

**THE POWER POLITICS AND THE MARGINALIZED: A STUDY OF ARUNDHATI
ROY'S THE COLONIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE**

V. R. Raja Pravina

Ph.D. Research Scholar (Part-Time)

Sri Meenakshi Govt. Arts College for Women
Madurai Kamaraj University

Abstract

Arundhati Roy is a contemporary writer, who is known for her revolutionary political essays and interviews. She writes and speaks about and for marginalized people. The marginalized people are those, whose voices are deliberately silenced by the power politics. In all her interviews she has boldly recorded the pains, sufferings, and struggles of the people in the periphery. Similarly, this interview, "The Colonization of Knowledge" also highlights the power operations and the effects of power operations on the life of suppressed people. In India, people are marginalized based on their ethnicity, community, caste, class, religion, and language. Roy speaks about all these types of discrimination. Besides, she highlights the reasons behind the discrimination to give clarity to her readers. This paper will focus on Roy's perspectives on the displacement of marginalized people, the idea of nationalism, and the effects of globalization.

Key Words: Marginalized, periphery, Power Politics, displacement, globalization, nationalism

Arundhati Roy, the powerful voice of voiceless was born on November 24, 1961 in Kerala, India. She became popular and was celebrated for her very first novel, *The God of Small of Things*. Besides, she became the first Indian writer to win the Man Booker Prize for the novel in 1997. After this, she shifted her mode of writing from fiction to non-fiction. As she mentioned in most of her interviews and conversations, her fiction is equally political as her non-fiction. Her political essays have direct factual references, on the other hand her fiction is allegorical. To note, alike her fiction the non-fictional writings are also fully loaded with the narrative

techniques. The genre or the form of writing only changes, the themes of her writings remain the same. So, irrespective of the form of the writings, she focused on the life struggles of the marginalized. When David Barsamian asked about this genre transition, she casually answered, “It’s only to other people that it appears to be a transition.” (Roy 43) Besides, she added “I don’t see a great difference between *The God of Small Things* and my non-fiction. In fact, I keep saying, fiction is the truest thing there ever was.” (Roy 44)

“The Colonization of Knowledge” was Roy’s conversation with David Barsamian that happened in 2001. In the conversation she highlighted the life of the people on the margin or the periphery. Besides, they discussed the global political situation of the country. The part of the ‘power’ in then India and the contemporary India is an important topic to converse. So, the relationship between power, politics and knowledge is explained by her. Here in the conversation, Roy elaborated the role of the power and its connection with the life of the marginalized. The struggles of marginalized people include the struggles of women, adivasis, farmers, the Dalits and the urban middle class.

The interviewer was so curious about Roy’s reflections on her own state and people, so he asked, “What’s the status of women generally in Kerala? Is it different from the rest of India given high levels of education?” She answered the question more authentically by citing examples from her own life. She said that, her childhood was not so pleasant. In the Malayalam movies of that time, women were beaten, raped and tortured both physically and mentally by men. These films made her to believe that all women will get raped. Through these reflections, the way women were treated can be observed. In addition, it is evident that irrespective of the class, religion, caste and educational qualifications, women were/are the object of subjugation. Roy proved this citing an incident that happened in 1956. In 1956, Supreme Court gave equal

inheritance to girl children as the boys. Despite the verdict of the court, women were not allowed to inherit their father's property.

She further added the way women were treated in a Syrian Christian family. In her words, "The churches had will-making classes. They taught fathers how to disinherit their daughters. It's a very strange kind of oppression that happens there." (Roy 39) Besides these, she also condemned the dowry system. The women who managed to get well paid job through good education, eventually ended up in the most subservient marital relationships. These oppressing systems gave nightmare to young Roy.

Roy said that the power politics is everywhere. Her main concern is to make people aware of the hidden or unnoticed world. In her writings, she creates links and connect the dots. In the interview, she affirmed that the readers should recognize and understand the dots connected by her. If they lose the connections or if they can't decode the connected dots then everything would be meaningless. She made it clear with reference to her own novel, *The God of Small Things*.

I try to create links, to join the dots, to tell politics like a story, to communicate it, to make it real. *The God of Small Things* is a book which connects the very smallest things to the very biggest. how history and politics intrude into your life, your house, your bedroom, you bed, into the most intimate relationships between people- parents and children, siblings and so on. (Roy 44)

So, it is duty of every citizen to decode the power politics in everything around us.

