



**Arundhati Roy's *Broken Republic* and *Azadi: Freedom, Fascism, Fiction:*
Reminders of Democratic Principles**



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ABSTRACT

Suzanna Arundhati Roy, Indian author of The God of Small Things, which won Man Booker Award for Fiction in 1997. Her writings are leaned more towards non-fiction rather than fiction as she has written only two novels. Her non-fiction is an accumulation of real and experience based stories; which are the burning issues of the world; the stories of marginalized sections of the society; the invasion of capitalism on tribal population; brutality, rape and exploitation of police on tribal women; grave violations of human rights in the tribal heartlands of India; the exploitation,

stigmatization of religious minorities and an essay to snatch their democratic rights. Roy's Broken Republic and Azadi: Freedom, Fascism, Fiction are the testimonies of grave human rights violations and sidelining of democratic values in India. The dream of India during adaptation of the constitution to create more healthy and exuberant democratic society is waning and fading away slowly. Roy talks about these issues in both the works. This paper will try to explore how she reminds us the forgotten democratic values and stresses upon the conservation of the same.

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction

Arundhati Roy, a staunch defender of the political democracy or democratic values has alarmed the citizens of the country that the democracy is in threat; the constitution is being put in attrition. She says,

To belong to a minority is a crime, to be murdered is a crime, to be lynched is a crime, to be poor is a crime and to defend the poor is a plot to overthrow the government. By such arrests, in effect, they are isolating lakhs of people as these activists are the representatives of those people. (Ghosh 1)

She always has concern over the gradual decline of democratic values. She actively involves herself in making people aware of their individual rights. She remains as a hard critic of a government which suppresses the voice of marginalized; encourages poor to speak up and assert their rights. She is the one who keenly observes the attacks on Dalits, Minorities and Adivasis. She says,

Lynch mobs have been let loose and cases are being registered against those who have been attacked. Whoever stands up for human rights, opposes the government and advocates the rights of people is termed as 'Urban Naxal. (Ghosh 1)

When spokespeople from one of the political parties in India, made a derogatory comment about Prophet Mohammad, she terms it not as an isolated incident but points out at the structural seeding of hatred towards one community as the cause for it. As she says, "But for India's 200 million Muslims, these comments were not an isolated incident. Rather, they were the culmination of the BJP's engineering hatred of a common enemy" (News Report 1).

Roy shows the utter bitter at the corporate control of media. She questions the pipelining of fake news through the biased media. Everyday false content is created which people are not able to digest at any cost. As she opines on a Show, "The media which is the forth-pillar of the democracy is pumping a twenty four hour of venom"(Democracy Now

00:09:33-50). The ability of the corporate-controlled media to reach mass, posits it at dangerously impacting people's attitude and to manipulate the behaviors of them easily.

Roy's *Broken Republic* and *Azadi*, are the collection of essays which show the spirit of her in evaluating major-happenings in terms of destruction of democracy is appreciable. Her ability to forecast the consequences of present-happenings on the democratic thinking and lifestyle.

Corporatized Media

The Democracy is balanced by the three pillars, namely the Executive, the Legislative and the Judiciary but now in this era, Democracy is lined towards the fourth pillar that is Media. It is so until and unless the transparency is the prime consideration of it. The media houses which are having responsibility of becoming the voice of the voiceless are becoming the voice of vested interests. The Public is mostly influenced by the media, it plays an important role in making and unmaking of the government, thus it would be not wrong while saying that the media plays a very important role in making of the government. Its duty is to hold the government or representatives responsible for their wrong-doings and promises during elections. But the media is becoming a pan for cooking their roti instead. Roy in her both the books write about this. The communal hatred that the media is injecting into the minds of the people is dangerous for the harmonic and secular society. She puts forth concern over the day by day increase of control of the government over media, the police and the intelligence agencies. As she says, "More than 400 round-the-clock television news channels and millions of WhatsApp groups and Tik Tok videos keep the population on a drip-feed of frenzied bigotry" (Roy, *Azadi* 117). Secularism which is one of the traits of democratic society; living with different faiths is the core principle of a matured democracy.

Roy further details how Muslims have lost their place in mainstream media. As she says, "The only Muslim voices we hear on television shows are the absurd ones of those few who are constantly and deliberately invited to play the part of the primitive, Islamist *maulan* (preacher), to make things worse than they are already" (Roy, *Azadi* 121). The media which has to be the voice of every community is becoming the voice of selected unfortunately, thereby weakening the secular aspect of the constitution.

