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## **MAL(E) DEVELOPMENT, (COM)MODIFICATION, NATIONALISM AND FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS: AN ANALYSIS OF ARUNDHATI ROY'S WRITINGS**

**ABSTRACT** The terms “mal(e)development” and “(com)modification” are coinages that underscore the nexus of the patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism in the Indian context. India has witnessed tremendous development and exploitation of its natural resources in the post-independence era owing to the aids sponsored by the developed nations. The mal(e) development and (com)modification of India on the western model is masquerading as nation building in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Arundhati Roy, the prominent feminist writer-activist, lays bare this camouflaged maldevelopment and commodification of nature and women. Roy's concerns are pretty much influenced by eco-feministic discourse. In post-independence India, colonialism has resorted to subterfuge, presenting a Western model of development to the developing nations.

**Keywords:** Development, Capitalism, Feminism, Dam building

The terms “mal(e)development” and “(com)modification” are coinages that underscore the nexus of the patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism in the Indian context. India has witnessed tremendous development and exploitation of its natural resources in the post-independence era owing to the aids sponsored by the developed nations. The mal(e) development and (com)modification of India on the Western model is masquerading as nation building in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Arundhati Roy, the prominent feminist writer-activist, lays bare this camouflaged maldevelopment and commodification of nature and women. Roy upholds Simon Gikandi’s proposition that *nationalism cannot be seriously considered to be the alternative to imperialism that it was once thought to be*.<sup>1</sup> Etienne Balibar in his essay ‘Racism and Nationalism’ argues that in many decolonized nations *nationalisms of liberation turned into nationalisms of domination*.<sup>2</sup> As nationalism is itself a Western concept, the anti-colonial nationalism derives the concept of modernity and progress from Western nationalism. John McLeod holds the anti-colonial nationalism responsible for the imposition of this seeming modernity of the West. This Western concept of modernity compels native nationalism to internalize Western superiority and the subservience of the traditional native culture. Partha Chatterjee points out the Eurocentric aspect of Indian nationalism which views that modern European culture *possesses attributes which make the European culturally equipped for power and progress, while such attributes are lacking in “traditional” culture of the East, thus dooming these countries to poverty and subjection*.<sup>3</sup> Hence this institutionalized marginalization and subservience of the poor tribal, *Dalits* and women, is attributed to Indian nationalism that has ever since internalized Western superiority. Roy questions the coherence and rationality of the development projects in India. Roy’s concerns are pretty much influenced by eco-feministic discourse. In post-independence India, colonialism has resorted to subterfuge, presenting a Western model of development to the developing nations. This Western model of development in Third World countries renders millions of natives homeless and displaced, and snatches their basic right to survive. It has serious implications on the ecology of Third World countries. It deprives the poor masses of the natural resources and doles them out to the corporate houses. Roy equates the exploitation of women with that of nature and depicts myriad forms of unholy nexus of the patriarchy and capitalism. Her eco-feministic concerns find expression in her novel *The God of Small Things*. The term “ecofeminism” is a heterogeneous discourse emerged in the 1970s and 1980s that encapsulates myriad forms of environmental theories and activism. The term was first used by Francoise d’Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death) published in 1974. Third World/Postcolonial ecofeminism is a nascent theory that underscores the exploitation of nature accompanying the exploitation of women. Postcolonial ecofeminism confronts the Euro-American discourse of eco-criticism

