

# Explore Democracy & its Consequences Regarding “Field Notes on Democracy Listening to Grasshoppers by Arundhati Roy”

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## **Abstract:**

This paper ventures into an in-depth examination of democracy in India as critiqued in Arundhati Roy's incisive narrative "Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers," juxtaposing it with global democratic experiences and theoretical discourses. Roy's work, renowned for its passionate and articulate dissection of the Indian democratic process, exposes the underbelly of what is often celebrated as the world's largest democracy. Through her narratives, she elucidates the crumbling edifices of egalitarian ideals, the weaponization of religion and ethnopolitical identities, and the consequential ruptures in the fabric of Indian society. This study probes the inherent contradictions and complexities of Indian democracy, revealing how the volatile amalgamation of neoliberal market forces and rising religious nationalism pose pressing challenges to democratic integrity. In dynamically integrating Roy's perspectives with the existing theories of democracy as proposed by scholars like Amartya Sen and Fareed Zakaria, the paper delves into the critical distinction between the procedural aspects of democracy and its deeper ethos. It highlights the alarming trends of political hegemony, institutional decay, media manipulation, and the suppression of dissent, thereby questioning the efficacy and sustainability of democratic governance as observed by Roy. Furthermore, by contextualizing Roy's insights within a broader global framework, this paper reflects on the universality of the democratic condition, echoing concerns of majoritarian tyranny and the plight of marginalized communities. Drawing parallels across borders, it seeks to understand the broader implications of Indian democratic practices for the global struggle towards genuine democratic fulfilment. The outcome of this scholarly inquiry is a nuanced portrait of a democracy besieged by internal strife and external pressures, grappling with the moral implications of governance in a pluralistic society. This paper captures the paradoxical realities faced by modern democracies, striving to unravel the potent blend of hope and despair that characterize the continuing evolution of democratic societies.

**Key Words:** Explore, Democracy, Consequences, Arundhati Roy, Field Notes

## **1) Introduction:**

In the contemporary discourse on the myriad expressions of democracy, "Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers" by Arundhati Roy serves as a profound exploration of the concept and its implementation in the world's largest democracy—India. This work is not just a literary critique but a piercing examination of the fractures and fissures within the Indian polity that challenge the very essence of what democracy stands for. Roy's narrative is a journey through the political landscape of India, marked by eruptions of violence, the rise of religious nationalism, and the dilemmas faced by a nation grappling with its democratic identity. As the title suggests, the book is an assemblage of musings, a collage of

poignant vignettes that reveal the cacophony of both dissonance and resistance within the democratic framework.

The narrative presented here is introspective and delves into the Indian experience while also highlighting broader patterns of democratic struggle across the world. The challenges faced by democratic governance worldwide, such as majoritarianism, economic disparity, and state hegemony, are also present in India. Roy's observations suggest that these challenges are not just isolated incidents but rather symptoms of systemic issues that afflict democratic governance.

An academic pilgrimage that traces the contours of democratic interaction, conflict, and potential within the Indian subcontinent, illustrated by Roy's incisive anecdotes and sharp analyses. By considering the consequences of democracy in the cauldron of Indian politics, we endeavour to glean broader insights into the corporatization of democratic space, the politics of identity, and the straining of democratic institutions—not as isolated phenomena but as echoing the global tussles between power, freedom, and justice. Through this in-depth exploration, we seek to capture the essence of a democracy that is as much a celebration of diversity as it is a contestation of ideologies, bearing profound.

## **2) Democracy As according to Arundhati Roy:**

Arundhati Roy's conceptualization of democracy in "Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers" is critical and complex. She views democracy not just as a system of governance defined by elections and the majority rule, but as an ethical and moral framework that should inherently respect human rights, equality, and justice. In Roy's perspective, democracy is judged not by the procedures that are followed, such as voting, but by the outcomes that these procedures generate. Roy challenges the notion that holding regular elections is synonymous with functioning democracy, particularly when these processes are coupled with systemic injustices, communal violence, and the suppression of dissent. Her writing is a powerful indictment of the Indian government's actions in the early 2000s, illustrating how democratic processes can be used to legitimise authoritarianism and communalism. Democracy, in her critical view, is supposed to be self-corrective and inclusive, with mechanisms for the protection of minorities and vulnerable populations against the tyranny of the majority, something she feels modern democracies, including India's, fail to achieve.