Then the conversation slowly shifted to the Narmada valley project. Through her reflections it is noticeable that, in the name of 'development' the natural resources and human

lives have been exploited. She also added that despite the exploitation, the wilderness is still there in India. This view point is proved with some real examples. One such is the power politics played by the government and the big industrial complexes in Gujarat. In Gujarat, two places named Kutch and Saurashtra faced extreme drought. The state government promised that these two places will receive water through the Namada valley project. Roy wanted her readers to see the other hidden side of the issue. Yes, the reason behind the drought was the groundwater was extracted by the industries and furthermore the industries poisoned the left groundwater too. In Roy's words,

‘Why is there a drought in Kutch and Saurashtra?’ The reason is that the government has systematically cut down all the mangrove forests. They have mined groundwater indiscriminately and so there is an ingress of seawater from the coast. They have big industrial complexes that poison whatever groundwater remains. (Roy 51)

In the name of development and industrialization the natural resources are exploited. Besides it also displaces the place who remain obstacle to the so-called ‘development’. Consequently, the effects of this industrialization directly and indirectly affect the lives of those marginalized.

“Industrialization is the process by which a society changes economically and socially because of the shift from agriculture to industrial technology. Where people live, the kind of work they do and the way in which time is managed all change with the advent of industrially mechanized modes of production” (Mooney & Evans 139) The government used the umbrella terms such as ‘development’ and ‘people’s welfare’ to exploit the same people. It establishes power by constructing dams and bridges construction and by supporting the growth of industries and factories. In 1990, the first dam on Narmada was built in Madhya Pradesh. The statistics approximately said that the project would have displaced around 70,000 people. Roy described

the scenario like, “they were just driven from their homes when the waters rose. They had to run up the hill with the cattle and children.” (Roy 53) These people should remain displaced throughout their lifetime. There is no single proof to prove that the government has given a place instead of the old one. Through these displacements it is evident that the people in power have the power to erase and redraw the lines of the borders within their governing areas.

The relationship between the knowledge and power politics is highly focused in the conversation. Roy instructed the people to question the authority. The authority can be the government or any other private power, but they should question them. The people have the right to information. So, they can and should question the power and politics. In addition to this, she also said that the organizations which has the control over the world, the World Bank and the government operate secretly. Roy said, “The organizations that control the world today-the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank- operate in complete secrecy. Contracts that governments sign with multinationals, which affect people’s lives so intimately, are secret documents.” (Roy 45)

This context in the country can be explained better using two concepts. They are Althusser’s ‘state apparatuses’ and Gramsci’s ‘hegemony’. The state apparatuses can be divided into two types, repressive state apparatus and ideological state apparatus. These two apparatuses are used to establish control over the people either using violence or imposing ideologies. The chief aim of these apparatuses is to transmit the idea of the ruling- class or the people in power as the ideas of the mainstream. Through which they maintain the existing inequality. The repressive apparatus directly works for the state using violence as a tool. On the other hand, ideological state apparatus works secretly and casually. Even though the state does not have any direct control over the ideas disseminated, its role is indeed crucial. For instance, ideological state apparatus includes family units too. The families enjoy some autonomy. Despite the autonomy,

the influence of the government can be noticed. Similarly, Gramsci named this indirect control as hegemony. Peter Barry explains hegemony using following lines,

Antonio Gramsci contrasts *rule*, which is direct political control, which uses force when necessary, and *hegemony*, which is ‘the whole lived social process s practically organized by specific and dominant meaning, values and beliefs of a kind which can be abstracted as a “world-view” or “class outlook””.....Hegemony is like an internalized form of social control which makes certain views seem ‘natural’ or invisible so that they hardly seem like views at all, just ‘the way things are’. (Barry 158)

So, to conclude the conversations act as a clarion call to her readers. She wanted her readers should act with boldness. Her motive is to tell people that, they should not allow their knowledge to colonized. They should question the power and politics through their knowledge, because right to information is their basic right. She felt bad that “Education sometimes makes people float even further away from things that ought to know about. It seems to actually obscure their vision. The kind of ignorance the people with PhDs display is unbelievable.” (Roy 45). So, its duty of the people to be cautious and act as per their qualifications.

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