CHAPTER III

1st PART

In The Cost of Living, Arundhati Roy attacks a so called monument of modern civilization: the dam. One would think these modern advancements are harmless, but Roy tells a stunning tale that is, essentially, about genocide. Placed in valleys with forests and rivers and villages, the dams are like bombs. Plant and animal life are forever eradicated, and people “are flushed out like rats from the land they have lived on for centuries.” And these people, if they survive, become like “refugees of an unacknowledged war.”

This isn’t a new tragedy. Roy establishes that in the past 50 years, roughly 50 million citizens of India have been displaced by the big dams. This is a staggering amount of people, and when Roy uncovers the statistic through sound research, she aptly notes that she feels “like someone who’s just stumbled on a massive grave.” She also shows the real consequences for these millions of people. Like refugees in their own country, formerly self-sufficient citizens drift into urban slums or barbaric squatter camps.

With the skill of a muckraking investigative journalist, Roy unravels the tangled web of greed and corruption behind the tragedy. “It’s time to spill a few states secrets,” She states. She does exactly this—naming names and depicting the greedy motives of the World Bank and private consultants who have colluded in the mass
destruction in exchange for “Range Rovers, holidays in Tuscany, and private schools for their children.” Roy also portrays a current battle as activists and “the common man” attempt to take on the powers that be.

In the second half of this book, Roy rails against India’s recent detonation of a nuclear bomb. She argues that rather than bringing power to India, the bomb is the “ultimate colonizer” -- “the most antihuman, outright evil thing.” She lambastes the arrogance of politicians who claim to be democratic yet make no effort to educate and inform millions of their citizens. She mulls over questions of identity and imperialism, as well as her own personal post-fame conflicts with greed and responsibility. Roy’s book is slim and concise. She gets right to the point and, while the point is harrowing, her gifts for language and storytelling make this book more than a polemic.


In the Second Essay, “The End of Imagination,” a criticism of India’s decision to test a nuclear bomb that was published in the “Nation” in September 1998. Roy asks why India built the bomb when more than 400 million Indians are illiterate and live in absolute poverty.
In her novel The God of Small Things, Arundhati Roy---with a great heart but on unrelenting eye---drew the unforgettable portrait of one family in India. Now she lavishes the same acrobatic language and fierce humanity on the future of her beloved country. In this spirited polemic, Arundhati Roy dares to take on two of the great illusions of India’s progress: the massive dam projects which were supposed to have this sprawling subcontinent into the modern age, but which instead have displaced untold millions, and the detonation of India’s first nuclear bomb, with all its attendant faustian bargains. Merging her inimitable voice with the moral outrage, imaginative sweep and narrative gifts of a Dickens;

Roy peels away the mask of democracy and prosperity to show the true costs hidden beneath. For those who have been mesmerized by her fictional vision of India, here is a sketch--traced in fire--of its topsy-turvy society, where the lives of the many are sacrificed for the comforts of the few.

Roy focuses her attention on the Narmada Valley, home to 325,000 people, mostly of minority tribes. When the building of a series of huge dams is completed the valley will flood and all will lose their homes, becoming, in a bloodless a cronym, PAPs: Project Affected Persons. A whole way of life will end as PAPs are relocated to dismal camps or end up in urban slums. Roy clearly and bitinglly
demonstrates, however, that it is not at all clear the project will do what it is supposed to. It may use more electricity than it generates or destroy more farmland than it creates, and those who are to receive drinking water may never have a drop reach them. The Indian state goes on its naughty way, blithely dismissing all doubts. Yet the people of the Narmada Valley have organized and resisted, and though the outcome is unclear, this resistance is what inspires Roy. The Narmada Project is a series of big dams being constructed on the Narmada river for providing irrigation and generating power. The project has been in news because of massive human displacement and corruption in rehabilitation of the displaced people.

The NBA (Narmada Bachao Andolan) has been fighting for over 20 years to get adequate rehabilitation for people who have been dislocated from the narmada valley in central India. The NBA claims that nearly 35,000 families have not been rehabilitated even as their houses and fertile lands are being submerged due to the Narmada Valley Project.

Dr. Sudhirendra Sharma from the Ecological Foundation said that the Indian government is looking at development from a different angle. He added:

“For the government the poor do not matter. It is focusing on a developmental model that leans heavily on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and this is a model that accentuates poverty. We have
to critically look at growth and development once again.”

Associate Co-ordinator from South Asia Network on Dams, River and People (SANDRP), a research organization that monitors management and activities related to rivers, Bipin Chandra said:

“People who were uprooted nearly 50 years back due to big dams have not been rehabilitated as yet. Nearly 500 families from the Pong dam (constructed in 1954 in the east Indian State of Orissa) and another 700 families from the Bhakhra Dam (constructed in 1963 in the North Indian State of Himachal Pradesh) are still homeless.”

Both these Dams (Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada) had been constructed amidst much fanfare, soon after India’s independence from the British, and were called “the temples of Modern India” by India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Displacement causes untold misery to the people as it uproots them, destroys their culture, snatches education from children, takes away livelihoods from the men and forces women to work harder for their sustenance.

In the sixty years since independence, after Nehru’s famous “Dams are the Temples of Modern India” speech (one that he grew to regret in his own life time), his foot soldiers threw themselves
into the business of building dams with unnatural fervour. Dam building grew to be equated with Nation-building. Their enthusiasm alone should have been reason enough to make one suspicious. Not only did they build new dams and new irrigation systems, they took control of small, traditional systems that had been managed by village communities for thousands of years, and allowed them to atrophy. To compensate the loss, the Government built more and more dams. Big ones, little ones, tall ones, short ones. The result of its exertions is that India now boasts of being the world's third largest dam builder. According to the Central Water Commission, we have three thousand six hundred dams that qualify as Big Dams, three thousand three hundred of them built after Independence. One thousand more are under construction. Yet one-fifth of our population—200 million people—does not have safe drinking water and two-thirds—600 million—lack basic sanitation.

Big Dams started well, but have ended badly. There was a time when everybody loved them, everybody had them—the Communists, Capitalists, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists. There was a time when Big Dams moved men to poetry. Not only longer. All over the world there is a movement growing against Big Dams. In the first World they're being de-commissioned, blown up. 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 (deciding who will get
how much water and who will grow what where). They’re a guaranteed way of taking a farmer’s wisdom away from him. They’re 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.

In India over the last ten years the fight against the Sardar Sarovar Dam has come to represent for more than the fight for one river. This has been its strength as well as its weakness. Some years ago, it became a debate that captured the popular imagination. That’s what raised the stakes and changed the complexion of the battle. From being a fight over the fate of a river Valley it began to raise doubts about an entire political system. What is at issue now is the very nature of our democracy. Who owns this land? Who owns its river? Its forests? Its fish? These are huge questions. They are being taken hugely seriously by the state. They are being answered in one voice by every institution at its command the army, the police, the bureaucracy, the courts. And not just answered, but answered unambiguously, in bitter, brutal ways.

The Government of India has detailed figures for how many million tonnes of foodgrain or edible oils the country produces and how much more we produce now than we did in 1947. It can tell you how much bauxite is mined in a year or what the total surface area of the National Highways adds up to. It’s possible to access minute-to-minute information about the stock exchange or the value
of the rupee in the World Market. We know how many Cricket Matches we've lost on a Friday in Sharjah. It's not hard to find out how many graduates India Produced, or how many men had vasectomies in any given year. But the Government of India does not have a figure for the number of people that have been displaced by dams or sacrificed in other ways at the altars of "National Progress". How can you measure progress if you don't know what it costs and who paid for it? How can the 'Market' put a price on things-Food, Clothes, electricity, running water-when it doesn't take into account the real cost of production.

A huge percentage of the displaced are tribal people (57.6 percent in the case of the Sardar Sarovar Dam). Include Dalits and the figure becomes obscence. According to the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, it's about 60 percent. When it comes to Rehabilitation, the Government's priorities are clear. India does not have a National Rehabilitation Policy. According to the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (amended in 1984), the Government is not legally bound to provide a displaced person anything but a cash compensation. A cash compensation, to be paid by an Indian Government official to an illiterate tribal man (the women get nothing) in a land where even the postman demands a tip for a delivery! Most tribal people have no formal title to their land and therefore cannot claim compensation anyway. Most tribal people, or let's say most small farmers, have as much use for money as a Supreme Court
Judge has for a bag of fertilizer.

The millions of displaced people don’t exist anymore. When history is written they won’t be in it. Not even as statistics. Some of them have subsequently been displaced three and four times—a dam, an artillery proof range, another dam, a uranium mine, a powerful project.

The millions of displaced people in India are nothing but refugees of an unacknowledged war. And we, like the citizens of white America and French Canada and Hitler’s Germany, are condoning it by looking away. 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 national interest. Therefore gladly, unquestioningly, almost gratefully, we believe what we’re told. We believe that it benefits us to believe. It is n’t an easy tale to tell. It’s full of numbers and explanations. It’s true that India has progressed.

Certainly India has progressed but most of its people haven’t. Our leaders say that we must have nuclear Missiles to protect us from the threat of China and Pakistan. But we can’t protect us from ourselves?

