



“Dissent and Dialogue: Arundhati Roy's Activism and India's Role on the Global Stage”

By:

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Abstract

This paper examines the interplay between Arundhati Roy's activism and India's growing influence on the global stage. As a prominent Indian writer and critic, Roy has vocally opposed India's development model, highlighting issues of social justice, environmental degradation, and human rights amidst the country's rapid economic growth. Through a review of Roy's key works and her engagement with global discourses, this study analyzes how her activism shapes and challenges perceptions of India's role in international affairs. The paper argues that Roy's dissenting voice contributes to a complex dialogue on India's global ambitions, underscoring tensions between national identity, development priorities, and global expectations. By exploring this dynamic, the research sheds light on the intersections of literature, activism, and geopolitics in shaping India's image worldwide. Ultimately, this examination reveals the nuanced ways in which literary activism can influence global narratives on national identity and development.

Keywords: [literature, activism, geopolitics, identity, development]

Introduction:

In recent years, India has emerged as a significant player on the global stage, marked by its rapid economic growth, expanding diplomatic influence, and increasing participation in international forums. The phrase "Resurgent Bharat" has gained traction, encapsulating the nation's aspirations to reclaim its historical prominence and assert itself as a major global power (Mishra 23). This narrative of resurgence is often tied to India's growing economic clime, technological advancements, and strategic diplomatic engagements, positioning the country as a key player in shaping global policies and trade dynamics. However, beneath the surface of this narrative lie complex challenges—social inequalities, environmental degradation, and tensions between development and democracy—that complicate India's path forward.

It is within this context that the voice of Arundhati Roy, an acclaimed Indian author and activist, becomes particularly resonant. Through her essays, Roy has consistently challenged the prevailing notions of progress and development, raising critical questions about whose voices are heard in India's growth story and who bears the costs of its ascent. As Roy (2019) argues, "The problem with the kind of nationalism that we're being asked to subscribe to is that it's based on a very narrow, aggressive, majoritarian idea of what it means to be Indian" (My Seditious Heart 15). This perspective underscores the tension between India's global ambitions and its internal social dynamics, highlighting the need to examine the narratives that shape the nation's identity.

This paper examines the interplay between Roy's activism and India's growing presence on the global stage, focusing on how her dissenting views contribute to critical dialogues about the nation's resurgence. By analyzing selected essays from *My Seditious Heart* (2019) and *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2001), this study explores how Roy's critiques of India's development model and policies spark necessary conversations about the country's global ambitions versus its social and environmental responsibilities. Specifically, this research argues that Roy's activism highlights the importance of inclusive dialogue in shaping a more equitable and sustainable vision of India's resurgence, one that balances economic growth with social justice and environmental sustainability.

2. Need of the Study:

Arundhati Roy stands as one of India's most influential contemporary voices whose activism intersects politics, human rights, environmental justice, and international relations. While her literary contributions have been widely analyzed, there remains a significant gap in scholarship concerning her role as a global dissenter and how her activism shapes international perceptions of India. In an era where the world is closely scrutinizing issues such as nationalism, democracy, civil liberties, ecological conflicts, and state accountability, Roy's interventions provide a unique lens through which India's evolving democratic identity can be assessed.

The study is particularly needed because Roy's writings and speeches—ranging from critiques of globalization, militarization, and caste-gender hierarchies to her commentary on Kashmir, tribal displacement, and nuclear policy—offer a counter-narrative to official state discourse. Her activism challenges dominant geopolitical narratives and compels scholars to examine India's position not only domestically but also within global political frameworks.

Furthermore, as dissent becomes increasingly contested in contemporary India, understanding Roy's activism contributes to ongoing debates about freedom of expression, the ethics of resistance, and the responsibility of intellectuals in democratic societies. Her global recognition makes her a pivotal figure whose dissent influences international dialogues on human rights and India's diplomatic image on the world stage.

Thus, this study is needed to explore how Arundhati Roy's activism functions as a form of critical dialogue that shapes India's global identity, interrogates state policies, and redefines the meaning of dissent in a rapidly changing socio-political world.

