

Arundhati Roy's unflinching Courage level in her works

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Abstract

The high profile intellectual of Arundhati Roy ensure a level playing ground in any national or international issues. She has the unflinching courage in criticizing even the international issues which culminate in exact reality without favouring any one side particularly. She suggests those people to join hands and be gentle instead of being brutal, be friend instead of being isolated and to love instead being hated. She said that Saddam Hussein might be a sinner but bringing down his regime is not acceptable to the long cherished democratic and humanistic values.

Key Words: unflinching courage, join hands and be gentle, nuclear test

1. Introduction

Arundhati Roy has a high profile intellectual. She would like to ensure a level playing ground in any national or international issues. She questions whether America's war is against terror in general or terror in America alone. According to her terrorism is only a symptom and not the disease. Being transnational, it has no country in particular. It is as global an enterprise as Coke or Pepsi or Nike. Whenever the terrorists come across any trouble they could move from country to country like the multi-nationals.

2. Unflinching Courage

Arundhati Roy has an extra perception-the literary student's gift of creative skills. This extra perception makes her to scan things and incidents vividly. She has the unflinching courage in criticizing even the international issues which culminate in exact reality without favouring any one side particularly. Her criticism on September 11 incident of the crash of the twin towers in the USA reveal her level playing criticism in which she says:
Who is America fighting? On September 20, the FBI said that it had doubts about the identities of some of the hijackers. On the same day President George Bush said.

"We know exactly who these people are and which governments are supporting them." It sounds as though the president knows something that the FBI and the American public don't (The Algebra of infinite justice, The guardian)

In his September 20, address to the US Congress, President Bush called the enemies of America as "enemies of freedom". When the Americans asked him why these enemies hated them he said:

"They hate our freedoms-our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other". Arundathi remarks to this

Americian people ought to know that it is not them but their government's policies that are hated..... America's grief at what happened has been immense and immensely public. It would be grotesque to expect it to calibrate or modulate its anguish. However, it will be a pity if, instead of using this as an opportunity to try to understand why September 11 happened, Americans use it as an opportunity to usurp the whole worlds sorrow to mourn and avenge only their own. Because then it falls to the rest of us to ask the hard questions and say the harsh things. And for our pains, for our bad timing, we will be disliked, ignored and perhaps eventually silenced.
(Ibid)

Instead of asking who is Osama Bin Laden she rephrases it by asking what Osama Bin Laden is and finds the answer that he is America's family secret. Both Bin Laden and Bush call each other as "the head of the snake" President Bush's ultimatum "If you're not with us, you're against us" is considered by her as presumptuous arrogance".

Saddam Hussein might be a sinner but bringing down his regime is not acceptable to the long cherished democratic and humanistic values. It is equally reprehensive. Times/CBS News survey informs that 42 percent of the American public believed that Saddam Hussein was directly responsible for September 11 attack on the *World Trade Centre* and the *Pentagon*. Saddam is also believed to be the supporter of the *Al Qaida*. However these opinions are baseless. Roy comments as:

All of it is based on insinuation, auto-suggestion, and outright lies circulated by the U.S. Corporate media, otherwise known as the "Free Press", that hollow pillar on which

contemporary American democracy rests (Instant mix Imperial Democracy, A talk presented by Roy)

Though the war against Iraq has been fought and won, no weapon of Mass Destruction was found. Roy feels that they must be planted before they're discovered.

She even doubts why Saddam did not use them when his country was invaded. She even goes to the extent of assuring it as:

Washington and London overtly and covertly supported Saddam Hussein. They financed him, equipped him, armed him, and provided him with dual-use materials to manufacture Weapons of mass destruction. (Ibid)

She opines that democracy has lost its meaning and it is in crisis. This is revealed through the lines:

Every kind of outrage is being committed in the name of democracy.
It has become little more than a hollow word, a pretty shell, emptied
of all content or meaning. It can be whatever you want it to be.
Democracy is the Free World's whore, willing to dress up, dress
down, willing to satisfy a whole range of taste, available to the used
and abused at will. (Ibid)

Here she disagrees only with the American President but not with its people. She suggests those people to join hands and be gentle instead of being brutal, be friend instead of being isolated and to love instead being hated. She said Sunday that she hoped President George W Bush would share the fate of the captured Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

She does not consider the international issues alone. She voices out her strong opinions about *India's Nuclear Test at Pokhran on May 1998*. All the great achievers and people of high imagination have seen the world as one land. Rabindranath Tagore does not want the world to be broken into many fragments. Kalpana Chawla in her last interview to the press said, "I was not born for one corner. The whole world is my native land" In the same interview she had given her message- "Listen to the sounds of nature ... take good care of our fragile planet" (11th std English Reader- State Board)

Roy has named her essay on the nuclear test rightly as "The End of Imagination" (The nation- selected feature Saturday, 2 January 1999). She feels that such tests will completely destroy the earth.

