



From Fiction To Resistance: A Critical Study Of Arundhati Roy's Literary And Political Trajectory

Krishna Kumar Dwivedi¹, Dr. Kavita Agnihotri^{2*}

¹Research Scholar, Department of English, P.K. University, Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh, India

^{2*}Professor, Department of English, P.K. University, Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh, India

Abstract

This paper explores Arundhati Roy's evolution from an acclaimed novelist to a committed political activist and public intellectual. Although her literary acclaim began with *The God of Small Things* (1997), Roy soon moved beyond fiction, becoming one of the fiercest critics of globalization, imperialism, and nationalism. This study examines how her early literary work served as a foundation for her activism, and how her essays reflect moral commitments already present in her fiction. Through an analysis of both her novels and non-fiction writings, this article traces her ideological journey and intervention in India's political landscape.

Keywords: Arundhati Roy, postcolonial literature, resistance, political activism, globalization, fiction and politics

Introduction

Arundhati Roy holds a distinct position in the realms of global literature and political thought. Following the release of *The God of Small Things* in 1997, she gained immediate global attention, receiving the Booker Prize. Rather than continuing solely as a novelist, Roy expanded her role to become a sharp critic of social injustice, inequality, and state power. This paper explores the continuity between her fiction and activism, and how both reflect a consistent ethical and political vision.

1. Literary Beginnings: *The God of Small Things*

Roy's debut novel is a poignant examination of personal and social trauma. Set in Kerala, the novel critiques caste discrimination, patriarchal structures, and lingering colonial influences. The tragedy of Velutha, a lower-caste character, becomes symbolic of entrenched systemic violence. These themes would become more explicit in her future political essays. Roy's use of nonlinear narrative and poetic language set the tone for her distinctive voice, one that combines beauty with deep socio-political critique.

2. Post-Booker Roy: Turning to Non-Fiction and Dissent

After her debut, Roy turned to non-fiction, publishing powerful essays such as *The Cost of Living* (1999). She critiqued state-led development projects and gave voice to displaced communities. In *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* and *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*, she addressed global capitalism and imperialist policies. Her vocal opposition to military operations in Kashmir and support for tribal rights drew national criticism, but also established her as a principled public intellectual.

3. The Writer as an Activist: Ethical Imperatives

Roy does not view writers as passive observers. In her speeches and essays, she urges intellectuals to align with the oppressed. She transcends commentary to become an engaged actor in resistance movements, from anti-dam protests to indigenous struggles. Her statement, 'The only thing worth globalizing is dissent,' embodies her belief that the writer must be ethically and politically accountable.

4. Returning to Fiction: *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017)

Roy's return to fiction came with *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Unlike her debut, this novel spans India's diverse social fabric—touching on gender, religion, and insurgency. Anjum, a transgender woman, and Tilottama, a journalist in Kashmir, represent the marginalized. Her activist background strongly influences the novel's fabric, transforming fiction into a space of resistance.

5. Criticism and Controversy

Roy's political engagement has drawn both praise and backlash. Critics accuse her of sympathizing with insurgent causes, while others commend her for exposing human rights violations. Her position provokes important debates on free expression, national identity, and the responsibilities of public intellectuals in democratic societies.

6. Literary and Political Synthesis

Roy's body of work defies simple categorization. Whether writing fiction or polemical essays, she maintains a lyrical style and a sharp critique of injustice. Her writing serves as both art and intervention, reinforcing her view that literature must engage with reality. Her refusal to commercialize her fame or join institutional power structures further reflects her integrity.

7. Conclusion

Arundhati Roy's evolution from fiction to resistance underscores the enduring power of literature to challenge injustice. Her work is not only a mirror to society's failures but a call to action. In times of censorship and authoritarianism, Roy reaffirms the writer's role as a beacon of truth and dissent.

Works Cited

- Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. IndiaInk, 1997.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Penguin, 2017.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The Cost of Living*. Modern Library, 1999.
- Roy, Arundhati. *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*. Haymarket Books, 2014.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*. Viking, 2002.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Politics of the Governed*. Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard UP, 2011.