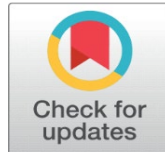
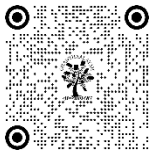


INDEPENDENT INDIA AND FREEDOM: A CRITICAL STUDY OF ARUNDHATI ROY'S "THE SILENCE IS THE LOUDEST SOUND"

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ABSTRACT

Arundhati Roy is a rebellious writer who has written about inequalities, hegemony, communal conflicts, globalization, economic imperialization and identity crisis in her novels and non-fiction. She is well known for her Booker Prize winning novel, *The God of Small Things*. Besides this success, she is also known for her non-fictional writings, in which she expresses her concern for human and environmental welfare. In 2020, she published nine essays as an essay collection. She titled the collection as *Azadi: Freedom Fascism Fiction*. In the collection she has reflected on the themes like freedom, fascism and fabrication of fiction as facts. This paper will explore the essay entitled, "The Silence Is the Loudest Sound". The objective of the paper is to throw light on the kind of freedom, democracy and secularism prevailing in Jammu and Kashmir.

Key words: Azadi, freedom, fascism, secularism, democracy, independent, government, constitution

1. INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy is a revolutionary Indian Writer, who was born on November 24, 1961 in Shillong, Meghalaya. She is one of the notable contemporary political activists in India. She gained universal acclaim with her debut novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997). The book and the author gained worldwide popularity. The themes and techniques of the novel, created a great revolution in the literary world. The unique features of the novel include, non-linear plot and postmodern techniques. After that, she published many essays and articles, which focused on real incidents and issues. She didn't restrict herself to national events and issues, she observed and reflected on all important national, international and global events. In her non-fictional writings, she connects all the dots between the international events and the local happenings. Her famous fictional collections are *Power Politics* (2001), *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2002), *Listening to Grasshoppers* (2009), *Broken Republic: Three Essays* (2011), *The Seditious Heart* (2019), and *Azadi: Freedom, Fascism, Fiction* (2020).

This research paper critically analyses the essay titled, "The Silence Is the Loudest Sound". This is one of the essays published in her recent collection, *Azadi: Freedom, Fascism, Fiction*. Roy specifically named the collection with the Urdu

term 'Azadi', which means 'freedom'. Through her essays, she puts forth a few questions related to freedom in the minds of the readers. They are

- 1) What is freedom?
- 2) Does Kashmir enjoy freedom in this independent India?
- 3) What kind of Independence Day, does the government expect the people of Kashmir to celebrate?

The subtitle of the book is "Freedom, Fascism, Fiction". 'Freedom' in the subtitle explains the need for freedom in independent India. Roy challenges the idea of freedom in a world of growing authoritarianism. Following that 'Fascism' refers to existing extreme Hindu nationalism and militarism in India. Finally, the word 'Fiction' is used by Roy to refer to the fictionalized stories about the victimized people and regions by the people in the power.

In the essay, "The Silence Is the Loudest Sound", Roy explains the condition of Kashmir. Despite the received Independence, Kashmir still struggles for freedom from its own government. Besides 'freedom', the concept of 'democracy' is also questioned by Roy. The reason behind doubting Indian democracy is she finds the government more authoritative than democratic, especially in the case of Kashmir. This is clear in the very opening lines of the essay. In which, Roy feels hard to say, "My India is Great". In her words, "Quite honestly, its hard to feel the way right now, because it looks very much though our government has gone rouge" (Roy, 2020, p. 91). Here, the term 'rouge' asserts that the government has become more authoritative.

Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as government of the people, by the people, for the people. This formula implies that every individual of the democracy should be represented on an equal basis in the political community. So, a democracy should give importance to people's suggestion, while taking decisions on people's welfare. Two important features of a democratic government are, (i) the government should stay liable to the common people and (ii) the government should welcome people's suggestions and keep them participative. Since, both of these are denied to the Kashmir people through Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act 2019, Roy interrogates the kind of democracy prevailing in India. Mooney and Evans say that, "Democratic government is only legitimate in so far as it is based on the people, and it always remains accountable to the people, i.e., to every single citizen" (Mooney & Evans, 2007 p. 63).

