

## Arundhati Roy: Voicing the Voices of the Marginalized through Non-Fiction

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### ABSTRACT

Arundhati Roy, a renowned Indian writer and activist, is celebrated for her Booker Prize-winning debut novel, *The God of Small Things*. Through both her fiction and non-fiction works, she has profoundly examined the struggles of India's marginalized populations. Her non-fiction writing extends the themes present in her novels, serving as a powerful platform for her passionate advocacy for social justice. This paper analyzes Roy's active involvement in social movements and tribal campaigns, highlighting her unwavering commitment to seeking justice and empowerment for the downtrodden. Her non-fiction works, *Walking with the Comrades* and *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*, are both thought-provoking and often controversial. In these contributions, Roy articulates a fervent critique of various political and social issues, consistently challenging the status quo and championing the rights of oppressed communities. She emphasizes the importance of sustained activism, urging readers to remain vigilant and proactive in confronting injustices. Furthermore, Roy advocates for collective action to address inequality, exploitation, and oppression on a global scale, asserting that meaningful progress typically arises from grassroots efforts rather than top-down initiatives.

**Keywords:** *Arundhati Roy, activist, nonfictions, social justice, advocacy, downtrodden, empowerment, collective action*

### Introduction

Arundhati Roy, a reputed Indian writer and activist, has addressed issues concerning India's downtrodden populations through both her fiction and non-fiction works<sup>1</sup>. Her Booker Prize-winning novel, "*The God of Small Things*", dealt with the cruelties of the caste system in Kerala, portraying both the sad predicament of untouchables and the struggle of a woman trying to have accomplishment in life in a patriarchal society<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, her second novel, "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*", offered vivid depictions of marginalized communities in India<sup>1</sup>.

Roy's non-fiction is an extension of the themes in her novels, serving as a platform for her strong advocacy for social justice<sup>3</sup>. In her own life she was involved in social movements and tribal campaigns underscores her commitment to seeking justice and empowerment for marginalized populations<sup>1</sup>. Through her powerful writings and unwavering advocacy, she delves deep into the narratives of those often silenced by societal hierarchies<sup>1</sup>.

### **Arundhati Roy's non-fiction advocacy**

Arundhati Roy's non-fiction advocacy, is depicted in works like "Walking with the Comrades" and "The Algebra of Infinite Justice,". Both are thought-provoking books but appear to be controversial. In these literary works, she comes out with a passionate criticism of various political and social issues, often challenging the status quo and advocating for the depressed communities and weaker sections of the society.

The themes and logical arguments presented offer a culmination of her extensive critique of socio-political and economic structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice. Throughout the book, Roy has highlighted the concept of "infinite justice," a term that is often used in political parlance, especially in the context of justifying war and punitive measures. She questions this concept, positing that true justice cannot be infinite if it perpetuates cycles of violence, displacement, and environmental degradation. Roy's reflections highlight the paradox of seeking justice through instrument that themselves are unjust, illustrating how such approaches can result in further injustices.

Hence Roy calls for justice to be redefined itself, one that is not bound by power politics or economic gain but is grounded in humanity, empathy, and respect for all life. She strongly proposes that any vision of justice must address the root causes of inequity, such as imperialistic foreign policies, corporate greed, and systemic discrimination.

Her final thoughts, are important which suggest that the pursuit of a just world requires a collective effort that transcends national boundaries. She strongly argues that it is imperative for individuals and communities to collaborate across divisions, standing in solidarity with those who are marginalized and oppressed. This collective action must be communicated by a consciousness that recognizes the interconnectedness of global struggles for justice.

Roy is not merely theoretical. She also gives importance to the role of sustained activism, urging readers to remain vigilant and proactive in the face of injustices. She is highly in praise of grassroots movements and the power of ordinary people to bring about change, underscoring that meaningful progress often comes from the bottom rather than from above. Roy envisions a harmonious world where policies and practices are shaped by ethical considerations and the well-being of all people and the planet. She gives a clarion call to end the exploitation of natural resources and a shift towards sustainable development built on ecological balance and the rights of Adivasis. Her vision is one of hope and resilience, rooted in the belief that a just world is not only necessary but realizable through collective effort and unshakable commitment.

