

## AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL ACTIVISM IN THE WRITINGS OF ARUNDHATI ROY

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### **Abstract**

Arundhati Roy, an Indian novelist, won the 1997 Booker Prize for her work, “*The God of Small Things*”. She is considered the queen of differing views on social and political matters. She exemplifies the ideals of human life in all of her writing. She is a social activist who writes and speaks about non-violence, environmental problems, and human rights. Roy's writings reveal her gloomy outlook and thoughts. Readers find that her journey towards human rights starts with “*The God of Small Things*” and continues till “*Azadi*”. Roy's writing serves as a wake-up call to reconsider deeply held convictions and demolish oppressive systems. The literary works of Arundhati Roy reveals the intricacies of today's societal issues such as gender inequality, environmental injustice, and caste discrimination. She uses her writings to connect the smallest of things to the biggest of concerns, and to show how they fit together. Her stark remarks are like a bullet piercing human heart and consciousness in areas where inequality and injustice exist. This paper is an attempt to study these concerns prevalent in her writings .This paper will find the lost voice of the powerless communities through Arundhati Roy’s writings.

**Keywords:** class, power, globalisation, humanity, activist, conflict

### **Introduction:**

One of the most well-known writers from India who writes in English is Arundhati Roy. Her debut novel, “*The God of Small Things*”, won her the 1997 Booker Prize, shocking all of the literary elite. She is not only regarded as a novelist in India and overseas, but also as an activist due to her numerous novels, essays, short stories, and other works that address the sociopolitical issues that our nation is currently facing. In addition to her current reputation as a feminist, essayist, persuasive speaker, and social activist, she has worked as a journalist, screenwriter, architect, and social activist. She wants to elevate the littleness and insignificance of the poor and oppressed into a position of importance and prominence. She is recognized as an exceptional post-colonial writer. Roy, a passionate environmentalist, skillfully weaves ecological issues into her literary works. Her stories frequently highlight the negative effects of unbridled industrialization, deforestation, and indigenous communities' relocation. Roy urges readers to consider the environmental effects of modernization and promotes a more equitable and

sustainable method of development through his vivid imagery and gripping storytelling. Roy had published “*The Algebra of Infinite Justice*” (2001), “*An Ordinary Person's Guide to the Empire*” (2005), and “*Listening to Grasshoppers: Field Notes on Democracy*” (2009) after the release of “*The God of Small Things*” in 1997. She had criticised national and international political and economic policies as well as the way in which government decisions are carried out in terms of their potential short- and long-term effects on the environment and populace in each of these. Her writings are published worldwide, and because of her speeches at international forums on important issues like the environment, large dams, religious fanaticism, and nuclear weapons, she has emerged as a formidable spokesperson for the world outside of Europe and America.

Activism assumes that a person has a strong sense of awareness of a problem or an instance of perceived injustice, as well as a strong desire to fight for it. Writers who regularly address current issues and promote a particular viewpoint are generally referred to as writer-activists in the literary community. Such writers are not, however, usually, or are supposed to be, officially, experts in a given field of modern social, economic, political, cultural, or environmental studies. Rather, a well-known author's elevated profile and public stature enable them to persuasively convey the ideas behind an activist cause. Arundhati Roy, an Indian novelist, is one such example.

Roy felt that she was a part of the current fight for social justice in our nation and has been an outspoken critic of globalisation and American influence. When we examine the social issues that the novelist raises in nearly all of her essays, interviews, and short stories in addition to her debut book, we can fully comprehend her portrayal of social realism. Roy's narrative art is of exceptional quality, as evidenced by the Sydney Peace Prize she received in May 2004 for her work in social justice. She employs complex language and a deliberate foregrounding style to highlight the fundamental problems faced by the oppressed in society.

