"Darling of the... middle classes" Or "Edge -girl?"

Nowadays in India the scene is almost farcical. Following the recent commercial success of some Indian authors, Western publishers are desperately prospecting for the next big Indo-Anglian work of fiction. They’re doing everything short of interviewing English speaking Indians for the post of ‘writer’. Ambitious middle class parents, who a few years ago, would only settle for a future in engineering, medicine or management for their children, now hopefully send them to creative writing schools (Roy 2002, 194).

The global literary market’s hunger for ‘new’ literatures since the 1980s has placed a growing demand on countries like India and other postcolonial societies to scale up production and produce new literature and newer writers. In an age of globalized consumerism, the need for Indian narratives contributes to the ever extending branch of the Orientalist fashion that colours Western readers demand for the exotic, ethnic-chic. In an oft cited article for the New York Times written in 1997, Somini Sengupta had analysed the advent of India in the global economy, through its aggressively marketed literature, “the starkest example of Indo-chic can be found in the new popularity of literature out of India” (1997). This is in keeping with the global commercial network that had in the past sought to exoticize representations of the ‘other’, like eastern spiritualism, world music, ethnic craft and food, for feeding an ever expanding, changing taste. Within these shifting paradigms consumption patterns created vis-à-vis literary texts are therefore viewed suspiciously as operating through a continuing exoticization of all that is “borne across”¹, i.e. from third world shores to the west. The ‘boom’ or what Bishnupriya Ghosh hails as the “Renaissance in Indian writing” (2004, 184)

is seen as a result of a faddish 'flavour of the season' or a 'new Orientalism', that rules in favour of it in literary markets globally. Critics like Graham Huggan argue that the marketing of postcolonial writing promotes nothing less than a literary tourism (1994). Through an exoticist maneuver books from countries like India acquire an almost totemic significance conveying the illusion of both acceptance and reciprocity, even as they are reabsorbed into mainstream culture and its created hierarchies between centre and periphery. Elleke Boehmer offers a similar reading when she says:

Extravagantly plotted, lushly written, the canonical postcolonial book, whether by Rushdie, Ben Okri or Arundhati Roy, at once offers a commodification of the exotic, and has itself become an exotic commodity (2004, 12).

The slew of international literary prizes garnered by writers like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and others, has created what critics like Huggan, Arjun Appadurai and Padmini Mongia have hailed as the phenomena of the 'new Indo chic'.

All prizes operate through narratives that carry their own politics and implications even as they mark the complex negotiation between competing discourses of aesthetic quality and commercial success. It is no surprise then when Pico Iyer says wryly about prizes like the Commonwealth and Booker, "When a traditional English name takes the prize - A. S. Byatt, say, or Kingsley Amis - it seems almost anomalous" (Quoted in Huggan 1994, 22). Bishnupriya Ghosh in "The Postcolonial Bazaar: Thoughts on Teaching the Market in Postcolonial Objects", offers an insightful reading of the "hullabaloo" over the publication of Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. She reproduces excerpts from Indian newspapers celebrating Roy’s Booker, as well as the provocative
taunts in newspapers like *The Statesman* that highlighted the absence of contemporary British writers from the prize list:

"Where is the British Novel now?" (says a reporter for the Calcutta daily, *The Statesman*). He continues: "If the Booker is a mirror in which contemporary literary culture may glimpse a reflection of its own worth, then one ought to look elsewhere—to the USA or India. I once again congratulate Roy for winning; but where are the new British writers?" (Quoted in Ghosh 1998)

Ghosh’s analysis draws attention to the irony implicit in statements such as the above that implicate themselves in hierarchical politics by continuing to invoke a British standard of merit:

Again, a double-edged sentence in which the anti-colonial nonetheless reflects a culture that continues to look at itself, via satellite as it were, through British and American ratification (*Ibid* 1998).

A literary prize such as the Man Booker (the Booker prize as it is now called since the investment company, the Man Group took over in 2002) is seen by some as a pre eminent act of legitimation, an almost infallible marker of merit conferred on a writer. In this it becomes a form of symbolic capital and an instrument of exchange within the contemporary economy of literary rewards and esteem. Prizes come with certain economic and aesthetic politics even as they assume a minor role in the larger cultural narrative and consecration of art and artists. Literary prizes are constructed through the actions of a variety of stakeholders - sponsors, media institutions, culture industries and they attract both media speculation and bookie betting. Interestingly the Booker is sponsored by what was once the Booker McConnell Company, a food conglomerate and owner of sugar plantations in the 1830s in British territories such as Guyana. Armed with
this information Huggan (1997) illustrates also how the prize works at limiting postcolonial resistance or cultural critique by its continued promotion of English as a common or shared fund. Thus there are many critics who see the awarding of the Booker to Roy and other authors living in former colonies as covert recolonization. Within this as long as these writers’ currency depends on their status as prize-winning literary celebrities, it stays subject to the criticism of being complicit with neocolonialism. It further carries an implicit threat of withdrawal should the critical tide turn against them or their work.

Yet these broad indictments from critics who see third world/postcolonial literature as profiting off the ‘exotic’ also force an obviation of literary merit as well as social relevance that many texts could very well lay claim to. In fact the same broad strokes that writers are accused of using are in turn deployed by studies that very often use the same ‘exotic’ lens in their exploration. Thus it would be a little simplistic to continue locating the dynamics at work in the reception of a writers work as being worked upon solely by the ‘postcolonial exotic’ logic.

Global literary processes and flows are not distinct from or unaffected by global economic processes. Working within these are layered considerations and politics about ‘who gets in and who gets excluded’, as well as the work of what are called ‘hidden persuaders’ and ‘spin doctors’. These then operate through a complex web of publisher, editor, distributor and reviewer networks. Huggan, citing Pierre Bourdieu, claims that:

The evaluation of a text, as of its author, will therefore depend on several factors: on the specific material circumstances under which the text is produced, disseminated, and consumed, but also on the symbolic assessments provided by
the text’s various ‘agents of legitimation,’ — publishers, critics and reviewers, individual readers and reading publics, and so on (2001, 212).

Thus novels and their proliferation and circulation are incumbent upon local and at once global co-ordinates that relay signals for production and consumption. Cultural and national borders have proven to be permeable and literary produce is trafficked at busy intersections where images of other-ness swirl around in revealing yet contradictory ways. This is done even as texts turn into commodities for global exchange. Analysing this practice Huggan says:

Value is constructed through global market operations involving the exchange of cultural commodities and, particularly, culturally ‘othered’ goods. Postcoloniality’s regime of value is implicitly assimilative and market-driven: it regulates the value-equivalence of putatively marginal products in the global market place (Ibid 6).

