Chapter 2

Literature, Democratic Practices and Delivery of Justice

2.1. Democracy: Trusting in and Caring for Each Individual

Democracy, as is well known, is power or rule of the people. Etymology apart, democracy is no simple concept. Like justice, its history too is millennia old. It is generally presumed that it is the western world which first thought and implemented principles of democracy. But scholars agree that some basic elements of democracy flourished in other parts of the world too, even though the western contribution to the modern form of democratic way of organizing society is certainly major (Dahl; Sen, *Idea* 322-23).

It becomes easy to understand that democracy and justice are intrinsically related when the former is seen as a tendency à la Tocqueville (vol.1: ch. 2). The democratic ideal “emphasizes the moral value of self-rule and the importance of participation in government” (Song 142). One of the most ancient recorded evidence that bring democracy and justice together is by Pericles in a speech stating that Athens’s constitution is democratic because it “favors the many instead of few” and its laws dispense “equal justice to all” (qtd. in Dahl). Pericles also says how every Athenian “individual is interested in not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well” and how in Athens “decisions on policy” are taken after “proper discussion” (qtd. in Crick 19).

What Pericles calls proper discussion, is also the same what Amartya Sen, borrowing the phrase from John Rawls, calls “public reason” and what his book, *The Idea of Justice* discusses in last and fourth part entitled “Public Reasoning and Democracy” (319-415). The rule of people thus depends on their fundamental contribution to political culture of debates and discussions, and these ultimately allow people to choose what is in their own collective welfare. In largely poor and uneducated masses, this is a challenge and these characteristics of poverty and lack of education can even cause falling back of democracies into “some form
of authoritarian rule” (Dahl). It seems a moral imperative for educated intelligentsia to contribute to strengthening of democracy by participating in and disseminating political debates of their times in such unconsolidated and fragile democracies.

The flaws of democracy in India may be partly attributed to sudden adoption of a new political system. Hundreds of feudatories were coalesced to be remoulded into a constitutional democracy at the time of India’s independence in 1947. The inauguration of universal suffrage, equality before law, freedom from partiality, from bias or unreasonable coercion were some of the fundamental gifts of this change, while requiring a fairly vast reorientation, if not complete upheaval, in a caste and religion based society, which was also largely illiterate and poor.

Depending on where Indian society is viewed from, these legally binding and modern values of freedom, equality, and participation in political process have huge impact on discourse of justice. A gradual development of large institutions of democracy (judiciary, police, media, bureaucracy, etc.) and culture along with them require a certain amount of patience as well as critical caution. A paucity of educated masses adds a degree of elitism in nearly all modern institutions in India\(^\text{65}\) which is still existent and has added to all kinds of problems impinging on policy framework. With the rise of education which reflects clear bias towards more budgetary allocation to higher education compared to school education, and a corresponding lack of employment opportunities, has given rise to disaffection and vile, opportunism-fuelled corruption\(^\text{66}\). There hardly have been any democratic institutions functioning successfully with an exception of Election Commission of India (McMillan,

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\(^{65}\) Pankaj Mishra profiles about post-independence India, via Vikram Seth’s novel \textit{A Suitable Boy}, and notes how “ruling class's rhetoric of socialism disguised its nearly complete monopoly of power” and in words of D R Nagaraj, “the institutions of capitalism, science and technology were taken over by the upper castes” in Nehru-led India (Mishra, “New”).

\(^{66}\) An instance of this wide and deep spread issue of corruption in education, employment and virtually all democratic state institutions is a case called by the name of Vyapam. Aman Sethi writes that Vyapam is “a vast societal swindle – one that reveals the hollowness at the heart of practically every Indian state institution: inadequate schools, a crushing shortage of meaningful jobs, a corrupt government, a cynical middle class happy to cheat the system to aid their own children, a compromised and inept police force and a judiciary incapable of enforcing its laws” (Sethi).
“Election” 98). Economic liberalization of 1991, prior to which economy was predominantly state-controlled, infused new values in the socio-economic system where a whole population was expected to gear itself to fresh demands of free-markets and a receding state.

The large scale changes in a populous country like India create a host of issues critical from public policy perspective. Several of these issues are either political or economic and thus have reluctance for literary writers, or non-experts of any kind, participate in debates on them. In fact, democratic framework allows them freedom to choose to speak on all of these issues. No issue arguably remains beyond writers’ keen and critical gaze—through which they tend to offer corrective discourse. Actually, democracy is an open system where some of its essential features viz. “effective participation,” “informed electorate,” “citizen control of agenda,” and certain “fundamental rights” (Dahl) impel every citizen to participate in debates of the day. A common citizen may find that compared to his/her vote, the value of investment required to argue intelligibly on any issue in a democracy is much too high. Hence, reluctance on part of citizens either to take keen interest in current political affairs or to vote. But via participating in debates, or by altering howsoever infinitesimally their contours, if writers or any other members of civil society are able to redress injustices, they become meaningful to process of strengthening democracy.

Arundhati Roy and Pankaj Mishra consciously attempt to reverse the tendency of several writers to volitionally stay away from controversial issues of their times, and thereby these two are contributing to public discussions in popular media. In fact, their literary interventions into contemporary debates may be called slightly more developed versions of what scholar Perry Miller terms as “citizen literature: reasoned debates about fundamental aims and devices of government conducted on a level demanding critical intelligence, but in good plain English” (Crick 47).
Alternately, Roy and Mishra’s non-fictional work has been examined here in the light of theorization of democracy in the thesis. Themes that are largely confined to India in case of Roy’s essays and including other Asian countries in case of Mishra’s non-fictional work are taken up here. A brief comparative assessment of their work has been done at the end of this chapter. Notably Roy and Mishra’s insights about motif of democracy emanates from the lived experience of the wilfully ignored and marginalized populations of India.

2.2 Roy’s Literary Inquiry into Democratic Practices

Arundhati Roy embarks on her enquiries about the health of democratic system in India right from her first essay based on a film proclaimed to be made on the life of a reformed bandit named Phoolan Devi. In this essay entitled “The Great Indian Rape Trick,” Roy points out brazen failure of director-producer duo of the film, Bandit Queen to regard a fellow citizen, a woman who defies easy categories. She persuasively argues to prove that film maker’s motives have been exploitative. Upon being asked as to why, Phoolan Devi being “scum,” she is “involved with” her; Roy answers thus:

I’m not sure I know how one defines scum. But for the sake of the argument, let’s assume that she is. … Does Scum have Civil Rights?

It took a Salman Rushdie to make the world discuss the Freedom of Expression. Not an Enid Blyton. And so, to discuss an individual’s right to Justice, it takes a Phoolan Devi. Not the Pope. (“Great Indian Rape Trick II”)

A little later in the essay Roy asks if the law considers Rajiv Gandhi (a former prime minister of India, on whom another film was being made) and Phoolan Devi equals. The questions about civil rights or an individual’s right to justice, and equality before law emanate from our belief in a functional democracy, which affirms the above rights to all.

In The God of Small Things too, Roy views Kerala as a “heady mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a shot of Democracy” (67). Elsewhere in the
novel she ironically views the concept of equality which has temporarily dislodged stubborn hierarchical status of a mistress and her servant in the Aymenem house when they munch nuts from the same bowel in a “television-enforced democracy” (88).

In her book, *Listening to Grasshoppers*, a collection of essays that, according to Roy, does not recount anomalies or aberrations of Indian democracy but “the consequences of and corollaries to democracy” (“Introduction” xi) Roy states how she has become so overt a political writer:

As a writer, a fiction writer, I have often wondered whether the attempt to always be precise, to try and get it all factually right somehow reduces the epic scale of what is really going on. Does it eventually mask a larger truth? I worry that I am allowing myself to be railroaded into offering prosaic, factual precision when maybe what we need is a feral howl, or the transformative power and real precision of poetry. Something about the cunning, Brahmanical, intricate, bureaucratic, file-bound, “apply-through-proper-channels” nature of governance and subjugation in India seems to have made a clerk out of me. … Repression “through proper channels” sometimes engenders resistance “through proper channels.” As resistance goes this isn’t enough, I know. But for now, it’s all I have. Perhaps someday it will become the underpinning for poetry and for the feral howl. (xi-xii)

Assumptions of democracy and its attendant promises are prevalent in much of Roy’s work, which is vehemently anger-filled on account of the social sanction of caste system that severely undercut and undermine founding principles of democracy. The ensuing section attempts to cull from Roy’s non-fictional corpus implications of our democratic setup entangled in caste-based attitude. More worrisome and perturbing is the fact how this caste-struck system remains largely ignored in apolitical and cleverly crafted literary fiction.

### 2.2.1 Caste as Locus of Democratic Enquiries in Roy’s Work
One of the sociological definition of caste – as “a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership and a specific style of life which sometimes include the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system, based on concept of purity and pollution” – has been given by Andre Beteille (qtd. in Marshall, “Caste”). In social sphere, however, caste manifests itself in all kinds of social intercourse and directly contradicts principle of equality deemed fundamental in a democracy. What may turn out to be more troublesome a fact, is articulated by Jayaram that “institution of caste can survive even Hinduism” (81). It may be partly attributed to the fact that caste has entered and now exists, in other Indian religions too, namely Sikhism, Islam, and Christianity despite having no scriptural basis for it.

Roy has been able to see that at moral and intellectual levels, caste is no small challenge to democracy—how to be part of a caste-based society and yet call oneself a citizen of democratic India remains as a question. Caste-ridden attitudes also preclude a person to become participant in a larger form of universal humanism that seeks to view world as based on justice and harmony. Roy’s scathing criticism of caste and the role it plays and injustice it causes in a democracy begins quite early. Even though her first essay, “The Great Indian Rape Trick” has a caste angle particularly because Phoolan Devi was an illiterate, so called low-caste woman, it is merely peripheral to the larger argument of the Roy wherein she contends that the filmmakers show a disdain of “educated for the illiterate [and of] the rich for the poor.” Apparently, the whole endeavour of film has “simple, pre-fabricated calculations of cloying morality play” in which all truth has been forcibly made to fit into a mould and eventually leading to a gross untruth as well as a grievously wronged alive subject.
In *The God of Small Things* too caste has a huge role to play at many levels. But apart from that the novel, which is set in Kerala, also evinces how caste degradations move into other religions such as Christianity:

Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. … Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints … In Mammachi’s time, Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. When the British came to Malabar, a number of Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas . . . converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability. . . . It didn’t take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests . . . . After Independence they found they were not entitled to any government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates, because officially, on paper, they were Christians, and therefore casteless. (73-74)

In another essay namely “The Greater Common Good,” Roy considers how the story of displacement of many million villagers due to big dams take a very different dimension if the fact is lent prominence that nearly sixty percent of those victims are Dalits and Adivasis, and therefore, “ethnic otherness” (62) of the majority of victims is the main cause precluding any upheaval in power structure. She explains in an interview how “a vast majority of displaced people don’t even weigh in as real people” and how none of the people who “plan

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67 Roy in “The Doctor and the Saint” cites a 2009 report on untouchability which lists prevalence of “ninety-nine forms of untouchability in 1,589 villages of Gujarat” (145 n18).
these mammoth projects are Dalit, Adivasi or even rural” (“Scimitars” 6). She comments further:

There is no egalitarian social contract\[68\] whatsoever between the two worlds. Deep at the heart of the horror of what’s going on lies the caste system: this layered, horizontally divided society with no vertical bolts, no glue, no intermarriage, no social mingling; no human—*humane*—interaction that holds the layers together. So when the bottom half of society simply shears off and falls away, it happens silently. (6)

Caste has been seen as a great wedge separating people by Roy. It excludes fellow feeling and togetherness that are necessary preconditions for a community to imagine a truly shared self-rule. Even though caste has been her preoccupation through and through; it apotheosis occurred in her book-length essay “The Doctor and the Saint.” It is published as an introduction to a new annotated edition of *Annihilation of Caste* (1936; rpt. 2014) by B. R. Ambedkar. Like in her other essays, here too, she has used passion and logic to position the role of caste in Indian society. She has done so by marshalling a lot of empirical data and through a historical debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar. The details of the debate are beyond the scope this work; nevertheless, it had profound impact on Indian democracy.

While Gandhi was in favour of caste as a system of societal arrangement, he was against its extreme manifestations such as untouchability. Ambedkar, on the other hand, was unwilling to keep caste and wanted it to be replaced by “constitutional morality” (“Doctor” 45). The religious morality of the Hindus is derived from Brahminism\[69\]—which is belief in casteism irrespective of actual caste; constitutional morality on the other side is a “cultivated”

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68 One can hardly fail to notice the language of political philosophy employed by Roy—egalitarianism as well as social contract tradition are important areas of that subject.

69 Roy writes that anti-caste Bhakti poets and other people in that old tradition preferred the term “Brahminism over ‘Hinduism’... [which] meant domino effect, what Ambedkar called the ‘infection of imitation’, that the caste that first ‘enclosed’ itself—the Brahmins—set off. ‘Some closed the door,’ he wrote, ‘others found it closed against them’” (50). Regardless of caste, Roy writes, “there is a quotient of Brahminism in everybody” (51). This is illustrated by the case of V.S. Naipaul, who “rousingly, and wittily declared himself against the caste system, but in his later days he often proved that he was still an unreconstructed Brahmin” (James 99).
sentiment (45) according to Ambedkar. So if caste remains, Ambedkar contended, morality of most of the people will be determined by caste and democracy will thus remain a “top dressing” over an “essentially undemocratic” soil (45). Roy quotes Ambedkar, “Brahminism . . . is the very negation of the spirit of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” (51). Gandhi, conversely, had firm belief in four varnas and in copious “ninety-eight volumes of his writing . . . never decisively and categorically denounced” it (42).

Eventually, the debate settled in favour of Gandhi, and Ambedkar had to withdraw his demand for extra vote and separate constituency, which the British government at that time had agreed to grant for untouchables. The impact of that debate and clash of religious and constitutional morality, has lingered till date in statistically observable facts of injustices that can be convincingly attributed to caste.

Roy asks as to how “varnashrama dharma play[s] out in our new ‘democracy’” (26). Her answer includes a two-way assessment of the population that ranges at the top of socio-economic class and the one that ranges at the bottom. She writes that “today [in 2014] India’s one hundred richest people own assets equivalent to one-fourth of its celebrated GDP. In a nation of 1.2 billion, more than 800 million people live on less than Rs 20 a day” (27). Even in that skewed a distribution with hugely poor base and negligible number of people at the tip of wealth-population pyramid, caste figures importantly. In a Forbes list of richest fifty-five Indians, twenty-six belong to merchant, or Vaishya caste and still more at the top, i.e., seven out of the top ten. Dalits and Adivasis do not figure in the list at all (28). Interestingly, caste statistics of population are not available as it was part of the census data up to 1931 in British ruled India only. At that time Vaishyas made for only 2.7 percent and untouchables 12.5 percent of the population (29). Roy also mentions how Kautilya’s “Arthashastra (circa 350 BCE) says usury is the Vaishya’s right” and “Manusmriti (circa 150 CE)” suggests a differentiated interest rate for varnas wherein Sudras, already worst off, pay highest interest
rates of sixty percent annually and rest pay lowering rates at the multiple of twelve for all the
deed higher varnas, thus minimum for Brahmins at twenty-four percent annual (29).