<sup>1</sup> J. McLeod (ed.), *Beginning Postcolonialism*, New Delhi 2006, p. 102 (*Beginnings*).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

that ignores the issues of Third World women and the ecology of Third World countries. Since postcolonial ecofeminism is a heterogeneous discourse, it has many facets of women's experiences in Third World countries. Though some of the eco-feminists like Vandana Shiva homogenize women's experiences, the Indian women novelists argue that women's experiences are divergent. Vandana Shiva has been criticized for essentializing women and nature and cementing the nature-culture dualism. Shiva's approach in the Indian context is practical as she equates development projects in postcolonial countries with the civilizing mission of the colonial empire. Shiva bitterly criticizes the development based on the Western model and views it as the *westernization of economic categories – of needs, of productivity, of growth* that leads to *the destruction of the local "natural economy"*.<sup>4</sup> Emma Tomalin and Bina Agarwal criticize Shiva for *her often explicit and often implied equivalence between women and nature, as if all women are by definition conservationist, life enhancing, and equity-seeking...*<sup>5</sup> Some of Vandana Shiva's arguments regarding women's participation in environmental movements are based on the Chipko movement where the women of the Garhwal region compelled the government to withdraw the deforestation to generate industrial timber. Arundhati Roy's eco-feministic discourse in her novel *The God of Small Things* and in her non-fictional writings converges with Vandana Shiva's arguments. Roy endorses Shiva's views regarding "development" as "maldevelopment." Simultaneously, Roy rejects Shiva's essentialization of women. *The God of Small Things* published in 1997 is a manifestation of Roy's socio-political activism. The novel supports ecofeminism's claims that the patriarchal structures justify their dominance through categorical or dualistic hierarchies: heaven/earth, mind/body, male/female, human/animal, spirit/matter, culture/nature, white/non-white.

The mal(e) development shows the domination of the patriarchy and the exclusion of women in the development projects. The pathetic condition of the Meenachal, the river in the novel, is attributed to the construction of a dam at the behest of politically influential paddy farmers. The construction of the dam is justified in the name of growth in GDP (Gross Domestic Product) which Shiva describes as "the poverty of mind" and the "abstract number" that is disassociated with its feedback in terms of the destruction of natural resources, and hence this GDP becomes a negative growth in terms of its ramifications over the natural resources. (Shiva, *Festival of Dangerous Ideas*).

*Downriver, a salt water barrage had been built, in exchange for votes from the influential paddy-farmer lobby. The barrage regulated the inflow of salt water from the backwaters that opened into the Arabian Sea. So now they had two harvests a year, instead of one. More rice – for the price of a river.*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> V. Shiva, 'Development, Ecology, and Women,' p. 290, at <<http://faculty.unlv.edu/wjsmith/smithtest/SHIVAwomenDevEcol.pdf>>, 12 March 2014.

<sup>5</sup> I.B. Tøllefsen, 'Ecofeminism, Religion and Nature in an Indian and Global Perspective,' *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2011), p. 93, at <[http://uit.no/Content/276140/Ecofeminism\\_Inga\\_2011.pdf](http://uit.no/Content/276140/Ecofeminism_Inga_2011.pdf)>, 12 March 2014.

<sup>6</sup> A. Roy, *The God of Small Things*, New Delhi 2002, p. 24.

Roy's sarcasm is substantiated by Shiva's claim of the poverty of the mind that allows the GDP or economic growth that is itself an "abstract number" to *destroy everything that is real, that sustains us, that sustains our ecological life, life in nature as well as our social life*.<sup>7</sup> Roy's fictional narrative of the Meenachal is a microcosmic example of the brutal exploitation of water resources in the Indian subcontinent. The novel presents a feminist voice of protest against the patriarchal-capitalist repression that has grave implications over the masses, especially the most vulnerable section – the women. The depiction of God's Own Country gives the impression that the capitalists are gods who have full authority to exploit its natural resources for their luxuries and leave the poor with a river like a *swollen drain*, its toxic water and smell of the shit that *hovered over Ayemenem like a hat*. Roy scathingly criticizes the communist government of Kerala by caricaturing the communists who work as *fawning bearers in colorful ethnic clothes, stooped slightly behind their trays of drink*.<sup>8</sup> The gesture of the old communists stooping towards the tourists is a comment on communist policies tilting towards the emerging capitalism. In the era of liberalization, the communist government has given way to the capitalist exploitation of natural resources and the masses and has gone astray from the Marxist principles of equality. The capitalist commodification of nature, culture and women is exemplified in the *truncated kathakali performances* presented in front of the tourists.