The Indian State is not a state that has failed. It is a state that has succeeded impressively in what it set out to do. It has been ruthlessly efficient in the way it has appropriated India’s resources-
its land, its water, its forests, its fish, its meat, its egg, its air-and re-distributed it to a favoured few.

The Narmada is legally bound by human decree to produce as much water as the Government of India Commands it to produce. Its proponents boast that the Narmada Valley Project is the most ambitious river valley project ever conceived in human history. They plan to build 3,200 dams that will reconstitute the Narmada. Of these, 30 will be major dams, 135 medium and the rest small. Two of the major dams will be multi-purpose mega dams. The Sardar Sarovar in Gujarat and the Narmada Sagar in Madhya Pradesh will, between them, hold more water than any other reservoir on the Indian subcontinent.

For better or for worse it will affect the lives of twenty-five million people who live in the valley. Yet, even before the Minister of Environment cleared the project, the World Bank offered to Finance the lynch-Pin of the Project-the Sardar Sarovar Dam (whose reservoir displaces people in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, but whose benefits go to Gujarat).

The relationship between us is exactly like the relationship between a landless labourer steeped in debt and the local Bania-it is an affectionate relationship, the poor man loves his Bania because he's always there when he's 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 overcome.

The Government claims the Sardar Sarovar Projects will produce 1450 mega watts of power. The thing about multi-purpose dams like the Sardar Sarovar is that their ‘purposes’ (irrigation, power production, and flood control) conflict with each other. 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 riddle 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 3 percent of the power that its planners say it will 50 mega watts.¹ Roy told a story about the Dams:

I grew interested in what was happening in the Narmada Valley because almost everyone I spoke to had a passionate opinion based on what seemed to me to be very little information. That interested
me too, so much passion in the absence of information.
I substituted the fiction I intended to read in the coming months with journals and books and documentary films about dams and why they’re built and what they do. I developed an inordinate, unnatural interest in drainage and irrigation. I met some of the activists who had been working in the valley for years with the NBA—the extraordinary Narmada Bachao Andolan. What I learned changed me, fascinated me. It revealed, in relentless detail, a Government’s highly evolved, intricate way of pulverising a people behind the genial mask of democracy. I have angered people in India greatly by saying this compared to what goes on in other developing countries. India is paradise. I’ve been told. It’s true. India is not Tibet, or Afganistan, or Indonesia. It’s true that the idea of the Indian army staging a military coup is almost unimaginable. Nevertheless, what goes on in the name of ‘national interest’ is monstrous.

Though there has been a fair amount of writing on the Narmada Valley Development Project, most of it has been for a ‘special interest’ readership. Government documents are classified as
secret. Experts and consultants have hijacked various aspects of the issue-displacement, rehabilitation, hydrology, drainage, waterlogging, catchment area treatment, passion, politics and carried them off to their lairs where they guard them fiercely against the unauthorised curiosity of interested laypersons. Disconnecting the politics from the economics from the emotion and human tragedy of uprootment is like breaking up a band. The individual musicians don’t rock in quite the same way.

In March Roy travelled to the Narmada Valley. She returned ashamed of how little she knew about a struggle that had been going on for so many years. She returned convinced that the Valley needed a writer. Not just a writer, a fiction writer. A fiction writer who recognised that what was happening in the Valley was perhaps too vulgar for fiction, but who could use the craft and rigour of writing fiction to make the separate parts cohere, to tell the story in the way it deserves to be told. She believe that the story of the Narmada Valley is nothing less than the story of modern India.

Today India has more irrigated land than any other country in the world. In the last 50 years the area under irrigation increased by about 140 percent. It's true that in 1947, when colonialism formally ended. India was food-deficient. In 1951 we produced 51 million tonnes of foodgrains. Today we produce close to 200 million tonnes. Certainly, this is a tremendous achievement. (Even though there are worrying signs that it may not be sustainable). But surely nobody
can claim that all the credit for increased food production should go to Big Dams. Most of it has to do with mechanised exploitation of ground water, with the use of high-yielding hybrid seeds and chemical fertilizers.

The extraordinary thing is that there are no official figures for exactly what portion of the total foodgrain production comes from irrigation from Big Dams.

Similarly, in the case of electricity, planners flaunt the fact that India consumes 20 times more electricity today than it did 50 years ago and yet over 70 percent of rural households have no access to electricity. In the poorest states- Bihar, Utter Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan- over 80 percent of Adivasi and Dalit households have no electricity. Electricity produced in the name of the poor consumed by the rich with endless appetites.

Official estimates say that 22 percent of the power generated is lost in transmission and system inefficiencies. Existing dams are silting up at a speed which halves and sometimes quarters their projected life-spans. It seems obvious, surely, that before the government decides to build another dam it ought to do everything in its power to maintain and increase the efficiency of the systems it already has in place. What happens, infact, is the reverse.

Dams are built, people are uprooted, forests are
submerged and then the project is simply abandoned. Canals are never completed.... the benefits never accrue (except to the politicians, the bureaucrats and the contractors involved in the construction). The first dam that was built on the Narmada is a case in point—the Bargi Dam in Madhya Pradesh was completed in 1990. It cost ten times more than was budgeted and submerged three times more land than engineers said it would. To save the cost and effort of doing a survey, the government just filled the reservoir without warning anybody. 70,000 people from 101 villages were supposed to be displaced. Instead, 114,000 people from 162 villages were displaced. They were evicted from their homes by rising waters, chased out like rats, with no prior notice. There was no rehabilitation. Some got a meagre case compensation. Most got nothing. Some died of starvation. Others moved to slums in Jabalpur. And all for what? Today, ten years after it was completed, the Bargi Dam produces some electricity, but irrigates only as much land as it submerged. Only 5 percent of the land its planners claimed it would irrigate. The Government says it
has no money to make the canals. Yet it has already begun work of downstream, on the mammoth Narmada Sagar Dam and the Maheshwar Dam.

When Roy was writing “The Greater Common Good” her essay on the Narmada Valley Project—wading through the fusillade of ‘Pro-dam’ and ‘anti-dam’ statistics, what shocked her more than anything else was not the statistics that are available but the ones that aren’t. To her, this is the most unpardonable thing of all. It is unpardonable on the part of the Indian State as well as on the part of the intellectual community.

When she wrote this Essay, She thought it necessary to try and put a figure on how many people have actually been displaced by Big Dams. To do a back-of-the-envelope caculation. A sort of sanity check. The point was to at least begin to bring some perspective to the debate. As her starting promise, she used a study of 54 large Dams by the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) based on field data from the central water commission. The reservoirs of these 54 dams, between them, displaced about 2.4 million people. The average number of people displaced by each dam came to 44,000. Correcting for the fact that the dams the IIPA chose to study may have been some of the larger of the Large Dam Projects, She pared down the average number of displaced people to 10,000 people per dam. Using this scaled-down average, the total
number of people displaced by Large Dams in the last fifty years worked out to a scandalous 33 million people!

Some of them had stood in their homes in chestdeep water for days on end, protesting the Supreme Court’s decision to raise the height of the Sardar Sarovar Dam. They were seen as people who were unwilling to pay the price for National Progress. They were labelled anti-national and anti-development and carted off to jail. The general consensus seems to be “Yes it’s sad, but hard decisions have to be made. Someone has to pay the price for development.” The evidence against Big Dams is mounting alarmingly-irrigation, disaster, dam induced floods, the fact that there are more drought-prone and flood-prone areas today than there were in 1947. The fact that not a single river in the plains has potable water. The fact that 250 million people have no access to safe drinking water.

And yet there has not been an official audit, a comprehensive, honest, thoughtful, post-project evaluation of a single Big Dam to see whether or not it has achieved what it set out to achieve. Whether or not the costs were justified, or even what the costs actually were.

In several resettlement sites, people have been dumped in rows of corrugated tin sheds which are ‘Furnaces’ in summer and ‘Fridges’ in winter. Some of them are located in dry river beds
which, during the monsoon, turn into fast-flowing drifts. She has been to some of these ‘sites’. She has seen film footage of others:

Shivering children, perched like birds on the edge of charpoys, 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, thin fathers swimming after them to retrieve what they can.

When the water recede, they leave ruin. Malaria, diarrhoea, sick cattle stranded in the slush. Forty households were moved from Manibeli in Maharashtra to a resettlement site in Gujarat. In the first year, thirty-eight children died.

Many of those who have been resettled are people who have lived all their lives deep in the forest with virtually no contact with money and the modern world. Suddenly they find themselves left with the option of either starving to death or walking several kilometres to the nearest town, sitting in the market place, (both men and women) offering themselves as wage labour, like goods on sale.

Instead of a forest from which they gathered everything they needed- food, fuel, fodder, rope, gum, tobacco, tooth powder, medicinal herbs, housing material- they earn between ten and twenty rupees a day with which to feed and keep their families. Instead of a river, they have a hand pump. In their old village, certainly they were poor, extremely poor, but they were insured against absolute
disaster. If the rains failed, they had the forests to turn to the river to fish in. Their live stock was their fixed deposite. Without all this, they’re a heart beat away from destitution.

