Chapter – Four

Subalterns of India: Outcry
Why Arundhati Roy migrated from creative writing to writing on political and social issues when her magnum opus brought for her both fame and wealth, and ensured her a noticeable place on the literary firmament is a heated topic of discussion amongst her readers. Just after *The God of Small Things* she wrote a political essay, ‘The End of Imagination’, on India’s nuclear test in Pokhran. This marked the beginning of the non-fictional phase of her career. While her novel made her a target of brutal criticism from the Leftists, this essay made her the favourite whipping boy of the Rightists. After this she wrote two other political essays, ‘The Greater Common Good’ on the devastating effect of Big Dams, and ‘Power Politics: The Reincarnation of Rumpelstiltskin’ on the privatization and corporatization of essential infrastructure. For these three political essays she is called a ‘writer-activist’, but she is not satisfied with this title, because she thinks that it is a conspiracy on the part of the powerful, and their tool, the fascist government to “reduce the scope, the range, the sweep, of what a writer is and can be” (*The Algebra* 209). She suggests what a writer’s role in the society should be.

The writers, according to Roy, are free to tread the path untrodden by the ordinary people without any interference of society’s preconceived values, existing notion of morality and responsibility. Nevertheless, even as they strive at transcending the limits of human consciousness and human imagination, they cannot avoid “morality, rigour and responsibility that art, the writing itself, imposes on a writer” (191). No responsible writer can afford abusing hard-won freedom. Abusing the freedom produces bad art which has no excuse. More than fifty years have passed since independence, yet India cannot liberate herself from the legacy of colonialism and cultural humiliation. India is trotting under the burden of huge illiteracy, ingrained caste system, widespread poverty,
oppression of the *dalits* and *adivasis*, civil wars. A writer is essentially a responsible citizen who, in these circumstances, should not be ambiguous, tentative, circumspect, because during such critical times, there is hardly a difference between ‘prudence’ and ‘pusillanimity’, between ‘caution’ and ‘cowardice’, and “sophistication was disguised decadence”, and “circumspection was really a kind of espousal” (197).

A writer has a big role to play in demystifying for the common people the strategies and decisions made by the experts to suppress them. A writer as a citizen must demand public information and public explanation. Experts are reluctant to make public issues transparent to the masses. Roy says:

> 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. (214-15)

Roy discards the existing notion of difference between a writer and an activist.

After coming to power in the centre, the Bharatia Janata Party (BJP)-led government detonated nuclear bombs at Pokhran on May 11 and 13 in 1998. The newspapers, radios, TV chat shows highlighted it as the proud moment for India. A majority of people who were ignorant of the devastating effects of nuclear tests gathered
on the streets to celebrate the successful detonation of nuclear bombs in the name of nationalism and at the same time condemned the Western culture. It was jingoistic nationalism through and through. In this critical situation, as a conscientious and conscious, responsible and accountable writer Arundhati Roy takes the initiative to spread the facts about nuclear bombs. She maintains that testing nuclear bombs is a luxury for a poor country like India, and that the bombs have a debilitating effect ecologically on the earth, and psychologically on human beings, even without an all out nuclear war. It is because Roy thinks that in this state of affairs, “keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out. There’s no innocence. Either way, you’re accountable” (193). To ensure the existence of an individual as well as of the masses and the earth one has to raise voice against nuclear tests for their consequences. So Roy takes the venture, because she thinks, in these circumstances, “silence would be indefensible” (4).

At the risk of being labeled as an anti-national and anti-Hindu, Roy protests against India’s nuclear tests and the euphoria among some jingoistic Indian citizens, who were hardly aware of the devastating aftermath of it to provide choice to humanity, because to test the nuclear bombs suggests the “end of imagination. The end of freedom actually” (22). She dares to cross the border of any political territory only to enter into the territory of humanity. She declares herself an ‘independent, mobile republic’, ‘a citizen of the earth’ who has no territory and no flag.

One of the advantages of democracy is that it makes national consensus on any big issue mandatory before it becomes practice. Nuclear tests conducted by India were not only a national issue, but it shook the international arena. It was a kind of fanaticism
on the part of the Indian government. It needed some garbs to hide the cruel intention behind it. So the government brought the theory of deterrence in order to convince the people of India for the justification of the tests.

Roy shows the irrelevance and ineffectiveness of the theory of deterrence for a country like India where ignorance and illiteracy prevail like dense, impenetrable veils. Even more pathetic is the case of Pakistan where stability of any government remains a big question mark. This theory is grounded on knowledge and understanding which arouse fear of annihilation that the nuclear bombs can cause. This is a perilous joke in a country where the people are prescribed to take iodine pills as a prophylactic for nuclear irradiation. She warns that the nuclear tests that India had conducted may encourage other countries irrespective of whether rich or poor, developed or underdeveloped or developing, because each country has its boundaries which need to be protected. If things are allowed to continue in the direction of developing nuclear arsenal, a day will come when the trade of nuclear bombs will become competitive business, and the businessmen, terrorists will possess nuclear bombs as private arsenal. Then the world itself will become a missile which can annihilate itself anytime. The nuclear bombs are more dangerous colonizers because they control every aspect of human life—thinking, behaviour, dreams, way of living.

The BJP-led government justified the nuclear tests as a matter of political expedience, because politically India was the target of constant threats by Pakistan and China. The third reason given by the government was “Exposing Western Hypocrisy”. As far as China playing a role in deteriorating security environment of the region is concerned, it can be said that the war phenomenon against China was about four decades
old and no new threat was posed by China. Further it can be mentioned that the Chief of General Staff of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army was welcome as the guest of Indian Chief of Army Staff just a few days before the nuclear tests. The claim that Pakistan was a trouble maker and had a vested interest in destabilizing India’s security system, posed a substantial threat to India, and needed to be deterred the threat of nuclear attack was deceptive. That Pakistan did not pose a threat was proved from many sources. Just after the nuclear tests in India, Kuldip Nayar visited Pakistan and wrote his experiences. He said that there was no doubt in Pakistan’s decision not to conduct the tests if India had not. Everyone confirmed it: political leaders, editors, intellectuals and human rights activists. Islamabad, with all its hostility towards New Delhi, could not have afforded to provoke India with the resources it has. The BJP’s argument that Pakistan was already preparing to detonate the bombs is fallacious. The responsibility of exposing the subcontinent to nuclear warfare rests squarely on the BJP’s shoulders.

Despite the fact that there was no doubt that Pakistan was not neutral viz-a-viz terrorism and militancy in Jammu and Kashmir, but Indian government could not deny its own responsibility in detonating troubles in Pakistan. Pakistan problem cannot be solved by “pointing nuclear missiles at Pakistan” (The Algebra 24). Kargil war bears witness to this observation, because it broke out just after the nuclear tests. The detonation of nuclear bombs was equally dangerous to both countries, no matter which of the two did it. Roy comments:

Though we are separate countries, we share skies, we share winds, we share water. Where radioactive fallout will land on any given day depends on the direction of the wind and rain. Lahore and Amritsar are thirty miles
apart. If we bomb Lahore, Punjab will burn. If we bomb Karachi, then Gujarat and Rajasthan, perhaps even Bombay, will burn. Any nuclear war with Pakistan will be a war against ourselves. (24)

It cannot be ignored that India tested the nuclear bombs with the intention of gaining membership of the club of Super Powers and hence played the games masterminded by American imperialism. Roy remarks that India’s effort to be a Super Power was not only fallacious but also ridiculous, because “More than 400 million of our people are illiterate and live in absolute poverty, over 600 million lack even basic sanitation and over 200 million have no drinking water” (26). Nuclear test was an act of betrayal to the people of India by the BJP-led government.