To acknowledge that literary texts are not isolated artifacts or freestanding objects, existing in a pre assigned legitimacy and space, is not to make a new claim. As commodities they have life histories or as Arjun Appadurai says, “Like persons, [they] have social lives” (1986, 3). There is a commodification of both literary texts and taste, with pulls on the reader/consumer that problematize the whole act of reading. In his ground breaking analysis of consumer society, Baudrillard argues against a theorizing that reads consumption as a function of autonomous individual pleasure, arguing rather that it is a shared social activity that cannot be disengaged from its economic underpinnings:

Although we experience pleasure for ourselves, when we consume we never do it on our own (the isolated consumer is the carefully maintained illusion of the ideological discourse on consumption). Consumers are mutually implicated,
despite themselves, in a general system of exchange and in the production of coded values (1988, 48).

The cultural industry globally, in the age of late capitalism, recognizes the literary book publishing market as an important marker of contemporary taste. Novels from third world, postcolonial societies find generous shelf space in most publishing houses. Ghosh reads this is as part of global marketing maneuver that invests for profit:

The rapid subsuming of all social activity into a global exchange system necessarily means that the global purchase of the [Indian writing] Renaissance is indicative of its abstraction into global commodity (2004, 184).

Within this even though a global standardization of what is acceptable in marketable terms is not glossed over, there is a magnanimously created space for local manifestations that might be heterogeneous and particularized. Expectations of cultural marking as though the text would, without these, lose not just its specificity but its raison d’etre often plays a crucial role in the reception of a literary work outside its country of origin. This mainstreaming of niche ethnic tastes and styles is gratifying in as much as it offers a recognition and recuperation of culture and literature (at times Indian or Caribbean, African or any ‘exotic’ other) and yet there are more complex power dynamics at play like those of homogenization and resistance as well pure commercial reasons that seek continued control over production and consumption patterns. Thus even as local manifestations within texts are ‘allowed’ to exist this maneuver could be an intrinsic part of a complex economy which is homogenizing in its operation and effects even as it retains token amounts of ‘otherness’.

Authors of texts are also marketed through what is often a strategically planned visibility, part of the imbrication of writers and the market. In 1997 when Roy won the Booker Prize for The God of Small Things, the global marketing machinery
had already spun into overdrive. This ranged from publicizing the advance she received of one million dollars (unheard of in India for a debut novel), a comprehensive campaign to applaud her book at the fiftieth anniversary of India’s independence, along with a high octane media offensive which advertised Roy as the new jewel in the crown. All of which had as she says, “a sort of cloying, Reader’s Digest ring to it” (2000). In the many interviews and reviews of her work there have been tantalizing glimpses doled out for a hungry, voyeuristic reading public, of her life before the Booker as well as the ‘fairytale’ twists and turns that her ‘discovery’ took. Padmini Mongia sees the novel’s success propelled by the “myth making” that surrounded its adit into the literary world (2007, 104). Reporting for The Independent before the Booker anointment Jan McGirk writes:

The rights were auctioned by her British agent, David Godwin, for $250,000 in the UK and $160,000 to Random House in New York, and lucrative deals for translation rights quickly followed. Godwin was alerted through Pankaj Mishra, a young reader in the Delhi branch office of HarperCollins, who took the manuscript along on a train trip and, overcome with excitement, broke the journey midway to telephone his congratulations to Roy. After reading a sample chapter in London, Godwin booked the first flight to India on impulse. He tracked down the writer at the top of a narrow New Delhi stairway that spirals as tightly as the obsessive twists in her tale, and signed her up on the spot (McGirk 1997, 2).

The breathlessness of the above account is coupled with the almost gushing reception that Roy herself received after the Prize from an adoring public both in India and outside. Her promotional appearances for the novel were greeted with the same awe and enthusiasm as she charmed audiences with her somewhat
studied style, “ethnic chic, new-age hippie, Western vogue, all rolled into one” (Bhaumik 2006), that was viewed as both individualistic and trendy:

[Arundhati Roy] looks simply too cute to fit the role of literary genius. At a reading of her book to the Delhi literary set, the year’s smartest British Council do, she appears girlish and unprepossessing in a white ribbed T-shirt and black jeans. Without her daily aerobics she would be seriously scrawny instead of fine-boned. Her diamond nose-pin winks in the spotlight and her hair grows curlier as she tells more of her tale. There is obvious joy in her wordplay: a character expires at a "viable, die-able age". As the guest of honour, Ms Roy squats down on the floor during the formal cocktail party, scrawling autographs on a pile of books proffered by admirers. It is easy to picture her as the book's heroine: Rahel, the Stick Insect, dark-skinned, with incipient horns on her forehead, watching and measuring everything, and reading words backwards when she pleases (McGirk 1997, 2).

Roy’s “intensely feminine elfin beauty” (Boehmer 2000, 64), was time and again emphasized in interviews and further juxtaposed against her widely circulated soft focus photograph with the overly fetishized diamond nose pin. Traveling across several countries, she won over audiences with her provocative personality, aided possibly by the opportunely publicized stories of her unconventional, bohemian life - a university drop-out who sold empty beer bottles and hawked beach snacks in Goa, an aerobics instructor who lived in a one room 'barsaati' or sometimes even in a slum settlement when she did not have the means to pay rent. This using and filtering of biographical details as strategies employed by publishing networks, as also writers themselves, to create 'marketable' identities as a phenomena has been analysed in studies on market-consumption patterns by critics like Saadia Toor and Padmini Mongia.

However, what do we do when the 'concrete, identifiable' artist herself becomes a commodity, such as Roy has become? It is impossible to abstract the sale of *The
God of Small Things from the publicity posters of Roy; it is Roy that carries the ‘aura’ in this case, not so much her artistic production. In fact, one could argue that the cultural commodity being produced, circulated and ‘consumed’ is also not The God of Small Things but Roy as the authentic postcolonial female subject, embodying the (post)modern pastiche that makes Indo-chic simultaneously ‘new’ and ‘Orientalist’ (Toor 2000).

