



## Broken Republic: Three Essays

*Arundhati Roy*

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On Naxalite movement and Indian state's counter insurgency methods and other policies.

## Broken Republic: Three Essays Details

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# From Reader Review Broken Republic: Three Essays for online ebook

## Ashok Krishna says

Arundhati Roy. The first time I heard this name, I was just about to exit my teens, into my second year in college, with hardly a dozen or so books in my bookshelf that had already gotten me the tag of 'intellect' amidst my relatives. That was the time when she had won Booker prize for her novel 'The God of Small Things'. I heard her name and about the award in the news and promptly forgot about it soon, considering novels and works of contemporary - read, those who are alive - authors to be 'too ordinary' for someone like me to read.

Now, my ego and so-called 'intellect' set aside, I grew up hearing about her once in a blue-moon while. Sometime about her new work, sometime about her involvement with the Maoist organisation, some other time in the form of a review that I didn't deign to read, about 'The God of Small Things'. She was always pushing herself into my life in one way or the other. On one occasion so very clearly remembered, I picked up a hardbound copy of her book 'Walking With The Comrades' at Landmark, only to drop it to fetch another book by Paulo Coelho. I had a shoestring budget for books at that time and one book per month was all that I could afford, you see.

Nevertheless, her foray into my attention continued in the form of her criticism of Anna Hazare, then her recent stupid criticism of Gandhi - I wonder why it has become a fashion in this country for the so-called intellectuals to attack Gandhi always, but I digress - and finally, my viewing the Tamizh translation of her book 'Broken Republic', in one of the book shows in my hometown. And, as if the Universe conspired to make me read her works, the book 'Broken Republic' came up first in the suggestions thrown up by Amazon.in recently. And, that was the last straw that made the camel order the book!

Once in a while you get to read a book that radically alters your whole perceptions about life and the way it is to be lived. Trust me. This book is one such. The book opens with events that will make you remember the Telugu movies of the 70's and 80's, which dealt with rebel topics of land reformation, oppressive landlords and revolutionary, vigilante heroes. But hardly a few more lines into the book and you realize that Arundhati means business – or, is it anti-business? She rips away the veil of pride about the country from before your eyes. She launches into a scathing attack about some of the biggest business conglomerates in the country, and some from out of its borders too.

This book is divided into four sections. Or, to be precise, four of her essays come together to make up this book. The first chapter, 'Mr.Chidambaram's War' attacks the ex-Finance-Minister-and-then-the-Home-minister of this country, P.Chidambaram, for his faulty policies, hypocritical standards of having been the evangelist for the greedy corporate in the past only to don the cloak of a nationalist now. She also exposes how the Operation Green Hunt is a veil to snatch the lands and livelihood from the sons of this soil, the tribals and small farmers, only to redistribute it to the corporate behemoths in the name of 'public purpose'. She also laments how the environmental impact of such actions is cared for little or no way by the indifferent Indian government.

The second chapter 'Walking With The Comrades' provides an inside view into the lives of those branded as 'Maoists' and hunted down by police, paramilitary and mercenaries alike. She spends a few days with them and as one of them, walking with them, talking to them, living with them, listening to their grievances and listing down their troubles. She explores how the 'Red Corridor' – Dandakaranya, the area between

Chattisgarh, Orissa, Andhrapradesh – is not actually suffering from Maoist presence, but by the presence of money-minting mining/infrastructure companies.

The third chapter 'Trickledown Revolution' deals with the displacement of poor and platform dwellers all over the country, for causes ranging from Commonwealth Games to corporate deals. It deals once again about the displacement of people due to the MoUs signed by the government with mining/infrastructure/construction companies. She spares none – neither the favorite punching bags of the previous regime – Sonia, Manmohan and Rahul – nor the current poster-boy of Indian politics, Shrimaan Narendra Modi. For once she shows some sanity, weighing not only the demands of Maoists, but their misdeeds as well. She contemplates as to how fit an alternative for the current system they will be and also whether their ideal, almost-utopian ideologies can really be implemented, in case if they ever assume power.

The fourth and final chapter 'Capitalism: A Ghost Story', starts by mocking Mr.Mukesh Ambani, whose obscenely ostentatious house (?) Antilla sticks out of the Mumbai skyline like a sore thumb. She goes on to talk about the corporate intervention into our lives and how we are being made to live and believe lies. Though this chapter sounds like the quintessential paranoid propaganda of the Left, you don't feel it that way when she starts stacking proofs about how the big companies have started wielding clout in the media, art and literature by acquiring huge stakes in them. Also, the typical accusations about how the American CIA, charitable foundations with surreptitious motives and the weapon-makers have infiltrated many countries in multifarious forms.