3.Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyze Arundhati Roy's activism as a form of political dissent and intellectual resistance within India's democratic framework.
2. To examine how Roy's writings, speeches, and public interventions critique state policies on globalization, human rights, environment, militarization, and minority rights.
3. To explore how Roy's activism influences India's image and role on the global stage, particularly in relation to international human rights debates, global South politics, and postcolonial discourse.
4. To investigate the ways in which Roy challenges dominant national narratives and introduces alternative frameworks for understanding democracy, justice, and citizenship in India.
5. To assess how Roy's dissent contributes to global discussions on resistance, activism, and the responsibilities of public intellectuals.
6. To understand the impact of Roy's activism on marginalized voices—tribal communities, displaced populations, women, and political minorities—and how these groups are represented in her work.
7. To evaluate how Roy's engagement with issues such as neo-liberalism, militarization, environmental crises, and nationalism reflect broader geopolitical and ethical concerns.
8. To investigate the dialogic relationship between Roy's dissent and state responses, including public reception, media portrayal, and governmental criticism.
9. To contribute to interdisciplinary scholarship that links literature, political science, activism studies, and international relations through the examination of Roy's role as a global activist.

4.Literature Review:

The intersection of Arundhati Roy's activism and India's growing global influence has been explored from various perspectives in existing scholarship. This literature review examines key works that address Roy's role as a critic of India's development model, the nation's resurgence on the global stage, and the interplay between dissent and national identity.

Scholars have widely analyzed Roy's essays as critiques of power structures and their implications for social justice. In *The Politics of the (Im)Possible: Arundhati Roy and the Postcolonial World* (2012), Sabrina Jalees highlights Roy's role as a vocal critic of neoliberal policies and their impact on marginalized communities in India (Jalees 45). Jalees argues that Roy's work challenges dominant narratives of progress, urging readers to consider the human cost of economic development.

Similarly, in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things: A Critical Companion* (2007), Murali Sivaramakrishnan examines Roy's use of fiction and non-fiction to critique social hierarchies and power dynamics in postcolonial India. Sivaramakrishnan notes that Roy's work often blurs the lines between activism and literature, positioning her as a key voice in debates about social justice and democracy (Sivaramakrishnan 78).

India's growing global influence has been discussed extensively in scholarly works. In *India's Rise as a Global Power* (2012), Sanjay Khanna analyzes the country's economic reforms and diplomatic strategies, arguing that India's resurgence is driven by its strategic engagement with global institutions and major powers (Khanna 112). Khanna emphasizes India's potential as a key player in shaping regional and global policies, particularly in areas like climate change and trade.

Pankaj Mishra's *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (2017) provides a critical perspective on India's rise, highlighting the tensions between economic growth and social inequality. Mishra argues that India's resurgence has been accompanied by increased social disparities and environmental challenges, raising questions about the sustainability of its development model (Mishra 23).

The role of dissent in shaping national identity and discourse has been explored by scholars like Arjun Appadurai in *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (2006). Appadurai discusses how nations often view dissent as a threat to unity and progress, leading to tensions between state narratives and critical voices (Appadurai 89). In the context of India, Appadurai's analysis highlights the challenges faced by activists like Roy in navigating the complexities of national identity and social critique.

While existing scholarship provides valuable insights into Roy's activism and India's global rise, there is a need for more focused analysis on how Roy's dissenting views contribute to dialogues about India's resurgence. Specifically, few studies have examined the interplay between Roy's critiques of India's development model and the nation's aspirations for global influence. This paper aims to bridge this gap by analyzing Roy's essays in the context of India's growing global presence, exploring how her activism sparks necessary conversations about the country's path forward.

5. Arundhati Roy's Activism: An Overview:

Arundhati Roy's work is characterized by its sharp critique of power structures, whether they be governmental, corporate, or social. As a prominent figure in Indian literature and global activism, Roy has used her platform to address issues ranging from environmental degradation and social inequality to human rights abuses and the impact of globalization. Her essays, often blending elements of journalism, memoir, and social commentary, offer a scathing look at the costs of unchecked development and the erosion of democratic values.

Roy's activism is deeply rooted in her concern for marginalized communities and her skepticism towards dominant narratives of progress. In *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*, she critiques the Indian government's policies, particularly in relation to nuclear power and militarization. As she notes, "The dismantling of the old order is proceeding with the speed and efficiency of a guillotine" (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 45). This statement reflects her concern over the rapid changes brought about by globalization and their impact on vulnerable populations.

In *My Seditious Heart*, Roy (2019) further elaborates on the role of dissent in democracy, stating, "Dissent is the engine of democracy. It's what makes democracy possible" (Roy 32). This perspective underscores her belief in the importance of critical voices in shaping societal discourse and holding power accountable.

Throughout her work, Roy challenges readers to question the narratives presented by those in power and to consider the human cost of political and economic decisions.

Roy's activism has not been without controversy. Her outspoken views on issues like Kashmir, the Indian government's policies, and her criticism of corporate influence have sparked debates and, at times, backlash. However, her work has also been widely praised for its courage and insight, earning her a reputation as a fearless voice for social justice.