The manipulations of the cultural industry ensured a publicity that would both launch and sell The God of Small Things, but through a hypervisibility that included the author’s photogenic beauty and tantalizing details from her personal life. In the light of this, Roy’s success in the immediate aftermath of her novel, as compared to that of Rushdie was read as being less ‘authentic’ and ‘real’, for the marketing of his name occurred after the literary merit of his writing had been established. Thus the market maneuvers were seen as working to enhance and reinforce the success of a deserving author, whereas for Roy the marketing preceded and superimposed the evaluation of the author, often at the detriment of her literary worth. The surfeit of publicity seemed to exhaust her critics who only saw her through the marketing hype and commercial success of her book.

Critiquing this success, Alex Tickell draws attention to the “remote controlled information networks and multinationals which she treats with such distrust” (2007, 75), but which nevertheless complicate the reception and understanding of her work through both aesthetic-literary as well as commercial markers. This is seen in the creation of a global brand of her name and writing, and a publishing industry that thrives off it. It is what Janet Mullaney in “Globalizing Dissent” calls the “critical construction, reception, promotion and consumption of Roy in the Western media” (2006, 117). Anything she writes on becomes big news and in
India publications like *Outlook* and *Frontline* flaunt their association with her and continue to splash her latest political essay as cover stories.

There are many problematic areas within this that need closer study. Firstly in the cultural currency as well as economic value that Roy’s writings have acquired in the recent past does she resist the commodification and institutionalizing of her name and writing for profit or is she willy-nilly complicit with the ‘exotic for profit’ demand? Does she fit in with Huggan’s portrait of postcolonial writers/thinkers as both aware of and resistant to their “interpellation as marginal spokespersons, institutionalised cultural commentators and representative (iconic) figures” (2001, 36)? An understanding of negotiations such as these would be complex. In the first place there is a need to recognise sites of struggle and resistance that exist, even as global economic forces seek to manipulate production and consumption graphs. Thus what merits attention is that the literary text can exist outside of the paradigm of neocolonial or neoliberal consumption, retaining both its oppositional, critical edge as well as its literary value. It is this negotiation of spaces that lie between the text as marketable commodity and the oppositional practices it operates through and the sites of resistance that it involves its progressive politics in, which make for interesting reading. This has also been explored by Ghosh in her nuanced study of the success of writers like Roy as she sees them:

Reflexively manipulate[ing] the terms of their own popular circulation through linguistic praxes and the staging of epistemological différance. Such aesthetic choices speak to the political and ethical agendas that they share here with historians, filmmakers, philosophers, ethnographers, and activists, among others, who aim at producing a minoritarian modernity (2004, 184).
She asserts this along with the belief that there are some "overlap in lifestyles and location" between economic globalists and cosmopolitan writers, but it does not follow that the two share common ideological frameworks. This comes with the conviction for Ghosh that despite the glare of international visibility, certain writers like Roy "engage in a literary politics that interrupts their own global circulation and rejects an overt fetishistic localism" (2004, 20). Thus even as commercial networks market writers, positioning them through their economic appeal by linking them to 'brand India' and its marketable produce, there is a group of writers who create works that have social relevance and that cannot, therefore, be marketed to the world without extracting in return from the world some act of cultural translation—or a commitment to an understanding of its larger politics.

Texts and their literary practices are capable of creating a politics that is ideologically rather than economically motivated. The seduction of the market and the pull of fame are delicately negotiated by Roy, even as she deliberately puts a distance between her writing and the resultant response it evokes. Thus the cost of success does not necessarily entail collusion with the values of the market. When she received the Booker Prize, Roy donated all of her Rs. 15-lakh award money to the NBA, for as she said in an interview to The Hindu:

I believe the time has come for alliances to be made by individual people in civil society and the other world that is being cut off (Parsai 1999).

On winning the Sydney Peace Prize in 2004, she donated the prize money to local activists for aborigine rights. Her essay collections have all been first published in India in defiance of standard commercial success laws. Outside India the publishing is from a small, independent company, South End Press. Her
speeches are, for the most part, readily available online, with no attempt made to preserve copyright. In effect, Roy has ensured that her work as an activist will not be professionalized, not be seen as an opportunistic profiting off the adulation that continues coming her way. Conscious of the industry spawned from Booker winning writers such as herself, she muses on the shifting resolutions that show up in a writers work after being swamped by public attention:

Now where does all this lead us? Is it just harmless nonsense, best ignored? How does all this ardent wooing affect our art? What kind of lenses does it put on our spectacles? How far does it remove us from the world around us? (2001, 195)

The dynamics of cultural production throw up questions of how much both economic and cultural factors influence the creative writer. Many creative artists resent the thought that their activities form part of an industry. Such a proposition, they believe, emphasizes the commercial aspects of artistic production and subjugates the pure creative impulse to the demands of the market place. Colluding with the process or using it to advance agendas and solicit support becomes a personal strategy, the thin line that writers need to both evaluate and negotiate. ²

Adulation and gratitude Roy realizes can put a heavy, suffocating burden on anyone striving for change and resistance. More than willing to shrug off the power that a willing populace would gladly invest in her, she says:

² The inadvertent complicity and collusion of third world performers/artists with global capitalism is also explored in Roy’s novel The God of Small Things in the abbreviated performances of the Kathakali dancers for uninitiated tourists who are happy with their token introductions.
In India particularly, self-righteousness is the bane of activists or public thinkers. It’s also the function of a kind of power that you begin to accumulate. Some activists have unreasonable power over people in their ‘constituencies’, they have adulation, gratitude, it can turn their heads. They begin to behave like mainstream politicians. Somebody like me runs a serious risk of thinking that I’m more important than I actually am — because people petition me all the time, with serious issues that they want me to intervene in (Interview Sengupta 2005).

There is a recognition of the dangers implicit in any kind of iconization and for Roy the warnings given out are as much for herself as they are for an adulating public. Her sharp, scathing, dismissals of the whole phenomena of celebrityhood are an attempt to overturn a commodification both of her writing and her actual physical appearance, greedily consumed by a smitten public after the Booker:

People are constantly in search of idols, heroes, villains, sirens — in search of individuals, in search of noise. Anybody in whom they can invest their mediocre aspirations and muddled thinking will do. Anyone who is conventionally and moderately ‘successful’ becomes a celebrity. It’s almost a kind of profession now — we have professional celebrities — maybe colleges should start offering a course. It’s indiscriminate — it can be Miss Universe, or a writer, or the maker of a ridiculous TV soap, the minimum requirement is success. There’s a particular kind of person who comes up to me with this star-struck smile — it doesn’t matter who I am — they just know I’m famous; whether I’m the ‘Booker Prize Winner’ or the star of the Zee Horror Show or whatever is immaterial (Ibid).

