

Silenced Voice in the Struggling Republic: A Critique of Arundathi Roy's "Walking with the Comrades"

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Three years after India got independence from the draconic British rule, it was declared republic and the country received the recognition from the world wide as the largest democratic country. Unfortunately, within a short span of time, people of the nation witnessed the breakdown of the republic by the series of actions of the rulers. First and foremost among them was the imposition of Emergency on the people of the nation. The period is considered to be the darkest one ever in the history of democratic India: Censorship was imposed on media, Killing spree of the Army on the suspects was taken place, mandatory family planning for the men was performed, and the constitutional rights like freedom of speech and expression were gagged. Above all in that period the Indian forces evacuated the millions of tribal people living in the forests. This study aims at an analysis of Arundathi Roy's essay "Walking with the Comrades" so as to bring out her treatment of the sufferings of tribal people in India and the reasons provided by her for that. Even after 67 years of independence and now the nation is commemorating 40th anniversary of Emergency, the situation is no different. Statistical data has proved the statement:

- (i) Every 15 minutes a Dalit woman is raped and killed in the country.

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(ii) Out of the 24.39 crore families living in India, 6.86 crore families are landless.

(iii) It is in this democratic India, for the past 15 years, Irom Sharmila is forced to do hunger strike for repealing ASPA, which could allow the men in uniform to enter in any house in the state of Manipur and conduct raid. She alleges that large scale sexual abuses occur due to this Act.

(iv) India has never hesitated to use military force to suppress the protest of the people – Kashmir, Nagaland, Hyderabad, Goa, Manipur, Telangana, Assam, Punjab, the naxal uprising in the west Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and now across the tribal areas of Central India.

Thousands of people have been killed and many of them have been tortured. All of these took place under the mask of democracy. These are substantial evidences to prove that the republic is a struggling one.

In such a struggling republic, the voices of the silenced are many. They are the Dalits, Tribals, Female, Children, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and the list goes on. In such a society, some proportion about the sufferings of Dalits has been made known. At least statistical data is available about the atrocities committed against them. Unfortunately, no data is available about the acts of molestation committed against the women of Tribal community in India. India has the surviving Adivasi population of almost hundred million, who face the real threat from the central and state governments of India according to the writer. Their culture, tradition and customs, which form the fabric of the great nation, are haunted by the corporates and bureaucrats. Maoists who fight for the rights of this section of the people are portrayed by the government as well as media (both are influenced by the corporates) as the biggest internal threat that the country ever faced after the independence. Arundathi asks the readers that

can they consider self - defence of people as a threat to the nation? This paper tries to shed light on the sufferings of tribal people in India and the necessity of the people to take arms to defend themselves in the light of reading Arundathi Roy's "Walking with the Comrades."

On the eve of the 40th anniversary of the darkest period ever in the history of democratic India, Emergency (1975), an unexpected verdict came from the High Court of Kerala. That is "Being Maoist is not a crime" (May 31, 2015, **The Hindu**). The fight between the government of India and the Maoists has a long history. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh described the Maoists as the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by the country (May 24, 2010, **The Hindu**). The fact is that right in Central India where Maoists have a great hold; their guerrilla army is made up of almost entirely poor tribal people who are living desperately in the condition of chronic hunger. If it is compared to the sophisticated Indian Army, the Maoists are not at all a formidable force.

India known as the largest democratic country was prepared to talk with Pakistan even after the biggest attack of 26/11 in Mumbai. It was prepared to talk with China, even when there was strong provocation. It was prepared to talk with all the border nations to solve the disputes arise over the area of control. Unfortunately, when it comes to waging a war against the poor, it's playing hard ball. Arundathi Roy says: "We are watching a democracy turning on itself, trying to eat its own limbs. We are watching incredulously as those limbs refuse to be eaten." (22) There is no room for talk or negotiations. The only word echoed is "WAR." If a sensible person asks the question "why" to this, he may get the answer for this question that leads him to the word "Vedantha." One of the biggest mining corporate companies in the world and it is owned by an Indian

called Anil Agarwal, a billionaire who lives in London in a mansion which once belonged to Shah of Iran. Indian forests contain mineral deposits estimated to be worth trillions of dollars. For looting this wealth, they need the Tribals to come out of the forest. That is why the unrest has been created. According to the recent Lokayakta report, concerned with the state of Karnataka, it mentioned that, for every tonne of Iron ore mined by the private company, the government receives royalty of only 27 rupees when the mining company makes the profit of Rs.5000. In the Bauxite and Aluminium sectors the figures are even worse. Day light robbery goes on in the Indian Forests which would help the politicians to buy votes in the Elections and run the Governments. Some of the Judges, Newspapers, Television channels and Non-Government Organisations have come under the influence of the corrupt politicians. It's shocking to note that according to the experts these wealthy minerals are exported to America and other countries for making weapons. Arundathi Roy has rightly pointed out that there are millions of people internally displaced and removed from their habitations for constructing big dams alone. She gives answer for the question about the necessity of building the big dams in the forest: "To produce one tonne of Aluminium, you need about six tonnes of bauxites, more than a thousand tonnes of water and a massive amount of electricity. For that amount of captive water and electricity you need big dams" (140). Even after knowing that the environment is affected due to the extraction of bauxite, the government is still supporting the corporate. Arundathi observes that in an era; when all other nations insist the importance of preserving their forests and the World Health Organisation (WHO) keep on insisting the necessity to plant trees for a better tomorrow, in India everything seems to be upside down. Arundathi points out that over the past five years, the government of

Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odissa, and West Bengal have signed hundreds of Memorandums of Understanding with corporate companies, worth of several billion dollars, for steel plants, sponge Iron factories, power plants, Aluminium refineries, dams and mines. In order to make them possible the tribal people are forced to move from their ancestors' lands. It's clearly mentioned under Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA-1996) that compulsory acquisition of tribal land cannot be justified on any count. Arundathi says that it is an irony that those who are being called Maoists are actually fighting to uphold the constitution, while the government is doing its best to vandalize it. With the help of the forces like Grey Hunt, Scorpion, Cobra, Central Reserve Police Force, Border Security Force and the Naga Battalion, the government of India tries its level best to vandalize the tribal people living in the forest. Arundathi feels that in such a catch 22 situation, Maoists are forced to take guns. There is no other alternative for them to protect their habitations. Non violent struggle may not have given any desired result. Arundathi Roy says:

Gandhian satyagraha for example, is a political theatre. In order for it to be effective, it needs a sympathetic audience, which villagers deep in the forest do not have. When a force of 800 policemen lay a cordon around a forest village at night and begin to burn houses and shoot people, will a hunger strike help? Can starving people go on hunger strike? Do hunger strikes work when they are not on T.V? (48)

If there is any hope for a world at all, it does not live in the climate change conference room or in cities with tall buildings. The intellectuals of the world should come down on the ground, with their hands around the people who go to battle every day to protect their forests, their mountains and their rivers. Arundathi contends that the Maoist movement gains support from different

strata of the society. She has openly declared her support for the cause of the Naxal movement in India in her essay named "Walking with the Comrades." Writers like K.Satchidanandan and Meena Kandasamy have supported the cause of them by writing poems and other works. Hence it is time for the nation to think about the genuine needs of the tribals and to give protection for their livelihood and their lives. It is the duty of every Indian citizen to protect a fellow Indian. Then only, India will become a prosperous and great republic in the world. It is the desire for every patriotic citizen of the country.

References

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