The media today is mostly controlled the capitalists who work behind the running of government. They have the ability to buy the government. The huge wealth they are having enough to buy politicians is another story of loot from the public and tribal lands of the

country. Roy projects how media portrays about the Maoism in the tribal heartland of India. The innocent tribal people who have no option than taking weapons into their hands to defend the forest from the destructions and profit-gaining ventures of capitalists, who are given free-hands by the government to exploit the resources, are projected as the grave danger to the security of the country by media. The population which is struggling to withstand hunger and malnutrition how can become a grave threat? It is the propaganda of the corporate media to project them so, because the capitalists are those who are benefited by the displacements of the tribals. Roy says in her one of collections of essays,

The press Trust of India put out several untruthful stories, faithfully showcased by the *Indian Express*, including one about Maoists mutilating the bodies of the policemen they had killed. (The denial, which came from the police themselves, was published postage-stamp size, hidden in the middle pages). (Roy, *Broken Republic* 120)

This kind of biased views and stories to stigmatize particular community and letting capitalists loose to control the behaviors of the mass according to their wishes is the denial of rights given by the constitution and it is dangerous threat to the healthy democracy too.

Rights of Minorities

Roy is always has concern on the deteriorating status of minorities in India. According to Albert Camus, Democracy is not the law of the majority but the protection of the minority. Roy opines that the Hindu right has taken almost complete control of the state. The constant content creation by media and other vested interests have created the image of Muslims as the traitors and Islamophobia is spreading like anything. The fear-mongering is so vast that the boycott of Muslims is done publicly. As she puts in one of her essays,

The increasingly blatant social and economic boycott of Muslims has pushed them further down the societal ladder and made them even more unwelcome in ‘secular’ public places and housing colonies. Some areas often hatefully referred as ‘mini-pakistans’”. (Roy, *Azadi* 152)

The growing fear about particular community is dangerous for a democracy which starves to give rights to at most destitute. She writes how even liberals try to segregate

themselves from being labled as muslim-favouring population. As she writes, “For many good-hearted liberals, muslims are welcome guests, but guests nevertheless- burdened with the expectation of good behavior, which is a terrible thing to thrust onto fellow citizens” (Roy, *Azadi* 165). She calls the liberals good-hearted because at least they are considering them as guests. Roy writes about the Kashmir issue and criticizes the abrogation of the article 370, which had given Kashmir a special status. The sudden arrests of most of the political leaders and activists in Kashmir; putting them in house-arrest for months together without giving them the rights to approach courts. The clamp-down of internet in whole Kashmir turned various activities to a halt. The rights a citizen is given fundamentally were snatched away from them.

Rights of Adivasis

The Tribal population of this country, who is living in the forest areas with forest as their ultimate source of life has been always denied their rights since the colonial rule. They resisted and still are resisting the snatching-away of rights on forest produce. Even after the constitution was ratified, the rights for which they were struggling to get during the colonial rule were not given to them, moreover, it was a black day for them. As Roy puts it,

Indian Constitutionwas adopted by the parliament in 1950. It was a tragic day for tribal people. The constitution ratified colonial policy and made the state custodian of tribal homelands. Overnight it turned the entire population into squatters on their own land. It denied them their traditional rights to forest-produce; it criminalized a whole way of life. (Roy, *Broken Republic* 5)

The tribal lands which are having huge amount of resources is the biggest profit-zone for the capitalists. The colonialist too had the same interests to exploit the resources of these lands but now that “honorary job” is taken by the big corporate, who see nothing than profit. The huge profits they make through mining of bauxite and other minerals have stripped the tribals off their natural habitats, polluted the environment, mass destruction of forest has been taking place. Roy refers the Lokayukta report for Karnataka to show the humongous wealth creation through mining. As she says,

For every tone of iron ore mined by a private company the government gets a royalty of Rs. 27 and mining company makes Rs. 5000. In the bauxite and aluminium sector the figures are even worse. Enough to buy elections, governments, judges, newspapers, TV channels, NGOs and aid agencies. (Roy, *Broken Republic* 11)

The profit, the corporates make out of it is so huge that they can subvert the elected government, which pledges to hold the principles of democracy up, but fails in the hands of capitalists. The violations of human rights, democratic principles are tolerated and diverted to their benefits. The rapes, molestations and destruction of properties of tribals by the police are defended on the doubt that they have connection with Maoists. The atrocities are common by police even it is a government body; is run through democratic laws. As she says,

Of course, from the forest Department's point of view, these were illegal people engaged in unconstitutional activity, and the department was only implementing the rule of law. (Their sexual exploitation of women was an added perk in a hardship posting). (Roy, *Broken Republic* 41)

The fundamental right of living dignified and healthy life is a far away dream for these people. The sexual exploitation is institutionalized through a series of attacks and rapes on tribal women. Their colonial condition is being made strong rather than giving them forest rights and the fruits of democracy.