Every page, every sentence and every word in this book smells of the so-called Leftist ideology, but dwell deep and you will realize that she is speaking about the real issues that stare us on our faces. While we sit at our drawing rooms, keep going on with our 'contented' lives of watching TV news and passing opinions about every unworthy event surrounding actresses' cleavage and abdominal abomination of the celluloid hero dummies, there is one part of the country that goes to sleep in hungry stomachs and uncertainty about waking up the next day. This book will make you think whether the lives that we are living are real and worthy. Those who complain about their lives will start seeing the blessings in theirs. This will shake you out of your society-induced soft slumber.

And, when the book ends, your pride about this country's economic achievements will stand deflated!

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## **Sai Kishore says**

The first step towards re-imagining a world gone terribly wrong would be to stop the annihilation of those who have a different imagination - an imagination that is outside of capitalism as well as communism. An imagination which has an altogether different understanding of what constitutes happiness and fulfillment. To gain this philosophical space, it is necessary to concede some physical space for the survival of those who may look like the keepers of our past but who may really be guides to our future. To do this, we have to ask our rulers: "CAN YOU LEAVE THE WATER IN THE RIVERS, THE TREES IN THE FOREST? CAN YOU LEAVE THE BAUXITE IN THE MOUNTAIN?" If they say they cannot, then perhaps they should stop preaching morality to the victims of their wars.

The day capitalism is forced to tolerate non-capitalist societies in its midst and to acknowledge limits in its quest for domination, the day it is forced to recognize that its supply of raw material will not be endless, is the day when change will come. If there is any hope for the world at all, it does not live in climate-change conference rooms or in cities with tall buildings. It lives low down on the ground, with its arms around people

who go to battle every day to protect their forests, their mountains and their rivers because they know that the forests, the mountains and the rivers protect them

-Arundhati Roy

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### **Martin Jost says**

Roy dokumentiert und kritisiert den industriellen Landraub an indischen Ureinwohnern, den die Regierung mit Waffengewalt und Progromen gegen die Bevölkerung durchsetze. Der erste von drei Essays liefert eine Einordnung zu den Hintergründen. Im zweiten porträtiert Roy Widerstandskämpfer, die sie im Urwald besucht. Dieser ist das beste Stück aus der Sammlung. Essay Nummer drei ist eine detaillierte Dokumentation der Propagandaschlacht zwischen der Regierungsmacht und dem Widerstand. Roys Stärke ist ihre Haltung. Streckenweise – zumal im letzten Essay – verliert sie aber die Souveränität über die erzählerischen Mittel und verliert sich in Engagement. Dann diktiert ihr ihre Haltung, alle Argumente aufzulisten, die sie recherchieren konnte und torpediert eine mitreißende Wirkung des Stücks.

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### **Sarguru nathan says**

As always Arundhati doesn't disappoint. Walking with the comrades is probably her best work.

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### **Shabbeer Hassan says**

In the years since Arundhati Roy won the 1997 Booker Prize for her debut novel, *The God of Small Things*, she has become the anti-globalisation mascot in India and abroad with her strident opposition of the Indian state, free market economics, the war on terror, and much else. Her prose is vivid and sometimes poetic: witty wordplay interspersed with biting satire that riles India's middle class, the wealthy, and the elite.

But as her appeal rises abroad, she has become increasingly irrelevant at home. Sincere anti-poverty activists find her shrillness exasperating, with some arguing privately that her writing about a cause is a distraction, shifting the focus to herself, and delaying, if not damaging, the prospect of a solution. Roy doesn't like compromised half-measures, but others have different views of what constitutes the best solution. Her fans abroad, who have little personally at stake in India, applaud her rapturously, so making her more marginalised among nationalistically-minded Indians.

The exasperation comes from the fact that what Roy describes is often an accurate description of a slice of the reality, but her prose has little room for layered nuances and granularity. It makes her critique almost comic-book like, with sharply edged "good" and "evil" forces. In her latest collection of essays, *Broken Republic*, Roy rightly points out the abysmal treatment of India's indigenous people who live in the tribal belt, which is rich with minerals and abounds with Maoists. But she is wrong in seeing those amoral nihilists – the Maoists – as harbingers of a better future. That's a dehumanised worldview.

True, the millions of tribals (as indigenous people are called in India) have been neglected and exploited. And India now wants mining companies to invest there. If the past is any indication, it will cause a massive upheaval, disrupting traditional lifestyles, displacing communities, with the abuse of many human rights.

Roy is a brilliantly articulate cheerleader for the Maoists, who claim to be fighting for the tribals. In perhaps a quarter of India's districts, the state doesn't have much control. Paramilitary forces have been deployed, and Maoists have launched spectacular strikes, killing many in the security forces.. In retaliation, politicians and landlords have created a vigilante militia to take on the Maoists.