For the people who’ve been resettled, everything has to be re-learned. Every little thing, every big thing: From shitting and pissing (where d’you do it when there’s no jungle to hide you?) to buying a bus ticket, to learning a new language, to understanding money. And worst of all, learning to be supplicants. Learning to take orders. Learning to have masters. Learning to answer only when they’re addressed.

So much for project costs. Now let’s take a look at the benefits. The started benefits.

The whole purpose of the Sardar Sarovar, the Government of Gujarat says, is to take water to the drought-prone regions of Kutch and Saurashtra which lie at the very end of the canal network. The Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Publicity Campaign is full of pictures of parched earth and dying cattle. In the name of Kutch and Saurashtra, it justifies using about 80 percent of Gujarat’s irrigation budget for the Sardar Sarovar. It says, categorically, that there is no alternative to the Sardar Sarovar.
When the Sardar Sarovar Project was first planned, there was no mention of drinking water for the village in Kutch and Saurashtra. It was supposed to be primarily an irrigation project. When the Project ran into political trouble, the Government discovered the emotive power of thirst. Drinking water became the rallying cry of the Sardar Sarovar Project.

The people in the Valley responded by declaring that they would drown rather than move from their homes. The NBA defied the gag imposed on them by the court. In a statement to the press, its leader, Medha Patkar, announced that she would drown herself in the river if the court permitted any further construction.

As a response to this, the Gujarat Government filed a petition asking that the NBA be removed as petitioners for committing contempt of court and that criminal action be take against her for writing "The Greater Common Good" which, they claimed undermined the dignity of the court and attempted to influence the course of justice.

To heed the warning might be prudent, but in her (Roy’s) opinion it would undermine the dignity of Art. And, as we all know, there's no excuse for bad art. Just as much as the Valley needs a writer, She (Roy) believes that writers need the Valley. Not just writers-poets painters, dancers, actors, film-makers-every kind of artist. If we are to remain alive, if we are to continue to work, we
need to reclaim the political arena which we seem to have so willingly
abdicated. If we choose to look away now, at this point-some how
it doesn’t say very much about our art. She is not suggesting that
everybody must turn out a hectoring, political manifesto. She is all
formatisse and goldfish on a windowsill. All her mean is that from
time to time we could lift our eyes from the page and acknowledge
the condition of the world around us. Acknowledge the price that
someone, somewhere far away is paying, in order for us to switch
our lights on, cool our rooms and run our baths.

It was only some years later that the full extent of the horror-
the impact that the dams would have, both on the people who were
to be displaced and the people who were supposed to benefit-began
to surface. The Narmada Valley Development Project came to be
known as India’s Greatest Planned Environmental Disaster. The
various people’s organisations massed into a single organisation and
the narmada Bachao Andolan-the extraordinary NBA-was born.

But fighting people tire. They fall ill, they grow old. Even the
young age prematurely. For twenty years now, since the Tribunal’s
award, the ragged army in the Valley has lived with the fear of
eviction. For twenty years, in most areas there has been no sign
of ‘development’ no roads, no schools, no wells, no medical help.
For twenty years, it has borne the stigma ‘slated for submergence’
so it’s isolated from the rest of society (no marriage proposals, no
land transactions). They’re a bit like the Hibakushas in Japan (the Victims and their descendants of the bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki). The ‘fruits of modern development’ when they finally came, brought only horror. Roads brought surveyors. Surveyors brought trucks. Trucks brought policemen. Policemen brought bullets and beatings and rape and arrest and, in one case, murder. The only genuine ‘fruit’ of modern development that reached them, reached them in advertently—the right to raise their voices, the right to be heard. But they have fought for twenty years now.

In addition to all this, they have to learn how to make written representations to the Grievance Redressal Committee or the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam for any particular problems they might have. Recently, 3,000 people came to Delhi to protest their situation—travelling overnight by train, living on the blazing streets. The President wouldn’t meet them because he had an eye infection; Maneka Gandhi, the Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, wouldn’t meet them but asked for a written representation (Dear Maneka, Please do not build the dam, Love, The People). When the representation was handed to her, she scolded the little delegation for not having written it in English.

In Vadaj, a resettlement site she visited near Baroda, the man who was talking to her rocked his sick baby in his arms, clumps of flies gathered
on its sleeping eyelids. Chidren collected around them, taking care not to burn their bare skin on the scorching tin walls of the shed they call a home. The man’s mind was far away from the troubles of his sick baby. He was making her a list of the fruit he used to pick in the forest. He counted forty-eight kinds. He told her that he didn’t think he or his children would ever be able to afford to eat any fruit again. Not unless he stole it. She asked him what was wrong with his baby. He said it would be better for the baby to die than to have to live like this. She asked what the baby’s mother thought about that. She didn’t reply. She just stared.

Twelve families, mostly Dalits, who had small holdings in the vicinity of the dam site had their land acquired. They told her how when they objected, cement was poured into their water pipes, their standing crops were bulldozed, and the police occupied the land by force. All 12 families are now landless and work as wage labour.

The area that the people of Jalud are going to be moved to is a few kilometres in land, away from the river, adjoining a predominantly Dalit and tribal village called Samraj. She saw the huge tract of land that had been marked off for them. It was a hard, stony hillock with stubbly grass and scrub, on which truckloads of
silt were being unloaded and spread out in a thin layer to make it look like rich black cotton soil. The story goes like this: at the instance of the S.Kumars (Textile Tycoons turned Nation Builders), the District Magistrate acquired the hillock, which was actually village common grazing land that belonged to the people of Samraj. In addition to this, the land of 10 Dalit Villager was acquired. No compensation was paid.

The villagers, whose main source of income was their live stock, had to sell their goats and buffaloes because they no longer had anywhere to graze them. Their only remaining source of income lies (lay) on the banks of a small lake on the edge of the village. In summer, when the water level recedes, it leaves a shallow ring of rich silt on which the villagers grow (grew) rice, melons and cucumber.

Roy reveals another story regarding the beginning of the Dam:

When I arrived on the banks of the Narmada in late March (1999), it was a month after the Supreme Court Suddenly vacated the stay on the construction work of the Sardar Sarovar Dam. I had read pretty much everything I could lay my hands on (all those ‘secret’-Government documents). I had a clear idea of the lay of the land—or what had happened where and when and
to whom. The story played itself out before my eyes like a tragic film whose actors I'd already met. Had I not known its history. Nothing would have made sense. Because in the Valley there are stories within stories and it's easy to lose the clarity of rage in the sludge of other people's sorrow. I ended my journey in Kevadia Colony, where it all began. Thirty-eight years ago, this is where the Government of Gujarat decided to locate the infrastructure it would need for starting work on the dam; guest houses, office blocks, accommodation for engineers and their staff, roads leading to the dam site, ware houses for construction material.

It is located on the cusp of what is now the Sardar Sarovar reservoir and the wonder canal, Gujarat's 'lifeline'. Which is going to quench the thirst of millions.

Nobody knows this, but Kevadia colony is the key to the world. Go there, and secrets will be revealed to you.

In the winter of 1961, a government officer arrived in a village called kothie and informed the villagers that some of their land would
be needed to construct a helipad. In a few days a bulldozer arrived and flattened standing crops. The villagers were made to sign papers and were paid a sum of money, which they assumed was payment for their destroyed crops. When the helipad was ready, a helicopter landed on it, and out came Prime Minister Nehru. Most of the villagers couldn’t see him because he was surrounded by policemen. Nehru made a speech. Then he pressed a button and there was an explosion on the other side of the river. After the explosion he flew away. That was the inauguration of the earliest avatar of the Sardar Sarovar Dam.

After Nehru left, the Government of Gujarat arrived in strength. It acquired 1,600 acres of land from 950 families from six villages. The people were Tadvi tribals, but because of their proximity to the city of Baroda, not entirely unversed in the way of a market economy. They were sent notices and told that would be paid cash compensation and given jobs on the dam site. Then the nightmare began. Trucks and bulldozers rolled in. Forests were filled, standing crops destroyed. Everything turned into a whirl of jeeps and engineers and cement and steel. Mohan Bhai Tadvi watched eight acres of his land with standing crops of jawar, toovar and cotton being levelled. Overnight he became an endless labourer. Three years later he received his cash compensation of 250 rupees an acre in three instalments.
Dersukh Bhai & Vesa Bhai’s father was given 3,500 rupees for his house and five acres of land with its standing crops and all the trees on it. He remembers walking all the way to Rajpipla (the district headquarters) as a little boy, holding his father’s hand. He remembers how terrified they were when they were called in to the Tehsildar’s office. They were made to surrender their compensation notices and sign a receipt. They were illiterate, so they didn’t know how much the receipt was made out for.

“People say that the Sardar Sarovar Dam is an expensive Project. But it is bringing drinking water to millions. This is our lifeline. Can you put a price on this? Does the air we breathe have a price? We will live. We will drink. We will bring glory to the state of Gujarat.”


“We will request you to move from your houses after the dam comes up. If you move it will be good. Otherwise we shall release the water and drown you all.”