*In the evenings (for that Regional Flavour) the tourists were treated to truncated kathakali performances ('Small attention spans,' the Hotel People explained to the dancers). So ancient stories were collapsed and amputated. Sixhour classics were slashed to twenty-minute cameos.*<sup>9</sup>

Roy comments on the economic colonization in India waged by America and its allies. She unfolds the hidden reality of the economic progress of India achieved at the cost of its culture and environment. World Bank loans only give rise to the use of pesticides that obliterate the environment of the poor nations like India. Roy's presentation of dismal aspects of economic growth is based on reality as the "progress" of India jeopardizes its culture and environment. Culture is at stake, as the Indian heritage is modernized and presented for the cheap entertainment of the exotic tourists. Roy's disapproval of building new dams is also expressed in the novel. Similarly, it is a major issue in Roy's political writings. One of the major forms of Americanization, the substitute for Anglophilia, is presented as industrialization. The expansion of multinational companies have affected the environment. Roy's description of God's Own Country presents the sordid reality of modernization and urbanization at the cost of environment and culture. Roy's eco-feministic approach is conspicuous as she slams the Indian subjects for their blind imitation of Western industrialization and tourism. The Meenachal, a feminine figure, is symbolic of the plight of women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>7</sup> V. Shiva, *Growth = Poverty*, Festival of Dangerous Ideas 2013, YouTube, at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7M3WJQbnHKc>>, 12 March 2014.

<sup>8</sup> A. Roy, *The God of Small Things*, p. 126.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

The government, a patriarchal functionary, is held responsible for the exploitation of the Meenachal. Roy sarcastically slams government's policies and its inhuman approach towards the exploitation of natural resources. It is a colonial strategy to exploit the natural resources of the colonized nations leaving behind the hazardous impacts for the colonized subjects. Roy clearly draws a line between the capitalist class and the marginalized class through the presentation of God's Own Country. People from the lower strata of society are compelled to bathe in the toxic water of the river, whereas the hotel has a swimming pool for the tourists. The slum beside the hotel exposes the reality of modernization in Kerala.

The Meenachal, the lifeline of the Ayemenem people, has become no more than a swollen drain. The narrator comments that the river *had the power to evoke fear. To change lives*.<sup>10</sup> This comment hints at the strong social status of women and the matriarchy in ancient Kerala that has been eliminated by the advent of the British to Kerala.

Roy points out that the burgeoning progress of India with the government's apathy towards the ecology has taken a heavy toll in the form of acute environmental problems. Moreover, the tourism industry is booming at the cost of cultural assassination.

*The God of Small Things* is a resistance narrative as it lambasts capitalist commodification of women. Ammu, the main female character in the novel, is insulted at the police station. Inspector Mathew taps her breast with his baton *...as though he was choosing mangoes from the basket*. Ammu is reduced just to the status of commodity or sexual object as she was given contemptuous sobriquet of "*Veshya*" (the prostitute) by Inspector Mathew. Whether it be Rahel who is propositioned by pimps about more lucrative job offers or Ammu who is labeled as "*veshya*," there is a nexus of patriarchy and capitalism that degrades women to sexual objects and hence consumes them. The capitalist commodification of women has extended its scope and expanded its tentacles to land and natural resources. The obscenity of this development is conspicuous in the exploitation of the masses (the *tribal* and *dalits*) who are the victims of 'ethnic otherness' and hence are subjected to pay the price of this mal(e)development for the luxuries of the rich. Roy upholds Edward Said's critique of Orientalism. Orientalism, an inherent colonial ploy to perpetuate and legitimize colonial domination, is practised by the Indian government to legitimize the destruction of natural resources as well as poor *tribal* and *dalits*. Whether it be Velutha (*dalit* carpenter) who is killed by police or millions of natives displaced by the construction of big dams, their stigma and miseries are colossal as they are destined to remain the underdogs of the society. The elites of the society and the colonial powers derive voyeuristic pleasure from the miseries of these millions of natives. *The God of Small Things* briefly discusses the issue of big dams that has found substantial space in Roy's non-fictional writings. The construction of big dams has been equated with the nation-building in the much-hyped projects of development. Her essay 'The Greater Common Good' is a vehement opposition to the construction of big dams. Roy vociferously protests against the building of the Narmada Dam. She assails the flawed policies of the Indian government regarding rehabilitation