That's a grim scenario, and can end in tragedy, but Roy absolves the Maoists. She sees their violence entirely as a reaction when all other means have failed, even portraying them as green egalitarian warriors fighting to preserve a pristine life. In that Manichean world, the tribals and Maoists are one; and anyone against Maoists is against the tribals, therefore for the state, and hence complicit in the abuses.

In her first essay, the Indian home minister P Chidambaram must be colluding with mining companies, since before he became a minister, when he was a corporate lawyer some of the companies were his clients. When mining shares rise after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh calls the Maoist threat India's gravest security challenge, she sees causality in that coincidence.

In her second essay, she travels through Maoist territory, and makes the Maoists almost as likeable as characters in the film Avatar. She notes, but doesn't condemn, their use of child soldiers, nor their summary show trials against "informants", some of whom are put to death.

But there is hope. In her third essay we see an introspective Roy, slightly disillusioned by Maoist rhetoric. She no longer ridicules Gandhi; now she cites him approvingly. Perhaps her education has begun. Roy sees India's upwardly-mobile aspirants as morally compromised.

My Rating-----4.5/5

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### **Ian says**

In this set of three political essays by Arundhati Roy, she takes a look at, and expounds upon, the Naxalite insurrection in India. As might be expected by those familiar with her politics, Roy has no problems taking the side of the Naxalite/Maoists as opposed to the corporatist-motivated traditional elite. Thus, while this is clearly biased towards the side of the rebels, it manages to contextualize the other half of this struggle, given that practically all that I'd ever really heard about this was limited to some description of the rebellion on Wikipedia. All in all, this is a good book (provided you don't mind Roy's politics and unabashed favoritism of the Naxalites over the Indian government), and it offered a significant insight into post-colonial struggles with globalization.

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### **Sumit Singla says**

There was a Times of India campaign some years earlier, which said, 'There are two Indias in this country...'. I disagreed with that point then, and I disagree with it now. This country isn't about two Indias, it is about a multitude of them, some thriving, some surviving, and some doing neither. Each of these alternate universes struggles to make its identity or to adopt another one.

As someone from an India that can afford lots of new and shiny things, it is easy to be dissociated from the

world that Ms. Roy talks about in her essays. It is easy to indulge in armchair intellectualism and conveniently demand a price to be paid for development. Easy, when that price is being paid by someone else, right?

It is indeed terrifying how much power corporations wield, and how millions of people are being displaced by their march into the Indian hinterland. There is large scale disruption of lives with little or no attempts at rehabilitation. The state's abject failure to care for its poorest is highlighted in the essays. Arundhati Roy paints a vividly grim picture, of how the shiny objects of our affection are tainted with blood.

However, what I found difficult to reconcile with were her distinctly pro-Maoist leanings. I find it immensely difficult to think of Naxalites as victims. Yes, the movement may have had its origins in that manner. But, terrorising the citizens of a state that is failing its people is not really the hallmark of a victim. Especially, if the alleged victim has access to sophisticated weaponry. There is no doubt that the government has handled anti-Naxal movements poorly. But, by painting tribals and Naxals with the same brush, Arundhati Roy does tribals a great disservice. The tribals are most certainly victims, the Naxals surely not.

It is important for us to be cognizant of what we consider 'collateral damage' in our march towards development.

Arundhati Roy has a provocative, compelling voice, one that she uses well to build a convincing case. But, at several places she does stretch logical threads to breaking point and beyond. She glosses over the use of child soldiers by Maoists. She sees cause and effect relationships where there are probably none.

Nevertheless, this book will probably be an insight into a different India from the one that you and I live in. It will probably make you feel a little guilty as well.

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## **Zanna says**

Ask hard questions.

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## **Praj says**

A month ago, on a lazy Sunday morning peering through inner pages of Mumbai Mirror were a set of colorful pins neatly clipped on oiled hair, the only source of happiness I could find in the photograph flooded with vacant eyes. The women folk of the Dongria Kondh, a little known tribe in the Niyamgiri hills in Odisha must have by now got used to the press photographers clicking their faces; their revolution against Vedanta (a multi-million dollar company owned by NRI Anil Agarwal) has reached its first victorious milestone. India's first ever open environmental hearings may have been an opportunistic pawn in the political landscape where the tribe's "*sipahi*" (soldier) Rahul Gandhi prosper or a simple game of 'vote-whoring' (the Dongria Kondh had not voted for Congress for 30 consecutive years). Nevertheless, the political move became their gold pot that put the tribe's struggle on the Indian center-stage with the Supreme Court prohibiting the Vedanta group from carrying out bauxite mining in the Niyamgiri Hills that begin from the point where civilization as we know ends. A battle was won; a war yet to be conquered.