While “Vaishyas control Indian business,” both big at corporation level and small at
town and village level, Brahmins, who are extrapolated to be fewer than four percent of total
population, dominate judiciary, bureaucracy, legislature, media and academia (30-32). At the
other end, again showing the usual imbalance, Dalits and Untouchables are represented far
below their percentage in populations. For instance, Roy cites that out of 315 media elites in
Delhi none was a Dalit or an Adivasi as revealed through a survey by the CSDS (31).

The argument that all this data, insufficient as it is for lack of availability/policy,
points to a huge structural flaw in Indian democracy. For a democracy that has been operative
for about seven decades, the principle of equality of opportunity should have enabled
proportionate representation of diverse caste-grouped chunks of population. Yet the starkly
skewed conditions of people and a lack of accurate data substantiate what Roy calls an
ongoing “Project of Unseeing” (23; 30), and “a gaping hole in our pedagogical universe”
(17). It is to say that even though caste plays a huge role in all aspects of life in India, it fails
to receive the due attention as a cause.

\[70\] The credibility to this assertion of a ‘project’ is provided by enough outside evidence. Within India, caste
figures less than the class in political left’s discourse. Liberal discourse about India too is largely reticent on
caste: The Idea of India by Sunil Khilnani, to give one prominent example, barely touches caste and claims that
no social group did “concentrate status, wealth and power exclusively,” which implies that no group was
excluded (19). Sham Lal, one of the most erudite literary critic and editor, in his career of nearly seven decades
reviewed and commented on hundreds of important books, ideas, and people. The caste is absent from indices of
two collections [A Hundred Encounters (2001), Indian Realities in Bits and Pieces (2003)] of best of his op-ed
essays. He thinks that reservation policy is a new injustice to “atone” for past wrongs (Indian 188). One of the
foremost Indian sociologist M. N. Srinivas wrote “An Obituary on Caste as a System” basing his arguments
entirely on reduction in prevalence of hereditary occupation and conveniently overlooking practices of
untouchability and endogamy which are easily observable (see Rukmini S for a recent survey data). In English
literature for R. K. Narayan (a friend of Srinivas), and many of his characters, caste was all but gone (Guide 85,
244; Writer’s Nightmare 134-35). When India’s own epistemic blunders on caste were so egregious, outsiders
can hardly be blamed for ignoring caste. To give just two examples, Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker writes
in The Better Angels of Our Nature that “lower castes had to pay steep dowries so their daughters could marry
higher-caste grooms” (ch. 7), and a sociologist in a well-known series of books writes that profound “inequality
of status is only tolerable and harmonious if, as in Hindu caste system, the ranking is widely known and
accepted” (Bruce, ch. 4). Both statements are erroneous.
Crimes against Dalits are a further testimony of systemic and structural perpetration of violence. Democratic institutions seem to abet rather than deter or redress such violence. Roy says that even if low reporting of crimes against Dalits is ignored (usually one out of ten cases is reported to police), a Dalit faces crime every sixteen minutes in this country, and . . . every day, more than four Untouchable women are raped by Touchables; every week, thirteen Dalits are murdered and six Dalits are kidnapped. In 2012 alone, the year of the Delhi gang-rape and murder, 1,574 Dalit women were raped, and 651 Dalits were murdered. That’s just the rape and butchery. Not the stripping and parading naked, the forced shit-eating (literally), the seizing of land, the social boycotts, the restriction of access to drinking water. (21)

Roy, however, juxtaposes the statistics with individual stories. Bant Singh, a Dalit Sikh, endures the loss of both hands and a leg because he tried to seek justice for his gang-raped daughter (21). Surekha Bhotmange of Khairlanji village in Maharashtra state was murdered along with her two sons and a seventeen year old daughter. Prior to gruesome killings, both females were gang-raped because Surekha, a low caste woman, did not stop trying to live a life of modest dignity amongst upper-caste villagers who were not used to ideas of equality and liberty (18-20).

The idea of fundamental rights, which is one of the necessary conditions to call a polity democratic, is thus challenged regularly and stoutly by the following: crimes against Dalits and Untouchables; severely impeded opportunities for low and socially backward castes in life; lack of proportional representation in jobs and seats; and official and academic chicanery in giving caste its due role in social affairs.

It is also easy to see that policies of affirmative action in the form of reservation in jobs and seats in fast diminishing public sector, directed to partially rectify historical wrongs, have always been thwarted and protested against. These protests seem particularly unjust if
the larger scenario is kept in mind. For instance, most of the Indian economy is made up by so-called informal sector, and public sector employees constitute less than five percent of the working population. Roy provides more data on how the reservation issue works out:

To be eligible for the reservation policy, a Dalit needs to have completed high school. According to government data, 71.3 per cent of Scheduled Caste students drop out before they matriculate, which means that even for low-end government jobs, the reservation policy only applies to one in every four Dalits. The minimum qualification for a white-collar job is a graduate degree. According to the 2001 Census, only 2.24 per cent of the Dalit population are graduates. (33)

Roy observes further that the little scope for aspirations of equality through reservation policy “washes up against a wall of privileged caste hostility” (33). Most of those who oppose reservation policy argue on the basis that it thwarts the merit principle. Roy bemoans deploying of such pseudo-argument because it conveniently views merit in “an ahistorical social vacuum” which deliberately forgets the subordination of so called low castes, and has been in practice for thousands of years (34). She also points out that such arguments about merit do not count “privileged-caste social networking and the establishment’s entrenched hostility towards the subordinate castes” and thus, effectively, “merit has become a euphemism for nepotism” (34).

Attitude concerning caste in India thus remains a very contentious issue vis-à-vis democratic ideals of equality and freedom. In Roy’s work, all this is conspicuous as she underscores this in her first ever speech to Dalit Sahitya Akademi in Kerala. She says:

I believe that the Dalit struggle for justice and equality in a society wracked by caste prejudice is going to be, and indeed ought to be, the biggest challenge that India will face in the coming century. … Here we are, poised to enter the twenty-first century,

71 This assertion by Roy cross-verifyes with sociological insight by Rita Jalali who says that it is not merely accidental that the rise in upper-caste violent backlash over reservation policy is concurrent with gradual beginnings of “improving the educational and economic conditions for Dalits” (253).
arming ourselves with nuclear bombs and medieval values. . . . we still have words in our vocabulary like 'scheduled tribe' and 'backward caste' and 'untouchable'. We use them with equanimity. . . . [And for this] I'm advocating a war of noisy beauty, of voices raised, of stories told, of songs sung loudly in the streets. (“I Give”)

2.2.2 Religion, Communalism and Democracy in Arundhati Roy’s Work

One of the essays by Roy is titled “Democracy: Who’s She When She’s at Home?” Home is a metaphor for India and the essay interrogates nature of democracy in it. Roy observes that right “now [in May 2002] we’re sipping from a poisoned chalice—a flawed democracy laced with religious fascism. Pure arsenic” (266). What Roy’s essay responds to is Gujarat pogrom of 2002 which re-poses the long standing question about position of religious minorities in a democracy.

Roy gathers the facts about violence towards minorities in this essay and asserts that minority bashing in the name of religion is neither justified nor sanctioned by religious scriptures (265-66). The essay questions the role of a citizen in a democracy towards the issue of minority status. She writes thus:

. . . every independent report says the pogrom against the Muslim community in Gujarat—billed by the Government as a spontaneous ‘reaction’—has at best seen conducted under the benign gaze of the State and, at worst, with active State collusion. Either way the State is criminally culpable. And the State acts in the name of its citizens. So as a citizen, I am forced to acknowledge that I am somehow made complicit in the Gujarat pogrom. (272)

But she seems not to write merely to exonerate herself by dissenting. She rather poses a series of questions about the possible end of such a state of affairs and underlying “depraved vision . . . without the range and beauty and spectacular anarchy of all these cultures” of India:
Is this the Hindu Rashtra that we have all been asked to look forward to? Once the Muslims have been shown their place, will milk and Coca-Cola flow across the land? . . . Will there be a shirt on every back and a roti in every belly? . . . Can we expect an anniversary celebration next year? Or will there be someone else to hate by then? Alphabetically: Adivasis, Buddhists, Christians, Dalits, Parsis, Sikhs? Those who wear jeans or speak English or those who have thick lips or curly hair? . . . Will people be beheaded, dismembered and urinated upon? Will foetuses be ripped from their mothers’ wombs and slaughtered? (270-71)

But her indictment of the state and majoritarian supremacists boils down to the complaints regarding dilution, and even suspension of democratic ideals in which minorities are relegated to a position of “second-class citizens, in constant fear, without civil rights and no recourse to justice” (277). On the other hand, the principle of equality before law is jettisoned in case of people who are in power and are absolved of the putative crimes and thus “governing principles of democracy are not just being subverted but deliberately sabotaged” (282). If the legitimacy of the law, policies/actions that the government can undertake is merely dependent on a majority mandate, without any space for arguments that emanate from ethics or morality, then everything including “legal system, the Constitution, the press,” genocides,” and “massacre” can be decided on the basis of votes and opinion polls, which in turn depend on “marketing campaigns” (283).

Here, Roy is invokes well-known problem of tyranny of the majority. The solution to this may be achieved through constitutional safeguards of rights, separation of powers and frequent elections; nevertheless, the solution may not be a perfect one, as Roy implies through her critique. She also views recent Indian history of recent years gradually leading to

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72 Mansfield cites two examples from the classic account of Democracy in America by Tocqueville where “in Baltimore, two journalists who opposed the War of 1812 were killed by a mob of the war-supporters, and in Philadelphia, black freedmen were kept from voting by intimidation” (41).
“incipient, creeping fascism” which has been groomed by many of “our ‘democratic’
institutions.” She comments on fascism thus:

Fascism is also about the slow, steady infiltration of all the instruments of State
power. It's about the slow erosion of civil liberties, about unspectacular day-to-day
injustices. Fighting it means fighting to win back the minds and hearts of people.
Fighting it does not mean asking for RSS shakhas and the madrassas to be banned, it
means working towards the day when they're voluntarily abandoned as bad ideas. It
means keeping an eagle eye on public institutions and demanding accountability.

(286)

She then asks to shift focus to real things like “bonded labor, marital rape, sexual preferences,
women’s wages, uranium dumping, unsustainable mining, weavers’ woes, farmers’ suicides”
alongside diminishing “displacement,” “dispossession,” and “everyday violence of abject
poverty” (287).

Thus, quite evidently Roy is not unaware of lessons of history when she avers that in
India fascism “has come after the dreams that fuelled the freedom struggle have been frittered
away, like so much loose change” (288). But those who are shielded from historical
knowledge do not seem to understand that “fascism will thrive for a short while and then self-
annihilate because of its inherent stupidity” (287). She enunciates how the dreams are
frittered away:

Every political party has mined the marrow of our secular parliamentary democracy
for electoral advantage. Like termites excavating a mound, they’ve made tunnels and
underground passages, undermining the meaning of ‘secular,’ until it has become just
an empty shell that’s about to implode. Their tilling has weakened the foundations of
the structure that connects the constitution, Parliament, and the courts of law—the

73 As per Tocqueville majority tyranny “leaves the body and goes straight for the soul” (qtd. in Mansfield 41). It
may be said that body too is not spared all the time.
configuration of checks and balances that forms the backbone of a parliamentary democracy. (288-89)

Exhorting all to “accept that there is a dangerous, systemic flaw in our parliamentary democracy that politicians [have and] will exploit,” Roy wants us “to address this issue and come up with a systemic solution” rather than to blame politicians (289). She goes on to enumerate the real grievance that has allowed fascist opportunists to pit one community against the other for electoral gains:

Every “democratic” institution in this country has shown itself to be unaccountable, inaccessible to the ordinary citizen, and either unwilling or incapable of acting in the interests of genuine social justice. Every strategy for real social change—land reform, education, public health, the equitable distribution of natural resources, the implementation of positive discrimination—has been cleverly, cunningly, and consistently scuttled and rendered ineffectual by those castes and that class of people that has a stranglehold on the political process. (289-90)

Finally, she thinks that a “commitment to social justice” (293) is only way to remedy deficiencies of democracy in India. Roy carefully keeps the discourse of justice apparently balanced when she responds to events like the one treated in this essay on democracy. She brought earlier pogroms into her arguments like the one that was against Sikh minority in 1984 in New Delhi. She also brings larger historical information that is amply relevant. For instance she mentions that this attempt of Hindu nationalism is likely to meet the same fate as that of “the restoration of Roman glory, the purification of the German race, or the establishment of an Islamic sultanate” (292).

If the Indian society fails to establish a society based on democratic ideals and social justice, Roy anticipates a world to come. She writes that if that happened
. . . years from now, when the rest of the world has shunned us (as it should), we too will learn, like the ordinary citizens of Hitler’s Germany, to recognize revulsion in the gaze of our fellow human beings. We too will find ourselves unable to look our own children in the eye, for the shame of what we did and didn’t do. For the shame of what we allowed to happen. (293-94)

It is important to remember that Roy neither writes as a political analyst, nor as someone with an identity narrowly definable in terms of caste, religion, gender, or nationality. To view the world only from any singular identity-perspective and ignore other identities, may result in too parochial a perspective rather than an objective one. More narrowly defined an identity is, greater is the likelihood of distortion and bias.

Amartya Sen, citing Shakespeare’s play King Lear in his book The Idea of Justice, says that view from a particular position (identity-centric for instance) has importance in realms of moral and political philosophy, jurisprudence, and epistemology. He further underscores that transcending the “positional sequestering” (155) is necessary for achieving better degree of objectivity by removing (removable) bias. During communal riots too, most crimes are committed through assertion of a singular identity of the perpetrators. There is enough evidence to show how virtues like empathy and compassion are inhumanly sidestepped and how even law enforcing agencies fail in quelling communal pogroms.