—Morarji Desai, speaking at a public meeting in the submergence zone of the Pong
Dam in 1961.

"Why didn’t they just poison us? Then we wouldn’t have to live in this shit-hole and the Government could have survived alone with its precious dam all the itself."

—Ram Bai, whose village was submerged when the Bargi Dam was built on the Narmada. She now lives in a slum in Jabalpur.

For twenty years above now, the people of Gujarat have waited for the water they believe the wonder canal will bring them. For years the Government of Gujarat has invested 85 percent of the State’s irrigation budge into the Sardar Sarovar Projects. Every smaller, quicker, local, more feasible scheme has been set-a-side for the sake of this. Election after election has been contested and won on the ‘water ticket’. Everyone’s hopes are pinned to the wonder cannal.

It’s worth knowing that of the one billion people in the world who have no access to safe-drinking water, 855 million live in rural areas. This is because the cost of installing an energy. Intensive network of thousands of kilometres of pipelines, aqueducts, pumps and treatment plants that would be needed to provide drinking water to scattered rural populations is prohibitive. Nobody builds Big Dams to provide drinking water to rural people. Nobody can afford to.
Alluding to the fanatics who destroyed the mosque in Ayodhya (in 1992), Arundhati Roy questions the propriety of “destroying the Sacred hills and groves, the places of worship. The ancient homes of the gods and demons of tribal people,” “of submerging a valley that has yielded fossils, microliths and rock paintings, the only valley in India, according to archeologists, that contains an uninterrupted record of human occupation from the old stone age.” Her questions are quite valid and difficult to answer for people who talk so much about the heritage of India.

We cannot but appreciate her concern for the loss of biodiversity and wildlife habitat when she writes:

“The Sardar Sarovar Reservoir, when the dam reaches its full height, is going to submerge about 13,000 hectares of Prime forest land.... Between the narmada Sagar Dam and the Sardar Sarovar Dam, 50,000 hectares of old growth broad leaved forest will be submerged-to mitigate this loss, the Government decided to expand the shoolpaneshwar wildlife sanctuary near the dam, south of the river. There is a hare brained scheme that envisages drowning animals from the submerged forests swimming their way to wild-life corridors that will be created for them and setting up home in the new! Improved! Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary.”
She draws our attention to the fact that the dam is going to destroy the Hilsa fish of the Narmada estuary in Bharuch which produces 13,000 tonnes of Hilsa and fresh water prawn and deprive 40,000 fisher folk of their livelihood. There is no way to make good of the loss because

"So far, scientists have not managed to breed Hilsa artificially. The rearing of Hilsa depends on getting spawn from wild adults, which will in all likelihood be eliminated by the dam. Dams have either eliminated or endangered one-fifth of the world's fresh water fish."

Arundhati Roy explodes our widely held notions about the benefits of canal irrigation when she declares;

"Perennial irrigation does to soil roughly that anabolic stroids do to the human body."

Traditional subsistence crops that need less water yield place to cash crops that need more water. That disturbs the normal living of the people and overtimes make the soil

"too poor to support the extra demands made on it. Gradually, in the way a steroid-using athlete becomes an invalid, the soil becomes depleted and degraded, and agricultural yields begin to decrease."
Then she reveals the fact that

‘land irrigated by well water is today almost twice as productive as land irrigated by canals.’

As canals block the flow of the natural, seasonal water and lead to water logging; it becomes necessary to build an alternate, artificial drainage system in conjunction with the canals. But the dam builders exclude it from their ambitious irrigation projects because the cost is simply prohibitive and makes the projects unviable.

“It costs five times as much to provide adequate drainage as it does to irrigate the same amount of land.”

That is why they have excluded drainage from their plans too. It means permitting salinization and water-logging to devastate land and then to seek fresh loans from World Bank and other agencies. That is what has happened in other countries and that is what is going to happen in India too.

“Irrigation uses up the water you need to produce power. Flood control requires you to keep the reservoir empty during the monsoon months.... And this defeats the purpose of irrigation, which is to store the monsoon water....The result of all 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 3% of the power that its planner say it will. About 50 megawatts. And if you take into account the power needed to pump water through its vast network of canals, the Sardar Sarovar Projects will end up consuming more electricity than they produce.”

Even in terms of human suffering, the Project deserve no support. Official estimates of the people it will displace have varied from year to year but the Narmada Bachao Andolan places the figure at about half a million. Most of the project affected people are excluded from government estimates on technical grounds. Even when their claims are admitted, they fare hardly better. The Government of Gujarat boasts of its rehabilitation policy and offers to resettle not only its own displaced persons but those from madhya pradesh and Maharashtra as well. in practice, it has not “even managed to rehabilitate people from its own 19 villages slated for submergence, let alone the rest of the 226 villages in the other two states.”

The so-called resettlement proves a cruel joke, when in several resettlement sites, people are “dumped in rows of corrugated tinsheds which are furnaces in summer and fridges in winter. Some of them are located in dry river beds which, during the monsoon, turn into
fast-flowing drifts."

Malaria, diarrhoea and other diseases are taking a toll everyday in these sites. Then the displaced persons, mostly tribals and dalits, have lost their forest, their river and their live stock which kept them alive. They are destitutes now striving to earn a living as wage-labourers. Such things have happened and will continue to happen as the recommendations of the morse report as well as those of the five member group were disregard.

The Greater Common Good was criticised by people accustomed to viewing big dams as the instruments of progress. Gail omvedt found nothing but ‘rhetoric’ and ‘eco-romanticism’ in it. Arundhati Roy gave her a befitting reply:

“Gail omvedt subscribes to the classic ‘green revolution’ school of thought-maximum production in a minimum period of time regardless of ecological consequences. Longterm sustainability is not taken into consideration. Thousand of hectares of land are now water-logged and salt-affected thanks to this approach. It’s the steroid-user syndrome. If avoiding steroids is romantic then perhaps I am a romantic.... We must stop pretending that rehabilitation is possible. It isn’t. In the last 15 years not one village in the submergence zone has been rehabilitated.”
IIInd PART

In response to India’s testing of nuclear weapons in Pokhran, Rajasthan, Roy wrote The End of Imagination (1998), a critique of the Indian Government’s nuclear Policies. It was published in her collection The Cost of Living (1999), in which she also crusaded against India’s Massive hydroelectric dam project in the central and western states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.

The issues on which Arundhati Roy has most frequently and most forcefully spoken are two: big corporate business and the war machine—whose interconnection or collusion President Dwight Eisenhower had termed the “Military-industrial complex.” This interconnection has been steadily tightening since Eisenhower’s time. Basically, the war machine is designed to keep markets stable and safe for business investments; in turn, corporate business finances the maintenance of the war machine. For Roy, the most gearing and preposterous manifestations of this collusion in India are the development of the nuclear bomb and the construction of “big dams” or mega-dams. Some of her sharpest attacks have been leveled at these targets. Although not intuitively evident, she has neatly pinpointed the linkage between the two phenomena—while inserting both in the broader framework of globalization. From a global angle, dam construction is part of the global market dominated by western corporate business; on the other hand, nuclear bombs are compensatory devices meant to provide domestic security and to
pacify volatile masses.

As she noted in an interview with David Barsamian in 2001, it is crucial to perceive the links between “privatization, globalization, and [religious] fundamentalism.” For when, in constructing dams, a country like India is “selling its entire power sector” to foreign business firms (like Enron), pressure is placed on the government to compensate people by building a bomb or else by erecting a “Hindu temple on the site of the Babri Mosque.” So, this is the trade-off one has to understand:

“With one hand, you are selling the country out to western multinationals; and with the other, you want to defend your borders with nuclear bombs.”

As perviously mentioned, the construction of mega-dams is closely linked with militarism or the advancement of military power—which in our age, means the development of nuclear bombs are weapons of mass destruction. In India, the big event happened in May 1998 with the denotation of the first nuclear bomb—an explosion which, according to government reports, made “the desert shake” and a “whole mountain turn white”. For Arundhati Roy—voicing the sentiments of millions of people in India and elsewhere—the event was an ominous turning point—steering the country and the rest of the world in a perilous and potentially disastrous direction. As she noted, the case against nuclear weapons had been made by thoughtful
people many times in the past often in passionate and eloquent language; but this fact offered no excuse for remaining silent. Despite a certain fatigue induced by the need to repeat the obvious, the case had to be restated clearly and forcefully:

“We have to reach within ourselves and find the strength to think, to fight.”

As with regard to mega-dams and their social consequences, Roy lent her pen to the vigorous denunciation of militarism and nuclear mega-politics. In language designed to infuriate Indian Chauvinists and especially devotees of “Hindutva” (India for Hindus), an essay published in the aftermath of the explosion asserted bluntly:

“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.”

In still bolder language, the same essay exposed the linkage between mega-bombs and the ruling military-industrial complex which, in India and elsewhere constitutes the major threat to the survival of democratic institutions:

“India’s nuclear bomb is the final act of betrayal by a ruling class that has failed its people [that is, failed to nourish and educate the people]. The
nuclear bomb is the most antidemocratic, anti-national, antihuman, outright evil thing that man has ever made."

