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Globalisation of Dissent: An Appreciation of Post-Globalisation in Arundhati Roy

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Abstract:

Democracy in today's India is mortally threatened with the massive pervasion of corporatization, consumerism and privatization that penetrated Indian economy hand in hand with the advent of neo-liberal capitalism which is facilitated by the state under the garb of 'development'. Natural resources like land, river, forest, and mountain across the country are being arbitrarily taken over by the multinational companies which are in direct collusion with the Government. This 'progress project' has been allowed to get subtly integrated with the electoral process on which, theoretically speaking, the Indian democracy rests. This ushers in an unprecedented marginalisation of the already marginalised people, the Dalits and the Adivasis, who inhabit the rural India and whose lives depend mostly on the natural resources they are being robbed of.

Keywords: *Democracy, corporatization, consumerism, privatization, neo-liberal capitalism, marginalisation.*

1. Introduction

The present paper is an intent endeavour to delve deep into the fissures in the sexagenarian democracy of this country in light of the writings of Arundhati Roy. It seeks to develop a logical understanding of 'the interconnection of state repression, religious fundamentalism and corporate globalisation', the 'hoary institutions of democracy' like the judiciary, the police, the media, elections as strategically manipulated by the state to perpetuate hegemony and coercion and the multifaceted forms of 'resistance' unleashed by the subalternized people- Dalits and Adivasis of this country. Arundhati Roy, an iconoclast, is always bent on denigrating all forms of the hegemonic power structure which in this post colonial era continue to perpetrate imperial enterprises through various subtler and more thorough means. Full spectrum dominance in electoral democracy is sponsored by neo imperialism that promotes terrorism, communal hatred and riot, genocide, seizure of freedom and fundamental rights across the globe. Roy's scepticism in Indian democracy is proven justified since post independence India despite having established 'democracy' through several elections fails utterly to ensure citizenship for the majority of its people. Hence Roy's contention is unequivocal: 'democracy is India's greatest strength but the way in which electoral democracy is practised is turning it into our greatest weakness.'

2. 'Project Development': A Neo-Liberal Frankenstein

Manmohan Singh, Montek Singh Ahluwalia and P. Chidambaram are termed by Roy sarcastically as the 'Holy Trinity' for their crucial patronisation on behalf of the Government in inaugurating neo liberalism for the first time in India in the 1990s. Inevitably it entailed corporatization and privatization for which the socio-economic structure of this country is essentially unsuitable. Privatization, as Roy puts it, is 'the process of transferring public assets held in trust for the public good to private companies to amass private profit'. The neo-liberal corporate model is keen on manufacturing unlawfully redundant wealth for the minority rendering abject poverty to the majority. Ergo natural resources are plundered by the multinational companies with the intervention of governmental assistance from the state's end. Roy is unmatchably categorical in her criticism against the successive Governments of the Indian nation-state regardless of whether Congress led UPA or BJP led NDA is in power. Before becoming the finance minister of UPA Govt. P. Chidambaram happened to be 'Enron's lawyer and a member of the Board of Directors of Vedanta, a multinational mining corporation that is currently devastating the Niyamgiri hills in Orissa.' Throughout India the natural resources are being unabashedly ravaged by numerous multinational corporations in a celebratory mood and Roy reckons this fatal environmental engineering as 'ecocide'. 'In eastern India bauxite and iron ore mining is destroying the whole ecosystems, turning fertile land into deserts. In the Himalayas hundreds of high dams are being planned, the consequences of which can only be catastrophic. In the plains, embankments built along rivers, ostensibly to control floods, have led to rising river beds, causing even more flooding, more water logging, more salinization of agricultural land and the destruction of livelihoods of millions of people.' Almost all the rivers in India including Ganga have got reduced to drains because of the industrial sewage and effluent and 'hardly a single river runs its course and meets the ocean.' Justice B.N Kripal the judge in the apex court paying less care to the ecological balance, ordered arbitrarily to interlink the rivers 'like a mechanical water supply system'. Coincidentally Mr. Kripal