Roy uses all these arguments with a view to get distanced from fixed and narrow positions as she also connects heterogeneous fields of knowledge and human experience to counter parochialism. She also answers some of the most powerful criticism through her interviews and subsequent writings. Responding to a question whether the word fascism is being used “loosely” in an essay “How Deep Shall We Dig?” via raising a flurry of eleven questions (226-27) pertaining to attitudes and actions of majority towards minority in light of events

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74 Fascism is defined as “an authoritarian and nationalistic right-wing system of government” (“Fascism”). For an elaborate definition with a context and its modern avatars see Umberto Eco’s essay “Ur-Fascism.”
that took place during Gujarat pogroms. Therefore, if democracy is the rule of people, it cannot allow unlimited powers to majority population to become a threat to social order and justice. This was what Tocqueville saw as a major flaw in democratic set up of America during 1830s:

Unlimited power is in itself a bad and dangerous thing. Human beings are not competent to exercise it with discretion. …There is no power on earth so worthy of honor in itself, or clothed with rights so sacred, that I would admit its uncontrolled and all-predominant authority. When I see that right and the means of absolute command are conferred on any power whatever, be it called a people or a king, an aristocracy or a democracy, a monarchy or a republic, I say there is the germ of tyranny, and I seek to live elsewhere, under other laws. (“Unlimited” 270)

The issue of religion and its manifestations in coercive actions has been countered in a major way by Roy in another essay “Listening to Grasshoppers: Genocide, Denial and Celebration.” She takes up the issue of denial of genocides as a historical phenomenon. She conjectures that such denials may have arisen out of “dual morality” of European empires in nineteenth century when in the home country the colonial powers were compelled to hide systematic and brutal atrocities on colonized populations abroad (140). Often the cause of denial of genocides, as also cause itself of genocides, is “[e]conomic determinism marinated in racial/ ethnic/ religious/ national discrimination” (140). Roy provides several historical instances75, wherein denial has been largely a standard response of the governments or states. Nevertheless, if genocide is accepted it is justified through inadequate or faulty reasoning.

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75 Recognized by the place name, Roy mentions following genocides in the essay: Armenians in Anatolia (133); natives in Congo (141; 143); natives of Rwanda, Bosnian Muslims in Bosnia, Sikhs in Delhi, Muslims in Gujarat, Carthage (137); native Indian and deported Africans in America (141); Jews, gypsies, communists, homosexuals, and Russian prisoners of war in Germany; Herero people in South-West Africa by Germany (143); aboriginal people in Tasmania and Australia by British (144). She says that UN definition of genocide does not cover other major such mass murders as “committed by Suharto in Indonesia, Pol Pot in Cambodia, Stalin in Soviet Union and Mao in China” (138). She also mentions that America “kidnapped and sold into slavery” some 30 million Africans, and bombed “Tokyo, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Dresden and Hamburg” and yet refuses to accept them as crimes or genocides (141).
Roy sees Gujarat pogrom in the long human history of genocides because its context shares characteristics which in turn emanate from a diabolic vision where differences in religious identities of people are used as ploy to persecute them rather than tolerate. She writes that genocides are as much part of “human condition as love and art and agriculture” are (144).

Denial or justification of genocides might have begun with change of value system in modern societies from honour/courage-based to justice-based. Economic determinism and its associated variants of progress have also played an important role in history of genocides as in case of Nazis who were spurred by competition with European colonial empires in conquests and easy riches (Roy, “Listening” 145). She views Hindu nationalistic rise in India in this larger history of continual events of the world that committed great violence and later justified/denied that violence. However, Roy is not alone or radically different except in her passion from some of the other writers who also view such developments in India with disapprobation and apprehension. Amitav Ghosh and Dom Moraes too share, among many others, these sentiments, and have written about the event (Kumar and Bhaumik).

2.2.3 Media in a Democracy as Seen through Roy’s Essays

Amartya Sen in his book, *The Idea of Justice* enumerates five different reasons why “unrestrained and healthy media” is crucially important for a democracy, which is based on a notion of government by discussion (335). Free media is important primarily for its “direct contribution of free speech in general” for want of communication amongst people (335). It also has “informational role in dissemination knowledge and allowing critical scrutiny” (336). Media also has crucial “protective function in giving voice to the neglected and the disadvantaged” (336). “Informed and unregimented formation of values” is also greatly dependent upon interactive processes which can be substantially assisted by a free and fair media (336). Sen gives example of importance of liberal value of toleration in a less than perfectly harmonious situation of different social groups (336). Finally Sen writes that
“media is important not only for democracy but pursuit of justice in general [as]
‘[d]iscussionless justice’ can be an incarcerating idea” (337).

Roy’s critique of media in general and Indian media in particular, may thus be viewed
in vital tradition of public reasoning as well in normative function of media in a democracy.
Her first essay after publication of *The God of Small Things* was partially motivated by an
excessive and uncritical jubilation in media over Indian government’s successful testing of
nuclear weapons. It is also important to remember that role of media is also crucial to
foundational argument concerning checks and balances and government’s accountability in a
democracy. Yet, information in itself is insufficient, and its efficacy to force accountability is
“an article of faith,” as Devesh Kapur writes, that despite many “elected officials in India
whose record on corruption and even violent crime is shamelessly transparent,” and they
hardly face any “negative consequences” (455).

Roy’s analysis of media is available in her essay “Peace is War” which was delivered
as a speech at the Centre for the Study of the Developing Societies (CSDS) in 2003. The
essay begins with “idea of ‘paid for’ news,” or “sponsored news” which at that time was
revealed in public by newspapers for an available option for buyers for papers’ page-three
space (89-90). Media bias which tilts towards favouring establishment views is clear after
events like September 11 attack in America and Kargil conflict between India and Pakistan.
Roy brings the larger scenario: “modern democracies have been around for long enough for
neo-liberal capitalists to learn how to subvert them. They have mastered the technique of
infiltrating the instruments of democracy—the ‘independent’ judiciary, the ‘free’ press,
parliament—and moulding them to their purpose” (91). According to Roy to “control a
democracy, it is becoming more and more vital to control the media” (91-92). She writes that
“it’s a mistake to think that corporate media supports the neoliberal project,” rather, “it is the

76 An interesting account (and which concedes with Roy’s critique of media) of newspaper industry in India is
provided by Ken Auletta in *The New Yorker*; see bibliography for details. For another take on the same topic see
Subramanian.
neoliberal project” (92). Revelation of nexus between power, money and media is important tasks to better understand workings of democracy for ordinary people.

Roy uses memorable metaphors of buffalo and the bees for old media (radio, television, and print journalism) and new media (internet) respectively (93). Bees buzz around the buffalo and go where it goes—which could be viewed as a series of crises. But bees are also bothering the buffalo by showing “what it really is—an elaborate boardroom bulletin that reports and analyses concerns of powerful people” (93).

The media which is more interested in spectacular crisis after crisis may become entirely different from what media is entrusted with in a democracy. It loses sustained interest in low-key injustices largely caused by structural flaws in a society. Moreover, the state can choose to ignore such durable and unspectacular injustices. On the other hand resistance movements on the ground resisting and fighting these entrenched injustices are forced to constantly improvise newer ways to attract attention from important outlets of media until removal of those injustices. Thus a majority of society, including the resistance movements, becomes “ensnared in a sort of vortex of crisis production” and consumption (96).

Need of attention/support from genuine resistance movements face a competition from “campaigns by political parties” which also seek the same (96). Though there is huge difference between quality of spectacles these two choose; they invite very different responses from the state. Roy mentions how there was hardly any state intervention, leave alone the police firing, when political parties organize their spectacles—“mass murder of Sikhs led by the Congress Party in Delhi in 1984,” “rampaging mobs that demolished the Babri Masjid,” “Shiv Sena led massacre of Muslims in Bombay in 1993,” and “the Bajrang Dal led genocide against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002” (97). Contrast this with how the State deals with the resistance movements or mass acts of civil-disobedience:
In April 2001 the police opened fire on a peaceful meeting of the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan in Mehndi Kheda, Madhya Pradesh. On 2 February 2001, police fired on a peaceful protest of Munda Adivasis in Jharkhand, who were part of the protest against the Koel Karo hydroelectric, killing eight people and wounding twelve. On 7 April 2000, the Gujarat police attacked a peaceful demonstration by the Kinara Bachao Sangharsh Samiti . . . In Orissa, three Adivasis were killed for protesting a bauxite mining project in December 2000. In Chilika, police fired on fisherfolk demanding the restoration of their fishing rights. Four people were killed. . . . The instances of repression go on and on—Jambudweep, Kashipur, Maikanj [and] Muthanga in Wyanad, Kerala. (99-100)

These instances cited by Roy may not be taken as exhaustive data about state discrimination but are convincing evidences of bias. She thus questions choices left for people who are so ensnared in unjust positions and that “space for genuine non-violent civil disobedience is atrophying” around them (102).

The preoccupation with crisis reporting, or what Roy calls “tyranny of crisis reportage” (109), demands intervention and participation in democratic processes to be ceaselessly creative. It means that in itself, moral and ethical appeal of issues is insufficient to draw enough attention that can sustain discussion and effect change. Eventually resorting to extreme measures becomes a norm which leads to loss of effectiveness of gentle persuasion or low-key consistent reasoning in democratic processes. It also may have the long term impact of making whole societies fragment into strategic consumer/producer human groups bound by interests rather than values. Reality, it may be argued, will be tinged with a permanent hysteria.

Roy further observes that “for most people in the world, peace is war—a daily battle against hunger, thirst, and the violation of their dignity.” She continues thus: “And it is the
flaws, the systemic flaws in what is normally considered to be ‘peace’, that we ought to be writing about. We have to—at least some of us have to—become peace correspondents instead of war correspondents” (106). Counting another pitfall of media’s this proclivity, Roy writes that “crisis reportage flips history over, turns it belly-up,” and forces “us to view a complex evolving historical process through the distorting prism of a single current event” (109). Moreover “[c]rises polarize people,” and “[t]hey hustle us into making uninformed [and offered in crude binary] choices” (109). She observes how corporate globalization has further increased distance of “top-heavy” state from common people and how that “distance puts justice out of reach” (111-12). Roy ends the essay with an extended metaphor of a ship which portrays a future that partly begets from a flawed media that do not take notice or chooses to remain silent about “the unrelenting daily grind of injustice”:

But we continue sailing on our Titanic as it tilts slowly into the darkened sea. The deckhands panic. Those with cheaper tickets have begun to be washed away. But in the banquet halls, the music plays on. The only signs of trouble are slightly slanting waiters, the kebabs and canapés sliding to one side of their silver trays, the somewhat exaggerated sloshing of the wine in the crystal wineglasses. The rich are comforted by the knowledge that the lifeboats on the deck are reserved for club-class passengers.

The tragedy is that probably they are right. (112)

Roy critiques the roles and functioning of media vis-à-vis those roles in a populous, poor, illiterate, and hierarchical society that ostensibly runs on principles of democracy. The critique may be supported by the insiders of the media profession. P. Sainath, an award winning journalist77, shares how major media houses are reluctant to spend resources on rural reporting which has important but unspectacular stories of farmer suicides or extent of poverty and malnutrition amongst rural poor. His book, Everybody Loves a Good Drought:

77 Ramon Magsaysay Award Sainath received in 2007, as the initial pages of his book informs, was under the “category of Journalism, Literature and Creative Communication Arts.”
Stories from India’s Poorest Districts was an attempt to partially correct this bias by looking at conditions of rural poor “in terms of processes” and not as “events” of poverty and deprivation (xi), and to bring them from “beyond the margins of a press and media that fail to connect with them (xv). Sainath too says, not unlike Roy, that Indian press increasingly fails to perform “its minimum duty” of pointing out “weaknesses in society” (435). He avers that this could be done by giving more space and covering more stories “on rights and entitlements of poor” (436). Roy adds to it the complaint about media not merely of a failure of duty in pointing weaknesses in society but becoming itself a weakness.

2.2.4 Indigenous People and Meaning of Development in Roy’s Work

Society can be viewed as an interconnected mesh of institutions. It is not new to use the term institution for such relations as marriage and family though more often the word is used for organizations meant to achieve various objectives of a society such as commercial, technical or educational. These institutions are inherently linked to value systems. That is why in his book on theory of justice, John Rawls assumes that if the institutions are fair, they help inculcate the value of fairness in the society and thus for Rawls “the basic structure of society is ‘the primary subject of justice’” (qtd. in Sen, Idea 67). In India, many of these institutions carry and perpetuate values that are at loggerheads with those that need to be part of a justly ordered society. It is not difficult to observe a regimented bias in most of social relations and institutional setups. Take for instance, fairly visible biases of rich towards poor, men towards women, adults towards children, fair-skinned towards dark-coloured, upper-castes towards lower, urban towards rural, and educated towards illiterates or less educated.

The discourse of justice thus seeks to identify these deep-rooted biases and then remedy them at profounder level of attitudes and also at more visible level of norms of behaviour. Some of the remedies might look like loss and even injustice to people who benefit from already entrenched biases, but two kinds of arguments can be forwarded to
continue rectifying such biases. First kind of arguments stems from rational-pragmatic outlook wherein the end of bias will lead to a kind of perpetual peace which is beneficial to all and sundry. Other arguments come from humanistic outlook in which it ought to gall any human being that his or her attitudes and acts are leading to reinforce the biases which are depriving fellow human beings of a possibility of a good life. Removal of biases may not lead to some egalitarian utopia or perfect balance but it can certainly lead to choice of a good life available to more and more number of people. Democracy as a form of polity becomes a force with its rule of law that, in principle, tends to counter these forms of biases. India, being a proclaimed democracy, has its share of egregious biases which linger and further permeate into its member citizens. An urban young professional, for instance, may not think charitably of a shepherd from hills or of a bow-slinging tribal from forests. They may evoke a fleeting sense of wonder, if at all, but hardly any sustained interest.

Roy views systemic biases both from political as well as social angle. People who are discriminated against, and those who bear the brunt of these biases in the form of threat to their livelihood and dignity, have no option but to struggle or revolt. They struggle “against big dams in the Narmada Valley, Polavaram, Arunachal Pradesh; against mines in Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand; against the police by the Adivasis of Lalgarh; against the grabbing of their lands for industries and special economic zones all over the country” (“Trickledown” 103). Many of these protests are staged at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi and Roy wonders who those people are. This wonderment and a sustained enquiry around this question have also led Roy to write some of her most passionate critiques of Indian democracy. Roy sees dual identity markers of poverty and indigenousness at the worst end of discrimination that seems to have become institutionalized because of dialectic evolution of institutions and value system they uphold and/or presume. She further writes that the state has waged wars “behind the benign mask of democracy” against “Muslims, Christians, Sikhs,
Communists, Dalits, Tribals and, most of all, against the poor who dare to question their lot instead of accepting the crumbs that are flung at them” (“Walking” 78).