### **Walking with the Comrades**

In "Walking with the Comrades," through her personal encounter, Roy narrates the life stories of the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency in India. She graphically portrays a firsthand account of her experiences living among the guerrilla fighters in the forests, throwing light on their motivations, struggles, and the harsh realities they encounter. Through her narrative, Roy questions conventional narratives that often treat the Maoists solely as terrorists and goes deep into the root causes of the conflict, including issues of land rights, displacement of the tribals, and inequality. Her empathetic portrayal of the insurgents is both compelling and controversial, as it humanizes a group often demonized in mainstream discourse. She shows that even in the midst of conflict, people can make choices to resist oppression.

Arundhati Roy's adventurous journey into the heart of the Dandakaranya forest concludes with a profound emphasis on the necessity of bringing about harmony by fostering understanding between warring groups. In her final reflections, she synthesizes the extensive observations and insights gathered throughout her time with the Naxalite comrades and the tribal communities. She points out, "When you step through the gateway into the forests and the world of the Maoists, it's like stepping through a looking glass". Through her real time live-in experience with the tribal people she shares her insight saying, "Poverty is not just about the lack of money. It's about the lack of a sense of security, a lack of a sense of belonging".

Roy states that there is a need for the critical need for empathy in addressing the complex socio-political issues at the root of the conflict. She asks the government not to treat the Naxalite movement as a militant

insurgency but must be understood in the context of tribal oppression. In fact the displacement driven by mining and industrial projects of the Corporates and the Government have left deep unhealed wounds on these communities, provoking a fight for survival and justice that many people fail to grasp fully. She calls for a prudent approach to understanding the motivations and grievances of the Naxalite fighters, stressing that their struggle is not merely ideological but deeply founded on the lived realities of oppression and marginalization.

In advocating for socio-political change, Roy questions the prevailing development paradigm pursued by the Indian state, which often gives importance to economic growth over the rights and well-being of tribal communities. She proposes alternative approaches that consider ecological sustainability and social equity, urging policymakers to rethink development policies that have historically alienated and harmed Indigenous populations.

### **The Algebra of Infinite Justice**

The Algebra of Infinite Justice consists of a collection of essays by Arundhati Roy covers a wide range of issues. In 'India's Nuclear Tests' it critiques the political euphoria in India following successful nuclear bomb tests. Roy discusses the effect of public works projects on the environment in her essay, "Environmental Impact". Similarly in "Multinational Companies" she explores the influence of foreign multinational companies on policy in poorer countries. Roy's writing is passionate and speaks for those whose voices have been silenced. In this book Roy explicitly delve into social justice theory, Roy's work often challenges structures of power and privilege. She advocates for collective efforts to address inequality, exploitation, and oppression globally. By recognizing interconnectedness, we can work toward a more just world.

Throughout her narrative, Roy brings out the power of storytelling and personal testimonies in bridging divisions. By sharing the voices and experiences of the tribal people and Naxalite comrades, she tries to humanize a conflict that is often reduced to statistics and sensationalized media reports. Her call to action is grounded in the conviction that meaningful change is possible if there is genuine understanding and dialogue between disparate groups.

### **Conclusion:**

Arundhati Roy's "Walking with the Comrades" is not just a documentation of a specific conflict but a broader commentary on the need for empathy and inclusivity in addressing social and political issues. Her journey through the forest serves as a metaphor for the deeper exploration required to uncover the truths underlying any struggle for justice. Critics argue that Arundhati Roy's non-fiction advocacy can be polarizing due to its confrontational style and unabashed criticism of established power structures. However, her ability to amplify the voices of the marginalized, whether it's the indigenous tribes in "Walking with the Comrades" or the victims of global conflicts in "The Algebra of Infinite Justice," is a testament to her commitment to justice and human rights.

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