctly audible in the oeuvres of Sashi Deshpande, Rama Mehta, Anita Desai, Amitava Ghosh, Upamanya Chatterjee, Manju Kapoor, Geetha Hariharan, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, V.S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee and a galaxy of other writers.

What is remarkably consequential about this epoch is the progressive voice of a cluster of women writers. The woman in this new age is not only playing the stereotypical role of a mother or wife – but amidst all she is a human being striving for her own 'space', her due recognition and respect. The 'fair sex' has never been treated fairly. They have always been discriminated unjustly and shoved on the fringe in our patriarchal society. The bourgeois always try to intimidate and subjugate the underprivileged. And in this existential order women are inflicted with

the dual assault – first by bourgeois class and then by men in general. Most of the gynocritical and feminist discourses have focused on this issue of women subordination under traditional laws. And with this they initiate a defiant mode of narrative – a strategy to voice the devoiced.

Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* (1997) mulls over all these concerns. Indeed, since the inception of it – a unique creation in both theme and technique, Roy has brought about an exceptional literary sensation. Her Booker Prize Winning debut novel is admittedly an image breaker and a trend setter. Her writing emanates an aura of freshness and that dispels the stagnancy prevailing there. What is particularly significant here is her daring effort in transforming the stereotypical ‘old-duchess-and-the gamekeeper plot’ into an engrossing account of transgressed love - affair between Velutha, the dalit-Paravan and the Syrian Christian, Ammu. The novel is unquestionably an outstanding venture for a writer like Roy who started off her vocational journey as a script writer. She was thoroughly a student of architecture. In both feeling and form, the novel has heralded a new conception – an upheaval in the realm of traditional thoughts. Thematically it deals with a confrontation between the ‘Laltain and the Mombatti’, offish and insensitive societal norms characterized by patriarchy, atrocious and iniquitous police administration, inconsiderate and deceitful politicians, tyranny and injustice on the dalit and the deserted, and above all, the problem of marriage.

Besides its theme, Roy’s much debated novel is also unique for her experimentation in form and linguistics. She engineers bizarre or ‘weird English as the antidote to the dominance of bigness’ (Ch’ien 156). Her use of words, phrases, fragmented narratives, off-the-cuff writings, whimsical prose and Malayalam

rendering of sentences are remarkable instances of bringing architectural novelty into English. Her dexterity in exploiting the language is truly noteworthy. In her anarchical, arbitrary sport with words, Roy twists, wrenches, moulds and even repudiates the hackneyed rules and rebuilds them to fit her needs.

Roy's maneuvering of the English language is significant because she is forming her own canon of signifier and signified. The traditional, the so-called accepted language canon establishes the superiority of the big things. That is why by subverting the canon, she frees and glorifies the 'Mombattis' from the clutches of the 'Laltains'. The semantic and semasiological experiments thus bring a novel facet to the stereotypical way of narrating and there lies the laudation of Roy.

However, what is even more interesting is that after her debut novel Roy has not penned down any single volume of fiction, (it is to be noted that her next novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* appeared in the year 2017, almost 20 years after *The God of Small Things*) instead she has shown tremendous interest in the contemporary environmental, socio-political, socio-economical and cultural affairs of India and the globe. It is truly an extraordinary gesture for a writer in terms of generic preference. This transformation is largely due to her painful consciousness of a world where the ruthless exploitation of the underdogs is carried on in the name of progress and development, and thereby, the obligation she felt as a writer, to forge an alliance – a direct link, between the personal and the public, between art and activism to expose the real picture of gross injustice and thereafter to narrativize the possible methods of resistance. Roy's transformation also opens up the debate between the writer and the activist as Roy herself quizzes : 'why it should be that the person who wrote *The God of Small Things* is called a writer, and the person who

wrote the political essays is called an activist?' (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 196).

