

Adaptation

(A Textbook for B.A/B.Sc Third Semester Additional English)

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Chapter 1

Confronting Empire

Arundhati Roy

When we speak of confronting Empire, we need to identify what Empire means. Does it mean the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and multinational corporations? Or is it something more than that?

In many countries, Empire has sprouted other subsidiary heads, some dangerous by-products— nationalism, religious bigotry, fascism and, of course, terrorism. All these march arm in arm with the project of corporate globalization.

Let me illustrate what I mean. India—the world’s biggest democracy—is currently at the forefront of the corporate globalisation project. Its ‘market’¹ of one billion people is being pried open by the WTO. Corporatization and privatization are being welcomed by the government and the Indian elite.

The dismantling of democracy is proceeding with the speed and efficiency of a Structural Adjustment Programme. While the project of corporate globalisation rips through people's lives in India, massive privatization and labour 'reforms' are pushing people off their land and out of their jobs. Hundreds of impoverished farmers are committing suicide by consuming pesticide. Reports of starvation deaths are coming in from all over the country.

While the elite journeys to its imaginary destination somewhere near the top of the world, the dispossessed are spiralling downwards into crime and chaos. This climate of frustration and national disillusionment is the perfect breeding ground, history tells us, for fascism.

All this is to say that it is a myth that the free market breaks down national barriers. The free market does not threaten national sovereignty, it undermines democracy. As the disparity between the rich and the poor grows, the fight to corner resources is intensifying. To push through their 'sweetheart deals', to corporatize the crops we grow, the water we drink, the air we breathe, and the dreams we dream, corporate globalisation needs an international confederation of loyal, corrupt, authoritarian governments in poorer countries to push through unpopular reforms and quell the mutinies. Corporate globalisation—or shall we call it by its name? Imperialism—needs a press that pretends to be free. It needs courts that pretend to dispense justice.

Meanwhile, the countries of the North harden their borders and stockpile weapons of mass destruction. After all they have to make sure that it's only money, goods, patents, and services that are globalised. Not the free movement of people. Not a respect for human rights. Not international treaties on racial discrimination or chemical and nuclear weapons or greenhouse gas emissions or climate change or—God forbid—justice.

So this—*all* this—is Empire. This loyal confederation, this obscene accumulation of power, this greatly increased distance between those who make the decisions and those who have to suffer them.

Our fight, our goal, our vision of another world must be to eliminate that distance. So how do we resist Empire?

The good news is that we're not doing too badly. There have been major victories. In India the movement against corporate globalisation is gathering momentum and is poised to become the only real political force to counter religious fascism.

Still, many of us have dark moments of hopelessness and despair. We know that under the spreading canopy of the War against Terrorism, the men in suits are hard at work.

While bombs rain down on us and cruise missiles skid across the skies, we know that contracts are being signed, patents are being registered, oil pipelines are being laid, natural resources are being plundered, water is being privatized. If we look at this conflict as a straightforward eyeball to eyeball confrontation between Empire and those of us who are resisting it, it might seem that we are losing.

But there is another way of looking at it. We, all of us gathered here, have, each in our own way, laid siege to Empire.

We may not have stopped it in its tracks—yet— but we have stripped it down. We have made it drop its mask. We have forced it into the open. It now stands before us on the world's stage in all its brutish, iniquitous nakedness.

Empire may well go to war, but it's out in the open now—too ugly to behold its own reflection. Too ugly even to rally its own people. Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness—and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we're being brainwashed to believe.

The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they

are selling- their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability.

Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them.

Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.

About the author:

Arundhati Roy is an Indian author, actress and political activist. She is very popular for her award-winning novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997). She is also well-known for her involvement in environmental and human rights causes.

Arundhati Roy, her full name, Suzanna A.R., was born on November 24, 1961 in Shillong, Meghalaya, India. Her father was a Bengali tea planter and her mother was a Christian of Syrian descent. She spent her childhood in Aymanam in Kerala. Her childhood is mentioned in her autobiographical book *The God of Small Things*, which won the Man Booker Prize for Fiction (1989). She was also awarded with Sydney Peace Prize in 2004, the Sahitya Academy Award in 2006. In 2003 she was awarded and recognized as a woman of Peace at the Global Human Rights Awards in San Francisco. In November 2011 she was awarded the Norman Mailer Prize for Distinguished writing.

She donated her prize money to the “Narmada Bachao Andolan”. She has written on several diverse topics like India’s nuclear weapons and American power giant Enron’s activities in India.

About the Text:

Arundhati Roy observes that there is no gain at all in the globalization of the economy. Hardly there are any good hopes in

future. She visualizes corporate globalizations which hit hard on the lifestyles of the developing countries. She opines that even the government which wants to serve the marginalized is finding it difficult to access their market place. She firmly condemns the rulers who encourage terrorism and intolerance which are handy for the expansionist activities.

Roy's convictions are that the corporate globalization is not in favour of the poor. Enriching the marketplace is encouraging terrorism and religious intolerance. Globalization, she says, is to expand the market place for the benefit of the multinational companies. She questions whether this was sufficient for the growth of the nation. Globalization of the universal principles must also include banning of nuclear weapons. Why do they resist, is her serious concern. The rich and the poor remain unchanged as the free market undermines the democracy.

India, as a developing country can defeat the Empire by refusing to buy what they are selling. Thus, Arundhati Roy negates 'corporate globalization' and its consequences for the poor, rural populace.

Glossary:

- Confront** : to stand or come in front of; stand or meet facing;
- Subsidiary** : serving to assist or supplement; auxiliary; supplementary.
- Bigotry** : stubborn and complete intolerance of any creed, belief, or opinion that differs from one's own.
- Fascism** : a governmental system led by a dictator having complete power, forcibly suppressing opposition and criticism, regimenting all industry, commerce, etc., and emphasizing an aggressive nationalism and often racism.
- Impoverished** : reduced to poverty; deprived of strength, vitality, creativeness, etc
- Sweetheart deals** : unethical arrangements for making profits

Plundered	: to rob of goods or valuables by open force, as in war, hostile raids, brigandage, etc.:
Brainwash	: deliberately make people accept new beliefs
Brutish	: brutal; cruel; uncivilized; bestial; like an animal.
Iniquitous	: characterized by injustice or wickedness; wicked; sinful.
Strategy	: a plan, method, or series of maneuvers or stratagems for obtaining a specific goal or result:
Relentless	: that does not relent; unyieldingly severe, strict, or harsh;
Deprive	: to remove or withhold something from the enjoyment or possession of

Questions:

1. What, according to Roy, is 'Empire'?
2. How does the author project the corporate globalization?
3. Why is the free market a myth?
4. What do the countries of the North aim at?
5. How is India proving against corporate globalization?
6. What does Roy mean by saying 'our strategy should not be only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it'?
7. How does Arundhati Roy express her arguments against globalization?
8. Briefly write your impressions on Roy's argument.

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