having retired from the judiciary joined the Environmental Board of Coca-Cola. On the other hand 'corporate globalisation needs an international confederation of loyal, corrupt, preferably authoritarian governments in poorer countries to push through unpopular reforms and quell the mutinies. It's called 'Creating a Good Investment Climate'. The state regulating its policies of economy and land reform in conformation with the corporations' strategy, gives an impression of 'development' in the forms of big dams, industrialization, rampant infrastructural projects, mines and Special Economic Zones. This nexus between the state and the multinational companies has got nudely manifested in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Jharkhand where the most vulnerable section of the population-the Dalits and Adivasis, poor farmers, landless labourers who live in utter 'poverty, hunger and injustice' are being ostracized with unemployment, dispossession, displacement, homelessness and brutal militarisation.

3. Corruption, Privatisation, Terrorism: A Neo-Colonial Fraternity

Corruption is acknowledgedly linked to state-power and as it has been quoted from Roy earlier, corporate globalisation prefers the corrupt authoritarian government. So it is no wonder that 'corruption has actually increased in the era of privatisation.' For example, Enron is reportedly known to have paid twenty million dollars to 'educate' Indian politicians. However amidst so widespread hue and cry over 'black money' and scams and money laundering, in today's Indian politics corruption seems to have become an open secret. Imperialism, as we all know, in this age of globalisation is propelled through corrupt puppet local government in place 'which takes charge of creating good environment'. What Roy suggests afterwards is strikingly significant: 'Those who are protesting against privatisation and development projects-making investments unsafe- are called terrorists.' This definition of terrorism propagated by the state has pragmatically been subverted by Roy for its linkage with neo liberal capitalism: 'Economic terrorism (is) unleashed by neo liberalism which devastates the lives of millions of people depriving them of water, food, electricity. Denying them medicine. Denying them education. Terrorism is the logical extension of this business of the free market. Terrorism is the privatisation of war.' Post-9/11 'war on terror' and the invasion on Iraq led by America have institutionalised terrorism all over the world. In fact the logicity underlying both of an act of terrorism and a 'retaliatory war against terrorism' is the same because 'both terrorists and governments make ordinary people pay for the actions of their governments.' There is no basic difference between the terrorism America does with pentagon, the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank and the terrorism perpetrated by the Al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba, ISIS or any other professed terrorist organisations. The point Roy makes in this connection is India behaves like the United States of the Indian subcontinent and what U.S does to other people India unfortunately does the same to its own countrymen in Kashmir, in North eastern states like Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and in Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

4. Religious Fundamentalism: Weaponisation of Neo-Capitalism

Arundhati Roy precisely exposes the linkage between religious fascism and corporate globalisation since according to her contention, imposition of corporate globalisation upon an 'almost feudal' society only reinforces inequalities. After the partition which itself is a product of communalism 'secularity' in Indian socio-political scenario has remained only a constitutional manifesto. History of Indian democracy is scarred with unusual exemplars of communal violence that has often discovered its zenith in umpteen numbers of genocide and pogrom which substantively demonstrate the friability of the democratic system of this country. Right-wing extremism spearheaded by such Hindu nationalist organisations as RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal in this country indoctrinates Hindutva-project as a national ideology through numbers of educational and religious institutions across the country which, as Roy points out, are 'no different from and no less dangerous than the Madrassas all over Pakistan and Afghanistan which spawned the Taliban.' Communalism is that trump card which is shrewdly played by almost every political party to win over the elections and it's the reason the impasses like Kashmir or Ram temple at Ayodhya have purposefully been retained unresolved till today. Political cadres are implanted almost in each and every institution of democracy of this country - police, administration, judiciary etc. 9/11 attack on America has been utilised by the West to fabricate and propagate 'Islamphobia' all over the globe and in India Hindu nationalists exploited it to the fullest extent possible in forms of indiscriminate massacre of muslims in several states and equating Islam with terrorism. Indian nationalism is manipulatively being projected as Hindu Nationalism which Roy argues 'defines itself not through a respect or regard for itself but through a hatred of the other. And the other is not just Pakistan its Muslims. It's disturbing to see how neatly nationalism dovetails into fascism.' India is now experienced with numbers of riots and terrorist-attacks and the resultant anti-muslim measures undertaken on part of the government. Simultaneously ongoing is the process of Hinduizing (in)famously known as 'ghar wapsi' through which not only the vulnerable section of minority community but a large section of Dalit and Adivasi people of the country is also being unlawfully Hinduized. Religious fundamentalism which has got intertwined with the electoral process has turned out to be one of the major threats to the Indian democracy and the two major political parties in this country viz. B.J.P and Congress are equally castigated by Roy for being 'an overtly communal party with fascist leanings' and 'an opportunistically communal party' respectively. Election the lame excuse in proof of democracy in India is fought on caste or communal issues and won by money and muscle powers. Democracy is at stake by the way it is being practised because, Roy opines, 'every 'democratic' institution in this country has shown itself to be unaccountable, inaccessible to the ordinary citizen and either unwilling or incapable of acting in the interests of the genuine social justice.'