It must be argued that an in-depth study of Roy's texts reveals unambiguously that in her case the literary and political are not discrete turfs – there is no ideological break between the novelist-Roy and the activist-Roy as writing in either form, for her, is to make sense of an unjust world. This generic mobility rather allows Roy to use multiple rhetorics so as to narrativize the pangs and pains of the subaltern living a precarious life in the shadows of deracination, malnourishment, unemployment and even exterminations. This purposive strategic intent is clearly stated by Roy in her “The Ladies have Feelings, so...” where she writes –

What is happening to the world lies, at the moment, just outside the realm of common human understanding. It is the writers, the poets, the artists, the singers, the filmmakers who can make the connections, who can find ways of bringing it into the realm of common understanding. Who can translate cash-flow charts and scintillating boardroom speeches into real stories about real people with real lives. Stories about what it's like to lose your home, your land, your job, your dignity, your past, and your future to an invisible force. To someone or something you can't see. You can't hate. You can't even imagine. (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 214-15)

In an interview to HarperCollins she also states the same urgency :

I am prepared to grovel. To humiliate myself abjectly, because, in the circumstances, silence would be indefensible. So those of you who are willing: let's pick our parts, put on these discarded costumes, and

speaking our second hand lines in this sad second hand play. But let's not forget that the stakes we're playing for are huge. Our fatigue and our shame could mean the end of us. The end of our children and our children's children. Of everything we love. We have to reach within ourselves and find the strength to think. To fight.¹

What Roy argues, in other words, that we cannot or should not leave everything to the professional politicians because what is happening in the name of progress and development is not necessarily the best means; rather, often the politicians, bereft of political acumen and political sagacity, dabble in petty, ineffectual politicization in order to gain mileage over every other consideration. Indeed the main objectives of the welfare state received short shrift in the hands of the so-called politicians. Guided by her dauntless courage, Roy, thus has transformed herself from a fiction writer into a political analyst, activist and commentator whose constant effort is to trace and expose the link, better say, the nexus between the current global affairs to the larger power-structures of US Foreign policy and her allies. Till date she has penned down four volumes of non-fiction through which she dissects the contemporary global politics and shows how democratic set ups have been appropriated and exploited to serve the elite interest. From the structural point of view, the essays are polemical in nature; they are logical, argumentative and her rhetoric is so powerful that she drags us into it. One may decline to accept her views but after reading them one can hardly forget them. And from the thematic perspective the essays are myriad. They show Roy's multi-dimensional role as – ecologist, environmentalist, ethnographer, observer and commentator, traveler, anti-globalization and anti-corporatization writer, political-activist, anti-nuke and over all a chronicler of small things.

The Algebra of Infinite Justice (2002), an assemblage of seven essays is the first volume of Roy's non-fictional essays. The essays concern diverse social-political and ecological issues which have become a subject of major contention in India and abroad. Incidentally, in 2002 she was sentenced a 'symbolic' one day's imprisonment for undertaking a sit-in-protest outside the highest apex court and showing open disrespect against the verdict of the Sardar Sarovar Case.

She is a representative figure of the anti-globalization / alter-globalization movement and a fervent denigrator of neo-imperialism and of the intercontinental stratagems of the US and her allies. She depicts the United States as the global oligarchy that holds the exclusive prerogative to invade and launch offensive against any of its subjects at any time, gleaning its authority directly from God.

Roy also explodes two of the great myths of India's progress : the massive dam-building projects that were supposed to expedite India's entry into the modern age - but which instead have displaced millions with a severe blow of untold sufferings; and the detonation of India's first nuke with all its attendant Faustian bargains. Analysing the facts and figures published by the dam authorities, Roy exposes their false claims. There is gross violation of environmental norms. Her unmediated empirical experiences among the distressed people underscore this gap between the government's claim and the ground reality, and the inexorable cessation she arrives at is that - reservoirs are being constructed less for the poor people to solve their problem of water, flood and electricity than for the rich and affluent. In the euphoria of progression millions of Adivasis, dalits, and the indigent are displaced, rendered homeless in the sequel of the construction of massive dams. She

raises her vigorous voice and expresses her deep concern for the people who are now displaced and dispossessed miserably.

