

Resisting The Empire: Arundhati Roy's Political and Ecological Critique of Global Capitalism and Neo-Imperialism

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Abstract— This article rigorously examines the radical intellectual and activist oeuvre of Arundhati Roy as a sustained critique of global capitalism, imperialism, and environmental destruction in contemporary India. Traversing both her fiction—*The God of Small Things* (1997) and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017)—and her robust non-fiction collections, including *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2001), *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* (2014), and *The End of Imagination* (1998), the paper situates Roy at the intersection of postcolonial, eco-critical, and anti-imperialist literary traditions. Through close reading and critical synthesis, the essay explores how Roy exposes the collusion between neoliberal market dynamics, military force, and environmental devastation, and how she retheorises resistance through polyphonic narrative, ethical engagement, and planetary solidarity. The argument asserts that Roy's corpus functions as both a challenge and an alternative to twenty-first century empire, making her a unique political writer whose moral interventions hold continued global significance

Keywords— Arundhati Roy, capitalism, imperialism, ecology, postcolonialism, resistance, neoliberalism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy's literary-political trajectory is remarkable for its uncompromising critique of economic, political, and ecological injustice within both the national and global context. Emerging from the tumultuous decades of India's postcolonial transformation, Roy threads together literary artistry and political engagement, interrogating systems that masquerade corporate dominance and environmental destruction as progress and development. While her debut novel, *The God of Small Things*, drew international acclaim for its poignant interlacing of caste, gender, and forbidden love in southern India, Roy's subsequent work—spanning

journalism, essays, and fiction—strategically confronts a spectrum of contemporary ills: the machinations of global finance, state militarism, religious fundamentalism, and the relentless exploitation of people and the environment. Roy's resistance, rooted in experiences both local and global, transcends denunciation to posit an alternate vision of solidaristic justice and ecological harmony, making her an indispensable voice in contemporary interventions against the expanding apparatus of neoliberal power. This essay examines Roy's corpus as a form of counter-hegemonic struggle, elucidating her critique of empire across forms and genres.

Objectives

This article undertakes to (1) delineate Arundhati Roy's sustained critique of neoliberal development, militarization, and ecological exploitation as articulated in her major fictional and non-fictional works, (2) situate Roy's intervention within the frameworks of postcolonial, eco-critical, and anti-imperialist theory, (3) analyze the formal and thematic strategies by which Roy links the fate of the dispossessed, the environment, and the idea of resistance, (4) examine how Roy's literary imagination performs a double movement of denunciation and hope, crafting spaces for alternative solidarities and (5) provide a comprehensive critical account of why Roy remains one of the most significant political writers of the twenty-first century.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a multidisciplinary approach, this essay combines the tools of literary analysis, cultural materialism, and postcolonial critique. Through close readings of Roy's principal novels and essays, bolstered by reference to prominent secondary scholarship (Nixon 2011; Choudhury 2018; Baviskar 2004; Said 1993), the argument foregrounds both the stylistic innovations and

political substance of Roy's body of work. The methodology integrates theoretical insights from eco-criticism, gender studies, subaltern theory, and the critique of neoliberalism (Harvey 2005; Shiva 2000), ensuring a rich, layered engagement with the complex subjects Roy addresses. Contextual historical and socio-political analysis is employed where necessary to situate Roy's activism and writing within national and global imperatives.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Roy's emergence as an iconoclastic voice within and beyond India has activated wide-ranging academic and intellectual dialogue. John Nixon's seminal *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* devotes major attention to Roy's effort to foreground "environmental suffering" as the unseen consequence of development (Nixon 31). Chandra Talpade Mohanty attests to Roy's "feminist praxis of dissent," amplifying the intersectionality of gender, caste, and environmental harm in her fiction and essays (Mohanty 217). Baviskar's work assesses Roy's anti-dam activism in Narmada as a catalyst for India's environmental justice movement (Baviskar 242). Postcolonial critics like Elleke Boehmer and Priyamvada Gopal have lauded Roy's interventions as part of a global insurgency against neoliberal capital, analyzing her "contrapuntal narration" (Boehmer 122) and her "democratization of dissent" (Gopal 197). Meanwhile, critical essays in ecofeminist and Marxist traditions (Shiva 2000; Harvey 2005) have read Roy's resistance as both symptomatic and diagnostic of late capitalism's failures. These analyses, alongside Indian scholarship (Choudhury; Sunder Rajan) and global reviews, confirm Roy's status as both an inheritor and radical renovator of the anti-imperial canon.