The critique of Indian democracy from vantage point of indigenous people’s place therein has appeared in first three essays in Roy’s *Broken Republic*. The first essay “Mr Chidambaram’s War” was published in October 2009 and it was motivated by a subdued announcement of government of India to start Operation Green Hunt. P. Chidambaram was Home Minister of India at that point in time. “Walking with the Comrades” came out in March 2010 wherein Roy recounts her journey into the heart of the forest from which Maoists—a conglomerate of indigenous insurgent groups—operate and wage their violent resistance against perceived or real threat to their way of life. If number of footnotes and empirical data in an essay are somehow related inversely with its literariness then “Walking with the Comrades” is one of her most literary essays. Third essay “Trickledown Revolution” was published in September 2010 and the fourth one, “Capitalism: A Ghost Story” has already been discussed in previous chapter. Thus *Broken Republic* predominantly takes up the issue of violent insurgency by an overwhelmingly tribal population, along with Maoist ideologues, against the Indian State in forests of central India.

Roy informs that the “Indian Constitution, the moral underpinning of Indian democracy, was adopted by Parliament in 1950. It was a tragic day for tribal people. The Constitution ratified colonial policy and made the State custodian of tribal homelands” making tribals “squatters on their own land” (“Walking” 29-30). Thus in “exchange for the right to vote it snatched away their right to livelihood and dignity” (30). But the “Fifth Schedule of the Constitution provides protection to Adivasi people and disallows the alienation of their land” (“Mr” 18). The genesis of the problem may be attributed to the fact that homelands of the tribals contain deposits of minerals of high market value for industry.

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Trickledown theory allows for a few people to get richer and richer thereby leading to their wealth trickling down to the poor below.
Roy states that cumulative mineral wealth in these forests of Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra is several times the current total domestic product of India (16-18). This much wealth has caused “paroxysm of greed” in many stakeholders who “are not always easy to identify” (19). She asks: “How will we ever know which political party, which ministers, which MPs, which politicians, which judges, which NGOs, which expert consultants, which police officers, have a direct or indirect stake in the booty? How will we know which newspapers reporting the latest Maoist ‘atrocity’, which TV channels ‘reporting directly from Ground Zero’” are compromised (19).

Because there are trillions of dollars of money, state governments have signed hundreds of clandestine memoranda of understanding with big corporations. Though the share of royalty from mineral extraction is as low as seven per cent (7), still it is huge money and has caused State institutions to see tribal people as impediments to access that wealth. In answer to the question as to who Maoists are, Roy offers two-pronged approach for the answer. One is through history—how and why indigenous people organized themselves through a party which has a Chinese pedigree and an avowed ideology which is extremist and not shy of violence and rather depend on it while dealing with the state. Another is through their present conditions—meeting them, knowing their problems through them, watching how they live their daily lives.

The narrative that emerges from three essays and interviews that focus on questions of indigenous people from central India is highly complex. A glaring, protracted failure of government and its institutions is made conspicuous in these essays. The details are too many but police encounters and atrocities, politicians’ espousal of covert and overt exploitation of

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79 Roy puts the question amidst many related questions: “When a country that calls itself a democracy openly declares war within its borders, what does that war look like? Does the resistance stand a chance? Should it? Who are the Maoists? Are they just violent nihilists foisting an outdated ideology on tribal people, goading them into a hopeless insurrection?” (“Walking” 31).

80 One interview “Choosing Our Weapons” predates essays in Broken Republic and is singularly important because it summarizes some of the key issues around the question of indigenous people in India. For another interview of Roy where she answers her stance on violence, see “The Power of Words.”
tribal people, and media’s glaring partisan attitude are some of the points of relevance for this section. Add to this huge mineral wealth and corporations that seek to acquire it, pushing state institutions to take measures that are antithetical to democratic ideals vis-à-vis tribal people. In a nutshell, there seems a breakdown of just law as it is replaced by a coercive, punitive, and demanding state. Result is an armed insurrection by ideologically backed rhetoric of an all-out attempt of overthrowing of the state.

Representation of the State is captured by Roy in a lecture by P. Chidambaram at Harvard where he “talks [with regret] about democracy and the obligations it entails: ‘Democracy—rather, the institutions of democracy—and the legacy of the socialist era have actually added to the challenge of development’” (“Trickledown” 112). But she acknowledges where the state has done its due to protect tribal interests as in case of Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act which was passed in 1996 and which “overrides all existing laws that may be in conflict with it” and which renders tribal land appropriation “illegal and unconstitutional” (112). According to Roy, tribal people are merely seeking their rights as safeguarded in the constitution. They want that they be left without basic facilities concerning health and education, as has been largely the case before discovery of enormous mineral wealth. She also questions the purpose behind the presence of “Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF), the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Border Security Force (BSF), the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Greyhounds, Scorpions, Cobras” and about “a policy that’s affectionately called WHAM—Winning Hearts and Minds” in Dantewada (“Walking” 55).

Roy does not look at this great field of violence/counter-violence in over-simplistic dogmas such as, violence is wrong, or tribal people are innocent people living in state of nature in the Rousseauistic mould. She views their so called revolutionary violence imbued with a “Janus-faced morality” in which “tactics trump rectitude and make the world a worse
place” ("Trickledown” 126). One question that is often raised against ideology of Maoists/ Naxals is their violent tactics and an uninhibited espousal of violence to depose Indian State.

Roy offers mainly three related arguments that contend with this question.

Firstly, she says that people and institutions which have come to conclude that only way ahead for growth and development is via exploiting India’s mineral wealth on urgent basis (read economic determinism of the capitalist formation with substantial collateral damage to indigenous populations) cannot dismiss the similar argument forwarded by Maoist ideologues who find the only way of resistance to preserve their life and mores through violence. It means that both the state and the groups can take similar line of arguments. It means that if state uses unjustified (unconstitutional and unlawful) force, it allows justification for violence in defence. She repeatedly says that alternatives of non-violent and closely reasoned means of dissent are increasingly overlooked by the state ("Walking” 57).

Second argument is made in an interview where she is asked about her position on violence, whether she prescribes it or not. She raises some basic questions to evoke a context and sensitise a whole issue:

My question is, if you are an Adivasi living in a village in a dense forest in Chhattisgarh, and that village is surrounded by eight hundred Central Reserve Police Force who have started to burn down the houses and rape the women, what are people supposed to do? Are they supposed to go on a hunger strike? They can’t. They are already hungry, they are already starving. Are they supposed to boycott goods? They can’t because they don’t have the money to buy goods. And if they go on a fast or a dharna, who is looking, who is watching? ("Un-Victim")

Thereafter, Roy goes on to state her position thus: “So, my position is just that it would be immoral of me to preach violence to anybody unless I’m prepared to pick up arms myself.
But I think it is equally immoral for me to preach nonviolence when I’m not bearing the brunt of the attack” (“Un-Victim”).

Third argument takes the form of a juxtapositioning of information that is widely known but perhaps seldom viewed in the way Roy wants us to see it thereby highlighting the state bias. She thinks that if Naxals/Maoists are seen as a group in which they defy law of the land and want to overthrow the state then the same can be said about other ideological groups. There might be difference in the degree, effort or extent of intent but essential quality of motives is unmistakably same. All these ought to have, Roy seems to suggest, received same kind of treatment from a democracy which works on the principle of equality: “The Maoists are not the only ones who seek to depose the Indian State. It’s already been deposed several times by Hindu fundamentalism and economic totalitarianism” (“Walking” 56).

Several questions have been raised about Roy’s essay, “Walking with the Comrades” and she answered them all. Another most important critique of her essays, apart from the espousal of violence, is accusation of “leaders of the [communist] party being parasites preying on poor adivasis” (“Trickledown” 135). This accusation results from the greater distrust of democratic spirit in which a common Adivasi is assumed to be unable to arrive at deciding his/her own good. For Roy, this distrust is “very disturbing” (135) because it somehow assumes a place of higher pedestal for urban, educated, middle class people compared to Adivasis. This is in consonance with the British argument wherein it was said that Indians were not capable of self-rule at a time when Indian freedom struggle was at its peak. Thus, it may be said that her arguments are for betterment of institutions of democracy, for prevalence of constitutional law in its enlightened spirit, and for evolving what she calls
atrocity-based analysis of the issue of Adivasi population of India, and to put it to human-centric and environment-centric analysis.

Roy directs her most cautious critique towards the Supreme Court of India, one of the most important institutions of Indian democracy. In her essays, where she has challenged the development paradigm that includes construction of big dams, which was opposed in a protracted struggle by people’s movement called Narmada Bachao Andolan, the apex court allowed for further construction of a particular big dam. Roy, along with others, demonstrated against this decision of the court which eventually resulted in Roy’s sentencing to jail for a day. Nevertheless, Roy’s focus on the apex court began with an essay she wrote on the case of conviction of a man named Mohammed Afzal in an act of terror by attacking Indian Parliament on 13 December 2001. This essay, apart from others which raise questions about judicial processes and outcomes, is published Listening to Grasshoppers, wherein her main contention is in the fact that the court found no evidence against Afzal’s connection with any terrorist group and based merely on circumstantial evidence ruled that “his life should become extinct” to satisfy “collective conscience of the society” (“‘And’” 48).

With forensic details presented in the essay, Roy asserts that though “judicial objectivity exists” in India but “it’s a shy beast that lives somewhere deep in the labyrinth of our legal system. It shows itself rarely. It takes whole teams of top lawyers to coax it out of its lair and make it come out and play” (58). Marshalling facts that point towards “serious lapse of procedure” (59), grievous errors on the part of police (61-3) and “fudging in almost every part of the investigation” (65), the essay convincingly questions the judgment of the court. In a more collaborative effort of many writers and journalists which brought out a book on the case, Roy provides an introduction to it wherein she raises thirteen questions which

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81 Much of what Roy says about the issue of indigenous people of central Indian forests is in consonance with Subhranshu Choudhary’s Let’s Call Him Vasu: With the Maoists in Chhattisgarh, which is result of seven years of reporting from those forests and meetings with hundreds of Maoists. Prior to this and essays of Roy, another book largely agree on the deficiencies of democracy; see Chakravarti, particularly his book’s introduction.
prick the rationale behind the judgment (“Breaking”). The investigations of the case and the judgment on it portray the “weakening fabric of our democracy” (Roy, “Custodial” 99).

Roy ups the ante of her criticism on the Supreme Court of India while recognizing that it is fraught with dangers of being viewed uncharitably by the Court and it can invoke the law on criminal contempt of court. She writes how the apex court affects matters of public policy alongside holding the rule of law in 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 privatised. 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 has become the premier arbiter of public policy in this country that likes to market itself as the World’s Largest Democracy. (Listening 117-18)

By delineating the extent of the power of the Supreme Court, Roy posits that due to a reluctance on the part of voted parliamentarians to take decisions that can affect their careers adversely, the Court has made such mostly unpopular pronouncements for holding the “Rule of Law” which is “distinct and can often be far removed from the principle of justice” (118). She also notes how higher level of judiciary has largely eschewed accountability and a measure of checks and balances which is necessary in a democracy to preclude unfettered accrual of power in any single institution. Because of existence of a law that may punish people with sole motive of offering constructive criticism of the judiciary, Roy seems at pains—an experience which she expressed through brief write-ups published through essays
and affidavits when she was incarcerated\(^{82}\) as a token punishment—to emphasize importance
of free speech and public reason both of which can be stifled with anachronistic legal
provisions. It may thus be summed up that her concerns for removal of deficiencies in
democracy are fairly evident in most of her non-fictional corpus discussed here.

Roy’s book *Broken Republic* is a testimony to the plight of indigenous people caught
between modernity and its pushy development paradigms. Splinter groups of communist
parties avow solidarity to the causes of indigenous people and sometimes they achieve\(^{83}\) what
ought to have been achieved via routine processes of democratic politics. Roy, though
sympathetic to the communist party cause, is not entirely enamoured by its violent ways
though she admits its justifications and compares it with the state violence. She seems to
suspect that in Maoists’ dream, if it ever came true; critics are unlikely to be spared. Pankaj
Mishra, nearly fifteen years ago, also met a similar splinter group in Bihar. The meeting, a
much less low-key affair, becomes the last chapter of his very first book *Butter Chicken in
Ludhiana*. The remainder of this chapter, deals with Mishra’s non-fictional corpus to show
how it affixes itself with the democratic ideal and thus to discourse of justice.

2.3 Mishra and His Striving for Democratic Practices

2.3.1 Mishra’s Journeys into the Heart of Indian Democracy

The first book of Mishra, *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana* — which Amitava Kumar calls,
a “love-letter to the real republic” (see blurb of the book) is a travelogue that covers over
twenty small towns of nine states in India. The idea behind the book was to “get a fairly
representative cross-sample” of India and no attached brief or agenda on what to look for and
write about (“Prologue” xix). The result is a kaleidoscopic and humorous travelogue sans

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\(^{82}\) Roy published two affidavits which she submitted in response to notices by the Supreme Court in wake of
contempt proceedings that led to her experience of legal system in India. See her “Defence of Dissent,” and
“Contempt of Court!” For her statement after she was out of jail see “‘I Stand by What I Have Said’.”

\(^{83}\) Several achievements are recounted by Roy in “Walking with the Comrades.” Share of adivasis in forest
produce increased due to organized intervention for tendu leaves (45-46), and bamboo (47); massive land was
redistributed and there are no landless peasants now as per a claim (48-49) and the gamut of feminist struggles is
leading to better lives for women (66-69).
strict sociology. Small towns being somewhere in the middle of rural and metropolitan demography; they register nearly all the human endeavours and impulses. The book lends itself to be viewed as representing a reality which somehow eschews from disciplinary confines. In the epilogue which was added after over a decade of its first publication, Mishra mildly dismisses the book because it reminds him of his “younger, callow, unresolved self” having an undeserved tone of “intellectual and moral authority” but he grants that the book nevertheless “responded” to a new economic phase of liberalization of early nineties in which a “culturally ambitious and politically conservative” middle class began expanding (272).

Mishra, almost preternaturally alert to his surrounding during his travels, notices physical squalor of places as evident on the very first page of the book while describing a bus stand in Delhi: “the thick fog of the low-octane diesel smoke, the stench from open, unflushed toilets, the roar of bus engines, the countless cassette players blaring simultaneously, the muddy floor, the swirling mobs of bewildered travellers, the thuggish touts for private buses, the aggressive child-beggars” (“Prologue” vii). Read closely and followed to its genesis, each of the phrases harks back to a civic failure. But as the book is on small towns, this description of Delhi bus stand is an aside to the larger world of small towns that are reached through such city terminals. Towns and their people are engagingly observed to foreground a palpable commotion, at times in the background and at others prominent. A pervasive sense of corruption, in all its wider sense, is palpably present in the book. Mishra once finds himself in an engagement ceremony in Muzaffarnagar where he hears about people gossiping of “dowries paid, bribes […] given to municipal officials and sales-tax inspectors, […] and of an inspector who had personally killed seven Muslims in a communal riots some months ago” (xiii).