In this she realizes lies a deadly, fatal swipe, one that powers the celebrity with a potency of a sign, which is both empty and reductive:
I think that there are many ways of shutting people down, and one is to increase the burners on this celebrity thing until you become so celebrity that all you are is celebrity (Interview Goodman 2006).

And yet both her celebrity status and the ironic distancing that she uses to disentangle herself from are double edged. While what the name-fame bestowing industry and public has done is give her writing a readership, one which is not quite so readily available to activists of other committed cadres. An article in *The Hindu*, quotes Claire Armistead, literary editor *Guardian*, on Roy’s post Booker activism:

> It very much caught the imagination of the media in this country. Because it combined activism with celebrity and we are very much obsessed with celebrity. And it is very nice to see who uses that for a good cause. And it is the symbolism of it, which caught our imagination . . . So it is an emotional response we have, probably, not necessarily understanding, though, the precise politics she is dealing with. As a Booker Prize winning author, she has literary celebrity which at the moment has very high value for us (Reddy 2002).

This is the attention garnered by savvy media projections that market her through her immensely saleable attributes, be it her Booker Prize winning novel or her photogenic looks. She realizes that with this she gets access to where few activists have been before. Celebrity advocacy does have the ability to garner public attention through the access celebrities have to the news media. Scholars of social movements see this largely as a star powered ‘outside strategy’ of social protest, wherein groups functioning outside the formal policy framework seek attention to popularize issues and causes (West and Orman 2003). And yet A. Trevor Thrall and others in “Star Power: Celebrity Advocacy and the Evolution of the Public Sphere”, contend that:
The "make noise-make news-make change" model of celebrity advocacy is not an accurate description of today's political and media landscape. Our findings show that although most celebrities participate in various forms of advocacy, rarely do even the most famous celebrities get sustained attention from mass media news organizations for advocacy-related activity (2008).

In this then is the recognition that celebrities in their participation are not always central players in the machinery of creating social awareness for causes. Roy is not blinded by the transient nature of the investment by the people in her salability, until another icon comes along and in this awareness is also another reminder both to the people and to herself of the limits that circumscribe celebrityhood:

To imagine that a leader's personal charisma and a history of struggle will dent the corporate cartel is to have no understanding of how capitalism works or, for that matter, how power works (2005, 296-297).

This is the power of corporates and governments to bribe and bully. It is this same recognition that she brings to her critique of iconic public figures and leaders like S. Africa’s Mandela or Brazil’s Lula:

Time and again we have seen the heroes of our times, giants in opposition, suddenly diminished. President Lula of Brazil was the hero of the World Social Forum (WSF) in January 2002. Now he's busy implementing IMF guidelines, reducing pension benefits and purging radicals from the Workers' Party. Lula has a worthy predecessor in the former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, who instituted a massive program of privatization and structural adjustment that has left thousands of people homeless, jobless and without water and electricity... Why does this happen? ...The moment they cross the floor from the opposition into government they become hostage to a spectrum of threats--
most malevolent among them the threat of capital flight, which can destroy any
government overnight (Ibid).

When the gains from being co-opted are far greater than those from the fight or
when pressure to conform succeeds in draining the dissidence then heroes fall;
thus this "crossing the floor" becomes a co-option stemming from a conformism,
one that Roy constantly alerts herself to:

There is the danger, especially for a writer of fiction, that you can become
somebody who does what is expected of you. I could end up boring myself to
death. In India, the political anti-establishment can be socially very conservative
(Bring on the gay Gandhians!) and can put a lot of pressure on you to become
something which may not necessarily be what you want to be: they want you to
dress in a particular way, be virtuous, be sacrificing, it's a sort of imaginary and
quite often faulty extrapolation of what the middle class assumes the 'people',
the 'masses' want and expect. It can be maddening, and I want to say like Bunty
in Bunty aur Babli, 'Mujhe yeh izzat aur sharafat ki zindagi se bachao...'
(Interview Sengupta 2005).

While impatient with the baggage of expectations that a celebrity such as herself
is forced to carry, Roy is also conscious of the danger inherent in a media cum
establishment projection that congratulates itself on 'allowing' her to be:

One of the things that I worry about is that there is a way in which, say,
somebody like me can also be used by the other side. I know – I'm very aware of
the fact that in India, you know, they kind of leak the political meaning out of
things, and they say, "Oh, we have this great batsman, cricket batsman, Sachin
Tendulkar, and we have Miss Universe, Aishwarya Rai, and we have this writer
Arundhati Roy." And, you know, everything is telescoped as a kind of "Look at
all the things that we have on display," and "We are a democracy, so we allow
her to say these things, you know, and go on with it" (Interview Goodman 2006).

And yet there is an awareness that the fame and publicity that *The God of Small
Things* brought was useful, in as much as it helped garner attention for the causes
that she writes about:

One of the reasons some people get so angry with me is because I have the space
now that a lot of others who think like me don't. It was a mistake maybe for so
many people to have opened their hearts to *The God of Small Things*. Because a lot
of dams and bombs slipped in along with it (Roy Interview Barsamian 2001).

Negotiating a double edged space, Roy is conscious of the complicity of her
position within the workings of global capital as well as the expectations placed
on her as a successful writer, "All of us who are protesting or writing or
whatever, we can be commodified" (Interview Goodman 2006). Critics like
Mullaney read the risks of wholeheartedly espousing globalization from below
in "being incorporated or co-opted from above" (2006, 112). But this co-optation
is mutually bound up with its own offer of judicious use, one that could help in
the creation of spaces for new social relations that operate in anti-imperialist
interests and in this enabling the empowerment of the previously dispossessed.

Roy also realizes that in her endeavour to put together a "politics of opposition"
(Interview Bunting 2001), there is a branding that accompanies it as she finds
herself becoming a byword for the business of protest. Naomi Klein, another
brand steward for the anti globalization struggles and one who is all too familiar
with the business of branding says:
There are moments when you try to use media interest to get issues across. I’m certainly not against doing that. So it’s just a question of managing it (Interview Thomas 2002, 12).