Developing nuclear arsenal was not an idea unique to the BJP-led Government. It was a legacy of Indira Gandhi-led Congress Government. Roy comments: “……the Congress sowed the seeds, tended the crop, then the BJP stepped in and reaped the hideous harvest” (32-33). Both can be accused of the same crimes, but the difference lay in the ways they committed them. The Congress kept their intentions concealed from the people because they had the least doubt about their ineffective design that could hardly bring any benefit to the people of India. On the contrary, the BJP Government treaded on the direct path and made their designs public and legitimized. They did nuclear tests in the name of nationalism.

To Roy, the elation over nuclear tests is a matter of apprehension as it may bring “dreadful things”. She assails the new version of cultural fundamentalism which the jeering, hooting Hindu young men embodied by ‘condemning Western Culture’. To condemn Western culture by “emptying crates of Coke and Pepsi into public drains” (33)
when the Government sold and is still selling the country out to the Western multinationals is a great irony. Those young men had been persuaded that the nuclear bomb was an old Indian tradition. Roy, dismissing that claim, sardonically comments: “……we storm the heart of whiteness, we embrace the most diabolic creation of Western science and call it our own. But we protest against their music, their food, their clothes, their cinema and their literature. That’s not hypocrisy. That’s humour.” (33-34). She suggests that if the cultural fundamentalists claim to rebuild the authentic India, they have to begin by giving India’s *adivasi* people their own place, rights and dignities in all aspects, because they are the indigenous people on this land, and then they have to proceed by boycotting almost everything western, even they be essential to sustain our daily life, such as certain ingredients from our cuisine, smoking, Cricket, English, Democracy, Western medicine and medical instruments, rails, airplanes, mobile phones, and go on to demolishing most of the monuments and buildings which were built on the land of *Adivasis*.

Roy calls upon all the well-wishers of human beings and makes a suggestion:

Railing against the past will not heal us. History has *happened*. It’s over and done with. All we can do is to change its course by encouraging what we love instead of destroying what we don’t. There is beauty yet in this brutal, damaged world of ours. Hidden, fierce, immense. Beauty that is uniquely ours and beauty that we have received with grace from others, enhanced, reinvented and made our own. We have to seek it out, nurture it, love it. Making bombs will only destroy us. It doesn’t *matter* whether or not we use them. Bombs will destroy us either way. (37-38)
Her comments on nuclear bombs are very pragmatic: “The nuclear bomb is the most anti-democratic, anti-national, anti-human, outright evil thing that man has ever made” (40). She further asserts: “If there is a nuclear war, our foes will not be China or America or even each other. Our foe will be the earth herself. The very elements—the sky, the air, the land, the wind and water—will all turn against us. Their wrath will be terrible” (5-6). It is our duty to save our earth and no Prime Minister or fundamentalist has the rights to destroy our beautiful world.

The long tenure of one hundred and ninety years of British colonial rule came to an end in 1947 with many promises by the national government. The promises of postcolonial nation-state to erase the colonial past — the past full of oppressions, suppressions, exploitations and barbaric tortures — turned into frustration and postcolonial anxiety, as the new postcolonial elites, including native-rulers, turned out to be as oppressive and exclusive as the colonial masters. The postcolonial India gave birth to the postcolonial subalterns, women, lower-castes, and classes, ethnic minorities, *adivasis*, *dalits* and the poor. They are constantly marginalized, disempowered and exploited by the native elites that include industrialists, bureaucrats, upper classes, and even native rulers. This is the continuation of colonialism through the new native colonizers with the same degree of brutality, cruelty and inhumanity. Like their predecessors, they also want to make profits out of human beings.

The ways and means of exploitation have changed. The native colonizers do not appear to be the enemies of the subalterns as the former colonizers appeared to the natives. They wear a masque of being the well-wishers and sympathizers of the ordinary citizens. They use appropriate language to hide their horrific intentions. ‘Development’,
‘Progress’, ‘Nationalism’ and ‘National-interest’ are the key words that they use to exploit the poor, and to preserve their powers and privileges. Pramad K. Nayar quotes from Armah’s story of postcolonial Ghana, *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* in which the ‘teacher’ says:

> I saw men tear down the veils behind which the truth had been hidden. But then the same men, when they had the power in their hands at last, began to find the veils useful…Only some people have been growing, becoming different, that is all. After a youth spent fighting the white man, why not the president should discover as he grows older that his real desire has been to be like the white governor himself…And the men around him, why not? What stops them sending their loved children to kindergartens in Europe? … That is all anyone here ever struggles for: to be nearer the white man…. (99)

The word ‘Nationalism’ in postcolonial India is misused. Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* talks about the emergence of the bourgeois class as the ruling elites that suppress the dissent. In the name of ‘national-interest’ and ‘national development’, the ruling elites bring various projects which are funded by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization and Euro-American corporate agencies. The international corporate agencies are the real beneficiaries of these projects, and it is tribals, *adivasis*, the poor and women who are the victims of exploitation and disempowerment. Narmada Valley Development Project, which includes building of Big Dams in order to irrigate agricultural lands, production of electricity, and providing safe drinking water, is a topic of heated debates. This is the
living example of how the elite ruling class exploit, suppress, oppress and disempower the poor of the nation. Roy through her seminal essays, ‘The Greater Common Good’ and ‘The Road to Harsud’ hits at the Indian Government and the World Bank for their wayward and insensitive activities in building big dams without thinking of adverse ecological, economical impact on human beings, without caring for how many people get uprooted and dislocated.

India is the third largest builder of Big Dams in the world with forty percent of the world’s Big Dams. It has three thousand and six hundred of them, and ninety five more under construction. When the First World rejects the idea of building big dams, realizing their obsolete and harmful effects, India is still taking up new projects to build big dams. Roy thinks that Big Dams are “a brazen means of taking water, land and irrigation away from the poor and gifting it to the rich” (The Algebra 57). The people of India have been persuaded the rhetoric of Nehru that ‘Big Dams are the Temples of Modern India’.

The Government of India completely ignores the social, economic and ecological impact of dams. It is the poor people, the *dalits*, the *adivasis* who are reduced to the status of mere postcolonial subalterns who are badly affected ecologically, economically and socially. They are the displaced people without rehabilitation and compensation who are the prey of ruling elites.

The Indian Institute of Public Administration after making a survey of fifty-four large dams out of three thousand and three hundred estimated that a large dam displaces about forty-four thousand, one hundred and eighty-two people. Thirty-three million people have been displaced by the big dams alone. In the opinion of N.C. Saxena, Secretary to the Planning Commission, “the number was in the region of fifty million (of
whom forty million were displaced by dams)” (61). Some basic questions arise here. Who are the displaced persons? What has been done to rehabilitate them? How are they benefitted by these development projects? Who are the real beneficiaries? The answers are gloomy. “A huge percentage of the displaced are Adivasi (57.6 per cent in the case of the Sardar Sarovar dam). Include Dalits and the figure becomes obscene” (62). The government has even no real statistics of the displaced persons, and “India does not have a National Rehabilitation Policy” (63). So a very few of displaced persons, who are considered as the Project Affected People, are counted for compensation by the cash payment. Millions of other displaced persons do not exist. They are treated as alien creatures, or more suitably refugees, and have no rights as Indian citizens. They live in slums and on the roads under the open sky. “[T]he quality of their accommodation is worse than in any concentration camp of the Third Reich” (64). Most of the displaced people are labeled as “encroachers”, that include thousands of landless farmers, poor labourers, the people affected by afforestation projects, the people displaced by canal construction in Gujarat, and the people who depend upon the river for their livelihood such as fisher folk, sand-miners, and the people whose bread and butter depends on seasonal cultivation on the riverbed. The qualified Project Affected People were given Rs.35,000 for land that was sold for Rs.350,000, or even more. In the name of ‘Free Market’ the government takes from the poor and subsidizes the rich. It is called National-interest in their terminology.