IV. ANALYSIS

Arundhati Roy and the Empire's New Clothes

Neoliberalism and Neocolonialism Roy's exploration of empire is not confined to the old imperial centres; rather, she maps empire's contemporary incarnation as transnational capital, supranational institutions, and the corporate-state nexus. From Capitalism: A Ghost Story to The End of Imagination, Roy exposes the collusion of the Indian state, IMF, World Bank, and multinational corporations. In The Algebra of Infinite Justice, she acutely observes, "The war on terror is a war for profit. Global capital needs a new frontier, and bodies and cities become its battlegrounds" (Roy 126). Her critique pivots on the insight that neoliberal "progress"—through privatization,

deregulation, and market expansion—is a mask for new forms of dispossession, especially of the rural poor and tribal populations.

Central to Roy's framing is the idea of "development as displacement," a phrase recurring in Power Politics where she documents the cost of India's massive dam projects: "Development has become the right to displace, to acquire land, to destroy water, to open the mine, to close the forest" (Roy, Power Politics, 64). Roy not only indicts global capital but insists on the complicity of Indian—often postcolonial—elites whose strategies of growth reproduce colonial patterns of extraction and control. Walking with the Comrades chronicles these dynamics via a journey among the indigenous Adivasi communities fighting to protect their homeland from corporate-mining interests, revealing "the true faces of empire waging war against its own people" (Roy, Walking with the Comrades, 212).

The Political Imagination: Literature, Testimony, and the Power of Denunciation

Roy's non-fiction operates at the intersection of journalism and literary craft. Her reporting on the Narmada Valley project, for instance, is as much mythic narrative and lament as it is exposé: "Big Dams are to a nation's 'development' what nuclear bombs are to its 'defense.' They are both weapons of mass destruction" (Roy, The Greater Common Good, 45). Deploying irony, metaphor, and pathos, she reclaims the stories of adivasi, peasants, and dissenters rendered invisible by official discourse—the "ghosts" haunting the corridors of proud capitalist states.

Beyond her condemnation of grand projects is Roy's focus on the subtler violence of narrative. Roy unmasks the mechanisms of "manufacturing consent," claiming that "Corporate media has become the Empire's most effective weapon—the story-tellers are conquerors" (Roy, Capitalism: A Ghost Story, 112). By exposing these mechanisms, Roy disrupts the consensus on which neoliberal legitimacy depends, calling for counter-narratives rooted in justice and memory. Eco-critical Resistance and the Ethics of the Earth Long before the global alarm of anthropogenic climate change, Roy discerned the link between capitalist expansion and environmental devastation. Her polemics against the Narmada dams—later extended to nuclear energy and mining—denounce the cost not only to humans but to the "river itself, to forests that have no voice in parliaments." In The Greater Common Good, Roy describes the river's submergence as "the drowning of a god, a civilization, a memory" (Roy, 69). The God of Small Things, though focused on caste and gender, is saturated in ecological detail—the river and landscape are living presences, their contamination

paralleling the deterioration of social and emotional bonds. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Roy's narrative violently oscillates between human tragedy and environmental ruin, mapping toxic waste, burial grounds, and animal suffering as inherent to modern India's politics. Roy's ecological vision challenges anthropocentrism, proposing, "The planet is a living thing; to destroy it is not only suicide, but murder on a cosmic scale" (Roy, *End of Imagination*, 99). Here, Roy's intellectual kinships with ecofeminists (Shiva 2000), deep ecologists, and world indigenous activists are unmistakable.

