Arundhati Roy could not sustain her fictional creativity so far, beyond her maiden novel *The God of Small Things*. Not that her imagination failed her but probably immediately after 1997 she was drawn into the issues of common cause like the *Narmada Bachao* Movement of Medha Patkar and other like-minded persons who waged incessant battles against the proponents of big ventures be it dams behind the façade of cheap hydro-electricity projects or mechanized fishing coglomerate with multinational connections. The prospects of these socio-political agitations in which the poor common men and women of humble means occupied the central focus are evident in her novel which won her the Booker Prize. Velutha in the novel becomes the symbol of the desperate struggle for survival against the overpowering odds created by men, socio-political agencies which are biased heavily against the have-nots and the humble. The nexus between the police and politician, according to Roy, is responsible for silencing all chances of protest because in their strategy death is the only penalty for transgressing the tortuous social
evil of discrimination not on the principle of justice and fair play but on the principle of injustice and high-handedness. Roy finds to her consternation that politicians of different shades and grades of Marxism just hobnobble with the concepts of the proletariate power and struggle to safeguard not the thought but their own leadership.

Arundhati Roy is a homegrown writer, sensitive, precocious and committed to the causes which uphold human dignity and believe in the principle of individual’s right to lead his own life in the least regimented way prescribed by the ‘haves’ in the society. She had seen the scourge of power which is made to bear on the poor, illiterate, powerless common people of India where socio-political respectability depends on considerations other than merely human. While she was busy brooding over the predicament of persons like Velutha, there occurred an event which to her appeared as a monumental folly on the part of the Indian government. The event was the nuclear explosion of 1998 at Pokhran in Rajasthan. Roy who seems to believe in the good of the ‘last man’ in the lowest range of society just could not understand the logic of conducting the test as it is a highly money-intensive project. And the net result is only a shameful folly.

Roy gives her own justification for writing her essay “The End of Imagination”. She feels it to be a bounden duty of everyone who can ‘write well’ to say something against the nuclear explosions and arms so that one may justify his mental faculties which is so unique and singular among the creatures of the planet. She also knows that as
May 1998. It'll go down in history books, provided, of course, we have history books to go down in. Provided, of course, we have a future. There’s nothing new or original left to be said about nuclear weapons. There can be nothing more humiliating for a writer of fiction to have to do than restate a case that has, over the years, already been made by other people in other parts of the world, and made passionately, eloquently and knowledgeably.¹

Fully conscious of her maiden success with her maiden work powerful enough to bag the Booker Prize, she is compulsively drawn to the existential dilemma of ‘to be or not to be’ because nuclear weaponry is a matter of paramount human concern as it endangers the very existence of our planet and its life. That is why as a novelist “she is prepared to grovel because:

... in the circumstances, silence would be indefensible. So those of you who are willing: let’s pick our parts, put on these discarded costumes and speak our second-hand lines in this sad second-hand play. (p. 4)

Roy knows that what she has to say has already been said by the social and humanist thinkers, scientists, politicians and by the millions who were killed, impaired and mutilated by the Bomb in the Second War. But as living and thinking human beings, she feels, we must raise our voice and tell the same tale of caution and warning even at the cost of repeating what others have already said. Any failure, reticence or half-hearted murmuring would open us to a
catastrophe in which the problem is of survival not only of ours but "the end of our children and our children’s children". It is imperative for us "to reach within ourselves and find the strength to think. To fight" (ibid.) because the stakes are crucial. The irony of the situation is that we are "pitifully behind the times—in our ability to grasp the true nature of nuclear weapons" especially in the face of the popular perception that nuclear bomb is just another hand granade to destroy Pakistan or vice-versa.

Arundhati Roy’s imagination perceives the horror hidden for most of us, and that explains her unusual alarm with which she takes the event. She is probably alarmed by the psychological states of India and Pakistan which abound in ‘tired, dejected heartbroken people’ which may in desperation trigger off a war which both are incapable of comprehending the vital dilemma involved. After using a number of “If only” clauses she comes to state it:

If only nuclear war was the kind of war in which countries battle countries and men battle men. But it isn’t. If there is a nuclear war, our foes will not be China or America or even each other. Our foe will be the earth herself. The very elements—the sky, the air, the land, the wind and water—will all turn against us. Their wrath will be terrible.

... What shall we do then, those of us who are still alive? Burned and blind and bald and ill, carrying the cancerous carcasses of our children in our arms, where shall we go? (pp. 5-6)

Thus, the production of atomic weapons is a colossal waste of human energy and national wealth. She appears to be a follower of Mahatma
Gandhi who believed in truth and non-violence. The monster of war can be killed through love, peace and harmony. In this way her attitude is very close to A. Gopal Krishnan who observes:

There was a realization that the country’s real security didn’t lie in possessing a few crude nuclear weapons, but in being able to feed, clothe and shelter its large population and provide the people with basic amenities such as drinking water and basic health care. Those governments also gave some weightage to the fact that having attained independence through a prolonged non-violent struggle based on the principle of ‘ahimsa’, India shouldn’t stray into the race for developing and deploying weapons of mass destruction with a clearly expounded abhorance to weapons of mass destruction and an abiding conviction in total nuclear disarmament and elimination of nuclear weapons everywhere. India had championed this cause among the international community in spite of the Pokharan I Test.²

*The End of Imagination* shows that Arundhati Roy is a great champion for the cause of peace and prosperity, harmony and integration. The Essay realistically deals with the problems arising out of nuclearization of India. She agrees with pearl S. Buck who rightly remarks:

War and killing achieve nothing but loss, and that a noble end is assured only if the means to attain it are of a place with it and also noble.³

She pooh-poohs the idea of India surviving the war advanced by the Health, Environment and Safety Group of the BARC but their logic and suggestions are found by Roy nothing more than the day-dreams
of the mentally deranged persons. She is puzzled to see that her sensible and objective appraisals of the nuclear war is taken as “Doomsday Prophet Hyperbole” because the proponents strongly believe in their foolhardy belief that there will be no war at all because our weapon capability will give us that imaginary guarantee called 'deterrence' which as a theory "has some fundamental flaws" (p. 8).