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

and ecology. The Narmada Dam is a macrocosmic representation of the microcosmic description of the Meenachal where the Indian Government constructs the big dam in order to achieve “the abstract number” (GDP) at the cost of ecology, environment and human beings. In order to improve the unsustainable GDP, sustainable human resources and natural resources are exploited ruthlessly. Roy’s essay came out after the Supreme Court had vacated the legal stay on the extension of the height of the Sardar Sarovar Dam. Roy regrets her little knowledge of one of the longest resistance movements (*Narmada Bachao Andolan*). Roy’s critique of the big dam is not given just to save a river but rather it underscores the dominant repressive power structures in post-independence India that collude with Western capitalism. *Narmada Bachao Andolan* not only gave voice to the suppressed tribal and dalits, but it also exposed the state’s heavy-handedness towards the poorest people of the world. The state’s acrimonious attitude towards the millions of displaced inhabitants of the valley shows the ruthlessness of the state-corporate nexus.

*The state is defined in the Marxists tradition as a force of repressive execution and intervention in the interests of the ruling classes’ in the class struggle conducted by the bourgeois and its allies against the proletariat. This is its basic function. It is, in that sense, an apparatus or instrument by which the ruling class cements its hold on power.*<sup>11</sup>

Roy’s writings seem to uphold Althusser’s concept of state apparatus. Roy slams oppressive power structures (repressive state apparatus: heads of state, police, army, court; and ideological state apparatus: religion, educational institutes, political parties) that legitimize their repressive dominations *by reinforcing assumptions of these binaries (e.g. heaven/earth, mind/body, male/female, human/animal, spirit/matter, culture/nature, white/non-white), even making them sacred through religious and scientific constructs.*<sup>12</sup> She brazenly condemns the Supreme Court’s judgment by criticizing the state apparatus that played vital role in the plight of millions and in the repression of their resistance.

*From being a fight over the fate of a river valley it began to raise doubts about an entire political system. What is at issue now is the very nature of our democracy. Who own this land? Who own its rivers? Its forests? Its fish? These are huge questions. They are being taken hugely seriously by the State. They are being answered in one voice by every institution at its command – the army, the police, the bureaucracy, the courts. And not just answered, but answered unambiguously, in bitter, brutal ways.*<sup>13</sup>

Roy’s comment against the court made the judges take exception to and deliberation whether her comments were tantamount to the contempt of court. Finally, the Supreme Court decided not to prosecute Roy for the contempt of court.

<sup>11</sup> Clarke R.L.W., *Louis Althusser “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”* (1969), p. 2, at <<http://www.rlwclarke.net/courses/LITS3304/2010-2011/07Althusser,IdeologyandIdeologicalStateApparatuses.pdf>>, 12 March 2014.

<sup>12</sup> L. Hobgood-Oster, ‘Ecofeminism: Historic and International Evolution,’ p. 2, at <<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/bron/pdf-christianity/Hobgood-Oster-Ecofeminism-International%20Evolution.pdf>>, 12 March 2014.

<sup>13</sup> A. Roy, ‘The Greater Common Good,’ *Outlook India*, 24 May 1999, p. 1, at <<http://www.outlookindia.com/printarticle.aspx?207509>>, 12 March 2014.