"May 1998. It'll go down in history books to go down in provided, of course, we have a future. There's nothing new or original left to be said about nuclear weapons. There can be nothing more humiliating for a writer of fiction to have to do than restate a case that has, over the years, already been made by other people in other parts of the world and made passionately, eloquently and Knowledgeably. I am prepared to grovel. To humiliate myself abjectly, because, in the circumstances, silence would be indefensible. Our fatigue and our shame could mean the end of us. The end of our children and our children's children of everything we love. (Ibid)

She further explains that the nuclear wars are not against our enemies but against our own earth herself and all the elements- the sky, the air, the land, the wind and water-will turn against us. These nuclear wars will make the earth an inferno. As India and Pakistan, all other countries in the world also have reasons for having the bombs. Then our earth will be beautified by missiles. The world order will also be changed. Dictatorship will be the order of the day. She salutes the Americans ironically for bringing down this sea change in the world by saying:

The Men who made it happen. The Masters of the Universe. Ladies and gentlemen the United States of America Come on up here, folks, stand up and take a bow, Thank you for doing this to the world. Thank you for making a difference. Thank you for showing us the way. Thank you for altering the very meaning of life. (Ibid)

However the nuclear test in India was highly appreciated by the media through various head lines such as "Explosion of Self-Esteem," "Road to Resurgence," "A Moment of Pride" But she felt it as the "End of our Imagination" Though India and Pakistan are separate countries, the sky, water that we share are common. If we explode the bombs not only Pakistan but also India will be affected by it. Hence it is a war against ourselves. A nuclear bomb will not improve our nation's development in any way. She says:

The nuclear bomb and the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya are both part of the same political process. They are hideous byproducts of a nation's search for herself. Of India's effort to forge a national identity. To define what being India means.(Ibid)

She ridicules the peoples' tendency of considering coke as Western but bomb as

Indian. Some even say that bombs are in the Vedas. With the same logic coke would also be found in the Vedas because that is the beauty of the religious texts. One can find anything one wants in them. Actually she feels: "Nuclear weapons pervade our thinking. They are the ultimate colonizer. Whiter than any white man that ever lived. The very heart of whiteness" (Ibid)

She opines that though the opinion polls gives a consent to the nuclear tests it cannot be considered. If everybody loves it, it does not mean that it is good. There are: millions of illiterates in India. One who does not know even to write his own name, would not be in a position to understand the evil consequences of the bombs. She concludes the talk with:

If you are religious, then remember that this bomb is Man's challenge to God. It's worded quite simply: We have the power to destroy everything that you have created. If you are not (religious), then look at it this way. This world of ours is four thousand, six hundred million years old. It could end in an afternoon. (Ibid)

Then she focuses her concern on the Kashmir issue. Salmon Rushdie had tackled the subject of Kashmir for the first time in his new novel "Shalimar the Clown". This has been discussed in the daily The Hindu as:

"Rushdie holds out little hope of a return to the Kashmir of his childhood, where he remembers Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims living happily side by side, bound by a sense of being Kashmiri above all else" (The Hindu, 2.9.05)

A similar concern is found in Roy which is voiced out by her in a meeting where academicians, social activists, human rights volunteers and students were also present. She boldly asserts:

We as Indians have no right to talk about whatever is happening in Palestine and Iraq unless we discuss and highlight the atrocities being committed in the Valley. The issue is not just related to the freedom of Kashmiris, it is a matter of concern for all Indians. What farcial peace are we talking about? (The Hindu, 31-8-05)

The daring nature of Arundhati is innate in her. This has got a license after she became a writer. This has been expressed by her as:

A writer (meaning novelist fiction writer rather than journalist) has license to

write things differently.... As a writer, I have the license and ability I guess, to move between feelings and numbers and technical stuff, and you know, to tell the whole story in a way which an expert doesn't seem to have the right to do (Roy as quoted in Kings north) (<http://www.arundhatiroy.com>.Untitled)

3. CONCLUSION

There are several other issues like alcoholism, violence, consumerism etc. which all form part of the major and minor areas of interest in the novel. But a society with healthy people and a society without snobs and a society without corruption and unrealistic planning in the field of education would be something that everyone might wish for. This would not mean that other issues should altogether be ignored

In short, the contemporary cultural scene as portrayed in the novel is far from satisfactory. As the novelist remarks in the sixth chapter of the novel the feeling one gets is that India (and of course Kerala) is going to the dogs. Basically all these have also to do with the social and economic life of the people. In the main money plays a very important role. The influence of the electronic media also may be playing a role to make matters worse.

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