What common people say makes for a sizable portion of this book. Once beyond the boundaries of the formal and scrutinized, they mostly fall back to their comfort zones of
mind, which betrays what might be called their understanding of reality, their Weltanschauung. Social sciences arrive at the facts of societies through extended empirical data and many a times it is done with informed consent and an implicit trust on part of researcher and the subject(s) that such data might be useful to understand to better those societies. In works like Mishra’s *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana*, an extra element of truth enters via absence of directed interest, which alerts people and make them hide their innermost thoughts and feelings. When unwary, they divulge much. That such talks are unstructured is their flaw as well as advantage. But what common mass of society thinks and believes, or what goes in the name of its values, is the content of their democratic spirit or its deficit. In Muzaffarnagar in that pre-marriage ceremony, Mishra finds “too much to see and take note of” and more than he should have seen and heard (xiii). From what Mishra is able to note and share in this book is also not little; therefore only a very brief and selective treatment is possible here.

Mishra’s journey begins in Simla in Himachal Pradesh. In the bus to Mandi from Simla, a co-passenger Mr. Benerji notices, amidst talk with Mishra on politics, a popular lewd number, *choli ke peechhe kya hai* being played loudly. Mr. Benerji asks the attendant of the bus to stop the vulgar song but the attendant mumbles something without doing anything. Mr. Benerji persists but to no avail until a young, “tall, hefty, impossibly broad-shouldered man” (15) asserts, addressing Mr. Beneji as boss, that we, presumably including other young people in bus, are enjoying it and he should not have any problem. This young man also adds that music may be bad for you but it is good for us. The attendant of the bus adds that this being a luxury bus, music will certainly be played and if it was not needed, then Mr. Benerji should have plied by ordinary bus. If further information about Mr. Benerji (he himself is chatty, excitable and quibbling) and hefty young man (who violently and needlessly kicked a
hapless dog which happens to come close on a recent stop of the bus) is added then problem of finding what is reasonable and right thing to do, would become even knottier.

Mishra witnesses another but smaller confrontation in a train named Tamilnadu Express. Mishra’s companions in the journey are Mr. Rastogi, a journalist, and Mr. Goenka, a “Marwari businessman based in Madras” (125). Mr. Goenka, “his stockinged feet giving off a terrible stench,” prefers travelling in planes; hates trains and lies that he couldn’t secure seat in first class bogey (125). His son is doing MBA and finds inspiration in Harshad Mehta, who, Mr. Goenka says, has been wrongly portrayed by media as corrupt. On media’s corruption—“In Madras, all journalists are behaving like chamechas of Jayalalitha”—Mr. Rastogi largely agrees. In Mr. Goenka’s opinion it is “pure hypocrisy” to single out Mehta if “[e]veryone is corrupt” (126). Talks move to topic of anti-north feelings in south Indian people, their laziness and inefficiencies; and then to inefficient waiters of Tamilnadu Express. About poor everywhere, Mr. Goenka says, seeing people sleeping on station platforms, that “buggers . . . don’t want to work” (129). A woman and her young daughter join them. Mr. Rastogi changes his demeanour, hides his pulp novels with sensual covers, and sets talking to the women who were travelling to Bombay to try daughter Rita’s luck in fashion modelling, which Mishra shares, having a good look at Rita, was a “hopeless venture” (132). There is some talk of Indian women’s breaking their chains and Mr. Rastogi’s offer to provide some page-three exposure to Rita. All this while Mr. Goenka, whom Mishra presumes “tradition-bound” and “an old-fashioned tyrant” of a father to his perhaps similarly young daughters, does not participate (133). His back faced all three—Mr. Rastogi and the woman and Rita who was busy reading Stardust. When Mr. Goenka takes turn he touches Rita’s upraised flip-flops which she has placed on his seat. He is infuriated and says that despite all this modernity the girl has no manners. Mr. Rastogi tries to help the girl by citing that she is only

84 Elsewhere, but nearly a decade later, Mishra asks: “Is there hope when Page 3 vacuity occupies our media space?” Mishra, it is clear, does not view world of fashion very highly (“In Bed with Celebrity”).
a child, a “bacchii,” but Mr. Goenka is quick to ask if this be so, why is she eager to “dance
on a stage” in Bombay (134). This settles the talks into a grim silence until the women reach
their destination.

In the first instance the matter is about individual choice in a public sphere, norms of
social behaviour, and underlying ethical judgments about what is right/wrong or complexly
dualistic. The second instance is a clash of tradition with forms of modernity in the garb of an
ignorable error of manners by the girl. The extent and purview of democratic spirit squarely
falls within these norms of civic intercourse and modifies them. The major question here is as
to whether democracy is a binding principle only in society at large, or is it possible to make
the core values of democratic ideal prevail everywhere: at home, in offices, in a bus/train, and
at school. In both cases above, as far as I know, law does not help much. Even the police is
going to look askance if Mr. Benerji takes up the matter to them, or Mr. Goenka wants
reparations for the soiled pyjamas. It is also not possible to take recourse to law in every
conflict, which might prove to be not only unfeasible but outright silly as well. Nostalgic
yearning for a power beyond the agents of conflict that can always settle such conflicts is
understandable, but human reason, sooner or later, is likely to counter arbitrary power. What
remains thus is a community of people who see themselves as equally equipped—given
sufficient agency and opportunity—and free to settle conflicts by arguments, debates,
persuasion and in the end, by lawful coercion.

Amartya Sen in *The Idea of Justice* says in a similar case\(^85\) that main issue is “whether
you should impose – or refuse to dismantle – barriers to the pursuit of other people’s goals,
when these goals are not in any sense evil, even if – as in this case – you do think that they
are not conducive to promoting their own well-being” (192-93). Neither listening to vulgar

\(^{85}\) A man sitting by a plane window on a sunny day is enjoying it when other man of aisle seat requests him to
down the shade so that he can view his laptop screen better and play a game. The man by the window obliges
but laments in his mind the prevalence of ignorance. He is sure that other one is wasting his time by playing a
stupid game whereas he should read news and inform himself on Iraq, Afghanistan or his hometown (192).
songs by youth and trying a career in fashion are evil things to do, nor asking for a quiet journey and simple, less glamorous world is particularly bad desire. How people respond to what they disagree with or dislike is within the ambit of democratic spirit. The lack of this spirit repeatedly gains prominence in Mishra’s book, wherein many people are unreasonably sceptical or outright dismissive of the postulate that people are equally eligible to pursue their life plans as long as they do not harm others.

Mishra’s book also registers brazen casteism and religious bigotry. For Mr. Sharma of Ambala in Haryana, Brahmins are new scheduled castes, a minority, and thus befitting to get a special quota and UN protection with regards to their human rights (36). Mr. Sharma, while all along sizing Mishra up as a prospective bridegroom for his daughter, keeps calling his servant, lists Brahmins—politicians, cricket players and film actors—who made India great, and then views book writing in purely monetary terms (37). While Mr. Sharma irrationally worries only on account of his caste’s status vis-à-vis schedules castes, Uday Prakash Singh in Gaya (Bihar), declares “without emotion” that his grandfather “burnt alive fourteen Harijans” (249). Mishra comments, while noticing confident and fashionably attired women guests at a reception party at Hapur in Uttar Pradesh, that low caste assertion is now underway. It was improbable that either women or Mr. Singh, who hosted a reception despite belonging to a so-called low caste, could have done it a few years ago. These opinions and facts seem more pronounced in the northern part of India. In south, in contrast, Mishra meets, amidst “unremitting desolation” (189) of Shimoga in Karnataka state, Mr. Bhatt who was once a big landlord but gave away all 200 acres except 5, which he kept for himself. Mishra informs that all this land redistribution was result of a Gandhian and socialist movement in fifties in which Mr. Bhatt, whom Mishra finds truly noble and dignified, was a participant. Another participant in the discussion of this past says that feudalism in south was “never as cruel as in Bihar and UP” (192).
Feudalism and its encounter with modernity in the north is found to be one of the root causes of rampant eve teasing and sexual harassment of foreign women tourists in Benares as experienced by Sarah, Susan and Jane (206-12), and as explained by Rahul (212-16), who is an acquaintance of Mishra. Rahul thinks that “wealthy types” among the Benares Hindu University students who want to live out of the campus, “eat, drink, and make merry, supported by the monthly cheque from their families” make the most of these offenders (213). Rahul outlines the connection of the eve teasing menace with the form of feudal mindset in these parts of India:

[T]his region around Benares where most of these students come from is socially and economically the most backward in all of India. The old feudal order is still in place, and feudalism here is of a different order altogether. There is none of that humanity you see in other feudal societies of the past where the landlord acted as a sort of benevolent patriarch and carried a certain responsibility for the peasant’s needs in exchange for his labour. Here it is simply cruel and barbaric exploitation. The landlord owes you nothing, he works you into the ground, and if he happens to take a liking for your wife or sister or daughter, there is nothing you can do to stop him from sleeping with her. (214)

These outworn attitudes lead to a social structure based on the tendency of violence and cruelty “right down to the bottom” where all share this streak (215). It is clear that the predatory values are distant from modern values of equality and individuality. Mishra writes about how Rahul feels that “dominant ethos” of the region perceive, mainly by wealthy and powerful, “people as property” and not as “individuals with inalienable rights” (215). These democratic ideals thus are yet to seep into many people’s psyche.

Rahul’s analysis, as recorded by Mishra, posits that modernity in these parts has also brought with it new and morally questionable values without really denting the old feudalistic
ones. Therefore, lure of urban consumerism coexists with feudal hierarchies in people’s minds. Ideas about progress are thus largely confined to material progress through crass consumerism and purchasing power rather than through practicing values of equality and freedom, and concurrently attempting to undo structural biases in the social system. Because of this unique mix of tradition and modernity, a fixation with economic growth is of paramount importance among already better off people. This easily dovetails with the question of population problem and later with Muslims in India who are viewed as singularly culpable in exacerbating the problem of population.

Mishra finds himself in the company of Mr. Agarwal, Mr. Shukla, and Mr. Lal when he encounters these kinds of attitudes in full and uninhibited utterances (200-02). Mr. Agarwal who is in the electronics business shares that India has a huge market for that business and Lal, who was not very well aware of the business or its gadgets, asks rhetorically: who says India is not progressing? While Shukla wants to bring in growth rate into the discussion; Agarwal says that the progress would fail if population is not controlled, which, he further suggests, can easily be done by means of forced sterilization. Shukla doubts availability of political will needed to take such measures but Agarwal knows “who’s behind the population growth.”[86] It’s the Mohammedans, who are marrying four times and having double-digit children” (201). Shukla blames pseudo-seculars who appease Mohammedans. Agarwal ups the pitch literally and metaphorically when he says that they (Mohammedans) would not listen (about need to control population) because the “bastards only understand the language of the sword” (202). Lal finds it a bit extreme and rather suggests education as a way to this problem which brings Mrs. Agarwal into the discussion who had been silent so far. She doubts furiously that education could be of any help because these people “are

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[86] The population arguments, when looked from further afield in the West, can easily be applied for whole so-called developing and underdeveloped world and, in fact, Churchill said that “Indians would go on breeding ‘like rabbits’ . . . when asked to send relief during the Bengal famine of 1943-44” (Mishra, “Ruins”).
reading Arabic and government is giving money to their madrasas. No, all that is useless. It is over. The government must tell them to stop having so many children and if they don’t listen they should send them to Pakistan. We don’t want them in India” (202).

This kind of peremptory segregation of people on the basis of religious identity, whether they themselves consider it dominant or not, is fraught with likely miscalculation of causes of problems and their potential solutions. Democracy develops a healthy distrust of any permanent identity apart from human identity. Where these identities are actually playing roles, such as in the substantial differences between males and females in almost all walks of life in most societies, democratic principles allow for a non-coercive force to make life equally interesting affair for all. It is not long ago in human history that women almost everywhere, and particularly so-called lower castes in India, were barred from all education; but it is rejected as unfair by all reasonable people. Yet the change in these values can only be termed as ‘small’ in India, as Rahul observes as there is much scope of more tenacious and lasting reach of democratic ideals into diverse chunks of populations.

The book also portrays how this deficit is not only shared by adults of India but by teenagers as well, who invest their valuable energies in the dubious projects of the politicians to hold power through winning votes/elections, and who have learned to reap benefits from divisions among people87. Mishra meets one such teenager in Ranakpur in Rajasthan, who is a boy from a minority religion of Jains but is hardly able to sort out his differences from, or similarities with Hindus. In a brief catechism, Mishra asks him whether he is a Hindu or worships Ram at his home. The boy denies it. When Mishra asks why then he supports building a temple in Ayodhya, the boy pauses and fumbles before he says that because all Jain are Hindus, and because both religions are vegetarian. When Mishra objects that many Hindus eat meat, the boy calls all meat-eating Hindus as non-real Hindus. Sensing a failure of

87 “As late as 1940, Winston Churchill hoped that Hindu-Muslim antagonism would remain ‘a bulwark of British rule in India’” (Mishra, “Exit”).
coherence or credibility, the boy finally arrives at the supposed fact that both Hindus and Jains have common enemy in Muslims and he looks forward to exterminate them all. Mishra comments that the boy is not alone in being “oblivious to the morality of his desires and actions,” but is rather one of many who are newly liberated:

You met them at homes, they were friends of the family, they were, at times, your own relatives. You had known them for a long time, they formed the familiar backdrop to your life, and now, suddenly, you realize with a shock that you had never really known them. They were people who had transcended both good and evil because they never knew them, and who had translated the notion of laissez faire into both economic and social terms – banal, middle-class producers-consumers who wore Hawaiian shirts and stonewashed jeans, regularly visited temples, abhorred meat, and concealed murder in their hearts. (83)

Thus, the democratic ideals, wherein it is possible to discover what are a society’s major problems and how best to solve them, seem to be missing from these bits of Mishra’s encounters. This compels Mishra to call “real” India as “poor, filthy, backward” (79). And it is understandable that India needs truer progress to avoid being part of a national identity which is so unseemly. But this pressing need of life of economic prosperity also causes hasty acceptance of quick-at-hand analyses offered by demagogues to gain cheap popularity.