The questions Roy raises can be answered by peeping into history. The state's heavy-handedness is attributed to the Indian Forest Act, 1927 that criminalized the forest dwellers by declaring the forest land as "government property" and hence the tribal, who had been living in the forests for ages, were held "encroachers" and "illegal occupants." The act was made to exploit the timber by the colonial rulers. In 1972, the Wild Life Protection Act was passed on the same lines with similar consequences. From 2002 onwards, the Tiger Task Force of the Government of India has evicted 300,000 families from their natural habitat in the name of conservation. The stigma of "encroachers" and "illegal occupants" carried by the tribal communities was recognized by the Indian State in 2006 when it made the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 which was amended in 2012 but until then the damage was done and millions of the poor tribal had been evicted on the pretext of development and conservation. In the view of this colonial act, the forest-dwelling women were the most vulnerable lot as in tribal communities women would bear the responsibility of providing fodder for the livestock. With the criminalization of the forest-dwelling tribal, the women were subjected to sexual harassment by the British soldiers as they had to go to collect the fodder. This colonial attitude existed even after gaining the independence as during the eviction drives by the Indian government tribal women were harassed and assaulted by the Indian police and security forces. The plight of the forest dwellers was aggravated by the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, (amended in 1984) that entitled the government to acquire land only with the provision of compensation. Thus neither the displaced communities were entitled to any kind of rehabilitation, nor was the government *legally bound to provide a displaced person anything but a cash compensation*.<sup>14</sup> The Indian government as a colonial-patriarchal functionary makes the displaced women nonentities by denying any kind of compensation to them.

Roy rejects Shiva's essentialization of women that women are inherently nature friendly, conservationist, life enhancing, and equity-seeking by mentioning NBA activists' meeting with Maneka Gandhi, the then Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment. The juxtaposition of social justice and empowerment with the struggle for survival (*Narmada Bachao Andolan*) is a bitter comment on Indian democracy. The ministry's portfolio was given to a woman who acts as an emissary of patriarchal-colonial government.

*In addition to all this, they have to learn how to make written representations (in triplicate) to the Grievance Redressal Committee or the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam for any particular problems they might have. Recently, 3,000 people came to Delhi to protest their situation – travelling overnight by train, living on the blazing streets. The President wouldn't meet them because he had an eye infection. Maneka Gandhi, the Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, wouldn't meet them but asked for a written representation (Dear Maneka, Please don't build the dam, Love, The People). When the representation was handed to her, she scolded the little delegation for not having written it in English.*<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

In the words of Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world.*<sup>16</sup> Thus, Maneka's insistence on the use of English is equal to the inculcation of colonial values. The project-affected persons are compelled to speak and write in the language of the colonizers in order to internalize and accept their inferior status. Roy exposes the hollowness of linguistic fascism of right-wing political parties. The right-wing politics staunchly supports the cause of Hindi with the empty rhetoric of Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan. Roy's indictment of Maneka Gandhi superimposes a nasty picture of fascist and jingoist sanctimoniousness towards the project-affected peoples over Maneka Gandhi's activism regarding animal rights. In the Hindutva fascist dictum, human beings can be butchered in order to maintain fascist vegetarianism as happened in Jhajjar (Haryana) in 2005 where some Dalits were brutally killed by Vishva Hindu Parishad in the presence of police for their alleged role in cow slaughter (Harsh Mander). Along with the patriarchs of Indian politics such as Digvijay Singh, the former Chief Minister of Congress party, Roy holds Sadhvi Uma Bharati, the then Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh responsible for the seizure of the tribal's right to survive. Uma Bharati's religious affiliation as *sadhvi* (the ascetic) also comes under scrutiny as she comes to power with the help of religion and colluding with the capitalist patriarchy. Roy sympathizes with the victims of state's tyranny but simultaneously hits hard on the jibes and invectives used in a patriarchal society. These invectives include *the derogatory references to women's body.*<sup>17</sup> Even the victims speak the same patriarchal language to register their protest, though their resistance is anti-imperial capitalism.