Such detection in them besides the possible alternatives mediated, account for the strongest petition against the construction of mega reservoirs and Roy's discourse becomes a sheer indictment on flawed development policies pursued since independence. Taking the cue from Slavoj Zizek we may argue that all these are 'low probability - high consequence risks' (Myers 47). These are :

...manufactured risks, which is to say that they are the products of human intervention in the natural world. Furthermore, they are such substantial interventions that we can no longer allow nature to correct itself and so solve the problem for us because each risk involves the derailment of nature itself. (Myers 49)

The noted German sociologist, Ulrich Beck also cautioned us about the dangerous consequences of this irresponsible techno-economic model leading to 'risk society' (Puleo 28).

An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire (2005) is the second volume of Roy's collected non-fiction writing which brings together thirteen essays written between June 2002 and November 2004. The essays, committed to the purpose, once again are dressed to kill the western hypocrisy. With her robust language she criticizes West for its unbridled materialism which, for her, is the root of all evils. She blatantly states that the problem of the modern world originates from the foreign policies of America and her allies. International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, several trade related treaties and intellectual property rights - are but the tools of western imperialism. The crises of Iraq, Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, North Korea, Cuba

etc. are the fruits of western greed and their unlawful, unethical intervention. West, the so-called power house, is toying with the peace of the entire globe. The greed of a handful of people is destabilizing and destroying the peace of the whole world. And people like Arundhati Roy, Vandana Shiva, Amartya Sen, Jean Dreze, Noam Chomsky, Khet Mar, Barbara Kingsolver and a host of other writers – across the world are striving to bring home the false myth of ‘growth’ by providing physical evidences of the civil and terrestrial injustices inflicted upon them so as to generate the culture of protest. Roy here also critiques at length the growing menace of corporate power. There is the vicious nexus between the multinational companies and the political parties. They run the virtual government paralyzing the democratic system. This underhand configuration is so powerful that it can form or topple any government. Thus development, instead of being all encompassing, has remained ‘all exclusive’ for a handful of privileged few. It is really shameful for a nation that has a glorious past, a nation that prides itself on its valiant manumission from bigoted autocrats should fall victim to some corporate conglomerates whose activities are gradually leading the poor to an inevitable extinction.

Listening to Grasshoppers (2009) once again shows Roy as a crusader on behalf of all the marginalized people. In this anthology there are eleven vibrant essays. She here focuses her attention mainly on her motherland India, and shows how the promises of India as the world’s largest democracy ring hollow. The old India mutates into that kind of sky-scraping agglomeration where there is abysmal void of guilt and injustice done to the poor people – the have not class. Modern India is a divided India². What Roy is arguing here that freedom, justice and equality of individual beings are being compromised; that in the name of progress by globalization and corporatization Indian diverse pluralistic democracy is now being

fused with Free Market which is hell bound for maximizing profit. In the name of progress, instead of general welfare, day by day militarization and policing are fast becoming the mode of governance. The tentacles of corporate globalization are crushing every protest of the common people. They have formed their own parallel administrative system which runs the shadow government. Law, administration, corrupt judges are devaluing the basic principles of democracy. Democracy has now become 'Demon-Crazy' (Roy, *Listening to Grasshoppers* xiii). Roy's anger spills over as everything is now on sale in the name of blind progress. The precious legacy of India's diverse pluralistic culture, bequeathed by our ancestors, is being replaced by the monolithic culture. There is rising intolerance for any kind of opposition. Roy is also harsh about the short sightedness of the Indian political leadership. Probably they are not up to the mark in helming the responsibility. It is their short sightedness and narrow politics that is allowing a wholesale corporate takeover of India. And now the first victims of this sacrifice are once again the poor people – the Adivasis, the dalits, the peasants, the small farmers who are robbed off their livelihoods, incomes, lands and what not! The high rate of suicides among the peasants is a testimony to this dismal picture. In the last few decades 'more than 1,80,000' (Sainath) debt-trapped peasants of India were compelled to commit suicide. Besides exposing the hollow promises of welfare democracy, Roy also critiques the ghastly attack on the Legislative Assembly of India on 13 December 2001 by some extremists.