Roy, dismissing the assumption that the Big Dams are the key to India’s food security, presents the report by Himanshu Thakkar which shows that the Big Dams contribute only twelve percent of India’s total food grain production that is only twenty-
four million tones. The irony is that in 1995, “the state granaries were overflowing with thirty million tonnes of foodgrain, while at the same time 350 million people lived below the poverty line” (67-68). She suggests to the government to pay attention on constructing more godowns for food grains than on building big dams, as because of bad and inadequate storage facilities ten percent of India’s total food grain production is wasted.

The fact that the Narmada Valley Development Project depends on the statistics determined from the rainfall data instead of accumulated data of some thirty years on the volume of actual flow in the river, shows the careless and callous attitude of the government. On the basis of this data, it determines the cost of the project, the submergence areas, the displaced people and the benefits by the project. It is obvious that the reality is far from these estimates of benefits and losses shown in the government’s record book.

The Narmada Valley Development Project alone can alter the ecology of the entire Narmada basin that can affect the lives of twenty-five million people living in the valley and “submerge and destroy 4,000 square kilometres of natural deciduous forest” (75-76).

The Dam Industry is a highly profitable business all over the world and it is controlled by the ‘Iron Triangle’, as Roy terms it, which includes politicians, bureaucrats and dam construction companies, the self-proclaimed International Environmental Consultants appointed by the dam builders and the World Bank. These agents are benefitted at the cost of the lives of millions of poor postcolonial subalterns who need to fight against their own government. This is a skilful game, a new way of economic
colonization. Roy clarifies the matter: “…….a huge percentage of what’s called ‘Development Aid’ is re-channeled back to the countries it came from, masquerading as equipment cost or consultants’ fees or salaries to the agencies’ own staff” (78-79). This happened to various developing and underdeveloped countries like Malaysia in the case of Pergau dam and India in the case of Sardar Sarovar dam in which Japan provided loan with a contract for purchasing turbines from the Sumitomo Corporation.

The Bargi Dam is the first dam built on the Narmada River which costs “ten times more than was budgeted and submerged three times more land than the engineers said it would” (84). It displaced one hundred and forty thousand people without any sign of rehabilitation. It “irrigates only as much land as it submerged in the first place—and only five percent of the area that its planners claimed it would irrigate. Even that is now waterlogged” (85). The Sardar Sarovar reservoir, the highest one in Gujarat, at its full capacity can submerge about “13,000 hectares of prime forest land”, and between Narmada Sagar dam and the Sardar Sarovar dam, “50,000 hectares of old-growth broadleaved forest will be submerged” (115). The Sardar Sarovar dam is designed to provide drinking water and to irrigate the large areas of twelve districts including two arid districts such as Kutch and Saurashtra of Gujarat, as well as two districts of Rajasthan with “almost 95 percent of Gujarat’s irrigation budget at the expense of other, more effective, more local schemes” (The Shape 210). But it provided drinking water to only “twenty-five million (1993)” (The Algebra 82) and irrigated “1.8 per cent of the cultivable area in Kutch and nine percent of the cultivable land in Saurashtra” (129). The other big dam designed for multi-purpose projects is the Narmada Sagar which is the largest in India as well as the most destructive. It has been built in order to “irrigate
1,23,000 hectares of land, it will submerge 91,000 hectares! This includes 41,000 hectares of prime dry deciduous forest, 249 villages and the town of Harsud” (The Road to Harsud 32).

This kind of exploitation and uprooting did not have plain sailing. There has been resistance all over India against the building of big dams and the displacement of the people without proper rehabilitation. A sort of civil war is fought between Middle Class Urban India and Rural Adivasi Army. The ragged Adivasi Army led by Medha Patkar is humiliated, tortured, but they are able to force the World Bank to set up commission to review the human cost and the environmental impact of big dams. In June, 1991, the World Bank set up the Independent Review led by Bradford Morse who studied in detail the various aspects of the project— “hydrology and water management, the upstream environment, sedimentation, catchment area treatment, the downstream environment, the anticipation of likely problems in the command area—water logging, salinity, drainage, health, the impact on wildlife” (The Algebra 94-95).

In June, 1992, just a year later, the Independent Review presented its report which was a blow to the Gujarat Government as well as the Central Government. Roy quotes from this report:

We think the Sardar Sarovar Projects as they stand are flawed, that resettlement and rehabilitation of all those displaced by the Projects is not possible under prevailing circumstances, and that environmental impacts of the Projects have not been properly considered or adequately addressed. Moreover, we believe that the Bank shares responsibility with the borrower for the situation that has developed . . . it seems clear that
engineering and economic imperatives have driven the Projects to the exclusion of human and environmental concerns... India and the states involved... have spent a great deal of money. No one wants to see this money wasted. But we caution that it may be more wasteful to proceed without full knowledge of the human and environmental costs... As a result, we think that the wisest course would be for the Bank to step back from the Projects and consider them afresh... (95-96)

The World Bank was not satisfied with this report and it set up the Pamela Cox Committee which gave similar report. Ultimately the World Bank, losing all legal ground, withdrew from the Sardar Sarovar Projects. This is not the end of the story. The Government of Gujarat came forward to compensate the $200 million shortfall. The projects were continued. The NBA with its poor but enthusiastic ragged army made stronger resistance. On 5th August 1993, the Union Government set up Five Member Group (FMG) to review Sardar Sarovar Projects, but the Government of Gujarat did not allow it to enter Gujarat.

As said earlier, the Narmada Sagar is the highly destructive to human beings as well as wildlife and ecosystem of the command areas. “The Wild Life Institute of India, Dehradun, warned of the loss of a vast reservoir of bio-diversity, wildlife and rare medicinal plants” (The Road to Harsud 32). Roy quotes from the report of the Ministry of Environment:

The compensation of the combined adversarial impacts of the Narmada Sagar Project and the Omkareshwar Project is neither possible nor is being
suggested. These will have to be reckoned as the price for the perceived socio-economic benefit. (32)

In the name of design, implementation and management of integration of ground water and surface water, the Narmada Valley Development Project formed the Single Authority that would decide “who will grow what” (*The Algebra* 127). The Single Authority is the new machinery of post-colonial elites that reduces the post-colonial subalterns into mere puppets with broken limbs. The farmers are forced to cultivate cash crops instead of cereal crops. When the World Bank stepped back from the project, the Single Authority decided to set up five-star hotels, golf-courses and water parks in order to raise money to complete the project. So this is a sort of urbanization process in which the poor, the *adivasis*, the *dalits* are to be driven out, because they are not fit to live in the post-colonial city. They have been rehabilitated (?) in places where there’s no water, no sewage system, no shelter, no school, no hospital. Plots have been marked out like cells in a prison, with mud roads that criss-cross at right angles. They get water from a tanker. Sometimes they don’t. There are no toilets and there is not a tree or a bush in sight for them to piss or shit behind. When the wind rises, it takes the tin sheets with it. When it rains, the scorpions come out of the wet earth. (*The Road to Harsud* 36)

