

BROKEN REPUBLIC: A CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

Arundhati Roy's loud and clear voice is evident that though we apparently cry for socialism, in fact there is absolute disillusionment. In the book 'Broken Republic: Three Essays' she makes her stand critical on the definition of progress and development. The book gives us an unprecedented view of disrupted socialism and how pro-capitalist approach questions the definition of democracy in a secular country like India. She justifies her stand on the Maoist and gives us an insightful picture of the ground reality by criticizing the operation green hunt. She exposes the masks of corporate giants under the veil of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Somehow she tries to bring the untold story of the Maoist movement and states how the fundamental rights of tribal are in danger. Her alternate vision lies in when the capitalist will understand and acknowledge the 'limits in its quest for domination' and when the capitalism is forced to tolerate the non-capitalist societies. However Roy's ultimate quest is to find equality in the society.

Arundhati Roy's Broken Republic is no doubt a loud and clear voice of disrupted socialism in a secular country like India. Roy critically scrutinizes the so-called definition of progress, development and asks some fundamental questions about the modern civilization. She puts a big question mark about being a citizen in a Republican country. She calls India's republic as broken since it serves to a few millionaires only. She questions the plan and policies that was taken for the improvement of indigenous people and how it actually turned out to be a big blow to the millions of tribals. Arundhati Roy's main aim is to minimize the gap between the rich and the poor. Through this book she makes it evident that though we apparently cry for socialism, but in fact the result is total disillusionment. In the name of progress, development, modernity we cry for the capitalism but Arundhati Roy's endeavor is to put a full stop to capitalism. Her voice puts emphasis on how the pro-capitalist theory continues to prevail in India. The idea of democracy only dwells in the home of corporate whereas millions of people have been denied to just live on their birth place. Roy exposes the MoUs between the corporate and government and clears the air about the ill intention. The book gives a solid view of disrupted socialism and pro-eco-socialism. Roy points out the ecological destruction that has been carried away by few capitalist and

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encouraged by India's pro-capitalism theory. She does not find equality in society which is her inner cry. However Roy presents an alternative vision which perfectly suits the meaning of democracy.

Broken Republic consists of three essays. In the first essay 'Mr. Chidambaram War', Arundhati Roy's first sentence makes it evident about her attitude and approach towards the indigenous people. Moreover she condemns the war against the Maoist and calls it a war against the poorest people of India. She categorically imagines about the possible danger that may come. Her stand is clear that capitalism will only increase the gap between the rich and the poor. It will offer development to the few people. Her universal voice of protest against the war is evident in the following lines:

...Of course, the Maoist are by no means the only ones rebelling. People are engaged in a whole spectrum of struggle all over the country-the landless, the homeless, Dalits, workers, peasants, weavers. They are pitted against a juggernaut of injustice, including policies that allow a wholesale corporate takeover of people's land and resources. However it is the Maoist the government has singled out as being the biggest threat.

(Broken Republic: 3-4)

Roy sees the point of deprivation very closely and justifies the counter attack of Maoist. In the first essay Roy observes the gap between the policy and functioning of that policy and admits it as the reason of disappointment for the tribals. She ridicules the present development model which brings only the rich to its umbrella and stays away from the basic need of tribals. The first essay 'Mr. Chidambaram's War' turns down the allegation and remark of Prime Minister who says that Maoist are the single biggest internal security challenge. Rather an expert group sees it as a fight for social justice and equality, which has been absent since the independence or the declaration of India as the largest democracy. The expert group's report called "Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas reveals:

Though its professed long-term ideology is capturing state power by force, in its day to day manifestation, it is to be looked upon as basically a fight for social justice, equality, protection, security and local development.

(BR: 9)

India which puts its vision to be a developed state by 2020, presently carries the tag of an emerging economic force never satisfies Roy. Instead she says that India is yet to ensure basic rights to its citizen. She says that yes we have maximum number of millionaires but we have millions of people living with less than Rs 20 a day.