One of the most valuable features of Roy’s anti-nuclear essay is its realist candor: its unblinking willingness to look at the horrors of nuclear devastation. This candor is particularly important in view of recent attempts—again by ruling elites—to downplay these horrors by throwing over them the mantle of relative normalcy or else of strategic inevitability (given the global dangers of “terrorism”). Most prominent among these ruses is the rhetoric of “smart nuclear bombs” and of “preemptive nuclear strikes” piercing this fog of deception, Roy’s essay offers a stark description of “ground zero”:

“If there is a nuclear war, our foes will not be China or American 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.”

Readers who still remember Hiroshima and Nagasaki will find their memories joltingly refreshed by Roy’s stark portrayal:

Our cities and forests, our fields and villages will burn for days. Rivers will turn to poison; the air will become fire; the wind will spread the flames.... Temperatures will drop to far below freezing and
nuclear winter will set in. Water will turn into toxic ice. Radioactive fallout will seep through the earth and contaminate ground water. Most living things, animal and vegetable, Fish and Fowl, will die.

Faced with catastrophes of this magnitude, the head of an atomic research centre in Mumbai recommended that, in case of nuclear attack, people retire to the basement of their homes and take iodine pills. As Roy scathingly remarks, governmental (so-called) preparedness is a shame; it is "nothing but a perilous joke in a world where iodine pills are prescribed as a prophylactic for nuclear irradiation."

The reasons given by Indian officials for the development of nuclear capability have been primarily three: the looming danger of China; the ongoing conflict with Pakistan; and the western example of nuclear power politics. None of these reasons stand up to scrutiny. Regarding China, Roy comments, the last military confrontation happened over three decades ago; since that time, conditions have by no means deteriorated but rather "improved slightly between us." Relations between India and Pakistan are more tense and perilous, especially when the focus is placed on Kashmir. However, here the geographical proximity itself undermines nuclear programs on both sides. In Roy's words:

"Though we are separate countries, we share skies,
we share winds, we share water. Where radioactive fallout will land on any given day depends on the direction of the wind and the rain.”

Hence, any nuclear attack launched by India against Pakistan will be “a war against ourselves.” Some what more tricky-but ultimately equally fallacious-is the reference to western power politics and the obvious hypocrisy involved in western nuclear policies (“bombs are good for us, not for you”). Although containing more than a kernel of truth, the charge of hypocrisy and duplicity does not vindicate India’s nuclear arsenal. “Exposing Western hypocrisy”, Roy asks mockingly,

“how much more exposed can they be? Which decent human being on earth harbors any illusions about it?”

While protesting self-righteously against nuclear proliferation, western regimes have in fact amassed the largest arsenal of nuclear devices and other weapons of mass destruction; and they have never hesitated to use this arsenal for their own political advantage:

“They stand on the world’s stage naked and entirely unembarrassed, because they know that they have more money, more food, and bigger bombs than anybody else. They know they can wipe us out in the course of an ordinary working
day."

"The End of Imagination" is a shorter but similarly impassioned essay on India's May 1998 test detonation of a nuclear bomb. The essay argues that India's entry into the nuclear race ushers in a new age of horror for the Indian people and continues a nightmare for the rest of the world. Roy is aware that the case against nuclear weapons, even as deterrents, has been made before:

"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."

Since the Indian government raised the issue again by testing a nuclear weapon, Roy feel obligated to revisit the case against nuclear arms. "silence", she claims, "would be indefensible". While she may make the case as "passionately" as other writers have, Roy unfortunately does not make it as "eloquently" or "knowledgeable". Her rhetoric often slips into adolescent satire, as in the following:

But let us pause to give credit where it's due. Whom must we thankful for all this? The men who made it happen. The masters of the universe. Ladies and gentlemen, the United States of America! come on up here, folks, stand up and
take a bow. Thankyou for doing this to the world. Thank you for making a difference. Thank you for showing us the way. Thank you for altering the very meaning of life.

She also resorts to melodrama:

“From now on it is not dying we must fear, but living.”

and “The air is thick with ugliness and there’s the unmistakable stench of fascism on the breeze.”

as well as racialized critique, claiming nuclear weapons are “the ultimate colonizer. Whiter than any white man that ever lived. The very heart of whiteness.”

The two articles in The Cost of Living are linked by Roy’s argument that dams and nuclear bombs both wreak havoc on ordinary citizens. She writes,

“Big Dams are to a nation’s ‘development’ what nuclear bombs are to its military arsenal. They are both weapons of mass destruction. They are both weapons governments use to control their own people. Both twentieth century emblems that mark a point in time when human intelligence has outstripped its own instinct for survival.”

It is argued, however, that India can survive a nuclear war.
The citizens are advised to take the same safety measures as the ones recommended by the scientists in the event of accidents at nuclear plants. The measures include taking iodine pills, consuming only stored water and food, avoiding milk and giving powdered milk to infants etc. To such recommendations, Arundhati Roy retorts:

“What do you do with these levels of lunacy? What do you do if you’re trapped in an asylum and the doctors are all dangerously deranged?”

That sounds too harsh but we can realise the truth it contains from our day to day experience. How accurate the estimates of provisions required for survival are likely to be? How much of them can be stored and supplied to the citizens by the government and non-government agencies? Judging from the functioning of rationing system, of water supply and of the electric supply, the answers are obvious and far from satisfactory. There is little reason to believe that people who fail in normal times will suddenly turn into efficient ones. Moreover, we cannot but question the propriety of equating a nuclear war with a nuclear accident and concluding that what suffices in the case of the latter will do in the case of the former too—they differ in nature and extent and cannot be equated only on pain of death and destruction.

There are persons who argue for nuclear weapon as they contend that those weapons deter war. Arundhati Roy demolishes this theory of deterrence pointing to two fundamental flows inherent in
The first flaw given by her is the following:

“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- ‘we’ll take you with us’ school- is that an outlandish thought? How did Rajiv Gandhi die?”

Then, the vital decisions about nuclear policy are made by governments and we can never be sure about them. The reasons are not for to seek:

“Governments change. They wear masks within masks.”

Secondly, the theory is premised on fear.

“But fear is premised on knowledge.... Deterrence will not and can not work given the levels of ignorance and illiteracy that hang over out two countries like dense, impenetrable veils (witness the VHP wanting to distribute radioactive sand from the Pokhran desert as prasad all over India. A cancer yatra?)”

Her arguments are too pithy to be dismissed or even challenged and they lead to a conclusion that deserve serious thought:

“The Theory of Deterrence is nothing but a perilous joke in a world where iodine pills are
prescribed as a prophylactic for nuclear irradiation.”

Then she proceeds to persuade us to consider what is likely to happen when numerous countries beside India and Pakistan begin to make nuclear weapons and a market for such weapons develops;

“...when it gets truly competitive and prices fall, not just governments, but anybody who can afford it can have their own private arsenal.... There will be a new world-order. The dictatorship of the pro-nuke elite.”

Thus, even without a nuclear war, threats to our environment will remain in the world which continues to make and possess nuclear weapons. And these threats are not limited to our environment, they pass much beyond them as she puts it;

“Nuclear weapons pervade our thinking. Control our behaviour. Administer our societies. Inform our dreams.”

In other words, nuclear weapons threaten not only the environment, they imperil our freedom and social values as well. They are a real danger to same thinking.

Making a nuclear bomb is generally defended as politically expedient. The three official reasons given for it are “China, Pakistan and Exposing Western hypocrisy.” She examines the reasons and
finds them far from satisfactory. As we have to confine ourselves to her concern. For environment, we refrain from quoting them. She is undoubtedly justified in holding that India’s problems

“Cannot and will not be solved by pointing nuclear
missiles at Pakistan.”

Even her bitter enemies dare not question the wisdom of her argument when she writes:

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


By afternoon the wind had fallen silent over Pokhran. At 3.45 P.M. the timer detonated the three devices. Around 200 to 300 metres deep in the earth, the heat generated was equivalent to a
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'The desert shook' the Government of India informed us (its people). "The whole mountain turned white", the Government of Pakistan replied.

By afternoon the wind had fallen silent over Pokhran. At 3.45 P.M. the timer detonated the three devices. Around 200 to 300 metres deep in the earth, the heat generated was equivalent to a
million degrees centigrade-as hot as temperatures on the sun. Instantly, rocks weighing around a thousand tons, a mini mountain underground, vaporized.... Shockwaves from the blast began to lift a mound of earth the size of a football field by several metres. One scientist on seeing it said, "I can now believe stories of Lord Krishna lifting a hill.

—India Today

Roy tried to explain, but did not do a very good job of it. Sometimes she need to write to think. So she wrote it down for her on a paper napkin. This is what she wrote:

To love, To be loved. To never for get your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch, To try and understand. To never look a way. And never, never to forget.

She tells about this essay, when she was talking with her friends that she was writing this piece, they cautioned her. 'Go ahead'
they said, 'but first make her sure, she is not vulnerable. Make sure her taxes are paid.'