Roy’s indictment against court verdict is very much justified as the judges, without caring about the social, economic and environmental costs of the dams, ordered to continue the building of Sardar Sarovar dam. The three-judge bench of the Supreme Court formed by the Chief Justice comprising of Justice A.S.Anand, Justice B.N.Kirpal
and Justice S.P. Bharucha, praising the virtues of the big dams based on no evidence, asked to complete the construction of Saradar Sarovar dam as soon as possible. Roy expresses her anguish and disgust against the judges in India by calling them the “divine beings” (Scandal in the Palace 16) who decide “what’s good for the environment and what isn’t, whether dams should be built, rivers linked, mountains moved, forests felled” (14). In the case of Sardar Sarovar dam construction, only Justice S.P. Bharucha gave a dissent. He was against further construction of Sardar Sarovar dam. Roy quotes Justice S.P. Bharucha’s concern about why construction should be suspended: “‘An environment clearance based on next to no data in regard to the environmental impact of the Project was contrary to the terms of the then policy of the Union of India in regard to environmental clearances and, therefore, no clearance at all’” (The Algebra 139). But the majority judgment given by Chief Justice A.S. Anand and Justice B.N. Kirpal, keeping aside the environmental clearance as ‘only an administrative requirement’, and even without caring for Madhya Pradesh Government’s sworn affidavit which clearly stated their inability to rehabilitate even a single project-affected family, ordered to raise the height of the dam. Roy assails the Court’s order to confer the Prime Minister the power of final arbiter of any dispute, even of the crucial and serious issue like the determination of the height of the dams to be raised without paying regard to the scientific studies to know its benefits and losses. When the Prime Minister of a country is attributed with the power to decide anything including human cost, it raises a basic question of true functioning of democracy. This compels Roy to label India as ‘Banana Republic’.

In this ‘Banana Republic’, as Chittaroopa Palit of Narmada Bachao Anddolan said, the institutionalization of justice in the form of judicial system that accompanied the
emergence of bourgeois democracy only serves the interests of the ruling classes. Susan Comfort finds that the essay ‘The Greater Common Good’ is an “attack on the ideology of development within India, especially the technocratic approach that seeks to quantify development” (How to Tell 131). The ideology of development is an alibi for capitalist expansion by dispossessing and repressing the weak of the nation. Roy says:

The ‘fruits of modern development’, when they finally came, brought only horror. Roads brought surveyors. Surveyors brought trucks. Trucks brought policemen. Policemen brought bullets and beatings and rape and arrest and, in one case, murder. The only genuine ‘fruit’ of modern development that reached them, reached them inadvertently—the right to raise their voices, the right to be heard. (The Algebra 91)

Roy tries to show how isolation, poverty and environmental disaster experienced by some communities are the result of uneven development and privatization. She makes an effort to expose the same brutality of violence and repression in the post-colonial India that has characterized colonial appropriations of land and resources.

The essays ‘The Greater Common Good’ and ‘The Road to Harsud’ are based not only on the accumulated data collected from various sources but also on Roy’s own actual experiences acquired by travelling to the affected areas and her meetings with the project-affected people who are displaced and humiliated by the state-machinery. She is an active participant in the Naramada Bachao Andolan led by Medha Patkar. The Supreme Court of India accused her of contempt of court for the comments in her affidavit against the petition filed by a group of lawyers claiming her to be a drunkard who was trying to murder them while campaigning outside the Supreme Court with other
activists of Narmada Bachao Andolan. She described the petition as “absurd” and “despicable”, one that was trying “to silence criticism and muzzle dissent to harass and intimidate those who disagree with its approval of a hydroelectric project” (It is a dangerous time). For being guilty of “scandalizing” and lowering the dignity of the court, she was sentenced to one “symbolic” day of imprisonment and a $42 fine on March 6, 2002.

Roy for her essay ‘The Greater Common Good’ received brutal criticism from various sources. Ramchandra Guha, an ecological historian, is one of them. Mr. Guha’s piece of writing in The Hindu Magazine section of November 26, 2000, is nothing but a lampoon which he wrote to attack Roy personally, deliberately, willfully and maliciously rather than presenting any authenticated logic. He advised the NBA to disengage from her, and advised Roy to discontinue her political writings and go back to literature. His argument is based on the fallacious premise that politics and literature are two different worlds. Most of the creative writers in the recent time engage with politics in their writings, ranging from Orhan Pamuk, Khalid Hossein, John Updike to Indian writers such as Arbind Adiga, Mahashweta Devi, Gopinath Mohanti and many more. The most interesting and ironical thing is that Mr. Guha even did not go through the writings of Roy while expressing discontentment with them. Mr. Guha denounced this essay as sentimental without being factual, self-indulgent and unoriginal, and a piece of writing romanticizing the adivasi style. This sort of accusation shows Mr. Guha’s ignorance of the subject as the essay is the result of well-researched and studied data on social, ecological, economic and political effect of the Sardar Sarovar and other dams. Roy cannot be accused of being ‘unoriginal’, because this essay is based on facts which can
only be accumulated through painstaking research, not invented. Roy herself admits this fact: “My essays are not about me or my brilliance or my originality or lack of it. They’re not meant to be a career move—they’re about re-stating the issue, they’re about saying the same things over and over again” (The Shape 17-18). As for ‘self-indulgence’, Chittaroopa Palit of NBA says in her article, ‘The Historian as Gate Keeper’, that the “I in her essays that critics like Ramchandra Guha sneer at as self-indulgence, is seen by others as painful honesty.”

As far as injustice to the postcolonial subalterns is concerned, the displacement and dislocation of the adivasis, dalits and poor people by the big dams is not the end of the story. The more painful part is yet to reveal itself. The apex court of the world’s largest democratic country has failed to uphold the well-being and interests of the common people, especially the poor, the adivasis, the dalits, the small businessmen, the poor farmers and landless labourers. It serves the interest of the bourgeois class and acts as an agent of postcolonial ruling elites.

Roy lashes out at the judicial system of India because of its undemocratic right to micromanage all aspects of our lives, even natural environment and ecology. She is critical of Supreme Court, because in a democratic country like India, it

decides what’s good for the environment and what isn’t, whether dams should be built, rivers linked, mountains moved, forests felled. It decides what our cities should look like and who has the right to live in them. It decides whether slums should be cleared, streets widened, shops sealed, whether strikes should be allowed, industries should be shut down, relocated or privatized. It decides what goes into school textbooks, what
sort of fuel should be used in public transport and schedules of fines for traffic offences. It decides what colour the lights on judges’ cars should be (red) and whether they should blink or not (they should). It has become the premier arbiter of public policy in this country that likes to market itself as the World’s Largest Democracy. (Scandal in the Palace 14)

In 2006, the Supreme Court’s order to seal thousands of shops, houses and commercial complexes that ran, in the court’s words, illegal businesses, raises a fresh question about the democratic colour of Indian Republic. The forty percent of Delhi’s total population, that is, about five million people dwell in the slums and unauthorized colonies and fifty thousand are homeless. They are deprived of all the municipal facilities like electricity, water, sewage systems. These people are pursued by the Government of India as non-citizens that include “hawkers, rickshaw pullers, garbage recyclers, car-battery rechargers, street tailors, transistor knob makers, button hole stitchers, paper bag makers, dyers, printers, barbers” (The Algebra 206-207) who earn their livelihood from what the court called polluting and non-conforming industrial units. But the fact is that “sixty-seven per cent of Delhi’s pollution comes from motor vehicles” (208). Roy points out that as far as pollution is concerned, these industrial units are not the conceivable threat to Delhi, but rather the government should show “great enthusiasm for regulating big factories run by major industrialists that have polluted rivers, denuded forests, depleted and poisoned groundwater, and destroyed the livelihoods of thousands of people who depend on these resources for a living” (208). In the same year, the Supreme Court’s order to demolish the Nagla Macchi and other jhuggi colonies, leaving hundreds of thousands homeless and destitute, is the initiative to purge the Delhi of its poor in order
to make a “glittering city of air-conditioned corporate malls and multiplexes where MNCS showcased their newest products” (Scandal in the Palace 16). This is a modern policy to fatten the fat bully.