In another essay of this anthology she scathingly satirizes and ridicules the Bush administration and its foreign policies. She here exposes the hypocrisy of the American government that, on one hand it is compelling the third world countries to stop providing subsidies to the farmers, and on the other hand it is providing

subsidies to its own farmers. She also criticizes America for constantly spying on us. It is noteworthy here that the founder and director of WikiLeaks³, Julian Assange published in 2010 US military and diplomatic documents leaked by Chelsea Manning. They are a testimony that Roy is right in her accusations.

The other essays of the volume deal with the genocide of Muslims in Gujarat, the volatile situation of Kashmir and the real lessons to be learnt from 26/11 attack on Mumbai.

The latest in the tirade against the atrocities of state apparatus is *Broken Republic* (2011), a collection of three mighty essays. The essays once again show Roy's constant effort to spill the bean of the insidious methods of the centre appropriating the margin. They try to contextualize the problem of Maoist insurrection – the condition, the situation, the people, and the policy which led a large section of people rise against their own motherland. They are pitted against a malfunctioning state that conceals, misdirects, displaces, deceives and even permits an extensive corporate acquisition of people's land and resources.

One professional body, designated by the Planning Commission of India, prepared a study-report in the year 2008 entitled - *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas*⁴. The report pointed out that :

The Naxalite (Maoist) movement has to be recognized as a political movement with a strong base among the landless and poor peasantry and adivasis ... it is to be looked upon as basically a fight for social justice, equality, protection, security and local development. (Roy, *Broken Republic* 7-8)

It is very interesting to note that former Justice P.B. Sawant⁵ even thanked the so-called Maoists for compelling the government of India and the local authorities 'to pay attention to the egregious injustice of the system' (Roy, *Broken Republic* 13).

In *An Uncertain Glory : India and its Contradictions* (2013) the two of the leading economists, Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen have poignantly expressed the dismal picture of rural-urban divide prevalent in the country. They have pointed out in unambiguous term the continuous negligence and failure of the state in providing her rural people the bare necessities of life. Social activists and commentators like Harsh Mander, Aruna Roy, Shobhaa De and many others have also pointed out the 'alienation of the Indian elite from the country's underprivileged' (Dreze and Sen 265). Mander, writing from the standpoint of exploited and oppressed people, has raised our awareness to the 'exile of the poor from our conscience and even consciousness' (Dreze and Sen 265).

Roy quizzes when a large number of people are being methodically silenced and exploited what other option is left to them than to fight back?

Arundhati Roy is thus vibrant with a rebellious spirit which seeks to break away from the conventional paradigms of accepted norms. If in her novel she champions the cause of the down-trodden, thus voicing the de-voiced, in her polemical essays too, she shows her dauntless courage and commitment to the cause. An indefatigable defender of human rights, Roy's sole concern therefore, is to 'open their eyes'⁶ so that the laymen become aware about this ruthless exploitation and can safeguard their rights by putting up certain amount of resistance to it.

Roy is ahead of the curve in the sense that she realizes, in this turbulent volatile world the writer / artist can no longer remain aloof in his / her relationship vis-à-vis with society. In this age of neo-globalization / neo-imperialism everything counts and matters. The policies of the global power are directly affecting us. For example the tension in America–Iran relationship is resulting in the sky-rocketing price rising of the crude oil in the international market thus affecting the common Indian households. The recent Syrian crisis once again lays bare the seamy side of the corrupt western policies especially of America. Rise of Taliban and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) are other instances.

Again, in this age of power-politics the intellectuals are often dragged into the process. Salman Rushdie was denied entry into the 2007-Joypur Literary Festival.⁷ Taslima Nasrin was denied visa by the Indian government. The gruesome murder of the rationalists - M.M. Kalburgi, Govinda Panesar and Narendra Dabholkar in India and the four liberal-minded bloggers in Bangladesh – Niloy Chakraborti, Ananta Bijoy Das, Washiqur Rahman and Avijit Roy demonstrates the horrific picture and terror of rising intolerance. The ‘ban culture’ once again is symptomatic of a society growing fundamentalist, fanatic and fascist more and more.