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's safety only in acquiescence. As I write, I am filled with forboding. In this country, I have truly known what it means for a writer to feel loved (and, to some degree, hated too). In 1997, I was one of the items being paraded in the media's end-of-the-year National Pride Parade. Among the others, much to my mortification, were a bomb-maker and an international beauty queen. Each time a beaming person stopped me on the street and said 'you have made India Proud' (referring to the prize I won, not the book I wrote), I felt a little uneasy. It frightened me then and it terrifies me now, because I know how easily that swell, that tide of emotion, can turn against me. Perhaps the time for that has come. I'm going to step out from under the fairly lights and say what's on my mind.

If protesting against having a nuclear bomb implanted in her
brain is anti-Hindu and anti-national, then she secede. She here by declare herself an independent, mobile republic. She is a citizen of the earth. She owns no territory. She has no flag. She is female, and have nothing against eunuchs her policies are simple. She is willing to sign any nuclear non-proliferation treaty or nuclear test ban treaty that’s going. Immigrants are welcome. our world has died. And she writes to mourn its passing.

Once again we are pitifully behind the times—not just scientifically and technologically (ignore the hollow claims), but more pertinent in our ability to grasp the true nature of nuclear weapons. Our comprehension of the Horror Department is hopelessly obsolete. Here we are, all of us in India and in Pakistan, discussing the finer points of politics and foreign policy, behaving for all the world as though our governments have just devised a newer, bigger bomb a sort of immense hand grenade with which they will annihilate the enemy and protect us from all harm. How desperately we want to believe that. What wonderful, willing, well-behaved, gullible subjects we have turned out to be. The rest of humanity (yes, yes, we know, we know, but let’s ignore them for the moment; they forfeited their votes a long time ago), the rest of the rest of humanity may not forgive us, but then the rest of humanity, depending on who fashions its views, may not know what a tired, dejected, heartbroken people we are. Perhaps it doesn’t realize how urgently we need a miracle.

India and Pakistan have nuclear bombs now and feel entirely
justified in having them. Soon others will too. Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Norway, Nepal, (she’s trying to be eclectic here), Denmark, Germany, Bhutan, Mexico, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Burma, Bosnia, Singapore, North Korea, Sweden, South Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan.... And why not? Every country in the world has a special case to make. Every body has borders and beliefs. And when all our larders are bursting with shiny bombs and our bellies are empty (deterrence is an exorbitant beast), we can trade bombs for food. And when nuclear technology goes on the market, when it gets truly competitive and prices fall, not just governments, but any body who can afford it, can have their own private arsenal businessmen, terrorists, perhaps even the occasional rich writer. Our planet will bristle with beautiful missiles. There will be a new world order. The dictatorship of the pronuke elite. We can get our kicks by threatening each other. We can be victims of the predatory imagination of every green-card-seeking charlatan who surfaces in the west with concocted stories of imminent missile attacks. We can delight at the prospect of being held to ransom by every petty trouble-maker and rumour-monger, the more the merrier, if truth be told, anything for an excuse to make more bombs.

It is such supreme folly to believe that nuclear weapons are deadly only if they’re used. The fact that they exist at all, their very presence in our lives, will wreak more havoc than we can begin to
fathom. All she can say to every man, woman and sentient child here in India, and over there, just a little way away in Pakistan, is: take it personally whoever you are - Hindu, Muslim, Urban, agrarian - it doesn’t matter. The only good thing about nuclear war is that it is the single most egalitarian idea that man has ever had. On the day of reckoning you will not be asked to present your credentials. The devastation will be undiscriminating. The bomb isn’t in your back yard. It’s in your body. And hers. We have less money, less food and smaller bombs. However, we have - or had - all kinds of other wealth. Delightful, unquantifiable. What we have done with it is the opposite of what we think we’ve done. We’ve pawned it all. We’ve traded it in. For what? In order to enter into a contract with the very people we claim to despise. In the larger scheme of things, we’ve agreed to play their game and play it their way. We’ve accepted their terms and conditions unquestioningly. The CTBT ain’t nothing compared to this.

All in all, she thinks it is fair to say that we’re the hypocrites. We’re the ones who’ve abandoned what was arguably a moral position, i.e. we have the technology, we can make bombs if we want to, but we won’t. We don’t believe in them. We’re the ones who have now setup this craven clamouring to be admitted into the club of super powers. (If we are, we will no doubt gladly slam the door after us, and say to hell with principles about fighting discriminatory world orders). For India to demand the status of a
super power is as ridiculous as demanding to play in the world cup finals simply because we have a ball. Never mind that we haven’t qualified, or that we don’t play much soccer and haven’t got a team.

Since we’ve chosen to enter the arena, it might be an idea to begin by learning the rules of the game. Rule number one is. Acknowledge the masters. Who are the best players? The ones with more money, more food, more bombs.

Rule number two is locate yourself in relation to them, i.e. make an honest assessment of your position and abilities. The honest assessment of ourselves reads as follows:

We are a nation of a billion people. In development terms we rank no. 138 out of the 175 countries listed in the UNDP’s 1997 Human Development Index. More than 400 million of our people are illiterate and live in absolute poverty, over 600 million lack even basic sanitation and over 200 million have no drinking water. So the three official reason, taken individually, don’t add up to much. However, if you link them, a kind of twisted logic reveals itself. It has more to do with us than them.

The key words in our Prime Minister’s letter to the US President were ‘suffered’ and ‘victim’. That’s the substance of it. That’s our meat and drink. We need enemies. We have so little sense of ourselves as a nation, we cast about for targets to define ourselves against. To prevent the state from crumbling, we need a national
cause, and other than our currency (and, of course, poverty, illiteracy and elections), we have none. This is the heart of the matter. This is the road that has led us to the bomb. This search for selfhood. If we are looking for a way out, we need some honest answers to some uncomfortable questions. Once again, it isn’t as though these questions haven’t been asked before. It’s just that we prefer to mumble the answers and hope that noone’s heard. Is there such a thing as an Indian identity? Do we really need one? Who is an authentic Indian and who isn’t? Is India Indian? Does it matter?

Whether or not there has ever been a single civilization that could call itself ‘Indian’, whether or not India was, is, or ever will become a cohesive cultural entity, depends on whether you dwell on the differences or the similarities in the cultures of the people who have inhabited the subcontinent for centuries. India, as a modern nation state, was marked out with precise geographical boundaries by a British Act of Parliament in 1899. Our country, as we know it, was forged on the anvil of the British Empire for the entirely unsentimental reasons of commerce and administration. But even as she was born, she began her struggle against her creators. So is India Indian? It’s a tough question. Let’s just say that we’re an ancient people learning to live in a recent nation.

The majority of India’s citizens will not be able to identify its boundaries on a map or say which language is spoken there
or which god is worshipped in what region. To them the idea of India is, at best, a noisy slogan that comes around during wars and elections. Or a montage of people on government TV Programmes wearing regional costumes and saying Mera Bharat Mahaan.

The people who have a vital stake (or, more to the point, a business interest) in India having a single, lucid, cohesive national identity are the politicians who constitute our national political parties. The reason isn’t for to seek, it’s simply because their struggle, their career goal, is-and must necessarily be-to become that identity. To be identified with that identity. If there’s not one, they have to manufacture one and persuade people to vote for it. It isn’t their fault. It comes with the territory. It is inherent in the nature of our system of centralized government. A congenital defect in our particular brand of democracy. The more morally bankrupt the politicians, the cruder the ideas of what that identity should be. However, to be fair, cobbling together a viable pre-digested ‘National Identity’ for India would be a formidable challenge even for the wise and the visionary. Every single Indian citizen could, if he or she wants to, claim to belong to some minority or the other. The fissures, if you look for them, run vertically, horizontally, and are layered, whorled, circular, spiral, inside out and outside in. Fires, when they’re lit, race along any one of these schisms, and in the process, release tremendous bursts of political energy. Not unlike what happens when you split an atom.
It is this energy that Gandhi sought to harness when he rubbed the magic lamp and invited Ram and Rahim to partake of human politics and India’s war of independence against the British. It was a sophisticated, magnificent, imaginative struggle, but its objective was simple and lucid, the target highly visible, easy to identify and succulent with political sin. In the circumstances, the energy found easy focus. The trouble is that the circumstances are entirely changed now, but the genie is out of its lamp and won’t go back in. Yes, it won us freedom. But it also won us the carnage of partition. And now, in the hands of lesser statesmen, it has won us the Hindu Nuclear Bomb.

The way it has worked-in the case of the demolition of the Babri Masjid as well as in the making of the nuclear bomb—is that the congress sowed the seeds, tended the crop, then the BJP stepped in and reaped the hideous harvest. They waltz together, located in each other’s arms. They’re inseparable, despite their professed differences. Between them they have brought us here, to this dreadful, dreadful place. The jerring, hooting young men who battered down the Babri Masjid are the same ones whose pictures appeared in the papers in the days that followed the nuclear tests. They were on the streets, celebrating India’s nuclear bomb and simultaneously ‘condemning western culture’ by emptying crates of Coke and Pepsi into Public drains. I’m a little baffled by their logic: Coke is western culture, but the nuclear bomb is an old Indian tradition?
Yes, I’ve heard— the bomb in the vedas. It might be, but if you look hard enough, you’ll find coke in the vedas too. That’s the great thing about all religious texts. You can find anything you want in them— as long as you know what you’re looking for. But returning to the subject of the non-vedic 1990s:

We storm the heart of whiteness, we embrace the most diabolic creation of western science and call it our own. But we protest against their music, their food, their clothes, their cinema and their literature.