The essay highlights the things happened in Kashmir in August 2019, just before India's 73rd Independence Day celebration. The government passed, the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act, 2019. Through the act, the special status of Jammu and Kashmir was stripped. "It also strips it of statehood and partitions it into two union territories" (Roy, 2020, p. 92). Immediately after passing the act, the government announced lockdown in Jammu and Kashmir. They claimed that this lockdown is just a way to prevent the expected riots and gatherings. Roy compares this authoritative act of the government with colonialism. She says that "There was a distinct whiff of colonialism in the air" (Roy, 2020, p. 92). The sad part is the ignorant common people could not understand the things happening around them. though the Prime Minister claimed that everything is for the good of the people, Roy refuses to accept it. After four days of lockdown in Jammu and Kashmir, on August 8 the Prime Minister appeared on television to address the people. In the speech, he didn't tell the reason for the lockdown, rather he just said that everything happens for people's welfare.

He didn't explain why Kashmir is needed to be locked down and put under a communication blockade while he delivered his stirring speech. He didn't explain why the decision that supposedly benefited them so hugely was taken without consulting them. he didn't say how the great gifts of Indian democracy could be enjoyed by a people who live under a military occupation. (Roy, 2020, p. 102)

The reorganization act made nationalists, businessmen and politicians happy, but it doesn't bring joy or relief to the people of the region. The members of the parliament welcomed the act saying that "a recalcitrant colony had finally, formally been brought under the crown" (Roy 92). She purposefully used the terms like 'colony' and 'crown' to show the authoritative act of the government. On the one hand, these people celebrate the act, on the other the people of the region are dead silent. The announced lockdown was more challenging for them. Their streets were already filled with military men with loaded guns for every ten steps. Besides, strong military control, the government decided to cut off internet connection. The people were forced to live under complete communication backout and complete surveillance. "Amid these vulgar celebrations the loudest sound, however, is the deathly silence from Kashmir's patrolled, barricaded streets and its caged, humiliated people, stitched down by razor wire, spied on by drones, living under a complete communication blackout" (Roy, 2020, p. 93). Here, she uses terms like caged and 'humiliated people' to describe the state of the people, who were imprisoned by their own government.

Two of the seven major Rights in the Indian Constitution are Right to freedom and Right to freedom of religions. these two rights are denied to the people of Kashmir. In the essay, Roy records her experience of meeting her friends in Kashmir on July 28, 2019. One of her friends is a senior doctor at a government hospital. He is a Muslim. He explains the exact situation, which is prevailing in Kashmir. "We started talking about the new phenomenon of mobs surrounding people, Muslims in particular, and forcing them to chant Jai Shri Ram! (Victory to Lord Ram!) (Roy 105). This shows the existence of fascism in Kashmir. Fascism makes the readers to question secularism, which is one of the basic features of the country mentioned in the constitution of India. Through the term secular, the constitution affirms that the country does not have an official religion. On the contrast, the existing fascism shakes the very basic features of the constitution.

The second right to be discussed is the Right to Freedom. The people of Kashmir are not free, because they are always surrounded by military force all the time. "Today Kashmir is one of the most, or perhaps the most, densely militarized zone in the world" (Roy, 2020, p. 98). Roy says that, the real enemy of these armed soldiers is Kashmiri people. Their duty is to safeguard the people, but they control the people. She gives an example, "Over the last few years, hundreds of teenagers have been blinded by the use of pellet-firing shotguns, the security establishment's new weapon of choice of crowd control" (Roy, 2020, p. 98). This act of controlling common people ends up with friction between soldiers and people. sometimes, the soldiers kill people by identifying them as 'terrorists'. Soldiers label them as terrorists; on the other hand, people call them as a 'martyr'. The constitution of India says that all people have right to freedom, but when it is denied for people of Jammu and Kashmir.

To conclude, Roy's reflections on the idea of freedom, democracy and secularism with respect to Jammu and Kashmir is discussed in this paper. As per the observation, in this independent India Kashmiri people are in the compulsion to fight for their 'freedom' and end up losing their lives. Though people are victimized for government's welfare, the facts are fictionalized in favor of the people in power. This is what Noam Chomsky meant, when he said, "Propaganda is to a democracy, what bludgeon is to a totalitarian state" (Chomsky, 1997, p. 20-21). The information and idea are exaggerated to support government's idea.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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