The juxtaposition of development and nationalism legitimizes the ostracism and marginalization of the displaced *adivasis* and *dalits*. This development, particularly the dam building, entails not only the elimination of the traditional methods of irrigation, severing old socio-cultural ties among the displaced communities who are forced to become slum dwellers and are scattered on the outskirts of cities, snatching their traditional way of livelihood and eventually commodifying them "like goods on sale."

*Many of those who have been resettled are people who have lived all their lives deep in the forests with virtually no contact with money and the modern world. Suddenly they find themselves left with the option of either starving to death or walking several kilometers to the nearest town, sitting in the market place, (both men and women) offering themselves as wage labour, like goods on sale.*<sup>18</sup>

Both Roy and Shiva converge on holding Western patriarchy responsible for the degradation of women and nature. In the neo-colonial stance, Western patriarchy colludes with the state in order to commodify women and nature. Shiva writes, *Develop-*

<sup>16</sup> J. Mcleod (ed.), *Beginning Postcolonialism*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>17</sup> A. Roy, 'The Cost of Living,' *Frontline*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2000), p. 11, at <<http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1703/17030640.htm>>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.



ment was thus reduced to a continuation of the process of colonization; it became an extension of the project of wealth creation in modern Western patriarchy's economic vision, which was based on the exploitation or exclusion of women (of the west and non-west), on the exploitation and erosion of other cultures.<sup>19</sup> Both Roy and Shiva view "development as a new project of Western patriarchy." However, in marginalizing women and underprivileged classes Indian patriarchy hardly differs from Western patriarchy. Western patriarchy wields capitalism to exploit women, and other marginalized communities whereas Indian patriarchy limits women's mobility by creating separate spaces for men and women. The inner domain was held sacrosanct by Indian patriarchy and women were assigned the responsibility of keeping this domain unpolluted by the cultural onslaught of the West. Thus they were made the preservers of honour of their menfolk. However, there is no denying the fact that patriarchy cuts across geographical boundaries to safeguard its interests.

Althusser's concept of Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses comes true as the dam building was equated with the nation building and hence held sacrosanct and sacred through the education. Althusser viewed public and private schools as "Educational ISA" (Ideological State Apparatus) and different religious denominations as "Religious ISA" (Religious Ideological State Apparatus) as Nehru's vision of the big dam as "the Temples of Modern India" became the part of school textbooks.

*Nehru's famous statement about dams being the Temples of Modern India has made its way into primary school textbooks in every Indian language. Big dams have become an article of faith inextricably linked with nationalism. To question their utility amounts almost to sedition. Every school child is taught that big dams will deliver the people of India from hunger and poverty.*<sup>20</sup>

Taking Religious State Apparatus, the development projects are equal to the reformation and the progress of the masses. In the puritanical Protestantism, Martin Luther views the masses (parishioners) equal to *the waste matter which falls into the world from the devil's anus*.<sup>21</sup> The masses, paying the price of these development projects, are treated as waste matter by the government and are dumped in the slums adjacent to the big cities. Roy caustically comments on the plight of these poor masses using a religious symbol of "altars".<sup>22</sup> The essay starts with Nehru's statement, *If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country*.<sup>23</sup> Since India's independence the sufferings of the masses have been legitimized and held sacrosanct in the name of national interests. Both Shiva and Roy highlight the collusion of patriarchy and capitalism to marginalize women and other impoverished communities (Dalits and *adivasis*). To quote Scott Wilson, *Capitalism equals war. War equals desire. Desire equals machine. People*

<sup>19</sup> V. Shiva, 'Development, Ecology...', p. 290.

<sup>20</sup> A. Roy, 'The Cost of Living', p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Qtd. Lacan J., *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. J. Alain-Miller, trans. by D. Porter. London 1992, p. 97.