But it is also wrong to assume that merely instilling of democratic ideal in masses will resolve the problems. Many other problems viz. fast and rash driving (53), urban planning (143), how to earn honest money without resorting to fraud (147), and “teaching English in a post-colonial setting” (195), are beyond the ideals of freedom and equality. These instead need concerted efforts in other directions like inculcating the value of knowing and practicing traffic rules, and developing required expertise in technical fields of knowledge. But many of

88 Mishra takes up the debate about progress in economic term via a review essay of books by Amartya Sen and Jagdish Bhagwati in “Which India Matters?”
the impressions from these encounters clearly show the deficit of democratic ideals and urgent need to fulfil it. Munna Yadav, for instance, whom Mishra meets at Udaipur, left school partly because he was brutally beaten there by teachers (88). Likewise, the prevalence of dowry (xiii), police beatings (97; 250), and misuse of official position (94) are all intrinsically related to grave insufficiencies in democracy.

Some other important pointers to large injustices and the associated attitudes that help them perpetuate are amply available in Mishra’s book. Mr. Mehrotra, whom Mishra meets in train from Kanyakumari to Bangalore, is a captain in the Indian Army. His recent experience of Kashmir puts him in position to air his views with confidence on the Kashmir issue. He is sure that the issue could be solved in months if the government allows “free hand” (183) to army which essentially means asking for impunity from law for any illegal act of violence, torture, or killing. Mr. Mehrotra does not care, whereas another passenger from Warangal agrees on human rights when in his mind they conflict with “unity and integrity of the country” (183-84). The man from Warangal, to whom human rights are “bloody nonsense,” suggests that “Hindus should migrate in large numbers to Kashmir so as to turn the Muslims there into a minority” (184). When a computer engineer suggests that “perhaps the Kashmiris should be allowed to decide their future,” he was interrogated by the man from Warangal if he is a Muslim and this goads Mr. Mehrotra to invoke his belief in secularism and essential equality of people in India (184). As these opinions reflect, the ideas about equality of human worth are largely superficial, as in case of Mr. Mehrotra’s on human rights, even when people have undergone considerable education.

Apart from the record of general physical wretchedness in all small towns, Mishra points out more brutal and brutalising forms of poverty and violence in Bihar, which he calls “Fourth World”: 
The facts [about Bihar] are too gross, the catalogue of atrocities too long. This . . . is where there is a caste of rat-eaters, where medical colleges sell degrees and doctors pull out transfusion tubes from the veins of their patients when they go on strike, where private caste armies regularly massacre Harijans in droves, where murderers and rapists become legislators through large-scale ‘booth-capturing’, where rich landowners own private planes and Rolls Royces, where a landless labourer owns nothing more than a scarf and has forgotten his own name. (243)

Thus, we may observe how these facts routinely exist thereby hardening and inuring people from sharpness of their impact and eventually relegate them to insignificant non-entities as part and parcel of Indian lives. In Butter Chicken in Ludhiana, the diagnosis is ill health of a democracy, and it could be cured only through recognizing/realizing basic conditions for self-rule viz. rights to equal opportunities and informed participation for all.

2.3.2 Mishra on Nepal and Tibet

Mishra’s concern for societies that are coming out of exploitative clutches of colonial rule is well reflected in his subsequent work Temptations of the West published in 2006. The trajectory of his concern seems to reflect a constant guard against abstractions, as opposed to concrete reality of these regions. For instance, he talks of deepening of democracy by severe critique of its flaws where it is already established by constitutions and followed by political institutions as in case of India. But wherever even nominal democracy is absent, Mishra is not shy of stressing its urgent need in unambiguous words.

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89 Mishra’s efforts to understand rural and provincial India are a continued process as apparent from his regular small columns at Bloomberg.com where he started to write in June 2011 and is still doing after four years. See, for instance, “In Rural India, Crooks with Crocs Get the Votes,” “India’s Empty Democracy Can’t Protect Its People,” “What Naipaul Got Right, and Wrong, about India.” He also seems keen on reviewing important books that come out of or about India; see “Caste of Millions,” “India and Ideology,” “An Excess of Goodwill,” “Reason, the Real Reason Why India Lives,” and “Fighting for Scraps” among many others on the internet.
Nepal falls in the latter category and is the object of Mishra’s narrative analyses in the penultimate chapter in *Temptations of the West*. Though dated as Mishra visited Nepal in March 2005, the chapter is still a relevant and succinct reckoner of this small hill country for the beginners. The narrative is built through meeting people of disparate backgrounds to assess the political and social conditions which adds to Mishra’s reading into history and literature of this country. Termed “A Nation Out of Time,” Nepal, in Mishra’s view, is a country where almost half of the twenty-six million people earned less than $100 a year and had no access to electricity, running water or sanitation; a country whose small economy, parasitic on the foreign aid and tourism, had to be boosted by the remittances of Nepalese workers abroad, and where political forces seen as anachronisms elsewhere – monarchy and communism – fought for supremacy. (393)

Whoever Mishra meets in the country, be that a businessman, a human rights activist, an estranged Maoist, father of Maoist leader Prachanda, or ordinary people, impresses upon the need of democracy and rule of law. Mishra notes how there are only “few places in Nepal untouched by violence” and how people are caught in constant fear of both the royal army and the Maoists. The use of the word ‘democracy,’ if it is any indicator of real concern for the concept, is more than twenty times in this small essay. After covering a brief political history the essay ends with musings on democracy’s true purpose. It is in a meeting with a European diplomat speaking of potential support of Western countries to thwart the force of Maoists and to side with monarchical remnants to “keep alive the prospects for democracy,” that Mishra works out substance of democracy and its true meaning which is about “dignity and justice” for “the disenchanted millions” being late comers to modernity (412). Arguing in his mind with the diplomat, Mishra also clarifies what is not democracy: it is not regular election under a sort of military watch, “as in Afghanistan and Iraq,” where native elites vie for

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90 This chapter has the distinction of being called outdated by at least two reviewers; see Pavan K. Varma’s “On a Wrong Track in India,” and Sam Miller’s untitled review of the *Temptations.*
political legitimacy, without bothering to eliminate, but rather fattening on, systemic and cruel biases and mostly bidding the wishes of their “Western patrons” (412).

Mishra’s work on Tibet is sustained by an abiding curiosity for him as if somehow the fate of the world— with Francis Fukuyama’s arguable thesis of culmination of historical development of human social organization into liberal democracy\(^91\)—depends on how a deeply religious people and a society under-prepared for the modern nationhood copes with changing times. The work begins with journeys into Buddhist dominant areas in India and a rigorous look into the religion which depart substantially from other major religions vis-à-vis idea of God and meaning of life. The enquiries into Buddhism resulted in Mishra’s second non-fictional work, *An End to Suffering*. The interest in Tibet, a country predominantly Buddhist in its own peculiar tradition, resulted in the last essay in *Temptations of the West*, along with a host of other essays, a couple of which appeared later in his last published book, *A Great Clamour: Encounters with China and Its Neighbours*.

Tibetan history and civilization, mainstay of which developed in Yarlung Valley, came in contact with modern world in 1903-04 when British invasion easily overpowered the government chiefly run by its monks. After British retreat, and a brief self-ending onslaught by China in 1910, Tibet was independent till in 1950 when Chinese communists “attempted to ‘unify’ a China they claimed had been carved up by the foreign imperialists” (Mishra, *Temptations* 423). Subsequent social engineering by the communist, and religion-phobic, China led to the flight of Dalai Lama to Indian hill town of Dharamsala in 1959.

Developments in the Tibetan region which is now firmly part of China, are commented upon by Mishra enabled through his readings of its history and literature, visits to what is now

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\(^91\) The thesis of end of history came out in 1989 when after fall of communist USSR Fukuyama claimed that the “conflict of ideologies that had dominated the modern world since the French Revolution” has come to an end and with this also Hegelian “dialectic interplay and contest of ideas” which is how history has been traditionally seen to be developed. Fukuyama was lambasted both from political left and right (Kumar, “End”).
called Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), and meetings with common as well as influential people on both sides of this intellectual and political divide.

During the years before Chinese attention, Tibet was, Mishra quotes a Chinese technocrat Chen Kuiyuan, without “a single regular school” (428). Indicators of progress in terms of measurables such as literacy were reflective of a self-interested Tibetan aristocratic minority, not particularly mindful to modern ways of the world. But Samdhong Rinpoche, the then prime minister of Tibet government in Dharamsala, “attributes the sufferings of the Tibetan people to their ‘collective negative karma’” (429). Dalai Lama and Tibet government in exile at Dharamsala, have reduced its demand of full independence to autonomy within China. The reason given for this is based on the pragmatic understanding of power of China and a consistent refusal to resort to violence. Back in Tibet, or TAR\footnote{In 2014 neither Britannica, nor United Nations Human Development Report, mentions Tibet as a country.} as it is internationally known as per wishes of China, the major cities are being fast remoulded in the shape of Chinese cities with their garish billboards, glass and steel faced buildings, bars and parlours. Many of the Chinese “economic migrants,” forming over 100 million of so called floating population, have settled in these Tibetan city centres (425). The statistics about atrocities of this forced mingling of two diverse cultures at the cost of indigenous one are alarmingly high: “tens of thousands of Buddhist monasteries and temples” have been destroyed; nearly 1.2 million people have been killed by “execution, torture, and starvation” (426).

Even with such atrocious use of force, particularly directed at those suspected of nostalgia for the old Tibet or reverence for Dalai Lama, Mishra notes—endorsed by most of the reports from Tibet including his own—that “despite being under continuous assault for almost three decades, Buddhism remains central to most Tibetan lives” (425). Chinese government has built most of the health care facilities and educational infrastructure but still people from both rural hinterland and cities, “seemed [to Mishra] discontented with Chinese
rule” (426). Cause of this discontent lies in the fact that most of these people are religious and think that their way of life and culture are under a grave threat of extinction, i.e., on the brink of “cultural genocide” (432). This is further expedited by the fact that Chinese government in recent decades “has encouraged Han Chinese to migrate in large numbers to Tibet” (432).

Despite the presence of such palpable discontent, Tibetan leaders in exile steadfastly denounce use of violence towards aggressive Chinese. This may appear to be either woolly idealism or abject subjection but it rather has a powerful rationale as Mishra collects from talks with Rinpoche, who says that sanctioning the use of violence, apart from diverting from Buddhist tenets, is detrimental as it will incite China to unleash repressive force on entire Tibetan society for sundry acts of violence by few young radicals, and as it will pave way for losing support of Chinese intellectual dissidents for Tibet’s cause of autonomy (436).

Another aspect that Mishra highlights, and which evinces a deeply troubling ethical deficit, is the lack of international support for Tibetan cause. He writes that “although many people see Tibet as a distinctive nation with an admirable religion and culture, no Western government dares lose lucrative business in China by recognizing the Tibetan right to self-determination” (437).

Mishra, in the last chapter of Temptations of the West, is in Tibet with a fact finding sojourn that begins to place the country (now no more) in writer’s larger understanding of the world. It also reduces an inevitable bias in the post-colonial world where most of the worldviews are bipolar. First of it is bequeathed by native place (India in case of Mishra), and second the West. This self-definition vis-à-vis the West is accompanied by hoary binaries in which West denotes and connotes science, individualism, and modern nation state whereas the East is pre-modern, communitarian, spiritual and given to easy fulfilments.

2.3.3 China and Its Neighbours in Mishra’s Work
An End to Suffering, the essay on Tibet in Temptations of the West, and introduction to A Great Clamour—all begin similarly where Mishra discovers from his landlord that beyond snow-laden hills in sight at Mashobra is Tibet. It is the idea of Asia of his landlord which evokes a sense of envy for a similar hold on understanding of Asia for Mishra who is deprived of it by larger historical currents that took him to English Literature and thus to easier and more assured affinity, for instance, with Edmund Wilson rather than Lu Xun.

Mishra explains this in introduction to A Great Clamour:

To be born in an Anglophone culture was to not only be reflexively West-centric, and to reserve one’s profoundest attention for Western literatures and philosophies. It was also to assume that the institutions (parliamentary democracy, nation-state), philosophical principles (secularism, liberalism), economic ideologies (socialism, followed by free-market capitalism) and aesthetic forms (the novel) introduced or adopted during the long decades of British rule belonged to the natural, indeed superior, order of things. (xii-xiii)

Realization of bias has pushed Mishra towards a concerted effort to remove it. This leads to planned travels to many parts of Asia and studies in its histories, literatures, and cinema. This is also where Mishra recognizes that common knowledge of this Asia is scarce beyond academia. Detached from but aware of academic discourse and more such “instrumentalist world views of foreign office pundits, security experts and financial analysts,” Mishra rather depends more on writers and thinker in these countries to glean understanding from/of these places (xxi).

In the tradition of ways of seeing that stands on shoulders of earlier practitioners of it, Mishra acknowledges the presences of V.S.Naipaul, Arthur Koestler (both West-phlic), Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes (both patchily perceptive), Rabindranath Tagore, Amitav Ghosh, Rahul Sankrityayan (stimulating trio) and later day journalists and social
scientists like Donald Richie, Ian Buruma, Pico Iyer, Jonathan Spence, Benedict Anderson, Clifford Geertz and James C. Scott (xix). Yet he finds that the new indigenous sensibilities from Asian countries capture, through novels and cinema, contours of human lives in these parts of the world in a more bracing and authentic manner. Essentially the newer products of these cultures, and travels in these countries, “broadened the frame of reference” for Mishra which was previously confined to a kind of “bifocalism” (xxi).

In this new widened frame Mishra views as to how Western visions of an arrival at solutions to human problems through science and social organization are still incomplete, being blinkered with insufficient human interest in other societies. And in this newfound distance from earlier binary (West/East) stereotypes, Mishra rues the facts that elections “have not produced functional democracy or even political stability, free markets have not led to freedom, or higher literacy and better communication to greater tolerance and human rights.” Instead Mishra comes to know of “political chaos, corporate greed, climactic depredation, xenophobic nationalism, and ethnocide on a greater scale” (xxi).

With this new tentative scepticism of deeply ingrained prejudices, that are avoidable but difficult-to-deny gifts to most post-colonial societies by their earlier rulers, Mishra shares his self-education with the readers. And one can again begin with Tibet where fears of a cultural extinction are already palpably manifest in many people as recorded in last chapter of Temptations of the West. After the Temptations (2006), Mishra has followed the issues of Tibet in various ways and some of that work has made its way in A Great Clamour.

In Mishra’s essay, “The Poet” he describes his meeting with Woeser, and her writer husband, to enrich his enquiries about Tibet. Woeser and her husband have shown courage to be forthright in criticizing the Chinese government for its role in Tibet. Woeser’s book Notes on Tibet is banned in China and her government job as an editor was forfeited, her writings

93 Even before Temptations, or after Clamour, Mishra wrote about Tibet. See his “The Restless Children of Dalai Lama,” “The Quiet Heroes of Tibet,” At War With Utopia of Modernity,” “Holy Man,” “Tibet’s Old Way of Life Is Slow Dying. Not Even Self-Immolation Will Change That” and “The Last Dalai Lama?”
on internet are continually censored. The communist government does not allow her to leave China. Mishra feels a continual surveillance when he meets the couple. This lack of freedom is also accompanied by real fear of arrest and interrogations. All these conditions fall squarely into the domain of democratic ideals wherein restriction of such mutual critique between governed and government is encouraged rather than proscribed. Thus critique which is akin to some bad news, is unwelcome and this proscription policy often results in further augmenting the problem rather than containing or redressing it.