Roy shows how justice is delayed for these people. They are arrested, put into jail for years for false reasons. No hearings in the court, no news of brutality on them, no evidence, no conviction and they end their half of life in prisons. As Roy writes,

On 22 January 2008 (Malti) was arrested along with several others. One of the charges against her is that she mailed CDs containing video evidence of Salwa Judum atrocities to several Members of parliament. Her case rarely comes up for hearing because the police know their case is flimsy. (Roy, *Broken Republic* 60)

Capitalism and Poverty

Capitalism fosters inequality at the same time democracy tries to eradicate that inequality. Do democracy and Capitalism can co-exist? That is the question which has to be debated upon. If Capitalism concentrates wealth, it concentrates power too and concentration power is always dangerous to a healthy democracy. Is Political system being blamed for not redistributing the wealth? Is it failure of representative political system? Can we blame Capitalists for the condition of huge income disparity? The answer for this is slightly fragile, because market Capitalism is not separate from the political system or political economy; they are interconnected like a web. It is the responsibility of the political system to make sure that winners don't win too big and losers don't get left behind. Roy tries to ponder upon this phenomenon. She questions the inability of the government to resettle people who are displaced by the development projects and at the same to time government's nod to give away the vast lands to Capitalists. As she says,

They asked how government that professed its inability to resettle even a fraction of the fifty million people who had displaced by 'development' projects was suddenly able to identify 1,40,000 hectares of prime land to give to industrialists to set up special economic zones, India's onshore tax havens for the rich. (Roy, *Broken Republic* 14)

The special love the government has towards these industrialists is not an abrupt one. The structural control the Capitalists put on the government is huge. The wealth concentration is too huge that they can buy elections, judges, bureaucracy etc., into their favor. The representative political system is put in the dust-bin thereby the rights of the people is neglected. Further she portrays how ministers are stakeholders in the missions of Capitalists'. They are integral part of the company as well as policy makers. Policy making is turned towards their own benefits. They give clearances for industries to exploit environment, displace people and we have already discussed the ability of them to buy the elections and people are not in the position to resist and put pressure on the government. She mentions about a minister from earlier ruling party. Who was non-executive director of Vedanta (a mining company). As she says,

What we are to make of the fact that he was a non-executive director of Vedanta-a position from which he resigned the day he became the finance minister in 2004? What are we to make of the fact that, when he became the finance minister, one of the clearances he gave for foreign direct investment was to Twinstar Holdings, a Mauritius-based company, to buy shares in sterlite, a part of Vedanta group? (Roy, *Broken Republic* 20)

Suppression of dissent

Roy shows concern on the government's techniques to snap away the freedom of speech. Whoever talks against the favour of the regime or the view of the government are put into jail; termed as anti-national. Disfavoring the government is the biggest crime that a person does do. Talking about the assertion of human rights is seen as pernicious to it. The dangerous laws are invoked against them like UAPA and sedition law. As she says, "There is another category of 'anti-national' villains-human rights activists, lawyers, students, academics, urban naxals -who have been defamed, jailed, embroiled in legal cases, snooped by Israeli spyware, and in several instances, assassinated" (Roy, *Azadi* 122).

The increase of mob lynching in the country is one of the major threats to democracy. The communal hatred towards one community is spread through fake news, rumors, hate speeches, lack of awareness, etc. Killing of people without due process of law is a crime against humanity. Dalits, minorities, adivasis and women are major victims of this heinous act of killing. Daily we see the news of mob lynching. Roy laments on this issue, she says, "The lynching of Tabrez Ansari illustrates just how deep the rot is. Lynching is a public performance of the ritualized murder, in which a man or woman is killed to remind their community that it lives at the mercy of the mob" (Roy, *Azadi* 122). This is utter failure of the government to assure the people of the country a dignified life under article 21 of the constitution of India.

Conclusion

Roy's concern on the decreasing value of democratic principles in India could be observed through her essays in both the collections. Her ability to keenly observe the happenings in terms of deteriorating democracy is laudable. She reminds the mass about the need of turning towards the democratic principles like justice, freedom, equality and fraternity. We have everything written in the constitution of India but there is a need of

awareness among the population about this. Media being the fourth pillar of the democracy has to play a major role in this regard, but otherwise is happening in the present due to invasion of corporate in the media industry and Roy laments on this in the essays. Roy also talks about the violations of human rights in the Adivasi communities due to inroad of Capitalism. She reminds us that the rights of the Adivasis on the forest produce are democratic and they are the real preservers of the forest. She severely criticizes the failure of the government to protect the rights of the tribes enshrined in the constitution. She also laments on the bad treatment of minorities, Dalits and women in her essays. Both the essays stand as the reminders of the democratic values enshrined in the constitution.

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