<sup>22</sup> A. Roy, 'The Greater Common Good', p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

*equal shit*.<sup>24</sup> Capitalism is *an acknowledged war*<sup>25</sup> waged by America and its allies against the people of the Third World countries in which the indigenous governments are the close associates of these foreign invaders. The motives of this war include: fulfilling the desires of the powerful nations by holding the economy of the poor nations hostage to the World Bank, imposing their obsolete technology on the poor nations and reducing the people of these nations to the status of shit. The project of maldevelopment perpetuates and legitimizes itself just as colonialism justifies itself in the name of the “civilizing mission” of the Orient. This crushing juggernaut of “development” takes its toll and collects its dues from these marginalized communities and benefits only a handful of elites. Roy lays bare the government’s euphoria of India being the third largest dam builder. With much alacrity of the government of India, building big dams is itself a matter of suspicion as the environmentalists are raising their voices against the complete annihilation of ecology, the traces of world’s oldest civilization and displacement of millions of natives without proper rehabilitation and compensation. Roy questions the feasibility of dam building in India and categorically describes it as the shit of First World countries that has been exported to the countries of the Third World. The governments of Third World countries are acting as *incurable [...] CCP, which was short for cchi-cchi poach and in Hindi meant shit-wiper*<sup>26</sup> of First World countries. These development projects are merely *gift-wrapped garbage*.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from the human and social costs of big dams, Roy counts environment costs in the form of *the submerged forests, the ravaged ecosystems, the destroyed estuaries, the defunct, silted-up reservoirs, the endangered wildlife, the disappearing biodiversity, the millions of hectares of land that are waterlogged or salt-affected*<sup>28</sup> that have not been assessed.

Roy bolsters “Deep Ecology” principles, formed by Arne Naess and George Sessions. The “Deep Ecology” principles require the humans to change “anthropocentric attitude” into “biocentric attitude.”<sup>29</sup>

B. G. Verghese, veteran journalist, a staunch supporter of the Sardar Sarovar Dam and a bitter critic of Roy’s arguments, terms her objections as “Neo-Luddite,” “anti-development diatribe.” He attributes the intellectuals who are part of the Narmada Bachao Andolan *more eminent than informed*.<sup>30</sup> Verghese’s counterarguments regarding the rehabilitation and relief of the displaced are based on the government’s data

<sup>24</sup> P. Waugh (ed.), *Literary Theory and Criticism. An Oxford Guide*, New Delhi 2006, p. 557.

<sup>25</sup> A. Roy, ‘The Greater Common Good,’ p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Eadem, *The God of Small Things*, p. 51.

<sup>27</sup> Eadem, ‘The Greater Common Good,’ p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Eadem, ‘The Cost of Living,’ p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Tošić J., ‘Ecocriticism – Interdisciplinary Study of Literature and Environment,’ *Working and Living Environmental Protection*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2006), p. 46, at <<http://facta.junis.ni.ac.rs/walep/walep2006/walep2006-06.pdf>>, 12 March 2014.

<sup>30</sup> B.G. Verghese, ‘A Poetic License,’ *Outlook India*, 5 July 1999, p. 1, at <<http://www.outlookindia.com/printarticle.aspx?207723>>, 12 March 2014.

which is most likely corrupt and concocted, whereas Roy's arguments are based on her personal interviews with the Project Affected Persons (PAPs). The acronym PAPs can be compared to the *Paap* (sin) in Hindu theology that Indian government is bearing on its shoulders and wants to get away with. Tabassum Ruhi Khan in her article raises pertinent questions regarding the role of Verghese as a staunch supporter of the Sardar Sarovar Dam and highlights the "societal relationships" and "power equations".<sup>31</sup> Roy substantiates Khan's arguments concerning the power equation created by the wealth of capitalism. Roy unequivocally condemns *the institutions of democracy – the courts, Parliaments as well as the media for compromising their ability to function in the way they are meant to*.<sup>32</sup> The creation of wealth ranges from buying shares in major TV news and entertainment channels by the big corporate houses to acquiring stake in mining, power generation, real estate and textile. The corporate sector's control over the media gives these corporate houses free hand in muzzling up the voices against the corporate loot of natural resources, as well as in blacking out the offences committed by the corporate giants as it happened in December, 2013 when Mukesh Ambani's son allegedly killed 2 persons in a car accident and the national media blacked out the news. Roy slams national and international media for its double standards about the poor and the rich.