6. India's Resurgence on the Global Stage:

In the past few decades, India has emerged as a significant player in global affairs, driven by its rapid economic growth, expanding diplomatic influence, and increasing participation in international forums. The phrase "Resurgent Bharat" encapsulates the nation's aspirations to reclaim its historical prominence and assert itself as a major global power (Mishra 23). India's economic liberalization policies initiated in the 1990s have led to substantial growth, transforming the country into one of the world's fastest-growing major economies. With a burgeoning middle class, a young population, and advancements in technology and innovation, India has attracted global attention as a potential economic powerhouse.

India's diplomatic efforts have also contributed to its growing influence. The country has strengthened ties with major powers like the United States, Russia, and Japan, while also playing a more active role in regional organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). As former Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (2019) stated, "India's vision is to be a leading power, rather than just a balancing power, in the global order" (Modi). This ambition reflects India's desire to shape global policies, particularly in areas like climate change, trade, and security.

However, India's rise on the global stage is not without its challenges. Issues like social inequality, environmental degradation, and tensions between development and democracy pose significant questions about the sustainability of its growth model. Despite economic progress, India continues to grapple with high levels of poverty, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and social disparities, particularly affecting marginalized communities. As economist Amartya Sen (2013) points out, "The challenge of sustainable development is not just about economic growth, but about ensuring that growth is equitable and environmentally sustainable" (Sen 56).

Moreover, India's approach to development has raised concerns about environmental sustainability. Rapid industrialization and urbanization have led to increased pollution, deforestation, and strain on natural resources. The country's commitment to addressing climate change has been met with mixed reactions, as it balances economic growth with environmental responsibilities.

In this context, India's resurgence on the global stage presents a complex picture. While the nation seeks to assert its influence and shape international narratives, it must also address pressing internal challenges that could impact its long-term stability and global standing.

7. Dissent and Dialogue: Analyzing Roy's Essays:

Arundhati Roy's essays serve as a critical counter-narrative to the dominant discourse of India's resurgence, challenging the notion of progress and development as uniformly beneficial. Through her writings, Roy engages with pressing issues such as environmental degradation, social inequality, and democratic erosion, urging readers to consider the consequences of India's growth model. This section analyzes selected essays from *My Seditious Heart* (2019) and *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2001) to explore how Roy's critiques of India's development model spark necessary conversations about the country's global ambitions.

In "The End of Imagination," an essay from *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*, Roy critiques the Indian government's nuclear policies, arguing that the pursuit of nuclear power is a form of "mass distraction" from pressing social issues (Roy 21). She writes, "The nuclear bomb is a weapon of mass destruction. It is not just a weapon of mass destruction. It is a weapon of mass distraction" (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 21). Through this lens, Roy highlights how the emphasis on military power and technological advancement often overshadows critical concerns like poverty, healthcare, and education. By questioning the priorities of India's development agenda, Roy's essay challenges readers to reconsider what constitutes true progress.

In *My Seditious Heart*, Roy further elaborates on the role of dissent in democracy, stating, "Dissent is the engine of democracy. It's what makes democracy possible" (Roy 32). This perspective underscores her belief in the importance of critical voices in shaping societal discourse and holding power accountable. In essays like "Why I Am a Citizen Today," Roy reflects on the erosion of democratic values and the shrinking space for dissent in India. She critiques the government's response to protests and social movements, arguing that dissenting voices are often labeled as anti-national or seditious (Roy, *My Seditious Heart* 15). By framing dissent as a vital component of democracy, Roy's work challenges the narrative that critiques of the state are inherently opposed to national interests.

Roy's essays also address the environmental consequences of India's rapid development. In "The Greater Common Good," she critiques large-scale development projects, such as dam constructions, and their impact on marginalized communities and ecosystems. Roy argues that the pursuit of economic growth often comes at the expense of environmental sustainability and social justice, stating, "The people who are being displaced, who are losing their livelihoods, their homes, their histories, their cultures – they are being asked to pay the price for a kind of development that doesn't belong to them" (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 45). This critique highlights the tension between India's aspirations for global influence and its responsibilities toward social and environmental justice.

Through her essays, Roy sparks a necessary dialogue about the kind of future India envisions. By challenging the dominant narratives of progress and development, she urges readers to consider alternative models that prioritize social equity and environmental sustainability. As noted by scholar Aijaz Ahmad (2013), "Roy's work is a reminder that the task of critique is not to reject modernity wholesale but to interrogate its promises and failures" (Ahmad 56). In this context, Roy's activism can be seen as an invitation to engage in a broader conversation about India's path forward, one that balances economic growth with social justice and environmental responsibility.