Time and time again I have inferred that democracy dwells in the homes of the rich. For the poor, it is a hallucinatory dais where their lives survive with a chimerical optimism. Slums spoil the picture perfect of shining India. Pavement dwellers, poor migrants are menace to the picturesque high-rise urban infrastructure. The poor swarm the cities, stink the surrounding with their filthy shanties. The impoverished population is a hindrance to the growth of India. The poor should be sent to the villages; they can't afford to live in the cities. Where are their villages? Where are their lands? Captured by the very own architects of India shining? Their land is seized, their houses burnt, their tribes eradicated. Everyone knows the written word, 'the poor are a menace to the flourishing society, like the Dalits who have always been a menace to the Brahmin social order'. To be a refugee in one's own country is worst than a maggot infested slow death. Hence, where will the poor go? In which corner of the country will they be able to find a home? Are only guns or suicide written in their pitiful fate? After all, weren't they following the orders of their country's supreme leader, the Prime Minister who once said that for India's sake people should leave their villages and move to the cities.

India has fought many wars, internal and external. Political analysts have speculated the 21st century to be a festering bed for civil wars. On the international podium the Indian political leaders have shown diplomatic sympathies to countries plagued by terrorism and civil wars. Yet, blatantly these same leaders chose to ignore the white elephant that strides in their own homeland. The Indian landscapes have been birthing numerous revolutions since the day Indian achieved freedom from British colonial rule. The impoverish artisans, the landless, the Dalits, workers, farmers, et al., have been engaged in a wide spectrum over 66 years. Arundhati Roy fires up three scintillating cerebral essays elucidating the insurgent landscape of *"the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by India."* – The Maoist. These members of the banned Community Party of India (CPI) are prevalent and active in Central India, dominant in areas of Lalgarh, Jharkand, Orissa and in W. Bengal. Roy who passionately adheres to her activist image asserts that the Maoist's guerrilla army in Central India is made up of poor desperate tribal who are fighting for a dignified survival.

Nobody needs a war. Wars annihilate civilization; gift the greedy their authoritative egocentric goals. Mostly, conflict arises from a desperate need for justice; it may arise from the need for authoritative power and in some instances from the falsified ideals of the fundamentalist fraternity. But, what about those conflicts that are organized purposefully? About those wars that become crucial to the government to enhance the climate of monetary investment? Roy, claims that the mining companies need this "war" between the Maoist and the State; an old technique employed to drive away the tribal people from their land.

*"To justify militarization, the State needs an enemy. The Maoist are that enemy. They are to corporate fundamentalist what the Muslims are to Hindu fundamentalist?"*

To this, one is then compelled to ask as to why it becomes essential for the combat forces to target only a solitary enemy while the other make speeches on political podiums. Why are the horrendous crimes of one terror outfit vividly splashed in the media while those of the other are clandestinely swept under the carpet? If this is the case, then why are the claims of India being a 'Hindu state' dismissed with political fervor? Why is the Indian government treating two terror outfits with vast discrepancies? Doesn't this scenario infer the obvious? The real problem lies in India's race to be a superpower and the struggle to sustain a celebrated economic growth rate. India even with its 66 yrs of independence is still a child when compared to the developed First World sovereign nations that have prevailed in their freedom for several hundreds, even thousands years. Akin to a child trying to become an adult, India in its restlessness to become an adult has forgotten the adolescence years of development and advancement. This restlessness has in turn given rise to the necessary evils of corruption and other unlawful practices of empty promises. Democracy has succumbed to fascist doctrines. India's dirty war has not only crippled its people but also the foundation of its democracy. Furthermore, supporting her stance on the India's war with the poor; Roy articulates the oddity



that arises from the governmental negativity towards the negotiation talk of ceasefire with the Maoist.

*“Odd isn't it? That even after the Mumbai attacks of 26/11 the government was prepared to talk with Pakistan? It's prepared to talk to China? But, when it comes to waging war against the poor, it's playing hard ball”.*

What a preposterous question? It is like asking a murderer who has already inserted a 6-inch knife in your stomach, whether death would be the final outcome? Why would the sadistic government want diplomatic conversations with the poor, when all they want is their land even at the cost of their life? Do the poor own nuclear weapons like Pakistan and China? This brings to the lingering question of what happens when the poor do really pick up weapons. Roy declares that it is an obvious form of combat for the poor to regain their dignity and freedom after being brutalized as there is no other “better” option rather than to fight. Suicide being a farthest option in this chaos. It is here that I find a bit discomfort in digesting the fact that if every violent action is generalized as self-defense then all the crimes would be acquitted on the ground of self-defense. If the poor who have chosen to defend themselves on their own through combat after being denied the said rights by the government then it also becomes acceptable for the victims on the other side of the conflict zone to raise their guns in self-defense. At this intersection it gets bit tricky to grasp Roy's sentiments on the topic as in the third essay, she questions Operation Green Hunt's self-defense theory whilst situating the clause of self-defense on favorable grounds with respect to the applicants of Maoist recruitment.