The marginalization of certain communities and identities within postcolonial societies is the new strategy of postcolonial ruling elites. Amongst the marginalized communities in India, the tribal and adivasi people are the most brutalized. They are victimized and exploited constantly by the elite class and the government. They are deprived of the basic elements of life—safe drinking water, electricity, education, and even dignity and identity of a man. Yet they are peaceful people whose livelihood depends upon the resources available in the forests. They live on the other side of the modern human civilization. They are supposed to be a burden for the ‘India Shining’. The last thing they possess, the land, is also being grabbed by the corporate sector with the active help of the government. Some of the millions of India’s tribal people living in the forests Dandakaranya, stretching from West Bengal through Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, parts of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, are forced to join the Maoists and most of them support them, because it is the Maoists who stand by them in their struggle for existence, when the state violence including police atrocities, push their back to the wall, when India’s courts fail to give them justice, when the media does not care to expose the harsh reality unfolding in the forests.

Roy unambiguously points out the basic reasons that compel some of the tribals to join the Maoists’ guerrilla army:

Right now in central India, the Maoists’ guerrilla army is made up almost entirely of desperately poor tribal people living in conditions of such
chronic hunger that it verges on famine of the kind we only associate with sub-Saharan Africa. They are people who, even after 60 years of India’s so-called Independence, have not had access to education, healthcare or legal redress. They are people who have been mercilessly exploited for decades, consistently cheated by small businessmen and moneylenders, the women raped as a matter of right by police and forest department personnel. Their journey back to a semblance of dignity is due in large part to the Maoist cadre who have lived and worked and fought by their side for decades. (Mr.Chidambaram’s War 32 & 34)

Calling people terrorists when they are fighting for survival verges on brutal farce.

The free market in India brings innumerable sufferings and miseries to the poor, especially to the tribals who live in the forests and hilly regions. Free market is designed to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. The government and the big corporations’ greedy eyes fall upon the lands, homes of the tribal, rich in bauxite worth four trillion dollars in Orissa alone and millions of tons of high quality iron ore in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand and the twenty-eight other precious mineral resources. When the government is unable to rehabilitate a fraction of the fifty million displaced persons, it is able to identify “1, 40,000 hectares of prime land to give to industrialists for more than 300 Special Economic Zones, India’s onshore tax havens for the rich” (40). There are many MoUs (Memorandums of Understanding) signed between Indian Government and big corporations, ignoring the ecological devastation and the agonies of the tribals. There is an excuse called ‘development’ and ‘progress’ and ‘national interests’ which the government uses to justify the dislocation of the tribals. Roy discards the government’s
logic that the mining industry will enhance the rate of GDP growth dramatically and provide jobs to the displaced people. She unmasks the devil and exposes the reality:

Most of the money goes into the bank accounts of the mining corporations. Less than 10 per cent comes to the public exchequer. A very tiny percentage of the displaced people get jobs, and those who do, earn slave-wages to do humiliating, backbreaking work. By caving in to this paroxysm of greed, we are bolstering other countries’ economies with our ecology. (44)

Actually the Government of India acts as the hench-man of corporate MNCs who want the forest land cleared of the tribals.

When the tribals with the help and support of the Maoists fight for social justice, equality, protection, security and local development, and for saving their own homes and lands, the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh describes the Maoists as the “single-largest internal security threat”. Instead of diagnosing the root causes, that is, the accumulated injustices, inequalities and atrocities that compel some to be Maoists with arms, some to be supporters and sympathizers, the government took the initiative to wipe out the Maoists by military force through killing, raping, driving them away from their homes.

To achieve the objective of decimating the Maoists, the Government of India led by Home Minister P. Chidambaram launched Operation Green Hunt in September, 2009. It rather more appropriately can be called Operation Adivasi Hunt, because it is adivasis who must be removed from the lands under which the rich minerals are deposited. So Operation Green Hunt is not for maintaining peace in the state, but for, as Mr. Chidambaram revealed in parliament on June 18, 2009, creating a favourable climate for
investment, because the *adivasi*-supported Maoists are the hurdle to this process in locations rich in mineral resources.

The painful matter for the people of a democratic country like India is that whenever there is any turbulence in relation between India and Pakistan or India and China, India and any other country, the Government of India tries to solve the problems through discussions or dialogues, but when there is any civil disobedience within its homeland, it tends to resolve it by military force and suppression. Every time the government fails to achieve its goal. It used this military strategy in Jammu & Kashmir and North-east states of India, but failed. Now it has focused its attention on the heart of India, on the tribal and *adivasi* people, just to flush out a few thousand Maoists from the forests.

Operation Green Hunt with its motto borrowed from George Bush Jr. used ‘if you are not with us, you are with the Maoists’ was launched in September, 2009. Operation Green Hunt is a disparate war fought between a ragged, starving army and a sturdy force equipped with an array of modern weapons. It is a battle between a large number of impoverished tribals and few Maoists on the one side, and the Special Police with code names like Greyhounds, CoBRAs and Scorpions, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Border Security Force (BSF), the notorious Naga Battalion with its irreparable atrocities, Salwa Judum or people’s militias, and Indo-Tibetan Border Police. They are conferred with a license to kill indiscriminately without any fear of retribution. Salwa Judum or Special Police Officers (SPOs) or people’s militias were set up of the ordinary tribals with the meagre salary of a couple of thousands rupees in 2005 in Dantewada of Chhattisgarh just days after the Memorandums of Understanding between the
Government and the Tatas were signed. The Salwa Judum began to kill, rape, loot and burn down the *adivasi* villages in order to clear the lands so that the corporations like Essar, Jindal, Tata, Vedanta and so forth could mine safely. Roy points out the basic arithmetic calculation of police brutality in Dantewada of Chhattisgarh alone: “Already 644 villages have been emptied. Fifty thousand people have moved into Salwa Judum camps. Three hundred thousand are hiding in the forests and are being called Maoist terrorists or sympathisers. The battle is raging, and the corporations are waiting” [Democracy’s Failing Light 21]. Lalgarh in West Bengal is a tribal inhabited area, rich in iron ore, where the tribals protest against the establishment of Jindal Steel Factory that can displace them. So the police brutality began to suppress the tribals. The Pulishi Santrash Birodhi Janasadharaner Committee or the People’s Committee Against Police Atrocities, a people’s movement, was formed to resist the police torture and violence. Though it is not a Maoist group, its leader Chhatradhar Mahahto was arrested as a Maoist leader without any proof, and is being held under custody without bail.