## **3) Identification of Major Facets of Democracy According to Arundhati Roy:**

Under the "**Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers**", Arundhati Roy has presented different facets of democracy and its functioning with a concentration on critical observation in India. Her narrative also enlightening to incendiary, intended to provoke reflection and reform.

### **First Facet:**

***The Discrepancy between Democratic Ideology and Practice***, Roy unveils the discordance between the idealized concept of democracy and its practical implementation. She contends that the systems and establishments professing to champion democratic ideals frequently participate in undermining those very principles. Roy meticulously chronicles cases of state-endorsed violence and the stifling of minority voices, exposing the paradox of a democracy occasionally acting in an undemocratic manner. Such contradictions, she asserts, are part of a wider global phenomenon where governments cloak their complicity in perpetuating inequality and injustice beneath the guise of democratic principles.

### **Second Facet:**

***The Weaponization of Religion and Ethnic Identities***, Roy delves into the intricate dynamics surrounding the weaponization of religion and ethnicity within democratic contexts, shedding light on its multifaceted implications. Central to her evaluation is the notion that democratic institutions, far from being immune to manipulation, are often ensnared in the web of divisive agendas propagated by majoritarian forces. Through a meticulous examination of the Gujarat riots, she unveils the stark reality of how extremist religious and nationalist narratives can permeate the corridors of power, wielding state machinery to systematically target and oppress minority groups. This deliberate orchestration of communal violence,

rather than an isolated occurrence, emerges as a symptom of deeper structural fissures embedded within the political fabric. Thus, Roy's discourse not only underscores the fragility of democratic systems but also underscores the urgent need for vigilance against the exploitation of identity-based politics for nefarious ends.

**Third Facet:**

**Control & Repression Mechanisms**, Arundhati Roy conducts a penetrating analysis of the mechanisms employed for control and repression within democratic frameworks. In her critique, she delves into the legislative and judicial apparatuses, originally conceived to safeguard individual freedoms, but now wielded to stifle dissent and uphold existing power structures. Roy's scrutiny extends to laws concerning terrorism and sedition, which she portrays as instruments of oppression camouflaged under the pretext of preserving public order and national security. By meticulously dissecting these legal frameworks, she unveils the insidious erosion of civil liberties, perpetrated in the guise of maintaining societal stability. This comprehensive examination not only exposes the perversion of justice but also underscores the imperative of safeguarding fundamental rights in the face of authoritarian encroachments.

**Fourth Facet:**

**Media & Public Discourse**, Arundhati Roy's examination of the media's role in shaping public discourse reveals the intricate processes through which narratives are constructed and manipulated to serve political interests. She provides a scathing critique of how media complicity perpetuates divisive ideologies, thereby distorting public perception and undermining democratic values. Roy highlights instances where media outlets, rather than acting as watchdogs of democracy, align themselves with powerful political entities, promoting agendas that exacerbate social divides and marginalize dissenting voices. By delving into specific examples of biased reporting and sensationalism, Roy elucidates the media's role in creating an environment where misinformation flourishes and critical thinking is stifled. This manipulation of information often leads to a polarized public, where fear and prejudice overshadow reasoned debate and informed decision-making. Roy's critique extends to the economic underpinnings of media organizations, pointing out how corporate ownership and advertising pressures can skew coverage in favor of the status quo.

She underscores the vital importance of independent journalism as a cornerstone of democratic society, advocating for media that holds power accountable and provides a platform for diverse perspectives. In her view, a truly democratic media landscape is one where investigative reporting thrives, and journalists are free to challenge authority without fear of retribution. Roy's analysis calls for a reinvigoration of public debate that is informed, nuanced, and inclusive. She stresses that sustaining democratic norms requires a media that not only informs but also educates the public, fostering a citizenry capable of critical thought and active participation in democratic processes. Ultimately, her work serves as a powerful reminder of the media's potential to either undermine or uphold the principles of democracy, depending on its commitment to truth and accountability.