The main element in **Mr. Chidambaram's War** is the establishment of Operation Green Hunt that is talked about in hush tones within the corridors of the Parliament; asserting its presence is an unimaginable thought. Chidambaram ( Union Minister of Finance) has always alleged that ‘Operation Green Hunt’ is the figment of imagination of Indian media and such an combat entity in reality does not exists. Interestingly, generous funds and armed forces have been allocated to the said eradication warfare program. The irony of the entire thing being the very existence of the name ‘Green Hunt’ that is out there to annihilate the environmental greenery, displacing thousand of tribals for the benefit for few yet influential imperialist forces.

*What this country needs is revolution.*

**In Walking with the Comrades**, Roy humanizes the brutal image of the Naxalite as she travels along with the Naxalites in the dense of forests aligning Dantewada. One can comprehend Roy's empathetic demeanor to the Maoist and their struggle, when she questions the validity of Salwa Judum (Purification Hunt); the government sponsored vigilante groups helmed by a shrewd Congress MLA Mahendra Karma that was responsible for rapes, burning down the villages and other related brutality committed in conflicts of land grabbing. Mahendra Karma was killed in a specialized revenge attack strategize by the Naxalites to avenge the brutalities of Salwa Judum in the Bastar region. Do you think the poor tribals who worshipped their lands and mountains want a brutal war? Would they have joined the Naxalites, if their lands and homes were not seized by unlawful tactics and policies? Roy makes a strong case that stands by the helplessness of the tribes that are caught in the crossfire between the State and the Maoist. Roy's prose is always a controversial one. Opinionated arguments have found a line of attack as far as Arundhati Roy is concerned; depending on which side of the fence one prefers to stand. Duplicitous workings of a corporation become vivid with the construction of a Cancer Hospital on the outskirts of a mining area. In the vein of a laughable diatribe one can assume the company slogan, "First we gift you cancerous cells and then we try and cure them". Aren't they a gem of a people? It is at this point I chose to be on the same side with Arundhati , irrespective to my differences with her other political scrutiny. When Roy questions the diabolical aspects of the Maoist and tribals being different entities, it further deepens the hypocrisies and the falsehood of the Indian government. Nevertheless, to be empathetic to the Maoist becomes a transitive factor of defending the bloodshed and the brutalities committed by the Maoists.

Although the word 'terrorist' can be easily manipulated by the egoistic political power-mongers, the word should not be loosely labeled. Terrorism is a politically and emotionally charged vocabulary. Hence, it is ambiguous. But, still isn't the act of terrorism born from the desperation of need of a dignified survival? If you trace the historical events of terrorism, it is evident that the struggle has always been for the rights of people, the land, for freedom. Aren't the dreams of a terror outfit, nightmarish to the rest of the world? If we start humanizing every act of terror by categorizing them by the degree of helplessness then violence would never stop until the last trace of civilization is eradicated from this planet. Terror can never be empathetic on the grounds of self-defense. There is no pardoning to brutality on human grounds. If that ever happens, then the entirety of terrorism would be acquitted on the said judicial grounds. War would then become a way of life. However, when the question arises of its origin, one is stumped by the much thought. Yes, it is true that Maoist are not the only one who seek to despise the Indian state, Hindu fundamentalist are even nastier than the Maoist. And, what about the candidates of economic totalitarianism, who have compelled the poor towards suicidal desperation. Unfortunately, the Indian government has singled out Maoist as a terror outfit in order to win their 'organized war'. Therefore, on the basis of these fundamentals, it becomes plausible to identify with Roy's inferences and viewpoints. Roy also points out the cruelty of the police force being imparted on any poor tribal with even the slightest resemblance to Maoist irrespective whether they being an active member of the group. But, isn't this modus operandi works the other way too. Don't the Maoists slaughter policemen on a slightest suspicion irrespective to their stand on the ongoing revolution? This stance has always been questionable.

*"If the cinema smelled--- then films like 'Slumdog Millionaire' would not win Oscars. The stench of that kind of poverty wouldn't blend with the aroma of warm popcorn."*

The poor appeal our fascination when they are framed artistically at an art exhibition or a festoon the cover pages of a book. Like the movie, we want to see the poor without their stench. We want to sympathize with their adverse fates over cups of frothy cappuccinos, but despise their presence in our backyards.