Klein is aware of the packaging of celebrities and the contradictions within that and how these can be useful if one is “not obsessed with purity... [And] aware of contradictions” (Ibid 10). In an interview with Madeline Bunting of The Guardian, Roy recounts tongue in cheek one of many proposals she had received soliciting support for a cause:

One woman phoned me and said, ’Oh, darling, that essay on the Narmada was absolutely wonderful. I wonder if you could do one for me on child abuse?‘ And I said, ’For or against?‘ (2001)

In interviews Roy has apurpose talked of exploiting her fame and publicity to come out against the centers of power in the society in which she lives as she relates with self-mockery her position as, “The darling of the middle classes” (Interview Hass 2007). The access granted to her as she becomes both a byword for protest and its standard torch bearer is of course both useful and problematic. Conscious of this she seeks to exert a certain amount of control over the production and dissemination of her name and also challenge the stereotyping of the writer. There is a self authoring of her persona that operates alongside a media authoring, subverting and reconstructing it. This contestation involves distancing as well as manipulation and control over representation. And yet the positing of celebrity authors as loci of power and authority churned by the culture industry operates through a double bind, challenging the control that they seek over the way their image and the ways in which it actually circulates. According to Joe Moran it is the inherent paradox of celebrity culture, which “promotes individualism at the same time as it undermines it” (2000, 61). And yet in India celebrity culture has not created victims of authors the way it has in
the West. Rabid, intrusive interest in writers' lives is still in abeyance here and rarely are there media reports on how someone like Roy spends both her waking and sleeping hours. Her so called bohemian and unconventional personal life has fortunately elicited neither moral condemnation nor a prurient obsession, which is why it still remains free of the 'tabloidization' that dogs the celebrity writer in the West. Stray incidents like the legal notice issued to her and her partner Pradeep Krishen for illegally acquiring land in the protected area of the Pachmarhi hills in Madhya Pradesh and building a house there without valid permission for land-use change, did generate some news space in the media but not excessively so.

The public appearances that Roy makes at forums and demonstrations are chosen with care and in the recent past her publicly circulated photographs are no longer of the same luminous, photogenic quality and self consciousness as the earlier ones. She herself has been acutely apperceptive of the fetishization of her face, hair and nose pin by the media. According to journalists like Madeline Bunting and Judith Palmer, she deliberately cut off her curly locks after the publicity surrounding her appearance and beauty, "I was getting oppressed by my own image" (2002). Ghosh reads this as Roy's rebellious stand against the media's glamorizing impulse:

Roy, once an aerobics instructor, went on to deliberately remove the star body from the camera's voracious regard; she began to resist her own fetishization, dulling the shine by cropping the troublesome curls and dressing in workday clothes in an attempt to become photographically unobtrusive (2006, 129).

Although Roy's public appearances are few, she is not averse to interviews with select people and publications. She was part of the opening ceremony of the 53rd
International Film Festival at Cannes, as a member of the Grand Jury in the year 2000 (in line with distinguished writers including Tennesse Williams, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Francois Sagan and William Styron, who had done jury duty in the past), she is now rarely seen as a panelist or jurist at high profile artistic events. In the recent past she has turned down invitations to be part of literary festivals and writers fora, like those at Neemrana and Jaipur, which have included among others, literary superstars like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and V.S. Naipaul.

I keep away from festivals. Maybe it's a bad thing. I'm quite comfortable in Jantar Mantar, or speaking to a large audience. But otherwise I'm socially dysfunctional and getting more so. If I have to choose between going to a festival, or travelling to Kalinganagar or to Kashmir, I've no doubt which I'll do. These are the choices I'm making — it's very difficult, after that, to shift registers and go to festivals (Interview Chaudhury 2006).

And yet Roy was present at the Shanghai Literary Festival in February - March of 2008, reading from her collection, *The Shape of the Beast* and answering questions posed both by her interviewer Pankaj Mishra and the audience. The reasons for her attending the literary event in Shanghai and not those in India are not easy to analyse. It cannot be the fear of hostility from Indian audiences that prevents her from being a part of festivals here, for there are similar voices in international forums too, as was evident in Shanghai where her credibility as a chronicler of the horrors of the Gujarat riots was questioned by a belligerent audience member. She was asked if she had actually researched into the incidents surrounding what happened in Gujarat, or if her essay was simply a work of fiction. To this an unshaken Roy responded by saying that she had done an extensive amount of research and work on the subject, documentation of which was there in her essays. Further she accused her interlocutor of not having read her piece at all, for had he read it he would have seen evidence of the same,
“It’s easy to just stand there and ask insulting questions but perhaps you should do some homework before asking them” (Interview Mishra 2008).

While the Indian establishment has never been very comfortable with Roy’s pronouncements over its state policies, it is in her encounters with the Indian judiciary that there have been sharp rebukes from both her side as well as from the side of the courts. As early as 1997 after the release of The God of Small Things, she was slapped with obscenity charges in her home state Kerala by a lawyer Sabu Thomas. He accused her of outraging public morality in her sexually explicit novel, especially in the context of the liaison between Ammu and the low caste Velutha. The novel had also angered the Communists in Kerala for portraying both the party and its leaders like E.M.S. Namboodiripad in an unflattering light. Agreeing with the Marxist critic Aijaz Ahmed that Roy’s description of himself through the character of Comrade Pillai amounted to libel and defamation, Namboodiripad said he was more concerned with the novel’s anti-Communist politics and its deviant sexuality than with the libelous portrayal. By far Roy’s most well known face off with the Courts resulted from her active support of the NBA against the Sardar Sarovar dam. In fact as early as 1999 after the publication of “The Greater Common Good”, some judges took exception to the references made to the Court’s judgements on the dam in her essay, but refrained from any legal action against either her or the NBA. It was in the year 2000 that the Supreme Court accused her of drunkenness and sloganeering against it. This happened when she and others like Medha Patkar and Prashant Bhushan were protesting the Court’s contentious decision to allow the construction of a dam in the Narmada valley despite environmental and social costs. The Court further issued her a contempt notice taking exception to
certain paragraphs in her affidavit in which she had replied to a petition that sought the initiation of contempt proceedings against her.\(^3\)

The Court subsequently fined Roy, Rupees 2000 and sentenced her to a night’s stay in Delhi’s notorious Tihar jail, which she did on the night of March 7\(^{th}\) 2002. Many of her supporters had expected the famously combative Roy to refuse to pay and instead serve the three months in prison, which she did not. She says she paid the fine because she did not want the episode to give her the virtuous tag of a ‘martyr’:

I did think about staying in jail, I certainly wasn’t afraid of it... It’s never been a case of me not accepting the jurisdiction of the court, but I did not want to become a martyr to this cause. I didn’t see why I should bring further suffering on myself. I think it would have been stupid. One has to be combative in an intelligent way (Interview Meo 2002).