Chinese government’s arguments are also presented by Mishra very pithily: those who want to preserve older form of life are “plotting to return Tibet to the corrupt feudal and monastic rule from which Chinese communists liberated it” (139). Mishra seems to side with Woeser who sees problems on both sides of this binary of “ancestral ways” of Tibetans versus the modern Chinese culture. But she finally goads on about tradition with a careful avoidance of “ignorance and conservatism” (121). Woeser wants allowance for people to choose their “own form of modernization” (121), and Mishra notices general Tibetan mood to be “extremely sullen,” and not of gratitude towards such things as railways developed by Chinese government (126). These notes of sullenness occasionally peak into self-immolations and Mishra finds that the cause of these extreme acts of protest is the undue repression of Chinese government in Tibet. It is easy to see that communist ideology is at work when incarcerated monks are forced to repeat their opposition to the Dalai Lama clique and praise the communist government of China.

One can easily sense the importance of the Dalai Lama and his hold on people’s affiliations in a largely poor and deeply religious society. In effect, this is a silent, non-violent and strong bulwark to a government which is reluctant to admit religion or pre-modern feudal past as a continuously relevant way of life for people of Tibet. Mishra, seeing the role the
exiled Dalai Lama plays, devotes an essay “The Importance of Being the Dalai Lama”\footnote{The essay is a very lightly edited version of “Holy Man” which earlier appeared in The New Yorker in 2008.} on him which provides a very colourful portrait of the Buddhist monk. Ostensibly a review of a book by Pico Iyer, *The Open Road: The Global Journey of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama*, Mishra’s essay sketches carefully nuanced politics of the Dalai Lama. The clique of the Dalai is not without intrigue which is generally associated with monarchical palaces and heirs. But the current head of the clique has been able to garner fair amount of universal publicity and support for his cause, largely from popular individuals rather than powerful governments. His avowed distance from violent or even coercive means to persuade the Chinese government to recognize plight of ethnic Tibetans has been largely unsuccessful. Meanwhile his lowering of demand from full independence to “genuine autonomy” (147), has caused considerable schism among his followers. That he, alongside the Tibetan government in exile, has modulated the demand in view of the likely failure of full independence and an associated currency of appeal to “global ethics” (143) speaks of a care for the Tibetan people’s need for religious freedom and reluctance for modernity on offer.

The Dalai Lama does not claim any divinity, nor does he seem eager to push Buddhism. His espousal of modern science, inasmuch as to discard some of the Buddhist scriptures failing to live up to modern science, speaks of a “forward-looking programme” (143). His philosophy is against belief in efficacy of economic boycott of Chinese goods because it likely harms the hapless factory worker rather than the powerful government. But his small hint about the animal-fur users being not Buddhist enough is a potent spur to start public burnings of fur-clothes in Tibet. All this amounts to a new life-revering philosophy of self-rule, something akin to an advanced version of Western liberal democracy. This is perhaps why Mishra writes, quoting Iyer and Arendt respectively, that “the boy from the Tibetan backwoods may be outlining ‘a process of mutual understanding and progressing
self-clarification on a gigantic scale’—the process which Arendt believed necessary for halting the ‘tremendous increase in mutual hatred and a somewhat universal irritability of everybody against everybody else”’ (149).

Mishra’s critique and commentaries on China are fast expanding. He is connected to its vital literary culture as he meets writers/intellectuals on his regular visits there. He was among the judges of Man Asian Literary Prize in 2009. Again apparent concerns of Mishra are understanding Asia apart from how it is viewed in terms of crude West versus East banalities or “free versus unfree worlds” (Clamour xvii). In this, Mishra avers that internal debates and conflicts of peoples, alongside random conversations, readings in literature and culture and a systematic travelling helps a lot “to sense inner life of a society” (xx). This inner life constitutes place of people, environment, social institutions and whole corpus of manners, moral and culture. There are several ways to enter in this life but Mishra seems to prefer literary fiction and non-fiction. Part 1 of A Great Clamour comprises of book reviews wherein two are of novels and two of five books on modern politics out of which three are on Mao Zedong.

Writing about Qian Zhongshu’s novel Fortress Besieged (1947), Mishra conjectures that many contemporary readers of China can relate well with this novel because characters and themes are still relevant. In the review, Mishra observes that in a largely uneducated and tradition-bound society, which has been belittled by the colonizing West and Japan, quest for survival and dignity pushes many good men to turn themselves into mimics of the oppressors because they are weak and unmoored from the tradition. In the process, as the protagonist Fang undergoes and procures a fake PhD from an absent European university, many become impostors and insincere. Mishra writes that the fate of the writer, and that of the protagonist of the novel is similar to those of millions of common Chinese who are forced to compromise

95 See “Communist Novel Wins Asian Prize.”
in the face of shrinking options available to them and they eventually embrace and experience life as a series of missed opportunities.

How it becomes the fate of millions of Chinese people is made amply clear by brief life of Mao, who pushed an entire country to “immense suffering” (21). Heeding ideological tutelage from communist USSR, Mao hurtled a dominantly agrarian society into collective farming, “communal kitchens,” and “backyard steel making” (24). The result was a decline in agricultural output, which party functionaries inflated to please their bosses along the ladder. While a Great Famine of 1958-62 was underway, China was actually exporting grains. Accurate figures of deaths in these famine years are disputed, but by some accounts it is in excess of forty million (20; 43). During the whole Mao era “Chinese were told where to live, work, and study, and how many children to have. . . . Mao instituted land reforms, abolished private property, silenced intellectual critics, segregated rural and urban populations, and launched Stalinist-style purges against counter-revolutionaries and rich peasants” (22).

Thus, it becomes easier to discern how Chinese people may want an amount of freedom in their personal lives. This desire for allowance to people in having their say, manifest in countless forms of dissent, which is always quickly and brutally suppressed. One such incident of student and people’s protest for democracy is the backdrop for the novel Ma Jian’s Beijing Coma, which is reviewed by Mishra in one of the essays. The incident is famous for the place it occurred at: Tiananmen Square. The writer reconstructs moods and incidents around the events of 1989 with a measure of adamant fight, using genre of novel, against the obliteration of an important day in public memory by oppressive Chinese regime. Mishra’s journeys and excursions into China in Clamour ends with a literary portrait of Yu Hua, one of the best selling and Nobel prize contending novelist and essayist of China.

Several meetings and readings into Yu’s work provide the narrative for “The Bonfire of China’s Vanities,” which earlier appeared in The New York Times. More than once Mishra
expresses nervousness because loud and jovial Yu becomes audibly critical of communist dispensation. A barely educated dentist who could not go to college, Yu chooses to write, Mishra recounts, because writers hired by the Cultural Bureau were mostly idle whereas ordinary people worked very hard to survive. Yu shares with Mishra that his entire education was provided through Cultural Revolution, wherein Chinese premier Mao Zedong puts the vast country through immense upheavals and violence. Fascination for leisure of writers brings results as Yu becomes one of the hired writers. But Yu consciously bends the Bureau for his own benefits by turning up only once a month to collect salary. From there he was eventually able to resign as profits from his novel *To Live* enabled him the financial freedom.

Yu’s early fiction is “relentlessly bleak” and he finds its cause in “his childhood exposure to brutality and death” (184). Yu thinks that two events—protests at Tiananmen for democracy in 1989 and market reforms of 1991—as the key cultural turn in the modern history of China after which people care less and less about politics and more and more about making money. For the generation which has not seen what Yu has – wretchedness, poverty, repression and violence – China evokes patriotic feelings rather than criticism and this generation swiftly becomes netizen nationalists who are intolerant of any such criticism.

Mishra writes that Yu does not use “mimetic realism” to represent present day China but “a bawdy semi-fantastical narrative” to evoke it (178). Mishra’s narrative about Yu highlights debates about politics of China, and Yu’s work’s vision of “China lurching between political authoritarianism, extreme poverty, consumerist excess, and moral depravity” (180). Questions about past and future are interspersed in this essay where many, including Mishra, seem to grope in the dimness to take hold of something reassuring like a stable, rife-free, sustainable and decent human life. This points to the democratic ideal of equality, dignity and freedom in an increasingly unequal society like China.
Mishra, in discussing novels, their writers, and political histories, seems never forgetful of making conspicuous the plight of ordinary Chinese people. The larger theoretical conflict is between the ideology and individual moral agency. While ideology sustains its moral universe by erasing individuals’ capacity for deciding their own good, democracy is a likely replacement that people prefer if they are allowed to exercise choice. Yet, democracy is another potential modern ideology unless its spirit is kept empirical and experiential rather than nominal, abstract and theoretical.

It is largely agreed that ours is an age of ideology (Nelson), and it is incumbent upon this researcher to deal its connection with democratic ideal because Mishra’s work on China implicitly poses the question of ideology. Ideologies may roughly be termed as a set of ideas that purport to explain how social conditions become what they have become and what collective and individual action may be required for a desired future. Among these, many are not unknown to students of literature like Marxism, fascism, conservatism, communism, liberalism, scientism, and nationalism. Religions too qualify for a sort of ideology. Origins and development of ideologies are found in the loss of community life which provided the ethical and moral codes of behaviour and actions for all its members of social groups. With science, industry, and decline of hold of religion these moral and ethical codes were beginning to lose sheen and this human need for ideational coherence was supplanted by these ideologies (Nelson 363).

All these ideologies seek to disband individuals from their capacity to arrive at independent judgements on the merits of an issue. Rather their individual sense of moral agency is subordinated to some higher form of moral reasoning. Nationalism, for instance, seeks to subordinate and even sacrifice the individual for the abstract ideas of nationhood. The same can be said for many ideologies, though to varying degrees. Democratic ideal, and need for justice enshrined in that ideal, somehow contravene usual callings of any ideology.
True democracy is akin to a rebel among ideologies. Albert Camus argued in his essay, *The Rebel* that “the true rebel is not the man who conforms to the orthodoxy of some revolutionary ideology, but a man who could say ‘no’ to injustice” (Cranston). Ideology somehow exalts the end and submits means for that exalted end. Means then become free of any moral reckoning and thus can be allowed to become evil. This is where the case of communist ideology can be seen to lie in the theoretical realm: because China needs national self-strengthening, and as quickly as possible, the urgency can be used as a blinder to the immense loss of life and decency. Political life seeks some teleological utopia, howsoever justified, at the cost of overlooking processes that make life.

This is particularly true of communism as an ideology as it happened in case of China where famine kept killing people for three years, which Mishra documents in *Clamour* in rather agonizing details:

[C]orpses lay on the roads and in the fields, hardened by the winter cold and bent, often with holes in their buttocks and legs where flesh had been torn off. The survivors blamed dogs for the disfigurement. But the dogs had already been eaten. The truth was that many people that winter and the next survived by preying on the dead, sometimes even on their own family members. (26)

Amartya Sen views a pattern of authoritarian rule with famine and this can extend to any large scale natural or man-made calamity which can be prevented by use of public reasoning. Sen points out that famine could occur in China because it had “no parliament open for critical dissent, no opposition party and no free press” (*Idea* 342).

But Mishra notes a nuanced and welcome shift in the ideological rigidity in China after the rise of technocrats who came after the generations of hardliner ideologues. The party does not try to control private spheres of people’s lives unless they intersect certain taboo topics like Tiananmen incident and it allows for some dissent. China has also progressed a
great deal, though unevenly, after the party adopted liberal capitalist economic policies.

Mishra thereby compares non-democratic China with democratic India and finds that latter’s liberal democracy is “feeble” (Great 77). Moreover, Mishra suspects people who reflexively seek democracy without detailing contents of what they are seeking. These people, Mishra believes, tend to forget peculiar circumstances and social conditions—“Reformation’s stress on individual responsibility or industrial capitalism”—of the West where constitutional democracy took roots (76). One can thus sense in Mishra a cautious empiricist, in the etymological sense of having basis in experience, rather than invested in any abstract concept or theory even if it is as sanitized as democracy. By comparing communist China with democratic India\(^\text{96}\), Mishra compares the contents of democracy comprising lives of actual ordinary people amidst the drift of the cultures in a global order with imminent threat to environment and an apparent moral chaos.

*A Great Clamour* also includes Mishra’s essay on Hong Kong which first appeared as “The Money Pit” in the *New York Times*. “Hong Kong: The Quest for Culture” does not easily lend itself as a particular instance where Mishra reckons any quickening aspiration for democracy, which he calls a “receding dream,” because material preoccupations seem to be the foremost among people of Hong Kong (196). The “longings” of something akin to a culture, Mishra surmises with some confidence in the end of the essay, cannot be supplanted by mere “material plenitude” (207). The undefined longing which Mishra perhaps could not exactly name, transmuted itself into fiercer demands for democracy six years later in Hong Kong. At that time in an interview Mishra clarifies that he used the word ‘spiritual\(^\text{97}\), “to

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\(^{96}\) Though these comparisons with India are pervasive throughout the essays in *A Great Clamour*, with China they are found in the essay “New Shanghai and the Shape of Things to Come.” The essay was initially published separately as “Getting Rich.” Salient points of the comparison can be grouped under similarities and differences. China and India are similar in fragmented societies, aspirations of middle class or newly rich people, attitudes to carbon emissions, burgeoning consumerist ethos, corruption and crony capitalism. Among differences, Indian leaders are subjected to more public accountability, there is more public anger, and more dynastic politics—“more ‘princelings’” and a largely missing moral value of egalitarianism (Mishra, Great 85).

\(^{97}\) The longings are called spiritual by him in the essay in the *New York Times* whereas the adjective is absent in the book version.
define aspirations for dignity and recognition, or an end to humiliation — desires that often lie under even demands that are explicitly political and economic” (“Q. and A.”).

As on Hong Kong, brief pieces on Mongolia, Taipei, and Kuala Lumpur are occasions of travel essays for Mishra in *A Great Clamour*. They are attempts at understanding neighbours of China and their experience ultimately becomes instrumental for Mishra to better place India in a global perspective. This seems justified only so far as it removes the bifocalism or what Amartya Sen calls, “positionally limited visions” (*Idea* 162). One can hardly fail to notice Mongolian historical/positional bias in view of “Genghis Khan as a model of efficient and humane governance” (Mishra, *Great* 213), the preference of international community for China over Taiwan, latter being a democracy, because profits trump ethics and arrangement suits China (223), and how Malaysia’s “flawed and rowdy” democracy has been able to stave off usual “conflicts of class, caste, ethnicity, and region” while also keeping indigence and “cruel disparities” at bay (242).