If the government’s purpose is to maintain peace in these areas, and not to grab lands, then it should solve the problems through discussions with rebels, because military brutalization cannot be a solution to this sort of problem spanning over decades. The government is, as Gandhian idealist Himanshu Kumar points out, “sowing the seeds of violence and mayhem. Before Salwa Judum, Maoists numbered only 5,000. After Salwa Judum, the Maoist strength grew to 1, 10,000—a 22-fold increase. After Operation Green Hunt, every surviving adivasi will become a Maoist full-timer” (Who Is the Problem 12).

In an interview with CNN-IBN, Roy outlined an alternative which can be fruitful to solve the Maoist problems in India. She says: “I think these people need to be
promised that there will be no displacement, that all these MoUs will be made public, get a clear idea of the development planned for this area, have people at public forums discuss these issues and take up the opinion of those of Ground Zero and then you can talk.” She also quotes from a report called ‘Development Challenges in Extremist-Affected Areas’ by the Planning Commission-appointed expert group:

. . . the Naxalite (Maoist) movement has to be recognised as a political movement with a strong base among the landless and poor peasantry and adivasis. Its emergence and growth need to be contextualised in the social conditions and experience of people who form a part of it. The huge gap between state policy and performance is a feature of these conditions. Though its professed long-term ideology is capturing state power by force, in its day-to-day manifestation, it is to be looked upon as basically a fight for social justice, equality, protection, security and local development.

(Mr. Chidambaram’s War 34)

When the government will learn the basic fact that the tribals and adivasis form a significant part of India’s population, and their development can contribute to the progress of India, many internal problems including civil war will be solved. They have to be treated as citizens of India who have the right to live as equals with other citizens. Their identity and dignity should be respected. Every kind of state violence ought to be stopped. Then it will be possible to bring them into the mainstream.

Postcolonial native-states like India isolate some sections of people within their territories from the mainstream India, thus creating the imagined communities. The creation of the imagined communities and the marginalization of them are the failure of
the postcolonial project of creating a unified India. The militancy-ridden state of Kashmir and the North-east states such as Tripura, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and Assam are confined to the margins of ‘mainstream’ India. In every aspect of life—socially, culturally and economically—the people of the north-east states and the state of Kashmir have been neglected. When they protest to get back their identity and freedom, they are suppressed by military force. The north-eastern states are torn with many-fold problems such as underdevelopment, cross-border refugees, smuggling, militancy and many more. These states are geographically parts of India, but emotionally they are poles apart. Siddharta Deb’s remark in this case is significant:

The modern, secular nation-state adopted as a political model for India demands a certain flattening out of differences and the imposition of a structure that does not consider small or anomalous groups of people or nomadic movements . . . If nations have to be imagined into being, the people of the north-east may represent the most remarkable failure of that imagination in regard to India. (88)

The machinery or the formula which the British colonial power used to repress the colonized Indians is borrowed by the postcolonial democratic Indian Government to control and suppress its own people in different parts of its territory. It is quite ironic and painful that the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, a harsher version of the Ordinance which Lord Linlithgow passed in 1942 to control the Quit India Movement, has been implemented to some states of a democratic country like India. This act gives powers to the army officers, irrespective of seniority, whether commissioned or non-commissioned, “to use force on (and even kill) any person on suspicion of disturbing public order or
carrying a weapon” (*An Ordinary Person’s Guide* 219). It was put into operation in parts of Manipur in 1958, whole of Mizoram and parts of Assam in 1965, Tripura in 1972, and in 1980 on the whole of Manipur. It is the people of Kashmir who are victims of this act to the greatest extent. The implementation of this act has proved to be destructive and perilous. With the power of the act, the army personnel kill thousands of innocent ordinary people on the basis of suspicion only in the name of killing the militants and label them gangsters, terrorists, insurgents or extremists. The torture, disappearances, custodial deaths, rape and gang-rape by security forces are daily affairs in Kashmir.

In twenty years, the Kashmir conflict “has claimed about 70,000 lives. Tens of thousands have been tortured, several thousand have ‘disappeared’, women have been raped and many thousands widowed. Half a million Indian troops patrol the Kashmir Valley, making it the most militarised zone in the world” (Democracy’s Failing Light 24) in the name of capturing “3,000-4,000 militants” (*The Shape* 185). In comparison, the United States had deployed about “1, 65,000 active-duty troops in Iraq at the height of its occupation” (Democracy’s Failing Light 24). The real design of the government is unambiguous even to ordinary citizens. Roy comments: “Clearly, the Indian army is not in Kashmir to control militants, it is there only to control the Kashmiri people” who experience the ugly and vicious reality of Indian attitude towards them which “they encounter every day, every ten steps at every checkpost, during every humiliating search” (*The Shape* 185).

The practice of democracy in Kashmir is a far cry, except for the holding of elections regularly. Roy says in ‘Democracy’s Failing Light’ published in Outlook on 13th July, 2009, that the Intelligence agencies that have created political parties and
decoyed politicians decide who will come to power in Kashmir. It is ironical that the blatantly rigged state election of 1987 was the immediate provocation for the armed uprising that began in 1990. The state government is fully controlled by the Central Government. The mainstream political parties of Kashmir—the National Conference and the People’s Democratic Party—are applauded by the Deep State and the Indian media. The leaders of these two political parties and hundreds of unknown candidates brought from outside by the Intelligence agencies talk about the solution of the problems of municipal issues like water, electricity, roads, putting aside the basic problems, that is, why they, the citizens of a democratic country, must live under a military occupation for decades, why they must be the victims of constant torture by military personnel, why they must live in constant fear of annihilation. Roy points out a basic fact of Kashmiri freedom struggle. The Kashmiri freedom struggle is strangled with various dangerous and conflicting ideologies—Indian nationalism, Pakistan nationalism, US imperialism, and a resurgent medieval-Islamist Taliban.

A recent memorandum submitted on August 18, 2008 to the United Nations Military Observers Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) by almost 3,00,000 Kashmiri people focuses on what their demands are. They demand “three things—the end to Indian rule, the deployment of a UN Peacekeeping Force and an investigation into two decades of war crimes committed with almost complete impunity by the Indian army and police” (Azadi 18). The expression of adoration of the Kashmiri people for Pakistan does not mean that they intend to comply with Pakistan, Roy thinks, but it is an expression of gratitude for their support to what Kashmiri people call a freedom struggle.
A continuing military occupation by a nation of its people can neither be
acceptable nor desirable, especially if the nation-state is democratic. Roy’s suggestion in
this regard is highly thoughtful:

The unimaginable sums of public money that are needed to keep the
military occupation of Kashmir going is money that ought by right to be
spent on schools and hospitals and food for an impoverished,
malnourished population in India. What kind of government can possibly
believe that it has the right to spend it on more weapons, more concertina
wire and more prisons in Kashmir? (24)

Her remarks on Kashmir, although realistic and logical, are highly controversial: “India
needs azadi from Kashmir just as much—if not more—than Kashmir needs azadi from
India” (24).