*I often wonder what would happen if the Government was to declare that in order to raise funds to complete these mammoth projects, it was going to commandeer the assets and bank accounts of a hundred thousands of its richest citizens. I have no doubt that it would become an international scandal. Banner headlines would appear in newspapers announcing the death of democracy. Suddenly the ecological and human costs of Big Dams would be Page One news.*<sup>33</sup>

Apart from Verghese, noted historian Ramchandra Guha also criticized Roy for her arguments. But Guha's approach regarding the dam building is quite different from Verghese's as Guha is not opposed to NBA, as he espouses the concerns of NBA but his view differs from Roy's polemical approach. Guha attributes Roy as *the Arun Shourie of the left*<sup>34</sup> and criticizes the hypersensitivity of both left and right wing. Guha holds Roy's anti-dam essay as *unoriginal, self-indulgent and hyperbolic*. Though Guha seems to support Roy on the issue of social justice, ecology and economic prudence, he is critical of Roy's passionate approach.

*Ms. Roy wanted, however, for the dam to be made a museum for failed technologies. Altogether, this was an essay written with passion but without care. In her stream of consciousness style, the arguments were served up in a jumble of images and exclamations with*

<sup>31</sup> T.R. Khan, "Dam" the Irony for *The Greater Common Good: A Critical Cultural Analysis of the Narmada Dam Debate*, *International Journal of Communication*, No. 6 (2012), p. 204, at <<http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1257/693>>, 12 March 2014.

<sup>32</sup> A. Roy, 'Capitalism: A Ghost Story', *Outlook*, 26 March 2012, p. 3, at <<http://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/capitalism-a-ghost-story/280234>>, 12 March 2014.

<sup>33</sup> A. Roy, 'The Cost of Living', p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> R. Guha, 'The Arun Shourie of the Left', *The Hindu*, 26 November 2000, at <<http://www.thehindu.com/2000/11/26/stories/13260411.htm>>, 12 March 2014.

*the odd number thrown in. [...] What struck one most forcibly was her atavistic hatred of science and a romantic celebration of adivasi lifestyles.*<sup>35</sup>

Guha does not stop here by calling Roy *careless beyond doubt*, but also advises her to retreat from activism and revert to fiction.

The opinions are divided on NBA. Many writers have brazenly criticised NBA for hampering a noble cause of providing drinking water and electricity to the millions. There have been accusations against NBA supporters of attacking people who accepted compensation for moving.<sup>36</sup> Though Leech criticised NBA, he maintains the concern of poor rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced people. His views are self-contradictory as he admits the loss of wildlife, generation of greenhouse gases, and resettlement as the essential byproducts of dam building and views it as a small price to pay for the greater benefits. Roy categorically shuns the rehabilitation policy of the government and hits out at the patriarchal mentality where the existence of women is negated altogether in distributing compensation.

Thus Roy painstakingly depicts post-colonial India, enslaved by its own rulers. The economic slavery of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and Western superpowers is a paradigm shift of colonialism into neo-colonialism or American Imperialism. These neo-colonial, imperial powers hold the economy of the poor nations hostage and work as patriarchal agencies to exploit women and natural resources of Third World countries in collusion with the corrupt local governments. Roy seems to be a Marxist existentialist in depicting the predicament of the marginalized sections of society.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> K. Leech, 'The Narmada Dambusters Are Wrong,' *The Guardian*, 3 March 2009, at <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/mar/03/india-narmada-dams>>, 12 March 2014.

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