

## “Study of Social Activism in Arundhati Roy’s Work.”

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**Abstract:** Indian English Literature written during the pre-independence period and post-independence period is the representation of its periods, where more or less the writers penned down the social issues in their writings. Writers of every genre are the representatives of their age. Some worth mentioning authors of the contemporary period to be mentioned here like Salman Rushdie, Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Mulk Raj Anand, Anita Desai, Manju Kapoor and many more of the contemporary literature who represents the age through their specific works. Their writing deals with the major issues of the society of every age. That is why the literature of earlier times cast a new picture of socio-political thought to the modern itself. Today our society faces tremendous problem under the influence of politics and power, which makes the innocent people its ladder to climb and to have the ripe fruit of development, and this issue directly or indirectly pepped out in the writings of the contemporary writers too. In this paper an attempt will be made to study the same in the writings of the Booker award winner, Arundhati Roy, for her debut novel “The God of Small Things”. The study will critically analyze the major issues of the contemporary society upheld by the author to make her readers aware of the same, whereas it will also seek out the answer for it’s the power of the capitalist or the discourse of the dominating rule over our country that still persists in the form of socio political issues. The study will take into account her all short stories, essays, interviews etc. besides the novel that makes her more to be an activist rather than a mere novelist.

**Keywords:** Imperialism, Anti-socialist, Capitalist, Colonialism, Activist, Power, Discourse, social conflict

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### I. Introduction:-

Toni Cade Bambara said that literature being the appropriate one to attack on the social evils creates awareness among the readers and make them to uphold their protest. Here I quote,  
“A writer, like another socio-cultural worker, like any other member of the community, ought to try to put her/his skills in the service of the community”.

Arundhati Roy, who emerged as a figure head in the contemporary literature while reflecting the social issues in her writings and bagged the acclaimed Booker award for her debut novel “The God of Small Things” (1997), had not only employed the description of how the small things in life affect people's behavior and their lives but also upheld the other conflicting issues of the society which still persisted in the modern society, after that she focused towards the socio political issues and wrote many essays, short stories etc where she had employed the socio political conflicts that our country is facing till today, for she was known more or less as an activist rather than a mere novelist.

If we peep into the history of literature we can perceive the same, where literature of early period exposed the façade truth of the society, and many modern writers joined in their group and raised their voices throughout their writings to bring awareness among the mass and to bring a revolution in the society. Arundhati Roy acclaimed to be one of them who reflected those issues without any hesitation and had to undergo to a troublesome state. On the other hand she had won many awards for upholding such realistic themes in her writings, for instance she bagged Sydney peace award in May 2004 for her social work.

Before we institute the author’s activities to consider herself as a social activist, we should first look into the term ‘social conflict’, what does the term actually connotes, for which people come up with their skills and stain their hands in the darkness of the society.

‘Social conflict is then the confrontation of social powers.’

Social power is an intentionally directed capability to produce effects through another person which bears a clear relation within the contemporary society where the person with ‘power’ dominates or intentionally directs his or her capability to produce effects on the proletariat by other person for self benefits. (Understanding Conflict and War, Chap.27, p.1).

The capitalistic suppression towards the proletariat defined in the Marxist theory is identical through the big leaders of the nation, who suppressed the poor on behalf of country’s betterment. Roy always has a cry for the poor, the ‘Dalit’, Women and the discriminated one within the society and we can make out that in her later writings; among them some such are “The Algebra of Infinite Justice”, “War is Peace”, “The End of

*Imagination*", "*The Greater Common Good*" etc which depicts the façade scenario of the modern society where on one side the people were endorsed with fundamental rights of Democracy and on the other, those rights were snatched away by the big leaders of the nation in the name of development, While criticizing the government's role Roy herself states in one of her speech

*"Flags are bits of colored cloth that governments use first to shrink-wrap people's minds and then as ceremonial shrouds to bury the dead"*.