Since 1989, the Indian state, as Roy points out,

has done everything it can to subvert, suppress, represent, misrepresent,
discredit, interpret, intimidate, purchase—and simply snuff out the voice
of the Kashmiri people. It has used money (lots of it), violence (lots of it),
disinformation, propaganda, torture, elaborate networks of collaborators
and informers, terror, imprisonment, blackmail and rigged elections to
subdue what democrats would call ”the will of the people”.(14)

The Government’s idea that the military domination in Kashmir is a victory is proved to
be an illusion when the thousands of people including fruit-sellers, doctors, house-boat-
owners,, guides, weavers, carpet-sellers, ordinary people began a non-violent uprising for
‘azadi’, just after the government’s ill-conceived move to allot 100 acres of state forest land to the Amarnath Shrine Board in the summer of 2008. Again the government declined to solve the dispute with discussion and took the armed forces to suppress the uprising.

Unsure of how to deal with this mass civil disobedience, it ordered a crackdown. It enforced the harshest curfew in recent memory with shoot-at-sight orders. In effect, for days on end, it virtually caged millions of people. The major pro-freedom leaders were placed under house arrest, several others were jailed. House-to-house searches culminated in the arrest of hundreds of people. The Jama Masjid was closed for Friday prayers for an unprecedented seven weeks at a stretch. (Democracy’s Failing Light 25)

Roy remarks: “For the governments of India and Pakistan, Kashmir is not a problem, it's their perennial and spectacularly successful solution” (War Talk 5). The painful reality unfolding in Kashmir is deliberately twisted and distorted by the state-sponsored media.

Indian democracy, the largest democracy in the world, is not meant for the deprived sections of society—the poor, dalits, adivasis and religious minorities. Indian democracy is by the rich, for the rich and of the rich. For the deprived sections, it manifests itself in two atrocious forms—communal neo-fascism and neoliberal capitalism. Roy says:

The targets of the dual assault of communal fascism and neoliberalism are the poor and the minority communities (who, as time goes by, are gradually being impoverished). As neoliberalism drives its wedge between
the rich and the poor, between India Shining and India, it becomes increasingly absurd for any mainstream political party to pretend to represent the interests of both the rich and the poor, because the interests of one can only be represented at the cost of the other. (*An Ordinary Person’s Guide* 234-235)

The geneses of communal neo-fascism and neoliberal capitalism in India are simultaneous. Manmohan Singh, the then Finance Minister of India, was preparing for neo-liberalism for India’s market, while the BJP’s L.K. Advani with rampaging mobs was campaigning for Hindu Rashtra. He led the mob to demolish the Babri Masjid in 1992. The BJP ascended to power riding the Hindutva wave, and the wave transformed into a tsunami in 2002 in Gujarat when in a carefully planned massacre, supposedly in reprisal of the fifty-eight Hindu Pilgrims’ burning to death in Sabarmati Express in Godhra, 2,000 Muslims were slaughtered in broad daylight by squads of armed killers, organised by fascist militias, and backed by the Gujarat government and the administration of the day. Muslim women were gang-raped and burned alive. Muslim shops, Muslim businesses and Muslim shrines and mosques were systematically destroyed. Some 1, 50,000 people were driven from their homes.

Even today, many of them live in ghettos—some built on garbage heaps—with no water supply, no drainage, no streetlights, no healthcare. They live as second-class citizens, boycotted socially and economically. Meanwhile, the killers, police as well as civilian, have been embraced, rewarded, promoted. (*Listening to Grasshoppers* 50 & 52)
Roy terms it a “genocide” that “has been brazenly celebrated as the epitome of Gujarati pride, Hindu-ness, even Indian-ness” (52). The Indian Muslims have been systematically marginalized socially, culturally, economically and even politically.

The leaders of the mob had computer-generated cadastral lists marking out Muslim homes, shops, businesses and even partnerships. They had mobile phones to coordinate the action. They had trucks loaded with thousands of gas cylinders, hoarded weeks in advance, which they used to blow up Muslim commercial establishments. They had not just police protection and police connivance but also covering fire. [The Algebra 268-269]

After that massacre, Narendra Modi, the designer of the pogrom, was applauded as a hero. He compared the events of the pogrom to “Gandhi’s Dandi March—both, according to him, significant moments in the Struggle for Freedom” (273). A.B. Vajpayee, the then Prime Minister of India who was supposed to be the protector of the citizens irrespective of the opinions and beliefs of the people, declared proudly that “[W]herever there are Muslims . . . there is strife” (279). He justified the pogrom as “part of the retaliation by outraged Hindus against Muslim ‘terrorists’” (265). When the European Union and other countries condemned the massacre, the Indian Government was outraged by this ‘interference’ in an ‘internal matter’.

Roy comments that Indian democracy is a flawed democracy laced with religious fascism. The leaders of BJP are not new to preach the sermon of hatred against Muslims and to practise brutal aggression against them. The Congress has a horrific past too. In 1984, 3000 Sikhs were butchered in Delhi, just after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Rajiv Gandhi justified it by saying “‘When a large tree falls, the earth shakes’” (275).
Even after 25 years, the Indian democracy is unable to punish even a single killer. In the name of nationalism, the Sangha Parivar and its multi-faced wings—VHP, BJP, Bajrang Dal and the like are trying to falsify and limit the meaning of democracy. They seek “to limit, reduce, define, dismember and desecrate the memory of what we were, our understanding of what we are and our dreams of who we want to be” (285). Indian democracy only lets the Sangha Parivar flourish.

It has been injecting a slow-release poison directly into civil society’s bloodstream. Hundreds of RSS shakhas and Saraswati shishu mandirs across the country have been indoctrinating thousands of children and young people, stunting their minds with religious hatred and falsified history, including unfactual or wildly exaggerated accounts of the rape and pillaging of Hindu women and Hindu temples by Muslim rulers in the precolonial period. (276)

No political party has the guts to say anything against them because of fear of losing votes. So Indian democracy has turned its face away from the poor and ethnic minorities. It has become their enemy.

Roy shows how Indian democracy has turned into a fascist nation. It is the world’s largest democracy where the government supports a massacre of two thousand Muslims, raping of women of that community, and displacement and dispossession of 1,50,000 Muslims. This democracy allows religious fanatics to spread across the country preaching hatred. In this democracy, painters, writers, scholars and filmmakers who protest are abused, threatened and have their works burned, banned and destroyed. This is the democracy where the fascist government sets up commissions to saffronize education,
and leads rampaging mobs to demolish historical monuments and burn archives of ancient historical documents.

The enactment of POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act) by the BJP government was another step to wipe out *dalits*, *adivasis*, dissenters who protest, and religious minorities, especially Muslims. It is a scandal in any democratic country, but democratically elected BJP government implemented it in ten states with horrific results. Roy points out:

In Jharkhand 3200 people, mostly poor Adivasis accused of being Maoists have been named in FIRs under POTA. In eastern Uttar Pradesh the Act is used to clamp down on those who dare to protest about the alienation of their land and livelihood rights. In Gujarat and Mumbai it is used almost exclusively against Muslims. In Gujarat after the 2002 state-assisted pogrom in which an estimated 2000 Muslims were killed and 150,000 driven from their homes, 287 people have been accused under POTA. Of these, 286 are *Muslims* and one is a Sikh! (*An Ordinary Person’s Guide* 217)

POTA is a special law that “is being used for precisely the reasons it was enacted” (219). The inhuman face of POTA is that the people arrested under it do not get bail and have to face trial in special POTA courts that are not open to public scrutiny. The accused cannot be granted bail until he/she proves himself/herself innocent. It is a kind of dictatorial act that allows confession of the accused extracted in police custody through physical and mental torture to be admitted as judicial evidence.
The inhuman and bestial treatment of the accused is not less severe than the infamous brutality done in Abu Ghraib jail in Iraq ranging “from people being forced to drink urine, to being stripped, humiliated, given electric shocks, burned with cigarette butts, having iron rods put up their anuses, to being beaten and kicked to death” (218).