Roy battles against influential columnists and other authoritative figures on behalf of Adivasis, Dalits, and Untouchables. Most people have no voice and are not treated like citizens of the country. The people who are suffering do not have the information needed to make decisions. In reality, India's deeply embedded caste system is dividing society as a whole. The ancient Vedas classified people based on their varnas, or occupations, which gave rise to the caste system. It has brought about a great deal of evil in society. The structural damage to society as a whole occurs when some people are harmed by the class system. The caste system is a major problem for Indian society. Within Indian society, it produces divisions based on classes and communities. Even with the advancement of civilization and culture, these aspects still have a big impact on our society today. The goal of the government is to create true equality for all citizens and find solutions to the issues with the current system.

"Literature serves as a social mirror." When we look back at the history of literature, we can see that it has been revealing the truth to society since its inception. Every literary work is unique due to the author's place of residence, the historical period, their personal convictions, and other contextual factors. In their writings, many modern authors speak out in favour of the social revolution. Throughout history, great writers have used their words to question social norms, spark revolutions, and inspire personal transformations. Among them is Arundhati Roy, who did not hold back while voicing those worries. She works hard to keep her works consistent with the

realistic theme. Based on the discussion above, we can draw a parallel between how the European countries formed and dominated most of history for a sizable portion of it. India was among the nations under the company's dominion. If we delve into the history, we can see how the company came to be the dominant force in the indigenous state. They had entered the country primarily as traders and had built an empire, but when trade began to interfere, the society was completely enthralled. At that time, white people believed they were superior to other races, which was one of the main reasons they conquered and colonised India. They caused significant harm to our nation's indigenous heritage and culture. For them, the people of the East were a group of barbarians, and they saw their rule as a mission to bring about civilisation. They completely subjugated the people, making their lives miserable. India lost its dignity and cultural legacy when it was ruled by the British. The native people were forced to live under harsh rules and to labour for meagre wages, which left them impoverished.

However, literature changes as society does. No literature can be as great as it is without using the façade realism of society, and Roy's works, socio political issues, and other works all possessed this kind of realism. It occasionally shifts to reflect all societal norms depending on what is needed at the moment. It highlights the real social events that occur, taking into account the injustices meted out to the impoverished or recurring political concerns. It has always been the expectation of the literary artist to portray these problems accurately, regardless of the era. The current and crosscurrent of this social change frequently elevates life, or it fragments it when it collides with this new change.

A voice like Arundhati Roy's is becoming inaudible to those who ought to be able to hear it and react to it. After "God of Small Things" brought her widespread acclaim, she turned to writing and political activism. According to analyses, her book shows violence against lower caste members, women, children, the impoverished, and other vulnerable groups in Indian society. Roy has cleverly mimicked social events to effectively depict violence. Since then, Roy has advocated for the independence of Kashmir, the Maoist rebels, and the rights of indigenous peoples to their land, written and published a large number of essays and nonfiction books, made documentaries, and been included on Time magazine's list of the 100 most influential people in the world. In addition, Roy has demonstrated against inequality, environmental degradation, Hindu nationalism, and government corruption. In "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness," she shares all of her feelings regarding the community of marginalised people in India. In this book, Roy explores social injustice, political corruption, and a great deal of violence through the perspectives of several characters. She also highlights the characters' resilience in the face of contemporary political oppression and India's long history of hope and resistance. The leaders of today's society who suppressed the poor in the name of advancing the country obviously believed that proletarian oppression was an essential component of capitalism. Roy's later writings, such as "*The Algebra of Infinite Justice*," "*War is Peace*," "*The End of Imagination*," and "*The Greater Common Good*," all target the impoverished, the "Dalit," women, and those who face discrimination in society. These pieces critique the role of the government while portraying the façade of contemporary society, where people are granted basic democratic rights on the one hand, but those rights are subsequently taken away by influential national leaders in the name of progress. Roy states this in a speech on her own:

Roy vehemently opposes globalisation on the grounds that she thinks it has increased the distance between those who make decisions and those who are forced to pay the price for those decisions. She is the lone activist exposing globalisation's hypocrisy. Roy, who made the decision to reside in India, is recognized as the most well-known anti-nationalist and leftist writer in that nation, supporting an open, pluralistic India over a closed, caste-based, nationalist one. She immediately shares their top-secret plans. Along with the infrastructure, the government, she battles against massive dams, globalisation, nuclear weapons, massacres, and genocides. The government has the authority to erect massive dams that force thousands of people from their homes, implement policies, kill women and children, and finance terrorism in order to make life miserable for the underprivileged in order to satisfy the sporadic avaricious person. In her nonfiction work, Arundhati Roy fights to preserve river water quality by speaking out against large dams and the millions of people forced to relocate. Regarding the large dams, she claims that they are an undeniable method of stealing farmer wisdom. It is a method of stealing irrigation, land, and water from the poor and transferring it to the wealthy. Industrialization, a recurring theme in Roy's works, foreshadows environmental degradation. She exposes the consequences of unchecked progress, whether through the lens of polluted rivers, depleted landscapes, or the looming threat to biodiversity. Roy's stories serve as a stark reminder that environmental degradation is a pressing issue that must be addressed collectively. The reservoirs displace large populations of people from their homes with no guarantee of rehabilitation, leaving them homeless and destitute.

Arundhati Roy states, "People who have been uprooted from their homes and communities, who have lost their culture and language, are being made to feel proud of something. Not something they strive for and achieved, not something they can count as a personal accomplishment, but something they just happen to be. Or, more accurately, something they happen not to be. And the falseness, the emptiness of that pride, is fuelling a gladiatorial anger that is then directed towards a simulated target that has been wheeled into the amphitheatre." (My Seditious Heart, p 174). To achieve her goal, she works to raise awareness among impoverished, defenceless dependents while also exposing the patriarchal elite's deceptive schemes. She says she tries to simplify complex concepts. "I find it offensive, this notion that things are too complicated to explain to an ordinary reader- again this coterie, this club mentality. I write about things that vitally affect people's lives". (The Shape of the Beast, p 18-19). It is especially the responsibility of governments to ensure that citizens can exercise their rights. They are expected to develop and implement policies and programs that allow people to live fulfilling lives while respecting their rights. She never fails to remind us that we take our freedoms from governments, not the other way around. People have the right to refuse and fight for their own victory.

Roy has never wanted to promote culture or India's new 21st-century emergence as an ambassador. Instead, she is recognized as a political activist. After being imprisoned for seditious behaviour, she joined India's Maoists. Every scene in "*The God of Small Things*" is symbolic; it is not a work of fiction that occurred by chance. The characters in "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*" present a fictionalised version of Hindutva doctrine, reinforcing this point. Roy's political ideas are the result of a long battle before these literary masterpieces are accepted into the canon of literature. After the release of "*God of the Small Things*" in 1997, she focused her efforts on nonfiction writing and political activism. The book "*Algebra of Infinite Justice*" (2002) covers a wide range of topics, such as the "war on terror," the impact of public works projects on

the environment, the political euphoria in India following its successful nuclear bomb tests, and the influence of multinational corporations in developing nations on policy. Arundhati Roy, an Indian author, provides an eyewitness account of the Naxalite–Maoist insurgency in “Walking with the Comrades” (2011). Her 2010 stay with Naxalite communist guerrillas in the heart of rural Chhattisgarh's forests is covered in the book. She also stands before us as an anti-globalization spokesperson. She describes India's nuclear programs and rapid industrialization as "encrypted with genocidal potential" and is vehemently opposed to both.