Roy goes on to build up a rationally secured imaginative account of the brittle theory of so called ‘deterrence’. Its first flaw is that it works on presumption but the resourcefulness of the human mind and heart are very often beyond presumption. The theory "presumes a complete sophisticated understanding of the psychology of your enemy. It assumes that what deters you (the fear of annihilation) will deter them. What about those who are not deterred by that? The suicide bomber psyche". (p. 8)

Moreover the given instability of governments both in India and Pakistan leaves so many lose ends and throws up many moot questions. Roy fears that the political option being limited for a party in power without even simple majority, the nuclear button may be used to ensure party ends.

The second flaw of the policy of deterrence is that it is ‘premised on fear’. But fear is premised on knowledge’ (p. 9). She is convinced that all talks of fear as conducive to deterrence is but a hoax. We don’t fear fear but we fear knowledge of the unimaginable scale of devastation which has, in reality, propagated by the endless
demonstration, tireless confrontational agitation through the globe that has led to this realization of the frightening scenario. It is not the fear but the knowledge so made public that has “averted or perhaps only postponed nuclear war.” For the illiterate, ignorant peoples of India and Pakistan the word deterrence just has no meaning. She asserts: “The Theory of Deterrence is nothing but a perilous joke in a world where iodine pills are prescribed as a prophylactic for nuclear irradiation” (pp. 9-10). It may be recalled that the pill was prescribed by BARC in case of hazardous radiation.

Her objection to nuclear explosion by India is caused by her fear that soon other countries will follow suit because every country has, like India, its “borders and beliefs” and the day is not far off when our planet “will bristle with beautiful missiles”. It is just foolish, Roy thinks, to believe that nuclear weapons are deadly only if they are used.” The fact on the contrary is that their very existence is fraught with dangers. It “pervades our thinking. Control our behaviour” (p. 12) and that is why she pleads “to stand up and say something. Never mind if it’s been said before. Speak up on your own behalf. Take it very personally” (p. 12).

Arundhati Roy prior to the Indian explosion held America responsible for the irresponsible sin of nuclear tests. But when she returns after a short visit to the West for Booker Prize investitive ceremony, she is shell-shocked to see that irresponsible reactions by even writers, painters, journalists who seem to have said a ‘good bye’ to reason in praising the event of nuclear test by India. The headlines
in papers like 'Explosion of Self-Esteem', 'Road to Resurgence' and 'A Moment of Pride' simply indicate that fascism has 'entered our homes'. Roy fears the repercussions. "In 1975 one year after India first dipped her foe into the nuclear sea, Mrs. Gandhi declared the Emergency." After the 1998 Pokharan Test danger signals are there in terms of Hindu India settling scores with its oppressors of yore—the Muslim Pakistan. The bogey of Hindu vs Muslim Bomb vitiating the human relationship may unleash potential forces of disturbing human relationship.

Roy knows that the sentimental question of national pride and the idea of nationalism, developed by Kipling and others in the heyday of British Imperialism, has seeped too deep among the countries of the world to be removed and forgotten easily. And that is why when she mentioned her project of writing the present essay to her friends and well-wishers, she was cautioned to be discreet and get her tax papers in order lest the state may persecute her. Roy has the memories of the Emergency in India when thousands were arrested and detained without rhyme and reason. Luckily her apprehensions proved wrong. Probably she overestimated the impact of her "The End of Imagination." She placed too high a premium on her celebrity status as a writer of _The God of Small Things_ and hence her misconceived forebodings. She mentions it explicitly:

My papers are in order. My taxes are paid. But how can one not be vulnerable in a climate like this? Everyone is vulnerable. Accidents happen. There is safety only in acquiescence. As I write, I am filled with foreboding.... In 1997, I was one of the items being paraded in...the
National Pride Parade. Among the others, much to my mortification, were a bomb-maker... I’m going to step out from under the fairy lights and say what’s on my mind. (pp. 20-21)

Roy feels dejected and her feelings are hurt as to a citizen of a country where emphasis has been on co-existence. She becomes a prey to ill-founded fears of a repetition of what happened during the Emergency in 1975. It is in this mood that she explains the purpose of her writing “The End of Imagination”:

My world has died. And I write to mourn its passing. Admittedly, it was a flawed world... I myself have criticized unsparingly, but only because I loved it. It didn’t deserve to die...
I loved it simply because it offered humanity a choice. It was a rock out at sea. A stubborn chink of light that insisted that there was a different way of living. It was a functioning possibility. A real option. All that’s gone now. India’s nuclear tests, the manner in which they were conducted, the euphoria with which they have been greeted (by us) is indefensible. To me, it signifies dreadful things, The end of Imagination. The end of freedom actually, because, after all, that’s what freedom is. Choice. (pp. 21-22)

Nuclear matter is a grave matter for any country. Nuclear test on 11 May 1998 was a hasty step and was conducted without consulting the army experts. Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Eric A. Vas said, “This momentous decision was taken solely on the advice of clever scientists and bureaucrats who lacked constitutional responsibility or accountability. The military chiefs hadn’t been consulted about a matter which had
far-reaching security consequences." Roy rather exaggerates her reaction and comes to believe:

On 15 August 1997 we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of India’s independence. From now on we can celebrate a future of nuclear bondage. (p. 22)

Anyway in 1998, she didn’t perceive the consequences of unipolarity and that is why the essay further examines the explicit reasons given by the Govt. of India for going for the test-explosion. The general reason is political expediency which does not carry much meaning for a pacifist like Roy as she puts the poser: Why should it have been politically expedient” (p. 22). The “three Official Reasons given are: China, Pakistan and Exposing Western Hypocrisy.” (p. 22)