8. India's Global Identity: Balancing Growth and Dissent:

As India seeks to assert its role as a major global power, it faces the challenge of reconciling its aspirations for influence with the complexities of its internal landscape. The nation's rapid economic growth, technological advancements, and diplomatic engagements have positioned it as a key player in international affairs. However, issues like social inequality, environmental degradation, and tensions between development and democracy pose significant questions about the sustainability of India's growth model. In this context, Arundhati Roy's critiques of India's development policies highlight the need for a more nuanced approach to balancing growth and dissent.

India's global identity is often framed around its potential as a leading economic and diplomatic power. The government's initiatives, such as "Make in India" and "Digital India," aim to boost economic growth and position the country as a hub for innovation and investment. Diplomatically, India has strengthened ties with major powers like the United States, Japan, and Russia, while also playing a more active role in regional organizations like ASEAN and the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue). As former Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (2019) stated, "India's vision is to be a leading power, rather than just a balancing power, in the global order" (Modi). This ambition reflects India's desire to shape global policies, particularly in areas like climate change, trade, and security.

However, India's pursuit of global influence is complicated by its internal challenges. Despite economic progress, the country continues to grapple with high levels of poverty, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and social disparities, particularly affecting marginalized communities. Environmental concerns also pose a significant challenge, as rapid industrialization and urbanization have led to increased pollution, deforestation, and strain on natural resources. As economist Jayati Ghosh (2020) notes, "India's growth story is marked by rising inequalities and environmental vulnerabilities, which threaten the sustainability of its development model" (Ghosh 78).

In this context, Arundhati Roy's critiques of India's development policies serve as a counterpoint to the dominant narrative of resurgence. By highlighting the human and environmental costs of unchecked growth, Roy's work challenges policymakers to consider alternative models that prioritize social equity and environmental sustainability. As she argues in *My Seditious Heart*, "The problem with the kind of nationalism that we're being asked to subscribe to is that it's based on a very narrow, aggressive, majoritarian idea of what it means to be Indian" (Roy 15). This perspective underscores the tension between India's aspirations for global influence and its responsibilities toward social justice and democratic values.

The challenge for India lies in balancing its global ambitions with the need to address internal disparities. Engaging with dissenting voices like Roy's could provide valuable insights into crafting a more inclusive and sustainable development strategy. By fostering dialogue between policymakers, activists, and marginalized communities, India can work toward a growth model that benefits all segments of society while maintaining its democratic values.

As scholar Pratap Bhanu Mehta (2018) observes, "India's global rise will be judged not just by its economic power, but by its ability to reconcile growth with equity and justice" (Mehta 112). In this context, Roy's activism serves as a reminder of the importance of dissent in shaping a more balanced and equitable vision of India's global identity.

9. Conclusion:

As India continues to assert its influence on the global stage, the nation faces the critical challenge of reconciling its aspirations for power with the complexities of its internal landscape. Arundhati Roy's activism, as explored through her essays in *My Seditious Heart* and *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*, serves as a vital counter-narrative to the dominant discourse of India's resurgence. By critiquing the social, environmental, and democratic costs of the country's growth model, Roy's work highlights the importance of inclusive dialogue in shaping a more equitable and sustainable vision of India's global identity.

This paper has examined how Roy's dissenting views contribute to necessary conversations about India's path forward. Her critiques of large-scale development projects, environmental degradation, and the erosion of democratic values underscore the tensions between India's ambitions for global influence and its responsibilities toward social justice and environmental sustainability. As the nation seeks to position itself as a leading power, engaging with dissenting voices like Roy's can provide valuable insights into crafting a development strategy that balances growth with equity and justice.

The challenge for India lies in embracing dissent as a constructive force rather than viewing it as a threat to national unity. By fostering dialogue between policymakers, activists, and marginalized communities, India can work toward a growth model that benefits all segments of society while maintaining its democratic values. As scholar Pratap Bhanu Mehta (2018) notes, "India's global rise will be judged not just by its economic power, but by its ability to reconcile growth with equity and justice" (Mehta 112). In this context, Roy's activism serves as a reminder of the importance of critical perspectives in shaping a more balanced and sustainable future for India.

Ultimately, India's global identity is still being written, and the interplay between growth and dissent will play a crucial role in determining its trajectory. By engaging with voices like Arundhati Roy's, India can navigate the complexities of its resurgence and emerge as a more inclusive and responsible global power.

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