From the above discussion we can form a parallelism where the European countries formed and controlled the largest part in history for a fairly long period. India was also one of the countries to be ruled by the company. If we go to the depth of the history we can see how the company starts its rule over the indigenous state, they entered the nation for trade and established the empire but when interference started in the form of trade it enraptured the society wholly. By then the white man had a feeling of racial superiority and this also was a main reason for capturing India and making it their colony. They damaged seriously the indigenous culture and heritage of our country. For them, the orient people were a mass of barbarians and called their rule as '*civilizing mission*' and suppressed people to the core and made their lives a hell. Under the British rule, India lost its cultural heritage and honor. The colonizers forced rules on the native people and forced them to do work requiring great effort with a less pay that made them poor.

While on the other hand literature moves forward beside the society. No literature can reach to its extent without employing the façade realism of the society and such realism was possessed in Roy's works, the socio political issues and etc. It changes from time to time reflecting all social norms as per the need of the time. It speaks out the true happenings within the society taking into consideration the injustice with the poor people or the political issues of time to time. In every age, this has been a foreseeable concern for the literary artist to reflect these issues as they are. Very often life is uplifted by the current and crosscurrent of this social change, or is fragmented by the collision with this new change.

Back to Roy's work '*The Greater Common Good*', Where Jawaharlal Nehru- the leader remarked to the villagers who were to be displaced by the Hirakud Dam, 1948.-

*"If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country"* (*The greater Common Good*, p.47)

Morarji Desai, while speaking at public meeting in the submergence zone of the pong dam in 1961 stated. - "*We will request you to move from your homes after the dam comes up. If you move it will be good. Otherwise we shall release the waters and down you all"* - (*The Greater Common Good*, p.55)

We can stretch the parallelism in Arundhati Roy's works as well where she has weaved the same of the contemporary society. In her essay "*The Greater Common Good*", she elaborately explained that our true enemies were not the neighboring countries, not the physical boundaries but it was the evils wearing the mask of the great politicians who sowed the seed of hatred in our soul in the name of betterment of the country. While completing big projects in the name of countries' development they are actually oppressing the poor people making them homeless specially the '*Adivasis*' for whom the nature was their means of livelihood. Destroying the nature for the big dam projects and compensating them with bare lands where they couldn't even earn their livelihood. Making them homeless by means of force which can be shown as a discourse of the European dominating ideologies existed in the form of '*power*' where the capitalist always oppress the proletariat. She ironically goes on thanking the great creator of the nation the USA, who sowed the seed of superiority and objectifying the other cultures as inferior to theirs. While Joseph Conrad blames the darkness of the European's cruel treatment of the natives, an unfathomable darkness within every human being for committing heinous acts of evil, in his '*Heart of Darkness*'

Arundhati Roy, the author shows acute sensitiveness to her surroundings which is reflected in her nonfictional works, books and essays. She has been an impassioned critic of globalization and American influence and felt herself part of the contemporary struggle for social justice in our country. In all these works it is not difficult to see her splendid ability to balance between the significant social impact of industrialization and more minute observations. The Social realism as portrayed by the novelist can be well understood if we analyze the social issues which have been raised not in her debut novel but also in her almost all essays, Interviews and short stories. Roy uses a dense language, careful style of foreground, the essential dilemmas of the socially oppressed; such is the extraordinary quality of her narrative art for she won Sydney Peace Prize in May 2004 for her work in social.

'*The Greater Common Good*' is about the impact of Narmada Dam project and also of India's Nuclear Weapons programme. She is a figure-head of the anti-globalization/alter-globalization movement and a vehement critic of neo-imperialism. In response to India's testing of nuclear weapons in Pokhran, Rajasthan, She wrote "*The End of Imagination*", a critique of the Indian government's nuclear policies, where she has shown the extent of disaster that we cannot even imagine. It was published in her collection '*The Algebra of Infinite Justice*', in which she also crusaded against India's massive hydroelectric dam projects in the central and western states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. She has since devoted herself solely to nonfiction and politics, Roy opted open discussion to uphold the unspoken story, the sufferings of the poor people, the

political gains behind the big political decisions taken in the name of countries' betterment in her almost all the essays.