Roy admits that the issues are real but ‘they aren’t new. The only new thing on the old horizon is the Indian Government led by Atal Behari Bajpai who, according to her, explained to the U.S.A. President the security considerations as being the main reason for the test. Arundhati Roy’s humanistic feelings are not ready to reconcile as the above reasons and she tries to debunk them. The China question according to her is bogus as the Chief of the General Staff of Peoples’ Liberation Army was with our Chief of the Army Staff and there were no words of war. Even the War with Pakistan is now 27 years old. As for the Kashmir issue it is an issue like many others for which the Indian Govt. is much responsible. And these problems ‘cannot and will not be solved by pointing nuclear missiles at Pakistan” (p. 24). Moreover as the two countries share contagious borders we share the same air, water and sky and therefore “Any nuclear war with Pakistan...
will be a war against ourselves.” Regarding the third reason viz. to expose the western hypocrisy Roy tells us that it is a well known fact: “Which decent human being on earth harbours any illusions about it? (p. 24) The western nations “stand on the world’s stage stark naked but... entirely unembarrassed.” They are arrogant than hypocrite with ‘more food, more money and larger bombs.’ By joining the nuclear Club we have become the hypocrites. “We are the ones who’ve abandoned what was arguably a moral position” of knowing the technology and yet not making the bomb because we don’t believe in them. To think that by possessing a bomb can take us to the exclusive club of the Superpowers is a folly as nonsensical as to demanding “to play in the World Cup Finals simply because we have a ball” (p. 26). It is foolish because even among the Superpowers the nation with “more money, more food, more bombs” would be superior to others in the club. In any honest assessment India stands nowhere as the UNDP’s 1997 Human Development Index places India at No. 138 out of 175 countries with its 400 million illiterate, 600 million without basic sanitation and 200 million having no drinking water. Roy asserts that the basic reason for going for the test is: “To prevent the state from crumbling, we need a national cause, and other than our currency...we have none” (p. 27). In her zeal she poses basic questions about the existence of Indian identity: “Is India Indians”. Her arguments may look reasonable but on objective observation we feel that on such vital issues she should have better remained discreet. If there is no Indianness in India, why she should so full of regret
about the values which Indian stood for? We feel difficulty in supporting her arguments about India without any identity:

The people who have a vital stake...in India having a single, lucid, cohesive national identity are the politicians...because...their career goal, is...to become that identity.... If there isn’t one, they have to manufacture one and persuade people to vote for it.... The more morally bankrupt the politicians, the cruder the ideas of what that identity should be. (p. 29)

Any talk of national identity appears farcical, according to Roy, because every individual can claim for himself a minority status. The result is that “The fissures...run vertically, horizontally and are layered... Fires (once lit) race along any one of these schisms, and...release tremendous bursts of political energy” resulting into the mob fury first utilized by Gandhi against the British and later by others especially Indira Gandhi who “made the genie a permanent State Guest” (p. 31). It was again used by BJP while demolishing the Babri Mosque structure. The same genie brought the nuclear explosion by using the rhetoric of insecurity and national cause.

Roy devotes almost 11 pages (25-36) of this essay to the way political parties in power both the Congress of Indira Gandhi and the BJP and how they hide themselves sometimes behind “tired platitudes” and “convent school rhetoric” and sometimes come out openly in support of their deeds somehow lacks the sincerity which otherwise characterize the matter and manner of the writer. Her writing smacks of prejudice and distasteful contempt. It somehow
takes the skew away from her well presented anti-nuclear weapons arguments. Just one example is enough:

The BJP is, in some senses, a spectre that Indira Gandhi and the Congress created. Or, if you want to be less harsh, a spectre that fed and reared itself in the political spaces and communal suspicion that the Congress nourished... while Mrs. Indira Gandhi played hidden games with politicians and their parties.... The BJP...has chosen to light its fires directly on the streets and in the homes and hearts of people. It is prepared to do by day what the Congress would do only by night.... Could the hypocrisy of the Congress Party, the fact that it conducted its wretched affairs surreptitiously instead of openly, could that possibly mean there is a tiny glimmer of guilt somewhere?... Actually, no. No. (pp. 31-32)

Roy sees the hypocrisy further in the BJP youth celebrating India’s nuclear Bomb and simultaneously “condemning Western Culture” by emptying crates of Coke and Pepsi into public drains.” She refers to the Indophiles claim that the bomb is in the Vedas and castigates them for accepting the western nuclear bomb.

Roy’s whole punch, present earlier in the essay, seems to have lost its strength when she refers to such bizarre ideas. She dwells on the issue of whether India is a Hindu state or not because much before the Hindus there lived the Adivasis and that a lot of foreign elements have entered to leave anything indigenously Indian or Hindu. Any insistence on things Indian would mean preparing a “a practical list of things to ban and buildings to break.” Roy gives a list with the confession “It’ll need some research, but off the top of my head, here are a few suggestions.” Humayun Kabir is of the opinion that:
Till recently the Aryans were regarded as the earliest invaders of the land. It was thought that they came to a country which was uncivilized and barbarian, but modern research has proved that there were invaders even before the Aryans poured into this land. They had evolved a civilization higher than that of the Aryans,... Today whatever is Indian, whether it be an idea, a word, a form of art, a political institution or social custom, is a blend of many different strains and elements.5

Thus the tribal are those people who may be called the real Hindu of the country.

Her suggestions are suggestions of impossibilities and we simply wonder whether this is the only thing that comes “off the top” of her head. She says:

They could begin by banning a number of ingredients from our cuisine: chillies (Mexico), tomatoes (Peru), potatoes (Bolivia)… Smoking will be out of the question. Tobacco came from North America.