Roy’s fight or as she hailed it “flirtation” (Interview Zinn 2002) with the Supreme Court continued with her expose “Scandal in the Palace” on the corrupt dealings of Y.K. Sabharwal, the former Chief Justice of India, even as she says:

\(^3\) The offending paragraphs in her affidavit were: “On the grounds that judges of the Supreme Court were too busy, the Chief Justice of India refused to allow a sitting judge to head the judicial enquiry into the Tehelka scandal, even though it involves matters of national security and corruption in the highest places”

"Yet, when it comes to an absurd, despicable, entirely unsubstantiated petition in which all the three respondents happen to be people, who have publicly - though in markedly different ways - questioned the polices of the government and severely criticized a recent judgement of the Supreme Court, the Court Displays a disturbing willingness to issue notice. "It indicates a disquieting inclination on the part of the Court to silence criticism and muzzle dissent, to harass and intimidate those who disagree with it. By entertaining a petition based on an FIR that even a local police station does not see fit to act upon, the Supreme Court is doing its own reputation and credibility considerable harm". Available online at http://www.frontline.in/fl1819/18190910.htm. Last accessed 1 January 2009.
Commenting adversely on the institution can lead you straight to a prison cell as some of us have learned to our cost. It’s like having to take the wolf and the chicken and the sack of grain across the river, one by one. The river’s high and the boat’s leaking. Wish me luck (2007).

The article sought to expose the Supreme Court’s insensitivity to the common man as well as its own judges’ lack of accountability:

The expansion of judicial powers has not been accompanied by an increase in its accountability... The judiciary has managed to foil every attempt to put in place any system of checks and balances that other institutions in democracies are usually bound by (Ibid).

This was written in response to a Supreme Court judgment in 2006 that ordered the sealing of thousands of shops, houses and commercial complexes that housed what it termed as ‘illegal’ businesses functioning out of residential areas in violation of the old master plan of the city of Delhi. But Roy’s article was seen by some as one last deadly swipe at an institution she had long been at loggerheads with and therefore in a sense as a deeply personal and vindictive attack.

Roy has also through her writing drawn attention to some very prickly, sensitive subjects. Her essays on Afzal Guru and the Kashmir imbroglio have generated enough heat to make them issues of national debate:

Arundhati’s careful piecing together of the Afzal case is an indictment of the shoddiness of our investigating agencies and the unscrupulousness of our media. It seems no one really wants to know what actually happened. They are all content to find a scapegoat and make a show of justice having been done and a lesson taught to ‘Kashmiri terrorists’. And as in most such cases, they have
caught hold of a socially, politically vulnerable man. The attack was not the act of one individual. So, how can this ritual exorcising be the response of a modern democratic society? (Nikhila 2006)

If there's even an iota of truth in what Arundhati says, a parliamentary inquiry should be instituted forthwith. Justice is the hallmark of our nation; let it be seen to be done (Desnavi 2006).

Arundhati's is a very disturbing account of what most probably happened. More disturbing is that the "free" media refuses to ask these questions. The politicians don’t care—they never did—but if the media slips up in highlighting the lacunae in our "free and fair" judiciary, then the common man has no hope (Malhotra 2006).

Here it's a grateful public that acknowledges Roy's effort in highlighting seemingly lost causes such as the hanging of Afzal Guru, yet even allowances such as these are no insurance against the public ire and diatribe that she faces with every new essay. Her choice of subjects/causes and her own subject position, has always elicited extreme reactions from readers both in India and abroad. In her case writing and interceding in debates of public import is also an act riddled with complexities generated by her being a woman and a writer. Conservative and traditional interconnections view the ivory tower as suitable confinement for both and any forays outside of it are immediately sought to be censured. Thus responses from some critics start with biases that are a reminder of both her gender and her 'real' identity as a writer of fiction and not political tracts. Roy's interventions are robbed of their import and impact and are viewed as a form of hectoring and nagging that can easily be shrugged off:

It's a pity the author of God of Small Things has metamorphosed into Our Lady of Eternal Petulance. It has become quite tiring to read Arundhati’s constant
diatribes ... yet another self-indulgent exercise in purple prose by Ms Roy (Sardana 2006).

Viewed as a jeremiad against corporate globalization and large dams, Roy’s unnerving ability to serve up unpalatable truths to the Indian people parallels her criticism of the U.S., Pakistan, China, Turkey and a host of other counties that fall into her net with their histories of violence and human rights abuse. Feted across the country here in India after she won the Booker in 1997, Roy’s fall from grace happened soon after with the publication of her views on India’s nuclear tests in “The End of Imagination”. The disenchantment grew with her essays on the Narmada dam, the Gujarat riots and other volatile issues. Critics like Raza Mir read the reaction of the Indian people stemming from a sense of being ‘betrayed’ by one of their own:

It is not so much what is being said, but rather who is saying it. This was the same woman who was shown all over the media, in her wine colored sari, as she exclaimed ‘Gosh!’ when informed that she had won the Booker. That same woman who acted in that ultra-urban college movie In Which Annie Gives it Those Ones, about the campus culture of Delhi University. How dare she use the craft she perfected while talking to us against us, and somehow imply that we have anything to do with the displacement of Gujarati villagers! Roy mixes her egalitarian focus with intellectual elitism in troubling ways -- one can almost see the felicity of a domestic partner in the ways in which she pushes the buttons of India’s liberal elite with uncanny familiarity. That explains why they froth at the mouth at her in ways they do not at other literary figures like Amitav Ghosh who write against India’s nuclearization, or other popular interlocutors of globalization like Amartya Sen. Roy’s growing unpopularity with the liberal elite is perhaps the best index of her effectiveness (Mir 2001).