As far as the first essay is concerned, Arundhati Roy is concerned has some valid points against the government's attitude and approach towards Maoist. It is increasingly clear as who wants war and why? Roy uncovers the insanity of capitalism and considers the present incidents as the glaring reflection of the brutal capitalism. In another essay "Capitalism: A Ghost Story" Roy states that 'India's 100 richest people own assets equivalent one fourth of the GDP'. The inequality between rich and poor becomes wider and wider with the privatization. As the

government is signing an MoU on every mountain, every river putting the life of indigenous people at stake, it never offers the real development. It only offers the Corporate's meaning of development. And this development does not even feed the belly of the indigenous people. On the other hand it offers war, displacement and ecological destruction. The brutal insanity of capitalism has many instances like the incident of Kalinga Nagar, Chhattisgarh government's signing of integrated steel plant at Bastar with the TATA steel will always be called as the opposite of development. Government which calls the fruit of development is bitter and can easily take the lives of poor indigenous people. In the first essay 'Mr. Chidambaram's War' Roy states that government instantly deployed two lakhs paramilitary troops across the states like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, and West Bengal. When the government fails to 'flush' the rebels out of the forest, it goes one step ahead and finally declares that it will deploy Indian Army and Air Force. About this Roy is very much critical and says:

In India we don't call this a war. We call it 'creating a good investment climate'. Thousands of soldiers have already moved in. A brigade headquarters and air bases are being readied. One of the biggest army in the world is now preparing its terms of Engagements to 'defend' itself against the poorest, hungriest, most malnourished people in the world...

(Outlook)

In an interview in early 2001, Roy had described India as two separate convoys. And the two separate convoys are going in different directions. One is going into the digital future of the promised land of glitzy election things, and the rest of the country, the poor, the anonymous are going in other direction. Roy never sees that those convoys will come closer rather believes that the way that the machine of neoliberal capitalism works, the distance will definitely increase.

A new India was born with the liberalization of trade policies in 1991. Prior to this it was a socialist inspired economy. It was a high time for the private corporation. The liberalization of economic policies gives boost to Private Corporation and strict restriction, and extensive regulation began to fade away. India became a capitalist nation. However Capitalism in India has not resulted in minimizing the gap between the rich and the poor. It does not bring equality to society. It failed to reduce poverty. Though the rate of GDP is higher, it fails to bring a sustainable development. The distribution of resources has been restricted to a favoured few. Indeed it leaves little to the middle class mass of India, forget the case of tribals. It is acknowledged that the gap between the haves and have nots has been widening. Roy successfully focused this treatment and stressed that it gave birth to the various resistance movements across India. The capitalism in India has created inequality, more starvation, anti-social sentiment, pollution, and finally a war that is absolutely undemocratic. Roy fears the deadly combination of capitalism with feudalism. She explains:

In India we are at the moment witnessing a sort of fusion between corporate capitalism and feudalism-it's a deadly cocktail. We see it unfolding before our eyes. Sometimes it looks as though the result of all this will be a twisted implementation of rural employment guarantee act. Half the population will become Naxalites and the other half will join security forces. And what Bush said will come true. Everyone will have to choose whether

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they are with 'us' or with the 'terrorists'. We will live in an elaborately administered tyranny.

(The Shape of the Beast: 189)

Instead of distributing the fruits of modern development the wealth remained within the few people.

The largest democracy of the world, India, seemed to put more support to capitalism. But one should keep in mind that 'democracy' and 'capitalism' are two different things. It cannot go parallel though it forcefully continues without bothering the millions of indigenous people. Democracy is something which offers political equality. On the other hand capitalism is not equality. Further it is neither political nor economic. It is about economic freedom, which Arundhati Roy states as 'free market capitalism'. The economic freedom includes 'freedom to buy and sell freedom to invest and make a profit'. As far as economic market is concerned the rich people matter most while the poor have a chance only in market for votes. And the theory is if the rich finance election campaign, the vote of the poor must be won. Here lies the shadow side of capitalism which is severely criticized by Arundhati Roy where our 80% of economy is controlled by the private hands. About the growing corporatization and privatization Roy holds her view:

As corporatization and privatization proceed a pace and more and more people are rendered jobless, homeless, and have no access to natural resources, anger and unrest will build. The central function of the state will increasingly be to oversee the repression of an unemployed, disposed population on behalf of the corporate. The state will have to evolve into an elaborate tyranny which retains all the rhetoric of democracy...

(TSB: 178)

Roy's cry for the safety of the people is evident in the essay. She is very much concerned about the life of the indigenous people. The capitalism in its full flow has opened the door of a war. And the war will bring much casualties and a weak economy too to India. She explains:

...the poorest people will die in this rich people's war. And if anybody believes that this war will leave them unaffected, they should think again. The resource it will consume will cripple the economy of this country.