Cricket, English and Democracy should be forbidden. Either Kabaddi or Kho-kho could replace cricket… All hospitals in which western medicine is practised…be banned…. The railways dismantled. (pp. 35-36)

Her funny musings in this vein sometimes receives her ironical punch for which she has rare talent:

Needless to say, sending your children to university in the U.S., and rushing there yourself to have your prostrate operated upon, will be a cognizable offence. (p. 36)

Her conclusion on the issue is pointed and unambiguous:
There's no such thing as an Authentic India or a Real Indian. There is no Divine Committee that has the right to sanction one single, authorized version of what India is or should be.... There are, and can only be, visions of India, various ways of seeing it—honest, dishonest, wonderful absurd, modern, traditional....” (p. 37)

After these stinted observations, she comes to her argument convincing by saying that the bomb is being made a symbol of national pride and achievement. The fact is that the majority of the Indian people just does not understand the nature of nuclear weapons. “Has anybody told them that nuclear war has nothing at all to do with their received notions of war” (p. 38). So the whole din is based on false glorification managed through misinformed misinformation. “The millions and millions who live in this country... have the right to make an informed decision about its fate, and as far as I can tell, nobody informed them about anything” (pp. 39-40). The information is difficult to give because the horrors are too great for the language. In short her final appeal and message is clearly audible in her assertion:

The nuclear bomb is the most anti-democratic, anti-national, anti-human, outright evil thing that man has ever made. If you are religious...this bomb is Man's challenge to God.... This world of ours is 4,600 million years old. It could end in an afternoon. (pp. 40-41)

The essay “The End of Imagination” is the anguished cry of a professed humanist. Her opinion and views may appear rather inconsiderate as Roy laments as if the world were lost. The world of imagination has always been at variance with the world of reality. Her
anguish and gloom has a literary parallel in William Hazlitt at the failure of Napoleon. Her feelings are similar to those of Hazlitt who came out on the street unshaven and uncouth on the fall of Napoleon. Denounced as a traitor Hazlitt held his views. Roy also seems to be in the same frame of mind when she declares:

If protesting against having a nuclear bomb implanted in my brain as anti-Hindu and anti-national, then I secede. I hereby declare myself an independent, mobile republic. I am a citizen of the earth. I own no territory. I have no flag....(p. 21)

The above statement indicates the extreme stand of the essayist as is done in the spirit of the 17th century Pamphleteers and the 19th century tractarians. Such assertive stance of subjective nature somehow make her impact rather blunt. Her argument appear based not on logic but obstinacy.

When Roy talks of Indian politics her aversion to party-politics takes control over her and she fails to give a cogent, coherent understanding of the Indian political life. She is not happy with the Left parties, shown so patently in her *The God of Small Things*. She does not hide her aversion to the rightist parties as well viz. the Congress and the BJP. Almost ten pages of the essay are devoted more to the ways of the politicians than to the exigencies behind the decision to go for the bomb.

As of now, it is difficult to understand her argument and trust her views especially in a world which has unfortunately become only unipolar. We very much doubt if without that nuclear power the
countries of Asia could stand the injustices inflicted by America as in the case of Iraq. In fact the essay *The End of Imagination* was written in 1998 but the geo-political situation in the world has much changed since. The U.S.A. has come to perfect the indecency of bullying the smaller countries and has taken upon itself the task of being the culprit and also the judge. In this changed perspective we are yet to hear from Arundhati Roy on the issue. There is no doubt that the issues she raises are vital and the very planet is at stake but then we also know that sometimes things refuse to remain under control and one is forced to take suicidal decisions.

To be precise Arundhati Roy succeeds as a humanist with the gusto and force of her style. Her views on basic issues are clear, pointed and straight and she minces no words in expressing them. She fulfils the objective, set by herself in the initial stage of the essay that a time has come when every right thinking person should speak out against the nukes because they are crucial for all forms of life on our earth.
The Greater Common Good

Even though Arundhati Roy is noted as a novelist whose attainments in the field of fiction is singular in view of the fact that she bagged the Booker Prize on her maiden venture *The God of Small Things*, her interests defied the limits of creative writings. It is fashionable to think of creative writers as dwellers in their own sphere of imagination with little pragmatic wisdom. But Roy has the distinction of being a writer with a difference. For her creativity need necessarily be oriented by the social purpose of the noble principle of “the greater common good of the largest number.” She as a person always feels highly for the voiceless majority of the deprived ‘have nots’ of the society who despite their large numbers have little access to public platforms and who therefore, plod silently with the inequities conceived and executed with methodical cruelty in the offices situated far off from their hamlets and homes nestled in the inaccessible forests and hills. The irony, she feels, is that the so called developmental plans prepared through the connivance of the world lending Agencies and the selfish bureaucrats and politicians who enjoy their positions unmindful of the consequences in the areas of operation of these so called developmental projects.’ Everywhere in the world the big dams have been found to be harmful in the long run and in many quarters of the Western developed world there is a serious threatening
growing for finding ways and means of decommissioning them. It is in this light, very carefully hided from the general public, that Arundhati Roy writes the essay ‘The Greater Common Good’. She feels rather emotionally surcharged at the folly of not listening to the “greater common sense” expressed by the propounders of the idea of big dams and water management techniques of mega size by the modern Indian vested interest. And in that emotional heat instead of writing creative work like *The God of Small Things* she pens down the present essay with the explicit purpose of giving us a call ‘to arise and to oppose’ the monstrosities like the Narmada Valley and Sardar Sarovar Projects which in the light of this available statistical information foretell a doom whose management could well be impossible in future.

This book reveals the author’s point of view to the dam projects of the government. The book is based on factual plight of the people who are sufferers of the Narmada Valley Project. She is especially pained to find that no responsible person in power, not even the political parties have paid any attention to their loss without any chances of any gain. She thinks that nature and natural beauty along with a life-style have been brought to nought by insensible human greed of a few.

The essay opens with the bitter irony of the fact that even the Supreme Court of the land instead of looking into the vital human issues of existence pay attention to trivialities like children’s park, etc. in the settlement colonies to be established for the displaced persons who are forced to move out from the catchment area of the
dam. While crossing the Narmada she came to see the tribals and their little world and was pained to realize that even the Supreme Court has chosen to look the other way round of the interest of the tribals. She could not repress her smile at the irony of the situation.