Neoliberal capitalism is the other dangerous face of Indian democracy. Neoliberal economic policy is a part of American neo-imperialism which is imposed mainly on the Third World countries with the purpose of exploiting them in a veiled manner. The literal meaning of “Neoliberalism” is “new liberalism”, but in its continental European (as opposed to North American) sense it means “free market economics”. Neoliberalism allows free movement of goods, resources and enterprises in order to find cheaper resources, to maximize profits and efficiency. It is based on the doctrine of privatization of national resources from industries, lands, mountains, minerals, to the basic elements of sustenance such as water, electricity and so on. Elizabeth Martinez and Arnoldo Garcia define neoliberalism as

Neo-liberalism is a set of economic policies that have become widespread during the last 25 years or so. Although the word is rarely heard in the United States, you can clearly see the effects of neo-liberalism here as the rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer....Around the world, neoliberalism has been imposed by powerful financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank....the capitalist crisis over the last 25 years, with its shrinking profit rates, inspired the corporate elite to revive economic liberalism. That's what makes it 'neo' or new. (Neoliberalism:
origins, theory, definition)

The American neoliberal ideology sees the Third World nations primarily as business farm which sell themselves as an investment location, rather than simply selling goods. “Today corporate globalization needs an international confederation of loyal, corrupt, preferably authoritarian governments in poorer countries, to push through unpopular reforms and quell the mutinies. It’s called ‘creating a good investment climate’” (*An Ordinary Person’s Guide* 225). In this sense India is a major link in the spread of neoliberal capitalism. It has been a state in which the rich accumulate wealth through the means of dispossession of the poor people. This accumulation of wealth through dispossession is done in the name of ‘free market’. Arundhati Roy calls it ‘secessionist movement’ in which “a relatively small section of people become immensely wealthy by appropriating everything—land, rivers, water, freedom, security, dignity, fundamental rights including the right to protest—from a large group of people” (223). The devastating aspect of neoliberal market is that “public infrastructure, productive public assets—water, electricity, transport, telecommunications, health services, education, natural resources—assets that the Indian State is supposed to hold in trust for the people it represents, assets that have been built and maintained with public money over decades—are sold by the State to private corporations” (223-224). To dispossess seven hundred million people living in rural areas whose livelihoods depend on access to natural resources is a kind of barbarism at a large scale. The CEOs of big corporations today control the lives of one billion people in India.

The era of privatization in India began in 1993 with a contract for a six hundred and ninety-five megawatt power plant signed between the Congress government of
Maharashtra and Enron, the Houston-based natural gas company. It was the first private project in India. The logic of the government behind the privatization of power sector is that it needs to reduce the transmission and distribution (T&D) losses of power to save State Electricity Boards that have been bankrupted by massive power thefts and inefficient infrastructure including unskilled labour and out-dated power equipment. As far as the stealing of power is concerned Roy remarks:

Some of it no doubt is stolen by the poor — slum dwellers, people who live in unauthorized colonies on the fringes of big cities. But they don’t have the electrical gadgetry to consume the quantum of electricity we’re talking about. The big stuff, the megawatt thievery, is orchestrated by the industrial sector in connivance with politicians and government officers.  

(Power Politics 49-50)

She says that “seventy percent of the industrialists in the state steal electricity” (50). Instead of going to the root cause of this malaise the government took steps to privatize the power sector. The government officials are much more interested in importing foreign goods and equipments because of personal gains. The Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) that once manufactured and exported world class power equipments is turned into a ‘sweatshop’ because of government’s negligence over the years and cutting off funds for research and development. Now it has become a joint venture with General Electricals (an American multi-national company) and Siemens (a German company) with the sole role to provide cheap and unskilled labour, while they – Siemens and GE – provide the equipment and technology. Actually neoliberal markets make a business strategy that the first world needs to sell; the third world needs to buy.
The privatization of power sector was undertaken to reduce the loss. To reform power sector, the Congress government of Maharashtra signed one-sided Power Purchase Agreements with Enron, giving it freedom to produce power at exorbitant rates that no one can afford. Enron acknowledged that “it had paid out millions of dollars to ‘educate’ the politicians and bureaucrats involved in the deal” (54). In 1996, the BJP government of Maharashtra signed a fresh contract, the largest contract ever signed in the history of India, which the experts called the most massive fraud in the country’s history. The rate of Enron’s power is “twice as expensive as its nearest competitor and seven times as expensive as the cheapest electricity available in Maharashtra” (56). It is an irony that the Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Committee (MERC) advised not to buy Enron’s power until extreme necessity, because it realized that it would be cheaper to just pay Enron the mandatory fixed charges for the maintenance and administration of the plant that they are contractually obliged to pay than to actually buy any of its exorbitant power. The fixed charges alone work out to around two hundred and twenty million U.S. dollars a year for Phase I of the project. Phase II will be nearly twice the size.

Two hundred and twenty million dollars a year for the next twenty years. (56)

When the industrialists in Maharashtra began to produce power with private generators at cheaper rate, the Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB) made them illegal. The industrialists were forced to buy Enron’s highly expensive electricity, resulting in the closures of hundreds of small industrial units.
According to the MSEB’s calculations, from January 2002 onward, even if it were to buy ninety percent of Enron’s output, its losses will amount to 1.2 billion U.S. dollars a year.

That’s more than sixty percent of India’s annual Rural Development budget. (57)

In 2001, when the Congress government of Maharashtra refused to pay Enron’s bills, Enron, one of the biggest corporate contributors to President George Bush Junior’s election campaign, warned to auction the government properties named as collateral security in the contract, because the government is bound to pay in accordance with Export Credit Agencies (ECA). The consequence of privatization is very much obvious.

. . . seventy percent of rural households still have no electricity. In the poorest states, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Orissa, more than eighty-five percent of the poorest people, mostly Dalit and Adivasi households, have no electricity. What a shameful, shocking record for the world’s biggest democracy. (59)

Indian politicians have mortgaged India to the World Bank. “Today, India pays back more money in interest and repayment installments than it receives. It is forced to incur new debts in order to repay old ones” (60). The politicians and the economists measure India’s development with the scale of GDP Growth Rate and the Government store houses overflowing with food grains, but real picture tells a different story:

Outside this circle of light, farmers steeped in debt are committing suicide in their hundreds. Reports of starvation and malnutrition come in from
across the country. Yet the government allowed 63 million tonnes of grain to rot in its granaries. Twelve million tonnes were exported and sold at a subsidized price the Indian government was not willing to offer the Indian poor. (*An Ordinary Person’s Guide* 221)

When food grain is rotting in the government store houses, just before the visit of US President Bill Clinton, the Government of India lifted import restrictions on fourteen hundred commodities, including milk, grain, sugar, and cotton (even though there was a glut of sugar and cotton in the market, even though forty-two million tons of grain were rotting in government storehouses). During The Visit, contracts worth about three (some say four) billion U.S. dollars were signed. (*Power Politics* 38)

Roy brings forth the data that more than 1, 80,000 Indian farmers have committed suicide. The recent statistics exceed this figure. According to data of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), “at least 17,368 Indian farmers killed themselves in 2009”, bringing the total “since 1997 to 2,16,500” (*Hindu*).


---. “Mr. Chidambaram’s War.” Outlook. 9 Nov. 2009. Print.