(BR: 16)

In a nutshell Roy beautifully exposes the masks of corporation for exploiting the natural resources of the country under the veil of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). She addresses the root and claims that the demand for global capitalism is the reason which gives rise to displacement, dispossession, and finally it leads to deprivation. We apparently cry for socialism but, in reality, there is total disillusionment. Roy says:

Most of the money goes to the bank accounts of the mining corporations. Less than 10 per cent comes to the public exchequer. A very tiny percentage of the displaced people get jobs, and those

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*who do, earn slave wages to do humiliating, back-breaking work.
By caving in to this paroxysm of greed, we are bolstering other
countries' economies with our ecology.*

(BR: 26)

The first essay is concerned about the everyday issues like Maoism, mining, debates over development, poverty with finger pointing towards the chief executive officer P. Chidambaram. The entire chapter has been devoted to him to state point blank how few governments like Chhattisgarh and Odisha are hired by mining companies as Vedanta and Posco. Roy asks:

*What are we make of the fact that he was a non-executive director
of Vedanta – a position from which he resigned the day he became
finance minister in 2004?...*

(BR: 27)

The second essay of the book 'Walking With the Comrades' gives an insight of Roy's personal experience with the Maoist. It unfolds more information and gives the readers firsthand information. It depicts the view points of Maoist more vividly. It highlights the link between the government and corporate giants. Moreover it exposes the present policy and function of development as not inclusive and unsustainable. It puts question mark about the present model of development. It portrays the stark reality of the other side of the coin i.e. the story that has been said with the headline as 'Maoist are the single biggest internal security challenge'. She has tried to justify the struggle and successfully brings the ground reality to the limelight.

Republic means a state in which supreme power is held by the people or their elected representatives. India became a republican country in the year 1950. When the constitution was adopted by parliament Roy calls it a tragic day for the tribal people. In the name of 'bringing tribals into the modern development', Government displaced a large section of tribals. It displaced tribal people, denied their access to forest production and snatched away their livelihood. Roy asserts:

*...It was a tragic day for tribal people. The constitution ratified
colonial policy and made the state custodian of tribal
homeland...It denied them their traditional rights to forest
produce; it criminalized a whole way of life. In exchange for the
right to vote it snatched away their right to livelihood and dignity.*

(BR: 43)

And here again the aptness and justification of title is revealed i.e. Broken republic.

Giving the ground reality of the movement, Roy fictionally tries to present comrade Venu, comrade Raju, Comrade Niti, comrade Kamla, comrade Narmada and many others as the characters of the Hollywood film 'Avatar'. The indigenous people of the film 'Avatar' are just like the tribals. They fight back to the alien and become successful to save their home and ecology as well. A similar picture is depicted by the writer cum activist Arundhati Roy in this essay. Roy being concerned about the phenomenon 'feminist' presents a brief but vivid picture of the Maoist's cry for women's rights. It is evident with the description of the comrade Laxmi, comrade Sumitra, comrade Rinki, comrade Narmada etc. She seems to be more interested about

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the story of these female Maoists. Moreover she praises the activities of Krantikari adivasi Mahila Sanghathan. It consists of 90000 enrolled members. Roy calls it as the largest women's organization in the country. It campaigns and makes awareness against the adivasi tradition of forced marriage and abduction.

Roy's essay filled with the lucid picture of who the Maoist are and what is their intention. She is successful to humanize the brutal image of Naxal. It projects the reason of why have they chosen the path of violence. Roy has attacked the religious wings, corporate led India government's politics. She says:

The Maoist are not the only ones who seek to depose the Indian state. It's already been deposed, several times by Hindu fundamentalism and economic totalitarianism.

(BR: 87)

Arundhati Roy's journey in early 2010 into Dandakaranya gives us an unprecedented report from the heart which Roy calls 'dreamland to some of the world's biggest mining corporations'. Providing the textual criticism to govt's discourse like 'internal security threat', Roy's endeavour in the whole essay calls them 'the most wild, beautiful'. They are being sandwiched between Corporates and Govt, and caught in a state sponsored war to annihilate them from their own land. She says:

It's not an alternative, this idea of Gram Swaraj with a Gun...Against the greatest odds it has forged a blue print for its survival... It does not need war. But if war is all it gets, it will fight back.

(BR: 132)

Arundhati Roy's third essay 'Trickledown Revolution' has a wider perspective in terms of equality, democracy, alternative vision and modern civilization. At the outset she describes the tale of pavement dwellers. A thousand pavement dwellers had assembled to demand some basic fundamental rights like right to shelter, right to ration card and right to life i.e. protection from the police brutality. Roy sees them as not the slum dogs. She calls them as 'refugees of India shining'. She calls them the representatives of estimated sixty million people who have been displaced by 'rural destitution', by 'slow starvation'. They are the representative of 836million people who live on less than Rs 20 a day. She calls them the parents of the tens of millions of malnourished children in our country. Here she puts a big question mark and says "Is this known as 'enjoying the fruits of modern development'?" She appreciates the courage, wisdom of comrades and terms it as extraordinary. She again reveals the truth and valid reasons of the fight and says:

...the bottom line is that they are fighting for their dignity, for the right to live and smell like human being. They are fighting because, as far as they are concerned, 'the fruits of modern development' stink like dead cattle on the high way'

(BR: 158-159)

Arundhati Roy believes that the protest in the tribal belt of India poses a radical challenge to the other resistance movement across India. According to her all the movements are set to demand just the fundamental rights and constitutional rights. Roy's disillusionment continues to

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prevail throughout the essay with the repeated action of government i.e. repression and to deceive people. In an interview to the channel Aljazeera Roy questions the growth rate of India and terms it as artificial. She says that a lot of growth rate is actually driven by things like mining which is very artificial way of pushing a country's growth rate.

Arundhati Roy beautifully unravels the layers and layers of truth behind the movement. We can't charge her as cynic or a little bit hopeless. Roy has signalled the possibility, hope in the midst of the forest, tribals, and minerals, Maoist and finally the government. The third essay seems to give a view of Arundhati's opinion regarding an alternative which she says in many interviews. In fact she has called for a new imagination. She hints that the alternative to death is right at the places of indigenous people. She explains it:

...The alternative, if there is one will emerge from the places and the people who have resisted the hegemonic impulse of capitalism instead of being co-opted by it.

(BR: 212)

At the end of the essay Arundhati Roy's urge is increasingly clear about how to stop the violence and to pay respect to the indigenous people's imagination, their culture and tradition. She makes it clear that they possess a different imagination- "an imagination that is outside up capitalism as well as communism". According to her we need to understand that imagination which has different understanding of human happiness and human fulfillment. Roy's dream of a change will be possible only when the capitalist will understand and acknowledge the 'limits in its quest for domination' and when the capitalism be forced to tolerate the non-capitalist societies. She points:

If there is any hope for the world at all it does not live in climate-change conference rooms or in cities with tall buildings. It lives low down on the ground, with its arm around the people who go to battle everyday to protect their forest, their mountains and their rivers because they know that the forests, the mountains, and the rivers protect them.

(BR: 213-14)

Apart from raising the matter of grave concern about the indigenous people, the third essay 'Trickledown Revolution' castigates the govt's role in ceasefire deal. It brings out the facts which have been discussed by several activists about Maoist ideologue. The fake encounter of the chief negotiator Azad shattered the idea of peace and Roy expresses strong disapproval of the inhuman killing. Her inner voice gushes forth:

...was it a mistake or was it a message...In the course of the war, if, in the preliminary stages of peace negotiation, one side executes the envoy of the other sides, its reasonable to assume that the side that did the killing does not want peace...

(BR: 148)

It reveals that the war has been predetermined and will only end with the acquisition of land, water, forest, and minerals by countable corporate houses However Arundhati Roy has an alternative vision. But Roy' idea of alternative vision is yet to take its own course. But she

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continues to speak of her alternative vision and asserts that it is not a 'grand Stalinist scheme that can be articulated in three sentences'. Right now the world is accretion of numerous decisions that have been made like economic, ecological, social, political,, pedagogical etc. She sees an alternative for each of those decisions. She sees an alternative for every high dam. She can see an alternative for every corporate contract. She supports the view of Paul Krugman's view that 'a country is not a corporation'. She explains:

... All policies can't be guided by commercial interest and motivated by profit. Citizens are not employees to be hired and fired, governments are not employers... Corporation like Monsanto and Wal-Mart are not supposed to shape India's politics.

(TSB: 215)

Arundhati Roy's alternative world consists of the ideas where fundamental rights of citizens come first and growth rate comes second. Otherwise she sees no meaning of democracy. Her world assures the minimum gap between rich and poor. She says:

... You can't say I'm taking away the livelihood of 200,000 to enhance the livelihood of 2 million... Why should taking from the rich called appropriation and taking from the poor be called development?

(TSB: 216)

Besides raising voice for the voiceless, exposing the grim reality from the ground zero, unraveling the real cause of the movement Roy's quest lies in the equality of the society. She asks the profound questions like what is progress? How do you define modernity? How would you reconstitute human happiness? Her quest is for a eco friendly civilization. Her quest is to redefine modernity and refinement of society. She strongly urges to redefine the meaning of human happiness. One Arundhati Roy's voice may melt into thin air but voices like Arundhati Roy may bring a sea change towards the attitude and approach of government and the day is not far when time will best judge the words of Arundhati Roy. Right or wrong? Million dollar question. Is not it?

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