That’s not hypocrisy. That’s humour.

It’s funny enough to make a skull smile. We’re back on the old ship. The SS Authenticity and Indianness. If there is going to be a pro-authenticity/anti-national drive, perhaps the government ought to get its history straight and its facts right. If they’re going to do it, they may as well do it properly.

First of all, the original inhabitants of this land were not Hindu. Ancient though it is, there were human beings on earth before there was Hinduism. India’s Adivasi people have a greater claim to being indigenous to this land than anybody else, and how are they treated by the state and its minions? Oppressed, cheated, robbed of their lands, shunted around like surplus goods. Perhaps a good place to start would be to restore to them the dignity that was once theirs. Perhaps the Government could make a public undertaking that more
dams like the Sardar Sarovar on the Narmada will not be built, that more people will not be displaced. But, of course, that would be inconceivable, wouldn’t it? Why? Because it’s impractical. Because Adivasis don’t really matter. Their histories, their customs, their deities are dispensable. They must learn to sacrifice these things for the greater good of the Nation (that has snatched from them everything they ever had). Okay, so that’s out. For the rest, she could compile a practical list of things to ban and building to break. It’ll need some research, but off the top of my head, here are a few suggestions.

They could begin by banning a number of ingredients from our cuisine: Chillies (Mexico), Tomatoes (Peru), Potatoes (Belisia), Coffee (Morocco), Tea, White Sugar, Chinnamon (China). They could then move into recipes. Tea with Milk and Sugar, for instance (Britain). 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. It don’t want to start a riot, so she hesitate to suggest a replacement for English (Italian....? It has found its way to us via a kinder route: Marriage, not imperialism). We have already discussed the emerging, apparently acceptable, alternative to democracy.

All hospitals in which western medicine is practised or prescribed should be shut down. All national newspapers discontinued. The railways dismantled. Airports closed. And what
about our newest toy—the mobile phone? Can we live without it, or shall we suggest that they make an exception there? They could put it down in the column marked ‘universal’? Needless to say, sending your children to university in the US, and rushing there yourself to have your prostate operated upon, will be a cognizable offence. The building demolition drive could begin with the Rashtrapati Bhavan and gradually spread from cities to the countryside, culminating in the destruction of all monuments (mosques, churches, temples) that were built on what was once Adivasi or foest land.

It will be a long, long list. It would take years of work. I (she) couldn’t use a computer because that wouldn’t be very authentic of me, would it? I don’t mean to be facetious, merely to point out that this surely is the shortcut to hell. There’s no such things 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 is no one religion or language or caste or region or person or story or book that can claim to be its sole representative. There are, and can only be, visions of India, various ways of seeing it—honest, dishonest, wonderful, absurd, modern, traditional, male, female. They can be argued over, criticized, praised, scorned, but not banned or broken. Not hunted down. Railing against the past will not heal us. History has happened. It’s over and done with. All we can do is to change its course by encouraging what we love instead of destroying what we don’t. There
is beauty yet in this brutal, damaged word of ours. Hidden, fierce, immense. Beauty that is uniquely ours and beauty that we have received with grace from others, enhanced, reinvented and made our own. We have to seek it out, nurture it, love it. Making bombs will only destroy us. It doesn't matter whether or not we use them. Bombs will destroy us either way.

India's nuclear bomb is the final act of betrayal by ruling class that has failed its people. however many garlands we heap on our scientists, however many medals we pin to their chest, the truth is that it is far easier to make a bomb than to educate four hundred million people. According to opinion polls, we're expected to believe that there's a national consensus on the issue. It's official now. Everybody loves the bomb. (Therefore the bomb is good)

Is it possible for people who cannot write their own names to understand even the basic, elementary facts about the nature of nuclear weapons? Has anybody told them that nuclear war has nothing at all to do with their received nations of war? Nothing to do with honour, nothing to do with pride? Has anybody bothered to explain to them about thermal blasts, radioactive fall out and the nuclear winter? Are there even words in their language to describe the concepts of enriched uranium, fissile material and critical mass? Or has their language itself become obsolete? Are they trapped in a time capsule, watching the world pass by, unable to understand
or communicate with it because their language never took into account the horrors that the human race would dream up? Do they not matter at all? Shall we just treat them as though they’re cretins? If they ask any questions, ply them with iodine pills and parables about how Lord Krishna lifted a hill or how the destruction of Lanka by Hanuman was unavoidable in order to preserve Sita’s virtue and Ram’s reputation? Use their own stories as weapons against them? Shall we release them from their capsule only during elections, and once they’ve voted, shake them by the hand, flatter them with some bullshit about the wisdom of the common man, and send them right back in?

She’s not talking about just a handful of people, she’s talking about millions and millions who live in this country. This is their land too, you know. They have the right to make an informed decision about its fate and as far as she can tell, nobody informed them about anything. The tragedy is that nobody could, even if they wanted to truly, literally, there’s no language to do it in. This is the real horror of India. The orbits of the powerful and the powerless spinning further and further apart from each other, never intersecting, share nothing. Not a language. Not even a country.

Who the hell conducted those opinion polls? Who the hell is the Prime Minister to decide whose finger will be on the nuclear button that could turn everything we love—our earth, our skies, our
mountains, our plains, our rivers, our cities and villages—to ash in an instant? Who the hell is he to reassure us that there will be no accidents? How does he know? Why should we trust him? What has he ever done to make us trust him? What have any of them ever done to make us trust them?

The nuclear bomb is the most anti-democratic, anti-national, anti-human, outright evil thing that man has ever made. If you are religious, then remember that this bomb is man’s challenge to God. It’s worded quite simply: We have the power to destroy everything that you have created. If you are not (religious), then look at it this way. This world of ours is 4,600 million years old.

Talk about the material she covered in “The End of Imagination” concerning the nuclear testing on the subcontinent. She answered that it’s so frightening, the nationalism in the air. I’m terrified by it. It can be used to do anything. I know that a world in which countries are stockpiling nuclear weapons and using them in the ways that India and Pakistan and America do to oppress others and to deceive their own people is a dangerous world. The nuclear tests were a way to shore up our flagging self-esteem. India is still flinching from a cultural insult, still looking for its identity. It’s about all that.

Again asked a question to her that you said that jeering young Hindu men celebrating the nuclear test were the same as the ones
who were thrilled with the destruction of the Babri Mosque. Then she answered that Indian intellectuals today feel radical when they condemn fundamentalism, but not many people are talking about the links between privatization, globalization, and fundamentalism. Globalization suits the Indian elite to a T. Fundamentalism doesn’t. It’s also a class problem. When people stop some film from being shot or burn a book. It’s not just that they are saying, this is against Indian culture. They are also saying, you westernized, elite, English-speaking people are having too much of a good time. It’s a very interesting phenomenon. I think it has to be addressed together, no separately. The religious right-wingism is directly linked to globalization and to privatization. When India is talking about selling its entire power sector to foreign multinationals, when the political climate gets too hot and uncomfortable, the government will immediately start saying, should we build a Hindu temple on the site of the Babri Mosque? Everyone will go baying off in that direction. It’s a game. That’s something we have to understand. With one hand, you’re selling the country out to western multinationals. And with the other, you want to defend your borders with nuclear bombs. It’s such an irony! You’re saying that the world is a global village, but then you want to spend crores of rupees on building nuclear weapons.

In May 1998, the Indian Government conducted a series of
nuclear tests in that desert, and officially announced itself a nuclear power. Roy returned to a country that had thrown itself into the nuclear arms race with gusto. She hated it. In July 1998 she published an essay, The End of Imagination, in two national magazines simultaneously. The End of imagination was a coruscating blast of wit, Fact and Fury against Indian’s BJP Government for spending its time, money and energy while its people starved and its land decayed. “The air is thick with ugliness,” She wrote, “and there’s the unmistakable smell of fascism on the breeze... India’s nuclear bomb is the final act of betrayal by a ruling class that has failed its people.”

In India, you don’t write that sort of thing if you don’t want to make powerful enemies. And Roy did. The same politicians who had praised her only months before, now condemned her for betraying her motherland. In a fever of nationalistic pride, Roy was savaged for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. As it turned out, she was just warming up.

The point, she says, is that her views have never been as easy to categorise as both her supporters and her enemies would sometimes like to make out. Yes, she opposes the dam and she opposes the bomb, but she is “not an anti-development junkie, nor a proselytiser for the eternal upholding of custom and tradition.” She believes that the growing urban-rural divide is killing India, and that
the country's newly trained legion of urban-minded 'experts' are more of a danger to the future than an illiterate peasantry could ever be. Yet she refuses, too, to buy into the sometimes romantic ideal of village India—"I grew up in a village," She says, "and I spent my entire childhood thinking about how to escape—how to not marry some one there and how not to produce their goddam children. I'm not going back."