She takes up the issue because she could not tolerate “the isolation, the inequity and the potential savagery of it”\(^5\). She knows that she is a progressive lady but her honesty is capable of looking through the façade of hypocrisy in the name of development. She is able to see as she says, it is possible, “to wade through the congealed morass of hope, anger, information, disinformation, political artifice, engineering ambition, disingenuous socialism, radical activism, bureaucratic subterfuge, misinformed emotionalism and of course the pervasive, unerringly dubious, politics of International Aid.” (p. 49)

The writer in Arundhati Roy has to make a hard decision of not continuing her creative fictional commitments. Rather the compulsions of the situation of speaking out for the mute tribals make her to decide. “Instinct led me to set aside Joyce and Nabokov, to postpone reading Don DeLillo’s big book and substitute it with reports on drainage and irrigation, with journals and books and documentary films about dams and why they’re built and what they do.” (p. 49) She realizes that the majority of the people in India just know nothing of the problem yet every one has an emotional opinion, for or against the Narmada Project. The controversy however has changed the face of the battle what began as a fight over “the fate of a river valley”, it raised doubt about “an
entire political system." Now very basic questions are being asked, 'for whom are the rivers?' who are their owners? The issues are muddled because the official documents are kept secret and the "conniving experts" they just confuse the issue by placing the undue emphasis on unimportant peripheral problems like "hydrology, drainage, water logging" etc. (p. 51) Social anthropologists, engineers and even individuals "are keeping the noise but lose the music." (p. 51)

The situation is not allowed to get clarity rather intentionally. There are needless cries of war between modern rational "Development versus and irrational, emotional anti-development" forces. The issue is also named sometimes, to give a note of immediacy as a conflict between Nehru and Gandhi. These stripes are all to deflect the attention from the real nature of the danger. Talking about herself she confesses that though she came to Narmada Valley to get a story but she was just drawn into it by the sight of the colossal waste and equally colossal suffering of the peoples involved in the politics of the International Aid and National vested interest in which the contractors, engineers, bureaucrats and politicians have very high stakes.

The book *The Greater Common Good* has a strange irony in its beginning. The author goes to see the Narmada Dam. She says "I stood on a hill and laughed out loud." (p. 47) The initial ironical laugh of the author is not a laugh due to pleasant and happy sight but it is an irony, a mysterious laughing to see the condition of the resettlement of the people who were displaced. The tribal people
are not happy at all in the resettlement colonies because these colonies are far from the sky to which they have been accustomed so far. They are deprived of their age long myths and traditions and natural gifts where it was easy for them to get their food and other things of life. The tribal people were very happy in their villages and dwelling places where they find tongues in trees and books in running brooks and sermons in stone and good in every thing. This is the reason of laughing of the author. Actually our psychology is deeply connected with the place where we are born and brought up. The same thing is with the tribal. They might be given big house to live, big fields to play but as a matter of fact it is not a real sympathy with them. They can never forget their birth place. However poor and miserable the man's home may be, he is emotionally linked to it that through all his life he cannot forget the memory of the place where he is born. This psychology compels him to come back to his home. There is great difference in a house and home. A house is a place where many facilities are available but we can not get love and affection, affinity and happiness. But so far as a home is concerned, whether it is without wall or roof, we get and feel love and affection and happiness. The homes of tribal are not structures but habitations comprising forests, rivers, hills and the mountains which give him love, livelihood and nourishment. These people who have lived in the open and in the real lap of nature will not feel well in over-populated cities, which is full of pollution and corruption. The men of cities are full of trickery and cleverness but these tribals have lived a plain life with
co-operation and intimacy. So they cannot adjust themselves in the cities. J.B.S. Haldane seems to support the idea when he observes:

In the country districts of the southern States, the birth rate of the Negro population exceeds the death rate. In the southern towns, and all through the north, more Negroes die than are born. Their high death rates are due to the fact that, in environments suitable to a white man; they die of consumption and other diseases, just as the white man dies on the West Coast of Africa, the Negro’s original home.⁷

Thus it is clear that the climate also does not favour the tribal if they are displaced from the original. The situation is crystallized in one of the epigraphic citation of the main body of the book on p. 55: “Why didn’t they just poison us? Then we wouldn’t have to live in this Shit-hole and the Government could have survived along with its precious dam all to itself.” This anguished readiness for death comes from an oustee from one of the minor dams of the Narmada Valley but it crystallizes the whole issue.

Arundhati Roy very graphically looks into the whole scenario and says that one emotional outburst from Pandit Nehru ‘Dams are the Temples of Modern India’ simply created the present situation. Nehru’s eminence made his words sanctified and people are taken by them without considering logic of big dams. The misinformation is drilled into the minds of the people by Nehru’s speech at the opening of the Bhakra Nangal Dam a part of the school text books. An illusion has been created that the solution to all Indian problems lies in making big dams. In reality they have made more harm than good for the people. But we are making more and more dams in
India. Our government present testimony that it is effective and cheapest way of storing water for irrigation and thus dams lead to much higher agricultural production with far less danger. Roy analyses the folly and observes:

The fact that they do more harm than good is no longer just conjecture. Big Dams are obsolete. They're uncool. They’re undemocratic. They’re a Government’s way of accumulating authority.... They are a guaranteed way of taking a farmer’s wisdom away from him. They are a brazen means of taking water, land and irrigation away from the poor and gifting it to the rich. Their reservoirs displace huge populations of people, leaving them homeless and destitute. Ecologically too, they are in the doghouse. They lay the earth to waste. They cause floods, waterlogging, salinity, they spread disease. There is mounting evidence that links Big Dams to earthquakes. (pp. 57-58)

Arundhati Roy is not in favour of big dams because they are no more monuments of modern civilization but they show man’s superiority over nature. Monuments are full with the feeling of worship and devotion. But so far as big dams are concerned they create havoc opposite to what people are told about them. Perhaps this is the reason that big dams are not being built in the developed countries. Developed countries are now against building of big dams and that is why the dams building industry in these countries is out of work. Building of big dams is transported to third world countries which are suffering from poverty, unemployment, malnutrition and over population.