**'Trickledown Revolution'** begins with the lingering inquiry over the status of pavement dwellers being the refugees of India Shining- "people who are being sloshed around like toxic effluent in a manufacturing process that gone berserk". Roy goes on to make a legitimate point with her analysis of the political execution of Cherukuri Rajkumar (Azad) just months ahead when the senior most member of the CPI was on the verge of negotiating a diplomatic dialogue between the Maoist and the State. Azad has said that "*a ceasefire even a temporary one would give respite to ordinary people who are caught in the war*". The truth may have been lost in between the barrage of bullets and bloodshed, but one can't deny the solid truth of '*equality being a Utopian fantasy*' in the "other" India. The government needs this war; the tribals need their lands. With almost 100 million surviving tribal population, Roy seeks an alternative.

*"Can we expect that an alternative to what looks like certain death for planet will come from the imagination that has brought about this crisis in the first place?"*

Ultimately, where would one find India's true democracy? Would it be found on the political dais at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi? Would it found in the combat of the helpless poor or in the mangled pages of Indian Constitution? Does democracy lurks through the monetary bribes given to the poor in exchange of their electoral votes? Will democracy ever cross the threshold of an affluent household? Or like Roy audaciously asserts, is India truly a 'broken republic'?

*"Can you leave the water in rivers, the trees in the forest? Can you leave the bauxite in the mountain? If they say they cannot, then perhaps they should stop preaching morality to the victims of their war."*

Arundhati Roy's words bring the best of me as a reader and the worst of me as a citizen. As a reader I may have a zealous streak while penning an appraisal, but as a citizen I turn off the news channel with the speed of a light as I'm more concerned about missing my favorite TV show rather than the anti-poverty protests happening in the city. I criticize the deeds of the very corporations while I immensely enjoy their fruits. Until the Niyamgiri revolution I was ignorant about the Vedanta group belonging to Mr. Anil Agarwal, but, I precisely knew which Bollywood star performed at Mr. Agarwal's family function. I'm more interested in the size of the rice grain and not the farmer who committed suicide on the same land from where the rice had come. I'm pleased when slums are demolished as they would no longer spoil my ocean view. I have luxurious data about various world tribes right from the jungles of Amazon to the deserts of Africa. Yet, when it comes to knowing the tribal culture thriving in my own homeland I'm at loss of words. It is disgraceful to know that my awareness of tribes in India increases with every political conflict that is exaggerated in the media. Unlike the tribals, I understand greed. In fact, it festers within me with every monetary acquisition. The Superintendent of the Police was accurate in his conclusion about the tribals lacking the element of greed.

*"See, ma'am frankly speaking this problem can't be solved by us police or military. The problem with these tribals is that they don't understand greed. Unless they become greedy there's no hope for us. I have told my boss, remove the force and instead put a TV in every home. Everything will be automatically sorted out."*

It is the shameful truth! I live with it, guiltless.

The author interviewing the Maoist.

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### **Aliya says**

This book was a can't-put-down read for me. The profundity of Ms. Roy's thoughts is admirable. A true public intellectual, who pulls no punches when exposing the atrocities perpetrated by the Indian government, owing to its newfound aspiration, of becoming an economic powerhouse.

What is stated here, applies to all mineral rich zones exploited by capitalistic interests, be they in Asia or Africa or south/central America.

If you love owning the latest iphone.ipad and change cars every year, or even if you are partially active in the consumerist rat race, then you should read this book. You'd then know that your gadgets have been manufactured from raw material sourced at the price of human lives and human dignity.

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### **Harsha Gurnani says**

*People who live in situations like this do not have easy choices. They certainly do not simply take instructions from a handful of ideologues who appear out of nowhere waving guns ... The*

*decision whether to be a Gandhian or a Maoist, militant or peaceful, or a bit of both is not always a moral or an ideological one. Quite often it's a tactical one. Gandhian satyagraha, for example, is a kind of political theatre. In order for it to be effective, it needs a sympathetic audience, which villagers deep in the forest do not have ... Sometimes, tactics get confused with ideology and lead to unnecessary, internecine battles.*

This book was a collection of four essays, which paint a very morbid picture of "a corporate take-over" - of our democratic institutions, of land and the resources within - "a war" against the poorest of the poor, and displacement (and destruction of livelihood) of the indigenous tribes in the forests and plains (which are highly coveted by the mining industry for their rich reserves of bauxite, coal and whatnot). The essays focus on the story of the Naxal-Maoist insurgency, how easy it is to confuse the violence of some of the Maoist practices with the causes of the tribals they are fighting for (besides their own grander revolutionary ideas).