Instead, the essay “Indonesia: Democracy Redefined” acquires greater relevance to the discourse of democracy and that of justice in Mishra’s work. Indonesia draws attention of Mishra because, apart from helping to understand Asia, it posits interesting and useful parallels with India. The plethora of factual information about a country that is fourth most populous and diverse enough to encourage dilettantish comparisons with India may obscure the single most important fact that the essay by Mishra is merely an attempt at understanding a whole country. The essay is about a country that is gradually taking steps towards the ideal of democracy if that is defined may be defined as a thoroughly deepening spirit of equality, freedom, and responsibility enabling self-rule.

Indonesia gained political independence from Dutch in 1949 and in initial decades of freedom its first president, Sukarno used the so called Guided Democracy, a euphemism for

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98 The essay in the *Clamour* is a light reworking of “After Suharto”; also see his essays “The Places in Between,” and marginally relevant “Land and Blood: The Origins of the Second World War in Asia” to Indonesia.
autocratic rule, after attempting to rule with an ideology created out of “nationalism, Islam and communism” called “Nasikom” (*Great 257*). In 1965 a military coup, and subsequent murders of nearly half a million people, mostly minority Chinese who make for less than five per cent population with a disproportionate share in national wealth (252) in a country of more than eighty five percent Muslims, mark the rise of Suharto who headed the country for nearly three decades. During his reign Indonesia invaded East Timor and decimated one third of the population in late 1970s (259). Mishra also informs that Suharto “designed a system of sham elections,” allowed to flourish “a culture of bribes and extortion,” but it happened along with an economic growth rate of 6.5 per cent until 1998 around when many Asian countries underwent economic recession (260). Mishra registers some of the loot and greed in Suharto’s era before its end in May 1998 (262-63). Jusuf Habibie, who came after Suharto, took steps such as removal of media restrictions, undoing political persecutions by “freeing political prisoners,” evacuating East Timor, and radical decentralization of power (263-64). These, in fact, may be viewed as baby-steps towards real democracy.

Despite many welcome changes, the flaws in Indonesian democratic set-up led to rise of religious fundamentalism of both Islamic and Christian denominations. Mishra also notes as to how demagogues and charismatic preachers harness widespread disaffection and turn it against the most vulnerable sections, mostly minorities in Indonesian society, and the pattern seems to match with that of India. Two large forces of democratization and globalization have fused together to result in power-plays and an “unseemly scramble for votes and a hectic manufacturing of election ‘issues’” (278). Mishra lucidly explains thus:

In post-Suharto Indonesia, democracy can’t help but become the promise of material improvement and social and economic justice for a politicized citizenry. Instead, globalization has entrenched vast inequalities, threatening traditional livelihoods as well as national sovereignty . . . . Far from helping, elections . . . have squandered the
energies and gains of a popular mobilization against a corrupt and brutal elite.

Political Islam, in this context, turns out to be effective only in encouraging private grievances and nebulous ideas of the enemy. The random violence of Islamists against minorities is less a reaction to Christianity or secular modernity than an attempt to create consoling illusions of identity and solidarity at a confusing time. (282)

As Mishra does in other excursions into newer territories, he talks with people from different backgrounds and beliefs to assess always contestable ideas and opinions about a society and he finds one of the interlocutors saying that he “would give a C to democracy in Indonesia” (265). Mishra culls his narrative, from travel experience, from writers namely Sanusi Pane (246), Richard Wright (256), Promoedya Ananta Toer (258), Goenawan Mohamad (261), and Ayu Utami (279) along with from politicians and businesspeople with a view to attempt a wholistic picture of Indonesian society as a democracy. And that his interest is more than a perfunctory curiosity, is attested by his follow-ups on Indonesia in many of his articles99, and some of them in comparison to India.

While writing about Indonesia in *A Great Clamour* Mishra also shares his preferred conception of democracy and makes it clear by underscoring its absence. To him it is “a conception of political life in which trade unions, peasant associations, student and women’s groups, and empowered local governments play a role” and the same is amiss in Indonesia (283). This tentative and context bound reach to capture the essence of democracy speaks of spreading the agency of power and opinion to the last, and historically least powerful, individuals and groups. It also speaks of the proportion and balance in a society. It rescues the common human fate to be decided largely by tendencies of greed and violence of a small

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99 See Mishra’s foregrounding of economic model from below rather than that which asks to wait for trickle-down in “Indonesia’s New Economic Model”; on plight of minorities in “How Democracy Kills in Indonesia and Pakistan”; and for a very brief comparison between two countries, through their currently elected top leaders Modi and Jokowi see “India and Indonesia Pursue Different Economic Paths.”
minority of human beings, and all this in an open atmosphere of arguments and debates that run the risk of invalidation through lack of not being reasonable enough.

As always the ideals of democracy, like ideals of many other abstract concepts, are hard to achieve; there remains always a chance to fall back to hierarchies, to inequalities, to impositions, and a pervasive sense of thwarted lives even if a semblance of democratic spirit becomes palpable in a society. There are reasons to believe that like the waves of feminism waves of democratisation are inextricably bound with modernization and globalization. But in many essays discussed so far, the modernization and globalization seem to glide erringly towards the westernization. The fact that values of modernity are not necessarily values upheld by democracy and justice is evident in the essay “Japan: Life after Economic Growth”.

Japan being the object of the worst nuclear, man-made disaster in twentieth century, had a pre-run of progress and power before that permanently etched nuclear memory in the history of the world. Japan being the first country to come out of feudal inertia, became the only Asian country with imperial ambitions whereas rest of the Asia was struggling to break free of colonial fetters. Japan’s mid-nineteenth century Meiji rulers decreed modernisation equivalent to Europeanization, and achieved it in quick decades before defeating Russia in 1905 as they belligerently overpowered China and Taiwan. Rise of hyper-nationalism, against which Tagore warned when he viewed it there, culminated in famous Pearl Harbour attack and prolonged war that ensued resulting in a devastated and militarily subdued Japan. America imposed democracy, which Mishra calls “semi-successful” (291), and thus began another phase of economic growth which ended in early 1990s. But the consequences of economic plenitude and a slowing down of usual economic growth on the culture are not less than alarming in Japan as Mishra records them:

100 This essay first appeared, slightly different from the book version dealt here, as “A Nation’s State: Japan’s Tormented Relationship with its Modernity” in The Caravan magazine.
The human toll of the slow economic implosion shows in the statistics about
suicide—one every 15 minutes; child abuse (a fourfold increase since 1999); rising
domestic violence; and the stories in the press about empty rooms where salaried
employees with no work are asked to spend their day until they resign. . . . An
estimated one million Japanese people almost never leave the house. Many of those
who bother probably do so in order to indulge in the *otaku* (geek) subcultures of
obsessively idle young men. (289)

Apart from the usual damage to natural resources of “land, air, and water” due to
pollution, material progress caused “destruction of childhoods” because of ambitious parents
but it hardly ensured equal status to women or minorities despite legal measures available for
the same (296). The conditions that are *sine qua non* for democracy like a free press of
critical culture were thwarted by a coterie of selfish politicians, bureaucrats, and business
people, and Mishra notes presence of this usual “iron triangle” in Japan too (297).

Once more ideologies such as nationalism, militarism, and “GNP-ism” (311) make it
hard for people to be really free thinking individuals who can resist ideologies as these
become context in confines of which the very thought of a society largely remains. At least
this confinement, manufactured if not already there, allows people at the helm of affairs to do
unfathomable damage to ordinary people. Frequent suicides and child abuse are the results of
a society affluent yet bereaved and these conditions may be viewed as the distant cultural
fruits of such confined thinking. Mishra put it succinctly when he writes that many people in
Japan were “dragged through hell by their right-wing leaders” (295).

Other aspect that is amplified by Mishra is how many Japanese perceive history of
their country. He visits an important shrine and a museum, and an adjoining Imperial Palace.
He observes that though such memorials fulfil the collective “need to grieve and mourn, and
to give meaning and dignity to the sacrifices of the dead; they don’t usually mention the
victims on the other side” (299). This is an important point because it is possible to arrive at collective misprision only because of lack of sufficient distance from the default vantage point. Ideologies play a role there but the individuals also avoid some decisive responsibilities to evaluate and scrutinize their perceptions and compare them with either from the point of view of contrarian perception about the issue at hand or from a distant and neutral position. The process, important for balance and justice, generally provides some measure of objectivity. Eventually “perceptions,” Mishra says elsewhere, shape history” (Moody). Mishra pertinently notes that Japanese perceptions about their history of “anti-imperialist campaign” (Great 298) and thus the memorials to the dead in that violent campaign to rescue Asia from European clutches is based on nothing but a “litany of half-truths, omissions, suppressions, and outright false-hoods” (300). He also quotes from a stone inscription to commemorate Radhabinod Pal, an Indian jurist present at Tokyo Trials in which many prominent Japanese were tried for war crimes in the West’s faulty and biased attempts at retributive justice, in which Pal saw travesty of justice against Japan:

When time shall have softened passion and prejudice
When reason shall have stripped the mask from representation
Then justice, holding evenly her scales, will require
Much of past censure and praise to change places. (301)

Inscription thus is an apt distancing device in the hope that temporal distance may remedy some of the parochialism but visits to war memorials and contemporary political developments prove that hold of nationalist ideology and remnants of feudal and military moral codes that go by the word “bushido” (310) is hard to break. 101

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101 Cass Sunstein provides some of the reasons why people across the spectrum from left to right strongly hold their political beliefs. The main reason is gaining knowledge about things and issues through very limited sources of information. Thus people live in “information cocoons” where they hear “echo” of their own arguments, reflexly barring contrary views. Thus despite being as good and wise as less extreme ideologues,
In fact, Mishra reports a very peculiar twist to meaning of democracy in Japan wherein it is something akin to “harmony or consensus” (312) rather than a concept wherein scope of different perspectives is realistically envisioned. Sweet and positive sounding words like harmony and consensus point to a blinding tendency of conformism that nostalgically aspire for a past in which king was a divine presence on earth and his “family at the center” of the Japanese society (323). To find some of the overt and covert nostalgia for such older values like hierarchies—along with a proclamation by the head of the then government that “individual rights” are better relegated back to “collective duties”—with a GNP-ism that sustains a system in which human being have tiny window of freedom to earn and spend, is not merely pointed out by Mishra but also by Kenzaburo Oe, whom Mishra calls “Japan’s social conscience” (316), and who also finds deficiencies of democracy in Japan glaring.

In 1999, On Politics and Literature: Two Lectures by Kenzaburo Oe, Oe discusses, in idiom of a Japanese political theorist namely Maruyama, how post-war Japan gradually tilted towards a wrong-headed nostalgia for the pre-war imperial Japan and its emperor worshiping and doubted/diminished the meaning and values of democracy. At the end of first lecture Oe says, again referring to Maruyama, that “democracy is a permanent revolution” and not Marxism or Maoism (25). He also stresses how this revolution remains necessity for all countries including USA and England and not just for Japan or newly democratized countries because the essential values of democracy are a hard to achieve ideal.

2.4 Comparing Roy and Mishra about Democratic Ideal

Both Arundhati Roy and Pankaj Mishra share their deep concern for democracy and its actual experience for the common, usually statistically-represented people. But there are important differences in their approach to articulate their concern. While Roy has largely focused on India, only occasionally juxtaposing it with other democracies like America, people invest in extremism out of very patterned and inadequate and thus “crippled” epistemologies. See his “How Voters can Escape from Information Cocoons,” which diagnoses, and advises on the remedies too.
Mishra resorts to a much wider geo-political sweep. Roy focuses on India repeatedly through its flaws and seldom through its strengths. The flaws are largely social-cultural like caste, religious parochialism and a visible alienation from indigenous people and their issues. This view that identifies flaws might look like a skewed perspective; but it is warranted by the humanist concern for the dire consequences that these flaws create. Innumerable lives are frustrated or ruined, sometimes fatally, because of an uncaring, unavailable, and often hostile state. The situation is further aggravated by social attitudes that preclude democratic ideals which can enable people in resolving their common problems through communitarianism. These attitudes are sustained by still strong currency of caste and religious faiths reducing people to narrowly defined identities. Roy thus is fiercely critical of casteist and bigotry-ridden religious sentiments that pose a robust challenge to democratic morality. Though Roy has been careful about proof she garners to build arguments, she is no scholar in the dour sense of the word. She seems quite strident and trenchant when read from cover to cover, and this sometimes may tax even the most sympathetic of her readers. Some of her work feels repetitive and redundant but she clarifies that it is vital that some important issues be brought to public consciousness again and again till they are given due attention and thus remedied.

But her work is cumulative and of more than a decade and on a wide of issues of social and political importance and it can be convincingly said that the purpose of her writings is for deepening the democratic spirit of India and expanding reach of justice. She is also keen on debating her positions and welcomes counter-arguments, as evidenced in this thesis. This willingness for deliberation is an important part of her understanding of a perennial scope of refinement/change of positions on issues of importance. But her ire is noticeable when ordinary and illiterate Adivasis are viewed as if incapable to think for their own betterment or interests. She is highly critical of media and uses her own access to it for highlighting its compromised stance in a democracy.
Mishra started with a youthful book of travels through small-town India and in the process develops a keen understanding of the republic. He then moves on to focus on an important process of democracy – elections. The reportage reveals the underside of a democracy. Perhaps curiosity took him to neighbouring countries and what came out of the contact with these countries is again the concern for the common people trapped in the warped histories of these countries. These travels were further testimonies for Mishra how it is not the abstract generalization (such as China is communist and India democratic) but lived life which is the central enquiry for him. Sometimes it seems as if the whole corpus of Mishra is propelled by a personal ambition but even if such a judgment is not wholly untenable what rescues his work is a relative self-effacement in the essays. While Roy seems to work from a well-honed moral intelligence, Mishra gleans his perspectives via writers, thinkers, scholars and film-makers alongside his own contacts with new places and people therein. Together they put forth the very essence of democratic ideal wherein fruits of progress ought to reach unto the last. Even when they are sharply critical or impatient of lacunas in democracies, they are essentially asking for more democracy rather than less. Comparative insights about political arrangements from Mishra are sustained, wider and forceful while for Roy they only perch instrumentally in her arguments. To sum up, we can argue that both Roy and Mishra’s understanding of democracy is in perfect consonance with Oe’s assertion that democracy is a permanent revolution which requires a multi-pronged engagement and persistent strivings.