Roy reads her own less than popular position as that of an “edge girl”, one who treads the thin line between what the “naïve writer of fiction who isn’t aware of
the powers that work in the world” and the “all-knowing person” which leaves her as she says, caught between these worlds, “torn in very serious ways, to a point where you’re sometimes up against insanity.” (Interview Chaudhury 2006)

Roy’s interventions in public debates have marked her as both “media magnet” (Interview Armstrong 1999) and “enemy combatant” (Interview Goodman 2006) with letters in magazines and newspapers from readers, after every new article that she brings out proving her ability to draw both public ire and admiration. Roy’s political essays have elicited both admiration and anger rarely indifference as she finds herself in an abstracted tug of war that pulls her between being the “darling of the... middle classes” (Roy Interview Tim Adams 2009) or “edge girl” (Roy Interview Chaudhury 2006). A simultaneous assault of sound and fury from both the left and right sides of the political spectrum has greeted the political statements she has made in her essays and novel. This is because neither side has been able to co-opt her writings entirely into its party’s politics or agenda. Despite her obvious criticism of the Right’s pro nuclear, pro liberal-capitalist policies, she had alienated the Left even earlier in her novel, *The God of Small Things* by showing the grand patriarch and ideologue of the party E.M.S. Namboodiripad in an unflattering light. There is in her essay, “The Road to Harsud”, also a broad rejection of the Left:

> The traditional mainstream Left, still dreams of ‘seizing power’, but remains strangely unbending, unwilling to address the times. It has laid siege to itself and retreated into an inaccessible intellectual space, where ancient arguments are proffered in an archaic language that few can understand (2006, 236).

Roy has also been openly critical of the Left ruled W. Bengal government for its Singur-Nandigram SEZ policy, as well as its treatment of exiled Bangladeshi
writer Taslima Nasreen. And yet in an interview with Tehelka, she expresses her sympathy for the Maoists’ armed struggle in Chhattisgarh and neighbouring states:

The Maoists phenomenon has arisen because people have had the doors of the liberal, democratic institutions slammed in their faces. To dismiss them all as extortionists and free-loaders is not just deeply apolitical, it’s extremely unjust (Interview Chaudhury 2006).

And:

Right now, in India, the Maoists and the various Marxist-Leninist groups are leading the fight against immense injustice here. They are fighting not just the State, but feudal landlords and their armed militias. They are the only people who are making a dent. And I admire that. It may well be that when they come to power, they will, as you say, be brutal, unjust and autocratic, or even worse than the present government. Maybe, but I’m not prepared to assume that in advance. If they are, we’ll have to fight them too. And most likely someone like myself will be the first person they’ll string up from the nearest tree — but right now, it is important to acknowledge that they are bearing the brunt of being at the forefront of resistance (Ibid).

In this play between challenging and endorsing certain agendas of political parties it is still the globalization of dissent that dictates Roy’s leanings, dissent against all totalitarian impulses that underlie political fights and struggles. It is this that gives her fight an irrepressible edge but also one that seems to be aimed

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4 In November-December 2007, while the exiled Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen was being hounded in W Bengal, Roy was one of the few writers/intellectuals who defended her Right to Speech, while blaming the W Bengal government of drawing attention to her writing in a bid to deflect attention from its own mishandling of the Nandigram issue. She accused the W. Bengal Chief Minister, Buddhadev Bhattacharya of being the “principal scriptwriter who managed quite cleverly to shift all the attention from Nandigram to Taslima and Taslima is not the person who is displacing the poor peasants of Nandigram”. Available online at http://in.news.yahoo.com/071202/211/6nymf.html. Last accessed 3 December 2007.
in all directions, as she continues unwilling to be co opted or coerced. Gautam Premnath responding to the labeling of Roy as a "loose cannon, answerable only to herself" argues:

Perhaps her decision to point this cannon against the market that anointed her as a celebrity in the first place might be construed as heroic refusal, perversity, or simply as a reassuring sign that the market does not have the power to comprehensively determine personality (2003).

Within a postmodernist restructuring this can also be seen as the setting up a principle of autonomy and self authorship that allows any number of specific values, in any range or permutation to keep or change. Postmodernism hypothesizes that each individual can construct his/her own and ever changing value orientation as there exists no fixed self or core values but an ever changing self with values being repositioned and amended constantly.

While Roy rails at the inequities of contemporary times, critics question whether there is an emancipatory politics that her writing works at or is her questioning and attack of domestic and foreign issues just outlandish conspiracy theorising? Further her critique is suspected of lacking a theoretically informed framework, thereby forever preventing it from becoming a viable political project. The answers to the above can be found in both her political essays as well as in the many interviews she has given to both the Indian and foreign presses. As she says, her political views seemingly extreme are in actual fact derived from the evidence supplied by those in power. She cites the American President, George W. Bush, as a case in point, who in his lust for power and domination brazenly leaves his tracks uncovered:

[His] tactless imprudence and his brazen belief that he can run the world with his riot squad has done the opposite...He has placed on full public view the
working parts, the nuts and bolts of the apocalyptic apparatus of the American Empire (2006, 134).

At other times she says, there is an ‘altered reality’ presented to the people, one that prevents them from arriving at the truth behind news events. It is then that alertness and counter scheming becomes all important:

We put our ears to the ground and look for other ways of making sense of the world. We search for the untold story, the mentioned-in-passing military coup, the unreported genocide, the civil war in an African country written up in a one-column-inch story next to a full-page advertisement for lace underwear (2006, 51).

Further, within democracy, activists like Chomsky and Roy are commonly assailed as ‘extreme’ and ‘unreasonable’. In judging their critiques through a logic that deems it emotive and excessive their work is sought to be marginalized, one not worthy of serious engagement. This is a power ploy that aims at containing claims that raise fundamental questions about unjust structural inequalities sanctioned by states.

Further Roy’s critiques of sociopolitical issues that seem subjective are in actual fact, resolute and consistent and shaped by the assertive analysis that accompanies them. Anthony Arnove, literary editor and activist, who has interviewed her on several issues, says that before her second piece on the Narmada was released to MSNBC.com, his staff fact-checked it thoroughly, “It checked out, there may have been one date that was wrong, because she rushed to get to out, but it [was] a solid piece” (Quoted in Chhabra 2001). Other favourably disposed critics point out how Roy deliberately juxtaposes her catchy turn of phrase with a firmly attached statistic:
When the increasingly abstract power of the state, of global military alliances, of barbaric privatization is difficult to grasp, envision or consolidate, Roy offers us a tactile *arithmetic*... To intersperse her lectures with suppressed evidence becomes the deliberate and meticulous creation of a historical record - a record of crimes against humanity waged by rogue governments and multinationals where life is always profit (Ghosh 2006, 138).