The essay *Walking with the Comrades* almost absolves the Maoist insurgents, depicting their "integration" or trust within the tribal communities, and justifying their attacks as defensive or counter-measures to the Government employing police and paramilitary forces against its own people. She notes with a bitter sarcasm how fifteen-year old "boys" among the Maoist organisation and thin, emaciated bodies forming a bulk of local tribal organisations (armed or otherwise) are the *"single, biggest internal security challenge"*. While it is essential to realise that Maoists are not bloodthirsty, raving revolutionaries just agitating the "naive" tribal masses for ideological reasons, that they are the same mix of angry and sensible, funny and solemn people as anywhere, such romanticizing falls into a similar category of using propaganda or falsification to gain sympathy for your cause. More inspiring though, was the self-organised (or barely supported) organisations amongst the *adivasi* communities that include women's groups fighting patriarchy, groups against exploitation by village leaders or landowners, resistance against mining factories, against police brutality, or even for transporting the bodies of the victims of this war to their loved ones - hundred of communities solving local problems. It helps to put names and faces and personalities to the main characters of this war, that are all too often sidelined or misrepresented.

The third essay, *Trickledown Revolution*, was by far the most reasonable and hopeful of all the essays, even as she questions whether the current model of industrial growth, privatisation and globalisation is sustainable or even desirable, or whether these communities cannot be allowed to live as they do without choking them with our urban notions of comfort and success?

*The day capitalism is forced to tolerate non-capitalist societies and to acknowledge limits in its quest for domination, the day it is forced to recognize that its supply of raw material will not be endless, is the day when change will come ... The first step towards reimagining a world gone terribly wrong would be to stop the annihilation of those who have a different imagination - an imagination that is outside of Capitalism and Communism. An imagination that has an altogether different understanding of what constitutes happiness and fulfillment.*

I feel a bit uneasy about her stance to prevent all dams, all mining because I don't think there is a way to turn back completely, to eliminate our requirement of power and certain resources. At the same time, strong-arming indigenous communities, allowing big corporations to make obscene profits off the land, turning a blind eye to the social and environmental consequences is a definite no-no. I don't know where the point of balance - a real, stable, practical and realisable sort of balance - lies. All I can say is that if you can forgive her for some of her extreme views, and do to her what she asks you to do with all resistance or opposition

movements - separate the personalities from the cause - this is a very good, albeit grim, reading.

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### **Deepu Shibu says**

The three essays are beautifully written by Arundhati Roy and it actually feeds the inner revolutionary in you. Through her essays she has portrayed the lesser known side face of India, a face that we are familiar with only by what the media wants us to see. Here she tells how crony capitalism has led to the exploitation of the common man, not the kind you see in your suburbs, but the tribals and adivasis, for whom their sacred land is being plucked away just to be sold out to the huge corporate magnates that use this land for mining and industrialization.

It makes us think what kind of industrialization is essential for a sustainable growth. Whether we should allow the mining of metals from the earth which results in the degradation of the whole eco system associated with it. This is a real good book to read on, keep an open mind while you are at it.

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### **Jaydeep says**

Fairly essential reading. Though if you've lived hereabouts for a few years now, the searing anger, neocolonial exploitation, and social engineering on an unimaginable scale this country is going through should not be news to you.

But yes, seeing as you're reading a book-review here on Goodreads, it's quite likely that you've spent at least some time of your life in some elite educational enclave or the other that about 3% of your fellow Indian citizens get to attend; that you are hence more comfortable with English than you are in your own vernacular; that your parents are more than likely urban professionals of one sort or the other, what would be classified as middle/ upper-middle class; and that by virtue of all of this, you may have been completely sheltered from the sort of anger Roy here is articulating. So yeah, just to know where this prosperity bubble you're living in actually comes from, read this.

You aren't ever going to feel very comfortable about who you are again, but that is anyday better than the Khan Market/DLF Emporio going vacuous bimchette you have until now been content to be. If you have reason to believe that you do not belong to this category I have somewhat derisively sketched above, do forgive me, and let us raise together one more clenched fist in defiance and solidarity.

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### **David says**

A book that shakes your moral superiority complex.

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### **Brian says**

I purchased this book at the airport in Mumbai for the 2 1/2 hour flight to Kathmandu - and the three essays were so well written, so engaging and heartbreaking, I couldn't put the book down. Roy's treatise on the poor and disenfranchised of India is a larger discussion about where unfettered global imperialistic capitalism is

taking us, and the costs from a local level (down to individual stories) straight through to the effect on national democratic discourse.

Have you seen the movie "Avatar"? Did you cheer when the indigenous people fought back and ousted the off-planet humans that wanted to rape-and-pillage their eco-balanced land? Then you definitely need to read this book, and find out that in the real world, indigenous people never win - and that all of us Westerners are the consumers that fuel the fire for this travesty.

Read this book.

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## **Riyas says**

Arundhati Roy's latest book "Broken Republic" is collection of three essays about the ongoing Maoist uprising and Governments responses to it.

In this book, Arundhati brilliantly question about the functioning of the government. She strives to find out the reasons behind the maoist uprising. She even stayed with the so called Maoist in Dhandakaranya in the red corridor. She was amazed by the dedication of the poor adivasi women to their cause.