Developed countries encourage these developing countries to build more and more dams so that they might become more and
more poor. Arundhati Roy threadbares the inhuman greed and design by exposing their deceit in the hallowed name of ‘aid’ to the poor countries of Asia and elsewhere. Their aid consists of obsolete technology which need much investment to modernize and dispose of. It is safer and also hasslefree to transport the old plants, ships, weaponry etc. to the less developed countries at a price which is fixed by the donors. To deflect our attention from the vital information Indians are being deluged by information not so vital. We have records of cricket matches but no record of the number of people displaced by dams and other such aid sponsored projects. And the irony is that this attrition is done in the name of Progress and the Indian leaders like elsewhere in the deprived nations welcome these obsolete technologies with an air of having achieved something great. “The millions of displaced people in India are nothing but refugees in an unacknowledged war. And we, like the citizens of White America and French Canada and Hitler’s Germany, are condoning it by looking away. Why? Because we’re told that it’s being done for the sake of the Greater Common Good. That it’s being done in the name of Progress, in the name of the National Interest (which, of course, is paramount). Therefore gladly, unquestioningly, almost gratefully, we believe what we’re told. We believe what it benefits us to believe.” (p. 65)

Arundhati Roy laments that under the Nehru’s impact 3300 new dams were built after Independence and an atmosphere was created in which every one “Communists, Capitalists, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists” (p.57) became admirers of the idea of
making big dams. It was happening against the Western realization that big dams cause more harm than good. She cautions us to wake up to the reality that “all over the world there is a movement growing against Big Dams” (p. 57). In the first world they are being decommissioned and blown up. Big dams have become the medium of accumulating power and authority. The powerful will decide how much water to be given for growing the choice product. “They’re a brazen means of taking water, land and irrigation away from the poor and gifting it to the rich.” (p. 57) These dams have also made the whole show town centric instead of the village centric. Now it can be said that India lives in her cities and the country’s villages live only to serve her cities.

The other problem associated with the dam projects is the heavy loan India has taken from the World Bank and other such Agencies for the development. The country is virtually in a debt-trap as India is in a situation where it pays back more money to the Donor Agency in interest and repayments of the principal than it receives from it. We are forced to create new debts in order to be able to repay our old ones. The author is of the view that “the relationship between us is exactly like the relationship between a landless labourer steeped in debt and the village moneylender—it is an affectionate relationship, the poor man loves his moneylender because he’s always there when he is needed. It’s not for nothing that we call the world a Global Village. The only difference between the landless labourer and the Government of India is that one uses the money to survive. The other just funnels it into the
private coffers of its officers and agents, pushing the country into an economic bondage that it may never escape.” (p. 77)

Roy tries to explode the myth of progress created by the exponents of Water-projects. They usually paint a rosy picture by saying that agricultural growth and industrial production of the country is based on water. Water is the source of generating electricity. The water stored irrigates the crops. It is also controlled and regulated by means of dams to produce hydro-electricity. India’s economy is under profit by having these projects. These projects supply powers to the industries and water for agriculture and electricity to the villages and cities for better life. According to government of India Sardar Sarovar projects are multipurpose as irrigation, flood control and power production will be taken care of. It will produce 1450 Mega Watts of power. Thus it is very beneficial for our country. But Arundhati Roy does not agree with this figure of government. She thinks that the fact is just the otherwise. She remarks:

Irrigation uses up the water you need to produce power. Flood control requires you to keep the reservoir empty during the monsoon months to deal with an anticipated surfeit of water. And if there’s no surfeit you’re left with an empty dam. And this defeats the purpose of irrigation, which is to store the monsoon water. It’s like the conundrum of trying to ford a river with a fox, a chicken and a bag of grain. The result of these mutually conflicting aims, studies say, is that when the Sardar Sarovar Projects are completed and the scheme is fully functional, it will end up producing only three per cent of the power that its planners say it will. About fifty megawatts. (p. 83)
Roy further points out that big dams create a reservoir and scientific studies have amply proved that reservoirs are the source of greater seismic activities. Those who are protesting against big dam projects namely Narmada Tehri and in Karnataka have arguments too strong to be refuted. There is no guarantee against reservoir-induced seismicity (RIS). She further points out that these protesters are having their fears confirmed as the earthquakes in Uttar Kashi and in Central India have become common. Roy is unable to understand the logic extended by the exponents of big dams that a country needing progress need not fear the risks and that therefore we should go on building hydro-power projects.

Arundhati Roy points out that even though the conflicting views of both the parties may have some substance but the real sufferer is the poor, illiterate mass of people “known as tribals”. There is an ethical issue involved and it must be cleared at the earliest. It is definitely repasterously inhuman to uproot the simple tribals from their villages and forests, to usurp their lands and rivers and make them emotionally uprooted. The misery of these people are further increased by the insensitivity as contained in the judgement of the Supreme Court where the judges said little about the tribal way of life and simply underlined the need for a park for the children in the resettlement colonies to come up.

For Arundhati Roy the question is of vital human sympathies and cannot be understood in terms of area irrigated and volume of power generated. It can only be understood in terms of our gains at
what cost involved. The cost is not in terms of money but in terms of human deprivation and suffering which no amount of money can compensate for. It is this emotional feeling for pain at the suffering of the 57% tribals that makes Arundhati Roy to leave behind her career as a creative writer. This explains Roy's earnestness in calling upon people of all sections of society to speak out on this genuine human problem. She reminds us:

The war for the Narmada Valley is not just some exotic tribal war, or a remote rural war or even an exclusively Indian war. It's war for the rivers and the mountains and the forests of the world. All sorts of warriors from all over the world, anyone who wishes to enlist, will be honoured and welcomed. Every kind of soldier will be needed. Doctors, lawyers, teachers, judges, journalists, students, sportsmen, painters, actors, singers, lovers... The borders are open, folks! Come on in. (p. 93)