Roy expressed her support for the Kashmiri people's struggle during an August 2008 interview with the Times of India. She argued that Kashmir should be granted independence. In the Jammu and Kashmir city of Srinagar, she supported "massive protests and demonstrations." The ruling party in India chastised her for her actions. Roy, along with Medha Patkar, opposed the construction of the Narmada Dam. The author argued in her essay “*The Greater Common Good*” that our true adversaries were not our neighbours or geographical borders, but evildoers posing as esteemed politicians who instilled hatred in us under the guise of advancing the nation's interests. While large-scale projects are completed in the name of national development, the poor are oppressed and made homeless, particularly the "Adivasis," who rely on nature for their survival. Nature is being destroyed for the big dam project, and they are being compensated with bare lands on which they cannot even earn a living. She even donated royalties from her books and Booker Prize money to the "Narmada Bachao Andolan" project. Arundhati Roy takes care to ensure that the accolades she receives do not result in financial gain. She rejects those that she believes are bribes, political awards, or conditional. She has donated the money she received from the Lannan Foundation to 51 different people and organisations, as well as the prize money from the prestigious French Cultural Award to nonviolent movements around the world. She donated the funds to those organisations to "honour their resilience and refusal to take up arms, even in the face of extreme provocation." She declined the Indian government's Sahitya Academy Award, believing it to be a political honour. Despite thousands of attacks from malicious individuals motivated by self-interest, she remains unadulterated and uncontaminated. Government agents want to completely destroy her, but all they can do is harm her reputation by using flimsy, deceptive, and circumlocutory arguments.

Arundhati Roy's stories in “*The God of Small Things*” and “*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*” depict the harsh realities of India's marginalised people. In these books, she tells the stories of people who face discrimination and struggle to survive. In “*The God of Small Things*”, Roy focuses on the experiences of Ammu and Velutha, members of the Paravan community who are classified as "Untouchable" under the caste system. Roy's love story depicts how society punishes those who break the rules. She depicts the Paravan community's difficult life, in which they have little power and face harsh treatment. “*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*” investigates the lives of people who do not conform to society's norms. Characters like Anjum, a transgender woman, and the hijra community demonstrate how complex identity can be in a society that frequently pushes people to the margins. The novel also delves into the conflict in Kashmir, revealing the struggles of those living in the midst of violence. Roy's writing not only depicts marginalised people's pain, but it also advocates for change and justice. She makes you feel the emotions of those who are frequently overlooked. However, she also demonstrates their strength, love, and ability to make decisions. Still, it is important to examine Roy's work closely. Some argue that by highlighting the struggles of marginalised people, she risks making them appear

too special or different. It is difficult to tell these stories without making them appear like symbols of suffering. Finally, Arundhati Roy's books "*The God of Small Things*" and "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*" provide an insight into the lives of India's deprived classes. Her stories highlight the strength and choices of these communities, prompting us to question the rules that keep them down. But, as we read, we should consider how these stories are told and what they may leave out.

So it is clear that Arundhati Roy's nonfiction advocacy is distinguished by its audacity and unwavering dedication to social justice. While her writings may cause controversy and debate, they are an important reminder of the importance of challenging power, amplifying marginalised voices, and holding governments and institutions accountable for their actions.

### Conclusion:

Arundhati Roy leans towards optimism. She is the only activist exposing the hypocrisy. She hopes to destroy large bombs, dams, ideologies, wars, and mistakes. Perhaps there is a small world here for Roy's imaginary things and people. Her timeless writings have made her the most successful author. Her works have been studied for their social realism, social segregation, and political transgression in an attempt to understand, from a sociological perspective, how her works have revealed the true nature of society as an expression of Indian social, cultural, political, and economic patterns. As a social activist, she puts her ideas into action to promote global peace, prosperity, and humankind. The author hopes that by portraying our country's harsh social reality, a large number of perceptive readers will be moved by her genuine voice and join her cause as a social activist and revolutionary. Arundhati Roy's fiction and nonfiction writing are inextricably linked to her fundamental ideas, emotions, and political philosophy. As an authentic democratic thinker and activist, she sincerely advocates for this class's awareness and empowerment, bringing justice, equality, and liberty in their purest forms.

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ISBN- 9781645603795,

Black Eagle Books, April 2023