Roy, free from any inhibition, ponders not only the ill effects of globalization, modernity and tradition, governance, politics, pollution and poverty but the paramount responsibility of art and artist also in countering the effects. After discussing them she weaves them together by suggesting a common solution to all these issues. She affirms that the only way to tackle all these issues is to develop the culture of protest, the politics of opposition and the politics of voicing the de-voiced

across the world to provide resistance to certain destructions. It is interesting to note that recently in India a host of writers / artists / intellectuals – to name a few – Nayantara Sehgal, Sara Joseph, Rehman Abbas, Ashok Vajpeyi⁸ etc. – have returned Honours and given up government positions as a protest against the menace of rising political, racial and religious intolerance threatening the fundamental concept of our democratic values.

Roy's style of writing and her constant concern for the impoverished class along with the raging issues of the present time have invited sharp attention from all over the globe. She has been discussed, scrutinized and analysed – in both ways positive and negative.

ii) Review of Related Literature

Jaya Prasad's article entitled "Arundhati Roy and Her Concern for the Environment : In Her Novel and Essays" published in *Cyber Literature*, Vol. 7 & 8, June and Dec. – 2001 discusses how Roy has joined hands with the likes of Medha Patkar, Maneka Gandhi and Sunderlal Bahuguna who have made environmental issues the *raison d'être* of their lives.

Graham Huggan has a very different view of Roy. He in his book *The Post-Colonial Exotic : Marketing the Margins* (2001) claims that the success and saleability of the contemporary Indo-Anglian writers especially as that of Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Arundhati Roy depend on their exquisite poisoning act of regaling to the Post Colonial exotic as well as attempting an appraisal of it. His denomination for such dissimulation is 'strategic exoticism'.

The Checkbook and the Cruise Missile : Conversations with Arundhati Roy (2004) is an assemblage of four interviews carried out by the radio-producer David

Barsaman over a two-year period. This tete-a-tete conversation gives us an insight into Roy's essays highlighting the reasons behind Roy's transformation from a script writer to a vocal spokesperson against the injustices caused by governments and Empires of the world.

Dr. Shibu Simon and Sijo Varghese, C. in their article "Art and Activism : An Analytical Study of Arundhati Roy's Fictional and Non-Fictional Writings in the Light of Gayatri Spivak's Theory of Subalternity" published in *Indian Journal of Postcolonial Literatures*, January-December 2004 discuss the issue of subalternity. However, the article deals with Roy's novel and selective essays from *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*.

Jason Mezey in the article "Franchises and Fetishes : Critiquing State Power in Arundhati Roy's Nonfiction" published in *South Asian Review*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2008 traces in a brief manner the emergence of Roy on the literary firmament as a novelist and then the socio-political reasons of her transformation to an author-activist.

Globalizing Dissent : Essays on Arundhati Roy (2009) edited by Ranjan Ghosh & Antonia Navarro – Tejero is another anthology of critical essays. It is a discourse that traces the multi-dimensional role of Roy and her vast works. The book has two parts. In the first part there is an in depth analysis of Roy's novel from several perspectives. The second part traces the inevitable link between politics and writing, between intellectual responsibility towards people and society.

Ms. Darkhasha Azhar's article "Arundhati Roy's Political Consciousness with special reference to *Power Politics* and *War Talk*", published in *Cyber Literature* Vol. XXVII, No.1, June 2011, brilliantly documents Roy's courage to call

the spade a spade. She has discussed meticulously Roy's constant concern about big dams, displacement of millions of people, hydro-power projects, industrialization, privatization, globalization, terrorism and US imperialism.