Arundhati magnificently reveals the unholy nexus between the powerful political elite and the big business groups and points out their interest in the forest of India. With examples she paints a clear picture how big mining houses manipulates the functioning of governments and utilises the it's arms for their own benefit.

Though she express her empathy towards Maoist cause, Arundhati Categorically rejects the path they have taken.

Though

**Sreedev R says**

This book shows the flip side of Maoist and Naxals. I can't resist a book like this when a lady takes all her guts to go inside forest, stay with so-called "Maoist and Naxals", observe their lifestyle and write about it. This book shows us the brutal strategies of Govt to get the poor killed and seize their land in the name of Development. Some unfortunate and unbelievable incidents are well described with essential facts that makes difficult for us to get along with development of nation. I was well convinced with the truth, that there is no other way for poor people rather resisting it in a violent way. Then they are framed as Maoist or Naxals. Even me you or anyone will become so-called Maoist and Naxals if we were in a situation like described in the book. This book is the voice of many helpless people who lost their livelihood that was destroyed for the cheap pleasures of political leaders.

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**Aubrey says**

*'See, ma'am, frankly speaking this problem can't be solved by us police or military. The problem with these tribals is they don't understand greed. Unless they become greedy there's no hope for us. I have told my boss, remove the force and instead put a TV in every home. Everything will be automatically sorted out.'*

4.5/5

First off, a big thank you to Brian Dice, without whom this book would have been read and reviewed a lot farther into the future. The only reason why I'm taking a half star off that rating up there is my concurrent reading of Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil. As much as I love Roy's writing and as disgruntled as my relationship is with the concept of "objectivity", her voice proves at definite odds with her relating the facts of the current showdown between the Indian State and the far more author-favored Maoist Party. This, combined with the fact that this work is essentially my gateway drug for these issues, means I could have used a little more of the balance of facts between the two antagonizing groups as was present in the third and last essay. However, as far as reportage on social justice goes, this was right up my alley.

I've read condemnations of Roy as a left-wing radical, a title that I do not view in as negative light as the middle ground would, or at least not in the same manner. I know who Mao is and the history he made, as well as the familiar tale of lands being forcibly taken away from native people by the government and the subsequent sacrifices of Environment in the name of Progress. As previously stated, the third essay titled *Trickledown Revolution* included more uncomfortable facts about the otherwise sympathized-with Maoists than the previous two combined. For all that obvious bias, Roy presents a great deal of what I care about: evidence of very familiar oppression in a well-researched manner, complete with biting wit and extensive bibliography. I may be a sucker for many of the social issues she touches upon in black and white, especially regarding the Party's feminism work (see Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan, or KAMS), but hardcore proof is a woman's best friend.

There is also the matter of the battle between rich and poor recounted in these pages being very similar to the one in the US, if more so in ideology than in happenstance. As for the ever-present question of violence, both

on the part of the government as well as Maoists, I don't think I'll ever be able to judge that sort of thing, at the very least not until I get through *Rising Up and Rising Down: Some Thoughts on Violence, Freedom and Urgent Means*. For now, I will mention that the Maoist Party's violence is widely displayed in subverted sensationalist forms. In contrast, the Government of India's violence as conducted under names like Operation Green Hunt gets as much carefully worded coverage as governments the world over think their paramilitary actions against their country's constituents deserve.

Ultimately, I learned far more about India's current times and recent history in this book than I had over the period of my lifetime, a pitiful truth that is as due to personal choice as it is to what US media considers worthy of reportage. However much Roy condemns the Government, she does not shy away from pointed mentions of the Maoist Party's underlying ideology and how much potential there is for things to go wrong. Despite that, she went into their world and heard what they had to say. Whichever side one's on, that kind of brave and forthright effort has to be acknowledged.

*The first step towards reimagining a world gone terribly wrong would be to stop the annihilation of those who have a different imagination - an imagination that is outside of capitalism as well as Communism. An imagination which has an altogether different understanding of what constitutes happiness and fulfillment. To gain this philosophical space, it is necessary to concede some physical space for the survival of those who may look like the keepers of the past but who may really be the guides to our future. To do this, we have to ask our rulers: Can you leave the water in the rivers, the trees in the forest? Can you leave the bauxite in the mountain?*

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## **AC Fick says**

Roy is essential reading for these times. Her essays are compelling and unnerving, her insights keen and her gaze unflinching; she looks where others often refuse to see, reveals what the anodyne mass media often ignore or deliberately cover up, lifting the veil of deceit and obfuscation thrown over India's self-promotion to reveal the ugly underbelly of destruction and human tragedy which is the substance of globalisation and neoliberal economic planning.

That the prose is faultless only adds to the reward of these incisive essays. Roy's is a welcome addition to the groundswell of voices against the Juggernaut of today's hegemonic regimes.

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## **Manoj says**

A punk ballad.

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