**Arundhati Roy – Literatus Par Excellence**

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The sun rises later and later now, and I, who only a month ago could sit with latte every morning watching the light walk down the green yard to the edge of grey structure house, now wait till six for dawn. All this point towards the transmogrifying month of November where everything seems amazingly beautiful yet dying down to breathe afresh later with new zeal and zest.

Even on the historical frontier, numerous defining events have been pen down in November chronology, which turned the course of history and opened fronts for political, social, and scientific avenues. Such as, on November 1, 1858, following the bloody events of the Indian war of Independence, Queen Victoria was proclaimed as ruler of India, replacing the reign of the East India Company. Likewise, Bolshevik Red Guards seized control of the Winter Palace and confirmed Vladimir Lenin as leader of Russia on November 7, 1917. Moreover, on 11 th Nov 1918, after four years and 97 days the guns finally fell silent as the Great War ended and around nine million lives lost with a further 27 million injured. Furthermore, November 22 marks the death anniversary of American president John F. Kennedy who was shot and killed in Dallas, Texas in 1963. On scientific frontier, November 24, 1859 was the day when Charles Darwin published his seminal book ‘Origin of the Species’.

In recent times, November 24 is also tantamount to similar importance as it is the birthday of living legend, Arundhati Roy who turns fifty-nine this year. Arundhati Roy is prolific novelist, actor and human right activist, and public intellectual of contemporary era born in Shillong India in 1961.

Roy is one of the best authors who is hailed by anti-war voices, liberals, pro-democracy, and human rights advocacy spheres all across the world particularly in third world countries. Her knowledge of history, philosophy, literature, and politics is wide and deep. She has an analytical mind that can relate concept to concept and assimilate disparate facts. All of this may sound like clichés but Roy’s perspicacity has always remained amazing.

Arundhati Roy tends to write heavily and can be verbose at some places, but I opine this in terms of newspaper writing and not that of a more serious variety. For Roy, there is no such thing as non-serious writing. When she is writing about political issues and ideological divides, her style acquires a bite that can cause sleepless nights to those written about..

There is scramble for elites. Merit has ceased to be its own reward in society. Opportunities are now only the privilege of a few. The poor are powerless and the only freedom available to them in the neo-colonial society is the freedom to starve and go under.

Roy has recently published her non-fiction book, Azadi, which come with a bang in the market.

The author through her debut novel, God of Small Things, won the booker prize in 1997. Her next novel came after almost two decades in 2017, i.e. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, which also was nominated for Booker prize the same year. Roy’s recent non-fictional book Azadi:

Freedom, Fascism, Fiction is published in September 2020 by penguin classics. It is a series of electrifying and penetrating essays on politics and literature. The book examine the questions of Azadi or freedom in this growing world of, modernization and challenges the notion of ‘freedom’ in democracy. Roy further argues that how the word ‘Azadi’ has evolved with new meaning in Covid-19. The book further states that the pandemic brought the terrible understanding of Azadi, making no sense of international borders, imprisoning entire populations, and bringing the modern world to a halt like nothing else ever could. The book includes essays on literature, language, government, public vis-a-vis private. Roy has further elucidated the role of fiction and imagination in these disturbing and challenging times. It is the collection of different talks and essays, which she has delivered on different occasions in different corners of the world. The latest one is on the virus covid-19 as how it has affected both hemispheres. On the pandemic, Roy says, ‘pandemic is a portal between one world and another’ and the illness, poverty, jobless and devastation it has left in its wake, it is an invitation to the human race, an opportunity, to imagine another world. Thus, whether you agree with Roy or not, she is an extraordinary person who is playing an important role not in left leaning political discourse alone but also in general global political context particularly in South Asia.

In a society where people tend to think in terms of stereotypes, fake news agenda is on the top, cut throat capitalism and corporate mindset have encroached upon independent editorial boards of news agencies, and where instant judgments are the norm, the eloquent minds like Arundhati Roy is destined to cause extreme reactions. And particularly, I am contented and feel much honored, being millennial though, to be alive in an era of public intellectuals like Arundhati Roy, Pankaj Mishra and Tariq Ali.

Like a haft of sunlight, her presence irradiates a landscape, which is full of forebodings and echoing with empty words and even emptier slogans. Much is wrong nowadays. There is scramble for elites. Merit has ceased to be its own reward in society. Opportunities are now only the privilege of a few. The poor are powerless and the only freedom available to them in the neo-colonial society is the freedom to starve and go under.

It is a time of violent social upheaval and uncertainty, but in shape of Noam Chomsky, Tariq Ali, and Arundhiti Roy, there is also a hope an innate belief among the people that regardless of the odds, “we would make it”. In this decade, everything and everyone desire to be in the headline but they are unaware that headlines may give you a clue to the story, but they never tell the whole story. Same goes for Arundhati Roy as she is too intricate a person to be explained away in an opinion piece or an adulatory epithet.

As third world countries are passing through such a terrifying baptism of blood and fire that the dividing line between reality and nightmare is no longer discernable, if we wish to understand our contemporary world in general and South Asian society in particular, we must try to study authors like Arundhati Roy, Tariq Ali, and Pankaj Mishra. Perhaps only by doing that, we will begin to understand our socio-political surroundings and ourselves. Words cannot express our happiness for the opportunity to celebrate your special day. May you be blessed with many more fruitful years. Amen

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