Arundhati Roy did not set out to be a 'political writer'. And if people now see her as one, that perhaps reflects on the rest of the literary world rather than her. "People say to me, 'Oh, it's so wonderful that you're writing about real things,' and that it's a political thing to do, and I say, look.... to be in my position and not to say anything is a hell of a political thing. You need to think politically otherwise you'll be one of these people who says 'Oh, this person's saying this and that person's saying that, and I'm confused.' And I say, yeah, because you want to be confused. No one in the valley's confused.... If you have the luxury of being confused, be confused.... It's a political intelligence you need to understand.

It's just such a political intelligence that informed and spurred both of Roy's essays, and which, if you look hard enough, can be found weaving through the pages of The God of Small Things—a book which could never, in the conventional sense, be called a 'political' novel. Again, the message is about connections. And the
failure to make those connections, she says, what is leading India- and the west, upon which it increasingly models itself astray. Ask her about this and she takes a deep breath. "I have to believe," She says, 'that what is being done—the dams and the nuclear bombs; the whole development model—they're the symptoms of a terrible malaise, and that lies inside people's heads. I don't know how you address that... but the idea that you just accept it all makes me angry."

Roy's three books of political essays to date extend one major theme from The God of Small Things: they argue on behalf of "the small", a stance that prompted Member of Parliament Balbir K. Punj to satirically call Roy "The Goddess of Small Things" (Outlook, 27 May 2002). The "Small Things" at the heart of Roy's passion are the people whose homes and fields are submerged by mega-dam projects in rural India, the destitute who suffer in poverty and illiteracy while the Indian government pours billions into its nuclear arms program, the muslims of Gujarat who were persecuted in what she calls hindu nationalist "Pogroms" in 2002, and the innocent and helpless individuals of the "ancient" civilizations of the world adversely affected by U.S. Foreign Policy and corporate globalization. Like Velutha and Ammu condemned to death and ruin by a pharisaical society, the small people of Roy's political essays suffer similar fates under uncaring powers (the Indian government, the United States Government) and in human forces (globalization,

We have to support our small heroes. (of these we have many, many) We have to fight specific wars in specific ways. Who knows, perhaps that's what the twenty-first century has in store for us. The dismantling of the Big. Big Bombs, big dams, big ideologies, big contradictions, big counties, big wars, big heroes, big mistakes. Perhaps it will be the century of the small. Perhaps right now, this very minute, there's a small god up in heaven readying herself for us.

Roy claims in "Power-Politics" that "The God of Small Things" is "no less political than any of my essays" (p.11). Her specific reference to the "small god" thesis in her political writings invites readers to explore the political implications of the novel. There are no mega-dam projects and nuclear bombs in The God of Small Things, but the novel's examination of upper caste attitudes towards the lower caste and of those who would transgress the boundaries is analogous.

The reader is also encouraged to link the novel with her political writings by the title of her first collection of essays, "The Cost of Living" (1999), which is taken directly from the novel; indeed one might even assume from its title that "The Cost of Living" is
a kind of sequel to "The God of Small Things", and in a way it is. At the moment when Velutha enters Ammu in their first sexual encounter on the riverbank, Roy writes, "the cost of living climbed to unaffordable heights; though later Baby Kochamma would say it was a small price to pay" (p.318) "Living", then, is following one's passions. The "Cost" is the price one pays for transgressing society's moral code in following one's passions.

The other sense in which the "the cost of living" idea carries over from The God of Small Things is in Roy's Championing of "Small" people in her essays. Roy argues that in India it is possible to get statistics on everything from cricket scores to stock market performance to the number of "Vasectomies in a given year,"

But the government of India does not have a figure for the number of people who have been displaced by dams or sacrificed in other ways at the altars of "national-progress". Isn't this astounding? How can you measure progress if you don't know what it costs and who has paid for it?

"The Cost of Living" in India, Roy claims, is borne by the poorest people, mostly made up of "untouchabilites" like the Dalits and the aboriginal Adivasis. "It's like having an expense account," She argues, "someone else pays the bills. People from another country. Another world. India's poorest people are subsidizing the
life styles of her richest” (p.19) While this argument is not congruent with the case of Ammu and Velutha transgressing the moral code, it does extend Roy’s metaphor of living costs which first appears in “The God of Small Things”.

In making these connections between her novel and her political essays, Roy is clearly leveraging her notoriety as the author of “The God of Small Things”. Roy sees herself as caught between her political activism and her novel’s success. On the one hand she intentionally uses her fame to bring greater publicity and broader awareness to the causes she believes in; on the other she does not want to appear as a “hero” in battles where others are suffering in more heroic ways than she. In her acceptance speech for the fourth annual prize for cultural freedom by the Iannone Foundation based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Roy said,

“I accept this prize knowing that there are many people around the world who deserve it more than I do. Unknown, invisible people who are raising their voices and fighting the fight at much greater cost to themselves than I could ever claim” (Outlook 23 January 2003).

Nevertheless, one of the most consistent criticism Roy faces is the charge that her political writings are self-serving and egotistical. Ian Buruma, in an article entitled “The Anti-American”, talks of Roy’s
snobbish tone and her “tendency to sound preposterous.” Buruma paraphrases Ramachandra Guha from his November 2000 article in the Hindu as saying that Roy’s “vanity and her self-indulgence devalues the work of serious activists” (outlookindia.com, 4 May 2002, first published in The New Republic). Reeta Sinha, in, “What makes me and Expert on Arundhati Roy,” talks of the “me-myself-and-I attitude which permeate [s] her essay.” (outlookindia.com, 16 January 2002). The publishers weekly reviewers of The Cost of Living Point out the irrelevance of digression that call attention to herself and detract from the issues at hand:

“Fully a fifth of the article [The End of Imagination] is devoted to a friend telling Roy that she has become so famous that the rest of her life would be ‘vaguely satisfying,’ which is a fair description of this book.” (20 September 1999)

Despite these criticisms, and as even Buruma concedes, issues such as the Sardar Sarovar Dam have come to the attention of more people—more of the average population who do not normally read political essays because Roy has utilized her fame as the author of the Booker Prize-winning “The God of Small Things”.

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 a 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.

She noted: I’m prepared to grovel. To humiliate myself abjectly, 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. But let’s not forget that the stakes we’re playing for are huge. Our fatigue and our shame could mean the end of us. The end of our children and our children’s children. Of everything we love. We have to reach within ourselves and find the strength to think. To fight.

If only, if only, nuclear war was just another kind of war. If only it was about the usual things—nations and territories, gods and histories. If only those of us who dread it were just worthless moral cowards who are not prepared to die in defence of our beliefs. 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.

What shall we do then, those of us who are still alive? Burned and blind and bold and ill, carrying the cancerous carcasses of our
children in our arms, where shall we go? What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we breathe?

Ignore it, it's just a novelist's naivete, they'll tell you, Doomsday prophet hyperbole. It'll never come to that. There will be no war. 'Deterrence' is the buzzword of the people who like to think of themselves as hawks. (Nice birds, those. Cool stylish predatory pity there won't be many of them around after the war. Extinction is a word we must try and get used to) Deterrence is an old thesis that has been resurrected and is being recycled with added local flavour. The Theory of Deterrence cornered the credit for having prevented the cold war from turning into a Third World War. The only immutable fact about the Third World War is that if there's going to be one, it will be fought after the Second World War. In other words, there is no fixed schedule. In other words, we still have time. And perhaps the Pun (the Third World War) is prescient. True, the cold war is over, but let's not be hoodwinked by the ten-year lull in nuclear posturing. It was just a cruel joke. It was only a remission. It wasn't crude. It proves no theories. After all, what is ten years in the history of the world? Here it is again, the disease. More widespread and less amenable to any sort of treatment than ever. No, the theory of Deterrence has some fundamental flaws.

Day after day, in newspaper editorials, on the radio, on TV chat shows, on MTV for heaven's sake, people whose instincts one
thought one could trust-writers, painters, journalists—make the crossing. The chill seeps into her bones as it becomes painfully apparent from the lessons of everyday life that what you read in history books is true. That fascism is indeed as much about people as about governments. That it begins at home. In drawing rooms. In bedrooms. In beds ‘Explosion of self-esteem’, ‘Road to Resurgence’, ‘A moment of Pride’, these were headlines in the papers in the days following the nuclear tests.²

“We have proved that we are not eunuchs any more,” said Mr. Thackery of the Shiv Sena.¹

(whoever said we were? True, a good number of us are women, but that, as far as I know, isn’t the same thing.)

Reading the papers, it was often hard to tell when people were referring to viagra (which was competing for second place on the front pages) and when they were talking about the bomb—‘We have superior strength and potency.’ (This was our Minister of Defence after Pakistan completed its tests).³

The forthcoming chapter is going to focus on next essay “An Algebra of Infinite Justice” and “Power Politics” concentrating on attack on WTC & other issues.
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the algebra of infinite justice

ARUNDHATI ROY
"Each essay is an elaborately argued thesis.... Simultaneously both profound and poetic."

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