5. Neo-Imperial Exploitation and Subaltern Resistance

Neo-imperialism by dint of its 'deadly cocktail' between the corporate capitalism and feudalism has wreaked havoc on the lives of the marginalised people i.e. Dalits and Adivasis of this country. Roy graphically portrays the socio-economic abjection of the rural India where seventy percent of the population of this largest democracy live in. She refers to Utsa Patnaik who statistically exposes the murky reality of this country: 'Forty-seven percent of India's children below three suffer from malnutrition, forty six percent are stunted...about forty percent of the rural population in India has the same food grain absorption level as sub-Saharan Africa. Today an average rural

family eats about 100kg less food in a year than it did in the early 1990s.' The United Nations Development Program (UNDP 2009) 'rates India in their reputable Human Development Index (HDI) in having life expectancy, education and standard of living on a place 134 of 182 nations for the year 2009.' HDI reports on Andhra Pradesh and Chattisgarh reveal extraordinarily low grade development and the poverty rate in the rural areas of Orissa and Bihar is reported to be among the 'world's most extreme'. Around forty two percent of India's total population live below the global poverty line. One third of the global poor lives in India, seventy five percent in rural areas. In addition to this degree of hunger and poverty, the rural inhabitants, mostly the Dalits and the Adivasis, have to suffer dispossession and displacement which are inevitable consequences of the neo-imperial 'development project'. Eighty percent of the total displaced people within the period of 1947-2000 were tribals. Lennart Bendfeldt referring to a report from the Planning Commission points out that '...low degree of employment and qualification, new forest policies with restriction for their livelihoods, cultural humiliation, weak access to health care, education and power, restricted and limited access to natural resources, multifaceted forms of exploitation, social atrocities, displacements and deficient rehabilitation programs, political marginalisation and suppression of protest' lead the Dalits and the Adivasis to take recourse to violent insurgency which is prevalent in several states of this country for no less than forty years in the name of Naxalite or Maoist movement. When non-violent movement of resistance is criminalized and retaliated through brutal militarisation by the state there is no way left for the down-trodden people except armed revolution. In states like Chhattisgarh even the poor villagers are being armed by the Govt. in the name of 'Salva Judum' to fight against their fellow countrymen who are labelled as 'terrorists'. Therefore Roy proposes that confrontation against this ubiquitous and claustrophobic coercion can only be exercised properly by 'globalisation of dissent' which means 'the joining of hands of people who do not believe in empire.'

6. Conclusion

On April 21, 2010 Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh declared the Naxalite movements as the 'greatest threat to internal security' of this country. Anand Teltumbe, a civil rights activist with the Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights, Mumbai in reference to the prime minister's observation judiciously points out in one of his essays that 'The state is not worried about the guns of the Naxalites. It is scared about the dissent they foment.' Arundhati Roy's non-fiction is meant to globalise this voice of dissent since she believes 'the battle must be joined' as one cannot be neutral on a moving train.

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