Jacqueline N. Kerr's thesis *Uniting Postcolonialism and Environmentalism through Historiographic Storytelling in the Writing of Arundhati Roy* (2011), submitted to the University of North Carolina, critiques how Roy's fiction and non-fiction yoke the concerns of Postcolonialism and Environmentalism. She also provides physical evidence of the civil and terrestrial injustices inflicted upon as the consequences of globalization.

Tabassum Ruhi Khan in her article "Dam the Irony for *The Greater Common Good* : A Critical Cultural Analysis of the Narmada Dam Debate", published in *International Journal of Communication* 6 (2012), argues how Roy's protest against the Narmada Valley Project was much more than a battle to safeguard the eco-region of the entire affected area; it was a wrestle to reinstall faith and righteousness in the democratic set up of India.

S. Sujaritha's article "Eco-Feministic Reading of Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* and Arundhati Roy's *The Cost of Living*", published in *The Vedic Path*, Vol. LXXXVII No. 1 and 2 Jan – Mar / Apr – June 2013, discusses Roy's essays from the Eco-Feministic perspective.

Naman Mody and Arnapurna Rath's article "Author-Activism : Philosophy of Dissent in the writings of Arundhati Roy", published in *Asiatic*, Vol.7, No.1, June 2013, focuses on theorizing 'dissent' as a philosophical – political 'moment' and also attempts a critique on the voice of dissent through a close reading of Roy's

texts. However, the article concentrates on two essays mainly “The End of Imagination” and “Greater Common Good”.

Anup Baul and Dr. Reena Sanasam’s article “Study of Social Activism in Arundhati Roy’s Work” published in *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Vol.19 No.1, Feb. 2014, critically analyzes the socio-political consciousness of Arundhati Roy as reflected through her essays, interviews, novel and other activities.

iii) Statement of the Research Topic

The available scholarship on Arundhati Roy reveals that most of the scholars have dealt with their relevant and contemporary themes, none of them has, however, discussed the issues of ‘Reconstruction’ – especially the reconstruction of the subalterns. The need to investigate this aspect of Roy’s non-fictional works for my research work has arisen from this intellectual vacuum. This research, therefore, seeks to explore the discursive way/s in which Roy re-constructs the excluded voices and resists the politics of excision.

iv) Chapter Division

As such, this research paper consists of five chapters. The introduction serves as the necessary backdrop for the rationale of this study. It traces the evolution and transformation of Arundhati Roy from the much-hyped prestigious Booker Prize winner to an author-activist whose sole concern is to narrate the untold and unheard tales about the pathetic plight of the socially excluded people from the multiple minoritarian perspectives. The first chapter concerns ‘Reconstruction’ and Roy’s role in reconstructing the excluded voices by confronting the dominant and oppressive structures on both, the global and the local level. The second chapter,

‘Reaction Against Environmental Injustice’ penetrates into the representations of eco-consciousness of Roy’s texts from an eco-critical standpoint. It deals with the issues of environment – its exploitation and degradation due to the pursuance of the flawed developmental policies of corporate globalization and the terrible plight of a large number of people dislodged to make room for the mega projects. The next chapter i.e. the third chapter, ‘Resistance Against Neo-Imperial Injustice’ relates and limits to the injustices inflicted upon the laymen by neo-imperialism that operates through the means of corporate globalization and neo-liberalism. An in-depth analysis of the perspective reading of Roy’s texts has been done to understand how she problematizes the issues of corporate globalization, neo-liberalism and the catastrophic effect of America’s global war on terror. The fourth chapter, ‘State Sponsored Communal Violence and Genocide: A Critique’ emphasizes on communal violence and genocide - both in India and abroad – to understand how they are used by the power as effective tools of hegemonic expansion. The fifth chapter, ‘A Review of Maoist Insurrection’ critiques at length the impact of India’s New Economic Policy upon the tribal heart-land of India, the recent Maoist insurrection, and the subsequent launching of Operation Green Hunt – fuelling a serious internal crisis in the country. The conclusion is based on the findings and inferences that are derived and wrested from the research work of her non-fictional endeavours. There is also a select bibliography following the conclusion.