**Fifth Facet:**

**Local Democracies Affected by Global**, Arundhati Roy's analysis profoundly highlights how global trends and forces intricately shape the practice and health of democracy in India. She meticulously traces the impact of neoliberal economic policies, which often prioritize market liberalization and corporate interests over social welfare and equity. Roy argues that these policies exacerbate economic disparities and undermine the social fabric by marginalizing the poorest and most vulnerable segments of society, leading to disenchantment with democratic processes and institutions.

Moreover, Roy delves into the repercussions of the global war on terror on India's democratic landscape. She critiques how the global narrative of security and counterterrorism has been appropriated by the Indian state to justify draconian laws and repressive measures that curtail civil liberties. These actions, she contends, are often undertaken under the pretext of maintaining national security but in reality, they serve to stifle dissent and consolidate state power. The alignment with global counterterrorism strategies has thus provided a convenient cover for undermining democratic freedoms and perpetuating authoritarian practices. Roy's evaluation extends to the cultural and ideological influences that flow from global to local

contexts. She discusses how global media and cultural industries propagate certain ideologies and consumerist values that reshape public consciousness and expectations from democracy. This cultural imperialism can dilute indigenous democratic traditions and values, leading to a homogenized and often superficial understanding of democratic principles.

Furthermore, Roy underscores the interconnectedness of democratic struggles worldwide. She emphasizes that the challenges faced by Indian democracy are not isolated incidents but part of a broader pattern of democratic backsliding seen globally. The rise of populist and authoritarian leaders, the erosion of civil liberties, and the manipulation of electoral processes are phenomena that transcend national borders. In this context, Roy advocates for greater solidarity among democratic movements across the globe. She calls for a transnational effort to defend democratic ideals and support grassroots movements that challenge authoritarianism and fight for social justice.

#### 4) Consequence:

**Consq-1: *The Illusion of a Functioning Democracy***, The consequence of this is a disillusioned populace who may feel that their vote does not lead to meaningful change. It can also lead to the entrenchment of authoritarian figures who, once elected, manipulate the system to remain in power irrespective of their governance quality.

**Consq- 2: *Communalism and the Politics of Division***: Roy discusses the politics of identity and how it can be weaponized to pit one community against another, often leading to violence. She gives a vivid account of the Gujarat riots, where state machinery failed to protect minority groups from orchestrated violence. Besides the immediate horrific violence and loss of life, such events have long-lasting impacts on social stability, mental health of survivors, intercommunity relations, and the wider cultural fabric of the nation. They erode the trust in the government's capacity and willingness to protect its citizens equally.

**Consq- 3: *The Rise of Religious Fascism***, This has made it difficult for secular and inclusive narratives to gain ground, reducing the space for objective historical understanding and academic freedom. Over time, this could reshape cultural memory and identity, leading to alienation and disenfranchisement of non-majority groups.

**Consq- 4: *The Erosion of Institutional Integrity***, This compromises the democratic framework, undermining fair governance and the rule of law. It could result in miscarriages of justice and create a populace that is cynical about the effectiveness of institutions meant to serve as society's ethical compass and protectors of democratic norms.

#### 5) Conclusion:

"Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers" is a stark reminder of the dissonance between democratic theory and its practical application in India. Arundhati Roy's narrative urges readers to examine the pillars of governmental accountability and the ethical compass guiding national leadership. This conclusion underscores the imperative of upholding authentic democratic values: safeguarding minority rights, ensuring leaders' answerability, and preserving a secular foundation. Roy's vision resonates with the notion that any democracy failing to shield its most vulnerable constituents cannot claim authenticity. It prompts introspection among citizens and intellectuals alike, compelling them to safeguard the essence of democracy from those who conflate numerical dominance with moral righteousness. Roy's work is not merely a critique; it's a rallying cry for continuous societal advancement toward a more compassionate and just society. She advocates for a democracy that relentlessly pursues inclusivity and fairness, valuing every individual and community within its midst. Ultimately, her narrative serves as both a challenge and an inspiration, driving the ongoing quest for a more equitable and genuine democratic practice.

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