The text of The Greater Common Good draws out the emotionally surcharged self of Arundhati Roy because she knows that in the Narmada Projects so many State Governments are involved and their track records in the field of rehabilitation and resettlement of the suffering tribals have been far from satisfactory. While the government of Gujarat have been generous in its approach to the problem, the government of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra have really failed in paying attention to the problems of the sufferers. In fact there seems to be a callousness on the part of the two governments to address themselves to the essentially human problems of the oustees from the catchment area. The Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh people and also a number of people in Gujarat
have still to get a suitable place for their habitation. Since the uprooted are in lacs it is just impossible for the government to provide them proper resettlement colonies. Villagers are separated from their clans and families and virtually nothing is being done to put them together. The tribal life has been marked by “a strange sense of togetherness”. Even the better managed Gujarat oustees have much suffering to their lots. While some have got lands others are not so fortunate. The land allotted to them is not fit for cultivation. Not only that even the land allotted to them is in litigation because the original land owners are still to be paid by governments resulting into the fact that the allottees could not get possession of the allotted lands. So in practice the settlement plan half hazardly executed making the problem just beyond redemption for the poor people to have lost their homes. In fact the tribals are running from pillar to post. Some of them are seen by Roy and she has this to say,

In several resettlement sites, people have been dumped in rows of corrugated tin sheds that are furnaces in summer and fridges in winter. Some of them are located in dry river beds that, during the monsoon, turn into fast-flowing drifts. I have been to some of these ‘sites’. I’ve seen film footage of others: shivering children, perched like birds on the edges of charpais, while swirling waters enter their tin homes. Frightened, fevered eyes watch pots and pans carried through the doorway by the current, floating out into the flooded fields, their fathers swimming after them to retrieve what they can. (p. 104)
The resettlement colonies create a psychological and physical void in the lives of displaced people. Mentally they are haunted by their villages in the deep forest which were their protector and providers. They got everything for their subsistence from the forest in the natural way. Now in the colonies starvation is their common lot. Towns are far away from these resettlement sites and in order to earn their livelihood they have to be wage-earners. In contrast with the present their past was definitely better because food, fuel and fodder were readily available. Their old habitation brought them security. Even the failure of rains hardly disturb their rhythm of life. So life in the forest gave them security, stability and sense of belonging which the new settlement colonies cannot. These people therefore are torn between “memories and desires”. They are very often nostalgic and suffer from acute homesickness. These colonies, apart from taking away their peace have thrown up new problems of adjustment. They have been accustomed to a life based on self reliance and minimum needs. Their new life is a life of want for every need must be monetarily addressed and possibilities of financial gain with their traditional skill is rather meager in the resettlement colonies.

Arundhati Roy puts forward her arguments on the strength of technological and statistical data and with their help she tries to explore the myth of “local pain for National Gain.” According to her Nation gains nothing except ensuring pain for the simple men and women in the prestine river valleys. It is a known fact that “the dam building industry in the first world is in trouble and out of
work.” She says, “So it’s exported to the third world in the name of Development Aid along with their other waste, like old weapons, superannuated aircraft carriers and banned pesticides.” (p. 58). Roy is particularly pained to see that the Indian government and the supporting political system just ignore even the writings on the wall. It is a common knowledge that the West gives the development Aids to save itself from the trouble of disposing of obsolete technology. So their “gift-wrapped garbage” is handed down to the developing countries and the result is open for all to see. Most of Africa is destroyed and quite near us Bangladesh is no better.

This dam building business-mind-boggling financial fiasco and Arundhati Roy has very logically built up a case for deep contemplation. That explains the need for quoting her at length:

Over the last fifty years, India has spent Rs. 87,000 crore on the irrigation sector alone. Yet there are more drought-prone areas and more flood-prone areas today than there were in 1947. Despite the disturbing evidence of irrigation disasters, dam-induced floods and rapid disenchantment with the Green Revolution (declining yields, degraded land), the Government has not commissioned a post project evaluation of a single one of its 3,600 dams to gauge whether or not it has achieved what it set out to achieve, whether or not the (always phenomenal) costs were justified, or even what the costs actually were. (p. 59)

Apart from this colossally wasteful expenditure the benefits of which are very short-lived the really disturbing thing is the human issues involved. The Indian Institute of Public
Administration in its detailed study “of fifty four Large Dams estimated that one large dam normally displaces a population of 44 thousand one hundred 82 in India.” (p. 60) Even if instead of 44000 we accept even an average of 10,000 just per dam then 10,000 multiplied by 3300 dams in India comes to a devastating figure of 33,000,000 of displaced persons. To manage the numbers to the life at even subsistence level would require land and other infrastructural activities. The cost of which is just impossible to be met by a poor country like India. During the last fifty years India has seen forty million people displaced by dams as mentioned by N.C. Saxena, Secretary to the Planning Commission in a private lecture (p. 61). Arundhati Roy like a skilled orator and debater knows that mere numbers will fade from the public memory and therefore she refers to physical units to magnify the effect and it is really remarkable to see the dexterity with which she relates the data with the human existence. “Fifty million is more than the population of Gujarat. Almost three times the population of Australia. More than three times the number of refugees that Partition created in India. Ten times the number of Palestinian refugees. The Western World today is convulsed over the future of one million people who have fled from Kosovo.” (p. 62)

The really painful thing according to Roy is that the majority of the sufferers are the Adivasis and Dalits who account for “about sixty per cent” (p. 62). The whole process is dehumanized because “India’s poorest people are subsidizing the lifestyles of her richest” (p. 62). This statement is amply corroborated by Roy’s account of
the situation at the so called rehabilitation or resettlement colonies. The illiterate Adivasis is officially paid compensation but the amount really received can be anyone’s guess, “in a land where even the postman demands a tip for a delivery.” The fact is “Most Adivasis—Or let’s say, most small farmers—have as much use for money as a Supreme Court Judge has for a bag of fertilizer” (p. 63). The situation is further aggravated by the fact that these rehabilitation camps simply “redefine the meaning of liberty” (p. 64). In order to draw attention to the situation of willing captivity for slow death Roy has used the example of Lord Amherst who exterminated the Canadian native population by offering them blankets “infested with the smallpox virus.” In other words these camps are chambers for these oustees to die natural death slowly.