The Indian State and the Internal Empire: Militarization and Corporate Rule

Roy's political activism meticulously traces how Indian democracy, supposedly an emblem of postcolonial achievement, is increasingly hollowed out by what she calls the "internal empire." Walking with the Comrades foregrounds the suffering of tribal and peasant populations targeted by the military-corporate state in its resource grab, reframing the so-called Maoist "insurgency" as a just struggle against expropriation. Roy writes, "Who are these 'Maoists' but our own people, seeking to defend life, land, and dignity?" (Roy, 226). She refuses simplistic binaries of violence and non-violence, insisting on empathy and witnessing: "What is the morality of a state that uses its army against its own?" Her critique of the Indian state under neoliberalism argues that it acts, not as "protector of the people," but facilitator of capital and security interests, its nationalism little more than a "mask for internal colonialism" (Roy, *Field Notes on Democracy*, 13). The postcolonial state is thus indicted for its reproduction of colonial violence—through paramilitary force, legal dispossession, and surveillance—making India both subject and agent of twenty-first century empire.

Fiction as Resistance: Narrative Polyphony and the Ethics of Storytelling

While Roy's essays are forceful interventions, her fiction elevates politics into narrative art. *The God of Small Things* interrogates the intersection of caste, gender, and class through forbidden love and familial tragedy; the novel's riverine landscapes embody the fall from wholeness into pollution ("the river shrinks, the fish die, and the swamp stinks of despair"). Roy positions the personal as a crucible for political critique: the consequences of caste violence and patriarchal law are rendered through lyrical language, non-linear structure, and child narrators, which together demand an empathetic rather than voyeuristic reading.

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness broadens this resistance into a fragmented, multi-vocal epic: the lives of Anjum the Hijra, Tilo the activist, and Musa the Kashmiri militant

intersect across spaces of protest, dispossession, ecological devastation, and intimate care. The burial ground, where the living and dead cohabit, becomes a sanctuary for the abject—a microcosm of Roy's ethic of inclusion. In both novels, Roy's formal innovations—shifting narrators, non-chronological timelines, and intertextual references—embody a refusal of the "master narrative," what Said problematized as "narrative hegemony" (Said 95). Roy thus animates Edward Said's "contrapuntal reading," creating spaces where suppressed voices and histories assert themselves.

Ethics, Resistance, and the Politics of Hope

Roy's resistance ultimately returns to an ethical imperative that transcends ideology, party, or utopian rhetoric. Her writings insist that the logic of profit and expansion is incompatible with the flourishing of life: "Infinite growth on a finite planet is the doctrine of the cancer cell," she warns (*Capitalism: A Ghost Story*, 142). Yet Roy consistently marries critique with hope. The slogan she repeats in speeches—"another world is not only possible, she is on her way"—becomes a motif of resilience and anticipation, rooting political possibility in grassroots movements, indigenous knowledges, and everyday acts of courage. Roy's alternatives are piecemeal but tangible: tribals defending forests, women cultivating solidarity, protestors occupying streets, and writers telling the stories that power would silence. By recuperating the politics of hope, Roy transforms narrative from mere commentary to an act of resistance.

V. CONCLUSION

Arundhati Roy's corpus stands as a singular bulwark against neoliberal orthodoxy and neocolonial power, forging an alliance between literary imagination, political witness, and ecological consciousness. Her fusion of fiction and non-fiction constitutes a sustained assault on the discourses of empire—whether in the form of global finance, developmentalist mythology, or the violence of the postcolonial state. Roy's resistance is holistic and intersectional; it encompasses the ruptures of caste, gender, sexuality, region, and species, and it refuses the binaries—between self and other, nation and outsider, human and non-human—that underpin empire's logic.

Through both the despair and fierce hope of her writing, Roy re-imagines what it means to be ethical in a world of ghosts: "To love. To resist. Not out of hope or calculation, but because to do otherwise would be to lose our own humanity" (Roy, *Come September*). In unmasking the "ghost stories" of capital and power, Roy reanimates possibilities for justice, stewardship, and planetary belonging. As the world faces escalating crises of

inequality, climate, and democracy, Roy's voice, uncompromising in its truth-telling, remains an urgent summons to contest empire—by imagining, narrating, and enacting the world otherwise.

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