"*The Algebra of Infinite Justice*" (2001) which is a collection of essays such as '*An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*' — in which Roy deconstructs the concepts of empire, neoliberal capitalism, corporate globalization, and state terrorism with a degree of both passion and erudition that is truly astounding.

Her activism lies with her passionate critiques of imperialism, the corporate media and their "neoliberal project"—what she describes as "the medium of those who have power and money?" Her unambiguously critical look at the Bush administration's policy in Iraq will likely lead American readers to label her as either brilliantly of good judgment or strongly anti-American.

Her next essay - "*Walking with Comrades*" that has acquired the most attention, reflects her secretive journey into the Chhattisgarh forests guided by a militant resistance group of Maoist rebels who fight the Indian army and police on behalf of the indigenous population. Roy follows the Maoists through the forest. Roy acknowledges their violence in her book, saying of the wider Maoist movement that "*it's impossible to defend much of what they've done*". But her sympathies rest with the individual activists she meets in Chhattisgarh and she has no problem, in principle, with their methods. Even though Roy identifies with Mahatma Gandhi's vision of self-reliance, she sees his advocacy of non-violent resistance as little more than "pious humbug".

In an interview with the Times of India published in August 2008, Arundhati Roy expressed her support for the independence of Kashmir from India after massive demonstrations in favor of independence took place—some 500,000 separatists rallied in Srinagar in the Kashmir part of Jammu and Kashmir state of India for independence on 18 August 2008, following the Amarnath land transfer controversy. According to her, the rallies were a sign that Kashmiris desire secession from India, and not union with India. She was criticized by Indian National Congress (INC) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for her remarks.

"*Why didn't they just poison us? Then we wouldn't have to live in this shit-hole and the government could have survived along with its precious dam to itself.*" —*Speaking by Ram Bhai, whose village was submerged when the Bargi dam was built on the Narmada. (The Greater Common Good, p.55).*

The cry of the oppressed people makes her impatient to pen down their problems to make the society aware of the façade truth of the society. She had shown how the elements of Democracy became the weapon for the big leaders to oppress the poor.

Roy witnessed the ugly face of the nation where the capitalist, the man with '*Power*' makes the poor people their ladder to climb and to have the ripe fruit in the name of the country's betterment. Roy's intense sensation towards such injustice makes her to give a call to the country to awake and make a change in the whole system together. She found literature as a media to wake the entire countrymen through the active readers and in her journey she composed many essays, short stories and the most eminent one "*The God of Small Things*". She expressed her keen pain to the readers for those deprived peoples of the country and as well as tries to show the fruitful reason behind any political action taken in the name of the country's betterment in almost all her writings, we can see that the cry for the injustice is vehement alongside with her role of a social activist. She goes on uncovering the façade truth of the country.

As a social activist she chooses the literary form to express her keen thoughts, hatred towards the dirty game of politics.

She uses various methods in her writing as a social activist such as boycotts (while refusing the government's acts in her essays), protests (while showing resentment against the various governments policies) and open discussion with the readers as well as the media and pragmatic style of criticizing the government's roles, holding social campaigns and ultimately being advocate of the non-violent strategy towards criticizing the various governments policies and decisions.

Mrs. Arundhati Roy has indeed the most successful writer with her immortal creation '*The God of Small Things*'. And with the other works which directly attacks on the various social evils including economic and political transgression. The study about the social realism, social segregation and political transgression of her works has attempted to find out, in a sociological perspective, how her works have brought out the true nature of the society, being an expression of the social, cultural, economic and political patterns of Indian society. Though all her voices seem very vital for the present time, it is not difficult to achieve it. Because what she voices in her works she does it practically as a social activist for the peace, prosperity and progress of the mankind and of the world. While describing this hard social realism of our country, the author hopes that many sensitive readers of her novel must listen to her sincere voice and would join their hands with her rebelling soul as a social activist and revolutionary spirit as a progressive writer would be satisfied seeing a new social order free from all discriminations, exploitations and inequalities.

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