After the statistical support to her argument Roy explains the irony by which the liberal slogan of the 18th century England namely the Greater Common Good is being used in India for supporting the deadly dam building at the cost of Adivasis and the other poor communities in India. “The millions of displaced people in India are nothing but refugees in an unacknowledged war. And we, like the citizens of White America and French Canada and Hitler’s Germany, are condoning it by looking away. Why? Because we’re told that it’s being done for the sake of the Greater Common Good. That it’s being done in the name of Progress, in the name of the National Interest (which, of course, is paramount). Therefore gladly, unquestioningly, almost gratefully, we believe what we’re told. We believe what it benefits us to believe.” (p. 65)
That is why Roy feels that every one must listen to her statistical data and only then an understanding of the situation will be possible. She is so confident of the plausibility of her arguments that she allows the listener to take the other side if they find reason to disagree. This invitation is followed by a graphic account of the ground reality. The government statistics show that from 51 million tonne food grains now we produce two hundred million tonnes. This increase is squarely attributed to dam whereas major portion of irrigation is covered by ground water and the increase is more due to hybrid seeds and chemical fertilizers. The government has not so far proved reasonably that big dams are the only cause of larger food grain ends. The study by Himanshu Thakkar on Dams mentioned clearly that big dams are responsible only for 12 per cent of India’s total food grains production. This amount is almost the amount lost annually to rodents. The reality is that the poor in Orissa are still dying because of starvation despite the fact that the Kalahandi has a rice production level higher than any other part of the country.

Roy further unfolds the sordid story of how very vital decisions like by raising the heights of dam are enlarging the catchment area is taken in the most callous casual manner even without the basic field study. An account of the various meeting held between the functionaries of the different states associated with the Narmada Valley Project only makes us aware of the casual methods in which the vital decisions are taken which make and mar the lives of the innocent villagers. Her assessment of the Indian
state that it has succeeded “in being ruthlessly efficient in the way it has appropriated India’s resources—its land, its water etc.” (p. 69). It is equally efficient in hiding and misappropriating data. To say that India lives in her villages is in fact a bull shit. The cruel fact is that the government machinery is a “giant poverty-producing machine, masterful in its methods of pitting the poor against the very poor, of flinging crumbs to the wretched so that they dissipate their energies fighting each other, while peace (and advertising) reigns in the Master’s Lodge’ (p. 71). The concluding part of the essay is devoted to the story of how Narmada Valley project came into existence. The Narmada Valley project plan started in 1946 with the establishment of Gora dam in Gujarat in 1961. The real study and the real actual flow of river was done away with because it needed forty long years and instead they took recourse to rainfall data. Ultimately, through the dubious ways of State sponsored informative data the Narmada Valley project came to be accepted even without the clearance from the Ministry of environment. The World Bank offered to finance the project ironically even without the results of field study. It was simply because World Bank just does not turn down the Project because they are more concerned with terms like ‘Moving money’ and ‘meeting loan targets’. For the World Bank India is a favoured state because “it is in a situation today where it pays back more money to The Bank in interest and repayment instalments than it receives from it” (p. 76-77). The situation has come as evident from World Bank Annual Reports (1998). India paid The Bank $ 478 million more than it borrowed.
The situation is that the India and the World Bank is like landless labourers living in the company of the smiling money lenders. In fact these international funding agencies are doing the same heartless business in China also and they are financing only the big dams in China also (p. 80). In fact the World Bank is ever ready to finance any such proposal in any Indian state unmindful of the consequences.

All said and done. The essay is an eye opener. Arundhati Roy has used the oratorical method in this essay. Aristotle speaking about oratory divides it into three categories—forensic, deliberation and epideictic. This essay falls under the forensic category because this category is used “in the defence of individual freedom and resistance to prosecution.”8 Though such oratory was suited to the city states of Greece, it produced the greatest orator Cicero who influenced the later western oratory and prose style. The essay by Arundhati Roy is nothing but an emotional outburst conditioned intellectually to the modern statistical data-frame to support her point of view and to refute those of others. This essay also uses the method of the third category of Aristotelian division of oratory namely “epideictic that is ceremonial. This oratory was panegyrical, declamatory and demonstrative. The aim of any orator of this category was to praise or condemn any individual cause or movement.”9

The two methods have their own points of strength and weaknesses and Roy’s essay is no exception. Influenced partly by the new structural devices introduced by the writers of Post-1981
which saw the publication of Salman Rushdie’s epoch-making book *Mid Night’s Children*, and partly by her vast readings of persuasive writings she evolves a method of presenting the factual reality in a lyrical mode. At places she is surcharged with emotion and yet maintains the intellectual poise. Her assessment of the situation is not only emotionally realized but also factually correct. Even when she appears writing in the form of fiction she is quick to strike some statistical detail to beat hollow the tallest claims made by the supporters of the big dams. As usual her most violent bunches of sarcastic wit are reserved for those hypocrite politicians and bureaucrats who plead vociferously for the so-called developmental projects despite knowing the reality. In a way she succeeds in presenting her brief in the parliament of all democratic people who feel that even the last man in the Adivasis population has a right to live in his own way at the place of his choice, in his own style with all the traditions and customary privileges ensured to them so far without any interference from the so-called enlightened people who profess to bring happiness and prosperity to the life of these ordinary men.

The style used by Arundhati Roy for persuading the intelligentsia and all such concerned people, is by nature open to certain irritating defects. At places it becomes rhetorical and very frequently repetition seems to spoil the show. But then Roy’s commitment to the cause of the down-trodden and poor is sincere enough to forget these lapses and we are made to share most of her conclusions and also feel ready to be a party to her commitment to
the cause of the mute Adivasis and the equally mute dalit majority of the sufferers at any place where big dams are being constructed not so much out of reasoned necessity as out of the servility of Nations to the mechanizations of the so called international developmental lending agencies. It is definitely an achievement on her part to remind us that in a certain span of time six thousand projects were submitted to the World Bank for funding and not a single project was turned down despite valid reason for doing so. (p. 76)
References

1. Arundhati Roy, "The End of Imagination" in The Algebra of Infinite Justice, Penguin India, New Delhi, 2002 revised ed. All subsequent references are from this edition. Page numbers are in parenthesis.


9. Ibid.