Roy herself is acutely conscious of the responsibility that comes with marshalling facts and using them for propaganda in her political arguments:

The responsibility is to know what you’re doing. The responsibility is to understand that I’m not an actress or a football star that’s endorsing a cause. I'm a player. I’m making the argument. And I better know it — otherwise it would be damaging, if I didn’t. If I was going there as a bleeding heart endorsing some cause that I didn’t fully understand, I could do more harm than good. So, I suppose that is a kind of responsibility. And beyond that, does art have a responsibility, an inherent responsibility. But part of it is to remain a free-thinker, to remain somebody who says what they believe in and who’s prepared to concede a point if you think that it should be conceded and to stick to your guns if you think you should do that (Husain 2003).

In this and in her larger approach to political issues, a strong affinity to Chomsky’s methodology can be discerned. In the first place, he asserts that he does not ‘do’ theory, much like a reading of Roy’s approach would suggest. He confesses:

My own political writing is often denounced from both the left and the right for being non-theoretical- and that’s completely correct (Mitchell and Schoeffel 2002, 229).
Yet this remains so only within a conventional understanding of political theory that expects a clearly defined position vis-à-vis a liberal, socialist, Marxist, libertarian or conservative politics. As he contends:

> It seems to me the question a rational person ought to ask is, what is there in Marx’s work that is worth saving and modifying, and what is there that ought to be abandoned? (Ibid 228)

Cynics, critics, status quoists and other conservatives often dismiss these on counts of impracticality or idealism and ask if social movements have any impact. They point out that Iraq is under siege despite the millions who protested, and that dams are still standing defying their anti movements. This in turn does infect moments of doubt in resistance movements and their strategizing. But a closer look would make the gains clearer, for instance, the peace movements have prevented countries like India from sending its troops to Iraq in support of America’s aggressive policies, and also divided Europe over this. Some have questioned the expediency of spending large funds on events like the WSF, but in comparing it to the price of the deadly combat arms that a state possesses, or the cost of actual war or dam building or pay-offs in global capital deals, the WSF with all its costs would account for a mere fraction of each of these. Even a rapid scan of global struggles since the 1990s would show the increasing impact of resistance, protest and struggles leaving their mark in challenging ways. From the 1994 Zapatista revolt in Chiapas, Mexico, an uprising that burst out on the anniversary of an earlier wave of activism against the 1992 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), to the 1996 general strikes in France, through waves of strikes against neoliberal policies here in India, in Indonesia, Korea, and Latin America throughout the 1990s, back into the 1999 European mobilizations against the G7 meetings in Cologne and the worldwide campaign that halted the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, are evidence of dissidence percolating worldwide. This is especially so in comparison with the
political, intellectual, and cultural climate of the eighties—the heyday of neoliberalism, the era of the fall of the Berlin Wall, of the time when Margaret Thatcher’s TINA—"there is no alternative" vindication of free-market policies rang with conviction and the right wing ideologue Francis Fukuyama’s *End of History and the Last Man* argued that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, history as the chronicle of gigantic world-convulsing conflicts between mass ideologies and ways of life, had come to an end in the universal triumph of free-market capitalism—shows how much has changed. New vocabularies of contestation now speak through a mobilization that cannot be ignored. It is an acknowledgement that Derrida also refers to when talking of his idea of a justice to come through weak forces or movements such as the anti globalization movement:

The weak force indeed refers to ... what I call “messianicity without messianism”: I would say that today, one of the incarnations, one of the implementations of this messianicity, of this messianism without religion, may be found in the alter-globalisation movements. Movements that are still heterogeneous, still somewhat unformed, full of contradictions, but that gather together the weak of the earth, all those who feel themselves crushed by the economic hegemonies, by the liberal market, by sovereignism, etc. I believe it is these weak who will prove to be strongest in the end and who represent the future. Even though I am not a militant involved in these movements, I place my bet on the weak force of those alter-globalisation movements, who will have to explain themselves, to unravel their contradictions, but who march against all the hegemonic organisations of the world. Not just the United States, also the International Monetary Fund, the G8, all those organised hegemonies of the rich countries, the strong and powerful countries, of which Europe is part. It is these alter-globalisation movements that offer one of the best figures of what I would call messianicity without messianism, that is to say a messianicity that does not belong to any determined religion (2004).
There have also been times that Roy herself has attempted to delineate the impact of the resistance strategies of the WSF on the globalization behemoth in a bid to work out gains and future tactics:

[The] danger is that the WSF, which has played such a vital role in the movement for global justice, runs the risk of becoming an end unto itself. Just organizing it every year consumes the energies of some of the best activists. If conversations about resistance replace real civil disobedience, then the WSF could become an asset to those whom it was created to oppose. The forum must be held and must grow, but we have to find ways to channel our conversations there back into concrete action (2006, 305).

After addressing the opening plenary with her powerful speech at the Mumbai WSF, Roy declined to participate in the Karachi part of the 2006 WSF as she felt that it had “become very NGO-ized...it’s just become too comfortable a stage”, even though it had in the past played a very important role, “We’ve got to move on from there...I think we have to come up with new strategies” (Quoted in Bowman and Stone 2006). It would be easy to see this as evidence of the social incoherence that often accompanies socioeconomic developments and the resulting crises of contemporary capitalism. These developments further splinter identities, render mass resistance inconceivable, and make widespread collective action for radical change increasingly difficult. And yet within Roy’s statements it is important to locate an anxiety, which is not evidence of the kind of ‘cultured despair’ that Sharon D. Welch in her book, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk* defines as the ethic of despair that is the prerogative of the privileged classes. Welch sees it as a helplessness that overtakes groups and individuals accustomed to the ease of achievement and who therefore view a cause requiring hard work or lacking a guarantee of success, as a senseless waste of effort:

Becoming so easily discouraged is the privilege of those accustomed to too much power, accustomed to having needs met without negotiation and work,
accustomed to having a political and economic system that responds to their needs (2000, 41).

Rethinking tactics, and working through the many contradictions that struggles and movements are constantly faced with, is part of Roy’s continuously evolving strategy of dissent and resistance. She continues to take unpopular and confrontational positions in her interventions aware of the political potential of writing as a force of radical change, despite a culture that tries very hard to dismiss any form of intellectual dissent unless it has a commodifiable and utilitarian outcome in the interests of the capitalist order. And yet democracy rests upon an informed citizenry capable of critical thinking contributing to progressive change and within this the political purchase of Roy’s contribution cannot be negated.

References-


